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Community organizing in social work and progressive urban planning – interdisciplinary challenges and opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines aspects of community organizing within social work and progressive or transformative planning within urban planning, with an implicit question as to whether these two practices within their respective professions can work together to achieve progressive goals. For each profession, I first review the professional histories and the ethical codes of each discipline, next discuss how these more activist trends emerged, and then compare the two practices to suggest possibilities for joint efforts toward the social justice goals embedded in each defining statement. I discuss the context for both types of work, as well as the means by which individuals in each discipline work toward progressive goals. Questions I consider include how similar the social justice orientations within their disciplines are, and how community organizers and progressive planners can work together for social justice goals.

KEYWORDS

Community organizing; progressive planning; equity planning; transformative planning

Introduction

The aspect of social work encompassed by the term community organizing or “community social work” shares various degrees of conceptual and practical space with advocacy planning, empowerment or transformative planning, or progressive planning. Each approach involves the voices of residents, particularly from marginalized communities, being heard in both government deliberations and private sector decisions regarding the life and direction of a municipality or a state, and inherently raises equity and social justice concerns. Given the intense issues facing many urban residents, the ability of these two groups of progressive professionals to work together, and with others involved in urban problems, can be an important element in achieving social justice in cities.

My interest in pursuing this paper arises from the unique set of circumstances that have enabled me to have a foot in both worlds: from the urban studies and planning field in which I received my doctorate and in the realm of

community organizing or “community practice” within social work where my academic career has developed. It has long been my interest to compare advocacy or progressive planning to community organizing, and thus, this paper offers the opportunity to do so. However, more important than personal interest, I believe that individuals from both professions can and do make important contributions to social justice, economic justice, racial justice, gender justice, and other social movements. In some instances, the knowledge within each profession can complement in solving social problems, notably in their work in disinvested cities. Importantly, both approaches pull their respective disciplines into more progressive directions. Overcoming differences in approaches and contributing to movements as allies can energize organizers and planners to recreate the social justice impulses of the genesis of each profession.

This paper first discusses how community organizing (CO) fits within the realm of social work, including a brief overview of how it fits into the history of social work and how CO flows from mission statements of the social work profession and social work education. Then, various models of CO within social work are presented. Next, I present a discussion of progressive planning, including its development and history within urban planning. I discuss the mission statements of planning organizations, as well those from the more recent missions of progressive/transformational planning organizations. Next, I compare CO and progressive planning, and lastly discuss how these two enterprises can work together.

The paper is based on my experiences in my local community where I have lived and been active in social justice movements for over 40 years, both as a participant and participant-observer and through analytical work on a variety of publications, as well as reviewing literature in both CO and progressive planning. Additionally, I have attended conferences in the fields of urban studies, labor, and social work. This is all summarized and blended from the vantage points of activism and as an academic.

Community organizing in the social work context—history and literature

Community organizing (CO) is considered part of “macro social work,” that is the aspect of social work practice that is concerned with both organizing people to address social injustices and changing social policies to achieve progressive change. CO attempts to shift power relationships between marginalized and oppressed communities to achieve social justice goals. However, there are more than spatial issues or identities at play in CO: it may involve racial justice issues, gender issues, immigrant rights campaigns, economic justice campaigns, climate justice, and other social movements. CO and macro-social work are inherently political in that there is frequent interaction between the organized constituencies and the political structures of society. It

is also the case that some social workers may participate in political campaigns or seek and obtain elected office to work within “the system” to bring about social change.

Community organizing (CO) takes place in a multitude of locales and by a variety of different organizations in the U.S. context. Many community organizers are not products of social work programs and come to community organizing via different life paths and through different training programs. However, social work can trace its origins in the U.S. to the conditions in cities that resulted from the urbanization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). The settlement house movement and its leaders, notably Jane Addams, began their activities in these dense urban neighborhoods of Chicago and other cities over issues of sanitation, working conditions in factories, child labor, and other urban problems, and these activities are seen as leading to social work’s formation. The advocacy in which early social workers engaged contained many dimensions of community organizing. Additionally, the examples of rebellions of enslaved people and abolitionists and the women’s suffrage movement are embedded in some origins of community organizing.

Over time, two strands of social work have developed: one more community and social activism oriented, and the other more psychologically oriented and concerned with the professionalization of social work (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989). Professionalism involved adopting models of “scientific charity” or “scientific philanthropy” (Gitterman & Germain, 2008; Wenocur & Reisch, 1989) and the bureaucratization of the profession. Later, social work attempted to distinguish itself from psychology by adopting a “person in environment” approach (Wenocur & Reisch, 1989).

Inherent in the division between the two strands of social work is the idea of where change should occur and where individual social workers’ focus: at the individual level or at the structural and societal levels. This division finds expression in choices within professional education, employment, and career development rather than in the ideological or political viewpoints of many social workers. A clinical social worker may have very liberal or radical political views but be involved in social work practice that focuses on clients’ individual problems and therefore may not be very involved in political and social issues. Moreover, it is unlikely that professionally trained social workers who are community organizers would work for politically conservative organizations or movements.

Ethical and educational standards within social work

What can also be said about social work is that its Code of Ethics and the accreditation standards for social work programs are social justice oriented. This explicit connection is evident in the first two paragraphs in the Preamble

to the Code of Ethics as published on the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2021) website (<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>). Briefly summarized here, the NASW states that social work's mission is to enhance human well-being with attention to the needs of marginalized people and that social workers promote social justice and social change. Also, community organizing is specifically mentioned as a form of social work.

Accreditation is an intensive process for social work programs. In terms of accreditation standards for social work programs, among these standards is an important emphasis on anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. These issues are also inherent in detailed sections on aspects of social work education such as field education and evaluation, among other standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2022), see <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/bb5d8afe-7680-42dc-a332-a6e6103f4998/2022-EPAS.pdf> for the opening section of the 2022 Accreditation Standards.

Models and methods of community organizing

Within social work education and scholarship, there are various models and orientations as to how to frame and practice CO. This section will show different models of CO as presented in writings from both academics and practitioners. These pieces illustrate how CO is evolving to respond to new challenges in the current neoliberal political economy while adhering to its social justice roots and mission.

CO writ large is informed by and, for some, inspired by Saul Alinsky (Alinsky, 1969, 1971). Alinsky's tactics of militant or confrontational community organizing originated in his work in Chicago to organize a working-class community, the Back of the Yards neighborhood, and later in Rochester, New York, and in other cities. Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation as a training center for community organizing in 1940 and it still exists. In his own writing, Alinsky offers a combination of militancy, pragmatism, strategic considerations, and courage, while also emphasizing a non-ideological approach to organizing. He expresses his concerns for inequality as the "have-nots" against the "haves" (see *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky, 1971, in particular) and eschewed Marxist terms or ideology. He spoke about inequalities in power and the difference between being a radical as opposed to a liberal (one who settles for minimal change) in *Reveille for Radicals* (1946/Alinsky, 1969) and situated himself as a radical. Although not a social worker, his work is still taught or referenced in social work education. He pioneered a new way of approaching problems in communities and incorporated lessons from his labor organizing experiences with John L. Lewis, Leader of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) during the 1930s (see Alinsky, 1969, 2010). Groups

such as ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and the militancy of the National Welfare Rights Organization have been seen as drawing from Alinsky models (Fisher, 1994, as cited in; Pyles, 2021).

There are other organized training programs and centers, notably the Highlander Center, which has trained many organizers, using popular education techniques. This puts an emphasis on building organizers through exploring lived experiences and grievances. Key features of Horton's approach include leadership development and empowerment, power analysis, experiential means of learning, and making social meaning for collective and personal change (Pyles, 2021, p. 124).

Alinsky's methods have come under scrutiny for not intentionally incorporating social justice concepts, ideology, and practices as foundational in his work. Social Work programs incorporate many more concepts and models of community organizing that include anti-racism, pro-immigrant rights, feminist methodologies, and other areas that surpass Alinsky's limitations. See Pyles (2021) for a discussion of the limitations and lasting contributions of Alinsky. Indeed, as has been observed, conservative groups can use and have used the same Alinsky tactics and strategies, notably the Tea Party in its style of organizing and mobilization, and more recently, the groups supporting defeated President Trump in his attempt to steal the 2022 election. For example, in the 2000s, I personally witnessed Tea Party activists disrupting a large pro Affordable Care Act rally in West Hartford, Connecticut – arriving carrying a mock-coffin with a skeleton in it and attempting to disrupt the rally. They were greatly outnumbered, yet their presence was unnerving.

Within social work, scholar and educator Jack Rothman (1974), developed a model of CO that has been used widely in social work education. He originally offered a three-part model of CO:

- (1) *Locality Development* - building community capacity and strengthening local organizations;
- (2) *Social Planning* - a more technical orientation of performing needs assessments, grant-making capacity, and organizational development methods;
- (3) *Social Action* - neighborhood organizing, issue campaigns, protests, petitions, boycotts, sit-ins, and other direct action activities, including some of the Alinsky tactics.

Over time, his model evolved and incorporated different approaches, and blended elements of each approach. Thus, in 2008, he relabeled and formulated a grid that illustrated the possible blends of approaches (Rothman, 2008). These renamed approaches included:

- (1) *Planning and Policy* – employing data driven solutions to community issues as well as participatory planning activities;
- (2) *Community Capacity Development* - much like locality development above, but more inclined toward community development undertakings as well (an area with some similarity to urban planning);
- (3) *Social Advocacy* – including the social action strategies above, but also incorporating other pressure-building strategies to achieve goals, and organizing based on group solidarities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities.

There have been both critiques of Rothman and discussion of other models of CO within social work scholarship. Feminist scholar Cheryl Hyde (1996) suggests that women's organizations and feminist organizing were not sufficiently incorporated into Rothman's early model and that in general Rothman paid "scant attention" to the role of ideology. She also argues for the incorporation of "vibrant and passionate commitment" (p. 142) into an analysis of CO.

Sites and colleagues (2007) address the need to reassess community practices based on the neoliberal order that has succeeded the Fordist socioeconomic order. This involves incorporating the shifts in social, political, and economic arrangements of neoliberalism into models for social change and community practice. Rather than the conceptions of the Rothman model's three types of community practice (social planning, community organizing, and community development) they offer three newer conceptual alternatives that they argue are more useful for current conditions, including *flexible services, interest-group advocacy and coalition-building, and economic development and community building*. Flexible services may involve privatization of services previously in the government sector to community-based organizations and the expanded role of non-profits and private funders. Not all examples of these changes can adequately serve communities, thus generating anti-privatization responses. However, there are models that also suggest more emphasis on collaboration among community groups and multicultural practice. Interest group advocacy and coalition building involve both a push toward more inclusive development initiatives, as well as the need to create new forms of social regulation (e.g., living wage campaigns and environmental justice). Economic development may now involve more than housing or other economic initiatives and focus on building community assets and social capital development, or network building that brings these forms together (p. 39).

Sites et al. (2007) additionally see the future of community practice as needing to cross boundaries and contribute to social justice. To do this, they identify four boundaries that need to be addressed by 21st century organizers:

- social divides for example, between immigrant and native-born communities;
- spatial/political boundaries, that is, the linking of cities and suburbs over common issues, as well as development of cross-national coalitions;
- sectoral boundaries such as housing advocacy and social welfare advocacy or the community-labor divide;
- scalar boundaries that scale up or down to build organizational connections across local areas or work or across national boundaries (p.45-46).

CO also embraces community development as an activity that fits under its umbrella. There are several texts that cover this area of work in communities. One notable text that I have used in classes is by Soifer et al. (2014), and others were published around the same time such as Pyles (2021). However, it is not necessarily a topic that gets the attention and curricular emphasis as is the case in urban planning programs.

CO now takes place in a myriad of contexts and is not based on one specific model; therefore, many different methods and models are used in the world of organizing. Some groups are explicit in putting forth the necessity of confronting racism and inequality as systemic problems, while others simply try to work on everyday problems in communities without involving ideological discussions or issues of systemic inequalities, as in the Alinsky tradition (1969). Within social work education, CO is tied explicitly to the larger social justice mission of the profession. In my own work, I place an emphasis on community-labor coalitions and relationships and the entire realm of economic justice (see Reynolds & Simmons, 2021).

The models presented above demonstrate that the nature of CO is to evolve and adjust to the challenges of the various contexts and socioeconomic conditions within society. Moreover, there are many other useful sources on community organizing from a social work perspective and nonsocial work sources as well, such as the MidWest Academy, an institute that has trained many organizers. What is encouraging is that macro practice and CO are receiving a renewed focus in social work education and the social context demands it. CO also has an important organization, Association of Community Organization and Social Action (ACOSA) that sponsors this journal, sessions at social work conferences, as well as regional meetings in the social work profession and educational institutions. ACOSA's presence is critical to community organizing.

Advocacy, progressive, and transformative planning

One of my first exposures to the notion of progressive planning came in Pierre Clavel's *The Progressive City* (Clavel, 1986) in which he chronicles experiences in five cities in which municipal leaders attempted to create progressive

policies, and in which he defines and focuses on the role of planners in these cities.¹ Inherent in his formulations is that progressive planning involves participatory and redistributive policies. As progressive planning developed, various schisms in planning came to be recognized as people-based planning versus place-based planning. I note that different individuals and groups use different labels to define themselves: advocacy, progressive, or transformative. In this piece, I will use *progressive* as a general term and when discussing specific authors' pieces use their terminology. The different terms seem to vary and develop both historically and ideologically, as well as by the individual authors.

Urban planning, like social work, developed in response to the conditions in cities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. As planning developed, it took on issues such as traffic, sanitation, housing, and many physical aspects of urban life. The earliest planners were also influenced by the Settlement House movement and their emphasis on neighborhood improvement (Krumholz, 2018). Among the various people considered to be influential for early planning was Frederick Law Olmsted who emphasized the importance of parks for urban residents and is known for designing Central Park in New York City (Krumholz, 2018) and other locally important parks, including Bushnell Park in the downtown of my own city of Hartford. The history of urban planning is impressively recounted by scholar and practitioner Norman Krumholz in the introductory chapter of the edited volume *Advancing Equity Planning Now*. Krumholz (2018) also emphasized that the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s provided examples of victories from prolonged struggles that served as inspiration and models for equity planning. An earlier expression of the need for urban planning to face the social problems of urban decay authored by Needleman and Needleman in their important book, *Guerillas in the Bureaucracy* (1974), where they suggest that cities face financial constraints and city planners lack the requisite power to address the problems. Over time, and as a result of the differential impacts on urban residents of urban renewal, they identified two strands of urban planning: one was the call for regionalism and national resources to take on challenges, and the other was to extend the advocacy aspect of planning to those two groups of residents whose needs were ignored in past renewal projects (hence the seeds of those who would become the guerrillas in the bureaucracy) (Needleman & Needleman, 1974). As I see it, the activities of these guerrillas came to resemble community organizing.

Various tensions have existed in defining the purpose of urban planning between people-focused versus place-focused planning, its relationship to architecture education and practice, and the direction of professionalism within planning. Gleye (2015) provides an extensive discussion of these issues from both historical and contemporary vantages. He highlights an historical schism between design-oriented physical

planning and policy-oriented or socioeconomic planning. More recently, he characterizes these differences among planners as those who are oriented toward the physical aspects of cities – urban design and form – and those who are concerned with the social process of planning – citizen participation and questions of equity for those who live in a city (see also Szold, 2000). These issues continue in contemporary planning education and practice in which planning is often overshadowed or subsumed by architecture and engineering.

An extremely valuable example of some of the dilemmas facing progressive urban planners is proposed by Silverman et al. (2020). They relate their story of how city planners in Buffalo, New York, were obstinate in a debate with advocacy planners over both the inclusion of neighborhood representatives in the process of gathering viewpoints of different interest groups on the fate of local low-income neighborhoods, as well as whether in the distribution of the final version of the study, the strong voices of these neighborhoods should be included. The authors illustrate the various roles urban planners may play and how their allegiances may vary depending on to whom they feel responsible.

Ethical and professional standards in urban planning

As can be seen in the mission statements of planning organizations, there are some allusions to advocacy or progressive planning concerns, but how these issues play out within the profession is still a source of concern to many planners and planning educators, as is discussed below. The mission statements of the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) and the Code of Ethics of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) are succinct in comparison to equivalent documents in social work.

The AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct has been substantially revised and lengthened in recent years, and the documents do acknowledge some of the issues of concern to progressive planners in terms of inclusion and diversity, but there are other constituencies addressed by progressive planners besides those listed in the Code. Section A of the Code of Ethics emphasizes serving the public interest, acting with integrity, and, most importantly for progressive planners, working to achieve economic, social, and racial equity, as well as other criteria (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2021). There are additional sections entitled: Our Rules of Conduct; Advisory Opinions; Adjudication of Complaints; and Discipline of Members (<https://www.planning.org/ethics/ethicscode/>).

According to the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) (2022), it is apparent that the Board has made changes to its accreditation standards, as published in 2022, from my first read of it which was published in 2015. The 2022 version has six sections including the following: Preconditions to Accreditation, Strategic Planning and Progress, Students, Faculty, Curriculum and

Governance. Within the sections on Students and Faculty, the emphasis on Diversity is discussed as follows:

Diversity is an inclusive concept which encompasses, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, ability, educational attainment, first-generation status, spiritual beliefs, creed, culture, tribal affiliation, nationality, immigration status, political beliefs, and veteran status. (from both sections in relation to recruitment of students and faculty) (<https://www.planningaccreditationboard.org/accreditation-standards-2022>)

The actual accreditation standards are much more detailed, but the language and issues addressed in the whole of these two mission statements are very much oriented inward to the planning profession rather than to the social context that planners may encounter, issues that are emphasized more directly in the social work organizations' mission statements. As with community organizing in the larger enterprise of social work, progressive planners articulated their own sets of concerns, largely about social justice issues, as they defined their roles within the planning profession.

Equity, progressive, and transformative planning – history and literature

The development of equity or progressive planning involved planners who had ideological affinity with the social movements of the 1960s and strove for the inclusion of local residents into planning processes, and who eschewed traditional-planning doctrine as technocratic and distanced themselves from local residents (in particular, urban renewal programs). The notion of inclusion of the views and interests of local residents into local planning initiatives is consonant with community organizing. Several key texts and individuals are credited with formulating the important tenets in defining this approach to urban planning: Paul Davidoff (1965) on advocacy planning, and Norman Krumholz whose work in Cleveland served as an example of a new type of planning that represented the perspectives of the marginalized populations, labeled equity planning (see Krumholz & Forester, 1990). The two types of planning were closely related and departed from the notion of the non-ideological technocratic role for planners. In an issue of *Journal of Planning and Research* (Gleye, 2015) edited by Marisa Zapata and Lisa Bates (2015) that examined the status of equity planning in the contemporary era, they state:

... This planning model (equity planning) is confronting persistent and emerging challenges of social and economic disparity and political marginalization: long-term poverty and ghettoization of racialized minorities, the spatialized effects of the predatory financial sector and its collapse, and the impacts of the global recession including differential effects of government austerity. (p. 245)

In tracing the development of the strands of planning that were attentive to social, economic, and political structures and marginalization,

Angotti employed the term *progressive planning* (Angotti, 2018). He envisions that “(a)n indispensable part of progressive planning today in the focus that advocacy planning started with – opposition to the conditions that produce and reproduce the inequalities of race and class. Without that, advocacy would be just a conservative appeal for pluralism – everybody do your own thing and don’t challenge existing relations of economic and political power” (2018, “After the 1960s” section, para 4).

Marie Kennedy (2007, 2020) and Tom Angotti (2020) take these concepts further in arguing for “transformative community planning” (Kennedy, 2007). Kennedy argues that advocacy planning is now institutionalized in terms of planning education and practice, yet more is required than making room for community input into urban planning. In the contemporary context, she points out that the terrain of struggle has changed since the 1960s and 1970s: in this era, more urban redevelopment is privatized, leaving the community less space for input and resistance. She argues for transformative community planning in which planners acknowledge the political structures, as well as economic and social marginalizations. Planners need to pay more attention to the strengths within communities, recognize the planner’s own background and any implicit assumptions and biases, and facilitate and enhance community members’ decision-making roles.

Angotti (2020) analyzes the role of planning as cities developed during the 19th and 20th centuries and argues that it mostly served elites and financial entities (2020). During the 1960s, the trend for more radical planning emerged as certain planners joined in community movements against displacement resulting from urban renewal that displaced thousands of African Americans and other marginalized populations. This “insurgency” was named “advocacy planning.” Transformative planning emerged to include previously uninvolved constituencies and to use “bottom-up” methods of planning rather than top-down approaches in order to have community participation and perspectives as key components of urban or city planning. Angotti laments the means by which many of these endeavors have been coopted in this neoliberal era:

Neoliberalism spawned public-private partnerships that sapped the capacity of the public sector and promoted private interests . . . Instead of genuinely intersectional community organizing, professional planners began to create artificial rainbows that quickly disappear at every political turn. (2020, p. 7)

In their argument to develop a “political urban planning,” Grooms and Frimpong Boamah (2018) consider how the urban growth machine and advocacy planning interface and also suggest that planners have multiple roles to play in these disputes. They acknowledge that social justice has always been important to many urban scholars and practitioners. What is useful here

is their summary of the varieties of social justice insights with regard to urban planning:

... There is no dearth of evidence that normative planning theories and practice methodologies have failed to satisfactorily mitigate inequitable and unjust conditions in cities. That their number continues to grow—starting with Advocacy Planning and “evolving” into Equity Planning, Progressive Planning, Communicative Planning, Collaborative Planning, Emancipatory Planning, and more recently into conceptions of “Just” Sustainabilities, and “The Just City”—demonstrates planning scholars’ and educators’ continued commitment to securing significant improvement in urban conditions. (Grooms & Frimpong Boamah, 2018, p. 214)

Important for progressive or transformative planners is the existence of Planners Network (PN). This association of planners, scholars, students, and practitioners involved in all aspects of planning emphasizes that the organization’s purpose is to “promote fundamental change in our political and economic systems” (www.plannersnetwork.org). PN serves as a forum in which these individuals come together, share experiences and scholarships, and forge solidarity. They have a periodical (now on-line), a newsletter, hold conferences, and foster relationships for both practice and scholarship.

Just like their CO counterparts in social work, progressive planners (and those who identify with the other titles mentioned above) have struggled for recognition and validation within planning. This recognition may vary from institution to institution in terms of faculty members and curriculum, but these progressive planners and planning faculty are asserting their presence and carving out a role in the planning profession where issues of social justice, inclusion, inequality, and other issues are prominent. It is been pointed out to me, in versions of this article which others reviewed that progressive planners do not enjoy the same degree of recognition that community organizers do in social work.

Comparing community organizing and progressive planning

Is this an attempt to compare CO to Progressive Planning apples and oranges exercise or is this a comparison of Red Delicious apples and Fuji apples? Perhaps, a little of both. However, there are some areas that are worth teasing out and may point the way toward cooperation in practice.

Similarities

First, both are not mainstream areas in their respective discipline’s scholarship, education, and practice. For social work, the majority of social work students and practitioners are interested in a more clinical or individual level of the profession. For planners, many scholars and practitioners are focused on the more traditional and technocratic aspects of planning. Thus, both of

these groupings form their own networks and activities to cultivate relationships among the like-minded within their profession.

Second, both tend to focus on structural, economic, and social inequalities and incorporate these factors into their practice. One can perhaps find social workers working with immigrant communities and planners working with environmental justice organizations, or vice versa, or even working in the same arenas of social movements. For student internships or field placements (social work terminology), on occasion, students from both disciplines do their internships at the same types of organizations. This was confirmed for me by a former director of the UCLA Urban Planning Program in some e-mail exchanges (Tilley, C. personal communications, November 23, 2023).

Third, both relate to social movements and have to ascertain what the most effective ways of achieving the goals of these movements are, while at the same time respecting the knowledge and experiences of those most affected by the issues. This is sometimes referred to in both areas as recognizing one's *positionality* in the course of practice. Both professions also make use of community-based participatory action research.

Fourth, both engage in varying degrees to community development, albeit from different starting points. Social work includes building community capacity, as well as economic development, while urban planning is more focused on bricks and mortar projects. Of course, there are exceptions, but these are prominent to this observer.

Fifth, both are deeply tied historically and emerged from conditions in industrializing cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through different historical paths, sometimes crossing, and intertwining, perhaps sometimes at odds, the city is most often the scale of engagement.

Differences

First, while not all community organizing is confrontational, most community organizers would not shy away from some level of confrontation. This can mean bringing noisy crowds into City Hall over issues of concern. It can also mean shielding women seeking health services from Planned Parenthood from anti-choice groups who shout at these women and try to intimidate them. It can also mean sit-ins on the streets in Fight for 15 activities. Confrontation in the CO context does not include perpetrating violence, but it can include civil disobedience. These are generally not topics that urban planners consider in class discussions or urban planning texts, but there may be occasions where planners on their own or in concert with a community group for whom they work do engage in some aspects of confrontation.

Second, urban planners are trained with specific methodologies and with various technologies. GIS comes to mind, but there are others. What is interesting is that some social work scholars and schools are beginning to use GIS technology, but it is not an expectation that social workers will have this type of

technical knowledge. Both disciplines make use of sophisticated statistical techniques but are generally in very different subjects of inquiry. Many social work scholars use qualitative methods, and these methods complement many of the empowerment and redistributive goals of community organizing.

Third, the entities in which the two professions are employed generally vary. Planners often work in City Halls or regional planning agencies; community organizers generally work in local organizations who take their grievances to City Hall. CO people work in a huge variety of settings – neighborhood organizations, labor unions, regional advocacy groups on specific issues and elsewhere. Planners might move to new locations more readily than community organizers, however in both professions, effective individuals can be solicited for new positions, once their work is recognized.

Fourth, the academic preparation for both professions varies a great deal, based on which disciplines inform each area. Social work students are required to participate in two-year-long internships while planners do not face this requirement. Of interest here are that there not many universities in which joint MSW-MUP (or MCP) degree programs exist. Upon checking the Council on Social Education website in January 2023, the section on dual degrees noted that there were seven institutions that had joint degrees in social work and urban planning. However, in looking on the websites of all seven universities, this author could only find five of these joint degrees listed. If the other two institutions have these dual degrees that information is not found on their respective websites.

Fifth, social work is urging all social workers to become involved in politics and to pay attention to political campaigns. Some Schools of Social Work have courses, institutes, and outreach efforts on voter registration, issue campaigns, and other political aspects of practice. This is highly embraced by CO and

Table 1. Similarities & differences between progressive planners (pp) and community organizers (co).

SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
PP is not mainstream in urban planning education and practice; CO is accepted in social work, yet engages a minority of social workers	PP rarely get into confrontational activities, yet on occasion it can happen; CO engages in confrontational activities, including civil disobedience, but do not plan violent activities
Focus on forms of social justice and eradicating injustice	PP & CO use research different approaches and technologies based on their respective training but consistent with goals of empowerment & social justice
PP & CO relate to and engage in social movements, and engage in community based participatory research	Planners' employment tend to be in city halls and regional agencies; PPs must look hard to find employment in socially responsible jobs; CO find employment in various areas from neighborhood groups to advocacy groups to unions & elsewhere
PP & CO engage in community development making use of their respective skills and technical knowledge	PP academic preparation focuses on physical issues; CO academic preparation focused on social environment
Urban planning and social work both arose from the conditions in urban areas on the late 19 th and early 20 th centuries; each had its own focus and development as professions	Political participation not emphasized in PP Political participation encourage in CO & social work more generally

other macro-social work students, and some have gone on to have political careers. This is marked different from planning programs, although many planning students may also be involved in political campaigns on their own.

A summary of the above section is in [Table 1](#). It must be understood that the content in the rows within respective columns is not meant to be seen as direct comparisons, but rather as simply the varieties of differences and similarities.

Conclusion

Thus, apples and oranges or Red Delicious and Fuji apples? There are probably many different ways to assess whether CO and Progressive Planning have much in common. In terms of their disciplinary backgrounds and professional preparation – perhaps apples and oranges. In terms of the goals and values of each approach – Red Delicious and Fuji apples. Sometimes organizers and planners meet in the work that they do, as coworkers, allies or even (rarely) opponents.

At the heart of community organizing is the building of relationships, both between organizers and aggrieved parties, as well as among the community members so that sufficient trust exists to work together. Organizers – the best ones – do not try to manipulate community members into participation in issue campaigns but rather learn how to bring people together on issues. Urban communities affected by environmental degradation, for example, have come together under the banner of environmental justice or the fight against environmental racism and must deal with complex corporate structures to get to the root of the problem. Environmental justice is an area where progressive planners can and do contribute to their efforts and expertise.

Urban economic development is another realm of community organizing in that communities are demanding that urban development should produce specific gains for the areas in which large projects are built. Issues such as living wages, community benefit agreements, environmental remediation and hiring of local residents are prominent, and organizers bring various coalitions to city halls to present demands and insist that their perspectives are considered. Community-labor coalitions have been active on these demands, as well as immigrant rights and immigrant workers. Examples of these activities may be found on the website of the network now known as PowerSwitch Action, previously known as the Partnership for Working Families, www.powerswitchaction.org, a network of organizations who take up these various problems through collective action (see Reynolds & Simmons, 2021 for examples of these organizations).

Other aspects of CO involve deliberate involvement in local, regional, and state politics both in running local activists for elected office and developing a volunteer base for campaigns. One example of recent decades is the Working Families Party, which is active in several states.

Equity planners or progressive planners may face some of these issues in their practice environments and, depending upon their employment, can be part of the community organizations, adding a level of technical expertise to these movements. Or they can function within planning bureaucracies to ensure that community participation is genuine and meaningful. They may help shape the future of planning to be a greater force for social justice. In one of his most recent works, Krumholz (2018) frames the challenges for equity planners this way:

... they (equity planners) seek greater equity among different groups as a result of their work and prioritize the needs of the poor. ... They try to provide the poor with more resources and some countervailing power that, like universal suffrage and majority rule, create a more equal and just democratic society. (p. 1)

The contexts that both equity or progressive planners and community organizers face present each discipline with an interrelated set of issues, namely all of the impacts of inequality, wealth disparities, racial injustice, gender issues, the power of the private sector in urban development, and governmental policies that give little priority to the needs of the poor. Given the breadth of issues facing communities and their residents today, the challenges facing community organizing and progressive planning are often global as well as local in nature and require the creation of new models for the 21st century. In an impressive article published in this journal, Patterson and colleagues (Patterson et al., 2021) dissect the means by which a backlash against racial justice endures and serves as a means of sustaining neoliberal social policies. Deconstructing and reframing issues of social policy are projects for both progressive planners and community organizers to take on. Community organizers and progressive planners can work together in local coalitions to craft solutions to contemporary urban problems, and they can both take part in larger social movements. They can learn from each other and complement their respective skill sets. Many of their goals are the same, and coalescing in the many urban social movements can strengthen the possibilities for social justice.

Note

1. Although I differed from Clavel's inclusion of Hartford as progressive city due to the focus on the late Nicholas Carbone as a progressive leader (see Simmons, 1996), I gained a great deal from Clavel's book and subsequent work.

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