

Paul Davidoff's Life in Prospect: Building a Progressive Planning Research Agenda Through Engaged Scholarship

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Abstract

This article explores Paul Davidoff's life and its relevance to the epochal turn for the planning discipline when theories in planning gave up ground to new theories of planning. By using biography as a method of inquiry, this article highlights the intertwined relations between Davidoff's scholarship, his public and private life, and his efforts to face structural racism in planning. The article offers suggestions for progressive planning by reflecting on the relevance of scholars' entrenchment with their context to foster practice and research through engagement.

Keywords

Paul Davidoff, biography, advocacy planning, suburbanization, anti-racist planning

Introduction

In the early 70s, Andreas Faludi introduced the distinction between theories *in planning* and theories *of planning*.¹ He urged planning scholars to move away from theorizing about decision-making outcomes and, instead, to focus on the relationship between the planner's role and the decision-making process.² In those early days of planning theory, there was an increasing concern regarding the intrinsic definition of what planning theory should be. Faludi's compendium, *A Reader in Planning Theory*,³ compiled the work of those whose goal was to define a generalizable normative theory of planning and those highlighting the impossibility of doing so, advancing the notion of multiple theories depending on planners' diverse methodologies as context-dependent. This shift in post-modern epistemologies also focused on the importance of theorizing and practically exploring the linkages between knowledge and action in planning.

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Over the last 50 years, planning theory has developed in many different directions, situating scholars in various theoretical communities whose rival epistemological positions have often generated high levels of contestation and, in some cases, harsh conflict. This article will not focus on the stark critiques of those who express theoretical positions that appear at odds but will instead explain the reasons for the rise of a specific theory of *planning*. By focusing on Paul Davidoff's work, this article explores why his theory of advocacy and pluralism emphasized the importance of *what planners ought to do* instead of *what planning ought to be*⁴ by grounding critical reflections in an analysis of his life using a biographical method. The article argues that big planning ideas develop within systems of values and beliefs deeply rooted in personal and professional experiences faced while challenging social and political structures in the struggle to make the world a better place.⁵ By making this connection explicit, the article offers relevant planning lessons drawn from the too-often overlooked and underappreciated progressive planning work undertaken by Paul Davidoff. The article builds upon Davidoff's biography while contributing to the body of scholarship examining how advocacy planning advances planning theory and practice.⁶ There are several reasons why an examination of Davidoff's public and private life is relevant to the future of progressive planning. First, Davidoff's personal life in the NY region during the 50s and 60s prompted him to situate his work at the interface between knowledge and action by producing scholarship embedded in highly practical planning experiences. Second, by working at this interface, Davidoff positioned himself as one of the precursors of what later became known as the scholarship of engagement.⁷ Third, and connected to the first two points, he directly contributed to the creation and implementation of new organizational systems committed to addressing structural racism within public planning systems: the most pressing social issue that America was and is still facing today.

This article is organized into five main sections. The first introduces the methodology used to develop Davidoff's biography while the second provides a timeline of the major events in his private and public life contextualized within the broader US political environment. This timeline helps readers navigate the body of the paper, highlighting three primary aspects of Davidoff's life considered foundational to the development of his theory of advocacy and pluralism: (1) his lifelong commitment to improving the quality of life of people of color in a highly segregated society; (2) his innovative scholarship that transcended the mainstream academic enterprise; and (3) his ingenuity in creating new institutions to advance planning theory and practice. Based on the successes and challenges he encountered through his work, the fourth section and the conclusion reflect on three prospects that we believe are relevant for progressive planning today.

Biography as a Method of Planning Inquiry

Biographical research methods have been broadly defined and utilized in various humanities and social sciences studies dedicated to increasing the understanding of a person's life and their contributions to a discipline, field, or society.⁸ Few social scientists have demonstrated a how to use biography instrumentally to go beyond traditional accounts strictly focused on individual selfhood. For instance, some biographers have highlighted possible misinterpretations when examining an individual's life within a given context, advocating for the use of post-modern epistemologies when using biographical methods⁹; others have presented biography as a means of emancipation, suggesting the importance of rethinking narratives usually constructed through the use of dominant positivist paradigms¹⁰; others have shown the urgent need to renovate old, detached, and objective characterizations of biographical methods, and reimagine biography as an art form rather than as a rigorous science.¹¹

Similarly, others have offered rich overviews of how biography could provide rich opportunities to answer research questions focused on the relationship between the individual and their

social context and socially constructed identity.¹² Kridel, for example, offers valuable insights on how to use biographies as accounts that “deal with the ways people faced living—tell how they met problems, how they coped with big and little crises, how they loved, competed, did the things we all do daily, and hence these studies touch familiar chords in readers.”¹³ These perspectives challenge scholars to reconsider the individual within specific historical contexts, revealing how ideas arise within a matrix of unfolding complex events. Such a perspective offers essential insights into the relationship between personal experience and the generation of those ideas.

Within the planning realm, biography has been limited in its scope and is traditionally used to celebrate individuals whose accomplishments are considered exceptional because of the continued use of their ideas and work. Several biographical works have explored the lives of foundational figures within the discipline, including Patrick Geddes,¹⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted,¹⁵ Robert Moses,¹⁶ and Jane Jacobs.¹⁷ Some scholars have used biography to highlight key contributions by women to planning theory and practice,¹⁸ as well as those who became environmental icons through their public engagement.¹⁹

In efforts to go beyond selfhood accounts, a few planning scholars have highlighted the importance of autobiographical methods to explore different levels of individual embodiments in their contexts to promote a better understanding of how these have influenced their ideas, knowledge-production efforts, and actions. Saija proposed *autobiography as a method of inquiry* using a phenomenological lens to explore planning scholars’ life, reflecting on the fact that their “thoughts and interests are intertwined [...] with their place of birth, what they’ve seen, touched, smelled, the people they’ve interacted with.”²⁰ On this methodological foundation, *Encounters in Planning Thought*²¹ collects planning thinkers’ autobiographies where scholars’ personal accounts intertwine individual selfhoods, emotions, ways of acting in the world, and their scholarly production. Similar goals have been set by those who have used autobiographical methods to explore the link between race and place in planning education²² or have solicited emancipatory life stories through digital ethnography.²³ More recently, Thomas describes the struggles for school desegregation by using semi-autobiographical methods to depict Black Civil Rights organizing in South Carolina.²⁴

This article draws on these biographical and autobiographical phenomenological exemplars to explore Davidoff’s life using testimonies collected from interviews with his closest family members (FM), academic colleagues (AC), co-workers (Co), and students (St). It uses 50 interviews, complementing those with Davidoff’s published and unpublished papers, archival materials, and scholarly work by those who used Davidoff’s work as a relevant foundation to shape the field of planning.

Davidoff: A Brief Overview of His Life

Paul Davidoff was born in New York City on February 14, 1930. He and his younger brother, Jerry, were the children of Bernard and Mildred Davidoff. “They grew up famously with Lewis Mumford and all the other stars of Sunnyside Gardens” (FM). Both parents were described as “not politically activists, but [...] progressive in spirit” (FM). Davidoff completed primary school at the Little Red School House and its affiliated secondary school, the Lois Erwin High School, in Greenwich Village in Manhattan in 1948. Both were very progressive schools that had “a great impact on his politics and on his viewpoint” (FM). Davidoff’s early progressive education was reinforced by his involvement in the Woodland Summer Camp (1944–1948) in the Catskills (NY), organized under Norman Studer’s progressive educational philosophy and in the community educational programs at Camp Walt Whitman (1948–1950) in Piermont (NH). Friends and family members refer to these camps as foundational educational experiences where Davidoff developed

his closest friend connections and personal relationships, including a deep connection with his first wife, Mary “Rusty” Miller.

From 1948 to 1952, Davidoff attended Allegheny College in Meadville (PA) as a history and political science major. This academic environment was particularly fertile for Davidoff to cultivate his intellectual interests and explore his professional options. During those years, Davidoff was very active in the College Newspaper—The Campus—where he was an editorial writer and deeply engaged in the College’s International Relations Club (IRC), which he led during his period at Allegheny. From analyzing The Campus’ articles, Davidoff appeared as a robust antiwar voice during the Korean War conflict and someone who was deeply involved in domestic and international policy debates and discussions.²⁵ During those years, Davidoff developed a deep interest in the law and, following his graduation from Allegheny entered Yale Law School.²⁶

After taking an urban planning class during his first year of law school, Davidoff decided to interrupt his legal studies at Yale to enroll in the Master of Regional Planning Program at UPENN (1954). Following his graduation in 1956, he accepted several planning consultant positions, providing planning services to cities and counties throughout the northeast. During his post-graduation years, Davidoff maintained his personal, intellectual, and professional interests in the New York Metropolitan Region. He subsequently became an assistant planner for the New York City Planning Department in 1958.²⁷ During those years, Davidoff lived in Morningside Gardens, one of the first owner-occupied co-ops in New York City, while his family was growing: Susan, Adam, and Carla were born in 1957, 1958, and 1962, respectively.

Following his service as a professional planner, Davidoff initiated his academic career by accepting a teaching position in the graduate planning program at UPENN, although none of his friends, family members, and colleagues ever described him as a mainstream academic “because he had always wanted a broader agenda” (FM). At UPENN, Davidoff and a senior colleague, Martin Myerson, involved their students in a series of “hands-on” community planning studios in economically distressed inner city and first-ring suburban communities. Two distinguishing characteristics of these efforts were the degree to which they engaged residents and leaders in identifying the current challenges and future development opportunities confronting their communities and the extent to which their planning recommendations transcended the then-accepted bounds of land use and physical design.²⁸ During those early academic years, Davidoff started theorizing about the role of city planners in a democratic society, eventually conceptualizing the idea of advocacy and pluralism.

For several reasons, 1964 and 1965 marked a critical turning point in Davidoff’s life due to important national events as well as a profound tragedy in his personal life (see timeline in [Figure 1](#)). In 1964, while driving his family to Williamsburg, VA, near Washington DC, the family had a terrible accident. Both Rusty and Adam died, marking a huge loss in Davidoff’s life, an event that “had an enormous impact on [his life] and a large factor in his [...] progressive presence” (FM). Shortly after this event, Davidoff married Linda Greenberg, a graduate planning student at UPENN, and subsequently moved the entire family to Larchmont, NY—a middle-class suburb north of The Bronx. In the same year, Davidoff left UPENN obtaining a tenured faculty position at Hunter College in NYC, where he also founded and directed the Urban Studies Department while preparing and publishing *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning* (1965).²⁹ During his years at Hunter, Davidoff and his wife Linda established a strong relationship: many family members and colleagues attribute to Linda Greenberg the emotional support that allowed Davidoff to overcome devastating losses in his private life while providing significant intellectual contributions to advancing his scholarship and activism.³⁰ During his Hunter years, their first child, Daniel, was born (1968) as they actively pursued civic engagement through direct action organizing, litigation, public communication, and running for formal offices on platforms

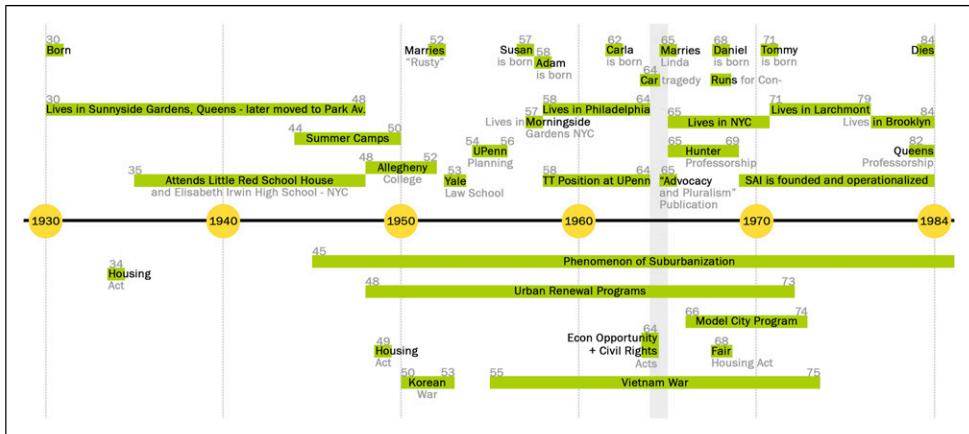


Figure I. Davidoff's life events timeline. Davidoff's private and public events can be better explained in the context of urban phenomena, legislation affecting spatial segregation and allocation of resources, and more general historical events impacting the US political climate. The timeline highlights the 1964-65 period as a turning moment not only in US history but also in Davidoff's personal and professional life. Source: Authors' graphic elaboration.

emphasizing policies to reduce poverty, eliminating racial discrimination, and expanding access to quality affordable housing. Davidoff ran for Congress on this platform while Linda Greenberg pursued local, county, and state Democratic Party offices highlighting these progressive ideas.

“Davidoff had a very contradictory, contentious connection to the [Hunter] program, [having no patience for] administrative drudgery [but also for academics] nowhere near active scholars and intellectuals as he would have liked” (AC). Many attribute this dissatisfaction with higher education’s intellectual and administrative features as one of the primary reasons he chose to take a more independent route in 1969 when Davidoff co-founded the Suburban Action Institute (SAI) with Linda Greenberg and Neil Gold while on leave of absence from Hunter. In the first 5 years of operation, SAI produced research, sponsored policy conferences, filed lawsuits, and proposed land developments to advance the economic status of the poor and families of color in efforts to provide access to living wage employment, high-quality public schools, and public and affordable housing. Among the landmark legal struggles, Davidoff was involved in were the Mt. Laurel zoning case, the Yonkers housing and schools segregation case, and the Starrett City housing discrimination case, just to name a few.

During those years, his second child with Linda, Tommy, was born (1971). While his national reputation as a public scholar was growing, he taught at the Yale Law School (1975), and received Distinguished Service Awards from both the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Planners (AIP) in 1976 as well the National American Institute of Planners in 1978. In the late seventies, SAI was “having continuing financial struggles” (Co), which led the organization to rearrange its structure, reduce its staff members from 15 to 5, and move its office. In 1979, Davidoff moved from Larchmont to Flatbush, Brooklyn, and in 1980, SAI was renamed the Metropolitan Action Institute (MAI). The organization’s continuing financial struggles led Davidoff to reconsider the public university as a viable organizational location to ensure the ongoing sustainability of his institute. In 1982, Queens College of the City University of New York offered him a professorship in their Department of Urban Studies. He subsequently brought his non-profit under the university’s umbrella, changing MAI’s name to the Center for Metropolitan Action at Queens College. This chapter represented the last of his career: he passed away in New York City on December 27, 1984, from complications related to his cancer treatment.

Challenging Racist Planning by Building Engagement and Infrastructures for Change

Davidoff's private and professional life events can be better explained by embedding them within the broader struggles the Civil Rights Movement faced, especially regarding spatial segregation. The use of planning to enable segregation, whether within conditions engineered according to the law (*de jure* segregation actively occurring before 1964) or through hidden mechanisms designed to circumvent desegregation laws (*de facto* segregation actively pursued after 1964), was one of Davidoff's primary concerns throughout his life. The connection between the public enactment of planning regulations and the pervasive and persistent evidence of racial segregation provides a lens through which to analyze one of the most powerful pillars of structural racism in the United States. For Davidoff, racialized land use planning policies and practices posed fundamental challenges that required a re-imagining of the planning researcher's role through a pursuit of various forms of scholarship that did not separate the intellectual task of critical reflection from practical engagement in the context that academics were examining. By dealing with unprecedented social challenges, Davidoff implemented an *Ante Litteram* engaged scholarship that moved him and his colleagues to create new forms of social organizations that could stimulate the re-imagining of new planning futures, especially for Black Americans. In doing so, he faced criticisms from inside and outside the academy from scholars, policy-makers, and activists who dismissed his work, which challenged senior administrators, legislators, and judges to rethink federal policies and their implications.³¹ According to colleagues, these reasons prompted Davidoff to expand his work's applied component by creating infrastructures needed to more effectively support the flourishing of new forms of organizing and advocating for change. Structural racism in planning, his *Anti Litteram* engaged scholarship, and the creation of new infrastructure for change are discussed in the next three paragraphs.

Structural Racism in Planning and the Paradox of Ivy League Socialism

Davidoff saw planning as a powerful tool for either re-enforcing structural racism or reimagining an anti-racist society where space could be organized to operationalize the aspirational goals of the Economic Opportunity and Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Family members broadly shared his consistent acknowledgment of his white privilege and ongoing efforts to engage with communities of color. One of the interviewees commented that Davidoff was constantly shaken and moved by:

[the fact that it was unacceptable that] privileged white people could move to the suburbs as a way of moving away from poor people, from Black people, from People of Color. It was very important to [Davidoff] that [his family] see how other people lived and the conditions in which other people lived. [...] people at times found him sanctimonious. [...] Here was this white guy of privilege, telling everyone else how to live their lives (FM).

His deep understanding of the role race plays in American society caused Davidoff to constantly challenge his family and friends to be aware of their privilege and to behave, act, and live, knowing that every opportunity in life could have been different without that very privilege. In his personal life, he fiercely reacted against all forms of privilege supported by fundamentally racist land use regulations established after the passage of desegregation laws. While describing the years they lived in Center City Philadelphia during the 60s, one family member commented:

[they were] living in an apartment building that was primarily white tenants. And the children who lived in that building would get variances so they could go to a predominantly all-white elementary school. [Davidoff] with four other families in that building decided that [their children would] go to the local school, which [their apartments were] zoned for, which was the Durham school, which was all Black (FM).

Where Black people lived and what resources they could access became central concerns for Davidoff since it clearly showed how structural racism had spatial consequences, which he felt should become a foundational concern within the planning profession. From this starting point, Davidoff's work revolved around the pursuit of planning alternatives that could address the pervasive lack of access to resources in new suburbs whose development was ramping up across the country that Black people confronted.

This definition of the suburb as the "public planning battlefield" was also one of the underlying elements fueling controversies in the planning academy. Some colleagues strongly opposed the suburban argument by advocating the need to maintain the focus of academic research and professional practice on inner-city communities to concentrate progressive efforts in Black neighborhoods intentionally targeted for failure.³² This counter-argument was based upon the firm belief that disinvestments and the abandonment of the manufacturing sector from central cities, along with the erosion of the accountability of city administrators during the neoliberal years of planned austerity, were the optimal triggers capable of mobilizing a successful movement for disenfranchised Blacks.³³ These positions were always seen as adversarial and never intended as complementary.

The relevance of the suburban argument was presented in several of Davidoff's writings. For Davidoff, federal programs aimed at re-organizing inner-city neighborhoods reinforced discrimination patterns of development that had been used to reshape the urban geography of the US in the 60s and 70s. Davidoff revealed the failures of the Urban Renewal and Model Cities Programs designed to demolish and reconstruct the majority of African American inner-city neighborhoods facing poverty and distress.³⁴ In his view, a "rebuilt ghetto" strategy was not going to address the structural causes of stigmatization and de facto segregation, which could only be combatted through massive public investments designed to expand access to critical resources, including: jobs, housing, health care, and educational opportunities.³⁵ Thus, Davidoff's focus of attention remained on the suburbs since he saw in that new geography, increasingly augmented by public policies, places where an incremental approach to improving Black conditions and access to opportunity could be concretely materialized.

For Davidoff, the suburban issue and its related white flight represented the materialization of a new and highly corrosive structural form of exclusion of Black families and communities from new development opportunities rapidly accelerating outside the city (Figure 2). While scholars have long debated whether the causes of white flight were more related to the arrival of large numbers of Blacks to the city or better socio-economic opportunities in the suburbs, Davidoff's concern was with planning as a tool of power that could either favor or hinder access to suburban wealth-building for people of color. Planning, in general, and zoning regulations, in particular, were being widely used to force Blacks to remain in inner-city neighborhoods where they faced progressive disinvestment and to undermine the ability of these groups to move to the suburbs where the number of well-paying jobs was growing and homeownership, America's primary tool for intergenerational wealth generation, was a greater possibility. By reflecting on this issue, Davidoff defined the notion of an urban "apartheid," which, he suggested, "began to be used to describe the *de jure*, as well as the *de facto* methods employed to separate [...] (B)lack Americans from white Americans."³⁶ More dramatically, he pointed out that the private sector did not trigger this "apartheid," which was largely determined by the highly intentional strategies and policies

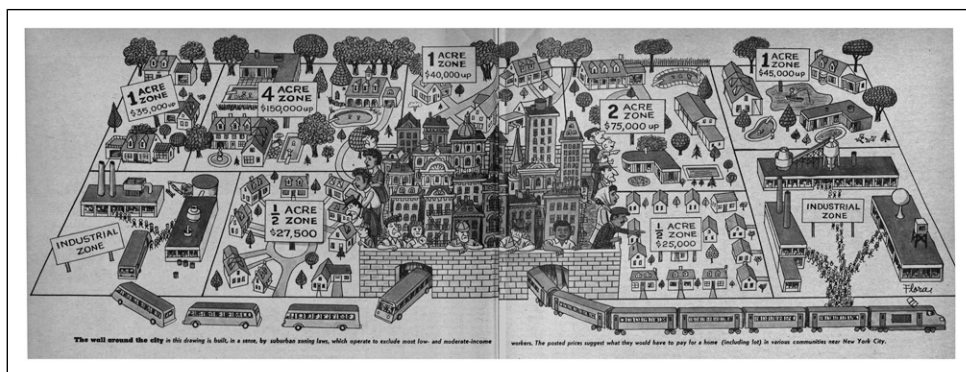


Figure 2. The wall around the city. A vignette from *The New York Times Magazine*, which is accompanied by an article by Paul Davidoff and his colleagues, exemplifies the exclusion of inner-city communities from the possibilities of affording new opportunities in the suburbs. Source: Linda Davidoff, Paul Davidoff, and Neil Newton Gold, "The Suburbs Have to Open Their Gates," *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 November 1971.

aimed at protecting land values for wealthy whites by restricting land and ownership for the most disadvantaged,³⁷ a paradox that he labeled as *Ivy League Socialism*.³⁸ In other words, during the heights of the desegregation period made possible by the Civil Rights Movement, there was an intentionally designed public planning agenda to systematically exclude Blacks from entering the suburbs where employment, business, educational, and housing opportunities rapidly expanding.

Fostering an *Ante Litteram* Engaged Scholarship

Because of these structural issues, Davidoff intentionally and directly engaged in planning initiatives in communities where the dominant white-elite-driven urban agenda was rarely challenged by professional planners or planning academics. Comments by those we interviewed described him as being very aware of the powerful public institutions that had been built and perpetuated to protect that same agenda. The majority of those we interviewed described his passionate commitment to imagining a different idea of planning, one that could foster a change in the existing public institutions governing US cities. His scholarship was based on a search for more inclusive planning processes that would lead to a revitalized democracy that he intended as:

Some kind of process by which people participate in the decisions about the places where they live, even if they don't have the final say because democracy says the final say is with the accountable elected officials. And what Davidoff talked about with regard to pluralism says it's not majority rule. It's some kind of interaction among contending groups and some way of reconciling their different rights and interests, not just saying the majority rules. [...] (AC)

Davidoff believed this idea would have to be the basis of any process intentionally designed to empower different groups in a pluralistic society to have their voice translated into a plan, zoning ordinance, or any other form of future-oriented technical endeavor. Similarly to the skepticism around his suburban focus, advocacy planning was harshly criticized by scholars and activists for various reasons. In the first two issues of *Policy Debate* (1970), Frances Fox Piven sparked a debate on the limited capacity of advocacy planning to achieve real change that could immediately benefit the poor.³⁹ Sympathetic to Piven's position, Sherry Arnstein saw the potential to benefit the poor but warned about the pitfalls that advocacy planning could have if not properly

implemented.⁴⁰ Paul and Linda Davidoff responded to these criticisms by highlighting how short-term action would not derail long-term planning; quite the opposite. They emphasized how the planning process and its outcome (the plan) could be intentionally used to make demands, including those short-term goals deemed important to scholars and activists who minimized the importance of advocacy compared to street protests.⁴¹

From this perspective, the advocacy plan was not seen as a sterile outcome of a bureaucratic procedure but as a way to intentionally and purposefully mobilize political power around burning issues identified by the plan's "client." Although popularized as prescriptive documents, Davidoff's advocacy plans and reports had a powerful normative thrust informed by minority voices that helped generate alternative and imaginative planning processes. In this regard, one interviewee discussing the Ramapo Plan commented:

[the plan] was a vision of what could be developed. I don't think they intended ever to develop it. [...] it was an advocacy plan. And the goal of the advocacy plan wasn't to actually be developed but to change the central government plan. And so the city would have to adjust to this thing, it was going to be proposed, and it looked very attractive (Co).

Unlike many of his planning colleagues, his work was oriented toward normative disciplinary goals. For Davidoff, while the intellectual work around the consequences of segregation was valuable, it could not remain a purely academic exercise; instead, planning alternative experiments must be brought to the foreground of the academic enterprise. Although his work was done almost 30 years before the conceptualization of the scholarship of engagement,⁴² Davidoff articulated a form of scholarship that embodied the essence of engaged practice by challenging existing structures of planning power to generate needed forms of change.

During the years when a great deal of planning research focused on racial and economic causes of the rise of American suburbs,⁴³ Davidoff suggested an *Ante Litteram* engaged scholarship to explore destabilizing suburban issues and inequalities. He devised and pursued a research agenda focused on the indissoluble axis linking analytical and normative research to reimagine planning as an activity committed to addressing the policy and planning supports for all white homeowner suburbs. Moreover, his scholarship sought to overcome the dominant conceptualization of scholarship, which focused on describing the world as it is, to include research that acknowledged different ways of knowing through unconventional pedagogy and direct involvement with practice.

Davidoff's approach to pedagogy challenged students to use all available traditional planning instruments to combat pervasive and powerful mainstream exclusionary and racist planning approaches. In his interactions with students, a recurring theme was the reflection on the final recipient of the planning activity under consideration:

He started pestering me with questions like, "who's the client?" Well, I said, what difference does it make with the city planners? "You've got to turn out the plan." He said. "You turned out the plan by finding who the client is." And that was my second conversation with him [and it] was about who is the client (St).

Another commented:

He didn't really [...] actively coach me on anything he was doing; he led more by example, and by including me in his activity. So, I get to see lots of things. [...], I got to be a fly on the wall, really. And, well, more than that — I was at the table, actually, at the table [doing litigation with him] (Co).

Similar testimonies show a pedagogical approach that was less founded on detailed syllabi and long lists of deliverables and more oriented toward exposure to real world planning issues based on direct experience. His approach sought to show how every student could effectively examine and write about the structural factors responsible for racialized patterns of urban development and, in cooperation with others, devise powerful interventions to dismantle significant contributors to this pervasive and persistent problem.

One of the planning documents that best represents his direct involvement with practice was a research project he undertook focused on New York City and State's housing crisis. An examination of the shortage of affordable housing for low and moderate-income families in New York was the basis of Davidoff's investigation into the housing crisis. However, his research also uncovered the specific racial mechanisms used to systematically concentrate low-income Black and Puerto Rican families within a limited number of neighborhoods targeted for planning shrinkage. Contextually, it showed how planning's often hidden mechanisms excluded low-income Black and Puerto Rican families from accessing housing opportunities in the outer boroughs and suburbs through the fundamentally racist practices of area management brokers in assigning low-income housing units.⁴⁴

*A Housing Program for New York State Report*⁴⁵ presents the previous findings while advancing concrete solutions to address the housing shortage in New York State. These include a precise allocation of different affordable stocks, new laws and regulations, and the re-imagination of management committees and public departments. However, beyond these recommendations, this work explicitly embraces the idea of housing whose value transcends the notion of a commodity by acknowledging housing as a universal right:

Decent housing is a right belonging to all citizens of the State of New York, and should be established as such by law. Under the law, the state would be responsible for finding a decent dwelling for every resident of the state. If a decent dwelling could not be found at a rent within the means of a resident, the state would pay the difference required in order to enable the resident to obtain a decent dwelling.⁴⁶

From this perspective, the planning policies guiding practical action were not limited to prescribing immediate solutions to face the urban crisis but instead articulated a vast normative horizon of work articulated to challenge planners and policy-makers to reconsider the broad planning values underpinning such suggestions.

Bringing “Something New into the World”

The previous two paragraphs introduced Black segregation as the primary rationale motivating Davidoff's work and the *Ante Litteram* engaged scholarship as a promising approach to address its structural causes.⁴⁷ These underpinnings were either praised or considered problematic, criticized, or even dismissed inside and outside academia.⁴⁸ Many critiques came from public conversations and professional planning practice discussions, which constituted the realms Davidoff directly engaged. For example, one of his former students and later collaborator shared that:

The senior people very much disdained Davidoff. They didn't think what he had to say was very useful. They always start by saying 'he has great stuff to say,' but it does not fit in our city. And that was one of the most popular sentences I have ever heard in my professional life (St).

Often, Davidoff's view of the world and commitment to social justice viewed through tactical research and direct action was deemed relevant but not a practical asset that could be used to

improve public planning systems. Many other colleagues were skeptical of pushing efforts to advance integrated housing too far. One of Davidoff's co-workers commented:

[...] One of the things that Davidoff stressed was this idea of building and developing, this idea of community. [...] I think he was [...] really an idealist [...]. This guy, Ernie Erber, [...] he had a little bit different view. He said, look, I live in Columbia, Maryland. [...] I'm just telling you, it's not going to be utopia, OK? All these low-income people that are coming in from the cities, they are not going to leave all their problems in the ghetto. [...] A lot of the baggage that they're bringing in, culturally and otherwise, they're going to bring into this community. And you're going to have to deal with it (Co).

Similar attitudes reflecting biases, stereotypes, and assumptions prevented local decision-makers from seriously considering the implications of advocacy and pluralism. But while these criticisms were rooted in public officials' fears of the potential impacts of the advocacy movement interfering with institutional goals, criticisms also arose in several Black communities. In 1970, during the first and only advocacy planning conference, many New York-based community leaders argued for dissent and social disruption as a better social change strategy rather than advocacy planning, which they characterized as "colonialist, elitist, self-serving, top-down, and repressive".⁴⁹ Skepticism was primarily directed to various forms of participation advanced by federal programs (i.e., Model City Program), giving space to central city residents to participate in what Sherry Arnstein defined as a "Mickey Mouse game for the have-nots."⁵⁰ In short, by blurring the distinction between advocacy planning and participatory planning, many conclude that inclusive processes designed to involve citizens in public decisions were intentionally depriving low-income people of color of the necessary tools needed to shape local, state, and national urban policies. Davidoff, his partners, and his supporters acknowledged the many possible pitfalls of participatory processes but distinguished those flawed participatory experiences from more genuine forms of advocacy planning. For instance, Paul and Linda Davidoff warned about the risk of the "elitist notion of social change" most planners have,⁵¹ and Chester Hartman, an early practitioner of advocacy planning, articulated the importance of having a "clear political analysis of how the system works as a whole" before suggesting any course of action.⁵²

These criticisms pointed to the risks advocacy planners faced of being co-opted by existing institutions and encouraged Davidoff to work with numerous intellectuals spanning academic, professional, resident, and activist communities to conceptualize third-party institutions that could be somehow independent from existing elite dominated institutional infrastructures. The establishment of new agencies dedicated to addressing racial segregation was first embodied in the Suburban Action Institute (SAI), which became an incorporated non-profit in New York State in 1969. SAI's primary purpose was to challenge existing exclusionary zoning and other restrictive land-use policies in order to provide access within the existing system to the educational, economic, and social benefits being generated in the suburbs through the consideration of metropolitan scale remedies and use of the courts to stimulate policy change in other branches of government.⁵³ SAI aimed to achieve these goals by (1) enhancing the public's awareness of suburban exclusion, (2) striking down local zoning ordinances that constitute the legal bulwark of suburban exclusion of racialized minorities, (3) challenging the efforts of major corporations to relocate from central city locations, (4) lobbying national civil and human rights organizations and other official planning bodies to focus greater attention on suburbanization, and (5) institutionalizing SAI to provide low-income communities of color and their allies with the social science, housing/employment law, and urban planning expertise to challenge discrimination in all of its forms.⁵⁴

SAI's activities took advantage of Davidoff's legal training and network of Civil Rights minded attorneys to challenge the racially based arrangement of the spatial distribution of resources

supported by mainstream planning. He used the law to challenge the existing distribution of residential opportunities, low-income housing, jobs, and means of transportation. Most of the interviewees discussing Davidoff's work at SAI aligned with the following testimony:

Some of us were impressed with the idea that a lawyer could be that focused on changing things, because some of us assumed that lawyers were mostly about defending the status quo. [...] He was interested in the law and the way the law could be used to change things. And I was impressed with the fact that he cared about the outcome for different groups of people. And he didn't think that whoever was the planner was working for was supposed to just tell the planner what to do. And the planner was supposed to do that with their expertise linked to what the leadership in power wanted. So I was impressed with his ability and his orientation to challenge the status quo, to use the law as a tool for challenging zoning, and to understand that the goal was what was important (AC).

In other words, while planners within public agencies were working to insure that new developments were in compliance with discriminatory zoning regulations, SAI questioned the rationales of those very regulations while simultaneously seeking to establish new zoning rules. Additionally, SAI was founded as a real advocacy organization that sided with victims of discriminatory planning practices not only in New York but also across the country. SAI's idea was revolutionary because its underpinning assumptions were fundamentally grounded on the structural forms of exclusion pervading the public American planning system. In discussing SAI, one of Davidoff's co-workers shared that:

I really see the advocacy planning concept as being very parallel to the legal services movement and community lawyering: the idea that [...] not just poor people individually, but poor communities need representation in the legal process [...] where you're really working on behalf of poor communities and poor people to balance the scale and the legal system. [...] I think in the fair housing field, [...] his impact has been really significant. I think the principles of Mount Laurel and remedies that he helped develop through some of the legal cases (Co).

This last testimony best reflects the shared opinion of the majority of our interviewees that SAI represented a vital infrastructure for advancing ideas during its operation and long after its demise. Despite SAI's legacy and success, many testimonies also pointed to similar infrastructures' challenges in their daily operation. One of the most important is considering sustainable models to maintain similar independent operations. Along these lines, one testimony commented:

[In] the last two years of its existence, they [Davidoff and his co-workers] were having continuing financial struggles, [...] as we all do in the non-profit world, especially on some of these more 'quixotic' efforts! Funding is a cyclical and difficult challenge. [...] They had moved from their Park Avenue offices to this old industrial factory building on West Thirty-Third above the train tracks, west of Penn Station. And it was a fairly decrepit old building. [They] were [...] above this printing office, you can sometimes smell the fumes coming up. And it was a huge open space with a bunch of second-hand furniture spread all around, [they] were sharing the floor with this big old [...] factory space sharing the floor with *City Limits Magazine* (Co).

SAI's financial challenges represented a fundamental issue that profoundly affected its effectiveness and survival. This issue repeatedly emerged during interviews and posed a question about how to structure feasible models to develop similar initiatives to advocate for people who do not have the means to hire experts to advocate for their interests.

Prospects: Looking Back to Look Forward

The previous three sections highlighted Davidoff's most relevant heuristic priorities in planning research, his engaged approach to research and his efforts to establish new infrastructures for social change. A clear analytical-normative axis links his research questions aimed at explaining racial segregation issues to the type of planning that he believed should be undertaken to address these very issues. This article argues that this analytical-normative axis⁵⁵ is not developed in a vacuum but instead is deeply embedded in scholars' ways of being and acting in the world. Yet, what planning academics do is determined by their personal views of the world deeply imbued by their life experiences which, in turn, determine what objects of inquiry they deem worthy of study. Family members, colleagues, students, and academics' testimonies show the breadth and depth of the private and public forces that shaped Davidoff's multifaced scholarship, which ultimately stood as the basis for his formalization of the theory of advocacy and pluralism in planning.

Davidoff's advocacy and pluralism theory is well known because it questioned the existence of value-neutral planning, rejected the notion of a unitary public interest, highlighted the exclusionary nature of many public planning processes, and noted the tendency of municipal planning to advance the interests of powerful downtown elites over those of poor, Black, and Brown communities. Looking back at the breeding ground of Davidoff's theory of *planning*, and using biography as a method of planning inquiry, this article forwards reflections on important lessons for the next generation of progressive planners. His work was strictly linked with his deep personal and professional commitment to generating a public movement challenging American urban apartheid. Fifty years later, we believe that the legacy of this work is still relevant for reflecting on the future of planning as a public enterprise. By building on the account of his journey, we offer three main critical prospects relevant to progressive planning today.

Our first critical reflection revolves around the planners' role (and universities' role, more generally) in challenging existing causes of exclusion and segregation intentionally or unintentionally determined by planning actions. Davidoff saw his role as intellectual as inseparable from his engagement in the context of dramatically changing cities' geographies. Such engagement determined the existence of a planning research agenda that deeply differs from those exclusively focused on exploring and explaining planning phenomena. It, instead, aims to establish engaged intellectuals to undertake the difficult task of contributing to a body of theories that challenge rational planning theory while incrementally contributing to improving Black conditions and access to resources. From this perspective, the form of engagement he modeled and articulated went well beyond the idea of intellectual activists intended as those privileged individuals whose tenure should be used to "speak the truth to power."⁵⁶ Davidoff's work states that speaking the truth is essential but insufficient. Intellectuals and their institutions are, by nature, supposed to foster ideas and critical voices that question problematic urban phenomena, more so when these are perpetuating practices leading to the racialized organization of land, space, and resources. More than 20 years ago, Goldsmith suggested that, while this original task should be embedded in academic institutions' DNA, its implementation cannot be taken for granted since universities are, first and foremost, power structures whose main concerns primarily revolve around their businesses.⁵⁷ By drawing on Gorz's non-reformistic reform approach,⁵⁸ Goldsmith identifies a horizon of work challenging academics to engage in consistent interventions that directly, and in small doses, empower weaker parties in dispute over problematic issues.⁵⁹ Davidoff's legacy invites planning scholars to not separate their work as documenters of "what is wrong" with forms of actions (non-reformist reforms) that directly address pressing civic issues. While we have exemplary examples of the former, we witness way fewer practices of the latter.

Secondly, it is relevant to reflect on what practical actions academics can take to contribute to non-reformist reforms. Davidoff, his students, and his SAI colleagues were able to undertake

research, writing, advocacy, and litigation that sought to challenge the role of land-use regulations in reproducing social inequality while introducing legislation that required inclusionary zoning with guaranteed funding. Davidoff acknowledged that existing organizations (including public institutions) have shown their limits in dealing with power dynamics and that diverse and new institutions should be imagined to address those pitfalls. His life was dedicated to finding ways to shape those diverse institutions, and his work shows the progressive planner's challenges in entering that transformative space where their political embeddedness, economic resources, and institutional shells are critical factors in the sustainability of those operations. SAI's active life brings insights into discussions regarding the difficulties faced by third-party institutions that seek to challenge existing power structures. The numerous iterations of SAI speak to Davidoff's commitment to linking knowledge to action by establishing new social infrastructures to challenge existing infrastructures to move towards change. Despite his failures and the imperfect nature of his third-party organizations, his attempt offers important lessons. Davidoff's work challenges progressive planners to reimagine third-party institutions to counter mainstream public planning while, at the same time, still valuing public institutions. Innovation can be generated by the establishment of these new entities and the tension they can initiate with public agencies.

Finally, Davidoff's work strove to generate infrastructures for change, reflecting new forms of alliances between communities of scholars and communities of practice. SAI generated the space for intellectuals, students, and practitioners to change existing legislation and, consequentially, planning practices. Traversing the SAI's specificities, this work pushes for the establishment of intellectual infrastructures that effectively advance actions with normative rather than merely prescriptive goals by opening up possibilities to reinvent unimagined futures. It formalizes the quest to understand how research developed within specific disciplinary boundaries can be used creatively and unexpectedly to challenge current marginalization and discrimination practices. This quest asks academics to explore the emancipatory value of their disciplines by directly engaging with racialized social groups whose members are fearlessly confronting various oppression mechanisms. Davidoff's theory of advocacy and pluralism has the potential to transcend the planning discipline by inviting all scholars to conduct research and action that directly contribute not only to knowing more about disenfranchised communities but also to acting on these newly acquired understandings. In this broader sense, his theory also constitutes a quest for connecting the planning figure with other figures capable of directly engaging with place-based struggles to shape a new course of action informed by the plurality of ways of knowing. Pluralism cannot be materialized without considering that different groups might have unique ways to communicate their issues, concerns, and ideas. Broadening approaches to knowing by maintaining a normative perspective is essential to move forward toward richer and more meaningful forms of progressive planning.

Conclusions

This article shows that leading progressive planning ideas, such as those advanced through advocacy and pluralism, have their roots in personal and professional challenges encountered while trying to directly change a context for the better. Paul Davidoff's life reveals a never-ending struggle against a racialized allocation of land and resources through an engaged approach to research and the creation of alternative institutions for change. His living legacy has influenced many of his colleagues inside and outside major governing institutions. It goes without saying how the work of community planners and the progressive city movement have operationalized lessons from advocacy and pluralism, achieving remarkable results.⁶⁰ However, the contemporary progressive planning movement appears to face unsolved challenges, for instance, related to its engagement with race⁶¹ and climate policies,⁶² to name a few. In this article, we articulate three

prospects that emerge from a closer look at Davidoff's life and the insights he developed while trying to change the world of planning and our broader society. The hope is to promote a renovated progressive planning academy by embracing similar work prospects moving forward.

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Notes

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