

complex systems thinking in international aid

**COMPLEXITY SENSITIVE
PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT**

**practical complexity-sensitive approaches
to development and aid**

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Summary

- Being complexity **aware**
- Being practical
- Approaches to development
- Approaches to aid requested and paid for by clients at home and abroad
- What is special about international aid?
- Practical approaches to aid as practiced (as opposed to preached) by EU-MS

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Being complexity aware

- ... complexity as the sleight of hand experts use to bamboozle everyone else
- it is easy to make things more difficult, but difficult to make them easier (to understand, to do) : keep it simple - simple rules
- **any human action for development is participation with a purpose in a complex adaptive system (CAS)**

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Being practical

- the intended **result** guides conscious and unconscious choices in what to consider relevant in the CAS
- **willingness** (to fight, to collaborate, to resist, to learn, to impose), **ability** (awareness of the CAS, knowledge of expectations, of perceptions, of why, where, what, when, how, with whom to do), **means** and **perceived setting** of stakeholders are major variables to take into account

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Approaches to development

- **"It depends..."**
- **Ownership** of problem and solution with the stakeholder(s): individual, organisational, institutional – but **no** owner of major societal systems ex governance
- **Planning** to know **why** you are **doing** things **differently**
- Being explicit can be self-denying – **play the system**
- Being CAS aware **does not mean** (co-) designing CAS (ex: whole sectors or programmes – trying that is an intention, a result one wants to attain)

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Aid requested & paid by clients

- At home (NL): modernisation (rationalisation of water boards - tacit, principle port - unexpected, street repavement – 20 year
- At home and abroad change process aid: same advisors but rarely permanent
- +/- of design and implementation in one hand
- Changing advice strategies f(changing nature of problem at hand)

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What is special in international aid?

By definition between governments in an unequal relationship,

- implemented by agents in a bureaucracy,
- accountable to politicians at home,
- accountable to national parliaments,
- obliged to be explicit about purpose, means and delays,
- needing visibility, inaugurability (ownership?),
- multiple layers between initiators, designers, implementors,
- no administrative appeal,
- timing, delays, discontinuity and uncertainty

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Approaches to aid as practiced

- **it depends...**
- **concrete** analysis of the **concrete** situation
- **try to understand** context beyond docs
 - buy and read secondary school geography, history and literature books
 - ask who/what are the best and/or the most popular writers, singers, musicians, books, journals, national TV series, read, listen, look
 - walk or drive in the area (public transport)
 - talk with people
- let the engineers, lawyers, economists do a pilot survey with the beneficiaries and present their conclusions

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Approaches to aid as practiced

- use conventional planning tools at the appropriate level of detail (largely unknown in aid; ex: not discussed in the book)
- co-construct a monitoring system at interfaces in the CAS with mutually understood, agreed as relevant, indicators and
- translated between levels and areas as converging clouds of meaning
- resulting over time in a shared language between stakeholders - the jargon - of the intervention

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Approaches to aid as practiced

be aware of where you and your aid policy, programme, project or act is in the evolving CAS and of your evolving understanding

- what you think you know
- what know you need to know
- that you don't know the rest of the world interacting

(tool: SAM)

search for refutability of your assumptions

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Approaches to aid as practiced

- Analyse language-jargon used by stakeholders at interfaces in the CAS
- Search for explanations of own and relevant other's behaviour (5x why?) by stakeholders at interfaces in the CAS

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How to **change** aid as practiced

USE RESULTS AS THE LINCHPIN

between advocates of CAS awareness and other actors in the aid CAS

USE CAS AS A PERSPECTIVE to identify what is the relevant "sub-CAS" for your intent to have CAS awareness in belgian development aid

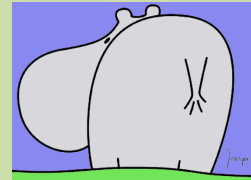
AVOID USING CAS AS A DESIGN NORM FOR POLICIES, PROJECTS, RESEARCH OR OTHER INTERVENTIONS

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Thank you



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