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SOCIAL SPACE, SOCIETAL POLICY, AND SOCIAL THEORY

Recently, I have been trying to develop some indicators for the affective quality of life and a procedure for the use of such indicators within social policy formulation.¹ I've come upon several fundamental problems about social policy, social theory and the use of such policy within a government.

I have been trying to develop some social indicators which are oriented towards individual development. This is somewhat in contrast with the usual indicators which are programmatically oriented, such as housing or health, or societally oriented such as GNP. This has led me to consider certain questions which seem especially relevant when getting down to the individual dimension, to the psychological level. There, I think we have to ask the questions about how much and what kind of control can be exercised by governmental bodies.² We also have to ask what kinds of resources are available for creating possibilities for individual development and fulfillment. These kinds of questions have led me to certain considerations about the typology of policies as well as about how policies are related to what we know about social theory. In the paragraphs below I hope to make some distinctions about social policy which are useful in illuminating some of the new problems that we will face when we start making social policy explicitly related to individual development.

¹Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, Berkeley, 1969, Working Papers 103, 104, and 106.

²As for groups, the advertising business suggests that no holds are to be barred, or almost.

Some Distinctions

I would like to distinguish among the kinds of policies we see and suggest avenues for new policy formulation. Until very recently, almost all of our social policy can best be grouped under a single term which I will call physical space policy. Physical space policy is concerned with concrete objects in space and time, with measurements of the existence of these objects, and with financial provision (whether it be for health or for welfare) for dealing with the necessities of life in a physical form. We have extended this notion nowadays, and education, for example, is considered a valid part of this kind of policy. However, I would like to suggest that even education is still a provision of physical policy, because it relates to the kind of work environment that students are being prepared for. Physical policy deals with physical space.

A second kind of space is institutional space.³ Institutional space is a series of structures in which we carry on much of our social interaction. It is also a series of structures which provide for much of our physical needs or physical space needs. It is an intermediate space. It is a space that is essentially related to some physical manifestations of social space and some social manifestations of physical space.

For example, a policy about a university would be a policy concerned with institutional space since it might well affect the interactive potential of individuals within the university; it also probably would reflect how the university comes to be shaped physically.

A third variety of space, I call social space. Social space is concerned with culture, norms, laws, policies relating to individuals,

³Leonard Duhl suggested this point.

forecasting models, the world view of individuals, and psychological states. Social space is in the realm of feeling, of sense, of milieu, of style. Social space is the provision for mental health and well being, and is the provision for education for individual growth and development. It is the kind of space for which we have made little policy nowadays, except by indirection. But I expect that we are going to develop knowledge in the psychological realm that will give us the capability for handling problems within the social space realm and make us capable of developing direct useful policy within this realm.⁴

Trade-offs exist within three spaces -- physical, institutional, social -- policies developed for any one of them may well be useful in taking the strain off policy developed for another. Let me give an obvious example. Say we have a policy about environmental management which relates mostly to the landscape, its general structural form, its recreational usage, and so forth. For the most part, this would be looked at as a development in physical space. Yet obviously we can extend this policy. First of all, physical space policies -- such as putting up sculptures, developing open space areas or closed space areas, are very much related to institutional space problems, i.e., development of structures which facilitate individual interaction and which serve certain strong physical functions. Finally much landscape development which seems to be quite physical, very spacially oriented, very much related to the provisions and allocation of physical resources within a society, can well serve social space functions. For example, we can develop good play environments for children or encourage new modes of behavior and feeling.

⁴W. G. Bennis et al, Interpersonal Dynamics, Dorsey Press, Homewood, Ill., 1968, is a good place to start.

Such physical space objects as land are quite limited as resources, and we are going to have to develop new resources in social and institutional space which will give us a mix of resources more capable of meeting our needs.

An explicit realization of the possibility of social space policy may lead us to consider explicitly the kind of policies that we once considered taboo. A scarcity of physical space may well force us to enlarge our social space; we will approach such enlargements with a great deal of fear since we are quite suspicious of playing around with each other's psyches. A question I would like to ask is, why are we not so suspicious about playing around with each other's physical space? To boot, we are willing to play around with each other's psyches only if we do so indirectly and without specific knowledge of what we are doing.

Some Problems Associated With These Distinctions

A large amount of the concern about policy related to social space has to do with the possibility of governmental take-over of individual initiative and development by a "big brother" policy. I think that one can make an important distinction here which may well make it possible for policy to operate within the social-psychological realm and yet not be repressive. I would like to distinguish between allocative and provisional policy. An allocative policy tells one what to do with a certain amount of resources. Allocative policy is rather specific and very much instrumental. Provisional policy on the other hand provides for certain possibilities of action; it allows for more freedom rather than less. Of

course, in creating provisional policy one eliminates some alternatives by making them substantially less attractive than others.⁵

The difference between allocative and provisional policy is similar to the difference between closed and open policy. Closed policy assumes a track, a path, a direction, a way of going, while open policy provides for ways of going. Open policy provides for deviance; it tries to keep the system going in some general direction, mainly by a small amount of strategic planning. Provisional policy is very much a policy of choice, cafeteria-style. It is much freer than allocative policy, because in allocative policy one is saying what should be done and in provisional policy one is suggesting possible avenues.

If the intent of the policy makers is to be deceptive, then distinctions between closed and open, between allocative and provisional, can be blurred. By this I mean that a provisional or open policy can be a very strict and unfree policy, since the "carrots" that are rewarded can be so tremendous that it is extraordinarily expensive for one to fail to follow the correct path. However, I think that there is a distinction between a policy that will suggest the use of a "carrot" and a policy that will suggest the use of a "stick".

Social Theory

How do we relate social space policy to social theory about social relationships? A natural scientist might say that there is a way of explaining a phenomenon which then leads us to a policy and a way of dealing with that phenomenon. But, regarding social problems, we do not

⁵See J. Friedmann, "Notes on Societal Action," Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Sept., 1969, p. 311 (esp. p. 313).

realize how little we know; there exist a substantial number of possible explanations for the meager amount of data we have available.⁶ Different theories may span and explain the data from somewhat different points-of-view, yet each one may be equally "good."

What are we to do with these several theories? I think that choices have to be made among different theories mainly on the basis of the kind of policy one would like to make. An example should clarify this point. Choose two theories of individual development, a Freudian model and one that is less historical, a la Maslow or Erikson. Which gives better guidance for policy formulation? In the context of policy development for the United States at this time, I find Maslow's theories much more operational than a Freudian conception. Thus any social theory is important insofar as it can lead one to effective policies going in a politically chosen direction. There's no one-to-one relationship between a problem, a theory, and a solution, there is a multivalued relationship which is not very simple to elucidate. The value of social theory is largely in its suggestive aspects rather than its explanatory role.

A very interesting consequence of the idea of a multiplicity of theories related to a single problem is that we may well employ operational, phenomenological variables that are useful for the description of events and society and which are common to several theories. Such a variable would be a measure of friendship, which is not a very theoretical concept, but is related to socialization problems and is equally applicable to theories with a more societal or a more personal orientation of individual

⁶We always say that we know little, but what I mean here is that we know little that is useful for a predictive theory.

development. In using such variables which are rather broadly based, we may be able to develop fairly useful policies even though the theory does not tell us exactly what to do.

A consequence of dealing with problems in social space is that our ignorance here is so apparent. We are not so ignorant about most problems in physical space; we have a well developed set of concepts for area management problems like location theory, and urban economics, but within social space, our ignorance is vast and therefore it is quite likely that many of our policies will result in conscious waste. We're going to have to follow through with a fairly buckshot theory of social policy, whereby we try several alternatives knowing that perhaps half or a tenth of them will work. Conscious waste (which is like economic "risk") is not bad if one realizes that there is some probability that some of one's efforts will work. This is very different from a theory that gives us a cause and effect relationship. We are much more likely to be dealing with, in these cases, a collection of past experiences that only suggest the possibility of one policy rather than another being more effective.

Positive and Anti-Negative Policy

I also want to make a distinction between what I would call positive policy and anti-negative policy. I derive this distinction from Bradburn and Caplowitz's study on happiness.⁷ In their work they show that an ameliorative policy may well be a policy that either creates positive happiness or decreases unhappiness. Such a distinction can lead to different kinds of policy formulation. We can decide that we want to

⁷N. Bradburn and D. Caplowitz, Reports on Happiness, Aldine, Chicago, 1965.

foster human development rather than prevent failure. We can develop policies which are positive in orientation and serve to deal with specific problems of development, for example, rather than policies which are anti-negative in orientation, i.e., rehabilitatory. It is not that I wish to de-emphasize the importance of rehabilitation efforts, so much as to emphasize the possibility of prevention in decreasing the incidence of disease and failure.

The Use of Policy

Another possibility to be considered is the difference between an integrated and a policy-run society. An integrated society will be defined as a society in which policies are not created or destroyed but which evolve in subtle and slow ways. There's no enunciation of a new policy as such, but there are changes of customs and habits. This is perhaps most congruent with what is normally called a traditional society.

A policy run society makes explicit choices and explicit changes in direction, dependent on needs that are perceived by the society. One believes that policy, namely explicit statements of what you are going to do, are valid means of causing change. A policy run society assumes that letting things go along will let them go to pot. A policy run society can change very rapidly and in changing creates more policy problems.

It is quite likely that one must have a policy run society where there is a large amount of technological change. We haven't had time to develop integrated societies based on technological change; the time scale of change in an integrated society may be very much longer than the time scale of technological change and therefore one could not have such a combination. The time scale of change in the policy run society is similar to that of a technological situation.

In a policy run society, we must define problems positively and broadly. We can't say for instance, that our policies should not interfere with individual psyches, because we purposely do this in some cases, as with mental retardation. Rather, we should begin by saying that we would prefer to have well developed individuals and then handle the problem from that point of view. I think the value of such an orientation in a policy run society is that we can know where we are going, we can have a sense of what things are important, and we may avoid the use of crass means to our ends. But it is not obvious that this will happen.

In policy run societies, we find both responsive and co-optive organizations. A responsive organization is an organization which changes to meet the needs of individuals within it. A co-optive organization changes, but in the process, it disintegrates the individuals. It destroys their sense of self, by ostensibly providing them with what they want but without giving them what they seem to really need internally. I make this distinction to suggest that policy run societies will probably need to develop responsive organizations so that many people do not feel oppressed by organizational milieus that are highly artificial to them. Policy run societies are especially prone to such disease. Too much of a policy-run society with co-optive organizations can become quite oppressive; this oppression may not be a purely political repression but may well be psychological.

Indicators of Social Space

What are the indicators of social space? What are the possible dimensions? One suggested set of indicators measures communications. We could measure the number of telephone calls to indicate how much people

communicate with each other on the interpersonal level. Other measures of social space can include indicators of friendships and indicators of how satisfied people are with interpersonal relationships.

Another kind of indicator would be measures of deviance. It may turn out that the development of alternative systems and their survival is a very positive correlative with the quality of a society in its social space. Many advantages of invisible colleges, the mafia, riots in the streets and subversion of the system lie not in their purely instrumental nature, but in the fact of their highly expressive qualities, and the interaction potential for the formation of friendships. It is important to take these things into account when one is evaluating a social system.

In order to get a handle on the quality of interaction and the effectiveness of interaction in social space we might measure some very common items. How many people are using dating services and why do some places seem more successful than others? What are the nature of the Dear Abbie letters -- do they differ according to the time and location of the senders (they should). Count the number of suicides and try to correlate with other events and the social relationships that the people had (a la Durkeim). We might try to measure the possibilities of group endeavors getting started. A more ambitious attempt would be to analyze the laws and/or customs of a place in order to develop classification schemes for the limits of action in social space.

It is difficult to tell one to measure something to learn about a kind of policy when the typology is not too well specified. On the other hand, the process of measurement leads to greater clarity in the definition of problems.

How Can We Do Provisional Planning

How can needs and resources be matched in a provisional planning framework?

A market of some sort, with very imperfect information, will be part of the plan. We under-plan, leaving a large number of needs and resources un-provided for and un-obligated.⁸

An agency provides all comers with organizational resources, means of communications, and advice on how to form effective constituencies. It may well be an old time political clubhouse. Experts of all sorts can be hired for short periods of time. Then there is some opportunity for the unheard voices to influence the distribution of resources. Of course we do not attack the entrenched parts of the system (e.g., defense budget), but we do let other demands get heard.

An example of how such a seemingly reasonable policy can be bad is found in presidential campaigning. Give each of the candidates some free TV time, but then the number of candidates is restricted to two or three of the major parties. There is freedom to differ, but only a little bit.

⁸Like the non-vulgar planning of Hirschman.