



# Application of quality management criteria to regional growth management

## Lessons from South East Queensland

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**Improving the quality of the planning and administration of regional growth management processes is an important issue in many parts of the world. This article reports a case study in the rapidly growing region of South East Queensland, Australia, using a Quality Management framework. This focused on leadership, human resources, customer relations, operations process control, continual improvement, and efficiency in meeting customer needs. It found that, with some modifications, this framework was both applicable and useful in assessing the case study and is likely to be more widely applicable as a guide for the administration of regional growth management. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved**

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### Introduction

Metropolitan regional growth management is an issue of considerable urgency for governments around the world. How its processes and outcomes may be enhanced are matters for debate and research. Both government and non-government processes are involved all of which rely on certain fundamentals. There is a growing body of evidence that quality man-

agement techniques appropriately applied can be used to improve them (Steeple, 1993; Cohen and Brand, 1993; Connor, 1997; Hunt, 1993; Redman *et al*, 1995; US General Accounting Office, 1992). Swiss (1992) offers a wide-ranging assessment of the applicability in government of some approaches to quality management. He identifies four areas (customers, services, processes, and political culture) where difficulties might arise. Rago (1994) dismisses the first three of Swiss's concerns. Both feel that there are important components of "orthodox" quality management which can benefit public sector management. The study, the subject of this paper, sought to define the potential benefits of integrating quality management concepts into established urban growth management processes.

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Developing from work by Wyeth (1995), such processes were shown to be similar to design management processes as both involve intensive information-handling and decision-making, that is, they may be enhanced through adoption of quality concepts. The theory was then tested through a case study of the SEQ2001 Project. Before reporting the findings, the significance and context of SEQ2001 needs explanation.

Two additional issues are pertinent. First, many public sector projects involve interaction of several agencies of central government, local authorities, community organisations and consultation with the wider public. Second, the interactive networks set up to develop such policies are not unlike organisations set up for more clearly defined, more specific purposes. The SEQ2001 project organization was such a network, that is, a virtual organization. These issues underlie our analysis and give guidance when proposing future directions.

### Quality management and urban growth

Public and private organizations, including those concerned with urban management, have been involved recently with the implementation of management enhancement with innovations of many kinds based on quality concepts (AQAF, 1994; Australia DAS, 1996; Ferris, 1997; Mahon and Kapsis, 1996; Morgan and Carnevale, 1997; Navaratnam and Harris, 1995; Steeples, 1993). Certainly, there has been governmental support of quality in the public sector in Australia through various means.

While Vu *et al* (1997) found that quality management activities in local government are still in the early stages of development, focusing mainly on administration, customer interfaces, and purchasing, several public sector corporations have performed well in the Australian Quality Awards in recent years.

The aim of the research reported here was to evaluate the management processes of a complex agency structure set up to develop and implement growth management strategies for the South East Queensland region of Australia. The focus was the application of relevant quality criteria to the regional growth management process. Although quality management was not considered specifically in the development of the agency involved nor implemented in its work, reviewing its processes in terms of quality criteria provides a framework for suggesting improvements. Given the importance of regional growth management in many parts of the world these suggestions have wide applicability.

#### *South East Queensland 2001*

South East Queensland is one of the fastest growing metropolitan regions in Australia (Low Choy and Minnery, 1994). Its location and its size compared with that of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

Northern Ireland is shown in Fig. 1. Most of the population growth is through intra-state and inter-state migration as part of a “sun-belt” phenomenon. With only 11.7 percent of the national population in 1996, the region accounted for 25.3 percent of the nation’s growth during the 1991–96 period and for 77 percent of the population growth of the state of Queensland (Minnery and Barker, 1998). Growth occurred mainly as low-density urban sprawl across a vast area, creating difficulties for public sector managers in planning for and providing infrastructure and services (Roberts *et al*, 1996; Stimson *et al*, 1997). The population of the region is expected to increase from 1.6 million in 1986 to about 3 million in the year 2011 (RCC, 1998).

Up until 1995, urban and regional planning in Queensland was essentially devoid of any significant direction at state level, unlike land management regimes in other states which used State Planning Authorities/Commissions (Collie, 1996) in a fourth tier of government for land-use and infrastructure planning, development and co-ordination. Yet planning in Queensland still involved the same partners and a similar set of principles to planning elsewhere. Local Government in those other states is of much less political significance than it is in Queensland where planning is principally the responsibility of individual local authorities. However the final responsibility for approval of such plans and changes to them remains with the state. It did mean that regional co-ordination between local authorities was at best *ad hoc*; at worst non-existent. Despite concerted but ill-fated efforts by Queensland’s Co-ordinator-General to introduce Regional Planning in the mid-seventies (Minnery, 1988), there were no formal or institutional links between land use plans of local governments and the plans of state government agencies for infrastructure provision until some twenty years later. There were no links between the fiscal or budgetary planning of levels of government either.

In 1990, the recently elected state government recognized the potential costs to the community of unplanned, unco-ordinated development. In response to the publication of new population projections for South East Queensland (APRU, 1990), it organized the SEQ2001 Growth Management Conference in December 1990. The conference involved some 250 representatives of Commonwealth, State and Local Governments, business and industry, the trade unions, professional groups, and community organizations. It showed:

that people feared that growth and development were out of control . . . the loss of valued agricultural areas, of bushland and coastal environment areas, of the relaxed Brisbane lifestyle, and (of) the region turning into a Los Angeles type urban sprawl from Noosa to Coolangatta. (Abbott, 1996)

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