

LINKING *EX ANTE* AND *EX POST* EVALUATION IN BRITISH TOWN PLANNING

N. LICHFIELD & A. PRAT

1. Introduction

Statutory *town planning* in Britain can be seen as an elaborate system of development planning and implementation set in place in order to directly shape and, more often, indirectly affect the process of change and conservation of the built and natural environment. This traditional term is still used, despite being somewhat outdated. Amongst current synonyms are: urban and regional, town and country, land use and community planning.

In simple terms, this institutional and legal system produces, at the local authority level: 1. processes, i.e. the cyclical sequences of plan making/implementation/review, where many actors, interests and decisions are involved; 2. products, i.e. the plans, comprising both maps and supporting documents.

This paper focuses on how evaluation is conceived and used in this distinct policy system, both in relation to its processes and products; on the present shortcomings; on the possible explanations for the current situation; and, finally, on suggestions for improvement, referring to the need for:

1. better integrating of evaluation in the planning system
2. greater strengthening of the link between *ex ante*, *in itinere* and *ex post* evaluation

In undertaking this analysis, it has to be recognised that the town planning field overlaps more and more with other policy fields. The means, objectives and institutions involved in this system embrace those of other planning systems dealing with other aspects of the urban and rural change (such as transport, urban renewal, urban and rural conservation and environmental protection) or with other activities that, while having a physical component, are more focused on economic and social objectives (urban programmes, economic development policies, housing). Thus, it would also worth investigating if this proximity with other policy fields has some impacts on evaluation in town planning, and if some learning between different evaluation traditions can be

initiated. This apart, evaluation in the British planning system is, or could be, affected by three major developments:

- recent changes in the town planning system itself and their shortcomings as far as evaluation is concerned;
- recent changes in evaluation in the environmental field;
- evaluation research tradition beginning to be applied in the evaluation of urban programmes.

2. Evaluation in the British Town Planning System

2.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STATUTORY PLANNING SYSTEM

It is well known that the British planning system had an early origin. The original planning framework was designed by the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act, followed by the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act, which gave Local Authorities the power to control development by means of planning schemes. These were local acts setting out regulations for the use and development of land. The schemes had to be approved by the Minister and both Houses of Parliament: this process gave them the force of law and consequently allowed permission to develop in conformity with zoning prescriptions.

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, which is often considered a turning point not only in British planning, introduced a new paradigm in planning, through two major changes: (1) a new development planning system; (2) financial provisions for the compensation and betterment problem. The core of the system was the development plan, which was conceived as a "... framework or pattern of proposed land use, in the form of coherent set of proposals for the use of land, against which day-to-day development can be considered" (MoLGP 1951, p. 23) It essentially consisted of a survey, a statement of the main policies and proposals, and maps. Consideration of day-to-day development against the plan meant the use of discretion in the planning process: each permission would be granted or refused on the basis of its merits against the policies indicated in the plan binding and "other material considerations". Conformity to the plan did not immediately mean permission to develop would be granted. The plan itself did not convey development rights. Certainty for the developer had been reduced in favour of flexibility of the system.

The 1947 style of planning proved to be extremely slow in the process of approval and review and demanding in terms of analytical studies. Moreover, the Act was built on the logic of a positive development planning, which was rejected during the 50s, for ideological and practical reasons. Following the widespread criticisms and the report