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ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING  
IN THE  
WIDER CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICA

Constraints to An Effective  
Regional Institutional  
Structure

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## INTRODUCTION

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- 1.1 There are a number of factors common to most States in the Caribbean which impede the formulation and evaluation of development plans. These include, for example the weakness of the statistical and research bases. Plan implementation often suffers as well due to the dearth of locally available expertise and to financial constraints.
- 1.2 It is against this background, that the last decade has seen several initiatives to establish regional integration schemes. The 1977 initiation of attempts to promote a Caribbean Programme for Environmental Planning is both timely and appropriate. The principal objective of the Programme, as stated in the Draft Action Plan, is "to assist the Governments in the Region to improve the quality of the information on which national development and environmental management policies are based, and thus to improve the ability of each government to identify various options, and to make rational choices among alternative patterns of development and appropriate allocation of resources. Further more the Action Plan will establish a framework for activities

requiring regional cooperation in order to strengthen the capability of the States and Territories of the Wider Caribbean Region to implement sound environmental practices and thus to achieve sustainable development of the region." (E/CEPAL/PPOY. 3/4.3)

While the realisation of both objectives is crucial to the success of the Project the sources of weakness of Caribbean Regional Institutions suggest that, in the context of the political framework, the achievement of the first aim is likely to be less problematic than the second.

## 2. Summary

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- 2.1 It is recognised that the countries of the Wider Caribbean and Latin America exhibit a number of similar features of environmental impact, as a result of the development process. There is then likely to be objectives common to most of the national policies for environmental planning.
- 2.2 It is argued that the strategies for achieving these objectives and the institutional arrangements devised for implementing the strategies are likely to be varied in character. The reason being offered for this variance in methodology and organisation is expressed in the theoretical relationship between the national planning 'environment' and planning 'style' and the resultant institutional framework.
- 2.3 This variance does not, however, negate the benefits that can be derived from regional cooperation; it in fact brings into focus the caution required in formulating the techniques and institutions for cooperative action. Care should be taken to allocate to regional organisation only those responsibilities for which they can exercise authority. In other words the decision-making status of national governments should not be undermined.

2.4 Finally, in view of the financial constraints being experienced by most, if not all nations, it is felt that steps should be taken to ensure that the available assistance by the existing international agencies is being fully utilized. This begs the question of the existing structural and organisational capacity of the Region's states to exploit such assistance.

2.5 The immediate need as seen, is then for intensified assistance to nations to establish or improve their internal planning agencies. Educational programmes, seminars and discussions should continue on a regular basis, with the continued support and service of a Regional Authority (ILPES) and its Sub-Regional Secretariat comprising the CEPAL Group.

### 3. Effectiveness in Planning

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31. In his discussion of 'the Nature of Planning and the Educational Response' at the Town and Country Planning School, (Sept. 1977) Professor Trevallion made the compelling argument that planning as a process represents no more than carefully institutionalized replicas of the everyday habit of human thinking processes (problem solving, diagnostic, iterative, cyclical, continuous).

3.2. He felt that we move with ease in a conceptual world of great complexity; interpreting our input of information and regulating the output of our behaviour or action according to an elaborate set of criteria. He states

"the sheer ingenuity of the human thought processes enables us to understand the presentation of another's thought processes without necessarily assuming that one's own appreciation is incorrect. This action facilitates comparing and bringing into conformity differing appreciations with the common ground delineated. But differing views must eventually affect the

the course of events which they attempt to define. Planning reflects and adds its own reflection to the process it is attempting to analyse and adds its contribution."

(pp 61)

This translation of the human mind model to other decision-making systems is adopted by well-known theorists. Karl Deutch's (1976) work on political decision-making is one example.

3.3 An obvious objection to the analogy between planning and individual thinking might be that of over-simplification of both processes. However, the analogy is here considered rather appropriate since it captures the existence of the influence of consciousness or value systems on the interpretation of the environment by the individual - the planner. In other words, a problem only exists because it is defined as such.

3.4 In planning therefore, we identify societal variables for manipulation and this brings us to the objectives we strive to achieve. Objectives can be said to provide a bridge between the goals of the planner and the way in which he or she perceives the world. Development objectives are

necessarily normative if one does not attempt to hide one's value judgements. It can be argued that the conceptualization of problems and their measurement could mould policy objectives, planning methodology and implementation.

- 3.5 Thus even when the Caribbean nations share the ultimate goal of effective environmental management, there can be a fundamental variance between the objectives of one society and another, reflected in the features upon which influence is focussed.
- 3.6 The literature in development problems makes repeated references to different economic, social, psychological, political and other factors, as being responsible in various degrees and combinations, for the success or failures attained. In discussions, of planning 'environments' and planning 'styles,' the argument goes that the socio-political context as well as the level of theoretical and technical sophistication influences the planning strategy. Yeh (1976) said that there was usually little 'goodness-of-fit' between the planning objectives and methodologies of countries with, for example different levels of statistical systems. For him, the reason is the differences in cultural values and political planning environments.

3.7 In summary, in any State the parameters mentioned above influence and are in turn influenced by one another to constitute the socio-economic and political fabric of the society - the 'environment' as it were, in which planning, including environmental planning must be pursued. Available theories and methodologies are imposed on the planning 'environment.' The resulting process of modifications and adaptations of these methodologies produces a planning 'style' which is in turn the basis of, and is reflected in the institutional arrangements of the State.

3.8 However some theorists point out that the political influence is undoubtedly, the dominant one in the planning context.

"It seems clear that despite the repeated claims of urban planners to be non-political policy and technical advisers, the city planner definitely is an actor in the urban political arena" (Rabinovitz 1969. p154)

Rabinovitz felt that the adjustments to plans are seen to occur as the process of planning proceeds, not because of changes in technical standards, but because of the pressures of politics. Indeed, she continues, it is possible that an organisation acts as an intermediate and not a determinative

factor; therefore it is also possible that effectiveness depends not on organisation but on the type of political system in a given community.

- 3.9 The question is what are the implications of the range of Caribbean Political Systems for effective management of the environment at the Regional level?

#### 4. Environmental Planning in the Wider Caribbean

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- 4.1 The States of the Wider Caribbean can be seen to exhibit a wide range of linguistic, cultural, climatic, demographic and physical characteristics, to which must be added the varying levels of economic development and financial resources.
- 4.2 If one subscribes to the relationship (outlined above) between effectiveness and organisation, then the Caribbean Governments are seen to be faced with the task of establishing a regional institutional machinery which would effectively harmonize the diversity of respective national interests, and integrate the internal organisations designed to safeguard these interests. This link between the institutional machinery and the success of regional integration schemes is very crucial, and it focuses attention on the planning processes adopted by individual states.
- 4.3 If on the other hand, one agrees that the achievement of any degree of regional integration would be influenced less by the economic and social objectives than by the political will of the States, then herein lies the dilemina facing environmental planning. And planners, seeking as we do to enhance the prospects for conservation and for sustainable development at the Regional level, would be further constrained by the weakness of the institutional structure.

- 4.4. Generally speaking, environmental planning can be seen as the process which integrates conservation and development, by attempting to rationally allocate the use of resources. The basis for this allocation is the assessment of the environment, the monitoring of the impact of development on the ecological life-support systems, and the evaluation of these systems. The Regional institution must be designed to assist governments effectively to perform these tasks.
- 4.5 Perhaps some reference can here be made to some of the views expressed in the Report of the First Meeting of Planning Officials. (1979) While there was a call for environmental management to be made on explicit fundamental policy of all CACE governments, and environmental parameters to be incorporated into all aspects of development planning (p 15) another author opined that planning as a tool for development was never really fully tried. (p 11) Indeed many papers, whether related to the development of agricultural communication, industry or transport bore a measure of consensus that planning in the region at the national level was not only of a backward nature and failing to come to grips with the extant possibilities, but had reached varying levels of legitimation where it was practised. (p 18)

4.6 Again the question arises about the significance of the national planning 'environment' and its influence on the emphasis and 'style' of planning the existing level of planning activity in the Region is not without significance if an appropriate institutional structure is aimed at.

4.7 There should be caution lest the Regional organisation appears to lack effectiveness because national systems are not yet geared to fully utilise the benefits of a sophisticated international organisation. Yet another author at the last Meeting was reported to have emphasized that the Caribbean is not yet ready for grand schemes, but rather for beneficial participation in the international environment of the 21st century (p 50).

## 5. The Essentiality of Regional Cooperation

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- 5.1 The call for the formulation and implementation of strategies aimed at the achievement of sustainable development, reaches far beyond the boundaries of the Caribbean and Latin America. The World Conservation Strategy (IVCN, UNEP, WWF, 1980) expresses the hope that it "will help governments, inter governmental bodies, private organisations and individuals to cooperate with each other and jointly deploy the limited means available to much greater effect."
- 5.2 The notion of integration schemes is not new in the Region though these have hitherto been most related to economic development. As Alister Mc Intyre, Secretary General of CARICOM put it, "economic integration represents a central element in development strategy designed to overcome by joint and concerted action among neighbouring countries, some of the basic constraints to development" (Mc Intyre: 30 in Hall and Blake) there is no doubt that countries of the Region appreciate that integration schemes are no less crucial to the environmental planning process. The linkages and externalities can be analogous, for example, to the protection of ecosystems on physical degradation of the environment.

5.3 Perhaps, however, the over-riding impetus to cooperation should be financial constraints. Can many of the countries of the Region afford to relinquish the benefits that can be derived through access to a regionally compiled data system, skills and expertise in resource management through regional or strengthened national training facilities, reduced risk through research-oriented management techniques?

## 6. The Caricom Framework

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- 6.1 If, for discreteness of focus, the English speaking Caribbean is separated out as a sub-regional unit, an empirical example of the likely constraints to cooperation and integration can be seen in an examination of the existing Caribbean Economic Community, (CARICOM) and the interaction of Member Countries as they participate in the solution of similar problems while striving to safeguard their respective interests.
- 6.2 Hall and Blake in their study of the Administrative Organisation and relations in Caricom identified four categories of factors which appear to have been crucial in determining the nature of the arrangements - legacies of previous attempts at regional integration, the structure of national administration, the objectives of the integration process and the disparity between Member States.
- 6.3 In their analysis of the principles underlying the institutional structure and the distribution of power between the regional and national institutions, the above categories of factors were again influential. It can be appreciated that

the operational principles of an institution would have a critical impact on the distribution of power between levels of administration.

- 6.4 In the case of Caricom, it was found that the institutional arrangements left all the effective power at the national level, as illustrated by an examination of the decision-making process and the coordinating and servicing functions assigned to the Secretariat. Indeed Member States retained the crucial aspects of decision-making - initiating and deciding; even after a decision has been taken, they retain exclusive control over its implementation.
- 6.5 Yet, a unique feature of the administration of Caricom is the absence of national co-ordinating agencies primarily responsible for regional affairs. Instead each area of activity at the regional level is dealt with by the Minister and Officials within whose portfolio it falls.
- 6.6 The reluctance of Caricom Member States to invest regional institutions with decision-making and executive powers has left some of the regional institutions without the capacity to undertake regional activity requiring these powers. Nor is there any mechanism for making decisions taken at regional level, binding at national level. It is to this combination of circumstances that earlier mention of the weakness of regional institutional structures refers.

## 7. Appropriate Institutional Arrangements

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- 7.1 The relationship between systems structure and systems performance is intricate and reciprocal. Whatever the branch of planning, the methodology to be used has to be institutionalized in one form or another in order to provide a basis for action or policy-making leading to action. With regards to supra-national organisations, appropriateness is keyed to the capacity of the national systems to utilize the level of technology, to assimilate new concepts and adopt new techniques.

In this specific case, the formulation of the Regional organisation is against the background of national characteristics (at least for most of the English speaking Caribbean) including the problem of inadequate information, the dearth of technical skills and in some cases of human resources and the lack of weakness of technology policies. It is felt therefore that institutional arrangements for the effective implementation of an environmental planning programme over a geographical Region as defined (the Wider Caribbean and Latin America) is fraught with operational difficulties. Furthermore, the degree of flexibility required for adapting

to changing circumstances is likely to be strained by the range of national dissimilarities involved.

Any attempts to establish a determinate organisation, would require decision-making and executive powers at the Regional level, for the conversion of policy into action. Such an imposition would be understandably objectionable to respective States. The focus should be on international cooperation with an intermediate Regional organisation monitoring and servicing the national activities.

There is no question about the invaluable work in the form of aid, technical assistance and research already being conducted in the Caribbean and Latin America by the well-known international bodies. It is being suggested that these functions should now be consolidated in preference to the establishment of new organisations and institutions.

It is recommended that the greatest need is for the States to be assisted with the establishment or improvement of their national planning systems, with a view to increasing their structural capacity for improved environmental management. The existing educational programmes should be intensified, so that the awareness of all peoples in the Region is expanded into an environmental ethic.

The Latin American Institute for Social and Economic Planning (ILPES) should be the 'umbrella' organisation supported by the secretariat of CEPAL organisations. National organisations would interact amongst themselves at one level. National organisations would also interact with ILPES through CEPAL.

ILPES is presently involved in a programme to support national co-operation. Their programme also includes the creation of the ground work of information of work done by planning bodies in the development of planning methods appropriate to the Region.

The joint ECLA/UNEP Project for Environmental Management proposes work in environmental assessment, including the identification of activities and events which have an impact on the environment, and the identification of gaps in knowledge. It is later proposed to identify the existing human and institutional resources within the region to deal with environmental problems.

It is felt the existing agencies have on-going programmes geared to establish an effective service and co-ordinating function to national planning activities.

There should be early consolidation so that national attempts at rationalizing their internal systems would be supported by access to a Regional data system, fora for discussion of problems and progress, opportunity for devising techniques of cooperation to their mutual benefit and knowledge of the available expertise and training facilities and experiments in devising appropriate technology.

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