

GROWTH MENTAL MODELS AND SOCIETAL WELL-BEING IN AUSTRALIAN URBAN AREAS

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide urban societies have advanced in terms of economic and social conditions over the last five decades, improving the living conditions of millions of people. However, several important environmental and social indicators have declined over this period, and the continued reduction will negatively impact the overall well-being of societies in the future. In this study, we used a grounded theory approach using a priori content analysis and causal map diagramming to capture the dominant policymakers' mental models – in terms of perceived causal relationships, strategies, and decision policies. We analyse three published urban plans of Greater Sydney between 1968 and 2018. We find that policymakers' mental models concentrate urban policy decisions on growing city areas in response to population growth through greater infrastructure and economic activity investment. Even though social and environmental indicators have gained importance in the urban planning and policymakers' mental models, the economic dimension still represents the primary concern of Greater Sydney's policymakers. In conclusion, collective beliefs about causal relationships influence the strategies that decision-makers formulate and the rules of thumb adopted to make decisions affecting urban development planning, societal well-being, and city sustainability.

KEYWORDS.

Societal well-being, objective well-being, city sustainability, collective mental models, beyond economic growth, urban decision making, causal maps.