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**The future
of national planning systems:
some new steps**

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Summary

1. The concept of "national planning"
2. National planning: a systemic vision
3. What opportunities exist for systemic development of the national planning?
 - 3.1 The weight of the past
 - 3.2 Strategic planning at a national scale
4. American federal strategic planning: its effects on national planning future
5. From strategic planning toward national economic programming: a necessary step toward a systemic planning vision
6. Some integrative fields of analysis and evaluation to be cultivated at a national level
7. Toward a scientific and professional approach to systemic planning

The future of national planning systems*

1. The concept of "national planning"

In order to talk about the "future" of national planning¹, one needs to clarify what we mean by "national planning". The adjective "national", evidently, delimits the territorial scale of planning (inclusive however of all possible difficulties stemming from the highly variable sizes of different countries).² Even neglecting this objective disparity of references, "national" planning can be regarded (and in fact in the history of the last century, has been regarded) from several viewpoints. We can distinguish at least three major viewpoints:

1. In the first sense, the term "national" means the co-ordination of town planning policy by a national government. Planning remains "town" planning, while the guidelines, managerial modalities and rules are elaborated and dictated at a national scale.
2. In the second sense, on the contrary, the term, "national," elevates the physical and land-use planning, usually applied first at urban and rural levels, to a national scale, i.e. the whole territory of a country. In this sense, the prevailing problems are: the greater physical infrastructures; communications and transport networks of a country; the environmental and land use protection issues; the interregional and intercity accessibility concerns; and so forth.
3. Finally, in the third sense, the term means a more general shift of planning from the physical dimension to the socio-economic one, given that at a national scale a set of socio-economic issues is emerging, which deserves to be subject to the planning methodology.

Indeed, a rigorous systemic concept of planning could not admit these different viewpoints except in a systemic vision which includes the entire domain of planning. Such a vision would consist in many facets belonging to a single prism. It could not admit a disordered application, as is the case today for the different "substantive" planning experiences which lack any external co-

*I thank my colleague Albert Guttenberg for the help he gave me in translating this paper into acceptable English - an act the more generous, the little his consensus with the arguments developed.

¹ It is one of the themes on which AESOP has based its XII Congress and – it should be noted here – in an unusual way with regard to its previous Congresses, and also with regard to the prevailing cultural and scientific interests of its members, almost all of whom come from urban and regional fields.

² In Europe it is legitimate to ask oneself what relation can exist between planning at a "national scale," not to say the Granduchy of Luxembourg, but even of spatially and demographically relevant countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy, as well as others whose many regions have a territory or population greater than the "national" countries above (not to mention any comparison with North American countries).

ordination in their plan design and implementation; multiple plans are often overlapping and inconsistent, with heavy damage to their reliability and feasibility

2. National planning in a systemic vision

In a systemic vision, which also belongs to a "rational" vision (to the unique possible rational vision) of planning, the national planning would unify all three of the above viewpoints. It would try to identify the substantive connections between them and also try to establish the substantive aspects of analysis and decision-making belonging to the national scale itself (in contrast to the other possible scales – for instance: sub-national, supra-national, or global). And all this in an integrated vision and approach to planning, including both socio-economic and physical-environmental planning.

Therefore, beyond the actual and historical experiences that could induce us to speak about types of planning completely different from each other (which rarely share common experiences with reciprocal benefit), if we wish to build the foundations of a general and really comprehensive planning methodology (or "planning science", or "planology", as I would prefer) capable of unifying in a common structure or frame all kinds and types of planning, we need a national planning able to find its own place in a multidimensional frame. And from this location, it should be possible to draw and develop its relations with all "other" plannings.

And if it is admissible that the technical-professional operator of planning, the "planner", be active mainly in one territorial scale (urban, regional, national, supra-national) or in one substantive sector (land-use, transport, industry, environment, etc.), and from this activity draw the best of his or her experience and skill, much less admissible is it that he or she not be prepared – at least in the educational phase – to know how to deal with problems and issues and – overall – interactions concerning all the planning dimensions (as is unfortunately the present case everywhere in higher studies, an integrated and unified discipline of planning science has yet to take shape).³

3. What opportunities exist for systemic-type development of the national planning?

The prospective of a systemic-type development of national planning is not very clear. The weight of the past is strong. However, the vision of an uncertain present provides some possibilities. In any case, the role of the scientific community and the professional community as well, will be crucial. Although scientific developments and professional applications are normally strongly influenced by political and organisational demands (or, if not this, then by a lack of technical supply), a strong engagement on the part of the scientific and

³ See Archibugi, Palermo1992

professional communities could provide an effective contribution for more coordinated and conscious practices.

3.1 The weight of the past

It could be useful to glance at the different experiences of national planning around the world in the last century, in order to evaluate their meaning and limitations in regard to a systemic concept.

A first historical example of national planning – it is hard to deny – is the Soviet example of the 1920's. It was essentially a matter of economic planning which was never systemically integrated with physical planning, not least because of the insufficient political decentralisation which characterised the Soviet regime. Moreover, the lack of a developed and complex social context, the cultural and technical backwardness, the lack of entrepreneurial capacity, the absence of a free market and free initiative, all deformed the planning experience into a system of bureaucratic enforcement with scant participation.⁴

In the 1930's, the American "New Deal" attempted to introduce similar procedures of national economic planning, supported by a group of qualified economists,⁵ under the guise of the priority being the best use of national economic resources. But even this national economic planning experience was dissociated from the city-planning experiences which were also developing in that country.

It was the post-war recovery in European countries that induced, in the 1940's and 50's and, finally, in the 60's, several experiences of (macro) economic planning at the national scale. This kind of national planning has been called "indicative" (just to emphasise its radical difference from the Soviet economic planning called "authoritarian"). But even this kind of planning did not introduce an integrated systemic vision, and was developed without any strict relationship with a physical approach at a national scale, and also without any real connection with the regional and urban planning also in progress at that time in countries such as: (a) France, where the Commissariat au Plan was accompanied by the Datar, the national delegation attached to the physical and regional development; and (b) the Netherlands, where – despite the traditional connection between physical and economic connection at national scale, favoured also by the country's small size – it is difficult to find even one document of the Central Bureau of Planning, even in its best period, in which land use and economic aspects are evaluated in an

⁴My conviction is that it was not planning which failed in Soviet Union but the bureaucratic and totalitarian regime without freedom. This regime would have created intolerable conditions, even for the best planning methods. Moreover the so called planning was applied without the use of appropriate technologies of planning (in spite of many attempts by a few competent economists to introduce "optimal planning" and strategic planning; economists who earned for themselves the accusation of attempting to introduce the methods of Western "imperialist" culture). But that failure was very well exploited by the Western enemies of planning, in order to discredit any attempt of national economic planning.

⁵ See, for instance, Mitchell, Galloway, The National Resources Commission...

integrated way.⁶

None of these experiences was sufficient to stand in the way of the demonstrated inadequacy of the (almost exclusively) macroeconomic approaches; nor did they stand against the insufficiency of the effective integration between the macroeconomic planning and the operational structures of the public administration.⁷

In Italy, at the beginning of the 1970's, an attempt was made (with the creation of an official body, "Research Institute for Economic Planning", ISPE) to build a complex system of national and regional accounting, inclusive of a social and environmental non-market or informal accounting. This effort was intended as a tool for a very integrated evaluation and management of the country, and for overcoming the conventional and inadequate macroeconomic approach to decision-making and planning at a national scale. The methodology suggested was a technical advancement beyond the usual planning approaches.⁸ But the implementation of this research was not taken into consideration even by the planning authorities themselves.⁹

In the face of these scattered and intermittent experiences of "national" economic planning, in the 1970's and 80's we also observed some attempts at physical planning at a national scale. The best, in my opinion, has been the experience of the German Raumordnungprogramme (territorial planning programme) (1972-75) designed by the federal Government in co-operation with the lander through a common planning Committee. This programme has split the whole German territory into about thirty urban-regional "units" (einheiten), as critical entities of reference (not related to the current administrative boundaries), which are only related by the functional role of a "city effect".¹⁰

⁶ For more information on the problems of disassociation/association between indicative macroeconomic planning and physical planning, see an old report of mine for the UN Center for Housing, Building and Planning (1969), prepared for an international seminar in Bucharest.

⁷ See an ONU integration report....

⁸ Progetto Quadro....

⁹ It is also irrelevant to remember that the wide experience of the first two United Nations "decades of development" (the 1960's and 70's) provided the impulse for many, essentially macroeconomic plans at a national level, in many developing countries. This was also a failed experience because of the scant managerial capacities in those countries, and the distorted role of a plan (as in USSR in all its experiences) by the ruling classes and the dominating regime. Later, attention came to be concentrated on individual projects, mainly funded by Western multilateral or bilateral assistance, without entering into a systemic and at the same time operational logic, which – if difficult in the developed countries – would have been more incompatible given the political and managerial immaturity in developing countries.

¹⁰ An extension and up-to-dating both of the above quoted Italian and German experiences of physical planning at the national scale (based on the identification of functional and "programmatic" urban systems or city-regions, at national scale) can be found in a more recent research carried out by the *Planning Studies Centre* on commitment of the European Union Commission (under the co-ordination of F. Archibugi). Among the findings of this research (related only to four European countries, i.e. France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy), four maps were designed (one for each country) concerning a proposal for a spatial reorganisation of "urban effect" in the national territory; with three kinds of strategies for every urban system identified: "polarisation", "depolarisation" and "rationalisation." For more information see "a forthcoming

More recently (in the 1980's) we observed – under the influence of the environmentalist wave – an interesting experience of environmental national planning in several countries: in sequential order, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Canada, Italy, and others. These long term- plans, for the most part oriented to the physical aspects without co-ordination with the economic implications, have been able to elevate to a national scale physical issues which before were dealt with only at a local scale; and they have contributed in a certain way to overcoming the disciplinary isolation of the different scales.

Finally, in the 1990's, national planning was given a strong impetus within many countries by the introduction at the central government level of new management methods and – especially in USA – of the so called "strategic planning."¹¹

Well, these last innovations of strategic planning at the US federal level have had – in my opinion – a very important impact on the perspectives of national planning. In fact they are so important that they deserve special consideration.

3.2 Strategic planning at the national scale

The American federal act of the 1993¹², called "the Result Act", introduced for all federal agencies (including the "departments") the obligation to prepare: 1) the *strategic plans*, that "*shall cover a period of not less than five years...and shall be updated and revised at least every three years*"; 2) the *yearly performance plans*, "*covering each program activity set forth in the budget of such agency*" (beginning in the first year of the strategic plan); 3) the *performance report*, concerning the ex post evaluation of the performance plan implementation.

Furthermore, the act forecast the future obligation of the agencies to build a *program budget*, i.e. a budget based on the actions, sequences and results achieved by the performance plans. Program budgeting permits the government and authorised decision-makers, to evaluate ex ante (using various ex post data) the relative effect of single expenditures in terms of results achieved, and to operate, based on the effectiveness of the various expenditures, a more conscious trade-off between different packages (or scenarios) which use federal resources – with a real knowledge of the efficiency of each expenditure. We will consider later the implications of this new opportunity for the federal government.

At the moment, it is very interesting to observe how the Result Act outlines (and constrains the program designers to respect) the contents a) of the *strategic plan*; b) of the *performance plan*; and c) of the *performance report*. The *strategic plan* "*shall contain* (Sec 3/a):

1. a comprehensive mission statement covering the major functions and

publication, (Archibugi); a summary of this research (and these maps in colour) can be found on the PSC web page: www.planningstudies.org

¹¹Strategic planning otherwise calls to mind previous attempts to introduce the methods of "Planning-Programming-Budgeting System" (PPBS) in the 1960's; however it seems that now the administrative and political commitment is completely different.

¹²*Government Performance and Result Act (GPRA)*.

- operation of the agency;
2. general goals and objectives, including outcome-related goals and objectives, for the major functions and operations of the agency;
 3. a description of how the goals and objectives are to be achieved, including a description of the operational processes, skill and technology, and the human, capital, information, and other
 4. resources required to meet those goals and objectives¹³ ;
 5. a description of how the performance goals included in the [performance] plan [next and new sec.1115 of Us Code] shall be related to the general goals and objectives in the strategic plan;
 6. an identification of those key factor external to the agency and beyond its control that could significantly affect the achievement of the general goals and objectives; and
 7. a description of the program evaluations used in establishing or revising general goals and objectives, with a schedule for future program evaluations."

The performance plan – according to the Result Act (sec.4/a) – is requested by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget from each agency every year "*covering each program activity set forth in the budget of such agency*"¹⁴ . And "*such plan shall:*

1. establish performance goals to define the level of performance to be achieved by a program activity;
2. express such goals in an objective, quantifiable, and measurable form unless authorized to be in an alternative form under subsection (b)¹⁵
3. briefly describe the operational process, skill and technology, and the human, capital, information, or other resources required to meet the performance goals;
4. establish performance indicators to be used in measuring or assessing the relevant outputs, service levels, and outcomes of each program activity;
5. provide a basis for comparing actual program results with the established performance goals; and
6. describe the means to be used to verify and validate measured values."

¹³For the purpose of complying with the performance plan, the agency "*may aggregate, disaggregate, or consolidate program activities, except that any aggregation or consolidation may not omit or minimize the significance of any program activity constituting a major function or operation for the agency*" (Sec. 4/c).

¹⁴In Sec 3/c of the Act it is stated that the "*performance plan shall be consistent with the agency's strategic plan,*" and that "*a performance plan may not be submitted for a fiscal year not covered by a current strategic plan....*"

¹⁵In subsection (b) is established that "*if an agency, in consultation with the Director of the OMB, determines that it is not feasible to express the performance goals for a particular program activity in a objective, quantifiable, and measurable form, the Director of the OMB may authorize an alternative form*". It lays down some further guidelines with respect to the adoption of such "alternative form".

The *Program performance report*, in turn presented¹⁶ by the chief of the agency to the President and the Congress, shall have the following contents:

"Each Program performance report shall set forth the performance indicators established in the agency performance plan ..., along with the actual program performance achieved compared with the performance goals expressed in the plan for the fiscal year.....". Furthermore, "each report shall:

1. review the success of achieving the performance goals of the fiscal year;
2. evaluate the performance plan for the current fiscal year relative to the performance achieved toward the performance goals in the fiscal year covered by the report;
3. explain and describe, where a performance goal has not been met (including when a program activity's performance is determined not to have met the criteria of a successful program activity under [performance plan] or a corresponding level of achievement if another alternative form is used [see note 7], A. why the goal was not met; B. those plans and schedules for achieving the established performance goals; C. if the performance goal is impractical or infeasible, why that is the case and what action is recommended;
4. describe the use and assess the effectiveness in achieving performance goals of any waiver (under the sec. 9703 of this title); and
5. include the summary findings of those program evaluations completed during the fiscal year covered by the report."

4. The American federal strategic planning: its effects on the national planning future

This act, although it is federal law, and although it is aimed exclusively at the planning of federal (i.e. governmental) agencies, has a significance and impact as an important act of planning at national scale that cannot be ignored.

Moreover the GPRA, or Result Act, has received and brought to a national (federal) scale a multitude of experiences developed in the last twenty years at state and local levels (and also by individual cases from other countries, giving to all this an unsuspected single pattern of rationality and essentiality). And it is already having a "demonstrative effect" at every governmental sub-federal level. It is a matter of a national movement for planning at the national scale.

It is difficult not to consider such an act – even in its present limited function – an important step toward a national planning system. And it cannot have unimportant demonstrative effects also in other advanced countries.

The act (which became – as an amendment – an integrated part of the *US Code*) engrafted a process which will be difficult to reverse. September 1997 saw the first important rendezvous for the delivery of all strategic plans from the agencies. And for the plan preparation the act requires that "*the agencies shall*

¹⁶"No later than March 31 2000, and no later of each year thereafter" (new Sec. 1116 of the amended *US Code*).

consult with the Congress"(Sec.3/d); to what extent has this consultation been implemented? and what forms has it taken? Perhaps the answers to these questions can be found only case by case, i.e. agency by agency. In any event, the work to evaluate the strategic plans which were delivered in September 1997 has already begun (with a kind of score for each plan as determined by a multicriteria analysis and evaluation).

Moreover, the act (by the same sec.3/d) prescribed that when developing its strategic plan, the agency *"shall solicit and consider the views and suggestions of those entities potentially affected by or interested in such a plan"*. Evidently these entities are those groups commonly called in recent political jargon, the "stakeholders".

Even if the act does not explicitly call for an *"inter-agency"* type of consultation and co-operation (i.e. between different units of the federal government), in fact the start of intense reflection and programming activity has represented a significant development in this direction. The same is also true at an *inter-governmental* level (i.e., within that country between the federal government and other local and state governments), in the aims of assuring consistency of objectives and resources employed, and of obtaining possible synergies, important developments have occurred.

This is the reason why the act cannot (especially with its increasing implementation) avoid producing a national planning movement, involving sectors outside the strict control of the federal government.

And all this is in order to obtain the necessary evaluation of the program activities of the federal government – to evaluate the federal programs' direct and indirect effects (positive and negative) on the entire social system of the country.

5. From strategic planning to national economic programming: a necessary step toward a systemic planning

The great and growing weight of the public sector in any advanced country, in terms of State's income and outcome flows as a proportion of the GNP, and with respect to the whole societal context, is such that we cannot imagine a governmental expenditure planning without an evaluation of its effect on the economic system as a whole, and therefore without a comprehensive planning vision of this system.

Already, the strategic planning for every program activity and every program budget must be evaluated with respect to its effect on the entire societal context, beginning with its "target" population, or beneficiaries. And it is impossible that a selection and evaluation process of individual expenditures in the program budgeting, could not be aggregated into a public budget at the national level, in order to evaluate its effectiveness, priority preference, compatibility and necessary alternatives and options. And we know as well that this unavoidable assumption at the scale of the national budget cannot avoid also a comprehensive evaluation of the effects at the scale of the entire societal context.

This amounts to the natural improvement – not necessarily easy to implement

– of modern governance: modern in the sense of a better understanding and knowledge of interdependencies and best solutions.

The problem, and it is a big problem, is that this process, required by the evolution of the innovations of strategic planning at the governmental scale, has not found – to date – neither the political consciousness necessary for its operational implementation, nor even the technical consciousness – on the part of the scientific and professional community of planners – required for its conceptual and technical implementation.

6. Toward a scientific and professional approach to the systemic planning

What I mean to say here – especially in this Congress – to the colleagues who represent a didactic function in the field of planning, is that the scientific community shows itself today to be terribly unprepared to provide valid tools of knowledge and of professional skills to this emerging type of strategic planning at a national scale, and to give attention to its unavoidable connections toward a more comprehensive system of societal planning (including its socio-economic and environmental components).

My opinion is that – independent from the willingness on the part of decision makers of any kind and shape to apply and implement such schemes, and even accepting the risk of an approach which could be too "rationalist" (as many are only too ready to point out) and disappointing in its results – the scientific community has the duty to prepare (with all didactic implications about the know how), the interpretative and conceptual schemes of a *multidimensional, multiobjective, multidisciplinary, and multilevel* planning. Where, of course, the emergent "national" scale could again find its full role, its effectiveness and its dignity, (even to the benefit – in this systemic consciousness – of "other" effective and feasible plannings, at other scales).

And the scientific community has the duty to work consistently in this direction. To improve the conceptualisation and the methodologies, simulating the implementations according to the nature of the planning approach: to pursue not *what is* but *what should be*: and this without despairing that the evolution of things and the general improvement of the consciousness could also influence the practical or political implementation of this general planning above outlined.

This Congress has already set the theme of the "future of national planning systems" as an impelling theme in this historical conjuncture. This paper, along with those papers of other colleagues interested in the same theme, is a trial answer to our Congress's invitation. It is to be hoped that the time which separates this Congress from the forthcoming congresses of our association will be marked by intensive study and research (and yielding future papers) in the direction of clarifying and commenting on the relationship between *strategic planning* – actually developing in governmental agencies within certain countries in the frame of the renovation, nay reinventing, of public administration – and *systemic planning* (of multilevels and multiactors), the existence and even the functioning of which it is the responsibility of our scientific community to outline.