

Scenario planning as a potential step towards urban policy integration: Evidence from Portugal

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Abstract

Policy integration has become a high-priority objective for many in transportation and urban planning. The need for coordination is especially apparent in the area of transportation policy and metropolitan urban development, where governments must address the complex issues of sustainability and equity, and where policies must coordinate action across sectors and across space. However, existing research offers limited insight into how integration in the context of urban governance can actually be achieved.

At the same time, many transportation and urban planning organizations have adopted scenario planning approaches, not only to develop long-term strategy, but also, potentially, to build organizational capacity and strengthen organizational networks. The supposed organizational benefits of scenario planning—including its ability to persuade participants to dislodge preexisting views, improve understanding of the organizational context, provide a common instrument of communication among disparate actors, and build networks—are all, according to existing research, factors which facilitate collaboration. Yet these supposed outcomes of scenario planning remain largely untested.

In this study we examine the potential of scenario planning to provide a path toward policy integration, particularly via its ability (or inability) to build inter-organizational relationships and foster organizational learning. We investigate the effects of a particular scenario planning process, conducted with Portuguese stakeholders around the issues of transportation and urban revitalization. We specifically examine whether the process increases the participants' propensity for future collaboration. Using a pre-/post-test survey, we attempt to measure change in participants' perceptions and understandings with respect to factors that lead to collaboration.

The results suggest that the scenario planning process may have increased participants' propensity to collaborate, primarily by strengthening inter-agency networks. The survey results indicate that participation in the exercise helped create new inter-agency connections. However, the deeper effects on participants' views and understanding remain inconclusive, bringing into question whether scenario planning holds advantage over other professional network-building activities. We suggest that specific challenges in applying scenario planning in the public sector may limit the method's potential in achieving inter-organizational collaboration in urban governance.

Keywords: inter-agency collaboration, scenario planning, policy integration