Vision, Actions and Requests (VAR) across administrative levels: A methodological proposal for strategic planning in territorial development

Internal report for discussion
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1. Introduction

Planners and politicians recognise more than ever the necessity of involving the local population and different players (or stakeholders, or actors) in planning activities through participatory processes. Not only is it necessary to insure their engagement in the planned actions, but it eases the planning process by allowing guidelines to follow the needs and wishes of the ones they concern. On the other hand, strategic planning exercises required from territorial[1] entities of different administrative levels (municipalities, departments and provinces, and higher levels up) can be good opportunities to plan rural development. At the municipal level, they can allow the local government to connect with rural populations, and to involve them in the decisions about the allocation of public resources.

Although this necessity is known and a participatory process formally prescribed in the guidelines for territorial planning of many countries, guidelines for the participatory process as such are rarely proposed. The objective of this document is therefore to propose a simple participatory approach that can be used to integrate the input of stakeholders at different administrative levels, hence at different geographic scales. We integrate existing visioning and strategic planning principles in a systems approach.

While it is always positive to stimulate the communication between stakeholders and to have a dialogue between administrative structures and the local population, participants can be disappointed with the participatory process and lose faith in it. The word "participation" has acquired a negative connotation because of certain abuses of it. When only consultative meetings are conducted, there is often no way to track one's suggestions and requests, which leads to a sensation that discussions were forgotten, that decisions were taken without considering them, and that the participatory process was done only to fulfil an artificial requirement.

Another criticism often given to participatory methods in local development is that they are only locally oriented, and that the actions planned are disconnected from more regional policy-making. This is exactly what this approach intends to achieve, to connect the local players with the more regional ones, and the regional ones to the local. Many of the participatory methods we are acquainted with were designed for project planning, research, innovation or decision-making, and therefore are oriented towards problem solving. However, for strategic planning over a territory, the players within it need to develop a long term and collective vision of how they want themselves and their environment to be, and then determine actions that can be done (by them and others) to achieve these desired conditions.

[1] Here we define territory as either one of the following "a) An area of land; a region. The land and waters under the jurisdiction of a government, C) A political subdivision of a country. (www.dictionary.com) But in the context of this document, definition a) is more appropriate because the territory being planned will be divided into sub-systems corresponding to the social sub-systems. each sub-system will have a corresponding area of land that is not necessarily a political subdivision, and that does not necessarily have to be have its geographic boundaries defined. In the language of systems thingking, the territory's boundary is the boundary between "we" and "others". We will also consider that land (and therefore the territory) includes all physical and social systems within it.

We know that if strategic planning exercises done by different levels of government aim at reaching as many of the social players as they can, they cannot be based on complex methodology at every level. We therefore present the approach in its simplest form in section 4, where the input from players is based on only three concepts: their vision of desired future conditions, actions that they propose to conduct, and actions they request from others. Organisers of the planning can innovate and complete the approach as they need, in function of the requirements of the plan they must prepare. A series of questions are proposed to guide discussions and the formalisation of the plan. Section 5 deals with ways to innovate and to adapt the approach to local needs and conditions. Section 6 presents an example of more complete tables that can be used to obtain input from players and player groups, including a diagnosis, goal setting and indicators for monitoring and evaluation. One of the ways to adapt and innovate is to combine this simple approach with other participatory methods that have been developed either for project planning, agricultural research, decision-making, rural appraisal, networking for innovation or monitoring and evaluation. A short review of some other participatory methods is presented in section 9.

This approach also facilitates the formulation of the questions which will guide the acquisition of data for a formal diagnosis, monitoring and focusing of the actions in space and time, as we will see in section 8.

2. Objectives

The proposed methodology has the following objectives:

- To allow an articulation of actions between players of different sectors and administrative levels, taking advantage of differences and complementary roles, emphasising the fact that requests of ones can be actions of others
- To stimulate the enthusiasm of the players through visualisation exercises
- To allow the formulation of individual or sub-group versions of a desired future (also stating undesirable conditions)
- To allow players to agree on a concerted vision of a desired future, that is not necessarily a consensus, but that is compatible with the players' visions
- To allow players to identify what is needed to achieve the desired conditions (and the obstacles in the way), especially to distinguish between actions that they can conduct themselves and the ones that they request from other players
- To allow players to react to the requests others may have towards them, and to the actions proposed by others, and therefore discuss potential and present conflicts
- To allow the tracking of planned actions and requests from the most local to most general levels
- To compile players' input in an effective and faithful manner
- To help make planning meetings more effective by focusing first on desired future conditions and possible means to get there rather than focusing on problems and site characterisation per se.

The objective of this document is only to present the methodology as such. The results of its use in different sites will be the object of subsequent publications.

3. The context in which the approach was developed

This method was developed in respond to a need that is strongly felt in Colombia in the present legal context, and is presented here because it could be used to help planning processes in other countries. In 1997, a law was voted by Colombian congress (law 368/97) that obliges all municipalities to develop territorial plans Ministerio del Medio Ambiente de Colombia (1997), without which they are not eligible for certain economical contributions from the Nation. The deadline, which has been postponed twice, was June 2000. The departments of the country (the next administrative level up) will later have to synthesise the municipal-level plans to elaborate departmental level plans. This law caused panic among municipalities and at the moment of the deadline most of the municipalities of the country were still developing their plan or had not started yet. In 1999, the Land Management project at CIAT assisted a "pilot" municipality, Puerto López, in the development of its plan (Alcaldía de Puerto López y CIAT, 2000), aiming to develop simple GIS approaches that could be later used by other municipalities and later for the department level planning.

In the process of working with the personnel of this municipality, and also of discussing with people developing territorial plans in other municipalities, we saw that a general frustration often occurred at the diagnosis stage, which we humorously called the diagnosis syndrome. This frustration tends to occur when large quantities of data are acquired over a site and that one cannot draw diagnostic conclusions. This frustration is sometimes exacerbated by the use of GIS, because important investments are made in digitising data. Indicators can be calculated from the data, but they cannot be used in a diagnosis when the development objectives are not clear. It is not the planners nor the municipal administrators role to set these objectives alone, and it is often impossible to set a unique set of objectives that represents the very complex requests and needs of the different stakeholders of a municipality.

In the case of Puerto López, participatory workshops were led by the municipality with different stakeholders using the well known SWOT matrix method (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and a certain number of projects were designed with each of these stakeholders. But later, at the general diagnosis stage, we realised that things would have been easier if the information had been specifically collected in function of the objectives stated by the stakeholders, and if these objectives had been stated in a more straightforward manner. As law 388/97 and its corresponding *decreto* 879 state, the diagnosis is an evaluation of the contrasts between the desired conditions and the actual ones. The most straightforward way of addressing this is to define, through common vision exercises, what are the desired conditions and what are the actual ones. As this is formalised, indicators are defined implicitly. The participatory process can then be continued to include an analysis of the causes of the discrepancy between the desired and actual conditions, a set of action and requests, indicators for monitoring and criteria for the eventual adjustment of these actions. The results of the planing workshop at the village, enterprise and association level can be harmonised at the municipal level, including an analysis of conflicts and of the compatibility of actions and requests. In CIAT's aim to produce International Public Goods, we are developing methodological guides and tools to help the planning process and are giving training in territorial planning. For this purpose, we formalised a first methodological proposal in Spanish (Beaulieu et al, 2000), including a series of tables. It was tested with communities in Puerto López and was also proposed to many trainees in training sessions on territorial planning in Colombia in 2000. It was successively improved according to suggestions from trainees or other people to whom it was presented, and is now presented here.

It was then used in 2001 with the mayor's office of Puerto López for the elaboration of the municipality's development plan (Alcaldía de Puerto López and CIAT, 2002).

4. The approach in its simplest form

This strategic planning approach is meant to consider the synergetic role of the different players, at different administrative levels, in the task of jointly trying to achieve desired future conditions. The approach includes a hierarchical series of planning workshops with focus groups, successively run from the most local level to the most regional. The input from players at a given administrative level includes the sharing, comparing and discussion of the previous input of the players within them, in other words of the players from the administrative level below. The input from the players consists in an expression of their vision of desired future conditions, actions they are willing to conduct in order to arrive to those conditions and requests they have to other players. During the whole strategic planning process, a number of questions help guide the discussions and will ultimately help write the report and the final plan.

The approach follows systems thinking, in the sense that it helps participants consider their particular system within the context of a larger whole, i.e. to consider the circumstances or environment that surrounds it. A "system" is an integrated whole whose essential properties arise from the relationship between its parts (Checkland and Scholes 1990). Systems have borders which define the components on which control action can be taken. The location of a particular system within a continuum of organisation determines its hierarchical position. Any system is at the same time a sub-system of some wider system and is itself a wider system to its sub-systems. The nested systems are inter-connected, their conditions are affected by conditions and actions in the others, and they give feedback to one another. In this approach, we consider the players and the player groups as nested hierarchical systems. "Territories" can also be considered as systems (also hierarchical and nested) composed of the social players and the land they live on. Their boundaries are geographical but are often determined by social groupings.

4.1. Understanding the role and the relationship between player systems

In order to organise the participatory workshops, it is necessary to identify the players (actors, stakeholders, or systems) to be involved in them, and to analyse the relationships between them. The relationships between the player systems will clarify themselves during the process of gathering and discussing their visions, actions and requests during the workshops. In deed, the attaining of many desired conditions requires actions by different players, who cannot attain the conditions on their own. This interdependence of players (or player groups, or systems) on one another determines causes a relationship, who's efficiency or quality can be improved by co-operation.

For example, for planning at the municipal level, two different levels of workshops could be conducted:

- workshops with members of each village community, urban neighbourhood, enterprise, farmer association, NGO, where players conduct the planning for the group in question (not the whole municipality). In these workshops, all individual members should be invited to participate.

- A longer workshop at the municipal level, which joins representatives of each of the players considered in the first series of workshops who share, compare and discuss the results of these previous exercises.

The logistics of this process can become complex when many different levels are involved, but there is no theoretical limit to the number of levels it can integrate. For example, participants from the municipal level can be joined for departmental-level planning. Different sub-groups within a specific stakeholder group could also conduct their own planning exercise and harmonise the results during the stakeholder group workshop. Although the input of the players will be compiled from the "bottom-up", the sequence of workshops needs to be planned from the top down. In deed, each administrative level has to co-ordinate the process with its constituting players. Also, as we will see in section 8, the rough planning based on players perceptions can be further refined using information for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and action planning. The convective (both top-down and bottom-up) flow of information and assistance can be represented such as in figure 1:

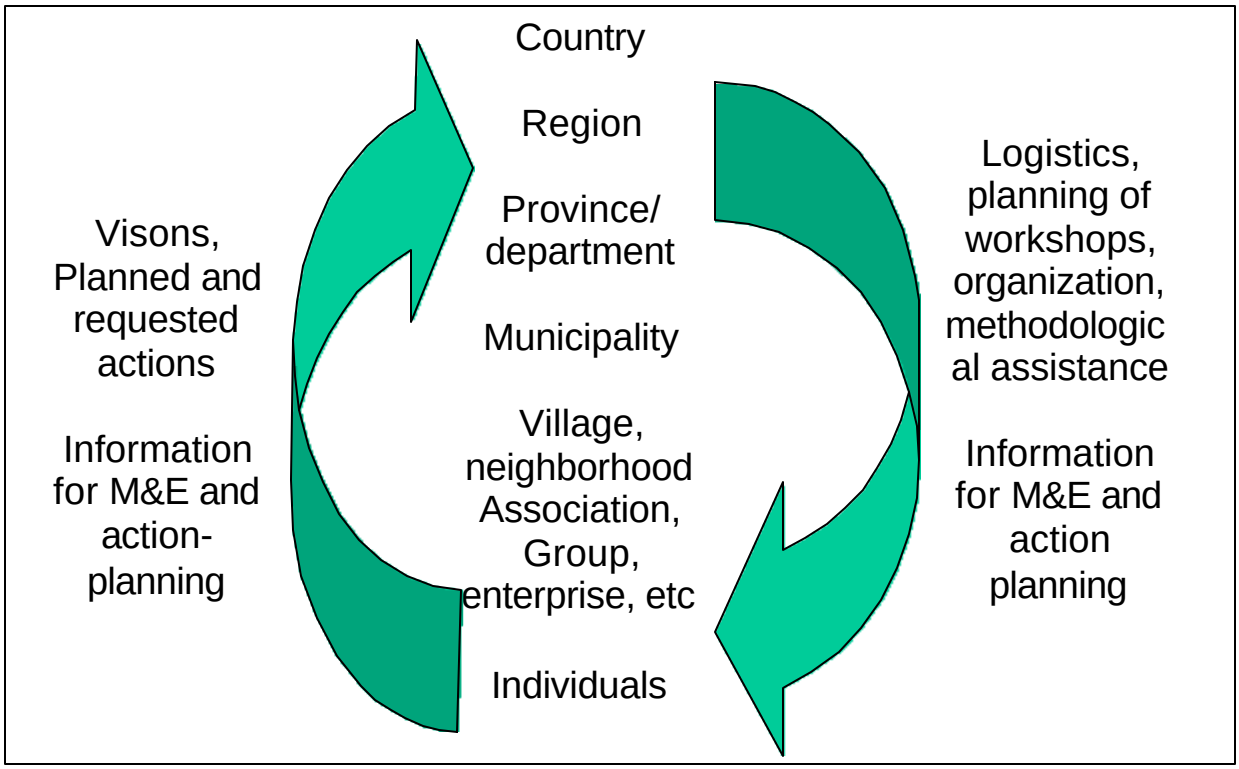


Figure 1: top-down and bottom up flow of information and assistance between administrative levels

4.2. Getting input from players: Vision (desirable future conditions), actions and requests

During the workshops, the participants can fill in tables either individually, in sub-groups or in one single group, depending on the size of the group, available time and preferences of the facilitators and participants. The approach is flexible and facilitators can design their own tables. However, the simplest table to fill in (or "bare bones" version) has three columns, as we can see in table 1. The headings should be similar to the following: a)Vision: How we would like to see our system (enterprise, group, community, municipality, etc…) in a defined number of years (for example, 5, 10 or 20 years), b) Actions, what we (as individuals, or as a group filling this form jointly) can do to achieve the desired conditions and c) Requests: What other players could do that would help us arrive at the desired conditions. During the workshops, the contents of the tables can be elaborated on large sheets of paper, on a blackboard or directly pencilled into a table printed on letter paper. It is important that a paper or digital version of this table be kept and presented in appendix of the final planning report.

Actions are characterised as being possible to achieve from within the system. Requests are actions that could eventually be done from outside the system, by players from other connected systems, or by systems at a higher hierarchical level.

Table 1: Simplest table to collect input from players or player groups: vision, actions and requests

Vision What we would like our community to be like in XX years (and what we would not like)	**Actions:** Things that WE can do to allow the desired future	**Requests:** What we would like other to do to help it happen

4.3. Sharing, comparing and discussing input from player systems, from one level to the next

After conducting this exercise, results are shared, compared and discussed. If, during a given workshop, the exercise was done by splitting the group into smaller groups or if participants conducted it individually, the individuals or sub-groups present their contributions to the others. Participants of the large group discuss together if there is any discrepancy between the different visions, and if present, players who are the aim of requests discuss if these requested actions are feasible for them. Actions are discussed to see if they do not cause disagreements and potential conflicts. The same is done in workshops of the level above with the results obtained in the level below.

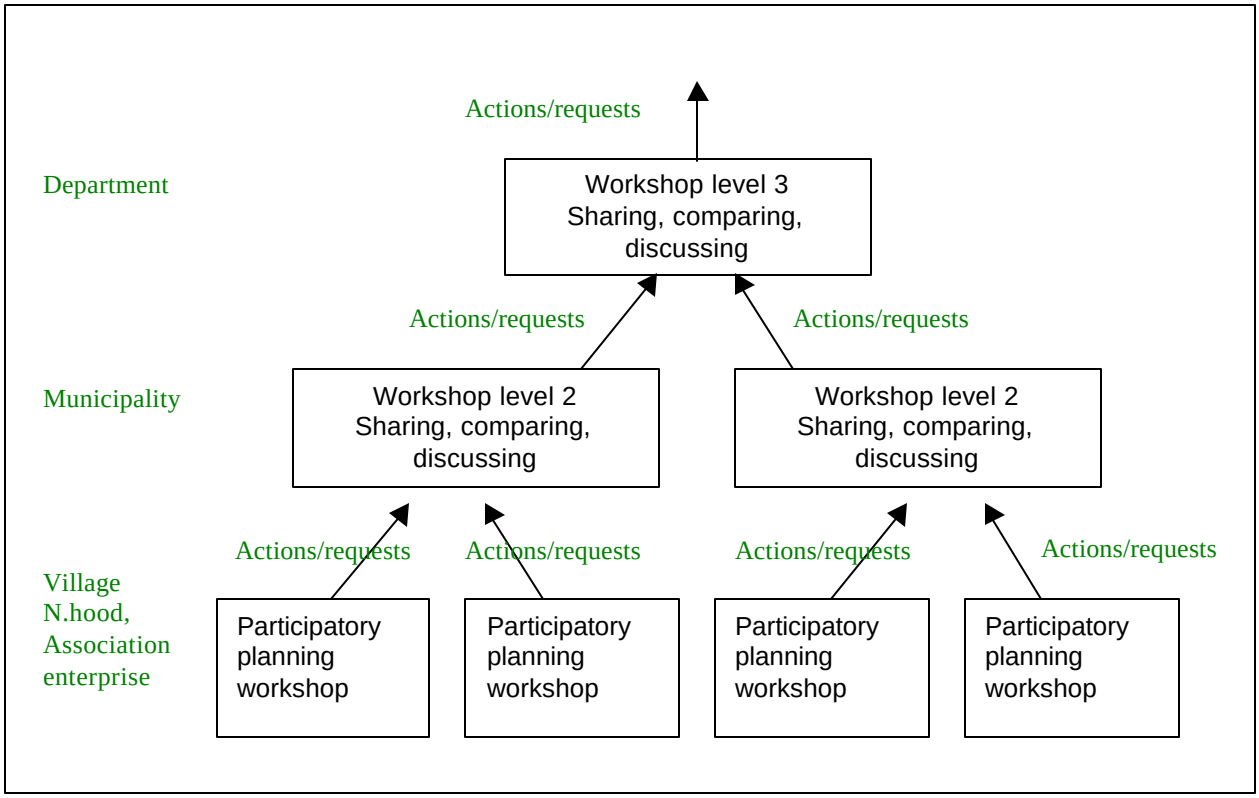


Figure 2: hierarchy of compiling input from players and sharing, compaing and discussing from one level to the next

4.4. Questions to address all along the planning process

Although the basic principles are simple and the input from players can be collected in the form of a three column table, there is a series of questions that should be present in the mind of the persons who are leading the planning process, and that should guide discussions and the elaboration of the final plan. These questions, which are additional to the questions in the headings of table 1 (what are our desired future conditions? What can we do about it? What could others do about it?) can also lead to further participatory exercises as we will see in the section on "how to innovate within this approach". The questions are the following:

- Which are the present conditions?
- Which are the present tendencies? (how have things been evolving in the last years?)
- How do these present conditions compare the desired ones?
- Why are the present and desired conditions different?
- Which are the reasons of this discrepancy that are within our control, which are within the control of other players and which are out of anybody's control?
- What would happen in the future if the present tendencies continued?
- Which are the "forces" acting in our favour, and which are acting against? (or which are our opportunities and which are our threats?)
- Which are the alliances that we need to help us attain our desired future conditions?
- What are we good at, and what should we improve (which are our strengths and weaknesses?)

- How can we prioritise actions to conduct?
- How can we turn proposed actions and requests into norms, activities, programs and projects?
- When different options are possible, how can we define which are the best for us?
- Who will make themselves responsible for which action and by when?
- Are the available human, financial and natural resources sufficient to conduct the proposed activities?
- How will we verify if these actions are being done, and if they have any impact on the conditions we wish to improve?
- How can we verify if things are getting better or worse?
- Who will be responsible for taking action when the plan is not respected, and how?
- Which persons or institutions will arbiter and moderate in the case of conflicts?

5. How to innovate within this approach and adapt it to local conditions?

This approach can be adapted in function of the items required by any official plan, the local culture and context, and in function of the ideas and creativity of the organisers of the planning activities.

5.1. Plan the logistics of the meetings and adapt it to the players, the geography and available time. If possible, make them into mini social events.

You can invite certain participants to prepare local specialities for the coffe-break food and drinks.

You can invite local talents to perform.

You can encourage small groups to form and representatives to present their results to the others, or some participants to animate parts of the discussions.

5.2. Find the ways that suit you best to answer the questions listed in section 4.4

The more complex tables shown in section 6 give an example of a structured way to address some of these questions during the workshop. However, you can do this in the form you choose. The questions in section 4.4 could each lead to a formalised participatory exercise, or can simply be discussed and then explained in the final plan.

5.3. Find the way that suits you best to cover the different themes involved in the plan

You can either divide the focus groups into sub-groups, divide tables into sub-tables, carry a checklist, but you must find a way to have the group cover the various themes involved in the strategic plan. Here is an example of different themes that need to be covered for municipal planning:

- Communication systems between rural and urban areas
- Access to public services such as healthcare, education, transportation, electricity, water, etc

- Environmental quality, protection and conservation systems
- State of cultural and architectural patrimony, protection and restoration systems
- Areas affected by natural and artificial hazards such as floods
- Land use
- Public areas, access to recreation infrastructure
- Waste and wastewater disposal
- Living standards, well-being, poverty, employment
- Land tenure
- Productive activities and commercialisation systems
- Social and cultural activities
- Tourism

5.4. Find images and strategies to help people visualise future conditions, express their vision and propose actions and requests

Maybe the most critical and difficult task of the meeting facilitators is to have the group define the desired conditions and define the collective actions that are necessary to reach those conditions. The problems experienced are simply obstacles in the path, that they will have to overcome with specific actions, or by taking precautions.

It can be useful to visualise these concepts by using metaphors. Here is an example of a metaphor to visualise the whole planning process :

> *The set of actions being planned is like a journey by boat between two shores of a large river. The collective and individual actions make the boats progress from the initial to the desired conditions and allow them to overcome or avoid the obstacles. The progress between these two shores can be monitored (position, speed, etc) but for this, it is important to know where the shores are. That is why the determination of desired conditions is the first step, step that will guide the description of the present conditions. For certain conditions, the boats are tied together, or many players are in the same boat. These players have to work together in order to go in the same direction.*

One can use variants of this, adapted to the local culture (journey by foot, climbing a mountain, making a large carpet, etc…)

To help people visualise desired future conditions, which is not an obvious task, one can use a mixture of humorous allusions to the possibility of travelling to the future, looking into a crystal ball or considering the intervention of supernatural forces that could make these desirable conditions possible. An example of this type of visualisation would be: "*You become ill and fall in a coma. While you are asleep, you make wishes for the best to happen in your group (or community) and your wishes are gradually fulfilled. In 5 years, you wake up, totally well. You get up, walk around, what do you see?*". Local variations of these can be coloured in function of which divinity is usually solicited for wishes, and what could be the cause of a prolonged comma or illness.

One can also get inspiration from examples of use of visioning in planning. Visioning has now become a classical technique in business planning. Many other teams use vision-based methods for planning of development , such as Lightfoot and Okalebo (2000) and Green *et al.*, 2000.

5.5. Combine this approach with other methods and tools

The basic assessment of vision, proposed actions and requests should be complemented with a reflection on the questions listed in section 4.4., as well as any other pertinent questions that arise. While reflecting on them in a group, other participatory approaches and tools can be used, even if these methods were developed for different purposes. Section 9 is dedicated to the theme of combining the vision-actions-requests approach with other methods, and thus gives a short review of some other participatory methods used for project planning, rural appraisal, networking and other activities.

6. Traps not to fall into

6.1. Leaving the conduction of the plan in the hands of external people who will not be involved in its execution.

There is no harm to hire external help for facilitation, document writing and accounting, but the institution who is in charge of the planning should assume its responsibilities entirely.

6.2. Frustrating visualisation exercises

During the visualisation exercise,

- Avoid letting participants enumerate their problems at the start. If the participants tend to fall in the temptation of enumerating problems, ask them to start all their sentences with "I see…." or “I don’t see…”, referring to the desired environment they visualise.
- Avoid asking "what would you like?", but encourage a genuine visualisation of the desired conditions

6.3. Making people feel they have lost their time and spoken for nothing

Keep track of people’s input in the appendix of the plan document, and send copies to their groups so they can verify that it is there and that is has been taken into account. Allow them to comment on the document before it becomes final.

7. Example of a more complex series of tables, including information for diagnosis, milestone setting and monitoring (cookbook style)

In this example, developed for the Colombian Ordenamiento Territorial process (which requires an explicit diagnosis, concrete milestones, a monitoring strategy and suggest scenario analysis, Ministerio del Medio Ambiente de Colombia, 1997/1998) the **planning tables** summarise the results of eight steps:

- 1-Elaboration of a common vision of the desired conditions: Brainstorming and description of how the participants would like to see the group and its environment (community,

enterprise, association, municipality, department, region, whichever the case) in a predetermined number of years.

- 2-Description of the actual conditions: brainstorming of the participant's perception of how things are actually, following the points expressed and noted in step 1.
- 3-Diagnosis: Speculation about the causes of the discrepancies between desired and actual conditions, following the points listed in step 1. The causes must be divided in the ones that can be controlled by the group and the ones that cannot.
- 4-Prospective: Brainstorming general list of actions ("things to do") and requests to other stakeholder groups or higher administrative levels ("things to ask for"). The requests should include the specific questions for which technical assistance is needed.
- 5-Prioritise actions and requests: participants rate each of the actions or requests by order of priority. Label with a "*" the actions planned that are a priority but cannot be conducted until sufficient resources are available or before another group responds to the request. Label with a "♦"the actions that are not necessarily urgent but that can be done right away, without investing too much time or resources. Recopy the list on a new sheet of paper, in sequential order of what should be done first and next, retaining labels and placing arrows to indicate when an action is dependant on the result of another or on the fulfillment of a request.
- 6-Establish responsible persons and specific goals for each of the actions (these are preliminary goals, which will later be refined with necessary data, expertise and decision-support tools)
- 7-Establish means of verification and indicators to monitor the actions and their effect on the actual conditions
- 8-Establish criteria for revising the actions: establish what would make the group change or readjust the actions planned and how these would be modified ("If….then….")

Steps 1 to 5 fit on a single table, table 2, to be able to visualise that the actions and requests are the ones that will allow the progression from the present conditions towards the desired ones. Steps 6 and 7, the goals for the actions and indicators for monitoring, are summarised in table 3. Table 4 summarises criteria for the eventual adjustment of the goals.

In addition to these eight steps, participants are encouraged to conduct a **scenario building exercise**. This exercise is useful for the group to reflect on which strategies to adopt in situations different from the present and desired conditions. The group must determine the main two or three external conditions (or driving forces) which affect its future. To find these forces and establish contrasting scenarios, it can be helpful to think of "What is the very worse that can happen?" and "What is the very best that can happen?". It is very likely that these driving forces will have appeared during the analysis of criteria for adjusting the goals of the actions (planning step 8). The chosen driving forces must not be strongly dependent on one another. The combination of two driving forces can be represented by two perpendicular axes that divide the space into four different scenarios. The interaction of three forces can be represented as three axes, and would result in eight different scenarios arranged as a cube. For each scenario, the participants make suggestions on what would be the best strategy for the group. It is important to determine which is the "most desirable" scenario, even if it very different (and sometimes opposite!) to the "most probable" scenario. Strategies should include actions that would influence the external conditions in the desired direction. An example of a possible result from a scenario-building exercise is shown in figure 4.

The **harmonisation tables** are used in workshops of level 2 and higher, which join representatives of groups having previously conducted their planning exercise. They are filled after each representative has presented the list of actions and requests resulting from this previous exercise (listed in table 2). The first harmonisation table, table 5, compiles the requests made by each of the stakeholder groups and the analysis of their feasibility. If a request is accepted by one of the participating stakeholder groups, it must then be integrated in that group's list of actions. The second harmonisation table, table 6, summarises the analysis of conflicts. This analysis is based on the reactions of the participants to the actions proposed by the other stakeholder groups. It is also based on passed and present experiences. The table lists potential and present conflicts along with their causes, consequences and possible solutions.

Workshops of level 2 and higher then continue with the filling of the planning tables and the scenario-building exercise, this time considering the well-being of the whole group of stakeholders, considering the whole territory corresponding to the administrative level considered.

TABLE 2: SYNTHESIS OF DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS, PRESENT CONDITIONS, CAUSES OF DISCREPANCY, PROPOSED ACTIONS AND REQUESTS

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">PRESENT CONDITIONS</td><td>CAUSES OF THE DISCREPANCY, WHICH WE CAN CONTROL</td><td>PLANNED ACTIONS (PRIORITISED)</td><td rowspan="2">DESIRED CONDITIONS (5-YEAR VISION)</td></tr>
<tr><td>CAUSES OF THE DISCREPANCY THAT WE CANNOT CONTROL</td><td>REQUESTS TO OTHER STAKEHOLDERS OR ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS (including questions for technical assistance)</td></tr>
</table>

TABLE 3: GOALS FOR ACTIONS AND INDICATORS FOR MONITORING

ACTION	GOALS	RESPONSIBLE PERSONS OR INSTITUTIONS	GENERAL INDICATORS (the condition that we want to improve)	INTERMEDIATE INDICATORS (of the progress of actions and their immediate effect)

TABLE 4: CRITERIA TO REVISE OBJECTIVES

IF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS OCCUR…	THEN WE …

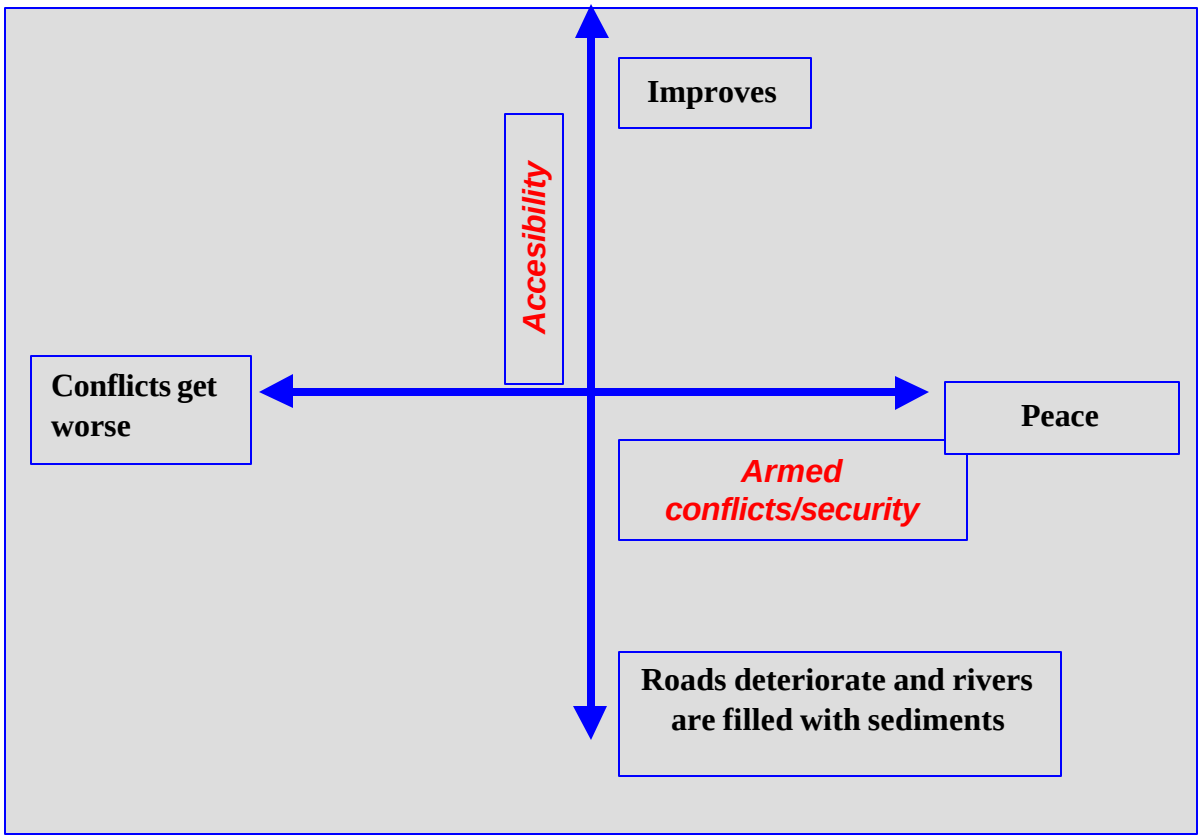
TABLE 5: HARMONISATION OF REQUESTS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

REQUESTED ACTION OR ASSISTANCE	REQUESTED TO	FROM	If the solicited stakeholder is present, do they agree to integrate the solicited action in their plan?	If the solicited stakeholder is not present, do the participants think that the request is realistic?	If not, explain why

TABLE 6: PRESENT AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN PLAYERS

	GROUPS INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT	CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT	CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ACTIONS TO TAKE	ASSISTANCE TO REQUEST TO OTHER STAKEHOLDERS
PRESENT CONFLICTS						
POSSIBLE CONFLICTS						

Figure 3: Example of the representation of two driving forces (accessibility and security) dividing four scenarios, in each of which the group decides what the best strategies would be.



8. The role of information in strategic planning: responding to questions for monitoring and evaluation and for action planning

After it has been roughly defined through participatory meetings, the general planning procedure can then be refined and supported with data and analysis. The data and information can be acquired through field measurements, surveys, Remote Sensing, census and agricultural statistics, and can be analysed with statistical packages, spreadsheets and GIS tools.

The data acquisition and analysis should be guided by two types of questions, the Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) questions and the action planning questions. The M&E questions can lead the determination of indicators of pressure, state and response (Winograd (1995) and Winograd and Farrow (2001)).

The M&E questions are of the following type (some of which appeared in section 4.4)

- How far are we from the desired conditions?
- Are we getting better or worse?
- Is the situation intolerable, tolerable or just fine?
- Given the existing external forces, how are we likely to progress?
- What is being done about it?

The action-planning questions are of the following type:

- We have an idea of what we should be doing, but which are soundest options, economically and environmentally?
- Are these actions feasible, environmentally and economically?
- Where should we apply them?
- Over how large of an area?
- When is the best time to act?
- Which would be the best combination of actions?".

As mentioned by Tufte (1974), data analysis is also used, in politics and policy, to test theories and explanations by confronting them with empirical evidence. Data can in deed be used to verify if local perceptions of conditions and trends are accurate, and to verify if the factors supposed to be causes of the discrepancies between desired and actual conditions really do have a causal effect.

While trying to answer the M&E questions mentioned above, it is extremely important to carefully choose the variables and indicators to measure or estimate. This can be eased by making informal statements of desired and perceived present conditions.

9. How this approach can be linked with other approaches

Many participatory approaches have been developed and used for project planning, agricultural research, monitoring of natural resources and agriculture, or for decision-making. Ideas, tools and exercises from these can also be incorporated into a strategic planning framework.

Participatory rural Apraisal (PRA), eventually called Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) is a generic term that refers to a series of tools used for the assessment of problems and needs, natural resources, production systems, social networks, and other useful information for rural development. PRA is not a method as such but is a field methodological use and development, in which different institutions have been involved. Examples of applications can be found in Nabasa *et al*., 1995. PRA methods have been used extensively in Farming Systems Research (FSR).

The Participatory Assessment and Planning (PAP) process for community planning and Natural resources Management, promoted by the FARM program of FAO, begins with PRA techniques. It has the following sequence of steps: 1- Mapping of natural resources and assessment of problems, 2-Assessment of the social situation and the community needs, 3-Collective envisioning of a vision for the community, 4-collectively develop a community plan, 5- Develop an implementation strategy.

Geilfus (1997) makes a review of 80 participatory methods for participatory development including diagnosis, planning, monitoring and evaluation. Among these different tools, SWOP analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and scenario analysis are extremely useful for strategic planning. We must mention here that SWOP analysis can either be applied to characterise the system under study, or used to prioritise different options. Scenario analysis can be used either to explore possible variations of external factors (the ones that are not controllable within the system) or internal ones. However, for strategic planning, these approaches necessarily have to accompany a reflection on the desirable future conditions and the means to get there.

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM, Checkland and Scholes, 1990) proposes a seven-step approach that has been extensively used for the planning of environment and development projects. 1-unstructuring the problem situation, 2-visualising the problem situation , 3-defining a root definition of relevant systems, 4-developing a conceptual model of future visions, 5-comparison of existing and ideal visions 6-determining feasable and desirable changes, 7-determining actions to improve the problem situation. The root definition or the system is determined through five characteristics of CATWOE (Customers, Actors, Transformation, World View, Owners and Environment.

The RAAKS resource box (Engel, 2000 and Salomon and Englel, 2000) presents a very complete participatory method to study the social organisation of innovation for development, which follows a soft systems approach. Because it focuses on innovation, it begins with problem definition. It includes a set of laminated cards divided into windows and tools, to be used in teams to develop a shared conceptual framework. These can also be useful for team building. The tools contain a series of relevant questions, of which some can be combined with the questions addressed in the present document. However, applying the method from A to Z would be very tedious and is not even recommended by the authors. The windows and tools are more like a menu to choose from in function of the situation that players are in.

The ZOPP (Objectives-oriented project planning) method developed by GTZ since 1975, became a standard project planning method in many institutions in various countries. Hundreds of ZOPP facilitators were trained in Germany and abroad. This method includes the logical framework which has been the basis of project planning in CIAT and other centres of the CGIAR. Although it has been widely adopted, the method has been evolving in response to suggestions and criticism from users. The new version presented by Helming and Göbel (1997) is much more goal oriented than the previous ones, which were more problem-oriented. The logical framework was replaced by the Project Planning Matrix (PPM), which can also be used to describe and better plan projects emerging from strategic planning. Although the method does not suggest visioning exercises, these can be used to define common goals. The description of actions and requests can respectively result in the definition of projects and services on one hand, and assumptions on the other hand. The assumptions are in deed actions that are necessary by other players, or external conditions that need to be met in order for the products and services to allow the project to fulfil its purpose.

ITDEA: The Intelligent Team Decision Assistant (Leclerc *et al*., 2001) is a computer software that aids strategic planning. The vision-action-requests approach can serve as preamble to the use of ITDEA with a more limited number of players, for the formalisation of the strategic plan.

Sometimes, the planning requires geographical mapping of the present conditions or of the different potentials of the land. Participatory methods to achieve this mapping, such as Zonage à dire d'acteurs (ZADA, Clouet, 2000) can be combined with the interpretation of aerial photography or satellite imagery (Adell, 2001, Imbernon, 2001). The perspective of peasants and of satellite imagery can be extremely complementary (Ait Alhayane, 1993) and these perspectives can be joined and stored in a geographic information system, that can also be used in a participatory way (Taylen, 2000).

The learning approach proposed by the International Support Group (ISG) for community agroecosystem management is based on a cycle of phases which include (not necessarily starting from) Visioning agoecosystem management strategies, Planning on matching farmer demands with services provided, Negociating new partnerships, Action on projects, Reflection on actions taken and partnership performance. A set of learning tools are proposed, in the form of tables, for future visioning of agroecosystem management, clarifying requirements, partnerships and responsibilities, for clarifying characteristics of successful partnerships and for reflecting on agroecosystem performance. The visioning approach also includes hand-drawn maps of present situation and desired future conditions. Checkland and Schole (1990) mention that learning is made possible by successive comparisons of desired conditions with present ones.

The acronym PRA is also sometimes used to refer to Participatory Research in Agriculture, in which the objective of the participation is to do research on a theme, to solve a given problem or to test different agricultural options. Weather the participation is for research, appraisal, decision-making or for planning, there are some basic skills to develop, such as for facilitation, expression, listening, information management and coordination. All methodological publications on participatory methods, tools and approaches can help one improve these skills in one way or another. Good tips for facilitation (in the context of participatory decision-making)

can be found in Kanner *et al*. (1996) and tips as well as reflections about the facilitating roles of the planner can be found in Forester, 1989 and 1999.

10. Discussion

10.1. Why present this approach if so many other participatory methods exist?

We would first like to mention that the motivation behind this methodological proposal is not per se to present something new and innovative that has never been done before. It is to help local governments at different administrative levels be able to interconnect with the different political and other systems through a method simple enough for everybody to understand, and rapid enough to use. Nonetheless, the analysis of many other methods (see a summarised review in section 9) leads us to find that it is, in fact, original and innovative.

The innovation came from some light frustrations felt while attending planning meetings in different contexts, and mostly from sharing the anguish of planners who were experiencing problems with diagnosis (see section 3). In deed, many planning methods lead to interesting revealing discussions, but lacked a clear path "where we want to go" and "what we should do". The originality of this method lies in

- its simplicity,
- its placing of the envisioning of desired future conditions before diagnosis or action planning
- its working across administrative levels
- its linking between players (establishment of partnerships) by tentatively matching offer (actions) of ones with demand (requests) of others

With respect to simplicity, we based the method only on the questions "where do we want to go" (or how we want to be), and "what should we do", dividing the second questions in function of "we" and "others". As we mentioned in the introduction of section 4, we follow a systems approach, where the different social actors are organised in hierarchical groups and sub groups, or systems and sub-systems. Each system is a sub-system of a larger whole, and its boundaries are defined by the limit between "we" and "others". The links between the components of the systems is the interdependency to achieve the desired future conditions, expressed through the requests, and strengthened when requests of ones match actions of others. In this sense, this approach is akin to the soft systems methodology, although it proposes a different way of putting the principles into practice.

One has to take into account that the diversity of participatory methods that exist comes from the diversity of applications, in fields such project planning, agricultural research, monitoring of natural resources and agriculture, or decision-making.

Other publications that deal with strategic planning over territories, such as FAO (1993) or Kelly and Becker (2000), recognise the importance of citizen participation, without suggesting a specific method to obtain it. We think that the approach presented here can find its place in those contexts.

10.2. Goal or vision-oriented thinking versus problem-oriented thinking

This is a philosophical discussion that we will only superficially address, but that is the focus of very interesting research in psychology and sociology. Different people who work with different planning methods have found that the visioning of future desired conditions triggers much more enthusiasm and empowerment for action than do methods based on the identification of problems (Lightfoot, personal communication, 2001). Many methods include the visioning or the expression of desirable future conditions but place this step after a diagnosis step, which most often includes a definition of problems (this is the case of soft systems methodology, for example (Checkland and Scholes. 1990). We think that the visualisation and expression of desired future conditions can be conducted before the diagnosis phase, in order to be able to compare desired conditions with the present ones. In this document, problems are addressed through the causes of the discrepancies between actual and desired conditions. While collecting input from different players, if a formal diagnosis is not necessary for each of them, the expression of desired future conditions can be directly followed by "what can we do to achieve this vision?" (actions) and "what can others do to help us achieve it?"(requests). The description of present conditions and evaluation of the causes of the discrepancies usually comes up in the discussions, and is implicitly taken into account when the players formulate actions and requests. They implicitly propose the solution to problems they experience.

In their methodological guide of the new ZOPP version, Helming and Göbel (1997) report on the criticism that had been made to the ZOPP in the nineties : "ZOPP workshops participants sometimes got the feeling they were passive objects in a "workshop screenplay" which they could not fully understand. Many staff members, partners and representatives of target groups experienced ZOPP as being an instrument of power dictated by the GTZ Head Office. People felt they had been "zopped" ." This is why GTZ encouraged a dynamic evolution of the ZOPP, making it more flexible. The new version also insists much less on the definition of problems and much more on the definitions of goals.

However, there are cases where problem identification is crucial, such as during adaptation, innovation or project planning. Adaptation and innovation is generally triggered by a problem or a need, and to facilitate these processes, it is very important to understand what the problems and needs are. Once these are identified and understood, then it is possible to visualise the future conditions after the problem is solved or the need is fulfilled. But the visualisation of desired future conditions can also greatly help defining and clarifying the problems.

10.2.1. Has the visioning practice been proven effective and is it based on sound theory?

As stated by Shipley (2002), "there has been little or no examination of the theoretical underpinnings of the (visioning) practice. Practitioners of the technique, whether consultants or municipal planners, seem to have worked largely from a set of tacit assumptions about the usefulness of the practice". It would be very interesting to conduct research comparing the outcomes of planning initiatives based on visioning techniques with those based on diagnosis and problem oriented ones (Lightfoot, 2001, personnal communication). In deed, as we

mentioned before, users of the technique often feel a greater enthusiasm on the part of participants with visioning techniques than with diagnosis techniques. Most planning approaches used presently involve both diagnosis and visioning. However, here, we tried to convince the reader of the usefulness of visioning not so much for obtaining final results and actions, but for helping players draw a diagnosis (and therefore implicitly identifying problems) and identify actions and partnerships leading to the desired future conditions.

We think that visioning exercises also have the advantage of enriching the community leaders' mental representations of the community they represent, increasing their consideration of the long term and collective issues into their everyday decision-making.

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