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# Neighborhood Planning

*W. Dennis Keating & Norman Krumholz*

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The neighborhood planning idea has roots that go back over one hundred years. The neighborhood was seen by settlement house social workers such as Jane Addams, Robert Woods, Mary Simkhovitch, and others as the means not only to rebuild the congested neighborhoods of the immigrant poor but also to reconstruct the entire city. Most settlement workers pressed for housing reforms and improvements limited to poor neighborhoods, but early planners James Ford (1916) and Benjamin C. Marsh (1909) suggested variations of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City as a means of decentralizing the working class, reducing congestion, and improving the neighborhood, city, and region. During the early 1900s, planners proposed neighborhood civic centers consisting of grouped public and private institutions that would encourage neighborhood pride and betterment. Such a scheme was suggested as part of a general effort at city beautification in the 1907 St. Louis plan (Davis 1908). A darker side of neighborhood planning also emerged as Richmond, St. Louis, Chicago, Atlanta, and other cities experimented with neighborhood planning and zoning for racial exclusion (Silver 1985).

The tendency of city planners to translate general aspirations into concrete community designs is clearly evident in Clarence Perry's contribution to neighborhood planning. Perry's Neighborhood Unit Plan was an attempt to adapt the social uniformity sought by the settlement house workers into a blueprint for the automobile age (Perry 1924). His scheme included a residential space for a given number of families, recreation space, local schools, commercial shops, and the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. By the late 1940s, Perry's neighborhood unit had become one of the most widely discussed urban planning ideas (Stein 1945; Dahir 1947).

In the 1960s, neighborhood advocate Jane Jacobs (1961) stated her contention that diverse and multiuse neighborhoods were key to city vitality. Her views favoring high-density and unplanned development challenged Perry's ideas of fixed and restricted community scale. Sociologist/planner Herbert Gans, whose research (1962) found a vibrant social network behind decaying physical facades of neighborhoods threatened by urban renewal, also attacked the physical determinism of the neighborhood plan. Paul Davidoff (1965) offered a new planning approach that would assist threatened neighborhoods to advocate their own interest in a challenge to the official

## Abstract

Neighborhood planning in American cities goes back more than one hundred years. The settlement house social workers pressed demands for neighborhood and housing improvements. They were followed by early city planners, who included neighborhood multipurpose civic centers within their comprehensive citywide plans. Clarence Perry's neighborhood unit plan of the 1920s saw the urban neighborhood as a means to organize space and socialize residents. Today, with the rise of community development corporations, neighborhoods are again the focus of renewed interest. This commentary discusses the past and present of neighborhood planning within the context of a survey of ACSP faculty who are teaching neighborhood planning.

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city plan. Together, the critiques by Jacobs, Gans, Davidoff, and others helped to end the urban renewal clearance program and laid the groundwork for the citizen and neighborhood involvement requirements written into the federal Community Development Block Grant Program of 1974. Citizen participation is now a routine element in American urban planning.

At the start of the new millennium, neighborhood groups in many American cities are involved in commenting on or shaping the planning, zoning, and development proposals that affect their neighborhoods. Numerous cities have official planning staffs that continually seek neighborhood input, modifying their citywide plans to reflect constituency preferences. Most important, powerful new interest in urban neighborhoods has been spurred by the accomplishments of some 2,500 community development corporations (CDCs) in localities all over America. Through 1996, these CDCs have built some 500,000 units of affordable housing produced nationwide (Orlebeke 1997). In addition, they have been responsible for the construction of large amounts of commercial and industrial space in difficult locations. The CDCs are popular with both liberal and conservative politicians and with funding "intermediaries." They have been institutionalized in federal legislation. They are an important new dynamic in urban areas and an important source of jobs for planning students.

Because of growing interest in neighborhood planning as a career path, it is timely to look at how the subject of neighborhood planning is being addressed by ACSP member schools. Given the interest of government in collaborating with universities on community development, neighborhood planning can be an important connection. One example is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's University-Community Partnership Center (COPC) program.

### ► Survey

In 1997, the American Planning Association (APA) asked us to survey the faculty of ACSP member schools to determine the current state of the art in teaching neighborhood collaborative planning (NCP). In commissioning this first survey of its kind, APA hoped to reinforce this planning specialty. We mailed our survey instrument to 283 ACSP faculty selected for areas of specialization related to NCP and received 43 responses. Of the eighty schools in the United States represented in the *Tenth ACSP Guide to Graduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning*, we received positive responses from at least one faculty member at about half (thirty-five) of the schools. This is a small but representative sample of faculty

involved in teaching NCP. Most survey respondents were full or associate professors; all but two were full-time faculty.

The survey responses made clear that there was a wide range of courses offered, including planning, architecture, community development, and housing and neighborhood revitalization. Many were designated as studios and workshops. Forty-six were graduate courses; only nine were undergraduate. A majority of the courses were required and most were offered for just one term. Student enrollment varied from eight to twenty-five. Based on the responses to the questions on teaching techniques and the strengths and weakness of each, we compiled the data shown in Table 1.

In discussing the dynamics of teaching NCP, particularly when it involves field research and often real clients, respondents noted many problems and issues:

- neighborhood organizations may have weak leadership, making collaboration difficult;
- with fieldwork, there is often a conflict between the deadlines of a real client versus the academic calendar;
- communication between students and real-world clients and their constituents can often prove difficult, leading to frustration and delay;
- setting priorities for neighborhoods can prove difficult when the needs are many, especially in distressed neighborhoods, and the resources are limited; and
- the logistics of transporting students off campus to a neighborhood site can often present problems of funding, liability, and assimilation.

On the positive side, respondents noted that

- students often have a heightened interest in an NCP class because of the attraction of working with real clients;
- when students work in groups, intensive interaction may result;
- the experience may result in job opportunities for students; and
- despite problems, as one respondent noted, "When students and clients click, it's magic."

All of our respondents believe NCP could be very important in the planning curriculum. The following are recurrent reasons given to support this view: NCP exposes students to community partnerships and a more diverse population while providing assistance to community clients, it provides insights into the dynamics of low-income neighborhoods, it helps fulfill the service mission of urban universities, and it educates the students about issues related to social justice and equity.

We offer two examples to support our argument of the importance of teaching NCP in the curriculum. One of the best-known and most successful examples of NCP is the East St.

Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP). Its chair, Professor Kenneth Reardon (1998) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), has previously described ESLARP and assessed its effectiveness as empowerment planning. He points out the benefits and pitfalls of NCP. In an October 1999 update on ESLARP's accomplishments, Reardon estimated that 4,000 UIUC students have volunteered in East St. Louis since 1987, 1,800 of whom have earned academic credit for their field-based learning. One hundred graduate research assistants have been funded and eighty master's theses and research papers related to ESLARP have been written. ESLARP's impact on both UIUC faculty and students and the East St. Louis neighborhoods in which they have worked is indeed impressive. Not only has ESLARP involved many colleges and departments at UIUC, but it has helped satisfy the university's commitment to urban service. In recognition of his work and its importance in disadvantaged communities, Professor Reardon in 2000 was awarded the President's Award of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Here at the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University, a graduate class titled "Neighborhood Planning" has long been offered, focusing each year on a selected Cleveland area neighborhood. Students work with community-based clients on projects. This and other programs and classes at the college have led many graduates to continue to work in the field of neighborhood redevelopment and planning, both with local governments and CDCs. Alumni of the Neighborhood Planning course are now heading several Cleveland CDCs and working for

**Table 1.**  
**Neighborhood Collaborative Planning Survey:**  
**Question 10, teaching techniques.**

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Weakness</i>
Team teaching	Diversity of perspectives applied partner keeps focus, use skills of other faculty	Can confuse students
Neighborhood history	Experimental knowledge historic precedence Fascinates students Shows what planners have done	No theory to place the action within Sometimes too idiosyncratic Often not available Time-consuming in quarter system
Neighborhood analysis	Experimental knowledge Abstract vision Apply research techniques Data-driven reports Objective Basic planning skills applied	No theory to place the action within Dehumanizes Inadequate data availability Time-consuming in quarter system Data sources not always accurate
Mapping	Experimental knowledge Abstract vision Learn neighborhood Helps to see land use patterns	No theory to place the action within Scale problems Fosters elitism
Readings	Multiple perspectives Provide case studies Information rapidly communicated Breadth and depth of issues Can review at own pace	Too abstract for some Some studies are dated May not be done Abstract
Films/videos/slides	Very realistic documentation Dramatic visual Engaging Piques student interest	Some are dated Can seem like entertainment Superficiality
Role-play	Experience different roles	Reluctance to participate
Neighborhood tours	Experimental knowledge Essential for "familiarization" Local knowledge See complexity of real world Realistic exposure	No theory to place the action within Logistics Hard to match with readings
Real clients	Increased interest for students Practical/political Students feel professional Strong dose of realism Essential; grounds project	Client may suffer Introduces complication Students may become "cheap labor" Unpredictability
Field research	Students' awareness and understanding improve Students learn where to get information Essential to understand neighborhood Networking skills	Time-consuming; logistics Time-consuming
Observation	Learn what works and what doesn't	Hard to find appropriate hearings

Cleveland's planning and community development departments. Many Cleveland CDCs are associated with the Cleveland Housing Network (CHN), a nationally recognized network of eighteen CDCs providing affordable housing (Krumholz 1997). These are but two examples of why NCP should be supported within the planning academy.

### ► Conclusion

The authors share the prevailing view of our respondents that ACSP member schools should reinforce or elevate the teaching of NCP to a more important position in their curriculum. There is no doubt that CDCs and other neighborhood-based organizations are having a significant impact on urban neighborhoods. They have become a major supplier of affordable housing in the United States as well as being important commercial developers and providers of social services. Their numbers and their competence continue to grow, and more and more planners working at the neighborhood level, inside local government and through nonprofit agencies, are helping them. The many problems of disinvested urban neighborhoods have confounded traditional formulas; CDCs have succeeded in at least making progress on some of these problems. In the process, they have learned to survive on the rocky soil of the poorest of urban neighborhoods, making a contribution along the way to the greater society. ACSP member schools should do more to support faculty to prepare their students through neighborhood planning to contribute to this and similar efforts.

This effort should be supported by further research. The APA NCP survey did not include any student evaluations. As a result, we have no data independent of the faculty responses to measure the effectiveness of the teaching of NCP courses. Such information is essential, possibly from a survey aimed at students in NCP courses. We also did not survey students who took NCP courses and then later became neighborhood

planning practitioners. Such a survey could reveal how students in NCP classes found their jobs working for CDCs, whether they felt their NCP courses had prepared them adequately for neighborhood assignments and what other teaching approaches and materials might have been more effective. In the alternative, ACSP and APA conference panels and roundtables can help to advance our knowledge.

**Authors' Note:** Complete copies of the *Teaching Neighborhood Collaborative Planning Survey* are available from the authors or via APA's Web page: <http://www.planning.org>.

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