Documentary Narrative 1

The Coordinadora No a la Costanera Norte:
Context and Communities

Beneath each stone
are those who taught us to live
or to prepare our deaths with pleasure
after all life had ended.

Beneath each word
lurks a lethal germ
as well as some sign
that all life is still
beginning.
Walter Hoefler, p. 81, Poets of Chile, 1986.

DN1.1 Santiago and the Costanera Norte Highway Project

In the 1990s, Santiago was a metropolitan region with 5.4 million inhabitants, a reasonable
density of 70 people/hectare, and 16.5 million trips daily. In 1991, the modal share of
motorized trips (57%) still heavily favoured public transport, versus just 23% for cars, and 20%
for taxis, collective taxis, the metro and other modes. Ten years later, this was changing
radically, as bus use had dropped to 38%, car use had risen to 40%, and other modes stood at
22% (Quijada 2003).

Based on the assumption that Chile was suffering from an “infrastructure deficit” and
that more cars required more roads, the public works ministry set up an elite concessions unit
to incorporate private construction and infrastructure management firms to create a highway
network within the city. In the early 1990s, it announced its emblematic first project, the
Costanera Norte, a 29 kilometer highway, three lanes wide in each direction, with design
speeds of 80-100 km/hr, and an initial pricetag of US$120 million. The highway was to cut a
grin-like swath across the relatively round city, running from the wealthy neighbourhoods (with
high rates of car ownership) in the foothills of the Andes to the east, through the city centre
where many of them worked, and on to the airport and the coast, where Chile’s main ports and
seaside resorts were located (Quijada 2003).
Figure DN.1. The map (top right) shows the Costanera Norte highway project in its geographic context, cutting from the impoverished east, through the city centre (north of the Mapocho River) and westward, to the high-income suburbs in the Andean foothills. The pink rectangle is the airport, while the blue is the ENEA real estate development. The red line indicates areas through which the highway was initially supposed to pass, while the green line reflects the route that actually entered the environmental assessment. Source: Quijada 2009. The map (right middle) shows the territorial jurisdictions of the comunas through which the highway was to pass. The large map (below) shows these same jurisdictions with socio-economic information. The highest income (ABC1) is the darkest blue, shading lighter as income drops (Source: Juan Pablo Frick, Living City geographer, with census data). The maroon circle indicates the main territories involved in the anti-highway revolt led by the Coordinadora.

Figure DN.1 provides several views on the highway project. The first map (top right) offers an aerial shot of the highway in the context of the Andes and coastal mountain ranges,
and the central valley between them where Santiago is located. The second (middle right) provides more detail on the shape of the comunas, or municipal jurisdictions, through which the highway passed. The main map (bottom) illustrates the socio-economic aspects of the highway with respect to the jurisdictions through which it travels. Note, that as the first figure indicates, a huge part of the city, including its most populated and poorest comunas, are located to the south, far beyond the service area of the highway. All of these areas urgently needed better access to jobs and other social benefits of the central areas of the city, particularly the city centre (the comuna of Santiago) and Providencia, where a disproportionate number of services, government offices, hospitals, schools and other destinations are located.

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Table DN.1 lists the municipalities directly affected by the highway project, providing some socio-economic and other relevant information for each. Those highlighted in green are the focus of this study, since these are the ones where the Coordinadora became most active. Those in yellow expressed some opposition to the highway initially, led primarily by mayors, rather than citizens’ groups. These conflicts were eventually resolved through negotiations with the public works ministry. Cerro Navia, one of Santiago’s poorest municipal territories, stands out: not only did it experience some of the most brutal expropriation processes, to build the highway, the mayor, Cristina Gerardi, actively supported the project. Indeed, she argued that it would benefit poor domestic workers, who would travel to work more quickly on the highway. She never addressed the issue of how people on such low incomes would be able to purchase a car.
Three of these comunas, with their respective municipal governments, became the main sites in the development of the anti-highway campaign, led by citizens’ groups organized under the name Coordinadora No a la Costanera Norte. These were Independencia, Recoleta and Providencia, all located on the north side of the Mapocho River, just to the north of the city centre. These are also some of Santiago’s oldest neighbourhoods, as figure 2.x illustrates. The importance of local identity, oral history, the wisdom of small-scale entrepreneurs and the creativity of artists and intellectuals, which are central to traditions in this part of Santiago all played a role in the anti-highway campaign and the subsequent creation of Living City.

Initially, in the early 1990s, the Municipality of Recoleta rejected the project, entering into a series of conversations with the national authorities on the specific route that it would follow, and ultimately settling on one through the Pedro de Valdivia Norte-Bellavista neighbourhoods (figure 3), outside its jurisdiction. From then on, the Christian Democratic mayor, Ernesto Moreno, strongly supported the project, even resorting to threats and manipulation in his efforts to neutralize opposition, as discussed in more detail below.

Independencia, meanwhile, typically took few public positions on the project, but negotiated a deal early on with the MOP to give up its municipal offices on the river’s edge in exchange for compensation for a more modern building nearby (pp.43-44, Quijada 2009).

Providencia, headed by retired army colonel Christián Labbé, backed by two of Chile’s most respected urban advisors, German Bannen and Jaime Márquez, played a much more active role, demanding detailed information early on, commissioning its own environmental impact assessment from an independent, and respected, consulting firm, and cooperating, on many occasions, with the neighbours of Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia Norte to first oppose, then attempt to mitigate the impacts of the proposed highway.

DN1.2 Key Sources and Positioning

The news of the highway project hit the different organizations in the communities at different times and in different ways. The account that follows in this narrative is based largely on several key studies and archival material. The first, which focuses on the Coordinadora itself, is Costanera Norte, Qué Ciudad Queremos (1997), edited by Ricardo Araya and myself at the height of the conflict, in 1997, and co-published with the Observatorio LatinoAmericano de Conflictos Ambientales. It offers a relatively detailed record of how the conflict developed up to its publication at the end of 1997, the year with the highest level of activity, most of it focusing on the environmental assessment process. This book was the result of the ongoing file that we kept as the conflict advanced. Eventually we found ourselves trying to print out
hundreds of pages for the different people interested in our positions. The book is a welcome cornerstone to memory, although I have also triangulated this narrative with other leaders and actors, Quijada’s book, and publications by other authors as described in this section.

The second is an unpublished manuscript by transport engineer, Rodrigo Quijada, which chronicles the story of the highway project itself. Quijada pulled together this book (2009), based on a detailed review of the press and supplemented by interviews and other research. Quijada’s interest in active citizenship for sustainable transport led him to work for Living City briefly (2003), and he has participated as an advisor on some of our transport-related activities since.¹ A meticulous observer, he followed parts of the story that were beyond the reach of the community groups involved, making his carefully documented book a useful testimony to the debates that surrounded the project and specific events that influenced the outcome.

A third source was research conducted by Enrique Silva, now a professor of planning at Boston University. As a PhD student, he requested permission to follow Coordinadora/Living City activities, attending many events and meetings, and interviewing many of the players in the highway conflict. In a recent article based on that research (2011), Silva characterizes the highway planning process led by the MOP at that time as “deliberate improvisation”, which he defines as “the conscious decision to plan without a plan, a political choice that signals the power of the state to define what should be planned, how and when” (p. 35, Silva 2011).

A fourth source consists of press coverage in the Coordinadora’s archives, and particularly studies published in the journal, Ambiente y Desarrollo, part of an ongoing study of the conflict financed by Chile’s national research council (Fondecyt 197045/97).

A fifth source, of extraordinary -- but challenging -- richness are the archives of the Coordinadora itself. To make the most of my time and the information they contained, I have focused on key elements in the electronic versions of those archives. These are relatively complete and more accessible than the physical papers, carefully stored, but far from well organized, in Living City’s community centre.

Reviewing this material has renewed and sharpened my awareness of the challenges we faced and how desperately we reached for knowledge, as we faced off against an urban policy world rippling with unseen powers that we were ill-prepared, individually and collectively, to face. I remember the tremendous pressure we were under, how one crisis,

¹ In 2011, he joined the board of Living City and in 2012 he became president, Living City’s first male and first professional president.
demand or opportunity would pile up on another, and our home lives, our work, our incomes, would all suffer. We dealt with this largely through endless phone calls, sharing news and rumours, chiding and confiding, giving and receiving support and the energy to carry on in the face of what we all, as a group of community leaders, felt was a terrible injustice, unworthy of our new and, we had hoped, soon to be thriving democracy.

At this time, I was a leader among leaders, but I was not the main leader of the campaign. Each community had its own spokespeople (usually two or three really strong leaders) and chose its own representatives for presentations to the minister and government officials, municipalities, and other actors. A working journalist, I avoided these meetings, leaving them to others. I did, however, take charge of our communications, which meant that I became increasingly well known, and, over the years, acted as the de facto “coordinator” of the Coordinadora. Moreover, I continued to participate in a very collective group, EcoBella, with a group of mostly women, artists and professionals, and sometimes children, who would join for specific activities or occasional meetings, and then move on. As the highway campaign progressed, EcoBella alternated leadership with the neighbourhood association, the Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza.

Much of this account will explore the campaign and the events that surrounded it from the perspective of the Bellavista community, or the 15 to 25-member coordinating body that led the Coordinadora. Bellavista was key to the process. Geographically, it is located in the middle of the four main territories involved in the dispute. Moreover, as an arts community, it proved flexible and open enough to serve as a kind of hinge between the low-income and working-class residents of Independencia, Recoleta and Bellavista itself, and the wealthier, more established professionals of the Pedro de Valdivia Norte neighbourhood to our east.

At the heart of La Chimba, the larger territory on the north side of the Mapocho River (see maps above), Bellavista has served as a meeting place for misfits of all kinds and shapes. Popular bars, nunneries and monasteries, hospitals and cemeteries, all the detritus of an official society bound by rigid rules and roles, came into its own in Bellavista and La Chimba as a whole. Moreover, in highly segregated Santiago (Vargas Aguirre; Sabatini, Wormald et al. 2009; Roberts and Wilson 2010), Bellavista was at the time, and remains, one of the very few neighbourhoods with a strong, mixed population, in socio-economic terms, racial and ethnic terms. For over a century it has been one of the main receiving centres for immigrants, first the “Turks” of the 19th century (Palestinians who came in on Turkish passports), followed by the Chinese, Koreans and Peruvians in recent years.
Heritage played a key role in shaping the nature of the battle over the highway project throughout the four territories of the Coordinadora, known by their individual names (Independencia, La Vega-Recoleta, Bellavista, Pedro de Valdivia Norte) and collectively, as La Chimba. Three of the four were, and to some degree today remain, badly deteriorated. Nonetheless, their central location and their proximity to key educational, recreational, cultural and job-related centres, along with a strong popular culture, much of it associated with the markets, flowers, fresh fruit and vegetables and the restaurant and tourism activities that go with them, have made them inexpensive and therefore popular attractions for people from all over the city. Thus, while their specific communities were more or less diverse in and of themselves, their role within the metropolitan region overall has made them crucial meeting points of extraordinary diversity for as long as the city has existed.

Battered by the neo-liberal experimentation of the 1980s, moreover, and efforts to “clean up” the high-middle and high-income sectors of the city, these communities became an economic and cultural refuge. “Después de dios está la Vega” (after God comes the Vega), goes a popular saying: as the poor are driven out of one area after another, they can still find refuge and a hot meal in the Vega area.

Bellavista during the 1950s and 1960s, meanwhile, became synonymous with some of Chile’s best artists and leading intellectuals, particularly the painter, Camilo Mori, the sculptor Marta Colvin, and the Nobel-prizewinning poet, Pablo Neruda. During the military years (1973-1990), the country’s first cultural centre, Taller 666, took over an old house in Bellavista, working quietly and ceaselessly for freedom of expression despite the extreme repression of the period. Bellavista’s nascent (2001) cultural and development non-profit corporation was led by Carmen Silva, a distinguished painter, who had moreover worked with Ecuador’s Guayasamín during her exile. The Bellavista neighbourhood association, which started in the late 1980s, was headed by Mario Baeza, a beloved cultural icon as a choir director who brought music to thousands of people up and down the country throughout his long life, and María Inés Arribas, an inspired and dedicated architect and urban planner.

Shortly before leaving power, Pinochet created a series of new municipal districts, fragmenting the already fractured city of Santiago even further. One result was that Bellavista, a single neighbourhood with a single history, which had been part of the large and politically weighty Santiago municipal district, was split into two totally different municipal jurisdictions. One was the newly created municipality of Recoleta, where the markets are located and with high levels of poverty. The other was Providencia, an elegant, upscale city centre, with a profile
very different from Bellavista’s. As one planner put it, in an EcoBella meeting in the 1990s, “At first, Bellavista was a real wrench in the works ("un cacho") for us. We just didn’t know how to deal with it.”

I remember my husband, Patricio Lanfranco, as leader of the first elected neighbourhood association, commenting once at a meeting that “For Recoleta we’re their golden goose, and for Providencia we’re their poor neighbourhood, the wrong side of the river.”

The neighbourhood associations eventually learned to use this division, which began as a major problem for Bellavista, to their advantage. During the 1990s, however, lax regulation and enthusiasm for new freedoms brought a rash of poorly designed but profitable nightclubs to the neighbourhood. Their improvised construction and location on formerly quiet, residential streets brought noise, drunken behaviour in the streets, drug trafficking and a host of
related issues. These catalyzed participation in the neighbourhood associations, as people couldn’t sleep at night, and neighbours emerged on weekends to find their sidewalks and plazas full of broken glass, puddles of urine and human excrement. Thus, the two neighbourhood associations, the Junta de Vecinos #35 (Bellavista Recoleta), and the Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza (Bellavista Providencia), were soon joined by EcoBella, an activist-oriented committee concerned about garbage, noise and other issues, and the Bellavista Cultural and Development non-profit, mentioned above.

These groups worked, together at times, individually at others, to find solutions to problems that began to drive neighbours out of their lifetime homes. With no regulation and zoning, the typical pattern was that an improvised discotheque would start up on a street, often in the middle of the block, expelling neighbours with the option of moving away and, in many cases, buying up the properties thus vacated, only to repeat the pattern over and over. These trends produced long, seemingly senseless and endless battles with the local municipal governments that revealed an unhealthy level of cooperation among the nightclub owners, drug traffickers and officials. They also provoked the first, mostly frustrating and therefore
hostile encounters between these newly created citizens and their recently elected public servants, more commonly known as The Authorities in post-Pinochet Chile.

These events also forced neighbours to seek out allies and build new networks among neighbourhood groups, an NGO-community consisting primarily of environmental organizations\(^2\), professional associations (particularly the College of Physicians and the College of Architects) and increasingly, frustrated planners and other officials within local governments themselves. As a result, neighbourhood leaders began to acquire some of the citizenship skills and contacts that would become crucial to the anti-highway revolt.

In some cases, political parties tried to take over the neighbourhood associations for their own ends. This did not go over well with the embattled and largely non-aligned neighbours of Bellavista, although there were important differences between the JV\#35, which swung between leadership by Carmen Silva, a well-known Socialist Party member, and other neighbours belonging to the UDI, a rightwing party that formed the intellectual backbone of the Pinochet regime (Huneeus 2007). Overall, however, the Concertación parties were too busy focusing on their new powers and responsibilities in both Congress and the national and regional ministerial apparatus to think about municipal politics. Forced into the opposition, Pinochet’s civilian supporters, involved in the Renovación Nacional (RN) and Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI) parties, focused on the wealthy municipalities of Las Condes, Vitacura and to a lesser extent Lo Barnechea, to stage their political comeback.

Neighbourhood struggles against concrete issues -- the noise, the dirt, the garbage and the poor management of alcohol licenses -- impacted on the ground in multiple ways. More than 800 people participated in the 1993 election, the first since the coup, of the JV\#13 Mario Baeza. Neighbours organized Christmas parties, Independence Day celebrations with folk dancing and food, children’s events and all-candidates foras in newly conquered public squares. To the timid question from some participants, “don’t we have to ask for permission to use the square?” militant neighbours replied over and over, “No, it’s OUR square. We’ll tell the

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\(^2\) During the dictatorship, civil society organizations consisted primarily of human rights groups, many of them protected by the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches. With generous funding through solidarity and other organizations abroad, many professionals also formed social service oriented NGOs, particularly dealing with health issues and small production-oriented workshops to generate income. Several key environmental organizations also formed during the 1980s, however, particularly Codeff, the Committee to Defend Chile’s Flora and Fauna (Chile’s oldest NGO), the Political Ecology Institute, and Renace, a network of environmental groups. Neighbourhood organizations were controlled by military appointees, as were Mother’s Centres and a series of service groups set up and often headed by generals’ wives.
municipality we’re going to use it, but freedom of expression means we don’t have to ask for permission.”

One key undercurrent in Bellavista was the deliberate effort on the part of many neighbours to heal the political rifts that had turned people against each other during the 1970s. It is hard to convey how this worked in abstract terms, so here is an example. Many neighbours met regularly at parents’ meetings at the local daycare centre, on Crucero Exeter street, at the foot of the San Cristobal hill. The childrens’ first day at school happened to fall on the day after the official inauguration of Chile’s first elected government since 1970, headed by President Patricio Aylwin. Newspapers led with photographs of long lines of civilian cabinet members and solemn images of their swearing-in ceremonies, while some media commented on how reluctant Pinochet was to hand the presidential sash and other symbols of power to Aylwin. As our children lined up in their new grade one classroom, we, the parents, formed a semi-circle, singing the national anthem together. About that moment I wrote:

...we sing shyly together, glancing sideways at the other parents, as if we have never met before. The only political message is one of unity and pride. It’s as if the music is slowly waking us from a long and terrible dream. ... Each day from now on will be subtly and completely different. We can say different things to each other, provoke different reactions, do and feel and live things differently. I realize from the snatches of conversation that float in the air around me, mostly about yesterday’s inauguration, that many of these parents, who we’ve ‘known’ for as long as five years, opposed the regime, but we have never spoken before. It’s equally clear that the parents of Rafa, [my son] Camilo’s best friend, and María Jesús, Camilo’s first girlfriend, supported the regime and are worried about the future. Round-faced, sharp-featured Daniel, Matias’s father, cracks a joke about the kids looking like a line-up of cabinet ministers and we all laugh at once (p. 272, Sagaris 1996).

A year or two later, it was my regime-supporting neighbours (wielding baseball bats and prepared to use them) who came to my rescue one night when several men broke into my house and the police were nowhere to be found. Around 1995 or 1996, exhausted by a car whose alarm had been going on for hours outside our houses, a group of 15 or so of us picked it up and set it in the middle of the road, so the police would have to move it. The alarm abruptly fell silent and we were left staring at each other, disconcerted. When a puzzled police officer threatened us all with arrest, if the car remained in the road when he returned after going for a quick trip around the block, we promptly picked it up and put it back at the side of the road. The story became a source of endless anecdotes and laughter in the ensuing years. We never explicitly said that doing these things together, helping each other, was our way of healing the wounds opened by the repression. But these were important moments that cemented -- deep friendships, in some cases, and “deep acquaintanceships” in others. Those bonds have held, long after our children have grown up and even when some of the families have moved away.
This kind of emotional and social healing on the personal level and the citizenship learning that basic attempts to problem solve generated on the collective level, contributed to Bellavista’s effectiveness when it faced the challenge of the highway project and the destruction it was scheduled to bring.

DN2 From Bellavista to the Coordinadora: Territory, history and identity as catalysts

“You have no idea what you’re doing or how to build an organization. An organization has to have a leader, a single strong leader. Everyone has to do what he says. All this stuff about a ‘coalition’ makes no sense to us.” A Patronato leader, to EcoBella, c. April 1997.

Although the organizations participating to varying degree in the highway revolt numbered more than 50 at different points in the campaign (see list at the end of this chapter), 12 formally constituted organizations and 10 informal groups formed the main body of the Coordinadora No a la Costanera Norte (Table DN.2). Together, these 22 groups represented different aspects of life and struggle in four communities: the mostly working class and arts community of Bellavista, famous for the painters and poets who had settled there in early generations, discussed in the previous section; the market vendors in the area surrounding the Vega-Recoleta, Santiago’s pivotal market, created in 1895, and just three blocks from the city’s original market traditionally functioned in the central Plaza de Armas from 1541 on; the middle- to high-income professional elite of Pedro de Valdivia Norte; and Independencia, the poorest, where social housing and a mostly elderly population was extremely vulnerable to the pressures from the highway project and their own municipal authorities;

Table DN.3 (next page) summarizes the population and the main characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the four leading communities, ordered from west to east. As the municipal profiles in Table DN.1 suggest, both Independencia and Recoleta were primarily low-income neighbourhoods, while Bellavista’s population mixed low- and middle-income households, both renters and property owners, and Pedro de Valdivia Norte tended to be high-income, more in line with the general profile of Providencia residents. A description of each community follows in the next section.
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Source: Own elaboration, based on Araya and Sagaris 1997, Quijada, Coordinadora archives. The first 18 groups formed the nucleus of the Coordinadora, although El Baratillo dropped out after the death of its leader, and the Remodelación Recoleta, a sidewalk market, also participated in 1997.
Dn2.1 Independencia: renters and owners fight for their homes

One could say that time has acted against the conservation of the buildings, but in favour of the formation of a piece of city whose inhabitants know each other and who, thanks to a favourable location, can take advantage of their centrality in their daily efforts to improve their living conditions. (Description of the Independencia community, by its leaders, p. 52, Araya and Sagaris 1997).

Independencia Avenue is a long diagonal, sloping westward as it travels from the Mapocho River toward the northern edge of the city, the living trace of the Camino de Chile or Incan road that predates the arrival of the Spanish, and once carried travellers all the way to Cuzco. This was once one of Santiago’s wealthiest neighbourhoods and the spacious old buildings with their generous courtyards bear witness to this day (Désramés, Klein Kranenberg et al. 2007).

Two humble neighbourhoods in the comuna of Independencia contributed activists and their own particular perspective to the Coordinadora. One was located at the municipality’s southernmost edge, with a view of the imposing Mapocho Train Station just across the river, the Central Market, and the city centre just beyond. The community of Borgoño-Escanilla reflected one of the city’s first efforts to create social housing for those unable to afford a decent life. Ninety families lived in this complex, around 60 of them renters. Thirty households had lived there for over a decade and several descended from the original owners, who had proudly taken possession almost a century earlier. Homes were old but had survived major earthquakes in the 1960s and 1980s. Their leaders included Luis Olivares, who represented homeowners, and Alfredo Basaure, on behalf of renters. Most of these families had grown up in the neighbourhood. Many had small children and there were also many elderly people.

A second community, the Pasaje Independencia Olivos, also joined the Coordinadora, led by Alicia Cid and her brother César Cid. A modest passageway tucked into a gap just off
Independencia Avenue, the bungalows were simply built and furnished but solid, and the rents were low, allowing pensioners and clerical and other workers on very low wages a toehold near the rich resources of the city’s centre, where the best public schools, libraries, parks and other institutions are located.

This community’s situation was particularly heartrending. Thirty households lined the unpretentious passageway, located just behind the Vega Central with its cheap nutritious food and on major buslines and transport connections all over the city. Most families had lived in these homes more than 60 years and had applied to the then Municipality of Santiago to purchase them, under social housing programs. For eight years, on the promise that they were in effect buying their homes, they had even paid property taxes. Some of the modest homes housed two families, and Alicia Cid was also the spokesperson for an additional seven families from across Independencia Avenue. Altogether, 140 people, 112 adults and 28 children lived in these homes in an area that wasn’t even in the pathway of the highway project. The lots were, however, under consideration to relocate the municipal building, which would be torn down for the highway. Leaders of the Coordinadora were witness to an extraordinary campaign consisting of threats and bullying on the part of municipal staff to force these families out of their homes. Alicia and her neighbours lived in a current state of fear, which affected their health and wellbeing. In 1998, the municipality resorted to declaring these homes “unsanitary”, bulldozing adjacent properties (Coordinadora 29-June-1998).

Together, these communities protested the Costanera Norte as an example of “social injustice” (p. 52, Araya and Sagaris 1997), noting that their existence was not even mentioned in the Environmental Impact Assessment for the project, despite the fact that it would require expropriations of owners and, in theory at least, should also insure some kind of indemnity for displaced renters and “allegados”, families squeezed into properties owned or rented by friends or relatives, with no other place to live and no possibility of paying rent.

**DN2.2 Recoleta’s markets and shops around the Vega: fighting for their livelihoods**

Next to Independencia, along the river, four organizations representing four different kinds of commerce participated actively in the Coordinadora. Representing an estimated 10,000 people, they were the fruit and vegetable market, named for the medieval Spanish playwright, Tirso de Molina, represented by Jorge Cannobbio and Domingo Pérez; the flower vendors organized in the Pérgola Santa María, and represented by Nury Gatica; the mixed market and
eateries of the Vega Chica, represented by Sonia Abarca, who went on to become the first president of Living City; and the many small shops around the areas, organized into an association known as Acofer, and represented by Inés Fernández, an outspoken hardware store owner of Spanish descent, who had grown up in the neighbourhood.

Members of these organizations were aware that they were fighting for their livelihoods and their right to continue to work in a privileged location, at the centre of several major transport hubs and very near the city’s downtown area. All of them remembered years when they had been informal vendors, selling on the street. For them, achieving the fragile stalls that composed the Tirso de Molina (408 stalls, supporting some 4,000 family members), or the right to use the old trolley repair shop, which housed the Vega Chica (120 stalls, some 2,000 dependents), were major achievements after lengthy and difficult social struggles. Even before the Coordinadora was able to obtain advice and information from geographers and urban planners, leaders from these communities already knew from past experience that part of the

Figure DN.5. The main Independencia community (Escanilla-Borgoño), just across the river from one of Santiago’s largest cultural centres (the copper roof, on Pdte Balmaceda) and one block from the Pérgola Santa María (red star), in the market area. This area was expropriated and the map reflects buildings post-highway construction.
highway agenda was to “clean up” the neighbourhood, and get rid of them.

The flower vendors’ in the Pérgola Santa María brought a particularly significant knowledge into the process of the highway conflict. Their main leader, Nury Gatica, was the daughter and granddaughter of flower vendors who staged one of Santiago’s first major battles over the right to the city in Santiago. Originally located at the heart of downtown, just outside the city’s oldest church, the Iglesia San Francisco, the pergoleras used wit, determination and grace to sell flowers to passersby, many of whom were wealthy business men and powerful politicians rushing to and from the governmental buildings nearby. When, in the late 1920s, a project to widen the Alameda de las Delicias, Santiago’s main road (now called Alameda Bernardo O’Higgins, after a leader of Chile’s independence fight against Spain) required their removal from the city centre, the pergoleras successfully resisted. The story was enshrined in a musical (1960) by Chile’s first major playwright, Isadora Aguirre (photo this page), and today it is hard to tell what really happened apart from the powerful urban legend that has grown up around it.

Eventually, the pergoleras were granted two new sites on the north side of the Mapocho River, one, the Pérgola San Francisco, in the comuna of Independencia. This second organization participated for a brief period in the Coordinadora, but later demonstrated hostility to its colleagues across the road who dared to challenge the authorities of the day. Just across the street, though, and therefore in Recoleta, the flower vendors of the Pérgola Santa María (60 stalls, some 500 people affected) were willing to participate. This group was led by Nury Gatica, a down to earth, shy but articulate woman, whose husband also owned a stand in the Pérgola and actively supported her efforts. With the wisdom of three generations of
women who had fought for a toehold in the city, Nury too was clear that part of the highway agenda was to get rid of the markets and the Vega itself, and replace them with the malls and highrise buildings that were just beginning to spring up at key points around the city.

The Tirso, the Pérgola, the Vega Chica and Acofer were major players in the Coordinadora. They participated actively in all decision-making, fundraising, protests, the lawsuits, marches, environmental assessments and other activities, and they were also crucial to the decision to found Living City in 2000. They remained

Figure DN.7. One of the original posters from the musical play, La Pérgola de las Flores, by Isadora Aguirre. It remains popular to this day and has often been performed in the Pérgola Santía María itself. Below, Nury Gatica.
active for the first four years of the organization, participating in the projects that established the foundations of Living City, but became less active as the decade progressed, reflecting different factors, both internal and external, discussed in the chapter on Living City.

Two additional groups in this neighbourhood also participated in the Coordinadora: the Remodelación Recoleta, about 100 sidewalk vendors working out of 20 stalls on Recoleta street; and a small group of vendors from the Baratillo, represented by Carlos Galeguillo, who died, tragically, in a fire in 1999.

Leaders of the Vega Central itself participated sporadically in the activities of the Coordinadora. The Vega, which is the main terminal receiving and distributing fresh produce from the surrounding countryside to retailers, wholesalers and direct to customers, has a complex structure composed of many, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing, organizations. Although the neighbourhood is extremely poor, often strewn with garbage, black
with particles from the diesel trucks that constantly go in and out of its main patio and use its many narrow, hole-filled streets, the Veguinos themselves include a very diverse group, in ethnic and socio-economic terms. Many are very wealthy and live in the high-income municipalities of Las Condes and elsewhere in the city. Moreover, the Vega is central to the city’s imaginary, a place that is constantly painted, filmed, photographed and celebrated by tourists and artists alike. Mauricio Palma, of the wholesalers, Arturo Guerra, of the Chacreros (fresh vegetables), and Rafael Lawner, participated at times with the Coordinadora and Living City. They were not permanent members, but appeared in response to specific threats specific moments.

The role of the Patronato Chamber of Commerce, located across the street, between the Vega and Bellavista, was similar to that of the Vega Central. The two main leaders, Carlos Abusleme and William Banduc, preferred to negotiate their own path through the conflict, although their positions often coincided with those of the Coordinadora, and at some points they explicitly supported Coordinadora positions.

**DN2.3 Pedro de Valdivia Norte: Defending the Parque Metropolitano**

Two organizations from the high-income Pedro de Valdivia Norte (Providencia municipal area) participated in the Coordinadora and the founding of Living City. The first was the legally constituted neighbourhood association, the Junta de Vecinos #12, headed by an engineer, Ambrosio García-Huidobro and Juan Luis Moure, an owner of one of Chile’s most successful perfume importers. The second was an ad hoc committee led by Dr. Ricardo Araya, a community psychiatrist; Alfredo Gredig, who owned a store catering to the needs of the owners of luxury yachts and other recreational boats; Inés Watine, a French immigrant who moved to Chile in the 1970s to marry Judge Juan Guzmán; and her friend, Céline Désramés, a more recent French immigrant to Chile, who was both a historian and a bookstore owner. The key issue for the neighbourhood and people from elsewhere in the city who participated in the ad hoc committee was the defense of the Cerro San Cristobal (Saint Christopher hill), home to Santiago’s largest park, the Parque Metropolitano, with picnic areas, botanical gardens, the public zoo, eucalyptus, mimosa and other flowering trees, amongst the species found there.

The entrance and climb into the park is a gentler one than the Bellavista entrance and, as a result, the area receives many more cyclists and walkers, and its own population also tends to see the hill as an extension of their own generally lush and, for central Santiago, spacious gardens.
The architectural faculty of the Catholic University is located on a carefully renovated and conserved property that was once the gracious home of a major landowner on this side of the river in Pedro de Valdivia Norte. Over the years, professors from what was then the Institute for Urban and Territorial Studies and other departments hosted debates, wrote articles and issued opinions on the conflict over the Costanera Norte. Indeed, despite its more conservative outlook (particularly after depuration under the military regime), the prestigious and wealthy Catholic University contributed several key advisors to the anti-highway campaign, particularly Dr. María Elena Ducci, an architect and urbanist, and Dr. Juan de Dios Ortúzar, a world authority on urban transport modelling, and a highly respected professor in the transport department, located on the San Joaquin campus toward the southern edge of the city.

Physicians in both Pedro de Valdivia Norte (Araya, who was an active leader of the Coordinadora until he moved to England in 1999) and Bellavista (Rodrigo Contreras, who advised the coalition) provided links to the influential College of Physicians, which also provided some assistance and support.

**DN2.4 Bellavista: Heritage, Community and Air**

The most reliable figures for the Bellavista neighbourhood are from the 2002 census. They reveal the depopulation of the neighbourhood due to the stresses described above, and growing disparities between the two “wings” of the neighbourhood, Recoleta and Providencia, reflecting the very different management practices and organizational abilities of the two neighbourhood associations. According to that Census, 2,659 people lived in 861 households on the Recoleta side, while another 1,363 households contained some 3,806 residents, on the Providencia side. Another 700 households joined the neighbourhood due to a highrise development (at Loreto Street and Bellavista Avenue), bringing the total estimated population to about 9,200 people.

In terms of income, Bellavista’s profile was more similar to that of Recoleta than that of Providencia. A neighbourhood founded during the late 1800s, much of the housing is continuous facade, wooden structures stuffed with adobe. A whole chunk of the Providencia end of the neighbourhood was originally social housing. In fact, it was the first social housing built for workers, starting in the 1880s and completed in the early 1900s. Thus, most of the neighbourhood’s “heritage”, was of a modest, working class nature, complemented by an urban style more typical of the rural settlements in Chile’s provinces, with neat gardens greening the wide sidewalks and canopies of acacia (mimosa) trees freshening the hot summer days with their shady breezes. An undercurrent of the anti-highway battle, which became explicit during the early years of Living City, was over the issue of what constituted “heritage”,...
in a society whose values were heavily shaped by the monumental palaces that had long been the homes of Chile’s homegrown, pseudo-aristocracy. As we shall see, as the battle developed, these values became mixed with those of Independencia and eventually the markets. Indeed, Living City later came to consider both the permanent markets around the Vega and the itinerant street fairs that serve much of Santiago, as “intangible” heritage, a category first developed by UNESCO to define and justify protection for specific “ways of life”, particularly those of the continent’s native peoples.

Thus, for Bellavista, the key issues arising from the highway project dealt with its destruction of key heritage in the neighbourhood, particularly buildings at the gateway to the San Cristobal hill, designed by “Chile’s Gaudi”, Luciano Kulchewsky, and the Art Deco homes around Pablo Neruda’s Santiago house, La Chascona. The highway project included ramps that potentially impacted on other parts of the neighbourhood, and involved vaguely described ventilation, which sometimes required “chimneys”, with or without filters.

As mentioned, the organizations that led the anti-highway revolt in Bellavista were the Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza and EcoBella, with support that shifted between active and passive from the Cultural Corporation and the Junta de Vecinos #35. The main leaders were Mauricio Montecinos, the son of longtime residents; neighbourhood association secretary María Eliana Bustamante; María Inés Arribas, mentioned above; María Inés Solimano, a historian and designer who had worked mostly with Chile’s community of artists during her long and colourful career; Waleska Salinas, painter, and Joan Morrison, ceremist; among others.

DN2.5 Some important commonalities, despite diversity

As discussed above, for a society as rigidly classbound and discriminatory as Chile’s, the range and diversity of participants who formed the Coordinadora was unheard of, and indeed, very questioned during its early years. Despite the obvious socio-economic, educational and other differences, the four communities, and particularly the two pivotal neighbourhoods (the Recoleta markets and the Bellavista arts community) shared some significant common characteristics.

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3 There were many versions of the highway project over the years. For the purpose of clarity and simplicity, I will use this term to refer to the specific project presented as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment process, since that was the main project debated. The MOP later proposed a “Bellavista variant”, which was approved in a last-minute decision by the environmental commission, and the company itself opted for a “Mapocho river variant”, which was the route eventually built and now in place.
Most of the groups’ leaders controlled their own working times, and were therefore free to take time off for Coordinadora meetings and other activities, although in the case of Recoleta-Vega and Bellavista, at significant cost in terms of their income. All tended to spend the most significant part of their waking hours in the affected neighbourhoods: although the Recoleta-Vega people “only” worked there, the reality of their working lives was that they worked long hours, usually from 7am when the trucks came into the terminal part of the Vega Central from the countryside, until well into the night (8-9pm), six days a week (Monday to Saturday) and half-days on Sundays. This meant that they raised their young children together in the hallways between their stalls and that their de facto “neighbours” were the people with stalls in their particular aisles and passageways. If someone’s house burned down or a family member suffered from a serious illness, it was these neighbours in the market who would band together to organize a raffle or a collection, to help the family get through the challenge.

Moreover, as with the pérgolas, many of the stall owners had started out as street vendors, working their way up to the relative security of the Tirso de Molino, Vega Chica or Pérgola, which despite their relatively precarious construction, by other Santiago standards, provided them with a mostly waterproof roof over their heads. Although technically their occupation of the lands where they were located was illegal (Tirso) or relatively precarious (Vega Chica, Pérgola), this reality constituted a major achievement in the lives of these vendors, as they liberated them from the constant persecution by police that had been their lot during their early years, still selling on the streets.

In the case of the Acofer membership, looks could be deceiving. They were mostly owners of small, modest shops tucked into old buildings along the streets surrounding the Vega Central. While the shops were very simple and down at the heel, many owners had prospered and now lived in high-income sectors of the city, particularly Providencia and Las Condes. All tended to set a high value on education and for the Tirso de Molina family businesses, their income from their stalls allowed them to send their children to the better public schools (in downtown Santiago, just across the river) and on to university or technical post-secondary education. This situation was similar to that of most residents in Bellavista, who relied on the better public schools available to them or paid the fees of the cheaper private schools available just across the river in Providencia.

Although many of the high income business and professional people in Pedro de Valdivia Norte tended to work in offices across the river, in upscale Providencia or elsewhere, their central location (particularly compared to most high income neighbourhoods, nestled
higher up in the Andean foothills on the city’s eastern edge) meant they walked or took public transport more often. As mentioned, their proximity to the hill also produced a strong sense of identity and ownership of their public as well as private spaces.

Three (Recoleta-Vega, Bellavista, Independencia) of the four neighbourhoods were also very old, as mentioned, and had played crucial roles in urban development virtually since the arrival of the Spanish (and some historians argue that Santiago was a key location to the indigenous peoples as well). They had a strong sense of local identity and deep connection to their local environment: some of the Vega and Acofer leaders had spent most of their childhood and attended school in the Recoleta neighbourhood, while in Bellavista most residents were second or third generation, and some even older. Amidst the cement, asphalt and other harsh materials of much of the city, the natural environment, particularly in Independencia, Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia Norte, is particularly generous: several of Santiago’s key parks (Forestal, San Cristobal, more recently Cerro Blanco), and the park-like General Cemetery, are major landmarks that shape and influence activities in these neighbourhoods. Streets in Independencia, Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia Norte also tend to contain street gardens and long lines of trees, which in some areas form generous canopies of shade that reduce summer
temperatures by several welcome degrees. The presence of nature in these parts of an otherwise under-endowed urban landscape was a significant theme in many of the groups’ presentations and work.

All four communities had at some point in their remembered history received significant numbers of immigrants, making them somewhat unusual compared to other parts of the city. Inés Fernández, who was the main Acofer leader involved in the Coordinadora, ran the family hardware store in the Vega area, where she had grown up, after her parents immigrated to Chile during the Spanish civil war. Céline, Inés and I were all products of the relatively stable democracies of Europe and North America: we had grown up in societies where civil society was active and citizens were expected to play an active role in public affairs.

María Inés Solimano, a key leader in Bellavista, was the daughter of an Italian immigrant (who

Figure DN.11. The Vega-Recoleta area. The green arrow points to the Vega Central, which combines terminal and other central market functions. The red star marks the Pérgola Santa María (white roof), and immediately to its right, the lot holding the 408 stalls of the Tirso de Molina market. The blue arrow marks the Baratillo building and next to it the two long roofs of the Vega Chica. The turquoise square marks the Acofer territory.
was a close friend of Pablo Neruda, the poet whose consular efforts ensured many Spanish and other immigrants were able to escape repression in Europe by fleeing to Chile).

Politically speaking, we were an unusually mixed group, particularly for Chile at that time: while some, like Bellavista’s leaders Carmen Silva (socialist) or my husband, Patricio Lanfranco (communist), had participated actively in leftwing parties, supporting the Allende government and suffering direct repression (exile, arrest, temporary disappearance) for their cultural activism against the military regime, others had actively supported the military, or simply kept their heads down and cooperated with its social and charitable initiatives when it was advantageous for them to do so. Bellavista’s Mauricio Montecinos, who headed the group that prepared the Coordinadora’s response to the Environmental Impact Assessment, was grandson of workers who had organized Chile’s first unions in the nitrate fields of the north, and the son of the first university graduate of the family, Hugo, who became a university professor and a staunch supporter of the socialist party, to which Lagos, the public works minister determined to make the highway a reality, belonged.

Because of these rather extreme differences, politics were seldom discussed within the Coordinadora and mutual tolerance and respect became a necessary foundation for joint actions. In these circumstances, leaders and groups focused on what brought them together: the urgencies of survival, in the case of the Independencia and Vega-Recoleta people, whose quality of life (cheap living arrangements in close proximity to the city’s main employment, educational and cultural resources) and survival/work activities were threatened by the highway project. For the Bellavista community, the main issues involved that neighbourhood’s fight to have its working class heritage recognized as valuable, and therefore worth salvaging, in the face of relentless destruction from the rather depredatory businesses that had invaded it from the late 1980s on. But many of these issues had also been framed in environmental terms, so the Bellavista groups were also very concerned about the highway’s impact on air pollution. Interestingly, they were less concerned about the San Cristobal Hill, which was the main catalyst triggering action on the part of the Pedro de Valdivia Norte neighbours.

Altogether, then, the reasons for questioning the highway were rooted in diverse clusters of social, cultural and environmental concerns, reflecting the diversity of the communities involved. There were crucial turning points, as the conflict progressed, at which the Coordinadora had to decide if it was more important, for example, to be environmentally “pure” and therefore, expel those motivated by socio-economic interests from the coalition. The choices that these leaders made, typically sitting in a circle in a Bellavista living room, in the parish hall of Pedro de Valdivia Norte, or in an apartment over Inés Fernández’ hardware
store, became crucial to the identity and characteristics of Living City, the citizen planning institution they would eventually find.

**DN3  The main events in the anti-highway rebellion, 1996-2000**

_In a meeting of the Ecological Committee of Bellavista (EcoBella), toward the end of 1995, we were finishing up our agenda, relaxing and starting to chat. Someone mentioned rumours about a highway, scheduled to run through the Bellavista neighbourhood. We started to worry. We started to look for information_ (p. 9, (Sagaris and Araya 1997).

**DN3.1 Starting from nothing... (1990-1996)**

Neighbourhood organizations, _juntas de vecinos_, have been legally recognized actors in Chile since Law 19,418 passed under the Frei government in 1968. This, according to Silvino Zapico, a Bellavista neighbour who had formed part of the executive of the neighbourhood association in the late 1960s, was the result of widespread social pressure that formed part of the social movements that created enormous turbulence as they challenged the rule of Chile’s traditional elite. Under that law, neighbourhood associations are composed of the residents, whether renters or property owners, of a given territory. Depending on its size and population, each municipality is subdivided into neighbourhood units (_unidades vecinales_). These are run as democratic associations with regular assemblies, usually held once or twice a year, with elections of a three- to five-person executive, normally consisting of at least a president, treasurer and secretary.

The military regime replaced the neighbourhood associations’ elected leadership, appointing its own supporters to head the _juntas de vecinos_, a process that took away all credibility and made them virtually invisible (1973-1990). Pressures on the Bellavista neighbourhood in the late 1980s, however, amidst growing social unrest and the sense that democracy was coming, led Mario Baeza, a distinguished choral director, and María Inés Arribas, an architect and urbanist, to form the Bellavista Neighbours’ Association. Although not legally constituted, this group became active around noise from the discotheques and other nocturnal activities that began to torment the Barrio Bellavista, as curfews were lifted and rigid military controls began to relax. Thus, a report (27-July-1992) summarizes actions taken by the association to deal with the “Discoteca Oz”, which had recently opened in an old shoe factory on Chucre Manzur street, perched on the slopes of San Cristobal Hill, slightly above the rest of the neighbourhood, in fact, level with second floors, where most bedrooms are located.

“From that moment on, life in our neighbourhood changed radically, due to the invasion of cars, drunken persons, and noise from the discotec itself, until 6am” (Baeza and
Arribas 1992). In response, the neighbours called police, only to hear the noise decline for a short while, and then resume. Formal contacts with the municipal government of Providencia led to several “orders to close”, none of which were carried out, much to the neighbours’ surprise. Their report then summarizes a list of meetings with the head of the local police station, the judge at the corresponding court, the municipality’s director of works (responsible for granting liquor and other licenses, and executing the order to close), the regional health office, and other official bodies. The result was the discovery that the discotheque was functioning illegally, but under the protection of a network of television personalities and politicians.

In less than a month, the neighbours’ experience stripped away expectations and laid bare the deficiencies of Chile’s hard won democracy, demonstrating that where the interests of powerful people were concerned, even when it came to something as frivolous as a
discotheque in a residential neighbourhood, their interests would take priority over the law and the general welfare of the community.

By 16 June, for example and as the report notes, the municipal government had responded to the illegality of the discotheque Oz, by providing it with a temporary license to operate, ignoring the complaints from neighbours, unable to sleep due to the fact that the old warehouse served as an amplifier and the property had no insulation for sound. The report ends with the question: “Who has so much power that they can pressure the municipality of Providencia and force it to act against the will, petitions and reports from the neighbours of Bellavista?” (Baeza and Arribas 1992).

This experience became the motor driving the early activities of the Junta #13 Mario Baeza, when it was refounded in 1993. Indeed, on 20 December 1993, during an assembly in the Plaza Camilo Mori, neighbours were invited to enlist in a series of commissions to deal with the challenges facing the neighbourhood. These included the ecological commission, which became the Comité Ecológico Silvino Zapico, EcoBella for short. The other commissions in the very ambitious program dealt with urbanism, art and culture, legalities, sports and recreation, international relations, commerce and manufacturing, solidarity, history and tradition. The art and culture, solidarity, and history and tradition commissions functioned for a short while, and indeed became a permanent part of the neighbourhood’s activities, but ceased to operate as specific commissions shortly after the assembly.

Eight women, however, signed up for EcoBella. Powered by neighbourhood frustration with dirt, discotheques and lack of recycling facilities, this group carried on for several years (JuntaVecinos13 1993) and eventually became a key organization in the anti-highway fight.

A year later, in January 1994, the Junta de Vecinos invited neighbours to attend a seminar in a local art gallery, the Casa Larga, where they debated the neighbourhood’s options with a municipal councillor, Rodrigo García Márquez, and Jaime Cataldo, then in charge of a non-profit corporation assigned the responsibility of recovering downtown Santiago, which was suffering from similar pressures to those of Bellavista. Other participants included Mario Baeza and representatives from the College of Architects, the local police station, and the regional health office, among others.

Amongst the early participants in the neighbourhood movement, Silvino Zapico was key. The son of Spanish refugees who fled to Chile on the Winnipeg, the ship that Pablo Neruda organized while Chilean consul in Madrid and then, once the Spanish Civil War broke out, Paris. Don Silvino, as we called him, ran the local grocery store, on the corner of
Mallinkrodt Street and Antonia López de Bello, one of the main east-west streets in the Bellavista neighbourhood (in fact, it reaches through the Vega and into Independencia as well). He was a citizen of the old school, formed in the Chile of the 1960s.

Don Silvino recalled how neighbours had organized to get Antonia López de Bello street paved, who had built the different homes when, and the programs that developed much of the neighbourhood's current physical appearance -- the tree-lined roads with their sidewalk gardens, which blurred the frontier between public and private space. His grocery store, visited almost daily by most neighbours, since it was still the custom to buy bread fresh every morning and evening for breakfast and evening tea, was a local centre for information, complaints and debates, a communications medium par excellence.

Don Silvino himself was an inveterate letter writer and would pronounce impassioned speeches on a moment's notice. Although he did not participate formally in the organizations that emerged in the post-regime period, he was an enormous presence, linking us to the civic customs of Chile's democratic past, particularly as they related to neighbourhood affairs. He became our memory, our inspiration and a major thorn in our sides, when we felt like slacking off or giving up on the seemingly impossible battles that continuously arose in our quest for peaceful, harmonious neighbourhood living.

After his death in September 1995, the Ecological Committee added his name to the group's, becoming the Comité Ecológico Silvino Zapico (EcoBella for short). This tradition continued in 1998, when Mario Baeza Gajardo, the Bellavista-born musician, who originally led the Bellavista Residents' Association, dropped dead of a heart attack, while directing a choral presentation in Santiago's luxurious Hyatt Hotel. Upon his death, the neighbourhood association became the Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza. His sister continued to live in a blue and white house at Antonia López de Bello and Melchor Concha until 2010, when she

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4 Baeza was an extraordinary artist and human being. Not only did he found Chile’s first major choir (Coro Sinfónico de la Universidad de Chile, 1945), but he went on to found choirs up and down the country during the 1950s and 1960s, in an unprecedented effort. A kind of Yehudi Menuhin, with strong convictions about the importance of culture to building social and intellectual capacity in excluded sectors of the population, after the coup, he continued his work, despite the military regime’s active hostility toward independent cultural activity, forming choirs and bringing music to children and adults throughout the country. In 1996, at a dinner that EcoBella held to honour his 80th birthday, he explained his belief that personal development, social equality and beauty went hand in hand with music and art and urged us to remember and cultivate this connection in everything we did. Speaking with elegance and passion he emphasized the importance of art and culture to human development, and as part of any effort to build equality. His funeral, two years later, lasted throughout most of the day, as hundreds of choirs he had founded or inspired played non-stop in the Providencia church where his remains were watched over.
was moved to a resting home. His wife, Iris Gazitúa, left the neighbourhood in the early 1990s, unable to withstand the noise from the discotheques and their users.

My husband, Patricio Lanfranco, a musician who used to walk around for days humming the same song, once opened our front door and sang a greeting from an old canon he had learned as a child. We were amazed when the fellow on the doorstep responded, singing the difficult counter harmony with an energetic, melodic tenor. It was our first meeting with Mario Baeza, who had written the song and taught it to Patricio’s choir, some 40 years earlier in Patagonia, where Pato grew up.

These kinds of ties, spiralling threads of relationships that came together, then separated, then reunited after years of distance, were typical of social relations in the barrio (neighbourhood). The coup and its aftermath had torn them apart. Picking up the lost stitches, patching and renewing them, became a central, although often unspoken part, of organizing and reaching out to other actors who could assist us in our efforts. They nourished these modest movements and gave meaning to what otherwise seemed like a useless expenditure of precious time.

By the end of 1995, the neighbourhood’s fight for its rights had been covered by several media (Channel 4, the newspapers La Epoca and La Nación, Radio Tierra a local radio station), and an assembly of more than 150 neighbours had approved a Declaration of Neighbours’ Rights, prepared by Patricio Lanfranco, treasurer of the neighbourhood association, and Jorge Vergara, a neighbour and philospher (Lanfranco and Vergara 1993, 1995).

The declaration begins:

Human beings have built cities and their neighbourhoods with the primordial objective of living in them, and all other functions related to human activity, whether commerce, industry, management, entertainment, etc. should be subordinate to this fundamental objective. Our neighbourhood, exceptionally well located and in balance with the environment, between the River Mapocho and the San Cristobal Hill, is suffering from the devastating aggression associated with an excess of polluting, commercial activities, which are out of control. Despite the above, we are probably the only part of the old sector of Santiago that still conserves its historic, artistic and cultural heritage, due mainly to the long defense that the inhabitants of Bellavista have led... (Lanfranco and Vergara 1993, 1995)

The rights reclaimed in the declaration included: the right to live in a healthy environment, free of pollution; the right to be heard, with respect, by public service bodies; and the right to be consulted in decision-making regarding the neighbourhood and its residents. It also made three proposals, which became the foundations of neighbourhood work in the years to come:
1. That Bellavista should be recognized as part of the country’s cultural and architectural heritage;

2. That a Board with neighbourhood, municipal, regional government, and private sector participation should be created, similar to the Santiago corporation, to supervise the neighbourhood's development;

3. That a system for coordinating neighbourhood complaints and public service response should be created, involving the neighbourhood associations, the municipalities of Providencia and Recoleta, the regional health office, and police.

The assembly also demanded the closure of the most damaging discotheques (by then there were seven), and ongoing supervision and enforcement of health, alcohol and other regulations by the regional health office (Lanfranco and Vergara 1993, 1995).

Two years later, in 1995, a report from EcoBella to a neighbourhood assembly held on 11 November, noted very little activity in 1994. Discouraged by the endless runarounds from government offices at all levels, the neighbours had retreated to their homes. Problems, however, continued to worsen, making it impossible to sleep, sometimes as often as six nights a week.

In July 1995, neighbours re-founded EcoBella as “an independent committee of neighbours of Barrio Bellavista”. To avoid conflicts with the neighbourhood association, its president, María Inés Arribas, also participated as an active member and liaison between the activist EcoBella and more institutional bodies, whether the neighbourhood association or different instances of government. By November, the committee had published and distributed three newsletters door to door. It had 19 permanent, active members and an additional 16 officially registered supporters (membership list, 1995). It had met with municipal authorities and struck up a more collaborative relationship with Dr. Hernan Varas, the director of Hygiene and Environment, who had even offered committee members a course on noise and how the legal system worked (or failed to do so) to ensure its control.

A 1995 report to the assembly of the Junta de Vecinos, noted that, aside from the seven editions of its own newsletter, published between 1993 and 1995, EcoBella was beginning to deal with the press, having issued “several news releases and articles, to publicize our problems and proposals”. It had also participated in courses on the environment, one organized by the College of Physicians, another by Quercum, a legal NGO, and one on transport problems in Santiago, organized by the NGO Participa. Member Anita Silva was in charge of recycling, Joan Morrison in charge of illegal offices that were eating into the small residential area, while Waleska Salinas was in charge of noise pollution, and I was the general coordinator (Sagaris, 1995).
EcoBella had prepared a fact file and presented it to all city council members (four of the eight accepted meetings), two congressional deputies, and the editor of a Santiago daily located in the neighbourhood, Las Últimas Noticias. Results, while modest, were encouraging: ten illegal offices had been closed; several discotheques had been shut down, although some reopened; and the neighbourhood was starting to formulate a vision shaped by the values of social, economic and environmental sustainability (Sagaris 1995).

By year’s end, the committee was framing the issues as “a problem of urban ecology”, in which “a beautiful residential neighbourhood” was being exploited “as quickly as possible, eliminating local services, filling it with restaurants (three, four, five per block), offices (many of them illegal) and discoteques, which are totally incompatible with its residential character. This over-exploitation began five years ago. It cannot continue without doing irreparable damage.” Moreover, the report notes, most of these problems reflect “transgressions to the regulations currently in effect” (Sagaris 1995).

On 20 October 1996, Bellavista became the only neighbourhood of the time to hold an all-candidates meeting as part of preparations for the municipal elections of that year. During the meeting, an assembly of neighbours required that candidates sign an “Act of Commitment to the Quality of Life in Bellavista”. In upscale Providencia, three of the candidates won, including Mayor Christián Labbé, a former army officer who had served General Pinochet after the coup, María Lea-Plaza, also of the ultra-right party, the Unión Democrática Independiente (UDI), and an actor and socialist party member, Julio Jung.

The Commitment reflects the neighbours’ frustration with the endless runarounds amongst government offices, police and politicians, and notes that problems with discotheques have increased (from one to six): If, in 1992,

we were worried about the lack of safety in our streets at night, now we have witnessed rapes and murders, and a steady influx of drug trafficking on our streets. If we originally, and rather ingenuously, thought the noise problem was temporary, we’ve now lived for four years at the mercy of this monster that splinters our most intimate dreams and sows personality changes, stress and grave mental health problems (EcoBella and JuntaVecinos13 1996).

The document concludes with the phrase “I hereby commit myself to a Barrio Bellavista as a model neighbourhood for human and ecological development”, based on access to municipal council meetings, strict respect for the local zoning plan, recycling, support for cultural initiatives and citizens’ groups, and policies to discourage car use and favour quality public transport, investment in greenways for cyclists and pedestrians, and citizen participation in transport and metropolitan planning at the urban level.
In five short years, with help from the NGO and professional organizations mentioned above, and its own community resources, the Bellavista neighbourhood was beginning to develop a citizens’ perspective on urban events, as they played out in the intimacy of their own homes, streets, and in clashes with other users. Moreover, neighbours had learned the hard way that, while there was a new democracy on paper, in practice the interface between citizens, politicians and the government remained subject to the same rigid class differences so apparent throughout Chilean history and reinforced by events and policies under the military regime. Perhaps the most telling event of the time was a visit, by a group of 15 neighbours from EcoBella and the Junta de Vecinos #13, to a meeting of the Providencia municipal council. An EcoBella member had duly phoned beforehand, to check the time and date of the meeting, and asked if neighbours were allowed to attend. “Yes,” she was told, “the meetings are open to the public. You can watch but you can’t speak unless you’re on the agenda.”

When neighbours actually arrived and attempted to enter the council chamber, however, they met with resistance from guards and secretaries, who refused to let them go in. An absurd dialogue than followed, in which different neighbours would insist, “But meetings are open to the public? We’re the public. We want to go in.” And the secretary in charge would reply, “Yes, meetings are open to the public, but YOU can’t go in.”

The exchange went on and on like a kafkian chorus, and the neighbours never did get to attend the meeting that day. This, then, was where things stood for the neighbours, their neighbourhood and their relations with the rest of the city at the end of 1995 when, as an EcoBella meeting drew to a close in a sunny kitchen in the Bellavista area known as the Población de los Gráficos (the Printworkers’ Quarter), someone mentioned the rumour that a major highway project was slated to run right through the Barrio Bellavista, obliterating it from the face of the city.

**DN3.2 The Campaign Begins (1996)**

* We want development for people, families, communities and quality of life, not for cars.

* We want a project for rapid and effective transport, that benefits everyone along the way. This could be an urban train; a metro train (since they are planning to dig trenches and tunnels anyway); rapid, efficient buses; cycle ways; other solutions.

* We want the public works minister to come to the neighbourhood and listen to people.

* We want a healthy city for **EVERYONE** (campaign leaflet, 4-May-1996).

The Chilean government, headed by engineer and businessman Eduardo Frei (Jr.), announced the Costanera Norte project in March 1995, but the news created little stir amongst the communities potentially affected. There was little clarity about the specific route and little
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Main identity/activity</th>
<th>Approx. population</th>
<th>Main strengths</th>
<th>Main weaknesses</th>
<th>Other Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independencia</td>
<td>Two poor, working class residential areas, many elderly residents</td>
<td>1: 90 families, 60 renters, 30 residents for over 10 years. 2: Pasaje Olivos, a dozen families, mostly elderly.</td>
<td>Active involvement, persistent meticulous leadership</td>
<td>Fear of consequences, often paralyzed; No previous knowledge of transportation or urban issues</td>
<td>Fear response to their situation, victimization, inward turning focus on basic survival</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Eventually community was dissolved, very painful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Memorial events held to recall and learn from experience, some healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recoleta</td>
<td>Multiple groups in central market district, little residential</td>
<td>Tirso de Molina: 408 kiosks, 5,000 people, selling fruit, vegetables, etc; Vega Chica: 120 kiosks, some 2,000 people Remodelación Recoleta: 20 kiosks, 100 people; Acofer: shopkeepers around central market. No count. Pérgola Santa María: flower vendors, 500 people.</td>
<td>Strong ability to mobilize, sector beloved by the rest of the population (because of the market activity and heritage)</td>
<td>Very mistrustful, hierarchical, competitive relationships among different groups, easily divided</td>
<td>Enormous power to mobilize weakened by mistrust, rumour mongering, tendency for leaders to be undemocratic, populist or authoritarian, less information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellavista</td>
<td>Arts community, mixed residential and commercial, with many related problems</td>
<td>Some 10,000 residents mostly in traditional, low-rise adobe houses and four-storey walk-up apartments; social housing; some larger housing. Administration split between Recoleta and Providencia municipalities.</td>
<td>Creative, committed, friendly and attractive to outsiders, beloved sector among the rest of the population (because of cultural activity, night life and heritage)</td>
<td>Turnover in leadership could lead to inconsistencie s</td>
<td>Power centre with strong leadership, much of it highly educated, but mixed economic base well integrated, the “hinge” with other groups. Lots of mutual support, capacity to bring new people in and educate them relatively quickly, overcome frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro de Valdivia</td>
<td>Wealthy upper class neighbourhood</td>
<td>Some 5,000 residents in some apartments, mostly large single family homes at foot of San Cristobal hill.</td>
<td>Highly skilled, good lobbyists Some previous knowledge of transportation or urban issues</td>
<td>Hard to mobilize Knowledge concentrated among experts who often worked on their own</td>
<td>Economically and socially the most powerful sector, but less social capital. Comes and goes according to the issue and how seriously they feel affected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
certainty about its execution. An article in the evening paper, La Segunda, gives a good sense of the atmosphere in which the project would be implemented. “Urban road investments must double or triple to maintain (not even improve) current levels of congestion” a two-inch headline announces, followed by the proclamation, also in large print:

Minister Lagos painted a pretty “terrifying” picture with regard to the perspectives for one of the problems of today that produces the most stress amongst Chileans and is going to worsen. He called on the private sector to invest in profitable projects and on the finance ministry to give priority to infrastructure, with growth in this item of from 9-10% of public expenditure (Segunda 1995).

Behind the scenes, however, the national government, represented by the public works ministry (MOP), headed by Ricardo Lagos, began a series of intense negotiations with the different municipal governments and some of the actors along the routes initially considered.

As the year progressed, the highway’s route shifted constantly, away from early alternatives, which would have devastated old, working class neighbourhoods to the north of the San Cristobal Hill, into positions that would locate it closer to downtown. This reflected the economic imperative -- the highway would have to generate profits -- inherent in the decision to make the project Chile’s first major urban highway concession, a poster child for an ambitious, but poorly planned program (Silva 2011). This meant its development would require public tenders, private partners for the building and then the management phases, business plans and calculations that promised sufficient profits from tolls to make the investment worthwhile. Thus, while originally intended to by-pass downtown, the enormous volumes of traffic from the wealthy comunas on Santiago’s northeastern edges to downtown made access to the city centre essential from a financial, if not a logistical perspective.5

In March 1996, some of the government’s own technical advisors were already trying to open the debate about Santiago’s congestion “problem” and public transport. In a thoughtful op-ed column in El Mercurio, Santiago’s most influential daily newspaper, Daniel Fernández, then the executive secretary of the transport infrastructure investment planning commission, noted that 77% of daily trips were made by public transport, and underlined the importance of creating bus-only routes on major streets. Where would the investment come from?

These are projects that aren’t profitable for an investor, since there could be no charge for vehicles using this infrastructure, as there would be for cars... So, does this mean that in the case of urban projects, they can only happen if they’re a good investment for a private

5 Recoleta mayor, Ernesto Moreno, originally explained the multiple routes explored as part of the project’s preparation as a sign of his success in protecting “his” comuna, during a meeting with neighbours at the Juan Verdaguer School in Bellavista, in March 1996. The result, however, was that these negotiations shifted it from the middle of his jurisdiction to the southern edge, where it impacted heavily on the neighbours and markets on the northern bank of the Mapocho River.
investor? The answer is no. Here we are faced with the unavoidable role of the State... (Fernández 1996).

His words were quickly lost, however, as the press announced (figure DN.x) the government’s interest in creating attractive investments in urban infrastructure for the private sector. The same day, in an official news release, the housing ministry and Lagos himself announced that “there is an agreement between the authorities and the community, that the urban road project, the Costanera Norte, is an initiative that generates enormous urban opportunities that should not be ignored” (MINVU 1996). Two routes were under consideration, one that would run through the heart of Bellavista, under Constitución street, and a second that would take up a local road (Loreto-Vivaceta) on the neighbourhood’s western edge, between Bellavista and Patronato, a popular shopping area. Lagos, quoted in the same news release, promised that the decision on which option to implement would be the result of “environmental impact and technical studies”, a promise that he and his concessions unit would repeat often in the coming months. The price tag on the project had already risen to US$233 mn, in the year since the project had been first announced.

These announcements, that the “community” was already onboard and supported the project, raised the antenna of the Bellavista groups. Thus, that same month, the two Bellavista juntas de vecinos jointly organized a public meeting about the project in a spacious auditorium in the Liceo Alemán (German highschool), then located at Dardignac and Pio Nono streets. Led by urbanist María Inés Arribas and artist Carmen Silva, more than 300 neighbours packed into the hall, anxiously perusing the highway plans, which had been taped up on the walls.

MOP officials had also heard about the meeting and hastily organized to have two representatives there: Fernando Valderrama, the MOP official in charge of the project, and Julio Alegría, an architect and external consultant responsible for the initial set of studies. When they arrived they produced the project plans with a flourish, only to discover that the versions obtained by the neighbours were more recent than theirs. The incident marked what would become a constant: the lack of transparency in the MOP’s approach to providing information on its flagship project, and the neighbours’ ability, often through divisions and dissent within the government itself, to obtain key information and place it in squarely in the limelight of public scrutiny.6

At the two March meetings, the message from Recoleta Mayor Moreno and the project’s other proponents was that the government had done a good job figuring out the details of the

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6 Anecdote recounted by María Inés Arribas and other leaders of the neighbourhood association.
project, that it would go ahead no matter what the neighbours said or did, and that their only course of action was to accept it, gratefully, and perhaps attempt to negotiate some mitigations to reduce its impacts. Then, as ever throughout the project, there was no information provided on the project’s impacts in terms of air pollution, congestion, access and egress points, noise, expropriations and other key issues that became increasingly important, as the neighbours’ knowledge of such projects began to grow.

Neighbours, notwithstanding, were not happy with this policy of fait accompli. I remembered similar debates about the Spadina expressway in Toronto, when I was growing up, and shared this story with many, always ending with a description of a recent visit to Toronto, where I took a streetcar along what had almost become the highway route. Others had heard of similar fights elsewhere, or simply argued that if they had been able to oppose a military dictatorship, why not dare to oppose a highway project? These were complex issues: people who had fought the dictatorship for the government now in power did not much like the idea of starting a campaign against that same government. Some, however, thought that because they belonged to the same parties now in government, it would listen more willingly and find better solutions to the problem.

As the year progressed, the Bellavista organizations began to collect more information about highway projects and their impacts on cities and specific communities. At first, transport engineers who opposed the project were reluctant to talk to its opponents for fear of reprisals from the government, their main source of employment. Later, as the campaign progressed, several academics began to take public positions on the project, most notably María Elena Ducci, Ignacio Santa María and Alberto Gurovic, distinguished architects and urbanists; Juan de Dios Ortúzar, Francisco Martínez and Juan Carlos Muñoz, transport engineers; Simón Figueroa, a Bellavista neighbour and chemist, who dedicated long hours to collecting information about contaminants and what they would mean for the health of those living along the path of the highway; Pablo San Martín, a geographer working with the Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (an NGO that observed environmental conflicts in Latin American countries); Chris Zegras, a staff person with the International Institute for Energy Conservation (now an MIT professor of transportation). Under their tutelage, the Bellavista groups realized how devastating the project was going to be. Thus, their analysis of the project itself offered considerable evidence that it would have intensive, extensive and extremely negative impacts on the central communities through which it would pass.

Benefits would accrue primarily to residents in the wealthy east end, and real estate projects planned for both ends of the highway. The central communities risked being erased
and either replaced with “modern” projects involving malls, parking and highrises (the Vega area) or densely polluted and degraded urban areas (Bellavista), while Pedro de Valdivia Norte would see its congress with the hill cut off by a six-lane highway, with the noise and contaminants that would involve, and the Independencia communities would simply disappear under the asphalt ribbon and cinder block administration buildings of the highway.

On 7 June 1996, EcoBella members, with a cardboard chimney spewing out balloons of different colours to represent the different contaminants that would flood the community, presented their analysis to an assembly of neighbours in the Plaza Camilo Mori. In their declaration (figures 3.2, 3.3), they called on the Bellavista community to oppose the project, and launched the slogan “No a la Costanera Norte”. The event, coming on the heels of major environmental conflicts in Tierra del Fuego (over the Trillium forestry project), Mehuin (over pulp emissions into a fishing-dependent bay), and the Maipo canyon (over the GasAndes pipeline project), reflected the first major urban environmental conflict to hit Santiago itself.

Despite the magnitude of the challenge, this event, like most of those associated with the campaign, was cheerful and friendly, helping to build ties among neighbours and their supporters. Privately, however, leaders had no illusions about the results of the conflict they had just begun. Even friends, especially those with close ties to the governing coalition, had warned that there was no way the government would back down. The way we saw it, we were headed for sure defeat. There was always a point in these conversations when we would look at each other with despair, and then shrug. The Mapuche had decided to die, if necessary, defending their right to their lands. We felt that if our neighbourhoods were going to die, then we too would defend them, showing a minimum of human dignity.

While most of upscale Providencia had been a rightwing stronghold for decades, politically mixed, artistic, ragtag Bellavista was best known for its opposition to the military regime. Nonetheless, the Costanera Norte project itself was being championed by Socialist Party member Ricardo Lagos, a highly popular leader who was angling to become the next president of Chile. Indeed, many saw his presence in the public works ministry as an effort to show that in post-Pinochet Chile a socialist could be president without the economy falling apart, and could even work well with business and economic interests. As a result, discussions amongst leaders of the Junta #13 and EcoBella led to the conclusion that the groups would oppose the project but would refrain from attacking the individuals associated with it. This approach would later become a hallmark of Living City’s work.

In July 1996, María Inés Arribas, president of the Junta de Vecinos #13, was surprised to receive a call from Jaime Márquez, urban advisor to the municipality of Providencia. He
begged her to join him in a meeting with MOP officials. He had been trying to get information about the highway from them for several weeks and had noticed that the neighbourhood association had been more successful than he. He therefore proposed that the neighbours send representatives to a meeting he was going to, with MOP officials in charge of the highway project. Thus began an uneasy truce between the Bellavista groups and the municipality of Providencia.

Indeed, a Bellavista leaflet from that period quotes Jaime Márquez as concerned because of the lack of studies of the highway’s impact. Two routes were still under consideration, moreover, one that would slice a tunnel through the hill, emerging in Bellavista near the one-time residence of Neruda, which became a venerated museum after the death of his widow, Mathilde Urrutia; the other would take over existing roads crossing the city, with no alternative route in place for the 30,000 or more cars travelling them to downtown, during the construction period.

This early leaflet (1996) ends with a series of questions that would become central to the next phase of the campaign:

If this is about solving a transportation problem, why not seek solutions that benefit more people?

Authorities (Recoleta, MOP, MINVU) say we shouldn’t worry, they’ll take care of the quality of life and avoid negative environmental impacts. How are we supposed to believe they’re capable of this, when the levels of noise, violence, social problems have already overcome the authorities, who are incapable of correcting these situations? If they can’t even close a discotheque that makes unbearable noise all night, how will they do anything with a superhighway?

What about the vibrations (during construction) and the toxic gases (once the highway is up and running?).

The year ended with an event that would serve as a warning of what the MOP was willing to do to ensure that its flagship project went ahead as planned. On 2 December, a young woman appeared at my door, claiming to be a friend of María Inés Arribas (president of the neighbourhood association). Using the familiar “tú” form, she told me she’d heard about a meeting to discuss the future of the neighbourhood, where they were “probably going to discuss the highway project”, and thought it was really important to ensure that some of the neighbours opposed to it were present. She asked for the list of EcoBella members, which I gave her, and invited several of us⁷ to the meeting, in a few hours time. The “meeting” (see invitation, figure 3.4), in Antonia López de Bello 172, 5th floor, in the Recoleta side of

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⁷ María Inés Arribas, María Eliana Bustamante and I were present, along with five or six others.
Bellavista, turned out to be an apparently free-ranging conversation about our hopes for the neighbourhood, our fears regarding threats such as the discotheques and the highway project. As the facilitator increasingly focused in on the highway project, our suspicions became aroused and we started to ask questions ourselves, insisting until the organizers admitted that we were being filmed and recorded.

In a reasonably democratic society, this would have been an obvious case of violation of ethics: a “focus group” in which participants were not informed of its purpose or the rules of engagement, including recordings. In a post-dictatorial environment, the impact was terrifying. To think that a national ministry, led by a socialist who had himself been the victim of repression during the regime, would stoop to this kind of spying was an appalling revelation to us. We were forced to choose between fear and paralysis, or the more frightening but also empowering option of denouncing this event. We did denounce it publicly, receiving enormous support from other civil society organizations, particularly Casa de la Paz, an NGO located in the Bellavista neighbourhood, which became a quiet supporter and enabler of the Coordinadora’s efforts. The support was crucial, as all of us felt vulnerable to pressures that could lead to losing our jobs, our livelihoods or our homes.

It’s hard to convey how frightened we were, throughout these early years of conflict. The burden of fear from the military years did not just disappear on the day that Patricio Aylwin was sworn into office. Even those of us who had played roles in opposing the regime lived with that fear all the time. In post-Pinochet Chile, the repetition of patterns associated with the repression of the previous period was deeply threatening and we were all afraid, all of the time. What we also carried over from the regime, however, was the urge and the will to resist that fear, to live with it, control it and redirect it into a direction that could lead us through and beyond the fear. For some of us, particularly in Bellavista, this became very central to our feeling about and motivations for continuing a very heavy and unequal battle. We wanted our new democracy to be real. We wanted our neighbourhood to survive. And we used these deeply felt aspirations to tempt our own people out of their homes and into our squares and streets, to march, but also to hold each other’s hands in a huge neighbourhood hug, a way of demonstrating that our “fight” was fueled not by hatred or rage but by a deep, abiding love for our neighbours and the places we all shared.

To see people emerge from their homes and venture out into the square, to see our seniors marching, with canes and crutches, and the energy and enthusiasm that they must have felt in the 1960s under Chile’s previous democracy, was an inspiration that drew us on and pushed us further. It represented both a daring and a healing. As it turned out, this spoke
strongly to the rest of the city, calling out support, sometimes where we least expected it, among other groups but also even within government offices and the MOP itself.

**DN.3.3 Citizen participation: Opening Skirmishes (1996-early 1997)**

Enrique Silva, who studied the Costanera Norte highway concession process, as part of his PhD studies, characterizes Chile’s implementation of franchised highways as “an instance of deliberate improvisation” (2011). He notes that unlike planning traditions in the north, “Chile’s central government has framed planning as a narrower, technical-market enterprise,” designed to support “production by facilitating the construction of large infrastructural projects” and encourage “private companies to actively participate in the public works sector” (p. 36, Silva 2011).

What emerges in Chile is an argument about improvisation as planning strategy or what I call deliberate improvisation, a political choice that signals the power of the state to define what should be planned, how and when. More simply, deliberate improvisation is planning without a plan (p. 36, Silva 2011).

Silva argues that this reflects the “path-dependent or variegated aspects of the neoliberal turn in Chile” as a “composite of old, new, endogenous and exogenous ideas and practices of regulation”. Thus, the concessions program illustrates “an embrace of market logic for public works delivery but not in ways that dramatically redefine the role and structure of the Chilean state or its planning arm, the MOP” (pp. 36-37, Silva 2011).

Silva considers the implementation of the new concessions program with its flagship Costanera Norte urban highway concession, a “foundational moment” in Chile’s political and economic liberalization under the new government. This helps to explain why the unexpected strength of the opposition movement and its efforts to contest and even contain the government’s most powerful ministry, became considered a turning point in urban planning, in post-dictatorial Chile (Sepúlveda and du Monceau de Bergendal 1998; Sepúlveda 1999; Ducci 2000; Ducci 2002; Allard 2003; Ducci 2004; Ducci 2004; Sabatini, Geisse et al. 2004; Poduje 2008; Poduje 2008; Tironi, Poduje et al. 2010; Poduje 2011).

As 1996 folded into 1997, neighbours were already becoming concerned (see figure DN.x) as the Concertación government responded to electoral demands for greater social equality and better social programs, by arguing that Chile was suffering from an “infrastructure deficit” that threatened its economic development and required “modernization” of roads and

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8 Indeed, I remember comments from one of the external consultants responsible for several studies of the Costanera Norte, who commented that although the project had taken years to develop, no single study had had more than two months to examine conditions, analyze and prepare conclusions and recommendations.
highways. Already a relatively successful highway concession program had been implemented to connect Chile’s far-flung cities with a road network, thus leaving its railway system in decline.

Table 3.1 summarizes the main arguments in favour of the project. At the time, they seemed obvious and uncontestable, and there is every sign that the government expected no real opposition to its multimillion dollar baby. The double whammy of spanking new infrastructure combined with a shiny new financing mechanism, the build-operate-transfer concession, seemed like a winner from every perspective. Indeed, the MOP sang the praises of its new highway concessions program as a way of obtaining private investment in key infrastructure projects, as a perfect strategy for “saving” government funds much needed for social programs.

For the newly elected leaders the country had no choice but to act quickly and decisively to invest heavily in upgrading and expanding the network of roads, ports and airports previously ignored by the Pinochet military regime. In the words of a former Minister of Public Works, not to act on the infrastructure front ‘would be intolerable ... the costs of inaction would be too high” (p. 38, Silva 2011).

These arguments of urgency also served to justify the lack of consultation of those affected, as a national ministry, the MOP, stepped into the delicate interrelationships of a city ecology to impose a massive highway project.

...deliberation on anything other than the technical and financial dimensions of concessions risked delaying the implementation of the system and the construction of much needed infrastructure; and the political costs of not delivering infrastructure would be higher than the costs associated with any political fallout linked to concessions and its projects. This perspective, moreover, was built on the assumption that if and when unforeseen consequences arose, the government would have the capacity to manage them (p. 41, Silva 2011).

Evidently, the MOP was confident it would be able to deal with any fallout from the proposed project through a simple exercise of power, its own. Moreover, the previous minister, Carlos Hurtado, had deliberately designed the system to bypass stakeholders within the government itself, setting up the Concessions Unit as an elite, standalone unit whose professional staff enjoyed some of the highest wages in the whole government and the least restraints on their actions. Indeed, concessions head (later minister of public works) Carlos Cruz and 13 other people who worked in the concessions unit under Lagos were eventually tried for defrauding the State, in a system involving triangulation of payments extracted from private firms, via the Gate consulting firm, to pay higher wages to concessions staff. Police investigations calculated the total amount involved to be some US$2 million. After a lengthy judicial investigation, Cruz
was convicted, receiving a three-year suspended sentence in July 2010, and an order to personally repay US$1.6 million (LaNacion 2010; Quijada 2010; Silva 2011).

Suspicious of irregularities surrounded the project at many steps in the process, but judicial corroboration remained far in the future, in 1997, as the year and the debate began. In January, an article in a financial newspaper reported the creation of a special unit in the MOP, to be in charge of oncessions in Santiago. The first was the Costanera Norte, now worth US $250 mn, whose design was “already 95% ready. The only task left is to define a few details, based on the environmental impact study, whose recommendations increased by 15% the initial cost estimates for the project” (ElDiario 1997).

The rest of the summer (Jan/Feb 1997) was relatively quiet, although an article in La Segunda announced that more than 1,000 neighbours would be invited to participate in the environmental impact assessment process (Segunda 1997) and there was some mild debate about integration of existing roads into the Costanera highway project, the tender and the rules of the concession.

As most Santiaguinos enjoyed the summer, swimming in the ocean or southern lakes, in an op ed piece, national prize-winning architect, Mario Pérez de Arce was warning that the highway would destroy the river, one of Santiago’s most salient natural features (Pérez de Arce 1997). At month’s end, the neighbours of Pedro de Valdivia Norte were “on the alert” (see figure 3.6), and had begun to study the project’s route and its impacts on the San Cristobal Hill park (Díaz Raffo 1997), while mayors and neighbours were criticizing the lack of participation in several megaprojects, including gas pipelines, thermoelectric generating stations and the Costanera Norte highway project (ElMercurio 1997).

**DN3.4 The Battle to Open Up the Environmental Impact Assessment process (1997)**

In March 1997, Lagos announced he was willing to delay the call for bids on the Costanera Norte until month’s end, in order to reach an agreement with the Pedro de Valdivia Norte neighbours. In the report, a relaxed Lagos casually dismisses the neighbours’ concerns “We’re in the presence of a project that will benefit tens of thousands of santiaguinos”, a project which “everyone knows” has existed for more than 30 years, and that has been duly discussed with local authorities from Providencia (Henríquez 1997).

Notwithstanding, the next day’s Segunda announced that “Neighbourhood power has issued a call to order” (Guerra and Aguirre 1997), and carried a photograph of a candlelit procession against “aberrant urbanismo”. A few days later, Oscar Astrain Donoso, a concerned
lawyer, wrote a letter to El Mercurio expressing his angst at the thought that “a hundred people” might delay such a crucial project (Astrain Donoso 1997).

By month’s end, Lagos’ patience with the fractious neighbours of Pedro de Valdivia Norte seemed to have waned, because the MOP announced that it would open the bids on the project as planned, at the same time as it presented its environmental impact study to Chile’s newly created environmental commission (ElMercurio 1997). During a neighbourhood assembly in March 1997, Mayor Labbé of Providencia expressed his opposition to the project, at the same time as MOP officials were reaffirming their promises to enter the newly created Environmental Impact Assessment Sistem (SEIA) in meetings with Labbé’s urban advisor, Jaime Márquez, and representatives of Bellavista.

Meanwhile, the SEIA, which had initially been voluntary, became compulsory on 3 April 1997, as the result of a major conflict over native forests on Tierra del Fuego, led by a coalition of Chilean and American environmental groups. Notwithstanding its promises to the contrary, the MOP opened tenders on the US$333 mn project three days later, publishing large advertisements in the major Santiago newspapers and, rather surprisingly given the many promises to the contrary, showing no intention of presenting an environmental assessment. In the days that followed, and with no coordination, neighbours from the wealthy Las Condes neighbourhood filed a suit against the inclusion of existing roads in the project (15 April 1997), while neighbours from Bellavista and nearby Pedro de Valdivia Norte (Providencia) also filed suit, requesting an order to paralyze until the project entered the SEIA (16 April 1997).

Table DN.X summarizes neighbours’ responses by the different comunas in which they were located. There were some initial skirmishes in the wealthy areas of Lo Barnechea, Vitacura and Las Condes, mainly over the principle of charging for Kennedy Avenue, a trunk road that was rolled into the overall Costanera Norte project, and thus became subject to tolls. Overall, however, residents in these neighbourhoods, with their high incomes, high car ownership levels and interest in travelling as quickly as possible to the city centre and points west (airport, ports, sea resorts, etc.) supported the project and there was little outcry and no grassroots organization against the project.

Similarly, in the poorest areas, particularly Cerro Navia, Renca and Pudahuel, there was little organized opposition (although the Coordinadora did have sporadic contact with

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9 Quijada notes an “ephimeral” Coordinadora NO a la Concesión de Av. Kennedy, which sent several letters to the mayors of Las Condes and Vitacura, asking the municipalities to take legal action to stop Kennedy from being included in the highway project, with no followup or continuity. (p. 87, Quijada 2009)
citizens’ groups in all three comunas). Contrary to initial promises, moreover, there were expropriations in Cerro Navia and Renca, with households receiving less compensation than their counterparts in Independencia. The two Independencia groups (which included both renters and property owners) joined and became stalwarts in the Coordinadora, helping to organize against the project and leading a stubborn battle of attrition with the MOP to achieve what they considered reasonable compensation. During the final phases of the conflict between the Coordinadora, the MOP and the municipality of Independencia, the citizens’ groups failed to save these vulnerable communities, but they did achieve compensation for both renters as well as owners. The MOP never kept its promises, however, to provide equivalent housing in the same part of the city, and once expropriated, these families were dispersed to the far corners of Santiago (Olivares 2010). This was the most bitter defeat for the Coordinadora, which by and large would succeed in terms of saving the member communities affected by the project.

Although the Las Condes suit was rejected, after Lagos argued that US$20-25mn would go into this section of the project, and that charging a toll was therefore justified, the Bellavista/PVN suit was initially accepted (25 April 1996), on the grounds that the route through the park (San Cristobal Hill) would violate zoning bylaws and citizens’ right to a pollution-free environment. In a surprise move, the Appeals Court issued a temporary order paralyzing the project, essentially requiring that the government enter the environtal assessment process (SEIA).

The response from the authorities and the Chilean builders’ association (Cámara Chilena de la Construcción) roared through headlines in the main newspapers the next day. The sense of business-as-usual complacency vanished overnight. MOP and its supporters in the press and the private sector exploded in indigation. In the Mercurio, for example, Lagos, furious that these complaints from neighbours were “affecting the right to circulate on our streets at suitable speeds”, argued that there should be laws forcing citizens who filed these kinds of writs to pay the expenses. The builders’ association, meanwhile, announced it would join the legal fray at the MOP’s side, while Jaime Ravinet, a prominent Christian Democrat, then mayor of the comuna of Santiago, called the Appeals Court decision “appalling” and said that “the personal interest of a few neighbours could not continue to paralyze advances and progress of the Chilean capital”. Ravinet too announced his decision to take the MOP’s side in the legal suit (media reports quoted on p. 46, Quijada 2009).

These responses triggered anxious calls among the leadership of the both neighbourhoods, terrified at the prospect of being sued or perhaps even losing their homes. It
is hard to communicate the level of panic that we all felt, at being set upon by what, at the
time, seemed like the entire economic and political elite of the country, willing to use their
considerable powers to empoverish and silence any questioning of their important project.

Shortly, however, some key experts raised the first technical objections to the project.
Ignacio Santa María, who would win the national award for urban planning the next year, said
“we’re beating the record for urban foolishness for lack of management and administration of
the city”. Juan de Dios Ortúzar, one of Chile’s most respected transport engineers, added his
voice, noting that the highway would not reduce congestion and would definitely increase the
city’s already suffocating air pollution. Patricio Gross, then president of the Catholic
University’s Institute for Urban and Territorial Studies, compared the highway to an “elephant
in a crystal store” (quotes from the debate in the media, from pp. 46-47, Quijada 2009,
Coordinadora Archives).

At the same time, Mayor Labbé consulted the Bellavista and PVN neighbourhood
associations and commissioned an independent environmental assessment from CADE-IDEPE,
a prestigious engineering firm
that was well known for its
serious work in this field.
Although it initially argued that
the court order did not affect
the call for tenders, on 1 May
the MOP was forced to
suspend the tender, and on 7
May the MOP it presented a
hastily prepared environmental
assessment study to the
environmental commission
(Conama).

The MOP’s quiet
negotiations during the early
months of 1997 brought onboard most of the Santiago mayors, those from the governing
colition (the Concertación) and even those from the opposition (Las Condes, Vitacura, Lo
Barnechea), with the exception of Providencia’s Mayor Labbé. Moreover, it successfully
neutralized opposition from the wealthier comunas, where it might have been expected to
arise, given the human, technical and financial resources available. It seems that the MOP did
not expect the low- and middle-income communities of Bellavista, La Vega and Independencia to be capable of mounting a serious opposition to its flagship project.

Despite its initial outrage, the MOP proceeded to treat the Appeals Court decision to suspend the project as a temporary setback. Although it had announced repeatedly that it had conducted in-depth studies, including an environmental impact assessment, the cobbled together report submitted to the environmental commission in May suggests that it had done very little prior to the court order. Indeed, the MOP kept adding new sections to the report, particularly as the objections and criticisms began to pour in, not only from citizens and academics, but also from its own technical reviewers in other governmental departments and ministries. As the months passed, the EIA process shone a powerful spotlight on the inadequate information presented. Debate over the project became increasingly public and began to engage with an ever broadening circle of public opinion.

With the MOP’s presentation of the environmental impact study to the environmental commission, the court considered the grounds for the court order paralyzing the project had been suitably dealt with, and in August 1997 it was lifted. Notwithstanding, the project would spend another year under scrutiny, before the government would mobilize all its power to summarily quash the opposition, at least in the environmental arena.

**DN3.5 A Coalition Emerges (1997-1998)**

On 19 June, the Santiago region environmental commission, Corema, began a citizen participation process, as required by the new environmental framework legislation and regulation. Thus began the period of most intense activity by the communities affected by the highway project in an environment heavily influenced by the total absence of any experience with citizen participation. These early sessions were maked by a painful clumsiness that reflected the conditions prevailing in a post-dictatorial society, but also a fear of conflict that pre-dated the regime. Oriana Salazar, who worked for Casa de la Paz during this period, and later became head of citizen participation in the national environmental commission, Conama, noted that:

> Conama maintained a low profile, because it was barely a year old. No one in Chile knew how to organize citizen participation. Conama was always indecisive about conflicts in general -- 20 years of dictatorship bore deep into the bone (*nos hizo mella*) (Salazar 2010).

This lack of experience was apparent during the first session, a half-day that took market people away from their stalls and Bellavista neighbours away from their work, only to hear a seemingly endless explanation of the participatory methodology to be used. We had very
concrete questions about both the project and the process and we wanted access to the actual studies and plans that constituted the project, along with guarantees that our observations would weigh on the final decision. These questions received no answers.

Participants did learn, however, that everyone from “architects and engineers who were experts in these subjects all the way down to ignorant housewives, who know nothing” would receive “equal treatment” during the environmental assessment process. “Isn’t that reassuring?” I whispered to a corpulent, rosy-cheeked woman sitting on my right. She was Sonia Abarca, president of the Vega Chica, who nodded her agreement. There began the process that would forge the Coordinadora. Indeed, the Coordinadora’s formation was very much an unexpected side effect of the dysfunctional participatory process to which the government invited citizens.

Earlier, Bellavista had tried to create a joint effort among anti-highway groups, when EcoBella met with Ambrosio García-Huidobro, the president of the PVN neighbourhood association (Junta de Vecinos #12). García-Huidobro wasn’t convinced of the need for a combined effort, however. As an engineer, he believed that his own technical measurements, proposals and arguments would be enough.

The early participatory meetings at the environmental commission brought together representatives of the different communities affected by the project, however. During the coffee breaks we sussed each other out, and very quickly, we began to gather in people’s homes or, eventually, with support from Casa de la Paz, in that organization’s meeting room, on the top floor of a three-storey building in the centre of Bellavista.

At those meetings, the profile of the original Coordinadora quickly took shape (table 3.3), revealing a diverse mix of socio-economic backgrounds and interests, ranging from defense of the environment, heritage, livelihoods, homes and the right to live in a central part of the city, with excellent services. Group meetings, every week or two, became trainings in the different issues associated with the project, including urban and transport considerations, pollution, the environmental assessment process, political analysis and strategizing.

Decisions were taken by consensus and many advisors from academic bodies (see Table DN3.4) and NGOs participated at different stages in the process. Mauricio Montecinos, who would later become president of the Bellavista Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza, was a forester who worked in Conaf, the national body responsible for Chile’s forests. As a result, he had extensive experience with environmental impact assessment and considerable understanding of the legalities of the new EIA law. He trained other Coordinadora members in
its import, and eventually coordinated the communities’ in-depth response to the government’s environment impact assessment.

In fact, the diverse knowledge available to the Coordinadora, every time the leaders from each sector sat down together in a circle in someone’s living room or around a table in the church hall in Pedro de Valdivia Norte, was quite extraordinary, particularly if we include the advisors who approached during different public events, offering advice, support and practical knowledge, as well as much needed contacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table DN.4. Common characteristics among the four communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main individual actors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recoleta-Vega: Small business people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellavista: Small business, taxi drivers, artists and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intellectuals, independent professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PdeVNorte: Professionals and business owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independencia: Low-income pensioners, administrators,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domestic and other precarious and low-paying work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of employment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal, formal, self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal, formal, self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owners and well paid professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly informal and some formal economic ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to neighbourhood</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of work and life space, 12-15 hours a day, seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>days a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both live and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dormitory and weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dormitory and weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main group actors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally constituted organizations and informal groups led</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by strong, activist leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formally constituted organizations and informal groups led</td>
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<td>Formally constituted organizations and informal groups led</td>
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<td>by strong, activist leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intergroup dynamic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional-activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional-activist</td>
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<td>Institutional-activist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional-activist</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time dynamic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No work, no income</td>
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<tr>
<td>No work, no income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wage and other income, less dependent on actual working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners less wage-dependent, others wage-dependent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally married with children, often several generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of dependents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally married with children, often several generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of dependents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally married, fewer dependents aside from children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married or widows, struggling on low incomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key leaders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 women, 4 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 women, 2 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 women, 4 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 women, 3 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Previous political involvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, opposition to Pinochet regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little, but one woman experience as grassroots activist, Christian Democratic party.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration, based on Araya and Sagaris 1997, Quijada 2009, Coordinadora archives.
The level and quality of debate was also extraordinary, for a group this diverse, in a society as divided as Chile’s. Partly, and particularly at first, this reflected the courtesy that tends to rule any group of relative strangers. But as the process and the meetings progressed, relationships deepened, nourished by a mutual need in the face of powerful opponents who threatened essential components of the different communities’ lives: livelihoods, homes, health, the park.

I will take some time to describe the individuals involved. Their different skills, personalities and their vocation for service to their communities seemed ordinary at the time, but in retrospect, it was a very special group that came together under the pressure of the highway project. Each person contributed particular skills and views, and above all a willingness to learn from and work with the group. The coalition would have had little effect without each one, the communities they represented, and the way, in the end, we meshed together into a somewhat messy but coherent whole.

At first, outsiders had a hard time understanding how such diverse groups could work together. Indeed, as Allard notes,

> The novelty of this case, at least in Chilean history, is the fact that the coalition included for the first time a variety of actors and interests that bridged historical divisions such as political interests and both social and economic status. Chile is still a country where power structures are socially determined; therefore, the fact of having “pobladores” or informal settlers sitting at the same table with rich homeowners, businessmen, and informal street merchants, was completely unprecedented (2003).

Some environmentalists considered those who were fighting for their livelihoods as mere opportunists, not genuinely committed to the “purer” values of an environmental agenda. As a group, the Coordinadora debated this issue in 1998, when the government offered the Tirso de Molino and the Pérgola Santa María an agreement, or protocolo, which guaranteed they would not be expelled from their precarious locations on the river bank, on land that was officially publicly owned and for the purpose of parks and green space.

After a round of opinions from the different leaders and advisors present in the room, the Coordinadora as a whole politely rejected the opinion of an environmental advisor, who insisted that anyone signing a protocol should be expelled from the group. The concensus among the community leaders was that while the overall purpose of the campaign was to stop the highway project, a major secondary goal involved ensuring the survival of the existing communities, in all their richness. From this perspective, social needs were as important as environmental goals, and the market groups were encouraged to sign the protocols, as a bottom line that guaranteed that, no matter what the final results of the struggle, they would
indeed survive. This position affirmed the market leaders’ commitment to the group, and they remained active leaders throughout the campaign and into the early years of Living City, going on to fight for and achieve further concessions from the MOP, including new buildings, which were completed in 2011.

Table DN3.5 summarizes the protocols that the MOP signed in the late months of 1998, in its efforts to resolve opposition to the project. The agreements with the Pérugola Santa María and the Tirso de Molino were the only ones signed with citizen organizations. The rest reflected negotiations with the mayors of the specific municipalities.

Many outsiders expressed their doubts and then attempted to articulate an understanding of the diverse group. They saw it functioning with neighbours from Pedro de Valdivia Norte serving as the brains and contributing much needed funds, the market people providing the “foot soldiers”, and Bellavista acting as a kind of creative hinge.

They were mostly right about Bellavista as the hinge, but as it turned out, the leaders from Pedro de Valdivia Norte proved to be excellent at going door to door, talking to their neighbours, getting people on board and getting them out to events at key points in the campaign. Their contribution to campaign finances was pretty similar to the other groups, however, and there were times in the campaign when they proved unable to contribute to urgently needed campaign materials or payments to the lawyer, Fernando Dougnac, who represented the Coordinadora during much of the campaign.

In fact, when funds were short, it was often the markets and Acofer, the storekeepers in the area around the markets, who could come up with the necessary money on relatively short notice. Individually most didn’t have much money, but because there were so many, so desperate to preserve their livelihoods, they could be quick to put together several hundred dollars just by running a collection. When events were held in their territory, the market people were massive in their response. They were more reluctant, however, to join events elsewhere, although a small group of 6-8 leaders would usually go as far as the environmental commission, a ministry office or Bellavista, as required, particularly if they could count on the moral support of leaders from the other communities and expert advisors.

Independencia, the two poorest communities and those who felt that everything they held dear was at risk, proved to be a cable to earth, as the Chileans put it. The reality of these communities, of generally very low income, mostly elderly people confronting displacement, at first with very little or no compensation, was a compelling factor for the whole group. Moreover, Alicia Cid, an elderly woman both frail and surprisingly tough, who represented the
smaller Olivos group, was an avid participant and excellent leafletter, bringing in news about opinions on the street, and the Christian Democrat party in which she’d long been a grassroots participant. Like Bellavista’s Montecinos in the case of SEIA-related issues, Luis Olivares (who represented neighbours from the communities by the river, Borgoño-Escanilla, in Independencia), was a meticulous master of details, a skill that served him well in his dealings with the MOP over compensation for the community. Alfredo Basaure, who represented renters in the group, was also an active leader, although his precarious economic situation made days spent in meetings or other activities a particularly difficult sacrifice.

In the Tirso de Molina, two leaders stood out: Domingo Pérez, who sold olives, nuts and other specialties at a double stall he rented, and his friend, just across the passageway, Jorge Cannobbio, a large balding fruitseller, with a cheery smile. Their use of their stalls depended on the goodwill of the mayor of Recoleta, who threatened them with expulsion if they continued to speak out against the Costanera Norte. Terrified, they brought this news to a regular meeting of the Coordinadora, where it was discussed in detail. The general thrust of the conclusions was that it would be unwise for the pair to give in to this kind of threat, but if they did, the rest of the group would understand. No one really knew what decision they would make, until a forum held at the architects’ professional association, where they stood up and formally denounced the mayor for his threats, an initiative that effectively saved them from further persecution.10

Both Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia Norte proved proficient at reaching out to political and professional organizations with the message that the Concertación was making a bad mistake with the Costanera Norte. In Pedro de Valdivia Norte, business men Alfredo Gredig and Juan Luis Moure (often as vice-president of the neighbourhood association) played key roles in mobilizing their neighbours and offering important information to the political analysis that became a regular part of the Coordinadora’s campaigning. Bellavista too provided solid political expertise, the result of involvement of Patricio Lanfranco, a key leader, in anti-

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10 At some point, someone in the MOP concessions unit seems to have made a concerted effort to threaten several Coordinadora leaders in this way. Dr. Ricardo Araya, of Pedro de Valdivia Norte, found his government grants abruptly cut off and university tenure, granted one week, promptly stripped away the next. My contact at one of my main translation clients (Codelco, the state-owned copper corporation) described to me how a MOP team member (in fact, a colleague whom I knew from the foreign journalists’ association during the military years) had bitterly reproached her for hiring someone like me, who was opposing an important government project, and argued that she should suspend her dealings with me.
regime movements in the 1980s, particularly the Cultural Association of the University, among others.

In Bellavista, María Inés Solimano (now over 80 years old, still an inspiring leader on the Living City board) also proved an extraordinary resource. After spending much of her life working with some of Chile’s most outstanding artists, she had a wealth of social contacts and ideas about how to raise funds, get people involved, and keep them connected. One week, early in the campaign, she single handedly convinced shopkeepers and neighbours along Bellavista Avenue to make the necessary donations and hang anti-highway banners up and down the busy road, an initiative that made the television news and remained in newspaper’s photo archives for frequent use for the rest of the campaign. She also invented the art auction that ultimately provided the US$3,000 per year or so that allowed the Coordinadora to function from 1997-2000, paying off lawyers, funding leaflets, and generally providing for the campaign. An excellent cook, she made fundraising dinners a central feature of the Coordinadora’s campaign, an effort that brought in modest amounts of money (about $300 each time) but enormous amounts of social capital amongst sectors who would not participate in regular meetings.

Katia Cotorás, an architect who worked for her family’s pharmacy, put her skills to use analyzing the legislation governing use of the San Cristóbal Hill park, zoning, highways and other relevant laws, doing much of the groundwork for the legal components of the campaign, much aided by the legal expertise of Mauricio Montecinos of Bellavista.

Ricardo Araya and I pulled together the texts that documented and supported our many arguments, and as a writer and journalist, I became the main architect of our communications campaigns. These involved a communications tree that functioned by phone and fax during the early years, then slowly migrated into e-mail and the internet, as it developed, making us early users of the Geocities webhosting space, for example, where we put together a website in English, French and Spanish, that aimed at civil society groups in the countries where the potential concessionaries of the Costanera Norte were located. This, and support from some of my colleagues among investigative journalists, eventually provided us with abundant, and often unsavoury files, on the companies interested in the Costanera Norte, all important material used at different stages of our campaign.

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There is a chapter on this extraordinary effort in my book, After the First Death (Sagaris 1996). The ACU, as it was known, successfully pitted music, theatre, painting and literature against the fear and weapons of the military, during the early years after the coup (1978-1983), opening the way for students in Chile’s politically influential universities to take their associations and federations back from the military’s appointees, as the regime’s hold weakened during the 1980s.
Table 3.6 summarizes the main arguments that mobilized the Coordinadora and its supporters to oppose the project. These reflect the diverse interests and agendas of its different members, as discussed earlier, combined with the lessons that the membership was rapidly learning from its contacts with academics and other experts, particularly in NGOs.


As Allard notes (2003), “civic groups needed to develop strategies based on lessons learned from past conflicts. As recently as 1992, citizens failed to successfully oppose subway line 5, a MOP transit viaduct built without consideration of its urban impact.”

In its early meetings, the Coordinadora analyzed conflicts that had preceded it, particularly that of the Trillium forestry venture in Tierra del Fuego, in which foreign and Chilean environmental groups successfully challenged a foreign company’s right to exploit a native forest; a cellulose company’s unsuccessful efforts to dump wastes into Mehuín Bay, a major source of fish for local fishing families; and the GasAndes conflict in the Maipo canyon, very near Santiago. Environmental groups involved in all three conflicts, but particularly Mehuin and GasAndes, actively supported the Coordinadora, and community leaders from the Maipo canyon also provided some assistance.

After examining everything that was known about the project, the Coordinadora outlined its position (table 3.6) and the process that the highway would have to go through before achieving implementation, identifying breaking points where it could potentially fail. These included:

- Rejection by the Environmental Commission: unlikely, since the government is judging its own project and the final decision will be made by a high-level commission of political appointees, but the system is new and should be tried.
- Rejection by companies, because the financial guarantees and other conditions are not enough: possible, and indeed occurred on several occasions during the process.
- Rejection by the government, due to pressure from public opinion or because the project had grown so expensive that it was no longer viable.
- Rejection by the courts, if strong enough legal arguments can be found.

Based on this analysis, the Coordinadora outlined a strategy based on mobilizing at specific times to concentrate all energies and force on these specific pressure points. This was an unusual process for the time. Faced with similar problems, many groups would seize on a tactic, particularly the courts, mobilization or the media, as if a single tactic could substitute for a general strategy. Indeed, “strategic” debates often focused on passionate and sometimes bitter arguments over one tactic versus another. Instead, with the benefit of collective wisdom from highly diverse groups, the Coordinadora was able to match tactics to specific breaking
points in the process, and use them to greater effect. Thus, it opted for a combination of five main efforts, in the framework of initial action to win more time for the entire process. Without that first effort, there would have been no room for anything else: the highway would have been under construction by 1998, as originally planned and announced by the MOP. The five components were:

1. **Communications** to mobilize public opinion (mass media), and own community communications network, to mobilize neighbours and other supporters.

2. **Mobilizations** to bring attention to its issues, involve neighbours and other concerned citizens and apply pressure on local and national politicians.

3. **Political pressure and alliance-oriented tactics** to mobilize specific professional groups, particularly environmental, medical, academics, urban-related and others, to take strong positions against the project.

4. **Legal tactics** to push the judicial system to take a position on the project and potentially stop it for good.

5. **Company-centred tactics and demands for mitigation that would integrate external costs**, demonstration the financial inviability of the project.

**DN4.1 Time: The Most Urgent Ally**

"From the start, they’ve told us that the Costanera is going to happen, that there’s nothing to be done, that we should try to negotiate, to get some benefit for ourselves. But although we started out concerned about its impact on our corner of the city, we continue with this enormous effort because we feel that we carry on our shoulders an enormous responsibility: to ourselves, to our communities, and above all, to all those sons and daughters who fill our hospitals with their tears and cries every time pollution levels rise.” (Araya and Sagaris, English quotation from p. 13, Ducci 2000).

As Silva notes, “the concessions system and its first generation of projects... prioritized speed to project sale or auction and completion, over comprehensive planning, attention to design details and a minimal incorporation of social and environmental considerations...” (p. 45, Silva 2011). This approach is common in urban Chile today, and is known as a *política de hechos consumados*, a strategy of *fait accompli*, or the done deal -- too late to respond to effectively. That is, from the start, potentially controversial projects are presented to public opinion as done deals, with no possibility for contesting anything but minor details. The State (and other powerful proponents) rely on sheer might and money to crush any opposition that may appear.

In this environment, in its first meetings, members of the newly formed Coordinadora were all too conscious of the fact that they were in a race against time. From this perspective, they set a priority on forcing the project into the environmental impact assessment system (SEIA) as crucial to winning the time to access much needed information, open the project and debates to the public, and raise key questions that normally would be more suitable to a pre-project stage.
Thus began a process that the Coordinadora’s leaders came to call “winning by losing”. Many individual tactics ultimately failed, but along the way they managed to achieve important openings in a process that had seemed totally closed to any access from the participants viewed as crucial by the MOP concessions unit, the companies themselves and, as the process became more complex, the financial actors necessary to ensure the system went ahead.

The first great victory was the court order to paralyze the project, issued in April 1997 by the 8th Court of Appeals, in response to the suit filed by Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia. Although ultimate lifted, this order forced the MOP to enter the SEIA, immediately guaranteeing a two-month period for citizen participation, that opened the secretive project up to intense public and institutional scrutiny. As a result, the EIA process turned a project that was supposed to be up and running within a year into a much longer process, as we will explore in the rest of this chapter.

**DN4.2 Communications: A Two-Pronged Strategy**

In terms of communications, the Coordinadora also adopted an approach that was different from the focus on mass media that was prevalent among contemporary efforts. It did focus its scarce resources on the mass media on several key occasions, using techniques such as breakfasts with the press, news releases, early morning teasers to morning shows on the radio, mobilizations, to good effect. These brought increasingly sympathetic coverage, which produced a change in media coverage, although this was uneven.

At first, all coverage focused solely on the official version of the project from the MOP and particularly Minister Lagos. When neighbours first announced their opposition, coverage was often framed using the MOP’s view, that these were selfish ignorant neighbours standing in the way of progress (Quijada 2009 provides extensive references to media coverage during the whole project contestation and implementation project). As the debate progressed, however, some media, particularly the newspaper La Epoca and the popular radio station Cooperativa, tended to frame the struggle more and more as citizen Davids versus the MOP Goliath.

Without the fulltime staff and extensive resources of the MOP, the Coordinadora nonetheless undertook a guerrilla approach to communications, sending out early morning teasers that raised key issues about the project as they came up. One morning, the Coordinadora’s question rolled in, just as morning host Sergio Campos was preparing for an interview with Lagos himself. All of a sudden, Lagos was put on the defensive and the Coordinadora’s position got equal time and a strong positive response from listeners.
Most of the Coordinadora’s efforts went to building its own communications system, however. Early on, the group analysis concluded that the post-dictatorship media, with ownership concentrated in ultra-conservative economic groups (the Edwards family, which owned three of the six daily newspapers, and Copesa, which owned two) and television news programs content to transmit solely the “authorities’” official views, would not be favourable to its positions and would tend to distort, rather than transmit, citizen positions. At the same time, we were aware that we could actually identify the public opinion leaders and support we required as a relatively small and accessible, group. My experience as a foreign correspondent, which had allowed me a privileged viewpoint on both events and the Chilean media themselves for the previous 17 years, was influential in this analysis. My experience with student journalism at highschool and university in Canada provided an additional resource, not available to Chilean groups at the time.

Thus, the Coordinadora started by building a phone tree, which consisted of lengthy phonecalls, often on a daily basis, between leaders from the different neighbourhoods. As the organization and the campaign grew, and technology advanced, we began to use first fax machines and eventually e-mail and the internet as it evolved. At particularly eventful points in the campaign, the Voz (the Voice)\textsuperscript{12} was born, at first as a poster-news medium that was tailored to each neighbourhood, printed in a large format available at one of the local printshops, and pasted up on doors, gates and market stalls. Thus, we were able to keep people informed and involved in events on almost a daily basis.

This campaign also had an unforeseen side effect: between the faxes and the Voz, people we never saw or didn’t know very well felt part of the campaign and began to take sides, transmitting our arguments in their own circles. In any society this kind of grapevine is a powerful communications tool. In Chile, where social relations remained extremely fragmented and inward-looking, after 17 years of cultivating terror of public spaces, this method seemed particularly effective. Many of us can tell anecdotes of hearing people we’d never met before telling some story about the anti-highway fight as if they’d been there. Moreover, through our communications tree, people who entered our “orbit” for some reason, remained in contact. This was an important feature in retaining advisors and other supporters, since we didn’t have the time or energy to reach them on an ongoing basis. Thus, we were able

\textsuperscript{12} The name of the Voice was inspired by the history of the Village Voice, also created during an anti-highway campaign in New York City. With no confidence in our own ability to influence events, these nods to successful struggles elsewhere were talismans that helped us keep up our spirits and toss our heads in defiance at the odds we faced.
to accumulate a supportive network, rather than watching people approach and then move away, beyond our reach.

These guerrilla tactics also combined with the publication, almost by accident, of the Coordinadora’s book, thanks to support from the environmental group, the Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (OLCA), in late 1997. Thus, two central planks in the foundations of the future work of Living City were consolidated during this phase: the emphasis on our own communications media and methods, and the publication of serious, well-founded books to bring citizens’ views on urban problems to public notice.

DN4.3 Mobilizing the Same But Different

July 23rd, the day we handed in our reply to the COREMA, was a great day in our process as Coordinadora. We held a news conference on an improvised stage in the Tirso de Molina [traditional market]. This was organized by the associations of the Tirso de Molina with the people from Independencia, while the Vega Chica contributed buttons, posters, balloons and other elements. A lot of media attended. The leaders of each community spoke, along with Ignacio Santa María, a distinguished urbanist and one of our advisors, and Mauricio Montecinos, the head of the team that prepared our reply. Over 300 people attended and most of us marched to the COREMA office downtown and back again (English quotation of Araya and Sagaris 1997: 47, p. 13, Ducci 2004).

Despite its apparent size and the 50,000 population that the Coordinadora’s organizations claimed to represent, with little experience, we were nervous about our ability to mobilize significant numbers, especially in a country where significant demonstrations have historically numbered in the tens of thousands, with one of the most significant pro-democracy events (the Parque O’Higgins rally in 1988) reaching 1 million.

Thus, Coordinadora events tended to be modest and focus on getting our own people out of their shells and into public spaces again. The rally in which Bellavista announced its opposition to the highway involved around 200 people; the rally and march from the central markets to the downtown offices of the environmental commission united some 300 people; and a “wave of hugs of our neighbourhoods” started out in Independencia with no more than 50 people, before extending to Bellavista (some 200) and Pedro de Valvidia Norte (a similar number).

Nonetheless, these events achieved their central goal: bringing ordinary people out of their homes and developing civic practices long forgotten during the military years. Not surprisingly, many of the people who participated were elderly, partly reflecting the profile of our populations, but also tapping into a generation with a strong civic consciousness and practice formed during the 1960s.

We also staged several smaller events, such as taking a giant cheque to the MOP offices downtown (27 July 1998), to symbolize the large subsidy that became necessary to make the
project viable from the private sector’s perspective. As we stood outside the presidential palace, La Moneda, with our giant 4 x 2 metre cheque, or marched along the sidewalk to deliver it to the MOP, justly around the corner, Ricardo Araya and I argued vociferously with police officers who wanted to arrest our hardy group of no more than 15 people: “This is freedom of expression! We’re allowed to do this now! You can’t arrest us for exercising our right to an opinion!” We were so insistent that in fact there were no arrests that day, or at any of the Coordinadora’s events.

DN4.4 Alliances and Pressure Tactics

The organization also sent well-prepared delegations to speak to the Environmental Commission of the Senate, to a Congress organized by the Chamber of Deputies Environmental Commission, to the Santiago College of Physicians, the Environmental Commission of the National College of Physicians, several commissions of the National Architects Association, the College of Psychologists, and environmental organizations, among them RENACE (a national network of environmental groups), the Instituto de Ecología Política (Political Ecology Institute) and the Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (Latin American Observatory of Environmental Conflicts). All of them provided extremely important moral and technical support. They also received the support of the Clínica Jurídica de la Universidad Diego Portales (Diego Portales University Judicial Clinic), the Engineers National Association, and many distinguished professionals (p. 13, Ducci 2004).

From the start, the Coordinadora was painfully aware of its own insignificance. With the possible exception of people from the Pedro de Valdivia Norte neighbourhood, members had no confidence that their voices would be listened to by anyone in power. This was driven home in an early meeting between Coordinadora members, advisor and transport expert Francisco Martínez, and Santiago mayor Jaime Ravinet, a strong supporter of the highway. After a detailed presentation of the social and technical reasons why highways through central parts of cities were poor options for solving environmental, social and economic problems, Ravinet said he couldn’t care less about experts and their opinions. He liked the highway project and that was that.

At an early meeting, the Coordinadora drew up a lengthy list of organizations who could potentially take a position on the highway. Although at first, constantly strapped for time, fighting crises on home, work and anti-highway fronts, leaders saw the list as virtually impossible to implement, as the years progressed, it did work its way through most of the organizations included, and extended its efforts to many more, in government, in the media and at universities. Many of the people thus contacted became important resources for the Coordinadora, becoming advisors or contacts that facilitated and led to other contacts. In this sense, the fact that Chile’s elite is relatively small played in the Coordinadora’s favour, since it actually was possible to reach out to many significant voices through the diverse personal networks of the diverse people involved.
As Quijada’s detailed manuscript reveals, many of these direct and indirect contacts created a network of people with strong opinions on the highway project. Aside from Ignacio Santa María, who participated in the rally described above, architects Christian De Groot, Patricio Gross, María Elena Ducci and sociologist Francisco Sabatini, among others, wrote frequent letters. The urban and social studies centre, SUR, published several articles on Bellavista and later the Coordinadora, as did the Centro de Investigación del Medio Ambiente (CIPMA), headed by Guillermo Geisse\textsuperscript{13} and environmental economist Nicola Boregaard. Two CIPMA researchers, Claudia Sepúlveda and María Isabel Du Monceau studied the Coordinadora in depth, as a crucial case in Chile’s efforts to create sustainable, and credible environmental institutions.

María Elena Ducci studied the Coordinadora for many years and eventually became an advisor and close friend, specializing in the importance of formal and informal markets, particularly those of the Vega, to ensure healthy urban ecologies. Boregaard, also a resident of Pedro de Valdivia Norte, participated often in Coordinadora and Living City events, bringing along her children and husband, a professor at the Catholic University’s faculty of architecture.

Quijada himself, then a young transport engineer and student of Francisco Martínez at the University of Chile, formed part of a collective of transport students,\textsuperscript{14} Tranvía, which helped to publicize Coordinadora, but also many other transport-related issues crucial to building a more sustainable Santiago. He went on to work for Living City’s transport project (2003) and continued to cooperate on specific projects throughout the decade.

Thus, while most of these contacts consisted of formal presentations and a request for public commitment and support for the Coordinadora’s positions, a very significant outcome of this part of its strategy wove a network of deep, long-term relationships, many of which continue to this day. These have helped to orient both the Coordinadora and Living City, providing an enriching dialogue between citizens’ and academics’, two world-views that, in the 1990s when the conflict erupted, were totally separated.

\textsuperscript{13} A good friend of planning theorist John Friedmann, who spent four years in Chile in the late 1960s. In fact, CIPMA seems to be an attempt to keep alive the institution where Friedmann worked, once its functioning directly within the Catholic University became impossible under the military regime.

\textsuperscript{14} Other members included Leonardo Basso, who contributed a chapter to Living City’s book on transportation in Santiago, before going on to a PhD at UBC; and Rosemary Planzer, who remained a friend of Living City’s as she pursued her career in different government institutions related to traffic safety, energy efficiency and other issues.
Legal Tactics: Learning to Win by Losing

As the events summarized in chapter one indicate, all over the world, legal initiatives form an important, and sometimes decisive, part of citizens’ revolts against highways. In Chile’s case, however, the options for legal option were limited. Although several groups filed complaints with the courts (see timeline, Table 3.x), only one, the first by the Coordinadora, found a favorable hearing when presented, leading to the order to paralyze the project, which ultimately forced the MOP into the SEIA, as discussed above. There are two aspects of this experience that are important to note: one, regarding lawyers themselves, and citizens’ access to them; and the other, regarding the legal processes open to citizen action in these cases.

For the first case, the Bellavista neighbourhoods worked with Cristián Espejo, a lawyer financed -- and selected -- by the Municipality of Providencia. While at first this seemed an important opportunity, in practice it proved a serious error that revealed the naiveté of the leaders and some unforeseen pitfalls of legal action in a small country like Chile, where ambitious lawyers aspire to work for the State and/or a small group of powerful business interests. After a meeting with Bellavista leaders Espejo filed the writ and applied for the order to paralyze the project. He also contacted other groups in what was rapidly becoming the Coordinadora, who became part of the legal initiative, charging additional, and substantial sums to Acofer. Despite the initial victory and subsequent debate due to the court order to paralyze progress on the project, when the time came to argue the substance of the writ, Espejo did not show up in court. The Coordinadora lost miserably, and the final resolution reflected the MOP’s defense very closely.

Still convinced of the importance of pursuing legal aspects of the case, the Coordinadora made a huge effort to raise funds, and hired its own lawyer, Fernando Dougnac, an experienced environmental lawyer who had won several key cases in the past. Dougnac did his best, but by the end of 1998, his own observation was that the spirit in the courts had changed. There was a feeling among judges that they were seeing too many environmental cases being challenged in court and there was a general tendency to dismiss them all. This was confirmed by other contacts within the judicial system, and after some debate, in 1999-2000, the Coordinadora decided to dedicate its scarce resources, raised mostly through the Bellavista art auction started by María Inés Solimano, to a quarter time staff position for a few months, to help get its new organization, Living City, off to a good start.

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15 Personal communication, Inés Fernández, Acofer representative in the Coordinadora.
Partly, this experience also reflects the extreme rigidity of Chile’s judicial system coming out of the military period. Based on the Napoleonic Code, rather than a series of precedents as occurs in English Common Law, judges primarily applied written laws and tended not to innovate, a position that had solidified as the military regime appointed extremely hardline conservative judges to the courts. Moreover, during the last year of military rule, Pinochet had offered extremely generous retirement packages to senior judges. This way, most retired and he appointed a majority of his own supporters, among his last political acts. This was mainly to head off human rights trials and any attempt to prosecute the military, but it also reinforced the conservative, closed and elitist views of these bodies, making innovation extremely unlikely.

DN4.6 Company-centred Tactics to Internalize External Costs

Doubts about the Capacity of Key Companies. In a long, well documented report, Capital magazine (April 1997) notes enormous questions about the functioning of the concession system, given the few companies that are participating. Moreover, there are serious concerns about the solidity of Tribasa, a Mexican firm that won three major project bids. “There are fears in the market. Although it is daring for our country to bet on Tribasa, perhaps because the future of the Mexican firm is associated with its potential for success in our country, the truth is it is far from an ideal candidate. Its financial profile is not robust enough, its long-term administrative capacity remains to be seen... And its background in Mexico is far from ideal.” Extract from the Coordinadora’s presentation to the Senate (1997).

Although hard to substantiate, it is arguable that the part of the Coordinadora’s campaign that focused on the financial aspects of the concessions program and particularly the external costs and the companies in line to participate in the tenders may have had the most impact on the final outcome. This part of the campaign started from leaders’ conviction, supported by advisors, that the US$130 mn price tag initially announced, was ridiculously low for such a major project through an entire city, and particularly consolidated, older central city sectors.

Thus, from the start, the campaign focused on identifying real costs, including many mitigation costs not considered at all, and pressuring for these to be recognized in the project’s budget. The SEIA was particularly important to identifying these elements and forcing the proponent and the system itself to address the many externalities of the project, during construction and particularly during implementation. Although initially the MOP attempted to argue that the project would reduce air pollution, it became a major issue, as did the proposed intervention in the San Cristobal Hill park, the most important park in metropolitan Santiago. Its impacts on heritage in Bellavista also became a concern, particularly classic designs by a beloved Chilean architect, Luciano Kulschewsky, which form the Pío Nono entry to the funicular and park, and the art deco inspired buildings surrounding Neruda’s Santiago home and museum, all scheduled for destruction and replacement by a two-storey, cinderblock administration building for the new highway.
As the campaign progressed, the Coordinadora used its presentations and media contacts to distribute information about these and other project costs, and the need to either eliminate the project, or have it assume the real costs of mitigation. Accounts of the highway revolt in the media (quoted in Quijada 2009) and newspaper accounts, emphasize that the price did rise, from the original amount to over US$300 mn by 2000. The final cost does not appear in press accounts, but Quijada estimates it at US$280 mn (company) combined with the US$550 mn reported in the most recent public works annual report (MOP 2010), for a total of over US$900 mn, almost as much as the expansion to the Santiago Metro network. They ascribe this mainly to the measures added to deal with the impacts raised by the Coordinadora and other commentators.

As the costs rose, the MOP found the project harder and harder to sell, to the companies it was interested in attracting. This meant that the total amount of subsidies and benefits that the government offered eventually surpassed any payment from the company winning the tender. The financial acrobacy eventually required, to create a winning business proposition that the government could successfully tender, is the subject of extensive studies by Engel, Fischer and Galetovic, discussed in more detail below.

The need to reach out and discourage foreign companies potentially interested in the Costanera Norte project, through civil society groups in their home countries, drove the Coordinadora to pioneer one of Chile’s earliest websites for this purpose. Taking advantage of the language skills of its French- and Canadian-born members, in August 1998 the Coordinadora launched a website in English, French and Spanish, at www.geocities.com/RainForest/Andes/1583, designed by cyclist and computer expert, Cesar Garrido. It organized a demonstration in one of Santiago’s first cybercafés, at a major city hub, Plaza Italia, with breakfast for the press included. The MOP replied that it had more important problems to worry about, in Santiago’s west end, where people “don’t have fax or internet” (Rivera 1998), a story that was, fittingly, reported in one of Santiago’s first on-line newspapers, La Tercera en internet.

By 2000, the MOP was guaranteeing usage, paying for expropriations, bridges, roundabouts and key links between the highway and the city road network, in an effort that made the concession highly controversial, in congress and even among the concession system’s own supporters (Quijada 2009).

But this wasn’t the only issue that the Coordinadora exploited as part of its highway revolt. When a bribery scandal exploded around Copeva, one of the companies’ on the initial list of potential concessionaires, the Coordinadora began to look more closely at the
companies that the MOP was approaching in its road shows and other efforts to sell the project. Twice during the campaign, the Coordinadora sent personal letters to the CEOs of the companies currently on the MOP’s list, warning them that the project was more expensive than the MOP was telling them, and that the risks of controversy, delays and other complications were extremely high. Moreover, when it discovered that several of the companies on the MOP list had been subjected to serious corruption charges in their own countries, the Coordinadora leafleted all of downtown Santiago with the information, on its way to present a formal complaint to the national comptroller’s office.

Although it is hard to estimate how much this campaigning weighed on the companies, tenders failed repeatedly, throughout the process, with the MOP having to rework the project over and over again, in response to the critiques from a variety of sources.


On 23 July 1997 the Coordinadora staged its first major event, a rally in the market area, with strong participation from PVN and Bellavista, followed by a march to deliver a 200-page response to the environmental authorities. In August, CADE-IDPE released the assessment commissioned by Providencia, which was largely negative and raised important questions that the MOP had failed to answer. That same month (6 August), the Court of Appeals rejected the Coordinadora’s order to paralyze the project, on the grounds that it had entered the SEIA, and could therefore legally proceed. In September, with support from the NGO *Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales*, the Coordinador published its book (*Costanera Norte ¿Qué ciudad queremos?*), presenting the arguments against the project and framing them within a wider debate: What kind of city do we want?

Throughout the environmental assessment process, the MOP was forced to present one clarification after another, in the form of Addendums to its original study (September, November, December 1997, June 1998). Within the environmental commission process, the Coordinadora challenged and ultimately obtained a complete change in the participatory process. While the commission had originally grouped Bellavista-Providencia in meetings of the wealthy *comunas* (Las Condes, Vitacura, Providencia), the Coordinadora insisted on Independencia, Recoleta, Bellavista and Pedro de Valdivia Norte being grouped together and attended the same sessions.

Moreover, the Coordinadora demanded equal time with MOP proponents, a procedure that was eventually accepted by both the Conama and its consultative committee. Thus, to its surprise, the MOP found its arguments in favour of the project being challenged at official
government meetings about the project, and in a series of foras organized by universities, municipalities, professional associations and other bodies, which got involved with what became a burning debate.

Thus, an issue that was initially posed as “highways, yes or yes” became a debate around the options, “highways yes or no” and, eventually, about public transit and other issues, although these were more muted.

The SEIA process shed a spotlight on a poorly studied, crudely developed project that raised more questions than answers. During the process, the environmental commission received hundreds of comments from citizens, academics, most of the municipalities on the route, and the many different government agencies and secretariats that were part of the SEIA consultation process. Comments from the regional transport secretariat, for example, noted that with no information on where the highway’s entry and egress facilities would be located, it could provide no definitive opinion on the project’s environmental impacts.

The Coordinadora’s own 200-page response, supported by a growing chorus of experts, including the scientific society of transport engineers, pointed out design errors that included two 90-degree turns within a three-block area, which were inviable on a highway with a design speed of 80-km/hr. In December 1997, the environmental commission’s own consultative commission, which included representatives from the academic, business and citizens’ sectors, unanimously rejected the project on the grounds that it would harm Santiago’s already highly polluted environment.

Along the way, a series of government bodies consulted as part of the SEIA procedures expressed serious doubts and questions about the project. The National Monuments Council, responsible for heritage, complained that the plans provided were inconsistent and asked for clarification on the “real” route the highway would follow, noting, moreover that key monuments such as Neruda’s house-museum did not even appear in the documents.

The lack of the precise information necessary for a proper environmental assessment was noted by most of these government agencies: the national mining and geology service (Sernageomin), the environmental health service, the undersecretary of transport and telecommunications among them. The national tourism office expressed concern about the highway’s impact on Bellavista, especially La Chascona and the entry to the San Cristobal Hill Park, while even the public works metropolitan region secretariat complained about inconsistent and incomplete information, while the housing and urbanism metropolitan
secretariat noted there were insufficient provisions for the residents who would be displaced by the project.

Municipalities (Las Condes, Vitacura, even Pudahuel which expressed support for the project overall) also complained about the lack of analysis of the project’s impacts on local traffic conditions, while Quinta Normal noted that the project would cause significant damage in its territory while at the same time worsening congestion in the city centre (summarized on pp. 68-70, Quijada 2009. The original documents are in the Coordinadora archives in Living City).

On 1 September, the environmental commission sent a consolidated version of these comments to the MOP, which replied in an addendum the following week. A round of critiques followed, as several of the regional secretariats and services, along with the municipalities of Providencia and Lo Barnechea continued to complain about the lack of information.

The regional transport secretariat insisted to the end that it would not approve the project without information on its points of ingress and egress. This information was never provided as part of the SEIA and from the communities’ perspective, it looked like the MOP was improvising on these points right up to the moment construction began. This was important, moreover, not only because of its impact on local traffic conditions and therefore air, noise and particle pollution, but also because the MOP had promised there would be “chimneys” of some kind, with “filters” to deal with the emissions from traffic. This was a constant promise throughout the promise, although the final design that was implemented relies on the entry and exit tunnels themselves, to ventilate the tunnels, with no effort to filter gases.

From the start, the Coordinadora was determined to push the newly created Environmental Assessment process as far as it would go. The first major project to enter the system once it became compulsory, the Costanera Norte offered the system an opportunity to show what degree of autonomy and genuinely balanced criteria would be brought to bear to ensure major projects reflected the needs, suffering and goals of the country as a whole, rather than its powerful elite, accustomed to running its own show.

Each step was put to the test and there were some interesting surprises: government offices and agencies that objected to the project’s weaknesses and demanded improvements, municipalities that did likewise, an advisory council that reviewed the evidence and unanimously rejected the project, an opportunity for participation that stretched beyond the
required six weeks and provided for intense scrutiny of the previously secretive plans. As the process advanced, the newly minted institution’s own participatory procedures improved, and a department was eventually set up, with professionals (primarily from non-governmental organizations, particularly Casa de la Paz, which pioneered participation in Chile).

The advisory council’s rejection was particularly significant, as it was arguably the most representative and most independent group involved in the entire process. By law, the president of Chile selected advisory council members from lists of five nominees, as follows: two scientists selected from five, nominated by the council of university presidents of Chile; two representatives of non-governmental organizations;16 two representatives of independent academic centres involved in environmental studies and concerns; two business representatives; two union representatives; and a direct representative of the President of the Republic (p. 22, Chile1994).

Notwithstanding these potentially significant advances, the whole process collapsed in July 1998. Aware of the overwhelming support for the Coordinadora’s position, based to a large degree on the project’s own notorious weaknesses and design errors, the MOP used its authority within the Concertación government to push the project through in a sudden, lickety spit ending that demonstrated that when push came to shove, the national government’s power was what really mattered.

This process started as the different government, municipal and other “technical” bodies required to issue opinions on projects were still awaiting replies to their insistent questions from the MOP. Moreover, the advisory committee had agreed to reconsider the project, once the MOP presented additional information. The MOP’s third addendum, then, should have contained an adequate reply to the observations from citizens and government agencies and offices, and the municipalities. Instead, it used the third and final addendum to introduce a new route in the downtown area covered by the Coordinadora, between Pedro de Valdivia Norte and Bellavista, which it labelled the “Bellavista variant”. This took the highway out of the San Cristóbal Hill park (and Pedro de Valdivia Norte) and placed it in a trench under existing roads, particularly Los Conquistadores-Bellavista Avenue (Resolución Exenta 335-A/98, 10 June 1998).

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16 The law does not specify how these were to be selected, but in practice, the Commission opted for an electoral process. Interested non-profits registered with the commission, and could thereby nominate and vote for candidates for the advisory council. Thus, the two candidates receiving the most votes from registered non-profits would sit on the council.
A new route should have required an additional EIA, but this did not happen. To comply with participatory requirements, the environmental commission then held an improvised session not in Bellavista, the area most affected by this change, but in Pedro de Valdivia Norte. With no additional studies, the environmental commission suddenly approved the project on 10 July 1998, before the advisory committee was allowed to reconsider and even before the environmental assessment was officially completed (21 August 1998). The final resolution, completed more than a month later, established 31 conditions that the project should meet, including:

- The installation of a network to monitor air quality and noise,
- A plan for environmental monitoring geological and geomorphological impacts,
- A plan to offset nitrogen oxide emissions (pp. 25-26, Sepúlveda and Du Monceau 1998).

The Environmental Commission itself recognized the inadequacies of the MOP’s studies, noting that the study “dealt with the issue of expropriations in a way that was absolutely insufficient” and admitting that the MOP’s environmental monitoring plan failed to deal with some key issues, such as the definition of the area of influence (quoted on p. 98, Quijada 2009).

In her study of the early functioning of the SEIA, and particularly its dealings with a pulp plan in southern Chile and the Costanera Norte, Sepúlveda notes that:

The formal instances for citizen participation included in the SEIA were insufficient to prevent and resolve the conflict over the Costanera Norte, as were the broader instances implemented by the MOP and the COREMA... For the Coordinadora, the final resolution ... manipulated the evaluation and citizen participation process, deciding first and justifying later its approval of the project (pp. 13-14, Sepulveda, 1997).

To understand the results of this conflict, it is important to examine the structure of the Environmental Commission itself. Indeed, its structure makes the contradictions, particularly the many negative evaluations and criticisms of the government’s own technical bodies that arose during the intense debates of 1997-1998, all the more noteworthy.

The National Environmental Commission (Conama) consisted of three entities: an advisory committee, representing varied interests; a “technical” instance, with an executive director and staff, responsible for coordinating the process in general and particularly the opinions from the technical offices and agencies throughout the different ministries who were expected to comment based on their particular expertise; and a “political” instance, the

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17 From a procedural perspective, this was highly irregular. The Coordinadora presented another legal action on this point, but it was rejected.
Consejo Directivo, or board or directors (Chile 1994). The board of directors was chaired by the Minister directly responsible for representing the presidency (Ministro Secretario General de la Presidencia), and included the ministers of foreign affairs, national defence, economy, planning, education, public works, health, housing and urbanism, agriculture, mining, transport and telecommunications, and national properties (p. 20, Chile 1994). Strictly speaking, the public works minister’s participation violated the rules of due process, in which a party involved in a judgement should not be present in the body making the decision. The Coordinadora and others involved in the process remarked on this, but these observations were never answered.

Each region of Chile, including Metropolitan Santiago, had its own regional commission, whose structure mirrored that of the national body. The regional environmental commission was chaired by presidential appointee, the Intendente, and comprised of the regional representatives of the same national ministries represented by their ministers in the national environmental commission.

Given this structure, no one expected the environmental commission to stand in the way of the MOP’s flagship project. Notwithstanding, the rejection by the Advisory Council and the critical questions raised by many of the technical agencies involved in evaluating the project reflect just how far the criticisms from the Coordinadora, its advisors and other participants reached into the government, stirring the first important debates over urban transport, environmental and participatory policy and processes.

During the inauguration of the newly created national sustainable development commission in April 2000, Lagos himself praised the Coordinadora for its initiative, admitting that at first the opposition had bothered him, but that overall it had created a much better project. Moreover, he concluded, Chile needed many more citizens’ groups like this one.\(^{18}\)

Discussion of the first cases to enter Chile’s new environmental impact assessment system focused on the issue of citizen participation and its potential role, primarily in terms of conflict resolution (Sepúlveda and du Monceau de Bergendal 1998; Sepúlveda 1999; Sabatini, Geisse et al. 2004) and citizen-government interaction (Winchester, Cáceres et al. 1998).

Winchester et al (1998), who had been studying Bellavista for two years by then, contrasted the responses of the two municipalities: Recoleta and Providencia. While, very much to the neighbours’ disapproval, Recoleta “tried to negotiate with the central authorities to

\(^{18}\) Coordinadora leader, Patricio Lanfranco, heard Lagos say this during coverage on the national news, and Ximena Abogabir of Casa de la Paz, who participated in the council, reported it to Lake Sagaris.
obtain certain compensations that would benefit the comuna”, Providencia had “assumed an attitude of frank rejection of the highway”, which led to the “expeditious transfer of information between the Junta de Vecinos #13, the Ecological Committee and the Municipality” (p. 11, Winchester et al. 1998).

Thus, these researchers conclude:

...we can see well organized actors with high capacity to participate in governance at the local level. We also see a State that doesn’t necessarily take into account the visions of these local groups, whose attitude toward the issue of neighbourhood is not very proactive, with no projection for neighbourhood development that gives room to the interests of both organized groups and private actors. In this sense, although the organized groups have the capacity to participate in decision-making about the local social space, they encounter barriers to influencing neighbourhood development (p. 11, Winchester et al. 1998).

Thus, for these researchers, these struggles for the right to influence local development became the first real tests of the limits to Chile’s new democracy. Moreover, Winchester et al. note a tendency that had prevailed in the post-Pinochet years and that would become a strong theme during the next phase of this study, Living City (2000-2010).

Organized groups have some power within the state sphere, since they have gained legitimacy in some instances... and have a broad social base. However, when we see what actually goes on in the neighbourhood, the civil society-State relationship isn’t so important. It is the commercial interests associated with the market that ultimately define the development of the territory and its future, drowning out neighbours’ demands and concerns. [This occurs because] the State has not regulated these interests enough, and implicitly gives them priority. This is paradoxical since these commercial interests, which also come from local actors, do not appear at all in the discourse about citizen participation and the State (p. 12, Winchester et al. 1998).

Sabatini (Sabatini, Geisse et al. 2004) notes the significance of these early efforts at citizen participation in Chile, given that the environmental law and revisions to national urban laws were the first to formally mention and introduce participatory processes into planning in post-Pinochet Chile. In the same interview, Rafael Asenjo, a lawyer who became one of the early directors of the national environmental commission, agrees, underlining both short-comings but also the fact that at the time, when Chile was just emerging from a dictatorship, citizen participation remained “semi-clandestine” (p. 35, Sabatini et al. 2004).

The short-comings, however, were severe and ultimately crippling of any genuine influence by outsiders on decision-making crucial to the city’s future. Sepúlveda notes the distance between citizens’ aspirations and the actual possibilities of the participation offered them under Law 19,300. Comparing the views of citizens’ groups who boycotted (Celulosa Valdivia conflict) or participated fully (Costanera Norte), she found their opinions about the
very “similar”. Based on these results, she asks what degree of influence should be guaranteed to citizens through participatory processes, and makes several essentially procedural recommendations: clearer explanations about the limits of participation, additional instances for participation in the case of megaprojects, and greater transparency. Her remarks focus mainly on trying to make the system more credible and more effective in preventing or resolving conflicts.

Sepúlveda also notes the contradictory discourses experienced by citizens’ groups, who on one hand were attacked when their observations weren’t “technical” enough, or were “too political”, only to find that the decision was ultimately made by a body of politicians (ministers or their regional representatives) reflecting political expediency rather than the general conclusions of a technical-citizen-political consultation process. Her additional remarks note that participation only within the SEIA effectively limits the evaluation of social impacts, which can favour or further damage society's aspirations for greater social equality. Finally, she notes the citizens' critiques regarding the timing of participation, as very late within project development, long after a problem has been defined and a solution has been selected (pp. 13-18, Sepúlveda 1999).

These studies, remarks and recommendations by influential researchers of the time give some sense of the impact of the Coordinadora’s campaign to stop the highway on the environmental impact assessment system. The Chilean elite, led by the Concertación de Partidos for Democracy, did not respond by opening the system up, or structuring new improvements. Instead, after Lagos’ hard fought presidential campaign against pro-Pinochet leader Joaquín Lavín (Lagos won by just 30,000 votes in 1999), the MOP was careful to avoid further exposure of its projects to public scrutiny, expert or otherwise. Rather, the urban highway projects that followed the Costanera Norte were reclassified as “vías expresas” (expressways) and, although there seems to have been no official ruling, in practice Conama no longer required studies of their environmental impacts. This meant that the urban highway concessions that followed the Costanera Norte merely presented declarations of impact, designed for rapid approval, and proceeded into the construction phase, regardless of the opposition or questioning that sporadically developed around them. The implications of these and other results will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Dn4.8 Concessions and Finances Become the Issue (1998-2000)**

In 1998, as the environmental commission ignominiously rushed to approve the project even without completion of the assessment process, the focus of the debate over the highway shifted into issues of costs, subsidies and financing. The original project cost of US$160 million had by
then risen to an estimated US$306 million, excluding costs inherent in the debate itself, including lawyers, publicity and community relations. “This increase to some degree represented a victory by the project’s opponents, as they had taken it to the limits of profitability, thus endangering its chances of actual implementation,” note Sepúlveda and Du Monceau (p. 26, 1998).

The Coordinadora argued that the rise in costs reflected a more serious study of the project, while the MOP and the media (see La Tercera, El Mercurio and other publications from November 1997, for example, quoted on p. 73, Quijada 2009) attributed it to the additional costs required by the environmental assessment approval. Whichever the reason, the hefty rise in the price tag made a direct government subsidy necessary, thus sending the MOP to the finance minister in an attempt to keep its pet project viable in the eyes of much needed, but reluctant, investors.

As mentioned, in its five-pronged strategy against the project, the Coordinadora had focused several major efforts on the CEOs of companies that at one time or another looked interested in the highway project. Moreover, as a result of the conflict and the growing requirements placed on the MOP, several tenders had been suspended, and the companies interested changed constantly. In both 1997 and 1998, the Coordinadora wrote letters to CEOs, telling them the project was bad for the community, but also for business, because its high costs weren’t reflected in the MOP’s figures. Moreover, the destruction of key communities in Santiago would also darken the companies’ reputations. How much these arguments actually influenced the companies, and how much they simply served to enhance the image of conflict with its inherent risks of delays and higher costs, is hard to estimate, but the MOP’s frantic attempts to tender the project failed over and over again (see Timeline, table 3.x, 3.x).

In mid-1998, more desperate than ever to get the project off the ground, as Lagos prepared to leave the MOP to prepare his presidential campaign, the MOP set down with potential builders and administrators of the project, most of them belonging to the powerful Chilean builders’ association (Cámara de la Construcción). As a result, Lagos went to finance minister Eduardo Aninat to request a series of benefits necessary to make the project financially viable. Far from providing income to the national treasury, by 1998 the project that was supposed to save the government funds much needed for social programs required a US$60 million direct subsidy, a state guarantee of minimum income covering 90% of the investment and operating cost for the first 17 years, a state guarantee of 85% of income should drivers use the highway without paying, and the offer that the MOP would assume an overruns for expropriations and environmental impact mitigation (p. 104, Quijada 2009).
These benefits fed opposition from an unexpected source: three academics at the University of Chile’s Centre for Applied Economics. Supporters of the general idea of concessions, Engel, Fisher and Galetovic had already appeared in the press in 1997, warning that it was dangerous for a single governmental entity, the MOP, to be involved in the dual role of marketing build-operate-transfer concessions to private companies, and then supposedly supervising their eventual implementation (p. 85, Quijada 2009).

In a clear example of Silva’s deliberate improvisation, Carlos Cruz, the head of the concessions unit frankly declared, some years after the conflict:

We had to carry out specific projects and we could see the failure of concessions in Spain, France, Mexico, the absolute incapacity of the Argentines and the Brasilians to carry out a concession program. In this context, were we going to debate the institutions necessary? The regulatory framework? Who should regulate a non-existent industry? The possibility that this industry might not be born? What we did was first create the industry and later see how to regulate it (cited on p. 86, Quijada 2009).

In August 1998, the Coordinadora took to the streets with a campaign calling on people to fax finance minister Eduardo Aninat on his direct office line to express their opposition to any public funding going to the project. Ultimately, Aninat, who considered these benefits excessive, did refuse to provide a subsidy, effectively killing the project for awhile, as Lagos himself left the public works ministry (August 1998), to prepare his presidential campaign.19

This was almost the end of the project, and for awhile the Coordinadora could rest and catch its breath. Hernán Doren, president of the Chilean builders’ association, stated the options succinctly. With the MOP and Finance at loggerheads over the financial benefits necessary to make the project feasible from the companies’ point of view, it was up to President Frei to make the final decision. Ultimately, that is exactly what happened. In 1999, President Frei himself stepped in, resolutely reviving the flagging effort and ensuring that a new finance minister willingly signed off on an extensive set of benefits for any company willing to take on the project. Indeed, while Jaime Tohá, the new MOP minister organized a roundtable to discuss the project with the Coordinadora, the concession unit head was meeting with interested companies to negotiate sufficient benefits for a successful tender, in a ski resort high up in the Andes outside Santiago (pp. 116-118, Quijada 2009).

19 This fax campaign became one of the few instances where MOP staff revealed the discomfort that the Coordinadora’s challenge to their apparently absolute power. During 1998, several supporters from within the government or the governing political parties reported that Lagos was furious that a small group of neighbours with access to a fax machine could do so much damage to his project. Indeed, an article in La Tercera (20-Aug-1998), then undersecretary of the MOP, Guillermo Pickering commented rather obscurely that there were other social problems much more important that those mentioned by representatives of the Coordinadora No a la Costanera Norte, especially in Santiago’s westside, which would receive many benefits from the building of the highway “and don’t have fax or internet.”
At the same time, then mayor of Independencia, Antonio Garrido, began a new wave of intimidation, threatening the residents of the Independencia neighbourhoods affected by the highway project with instant eviction, if they didn’t sign an agreement stipulating they would leave immediately, the moment the Municipal government requested they do so. They were damned if they signed, damned if they didn’t and the threats of police breaking down doors and throwing families and their possessions into the streets led to anguished calls between community members and throughout the whole Coordinadora.

Coordinadora leaders responded by noting these threats violated the national law governing rentals and were inconsistent with the MOP minister’s promises to find equivalent housing nearby and provide adequate compensation to everyone affected. Concessions head Cruz responded, assuring neighbours they would be covered by provisions for housing and relocation and Tohá himself spoke to Garrido, who finally suspended the visits to the community (MOP ordinance, Coordinadora letter to Tohá and report in La Tercera, cited in Quijada 2009).

The municipality attacked again a few months later, however, demolishing a wall belonging to the University of Chile, which had been damaged by rain, and was adjacent to the Independencia-Olivos homes. Another round of memos followed between the MOP and the Municipality of Independencia, which brought more press coverage and a writ of habeas corpus, filed by resident Rosa Acosta (Recurso de Protección, writ of habeas corpus, presented to the Santiago Appeals Court, 22 December 1998, No.: 005200-98).

These tactics delayed eviction for some time, and eventually most of the Independencia and Independencia-Olivos families received some compensation for their homes. None of them, however, were able to remain in “equivalent housing in the same neighbourhood” as demanded by the Coordinadora, promised by the MOP on multiple occasions (see, for example, La Epoca 5-IV-1997, Mayors of Recoleta and Independencia support Costanera Norte project), and required by the environmental resolution. This was probably the most tragic failure of the Coordinadora: both communities were dismantled and their residents dispersed to the periphery of Santiago, where rents more closely matched their meagre incomes.

By the time the Coordinadora held a memorial for the Independencia communities lost in the battle (May 2003), several had died and others complained of serious illness. Alicia Cid herself developed a cancer and, although she continued to make the enormous effort to attend early meetings of Living City, she eventually dropped out of sight, despite efforts to find her.
Nonetheless, the tender in December of that year failed yet again, when a single firm, the French company Transroute, presented a bid without presenting all the documents required. On 8 January 1999, an editorial in El Mercurio expressed the builders’ association’s dissatisfaction with the financial guarantees provided for the project, while La Tercera and business publications such as El Diario and the news magazine Qué Pasa considered it a major failure for the ambitious concession program (cited on pp. 126-127, Quijada 2009).

Business spokesmen and the ministry blamed the failure on “the risk, because it is the first urban concession, the conflict with environmental groups, its profitability or current economic conditions”, according to newspaper coverage, which directly acknowledged the Coordinadora’s letter writing campaign to CEOs included on the MOP’s list of qualifying companies (Rivas 1999).

Nury Gatica, leader of the Pergolera Santa María, spoke for the whole Coordinadora when she told La Tercera that for her sector news of the latest failure of the concession was a relief, because “these works would be very bad for us. We’ve said this all along. That’s why we’re in no rush to see this project go ahead.” The Coordinadora, moreover, expressed its dismay that the MOP would consider providing “millions in insurance” for the project, when the national budget was subject to cutbacks due to difficult economic times (Rivas 1999).

Each time the tender failed, the MOP had to rework its plans, not only for the Costanera Norte, but for the whole “calendar” of urban concessions, since they all depended on the success of its first project. In early 1999, MOP minister Jaime Tohá announced the government was considering other priorities for the project list, because of the need to “open up a space of opportunity for new investors” (ElDiario 1999). Investors and government alike seemed resigned to the idea of taking on smaller, less controversial projects, in order to get the concessions program underway with private investment (Isla 1999).

Until the Coordinadora staged a massive leafleting session and march on the national comptroller in September, Egis Bougues, whose top executives had spent time in jail for their construction-related cartels in their home country, France, was one of the leading candidates to win the Costanera Norte bid. This accusation, based on research by public service unions in Europe, was picked up by congressmember Nelson Ávila, after a meeting with Coordinadora leaders (ElDiario 1999; ElMercurio 1999; Gutiérrez 1999; Moreno 1999).

A week later, Engel, Fischer and Galetovic published a major op-ed in El Mercurio, protesting the generous subsidies, insurance and guarantees the government was providing to the project and noting that “The information available does not permit an independent
evaluation of the selection mechanism and pertinence of subsidies and guarantees provided” (Engel, Fischer et al. 1999). They add that the generous conditions provided to the government’s pet project considerably weaken “the test of the market” and conclude that in future it is vital for the government to make public the studies on which these kinds of decisions are based.

For a while, the future of the flagship project seemed to hang by a threat. Quijada, however, notes Garb’s view, based on his study of the Trans-Israel highway conflict, that for a project of this kind to go ahead, a fundamental element is a sense of “inevitability”. In the case of the Costanera Norte, the government’s campaign hammered away at the crucial idea that solving the “infrastructure deficit” was essential to overcome congestion and other urban issues; that the project was part of plans dating back to the 1960s; and that the project was already well underway, even when it hadn’t yet been tendered. Moreover, no alternatives were considered, despite the efforts in this sense by the Coordinadora and its academic advisors, for all their credentials (pp. 128-129, Quijada 2009).

Thus, on 3 May 1999, the government announced a new tender and committed to building US$80 mn worth of works to complement the highway project, admitting that this was to make “a project of this nature attractive to private actors and, given the associated risks, ensure a higher profitability than a tradition concession”, as MOP minister Tohá put it (quoted on p. 129, Quijada 2009).

Engel, Fischer and Galetovic objected to a subsidy that was equal to 10% of the ministry’s annual budget (column in El Mercurio, 21 November 1999). Previously they had laid out the dangers inherent in the ongoing battle between the MOP and the finance ministries as follows:

The main issue is that the companies, especially the builders, are asking for guarantees from the state. The MOP, which is interested in seeing these roads built soon, has supported the guarantees and in some cases subsidies. It often takes the side of the companies, and argues that the guarantees are essential for the program’s success. On the other hand, the Finance Ministry, which will have to sign the cheque if the guarantees become a reality, is less enthusiastic and has insisted on careful evaluations if they are to be granted... The MOP often tries to make projects “attractive” to companies, fearing that otherwise there will be no one interested in the tender... In the absence of collusion, the threat of non-participation should not be taken so seriously by the government (quoted on p. 91, Quijada 2009).

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20 This assumption, regarding the “absence of collusion” rings ominously as I revisit the debate in 2011. Given the convictions of Carlos Cruz and other senior management of the concession unit and MOP, for their triangulation of funds from companies to consultancy firms, and from there to increase wages in the unit and for other unspecified purposes. I have not seen this issue reexamined in light of the subsequent trials.
Nonetheless, the MOP achieved its guarantees, the companies applauded and the tender went ahead. Both the MOP and companies themselves were tightlipped about the reasons behind the decisions that became public knowledge, so it is extremely difficult to estimate how much the Coordinadora’s efforts weighed on companies. Nonetheless, the MOP’s hurried efforts to bring the project to tender and execution quickly failed on no fewer than four occasions (see Timelines, tables DN.x and DN.x). Moreover, for the final tender, the companies’ with the worst records for corruption withdrew from the competition. They had been the focus of the Coordinadora’s presentation to the Comptroller’s office, so again, that initiative officially “failed”, another case, the leaders decided, of winning by losing.

Four companies ultimately participated in the bid and in December 1999, the government finally achieved a successful tender. Left in the race was a small group of consortia that usually consisted of a major transnational and a local construction firm.

The winner was a consortium formed by Impregilo (Italian) and its Chilean partners, FE Grande and Tecsa, for an offer of just US$12 million, well below the US$60 million that Cruz had confidently told the Chilean congress the project would earn the national treasury in September 1999 (Public Works Commission Session, Chamber of Deputies, Chilean Congress, 7 September 1999).

What followed was even more curious however: despite all the rush and urgency ascribed to the project since its inception, for over a year, nothing visible happened. Behind the scenes, the company held several meetings with the Coordinadora, getting treated to the full range of opinions by the different organizations and the territories they represented, and asking primarily about an alternative route, which would place the controversial highway under the River Mapocho, precisely in the sectors where the Coordinadora was most active.

With evidence from these meetings and information from inside the business groups involved, the Coordinadora concluded that the company was worried about community reaction to the project, believed that the route under the river would neutralize opposition, and was battling with MOP over a change in the route, and the additional costs it would entail. Unofficially, we received information that the company was threatening to withdraw from the project if the MOP did not accept the route under the river, and underwrite much of the additional cost. Whatever the speculation, almost two years passed until finally, in September 2001 the new route, under the river in three of the four territories represented in the Coordinadora, was approved in a joint announcement by MOP-Impregilo.
Throughout 2000, the media fell remarkably silent about the project. Behind the scenes, the Coordinadora held several meetings with the company, which was proposing another change of route, specifically in the areas where the Coordinadora was active. This route would involve sinking the six-lane highway under the Mapocho River, to avoid impacts on Pedro de Valdivia Norte, Bellavista and the Vega. In Independencia, however, the highway continued to emerge in the properties occupied by the Escanilla-Borgoño families, represented in the Coordinadora by Luis Olivares and Alfredo Basaure. Whether this was due to the municipality’s protocol, which included a spanking new administrative building in exchange for giving up its claims to properties on the riverbank, to the families’ poverty and therefore lack of clout in the face of a determined MOP, or some other reason was never clarified.

Quijada sees some tendency to division within the Coordinadora, particularly between the majority and Pedro de Valdivia Norte over this new route, which was publicly supported by Juan Luis Moure, VP of the Junta de Vecinos #12. For the coalition itself, however, these kinds of differences, matices or shades of meaning, were normal, particularly after the potentially divisive experience with the protocols. PVN had always had a tendency to follow its own process, as did most of the organizations in the Coordinadora. In practice, key leaders from PVN (Inés Watine, Moure himself and Alfredo Gredig, who was treasurer of Living City during the early years) remained and supported the creation of Living City, in 2000. As the MOP continued to plan tunnels and highways through the neighbourhood, the neighbours of Pedro de Valdivia Norte went on to fight one battle after another in their attempt to defend the right of a wealthy neighbourhood located in the city centre, rather than in the distant suburbs, where upperclass Chileans had moved in previous decades.

For the Coordinadora itself, the leaders decided not to support the alternative route, although they did see it as an option that would ensure the survival of three of its four communities, and decent compensation for the fourth. The concensus was to wait and watch with interest, as there was clearly a battle of wills going on between the government, which insisted on the original route, and the company, which was equally determined to get its way.

Ultimately, the company won, and eventually work began on the project itself. Because this involved building in the river bed itself, life in the neighbourhoods went on more or less normally. Eventually access points in Bellavista and the Vega would produce additional conflicts. Moreover, the markets (Tirso de Molina, Pérgola de las Flores) would have to battle for the buildings that had been promised them in their protocol and these were eventually built by the MOP itself, not the highway concessionaire, in 2010-2011.
Beyond Distrust: Learning Citizenship

What did all this mean to the individuals and groups involved in the fight against the Costanera Norte? Meetings were often intense and it took time to build a common pool of language, trust, willingness to assume risks and to contribute time and other resources. Moreover, aside from overcoming the obvious challenges inherent in their diversity, the coalition’s members also had to acquire -- just about every skill in the political, analytical, urban planning and movement book -- in a very short period of time. The stakes were high: their survival as individuals, communities and an integral territorial unit within Metropolitan Santiago.

Where was all this supposed to come from?

In his reflections on the problem of civic competence (1992), Dahl defines “the good citizen” as:

highly concerned about public affairs and political life; well-informed about issues, candidates, and parties; engaged often with fellow citizens in deliberations on public matters; an active participant in efforts to influence governmental decisions by voting, communicating views to public officials, attending political meetings, and the like; and motivated in all these activities by a desire to foster the general welfare (p. 46, Dahl 1992).

And Dahl admits, moreover, that “It is clear that few citizens in democratic countries actually measure up to this idealized portrait, and most appear to fall far short of it.”

Where, then, do good citizens come from? How do you get eggs with no chickens?

If these are difficult questions for countries with established democratic systems, they are even tougher in a post-dictatorial environment, such as Chile’s in the 1990s. Asia-based Juliet Merrifield, working with the Institute of Development Studies Participation Group, talks about citizen learning (Merrifield 2001). This is based on individual and collective aspirations: “citizens say that the spirit of a good society is embodied in caring and sharing” (Commonwealth Fundation 1999 quoted on p. 38, Merrifield 2001). Moreover,

Citizens believe that a good society is one in which they can participate in public spheres to make their own contribution toward the public good ... They want to be heard and consulted on a regular and continuing basis, not merely at the time of an election. They want more than a vote. They are asking for participation and inclusion in the decisions taken and policies made by public agencies and officials (Ibid).

Merrifield adds that the practice of citizenship requires: knowledge, abilities and disposition. Certainly, as the experiences above indicate, the Coordinadora identified individuals willing to question the project (disposition), with considerable abilities and life experience to start, and
mobilized those abilities to enable them to acquire the knowledge they needed to intervene effectively in a major public planning decision that not only excluded ordinary citizens, but many expert, government and other key players.

Merrifield also notes Gaventa’s observation that “development of critical consciousness is also essential for full citizenship.” Thus,

An underlying critical or questioning stance, an attitude of inquiry, a scepticism toward authority, can be seen as an underlying disposition that is essential to democratic participation and protection of freedoms. Allied with this is sense of efficacy -- a sense that one can have an impact, and the self confidence to attempt it. Gramsci suggested that ‘it is necessary to direct one’s attention violently towards the present as it is, if one wishes to transform it. Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.’ (Gramsci, 1971: 6) These dispositions underpin the particular actions citizens may pursue, or knowledge and skills they attain, and make them all possible” (p. 7, Merrifield 2001).

For Merrifield, achieving “active citizens” (Dahl’s “good citizen”) is a task that is often assigned to elites in classic political science research (she cites Almond and Verba 1963, and Pye and Verba 1965). But where the elite’s interests are not served by democratization, where will it come from?

Again, how do we get eggs with no chickens? Merrifield’s answer lies in political culture, which Taylor, with extensive experience in Latin America (El Salvador, Chile and Argentina), describes as

the specifically unwritten norms of conduct both of and between the various political actors operating in society, together with the concomitant expectations and understandings of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, representatives, public servants and so on.’ (Taylor, 1999: 64, quoted on p. 7, Merrifield 2001).

Political culture, then, writes Merrifield:

shapes what people expect of their political system, what they see as possibilities for their own action, and what rights and responsibilities the various actors are perceived to have. It is not static: Taylor argues that political culture is ‘developed through experience and practice and is constantly changing’. It may itself be a site of political struggle. At the same time that it shapes political discourse and the sense of what is possible, it is in a constant state of tension as it is pulled from the bottom and from the top. Yet because it is embedded, political culture is usually not visible or questioned” (p. 7, Merrifield 2001).

As Merrifield notes, political thinkers such as Mansbridge (1999) have traced the association between participation and better citizens back to Aristotle, supported by de Tocqueville’s oft cited observations of the practice of direct democracy in New England town meetings.

Although there are few before and after studies of participation and its impacts on participants, other researchers (Foley, Elsdon, and Mansbridge herself, cited on pp. 12-13 of
Merrifield 2001), have noted the link between lived experience in civil society and the practice of citizenship. Among the factors that facilitate this development, they point to the importance of talk, cultural expression, knowledge (“tailored to particularly social issues and problems experienced by participants”), action and civic education, all of which help to move people “from ‘common knowledge’ to ‘critical knowledge’” (Campos Carr, cited on p. 17, Merrifield 2001).

The Coordinadora started from a critical premise and was able to send it spinning through many different spheres and orbits of public and private opinion, with its varied actions, its diverse membership and variegated strategy, and its development of its own Chilean version of interrelated community media that brought together everything from the mass media, to faxes and the newly developing e-mail and internet technologies of the time, through to the corner grocery store and the local grapevine (known, fittingly, in Chile as el correo de las brujas, the witches’ post). By daring to question a flagship project and a powerful politician, it also demonstrated, simply, that this could be done.

Merrifield then examines current thinking about how people learn, noting that learning is purposeful, social and requires communities of practice (p. 22, Merrifield 2001). She uses these ideas to define the key components necessary for citizenship learning to occur. As table 3.8 indicates, all these components were present in the improvised pressure cooker that turned the Coordinadora into a respected actor in the highway debate. New knowledge was deeply linked to each community’s current patterns, reinforced by their powerful need for survival, in the case of the Recoleta and Independencia groups; the aspiration for a clean, green socially just environment, in the case of the PVN groups; and the aesthetic and environmental purposes of the Bellavista groups, who sought to preserve the working class buildings and natural heritage of their own neighbourhood.

The processes involved in the SEIA, media debates, judicial actions and mobilization all demanded that leaders not only talk, but also practice their values, not only internally within the Coordinadora, but in their meetings with a wide variety of authorities and their occasional clashes with police on the streets. In November 1997, it was their love for their neighbourhoods and not their dislike of the project that led them to organize a “wave of hugs”, complete with balloons, ribbons, hundreds of neighbours holding hands to protectively circle the homes they loved (Independencia), the squares and museum of Pablo Neruda (Bellavista), the markets (Recoleta) and the access to the park (PVN). The attacks from powerful politicians, business organizations and pro-business media also forced leaders to debate, reframe and
challenge prevailing values, creating a solid core of leaders with common views, and capable of communicating them to their grassroots membership.

Was this all just motivated by narrow self-interest, as some theorists, particularly economists, tend to argue? Ducci (2002) examines this question, from the perspective of Sen’s dual concepts of sympathy and commitment.

Sympathy as a basis for decisions would fall within the realm of selfishness, since “... conduct based on sympathy is largely selfish, because one enjoys it when others are pleased, and feels pain when others suffer.” On the other hand, behavior based on commitment would not be selfish if we understand commitment as “...a person choosing an act [in a manner that] he believes will yield a lower level of personal welfare to him than an alternative that is also available to him” (quoted on p. 179, Ducci 2002).

After observing close up how these groups operate, Ducci notes that:

all have some members, generally very few, who, without necessarily being the most visible leaders, devote a large part of their energy and time to working on the issue that brings their group together. It is amazing to see how after long hours of work, day in and day out, the leaders and individuals most involved invest time in meetings and discussions to reach agreements and define strategies for their struggle. This is especially the case among the middle-class and poor sectors, who have a harder time making themselves heard and seen (p. 179, Ducci 2002).

Beyond self-interest, she identifies safety, stability and one’s sense of self as crucial factors in bringing neighbours together into these kinds of movements. Nonetheless, she notes that when one’s sense of identity is threatened, “the strongest passions are aroused to defend the place where one lives or works” and cites the example of groups in the Coordinadora (and later, Living City), particularly the traders of the Vega and the Pérgola Santa María:

who feel that the importance of their work goes beyond the neighborhood and the city. Indeed, the pergoleras take great pride in their symbolic importance as the persons in charge of bidding farewell, with showers of flower petals, to all illustrious persons who pass by on their final trip to the cemetery. Also noteworthy, in a city that appears so little beloved by its inhabitants as is Santiago, is the ardor with which the residents of Bellavista defend their neighborhood from the invasion of nighttime activities that threaten its peace and tranquility. They defend a bohemian and urban way of life, a neighborhood life that enjoys a mix of artists and social classes, where everyone knows the corner storekeeper and the old woman from the house at the end of the street (p. 180, Ducci 2002).

This perspective enriches Merrifield’s typology and offers some insight into the particularities of citizen learning as it relates specifically to urban spaces and territories. Thus, “the material use of space cannot be separated from its psychological use”, Ducci argues. “People feel that their neighborhood is the place that best meets a complex set of conditions: from solutions to practical problems to the security and peace of mind one derives from knowing and trusting your neighbors (a ‘use value’)” (p. 181, Ducci 2002). Finally, in response to those analysts who
argue that these are merely “fundamentalist and reactionary responses to the necessary and constant changes” in city life, she notes that:

While most of the movements oppose specific projects that have a detrimental impact on quality of life, the social dynamics that these battles are setting in motion do not appear to be reactionary in the least. To the contrary, they are giving rise to and sometimes proliferating solidarity and partnerships among distinct groups and different social classes, who are quickly learning the value of collaboration and mutual support in advancing towards a common goal: a better quality of life in the city in which they live (p. 182, Ducci 2002).

These changes, arising from citizenship learning, are playing a growing role in city governance. But it is important to underline that they play out as much in people’s hearts as on the streets, in private as well as public spaces. There was nothing theoretical about the transformations that this learning-acting wrought.

Domingo Pérez, one of the key leaders of the Tirso de Molina fruit and vegetable market said:

When I joined the Coordinadora, I didn’t even know how to talk. I learned a lot in that group -- even how to read plans. I just wanted to defend my people, to ensure that any old political project, no matter how important, couldn’t just roll right over us. We learned how to act as a group, how to fight in a democratic way, how to organize (Pérez 2010).

Mauricio Montecinos, who led the Coordinadora team that prepared the response to the EIA and later served two terms as president of the Bellavista neighbourhood association (Junta de Vecinos #13 Mario Baeza), described what he and the group learned together as follows:

The antihighway fight made us learn. We realized that what we were fighting for was a much more global issue. It changed our lives. We learned to look at the city differently. This issue was about the city as a whole, not just something local (Montecinos 2010).

On 29 July, 2010, several leaders from Independencia, Recoleta and Bellavista who had been fundamental to the Coordinadora gathered to reflect on their experiences and what they meant to them, individually, and to the group, a decade after the most intense period of the highway conflict had ended.

María Inés Solimano (Bellavista, 79 years old), began:

There came a time when I heard they would sell the school next door and the highway would go right past my house. This activated my animal instinct of belonging, not animal, my sense of belonging. I began to work [on the campaign] like crazy. I remember the meetings at the ministry -- 20-25 of us would go. They would say stupid things to us, like promising to remove the gases via the River. The stupidity of the things they said to us affected me. I never had a very high idea, but I was impressed by the lack of ethics of the staff involved. I remember, Nury, the marvellous bouquets of flowers you used to bring to
the art auctions. I’ll never forget the celebration at your house, when the highway was stopped. You loaned us bathing suits for 17 women more or less.

Luis Olivares (Independencia, c. 60 years old), added:

*Inés Fernández made a paella...* (Everyone chimes in with memories of the event, and there is much laughter at the memory of artist, Carmen Silva, in improvised bikini, at the side of Nury’s pool.)

Luis recalled how he had first heard about the highway project, joining and then being elected president of the association of owners and renters.

*I was amazed by how little we all knew about what an expropriation was going to mean. We were totally lost. After a meeting with the Mayor, he seemed to promise something, but underneath there was nothing but words, nothing concrete. Afterward, in practice, that was exactly what happened. Then I heard there were other groups in Bellavista. That was how I came to the meetings and we formed the Coordinadora.*

We were just emerging from the dictatorship at the time. Citizens had no experience with what it meant to be an organized community. There had been too many years of “organizations” in quotation marks, where people participated, but we knew they were all run by the authorities of the time.

Luis added:

*The Coordinadora had a lot of presence. It reached the press. It reached the other media. It got us a voice in different instances, the College of Architects, for example. It triggered an enormous debate about the project, as something that would break into the city, a consolidated area, of older communities, very representative places.*

Nury chimed in: *You remember Señora Alicia?* [The fragile, determined leader from Independencia-Olivos]

Lake: *We couldn’t find her to invite her.*

Nury: *She went to Maipu* [a very distant comuna, on the south-western edge of Santiago.]

Lake: *She kept coming for a long time.*

Nury: *Afterwards she had a problem with her daughter’s husband (where she was living), so she moved in with her son.*

MIS: *She ended up allegada (homeless), just living in someone else’s house.*

Nury: *The most affected. She ended up with nothing. If you’re allegada no one will let you keep your furniture, your things. She was very sick the last time I saw her.*

Luis: *Citizen participation -- after so many years of darkness and lack of citizen organization, it was so important!*

This weaving of parallel threads into a conversation, blending affection and concern over the fate of a friend and fellow leader with a more analytical perspective on the meaning of the experience overall, was fairly typical of the way information was exchanged, energies replenished and decisions made at meetings of the Coordinadora. Although we hadn’t met
together for at least five years, the old patterns for sharing affection and intellect, spirit and laughter, solidarity and pain, remained.

Certainly “citizenship” is a way of acting in and on the public world of political and social decisionmaking and debate, but there is also an emotional quality to it, which glues people together or, in other circumstances, tears them apart. For the communities of Independencia, which were ultimately displaced by the highway project, the Coordinadora was a lifeline that enabled them to salvage something of their lives, a minimum of dignity. Luis contrasted the benefits for the company with the treatment of the people who were losing their homes.

We couldn’t stop the expropriation. The highway could have emerged [from the tunnel under the river] just a few meters further along, and it wouldn’t have touched our homes. Because the Municipality didn’t support us, the fight with the Ministry was really hard, it didn’t want to give us anything. But with the ruling by the Comptroller’s office we forced the Ministry to provide us with compensation. They couldn’t kick us out without complying with the [environmental commission’s] resolution. With that, we managed a payment very quickly, in late 2001-early 2002 (Olivares 2010).

He concluded that:

the arrival of democracy hadn’t changed how the State dealt with its citizens. It was very comfortable for politicians not to change that structure, because it gave them the facilities to do exactly what they wanted... The community that organized managed to achieve much more than we expected at the start. And the Ministry’s attitude changed. That’s something I found very valuable for the communities themselves, for the city, and especially for a city that is so segregated (Olivares 2010).

As Lucho finished his reflection and María Inés commented on the darkness of the period, Nury took up the story from the perspective of the pergoleras and Recoleta:

We were the most affected, the most defenseless, because we knew nothing at all about the project. No one knew about it. All of a sudden we heard that the highway would run right through the Pérgola, that we would be demolished, that we could do nothing to stop it. I had thought it would run through the north -- why should I care? Let them do it up there! I never imagined it would take away my income. I spoke to Sonia from the Vega Chica and she mentioned this association, so we said, let’s go, we’ve got nothing to lose (Gatica 2010).

Nury remembered the first meeting, at the home of Lake and Pato. “I said nothing. I went to listen, to learn, to find out what this was about.” She captured the contradictory sense of fatality and determination of those early days:

I was going to fight, though, even if I had to do so alone. I found that at the first meetings we were like kids at school, waving a little flag to protest because the bus wouldn’t stop for us. We were pretty small fish. I had no faith that we could pull off something big. But
afterwards, when more people started to come, we started to talk to more people (Gatica 2010).

Nury recalled how leaders from the Tirso de Molina, the Bellavista neighbourhood associations, other groups began to join, and this nucleus began to attract advisors

professional people, who knew a lot about the terrain, about the impact on the city, the urbanists, the architects, the people from Conama, the government itself. The Coordinadora grew stronger. There were journalists in the group. There was an enormous variety of people, housewives with no special knowledge, people like me, a vendor. I had no idea how to fight, how to write a letter so it would be read. I was tremendously enriched as a person. I learned a lot, so many things that if I'd just sat in my business I would never have learned (Gatica 2010).

Describing the process, Nury reveals both an inward-reaching experience, that enriched her personally, but also something that changed her interactions with everything around her.

For me this meant feeling that when someone does something right, for people, for the community, with no personal ambition and without selfishly seeking praise, but rather just because this is what feels right, people give you support. They feel what you’re feeling. They listen (Gatica 2010).

Moreover, she was very clear about the link between the Coordinadora and Living City.

This organization was born from that [spirit] and later became Living City, an organization with an obligation -- to teach. That is the main point of this organization. To teach the community everything it can do, everything it can achieve, and how to do this. More than an organization for citizens’ rights, it is about teaching people how to organize: Look lady, they’re telling you you’re being evicted so they can build a highrise, complain, that’s your right. Look lady, you own a house and they want to run a highway through it, complain, that’s your right... It’s not just the government, people have to learn that no one can trample on their rights (Gatica 2010).

All those interviewed felt that although the coalition was unable to stop the whole highway project, it had modified it so much that their communities had achieved significant victories.

For Luis (Independencia), it was forcing the MOP to provide much higher compensation to the displaced households. For Nury (Recoleta-markets), “it was a big deal and what I achieved for my community was a big deal too. If I hadn’t participated, they would have run right over us, demolished us, and we would no longer exist.” For María Inés (Bellavista):

It could have been so much worse. We made a great contribution, when we fought the Costanera Norte. We said a lot would happen, and it’s happened. We said the highway wasn’t a solution, that with more roads would come more vehicles, and so it is. That the pollution would increase (Solimano 2010).

But for María Inés, the importance of the Costanera Norte conflict goes beyond the achievements in terms of each community.

As a founder, I feel Hey! I participated. With all the people I met, we hug, we’re happy to see each other again. The relationship that remains is very special. It’s in times of trouble
that people really come together. And the CN brought us together very deeply (Solimano 2010).

This sense of pride and citizenship reflected important achievements, but sometimes it was hard to figure out how much had really been achieved, and whether it was worth the enormous effort involved. For those of us in the centre of the battle, it took us a long time to realize that what we had achieved in our battle against the highway was highly significant, even though the project had ultimately gone ahead. Often, it took long arguments with our academic advisors, who were accustomed to studying these kinds of phenomena, to grasp that what we had done had meaning far beyond our own small world or the larger communities in which we worked.

One of the first official organizations to note the development of these urban initiatives was Sur, a non-governmental organization specializing in urban and social issues. Alfredo Rodríguez, its director, said that the Coordinadora/Ciudad Viva represented a new kind of citizen organization. “Before, there were popular organizations, that lined up according to certain political ideologies. Living City demonstrated that it was possible to put together another kind of organization” (Rodríguez 2010).

**DN5 Other interactions of interest**

**DN5.1 The “foreign” factor**

Several non-governmental organizations played key roles in observing and supporting the development of the Coordinadora. One of them was Ximena Abogabir, president of Casa de la Paz, the institution which received the Coordinadora’s leaders, as they first reached out in search of allies and information. It also provided a meeting room, as the organization grew and it became difficult to hold meetings in people’s living rooms. Abogabir notes that for the Coordinadora achieving the change in the highway’s route was a “landmark achievement”, that involved deeply influencing governmental decisions.

What’s interesting about this story is how in parallel the new environmental law was being born. This became a great exercise in citizenship and probably we all were learning to be citizens at the same as the government was learning to be government and the MOP was learning to be MOP. In other words, it was a process of growth, with all that involves in terms of things poorly done by all. This was its value, because it was the first great exercise of citizenship to take advantage of the formal spaces created by the environmental law. [The Coordinadora] became a tribunal for the academic world (Abogabir 2010).

The presence of three foreign women was also important to the Coordinadora’s development. Inés Wattine (PVN), Céline Désramés (Committee to Defend San Cristobal Hill),
and I came from countries with longstanding democratic traditions, Inés and Céline from France, and I from Canada. Inés’ father had served in the resistance against the Nazi invasion of France, while Céline was a student of history, working on a PhD dissertation on public spaces in Chile in the 1900s. Along with Alicia Cid (Independencia) Inés was the best door-to-door person I have ever met, reliable, serious, quiet and humble in her attitudes at meetings, but indignant at the arrogance and discrimination often dealt out to our campaign. Céline, too, was articulate and lively, an active, responsible participant who later edited a book on heritage, published by Living City, before returning to France.

I had been largely formed by the student movement in Canada, and particularly the two national organizations, the National Union of Students (the predecessory of today’s CFS) and Canadian University Press. Again, as with the class differences discussed above, this foreign presence was the object of some misinterpretation and caricatures about our role.

Far from being foreign “experts” with enormous power and resources to tell people how to do things right and make them do it, we were all experiencing the reality of being outsiders, unable to interact in more than a superficial way with and upon our Chilean environment. Always insular, Chile at once “loved” foreigners, and ruthlessly excluded them from meaningful political and social involvement, locking us into a belljar of clichés: upper class Chileans tend to see us as cute little versions of Ronald Reaganites, while lower income people could be resentful, classifying us indiscriminately as rich powerful gringos, “yankee go home!” regardless of our precarious incomes and lifestyles.

In 1991, I myself was, for the first time since immigrating to Chile in 1981, thinking seriously about moving back to Canada. With three young boys, I was concerned about the social arrogance and inequality that they were being bred into, and which seemed impossible to challenge in any meaningful way. Our oldest two had gone to middle class private schools, to avoid the repression and risk inherent in their attending the militarized public schools. But even our youngest, born with Chile’s new democracy in 1991, required difficult decisions. He went to the local public school for the first few years, dealing painfully but successfully with such high levels of violence that we almost withdrew him during the first semester. But for highschool, faced with the choice of an all-boys’ public highschool, we reluctantly accepted the need to put him in a modest private school, where he would have a normal adolescence amidst both boys and girls of his own age.

We used our language skills to reach out to organizations in the countries of origin of the foreign firms interested in bidding on the project. The trilingual website that we published existed primarily for this purpose, and we also corresponded with environmental groups, such
as Friends of the Earth, in their own languages, obtaining their formal support and signatures on letters to the companies.

It’s harder to define precisely just how our “foreignness” contributed to building the interclass relations that characterized the Coordinadora. But over the years other leaders have commented on this. Patricio Lanfranco (my husband) and María Inés Solimano both emphasize that we were fundamental to creating the spirit of equality that grew up among the members, for the simple reason that we hadn’t grown up with the superior attitudes -- expressed in body language, accents and other, often subtle, characteristics of communication -- that typically characterized high-income Chilean’s relations with market and low-income people. Ximena Abogabir, for example, said:

I think you, as a Canadian were a great contribution in terms of democracy. What we see in most organizations are very authoritarian leaders. They want to be protagonists. In contrast, you were stubborn about sharing power, visibility. From my perspective, I always learned from the way you exercised your leadership (Abogabir 2010).

There was one incident, too, that circulated at the time (we did not know this) among many of the people who signed on as our advisors. It was originally witnessed by Ximena Abogabir, who commented on it to many of her friends and acquaintances (Salazar and Ortuzar, for example, both recounted Ximena’s version of this incident during their interviews 2010). During the closing event of Santiago Como Vamos, at the Catholic University, amidst the hundreds of participants, I seized the opportunity to approach German Quintana, then the Intendente of Santiago. In Ximena’s words:

You went up to him and said, Intendente, we’ve been asking you for a meeting for three weeks and you haven’t answered us. He says, I’ve been busy, and keeps walking past you. You intercept him again, and then again, and insist that it’s his obligation to receive you. So he says to one of his assistants, Aldo, look after this little girl (ñiñita) would you? And you intercept him for the fourth time and say, Intendente, I’m not a little girl. That ... showed such profound dignity and self-respect, something we Chileans don’t think of doing (Abogabir 2010).

Ortuzar reacted similarly, first noticing, then feeling called upon to respond (Ortuzar 2010).

What caught my attention at first was Lake. I saw her speak in public a couple of times and I thought how can we be such geese in this country, that we don’t do anything, and this fantastic gringa from another country gives us a class in how to stand up against this atrocious thing, they’re trying to do in our city, and we do nothing. This moved me deeply... To say the right thing and make the government listen to citizens, seemed extraordinary to me: people with no preparation were willing to stand up and defend their neighbourhoods. That was really good (Ortuzar 2010).
DN5.2 Innovation from diversity

Architect and urban planner, María Elena Ducci, became one of the first to study the Coordinadora and other urban social movements post-regime in-depth. She examined their characteristics in comparison with Latin American social movements of the 1950s-1970s, when population growth rates reached new records, and rural to urban migration meant city development reflected acute tensions between “three opposing forces: the state, the private sector, and the ‘popular’ (low-income) sector”. These movements “invaded open land left aside by the real estate developers” to build new homes and communities, known as shantytowns, favelas, or in Chile, poblaciones (Ducci 2002).

A large part of the urban population of Latin America participated in this form of urban life, and the battle for land, a home, and services characterized urban dynamics. By the late sixties, thousands of squatters who had invaded urban land on the city’s outskirts began to form popular urban movements “endowed with effectiveness, continuity, institutional response, social recognition, accumulative progress and organizational development” (Borja 1975:100). National governments, completely overwhelmed by the organizing strength and size of these popular groups, let them be, and little by little began to implement policies of service provision and the legalization of property held in these irregular areas (p. 6, Ducci 2002).

Military regimes, neoliberal economic policies, the achievements of these early movements in terms of housing, health and education, combined with an end to the rural-urban flows into cities in the 1980s and 1990s, brought with them a decline in social movements, on one hand, and a shift in the forces shaping the city. By the 1990s, Ducci notes three important forces at work shaping the cities of the developing world. First, large infrastructure projects. These are promoted by different branches of government, often with little coordination, and frequently generate unforeseen impacts. These projects are becoming a major source of conflict between citizens and governments, and their construction is more and more threatened by citizen opposition, as we shall see below. Second, real estate capital. This capital, by definition, pursues the maximization of profits by developing large housing areas on the outskirts along with megaprojects that can be located in outer city areas or inside the urban area (malls, office centers, closed residential areas, gigantic social housing projects). Third, organized citizens’ groups (p. 6, Ducci 2000).

These new movements, writes Ducci, are more heterogenous than their predecessors of the 1950s and 1960s, raise environmental as well as socio-economic concerns, and no longer require the massive participation levels and mobilization that were necessary to thrust working class and poor organizations into the public limelight and political debate. Although high-income groups may be unwilling to ally with others, “preferring to find support among

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21 Indeed, she eventually became an advisor and friend of Living City, serving on the board between 2005-2007.
neighbors with greater economic capacity and strength, and relying on persona influence and access to ministers, mayors and so on” alliances among different social classes can produce surprising results. Based on studies of neighbourhood response to a major fire, involving highly toxic chemicals, “in defense of ‘their own’” and on how, through the Coordinadora experience, “a neighbors’ group became a citizens’ movement” Ducci defines the changing dynamics of citizens’ organizations in post-Pinochet Chile, in contrast to those prevailing in the earlier period.

If the group includes one determined professional, journalist, artist, or television personality, the organization can gain media access that will strengthen the group’s position and allow it to be heard (although this does not guarantee the success of its efforts). Furthermore, when organizations include a small upper middle-class group with access to political, economic, and communications resources, the chances of success rise enormously... In this sense, we see a profound change in the urban dynamics in the seventies as compared to the end of the nineties. Then, the world was polarized, and positive social change could only come from the popular sector, while the work of middle-class elites with a social conscience was to support the demands of the poorest members of society. Today, many environmental movements are led by middle-class groups and, above all, by multiclass alliances. There are also interesting examples of positive change in cities produced by groups, not necessarily popular or multiclass, but still marginalized by society in some way (p. 8, Ducci 2000).

The Coordinadora had always proclaimed dual goals: to stop the highway project and/or at the very least ensure the survival of the communities affected. In retrospect, saving these communities was amazing, miraculous even, given the impact of the campaign on a planning and political order that was deliberately, and sometimes brutally, exclusive.

Underlying this “success”, however, was the fact that by saving three of the four neighbourhoods, these communities could remain present, physically, in their central territories, with easy access to most of the city, including its centres of power. This opened up yet another possibility: that of their voices remaining, to offer a respected citizens’ perspective on crucial urban issues, from a social justice, rather than a dry “technical” perspective. Even Luis Olivares, whose community had been dispersed, went on to organize the community in the Avenida Matta neighbourhood where he settled, after he lost his home in Independencia. Nury, who had left the Living City board in 2004, remained in touch, participated in market-specific initiatives, and continued to argue and advocate for her group, although she was no longer an elected leader of their association.

Moreover, in the years that followed, similar conflicts sprang up in different communities, over highways, the Transantiago Bus Rapid Transit system, highrise development, malls, parking lots under popular squares, the authorities’ to shut down street markets, garbage
collection, insecurity, holes in roads, and a vast array of urban issues, many of which increasingly came under the overall heading of cultural heritage and identity.

For the first time in a presidential campaign, Lagos debated public transport with his competitor Joaquín Lavín in the 1999 elections. Citizen participation became an important concept during the Lagos’ government -- he even issued a very top-down, presidential edict requiring it from every ministry and government agency. Michelle Bachelet campaigned and governed under the slogan that hers was a “citizen’s government”.

Despite the distance that remained between these concepts and the actual practice that went on under each government, which we will explore further in the chapter on Living City, the question of citizen participation shifted away from a sort of minor procedure that should be skipped over wherever possible to avoid delays and added costs, to a political demand that no politician in Chile could afford to ignore.

I am not arguing that Living City’s predecessor “did” all this, but what it did do was demonstrate that it was possible to question authority effectively, to achieve meaningful objectives (if not all of them), and to survive, and thus be capable of carrying on and assuming new challenges.

As Ducci put it in an early study for the Wilson Center in 2000:

Although the Coordinadora continued its battle and maintained pressure on the authorities and interested firms, to date there has been no clear victory. However, the people of Santiago, other organizations, and many politicians view this citizens’ group as an exemplary organization that is opening the way to achieving a city that is truly sustainable and livable (p. 14, Ducci 2000).

Dn5.3 Deliberation, Strategic Conviction and DIAD: Conversation in the Coordinadora

As the previous sections reveal, for five years the Coordinadora was able to leverage its diversity, using variegated strategies that at different moments in the conflict focused on the press, the Coordinadora’s own community media, personal contacts with professional associations and universities, letter writing, leafletting, legal initiatives and mobilizations. This strategy effectively impacted on significant components of the Chilean elite, which according to the UNDP definitions (2004) involves economic, political, symbolic (media, arts, churches) and social (unions and civil society) components.

Thus, despite consisting primarily of excluded social groups, its combined efforts proved able to mobilize critiques and dissent, first among influential academics and professional sectors (physicians, the college of architects), and later among technical and political leaders within the government itself.
As a result of its experience with the highway and the SEIA, early on (1997) the Coordinadora published a manifesto defining the bases for genuine citizen participation. Thus, it demanded “guarantees for adequate citizen participation”, involving equality and respect: equal information, equal resources, and an environment favorable to dialogue and participation. It also demands “access and impartiality”, that is equal access to the environmental authorities and that these same authorities be impartial and fair in their decision-making. It also critiqued the system’s failure to meet these guarantees, listing key information missing from the MOP’s presentations, the lack of resources for the communities’ unequal battles with the MOP, and the positive response (from many of the environmental commission staff) and negative results (from the actual decision-makers) (quoted in full on pp. 100-102, Araya and Sagaris, 1997).

Ultimately, the Coordinadora and its advisors and other individuals were able to present their opinions to the technical bodies, the advisory commission and in other instances that became part of the highway SEIA, particularly during a two-day meeting organized 18-19 June 1997, one year almost to the day from the Bellavista neighbourhood’s first protest and announcement that it would contest the project. This pushed the newly inaugurated system to the limit, but also revealed the very real weakness in its lack of genuine independence from the national government and main proponent of the project.

At the heart of this process was an intense, new (for Chile) form of dialogue across diversity, what Forester, Healey and others call “deliberation” or Innes and Booher “authentic dialogue”. This involved an ongoing, collective conversation in which all members were willing to listen and even to change, in order to reach new agreements, forge new truths, Healey’s “strategic conviction” (Healey 1997). Innes and Booher talk about DIAD: diversity, interdependence and authentic dialogue, all present in this case and strongly active in building the ties and capabilities of the organization as a group.

This process, however, was occurring in the urban planning sphere, but not in the tame spaces usually controlled (and studied) by planners. Rather, this was out of control, occurring in a wilderness of citizen engagement that was occupying every nook and cranny of urban, physical, psychological and symbolic space, well beyond the limits and borders of normal legal and procedural structures. Moreover, it dared to engage with those official processes, both challenging them and demanding changes, thereby raising crucial issues that have become central parts of debate, and the subject of concrete political advances, such as right to information legislation, in the ensuing years.
Beyond Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation” (1969) or Healey’s “collaborative planning”, Susskind et al.’s categories, based on urban social movements of the 1960s and 1970s offer to provide the most conceptual illumination regarding the nature and meaning of these kinds of movements.

Susskind et al. identify three kinds of citizen participation or action: **paternalism** (attempted by the MOP and environmental authorities), but promptly challenged by the communities organized into the Coordinadora and their supporters; **conflict**, the result of independent citizens’ organizations demanding and to a large extent managing to act freely and publicly in the dispute; and **co-production**, a kind of joint conversation and decision-making process between public officials and residents. This last typology did not arise within the highway revolt, but it will become useful when examining the next part of this study, the experience of Living City (pp. 6-15, Susskind et al. 1983).

### Dn5.4 Wither or whither: beyond the Coordinadora

Based on his study of the Clamshell alliance anti-nuclear movement in the US, Bill Moyer, a writer, organizer and former staffer with Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s Poor Peoples’ Campaign, noted that, despite their significant achievements, Clamshell organizers were often discouraged by what they considered their own failure (Moyer 1987). Moreover,

The Clamshell experience of discouragement and collapse is far from unusual. Within a few years after achieving the goals of “take-off”, every major social movement of the past twenty years has undergone a significant collapse, in which activists believed that their movements had failed, the power institutions were too powerful, and their own efforts were futile. This has happened even when movements were actually progressing reasonably well along the normal path taken by past successful movements! (p. 2, Moyer 1987).

Like Susskind’s team in 1983, according to Moyer, the “source of power of social movements lies in two human qualities:

1. A strong sense of right and wrong. People have deeply felt beliefs and values, and they react with extreme passion and determination when they realize that these values are violated.
2. We understand the world and reality, in large part, through symbolism (p. 6, Moyer 1987).

When these two factors come into play together, they can become powerful catalysts for social action and change. Writes Moyer:

Normal times are politically quiet times because the powerholders successfully promote their official doctrine and policies while hiding their actual operative doctrine and policies, thereby keeping the violations of conditions and their policies out of the public
consciousness and off society's agenda. The opposition feels hopeless because it seems that the situation will continue indefinitely, and they feel powerless to change it. Beneath the calm surface, however, the contradictions between society's values and the powerholders' actual, operative policies hold the seeds for popular discontent that can create dramatic changes (p. 10).

To change this situation, “the opposition must prove both that the problem exists and that the official powerholders and institutions perpetuate the problem” (p. 11, Moyer 1987). Throughout the different stages that Moyer identifies, social movements establish goals (stage 2), ripen (stage 4), achieving, if they’re successful, majority public support (stage 6). At this stage, major pitfalls include the risk of activists remaining stuck at the protest stage, resorting to violence or “macho radicalism,” “believing that the movement is losing and local efforts are futile” (pp. 31-32, Moyer 1987). Individuals within the Coordinadora or among its advisors may, at times, have felt tempted by any of these attitudes. The overall effect of the group, however, was to balance each other out, particularly given the existential outlook shared from the start, of expecting little but feeling the need to say/do something in the face of a major injustice.

Success (stage 7) may take the form of “dramatic showdown, quiet showdown, or attrition.” During the course of its short life, the Coordinadora had been involved in all three. The pitfalls at this stage included “compromising too many values and key demands; achieving minor reforms without building basic social change, having activists feel dismayed and powerless because they do not recognize success; and having apparent final victory end the movement” (p. 33, Moyer 1987).

In Chile in the late 1990s we did not have the benefit of Moyer’s wisdom and insights, based on those of movements on very different issues and in very different conditions. Notwithstanding, there was a need to derive some meaning from what we had done and what we had become, collectively, no matter how hard it was to define that, or even to decide if we’d been successful, sell-outs or flat out failures. What, and who, were we, as communities? As an organization? After all the demands, the sacrifices and the learning, where could or should we be headed?

At the end of 1999, conscious that the highway project might or might not go ahead, leaders sat around in a circle, to discuss next steps. We were all too aware of the high cost of saving our communities -- all the energy that we had spent over the previous three years. Although the communities’ survival now seemed guaranteed (at least for three of the four), the problems that plagued our sectors, noise, dirt, poverty, urban decline, trafficking, delinquency
petty and otherwise, remained the same, or even worse, under the shadow of the highway project.

What if we all stayed together? someone asked. Could we use all that we’d learned in the anti-highway fight to create some kind of movement for changes?

Positive changes, though, someone else said. Defensive campaigns were important, but ultimately they left you where you started, or even a little behind. We had to start making our own proposals.

What would we do? someone else asked. The conversation fired back and forth across the room, with different leaders contributing their ideas about what they would really like to achieve in their communities: recycling, sustainable transport, clean air, gardens, trees, a stronger economy with more emphasis on the services offered by small entrepreneurs.

What would we call this? Someone finally asked. People had listed an awful lot of concepts and hopes to squeeze them all into a single organization. How about Living City? I asked, ever the writer. I was fed up with committees, commission and associations and wanted an active name. Ciudad Viva. People chewed it over, let it settle on tongues.

We looked at each other and grinned. We liked each other. We were happy we’d found a meaningful way to stick together.

That’s how Living City started.


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