

OPINIONS OF SELECTED RESIDENTS REGARDING LAND USE
IN THE OWENSBORO-DAVIESS COUNTY AREA

by

The Sociology Research Methods Class

Directed by

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the spring semester of the 1974-1975 academic year, the Sociology Research Methods class conducted a survey pertaining to land use and land use planning in the Owensboro-Daviess County area. The study was done primarily to acquaint class members with the various steps and procedures involved in conducting a survey and writing a research report.

Because of the time and expense involved in interviewing a random sample of Owensboro-Daviess County residents, the class decided to use mailed questionnaires¹ and an accidental sample of selected categories of residents. The selected categories were professional people of Owensboro and both farm and nonfarm residents of rural Daviess County. The data from the questionnaires were transferred to McBee Keysort cards for sorting and tabulating.

Limitations are unavoidable in a study designed primarily as a learning experience for students who have had no previous courses in research methods. Items on the questionnaire were kept to a minimum to simplify analysis. More importantly, the non-randomness of the sample and the 40 per cent non-returns make it impossible to generalize the opinions of the respondents to the residents of the Owensboro-Daviess County area.

It is hoped that some helpful insights may be gained from the opinions expressed by the respondents and that the study may serve as the exploratory stage of more elaborate and sophisticated research in the future.

* * * * *

Part II will trace briefly the development of land use patterns in the Owensboro-Daviess County area and will be followed in Part III with a presentation of the data obtained from the questionnaires. Part IV will conclude the study with a summary of the findings.

¹See copy of questionnaire in Appendix.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF LAND USE IN THE OWENSBORO-DAVIESS COUNTY AREA

For two hundred years we have been relatively free to use land as we pleased although there have been some government controls. As our country has changed from rural to urban, land is swiftly disappearing and all too slowly man has come to realize that proper use of our land is very important if there is to be any worthwhile future for us. Demands are increasing for land, minerals, timber, beef and recreational space. The demand for land will soon exceed the amount available.

One of the most baffling problems we face today is whether we should preserve the land for open space for agriculture or develop the land for industry and urban growth. Is growth always the answer or should we be more concerned with the quality of life in our environment? Another problem we face is, how do we control land use? Should it be at the local, state or federal level, or some combination of these?

Many factors have determined land use in our area. We will briefly review some of these. Since the river city of Yellow Banks (later called Rossboro, then Owensborough, and finally Owensboro) was chosen county seat of the new Daviess County in 1815, it has become a center of trade for western Kentucky. Due primarily to its Ohio River location, this is not surprising. Population--its size, distribution, density and composition--are partial determinants of land use. From 1900 to 1960, Owensboro's population grew from 13,189 to 42,471. On the average, population grew at about 21 per cent per decade but the greatest increase occurred between 1950 and 1960 when 8,820 persons were added to the population.

Population growth is caused by three factors: natural increase, net migration, and annexation. Annexation is a major factor contributing to the growth of Owensboro. Owensboro's growth in terms of acreage is based on the continuation of past annexation policies. Owensboro's annexation policy has been to annex newly developed areas as requested by developers. This policy has served to assure the developer of water and sewer services for new areas. It is predicted that Owensboro will continue this pattern of growth into the future.

Past annexation history of the city of Owensboro during the years 1950 to 1973 has produced a net acreage gain of 3,275 acres. This represents an average annual gain of approximately 142.6 acres per year.

Another determinant of land use is the economy. The nucleus of Owensboro's economic base is the manufacturing industry. More people are employed, more wealth is created and more wages are distributed by this industrial base than by any other component of the city economy. Other major sources of employment include trade and services, government and agriculture.

Other determinants of land use that should be included are thoroughfares, airports and zoning policies. All these factors and many others have in varying degrees influenced the development of present land use patterns in the Owensboro-Daviess County area.

III. ANALYSIS OF DATA

One hundred eighty, or 60 per cent, of the 300 mailed questionnaires were returned.¹ Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents who returned their questionnaires by sex and occupation. It will be noted that most of the respondents are male. This is due mainly to the fact that listings in the yellow pages of the telephone directory were used to locate names of professionals who are, for the most part, male.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY SEX AND OCCUPATION

Occupation	Male		Female		Not given	Total	
Doctor	40	(24)	1	(6)	...	41	(23)
Attorney	40	(24)	...	...	...	40	(22)
Farmer	34	(21)	...	...	...	34	(19)
Minister	19	(12)	...	...	...	19	(10)
Teacher	11	(7)	10	(63)	...	21	(12)
Other ^a	16	(10)	5	(31)	...	21	(12)
Not given	3	(2)	...	...	1	4	(2)
Total	163	(100)	16	(100)	1	180	(100)

^aMiscellaneous category including retired, housewife, and unclassifiable.

Land Use Decisions

It is clear from Tables 2 and 3 that the vast majority of respondents, regardless of age category or occupation, preferred decisions regarding land use in this area to be made on the local level. However, a number of comments are instructive: An attorney: "Although I prefer city-county, I realize that to date, there have been at least three occasions where Owensboro has missed good chances to expand." A teacher: "To stimulate local action I would like final decisions to be made at the local level. However, in order to prevent private interests from gaining too much control and prospering from such action I prefer that it be within guidelines established on a state and/or national level." A farmer: "Local people can do a much better job as they should know local conditions better and do a better job if they don't try to promote their own selfish interest." A dentist: "Never-but-never past local planners and no powers of condemnation." A teacher: "State and federal guidelines desirable." One teacher preferred decisions on the state level. He commented: "The incompetence of local officials often displayed in this matter leads one to the conclusion that the job should be removed from their list of duties."

¹Six more were returned, but too late to be included in the study.

TABLE 2
RESPONSES TO ITEM 10 BY OCCUPATION

Response	Doctor	Attorney	Farmer	Minister	Teacher	Other	Total
Local	41 (100)	38 (100)	30 (94)	19 (100)	17 (85)	20 (95)	169 (97)
State	.. ...	.. ...	.. ..	.. ...	3 (15)	1 (5)	4 (2)
Federal	.. ...	.. ...	2 (6)	.. ...	.. ..	.. ..	2 (1)
Total	41 (100)	38 (100)	32 (100)	19 (100)	20(100)	21 (100)	175 ^a (100)

Item 10: At what level of government would you prefer land use decisions to be made for the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

^aNot given--5.

TABLE 3
RESPONSES TO ITEM 10 BY AGE CATEGORY

Response	Under 30	30-59	60 and over	Total
Local	17 (100)	125 (95)	26 (100)	169 (97)
State	.. ...	4 (3)	.. ...	4 (2)
Federal	.. ...	2 (2)	.. ...	2 (1)
Total	17 (100)	131 (100)	26 (100)	175 ^a (100)

Item 10: At what level of government would you prefer land use decisions to be made for the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

^aNot given--5.

Land Use Planning

As shown in Table 4, owners/buyers differed only slightly from renters in the degree of importance they attached to land use planning--three-fourths of each category considered it "very important." However, owners/buyers were more likely than renters to say that they had been "very interested" in land use planning--43 per cent and 32 percent respectively (Table 5). Furthermore, although three-fourths of each category said "very important" to land use planning, a much smaller percentage of each stated that they had been "very interested."

A dentist, commenting on Item 8, said: "Recent concern with drainage seems to indicate importance of planning for some areas." The importance of immediate planning was stressed by a teacher who commented: "A hodgepodge will continue to accumulate unless serious plan is set--NOW!" A farmer who declared himself "not interested" in land use planning, said: "I believe in the right to own property and to do with as one pleases."

TABLE 4
RESPONSE TO ITEM 8 BY HOME PROPERTY

Response	Owned/Buying	Renting ^a	Total
Very important	116 (76)	19 (76)	135 (76)
Somewhat important	32 (21)	6 (24)	38 (21)
Not important	5 (3)	.. ..	5 (3)
Total	153 (100)	25 (100)	178 ^b (100)

Item 8: How important do you consider land use planning for this area?

^aIncludes seven ministers whose homes are provided by the parish.

^bNot given--2.

TABLE 5
RESPONSE TO ITEM 7 BY HOME PROPERTY

Response	Owned/Buying	Renting ^a	Total
Very interested	65 (43)	8 (32)	73 (41)
Somewhat interested	69 (45)	13 (52)	82 (46)
Not interested	18 (12)	4 (16)	22 (13)
Total	152 (100)	25 (100)	177 ^b (100)

Item 7: Until now, how interested have you been in land use planning in the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

^aIncludes seven ministers whose homes are provided by the parish.

^bNot given--3.

TABLE 6
RESPONSES TO ITEM 7 BY LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

Response	Less than 10 years	10 years or more	Total
Very interested	29 (32)	44 (50)	73 (41)
Somewhat interested	49 (54)	35 (40)	84 (47)
Not interested	13 (14)	9 (10)	22 (12)
Total	91 (100)	88 (100)	179 ^a (100)

Item 7: Until now, how interested have you been in land use planning in the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

^aNot given--1. $X^2 = 5.99$; d.f. = 2; .05 > P > .02.

Length of residence seemed to influence the degree of interest in land use planning (Table 6). Those who had resided in their present location for 10 or more years were significantly more likely to say they had been "very interested" in land use planning.

Table 7 shows a significant relationship between degree of interest in land use planning and awareness of studies done by city planners in recent years. As degree of interest declines, so do the percentages of those who said they were aware of studies having been done.

TABLE 7
RESPONSES TO ITEM 11 BY RESPONSES TO ITEM 7

Responses to Item 11	Responses to Item 7			Total
	Very interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested	
Yes	51 (70)	45 (54)	5 (25)	101 (57)
No	22 (30)	39 (46)	15 (75)	76 (43)
Total	73 (100)	84 (100)	20 (100)	177 ^a (100)

Item 7: Until now, how interested have you been in land use planning in the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

Item 11: Are you aware of any study or studies that have been done by city planners on land use in the Owensboro-Daviess County area in recent years?

^aNot given--3. $X^2 = 13.39$; d.f. = 2; $.01 > P > .001$.

Knowledge of the existence of a planning commission for the Owensboro-Daviess County area ranged from 100 per cent of the attorneys to 67 per cent of the teachers (Table 8). Overall, 77 per cent of the respondents said they knew of the planning commission. However, as shown in Table 9, only 57 per cent said they were aware of any studies that have been done in recent years on land use. It is interesting to note that although all the attorneys declared themselves knowledgeable regarding the planning commission, 15 per cent said they were unaware of any studies.

A teacher, who said he did not know whether or not the Owensboro-Daviess County area has a planning commission, commented: "If there is one, they appear to keep very quiet." A farmer, who said he knew of the planning commission, expressed his concern that the commission "needs more farm representation."

Respondent awareness of recent studies ranged from 85 per cent of the attorneys to 45 per cent of the farmers.

TABLE 8
RESPONSES TO ITEM 9 BY OCCUPATION

Response	Attorney	Minister	Farmer	Doctor	Teacher	Other	Total
Yes	40 (100)	16 (84)	24 (71)	29 (71)	14 (67)	13 (62)	136 (77)
No	.. ...	1 (5)	2 (6)	3 (14)	2 (10)	1 (5)	9 (5)
Do not know	.. ...	2 (11)	8 (23)	9 (5)	5 (23)	7 (33)	31 (18)
Total	40 (100)	19(100)	34 (100)	41(100)	21(100)	21(100)	176 ^a (100)

Item 9: Does the Owensboro-Daviess County area have a planning commission?

^aNot given--4.

TABLE 9
RESPONSES TO ITEM 11 BY OCCUPATION

Response	Attorney	Teacher	Doctor	Minister	Farmer	Other	Total
Yes	34 (85)	13 (62)	20 (49)	9 (47)	15 (45)	9 (43)	100 (57)
No	6 (15)	8 (38)	21 (51)	10 (53)	18 (55)	12 (57)	75 (43)
Total	40(100)	21(100)	41(100)	19(100)	33 (100)	21(100)	175 ^a (100)

Item 11: Are you aware of any study or studies that have been done by city planners on land use in the Owensboro-Daviess County area in recent years?

^aNot given--5.

Land Use for Urban Development

Table 10 shows that owner/buyers did not differ significantly from renters in their opinions regarding use of farm land for urban development. But, as shown in Table 11, rural residents differed significantly from urban residents in advocating prevention of the use of prime farm land for urban development--38 per cent and 19 per cent respectively. Half of the respondents took the middle position of giving priority to prime farm land whenever possible.

It will be noted in Table 12 that the "Other" category was omitted in comparing professionals with farmers. It will further be noted that the percentage distribution and X^2 results are very similar to those in Table 11 since professionals are almost identical to urban residents and farmers to rural residents.

One of the farmers who wished to prevent the use of farm land for urban development, commented: "Urban development should be on land unsuitable for farming." A minister who was of the same opinion, stated: "Farm

land, such as is found in this area, is at a premium in the world today. With the food problem of recent years, we must make every effort to preserve what is left."

TABLE 10
RESPONSES TO ITEM 12 BY HOME PROPERTY

Response	Owned/Buying	Renting ^a	Total
Unrestricted use of farm land for urban development	41 (28)	5 (20)	46 (27)
Priority to prime farm land whenever possible	70 (48)	14 (56)	84 (49)
Prevent use of prime farm land for urban development	35 (24)	6 (24)	41 (24)
Total	146 (100)	25 (100)	171 ^b (100)

Item 12: Which of the following best expresses your opinion on the use of farm land for urban development?

^aIncludes seven ministers whose homes are furnished by the parish.

^bNot given--9.

TABLE 11
RESPONSES TO ITEM 12 BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Response	Rural	Urban	Total
Unrestricted use of farm land for urban development	7 (15)	39 (30)	46 (26)
Priority to prime farm land whenever possible	21 (47)	65 (51)	86 (50)
Prevent use of prime farm land for urban development	17 (38)	24 (19)	41 (24)
Total	45 (100)	128 (100)	173 ^a (100)

Item 12: Which of the following best expresses your opinion on the use of farm land for urban development?

^aNot given--7.

$\chi^2 = 7.95$; d.f. = 2; $.02 > P > .01$.

TABLE 12
RESPONSES TO ITEM 12 BY OCCUPATION

Response	Farmers		Professionals		Total	
Unrestricted use of farm land for urban development	5	(15)	37	(31)	42	(27)
Priority to prime farm land whenever possible	16	(47)	62	(52)	78	(51)
Prevent use of prime farm land for urban development	13	(38)	20	(17)	33	(22)
Total	34	(100)	119	(100)	153 ^a	(100)

Item 12: Which of the following best expresses your opinion on the use of farm land for urban development?

^a"Other" category and not given--27.

$\chi^2 = 8.42$; d.f. = 2; $.02 > P > .01$.

Land Use for Public Recreation

Although 50 percent of the respondents said they thought enough land in Owensboro is being used for public recreation (Table 13), only 37 per cent said the same for rural Daviess County (Table 14). It is also evident from these tables that respondents in age category 60 and over were significantly more likely to say they thought that enough land in both Owensboro and rural Daviess County is being used for public recreation.

TABLE 13
RESPONSES TO ITEM 13 BY AGE CATEGORY

Response	Under 60		60 and over		Total	
Yes	69	(46)	19	(70)	88	(50)
No	60	(40)	2	(8)	62	(35)
Undecided	21	(14)	6	(22)	27	(15)
Total	150	(100)	27	(100)	177 ^a	(100)

Item 13: Do you think enough land in Owensboro is being used for public recreation?

^aNot given--3.

$\chi^2 = 10.69$; d.f. = 2; $.01 > P > .001$.

TABLE 14
RESPONSES TO ITEM 14 BY AGE CATEGORY

Response	Under 60		60 and over		Total	
Yes	49	(33)	16	(62)	65	(37)
No	72	(47)	4	(15)	76	(43)
Undecided	30	(20)	6	(23)	36	(20)
Total	151	(100)	26	(100)	177 ^a	(100)

Item 14: Do you think enough land in rural Daviess County is being used for public recreation?

^aNot given--3. $X^2 = 10.56$; d.f. = 2; $.01 > P > .001$.

TABLE 15
RESPONSES TO ITEM 13 BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Response	Rural		Urban		Total	
Yes	25	(54)	64	(49)	89	(50)
No	10	(22)	52	(39)	62	(35)
Undecided	11	(24)	16	(12)	27	(15)
Total	46	(100)	132	(100)	178 ^a	(100)

Item 13: Do you think enough land in Owensboro is being used for public recreation?

^aNot given--2.

TABLE 16
RESPONSES TO ITEM 14 BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Response	Rural		Urban		Total	
Yes	23	(50)	42	(32)	65	(37)
No	14	(30)	63	(48)	77	(43)
Undecided	9	(20)	27	(20)	36	(20)
Total	46	(100)	132	(100)	178 ^a	(100)

Item 14: Do you think enough land in rural Daviess County is being used for public recreation?

^aNot given--2.

$X^2 = 5.40$; d.f. = 1; $P = .02$. ("Undecided" category omitted in computation of X^2)

It can be seen in Tables 15 and 16 that half the rural residents agreed that enough land is being used in both Owensboro (54 per cent) and rural Daviess County (50 per cent) for public recreation. These same tables show that slightly less than half (49 per cent) of the urban residents said enough land is being used in Owensboro for public recreation, but only about a third (32 percent) said that this is true of rural Daviess County. Moreover, urban residents were much more likely than rural residents to say that there is not enough land being used in either Owensboro or rural Daviess County for public recreation.

Differing opinions were reflected in comments on Item 13. The following comments were among those made by respondents who said "yes" to this item: A minister: "I think Owensboro has a very fine park and recreational system." A teacher: "More importantly, have they done the best job with that available?" An attorney: "There is sufficient quantity of land for recreation. The quality and distribution needs improvement." A farmer: "For the present we need to conserve both resources and energy--not play."

Among comments made by respondents who answered "no" to Item 13, the following are representative: A teacher: "Compared to other cities with similar tax bases, Owensboro seriously lags in recreation facilities." A doctor: "Housing developers should be required to put small recreation areas in their sub-divisions." A minister: "Particularly in the northwest area."

Item 14 also received a number of interesting comments. Three respondents who said "yes" to this item, qualified their answers as follows: A minister: "Schools and recreation areas can be used in better ways." A farmer: "It isn't so much the amount of land being used, but what facilities are available." An attorney: "Available but not being used."

Two comments by respondents who said "no" to Item 14 are: A farmer: "There is next to nothing for the kids in the country to do. There are no parks, no community center, etc...." A steelworker-farmer: "The proposed dam on Jack Hinton Road should be built."

Natural Resources

Table 17 shows that almost half of the respondents, both rural and urban, said they did not think proper precautions are being taken to preserve our natural resources. Rural residents were somewhat more inclined than urban residents to answer "yes" to Item 15--35 per cent and 28 per cent respectively--while urban residents were more likely than rural to answer "do not know"--25 per cent and 17 per cent respectively.

TABLE 17
 RESPONSES TO ITEM 15 BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Response	Rural		Urban		Total	
Yes	17	(35)	37	(28)	54	(30)
No	23	(48)	62	(47)	85	(48)
Do not know	8	(17)	32	(25)	40	(22)
Total	48	(100)	131	(100)	179 ^a	(100)

Item 15: Do you think proper precautions are being taken to preserve our natural resources in the Owensboro-Daviess County area?

^a Not given--1.

Strip mining was particularly singled out for negative comment. A farmer's statement was typical: "Old mine shafts and strip mining areas should be leveled and planted in trees or cover crops." Concern for wild life in the area was expressed by an attorney: "Wild life is being neglected; natural lakes polluted by oil and coal operations." A teacher commented: "If you mean for natural beauty to be one of our natural resources, I say 'no'--there are too many trash heaps on otherwise passable roads."

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is important to remember that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the Owensboro-Daviess County residents as a whole, primarily because of the selective, accidental nature of the sampling procedure. For this reason, the conclusions drawn from the findings must be tentative statements awaiting further study for verification.

There is little doubt that the respondents preferred decisions regarding land use to be made at the local level. However, there is evidence from the comments that some respondents realize that decisions of this kind cannot always be left to the local level and, therefore, state and/or national levels of decision-making may at times be necessary.

Three-fourths of the respondents stated that they consider land use planning to be very important, but only 41 per cent said they had been "very interested in land use planning. Property owners and buyers and those who have lived at their present location for 10 years or more were more likely than renters and those of shorter residency to express themselves as "very interested."

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents said they were aware of land use studies done by city planners in recent years. Those who said they had been very interested in land use planning were much more likely to say they were aware of such studies. Seventy-seven per cent said they knew that the Owensboro-Daviess County area has a planning commission.

Approximately 50 per cent of the respondents preferred giving priority to prime farm land whenever possible. The remaining 50 per cent were almost equally divided between the two extremes, with urban residents much more likely to advocate no restrictions on use of farm land for urban development and rural residents to advocate complete prevention of the use of prime farm land for urban development.

The respondents in general expressed greater satisfaction with the amount of land being used for public recreation in Owensboro than in rural Daviess County. Urban residents and respondents under 60 were much more likely than rural residents and respondents 60 and over to be dissatisfied with recreational land use, especially in rural Daviess County.

Almost half of the respondents did not think proper precautions are being taken to preserve the natural resources in the Owensboro-Daviess County area.

The following conclusions seem warranted by findings of this study: (1) residents of the area should be drawn into land use planning on a much wider scale than in the past; (2) a more effective system of communication should be established between area planners and area residents; (3) land use decisions should be made at the local level whenever possible or at least should reflect the needs of local people if made at a higher level; (4) positive steps should be taken to preserve prime farm land and all natural resources in the Owensboro-Daviess County area; and (5) recreational facilities, especially for younger urban residents and in rural Daviess County should be improved.

LAND USE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age category:
 - (1) under 30
 - (2) 30-59
 - (3) 60 and over
2. Sex _____
3. Occupation _____
4. Place of residence:
 - (1) farm
 - (2) rural community, not farm
 - (3) urban outskirts of Owensboro
 - (4) within Owensboro
5. Length of residence at present address:
 - (1) less than 5 years
 - (2) 5-9 years
 - (3) 10 or more years
6. Home property:
 - (1) owned
 - (2) renting
 - (3) buying
7. Until now, how interested have you been in land use planning in the Owensboro-Daviess County area?
 - (1) very interested
 - (2) somewhat interested
 - (3) not interested
 Comment:
8. How important do you consider land use planning for this area?
 - (1) very important
 - (2) somewhat important
 - (3) not important
 Comment:
9. Does the Owensboro-Daviess County area have a planning commission?
 - (1) yes
 - (2) no
 - (3) do not know
 Comment:
10. At what level of government would you prefer land use decisions to be made for the Owensboro-Daviess County area?
 - (1) local (city/county)
 - (2) state
 - (3) federal
 Comment:
11. Are you aware of any study or studies that have been done by city planners on land use in the Owensboro-Daviess County area in recent years?
 - (1) yes
 - (2) no
12. Which of the following best expresses your opinion on the used of farm land for urban development?
 - (1) Place no restrictions on the use of farm land for urban development.
 - (2) Give priority to preserving prime farm land whenever possible.
 - (3) Establish strict zoning controls to prevent urban development on prime farm land.
 Comment:
13. Do you think enough land in Owensboro is being used for public recreation?
 - (1) yes
 - (2) no
 - (3) undecided
14. Do you think enough land in rural Daviess County is being used for public recreation?
 - (1) yes
 - (2) no
 - (3) undecided
15. Do you think proper precautions are being taken to preserve our natural resources in this area?
 - (1) yes
 - (2) no
 - (3) do not know
 Comment: