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# Development vs. Environment in Taipei

Simona Alba GRANO and TU Ping-Lan

**Abstract:** Although Taiwan arguably needs civil and official collaboration on environmental protection, the implementation of an efficient system of environmental regulations has often been hindered by the many actors involved in the process of environmental governance (state, economic actors, civil society, media), whose interests are divergent. Consequently, there is no uniform, homogeneous authority for environmental governance but rather a variety of official and less official agents of authority whose interests and powers overlap and compete. In this paper we will introduce a case study dealing with the controversy surrounding the construction of an alternative road connecting Danshui (淡水) with Taipei City (namely, the Danshui North Shore Road Project, 淡北道路, *Danbei daolu*) to elucidate what the key influences are that govern environmental power dynamics between different agents with conflicting (or, sometimes, colluding) interests and how these multiple levels of interaction are negotiated by the various players. Our hypothesis holds that although environmental policies are, for the most part, mandated from the top, at the local level their implementation can be bypassed, altered or stalled by these various agents.

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**Keywords:** Taiwan, environmental governance, road politics, social groups, heterarchy

**Dr. Simona Grano** obtained her Ph.D. in Chinese Studies from Ca' Foscari University of Venice in 2008. Since February 2009 she has been working in the Department of Sinology at Zürich University, where she teaches various courses and carries out research on contemporary social problems and green politics in China and Taiwan. Her research interests focus on environmental management and politics, state–society relations, and judicial sector reforms.

E-mail: <simona.grano@oas.uzh.ch>

**Tu Ping-Lan** is a Ph.D. candidate at National Chengchi University of Taiwan. Her main research interests are Chinese contemporary society, green politics and charity organizations in mainland China.

E-mail: <vivin731@yahoo.com.tw>

## Introduction

All Taiwanese political parties prioritize economic growth over environmental protection. The two main parties on the political scene use the environment as a tool to attack each other, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) (民主进步党, *Minzhu Jinbudang*) claiming that the Kuomintang (KMT) (国民党, *Guomindang*) is irresponsible in its pro-growth stance, and the KMT maintaining that the DPP is anti-business. However, Taiwan is also a place where regulators and city officials have attempted to redress certain imbalances in the ecological environment by enacting a series of programmes aimed at the creation of a green, sustainable economy and a recycling-oriented society (Her 2010: 4-12).

While environmentalists gained access to policy decision-making after the democratization process started in 1987, pro-development groups have also increased their power since then, and government policies have consequently shifted back to a more pro-business position. As argued by Ho, this paradox is the result of a decreasing state capacity, which empowered environmentalists but at the same time could not resist businesses' lobbying (Ho 2005). While Taiwan is praised by some scholars for being a brilliant example of a country that has enjoyed a smooth transition to democratization, an analysis of its green politics will show how democratization, by empowering agents that previously lacked power, has created both opportunities and obstacles for those groups whose interests lie with environmental protection (Tang 1999: 351).

The numerous "stakeholders" participating in the environmental governance process have been the focus of public policy research but have seldom been studied in terms of their political influence and their ability to influence the implementation of green policies. Our unit of analysis centres on social and political interactions among various actors in regards to a controversial developmental project, the Danshui North Shore Road Project (淡北道路, *Danbei daolu*). We are interested in discovering who the most effective actors were in the Danshui case. Did social groups make a difference, or did the ultimate decisions lay primarily with other, more "legitimate" actors? We furthermore elaborate on what kinds of methods were used: official ones (which implies making use of the available legal tools) or unofficial ones (for example, street protests or, in the case of local governments, bribery by the construction companies)?

The methodology employed for this research was inspired by that used in similar projects in other parts of the world, and it hinges pre-

dominantly on extensive interviews (informal, unstructured interviewing and semi-structured interviewing) with NGO activists, local residents and related local institutions, as well as on a review of relevant literature. Field research for this study was conducted in Taibei City and Danshui from February to June 2011. Follow-up interviews were conducted in September and October of the same year. All the civil society organizations interviewed are grass-roots NGOs except for one, which is sponsored by the local Danshui government (namely, the Danshui Heritage Foundation). Among the grass-roots organizations we interviewed, we have chosen to focus in this paper on two of the main NGOs involved in the controversy, the Green Citizens' Action Alliance (绿色公民行动联盟, *Lǜsè gōngmín xíngdòng liánméng*) and the Society for the Protection of Wilderness (荒野保护协会, *Huāngyě bǎohù xiéhuì*). Moreover, we carried out multiple interviews with the local Danshui representative of the Green Party of Taiwan (绿党, *Lǜ dǎng*), with two scholars who have a personal vested interest in Danshui, and with other environmentalists who have in-depth knowledge of this case. Though the two NGOs were interviewed in March, when the results of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA, 环境影响评估制度, *Huánjīng yǐngxiāng pínggū zhìdù*) were still unknown, Green Party representatives and local residents were interviewed in April and May, when the final decision to go ahead with the construction project had already been made public. Follow-up interviews with other members of those same NGOs were carried out in the fall. Participant observation methods were also employed in that same period: One of the authors actively participated in all of the activities (from the organizational start-up phase to the actual street protest) organized by the Green Party of Taiwan and co-sponsored by the Green Citizens' Action Alliance to fight the road-building project. This study is based on ethnographic data, as well as newspaper articles, data collected from various websites, environmental reports, NGO newsletters, and documents provided by social organizations, governmental agencies and the Green Party of Taiwan. All interviews were conducted in Chinese by the authors.

## Theoretical Foundations

### Local Governance

Local politics in Taiwan feature characteristics of both pro-growth urban regimes of Western democracies and patron-client networks typical of authoritarian regimes. Such features have rendered local politics resistant to democratic reforms. While at the central level competitive elections were introduced decades ago, urban policies are still dominated by a minority of powerful elites, and the interests of disadvantaged groups have remained largely under-represented. Tang argues that numerous cases of anti-growth politics in numerous localities indicate the possibility that, as of recently, democracy is slowly reaching the local level, thereby shifting local politics away from a sheer interest in revenue-seeking activities toward a civic activism whose main concerns are social and environmental (Tang 2003: 1029). Such a theory leads us to consider local authorities as unitary wholes sharing the same set of interests. As we will see in the Danshui case, though, different governmental bureaus and agencies often have different agendas and try to circumnavigate each other, which has led some scholars to use the expression “iron triangle” (铁三角, *tie sanjiao*) when referring to the interest ties between the ruling party (执政党, *zhizheng dang*), local factions, and business conglomerates in Taiwan at the expense of the environment and the public interest (Jobin 2010: 56; Hsu 2003: 459; Kuo 2000). Such was the case in the controversy over building a cable car in Yangmingshan National Park (阳明山国家公园, *Yangmingshan guojia gongyuan*), north of Taipei. In that case, the Taipei City government tried more than once to bypass the legal requirements of an EIA and circumnavigated the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration’s control (Su 2006: 2). The same is true for the case study in this article where, as we will see, two local governments with differing interests tried to overcome each other and to evade the EPA’s control through various means. Hsu argues that in the case of watershed management, for example, democratization has had a negative effect due to the exaggerated influence of this iron triangle in the policy process. In reality, the problem lies in the explicit support that is being given, often without prior EIAs, to controversial projects, thus making widespread corruption and the pursuit of economic interests the two main culprits. It has to be noted that in Taiwan the situation has increasingly improved since the landmark case of the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat

Development Project in Hsinchu (1992–2001), in which an EIA for the first time managed to prevent the realization of a highly damaging developmental project. In that particular case, also for the first time, a scientifically based discussion by scholars, academics and activists substituted previous emotional environmental protests (Tang 2003).

The overlapping competencies and increasingly complicated networks of governance that have arisen in the environmental realm in Taiwan are also visible at the global level. In Khagram and Ali's words,

A more complex political economy is emerging globally in which the actors of governance stretch beyond the confines of states to where governmental, civil society and private sector actors form functional coalitions and broad horizontal networks, and the institutions of governance include not only international laws and treaties, but also the use of norms, codes, and voluntary standards (Khagram and Ali 2008: 133).

While classic policy studies tend to focus on institutional actors (governments and states) and their politics because these are the most authoritative figures – those with the capability of turning policies into actions and regulations – lately, scholars have started to consider another angle, one that gives high importance to personal and ideological politics and that falls into the category of critical policy studies. In doing so, they take into consideration how values, opinions and ideas are shaped by the policymaking discourse and how these, in turn, shape the policymaking process (Whitman 2008: 163).

The non-state sector is one of the most active players that has recently emerged in governance (Zheng and Fewsmith 2008), capable of influencing the policymaking process and the implementation of regulations at the local level.

## Political Patronage

Tang Ching-ping and Tang Shui-yan demonstrated in one of their articles how the ruling party, in order to be successful in a confrontation with environmentalists, needs to have a strong political network at the local level, where patron–client ties are thicker and can be exploited when needed (Tang and Tang 1997: 293). This interaction between national and local political processes is directly related to a deeper understanding of the democratization process. As argued by Diamond, “democratization inevitably proceeds unevenly, and authoritarian enclaves

persist most stubbornly at the local or provincial level” (Diamond 1999: 244). Local politics are also more easily subjected to patron–client networks, which follow private interests and promote favouritism rather than transparency or accountability. Thus, public projects often become private, rent-seeking activities rather than being created for the public good. While in “young democracies” central-level politicians are usually committed to democratic principles (if for no better reason than simply because of their public profile), at the local level government officials still maintain patronage networks with their supporters, involving the employment of material gifts and favouritism (Tang 2003: 1030).

When public expenditure issues are debated, citizens become involved in this equation as well, joining with concerned environmentalists and social groups in demanding to know how and why public money is being spent on potentially environmentally damaging projects (Ho 2006). The following question thus arises: Which actors are the most influential and how do they manage to gain support for their cause?

## A Heterarchy of Powers

Coming from a political science perspective, we believe that concepts like “state” and “local government” are not to be taken as unitary wholes situated on the top or bottom of the power scale. In our case study, the anthropological concept of heterarchy, which defines hierarchy as complicated, fragmented, and influenced by various agents whose power varies with time, is a better theoretical starting point than the concepts mentioned in the previous sentence.

This article cites a case study in Taipei County and analyses the evolution of local governance around a controversial road project with numerous agents involved. While some actors try to reinforce and better represent the public interest, others are out for their own private gains, and still others attempt to safeguard the effectiveness of legal institutions, such as the EIA, to name but one. Such a discrepancy of interests is quite normal considering that while central governments have to balance the country’s pursuit of energy supplies with the ensuing environmental damages arising from hasty economic development, local governments usually pay more attention to short-term economic growth issues. Under such circumstances, local and central interests in regards to the implementation of environmental policies differ. This conflict of interest between national regulations and local stakeholders has, in the

past few years, become influenced by new emerging powers and actors like social organizations, journalists, and local and national agencies.

As we shall see, the Danshui North Shore Road Project comprises a mixture of successes and failures, the meeting of various levels of government, and the competing interests of the various actors. Even though the dichotomy of “green policies from above and countermeasures from below” (Weller 2006: 155) helps to explain some of these dynamics, its weakness is its oversimplification of the complex interactions between different agents into a “dyad”, positioning either people against the state, or local and central governments against each other. In the case of the Danshui Road, the situation is not unitary; there is no harmony between the two powerful actors (local and central government), nor is there any agreement, for that matter, among the people. With this article, we want to challenge the often-used binary distinction between “central” and “local” and show that it is too simplistic in its approach, as it does not take into consideration a variety of other actors, their economic and personal interests, and the overall changes in environmental behaviour that are mostly seen at the central level, where influences from abroad are felt more strongly (Weller 2006: 169). Rather than just accepting or rejecting the top-down view, we will try to show that environmental governance has developed into a heterarchy of conflicting nodes of powers at all levels.

As explained by Weller, the most common anthropological response to the top-down model is the study of how local communities resist, rework or subvert these policies. While anthropology tends to consider the “state” a unified independent actor to be treated as a whole (in contrast to local communities, which are treated as fragmented and complex), political science tends to do the opposite: It underscores distinctions among the different levels of the state and their competing interests but ignores the differing interests among local communities, including their differences in both culture and levels of power (Weller 2006). In this article we try to challenge both of these views, showing that a complex interaction of state and local communities at various levels does not allow us to employ a binary dyad of “central versus local”, because even within the same level of government we find differing behaviours among county and municipal environmental protection authorities and sometimes differing interests between the personnel of environmental bureaus and those of other bureaus.

## The Growth Machine Theory

Business elites have a strong personal financial incentive to maintain pro-growth public policies and thus often seek alliances with local politicians who can facilitate their investments (Tang 2001). In turn, local politicians, conditioned by the lack of resources to govern efficiently, seek alliances with those very same powerful business elites who can facilitate their rule. This vision of a city's future to be developed according to the imaginations and desires of business and political elites has been defined as the theory of the "growth machine" (Molotch 1976, 1993). As explained by Clarence Stone in his study on Atlanta's urban politics, since every local leader has to take into account the requests and interests of a varied and fragmented electorate, business elites, with wealth and resources at their disposal, become an ideal partner for politicians, who can thus satisfy different stakeholders (Stone 1989: 3-12). Although the growth machine theory best applies to democratic political systems with free competitive elections, research that has applied this theory with various degrees of success to one-party authoritarian systems, such as China or Taiwan in the pre-reform period, does exist. Zhu Jieming, for example, applies the concepts of the growth machine and growth coalition to China's urban land reforms (Zhu 1999). Tang Ching-ping, in his study on the democratization of urban politics in Taiwan, claims that under one-party rule, prior to martial law being lifted, Taiwan fit the regime model well enough since even under such authoritarian and rigid constraints there were "frequent political successions through local elections" coupled with an overall continuity in pushing forward numerous pro-growth economic projects (Tang 2003: 1033).

## The Developmental State Theory

These characteristics of Taiwan's pro-growth regime allow us to introduce another theory that fits our case study and that marks the difference between Taiwan's pro-growth regime and its Western counterparts: the developmental state theory. As we will see in the Danshui case, the dominant role in this developmental project is played by a coalition of pro-growth politicians who will ultimately make the final decision to go ahead with this controversial road. It is no mystery that political elites are more successful at enforcing regulations and pushing forward their agendas in authoritarian contexts, where they can easily stifle dissent voiced by environmentalists or concerned citizens. At the local level,

politicians are often enmeshed in the economic environment by running private businesses and thus enjoying special privileges to participate in local developmental projects.

The developmental state is usually conceptually positioned between two models: the state-planned economy model and the liberal economy model. Chalmers Johnson, in his book *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, used the term “developmental state” in his analysis of Japan’s industrialization process. To paraphrase Johnson, the developmental state theory is a euphemism to describe the tight net of influences and contacts between political, bureaucratic and business actors that governs economic life in the capitalist states of Northeast Asia (Johnson 1982).

To elaborate on the above arguments, this article first depicts the politics of road-building in northern Taiwan as it evolved into a protracted contest between environmentalists, on one side, and a pro-development faction of politicians and real estate developers on the other side. Second, by delineating and analysing the case of the Danshui North Shore Road Project, it shows how civic associations have been able to stall, for quite lengthy periods of time, the ultimate decisions of pro-growth developers and traditional power elites by employing legal tools and measures such as the EIA.

Our theoretical framework maintains that this case study represents a model of environmental governance in which there is no uniform attitude toward the construction of the Taibei–Danshui road but rather a complex interaction of the state, local communities, and other actors. Rather than simply rejecting or adopting either the top-down or the bottom-up view, we will try to show how road politics have evolved into a protracted and exhausting deadlock involving the use of environmental laws and personal ties to advance each faction’s goals. This environmental governance model has been influenced by numerous heterogeneous actors who gained conspicuous influence after the democratization process began, toward the end of the 1980s. Authoritarian legacies are still present in local environmental governance, in the form of patronage and favouritism; nevertheless, other, previously powerless actors now play an important role as well. Thus, it is fair to say that Taiwanese environmental governance is, especially at the local levels, fragmented, inefficient and subjected to several debates that often prevent the best solution from being found. However, some harmony has been re-established by the EIA, which approved the controversial project. In this kind of environmental governance model, the state (in our case, local) often attempts to

enhance its own power by entering into partnerships with commercial and other powerful actors lacking in an overt political function in order to increase the efficiency of environmental governance and seek support for its developmental projects, thereby solving protracted and common stalemates.

## The Danshui North Shore Road Project

### Background Information

The Danshui River runs alongside Guandu Natural Park (关渡自然公园, *Guandu ziran gongyuan*). According to the historical records, the area was almost completely covered by water until at least the early Qing Dynasty. In Emperor Guangxu's time (光緒帝, *Guangxu di* 1871–1909), after the arrival of a few settlers, the area became farmland and remained so until 1965. In 1968 the government constructed an embankment to prevent flooding, while farmlands outside the embankment were gradually abandoned. Due to its geographical location, near the mouth of the Danshui River, frequent tidal changes and the saline content of the water have transformed the location into a unique ecosystem, very suitable for mangroves (红树林, *hongshulin*), with a few heritage buildings and scenic areas. In the past decade, Danshui has become a popular attraction for daily visits from city slickers and families in search of a relaxing afternoon away from urban pollution. For these reasons, an increasing number of people have been going to Danshui for the weekend to enjoy its natural surroundings, and an increasing number of local residents have been commuting to Taipei every day for work. Danshui has also seen an increase in the number of Taipei residents moving to the area for its scenic beauty and lower housing and rental costs.

This incessant flow of people entering and exiting has increased the demand for additional transportation. At the moment there are two ways to travel between Taipei City (台北市, *Taipei Shi*) and Danshui: the metro line and a highway, Route 2 (台二线, *Tai er xian*), which is increasingly prone to traffic jams at rush hours, a condition we had the opportunity to witness in person when, in February 2011, we observed the unending serpent of cars near the Guandu Bridge filled with visitors from Taipei City on their way to enjoy a sunny Saturday by the sea in Danshui, Taipei County (台北县, *Taipei Xian*). With the real estate industry building more and more skyscrapers to attract newcomers to Danshui, the existing

means of transportation between the latter and Taipei City are becoming increasingly inadequate in preventing traffic jams.

## Proposed Alternatives

Since 1996 numerous projects and proposals have been planned and discussed regarding solving the worsening traffic situation; due to the many agents and interests involved, they have all been either discarded or delayed until April 2011. On 15 April 2011 the committee responsible for carrying out the EIA (环境影响评估委员会, *Huanjing yingxiang pinggu weiyuanhui*) authorized the construction of the controversial road. Environmentalists have fought this project since 1996 out of concern for the ecological environment, which hosts a variety of rare species of birds and trees.

The four alternatives proposed over these 15 years by the various agents involved have been:

- the widening of Route 2;
- the building of a highway along the north shore of the Danshui River;
- the building of a surface road along the north shore of the river (on the riverbed); and
- the building of a surface road along the north shore of the river (but not on the riverbed).

All of these projects present problems and have encountered fierce opposition; we discuss the problems and the opposition below.

### *Widening of Route 2*

Initially, the most viable option seemed to be the widening of the already existing Route 2 (台二线拓展, *Tai er xian tuozhan*). However, this project was abandoned quite soon due to lack of funds. During the planning phase, Route 2 was designed to be 40 metres wide. Due to lack of subsidies needed to purchase the necessary land, its width was then reduced to 25 metres. The widening plan soon ran out of money so the whole project was eventually discarded.

## *Highway along the North Shore of the Danshui River (1996–2000)*

This second project (淡水河北側沿河快速道路—高架, *Danshui bei ce yanhe kuaisu daolu – gaojia*) was proposed by the Ministry of Transportation (交通部, *Jiaotong bu*) in 1996. One year later, in 1997, it obtained the formal approval of the Executive Yuan (行政院, *Xingzheng yuan*). The planned highway would have been 12.8 kilometres long, linking the existing highway network of Taipei City to the northern tip of Taiwan. The route would start from Beitou, proceed toward the Guandu Bridge, cross over the metro line, and continue along the Danshui River, passing through areas of natural beauty such as mangrove forests (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: A View of the Future Site of the Danshui North Shore Road Project Seen from Danshui



Source: © Simona Grano, 17 September 2011.

Shortly following the project's approval by the Executive Yuan, some civil society groups joined forces and set up an organization called the

National Alliance for the Rescue of the Danshui River (全民抢救淡水河行动联盟, *Quanmin qiangjiu danshuihe xingdong lianmeng*) in order to fight the Executive Yuan's decision. In voicing their objections, they demanded that a formal EIA be carried out. In 2000 the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA, 环保署, *Huanbaoshu*), created in August 1987, conducted its first EIA on the project. At the conclusion of the EIA, the EPA stopped the construction of the road, considering it too damaging to the local ecosystem.

### ***Surface Road along the North Shore of the Danshui River (on the Riverbed)***

The third alternative, to build a surface road on the north shore of the river (淡水河北側平面道路, *Danshuihe beice pingmian daolu*) on the path of the actual riverbed (河川行水区, *hechuan xingshuiqu*), was put forward by the Taibei County government, but due to the various restrictions of the Water Resources Law (水利法, *Shuili fa*) this project was discarded in the early planning phase. For the sake of clarity, a surface road is a standard road that runs at ground level. The term is usually employed to differentiate a particular road from a highway in that it usually runs more slowly, as it has many traffic lights.

### ***Surface Road along the North Shore of the Danshui River (2006–present)***

To avoid the above-mentioned problem, the Water Resources Bureau (水利署, *Shuili shu*) of Taibei County later suggested building the expressway along the river (not over it) so as not to violate the Water Resources Law. This fourth proposal, “Surface Road along the North Shore of the Danshui River”, is the one that best embodies the divergent interests of the various agents involved in the controversy: two local governments – Taibei City and Taibei County, the latter of which has recently changed its name to New Taibei City (新北市, *Xin bei shi*); the central government with its various bureaus and offices; the local community; and various social groups.

The planned road in this fourth project starts from Deng Hui Avenue (登輝大道, *Denghui dadao*), now called Danjing Road (淡金路, *Dan-jing lu*), and it stretches along the river connecting the mangrove area with Zhu Wei Road (竹围路, *Zhuwei lu*). It measures 4.7 kilometres in length and it is a 20-metre-wide, four-lane road.

# The Road Saga

## Conflicting Powers

As mentioned earlier, this last proposal, which was approved by the EIA committee in April 2011, best exemplifies the various conflicting interests of the many parties involved in the controversy. On one side of the barricade we find New Taipei City, which includes Danshui Town. On the other side we have Taipei City. What are their respective interests? Taipei County, hoping to develop the real estate market in Danshui, has pushed for the construction of the surface road for many years, while Taipei City, afraid of the traffic consequences for the already jammed roads, has long been staunchly opposed to it. At the initial stage, Taipei County, encouraged by the Ministry of Transportation, sought hard to establish regular meetings with Taipei City in order to find a solution to the protracted stalemate. In 2006 various monthly meetings were scheduled, but Taipei City boycotted every one of them by refusing to send equal-level officials to the coordination assemblies (Interview 4). In these cases, civil service personnel often create an informal network connecting local officials with their central counterparts in order to facilitate coordination; due to its opposition towards the project, however, Taipei City did not send anyone to represent the city government at the meetings. Furthermore, at that time the central government was still in the hands of the DPP, and between 2007 and 2008 the Minister of Environmental Protection was Mr Winston Dang (陳重信, Chen Zhong-xin) who viewed the project negatively because of the damage it would cause to the mangrove forest (Interview 2).

## Chronology

One of the main events in the road saga took place in July 2008, when the KMT came back into power. Wu Yu-sheng (吳育昇), a Kuomintang legislator, convened a meeting to discuss the fourth proposal in detail in order to get beyond the impasse. At the initial stage, the open support of Wu Yu-sheng offered a guarantee of the project's political feasibility. He invited representatives from the Water Resources Bureau, the Taipei County government, the Transportation Bureau of Taipei City, and the Ministry of Construction (營建署, *Yingjian shu*) to the aforementioned meeting. The talks ended in deadlock due mainly to the opposition of Taipei City's Transportation Bureau; its representatives claimed that the

road would mean a massive increase in the flow of people entering the city, which would be detrimental to Taibei's already jammed arteries.

What proved crucial for the temporary halting of the surface road option in the end was a prehistoric site that was discovered on the planned route in July of that same year, causing the central government to stop work and call in an expert from Taiwan University to evaluate the relics (Interview 4).

In September 2008 a few social groups opposed to the construction of the project organized a press conference and started an online petition (反淡北道路连署, *Fan Danbei daolu lianshu*) (Petition 2008) broadcasting the fact that the consultation with the county government, organized by Legislator Wu, did not yield any results. In the months that followed, a wide range of civil society groups joined in the collective effort to stop the project. The main group was the Danshui Heritage Foundation (淡水文化基金会, *Danshui wenhua jijinhui*), which was founded in 1995 by the Danshui municipality government to supervise the area's numerous cultural relics, and which undertook the action of writing to the EPA to remind it that the previous EIA had occurred eight years ago and that, at the time it was carried out, it had resulted in a "red light" for the project. In reality, the first EIA, conducted in 2000, was directed at the second project but since the planned route in the fourth project does not differ much from it, except for being shorter, some of the agents involved (e.g. the EPA) thought it unnecessary to carry out a second EIA.

Simultaneously, this same group of NGOs – sometimes collectively referred to as the Alliance of Green and Democratic NGOs (绿色民主社会联盟, *Liise minzhu shehui lianmeng*) – prompted the Control Yuan (监察院, *Jiancha yuan*) to pressure the EPA to renew the EIA while also criticizing the attitude of the Taibei County government. Many of the social groups we interviewed have used the word "hoodlum" (流氓, *liumang*) to describe construction companies and local governments who, in their words, often utilize intimidating and rogue techniques to make them desist in their quest to stop the project. While in mainland China green NGOs have to be careful not to irritate the government, in Taiwan it is private companies and their allies (e.g. local officials) that NGOs have to be wary of.

The first turning point in the Danshui road case came in October 2008, when the EPA, under pressure from the Alliance, sent a letter to the Taibei County Water Resources Bureau requesting a new EIA even though the proposed route was almost identical to that from the year

2000. Among the different civic organizations comprising the Alliance we find: the Green Citizens' Action Alliance, the Society for the Protection of Wilderness, and the previously mentioned Danshui Heritage Foundation. By forming this alliance, green civil society organizations and concerned local residents were able to influence a government organ (the EPA) into complying with their requests (conducting a second EIA). While a few of these groups were obviously driven by private interests – some local residents were afraid that their properties would lose value by being so close to a major highway – most had more altruistic motives: Some wished to preserve this area for recreational purposes, while others hoped to save the local wildlife and flora.

The second essential turning point took place in November 2008, one month after the EPA ordered a second EIA, when the mayor of Danshui Town (蔡業偉, Cai Ye-wei) petitioned the Control Yuan to impeach the director of the EPA, Shen Shi-hong (沈世宏), claiming that Shen had violated the EIA Act (环境影响评估法, *Huanjing yingxiang pinggu fa*). The grounds for the accusation were that the planned route was in fact only 4.7 kilometres long, and thus, according to EIA regulations, did not necessitate a new EIA. Cai writes in this petition letter (陈诉书, *chensushu*) that the EPA had simply caved in to the emotional outbursts of “pseudo-environmentalists lacking any basic knowledge of the project” (Interviews 9).

The director of EPA was in fact “temporarily” impeached, and the Republic of China’s vice-president, Vincent C. Siew (蕭萬長, Xiao Wanzhang), declared in 2009 that the responsibility for planning this project should be returned to the Ministry of Transportation. From that moment on, everything stopped because the different parties could not agree on a common solution. At the central level, the EPA and the Ministry of Transportation have been increasingly cooperating with one another to try to find a common solution as they wait for the results of the second EIA.

## Multi-scalar Levels of Governance

### Supporters and Their Motives

As briefly mentioned earlier, this case is extremely interesting because it involves a plethora of different actors with conflicting interests within and outside of multiple levels of government, each with their own agen-

da. Even though the differing positions of the two local governments (that of Taibei City and that of Taibei County) have already been emphasized, it is necessary to mention that there were different opinions and views within the central government itself.

The Ministry of Transportation was the main organ in favour of approving the project in the hope that it would ease the difficult traffic situation. The EPA, also a central government organ, initially claimed that an EIA was not needed since the new project was less than five kilometres in length. According to Articles 5 and 6 of the sub-regulations of the EIA Act titled Standards for Determining Specific Items and Scope of Environmental Impact Assessments for Developmental Activities, any project that is less than five kilometres in length does not need to undergo an EIA. As previously mentioned, under pressure from civil society groups, the EPA agreed that a new EIA was nevertheless needed.

The positions of the local governments are also worth analysing in depth: On one side, both the government of Taibei County and that of Danshui Town are in favour of the new road and claim that the decision-making process rests with them since the road would run within Taibei County. Thus, the right to build and operate this road (without consulting either the central government or the Taibei City government) is theirs. According to Article 11 of the Highway Law (公路法, *Gonglu fa*), the right to build and operate a road within the territory of a county government resides with the latter. Opposed to the road and worried that an increased flow of people entering the city would lead to a rise in traffic congestion, the Taibei City government said that it would support the project only if it passed the second EIA assessment. It has to be mentioned that the Taibei–Danshui surface road has long been planned as a lynchpin to New Taibei City. Since the very beginning, though, the pressure to build and the support for this road has come from New Taibei City and Danshui Town, with Taibei City's stance on this issue varying from disinterest to outright opposition, according to a multitude of factors, among them: who was in charge of the EPA; who was in charge of Taibei City's Traffic Bureau; and, finally, which party was in charge of the central government, blue (KMT) or green (DPP). All of our informants in the Taibei City government claimed that the city has nothing to gain from this road and thus has no interest in supporting it; according to them, there is sufficient communication between the two places, and an additional road is only going to increase traffic jams in Taibei.

What were the real motives of the “pro-growth” coalition aggressively advocating for the road? In fact, behind the scenes, the political interests of politicians along with the financial incentives of the business community were playing out. According to Mr Wang Chung-ming, Green Party candidate for city councillor of Danshui Town and member of the Green Party Central Committee, the two interests overlap in this case because quite a few of the local politicians also own successful real estate and construction companies (Interview 8). In democratic countries, politicians have to compete for votes. It thus goes without saying that the driving force behind certain decisions is often the attempt to attract people’s votes (Weller 2006: 150). In the Danshui case, for example, some members of the Legislative Yuan were opposed to the construction of the road – a notable example being Tian Qiu-jin (田秋堃), DPP legislator – but others, like Legislator Wu Yu-sheng, supported the project in order to fulfil the promise he made during the election campaign to relieve traffic congestion in Danshui. During the past three years, various organs have tried to coordinate the various actors involved so as to facilitate the adoption of a common project. It has to be said, though, that those who tried hardest to coordinate and push for the construction were also those who would gain the most from the project (e.g. Danshui Town and Legislator Wu; Taibei County and its real estate sector). Since all of these agents know how to employ and bend the rules to their own advantage (especially those connected with the government, be it the local or the central), with the present article we have tried to clarify which agents were most successful at influencing the decision-making process and what their key motivations were. In the next section, we will discuss and analyse the methods and strategies used by the environmentalist camp.

## Opponents and Their Strategies

What was the role of grass-roots organizations in this case? How did they impact the decision-making procedure? Ho Ming-sho talks about procedural participation when referring to the “institutionalized access for environmentalists in the decision-making process” (Ho 2005: 345-346). He also defines “policy impact” as “the possibility of whether movement ideas can be realized through state action” (Ho 2005: 345-346). In our research we tried to find out whether, in the Danshui case, social movements have been able to substantially impact the decision-

making process even without being granted official participation in state echelons.

Many environmental groups have been involved in this case throughout the years; some are still active today and have meanwhile devoted their interests to other cases while other, less stable groups disappeared when the immediate threat to them or to their properties seemed to be more distant, even if only temporarily (Hsiao 1999). Since 2006, when the discussion about the fourth project began, a few of the more active social groups have decided to join efforts with the local residents of an area of Danshui Town called Zhu Wei (竹圍). Being the town's closest area to the mangroves, its residents are those who will lose the most once the road is built, and they claim it will ruin their view and affect the local environment negatively (Interview 1). It is also worth mentioning that apart from Zhu Wei residents, the majority of Danshui Town locals are in favour of the construction project, or at least do not dare say otherwise openly (Interviews with various local residents, February–May 2011).

So what kind of strategies did the social groups use to stop the construction of the road? And how did they get involved in this case in the first place?

In June 2008 a group of Zhu Wei residents called the Green Citizens' Action Alliance to enlist their help. For the sake of clarity it must be explained that the first big wave of protest (抗議, *kangyi*) against this project took place from 1997 to 2000. After carrying out the first EIA, the EPA ended up halting the project altogether. The second time around (from 2006 up to the present), NGOs have lamented the fact that local citizens have been much less involved and interested in fighting the authorities, although the NGOs have thus far been unclear on why people have lost interest in the case (Interview 7).

As for the second EIA, the Danshui road project has gone through three review meetings in the year 2011 alone; during these assemblies, civil groups were allowed to express their concerns and present their evidence while experts from both sides voiced their opinions and proposed alternative plans. Both sides have the right to call in three experts to champion their cause (Interview 3). When we asked Ms Tsui if she was invited to these meetings as well, her laconic answer was: "I participated but I was not invited. Social groups are never welcome because government officials fear they might cause embarrassing scenes" (Interview 7). If that is the case, how then do the groups know when the EIA

committee is holding its meetings? All social activists interviewed explained that they devote a huge portion of their time to checking the webpage of the committee responsible for the EIA each day to see when and where the next assembly is going to be held; a task that proves more difficult than one would think, as the committee purposely posts this information online less than one week prior to the actual meeting in order to try to restrict social groups from participating.

As for the methods employed by social organizations in this controversy, they range from organized sit-ins in front of the Control Yuan with a crowd of 60 to 70 people (in 2008) to systematic street protests, generally held the day before the committee plans to meet. Also, prior to every EIA assembly, social groups prepare a summary of the case that contains the most important facts, and they send it to various media outlets to try to get them involved. This has ensured media coverage even on short notice, but it has also meant extra work for the environmentalists, who have had to prepare a press release before every protest or demonstration in order to get the media interested. This indifference on the part of the media changed (though probably only temporarily) in the aftermath of Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster on 11 March 2011. In the past few months, the Green Citizens' Action Alliance has been bombarded by telephone calls from journalists interested in both the public opinion on "green issues" and what the alliance is doing in regards to its other main concern: nuclear power plants. The Green Citizens' Action Alliance devotes its energies to two main issues: fighting the construction of nuclear plants on Taiwanese soil, and protecting the Danshui area.

Many social groups believe that, apart from media involvement, the most important factor in succeeding in a confrontation with the government is public opinion. All social groups we interviewed have stressed that public opinion plays a very important role in Taipei, where the political powerhouses have to gain the confidence of the electorate (and where land prices are so high that every case involves huge economic interests), while it plays a lesser role in other Taiwanese cities (Interview 6, 7). While print media often report on green campaigns because they seek the catastrophist tinge that creates public interest and concern (and thus helps to sell more copies), NGOs have to be more creative in their dealings with the public. An effective way to keep people's attention high is to organize leisure activities like concerts with famous artists and rock stars who perform on behalf of the protection of the Danshui area (a

notable example being the NoNuke Street Band, 诺努客走唱队, *Nuonuke zou chang dui*), as well as coordinating other outdoor events (Yang 2011). The latter is a particularly successful strategy: NGOs often organize biking trips close to the mangrove forests; in this way, they vividly convey the effects that the construction of the road would have on people's lives and those of their loved ones. The message is clear: No more leisurely Sunday afternoons with children and grandchildren in the nice green surroundings of Danshui. If the road gets built, the mangroves will be torn away and so will the bike lane!

Finally, another very effective method activists have employed in the Danshui case has been the organization of petitions. In 2008 alone, more than 10,000 signatures were collected, the majority of which came from non-residents of Danshui. During a follow-up interview on 24 September 2011, Ms Tsui revealed that 131 social groups (a very conspicuous number considering the total number of NGOs devoted to the environment in Taiwan) took part in this petition.

## Opponents and Their Allies

Before the final ruling in April, we asked social groups what they thought the results of the second EIA would be, and many green activists gave the same answer: "There is a 50-50 chance that things will go either way" (Interview 6, 7, 8), an answer that conveyed the uncertainty surrounding the final outcome previous to the EIA decision. One particularly troublesome aspect social groups and other actors belonging to the "opposing faction" have highlighted was that even though the Taibei City government remains opposed to the construction of the road, its administration still belongs to the KMT. Over the past few years, social groups have often tried to cooperate with the government of Taibei City because of the common position on this project. The Taibei City government, though, cannot/ does not publicly express support for NGOs, and if it does help by occasionally leaking information on the Taibei County government or the Danshui Town government, it does so secretly. For this reason, social groups became more pessimistic in regards to the outcome of the second EIA after the presidential election of 2008. Even though the DPP government was also interested in doing business at the expense of the environment, civic groups still think that it was easier to find a wedge between the different parties to be used as leverage in their favour when they were not all "on the same side" (Interview 7). Now, even though the different governmental agencies and parties involved

have conflicting interests, they still belong to the KMT and therefore, strictly speaking, they are all on the same page, which has made it easier for them to cooperate and ultimately find a common solution.

The preconceived idea that the DPP is the party that has environmental protection at heart dates back to the early years of the party's political life. In the early to mid-1980s, when the authoritarian regime of the KMT still ruled the country with an iron fist, one of the first movements to emerge was the environmental one; its members were engaged citizens (many of them lawyers and professors), increasingly concerned by the government's utmost disregard for the degradation of public lands that its industrial policies were provoking (Arrigo and Puleston 2006: 165-184). Things changed after the martial law system was lifted, and the DPP became an "institutionalized" political party with all that this entails: They suddenly had to balance industrial growth and attracting investments, on the one hand, with protecting the natural environment, on the other (Lyons 2009: 59, 64). The DPP's change of attitude is best exemplified by former President Chen Shui-bian's behaviour throughout the years. At his inaugural speech in 2000, the first thing he did was to announce his grandiose plan to turn Taiwan into a "green silicon island" (綠色矽島, *Lǜsè xīdǎo*) (Williams and Chang 2008); barely one year later, at the Economic Development Advisory Conference held in August 2001, faced with the many financial and industrial difficulties of the country, he went so far as to claim that the EIA was a "roadblock to economic development and that he would like to 'kneel down' to the EIA reviewers on behalf of business" (as quoted in Ho 2005: 350).

Thus, the only viable option for cooperation between environmentalists and politicians seems to be the Green Party. In Danshui, Green Citizens' Action Alliance cooperates closely with Wang Chung-ming (王鐘銘), a local resident who stood for city councillor in Danshui Town in 2010 representing the Green Party. Social groups emphasize that he obtained 7,098 electronic votes (Tsui 2009) despite his firm opposition to the construction project (the majority of the local people are in favour of it). Since his candidacy did not end up a political debacle, social groups regard this as a sign that the number of local residents opposed to the road is in fact increasing. As for the Taipei City government (which was initially opposed to the road), after the committee's ruling it said that it would comply with the decision, provided that the road would stop before entering the city (E-mail exchange with Mr Lan Weigong, 12 July 2011). According to all of our informants in the environ-

mentalist camp, this type of behaviour seems to be “a somewhat childish attempt at not completely ‘losing face’ (丟面子, *diu mianzi*) while being forced into complying with the EIA committee’s decision” (Interview 3, 5, 6, 7, 8).

## Final Stages

### The Second EIA Ends

The case against the road was formally terminated on 15 April 2011 when the third EIA review meeting ruled that the Danshui North Shore Road Project could proceed. The experts responsible for the EIA named a few conditions that New Taibei City has to fulfil before starting construction. The first condition is that New Taibei City shall carry out a study on how to best conserve local cultural and ecological properties. Second, the city shall organize a workshop for the ecological supervision of the area; this workshop has to include at least 12 members recruited in equal proportion from among state officials, NGOs, and the academic community (Central News Agency 2011). It is the general opinion of numerous activists interviewed for our study that “this behaviour is a mere façade” and that the EIA committee seeks “to stifle criticism from the environmental community” (Interview 7, 8 among others). Under the current structure, with six members recruited among pro-KMT professors and experts, environmentalists claim that it happens quite frequently that the committee will lean toward the approval of controversial developmental projects (Informal chat with Professor Winston Dang, 21 August 2011).

Neither social groups nor the Green Party participated in the last EIA meeting but they knew that the committee was going to meet on 15 April. For this reason, they called a press conference the day before to give visibility to the Danshui road saga once again, hoping that this would somehow influence the EIA committee’s decision. As Mr Wang Chung-ming put it: “We thought that the committee responsible for the EIA would behave reasonably” (Interview 8, 29 June); what he meant was that the government could not legally proceed, as its actions are in violation of the Environmental Protection Law. Strictly speaking, though, his claim is incorrect as the law states that if the road is shorter than five kilometres (here the road would measure 4.7 kilometres), construction can go ahead without even being subjected to an EIA, which

ironically in this case was mandated anyway after social groups exerted pressure on the EPA. Furthermore, those in favour of the road maintain that it will have no effect whatsoever on the mangroves since no portion of the forest will have to be removed as the road will simply pass over it. Social groups refute this explanation and claim that flora and fauna will still be affected by being in such close proximity to a highway. Because social groups know that their leverage in cases like this (involving many powerful agents) is quite limited, one of the main strategies they employ is to postpone the approval of the case. While gaining more time, they try to turn public opinion on environmental issues by organizing numerous press conferences in order to put pressure on the members of the EIA committee.

## The Next Step

Even though the EIA committee's decision did not surprise those social groups and residents opposed to the road, the speed at which permission has been granted is somewhat puzzling. On 4 May 2011 we asked Mr Wang Chung-Ming (the above-mentioned Green Party representative) and Mr Chen – a resident of Zhu Wei nicknamed “Chocolate Daddy” (巧克力爸爸, *Qiaokeli baba*) – what they planned to do next. Mr Chen is a well-known figure in Zhu Wei both for his political activism in the Danshui road case and because he owns a stall where he makes chocolate waffles, hence his nickname. For security reasons, he does not want us to use his real name, so we will use the pseudonym “Chen Fang-bin”.

At first, in May 2011, aggrieved social groups and local residents planned to sue the New Taipei City government; they claimed that one portion of the planned road, close to the mangrove area, slightly invades the boundaries set for the protection of the forest, thus violating both the Cultural Property Law (文资法, *Wenzī fǎ*) and the Environmental Protection Law (环境保护法, *Huanjīng bǎohù fǎ*) and endangering the delicate ecosystem. New Taipei City does not seem to be too concerned about the plan to sue, and even retorted that social groups are wrong and that they simply use a different kind of measuring system, when in reality, according to the county's own calculations, the planned road was never to cross the forest. The plan to take legal action was abandoned in July because it would require too much effort and too much money to sue the local government (Informal conversation with Green Party members such as Wang Chung-Ming and Lai Fenlan, 3 July 2011). Thus green activists are planning a variety of alternative activities, such as stag-

ing a protest in front of the Control Yuan to challenge the committee’s decision, and organizing a protest demonstration in Danshui; only one week after the committee gave the project a green light, thousands of posters and leaflets of protest had already been printed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Posters of Protest against the Danshui North Shore Road Project



Source: © Simona Grano, 4 May 2011.

Even though the actual construction is scheduled to begin quite soon and a construction site has been set up since October 2011, social movements still have not lost hope, and they seize every opportunity to emphasize their opposition. On 17 September, on the occasion of a “No Car Day” celebration (see Figure 3) organized by the local Danshui Town government to boost its image as an “eco-friendly touristic” administration, green groups, local activists and green politicians organized a counter-protest (see Figure 4) to emphasize the paradox and absurdity of a “No Car Day” when, upon completion of the project, the traffic flow will in fact be much worse than it is today.

Figure 3: "No Car Day" Event in Danshui



Source: © Simona Grano, 17 September 2011.

Figure 4: Protest of the “No Car Day” Event



Source: © Simona Grano, 17 September 2011.

According to Mr Chen, many people in Danshui are actually opposed to the construction of the road but do not dare to say it out aloud due to the widespread connection between local political factions (地方派系, *difang paixi*), construction companies, and real estate developers.

Social groups hinted that especially in Danshui (although this is also true for many other places in Taiwan), the alliance between business and political elites dominates local politics. A particularly strong claim made by Mr Chen is that many Danshui officials have their own real estate and construction companies and thus have a vested interest in this road being built. One Green Party representative even went so far as to say that local mafia (in collusion with construction companies) stages most of the traffic congestion problem on Route 2 in order to give people the idea that the road is insufficient to cater for the mounting flow of traffic. He claimed that every time he goes in loco to check on the traffic situation, there is some staged problem like a broken light or a temporary blockage set up in order to slow down the traffic. The fact that there are no workers actually repairing the alleged problems has led people to suspect that

it may all be a ploy to garner popular support for an alternative road. When we went along with Green Party representatives to check on an “electrical problem” with a traffic light, we were quickly shooed away by a bunch of workers who, previous to our arrival, seemed to be very engrossed in a card game rather than in fixing the problem (20 March 2011).

## Conclusions

Through the analysis of the Danshui North Shore Road Project case, we have tried to show how, even though at the central level environmental regulations are clearly formulated, at the local level a plethora of agents (from local governments to social groups) have many different ways of manipulating and stalling the execution of these regulations. Taiwan needs to create new mechanisms that legitimate the participation of all concerned stakeholders in the process of implementation in order to strengthen agency–constituency communication channels in environmental management. At the same time, though, policymakers should avoid creating a situation in which having these multiple stakeholders leads to a paralysis of the decision-making process due to lack of clarity on who the ultimate authority is for these various interconnected sectors. Sustainable development requires public participation coupled with political, institutional and administrative capabilities to achieve effective policies. On the one hand, empowering the public by giving it more institutional channels to vent its discontent through policy mechanisms can advance democratic governance and prevent the embarrassing street protests that have often occurred in Taiwan. On the other hand, too many actors can actually further complicate the situation and hinder effective management and implementation of laws. In this particular case, various social interests pull the government in many different directions, as the gap between environmental interests and local interests grows wider.

In the Danshui road case, a vertical power hierarchy is clearly visible in which local people (from below) try to counter powers from above (be it the local or the central government) by using environmental policies from above (EIA) to aid their cause. In this specific case, though, we have also seen other powers at work: the conflicting claims many local governments (and their various bureaus) make regarding having authority over the project, and the interests of both the local people and civil

society organizations in protecting the mangrove areas and or/ their personal stake.

In popularly elected legislatures, these various departments have a common interest: attracting votes. It was therefore not difficult to predict that in the end, the outcome of the EIA review would satisfy the interests of the people of Danshui and push forward the development of the transportation system. Contrary to what happened in the Hsiangshan Tidal Flat Development Project in Hsinchu (新竹市, *Xinzhū Shì*) – in which social groups, making use of the available legal channels, successfully managed to hinder the construction of a project damaging to the local ecosystem (Tang 2003) – in the Danshui case, it seems that a scientifically based discussion among scholars, academics and other experts has in fact led to an official green lighting of the project. One thing is clear from our analysis: Even though at a first glance it seems that formal tools (in this case, the EIA mechanism) have managed to postpone the construction for so long – thus proving that in democratic countries NGOs have a chance to influence green policies by operating inside legal channels – a closer look the Danshui case reveals that a second EIA was made only after repeated requests, street protests and media reports organized by social groups and Zhu Wei residents. Thus, this case is a perfect example of how official governmental action can be prompted by unofficial tools (media, public involvement, street protests), the ultimate effect of which was to delay the project. This underlines the importance of unofficial tools even in democratic regimes such as Taiwan. Nevertheless, even though both unofficial strategies (protests in front of various governmental bureaus, petitions and media involvement) and official strategies (making use of the EIA regulations) were utilized in the Danshui North Shore Road Project, our conclusion is that the official strategy (requesting a second EIA, thereby postponing the construction) certainly proved more effective in delaying the road project. It came as a great surprise to the developers that the project could be stopped, even if only temporarily, by those civic associations that had never been “political” or powerful enough in Danshui before.

Our initial question regarding who the most effective actors were can be answered this way: Even though social actors have played a key role in stalling the project, in the end the decisions lay mostly with other, more institutional players like local and central governments (and their various bureaus: for instance, the Environmental Protection Administration).

Even though there is no debate as to whether the construction project violates the law (as previously mentioned, legally this road is in accordance with EIA regulations as it is shorter than 5 kilometres), this case fits our analysis by showing that – its legality notwithstanding – social groups still managed to stall the construction for three years (2008–11) employing that very same EIA Act, which formally allows the construction of said projects! It is possible that the transverse alliance of social groups with the Taipei City government aided civic associations in delaying for a longer period of time, thereby proving that although environmental policies are, for the most part, mandated from the top, at the local level their implementation can be bypassed, altered or stalled by these various agents.

As for the research potential of this case, benefits derived from it include future prospective comparative analyses between Danshui and other localities' developmental projects in order to further our comprehension of local environmental governance dynamics in Taiwan. Generally speaking, "opposition to" or "promotion of" a certain project depends on the specific details and characteristics of that project and of that locality. In this case, the Taipei City government thought the road project would negatively impact the traffic situation, and the environmentalists believed that the road would damage the local environment. In certain cases, a bureaucracy can experience internal conflicts over certain aspects of any given project. For example, in the Danshui road project, the central government's ministries were not all on the same page, with some agencies favouring the project – the Ministry of Transportation – and some railing against it – the Environmental Protection Administration, whose attitude changed throughout the course of the debate. Inherent difficulties in researching a complex topic like the influence of green NGOs on local developmental politics make some of the arguments in this article tentative. Further empirical as well as statistical data will be needed to provide more detailed conclusions. At any rate, after a detailed analysis our case study suggests that the political process in Taiwan is becoming more pluralistic in ways that are not yet sufficiently represented in the existing literature.

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