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Planner's Guide to the
Places Rated Almanac

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A PLANNER'S GUIDE TO THE PLACES RATED ALMANAC

Place-rating schemes have caught the attention of the public at large, elected officials, business executives, and city and regional planners. The results of new ratings grab headlines. On the same day that newspapers in Atlanta boasted that the newest Harris poll listed Atlanta as the most desirable place to locate a business (Madison, Wisconsin, was among the worst), newspapers in Madison noted that their city ranked first for equal rights (Atlanta was dead last).

Among the dozens of published place-rating studies, two stand out: The Places Rated Almanac (Boyer and Savageau, 1981 and 1985)¹, and the Grant-Thornton Annual Study of General Manufacturing Climates of the Forty-eight Contiguous States of America (Grant-Thornton, 1986)². These studies are notable not because of their theoretical defensibility but because of their popularity. People are aware they exist, quote them widely and freely, and, presumably, act on their conclusions.

For planners, both academic and professional, the issues raised by quality-of-place ratings are both important and troubling. How reliable are such ratings systems? Do they accurately measure and communicate the quality-of-life in specific cities and metropolitan areas? If they are reliable, what do they tell us about local quality of life? Can they be used to improve local planning? If they are not reliable, but are nonetheless widely read and highly regarded, how will they distort the political and institutional environment in which planners work?

The purpose of this paper is to examine and evaluate the Places Rated Almanac (also referred to hereafter as Places Rated.) In spite of the visibility and popularity of Places Rated, no detailed study of it has yet been undertaken by planners or policy analysts (Cutter, 1985, p. 53). Our evaluation, first and foremost, is undertaken at several levels, all of importance to planners. We are concerned with the appropriateness and reliability of the concepts and measures used in Places Rated. First, how well do the place ratings meet the needs and demands of migrating households and individuals (the primary intended audience for such systems)? Second, to what extent do place-rating systems evaluate quality-of-place versus quality-of-life? Third, how are quality-of-place issues measured and compared? Toward this end, we examine the types of categories and components included in Places Rated. Fourth, what is the effect of such schemes on local planning and policy-making?

PLACES RATED ALMANAC REVIEWED

Whatever else they are not, the two editions of Places Rated Almanac are marvels of data collection, manipulation, and synthesis. The authors have compiled an amazing amount of information on the characteristics of the 329 federally defined metropolitan areas and combined it into nine general categories. (The earlier, 1981, edition of Places Rated rated only 277 metropolitan areas.) Almost all of the information

included in Places Rated is presented in a form which is easily comprehended by lay readers.

The overall Places Rated rank for each metropolitan area -- the aspect of Places Rated that has received the most media attention -- is determined by summing each locality's rankings in nine separate categories: climate, housing, health care, transportation, education, arts, recreation, crime, and personal economic outlook. Within each of the categories, metropolitan areas are scored according to a variety of component measures. To determine metropolitan area ranks within the separate categories, the component measures are summated, sorted from highest to lowest, and then converted to ranks. Table 1 shows the nine Places Rated categories, their component measures, and the weights used to aggregate the components.

Two types of metropolitan areas score highly according to the 1985 edition of Places Rated, those rated consistently high across all nine categories (e.g., in 1985, Louisville, eighth; Cincinnati, seventeenth; St. Louis, seventh), and those that are rated very well in some categories and not too badly in others (Boston, second; San Francisco, fourth). Metropolitan areas that mix high and low category ratings tend to be mid-pack in the rankings (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles), while the lowest-ranked places earn consistently lower category scores.

Sharp-eyed readers will note that although the nine categories are consistent across the 1981 and 1985 editions,

TABLE 1: Places Rated Almanac Categories and Component Factors: Comparison of 1985 and 1981 Editions

CATEGORY	1985 COMPONENT FACTOR	FACTOR WEIGHT*	1981 COMPONENT FACTOR	FACTOR WEIGHT*
Climate	*Number of months mean temperature above 75 degrees or below 32 degrees	-10	*Number of months mean temperature above 75 degrees or below 32 degrees	-10
	*Difference between maximum summer and minimum winter temperatures	-1	*Difference between maximum summer and minimum winter temperatures	-1
	*Heating- and cooling-degree days	-0.02	*Heating- and cooling-degree days	-0.02
	*Freezing days	-1	*Freezing days	-1
	*Zero-degree days	-5	*Zero-degree days	-3
	*Ninety-degree days & humidity level	-1 to -4	*Ninety-degree days & humidity level	-1 to -3
Housing				
Affordability	*Annual average utility bills	+1	*Annual average utility bills	+1
	*Annual average property taxes	+1	*Annual average property taxes	+1
	*Annual average mortgage payments	+1	*Annual average mortgage payments	+1
Health Care	*Physicians per 100,000 residents	+1	*Physicians per 100,000 residents	+1
	*Teaching hospitals	+200	*Beds per 100,000 residents	+5
	*Medical schools	+300	*Teaching hospitals	+200
	*Cardiac rehabilitation centers, comprehensive cancer treatment centers, and hospices	+100	*Medical schools	+300
	*Health insurance cost index	-200 to +400	*Health Maintenance Organizations	+100
	*Floridation	+100 to +300	*Cardiac rehabilitation centers, comprehensive cancer treatment centers, and accute stroke centers	+100 each
	*Days exceeding EPA air quality standards	-100	*Floridation	+200
	*Access to Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area	**	*Days exceeding EPA air quality standards	-100 to -500
Crime	*Violent crime rate	+10	*Violent crime rate	+10
	*Property crime rate	+1	*Property crime rate	+1
Transportation	*Deviation from national average commuting time of 49.7 minutes	+1000	*Deviation from national average % urban freeway miles of 3.24%	+1000
	*Deviation from national average mass transit seat miles per capita of 2.43	+1000	*Deviation from national average residents per mass transit vehicle of 7,072	+1000
	*Number of Interstate highways in metro area	+1000	*Number of Interstate highways in metro area	+1000
	*Residents per airline departure (divided by 8,862)	+1000	*Residents per airline departure (divided by 23.72)	+1000
	*Residents per Amtrak departure (divided by 197,497)	+1000	*Residents per Amtrak departure (divided by 87,568)	+1000

TABLE 1 (Continued): Places Rated Almanac Categories and Component Factors: Comparison of 1985 and 1981 Editions

CATEGORY	1985 COMPONENT FACTOR	FACTOR WEIGHT*	1981 COMPONENT FACTOR	FACTOR WEIGHT*
	-----	-----	-----	-----
Educational Opportunities				
	*Pupil/teacher ratio	+1000	*Pupil/teacher ratio	+1000
	*Proportion of metro area revenue used for education	+1000	*Proportion of metro area revenue used for education	+1000
	*Higher education options	+500 to +1500	*Higher education options	+600 to 1000
Arts & Cultural Opportunities				
	*Number of Museums	+500 to 2000	*Number of Museums	+500 to 1800
	*Fine arts/Public radio	+200 to 500	*Fine arts/Public radio	+50 to 200
	*Public TV stations	+200	*Public TV stations	+500
	*Universities granting arts degrees	0 to 1000	*Major universities	0 through 3600
	*Symphony orchestras	+100 to 500	*Symphony orchestras	+100 to 300
	*Professional theatres	+100 to 500	*Professional theatres	+100 to 500
	*Opera companies	+200 to 500	*Opera companies	+200 to 500
	*Dance companies	+50 to 200	*Dance companies	+200
	*Number of volumes in library system/1000	+1	*Number of volumes in library system/1000	+1
	*Access to Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area	**	*Access to Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area	**
Recreational Opportunities				
	*Number of good restaurants	+100 to 400	*Number of public golf courses	+100 to 400
	*Number of public golf courses	+100 to 400	*Number of bowling lanes	+100 to 400
	*Number of bowling lanes	+100 to 400	*Per capita expenditures on parks and recreation	10
	*Number of movie theatres	+100 to 400	*Number of movie theatres	+100 to 400
	*Zoo size	+100 to 400	*Neighborhood bars	+100 to 400
	*Aquariums	+100 to 400	*Zoo size	+100 to 400
	*Family theme parks	+100 to 400	*Aquariums	+100 to 400
	*Auto racing speedways	+100 to 400	*Family theme parks	+100 to 400
	*Pari-mutuel betting tracks	+100 to 400	*Auto racing speedways	+100 to 400
	*Professional sports teams	+100 to 400	*Pari-mutuel betting tracks	+100 to 400
	*NCAA Div. 1 football/basketball	+100 to 400	*Game seats per capita	+100 to 400
	*Miles of coastline	10		
	*Percent of metro area classified as inland waterway	50		
	*Percent of metro area classified as national park, forest, or wildlife refuge	50		
	*Access to Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area	**		
Economic Opportunities				
	*Average household income adjusted for taxes and living costs	10	*Average household income	10
	*Percentage rate of income growth	50	*Percent of household income paid in state income & sales taxed	100
	*Percentage rate of job growth	50	*Percentage job growth to 1990	100
			*Percent income growth to 1990	100

their component parts and component weights are not. This is especially true for five categories: health care, transportation, the arts and cultural opportunities, recreational opportunities, and personal economics.

The 1985 edition also uses the concept of access to a consolidated metropolitan area. Metropolitan areas which are in Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas (CMSAs as defined by the Census Bureau) are given bonus points to reflect the fact that residents of such places may have simultaneous access to the services and opportunities of more than one metropolitan area. CMSA access is included as a factor in the health care, arts, and recreation category ratings in the 1985 edition, but is not included in the earlier 1981 edition.

Definitional differences exist between the two editions, which means that metropolitan area ranks should not be compared across the two editions. Boyer and Savageau warn the reader about measurement changes in their introduction to the second edition (pp. xii-xiv). Unfortunately, readers often forget that these place rankings cannot be reliably compared across the two editions. So, for example, while Atlanta was the top-ranked city according to the 1981 rating system, it was the eleventh-ranked city according to the different 1985 rating system. And when Atlanta sank from first-ranked in 1981 to eleventh in 1985, this set off a media battle with Pittsburgh, which was ranked as the first metropolitan area in 1985).

The battle between Atlanta and Pittsburgh serves to illustrate another way in which the Places Rated rankings are

often misinterpreted. Even casual readers should note that Boyer and Savageau's ratings apply to entire metropolitan areas, not simply cities. The contribution of a central city to a metropolitan area can vary considerably depending on whether one is counting population, jobs, or public services. Those who might use the results of Places Rated Almanac (and other similar ratings systems) to address perceived shortcomings are well advised to keep in mind the distinctions between metropolitan areas and political jurisdictions such as cities.

One of the most frequent criticisms of Places Rated Almanac is that it is biased against smaller metropolitan areas and smaller cities, or slow-growth areas. To assess the validity of this complaint -- and sidestepping for the moment the related issue of whether quality-of-life is in fact related to city size -- we examined the statistical correlations between metropolitan area population size and growth rate, and the individual category ratings reported in the 1985 edition of Places Rated. Instead of analyzing the entire set of 329 metropolitan areas, we randomly selected a subset of 51 metropolitan areas; Appendix A lists the metropolitan areas included in the sample.

As shown in Table 2, criticisms of inherent size bias are not borne out by the data. Of the eight categories (climate was omitted as irrelevant), only the health care and arts/culture ratings were highly correlated with metropolitan area size. As we note below, given the way in which the health

TABLE 2: Correlation Coefficients between 1985 Places Rated Almanac Category Ratings and 1980 Population, 1970-80 Population Growth Rates; for 51 Randomly Selected Metropolitan Areas

Places Rated Almanac Category	Correlation Coefficients		
	1985 Mean Category Score (St. Dev.)	1980 Population	1970-80 Avg. Annual Percent Pop. Change
Housing Cost Rating	8,296.7 (2,277.4)	0.505	0.229
Health & Environment Rating	1,132.6 (990.5)	0.795	-0.278
Education Rating	2,802.9 (286.3)	0.389	-0.235
Crime Rating	1,001.1 (393.6)	0.406	0.298
Transportation Rating	3,984.4 (1,336.6)	0.058	0.135
Arts & Culture Rating	2,991.9 (3,872.4)	0.908	-0.152
Recreation Rating	1,823.6 (884.0)	0.474	0.336
Economics Rating	5,366.1 (1,411.1)	0.108	0.385

SOURCE: Bureau of the Census: State and Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1982

care and the arts/culture ratings are derived, this finding is not surprising. Less significant in their respective relationships to metropolitan area size are the housing cost, crime, education, and recreation ratings. The economics and transportation ratings are only slightly correlated with metropolitan area size. This last finding is especially interesting because the components of the transportation category as shown in Table 1 would seem, a priori, to reward size. A closer reading of Places Rated, however, reveals that the authors have made great, and evidently successful, efforts to control for city size in their metropolitan comparisons of transportation services.

EVALUATING VALIDITY -- THE USER PERSPECTIVE

To evaluate the usefulness of Places Rated Almanac, we must first assess its validity. We are concerned here with two types of validity. Internal validity refers to the adequacy and consistency of the rating system itself: how appropriate are the chosen quality-of-place measures? Do they accurately capture the quality and variety of services and opportunities available in metropolitan areas? Are the units and methods of measurement appropriate? How are the individual component scores synthesized into an overall category score? Does the score mean anything? Issues of internal validity, are, we suspect, of paramount importance to researchers and social scientists concerned with the accurate measurement of the components of quality-of-life or quality-of-place.

External validity concerns the issue of appropriateness of use: how is a rating/ranking system designed to be used, and by whom? Can it be reliably used in ways beyond which it was intended? Do the results/ratings/rankings mean what they are supposed to? Issues of external validity, we suspect, are most important to the users of place-rating systems.

To some extent, assessments of external validity cannot be separated from assessments of internal validity. A place-rating system based on flawed indicators or weights would be of little use to anyone. Readers should realize, however, that we are dealing with questions of degree, rather than absolutes. It is possible, we believe, for a place-rating system to be of partial value to specific users despite some degree of internal inconsistency.

Our evaluation of Places Rated Alamanac assesses both internal and external validity. We begin by focusing on issues of external validity.

Who Is the User?

Judgements of the external validity of place-rating schemes such as Places Rated Alamanac can only be made in comparison to the needs of specific users, both intended and incidental. What could be regarded as a weakness of a particular rating system for one consumer group may not be for another. As noted by Boyer and Savageau in their introduction, the intended audience for Places Rated is the migrating individual, or the individual considering migrating (1985; p. xi):

"Like its predecessor, this edition of Places Rated Almanac is meant for people who are thinking of moving as well as for armchair travelers who enjoy finding out about American cities and towns, and what they have to offer...."

Two approaches present themselves as a means for determining the quality-of-place factors most important to real and potential migrants. One approach is to objectively examine the characteristics of places and rank them accordingly. This, of course, is the approach taken in Places Rated. The alternate approach would be to ask recent and potential movers to list and then rank their own comparison criteria³.

Boyer and Savageau simply assert that the nine factors profiled in Places Rated are the ones most considered by migrants⁴. Is this assertion consistent with what is known about the causes and patterns of migration?

To answer this question, it is useful to distinguish between local and non-local migrants. For measurement purposes, the U.S. Census defines migrants as inter-county movers; intra-county movers are not considered migrants. (Boyer and Savageau portray the primary users of Places Rated as interstate movers.) In evaluating alternative destinations, local, or intra-county, movers are usually presumed to be motivated by personal and life-cycle considerations: age, child-birth, marriage, divorce, retirement, and death. Principal among the place characteristics which most concern local movers are housing characteristics and costs, neighborhood and school quality, and proximity to work (Goodman, 1979).

The decision to make a non-local move is presumed to be influenced by different factors: job characteristics and opportunities, and retirement. Put another way, there are two types of potential consumers of place-rating schemes: the footloose and the market-driven. The footloose are the fortunate few whose jobs (or incomes) are such that they are free to seek work or reside in any number of metropolitan areas. For those who truly are footloose, Places Rated represents a relatively reliable and inexpensive source of basic information about many place characteristics. As an aside, the aging of the population means that the ranks of the footloose can be expected to swell significantly during the next two decades. This, in turn, should lead to an increase in the demand for the types of information published in Places Rated. In fact, Boyer and Savageau produced Places Rated Retirement Guide: Finding the Best Places in America for Retirement Living in 1983. The book contains six of the nine factors, dropping transportation, education, and the arts, and altering some of the remaining six factors to more appropriately reflect the interests of the retired. The unit of analysis is changed from 327 metropolitan areas to 107 counties, 34 of which are in SMSAs. The authors are currently completing the next edition of the retirement guide.

In contrast to the footloose movers, market-driven migrants respond to larger forces in local economies. Architects as well as construction workers are driven away from depressed local economies to ones that are booming. Thus, to

the extent that Places Rated includes reliable information on economic opportunities, it has the potential to serve the market-driven as well as the footloose.

How well is this potential realized? Unfortunately, the literature on inter-metropolitan migration is largely concerned with the measurable characteristics that either "push" or "pull" migrants, and not with the characteristics of metropolitan areas that migrants themselves perceive as important. Studies of individual migrants which rely on social security records, for example, generally concentrate on the demographic characteristics of the movers, and not on mover perceptions of the characteristics of possible destinations. In a recent article, however, Herzog and Schlottmann (1986) develop a multivariate model of 1975-80 metropolitan out-migration (only) using Boyer and Savageau's overall metropolitan area scores (not rankings) from their first edition, running them against the characteristics of a selected, non-random group of households from the 1980 Census Microdata Sample. They discover only four of nine factors prove significant. Housing costs, crime, education, and recreation all contribute roughly 25 percent to their implicit weighing system. Thus, high housing costs and crime rates increase the likelihood of a household out-migrating while better educational systems and recreational opportunities decrease that likelihood.

In a similar test, we employed a rather crude method of testing the relevance of the Places Rated categories and

ratings as presented to actual migration decisions. Specifically, we regressed the nine category ratings (not rankings) against rates of inter-metropolitan in-migration between 1975 and 1980 for a random sample of 51 of the SMSAs profiled in Places Rated. (Regressions for out-migration and net-migration are also included; Appendix A lists the regression sample.) Since we employ 1975-80 migration rates, this is not a test of whether the Places Rated Almanac convinces people to move to its most favored areas. Rather, it is a test of whether the factors and weighting systems chosen by Boyer and Savageau are comparable to those shared by migrants to growing metropolitan areas. It is, in other words, the beginning of a empirically-based factor-weighting system -- with the factors most associated with in-migration given the most weight.

Given what is known about the nature of inter-metropolitan migration, we would expect in-migration to a metropolitan area to be positively correlated with its economics rating and negatively correlated with its housing cost rating (a higher housing cost rating indicates more expensive housing, which, all else being equal, should discourage in-migration.) For most sectors of the population, factors such as health care, educational quality, and the variety of available cultural and recreational opportunities would probably be of secondary importance in determining inter-metropolitan migration.

The regression results are shown in Table 3, and are interesting for the ways in which they support some

TABLE 3: Correlations Between Places Rated Almanac Category Ratings and Inter-metropolitan Migration Rates: 1975-80

DEPENDENT VARIABLE:	In-migration Rate 1975-80	Out-migration Rate 1975-80	Net-Migration Rate 1975-80
	=====	=====	=====
INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	Standardized Coefficient (t-statistic)	Standardized Coefficient (t-statistic)	Standardized Coefficient (t-statistic)
-----	-----	-----	-----
Climate Rating	0.018 (.13)	-0.256 (-1.56)	0.226 (1.51)
Housing Cost Rating	-0.329 (-1.88)	-0.266 (-1.35)	-0.239 (-1.34)
Health & Environment Rating	0.094 (.35)	0.745 (2.48)	-0.456 (-1.67)
Crime Rating	-0.023 (-.15)	-0.149 (-.90)	0.087 (.578)
Transportation Rating	0.206 (1.67)	0.067 (.487)	0.224 (1.78)
Education Rating	-0.491 (-3.56)	-0.646 (-4.18)	-0.154 (-1.09)
Arts & Culture Rating	-0.433 (-1.54)	-0.579 (-1.83)	-0.138 (-.49)
Recreation Rating	0.081 (.60)	-0.058 (-.38)	0.154 (1.11)
Economics Rating	0.460 (3.24)	0.207 (1.30)	0.459 (3.17)
-----	-----	-----	-----
R-squared	0.52	0.40	0.50
F-statistic	6.38	4.16	4.6
N	51	51	51

expectations while contradicting others. Overall, the nine metropolitan area category ratings explain 52 percent of the inter-metropolitan variation in population in-migration between 1975 and 1980. As expected, the housing cost ($t = -1.88$) and economic opportunity ($t = 3.24$) ratings are significantly correlated with rates of in-migration.

Also significant is the education rating ($t = -3.56$), but in a way which is contrary to expectations: as measured by Places Rated, the quality of education in a metropolitan area is inversely related to the rate of population in-migration. Assuming that high levels of educational opportunity are not in fact a disincentive to population growth, how should this result be explained? One explanation is that the metropolitan areas rated highest by the Places Rated Almanac in the education category tend to be the older, larger urban areas of the Northeast and Midwest -- places that for economic reasons experienced considerable out-migration during the Seventies. Another explanation is that the educational rating system used by Places Rated Almanac does not accurately measure local educational opportunities.

The poor statistical performance of the health, crime, arts/culture, and recreation categories (none of the estimated coefficients are statistically significant at the 90 percent significance level) is also open to interpretation. On the one hand, we may interpret the lack of significance as indicating that these factors are indeed of secondary importance in attracting inter-metropolitan migrants. An alternative

explanation is that the ratings in these four areas are internally inconsistent.

Also puzzling is the poor performance of the climate rating. Graves (1980) has demonstrated that climate is an important determinant of inter-metropolitan immigration, even after accounting for income, unemployment, and age. Yet Table 3 indicates that climate, at least as measured in Places Rated, is irrelevant to the explanation of inter-metropolitan migration patterns. Herzog and Schlottmann obtained similar results for out-migration (Herzog and Schlottmann, 1986).

It is important not to attach undue significance to these tests. As noted above, they are not precise enough to serve as a proper evaluation framework for the factors and weights used in constructing the category ratings included in Places Rated Alamanac. Nor do we presume that inter-metropolitan migration decisions are either influenced or based on the place-quality ratings included in Places Rated Alamanac. Still, the foregoing analysis, along with the work of Herzog and Schlottmann, does point to an interesting contradiction between the validity of the category rating and the relevance of the overall place ranks.

Quality-of-Life Versus Quality-of-Place

The potential audience for Places Rated Alamanac is not necessarily limited to real and "armchair" migrants. In a more ambitious vein, Boyer and Savageau suggest other uses and users for their work (1985; p. xi):

"....Places Rated might be considered a self-help book with a difference: Instead of pointing the way toward upward mobility, as most such books do, it helps you determine whether geographic mobility might be the route to a **more satisfying life** (bold added).... Certainly this second edition of Places Rated Almanac offers readers a wide range of places for research and consideration. Whether your motivation is personal relocation, plant expansion, personnel placement, or mere curiosity....."

The implicit assumption behind this quote is that an individual's well-being, sense of well-being, or quality of life is critically related to the qualities of the political jurisdiction in which they reside or work. Although this assumption might seem self-evident, it is contradicted by research results indicating that most individuals rank personal causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as much more important determinants of their quality of life than geographically-based factors:

- o In a 1975 study comparing objectively determined measures of place quality with measures of individual satisfaction, Schneider found little correlation between a city's objective scores and the aggregate level of individual satisfaction within those cities. Among whites, for example, only 3.1 percent of the variation in individual satisfaction was explained by place-oriented measures of the quality of life.
- o These results are supported by Zehner's finding that personal standard-of-living is the most important factor explaining individual satisfaction with quality-of-life (1977). Next in importance were leisure activities and job. Much further down the list were community conditions, and neighborhood and housing quality.
- o More recently, Wish compared Boyer and Savageau's ratings of cities with individuals' attitudes about house, street and neighborhood in those same cities (Wish, 1986(a) and 1986(b)). Using data from the Census Bureau's Annual Housing Survey, she found little correlation between the two.

The fact that community-level factors are secondary to personal considerations in determining an individual's quality of life is certainly not surprising. Nor does it lessen the validity of the place ratings included in volumes such as Places Rated Almanac, or our interest in measuring the characteristics of communities, and how people evaluate those characteristics. It should, however, serve to remind us of the relative roles that places play in most peoples' lives, and that quality-of-place is a far different concept than quality-of-life.

RATING PLACES RATED

Criticisms of Places Rated have generally centered on the ad hoc nature of the weighing system used to amalgamate the nine category scores into an overall place-rank. Yet, like a house of cards, the fundamental problems with Places Rated are at the bottom, with the choice, measurement, and aggregation of the basic descriptors of metropolitan area quality-of-place. This section focuses on these basic questions of the internal validity of Places Rated. Specifically, we take a more detailed look at the theory, construction, and reliability of the nine Places Rated categories. Our analysis considers five evaluation criteria:

- o Appropriateness of Concept: Do the indicators chosen by Boyer and Savageau really measure what they are intended to: the quality-of-place in a city or metropolitan area? In some cases, the link between a particular indicator and personal well-being may be clear (crime rates); in other cases, it is asserted without being demonstrated (personal economic outlook). We note that issues of appropriateness are contingent on application. The number of volumes in

local libraries, for example, may be an important indicator to a relocating family, but irrelevant to a relocating business. As above, we will assume that the primary audience for Places Rated is the migrating individual.

- o Robust and Reliable Indicators: Because of variations in data collection and validation, some indicators are more reliable than others. The reliability of certain types of crime statistics, for example, is notoriously poor. Other types of indicators may not be appropriate to their actual use. Still other indicators (anticipated job and income growth rates, for example) may be speculative.
- o Ecological Fallacy: Are the indicators used in Places Rated developed for the most appropriate spatial unit of analysis? In several instances, metropolitan area averages are used as proxies for community- and neighborhood-based measures. In general, metropolitan-area-based indicators are inappropriate when the characteristic being considered varies widely within the metropolitan area. It may be argued that footloose migrants do in fact use metropolitan area averages in making their location decisions, and that metropolitan-wide averages are therefore more appropriate than community or neighborhood measures. While this may be true for unemployment rates and newspaper circulation, we doubt it to be true of crime rates and educational quality -- things that are either experienced or consumed locally. Using metropolitan-wide crime rates and pupil/teacher ratios as indicators of crime and educational quality, respectively, are examples of the ecological fallacy. In such cases, measures of local variability around the metropolitan-wide average are most appropriate.
- o Anchoring and Scaling Issues: Complex, multiple-level rating systems are prone to scaling problems. That is, even when the component indicators used to generate a category rating are themselves scaled along an interval, the resulting rating system may be ordinal, not interval. This makes simple comparisons difficult. As an example, consider that the top-ranked area for climate in 1985, Oakland, earned a rating of 910 (and a ranking of 1), while the bottom-ranked city, Grand Forks, earned a rating of 105 and a ranking of 329. Clearly, the authors of Places Rated do not wish readers to interpret the climate of Oakland as being nine times better than the climate of North Forks. Moreover, the problem of non-interval scaling cannot, as Places Rated would suggest, be solved by conversion to ranks. In fact, conversion to ranks may worsen the problem, particularly if uninformed consumers confuse the ordinal nature of the rankings with the quasi-interval nature of the ratings.

- o Double-Counting: Many indicators of place-quality are not mutually independent. The number of public radio stations in an area is usually related to the number of public TV stations, for example. To the extent that characteristics which are not mutually independent are both separately included as independent indicators' components, there may be problems with double-counting. Depending on the category, double-counting may work in favor of a particular metropolitan area (arts/culture) or against it (climate).

Table 4 summarizes our evaluations of the nine Places Rated categories according to these five criteria. The following sections take a closer look at the issues raised in our evaluation of each category:

Climate Mildness: Of the nine quality-of-life categories explored in Places Rated, the climate category is, in many senses, the best constructed. It is also the one category which local policy-makers are powerless to affect. Underlying the climate ratings is the presumption that most individuals prefer climates where extreme differences are minimized. Accordingly, Boyer and Savageau assign each metropolitan area a maximum score of 1000, and then penalize areas according to six factors of climate harshness. Each of the factors (humidity, heating and cooling degree days, freezing days, zero-degree days, yearly temperature variation) is directly measurable.

Although the component indicators used to determine an area's climate rating are sensible, the ratings themselves are neither anchored or scaled. Also, the way in which the ratings are determined suggests problems of double-counting. Thus, the climate ratings themselves are somewhat difficult to interpret. Despite these flaws, the overall place ratings are consistent

TABLE 4: Summary Evaluation of Places Rated Almanac Categories and Category Ratings

PLACES RATED CATEGORY	EVALUATION CRITERIA							Author's Overall Category Rating
	Appropriate Concept?	Reliable Indicators?	Ecological Fallacy?	Scaling Problems/	Double Counting?	Policy Relevant?		
Climate	Yes	Yes	No	Somewhat	Yes	No	Good	
Housing	Partially	No	Yes	No	No	Slightly	Poor	
Health Care	Partially	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Slightly	OK	
Crime	Partially	No	Yes	Somewhat	No	Yes	Poor	
Transportation	No	Yes	Somewhat	Yes	No	Slightly	Poor	
Education	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Poor	
Arts & Culture	Yes	Yes	No	Somewhat	Somewhat	No	Good	
Recreation	Yes	Yes	No	Somewhat	No	No	Good	
Economic Opportunities	Partially	No	No	Somewhat	Somewhat	Slightly	Poor	

with the authors' intent to reward places with moderate climates and penalize places with extreme climates. Moreover, enough of the individual component measures are presented (as opposed to summary ratings) that individuals who disagree with Boyer and Savageau's rating system -- for example, those who enjoy four distinct seasons -- can create their own ratings.

Homeowning Costs: Whereas the 1981 edition of the Places Rated Almanac focused on the quality of housing available in a metropolitan area, the 1985 edition looks only at housing costs. Behind this change is the presumption that a wide variety of housing types are available in almost all metropolitan areas, and that cost (or more accurately, price) is therefore the key determinant of housing choice. Following this logic, Places Rated awards the best housing scores to metropolitan areas that have the least expensive housing. Average annual mortgage payments are used as a proxy indicator of housing acquisition costs. To indicate housing operation costs, Boyer and Savageau add average annual utility bills and statewide effective property taxes. (Table 5 shows how the 1985 edition of Places Rated calculates the housing scores for two metropolitan areas: Stamford, Connecticut, and Joplin, Missouri.

This approach is open to three types of criticism. First, as noted above, it assumes that acquisition and operating costs are the most important descriptors of housing quality, and that most physical housing characteristics are perfectly capitalized

**TABLE 5: Derivation of 1985 Places Rated Almanac Housing Category
Ratings for Stamford, CT; and Joplin, MO**

	STAMFORD, CT	JOPLIN, MO
	-----	-----
Avg. 1985 Housing Cost	\$200,000	\$37,600
Utilities	\$1,617	\$1,156
Property Tax	\$3,061	\$440
Mortgage	\$18,962	\$3,563
-----	-----	-----
TOTAL	\$23,640	\$5,159
1985 Places Rated Almanac Housing Category Rank	329	1

Source: Places Rated Almanac, 1985, p.77

into the purchase price (which, in turn, is reflected in the mortgage cost). The extent to which housing qualities are or are not capitalized into purchase prices has been found to vary widely, largely depending on conditions in local housing markets. But even if the underlying assumption of perfect capitalization were valid, indicators based on averages (such as average prices and average mortgage payments) tend to be biased; median prices and/or median mortgage payments would be much more reliable indicators of the typical housing acquisition costs facing in-migrants.

Second, even if perfect capitalization can be assumed, when undertaking cross-market comparisons it is essential to compare equal commodities. Metropolitan area averages, unfortunately, do not lend themselves to such comparison. A better approach would be to find substitutable houses in different locations (we use the term "house" broadly to define a bundle of physical, neighborhood, and social amenities), and to compare their respective prices. There are undoubtedly price differences for exactly comparable "housing bundles" among metropolitan areas, and to some degree such differences properly reflect the desirability of living in those areas. If exactly the same "housing bundle" can be obtained more cheaply in Joplin than in Stamford, then and only then does Joplin deserve to be rated higher than Stamford. Under the Places Rated system, many of the so-called losers, such as Stamford, Norwalk, San Francisco, Honolulu, and San Diego, are precisely those places where people most want to live -- and are willing

to pay accordingly. In such circumstances, higher housing prices may in fact be indicative of a better quality-of-place.

This brings us to our third criticism. If quality-of-life concerns (such as educational quality) are even partially capitalized into housing prices, then the inclusion of housing prices in an overall quality-of-life/quality-of-place indicator represents double-counting. Statistical techniques are available to help disentangle these concerns; however, the authors of Places Rated have (somewhat understandably, given their intended audience) chosen to avoid using such techniques.

The use of statewide effective property tax rates (as a substitute for local property tax rates) in the calculation of local property tax costs introduces additional bias into the housing cost ratings. This simplification totally masks the dramatic tax rate and tax burden differences that exist between metropolitan areas of a state, and between municipalities in the same metropolitan area.

Health Care: Under the Places Rated Almanac system, adequacy of health care services is generally synonymous with having the latest in medical equipment and the most prestigious personnel. Areawide average health care costs, the presence of natural or added fluoridation, and the severity of local air pollution are also included in the score.

One can certainly question the empirical basis for including a medical costs index and air pollution levels in an index of health care quality. Yet, for all the complexity of

the scoring system, a metropolitan area's health care score is basically a function of its population. (As noted above, the correlation coefficient between a metropolitan area's health care score and its population size is .795). Simply put, there are more doctors in bigger places. And where there are more doctors there tend to be more hospitals and specialty centers. To the extent that the number of doctors, hospitals, and specialty centers are all components of the health care category, it, just like the climate category, is likely to be characterized by problems of double-counting.

The appropriateness of the health care measures used in Places Rated can be questioned on two levels. First, underlying the ratings is the untested presumption that more doctors produces better health care -- a presumption that is, at best, controversial. Second, although there is little doubt that less total health care is available in small, remote places than in larger cities, health care, like so many other things, is probably subject to threshold effects. That is, most potential migrants are probably more concerned with having good accessible everyday health care and services than with the occasional need for specialized health care. (Some elderly are probably exceptions to this last generalization.) Thus, the quality of everyday health care provided to the typical resident of Olympia, Washington (1985 health care score: 338; rank 306) may be as good as the health care provided to the typical resident of San Francisco (1985 health care score: 3826; rank 10).

We recognize that measures like the number of hospitals and specialty care units, and doctors per capita, are likely to be considerable more understandable to potential migrants than are more complex (but more valid) measures of health care. We also recognize that quantity can be a useful proxy for choice. At the same time, we firmly believe that one of the purposes of volumes such as Places Rated should be to improve the quality of information available to potential migrants, not just increase the double-counted quantity.

Safety from Crime: In assessing the crime problem, Places Rated relies on county-level crime data as assembled and reported by the FBI. Seven crime-rate measures are then aggregated to two: violent crime rates (which include murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault); and property crime rates (burglary, larceny/theft, and motor vehicle theft). After weighing violent crime by 10, the two measures are added together and aggregated for all counties of each metropolitan area. Predictably, New York City, Miami, and Los Angeles head the list of Places Rated's most crime-ridden metropolitan areas.

Here, as elsewhere, the problems of factor weighing make it difficult to properly interpret the Places Rated results. While it might seem intuitively plausible to weight violent crimes more heavily than property crimes (given the severity of the outcome), such differentials make sense only if they capture measurable differences in incidence or risk to

potential migrants. That drug dealers kill each other in Miami certainly increases crime rates, and statistics may affect people's perceptions of Miami as a desirable place to live and to visit. But these statistics are unlikely to affect actual safety as a resident.

There are, however, deeper problems with the Places Rated approach to measuring crime than just the choice of measurement scale. First, the FBI crime index has no underlying concept. It was, and is, a measure designed around a data collection system (DeNeufville, p. 107-119). Second, as crime rates vary much more widely within metropolitan areas than between them, the metropolitan-wide crime indices used in Places Rated indicate little of the actual crime risk facing the individual. If individuals were to go beyond macro-level averages, and analyze the components of potential crime, they would likely concern themselves with the specific neighborhoods in which they worked, lived, or shopped. Aggregated county-wide (most metropolitans are comprised of several counties), crime statistics should have little relevance to individual inter-regional location decisions.

A better indicator of the dangers of crime than metropolitan-area crime rates would be crime risk, or the potential for victimization in a particular location given a particular lifestyle. As correctly reported in Places Rated, the victims of crime are disproportionately young, male, poor, urban, black, and unemployed (Boyer and Savageau, 1985, p. 177). Unfortunately, crime risk is a concept which can only

be measured for individuals or select groups of individuals, and for small geographic areas, and does not lend itself to aggregation.

The problem of measuring crime illustrates the difference between perceptions and reality. Is it more responsible to offer the consumer measures which he or she rightly or wrongly perceives as important (i.e., county FBI indexes weighted as they have been in Places Rated), or more complex measures that gauge a concept with more validity?

Transportation Supply: The concept offered here is that metropolitan areas with high levels of transportation system supply are more desirable. The more bus, train, and plane operations per capita, the more attractive the location. The more interstate highways a metropolitan area includes, and the shorter the average commuting time, the higher the score. To a great extent, Places Rated confuses inter-metropolitan accessibility, as measured by airline flights and AMTRAK departures, with intra-metropolitan accessibility, as measured by the absolute supply of public transportation, and average commuting times.

One of the problems with such a system is that it rewards empty transportation capacity. The fact that a city has AMTRAK service is rewarded under the Places Rated system whether or not the service is used by metropolitan residents. The same is true for airline, interstate highway, and mass transit service. Although this type of approach may be useful if one assumes

that the potential migrant is primarily interested in maximizing his or her transportation choices, it obfuscates the more important issue of level-of-service. As an illustration, consider that the Los Angeles metropolitan area has more miles of interstate freeway than any other metropolitan area, as well as more miles of continuous freeway gridlock.

The transportation category does include one level-of-service measure: average daily commute time. In some ways, average daily commute time is an example of an almost perfect quality-of-place indicator. It has immediate and clear meaning to commuters, to businesses, and to planners. It indicates level-of-service, not empty capacity. And, as noted below, it is one of the few indicators which is consistently and directly equated with quality-of-life. In fact, a transportation rating composed only of the average-daily-commute time and a measure of the intra-metropolitan variation in commute time (to account for the fact that trips to work vary widely according to residence, place of work, income, and occupation) would probably be an excellent overall indicator of the quality of local transportation services.

Educational Opportunities: Places Rated measures three inputs into the educational process: pupil/teacher ratios, fiscal effort, and the absolute supply of higher-education opportunities. These measures are all aggregates of sub-metropolitan school system statistics.

As with all the other categories, it is essential to ask what concept of education is most salient to the potential intermetropolitan migrant -- the principal intended audience of Places Rated. We assume that potential migrants are most interested in educational quality. Yet research since the Coleman Report (1966) has shown that differences in the objective inputs to schools like lower pupil/teacher ratios, bigger libraries, better labs and facilities -- the sorts of things measured by Places Rated-- have little or no effect on student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Much more important are family background, school peer group intellectual quality, and "effective school ethos." (Coleman et al., 1966, 1975, and 1982; Purkey and Smith, 1982; and Rutter et al., 1979).

Once again we are confronted with the issue of whether to give greater weight to the types of factors which affect migrants' perceptions, or the results of policy research. Should Places Rated mirror public perceptions (Lindholm and Cohen's "ordinary knowledge," 1979), or attempt to inform them? The former approach would probably dictate using test scores from the target areas. The latter might have migrating families seeking more diverse metropolitan areas and then more affluent neighborhoods within them.

Above all, the education ratings fall victim to the problem of ecological fallacy. Most metropolitan areas have numerous school districts and schools, some of which are good and some of which are poor. Thus, it thus make little sense to

aggregate ratios for all school districts in a metropolitan area and report the average. Here, unlike the transportation category, the operative issue may be **choice**. What migrating parents may be looking for in metropolitan areas is a variety of school choices, with varying learning "ethos" and peer group qualities. Even within a single family, very different schools are often sought for different children. Although the authors of Places Rated are, of course, correct in suggesting that the quality of primary and secondary schools is a major determinant of residential location, we believe that such concerns are expressed in the context of choosing between neighborhoods within metropolitan areas, not between metropolitan areas (G. Donald Jud, 1985).

Supply of Cultural Facilities: In rating metropolitan areas for cultural variety, Places Rated assumes that more is better, irrespective of the physical or population size of the metropolitan area. If a facility exists, and meets certain quality criteria, it gets added to the total supply. Thus, larger metropolitan areas do somewhat better in the culture ratings than do smaller ones.

We see little problem with this concept or the way in which it is measured, except to note that, for many people, an average supply of cultural facilities to which they have convenient access (in terms of time, distance, and price) may yield the best quality of life. Boyer and Savageau do not consider the issues of access or price here as they did for

housing. For residents of very large metropolitan areas, the pleasures of being able to go downtown to a play or opera may have to be weighed against the difficulties of getting downtown, and the high cost of tickets. Realistically, we recognize that merging the concept of access with that of supply would present severe, and possibly insurmountable, data difficulties.

Recreational Opportunities: The Places Rated measure of recreational opportunities is constructed in a different fashion than that of cultural facilities. Here, most factors are measured on a per capita basis, not on an absolute basis. This is typical of recreation supply measures. Many of the recreational attractions included in Places Rated are:

1) provided in the private market; and 2) subject to crowding and congestion. Thus, how many people must be served by a particular attraction may be a crucial determinant of its quality. The final ranking of metropolitan areas reflects this philosophy: many of those places ranked highest in the 1985 edition (Boulder, 5; Tacoma, 7; Salt Lake City, 11) have small populations, and excellent access to major outdoor recreational activities.

As with the culture category, the recreation category presumes that more (in this case, more per capita) is better, but that a variety of potential experiences is also desirable. We believe that this approach is generally sensible, subject to issues of access and cost. At the same time, it is important

for readers to realize that the Places Rated list of recreational opportunities is **representative**, not exhaustive. Those who like to play golf, go to movies, bowl, or hike may find the ratings interesting. Those who like to play tennis, swim, drive through pretty countryside, or peruse bookstores will find the ratings irrelevant. An alternative approach would be to look at those recreational and cultural activities in which public participation is greatest (walking, swimming, and fishing are obvious examples) and rank metropolitan areas according to their level of supply and access. Finally, we caution that although the component indicators selected by the authors of Places Rated may be defensible, as with the arts/culture category, the weighing system used to aggregate the individual components is decidedly arbitrary.

Personal Economic Outlook: Places Rated's concept of personal economic outlook focuses on comparing job opportunities and potential rewards: is one likely to find employment in a particular metropolitan area, and, if one is, will the pay be good? And will it be good relative to the cost of living? As a measure of opportunity, this concept is quite sensible. Yet, when added with the eight other category scores it can produce confusion for the potential migrants. For market-driven migrants who work in local-serving jobs such as real estate sales, retailing, or construction, recent job growth rates may in fact be a good indicator of future opportunities. Such measures are likely to be of considerably less value to

potential migrants who work in specialized occupations or industries such as brain surgery or steel manufacturing. Footloose migrants may not care at all about recent job growth.

Income growth also provides an ambiguous measure of personal economic outlook. Income growth occurs as the result of numerous factors, not the least of which is the tightness of the labor market, and shifts in the employment structure of the local economy -- factors which vary widely with occupation.

Even if the basic concepts behind the consideration of economic opportunity may be defensible, the actual indicators used to measure the concepts are not. In an attempt to meet the needs of future migrants, Boyer and Savageau rely on predictions of job and income growth through 1990. Critically, no attempt is made to assess the reliability of such predictions.

Also suspect is the index of living costs the authors use to compare household incomes across areas. While noting that some relocation specialists use a rule of thumb that 80 percent of local living cost differentials are attributable to housing costs and taxes (1985, p. 372), Boyer and Savageau use a different and undocumented weighing system of local housing, food, and service costs to determine their own local cost-of-living index. Thus, the extent to which Places Rated examines comparable market baskets is not clear.

To be fair, the types of economic measures used in Places Rated (if locally accurate) do capture many aspects of personal economic opportunity. We are concerned, however, that they are

overly general. Recent experience has shown that a substantial number of interstate migrants are ill-informed about employment and earnings prospects until they arrive at their destinations. With its reliance on general indices, Places Rated does not really improve the quality of information available to potential migrants.

PLANNERS AND PLACES RATED

Do studies like Places Rated matter to those who plan, administer, and govern our nation's cities and metropolitan areas? Do the rankings, ratings, and information included in such studies help local officials identify strong points and weak points in their communities? Do the types of issues and concerns raised in quality-of-place studies match the issues and concerns being expressed at the local level? To address these and other issues, we surveyed a sample of planning directors in -- of the cities profiled in the Places Rated Almanac. Our sample (shown in Appendix B) included some metropolitan areas at the top of the 1985 Places Rated rankings, as well as some at the bottom. We also surveyed planning directors in cities identified as "winners" (cities whose overall rank improved greatly between the 1981 and 1985 editions) and "losers" (cities whose rankings declined sharply between the two editions). We surveyed planning directors because we thought that they would have broad knowledge of the types of issues facing their respective communities, and

because we thought that they would be familiar with some of the methodological problems inherent in comparing places.

Of the 32 planning directors⁵ contacted, 74 percent knew of Places Rated Almanac. Decidedly fewer, however, were familiar with how their cities rated; only one was aware of his area's change in rank between the 1981 and 1985 editions. In general, planning directors in areas which were either highly-rated or poorly-rated were somewhat more likely to be familiar with their area's ranking. In the former case, the area's high ranking was often being used as part of a public relations program to attract businesses, tourists, and, in a few instances, residents. In the latter case, local and occasionally national media had publicized the rankings. Planning directors in areas identified as "winners" and "losers" tended to be much less cognizant of their area's rankings.

Typically, those planning directors who did know their area's rating had learned of it not from Places Rated directly, but from secondary accounts in local newspapers. Of the planning directors surveyed, only 35 percent had actually read Places Rated. Even fewer had critically considered the category components and ratings. As above, planning directors in high- and low-ranked cities were slightly more likely to be personally familiar with the Places Rated Almanac.

In quite a few cases, an area's ranking became a political issue. The mayor of Norwalk, Connecticut (an unexpected winner), continually pointed to the city's high rank during his

campaign for re-election. Local publicity over Seattle's high rank (#10 in 1985) had prompted the city to put together an all-day conference on quality-of-life issues in the Seattle area. Surprised at Fitchburg's low rank in the 1985 edition (and neighboring Boston's very high rank), the Fitchburg Planning director publicly debated David Savageau on the reliability of Places Rated indicators. In honor of its number-one ranking in the 1985 edition, the city of Pittsburgh threw itself a parade. Of perhaps greater benefit, Pittsburgh officials report that foreign tourist visits to their city have increased since publication of the 1985 edition of Places Rated Almanac. These responses, however, are the exceptions. Overall, our respondents report that the ratings generated considerable public and media interest at the time of their first publication, but that, in general, such interest has since waned.

In a very few cases the rankings have led to substantive changes in local policy. In Raleigh, North Carolina, public officials reacted to the city's poor recreation rating (alone, among other excellent ratings) by pushing forward with a bond issue to build a new coliseum and stadium. In Cincinnati, planners worked to include a quality-of-life component in the city's strategic plan, only to ultimately discard it because of a lack of reliable indicators. And in Atlanta, the belief that the city's fall in rank was the result of neglect of its zoo helped secure new and additional funding for zoo development.

Still, if a pattern does emerge, it is that the results of quality-of-place studies such as Places Rated have not had a measurable effect on local policy and planning. This is not because people are not concerned with quality-of-life issues, or because place-rating systems are perceived as irrelevant. When we asked respondents to rank (on a scale of one to five) how they thought members of the community valued place-rating systems, we found that such systems were thought to be fairly highly valued.

Overall, our sample of planning directors believed that the results of place-rating systems were very important to local chambers of commerce and business associations, fairly important to city/county administrators and managers, but only somewhat important to local politicians and elected leaders (Table 6).

In contrast, our sample of planning directors was split over the importance of place-rating systems to citizens' groups and incoming businesses. Some respondents suggested that businesses made their location decisions using their own criteria, and with little regard to published indices; other respondents believed that businesses used studies like Places Rated only in the very preliminary stages of making location decisions. Still other respondents noted that they knew of specific cases in which quality-of-life issues had been of explicit concern to incoming businesses. In explaining the perceived indifference of citizens to quality-of-life studies, one planning director suggested that "residents don't need a

bunch of statistics to tell them about the quality-of-life in their town."

To determine the relevance of the types of factors measured in Places Rated to current quality-of-life issues as being expressed in local communities, we asked local planning directors to list those issues. Readers should note that the types of issues which concern existing residents, businesses, and officials are not necessarily the same quality-of-place issues which would concern potential migrants. Still, if one assumes that today's migrants are tomorrow's residents, a certain amount of topic overlap should be expected.

Overall, jobs and environmental quality emerged as the two most frequent quality-of-life concerns (Table 7). Not surprisingly, economic development and job creation tended to be more important in older, declining cities such as Buffalo and Pittsburgh; concerns over environmental quality, however, cut across the spectrum of city age, size, and location. Traffic congestion and maintaining or improving local educational quality were also frequently mentioned as important quality-of-life issues.

Planning directors whose cities have had, and are experiencing, continued growth reported that overdevelopment, housing affordability, and infrastructure were important quality-of-life concerns. Four planning directors noted that maintaining and improving local recreational opportunities had emerged as recent priorities. Taxes and crime -- two indicators which play a large role in Places Rated -- were not

TABLE 7: Planning Director Survey:
Quality-of-Life Concerns in Selected Metro Areas

Quality-of-Life Issue -----	Response Frequency -----
Jobs and Economic Development	9
Environmental Protection (Air, Water, Toxic Wastes, Open Space)	9
Traffic and Transportation	6
Educational Quality	6
Overdevelopment	5
Recreation Services	4
Infrastructure Quality	4
Housing Affordability	4
City Appearance/Aesthetics	3
Downtown Revitalization	3
Crime	2
Political Leadership	2
Housing Quality	1
Neighborhood Problems	1
None	1
-----	-----

generally thought to be important issues. These results should be considered cautiously. The sample size is too small to guarantee statistical reliability. And the opinions of local planning directors may or may not reflect the opinions of other public officials. Nonetheless, we believe that the survey results point to three findings of importance: (1) that the results of quality-of-place-rating systems such as Places Rated have not had a substantive impact on local planning or policy-making; (2) that local officials are very interested in how their communities compare with other communities, and would be receptive to comparative studies such as Places Rated provided that many of the methodological problems could be solved; and, (3) that the types of quality-of-place issues profiled in Places Rated do not match the quality-of-life issues which most concern local residents.

A PLANNERS GUIDE TO RATING PLACES

Question 1: Is the Places Rated Almanac likely to be useful to potential migrants -- its primary intended audience?

This depends on the type of migrant. Market-driven migrants, those searching for better employment opportunities, may find the information included in Places Rated interesting, but not necessarily useful. Footloose migrants -- those whose search is not primarily economic -- will find Places Rated of somewhat greater use. In both cases, it is the variety of information included in Places Rated, not the category scores or metropolitan area ranks, that will be most useful.

To us, Places Rated Almanac represents a lost opportunity. Boyer and Savageau have gone to a great deal of effort to assemble a considerable amount of information -- much of it inherently useful for making place comparisons. We believe that if they had used more reliable and appropriate indicators, if they had been more careful with their unit-of-analysis, and if they had made better use of existing research into the nature of quality-of-place factors such as crime, education, housing, and personal economics, then they could have produced a more useful and accurate set of place comparisons.

Question 2: Is the Places Rated Almanac useful to planners and public officials?

No, not in the slightest sense. For planners, the purpose of comparing places is to learn from other communities; to understand how planning can or cannot help reduce crime, improve the quality of health care, expand educational and economic opportunities, and promote better neighborhoods. Making such comparisons is not simple. It involves well-defined and well-measured indicators of performance, and an understanding of the link between inputs and outputs. For planners, the problem with volumes like Places Rated is that we never learn why some places may be superior to others.

Question 3: Can areas be compared with one another?

The pragmatic answer to this question is that people want to compare areas; that there is a market for such comparisons;

and that planners and public officials are as interested as any others. This guarantees that there will be place comparisons even if some don't like them. Under what circumstances, then, are comparisons acceptable?

The answer to this question is not straightforward. The intended audience must first be identified. Then concepts appropriate to that audience must be developed. Lastly, defensible, valid measurement systems must be designed to capture the intentions of the concepts. Among possible consumers of place-rating systems, the following stand out as having clearly definable but different needs:

- market-driven migrants, primarily interested in labor-market and cost-of-living conditions in metropolitan areas;
- businesses, needing much the same information as market-driven migrants, but also wanting information on such things as transportation facilities, technical education opportunities, etc.;
- tourists, needing information on the supply of hotel, recreation, and cultural facilities in a metropolitan area;
- retirees, needing information on climate, housing, cost-of-living, medical facilities, and cultural facilities;
- intra-metropolitan movers, wanting to compare attributes of neighborhoods within metropolitan areas.

Clearly, the unit of analysis (state, metropolitan area, county, city, or neighborhood) for which comparisons are made must depend on the intended audience. For certain types of indicators, comparisons conducted using the wrong unit of analysis may be worse than no comparisons at all.

Question 4: Are place-rating schemes also quality-of-life-rating schemes?

The answer is "definitely not." In some instances the two may be related, but they are seldom synonymous. The literature is filled with different quality-of-life concepts and measures (Myers, 1987). It seems to us that quality-of-life concepts must be derived from observing individual people's behavior and from querying them about their preferences. As noted above, quality-of-places may not rank very high on individuals' quality-of-life lists.

That doesn't mean we should abandon interest in the quality of places. It does mean that we need to pay particular attention to where the two ideas intersect. We also need to develop place-rating schemes using the pragmatic criterion of whether public policy can affect change in the quality of the place. This kind of place-rating scheme could be useful to planners and policy-makers wanting to affect change and measure whether they have done so.

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1. Joyce Hodel of Rand McNally reported the following sales figures to the authors recently: Places Rated (1st edition), 124,347; second edition, 102,747 (to date); Retirement Guide, 98,114.

2. Ratings published in the seventh annual Grant Thornton Study of Manufacturing Climates of the 48 Contiguous States of America utilize "22 factors selected by 36 state associations representing over 90,000 manufacturing companies around the country." The ten most important factors are, in order of importance: wages, unionization, energy costs, workers' compensation insurances, taxes, man-hours lost, value added, changes in wages, unemployment compensation benefits, and changes in taxes.

The most serious problem surrounding the Grant Thornton index is that consumers use it as a general measure of business climate rather than the more specific manufacturing climate. Critics contend that the 22 factors listed by Grant Thornton have little to do with business climate, and that no formal model underlies the choice of factors. Nevertheless, Grant Thornton's index gets widespread publicity, and is very likely a factor in the decisions of thousands of state and local economic development planners. For a critical review of the Grant Thornton study, see "Taken for Granted: How Grant Thornton's Business Climate Index Leads States Astray" (Corporation for Enterprise Development, 1986).

3. In a variant of both approaches, Pierce (1985) surveyed a random sample of New York State residents as to how they would weight the nine categories included in Places Rated. Residents chose personal economics as the most important variable, followed, in order, by: housing, crime, climate, health, education, recreation, transportation, and arts and culture.

4. We have conversed at length with both Boyer and Savageau. Boyer noted that after they conceived the idea of Places Rated he began a systematic search of the literature in an attempt to choose indicators. (Both were former book editors and were familiar with the works of many well-known social scientists.) He read the classics in social indicators but finally decided the whole area was unnecessarily complex for their needs. The team developed the concepts and the measures using common sense, and the sales of the book provide evidence that they have struck a responsive chord among readers.

5. Chief planners were interviewed when planning directors were unavailable. Directors of Economic Development were interviewed when the city had no planning director per se.

APPENDIX A: Metro Areas Included in Regression Sample

Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton, PA-NJ
Anderson, IN
Atlantic City, NJ
Baton Rouge, LA
Beaumont-Port Arthur-Orange TX
Benton Harbor, MI
Boise City, ID
Brownsville-Harlingen TX
Charleston, SC
Chattanooga, TN-GA
Columbia MO
Danville, VA
Des Moines, IA
Duluth-Superior, MN-WI
El Paso TX
Fargo-Moorhead, ND-MN
Fort Collins, CO
Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood Beach-Pompano Bch FL
Gary-Hammond IN
Grand Forks, ND-MN
Huntington-Ashland WV-KY-OH
Jacksonville, FL
Joplin MO
Kalamazoo-Portage, MI
Kokomo, IN
Lancaster, PA
Lexington-Fayette, KY
Lorain-Elyria, OH
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA
Madison, WI
Modesto, CA
Nassau-Suffolk, NY
New Haven-Meriden CT
Newark NJ
Oklahoma City, OK
Panama City FL
Phoenix, AZ
Portland, OR-WA
Poughkeepsie, NY
Redding CA
San Angelo, TX
Santa Cruz, CA
Santa Rosa-Petaluma CA
Sherman-Denison, TX
Springfield, IL
Steubenville-Weirton OH-WV
Texarkana, TX-Texarkana, AR
Toledo, OH-MI
Tyler, TX
West Palm Beach-Boca Raton-Delray FL
Youngstown-Warren, OH

APPENDIX B: Planning Director Survey: Cities Surveyed

TOP 20

Pittsburgh
 Boston
 Raleigh-Durham
 San Francisco
 St. Louis
 Louisville
 Seattle
 Atlanta
 Buffalo
 Baltimore
 Cincinnati

WINNERS

Danbury, CT
 Lafayette, IN
 Lawrence-Haverill, MA
 Norwalk, CT
 Reading, PA
 Santa Rosa, CA
 Kenosha, WI
 Wilmington, DE
 Johnson City, TN

LOSERS

BOTTOM 20

Pine Bluff, ARK
 Rockford, ILL
 Fitchburg, MA
 Sheboygan, WI
 Baton Rouge, LA

New Bedford, MA
 Midland, TX
 Pueblo, CO
 Kansas City, MO
 Rochester, NY
 Sioux Falls, ND
 Chattanooga, TN

Top and Bottom ranked metro areas as identified in the 1985 Places Rated Almanac.
 Winners identified as improving 3 or more deciles between the 1981 and 1985 editions
 of the Places Rated Almanac; Losers identified as declining 3 or more deciles
 between editions.