Letter from the Director

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE: ONE CHALLENGE

Why is it so difficult to think of examples of successful public planning efforts? I asked this question last fall in a new seminar I was teaching called Development, Planning, and Implementation: The Dialectic of Theory and Practice. While hoping to facilitate a discussion, I was not so naïve as to assume that all the past planning efforts recalled by the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows would be “success stories.” Rather, I was trying to inspire their thinking about how to learn from the practice of public planning. Since planning-related discussions often center on failures—thanks to powerful books such as Peter Hall’s Great Planning Disasters (1982)—I explicitly asked the students in the seminar to start the discussion by recollecting past planning successes, however small, that they had either observed or actually contributed to in some way. Unfortunately, most students could not think of any examples of planning success, raising the question I began this article with: Why is it so difficult to come up with any examples of planning success—particularly in new nations such as those that are home to so many SPURS/Humphrey Fellows?
Thinking about this question led me to three tentative hypotheses. My first is that the Fellows from developing nations look up to the United States as a model of what their nations could be if only the development process were better planned. This creates a paradox: The Fellows are usually very proud of their countries of origin and are eager to talk about the country’s scenery or cultural heritage, but they are intensely critical of what their countries have achieved in terms of development. In fact, there is a widespread feeling among the Fellows that their countries could have been much more developed if only “the political system” at home were more friendly to development—as it appears to be in the United States.

This view should not be surprising to development scholars because so much of the published literature on development is still based on the implicit assumptions outlined by Walt Whitman Rostow: that all nations take an upward path as development picks up and production becomes more efficient, enhancing productivity and income along the way. In other words, developing countries should look at developed nations as their models, learn from the experiences of the developed world, and leap-frog various development steps technologically rather than “reinvent the wheel.”

The Fellows, like most development scholars, are therefore puzzled about why this kind of positive development trajectory has not yet been achieved in their countries, and they are critical about the slow pace of development. That is why their first inclination is to see failure and to wonder why their nations lag behind in development when their people are as smart and hardworking as North Americans. While most understand that their countries do not have the financial resources of the United States, they express serious anguish about whether the resources their countries do have are being used well.

That brings us to my second hypothesis about why the Fellows are not inclined to look for success in public planning efforts, and that has to do with how governments are viewed generally around the world. It is truly astonishing to comprehend the level of worldwide disappointment about governmental performance—and that includes various public planning efforts. There seems to be a worldwide concern that echoes what President Reagan said about the United States nearly 35 years ago: “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” I am struck by how widespread this anti-government view is and how much it really prevents citizens from appreciating governmental efforts—even though not all efforts are failures.

The criticisms of governments are many: they are too bureaucratic and make too many irrational rules; they are wasteful and not market savvy; they are unresponsive to changing conditions; and so on. One could almost predict how criticism of governments would unfold, step by step, creating a deep sense of pessimism about a condition for which there is no clear and immediate way out. One would think that such pessimism would make us search for positive exceptions amid the norm of institutional darkness, but the opposite is true. The more pessimism prevails, the less inclined people are to learn from past efforts because all effort is dismissed as useless. Optimism is necessary to motivate the effort required to sift through past experiences and look for nuggets of success, however little, amid the larger pile of garbage.

What adds to the general gloom and pessimism is the discrediting of the formal political process. The presiding sentiment—that it is totally corrupt—makes it unsurprising that no one sees any trace of success in public planning efforts. What makes reimagining the political process difficult is that, indeed, there is corruption—no one can deny that. But it’s important to ask: Do a few things get done despite corruption? Or, to put it another way: Do all governmental planning efforts lend themselves equally to corruption? If not, can projects and policies be designed to be less prone to corruption? Take the case of governmental contracts, for example. Are there ways of preparing contracts that are more transparent? These sort of questions cannot emerge if one feels hopeless about the overwhelming impact of corruption.

In the seminar, I pointed out that not all politicians nor all aspects of the political process need be dismissed as corrupt. On the contrary, some politicians are inspiring, and the poor vote for them not simply because of patronage (as is sometimes assumed). This sensitivity can be useful in cutting through political rhetoric and judging true political accomplishments, which is one way to understand the politics of even small successes. How are we to rethink politics and reimagine political leadership, I am not sure; what I do know is that broad branding of all political leaders as corrupt, self-serv ing, and utterly useless is not a particularly useful way to move development forward. In fact, it can sometimes create the opposite effect as when the formal political process is discredited to such an extent that working outside official channels begins to look like an appealing way to get things done. A democratic process is always slow, conflict-ridden, and demanding of compromise, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t add value to the way any society articulates its priorities.

A third plausible explanation as to why people have such difficulty identifying success stories is because of the academic legitimacy of “critical thinking.” True, critical thinking is absolutely essential for good scholarship and for all for vibrant democracies, but one needs to be critical about the nature of criticality itself, why some form of criticism leads to better policy formulations, while others may lead to complete inaction. What is that kind of criticality, one may ask; I myself asked that question as I offered the seminar last fall. The course was based on a key assumption: that by critically evaluating past planning efforts—not simply rejecting all past efforts but understanding which aspect of any policy or project worked better than others—one would be able to think about planning theories in a new way. These include theorizing from practice, not the other way around (the conventional way is to dissect the shortcomings of practice on the grounds that reality did not meet the expectations set by conventional “theories”).

One of the main conceptual challenges of education these days is how to deal with the intellectual baggage most students carry with them about politicians, government, and bureaucrats—that they are not development agents but hindrances whose influence in the development process has to be curtailed somehow for entrepreneurial energy to flourish. This intellectual baggage does not allow the student to see any evidence of success, because to acknowledge any success disrupts the students’ preconceptions about how the world works—or, more precisely, does not work! How to break out of this mindset is an educational challenge I intend to pursue with even more vigor next year.
This advanced seminar taught by Professor Bish Sanyal analyzed the effectiveness of development and planning theories from the perspective of practitioners who implement projects and policies based on such theories. SPURS and Humphrey Fellows were joined by graduate students from MIT, leading to lively discussions as students shared their contrasting experiences regarding planning in developing nations.

The course reviewed the conventional theories of development, planning, and implementation, setting the stage for a critical review of how such theories actually unfold in practice. Drawing on their collective experience implementing projects and policies, students revised the conventional theories to fit the organizational constraints that influence implementation outcomes. The ultimate goal was to create new planning sensibilities that develop theories from practice, not the other way around.

The course was organized around 12 implementation puzzles, which were designed to prompt students to re-theorize developmental and planning processes. Over the course of the semester, students were asked to focus on any one of these puzzles, write a paper on its multiple facets, and illustrate their thinking via a case study of one of their own implementation experiences. Through this assignment, students reconceptualized the processes through which nations develop, cities grow, and planning is practiced by professionals who do not think of the process either as “top down” or as “bottom up,” but rather seek to connect the two levels.
MYTHS ABOUT AMERICA

The SPURS/Humphrey Program held a seminar series on “Myths About America (and American Planning)” this spring term. Each seminar was led by an expert in a particular aspect of American life. Guest speakers came from a variety of institutions, including MIT, Harvard University, the University of California, New York University, and Occidental College.

Each seminar centered on unpacking a stereotype about American life that is widely held overseas, for example, that all Americans own guns, or that Americans are not religious. Other seminars explored how socially mobile the United States really is and the extent to which progressivism has a foothold in American politics.

Each seminar began with a talk by the invited speaker. Through selected readings and class discussion, participants then examined each stereotype’s historical roots, as well as what elements of truth or myth it contains. Through seminar-style discussion, participants analyzed how each idea has shaped American society in general and American city planning in particular.

Throughout the series, participants were encouraged to draw on and share their knowledge of urban planning in different countries in order to draw comparisons with the U.S. experience and explore the implications for planning in developed vs. developing nations.
This fall, the SPURS/Humphrey Program hosted a seminar on climate change taught by SPURS doctoral associate Jessica Debats. Through lectures, readings, and discussion, Fellows explored the social, economic, and policy implications of climate change. Over the course of the seminar, the Fellows collaboratively designed a proposal for how the world can mitigate and adapt to climate change while ensuring environmental justice, both between and within countries. For instance, the developed world has emitted most of the carbon responsible for climate change, yet developing nations have suffered most of the early consequences. The Fellows therefore advocated transferring “green” technology from developed to developing countries, as well as instituting a retrospective carbon tax to finance adaptation in vulnerable regions. Since climate impacts will fall hardest on marginalized populations within both developing and developed nations, the Fellows also advocated including such groups in planning adaptation efforts, empowering communities to develop their own local-scale adaptation plans. The Fellows elected two members of their class to present the proposal to the Humphrey Global Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C.: Maria Lucrecia Bertelli, a sustainable development specialist from Argentina, and Tabjeel Ashraf, a civil engineer and transportation planner from Pakistan.

The Fellows advocated instituting a retrospective carbon tax to finance adaptation in vulnerable regions

GIS WORKSHOP DURING IAP

For the first time during MIT’s Independent Activity Period (IAP), the SPURS/Humphrey Program offered a workshop on Geographic Information Systems (GISs) for its Fellows. A GIS can collect, store, and analyze spatial data and display data on a map, making it a powerful tool in many fields, including planning and architecture. The IAP offering was a five-day-long course consisting of two lecture hours and two lab hours a day for a total of 20 hours. The goal of the workshop was to introduce some of the fundamentals and concepts in the field and allow Fellows to become familiar with GIS terms and software.
RCC/MIT ASSOCIATE CAMPUS PARTNERSHIP: LET’S CELEBRATE OUR 5TH ANNIVERSARY AND WHAT’S NEXT
By Nasreen Latiff, RCC Faculty

It is time to reflect on my journey with the Roxbury Community College (RCC)-MIT/SPURS Humphrey partnership. On our fifth-year anniversary, it is my privilege to congratulate and give thanks to all of the members of this partnership, RCC’s management, my colleagues, and my students for giving me inspiration and the opportunity to work on this project. It has been a great experience for me to be a member of this collaboration design team.

As per our initial plan in 2010, the mission statement is to collaborate in a joint program to benefit the students, scholars, Fellows, and faculty of RCC and MIT within the context of city and regional planning.

Over the years, we at RCC have spent a great deal of time with our partners at MIT, both face to face and virtually. RCC students have met many SPURS/Humphrey Fellows and staff, including Professor Bish Sanyal (director of SPURS/Humphrey), Assistant Director Nimfa V de Leon, research fellow Ofer Lerner, Professor Emeritus Tunney Lee, and Professor Ralph Gakenheimer, and others over the years, engendering new synergies for this collaboration that has made our courses more attractive and effective.

We are very grateful to the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows for enriching our curriculum by providing their global perspective on planning issues. During the last five years, this program has impacted the lives of so many Roxbury Community College students. As one RCC student wrote, “When I started this course I was focused on nursing and becoming an RN. After taking this course, my focus has been on building up our urban communities and getting our young people interested in school instead of the streets. The opening up of my mind has allowed me to think of new ideas and ways to help with this important task.”

In 2014, I added a new item to our yearly schedule—a community potluck luncheon held at RCC in the fall to bring Fellows and RCC students together around food and culture. It was a great success, and our Urban Economics students proudly plan to host this event for many more years to come. In fall 2015, SPURS/Humphrey Fellows also participated in our community service day, planting flower bulbs to beautify Roxbury.

In 2016, we are working with the Roxbury community on the Reclaim Roxbury Project. From my understanding, it will be interesting but challenging for our students and us. They are doing this type of future-oriented project for the first time.

In conclusion, we are all getting benefits from this partnership. In fact, this partnership has impacts not only locally but globally too.
On February 29, the MIT SPURS/Humphrey Fellows met with Harvard Loeb Fellows for a dinner at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, followed by a presentation on the future of urban design for social impact by John Peterson, the Loeb Fellowship curator.

The evening gave SPURS/Humphrey Fellows a chance to meet with this year’s Loeb Fellowship cohort, a group of nine people from the United States, Romania, Columbia, and Australia. These individuals are spending the 2015–2016 academic year at the Harvard Graduate School of Design where they take courses, collaborate with faculty and students, and expand their understanding of design as well as their leadership skills. Like the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows, the Loeb Fellows are accomplished midcareer practitioners in fields such as urban planning, urban design, architecture, and community development. The cohort includes architects, landscape architects, urban planners, artists, and community organizers. In contrast to SPURS/Humphrey, the Loeb Fellows hail both from abroad and from the United States. What all the Fellows share, however, is a commitment to improving quality of life and social equity through a better understanding of cities.

The event engendered a lively discussion on promoting social justice via design, and the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows and Loeb Fellows traded their wide-ranging experiences and perspectives on how urban planners, designers, and communities can partner to improve life for vulnerable populations. Given the success of the evening and the MIT and Loeb Fellows’ mutual enthusiasm for further collaboration, plans are in the works to continue connecting the two programs throughout the rest of the academic year.
In collaboration with the SPURS/Humphrey Program and the International Development House (iHouse), undergraduates Burhan Azeem and Tchelet Segev worked with SPURS Fellow Eirik Jarl Trondson at his Kenyan-based company, Energy Africa Ltd.

Energy Africa is an agribusiness that farms and sells fresh and eco-friendly crops mainly to hotels with the aim of increasing local employment. The students’ work followed up on Energy Africa’s decision to invest in Jatropha curcas, a plant used to make biofuel, after it became clear that the product was not living up to the hype it had generated.

Trondson, alongside Segev and Azeem, organized a task force to evaluate past business decisions, examine current market opportunities, and investigate future opportunities for Energy Africa. The purpose was to determine how Energy Africa could sustainably invest in the South Coast of Kenya. In investigating potential initiatives, there was a focus on using Energy Africa’s existing resources to identify new initiatives that are commercially viable, environmentally sustainable, and have a positive social impact, particularly promoting local employment.

The team conducted the assessment by examining company records, visiting relevant sites, and interviewing current and previous employees as well as stakeholders. The team recommended the company consider opportunities in forestry and the sale of crops both locally and nationally. The team further suggested the business could benefit by providing farmer training, a research center, and a demonstration site for tourists.

The project was mutually beneficial for all involved—Trondson gained insight into Energy Africa from the feedback the undergraduates provided, and Segev and Azeem learned how to conduct evaluations and consider the pros and cons of potential initiatives. It was a great collaboration for all, and plans are under way for the SPURS/Humphrey Program and iHouse to continue working together this summer!
This year, SPURS organized a Midyear Retreat at the MIT Endicott House to refocus the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows after their return from winter break. One part of the retreat centered on issues of self-identification and group dynamics. This session was led by Yazmany Arboleda, a New-York–based artist and architect who lectures internationally on the power of art in public space.

Arboleda conducted two exercises. The first involved placing different shaped dots on people’s foreheads. Without knowing which shape they had—and without words—the Fellows were asked to organize themselves. This exercise revealed the instinctual tendency humans have to form groups through specific means—based on sameness, as a response to being invited, in response to rejection, etc. The Fellows quickly found ways to communicate their “identities” by using their hands to create shapes and by pointing to colors in the room. In various instances, Fellows were excluded from groupings as per their assigned “identities.” Although the instructions did not communicate that people of different “identities” could not be grouped together, the Fellows never considered this an option.

Reflection: This exercise revealed that the means through which one joins a group affects the group dynamics. For example, if you are co-opted into one group because you were rejected from another, the dynamics will be different than if you were invited into the group. The exercise was intended to foster tolerance and accountability as well as to indirectly address stereotyping, prejudice, and privilege.

In the second exercise, Fellows were asked to consider a metaphorical lake and self-identify as “plungers,” “waders,” or “testers.” The three teams identified how they saw themselves and then allowed the other teams to share how they perceived them, quickly revealing the biases that existed from team to team. The objective of the exercise was to create a safe space for the group to share feelings about each other, troubleshoot unhealthy patterns, and learn to speak about one another from a place of appreciation rather than criticism.

Reflection: This exercise revealed diversity in leadership styles, the pros and cons of various styles, and the disparity that can exist between self-perception and the perception of others.

Our team of organizers thoroughly enjoyed engaging the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows in these activities and reflections because the Fellows were able to share how these experiences inform their day-to-day lives in a dynamic and forthcoming way. This year’s Fellows are communicative and proactive. These qualities definitely made the experience meaningful and rewarding for everyone involved.
2015-2016 Fellows’ Contributions

GENDER AND RACE INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITIES: LESSONS FROM THE U.S. FOR THE ONGOING STRUGGLE IN PALESTINE
By Anjadj Hitnawi, Humphrey Fellow

Prior to coming to the United States, I worked on planning and urban development projects for Palestinian communities living in the occupied Palestinian territories, specifically in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank. Throughout my work, I endeavored to build community resilience by using planning as a tool to secure building rights and the provision of socio-economic development opportunities. As someone who has worked and lived her entire life under occupation, “social inequality” and “injustice” have had very specific definitions. In Palestine, the fundamental struggle was and still is about freedom, rights, dignity, and self-determination. For a long time, I believed you needed an “occupation” or a dictatorship to construct oppression and state violence. I thought wrong.

In the country that leads the democratic world and sits on so many U.N. committees and councils, there are prolonged struggles for rights, dignity, self-determination, and freedom. During the past months of my fellowship at MIT, I have visited a few neighborhoods around Boston and New York and spoken to many community members from different social groups during workshops and meetings addressing the social inequalities and injustices in the United States. Though there has been progress since the beginning of the century, the fight for racial and gender equality is still very much alive and very relevant. It was shocking for me to learn that the life expectancy for an African-American male in some parts of the United States is much lower than the life expectancy rates for men in Iraq or Afghanistan, that the average household income of a black family is slightly more than half that of a white family, that you are three times as likely to live in poverty if you are born African-American than if you are from another racial group (and that in some states the likelihood jumps to six times), that for every $1 a white person makes in the United States an African-American makes 60 cents, that in some states the unemployment rate of African-Americans is three times higher than that of white men and women, and that in other states the poverty rate of African-Americans stands at an alarming 40 percent.

Gender disparities were equally shocking, and it was even more appalling to see the obliviousness of local groups to this information. A recent report by the World Economic Forum clearly stated that the pay gap in the United States is indeed increasing! Women now earn 64 percent of what men earn, a decrease of 2 percent from last year. The United States ranked behind Rwanda, South Africa, and Mozambique among others in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2015. Only two countries in the world do not ensure paid maternity leave for new mothers, and yes, the United States is the first, and Papua New Guinea is the second. In 2015 alone, more than 400 legislative bills were submitted by state legislators to restrict women’s reproductive rights, a battle that remains fierce in the United States. Women of color suffer the most from the combination of gender and racial discrimination. The racial and gender inequalities in the United States are stark, and with the ongoing lack of public knowledge and awareness of these issues—as well as the tendency to frame them as problems only for “poor” and “developing” countries—these disheartening problems will continue to exist.

During my time at MIT, I had the chance to work with communities in the neighborhoods of Roxbury in Boston and Brooklyn in New York City. Through interactions with these two communities, I witnessed inherent resilience, persistence, and commitment to overcome the status quo and realize the dream of an equal and just future that upholds the rights to equality and nondiscrimination. I learned about the power of community organizing to create social change and secure rights. I learned that a planning approach that isn’t multidisciplinary in nature will never achieve inclusive, sustainable, empowering results, and that community-led development companies can succeed in achieving concrete results where traditional methods have failed.

Most importantly, I have learned that educational institutions, including MIT among others, have a great role to play in identifying these challenges, formulating integrated solutions, and informing equitable policy changes. Planning is, without any doubt, a tool for securing rights and ensuring equal access to resources. Yet for so long, it has been used to control and oppress different community groups in the United States, in Palestine, and in many other places around the world. The past few months have truly opened my eyes to different struggles and to how patience, dedication, solidarity, and collective work can help address and overcome the challenges ahead and achieve (though in small steps) substantial results.

In the country that leads the democratic world and sits on so many U.N. committees and councils, there are prolonged struggles for rights, dignity, self-determination, and freedom.
AFFIRMATIVE ART
By Erik Trondsen, Spurs Fellow

Affirmative Art was created in East Africa as a tool that helps individuals develop a sense of purpose and make the changes necessary to reach personal goals. Initially it was used at schools and youth clubs as a tool for identifying what youth really wanted to do with their lives. It has since also been used as a tool by businesses and other organizations to identify purpose and shared vision.

Eirik Jarl Trondsen, 2015–2016 SPURS Fellow, is drawing MIT into Affirmative Art projects. To prepare Affirmative Art for takeoff, he shared the tool with SPURS/Humphrey Program staff prior to coming to MIT. Since his arrival, he has been working with the program to provide a platform for developing Affirmative Art.

Trondsen developed the concept while living in Kenya working on aid projects. Realizing that foreign aid was not creating much-needed changes, he wondered why. He concluded that unless people defined themselves and their own purposes, outside aid would not work. In most cases, aid projects in Africa define the purpose for “beneficiaries,” rather than allowing residents to define their needs themselves. Affirmative Art addresses this by facilitating the process of awareness through self-defined artwork and action.

Affirmative Art has been further developed at MIT, Roxbury Community College, and with local community art groups in Boston. Both SPURS/Humphrey Fellows and MIT Sloan School of Management students have used the technique and helped develop the concept.

The approach is very simple: It uses visual art as a tool for personal reflection and finding a new/true direction—a purpose! By reflecting on personal dreams and aspirations and drawing/painting them, each individual is able to bring these goals closer and make them more real, thus defining an ideal future.

Examples are many. Some users of Affirmative Art have opened websites and companies. Others have changed paths and taken new jobs or found more balance in their lives. Some have simply realized that they have not yet found their calling or that they are still far from achieving their purpose in life.

For some samples, please see:

www.affirmativeart.org
www.facebook.com/AffirmativeArt

Affirmative Art is also a useful tool for developing a collective vision. In this case, the artwork becomes a creative mosaic wherein each participant integrates his or her individual contribution into a larger vision/cause. The SPURS/Humphrey Program used this tool in the spring to create something new and refreshing as a team—a joint purpose with input from all.

Trondsen plans to return to Uganda after his fellowship to develop an Affirmative Art lab at the Nagenda International Academy of Art and Design that he helped found a few years ago (www.niaadacademy.com).
Our group represented MIT at the Global Leadership Forum (GLF) in Washington, D.C. This year’s topic was “Resilience in the Face of Climate Change: A Global Perspective on Leadership,” and we were to show the links between climate change and our professional fields. This was a particularly interesting time to develop a presentation on climate change as the U.N. Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—also known as COP21—was held in Paris at about the same time. For the first time in more than 20 years of negotiations within the United Nations, the COP21 hoped to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the main aim to keep the temperature rise associated with global warming below 2°C.

Jessica Debats, a doctoral associate with the SPURS/Humphrey Program, organized a seminar to discuss the literature on adaptation, mitigation, maladaptation, resilience, and climate justice to help us prepare for the presentation. Our meetings featured very passionate discussions since our views were entirely shaped by our cultures, ideologies, socio-economic backgrounds, and personalities.

We realized we often were not listening to one another, which made coming to agreement very difficult. We were focused on imposing our own ideas in the climate change meetings, rather than adding value. Finally, at the last scheduled seminar meeting, we were able to identify a common topic of interest and develop a work plan.

Even though climate change is a global phenomenon, some populations are disproportionately affected, and our countries, mainly in the global South, face common challenges related to climate change—even though they are not the main producers of greenhouse gases. Therefore, we decided to talk about “Environmental Justice in Response to Climate Change.”

During our pilot presentation, we received a lot of suggestions from Professor Bish Sanyal, director of the SPURS/Humphrey Program, and doctoral students specializing in climate change. Professor Sanyal suggested that it would have been richer to show the differences in how the Fellows think or how different the solutions might be given our different backgrounds, rather than forcing an agreement on such a complex issue.

Based on these suggestions, we decided to change almost our entire presentation and focus on the topic “environmental justice.” Our goal was to present a holistic approach to addressing the concerns and engaging the efforts of developing countries, which are the ones that have least contributed to climate change but are most impacted by its adverse effects.

Our presentation showed how developing countries and vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, but we also talked about the impacts in some areas of the developed world, emphasizing that we live in an interlinked world.

We also made clear that we can still see the “light at the end of the tunnel,” and we made a couple of recommendations that we thought that the COP in Paris should take into account. We emphasized that we need to empower local communities to facilitate participation in designing and implementing solutions—paying particular attention to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. We also talked about two controversial solutions upon which we had agreed. We believe that “green technology transfer” from the developed countries to developing countries and “retrospective carbon taxation” should be encouraged. Moreover, we argued that the Paris COP should provide effective tools to finance adaptation and low carbon transition and promote transparency and accountability of greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

Many Fellows from other universities asked questions, and we were glad to have provoked such an interesting discussion. Moreover, our presentation remained the locus of discussion during the GLF, especially during the regional meetings. The other presentations were very stimulating, and we were surprised by how Fellows who were specialists in diverse professional areas presented how climate change is related to their fields. For example, we heard about forced migration and needed technological innovations.

In conclusion, this was a very enriching experience for our group. The whole event was really interesting, and we learned that climate change is a global issue that transcends disciplines and that we should consider common efforts to avoid or mitigate its impacts. Excitingly, this was also reflected in the COP21, which ended up being a turning point in history, establishing an enduring, legally binding treaty on climate action that contains emission reduction commitments from 187 countries starting in 2020! But, apart from that, we have learned how important it is to leave our preconceptions behind and listen to each other if we are to design solutions for common problems.
The SPURS/Humphrey Program at MIT doesn’t only provide its Fellows with knowledge, tools, and a professional network. It also offers the opportunity to have fun with other Fellows who share common interests and hobbies—in this case, fashion design and waste management. Every year since 2011, MIT has held a fashion show, the “Trashion,” designed to raise awareness about solid waste generation. Organized by the Undergraduate Association Committee on Sustainability on campus, this is a fashion show with a difference: All the designs must be made out of trash.

The three of us share an interest in the issue that this show addresses, and we learned that a design for the show could be the final project for our class on waste in D-Lab (a hands-on lab at MIT fully titled Development through Discovery, Design, and Dissemination). Barros had experience back home in Cape Verde in designing and making outfits for carnival as a hobby; Uijt den Bogaard, who had no experience whatsoever in design (although she knows how to stitch), had worked on waste research; and Lerner offered to model our design. Together we decided to give it a try.

After a few prototypes we finally agreed on one inspired by New England’s foliage, merging natural components with oil-based materials. The primary material was fallen leaves collected from the MIT campus, New Hampshire, and Vermont, where we traveled with the program. Other materials include recovered tablecloths from different program events, such as a Thanksgiving dinner and luncheon seminars. We also reused plastic bags that had been used for recycling (thanks to MIT Facilities for helping us out!). Lastly, we made shoes from recovered cardboard boxes and accessories from recovered plastic cups and old coffee capsules. Since plastic is one of the main components of municipal solid waste in the United States—and a petroleum product—we considered it important to raise awareness of the amount of disposable plastic materials being used for events at MIT.

During the whole process, other Fellows gave us their support. On the day of the event, many Fellows showed up to cheer us on. It was a great night, and everyone had fun. Although we didn’t win the competition, we found a new way to engage with Fellows and the memories and friendships will stay with us long after the program. We also did well on our final project for the waste course; the dress was so popular that we were asked to leave it in D-Lab as a showcase piece.
A PLACE WE CALL SPURS HOUSE
By Eirik Jarl Trondsen, Josefina Uijt den Bogaard, Lucrecia Bertelli, Tito Francisco Chile Ama

One of the pillars of the SPURS/Humphrey Program is that friendships are formed between and among Fellows. The program not only provides professional development but an opportunity to gain new friends from all around the world. The SPURS House, where four Fellows (and one spouse) have been housed during the 2015–2016 academic year, has become a small sample of this program highlight. Here professionals from Argentina, El Salvador, and Norway live together and share a common space, a community, and learn about each other while exploring ways to generate changes at home.

All but one of the SPURS House residents first met each other en route to the house from the airport, where MIT research fellow Ofer Lerner picked up all of us. Excitement, curiosity, and joy were some of our feelings about finally arriving at what would be forever called “SPURS House,” a cozy Colonial house built in the 1880s in Dorchester, a neighborhood with a very diverse mix of people of African, European, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent. These populations bring their culture, music, cuisine, and language into the streets and shops of the neighborhood.

At the SPURS House, Shanti Kleiman, one of the landlords, and Tito Francisco Chile Ama, a Fellow from El Salvador who had arrived a week earlier, received us. After choosing rooms, shopping, and eating a good meal, we were all set and ready for the program to begin the next day. The house, with its magnificent architecture, is spacious, nicely decorated, and fully equipped, which made settling down in Boston a very smooth process.

The whole first semester went by quickly, but in the house there is always a place for relaxing. Some would say the best places in the house are the bedrooms, where each of us has supplied personal touches by hanging pictures and placing ornaments. These are also the places where each one of us can get a necessary break from the program, listen to music, work, or just enjoy a movie or book in bed. However, at the same time, everyone would agree that the kitchen is great! This is where all the cooking, chatting, and planning take place. Although each resident has his or her own schedule, meal preferences, and interests, the kitchen is where we update each other on our lives. In the kitchen we learn about each other’s families back home, their likes and dislikes; we share a dessert somebody cooked, or sometimes a whole meal. There is enough room in the kitchen for the five of us to work at the same time, and a fridge and a storeroom enables each of us to have private as well as shared space. Recommendation for next SPURS Fellows: try out the couch in the kitchen and you’ll never want to give it away!

Shanti Kleiman and Koﬁ Taha, a young professional couple, made our first days very easy. Welcoming and helpful, they introduced us to the neighborhood and the city—where to buy food (you can get anything from North American to Asian in the area supermarkets), how to get to MIT (which is very handy on the Red Line), and how to use the facilities of the house (dishwasher, clothes washer, heating, etc.). Whenever we have doubts about something, they always try to help out. They even care about our progress in the program and how we are getting along with American culture. Their friendship has even extended to shared meals, both upstairs in their home, and downstairs in the SPURS House.

Regarding Dorchester, after adjusting to the sounds of the neighborhood and its residents, it became our community. With Lerner’s knowledge, we started to understand more of the area’s struggles and collisions with the system. Although many people who are living on the other side of the Charles River raise their eyebrows when we say where we live, we have found the neighborhood to be a community where people say “hi” in the street, neighbors know each other, you can speak your own language in the supermarket, parents wait for the school bus in the morning with their kids, and baseball games are played in the park. The neighborhood is active from early morning till late at night. Most of the action takes place along Dorchester Avenue, the main street that goes almost all the way to downtown. Inside the house there is no sound to be heard, except that of the tenants enjoying themselves after a long day at MIT.

A successful time in the SPURS House would not be possible without common sense on how to coexist, and advice for the next SPURS Fellows include tips that make any relationship work. Sharing a house means sharing a common space; it’s important to be respectful of others’ needs and desires, to communicate with your housemates, to be patient and understanding, and of course to help out with chores.

A few fun facts: Since the SPURS House accommodates the highest number of Fellows, at the end of each SPURS event we would get all the food leftovers, which would stay in the freezer as long as it took for us to eat them all. We believe we did a great job in avoiding food waste! Moreover, taking advantage of the Argentinean skills for making “asado” (charcoal barbecue), we held a few asado events for the whole program (one even took place the day after a snowstorm). Last, one of the Fellows became a very busy host during the fall semester, holding the record for visitors (4!) in the house. Anyway, we all enjoyed receiving them and learning about biodiesel, professional fights, permaculture, and others weird subjects!
CARLOS BRANDO
Spurs 1979-1980 (Brazil)

Carlos runs a combination of small and mid-size companies that “encompass the coffee business from seed to cup and include technology (exports of coffee machinery) and marketing. Our largest company, P&A, exports Brazilian-made Pinhalense coffee-processing machinery to over 90 countries on five continents.” For the last 30 years, he has spent almost a quarter of his time traveling to “exotic coffee locations. I make presentations in coffee conferences and events on subjects ranging from our businesses to coffee markets and the future of the coffee business, such as single-serve capsules and individually filtered coffee. It is hard work but a lot of fun, too.”

Carlos will be the 2015–2016 SPURS commencement speaker on May 3, 2016, at MIT.

ABDULAZIZ A. ALKHEDHEIRI
Spurs 1988-1989 (Saudi Arabia)

Abdulaziz, former Minister of Culture and Information for the Kingdom Saudi Arabia, has served as Executive Manager of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Project for Developing Public Education (Tatweer), Executive President of the Education Development Holding Company (Tatweer Holding), Governor of Makkah City, Deputy Governor of Makkah Region, and Secretary General of the Makkah and Al-Mashaer (Sacred Places) Development Commission. Alkhedheiri is currently Chairman of Kerdar for Investment & Development, Chairman of Dar Athan for Research & Studies, and Vice President of AlGhad Youth Association.

Abdulaziz established the Abdulaziz Alkhedheiri Leadership Fund, which since 2012 has supported fellows with leadership qualities in the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning in their efforts to craft innovative planning practices around the world.
KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA  
Spurs 1991-1992 (Bulgaria)

Kristalina joined the World Bank as an environmental economist and has “kept moving up into more exciting roles, including Director for the Environment Department, Director for the Russian Federation, Director for Sustainable Development, and finally Vice-President and Corporate Secretary for the Bank. One of my most memorable tasks was taking part in the invention of the carbon market and the setup in 2000 of the first Prototype Carbon Fund.

In 2010, I became European Commissioner responsible for the EU’s International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid, and Crisis Response. I worked on the delivery of life-saving assistance to nearly 500 million people affected by conflicts and natural disasters around the world.

Since 2014 I have been Vice President at the European Commission in charge of budget and human resources. I negotiate and manage the EU budget (around 150 billion euros a year), and I am responsible for administration and staffing in the Commission (more than 33,000 people).

Recently I presented the report of a panel I co-chaired at the request of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on how to plug the humanitarian financing gap.”

In 2010, European Voice named Georgieva “European of the Year” and “EU Commissioner of the Year” in acknowledgment of her work, particularly her handling of humanitarian disasters in Haiti and Pakistan.

DEEPENDRA NATH SHARMA  
Humphrey 2007-2008 (Nepal)

Deependra was appointed secretary of the Ministry of Urban Development, Nepal. He is responsible for leading the following activities: post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction, which mainly includes rural housing (reconstruction of about 700,000 houses that were damaged by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal in April 2015), resettling and clustering rural communities, ensuring building codes and by-laws are followed strictly to prevent major ramifications from future disasters, reconstructing public buildings (including health service centers), training construction workers for a massive scale of reconstruction, and coordinating with donors and international nongovernmental organizations for financial resource mobilization.
Alumni Updates

Parviz Towfighi SPURS ’68 (Iran/US) worked for the UN on many aspects of housing and environment, then consulted for housing programs in Kenya before returning to the US to write history books about Islam and the West.

Naomi Carmon SPURS ’70 (Israel) is professor emerita at the Technion (Israel Institute of Technology), where her current work focuses on urban regeneration, housing policy, and social change in global and globalizing cities.

Fernando Quezada SPURS ’78 (Mexico/US) heads the Bio-technology Center of Excellence Corp., which supports development activities in Latin America and other regions.

Angelito Santos SPURS ’79 (Philippines/US) joined Brandeis University (Mass.) after a long career in housing and community development. He is now responsible for the budget system as well as creating and maintaining university and department reports.

Dwarka Nath Dhungel Humphrey ’84 (Nepal) is a policy and political analyst, and actively participates in the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation on important regional issues.

Umesh Bahadur Malla Humphrey ’84 (Nepal) has been the urban planning and water resources specialist for Mainstreaming Climate Change Risk Management in Development, Nepal since 2012.

Senen Ricasio SPURS ’85 (Philippines) and colleagues formed a company, IDP Consult, which has merged with Poyry of Finland and then with Lahmeyer of Germany.

Benjamin Hyman Humphrey ’86 (Israel) earned a law degree from Hebrew University and specializes in planning law, where he tends to assist environmental and civic causes.

Ambika Prasad Adhikari Humphrey ’87 (Nepal/US) holds several appointments at Arizona State University including portfolio manager for the Project Management Office, research professor in the School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning, and senior sustainability scientist.

Flordeliza Melendez Humphrey ’87 (Philippines) works as a consultant for the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program at the Asian Development Bank.

Jose Barbero Humphrey ’87 (Argentina) currently splits his time as dean of the Transport Institute at Universidad Nacional de San Martin, and as an independent consultant working with several multilateral and research institutions in transport and infrastructure public policy.

Richard Tomlinson SPURS ’87 (South Africa/Australia) is former chair in Urban Planning in the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne.

Jacek Szlachta SPURS ’88 (Poland) participated in many EU projects and international conferences, as well as projects in Poland for economic development strategies, regions and metropolitan areas, and the country’s National Spatial Strategy.

Li-Chi Yang Humphrey ’89 (Taiwan) is the Secretary General for the Chinese Institute of Engineers and has extensive experience with public works design and construction, especially in transportation.

Perry Davies SPURS ’90 (Israel) moved between environmental consulting to information professional, and eventually became an independent environmental consultant specializing in International Environmental Standards Certification.

Cesar Umali Jr. Humphrey ’90 (Philippines) is a freelance consultant currently in Bangladesh, working on rural development projects all over Asia for a wide variety of governmental organizations and NGOs.

Ben Kao Humphrey ’90 (Taiwan) is the director general of the transportation bureau of Taiyuan, one of Taiwan’s six major cities.

Domenico Enrico Massimo SPURS ’91 (Italy) has focused for 25 years on the theoretical foundation and operational capacity to successfully implement Bio Ecological Sustainability at all levels from landscape to regional.

Jose Angel Velasquez SPURS ’94 (Venezuela) is the dean of Economics at Universidad Metropolitana de Caracas.

Atrindra Sen ’94 (India) currently is corporate advisor to the Shapoorji Pallonji Group, and has held numerous positions in government and university boards on educational topics.

Anne-Catherine Galetic SPURS ’97 (Belgium) founded a real estate development company, Galika Human Estate, that focuses on urban renewal projects in downtown Brussels.

Piotr Lorens SPURS ’97 (Poland) is head of the Department of Urban Design and Regional Planning at Gdansk University of Technology, president of the Society of Polish Town Planners, and vice president of the International Society of City and Regional Planners.

Manisha de Lanerolle SPURS ’00 (Sri Lanka/Canada) is the program coordinator for Riverdale Immigrant Women’s Centre and the Riverdale Hub, a nonprofit women’s organization and community hub in Toronto that provides social services to marginalized women and youth.

Ke Fang SPURS ’01 (China) graduatedly focused his career interest at the World Bank on urban transport policy, planning and investments, and has worked in Manila and New Delhi for the last five years.

Li Tian Humphrey ’02 (China) earned a PhD from the University of Cambridge, England, and is a full professor in the Department of Urban Planning at Tongji University, Shanghai.

Martha Bonilla SPURS ’03 (Colombia) is completing her PhD at The Universidad Politecnica de Madrid. Her research work is on BRT’s systems and in particular on the gap between planners and Users of the transportation system (the case of Bogota). Martha is also the technical adviser for the president of The Colombian National Development Bank (FDN) for urban planning and mobility.

Alberto Blanco-Lara SPURS ’03 (Colombia/US) is the interim director of Global Business Partners of MTS Systems Corporation, and volunteers as a social entrepreneur for various causes.

Claudia Cordie SPURS ’05 (Italy/Austria) currently is the president of an association of expat families in Vienna with more than 1400 members from around the world.

Roberto Bruno Humphrey ’05 (Panama) is a physical risk analyst at the Panama Canal Authority, where he develops mathematical models assessing risk associated with the performance of civil and mechanical structures under various hazards.

Sanghoon Lee Humphrey ’05 (South Korea) is director general for the Ministry of Public Safety and Security in Korea, which involves management policies to prevent or mitigate big disasters.

Paulina Burbano de Lara Humphrey ’05 (Ecuador) has become executive president of Metropolitan Touring Ecuador,
with responsibilities for offices in Ecuador, USA, Peru, Colombia, Chile and Argentina.

Michał Stangel SPURS '06 (Poland) deals with urban design and planning at the Silesian University of Technology, and runs a small urban design firm that won an international competition for the vision of development in Krakow.

Fazilet Tanrikulu Humphrey '06 (Turkey) is an urban planner and technical expert in the Urbanization Department of Iller Bank, where she provides technical and financial services to cities on topics including spatial planning, water and sewerage.

Masato Kamiya SPURS '07 (Japan) joined INPEX Corporation, a state-controlled oil company, where he works on corporate strategic investment planning with the ultimate aim of contributing to Japan’s energy security.

Sanjay Bissessur Humphrey '07 (Mauritius) represented his country, one of the four invited African countries, at the Second World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, China in 2015.

Faranak Seifoddini SPURS '08 (Iran/US) does research at the Department of Urban Studies at Tennessee State University, Nashville.

Dana Erekat SPURS '08 (Palestine) serves as a senior advisor to the Minister of Finance and Planning, and as the head of the Aid Management and Coordination Directorate in Palestine.

Adam Pinto Humphrey '09 (Benin/France) resettled in France and developed URIHA, a new company that hopes to shape urban development processes that will help fill the housing and urban infrastructure gap in cities, make urban dwellers better off, and empower and better connect African communities to the rest of the world.

Paula Moreno Humphrey’10 (Colombia) serves on the Ford Foundation’s Board of Trustees. Founded and directs Manos Vizibles, a nonprofit foundation established to promote social inclusion and peace building in Colombia. From 2007-2010, she served as the minister of culture in Colombia—the youngest person to lead cabinet-level ministry in the history of the country.

Francesco Barreto Humphrey ’10 (Mozambique) works for the government and also at his own civil engineering construction company.

Slawomir Ledwon SPURS ’10 (Poland) moved to Qatar and works as an urban planner/designer for the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning.

Fan Tu Humphrey ’11 (China) joined Zhejiang University of Technology as an associate professor, focusing her research on land policy, land property rights and affordable housing.

Sophap Phim Humphrey ’11 (Cambodia) provides technical coordination for a USAID project that integrates health, nutrition, water, sanitation and agriculture to improve the nutrition status and well-being of women and young children.

Yongjian Xu Humphrey ’11 (China) joined the Division of Public Finance in the Hunan Provincial Development and Reform Commission.

Tamer Al-Assad Humphrey ’12 (Jordan) was appointed team leader for his country’s Strategic Master Plan for Municipal Water Infrastructure, where the group developed a national 10-year master plan considering the impact of 1.5 million Syrian refugees on the urban infrastructure.

Geley Norbu Humphrey ’12 (Bhutan) continues as the chief urban planner for Thimphu Municipality, and occasionally assists Tra Vinh City, Vietnam, on land pooling and readjustment as a World Bank consultant.

Ruishan Zheng Humphrey ’12 (China) started a new job as a senior program specialist at the China Sustainable Transportation Center (CSTC), where he mainly concentrates on transit-oriented development and non-motorized transportation.

Angela Franco Humphrey ’12 (Colombia) is beginning a PhD in Architecture and Planning at King’s College, University of Cambridge, England, and hopes to develop useful projects in urban development and sustainability in Cali, Colombia.

Deyin Luo SPURS ’12 (China) is one of the leading figures in the field of traditional Chinese village protection and development.

Chipo Gift Mubambwe Humphrey 13 (Zambia) works in the Ministry of Energy and Water Development in Zambia.

Dorota Kamrowska-Zaluska SPURS ’13 (Poland) became an assistant professor at the Department of Urban Design and Regional Planning at Gdansk University of Technology, where she conducts participatory action research co-designing urban space with its future users.

Araya Santisan Humphrey’13 (Thailand) is a PhD student in the Design Arts program at the faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University, Thailand, focusing on arts and crafts and the built environment.

Liliana Pimentel Humphrey ’13 (Brazil) relocated to the Ministry of the Environment, where she advises the Secretary of Biodiversity and Forests on topics related to governance and conflict resolution over natural resources.

Muhammad Hanif Gul Humphrey ’13 (Pakistan) is doing an intensive mandatory senior management course for promotion to the joint secretary level.

Xuesong Gao SPURS ’14 (China) is the principal investigator of a major planning project to reclaim a local industrial wasteland at the College of Resources at Chengdu University.

Sandra Gutiérrez Poizat Humphrey ’14 (El Salvador) collaborates as a consultant for the Inter-American Development Bank while resuming her academic work at Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), including the Urban Rivers Rehabilitation Project.

Kai Zhu SPURS ’14 (China) obtained a teaching and research position at Zhejiang University of Technology, as well as a city innovation policy research position in Hangzhou City.

Rodrigo Rodriguez Tornquist SPURS ’14 (Argentina) teaches at the Institute of Transportation of the National University of San Martin in Buenos Aires, and advises in environmental issues at the national Ministry of Transportation.

Umar Benna SPURS ’14 (Nigeria/US/Saudi Arabia) retired from formal teaching two years ago. He found that the economic downturn limited the flow of projects into the office of Benna Associates, and he now spends most of his time writing and editing books.

Nabila Alibhai SPURS ’14 (Kenya) helped create a social enterprise called limeSHIFT, which uses socially engaged art practice to help communities in New York City and Kenya become more creative, productive and connected.

Yanyu (Peter) Zhang Humphrey ’15 (China) works on China’s spatial planning system reform that places more emphasis on ecosystem protection, regional coordination, inclusiveness and sharing.

Jean-Bosco Abderamane Humphrey ’15 (Central African Republic) is the permanent secretary of the Central African Republic’s Mayors Association, as well as the technical coordinator of projects for an international NGO, the Helpage Rwanda Car Program.

Xiaowei Huo SPURS ’15 (China) continues research and practice with a professional focus on preservation and sustainable development of historic settlements ranging from villages to cities.

Irakli Zhvania Humphrey ’15 (Georgia) works for Geographic, a leading urban planning company, on multiple projects from urban design to master plans and architecture.