Are Planners Prepared to Address Social Justice and Distributional Equity?[1]

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Planners have stated their commitment and responsibility to assure fairness in community and regional planning activities. Evidencing this is an abundance of literature on the theoretical perspectives of social justice and planning ideals. But is this stated concern for social justice and equity reflected in the training that professional planners receive in US graduate planning programs? Unfortunately, it has not been translated into providing practical methods to measure and assess fairness that can be applied in the field. While such methods exist and have been researched by related disciplines, planning has fallen short of developing and incorporating them into curricula along with transportation, demographic and economic analysis methods. A review of US graduate planning program curricula reveals few course offerings that cover social justice analysis methods.

> As agents of the capitalist state, planners are inherently unable to deal successfully with problems that result from capitalistic accumulation. At best, they can throw up a smokescreen of good intentions behind which capital is free to pursue its relentless pursuit for private gain without concern for the intricate web of communities and people's lives. (Friedmann 1982)

Introduction

Two 1965 articles published in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (JAIP), one by Bernard J. Frieden and the other by Paul Davidoff, highlighted the planner's role as "advocate" and promoted "pluralistic" planning approaches. Frieden and Davidoff called for intelligent planning practice as a means to achieve equal opportunity (Davidoff 1965; Frieden 1965).

Planning a fair distribution of public resources requires training as well as personal motivation for social action. Approximately twenty articles on the subjects of advocacy and social justice have been published in the JAIP (later, the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, or JAPA) since the Frieden and Davidoff articles. However, these have not sufficiently addressed the need for planning techniques in this area.

Progressive planning activists organized groups during the 1960s and 1970s that were interested in promoting advocacy through urban policy (Clavel, Forester and Goldsmith 1980). But these efforts, sometimes referred to as "equity planning" (Krumholz and Forester 1990), have been criticized in terms that echo those of Frieden: namely, that they are characterized by broad and abstract objectives in addressing social goals, but do not provide specific means for planners to employ in addressing social inequities. Other equity-based critiques of planning theory and practice include a lack of innovation in planning education and planning techniques (Brooks and Stegman 1968; Skjei 1972), institutional barriers resulting from the existing power structure (Mazziotti 1974), lack of expressed ethical responsibilities by planners (Marcuse 1976) and the composition of planning staffs that do not represent the social and cultural values of their constituents (Hoch 1993).

Over the years the lack of training in equity-oriented research and analysis has not gone unnoticed. Davidoff and Boyd ask, "Why do planning analysis courses consider economic and demographic factors but ignore fairness issues? Why do they ignore studies of proportionality and balance in the distribution of resources?" (1983: 54). A number of planning academics have identified a need for appropriate methods and techniques for equity planning (Canan and Hennessy 1985; Castells 1982; Checkoway 1989; Kaufmann 1989; Krumholz and Clavel 1994). More recently, social impact assessment research has included the use of geographic information systems technology (GIS) as a means to analyze distributional impacts (for example, Heikkila and Davis 1997; Sanchez 1998a, 1998b; Talen 1996, 1998). In addition, planning faculty have initiated efforts to put neighborhood problem solving issues directly in the hands of students through research and planning studio projects (see Reardon 1998). However, these efforts have not produced systematic methodologies with broad applicability. Washington and Strong (1997) noted the "marginal role" that planners have played in the environmental justice movement, which is closely related to social justice concerns. The lack of attention to the distributional aspects of planning activities has been conspicuously missing from city development policies (Alexander 1981).

Among other things, urban planning is a process of recognizing opportunities. In some cases these opportunities are naturally occurring, such as waterways for transport or recreation. In other cases, legal mechanisms such as zoning, development activities such as road building and service provision such as library or park construction meet important economic, social and cultural needs. Public service provision influences social and economic opportunities, and provides some citizens with a greater proportion of service benefits compared to others (Lineberry 1974, 1977; Thomas and Krishnarayan 1994). Even though the issue of proportionality is of direct concern to planners, it appears that the majority of analyses devoted to distributional equity have come from the fields of public policy, public finance and public administration. Policy analysis in planning has remained focused on areas such as regional science, labor, transport, environment and housing while struggling to be perceived as "rational" (Friedmann 1987).

Distributional Analysis

Distributional analysis is a subset of social impact analysis. In addition to identifying and measuring the impacts of policy interventions, social impact analysis is concerned with direct effects such as how individuals or groups adapt to these interventions. Such adaptations can take the form of physical or psychological responses, such as health outcomes, as well as economic responses, such as residential relocation. Distributional analysis generally identifies the outcome of a decision-making process as it differentially affects demographic subgroups, but does not address such responses, nor does it identify weaknesses or biases in the system that produced the outcome.

In an effort to evaluate distributional equity, many studies have compared the quantity of public services provided within neighborhoods with the income class and racial composition of each neighborhood. Examples include the provision of libraries (Levy, Meltsner and Wildavsky 1974), parks (Koehler and Wrightson 1987), police services (Mladenka and Hill 1978) and streets (Antunes and Plumlee 1977). Other equity studies have attempted to measure public service delivery levels as a function of administrative and bureaucratic changes over time (Miranda and Tunyavong 1994). A common criticism of these analyses is that they do not adequately account for the quality of the services being provided, nor do they consider that the utility of some services varies for different segments of the population. For instance, the use of park facilities is different for households with and without children. In addition, service needs and preferences can change as populations age or neighborhoods undergo redevelopment, gentrification or housing market shifts.

Public service distribution analyses typically use quantitative comparisons of service levels between geographic units (Benson and Lund 1969; Miranda and Tunyavong 1994). The demographic characteristics of geographic units at the neighborhood level (usually census tracts or municipal districts) are correlated with service level indicators (Newton 1984). These measures are used to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and service levels. For example, a negative correlation between income and benefit levels suggests that higher income groups receive lower levels of service. Typically these calculations are based on the assumption that the relationship between socioeconomic indicators and service levels is linear. But some researchers have found that a U-shaped curve is more appropriate, reflecting the fact that the lowest and highest socioeconomic strata receive higher levels of service, while those in the middle receive lower levels (Rich 1982).

The courts have recognized the appropriateness of analytical approaches in examining distributional equity of public services and actions. Three particular court cases have addressed urban service delivery equity, especially as it relates to planning analysis methodologies: Hawkins v Town of Shaw (1971), Beal v. Lindsay (1972) and Ammons v. Dade City (1986).[2] In each of these cases the court reviewed statistical data to determine whether service distribution was inequitable. Nevertheless, no precedent regarding accepted quantitative methods was established. It is likely that if more communities employ indicators of equitable urban service delivery, the courts will pass judgement on which forms of measurement are most appropriate.

The equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution has been interpreted to mean that services must be provided in a non-discriminatory way throughout communities. This has led the Supreme Court to find unconstitutional a number of discriminatory state practices, including school segregation, mal-apportionment in legislative districting, and residency requirements for welfare recipients. Enforcement of the equal protection clause has also offered remedies for blatant discrepancies in municipal service allocation, such as the failure to provide service in certain neighborhoods. The evaluation criteria of the courts are of particular importance to planners. Planning policy that is legally viable will be durable and stand a better chance of discouraging or minimizing occurrences of service delivery inequity.

Thus, despite their relatively undeveloped state, analysis techniques focused on social equity and fairness do exist, have been applied in a research context and have some legal standing. Many examples are applicable to community and regional planning activities and could be used by professional planners. But, as we will see below, sufficient training may not be provided by academic planning programs.

Why Measures of Equitable Service Delivery Are Useful

Measures of equitable service delivery by no means provide proof that households and neighborhoods are or are not being treated equally. But these measures can be used to indicate imbalances, much like a doctor uses body temperature and blood pressure as indicators of a patient's health.

Social impact indicators may be criticized as not providing evidence of the causal relationship between discrimination, service delivery and social problems. Again, biased service delivery patterns are only indicators of a problem. The information from social impact analyses can inform citizens and public officials about system-wide service delivery characteristics as well as provide the means for policy selection, design and administration (Finsterbusch and Wolf 1977). Where there is an indicator of a discriminatory service delivery pattern, the availability of this information may stimulate more detailed analysis of deficiencies, and eventually lead to corrective action. The information can also be used in cases where citizens feel that systematic bias in service delivery patterns persist.

Monitoring equality of service provision is "a mark of seriousness of intent, as it provides some indication of whether outputs and actions are consistent with rhetoric" (Riley 1994). Similar to reporting requirements for environmental impact assessment and fair-housing initiatives, and to the way some states require specific elements in community plans, a "social impact" or "equity impact" element could be required by state or local jurisdictions for applicable planning activities (Pinel 1994).

Thus, the utility of using measures of social equity is twofold. First, these measures can inform planners of potential imbalances. Second, they can promote public awareness of equity issues and stimulate public debate.

Are Planning Schools Teaching Methods to Assess Distributional Equity?

Because social justice and equity issues are a stated priority within the planning field, it seems logical that this concern should be reflected in how planners are trained. The core requirements of most planning programs include a variety of quantitative methods, along with planning history, theory and planning law. Many programs also require course work in economics (or economic development), environmental assessment, housing and infrastructure planning. These and supporting courses are designed to prepare planning students to recognize and frame problems, collect and analyze appropriate data, and report policy relevant findings.

Social impact analysis and equity measures should be included along with standard population, economic and environmental applications taught in standard analytic methods courses. The use of these measures does not require substantial additional quantitative training on the part of planners because it involves simple descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, regression analysis and survey research techniques. These traditional analysis tools are taught in most, if not all, planning programs in the US.

In the *Criteria and Procedures of the Planning Accreditation Program*, the Planning Accreditation Board (1999: 20) specifies that program curricula should reflect a range of "knowledge, skills, and values necessary for becoming competent professional planners." The "values component" of the course curricula that the accreditation process reviews includes "issues of equity, social justice, economic welfare, and efficiency in the use of resources" (22). However, while the accreditation guidelines recommend that students "be able to identify and debate the importance and effects of the following values in relation to actual planning issues" (22), no direction is given regarding how this can be accomplished.

Are planning schools teaching methods to assess distributional equity? I examined course offerings from graduate US planning programs (as listed by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning in Fisher 1996) with an eye toward those classes that focus on methods for social impact assessment. This analysis dealt only with graduate planning programs because graduate courses tend to be more advanced and specialized compared to undergraduate studies. In addition, there are relatively few undergraduate programs compared to graduate programs in the US. Graduate courses listed on internet sites for each of the seventy-seven graduate planning programs were surveyed.[3] Of the seventy-seven programs listed by ACSP, fifty-eight of the program web sites displayed full course offerings. Sites that only displayed core requirements or concentration areas were excluded. The majority of the fifty-eight sites selected also provided a brief course description along with the course title. Because course content is not always easily discernible from course titles, the descriptions helped in categorizing courses as being related to both social equity and planning methods. In the cases where course descriptions were not available, course title wording was used for categorization. In addition, courses that appeared to be primarily directed readings, practicum or thesis research were excluded from the survey of classes.

Because the area of social equity has a wide variety of elements spanning race, gender, culture, class, religion, lifestyle and location, certain keywords were used to categorize planning courses: social, poverty, welfare, diversity, gender, women, inequality, racial, advocacy, monitoring, evaluation and justice. In most cases the emphasis of the class could be easily distinguished as being either related to history, theory or policy through course titles (e.g., PLDV 452 Planning, Policy-Making, and Social Change at USC, CRP 427 Social Policy Planning at ISU). In other cases course titles were very explicit about course objectives being oriented to planning methods or techniques (e.g., P11.2609 Measuring and Analyzing Social and Economic Change at NYU, UP 256 Social Impact Analysis at UCLA). Course descriptions were also helpful in determining if course objectives were theoretically or methodologically based. For example, there is an apparent analytical orientation in the course descriptions from the University of Rhode Island and the Pratt Institute as compared to the University of Illinois at Chicago course shown below. In this case the first two courses met the criteria while the third did not. While the first two descriptions contain fewer relevant keywords than the third, they include language suggesting an explicit attention to analytical and methodological tools, while the third does not.

> CPL 543, Methods of Social Policy Analysis. Methods and techniques of social public policy analysis as applied to social problems and the evaluation of policy options, programs, and quality of life. (University of Rhode Island)

> PL 679, Monitoring Community Change. The purpose of this course is to develop practical skills in analyzing community change. Technical methods, such as survey and sampling techniques and selected topics in regional economics and demographics, are covered in class through lectures. The class is divided into working groups, which jointly select and carry out a case study of a community. As part of the group project, a community survey is developed and administered. The group projects may be linked to one of the department's studio courses. (Pratt Institute)

> UPP 516, Issues of Class and Race in Planning. Critically examines the significant role of race/racism, class, as well as ethnicity/nationality and gender as factors in the field of planning and in public policy formation, implementation and evaluation; emphasis is placed upon a survey of the effects of these factors at the global, national, urban and inter community contexts of planning and policy analysis. (University of Illinois at Chicago)

Overall, I found eighteen courses that were directly concerned with equity planning analysis techniques. Out of the 2096 total classes reviewed on planning program web pages, this means that less than one percent (0.86 percent) of planning courses being offered fit the criteria discussed above. The eighteen course titles and school names are shown in Table 1.

Obviously, the approach used here to categorize classes is cursory and subject to error. The objective was, however, to identify complete courses that focus on analysis methods for social justice and equity impacts rather than just portions of courses devoted to the topic. The priority given to such methods would

Table 1 Equity/ Social Planning Analysis Courses

Planning Program	Course
Rutgers University	34:970:611 Urban Planning and Social Policy
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	344 Social Impact Assessment
University of Rhode Island	CPL 510 Community Planning and Political and Social Change
	CPL 543 Methods of Social Policy Analysis
University of Pennsylvania	CPLN 645 Urban Social Stratification/ Balkanization and the Future of Cities
Clemson University	CRP 823 Social Policy Planning and Delivery Systems
MIT	DUSP 11.232 The Uses of Social Science for Social Change
New York University	P11.2609 Measuring and Analyzing Social and Economic Change
Cleveland State University	PDD 531 Public Works and Urban Service Delivery
Pratt Institute	PL 661 Advocacy Planning/ Social Action
	PL 679 Monitoring Community Change
University of Hawaii, Manoa	Plan 653 Social Impact Assessment
University of Southern California	PLUS 552 Urban Planning and Social Policy
University of Massachusetts, Amherst	RP 643 Economic and Social Planning Analysis
University of California, Irvine	U217 Poverty and Social Policy
University of California, Los Angeles	UP 256 Social Impact Analysis
University of New Orleans	URBN 4810 Environmental Justice in Urban Environments
Portland State University	USP 582 Poverty, Welfare, and Income Distribution

also be signified by the amount of class time devoted to the subject—with a full class (or more) on the topic being the highest expressed level of importance. Ideally, course syllabi (including assigned reading materials) should be reviewed to identify the type and extent of topic coverage.

One argument against the conclusion that social impact analysis courses are nearly absent in planning curricula today is that these techniques have been integrated into other related courses. Quite possibly, social impact assessment methods are found in courses on general quantitative analysis and environmental impact analysis, as well as those on community development and transportation planning. However, I believe that the distributional aspects of planning activities are complex and cannot be sufficiently addressed in less than a term-long course. Furthermore, theory-based courses cannot provide the practical tools needed by professional planners. Social justice concerns should be manifest in what planners *do*, rather than just what planners *think*. Planning theory courses that address social justice issues may inform planners, but they are insufficient in terms of practical approaches to planning analysis. Evidence of this is the dearth of professional planning reports addressing the social inequities inherent to and perpetuated by contemporary urban development patterns.

Conclusion

The public policy and public administration literatures provide extremely valuable examples of how indicators of service delivery can be used to assess distributional equity. These methods or quantitative techniques could be applied systematically by planners in the form of a "social equity audit" similar to the housing audit procedures required in the Fair Housing Act (Fix and Struyk 1993). Where the housing audit is used to detect discrimination or bias in mortgage lending practices, a social equity audit could be used to detect inequitable access to public services. These methods are not proposed as a means of scientific proof, but as indicators of potential inequitable service delivery. Repeated testing for systemic discrimination in public service delivery would provide stronger evidence (Tisdale 1993).

These measures could also provide tangible evidence that could be challenged and contested by groups alleging discrimination. Similar to planners' use of population projections, the measures are indicators or estimates of likely future conditions that also can be used for public debate and policy-making.

If planners were equipped with the skills to carry out distributional analysis, social injustices would not necessarily become easier to redress. But environmental assessments, general plans, capital improvement plans and housing elements could be extended to include such analysis. These are traditional venues where this tool could be readily added, although its adoption will certainly face bureaucratic hurdles. There is an obvious challenge related to whether such analysis will be widely recognized and deemed politically useful.

Why the need for specific planning analysis courses that focus on social impacts when civil rights laws, environmental impact reporting requirements, fair-housing reporting requirements and employment opportunity laws are in place? Why the need for such courses when theory classes are universally offered by planning programs? If social equity is already a responsibility of planners, why re-state these ideals again? The socio-spatial conditions of urban areas throughout the US provide a partial answer to these questions. A recently released report from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation indicates that American neighborhoods and schools are re-segregating, as predicted by the Kerner Commission's report thirty years earlier. Given the current disparities between central city and suburb in property taxes and service benefit levels, maintenance of the status quo will perpetuate the trend of continued central-city/suburban isolation (Wilson 1987, 1997). Planners have some responsibility for affirmative action in equitable resource delivery levels, or at least we say that we do.

Did the social science research efforts of the 1970s fail to properly address the problem of urban social inequities? No, generally the issue is not whether there is a sufficient awareness of imbalances. Rather, it appears that the weakness has been in the translation of awareness to planning education and action.

Endnotes

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[2] Hawkins v. Town of Shaw, U.S. 437 F2d 1286 (1971); Beal v Lindsay, U.S. 468 F2d 287 (1972); and Ammons v. Dade City, 783 F.2d 982 (11th Cir. 1986).

[3] For a list of accredited planning programs and their web addresses, see the ACSP web site at http://www.uwm.edu/Org/acsp/CareerInfo/Accredited_programs.html.

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