

Recoding Embedded Assumptions: Adaptation of an Open Source Tool to Support Sustainability, Transparency and Participatory Governance

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Abstract

This chapter traces the adoption of Envision Tomorrow, an open source planning support tool, in a large-scale planning effort within the Austin metropolitan region. A regional consortium of public, nonprofit, and private organizations was awarded a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities grant to create and deploy an analytical tool for the assessment of district, community and regional-scale scenarios. Several dimensions of Envision Tomorrow are described in the chapter including its use: as a tool in participatory plan-making; as an analytical process that extends and structures how planners perform analysis; as a PSS that focuses on quantifiable sustainability indicators and thus supports the inscription of particular definitions of sustainability; and as a conduit of exchange between planners and university researchers and between planners and member of the public. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the virtues of transparency and adaptability. It also reveals embedded assumptions that represent both sources of promise and concern in the application of a PSS in planning processes.

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