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The Use of policy analysis in southern Nevada planning and development departments

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Policy Analysis
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of policy analysis by planning and development departments throughout the Southern Nevada region. The data for this study was collected from interviewing eight planning and development department heads within various jurisdictions. The interviews consisted of twelve questions that were designed to explore the roles of department heads with respect to the policymaking process as well as whom is conducting policy analysis to assist in Decision-making. The main research question this study attempts to answer is, do Southern Nevada planning and development agencies conduct and use policy analysis?

The data was interpreted through qualitative analysis and conclusions were derived from the findings. The findings suggest that all the departments in some form utilize policy analysis such as GIS mapping, flow charts, gantt charts. The exact extent these organizations conduct policy analysis is unknown. However, it is speculated the amount of analysis conducted increases with the size of the organization. Although elected officials are the primary decision makers, they were not the focus of this study.

After summarizing the findings, limitations are discussed to explain challenges and obstacles encountered. The small sample size and inconsistent methods of obtaining interview answers are some of these challenges that could be addressed in future research. Additional suggestions of improving and expanding on the current study are discussed in the future research. Further research is needed to provide more comparable and universal results for Nevada.

Introduction

The public sector has a long history of using policy analysis to assess problems, develop policies, and conduct program evaluations. This is considered a standard method of practice within the decision-making process, especially at the federal level, and is thought to provide policymakers recommendations containing useful information, such as potential impacts and alternatives. However, more and more questions are emerging about whether or not policy analysis is conducted and used effectively throughout the public sector, especially within local government entities. These questions have only raised concerns about what information policymakers and elected officials are using to make decisions on behalf of the constituents and communities they represent.

It was in consideration of these questions and concerns that this research project was developed. The project sought to explore how decision-making occurs within local governments in Southern Nevada and the role of policy analysis in the process. Upon reviewing the limited literature and developing a framework, interviews were conducted with directors of local planning and development departments and the information obtained was evaluated using an established qualitative analysis method. Findings about how policy analysis is conducted and used among all of the departments selected were compared and formed the basis for conclusions drawn. In addition, observations made about the possible limitations of the project and recommendations for future research were discussed. Ultimately, one of the main goals was to begin exploring in more detail whom is responsible for making policy decisions and what information is provided to these policymakers within the realm of local government agencies.

Literature Review

As was anticipated, the amount of research examining if and how local governments conduct and use policy analysis in general is limited. For the research that has been done on this topic, the majority of researchers attempt to define the term “policy analysis” or generally explore its use in policymaking. Hird (2005) defines it as “a subset of expertise applied to public problems... [and] any form of expertise in service to public policymaking and administration.” According to Walker (2000), policy analysis constitutes “a rational, systematic approach to making policy choices in the public sector.” He further explains it as a process that evaluates the possible outcomes of various policies enacted or chosen. He even proposed an eight-step process for conducting policy analysis that can be followed by any new policymaker to assist with defining and solving problems.

In examining decision-making processes within the public sector, both Shulock (1999) and Hird (2005) explored the irony that although a great amount of time and resources are used to produce policy analysis, policymakers rarely use policy analysis to make decisions. Shulock hypothesized that policy analysis is used more frequently when public attention towards an issue is high. Hird found in his research that while analysis conducted by nonpartisan research organizations (NPRO's) is considered important to state legislators, it is also not used to its full potential. Walker (2000) took these concepts one step further and concluded that any policy analysis created can be considered a failure if the information is not actually used.

Some of the researchers appear to support the concept that the relationship between the information provider and the policymaker has a greater influence in

determining if the policy analysis is used or not than the actual content of the analysis itself (Wingfield, 1963; Walker, 2000). Wingfield further explored the role of influence in policymaking and concluded that informal community political systems, such as volunteer citizens or political groups, can play a more significant role than any actual policy analysis conducted. In fact, each group can affect the other and the end result can be considered inadvertent policymaking.

Interestingly enough, while conducting research on how gender influences the decision-making of city managers, Fox and Schuhman (1999) determined that political ideologies cannot ever be truly eliminated by policymakers in the decision-making process. This finding only generates more questions about how influential policy analysis really is when all is said and done.

In addition to examining the general topic of policy analysis, some researchers have focused on how policy analysis has been created and used specifically by planning departments. According to Neuman (1998) and Walker (2000), conducting policy analysis stemmed out the need for planning departments to move away from using only a theoretical perspective and towards focusing on a more comprehensive perspective, as it relates to public policy and city based needs. Neuman emphasized the importance in considering the overall Decision-making-process, and not just theory alone, when performing city planning. This shift is what eventually led to the incorporation of other community development and environmental issues in the planning process, such as the consideration of clean air and water, flood zones, and endangered species.

Other researchers (Wingfield, 1963; Brill, 1979) also stress the significant role sources outside the organization (e.g. general public and interest groups) can play and

how much they contribute to public planning and the policymaking process overall. They determine it is nearly impossible to capture all variables contributing to planning problems and that studies attempting to understand these may be downright useless. In addition, Brill emphasized the need to utilize an optimization model in public sector planning, as a way to accomplish the best outcomes without harming anything or anyone.

So while there is extensive literature that seeks to define policy analysis and its role in the public sector. It was evident that little research has been done to examine its utilization within local government agencies, specifically planning departments. However, the available research information was instrumental in providing a framework comparison during the analysis and also gave guidance for future research concepts.

Conceptual Framework

From the beginning stages of this project, it was understood the underlying framework would be based on concepts developed by Hird (2005) and his research of the relationship between state legislators and nonpartisan research organizations (NPROs). In his research, Hird examined the role of policy analysis and how it is used in state legislatures in order to determine the impact it has on policymaking.

While ultimately Hird found that NPROs are valued by the elected officials that support them, he also concluded that the information typically provided by NPROs does not constitute thorough policy analysis nor is it very influential in the decision-making process. Instead, the policy analysis done by NPROs is often seen as politically neutral and fails to assess policy alternatives in light of standard analysis frameworks, such as

effectiveness, efficiency, or equity. It is also considered to lack independence of thought or creativity in the problem-solving process.

The subsequent result of this dynamic is that elected officials must seek additional and/or more specific information from outside sources, such as lobbyists and political consultants. Not only does this generate questions about the true usefulness of NPROs, but it also exposes concerns about transparency and public participation of the policymaking process at the state level.

Yet in examining Hird's research framework, there was an underlying sense that elected officials only bear some of the responsibility for decision-making done in the public sector. In fact, it was suspected that agency directors and administrators are often highly involved with the decision-making process and their recommendations generally carry a great deal of weight with elected officials. It was assumed their involvement includes creating, evaluating, and revising public policy and extends far beyond the general capability and availability of most elected officials.

Unlike Hird's research, the intent of this study was to examine the use of policy analysis within local government agencies, and not at the state level. In addition, the design of this study deviates from Hird's by focusing on individual departments and their directors instead of elected officials. Assumptions were then made that department directors play a key role in the decision-making process and that this is occurring within the local government structure more than is really understood.

Focus of Study

Moving beyond the conceptual framework established, it became necessary to narrow the focus of the study by deciding which local governments and/or particular departments would be included in the research. Various options were presented and considered during the initial brainstorming session, such as whether to examine all counties or cities/towns in Nevada or to identify a group of local government entities within a specific region.

Region

Further discussion of the economic and political landscape throughout the state of Nevada led to an interest in narrowing the research to the Southern Nevada region, as this area was recognized to have significant differences compared to other areas within the state. In particular, there is a larger population base and higher concentration of local government entities that must interact and share common albeit limited resources. Even just from a sustainability perspective, there was interest in exploring whether or not it is a necessity for local governments within this region to utilize policy analysis in decision-making in order to most effectively and efficiently serve the citizens within their jurisdiction.

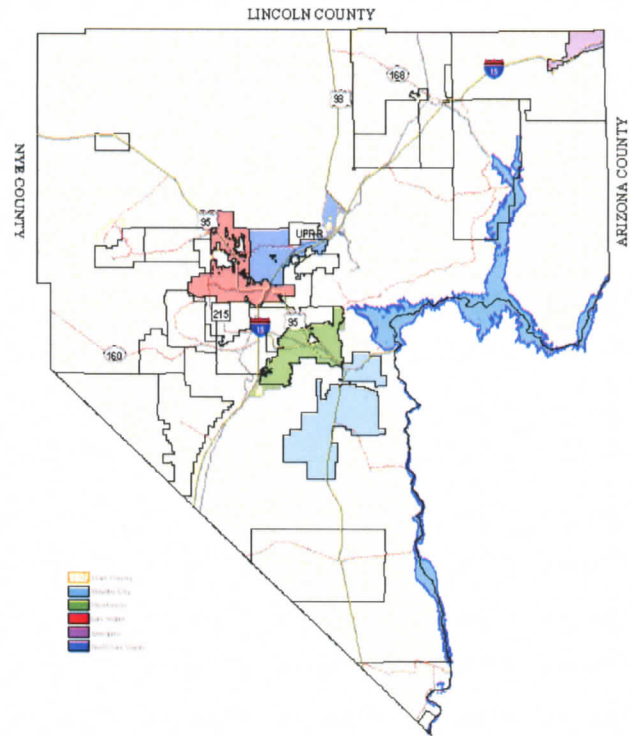
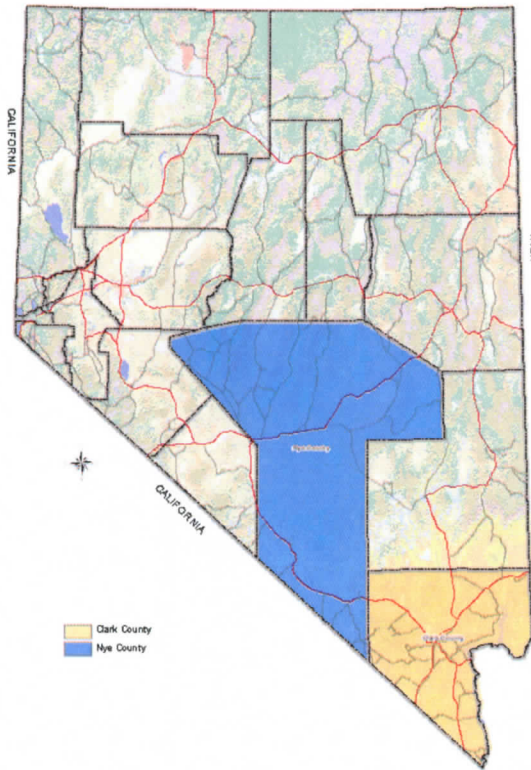
The initial thought was to target local government organizations directly within the Las Vegas Valley, encompassing only the government entities of Clark County and the various city governments. Yet, it was also recognized that any decision-making occurring within the rural communities nearby might have an impact on the larger metropolitan area. Therefore the decision was made to include local government entities from rural areas in order to provide a possible means of comparison between urban and rural areas.

Specifically, it was assumed rural areas may be less likely to use policy analysis in the decision-making process either because of limited funding or lack of real need to do so.

For the purpose of this study, the Southern Nevada region was defined to encompass those communities directly within the Las Vegas Valley and the larger rural communities within approximately 100 miles of the metropolitan area. The physical geographic range spanned all of Clark County and only the Southern part of Nye County. The original list of local government entities selected included the following:

- Urban areas: Boulder City, Clark County, Henderson, Las Vegas, and North Las Vegas;
- Rural areas: Laughlin, Mesquite, Pahrump, and Nye County.

However, it must be noted once actual research for the study began, it was discovered that the towns of Laughlin and Pahrump do not have individual planning and development departments. Instead, the planning and development departments of the respective counties of Clark and Nye have jurisdiction over these communities. It was not clear on the surface why these towns have not become incorporated and established their own planning and development departments to represent their own communities. These findings seemed noteworthy to mention but it was beyond the scope of this project to delve into the reasons why this arrangement exists. Suffice to say, further investigation into these organizational relationships and assessing any benefits might be a worthwhile consideration for future research.



Departments

After selecting the local governments, it then became necessary to narrow the selection even further by determining the departments to be studied. Common functions and operations within the local governments were researched and yielded only a handful of comparable options among the cities/towns and counties selected. These included administrative services, building code enforcement, and planning and development departments.

Ultimately, planning and development departments were chosen, primarily because they were considered to have broad span of influence and impact on the communities they serve. Subsequently, it was assumed the use of policy analysis would be more likely to occur within these departments due to the technical aspects of engineering and designing a community and its environment.

Once the research began, it was discovered planning and development functions are split between two separate departments within Clark County, namely the Comprehensive Planning and Developmental Services Departments. As a result of these findings, the total number of departments selected for this research project totaled eight (Table 1).

Table 1: Jurisdictions with Associated Departments

Jurisdictions	Departments
City of Las Vegas	Department of Planning and Development
Boulder City	Community Development Department
City of North Las Vegas	Department of Planning and Development
City of Henderson	Community Development
City of Mesquite	Planning and Redevelopment
Nye County	Planning Department
Clark County	Department of Comprehensive Planning
Clark County	Developmental Services

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent that policy analysis is used by local governments using a qualitative research design. The study sought to gain a better understanding of the roles of department heads with respect to public policymaking and to what extent they make informative decisions or recommendations. Processes for providing information within each department were examined, in addition to determining who within the department might be responsible for conducting any policy analysis.

For this study, policy analysis was defined as any research or form of expertise used to make well-informed decisions about policies, programs, or projects. The main research question this study attempted to answer was, do local planning and development agencies conduct and use policy analysis?

Data Collection and Methods

For this research study, a total of twelve questions were developed for the interviews and included two sets of questions: six closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were designed to gain general background information for the comparison of various organizations and their jurisdictions. They provided data for identifying patterns and connections. Because they are more definitive in nature, they were used to categorize the organizations in terms of size, budget and experience. Associations between various agencies were apparent when considering these with the results of the open-ended questions and these conclusions are suggested in the findings of this study.

The open-ended questions focused on three areas of research, which were the roles of the department heads, the sources of information, and the methods of analysis. The questions were designed to determine how decision-making occurs within these organizations and who is responsible for making those decisions. Subjects were not specifically asked whether or not their departments perform policy analysis. This is due to concerns either that they might provide an erroneous answer if they lacked an accurate understanding of policy analysis or might be compelled to misrepresent their organization. Instead the questions were intended to provide the researchers with indicators of policy analysis, in order to provide greater assurance that any conclusions were based on a uniform assessment and were consistent with the definition used in this study.

All twelve questions and the definition of policy analysis used in this study were provided to the subjects in advance so they were able to review them prior to the

interview (see Appendix A). Separate research members, with the exception of Mesquite who elected to submit written responses, conducted interviews with each department head. The subjects were asked to answer the questions after considering the three most significant decisions made within their departments in the past year. The questions and their order were structured across each interview. However, researchers also elaborated on key topics to stimulate dialog and engage with their interviewees. Responses to the questions were recorded through notes and summarized by each respective interviewer.

Analysis

This analysis interprets narrative data, or content analysis, from a qualitative study on decision-making processes in Southern Nevada planning and development agencies. The methodology utilized a model for assessing, categorizing and interpreting the data. Findings were compared to those of similar research and summarized in both narrative and graphical formats.

The analytical model used in this study was developed by Ellen Taylor-Powell and Marcus Renner of the University of Wisconsin-Extension (Powell and Renner, 2003). According to Taylor-Powell and Renner, the model “outlines a basic approach for analyzing and interpreting narrative data” through a five-step process, which involves the following:

1. Get to know your data
2. Focus the analysis
3. Categorize information
4. Identify patterns and connections within/between categories
5. Interpretation

The data collected for this study was derived from interviews with the department heads. The interviews comprised of six closed-ended and six open-ended questions. These questions were grouped into three categories: *Decision Makers*, *Information*, and *Methods of Analysis*. The category for *Information* was then further sub-divided into categories titled *Information Sources* and *Information Providers*.

The purpose of the interview questions was to address two underlying questions: who makes decisions and how are they made? By answering these, it was possible to assess whether or not policy analysis is being conducted.

All interview responses were summarized by the respective researcher and recorded in a standardized structure. Responses to the closed-ended questions were compiled and used for analysis in conjunction with the open-ended questions (see Table 2). Specifically, data obtained from the closed-ended questions was used for comparison with the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions to identify any patterns or connections exist among the various departments studied.

Table 2: Summary of Responses to Closed-ended Questions

Question	Responses
Years in current position	2 to 8 years
Years directly involved with public policy issues	14 to 32 years
Number of employees working in organization	10 to 375
Number of employees directly managed	3 to 17
Average annual operating budget of organization	\$900K to \$43MM
Population of jurisdiction	16K ⁺ to 1.8 MM ⁺

Responses to the open-ended questions were then evaluated to determine whether or not the decision-making process of an agency signified that policy analysis, per the established definition, is being used. These were assessed using a combination of preset and emergent criteria. The data was coded to establish which criteria did or did not apply.

The preset criteria were obtained from concepts depicting policy analysis and information identified in the literature review. Examples of preset criteria can be found in interview question #4 (see Appendix A), in which various examples of individuals who might act as analysts were listed with the question.

Criteria that were not preconceived were defined in the analysis as emergent criteria. These were derived from the responses found to be recurring in the data, and yet were not specifically asked about during the interviews. Examples of emergent criteria can be found in responses to interview question #3 (see Appendix A), in which most of the department heads identified professional publication and associations as sources of information. As all criteria were not mutually exclusive, there were cases where data fit into two or more categories, thereby requiring them to be cross-indexed.

Researchers interpreted the data separately and coded them into the different criteria. Once the data was tabulated, the individual analyses were compared and any discrepancies were identified. Discrepancies were then reconciled through a joint review process, which subsequently did not alter the original conclusions of the individual researchers in a significant manner. A final set of coded data was established for final analysis (see Appendix C).

Patterns in the data were examined and interpreted to bring out their meaning and significance. The frequency of responses for each criterion was used to rank its relevant importance to this study. For example, criteria that applied to a majority of organizations were considered important patterns to investigate. Conversely, criteria that applied to few or no organizations also warranted consideration. Although not suited for statistical

significance, general patterns revealed relationships that suggested occurrences related to cause and effect.

Findings

The findings in this study were not exhaustive but some important aspects were highlighted and identified by the research. Overall, it was difficult to ascertain the depth that policy analysis is being used from the interview responses. In fact, the study seemed to indicate that most planning and development departments in Southern Nevada do not have a systemic approach in place for making policy. Still, the findings suggested that the departments interviewed for this study do conduct some form of policy analysis in order to make recommendations to elected officials. The following interpretation of data is an attempt to summarize the findings in light of the three categories established for the interview questions (Decision-Makers, Information, and Method of Analysis), a comparison drawn from the literature review, and a summary of the findings.

Decision-Makers

The data clearly demonstrated that all department heads provide policy recommendations to the elected officials serving as lead decision-makers for their jurisdictions and constituents. All but one department head indicated they only make recommendations and do not make policy decisions. In contrast, the department head of Clark County Development Services indicated they actually make most final policy decisions, in addition to providing recommendations to elected officials. This department stood out from the rest, in that it appeared to run its revenue streams more like an organization in the private sector than one in the public sector. However, further research

is needed in order to gain a better understanding of why this department is operated and managed in such a different manner.

The common roles of each department head are to evaluate existing policy and create alternatives. Five out of the seven agencies indicated they play a role in creating new policy by proposing their recommendations to elected officials. The department heads of all the agencies considered their elected officials as their primary influence on the recommendations they make (see Figure 1).

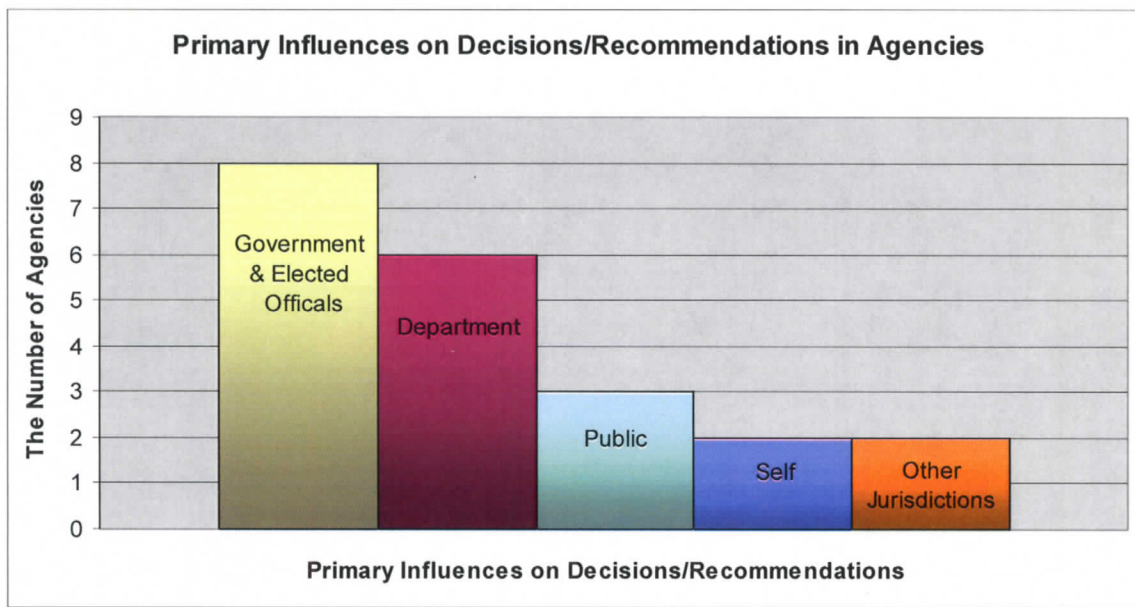


Figure 1

Information

The policy decisions or recommendations made by department heads stem from various sources of information. Providers of information, analysts of sorts, conduct research and propose conclusions that are derived from these sources. In this study, the findings specific to information were evaluated as either sources of information or providers of information.

The data showed that other jurisdictions, published journals and reports, and staff and peers are common sources of policy analysis information for all eight departments. The public and attorneys contributed occasionally among most of the agencies. The outsourcing of contractors was reported by only two departments, and thus appears to be rarely used.

The use of professional associations as a source of information was discovered during the analysis to be an emergent criterion under the category for “Other” in response to interview question #4 (see Appendix A). Only five out of the eight departments reported using professional associations, such as the American Planning Association and Planning Advisory Service. However, it was suspected that all of the department heads might be affiliated with these organizations based on outside communication with the department heads that did not report this during the actual interview (see Figure 2).

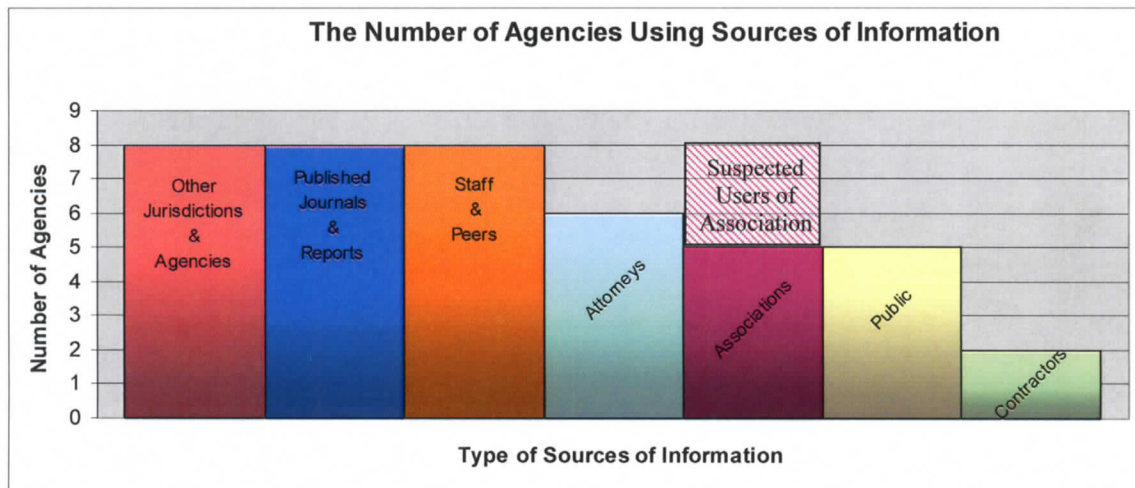


Figure 2

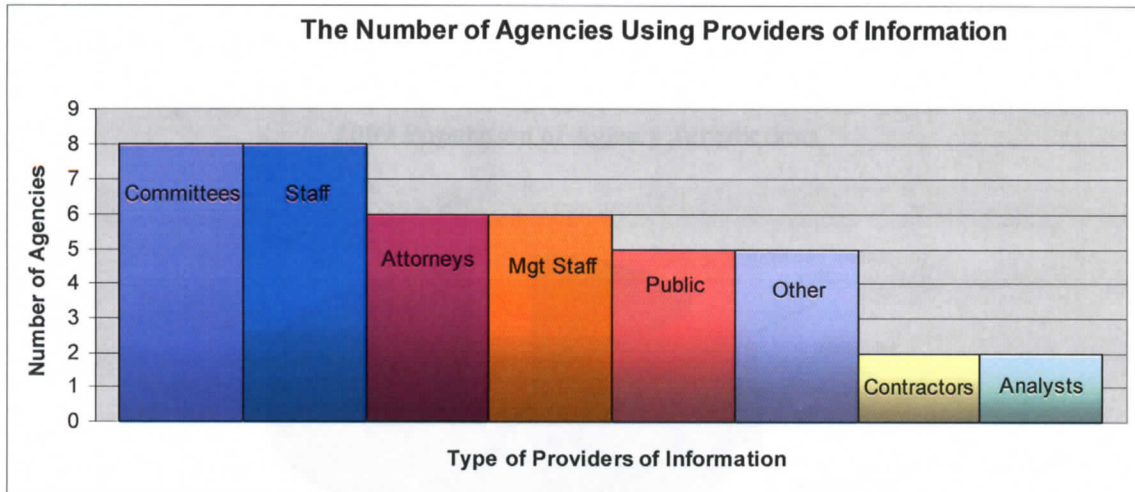


Figure 3

All of the department heads reported they rely on information providers to make well-informed decisions and/or recommendations (see Figure 3). In comparing individual departments, it was observed that Clark County uses the most providers of information, which also corresponds with them having the largest population, budget, and number of employees (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). Conversely, while Mesquite is among the departments with the smallest population, budget, and number of employees, it utilizes nearly as many information providers as Clark County does.

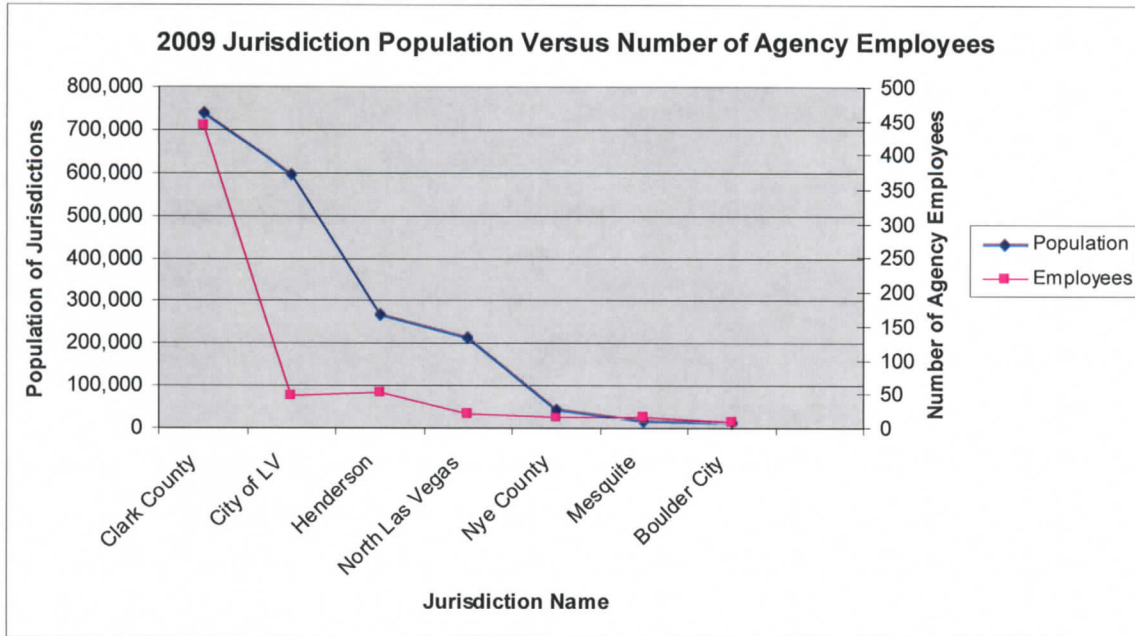


Figure 6

Methods of Analysis

Various analytical methods were used by the departments interviewed (see Figure 7), but Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping was the primary analytical tool across all agencies. Cost-effective analysis, Gantt charts, performance indicators, and surveys were the least used methods of analysis. The number of methods used ranged significantly across the agencies, with Clark County standing out as the one that used the most.

In fact, only the two departments within Clark County reported using all but one method of analysis listed in the interview question as criteria, and they also identified other methods used that were not listed. It was speculated this might be a result of the county having the largest population among all the departments examined and, consequently, the largest budget to allocate for various types of analysis. In contrast,

departments with jurisdiction over smaller populations, such as the City of North Las Vegas, Boulder City, and Nye County, primarily used GIS mapping. However, they reported very little use of other methods of analysis, if any. Therefore, it could be assumed from these data comparisons that the variety of analytical methods used by any department is directly related to their overall size.

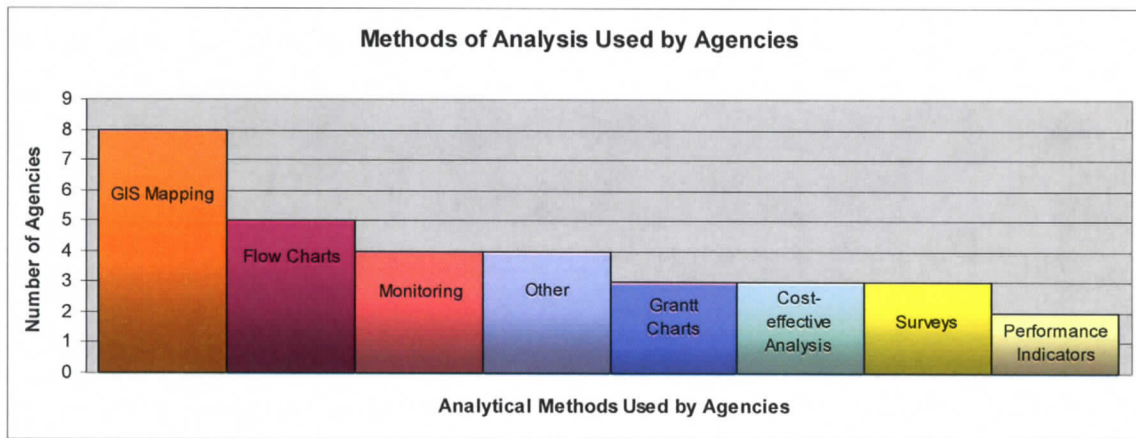


Figure 7

Comparison to Literature

The literature review supported the idea that important elements of decision-making can be accomplished through the use of an established policy analysis process, such as the eight-step process developed by Walker (2000). Walker noted that having an eight-step process makes it easy for someone who is new to policy analysis to be able to set out a plan for what needs to be accomplished. These findings are consistent with one of our study subjects in regard to having a process in place, which anyone can follow.

Clark County’s Department of Comprehensive Planning uses a policy analysis process consisting of twelve steps, which was designed to assist the elected officials in making effective decisions for establishing and/or alternating new policy (see Table 3). This process is the main staple for decision-making and policy analysis and is followed

precisely by the department. The Department of Comprehensive Planning appears to understand and value the concepts discussed by Wingfield (193) regarding the role of community influences and other stakeholders. Subsequently, the twelve-step planning process they developed seeks to involve several entities throughout the community, including the public, other local municipalities, town boards, the Planning Committees, and the Board County Commissioners (BCC).

Table 3: CC Department of Comprehensive Planning 12-Step Process for Policy Analysis

Steps
1. Open house - Draft community issues, opportunities and goals
2. TAB (town board) meetings - Prioritize list of issues, opportunities and goals
3. BCC/PC Public Hearings (formalize community goals) - Concept plan is drawn up
4. Planning Advisory Group Meeting - Preliminary draft plan
5. TAB Meeting (review preliminary draft plan) - Steering Committee, Neighboring TAB, review, comments
6. BCC/PC Briefings (educational seminar, gather an additional info) - 2 nd draft plan
7. Open House (comments on 2 nd draft plan - Final draft plan
8. TAB Meeting (recommendations regarding adoption of plan)
9. Steering Committee (recommendations regarding adoption of plan)
10. BCC/PC Public Hearings (adoption of Plan) - To be or not to be adopted plan?
11. Plan Monitoring (evaluate effectiveness of plan) - List potential problems and improvements
12. Plan Amendments if necessary

Summary of Findings

Across the board, the data strongly suggested policy analysis takes place in planning and development departments throughout Southern Nevada. For the most part, the research demonstrated policy analysis is occurring to some degree within all of the departments and is used to provide information and alternatives to decision-makers (i.e. elected officials). However, it could not be concluded in this study whether or not policy

analysis is also being conducted by elected officials nor could it be determined what additional information they may be using in the decision-making process.

Correlations between the size of the departments and the number of analytical methods used were observed in the data. The graphs in Figures 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the direct relationships between population, budget, and number of employees, all of which increase proportionately to each other. Therefore, the size of an organization in this study was considered in terms of these three parameters.

The exact extent these organizations conduct policy analysis has yet to be determined. However, it is speculated the amount of analysis conducted increases with the size of the organization. This evokes the question of whether or not smaller agencies are able to conduct thorough policy analysis for their decision-making processes, or even if there is a need for them to do so.

Interestingly enough, the City of Mesquite was ranked as one of the smallest jurisdictions researched in this study, but the data demonstrated they use as many providers of information as their larger counterparts, such as Clark County (see Figure 8). From the information obtained, it was not clear why the planning and development department in Mesquite utilizes more providers of information than other jurisdictions of comparable size (i.e. population, budget, and number of employees). One possible explanation is Mesquite's rapid growth during the recent development boom, when it may have been trying to develop its community independent of the greater Las Vegas area (see Table 4).

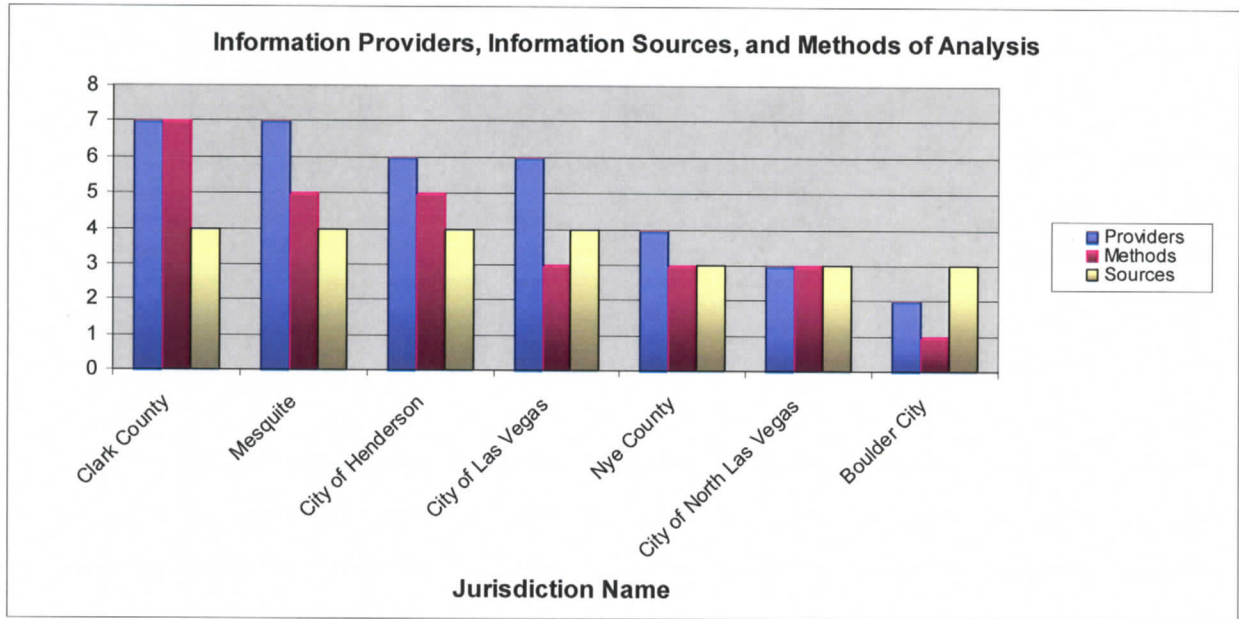


Figure 8

Table 4: Jurisdiction Years 2000 Through 2009 Approximate Population Growths

Jurisdiction	Percent Population Growth
Mesquite	110%
North Las Vegas	89%
Henderson	54%
Nye County	42%
Clark County	27%
City of LV	25%
Boulder City	11%

Note: Percent growth based on year 2000 Census and 2009 estimated populations.

Another interesting finding was identified when the data was normalized to establish an agency cost per capita based on respective budgets and populations. Not surprisingly, the data shows that Clark County allocates the most money to planning and development, when compared to other smaller agencies. However, Boulder City, whose population is the smallest of the jurisdictions in this research, allocates the second most amount of money in planning and development (see Table 5). One possible explanation

is that Boulder City is culturally different and reluctant to experience significant growth, thereby utilizing a lot of planning to prevent it.

Table 5: Budgetary Cost Per Capita for Planning and Development Agencies

Jurisdiction	Annual Budget	Population	Cost Per Capita
Clark County	\$53,000,000	741,308	\$71.50
Boulder City	\$900,000	16,684	\$53.94
Nye County	\$1,300,000	46,236	\$28.12
City of Mesquite	\$543,000	19,754	\$27.49
City of Henderson	\$5,000,000	270,000	\$18.52
City of North Las Vegas	\$3,400,000	218,000	\$15.60
City of Las Vegas	\$6,700,000	600,000	\$11.17

Throughout the entire analysis, there appeared to be no correlations between either rural and urban jurisdictions or city and county jurisdictions. Instead, there were indications of analysis being used at greater and lesser levels in every department. For example, the two county jurisdictions studied (Clark and Nye) were both large and small users of analysis in terms of how many methods of analysis and providers of information are used. Similarly, the City of Henderson and Boulder City also shared opposite extremes. And as noted previously, the City of Mesquite, which is considered a rural jurisdiction, was among the higher users of analysis and their rate of use was comparable to urban jurisdictions, such as Henderson. (see Figure 8)

Overall, trends in the data appeared to support the conclusion that jurisdictions with a larger population base correlated to a greater likelihood of having larger planning and development departments. Additionally, it appeared that these larger departments

conducted more policy analysis by comparing how many providers of information and methods of analysis they utilize. The only exception to this conclusion was the City of Mesquite, but the exact reasons for this difference could not be determined by the scope of this study.

Limitations

As in the case with any project, there is always going to be limitations. Initially, the limitations were difficult to envision but they became more evident throughout the course of the project. The acknowledged limitations in this project are a result primarily to time constraints and location. They are related to sample size and the inconsistent method of the interview process.

The data consisted of a small sample size restricted to Southern Nevada agencies. For a qualitative analysis, the findings are difficult to generalize with other counties, cities, and states with limited data. The number of planning directors interviewed and the focus on Southern Nevada planning departments diminishes the ability to determine the states usage of policy analysis in all agencies. Including the entire state creates a larger sample size that would produce more comparable and generalized findings. Also, a small sample size makes it difficult to determine whether the findings are reliable results of the research or due merely to chance.

The interview process produced inconsistencies. Even though the same questions were asked of each interviewee, the manner in which the interviews were conducted was dissimilar. Some of the interviews were face-to-face while others submitted answers via email and telephone. Interviews conducted via email and telephone lacked the

phenomenon of body language and facial expressions. This method may have also allowed interviewees to “script” an answer versus answering the question on the spot. The interviews that were conducted face-to-face enable the interviewer to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on key points and draw further conclusions. With more time, researchers may have been able to travel to all the locations of the agencies.

Recommendations for Future Research

The concept of future research encompasses the methods that would be taken to expand on the current project. If not limited to the time constraints, there are various options that could have been chosen. For instance, the focus could be expanded statewide including all counties and cities. Since Nevada consists of both rural areas and urban cities, interviewing planning and development department heads from all Nevada agencies could present a greater understanding of the use of policy analysis in these areas. It could also reveal discrepancies between Northern and Southern Nevada. Including agencies statewide could offer further insight as to whether or not population size, demographics and departmental budgets also play an integral role in the use of policy analysis. Overall, including a larger sample size affords more universal and comparable results.

Developing a survey with questions that solicited more personal and detailed information from interviewees, such as: political affiliation, gender, age and income level, may reveal a correlation between these personal aspects of the interviewee and the use of policy analysis, as Fox and Schuhmann (1999) related to in *Gender and Local Government: A Comparison of Women and Men City Managers*. Fox and Schuhmann

(1999) found that women managers tend to use more public and employee input than men in their Decision-making process. Comparing gender use of policy analysis is just one example of obtaining further correlations based on characteristics.

Considering the findings of this project, it could be recommended to investigate the dynamics of Mesquite. Mesquite served as the second smallest population but employs nearly as much policy analysis methods and providers as Clark County, the largest department surveyed. Expanding on this may provide an interesting insight into why Mesquite operates in this capacity and the affects it has on their annual budget.

Another aspect of future research should be the cost of conducting policy analysis. Determining the percentage of the respective departments' annual budget spent on policy analysis, in comparison to it's usage, could prove if the process of conducting policy analysis is cost effective or merely an unnecessary drain on the department's annual budget.

More importantly, interviewing or surveying elected officials should be included to gain a better understanding of what information they are using in the Decision-making process. Specifically, determining how often, if at all, policy analysis provided by planning and development directors is taken into account by elected officials in the final Decision-making process.

Conclusion

The basis of this study was developed upon the similar concept of Hird's (2005) research, which analyzes the role of policy analysis and its use in government for the Decision-making process. This study differs from Hird, in that it examined the use of

policy analysis in local government instead of statewide and does not include elected officials. Research on the use of policy analysis by local governments in Nevada is limited. Therefore, determining a starting point for this study was a challenging task. Conducting the study based upon planning and development departments deemed to be a significant because of the influence and impact on the communities they serve. This led to address the question, do Southern Nevada planning and development agencies conduct and use policy analysis?

This qualitative study utilized a model for assessing, categorizing and interpreting the data. The data gathered from the interviews focused on the roles of the department heads, the sources of information, and the methods of analysis. Data regarding general background information for the comparison of various organizations and their jurisdictions was also obtained.

This research yielded several key findings related to methods of analysis, sources of information, and influences on decision-making. Regarding the influence of recommendations for decisions, department heads of all the agencies considered their elected officials as their primary influence. Sources of information and methods of analysis were pertinent in all the departments. The data showed that other jurisdictions, published journals and reports, and staff and peers are common sources of policy analysis information for all eight departments. They employ methods such as GIS mapping, cost-effective analysis, and various other resources to assist elected officials in the policymaking process. The findings also revealed a correlation between budget size, jurisdiction population, and number of agency employees (with the exception of Boulder

City). Finally, there is a correlation between budget size and methods of analysis with the exception of Mesquite.

As with any research, there are limitations that can be addressed by future research. Furthering this research should include interviewing or surveying elected officials and all planning and development department heads in Nevada. This larger sample size would provide further insight to the role of policy analysis in the Decision-making process related to planning and development in Nevada. Generating results that could be comparable to other states and could explain whether policy analysis is useful to policymakers.

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