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## **In what circumstances should we plan in public?**

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### **Abstract**

The literature on planning assumes that plans, to be useful, should be public and then implemented. The participatory paradigm, with its recent resurgence, assumes that planning should be performed with stakeholders in public forums. This paper challenges the notion that plans and planning processes should be public in general or even within a group whose mandate it is to plan. It considers the inherent strategic reality of planning and interactions of multiple plans, existing and being made and being discarded, to argue for cases in which plans are and ought to be private and planning necessarily strategic and idiosyncratic. This paper addresses questions such as: In what circumstances will a plan maker choose to make plans public, to whom, and when? What should we expect to be public from the plans of others and what not? This paper will posit that plans are subsumed in plans about plans and that plans are strategically made explicit in public. The absence of public documents in particular situations should not be taken to imply that plans do not exist or that plan led behaviour is not occurring, inferable, or observable. Based in part on examples from New Orleans recovery planning, we then provide explanations of why and in what circumstances individuals, voluntary groups, and governments are likely to plan in public and make plans public. And we consider related but distinct justifications for what aspects of plans should be made public and in what circumstances.

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The literature on planning assumes that plans, to be useful, should be public and then implemented (Berke, Godschalk, Kaiser et al. 2006). The currently dominant participatory paradigm argues that planning should be performed with stakeholders in public forums (Ames 1998). That planning and plans occur in continually changing organizational and interorganizational settings, however, is now well recognized (Alexander 1992, 1995; Webster and Lai 2003). This paper builds on these recognitions to challenge the presumption that plans and planning processes will or should be public in general or even within a group whose mandate it is to plan. It considers the inherent strategic reality of planning. Considering the context of interactions of multiple plans of multiple actors, we argue for cases in which plans are and ought to be, at least in part, private while being made, as plans, and while being used. Such strategic use of plans means that planning practices are necessarily contingent and idiosyncratic. What sorts of plans are made public, when, and in what manner? We also claim that making a plan public and planning in the public eye are distinct questions with potentially different justifications and explanations. Choices about what is done in public and made public have implications for what plans can tell us about a particular group's obligations and behaviour

In contrast to the current norm that planning for metropolitan regions, for example, should seek consensus and agreement on a visionary plan based on wide participation and agreement on goals as well as actions, this analysis suggests that planning is and should be more strategic. Actors may not participate, may drop out from and rejoin, or may join planning processes later and all for sensible reasons (Wies 1992). Municipalities, coalitions of business interests or neighbourhoods, and regional agencies are likely to behave strategically in participating in plan making, in making public the content of their own plans, and in using plans in public. These possibilities undermine the assumption that one public regional planning process is an effective way to come to agreement about goals or actions. Even if actions have regional implications or require approval from multiple actors, strategic participation is likely. Although such strategic behaviour occurs in making and using plans, in this paper we de-emphasize the communicatory aspects of making plans, widely discussed elsewhere (Innes 1995, 1996, 1998), and emphasize instead the communicatory aspects of plans and using plans in informing decisions.

In the United States, most regional planning is led by transportation issues and funding. Municipalities, counties, special districts, state agencies, and federal agencies may all have to act to approve a highway construction project, and they are presumed to come to agreement on a plan. Even if, they were to participate in a regional planning process to agree on goals and actions, as currently mandated by federal legislation, it is seldom that process in any simple way or that decision arena that determines what actions are eventually taken. The actors are likely to choose when and how to participate in arguments about what goals and what actions to consider. If arguments about goals are insufficient to distinguish among actions of interest or if arguments are about actions that do not affect them, then actors are unlikely to engage the process (Hopkins 2005). And when they do, they are likely to do so strategically (Wies 1992).

In analyzing cases of metropolitan regional planning in Australia, Abbott (2005) identifies the issue of credible plans. Planners interviewed acknowledged this situation: "While these plans were known to exist, some respondents took the view that they were so broad they did not reflect the Councils' true intents or likely actions." It is thus important in many contexts to develop a better understanding of the strategic nature of decisions to make plans, to share them, and to use them. We argue that, rather than pursue the implausible task of ensuring that complete and "true intents or likely actions" will be included in plans, we should learn to be savvy about strategic use of plans. We should be savvy about inferring strategic use by others and strategic use for ourselves.

The argument is developed as follows. First, we elaborate briefly the concepts of plans and planning processes as rhetoric about commitments to intentions and actions. Then we consider plans and planning by individuals or relatively stable organizations. Some of these organizations are governments.

These individuals and organizations are also members of less permanent voluntary groups or coalitions. We then explain how players in these situations, as individuals or coalitions, are likely to use strategically their participation in planning processes and their revelation of plan content. Recognizing how we might expect people to behave also suggests arguments for how we should choose to behave when deciding to plan in public, or not, and whether to reveal the content of plans, or not.

### **Rhetorics of Commitment – Plans and Planning Processes**

Hoch (2005) has framed planning process and plans as rhetoric. We use this approach slightly differently, but accept that both process and resulting plans have rhetorical work to do. Plans are records of decisions that are taken ahead of time before actions that realize them, and thus express some level of commitment to intent and action. It is pervasive in planning praxis to suppose that these records of decisions exist and should exist as documents available in public and devised in public. Plans are not necessarily documents or physical records, but information, explicit or implicit, about commitment to particular courses of action, often in relation to intentions, and expectations. They are partial orderings of actions, which means that they incompletely specify which action should be preferred over another and in what circumstances. They are thus partial commitments, or partial decisions. They give clues to commitments toward intentions and goals of the particular actors for which there may be alternative courses of actions that could realize these intentions and expectations.

Levin (1976) argued that different stages of planning provide varying degrees of commitment to a proposal. The commitment itself does not guarantee the proposal being realized, much less in any particular form, but does provide information about how one should modify one's own plans to suit the new information. Plans are made explicit a priori, to provide a clue to others as well as oneself as to expected actions (Mastop and Faludi 1997). It is useful to make my plans public in some cases because it reduces the strategic uncertainty of other actors about my actions so that others can plan accordingly, which may be beneficial to me.

The planning activities and plans may be public (widely publicized) or private (confidential to a restricted group). The plans may be for an individual (or equivalently for a unitary organization) or for a collective (an ephemeral group or coalition that exists only in relation to the plan, planning process, or focus of attention on particular issues). Hopkins (2001) characterizes plans as useful in cases where there are four distinct attributes: 1) imperfect foresight, 2) irreversibility, 3) interdependence, and 4) indivisibility. This characterization builds on Friend and Jessup (1969) and others and is consistent with decision analysis (Raiffa 1968). It clarifies reasons for wanting to consider future actions or other actions before acting on a decision of immediate concern. None of these attributes is a characteristic particular to decisions that are made or need to be made by groups or organisations or to decisions that are made or need to be made in public. It is then important to ask ourselves not only why we plan, but also why we plan in public.

If a plan proposes an agenda, it is declaring a commitment to a particular list of actions with specific attributes, without emphasising the intentions behind the actions. Designs have actions or states with spatial and functional relations. The commitment to the particular design illustrates a commitment to all the actions that constitute the design as well as the relationships between the actions the design is purported to clarify. On the other hand, plans are also abundant with policies, goals, visions, and to a lesser extent strategies. These in themselves are primarily not atomic actions or actions with relationships to other actions, but they set expectations about likely actions and preferred states. A commitment to a goal of 'equality of housing opportunity' is not a commitment to a particular subsidy or a specific regulation. Both the subsidy and regulation are alternatives to achieve the same goal. The commitment to intentions allows flexibility in choosing particular actions or sets of actions as the situation demands. However, committing only to intentions postpones the decisions and commitment to actions, which may be advantageous or not, or advantageous to some and not others.

Many planning scholars and practitioners have challenged the claim that a plan is the end goal of a planning process (Healey 1997; Hoch 1994, 2005; Innes 1995, 2004). Their claims for benefits from planning as process include collective group formation, collective action, negotiation, and capacity building. However, plans are important and useful products of planning processes. Such plans have value distinguishable from, if not independent of, the processes by which they are made and any other incidental effects. And the value of such plans depends in important ways on to whom the content of plans is public and when. Even when the group does not agree on a plan, the process itself can substantively inform and modify the plans (which might be mostly private) of individuals and organisations that participate in the process. Plans give us some clues toward commitments by particular groups to particular courses of action and intentions. And such information may be useful to us. Those who make such plans will have reason to care whether, and if so when, we know what about their intended commitments. Thus planning in public and plans that are made public are strategic questions of making commitments. In some cases it is crucial that the content be public; in others it is crucial that it not be public.

### **Plans in Public: Recent Planning in New Orleans**

On 12 January 2006, The New York Times reported on the public reaction to a plan that was unveiled for the rebuilding of New Orleans, which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. More details of the plan can be found at <http://www.bringneworleansback.org>. This plan was authored by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC), which was set up by the Mayor separate from the official planning activities of the city agency. An important proposal in the plan advises the city to allow rebuilding in any part of New Orleans for about a year, and then to evaluate after the elapsed time where clusters of development occurred. The strategy would be then to promote further development of the most successful clusters and reverse what little development occurred in other areas to revert them to an undeveloped state. The merit of the proposal, purely on political justice, economic, and ecological considerations continues to be under debate. We can, however, trace the implications and potential ramifications of this particular information regime, its implied levels of commitment, and appropriate responses by various actors.

The New Orleans proposal, typical of many plans, sets out rather starkly information about a government's (a particular organisation with a particular set of capabilities and authorities) intentions. One possible scenario is that developers with enough resources to act quickly will concentrate their resources in particular areas. In these areas, a reasonably large development proposal under consideration then affects the likelihood of smaller neighbours realizing that their own development plan and actions are under lower threat of reversal by the city. These smaller players thus act more decisively, thereby locking in increasing returns to scale in areas where they are told or are able to infer that large players are investing. Or neighbourhood groups may voluntarily form a collective to plan for the neighbourhood to discover plans of the individuals that comprise the group or persuade them to adopt investment strategies that promote cooperation. Or political coalitions may form to oppose, undermine, or change the relocation plan. These plausible responses are based on longstanding ideas about group behaviour (Olson 1965).

In general, actors will make choices about whether to participate in planning processes in order to learn what others are saying or influence group plans. And they will be making strategic judgments about what to reveal and what to take as credible commitments from others. That is, we need not assume super-optimizing rational actors, only a loose system of intentional and adaptive actors. The announcement of such a plan will actually shape the plans of other agents, big and small, collective and individual, hierarchical and voluntary, ad-hoc and organised. These reactions will affect the realization of the relocation plan. To paraphrase it slightly differently: The system adapts to information, not necessarily to an intervention or direct action. And plans that are public in some degree to some group of people provide this information.

In the New Orleans case, the commitment of the city to choose a cluster pattern of development dispersed in space is a commitment to a vision of a structure of a city. However, the policy of allowing spontaneous clusters to emerge over a period of a year has more information, and therefore precipitates very specific kinds of responses from other actors in the urban development process. This commitment to intent without commitment to action in specific areas is sufficient for developers with mobile capital to move forward in rebuilding parts of the city they choose to rebuild. It is not, however, as advantageous to individual homeowners, who must risk their own small investment on the contingency that their neighbors will do likewise. The strategy to decide later on connections between the clusters and how to protect them from flooding delays these decisions for later commitment through separate design and planning exercises. Thus multiple plans are contingent and interdependent on each other and are continually informing each other.

With the possibility of this information becoming available, it is very tempting to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of showing one's hand. It could, however, be argued that the revealed plans may not be reflective of the true plans of the actors. While this is very much a possibility, the considerations of repeated interactions should be taken into account. In repeated interactions, trust is a crucial component to deal with uncertainty. The benefit reaped from establishing trust, prevents people from breaching trust. The principle of reciprocity, which Axelrod (Axelrod and Cohen 1999; Axelrod 1981) demonstrates, is also crucial for cooperative behavior. It reduces the costly process of sharing individually created individual plans with credibility. Trust is gradually built contingent on the how the previous situation turned out. If all public plans are deemed untrustworthy it makes little sense to make plans public because no one believes in the explicit plans of others any more. However, if there is even a modicum of trust, then plans are likely to be made public explicitly because the effective plans build the trust and thus reinforce the cycle of increasing trust. This touches upon the critical question of how public one's true plans ought to be. Are they well developed in private but ambiguous in public? Or are they deliberately under developed to avoid public disclosure? In other words when do we choose not to plan? And when do we choose to plan but not to make it public?

### **Plans of individuals and organizations**

The tyranny of small choices as described by Kahn (1966) and Schwartz (2004), and by extension the paralysis of decisions that arises from it, is, alleviated by planning to some extent. Plans provide directions for decisions that come after them and public plans provide what Habermas and Rawls refer to as 'public justifications' for these decisions. Clearly dominated alternative actions are taken out of consideration in future decision making to reduce choices in a decision situation. The contingencies between various actions are clarified in a plan, and thus relationships included in a plan are more likely to be recognized than relationships among actions that are not considered in any one plan. For example, an interchange on an interstate highway and a zoning change to commercial in the adjoining areas are interdependent actions. A good plan would typically recognize these relationships ahead of time, and when the decision to change the zoning category of a particular parcel in the neighbourhood is required, the decision maker, with the help of the plan, would take into account whether the interchange would be realized or not.

A planning process may not completely match actions to circumstances; for it is prohibitively costly do so, and plans are not predictions of a future. In other words, the planner and thereby the decision maker should not only recognise various actions that may lead toward the goal but also various uncertainties that hinder or complement such actions. It is useful to think about these actions, effects, and intentions and various interesting, not all, combinations of them ahead of time before acting. These are plans of individuals. Organisations making and using a plan as a single cohesive entity, for specific purposes, can be considered equivalent to individuals, acknowledging resolution of differences within one mind as well as within one organization (Hurley 1998).

Individual plans in the traditional urban planning context are, for example, location decisions of firms and of individuals. While explicit planning is not undertaken in a traditional sense, nor are plans usually made in the formal sense of documents, these informal plans drive individual decisions whenever there is uncertainty, irreversibility, and contingency. There are plans that are not records, but only inferable, even for public agencies.

Plans for school districts in the United States are unlikely to be written documents of future intentions because of political considerations and thus are seldom public. However, these plans are common knowledge to the school board, hidden under the considerations of staffing decisions, fund seeking, tax structure decisions, and deliberations that occur. Alternatively, a school district may choose to make a public commitment to a plan of building renovation and location precisely for the purpose of persuading its voting constituency to vote in favor of a bond issue. The content of such a plan may be most effectively explained by its specific purpose of attracting votes.

### **Plans of collections of individuals and organizations**

In many ways plans by groups for themselves are very similar to those by individuals except for the group processes that bring the plan into being. Plans inform the collective action strategies, policies, and agendas of the group, as well as those of the individuals in the group (Hoch forthcoming). Bearing in mind that plans are being made at different levels at different times by different individuals making up different communities, we need to consider the interacting nature of these multiple plans. How do they inform each other and how do they inform the decision making and action taking, both individual and collective at multiple levels?

Wies (1992) describes the planning situation in Lake County, IL in which various communities and other players choose strategically to participate in the planning process. He contends that game theoretic ideas of strategic interactions can explain why different actors chose to participate, oppose, support, and modify at particular times different elements of the regional plan to suit their particular objectives and plans. This leads to the rejection of a hierarchical comprehensive model of planning, in which plans of subsets of geographic and functional scopes are assumed to be in agreement with other plans within the hierarchy. We need to replace that model of planning with a model of planning where plan making is idiosyncratic, often times as a strategic response to changing circumstances, by the same or different groups of individuals, for very different purposes which may be in direct disagreement or even confrontational in nature (Davidoff 1965; Donaghy and Hopkins 2006; Mandelbaum 2000).

Group processes incorporate systemic effects and are thus different from an arbitrary collection of individuals. These systemic effects include pooling of capabilities in terms of organizational capacity, rights setting authority to act, and capabilities influencing or informing collective action. Unionisation for the express purpose of dramatically improving bargaining ability and economies of scale and scope of industrial location decisions are examples of such collective actions. However, these collective actions need not be intentional and prior, and in these they differ from group planning processes. A planning process by very definition is a deliberate process not just a deliberative process. It has to be undertaken by an intentional actor, or collectives of them, for specific purposes.

The planning literature, has focused on plans by groups because of the complexity of the urban development process, the likelihood of the necessary range of skills available, the number of alternative solutions considered, and the multiple perspectives, values, and preferences brought to the table when plans are made by groups (Healey 1997; Hopkins 2001). Group processes and the communication and decision making in a multi preference situation has been the purview of political economics, including the seminal paper by (Arrow 1951). Recently, however, planning theorists have ignored the ramifications of that body of literature, and have placed emphasis on consensus within a group as a politically, procedurally, and ethically prudent method (Kaza forthcoming).

If a grass roots organisation in New Orleans is formed to plan for neighbourhood redevelopment in the given information regime, then the group would consider specific strategies on how to respond to the threat of relocation. It provides for a common forum to decide on the course of action of each individual in their own decisions about whether or not to invest in rebuilding in the neighbourhood. It provides opportunity for each individual to discover the preferences of the neighbours and thus provides estimates of how likely their own financial as well as emotional investments are to succeed. The group by itself may not have the capacity to act on behalf of the individuals to build the neighbourhood, but it provides an opportunity for each individual to explore their own options given better information. It should not be assumed that the inherent result of such group interaction would be a greater commitment to rebuilding. Such group activity might instead lead to a concerted effort to be bought out as a neighborhood on the expectation that such a proposal will be attractive to a city government that could benefit from such bottom up, voluntary proposals. Or, it might lead to a more informed, apparently collective behavior of not reinvesting.

The organization's original intent may be merely to respond to the threat of uncertainty about relocation versus rebuilding outcomes. In New Orleans at the moment, a major cause of uncertainty is imperfect foresight about whether enough neighbors will come back to make a land parcel viable as a rebuilt residential or business location. Group interaction is one way to learn about neighbors' situations, preferences, and budget and other capability constraints that will improve predictions of their behavior. Such interaction is also an opportunity to influence their beliefs about what I will do. It is also a way to organize for collective action to influence others including others who may become members of the group as well as government agencies or other significant actors who will necessarily remain outside the group. One way to motivate such group interaction is by setting the task of creating a plan of action for the group.

If group interactions lead to discovery of preferences about political change that might change information about relocation, then the group's collective action strategy may change and be unrecognisable from the original intent. Thus groups may adapt and re-form as new information becomes available. The grassroots group may decide to act covertly to solicit interest in changing the political regime or decide to publicize its intentions widely to attract attention of groups with similar preferences to form coalitions. A group or an individual actor may decide to make a plan public, or the group may decide to plan in the public eye. These are two distinct processes and with very different outcomes and justifications. It is to these situations we turn next.

It is unlikely that all members of a group are privy to an entire planning process. A case in point is the planning process that is currently underway to decide on rebuilding of the World Trade Center. One only needs to trace the levels of involvement of experts, developers, governments, quasi-governments, insurance agencies, participants in the process, the public at large peripherally interested in the project, to note that the definition of the group for which the plan is being made is necessarily amorphous.

Planning in a group has to bring together varied interests for a collective action problem. However, it is very likely that there are dissenters within the group who do not agree with the conclusions that are advocated by the majority. The traditional response in the participatory paradigm is to evolve a consensus among various subgroups within a group. However, if the intent of planning in the group is to align the subgroup's particular plans with respect to the larger group's plan then consensus is not necessarily the only outcome to seek. Strategic meta-planning could include alternatives that are put forth by the group primarily to seek expected responses from others.

- Of many, the following responses dissenters within a planning process are important to consider.
- The subgroups acquiesce in the planning process. but secretly undermine the adopted plan in influencing decisions.

- The dissenters make clear their displeasure in the planning process, but do not undermine the plan by opposing actions.
- The dissenters sever their ties to the planning process thereby denying some legitimacy and form a separate group that undermines the plan from without.

These disagreements are important to nurture even in a mode of planning where the consensus building paradigm has primacy. Especially when subgroups dissent, they provide valuable information about preferences of individuals within the group and the stridency of the dissent is likely to give indications about the strength of otherwise ordinal preferences (Sunstein 2003).

### **Making plans public**

It could be argued that a plan, if it involves strategic considerations, needs to be secret. A developer trying to acquire land for commercial development may try to keep plans about the development activity secret in order not to encourage hold outs or drive up the price of the property (Schaeffer and Hopkins 1987). Various tactics, such as acquiring land under shell corporations or individuals, buying options anonymously, and approaching private debt issuing entities are used to maintain the secrecy of the plan. Conservation agencies that follow the acquisition approach often make and follow their plans in secret because of the sensitive nature of real estate acquisition and species protection, revealing them only later as accomplishments to sustain fundraising. Conservation organizations that follow public education and political action approaches to conservation, on the other hand, may indeed publicly declare their intentions and commitments to actions to solicit support and visibility.

Actions may be publicly observable. The very act of construction of a commercial complex by a developer reveals the intentions of the developer. Before the action is itself undertaken, necessary prior actions such as seeking permissions for zoning variances or changes and planning commission or development authority approvals require revealing actions, which may in turn reveal intentions. Depending on the different institutional settings, the times at which these plans are revealed may be different (Hopkins 1981).

Actions may have consequences that are publicly observable even if the actions themselves are not. While acquisition of a particular parcel of land itself may not constitute a definitive guide to the intent of a private plan, a sequence or combination of actions that have some definitive consequences may lead us to infer a plan that backs up these actions. Conservation agencies acquiring multiple properties in a sequential fashion along an ecologically sensitive floodplain imply, to an outside observer, that these actions will result in securing rights that will preserve the floodplain. Even when the acquisitions are not yet complete, we can begin to understand the motives of a particular intentional actor in a strategic environment. Similar inferences about a city's growth policy can be made from the series of the city's annexation actions, even if there is no explicit and public policy. This is the classic plan recognition problem, which chess players, military strategists, and players in most sports understand quite well. The plan recognition problem is seldom addressed in the urban planning literature, however, because, perhaps, urban planners too easily assume that all relevant plans will be or should be public.

There are other cases when plans themselves as future possible actions are likely to be made public. Individuals will make a plan explicit in some cases because the knowledge affects the interests of the other actors whose plans include decisions that are related to one's own. The process of revealing these plans will then be based upon how such revelations would affect the choices others would make that might strengthen one's own strategic position. If a large developer intends to concentrate on a location and intends to attract neighbours to invest around the location, then she will reveal her plan because such revelation increases the success of one's own action under the threat of relocation. The announcement of a



future project may indeed be enough of a catalyst for a cluster formation around the location of the project. The sharp increase in the rise of property values around proposed light rail corridors is a well studied phenomenon (Knaap, Ding and Hopkins 2001). The public declaration of such intentions results in changing the expectations of the land owner nearby about the value of the land and thus may induce the denser and higher use development pattern that enhances the utility of the light rail.

If plans are commitments to intentions and goals, then making plans public is useful to shape expectations of decisions. If actor A adopts a policy that describes under certain combinations of conditions what actions A would pursue, then other actors will start expecting these actions to be taken. If the policy is to extend the sewer services into an area only after annexation into the city is complete, then developers and home owners understand the circumstances in which the services get extended. However, this does not imply that the policy is followed every time. Policies, unlike regulations, have no legal standing or obligations. These policies only describe commitment towards certain actions. There is always an inherent uncertainty whether the implied commitment will be honoured.

When no plan is apparent in public, it is tempting to infer that the conditions of interdependence, indivisibility, irreversibility, and imperfect foresight, which make plans useful are not met (Hopkins 2001). However, a deliberate decision not to plan even when the conditions are ripe for planning could also be a reasonable inference. One might decide not to plan as a deliberate strategy to avoid information sharing that will undermine the intended actions. While this strategy may appear irrational, it may not be. For example, in a predator-prey model, for which urban planning analogies are numerous, the prey can decide not to follow any plan, so as to appear irrational to the predator and thus to confuse the detection of the plan which undermines the escape. As always the incentives not to plan have to outweigh the benefits of planning, especially when the plan is public or inferable.

The city of New Orleans has still not adopted an official plan ten months after the city was devastated by flooding and several months after the BNOBC proposed its plan for realizing clusters of redevelopment. Why is the city not putting forth a plan committing one way or another on what will be redeveloped? Can its plan be inferred? The political and pragmatic considerations apparently outweigh the city's interest in committing to one form of development or certain kinds of procedures. The city appears to have chosen an implicit policy to allow for its development activity to proceed in its normal course in a seemingly haphazard fashion. The city may have deliberately decided to keep its plans implicit, if not secret, because its honest plans are not politically acceptable as public statements, and statements that are politically acceptable are not credible and thus not useful information about intentions and likely actions.

However, making some government's policies public would address the issues of procedural justice. Especially in a liberal democracy, the government's ethical obligation to cater to groups in a just fashion, however justice is defined, make it necessary to provide justifications for different responses in similar situations. A policy that is public knowledge would force the policy using authority ethically, though not necessarily legally, to act in a consistent fashion. These consistent actions for similar situations would help other actors to estimate with a reasonable the courses of action of the government. This is not to say that all policies, and by extension plans, by governments in a liberal democracy must be public. Many a time, substantive justice considerations outweigh the procedural justice issues to allow for plans to be made and kept secret with limited oversight. A case in point is plans for expansion of infrastructure of a school district.

Traditional comprehensive plans provide justifications for changes in regulations and investment patterns of government agencies. In order for democratic governments to function, some of these justifications must be made public. However, it is not to be assumed that all such justifications are public knowledge. In so far as these justifications satisfy the statutory and pragmatic obligations of the governments, they are made widely known.

## **Plans to influence others**

Plans made by one group for another are a common phenomenon in urban planning. A trivial case is a group of experts under contract writing a plan for a particular client. But more interesting and telling examples are of the plans that are made to influence others. The Chicago 1909 plan (Burnham and Bennet 1909) and more recent Metropolis 2020 (Johnson 2001), both instigated by the Commercial Club of Chicago, are examples of this kind. Routinely, various groups who have the capability to plan for others will do so in order to provide alternative courses of action so as to influence others' actions. A recent example is the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) planning charettes for the City of Biloxi, Mississippi area, which was devastated by the Hurricane Katrina. While the cities, counties, and state were pursuing separate plans and actions, the CNU seized the situation as a chance to advocate its particular brand of alternative actions and strategies to the city's comprehensive planning processes. Two other examples, an environmental group's corridor plan and a business group's counter plan, provide additional understanding.

The Route 47 Corridor plan in McHenry County, Illinois was made by an environmentally oriented non-profit group with the cooperation of the cities of Woodstock, Huntley, and Marengo (Conservation Design Forum 2002). While the group itself has no standing to enact regulations, make investments, or pursue as a group the policies that the plan recommends, it can influence others. The presence of the cities in the plan making process and the availability of the plan in the future to decision making by these cities, the sewer district boards that overlap the cities, the school districts that span them, and the state natural resources department that oversees particular projects in the area informs these decision makers with authority of the interests of the environmental group. The participation of these governments in the plan making process does not automatically endorse the plan recommendations, and in fact some of the plan recommendations are directly contradicted in the cities' own comprehensive plans (Finn, Hopkins and Wempe 2005). This Route 47 corridor plan acts as an advocacy tool to shape public preferences and influence actions of others through information. It is thus crucial that it be made public.

A well known study by Flyvbjerg (1998) describes the case of the city of Aalborg's plan, which was defeated by a counter plan by the business association in concert with the city newspaper. In this case, the plan by the association was made public explicitly to provide an alternative course of action and to change perception that the city's plan was the only course of action available to deal with future traffic issues. One can think of a situation in which the strategic revelation and public fanfare that surrounds the announcement of a specific plan by a particular actor is a choice made by the actor to provoke those most negatively affected by the plan to come up with alternatives that can be synthesised in the Hegelian sense. Flyvbjerg does not delve into this line of reasoning to analyse the motivations of the city and the business association and other actors. Implicit in his characterisation of the process is that city's plans were made public, were not realised, and thus were not useful. His interpretation is that power trumped rationality. Or, more generally, in his view the wrong plan won for the wrong reasons. We beg to differ. In developing explanations useful in coping with the world, there are better possibilities. The Aalborg situation was typical in that various actors made plans, participated in, and dropped out of planning processes as strategic means for pursuing their beliefs and interests. Imagining a plan as something to be made in public, announced, and then implemented leaves no interpretation but an amorphous notion of power trumping the simplistic rationality of that notion of planning. Imagining plans as artifacts of strategic behaviour, plans about plans, among multiple actors is more useful in understanding what is happening and thinking about what to do.

## **Making plans publicly**

Collectives plan to shape the collective interest of the individual actors. By adopting a formal process of planning, the collective brings together a myriad of interests where one views one's own preferences amidst others' interests and compulsions, which might help to precipitate change in one's own

preferences. The plans that are the ends of such planning processes then do not compel individuals to act in the fashion specified in the plan, because plans have no jurisdiction or legitimate force unlike binding contracts. Plans compel individuals to act because the individual's plan may become aligned with the collective's plan. Interests are constantly balanced and preference orderings are modified in the process of planning. The plans of the group are made explicit and planning is inclusive when these plans are meant to shape the individual plans.

Many visioning projects happen across the United States in part to encourage public engagement and participation in a planning process. Visioning projects are typically organised by interested parties acting voluntarily on behalf of the communities they claim to represent.. Helling (1998) points out that Atlanta's visioning project cost about \$4.5 million in terms of the opportunity costs of the participants and direct expenses. She goes on to ask if this process is worth the expense. In other words she asks did the process produce any tangible results that justify the expenses.

Many visioning exercises are not used because the procedural climax of the visions, and in some cases other types of plans, is the consensus within a group whose vision it is. And in search of this consensus as the aim of the process, the knowledge produced, the skills used, and the opinions considered are not particularly useful in informing future decisions and actions. While consensus as a methodological outcome may be politically suitable in a multi stakeholder environment, arguments for its practical and moral superiority are questionable (Kaza forthcoming)

However, visioning exercises have a different role to play. Especially when engaged in a visioning process *in public* or within a group, they provide an opportunity for various individuals and groups to discover others' attitudes, goals, and preferences. They afford formation of collectives at a later date that build on this knowledge for specific actions or for further planning exercises These indirect effects are observable (Harwood forthcoming). While planning in the public realm has to do with discovering some, common purposes toward which the collective may aspire, the presumption of stable and unitary public purpose as the ultimate aim of the group process is misplaced (Donaghy and Hopkins 2006). The focus of the conversations should be about whether the visioning process in public produces coalitions of groups for future planning and somehow legitimates because the process is public actions that are undertaken by various actors.

### **Conclusion: we should plan in public when...**

Planning in public can yield benefits from cognitive collaboration, inter or intra organizational negotiation, and procedural justice. Making resulting plans public can yield benefits when sharing intents or commitments to actions can influence actions, especially when authority and capability to influence action are distributed.. Rather than imagining a planning process and plan as a means to find and articulate an agreed, common future, it is more useful to imagine many plans and planners opening some of their processes to participation from others and revealing some of their resulting plans. This framing describes and explains better the planning we see and provides analytical approaches for developing recommendations about how to plan effectively in such a world.

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