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## PLANNING IN SPAIN: INFORMAL LINKAGE IN A CHANGING FRAMEWORK

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### Formality and Informality in Decision-Making

The ensuing discussion comes as a response to that on 'personal linkage' which appeared in the editorial of *Linkage Four*. In the section subtitled "Is informality the answer?" it was suggested that informal 'personal linkage' could play a valuable part in effecting inter-agency co-ordination, but that such decision making activity inevitably made it less easy for those affected by decisions to hold the decision makers to account. "At what point", it was asked "does publicly beneficial co-ordination end and unhealthy collusion begin?". This article addresses this question by reporting on some recent research into decision making in the Spanish planning process.

Although the analytical framework within which the Spanish planning process was studied differs somewhat from the concept of linkage forms put forward by Friend, Noad and Norris,<sup>2</sup> there nevertheless seems to be some overlap. These authors identify three levels of linkage in the decision making process: linkages within the *institutional framework*, shaped by national legislation or other forms of central guidance; then intermediate *local level* linkage which evolves between specific organisations operating in the same local context; and, finally, informal *personal network* linkage, which encompasses those decisions made on a personal basis which cannot be regulated by statutory norms or legislation. In the Spanish research, however, selected case studies were used to study changes in the decision making process over a 10-15 year period. The main interest lay in the use and abuse of planning mechanisms, and the evolution of agency role and inter-relationship. The focus then was on the decision making process as a whole, rather than on forms of linkage in particular.

The Spanish research suggested that a distinction could usefully be made between two major decision making strands. The strand of 'formalised decision making' was seen as comprising those decisions corresponding to a recognised step or stage in the drawing-up and approval of plans and in the implementation of development, for which provision was made in corresponding national legislation. 'Non or semi formalised decision making', on the other hand, encompassed those decisions made outside the framework of the statutorily regulated process. This distinction was made somewhat tentatively, with the realization that further refinement and testing of its usefulness in other planning environments would be necessary if such a categorization was to make any valid contribution to the study and comparison of decision making in different planning environments. In this context, it was interesting to note that another case study research into planning and development in the Netherlands highlighted the 'limited role played by purely formal procedures in the formulation of plans as against informal negotiations and the ways in which the development process was affected by external factors'.<sup>3</sup> It was suggested, then,

that all planning processes could be interpreted in terms of these two decision making 'strands', and that consideration of the nature and inter-relationship of the two could provide a useful framework within which decision making in different planning systems could be studied.

### Method of Study

Before discussing the research findings, it is perhaps worth briefly outlining the research method. For each case study a data base was compiled, consisting of real world documentation, such as plans, resolutions or letters, drawn from authority and agency files. To arrive at initial structuring of this data, incorporating firsthand accounts from involved parties, 'decision making areas' were identified representing steps or stages in the evolution of the decision making process. From here, more complex decision stage charts and process flow charts were constructed in which the flow of decisions and overlap of 'sub-processes', such as plan making or plan approval, were graphically portrayed. Further, in consultation with those actively involved in the case, an attempt was made to pinpoint what were generally considered as the 'critical points' in the decision making process.

### The Changing Context in Spain

It was from this treatment of each case that the analytical value of identifying the two 'strands' of decision making emerged. Three of the case studies came from the Barcelona periphery,<sup>4</sup> all of which exhibited similar features with regard to these two types of decision making. In the sixties and early seventies, the formalised decision making process involved major contraventions of planning (and other) legislation. This formalised process, however, was really just the tip of the iceberg and was generally subordinated to the non/semi formalised process, within which the majority of critical decisions were made (Figure 1). What seems of importance is not that so many critical decisions were made outside the formalised process, but rather that these decisions had no formalised counterpart, or that this counterpart constituted a contravention of the statutory planning process, providing a quasi-legal framework for subsequent decision making. Under such circumstances, then, the formalised process played little part in directing or controlling the course of change; rather it either played no part at all, or, in corrupted form, played a secondary role in the fulfilment of developmental objectives that frequently contravened previously approved plans and planning legislation.

In the seventies, however, changes in both the external political and planning framework, and in the strategies and activities of agencies intervening at local level, have resulted in a somewhat different model (Figure 2). New planning legislation and urban plan arrangements introduced rather more realistic frameworks and more appropriate plan mechanisms to fit the new control and improvements objectives of local and central authorities in the post-Franco era. Irregularities in the formalised process have become less evident (although by no means non-existent) as local authorities, in particular, have exerted a firmer control on private sector development. At the same time, there has been an increased 'harmonisation' of the two decision making strands, reflected in a more intensive decision flow between the two and the emergence of the formalised strand as generally dominant in its control and regulation of the non/semi formalised process. Nevertheless, the continuing failure of planning law to encompass certain aspects of change - such as resident participation - along with the chronic poverty of local authority resources,<sup>5</sup> has meant that a certain number of decisions of critical importance in the planning and implementation of development continue to be made outside the realm of the formalised process without any corresponding counterpart within that process. Only when the legislative and administrative machinery is changed to enable the planning authorities to confront more adequately the urban management problems of today - and tomorrow - will the formalised process encompass and regulate the breadth of issues about which decisions are made in the planning and implementation of development at local level.

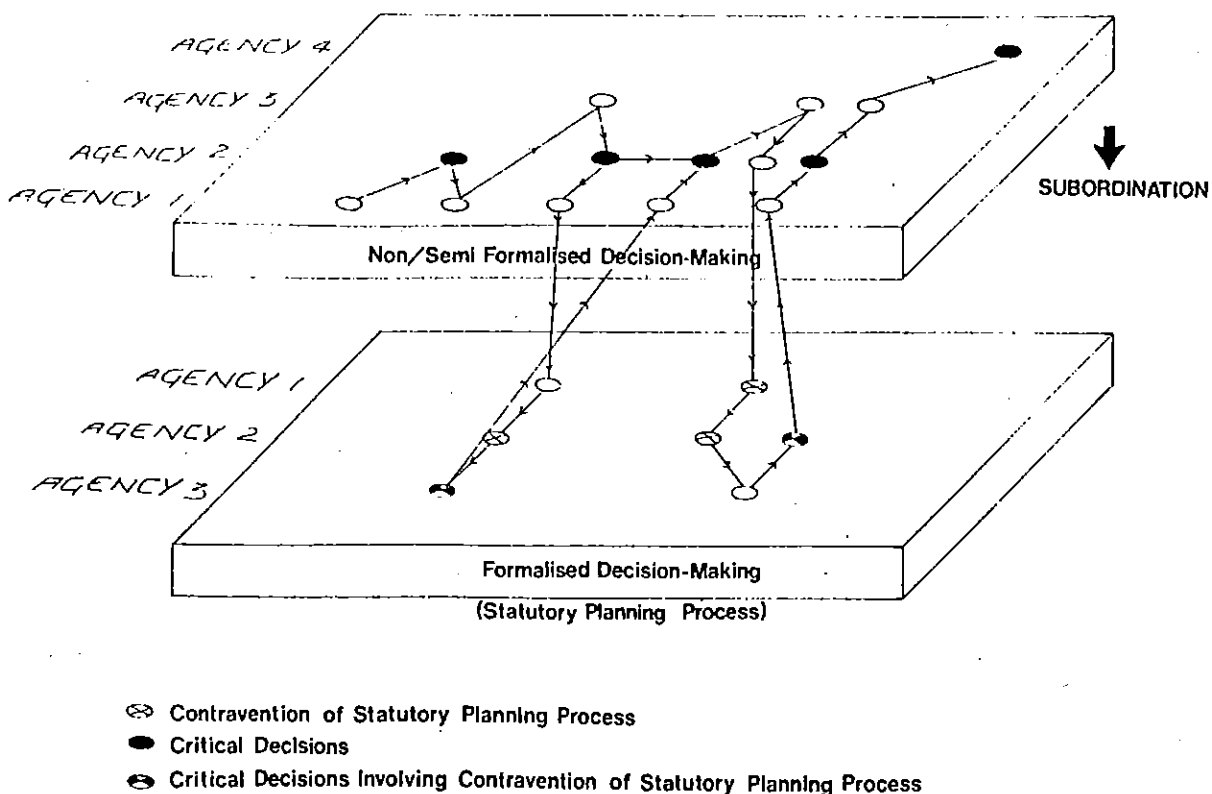


FIGURE 1 Conceptualization of the Decision-Making Process in the sixties and early seventies (subordination of the Statutory Planning Process).

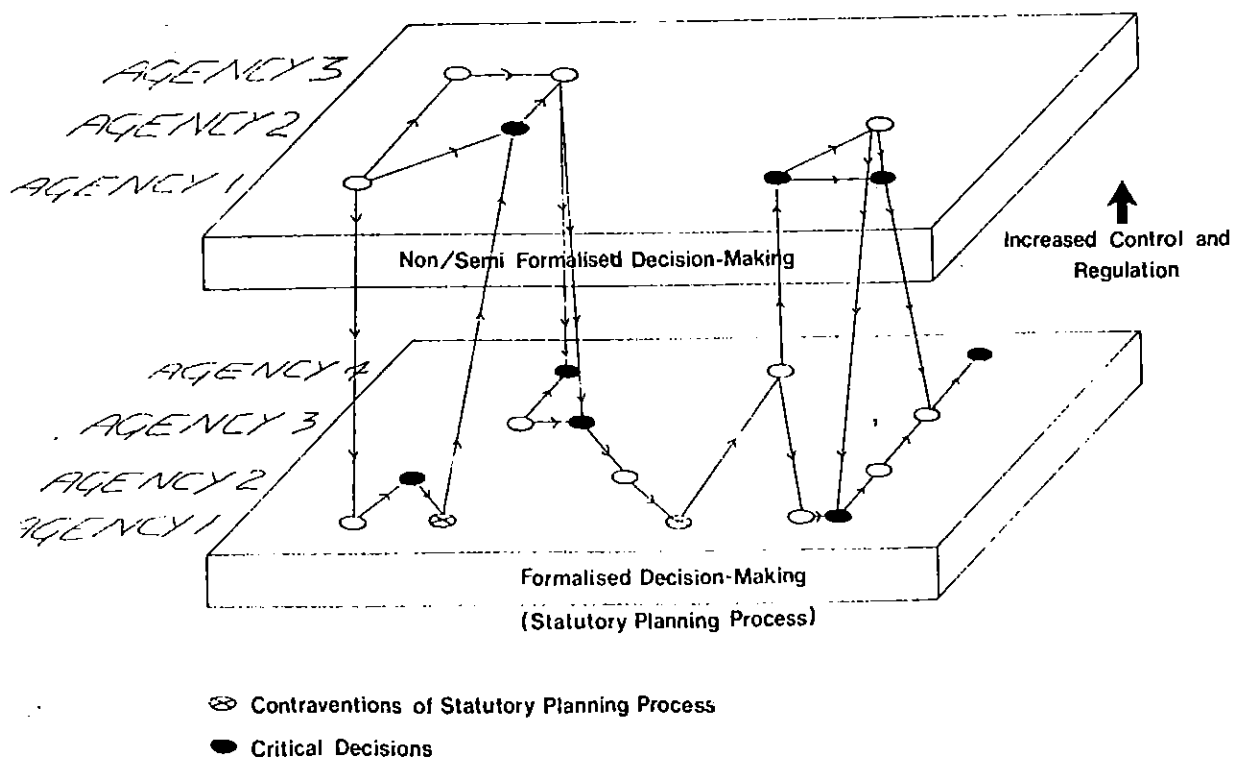


FIGURE 2 Conceptualization of the Decision-Making Process from the Mid-Seventies Onwards (Increased Control and Regulation)

The foregoing discussion suggests, then, that at least three generalised models of decision making in the planning process can be drawn (Table 1), representing the subordination of the formalised process (Spain in the sixties), the prominence of the formalised process (in terms of effectively regulating the course of change) and a transitional model between the two (Spain in the late seventies). If we now try and relate this to the forms of linkage outlined earlier, then personal linkage would seem to be quite acceptable within the functioning of a planning system in which the formalised process regulates the course of change (Model 2) so long as the outcome of that linkage is also formally expressed within the institutional framework and that resultant decisions do not constitute contraventions of planning (or other) law.

TABLE I

Characteristics of decision making strands	MODELS OF PLANNING PROCESS		
	Subordination of formalised process (1)	Prominence of formalised process (2)	Transitional models (3)
Formalised strand	contains many irregularities and contraventions some of critical importance	no irregularities or contraventions of statutorily regulated procedure. Contains majority of critical points.	some irregularities and contraventions, some of which are of critical importance
Non/semi formalised strand	contains majority of critical points, many without legal counterpart within formalised strand.	all critical points have legal counterpart in formalised strand	some critical points have no counterparts in formalised strand. More even distribution of critical points between the two strands.

Characteristics of the Two Decision Making Strands in Models of the Planning Processes

In practice, however, planning systems and the legislation that underpins them are evolutionary and are rarely perfectly adjusted for all eventualities; and in some instances it may be necessary and even desirable for the formalised process to be contravened or circumvented. Indeed it has been this type of ad hoc decision making outside the bounds of the statutory planning machinery that has paved the way for much needed reform in the legislative and institutional basis of the planning system in Spain. And now, even though increased flexibility in the statutory framework allows local authorities greater scope in choosing forms of linkage appropriate to their circumstances, many are still facing political confrontation with upper echelon authorities. Thus, there would seem to be no simple answer to the question posed earlier with reference to personal linkage, i.e. "At what point

does publicly beneficial co-ordination end and unhealthy collusion begin?" Leaving aside the fact that one's definition of 'publicly beneficial' must inevitably be linked to one's political values, the answer must also depend on the nature of the planning system. If the planning machinery is so finely tuned that it can encompass and regulate the full range of decisions connected with the development process, one would expect personal linkage to act merely as a lubricant for the smooth running of that machinery; as a medium for effecting decisions made within the formalised decision making strand. Unfortunately, however, few planning systems are so well adjusted to reality and most are in a constant state of flux, reflecting changes in the broader socio-political system. Thus, what appeared as 'publicly beneficial co-ordination' in Spain ten years ago might well seem like 'unhealthy collusion' today; and some of the widely acclaimed local level 'initiatives' of recent years (for which the existent Spanish planning machinery makes no provision) would perhaps be seen in a different light five years hence. Clearly informality in decision making is always one possible answer; but whether one should see this as acceptable, inevitable or desirable, is somewhat more difficult to ascertain.

#### Footnotes

- 1 Some of these studies have been published as research articles elsewhere; see M. Wynn 'San Cosme, Spain: Planning and Renewal of a State Housing Area' Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol: 46, No. 1, Jan. 1980: M. Wynn 'Gallecs: Rebirth of a Spanish New Town?', Town and Country Planning, November, 1980: M. Wynne, P. Portilla and J. Urena 'The Port Service Area Project, Santander, Planning and Administration, 1980 No. 1: M. Wynn 'Planning and Improvement of the Urban Environment: A case study from the Barcelona periphery (Can Serra)', Local Government and Environmental Planning and Control (Conference Proceedings), Gower Press, 1981.
- 2 J. Friend, A. Noad and M. Norris 'Progress in understanding linkage: a concluding review from the research team', Linkage 3, 1978.
- 3 I. Masser, W. Van Has, W. Post and R. van Schijndel. 'The Dynamics of the Development Processes', Town Planning Review, Vol. 49, No.2, 1978.
- 4 M.G. Wynn 'The Planning and Implementation of Development in the Barcelona Periphery (a case study approach), CNAA PhD Thesis, Department of Town and Country Planning, Trent Polytechnic, 1980.
- 5 See J. Urena, 'Local/Central Government Relations in Spain', Linkage 5, 1980.