

Attitudes Toward Land Use Planning

Telahoun Eshetu, D. L. Helgeson and E. V. Dunn

Land use planning is a process by which people living within a given geographic area attempt to identify and obtain uses for land which are best suited to the characteristics of the land and the needs of the people. Land use planning is used (1) to protect current land uses, (2) to guide future development in an orderly fashion, and (3) to minimize present and future land use conflicts.

Introduction

The increasing attention being devoted to land uses in local areas, and at state and national levels, reflects the concern over the increasing demand for different types and intensities of land uses. The complementary and conflicting nature of land uses is becoming more apparent with technological advancement and the rapid increase in the development process. Therefore, the process of land use planning is an attempt to establish patterns of land uses that maximize the complementary aspects and minimize conflicts in the use of land.

State Planning Region VI, a nine-county area located in south central North Dakota, was the geographic area selected (Figure 1) for an analysis of the attitudes residents have toward land use problems and policies. This study was conducted

under the Research and Extension Rural Development project at North Dakota State University. The analysis was designed (1) to identify land use problems within the region, and (2) to determine the attitudes of the citizens within the region toward present and emerging values associated with the use of land.

Attitudes held toward land use are based on historical values and institutions of a society which are modified or changed during the process of development to reflect the actual circumstances of the time. Therefore, expressed attitudes by a group of people reflect feelings, fears and pre-conceived notions (Thurstone) that are established by the predominant values and institutions of a community, region, state or a nation. The identification of problems and the measurement of attitudes in this analysis were based upon a five-point scale (Likert) for purposes of measuring the intensity of responses.

Four sample categories were established to measure attitudinal differences among residents:

Eshetu is a graduate assistant, Dr. Helgeson and Dunn are associate professors, Department of Agricultural Economics.

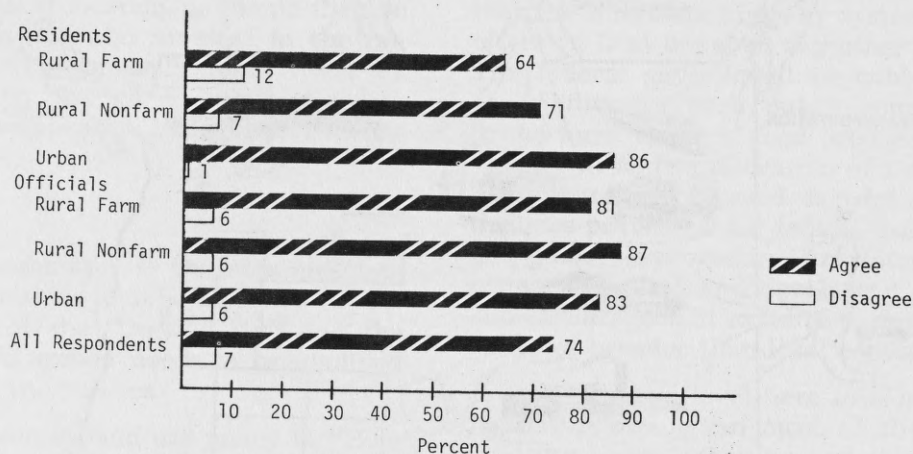


Figure 2. Per cent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "Land-use planning can be effective in avoiding conflicts between landowners and the public."

(1) rural farm, (2) rural nonfarm (communities of 2,500 residents and less), (3) urban (communities of 2,500 residents and above), and (4) public officials (both elected and appointed) according to their place of residence.

The rural farm category was further stratified into three groups: (1) small farms (1-999 acres), (2) medium farms (1,000-1,999 acres), and (3) large farms (2,000 acres and above). A mail survey of 2,959 residents in the region provided information for this analysis.

Land Use Problems in Region VI

Various land use problems were identified and combined into 11 major groups. Results of the survey analysis revealed that four of the 11 problems were considered important (statistically significant). These four problems were: (1) high voltage power lines crossing irrigable land; (2) abandoned farmsteads; (3) pollution of streams

from farm chemicals, runoffs and bank erosion; and (4) lack of adequate land use control methods. When the 11 land use problems were ranked by sample categories and individual counties, it became apparent people have different perceptions of the problems, depending upon their place of residence and occupation.

Land Use Values and Policy Conflicts

Most of the respondents in all sample categories were of the opinion that land use planning can be effective in minimizing conflicts between land owners and the public (Figure 2).¹ The conversion of agricultural land to urban and industrial development was not perceived as a high priority problem (conversion of prime agricultural land to urban uses ranked sixth out of 11 problems identified). However, all respondents within the

¹Figure and table percentages throughout this article will not total 100 per cent because undecided and nonrespondents were not presented in each instance.

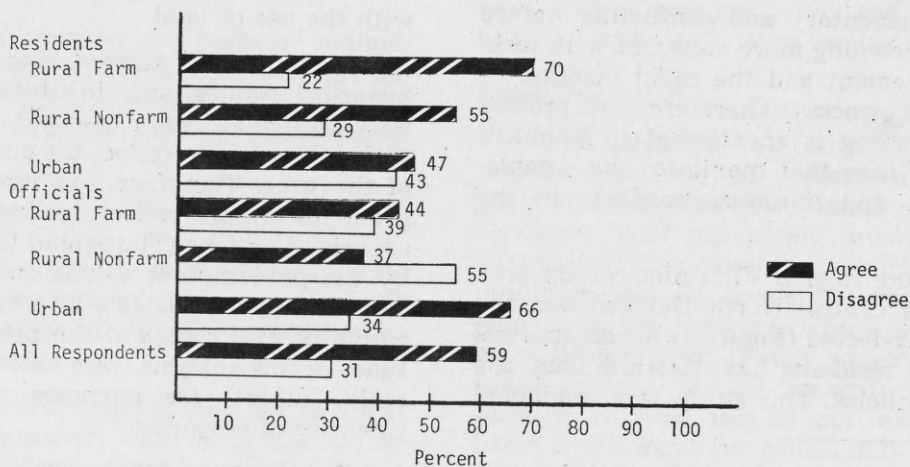


Figure 3. Per cent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "Ownership of land should allow absolute individual rights as to how that land may be used."

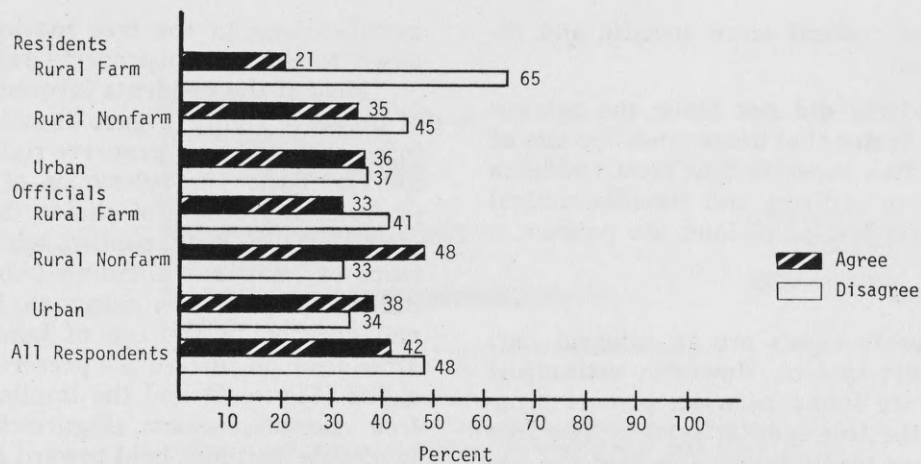


Figure 4. Per cent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "The government should have the right to control land use in the interest of public health, safety, morals, or general welfare."

region held a favorable attitude (agree - 65%, disagree - 13%) toward the effectiveness of land use planning as a means of preserving prime agricultural land from urban development. Secondly, most of the respondents were of the opinion (agree - 73%, disagree - 15%) that people within the region should be concerned with land use planning, despite decreasing population in the region.

Most respondents agreed with the statement, "Ownership of land should allow absolute individual rights as to how land may be used" (Figure 3). Rural farm residents and urban officials (70% and 66%, respectively) favored absolute individual rights in the use of land. Disagreement ranged from a low of 22% by rural farm residents to a high of 55% by rural nonfarm officials. This suggests that farmers, more closely associated with land, favor absolute individual rights in the use of land to a greater degree than persons who are further removed from the land.

Policy and Implementation Conflicts

Respondents favored land use planning in principle, but objected to certain implementation methods, such as government control of land use and eminent domain, as a means to claim land for public purposes. Residents were highly limited in the degree to which they were willing to sacrifice their individual freedom.

Respondents showed contradictions in their attitudes toward the concept of land use planning and the methods by which it is implemented. All sample categories favored legal regulations, as a general statement, requiring land owners to consider the rights of others in the use of their land (agree - 85%, disagree - 9%). However, as legal requirements became more specific and restrictive, attitudes held toward governmental control and the right to claim land for public purposes became less favorable (Figures 4 and 5). Thus, favorable attitudes held toward legal requirements in general were much different from the

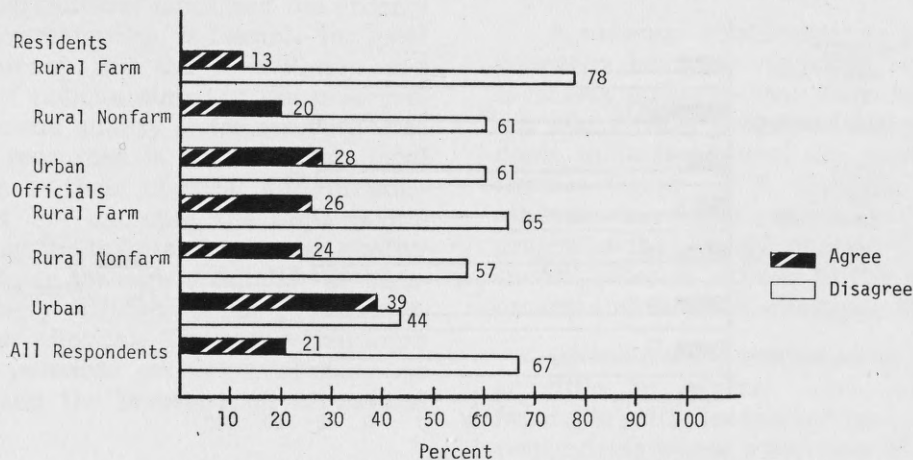


Figure 5. Per cent respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "The government should have the right to claim any land for public use as long as just compensation is paid to landowners."

attitudes observed toward more specific and restrictive measures.

Most respondents did not favor the market price as the only factor that determines the use of land (Figure 6). This suggests that most residents in the region favor indirect and flexible control methods in the application of land use policies.

Conflicting Values

Private property rights are an integral part of the free market system. However, attitudinal contradictions were found between private property rights and the free market system. The free market system has traditionally allocated the use of land and other resources. Changes in the attitudes of people have forced the public sector to modify the free market system through such activities as land reserves, subsidies and preferential taxes. Similar changes have not occurred relative to property rights. The absence of similar changes in property rights² has helped preserve some of the "frontier values" (such as individualism and absolute right to property) associated with land.

Changes in the free market system normally affect individuals indirectly and are usually accompanied by a time lag that allows individuals to adjust their decisions to these changes. Modifications of private property rights have a more direct and immediate impact on individuals. This helps explain why people object less to changes or

²A 1973 study of court cases by Bosselman, Callies and Banta indicated that court rulings (regarding property rights) in favor of the public interest over that of the individual owner were not consistently made until the 1970's, especially in cases that have regional and statewide significance.

modifications in the free market system as opposed to changes in property rights.

Most of the residents favored the preservation of property rights (Figure 3) and were opposed to infringements upon property rights (Figures 4 and 5). The basic characteristics of property rights (individual freedom of choice, decision, and ownership) are in direct conflict with basic characteristics of land use planning (which may involve limitations placed on individual freedom of choice and decision in the use of land). The favorable attitudes held toward the preservation of property rights (Figure 3) and the implied changes in the free market system (Figure 6), coupled with favorable attitudes held toward land use planning (Figure 2), are a reflection of the contradictions that face those concerned with avoiding and resolving land use conflicts.

The historical process of development that has brought about changes in the attitudes of people and changes in the free market system seems to have resolved basic value conflicts between the free market system and land use planning. This same historical process of development has not significantly changed the values placed upon property rights. Consequently, the basic conflicts between the values placed upon property rights and land use planning are reflected in the attitudes held by residents in the region.

Formulation and Implementation of Land Use Policy

Respondents tended to favor formulating land use policies at the local level of government (Table 1). Their opinions concerning the formulation of land use policies became more uncertain at higher governmental levels.

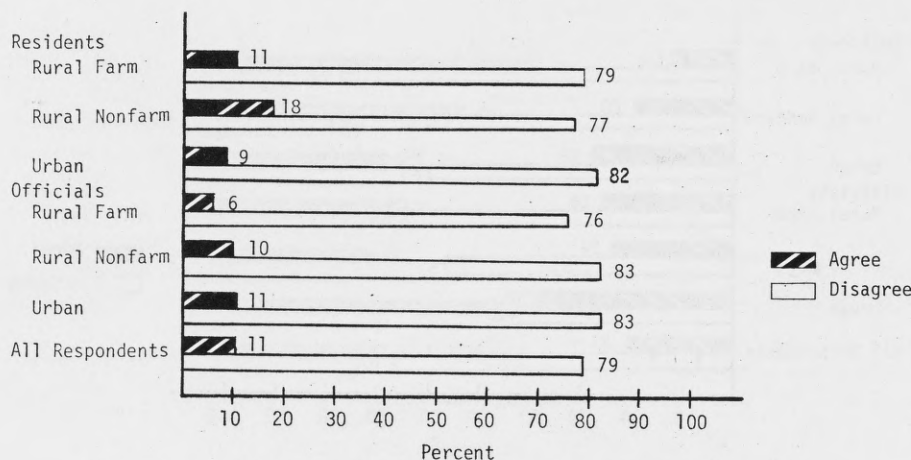


Figure 6. Per cent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "Market price should be the only factor which determines how land should be used."

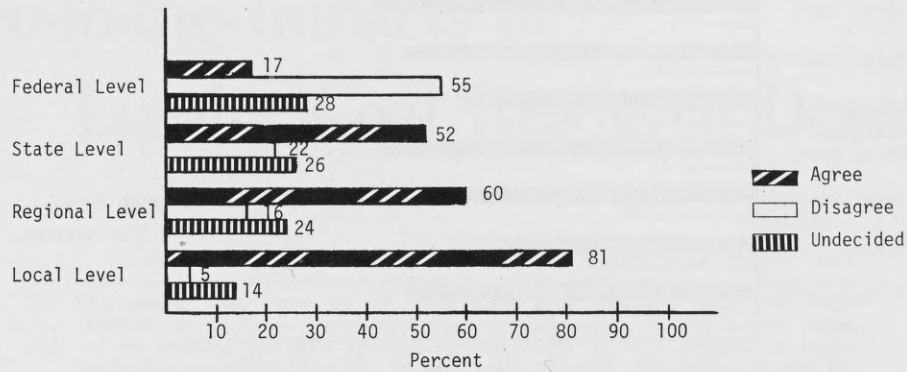


Figure 7. Percentage response of all respondents toward the statement, "The initiation and design of land-use planning should take place at the federal, state, regional, or local levels."

Respondents tended to favor implementing policies at the local level of government as opposed to the regional and state levels (Figure 7). They strongly disagree with the federal level of administering land use policies. Few respondents tended to disagree with local levels of administration.

Local Government

Consistent and overwhelming preference for the formulation and administration of land use policies at the local level of government compared to the higher levels emphasizes the desire on the part of the citizens to participate in the decision making process of government. The proximity of the local government is not only conducive to citizen participation, but also allows daily personal contact between public officials and citizens.

Local governments face severe limitations in dealing with certain land use problems even though respondents expressed a more favorable attitude toward the local level of government. The formulation and implementation of policy directed at specific objectives or goals, such as the preservation of prime agricultural lands and the orderly development of communities, is feasible for local levels of government. But the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at the preservation of environmental quality or for assuring wise use of natural resources is difficult for local governments due to their physical and jurisdictional limitations. For example, the implementation of local policy for maintaining water quality of a river that flows through a number of jurisdictions is extremely difficult without the cooperation of other jurisdictions. The same limitation exists for other potential problems, such as air quality control and the preservation of natural resources.

Favorable attitudes held toward the local level of government concerning all aspects of land

use planning (including legislation to force land use planning) should not be interpreted as an acceptance of reduced individual freedom in the use of land. Rather, it is an indication of the level of government the residents favor in formulating and implementing land use policies, if and when such decisions become necessary to guide development, resolve conflicts, or preserve agricultural land. It further indicates the preference of citizens to participate in and to influence land use decisions which could affect them directly.

The desire of residents to participate in land use planning was supported by the attitudinal results which were found toward organization needs. Residents were of the opinion (agree - 56%, disagree - 16%) that sufficient community organizations did not exist to reflect and protect the interests of the general public in regard to land use decisions. There was overwhelming agreement (agree - 85%, disagree - 5%) that such organizations should be created. There was also strong agreement by all sample categories that land use plans should not be adopted without the final approval of local citizens (Figure 8).

A measure of sincerity to participate in and influence land use decisions is reflected in the favorable attitudes that were found toward land use educational programs designed to help residents understand land use problems and opportunities (agree - 87%, disagree - 7%). Favorable attitudes were also expressed toward educational programs that would explain the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the land use planning process (agree - 92%, disagree - 4%).

Officials and participants in land use planning activities in general, have significantly more favorable attitudes toward land use planning than respondents whose awareness of land use issues is assumed to be lower (nonofficials and nonparticipants in land use planning activities).

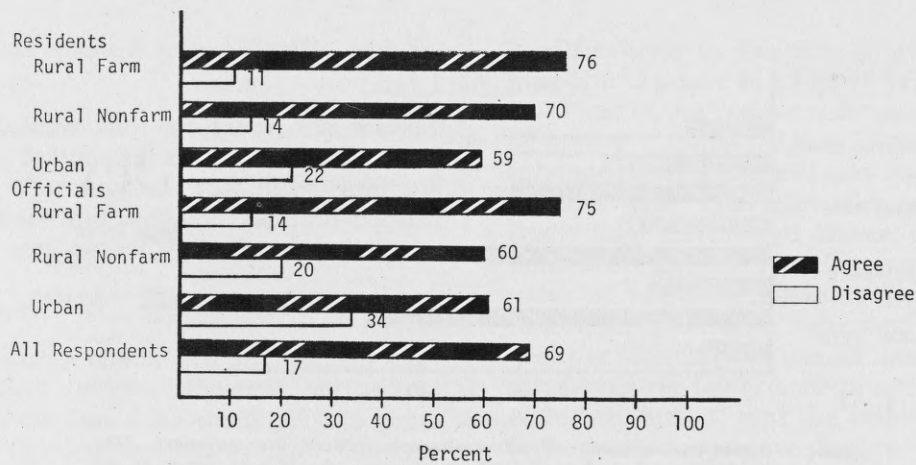


Figure 8. Per cent of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, "Land-use plans should be adopted only with the approval of the local citizens."

Attitudinal Differences

The most significant factors explaining attitudinal differences among people in the different sample categories were place of residence and whether or not they owned land. For example, rural farm residents consistently expressed a less favorable attitude toward land use planning than residents of rural non farm and urban areas.

Landowners, in contrast to nonlandowners, were found to have attitudes which were significantly less favorable toward land use measures that directly affect the land. As the size of farm increased, attitudes toward the formulation of land use policies at higher levels of government became more unfavorable.

Attitudinal differences were found between officials and nonofficials exclusively at the local level of government. Public officials were significantly more in favor of having land use issues addressed at the local level of government. It appears that the place of residence and whether or not an individual holds a public office represent the most important factors.

Summary

Residents of Region VI were of the opinion that the process of land use planning can be used to resolve conflicts, preserve agricultural lands and guide the orderly development of local communities. Indirect and flexible control methods, through the modification of the free market system, were preferred for the implementation of land use policies. Residents opposed control methods that limit or restrict the freedom of the individuals to exercise their constitutional rights with regard to property.

The favorable attitudes toward the modification of the free market system and the feeling that

property rights should be preserved results in contradiction. This makes it extremely difficult for public officials to formulate and implement land use policies because property rights are an integral part of the free market system. This attitudinal contradiction is a reflection of the historical process of development, which has involved gradual modifications to the free market system while similar modifications to property rights have not taken place. It also reflects a closer identification of individuals with property rights compared to the free market system.

Attitudes toward land use planning are dependent upon the extent to which an individual sacrifices the right to make land use decisions. This appears to be dependent upon the policy objective and the level of government at which the policy is formulated or implemented. In general, the more restrictive a policy objective and the higher the level of government, the less favorable was the attitude of residents.

References

1. Bosselman, Fred P., David Collier and John Banta. 1975. "The Taking Issue: A Study of the Constitutional Limits," in *Management and Control of Growth*, Vol. I, pp. 256-265, Randall W. Scott, David J. Brower and Dollar D. Miner, editors, Urban Land Institute, Washington, D.C.
2. Likert, Rensis. 1970. "A Technique of the Measurement of Attitudes," in *Attitude Measurement*, edited by Gene F. Summers, Rand McNally and Company, Chicago, p. 151.
3. Thurstone, L. L. 1967. "Attitude Can Be Measured," in *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement*, Martin Fishbein, editor, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York, p. 3.
4. From *Land Use Policy: Guide for a Growing Iowa*, prepared by Land Use Planning Task Force, John A. Wallize and Lynn Betts, editors, Iowa State University, Ames, May, 1974.