

**Goal Achievement,  
Relationship Building,  
and Incrementalism:  
The Challenges of University-  
Community Partnerships**

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**A Great Cities Institute Working Paper**

January 1998



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## Acknowledgement

The authors thank the editors of *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, anonymous reviewers, and especially Charles Hoch for their helpful comments. They also thank all the partners and funders involved in the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative for their participation. This report will be forthcoming in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*.

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## Great Cities Institute Publication Number: GCP-97-12

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# **Goal Achievement, Relationship Building and Incrementalism: The Challenges of University- Community Partnerships**

## **Introduction**

Planning theorists have often argued that the rational planning model continues to dominate the rhetoric and intent of most planners, even though there is a great deal of intellectual acceptance of the idea that planning practice rarely conforms to the model (Baum 1996; Hoch 1995, 225). Planning education, too, mostly prepares students for the role of technically competent planner in a rational world, rather than the role of political operator or negotiator that is more likely to be the day-to-day reality of most planners' jobs (Hoch 1995).

It may well be that the organizations in which most planners work--primarily government agencies--are particularly conducive to maintaining a fiction of rational, goal-oriented planning. Governments are supposed to be guided by a program formulated jointly by the legislative branch and the chief elected leadership, and then implemented rationally by a presumably impartial bureaucracy. While few, if any, people seriously believe this reflects reality, it is in the interest of both the legislators and bureaucracy to at least pretend this is how things work.

Other types of organizations are not expected to be so clearly goal-oriented. For instance, universities are often described as feudal entities, where all fiefs--colleges or departments--or even individuals (at least those who have tenured faculty appointments) are free to pursue their own interests. Similarly, community-based organizations, working in the messiness of often politically divided communities, with unclear lines of accountability, and little control over their external environment, more often have no choice but to be opportunistic, to go for symbolic victories, and to focus on political, rather than substantive gains (NCCED 1992).

Thus, it is not surprising that the development of partnerships between universities and community organizations might follow a different planning model than the traditional rational model. In general, when planning occurs in a situation of shared power, it is less likely to follow the standard model of progression from problem definition to development of alternative solutions, to implementation (Bryson and Crosby 1996, 463). How then, in such a situation, does planning occur? What is the relationship between the values, interests, and goals of various actors and what gets done? What is the role of planning, and planners, in linking knowledge effectively to action (Friedman 1987)?

The Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) programs offer a good opportunity to analyze the development and implementation of this relationship-oriented form of planning.

Because of the nature of the partners involved--universities and community organizations--the pretense of a rational planning approach is less likely to be important or feasible, opening the door to a planning process that is more explicitly oriented toward building relationships, taking advantage of strategic opportunities, and remaining fluid, or messy.

This alternative approach is reflected in the idea of "disjointed incrementalism" (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963) or "principled opportunism," the notion that one has certain starting principles, but beyond this takes advantage of strategic opportunities as they arise, rather than following a formulated plan. Another version of this is planning along the lines of Schon's "reflective practitioner," described as working in the "swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution," as opposed to the "high hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique" (Schon 1983, 42).

The appropriateness of this approach has recently been debated extensively, both at meetings of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning and in *Planning Theory* (Healey 1997). The alternatives are posed as planning either along structuralist and political economist lines, or in a pragmatist, incrementalist, or communicative mode. Of course, this bifurcation does not do justice to the considerable subtlety of the positions and theoreticians involved, but roughly speaking the first group argues that planning takes place in a structural context (such as specific urban regimes) which is knowable, and that this context is the dominant feature and constraint of any planning process (Feldman 1996; Lauria 1997; Imbroscio 1997). The second group emphasizes the indeterminacy of meaning, and looks at structural factors as providing a context, but not a determining one. Rather, the real story of planning takes place in the meanings planners and all participants construct on a continuous basis. Thus, planning draws on symbolic interactionism and has to pay attention to how different groups negotiate meaning in a constantly shifting, post-modern environment (Hoch 1997; Innes 1995). There are also those who seek to reconcile the approaches, focusing on the combination of deep, underlying structures with the possibility of change based on the process of redefinition by participants. Patsy Healey summarizes Anthony Giddens' attempt to bridge the structuralist-pragmatist divide as follows: Actors, in the relations of their social practices, are continually inventing responses to the situations they find themselves in, being shaped by structural constraints as their actions in turn remold the driving, 'structuring' forces" (Healey 1997, 10).

The present article provides an example of planning in an incrementalist mode and makes an argument for this as the only appropriate approach in this context of shared power. In an update on Lindblom, Harper and Stein (1994) identify several key elements of incrementalism. Foremost among these is its appropriateness in a situation where there may be agreement on process, but not on substantive goals. They argue that ends and means cannot be separated; each choice of an approach or solution implies a value choice, and at the same time most "ends" are means at a higher level. Therefore, it would be close

to impossible to start out with a fixed goal in mind, and plan the intermediate strategies to reach the goal. Rather, in a situation where no participant has the power to impose a dominant definition of the problem, small steps in the beginning of a planning process create a joint engagement in defining the situation and the gradual development of shared values.

Furthermore, incrementalism based on the assumption that precise predictive social theory is impossible. When we can't know the outcome of our actions, we can't develop grand plans, and small incremental steps are the only possible approach. In the particular case at hand, this certainly applies. There is no single accepted theory of neighborhood revitalization (see Wiewel, Teitz and Giloth 1993), and therefore it would be very difficult, and possibly unwise, to impose one specific approach.

There are several key issues in developing and implementing such a planning process. Innes and Booher (1996, 10) describe it as *bricolage*, the artisan's process of taking available materials and equipment to create a structure or solution, building up from what's at hand, rather than letting the desired end structure determine the means.

Borrowing loosely from these concepts, the planning process described in this article can be seen as the creation of new types of institutions or arrangements, in a *bricolage* type fashion. This process can be described in four stages. The first stage is the very decision to form any kind of a planning partnership at all in a situation where neither party is required to do so and cannot force the other. Second, since there is no clear authority, the partnership has to develop some level of trust in order to be able to proceed, or some set of procedures needs be developed that allows the partners to gain mutual benefit. Third, decisions need to be made about what to do, how resources are acquired, who has responsibility, and how activities are evaluated. Fourth, each of the partners may need to make internal changes in order to accommodate the partnership and its activities. This also encompasses the notion of enforcement of norms and accountability. Through internal institutional changes, new normative structures can be created that legitimate the partnership.

UIC's Great Cities program expresses the university's commitment to direct its teaching, research, and service programs to address urban issues in the Chicago metropolitan area. Great Cities refers to the mission of the university as a whole, and as such encompasses work done by hundreds of faculty and university departments. In addition, it includes several specific new initiatives. One of these is the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI), a partnership between UIC and organizations in neighborhoods adjoining the university, especially Pilsen and the Near West Side. The purpose of the UICNI is to strengthen the quality of life in these neighborhoods through collaborative programs between university faculty, community organizations, local government, and corporations.

This article will explore the nature of this planning process by using examples from one particular case, that of the University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative. We believe that this case brings out more general characteristics of this planning model, and that it has particular relevance to collaborative planning. After some background

information on the Community Outreach Partnership Center program and the University of Illinois at Chicago's version of it, we will discuss each of these four stages in detail.

### **COPC at UIC**

The Community Outreach Partnership Center program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is intended to assist universities in developing programs that involve faculty and students in applied projects that benefit neighborhoods and communities. For UIC, the program happened to come along as a perfect fit with a set of institutional priorities that had just begun to be developed.

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Pilsen, just south of the UIC campus, is home to a largely Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant community of almost 50,000 people. The Near West Side is a largely African-American community of about 15,000 people, with a high percentage living in public housing developments. Most of the activities of the UICNI are interdisciplinary projects involving faculty, students, and staff. In addition to the HUD funding under both the COPC and Joint Community Development program, UIC has made a ten-year commitment using state funds, and also has brought in many other funders. UICNI is overseen by a Planning Committee, whose membership is equally divided between community and UIC representatives, and is managed by UIC staff.

### **Deciding to Plan**

The UICNI is one of 42 COPC-funded programs, and among perhaps a dozen in total nationwide, that consist of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary partnership with a targeted neighborhood, rather than broad-based assistance or involvement with constituencies throughout a university's service area. In some cases, universities developed this approach out of a clear self-interest in the conditions of the neighborhood immediately surrounding the institution. The efforts of the University of Chicago in Hyde Park and Woodlawn in the 1950's and 1960's, of Columbia in Morningside, Yale in New Haven, and Marquette in its neighborhood in Milwaukee are all fairly explicit examples (Wiewel and Friedman 1993). If the involvement with a neighborhood stems from a self-interest in revitalization, the institution is likely to try and develop an explicit plan and strategy to achieve desired outcomes, such as reductions in crime and physical deterioration. Often these efforts are led by the administration and real estate development arms of the university, rather than the faculty. Such efforts are more likely to take on the characteristics of typical government-initiated planning efforts, rather than the incremental approach.

In the case of UIC, the rationale was different, even though for some administrators the possible improvement of adjacent neighborhoods no doubt was attractive from the perspective of institutional self-interest. There were really two main purposes of establishing the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative. One was to have a showcase project for the Great Cities initiative, both as a model of interdisciplinary, applied work for faculty, as well as for outsiders, who might otherwise dismiss the Great Cities concept as primarily a public relations-oriented repackaging of existing programs. The second purpose was to develop expertise in the comprehensive neighborhood revitalization approach, as a specialization that would give UIC national visibility.

The reason that neighborhoods adjacent to the campus were selected was not because the committee and individuals involved in the decision felt it was more important to revitalize specifically those neighborhoods rather than others, but for both a pragmatic and a political reason. Pragmatically, UIC was already conducting several programs in these neighborhoods, such as a health clinic and several school improvement projects. Thus, there were contacts who could provide access and knowledge of the terrain. Also, the proximity was convenient for faculty and students. Politically, those involved in the decision wanted to avoid "carpet bagging" and felt that UIC could reasonably claim to be a member of the community in which it was located, and that it had a right as well as a duty to work with other organizations in this community. The choice of any other neighborhood would have been harder to justify. (It should be noted that the University was criticized both by south side African-American and north side Hispanic community representatives for not choosing their neighborhoods. These groups conceded, however, that UIC's choice was logical and defensible; they wound up requesting that in due course UIC include other neighborhoods as well.)

Given the reasons why UIC established the program, a wide range of activities between faculty and neighborhood partners could potentially help meet UIC's purposes and fit into the program. This created a context that was very favorable for an incremental approach to program development, and one which valued projects as long as they provided either visibility or enhanced expertise--even if they did not immediately improve neighborhood conditions. Thus, unlike a governmental agency that might announce a program that promises to reduce crime, or increase home ownership, UIC sought to establish relations and develop programs that contributed to learning, and to good relations. Obviously, in the long run these programs also needed to do some form of good--improve reading scores, or health indicators, or reduce drop-out rates. But in the short run, that was not the main criterion, or even a very important one.

Not everyone agreed with this approach. Both the Chancellor (an engineer by training) and his Corporate Advisory Board repeatedly pressed for more specific goals and outcomes measures. However, they were not close enough to the actual operation of the program to materially affect it. Furthermore, the funding from HUD gave the program and participating faculty a fair amount of autonomy.

The motivations for neighborhood agencies and organizations to participate in the planning process were varied. Some had established relations with UIC and knew they could benefit from a partnership. Others were willing to give it a chance, especially since there was a promise of resources. Several organizations, however, declined to join the partnership, either explicitly or by simply ignoring the overtures made by university staff. (Several became partners in the subsequent period). None of the organizations, however, made an explicit commitment to a major joint planning effort; the most they were willing to do was discuss specific projects. Thus, this further militated against the development of a grand plan and encouraged the development of small incremental projects.

### **Building Relationships and Building Trust**

Collaboration is a planning approach that presupposes constructing relationships between parties, since planning, gathering resources, and implementing what has been planned are arrived at through joint effort. The nature of the relationship may vary with the nature of the parties and what each seeks in the relationship.

There may be a clear power differential or the parties may negotiate on relatively equal footing. The university may see itself as "doing things" for the community or as facilitating what the community is already doing. The community organization may see the university as a welcome increment in its resources, or it may see the university as one more agency to be exploited or as a potentially useful alien force that has to be handled carefully. Building relationships will mean something different in each case, as will what constitutes trust, and the process will vary accordingly. The nature of the collaboration will necessarily follow from that process.

To what extent can a single case study such as this one yield generalizable principles, and what sort of theoretical framework best facilitates useful empirical generalizations? Our approach to inferring generalizable principles from parochial events is to understand the processes of collaboration as embedded in the specific contexts that constrain them. We distinguish patterning of processes that recur across several contexts from that which is unique to a specific context, drawing generalizations from the former.

The method we have used to collect data for these generalizations, generally called "process evaluation," is an ethnographic method designed to yield data on the ways in which each project is planned and conducted by the partners such that the constraints that shape planning and implementation are inferable. The data collection method takes *activity* as the unit of analysis and proceeds in two stages (Goodenough 1963, 322-348; Goodenough 1994, xi-xviii; Lieber 1994, 16-19). First, any human activity has six features--goal(s), procedures for accomplishing the goals, instruments required by the procedures, personnel, social organization of the personnel, and occasions for performing the activity. A project is viewed as an activity or a set of related activities, and observation and interviewing are designed to elicit data on all features of the specific activity or activities comprising the project. These data yield the first order of inference, given that the features form a set of constraints that organize the activity. It is the relationships

among the constraints, a second order inference, that partly defines the shape of the context of the activity. It is an abstract way of describing any context of any activity.

Second, any human activity in any human community is one of many activities whose performance maintains that community's physical and social order. The other activities a community engages in serve to constrain the performance of any specific activity, i.e., requiring activities to be scheduled to either avoid competing demands on participants or to coordinate activities into sequences. So, for example, many of the community partners in UICNI projects conduct a number of other projects, some of which involve them in yet other partnerships. These other projects constrain the timing of performance of UICNI project activities, the scheduling of meetings, the use of instruments, etc. Some of the UICNI projects are designed to implement or facilitate an organization's other projects, e.g., the provision of computers and Geographic Information Systems software to a community development corporation for a specific housing development project. This technology can then be used as one of the features of other activities. A continual focus of observation and interviews with university and community partners is how issues are discussed and how decisions are made about which features--particularly procedures and social organization of personnel--are organized in what way. The patterns of organization of activities that result from these decisions can be compared using the organization of features and the organizational effects of multiple activities as first and second order empirical generalizations from collected data (Lieber and Pinsker 1996 and 1997).

The Neighborhoods Initiative is one of the few programs funded by HUD whose community partners border the university and with whom the university shares a long history. That history is one of displacement of neighborhood homes and/or businesses, well publicized and eventually discontinued large programs of service to the community, and a small set of programs of service that community residents associate with specific departments and not with the university as a whole. Mistrust of the university is nearly universal in the Pilsen and Near West Side neighborhoods with whom collaboratives were to be planned. This was the context shaping the planners' approach to collaboration: building trust was the highest priority in planning the Neighborhoods Initiative.

In the UIC case, then, the planners' focus on building relationships between partners was a pragmatic response to a context of mistrust, leaving the concepts of collaboration and partnership undefined. Each was an empty category of relationship to be filled in by the process of forming specific relationships with specific community groups. The projects that were to be the activities of partners were, then, contexts for relationship building whose specific outcomes were as much an indication of the effectiveness of relationship formation as the effectiveness of the project. Trust, in this scenario, arises from consistently meeting expectations, and creating outcomes which the partners perceive as mutually beneficial, so that they decide to keep working together. UICNI planning eschewed a blueprint for what the partners were supposed to do, what the partnership was supposed to look like, and also what the *relationships between partnerships*, i.e., UICNI as a whole, were supposed to look like.

Relationship building in collaborative contexts presupposes that collaboration fits with the wants, needs, strategies, and available resources of the community and the university. The actual development of projects took place in this context of an emphasis on relationship-building, rather than goal achievement. It started with a 1993 key informant survey in the community, exploring what the experiences of community agencies had been in the past in working with UIC; what their needs and priorities were; and whether they were interested in the formation of a lasting partnership. Based on this, the staff of the (embryonic) Neighborhoods Initiative office identified faculty who might potentially be interested in developing programs that responded to the needs identified. Just as this process of matching potential partners started, HUD issued its Request For Proposal for the COPC program. This created a little more guidance for what kinds of projects might best be selected initially. Although the COPC RFP was very broad, given the programmatic emphases of HUD it was possible to anticipate that, say, a housing development program might be more fundable than a program to improve classroom instructional methods. At this point, faculty and community representatives held several meetings, both separately and jointly, to identify potential programs and projects. Staff of the Neighborhoods Initiative office took a lead role in negotiating the projects, and determining the relative size and scope of each project. For each project, there needed to be both a neighborhood organization and a faculty member who agreed to work on it.

For instance, staff brought community development corporations together with the Center for Urban Economic Development to develop internship programs with their students, at the same time responding to these groups' expressed needs for design work by linking them with faculty from the Schools of Art and Architecture. These partnerships were written into the grant proposal, as was the Parent Leadership program, an ongoing project using African-American's women's writings as an avenue to their becoming social activists in their community. It became the impetus for a similar program for Hispanic mothers of elementary school children in Pilsen through the long-standing relationship between UIC staff and the director of an adult education organization in Pilsen that sponsored and ran it.

Through these contacts came yet others that resulted in a hiring and purchasing program connecting residents in both communities with university employment and purchasing offices. Another program incorporated into UICNI was the Community Health Education program, whose director has extensive contacts from long experience in the Pilsen community. These and other initial partnerships were forged on the basis of personal contacts by UIC staff, using information from the 1993 interviews.

Recruiting faculty outside this network proved more difficult for several reasons. First, the fiefdom structure of the university makes it difficult to know where the appropriate research, service programs, and special expertise are located. Second, faculty are at least as skeptical of the university's commitment to the neighborhoods as community residents are. Third, there are few institutional rewards for outreach and service by faculty. Fourth, faculty were fearful of a new entity that might divert university resources from their own college and departmental budgets. Nevertheless, Great Cities staff was very active in contacting faculty with interests in community work, sponsoring a series of informal lunches for faculty with various community interests, an annual forum bringing together

professionals from the campus, Chicago, and around the country to discuss issues of local and national policy, and meetings of researchers from across the campus to discuss evaluation of the UICNI. These meetings resulted in several new partnerships as well the design of a major process evaluation of the UICNI.

Once recruited, faculty tended to involve other faculty, just as community partners have helped recruit other community partners. For example, by the end of UICNI's first year, a West Side umbrella organization, some of whose members are UICNI partners, sought partners for three of their projects. Similarly, the anthropologists conducting the UICNI evaluation research recruited faculty from Public Health, Occupational Therapy, Psychiatry, and Social Work to direct and review the work of the evaluation team.

Thus, the initial projects were the result of a negotiated process, based on the desires and interests of the partners, within (perceived) boundaries set by HUD, and also limited to those projects for which partners could be identified in the community as well as the university. While some of these desires and interests were informed by a vision of the future direction of the neighborhoods and strategic understandings of the development process, these issues did not enter the discussions explicitly and there certainly was no common understanding or agreement on overall development goals.

Generally, it seems that in a university setting it would be impossible to have very clear, specific outcomes in a program that is intended to have a large number of faculty involved. Such a program would require agreement on desirable outcomes; methods of achieving the outcomes; and the implementation of these methods. It is contrary to the nature of how faculty work for them to submit to a central plan, and very unlikely that such a plan could be consensually formulated. Even with a centrally funded plan it would probably be difficult to find enough faculty to actually participate; they would insist on their right to change the goals, methods, and implementation. When faculty play a role in obtaining the resources, they are even less likely to yield autonomy to any centralized vision. UIC's previous experience with a large neighborhood-oriented project, The Nation of Tomorrow, had suggested some of these issues (Braskamp and Nucci 1995).

The above is not intended as a caricature of the lone ranger academic. Of course groups of faculty occasionally come together to work on joint projects, especially in technical fields, medicine, or the hard sciences. In the social sciences and most professional fields, such efforts rarely involve more than a small group. The difficulty is increased by the very nature of the work involved here; there is little codified knowledge on the process of neighborhood revitalization, and the complexity and interrelatedness of the problems makes it difficult to get agreement on how to proceed. Indeed, these are among the key justifications Harper and Stein (1994) cite for incrementalism.

From the side of the community, there is a similar reluctance to develop a clear and specific plan. Since there are multiple organizations in most neighborhoods, each with its own agenda, resources, and specializations, any attempt to form a strategic plan usually winds up as an aggregation of every individual organization's priorities. This certainly was the

case in Pilsen, where organizations had been forced to put together a community plan as part of the federal Empowerment Zone process. This plan's priorities derive directly from those of the most important organizations in the neighborhood, but it also pays lip service to so many other needs, that virtually any program or project one can think of could be justified as being part of the plan.

Thus, the process of incremental planning and a focus on the development of relationships between faculty and community became the dominant mode of program development and suited all parties involved.

### **What To Do and How To Do It**

There were three kinds of partnerships in the initial UICNI projects: partners who had worked with one another in the past, partners who had never worked with one another, and unacquainted partners brought together by a third party connected with both. The first kind of projects, those undertaken by partners who had worked together previously, ran smoothly and were achieving their goals. The other two types of projects, that brought together partners who were previously unacquainted are the best examples of the importance and stability of established contexts. Community development corporations in both Pilsen and the Near West Side were partnered with faculty and students from urban planning and architecture for internships and design studios. The three community organizations had experience with the urban planning program and staff, although not necessarily with the specific individuals involved in the new projects. Some of the internships and design studios worked well for both partners, others did not. In no case was the relationship between the university and the CDCs ever threatened by the failure of a project to realize its goals. New personnel, in other words, were incorporated into established contexts, which remained impervious to particular project outcomes.

Programs that involved university and community partners previously unacquainted with one another ran the gamut of success in the project or the partnership or both. In every case, however, the relative success or failure of the project hinged on the ability of the partners to negotiate their positions in the planning stages of the projects and on their willingness to adapt goals and strategies for implementing them to the exigencies of the project's context. The school-to-work programs had to change their goals to accommodate to what teachers wanted; a program to connect community agencies to the university's computer system had to abandon mass meetings and mass mailings to concentrate on contacting organizations one-by-one to discuss their information and equipment needs, etc.

From the examples above, it is clear that the emphasis on relationship building over project outcomes institutionalizes a trial-and-error process of mutual adaptations of goals, of strategies, and of expectations among the partners. Over time, the most important change among partners is the ability of each to see problems as the other partner perceives them. The most important contribution of a focus on relationship building, however, is the *flexibility* it lends to the partnership relation--the ability to adapt to the context of partnership.

Collaborative community initiatives of any sort require relationship building as part of the planning, implementation, and tracking processes, and relationship building takes time. Funders and administrators require some clear evidence that their money is being used effectively to accomplish explicit goals. The problem for both is knowing (1) what kind of relationship building is needed and (2) how long it is needed before one can expect to see measurable project outcomes. It is the *administrative context* in which posing relationship building and project outcomes as opposites makes sense.

The kind of relationship building required and the time required to translate relationships into project outcomes depend on the nature of the project. A project whose goal is the construction of X number of houses is very different from a project whose goal is developing leadership capacities of a specific set of people. The first project has specifiable outcomes that either happen or do not happen within the time allotted in the project proposal. The second example is one whose outcomes really only show up in "ripple effects," i.e., whose initial outcomes lead to yet wider outcomes that continue to amplify one another in a positive feedback cycle *over time* (Maruyama 1963, Lieber 1994).

Universities are uniquely positioned to take the kinds of risks that a trial-and-error experiment like collaboration requires. UIC, for example, committed itself to maintaining the Neighborhoods Initiative for a minimum of ten years, and this fact alone gives its personnel the leeway to take risks. These risks, however, have meaning in two contexts. The failure of a project to fulfill its goals may be an embarrassment to partners, but it is also a *datum* from which generalizations about processes and the relation between process and outcome can be drawn. It is to these that we turn for the most important generalization from our data.

Without exception, the projects and programs that failed to accomplish their goals and/or faced serious crises were the ones in which partners failed to make their goals and/or procedures explicit so they could be negotiated at the outset. In one case, three of five partners had serious reservations about fundamental policy decisions, but failed to raise them in order to preserve harmony in the group. As a result, the issues were never debated, and the program suffered. In two other cases, both the university and the community partners were pressed for time, and in order to get the project going without further delay, they left the project goals and procedures ambiguous. The ambiguities surfaced repeatedly as procedural problems in an oral history project on the Near West Side, where it was never clarified who would be responsible for which specific activity, such as providing equipment, stipends, and supervision. In another project expectations were never discussed between the community organization, an architecture professor, and his students. The resulting work met academic design criteria but was entirely unrealistic for the neighborhood and perceived by community residents as arrogant and offensive.

Ambiguity plagued even planners' consistent focus on relationship building, including not only the emergence of projects as contexts for partnerships, but also the emergence of relations between partnerships that would constitute UICNI as a whole. It was the intention of the Great Cities director that the leadership and character of UICNI emerge

from the synergies among its faculty and community partners. The UICNI Planning Committee, whose members were all community and university partners, was created for the purpose of reviewing and discussing projects, critiquing UICNI policy, and setting priorities and criteria for new projects, if not selecting and initiating them. The committee never assumed its intended leadership role for two reasons.

First, the Great Cities director reckoned that convening and giving the Planning Committee its charge would have the appearance of top-down direction. In order to avoid this sort of paradox (on the order of commanding someone to be spontaneous), the initial agenda item for the group's first meeting was "Creating a Vision" for UICNI in the hope that discussion of a shared vision would lead to either a discussion of the committee's role. But vision was ambiguous, the group too new, and the intent too subtle. It was instead a kind of verbal dance as community partners and Great Cities leadership each waited to see what the other wanted (a pattern that recurred in other contexts). This left the agenda for Planning Committee meetings in the hands of the UICNI staff.

Second, whatever direction the Planning Committee might take, decisions had to be made about funding, about new projects, about exploring new partnerships, and the like. The *de facto* leadership of UICNI devolved on its Coordinator and other key staff, who constituted an informal "executive committee." While the Planning Committee became a networking and information sharing group, day-to-day decisions were made by the executive group. As one community partner put it, "When I need a decision, I go to the Great Cities director, not to a committee meeting."

The *opposition* between relationship building and project outcomes is a non-issue. It arises as a pseudo-issue only from the failure of planners (a) to allow for the time necessary for partnerships to function, (b) to distinguish between different sorts of project designs and forms of outcomes, and (c) to design a process evaluation to *contextualize* the data on outcomes.

Far more serious from a planning perspective is the dilemma posed by the necessity for both **explicitness** and **flexibility** in partners' statements of and negotiations over goals, strategies, procedures, and resources that each will bring to the partnership. Negotiation is the mediator between explicitness and flexibility, and it is here that ambiguity can plague a partnership.

One cannot assume that one knows what a partner means by X, particularly in the early stages of the relationship. Directors of community agencies are by necessity as skilled in image management as university faculty. They know how to use the latest buzzwords to create what funders want to see, just as faculty do. The image of mutual understanding dissolves when partners negotiate the project's specifics, and knowing what one's partner means is most crucial.

Negotiating a project's strategies and procedures to meet specific goals is the context that most readily uncovers fundamental misunderstandings (such as different culturally shaped

and unstated assumptions) between partners. For example, when it is clear to a faculty partner that strategy A most efficiently accomplishes goal X and equally clear to the community partner that strategy A is inappropriate for this community, this may signal the need for another strategy *or* that the partners have very different understandings of goal X. For instance, in the oral history project, a faculty member recommended to interviewers that they start conversations by asking about pictures on display in the interviewee's house. A community resident pointed out this would be considered an invasion of the family's privacy, and that a project about community history should concern itself with less personal matters. Both the definition of community history and the method of getting at it turned out to be subject to differing, unexplored definitions. As partners explore these issues, not only do the project's components become clear enough to allow for flexibility, but the partners know what they can expect from one another--that is, the partnership becomes a stable context for the next decision.

### **Internal Changes**

While the mode of planning and operating that has been described here fits well with the needs and some of the structural characteristics of the partners, the match is far from perfect. As in any partnership, the participants in it have to make certain accommodations and changes in order to maintain the relationship or make it work better. This may be done as a conscious effort, or may happen randomly and accidentally, or as part of other changes going on.

Within the university, there are several structural and process characteristics that present obstacles to applied, interdisciplinary work in partnership with outside organizations. The main ones are the orientation of many faculty to their disciplinary guild, and the emphasis on research published in refereed academic journals as the main measure of faculty quality. Nationwide, there is significant change occurring in regard to these issues. Many funding agencies, including the National Science Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation, place far greater emphasis on interdisciplinary work and on application than used to be the case. Many universities are also adapting their criteria for faculty evaluation and improving the measurement and increasing the rewards for teaching and, less so, professional service (Lynton 1995). COPC projects are among many new types of programs that have become possible within this changing context and indeed help to shape the context.

At UIC, only in 1995 did it become possible to share credit for external grants among multiple units. Until that time, one principal investigator had to be identified, and his/her college received all the credit--obviously creating a disincentive for inter-college collaboration. At the same time, there was a great interest among faculty in doing interdisciplinary work, and several seminars and meetings on interdisciplinary work and partnerships organized during the past two years by the Great Cities program drew large numbers of faculty. These faculty became a constituency for change and helped bring about the modification of previous practices.

Several aspects of community partnership work may make it harder for faculty to meet traditional performance criteria. For one, the process of establishing partnerships as

described here (i.e., the need to build trust and negotiate projects) may take significantly more time than a more traditional literature search, hypothesis development, survey, or secondary data analysis. Second, work conducted in partnership with a non-academic partner inevitably needs to include a substantial applied component, which may not lend itself well to production of an academic publication. Obviously, this latter obstacle is less serious for professional fields (as witness this article).

So far, at UIC there have been no changes in faculty evaluation standards in regard to professional service. Ironically, an institution like UIC may find it more difficult to be a pathbreaker in this regard. As an urban campus that achieved Carnegie I Research Institution status only in the early 1980's, there is still a lack of self confidence and fear of backsliding, that makes many faculty committees quite traditional and rigid in their application of evaluation standards. Nevertheless, the faculty involved in the Neighborhoods Initiative, and those committed to the Great Cities concept generally, are becoming a growing constituency for change in this regard as well.

Another issue is how to structure outreach and partnership efforts and where to locate them organizationally. Several universities have participated in the creation of joint, external organizations to house and direct this work. For instance, the University of Pennsylvania created the West Philadelphia Partnership, and the University of California at Berkeley is a partner in the Telegraph Hill Partnership. The Kellogg Foundation explicitly requires such intermediary structures for several of its funding programs.

The advantages of this model are that it increases the chance that all partners feel equal, and that decision-making is widely shared. On the other hand, given that the partners in fact are not equal in power and resources, this model may lead the university, as the most powerful partner, to try to dominate or, alternatively, to lose interest. At UIC, the university twice previously had become a founding partner of a consortium of neighborhood organizations and agencies. Both of these efforts had been initiated from outside of the university and primarily involved administrators rather than faculty. Neither one of these efforts received more than token support, and the university never saw itself as a true participant. For these reasons, the Neighborhoods Initiative staff decided to keep the project inside the institution, and developed an advisory and planning structure that included significant outside participation, as described in the previous section. As expected, this limited the degree to which non-university partners took ownership of the Neighborhoods Initiative, and also further limited the extent to which these partners were willing to devote time and effort to the development of any comprehensive plan for the Initiative. Thus, this structural decision contributed to the relative lack of strong goal and outcome orientation, although partners themselves tend to focus their efforts on outcomes once work is underway.

Another structural characteristic that influenced the development of the Neighborhoods Initiative was its status as a project in the office of the Special Assistant to the Chancellor for the Great Cities Program. This gave the project a clear campus-wide status, with direct access to the chancellor and a central role in a key institutional priority, the Great Cities

program. Thus, faculty and university units saw participation as bringing them potential institutional benefits as well as intrinsic ones. Even more importantly, outside agencies, both the neighborhood partners and resource providers outside of the neighborhood, valued that they were dealing with a high-level institutional representative. HUD indicated that the clear institutional commitment was a key factor in awarding UIC one of the sixteen first COPC grants in 1994, and one of the first three Joint Community Development grants in 1995. In addition, the State of Illinois appropriated \$1.5 million in permanent new funding for the Great Cities program, and the Neighborhoods Initiative was presented as the key programmatic component in the request for funding. Corporations represented on the Chancellor's Corporate Advisory Board also committed funds and agreed to participate in other ways, by providing jobs to neighborhood residents, increasing lending in the area, participation on committees, etc. The City of Chicago agreed to keep university staff closely involved in its revitalization efforts in the neighborhoods. Although not all of these commitments eventually yielded concrete action, they were important symbolic acts that served to mobilize a wide variety of participants and resources.

The central organizational location might have increased the likelihood that a central plan would be developed. As indicated earlier, there was some pressure to do so from the Chancellor and his Board. Faculty might have been willing to go along, as long as resources were provided centrally. However, there were sufficient countervailing pressures to keep this from happening. The idea for the Neighborhoods Initiative was developed based on the work of the Center for Urban Economic Development and the Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, both applied research and technical assistance centers in the urban planning program. Since faculty and (former) staff of these centers formed the leadership of the Great Cities program and the Neighborhoods Initiative, the program was significantly rooted in departmental faculty and staff projects, rather than a centrally developed plan. Pre-existing relations between this leadership and other faculty colleagues played a large role in developing new projects. Thus, the personal institutional base and history of several of the key actors played an important role in offsetting the centralization tendency that might otherwise have been present.

A final aspect of the structural effects of the partnership is the degree to which the relations and expectations that were created affect other university programs that are not directly part of the Neighborhoods Initiative. Recently, the university has begun to draw on organizations involved in the Initiative to express political support on issues affecting the university. In exchange, partner organizations have begun to demand a greater involvement in the university's decisions regarding its own development plans. From the beginning, the university agreed that partnership would not be limited to academic projects. The Neighborhoods Initiative also includes elements such as making the university's athletic facilities available to neighborhood programs, increasing the hiring of neighborhood residents, providing Internet access to partner organizations, and increasing purchasing from neighborhood firms. Not surprisingly, the neighborhood partners now also use the rhetoric of the Neighborhoods Initiative and partnership to demand involvement in the

planning for the university's South Campus expansion, a major 40-acre development project bordering the campus and the Pilsen community.

Thus, in addition to the pressure this type of work generates on the disciplinary boundaries and traditional faculty evaluation criteria, it has also begun to affect the non-academic, operational side of the university. As a partnership develops, the effects continue to spread beyond whatever the initial projects and goals may have been. This is really the significance of a focus on relationships rather than specific goals: new opportunities continue to arise, expanding the benefits (but sometimes also the costs) of collaboration far beyond the original boundaries.

It is less clear at this time how the other partner organizations are changing as a result of the partnership. Several of the organizations are headed or staffed by graduates of UIC's Urban Planning and Policy program, but this has been the case for many years. Their staff capacity has been expanded through the graduate students placed in the organizations, the other planning and analysis assistance that has been provided, and through the technical assistance (and in some cases equipment donations) related to the provision of Internet access through the UIC computer system. The organizations that historically took a confrontational approach still do so, while those that did their work through more collaborative negotiation have similarly maintained that style (see also Wiewel and Guerrero 1997).

For both the university and the community partners, the collaboration requires increased political skill, internally and externally. Within the community, different organizations jockey for position in regard to the partnership with the university. Within the university, there is a similar jockeying between those with responsibility for the institutional, hiring, purchasing, and land development activities and those more interested in the community-oriented research, teaching, and service programs. Faculty, staff, and students from the urban planning program are prominently involved on all sides of these issues. In all of the specific issues that arise within this general domain, the nature of the relationships between the various entities and individuals is often preeminent in determining how an issue will play out. For instance, UIC faculty can at times appeal to their former students, now community representatives, for backchannel information or strategic discussions. At the same time, these graduates also need to maintain their credibility with other community organizations and therefore at times have to strike an oppositional pose. Thus, all actors are faced with the need to maintain a variety of relationships which presents both constraints and opportunities for action. Only through deliberate and consistent attention to the nurturing and preservation of these relationships can any programmatic actions move forward.

### **Conclusions**

It is hardly news that both goal achievement and the maintenance of relationships are crucial aspects of a social system--sociologists have been writing about this for over a century. What is surprising is how little attention the traditional rational planning model pays to the second of these. In the beginning of this article we posed questions about how

planning occurs in a situation of shared power; what the relationship is between the goals of participants and what actually gets done; and what the role of planners is in linking knowledge to action. The case study suggests that a collaborative planning model is characterized by incrementalism and that relationship building is a key element of incrementalism. Perhaps in a situation where one actor has a great deal of sanctioned power, such as a government, it may seem that relationship building can be ignored and be replaced by mandate, fiat, and sanctions. The in-depth analyses of how planning in government actually takes place by Hoch (1994), Krumholz and Forester (1995), or Clavel and Wiewel (1991) illustrate that even there the reality is different. In a situation where planning occurs in a voluntary partnership, goals can only be pursued within a context of a relationship with some stability, and relationships will only be sustained if progress towards goals is made. The goals and the relationship may be strictly utilitarian and based on self-interest, or may have significant elements of shared values, loyalty, and other attachments. In either case, there must be sufficient trust and enough stability to enable partners to move forward. Incremental decision-making allows the relationship to grow, which allows planning and implementation to proceed.

To pose relationship building and goal achievement as opposites is to *decontextualize* both, since planning never occurs in a vacuum. The achievement of goals requires some level of trust in a partnership. The emphasis on one or the other depends on the specific context--and in particular on the *level* of context--in which planning is done. The UIC case illustrates the relationship between planning emphasis and the level of the planning context.

At one level of context--the relationship between UIC and two communities at its borders--a history of development and displacement fostered a tradition of rampant mistrust of UIC in the neighborhoods. It was this larger context that shaped planning within the university, resulting in the decision to emphasize relationship building over goal achievement in the initial phases of the Neighborhoods Initiative. The context here is an administrative one involving the planning of an entire program with multiple partnerships. UIC personnel did not approach the Pilsen and Near West Side communities with a proposal to build relationships, however. Instead, they proposed to *do something together*. Partners came together to work and not for the purpose of being sociable. In the context of specific partners conducting specific projects, the achievement of specific goals was their reason for collaborating. Discussion, trial-and-error, negotiation, and the learning that inevitably happens in a collaborative effort were necessary steps to get the projects underway in a manner that the partners could understand and manage. In the context of partnerships, in other words, relationship building is an *outcome* of the pursuit of a goal and not the goal of the partnership. Funders and administrators, often impatient with the work and the time that relationship building requires, are the ones most likely to decontextualize the collaborative process and focus their impatience on an opposition between relationship building and goal achievement that exists only within the walls of their own offices.

The university setting lends itself relatively well to an approach which emphasizes both relationship building and goal achievement. A high degree of decentralization and faculty autonomy make attempts to impose a centralized, coordinated plan from above virtually

impossible. Decentralization does, however, encourage development within the faculty of a variety of skills, approaches, interests, and areas of expertise. This increases the likelihood of finding university partners who are able to provide strategies and resources for change tailored to specific communities or neighborhoods. Thus, the specific ways in which relationships are built and goals pursued--and how much emphasis each will receive--depends on the previous history of the participants (in terms of both personal and institutional relationships), on the specific project and its demands, and on other constraints posed by the external environment. Data from the UIC case demonstrate that regardless of the specific emphasis in the specific project, common to all projects is the minimal necessity for extensive communication between partners sufficient to (1) make explicit each other's needs and goals, (2) resolve ambiguities in their understandings while maintaining flexibility to (3) negotiate changes in the projects objectives and/or implementation strategies when it is clear that they are needed.

The implications of these conclusions for planners and planning education confirm what John Friedmann (1995, 158-160) has called for in describing two main modes of theorizing about planning: "Behavioral approaches and communicative theory," and "The Linking of Knowledge to Action, or Social Learning." To work effectively in planning practice, particularly in the rapidly growing practice of collaborative planning, planners need extensive skills in analysis of political situations in order to understand the motivations and constraints of their partners. They also need to become more adept at communicating and negotiating, not just as minor details to deal with what appears as people's "irrationality", but as a central component of the planning process. Indeed, the experience of the collaboration process may reveal that what appears as irrationality in the objectives or demands of one's community partners from an administrative point of view, may turn out to be quite rational from the perspective of the larger community for which change is planned. Without the requisite communication, this rationality remains opaque.

The project described in this article may be unusual because of its relatively rich resource environment and limited time pressures. This made it possible to follow an incremental approach, without excessive concern about immediate results. We believe it shows the importance of this approach in any situation of shared power, where attempts to quickly impose an overarching definition of the structural situation and develop specific projects based on that definition, are likely to fail, and indeed destroy the planning partnership. At the same time, Lauria (1997) and Healey (1997) are right, in that definitions of the situation are not endlessly subjective and relativistic. This is obvious in the case of UIC-community partnerships, which reach a point at which planning discussions end, decisions are made, and implementation begins. The partners do indeed have to *do* something and either continue working as planned or make adjustments to the plan given the results of what they have done before. Contextual factors such as the history of UIC's development and its place in Chicago's power structure, as well as the structure of university reward systems, influence the range of possibilities for any partnership between the university and community agencies. Good planning practice takes account of all of this.

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