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THE IMPACT OF A PLANNING PHILOSOPHY

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John Friend stood at the cradle of the strategic choice approach put forward in *Local Government and Strategic Choice: An Operational Research Approach to the Process of Public Planning* (Friend and Jessop, 1977). Clearly, without his continuing involvement (always in close cooperation with others) the strategic choice approach would have been nowhere as well established as it is. The purpose of this essay is to give an account of the impact of strategic choice as a planning philosophy, in particular on Dutch planning thought where this impact has been pronounced. In other countries, the impact, especially since the 1980s, has been more outside planning as such. This is particularly true for the UK where, of course, the philosophy was formulated. The major impact there was initially in local and subsequently in structure planning. Since the 1980s though, interest in the planning field has receded, and much of the advisory work of the 'IOR-School' (Institute for Operational Research-School) took place outside mainstream planning. The decline of planning interest in the 'strategic choice approach' was more than matched by a growing interest in it as an example of what came to be known as 'soft OR' (Operational Research). This interest in strategic choice is well documented in the book by Friend and Hickling (1997), *Planning Under Pressure*, a third revised and

substantially expanded edition of which due to be published with Elsevier is at the time of writing eagerly awaited. There is more than an ephemeral link to Alternative Dispute Resolution, ever so popular in the USA. Allen Hickling had good relations with Larry Susskind with whom he has worked on commissions from the Dutch environmental ministry. The planning philosophies underlying have a cunning similarity.

So it is of little surprise that themes central to current debates (for a summary and a rebuttal of unjustified theoretical allegations see Innes, 2004) about planning being a communicative, interactive process remind us distinctly of the strategic choice approach. Indeed, much of the teaching of the IOR-School has a decidedly modern ring about it. At the same time, strategic choice relates to an old-timer among theoretical issues, rationality. This author has always claimed (even in the face of opposition from the IOR-School [see Faludi, 1987: 97–9]) that, far from being the polar opposite of rational planning, strategic choice represents a practical way of approximating this noble ideal. The value of this approach derives from the wholehearted acceptance of, and its manner of dealing with, uncertainty as part of the human condition. So it is definitely what the seminal paper by Rittel and Webber (1973) describes as an approach of the second generation. In dealing with uncertainty, strategic choice puts essential aspects of planning, such as engaging in research, political choice and coordination into a unified perspective.

Being an operational researcher and a mathematician by training, it is hardly surprising that John Friend should have started out seeking to apply 'hard' approaches. What is remarkable is how 'soft' in the sense of adapted to real-life problems as faced by decision makers from flesh and blood his approach has become since. The key in this respect has been the detailed study on 'Policy Research for Local Government'. It was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and involved several years' research into the practice of decision-making in Coventry in the British Midlands. It is characteristic of strategic choice that it has been developed by means of participatory-observer research based on the tradition of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, of which the Institute for Operation Research, or IOR (hence 'IOR-School') formed part. A vivid personal account of this key project of the IOR-School by John Friend can be found in the Postscript to the second edition of *Local Government and Strategic Choice* (Friend and Jessop, 1977; see also Friend, 1983: 64). Under the impact of close encounters with real-life decision-making, apparently abstract approaches were turned into practical tools for coping with the various pressures decision makers are under. The innovative element in this research lies in the fact that, in the best of the Tavistock tradition, the researchers have put themselves into the situation of decision makers. Studying them in their natural habitat and using a qualitative approach inspired by the Human Resources Centre of the Tavistock Institute, the researchers have thus deciphered and interpreted for us the strange language and customs of real-life decision

makers. In this way they were able to form a reliable view of the needs, the problems and the logic of practical decision-making. Years later, Friend and Hickling (1997: 325–6) were to describe the shift that has occurred during this project as that from a 'system-centred' to a 'decision-centred' view. Be that as it may, it is this research that has resulted in the seminal book, mentioned above, under the title of *Local Government and Strategic Choice*.

The book did not stop at interpreting this situation of decision makers. It also sought to give them guidance. In so doing, the authors drew on another project conducted at the Tavistock Institute. It concerned communication in the building industry. That project had led to the development of the so-called 'Analysis of Inter-connected Decision Areas' (AIDA) (Luckman, 1967) using graphic representations of the inter-relations between various options per decision area to systematically generate alternatives. In simple manner, it lays the decision-making process open so that every assumption can be changed at will. AIDA is the best-known part of the strategic choice approach, so much so that many believe it is all there is to it.

Local Government and Strategic Choice got a remarkable reception. There were enthusiastic reviews by Peter Hall and David Krueckeberg, and it is clearly one of the classics of the international planning literature. *Local Government and Strategic Choice* has had an impact on the early 'social learning' literature as well. For instance, the book by Michael (1973), *On Learning to Plan – and Planning to Learn*, quotes it extensively. Parts of *Local Government and Strategic Choice* have been included in an important reader on *Decision-Making in Urban Planning* by Robinson (1972). With the exception of a section written specifically with a view to British local government organization in the late 1970s, *Local Government and Strategic Choice* has been translated also into German under the title of *Entscheidungsstrategien in Stadtplanung und Verwaltung* (Friend and Jessop, 1973). It was, of course, standard fare for planning students in the Britain of the 1970s. If anything this was even truer for the Netherlands, about which there is more below.

In planning practice, strategic choice made its initial impact by means of short courses, in-house training sessions and teaching material produced for this purpose with examples relating to areas of application like structure planning, environmental planning and the like. (On the various modes of developing the strategic choice approach see also Friend and Hickling, 1997: 243–6.) This line of business was kick-started by a shoestring operation funded by the then Centre for Environmental Studies in London. It was called the LOGIMP experiment (for Local Government Implementation) and entailed experiments in various English local authorities. The researchers were acting as iterate consultants, and a debriefing was held (Centre for Environmental Studies, 1970). The approach was repeated, albeit on a larger scale, in a project funded by the then Department of the Environment code-named SPAIDA (for Structure Plan AIDA). The

project, extending from 1973 to 1976, concerned the application of strategic choice, at that time still strongly identified with AIDA, hence the name SPAIDA, to structure plan preparation. The principal researchers were Alan Sutton, John Friend and Allen Hickling, the latter to become a close collaborator of John Friend's for the next quarter of a century.

The teaching manuals produced for short courses emulated the practice established in *Local Government and Strategic Choice* of using stylized case studies as vehicles for conveying vivid views of decision-making. These greatly enhance the reader's interest and comprehension. An early example of this kind of 'hands-on' material was a booklet by Allen Hickling (1974) who by that time had joined the Institute for Operational Research to become the second principal advocate and leading proponent of strategic choice. As always in close cooperation with John Friend, Hickling has given attention to the social aspects of strategic choice, such as conflict management and, more generally speaking, facilitation. As indicated, there are distinct overtones of 'Alternative Dispute Resolution' (ADR; see Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987). This has increased the attractiveness of the approach for private, as well as public management. However, before we discuss the period during which the cooperation between Friend and Hickling has come about, the follow-up to the Coventry research needs to be discussed.

After his co-author and first director of the Institute for Operational Research, W.N. Jessop, had passed away, John Friend pursued the social-scientific dimension of decision-making further in a follow-up study funded by the British Social Science Research Council. The result of this was another classic work, *Public Planning: The Inter-corporate Dimension* (Friend et al., 1974). This book deals with decision-making in networks within, but also and in particular between organizations, hence 'inter-corporate dimension' in the subtitle of this book. Note that this came out years before the notion of networks became popular. The object of study was a so-called expanded town, Droitwich in the West Midlands, catering to overspill from Birmingham. In demonstrating a clear understanding of the role of 'boundary-spanners' (called 'reticulists' in this work) the study was even more ahead of its time than *Local Government and Strategic Choice* had been five years earlier. It developed the notion of 'policy-systems' and 'decision-networks' as cross-cutting organizational boundaries in ways that make it read remarkably modern (which is perhaps why it did not receive half as much attention at the time as *Local Government and Strategic Choice* had).

As far as its echo in the academic planning literature is concerned, as indicated, it is fair to say that, certainly as compared to other countries, this has been greatest in the Netherlands. (For the wider impact and parallel developments in the OR field see 'A Guide to Further Reading' in the second edition of *Planning under Pressure* [Friend and Hickling, 1997]) A number of Dutch planners, some of them with an academic background, were among the early participants of short courses given by the Institute for

Operational Research. Probably the first Dutch publication drawing attention to this school of thought has been by Kreukels (1975). Upon his appointment at Delft University of Technology, the present author was drawn into applying strategic choice in his teaching projects. This led to more regular exchanges with both John Friend and Allen Hickling. A modified text of Hickling's strategic choice manual was published in Dutch. In the spirit of the didactic philosophy of the IOR-School, this manual was amplified by a Dutch case study written by two graduates from Delft (Hickling et al., 1977). There were few Dutch textbooks at the time and so this book rendered good services to students.

In addition, the IOR-School's message entered into the interpretation of English-Dutch comparative research in the mid- and late-1970s (Thomas et al., 1983: 143–252). This went beyond *Local Government and Strategic Choice*, by then a standard text, to include the more complex work, discussed above, on *Public Planning: The Inter-corporate Dimension*. Next to the three classical forms of uncertainty as regards the environment, political values and related areas of choice a fourth form of uncertainty concerning procedures was identified. Putting 'reticulists' (as indicated, the term used by Friend et al. [1974]) to work was portrayed as the appropriate response. Gradually, the reflection on the implications of the teaching of the IOR-School led to the distillation from it of what might be regarded as its essentials (Faludi and De Ruijter, 1978). These essentials are that planning is a process of choice under uncertainty and that, whilst in principle uncertainty is here to stay, there are ways of coming to terms with it.

After his move to the University of Amsterdam, the involvement of the present author with applying strategic choice in the Dutch context took new forms. The aim was to relate strategic choice to mainstream planning thought, by identifying the radically new underlying planning philosophy (Faludi and Mastop, 1982). This philosophy was described as the 'decision-centred view of planning' (see also Faludi, 1982) and happens to be the view of planning that the present author has advocated ever since. Some relevant works are available in English (Faludi, 1986, 1987). In a nutshell, the radical element lies in shifting attention from plans to day-by-day, so-called operational decisions. Thus, the IOR-School thinks of planning,

> . . . as not so much concerned with the description of the future – a future over which there is only limited control – but with providing a firmer case for action which there is power to take now. Planning is not so much concerned with producing a plan as with gaining a better understanding of the problems with which we are faced now and in the future, in order that we can make better decisions now. (Centre for Environmental Studies, 1970: 16)

This has important implications for what the literature describes as the 'object' of planning. Previous views have assumed that what is being planned is some material object outside the planning agency. The emphasis

of the IOR-School on day-to-day decision-making undermines these views. Indeed, *Local Government and Strategic Choice* describes the object of planning as 'the powers for dealing with . . . situations' (Friend and Jessop, 1977: 120). The authors see planning as arranging ongoing decisions into packages that make sense from some overall point of view. Appropriately, Friend and Hickling (1997: 5) in their work *Planning Under Pressure: The Strategic Choice Approach* summarize their experience by talking about 'scheming'.

This is one of the things that the study by Mastop (1987) giving a detailed account of the development, up until then, of the strategic choice approach, picks up. This work, which is only available in Dutch, is teasing out from the account of the development of strategic choice the underlying planning philosophy. An important aspect of the application of strategic choice in situations where, as in the Netherlands, the ideal of a plan is that of a legally binding document, is the relation with the law. Mastop devotes an entire section of his study to a thorough discussion of this relationship.

PhDs are very important building blocks of Dutch academic literature. They are all published and regarded not so much as an entry ticket to an academic career but rather as the first milestone in it. Also, a fair share of the investment in university research goes towards supporting PhD research, and this investment has not been without its beneficial effects. As far as the further development of the 'decision-centred' philosophy underlying strategic choice is concerned, this has taken two tacks.

One has been to pay more attention than hitherto to the context, including mobilizing ideas and organizational modes of expression, of decision-making. Thus the study by Van der Valk (1989) of late-19th century planning in Amsterdam identifies the substantive and procedural ideas held by professionals. It coined the term 'systematic town expansion' to refer to the complex of such ideas. Systematic town expansion was the driving force behind planning strategies and actions. Understanding this concept allows us to interpret the development of planning. The earlier study by De Ruijter (1987) invokes the similar concept of a 'programme' binding the coalition behind the formation of the Netherlands Institute for Housing and Planning together. It was the first to take its cues from the history and philosophy of science, especially Kuhn and Lakatos. Similarly, Zonneveld (1991) traces patterns in the formation of planning concepts, identifying a 'hard core' and 'positive heuristics', together with 'explosive issues', analogous to Kuhn's 'anomalies'. They cause fundamental change in the dominant 'conceptual complex', a notion comparable to that of a paradigm.

All this relates to a topical theme, the importance of frames in consensus building. Such frames are the keys to political effectiveness. Hajer (1989; see also Hajer, 1995) introduces the notion of hegemonic project consisting of a discourse, a system of positions and practices and strategic action. The term used by the present author is planning doctrine (Faludi, 1985, 1987; Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; see also the special issue of *Planning Theory*

edited by Alexander, 1996). Planning doctrine delineates an arena for discussion and action. By performing its framing role, doctrine enables 'normal' planning (Alexander and Faludi, 1996: 34). A benefit is to reduce the burden of plan making. Planning becomes cumulative and progressive. It is suggested that this is why Dutch strategic planning has been effective. It does so by providing the code (Faludi and Korthals Altes, 1997: 10) in which situations are being defined, not only by the planners, but ideally also by their critics and, most importantly, by those responsible for follow-on decisions under the terms of the plan. In the language of strategic choice, one would say that doctrine indicates terms in which decision areas, options, option bars and so forth are being described.

This takes us to the second tack taken in the Netherlands, research into the performance of plans. This research approach takes its cues from something that Friend has said: it is not the implementation of plans but rather the quality of day-by-day decisions that we should worry about. Inspired by the work of Barrett and Fudge (1981) Dutch researchers have turned this into a veritable research school with the aim of establishing how plans perform in improving decision-making. Under this philosophy, the purpose of plans is not that of directing decisions according to preconceived ideas. Rather it is that of providing intelligence for decision makers as to the likely ramifications of their intended action. In 1997, a collection of articles in *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* has come out documenting this distinct research approach and its achievements in analysing the performance of Dutch planning (see in particular the introductory essay by Mastop, 1997). The present author has subsequently given another progress report on Dutch research into the performance of plans (Faludi, 2000). Research since on the application of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (Faludi, 2001, 2003) fits into this tradition saying that strategic planning 'shapes minds, and not space', and so does work by Shaw and Sykes (2001) on the application of the ESDP in English regional planning.

Long-term effects on academic theorizing apart, there have been more direct lines of influence in the Netherlands as well. In the 1980s, Allen Hickling has been a consultant to the Directorate-General for Environmental Management of the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment – which is when Larry Susskind, too, has been involved. At local level Arnold de Jong, a consultant with previous political experience, spread the message of strategic choice. Together, De Jong and Hickling have synthesized their experiences in the Netherlands into guidelines for planning practice in the 1990s in the form of a very accessible booklet *Mens en Beleid* (De Jong and Hickling, 1990). It has been used as a textbook, among others on a public administration course, as well as on the planning course of the University of Amsterdam. With Arnold van der Valk, one of the enthusiastic Dutch proponents of strategic choice, having moved from Amsterdam to Wageningen University, that is where most of

the action is now. The third edition of *Planning under Pressure* gives a vivid account of his distinct approach to teaching strategic choice.

John Friend himself has stayed in Britain. During the Thatcher years, he was forced to witness the dismantling of the Institute for Operational Research, in its latter days called the Centre for Operational and Organisational Research (COOR). It was at that time that he held a temporary appointment as a fellow at the University of Sheffield where Ian Masser (before then a professor of planning, albeit for a short spell, at Utrecht in the Netherlands) taught. He set himself up also as an independent consultant, working as an adviser and giving courses the world over. Having brought their joint ideas into practice as consultants over many years, Friend and Hickling published their mature views in *Planning Under Pressure: The Strategic Choice Approach* in 1987, with a second edition coming out in 1997.

Not the least of John Friend's projects over the last years has been a joint one with his son, a computer programmer. The aim of the project was to develop software for the advanced version of strategic choice represented by *Planning Under Pressure*. This computer program, Strategic Adviser (STRAD), distinguishes itself from other decision support systems by its user-friendliness and transparency. There are no complex algorithms, so the user can keep tabs on the relation between input and output. The program fits seamlessly with the notion of planning as a cyclical and iterative process. Using this program, participants in the decision-making process can easily retrace their steps. It provides an excellent basis for discussions and negotiations, and it is for these reasons that the program is very well suited for planning courses. Research and experiments at the University of Amsterdam concerning the applicability of the Windows version done in the context of a project on computer-supported teaching proved its usefulness but, as indicated, the centre of attention to strategic choice has shifted away from Amsterdam since.

From 1997, John Friend took up a part-time development role as Research Professor at the new Lincoln University campus; this involved adapting strategic choice and the inter-corporate dimension to the challenges of third world development. He moved in 2001 to retirement in South Yorkshire, while continuing to act as adviser to the Community Operational Research Unit at Lincoln. Having just completed, with his long-time collaborator Allen Hickling, the revision of *Planning Under Pressure*, John Friend, now well into his retirement, is engaged in another exciting writing project.

In summary, the impact of John Friend's work is as follows:

1. He has advanced our understanding of the practice of planning by drawing attention to uncertainty and how to cope with its various manifestations. At a time when practitioners as well as academics were trying to come to terms with process planning as the counterpoint to the

unanimously rejected notion of blueprint planning, he has developed a workable form of rational planning.

2. He has cast new light on the phenomenon of planning by emphasizing concrete, so-called operational decisions. Accordingly, plans are useful to the extent that they play a role in the deliberations and interaction around decision-making about concrete intervention.
3. John Friend rethought the role of plans several years before the public administration literature started debating this issue in the wake of the publication of the seminal work by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) on *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland*. John Friend and his associates had turned the whole issue upside down. Essentially, plans were not there to be implemented. Rather, they were guides to be used in decision-making, but without denying the responsibility and intelligence of decision makers, they argued.
4. In his books about the application of the strategic choice approach John Friend has put flesh to the bones of the now fashionable notion of interactive policy making. In fact (although this is sorely misunderstood by its proponents) he may count as a pioneer and representative of what is presently described as the communicative approach to planning. In so doing, he has sketched out the contours also of a model of decision-making within and between policy networks.
5. It will be evident that the impact, both directly and indirectly, of John Friend's work has been particularly strong in Dutch planning and planning education. This is true for both the University of Amsterdam, where it has formed a major input into the programme, as well as for Radboud University Nijmegen where there is a strong school of research evaluating the performance of plans, and for Wageningen University.

His contribution to the analysis of, and reflection on, planning notwithstanding, John Friend has never been a full-time academic. His was and is a form of reflection on practice that distinguishes itself over much academic theorizing by taking practice and practitioners as its reference points. His work and the impact that it has falsify the much-heralded view among planners that planning theory and the practice of planning are, and will always remain, worlds apart. That the work has never received the wholehearted recognition from planning academics that it deserves is perhaps due to the fact that John Friend feels ill at ease with rarefied debates. Particularly at a time when academic planning theorists were hotly debating the crisis of capitalism, John Friend was working tirelessly to develop and refine a model of planning that was acceptable, both from a practical as well as a methodological point of view.

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