



New Zealand
Planning Institute[®]
Te Kokiringa Taumata

Submission: Housing Quality Definition

Prepared by New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI)

13th November 2018

Introduction

NZ Stats are inviting views on what housing quality means in New Zealand. In its preamble to the current consultation initiative, NZ Stats notes:

Housing quality is important for all New Zealanders. Everyone should have access to healthy, safe, and secure housing and basic services. Poor housing quality has been linked with poor physical and mental health.

Housing should also support cultural and spiritual needs, reduce the limitations of disabilities, enable access to social support networks, and adapt to changing living needs.

Currently there is no single agreed definition of housing quality nationally or internationally. We propose a definition of housing quality for use in New Zealand's data system and seek feedback so it can be refined and developed.

Our proposed definition includes a framework to help collate, describe, and define all the different parts. The housing quality framework brings together and defines four interrelated elements of housing quality:

- housing habitability
- housing functionality
- environmental sustainability
- social and cultural sustainability.

Background

NZPI is interested in planning processes that improve the quality of housing, and advocates for evidence-based approaches in related decision-making. We find that the aphorism “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it”, generally applies in thinking about the development and implementation of housing policy. We support initiatives that can inform good housing policy through systematic collection and production of useful, credible and independent data on detailed factors and aspects that can individually indicate, and together measure the quality of housing.

We note here, for example, that in Australia where urban intensification has had a variety of effects on housing quality – some positive, some negative – urban planning policy development is increasingly based upon its ability to improve specific housing quality indicators. These indicators are increasingly used as measures of housing quality.

Thus NZPI is interested in the development of a housing quality definition that is purposeful, that can play a useful role in setting out indicators that can be used to measure the outcomes of the next generation of urban planning policies in New Zealand. We are moving beyond a system of urban planning which was based on the avoidance of environmental effects (leaving social and economic outcomes to the market), to a system which is more focused on planning that is intended to deliver improved social and economic outcomes.

We think it would be useful for Stats NZ to set out the purposes or practical applications of the housing quality definition proposed.

International Practice

NZPI generally supports the proposed conceptual framework proposed, but considers that it is too focussed on the physical characteristics of individual houses and does not give sufficient weight to the house environment nor to the economics of the house (both capital and operating costs). NZPI notes the wide-ranging nature of the international literature search undertaken in preparing the consultation materials and the proposed framework. However NZPI is concerned that a focus on simply producing a broadly worded definition will not produce the kind of purposeful and focussed housing quality measure(s) that will be applicable in the development of housing planning policy, because it is not specific enough.

While the jigsaw pieces **habitability, functionality, environmental sustainability and social & cultural sustainability** might frame a good conceptual picture of housing quality, it is when the set of indicators that combine to make each of these jigsaw pieces is identified and routinely measured that the picture becomes sharp and useful.

This is illustrated in work done in Vietnam to measure the quality of social housing. This work focuses on a number of indicators, which themselves are derived from subsets of measurable component factors:

No.	Indicators	Component factors
1	Location	Distance to the center Distance to the working areas From the building to external transportation systems Evaluation of the neighbourhoods The potential of the location in future development
2	Distance to the current social facilities	Distance to the market Distance to the shopping mall Distance to the kindergarten Distance to the primary school. Distance to the secondary/ high school Distance to the cultural center Distance to the sport center Distance to the medical center Distance to the park, open spaces
3	Evaluation of the master plan of the building	Features of the site Index of urban planning articles Infrastructure Building's direction External services Landscape
4	General issues in terms of "building design"	The height of each storey Structural span The layout of the building
5	Movement inside the building	Elevator Stair Corridor Fire escape
6	Public spaces of the building	Lobby Communal spaces Other spaces (such as: parking area)
7	Technical areas	Electricity and water supply Technical storey Waste collection
8	The total area and the number of rooms in apartments/ units	Total area (m2) Quantity of bedrooms, bathrooms Flexibility
9	Structure of spaces inside each apartment/ unit	Space's layout, its form and dimension. Movement Position of walls and partitions.
10	Apartment's microclimate	Ventilation Illumination Sun-proof Noise-proof
11	Apartment's equipments	Electronic equipment Bathroom equipment Kitchen equipment Fire alarm equipment Ventilation equipment
12	Others	Sustainable solution Rational expenses Accessibility for disabled Security Community

The above table is copied from an academic paper (which provides an excellent summary of the development of housing quality measurement systems across the world) examining housing indicators in Vietnam¹.

The literature generally indicates that different nation states are experiencing different housing problems, which influence the focus of local research. For example the previously mentioned Vietnam research focus is apartments and social housing. Similar work was conducted in the Baltic States². Its focus was different, reflecting the different policy drivers and political factors there, though it has a similar focus on measurability:

Table 1. Housing indicators relevant to quality of life

Dimensions	Indicators		
Housing quality	Overcrowding rate, %	Housing deprivation rate by number of items, %	Share of total population considering their dwelling as too dark, %
Housing environment	Crime, violence or vandalism in the area, %	Noise from neighbours or from the street, %	Pollution, grime or other environmental problems, %
Housing expenditure burden	Housing cost overburden rate, %	Inability to keep home adequately warm, %	Inability to pay utility bills, %

Another piece of related research applies the experience of measuring housing outcomes in the UK in order to recommend possible housing quality assessment measures in Canada³. This focuses on housing insecurity. This was defined on the basis of housing that is in poor and unsafe conditions, overcrowded or unaffordable. This approach is interesting because one of its purposes – indeed one of the purposes for measuring housing quality in many countries – is to identify those urban areas which are in most acute need of intervention, they are “in need”. This research paper notes that in Canada it has become “increasingly difficult to track program outputs”. These are not a simple matter of establishing housing affordability. Significantly, the paper states:

Housing markets are local not national and issues of market failure or dysfunction are most evident at the local level (although ultimately can have national consequences as recently seen in US and UK). Local effects can potentially be rolled up and aggregated into some national assessment, but local measures are also valuable in developing local responses and strategies

NZPI supports the development of an approach to measuring housing quality in New Zealand which can provide good data at local level, to provide an evidence base that can support the development of and evaluation of urban planning and development policies. **END**

¹ Lan Huong Le et al. (2016) Building up a System of Indicators to Measure Social Housing Quality in Vietnam.

² Dalia Štreimikiene (2014) Housing Indicators for Assessing Quality of Life in Lithuania

³ Pomeroy (2011) Are we making any difference? Measures to assess housing outcomes: Comparing the Experience in Canada and the UK