

Zoning Ordinance of the Selected Local Government Units in the Province of Laguna: Towards Enhanced Implementation

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Article Details:

Received: 24 May 2026
Revised: 28 May 2026
Accepted: 3 June 2026
Published: 30 June 2026
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Recommended Citation:

Jamero, F. K. (2026). Zoning Ordinance of the Selected Local Government Units in the Province of Laguna: Towards Enhanced Implementation. *The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research*. 1 (8), 443-449.
<https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.572>

Index Terms:

critical discourse analysis, eco-media, ecolinguistics, multimodality, student reception, sustainability education

Abstract. The zoning ordinance provides for a clear, cogent, and organized physical, social, and economic demarcation of allowed activities within reasonable regulations. The expansion and unwarranted incursion, along with mixed land use, competition for space, and the construction of various infrastructure, eventually lead to disorder and competing land interests. The study shows that Local government units exercise flexibility in implementing and monitoring their respective zoning ordinances in line with their comprehensive land-use plans. Uneven adaptation is observed among local government units, strongly influenced by experience, technical expertise, and institutional capacity.; Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are embedded in the zoning ordinance and framework through mechanisms such as hazard mapping, base and flood overlay zones, buffer requirements, and other land-use controls and physical identifiers; Market forces and political interests heavily influence land-use decisions, override zoning regulations, and expedite land-use conversion and allocation. Informal settlement programs vary across the subject local government units, intensifying pressures and limiting the effectiveness of the formal zoning mechanism in the sector. Socialized housing provision remains underdeveloped and is challenged by land availability, relocation areas, structures, and distribution mechanisms. Market actors, local leaders, and other interest groups influence land-use planning, decisions, and implementation. Limited staffing, inadequate funding, and inconsistent monitoring weaken enforcement capacity, and interagency coordination, though formal, remains advisory than proactive in safeguarding the comprehensive land use plan. A technical and operational coordination mechanism, establishing transparency, and a rule-based enforcement system can reduce discretionary decision-making and political interference. Strengthens institutional accountability and monitoring, enhancing governance outcomes. The selected local government units institutionalize knowledge management systems, standardize operational procedures, and enhance capacity-building programs on forming consistency.

Introduction

A vramchuck et al. (2020) define zoning as a planning instrument, such as urban plans. The plans are integrated with other models, including territorial, site, and development plans. And Lukho et al. (2025) state that land-use regulation involves demarcating permitted and prohibited human social and economic uses within a defined geographical area.

The limitation and prohibition of use are necessary elements of control and supervision, and an essential element of the domains of sovereignty. The lack of control, implementation, and planning brings challenges that society and government

must address. Attendant to this power is reclassification from original topological nature into vast economic, social, institutional, and political activity.

Tontisirin et al (2021). studied the development of land-use activity in Thailand and established a cause-and-effect relationship between government incentives and infrastructure that attract industries, which in turn drive urbanization and expansive human settlement challenges; conversion is rapid from agricultural to industrial to built-up. The decline is the aftereffect of an economic shift and land-use practices that pose environmental, social, and political concerns. The administration and management of urban areas are problematic for appropriate fiscal and resource allocation among these municipalities. Both natural resources and man-made urban plans should be integrated across several municipalities when urban areas expand beyond two local administrative boundaries.

Bao et al. (2024) examined land banking, policy, finance, and law in Vietnam and found that land banks have a substantial impact on a sustainable society; they also serve as a guiding role for lower-level plans. It is a factor that directly affects land-use planning and land-bank development, underscoring the master plan's significant role in socio-economic development. Planning norms affect the decision to approve investment projects. Projects whose scale exceeds planning norms are considered inconsistent with the planning and must be implemented. The paper identifies the need for effective coordination of planning in the researcher's study, showing that organizing the management of land-use purposes from the planning and announcement stages onward is necessary. Pay attention to calculating land use efficiency when formulating local land use planning projects, thereby allocating appropriate land use plans without waste. Strictly manage the implementation of detailed land use and construction planning; Resolutely handle cases of non-compliance with planning.

Shahpari et al. (2021) showed that agricultural land use is a dynamic process that varies with social, economic, and environmental factors at the global scale. The use of technology to determine the extent of conversion and the spatial dynamics of development is one of the challenges confronting economic utility for land. The uneven demand and competing development put pressure on the ecosystem, requiring policy intervention.

The explosion of knowledge had not departed from the land, as the most expansive among resources subjected to regulations and unplanned conversions has led to untoward incidents, among which are increased danger of landslides, erosion, and ecological alterations incapable of or limited to human habitation—the economic and social costs of lost human lives and unsustainable land-use conversion policies.

Hekmat, et al. (2023) presented in their study using Landsat and Sentinel imagery as the primary tool of analysis, classifying land use and land cover change (LALC) into five (5) category: water bodies, vegetation, barren land, barren rocky terrain, and buildings, the study shows that there are significant changes across all named categories, showing dynamic transformation recording increase in barren land and decrease in vegetation. Human activity alters the ecology. Given the shift from rural to urban growth observed, the developmental challenges faced by human settlements and ecosystems must be balanced.

This study examines the governance structure of zoning ordinances, monitoring, implementation, and actors across national, provincial, and local government departments with oversight functions, as well as the zoning ordinance itself. Further, assess the effectiveness of the different zoning officials across the select local government units, given political, institutional, and structural limitations. The paper also examined competing pressures and interests that limit and challenge the sustainability of the comprehensive land use plan through the local council enactment of its respective zoning ordinances.

The literature shows limited Philippine context cases, and the scenarios focus on urban planning, practices, and protocols. This study examines the governance structure, implementation, and monitoring, as well as the numerous laws incorporated into the comprehensive land use plan and the zoning model guidelines issued by the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Planning, a national agency tasked with overseeing a wide range of human settlement issues. Further, the study examined the areas identified by the zoning model ordinance, including, but not limited to, variations in structures, accountability, flood overlays, environmental limitations, protected areas, human settlements, and industrial and commercial hierarchies.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative multiple-case study approach to examine how selected local government units in the Province of Laguna operationalize zoning ordinances in relation to their approved comprehensive land use plans. The

qualitative approach was deemed appropriate in determining information, and understanding of institutional processes, governance structure, and dynamics, and experiences from the provincial development office, regional office of the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Development, land use and zoning officials of the selected local government units, whose experiences and daily performance of zoning-related functions are complex, context-bound, and not readily quantifiable.

Qualitative research is well-suited to exploring how policies are interpreted, monitored, and implemented at the local level. Within the purview of zoning governance, formal zoning policies and comprehensive land use plans do not operate in isolation; institutional capacity, political pressures, resource constraints, and local socio-economic realities shape them.

Research Locale

The study utilized a triangulation method; it first analyzed the past and current zoning ordinances of San Pedro, Santa Cruz, San Pablo, and Santa Rosa using the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Development. It was cross-referenced, content-analyzed, and interpreted based on the outcomes of the conducted comparative and content analyses.

The comprehensive land use plan maps were analyzed across the selected local government units; the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Development's model zoning ordinance template was reviewed; the plan's visual, overlays, and legends were analyzed; and the visual size, dimensions, and parameters were assessed. The maps are cross-referenced with the selected local government units, interpreted, and presented.

Research Instrument

The adoption of a multiple-case study design enables the researcher to examine zoning governance across selected local government units, treating each locality as a distinct yet comparable case. San Pedro, Santa Cruz, and San Pablo present diverse development stages in the province of Laguna, including highly urbanized areas, industrial zones, administrative centers, and mixed human settlement infrastructure. The diversity shown provides a basis for investigating how zoning ordinances are operationalized under different conditions of urban sprawl, economic activity, population growth, and environmental challenges.

It uses semi-structured interviews and official documents, such as comprehensive land-use plans, zoning ordinances, and policy frameworks, which allow for data triangulation and help identify causes rather than relying on a single source. The method provides a structured, tangible framework for assessing multi-level governance, institutional behavior, and policy execution dynamics in land-use governance across the selected local government units in Laguna province.

Research Informants

The Key Informant Interview Questionnaire was constructed based on information and documentary analyses of the respective zoning ordinances of the subject local government units. At the same time, the Provincial development office and the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Planning share the same set of questions. Interviewees are apprised of the manner and content of the questions. They are directed to read and comment on the limitations and any ambiguity in the question guides before proceeding to a recorded interview.

Key informants of this study are: San Pablo, Laguna Zoning and Development office, Santa Cruz, Laguna municipal planning office, Santa Rosa City Zoning and Planning Development Office, San Pedro City Development and Planning Office, and the Department of Human Settlement and Urban Planning Region 4-A, Laguna Provincial planning and development office. The researcher personally delivered request letters for interviews to local government units, national offices, and the Laguna provincial office.

Ethical Consideration

Respondents were informed that the interview would be recorded and transcribed for academic use and reference, and that the information solicited would be treated with the utmost respect and secrecy, as required by the Data Privacy Act. Letters of request for interviews to key informants (city/municipality planning and development officers) were received, stamped, and scheduled for the conduct of interviews, observing the availability and consent on the questions to be discussed and their capacity to answer based on their office function, as well as limitations to provide other information in their view is beyond their function.

Further, any request for information derived from the interviews will not be released without express consent and a formal letter of request. Respondents' consent shall be required before any part or segment of the interview is released.

Questions are semi-structured to address the study's subject matter. The researcher observed the limitations of the offices and the officials' concerns. University Ethical Clearance number 2025-3407 was issued as directed by PHREC.

Results and Discussion

1. Land use and zoning governance in the province of Laguna and selected local government units operate within a structured multi-level framework in which national policies, guidelines, zoning ordinances, and comprehensive land use plans are observed and aligned with the provincial physical development plans. Local government units exercise flexibility in implementing and monitoring their respective zoning ordinances in line with their comprehensive land-use plans. Uneven adaptation is observed among local government units, strongly influenced by experience, technical expertise, and institutional capacity. There are varying levels of policy implementation, interpretation, and enforcement.
2. Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction are embedded in the zoning ordinance and framework through mechanisms such as hazard mapping, base and flood overlay zones, buffer requirements, and other land-use controls and physical identifiers. Despite the presence of these mechanisms, enforcement relies on local government units, which are often hampered by financial and personnel limitations, concerns of property owners and other interested groups, an insufficient monitoring system, and varying institutional capacities among local government units. Integration is more evident in the planning and permitting process than in actual land development outcomes.
3. The study yields that subject local government units in Laguna are confronted with significant and persistent competing land-use pressures arising from rapid urbanization, industrial expansion, agricultural degradation, commercial development, and an expanding population. Market forces and political interests heavily influence land-use decisions, override zoning regulations, and expedite land-use conversion and allocation. Informal settlement programs vary across the subject local government units, intensifying pressures and limiting the effectiveness of the formal zoning mechanism in the sector. Socialized housing provision remains underdeveloped and is challenged by land availability, relocation areas, structures, and distribution mechanisms.
4. Zoning enforcement is affected by political, institutional, and resource constraints. Despite the technical nature of zoning ordinances, implementation is often shaped by political considerations. Market actors, local leaders, and other interest groups influence land-use planning, decisions, and implementation. Limited staffing, inadequate funding, and inconsistent monitoring weaken enforcement capacity, and interagency coordination, though formal, remains more advisory than proactive in safeguarding the comprehensive land use plan.
5. The study yielded multiple structural challenges, including enforcement gaps, jurisdictional overlaps (particularly with LLDA), inadequate monitoring systems, and the persistent failure of socialized housing initiatives. These challenges are interconnected and further compounded by the mismatch between the expanding mandates of zoning governance and LGUs' limited institutional capacity to fulfill these responsibilities.
6. The study shows that zoning ordinances are generally perceived as well-designed but limited in effectiveness. Compliance at the permitting stage is relatively high, but monitoring and regulation of various infrastructure, development activities, and programs for informal settlers remain inconsistent. The effectiveness of zoning as perceived by zoning officials across the selected local government units in Laguna depends on institutional capacity, political will, and the strength of coordination mechanisms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following conclusions are drawn.

1. The governance structure is fundamentally sound in design but operationally dependent on institutional capacity and human resources rather than solely on policy strength. The reliance on experienced personnel highlights structural vulnerability; the effectiveness of zoning governance may decline with staff turnover or without additional recruitment to meet the population and land area requirements of local government units. The balance between national policy direction and local autonomy creates inconsistencies and differing priorities in implementation, requiring stronger institutional support.

2. The study reveals a significant gap between policy integration and operational implementation, suggesting that disaster risk reduction considerations are not fully incorporated into zoning decisions. A compliance mechanism exists, but its effectiveness is limited by socio-economic realities and institutional constraints, resulting in current DDR integration approaches that vary across local government units and are more procedural than transformational.
3. Zoning ordinances struggle to manage competing land-use demands, where economic incentives and political considerations prevail in decision-making. The incapacity to effectively implement socialized housing programs and regulate informal land-use changes represents broader structural challenges in the current land governance system.
4. The interaction of political, institutional, and resource-related factors structurally constrains the effectiveness of zoning governance. These constraints create inconsistencies in enforcement and limit LGUs' ability to fully implement zoning regulations, regardless of the technical quality of their planning instruments.
5. The limitations of zoning governance are systemic and cannot be addressed through isolated or incremental interventions. The interrelated nature of these challenges suggests that comprehensive and coordinated reforms are necessary to improve overall governance effectiveness.
6. The primary limitation of zoning governance lies in its implementation rather than its design. Variations in effectiveness across selected local government units in Laguna highlight the importance of institutional capacity and governance practices in shaping outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. The selected local government units institutionalize knowledge management systems, standardize operational procedures, and enhance capacity-building programs to reduce dependence on individual expertise. National agencies should provide clear operational guidelines for local application to ensure consistency while preserving flexibility. Strengthening training programs, documentation processes, and inter-local government units' knowledge sharing to enhance the uniformity and resilience of zoning governance.
2. To strengthen DRR integration, LGUs should enhance enforcement mechanisms and invest in technical tools such as updated hazard mapping and GIS-based monitoring. National and local governments should also provide financial and technical assistance to support compliance among vulnerable populations. Institutionalizing stronger interagency coordination and embedding DRR considerations into both planning and post-development monitoring processes are essential to achieving more resilient land-use outcomes.
3. The local government units strengthen enforcement of land conversion regulations and balance economic development with environmental sustainability and social equity. Clearly allocating funds for socialized housing programs to address informal settlements. Additionally, stronger coordination between national and local agencies is needed to manage land use transitions.
4. Local government units should invest in their human complement by increasing staffing levels, improve technical capacity, and allocate sufficient resources for monitoring and enforcement. A technical and operational coordination mechanism, establishing transparency, and a rule-based enforcement system can reduce discretionary decision-making and political interference. Strengthens institutional accountability and monitoring, enhancing governance outcomes.
5. The local government units invest in advanced monitoring technologies, establish formal complaint and reporting mechanisms, and clarify interagency roles to reduce jurisdictional conflicts. Aligning institutional capacity with regulatory mandates requires increased funding, staffing, and technical support. A holistic approach that integrates policy, institutional, and community-based strategies is necessary to address these challenges effectively.
6. Local government units should enhance monitoring systems, institutionalize performance evaluation mechanisms, and promote community participation in enforcement processes. Request an increase in the allocation of personnel, equipment, and training for monitoring and reporting purposes. Sharing best practices across local government units and strengthening intergovernmental collaboration can also help improve consistency and overall performance in zoning governance.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank his colleagues and institutions who provided guidance, feedback, and support throughout the conduct of this research and the preparation of this manuscript. Any remaining errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this research cannot be accessed; the information derived from interviews and content analysis of materials collected by the researcher is protected under the Data Privacy Act.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.