Q: How are the social, political and economic changes in society shaping planning methodology?

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In the middle of a frustrating session, trying to understand why Stata® (a popular statistical software program) would not read my complex data file on day laborers, I am reminded of my task to reflect on the meaning of planning methods in the context of social, political, and economic changes in the city. As my frustration with Stata® suggests, much of how we collect data remains the same. We are still undertaking costly surveys, developing complex statistical models to interpret our data, and coding our information so that we can create visually appealing and powerfully analytic displays of geography of varied social strata. We have also come to fine-tune the art of collecting data through archival research, conversation, observation, and participation. What then is new about planning methods? Perhaps more importantly, we should ask ourselves how planners and teachers of planning can better understand the "what" and "why" of social events in cities. Sound data collection often tells us "what" is going on and, depending on the utility and appropriateness of the method, answers the "why." Knowing your methods well continues to be central to good planning.

While collecting data has changed very little for planners and other students of social science, the art of analysis, interpretation, and presentation has developed significantly. I do not mean to suggest that data collection methods have not been refined, altered, or even discarded, but rather that we still rely to a large degree on surveys, polls, and interviews with little reflection on their utility and limitations. Often, "getting the data" takes precedence over, for example, theory-building to guide one's selection of method or regression model, or practical considerations like asking simple questions rather than a series of questions that only end up frustrating and confusing both respondent and analyst. Balancing how one collects, organizes and makes sense of and deciphers data is central to better planning and applied research.

But teaching research methods is often like following a recipe. A research question is posed, a method identified, and a chronological stepwise formula developed. Yet, urban phenomena are rarely ordered, so why should methods be likewise? Certainly, some research approaches need to follow prescribed protocols such as the development of models and survey instruments. Other approaches, equally powerful in their ability to analyze, are inductive. Understanding deductive or inductive research processes and which approach may best serve a particular project should be based on reviewing the large and rich literature on methodology, participating in seminar discussion on the topic, and undertaking other learning activities. When students and teachers of urban planning learn and teach methods, an equal amount of time has to be devoted to methodological theory.

Computer-aided analysis of data entered the 21st Century two decades ago and hasn't looked back—reaching fever pitch in the 1990s as new software versions regularly update older ones and new programs are released almost yearly. As a result, our ability to tease out complex urban findings has

increased ten-fold. No less surprising is our ability to mix methods that in past times were seen as distinctly separate. Today, still-imaging, geographic information systems mapping, multivariate modeling, and text analysis can all be interfaced not only on one monitor with one computer, and more importantly, integrated within each. This multi-methodological approach to research is entirely consistent with planning's multidisciplinarity and challenges the dichotomous and parochial notion that methods are either qualitative or quantitative. The end result is a broader, more holistic approach to carrying out planning research.

UCLA's Department of Urban Planning is fortunate to be in Los Angeles for many reasons, not least of those being our ability to undertake inquiry in a metropolis unique in many ways. As a harbinger for cities elsewhere in the United States and the world, Los Angeles provides the planning field with a test of what applied and scholarly research is and what it might become. Developing theories that reflect on and help us understand poverty, regionalism, unemployment, trade, immigration, space and geography, zoning, public and private land use, transportation, and housing has produced a Los Angeles school of thought on these and other planning issues. What we have not done as well as a department is more fully integrate methods into our curriculum, degree requirements, and the general culture of our planning program. However, being able to train and develop a cadre of planning professionals and academicians to properly collect, analyze, and present data rounds out a planning education necessary to plan and teach about the multi-everything city.

Over the years, UCLA and indeed the planning field in general, has evolved for the better. As planning professionals and scholars, our scope of employment has expanded to the point where planners are found in most every sector of the "planning, policy, management, public" sphere. Planners are finding

themselves increasingly reliant on applied methods to better understand social, economic, political, and other urban issues that may not be easily explained by well-known and developed theories. Data, if properly collected, analyzed, and placed into its proper context, provides the confidence from which to refute and/or corroborate complex theories that attempt to explain perplexing issues. The answer to these difficult-to-explain social phenomena lies in our ability to fashion research questions balanced with sound theoretical and methodological applications. Planning for the city requires an approach no less serious or thorough - We owe it to future planners, planning academicians, and habitants of cities.

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