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Improving urban management

A case study technique

A basic, local-level monitoring technique has been developed to aid self-learning and facilitate international exchange of urban management experience. The technique is outlined and some implications for Third World planners are discussed.

by Martin Wynn, John L. Taylor, Ian Haywood, and Roger Smith

Urban Managers working in the Third world are charged with implementing a range of urban policies, many of which will be concerned with the provision of infrastructure and the planning, management, and control of new development. These policies must be carried out in the face of the classic, and often seemingly intractable, problems associated with massive in-migration into cities, the consequent growth of poorly equipped shanty towns, chronic under-employment, corruption and inefficiency in local government, etc. although it is difficult to find much consensus of opinion on how these problems should be tackled, a case study technique has been developed for giving urban managers a framework for dealing with common situations.

Training methods

One approach increasingly being employed to improve urban management training - particularly among the richer countries of the Third World - is to dispatch the urban manager to an institute of higher education in one of the more developed countries, where he can study urban management, planning, or a similar subject. If such courses are run by personnel with the experience necessary to provide training relevant to a Third World context, the courses can clearly be of value.

This learning method may not always be the most effective one, however; the development of self-monitoring techniques may provide a better, more direct way for urban managers in the developing countries to learn from their own and others' experiences. The case study approach described below, developed through research sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹ and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC),² is one such technique. Aimed at facilitating the dissemination of experience throughout the administrative system as a whole - both nationally and internationally - the technique enables managers to learn from the successes and failures of local solutions generated in response to specific urban management problems.

Program research

To establish a case study program, the ministry, agency, or local authority responsible for urban planning appoints a small team of full- or part-time researchers. While there are no essential qualifications for these researchers, experience in related fields and a proven ability to work well with others will help ensure success. The team may consist of one department, an interdependent group from within the planning organization, academics from a university, or outside consultants. Its responsibilities will include both compiling the case study and exploiting the instructional potential of the data-bases. Compilation and structuring of the case study may be performed by a smaller group within the team.

In the context of this management technique, a "case study" is defined as the recording and analysis of a particular event or series of events, using a systematic method, to facilitate the development of learning and the transfer of experience. To accomplish these ends, the case studies developed according to OECD/SSRC techniques have had the following common characteristics:

- They document recent, local-level projects selected either because they are considered representative of typical development (e.g., a public housing project or industrial expansion scheme) or are worthy of in-depth study because of particular lessons which might be gained (e.g., innovative renewal and shanty improvement schemes or city center conservation projects).
- At the outset, they consist of authentic documentation of the development process assembled by the research team working in conjunction with the authorities and interest groups involved in the case study development. (See figure 1.)

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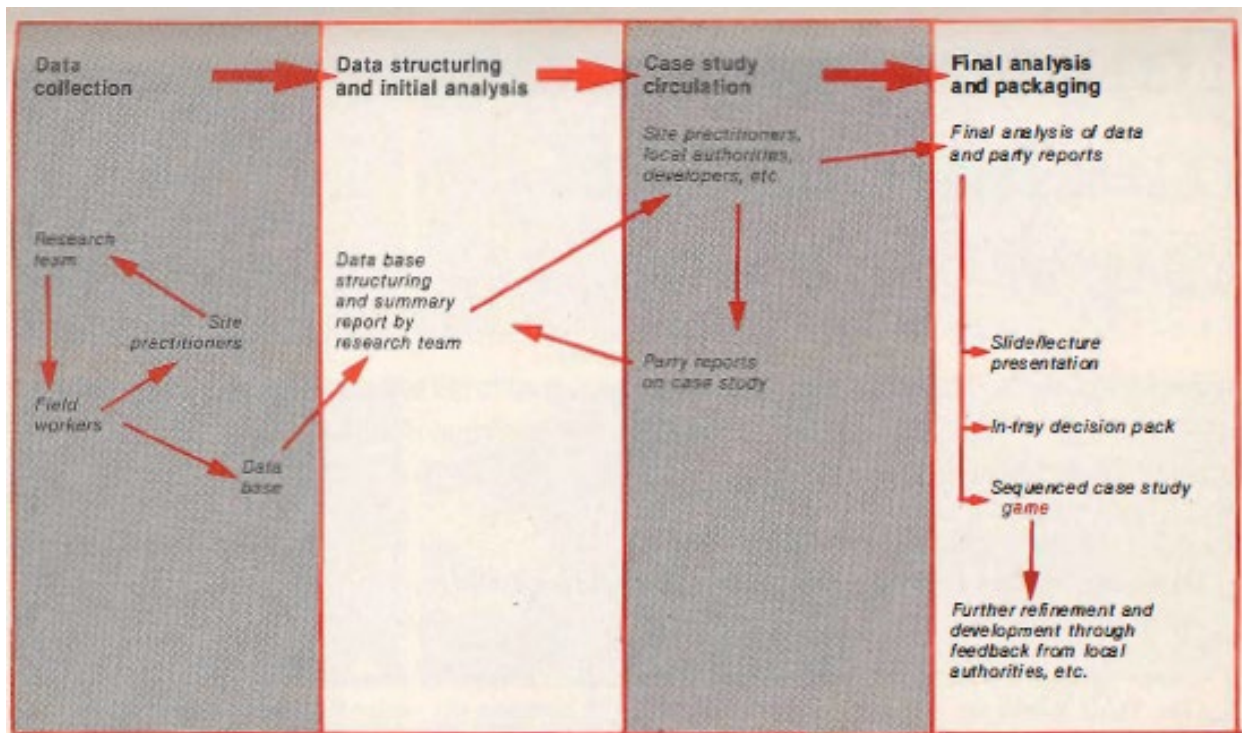


Figure 1. Stages in the development and use of a case study.

- This raw data is then structured, ordered, and finally edited in book format to avoid repetition and irrelevant or excessive detail. In general, it has been possible to group documents into stages or “decision-making areas” within the development process, with link commentaries explaining and briefly summarizing the administrative and other processes illustrated by the documentation.
- Introductory material, plans, and photographs are added by the research team (working with their data sources), to provide the necessary context for each case study (structure and responsibilities of authorities; existing plans for the area; social, political, economic factors, etc.).
- Color coding and/or side-page indexing are added (e.g., original documents may be white, introductory material blue, link commentaries pink, and the summary green). This enables the reader to use the study in a variety of ways; for example, he can start with the summary. Or, using the contents page at the front of the document, he can isolate individual “decision-making areas” and read the link commentary. If he wishes to pursue the matter further, the reader can then refer to the lettered, original documents. The introductory material can be used to obtain information about the context of the project-authorities, plans, history, etc.

When the case study data-base is structured (see figure 1), it can be circulated to all parties represented in the study, different government departments and sub-departments, etc. Individuals are then requested to give their views, based on the evidence presented and their own involvement. They can be asked to identify the key issues underlying the success or failure of implementation (the nature of such success or failure can be explored further, as necessary, by more questioning and research), and to point out “critical gates,” administrative blockages, etc. While this stage may be the most difficult to complete - with some parties not willing to contribute - it is an important step in that it provides an opportunity for decision-makers and participants to comment on the case study before it is finalized. Even if all parties do not make use of the opportunity, circulation of the data-base can be viewed as a “proofing process” likely to comb out errors and forestall needless future debate.

It is particularly important that the right to comment be explained at the outset of the research, as participants are encouraged to open their complete files if they know they have some say over the form of the final product. From the researchers’ point of view, the comments are invaluable, as they provide a number of perspectives on the interpretation of the basic data, help in the assessment of the value of the collected material, and offer a systematic overview of individual department and agency roles in the development process - an overview usually not available to Third World management. This makes creation of the case study as much a tool for monitoring as for retrospective learning.

These final comments and revisions, along with those of the editorial panel, are incorporated into the case study and color-coded accordingly. (See figure 1.) Final copies of the data-base and group reports can then be circulated.

Learning potential-self-learning

The compilation and structuring of the case study data-base is the first stage in the management education process; performing the study is an individual learning exercise for members of the re- search team. Another important use as an individual educational tool is the circulation of the structured data-base to all interested parties for their information and feedback. Circulation of the final draft of the case study is the last step in this phase of the learning program.

In addition to the value of the case study documentation at an *individual* level, case studies can be used in a series of more intensive *group* learning exercises for professionals and politicians. These exercises may include slide/lecture presentations or “in-tray decision packs,” which consist of memoranda, letters, reports, etc., from the case study. Group leaders present the material and ask participants “What would you do now?” Particular objectives of these exercises can include:

- examination of the policy-making process;
- analysis of the relationship between implementation and policy formulation;
- consideration of the effectiveness of specific policies and action;
- evaluation of the importance of the legislative powers and administrative machinery in achieving successful implementation.

The data base material can also be exploited through sequenced case study simulation,³ or case study games. (Since these games need to be designed, it may be necessary for the urban planning agency to employ outside consultants for this purpose.) Decision-making contexts taken from the study are presented in seminars to role-playing teams representing the major interest groups in the case study. The simulation may closely follow the original project; if not, the simulation can be stopped at selected points and compared with the decision-making course of the real development. Subsequent discussion and de-briefing help identify key issues and reinforce the learning process.

Learning potential-mutual learning

Although the countries of the developed world share many problems, the exchange of practical planning and management experience has often been limited by the lack of a common framework within which to view planning successes and failures. In the developing world, this situation is often exacerbated by additional factors, including the relatively low status afforded physical planning, as distinct from economic planning; the lack of established institutional and administrative machinery (e.g., academic and professional institutes and agencies); and most of all, the lack of financial resources and of skilled professionals⁴ who are available to undertake research activities that may not be seen as specifically productive.

Because case studies provide a common framework for the examination of project management, they represent an important means of fostering international exchange at the professional level, with reciprocal benefits to all participants. Case studies with contextual similarities may be exchanged between agencies and ministries to help the developed countries to more clearly understand the problems of the developing world, and to contribute to the creation of appropriate planning mechanisms and processes. More immediately, this exchange can be of immense value in helping each country measure and improve its performance through the individual and group self-learning processes.

Using case studies in this manner can contribute to improvement in three interrelated aspects of planning and development. These aspects are system performance, administrative procedures, and projects and programs aimed at specific problems. Examples of the usefulness of case studies in these areas further illustrate the need for this new technique.

In many countries-both developed and developing-the thrust of development is on the improvement of economic *performance*, often read as a crude increase in the GNP and balance of payments. Local-level case studies can draw attention to the need for a more realistic assessment of the true costs and benefits of development, which will include social and environmental considerations.⁵ Too often, physical planning is seen as an unnecessary, inhibiting mechanism that merely adds to the costs of development. Analysis of the performance of the physical planning system through case studies, however, can demonstrate the importance of seeing physical planning as essential to economic planning. This view can contribute to more effective economic development, particularly in the long term, by providing a context at regional and local levels for development decisions.

To achieve any planning objective it is necessary to have developed procedural mechanisms which will include financial, legal, and administrative powers. This process is complicated by the fact that most countries suffer from expanding and often inefficient bureaucracies. Case studies provide a process whereby the procedural aspects of any planning situation can be defined, isolated, and examined with a view to the refinement and improvement of those procedures. At the international level, case studies can demonstrate the means necessary to achieve specified planning ends and can help in the formulation of appropriate procedures specifically oriented to particular tasks in the developing

world.

Within the diverse stages of development of different countries, there are many specific problems that are of common interest and that may have transferable solutions. One such example is the growth of illegal settlements and the resultant shanty developments associated with patterns of rapid urbanization. To help solve these problems, it may be useful to look at case studies in Southern Europe, where the nature - if not the scale - of these problems is similar, and where an established planning machinery exists.

Examples of such innovatory schemes currently being documented include the Seixal shanty improvement and reconstruction scheme outside Lisbon, Portugal (Costa Lobo 1977, 1979), where shanty residents have been actively involved in the construction and financing of 500 new dwellings in collaboration with local authorities. A similar but smaller (200 houses) shanty redevelopment scheme is being employed in Ramon Casellas, in the Barcelona periphery (Wynn 1979). (See figure 2.) It is this type of problem-focused case study that provides more immediate scope for worthwhile exchange between the less developed European countries and the Third World.



Figure 2. Ramon Casellas, Barcelona. These shanty dwellings are now being knocked down to make way for new two- and three-story structures that will house the existing community. The Residents Association, consultant architects, and local and central authorities have collaborated in the scheme. It is this type of problem-focused case study that may provide the most immediate scope for international exchange. Photo courtesy of M. G. Wynn

The need for new initiatives

Although one can make a general case for the need to more widely adopt case study techniques, little progress will be made without the development of appropriate and agreed-upon methodologies. The initiative of international organizations, such as the OECD and the International Institute for Environment and Development,⁶ in promoting and sponsoring case study research is to be welcomed. Yet there is a need for a much wider sponsorship of work by international agencies, both in increasing the north-south dialogue and in the application of case study techniques at a national level to problems of common concern.

Many agencies are already bridging the developed and developing worlds through their involvement in international aid programs involving technical assistance. While some of these packages now include an element of local employment and sometimes a local training component, too often the expertise and experience developed is taken away with the promoting agency at the conclusion of the program. The application of case study techniques to such development projects would provide an invaluable method of documenting the process for the development and transfer of experience, and also provide a sound basis for the future evaluation and assessment of the project in relation to its original objectives.

Development of the planning profession

Planners, in common with many development agencies, have tended to ignore the need for monitoring systems to continually assess their own performance and to assist in making necessary adjustments. The last 20 years have seen rapid technological growth in the developed world, coupled with economic and social changes that have created problems of unprecedented complexity. Generations of new specialists and sub-specialists have often ignored established social values and have helped shift the emphasis from "democracy" to "technocracy," where technical right

is judged as “might.” As a result, much of the consensus of support for the physical planner has been eroded to be replaced by a general atmosphere of conflict, doubt, and cynicism. The new emphasis on the implementation aspects of planning, and the interest being shown in the application of case study techniques to physical planning and the management of change, are a part of the effort by planners to improve their performance and develop a wider consensus of support for their actions.

The adoption of case study methodology in the developing world can provide valuable assistance to the growth of the planning profession in ensuring that the difficult position the planner occupies between the politician and the public is made more explicit. At the same time, this method can serve to monitor overall performance, in response to social and political pressures, and provide opportunities for necessary reassessment and adjustment of urban planning. Such steps can do much to ensure that the planning profession is always seen as being of direct relevance to the problems of developing countries.

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Notes

1. Following the OECD Athens Symposium on Plan Implementation (October 1977), the Urban Management Unit gave partial financing to Dr. John L. Taylor to head a small team of researchers based in the Department of Town and Country Planning, Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, United Kingdom. This research commitment by OECD had two broad objectives: (1) to provide a means of exchanging, at an international level, urban management expertise and experience; and (2) to provide a training method in urban management for a wide range of interdisciplinary interests.
2. Further case study research, financed by the Social Science Research Council, London, is currently being carried out under the authors' direction.
3. Some recent developments in urban education are of relevance here. In the past few years, attempts have been made to incorporate more accurate and lifelike definitions of reality into urban gaming exercises, moving closer and closer to the case study, and yet striving to maintain the element of choice essential to heuristic and interactive learning. See, for example, Wynn and Taylor 1978, Romanos 1978, and Smith, Totterdill, and Wynn 1979.
4. Figures were presented at the 1977 Commonwealth Conference of Planners which estimated that the theoretical short- fall of planners in Africa would be some 3360 by 1981, with an estimated figure for the whole of the developing world (excluding

Europe) of 24 000 by 1981. See Commonwealth Association of Planners, 1977.

5. The general interest in the development and application of Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) to major development projects is a part of this general effort to re-assert the importance of social and economic considerations in any planning decision. The application of EIA can produce a valuable range of case studies associated with the implications of major development and may provide a new learning input.
6. The International Institute for Environment and Development in London is sponsoring a series of comparative case studies in Sudan, Nigeria, India, and Argentina, to look at the role of intermediate and small settlements in the socio-economic development of countries. These studies reflect a growing recognition that the benefits of large-scale investment in industrial and agricultural schemes are marginal for the rural dwellers (who constitute 90% or more of the populations of many developing countries). Institutes collaborating in this research are the Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore, India; the Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Lagos, Nigeria; the Center for Urban and Regional Studies, Argentina; and the Sudanese Group for Assessment of Human Settlements, University of Khartoum, Sudan.