

# Critical analysis of the official Greek urban planning indicators of private uses



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to review the official Greek *target indicators*, i.e. those standards that are included in the current planning legislation ([Official Government Gazette 285/D/5.3, 2004](#)), and are used for the planning of private uses, such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail trade, offices, and housing. The article elaborates on the general typology of urban indicators and, more specifically, it addresses the methodology for the calculation of target indicators. Part of this methodology is utilized for the evaluation of the official target indicators that are currently in force. This evaluation is mainly based on the comparison of target indicators with the respective state indicators of years 2004, 2008, and 2012, and is carried out for each category of private urban uses separately. The article concludes on the inappropriateness of the values legislated as target indicators, and stresses the need for their immediate revision.

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## Introduction

It is clear to every urban planner, even to those with limited practical experience, that, when it comes to planning of urban space, it is necessary to use certain indices that render the complex and multi-dimensional policies of urban planning into precise quantitative objectives. Among such indices, the most prevalent and useful ones are: *the floor area ratio*, which indicates the degree of the exploitation of the land for building purposes, *the ground floor coverage ratio*, which represents the percentage of land covered by buildings, *the population density*, which shows how densely an area is populated, and *the planning standards*, which define the type and size of urban uses that are necessary for properly catering for a given number of inhabitants. It is also clear that the choices that are made in the numerical values of the above indices, in order to accurately reflect the expected form and character of the planned urban space, is key to the success of any urban intervention.

The appropriate value of the floor area ratio and of the ground floor coverage ratio can be estimated empirically by extensive exploratory tests, in which different combinations of values are studied, until the appropriate ones that meet the planner's objectives are identified. In particular, by working with different

combinations of floor area ratio and ground floor coverage ratio values for a single plot, we can estimate the morphology of the building to be raised on a certain plot. When this generic morphology is applied to the urban scale, it offers a first insight into the general morphology of urban space that will result from the broad application of these values. A similar procedure can be followed for the estimation of the proper value of population density – although planners, based on their experience, can intuitively ascribe a specific value of population density (or certain values of floor area and ground floor coverage ratios) to a particular kind of urban space ([Aravantinos, 1997](#)). Moreover, planners can use certain equations that link these indices together (see [Pissourios, 2010](#)), in order to detect any inconsistencies among the selected values for each of these indices, or in order to calculate retrospectively the value of one of the above indices, based on the choices that were already made regarding the values of the rest of the indices.

Unlike the quite simple procedure in technical terms presented above, the estimation of planning standards values is considerably more complex. Thus, specialized studies dealing with this particular topic have to be conducted. Such studies propose typical/average values or ranges of values for planning standards of various urban uses. These values are used by planners during the preparation of urban plans, as guidelines for the estimation of the necessary size of urban uses. Such standards usually define the floor area or the plot size of a particular urban use that is necessary for the accommodation or service of one resident or user (e.g. 0.35–0.65 sqm of retail trade per inhabitant, or 7–11 sqm of school plot per student).

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It should also be noted that the utilization of planning standards is an international practice in urban planning (Pissourios, 2013).

In Greece, such specialized studies, focused on the estimation of the values of planning standards, have been published since the 1960s. The multi-volume study entitled *The Human Community* (Athens Center of Ekistics, 1964) and the even further specialized study *Constants of Urban Space* (Markopoulou and Partners, 1973) comprise the first two attempts to estimate Greek planning standards. These studies were followed by the eighteen-volume study *Research on Urban Standards*, prepared by the Laboratory of Urban Researches of the National Technical University of Athens in 1977. The conclusions of the latter study were included in the policy document *Urban Standards*, published by the Ministry of Urban and Regional Planning and Environment (Operation of Urban Restructuring, 1983), in order for this document to provide planners with a guide for the preparation of *General Town Plans* during the 1980s. Since then, planning standards form an essential part of the Greek planning legislation.

Studies like the ones mentioned above are quite voluminous, which is a fact that discourages their frequent update. This, however, does not adversely affect the urban planning practice, since the value of a standard changes slowly over time, thus the proposed standards can be useful for planning purposes for some years. Nonetheless, it is obvious that, in the long run, standards have to be revised, in order for their values to be aligned with the altered socioeconomic environment, and with the planning objectives that emerge over a period of time. In Greece, the most recent revision of values of standards took place in 2004, that is, 10 years ago. Moreover, Greece has been going through a period of extreme economic changes over the past six years, which unavoidably lead to social changes too (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2013). These changes have had a significant impact on the structure of urban uses, especially those closely related to the function of the free market economy (e.g. retail trade shops). Both facts, that is, the ten-year period since the last revision of planning standards, and the recent socio-economic changes, indicate that Greek planning standards should have already been revised. Furthermore, as it will be demonstrated below, the set of standards that is included in the current planning legislation is based on studies published in 1983, or even earlier. As a result, Greek standards that are currently in force are based on studies that span over 30 years ago, thus their immediate revision is imperative.

Based on the above necessity, the article focuses on the evaluation of planning standards that form part of the 2004 legislation. In particular, the article evaluates the standards that specifically and exclusively relate to private uses, such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail trade, private offices, and housing (for the evaluation of planning standards of public uses, see Pissourios, 2012). In the context of this evaluation, the paper proposes a new typology of urban indicators, as well as a methodology for the evaluation of planning standards.

### The typology of urban indicators

The typology of urban indicators was initially studied by Lagopoulos (1977a), and was further elaborated on by Pissourios (2011), upon which study the typology presented below is based.

Urban indicators can be divided into two main categories: (a) *state indicators* and (b) *planning indicators*. The first ones are used to describe the state of an urban system, while the second ones are employed in planning of urban space. Although state indicators are not directly involved in the planning procedure, their contribution to the estimation of the values of planning indicators is crucial, which is a fact that allows us to make a further presentation of their typology. State indicators can be divided into *historical indicators*,

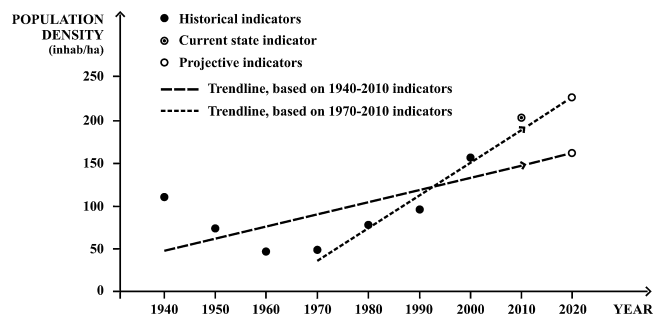


Fig. 1. Graph showing the development of population density through time for a specific settlement. Different collections of historical indicators taken into account lead to different values of projective indicators for the year 2020.

*current state indicators*, and *projective indicators*. The first ones describe the state of a planning system in the past, the second ones reflect the current state, and the latter are used to describe the future state of an urban system if the system follows its current trends. It is obvious that the calculation of a projective indicator is based on the projection of historical and current state indicators in the future, a technical procedure that assigns a name to the term in question. Furthermore, it should be made clear that the various collections of historical indicators taken into account, and differences in the projection methods utilized may yield different projective indicators regarding a certain future moment in time (see Fig. 1).

Planning indicators form the second category of urban indicators. The main feature of planning indicators is their direct participation in the planning procedure, thus, they are future oriented. Within the category of planning indicators, we may find the subcategory of *planning standards*, and the one of *target indicators*. Their differentiation is based on the contrasting types of planning systems in which these indicators are utilized. Planning standards are used in an *imperative planning system*, which is the one that has full control over both the planning process and the apparatus that implements the proposed planning (Kafkalas, 1984; Komninos, 1986). In other words, imperative planning systems have the right to allocate, and also to construct the urban uses that are planned. Such systems can be found in authoritarian regimes, in socialist political systems, and even in liberal socioeconomic administrations, although in the latter case their jurisdiction is limited to the planning of public uses only (e.g., to the planning of public schools, hospitals, green spaces). For instance, the English well-known 'Six Acre Standard' proposed by the National Playing Fields Association and adopted by the *Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002), forms a planning standard that ensures a desired state for open spaces (the standard suggests that there should be a minimum provision of 6 acres of open space per 1000 inhabitants). In imperative planning systems, planning standards express a *desired state of urban uses* (regarding their size and allocation), after taking into account the various economic, ecological, social and technical constraints.

Conversely, target indicators are used within an *indicative urban planning system*, which is the one that has full control over the planning process however, it does not have the authority to implement (construct) the proposed planning (Kafkalas, 1984; Komninos, 1986). In such a planning system, the implementation of planning is left to the function of the free market economy. In this context, *target indicators form quantitative objectives that are set within a specific time-frame and within a particular study or under a certain policy*.

For example, the Greek planning legislation recommends the provision of 0.35–0.65 sqm floor area of retail trade per inhabitant. However, it is not the public sector that sets up shops, but the private sector, which may finally set up less than 0.35, or even more

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