

PAPEP

*Political Analysis and Prospective
Scenarios Project*





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POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS PROJECT (PAPEP)

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDS

PAPEP

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION4

2. PAPEP PROJECT OBJECTIVES5

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK7

4. GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS 14

 4.2. SECOND METHODOLOGICAL DISTINCTION: FOUR STAGES 18

 4.3. THE MAIN CONCEPTUAL RESULT: THE “PROSPECTIVE SCENARIOS” 24

 4.4. THE FUNDAMENTAL METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE: “ACTIVE NEUTRALITY” 26

5. THE INSTRUMENTS 27

 5.1. STAGE 1: DESIGN 27

 5.2. STAGE 2: DATA COLLECTION 29

 5.3. STAGE 3: ANALYSIS 36

 5.4. STAGE 4: DEVOLUTION 40

BIBLIOGRAPHY45



1. INTRODUCTION

The two main goals of this document are:

- (a) To clarify the general objectives, theoretical proposals, methodological definitions and specific instruments used by different PAPEP projects.
- (b) To describe the above mentioned issues with such specificity that future users and practitioners of this methodology will be able to orient their decisions.

Two additional precisions are required:

First of all, though different PAPEP projects may have similar origins (having been developed in difficult situations by national UNDP offices), a methodological proposal previously designed in all details was not applied. Instead, different national experiences (Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador), were complemented by a regional vision that included the continent's most important countries (Argentina, Brazil, México, Unites States).

A significant degree of convergence between different projects exists, nonetheless. This is mainly due to three reasons: (i) though national initiatives were not coordinated, initial demands, coming from national political forces, including governments and international cooperation, had many elements in common (in general related to pre-crisis, crisis or post-crisis context analysis); (ii) although national projects were autonomous, the work teams involved almost always coordinated; and (iii) as a result, their studies shared a common conceptual framework (Calderón 2006). In consequence, this paper summarizes a series of theoretical and methodological convergences that became significant, in spite of having been put together "on the go".

Second, the idea is to clarify the basis of this work, as well as the explicit principal instruments and expected results, in order to contribute to the development of well-informed demands from *toolkit beneficiaries*; that is from the potential users of this methodology. This is true whether they use it to develop PAPEP projects (UNDP offices) or to use project results (governments, relevant national



actors, international cooperation, OOH). Thus, this document is intended as a general guide (a sort of “navigational chart”), but not as a detailed methodological manual. This would be impossible as well as unnecessary in a brief essay since all PAPEP projects require intensive use of different techniques. Additionally, the methodology has been designed for professional use.

The report is organized as follows: Chapter 2 describes PAPEP projects in their general specific objectives. Chapter 3 synthesizes the central elements of the conceptual framework underpinning the design and execution of the projects. To facilitate this presentation, the central components are summarized in five main well-sustained theoretical assumptions. Chapter 4 contains general methodological definitions guiding this work. In a further facilitation effort, these definitions are presented as a series of distinctions in three application levels and four execution stages. The main results expected from the analysis stage (“prospective scenarios”) are also included in this chapter, as is the fundamental methodological principle sustaining the whole project: “the active neutrality”. Finally, the principal work instruments are presented in the last chapter, ordered according to pertinence for each one of the four stages described above.

2. PAPEP PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The *general objective* of any PAPEP project is to contribute to the strengthening of Latin American democracy. The PAPEP also shares the final UNDP objective -the promotion of human development in all its dimensions- and the goals of United Nations Charter itself. However, unlike other projects that aim at strengthening democracy by strengthening its economic or social bases, the PAPEP proposes to contribute to the strengthening of democracy *from politics*. The central idea is that form and mode have high impact on the results. The way of handling the processes of design and

institutional reform, and the manner in which public policies are prepared and executed, impact on the democracies and their capability to satisfy society's demands and expectations¹.

Dialogue initiatives supported or developed by United Nations also act from politics, in circumstances of high polarization or conflict among different actors, seeking precisely, to control those tensions and facilitate negotiations ("dialogues") able to overcome them. The national PAPEPs, on the contrary, *assume* that certain conditions for dialogue already exist among different actors, and that in fact, there already is some type of dialogue in play among relevant actors. In general terms, PAPEP projects are "posterior" (conceptually) to dialogue projects, and try to provide useful substantive contents build on pre-existing dialogues (mainly prospective *scenarios*, as examined below).

In this general conceptual Framework, PAPEP projects aim at achieving all or some of the following *specific objectives*, according to each project's precise nature:

- (a) Identify the main current public agenda issues, and the most significant political *decision-making processes* used; at the moment when the study is being implemented.
- (b) for each one of these issues and processes, identify the most relevant *actors*, in the political, economic and social arenas;
- (c) Identify the *perception* of each of the relevant actors with respect to issue or process being analyzed, including a forecast on its short and medium-term evolution;
- (d) learn the perception of the actor on *his/her own restrictions* and identify the main *strategic objective* for each of the most relevant actors regarding a specific issue or process being analyzed.
- (e) starting from the above, estimate short and medium-term *probable trajectories* for the different actors;

¹ This point will be developed in detail in the next section.

- (f) starting from the ‘mapping’ described above, estimate the *probability of blockade or conflict* existing in relation to each issue or political decision-making process, and *identify the moments* of the debate or process when they are expected to happen;
- (g) taking the above as a basis, identify possible blockades or conflicts that would have the greatest *destabilizing potential* on the political system;
- (h) starting from information collected on actors, perceptions, strategic objectives, probable trajectories and expected effects of blockades or conflicts, identify short and *medium-term prospective scenarios*, Assuming that new strategic objectives or different restrictions are not introduced or generated,
- (i) explore possible appropriate *actions* to sidestep those blockades or conflicts which have the greatest destabilizing capability, favoring progress toward more desirable scenarios; these actions must be able to articulate with the relevant actors’ perceptions and strategic objectives.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At least in two senses, the PAPEP projects are neither politically nor methodologically neutral. They are not, in the first place, because they are committed with the strengthening of democracy, and the promotion of human development. PAPEP projects are framed in UNDP activities, and take up the general objectives of the Organization. When in the enumeration of specific objectives it is said that the process toward more “desirable” scenarios will be favored, “more desirable” is meant as: the most favorable in terms of institutional strengthening, democratic consolidation and human development. The PAPEPs assume that Latin Americans want a stronger democracy and have placed themselves in the service of this search. The first is an empirically verifiable fact, the latter is a normatively well-based decision.

In second place, the PAPEP projects are not neutral in their way of approaching political phenomena. A basic presupposition is that the *manner* in which debates are processed and decisions are built has decisive effects on institutional stability, the quality of the policies and the efficacy of their results. Taking up a conclusion of the contemporary debate on the nature of the successful policies², the PAPEP projects assume that technical aspects are important but not decisive, and certainly are insufficient. Particularly in democracy, the real results of the policies are closely linked to their processes of construction and implementation.

In the framework of these general definitions, the PAPEP is offered as an instrument that can be placed *at the disposal of the actors themselves* to help them to:

- (a) Perceive with greater clarity, the scope and nature of the discrepancies and conflicts that exist among them;
- (b) Understand the dynamic of the blockades that make the construction of agreements and the implementation of change processes more difficult;
- (c) Identify potential areas for convergence and possible trajectories that might permit overcoming the blockades;
- (d) Acknowledge the principal restrictions and incentives that create boundaries in the space available to carry out new discussions and decision dynamics;
- (e) Agree on thematic agendas, common objectives and common temporal scale-ups.

The PAPEP projects are not applicable in any kind of political and social context. In particular, there are five assumptions that delimit their areas of action. That is, that allow the identification of the types of societies in which a PAPEP project may be applied and produce results of some usefulness. These assumptions are the following:

ASSUMPTION 1: Democracy as a shared goal

² See, for example, Malloch Brown 2002, Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2003, Payne, Zovatto, Carrillo Flórez and Allamand Zavala 2003, Stein, Tommasi, Echebarría, Lora and Payne 2005.



The starting point for the PAPEPs is that Latin American societies are involved in a process of democratic consolidation, and that the most of the political and social actors participate in this process (or at least do not actively oppose it). The PAPEPs aim at providing inputs that will allow overcoming those blockades that make strengthening democracy more difficult.

This assumption does *not* state that all the actors agree on the exact point of arrival that is being sought (a “full democracy”), and that they only find difficulties at the moment of building roads that lead to such end. On the contrary, it is assumed that there will be discrepancies in relation to the final end, because there will be discrepancies on the meaning of the terms “democracy” and “democratization”. But a PAPEP project will be pertinent insofar as the discrepancies should not affect a “hard nucleus” of shared convictions that associate democracy with: (i) the subordination of military power to civilian power, (ii) the regular occurrence of competitive elections that make possible the rotation of parties in government, and (iii) the respect of the fundamental freedoms, of institutional stability and juridical security.

PAPEP projects are viable and effective in societies in which these basic elements of democracy are accepted by the majority of the political and social actors, although there may be discrepancies on its scope (some may think that these elements are sufficient to define democracy, while others may think that they are necessary but not sufficient)³. PAPEP projects are also viable and productive in contexts with strong discrepancies on the conditions that make democracy viable. For example, they may be applied in societies in which there are antagonistic positions on the social and economic requirements that must be satisfied, in order to make possible an effective citizenship exercise.

A PAPEP project may only be executed successfully in a society where the majority of the political and social actors (including the members of their elites) value and desire democracy, at least as a medium and long-term objective. In the current context, ample evidence from the different sources confirms that this empiric supposition is effectively complied with: it does not happen that

³ A somewhat more detailed exposition of these debates is found in González (2006).

democracy is rejected by a significant number of Latin Americans, and it does not happen that it is perceived as imposed by outside forces.

With differences from one country to the other (for example, relative to the size of the majorities that support the democratic order) the assumption is confirmed in the entire continent.⁴

ASSUMPTION 2: Institutions are important

A second assumption of the PAPEP project is that no matter the economic and social conditions that must be fulfilled for the stabilization of a democratic regime, institutional aspects are essential. Without well-designed institutions, acceptably balanced and accepted by a large majority of the population, democracy cannot be sustained in the medium and long-term.

The above *does not* mean that institutional aspects are sufficient to ensure proper functioning of the democratic order, in fact there are good reasons to believe the opposite. What the second assumption affirms is that the institutional dimension is not “an epiphenomenon of what really matters but rather a constitutive part of democracy (PNUD 2004, p.176). If this is so, then there are reasons to favor a healthier institutional design and greater stability of fundamental rules of the game.

Acknowledgment of the importance of institutional aspects plays a double role in justifying the pertinence of a PAPEP project. In the first place it plays a *conceptual* role: an assumption of the “PAPEP logic” is that contributing toward helping actors find ways of strengthening the institutional order and improving the functioning of institutions will help to strengthen democracy. This conceptual link is considered well argued in recent politological literature.

In second place, acknowledgment by the principal actors of the importance of the institutional order is an *empirical* prerequisite for progress in a PAPEP project. A PAPEP project is only able to make contributions on the issues that the principal actors effectively *speak of* (although with variable

⁴ Un análisis reciente, incluyendo tendencias y contratendencias (especialmente en el corto plazo), es el de *La Democracia en América Latina* (PNUD 2004).

degrees of agreement and disagreement on details). If only a minority in a given society acknowledges the importance of institutions, a PAPEP project may record the fact but will not be able to make a major contribution to the improvement of the institutional fabric.

As in the case of the earlier assumption, abundant evidence shows that a great majority of present day Latin American societies effectively acknowledge the importance of institutions. Both public opinion and members of the elite amply acknowledge their relevance. There is strong demand for better institutions (better administration of justice, better electoral laws, etc) even when it is simultaneously believed that institutional quality is not sufficient to ensure quality democracies⁵.

ASSUMPTION 3: “practical” politics are also important

A third assumption of the “PAPEP logic” has already been mentioned: the viability and balance of the institutional order do not depend exclusively on good institutional design, but on the way that this design is *worked out* and the way it is put into practice. In this regard PAPEP projects participate in the “turn toward politics” that in the recent past has distanced itself from more or less “technocratic” approaches typical of earlier decades. In particular the “PAPEP logic” assumes as well-founded the following affirmations:

- (a) the ability of generating public agreements on the need for institutional change has at least as much impact on the viability of the initiative, as the intrinsic quality of the design itself;
- (b) the installation *process* of an institutional solution (its capacity for generating positive incentives, providing alternatives for the “losers”, of neutralizing the de-legitimation risks) is as important as the technical quality of the designed solution;
- (c) the handling of times in the change-introduction process (and most especially the form of managing tensions between short-term costs and medium and long term benefits) is essential to ensure the viability of any institutional change process.

⁵ Continent-wide public opinion surveys, such as *Latinobarómetro*, provide very consistent evidence in this regard

Contrary to the two above cases, it is not a precondition, that the majority of political and social actors should share these convictions. In principle, it would sufficient if these convictions are shared and supported by the actors who propose and promote changes (for example, government coalition members). In any case, there are indications that these ideas have been amply disseminated among Latin American political and social actors. In fact it can be argued that this is not a vision suggested by academia or by technicians that flows toward the current actors in the arena, but rather an already present (and long standing) vision among actors, that flows toward academia and technicians who participate in public policy design.

ASSUMPTION 4: The actors' vision is crucial

The last supposition of the “PAPEP logic” is that the actors’ vision matters. This affirmation can be understood in a general and also in a more restrictive sense.

Generally speaking the actors’ vision is important because as has been observed already, the consensus building *processes* and installation of new institutional solutions, matter. The knowledge of subjective perceptions (the most common fears and mistrusts, the perceived images of other actors, the way in which preferences are ordered) is decisive to identify blockade risks and eventual points of support to be used advantageously. This “subjective” knowledge is an important complement to the more “objective” information usually provided by technical studies (for example, the way in which an institutional change will modify income distribution).

In order to validate the “PAPEP logic”, it is not necessary to specify the impact of these “subjective” factors in comparison to “objective” factors. It is enough to admit that *both* are important, in the sense that both are able to generate blockade or conflict attitudes. That the income or the influence capacity of a specific actor (for example rural producers) will be affected by an institutional decision, is a fact that allows prediction of some degree of opposition. That the members of the group *believe* that a particular innovation will harm them (even though this might not be objectively true) is an equally good resistance predictor, at least in the short and medium-term, and that the long-term

benefits of a policy will not come to happen, if there are blockades in the short or medium terms, is decisive.

The restrictive interpretation of this fourth assumption is fundamentally- but not exclusively- applied to elites: a subjective conviction sufficiently shared among those with decision-making capabilities usually becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the principal economic agents believe that inflation will increase, the protection measures they will adopt could become inflation generators. If the main political actors expect a short-term increase in political violence, it is probable that the measures taken by each will confirm said suspicion in others. Therefore, knowing the more widespread subjective visions (mainly, but not exclusively existing among members of the elites) is an important input for the preparation of short and medium-term scenarios

Whether the general or restrictive interpretation is adopted on the importance of the actors, the “PAPEP logic” assumes the capacity of politics for generating spaces where these actors may exchange arguments and proposals to reach agreements or process differences. Such an exchange can only happen in a framework of mutual acknowledgment of the identities, perceptions and interests of the different actors. PAPEP projects aim at generating inputs to facilitate this process.

ASSUMPTION 5: The dialogue has transforming capacities

PAPEP projects intend to produce substantive inputs for dialogue among the different actors (government agents, social and political leaders, economic actors, cooperation agencies) and effectively promote this dialogue in the final stages of its execution. The assumption underlying this intention is that the exchange of ideas and points of view not only allows information to be transmitted, but also has the capacity of transforming mentalities and behaviors. In particular it is assumed that the constant, respectful and organized exercise of a well-informed dialogue that takes differences of opinion and conflict of interests into consideration as normal situations rather than anomalies tends to produce at least the following effects⁶:

⁶ The following list reflects elaborations by Pruit & Thomas 2007, pp. 10 ss.

- (a) strengthen the disposition of peaceful conflict resolution in the actors;
- (b) increases capacity for cooperation in spite of political alienations;
- (c) favors the development of inclusive agendas that incorporate the interlocutors' interests and needs;
- (d) promotes citizen participation;
- (e) develops the communication and intellectual capacities required to deal with complexity;
- (f) stimulates the search for innovative solutions;
- (g) favors a culture of results evaluation
- (h) facilitates collective learning;
- (i) improves the quality of public discourse;
- (j) reduces the distance between experts and citizens;
- (k) Leads to more rational and better informed decision-making processes.

4. GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS

A PAPEP project may be developed in three different levels (or a combination of the same): at a national level, a supranational level or a sub-national level. In any of these cases the project is organized in four stages: design, data collection, analysis and devolution. The principal result of the analysis is the preparation of prospective scenarios that are submitted for discussion by the actors at the moment of devolution. In any of the three level in which it is applied and any of the four stages being worked on, the fundamental methodological principal is "active neutrality".

4.1. First methodological distinction: three levels

A PAPEP project being carried out at a national level takes a country as its analysis unit. A PAPEP project that is being carried out at a supranational level takes a region (and not merely a sum of countries) as an analysis unit. A PAPEP project that is carried out at a sub-national level takes at its analysis unit a region within a country.



Level 1: National

Most of the PAPEP projects carried out until now were performed at a national level: the analysis unit is the country as a whole, and the actors considered are national actors (national government, political parties, union and entrepreneurial organizations, communications media and social organizations active in the territory as a whole).

National PAPEPs have proven to be profitable for the design of short and medium-term prospective scenarios; they have generated useful inputs for strategic reflection by different actors, and have supported the work of diverse local UNDP offices. National PAPEPs also offer several operational advantages:

- (a) identifying the more relevant members of the political, social and economic elites is simpler;
- (b) carrying out opinion surveys that ensure good levels of statistical representation is comparatively easy;
- (c) finding and recurring to secondary literature during the general project design stages and preparation of the interview guidelines is also comparatively easy;
- (d) It is comparatively easy for political and social actors to appropriate their results.

Level 2: Regional

Nevertheless, national PAPEPs do not allow registration of all the important tendencies that affect political decision-making processes within a country. With different degrees of importance according to the cases, the exploration of prospective scenarios is conditioned by extra-national trends (both political and economic) that cannot be described with precision from the data collected within the

frontiers of a specific state. These phenomena not easily registered from a mere national perspective may have two different origins:

- (a) intra-regional processes such as economic and political integration, some population movements and strategic alliances among rulers;
- (b) extra-regional phenomena that affect several countries simultaneously, such as changes in the immigration policies in the United States or transformations linked to drug-trafficking.

To analyze the effects of this type of phenomena, some *regional* PAPEP experiences have been attempted. The most complete consisted of an analysis of the predominant opinions of influential elites in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and the United States. In this case, the analysis unit was Latin America as a whole, although it is possible to carry out studies of this type with a more limited scope (for example, Central America, South America or the Southern Cone). An exploratory study of the opinion of influential elites in the European Union was also carried out on the basis of a smaller number of consultations.

Finally, in some national PAPEP cases, consultations have been carried out in the United States centered on the situation and perspectives of the countries being analyzed, as they are seen from the United States' point of view.

The regional perspective is not the sum of national cases, but rather a snapshot of the common intersections, interests and challenges (sometimes contrary) that the societies of the regions share beyond their differences and specific characteristics. These common points have often driven or slowed down, processes of integration or alliance between neighbors, but they also foster trends that affect the internal life of each individual country. It has to do, therefore, with observing common regularities and problems that are significant in themselves, and that at the same time may have explicative value when analyzing restrictions and opportunities in national cases.

A regional PAPEP has three distinctive characteristics:

- (a) it is applied in several countries (inside or outside the region under consideration) under the condition that fieldwork is carried out simultaneously or approximately simultaneously;
- (b) local studies are performed starting from a research design that covers the whole of the region under consideration, which implies that they use (at least in part) the same interview guidelines and the same survey forms;
- (c) Results analysis is made taking *the region* (or a part of it) as the analysis unit, which implies extracting conclusions that must be more than the comparison or aggregation of the results obtained at the national level.

The importance of regional PAPEPs will probably increase with time, resulting from the two processes that are already limiting (or could limit in the future) the decision-making capacity of national governments. The first of these is the globalization process, considered as the growing importance of international commerce, on the total volume of interchange and in the acceleration of financial and migratory flows. The second process is the consolidation of different regional commercial and political integration organizations, such as CAFTA and MERCOSUR. As these processes continue to move forward, regional studies will increase in pertinence and explicative capability.

Level 3: Sub-national

Finally, work methodology also allows the performance of studies at a more disaggregated level than that of the nation-state. In this case this means carrying out a sub-national PAPEP, that applies to a specific area or problem within a country.

To date, only one study of this type has been done, centered on the Panama transoceanic canal. This was, therefore, a sub-national study in a small country with a reduced population. However, sub-national PAPEPs seem to be especially appropriate for large countries with great demographic

development. For example sub-national PAPEPs could be envisioned as applied to Greater Buenos Aires (Argentina), the State of Sao Paulo (Brazil) or the Federal District in Mexico.

The design of a sub-national PAPEP demands to be able to count on detailed information of political and social actors, members of the elites and the economic and political processes in effect in the region being considered. Depending on the relevance and degree of development of this region, this information could be more or less easy to obtain. In any case, the contribution of local informants (and not merely of people installed in the nation's capital) is essential to ensure the quality and pertinence of the information generated.

4.2. Second methodological distinction: four stages

Every PAPEP project has four stages: design, data collection, analysis and devolution. This main *conceptual* product of the PAPEPs is the set of scenarios resulting from their analysis. The main products (in plain terms) are the devolution instances.

Stage 1: design

The design stage is that in which the *issues* on which the project will work, the *actors* who will be consulted, and the *instruments* to be employed, are defined. Data collection instruments to be used in gathering information start from these definitions. These definitions depend on the project's specific objectives and the resources available for its execution.

The design stage has a double starting point. First, the set of informal interactions in which the concerns and interests of the relevant actors (national and extra-national) are registered, as well as the possible courses of appropriate action to meet these concerns. The second starting point with variable intensities and durations, is the data collection and information analysis of a contextual and secondary character (that is, not generated by the project itself) which provides reasonably trustworthy data on:

- (a) ongoing political discussion and decision-making processes in the territorial unit being analyzed;
- (b) the identity of the main political, economic and social actors involved in these processes;
- (c) the possible conflict causes existing among these actors, in general terms, and particularly in relation to these processes;
- (d) the potentially destabilizing situations that could be generated during those processes;
- (e) the states of opinion or particular perceptions that might have been identified in relation to said processes.

There is no completely neutral form of collecting this information. For a long time now, it has been accepted that “pure data” does not exist. What exists is information “formatted” in conceptual frameworks. The basic caveats on this matter are also well known: do the work from the perspective of the “best practices” and conceptual models available (i.e. “state of the art”), have access to the most accredited literature, identify the local sources of information considered to be most trustworthy, check the information with qualified informants.

The analysis of this secondary information (together with the resources available to the project) will be the basis on which three central decisions will be made on the research design:

- (a) which are the data collection instruments to be used during fieldwork (especially, are interviews with elites to be used exclusively, or if focus groups or public opinion surveys are used);
- (b) which will be the specific issues on which opinions will be collected;
- (c) who will be the actors from which opinions will be solicited (if this means interviews with members of the elites, this component includes a listing of persons to be interviewed; in the case of focus groups, it includes recruitment criteria; it has to do with opinion surveys, includes sampling criteria).

The final result of the design stage includes:

- (a) the nature of eventual papers to be done, summarizing the “state of the art” on some key aspect of the project;
- (b) interview guides and (eventually) guidelines for focus group discussions and survey forms to be used;
- (c) a list of elite members to be interviewed and (eventually) recruitment criteria for focus groups and sampling design in the case of a survey.

Stage 2: data collection

This is the stage in which the original information to be provided by the PAPEP project will be generated. As noted in the above paragraph, this information may be obtained by one or several of the following instruments: interviews to members of the political, economic and social elites, focus groups and public opinion surveys.

In the corresponding section, some aspects of the different data-collection instruments will be noted. At this time, it is important to emphasize that the approach of a PAPEP project consists mainly in collecting the perspectives of the different actors. For this reason, one of the main challenges presented by these projects is to achieve adequate communication. There are no recipes or universally useful ways of doing this, but at minimum it is necessary to employ the language that is most similar to that of the actors themselves. This has important implications for the composition of the teams. A PAPEP project interviewer must be a highly qualified person, with analysis and conceptual capability, and sufficient autonomy as to make decisions on the go, but at the same time, must be an effective communicator who manages to make contact with diverse interlocutors from different activity areas.

It is important to do the data collecting in a relative short period of time (ideally, no more than a few weeks) in case new events should “contaminate” the responses of the actors consulted. If between the first and the last interview there should occur events that modify the scenario and impact on dominant perceptions, the collected contents will not be comparable with each other.

For the same reason, it is necessary to select, for the data collection stage, periods that can be foreseen as “calm”, that is, where no high-impact events are predicted. There are no rules for absolute guarantees in this sense, but at least it is important to discard those periods in which it is *certain* that relevant events will take place. For example, for collection, a period in which elections or changes of authorities will take place should not be selected. Probably, it is not convenient to do so in periods of intense economic activity of national relevance (such as high tourist season, for example).

In the case of a regional PAPEP (or of a national PAPEP that includes collection of opinions outside the analyzed country) it is essential that data collecting be carried out simultaneously or almost simultaneously. Otherwise, control over the influence of internal or external events will be lost.

Stage 3: analysis

Once data collection is finished, the stage of analysis of the data obtained begins. The procedures for doing this analysis will depend on the instruments employed. If the choice is focus groups or interviews with members of elites, qualitative techniques will be used. If a public opinion survey was included, quantitative techniques must be used. PAPEP projects do not propose innovation in these matters, but use standard techniques (both qualitative as well as quantitative) currently employed in social sciences⁷.

Whatever the procedures used, the analysis work intends to achieve the following results:

- (a) describe the *predominant perceptions* of the political, economic and social actors (with respect to issues in discussion, current decision-making processes and their own objectives and restrictions):
- (b) explore *trends and mechanisms* that may be influencing said processes (for example conflict logics that may dominate the behavior of the actors);

⁷ On this point, see, for example, National Science Foundation (2007).

- (c) when dealing with political decision-making processes for application of decisions, evaluate the possibility of *blockades* that may occur in their diverse stages or “segments”;
- (d) identify short and medium term *prospective scenarios*;
- (e) Explore possible *actions* that would permit sidestepping those blockades or conflicts which have the greatest destabilizing capability.

Stage 4: devolution

Devolution is at the same time the *last stage* and the *final product* of the PAPEP projects. It is not the formal delivery of a product separable from the execution process, but the presentation of a constitutive part of the project itself. A PAPEP project that has fulfilled the earlier stages in a satisfactory manner, but fails at the moment of devolution, will be a failed or incomplete project. Devolution includes (but does not end with) the presentation of a document summarizing the principal conclusions of the work. This document contains a short and medium-term political analysis and presents two kinds of elements:

- (a) *situation diagnosis* : on the issues in discussion, the perceptions and positioning of the actors, as well as the trends that affect decision-making processes; and
- (b) *Forecast*: on the probability that blockades and conflicts may emerge, as well as to the possibility of orientation toward alternative scenarios.

But the purpose of devolution is not only to communicate the main *conceptual* results to relevant national actors (and international cooperation), but to initiate with *those* actors a debate on possible changes. Devolution has, in this sense, a *dialogue component*: it attempts to actively promote certain values (institutional strengthening, democratic consolidation and human development), to contribute with useful ideas to the avoidance of undesirable scenarios, moving toward more desirable scenarios (Pruit & Thomas 2007, pp. 32ff.).

Devolution is not an academic instance: it is not limited to diagnosis and analysis, but it involves the actors in change processes. However, although it aims at fostering the generation of ideas on “how

to act”, it is not a consulting instance in the traditional sense of the term. The differences between a PAPEP project and normal political consulting tasks are (at least) of two types:

- (a) the devolution of a PAPEP project is generally made to a collective target audience, including actors with rivalries or competitive relations among each other. This does not normally occur in consulting activities, which propose to advise and strengthen a specific actor in relation to rivals and competitors;
- (b) The way in which the contributions of a PAPEP project are made is already part (preliminary or initial) of a decision-making process. Precisely because it intends to nourish the democratic process, a PAPEP contribution can never be a mere “technical recipe” but rather an input directed to feeding a process of uncertain results (the so-called “democratic uncertainty”).

In this last aspect resides the difference between the “PAPEP logic” and the more traditional models of technocratic intervention. Those models used to look on development-oriented politics as technical questions that accepted technically correct answers (Stein et al. 2005, p.255). From that perspective, the more complete, detailed and closed the proposal, better was its quality. The natural procedure consisted of identifying the technically correct solution (or the best of the technically correct solutions) and then convincing decision makers that this was, in effect, the appropriate solution.

However, the “PAPEP logic” assumes that the discussion is not technical. Therefore, the most useful contributions will be those that take into account the open and democratic nature of the process. Contribution designs must anticipate the question of their own political viability, and their content must be open and flexible to facilitate their incorporation into the democratic construction. Development “does not depend so much on selecting the correct policies from a technical viewpoint, but in negotiating, approving and implementing them in ways that help their political survival and effective application (...) [political] institutions and processes are not neutral or merely instrumental; they are the crucible in which policies are forged and acquire their true form and meaning.” (Stein et

al., 2005,, pp.255-56). In fact, these requisites do not *replace* the exigencies for technical quality, but are *added* to these.

Devolution is an initial or preliminary stage in a (necessarily plural) democratic debate on collective priorities, anchored in diagnoses, trends and scenarios resulting from PAPEP projects. As a consequence of less “technical” (or “technocratic”) and more political policies, *priorities* are more important for the “PAPEP logic” than the precise nature of the *policies* designed to face those priorities. The goal is to help generate (and constructively develop) a debate on development urgencies and bottlenecks and on the construction and institutional consolidation of the specific circumstances of the countries involved.

4.3. The main conceptual result: the “prospective scenarios”

The diagnosis to which any PAPEP project arrives, identifies the main characteristics of the issues being analyzed (including their principal *actors*), it explains why these characteristics are considered “principal” (that is, justifies their relevance), analyzes their past evolution (why and how they reached their current state), and examines how they interrelate (at present). All things being equal the *forecast* explores the possible evolution of these characteristics, and proposes hypothesis on alternative evolutions if modifications are made to some contextual elements.

Diagnosis and *prognosis* are the basic inputs for the construction of *prospective scenarios*. These scenarios are the main expected result of the analysis work. The fundamental purpose of devolution is to transfer these scenarios to the actors themselves.

The construction of prospective scenarios is not a science, not even a defined set of techniques. It is, rather, a handcrafted method (although it can use sophisticated instruments), supported by a set of ideas, techniques and substantive conjectures referred to the future. These conjectures are, at the most, “plausible”.

Although there are precedents in the between-wars period, this type of analysis was developed, above all, in the second half of the past century.⁸ Its fundamental assumption is (perhaps deceptively) simple: the future is not determined; it is open⁹. It is, at least partially, “constructible”. In spite of its name, one could say that the real objective of prospective analysis is not the future, but the present, because it reflects on the future in order *to act* on the present. Deep rooted trends constricting the evolution of those tendencies are not ignored, but it assumes that there are always (except in the very short-term) margins of freedom. The future does not exist yet, not only (nor principally) for the obvious reason that it has not arrived yet, but because it is not determined; there are several possible futures. The idea is to identify (*from* the perspective of the issues being analyzed) which those possible futures are, and which of these possible futures are relatively more probable. Those possible and relatively more probable futures are the “scenarios”¹⁰; the same analysis that produces them should show the paths that could lead toward them¹¹. The goal is to try to construct some of the more attractive of those scenarios and avoid the less desirable ones, independently of their relative probabilities¹².

⁸ In its origins, there are two schools, an Anglo-Saxon one (whose best-known initial contributions are perhaps, those of the Rand Corporation) and a French one. States and armies had important initial roles, but then international organizations and great corporations went on to demand this type of analysis regularly. (Alemany 2006).

⁹ The very synthesized description that follows relies on De Jouvenel (1999) and Godet (2001).

¹⁰ No matter what the situation analyzed should be, there normally no single set of scenarios. In the first place, since scenarios cannot be identified “from the perspective of problems being analyzed”, it is evident that different problem situations involve potentially very different scenarios. In second place, even within the same problem situation, different scenario designers can arrive at different scenarios when their analytical emphasis or goals are different. If these sets of different scenarios (for a single problem situation) are well supported, then all are equal legitimate (said more precisely: as legitimate as the goals and values of their designers) and are equally valuable guides for action.

¹¹ “Scenario” can also be defined (in a wider sense) as the sum of the “scenario” (in the recently described sense) plus the road that leads to it.

¹² In particular: if the most probable scenario is and the action contributes to the construction of another scenario, desirable but less probable, in this case the “well done prospective guarantees that the anticipated phenomena will not come to happen, because venues will have been opened to affect the course of events” (Arocena 1992, p. 11)

4.4. The fundamental methodological principle: “Active neutrality”

PAPEP projects *do have* their own political agenda: promoting democracy, but are also *neutral* in two different ways. This is why their perspective is called “active neutrality”.¹³

In first place, PAPEP projects are neutral because, as noted in the beginning, the majority of the principal national actors in Latin America *share* the political goals of the PAPEPs, that is, the strengthening of democracy. Therefore acting in order to achieve this goal does not imply discrimination between actors.

In second place, PAPEP projects are neutral because they assume that these shared goals can be sought with policies of different *ideological signs*. PAPEP projects are not necessarily neutral with respect to the different policies proposed, (in appropriate circumstances they can pronounce themselves in favor or against these), but they are with respect to the “ideological signs” that these exhibit. PAPEPs may not argue in favor or against a policy or family of policies *because* they are center right or center left. In this level, decisions are *national* and PAPEPs are agnostic.

The “PAPEP logic” assumes that there is political diversity oriented to fulfilling shared goals (strengthening of democracy and democratic governance) that belong to different signs or express diverse ideological inclinations but are articulated by competent technicians. Each one may have strong and weak points, but in principle they are all applicable. This does not mean that in all countries in the region and in all circumstances, *all* political proposals could be equally plausible or defensible. What is interesting is that plausible and defensible policies may emerge from any of the ideological sides, and that in some moment these probably will *come to be*. Otherwise, why would it be positive to have rotations of *parties* in government, and with these, at least occasionally, of ideological *sides*?

The second type of neutrality is the most important with respect to the justification of PAPEP projects before political, social and economic actors. The “PAPEP logic” ensures that none of these

¹³ Both the expression as well as the initial idea belong to Fernando Calderón.



actors will be favored, because this would jeopardize its own assumptions. But at the same time, the “PAPEP logic” has the capacity of generating arguments in favor or against specific policies, independently of being identified with some political party or ideological side. The legitimacy of the approach lies in that it analyzes policies from the point of view of their impact on the prospective scenarios, and in the light of the ultimate goals shared in principle by all the actors.

Additionally, it makes this examination in a dialogue with representatives of the different parties and ideological sides, because this is its specific form of favoring the construction of democratic decisions.

5. THE INSTRUMENTS

The instruments used by the PAPEP projects differ according to the stage of project execution: design, data collection, analysis or devolution.

5.1. Stage 1: design

After registering the concerns and interests of the relevant actors who will put a PAPEP project in motion, the next step is the generation of a preliminary diagnosis or *pre-diagnosis* on the current situation of the country or region, considering the political, social and economic arenas. In this case it has to do with achieving as “objective” a description as possible, beyond the perceptions of the actors, founded on the traditional indicators that allow picturing these situations (such as, for example, product evolution, Gini coefficient, the state of public finances, electoral participation levels, statistics on social conflictive tendencies etc.)

For many more or less evident reasons (including some very practical ones, such as costs in time and money) it does not make sense to develop an original investigation with the objective of producing this preliminary diagnosis. The appropriate procedure here is, rather, to directly summarize “what is known”, starting from, if possible, what is said by those who generated the knowledge (those “who

know”). To , it is enough to make a systematic collection of the available secondary literature, and eventually, if necessary, commission essays summarizing the situation.

As for the first step (collection of secondary data), the usual methodological criteria must be applied in its development when trying to know “the state of the art” in a specific domain. At minimum it is necessary to:

- (a) collect recently published materials on the issues being analyzed in the more prestigious academic journals in the corresponding area;
- (b) collect the set of books published within and outside the country, following a double *relevance* criterion (that generally is associated to the prestige of the publishing house) and of plurality of approach (for which it is necessary to make a selection that includes divergent points of view); collect publicly accessible reports from consulting firms and independent political analysts;
- (c) collect public opinion survey results, economic statistics and recent electoral results;
- (d) in the cases in which it should be necessary, recur to qualified informants that must have a technical character and a high level of professionalism (economic analysts, public opinion analysts, etc.)

When essays summarizing “what is known” are commissioned, author selection must follow two essential criteria:

- (a) a criterion of professional solvency (these must be acknowledged experts in their respective fields)
- (b) A criterion of political-ideological balance (the *set* of experts must be ideologically ample, encompassing, insofar as possible, well-regarded intellectuals from the different currents of thought).

In contemporary matters, each party or opinion group will have its preferred experts, and in turn, the experts will have their political, party or at least ideological preferences (in the wide sense). It is



essential, therefore, that during the execution of a PAPEP project, all voices should be heard from the beginning (at least the most important). Selective deafness in this context, though not deliberate, endangers the equilibrium essential to the political viability of proposals resulting from PAPEPs, and hinders or makes it difficult for these proposals to have the necessary flexibility to become protagonists in an open and democratic debate.

It is important to make precise demands to the persons in charge of drafting the preparatory essays. The objective is not to present results of original research, nor to test those already existing, but “simply” summarize what is already known on the issues being analyzed. To ensure the usefulness of the materials, it is critical that these should differentiate between what seems to be knowledge accepted by the larger part of the professional-academic community and those aspects on which there seems to be no consensus.

The PAPEP projects experience shows that this procedure is efficient, that is, that it allows great progress, employing a relatively modest part of the available resources. Since the objective is not innovation, but rather summarizing that which is already known (knowledge that with frequency the authors themselves have contributed toward generating), the times for drafting can be very short. Very frequently the authors have already written texts that pursue similar ends, and therefore must only update and adapt them to the PAPEP’s specific needs. This, in turn, helps to keep the cost of the essays low.

5.2. Stage 2: data collection

The instruments for collecting original information may be divided into two categories: those that reflect the points of view of the population in general (“the sovereign”), and those that reflect the points of view of the members of the elite (“the leaders”). This distinction is especially pertinent in the case of PAPEP projects, since these give much more heuristic and predictive value to dialogue with members of the leading minorities.

Listening to the voice of the sovereign (I): focus groups or discussion groups

The focus group or discussion group technique has been employed for something more than half a century (Merton and Kendall 1946; Merton, Fiske and Kendall, 1956). Its first uses were academic (to study interpersonal relations in an army), but during the following thirty or forty years, the technique was oriented toward marketing studies. From this commercial use, and from some of its conceptual assumptions related to the consumer behavior, the “motivational” term with which these groups are still generally described, remained. During the last two decades, the technique “returned” to academia (without leaving the professional plane), and its scope of its applications was widened, including basic (“academic”) and applied (for example, electoral campaigns) political analysis. Valles (1999, ch. 8) summarizes the history, concepts, practices and variations of this technique.

According to the more frequent uses, the participants in these groups (generally between eight and twelve persons) must not know each other. They are invited to participate (“recruited”) according to criteria that depend on the objectives of the case and of the strategy of the researchers. The groups discuss the issues proposed by a professional moderator (one or two persons). The moderator *organizes* the debate (is the “arbitrator” in speaking rules, presents issues) but does not *direct*. This is a very important distinction: given the issues, the direction in which the conversation/debate goes has to come from the groups itself, not from the moderator.

Group participants are not limited to providing responses in isolation, but rather react to what the rest are saying. The participants express themselves in their own language, they interrupt each other and permit the mechanisms and situations that inhibit, stimulate them or make them go into conflict, to become visible. This process reflects in this manner some of the interactions of daily life. The terminology and the form of expression provide, in themselves, valuable information beyond the substantive content of what is said. To capture and analyze these aspects, it is necessary for sessions to be recorded (sound and image). According to the places and companies that do this work, the sessions may also be observed “live” through one-way glass or closed circuit TV.

If the team in charge of a PAPEP includes experienced professionals, the technique can be employed with very few limitations. In all of Latin America, even in the smallest and least prosperous countries, there are consulting firms that regularly employ this instrument (though it may be only for commercial purposes). In these conditions, the PAPEP can design the work, moderate the sessions and analyze results, while the practical details and logistics are handled by the consulting firm.

If there are no experienced professionals in the PAPEP, then it would be prudent to commission an appropriate team for the task, following its performance closely. This is a professional task that needs knowledge and experience; it cannot be improvised. The criteria employed for contracting are the usual. Price is important, but it can never be the sole criterion. The cumulative reputation of the firms or professional teams that offer these services is usually the most important criterion to be considered. In sum, what is needed is an “informed buyer” strategy.

Listening to the voice of the sovereign (II): surveys

The systematic employment of surveys in social research began a little before focus groups. The principles on which professional contemporary surveys are based (the statistical inference) were systematized at the beginning of the last century, though with other purposes. These principles allow saying something about a very large population (of objects or persons, for example) starting from a relatively small “sample” of said population, if and only if the representative sample is selected according to certain criteria (“probabilistic” samples, including randomness). It is not certain that what is said about the population starting from what one knows of the sample is true (or “exact”), but if the appropriate rules are followed, the possibilities of error are known¹⁴.

Two of the most influential benchmarks in the dissemination of political surveys happened in 1936 and 1945. In 1936 a professional survey (Gallup) correctly anticipated the results of the United States presidential elections, against what was held at the time by a then famous publication that based its

¹⁴ The literature on surveys is vast. Biemer and Lyberg (2003) include a brief history and pay special attention to quality control



prediction on what its readers said. The number of readers that expressed their preferences was two orders of magnitude larger than the “professional” sample, but for the effects of that election, the readers of the magazine formed a biased group, that did not represent the electorate adequately, and their preferences did not coincide with those of the voters as a whole. In 1945, with similar techniques as those used in the United States, an English firm correctly predicted the Labor victory, and the defeat (that at the time many believe impossible) of the great leader of the war, Winston Churchill.

Since mid-nineteen twenties, professional public opinion surveys, on very different issues, were developed first in all the prosperous democracies, and then, rather more slowly, in other regions. Although with occasional errors, even in those countries with more experience and resources, political surveys are, today, reasonable trustworthy instruments.

Just as in the case of focus groups, if the team in charge includes professionals with survey experience, and if resources allow it,¹⁵ the PAPEP itself can carry out a complete survey (eventually outsourcing fieldwork). Otherwise, a survey can be commissioned to local firms, or even, if resources are limited, a more or less small “package” of questions can be contracted in an “omnibus” survey¹⁶.

All stages of a survey¹⁷ require training and professional experience. Once more, one cannot improvise. Professional teams that do public opinion surveys can be found today in all Latin American countries. In the region in general, the quality of political surveys (measure by a single but

¹⁵The price of a single nation-wide survey, even in small countries, with short distances and relatively low transportation costs, is several times higher to that of focus groups.

¹⁶“Omnibus” surveys are those that include groups of questions for different contracting agents. This can considerably lessen the total cost, although the “cost per question” may be normally greater.

¹⁷ Including, in particular, the drafting of the questionnaires. It can happen, even in established firms that this work could fall into the hands of persons without experience (young assistants, experts without work expertise in surveys). This happens in part for practical (and economic) reasons, and in part, for lack of rigorous professionalism.

important indicator: the precision of their pre-electoral estimations) improves and experience¹⁸. Here too, in sum, an “informed buyer” strategy is needed.

Listening to the voice of the leaders: interviews

The voice of the elites (understood as those groups of persons with high decision-making capacities in the political, social and economic arenas) is central for any national, supranational or sub-national analysis. Furthermore, as the analysis horizon shortens, and attention is focused on the short and medium terms, the ideas and behaviors of the leaders become even more important. Political elites, in particular, are decisive in shaping policies.

This consideration does not imply an elitist vision of politics, but it recognizes a specific influence factor that is especially relevant in a certain temporal horizon. “The demands and pressures emerging from the population and the electorate are surely more powerful influences than those coming from the elites, but this is correct in the medium and long term, “In the last case”. [Additionally,] ... although powerful, popular influence defines the great trends, it rarely defines policy strategies and details. The latter is the typical work of the leaderships: to give shape to different demands and pressures, usually assuming the representation of diverse sectors, including the elites (in a wide sense) of which they form part. Leaderships “express” these demands and negotiate between each other with variable degrees of polarization and conflict” (Achard and González 2004, p.87)

The leaders’ past *conduct* and general *ideas* are normally documented: in one way or another, they form part of the historic record. However, the implication of their ideas about the present and the future, their expectations and eventually their plans, are not documented or are only partially documented. Without this information, it is not possible to imagine prospective scenarios, because it is precisely those ideas, expectations and plans that will influence the decisions to be made in the immediate future. Therefore, it is essential for the objectives of a PAPEP project to collect all

¹⁸ In terms of precision there can be big differences between *firms* from the same country, and also between the groups of firms from different countries (i.e., *national* differences), easily observed in the media.

possible information on this kind of information, , and to achieve that it is indispensable to *talk with* the political elites. The conversation (“the interview”) is presumably the oldest and most traditional of the social and political research instruments. Herodotus and Thucydides used it. “What we have progressed since then are the ways of systematizing the information obtained in this manner”. (Sewell 2007).

The “series of interviews” of the PAPEP projects are a set of conversations that have common characteristics. This is the only tool employed by *all* PAPEP projects. In part due to this, and in part because these projects are oriented toward the future (in the short and medium term), the series of interviews are the most basic of all information- gathering instruments required by the “PAPEP logic”.

The main characteristics of the series of interviews that take place in all projects, are the following:

- (a) *The interviewees* are a sample of the top strata of national elites. The sample is *intentional* (interviewee selection is not random, it attempts to include top levels) and is relatively small (usually between forty and sixty persons).
- (b) Due to the nature of the project goals, the sample includes especially political elites. Its precise composition and the proportion of members of other elites to be interviewed, (such as entrepreneurs or opinion leaders) depends on the specific objectives of each PAPEP.
- (c) The interviewees are selected on the basis of the experience and knowledge of several experts on the issue to be analyzed, so to minimize the probability of inappropriate invitations and/or especially serious omissions. Whatever its precise composition may be, the sample must include members of all the principal currents of opinion (party, ideological). This political-ideological pluralism is crucial from the point of view of the PAPEP objectives (the opposite could seriously bias the study results, and therefore, the quality of its findings).
- (d) The *interviewers* must always be persons with experience in direct personal interaction with high ranking personalities such as the interviewees. Having good intellectual or professional

credentials is not enough, it helps to have personal political experience and consulting experience in different areas

- (e) It is Just as important for interviewers to be foreign helping tease the mistrust that usually emerges in sensitive interviews of this kind. If the interviewer is a compatriot, it is more probable that the interviewee will adopt a stereotyped role (“politically correct” or simply suspicious, for example), and the quality of the resulting information will diminish.
- (f) It is never easy to set up the *interview* because chosen personalities usually have full agendas (if not, maybe they should not be interviewed). This means that the interview set up must be well planned: including clearly explained letters, and telephone calls from the head of the Office in charge of the project to key actors.
- (g) The interview is not an interview “like many others”; it is special because of the nature of the issue being analyzed, because of the identity of the interviewee, because of the project goals, and because the project is part of the UN/UNDP. All this must be clarified while setting up and requesting the interviews.
- (h) The interview must follow clear guidelines, whose preparation requires professional experience. The content of the guidelines depends on the specific objectives of each PAPEP. After experimenting with different formats, experience has shown that some of them are particularly appropriate for the PAPEP goals.
- (i) The guidelines that have proved to be more appropriate are divided in two parts. The first, and most extensive only includes “open” questions (which do not have closed multiple choice answers). The questions originally included in the interview are the core of the conversation, in the sense that everything indicated therein must be asked. However it does not mean that, if circumstances should advise so , the interviewer may not incorporate other questions. This first part of the interview is qualitative, focalized, semi-structured (Valles 1999, Ch. 6). The second part (the briefest) on the contrary, is structured and closed. It only uses “Delphi type” closed questions, that is, the kind of questions used in Delphi studies to record beliefs on coming events

and subjective opinions on their probable occurrence¹⁹. The answers to this part of the interview allow analyzing the expectations of the interviewees and expected trends for the diverse key factors being identified (“variables”). These responses also allow rough conjecturing (although more credible because it is anchored on the opinions of personalities consulted) on the occurrence probability of different scenarios constructed by the project.

5.3. Stage 3: analysis

Two factors govern the analysis of the information generated by the different instruments: the project execution stage in which the analysis is performed (analysis is done at more than one stage: at least in design and in the analysis stage itself), and the characteristics proper to the instrument being used.

The *analysis of secondary information* during the design stage has a pre-diagnostic goal. It aims at identifying the main current political discussion and decision-making processes, the most relevant actors involved, the conflicts that could have occurred (whether recently concluded or not) and the context information that would help to understand the above

The results of this analysis are directly used for:

- (a) Commissioning, if necessary, summary essays that synthesize “what is already known” on the situations being studied;
- (b) preparing survey structures, guidelines for carrying out focus groups, and interviews;
- (c) lists of persons to be interviewed and relevant samples for the application of other information gathering instruments;

¹⁹In the text it says “Delphi type” to underline that the interview series are *not* Delphi studies. The most visible difference is that Delphi studies, in their classic format, seek to build estimations starting from an iterated procedure in which opinions generally are, in some way convergent. In a first stage interviewees are asked what they think about X; in the second stage the same thing is asked again, of the same interviewees, but before this they are shown the results obtained in the first stage. When answering the second time, the interviewee knows how the others answered (in the first stage).

- (d) preparing the central questions (on current processes, the behavior of the actors, conflicts and challenges) that will guide the interpretation of the information gathered through the different instruments.

Focus group results are not statistically “representative” (as survey results can be). Therefore, their analysis is based on qualitative techniques that today are highly standardized. The application of these techniques allows obtaining a very complete panorama of the public opinion trends on the issues studied, and of the opinions prevalent in the environment of the participants. The groups generally allow identifying the principal opinions and attitudes on the issues discussed. However, the opinions emerging from them cannot be considered as statistically relevant in the population as a whole.

Experience shows that a relatively small number of well-designed groups identifies the main perceptions on the issues under discussion (it is very improbable that something truly important might not be detected by a set of groups), and can even give a rough, approximate idea of the incidence of such ideas in the population²⁰, whose quantitative estimates can be later obtained through public opinion surveys. Focus groups also help to identify opinions and attitudes; they help to explore the factors that affect or configure these opinions, and permit analysing the form in which people interchange ideas with each other, (the form in which they are “structured”). , Focus groups are one of the most efficient instruments available today. The results they generate are very well complemented with those generated by surveys, in part because they provide information of a different nature (their results “add” qualitative data), and in part because -in professional practice- it is very rare that the results of a set of focus groups may contradict surveys findings (their main results are usually consistent with each other)²¹.

²⁰ Distinguishing between, for example, the ideas that probably have considerable influence (because the reappear spontaneously and frequently in different groups). And those that may perhaps be marginal (because they rarely appear and/or if, when they appear, they find no echo among the other group participants).

²¹ Assuming that all are professional works and reasonable competent.

The analysis of *survey results* consists of interpreting the responses given by the persons surveyed, considering the certainties and uncertainties generated by quantitative analysis methods usually used in social sciences.

It is often said, somehow redundantly, that the total error of a survey is the sum of its “sampling” errors, plus the “non-sampling” errors. The roots of the survey in statistical inference, and the “technical data sheets” that serious surveyors include with the results (including sample type, sample size and error margins expected by the whole set of samples) seem to suggest, involuntarily, that the technique is complex and that the problems linked to its eventual sampling errors are, in some way, “technical”.

That is not the case. Techniques in use today are doubtless perfectible, but their bases are relatively simple, solid and amply proved. The fundamental problem is that samples of appropriate size, designed and executed with satisfactory criteria, are much more expensive than gross “approximations” that do not fulfill the requisites of statistical inference rules. Even so, normally they come closer to real results than the “Fuzzy” criteria of the observers.

“Non-sampling errors” are a mixture of technical and practical problems (mainly economic, just as in sampling errors). These error sources include inadequate questionnaires, surveyors and supervisors, registration errors and processing errors. These problems are aggravated by loose or inexistent quality controls. Good quality control, including good fieldwork control, is not cheap.

Surveys allow the production of prudently handled conclusions supported by statistically representative data. This representativeness is achieved by means of an adequate sampling technique and through the use of questionnaires with “closed” questions that make the responses of those surveyed strictly comparable.

Surveys are more representative but less sensitive to the nuances and inflections of the collected opinions. The situation is exactly the opposite than that of focus groups which reflect those nuances

and inflections very well, but lack statistical representativeness. A combination of both techniques generates optimal conditions for analytical work.

The series of interviews, finally, can produce results that come halfway between those generated by focus groups and surveys. In part due to the relatively small number of interviews, and above all because of the characteristics of the samples²², the resulting data of these series of interviews do not have “statistical representativeness”. This does not allow the use of the quantitative techniques used in surveys. However, *some* of their principal results can be summarized in figures.

Calculating the percentage of interviewees who express one or another opinion with respect to the universe consulted is always possible, but the majority of those percentages considered individually are useless. Although the majority of those consulted believe X, as the sample is intentional (and the number consulted is small), it could well happen that the majority of interviewees in another sample of similar size and selection criteria, would believe something different from X, and it could occur that the set of all elites relevant to the study (the “universe”) also could believe something different from X. The majority of a sample could well be the minority in another (and in the universe, which is what matters to the effects of this discussion).

However, *if* the majority of those consulted believes in X, and *if, separately*, X is *also* believed by:

- the majority of the government sympathizers consulted,
- the majority of the opposition sympathizers consulted,
- the majority of the *politicians* interviewed, and
- the majority of the *entrepreneurs* interviewed,

and *if additionally* these opinions are convergent (or at least consistent) with what is suggested by other trustworthy information sources, *then* it is most probable that the majority of the elites

²² The sample is not random or probabilistic, but it could be. A sample of said characteristics can only be designed if the “universe” (the set of *all* the members of the national elites included in the study) is well defined, at least in theory, and in this case this does not happen. On the possible ways of defining this universe, there are different ideas, whose implementation, additionally, frequently involves considerable difficulties.

effectively consulted do believe in X. The probability of this convergence of opinions happening by pure chance in this sample, but not in the “universe” certainly is not nil, not even negligible, but is acceptably modest.

Together with ability for marking reasonably trustworthy trends, interviews allow the collecting of judgments, nuances and quantifications with a high degree of sensitivity. This sensitivity is greater in the first part of the standard PAPEP project interview, in which the work is done with open questions and decreases in the second part, in which closed questions are included. On the other hand, the second part, allows under certain conditions the detection of trends in relatively more trustworthy form.

5.4. Stage 4: devolution

Devolution is the moment in which results are presented, and are socialized at the same time. This means that they are not offered as diagnostic or an action recipe ready to be applied, but rather as objects of discussion and interpretation.

This form of conceiving devolution becomes necessary once the importance of the political approach has been assumed as fundamental in policy formulation. But, additionally, it is especially pertinent in those countries in which PAPEP projects are applied.

The majority of the countries in the region suffer a situation of *institutional fragility* in some degree. The institutional solidity indicators compiled by different organizations and the results of consultations with national leaderships, carried out in the framework of different PAPEP projects, coincide in identifying significant deficits, at least in comparison with established democracies.

The existence of ample discretionary spaces is a consequence of this fragility is. According to the letter and spirit of Latin American legislations, policy *implementation* should occur in relatively autonomous institutional spaces, with well-defined attributions and responsibilities. But this is not what happens in practice. The issues are not processed and resolved in the corresponding spaces, but *outside* them. Decisions are taken by legitimate authorities acting illegitimately (because they

amply exceed their institutional attributions) or directly, by illegitimate authorities or alternative power structures.

Real decision makers are, in the first place, presidents, their close entourage, their advisors, party leaders and sub-leaders, and trusted personnel working with all these figures. In second place, there are those who for one reason or another, have influence on, or easy access to these political authorities: according to the context, entrepreneurs and the military (the most classic of the “corporations”), but also, according to circumstances, cultural, religious, union or social leaders.

Institutional deficits and too much discretionary power mean that the space for “technical” decisions within institutions decreases; while the space for politics increases politics. Spaces that in prosperous and consolidated democracies are in mainly technical-professional, are strongly political in such circumstances. This is not new: in the region such spaces have always been political, and they continue to be so. In any case, in theory today there are more institutions that should “internalize” those spaces and in theory function in a different way. But in practice, this is not easy. Institutional strengthening has advanced, and surely has progressed in form, but not enough in real actions.

It should not be assumed that technical studies can be applied directly to institutions, because of institutional deficits and abuse of discretionary power. Reality indicates that, throughout the different stages a project goes through, responsibilities are not clearly defined and in every moment technical components are mixed with political components. The latter have the potential capacity for blocking or significantly altering the project’s expected development. There is no single cut-off point for the process; instead, between political decisions and “technical” execution, several segments with their own cut-off points appear.

Politics continue to reappear when least expected. Case studies of substantive *non-political* nature that suffered serious problems show that the causes of the problems were political, and can be described in earlier terms. These were non-anticipated cases of “political risk”.

Paradoxically, it is possible that the development and strengthening of electoral democracies in circumstances of considerable institutional fragility should *fuel even more* these problems (at least initially when prediction is difficult). In emergent democracies, influential political actors in these “segments”, have *more power do to electoral competition. In parallel* institutional weaknesses blur the discretionary power of these same actors. Those with more power but with fewer restrictions than in the past will tend to abuse their influence, for profit. Similarly the number of potential influential actors will probably *increase*²³.

The above considerations suggest that devolution of the results obtained in the execution of a PAPEP project must be seen as a *political* moment. The correct concept is not to say that that project execution has ended at the moment of presenting results. The presentation of results is, rather, part of the project execution and opens a new work stage. Discussion of the results should allow, at minimum:

- (a) confronting diverse interpretations with regard to the results analysis;
- (b) guiding the actors in seeing those conflicts in which they are involved from new perspectives (in particular, from the perspective of their antagonists);
- (c) helping the actors to find out opportunities for cooperation and confluence that had not been seen before;

making the discussion explicit on strategic objectives, incentive and restriction structures, which is equivalent to generating a new discussion culture (in place of hiding what I want and giving the sensation that I do not perceive what the other wants, admitting publicly that we all want different things, that it is legitimate to do so, and that the challenge consists in finding trajectories and scenarios that will allow everyone to maximize their achievements without uniting the rest with unjustifiable externalities).

²³ Or “veto players” (Tsebelis 2002).

In general, two practical noteworthy consequences have been identified in this form of interpreting devolution. In first place, the demand for knowing the information generated and participating in its interpretation emerges frequently from the people involved in the project: technicians who drafted reports, officials who prepared official information, and most especially, the interviewees themselves.

In these conditions, those in charge of PAPEP projects have always committed to devolving to the interviewees all conclusions obtained. This generates certain expectations, which when properly satisfied, give prestige to the project. Experience shows that in this way one strengthens a virtuous circle from the point of view of project objectives:

- (a) PAPEP development generates interest,
- (b) this makes devolution more important,
- (c) and, for this very reason, devolution must reach, in several carefully planned stages, more extended groups beyond national leaderships²⁴.

Finally, this dynamic generates important feedback for the project end documents; it improves their quality and improves their dissemination among crucial audiences.

The second observation is that devolution conceived in these terms strengthens the image of the institution that develops them, by presenting it as the promoter of a more plural and democratic debate *style*, and in the end, as more favorable to the collective construction of consensus based and stable decisions. Furthermore, PAPEP's dialogical and participatory approach enables the generation of a "relational capital" that can be highly valuable and functional for UNDP work in the country, strengthening cooperation with and among national counterparts.

The most adequate instruments to sustain this devolution mechanics are *seminars* and closed *workshops* with high internal homogeneity. The fact that they are closed makes it impossible for

²⁴ Coming to a certain point, this requires training for the UNDP national Office teams. Proof of this came from experience; the first activity of this kind was a Workshop in Montevideo, in August, 2000. A year later a new Workshop was held (together with the Latin American Social Sciences Faculty FLACSO) in Buenos Aires.



PAPEP

*Political Analysis and Prospective
Scenarios Project*

participants to adopt strategic attitudes in front of the wider public (that is to say, that they speak thinking of what the media will pick up or what the public present will hear). In order to make interaction effective, mapping actors is fundamental to identify who is who, and in which group meeting he/she should participate. Usually the same results are presented more than once to different small homogeneous groups. This is done to create a friendly environment that supports constructive debate. On the contrary, large meetings of heterogeneous groups would make it difficult to achieve effective interaction. .

Publications can be a *part* of the devolution instruments, but they cannot be the principal vehicle, and much less the exclusive one. Moreover, in case of producing publications, these should collect at least a part of what was said at the seminars and workshops.

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PAPEP

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