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REGIONAL PLAN FORMULATION AND POPULAR PARTICIPATION

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Preliminary notes for discussion at the Seminar on
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1. The Governments which voted in favour of the United Nations Resolution calling for a world-wide programme of research and training in regional development considered as one of the motivations for sponsoring regional development the "urgent need" to promote "modernization" in the cities and the countryside.[1/]

2. Governments define in various ways the actual meaning and content of the term "modernization". A growing number of governments and politicians consider that "modernization" implies a gradual or abrupt transformation in the social structure of society, and a general democratization of the process of decision-making in society.

3. Some Government leaders and politicians recognize the obstacles impeding their nation-wide efforts aiming at social transformation and democratization. Some among them have therefore capitalized on regional development to supplement general nation-wide measures with specific action programmes concentrating on selected regions and explicitly aiming at a profound transformation of the social structure of society in those regions. One outstanding example of this approach is the planned development of the KOSMET region in Yugoslavia over the past decades.[2/] It should be noted that in this case a change in the political and social system at the national level preceded the formulation of policies and the implementation of action aiming at a transformation of the social system at the regional level.

4. Other Governments have recognized wider popular participation as one of the ultimate goals of development, but their leaders have not yet defined its meaning and content in operational terms [3/] and no single broad policy can be discerned as the central one in relation to popular participation in the life of the nation.[4/]

1/ United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolution 1086 C (XXXIX)

2/ See: NIKOLIC, Miodrag
Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija
Medunarodna Politika, Belgrad 1965, No.5, 43 pages

3/ ECLA: "Popular participation and principles of community development in relation to the acceleration of economic and social development"
In: Economic Bulletin for Latin America
Vol. IX, No.2, November 1964, page 227

4/ ECLA: "Second United Nations Development Decade"
"Social change and social development policy in Latin America", 1969, page 370

5. At the same time the overall political climate in many of these countries remains unresponsive to effective involvement of the entire population in the economic, social and administrative and political decisions facing the nation in its process of development. The majority of the people have long been excluded from the tasks of government and the furthering of development. 5/ Moreover, while "present lines of economic growth and social change are of a nature to exclude rather than foster popular participation", "there is only lukewarm support in central policy and decision-making layers for creating instruments of local institutional change and participation". 6/ Attitudes prevailing in key-groups such as the local power-elites, local business circles, the church, the military, the press, have not yet generally evolved to a point where vigorous support to further democratization is being given. Generally, in these countries the prevailing center-local relationship, between the capital city and the rest of the country and between the central Government and authorities at lower levels, has not facilitated any initiative towards broadening the basis of democracy. 7/

6. It is noteworthy that it is in particular in relation to this latter group of countries that professional persons dealing with regional planning are currently opening discussions on the broad issues of the "models" for the society of the future. 8/ Recent discussions sponsored by the United Nations pointed to a high degree of consensus among professional specialists from Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Latin America as regards the ultimate goal of social transformation and democratization of society in regional planning and in regional plans. 9/

5/ ECLA: "Popular participation" etc. op. cit. page 228

6/ ECLA: "Second United Nations Development Decade"
"Social change and social development policy in Latin America", 1969
pages 352 and 375

7/ ECLA: "Rural Settlement Patterns and Social Change in Latin America",
in: Economic Bulletin for Latin America, Vol. X (1965), pp. 1-22

8/ UNRISD: "Goals in Regional Policies and Objectives in Regional Planning"
Geneva, 1969, 56 pages

9/ UTRIA, Ruben D.
Draft Report of the Workshop on the Sociology of Regional Development
held in Geneva on 11, 12 and 13 November 1968
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 1969, 51 pages

7. In practice, however, there is an increased risk that goals in regional policies and regional plans become ambivalent in a situation where government leaders and politicians have not yet defined their concept of wider popular participation (and in fact, may wish to use planned social change in order to prevent upheaval) while on the other hand the planning profession may wish to insert progressive democratic ideas into the future model. In order to get their goals accepted in such a situation planners may feel tempted to promise at the same time (but to different groups in the region) : preservation and changes; past and future. Goals presenting such different faces may at first obtain common consent practically without scrutiny. It may however prove difficult to translate such goals into concrete, quantified, objectives and targets. It may even prove more difficult to implement such goals as various groups will gradually discover the points on which the plan contradicts their group interests and their view of "popular participation".

8. Whether or not wider popular participation is among the explicitly recognized goals of regional planning, any public planning, including regional planning, is universally considered to be more valid and effective the more it is a) rational, b) comprehensive and c) reflecting the interests of those for whom the plan is made.

9. Here the question arises as to what extent regional planners, including those who aspire to a complete transformation of social structure, do themselves meet these three criteria in their formulation of regional policies and regional plans.

9. Regional development planning as a profession is only emerging now and hardly any evaluations are available to answer this question. However a closely related professional specialist of established academic standing is the city planner, whose claims towards building for a new society at city-scale shows a remarkable resemblance with the claims of today's regional planners towards constructing a new society at a regional scale. Evaluations have been made of city planners professional performance and of the plans they produce.

a) A sociological evaluation of western town and country planning (in particular in the United States and Great Britain) was made by Ruth Glass.[10/] This evaluation points out that in the planning profession the "planners"

10/ GLASS, Ruth
"The Evaluation of Planning, Some Sociological Considerations"
in "Regional Planning" combined nrs 12 and 13 of "Housing, Building and Planning", UN 1959, pp. 51-57

namely the architects, engineers, surveyors and administrators, are all specialists in their own field, used to a mechanistic mode of thought, and that each one considers planning as a new professional label added to the previous one. As regards the reflection of the people's best interests in the plans, Ruth Glass notes that planners in Great Britain under-estimate people's desire and capacity to change, stress the preservation of the status quo, take their own subjective preferences to be objective and universal, and easily call the interests of some groups "the public interest". It should be noted that this evaluation focussed on a country with an universally recognized high standard of training and professional competence among its planning profession.

b) Thomas A. Reiner, upon analysis of 20 city plans presented during the period 1896-1947 by world famous town-planners, concludes regarding their logical consistency that in many cases the conclusions simply do not follow from stated assumptions; that often however neither goals nor assumptions are clearly stated; that often also neither the source nor the degree of certainty of the goals are identified and finally that there is sometimes even confusion as to whether the plan is intended as an actual plan of action or only as a logical demonstration of theoretical possibilities. As regards comprehensiveness he notes that sometimes the entire economic or social situation of the planned city is left out of consideration and in general that there is little recognition by the planners of the limitations of their approaches. In so far as some regional planners today pretend to accurately reflect the wishes of the population by mixing their political views with their professional thinking, it may be interesting to note that Reiner could not detect in the city plans he reviewed a consistency of approach according to the political bias of the authors. 11/

c) Francoise Choay analyses the basic ideas and ideals which have inspired town and country planners including Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Camillo Sitte, Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Franck Llyod Wright, Eugène Hénard, Iannis Xenakis, Patrick Geddes, Marcel Poéte, Lewis Mumford and Keven Lynch.

11/ REINER, Thomas A.
"The Place of the ideal community in urban planning". University of Pennsylvania Press 1963, 194 pages.

She brilliantly demonstrates to what extent in various parts of the world planners have taken their own subjective preferences and value-systems to be objective and universal. In her conclusions she warns therefore the citizen not to be mislead by the myth of "scientific" town and country planning. The idea itself of scientific town and country planning is in her opinion one of the myths of the industrial society. 12/

10. These short notes from some current evaluations of the contribution made by town and country planners confirm the urgency of raising the same question among regional planners: to what extent do regional planners take their subjective "models" for the future of society in certain regions to be objective and universal in the sense of reflecting the true interests of the population at large. It is true that there is a growing feeling that construction of "models" or of "pre-conceived schemes of social progress" is not feasible and that attention should focus on the identification and definition of values and goals to guide planning as an continuing and open-ended process. 13/ This recognition does not however in any way diminish the urgency of this basic question, which can be re-formulated as follows: how can regional planners ensure that their plans become more rational, more comprehensive and more truly a reflection of the people's aspirations, needs and demands ? 14/

11. At present, most regional planners are located in national civil services, mainly in national capitals, a few in capitals of regions or districts. These regional planners deal mainly with problems of disagregation of national targets and with problems of aggregation of local targets into a intra-regional plans within the framework of the directives contained in the national plan. These notes focus on the question of popular participation in relation to the formulation of intra-regional or mono-regional plans and policies.

12/ CHOAY, Françoise
"L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités, une anthologie"
Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1965, 448 pages

13/ ECLA: "Second United Nations Development Decade"
"Social change and social development policy in Latin America", 1969

14/ "How public opinion and professional expertise should be institutionalized is an open problem in some countries". Quoted from:
KUKLINSKI, Antoni R.
"Growth Poles and Growth Centres in Regional Policies and Planning, an Institutional Perspective"
Toulouse, 19-24 May 1969, 7 pages

12. The view has been expressed that the region is the level where the forces behind social problems originate, where specific solutions can best be found; and where efforts can best be pooled to implement the suggested solutions. 15/

13. This view does not exclude that there may be clear conflict of interests among political and economic forces operating in the region. For instance, conflicts among established forces within the region (e.g. between importers and business men; between crop farmers and livestock producers, 16/ and conflicts between the regional "establishment" and newly emerging forces. 17/

14. In relation to formulating a regional plan some of the following groups will have some interests to promote or to defend: 18/

a) the government, represented by its planning office and by local offices of vertical central government organizations (e.g. Ministries and agencies for public works; agriculture, mining, education)

b) local politicians, representing to some extent the interests of local power élites, big land owners, large industries, business and utilities, etc.

c) "Service institutions", including government sponsored banks and credit institutions

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15/ UTRIA, Rubén D.
Development as a Social Phenomenon and its Implications for Social Policy and Programmes at the Regional Level
Geneva, November 1968, 46 pages, in particular pages 31-35

16/ ECLA: "Popular participation and principles of community development in etc. op. cit. page 231

17/ It is interesting to note that some recent United Nations papers concerning regional planning and development planning suggest explicitly an analysis of social change in terms of possible social conflict between groups, collectivities and other categories among the population, for example:

a) ECLA:
"Social change and social development policy in Latin America", 1969, op. cit. cit. in particular pages 352-364 on conflicts between "collectivities"

b) MORSINK, Hubert J.A.
"Five Fields for a Sociology of Regional Development, Suggestions for a United Nations Programme"
UNRISD/68/C.46, 1968, 20 pages, in particular pages 10-13 dealing with "Social Transformation" and The role of power

18/ Please compare the following article:
Le COMPTE, Bernard "Eléments pour une re cherche sur l'Organization de l'Aide (interne and externe) au développement rural"
In: "Développement et Civilisations", June, 1969, pages 8-23

d) foreign technical assistance in the region

e) medium and smaller private enterprises, perhaps represented in a chamber of commerce

f) the large majority of the population: the adult male population, mainly peasants and labourers, perhaps represented in peasant and labour organizations; adult women, and youth

15. These groups differ in:

a) amount and type of political power, social prestige and economic resources which they can marshall to buttress their aspirations concerning the content of the regional plan

b) their interests in relation to the plan (big business e.g. profit and sometimes non-economic prestige behaviour; small landowners: e.g. defense of old rights; government: e.g. protecting tax values; protecting land for public use; promoting economic development.)

c) their internal organization and external relations (e.g. local government offices may show lack of coordination between different agencies; small farmers may not at all be organized)

d) to whom the group is responsible (foreign technical assistance experts to foreign government or international organizations; a big corporation to the parent company and to stockholders; small enterprises only to themselves.

As regards The degree of internal organization and as regards the impact of external relations of collectivities, the ECLA study "Social Change and Social Development Policy in Latin America" (1969-376) presents a most valuable analytical framework for classifying them. This study provides moreover several examples of the importance of such organizations and associations in obtaining a voice for categories of the population hitherto excluded from active participation in the process of decision making in public affairs.

16. The inclusion of these groups and interests in the process of plan formulation will have the following advantages for the regional planners:

a) it provides the planner and all participants with more information about the interests to be represented in the plan

b) it may assist the planner in formulating more realistically goals, objectives and targets.

c) it may assist the planner in allocating means more realistically

d) it will make people aware that the regional plan is not being imposed by outsiders formulating a plan "chez nous, sur nous et sans nous", and in that sense it may promote identification of the population with the plan.

e) it may help mobilize resources available within the region in terms of finance, land, labour and commitments

f) as regards commitments it may facilitate progress in mutual trust and understanding to a point where several parties participating in regional plan formulation may be willing to commit themselves contractually to perform their tasks as envisaged in the plan

g) even without such contractual commitments, it may facilitate early adoption of the plan at the regional level

h) it will encourage continuous evaluation of the plan and its implementation by all concerned in so far as this implies an element of continuing mutual control or general supervision by all those who participated in the formulation of the plan

17. In all the above listed respects it can be said that an effective inclusion of these groups makes the process perhaps more rational, certainly more comprehensive, and definitely more democratic. Some governments are becoming aware of this. For example, the Government of France, fully recognising that the success of regional development efforts depends on popular participation, drew up its plans for regions of Brittany and the Massif Central in close consultation with industry and with the agricultural, trade union and local organizations.[19/]

18. It seems useful when discussing popular participation in plan formulation to distinguish between "participation" in the sense of expressing an opinion without taking responsibility for its implementation; and participation in the sense of accepting a responsibility for its implementation in terms of finances, labour, or moral commitment. This distinction permits us to see more clearly the difference in maximum "participation" which each group can possibly be allowed to enjoy. On the other hand, even when "participation" means only an exchange of views and opinions such participation in plan formulation should be real and effective, as

19/ See: ECOSOC E/CN.5/SR.414 of 22 September 1966, page 11)

distinct from a ceremonial "pseudo-participation" on ineffective committees or boards whose decisions will be ignored, mislaid, or otherwise made ineffective 20/.

19. As regards the organizational structure for wider popular participation in the process of plan formulation at the regional level, several solutions can be tried within the region of their jurisdiction by existing regional planning offices and agencies:

a) an ad hoc advisory council, with some members appointed and others elected, directly or indirectly. The council's elected members could be chosen from among the general public or from special interest groups as listed above

b) public hearings on draft regional plans prepared by the regional planning office

c) a permanent advisory council

d) a "people's spokesman" assigned and paid by the regional planning office to take initiative in exploring the demands of all groups in the region in order to transmit them to the regional planners for their consideration. This official would be open to public suggestions as to the content of the regional plan. He would be in close contact with all groups mentioned before. An essential characteristic of his function would be that he would be free to take the initiative in making or transmitting suggestions to the regional planning officers. 21/

20. A study published by ECLA points out some of the obstacles against any of these solutions, such as: the sparseness of population and the topographical barriers limiting contacts between rural populations and urban centers; the feeling of superiority prevailing among urban residents towards the rural population; the direct intervention of hacienda management in public affairs while isolating the resident workers from such public affairs, and the suspicion among large segments of the rural population that any official activity is a subterfuge for some new exploitation. Especially important for any attempts towards more widely involving

20/ See: United Nations; European Social Development Programmes: Seminar on Rural Community Development, Madrid, Spain, 21-28 April 1968. Final Report, New York 1969, page 73, on different forms of "pseudo-participation".

21/ Compare suggestions recently made for a "Tribunis Plebis" in city government. See for instance: "Popular Participation and Representation" chapter V of a forthcoming publication by the United Nations Public Administration Division on "Administrative Aspects of Urbanization" (Second draft of Chapter, 1969, 28 pages).

the population in regional plan formulation at the regional level are the observed attempts by the rural population not to link with municipio or district level authorities in order to avoid abuse, and to link directly with the national level[22/].

21. The question arises therefore whether any of these four suggested institutional solutions can bring about wider popular participation in regional plan formulation, or whether perhaps a more gradual "preparation of the ground" would be called for.

This preparation might consist of:

a) accepting any of the four suggested forms just mentioned, but step by step for example as regards: the issues to be discussed or the stages of plan formulation at which wider consultations are held; as regards the groups being consulted; as regards the degree of consultation of these groups, etc.

b) finding other and more modest institutional solutions for wider participation of the groups listed before

22. Whatever solution will be adopted, the State through its civil servants will have to play a key role in two respects:

a) in providing the general framework and guidelines for the formulation of the content of regional plans [23/].

b) in promoting wider popular participation in the regional planning process through information, education and organization of all partners involved in the process of development [24/].

22/ ECLA: "Rural Settlement Patterns and Social Change in Latin America", in: Economic Bulletin for Latin America, Vol. X, (1965), pp. 1-22

23/ United Nations "Local participation in development planning", New York 1967, 64 pages

24/ See: ECLA: Social change and social development policy in Latin America", 1969, op. cit. page 376.