To Make Both Ends Meet:
A Comparison of Two Paradigms of Public Participation

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Abstract:

In the discussion of public participation, two paradigms pay particular attention to the elaboration of rationality. The first is Mancur Olson's rational choice theory and the second is what Judith Innes calls 'the emerging paradigm of planning', the communicative planning theory. Olson argues that people tend not to participate in the decision-making of public goods without external inducements and they choose not to do so probably for practical reasons, rather than because of normative considerations. Rational choice theory sees participation as a preference aggregation process, in which participant is regarded as utility maximiser who makes decision in accordance with a cost/benefit calculation. Olson's logic of collective action and the phenomenon of the 'free-rider' demonstrate that the summation of individual preferences may prove to be harmful for the individuals as a whole. As a result, rational choice theory is best described as the pathology of public participation and provides answers to the common phenomenon, indifference. On the other hand, communicative planning theorists regard participation as a process of communication, where participants deliberate via a social learning process. Compared with the aggregation of individual preferences, communicative planning stresses the importance of group dynamic and it argues that participation should be interactive and socially constructed. The result of communicative participation should therefore be a legitimate and optimal consensus.

The two theories make an interesting antithesis: the explanation of rational choice theory ends with when participation begins and provides no description of how participants interact with each other, while the rationale of communicative planning theory only begins with where rational choice theory ends and it cannot explain why people decide to participate. As a result, the former may only present a pathology of participation and the latter may present a bounded rationality and circular argument. The two theories happen to be inter-supplementary to each other. An infusion of the two will be very thought-provoking and is worth further elaboration. However, the paper will focus on the dialectical relationship of the two theories. Major attention will be paid to the discussion of the new paradigm of planning. The author points out that the reflection of publicness will play a significant part to improve the new paradigm for public participation in urban planning.

Key words: rational choice theory, communicative planning, public participation

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In recent years, a new policy-making paradigm, derived primarily from Habermas's theory of communication ethics, has emerged and it has won huge attention from the academic fields. In political science, the paradigm is called deliberative democracy while in planning, the policymaking paradigm was proposed as communicative planning (e.g. Sager, 1994) or collaborative planning (Healey, 1997). The Habermassian, communication-based policymaking paradigm provides a new perspective for public participation in democratic decision-making process, which has long been cornered by the dilemma between the elitist or egalitarian viewpoint (Webler and Renn, 1995). Webler and Renn think the communicative rationality of stakeholders is a possible way to overcome the dilemma between competence and fairness(ibid.). However, the paradigm only normatively demonstrates a partial process, participated by those who are willing to communicate or bargain with the likeminded to reach and accept a consensus, of the whole social interaction. For those who do not participate in the communicative forum, no matter they are unable, unwilling or unknowing, the communicative process cannot be regarded as fulfilling the mission of balancing competence and fairness. In this regard, rational choice theory provides an analytical framework explaining why rational individuals tend to decide (not) to participate in public goods decision. As a result, they are, to some extent, inter-supplementary although there are still deficiencies in their own parts.

I. Communicative planning

In recent years, many people have emphasised the importance of communication, debate and discourse in planning (Forester, 1988; 1993, Healey, 1992; 1997, Sager, 1998). Innes (1995:184) describes, 'planning is more than anything an interactive, communicative activity'. The major difference between communicative planning and others is how it sees the planning world. In other words, it is epistemologically distinctive from other planning theories. In this regard, knowledge, broadly speaking, is seen as being socially constructed and interactive and the way of knowing must be obtained by means of an interactive observation and participation. Habermas's idea of communicative rationality and ideal speech situation stand for a universal pragmatic, which " lies within the mode of speech itself as it unfolds through intersubjective communication, if the dialogue relies on the sincerity, comprehensibility, legitimacy and truthfulness of arguments"(Hoch, 1996: 89, cited in Ploger, 2001). Habermas argues that there are four types of speech act in our everyday discourse. They are,

1. communicative speech acts. They make validity claims to their comprehensibility.
2. representative speech acts. They claim sincerity with reference to speaker's subjectivity.
3. regulative speech acts. They claim normative rightness through appeals to legitimate interpersonal relationship, and
4. constative speech acts. They claim validity in accordance with truth (Webler, 1995).

In accordance with this typology, communicative speech could be deconstructed and categorised to these four distinctive parts and they claim validity from different domains. Misuse in appealing to validity would confuse and trouble communication. Communicative rationality means a successful message exchange with a correct validity claim, and of course the competence of speakers to manage to differentiate these speech acts. The ideal speech situation is therefore one

in which speakers have the same chance to employ these acts and to interpret, assert, justify or refute these speech acts and most importantly, all the participants in a discourse must have the opportunity to use these speech acts (Kemp, 1985). With the help of the clearly-defined speech acts, participants are able to select and check appropriate validity claims and enhance the likelihood of mutual-understanding in an ideal speech situation. More importantly, Habermas's communicative rationality could therefore be transcendental.

II. The new roles and institution for communicative planning

In Habermassian procedural criteria of the ideal speech situation, the planner's role should be changed and could be discussed from both the professional and ethical aspects (Rydin, 1999, Healey, 1997; 1998, Innes, 1995; Taylor, 1998). Planners should empower the participants by providing advice and expertise in the participation process, drawing participant's attention to alternatives and helping the disadvantaged to have their ideas expressed. The lay/expert distinction and instrumental rationality would be minimised and dispersed because participation in this framework has been transformed into a social learning process and it would reach a 'collective wisdom' in the Aristotelian phrase. The new roles for both planners and participants in communicative planning echo some democracy theorists' (Pateman, 1970; Lively, 1975) 'the developmental or educational effects of participation'. Pateman argues that participation is a social training:

> "democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the every widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedure" (Pateman, 1970: 42).

The emphasis of communicative rationality in our everyday speech is perhaps the most attractive part of the new paradigm of participation. However, how can it be guaranteed? Habermas also emphasised the importance of "'institutionalisation of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication... rather than reliance on a shared ethos" (Baynes, 1995:215, cited in Sanderson, 1999:331). In this regard, many scholars endeavour to work out some institutional arrangements to promote communicative rationality in planning, which could minimise power manipulation. For instance, Dryzek suggests that a neutral third party should oversee discussion (Hillier, 1993). Innes and Booher (1999) propose seven process criteria as the institutional arrangements. The most systematic arrangements were proposed by Healey (please see, Healey,1996:231). These could possibly take communicative planning and the ideal speech situation from a normative model to more feasible and pragmatic methods.

III. The advantage and disadvantage of communicative planning

Communicative planning theorists argue that participation must face and solve the dilemma between elitism and egalitarianism, i.e. either competence or fairness, and they maintain that communicative planning is able to solve the problem. The major reason is communicative planning emphasises that political decisions should be made in a collective and deliberative fashion, in which the better argument prevails. Benhabib (1996:73) argues "when presenting their points of view and positions to others, individuals must support them by articulating good reasons in public context to their co-deliberators. The process of articulating good reasons in public forces the individuals to think of what would count as a good reason for all other involved". Clearly the source of legitimacy in this process is more about the process than about the result. It is the deliberation that generates the legitimacy of policies (Benhabib,1996; Manin,1987). Unlike representative democracy, which adopts a procedural or instrumentalist rationality seeking for the majority vote as legitimacy, communicative rationality seeks for a consensus based on deliberation. More importantly, only the legitimacy based upon communicative rationality can possibly solve the problem about boundaries as delineated by Schmitter (1994:65-66), "if there is one overriding political requisite for democracy, it is the prior existence of a legitimate political unit. Before actors can expect to settle into a routine of competition and co-operation, they must have some reliable ideas of who the other players are and what will be the physical limits of their playing field. The predominant principle in establishing these boundaries and identities is that of 'nationality'".For instance, when we consider the issue of sustainable development, we must take future generations and neighbouring countries into consideration. However, they cannot be legally represented and their welfare might therefore be discriminated. The proposal of communicative rationality and deliberation as the source of legitimacy would to some extent, offset, if not resolve, this deficiency of democratic decision-making. "The essence of democratic legitimacy is to be focused not in voting or representation of persons of interests, but rather in deliberation...It can downplay the problem of boundaries" (Dryzek,1999:44).

Communicative planning has a strong normative tendency and has inevitably faced criticisms, one of which is that Habermassian thought tends to demonstrate a significant blindness to the role of power..."(Hillier, 1993:89). She argues that "Habermassian analysis is thus an attempt to demonstrate the means by which communications may be systematically distorted by organisations and/or individuals to obscure issues, manipulate trust and consent, twist fact and possibility. Such analysis alone, however, does not allow sufficient consideration of the why and how issues of power relations" (ibid.: 95). In this regard, Foucault points out that rhetoric, knowledge and power are related and power relations are rooted in social networks (ibid.). Nevertheless, communicative planning theorists have more or less noticed that and they have tried to improve this problem in their institutional arrangements (e.g. Innes and Booher, 1999; Healey, 1996).

Secondly, within the political context where power is more obvious, the way to deal with power is by institutional arrangements to exert the functions of checks and balances, which prevent power from over-concentration. As Sir Acton argues, power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Then how about planning? One of the purposes of participation is to provide checks but it could not necessarily balance the existing power relationships between the

state and the participants and between the participants. Compared with pluralism, where decisions should be made from bargaining, exchange and compromise between interest groups, communicative planning seems to be too optimistic because it hopes the powerful abandon their vested interests in the process of communicative participation. Habermas argues for the enlightening power of human rationality but it may not outweigh people's selfishness, particularly in a winner-takes-all capitalist market.

Thirdly, communicative planning may present a perfect intrinsic logic of communicative rationality within a participation forum but it may be a bounded rationality if only limited people participate in the forum. Communicative planning theorists pay most of their attention to how the communicative rationality is and how it can run smoothly. On the other hand, they do not answer what if stakeholders do not, wittingly or unwittingly, participate in the forum.

Rational choice theory

The analysis of participation based on a rational choice theory is that participation is a collective action but it is composed of participation by individuals under their free and rational considerations. This viewpoint takes account, therefore, of decisions to participate in relation to an individual's rational calculation. Instead of saying people ought to participate, it tends to provide a rational calculation framework explaining what might affect an individual's participation decision and therefore draws a tendency that rational individuals tend not to participate. It tries to answer why there is a gap between the normative claims of participation and some of the facts, e.g. the low turnout at elections.

While many political theorists argue that people should participate and the advantages of participation are so important, only a limited number of people do participate in fact. Olson argues that those who do not participate choose not to do so probably for practical reasons, rather than because of normative considerations (Olson, 1965). Olson's major argument is that rational individuals in a large group tend not to participate without external inducements (Nagel, 1987). There are three assumptions for this argument: firstly, rational individuals maximise utilities; secondly, individuals are free and no enforcement should be placed upon them to influence their decisions; thirdly, every individual is equally entitled to enjoy the public goods resulting from collective action, no matter whether he/she participates or not. In any collective action where the three assumptions hold, and because participation has a cost in terms of time and money, a rational individual tends not to participate in order to maximise his/her utilities and non-participants become free-riders as a result. This tendency needs to base itself on another premise that the group is large enough to make every decision-maker recognise 'the imperceptibility of individual effects', in Nagel's phrase (ibid.). In a small group, if people find their individual absence in participation would affect the consequence, they are likely to change their mind and to take part in order to maximise the utilities. When individuals feel that their participation will make little difference to the consequence, rational individuals tend not to take part. Therefore although we think participation should be considered under a cost/benefit analysis for rational individuals, their decisions are to a large extent considered under a cost-oriented fashion because the individual's participation has little influence on the outcome in a large group. In addition to the cost/benefit account, in fact, people may participate to fulfil
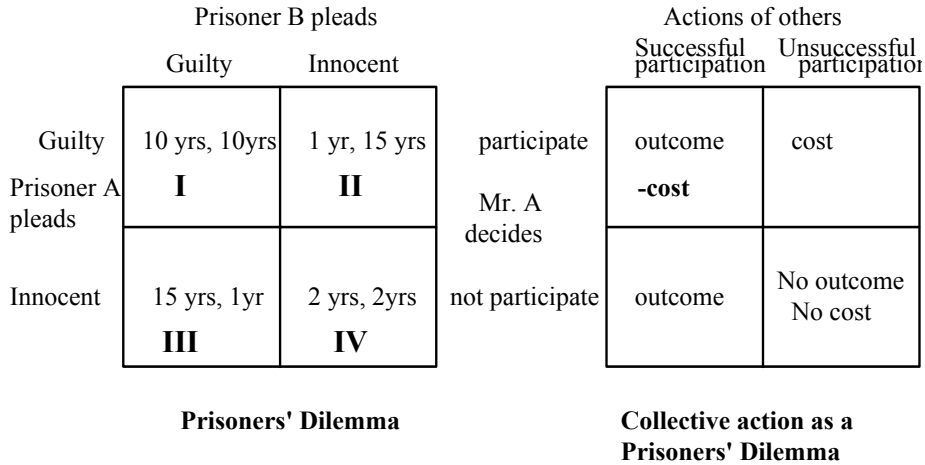
their civic duties, to enjoy being included as well as social affinity, to learn skills and knowledge and because they are subject to group pressure, all of which are independent of the possible outcome. Olson also noticed these possibilities and discusses the influence of external inducements, saying that people are sometimes also motivated by a desire to win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social and psychological objectives (Olson, 1965). However, his rational choice explanation is regarded as economically-driven (Jordan and Maloney, 1996). Olson does not emphasise too much the relationship between these side-effects, and participation and therefore he comes to a pessimistic conclusion that rational individuals tend not to participate. In some cases, the side-effects might outweigh the rational calculation of participation. For instance, rational individuals might not vote but those who do vote are still rational because they might vote for strategic reasons or to fulfil their civic duty. According to a research regarding public interest participation, Jordan and Maloney think that Olson's theory should be improved in two respects: firstly, it should subsume non-material incentives; secondly, it is significant to consider group activity in shaping the preferences of potential members and in stimulating membership (ibid.). They found that "the public interest group expansion (in membership) and proliferation in the past decades suggest that sufficiently large numbers of sympathisers do not engage in such reasoning"(ibid.:669).

Key factors in Olson's theory are assumptions that individuals act rationally, the existence of large groups where individuals cannot feel their influence on the outcome, collective action and lack of external inducements, to which Olson does not pay sufficient attention. Jordan and Maloney (ibid.) also argue that participation is a preference-shaping process, which would have an influence on potential participant's attitudes. This point is significant in saying that participation could manage to effect an optimal decision or even establish a new agenda but it is irrelevant to Olson's logic. If the new agenda or the mediated preference is attractive to the stakeholders who have not yet participated, potential participants would still stand a reasonably high chance of taking a free ride and choose not to participate, unless they think they could make a unique contribution to the agenda-setting, optimal decisions and the common good. But, this possibility is against the principle of imperceptibility of individual effect. In voting, if one learns that the other voters would make a fifty-fifty balance and her single vote is decisive, she is likely to vote; in a forum, if one gets an idea which seem to be much better than all others, she is likely to advance that solution, but both the situations do not apply to Olson's assumptions, and nor to Jordan and Maloney's.

IV. Participation and game theory

Olson's theory could be exemplified in a prisoners' dilemma-type situation as shown in figure 1. In the example of the prisoners' dilemma, prisoner A and B are isolated and there is no communication between them. Under these circumstances, the individual optimal decisions will result in an outcome which ends up to be the worst for both. Co-operation barely stands a chance here, not only because they are isolated from communicating with each other, but because there is an assumption that an individual's decision-making is largely driven by self-interest and the possibility of altruism and self-sacrifice are thus unlikely. If communication

is allowed or the game is iterated, which means that they could cultivate a sense of trust, then the worst situation could be avoided by co-operation (Hardin, 1982). In the application of the prisoners' dilemma, the situation of making a decision in a collective action would be more complex for the potential participants. Firstly, an individual will predict the possible outcome but her own endeavour will not stand a chance to affect the outcome, as she rationally understands it. Secondly, the individual then decides to take part or not. Olson's logic is that the individual will

	Prisoner B pleads	
	Guilty	Innocent
Guilty (Prisoner A pleads)	10 yrs, 10yrs **I**	1 yr, 15 yrs **II**
Innocent	15 yrs, 1yr **III**	2 yrs, 2yrs **IV**

	Actions of others	
Mr. A decides	Successful participation	Unsuccessful participation
participate	outcome **-cost**	cost
not participate	outcome	No outcome No cost

Prisoners' Dilemma   **Collective action as a Prisoners' Dilemma**

decide not to take part because this will avoid the cost of participating but maximises the net utility.

Figure 1: Application of participation in Prisons' Dilemma (based on Nagel, 1987:25)

Participation in voting

Before discussing what factors could make people participate, it is helpful to look at how some economists see voting participation. Riker and Ordeshook, following Downs and Tullock, argue that rational voters act under the following hypothesis,

$R = PB + D - C$ (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968).

In this hypothesis, P is a subjective expectation of the percent a voter perceives her preferred candidate will get; B, the net benefit from her preferred candidate; D, some psychological effects like civic duty and C represents the cost of voting. Thus, a person votes when $PB + D - C > 0$ (Mueller, 1987: 78-83).

Nagel expanded this formula by adding some considerations from Olson and the expanded version is,

$P(B_i + B_g) + S + D - C > 0$

In this formula P is the individual's power to suggest the collective outcome; B_i, the value to the individual of the collective good; B_g, the value the individual places on the benefit other people receive from the collective goal; S, the value of any personal and collective incentives that depends on the individual's participation; D, the strength of the individual's sense of duty or responsibility to participation and C is the cost (Nagel, 1987: 26).

Actually, variable B in the former and variables (Bi + Bg) in the latter almost refer to the same thing and the major difference between them is the latter contains one more variable S: selective incentives. By selective incentives, Olson means rewards and punishments that can be given or withheld contingent on the members contribution (ibid.). The first factor that would affect participation is the size of the group. In a small group, one gets a bigger stake in terms of sense of duty and influence on the group. In addition, social interaction would be better in small groups than in big groups and people would have more face-to-face interaction, which would help to form a well-connected social network among people. As the social capital theory argues that some factors would promote organisational efficacy, it is likely that these factors will be present in small groups rather than in big ones. In a small group, Olson's assumption of the imperceptibility of individual effect would be less likely to hold. Olson mentioned the idea of federations of small groups and he thought that small groups could promote participation (Olson, 1965). Small groups provide people with a belief that every individual's participation is to some degree influential but as the members in a group increases, this belief fades out. As a result, the objective perception of one's influence is replaced by a subjective one. Therefore sometimes an announcement is made before elections that 'your vote counts' and the purpose is to create an image that their participation could still be influential and to encourage people to participate. However, this propaganda is directed at some groups only. Under the assumption of rational behaviour, these announcements are effective only when people believe that a collective good is on the threshold and thus their participation becomes psychologically more important and the target groups are tempted to participate to tip the scales because they believe that their participation will make a quantitative difference. This normally happens in elections and is not common in other forms where participation is a deliberation. In other words, this motivational explanation is quite limited. The second factor that could affect participation is the selective incentives in Nagel's formula. Unlike collective goods, one has to participate to get the selective incentives. In other words, the groups use selective incentives to regulate the behaviour of their members. Like Olson's theory, social capital theory also emphasises the importance of rewards and sanctions in groups. Selective incentives, on the other hand, imply there should be some institutional arrangements in groups to promote participation.

The third factor concerns psychological and moral motives. In Olson's argument and in the prisoners' dilemma, individuals are regarded as self-interested and the prototype of rational individuals are utilitarian maximizers. In Nagel's formula, the individuals would not only consider their own benefits but also other's as well. Altruistic individuals are more likely to participate because they would value the welfare of others as well as of themselves and would therefore get a stronger motive to take part. In addition to altruism, people might in other cases consider other's welfare. From the geographical aspect, people will have a sense of community and care for those who share common interests with them. For political reasons, people of the same interest form a political party and co-operate to promote the common interest. And for some social reasons, people from the same associations might consider other fellow member's welfare when they are making decisions to take part in collective actions. The description of isolated and atomised individuals made by rational choice theorists is quite limited. Those social bonds would influence a rational individual's decisions and make them consider other rationalities, for instance,

group pressure and group norms. In political mobilisation, group pressure and norms are perhaps more effective to make people participate than informing them participation is in their interest.

Duty is another moral motive that makes people participate. Compared with altruism, a sense of duty is not interest-driven and is unconditional. Judgement out of an altruistic motive means that one has to be able to make a value evaluation on the matter involved and make a decision in accordance with other's interests. However, if one has a sense of duty, the question why it is one's duty has been socially internalised into one's mind and answered. Under the circumstances, the person stands a higher chance to take part.

Therefore the conclusion is that participation from an individual perspective should be revised by adding some social factors into consideration. One's participation could be an individual's decision or the result of group mobilisation. An individual might not only think of her own benefit but also her group's benefit when making participation decisions. If that is the case, the influence P in the equation R should also be expanded from one's own to that of the whole group. For instance, Putnam argues that people in dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the 'I' into the 'we' or enhancing the participants' taste for collective benefits (Putnam, 1995: 67).

Planning theorists can learn a lot from political scientists regarding their delicate anatomy of voting behavior. Factors such as selective incentives, federations of small group etc. could be regarded as guidelines for the institutionalisation of public participation in planning. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the framework of analysis was developed by theorists to explain voting behaviour, which is different from other forms of participation. Participation in a long term process such as a campaign or social movement could be a continuous or spiral process, which helps the participants to decide whether to continue their involvement. Both of the formulas lack the ability to explain how interaction between people works, which might in turn affect the nature of the issues, options and the participants and non-participants' sense of duty or other norms. It is better to see these formulas from a qualitative perspective rather than a quantitative one although they are in a mathematical form.

V. Conclusion: is it possible to make both ends meet?

Rational choice theory, as introduced above, pays great attention to solve the problem of ' to be or not to be' and pessimistically claims that rational individuals tend not to participate in public goods decision, although it pragmatically provides some solutions. On the other hand, communicative planning stresses the importance of communicative rationality and hopes a consensus can be reached through an inclusionary and non-coercive deliberation. They present an interesting antithesis because each provides what the other lacks: rational choice is about what might influence stakeholder's decision to participate or not but does not say anything about the interaction in participation; while communicative planning sets normative regulations for participants' communication but does not say anything about how to restructuring communication with more stakeholders.

There are some different features between them, which makes them difficult to merge.

Firstly, rational choice theory is based on individualism. Social action is composed of individual's free and rational calculation, based primarily on her own cost/benefit analysis. However, communicative planning has a communitarian assumption of human nature and social action. They can be both true so long as they do not make universal claims. It might be possible to introduce an individualist to communicative participation but it is perhaps very unlikely to merge these two theories. In other word, it is feasible to devise a participation institution with the ideas of ' federations of groups', which makes rational individuals non-anonymous and their participation perceptible, but it is difficult to make they abandon their vested interest when it is in conflict with the public interest. That is to say, communitarianism and individualism are different systems of knowledge and values. To merge them is not only about decision-making or conflict resolution. It will definitely involves different ideas of the public interest, protection of private property and limits of freedom, which have been not so far harmonised.

Secondly, they are different in terms of their source of policy legitimacy. Rational choice theory, particularly as far as voting analysis is concerned, is base on liberal democracy. And thus policy legitimacy is based on majority vote. In communicative planning, legitimacy is about the establishment of deliberation and communicative rationality. As a result, at least in theory, this proposes a promising solution to the problem of boundaries in democracy and to the problem of sustainable development.

Finally, rational choice theory depicts a picture, where rational individuals are faced with non-excludable public goods and other possible stakeholder's participation. They tend to adopt a cost-oriented calculation and decide not to participate and to be free-riders as a result. They are faced with a fixed issue and agenda and they may feel either unaware or unable to reset the agenda and change the essence of the issue.

However, on the other hand, stakeholders may participate to challenge the norms, reset the agenda and redefine the scope of the plan and who the stakeholders are. According to Tan (2000), a planning case could exert different discourse powers to redefine its essence and boundaries, depending on whether it was defined as a compulsory purchase of private property or heritage conservation.

In rational choice theory, the essence and boundaries of an issue are predetermined. Nevertheless, communicative planning theorists argue that people can participate to redefine and thus to restructure the plan. People may, in the first place, think it is not a public good issue and decide not to participate, rather than think it is and do likewise. If we agree that the essence and boundaries of an issue should not be predetermined, then we probably need to accept that rational individuals cannot do rational calculation. Communicative rationality should therefore be brought into rational individual's mind. The phenomenon of free-rider will still be valid, but its territory would be thus diminished.

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