

POLITICAL FEASIBILITY AS A FACTOR
IN REGIONAL LAND USE PLANNING

by

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ABSTRACT

Although landscape architects have traditionally been concerned with the natural, economic, and social constraints to land use planning, recognition and understanding of political constraints have generally been neglected.

One reason political feasibility has not been considered in the planning process is the lack of a convenient methodology to use as an analytical tool. A three-part typology is presented for use in analyzing the political feasibility of land use plans or projects. A scenario is then introduced to illustrate the practical application of the typology components and to demonstrate the general principles and methodology of political feasibility assessment. The situation examined is the introduction of a new grazing program on a national forest. Finally, an evaluation is made of the typology as to its general applicability as an analytical and decision-making tool in a variety of land use planning situations.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although landscape architects have traditionally been concerned with the natural, economic, and social constraints to land use planning, recognition and understanding of political constraints as an important factor in the planning process have generally been neglected. Land use planning failures often occur, even though programs meet goals and objectives, because of a disparity between program formulation and program implementation. This is due in part to neglect of political constraints as a significant factor in the planning and implementation process. Such neglect leads to unrealistic program expectations and the consequent inability of the program to fulfill its objectives.

Typically, land use planning involves a number of analytical tools--such as social impact assessments, economic efficiency analyses, and physical impact studies--that provide information on the potential effects of possible programs. While all of these methods are important for evaluating plan alternatives and for providing information on how specific consequences are distributed through society, none were designed to address specifically the effect of political factors.

Economic modes of analysis are useful techniques for evaluating the economic costs and benefits of alternative programs. They are especially valuable in getting rid of the worst programs (Wildavsky 1968,

p. 55); however, they are less useful for making political decisions, because economic rationality and political rationality are often at odds with one another (Diesing 1962; Wildavsky 1979; Behn 1981, p. 201). In some instances, economically efficient programs--in which economic benefits exceed net costs--can be politically infeasible and hence nonimplementable. Conversely, a program that presents an inefficient solution can be politically feasible because it is based on society's distributional preferences. In considering a range of program alternatives, efficiency is a major consideration, but costs and benefits of political change must also be measured.

Social impact assessment is another important component of the land use planning process, pinpointing what groups are affected by the program, and providing information on the broad social consequences of program alternatives. However, the groups affected by the program may not be the groups with the most interest in the program or the ones most likely to place obstacles in the path of program implementation. Investigation of the distributional effects of a program may reveal that initial demands for equity (fairness) are expressed only by those who are actively involved in the issue, specifically those who have something to lose or gain from a program alternative.

Many physical impact assessments try to meet a presumed ideal of measuring and valuing all impacts using a formula or equation and a scoring method. By assessing the beneficial and adverse physical impacts of planning alternatives, trade-offs among the many natural components of the program are revealed. However, all the trade-offs that

are crucial to choosing among alternative plans cannot be revealed by this type of method. Many trade-offs will have political consequences and most political tradeoffs are resistant to quantification. Even when attempts are made to place values on these trade-offs--for example with noncommodity resources such as scenic beauty--the state-of-the-art is new and results are difficult to evaluate. In these instances, evaluation becomes more subjective and judgmental.

Although political factors can be the most formidable obstacles to achieving plan and program goals, most of the assessment methods described above omit political costs and benefits from their calculations. As a consequence, the results of decisions based largely on these analyses often do not mesh with political reality.

One reason land use planners have generally overlooked making political feasibility assessments a part of the planning and decision process is the lack of a convenient methodology to use as an analytical tool. In part this is due to the fact that most of the variables that shape political feasibility are not amenable to quantification. Because they are unwieldy, consideration and examination of these variables tend to result in imprecise analyses. In addition, factors affecting political feasibility are dynamic, changing and recombining into new clusters of variables that often make reliable prediction difficult (Dror 1969, p. 283). The time-sensitivity of political constraints adds another dimension to the problem of structuring a satisfactory methodology, because constraints are likely to vary from the initiation of the planning process through the entire period of program implementation.

Despite these inherent limitations, the analysis of political feasibility can be a realistic and useful way to deal with program formation and implementation, helping land use planners estimate how alternatives will affect future events. As in any planning and implementation situation, the task of the land use planner is not only to determine the "best" program alternative for a given situation, but also to ensure that the chosen alternative can be successfully implemented. By broadening program evaluation criteria to include assessments of political feasibility, land use planners can move away from the traditional view of planning as a purely technical exercise and toward a more realistic view of what is possible under existing political and social conditions. The land use planner can choose the alternative course of action judged best on a combination of physical, economic, social and political factors.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the importance and utility of political feasibility assessment as an analytical and decision-making tool. By illustrating application of such assessments in planning and program implementation, it is hoped that land use planners will become more aware of how political constraints and opportunities can affect the outcome of their programs. By recognizing that these constraints do exist and understanding their significance in the planning process, land use planners can improve their planning effectiveness. The assessment of political feasibility can assist in planning programs that are implementable and prevent the implementation of programs which may be politically costly in the future. Attention

and effort can be directed toward proposed plans that have some chance of being implemented, screening out those that are unlikely to be successfully implemented.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to define the principal elements of the concept of political feasibility and to construct a workable typology of these elements. A scenario is presented in which a new land management program is being proposed. By applying what has been learned from the typology to the scenario, the political feasibility of implementing the new program is examined. The purpose of this exercise is to illustrate the practical application of the typology and to demonstrate in realistic terms the general principles and methodology of political feasibility assessment. A strategy is then devised by which political assessment can be successfully used for land use planning. Finally, an evaluation is made of the typology as to its general applicability as an analytical and decision-making tool in a variety of land use planning and management situations.

Method

Political Feasibility

A thorough search of the policy studies literature was undertaken to identify work which defines or discusses the concept of political feasibility. The principal variables identified in these works were then extracted and an analysis made of their significance to the

concept of political feasibility. The variables were then structured into a typology that can be used for evaluating land use planning alternatives and activities. Three main categories--issues, actors, and arenas--form the basis of the typology. Subcategories under each heading further organize the questions needed to be addressed when considering political feasibility.

Scenario

In order to build a credible scenario, extensive research was done on an actual national forest examining past grazing management practices, including past and current issues and controversies. The research for the scenario encompassed two phases. First, general background material on the history and mission of the U.S. Forest Service was reviewed. The review included an investigation of the history of the U.S. Forest Service public land grazing policies as well as other land management policies, and how they have affected the economic aspects of ranching on the national forests. Further, background material on the history of Forest Service permittees was researched by reviewing available documents detailing grazing practices and how they have affected the land.

The second phase involved specific research including review of forest files germane to the grazing issue on that forest. Forest personnel involved in forest range management and program implementation were interviewed. Ranchers who are or had been permittees on the forest (as well as other people knowledgeable about the grazing situation) were also interviewed concerning their perceptions of the situation.

The scenario demonstrates the applicability of the assessment process. A post hoc analysis is presented which illustrates in realistic terms the application of the general principles and strategies of political feasibility assessment to a specific management problem. Using the factors of the typology, the situation is analyzed and the important constraints and opportunities affecting the political feasibility of implementing the new Forest Service grazing program are pointed out. A strategy is then devised to overcome those constraints and to use those opportunities to an advantage. Finally, the ongoing process of political feasibility assessment is discussed.

Conclusion

A synthesis is presented of the concept of political feasibility, its application generally as an evaluation method, and the factors that affect it. On the basis of this discussion, an estimation is made as to the usefulness of political feasibility assessment as an evaluation and decision criterion for landscape architects in their role as land use planners.

Outline of the Study

Chapter III of the study explores the concept of political feasibility. It begins with a general definition of political feasibility based on the literature review. The study then turns to an analysis of some of the assumptions that are made about the behavior of the political system. These factors provide a rationale for the selection, structuring, and behavior of the political constraints in the typology.

Chapter IV presents the typology. Three categories--issues, actors, and arenas--are examined in some detail along with the subcategories for each factor. Questions are presented that land use planners need to address when assessing political feasibility.

The scenario is introduced in Chapter V. The situation outlined is on a national forest where a new grazing program is being proposed. An analysis is made of the political feasibility of the program being successfully implemented. Through the use of the scenario, political constraints to policy implementation are pointed out and conditions are examined under which political feasibility is enhanced.

The concluding chapter contains a review of political feasibility assessment as a planning and management tool, followed by an evaluation of its usefulness as a decision-making criterion for a variety of land planning and management activities.

CHAPTER III

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL FEASIBILITY

Political Feasibility Defined

If politics is the "art of the possible," then recognition and application of the concept of political feasibility helps "avoid impossibilities" (Aristotle). In land use planning and management, as in any field of endeavor, it is important to know what is not possible under a given set of circumstances, as well as what is possible (Majone 1975, p. 49). Land use planning is dependent on what can be accomplished as well as on what is efficient, biologically acceptable, or equitable. It is thus a political undertaking as well as a technological and biological problem (Vasu 1979, p. 235).

No longer are there sufficient land resources to accommodate all uses without conflict among users. Increased diversity and intensity of demands for limited resources force planners to choose among several value-laden planning alternatives, each of which imposes costs on some and benefits on others. In this sense, by allocating goods and services in part on the basis of what people want, land use planners are participating in a political process (Shepard 1980, p. 3).

Political feasibility assessment helps land use planners understand the future political consequences of planning alternatives (Meltsner 1972, p. 859). When programs are proposed, the analysis of

political feasibility can illustrate how the specifics of the proposal will be changed by the political system and also may help reveal unanticipated consequences (Ervin et al. 1977, p. 53).

By examining future consequences, land use planners can more easily predict the political acceptability of planning alternatives to the groups affected by those alternatives. Political feasibility assessment explores the possibility of whether an idea (policy, program, project) can be approved and carried out, describing the chances of "getting permission" to launch that idea and assessing what cooperation might be expected (Halachmi 1979, p. 293). Careful pinpointing of variables allows the land use planner to see how alternatives can be manipulated to achieve desired future results.

A policy is feasible if it satisfies all the relevant constraints, that is, those features in the environment that would affect the outcome of a proposal (Majone 1977, p. 82). The politically feasible proposal is sufficiently acceptable to the various planners, decision makers, administrators, and concerned publics, whose acquiescence or participation is needed, to allow the plan to be implemented (Dror 1968, p. 35). To say that a proposal is politically infeasible means that the lack of political resources, the "intractability of institutions" (Toynbee), i.e., bureaucratic checks and balances, distributional considerations, procedural obstacles, or other limiting factors, inhibit the realization of a proposed course of action (Majone 1975, p. 61).

In stressing the importance of accurate knowledge of political constraints, it is not implied that all relevant constraints can be known in every instance. Such a complete knowledge is impossible. We can never be completely sure our solutions are feasible. But by recognizing that unpredictability exists, we can eliminate many surprises.

Another primary concern of political feasibility analysis is the distributional effects of a proposed program. Program alternatives are examined from the standpoint of their potential effect on different groups, how those groups will perceive the effects of the program, how they will try to change the decision process, and the resources they have to press forward their values in the decision-making process. When distributional effects on groups are too fundamental or too extensive, changing income, rights, status, or the power of politically influential groups, a program becomes infeasible. This is also true when a proposal runs counter to widely held preferences (values) of politically influential groups (Ervin et al. 1977, p. 34). Assessing the political consequences of a program provides information on the preferences of groups and how strong these preferences are. Program recommendations can then be partially drawn by measuring the intensity of group views (Behn 1981, p. 201), and means subsequently tailored to those ends.

The political price to be paid for a course of action is also a basic element of political feasibility (Huitt 1968, p. 264). Political costs and benefits are estimated by shifts in the levels of support and opposition of groups participating in the decision process. The net effect is the political price to be paid for that decision. Political

feasibility is then determined by deciding if the price is worth paying (Shepard 1980, p. 13).

By identifying programs that are politically feasible, policy implementation can be ensured and time and effort saved. A program needs to be evaluated as to its effects on the political system because a serious political inadequacy can prevent successful implementation. In this sense, it is prudent to reject a program which corrects social, economic, or physical inadequacies but which also increases political costs in favor of a more politically feasible solution (Diesing 1962, pp. 203-204, 228).

Even though the estimation of political feasibility is very necessary to land use plan assessment, it is not totally sufficient. A program may be politically feasible, but still have a substandard effect on the situation at hand (Dror 1968, p. 35), i.e., it may not correct the problem it is aimed at. Other factors--economic, technical, social, biological--may be more critical to the implementation process. Alternatively, proposals may be politically feasible, but aimed at the wrong problem. Political assessments do not provide a "single solution" to planning and management. They need to be balanced with economic, technical, and social assessments in order to ensure the successful implementation of programs.

Political System Characteristics

All political systems are characterized by scarcity and conflict, exchange, uncertainty, complexity, and incrementalism. These characteristics define the structure and behavior of the political

system and the nature and limits of our knowledge of it. On the one hand, they make assessments of political feasibility necessary; on the other hand, they place limits on what feasibility assessments can accomplish. They thus define the political context in which political feasibility (as well as any other planning) assessment occurs. As such, these characteristics form the basis for selection and ordering of the variables in the political feasibility typology discussed in the next chapter.

Scarcity and Conflict

One of the fundamental conditions of the political system is the scarcity of tangible and intangible resources and the conflict that ensues when these limited resources are allocated. In fact, "conflicts over demands constitute the flesh and blood of all [political] systems from the smallest to the largest, from the simplest to the most complex" (Easton 1965, p. 53).

Conflict over allocation is a dynamic process between two or more groups competing for the same scarce or valuable resource. Conflict resolution centers around bargaining among groups or coalitions of groups organized around shared interests. In the process, groups act to maintain or increase their share of scarce resources, seeking a balance of benefits over costs (McRae and Wilde 1979, p. 227). Because resources are finite, one group's advantage is checked by the advantage of another. The more scarce the resource being allocated, the greater the political strength needed by the group to ensure the allocation meets its demands. It is important to realize that conflict will always exist

and that it is the task of the land use planner to manage conflict in a beneficial manner.

Exchange

Individuals organize into groups to pursue their interests more effectively, expecting to derive some tangible or intangible benefit from the relationship or "exchange." Because organized political interest groups play a significant role in the political system, influencing political behavior and policy outcomes, they have been labeled the "raw material of politics" (Bentley 1967).

Relationships among individuals in groups are governed to a large extent by their expectations, that is, the particular incentives they had to join the group (Berry 1977, p. 21). The types of relationships to be found among people are determined by their expectations--by what they hope to achieve or get by relating to others (Lowi 1964, p. 688). Once involved in a group, members then exchange resources with other groups to achieve specific, internally agreed upon goals and outcomes. Resources can be either substantive, e.g., tangible goods such as jobs, money, or market opportunities, or symbolic, e.g., the issuance of sympathetic statements or the public acceptance of a list of grievances. The type of political action and the types of resources available to a group for its political activities may, to a large extent, depend on group motivations (Ornstein and Elder 1978, p. 29). A requirement that resources be allocated among needs that cannot be met leads to groups setting priorities as to which resources are more important to their interests (Huitt 1968, p. 265) and groups calculating trade-offs

to determine what resources can be exchanged with other groups. Exchange behavior among groups is characterized by negotiation, bargaining, and compromise. Such behavior is aimed at reaching a consensus on the allocation of resources in a politically feasible manner.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a characteristic of modern life generally, and the political system in particular. As long as we are dealing with complex, unpredictable human behavior patterns, future events cannot be expressed as objective probabilities. This is especially true of political events, due in part to the deficiency and complexity of information about them and the non-replicative nature of their occurrence. Analysis of political feasibility is thus a subjective pursuit at best.

Issues (areas of political conflict) have a cyclical nature, changing over time. As an issue changes, a change in values and attitudes is effected, altering the original issue. It is difficult to predict what changes will take place. Most issue crises in our society do not reflect changes in real conditions as much as they reflect the operation of a "systematic cycle" of heightened public interest followed by increased boredom (Downs 1972, p. 39). Uncertainty in calculating future events is complicated by the unpredictable change in values and attitudes that are interrelated with the cycling of issues.

Because political variables cannot be precisely specified, speculation and prediction of future events is subject to error; hence, "political prediction and error are bedfellows" (Meltsner 1972, p. 864). The likelihood that unknown and unforeseen political factors are likely

to enter the decision-making process increases the possibility of error. As plans and decisions move from the conceptual stage to actual implementation in the public arena, endless numbers of unpredicted variations are created and the potential for error increases further.

No amount of data can completely eliminate uncertainty. When examining human values and actions there is no clearcut cause-effect relationship. Our knowledge of the dynamics of human interaction is inadequate at best. Even with exhaustive amounts of data and innovative attempts to derive statistically valid indicators of political behavior, the myriad of possible patterns of human behavior still makes prediction of future events highly speculative. And because there is often so much data and so little time, expert judgment is increasingly recognized as a reasonable and sometimes necessary approach for estimating objective information (McAllister 1980, p. 74).

Complexity

Uncertainty is increased by the complexity of processes and structural forms in the political system. A pluralist, decentralized political system, such as exists in the United States, increases complexity in several ways, making prediction of political feasibility even more difficult.

In a pluralist society, there is no agreement on what constitutes the public interest (Ukeles 1977, p. 226). Such a system multiplies the numbers of groups whose various perceptions and judgments of the public interest significantly affect political decisions (Huitt 1968, p. 264). Groups in our society also vary considerably in the

value they assign to the consequences of policy decisions. These value differences, translated into the form of groups or coalitions of groups, exert strong political pressures on decision makers.

A decentralized political system, with its complex layers of government and system of checks and balances, creates multiple decision points. These multiple decision points provide places at which a veto can be exerted, that is, points at which delay, disagreement, and conflict can be encountered and exploited to avert unwanted decisions. The complexity of the decision-making process increases the magnitude of the task of evaluating alternatives. As decision points increase, decisions become more complicated and imprecise, the number of people involved in the process increases, alternatives multiply, and time and resource costs rise (Ukeles 1977, p. 226).

The evaluation of decision alternatives inevitably encounters the subjective and complex realm of human values. Because individual values are perceived and formulated in different ways, each decision entails the acceptance and/or rejection of a multiplicity of values. Evaluation involves the judgment of the relative importance of competing values. These are often difficult to discern or to isolate from the intricate web of human relationships from which they derive their essential character.

As well as being widely differentiated, values are also fluid and unstable (Braybrooke and Lindbloom 1963, p. 26), reflecting changes in time and the experiences of individuals and groups. Even though it is impossible to stabilize values, predictions and decisions are made

for one point in time, based on the assumption that the values of today will be the values of tomorrow. In many cases this is just not true, but the complex problems of predicting just what future values will be and how to reconcile those values are difficult to overcome.

Incrementalism

The combined factors of complexity and uncertainty contribute to a system in which change becomes admissible only if it occurs slowly. Incrementalism is a political system response to the ever-present problem of uncertainty and complexity, i.e., incremental decision making is an institutional response to the state of affairs that we cannot know everything.

Following one upon the other, incremental decisions and policies are remedial, serial, exploratory, and marked by adjustment of ends to means (Braybrooke and Lindbloom 1963, p. 73). Only tasks that can be solved are set. Characteristics of the incremental system are predictability, repetitiveness, and marginal change. Policy proceeds along the path of least resistance, responding incrementally to changes and demands from the environment. Standard responses are developed to frequently encountered situations which cut decision costs (Wildavsky 1962, p. 718). Routine becomes valued and protected, and threats to existing domains are avoided.

A barrier to innovative action is the high cost of change. Future benefits from non-incremental change are disregarded in light of committed "sunk costs" of time, money, effort, and the accumulation of experience that would have to be discarded in the event of far-reaching

change (Ingram and Ullery 1980, p. 674). Decision makers minimize the costs of change by devising new alternatives which are compatible with existing conditions (Williams 1980, p. 56). A policy is rarely an innovative, final solution to a problem, but rather only one element in a long succession of incremental changes (Majone 1977, p. 91). Public goods and services are demanded and supplied through political processes that are to a large extent institutionalized, restricting freedom of choice, action (Majone 1977, p. 88), and the amount of resources devoted to the particular decision.

In an uncertain world certainty becomes a value because participants in the decision-making process do not want to sacrifice existing benefits for future benefits unless they are certain future benefits will actually occur. Participants ask how much of one value is worth sacrificing to achieve an increment of another value. The real choice between alternative policies is a choice between different combinations of ends and means that focus on immediate needs and differ only slightly. In general, what is most feasible is what is most incremental (Huitt 1969, p. 274; Ervin et al. 1977), and what is most infeasible is what is most innovative.

There are limits to man's ability to remodel his environment, due in part to the constraints placed on the decision-making process. The strong societal belief that every problem can be solved if enough resources are made available is predicated on the assumption that obstacles to progress are external to the system itself and can be conquered (Downs 1972, p. 39). However, constraints internal to the

system, such as limited problem-solving capabilities, decision makers' limited understanding of the political process, finite resources (including time), and incomplete information, all put restraints on the decision-making process.

Having examined the concept of political feasibility and some of the important characteristics of the political system that affect it, we now turn to the typology of political feasibility.

CHAPTER IV

TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL FEASIBILITY

To determine the political feasibility of a planning alternative it is useful to form a picture of the system in which the decision process will occur and outline the steps through which the proposal must pass to be implemented (Cavala and Wildavsky 1970, p. 321). Constraints to the success of the proposal can then be pinpointed. Identification of the factors that influence the political feasibility of a proposal gives an idea about the obstacles and opportunities that will be encountered along the way.

For better manageability in identifying these factors, it is useful to cluster them into logically defined and related categories. For purposes of this study the three categories are: 1) Issues--problem-specific conflicts between two or more groups; 2) Actors--individuals, groups, organizations; and 3) Arenas--a policy issue area or a cluster of related issues. While separate categories are more useful for organizing and analyzing the factors, in the final analysis constraints need to be synthesized into an understandable whole so the decision maker can arrive at a judgment about political feasibility.

Issues

"An issue is a problem-specific conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to

the distribution of positions or resources" (Cobb and Elder 1972, p. 82). Issues vary over time. As the decision-making process unfolds, an issue can only be defined for one point in time. Seldom are there well-defined issues. Different actors will perceive the same issue differently. The same actor may perceive and define an issue differently over an expanded time period. The perceptions actors have of issues will many times reveal how an actor will behave. Therefore it is important that the decision maker attempt to define the issue as the actor perceives it, even though in many cases this is difficult to do.

The main components of an issue are its history, its dimensions, and its decision points.

History

Examining the history of an issue reveals the broad impacts that have happened to that issue over time and how they have changed the issue. Many times the historical events preceding the current issue conflict are overlooked or discounted. However, study of the history of an issue not only tells us what has happened in the past, but also may contain clues about future events, thus helping avoid the pitfalls and failures of the past.

Historical investigation reveals what actors have been involved in the issue, how they have behaved, and what coalitions have been formed. As an issue changes through time, winners and losers are created, resources are spent, solutions are tried, and commitments are made. All these features are important to the present issue and how it is perceived by the actors involved in the conflict.

Questions to consider about the history of an issue include: What has happened to the issue over time? Who has been involved? What successes and failures have the actors had? Have their positions changed? What resources have been spent? What coalitions have been formed? Does the past provide clues about the future? What past solutions have been sought? Why hasn't the issue been resolved?

Dimensions

The dimensions of an issue have an important bearing on the outcome of an issue conflict over time. Because issues are constantly changing, the dimension of an issue can be defined for only a certain point in time. An important clue to whether a management decision is politically feasible is if the definition of the issue or disputed question for that point in time is changing. If a management decision is not politically feasible, actors will attempt to change the dimensions of the issue by redefining and expanding them. This is done in hopes that the influence of the original group of actors on the decision-making process will be increased.

Issue expansion has a number of ramifications that can affect the implementation of a decision. First of all, as the issue is expanded, the issue becomes a focus of concern for a broader group of actors. As the number of participants multiplies, a broader spectrum of interests is introduced. Larger numbers mean that resources will increase, including money, access, political skills, and control of information. Many times issue expansion means a shift in support from the actors involved. One group gains support while other groups lose it.

Other times issue expansion means that new actors who have not been involved before will begin to participate, bringing new resources into the conflict.

Cobb and Elder (1972, p. 96) make the point that issues should be defined not in terms of the content of the issue, but rather in terms of the intrinsic character of the content. They have defined issues in terms of certain fundamental dimensions that bear on the prospect of that issue conflict gaining broader attention from additional actors rather than on substantive criteria (what problem is getting solved). Using Cobb and Elder's concepts (Cobb and Elder 1972, pp. 96-102), but with a modified terminology, issues can be defined along several dimensions. These dimensions are variable and range along a continuum between the two extremes.

Abstract/concrete. Measures of specificity include how objectives are formulated, the number of emotional symbols used compared to the number of factual symbols, and the perceptions of the actors as to the concreteness of the issue. The more abstractly an issue is defined, the greater the chance the conflict will be extended to a broader set of actors; the more concretely an issue is defined, the greater the chance the conflict will be confined to a smaller group of actors.

Localized/generalized. This refers to whether an issue is important to just a small group of actors or if it impacts a large segment of society. The broader the impact, the greater the number of actors that will become involved in the decision-making process.

Short-term/long-term. Relevant issues have impacts beyond one point in time or at one level of decision making. Issues that have long-term relevance involve a greater number of actors in the decision-making process.

Complex/simple. Complexity is concerned with the expression of the issue as highly technical and therefore difficult to understand. The more simple an issue, the more easily understood. A complex issue that is the concern of only a small group of knowledgeable actors will continue to be expressed in complex terms. The more complex the issue, the less knowledgeable most actors are, causing them to express their preferences in broad, general terms. A non-technically defined issue involves a broader set of actors than a complex issue.

Latent/intense. A latent issue may be present over a long time period with little conflict and few actors involved. An intense issue, on the other hand, is more visible, involving more conflict and a greater number of actors.

Routine/novel. The context in which an issue occurs relates to actors' perceptions of the issue, i.e., the way they seek out, receive, and evaluate information concerning the issue and how they resolve conflicts (Wildavsky 1962, p. 717). A routine issue has clear precedents and therefore standardized or "canned" procedures for solution. If actors remain in conflict over an issue for a sustained period of time, the issue becomes polarized and the actors' behavior becomes institutionalized, routine, incremental, and in many instances inappropriate (Wildavsky 1962, p. 717).

A new or novel issue, on the other hand, evokes behavior that is novel, non-incremental, perhaps innovative (Williams 1980). The less routine the issue, the less obvious the solution.

When assessing the political feasibility of an alternative, land use planners need to define issues in terms of the nature of the conflict. Is the issue abstract or concrete? Localized or generalized? Long-term or short-term? Simple or complex? Latent or intense? Routine or novel? Will the issue be expanded? How has the issue been expanded in the past? What factors could change the definition of the issue? Public opinion? Availability of resources? Political climate? Technical innovation? Changes in taste and culture?

Decision Points

Each issue has a number of decision points where choices are made among alternatives. The decision point is a potential constraint, a point where actors with their preferences and resources come together and conflict can ensue. Each decision point has its own peculiar formal and informal rules which give boundaries to the actors' activities.

Decision points are determined by several dimensions. First, there are multiple points of access due to different levels of government. Another dimension that determines the number of decision points is the extent and level of analysis of decision making. Singular issue analysis is simple, develops few alternatives, and therefore has few decision points. As the levels of analysis increase, the number of decision points increases. Complex levels of analysis create increased alternatives, broadened criteria, and heightened costs, making analysis

more imprecise (Ukeles 1977, p. 226). As the number of decision points increases, the number of actors increases, the number of points to exert a veto increases, and uncertainty about the outcome increases.

Control over the process by which decisions are made is an important resource in a political conflict. In some cases access to the decision-making process only provides a chance to be heard, but in other cases access to the process offers a chance to have real influence over the outcome of a decision.

To determine the number and importance of decision points in the process, land use planners need to ask: How many decision points does an issue have? Which are the most important? How complex is the decision process? At what state in the decision-making process will there be conflicts over the issue? Do those affected by the decision have access to those decision points?

Actors

Actors are groups of organized interests that participate in the political system. It is important to identify the actors that will perceive the issue as being important to their self-interest, because they are the ones who will bring their resources to bear on the issue, paying the price of participation in order to influence the outcome of the decision. Three important elements to identify concerning actors are benefactors and beneficiaries, value structure, and resources.

Benefactors and Beneficiaries

Most political decisions involve a distribution of costs and benefits. The "winners" are rewarded, receiving goods, services, and/or privileges that are clearly discernible, while the "losers" are deprived of those same resources. (Because of the scarcity of resources, there are rarely only winners.) The decision maker is less interested in what beneficiaries need than in what they prefer. Decision makers judge policies by the effect they will have on their own position, because those affected by the policy will allocate blame or reward on the decision maker, depending on how they perceive their gains and losses, the extent of their political resources, and the intensity of their interest (Ervin et al., 1977, p. 31). Thus, decision makers are motivated to allocate benefits to those who will identify them as benefactors, seeking support from groups that will ensure their security (Ervin et al. 1977, p. 54).

The strategy of the benefactor is to provide as many groups as possible with benefits. Decision makers are particularly responsive to groups that exert political influence, because incurring exchange and hostility costs from them may have an undesirable effect on their position (Wildavsky 1968, p. 81). It is assumed that actors are more interested in smaller, short-term benefits rather than larger, long-term benefits. This phenomenon is useful to the benefactor because many times long-term benefits are difficult to identify, thus denying the decision maker recognition as the benefactor. Costs are widely diffused to reduce their effect on the influential and to avoid having recipients of the costs readily identify the source of their displeasure.

When assessing actors there are some questions that need to be asked. Who are the benefactors and the "evildoers"? Who are the winners and losers? Are they easily identifiable by all actors? How does each actor perceive the issue? What potential is there for other actors to become involved? What possible coalitions will form?

Value Structure

Actors have certain orientations toward the empirical world. Actors' ideology, values, beliefs, and attitudes determine their perception, interpretation, and evaluation of reality and how they interact with that reality. Social values help determine social preferences and furnish various actors with social norms.

Social norms are standards or rules for human behavior, giving proscriptions, prescriptions, and permissions. Social norms are internalized by actors and serve as a frame of reference for them, dominating their experiences and subsequent behavior in concrete situations. Social norms are partially a product of the existing system of rights, duties, and privileges, reflecting the tendency of society to view what "is" as what "is right" (Ervin et al. 1977, p. 33). For example, the social norms associated with real property and property ownership are widely held and deeply ingrained. An indication of their widespread acceptance is the way these values are protected by the legal system.

A shared set of attitudes among actors constitutes a group interest or preference and leads the group to make certain claims on the rest of society. A shared set of values is important to groups because

it helps maintain the cohesiveness of the group and also helps define its objectives (Truman 1951, pp. 33-34).

Information on the preferences of actors is very important, but not wholly sufficient. Information is also needed on the intensity of those preferences (Cobb and Elder 1972, p. 43). Intensity of preference is determined by values, attitudes, and motivations, and how directly the actor is affected by a decision. In many cases it is difficult to determine. Assessing the intensity of preferences enables the decision maker to weigh and prioritize distributional costs and benefits, to calculate the price to be paid for political support, and to identify possible compromises and trade-offs.

Questions to be asked concerning actors' value structures include: What are the values of the various actors and how do they differ? What is the intensity of the actors' preferences? How do these values affect behavior? What are the consequences of violating community values and social norms?

Resources

Actors use resources to gain support. They help actors achieve access to the decision-making process, enabling the actors to act more influentially. A lack of political resources is a real constraint to actors' achievement of goals. Estimation of the amount and kind of resources the various actors can bring to an issue conflict helps the decision maker determine what the final outcome of that issue conflict might be.

Examples of resources are money, power--physical and symbolic--status, political and administrative skills, and expertise. The key resources for groups in conflict are the skills of its leaders or agents, the amount of money they can devote to the conflict, the number of members they can devote to the conflict, and the information they control (Truman 1951, pp. 254-261). These resources are often inter-related.

Political resources are distributed unevenly among actors. Political advantage means greater access to the decision-making process, increasing the actor's influence over decision outcomes. Political resources are usually held most often in socioeconomically advantaged groups. Even though political resources are unevenly distributed, they are substitutable and tradeable through logrolling, compromise, and negotiation. Identification of trade-offs becomes very important because it allows actors to redistribute resources to achieve some goal.

There are several important considerations when appraising actors and their resources. What resources will the actors bring to bear? Financial? Power or influence? Expertise? Numbers? Administrative skills? Who has what "rights" or privileges? What information do the various actors control? How can the various actors compensate for a lack of resources?

Arenas

Arenas denote policy issue areas or clusters of related issues. An arena tends to develop its own characteristic political structure, political process, loci of decision making, actors and elites, and group

relations (Lowi 1970; Ingram and Ullery 1980). Each arena has its own set of political constraints that can be separated into three subcategories: legal authorities, informal rules, and policy impacts. By determining the important constraints of an arena, the decision maker becomes aware of the factors that limit the decision-making process in the domain of a particular issue.

Legal Authorities

Legal authorities are the fixed features of the arena (Majone 1975, p. 58). They include public orders or decisions that are formal, binding, and easily recognizable, conferring costs and benefits on citizens. Constitutions, statutes, court rules of practice, administrative regulations, treaties, interstate compacts, executive orders, judicial decisions at all levels, local laws and ordinances, attorney generals' opinions, and other departmental opinions are but a part of legal authorities.

Legal authorities limit the land use planner's range of choice and reduce the domain of feasibility for an alternative (Majone 1977, p. 91). Failure to conform to these restrictions can be fatal to program implementation.

Legal authorities at all governmental levels need to be examined for their effect on program alternatives. The land use planners must ask: What legal authorities might limit alternatives? What legal authorities could facilitate implementation? Are there legal obstacles that could be easily bypassed? What legal authorities are likely to be changed in the near or distant future?

Informal Rules

Each arena has its own set of informal rules that influence and affect choice by reducing alternatives and limiting conflict. Informal rules are those restrictions that exist because of the intrinsic nature of institutions, past actions of institutions, and patterns of behavior of institutions and their processes. These institutional characteristics limit what can and cannot be done (Jones 1977, p. 54). Informal rules are an important feature in structuring exchanges between groups by regulating behavior, reducing conflict, and restricting choices. Some informal rules, as well as some decision points, are difficult to recognize. Experienced actors have the advantage of being more aware of these, and can use them to their advantage.

We know that institutions do not usually behave innovatively (Braybrooke and Lindbloom 1963). Change occurs incrementally within the context of what has gone before. Those who want change must devise strategies which allow for the realities of institutional behavior. Many times these elements or procedures provide opportunities for the planner. Because people are used to doing things in a certain way, innovative action in many cases can be costly to a planning alternative. By following the informal rules of the game (when possible and/or opportune), constraints can be eliminated which otherwise might be restrictive.

When assessing the political feasibility of a planning alternative the land use planner must ask: What procedures and patterns of communication exist within the arena? Can informal rules be overcome

or changed? What commitments, rights, expectations exist to restrict the decision process?

Policy Impacts

Policy impacts refer to policy consequences. All policies involve some form of coercion, allocating benefits to some and costs to others. Every issue cluster or arena has its own unique set of costs and benefits, as well as its own arrangement of decision rules or other coercive techniques to regulate the allocation of those costs and benefits (Ingram and Ullery 1980, p. 665). Different issue clusters involve different actors whose perception of how costs and benefits are distributed determine the consequences of the policy impact.

Policy analysts (Lowi 1964; Ripley 1966; and Ingram and Ullery 1980) have identified three highly generalized policy types: distributive, regulatory, and redistributive. Each policy type can be identified by actors' perceptions of how costs and benefits are bestowed and the techniques used to gain compliance to the policy.

Distributive policies involve the perception that benefits are being bestowed, but usually actors do not perceive that costs are being imposed. Regulatory policies, which seek to meet goals through administrative rule making, invoke a clear perception of who is imposing regulatory costs, while perceptions of who is receiving benefits are unclear. Redistributive policies, which transfer resources from one group to another, are perceived by actors as having clear winners and losers. Examples of distributive policies include water resource development policies, while water pollution control policies are examples of

regulatory policies; welfare policies are examples of redistributive policies.

Each policy type involves different kinds of techniques and incentives to gain compliance. Distributive policies rely heavily on subsidies; coercion is minimal. Regulatory policies rely heavily on coercive techniques such as fines or removal of benefits. Redistributive policies are the most coercive, relying on techniques of manipulation to transfer benefits from one group to another.

Critical questions to ask are: Will policy implementation have distributive, redistributive, or regulatory impacts? What kinds of techniques are used to gain compliance with the policy or decision?

Having completed our discussion of the prime elements of the political feasibility typology, the typology is now applied to a hypothetical situation. The case to be considered involves a range management program of a public land management agency. It examines the importance of political feasibility as a factor in regional land use planning.

CHAPTER V

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE TYPOLOGY

At the beginning of this chapter a scenario is presented as a means of demonstrating the practical application of the typology. The scenario suggests that resource planning in the area of public range management is not only a biological, technical problem, but also fundamentally a political problem. Political constraints and opportunities in the case are pointed out and their importance is assessed. Next, suggestions are made concerning the design of a strategy that will increase the political feasibility of new programs or projects. Finally, it is argued that political feasibility is an ongoing process and should be applied from the moment a problem reveals itself, during the planning stage and on through the implementation process.

Scenario

The Givahoot National Forest varies from semiarid ecosystems to coniferous forest. The area suffers from erratic periods of precipitation described by some as droughts. Historically, much of the forest has been grazed by too many or improperly managed livestock. Yearlong grazing operations with a lack of livestock management systems have been major factors affecting range conditions.

The earliest and most numerous settlers in the area were cattlemen who used the public domain, where access and use were relatively

unrestricted. Many of the current permittees are descendants of these earlier settlers who were opposed to the controls that came with creation of the forest. These "old-breed" ranchers, who have depended upon public land livestock grazing for their livelihoods, tend to be independent and highly individualistic. They view most governmental regulation as an unnecessary interference in their lives, many of which have a direct economic impact. As one old-timer stated, "They are either trying to cram something down your throat or bribe you." Aversion to regulation is often reflected in their reaction to Forest Service decisions. Ranchers perceive themselves as close to the land. In many instances they perceive agency personnel as bureaucrats lacking in feelings for the land because they are more strongly attached to the survival of the agency.

A large part of the local community has been associated with ranching in the past and has daily business transactions with the forest permittees. Through a broad network of relationships with other permittees, with local, state, and national livestock associations, and with university extension personnel, the ranchers exert considerable political influence in the conservative state legislature and with supportive congressmen.

In recent times, changes in ranch ownership patterns on the Givahoot have begun to appear. New tax laws have seen the emergence of a new kind of permittee, the "tax shelter cowboy," and economic changes have made it very difficult for some ranchers to maintain a profitable operation. As a consequence, several old-breed ranchers are selling off.

Although the Forest Service's official position is that permits have no value, in reality they very much enhance the value of the livestock operation involved and the base property owned by the grazing permittee. At this time, for each cow permitted to graze yearlong a value of approximately \$2,000 is accrued to ranch value.

In recent years forest officers have become more and more concerned about deteriorating range conditions. Range analysis conducted indicates the need for changes in stocking levels and the way livestock are managed on the range. The forest officer responsible recognizes that in some cases range management practices do not reflect current state-of-the-art knowledge. Staff assigned to the forest believe downward adjustments are needed. Some suspect permittees are grazing more livestock than are permitted.

Forest officers having responsibility on the Givahoot, as well as in the Regional Office, are in agreement that changes required to bring about grazing at levels to establish improved conditions must be undertaken. The program in accordance with Forest Service and Regional policy involves three aspects: 1) develop allotment management plans calling for needed changes, including utilization of Range Betterment Funds (RBF) to install needed improvements to implement the plan (RBF would not be available for use on allotments not under an allotment management plan); 2) educate ranchers to improved range management practices; and 3) as a last resort, require downward adjustment in numbers or seasonal changes in use to establish proper grazing on each allotment. (Range analyses indicate several allotments where reductions of up to

50% will be necessary to obtain the desired level of grazing activity).

Several ranchers, however, have indicated their reluctance to go under allotment management plans, claiming that the level of intensive range management practices required is too expensive and that the Forest Service assessment of the situation is far too severe. They believe that their current livestock management systems are adequately protecting the resource.

Assessing the Political Feasibility of the Program

What will happen if the forest institutes this new land management program? Is it politically feasible? What are some of the main factors that will affect the outcome of the program?

The first thing that can be assumed when the new grazing program is implemented is that there will be conflict. It is the task of the Forest Service to allot scarce and finite land resources among many different users and to maximize the net social benefits of all uses of those lands. In the past, on many forests, ranchers were the preeminent constituents. Because of recent statutory requirements for public participation, the decision-making process has been opened up to more users. This has increased conflict over the land resource. Any additional regulation or reallocation of use will only add to that conflict.

Every forest grazing policy has an economic impact on permittees. These policy impacts are generally regulatory in nature, which means that they reduce the economic alternatives for ranching activities on the Givahoot. In this case the ranchers will perceive themselves as

losers and identify the Forest Service as the "malefactor," heaping blame on the agency for its actions.

Ranchers are generally interested in short-term economic benefits. The newly suggested management program is likely to be perceived by ranchers as having a negative effect on those benefits. Further, if ranchers' permitted numbers are reduced, there will be a significant effect on their overall assets and the value of their ranches. Thus, it is safe to assume that ranchers, especially the old-time permittees, will be resistive to the new plan. The broader the distributional effects on ranchers, the more politically infeasible program implementation will be.

It is the long-time permittees who will have the most intense interest in the new program. This is due to their long history of ranching in the area and their ties to the land. Because they are highly individualistic and independent, and because they generally dislike governmental interference and regulation, they probably will try to resist or circumvent the new program. Because the program affects the economic success of permittees, they will probably attempt to change the program by expanding the issue to a broader group of supportive actors, thereby increasing their chances of gaining access to the whole decision-making process.

In this event, ranchers could take advantage of their connections with the local community and their association with various cattlemens' groups to expand the issue. This could be done, for example, by redefining the issue in more abstract terms. They may change the

definition of the issue from grievances against the agency to grievances against "government" generally. If the issue is redefined as a "big government" issue, many more actors will become involved in the controversy. This could possibly have the effect of shifting support away from the agency, and creating a situation in which the Forest Service loses control of the conflict. By expanding the issue to a broader group of actors, the certainty of the outcome of the situation decreases, decision points increase, administrative costs multiply, and the time of final resolution of the problem is pushed into the future.

Although ranchers generally rely on spontaneous rule-of-thumb methods for problem solving, they are turning more and more to technicians to solve their range problems, and sometimes their problems with the agency. In this case the ranchers have the option of calling on the university extension service range experts to help them build a case against the Forest Service range analyses upon which the agency's policy decisions were based. The extension personnel may find that the condition of the resource is not as bad as presented and suggest that carrying capacity can be upgraded. Or perhaps they may find that resource improvement could be achieved by other means than those put forth by the Forest Service.

On the other hand, it may also be possible for the Forest Service to redefine the issue as a long-term, technical management problem. This may have the effect of drawing other groups into the controversy, namely environmental groups that are concerned over the long-term effects of grazing practices on the resource. If the agency can redefine

the issue in this way, it will gain the time needed to balance out the competing interests on the forest and possibly reduce the level of conflict.

In the face of this new program, the new permittees will behave in a different manner. One reason for this is that the new permittees lack the long-time attachment to the land and to the ranching lifestyle that the old-time permittees hold (Smith 1971). Another reason is that most new permittees did not purchase their ranches as a means to earn a living, but rather as a source of other economic benefits. Developing allotment plans and adjusting permitted numbers do not affect the economic goals of these permittees and therefore compliance does not entail the same costs.

Most new permittees will probably acquiesce to the new agency management directives. If this happens, the agency has the opportunity to use the cooperation established with the new permittees as a strategy to push recalcitrant ranchers into line.

Because the new permittees are most likely not a homogeneous group with common values, they are unorganized and lack industry and local support. That is to say, they lack the political skills, informal networks, and local political clout that the old-time permittees possess. Because the points of conflict are reduced, the agency will not have to expend a large amount of its resources to gain compliance with its new program. Thus the political feasibility of program implementation is increased and the political costs of gaining compliance are reduced.

The Forest Service is a well-integrated, highly unified organization with a long-standing history of esprit de corps and a common well-developed professional value system (Kaufman 1960; Nienaber and McCool 1981). Organization loyalty and conformity are accomplished through "inbreeding," self-containment, and acculturation (Robinson 1975, p. 262). This has resulted in an inner support base that is an important resource for the agency. Given the character of the agency and the cohesive strength of the staff, once the new program is initiated, the staff will most certainly fall into line.

This behavioral response is valuable in that it presents a united front to outsiders, conveying a semblance of consistency, simplicity, and certainty. On the other hand, in the past this has been also interpreted by outsiders as government rigidity, i.e., unwillingness to back down or make any concessions once a commitment is made to a program. It also conveys to staff members confidence in their "mission" and develops and reinforces the underlying assumption that as members of the agency they alone can determine what is best in the long run for the resource (O'Connell 1980, p. 1).

Standard agency policy is created and reinforced by a myriad of laws, statutes, judicial and administrative decisions, and agency directives that provide a framework within which the agency may function. As a body of "rules," they all will have an impact on the successful implementation of the new grazing program. For example, the Forest Service's right to regulate grazing was settled early on by the U.S. Supreme Court (U.S. vs. Grimaud (220 U.S. 506, 1911); Light vs. U.S. (220 U.S. 523,

1911)). In another important case (Perkins vs. Bergland (608 F2d 803 (9th Cir. 1979))), the court ruled that the Secretary of Agriculture's power to regulate grazing on the national forests was statutory and therefore not subject to judicial review. Therefore all appeals are subject to the Forest Service's administrative public appeals process. This means that the appeals are kept within the Forest Service system and that the ranchers are put at a disadvantage. Because the right to regulate grazing is committed by law to agency discretion, the agency which sets the rules also arbitrates appeals under those rules.

Traditionally, the focus of decision making in forest range management has been at the individual allotment level. This is the point where the forest will try to implement the new management plans and in some cases reduce numbers. The agency has the option of using a variety of management tools to gain compliance with agency range directives. Permittees are responsible for managing their livestock in accordance with the terms of their permit. If the allotment is not managed according to the agreement, then the forest supervisor can cancel the permit for violation of its terms. The forest supervisor can also modify permitted numbers because of resource conditions or reduce permitted numbers if violations are ascertained, i.e., if cattle in excess are found, he can reduce permitted numbers.

The use of Range Betterment Funds can be an important element in successful implementation of the new program. Range improvements are expensive and many times are not economically feasible for ranchers. They contribute to the economic success of the ranch and also to the

value of the ranch. These funds can be used as an important bargaining tool to gain permittee compliance with agency policies.

A Strategy for Political Feasibility Assessment

The application of the typology to the scenario demonstrates the significant obstacles that need to be overcome to achieve successful implementation of the new program. It also pinpoints some of the opportunities that may be presented and which can perhaps be manipulated to the agency's advantage. To better determine the political feasibility of the program it is useful to form a picture of the system in which the planning and implementation process will occur, and outline the steps that the proposal must pass through at each stage of the process. By doing this the constraints that will inhibit the plan are revealed and a strategy to overcome those constraints can be devised.

To measure the impacts of policy decisions in the scenario, inputs and sunk costs--both those to the permittees and those to the agency--need to be assessed. It is important to determine if the position or strength of the actors has been enhanced, maintained, or diminished. When benefits and costs are assessed, possible trade-offs between the agency and the permittees can be determined. By doing this the political feasibility of the program's implementation will be enhanced.

Careful identification of political constraints is heavily dependent on the quality of empirical evidence and the theoretical constructs that support it (Majone 1977, p. 8). The success and quality of political feasibility assessment is dependent on how complete the

analysis is in determining the significant variables and how accurately these variables can be altered in response to future events.

Thus, it becomes quite clear that analysis of political feasibility is impotent without devising a strategy to overcome political constraints. In many cases, the successful outcome of a proposal is dependent on the inventiveness of the political strategy designed to increase its political feasibility. Constraints should be viewed as opportunities or challenges rather than accepted as absolutes or as self-fulfilling predictions (Dror 1969, p. 288; Illchman 1971, p. 27). To ignore the constraints pinpointed by the scenario would probably mean that the conflict would intensify. By planning a strategy, situations can be identified where conflict needs to be managed and resources need to be spent. For example, the agency's cohesiveness and its possession of the "rules of the game" are resources that in most cases will prove invaluable during program planning and implementation. On the other hand, the strength of the ranchers' connections with local and regional political leaders and their network of sympathetic actors are factors that the agency needs to recognize and deal with.

The Ongoing Nature of Political Feasibility Assessment

By using the scenario as a framework for demonstrating how the typology works, political feasibility assessment is done only for one point in time. It is important to point out that political assessment should be introduced at each stage of analysis. This is because political constraints do not behave in a linear, directional, continuous manner, but rather decrease, increase, and even temporarily disappear

over time (Dror 1969, p. 283). Even though constraints are investigated all through the planning process, new constraints are often revealed during the implementation process.

Political feasibility assessment is an ongoing process and should begin the moment a problem presents itself. The land use planner needs to be constantly aware of the changes that may occur in the conditions of political feasibility. For example, federal natural resource policies, including range management policies, shift in emphasis as political administrations change. The production side of public resource management is now a dominant federal policy. It is evident from examining the history of public resource management, however, that this policy will change at some point in time, causing redefinition of public resource issues. When this happens, it will be important to reassess the political feasibility of various public resource management policies and decisions and readjust them to provide for new circumstances.

The suggested typology of political feasibility provides an easily used method that land use planners can employ to increase their understanding of the political dimensions of land use planning and resource problem solving. The variables in the typology provide a flexible checklist whereby factors that affect political feasibility can be singled out and examined. Each issue will have a different set of dominant variables that are significant for that particular problem, and which will differ in degree of importance.

As suggested by the diagram (Fig. 1), each category has an effect on the other categories. As one changes, another may change. A

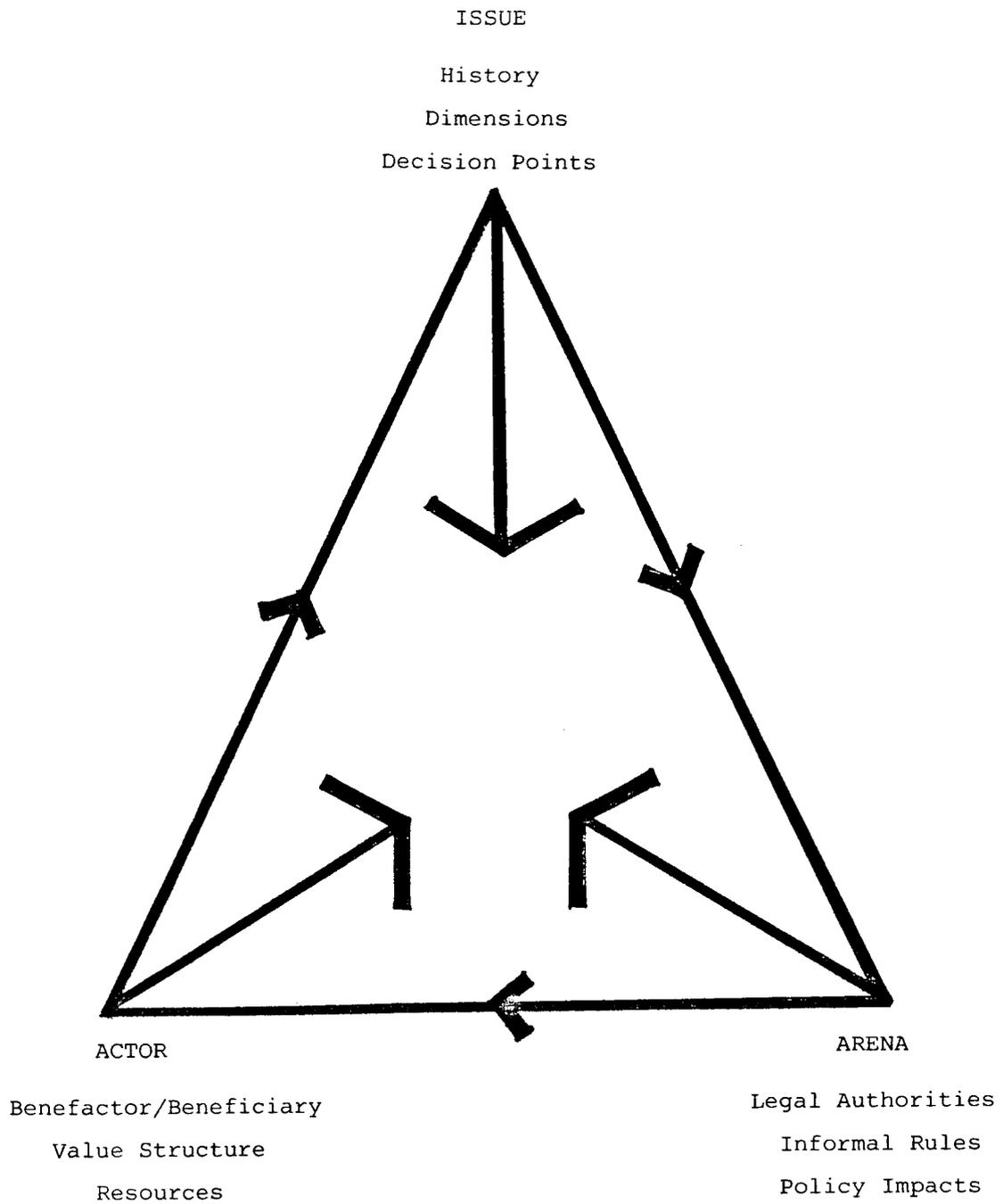


Figure 1. Typology of political feasibility.

change in legal authority, for example, will have an effect on the decision points of an issue, perhaps increasing, decreasing, or changing them in some way. This in turn may change the individual actor's behavior or the size or makeup of the dominant actor group. Actors may also seek to change the dimensions of the issue in order to increase their influence. For example, on the Givahoot, old-time permittees may seek a coalition with new permittees and to do this they may redefine the issue in such a way as to point out the commonality of their interests. As the issue takes on a new definition, the need may present itself for a new legal authority. These interrelated chains of events require political feasibility assessment to be applied not only at the initial stages of problem solving, but also that it be used as a tool in day-to-day management to make adjustments in implementation and to anticipate impediments to plan or project achievement.

The variables that affect political feasibility are dynamic and require constant attention. They are continually being redefined or causing other variables to be redefined. Thus it is important to recognize political feasibility as a continuous process, beginning the moment a problem reveals itself and continuing through the planning and implementation process. By monitoring implementation activities, political feasibility can be tested in an ongoing way. Constant feedback through monitoring supplies information concerning the political feasibility of the plan. As changes take place in the environment, the plan can be readjusted to meet new constraints and new needs. In the realm of political feasibility, it is difficult to predict what changes will take

place. As unknown or unforeseen factors enter the issue area, an endless number of variations are introduced into the process. Because most of the variables form into clusters unique for that issue at that point in time, planning solutions must also be unique. As the issue changes, new solutions need to be developed and reapplied to the problem.

What this means in terms of the scenario is that there needs to be a continual reassessment of the grazing program and the factors that affect it. Political feasibility assessment should not be done only one time and then put on the shelf, being used as a blueprint for all time. Rather, it should be an ongoing process that is flexible and can shift with changes in the variables that are important to the issue.

CHAPTER VI

SYNTHESIS

Political Feasibility Reexamined

Political feasibility means that an idea (policy, program, project, plan) is acceptable enough to all those affected by or involved with the idea to gain their cooperation during and after that idea is implemented. If the idea satisfies the relevant political constraints, then it can be said that it is politically feasible. If the limiting factors are too insurmountable or too intractable, then it can be said that the idea is politically infeasible.

As noted in Chapter III certain characteristics of the political system--scarcity and conflict, exchange, uncertainty, complexity, and incrementalism--necessitate the use of political feasibility assessment. It is also true that these same characteristics place limits on what can be accomplished. Political feasibility assessment does not guarantee the success of a program or project, it is merely one of several analytical tools that are useful in the planning and decision-making process.

Political feasibility assessment does help reduce the amount of conflict that ensues when decisions are made. It also eliminates a lot of surprises, even though total certainty about future events is never sure. The assessment process does not, however, necessarily pick the best alternative; in many cases it may only weed out the worst

alternatives. By helping planners and managers avoid impossible situations, political feasibility assessment helps assure more implementable solutions; that is to say, solutions can be accomplished because they will be more acceptable politically to those involved. Careful analysis, in many cases, enables managers and planners to foresee what the future consequences of their decisions will be, thus allowing them to modify those that appear unacceptable.

This does not mean that decisions should be made on the grounds of political acceptability only. Other factors--economic, social, and biological--can also be of the utmost importance. There may even be instances where decisions need to be made that are totally unacceptable to various groups of actors. Planners and managers, however, need to decide if the political price is worth paying. In most cases, assessment of the political repercussions of decisions, along with other evaluations, will ensure the successful or at least partially successful implementation of a plan or project.

Because the factors that affect the political feasibility of plan or project implementation are so varied, it is useful to cluster these elements under the categories described by the typology. In each case these factors will vary, some being more important than others. In most instances categories will overlap. In spite of these difficulties, the categories provide a useful, flexible checklist which organizes the factors that affect political feasibility into categories that allow for a continuing reassessment.

As outlined above, these factors are grouped into three categories. The first category, issues, describes problem-specific conflicts between two or more groups of actors. In most cases, the history of the issue is an important factor affecting political feasibility. Long-standing conflicts have an effect on issues as they exist presently and also may tell something about what will happen in the future. By defining the dimensions of the issue, the analyst can determine how large a group of actors is involved in the issue for that point in time. By using the definitions set forth in the typology, e.g., abstract/concrete, complex/simple, the planner or manager can determine the character of the issue and make some determinations as to whom the issue appeals, and what their reactions might be. As the issue is expanded, decision points increase. It is important to determine where these decision points are because that is where choices between alternatives are made, conflict takes place, opportunity lies for influencing decisions, and resources are spent to affect the outcome of the decision.

The second category of the typology is actors. Actors are groups of organized interests that participate in the political process. It is important at the very beginning of the assessment process to determine which group(s) are the benefactors and which group(s) are the beneficiaries, and whether they are winners or losers. Sometimes this is very obvious, but in other instances it may be difficult to discern. Actors' values have a significant effect on their behavior. When analyzing actors' values, it is important to note how intensely the values are held. The more intensely they are held, the greater the chance of

conflict if a planning or management decision affects a change in those values. When actors find change unacceptable, they use their resources --money, power, status, skills and expertise--to achieve access to the decision-making process in order to influence the outcome of a decision.

The third category, arenas, describes policy issue areas or clusters of related issues that develop their own set of political constraints. These constraints--legal authorities, informal rules, and policy impacts--set the domain within which decisions or programs can be implemented. Legal authorities are usually evident, but are also unalterable for that point in time. Informal rules may be just as unalterable, but many times are difficult to distinguish. By interpreting the impact or consequence of a policy, the planner or manager can many times determine who will be affected, how the costs and benefits will be distributed, and what means will be used to gain compliance. Actors' perceptions of how costs and benefits are distributed and their subsequent behavior are important factors affecting the political feasibility of plan or project implementation.

Application of the Method to Public Land Planning

All planning and management decisions associated with land use planning will benefit some and cost others, and thus have distributional impacts on the participants. In our society, groups of actors vary considerably in the value they assign to different management alternatives, and these are translated into the views or positions of different interest groups. These interest groups in turn exert strong political pressures on planners and managers when they are dissatisfied with the

consequences of a planning or management decision. This has a direct effect on the political feasibility of a program or proposal.

Planners and managers need a better understanding of the methods needed for allocating scarce resources among competing groups and of the bases for group support and opposition to proposed allocations. The number of uses and demands for finite land resources is increasingly growing in volume and complexity. Allocating uses among competing interests is becoming more and more difficult. This trend significantly complicates land use planning and management.

In the case of the scenario, it becomes evident that public land use planning is not only a biological, technical problem, but a political problem as well. Technical knowledge is not at present a limiting factor in obtaining proper management of public lands. Economic, social, and political constraints are often a deterrent to a full application of what is presently known, and are the barriers that are the most difficult to overcome. Degradation of public land resources is not only the result of misuse or overuse, but in many instances, a result of these other factors as well.

Because planning and plan implementation are not wholly objective, technical processes, it behooves planners and managers to have a practical, working knowledge and understanding of the concept of political feasibility and how political constraints can influence the outcome of a planning decision. The suggested typology of political feasibility provides a simple, yet workable, methodology that planners and managers

can use to obtain greater awareness and sensitivity to the political aspects of land use decision making.

Dependence on administrative and technical skills has been an important strategy for public land management agencies in the past, but there is an increasing need for the development of political skills. Increased public participation in agency decision making calls for these skills in, for example, assessing user group preferences or communicating agency proposals to those groups. New planning mandates require a greater relationship between what plans propose and what agencies actually attempt to accomplish. This means that plan alternatives need to be formulated and evaluated on the basis of the likelihood that successful implementation can be achieved given political realities.

Development of additional political skills would better help agency personnel to judge if proposals are acceptable to user groups or if a conflict would develop. In dealing with any public land planning issue, it is essential to have knowledge of the actors, the parts they have played in the controversy, who have been winners, who have been losers, what past commitments have been made, and what coalitions have been formed. By doing this, the land use planner can better assess political support or opposition to a proposed decision or policy and consider how support can best be developed. Planners and managers need to determine what responses or resources will be chosen by actors in reaction to new events. Will they be the same as in the past, or will new methods be used? Through the use of persuasion, communication, and bargaining, the political feasibility of a proposal can be increased.

Public land planners and managers need to be continually aware that both tangible and intangible political costs and benefits can result from agency action and policy making. These costs and benefits can be identified by examining the political results of the decision. Policies that have distributional impacts usually result in conflict. Conflict is costly, both in resources used and in political costs incurred. In many cases there is a loss in support for the agency and/or its policies. By implementing decisions in an incremental manner, distributional costs are dispersed in small doses, thus enhancing the political feasibility of a proposal or program. Sudden changes in the way costs and benefits are dispersed, or to whom they are dispersed, usually result in conflict and a lack of success in achieving what was intended.

Essentially political feasibility assessment asks the question "what kind of cooperation can be expected if a certain decision or program is implemented?" When a decision or program faces opposition, the political feasibility of its being implemented is low. By using the political feasibility typology, factors that may have an effect on the outcome of a program or plan can be identified and constraints adjusted to make the policy or program more feasible.

Other Applications of the Typology

While the discussion of political feasibility assessment has focused on public land and resource planning, political feasibility assessment is a useful analytical and decision-making tool that can be applied in many other land planning activities. This is especially true of those activities that develop new uses for land resources or change

old uses in urban locations, or other areas where land is predominantly in private ownership. Community and urban development, for example, involves the planning and design of new communities or the enhancement, renewal, or revitalization of existing ones. The importance of user input into such projects and the consideration of user values, attitudes, and concerns are factors that have a direct bearing on whether a plan will be successfully implemented.

Siting decisions, such as highway corridor or transmission line placement, are another type of land use decision which can benefit by political feasibility assessment. Because many times such decisions disrupt present uses and/or change land values, they have distributional effects with significant political overtones. By analyzing the political feasibility of a project, the land use planner can identify the steps to secure support and the resources needed for successful implementation.

In the public sector, at all levels of government, the planning and management of land resources are among the most volatile and controversial issues faced by decision makers. The allocation or reallocation of land uses, be it wildlife habitat planning, coastal management planning, or mine reclamation, almost always involve the resolution of conflicting resource uses. This puts the planner in the political process of distributing costs to some and benefits to others, and as planners have sometimes painfully learned, the costs and benefits of public planning and regulation are often substantial and political repercussions significant.

The purpose of political feasibility analysis is in part to recognize and study political constraints in order to change them, if possible, into political opportunities. Political feasibility analysis can also help reveal what set of politically favorable conditions is necessary to accomplish a desired purpose, and what resources are needed to enhance feasibility. In the area of public planning, land use planners help establish public goals and devise means of obtaining them. This process usually involves public participation through meetings or surveys. Awareness of political constraints can only improve the planning abilities of land use planners.

The main thrust of this work has been to demonstrate the importance and utility of the concept of political feasibility as an analytical and decision-making tool for landscape architects in their role as land use planners. By recognizing political constraints and understanding their significance in the planning process, landscape architects can improve their planning effectiveness when making real-life planning and management decisions. The assessment of political feasibility enables the landscape architect to determine the best program or plan alternative for a given situation and helps ensure that the alternative will be successfully implemented. Political feasibility assessment also helps estimate how alternatives will affect future events. By using political feasibility assessment as an evaluation and decision-making tool, the landscape architect can examine the probable outcome of certain decisions before any action is taken or any program or plan is implemented, and decide which alternative best fits those

circumstances. In this manner, time, money, and effort can be husbanded, and a more defensible and realistic product rendered to the private or public sector client.

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