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In What Circumstances Should Plans Be Public?*

Nikhil Kaza & Lewis Hopkins

▶ A Story

Consider a story about urban development in which many actors interact repeatedly.[1] A developer has plans to build residential subdivisions in three different locations at the edge of a twin city metropolitan area. These plans are neither formal nor publicly announced but can be inferred from land acquisitions, inquiries about road construction timetables, and donations of land to a park district.[2] Five other developers plan infill developments in or near each of the two downtowns. These plans evolve rapidly over a period of a few years as financial situations change and other developers build smaller, competing projects more rapidly. Each city adjusts its downtown plans, between formal revisions of these plans, to work with these developers. A large medical institution announces new plans for a major expansion in its current location and another facility on the opposite side of town. The neighbors and the city had inferred these actions in part based on the institution's previous plans made public, but in part these actions are a surprise. Another medical institution announces it will move to a peripheral site, releasing a large area in one of the downtowns for new uses. One of the twin cities has long advocated a new interchange on the western edge of the metropolitan area, which it includes in its official plans and which is included in the Long Range Transportation Plan prepared by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (of which both cities are members), as required for federal funding for transportation projects. Ideas for major commercial development at the new interchange surface at a public meeting by consultants but are not consistent with currently acknowledged plans of the city. Residents nearby know from experience that the city may change its plans and that a city plan that designates agriculture does not mean future agriculture. The other city has long considered a new interchange on the eastern edge, but choice of a location is controversial. The sanitary district has a plan to expand its treatment plant capacity in the area of the new interchange on the western edge as well as to extend services on the eastern side of the metropolitan region.

Each of the characters in the above story—a story typical of plans and planning in the United States—has plans, knows that others have plans, expects others to reveal some of their plans, expects some plans to be secret, and infers other plans from observed behavior. Each of the characters, which include governments, government agencies, and private sector firms (all called *organizations* or *agents* in this article), has complex and multiple interactions with the other characters, with long experience and expectations of continuation into the future. Building on the "uncertainty about the actions of others" of Friend and Jessop (1969), Abbott (2005b) characterizes this uncertainty about what other organizations intend or

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Abstract

Characterizing plans as means of interaction and influence among organizations rather than as mechanisms of control over a complex multiorganizational environment frames the question: In what circumstances should plans be shared widely? Organizations have persistent and repeated interactions about many issues, have fractured capabilities and authorities, and make multiple, overlapping, and interacting plans. Some of these plans are public and some of them are kept private because the plan makers and plan users can benefit from doing so. The publicness or privateness of plans and that of the processes that make plans serve distinct purposes. Examples from recent recovery planning in New Orleans illustrate why and in what circumstances individuals, voluntary groups, and governments choose to plan in public, make their resulting plans public, and find the public plans of others credible. Plans as rhetorics of action, intention, commitment, and influence can be more effective if revealed strategically to particular audiences at particular times.

Keywords: *plans; interorganizational systems; public*

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will do as "organizational uncertainty". Each character is aware that new players may enter the story and old characters may disappear or transform themselves. No character expects the organizational structure, intra- or interorganizational, to remain static.[3] No character expects itself or others to stop planning and acting. Some of these plans will take explicit account of other agents' plans and actions but remain separate, while other plans will result from collaboration and commitment across organizations (Christensen 1999).

When there is more than one organization and more than one interest and these organizations and interests change while confronting a continuing stream of issues and actions, then plans should be used strategically. An organization's own plans, the plans of others, and joint plans should all be considered strategically. Such strategic thinking about plans requires us to move beyond the traditional critiques that conflate plans with regulation and planning with governance. It requires us to move beyond thinking about plans as negotiated decisions in wide participatory settings and think of plans as information about relationships between and among actions, intentions, beliefs, desires, and futures in light of interdependence, irreversibility, indivisibility, and imperfect foresight (Hopkins 2001).

The intent of the article is not to discuss the substantive merits of certain claims about urban development or political justice (sprawl vs. compactness, fairness vs. exploitation, etc.). The notions of interacting plans and strategic meta-planning are positive notions, not normative ones.[4] In other words, they explain existing organizational behavior and the roles of plans and making plans in a multiorganizational framework.[5]

The argument is developed as follows. First, we clarify the meanings of public in discussing plans. Second, we set the idea of interacting plans in the literature by contrasting it with other concepts of how plans work. Third, we elaborate the concepts of plans and planning processes as commitments to intentions and actions that an organization controls and as rhetoric to influence intentions and actions that other organizations control. Fourth, using New Orleans to illustrate the argument, we identify circumstances in which plans that are acknowledged publicly are likely to be less useful than plans that are not acknowledged publicly. Fifth, we consider the publicness of processes by which plans are made. Finally, we conclude that the norms of planning practice should encourage a variety of processes for creating and sharing the content of plans so that plans can be useful in a wider range of circumstances.

▶ Plans and Meanings of Public

Plans for urban development are not inherently *public* in any of several senses. First, a plan need not be made by or for government, for the *public sector*. Second, a plan need not serve the *public interest* or enable collective action. In the earlier story plans are made by nongovernmental organizations such as developers and hospitals and their plans are meant to serve private interests even as their actions affect the public good. Third, a plan, once created, need not be shared or acknowledged *in public,* meaning the ideas in the plan need not be known to everyone. Such *privacy* is expected for developers but also helps to interpret government plans in which claims acknowledged in *public* lack credibility. Formally acknowledged plans for the recovery of New Orleans commit to recovery for the entire city, even though such a commitment is arguably not credible. Finally, a plan need not be made *in public*, meaning it need not be created, approved, or even acknowledged in an open forum. A plan for New Orleans recovery that involved reconstructing a neighborhood in a different (new) location would be unlikely to emerge from deliberations that could only occur fully in the *public* eye. Such a plan might emerge and be more credible as information about the future, might even win acceptance, if deliberations and collaboration occurred, at least initially, in *private*.

Calls for a plan for the recovery of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina implicitly assumed that the plan would be public in all four of these senses. The norms of the planning profession as expressed, for example, in the American Planning Association Ethical Principles (http://www.planning.org/ethics/ethics.html) reinforce the expectation of plans being public in these four senses. Prevailing norms for planning in a metropolitan region suggest that planning should seek consensus on a common vision for concerted action based on wide participation in the process and agreement in public on goals and actions (Berke et al. 2006; Innes 2004).

By focusing on how plans are used, we identify circumstances in which plans may be more useful when they are *not* public in the last two senses—not publicly acknowledged and not created through fully public processes. These circumstances depend also on understanding that there is not *one* plan controlling organizations from *outside* the system but many plans interacting from within a system of organizations. Although many of these organizations may be in the public sector (government) or be ephemeral coalitions of organizations serving a collective interest (across a subset of organizations), we must also be careful not to assume that plans are necessarily public in the first two senses. Our argument is *not* about *private sector* plans in contrast to *public sector* plans but about plans from either sector that are or are not acknowledged *publicly*, that is, are not given *publicity*.

Our perspective surfaces two challenges. In some circumstances, actors willing to use plans that cannot be acknowledged publicly—for example, the plan may not be politically feasible as a commitment in public—will be acting on better information and able to act more effectively than others unwilling to use or create such information. In such situations, plans made without involving the broader public or announcing the plan as a public commitment may be more

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useful than plans meeting those norms both to the organization making the plan as well as to other organizations that may use the plan.

► Interacting Plans in Complex Multiorganizational Systems

It is widely recognized in the planning literature that plans occur in continually changing organizational and interorganizational settings, which include private and public sector organizations and interests (Altshuler 1965). Most of this analysis, however, relies on an underlying presumption that the role of a plan is to coordinate across organizations and interests (Alexander 2001; Chapin 1957). In this view, the complexities of a multiorganizational system are resolved by *a* plan in the common interest that creates an agreed overview, *an external view*, that enables a collective action or coordinates actions among organizations. In contrast, building on Friend and Jessop (1969), Christensen (1999), and Hopkins (2001), we consider the existence of many, partially overlapping plans as a means by which each organization or subgroup of organizations interacts with others from *within* a multiorganizational system. This interaction through plans perspective opens additional interpretations of *using* plans strategically, meaning considering whether to release the information in plans and whether to treat plans as credible.

Susskind, Wansem, and Ciccarelli (2000) compare three approaches—technical rational comprehensive, advocacy, and consensus building—as mechanisms for devising a common plan. None of these approaches considers separate organizations interacting *through their various plans*. Considering the three approaches in turn, however, sets up the idea of interacting plans.

Planning for recovery in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina provides vivid illustrations to help think about the technical rational comprehensive norm. Individual New Orleans residents and small business owners were reasonably clear about what decision points they faced: if and when to return, where to live or open shop, whether to restore or rebuild a building they occupied previously, where to put their children in schools, and how to find a job, employees, or customers. Thinking through the relationships among these decisions quickly prompts recognition of decisions by others that might interact with these decisions: What will insurance pay? Will the city allow rebuilding of this structure? Will my previous employer reopen business? Will schools be available? Will levee protection be recreated, and, if so, where and when? What services might become available, when, and where? Public sector agencies responsible for schools, transit, sanitary waste treatment, and highway construction faced similar decisions. Many people and agencies have long since realized that the grand planning schemes talked about in the press are not focused on providing this kind of information in useful or usable ways, much less doing so in time to help make decisions that needed to be made now. The individuals, businesses, and agencies were making their own plans, in widely varying degrees of formality, to make decisions and take actions. An editorial called the situation "a raft of incoherent plans" (*Washington Post* 2007), and the profession continued to call for a plan (singular) for the recovery of New Orleans. One could easily infer that these calls believed the plan should be a rational comprehensive plan for the city as an organization and that once the city had a plan everyone, including the public agencies, would know what to do. In contrast, an interacting plans perspective would consider how the many individuals and organizations could interact through their many, partially overlapping, and rapidly evolving plans to coordinate or otherwise influence their own actions with the actions of others to the individual organization's benefit, a collective benefit, or both.

Each of these decisions is contingent on, interdependent on, or otherwise related to the decisions and actions of others and other decisions that come after them and before them. Many of the outcomes are highly uncertain, and some of the actions when taken are very costly to reverse. It is in these circumstances that both state and nonstate actors are likely to plan. They do not make one overarching plan but many potentially overlapping plans about different decisions and about different contingencies. They make these plans alone and jointly. They discard some plans as situations change, modify others, and create new ones as and when more information becomes available. The substantive contents of the plans are different for different organizations and groups of organizations; the recognitions of uncertainty and interdependencies are different at different social scales. Nevertheless, all actors recognize these interdependencies and plan accordingly.

The simplest notion of advocacy planning is plans by and for different interests competing for one set of decisions, usually by a particular organization or actor, often presumed to be a government (Davidoff 1965). That is, various groups advocate for what the "state" should decide. Although advocacy is often presumed to be for the less represented, the model of competing plans applies regardless of the capabilities of the interests being advocated. A well-known study by Flyvbjerg (1998) describes the case of the city of Aalborg's plan, which was "defeated" by a counter plan by the business association in concert with the city newspaper. In this case, the plan by the business association was made public explicitly to provide an alternative course of action and to change the perception that the city's plan was the only course of action available to deal with future traffic issues. Implicit in Flyvbjerg's characterization of the process is that the city's plan that was acknowledged publicly and created through processes carried out in public, was not realized, and therefore was not useful. On the

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other hand, the business association's plan, which was not created in public, was "implemented." His interpretation is that power trumped rationality. Or, more generally, in his view the wrong plan won for the wrong reasons. Focusing on only two plans competing for adoption by one official actor limits the possible perspectives.

In developing explanations useful for coping with the world, considering many plans and many actors over time and scope provides richer interpretations. The Aalborg situation was typical in that various actors made plans, participated in, and dropped out of various public and private planning processes as strategic means for pursuing their beliefs and interests. Imagining a plan as something to be made in public, announced to the public, and then implemented leaves no interpretation but an amorphous notion of power trumping the simplistic rationality of that notion of planning. Imagining plans as artifacts of strategic behavior, as plans about plans, among multiple actors is more useful in understanding what is happening and in thinking about what to do. In general, actors will make choices about whether to participate in planning processes to learn what others are saying or influence group plans (Wies 1992). And they will be making strategic judgments about what to reveal and what to take as credible commitments from others. We need not assume superoptimizing rational actors, only a *loose system of networked intentional and adaptive actors.*

The ideas of "relational planning" and "strategic frames" (Healey 2007), building on earlier work on collaborative planning (Healey 1997), move beyond the advocacy caricature of competing plans. They also move beyond the notion of structured consensus building among a particular set of stakeholders about a particular issue (Innes 1996; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). Strategic frames emerge from the complex multiorganizational system of a particular place and change the discourse about that place. The meaning of *plan* as a particular kind of artifact becomes important in explaining how our interpretation differs from Healey's. Healey focuses on making sense of how new strategic frames for a place emerge. The object of interest is the strategic frame, its creation, and its role in urban development. Complexity in the frame's emergence is clearly acknowledged, but there still seems to be one strategic frame for a place at a time. That is, to the extent that a strategic frame plays a role similar to a plan, the focus is on one frame emerging as a new frame for a region, not many interacting strategic frames as a means by which different interests and organizations interact within the region. In contrast, the interacting plans perspective interprets patterns of urban development that result from the interactions of these plans in influencing actions rather than only from the emergence of one strategic frame.

In this article we are not exploring the emergence of a macro outcome from large number of repeated and random micro actions and preferences as other complexity theorists (e.g., Schelling's [1971] segregation model) but of continual interaction between organizations using, among other things, plans. Our perspective on strategic *use* of plans is enabled by considering many plans that overlap and serve different interests among many organizations, rather than focusing on one plan. Rather than focusing on consistency among plans in a hierarchy of plans, or on competition among advocated plans to become the winning plan, our perspective focuses on many interacting plans as a continuing medium of interaction among organizations.

The interaction of these plans is analogous to Bruce and Newman's (1978) explanation of the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel (http://www.mordent.com/folktales/grimms/hng/hng.html) as interacting plans among the characters. Each character not only has a plan but also interprets the plans of others. Hansel overhears a plan believed by his parents to be secret, and then he creates his own plan and keeps it secret (successfully despite his parents' observation of his behavior). In particular, Hansel does not accept his parents' stated intent to return at the end of the day to the place they leave the children. Nor does Hansel reveal his plan to drop pebbles to mark a path home. Hansel is an imperfect collaborator and coalition partner with his sister Gretel, providing assurances but not sharing his plan. The parents are also only imperfect coalition partners in their individual commitments to intentions of the plan they share with each other, but not the children. Urban development is more complex than a fairy tale. We should expect the behavior of characters and the interactions of the plans to be at least as complex. The story with which we introduced this article provides one such example, and New Orleans recovery provides another.

The interacting plans perspective is useful in understanding and explaining how plans occur and work. It makes sense of what is happening out there. Whether any particular set of interacting plans leads to a better (more efficient, more just, more sustainable, more ordered) pattern of urban development than another set is a separate question. We use the interacting plans perspective in this article only to argue that, in some circumstances, requiring that plans be acknowledged in public and created in public may preclude those plans from being credible and from containing controversial but nevertheless, useful content. Recognizing such situations enables organizations to use plans, their own and others', strategically so as to increase their capability to achieve their intentions. Such improved capabilities justify using plans that were not acknowledged in public or created in public.

▶ Plans as Commitment to, or Influence on, Intentions and Actions

Plans work in two fundamental ways. One is to clarify the relationships among one's own past, current, and future

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actions and the relations of these to the actions of others.[6] The other is to do the rhetorical work of persuading others what their actions ought to be, given these relationships or, to be more precise, given a particular view of these relationships. At any given time, a public (meaning widely shared) plan works on both these fronts simultaneously. In doing so, it shapes intentions of self and others (see Hoch 2007; Bratman 1987). Given the fluid nature of circumstances, preferences and plans continually change.

The contingencies between various intentions are clarified in a plan, and thus relationships included in a plan are more likely to be recognized than relationships among actions that are not considered in any one plan. For example, an interchange on an interstate highway and a zoning change to commercial use in the adjoining areas may be interdependent actions. A good plan would recognize these relationships ahead of time. When the decision to change the zoning category of a particular parcel in the neighborhood arises, the city's plan would point to the interchange question. When the decision to acquire the parcel for speculative development arises, the developer's plan would point to this interdependency.

Furthermore, plans also recognize and explicitly address uncertainty of futures and, therefore, the effects of one's own actions and the relationships with other's actions that follow in those futures. Plans will not completely match likely actions to all possible circumstances, for it is prohibitively costly do so. In other words, a planner and a decision maker should recognize not only various actions that may lead toward a goal but also various uncertainties that hinder or complement such actions. It is useful to think about these actions, effects, and intentions and various interesting, but not all, combinations of them before acting.

Levin (1976) argued that different stages of planning provide varying degrees of commitment to a proposed action. While necessarily all intended actions are provisional, plans nevertheless serve as commitment strategies. For example, in mandated transportation planning processes for Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the United States, a project included in a Long Range Transportation Plan has a lower degree of commitment than the same project included in the Transportation Improvement Plan. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the project in particular public (meaning shared) plans signals the degree of commitment to others and thereby influences the actions and decisions of others.[7] In other words, plans and prices have roughly similar functions in a multiorganizational framework. *They are both signals*; plans signal intent and prices signal opportunity costs of exchanges. Plans and prices are thus complements, not substitutes.[8] As with all signals, they are fraught with both systematic and background noise.

The commitment itself does not guarantee the action will be realized, much less in any particular form, but does provide information to others about how they might modify their own plans to suit the new information. Plans are made explicit a priori, to provide a clue to others as well as to oneself about expected actions (Mastop and Faludi 1997). If a transit authority has a plan for operational maintenance of a railway system, for example, this plan lays out the sequences of actions (closing links, rerouting trains, etc.) that it intends to pursue in various futures. In other words, this plan is useful to make even if no one else wants to know about it. It is useful to make my plans public in some cases, however, because it reduces the strategic uncertainty of other actors about my actions, and such knowledge by them may be beneficial to me. A transit agency is likely to make some parts of its operational plan (intents about future changes in operations) public to affect the travel behavior choices of commuters.

The Bring New Orleans Back Plan (Bring New Orleans Back Commission [BNOBC] 2006) that was made after Hurricane Katrina also illustrates the importance of recognizing what a plan may mean to particular potential users. Released in January 2006, one of the suggestions in the BNOBC's plan was that for about 6 months the city of New Orleans would allow individuals and organizations to make choices about whether to return and restore property. Then the city would respond with services and construction projects in neighborhoods that achieved sufficient intensity of redevelopment. Areas without active development would lose their service and likely not be redeveloped. This proposal was quickly rejected *in public*, based in part on reactions from constituents. The plan was politically infeasible, whether or not it would have provided credible and useful information.

A commitment by the city of New Orleans to choose a cluster pattern of development is a commitment to a vision of a structure of a city. The policy of allowing spontaneous clusters to emerge over a short period has more information and is, therefore, likely to precipitate specific kinds of responses from other actors in the urban development process. This commitment to intent, without commitment to action in specific areas, is sufficient for developers with mobile capital to move forward in rebuilding parts of the city they choose to rebuild. It is not, however, as advantageous to individual homeowners, who must risk their own small investment on the contingency that their neighbors will do likewise. The strategy to decide later on connections between the clusters and how to protect them from flooding delays these decisions for later commitment through separate design and planning exercises. Multiple plans are, thus, contingent and interdependent on each other and are continually informing each other without requiring conformity of plans.

A commitment to a goal of "equality of housing opportunity" is not a commitment to a particular subsidy or a specific regulation. A subsidy and regulation may be alternatives to achieve the same goal. When a plan for a city publicly

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declares such a commitment as an objective, it leaves vague the question of which particular action will achieve this intention. The commitment to goals allows flexibility in choosing particular actions or sets of actions as the situation demands. However, committing only to goals postpones the decisions and commitment to actions, which may be advantageous or not, or advantageous to some and not others. The choice of whether to commit in public to intentions, actions, or both is a strategic choice in the use of plans. In analyzing cases of metropolitan regional planning in Australia, Abbott (2005a) identifies the issue of credible plans. Some planners he interviewed said that plans available in public were so broad that they did not reflect the government's "true intents or likely actions." It is, thus, important in many contexts to develop a better understanding of the strategic nature of decisions to make plans, to share them, and to use them. We argue that, rather than pursue the implausible task of ensuring that complete and "true intents or likely actions" will be included in plans, we should learn to be savvy about strategic use of plans (Christensen 1993). We should be savvy about inferring strategic use by others and strategic use for ourselves.

▶ Plans in Public

What sorts of plans are likely to be made public, when, in what manner, and to whom? Given these expectations, when should plans be trusted as credible? How should plans be used strategically?

Many planning scholars and practitioners have challenged the claim that a plan is the end goal of a planning process (Healey 1997; Hoch 1994, 2007; Innes 1995, 2004). Their claims for benefits from planning as process include collective group formation, collective action, negotiation, capacity building, and shaping collective intentions. We later return to these issues and the implications of processes occurring in public, or not, on the likelihood of achieving these claimed results. First, however, plans are important and useful products of planning processes, and plans have value distinguishable from, if not entirely independent of, the value of the processes by which they are made.

Hoch (2007) has framed planning process and plans as rhetoric. We use this approach slightly differently but accept that both process and resulting plans have rhetorical work to do. The rhetorical work of a public (openly shared) plan is different from the rhetorical work of a public (openly shared) planning process, with potentially different justifications and explanations. A plan that is made public reveals (or obfuscates) one's own intentions, which reduces (or increases) uncertainty in the system, whereas planning in public provides opportunities for group processes to play out to afford opportunities for coalition building and social cognition as well as dissent. The value of plans depends in important ways on to whom the content of plans is public and when. Plans give us some clues toward commitments by particular groups to particular courses of action and intentions. Such information may be useful to us. Those who make such plans will have reason to care whether, and if so when, we know what about their intended commitments. Thus, planning in public and plans that are made public are strategic questions of making commitments. In some cases, it is crucial that such commitments be public; in others, it is crucial that they not be public.

Recent planning in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina illustrates these ideas. The hurricane-caused disruption of routine processes gave even greater visibility to interorganizational activities. Many plans have been made in relation to New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina hit. Looking for a "figure-it-all-out-so-we-all-know-what-is-going-to-happen" kind of plan is unlikely to fit this complex world. We expect to use real-time plans we can figure out and infer in action, as well as longer lead time plans for particular purposes.

The merit of the BNOBC proposal to allow clusters of development to emerge can certainly be debated on political, justice, economic, and ecological considerations. For present purposes it is more pertinent, however, to trace the implications and potential ramifications of this particular information regime, its implied levels of commitment, and appropriate responses by various actors. The city's decision not to endorse or adopt this aspect of this plan did not mean that the idea—the information provided about one way to think of recovery—was not useful to various people and organizations. Indeed, it may have been one of the best explanations of what was already happening and likely to continue to happen. It may have created additional energy among some groups to build coalitions to counter the potential strategy and to participate in it. Trying to influence how the city responds by arguing for criteria in addition to the intensity of emergent redevelopment while also trying to encourage neighbors to restore property was a robust strategy for individuals and organizations, who realized that they could influence but not control the future.

One possible scenario is to interpret the BNOBC proposal to be credible information about the city's likely actions, even though the plan was rejected *in public*. In other words, strategic users of this plan might take advantage of its content—a possible intention proposed *in public* but then rejected *in public*. Developers with enough resources to act quickly would likely concentrate their resources in particular areas. In these areas, a reasonably large development proposal under consideration would then affect the likelihood of smaller neighbors realizing that their own development plan and actions were under lower threat of reversal by the city. These smaller players would, thus, act more decisively, thereby locking in increasing returns to scale in areas where they were told or were able to infer that large players were investing. Or neighborhood

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groups would voluntarily form a collective to plan for the neighborhood to discover plans of the individuals in the group or to persuade them to adopt investment strategies that promoted cooperation. On the other hand, political coalitions might form to oppose, undermine, or change the plan. These plausible responses are based on longstanding ideas about group behavior (Olson 1965). Many observed instances in New Orleans are consistent with these explanations.

Not surprisingly, voluntary groups have also been planning in New Orleans. One of the most prominent is the Lake Vista Property Owners Association (http://www.lakevistapropertyowners.com). That this group was able to organize and pursue planning interests is consistent with conventional claims about collective action: its residents have the income, professional skills, and affinity of social class to take collective action (Olson 1965). The residents of this neighborhood have the kinds of social capital that enables action, and they have expectations that they can use professional skills and links to other groups and governments (Putnam et al. 2002). These residents were involved in early planning efforts at the neighborhood level and were able to work with consultants hired by the city, and one of the lead planners for the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) is a resident of the neighborhood. Posts on their Web site not only responded to the confusion among their constituents about the many planning processes but also highlighted the wide range of actions and plans being taken by individuals and organizations. These residents are not merely relying on or waiting for the city to plan.

During fall 2006, the salient planning activity was the UNOP, funded in large part through the Rockefeller Foundation and driven by a new coalition of interests. The major driving force was a mandate for a plan to gain release of federal and nonprofit funding. This mandate created incentives to participate and to get the plan done within a set of constraints. The task was framed by some as requiring a grand vision and consensus about the future of New Orleans.

Ed Blakely, the mayor's director of recovery, announced the more limited plan approximately one year after the BNOBC plan and while the city council was still debating the UNOP. The Blakely plans responds to, that is, interacts with, the preceding and parallel plans. It includes most of the nodes of concentrated development that would have resulted from the BNOBC recommendation plus two additional nodes taking into account areas of the city that would not have redeveloped successfully under the BNOBC initiative. These additions are arguably, at least in part, because of the efforts of neighborhood-oriented planning efforts, some of which broke away from the UNOP process, to act in the interests of those neighborhoods. That is, planning initiatives by many different interests and strategic decisions about whom to include in their separate processes and when to announce their results to whom is one way to explain what was happening. Organizations were using plans strategically.

Why would a city not put forth in public a plan committing one way or another on what will be redeveloped? If it did, would its plans be credible? Can its plans be inferred, perhaps with greater credibility than its plans that are acknowledged in public? One interpretation is that the political and pragmatic considerations apparently outweighed the city's interest in committing to one form of development or certain kinds of procedures. The city appears to have chosen a mix of implicit, inferable policies and partially consistent public announcements to allow development activity to proceed. The city may have deliberately decided to keep some of its plans implicit, if not secret, because its true intentions were not politically acceptable as public statements, and statements that were politically acceptable were not credible and thus not useful information about intentions and likely actions. This touches on the critical question of how public one's true plans ought to be or can be. Are they well developed in private but ambiguous in public? Or are they deliberately underdeveloped to avoid public disclosure? In other words, when do we choose not to plan? And when do we choose to plan but not to make the plan public? Separating these questions should help us think through the implications of making plans.

The public announcement of a plan almost certainly influenced the plans of other agents, big and small, collective and individual, hierarchical and voluntary, ad hoc and organized. These reactions, including reactions to other plans made public, will affect the realization of recovery. The complex system adapts not only to an intervention or direct action but also to information about intentions and likely actions. Plans that are public in some degree to some group of people provide this information, but in some circumstances, as illustrated above, a plan made public may not provide the best information. The traditional interpretation of a plan as a mechanism for control is insufficient to explain these interactions.

How do we recognize implicit plans when they are not publicly stated? Actions, informed by these implicit plans, may be publicly observable. The construction of a commercial complex by a developer may reveal the intentions of the developer. Before the action is itself undertaken, necessary prior actions such as seeking permissions for zoning variances or changes and planning commission or development authority approvals require revealing actions, which may in turn reveal intentions. Actions may have consequences that are publicly observable even if the actions themselves are not. While acquisition of a particular parcel of land itself may not constitute a definitive guide to the intent of a private plan, a sequence or combination of actions that have some definitive consequences may lead us to infer a plan that backs up these actions. Conservation agencies acquiring multiple properties in a sequential fashion along an ecologically sensitive floodplain imply, to an outside observer, that these actions will result in securing rights that will preserve the floodplain.

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Even when the acquisitions are not yet complete, we can begin to understand the motives of a particular intentional actor in a strategic environment. Similar inferences about a city's growth policy can be made from the series of the city's annexation actions, even if there is no explicit annexation policy or plan. This is the classic plan recognition problem, which chess players, military strategists, and players in most sports understand quite well. The plan recognition problem is seldom addressed in the urban planning literature, however, perhaps because urban planners too easily assume that all relevant plans will be or should be public.

There are other cases when plans themselves as future possible actions are likely to be made public. Individuals will make a plan explicit in some cases because the knowledge affects the interests of the other actors whose plans include decisions that are related to one's own. The process of revealing these plans will then be based on how such revelations would affect the choices others would make that might strengthen one's own strategic position. If a large developer (or an infrastructure provider) in New Orleans intends to concentrate on a location and intends to attract neighbors to invest around the location, then she or he will reveal her or his plan because such revelation increases the success of her or his own action under the threat of relocation (or under utilization). The announcement of a future project may indeed be enough of a catalyst for a cluster to form around the location of the project. The sharp increase in property values around proposed light rail corridors is a similar and well-studied phenomenon (Knaap, Ding, and Hopkins 2001). The public declaration of such intentions results in changing the expectations of land owners nearby about the value of the land and thus may induce the denser and higher use development pattern that enhances the utility of the light rail.

Making some government policies public would address the issues of procedural justice. Especially in a liberal democracy, the government's ethical obligation to cater to groups in a just fashion, however justice is defined, makes it necessary to provide adequate justifications for different responses in similar situations. A policy that is public knowledge would force the authority using the policy ethically, though not necessarily legally, to act in a consistent fashion. This reduces the strategic uncertainty of actions of others that are dependent on the actions of these governments. This is not to say that all policies, and by extension plans, by governments in a liberal democracy must be public.

Many a time, substantive justice considerations outweigh the procedural justice issues to allow for plans to be made and kept secret with limited oversight as in self fulfilling forecasts or intentions that are not currently (yet) able to survive public challenge. An example of the latter might be locations of affordable housing or removal of housing in floodplains. Equally pertinent, strategic users of plans should acknowledge that in some cases, such as these, plans that are acknowledged publicly are not credible. The UNOP process in New Orleans, for example, was constrained from the beginning to assume that all neighborhoods would be rebuilt. If I believe that redevelopment of all neighborhoods is normatively undesirable, empirically infeasible financially, or politically unlikely, then I will not grant credibility to the UNOP plan. It would not be credible because I know it was artificially constrained to exclude from consideration ideas and data I believe to be pertinent. Despite its processes of public creation and its official public acknowledgment, it would not be credible as information on which to base decisions.

A case in point is plans for expansion of infrastructure of a school district. Plans for and by school districts in the United States are unlikely to be written documents of future intentions because of political considerations. These commitments are common knowledge, however, to the school board (to a particular group and not to a wider public), implicit under the considerations of staffing decisions, fund seeking, tax structure decisions, and deliberations that occur. However, when the board seeks to obtain broad citizen support (e.g., when seeking referendum on a bond issue) for a specific decision or commitment based on the plan, the board will seek publicity. The board will seek to describe its commitments in terms persuasive to local citizens.

▶ Planning in Public

The BNOBC plan was created with greater reliance on expertise and less on public participation than later plans. It was presented to a public forum but never acknowledged as *the* plan; it was not adopted. Blakeley's plan was not created in public; rather, it was a public announcement of a commitment to a public acknowledgment and in some sense an adoption of elements in various other plans, many of which were created through broad public participation. The planning process by the Lake Vista Property Owners Association was essentially closed to a wider public but open to a restricted group. Parts of its plans were made public to a wider audience because it was useful to the group to do so. On the other hand, creation of UNOP involved wide public participation. In this section, we discuss the value of publicness of the process and how different groups strategically choose to participate in such processes.

Planning processes in public have value different from, if not entirely independent of, the value of plans that may or may not result from the process. Visioning processes currently popular in the United States (Kwartler and Longo 2008), and exemplified by the UNOP process, are sold not only as a means to find a common vision but also as a means to build social capital in the form of new connections among participants. Helling (1998) asks if Atlanta's visioning project, which cost about $4.5 million including the opportunity costs of the

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participants' time and direct expenses, was worth the expense. She acknowledges that valued outcomes include both any resulting plan and new connections among participants.

Participating in a visioning process or other planning processes *in public* provides an opportunity for various individuals and groups to discover others' attitudes, goals, and preferences. Processes within a group that keeps its deliberations private (not sharing them with others outside the group) can yield similar benefits, and arguments about the effects of open (public) versus closed (private) deliberations are well established (Susskind and Cruikshank 2006). Some kinds of participants are more likely to share some kinds of opinions in private than in public, and some privately shared information will be more credible than some publicly shared information. While planning in public may discover some common purposes toward which the resulting collective may aspire, the presumption of stable and unitary public purpose as the ultimate aim of the group process is misplaced (Donaghy and Hopkins 2006). The focus of assessing visioning should be about whether the process in public produces coalitions of groups for future planning or action and whether the process legitimates actions that are taken by various actors.

Collectives plan to shape the collective interest of the individual actors.[9] By adopting a formal process of planning, the collective brings together a myriad of interests. Participants view individual interests amid others' interests, beliefs, and plans, which may precipitate changes in individuals' preferences. The plans that are the ends of such planning processes then do not compel individuals to act in the fashion specified in the group's plan because plans have no jurisdiction or legitimate force, unlike binding contracts. Collective plans propel individuals to act because the individuals' plans become aligned with the collective's plan, both by changes to individuals' prior plans and by shaping the collective plan. Interests are constantly balanced and preference orderings are modified in the process of such planning. The plans of the group are made explicit and planning is inclusive when these plans are meant to shape individual's plans.

Wies (1992) describes the planning situation in Lake County, IL in which various communities and other players choose strategically to participate in the planning process. He contends that game theoretic ideas of strategic interactions can explain why different actors chose to participate, oppose, support, and modify at particular times different elements of the regional plan to suit their particular objectives and plans. His argument leads to the rejection of a hierarchical comprehensive model of planning processes, in which plans of subsets of geographic and functional scopes are assumed to be in agreement with other plans within the hierarchy. It also rejects the notion of presuming that organizations either are or are not participants in a collective planning process because it recognizes strategic and incomplete participation.

We can better explain what we observe by characterizing plan making as idiosyncratic, often times as a strategic response to changing circumstances, by the same or different groups of individuals, and for very different purposes, which may be in direct disagreement or even confrontational in nature (Davidoff 1965; Donaghy and Hopkins 2006; Mandelbaum 2000). Group processes of communication and decision making in a multi preference situation have been the purview of political economics, including the seminal "impossibility theorems" by Arrow (1951) and Sen (1970). Recently, however, many planning theorists have ignored the ramifications of that body of literature, and have placed undue emphasis on consensus within a group as a politically, procedurally, and ethically prudent method. While consensus as a methodological outcome may be politically suitable in a multi stakeholder environment, arguments for its practical and moral superiority are questionable (Kaza 2006; Sager 2002). The tyranny of public participation is likely to result in the *a priori* median position. While this is not in itself necessarily a bad outcome, we should be cognizant of the strategic behavior of various actors in the process, including posturing and grandstanding. More importantly, opportunities to lead major change require processes whose outcomes are not restricted to the central tendency of collective opinion, but rather change this median view.

If a grassroots organization in New Orleans were formed to plan for redevelopment in the given information regime,[10] then the group would consider specific strategies on how to respond to the threat of relocation. It would provide for a common forum within which each individual or subsets of individuals could decide whether to invest in rebuilding in the neighborhood. It would provide opportunity for each individual to discover and shape the preferences and plans of neighbors and thus estimate the likelihood of the success of their own financial as well as emotional investments. The group by itself might not have the capacity to act on behalf of the individuals to build the neighborhood, but it would provide an opportunity for each participant to explore individual options given better information.

It should not be assumed that the inherent result of such group interaction would be a greater commitment to rebuilding. Such group activity might instead lead to a concerted effort to be bought out as a neighborhood. Such an effort might reduce risk to individuals and be attractive to a city government that could benefit from such bottom up, voluntary proposals. Or group interaction might lead to a more informed, apparently but not necessarily collective, behavior of not reinvesting. In all these cases, the plans of the collective shape those of the individuals. The discovery of others' plans shapes one's own, which in turns shapes that of the collective.

The organization's original intent may be merely to respond to the threat of uncertainty about relocation versus rebuilding outcomes. In New Orleans now, a major cause of uncertainty is imperfect foresight about whether enough

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neighbors will come back to make a land parcel viable as a rebuilt residential or business location. Group interaction is one way to learn about neighbors' situations, preferences, budget, and other capability constraints that will improve predictions of their behavior. Such interaction is also an opportunity to influence their beliefs about what I will do. It is also a way to organize collective action to influence others including others who may become members of the group as well as government agencies or other significant actors who will necessarily remain outside the group. One way to motivate such group interaction is by setting the task of creating *in public* a plan of action for the group.

If group interactions lead to discovery of preferences about political change that might change information about relocation, then the group's collective action strategy may change and be unrecognizable from the original intent, in part by the spawning of subgroups.[11] Thus, groups may adapt and re-form as new information becomes available. A grassroots subgroup may decide to act covertly to solicit interest in changing the political regime or decide to publicize its intentions widely to attract attention of groups with similar preferences to form coalitions. A group or an individual actor may decide to make a plan public, or the group may decide to plan in the public eye.

Planning in a group brings together varied interests in a collective action problem. It is likely that there will be dissenters within the group who do not agree with the conclusions that are advocated by the majority. If the intent of planning in the group is to align any subgroups' particular plans with respect to one another and therefore the larger group's plan, then consensus is not necessarily the only outcome to seek. Strategic meta-planning could include alternatives that are put forth by the group primarily to seek expected responses from others. Of many, the following responses of dissenters within a planning process are important to consider.

- A subgroup acquiesces in the planning process and plan *in public* but then undermines the adopted plan in influencing decisions. It participates in the planning process only to learn about the strengths of various positions and to build future coalitions.
- A dissenting subgroup makes clear *in public* its displeasure in the planning process to position itself in future interactions but does not undermine the plan by opposing actions. This provides social cognition benefits to the whole group by allowing for dissenting positions to be heard and considered in an open forum and may lead to modifications of other positions.
- A dissenting subgroup separates itself *in public* from the planning process, thereby denying some legitimacy, and forms a separate group that undermines the plan *in public* from without.

These disagreements are important to nurture even in a mode of planning where the consensus building paradigm has primacy. Especially when subgroups dissent, they provide valuable information about preferences of individuals within the group, and the stridency of the dissent is likely to give indications about the strength of otherwise ordinal preferences (Sunstein 2003).

Plans in public and planning processes in public have very different roles to play. Users of plans and planning processes, whether from the public sector, voluntary sector, or private sector, can increase the value of these activities by strategic choices of when to make plans and planning processes public and when to grant credibility to plans and planning processes made public by others.

▶ Conclusion: Plan in Public When . . .

When a plan cannot be acknowledged in public because, for example, the plan is not politically feasible as a commitment in public, actors willing to use or infer such plans will be acting on better information and able to act more effectively than others unwilling to use or create such plans. In such situations, plans made without involving the broader public or announcing the plan as a public commitment may be more useful than plans meeting those norms, In some cases, procedural justice demands that the processes of planning or the resulting plan be open to wide public participation. For example, openness to public dissent is justified when governments plan or act. This means that in some situations governments may not be able to make credible plans *in public* and may, therefore, choose not to plan formally at all because of procedural justice constraints. Organizations able to recognize such situations and infer implicit plans will likely be more effective than organizations unwilling or unable to do so.

When interorganizational interests are framed around overlapping goals, organizations can benefit from planning in a group because the process will exchange information about and shape beliefs and preferences of individuals and groups. Whether or not such group processes are open to the wider public depends on both the substantive content of the interests and the political roles of the organizations. The plans should be made public or not, irrespective of the processes that generate them, when it is strategically advantageous to share information about intents and expected actions to influence plans or actions of other organizations. The openness of the process of making the plan and the publicity of the resulting plans have different justifications and outcomes.

In this article, we have demonstrated that plans and planning processes themselves are not inherently collective goods.[12] That is, their benefits *can be* rival and excludable. Plans are merely information, and information can be guarded or widely shared depending on the content of the information and the usefulness of such sharing to the organizations that possess it. Considering plans as strategic information recognizes that many distinct actors will be planning and acting individually, in groups and in changing coalitions. These organizations and coalitions will have reason to reveal strategically the information in their plans. Other organizations whose

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actions interact should expect such strategic use of plans. Only in certain circumstances should we expect that plans made by others will be public in the sense of shared widely and made through processes open to the public. This framing also provides a basis for justifying choices about whether to make plans in public or to make resulting plans public.

► Notes

1. The argument of this article is presented with examples and in the institutional context and terminology of planning in the United States. We believe that the argument is more widely applicable with suitable modifications for the particular institutional structures and social norms, but we cannot within the scope of one article present it also in other contexts, terminologies, and examples. Examples such as the Alborg case presented by Flyvbjerg (1998) and Queensland case by Abbot (2005a, 2005b) are alluded to later on.

2. In this context, *formal* describes plans that are documented in some tangible form, including digital, and acknowledged by decision-making procedures of an organization. Not all plans are formal or are explicitly identified in their title as *plan*. Plans can be found in many disguises ranging from internal memoranda to external press releases. These documents, insofar as they are records of governments, can be requested and made public through public access statutes such as the Freedom of Information Act or other state and local regulations. However, inferring plans behind these documents requires considerable effort when the relationships between decisions are not made apparent. Furthermore, even government plans often pass through several phases before they enter the public domain. Even so, we still have to contend with the plans of private organizations that may choose to keep them private. In other words, the plan recognition problem does not disappear in the face of public access statutes.

3. Interorganizational structure could be construed as contracts, expectations, and norms of intergroup behavior and is an integral part of the institution building, within which plans play *some* part. In this article, we are concerned with the interorganizational roles of plans, not their intraorganizational roles.

4. Remember that plans, as used in this article, constitute information about relationships among intentions, actions, and future events. Plans of this kind need not resolve problems of externalities or collective choice but seek to address the problems of interdependence, indivisibility, irreversibility, and imperfect foresight. The arguments that the use of such plans can lead to outcomes that are closer to intentions and that they are more feasible to create than overarching, externally controlling plans and complement rather than substitute for governance and regulation are elaborated in Hopkins (2001).

5. Whether plans reduce inefficiencies and planning helps mitigate inequalities, or not, is the role of the substantive content of the plans. They are external standards, which are quite different from the internal consistency and efficacy of the plans. The internal standard about the usefulness of the plan is primarily about providing information to the organization, which would otherwise have to act impulsively or myopically without considering the ramifications of the action on other actions. Whether such considerations lead to just, efficient outcomes is a different question that is not addressed here. To see this, one only has to consider plans of two opposing armies in a war. We can talk about the usefulness of each army's plans to itself without considering the justness of the cause, outcome, or conduct. Analogous conditions in urban development are plentiful.

6. Plans are both forward and backward looking, though the latter is not emphasized in the literature as much as the former.

7. There are other kinds of commitment strategies as well, which we do not delve into for the sake of conciseness. As Elster (1984) famously demonstrated using the case of Ulysses, who bound himself to the mast, to guard against future weakness of will, organizations can choose to publicly commit themselves to bind the futurity.

8. Our argument is about plans as recognitions of relationships among intentions, decisions, events, and futures, not about regulations by voluntary, private, or public sector (government) organizations of public goods or public good externalities. Our argument is not about government regulations versus markets but about the use of information by organizations within markets and among governments. Thus, we are arguing that plans as information about intent are complements to prices, which is distinct from the argument of "plans versus markets" (Gordon, Deng, and Richardson 2007; Hopkins 2001; Webster and Lai 2003). The latter focuses on issues of property rights, regulations, and government authority versus autonomy of individual organizations.

9. Collectives may also plan for individual interests when the planning itself is a public good, without any intent to shape collective or individual interests (Hopkins 2001).

10. A well-known study of asymmetric information in the market place is Akerlof's (1970) lemons. In this article we are arguing for similar asymmetric information structure in the web of plans and their users.

11. Planning is distinct from collective action. One can make plans are about collective action, but not all plans are about collective action, let alone collective choice.

12. Again, one can make plans about collective goods but not all plans about those. Plans and the processes that create them provide information that is sometimes nonrival and nonexcludable and at times is, irrespective of whether the plans are about decisions that involve collective goods.

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