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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7619-6079>, Smith, Roger and
Haywood, Ian (1979) Local Plan Implementation: some Case-
Study Implications for Research, Training and Management.
In: Symposium on Improving Implementation in Urban
Management, July 2nd - 6th, 1979, Milton Keynes, UK.
(Unpublished)**

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/9219>

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Co-operative Action Programme
Joint Activity on Urban Management
Local Plan Implementation: some Case-Study Implications for Research, Training and Management
By John Taylor, Martin Wynn, Roger Smith, and Ian Haywood
Symposium on Improving Implementation in Urban Management Milton Keynes, 2nd - 6th July, 1979
47.666

Paper 1

Local Plan Implementation: some Case-Study Implications for Research, Training and Management

John Taylor, Martin Wynn, Roger Smith and Ian Haywood

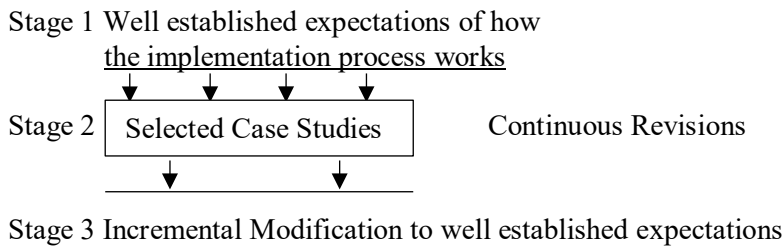
I. Introduction

1. Following the OECD Athens Symposium on Plan Implementation (Oct. 1977), the Urban Management Unit gave pump-priming finance to Dr. John Taylor to head a small team of full and part-time researchers¹ (based in the Department of Town and Country Planning, Trent Polytechnic) who were to examine the plan implementation process in two tightly defined case study areas in England. There were two broad objectives underlying this research commitment by OECD:
 - a. "to provide a means of exchanging, at an international level, urban management expertise
 - b. to provide a training method in urban management for a wide range of interdisciplinary interests"²
2. Dr. Taylor was already experienced in preparing case studies of development control decision-making within the British context.³ Other members of the team also had experience in different forms of research on plan implementation involving a case study approach.⁴ Even so the proposed work for OECD was to a large degree experimental, and speculative. The basic aim was to indicate what the scope and limitations were of the case study approach and whether OECD could profitably further develop this work as a means of fulfilling the wider objectives of exchanging international expertise and promoting inter-disciplinary cooperation. The aim of this paper is to report back on what has been discovered and to indicate future directions.

II. 'Top-down' and 'Bottom-up' Case Studies

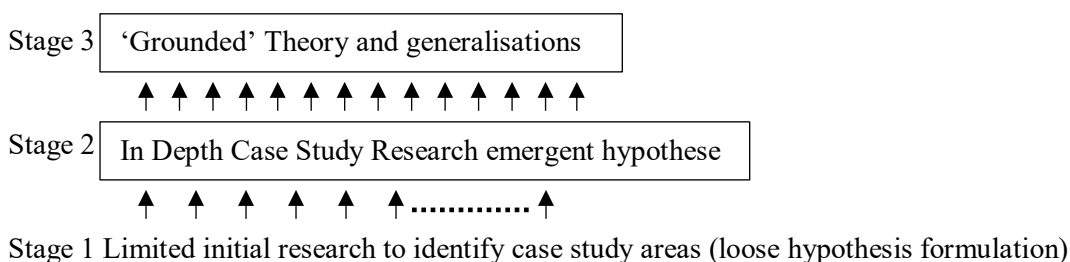
3. Case study has long been accepted as a valid research and teaching method in disciplines such as law, anthropology, business studies, social and economic history, and more recently, education. In urban planning, case study research has also been undertaken at the metropolitan, city and town scale.⁵ At the local (sub-municipal) level, case studies have been used for teaching purposes but only recently have attempts been made to develop case study research techniques.⁶ This has meant that relatively little in-depth research has been done into the operation and implementation of local level planning and development e.g. housing estates, industrial areas and commercial centres.
4. In terms of the theoretical justification of case study research two major approaches can be identified. The first of these might be termed the 'top-down' method (Figure 1). This is the more traditional research approach and has also given rise to the standard case study teaching unit as a more detailed example of processes well documented at a more general level. The researcher starts off with a hypothesis which he wishes to test. He then selects his case studies to discover whether his hypothesis is correct. The original hypothesis is then modified according to the findings of the case study. Put another way the researcher begins with certain ideas about how he expects the plan implementation process to work and uses the case studies to verify, modify, or reject these ideas. The revised hypothesis can then be tested by other case studies.

Figure 1 The ‘Top-down’ Approach to Case Study



5. The second and more pioneering approach to case study research might be termed the ‘bottom-up’ method (see Figure 2). Here the researcher starts with the minimum of expectations of how the implementation process might be expected to work. He plunges directly into the case studies, and then proceeds to construct a series of generalisations based upon his case study findings.

Figure 2 The ‘Bottom-up’ Approach to Case Studies



6. The logic of the ‘bottom-up’ approach is, of course, that hopefully a stage is reached when certain ‘common ground’ between a number of case studies enables generalizations to be made. Gradually then, as this body of knowledge grows, further case studies will increasingly fit the ‘top-down’ model. We shall return to this theme later.

III. The Trent Case Studies

7. We have already indicated that the initial Trent research proposal was essentially open-ended and exploratory. Two pilot studies were selected in Britain: one was concerned with the rehabilitation of a small group of old working class houses (The Buildings) in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. The other was based on the redevelopment of a small town centre site in Stoney Stratford, Buckinghamshire, by the Milton Keynes New Town Development Corporation. (See Figures 3 and 4). They were chosen as examples of current planning practice in Great Britain, and suggestive of the shift of emphasis in British planning towards small scale community-based schemes.
8. In mid-1978 a further case study was undertaken on the San Cosme Residential Estate built outside Barcelona, (Figure 5) by the State-run Syndical Housing Authority. This study was seen as providing an opportunity for testing the research technique outside the U.K., and represented the first step towards giving the series an inter-nation dimension that could contribute towards an exchange of expertise and experience at international level. (Four further case studies were subsequently undertaken in Barcelona by M.G. Wynn⁷).
9. This was followed up in early 1979 by the addition of fourth case study to the series, in Santander Spain⁸ (Figure 6). Again this was but one of several case studies in a wider-on-going research programme at the School of Civil Engineering, Santander University. It was chosen because the research team were particularly concerned to research plan implementation in industrial areas; at the same time, it is hoped it will subsequently provide scope for international comparisons and exchange.

IV. Research Technique

10. In all four case studies the research technique centred on the collection and compilation of data bases covering decisions and procedures involved in plan implementation.
11. It should of course, be recognized that by plan implementation we do not just mean the bricks and mortar construction phase. At the local level plan preparation and adoption are usually aspects of implementation in relation to wider ranging plans, programmes or policies. We are therefore concerned with economic and political-administrative decisions and processes that precede, accompany and follow actual development on the ground, from the inception of the project to the completion of the plan, programme or policy.

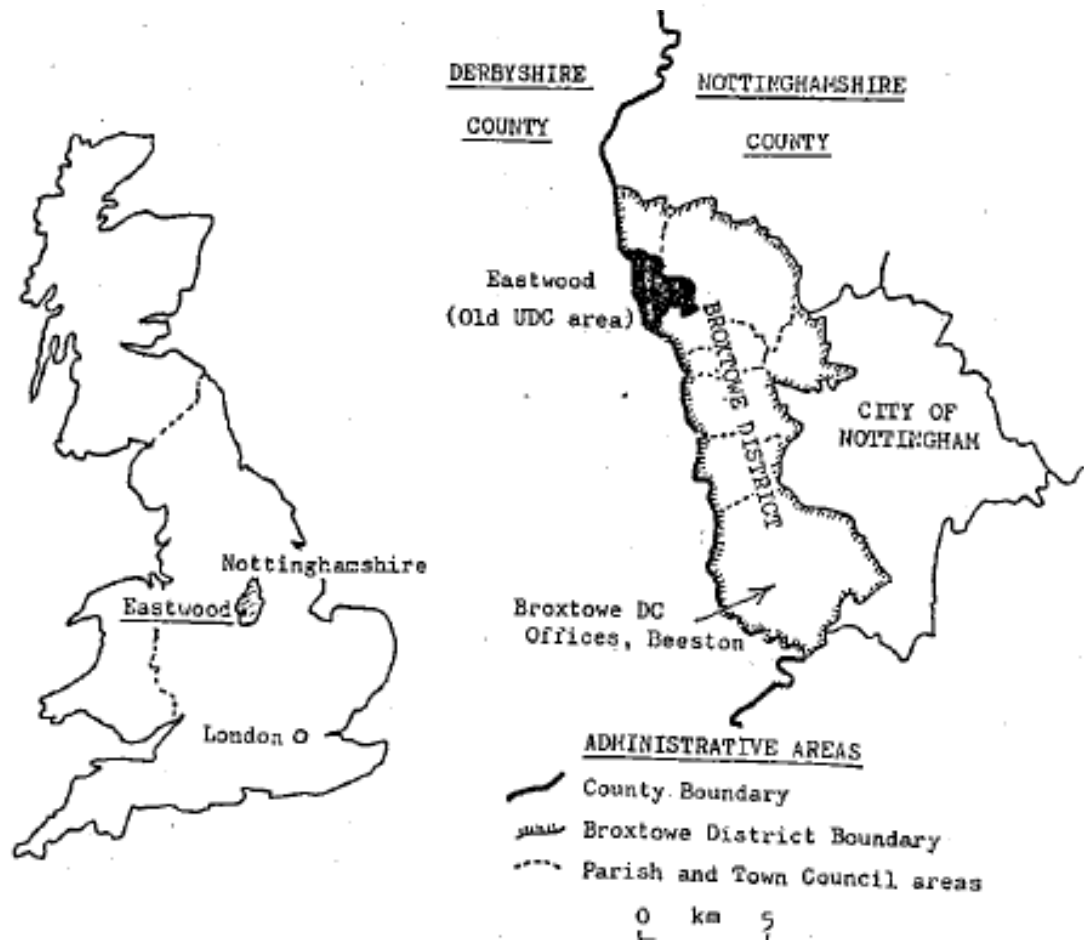
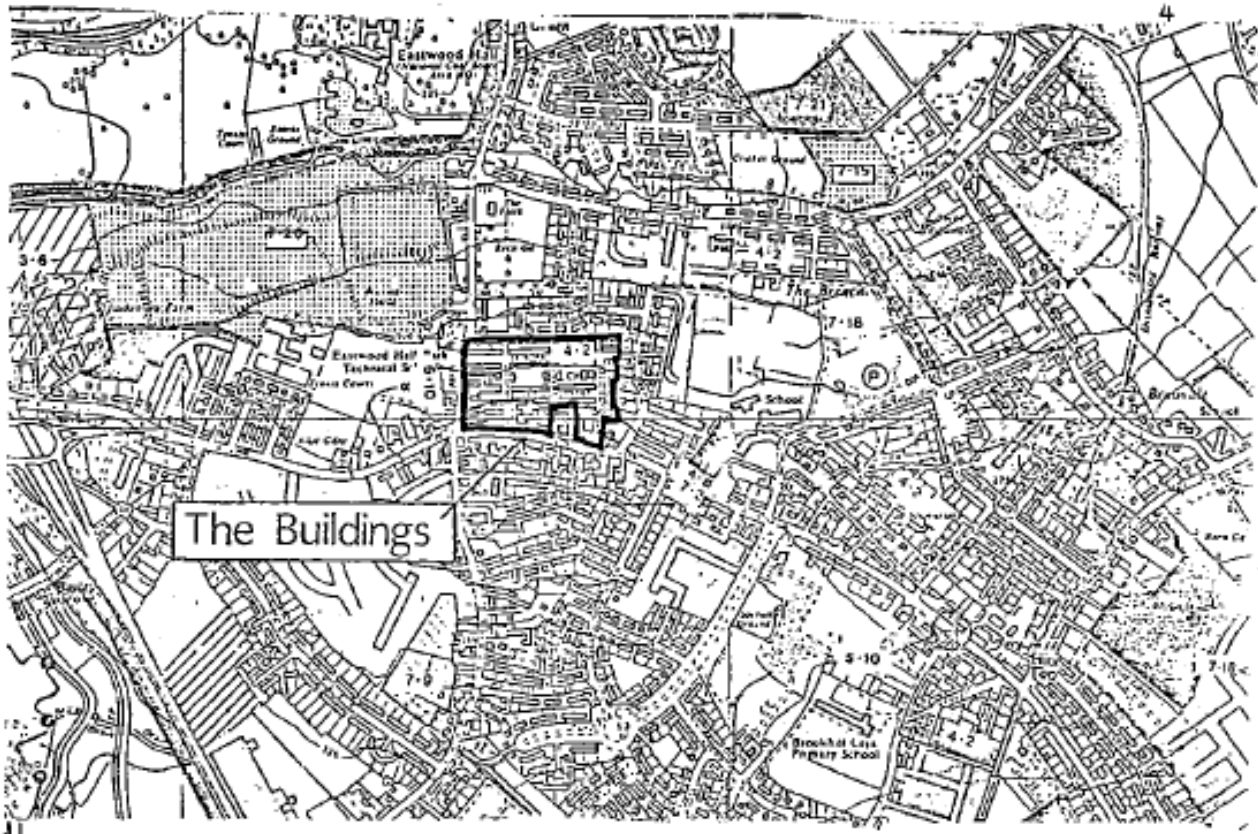


Figure 3 – Location of The Buildings, Eastwood, Nottingham

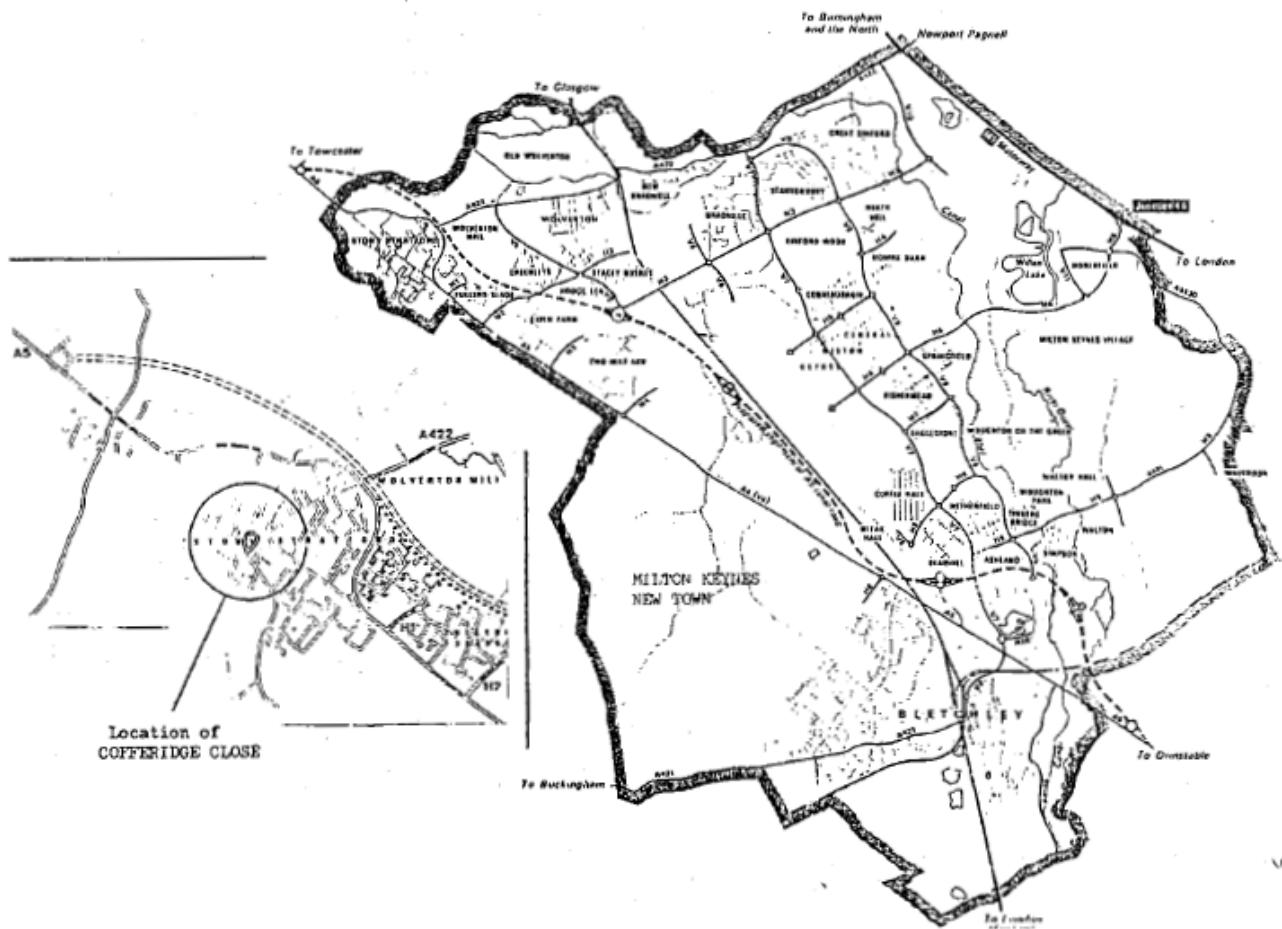
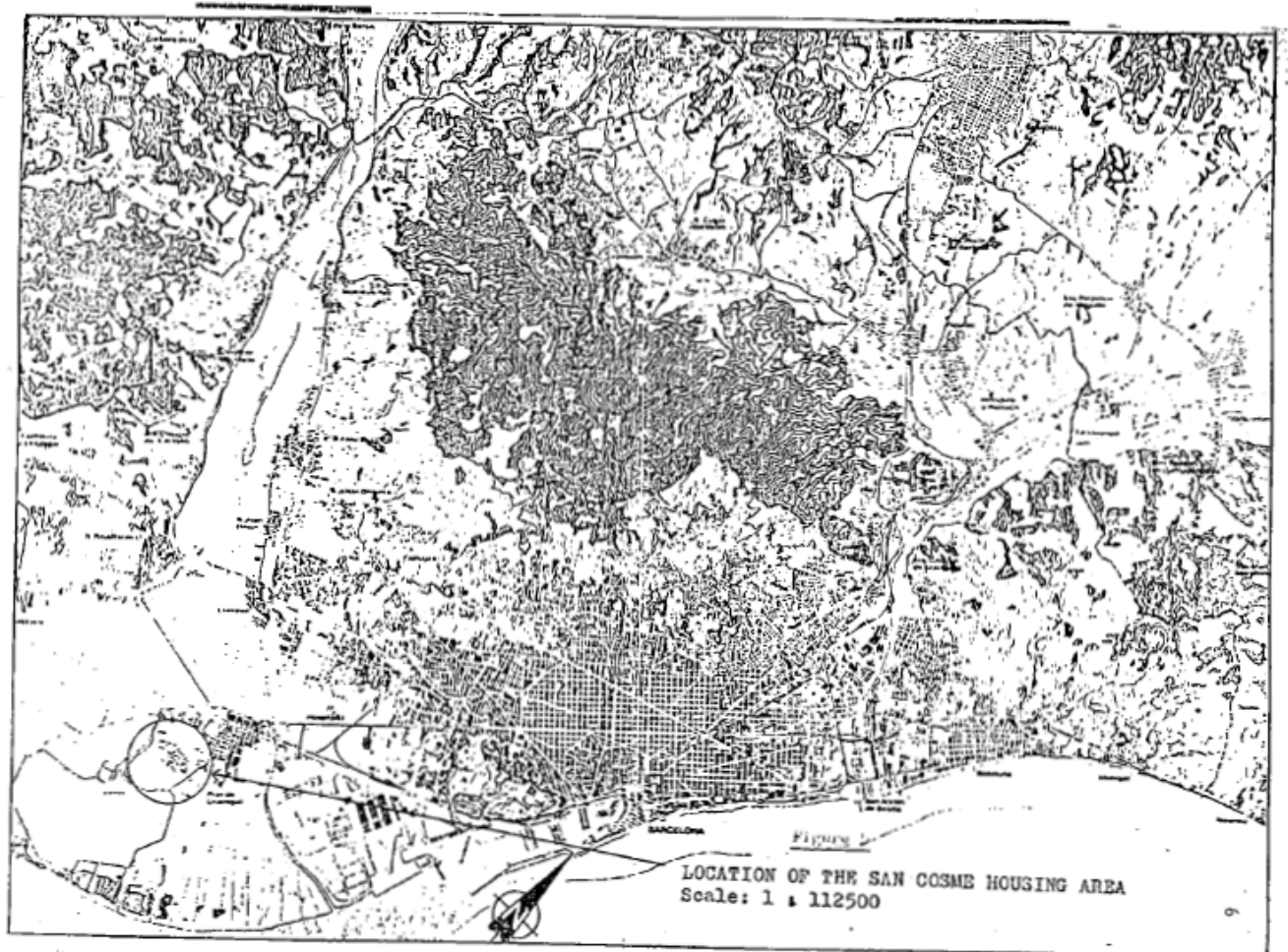


Figure 4 – Location of Cofferridge Close, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes



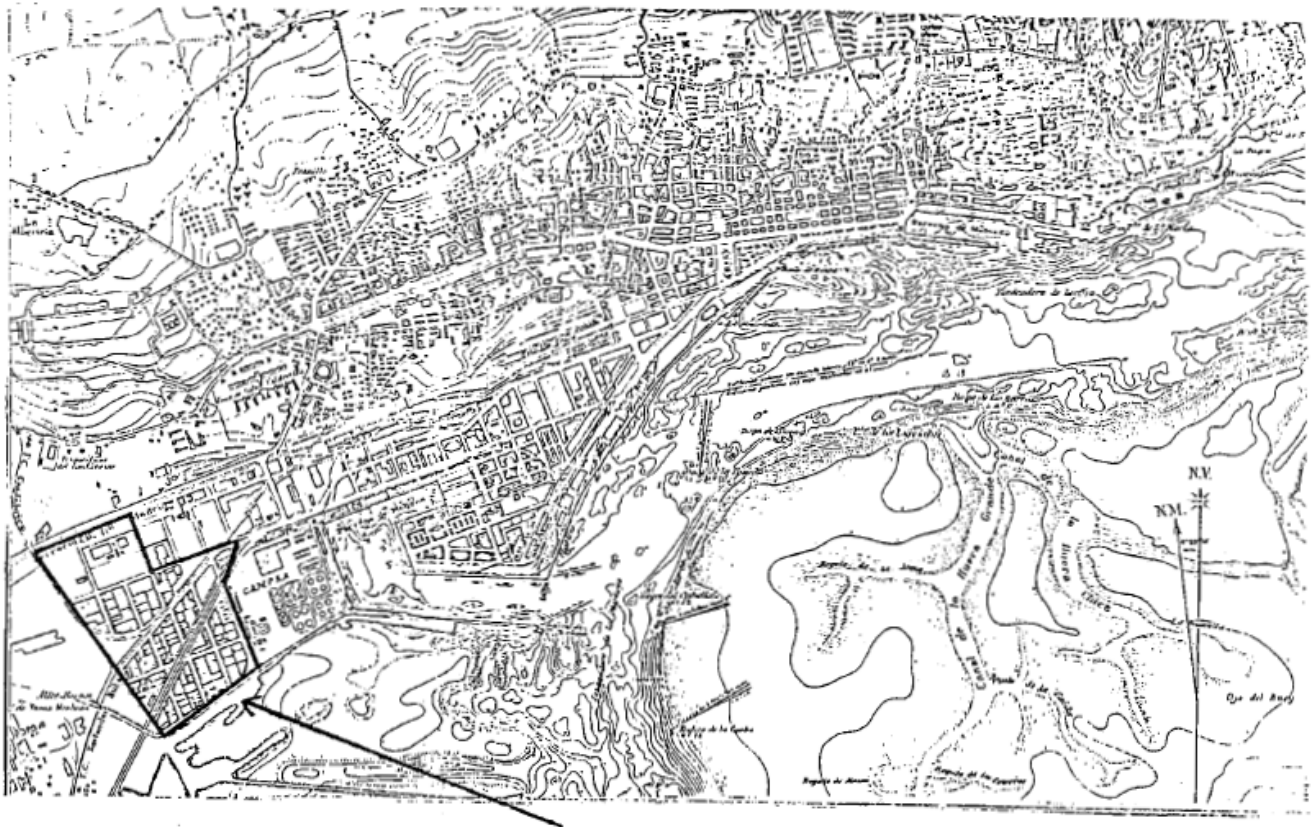


Figure 6 – Location of Port Service Area Project, Santander

12. The ‘data base’ and the way it was presented was thus a crucial element in the case studies. Two major phases can be identified: First, a rigorous data collection period involving minimal ordering of material; second, the structuring of the data base (usually chronologically) to include detailed explanatory commentary that is essentially descriptive and as objective as possible.
13. The data base was so assembled that it could be used for what may be termed ‘multiple interpretations.’ In other words, the researcher could provide in summary form his views on key issues in the case study; but at the same time the reader has the basic data to formulate his own, possibly opposing, views. Alternatively the reader can omit the detailed documentation if he does not wish to examine or challenge the basis on which the researcher arrived at his conclusions. Equally the data base facilitates a posteriori verification or modification of accepted theories and views in the light of new evidence, or its reconsideration by both researcher and reader.
14. A number of useful lessons were learned in the preparation of the four case studies. The compilation, presentation and reporting of case study research is to some extent an ‘art’, and undoubtedly demands literary skills and judgement not necessarily possessed by the social science researcher. It is perhaps worth pinpointing certain aspects that seem of relevance, some of which have been touched upon already:
 - a. Introductory Material: included at the beginning of the case study, should provide the necessary terminology and introduction to the legal, administrative, political, financial and spatial frameworks within which the case study takes place. Here again, original documents (or extracts) may be used, but the Introductory Section should not be too lengthy and at most should constitute no more than 30% of the complete data-base.
 - b. Documentary Evidence and Commentary: The data-base documentation must be suitably sequenced or progressed by the addition of commentary pages. Although each case study will, to some extent, necessitate its own special treatment, one page of commentary per 3-8 pages of documentation would seem about the right ‘balance’ in preliminary experimentation with the OECD prototype case studies. Similarly, plans, photos, etc. help to provide a more complete visualisation of the project as well as providing interest and helping to avoid monotony.
 - c. Commentary Pages: reporting should be as simple and as objective as possible. Often it is important to remember that much of the data can be included as it stands and without editing. Therefore the commentary pages are intended as simple linking mechanisms to help progress the narrative.
 - d. Central Features: Emphasis should be placed on a comprehensible, manageable presentation, clearly summarised in the contents page. Colour coding, cross referencing, indexing and flow diagrams may also be used to provide added clarity and increased usefulness.
15. The key component of the data-base is the indisputable documentary and photographic testimony to what went on at the time. This evidence will, of course, not provide all the answers, and here the questioning insistence of the

researcher in trying to get 'to the bottom of things' and seek out all available documentary evidence is of paramount importance. Not only must the Local Authority Planning Department files be searched, but also press reports, residents' associations' minutes, other Local Authority Departments and if possible, developers' views, statements, etc. The researcher must also be flexible and be prepared to follow up those aspects of a situation--often important ones--which he has not clearly foreseen at the outset. In this way, the researcher must attempt to minimize the 'subjectivity' of data selection as far as possible.

16. This data is then the point of departure for looking into and beyond its content, to theorize about reasons and interactions not necessarily explicitly stated in the case study presentation. Interview evidence and subjective observation may be brought in to support the researchers' interpretations and identification of key issues, which may then become part of a lengthier report where the complete case study is recounted from start to finish as seen by the investigator.
17. Problems of confidentiality are perhaps best overcome by undertaking, at the outset of the case study, to provide copies of the data-bases and subsequent draft reports to all informants and parties involved in the case study prior to any publication. A guarantee may also be given that any comments or interpretations at variance with those of the researcher will be included separately in the final report. Indeed, interested parties, whether directly involved in the case study or not, may be invited to contribute such reports. In this way the 'objectivity' value of the research approach is reinforced; at the same time such reports may stimulate further thought or consideration by the researcher.

V. Trent Case Studies as Research Tools

18. In this section we wish to assess the value of the type of case studies discussed in the previous section as research tools. Put another way, can these case studies generate new understandings and provide new insights into the working of the plan implementation process? We can perhaps best answer this question by referring to the 'top-down' and 'bottom up' models of case studies.
19. Let us firstly consider the Milton Keynes and Eastwood case studies. These were essentially 'top down' case studies and, as discreet entities, they did not add greatly to the general understanding of the plan implementation process in Britain. Rather they were illustrative examples of processes already reasonably well documented. There already exists extensive literature on the sorts of problems likely to be faced in implementing a general improvement area or undertaking a modest redevelopment scheme.
20. We can, however, claim that the Eastwood and Milton Keynes case studies were used to test a pioneering technique for the collection and presentation of plan implementation data. Having successfully established the feasibility of the technique in these isolated 'top-down' case studies, it has subsequently been employed in broader ranging research programmes in Barcelona and Santander where case studies have been more the 'bottom-up' type. As such it is perhaps the San Cosme and Port Service Industry case studies that best illustrate the potential of this form of research.
21. The Barcelona and Santander studies have revealed certain key issues in the plan implementation process that might otherwise not have been given sufficient emphasis or indeed may have been overlooked altogether in alternative research approaches. Whilst related hypotheses now have to be matched against further research results, the case studies have at least given researchers valuable insights into understanding the processes involved in implementation rather than merely measuring the degree of implementation.
22. It is perhaps in Southern European countries where the need to appreciate the key issues involved in successful implementation is greatest and yet where existing documentary sources are most limited. Here then, the 'bottom-up' case study may constitute an effective means of investigating and understanding the planning and development processes in these countries, whilst selected 'top-down' case studies from Northern European countries may be called upon to identify common frame-works and experiences and examine tried problem-solving strategies in achieving successful implementation.

VI. Trent Case Studies as Teaching Units

23. The circulation of case study data-bases and reports to interested parties constitutes one kind of information exchange. But as previously noted the case study has long been accepted as a teaching component in the stricter class/group seminar sense, when its usual justification has been that it gives insights into specific instances, events or situations, or to use Malinowski's term, 'it puts flesh and blood on the skeleton'⁹
24. In the plan implementation case study series, the major objective will be to put over to seminar groups the key issues in the plan implementation processes involved in the case study in question. As a rule case studies do not

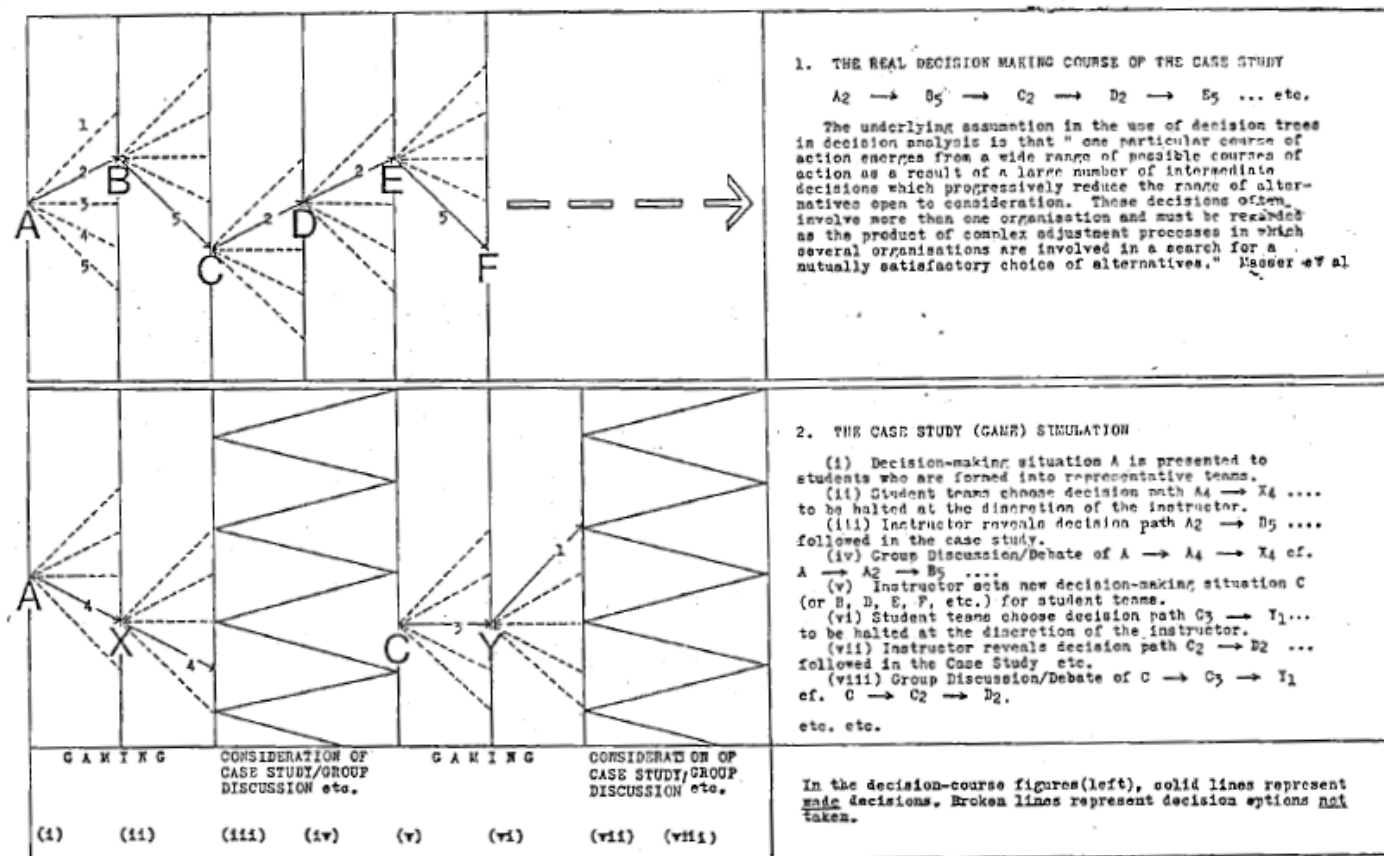


Figure 7 – Decision-Making Courses in a Real Case Study (above) and a Case Study Game

readily lend themselves to data 'condensation' and this has been one of the major stumbling blocks in getting over case study experience, especially to audiences consisting of hardened professionals and practitioners not easily convinced by essentially descriptive accounts. In this context, the case study data-bases seem of particular value as starting points for a variety of teaching formats in which emphasis can be placed on audience members to draw their own conclusions through interesting and convincing presentations of material drawn from the data-base.

25. Certain recent development in urban education are of relevance here. In recent years, attempts have been made to incorporate more accurate and lifelike definitions of reality into urban gaming moving closer and closer to the case study, and yet striving to maintain the element of choice essential to heuristic and interactive learning.¹⁰ At the same time, recent emphasis on decision-making in research into the planning process suggests a theoretical framework in which 'data-bases' could be used to generate and simulate real and alternative decision paths in a case study (Figure 7).
26. In practice, much will depend on the individual characteristics of each case study, the availability of audio-visual aids, the ingenuity and experience of the teacher, the time available and above all, the needs of the audience. Although some case studies will suit certain audience types more than others, the data-bases do provide enough material to give the teacher some flexibility in getting the right pitch for his audience and varying the presentation to suit different needs.
27. Whilst the standard slide-lecture discussion presentation is a useful technique to fall back on, especially if time is limited, the general aim is to maintain a certain continuity between research and teaching approaches by putting the audience in a situation where their interpretations are more significant than the case study compilers or presenters. In this way, participants may experience the decision making dilemmas and identify, for themselves, the key issues involved in each case study.
28. It is with this view in mind that the Trent Case studies of Milton Keynes and Eastwood have been translated into gaming exercises. There is still much work to be done in this area, but preliminary 'runs' indicate that the pressures and constraints on decision-making that exist in the 'real world' situations have been successfully simulated in the games. Armed with this awareness, the game-players are in a better position to be able to understand and evaluate the plan implementation process and to begin to seriously suggest reforms and new approaches to related problem-solving urban management contexts.

VII. Management Aspects

29. Clearly local planning case studies as management tools are the least developed use recognised by urban specialists.

In short their utility in this area still very largely awaits exploration. However experience in the business field would suggest that such work might be particularly rewarding in providing an inter-disciplinary focus for improving line management performances. This is of especial relevance to the planning field where executive authority is separated from technical management. The exact nature of the techniques' usefulness remains unknown. Suffice it to say that if one were to speculate on the experience gained in other fields than at least four applications already appear as particularly relevant to the case studies already completed; namely:

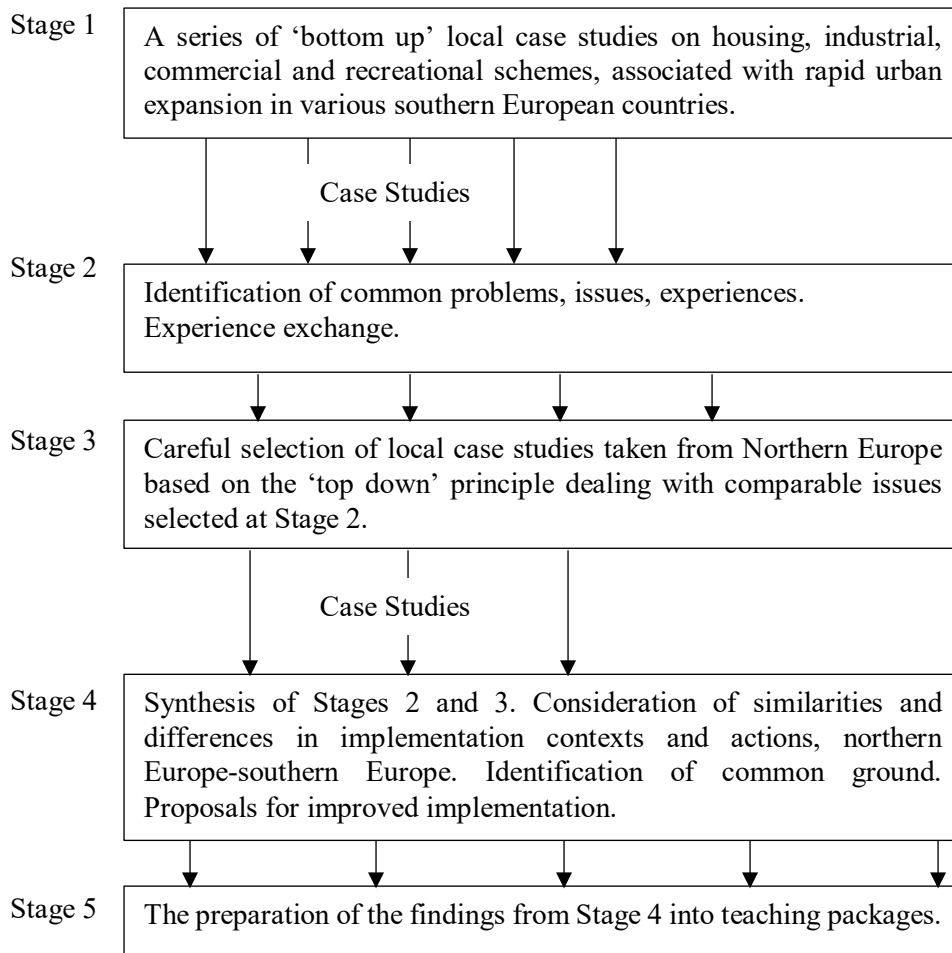
- a. In providing a reference point in relation to current or past practice as a basis for revising and improving the administrative and legal frameworks.
 - b. As acknowledged examples of 'good practice' for those faced with similar situations.
 - c. In serving as a source of information of procedures and operational data for new comers to planning.
 - d. In fostering self learning by encouraging users to hold up the mirror to themselves and consequently focus down on key decision areas and critical decisions experienced 'on the job' or identified by others.
30. The particular merit of the case study, as a means of improving management skills, is that it is relatively unsophisticated as a technique and requires little training to develop and put into practice. The need for urban managers to make use of such a tool must be seen in the context of the evolutionary nature of planning and the relatively long time span accorded to any particular phase. The result is that during the preparation and implementation of almost any development project, the time cycle is of such a length that it will witness changes of personnel both at political and administrative levels, changes of priorities and re-evaluation of objectives, shifts of emphasis and the reassessment of resources. The future role of the case study can be two-fold in that in a retrospective manner it can demonstrate the essential characteristics of the problems the urban manager has to face. But it also can be used in a contemporary manner to record progress and change, as implementation proceeds, to document the continually evolving contexts within which the decision-maker operates.

VIII. The Way Forward: Some Suggestions

31. It would seem that the OECD Urban Management unit's concern for the interchange of expertise and management training has particular value for the countries of Southern Europe. What have the exploratory Trent Case Studies to offer in terms of indicating new initiatives?
32. The most important planning issues to be found in Southern Europe are associated with the rapid growth of urban populations. The past twenty-five years has seen a substantial movement of rural people moving into the towns and cities. This has resulted in--
 - a. massive overcrowding in what are essentially, at least in structural terms, medieval urban cores,
 - b. saturation of planned 19th and early 20th century city expansion schemes
 - c. anarchical growth of the city periphery, which usually include areas of shanty development.
33. Planning solutions are provided in the form of--
 - a. urban renewal projects,
 - b. new peripheral housing estates.

Such schemes may incorporate or be otherwise related to the provision of industrial estates, shopping and commercial centres and recreational areas. Obviously, therefore, the most valuable urban management training for those involved in plan implementation in Southern Europe lies in these areas.
34. It is suggested that a series of case studies be undertaken in a range of fast growing urban settlements selected from various southern European countries (Stage 1, Figure 8). If similar planning contexts can be identified (problem focused) these case studies can then be used to facilitate the exchange of implementation experiences (successful or unsuccessful) and key issues identified (Stage 2).
35. Stage 3 would move onto inquiring what the experience of northern Europe--with its longer planning tradition and correspondingly more extensive complementary literature-- has to offer in terms of dealing with identified problem situations. Again this can be done through a case study approach, using the Milton Keynes and Eastwood studies as models. But for this exercise the case studies would be more rigorously selected and specifically geared towards the needs of the southern European countries. This would be very much a 'top-down' approach.
36. Stage 4 brings the results of the northern and southern European studies into a synthesis, and this leads logically on to Stage 5, the translation of the experience acquired and the lessons learned into teaching packages.
37. Perhaps some of the lessons learned from the preliminary attempts to turn the Milton Keynes and Eastwood case studies into simulation exercises will be useful here. The ultimate aim of these teaching packs would be to enable the findings of the research element of the programme to be communicated to urban managers as effectively and as efficiently as possible.

Figure 8 A Proposal for Further Case Study Research



IX. Concluding Remarks

38. It has to be acknowledged that much of the work discussed above is very exploratory. Building on the successful experiences in other fields and on modest earlier work sponsored by OECD, SSRC and LGTB a series of prototype case studies is being built up. In relation to the modest budget the considerable promise of earlier work seems to be justified at both national and international levels. It is important to recognize that, as international links are strengthened, the case study is an extremely efficient and rapid means of both teaching and learning about other systems, through the systematic transference of experience. As such it is a step towards better international cooperation and the more efficient utilisation of resources at all levels.
39. Given the success and acclamation accorded the work to date it is perhaps surprising that initiatives of this type were not explored earlier. Certainly it seems to be unique in relation to local planning implementation case studies that the research, training and management implications have been explored simultaneously and with a high degree of confidence that further work will produce even greater benefits in improving the overall performance of all those concerned with urban management.

Notes and References

1. Consisting variously of Professor Ian Haywood, now of Khartoum University, Mr. Martin Wynn, Mr. Peter Totterdill and Dr. Roger Smith, all of Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, Great Britain, and Miss Betty Gear, Mr. Rodney Duncan, and Ms. Lesly Timmins.
2. D. Rushforth, *Memorandum on Plan Implementation Case Studies*, 18th August 1978, CT/4917.
3. *Development Control Case Studies*, 7 volume set for Local Government Training Board, 1977. This work was originally sponsored by the Social Science Research Council.
4. e.g. Roger Smith, *East Kilbride: The Biography of a Scottish New Town*, HMSO, London, 1978 (this work was the product of a Building Research Establishment Commission); Martin Wynn was already engaged in researching a series of plan implementation case studies in Spain as part of the work for a PhD degree.
5. Michael Harloe, *Swindon: A Town in Transition*, Heinemann, London, 1975; D.A. Hart, *Strategic Planning in London*, Pergamon Press, London, 1975; Elspeth Farmer and Roger Smith, 'Overspill Theory: A Metropolitan Case Study', *Urban*

- Studies*, vol. 12, N° 21 1975. Also the 'case examples' used by Friend and Jessop in their book.
6. See for example Flynn, R. and Lewis, J., '*Implementation of Urban and Regional Planning Policies*', DoE, Sept. 1978; Masser et al '*Dynamics of the Development Process*', *Town Planning Review*, Jan. 1978 and Faludi, A., Hamnett, S., Hopkins, S., Minett, J., and Thomas, D. Leiden Oxford Comparative Planning Study, Project Papers 1-5, Department of Town Planning, Oxford Polytechnic.
 7. As part of an SSRC financed research project.
 8. As such this case study is not really one of the 'Trent Series'. But Martin Wynn worked on the study as OECD advisor with members of the School of Civil Engineering at Santander and the research technique is similar to that used in the other three case studies.
 9. Quoted in Lewis, O., *Five Families*, Basic Books, 1959.
 10. Duke, R.D., *The Future's Language*.

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