The conference title, "Unconventional Wisdom," emerged from reflecting upon what learning has occurred in SPURS over the last 45 years—a question we also hope to discuss with conference participants. Let me emphasize that we are searching for unconventional wisdom, even if some conventional ideas remain valid after 45 years of SPURS operation.

To begin such a process of reflection and learning, it’s useful to explore what the expectation was of SPURS at the beginning. My late colleague, Lydia Rodwin, who started SPURS/Humphrey, liked to remind me that SPURS was created as a non-degree one-year program to give mid-career urban planners from developing countries a chance to reflect on their experiences as they planned their professional futures. Rodwin insisted that program requirements should be minimal so that Fellows could freely decide how to spend their year at MIT. The Ford Foundation had approved this approach with generous funding in part because the foundation wanted to encourage intellectual interaction between U.S. academics and planners from developing countries at a time when neither group was particularly interested in the other. SPURS program components. In the process, many conventional notions about mid-career programs have been confirmed even as we have uncovered unexpected insights that I would like to share at this celebratory moment.

Much has been accomplished over the last 45 years, as the SPURS/Humphrey Program has evolved from a totally unstructured effort to one with well-defined outcomes and challenges. The program is about the older approaches to the program components. In the process, many conventional notions about mid-career programs have been confirmed even as we have uncovered unexpected insights that I would like to share at this celebratory moment.

First, we have learned that SPURS has been quite effective in creating a learning environment for the Fellows, but that the learning process is more complicated than is the case in many other mid-career programs. We have discovered that good learning environments strengthen student confidence and that building such confidence is as much a challenge as simply because MIT is a leading educational institution. In fact, MIT’s impressive intellectual atmosphere can also be a problem. There is perhaps no more difficult assignment for the Fellows first arrive at MIT, but the anxiety is heightened as the Fellows grapple with very high academic standards and expectations. The Fellows do work hard, grow intellectually, and often perform better when they return home as a result of learning at MIT. But the learning process is unpredictable. As new Fellows grapple to speak and write fluently in English, as they try to read in English, and as they grow used to the American way of life—competing with the best U.S. students and professors, who participated in the program lectured at RCC, interacted with RCC students, and built a network of friends who have seen that when the Fellows only focus on MIT activities. Significantly, the new programs from such countries over the course of the year. Many are very grateful that the program has provided them the opportunity to meet people from all across the globe, which is in itself an accomplishment. However, it is only a first step toward creating a global community of like-minded Fellows prepared to deal with complex global problems resulting from the equally complex flow of ideas, trade, and personnel. The varied political histories, taken together with the varying power imbalances, wars, mistrusts, and ethnic conflicts of all sorts. How do we take the good will our programs create to the next level of discourse? Can we encourage Fellows to question one another, disagree politely, and reflect on the conventional understanding of the past, and reconstruct a new understanding of what it means to be a true global citizen? This challenge remains.

Finally, one of the key objectives of SPURS—and of other mid-career programs in top-ranking U.S. universities—was to offer Fellows educational and retooling opportunities. The sentiment underlying this objective, I’m sure, is that almost any developed country is an advanced, well-developed nation where Fellows could learn planning skills they could later put into practice at home. At MIT, there was naturally an additional emphasis on technological know-how, which many still consider a major factor influencing development outcomes. In other words, the Fellows were expected to come to MIT to learn from their U.S. experiences. But the unconventional wisdom at the time was that the best mid-career Fellows in the world could come to the United States, learn from MIT, and return home. The flow of knowledge was to be one way: from the developed world to the developing countries through the Fellows.

In reality, the process of learning by the Fellows as well as by us, the university faculty, has been multidimensional. There are many elements to this learning effort, not all of which I can cover in this brief essay. But, one I must highlight—because it is an insight I gained recently as our Fellows started a wonderful relationship with Roxbury Community College (RCC) thanks to a special grant from the Hubert Humphrey Foundation—is that the Fellows to Americans in communities that face significant urban planning challenges. The action of their old biases about some countries do grow gradually, as they get to know Fellows from such countries over the course of the year. Many are very grateful that the program has provided them the opportunity to meet people from all across the globe, which is in itself an accomplishment. However, it is only a first step toward creating a global community of like-minded Fellows prepared to deal with complex global problems resulting from the equally complex flow of ideas, trade, and personnel. The varied political histories, taken together with the varying power imbalances, wars, mistrusts, and ethnic conflicts of all sorts. How do we take the good will our programs create to the next level of discourse? Can we encourage Fellows to question one another, disagree politely, and reflect on the conventional understanding of the past, and reconstruct a new understanding of what it means to be a true global citizen? This challenge remains.

As the SPURS/Humphrey Program at MIT moves forward, we need to continue to build on our past experience and to sort out both conventional and as unconventional wisdom about learning, because MIT is first and foremost a learning community. While the Humphrey Program was part of the International Development Group, and the Department of Urban Studies and Planning has been a part of the MIT community long enough to generate a rich body of experience about teaching, learning, and, yes, giving back. Combined, we are well equipped to continue to develop some insights into ways for finding ways for people to work together to make the world a better place.

Why are we celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS)? The conventional answer is that SPURS is one of the oldest programs in the United States for mid-career professionals from developing nations, with more than 600 outstanding alumni in 108 countries around the world. SPURS inspired the creation of the graduate degree program offered by the International Development Group within MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning—a program that has been consistently ranked No. 1 in the nation for 20 years. SPURS has also worked closely with the Institute for International Education’s Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program for many years, serving the nation by fostering international understanding, cross-cultural learning, and, ultimately, global peace in a world fraught with conflict.

There is much to be proud of. SPURS’s accomplishments deserve a memorable celebration, so we have gone the extra mile by joining hands with the International Development Group to organize a global conference: “Unconventional Learning in International Development” on May 2-3, 2013 at the MIT Faculty Club. This conference is centered on the idea that mid-career Fellows come to American universities not simply to reflect on conventional understanding of the past, and reconstruct a new understanding of what it means to be a true global citizen? This challenge remains.

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American Planning Seminars Series

Drawing from their diverse experiences, speakers discuss the institutional, social, financial, and political agendas of urban planning.

Sept. 17 Introduction to American Planning

Speakers: DUSP Professors Ralph Gakemheimer and Bish Sanyal with Ezra Glenn, special assistant to DUSP department head.

Sept. 24 Mega Projects in America: Local, State, and Federal Interaction

Speaker: David Lubetoff, visiting lecturer in sociology at Harvard and senior project advisor to the Boston Area Research Initiative. Discussion centered on the massive in-town project by which Boston cancelled its elevated highway across the city center.

Oct. 1 Urban Revitalization and Redevelopment

Leaders of nongovernmental organizations discussed planning, politics, finance, and public-private relationships within the context of Boston’s housing market.

Nov. 26 Communities Reinventing Themselves

The two planners discussed how Boston and Somerville plan to invigorate local communities and promote public-private partnerships.

Nov. 19 Planning Process, Politics, and Finance of Housing in Boston

This seminar provided a legal perspective on development.

A visit to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), a public agency widely known for its strong leadership in housing, area development, and city planning was arranged by Andrew Grace, senior planner and urban designer at the BRA. The Fellows gathered with several BRA professionals, including Senior Planner Mary Krasas, Director Peter Meade, and Director of Research Alvaro Lima at a large-scale model of the city to discuss urban growth and previous and ongoing projects. The group exchanged ideas related to low-income housing and services to several ethnic enclaves within Boston’s Downtown Crossing area.

Fellows also visited the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), thanks to Victor Rivas, a former SPURS Fellow who is now director of capital budget for the MBTA. MBTA General Manager Jonathan Davis and Director of Environmental Affairs Andrew Brennan described the condition of services, current projects, and future plans with an assertive message about the agency’s plans, which stimulated a great deal of discussion among the Fellows. MBTA staff also presented new projects, including the extension of the Green Line (light rail) currently taking place and prospects for expanded bus rapid transit in the metropolitan area. Officials also discussed the difficulty of providing adequate maintenance with limited resources as well as a number of other topics.

The director of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), MIT planning alumnus Mark Draisen, arranged for Fellows to visit the regional office responsible for coordinating planning in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. Massachusetts is governed by these numerous cities and towns, rather than through a county structure.) Deputy Director Joel Barrera organized and chaired the visit, which featured a discussion with several MAPC planners on cross-border collaboration, regional land development, and transportation planning, for which the MAPC has central responsibility.

Several Fellows revisited the offices of the MAPC for its annual open house. At this event, all the professionals of the agency were on hand to discuss their challenges and accomplishments.
Three years ago, the RCC/MIT Associate Campus Partnership Program (ACPP) emerged from an informal conversation between Dr. Phillip Clay, then chancellor of MIT, and Dr. Terrence Gomes, who was then president of Roxbury Community College (RCC). The idea was to engage MIT resources to expose RCC students to more of the opportunities available to them as they develop through their education. After three years, the program continues to grow and flourish.

This note from RCC student and program participant Carl Evans Homicil expresses the overarching vision of the partnership:

“When I pass by MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, I always say to myself that I would love to attend this school, that it would be a great achievement for me. However, I am always left with the thought that MIT is for people whose parents are rich or that certain people will never attend that school regardless of how much one is motivated, smart, and willing to study and get A’s. So I always thought there is no point in trying.”

“Well, my idea about MIT is now changed after this semester at Roxbury Community College. The collaboration of MIT and RCC, although at its starting point, is one that recognizes that talents can be anywhere in any social class. I do appreciate that MIT has reached out by doing conferences and offered us an opportunity to go beyond and hope for the best. The presentations were very informative and excellent. I hope more students are aware of that open door....

“Thank you MIT!”

Personal relationships are key to this partnership, which is why the MIT/Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS)/Humphrey Program has turned out to be an ideal partner. Since 1967, SPURS has attracted practitioners from around the globe—Africa, Asia, Eastern and Central Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Now the Fellows’ international perspectives are expanding the understanding of RCC students’ place in the wider world, while RCC students are exposing the international Fellows to their varied experiences as students in the United States. Some of these RCC students are international students themselves, hailing from more than 30 countries. They have also had a wide range of experiences—of immigration, war, natural disasters, refuge status, caste systems, economic and racial segregation, and oppression. Their experiences enrich the personal relationships engendered by this partnership.

At first, we began simply with one or two social gatherings featuring a keynote presentation followed by discussions, which were very lively given the varied experiential lenses that participants brought to the topics. Eventually and organically, informal relationships began to form: students and Fellows communicated through email; they met and visited institutions in Roxbury. Subsequently, RCC professors invited the Fellows to present during their classes. Informal talks developed into formal presentations of subjects in which the Fellows had expertise, such as urban economics, transportation, geopolitics, and regional planning. After two semesters of informal gatherings, the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows’ presentations became more formalized and became part of the curriculum of two social science courses: urban economics and political science. These presentations have educational value both for the RCC students and for the Fellows. Steadily, the partnership program blossomed. This year, we built in opportunities for internships at MIT to extend the educational experience of RCC students and to expose them to new elements of the planning discipline. In preparation for the internships, faculty and staff from MIT and RCC presented a seminar to help RCC students begin to bridge the gap between their experience as undergraduates and MIT’s graduate-level vocabulary and research methods. This gap may seem huge, but ACPP expressly recognizes that RCC students do not come to the table empty-handed. They bring resources to the partnership in the form of experiential learning, because most RCC students live in communities that have a long history of documented social activism and community development victories. ACPP is dedicated to "two-way learning," recognizing that while SPURS/Humphrey Fellows share their academic understanding, RCC students bring their own understanding and varied perspectives to the partnership, not on a theoretical basis but through experiential learning and practical experience. ACPP will continue to evolve, as personal relationships reveal new insights. The core program elements—social gatherings, SPURS/Humphrey Fellows’ presentations, planning seminars, internships, and other intellectually challenging opportunities—form the foundation upon which to build upper programmatic structures. These may include collective community development praxis such as: charrettes, asset mapping, and exploration of discipline-specific skills (research methods; written, oral, and technological communication; and presentation skills). We also plan to add seminars that explore the educational paths to careers in planning, ultimately increasing the pool of planners who hail from communities living with the challenges that planners so often confront.

By Jose A. Alica, EdD (MCP ’91), Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Roxbury Community College
Team Building

During the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows' weekend retreat in Maine, we invited James Rojas, SM ’91, MCP ’91, to conduct a team-building workshop. Rojas is an urban planner who devotes a lot of his time to translating the impenetrable maps and language of land-use planning into activities that are visual, tactile, and playful—the language of how we actually experience the world.

As an icebreaker for the 15 SPURS/Humphrey Fellows, I asked the Fellows to re-create their ideal childhood places. I wanted them to bond through their childhood memories and rediscover their initial reactions to public space through memory, exploration, and interaction. The activity allowed the Fellows to share their experiences and perceptions in a safe zone. Fellows were free to create any childhood situation and experience; I assured them that there were no right or wrong answers.

We began the process without discussion, maps, or PowerPoint slides because I wanted an untainted response from the participants. This lack of rules allowed them to think quickly and freely about the task.

Once they started to see, touch, and explore the materials in front of them, the creative process began. They chose pieces that they liked, or those that would help them reconstruct a memory. Once they began to place and layout a few pieces of material on construction paper, the design process got under way. Their hands moved furiously as their designs and ideas became more developed and elaborate. Many participants got up many times to gather additional materials. For the next 10 minutes, the participants were in a meditative state of thinking about childhood. The flurry of activity slowed down as people became satisfied with their models. They then began to talk, look around at the dioramas created by their colleagues, and pull out cell phones to take pictures of the beautiful models.

In a little less than 15 minutes I sensed the group was finished constructing. The fun and informative part of the exercise was next. I asked all the Fellows to give one-minute presentations about their favorite childhood places using their models.

The 15 Fellows came from all over the world, yet as children they had very similar experiences. The models were often of the outdoors, many of such natural settings as beaches, forests, or streams. Urban setting included gardens, streets, markets, or churches. Many of these places were associated with specific activities the Fellows had experienced. As children they had used these places for interactions—playing, exploring, and learning. Their senses, logic, and imagination had been stimulated, creating powerful memories of these places. This simple activity allows people to understand the power space has in shaping our lives. Through this process we can begin to deeply understand each other and to create shared experiences.

Even though humans live in various conditions and countries, we all share the same experiences in the built environment. There was very little difference in the models among those of different genders, income levels, nationalities, or race. Everyone was able to share and find common threads, making it easier to later explore differences. It was a great way for the Fellows to get to know each other!


English and Communication Training

Kelcy Roth trains and consults with international leaders who speak English as a second language. In addition to working globally, Roth teaches English communication to international business students and executives at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

This year the SPURS/Humphrey Program launched a new initiative to strengthen the English language capabilities of its Fellows.

Each summer the program requests that all entering SPURS/Humphrey Fellows write an essay noting three important differences and three important similarities between their countries and the United States; they are also asked to list six words that describe the average American. In addition to capturing the Fellows’ rich observations and preconceptions about the United States, the responses demonstrate the level of their English skills. This year’s submissions were fascinating—varied, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. Based on these essays and MIT’s English Evaluation, the program selected two groups of nine Fellows to participate in the new English program. These Fellows came from Armenia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mongolia, Thailand, and Zambia.

Customized content
Executive English customized a curriculum to address learning objectives for writing and speaking English effectively in the context of the Fellows’ projects. Writing included a review of present and past tenses, articles (the, an, a), vocabulary expansion, conciseness (the average English sentence is 20–25 words; the record sentence submitted by a Fellow was 78 words!), and document graphics. We examined ways to shorten sentences with punctuation and linking words, such as “furthermore,” “therefore,” and “although.” By mid-semester Fellows were reviewing the essentials of English presentations and short talks. Each participant gave a five-minute talk on a subject of his or her choosing to the group. Participants critiqued each talk, practicing giving constructive feedback—an important communication skill in the American academic and business culture. Participants noticeably improved in all areas, including the most difficult: using articles correctly.

Three workshops
Executive English offered three additional events to all Fellows during the fall 2012 semester. At the first, a welcome/orientation discussion, Fellows engaged in a relaxed and lively discussion of the six words they had each submitted to describe the average American. Examples included “patriotic,” “independent,” and “fatty.” The conversation highlighted American characteristics as well as the vocabulary of opposites, synonyms, and word forms. At the end of the morning, it was clear to all that the English program was off to a good start!

The second workshop focused on resume writing. Learning the rigid writing style of the English resume is crucial for anyone in an international career. Generating a strong, concise resume takes practice and many revisions. After the workshop, Fellows received individual support to complete their resumes and bios.

The topic of the third workshop was effective presentations. This two-hour event included a talk on the essentials of American presentations along with interactive discussion. A review of the 2012 English training program would be incomplete without a word about the extraordinary spirit and commitment of all the Fellows participating. The Fellows raised wonderful, probing questions throughout the 10 sessions. Benefiting from the small group format, everyone learned a lot and laughed a lot. Attendance remained high throughout the semester.

By Kelcy Roth, Founder and Director of Executive English
Collaboration With Present and Former SPURS/Humphrey Fellows

Xiaohui Chen and Adam Pinto Partners on Togo Project

Two Humphrey Fellows from the Class of 2008–2009, Xiaohui Chen and Adam Pinto, are collaborating on a planning project in Togo involving construction and development on two campuses, the University of Lome and the University of Kara. These developments are perceived as vehicles for prequalifying the university neighborhood area for the project. Beyond the planning, construction, and furnishing tasks, the project is designed to: 1) improve the economy and promote the hiring of local labor with an emphasis on youth employment; and 2) strengthen human capital via the use of local skilled workers and the training of new ones (transferring both technology and know-how).

On May 17 to May 20, Chen and Pinto organized a working visit in Lome, along with all the project partners. The main outcome of this visit included a protocol signed with the minister of higher education to prepare the project scope and to assist the government in submitting loans and grant applications to the Chinese National Development Banks. Following this protocol, the partners will help the Togolese authorities prepare feasibility studies, loan applications, and other key documents. Work is now in progress, with a focus on identifying financing options, collecting data, and conducting feasibility studies. Chen and Pinto continue to collaborate and hope to create opportunities to link American, Chinese, and African academicians and practitioners together on campus development.

Abel Manangi Joins MIT Students to Ghana during IAP

Abel K. Manangi, Humphrey Fellow from Zambia, traveled to Ghana during MIT’s Independent Activities Period, joining Senior Lecturer Susan Murcott, MIT students from Mechanical Engineering and Urban Studies and Planning, and a Loeb Fellow from Harvard University. The group gathered data on water and sanitation issues to gain insight into sanitation conditions and discover why Ghana is lagging in reaching its Millennium Development Goal for sanitation. During the trip, Manangi and the others met with the acting director of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and with representatives of Zoomlion, a private company implementing sanitation activities on behalf of the government of Ghana. Other meetings and field trips focused on water strategies for the Ghana Water Co. Ltd. Manangi’s visit was also part of the DUSP Sanitation Practicum in Ghana. Humphrey Fellows Liliana Pimentel from Brazil attended a peace seminar in Chile and Patricia Silva from Brazil participated with DUSP students in a studio project in Tianjin University, China during IAP.

MIT-SIGUS Groups Partners Humphrey Alumnus for a Housing Workshop In Fiji

The MIT Special Interest Group in Urban Settlement (SIGUS) team, joined with MIT Humphrey alumnus Mere Rayawa, principal administrator in Fiji’s Department of Housing, Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment, for a two-week workshop focused on incorporating “incremental housing” policy into the new National Housing Strategy of Fiji. (“Incremental Housing” is the newly embraced proactive strategy of the global development community, sometimes called “pay as you go.” It offers a viable approach for meeting affordable housing demands within the limited resources of government, drawing lessons from the demonstrated energy of self-builders and increasingly incorporating these into official policy worldwide.)

From left to right: Koifi Alipagana (second vice president, University of Lome); Adam Pinto (former Humphrey Fellow); Liu Hengmeng; Francois Aghenade Galley (former minister); Xiaohui Chen (former Humphrey Fellow), Kafui Andre; Li Wenguang; Zhu Haifeng.

Abel Manangi (Humphrey Fellow), Anna Groso (DUSP student), Lensoson Denidemi (acting director of Local Government and Rural Development, Ghana); Claire Maple (DUSP student), Shengkan Yang (MEng student), Lakshmi Towera David (DUSP student), and Ann Tochin (Loeb Fellow, Harvard University).

MIT SIGUS TEAM MEETS WITH US AMBASSADOR TO FIJI

Left to right: Cindy Cook (US Embassy), Mere Rayawa (Fiji Department of Housing), Kelly Heber (MIT), Christopher Malcolm (MIT), Junghwa Kim (MIT), Ambassador Franklin, Rd. Chunghe Dudeki (MIT), Adriya Barve (MIT), Ana Christina Yangus-Valas (MIT), Clay Anderson (MIT), and Dr. Reinhard Goethert, director of MIT SIGUS.
In Mozambique, as in much of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the environmental health research community remains focused on significant problems with the accessibility and/or adequacy of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)—largely in rural areas. However, especially in the region’s vulnerable urban settlements, where populations are set to grow most rapidly over the coming decades, and where the cost of living is higher on average than in most rural areas, it is also critical to understand the instrumental role played by affordability in defining and addressing WASH challenges. In short, a triple lens—namely of accessibility, adequacy, and affordability (or A3)—better explains how WASH issues are related to and influence the resiliency of vulnerable populations in urban and peri-urban environments in SSA.

In early September 2010, the significance of the richer triple-A lens was made all the more evident in Mozambique—a country that while still largely rural, has a growing and stratified urban population. Across a number of Mozambique’s cities, riots broke out protesting the rise in living costs such as wastes as well as bread and oil prices. Political escalation in Mozambique—the largest district in the capital. It is remarkable for the lack of density in its settlements (with only 119 people per square kilometer, as compared with other districts nearing 20,000 per square kilometer), as well as for its poverty incidence of over 70 percent, the highest figure in the city. In other words, from a perspective of density and income, KaTembe is a capital city municipal district with a decidedly rural feel.

However, KaTembe’s characteristics are set for serious change over the course of the next decade. The district is the center of an economic development strategy launched by a new company, Maputo-Sul, owned in partnership between the government of Mozambique and a private engineering company from Portugal (BETAR Consultants). Development plans for KaTembe center on: a) building a bridge between this district and the “cement city” (which is presently only connected by boat); b) constructing a paved toll road that would expand the major dirt road in KaTembe, connect it with Maputo’s other major road arteries, and provide direct access to tourist centers at the southern tip of Mozambique, bordering South Africa; and c) real estate developments in KaTembe (the revenues from which would support repayment of a construction loan from the government of the People’s Republic of China to build the bridge and road aforementioned).

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Peri-urban environments like KaTembe, and urban development projects taking shape in them, are not atypical in SSA. Much as urban renewal projects in the United States did, the flux of programmed change in these environments challenges SSA’s urban planners to facilitate the improvement of basic services for the current income-poor residential population while also accompanying physical plans and services for any new (wealthier) populations. However, in Mozambique—and specifically in peri-urban sites like KaTembe—there is an additional planning challenge: missing baseline data. While planners in rural and community groups in KaTembe plan for equitable growth and A3 services if basic socio-economic data on households, their neighborhood services, and specifically their water and sanitation systems are lacking at requisite scales? The dearth of sub-city-level data is a serious impediment to sustainable urban planning at the neighborhood level, which is where designs turn into reality.

In the latest Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) available on Mozambique (2003), for example, Maputo often emerges as an outlier compared with rural and urban areas in the country. While only 0.3 percent of the rural population and 17.3 percent of the urban population interviewed for the DHS in Mozambique had access to clean drinking water at home, the figure for Maputo was 39.8 percent. Likewise, while 63 percent of rural interviewees and 21.6 percent of urban ones reported having no sanitation infrastructure, only 0.5 percent of the survey respondents in Maputo indicated having no latrines or toilets. While no doubt troubling, data provides an opportunity for researchers to partner with others and the communities and environments they study in the Global South, communities’ expectations of field-based research need to be not only recognized and embraced, but also mobilized.

Planners largely already agree that data emergent from field-based surveys and interviews can be collaboratively produced and used, or in other words, activated, quantity that is not only internationally referenced. Engaging communities in the formal recording of data, primarily about themselves and their environments, strengthens research-based relationships but also importantly can help foster a community’s expectations of themselves and their leaders. Collaboratively produced and used scientific data provides an opportunity for participants, who otherwise remain...
subjects rather than active agents in field-based research, to strategically and creatively dare to envision wider scopes of opportunity in their neighborhoods. While such data collection by lay individuals, conducted at the local level, has centered on self-enumerations and household surveys among poor communities in the Global South, there is further room for this method in the production of sector-specific and environmental data too. In the United States, as well as a number of other high-income countries, community water management in urban environments has been popularized and facilitated along with the emergence of environmental justice movements that bring science to the defense of environmentally vulnerable publics. However, while such movements (e.g., the work of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement first in Kenya, and now throughout Sub-Saharan Africa) have found root in the Global South’s rural settings, particularly where natural resource extraction has deteriorated landscapes, urban communities have not yet witnessed a widespread grassroots movement for environmental justice.

For these reasons, my project also envisions deepening the typical cycle of survey work—or what would be sufficient for data gathering and dissemination. MIT students will accompany me on my next trip to Maputo, and working in conjunction with Mozambican university students and other colleagues based in Maputo, we will provide heuristic training to a locally based youth non-governmental organization (NGO) in KaTembe. Together we will expand on previous survey work and support our youth group partners in KaTembe to conduct future household surveys and to engage in the monitoring of local water systems, independent of this research project. Ultimately, securing accessible, adequate, and affordable (or A3) water and sanitation systems is necessarily tied to citizenship—and, in the age of decentralized administration of basic services, to the most local levels of government. As researchers and practitioners, we cannot afford to shy away from direct engagement with and support of locally based groups that can best advocate for their citizenship rights to the dignity of viable water and sanitation systems in healthy cities.

By Gabriella Carolini, EdD (MCP Assistant Professor for the Department of Urban Studies and Planning)

Alumni/ae News

Paul Altidor with United States President Barack Obama

Paul Altidor (SPURS Fellow 2002-2003) was appointed Haiti’s ambassador to the United States on May 2, 2012. Altidor previously served as vice president of the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund and has an extensive private-sector background. In the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Altidor led a team of professors and researchers from MIT’s Community Innovators Lab to Haiti to provide guidance on housing policy and financing. He received his undergraduate degree from Boston College, an SM in urban studies and planning from MIT (2004), and pursued graduate studies in law and economics at the University of Paris in France. (insert photo)

Kristalina Georgieva (SPURS Fellow 1991-1992) is European commissioner for international cooperation, humanitarian aid and crisis response. Previously, she was vice president and corporate secretary of the World Bank Group. Georgieva acted as the interlocutor between the World Bank’s senior management, its Board of Directors, and the 186 countries that are shareholders of the World Bank Group.

Christian Asinelli (Humphrey Fellow 2010-2011) has been appointed under secretary of evaluation for externally funded programs in Argentina. He wrote: “It’s been more than a year since my last days at the SPURS Program, and I can now appreciate what it really meant for my training as a policymaker. As undersecretary of evaluation for externally funded programs, in charge of negotiating with international organizations the best conditions for investment loans to my country, I need to understand global dynamics and analyze the quality of public programs, while interacting with people from all around the world. Thanks to my experience at MIT, I have been able to build these new responsibilities upon the skills I developed through the SPURS-Humphrey Fellowship Program’s multiple courses and activities, in a very challenging and stimulating environment. I deeply believe every ambitious and serious policymaker should undertake a program like this.”

Ilcac Diaz (Humphrey Fellow 2005-2006) is one of five winners of the 2012 Curby Stone Design Prize. Diaz created Liter of Light to provide residents of informal settlements in his country, the Philippines, with a cheap daytime lighting source that can be produced and distributed locally. Liter of Light is the first organization to widely distribute the solar bottle bulbs, and through a combination of social networking, open-source sharing, and hands-on building, the organization has placed tens of thousands of these bulbs—which use empty plastic bottles to refract sunlight into homes—in informal settlements worldwide.

Angela Franco Calderon (Humphrey Fellow 2011-2012), inspired by Ilcac Diaz’s Liter of Light project, has started a similar initiative. The project goal is to light 1,000 low-income homes people in Cali, Colombia.

Monica Amorim (SPURS Fellow 1991-1992) is deputy-secretary general for the World Famous Mountains Association (WFMA), an organization that encourages communities to engage in green economy, create inclusive development strategies, and promote local culture and products. She is also working on a Sister Cities Initiative, linking Brazilian cities to partners in China. As a result, a number of cooperative activities have emerged between universities of both countries (e.g., student exchanges, joint research projects). The effort has also sparked bilateral government agreements and mutual business promotion.

Spurs Anniversary Conference

SPURS celebrates its 45th anniversary this spring with Unconventional Wisdom: Learning in International Development Practice, a two-day conference held in collaboration with MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning’s (DUSP’s) International Development Group on May 2–3, 2013, at the MIT Faculty Club.

Dr. Joan Clos i Matheu, under-secretary-general of the United Nations and executive director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), will serve as the keynote speaker on the first day of the conference. Panels and presentations will also feature distinguished guests and alumni from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank, as well as regional and national governments, civil society organizations, and universities around the world.

Over the course of two days, the conference will bring high-level practitioners, policymakers, scholars, Fellows, and students together to explore issues at the forefront of planning practice. Plenary sessions, roundtable discussions, and in-depth workshops will offer perspectives from a wide range of political and institutional contexts and will challenge conventional wisdom and advance the field. A key theme will be knowledge creation and learning from multiple sources; failures as well as successful interventions; unconventional as well as proven approaches; practice as well as scholarly inquiry and analysis.
Unconventional Wisdom: Learning In International Development Practice
MIT International Development Group (IDG) 2nd Annual Conference & SPURS 45th Anniversary
In Collaboration With The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy And The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

May 2-3, 2013
MIT Faculty Club, 50 Memorial Drive, Cambridge MA 02142

Thursday, May 2nd

08:30-09:30  Breakfast and Registration
09:30-09:50  Welcome and Opening Remarks
09:50-12:30  Progress Through Unconventional Approaches: The Case of Medellin, Colombia
01:15-02:30  Keynote Speaker: Joan Clos, Under Secretary General United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
02:30-04:00  Fruitful Failures: How Practitioners Learn and Innovate from Mistakes-Experiences of SPURS/Humphrey Alumni
04:30-06:00  When Values and Priorities Collide: Resolving Ethical Dilemmas in Practice
              -Post Disaster Challenges in Haiti
              - Urban Mobility Reform in Santiago de Chile
              -Using Participatory Technologies to Address Development Challenges
06:00-08:00  Cocktail Reception and Networking

Friday, May 3rd

08:30-09:00  Breakfast and Registration
09:00-10:00  Critical Listening: Conversation facilitated by John Forester and Larry Susskind
10:15-12:00  Misperception about the City and Consequences for Planning Practice
12:45-01:30  DUSP at the World Bank: A Panel Conversation with DUSP Alumni at the Bank
01:45-03:30  The Role of Context in Effective Planning Practice
03:45-05:15  Round table discussions-Improving International Development Education
              -Curricula: Rethinking International Development Studies
              - Practica: Global North and Global South as Reflected in the Design of Place-Based Learning
              - Collaborations: International Collaboration between Academic Institutions in Support of Professional Development
05:30-06:00  Closing Session: SPURS Directors Reflection

For more information visit us at our website: www.unconventionalwisdom.mit.edu