

From Planning Practice to Academia

Norman Krumholz

By tracing his journey from city planning director to director of a technical assistance center within a large university, Norman Krumholz explores the importance of bridging the gap between the study and practice of planning. In so doing, he states that each of these very different worlds has a great deal to gain from the other.

Norman Krumholz has been elected president of the APA. He served as Cleveland, Ohio's Planning Director from 1969 to 1979, and is now director of the Center for Neighborhood Development at Cleveland State University.

I left Cleveland City Hall in 1979 after ten years as city planning director. I had not lost interest in the excitement and importance of local government. To the contrary, I believed and still believe that local government is a place where a planner with ideas to sell can successfully impact public policy for the benefit of many people outside the economic development process. I also remain convinced that planners can help strengthen the capacity of political leadership to respond to a responsible conception of the public interest.

In order to help shape public policy, planners must influence other, more powerful actors, such as the mayor and members of the city council. This requires both a program and access to these politicians. In 1979, following Cleveland's bitter recall election and the subsequent default of the City on its fiscal obligations, I lost my access to the mayor's office. Under unceasing attack, Mayor Dennis Kucinich adopted a closed, bunker-like position and no one except his closest confidants were allowed into the policy-making process. Since I was not a member of the mayor's inner circle, and had no chance to influence events, it seemed appropriate for me to leave and try to implement my ideas from a different platform.

The vehicle chosen for this effort originally had nothing to do with Cleveland State University. The vehicle was to be a free-standing, non-profit, neighborhood oriented technical assistance center with its

own board and staff. This center was to be funded by local and national foundations and perhaps by the city as well. Its purpose was to provide technical assistance and intermediation with government agencies and banks on housing and economic development projects undertaken by neighborhood based community development corporations (CDCs), which were growing in number, competence and programmatic range. In many respects, the center, which a former Cleveland planning staff member and I designed, was to carry on the neighborhood-nurturing work which had been underway in the city planning department since the 1970s.

We believed that working with neighborhood organizations was an appropriate part of what we called "equity planning": an effort to advocate the needs of Cleveland's poor and working class people and to provide direct planning services to those residents of Cleveland who had few, if any, options. We shared common agendas with these groups on a number of issues. For example, they provided a countervailing political force to demands by downtown interests for tax relief and capital improvement projects; they pressured city bureaucracies to improve the delivery of public services to the city's neighborhoods; they were willing to try and rebuild their neighborhoods' physical environment; and they argued that neighborhood considerations were frequently more important than regional considerations and that grandiose programs must sometimes

be set aside in favor of basic needs. We frequently agreed on these points. So the planning department provided staff support and technical assistance to these neighborhood groups. In return, the neighborhood groups supported issues of joint interest with citizen pressure at council hearings. Now that these groups were becoming more organized and beginning their efforts to rebuild their own disinvested neighborhoods, we wanted to continue to help. We drafted a proposal which we asked local foundations to support.

There are two large foundations in Cleveland. Together they issue grants of about \$25 million a year. Since both foundations had actively supported neighborhood development, they were our prime targets. The first received us positively. It told us that our idea for a Center for Neighborhood Development (CND) had merit, but that CND probably would not survive over the long term as a free-standing agency. As an alternative, they suggested that we become a division of a church-related agency involved with community organizing that they were already funding. We agreed. We were familiar with the church group and its staff, and had enjoyed a good working relationship with them.

The second foundation which was asked to share the funding of CND suggested a different arrangement. It suggested we join the College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University (CSU). The College was new, and it was committed to public service and applied research "in the great laboratory of the city." The foundation believed we could strengthen each other.

We had never considered becoming part of a college. While we had always tried to maximize the constructive interaction between city hall and the university, our experience with academic researchers had not always been positive.

In the 1970s, for example, the planning staff had become involved in a federal dial-a-bus demonstration program for the elderly and handicapped. The staff had identified the program, applied for the grant, and was acting as advisor to the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) which was administering the demonstration.

As part of the demonstration, the Department of Transportation hired a local university-based research organization to study the characteristics of both users and non-users of the service. The research contract required the final report to be submitted by mid-February. However, the program ran out of funds by the beginning of February. The decision-making process could not wait for the evaluation

of the dial-a-bus program to be completed as originally scheduled. Still, despite the urging of staff, the researchers refused to be rushed. They were clearly not going to release their findings until they were 99.5% confident of their data.

So while the academic researchers under contract waited for their interview results to be coded, key-punched, and statistically tested, a member of my staff hand-tabulated some of the responses of the dial-a-bus user survey. Her analysis, though based on data in which we had somewhat less than 99.5% confidence, succeeded in dispelling the rumor that most of the riders were wealthy ladies from a silk-stocking suburb going to a fancy restaurant for lunch. It indicated that the vast majority of dial-a-bus riders had extremely low incomes, lacked access to an automobile, and considered the door-to-door nature of the dial-a-bus service to be its most significant attribute. The one-page presentation of these findings, which we gave to key RTA board members and the media just prior to their decision on the continuation of service, had a great impact on the favorable decision to continue. The researcher's final report went largely unread when it appeared four months later.

the researcher's report
went unread

Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.



we questioned their values

The experience made us wary of consulting academic researchers. We were not opposed to the consultants' insistence on statistical validity; that is what the building of knowledge is all about. But they were impervious to our argument that improving the statistical purity of their research would not make it more useful to RTA, but would only reduce its likelihood of arriving on time and being used at all. We questioned their process skills, their value systems, and their basic understanding of the essential need for timeliness in policy formulation.

Our misgivings aside, the foundations agreed on the institutional base issue, the College was receptive, and so the deal was struck. The CND would become part of the Urban Center, a public service, research and out-reach division of the College of Urban Affairs at CSU.

The arrangement has been in effect since 1979. During the first two years all of CND's funding came from shared contributions from the two local foundations. Within a short time, the Ford Foundation awarded us a grant for a demonstration program using neighborhood organizations for residential energy conservation. A year later the Standard Oil Company began supplementing CND's energy-conservation activities with grants. At the same time, CSU assumed part of our funding. After the City of Cleveland and the State of Ohio adopted CND's neighborhood-based model for its energy conservation programs, we began receiving financial support from the Ohio Department of Development. Throughout this time the foundations, while admiring our efforts, made it clear that their continued support depended on CSU's willingness to support CND. In 1985, CSU agreed to contribute two years of support, amounting to about half of our total budget.

The reluctance of the University to provide support for CND puzzled us. CND had received favorable publicity since its inception. It was highly visible and positively viewed by local, state and national institutions. Outside reviewers of our activities agreed we were having a significant and unique impact on the quality of life in Cleveland's neighborhoods, as well as in aiding the University and the College to fulfill their outreach and public service missions. Among our most important accomplishments were:

Technical Assistance: CND provided technical assistance to over 30 Cleveland neighborhood-based organizations, community development corpora-

tions (CDCs) and non-profit housing corporations. Subsequently, these groups developed and implemented a major housing rehabilitation program in which over 500 units have been produced for low and moderate income families. The Center became well-versed in utilizing complex techniques such as tax syndication to support these projects.

CDCs have also executed economic development projects including a multi-use arcade and a recycling plant. The Center for Neighborhood Development has developed a major energy conservation program involving 12,000 residential energy-audits, 4,200 retrofits with an average payback of 27 months, and 60 new jobs for neighborhood residents.

Applied Research: CND evaluated the cost-effectiveness of energy conservation programs for the State of Ohio, and is now under contract for a second larger study. Our work with a local housing organization led to the passage of a new state law which allows community groups to become court designated "receivers" of abandoned homes. Center staff was crucial in establishing a statewide association of CDCs and in assisting its members to gain support from the state for the first time. Center staff not only helped create the Cleveland Housing Court, but helped analyze the Court's procedures, including recommendations for improvement. Members of the CND staff serve on the state's Energy Action Council, the city's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) project evaluation committee, and the board of the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority.

Facilitation: The Center provided research support and facilitation for a number of public-private collaborative efforts. For example, CND is given credit for creating several for-profit CDCs, including the Bank on Buckeye, which has been cited by the U.S. Comptroller of Currency as a model for community-bank cooperation. CND staff also helped create a neighborhood safety coalition with a task force made up of the Greater Cleveland Bar Association, twelve neighborhood organizations, and state and local law enforcement officials.

In addition, CND played a role in the development of the College of Urban Affairs as a respected urban college. Staff members have employed students to work on their projects, served as guest lecturers, published in refereed journals and books, and developed new graduate and undergraduate courses. One new studio course involves students with three city departments, area politicians and bankers, the neighborhood CDC and local business

having a significant and unique impact



Opportunities for neighborhood development.

persons. By helping to convert textbook knowledge into real-world applications, CND has increased public-private acceptance of the College's relevance to the Cleveland community.

And yet, despite the contributions listed above, the University was slow in assuming its present position of helping to support CND's budget. The delay, I believe, was due in part to University economics, which often do not permit support for technical assistance within applied centers. The delay was also due to a basic difference in objectives. CND was interested in building the competence of the neighborhood groups and helping the neighborhoods in general. The University saw as its primary role the education of students. These are not necessarily contradictory objectives, but may have been so perceived by the University. It was inclined to judge CND not by its success or the positive publicity it received, but by its impact on the school's academic growth. Initially, CND was not seen as relating in a substantive manner to the enhancement of the University's academic program. Hence, financial support was not immediately forthcoming.

I believe this problem has been resolved. The University's leadership now sees excellent reasons for pushing CND's role and helping to build its support base. CND is recognized as an important element in expanding classroom activities, providing students with broadened opportunities for internships and jobs, and strengthening the college's external relationships. The Center's challenge in the years ahead will be to maintain its outreach and neighborhood effectiveness, while also contributing in a substantive way to the academic needs of the University.

What else has been learned in these six years of creative tension that might be of use to planners interested in moving from planning practice to the academy, and especially to planners interested in setting up university-related technical assistance centers?

First, neighborhood-based redevelopment efforts work, and university-related technical assistance centers can help them work better. Neighborhood CDCs can and do play an important role in assisting the people and places left behind in the urban development process. Often, CDCs can take on problems and tasks the market or government cannot begin to address. In Cleveland, these efforts have produced a major low-income residential rehabilitation effort, a successful energy conservation program, and a variety of business projects that generate jobs, spur the local economy, and promote revitalization in deprived areas.

These efforts will not get everyone back to work, or reverse the decline of Cleveland's manufacturing industries, but they can soften the impact of decline, provide useful work for the unemployed, and sustain morale. They can give us an opportunity to restate our compassion for human needs and our continuing concern for greater fairness and justice. They also give planning educators an opportunity to train their students for modest but meaningful reform roles. This fits with the objectives of many students who continue to be drawn to the planning field because they want to devote their professional lives to improvement and reform. Support of these efforts is, in my judgement, precisely what an urban university ought to do, despite the fundamental differences between town and gown.

Educators should also note that CDCs have become important political and economic actors in many American cities. Increasingly, local and state governments, foundations, banks, and corporations are recognizing CDCs as significant—even preferred—vehicles for implementing urban initiatives. The City of Cleveland, for example, responded to major cuts in its 1987 CDBG allocation by embracing CDCs and non-profit housing providers more closely, and by placing the jobs of its own staff of city planners at risk. A growing number of city planners now work for neighborhood-based and other non-profit agencies. City planning educators should acknowledge this new reality and prepare their students for it.

Second, the university and the world of planning practice are very different worlds, characterized by conflicting values, language, and rewards. The status and treatment of people who hold the PhD degree is a case in point. City hall often uses PhDs as consultants but they are rarely hired for permanent positions. There is not a high premium placed on an advanced degree. In my ten years in Cleveland City Hall, for example, I can recall only one PhD who was on the city's payroll. Most city employees were high school graduates with some college training. As a result, the group of planners that I assembled for my staff in city hall, most of whom had Masters Degrees, was often seen by other city bureaucracies as an intellectual elite.

In academia, by contrast, the Masters Degree is a barely acceptable credential for teaching, and then only because it is recognized as the terminal degree in a professional field. In my own case, I suspect it was less my long experience as a planning practitioner that resulted in a tenured academic appointment than it was the unique nature of that practice and the publication record my colleagues and I established while in the field. Most planning practitioners without PhDs who want to teach at the university level will probably find it difficult to be fully accepted.

There are good reasons why the PhD is important in academia. While it is not absolute proof of scholarship, most holders of the degree place heavy emphasis on research and publication in refereed journals. They must, since these are the criteria used by most university departments in decisions involving hiring, promotion, and tenure. So "success" in academia is based on the PhD, a productive history of publication in refereed journals, the promise of more productive research, and tenure. A practicing planning director, on the other hand, may be

judged "successful" by the size of his own salary or the growth of his department's budget, by his "innovative" or "visionary" program, by his ability to be favorably received by the media, or by his simple ability to survive.

The insistence of the academy on the PhD as virtually the only way into teaching is, in my view, unfortunate. There is an enormous distance between planning theory and practice, and thoughtful practitioner-teachers who have faced the organizational complexity of city bureaucracies can provide their students with the understanding and skills that may make them more effective and useful planners when they are in the field.

Insisting on the PhD also weakens the possibility that the applied research provided by centers such as CND will become part of a planning program's curriculum. Conversely, such emphasis on the PhD weakens the utility of traditional university research aimed at solving city problems. That research is often directed at questions of efficiency and economy of means; at trying to get more output at a given cost. But a researcher who is not deeply familiar with city bureaucracies may assume a level of managerial skill and persistence which is rarely present in city governments. To improve the quality of recommendations and the probability of implementation, the researcher must know that the city's influence on its environment is tightly constrained. To admit thoughtful, reflective practitioners who understand the nature of those constraints on teaching, even if they lack the PhD, is to substantially improve the scope, insight and utility of the teaching process.

Third, the notion that the city is a laboratory and that the urban university is ideally situated to experiment in that laboratory in order to develop solutions to the problems of the city is a nice idea, but it does not hold up. Most traditional academics are not interested in applied research. They may be interested as individuals or as citizens, but as career academics they must try to rise within their own reward system. They will find it very difficult to do so unless they satisfy the demands of their peers for publications. Traditional research projects are more likely to satisfy the need for publishable articles in a timely, systematic fashion.

Applied research projects are often long-term, idiosyncratic, and changeable. Often they cannot be replicated because local conditions vary so much. Of course, it is precisely this variability which makes these projects so valuable as teaching tools, but it

is risky research for a budding academic. And, although the university may proclaim equal concern for education, teaching, and public service, it is suspected of placing more emphasis on research than on public service and teaching.

It is not only the criteria, but the style of research that differs as well. Traditional academic research seeks to filter out the values of the individual participants and arrive at an "unbiased truth" which deserves widespread acceptance, whether the receivers of the information find it palatable or not.

Applied research, moreover, must be built on shared commitment and trust. Once researchers become involved with people and neighborhoods, bonds will be formed which bring with them mutual obligations. This does not mean that researchers and technical assistance providers must be captured by their clients, but that both must develop a sense of confidence and trust in the other as they cooperate over the long term of the project.

Fourth, advocating neighborhood interests and the interests of poor and working class constituen-



Inner-city blight.

The researcher must be restrained, careful, dispassionate, and conservative. The academic who violates these stylistic norms is in danger of losing his credibility. By contrast, the leaders of neighborhood organizations tend to be competent managers who are also value-expressive. To lead they must be bold, persistent, and opportunistic. When they have to, they must be able to mobilize political power. The neighborhood leader who adopts the detached style of the academic is just as likely to lose his credibility as the academic who "goes native."

cies in general, is easier from inside the academy than from inside city hall, as is program development. Implementation is more difficult and depends heavily on cooperation from city hall.

It is a question of resources and influence. Within city government, a planning director may not have resources of his own to allocate, but he normally has an opportunity to influence the operations of line departments and the allocation of their budget resources. The planner's recommendations may lack the political support of a powerful constituency; the

access and persistence

mayor may have higher priorities; the council may disagree; but the planner's persistent interaction with city bureaucracies and their top officials puts him in a strong position. Access and persistence are key. Political decision-making is not a single act, but a process requiring one's protracted participation. A committee insider with information, a point of view, proposals, and access enjoys a great advantage in political decision-making. He also enjoys the luxury of great resources. Even in the most distressed cities, the department's budget for housing rehabilitation, or small business loans, or neighborhood parks is substantially larger than the best-funded CDC in town.

Without those resources, the best ideas in the most capable hands may not see the possibility of implementation. Shaping city policies from outside city hall is a bit like manipulating radioactive isotopes with remote control clamps. But it can be done, and the impact of one or two convinced officials within a city department can be quite remarkable and quite essential.

Fifth, university-related technical assistance centers are apparently most vulnerable during their first few years. For this reason, the first staff members and assignments must be chosen with particular care. They must be able to provide useful, creditable work to their neighborhood clients, to their funding sources, and to the university's mission. The primary objective is service to the neighborhoods, but staff who are also interested in involving students in their projects and in writing about the projects are especially valuable. To the extent possible, initial projects should have a high probability of success. But the wise center manager will not avoid risks. If he is doing his job, the technical assistance center manager should be taking risks in institutions where risk-taking is sometimes questioned. To continually play it safe is irresponsible and will not strengthen the center with clients or funders. It may in fact condemn the center to irrelevancy.

probability of success

Finally, budget problems within technical assistance centers such as CND are serious and continual compared with those inside city hall. From the moment I entered Cleveland City Hall in 1969, the city was wracked with one fiscal crisis after another. Various remedies were proposed by various mayors: attrition of staff; pay-less work days; shortened work weeks; tax increases, and so on. Through ten years of fiscal crises and a default I heard of no city employee who ever missed a paycheck or a raise. Outside of city hall, however, money problems are

real and constant and affect both the technical assistance center and its clients. The center must seek funding for its own survival, but it must also help its clients in their resource development. Who needs a technical assistance provider without clients? Consequently, much staff time must be spent on resource development.

Many of the issues identified in this paper have been identified by others. Along with them, I believe technical assistance centers are of significant importance to the urban university and to its quest for academic excellence and public service. I believe many public universities will come to share this view in the near future, if only because such centers build positive political relationships with other schools and with the many other publics of the university. They also do an effective job in leveraging marginal university resources.

In addition, the experiences of technical assistance centers can be useful to planning education by providing studio courses and case studies. In studio courses, students deal with real planning problems and issues. They develop practical planning skills and an understanding of key actors. They learn the dynamics of client relationships and obtain experience in working as part of a group or team. Case studies facilitate role playing and help students acquire the tools for political analysis.

Studio courses and case studies are vital in preparing students who lack planning experience. They can also attract students who have practical experience but want to develop it further by obtaining a professional degree. The latter group can play an important role in interacting with other students and enriching the learning environment.

Universities interested in building technical assistance centers could take two steps to greatly facilitate this process. First, they could give individual academics the opportunity to devote more of their time to applied research without losing academic status, prestige, or income. Second, they could adopt the view that "success" in these efforts is to be measured not by papers published or contracts received, but by actual improvements in the governance of cities and the lives of city residents. □