

## **Evaluating Land Use Plan Quality (8)**

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Topic area: Land use policy making, effectiveness, alternatives, consequences (impacts)..  
Approach: Multi-disciplinary/integrated

Hundreds of land use plans are made every year, but they are rarely evaluated against best practice standards. Despite the centrality of land use plan making to the profession of city and regional planning, there is a gap in our knowledge about the quality of the plans produced. This paper discusses a proven methodology for evaluating the quality of land use plans. This systematic evaluation methodology has been applied in a number of cases, ranging from research studies in the United States to national planning policy requirements in New Zealand.

The first section of the paper will discuss the evolution of the plan quality evaluation concept, as it has progressed from basic to more advanced applications and has drawn on ideas from various disciplines. It will describe the dimensions of plans to be evaluated, including their fact bases, goals, and policies, as well as their provisions for participation, coordination, and implementation. It will outline the principles and criteria to be used in evaluation, both in terms of internal plan quality (issues and vision statement, fact base, goals and policy framework, plan proposals), and external plan quality (recognition of opportunities for use, creation of clear understanding, accounting for interdependent actions, and revealing participation of formal and informal actors and institutions).

The second section of the paper will provide a comparative review of the findings from plan quality evaluations conducted to date, including natural hazard mitigation, growth management, coastal management, environmental protection, ecological systems, mandated state planning, sustainable development, plan implementation, and human rights. It will document the conclusions from fifteen published studies, along with the evaluation criteria used, in order to synthesize what has been learned from these applications.

The final section of the paper will consider future directions in plan quality evaluation. It will consider applications to other policy domains, including land use and equity, land use and transportation, and others. It will also discuss potential methodological advances, including simulation models and statistical evaluation techniques.

The authors have had considerable experience in developing and applying the methods and techniques of plan quality evaluation. Their writing on this topic has included work on plan quality evaluations in two books: *Urban Land Use Planning* (University of Illinois Press, fifth edition, 2006) and *Natural Hazard Mitigation* (Island Press, 1999), as well as a number of journal articles.