

# Social Research and Development Policy Implementation

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## Summary

The problems of implementation and/or non-implementation of plans and developmental policies are discussed on the basis of the Yugoslavian experience. Implementation is interpreted with respect to the macro-development of two contradictory processes, one referring to the autonomy of actors, and the other insisting on the integration of actors in space and time. Research might prove helpful in this respect. Two kinds of mechanisms have particularly adverse effects: on the one hand, the indifferentiated treatment of the means and goals of a policy or a plan for unities that are to be situated on different levels of development and on different time scales; on the other hand, the "hypertrophy of norms" or the "hyper-institutionalisation" that generate an excessive control. Both these mechanisms limit the efficiency of developmental policies and plans.

## Résumé

Le problème de la mise en œuvre ou de la non-mise en œuvre des politiques et des plans est discuté sur la base de l'expérience yougoslave et à partir des apports de la sociologie et de la science politique. La mise en œuvre est interprétée dans une perspective de macro-développement de deux processus contradictoires: l'un fait appel à l'autonomie de l'acteur et l'autre insiste sur l'intégration des acteurs dans l'espace et dans le temps. La recherche peut fournir ici un apport certain. Deux types de mécanismes ont des effets particulièrement pervers: d'une part, le traitement indifférencié des buts et des moyens d'une politique ou d'un plan pour des unités qui se situent à divers niveaux de développement et dans des échelles temporelles différentes, et d'autre part "l'hypertrophie des normes", ou "l'hyper-institutionalisation" qui mènent à un contrôle excessif. L'un et l'autre limitent l'efficacité des politiques publiques et des plans.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is largely based upon the knowledge acquired through observation of the developmental processes within the Yugoslav society.

Yugoslavia does not stand out because of its level of development; in this respect it can be situated somewhere in the middle between the developed and less developed countries. However, it does stand out because of its dynamic development in the last three decades. Substantial changes occurred in a relatively short time, changes that took a century's time or more in some economically developed societies.

The Yugoslav situation is distinguished by a well "profiled" and specifically defined long-term developmental orientation which does not follow any known pattern. At the same time it is known that the development of such an orientation is confronted with a considerable gap between the normative programmatic ideas and the actual situation. The latter, because of its high heterogeneity, sets severe problems for every effort in directing development change. Day by day it is proved that specific solutions may be optimal for some (e.g. developed areas) yet unsuitable for others (e.g. less developed areas). An inconsistency exists between the dynamic introduction of new ideas in the socio-political area, which require extensive testing, on the one hand, and the lagging behind of social sciences in studying this dynamism, on the other hand.

Although science, in principle, is important as a foundation for decision-making and planning, its role is still substantially curtailed. What should be the object of sociological research is often treated within the limits of common sense reflection and decision-making. However, social science has evaluated and taken advantage of the wealth of practical experiences: the great aspirations towards a planned and radical social transformation require far more accurate knowledge of the laws and frequency rate of developmental change, in their global framework, as well as on a local and regional level.

The lagging behind of social research is reflected in the problems of the non-implementation of some development policies. It can be expected that the more social research lags behind, the greater the risks will be: there will be more failures in experimenting, more oscillations, more uncertainty and greater instability in the search for more suitable solutions (e.g. Mlinar, 1980).

Although a kind of "sociological laboratory" is available, there has been little systematic research; the small amount of work undertaken could be mentioned as "policy studies". Thus, this study is still of a rather exploratory nature; it is based on a limited observation of practice and on the knowledge of concrete cases. General considerations about the conditions for the implementation of development policies and plans will be illustrated by some specific examples, concerning local and regional development as well as urban planning.

We are convinced that a society can contribute in many ways to the development of other societies, and to its own development by openly offering insight into both the positive and the negative experiences when implementing its developmental goals. If a bright image of our achievements was presented it would be misleading and it would prevent other contributions to our development problems.

## 2. The theoretical background

### 2.1. *Developmental laws and regulation mechanisms*

Bardach (1977,5) concluded "that the character and degree of many implementation problems are inherently unpredictable". Although numerous unforeseen events are discovered in case studies, as stated by Bardach, it may still be worth persisting towards predictability. Such an orientation is not often taken into account in numerous "policy studies" which, therefore remain very descriptive, although they classify characteristic ways of behaviour.

If development is defined as the dialectics of the unity of two opposite processes (i.e. emancipation of acting subjects and their increasing interaction), this clarifies why individual policies are (not) carried out without explaining all random influences. The main developmental preoccupation in a Yugoslavian context, related to the system of self-management can be specified as:

(a) the efforts to emancipate the working class by increasing the autonomy of "organizations of associated labour", and territorial units (communes, local communities), etc.;

(b) the efforts to increase the degree, the permanence and the spatial frame of their interrelations and their socialization.

Both preoccupations are founded, as a most general developmental policy, on the recognition of objective long-term laws of development. It can be expected that developmental policy which deviates from the indicated directions and frame of acting, is confronted with problems (at least) in the stage of implementation. These problems arise from the inconsistency of goals and means of a certain policy, on the one hand, and of the actual situation (the level of development) on the other hand. In general, developmental programs will not be implemented because:

(a) certain actors, contents and areas are treated too much or too little as independent units; and/or

(b) the desirable changes are not put into a realistic framework remaining unrelated with other subjects, other sectors and other environments.

In general, more or less suitable responses to developmental processes can be found with respect to:

– the institutional structure of decision-making, e.g. on which level of territorial political organizations decisions are taken;

– how clearly the goals of individual developmental policies are specified and coordinated;

– to what extent the mechanisms (means, measures) which are supposed to direct implementation of developmental policies are differentiated and coherent; and

– how all three responses (institutional structure, goals and measures) are related to the social environment or processes they are supposed to affect.

The supervision of planning development in Yugoslavian practice abounds with examples that illustrate the problems of implementation of individual developmental programs, which are the result of too crude, or too complex regulation mechanisms. Either of them can lead to different or even entirely opposite consequences for the individual development programs. Especially in the field of urban planning, housing and agrarian policy there have been a lot of these problems.

The essential unresolved problem in Yugoslavia is the contradiction between the demand for autonomy and interaction. In this respect, we may indicate here the somewhat simplified, characteristic modes of regulation: self-management, the market, the state and, inertia; of course, all of these intermingle.

It is noteworthy that inertia's influence as an automatic repercussion of past situations into the present and future, is generally counteracted. In spite of this, individual policies may fail owing to the inertia they are confronted with.

Instead of coercive State interventions a tendency towards increasing autonomy is gaining favour in the process of decentralization. However, autonomy can also mean withdrawal and closing up, at least temporarily.

Instead of a lack of interaction and anarchy on the market, forms of lasting cooperation assert themselves (self-managing, integration), through "self-management agreements" and "social compacts". Yet, there are still "white spots" when the policies and plans are not implemented.

## 2.2. *Social research and social mobilization: relativism and absolutism*

If the role of social research in the implementation of development policies is examined, the contradictory tendencies asserted by science and politics have to be acknowledged. Whereas the research worker prefers "*De omnibus dubitandum*" (also Marx's favourite principle), in political action the *credibility* and *feasibility* of the policy *in casu* is stressed, being one of the conditions for wider mobilization of the people involved.

On the one hand, this means that, even when treated dialectically, researchers are aware that their knowledge of the determinism of developmental change is imperfect. The implications of this relativism are twofold:

(a) it enables a realistic conception of developmental policies and of the mechanisms of controlling and promoting their implementation;

(b) this may lead to the weakening of motivation and of mobilisation of people and, in general, to a lower utilization of the relevant developmental potentialities: the feasibility of the program will be in danger.

On the other hand, political action in favour of policy implementation generally tends towards simplification in order to achieve a greater mobilizing effect by focusing on a narrower area. This is a tendency inherent in an absolutist approach to a concrete program (plan, goal) and is well known in periodic campaigns for a specific purpose. As the diver-

sity of social phenomena cannot be controlled, this approach limits itself to particular segments and expresses itself through simplified but efficient slogans.

### 3. Nominal and actual planning

#### 3.1. *Planning without influence and influence without planning*

The narrower the sociological knowledge of the problems directing developmental processes, the sooner one can expect that planning and its parallel activities will only nominally represent a factor of developmental change. There is an important difference between planning as understood by institutions and organizations and planning in its intrinsic meaning. The planning apparatus may spread without having a correspondingly real influence on development.

To what extent subjective options nominally responsible for planning, do influence developmental trends will largely depend upon the development and involvement of the social sciences, in a theoretical as well as in a methodological sense.

Wherever knowledge of the laws of development and an estimation of the subjective factor is lacking, trends towards *subjectivism* can be expected. It is realistic, to expect that planning will be left to the intuition, inspiration and arbitrary decisions of individuals in as much as the developmental laws are superficially explained.

In such cases, the goals of the three fields or aspects of planning as discerned in practice, (i.e. economic, social and urban planning) are not defined well enough in their globality. Although it is generally admitted that they ought to be treated as a whole, practice is mostly quite different (Lang, 1975). Separate goals are placed one next to the other without examining and defining the relation between them. It remains unclear how the realization of one may enable or prevent the realization of another, whether it is a complementary relation or an alternative and a competitive one<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, instead of having certain priorities and contradictions explicitly defined, different interests remain unreconciled in planning documents, and they are often mechanically added to one another. In such cases, whether the result from the ignorance of the complex networks of interdependency or of the imperfectness in the process of reconciliation of different interests, the final product is "just would-be planning" of development<sup>2</sup>. Instead of strictly defined priorities it is only an accidental, wearisome prolongation of existing trends.

<sup>1</sup> In a town plan we traced no less than 17 demands for "ensuring sufficient space for..." different purposes, nothing being said about how the realization of one demand conditions that of the others.

<sup>2</sup> See the characteristic inconsistency between a traffic policy that in principle favours public transport, on the one hand, and the availability of credits for buying personal cars, on the other hand. This inconsistency between a "principal direction" and empirical trends (later showing the dynamic increase of the number of cars) has far-reaching consequences for the spatial organization of towns too. Urban planners seem to hesitate whether to take into

### 3.2. *Definition of criteria, control and implementation*

Practical planning, especially of the urban environment, provides us with a multitude of poorly defined criteria for decision-making. Decisions are usually not based on past ones, nor do they extend them on the basis of a main developmental orientation; on the contrary, each individual decision actually affirms the momentarily prevailing particular interests, whether its legitimacy is stated at all in the general developmental programs or not.

If the criteria for individual "developmental decisions" are defined and presented vaguely, the deviations from the basic direction of development can be greater<sup>3</sup>. Self-management, decision-making and democratic control will be limited, which means that arbitrariness and even corruption might appear.

The interests of the bureaucratic and technocratic apparatus affirm themselves more quickly when there are no well-defined criteria for decision-making. However, it might also be noted that the professional people involved in planning, in administration and in political institutions, often lack the sociological knowledge of concrete situations which could be linked to the general criteria of planning. In any case, many decisions are presented by themselves and, as such, evade public participation: to present a proposal or decision (e.g. a site plan for a neighbourhood unit) without meaningful explanation cannot act as a challenge for public discussion in which citizens would be able to react.

## 4. (Un)differentiated mechanisms and their impact on implementation

Regulation mechanisms can either take over or lag behind the actual situation. Beyond a certain level of discrepancy the viability of the implementation of development policies is reduced. The Yugoslavian context has numerous experiences and examples of both kinds.

### 4.1. *Excessive complexity slows down implementation*

The long-term direction and high aspirations for a radical social transformation have led to a very prominent role of the normative-political superstructure (in the marxist sense of the word). The tendency to speed up development in a certain direction and, at the same time, to control developmental processes finds its expression in very complex regulation mechanisms. From this follows a whole range of unexpected and even opposite effects. Instead of a development in the expected direction we find slowing down, even total deviation from the expected

account the principally determined priority (public transport) or the actual trends. Numerous conflicts and problems are the consequence of traffic density and the lack of parking places even in newly built housing estates.

<sup>3</sup> In a concrete research project in one of the towns in Slovenia we found that in the absence of well-defined criteria and guide-lines for spatial (urban) organization, the particular individual interests of the most influential groups could easily assert themselves, causing deviations from the common interests and harming them.

development or rejection of the control mechanism. An example of this is illegal building; individual builders are no longer prepared to go through the extremely complex administrative procedures and numerous restrictions, but prefer to act beyond legally sanctioned behaviour. Such actions do, of course, distort the implementation of public policy in certain areas. The simplified notion that we can ensure implementation of a certain policy by intensifying and diversifying control measures has already brought about negative consequences, most obvious in urban planning. It is apparent that we are not dealing with a linear but with a curvilinear relationship: escalating control may initially increase the probability that the policy or plan will be implemented, but later its contribution dwindles and it reverses into a negative effect.

The discussion on “*hyper-institutionalism*” and “hypertrophy of norms” draws our attention to the exaggerated complexity of regulation mechanisms. Their functioning can deteriorate into the complete negation of the conception of development as the unity of the opposite processes of emancipation and association.

Even though supervision may orientate implementation activities within concrete policies, such examples concurrently create a certain practice that places the participants into a dependent role. This is another vicious circle with its own logic: the accepted increased control requires more control. Parallel to this is the inactiveness of the directly involved subjects, waiting for stimuli, instructions or directives from above. If their independence is weakened so will the probability that the generally defined policy will be sensibly translated into specific concrete conditions. The excessive complexity is transformed into its opposite, (i.e. into uniform and mechanical application of global regulation devices).

In extreme situations complex regulations may turn people away from the system; in other cases they may absorb enormous quantities of energy.

Escalating the complexity of the regulation mechanisms can also reduce their flexibility and the necessary changes in the process of implementing a certain policy: In the end these mechanisms invalidate the viability of implementation policy. Incorporating a wider circle of subjects into the decision-making process brings about greater diversity. This may delay the solving of problems, if it is not accompanied by the opposite process of reducing the complexity by routine, standardization and socialization.

All these questions have been treated rather scarcely, and the lack of social and political research has led to the retardation of policy implementation to solve concrete problems.

#### 4.2. *Crude measures in a differentiated reality*

The implementation of numerous development policies is threatened or made impossible by too crude and undifferentiated regulation mechanisms. This means that the regulation mechanisms do not allow for suf-

ficiently specific interventions on relevant subjects in very specific contents, in a defined space and time. Characteristic problems will now be discussed.

#### 4.2.1. Discrimination between means and goals

Undifferentiated treatment of means and goals in the implementation of a development policy narrows the choice of potentially available resources for their implementation. When means happen to be goals by themselves then this reduces the search for other ways, alternative solutions for the realization of the policy *in casu*. The range of applicable means is narrowed as is the substitute means when changes appear.

This makes it ever so more difficult to apply the principle that the decision-making procedure should start with a variety of alternative options. Whether planning and decision-making on the level of global society, or on the level of a town, it is difficult to find such alternative approaches that may widen the range of potentially applicable means and policy measures.

#### 4.2.2. Identical measures on different stages of development

It could be stated that so far neither research nor practice has adequately considered the qualitative and quantitative differences in the process of development.

A uniform model of measures (of an organization, of planning, of means) which is taken as universally applicable in local and regional units on very different levels of development, will certainly not lead to equalization and to identical results.

Without an accurate analysis it is not possible to establish to what extent the actual consequences are the result of an intervention of a subjective factor (policy), or of other circumstances, or the intermingling of both. The theoretical understanding of developmental laws suggests that reactions to any policy (plan, program) depend upon the level of development: That is why the intensity of the "impulses" which are intended to change a specific situation, in communities on a varying level of development must be different; for example, the lower the level of development, the greater the intensity of stimulation will be necessary to cause a certain change.

#### 4.2.3. Discrimination in the use of stimuli and sanctions

Following the process of the decline of State coercive interference and the assertion of self-management decision-making and planning in Yugoslavia, it is now necessary to discriminate between and consider both negative sanctions and positive stimuli. In all fields of planning (economic, social, spatial) the presence of the classic state instruments is still important, based largely on coercive measures. Therefore, as noted elsewhere (Mlinar, 1978) there is still no diversified use of different stimuli, models, patterns, type solutions. Notably, it is in the solving of the



housing problem and the implementation of a housing policy that one would expect to promote this diversification.

#### 4.3. *Illustrative example: (un)differentiated aid to less developed areas*

As an example of an, initially, insufficiently differentiated treatment of an actual situation one may quote the aid given to the less developed communes. The so-called "mono-type" treatment of communes, regardless of their level of development, used to dominate (Pusic, 1971). As a consequence of the aggravated problems of the uneven development within Yugoslavia some wider areas (Republics and the autonomous Province of Kosovo) were declared "*less developed areas*".

These areas then became the object of special attention: a policy was designed to help them through a range of specific measures. Yet, even this division was evaluated as being too crude and neglecting the substantial differences *within* the "less developed areas" (Basota, 1975).

Within the Republics a differentiated treatment of developed and *less developed communes* was subsequently introduced. Characteristic development indicators were used to classify certain communes as less developed within a Republic, and as such, they became entitled to certain forms of aid.

Still, a satisfactory differentiated treatment was not attained. Subsequently, another transitional or mixed category was introduced: "*communes with less developed local communities*". These communes would normally not be entitled to aid because of *their average* scores in development indicators. As they contain especially problematic areas they were given a special position.

During the discussion on planning yet another specific category of communes emerged: *the frontier communes*. It was agreed that these communes should not be allowed to fall behind in development at any cost. In the interest of the nation they were attributed a special position in the policy of even development.

Recently the aid policy is changing in the sense that the aid is no longer exclusively based upon territorial units.

Rather, it becomes a matter of *direct contacts* and cooperation between *working organizations*. The organizations of developed areas can directly invest half of a legally defined contribution in any of the working organizations of the less developed areas. This investment is by a liberal agreement. The intention is that both sides should show more concern to attain the highest possible developmental effects with the funds provided by the aid.

This is an illustration of the evolutionary tendency from crude categories and uniform "mono-type" treatment of communes towards a differentiated policy (structures, measures) for speeding up development. As a consequence, the influence of the "subjective factor" by decision-makers on the implementation of development policies can become more productive.

## 5. Time-space dimensions in the implementation of plans

The ability to control developmental processes and to implement development goals can also be examined through the time and space dimension which is taken into account in planning. In this sense the transition tendencies can be indicated as:

- from statically to dynamically designed regulation mechanisms of development;
- from short to long-term influences on development;
- from smaller to larger spatial units; and
- from a crude to a more refined differentiation of time and space organization and of the relevant regulation mechanisms.

These general trends can help to explain important issues brought about by the non-implementation of plans and policies. Some of them will now be briefly examined.

In theory, it is generally accepted that planning is a continuous process, and that its aim is not to fix a final goal permanently. However, the practice of urban planning has brought forward a multitude of problems due to deviations from this principle. The problem is not that a plan is not going to be implemented: it is rather the implementation of a plan that leads to problems. Such problems become evident when the variable needs of the inhabitants or the changed structure of population and its size make it impossible to change the built environment. It is then that conflict situations break out, because either the new needs are not satisfied or because partial “solutions” do not observe the initial plan<sup>4</sup>. Tendencies to complement or change the original structure have neither legitimacy nor are they physically viable. This permits an understanding of why individual changes so often take the form of illegal (non-authorized) building; such wide-spread phenomena serve as an important indicator of the failure to control the organization of space.

In planning, as in decision-making on a local level, generally we can trace the tendency that short-term preoccupations and interests prevail even though one ought to differentiate between short-term, middle-term and long-term planning.

Urban planning is foremost in determining the built environment and has much more constant and rigid consequences than the characteristics of the social environment. Furthermore, there are prevailing ideas that materialize in the spatial structure for the future. Until now, urban planning has usually revealed the short-term ideas it was inspired by, and it is because of this fact that the implementation of plans frequently becomes problematic. A characteristic phenomenon is the underestimation of needs for the future expansion of a city. In a generalized form one could indicate “the planned growth” of a town as *density waves* of built-up

<sup>4</sup> Very symptomatic in this sense are the three phases in the “life-cycles” of one of the Ljubljana low density neighborhoods. While the newest part is still being built, another part (finished 6-7 years ago) has stagnated; the third part (approx. 15 years old) increasingly shows building activities, deviating from the original site plan.

areas from the centre towards the suburbs. This is not just a simple matter of the density decreasing from the highest (the centre) to the lowest (the periphery): There are *oscillations within every stage*, all of them having a “top” and a “lowest” score. This means that in every stage there has been a critical evaluation about the temporarily greater needs; at the same time the subsequent growth of the town was underestimated. This is another indication of the narrow time perspective in prediction and planning of future changes.

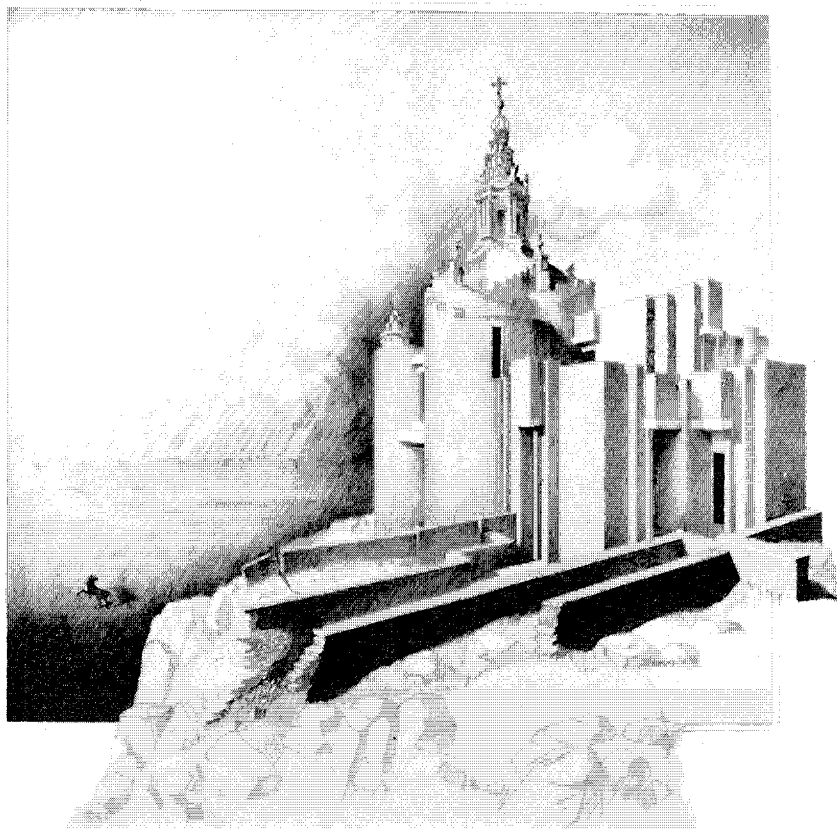
The short-term prospect of the time dimension can be the problems related to either the inner spatial organization of a town or to its outward growth. From the first point of view the result is an *excessive extension of the monocentric model* of growth. The spatial organization of the growing city area with smaller nuclei around the initial city centre is usually not conceived and differentiated in time. These problems were the result of ill-defined notions about the developmental trend of the inner differentiation of the city. In a similar way one can explain some of the shortcomings of planning as a result of ignoring the growing interdependence within a wider area.

In planning, the dominant notion about local communities seems to be that they are determined, above all, by the *physical limits of compact settlement*. The result is a tendency to predict the further growth of the settlement (the population) on the basis of the past growth within the same limits. Too little thought is given to the wider environment and its influence which, especially in the vicinity of big cities, becomes decisive.

The tendency to treat settlements within their physically determined limits, especially when ignoring the sociological aspects of interdependence in a wider context, leads to faulty predictions and to the non-implementation of plans.

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*Le désert des tartares.* Repères: P. Portoghesi & V. Gigliotti: Casa Bevilacqua, Gaeta (1966-71); F. Borromini: Chiesa S.Ivo della Sapienza (détail de la lanterne, 1642-1662).

*Il deserto dei tartari.* Sources: P. Portoghesi & V. Gigliotti: Casa Bevilacqua, Gaeta (1966-71); F. Borromini: Chiesa S. Ivo della Sapienza (detail of the lantern, 1642-1662).