**BUILDING ON A BREAKTHROUGH IN PUBLIC POLICY DESIGN**

**Throughout the world**, communities can now be found whose horizons have been expanded, in different ways and to varying degrees, through initiatives to develop more sensitive processes for the negotiation of important public policies.

**The origins of one of the most influential** of these initiatives extend back as far as the 1960’s. For this was when a pioneering project was launched to forge a deeper understanding of the processes of policy planning in cities, attracting a four-year grant from the Nuffield Foundation along with the active cooperation of Coventry City Council in the English Midlands. Uniquely, the project team brought together insights from operational research\* and from the more established social sciences, and was offered open access to the full range of processes - political, professional and consultative - through which crucial choices about the city’s future were all the time being shaped.

**The most significant outcome** of that initiative has been a fresh perspective of public policy planning as a many-stranded process of negotiation, in which diverse sources of uncertainty - evidential, political and structural - have to be addressed, while sustaining a dynamic balance between decisive action and flexibility of future choice. From this perspective was developed a set of guidelines for the design of inclusive planning processes, and a suite of visual aids to communication, which have now been adopted and extended by public servants and elected representatives in many parts of the world to help them in working together on all kinds of important environmental, social and economic challenges.

**The diffusion of these innovations** has now extended so wide, and over so many decades, that it has become hard to gauge their full current reach. Universities in many countries have played a crucial role in introducing this breakthrough to younger generations; even though a constraining factor has been the relatively slender links between academic schools of operational research, as the main source of this decision-focused philosophy, and the various other academic schools that prepare students for the subtle open challenges of public policy planning at scales from the local to the national and beyond.

**If further strategic progress is to be achieved**, a priority now is for investment in a new global hub, which is likely to be university-based, through which:

* to share more widely the fruits so far of this global experience.
* to publish accounts of successes in securing significant policy change.
* to extend this breakthrough to additional countries and domains of public policy.
* to build further on the bank of shareable resources so far developed.
* to share strategies for introducing the approach in new settings.
* to stimulate cross-boundary research directed to further advances in practice.

***\* AMONG THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OPERATIONAL RESEARCH, since its early successes in the Second World War, few can have now been adopted so widely or so energetically as a radical decision-focused approach to public planning and policy development that was pioneered in Britain during the post-war decades. Yet, among the many policy makers and advisers around the world who have now championed this breakthrough in practice, few would claim to share OR’s disciplinary base in mathematics and related scientific fields.***

**A MAP OF INFLUENCES**

***Contributing to and shaped by this breakthrough***

……… 1960 ………

**GRADUAL SHIFTS**

**OF EMPHASIS**

**Formative contacts between visionaries**

A

B

**Investments from research sponsors**

***20th CENTURY***

D

E

**Insights from elected local politicians**

**Inputs from operational research**

**C**

**Inputs from social scientists**

**Insights from environmental planners**

F

*the more*

*political side*

*the more analytical side*

**Gs**

***influences***

**R**

**S**

H

**Commissions from**

**UK government**

**A shift to a broader International focus emerges**

G

**A dual perspective of**

**public policy change**

**J**

**A decision-focused**

**view of public planning processes**

**I**

***where to discover more about***

**the story of this breakthrough in**

***STRATEGIC PROGRESS PLANNING* for**

**PUBLIC POLICY DESIGNI**

***These influences are expanded on reference sheets A to X on the pages that follow***

**in upper case**

**furth**

**f**

**tools for shaping linked**

**decision problems**

**K**

**N**

**Tools for mapping public policy landscapes**

**L**g

**tools for managing**

**sources of uncertainty**

**Inclusive designs for policy development**

**O**

A

**P**

**tools for negotiating strategic progress**

**M**

………… 2020 ………….

**….**

**Design of immersive**

**learning programmes**

**collaborating<<<<<<<< engaging<<<<<<<< interpreting <<<<<<<<< experencing <<<< <<>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> experiences**

**Helping communities to extend their capacities**

**Dialogue with political scientists**

***Influences***

**Impacts on policies within Britain**

**Publications for**

**diverse readerships**

**Impacts on policies**

**within Britain**

**Link sheet**

**Q**

**Impacts on policies elsewhere in Europe**

**Impacts on policies in other continents**

**V**

**c**

**U**t

**T**

**Y**

**Cultivation of**

**Facilitation skills**

**Development of software for process guidance**

**X**

**W**

***21st CENTURY***

* **Formation of an academic nexus for continuity - in 2021?**
* **Policy outreach via summer school programmes**
* **Refreshing international links**
* **Further extensions to resources, tools & global reach**
* **Bids to sponsors for programme investment**

***continuing cross-cultural diffusion of more sensitive processes for develong public policies***

**Link sheet A: FORMATIVE CONTACTS BETWEEN VISIONARIES**

The origins of an important breakthrough in approach to the design of public policies can be traced to the formation of a new research centre that became known known as the *Institute for Operational Research* [IOR], which was established in 1963 as a semi-autonomous unit of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. The Tavistock is an independent not-for-profit institution registered as a charity, with a mission to promote the application of the social sciences to challenges within organisations and within society. The impetus to form this new centre arose within the UK’s Operational Research Society, which was then also London-based. Within this Society’s Council, discussions had been ongoing since 1961 around the possibility of forming a national centre which could promote the wider use of operational research on broad challenges of public policy, following OR’s record of successful military applications during the second world war and its subsequent adoption and use in the larger industrial corporations.

There were three individuals whose vision, energy and influence were seminal in the formation of the new research centre: Neil Jessop on the Council of the OR Society, Professor Russell Ackoff of the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, and Dr. Eric Trist of the Tavistock Institute in London.

In the early 1960’s, **Neil Jessop** was the manager of a large operational research group at the Coventry headquarters of the Courtauld textile group; he had also been elected to the Council of the Operational Research Society with special responsibility for membership matters. With some other members of Council, and with many OR practitioners in the UK and the USA, he shared a concern that OR was becoming too focused on advanced mathematical models designed to address some limited classes of problems in industrial management, to the exclusion of broader issues of public, societal and business policy. A new national research centre was now being discussed as a response.

Professor **Russell Ackoff**, who had built a wide reputation as a prominent and sometimes controversial champion of OR in the United States, happened at this time to be spending a sabbatical year in the UK with the Engineering Department of the University of Birmingham, which had sponsored the UK’s first short course in OR. In the course of many discussions with Neil Jessop, Ackoff suggested the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London as a possible administrative home for a new research centre, offering the advantage of an extensive record in the application of the social sciences to challenges arising within organisations.

Dr **Eric Trist** was an eminent British social scientist who was at that time chair of the staff group within the Tavistock Institute in London. He had first met Russell Ackoff, and established a strong rapport, at a congress in Paris in 1959 of The Institute of Management Sciences. This society, known as TIMS, had been formed with an international membership some years earlier in the United States, as a means of bridging the cultural gap between the approaches of operational research and of the social sciences to challenges of business and public management. In 1969, Trist was to join Ackoff at the University of Pennsylvania when he accepted a chair at its internationally respected Wharton Business School.

It was Ackoff who introduced Neil Jessop to Eric Trist and his colleagues at the Tavistock Institute in 1962. The outcome was a proposal to form a new research centre within the Tavistock framework; this was duly endorsed by the Council of the Operational Research Society, then accepted by the Council of the Tavistock Institute in 1963. This led to the launch in May 1963 of the *Institute for OR* as the latest of five semi-autonomous units within the Tavistock Institute, with two representatives of the OR Society as members of its governing sub-council and with Neil Jessop as its first Director. A copy of the proposal that was accepted by the two Councils can be downloaded from the OR Society website via the link:

theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/22c46344-fa10-4e72-a1b8-29a02bc7199f/

**Link sheet B: INVESTMENTS BY RESEARCH SPONSORS**

On 1 May 1963, Neil Jessop took up his post as first Director of the new Institute for OR in an office in Hallam Street in central London, close to the then Devonshire Street headquarters of the Tavistock Institute. Yet he could call only on extremely limited seed funding with which to start developing the Institute’s staff base and work programmes. Between them, the Institute and its chairman Eric Trist had been able to contribute to the launch of IOR an initial sum of £6,000, partly as a grant and partly as a loan; beyond that there was an urgent imperative to generate external income to enable the new centre to start working towards its ambitious aims.

In the formative year of 1963, two relatively specific project prospects were in the offing. A consortium of the various professional bodies involved in the UK construction industry had approached the Tavistock Institute to explore how to improve communications within the building industry, and it was agreed that the new IOR could make a significant contribution to this. Also, an approach by Jessop to the UK Ministry of Health had led them to express an interest in funding a study of the challenges of adaptation to change in the management of hospitals, within the integrated framework of the National Health Service that was introduced in 1948.

Meanwhile, the aspirations of the new IOR pointed also to the value of an approach to charitable sources of funding for some basic research. Neil Jessop began by putting out feelers to the Nuffield Foundation, built on the success of Britain’s pre-war motor industry. Hoping at first for support for fundamental research into the processes of governmental policy making, Jessop was advised to return with more limited proposals in this field. From his base in the midland City of Coventry, Jessop had at that time become involved in discussions with the City Engineer, who had become interested in OR from a systems engineering perspective. He now attracted the interest of his fellow chief officers and the senior elected members of the City Council in the idea of hosting a broad project to investigate the challenges of policy planning within a city.

At a high-profile event in Coventry’s mediaeval St. Mary’s Hall, the City Council gave its formal endorsement to IOR’s bid to the Nuffield Foundation for a four-year IOR project based in the city, boldly entitled *“Policy Research for Local Government: the Development of a Planning Process”*. The project budget of £42,000 was enough in those times to support the recruitment of a team of two full time researchers resident in Coventry, one with an OR background and one with a social science background, plus part time involvement by Neil Jessop as team leader together with Hugh Murray, a senior colleague from one of the fellow Tavistock units, the Human Resources Centre, which had been closely involved in the formation of IOR. In early 1964, the Nuffield Foundation gave the proposal their approval, and the process of team formation began. The four years of the project were to bring many challenges and setbacks; yet they were to lay firm foundations for the pioneering work programme of IOR and its eventual global policy influence[[1]](#footnote-1).

Importantly, the 1960’s also saw the formation by the UK government of five new national research councils. One of these, the Social Science Research Council, was to provide funding for several further IOR research projects, starting in 1968 with a pilot project on the inter-organisational dimensions of public planning, which had emerged as important in most of IOR’s early projects[[2]](#footnote-2). This was quickly followed by a fuller three year project focused on a joint committee of county and district councils formed to manage the expansion of the small town of Droitwich in the English Midlands to accommodate “overspill” of population from the war-damaged city of Birmingham. This project, followed by a wider SSRC programme grant later in the 1970’s, was to provide a platform for a broader IOR programme of research and consultancy on the inter-agency aspects of public policy planning. These grants were to make a significant contribution to IOR’s economic stability, until the introduction of severe constraints on UK government funding towards the end of the 1970’s.

**Link sheet C: INPUTS FROM OPERATIONAL RESEARCH**

Once the Nuffield Foundation had accepted IOR’s proposal for a policy research project in Coventry, Neil Jessop was able to confirm his offer to the operational research practitioner he had chosen as the full time OR member of the Coventry team. John Friend joined IOR in February 1964, having previously spent five years as OR team leader for the Distillers Company’s plastics manufacturing group in South Wales, where he had also become closely involved in developing the programme of the first of the OR Society’s regional groups.

Friend moved to live near Coventry with a young family at the age of 33, to work in IOR’s first temporary office in the city, at a time when Jessop had recently taken on three other experienced OR practitioners in work in London. He had graduated in mathematics at Cambridge, specialising in mathematical statistics, after intensive coaching for a scholarship at his ambitious school in Edinburgh.. An early employment in an airline had enabled him in 1958 to attend a two-week introductory course on OR in the United States, presented by Russell Ackoff and other distinguished OR pioneers. This course not only introduced standard OR techniques such as linear programming but also offered an inspiring vision of the broader strategic potential of OR.

In Coventry, Friend was immediately plunged into an unfamiliar working environment alongside his full-time social science colleague, Paul Spencer. They were sent agenda papers for many meetings of committees and other working groups, typically three or four every week, and encouraged to attend as observers, either together or separately, sitting quietly in a corner and taking notes. This was a familiar discipline for Spencer but not for Friend, who initially also started to search for sources of harder data, in the form of time series or indicators of connectivity, that could be readily amenable to some form of statistical or logical analysis.

Early in the project, in April 1964, Jessop and Friend were both to play supporting roles in an international conference in Cambridge on the relationship of OR to the social sciences. Papers were presented by many distinguished social scientists from overseas, but there was as yet little to report from the Coventry project, where the team was still struggling to make sense of their early experiences in observing the diffuse group processes of city planning. Grasping for a coherent approach, various avenues were now explored, ranging from an experimental computer model of choices for a fictitious city to a three-dimensional representation of the relations among abstract entities such as “needs”, “demands”, “resources” and “programmes”. This “vase model” had some explanatory value but proved far from easy to develop into more operational terms.

The beginnings of a promising breakthrough only emerged when Spencer asked Friend for help in mapping the various available paths through the decision-making machinery of the City Council, drawing on Friend’s experience as an OR scientist processes - which he shared with most computer systems analysts - in drawing flow diagrams of management processes. Friend had meanwhile started analysing the chains of assumptions adopted by the officers who had been developing proposals for the future of the road network, housing, shopping facilities and other aspects of city planning policy. These assumptions could be classified as relating to uncertainties either of available evidence; of policy values; or of the intentions of other parties - uncertainties not all of which called for an analytical response. Together with information then emerging of the verbal responses of elected members and the public to these diverse sources of uncertainty, Friend saw here a possibility of a breakthrough in understanding the role of uncertainty and its management in public planning processes.

An opportunity to present this potential breakthrough to an OR audience presented itself in September 1967 at the OR Society’s annual conference, held that year at the University of Exeter. In view of the expectations of an OR audience, the paper included a sprinkling of algebraic terms, unlike his later publications for more general readerships. A copy of the paper that Friend presented on that occasion can be found via the link:

https://theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document/8423f9c7-30c3-49d9-a627-1fe748e1d68e/

**Link sheet D: INPUTS FROM SOCIAL SCIENTISTS**

In keeping with an interdisciplinary philosophy, the Coventry policy research team included two social scientists, one full time and one part-time, alongside their OR counterparts. Hugh Murray was a highly experienced social psychologist who had served in the Army as a commissioned psychologist during the second world war, and was later awarded a University of London doctorate for a thesis entitled *An operational research study of a military training system.* He joined the staff of the Tavistock Institute in 1955, where he worked with Eric Trist on a pioneering study of autonomous teamwork on longwall seams in the coal industry.

He was joined, as the full-time social scientist on the Coventry project team, by Paul Spencer, a social anthropologist who had joined the Institute having earned his doctorate after spending two years in Kenya on field work with the Samburu people. This meant that the backgrounds of the two full time team members were quite different. Yet so too were the social science backgrounds of Murray and Spencer - in contrast to the similar backgrounds of their OR counterparts Jessop and Friend in mathematics and statistical methods.

Once the Coventry project was approved, Murray made several visits to Coventry for informal discussions with the chief officers of the city council and the leaders of the Labour party, which was then in political control. In order to understand the political realities of decision making in the city, he was advised that the research team should seek access not only to official committee meetings, but also to the private meetings of the controlling Labour party, and those of the Conservatives in opposition. This was eventually agreed, putting Spencer and Friend in a uniquely privileged position to witness discussions on both sides of an entrenched political divide.

While they tried to adapt to their different disciplinary perspectives, Spencer provided Friend with some important background on the culture of the Tavistock Institute at its London headquarters. He also introduced Friend to the discipline of taking field notes in the many meetings they were invited to attend and, whenever they had attended together, comparing their interpretations of what had happened. Meanwhile, Friend came to appreciate that the development of theory in the social sciences was a matter of persistent controversy, rather than a matter of constructing more elaborate conclusions from stated axioms as in mathematics.

Before the end of the Coventry project, Spencer left to take up a position on the staff of a Royal Commission, having drafted many working papers but leaving Friend to draft the manuscript of a final report, in close consultation with Jessop. This report was published in 1969 as a book by Tavistock Publications*[[3]](#footnote-3)*, part of the Associated Book Publishers group*.*  In later years, there were to be further inputs to the work of IOR from social scientists, of quite diverse disciplinary backgrounds. One of the first of these was John Power, a prominent academic political scientist from Australia, who joined the IOR Coventry office for a sabbatical year in 1971, and was to make a significant contribution alongside John Friend in a follow-up project on inter-organisational relations in public planning supported by the Social Science Research Council.

Not long after this, Professor Fritz Scharpf, a German political scientist who was acting as adviser to the Federal German government, then located in Bonn, responded to the publication of the Coventry project book by inviting an IOR team to contribute to a pilot product he was conducting to develop new methods of policy co-ordination at federal government level. An intended successor project to build on this pilot was aborted because of a change of Federal Chancellor in 1973; but Scharpf later went on to head a new International Institute of Management in West Berlin, which conducted comparative studies in Europe drawing on some of IOR’s work in public planning. Later again, he invited Friend and an IOR colleague to contribute to a programme of international symposia which brought together leading academic political scientists from North America and Europe to explore new insights into inter-organisational relations in public policy change.

**Link sheet E: INSIGHTS FROM ELECTED LOCAL POLITICIANS**

The ready endorsement that was given to the IOR policy project by the elected members of Coventry’s City Council, followed by Hugh Murray’s informal discussions with some of the more prominent local politicians, paved the way for the close engagement of the research team with the Committees and other channels through which the Council’s policies were all the time being shaped. At the start of the project, the Council had been controlled for many years by the Labour party - some of the more senior members as indirectly elected Aldermen under the then system of local government. At the start of the IOR project, there were 44 Labour members of Council, with 20 Conservatives providing the sole opposition - though later in the project the Conservatives were briefly to take control at the 1967 local election. As an anthropologist, Spencer made a point of attending the highly-charged ritual of the counting of votes in one of the earlier election years.

Through observing many of the committee meetings that constituted the formal interface between the elected politicians of the Council and the officers employed by its various departments, and also through informal discussions with many of the politicians of both parties, Spencer and Friend were gradually able to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of decision-making in relation to problems both small and large, and the contributions of the various participants at the committee table. These participants included not only the politicians of both parties, with the committee chair invariably a member of the Labour group, but also the officers of whichever departments of the Council served each specific committee. Each department also had its own lines of professional accountability to its own department of central government, and in the case of the Council’s more strategic responsibilities, there could be more than one of these. Therefore, the overall pattern of accountability for the Council’s policy choices could be seen to be much more complex than in the case of a typical commercial business.

The principal means of co-ordination among the Council’s specialised committees was an influential *Policy Advisory Committee*, with a membership of leading politicians led by the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the Council’s Labour group. Whenever an especially politically sensitive issue arose in one of the committees with direct functional responsibilities, the expectation was that the chair of that committee would propose that it be referred “for further consideration by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman”. It was then understood by all present that the next step would be to seek political agreement through the next unofficial monthly meeting of the Council’s Labour Group.

These insights were to be further enriched when the researchers were afforded the rare privilege of attending the private meetings of both political groups. These were held, on Council premises, on the evening before each monthly meeting of the full Council at which the more significant policy decisions of Coventry’s local authority were to be ratified. In later IOR projects, these close insights into the political aspects of public planning were to be extended further when it came to investigating the processes of inter-organisational negotiation that become critical in situations where, as in many local government contexts other than that of Coventry as a “unitary” authority, responsibilities for policy development are divided between different levels of local government, or sometimes between different functional agencies.

A successor IOR research project followed between 1968 and 1973, focused on inter-organisational aspects of public planning. In this, opportunities arose to interview the members of two different levels of English local government - a County Council and a District Council, both controlled by the Conservative party - who had equal representation on a joint development committee charged with oversight of the planned expansion of the small midland town of Droitwich. In this project, methods were devised for mapping the often complex “policy landscapes”, linking local networks of individuals and organisations not only from different public agencies but also from appointed public agencies and voluntary and commercial organisations of public policy concern. Later projects were to offer opportunities to investigate the subtly different policy landscapes in Scotland, as a part of the United Kingdom with its own distinctive structure of public administration.

**Link sheet F: INSIGHTS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNERS**

At the time when the IOR team started work on its first policy research project in Coventry in 1964, one of the principal strategic priorities of the City Council was to conduct its first quinquennial review of Coventry’s post-war Development Plan. This was a statutory document intended, once approved by the national government, as a strategic framework to guide all future land use changes and modifications to the city’s road network. The policies of the development plan were to be summarised in a map of the city referred to as a “Master Plan”, in which colours and shading were to be used to indicate proposed future land uses. This approach reflected the architectural design principles that underpinned urban planning at that time - although these principles were now becoming widely challenged for their failure to adapt to the fast-moving post-war world.

In Coventry, responsibility for the groundwork for this development plan review had been assigned to a small policy team within the Council’s Department of Architecture and Planning. Any draft proposals that they might produce would then have to go through many processes of consultation and endorsement before being submitted for approval by the government’s then Ministry of Housing and Local Government. As researchers, Spencer and Friend established close contact with Coventry’s policy planning team, and followed several of their studies of different aspects of city policy - transport, housing, shopping - through from the early drafting stages to debates within the Council and subsequent public consultation - sometimes arousing controversy.

While questioning some of the logic by which proposals were developed from always challengeable assumptions, the researchers came to appreciate the complex realities and untestable predictions underlying their conclusions. They recognised that, in Britain as elsewhere, many in the urban planning profession had gradually developed analytical and critical capacities which in many respects paralleled those demonstrated by the more strategic practitioners of operational research. The difference was that their discipline was rooted in the crucial resource of land rather than a generalised focus on decision processes, with town planners in local government occupying clear executive positions in the processes of public policy development.

During the course of the IOR Coventry project, Friend had developed a close link with the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) in the nearby University of Birmingham, whose director and academic staff began to express a close interest in the conclusions starting to emerge from the Coventry project. Working from a pre-publication draft of the Coventry book, one senior planner on INLOGOV staff showed the manuscript to former colleagues in Hertfordshire County Council, and atttracted interest in applying this new decision-centred approach to current challenges of central area planning in the historic city of St. Albans.

The outcome was that in 1970 IOR, in association with INLOGOV, approached a new public funding body called the Centre for Environmental Studies with a proposal for a six-month project in which a group of planning teams from English local authorities could test the IOR approach in parallel on planning problems of current concern within their jurisdictions, with support from IOR and INLOGOV advisers. After an inaugural conference in Birmingham called by INLOGOV, six English local authority teams, some of them formed jointly from county and district councils, agreed to take part in what became known as the LOGIMP project - short for LOcal Government IMPlementation. Most of the teams included not only town planners but also associated engineering, financial and administrative staff. The problem areas selected ranged from town centre traffic through improvement of neglected green spaces to a new bus station and the future of a neighbourhood of increasing urban dereliction. A copy of the final LOGIMP report can be found at the address:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/c9755d1e-f167-4001-a5ec-8634f28b3cb2/>

The cases presented in this report, by the local planning teams themselves, vary in their appreciation of the new planning approach. The presentation by the Teesside team in particular was to provide an impressive example of an application which was later to provide a strong basis for IOR’s later publications and training.

**Link sheet G: COMMISSIONS FROM UK GOVERNMENT**

In 1973, the UK government formed a new integrated Department of the Environment, bringing together all its responsibilities for local government, housing, town planning and transport in three new linked tower blocks in central London. The new DoE began to set up new programmes of research in environmental planning and local government; so research leaders from Birmingham University’s Institute of Local Government Studies, IOR’s planning processes programme and a new School of Advanced Urban Studies at the University of Bristol paid a visit to DoE to explore how they might contribute, either separately or together.

For IOR, the first outcome was an invitation to advise on the design and analysis of policy alternatives within a new system of county *Structure Plans* which was then being introduced to guide strategic decisions on land development and transport networks. The essence of a Structure Plan was to be embodied not in a physical map of intended future land uses, but in a *written statement* of proposed policies which, prior to final approval, were to be submitted to a formal procedure of *Examination in Public*. In this, challenges to any policy statement could be mounted by representatives of other public agencies and of legitimate commercial or community interests. To deter objections to proposed policies from specific local landowners, any accompanying maps were to show proposed designations in a pixelated form.

At this time, in 1973, all English local authorities outside London were scheduled to be replaced in a new structure of larger county and district councils. In their new project entitled *The Analysis of Policy Options in Structure Plan Preparation*, the IOR team ofAlan Sutton, Allen Hickling and John Friend worked closely with the new county structure Plan teams for the four expanded counties of Hereford and Worcester, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire and Berkshire, plus the two more urban counties of Avon and Tyne and Wear. In the new policy-focused planning context, they found it helpful to distinguish between policy choices at the level of specific topics such as housing, employment and transport, and choices of broader overall objectives. The graphical methods of mapping relationships between decision areas and options that had already been developed in IOR were now adapted for use not only within each level but also between levels[[4]](#footnote-4). This extension to IOR’s methods of decision mapping proved useful in structuring informal two-way dialogue between planners and elected representatives; and much later was to become important in working with governments in other countries to introduce a wider general approach to public policy design.

Within one county team, one of the planners resisted the introduction of the IOR approach; but in most cases the Structure Plan proposals that were finally submitted clearly reflected IOR’s decision focused approach. In addition, some English and Welsh Structure Plan teams which were not directly involved in the project adopted a similar approach, encouraged by invitations to attend the regular review sessions that were held in IOR’s Coventry office throughout the course of the project.

For Friend as convenor of IOR’s planning processes programme, a particularly insightful opportunity arose when he was able to sit in at the Examination in Public of the first ever published English Structure Plan, which happened to be held in Coventry. Here was a dramatic demonstration of the intricate webs of public accountability involved in environmental planning, with representatives of different public bodies and other affected interests all seated around a large open square table, free to challenge each other’s policy proposals.

The conclusion of IOR’s Structure Plan project was soon followed by other commissions from DoE to explore related aspects of environmental planning, such as the monitoring of approved development plans. Other team projects were also now conducted for the sister DoE division responsible for regional planning, and for the Chief Planning Officer of the Scottish Development Department in Edinburgh, which was at that time not yet answerable to a devolved Scottish parliament.

**Link sheet H: A SHIFT TO A BROADER INTERNATIONAL CLIENTELE**

During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, IOR’s research staff in London and Coventry expanded rapidly, thanks to major contracts with UK government departments responsible for health and for civil service policy as well as successive projects for the Department of the Environment in local and regional planning processes. After a severe jolt from the premature death in 1969 of Neil Jessop as first Director, IOR’s project staff grew to a total of over 20, evenly split between London and Coventry, with a small new office in Edinburgh to work on Scottish projects. Typically for that era, a majority of IOR’s graduate staff were male and of European heritage.

From the mid-1970’s onwards, public expenditure in Britain became subject to increasing constraints, bringing severe pressure for IOR with its dependency for survival and growth on UK government projects. The Coventry group’s first overseas commission in Germany in 1971/2 was welcome, yet made little contribution to its capacities, even though it was to lead to contacts that were to become highly significant later.

A development of more immediate significance was to follow from an opportunity to visit western Canada in 1973, when the Chief Planner of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, Harry Lash, invited an IOR team of Alan Sutton, Allen Hickling and John Friend to design a short course in the new decision-focused approach to planning which, after a test run in Vancouver, might perhaps be introduced in other Canadian cities. As a concrete current problem situation on which to base a fictitious case example for the course, a long-running local impasse was selected. In this, the deprived riverside community of Bridgeview, which had long been pressing for improved municipal services, was threatened by a local mayor with relocation to make way for industrial development. The group exercise which was now designed by the IOR team was able to make creative use of the rich mixture in Bridgeview of engineering, political and environmental considerations.

After a successful first run in Vancouver, this course design was taken by Allen Hickling to other Canadian cities. It was later adapted for use in several other countries, sometimes with different case material and with modifications in content such as a demonstration of the use of software methods in decision mapping. Also, Alan Sutton spent some years with BC Research in Vancouver with Eric Trist, applying IOR’s planning methods in situations ranging from ceremonial routes in Ottawa to indigenous communities on Pacific coast islands.

An upsurge of interest in Europe In the new decision-focused approach to environmental planning followed an invitation to IOR by the Netherlands-based International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) to run short courses under its auspices in London, in Oxford and in continental Europe. The resulting interest led to a spread of commitment among governmental, consulting and academic planners in several countries, with the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy to the fore. Meanwhile awareness was further spread in Europe by Andreas Faludi, a leading Austrian planning theorist who had served with John Friend on a Pergamon Press advisory committee for a new Urban and Regional Planning Series. He now moved from an academic post in Oxford to one in the Netherlands and became a leading champion of IOR’s approach in academic papers and books[[5]](#footnote-5).

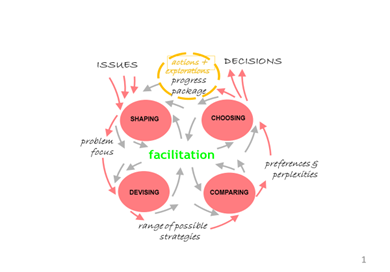
Allen Hickling now introduced the new approach to a government analytical group in Sao Paolo state in Brazil, and more briefly in Egypt and in the Portuguese outpost of Macau in China. Meanwhile Friend helped to facilitate a bilingual workshop in Brazil’s tropical north-east state of Pernambuco[[6]](#footnote-6), followed by a larger workshop in Botswana. At this time, the only text available was a slim illustrated volume by Allen Hickling, who worked from a video recording of a verbal presentation. This handbook was published by a local producer of management handbooks for sale at motorway service stations, and was to be translated into French, Dutch and Portuguese. Meanwhile, Friend and Hickling began working together on a comprehensive guidebook under the title of *Planning under Pressure*, to be published in Pergamon’s urban and regional planning series.

**Link sheet I: A DECISION FOCUSED VIEW OF PUBLIC PLANNING**

In 1987. when Pergamon Press first published the book *Planning under Pressure* by Friend and Hickling in their Urban and Regional Planning Series, it was given the subtitle *The Strategic Choice Approach*. That phrase had replaced the earlier acronym *AIDA*, standing for *Analysis of Interconnected Decision* Areas, which had previously been in general use yet strictly only describes the initial problem-structuring aspects of the approach. The label of *Strategic Choice Approach* has persisted, along with the abbreviation *SCA*; however, that phrase does little to reflect the dynamic nature of the process, and in particular its orientation towards *continuity* that reflects its origins and typifies its subsequent applications in the arena of public planning.

From later experience, a more appropriate label for the 21st century is now offered: that of *Strategic Progress Planning* (*SPP* for short), reflecting the view of acontinuing planning process that has been to the fore since before the initial publication in 1987 of *Planning under Pressure*. This view is most succinctly expressed in the form of a generic process diagram, the latest version of which is presented below. In this, the two familiar decision-making modes of *devising* alternatives (formerly *designing*) and *comparing* their expected consequences are accompanied by two broader modes: the mode of *shaping* decision problems and the mode of *choosing* strategies for progress. Both these modes can become more challenging the more the structure of the problem becomes unclear and the range of participants in the process may tend to become extended.

The four modes of shaping, devising, comparing and choosing are shown in this diagram as linked through a sequence of red arrows, indicating a logical pathway through the entire process. This begins with the identification of one or more issues that can be framed as areas of choice, and it ends with agreement on decision outcomes in relation some of these, while other areas may be left open for further consideration in later cycles. Yet the diagram also shows the possibility of a loop back from any mode - after the first - to any earlier mode, so that the overall process becomes a more flexible one. In a group planning workshop, this kind of flexibility calls for a process of *facilitation*, by one or more persons with well-honed facilitation skills.



***Option of shift to a wider***

***problem focus \****

**facilitation**

***\* triggered by perceived***

***limitations of earlier focus***

***Other related issues***

***Other related issues***

If those involved in the process find it difficult to move forward - which can happen most frequently at any stage of *comparing* possible strategies for progress - then the possibility arises of shifting to a broader problem focus before returning to deal with the issues currently at hand. This strategic option is indicated opposite.

This decision-focused view of a flexible planning process was hailed in public planning circles as a breakthrough when first articulated in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. It became fleshed out further by the views on the management of diverse sources of uncertainty and of strategic progress through time which are discussed elsewhere *(see sheets K and L)*.

***wider***

***problem focus***

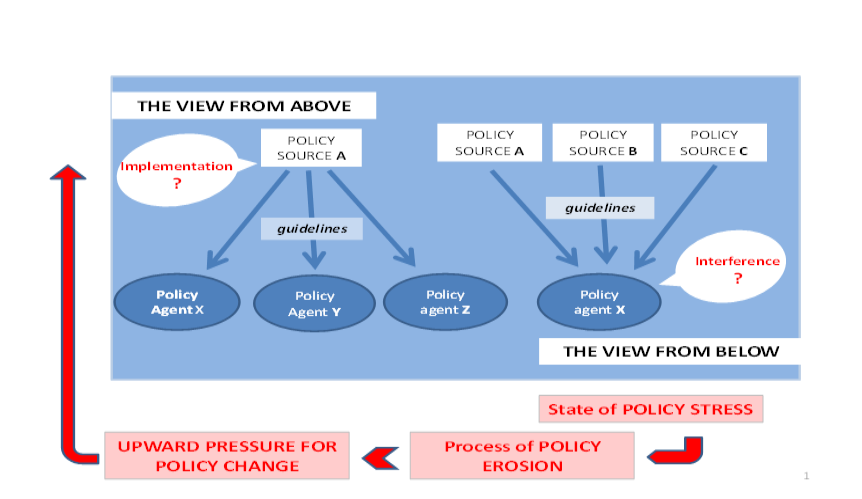
**Link sheet J: A DUAL PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC POLICY CHANGE**

Throughout the period of IOR’s first policy research project in Coventry in the mid 1960’s, John Friend could find no scholarly writings on the distinctive essence of *policy* in the field of public administration. This was despite an upsurge of interest at that time among European and North American academics in political science and public management in the formation of new academic units and new journals in the newly fashionable fields of policy studies and policy science.

Yet the distinctive role of public (i.e. published) policy statements in settled governmental systems became even more clear to Friend and his colleagues when working on IOR’s commissioned project in the mid-1970’s to advise on the design of statements of county council development policies within the new official vehicle of England’s first Structure Plans. In its essence, any such written policy statement could be seen as a *generic* expression of the authority’s proposed stance in relation to some defined *category* of decision situations that are expected to arise in future. As the IOR team witnessed, there could be much scope for discretion both in the wording of any proposed policy stance and in the basis for classification of the situations to which it should apply. What was in contention was often not so much the *direction* of a proposed policy statement, but more the specificity or *nebulosity* of the wording with which that policy is expressed.

Indeed, in the Examination in Public of a submitted county Structure Plan, it became apparent that the degree of specificity or nebulosityof the wording of some kinds of policy statement could become a sensitive political issue. This became evident from exchanges at the Examinations in Public of early structure plans, where expensive legal advisers could be hired to challenge the inclusion of such adjectives as *major*, or of a distinction between different areas of the county, in the expression of county policies - for example, on the location of new out-of-town shopping centres where the interests of major commercial developers might be at stake.

It is a basic characteristic of the public policy realm that the same local decision maker may become subject to policy influences from more than one legitimate policy source: for instance, from a local authority and also from a national ministry, which may classify decision situations in different ways; or from local agencies with different remits, for example in health and social care. Often, such divergent policy influences may make it difficult for local decision makers to find feasible solutions to locally complex problems, giving rise to what may be called a state of local *policy stress*; and this in turn can generate insistent upward pressures for policy change.



As illustrated in the diagram, the picture that emerges is of a two-way dynamic of policy change, involving a continual interplay between multiple more central policy *sources* and multiple more local policy *agents*. The top down processes of policy formation can now be seen as countered by bottom-up processes of *policy erosion*, as local decision-makers find it difficult to work within the often conflicting guidelines of diverse policy sources, generating a state of local *policy stress* and leading to upward pressures for policy change. This dynamic has been further explored by Friend in an article entitled *Community and Policy: Co-ordination from above or below?* which can be found on pages 4 to 7 of the second issue of the newsletter *Linkage,* published by IOR in 1977. That issue is now downloadable from the OR Society website via the link:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/c07e2d57-c38c-41bc-849c-c5ad41c2eb6a/>

**Link sheet K: TOOLS FOR SHAPING DECISION PROBLEMS**

As an aid to the discussion of the structure of decision problems, IOR’s policy research team in Coventry was able to draw on a graphical language that had then recently been devised by another IOR team based in London[[7]](#footnote-7). At its simplest, the method that became known as AIDA, standing for *Analysis of Interconnected Decision Areas*, involves representing any current decision problem by drawing a diagram with a set of named areas of choice - *or decision areas* - as connected nodes within what may be called a *decision graph*.

The labelling of any decision area can become a matter of debate among the participants in the process; and the resolution of any disagreements can be an important step in reaching agreement on how a problem should be structured. The addition of a question mark after the label can be a reminder that what is being labelled is not a specific proposal, but an area of choice within which more than one option can be considered. Decision graphs are commonly drawn freehand on flipcharts by a facilitator in a workshop session, with longer labels for decision areas recorded elsewhere. As a convenience, PostIt style sticky labels are now available[[8]](#footnote-8) in a large enough elliptical format for legibility in a workshop setting; in a more intimate setting, it is possible to replicate the process of collaborative mapping on a computer screen, with a few people grouped around a table.

It is important to note that this approach encourages the drawing of maps in which the decision areas may be of varied types - e.g. what, who, where, when. The method is not intended for showing recurrent decisions such as those arising in a production control setting. The graph is then completed by entering *decision links* between pairs of decision areas which are judged to be interlinked, in the sense that joint consideration may yield different outcomes. In this approach, arrows are not added to the links, because any sense of sequence, direction or priority is deliberately avoided at the shaping stage. A *problem focus* can then be chosen - usually restricted to two or three decision areas, though a new focus can be chosen in a later cycle of the process.

A next step is to convert the decision graph into an *option graph*, in which two or more mutually exclusive options are shown within each decision area. It is only a matter of logic -by hand or computer - to construct an *option tree* of available combinations, taking the decision areas in any order.

**A decision**

**graph** with a selected

Problem focus

.A close up of a logo

Description automatically generatedA close up of a map

Description automatically generated

**An option graph** grapggraph

**Link sheet L: TOOLS FOR MANAGING SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY**

During IOR’s first policy project in Coventry, perhaps the most significant breakthrough was the picture that emerged of three broad types of uncertainty in planning. This view came to the fore when groups responsible for decisions had to choose how to move forward, with a choice of routeing either (1) into *investigatory* channels to gather more evidence; or (2) into more *political* channels to seek firmer guidance on ways of reconciing conflicting interests; or (3) into channels of *negotiation with other decision-makers* responsible for related agendas, as suggested by the loop connecting the two levels in the diagram on link sheet I.

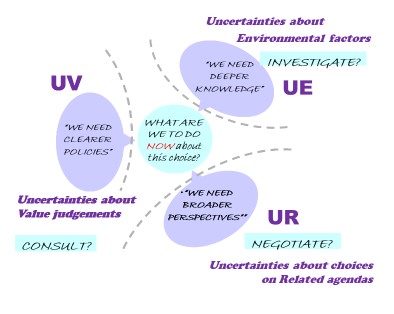
At the same time, a desk analysis in Coventry of the often extensive chains of assumptions involved in developing important policy proposals revealed the importance of finding ways to address these three same sources of uncertainty - about evidence, about policy values and about the actions of other parties. Challenges to assumptions of any of these three types were often raised when the planners’ proposals were presented for endorsement by elected representatives or by other affected interests, or in any arena of public debate.

The labels of **UE**, **UV** and **UR** for the three types of uncertainty have now been in general use for five decades. As shown in the diagram, they stand respectively for **U**ncertainties about **E**nvironmental factors, **U**ncertainties about **V**alue judgements and **U**ncertainties about choices on **R**elated agendas. Of course, translations into languages other than English have led to differenr labels, while recent reviews of the terminology have led to the notion of alternative terms such as Evidential uncertainties - still UE, *Political* uncertainties - UP - and *Structural* uncertainties - US. Also, there is an argument to be made for using the word *Perplexities* in place of Uncertainties - recognising the subjectivity of the concept of uncertainty when viewed from a decision-focused perspective - becoming *intersubjectivity* if people are working together. So the opportunity to replace UE, UV and UR by other labels now becomes available to future teachers and practitioners.

In agreeing how to respond to uncertainty, choices inevitably arise in the extent of the response as well as its direction. A response to UE can range from a quick chat with a nearby expert to a major commissioned research study; a response to UV can range from a word with a more senior decision maker to a high-level political debate; while a response to UR can range from a few words with a neighbouring team to a formal joint committee of public agencies with separate yet related jurisdictions. In a workshop setting, it becomes important to engage the participants in discussion of a range of possibilities for dealing with uncertainties of all three categories - involving different levels of investment in time and resources - before judging which, if any, to select as a a means of enhancing the confidence of decisions at this stage of the process.

A review of options for responding to different sources of uncertainty can be most worthwhile at any point in a planning process when working in the comparing mode, and facing a critical choice between promising or shortlisted alternatives.

Such a review can pay particular dividends in a context where those involved are liable to ignore one or more of the three categories of uncertainty; for example in a technical discussion where the inclination of the group is to focus on shortcomings of evidence, even though overcoming these may make less contribution to overall confidence than reference to a more political forum, or joint exploration alongside other policy issues - sometimes more speedily and at a reduced cost.



**Link sheet M: TOOLS FOR NEGOTIATING STRATEGIC PROGRESS**

It was In the early 1970’s, when IOR staff started for the first time to work with planners on real time local planning challenges, that a clear view began to cristallise of a graphical format for displaying the incremental outputs at any stage of a decision-focused planning process. What has to be displayed includes an agreed view of which decisions in the present focus of linked decision areas are to be settled at this time, and which others are to be deferred for later consideration - possibly in a different setting and perhaps with other people involved. At the same time, the picture should also display what is to be done about the more important sources of uncertainty, of any of the three types; for some kind of action might be agreed in response to some of these, but not in response to others. Rows of the grid are usually used to distinguish fields of responsibility for follw up action, whether at the level of the individual, the section or the organisation if more than one.

The basic format that became used to record progress at the end of a workshop session is illustrated below. This grid is typically posted on the wall of the room across two flipcharts posted side by side, with the contents hand-written on stickers, so that any entries can always be removed and replaced by others in the course of debate. At first, this kind of grid became known as a *commitment package*, because it records the balance between commitment and flexibility that is proposed at the current stage of the process. However, the term *progress package* is generally nowsubstituted, to reflect the point that the content of such a grid may not always represent a firm political commitment - but rather a proposed strategy requiring endorsement by other parties, especially as it may have been developed by a group of people who do not themselves have the authority to commit. The term *commitment package* can then be reserved for a stage in the process where formal approval has been granted to a particular set of actions and explorations that has been proposed.

At the start of a workshop session, it is usually advisable to post a blank progress package grid somewhere on the walls of the room. It is then important to leave enough time towards the end for serious debate about the content of the progress package in the light of the work done during the session. On the grid, it is possible to include notes on any agreed actions in relation to the more marginal decision areas and uncertainty areas, as well as those within the main problem focus, or the succession of foci, which have been explored in depth during the session. Notes on executive actions - who, when, how - can be recorded either on the grid itself or, more usually, in accompanying documents.

A screenshot of a cell phone

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**Link sheet N: TOOLS FOR MAPPING PUBLIC POLICY LANDSCAPES**

IOR’s first research project on inter-organisational decision making in public planning focused on the planned expansion of the small English Midland spa town of Droitwich. This involved reaching out to decision-makers employed in a variety of types of organisation from the most local to the national. As shown in the diagram below, local government occupies the focal position in this context of public planning, with other relevant sectors for commercial businesses, appointed public agencies and voluntary associations. The shadowy fan motif defines this broad canvas - with territorial scale as the vertical dimension and public versus private as the horizontal dimension. This allows any organisational entity to be placed in position within this overall *policy space*, ranging from a government department to an individual citizen.

The example shown here is one of a set of eight such “fan charts”, drawn in the early 1970’s without recourse in those days to computer graphics. Each chart was based on data supplied by a different member of staff of the Droitwich Development Group, to indicate the range of contacts which at that time were relevant to a particular field of decision within which that individual had responsibilities. Permanent organisations are shown with solid boundaries, in different shapes according to the sector. Broken lines distinguish linking structures between organisations, including in this case the joint Droitwich Development Committee which supervised the staff of an appointed development group, and also - at a less formal level - a network of engineers in local and central government who knew each other well enough to share experiences and advice.

On this organisational base map were plotted the positions of various individuals who were involved in the field of decision concerned, with the principal source of the information in the picture picked out in a double ring. In describing the full policy landscape of the Droitwich development scheme at that time, similar fan charts were constructed by seven other officers of the Development Group on the same base map. This same base map was also used to outline the tortuous negotiations that had earlier led to the agreement to expand Droitwich, including Birmingham City as exporter of population in need of housing.

With the more recent development of geographical and similar computer-based information systems, there is now much scope for the design of less crude methods of mapping policy landscapes in multi-dimensional data bases, with a capacity to display varied aspects in two dimensions in attractive full-colour format. One useful outcome could be in international comparisons of policy landscapes that would otherwise be obscured by the need to learn labels and acronyms which have little meaning outside their own governmental context.

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

From *Public Planning: the Inter-corporate Dimension:* Friend, Power and Yewlett: Tavistock Publications 1974: reprinted Routledge 2001. Figure 42, p182.

**Link sheet O: DESIGNS FOR INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION**

It was pure coincidence that the book reporting on IOR’s first SSRC research project on inter-organisational decision making in public planning was finally scheduled for publication in the very month, April 1974, when the entire structure of local government in England (outside London) and Wales was due to be reorganised. This coincidence was to make the extensive case material based on Droitwich instantly out of date; yet it also offered a base for addressing the important challenge of offering insights about how productive relations might be encouraged among agencies within the new structure.

The Droitwich book offered some tentative general propositions about relationships in the new structure, including the choice of balance among three levels of inter-organisational linkage: mandated links between general types of agencies; negotiated formal links between specific local agencies; and more personal links between individuals. One key conclusion was that the more unpredictable the decisions that arose, the more important the less formal levels of linkage, and therefore the more significant would become investment in what Power had termed *reticulist* or network-shaping skills[[9]](#footnote-9). This point was illustrated in the book by concluding with a fictitious story about an experiment at regional level to support the appointment of people with varied public service backgrounds who were judged likely to be able to deploy such skills within key roles in different local authorities within the region. The story is made to unfold in such a way that initial assumptions about preferred linkages may be overturned by ewhovents, political or other, and mayhave to be re-negotiated in an adaptive spirit.

In 1975, with the new governmental structures in place, a further three-year grant was awarded to IOR by the Social Science Research Council to follow through these findings. A distinguished programme advisory committee was formed, and met every few months in IOR’s Coventry office to guide the priorities of the IOR team. Also, three issues of a newsletter by the name of *Linkage* were distributed during the three years free of charge to a wider group of interested individuals in Britain and overseas. The members of the Advisory Committee all had valuable experience to contribute. Among them was the director of a Scottish local government research unit who also played a key role on the policy group of the new Strathclyde Regional Council, and who encouraged the IOR team to conduct field work around a new *Areas of Need Initiative* involving partnerships with four of its nineteen constituent District Councils. Some of the results are reported in the first three issues of *Linkage*, which can be downloaded from the OR Society website at:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/7c36dd2d-2dca-4cf0-b5ce-2ec977ea05ff/>

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/c07e2d57-c38c-41bc-849c-c5ad41c2eb6a/>

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/ba5d60fa-a1c1-4359-b75c-b33df976d0fe/>

While he was unable to spend much time on the Strathclyde field work, John Friend was later able to work with other IOR and academic teams on projects that explored challenges of inter-agency working in some important areas of social policy, beginning with another IOR SSRC project on responses to alcohol dependency in Scotland’s Lothian region, where more formal responses were compared with less formal community-based initiatives. Friend also worked with an inter-university team on a later SSRC project on collaboration of police and social services in investigation of cases of child abuse - where the very concept of investigation was variously interpreted as relating either to an incident or to a family situation. This project in turn was followed by a project funded by two government departments on services for children with special needs - the concept of special needs having arisen in the education context, where it was more meaningful than in the context of either health or social care. In this project, the experimental use of strategic choice workshops demonstrated their value for inter-agency planning and policy development in the social policy field.

**Link sheet P: DIALOGUE WITH POLITICAL SCIENTISTS**

From the early years of IOR, it became clear that political science was one of the most important disciplines within the wider domain of social sciences with which to connect in pursuit of the new centre’s mission in the field of public policy. Its status as a science might long have been in dispute, with many academic departments choosing to style themselves simply as schools of politics. Yet their special expertise was in the field of human relationships within the intricate domain of governance, where structures of varying effectiveness had developed through time for representing diverse local and special interest communities in the processes of accountable decision making and planning at all levels. So, it was not surprising in the 1960’s that academic political scientists were in the forefront of the new field becoming known as policy studies or policy science.

For the staff of the new IOR, opportunities arose to work closely with two impressive political scientists when John Power from Australia spent a sabbatical year in IOR’s Coventry office; and later when Fritz Scharpf from Germany invited an IOR team to join him in a pilot project to design new structures for policy development in the then federal capital of Bonn. Both these advisers to national political leaders had contacted IOR after their interest was aroused by the publication the book on the Coventry policy project. While he was in Coventry in 1971, Power joined John Friend and Chris Yewlett of IOR in a one-day conference in London, where Power presented a paper entitled *Planning: Magic and Technique*. This ended with the presentation of a new concept of *reticulist* skill: the skill of devising and managing networks - *aformal* rather than purely informal - within governmental systems. The full set of conference papers can be downloaded from the OR Society website at:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/1363a249-265f-4047-97d5-9c52341b465a/>

After an IOR team had worked with German counterparts on a pilot policy project in Bonn in 1972, the relationship with Scharpf developed further in the mid-1970’s when he was appointed Director of the new International Institute of Management in what was then the enclave of West Berlin. In 1975 he invited Friend and a colleague to visit IIM in its offices in the city, formerly occupied by the Luftwaffe, to discuss the work of an IIM team which was starting to apply IOR’s approach to mapping policy landscapes in a comparative review of local economic development initiatives in different European countries.

Then in 1977 Scharpf invited Friend to an international symposium of political scientists from Europe and North America on the theme of multi-organisational policy networks, which was to be held at the Federal Executive Institute in Virginia, a training institution for Federal civil servants. At this symposium - literally, a drinking party - leading political scientists from the US and western European countries were invited to present working papers for discussion. Here was a valuable opportunity for Friend to share his evolving ideas with an international group with shared interests yet different perspectives. The same group met again in 1981 at Indiana University in the mid-west, hosted by Vincent and Elinor Ostrom, joint directors of the University’s pioneering Workshop for Political Theory and Policy Analysis, from which Elinor was to go on in 2009 to be awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics for her ground-breaking work on management of communal resources.

At a further symposium in West Berlin in 1982, Friend was invited to present an informal account of his way of working, which clearly differed from that of a typical academic political scientist. After mentioning that a typical IOR project involved teamwork on a specific client brief, his paper introduced the concept of the *negotiated project engagement* which had recently evolved at that time from an SSRC-funded review of 13 past projects combining OR and social science inputs[[10]](#footnote-10). His paper can be downloaded through the link:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/96f4b095-8a5d-47b4-b56f-1893f0d2e5e7/>

Through this symposium and later meetings in Rotterdam and in Umeå in Sweden, the complementarity between political science and OR perspectives became more apparent. The former offered rich insights through a medium of text, while the latter offered rich visual images of both human and problem structures.

**Link sheet Q: HELPING COMMUNITIES TO EXTEND THEIR CAPACITIES**

Inevitably, the mission of IOR to develop innovative approaches to the processes of public policy choice meant focusing not only on the institutions of government but on the many interwoven community interests that they were intended to represent. This focus was central to two short IOR projects in the 1970’s for the Home Office Urban Programme, concerned with community influence on housing improvement in Coventry and on town centre renewal in West Yorkshire. The community focus also became prominent in the two-day training exercise that was developed in Vancouver in 1973, and later run many times in other countries. Yet it was only in the mid-1980’s that opportunities arose for IOR staff to work directly with local community groups, to counterbalance OR’s traditional clientele in large commercial and governmental organisations.

In 1986, Jonathan Rosenhead, Professor of OR at the London School of Economics, was elected President of the OR Society on a radical manifesto which included direct engagement with underprivileged communities. Through the Society, he secured some seed funding for the establishment of a Community Operational Research Unit at Northern College of Residential Adult Education near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. Jonathan first invited Friend to co-facilitate with him a workshop of activists in community health in the east end of London, who were resisting the planned closure of the Accident and Emergency Unit at their local hospital; the outcome of this workshop was agreement on a multi-stranded campaign strategy to counter an imminent decision deadline. Officers of the relevant authorities were later invited to join the local activists in a wider workshop on child health services; but, perhaps inevitably, this second workshop turned out to be less productive as it took the officers away from their familiar operational milieu.

Friend was then awarded a three-month contract to work on the new Community OR Unit’s first project, with a Tenants’ Housing Cooperative in the South Yorkshire mining village of Thurnscoe, for which the Unit had already been working in an advisory role. The residents had recently agreed to form this co-operative when faced with the sale of their 300 National Coal Board houses to the highest bidder at an auction in central London; and they had been granted a mortgage subject to an initial contract for management advice from a regional housing association. Friend and a colleague facilitated a series of workshops at Northern College with the Thurnscoe committee, a friendly group of miners’ wives and retired miners from a similar community background to Friend’s own South Yorkshire in-laws. The choices debated in the workshops pitted the shared concerns of the committee to dispense with their external management advice as soon as possible, against the concerns of those investing capital to minimise risk by the retention of continuing professional advice.

In 2001, the Community OR Unit moved to a new university management school in Lincoln. Projects with local communities continued here, and at other universities including nearby Hull. The reach of community OR of course remained modest by comparison with the vast extent of ongoing development work with underprivileged communities under way not only in Britain but in other European countries, in North America and in the so-called developing world. Later, in 2005, an outstanding example in which strategic choice methods were successfully adapted was reported from Venezuela at the inaugural meeting of a new OR Society’s group on problem structuring methods, addressed by two advisers to the Venezuelan government, Elisenda Vila and Ana Maria Benaiges, with whom Rosenhead and Friend had worked on visits to Caracas.

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/8c66a9b3-dbc2-41d0-9052-0dfbbc33c996/>

Here, Ana Maria reported on a workshop she had facilitated for the residents of the hillside village of San Julian, whose lives and services had been devastated by catastrophic landslides following days of heavy rain. She discussed how the workshop enabled the community to address the issues facing them following this tragedy, with reference to concerns ranging from overflowing sewage to community mental health; and thereby to engage in productive dialogue with local governmental decision makers. This not only allowed the local government decision makers to get closer to the community; it also enabled the community members to engage more closely in important decisions about their future

**Link sheet R: PUBLICATIONS FOR DIVERSE READERSHIPS**

In a non-academic independent research centre such as IOR, the incentives to publish journal articles and books are less pressing than in a university environment, where career advancement can depend critically on a record of publication in journals which are rated highly from a defined disciplinary perspective. In the case of IOR, with its lack of significant financial endowment, the pressure was rather - as in a typical management consultancy - to keep bringing in new projects which would ensure that staff salaries could continue to be paid beyond the horizon of a “cliff” which was often only a few months distant.

Yet Neil Jessop’s proposal to the Nuffield Foundation for the Coventry policy project had indicated that the publication of a book was intended to be the principal outcome. The idea of producing a major publication became an important incentive to John Friend as the full time OR member of the Coventry tesam, even though his anthropologist colleague preferred to focus on an output of incisive individually authored papers. So, Friend spent an uncomfortable few months after the grant had run out drafting and redrafting chapters of what was to become Friend and Jessop’s book *Local Government and Strategic Choice*.[[11]](#footnote-11) It was however not long before returns on this investment began to appear, in the form of appreciative reviews in periodicals addressed to broad readerships in fields such as local government, education, planning and social policy. For Tavistock Publications in those days was a small enterprise that cultivated wider review channels than most current business publishers which tend to focus on more specialised academic readerships.

IOR’s later SSRC project to investigate inter-agency decision processes again resulted in a substantial book published by Tavistock Publications[[12]](#footnote-12), including much case material relating to the Droitwich town development programme. Again, the publication of this book demanded much unfunded drafting effort; it appeared at a difficult time of institutional change in Britain, but has since attracted international interest in public policy circles, and it remains in print through Routledge. A third book by Friend with Allen Hickling, entitled *Planning under Pressure,* was published by Pergamon in 1987 as a guide to the methods and applications of the Strategic Choice Approach to interactive planning, and has since appeared in further editions, both in English and other languages, with some extensions in content as experience has developed[[13]](#footnote-13). This book added further depth and breadth to the earlier short handbook *Managing Decisions* by Allen Hickling, which had been in wide use from the 1970’s, with translations into French, Dutch and Portuguese.

During the 1970’s and ‘80’s, several articles on related topics by Friend, Hickling and other members of the IOR Planning Processes group were published in academic journals in such varied fields as environmental planning, operational research, policy studies, social science, strategic management, engineering and systems science. Some of these articles reported on conference presentations, and served to introduce the decision-focused approach to planning to readerships which might not otherwise have come across them, from child psychologists to transport engineers.

Now, In the 21st century, important new channels of publication have emerged through the internet, offering additional opportunities to disseminate accounts and applications of an innovative approach to public policy and planning, with wider use of colour features such as colour graphics. References to relevant websites, including in particular that of the Operational Research Society, can be found on other link sheets, while a fuller list of references to publications in print can be found in the bibliography of the third edition of *Planning under Pressure*, referenced below.

**Link sheet S: IMPACTS ON POLICIES WITHIN BRITAIN**

The first few applications of IOR’s decision-focused approach to public planning in Britain were conducted within the experimental setting of the LOGIMP project of 1970, the report on which can be accessed through a web link given on sheet F. This project was brief and involved several members of IOR staff working alongside six English local authority teams on specific current planning problems. The six teams achieved variable levels of success in the time available; the most successful application addressed an urgent issue of routeing a new arterial road through an impoverished neighbourhood in a former steelworks settlement in Teesside. The work of the Teesside team demonstrated in a graphic way the much wider opportunities for renewal that were offered by an alternative route that avoided the historic community core, by comparison with the more direct route initia lly proposed. A web reference to their report can be found on link sheet F.

A more extended opportunity to test the new decision-focused approach to public development planning arose in the mid-1970’s, with the introduction of the new *Structure Plan* system of strategic land-use planning within England and Wales, as described more fully on link sheet G. An IOR team of Alan Sutton, Allen Hickling and John Friend was now commissioned by the UK Department of the Environment to work with policy planning teams from six of England’s newly reformed county councils over a three-year period. Not only did this project allow for more extended collaboration with the planning teams concerned, but it highlighted the distinctive challenges posed by working with policy options rather than more site-specific choices. What was at issue was often not so much the choice of direction for a policy statement for housing or commercial development; but rather the choice between more specific and more nebulous wording with which it was expressed; for example whether a particular type of development should never be permitted, or only in some circumstances, - either precisely or loosely defined. Opportunities to attend the Examinations in Public of some early structure plans showed the level of investment that representatives of commercial developers were sometimes prepared to make in mounting legal challenges to such questions of policy wording.

The required format for submission of a county Structure Plan stipulated a broad statement of objectives plus chapters supporting policy statements for different types of development, showing the linkages between these two levels. This led to the development of a stratified variant of IOR’s decision-focused approach to planning, in which discussions between planning teams and elected representatives came to play an important role, referring to a grid on a flipchart showing the compatibilities between choices at both levels, with opportunities for adjustment at the level of objectives as well as that of more specific policies. Allen Hickling drafted an extensive report on the structure plan project at the time, with many examples; but this report has not yet been scanned for wider reference.

The 1980’s saw further developments in this decision-focused approach to policy design in other countries, including the Netherlands, Canada and Brazil; while John Friend worked on occasional publicly funded projects in Britain which enabled him to test the value of this approach with public servants in important fields of social policy such as education, health and social care. Then, in the 1990’s, Allen Hickling was able to demonstrate the value of the decision-focused approach in resolving environmental conflicts though working with the Environment Council, a UK national body that specialised during those years in bringing conflicting parties together to find an agreed way forward. Among the conflicts approached in this way were disputes over the disposal of redundant oil platforms in the North Sea, and over the safe disposal of nuclear waste.

During 2014, a one-day invitational event was held in London sponsored jointly by the Operational Research Society and the Policy Profession Support Unit within the UK Cabinet Office, on the theme of *Shaping Choices in Public Policy - a Decision-focused Approach.* Of seven recent applications that were presented and discussed, four specifically reflected the influence of the IOR legacy, including one from the Netherlands, one from New Zealand and two contrasting cases from the UK: one on national policy for addressing the safety of overhead power transmission lines, and one on child health services in the London Borough of Camden.

**Link sheet T: IMPACTS ON POLICIES ELSEWHERE IN EUROPE**

As the decade of the 1970’s ran its course, the influence of IOR’s planning processes group in Coventry spread from Britain to several other countries in Europe, as mentioned on link sheet H. One important influence was a professional training centre than based in the Netherlands, the International Federation for Housing and Planning, whose Swedish-Norwegian Director, Jon Leons, began to promote short courses for environmental planners in London and Oxford, attracting an encouraging response from several European countries.

On leaving IOR to become an independent consultant in 1980, Hickling began to commute almost every week to the Netherlands, and to immerse himself in learning the Dutch language - while carrying out a succession of assignments, not only for local and regional governments but for the national government and in particular the Ministry of the Environment VROM. Chapter 7 by Hickling of a book that reviews several problem structuring methods[[14]](#footnote-14) gives an account of a series of workshops in 1982 on the transport and storage of the volatile petrochemical LPG that followed a fatal explosion in Spain and provided the basis for new legislation in the Netherlands and Belgium. Hickling later contributed his policy design skills to the process for developing the first Netherlands national environment policy plan, and was to deploy this experience in the 1990’s in the design of a first Environmental Plan for Latvia. The process adopted is summarised in Figure 102 on page 292 of the third edition of *Planning under Pressure [[15]](#footnote-15)*.

Sweden is another European country which has invested over many years in extending the applications and scope of the strategic choice approach in public policy, initially through the influence of Knut Strömberg of the national building research station, who was later to become a professor in Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg. His contribution with Jaan-Henrik Kain to the third edition of *Planning under Pressure* (pages 303-7) outlines applications first to the restructuring of a municipal housing market; then to a regional review of environmental policies; then to a transition to a more localised approach to waste management in a district of Göteborg. Since the turn of the millennium, Swedish consultants have reported extensive applications to challenges in the management of water and sanitation services not only in Sweden but also in other countries both in Europe and in Africa[[16]](#footnote-16). An especially important focus has been on areas of peri-urban expansion in which the provision of basic services is made more challenging by differences between urban and rural areas in both legislative and political structures[[17]](#footnote-17).

Another European country that has invested in applications of the decision-focused approach to urban planning is Italy. On pages 322 to 326 of the third edition of Planning under Pressure (reference 2 below), Alessandro Giangrande and Elena Mortola of the Faculty of Architecture at the Universitá di Roma Tre report on their use of the strategic choice approach, in conjunction with visioning and architectural design tools, in engaging residents in the renewal of neighbourhoods within the city of Rome.

Another leading centre in the application of the strategic choice to urban development problems in Italy is the Politecnico di Torino, where Professor Isabella Lami and her colleagues have built close links between management education and project work, focusing on the development of new community uses for former military buildings in that city and elsewhere in Italy. This is a rare case in which, through presentation of papers at European OR conferences, close links have developed between urban policy applications and an academic school of management, which is regarded as the normal academic home for operational research.

**Link sheet U: IMPACTS ON POLICIES IN OTHER CONTINENTS**

After the experiences in 1973 of the IOR team of Allen Hickling, Alan Sutton and John Friend in western Canada, further opportunities arose to work on other continents, sometimes using other languages. Through the connections in Brazil of his Tavistock colleague Peter Spink, Allen Hickling paid training and facilitation visits to a public policy centre in Sao Paulo State. Then in 1984, John Friend was invited to facilitate a workshop in the tropical north-eastern city of Recife, following a year spent at the Tavistock Institute by Dr. Angela de Melo of the Federal University of Pernambuco, a former student of Eric Trist. In this workshop, Friend spent a week with two Brazilian co-facilitators working with a young inter-disciplinary team, predominantly female, who were in the early stages of a six-month project to develop policies for the offshore island of Itamaracá within the Recife Metropolitan area, which was subject to sharply conflicting pressures of nature conservation and tourist development. The members of the planning team, who had up till then been engaged in separate specialist studies, now worked together flexibly and energetically in Portuguese, while Friend was able to focus on overall process guidance, with the help of occasional brief translations. An account of the progress of the workshop, with photos, can be found via the web link:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/50244941-8367-412c-8844-cde4093996f8/>

By contrast, in 1980 a Dutch planning consultant, Frank van Steenbergen, who had read of the approach purely through the book *Planning under Pressure*, reported in the journal *Third World Planning Review* that he had organised a series of successful workshops on rural development issues in the Province of Aceh in the north of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. A short account of the experiences of can be found via the link:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/docume>nt-repository/document/3970f42b-3e0d-490d-b3c0-2d7d3e3bdc2a/

Some major extensions in the applications of this decision focused approach to public policy now came in Japan, when a group of planners from different cities had come together to work on a translation of *Planning under Pressure* under the auspices of the Japan Society of Civil Engineers, which plays a major role in public planning in that country because of its mountainous terrain. In 1991 Friend was invited to make a presentation at a JSCE event in Tokyo where several recent applications were presented and critically discussed. He was also invited to give lectures in several other cities; while on a second visit in 1992 he helped to facilitate bilingual workshops on ring road development in Tokyo and airport relocation on the northern island of Hokkaido. He kept in touch afterwards with his principal host, Professor Hirotaka Koike of Utsunomiya University, who had sent some years in the same research centre in Vancouver as Alan Sutton. Later however, Hiro’s retirement made it difficult for Friend to retain his links in Japan as he would have wished.

Experiences in Africa have been more limited. In 1989 Friend was invited to facilitate an extensive workshop in Botswana for a Dutch consultancy employed by government to investigate strategies for avoiding delays in the provision of new housing. Then in 1998 he faced a different challenge in post-apartheid South Africa, where he was invited to conduct a review workshop for a community-based organisation in Mpumalunga Province to provide supplementary education with a view to capacity to fulfil future professional positions[[18]](#footnote-18).

In the 21st century, there have been many further reports of applications in South America, both in Brazil and in Venezuela, through consultants in the Central University in Caracas working with governmental and community clients, as reported in a web link on link sheet Q. Then in 2009 an important workshop on water resource strategy in Canterbury Region on the South Island of New Zealand helped to unlock a long-standing impasse between agricultural and conservation interests in this region of central importance to the nation’s economy, as reported in a recent book by the former chief executive of the regional environment agency[[19]](#footnote-19).

**Link sheet V: FRAMEWORKS FOR INCLUSION IN PUBLIC POLICY DESIGN**

During the 1980’s, Allen Hickling started working with other consultants on important policy development projects in the Netherlands and some other European countries. These could sometimes involve a succession of workshops over several months, and involve engaging with people with many different organisational allegiances with differing levels of intensity. Important questions could then arise of who should be included in the policy development process, at what stages and in what ways. The guidelines for organisation of the process that are developed in Chapter 9 of the third edition of *Planning under Pressure* are largely based on this experience, as during this time Friend was only involved more occasionally in facilitating briefer strategic choice workshops which were usually backed by more limited contract arrangements. This difference in experience was to change over several months in 1992, when the two consultants had the opportunity to work together on a project in England for the West Yorkshire Police Service. This project was designed to engage all ranks, territorial sectors and specialist services in a restructuring of the management within this organisation of some 8,000 employees serving a mainly urban population of around two million.

The overall perspective on the organisation of policy design processes that is developed in Chapter 9 of *Planning under Pressure* is presented in Figures 94 and 95 of that book. The vehicle for the main activity in workshops is here referred to as the working group, ideally composed of some ten to twelve people chosen with a view to a balance between breadth of representation and effective group dynamics. Within this group, a smaller core group of two or three people is usually responsible for the co-ordination of whatever activities of investigation, consultation and liaison have been agreed during the previous workshop session, together with the logistic arrangements for the next session, including invitations to any additional participants.

Typically, those in the working group will be accountable to some form of steering group - referred to in the chapter as the responsible group. This group typically brings together senior representatives of all the organisations with a significant stake in the policy field concerned, who may have wide commitments which make it hard to become closely involved in the workshops. Their responsibility is to represent the interests of what may be several different *accountable groups* - typically separately accountable organisations which will be required to endorse any agreements that emerge from the policy development process. Other constituencies that may require to be consulted from time to time are referred to as *representative groupings* which reflect the political interests of other affected sectors of the community; and *reference groupings* representing office holders who will bear operational responsibility for putting any policy changes into effect.

Allen Hickling’s later sustained work on national environmental policy plans for the Netherlands and Latvia - the sequence for the latter being summarised in Figure 102 of Planning under Pressure - gave rise to further development of principles for combining technical and political cycles of input through time - the integration of these activities being of fundamental importance in any process of policy design. Figures 93 and 94 in the new Chapter 11 of the third English edition of the book illustrate a design for a twin track approach encapsulated in the acronym ISCRA, standing for the sequence of Identify Issues; Set Structure; Confirm Course; Review Recommendations; Agree Amendments.

These advances in guidelines for the engagement of different organisations and individuals throughout an extensive policy development process are the outcomes of experience in practice rather than of explicit research activities; for they took place after the years when Hickling and Friend were no longer employed by the Tavistock Institute, with its eligibility to apply for public research funds. So there remain many opportunities in future for university-based researchers to explore further innovations relating to designs for inclusion in policy processes; for example by linking these guidelines for inclusion to the guidelines for mapping of policy landscapes that were outlined on link sheet N; or by exploring the implications for remote policy meetings supported by conference software, which have become prominent since the pandemic that struck the world in 2020.

**Link sheet W: DEVELOPING SOFTWARE FOR PROCESS GUIDANCE**

Interest in developing computer software to support aspects of the new decision-focused approach to planning first arose within IOR during the the early years of IOR, focusing on the combinatorial challenges of the Analysis of Interconnected Areas (AIDA) as a problem structuring method. It was only in the mid-1980’s that opportunities began to become clear for developing an interactive software package that would, at least in some circumstances, help to guide the wider dynamic process in a logical yet flexible and user-guided way.

The first opportunity arose after John Friend left the Tavistock Institute in 1986 to work independently, at a time of intense trading difficulties, with a determination to continue building on IOR’s programe of innovation in public policy and planning processes. A further opportunity came from the availability for the first time of low cost IBM-compatible personal computers; while a third opportunity arose from the return from ten years in Australia of IOR’s former Director John Stringer, to live near Friend in retirement, having developed impressive software development skills. Finally, Friend’s teenage son Dave had now left school and was showing much ingenuity in writing software for the primitive home computers that were available in that era.

With advice from Stringer, Dave Friend started work in 1987 on a pre-launch version of the software package which was to become known as STRAD - short for Strategic Adviser. He was supported by a panel of twelve prospective users who offered advice on successive prototypes, and contributed in advance towards the cost of the published package. The first published version was launched in 1991 through a start-up company formed by John Friend and his wife Mari in the Sheffield Science Park, close to their home at that time. STRAD1 was marketed through demonstrations in UK cities; in 1994 it was superseded by a version designed for Microsoft Windows platforms rather than the earlier DOS. This enabled its graphic capabilities to be matched more closely to the conventions built up on flipcharts in the course of an informal workshop session.

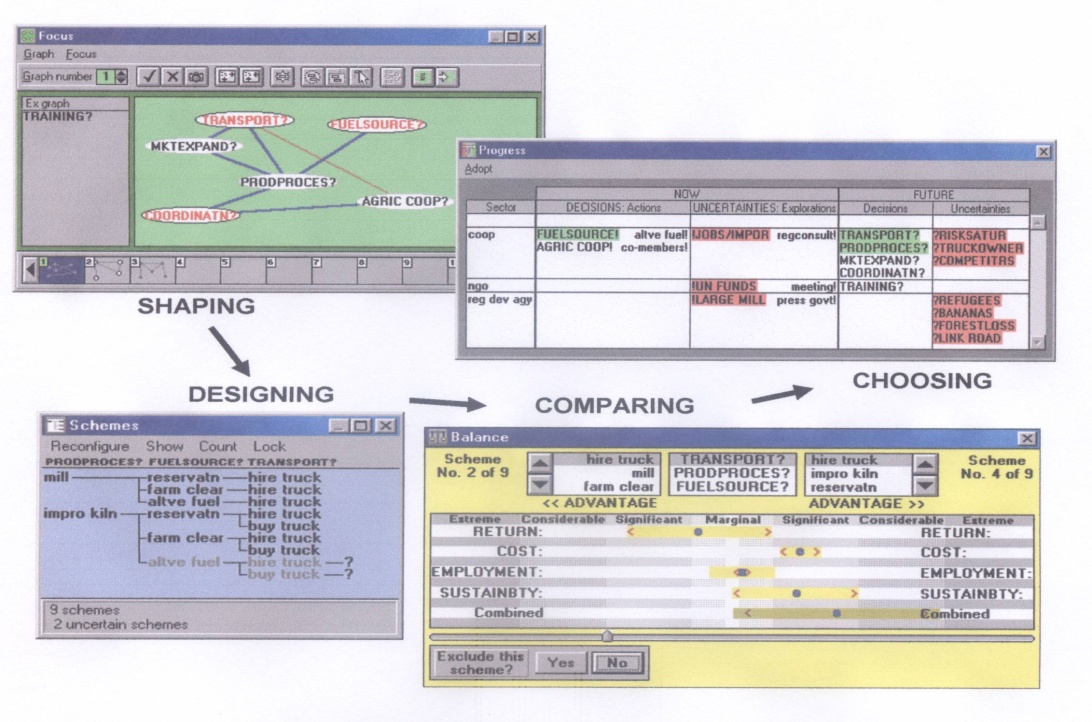
By the mid-1990’s, the spread of the internet led to a wider global distribution of the software, with over 250 licences purchased in the approximate proportions of 40% academic, 20% consultancy, 20% public services and 20% commercial. Among the applications were interactive consulting sessions, with individual clients or small groups meeting around a shared computer screen, enabling a developing picture of problem structure to be build up and discussed between consultant and client(s). An example of this kind of dialogue can be found on the later pages of a report from a European project to introduce new skills to managers of small food businesses in Lincolnshire; this report can be found on the OR Society website at:

https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/3fc339d4-ba7f-4aee-9085-7ac39457b24c/

A different kind of application for the software can be found in a presentation by a group of Peruvian students on an exercise in which they used STRAD to explore possible responses to gang culture in the principal national port of Callao. The report of the group can be found on the OR Society website at:

[https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/fa2ca82a-c85e-4ba1-8551-10bc68825103/](https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/fa2ca82a-c85e-4ba1-8551-10bc68825103/by)

During the first decade of the new millennium, Friend’s approaching retirement led to a slowdown in further development and marketing, and to discussions with potential successors with a firmer technological base. He closed the company in 2011, while keeping its website [www.stradspan.com](http://www.stradspan.com) open until other arrangements are made.



It has become clear that the success of any future arrangements for upgrading the software and extending its scope will depend on its being integrated within a wider international programme for further development of the decision-focused approach to planning, with a primary view to its value in the field of public policy choice within which it is rooted.

**Link sheet X: DESIGNING IMMERSIVE LEARNING PROGRAMMES**

Since the early 1970’s, short courses to introduce practising public servants and others to the foundations and tools of the decision-focused approach developed in the “IOR School” have been conducted in many parts of the world.. Typically these have been designed to last two days, and have involved adaptations to the immersive format developed in Canada by the visiting IOR team of Allen Hickling, Alan Sutton and John Friend. Usually, these courses have been sponsored either by governmental authorities, universities or management development agencies such as the Europe-based International Federation for Housing and Planning.

Meanwhile, some university schools have developed more extensive programmes to introduce the decision-focused approach to full time students of planning, engineering and other disciplines of relevance to public policy choice. In the third edition of *Planning under Pressure[[20]](#footnote-20),* Arnold van der Valk and Gerrit Jan Carsjens report on their many years of experience at Wageningen University in the Netherlands in introducing students from many disciplines and many cultures to this decision-focused alternative to traditional planning methods. The response has been encouraging once initial doubts and prejudices have been overcome. Another example of the exposure of students to the decision-focused approach can be found in the report by a group of Peruvian engineering students on an application to the challenges of gang culture in the national port city, using the STRAD software as described in Link sheet w and accessible via the web link:

[https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/fa2ca82a-c85e-4ba1-8551-10bc68825103/](https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/fa2ca82a-c85e-4ba1-8551-10bc68825103/by)

The design of a typical two-day short course is built around an introductory review followed by a sequence of modules of 100 to 120 minutes each, introducing concepts and tools for the four basic strategic choice modes of Shaping, Devising, Comparing and Choosing. In the case of the Choosing mode, it has been found valuable to split this between two modules, focusing respectively on tools for the management of *uncertainty* and tools for the negotiation of strategic *progress*. Each module starts with a short lecture to introduce the relevant tools, using a relatively simple example of a team-building problem. This is followed by a longer period of work with flipcharts in small groups on a realistic problem situation, then by a brief plenary period of report back and open discussion. The group exercise is designed to evolve from one module to the next, with a few surprises thrown in. For the intending course tutor, a set of self-explanatory yet modifiable PowerPoint lecture notes is available, while handouts are available for a range of group exercises reflecting different areas of policy concern. The design of entertaining yet realistic group exercises has proved to be a creative task.

Another type of immersive exercise has become known as a *mutual consulting workshop*. This can be completed within a period of eight hours and has proved to be especially valuable in introducing the decision-focused approach within the context of a short residential course for managers in public policy roles. This format enables partipants to share examples of current dilemmas arising in their own roles, as described in:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/3fc339d4-ba7f-4aee-9085-7ac39457b24c/>

In some operational research schools in Britain, the tools of this decision-focused approach have been briefly introduced within a course covering *problem structuring methods* of diverse origins, guided by the now classic OR textbook edited by Rosenhead and Mingers[[21]](#footnote-21). Typically, the lectures are given by academics from schools that are more familiar with other approaches such as Soft Systems Methodology or Strategic Options Development Analysis; and may have little experience of the *dynamic* orientation of the Strategic Choice Approach that reflects its origins in an extensive programme of funded research on public planning processes.

If the fuller philosophy and practice of the decision-focused approach is to be carried forward with fuller reference to its origins in research in public planning and policy design, it will be important to develop more focused programmes - for examplee Masters courses - which reflect the full significance of these origins.

**Link sheet Y: Cultivating facilitation skills**

The flexibility of process that is so valuable in steering a strategic choice workshop -demands a corresponding degree of versatility on the part of whoever is responsible for facilitating the process.

In facilitating any kind of group process, an essential skill is that of managing the *interaction* among the participants in a sensitive way - the dynamics of the group, including the tactful handling of the more voluble contributors along with the encouragement of the more reticent. In a process which is explicitly designed to work towards agreement on strategic progress within a set time frame, two other skills have proved to be of comparable importance - that of sustaining *progress* in the agreed diirection and that of handling the *methods -* or as operational researchers would say the methodology - by which this progress is to be sustained. The acronym IMP - for interaction - Methods - Progress - has proved to be a helpful one to the facilitator seeking to maintain the balance between these three important aims in the course of a decision-focused workshop.

The art of listening to a participant articulating her or his view of an issue is of course important; but so too is the skill of the facilitator in suggesting alternative ways of expressing that issue, which might contribute more directly to the building up of a shared view of the group’s “policy space” - for example by adding a question mark to a description of a decision area, or by suggesting alternative wording that turns a proposal into an open question, then checking whether the participant agrees before entering it on the flipchart.

The cyclic process diagram that appears in link sheet I indicates a range of options for switching back from later modes to earlier modes, and these offer a facilitator opportunities for flexibility in process management at any stage. During a one-day workshop, it is usually wise to allow at least an hour at the start for initial shaping of the problem space, and at least an hour at the end of the workshop to focus on strategic progress; and this limits the scope for flexibility in the intermediate period. However, in a workshop lasting more than one day the facilitator may find it valuable to suggest more than one cycle of devising and comparing, perhaps with at least one shift of problem focus, as the understanding of the group develops.

As a route to building mature facilitation skills, the familiar model of the apprentice, in which a learner works with a more experienced facilitator in a small facilitation team of two or three, has proved invaluable. Yet Allen Hickling and his various associates have also developed modular courses for the training of facilitators, on behalf of the UK Environment Council and other sponsors. During the course of a management development project he conducted with John Friend for the West Yorkshire Police in 1992, a group of twelve employees from different areas of the organisation were given a course by Allen Hickling in facilitation skills. It was encouraging to hear that the services of these facilitators continued to be in demand for many years after the end of the project.

In some countries, consultants and public servants have succeeded in building lasting careers as facilitators of public policy workshops. One prominent example is the late Arnold de Jong in the Netherlands, who was invited to write a foreword to the third edition of *Planning under Pressure*[[22]](#footnote-22)*.* After successive careers as an agricultural engineer, a corporate information manager and a senior local politician, he began working almost full time as a facilitator with Allen Hickling and a number of Dutch associates, using the Strategic Choice Approach as his guide to the facilitation process.

Similar skills to those of the workshop facilitator come into play in a more intimate computer-assisted consulting session using the same decision-focused approach, where the consultant seeks to build up a shared picture of problem structure with an individual problem-owner or an intimate group which is small enough to share access to a computer screen. In future, it is likely that policy workshops will increasingly be adapted to a virtual format, with participants communicating with each other from remote locations, bringing increased dimensions to the challenges of facilitation skill.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING FRESH MOMENTUM DURING THE 2020’s**

**Starting points.** This document has offered an overview of the full scope of an important programme of innovation in public policy planning. with origins of the decision centred approach developed during an ambitious inter-disciplinary research project in the 1960’s. Web and other references have been offered to some key documents, from the earliest indications of a breakthrough to more recent applications and adaptations of the decision focused approach.

An important global priority for the decade of the 2020’s will be for universities in the UK and other countries to take axlead in exploring practical opportunities for building on these foundations, alongside further innovations in practice and theory, so as to exercise a significant influence on global capacities in tackle the opportunities and threats of our 21st century world.

The last few pages have indicated some of the opportunities that can be explored over the next decade, including capacity-building programmes and further development of technological support. Much will depend on initiatives from academic schools responsible for world of operational research of skills in important domains of environmental, social and economic policy> However the impertus for development of the decision focussed approach has come from the broader direction of operational research, in partnership with insights on processes from the social sciences. Links between the associated academic communities are currently often restricted by faculty and other disciplinary boundaries, for example where operational research or management science groups are located within a business school.

**As a short term measure** to build bridges across academic boundaries, the vehicle of a *summer in a note de[posited on t programme* offers much promise, and should be possible to organise in time for the summer of 2021. Over the course of no more than five days, it should be possible to bring together academic staff and graduate students from different disciplinary backgrounds of relevance to public policy planning together with counterparts from disciplines such as OR and management science, exposing them to a combination of immersive learning programmmes such as those outlined in sheet X and more forward-facing discussions of opportunities for new initiatives to address 21st century policy challenges.

Such a summer school programme could be complemented by the design of more individualistic doctoral and masters projects dedicated to important areas of research associated with the decision focused approach to public policy planning, six of which are suggested in a note recently deposited on the OR Society’s website at:

**As a medium term target** after two or three years,

and

This breakthro document is designed to provide an accessible guide to the scope and current range of the decision-focused approach to public planning and policy development as it has demonstrated its potential for wide global influence over the decades since the initial breakthroughs of the 1960’s and 70’s.

Among those who will be well placed to play leading roles in building further on this record of innovation during the coming decade will be:

* imaginative academics who appreciate the potential for developing new programmes to build on the evidence so far that this decision-focused approach has the potential to break new ground in introducing more sensitive and inclusive processes for developing public policies at all scales from the local to the national and beyond;
* graduate students who aspire to develop publicly responsible careers that will help to address some of the most pressing challenges of public policy choice that lie ahead;
* leaders of governmental and research institutions who appreciate the potential for innovation in the ways in which public policies are shaped;

**Building early outreach.** ver the decades, immersive short course exercises have been developed and successfully introduced in diverse settings which, it is proposed, could quickly be adapted be brought together in an initial programme of summer schools designed to equip graduates from complementary disciplinary backgrounds with a basis of shared experience in the decision-focused approach, balanced by less structured opportunities for creative discussion of options for introducing these principles ino future academic and in-service programmes.

Among the most important aims of such a summer school will be that of *outreach*: firstly outreach between schools of operational research or related disciplines and other academic schools that are steeped in the challenges of divided accountability that pervade all domains of public policy; and secondly outreach between younger generations of students who are motivated to contribute to more sensitive processes for developing public policies and more mature generations with direct experience of the challenges that can arise.

The suggested design of any such summer school should strike a balance between offering shared experiences of working together on immersive decision-focused exercises, and offering opportunities for more open discussion of creative opportunities for building on this shared experience to design new postgnd secondly raduate programmes and other initiatives in response to the policy challenges of our troubled 21st century. A suggested design for a five-day summer school brings together three elements:

* an **immersive short course**, of about two days in duration, in which participants work together in small groups on a realistic strategic problem introduced over five modules, introducing unexpected developments between modules and enabling them to apply visual tools m flipcharts to represent **their** views of decision areas, options, impacts and uncertainties; (see link sheet X).
* a **mutual consulting exercise**, of one day’s duration, in which participabts use a structured seven-stage questionnaire to build *strategic profiles* of tough decision problems on their current agenda;
* **more open discussion** of opportunities for building on this decision-focussed approach in developing new strategies for introducing praxtitioners and students to the decision-focused approach.

Materials in electronic formats are now freely available for direct use in the first two of these elements, either as fthey stand or with adaptations to reflect changes of policy context..

In approaching the new year of 2021, universities on and many other institution face an unprecedented level of uncertainty over their future directions, depending on the course of the global COVID pandemic and the social and economic impacts that are gradually becoming more apparent. However, well-tested templates for introducing a decision-focused approach to public policy choice are now available.. These are designed around a suite of realistic case examples which are structured so as to develop from one module to the next, with unexpected events to contend with from time to time The participants will be encouraged to view these materials as starting points for employing their experience, and their imagination, in designing further case materials tailored to important challenges of 21st century policy choice.

Also available for inclusion in the proposed summer school format is a well-tested template for the form of *mutual consulting exercise* which was introduced in link sheet X. This can be completed within a single day; it introduces an eight-stage sequence of questions which asks each member of a small group to ask another member to build a structured *strategic profile* of a selected decision problem on their own current management agenda. The full set of profiles is then displayed on flipcharts, leading to the choice of a profile that is voted to be of sufficient interest to others to be explored in more depth. Experience has shown that such an exercise can be particularly valuable in the case of mature students on a short residential course.

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/3fc339d4-ba7f-4aee-9085-7ac39457b24c/>

If such a summer school experience is to provide a platform for building more lasting arrangements for developing university-based programmes of professional development, research and application to important challenges of public policy, then it is essential that enough time to be made available at intervals during the week for open discussion of opportunities for next steps, both within the host university and in collaboration with potential partners. Such discussions can then feed in to whatever wider arrangements are developing durin 2021 to build national and international momentum towards shared progress in public policy design.

If enough initial momentum is to be built during 2021, whether at national or international level, there are many types of institution that have a capacity to assume leading roles. Among these are universities; centres of innovation within governmental systems; professional bodies; and independent centres of development and research. The momentum is likely to be enhanced if such organisations can work in some form of partnership: for this is what led to the development of momentum in the constrained circumstances of the 1960’s and ‘70’s, when the seeds were first planted of the decision-focused approach to public planning and policy design that now offers a springboard for further progress.

**The rate of progress** that can be established during 2021 will depend on the emergence of effective steering or co-ordinating arrangements to build and sustain a sense of momentum during the course of the year - even though it is to be expected that any interim arrangements will require continuing adaptation as the momentum grows. The design of any such arrangements will depend on the balance of contributions in the early stages from the academic, governmental, and other sectors; on the degree to ahich it becomes possible to engage the enthusiasms of student generations; and on the extent of to which early momentum can be generated at an international level.

The evidence of global penetration of this decision-focused approach to public policy development is already substantial enough to underpin a bold approach from a consortium of programme builders to international charitable sources of funding - in contrast to the situation in the 1960’s and 70’s when there was as yet little such evidence of achievement on which to draw. The evidence presented on link sheets A to Y spans a range of fields of practice and theory which can e drawn on freely by whatever consortium of applicants can come together to submit proposals.

It should also be possible to develop practical and realistic targets for a mid-range development programme over a horizon of two or three academic years without waiting for the outcomes of such bids for strategic support from global foundations. From recent experience, the following three mid-term targets are proposed as realistic:

* **CC Postgraduate programmes for public policy design;**
* **DD creating a pool of resources for public policy design;**
* **EE shaping a strategic agenda for publicy design policy research.**

More specific suggestions for these mid-range targets are discussed in the three link sheets that follow, based on cumulative experience so far. Of course, these suggestions are offered merely as a starting point for discussion, challenge and modification by those who can offer different experiences, and by those who will carry more direct responsibility for sustaining momentum in the coming years.

In this 21st century, long-term investment is more likely to be attracted from global communication technology corporations, rather than from the energy and transport corporations that underpinned the innovations of

**Link sheet CC: postgraduate programmes in public policy design**

The offer of a full Master’s programme in public policy design, with its roots in a decision-centred approach that can claim a substantial record of influence in many parts of the world, should be attractive at two levels:

* It should attract **ambitious graduates** from schools of management and of public policy - whether with environmental, a social or an economic slant - who aspire to a career in which significant challenges of public policy choice will be confronted, whether at a national or a more localised scale;
* It should attract **respsonsible employers** in any significant sphere of public policy, as a source through which to recruit graduates with versatile skills for operating in the conditions of divided accountability, and of multiple sources of uncertainty, on which strategic progress in policy development depends.

In the history of the development of the decision-focused approach which is surveyed here, training programmes have been directed more towards practitioners on short courses than towards full time students, with corresponding limitations in their scope. Meanwhile, more extended programmes with full-time student classes have been developed by some universities; one impressive example of the enlarged scope that can be offered in such a course has been reported by Arnold van der Valk and Jan Carsjens in their contribution to Chapter 13 of the third edition of *Planning under Pressure[[23]](#footnote-23)*.

Courses in operational research schools have tended to be focused on a broader class of *problem structuring methods* of varied origins, as presented in the book edited by Rosenhead and Mingers[[24]](#footnote-24). The introductory chapter on the strategic choice approach therefore focuses on the more analytical aspects of the approach, as opposed to its origins in the more open and political context of a continuous and multi-stranded process of public planning as indicated on the right-hand side of the influence map presented here; however, the companion chapter by Hickling describes a classical application to the development of important public policies at the national level.

The set of link sheets A to Y draws attention to the wide range of materials that is now available to contribute to the design of a Masters programme which aims to do justice to the full range of experience accumulated so far in the decision focused approach to public policy design. Such a programe will also offer scope for introducing additional course material as further experience accumulates.

**Link sheet DD. Maintaining a pool of resources for public policy design**

The range of resources available to those making use of the decision focused approach to public planning and policy development has gradually extended from printed materials - booklets followed by books in English and other languages - to computer software and electronic files in PowerPoint and other presentation formats. As technologies of remote communication and conferencing continue to develop, transcending the limitations of distance and language, so the opportunities for extending this range of resources will continue to expand.

**The resource of software** for the guidance of planning processeshas already been shown to have a valuable role to play, through the experience during the 1990’s of the development and distribution of the *Strategic Adviser* (STRAD} package; this package builds on the graphic tools of communication that have proved effective in strategic choice workshops, and extends theseb tools in some significant respects. Licences for use of STRAD have been negotiated with some 250 governmental, academic and conrulting users in 36 countries, and a wide range of uses have been reported.

Because of John Friend’s gradual shift of priority es towards retirement, it has not been possible for him to keep this package upgraded to more recent improvements in operating systems; yet the advice is that this kind of upgrading should not be dillicult[[25]](#footnote-25). Once arrangements have been made for a basic upgrade, it will be possible to review a range of extensions to the capabilities of the software that have already been suggested by users, including in particular adaptations to participation from remote locations.

It is important that any further development and distribution of this kind of technology should be closely linked to a nucleus of education and research. A shift towards an open source principle of development has been suggested.

**Link sheet EE. Shaping a strategic agenda for public policy research**

Opportunities for further research in developing and extending this decision focused approach to public planning and policy development have been of crucial importance since the early days in the 1960’s and ‘70’s when the approach was pioneered within an independent UK research institute, with support from public sponsorship. Such research opportunities however became much more limited from the 1980’s onwards, with the dispersal of the members of the IOR planning process group.

A short document deposited by John Friend in 2019 in the OR Society’s document repository indicated six areas of research as priorities for university-based inter-disciplinary teams, reflecting the more political side of the influence map presented here.

* inter-organisational linkage;
* mapping public policy landscapes;
* the dynamics of policy change;
* the design of public policy dialogues;
* the design of public policy engagements;
* learning from negotiated project engagements.

Fuller discussion of these six areas will be found in the documemt repository on the OR Society website:

<https://www.theorsociety.com/resource-centre/document-repository/document/ece0e7a4-0231-4148-b991-0f0674061e26/>

There wil also be opportunities for the design of individual research projects within doctoral or masters programmes of personal postgraduate research. An important priority will be for students from different cultural backgrounds to explore the experiences of policy development workshops in their own countries, and arrive at any conclusions that might be of wider cross-cultural value. .

**Link sheet FF. Platforms for global exchange of experience**

An important aim for any centre which is designed to offer support to innovators in public policy design is to offer a reservoir of examples of previous workshops or programmes in realms of policy concern that are likely to be of direct relevance to them.

One example of an important policy field in which the decision-focused approach has been successfully applied by innovators working independently in different countries has been that of *water and sanitation* policy*.* This is a policy field of wide concern in developing countries which experience insistent pressures for urban expansion which cut across established boundaries of jurisdiction, as in many countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Another example of wide international importance concerns the interface between health services and other social services such as care of the elderly and education. Arrangements for the management of such services, and for co-ordination between them, vary widely across cultures, so the mapping of public policy landscapes, as discussed in link sheet M is likely to be especially significant in developing a framework for cross-cultural comparison.

**Link sheet GG. Firmer foundations for a science of public policy**

Debates about the scientific foundations of the academic disciplines of political science and policy studies which have been current at least since the 1960’s; yet there is little evidence that insights have emerged that would offer guidance to those involved in the practical management of processes of public policy choice and public policy design.

The development of a decision-centred approach to public policy choice has drawn attention to the complex challenges that arise from:

* the multiplicity of sources of policy influence representing different sources of public accountability;
* the intrinsic difficulty of designing generic rules to match the variety of situations that may arise;
* the subtle dynamics of policy change involving interplay between top-down and bottom-up forces.

Diuscussions with academic political scientists suggest that there could be important gains from addressing such dilemmas of practice in future academic programmes in public policy, alongside more conventional insights from political science.

**Link sheet HH: Wider appreciation of the value of inclusive public policy design**

The growth over the coming decade of support for more open and inclusive approaches to the design of important public policies will depend on an unpredictable conjunction of political influences.

Recent criticisms of established political structures have tended to focus on the potential for innovative forms of citizen assembly through which contentious issues can be addressed and ways forward can be found. This principle inevitably gives rise to a host of design choices. Questions of the composition of such an assembly are frequently discussed, but choices ofas to how its agenda should be negotiated are less frequently considered. These are essentially questons of problem structuring of the kind that are addressed at all stages of a facilitated strategic choice workshop.

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23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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