Chapter 13
Articulated Planning

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ABSTRACT

The authors bring a notion called articulated planning that defies existing associations between centralised government approaches and socialism. With increasing availability of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the authors argue that governmental processes can be facilitated and develop more participative planning efforts towards developing e-governance in countries. The free software and simulation tools can contribute to generate appropriate spaces for citizens' participation in, definition and supervision of government plans.

INTRODUCTION

A "politically correct" argument, normally presented against socialist systems, is that central planning is an intractable problem, impossible to solve in any nation state with the minimal demands of modernity (Wikipedia, 2009). A complementary assumption states that central planning is the only possible choice for Socialism, from which one derives that socialist systems are doomed to intractability.

The argument (simplistically) explains that modern nations produce, by allowing freedom of choice and expression for its citizens, an extremely complex network of desires and needs, which is impossible to serve by means of a central entity. Sooner of later, sentences the argument, the bureaucracies, established by the central power to process citizens' requests, are overcome by that complexity or, even worse, by upheavals led by frustrated citizens who do not trust those inefficient filters in a clearly insufficient system.

Therefore, central planning, as required by a socialist state that tries to organize production to serve the needs of its people, is a futile exercise only conceivable by immature minds completely out of touch with the real nature of modern human society: individuals have infinite needs and only a free market economy, with all its lacks, can bal-

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ance those needs and individual aptitudes against available resources.

In this chapter, we aim to challenge that argument by attacking the premise that Socialism is equivalent to central planning, CP. We will defend another approach to national or community planning that we call articulated planning, AP, which is based on the intensive use of Information Technologies, IT. In AP, centralism and all its bottlenecks are avoided by implementing a distributed planning system that articulates regional contents by intensively using computers and telecommunication systems.

AP is not quite an actual reality. However, with the increasing availability of IT, specially under conditions of freedom, more and more steps are being taken to make AP commonplace. We want to report on some of those experiences and also speculate on others more elaborated possibilities with computational models and databases (Domingo, C. et al, 2006) to automate many fundamental tasks in any exercise to articulate massive collective contents and agreements.

We must start, however, by admitting that there is, indeed, a inherent complexity to Socialism, specially in its more recent developments which declare a strong commitment to democracy and adopt a bottom-up governance strategy. Given the size of human populations, when people want a real and egalitarian participatory access to government, a very efficient peer to peer, communicational system and a very well organized (an distributed) collective memory seem essential.

THE HISTORICAL PROBLEM OF PLANNING

Planning seems to be a quintessential human ability. Every big endeavor requires some previous thinking to guarantee success. But, when it is about planning a national economy, it both gets essential to any exercises that pretends rationality in the productions of goods, and complex, by the need to take a big number of actors and their intentions into account.

This complex human ability has evolved, in contemporary times at least, throughout a number of variants and points of view, all attempting to improve its results. At the beginning of the XXth Century, probably influenced by the mathematical and positivist tradition, planning became the purely technical process of calculating means to achieve certain, unproblematic, ends. It used to be a very authoritarian activity: a central planner produced a plan that everybody else just followed, on the ground that the planner was the only expert (Ahumada, Jorge, 1969). Later, the anti-positivism movement impacted all these practices and planners began to take into account other possibilities, most of those having in common a problematic set of goals, which created the need for some sorts of negotiation protocols to consider the preferences of all involved: strategic planning (Ansoff., I, 1965) was born at this stage. It also became clear at that time that planning must be an open process, to take into account uncertainty, risks and instability in a changing environment. In later times, interest have apparently shifted from the instrumental aspect of planning to consideration of motivational strategies, specially in enterprises that require the efforts of many people. We believe that the shift is only apparent, because those calculating capacities are now applied to manipulating the will of the persons involved with those motivational strategies. With the increase of computational capacity, it is ever more feasible to analyze preferences variants and produce a plan that consider more sophisticated scenarios in which actors try to maximize their own utilities in an always open and permanent process of planning and production (Mintzberg, H**.,** 1994).