Path Dependence and Plan Formation: Envisioning and Implementing Chicago's Plan for Transformation

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Paper presented at the 26th Annual AESOP Congress in Ankara, Turkey, July 2012

Abstract

Over the past decade, the concept of path dependency has begun to appear in planning literature with increasing frequency as planning scholars have sought to explain historical continuity in a variety of urban policy issues including the economic development of regions, the provision of infrastructure and transit and the organization of planning processes. However, while path dependence offers a useful theoretical framework for exploring continuity and change in urban planning and policy, it remains an under-theorized and underutilized concept in planning.

This paper uses historical institutional analysis to investigate and interpret the conceptualization, planning and implementation of the public housing redevelopment program in Chicago. The paper argues that the evolution of Chicago's public housing program between the 1950s and the 1990s left an institutional structure, in which many local actors were deeply invested, that shaped and constrained efforts to create and implement redevelopment plans. Chicago's public housing program initially proved resistant to change. While it did eventually change, this change was highly contested and the resulting plan for redeveloping Chicago's public housing continued to reflect the institutional structure and corresponding power relations under which it was created. This institutional structure filtered attempts to develop a coherent approach to applying the HOPE VI program, a federal program which funded the revitalization of public housing, in Chicago and framed the process through which actors and resources were rallied in order to implement this approach.

Drawing on interviews and a detailed history of Chicago's public housing program between 1937 and 2007, this paper attempts to further understanding of how institutional path dependency shapes plan formation and implementation and the implications of this for urban growth and change.

1. Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, the concept of path dependency has begun to appear in planning literature with increasing frequency. The reason for this growing interest appears to be a desire to explain historical continuity and the resistance to change being observed in a variety of urban phenomena ranging from the economic development of regions to the provision of infrastructure and transit to the organization of planning processes. Yet, planning scholars, while increasingly referring to plans, policies and processes as path dependent, have rarely engaged with the concept of path dependence in a systematic or deep fashion. References to path dependence are made to suggest the importance of history in shaping the outcomes of a particular case without theoretical development or empirical support with a few notable exceptions (c.f. Moulaert et al. 2007; Henderson, Bowlby and Raco 2007; Pflieger et al. 2009 and Sorenson 2010). Despite growing recognition of that path dependence offers a potentially useful theoretical framework for exploring continuity and change in urban planning and policy, it remains an under-theorized and underutilized concept in planning scholarship.

This paper is an attempt to do three things: first, to provide a brief outline of a theoretical framework of path dependence as it applies to planning processes; second, to use historical institutional analysis to investigate and interpret the conceptualization, planning and implementation of the public housing redevelopment program in Chicago; and, third, to reflect on the implications of this theoretical framework and analysis both for planning practice and for planning scholarship. Underlying these three endeavors is an attempt to explain why Chicago's public housing program, a program that was glaringly unjust and inefficient, so stubbornly resist change. Chicago's public housing program was initially considered a model to which other cities across the US should aspire. Less than 15 years after its founding, its esteem had fallen such that it was already being considered as an example of how not to undertake public housing. Despite widespread recognition of its flaws, Chicago's public housing program retained the same basic structure that had garnered such criticism for another forty years. What explains this persistence? Further, what effect did this historical path have on efforts during the 1990s to revitalize and reform Chicago's public housing?

This research initially began as an investigation of Chicago's public housing program between 1989 and 1999. This period which began with the initiation of the Mixed Income New Communities (MINCs) program and the formation of the National Commission on Severely Distressed public housing and ended with the release of the Plan for Transformation of Chicago's public housing, was chosen because it encapsulated a 'policy window' (Kingdon 1995) during which Chicago's public housing program was restructured and redeveloped after decades of inertia. This initial research focused on how a new direction for Chicago's public housing was chosen, by whom and for what ends. This research found that the eventual agreement on how to restructure and redevelop Chicago's public housing had been produced by an (unequal) coalition of the variety of different actors noted above and that the inclusion of several unexpected actors was the result of the exercise of their ability to impede the planning process and force their inclusion (Gebhardt 2009 and 2010).

This initial 'snapshot' case study is where most planning studies would have ended. However, the results of this initial research were unsatisfying for two reasons. First, while it explained the changes that took place during the policy window and the negotiations that led to the new strategy for Chicago's public housing set forth in the Plan for Transformation, it did not explain why change of some sort had not come earlier. Every single actor involved in the process agreed that the program that existed in 1989 was broken, yet this was the same program that had existed for 30 years. Why and how had it lasted so long despite being so clearly deficient? Second, and perhaps more interestingly, the negotiations between the different actors were framed by inherited institutional constraints. Setting a new path for Chicago's public housing required nearly a decade of highly contentious battles and the alteration or elimination of many existing institutional structures. These institutions were absolutely essential for explaining why certain actors were able to force their inclusion in the planning process and why certain approaches required dramatic changes. The snapshot approach revealed that these institutional structures existed, but not where they came from or why they persisted.

The rest of this paper describes Chicago's public housing program prior to the policy window that opened in the 1990s as path dependent and examines the implications of this conclusion. The first section provides a brief summary of the concept of path dependence. The subsequent three sections describe how the path of Chicago's public housing program was first set, then maintained and finally changed. The final section examines the implications of this for planning theory and practice.

2. Theoretical Framework

The term path dependency provides a label for empirical observations and intuitions about the historical continuity of institutions and organizations (Kay 2005, 558). At its most basic, path dependence is the assertion that it is possible to identify a clear historic pattern in which some initial often historically distant event(s) change the probability of later events. As a result, some are more likely to happen than others.

Path dependence originated in economics as a means of explaining the adoption and persistence of technologies. The first to articulate this concept was David (1985). David used the example of the persistence of the QWERTY keyboard despite its inefficient design to illustrate how, once a particular technology is adopted by a large number of users it becomes increasingly difficult to challenge even if other, better options are available and the original circumstances that prompted design no longer exist. The concept was later elaborated on by Arthur (1994) who argued that the persistence of technology could be explained by high set up costs reducing the incentive to switch and learning and coordination effects along with adaptive expectations increasing the value or expected value of an existing technology to individuals as they both learn how to use the technology more efficiently and benefit from others adoption of the same technology. In both arguments, increasing returns and positive feedback "lock-in" the original advantage of a given technology over its rivals. Douglass North (1990) used this same logic to explain the role of the constraints imposed by historic institutions on economic growth arguing that path dependence in institutions helps explain anomalous economic performance.

Path dependence has since been borrowed and adapted by scholars in other disciplines. Of particular interest for this paper is the application of path dependence to politics and policy formation. Kay (2005) suggests that path dependency is a useful and emerging conceptual tool for understanding the public policy process because it allows observers to unpack dynamic processes as they unfold over time and to better understand the historical antecedents of a particular policy. Pierson (2000, 2004) presents the most developed conceptualization of path dependency as it applies to public policy. He argues that policy outcomes are the result of historical events, both large and small. The timing and sequencing of events matter; even small events that happen early in in a sequence can have profound impacts on outcomes and once a particular course of action is initiated can become increasingly difficult to reverse. Thus, starting from relatively similar conditions, it is possible to arrive a wide range of outcomes.

Drawing on the literature in economics, Pierson (2004) emphasizes how actions in the political and policy making realms can become self-reinforcing through the positive feedback as "the relative benefits of the current activity compared with other possible options increase over time". The longer a particular path is followed the more actors invest in a particular course of action and build institutions, policies and partnerships around it and the more the relative benefit of continuing this course of action and the relative cost of switching to an alternative increases. Eventually, alternatives that may once have been feasible become unattainable (Pierson and Skocpol 2002). Thelen (1999) makes a similar argument stating that once a path is chosen and a system is in place, actors adapt their strategies to reflect and work with and within this system. This also serves to reinforce this system as the new relationships and institutional arrangements can increase the cost of exit. Over time, the amount of sunk costs as well as the number of vested interests increase can "lock-in" a particular path making changing course difficult (Thelen 1999).

In Mahoney's (2000) formulation at the outset there must be more than one competing choice available. The choice made at this point in time is consequential because it creates a pattern that endures over time. Mahoney (2000) suggests that there may be several different mechanisms at work maintaining path dependent sequences. The first is efficiency. An institution, policy or program is reproduced because it serves a function for an overall system and the transaction costs associated with changing the original decision are prohibitive. The second is legitimacy. Here decisions that have been made are viewed as legitimate because they fit with broad institutional norms while alternatives lack this legitimacy. The final is power. In this case, elite actors with power reinforce and support a path because it suits their purposes. While only one of these mechanisms is necessary to initiate and maintain a path, all three appear to be present in the Chicago case.

While path dependency describes the persistence of particular institutions, policies and programs over time, it suggests that the old is not scrapped every time something new comes along or is proposed. Change continues as social, economic and political fluctuations put pressure on an existing path. However, this change is bounded change until something erodes or swamps the mechanisms of reproduction that generate continuity (Pierson 2000, 265). Rather than these pressures causing dramatic shifts in an existing path, new ideas and strategies are assimilated and made to fit the that path. New institutional layers are formed as the new ideas are coopted into existing structures (c.f. Mouleart et al 2007). Institutions may be changed through layering as new rules or structures are added on top of what already exists. Institutions may be reoriented to serve new purposes or reflect new power dynamics. They are not abolished altogether, but rather are changed to reflect external demands in order to survive. These new layers represent only small changes individually, but cumulatively may result in a fundamental change in an institution (Thelen 1999). As the below case suggests, the longer a policy or program remains in place, the more external pressures it will be subject to and the more institutional layers it will accumulate.

Path dependency is potentially useful for explaining continuity and persistence of institutions, policies and programs. However, this does not help explain how and when change does occur. To resolve this problem, scholars of path dependency have incorporated the concept of "critical junctures" (Collier and Collier 1991, Thelen 1999, Katznelson 2003). Critical junctures are part of a punctuated equilibrium model wherein endogenous contradictions and/or exogenous forces result in crisis points at which an existing path ceases to be sustained. At these points, path shaping takes place and alternative systems compete for dominance (Davies 2004). Drawing on Mahoney's (2000) observations about the mechanisms sustaining path dependent sequences, critical junctures represent moments at which the costs of switching to a different path are lessened or an existing path loses legitimacy or powerful supporters.

Finally, Harvey's (1989) concept of artifacts adds a useful spatial dimension to the path dependency literature. "Artifacts" (Harvey 1989, 6) are physical, social and cultural constructs, the result of the process of creating a city, that "dominate daily practices and confine subsequent courses of action." Generally concerned with the operation of institutions or economies, path dependency typically does not explore the way a particular course of action produces urban space or the way that these physical manifestations serve to constrain future actions. Patterns in the built environment would certainly seem to match descriptions of path dependent sequences as contingent decisions that occur early in a process can constrain later events, particularly as actors make investments and decisions based on this initial pattern. Studies of national housing systems that have applied path dependency have noted that one factor that contributes to the path dependent nature of these systems is that housing is expensive, lasting and place bound (c.f. Bengtsson and Ruonavaara 2010). When looking at Chicago's public housing program, it is impossible to separate out the local policy arena, the organization and the housing itself. The politics of public housing, the structure of the CHA and the expensive, immovable public housing itself all contributed

The next three sections provide a history of Chicago's public housing program from its inception in the 1930s through to the turmoil and eventual restructuring in the 1990s. These sections apply the concept of path dependence in an effort to identify what event or events set the program on the trajectory that carried it through second half of the 20th Century. It also describes how this path persisted (and was maintained) despite considerable external pressure to change. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of how the persistence of the path over three decades and the steps taken to maintain it constrained efforts to conceive a new path for the program during the 1990s.

3. Data and Analysis

3.1. Establishing the Path

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was established in 1937 by Mayor Edward Kelly. The board of the organization was originally filled with many of Chicago's most progressive reformers. The board was led by prominent African American, Robert Taylor. Elizabeth Wood, a progressive reformer herself, filled the position of the CHA's first executive secretary. The CHA was considered at the time to be a model public housing authority known for cutting-edge design and conscientious management. Despite the progressive orientation of the CHA (and at times because of it) by the time Elizabeth Wood left the organization in 1954, Chicago's public housing program was on a path that would lead it to be considered forty years later as one of the worst in the country marked by poorly constructed high-rise developments ill-suited to the needs of families located on enormous, isolated, segregated tracts and an inefficient, chaotic bureaucracy incapable of maintaining these buildings. This need not have been the path but for decisions made at the outset of the program, and, indeed, the leaders of the CHA pushed hard during these initial years for a quite different program. Yet once the path was set, it became increasingly difficult to change producing the program that became one of the most notorious in the country. This section details the setting of the path.

The CHA was established in response to the 1937 Housing Act which authorized and funded the establishment of local public housing authorities. The CHA initially constructed housing for war workers and returning WWII veterans. These early housing developments were low rise and built in both slum and greenfield locations. In keeping with the requirements of the authorizing Act which tied public housing to slum clearance, the CHA's leadership, dominated by housing reformers, gave preference to new projects on cleared slums. While not consciously segregated, the policy in place at the time was to fill public housing projects according to "neighborhood composition" wherein the number of families admitted to a new public housing complex would mirror the composition of the surrounding neighborhood. This rule meant that, despite concerns about the progressive tendencies of the leadership of the CHA, public housing itself remained acceptable to most residents and politicians and was built in neighborhoods throughout the city (Meyerson and Banfield 1955, Hunt 2009).

The nature of Chicago's public housing program changed in 1946. In that year, the CHA began selecting tenants to fill two new temporary housing developments. Both were greenfield sites near existing, predominantly white neighborhoods. With the conclusion of WWII, demand for public housing increased substantially as returning veterans sought inexpensive housing options. To deal with this pressure as well as demands for equality from black veterans, the choice was made to pursue racial integration for these developments. The integration of the first, on the northwest side, went unnoticed. The attempt to integrate Airport Homes on the southwest side raised the ire of white residents of the adjacent neighborhood. They protested the move and attempted to intimidate the project's black families into leaving.

This event precipitated decisions that would set a path for the CHA that would persist until the late-1980s. The unrest at Airport Homes in 1946 alerted Chicago's white aldermen to the CHA's intentions to integrate new public housing. The CHA had, up until that point, been protected by a sympathetic mayor in Kelly. His ouster in 1947 exposed the CHA to a backlash from various sources. Many of the CHA's powers for slum clearance and site selection were taken away by the State legislature in 1947 and, in 1949, the Chicago City Council was afforded veto power over the selection of sites for new public housing construction (Meyerson and Banfield 1955, Hirsch 1983, Hunt 2009). If there was a single, contingent event that set Chicago's public housing program's path, this was it. It was the fight over integrating Airport Homes that resulted in greater City Council interference in the CHA. And it was this fight that resulted in decreased decision-making authority of Taylor and Wood.

Previously, Taylor and Wood, while not entirely trusted by the City's aldermen, had been allowed to operate the CHA largely free from Council control and built public housing in both black and white neighborhoods on both clearance and greenfield sites. The ultimate shape of the program had yet to be established. Had the issue of integration been raised at a later point, after Taylor and Wood had established a clear path, it is possible that the pattern of public housing sites would have been different. Further, as the following paragraphs explore, had Taylor and Wood not expended their political capital on this battle at this point in time, they would have maintained some ability to affect some of the subsequent decisions regarding the physical design of Chicago's public housing. As it was, neither survived the fight over Airport Homes with sufficient power to shape later events.

Between 1948 and 1950 a series of proposals for new public housing sites were presented by the Chicago City Council and the CHA. The proposals put forward by the City's aldermen were decidedly in favor of building large projects in the City's African American neighborhoods while avoiding nearly all white neighborhoods. In contrast, the CHA presented a series of proposals for building a large number of units on both slum clearance and greenfield sites. The majority of the CHA's original commissioners were in favor of a large public housing program that would be built both on vacant sites and on slum sites throughout the city. They also favored a program that was desegregated (Meyerson and Banfield 1955, 45). The demand for housing in Chicago was substantial at the time with nearly a half million people living in neighborhoods considered slums (Meyerson and Banfield 1955, 91). Large slum clearance projects were perceived as necessary because the scope of the slum problem in Chicago was considered so large that small renewal efforts would be overwhelmed.

The CHA lost every fight with the City Council over new public housing sites. Eventually, after arguing for several years for a broader program, the CHA was forced to accept the City Council's sites in order to be able to build at all (Hunt 2009, 91). Robert Taylor resigned in exasperation in 1950 after it became clear that Chicago's public housing program had become a vehicle for promoting redevelopment and reinforcing segregation (Hunt 2009, Meyerson and Banfield 1955, Hirsch 1983).

As Hunt (2009) argues, the City Council's blatant racism helps to explain why little or no public housing was built in predominantly white neighborhoods, but is insufficient to explain the extensive building of public housing in the City's black neighborhoods. In this, the progressive tendencies of the early leaders of the CHA also played a part as they attempted to improve the conditions of poor blacks and slum dwellers. Driven in parts by the available funds, by the amount of substandard housing in the city and by a desire to create modern neighborhoods to replace old slums, the CHA pushed for large-scale projects over a more limited, scattered site approach (Hunt 2009). The construction of large amounts of public housing in the City's predominantly black wards was also supported by African American aldermen who sought to consolidate votes and political power in their wards (Meyerson and Banfield 1955). Yet despite the concern with slum clearance and large projects, had the CHA retained some authority over site selection and the greenfield sites that it proposed been accepted, the concentration and density of the projects built in the City's black neighborhoods would not have needed to be so high. This density proved to have disastrous consequences.

Another key characteristic of Chicago's public housing program, one that has been intensely criticized, was the predominance of high-rise buildings. The original CHA manual specifically directed the organization's architects to design only buildings with a "domestic" and "non-institutional" appearance (Meyerson and Banfield 1955, 95). In the early-1950s, the CHA experimented with high-rise buildings. The first elevator buildings, Dearborn Homes opened in 1950. Loomis Courts opened in 1951. Further complicating the situation, the CHA pursued a well-intentioned program to design and fill flats that met the needs of perspective tenants. As the majority of perspective tenants were large families, the majority of new units being built were for large families. This had the effect of concentrating large numbers of children into the new public housing.

While she originally supported experimentation with high-rise developments, Elizabeth Wood quickly identified that low-rise projects were a better form for public housing particularly for families with children (Hunt 2009, Meyerson and Banfield 1955). In 1952(!), less than two years after the first high-rise buildings had been completed in Chicago, Elizabeth Wood wrote a piece for *Architectural Forum* where she stated that the experiment with high-rises had been a mistake and argued instead for low-rise buildings more suitable for families. Experience with the first two high-rise developments made clear the flaws of this approach. Yet, by that point the path had already been set and Wood's authority was all but gone. Local politicians and civic leaders had reached a mutually satisfactory agreement over the shape of Chicago's public housing program which required high density high-rise development. This approach was further bolstered by the position of national level bureaucrats who viewed high-rise development as the most cost effective design. The cost restrictions imposed by the federal government coupled with the structure of Chicago's public housing program meant that high-rise buildings were inevitably the "best" choice. Thus, in a rather dramatic illustration of path dependency nearly 14,000 units including high-rise buildings at Harold Ickes Homes (1955), Grace Abbott Homes (1955), Henry Horner Homes (1957), Stateway Gardens (1958), Cabrini-Green (1958 and 1962), Rockwell Gardens (1961) and Robert Taylor Homes (1962), were built by the CHA using a model and designs that the leadership within the CHA had clearly identified as flawed.

Between 1948 and 1952, Elizabeth Wood and her staff became increasingly isolated from the CHA board. In a further confirmation of the chosen path of Chicago's public housing program, Wood was fired in 1954, after several years of increasing tension with the CHA Board over design, siting and integration culminated in a scathing letter criticizing their lack of commitment to achieving social goals. After Wood's departure former General William Kean took over as Executive Director. He lifted all racial quotas imposed on CHA developments, the result of which was that black demand for public housing quickly overwhelmed white demand. Kean changed the focus of the CHA from one in which progressive social goals were paramount to one in which administrative efficiency was most important. This fit neatly within the chosen path. In 1956 Mayor Richard J. Daley appointed a close political ally, Charles Swibel, to the CHA board. This move was intended to bring the CHA more closely under the control of Chicago's political machine. Swibel assumed the chairmanship of the CHA board in 1963 which insured the Authority's quiescence.

3.2. Maintaining the Path

Political, social and economic changes at both the local and national level resulted in considerable pressure being applied to the path of Chicago's public housing program at several points in the program's history. There were multiple points at which CHA and City of Chicago decision-makers were presented with opportunities to change the trajectory of the CHA. While minor changes were made, at each point the cost of switching to a different path was judged too high. The overall path remained constant. In keeping with the observations of Pierson (2000) and Thelen (1999), new rules and institutional structures were created and fit into the existing path. These layers, while they had little immediate impact on the program, had profound implications when a policy window opened in the 1990s and attempts to shape a new path for Chicago's public housing program were begun. This section discusses the period between 1955 and 1990 and the challenges that were made to the path of Chicago's public housing program and the steps that were taken to maintain it.

Chicago's public housing program followed the basic path set out in the early-1950s without major challenge until, in 1966, a group of CHA residents filed a lawsuit against the CHA. The product of the changing social environment of the Civil Rights era, this lawsuit claimed that the CHA had engaged in racially discriminatory project siting and tenant selection procedures in violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by locating all but a handful of public housing projects in predominantly African-American neighborhoods and placing African-American tenants only in the segregated projects. In 1969, a federal judge ruled on the lawsuit against the CHA in favor of the plaintiffs. Known as the Gautreaux decision after the lead plaintiff in the case, this ruling divided Cook County by census tract into "general areas" (areas with less than 30% African-American population) and "limited areas" (areas with 30% or more African-American population). For every unit of public housing built in a limited area, three units had to be built in a general area. This legal decision put pressure on the CHA to change and offered an alternative path for Chicago's public housing program. The standard practice in Chicago of deferring to aldermen regarding development decisions in their ward essentially rendered General Areas off-limits to new public housing construction. As the Gautreaux plaintiffs and the presiding judge argued at the time, this was an opportunity for the CHA to change its practices and create a very different program (*Gautreaux v Chicago Housing Authority* 1969).

Rather than pursing an alternative path, opening additional neighborhoods to public housing and establishing a scattered site approach, the City and the CHA instead chose to halt new public housing construction altogether (Popkin et al. 2000, Wilen and Stasel 2006). Opening the City's white neighborhoods to public housing, which was by this point occupied nearly exclusively occupied by African American's, could not be done without enormous political cost. This calculation was made plain in 1971 by a request by the CHA to postpone making public sites for new public housing that had been located in white neighborhoods so that they would not become "the central issue of the upcoming campaign" (Wade 1970 quoted in Hunt 2009, 250) and the immediate and ferocious response from the City's white aldermen when this request was denied and the list was made public immediately before an election. A scattered site program would have enraged white voters, introduced black voters into white wards and drained black voters from black wards. None of these were acceptable outcomes for local politicians, black or white. The status quo worked for those in power, and they saw no need to change it.

The CHA again was pressured to change in the mid-1970s. Under Charles Swibel, CHA projects were allowed to deteriorate as a result of rampant fraud, cronyism, mismanagement and corruption. Poor engineering and lax maintenance also contributed to a precipitous decline in buildings. During Swibel's tenure, the CHA's employment rolls ballooned and maintenance of CHA properties declined significantly (Hunt 2009, Sheppard 1982). Despite ample evidence of managerial incompetence and considerable pressure from tenant groups during the 1970s, the CHA proved "immune to reform" (Hunt 2009, 214). During the 1970s, CHA residents formed the Chicago Housing Tenants Organization (CHTO) and began a campaign to force the CHA to improve conditions in Chicago's public housing. Here again, those that benefitted and drew power from the existing configuration of Chicago's public housing program used their authority to adjust institutional structures to maintain the overall trajectory of the program. The residents' campaign led to the creation of the Central Advisory Council (CAC) which would include residents from each project in a monitoring and oversight board. However, the CAC was populated with resident leaders hand-picked by the CHA and beholden to Swibel. Local Advisory Councils (LACs) were set up at each site ostensibly to provide greater tenant control over CHA projects. In practice, these were used to discourage resident activism and give the illusion of resident authority.

In addition to pressure from below, pressure was applied to the CHA from above. As the fiscal crisis of the 1970s deepened and greater emphasis was placed on the efficient operation of programs such as public housing, nine different reports were written by auditors and consultants between 1978 and 1982 outlining numerous and widespread problems with the CHA's management. As with before, little was done to actually reform the organization. The CHA as it existed benefited some powerful interests including black politicians, the Democratic machine and Swibel himself. It was happily ignored by most everyone else. In 1982 the most comprehensive and scathing review of the CHA was written by Oscar Newman on behalf of the federal government (Sheppard 1982). It outlined in excruciating detail managerial intransigence, less-than-competent senior leadership and a bloated bureaucracy that resulted in crumbling buildings and an organization that resisted any attempts at reform (Hunt 2009). The CHA ran a deficit every year and public housing buildings were not maintained.

In 1981, newly elected Mayor Jane Byrne had appointed a new executive director, Andrew Mooney, who brought credentials as an advocate of "good government". However, Swibel, a major contributor to Mayor Byrne's campaign, was allowed to continue to serve as CHA chairman. After Newman's report was released in 1982, HUD finally forced Swibel to resign his position under threat of a federal takeover of the CHA. HUD's report and the dismissal of Swibel offered another chance to change the trajectory of the CHA, but again the cost of doing this, both in political terms for the politicians that benefitted from the existing arrangement and, for the first time, in fiscal terms[1] given the enormous maintenance backlog, prevented change. Also, as with earlier actions taken to preserve the existing path of the CHA, the legacy of Swibel's tenure as chairman of the CHA and the political fight with Mayor Byrne over his resignation left lasting legacy that would affect later attempts to restructure and redevelop Chicago's public housing. The fight to preserve Swibel led to a period of distrust between HUD and the CHA. It also led to a period of regular turnover of CHA leadership. Mooney lasted only two years as director of the CHA and accomplished little. Between 1982 and 1988, the CHA had three different chairmen and five different executive directors. The regular turnover in CHA leadership resulted in the further deterioration of the housing stock and of the CHA's relationship with residents and with HUD.

The upheaval within the CHA was reflective of the changes occurring in Chicago's political landscape during the 1980s. In 1983, after one term as mayor, Mayor Byrne lost the Democratic primary to Harold Washington. While Harold Washington's election as mayor altered the Chicago political landscape making it more inclusive of disaffected minorities and neglected neighborhoods, the governing coalition he assembled ultimately did little to change the CHA. Mayor Washington remained loyal to the public housing residents who helped secure his election victory, strongly opposing tentative plans to demolish public housing that began to appear during his mayoralty (Ziemba 1987a). Nevertheless while he supported many reforms, Washington remained a Chicago politician and, thus he ultimately did little better than his predecessors in changing the culture of the CHA. The status quo continued to benefit too many powerful players to be changed. One of the Mayor's powerful supporters, Renault Robinson, was appointed chairman of the CHA. Robinson's support of Washington secured him the job and insulated him despite repeated failures and poor management (Polikoff 2006). Robinson finally resigned as chairman in early-1987 when his performance became an impediment to Mayor Washington's reelection campaign (Spielman and Golden 1987).

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[1] One of the common myths about Chicago's public housing program is that the buildings deteriorated because there was insufficient national government funding to maintain them. As Newman's report details, up until the early-1980s, the CHA had sufficient funds to cover maintenance costs, but corruption, incompetence and poor organization meant the money was not used effectively. Here is a case where initial political costs of switching to a different path eventually led to and were compounded by actual financial costs.

As with previous opportunities, the choice was made to preserve the existing path by adding another new institutional layer. The constant turnover in CHA leadership meant that the agency was not able to pursue a coherent strategy to maintain deteriorating units, reduce criminal activity, improve budgetary practices or reform bureaucratic inefficiencies. In 1987, as they had in 1982, HUD threatened to take over the CHA. The CHA's lack of progress on construction of scattered site public housing had led the Gautreaux plaintiffs to repeatedly return to the Gautreaux court to try to force the CHA to comply with the consent decree. Beginning in 1980, Polikoff requested the appointment of a receiver to implement the scattered site program. This request was denied in 1980. In 1981, the Gautreaux case was assigned to a new judge, Marvin Aspen, who repeatedly accepted the CHA's arguments that the leadership turnover was responsible for the delays and pushed for the two sides to resolve their differences outside of court and without a receiver. Finally, the 1987 revelations of financial mismanagement that forced the resignation Robinson led HUD to strongly suggest that the CHA consider hiring a private management firm. Eventually, faced with enormous maintenance and new construction obligations, a lack of funds for these programs, and hoping to stave off direct HUD, Mayor Washington chose to support a receiver for CHA's scattered site program. The costs of more drastic changes (i.e. allowing HUD to take over the CHA) were judged to be too high in political and financial terms, but also, for the first time, in terms of the number of jobs that might be lost through a major reconfiguration of the program.

In May 1987, the Habitat Company was named by Judge Aspen as receiver. As receiver, Habitat was empowered to oversee the scattered-site program including "all CHA non-elderly public housing development programs which may in the future be authorized by HUD" while the Gautreaux decision remained in effect (*Gautreaux v Pierce and Chicago Housing Authority* 1987, 2). Thus all new family public housing construction in Chicago became the responsibility of the Habitat Company while jurisdiction over senior public housing buildings and over rehabilitation remained under CHA control. Over the next five years, the Habitat Company would do little more than the CHA to expand the supply of public housing or encourage integration. Again, decisive change was avoided through the addition of a new institutional arrangement that had little immediate impact on the overall trajectory of the program. Yet, as with earlier adjustments made to preserve the existing system, these new institutional arrangements only prolonged the inevitable critical juncture and would eventually complicate later path shaping efforts when that juncture did arrive.

3.3. Critical Juncture

The period between 1989 and 1999 appears to encapsulate a 'policy window' (Kingdon 1995) during which Chicago's public housing program was reshaped after three decades of inertia and before settling back into a new period of relative stability. As the previous section described, this was not the first time Chicago's public housing program was under pressure to change. Chicago's public housing program eventually collapsed under the weight of a combination of different pressures during this critical juncture. However, while the previous path was abandoned, the past choices, particularly those made to sustain the path in the face of previous pressures to change, narrowed the set of options that could be considered and increased the costs to certain groups of alternatives to these options. This section describes the arrival of the critical juncture and the forces that precipitated it.

Chicago's public housing had been built in areas of the City that were previously considered slums. The choice to locate public housing in these areas was a choice that satisfied both the housing reformers in charge of the CHA during its formative years that wanted to remove Chicago's slums and aldermen that preferred public housing in the least desirable sites for development, far away from the City's white wards. The design of the buildings also represented a compromise that was, at least initially, supported by both groups. However, these decisions led to maintenance problems brought on by the size and design, little interest from non-poor families in living in public housing, and little interest from politicians in fixing the problems. The decline of Chicago's public housing was self-reinforcing: growing maintenance issues confounded management and poor management led to more maintenance issues. Chicago's public housing became deteriorated concentrations of poverty and crime, an image popularized in media reports and books such as Alex Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here*. Eventually the deterioration and mismanagement reached a point at which the status quo could no longer be tolerated or ignored. Beginning in 1986 with a plan for redeveloping the vacant of Lakefront Homes, advanced by prominent local developer Ferd Kramer, Chicago's public housing projects faced mounting pressure for redevelopment. As interest in reorganizing and redeveloping public housing grew among local elites in the early-1990s, Chicago's public housing stock was so physically dilapidated and symbolically reviled that it was relatively easy to argue that drastic change was necessary. Further, when the federal government mandated an assessment of the viability of all of Chicago's public housing stock in 1996, nearly 18,000 units failed, meaning that they *had* to be demolished. The decisions made during the first decades of Chicago's public housing program had a cumulative effect that, by the 1990s, meant both the literal and figurative cost of keeping Chicago's existing public housing complexes had become too high. Even Vince Lane, who had initially favored rehabilitating existing buildings into mixed-income complexes, eventually accepted redevelopment.

Second, as noted above, much of Chicago's public housing was built in areas formerly considered slums. Chicago's historic pattern of development outward from the central area meant that the oldest residential neighborhoods – the areas considered slums – were located very near the city's core. Thus, many of Chicago's public housing complexes were located in a ring around the City's central business district, the Loop. The decision to locate Chicago's public housing in these areas had the consequence that, fifty years later, these complexes were located directly in the path of the City's revitalized and growing Loop. Thus the redevelopment of public housing is consistent with the ongoing redevelopment of Chicago's core neighborhoods. The growth of the Loop was a result of the City's changing economy as well as political changes made in response to these changes. Even as Chicago continued to lose manufacturing jobs for the preceding several decades, during the 1980s the City began to add service jobs. These jobs were concentrated in the Loop, spurring a prolonged period of new office, retail and residential construction. Eventually, the demand for space in the Loop exceeded supply and development spilled over into adjacent areas. When Mayor Richard M. Daley took office in 1989, he instituted policies that continued and enhanced this pattern of development, and which appear to reflect, in part, recognition of Chicago's changing economy and, in part, a politically motivated choice. The initial investments in downtown infrastructure made immediately after Daley's election were chosen both to appease the business interests that helped him get elected and to appeal to Chicago's residents and visitors. These Loopcentric, pro-development policies proved popular with Chicago's voters and created a positive feedback loop that then reinforced these policies. In the mid-1990s this path collided with the path of Chicago's public housing. Sustaining both was considered infeasible. Suddenly the calculation of the relative costs and benefits of maintaining the trajectory of Chicago's public housing program was flipped. The costs of keeping the program now dramatically outweighed the costs of changing it. Further, public housing reorganization and redevelopment, as it has been implemented in Chicago, works because it is consistent with the Daley administration's broad, and popular, strategy that favors enhancing the city's image and tax base through civic beautification, public safety, gentrification, consumption and development. Moore (1986) argues that ideas are more likely to be brought into practice if they demonstrate consistency with established practices, and, indeed, the Daley administration's approach to public housing redevelopment is remarkably consistent with its approach to all redevelopment.

In June 1988, after the resignation of yet another executive director, Mayor Eugene Sawyer appointed Vincent Lane as executive director of the CHA. When Lane assumed control of the CHA, approximately one sixth of all units were vacant. Years of no maintenance meant that many of these units were uninhabitable. One quarter of the elevators in the CHA's high-rise buildings were non-functional, and Lane lacked financial reserves with which to address maintenance backlogs (Flaherty 1989). Under Lane the CHA began to slowly remedy existing maintenance issues, conducting crime prevention sweeps of Chicago's projects, and lobbying HUD for flexibility to pursue income mixing; however, despite his initial position in favor of fixing public housing, he eventually became an advocate of demolition and redevelopment. Lane explained his reversal as a realization that high-rise public housing could not be saved, claiming as evidence several high profile incidents involving Chicago's high-rises. However, Mary Pattillo (2007) notes that Lane's circle of close friends and associates included several developers who were strong advocates of demolition and redevelopment and he was apparently influenced by their views. These include Alison Davis and Ferd Kramer, both of whom would later be involved in redevelopment efforts at one or more public housing site.

Changes at the national level brought about by the election of a Republican Congress in 1994 and the subsequent threat to dismantle HUD completely, created an opportunity for major reform of public housing generally and Chicago's public housing in particular. New sources of funding and greater flexibility to pursue comprehensive redevelopment of public housing was made available through the HOPE VI program. This removed or at least reduced the constraint on change presented by federal funding and regulation.

Perhaps more significant still was the election of Richard M. Daley, the son of former Mayor Richard J. Daley, as mayor of Chicago in 1989. Daley narrowly defeated the incumbent Mayor Eugene Sawyer, who was appointed after Harold Washington's death, along with three other candidates in the Democratic primary in a vote that largely split along racial lines. Daley went on to defeat Harold Washington Party candidate, 4th Ward Alderman Timothy Evans and Republican Party candidate, 10th Ward Alderman Edward Vrdolyak in the general election. Again, this vote vote was largely split based on race. Daley was elected based on his image as a competent administrator. Washington had had an acrimonious relationship with the City Council during his tenure – his first term was marked by the so called "Council Wars" in which the remnants of the Democratic political machine attempted to block all of Washington's major initiatives – and Daley appealed to voters' desire for stability and action (McCarron 1989). Daley had been elected despite drawing only about 6 percent of the black vote and could conceivably have won reelection without any black support. While he did make overtures to Chicago's black communities, unlike previous mayors, he was not reliant on public housing residents as a major voting block (Dold and Hardy 1989). Thus, Mayor Daley, rather than attempting to shield Chicago's public housing program from another federal takeover threat, chose to embrace it instead. Unlike previous Chicago politicians, Mayor Daley had no vested interest and drew no power from Chicago's public housing program. Quite the contrary, the existing program was a major potential impediment to his source of power and popularity, the expansion of Chicago's middle class neighborhoods and Loop.

3.4. Setting a New Path

Throughout its history pre-1990, Chicago's public housing program and its powerful supporters had continued to resist comprehensive reforms. The program had repeatedly faced pressure to abandon the status quo brought on by social, economic or political changes. Instead of yielding, when faced with negative feedback that encouraged abandoning the old path and forging a new one, the CHA and the City repeatedly opted to create new institutional structures to that would neutralize the negative feedback, maintain the existing system and push any changes further into the future. In the estimation of those with the power to change the trajectory of Chicago's public housing program, the costs of changing the path to their own political power and to the city in terms of civil service jobs as well as the actual financial costs of altering the physical stock were simply too great. By the time HUD took over the CHA in 1995 minor corrections such as the appointment of the receiver had, as Hunt (2009, 257) observes, "closed off possibilities for policymakers and left only the option of drastic measures."

During the 1990s Chicago's public housing program was remade through concurrent efforts to assemble coalitions to create and implement redevelopment plans at multiple public housing sites and citywide efforts to reorganize and restructure the CHA. These efforts were shaped and constrained by the institutional structures that were inherited from the previous era. Initial attempts by first the CHA and then the CHA (under HUD control) and City to impose restructuring and redevelopment plans on the City's public housing failed because of these institutional structures. Repeatedly throughout the planning process, a group of actors attempted to move forward with redevelopment, and repeatedly these efforts were stymied by the entrance of a new actor with the power to impede implementation, power that derived from the institutions and institutional structures put in place during the preceding thirty years in order to maintain the previous path. Over the course of the coalition building process, the participants first made visible the layers of institutions and institutional structures that constrained the trajectory of the Chicago's public housing program. Each time a new layer of sedimentation that impeded agreement upon and implementation of a redevelopment plan was discovered, it had to be lifted away. The process of peeling away the institutions and institutional structures that impeded redevelopment continued until a coalition of actors was assembled with the power to successfully proceed.

At each public housing redevelopment site throughout the city coalitions were formed, often after raucous battles. Each member of the coalition planning and implementing redevelopment brought power to resolve a specific problem or complete a specific task. Some were the result of prevailing economic and political forces acting at a national or international level. For example, developers were necessary to provide financial backing for and build the proposed developments. The CHA was necessary to secure demolition grants and oversee relocation and social services. However, the participation of many actors was necessitated by the left over institutional structures from the previous path. The Gautreaux plaintiffs' counsel was necessary to secure court approval for redevelopment. This was only necessary because the requirements of the original consent decree had not yet been met as the choice had been made to preserve the status quo rather than build integrated projects. The Habitat Co. was necessary to build new public housing units, a direct result of the choice to allow the appointment of a receiver in 1987 in order to avoid more dramatic restructuring through a HUD takeover. Residents, through their LACs and the CAC, established as a cooption mechanism to neuter resident demands during the 1970s, were also necessary participants. This, then, explained the odd makeup of the coalition that was assembled to oversee the restructuring and redevelopment of Chicago's public housing. It was a direct result of the steps taken between the 1950s and 1990s by those in power to preserve the path of Chicago's public housing program for their benefit.

Beyond the organization of the coalition, the initial decisions to pursue large-scale, high-rise developments in segregated neighborhoods also constrained the choices available during the policy window. The path of Chicago's public housing program prior to the 1990s had left projects that were no longer viable even with improved maintenance. The decline of Chicago's public housing had been self-reinforcing: growing maintenance issues confounded management and poor management led to more maintenance issues. Eventually the deterioration and mismanagement reached a point at which the status quo could no longer be tolerated or ignored, and, when interest in reorganizing and redeveloping public housing grew among local elites in the early-1990s, Chicago's public housing stock was so physically dilapidated and symbolically reviled that it was nearly impossible to argue that anything other than drastic change was necessary. Further, when the federal government mandated an assessment of the viability of all of Chicago's public housing stock in 1996, nearly 18,000 units failed, meaning that they *had* to be demolished. The decisions made during the first decades of Chicago's public housing program had a cumulative effect that, by the 1990s, both the literal and figurative cost of keeping Chicago's existing public housing complexes had become too high. Even Vince Lane, who had initially favored rehabilitating existing buildings into mixed-income complexes, eventually accepted redevelopment.

4. Conclusions

For a little more than three decades from the 1950s to the 1990s, Chicago's public housing program followed a path that to most observers was blatantly unjust and inefficient. The buildings were isolated, segregated and poorly designed and maintained and the organization was ineffective, bloated and poorly managed. Yet no steps were taken to change this by any with the authority to actually affect change. Instead, when faced with external pressure to change, steps were taken to bolster the existing program. This inertia is not surprising. Pierson (2000) has illustrated that institutions and public policies, once established, tend to be self-reinforcing by establishing patterns of relationships and behavior that are not easily altered. In the case of Chicago's public housing, local elites were deeply politically invested in the existing program. Public housing residents represented a significant and captive voting block for a group of powerful, black Aldermen. The CHA represented a significant employer of black civil servants and a landing spot for patronage hires. In addition, federal regulations governing public housing made reorganization and redevelopment nearly impossible by requiring replacement of demolished units, prohibiting mixed-financing arrangements and limiting the use of modernization funds. Finally, with the exception of Cabrini-Green, there was little incentive to reconfigure public housing into the 1980s as development in the Chicago region was occurring either in the Loop or in the suburbs. There were other costs as well. The cost in time and political capital necessary to change federal laws and rules governing public housing was simply too large, particularly when public housing had such a small and relatively powerless constituency.

For planning practice, this case offers some useful lessons. Most importantly, the history of institutions, actors and places matters in the crafting and implementation of new policies and plans. Planners and policy makers do not start with a blank slate, but begin with the accumulated sedimentation of existing policies, plans, procedures and places. Certain events, some of which may have occurred in a quite distant past, play a crucial role in creating new plans. Understanding the history and context of a plan or program, and in particular why a plan or program has persisted over a long period of time, can help planners to better understand how to change it. This can also better identify what constraints exist or what historical institutional structures need to be addressed in order for a new plan to be established and implemented. If one knows how stability is maintained, who is invested, how power is exerted, coalitions constructed and agendas set this can provide opportunities for change. This case also suggests that, if processes, even inefficient or unjust processes, tend to persist rather than change, then conflict can be good. It can produce negative feedback and reduce the value of particular courses of action to produce change. Negative feedback and conflict eventually led to window of opportunity to change. Lawsuits and protests and media campaigns, while they were resisted by those benefitting from Chicago's public housing program for some time, eventually helped create moment of change. Finally, events around (including preceding and immediately following) a critical juncture are crucial – this suggests that planners need to have a vision of what should be put into practice.

This case also provides some useful lessons for planning scholarship. Studying the historic path of a plan or a program is useful because it allows a researcher to unpack dynamic processes as they unfold over time and to better understand the historical antecedents of a particular policy. As this case demonstrates, there may be significant temporal distance between causes and effects. Decisions made at the outset of Chicago's public housing program had enormous ramifications fifty years later. Focusing on singular events or those with short time frames may erroneously lead to conclusions and generalizations that are really idiosyncratic or contingent while missing crucial contextual and historical factors which may be causal. This is an argument in favor of longitudinal studies, of panel studies and of evolution over time rather than one-off studies. Some outcomes are the result of a sequence of events that happened over a long period of time. Finally, as with practice, it is important for planning to have a coherent theoretical and conceptual justification and vision. Policy windows may open only infrequently, and it is important for planning to have a position in order to be able to influence decision-making rather than simply observing from afar.

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