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Forecasting the Sustainability of Alternative Plans: The Cambridge Futures Experience

Introduction

There is general consensus that sustainability indicators in urban planning should encompass three aspects: economic efficiency, social benefits and environmental sustainability. Like a tripod, the omission of any of the three 'legs' supporting a plan would unbalance a city and affect its long-term sustainability. There is, however, less agreement as to what constitutes the economic, social and environmental aspects of a plan and how they should be measured. Furthermore, even if there were consensus as to what to measure and how to measure it, there would still be a problem of how to combine the three individual measures of sustainability.

This chapter addresses these general issues of what elements of sustainability can be measured and the way in which they can be measured, as well as how they can be meaningfully applied when indicators have been defined. It refers to a case study, the Cambridge Futures experience, which has been influential in shaping the new structural plan adopted recently for the Cambridge sub-region. The approach taken by Cambridge Futures has been to engage stakeholders in the planning process from the outset, outside the statutory process, to fully explore the range of options and opinions available as a way of