

Techniques for Determining Community Values

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Recent studies have made it evident that transportation planning must take into consideration the values of the community, which are important both to the overall transportation plan and to the location and design of specific facilities and must, therefore, be considered on a community-wide basis, as well as at a more detailed, local level. A weakness in most transportation studies is that the study design does not adequately account for community values.

At the present time, three methods are being used to establish overall community values: focus groups, rating panels, and attitude surveys. Two techniques, community review and political review, are being used to resolve their differences with the planning function. Studies reported in this paper indicate that all these techniques have merit, but that success varies considerably with the situation and with the particular end sought. Additional studies and a more coordinated use of the techniques will, however, be necessary before they can become really effective.

At the location and design level, techniques for determining community values are just beginning to emerge. Teams of engineers, architects, and planners have helped bring together different points of view, but cannot assure adequate recognition of community values. Special techniques now being developed will assist the team in measuring the values of neighborhoods through which a facility may pass. These techniques deal with social values, living patterns, and community attitudes, as well as with aesthetic considerations.

●EVERYONE in the transportation planning field has asked himself, "Just which plan is best?" We have all sought some technique that would give us a dependable answer, some way in which to consider properly all of the many factors involved. We can list many or a few of them, as in the case of Enid, Okla., where the following factors will be used to test alternative plans:

1. Cost to develop the transportation system,
2. User costs and benefits,
3. Losses or gains in taxable revenues,
4. Relocation problems,
5. Consistency with community development goals, and
6. Aesthetic considerations (1).

But the difficulty is in measuring and weighting these factors. The more we think about the latter process, the more we are aware that almost every individual will weight these factors differently. A woman would weight alternative costs differently than would a man. An elected official would weight them differently than would an

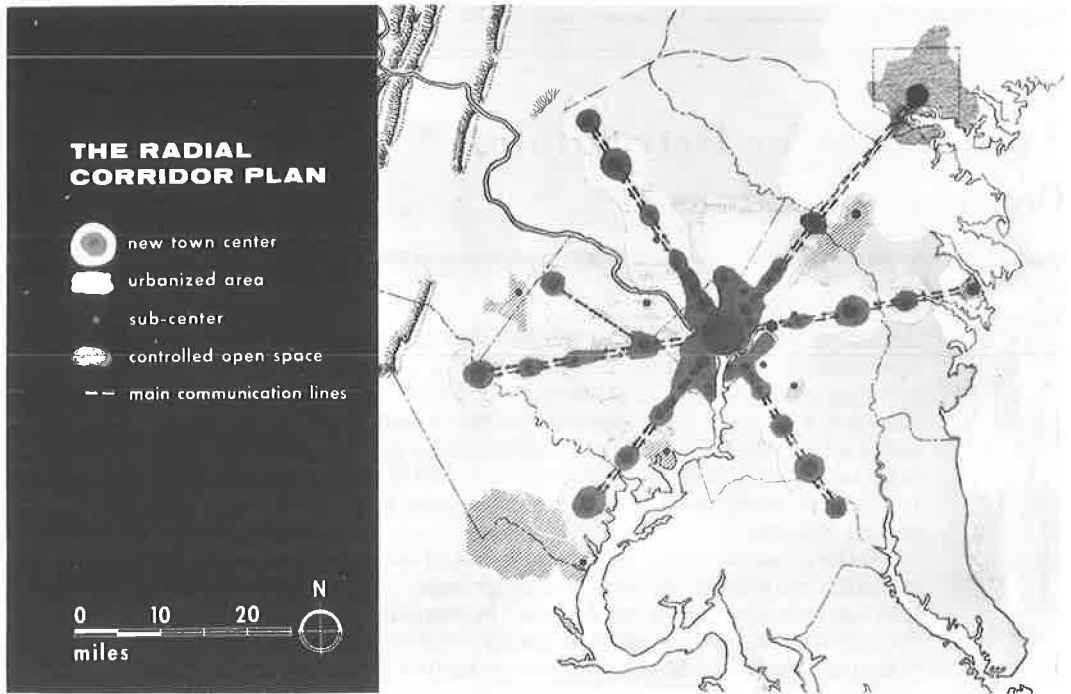


Figure 1. Year 2000 plan (source: National Capitol Regional Planning Council).

engineer. Relocation problems might appear more important to an elected official than could a cost and benefit analysis. An architect would certainly emphasize the aesthetic considerations, a city planner would give more significance to community development goals, and an economist would attach more importance to economic factors.

The difference in emphasis on criteria can readily be seen in the evaluation of existing plans. For example, the choice between the Year 2000 Plan in Washington (Fig. 1) and the Metrotown Plan in Baltimore (Fig. 2) rests largely on how highly one values broad expanses of open space and on the degree of importance one gives to the central business district. If one emphasizes a strong downtown and broad open spaces in the outlying areas, one would probably choose the Year 2000 Plan. However, if one puts less emphasis on downtown and feels that it might be better to distribute open space throughout the metropolitan area, one would then probably prefer the Metrotown Plan. So, in effect, the selection of the "best plan" depends on how much weight is placed on various community goals.

On a smaller scale, the choice between overhead or subway in the construction of a downtown transit system may hinge on one's evaluation of the impact that an elevated structure might have on downtown development. If one does not think it is likely to have much impact, then one might favor the overhead; or, if one feels that an elevated structure would depress real estate values or would be aesthetically undesirable, one would probably insist on developing a subway system. So, in reality, the best plan hinges on the values of individuals, and there is no one best plan from all points of view.

In a democratic society, people's values about public expenditure are largely reflected through the political process. The technician has the responsibility for developing alternative plans that take these values into consideration and then helping to evaluate each alternative. The determination of community values is, thus, a critical step in the planning process (2).

In the past, most urban transportation studies have avoided this issue. Some have tried to develop goals and objectives presumed to reflect community values. Other

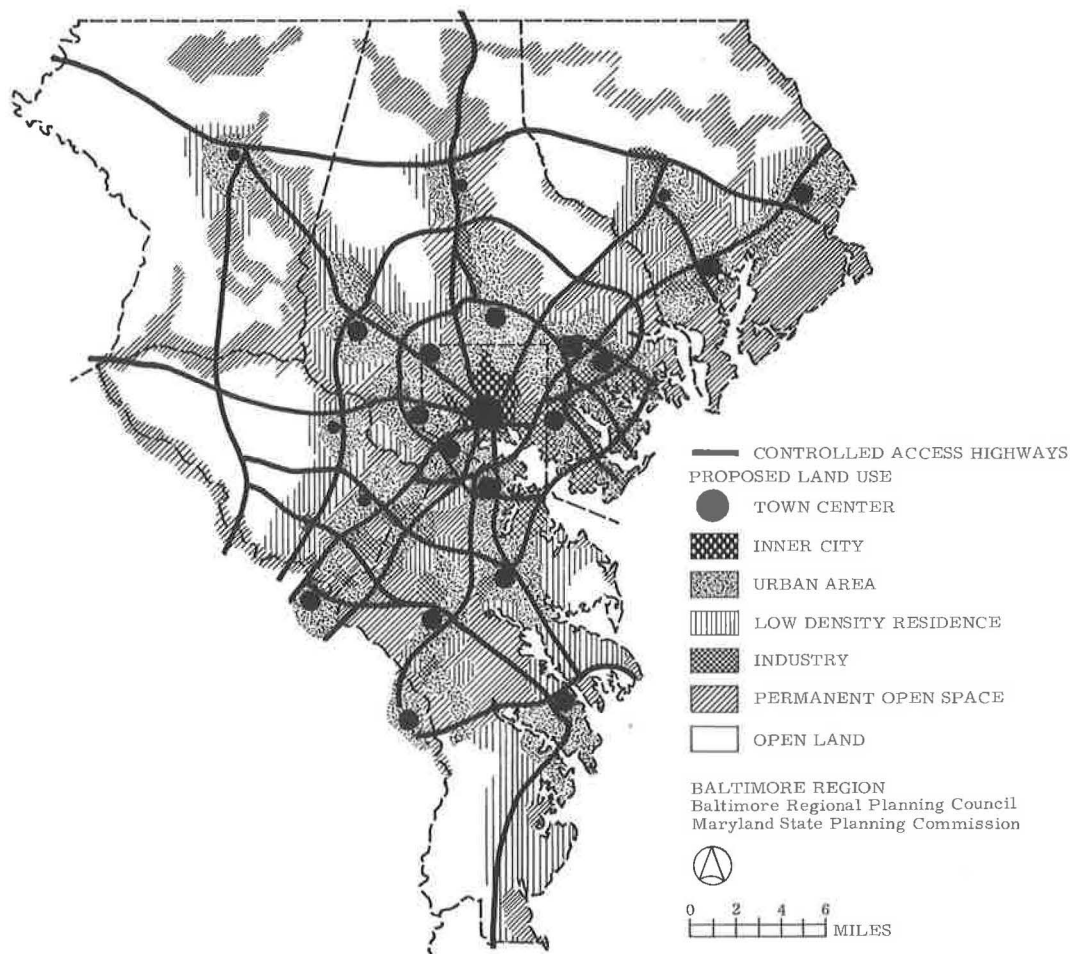


Figure 2. General plan, towns and cities.

studies have developed principles and standards for transportation service which were presumed to rest on such values. But the consensus reached on relative value was never articulated. Now, however, there are a few studies which have made systematic attempts to analyze community values and to incorporate such analyses into their overall programs.

Davidoff and Reiner (3) have indicated many techniques that can be used to determine community values—market analyses, public opinion polls, anthropological surveys, public hearings, interviews with informed leadership, press content analyses, studies of current and past laws, administrative behavior, and budgets. As planners, we are familiar with some of these techniques, but we have often overlooked the fact that we were dealing with individual and community values. For example, we tend to look upon a public hearing only as a necessary legal requirement, but, in fact, it usually brings out people's values quite clearly. It is true that those attending such a hearing often do not represent the community at large (and planners need to be familiar with a wider range of values), but the public hearing still reflects a considerable segment of community sentiment.

THE CINCINNATI EXPERIENCE

One interesting program to determine and resolve differences in community values was recently developed in Cincinnati in conjunction with the preparation of the down-

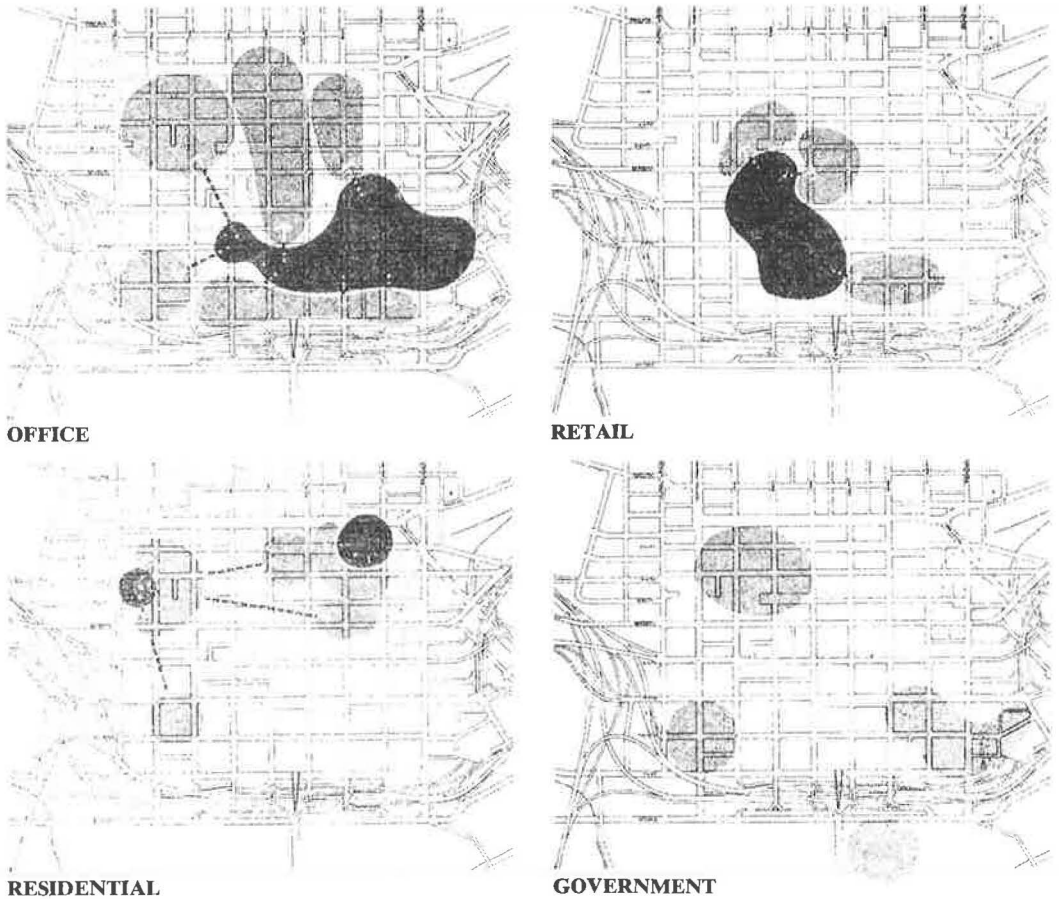


Figure 3. Growth alternatives (source: plan for downtown Cincinnati).

town plan. There, a Working Review Committee, similar to the "task force" outlined in an article by Nash and Durden (4), was set up. This committee consisted of the key Council members and the leaders in the downtown area. A plan was not developed and then presented to them "cold"; instead, it was conceived in a series of meetings between the planners and the Working Review Committee. The technicians working on the study presented the various alternatives to the committee and then let the committee make the final decision as to which alternative was "best."

They started out with the broadest issues, such as where the governmental complex should be located, where office expansion should occur, and whether retailing should be more dispersed (Fig. 3). But before these decisions were made, a thorough study of people's attitudes toward the downtown area—what they liked and disliked—was made. This was, in effect, an attempt to measure community values (5). These studies indicated the strong feeling people had about parking, so parking naturally played an important part in the alternatives conceived. These alternatives were prepared in depth by the technicians and then presented to the Working Review Committee. The committee discussed the alternatives from the points of view of its members, which were, in effect, weighted according to community attitudes.

A good illustration of how values affect the decision-making process was demonstrated by the discussions on the expansion of governmental facilities. It was generally

agreed that expansion was necessary and that the new facilities should be located in the downtown area. But the point at issue was whether the expansion should take place around the existing City Hall, because of tradition, or whether the new office buildings should be located in a blighted section of the downtown area where they might stimulate new development. The Working Review Committee's values seemed to favor tradition and, accordingly, they chose to expand the city activities near the present City Hall.

After the broader issues were settled, the committee turned to more detailed ones, such as how wide certain streets should be and what type of traffic control should be used. In these situations, the technicians presented a "preferred" technical solution, and the Working Review Committee either accepted or rejected it. By this process, community values were taken into consideration, and a plan for downtown Cincinnati on which there is agreement was created.

There were various occasions in this latter phase of the process when individual values played an important part. For example, in considering street improvements around Fountain Square, the question was raised as to whether they should be located north or south of the square. The technicians had suggested that they go north, primarily because they would have about the same aesthetic impact on all of the surrounding area. However, the Working Review Committee felt that the improvements should go south of Fountain Square, so that the fountain could be tied in with the redevelopment project to the north. The agreement that was reached strengthened the relative position of this particular project.

OTHER PROCEDURES

Values are important in considering areawide, as well as detailed, plans. Although Davidoff and Reiner suggest various types of studies to determine values, it appears that there are three types of procedure that are used to measure community values for land-use and transportation studies: focus groups, rating panels, and attitude surveys. The means used most often in resolving values are committee review and political review. A look at the work that has been done in these fields should be helpful in formulating more effective planning programs in the future.

Focus Groups

This technique uses a group of people who have common backgrounds and interests, and explores with them a particular subject with which they are familiar. There is usually a discussion leader who guides the group and an observer who does not participate. If the leadership is effective, ideas and concepts will grow, and a better understanding of the motivating factors behind individual values can often be obtained.

In addition to obtaining a better insight into values, the focus group can be used to develop a hierarchy of values, the order of importance of various factors. However, one cannot measure values from a focus group with any statistical precision like that provided by attitude surveys.

In connection with the Washington transportation study, focus groups were used not only to select values but also to determine the kind of language that best described the issues (6). In other words, this process made it possible to phrase more adequately the questions that were to be used in the follow-up attitude surveys.

The focus group technique is an effective way to get at major issues. For example, if one were concerned about freeway location in a certain section of town, it would be good to bring together a group of people who live in that section and who understand the area. By this process one could try to determine a freeway location that would be in harmony with the values of the people living nearby.

It would appear that the focus group technique might also be used effectively in formulating alternatives. Proper application could bring forth ideas and attitudes that would indicate alternatives that might not otherwise have been conceived and might be more in line with community values. In such a case, it would be a positive tool for improving transportation planning efforts.

Puget Sound Regional Transportation Study
 RATING FORM FOR EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS (1)

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	WEIGHTS FOR CRITERIA		ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS													
	Major Criteria (M)	Sub-Criteria (S)	CONTINUATION OF PRESENT TRENDS AND POLICIES		MICROTOWNS		RADIAL CORRIDORS		LINEAR CORRIDORS		CENTRALIZATION		SATELLITE TOWNS			
			Score (M)	Weighted Score (S)	Score	Weighted Score	Score	Weighted Score	Score	Weighted Score	Score	Weighted Score	Score	Weighted Score		
I. DESIRABILITY CRITERIA																
A. OPEN SPACE GOALS																
1. Generous open space should be interspersed between development so that it is accessible to the largest number of people.																
2. Open space should be utilized to give flexibility to urban development patterns.																
3. Areas for agriculture should be preserved in close proximity to urban development.																
B. EFFICIENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY GOALS																
1. National and state parks and forests and other major recreation facilities should be conveniently accessible to the region's residents.																
2. Future travel between major destinations should be minimized.																
3. Congestion of circulation facilities serving major employment areas should be reduced.																
4. Circulation facilities should be utilized to guide development.																
5. Development patterns which would make rapid transit feasible should be created.																
II. FEASIBILITY CRITERIA																
A. LEGISLATION AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE																
1. The extent to which new legislation, policies or programs of land use controls would be needed to implement the development pattern.																
2. Implications for change in government structure or the way in which governmental services are provided or paid for.																
B. COSTS OF GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES																
1. Public utilities costs																
2. Transportation facilities costs																
3. School costs																
4. Police and fire protection costs																
5. Costs of preserving open spaces																
TOTAL SCORE	100	400														
RANK																

Form B-11 1/19/64 (1) See instructions in *Alternative Patterns of Development*, Staff Report by CRTS, January, 1964.

Figure 4.

Rating Panels

Rating panels have been used effectively to evaluate individual values, particularly in terms of general land-use plans. The rating panel used in the Puget Sound Area (7) consisted of planners from various parts of the region who were required to rate alternative plans developed by the Puget Sound Regional Transportation Study. The rating form used is shown in Figure 4. After going through the rating procedure, this panel discussed the alternatives at some length and came up with a plan that was a compromise among several of the alternatives developed by the technical staff. This indicates again that the determination of values can be a positive tool in the planning process.

Of course, rating panel measurements represent only the members' values, not those of the community at large. However, there are times when it is very useful to know the values of a particular group, and in such cases the rating panel has considerable merit. The rating panel has an advantage over the focus group, in that a statistical evaluation of the results can be made.

Attitude Surveys

A well-conceived survey is probably the best way we have to determine values. If the questions are well developed and if there is an adequate sample, a great deal can be determined about community values, whether the surveys deal with attitudes about the home, the neighborhood, or the community at large.

In many cases, attitude surveys have been taken in transportation studies at the same time that the home-interview survey is conducted, either by extending the questionnaire time or by dropping off a self-enumerating questionnaire (8). Generally, these surveys have emphasized the overall aspects of urban living, particularly living patterns. Such facts, of course, increase understanding of people's values, but they do not measure them. For example, the fact that 80 percent of our leisure time is

spent around the home suggests why most people are so concerned with their neighborhood environment, but it does not tell just how important it is to them.

But the attitude survey can be used to establish the weights of various criteria. For example, it can quantify the relative weights of such things as the cost of the transportation system, user benefits, impact on taxable revenues, relocalational problems, consistency with development goals, and aesthetic considerations. We can obtain the weighting on a community-wide basis, or we can determine the weights for a particular group. This, then, should allow us to present to the policy-makers the values of the people at large or the feelings of a particular segment of the population about a particular alternative.

Unfortunately, this type of procedure has not been used in the past. Attitude surveys have been limited primarily to obtaining information on existing attitudes and have not attempted to measure the reaction of the public to proposed alternatives. This kind of test should certainly be employed in the future; the business world has found the technique very productive.

It has been reported that President Kennedy, in commenting on attitude surveys, felt that they should not be used to predict people's reactions but, rather, to measure what people were thinking. If the political leader fully understood the thoughts of each constituent, he would then be in a position to weigh properly the feasibility of a particular plan or program, even though it might appear in some ways adverse to the thinking of his constituents.

Committee Review

Committee review has been used in numerous cities throughout the country. In fact, most planning commissions serve this function. They attempt to evaluate broad, as well as detailed, proposals and to measure them in light of their values. Although this is not often explicit in their recommendations, it is always implied.

The general-purpose committee has proved rather ineffective because it usually does not have sufficient experience or knowledge of the special issues involved. A lay group, such as a planning commission, often is not in a good position to evaluate alternative plans because, in many cases, its members do not have enough experience to have formulated any opinions or values related to certain types of problems.

In San Francisco, another method of community review, more like the legislative hearing process, is being developed. The Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, created by the State Legislature to develop a transportation plan for the San Francisco Bay Area, is now meeting with many county leaders to learn more about the plans that have been made and the county development concepts of various people. By this hearing process, the Commission will become familiar with the goals and values of the individuals who live in various sections of the region and, therefore, will be in a better position to know the kind of plan that would reflect the aspirations of the people of the region. This technique is certainly sound and will undoubtedly be used in other studies throughout the country.

The Political Process

The final review, of course, is the political process, always the acid test of any plan. The political review can be accomplished through the normal legislative process, or it can be undertaken by an attempt to interpret the values of the power structure of the area through special interviews. A general weakness of most transportation studies in the past is that this has been overlooked. Not much consideration has been given to the political process, and information related to various alternatives has not been prepared in a manner that can be readily understood by the political leaders.

In the Hartford region, the alternatives were presented to the political leaders in a straightforward and simple manner, and over a period of a year. As a result, a plan for the future development of 27 towns was selected without a dissenting vote.

The proposed land-use and transportation study in Detroit is attempting to emphasize the need for cooperation with the power structure in the community and is setting up a special staff to work solely with the political policy-makers (9). The staff will try to

assess the values of the policy-makers and to develop alternatives that reflect them. This will be done through interviews with the power structure, as well as an evaluation of existing laws and ordinances related to urban development.

Each of the methods described has its advantages and limitations. In Cincinnati, however, it was discovered that if these various techniques are properly coordinated into an overall approach and if every effort is made to measure subjectively and objectively the value systems of the community, the chances of plan adoption are much greater.

There are, of course, various other techniques that can be used in determining community values, but none of them has been applied successfully in land-use and transportation studies. However, experiments are being made with sophisticated models that can be used to predict the reaction of various groups within a region. Development of such models would be a major step forward. Undoubtedly, this will take some time because the field is so new, so complex, and so involved.

CONCLUSION

The existing tools that thus far have only been partially applied must be improved. We must watch for changes in values, because it is clear that people's values do change, not only for economic reasons but also because of social and technological factors. Therefore, the process of determining community values is a continuing one which must be pursued diligently if we are to cope effectively with the changing requirements of our communities.

The development of a technique similar to the VPA (Vote Profile Analysis) probably is in order—a technique that will establish the factors involved in community values and will show how different groups of people evaluate them. A constant search for changes in these factors and values will help us understand the changing nature of our society and, therefore, enable us to plan more adequately for its future.

SUMMARY

The evaluation of community values is a very complicated issue. It is quite clear that it is fundamental to the whole planning process. It is the one factor that makes planning quite different from many other professional tasks. Until better techniques are developed to measure these values and to resolve them, it will be difficult to develop plans which will have public acceptance and understanding. Although this task is a difficult one, it is nevertheless essential if we are to prepare plans which may be successfully implemented in a democratic society.

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