

A Framework for Analysis of Regional Plans

The following is a suggested framework which may be used in the analysis of regional plans. It consists of two basic parts: description and criticism. Description is given the bulk of the attention in this exploratory attempt, based on the conviction that a thorough understanding of what is presented is a necessary prelude to fruitful criticism. Following the presentation of the two parts is a fairly brief application of the framework to plans prepared for the London region in the 1940's.

The purposes of the framework are to provide some guidelines for analyzing plans and to serve as a basis from which improved guidelines can be developed.

Description

The description suggested consists of nine elements, all of which might, and perhaps should, appear in a regional plan. The function of the analyst is not to be encyclopedic. What is important is to determine, for each of the elements, those items which are truly significant in understanding the plan.

1. Areas of concern. What activities, problems, questions, etc. are of concern? The analyst will not simply be interested in a list, however, but in determining what emphasis is placed on each item. Which are the real foci of the work and which are only casually considered? Typical areas of concern are functioning and location of different economic activities, residential environment, and trip-making.
2. Givens. This is a large basket of things. It includes items like area boundaries, time period of the plan, assumptions about

technology, future aggregate population and employment, and even assumptions about where and how planning should attempt to influence development. It should be looked upon as the frame into which the plan is to be set.

3. Functioning, evolution and forces. This might be considered part of the givens, and involves understanding the present, past and possible directions of those items relevant to the areas of concern. What are the requirements of different activities? How have they evolved into their present locations and kinds of organization? What are the significant forces acting upon them and in what ways are they effecting changes?
4. Assets, liabilities, problems and potential. These words are intended as a catchall for a normative evaluation of the areas of planning concern. They should be considered both in terms of the present and possible futures. Assets may include such items as natural resources, thriving economic activities, good residential environments and strong pressure groups for good planning. Liabilities may include the negatives of the above and trends toward decay in commercial areas, pollution of rivers, etc. Problems, which somewhat overlap liabilities, may also involve residential segregation, pools of labor unsuited for growing industries, etc. Potential, whose perception is perhaps the best sign of good planning analysis, deals with how the inherent qualities of activities or areas may influence development, be directed to resolve problems, or offer opportunities.
5. Objectives. These concern, of course, those items upon which the plan focuses. They follow assets, liabilities, etc. in this list

since many objectives can only logically be developed after these are assessed. Objectives may be quite general so that specific recommendations have to be deduced from them, or specific enough so that they are very close to being planning proposals to begin with. Many objectives are almost universal, applying to plans regardless of their foci. Some of these are efficiency (achieve objective with minimum use of resources or, alternatively, maximize benefit with given expenditure of resources), best use of land according to its characteristics, best interrelationship of activities. The real objectives of a plan are not always formally stated, but emerge from the main body of the work.

6. Alternatives. There are at least two alternatives in every plan: how things would be without planning and how they would be with planning. There may be many alternatives considered in coping with one problem and few considered in coping with another. Alternatives may grow out of objectives and assets, liabilities, etc., or they may be developed almost independently and then evaluated in terms of these. The second approach seems more popular among current regional plans; the first approach is probably more fruitful, since it forces one to consider the subject matter quite intensively before alternatives begin to emerge, thus encouraging more meaningful alternatives.
7. Proposals. These seek to achieve the objectives connected with the areas of concern. They should be within the frame of givens, build upon assets and potential and mitigate some liabilities and problems. They generally result from a study of alternatives and may include general policies and means of implementation as well

as recommendations which can be shown on maps.

8. Study program. This is how the planner really goes about his work. Where is the weight of research placed? Are alternatives developed impressionistically or through feeding different policies into mathematical models? What are the starting points of the planning effort?
9. Basic themes summary. This is meant to briefly summarize or characterize the plan. In some ways this is a test of the analyst's ability to grasp major emphases and implications. Areas of concern, major objectives, fundamental notions of the effective bounds of planning can all characterize a plan. Does the plan seek adjustment to certain trends or search for ideal forms? Does it emphasize quality of environment or functioning of activities? Does it deal with small scale prototype problems or with large scale systems? Does it concentrate on developing a map picture or on policies designed to respond to different kinds of development?

Criticism

In this section on criticism, only a few suggestive questions are offered. They generally apply to specific elements of the description, although a number of them refer to the interrelationships among elements.

Are areas of concern sufficiently explicit? Are they too narrow, or too broad?

Are givens sufficiently enumerated. Is too much or too little accepted as given?

Are the analyses of functioning, evolution and forces deep enough? Are they closely enough related to the purposes of the plan?

Do assets, liabilities, problems and potential receive only cursory treatment? Are they correctly interpreted?

Are objectives too vague? Are they important? Do they reasonably apply to the areas of concern?

Do alternatives cover too narrow or too broad a range? Do they relate sufficiently to areas of concern and objectives and other parts of the planning analysis? Are really meaningful alternatives considered?

Do proposals follow logically from objectives and other parts of the planning analysis? Are proposals realistic? Should they be followed?

Are items of the study program clearly related to elements necessary to the plan?

Are the basic themes reasonable and important for a regional planning effort?

Example of Application of Framework

This application of the foregoing framework for analyzing regional plans deals with the three advisory plans for the London area prepared in the early and mid-1940's: the County of London Plan, the City of London Plan and the Greater London Plan. The information presented here was gleaned primarily from Donald L. Foley's Controlling London's Growth and Peter Hall's The World Cities.

Description

1. Areas of concern. The distribution of employment and population throughout Great Britain and particularly the share of the London region in each.

The distribution of employment and population within the London region with particular regard to economic functioning, the journey to work and the place of agriculture.

The physical form of development in the region, in the reconstruction of parts of central London and in the outer areas being newly developed.

The quality of living conditions, including residential environment, provision of public facilities and the social composition of residential communities.

2. Givens. The time span of the plans is from the mid-1940's to about 1970.

The region covered includes a little over 2,600 square miles, roughly the area within a thirty-mile radius of the center of London.

Population and employment were expected to grow little within Great Britain in the planning period and it was assumed that their distribution could be sufficiently controlled so that almost no absolute growth need be planned for in the London region.

3. Functioning, evolution and forces. Migration within Great Britain of population and industry from less to more prosperous regions, with the London area primary among the latter.

The overwhelming dominance of London within its region, with no other center of really significant size.

The tendency, within the London region, for employment to seek central locations, and for population to spread into the suburbs, with resulting long journeys to work.

Expected increase in use of the private auto.

4. Assets, liabilities, problems and potential. Loss of industry from already depressed areas in Great Britain, a major problem for the nation.

During the war, an outmigration of 1.5 million persons from the County of London reduced the County's population from 4 million to 2.5 million by the end of 1944. Many communities in the outer parts of the region received heavy inflows of evacuees. Rather than encourage people to return to the County, this situation was viewed as an opportunity to establish decent residential densities there at levels far below those prevailing in 1939. The general trend of movement to the suburbs reinforced this opportunity.

Increasingly long and uncomfortable journeys to work, a major problem in the region.

The auto would add substantially to the mobility of the population but require major investments in roads and controls to preserve the physical environment.

A good deal of central London was destroyed during the war, requiring substantial investment in rebuilding but providing the opportunity to build according to desirable standards.

Formless urban sprawl was despoiling the English countryside, eliminating agricultural land and recreational opportunities for city dwellers. This new development generally lacked adequate public facilities and social diversification.

5. Objectives. To maintain a healthy and steady level of employment throughout Great Britain.

To avoid problems of accommodating excessive growth within the London region.

To avoid great imbalances of population and employment within the region.

To avoid excessive congestion of employment in central London.

To minimize excessively long journeys to work.

To develop a highway network to serve the needs of the region.

To maintain the countryside for agriculture and recreational opportunities near London.

To rebuild central London to conveniently accommodate port, commercial, governmental, industrial and headquarters activities.

To stop new development occurring as urban sprawl; to maintain the traditional separation of town and country. To quote Abercrombie, "Nothing is more attractive than a town hemmed in by the farming countryside."

To provide the best possible living conditions: comfortable housing with private gardens for as many families as possible, the avoidance of excessively high residential densities, provision of adequate community facilities including open space, convenient access to employment opportunities, freedom from dangerous traffic, socially mixed and balanced communities.

6. Alternatives. From the references used, it appears that the basic alternatives considered were the proposals that were made and the acceptance of current trends. These trends seemed to be leading to the continued growth of the London region--with attendant problems of accommodating such growth--at the expense of other areas of Great Britain; excessively high employment and residential

densities in central London; excessively long trips to work; lack of employment opportunities for the region's population outside the center; continued suburban sprawl and generally inadequate new residential development. There seems to have been debate regarding some details of the proposals, such as the exact location and size of the greenbelt and the number and sizes of the new towns.

7. Proposals. Encourage or require new or growing industrial firms to locate in regions of unemployment and keep population and employment growth in the London region to a minimum. A device to help achieve this policy was the issuance of industrial development certificates by the Board of Trade.

Encourage some employment decentralization within the London region through the issuance of industrial development certificates and the use of floor-area-ratios to limit office growth in central London (this last not implemented until the 1950's).

Detailed plans of redevelopment of bombed out areas of central London.

A highway network with three ring roads around, and a series of radial roads out from, central London. This network emphasized the dominance of the center and provided for efficient movement in the region.

Three principal density zones established to achieve desirable residential environments: an average of 200 persons per acre in the central district, 136 persons per acre and 70 persons per acre in successive outer districts.

A metropolitan green belt, approximately five miles deep, ringing the built up area of London 13 to 16 miles from the center.

Some of the green belt would be obtained through public purchases of land but preservation would be primarily through compensating owners for refusals to grant development rights. Some large green wedges extending inward would also be encouraged. The green belt partly controls urban sprawl, conserves good agricultural land near London and offers potential for active and passive recreation within easy access of London residents.

Build eight new towns, each planned for a population of about 50,000, to accommodate a total of about 400,000 residents. The new towns were to have a predominance of homes with gardens with some mixed development, be relatively self-contained, with employment for most workers, and offer a range of cultural and commercial facilities. They were expected to attract a cross-section of family types. The physical expansion of a new town was to be limited by a local green belt about one-half mile in width which would be merged with the metropolitan green belt where possible. Each new town to be designed and built by a single development authority or company. New Towns were proposed to supplant dull, ill-planned suburban development, and their green belts were intended to preserve the contrast and balance between town and country.

A selected number of existing communities in the outer portion of the region deliberately encouraged to grow, primarily in line with new town principles. These towns had received substantial numbers of evacuees during the war. (This policy not implemented until the 1950's.)

8. Study program. The study program (or programs) was not really detailed in the references used, but a very brief, suggestive

outline of the possible approach is given.

Initially, aggregate population and employment projections were made for the London region. Some limitation on growth as projected was considered desirable and achievable and so "desirable" levels of population and employment were used as the basis for planning within the region.

A strong body of cherished ideas was the starting point for plans of development in the region. These ideas included the desirability of limiting too great concentration, of maintaining the clear separation between town and country, of carefully planned residential and nonresidential development and of generally low residential densities. Coupled with these ideas were some traditional physical planning solutions: the green belt and the self-contained town. The major work of the plan consisted of applying these basic precepts in detail to the region.

9. Basic themes summary. The desire to share economic wealth throughout Great Britain and to minimize the problems of accommodating too much growth led to recommendations to limit population and employment growth in the London region.

The desire to limit too great concentration within the region, the ideal of separation of town and country, and notions of desirable residential environment (e.g., low densities, planned relationship with public facilities) led to proposals to limit the size of central London, foster a metropolitan and smaller green belts, and develop new towns.

Criticism

Areas of concern are quite broad and very appropriate for a physical

development plan for a large metropolitan region.

Accepting that population and employment growth in the London region could be held to a minimum should probably have not been the only basis on which the plan was developed. Attempting to accommodate projected (without constraints) population and employment might have been a realistic course, or at least a worthwhile alternative to explore.

Functioning, evolution and forces were probably not explored in sufficient depth to reveal strength of migrations to the London region nor of the tendency for employment to concentrate in the center of that region. The desire for access to very large numbers of jobs and other activities may not have been given enough weight when self-contained and fairly isolated new towns were proposed.

The war-lowered population of the County of London was perceptively grasped as an opportunity to permanently lower residential densities there. Problems identified were all of major significance, meriting attention in a regional plan. There was a somewhat one-sided view of employment and residential concentration as a generator of great problems, without a balancing view of what opportunities such concentration might offer.

All the objectives seem quite laudable, granting certain English biases such as houses with gardens and the juxtaposition of farm and town.

From the references used, it does not appear that very meaningful alternatives, in terms of physical devices to achieve stated objectives, were really explored. Some critics have suggested, for example, that green wedges radiating out from central London would have been more appropriate than a green belt for this large metropolitan area. Criticism has also been directed at the inflexible residential density standards, and a case made for the potential of high density residential areas in selected places.

(This criticism is not entirely fair since recommended densities by ring were averages and thus allowed some flexibility in the range of densities employed.) New towns have been attacked as not providing sufficient choice for their inhabitants. Some hierarchy of towns or functional clusters of towns, yielding greater choice, might have been explored. An important alternative that might have been considered was the accommodation of projected, rather than controlled, population and employment.

The proposals appear quite logically related to objectives in their general direction but some question might arise regarding specifics. Are excessively high residential densities truly those exceeding the recommended ones? When is employment concentration too much? Possible shortcomings of new towns and green belts were noted above. In short, some alternatives should have been explored more carefully before these proposals were accepted as final.

The study program appears to have been well-geared to developing the major elements of the plan: applying in detail certain accepted physical solutions to achieve stated objectives.

The basic themes were strong and comprehensive, but suffered from the lack of alternatives.