CEPAL

COMISION ECONOMICA PARA AMERICA LATINA

CENTRO LATINOAMERICANO DE DOCUMENTACION ECONOMICA Y SOCIAL
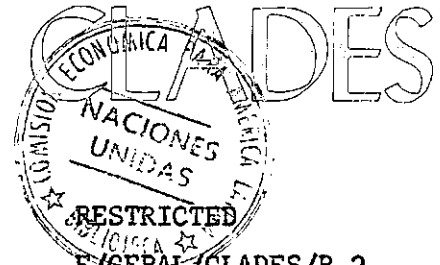
CLADES

INFOPLAN: BASIC INFORMATION

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1.   What is INFOPLAN?

        It is a project for establishing a System of Information for
Co-operation in Planning in Latin America and the Caribbean as a basic
component of the System of Co-ordination and Co-operation among Planning
Bodies pursuant to the mandates of the Second Conference of Ministers
and Heads of Planning held in Lima, Peru.

        The objectives of the project are:

        - In the medium-term.

                Implementation of an Information System which will permit
        co-operation in planning among the countries of Latin America and
        the Caribbean.

        - In the short-term:

        1.   Creation and feeding of data bases containing information
        for planning so as to provide the countries of Latin America and
        the Caribbean with information on the subject.

        2.   Formal participation in the pilot phase of the System of
        7 Latin American and 3 Caribbean countries through Agreements
        which will permit the future regular progress of the System.

        3.   Assistance in the preparation or implementation of the
        National Centres taking part in the System.

        The achievement of the above objectives covers varying periods
of time since during the implementation of the project changes may be
introduced in the bases of the information system, or the period assigned
to the pilot project (January 1979 to June 1980) may become longer than
anticipated.

        It is intended to use the Project:

        (a)   To measure the capabilities of the countries for absorbing
        the responsibilities involved in:

                - feeding the data base with information on planning
                   produced in the country; this in turn implies the
                   capacity to identify, collect, organize appropriately
                   and send this documentation to Santiago for processing
                   and entry in the computer;

                                                        / - the distribution

- the distribution of the documentation generated as a
  result of the activities of the project among national
  users of information for planning.

(b) Strengthening or, if they do not already exist, creation
of the national information infrastructures required for the
later decentralization of the information system, leaving CLADES
only as the general co-ordinator of the activities involved in a
regional network of information for planning.

2.   What will the Information System for Planning mean to the region?

        The information system may be the base on which the future
system of co-operation and exchange of experiences in planning will rest,
since if the existing documentation on planning produced in the region is
registered in an appropriate and timely form it will be easy to know what
aspects of the problem have been studied, where and by whom they were
studied, the results expected, etc. Through this knowledge the
additional contacts required for a direct exchange of experiences among
planning experts can then be established.

        One of the products of the system which may be expected is the
organization of networks of planning information in each country, which
would be in a position to provide:

        (a)   an information service suited to the needs of the country's
        users through a rational organization of planning libraries and
        documentation centres;

        (b)   information on documents in planning produced in the country,
        thus avoiding the duplication of experiences and efforts.

3.   Who are implementing the INFOPLAN Project?

        The problem of information in the planning process was already
noted by the specialists of the region some years ago.

        The CEPAL system, made up of the Economic Commission for Latin
America (CEPAL), the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social
Planning (ILPES) and the Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE),
identified this concern, and in different ways has been able to respond
to it. One way has been co-operation with the governments in setting up
the System of Information for Co-operation in Planning in Latin America
and the Caribbean.

                                        / The implementation

The implementation of an information system is a complex task since it requires a large quantity of different data to make it possible to design a system which on the one hand, will respond efficiently to the needs of the planners, and on the other, will define a series of successive activities which will direct the system towards the achievement of the goals proposed.

As examples, some basic data required before the system of information is implemented are described below:

- knowledge of the situation of planning in the region;

- knowledge of information needs in planning;

- identification of the planning institutions in the region,

- knowledge of the institutions in the region which generate information on planning;

- description of the documentation on planning produced in Latin America and the Caribbean (typology);

- appraisal of the information infrastructure existing in the countries;

- awareness of other information systems on planning or related topics at the regional and/or national level.

The executing agencies of the project - each in its own field - have sufficient knowledge of the situation of planning and information in the region to design a realistic action programme which it will be feasible to implement.

ILPES for one has a long history and the accumulated experience of 17 years of work in the field of planning in the region.

CLADES has carried out studies in order to formulate hypotheses on the problems of information in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC), a unit of CEPAL's Port of Spain Office, was set up for the purpose of supplying available information to the countries of the subregion.

4.   What are the future prospects of the project?

In order to answer this question a brief description must be given of the activities carried out in 1979 and those it is hoped to carry out in 1980.

Last year's activities will be grouped in sections for greater clarity.

(a)   Activities in designing the project.

Under this subheading may be mentioned the preparation by CLADES of a basic document containing the preliminary plan of the Information System for Planning.

At a later date, CLADES and ILPES organized two meetings (April and June) to which specialists from the region - both planners and documentalists - were invited to discuss the design and introduce in it any changes which might be suggested.

(b)   Activities directed at the dissemination of the project.

Both CLADES and ILPES are aware that the project on information for planning will really become a useful instrument for the planning process if there is a firm and decided desire on the part of the countries of the region to take part in it, supplying the system with the relevant information produced in the respective countries, to be entered in the data base.

Only in this way can the users of the system be assured of receiving high-quality information characterized by a great variety and an exhaustive stock of the documentation generated on this subject in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For purposes of dissemination, CLADES undertook two missions to the countries of the region and complemented them with the various journeys made by ILPES experts.

(c)   Implementation of the pilot project.

This activity is beginning with the creation in CLADES of the data base on planning using the documents collected by ILPES in its years of work in the region.

The best means of processing the information on planning for the use of the experts is thus being tested, from the computing point of view and from the standpoint of the preparation of the summaries and the classification of the subjects so that they can later be searched in the data base.

The first number of PLANINDEX is presented as a product of the pilot project; it contains the results of this research carried out by CLADES, with the direct support of ILPES.

In the activities anticipated for 1980 special emphasis has been placed on training, since CLADES is desirous of transmitting to the countries of the region the results of its research in the field of documentation. It therefore intends to organize in the course of the year two seminars of approximately three weeks each in order to provide the specialists with the methodology to be followed for processing information on planning.

The aim of CLADES in transmitting the working methodology is:

(a)   to standardize the technical procedures to facilitate the work, and to make the information transferrable or interchangeable among the different data bases which may be set up;

(b)   to tend towards the decentralization of the information system for planning by means of a rational division of work.

5.   Who finances the project?

The first phases of the project (1979 and up to June 1980) have been financed with a generous donation from the International Development Research Center (IDRC) of Canada which enabled CLADES and ILPES to prove the feasibility of the project and to test its usefulness in the development process. However, although it is true that it was possible to bring the project to maturity in terms of action, this is barely a start to what continued action could offer the specialists of the region. Examples of this would be:

With the data base

- half yearly publication of PLANINDEX;

- supply of documents or parts of documents depending on their size mentioned in PLANINDEX and supplementing it;

· retrospective searches for information in the computer according to express and specific requests from the users;

-- monthly distribution on request of the computer lists with the information entered in the data base during this period.

Through training activities

- strengthening or formation of planning information infrastructure in the countries of the region;

- application of the methodologies already tested by CLADES to the information processing;

- support for the control and registration of national information on planning produced in each country, etc.

These activities require financing which has been in part applied
to date by CEPAL, ILPES and IDRC. However, it would seem fair to
explain that the Information System for Planning still needs a further
4 or 5 years to mature and develop its full potentiality, and these
years must be backed by adequate financing which does not necessarily
imply high costs. This would be a basic financing which with the support
of the governments would ensure the continuity of activities so as prove
the efficiency of the Information System.