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Title:

Pragmatic Rational Planning: Comparing Shanghai and Chicago

Abstract:

Planners in Shanghai and Chicago inhabit contrasting institutional planning systems. Despite these differences the professional planners exhibit a shared commitment to basic rational planning doctrine. But most important they practice a kind of pragmatic planning that adapts the principles of sustainability and an inclusive public interest to everyday planning conduct. Professional planners share a kind of practical intelligence acquired through university education that they use to pragmatically pursue shared planning norms within different institutional settings.

Key Word:

Urban Plan System, Urban Development, Comparative Study, Shanghai, Chicago, Practical Planning, Pragmatism

1. Introduction

Planning theory debates about rationality, politics, technique, institutional design, ideology, participation and collaboration presume an audience of scholars who live and work in liberal democracies of one type or another. Ideas about central plans guiding development within a socialist state are of historical interest rather than relevant for current practice. But as we turn theoretical attention to spatial planning in China we need to ask what ideas animate spatial planning in a nation emphasizing the top-down authority of a nominally communist government. After the implementation of the Open Door Policy and Economic Reform, China embraced urban entrepreneurship adopting strategic economic development tied to rapid urbanization. Spatial planning played a major role guiding and shaping the construction of vast amounts of infrastructure and buildings to house millions of migrants from the countryside. But all this development came about without the liberal institutions familiar to most planning theorists. Professional planners in China made plans using theoretical ideas that did not draw directly on the democratic culture and beliefs at the center of planning theory debates published in this journal. What ideas do these professional spatial planners use and how do they guide the planning they do and the plans they make? This essay takes a small step trying to answer this big question.

The function of spatial planning and professional planners in urban development has gained recognition and acceptance across the globe (Healey & Upton 2010). The necessity and value of spatial planning persists in the face of a variety of institutional and political changes. In the US the dominance of market relationships challenges ongoing efforts to introduce sustainable planning practice (Dierwechter & Thornley, 2010; Beatley 2005). The transition from the planned economy to the market economy in China reduced the authority of central planning – even as demand for spatial planning increased.

The article compares professional planning for urban development in Chicago and Shanghai.¹ How do professionals located within such different cultural and political systems conduct spatial planning? We suspected that professional spatial planners in both places share an explicit commitment to public service and pragmatic concern for effective outcomes. However, based on our experience and observation of professional planners in Shanghai and Chicago, we discovered that they conduct plans differently. In Shanghai, the planners believe that public benefit flows downward from regional priority to district project. They emphasize the production of layered plans across scale offering increasing levels of detail. Policy flows rationally from center to periphery and from plan to place – often times leaving little room for the benefit

¹ Professor Wang spent two and half years working as a professional planner in China and four years in the US. She spent 16 months observing and interviewing planners in Chicago and 5 months observing and interviewing planners in Shanghai in 2008-2009.

of local feedback and intelligence. Planners possess the authority to represent interests abstractly and legitimately. In Chicago, the planners believe public benefit emerges through layers of planning compromise tied to networks of political involvement. Policy emerges across scale laterally through collaboration as multiple plans proposed by different institutional actors compete for validity and legitimacy. Planners identify and mobilize agreement among plans across scale and political interest. Shanghai planners enjoy authority but suffer the limits of a one-way rationality. Chicago planners lack strong authority but enjoy the resilience of adaptive collaboration among competing economic and community actors.

In terms of formal planning doctrines, professional planners in both places self-consciously pursue a broad public interest². We use the concept here adopting practical meaning associated with proper professional practice (Campbell & Marshall 2002). The professional at a minimum does not favor an interest for individual gain (e.g., corrupt contract) and at a maximum strives to offer advice that includes the many interests of people and institutions touched by the proposed plan without favoring one interest over another (e.g., common good).

Plans for both places consider short-term goals and projects in relation to large-scale physical, social, economic and cultural effects. The practical institutional and political actions the professional planners take revealed what we believe represents a shared moral outlook that respects the priority of the natural environment while building places for safe and secure human settlement, though the plans may be reshaped by politicians and investors. The professionals adopt pragmatic practical judgments to guide how they interpret and use the formal doctrine in their respective institutional settings. Doctrinal convergence occurs most vividly and coherently when comparing the effectiveness of a new railway, the functional integrity of a new plaza or the efficiency of port infrastructure. Rational standards for design, programming, spatial organization and construction are basically the same. For instance, concepts such as global city, transit-oriented development (TOD) and standards such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) generated in the planning field of the United States have been adopted by Chinese planners in their planning practices. Divergence emerges as attention turns to plan intentions and involvement: across generations and neighborhoods, among disparate ethnic groups and migration flows or between civic association and government decision-making. Here the tacit practical judgment of the planners combines professional and cultural beliefs to accomplish ambitious public good in the context of different institutional demands.

The pragmatist view does not compete with larger interpretive narratives about global capitalism and the spread of corporate sponsored neoliberal policies, the hegemony of commercial culture and the legitimation of increasing

social inequality in the US and China. The inferences that flow from such encompassing abstract conclusions often dismiss the sort of work that professional planners do as derivative. Studying differences in conduct does not offer much useful and valuable knowledge and advice for anticipating and coping with urban change. The pragmatist approach pays close attention to professional practice and plans using theoretical ideas to critically compare and explore convergence and divergence for the purposes at play. This focus on relevance and adaptability as criteria for theoretical insight shortens the conceptual distance between practice and reflection; doing and knowing (Hoch, 2007). This shifts the purpose of theory from establishing foundations for truth to finding the truth of practices that achieve purposes worth pursuing across unfamiliar divides (like Chicago and Shanghai). So the pragmatist approach can ask if and how the concept of the public interest animates professional planning in very different settings and offer insights through the comparison that identify conceptual and practical meaning relevant to both practitioners and theorists. The results do not displace other interpretations, but does shift attention away from the endless creative destruction of foundational theories that offer little practical insight for practical judgment and action. Theory for planning should inform the practice of planning not as an afterthought, but as forethought (Ansell 2011). That's what we try to do in this essay.

The scale and scope of Shanghai development has relied heavily on professional planners to review and approve construction projects that fit grand plans for unprecedented growth. Urban growth in China has achieved impressive levels of construction relying on rational planning tied to engineering processes that translate national growth policy into the largest network of metropolitan regions in the world. Political interests at each level of the hierarchy vie for influence. Sometimes planners anticipate and respond to these pressures using plans to challenge the legitimacy of these projects. The pluralistic planning in US cities like Chicago with its emphasis on competitive collaboration introduces transaction costs that Shanghai planners need not pay. The fragmented and politically pluralistic government in the US would cripple prospects for such massive city building. However, the messy negotiations that accompany urban development in Chicago do use plans and often these include public benefits that would otherwise be overlooked. We argue that despite these differences professional planners making plans in both China and the US share a pragmatic outlook that provides a practical basis for convergence and joint learning.

Understanding how plan-making convergence might work first requires grasping the differences in urban conditions and planning institutions for each place. Then the focus will shift to compare how professional planners in Shanghai and Chicago use knowledge, values and ideas as they offer advice about future settlement.

2. Planning Institutions

Shanghai

Spread out over 6,340 square kilometers, Shanghai numbered about 23 million people in 2010 including residents with Hukou and migrants staying in Shanghai for more than six months (*chang zhu ren kou*). The loosening of the Hukou system, has allowed 9 million migrants to join the local population (39 percent of total, Shanghai census 2010). Most include those who settled for more than half a year, but many uncounted short-term floating workers come and go.

The planning administration for Shanghai is embedded in its institutional structure (see Figure 3). The municipality administers 16 urban and suburban districts plus one county as the second-level administrative unit. Each district/county has a number of street committees that extend administrative authority within neighborhoods. This two-level government (Municipality and District) uses a three-level administrative (Municipality, District, and Street Committee) structure to make plans and authorize decisions for spatial development. The authority of development approval and building permit shifted from municipal to district level in the early 1990s when urbanization and redevelopment happened at a rapid speed requiring faster planning administration. Municipalities regained some power around 2000, as deepening competition among districts for real estate development promoted disorder. Both the municipal government and districts governments have legal authority to develop plans. The power shift increased tensions among administrative layers reducing consistency among plans at different levels. Plans developed by district governments need approval of the municipal government for implementation. Officials at municipal and district levels direct most plans at their respective levels, but selected municipal projects can obtain priority over district level policy. Street committees, as the extension of district government, do not have the authority to develop plans or approve developments (Zhang, 2002). Officials at the street committees usually provide opinions and visions representing local residents when participating in consulting meetings during the planning process.

Planners who conduct higher-level plans use knowledge and expertise to compose advice to guide policies and projects at lower levels. Interests defined by institutional norms and missions at each level such as promoting Shanghai as a global city at the city level or increasing revenue for local districts fuel controversies over authority in the planning process for instance, the tradeoff between collective and sectional benefit. Yet shared professional values temper the conflicts as respect for professional planners working on lower-level plans leaves room to consider counter arguments favoring local priorities and projects. The planning hierarchy remains both firm yet adaptable.

Chicago

The City of Chicago consists of a single municipal government with a mayor and 50 aldermen elected by ward representing about 60,000 residents. Municipalities in the United States obtain their legal authority from the States

(e.g., Illinois, Texas, California) including fiscal authority to raise revenue and borrow funds; and police power to enforce laws including land & development regulation. Although Chicago is famous for adopting the Burnham Plan more than a century ago, planning has not enjoyed a prominent place among municipal departments. The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) combined economic development and housing within seven divisions after administrative merger in 1991. The effort sought to integrate administration for physical and economic development with planning. But the new mayoral regime elected in 2010 broke apart and allocated the planning functions into a new Department for Buildings and another new Department for Housing and Economic Development (DHED). Additionally, Chicago has an appointed Plan Commission whose members review plans and projects – especially the routine regulatory recommendations made by the planning staffs who work in the Zoning Division now located in DHED.

The Chicago City Council also includes Committee of Zoning whose elected members review all zoning matters. The committee is composed of aldermen from different wards, which has been the locus of patronage politics. Local residents within the boundary of each ward elect their alderman, who represents their concerns and benefits. The boundaries of wards change every ten years to reflect demographic shifts in local population. Aldermen have historically come to control zoning changes in their own wards, even though zoning changes receive official approval by the Plan Commission and the City Council. This informal political reciprocity guarantees aldermen's authority on local zoning. The "aldermanic privilege" gives aldermen the power to arm-twist economic and design concessions from developers seeking regulatory approval for a project in their ward.

Shanghai & Chicago Comparison

The hierarchical administrative structure in Shanghai maintains the flow of advice from higher-level government to the lower level. Municipal government functions through Municipal Land Resource and Urban Planning Administrative Bureau, leading the role in plans for entire Shanghai and significant projects. District governments with corresponding District Land Resource and Urban Planning Administrative Bureau focus on economic development and public service provision within their administrative boundary. Street committees functioned as external agent of district government, gradually gaining more authorities to deal with local issues, but no equivalents of community plans of Chicago have been developed at this administrative level. Officials from street committees involve in plan making process by participating meetings.

In Chicago, the ward system combines top down with bottom up authority. Local aldermen use their zoning clout to negotiate development agreements that increase local benefits. For instance in one-ward developers proposed luxury condominiums for a large site. The alderman downzoned all the parcels of land

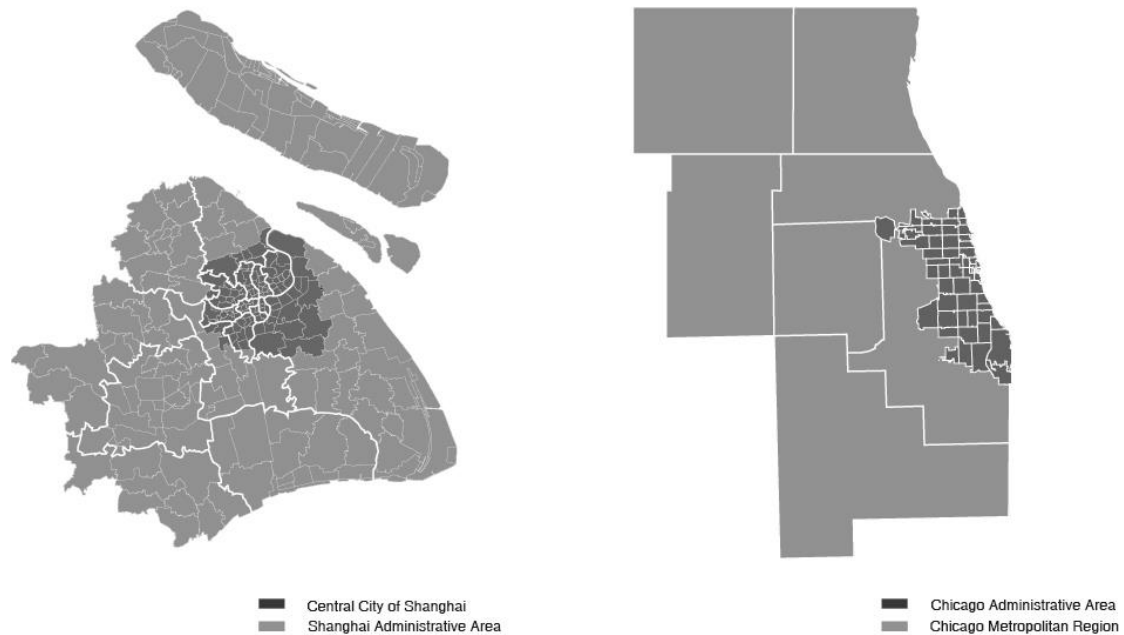
on the site to force the developers to negotiate with the alderman for higher density on each parcel. The alderman pressured private developers to provide lower-market rate housing in return for an up-zone allowing higher density. In attractive geographic locales this kind of negotiation can generate public improvements in the form of park space or affordable housing. In poor areas the deals may do little more than enrich the alderman's re-election fund. Aldermen lose their privilege for large development projects with major citywide impacts and global investors. In these cases the mayor and his staff play the major role negotiating development agreements including zoning. Official public plans play a relatively weak role in these deliberations, while private developer plans shape the agenda. But civic and community participation, especially at the local ward level, can and do often generate plans and policies backed up by citizen involvement and protest. Aldermen and even the mayor will respond to organized citizen actions that make and use plans to describe alternative development trajectories. The patronage system has generated a close relationship between public and private sectors. The plan system works within a pro-growth political culture to promote and guide urban development.

Shanghai planners are confronted with challenges of public services required by the increasing population, redevelopment pressure of dilapidated and/or historic neighborhoods, and spatial demand for economic development. Chicago planners are facing the challenges of spatial segregation of racial groups, pressure of gentrification and declining population. The political leadership for both of these cities aims for global city status. They want to provide space for economic activities and corporate headquarters with international reach.

Table 1: Chicago and Shanghai Basic Fact

	Land Area (sq kilometer)	Population (million)	Administrative Units	Urban Development Goals
Central City of Shanghai	660	9.76 (2005)	8 complete districts; partial of 3 districts	A world center for economic, finance, trade and transport
Shanghai Administra tive Area	6340	23.02 (2010)	16 districts and 1 county; 162 Communities and Townships	
Chicago Administra tive Area	596	2.70 (2010)	77communities, 55 wards	A world financial center and transport hub for the continental US
Chicago Metropolita n Region	10,543	9.46 (2010)	7 counties, 284municipanities	

Sources: Shanghai Statistical Yearbook, 2010; China Census, 2010; Census of the USA, 2010; The Chicago Central Area Plan: Preparing the Central City for the 21st Century, 2003; Shanghai Economic and Social Five-year Plan, 2010; Shanghai Urban Plan, 2006



Source: Shanghai Transportation and Construction Bureau, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

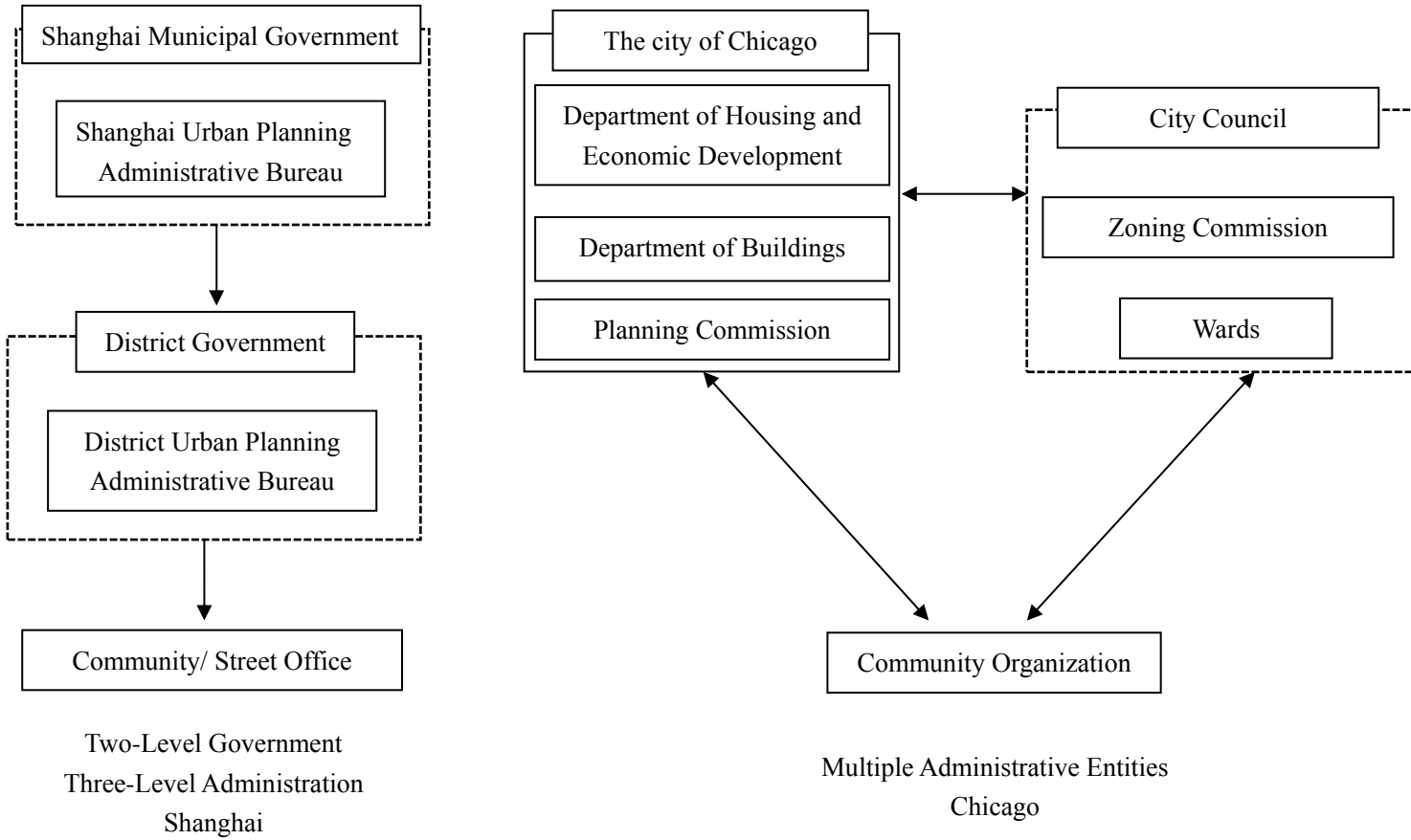
* The white lines in the map of Shanghai represent the boundaries of 16 districts and 1 county. The grey lines in the map of Shanghai represent the boundaries of 162 communities under the administration of street offices and townships.

* The white lines inside Chicago administrative area represent the boundaries of 77 communities of Chicago. The white lines outside Chicago administrative area represent the boundaries of 7 counties.

*The map shows that both Shanghai and Chicago have 'core' administrative jurisdictions and 'peripheral suburban' administrative jurisdictions. The paper focuses on comparing plan system and plan making for the core administrative jurisdictions: the central city of Shanghai and the City of Chicago.

Source: Wang, 2009

Figure 3: Planning Institution Structure in Shanghai and Chicago



3. Plan System

Shanghai

Statutory urban planning system for Chinese urban areas takes place at three scales: a regional plan, a municipal master plan, and detail plans. The regional plan is called urban system plan aiming at identify function and development goal of cities in certain geographic area such as a province or delta region. For instance, the Yangtze River Delta Regional Plan provides proposal to connect cities in the region through industrial chain, infrastructure and highways. Though no formal administrative entity exists to implement the regional plan, financial policies and public investments would lean to certain cities or industries.

The master plan including sectoral plans provides a framework that integrates the spatial organization of land use, transportation and infrastructure across the entire region. The city master plan, once approved by the Municipal Council and subsequently by the State Council of China, has statutory authority. But the master plan proves difficult to implement because it does not include details and policies that translate broad abstract spatial ideas into specific development projects. The master plan resembles urban comprehensive plans in US cities. But unlike comprehensive plans in the United States, the master plan in a Chinese city usually changes with a change in leadership. The master plan priorities are usually made to match the new mayor's priorities and gain land rents from real estate development (Chen, 2012). The duration of a master plan should last for 20 years according to Urban and Rural Planning Act of China, though revisions are made to meet the demand of urban expansions or mega-projects at least every five years. This produced inconsistency in the master plan and the ensuing "political performance projects". Within the hierarchical planning system, lower-level plans follow the master plan. If the master plan keeps changing the lower-level plans cannot keep up. Instead of offering guidance in the face of uncertainty, the frequent planning changes increased uncertainty.

Planners develop the "regulatory plan (detailed control plan)" to translate and enrich the ideas of the master plan. As an interface between planning officials and developers, the plan identifies development indicators for parcels, which resembles zoning maps in US cities. For instance, a plan might provide specific site regulations including land use, floor area ratio (FAR), building height, entrance locations, lot coverage ratio, green space, setbacks, and parking. Unlike zoning maps, the regulatory plans lacked legal authority until 2008. The new Urban and Rural Planning Act approved in October 2007 and implemented in January 2008 gave legal status to the regulatory plan. It is no longer easy to change or disobey the regulatory plan. Planning officials at the district level employed the regulatory plan to review the site plan (detailed construction plan) proposed by developers.

Theoretically, the hierarchy of plans provides a coherent vision and order for development. This presumes of course that local development activity approved in the regulatory plans follow the spatial organization described in the citywide master plan. The formal system defines how knowledge, values, and interests should converge across scale providing plans that guide local development to fit a coherent regional view. But this does not happen exactly as the plan system predicts. Public officials and professional planners adjust the plans to fit development interests for which level of government or whom they represent or serve.

Chicago

Professional plans for US cities like Chicago embrace the same kind of region to local vision used in China. The metropolitan region of Chicago includes an ambitious regional plan (CMAP, 2010) that sets urban development priorities for 284 suburban municipalities that surround the City of Chicago. The ambitious ideas reflect civic priorities designed and promoted by civic and professional elites including the same commercial club that sponsored the 1909 Burnham plan (Bennett, 2010). But no public authority exists to enforce the plan from the top down, while regional agencies such as CMAP obtain funding from the federal and state government and provide to local communities for implementation of the regional plan. The City of Chicago and its suburbs develop and implement plans as new elected officials come and go. The administrative systems include a place for planning, but mainly to conduct zoning reviews and periodically prepare plans – rarely comprehensive ones at the city level.

Professional planners working in Chicago do on occasion produce long-term plans, most recently including the Chicago Central Area Plan 2020, the Calumet Design Guidelines & Land Use Plan, and the Chicago River Plan & Design Guidelines. These long-term plans are fragmented in terms of geographic areas, in contrast to the hierarchical planning system that covers all city areas in Shanghai. They do offer guidance in plan reviews and some zoning decisions but lack legal authority. Sectoral plans such as transportation plan plays an important role in urban and regional development with the support from federal and state government.

Professional staff at the City of Chicago's Zoning Division in Department of Housing & Economic Development and Department of Buildings review and regulate privately sponsored urban development projects using permits and financial incentives. Zoning is perhaps their most powerful planning tool. Municipal officials use public zoning to negotiate with developers. For significant sites or large-scale developments, the planners in the Zoning Department recommend Planned Developments (PD) as a special form of zoning ordinance that increases staff discretion in the review process. Chicago planners also have financial tools such as Tax Increment Financial (TIF) District to adjust and

initiate private investment.

A large portion of spatial planning in Chicago consists of plans and agendas developed at the community level. Local community plans, usually include the cultural expectations and vision of local residents and business owners. These plans provide a framework for private investment by both for profit and non-profit developers. The appeals local plans may reshape zoning indicators for specific locations in communities.

Shanghai & Chicago Comparison

For both cities, planners expect to protect collective benefit of the public good for a geographic area. Planning advice and judgments go through different institutional structure and different relationship among plans. The hierarchical plan structure in Shanghai maintains the flow of advice from higher-level government to the lower level. Planners enjoy formal authority to implement well-conceived citywide plans for public benefit, but face difficulty transmitting these ideas from top to bottom. Representatives of local residents usually have the least authority over development. Planners at the municipal level place confidence in rational planning as they match goals and means using information and planning principles. They pursue the public interest paying close attention to the wider public good. However, they often lack detailed information, concerns and priorities from the district and the street.

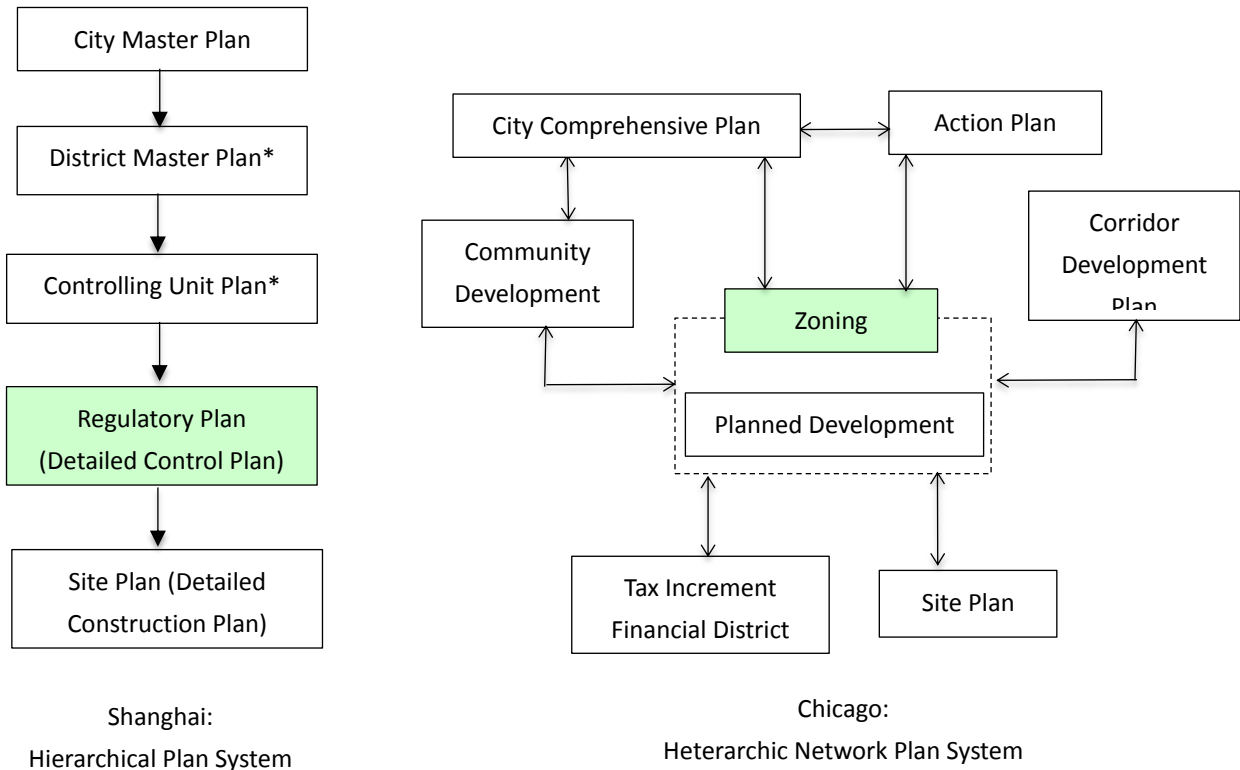
For instance, in preparing master plan for a city, professional Shanghai planners describe the overall public good in terms of plan elements that provide an industrial center, a regional transportation hub and improvement in regional food supply. They anticipate the impacts of this plan across geographic levels, but mainly present their plan proposals to public officials. Planners assume they include the impact on local residents as the plan provides job opportunities and public facilities. They only occasionally conduct surveys or interviews to identify local concerns and priorities.

The Chicago plan system includes a heterarchy of interests and values taking shape in multiple plans (Wang, 2009). A variety of organizations, agencies and associations develop plans to envision the future for a specific service area. The areas may overlap one another and even offer inconsistent advice. Plans made by public officials, private developers and organized citizen groups compete for public attention and legal authority in the US setting. The network of plans provides detailed information within or across geographic communities that can travel from top to bottom, across and even from bottom up. Politics plays a formal role explicitly shaping how values and interests might converge among diverse plans. The legitimacy of community plans and availability of City financial incentives can increase the leverage of Chicago professional planners as they negotiate with developers. Professional planners make some of these plans, but struggle to align the diversity of so many competing interests with the overarching regional goals of sustainability and a public good.

For instance, when initiating a plan for a river corridor in Chicago, public officials regarded the main public good as promoting new economic development. In community meetings, however, residents expressed their concerns about possible gentrification and an expected affordable grocery store. Environmental organizations hoped the development plan would not affect the river eco-system. Owners of factories expressed their worries about increasing property taxes in a focus group meeting. Based on a variety of meetings that engaged with different stakeholders, planners understood different expectations and modified ideas in the plan to work out a compromise among competing goals.

The kinds of plan making that professional planners conduct in each place appears to fit the contours of hierarchy and heterarchy. But these constraints did not seem to leave plan making a cynical top down process reflecting the powers of hierarchical command in Shanghai or a fragmented competition mirroring the relative power of heterarchical political interests in Chicago. Professional plan makers made plans to try and persuade their respective audiences to consider how future purposeful changes for a local place contribute to a sustainable public interest.

Figure 4: Plan Systems in Shanghai and Chicago*



Source: Wang, 2009, 2011; Development Methods of Urban Planning, Construction Department Act No.146, announced on Oct. 28, 2005; Development Methods of Urban Planning, Construction Department Act No.14, announced on Sep. 3, 1991, Urban and Rural Planning Law of China, 2008, Shanghai Urban Planning, Shanghai Urban Planning Administration Bureau, 2006

* The chart presents the plan system for the central city of Shanghai. The suburban area of Shanghai has a different plan system involving plans for townships and villages. The chart presents the plan system of the City of Chicago, not the metropolitan region of Chicago. The central city of Shanghai and the City of Chicago have similar land area.

* District plans usually reflect compromise with top down priorities of the larger area. It is required to develop district plan in mega-city such as Shanghai, after its master plan has been approved.

* Controlling Unit Plan is a spatial plan developed in Shanghai. It provides basis for developing regulatory plan.

Table 4: Comparison of Plan System Mechanism in Chicago and Shanghai

Chicago		Shanghai	
Plans	Function	Plans	Function
City Comprehensive Plan	Spatial arrangements based on estimates of population and job opportunity	City Master Plan	Planning for land use, transportation, public facilities
		District Master Plan (fenqu guihua)	Allocate ideas of master plan in sub-areas
Action Plan	Budget for Project Construction based on private developer plans with municipal approval	Short-term Construction Action Plan (jinqi jianshe xingdong guihua)	Short-term development goals and key projects
		Controlling Unit Plan	Distribute population and development quota to controlling unit
Zoning	Planning administrative tool integrated with a variety of plans	Regulatory plan (Detailed Control Plan)	Detailed development requirements to deliver ideas in higher level plans
Planned Development	Specify detailed requirement for important sites		
Site Plan	Spatial arrangement and development for special sites	Site Plan (Detailed Construction Plan)	Spatial arrangement and development for special sites
Corridor Development Plan	Spatial arrangement and development for areas cross communities		
Community Plan	Express priority and vision of local community residents and business		
Tax Increment Financial District (TIF)	Current public infrastructure subsidy tied to capture of future land value after construction		

Source: Wang, 2011; Action Plan in Shanghai Master Plan (1999-2020); The Chicago Central Area Plan: Preparing the Central City for the 21st Century, 2003; The Central Area Action Plan, government archive of the city of Chicago, 2009

4. Plan Making

Plans do their work as advice (Krieger, 1981). This conception avoids the misleading definition of plan as a kind of blueprint that people must follow to create the proper structure or effect. Plans use knowledge to compare the potential effects of options or alternatives that people may envision and compare before choosing. If a leader or institution makes a plan as a single pathway to a fixed goal, then this violates the conception of plan as advice. The plan in this case provides an excuse and not advice. Complex spatial problems do not submit to this kind of single-minded blueprint planning because no single powerful actor can know the consequences of such simple-minded correspondence (Hopkins, 2001). Authority that ignores advice invites disaster. When professional planners offer advice they combine knowledge, values and interests

to conceive plans (Wang, 2009). These aspects of planning judgment take institutional shape in the planning systems these professionals inhabit. These aspects accompany the practical judgment any person makes comparing future prospects. Each of us assesses the push of cause and the pull of purpose in relation to practical intention or interest. Professional urban planners elaborate each of these aspects using ideas and experience to inform the advice they give.

Professional planners in China and the US continue to use the same rational planning doctrine to describe and organize the work they do. The rational planning model so thoroughly critiqued by planning theorists still provides the conceptual and rhetorical guide for making spatial plans (Allmendinger, 2009, Hoch, 1994). But the doctrine does not adequately account for the tacit theories that professionals use to make plans in their respective institutional domains (Sanyal, 2005). The planners adapt the model more as a rhetorical guide than a resource for judgment. They combine knowledge, values and interests to make plans that offer the promise of persuasion for different stakeholders and actors in their respective settings (Hoch, 2002). Based on urban development cases in two cities including high profile projects, community public housing development projects and historic preservation projects, the remainder of this essay describes how professionals made plans and how ideas about pragmatic practice can account for similarities in how professional planners working in such different cities adopt similar knowledge, values and interests.

4.1 Knowledge

Professional knowledge plays a crucial role making plans to address complex spatial development. Professionals in China and the US learn specialized knowledge about the physical and functional relationships of city development, land use and transportation. Their planning work integrates local contextual information with specialized analysis into plans that compare and assess options for future development. For instance, knowledge about pre-modern architecture and its preservation helped planners in the Sinan Road project in Shanghai successfully convince local officials to preserve the historical urban fabric of the northeastern section of the site (Wang, 2009). Planners for the City of Chicago used environmental evidence and energy cost savings to convince the mayor and aldermen to adopt green roof requirements in the zoning code. This overlap between rational technique and practical persuasion fits the professional persona of rational planning.

The Shanghai planners at the municipal and district levels enjoy access to excellent knowledge about the physical conditions of the city. Street committees are assumed to provide knowledge of current resident needs and demands tied to local contexts, though usually fail to influence the plan making. In Chicago professional planners publicly obtain, exchange and debate real time information about the needs and demands of ward aldermen, private developers, community organizations and resident groups. In Shanghai the municipal planners lack enough relevant information to assess diverse plan effects for their formal plan,

while in Chicago they possess lots of relevant information about diverse plans and little capacity to organize coherent public coordination sensitive to wider regional goals.

In urban development, especially mixed-use projects, planning knowledge includes market demand, financial feasibility, and physical need. Shanghai planners prefer information of global standards and best practice experiences, which they can apply to Chinese context. Chicago planners collect ideas and visions from a diverse array of professionals, officials and developers in the region. Best practices from comparable western cities guide judgments about planning projects in Shanghai, while Chicago planners focus on institutional information that can attract cooperation among specialized developers in different uses such as retail, residential and office. Consider the response by a Shanghai planner who had done projects in historic preservation and urban regeneration for more than ten years (Wang, 2009):

“The experiences of historic preservation and renovation in France were valuable and persuasive. I used pictures taken in France to show the developer real examples of mixed-use in historic neighborhoods. It was very helpful. You cannot just tell them it will be good if we preserve it. We need to show the developer how beautiful it will be after renovation. The developers nowadays usually have rich experience and overseas insight. They would like to adopt best practices of the West that they have visited in their projects locally. They could just go aboard to take a look at certain projects. The communication with these developers about the Western experience has been smooth.”

The planners in Shanghai and Chicago use similar knowledge about the physical and functional dimensions of development. The Shanghai planners deploy more sophisticated information at the municipal scale, but lack diversity of relevant local knowledge from residents. Chicago planners take little guidance from regional plans, but coordinate and assimilate a wide assortment of competing planning ideas struggling to improve advice over contested zoning decisions. For instance, the publicly adopted Humboldt Park Redevelopment Area Plan (HPRAP) describes community-level development priorities. A private developer proposes a luxury condominium project that meets local zoning, but does not meet the Puerto Rican community preservation criteria set down in the HPRAP. The alderman, together with local community organization leadership convinces the City of Chicago to pressure the private developer to sell the proposed development site to the government. The site was allocated instead to a non-profit developer to build a mixed-use development with affordable residential and commercial properties as set out in the community redevelopment plan (Wang and Liu, 2011).

The participation of planners in a loose network of overlapping public,

private and nonprofit institutional relationships enables the Chicago planners to play an important role coordinating plans for large development projects. Access to both politically and socially diverse plans improves the quality and resilience of professional advice for large projects undertaken in a complex urban setting. But although planners may offer well-informed advice, they feel pressure to make development deals happen. For instance, one planner who had done work on a project called Block 37 in Chicago Downtown from 2001 to 2008 at the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) put it like this (Wang, 2009):

“The DPD hosted a charrette for Block 37. Experts from a variety of fields related public officials and community leaders were invited in the charrette. It was in the spring of 2002. The weather was nice. We watched the vacant Block 37 from the conference room and discussed its future. We gathered plenty of ideas and visions about the site. It was very helpful to obtain information from diverse sources. The DPD believed that it was not a good location for hotel, but the City wanted it and spent over ten million to allocate a high-end hotel to Block 37...FAR could leverage in development project, but may not be helpful in detail negotiation. The developer insisted on expanding the external wall above the sidewalk to maximize the retail space. The FAR was already 20, with a 100% building coverage. But we had to approve the bay windows above the sidewalk to make the development happen for this ten-year vacant land.

4.2 Value

The professional planners in both Shanghai and Chicago share similar beliefs about the importance of pursuing sustainable development and serving the public interest. The professional norms acquired in modern university education seen to cut across provincial cultural and national beliefs. Of course in Shanghai the government hierarchy pays lip service to these ideals, and uses planning to justify the approval of development projects with minimal public involvement or consent. Professional planners work hard to prepare plans at municipal and street level to leverage the legitimacy of official goals so as to include the interests of neighborhoods and sensitive environmental sites that might be sacrificed for growth. They use precedent from other countries and places to challenge the assumptions of a handful of decision makers about the legitimacy and efficacy of development projects. They take practical steps to put flesh on the often-cynical bones of the official planning doctrine and so persuade officials to compromise and include plan amendments that address resident need and environmental improvements. A planner working for Tongji Urban Planning and Research Institute had spent six years as a professional described his work of physical planning in this way:

“Language and image was used to communicate with decision-makers. We needed to propose new values using language that they understand and vivid images of best practice and possible futures. They hoped to accomplish a good project as did we. However, they needed to learn how to recognize value and perceive well the real effects; change their perspective of what counts for the future. This cannot happen in one day. Planning happens gradually as decision makers learn to include real beauty, good and right as they make decisions.”

In Chicago the democratic planning system may formally promise fairness for all, but the reality tends to favor the powerful and well connected. The availability of access means that professional planners in Chicago manage and coordinate the participation and input of many different stakeholders. The professionals possess views about the public good and sustainability that may compete with the views of aldermen, other city staff, private developers, community organizations and residents. Facilitating and coordinating meetings with these actors requires willingness to listen and mediate (Forester 1999, Healey 1997). But it also enables the practical minded planner opportunities to persuade others about alternatives that improve sustainability and offer more inclusive public benefit. In the end stakeholders in a planning process may not be happy with all the outcomes, but they may decide not to oppose it if they consider the process legitimate and they have obtained some outcomes they wanted (Innes, 2004). One community planner, who had spent five years working for a small community development corporation offered this account of his work on this affordable housing project (Wang 2009):

“We had community meetings with more than two hundred people. The proposal of the project was presented. The small developer group was against this project. We gave opportunity for them to communicate. Some of them just did not have full information about this project, while it was really difficult to communicate with some of them. When we presented all the information and vision to them, some of them changed their mind and liked the project. Some of them still insisted to be against this project. I told them that I had lived in this neighborhood for more than thirty years. I promised them that what they were worrying about would not happen. It would be a decent project, not necessarily bringing in crime and trouble to the neighborhood.”

Shanghai and Chicago planners converge on values when considering the basic concerns about sustainability and public interest. They also exhibited similar pragmatic approaches to their very different institutional settings. Whether challenging the hierarchy in Shanghai or the multiple demands in

Chicago professional planners exhibited a pragmatic sensibility and resilience. They pursued similar norms by taking practical steps to squeeze compromise out of a development process often indifferent to spatial planning norms about public benefit (Sanyal 2002).

4.3 Interest

Professional planners in both Shanghai and Chicago conceive of a public interest at the core of their planning effort. They recognize political complexity, but also embrace pragmatic principles that integrate a wider vision about sustainability with practical political steps to realize that vision. The professional ideal does not blind them to their institutional constraints whether administrative hierarchy or capitalist hegemony; political concerns or public deal making. Professional planners in Shanghai and Chicago pursued the public interest in different practical pragmatic ways³.

Different levels of governments in Shanghai do not necessarily represent the public good for the entire city. As a professor and senior planner told his students how to conceive the public good that:

“When we conduct a plan for a city at any level, we pursue the goal of protecting public interest. To do this, we need to understand there are two clients exist in each planning project. One is the exact client hiring us who represents sectoral or even personal interest, the other is the city which cannot talk per se but whose interest we need to protect.”

The hierarchic plan system helps us to protect collective benefits for a city. The formal public interest embedded in the hierarchical planning system, but requires translation. The plan may espouse legitimate widespread public benefits for the city, but reaching this vision requires flexible coordination. The political discretion that accompanies the often-frequent shift in planning authority practically undermines the downward flow of urban master plan ideas. Local specific plans for redevelopment often disguise district level interests as a broad public good. Planners at the municipal and district level make plans that may inhibit or balance these plans to sharing profits generated from urban development.

In Shanghai, global projects tend to dominate downtown development,

³ We recognize the contested nature of the concept of ‘public interest’. Our use here does not imply imperious elitism of a detached professional, the expected outcome of some democratic process, or other uses tied to theoretical claims about moral and political desert and authority. The planners used the concept to describe their efforts to envision the interests of future generations of people who would bear the imagined and estimated consequences of the plans they made. The public and their interest were not vastly inclusive, but shaped by the contours of the practical context of place and time.

while local demands usually receive little attention. The professional planners remain stuck within their positions unable to enter negotiations. Shanghai planners must rely on professional knowledge and formal authority to try and balance local sustainability goals and political interests favoring large mega-projects. Professional planners in Shanghai have mobilized attention on the preservation of local historic districts and residential communities. Support from local communities provides important legitimacy. A planner working in a neighborhood redevelopment project in Shanghai told us that:

“When working on a plan to redevelop a neighborhood, we conducted focus group meetings including officials at the Street Office, the Resident Committee and local residents. The possibility of redeveloping into the neighborhood into luxury residential towers had been distributed through hobby groups in the neighborhood. They discussed the proposal during their activities and built certain consensus. When we hosted the meeting, many local voices were well expressed. We adopted certain ideas and arguments to convince district officials that this neighborhood with long history needed to be preserved while minor renovation was necessary.”

In Chicago professional planners inhabit a network of plans by ward aldermen, community-based organizations, private developers and different parts of the City administrative hierarchy. Their planning work seeks to coordinate and reconcile these contested interests for small scale zoning decisions and large scale mixed use projects. In large metropolitan regions even the most powerful players worry about uncertainty and delays or about the risk of proceeding without the legitimacy of wide support (Innes, 1998). Chicago planners corral local plans to articulate and protect local interests even as they help pave the way for large-scale developments that promise economic and fiscal benefits. But the ensuing development only occasionally meets wider sustainability goals for lack of funds and commitment.

While planners in Shanghai lack financial tools to negotiate publicly responsive development deals in mega-project developments. Chicago planners have better access to both institutional pressures and financial incentives in global projects. In Chicago, the city functions as a business partner with the developer. Planning officials, representing the city, deploy planning tools that include the Request for Qualification (RFQ), Planned Development (PD), and Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Planners together with the developer design a mixed-use project that includes public infrastructure subsidy and density bonuses in return for enhanced environmental features and affordable housing units.

5. Conclusion

In Shanghai, planning is embedded in a hierarchical institutional structure and a correspondent hierarchical plan system. The Shanghai planners inhabit a

system where the authority of planning ideas for spatial planning presumes a rational pathway up and down the bureaucratic system. However, the doctrinal belief does not correspond with the political and economic reality. Professional planners in Shanghai pursue sustainability goals by drafting plans at one level to challenge the legitimacy of plans at another. They take pragmatic practical steps to meet the needs of local residents and pursue the demands of regional sustainability using the tools they can deploy within their institutional domain. For instance, a professional Shanghai planner illustrates this in his account of preparing a new town plan:

“The City Master Plan and the Industrial Park Plan at the district level expressed their priorities and visions. The mayor wanted a modern new town with skyscrapers like a mega-city nearby, while local district government hoped to develop more industrial parks for Gross Domestic Product (GDP, an important criterion for officials’ performance). And we believed that local residents wanted better living quality with better public facilities and infrastructure. So we first convinced the city government that more industrial parks would influence the environment of the new town and then the decision of investors. The officials at the district government would follow the higher-level decision. And then we convinced the mayor that we could have skyscrapers, but not too many, just some as landmarks. We will build an eco-city with better urban image and energy consumption. We demonstrated the idea with cases, perspective maps and a three-dimension animation.”

Spatial planning in Chicago has a fragmented institutional structure exhibiting a heterarchical network of plans (Donaghy & Hopkins 2006). Multiple administrative units in Chicago influence urban development, including formal city government agencies, a local resident-based ward system and community organizations. Professional planners for the City of Chicago play a coordinating and facilitating role involving multiple professionals, local residents, and various advocacy groups. They pay close attention to local preferences and priorities tied to diverse political agendas that can be quite complex. They enjoy little authority and their contributions offer only modest progress toward ambitious sustainability goals (Koval et al 2006). As a planner in Chicago told us in the interview that:

“There were multiple actors in a project we would listen to. Usually we tried to convince the aldermen and community leaders to support our main ideas. And then we left many decisions to be made by local residents in community meetings. Policies and plans initiated at the city level were expected to guide local developments toward sustainability. But sometimes we would adjust standards, or

even revise regulation, according to local demands.”

Despite these differences, the goal of connecting with the global economy has brought development pressures to both urban regions. Municipal authorities adopt similar competitive strategies that vastly increase the volume and speed of flows of people, products and capital. Urban planners prepare similar plans for the demands of the global market and local communities within their respective social and cultural context. In both cities, professional planners answer questions about how to promote economic development and at the same time improve living quality for dilapidated communities. Even though the hierarchical planning system in Shanghai is different from the heterarchical network in Chicago, plans in both places are adopted to define public benefit and constrain negative external effects over a long-term period.

Professional planners in both Shanghai and Chicago adopt similar practical judgment to cope with the disconnect between regional planning goals and parochial values, the merit of common goods versus special political interest and the importance of cultural or environmental benefit in the face of development profits. First, professional planners in both places employ powerful expertise to introduce their values into the planning process hoping to relocate interests among stakeholders. However, they differ substantially in how they offer planning advice. Professional planners in Shanghai provide advice within a tight hierarchical plan system. The bureaucratic separation of physical and economic review makes it difficult for professional planners to offer advice about cumulative environmental and social effects. Local officials face increasing political pressure from local residents in shaping their advice. The loose budget constraint of semi-government developers and the lack of political feedback do allow institutional room to show how including plan benefits can reduce political uncertainty. Planners can sometimes craft plans at one level to challenge the legitimacy of the plans used at another level. Officials will take this advice to alleviate the risk of political uncertainty or moral censure. For instance, in a master plan for a city with five townships as lower level administration entities, planners collected all plans from the lower level governments to understand appeals about land use areas of each township. Based on that, planners provided different scenarios to balance the possible conflicts. The mayor evaluated risks and conflicts through scenarios in the plan.

In Chicago, planners provide advice to satisfy fragmented concerns of stakeholders that are defined in a network of plans. They combine economic and physical arguments as they describe and assess proposed development projects. They use physical, social and economic knowledge about spatial change as they coordinate the plans from diverse stakeholders and a variety of professionals. Political interests enter directly into deliberations and planners must demonstrate the practical payoffs of different planning strategies without benefit of much institutional authority. One City of Chicago planner talked about financial tools in planning projects:

“We usually identified dilapidated neighborhoods as Tax Increment Financial District in order to keep public investment to these types of areas. Downtown Chicago was a special case, which we proved its significance to be designated as TIF District. When we used tax money to certain development project such as Block 37, the money went to support public facilities, like transportation infrastructure in this case. Multiple aspects were considered during the development of the planned development (PD). Diverse experts, officials and community leaders were engaged. Plans were usually revised after internal consulting meetings or public hearings.”

Shanghai and Chicago planners take practical steps to adapt important planning doctrines about sustainability and the public interest to the institutional demands of their respective places. The pragmatism they exhibit in practice does not fit the rational model that describes the formal planning doctrine for spatial planning in China or comprehensive plans in the United States. They engage in politically savvy practical judgments using the institutional tools they possess to influence official decisions approving physical development in each city. The hierarchy of the Shanghai planning system contrasts with the inclusivity and network of the Chicago system. But in each case the professionals used a pragmatic approach adapting principles to practice seeking relevant impacts for the basic values of sustainability and public good (Holden, 2008). Important for this comparison is the fact that although the Shanghai planners worked in a hierarchical system, they use the same kind of practical judgment as planners in a heterarchical network in Chicago. The ideas that animated their judgment did not require democratic institutions to validate their relevance, even though we can trace out contours of what these might look like should the opportunity arise (Ansell 2011). Ironically, the quality of professional practical judgment for planners in both places centers in collaborative learning and mutual criticism each learned in the modern university. The inherently democratic nature of this professional education and ensuing practice can and does exist in all sorts of non-democratic institutional settings. A pragmatic interpretation invites this empirical exploration and the possibility of finding ways to learn if and how these modest similarities of pragmatic convergence might serve more ambitious goals for plan making beyond the bounds of professional practice.

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