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EVALUATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING: ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRADE-OFFS

By DONALD M. McALISTER

Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press. 1980.

Pp. 308. \$24.95.

A critical review of evaluation methodologies used in urban/regional planning, this book's premise is that the technical rigor of planning methodologies has been achieved at the expense of the broader consideration of human democratic and environmental values. McAlister's objective is to show academic and professional planners how the various planning methodologies have failed to integrate such values, and how modifications in the design of evaluation techniques and channels for input of interested parties might improve the planning process. No new evaluation methodologies are proposed, nor are detailed directions offered on "how to do it" in practice. McAlister's work reflects a solid understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various evaluation methodologies and where such techniques might be used selectively. His suggested guidelines for incorporating broader considerations in the planning process are likely to be difficult to apply.

The book is divided into three sections. Section I, about 15 percent of the book, attempts to redress the narrowness of existing approaches by incorporating human values, democratic philosophy, and environmental values in the analytical frameworks. Section II, the evaluation of analytical frameworks, constitutes two-thirds of the book. Here, McAlister critically reviews the major *ex ante* analytical planning frameworks—benefit/cost analysis, planning balance sheets, goals achievement matrices, energy analysis, judgmental frameworks. The final section lays out a comprehensive planning theory which takes into account intangibles/intergenerational transfers/qualitative values.

While the explication of the evaluation techniques in Section II is strong, Section III has several flaws. Concerning the quantification of environmental effects, McAlister severely restricts the types of effects which he claims are capable of quantification. However, he correctly sees a value to policy makers in the exercise of attempting to quantify the benefits and costs of alternative courses of action.

The book suffers from a failure to consider the effects of institutions on the behavior of principal actors in the planning process.

There are flaws in the author's view of the role of experts and citizen input in environmental decision making. McAlister sees citizen input as being manifest in public forums and prompted by "articulate, logical, and compelling factual statements" prepared by experts. While advocating a greater reliance on judgmental frameworks, he recognizes the need for separating objective information from the value judgments of the experts. However, the flaws in his argument result from failure to consider the free rider problem in citizen input in decisionmaking, and in the censure of administrative action and the experts who might promote their own values or self interest at the expense of the broader consideration which McAlister argues should be incorporated. With regard to the importance of institutions, it should be noted that the institutional structure determines the level of achievable benefits as well as costs, e.g., tax subsidies or regulations which encourage or prescribe end-of-the-pipe controls may not provide maximum discharge reductions or do so at least cost. These are important points which should be clearly stated to academic and professional planners. However, the synthesis of alternative planning evaluation techniques makes the book well worth reading.

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*This review represents the views of the author only; the National Commission on Air Quality has not formally reviewed the piece.