Approaching sustainable planning from an indigenous platform

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Abstract

This paper explores the inter-relationships of ancestral domain, governance, and indigenous knowledge in the formation of a planning framework based on socio-spatial equity and ecological sustainability. An analysis is done of the nexus of *ancestral domain-governance*, *governance-indigenous knowledge* and, *ancestral domain-indigenous knowledge*, their implications for planning and how a careful evaluation of these nodes in relation with each other could determine socio-spatial parameters for a planning framework with long-term objectives of political sustainability, socio-cultural sustainability, and environmental or spatial sustainability. The cosmological context or spirituality forms an imminent fourth node being intrinsically connected to the three other nodes. The paper closes with an attempt to depict the relationship in the form of an analysis tetrahedron – not to take anything from social science but to accentuate the relationships.
Keywords: culture, indigenous planning, ancestral domain, governance, indigenous knowledge, relational approach, sustainability.

1   Introduction

The analysis tetrahedron looks at the inter-relationship of the three key elements of planning in the indigenous region (ancestral domain, indigenous knowledge, governance) forming the nodes of the triangular base nexus; and a fourth node, spirituality – its immanence through ritual in the daily lives of the indigenous people – impacting on the three other nodes, and completing a tetrahedron to be used as an analytical tool for planning.

The planning framework, as conceived herein, is premised on self-determination vis-à-vis communicative planning – "how planning might become

more inclusive of indigenous interests, knowledge and aspirations" (Sandercock [1]). I agree with Hibbard and Lane [2] that self determination as sovereignty can be thought of in terms of the interlocking dimensions of political autonomy, particular sets of social relations and more or less distinct cultural orders, and control over resources, especially land. These dimensions are seen in Philippine indigenous regions as reflected in native governance, indigenous knowledge systems, and ancestral domains respectively.

To these, I add an integrating dimension –spirituality, effectively forming an analysis tetrahedron. This is because despite inroads of Christianity, the Philippine indigenous peoples, particularly in the Cordilleras, continue to honor and venerate their ancestors and maintain their rituals for celebration, appeasement, or invoking their gods for good fortune. Spirituality in planning is approaching things holistically… (with) humans as beings comprised of different aspects that need to be in some kind of balance… that there are many components which make up the whole… that the whole is not simply the sum of its parts (Anhorn [3]). Sandercock [1] citing Palmer characterizes spirituality in planning as "the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected to the largeness of life".

2   The base nexus

The recognition of the ancestral domain is an essential start in the attainment of social equity because it acknowledges the property rights of indigenous people over the land they have historically claimed as their own. Tauli-Corpuz and Cariño [4] expresses this succinctly. "The right of self-determination for indigenous peoples cannot be fully realized if their right to their ancestral territories and natural resources is not recognized and respected." Governance is the enabling mechanism for ancestral domains to attain both political and economic sustainability. Ancestral domains attain ecological sustainability with the use of indigenous knowledge systems – systems that have been handed down from generation to generation and which have greater and more effective impact on sustaining the fragile Cordillera ecosystem.

The recognition of indigenous knowledge systems is fundamental to a holistic approach to solving planning problems in the region. Indigenous knowledge systems both embody and accentuate culture; and governance constitutes the enabling mechanism for self-determination via recognition of ancestral domain and cultural systems. This creates a triangular nexus that defines the functions, objectives and relationships of the factors for the proposed planning framework.

2.1 The ancestral domain: governance nexus

In Philippine indigenous regions, by legal mandate, planning is done at the local scale of the municipality. Notwithstanding the presence of indigenous ancestral lands and domains, land classification is based on the town-planning guidelines of the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB) which sees the municipal territory as the basic planning unit. The ancestral domain is virtually

rendered "invisible" by an oversight by the State and is classified either as protected area or public land although it can crisscross institutional as well as residential areas and be subject to the planning mandate of the municipal government. This non-recognition of ancestral lands and domains has been interpreted as the state turning its back on its social responsibility to promote social equity and social harmony through land regulation (Serote [5]).

Governance takes two forms under this planning regime: one, under the auspices of the state that considers the land as part of the national patrimony, and the second under traditional elders who consider the same land as ancestral domain under the customary law concept of "native title". Nonetheless, the state does not have guidelines for planning ancestral lands or the geographically larger ancestral domains, but rather requires claimants to prepare an *Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan* (ADSDPP) based on the indigenous community's cultural specificity. This plan is to be submitted "to the municipal and provincial government units having territorial and political jurisdiction over them for incorporation in their development and investment plans" [6]. In the event of conflict between the Land Use Plan and the ADSDPP, the latter is deemed to take precedence [7], a seeming default by the state of its authority over planning decisions to the indigenous people.

Local government structures are stymied over the treatment of *ancestral lands* or *domains*. Historically, these were not registered under the Public Land Law and as such do not have explicit boundaries. With the passage of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), state authorities began to realize that ancestral lands actually stretch over forestlands, mineral lands, national parks, and protected lands which are under the administrative supervision of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and which are exempted from the general jurisdiction of the municipality over all lands in its territory. After IPRA, the responsibility of delineating and disposing ancestral lands or domains was transferred to the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

2.1.1 Planning implications: the axial parameter for political sustainability

The concept of *ancestral domain* is new in the Philippine planning parlance and HLURB has not prescribed guidelines on how this would be treated in the land-use plans of its host-municipality. Unresolved technical and conceptual difficulties for planning include domain-related issues such as the delineation of boundaries and land use categorization as well as governance-related questions on administrative control and the relationship between customary and state laws. Basically, a planning nexus has not been fully realized between governance and the ancestral domain which has led to the political non-sustainability of plans and programs for land-use regulation and development in these areas.

Governance-related issues cover the relationship of the ancestral domain with the local government unit (LGU). By law, no land is outside the territorial jurisdiction of an LGU, and local governments are legally mandated to develop Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUPs) governing their territories. The relation of the ancestral domain with the DENR with regard to planning protected areas poses a third difficulty, as these have been exempted from devolution to the local

government. Another source of planning difficulty lies in whether or not customary laws could be interfaced with the process of dialogue, decision-making and conflict resolution.

An argument is made that to resolve these issues is to resolve the concern of planners for political sustainability and that the key to this is to understand the implication of the relations of property rights and governance structures, both state and traditional, as they interplay in the ancestral domain. Although the state has contradictory objectives which Lane [8] describes as the concern for social justice and equity as against its mandate to promote capitalism and industrial development, it is really the characteristic inability of state planners to understand, respect and give expression to distinct indigenous needs in the use and management of land that is directly implicated in the state's failure to prioritize the indigenous minorities' pursuit of sovereignty over their land (Hibbard and Lane [2]).

2.2 The ancestral domain: indigenous knowledge system nexus

For the grant of a CADT, as per the IPRA, the state requires from the indigenous people a management plan for their natural resources using their indigenous knowledge systems (IKS).

The use of traditional knowledge in natural resources management of ancestral domains enhances ecological or environmental sustainability. In developing countries, many rural people (the indigenous being the most rural) possess a fund of information about their environment and effectively manage that environment in ways that are sustainable in the long term. This makes it necessary to attach weight to cultural definitions of the environment, because planning cannot work without the participation of people and this participation depends on cultural understanding and mutual respect (Redclift [9]).

Apropos, a former state official once stated that getting the community to care for the forest means having the members appreciate the indigenous practices that guided their ancestors to value the environment and protect and enhance it; this, in a documentary where he recommended the study, documentation and preservation of "[our] cultural heritage and (the integration of) indigenous practices as part of every effort and understanding for the sustainable management and development of the country's natural resources, especially those situated in the cultural communities" [10]. It should be noted that communities in the Cordillera region are not supportive of social forestry practices not based on their indigenous system. According to Lane [8], if indigenous peoples do not understand or appreciate introduced concepts, then planning and management processes may appear both foreign and unimportant and thus not worthy of their attention.

2.2.1 Planning implications: the axial parameter for environmental sustainability

The ancestral domain-indigenous knowledge system nexus implies that spatial planning should be conducted in consultation with the indigenous people regarding the unique features of their ecology. For one there is a form of land use

classification different from standard land uses, the most profound basis of which is the spiritual dimension of the spatial environment.

Castree [11] argues for the right of indigenous peoples to make their own places rather than these made for them for survival, corrective redress, empowerment, and egalitarian reasons, explaining further that indigenous people planning their own places is the better option than "autonomy" or their long-standing political marginality if they remain passive to the plans of non-indigenous people. The other extreme spells a risk to further assimilation into external or exogenous cultures and the destruction of their native environments. Chambers [12] has noted that one of the finest demonstrations of traditional knowledge is that of communities which live near the margins of survival (presenting the need) who has had the resilience to survive almost four centuries of colonialism by the Spaniards, the Americans, the Japanese, and the neo-colonialism of the present state hegemony.

Thus, according to Lane and McDonald [13], the indigenous community can be conceptualized as an agent of planning. First, because community based approaches can be more functional and effective due to the proximity of the community to environmental problems, in contrast to the remoteness of the state. Second, it is incumbent upon indigenous communities to address environmental problems because ideally it completes the harmony and balance between human and ecological systems.

2.3 The indigenous knowledge: governance nexus

The relationship of indigenous knowledge and governance is premised on the cultural recognition by the state of traditional institutions and their use in harnessing the participation of indigenous peoples in state-initiated projects within their communities. Meaningful dialogue may be elicited by a mutual recognition of an intercultural relationship between the indigenous group and the state. Since the indigenous people are by their nature resistant to change, and similarly, the state by its authority can be imposing and dominating, the compromise for dialogue can lie in the creation of a public sphere of communicative action where both entities recognize each other as distinct cultural entities (Andaya [14]). Hibbard *et al.* [15] consider this a part of indigenous political autonomy where a means for sharing jurisdiction by providing for relations between roughly equal entities (the state and the indigenous community) is created with procedures to work out consensual and mutually binding relations of autonomy and interdependence.

The UN Forum on Indigenous Issues has recommended the participation of and consultation with indigenous peoples in development processes, taking indigenous communities into account as groups with distinct cultural identities and with their own systems of representation. Thus, the state must foster an enabling environment that promotes indigenous peoples' participation in all decision-making levels affecting them [16].

In terms of development, indigenous peoples need alternatives that provide a means for controlling their integration into on-going economic processes, without which they face continued poverty, assimilation and cultural

disintegration (Beneria-Surkin [17]). Planning can provide this alternative by bridging community concerns with the institutional support of the state. I agree with Lane [8] that this can be achieved by combining a strong institutional capability with an effective operational approach to community-based planning in which indigenous access to mainstream organizations and policy processes is enhanced. This in essence is a step towards spatial equity. It is important that differing traditions and values be recognized and accommodated in a way that contributes to rather than undermines good governance.

2.3.1 Planning implications: the axial parameter for socio-cultural sustainability

The process of communicative and collaborative planning is best effected though the Cordilleran *tongtongan,* an indigenous concept of decision making through consensus building facilitated by the village elders. The *tongtongan* as in communicative planning theory "leads away from competitive interest bargaining towards collaborative consensus building and, through such consensus building practices, organizing ideas can be developed and shared which have the capacity to endure, to coordinate actions by different agents, and to transform ways of organizing and ways of knowing in significant ways, in other words, to build cultures" (Healey [18]).

To facilitate this process, local government planners as "outsiders" to cultural practices, are advised to refrain from assuming that the "modern scientific knowledge of the center is sophisticated, advanced and valid and; conversely, that whatever rural people may know will be unsystematic, imprecise, superficial and often plain wrong" (Chambers in [16]). A look at the rationale of the process of comprehensive planning in this environment may be needed so we can turn to what Friedman [19] calls *facilitation*, *mediation*, and *arbitration* among conflicting interests, in an indeterminate sociopolitical process that is part-ritual, part-theater, and part real-life drama. Since two kinds of knowledge are implicated, Lane and McDonald [12] opine that planning inquiry might be more effectively structured as a coordinated process between indigenous and exogenous knowledge bases.

Since planning is meant to create an awareness of the problems in a field and elicit solutions to these problems, it should be able to do so in an un-coerced environment. Hillier [20] explains that communicative debate should incorporate the multiplicity of people's experiences or life-worlds in a regained public sphere in which mutual understanding is reached through everyone being able to speak and do so truthfully, comprehensibly, sincerely and legitimately as possible.

2.4 Spirituality: the fourth node

As mentioned previously, the indigenous peoples' concept of religion and spirituality pervades their culture – land is conceived as space shared with ancestral spirits, ritual is part of governance, and unexplained indigenous knowledge is implicated with cosmology. Spirituality is the invisible fourth node in our proposed planning framework for indigenous regions because it permeates through the three other nodes and subliminally forms part of them. Thus, any

engagement in the indigenous region – planning included – needs validation and legitimization by the community through the language of customary law symbolically laced with ritual.

Spirituality can, thus, be taken as a relational concept of looking at the world and as a relational process of connectivity. Since planning deals with land and what it means to people in the present and in the future (Sandercock [1]), it is imperative that the planning process in the indigenous region involves "spirituality".

3   The relational approach to planning in indigenous regions

3.1 Linking spatial and governance relations

The ancestral domain-governance nexus needs to consider the spatial parameter of ancestral lands (ad-hoc while awaiting legal recognition) in land-use plans. Within areas under the purview of the DENR, these are given recognition only as "culture zones." An implicit conflict in governance exists here where land under the municipal jurisdiction of a municipality is also under the administrative control of a national line agency – the DENR. To govern the same territory, the municipality prepares a CLUP while the DENR prepares a "Protected Area Management Plan." Meanwhile, the indigenous people draw up an "Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan."

This dissonance compromises political sustainability. National line agencies carry out their responsibilities without allowing or requiring any significant involvement of the LGUs concerned. The problems of rural development evoke responses in standard forms: plans, projects, and programs to be implemented by the LGUs. Resultant plan documents are "schizoid, with compilations of data coming first, and an unconnected shopping list of projects following," without integration of plans and projects or a more systemic integrated area development (Chambers in [16]).

I argue, therefore, that initiatives must be done to link, first, the spatial conceptualizations and, second, the governance relations of the indigenous and that of the state. This ultimately entails the recognition as well as acceptance of the ancestral domain and not the traditional municipal territory as the basic planning unit in indigenous regions as well as the inclusion of the native governance system at all levels of planning through a communicative process that is in itself indigenous.

3.2 Linking cultural relations

The governance- indigenous knowledge system nexus has also to be firmly in place to move planning towards the objective of socio-cultural sustainability. The state currently imposes its hegemony over traditional leaders, refuses to understand how cultural systems of dialogue work, and chooses to interpret silence as acquiescence and consent. Neither does it use indigenous instruments to access meaningful participation in planning efforts. The state persists on what

Casambre [21] calls "alien forms of dialogue" instead of indigenous forms of political communication.

A relational approach is needed that assists indigenous communities to reflect on their present conditions and find solutions for better futures in the frame of a wider dialectic involving the institutions of the state. It launches itself from the recognition that such dialectic is predicated on an uneven system of power relations that connects them in a forum of intercultural dialogue to resolve conflicting claims over land, resources, laws, projects, or any intervention that affects them.

3.3 Linking governance, spatial and cultural relations

Perhaps the greatest factor affecting the linkages of the base nexus of *ancestral domain, indigenous knowledge, governance* we propose is the lack of participation of the indigenous people in planning or the lack of initiative of government planners to genuinely include therein the indigenous communities. In response, indigenous peoples become generally reactive when their rights, especially over land and property, are violated. This is the reason for the mobilization of indigenous social movements concerned with the assertion of traditional and custodial entitlements to ancestral land (Hibbard *et al*. [15]) and one reason why an armed resistance for indigenous rights is ongoing in the Cordillera region.

In planning indigenous regions in the Philippine Cordillera, we, thus, propose the institutional frameworks of the *tongtongan* (dialogue) and *katulagan* (consensus) in linking governance, spatial and cultural relations and submit them as alternative mechanisms for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the planning process.

The t*ongtongan* has been described as "… address(ing) two purposes: either a conflict resolution or a community concern … (which may be) a project. The information is disseminated by word of mouth and the venue and date are set. The *tongtongan* [is] presided by whoever has leadership over the project or issue, [where]a free-flowing dialogue for what plans of action are to be undertaken, [and] who will be responsible for particular aspects of the work, etc. The ritual comes in at whatever part of the day the dialogue took place. The *tongtongan* is not recorded [22].

The *katulagan* has been also described as "…primarily an agreement reached over an issue that the *ili* (traditional village) resolved… or the barangay officials or elders resolved… (like) over property boundaries, penalties in vehicular accidents, marital conflicts… or any kind of agreement that two parties want other people to witness. The *katulagan* follows the procedure of the *tongtongan* (which) serves as the dialogue aspect of the event. In the past, the *katulagan* was oral although these days, it is written down and signed by parties involved and their witnesses. Again, the event is always graced by ritual" [22].

The dialogic forum of the *tongtongan* and *katulagan* realizes Habermas' theory of communicative action. His "ideal speech situation" operates because in the dialogic process leading to a *katulagan*, "everyone with competence to speak is allowed to take part in discourse; everyone is allowed to question any

assertion, introduce any assertion, and express attitudes, desires and needs; and, no speaker may be prevented by either internal or external coercion from exercising his rights" [23]. Consensus is the ultimate aim and elders talk individually to the members of the community who may have objections or questions until they are convinced of the wisdom of the decision and are ultimately won over. Thus, following Innes [24], the *tongtongan* can be seen as a part of the larger field of communicative planning theory – the theory and practice of consensus building.

3.4 The resultant indigenous planning framework

In sum, although there are three nodes that compose the base nexus of the analysis tetrahedron, these do not function independently of each other. For any planning effort or project intervention, the traditional elders must first confirm that it does not violate any customary law on land use (especially the land use of sacred ground). Secondly the intervention on the land itself must work within the protocols of the ancestral domains and concurred by the community, and thirdly, the intervention must be prosecuted using cultural decorum that includes indigenous knowledge. A relational approach is used to link these three nodes in the scale of the municipality in order to analyze parallel plans for conjunctions and disjunctions, not for the purpose of suborning the ancestral plan to the municipal plan but to identify areas where it can be strengthened when anchored to pertinent provisions of the comprehensive land use plan.
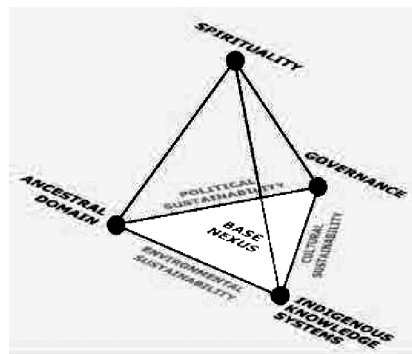

Figure 1:   The analysis tetrahedron.

Similarly the analysis tetrahedron is critical to the realization of the plan. If the elders together with the community decide that the proposed plan is not compatible to the ancestral domain use, then the plan becomes unworkable. The elders, however, can alter ancestral land use if they feel they can appease the spirits through ritual. The analysis of the two other nexus grounds the plan in culture and makes it sustainable

Once the proposal has satisfied the base criteria stated above, planning decisions or interventions can be made on the domain using indigenous

knowledge (with inputs from exogenous knowledge) and under the guidance of customary law (interfaced with state law where applicable). As the planning issue will involve both the interests of the state and the indigenous people as stakeholders, a collaborative planning approach can be undertaken.

At the risk of oversimplification, I submit that the indigenous and the state's points of view can be relationally superimposed while acknowledging that they are in a state of flux with inherent tensions between them. Areas of constructive convergence point can emerge from where the state's construction of the planning unit (as represented by a CLUP) overlaps conceptually with how the indigenous people concerned conceive of the same planning area (the oral and traditional conceptions of the trilectics of domain, knowledge, and governance) over a definite period of time. This area of constructive convergence becomes the starting point for a dialogic relationship between the state and the indigenous people – a process that could result into the formulation of a collaborative plan.

It is noted and accepted, however, that much of the separate constructions would be incongruous and would result in divergent constructions of the same planning unit. These divergent constructions form a conceptual area of contestation where claims are negotiated through indigenous processes of consultation and dialogue. It is assumed that these negotiations are open and undistorted for it to be able to generate valuable conceptual and practical contributions to the final agreed plan. Areas which cannot be negotiated remain points for further re-negotiation or remain as unresolved intrinsic properties of each culture –the indigenous and the culture of state.

4 Conclusion

The nodes of ancestral domain, governance and indigenous knowledge (and spirituality) are factors when taken one at a time could spell out a linear planning system of: What is the planning arena? Under whose authority is planning done? Who does the planning? What are the planning tools?

Whereas, when we consider the interrelationship of nodes, we bring more synergy and dynamism to the planning exercise. How do the planning requirements of the state affect the domain? How do traditional elders relate with the state? How is indigenous knowledge used to plan the domain? How does customary law dictate the land use of domain? The list can go on, but the point is, planning goes a step beyond *the "where am I-where do I want to go-how do I get there"* problematique to analyzing interrelationships influencing the planning exercise.

Massey [25] defines space as a "meeting place" – where relations interweave and intersect and where relational conflicts can emerge just as consensual relations can be consolidated among different spatial scales (Murdoch [26]). This paper has discussed relations and interrelations among three basic nodes which are implicated in planning for indigenous regions. These may either be interrelations within the indigenous cultural community, or relations of the indigenous community with the scale of the municipality. These are social relations which implies listening to the voices of all those who have a stake in

the planning process, to collaborate on consensual relations and negotiate divergences.

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