Choosing the Theme for SPURS’ 50th Anniversary Celebration

The Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS)/Humphrey Program at MIT will celebrate its 50th anniversary on October 12, 2018. The theme for the celebratory conference is “The Reflective Practitioner Reconsidered.” Let me explain the intellectual rationale for this theme, which we chose after considerable collective deliberation.

First, a brief historical overview of the time, 1968, when SPURS was created is necessary. In some respects, the world was very different in 1968 than it is in 2018. And yet in other respects there are striking parallels between the two time periods. Understanding these differences as well as similarities is important to thinking about what the mission of SPURS should be today and what kind of program structure must be put in place to fulfill new program goals.

In 1968, when SPURS was created by Professor Lloyd Rodwin with a five-year grant from the Ford Foundation, the field of development planning for newly independent and newly industrializing...
Learning new ways to perceive old challenges was also a priority, and that included not simply gaining insights from enlightened planners but also from social learning.
The 1990s unleashing of market forces in China, which in 1968 was trapped in the Cultural Revolution, seemed to affirm the optimistic mood of the moment—even if there was lingering concern about the Chinese Communist Party. On the democratic side, India’s escape from the “Hindu rate of growth”—a period of low growth in its planned economy—added yet another spark of hope to the times, suggesting that finally both the goals and mechanism of development were clear again, as they were right after the Second World War.

The new context called for a different form of professional expertise than suited the uncertain times of the 1960s. Knowledge of new technologies, along with a deep understanding of financial flows and private investment possibilities became essential for effective practice. The organizational creativity that Schon had espoused now took the form of creative financing of all kinds, which could be constructed through astute contracts that spread risk and uncertainties in a very different way than in the 1950s (when developmental financing started with increasing foreign aid).

The giddy world of the 1990s—as if “history has ended,” as American political scientist Yoshiiro Francis Fukuyama described it—did not last long, however. As data from various field studies conducted during this period indicated, income inequality had widened in both rich and poor nations; by 2000 many underdeveloped nations had vast numbers of citizens living below the poverty line. This was the moment at which Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen argued that what the world needed was a human development index, not a ranking of nations by economic growth indicators. And then in 2008, the market declined sharply, creating severe problems for both private firms as well as governments and shattering the prevailing sense of economic security.

On the political front, too, the feeling that the end of the Cold War would lead to a period of peace and prosperity did not last long. Over time, the Yugoslav Wars, global terrorism, and unending conflict in the Middle East brought new anxiety to both rich and poor nations. Exacerbated by growing economic inequality within and between nations, democratic political systems in both rich and poor nations were then jolted by a new turn toward authoritarian leadership. The large flow of global refugees added to the already high anxiety about whether conventional social policies would be adequate to address the new challenges. Many began to question whether the global integration of nations was beneficial at all, suggesting that “globalization” was a harmful process that primarily benefited a global elite detached from any territorial allegiance. Today, as in 1968, there seems to be no consensus either about developmental goals or the type of planning necessary to chart a clear vision for a better society.

Yet, not every nation or citizen is worse off than in 1968. The stunning success of China, and the somewhat moderate success of India has raised millions of people out of poverty. In many countries, there have also been significant gains in the provision of health care, water and sanitation services, and primary and secondary education. Yet, typically, these good outcomes are not examined carefully; often achievements are even dismissed as “exceptions” that cannot be replicated. This odd juxtaposition of overarching anxiety despite evidence of successful planning is a hallmark of the times—and a critical impetus for SPURS to reimagine its mission as a one-year program at MIT for mid-career planning professionals from around the world.
The need for reflective practitioners is as important now as it was in 1968, even if we have accumulated 50 years of experience examining and addressing development problems. Today we are less naïve and more astute in our understanding of what can be accomplished by whom and at what speed. Now very few speak of “alternative development” with the starry-eyed idealism of the kind that marked the 1960s. We understand and appreciate that development is a slow process, often unseen or unnoticed, and that the path of progress is not linear. Development requires reform—of social practices, institutions, and economies—and there remains much to be learned about how to induce such reform in a democratic way.

Distributional issues that have come to the fore lately, as a result of economic polarization, also need to be addressed humanely and in a democratic way. Even if some call for radical distribution of income, very few know how to implement such a distribution justly without major political upheaval. Hence, the need for critical reflection and learning remains high, and there is a growing need for more forums, like SPURS, that can provide the institutional setting for such reflection and learning.

One last remark about the programming structure: When SPURS was created in 1968, the program was extremely flexible and focused mostly on personal intellectual growth. Over the last 50 years, SPURS has evolved. There are a few more requirements now, including some coursework, a professional affiliation, and community service. Organized social activities, such as retreats and trips to East Coast cities have been added as well.

How has this programming structure affected the Fellows’ time for critical reflection and social learning? Today’s Fellows remain quite focused on their individually planned program activities: They take courses they like; engage in professional affiliations in different agencies; and, only occasionally, participate in collective reasoning and serious group discussions of important issues. Perhaps that needs to change. With deepening integration of the world, financially, technologically, ecologically, and ideologically, there seems to be a need for collective deliberation on issues that affect lives differently in different parts of the world. Toward that end, it may be appropriate for SPURS to begin to go beyond the usual weekly luncheon seminar on varied issues and actually work on specific problems. Rather than broadly discussing large topics, such as global warming or global economic restructuring, we might want to engage the Fellows in deep conversations on specific problems at specific geographical settings and in specific political environments.

To do this, SPURS would need to create a portfolio of cases to be studied in detail each year, and we are hoping that alumni of the program will be able to suggest examples for study. We also hope alums might help guide Fellows in thinking through planning solutions creatively through these examples of specific policies and their outcomes. This is of course easier said than done, and we need to give much more thought to how to conduct studio exercises, which may involve not only SPURS Fellows but also the Department of Urban Studies and Planning’s outstanding graduate students. The time is ripe for these discussions.

I am hoping that by the time you read this article, it will be clear why we selected the theme “The Reflective Practitioner Reconsidered” for SPURS’ 50th anniversary celebration. We sincerely hope that you will join us in rethinking SPURS’ mission, and that collectively we can create an interesting learning model, one that recognizes the principles that motivated the program’s founding in 1968 while also proving suitable to the new challenges of our time.
The Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS)/Humphrey Program has introduced a new, yearlong seminar series that addresses the broad theme of idea transference. This year, the series focused on the question: Is North American planning relevant to the developing world? Seminars explored whether and under what conditions planning ideas and practices from the United States can or should be transposed to cities in developing countries. Topics included whether U.S. practices can be implemented effectively or prove useful in other contexts. The importance and timeliness of this theme emerged from the sentiment—recently expressed by some planners worldwide—that the specialized knowledge of development problems that created the field of development planning is no longer necessary for effective practice around the world. This view rests on a few key assumptions:

- Development theories are converging due to economic globalization.
- Advances in information technology are strengthening the interconnections among planning settings around the world.
- The institutional forms used to address urban and regional problems are converging.

International planning work and education have evolved in the United States over the past 50 years based on the concept that planning ideas and practices here can...
People’s lives in the developing world. The objective of the seminar was to test this idea now. Has this mode of transferring ideas changed over time? Does it need to change? Are important planning practices being created in the developing world and transferred to the United States and Europe?

Planning problems today are often broader than the confines of a single city or even a single nation. Issues related to climate change, energy resources, environmental sustainability, and migration/immigration transcend traditional governmental boundaries. How can planners impact them in a globalizing world? Where in the world are the best approaches being created?

The seminar examined these concepts from multiple perspectives: economic development and industrial policy; infrastructure and transportation; affordable housing; urban design; imperialism and segregation; technology; and health care. Featured weekly speakers were mostly faculty members in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) plus senior academics from other universities, including New York University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Bryn Mawr College. Each week, a major presentation was followed by a respondent, who expanded the discussion, and then by a lively question-and-answer session. The seminars were open to all of DUSP, so SPURS/Humphrey Fellows were joined by DUSP faculty and students, all of whom enlarged the perspective on the issues.

Seminar speakers and respondents have been asked to write up their remarks, which will be assembled into an edited volume to mark SPURS’ 50th anniversary celebration in October 2018.
WHAT IS GOOD LEADERSHIP? HOW DOES IT RESPOND TO CORRUPTION?

SPURS tackled two interrelated questions—What constitutes good leadership? and How does corruption undermine equity?—in two workshops led by housing expert James Stockard, retired curator of the Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University.

The first workshop was held at the beginning of the spring semester in early February, when Fellows returned to MIT after scattering around the country and around the world during late December and January for travel, vacation, workshops, research, and professional engagements. This workshop focused initially on two general questions: What is leadership? and What is the difference between “good” and “bad” leadership? It then moved into more personal reflection, challenging Fellows to ask themselves: What major changes do they want to make upon returning to their own countries? and What resources will they need as leaders to achieve those changes?

Diverse, sometimes inconsistent definitions of “leader” and “leadership” emerged in the initial discussion, including:
- Leadership is finding the best solution that benefits the group.
- Leadership is a process of creating and enabling teams to achieve goals.
- A leader is a visionary who manages, motivates, and creates change.
- A leader helps get the best out of people.
- A leader mobilizes people to tackle difficult problems and adapt through change.

These definitions, in turn, prompted a debate about the difference between being charismatic and visionary, the difference between being a leader and a manager, and the question of whether values are important to leadership. Are you a leader if you direct your supporters to follow you over a cliff? Are you still a leader in that case, but just a bad one?

Shifting the focus to individual goals, Fellows identified broad improvements they hope to make through their own work. Ambitious objectives ranged from creating a new, more equitable constitution to enabling all people to have access to affordable energy. Several Fellows identified the need to eliminate corruption and build trust as essential underpinnings to serve as leaders for equitable growth.

Corruption is not often discussed in academia, but it was the central focus of a second workshop Stockard held early in the spring semester. Three questions framed the conversation:
- What are the forms of corruption? Patronage, bribery, and nepotism are obvious examples, but the workshop also highlighted indirect forms of corruption, such as unequal access to goods, services, opportunities, and information.
- What damage is done by corruption? Examples cited included not only diverting money from targeted projects and raising barriers to advancement, but also undermining the moral authority of institutions and exploiting those with less power. Discussants made the point that corruption stunts economic and social development while also eroding individuals’ moral well-being.
- What can individuals do about corruption? What are the ways you can reduce or try to eliminate corruption, and how does the context in which you work impact such efforts? Ideas discussed included becoming a whistle-blower or public advocate; changing policies and procedures to raise barriers to corruption; or taking legal action.

During the workshop, Fellows identified ways in which corruption impacts their countries and the challenges they see in combatting it. Fellows considered how they can take leadership roles in improving trust and transparency in their work and their organizations and thereby reduce corruption. After the workshop, one Fellow wrote, “It was a great opportunity to dialogue about a serious problem in our countries and discuss between the group our different experiences.” Learning from one another continues to be a hallmark of SPURS.
Winners of the DUSP/SPURS Collaboration Award

During the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows’ poster session in September, Professor Bish Sanyal announced awards for the best research collaborations between Fellows and students in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP). This year, awards were given to two teams:


SITE VISITS

During the fall semester, SPURS/Humphrey organized site visits for the Fellows to organizations involved in planning at three different geographic levels: the metropolitan area, the city, and the neighborhood.

- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is a coalition of 101 cities and towns throughout Greater Boston that work together to address issues ranging from regional equity and smart growth to improvements in transportation, housing, and recreation.

- The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA, formerly Boston Redevelopment Authority) is the lead urban public planning agency for the city of Boston. It tackles planning issues throughout the city, from major downtown redevelopment proposals and citywide sustainability initiatives to the rezoning of neighborhoods.

- The Neighborhood Developers (TND) is a community development corporation based in the small, older cities of Chelsea and Revere, which are immediately north of Boston. TND works to improve neighborhoods through housing and commercial development as well as a broad services program for children and adults, ranging from after-school activities to job training. Fellows toured one of TND’s target neighborhoods to see first-hand some of its new construction and renovated housing.

These three organizations are very different legally. BPDA is a Boston public agency with direct legal authority over planning and development in the city. MAPC is also a public agency, created under Massachusetts state law and governed by representatives from each of the 101 cities and towns in the Boston metropolitan area and by gubernatorial appointees and designees of major public agencies. In contrast, MAPC has no legal authority to direct policy or development; it operates by persuasion and consensus. TND is a nonprofit organization that undertakes its own development and social services programs. It is governed by a volunteer board composed of local residents and experts.

A fourth site visit during the spring semester complemented these three fall tours. In March, Fellows visited an affordable housing development created and owned by a Cambridge-based nonprofit organization, Homeowners Rehab Inc. (HRI). The project, called Putnam Green, has 40 one- to three-bedroom apartments that are affordable for low-income families. Fellows toured the two buildings on the property and visited an apartment to learn about the development’s design and “green” (environmentally sustainable) features. These include both solar domestic hot water and solar electrical systems, energy recovery ventilators, and super-insulated wall panels.

During discussions with both HRI staff and SPURS Lecturer Louise Elving, Fellows learned how the project was financed, permitted, and managed to ensure affordability and good service for residents. Thus, Fellows learned how financial, political, design, and social issues are intertwined in projects that provide high-quality affordable American housing.
NEW YORK PROFESSIONAL TRIP

Over the last few years, SPURS/Humphrey Fellows have made regular professional trips to New York City. The goal of these trips is to gain insight into the working of city planning and international development agencies. This year, the Fellows visited New York from February 15 to 17. The group had a packed schedule with visits to New York City’s Department of City Planning and its Economic Development Corporation (EDC) as well as to the Financing for Development Office and Office for Sustainable Development at the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

The group arrived early in the afternoon on a Thursday, and after grabbing a quick lunch, went straight to the Department of City Planning to hear presentations on neighborhood planning, geographic information systems, and climate change and resiliency planning. The chief of the department, Purnima Kapoor (an alumna of MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning), also spoke to the group. The presentations were followed by an engaging question-and-answer session. Fellows asked a range of questions regarding the planning process, the stages of planning, data transparency policies, water and sanitation, and more.

Friday was even busier. The group began by visiting the EDC, where Vice President of Partnerships Justin Kreamer outlined the objectives, organization, and projects undertaken by the corporation. The projects presented clearly showed how New York City plans to compete globally in the knowledge economy. It has a very strong focus on creating high-quality jobs. The city is trying to build state-of-the-art knowledge infrastructure, including new technical universities and spaces for startup incubation. The presentation was followed by a discussion in which Fellows asked Kreamer about the steps the city is taking to create jobs for blue-collar workers and those without a college education.

After spending an hour at the EDC, the Fellows made a dash for U.N. Headquarters to meet with staff at DESA’s Financing for Development Office. There Senior Economic Affairs Officer Oliver Schwank told Fellows about the new financing mechanisms that have been proposed for meeting sustainable development goals. The proposal goes beyond government funding sources and tries to harness the power of the private sector to leverage funds for development. The Fellows had a chance to ask many questions about implementation, funding sources, and the origins of this proposal during the informal conversation.

The group took a short walk around the neighborhood after the meeting and stopped for lunch at an outdoor café. The Fellows later regrouped at the United Nations for the fourth and final professional meeting at DESA’s Office for Sustainable Development. This meeting was also structured as a conversation with several team leaders discussing aspects of the sustainable development goals. Topics included planning and negotiation, expectations for implementation, relative performance of various countries, the limitations of such mechanisms, and other issues. After the meeting, one of the U.N. staff members kindly offered to give the group a tour of the U.N. Secretariat Building. The group visited the Security Council Chamber as well as the U.N. General Assembly Hall.

The group then headed to Chinatown for a lovely dinner at an authentic Shanghai cuisine restaurant carefully chosen by SPURS Fellow Yulin Chen. The group sampled many delicacies and left happily satisfied. The next morning, the Fellows visited New York’s famous High Line revitalization project before boarding the bus back to Boston. Fellows reported finding the trip very useful and informative.
One gets a flurry of MIT emails every day, but one particular message in mid-September 2017 caught my attention. I thought to myself, “This is going to be an interesting journey!” It proposed a great challenge: Could our SPURS/Humphrey team of 10 professionals from nine different countries, with diverse backgrounds, experience, and priorities—and who had met one another only a month previously—decide on one topic of international importance and present it with conviction at the Humphrey Fellowship Global Leadership Forum (GLF) in Washington, DC, at the end of October?

I wondered if this would be a team-building or a team-breaking activity. Would this project destroy relationships before they had even had a chance to evolve, or would it bring out the best in us? We hardly knew each other! Whatever the journey we were embarking on, it was certain that many aspects of human behavior, emotional intelligence, and international perspectives would be on the table for all of us to contemplate and use to create an interesting and valuable presentation. While in previous years, the Humphrey Program had provided a specific topic to the Fellows for consideration at the leadership forum, this year was different. We had to define a relevant topic. When we gathered the first time with our ever-supportive SPURS coordinators as facilitators, the enormity of the task was evident. The challenge was not about the technicality of any subject but to bring the group together around a single major issue and have a wide-ranging discussion, then gradually plunge into the details where the devil generally lies. The broad direction given to us was: Discuss a “policy area of highest priority in shaping the future of the world.” With only six weeks to prepare, we agreed that we needed to identify a priority that is relevant everywhere, especially in light of many governments recently turning inward, rather than supporting worldwide needs. Little did we realize then that our priority policy area would be a theme that we instantly identified at our first meeting! We had to travel through many other ideas before selecting it.

Over the next few weeks, we discussed a barrage of topics that Fellows felt were essential to improve the future of the world. Issues that we passionately identified included overcoming corruption, providing access to education, reducing nutrition deficiency, providing access to energy, improving public safety, fostering inclusion of migrants and immigrants, enhancing public
participation in decision-making, managing urban growth, and promoting equality in access to technology. We debated and discussed ideas with vigor, explored facts and data and drew on the multiple experiences that we all brought as individuals. After several meetings, we realized we were not converging on one area and one topic. Considering our diverse backgrounds both professionally and personally, we were possibly unconsciously pushing our individual areas of focus, genuinely believing them to be a matter of great importance to the world currently. Reflecting on those conversations, I can see now that those discussions and the time spent contributed significantly to our mutual understanding and building the lasting bonds that we treasure today.

It was not by chance but with the guidance of the SPURS staff and much debate among the Fellows that the discussions finally led to one topic we all deeply cared about and finally presented in Washington, DC: “Reimagining Globalization: From Competition to Cooperation.”

Once we found this focus, the team of 10 Fellows divided into three areas of interest – defining “globalization,” defining “cooperative globalization,” and identifying “pertinent questions for the future.” Each subgroup prepared a draft presentation on its topic; then jointly, we critically analyzed each other’s work and consolidated the three parts into one integrated presentation. Next, we needed artistic ingenuity for both the final PowerPoint presentation and a large paper poster; fortunately, the needed design talent was found within the cohort. Details of colors, images, typeface, and wording were scrutinized and decided by the group. This was a team-building exercise at its best: We worked through our frustrations and negotiated agreements. The photo says it all, revealing enthusiasm and interest! These were moments to treasure, business and pleasure in harmony.

The best compliment that we got after our presentation in the GLF from Humphrey Fellows at other universities was, “The MIT team looked so very synchronized and organized. How did you all work, plan, and manage that?” I thought the question was very important, but the answer was obvious for all of us. It was, of course, all about the journey.

While we have enriched our knowledge about globalization, the best learning came from the process: discussing issues, disagreeing, listening to each other, and spending time together with the coffee half left in the cup. The Global Leadership Forum experience has been a key part of the fellowship program, and we are sincerely grateful to the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program and MIT for bringing us together.
Professional and Social Events

MAINE RETREAT

POSTER SESSION
CITY TOUR

DUCK TOUR
Groundwater is the largest readily available source of fresh water on our planet. Yet, while nine treaties for binational water cooperation have been signed since 1848 between Mexico and the United States, none has dealt with groundwater. Much greater cooperation in the use of both surface water and groundwater within the border regions of these adjacent countries is now needed.

There are three binational watersheds in the U.S.-Mexico border region (the Tijuana River, the Colorado River, and the Rio Grande) which make coordinated use of water resources essential for both countries. However, the two have different laws, policies, institutions, and management regimes. In Mexico, water is a federal issue, while in the U.S., it is a local issue. This difference in government policy control, along with power asymmetries between them, make the coordinated management of binational aquifers challenging.

Despite these differences, there have been a number of successful joint US/Mexico water management efforts. One goes back almost 85 years to the Convention of February 1, 1933, when Mexico and U.S. agreed to jointly construct, operate, and maintain, through the International Boundary Commission (IBC), the Rio Grande Rectification Project, which straightened, stabilized, and shortened the river boundary in the El Paso-Juárez area.

Another long-term successful joint effort is the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)/(Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (CILA)) (with sections in both countries), created in 1944 to provide binational solutions to issues that arise during the implementation of joint treaties, such as boundary demarcation, national ownership of waters, sanitation, water quality, and flood control in the border region. The U.S. section of the IBWC is still responsible for the application of the two countries’ boundary and water treaties, settling differences that arise.

The equitable division of water between the two countries has remained a complex issue, and the question of whether pollution in one country is affecting water in the other is a recurring concern. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, water pollution in the Tijuana River and the Ambos Nogales area required bilateral negotiations to reach resolution.

Currently, the major water-related border concerns for U.S. agencies seem to be wetland habitats created by Mexican agriculture in the Imperial Valley, which has experienced infiltration of irrigation water in recent decades. For Mexico, the major concern is how to control private agricultural wells that are not fully regulated. The growing urbanization of the U.S.-Mexico border region is increasing concerns about water pollution control and wastewater infrastructure.

For both countries, groundwater can now be considered a timely area for new joint water management approaches. In 2016, the U.S. Geological Survey, Mexico’s National Water Commission, the University of Arizona, and the University of Sonora completed a research project on the San Pedro Aquifer. This marked the first time that data was shared between U.S. and Mexico regarding underground water and its implications along the border.

To improve bi-lateral water management, each country needs to define clear policies and regulations for transboundary water governance. Changes are needed in the governance structure of water issues in Mexico. Allocating some water governance issues to local levels—rather than addressing all nationally—makes sense in this large country, where different states have dramatically different hydrology, topography, and political economies. Yet other water issues are best addressed at the regional or national level, such as clean water or water treatment because every person in the nation is affected by water quality.

Upon returning to Mexico, my intention is to propose legislation that will better regulate groundwater nationally, particularly along the border with U.S. I will do this in my role as advisor to Mexico’s House Committee on Fresh Water and Sanitation, so its work can lead to sustainable management of water and sanitation through transboundary groundwater cooperation between Mexico and U.S. By educating stakeholders and the public, we can facilitate cooperation for managing both the quality and quantity of our bi-national freshwater resources.
"Food is a sustaining and enduring necessity. Yet among the basic essentials for life—air, water, shelter, and food—only food has been absent over the years as a focus of serious professional planning interest. This is a puzzling omission because, as a discipline, planning marks its distinctiveness by being comprehensive in scope." —The American Planning Association

In both academia and policymaking, there is growing interest in the intersection of health and place. As a SPURS Fellow, my research has focused on urban food policy. How can cities improve food environments to improve health by, for instance, preventing diabetes? DUSP and greater Boston have been informative places to learn how cities leverage their resources to improve the local foodscape. Food policy councils and urban food governance, urban agriculture programs, food innovation hubs, planning for resilient food systems, food access policies—all these ideas have been part of my learning.

Diabetes is a disease related to food. In Mexico, 30% of people 60-69 years old have diabetes. Diabetes and cardiovascular disease are the top two causes of death in Mexico. These diet-related diseases are generally considered the concern of the ministries of health, doctors, and nurses. But sadly, once people experience symptoms and seek medical care, they learn that diabetes is a progressive disease. Fortunately, diabetes is often preventable, and pre-diabetes is reversible. The solution is healthy food.

In the United States and Mexico, there is debate about whether or not food choices for healthy eating are matters only of personal responsibility. While food choices are made by individuals, they are also made within a food environment. And public action shapes the food environment. Sadly, a food environment for health doesn’t exist today in most places. Under the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Mexican national government ceded control of the food environment to market forces. For example, high fructose corn syrup exports from the United States to Mexico increased by 500% over the last two decades. During the past 30 years, the price of fruit and vegetables has been rising more than the price of most other foods in Mexico. Worldwide, there has been a significant loss of food diversity, even as calories have become more abundant. Cities have turned into obesogenic environments.

Nonetheless, there is hope that city leaders will tackle food challenges. The World Health Organization European Healthy Cities Network, 100 Resilient Cities, Cities Changing Diabetes, and C40 Cities Network are part of a global movement emerging around local governments. When mayors of 40 megacities realize they manage 25 percent of the world’s gross domestic product, collaboration among cities can become more powerful in shaping the food marketplace and implementing programs to support healthy eating. Local governments need to learn that urban territories are providers (and social determinants) of health. Cities may prove to be the best places to organize and promote better food systems since they are centers of consumption. Solutions to food system problems implemented at the local level can be readily visible to citizens and, thus, transformational.

Recent Mexican constitutional reform that now allows local officials to be re-elected may open the way for more city programs to improve food access and health. Mayors seeking re-election will need to demonstrate ways they are improving urban life, and mayor who promote health will have an advantage. Multiple terms in office will provide the time to plan and implement long-range agendas and convene stakeholders to improve local food environments. Health will become local politics.

At MIT, I am learning that food can be used as a planning tool to connect urban spaces with citizens’ health. At MIT, I am learning that food can be used as a planning tool to connect urban spaces with citizens’ health. Food planning can provide a fresh understanding of urban-rural linkages and so illuminate the connection between urban life and the larger environment. The SPURS experience has allowed me to expand my professional interests, meet new people, and reflect. This year has revitalized me, giving me new ideas and energy to go back to Mexico and solve our urban food challenges through the planning “lens” of food.
In late 2017, a major housing fire in Beijing triggered great debate about housing for urban migrants. Nineteen people living in an informal mixed-use building on the city’s outskirts died, 17 of them migrants from rural areas. After this tragedy, Beijing municipal government launched a citywide safety inspection of informal housing, closing down unsafe living situations so no more lives would be lost to fire. The outcome was controversial. When the city declared thousands of informal places unfit as residences, thousands of migrants were forced to move. The demolition of informal structures was legal. However, from the perspective of human well-being, this action destroyed stable social living conditions and made it harder for migrants to sustain themselves in Beijing.

The construction of illegal urban housing cannot be blamed solely on residents who built it or migrants who rented it. The phenomenon reflects structural challenges facing China as it rapidly transforms from a more rural to an increasingly urban nation.

Major challenges lie in the imbalance between rural areas and urban areas. Since economic and social reforms of the late 1970s and 1980s, China has had an economic boom. Hundreds of millions of rural residents have migrated to cities, providing labor for economic expansion. The rural-urban imbalance propelled migration because rural residents couldn’t find comparable opportunities in their villages. However, large cities were not prepared to quickly accommodate this migrant influx. For example, Beijing’s migrant population increased from 2.57 million to 7.05 million between 2000 and 2010, swelling from 18.9% to 35.9% of the city’s population. Large-scale migration creates mismatch between people and housing: While large cities become crowded and short of housing, small cities and villages decline. This problem of regionally imbalanced development is increasing in China.

The second challenge comes from institutional urban-rural division. Since 1949, Chinese local governments have put most of their resources into urban rather than rural or peri-urban areas. The low level of management in the latter areas allows residents there to build informal rental housing. The recent safety inspection of peripheral areas is in part a reaction to local government’s previous long-term neglect of them.

Another major driver of informal construction is the difference in legally allowed housing transactions for urban versus rural residents. While urban residents can sell their housing for profit, rural villagers are not allowed to sell their housing on the market; their land-use rights were allocated by the government to them as farmers to protect farming. Therefore, to gain financially, owners in peri-urban areas build informal housing on their land to rent to migrants. Although illegal, the construction brings profits to villagers and to township governments which turn a blind eye to this construction because of its revenue.

A third concern is migrants’ need for housing choices. Most migrants cannot afford to buy homes in large cities like Beijing due to soaring prices. They are also excluded from the publicly sponsored affordable housing system because they lack urban household registration certificates. Therefore, most rural-to-urban migrants must live in rental housing. And most migrants want to spend as little as possible on urban residences so they can save to build housing in their hometowns. This situation poses a public policy and program question: If affordable housing is to be built for migrants in cities, what kind of housing and price points are suitable?

To address these problems, China’s central government needs to balance development between rural and urban areas, to restore a match between the population and the space. The shortage of affordable urban housing calls for multiple strategies. One promising approach announced in 2017 is a new central government policy permitting village committees to build formal rental housing on rural land. The latest news from Beijing says that migrant rental apartments will be built on the site of the burned informal housing. Hopefully, similar residences will be built elsewhere. Then the tragic fire of November 2017 will have led to more inclusive development in China.
LESSONS ON MIT’S FASCINATING CULTURE
By Bindu Shrestha, Humphrey Fellow, Nepal

As a midcareer professional woman from Nepal, I have worked as a social entrepreneur, volunteered with a nonprofit organization, and advocated for marginalized people. But I’ve spent most of my career in academia, making students aware of architecture and urban planning topics. Eventually, however, the huge unresolved planning issues facing Nepal left me feeling stumped and lost.

Then I got the Humphrey Fellowship and began my amazing experience at MIT. On August 21, 2017, when I first entered the Building 7 lobby, I felt that I was inside of a museum—sort of a technology and hands-on museum. I never thought that any university could offer such tremendous opportunities for learning. Every second counts since seminars, workshops, talk programs, debates, labs, and student activities are endlessly running on campus. This is unbelievable to me.

The democratic learning style here really surprised me. There is radical freedom and a sharing culture in class, with no hesitation in the sharing of ideas between students and faculty. This is completely different from what I am used to, and I love it. Nepalese don’t speak up in front of bosses and senior people because it is not the custom to do so. Here, however, the professors are extremely encouraging to students. They bring food for classes and host grand dinners after the course ends, which gives a feeling of family and gives us time to interact with each other. The food-sharing culture encourages all students to be creative and motivates us to work extra hard.

I was also astonished by MIT’s vigorous culture of sharing all sorts of used materials. Last year’s SPURS class left us boxes of kitchen equipment to help us get settled. Every month we can pick up free clothes and household goods at an official campus reuse event. Instead of throwing out food after meetings, people send out emails announcing that there are leftovers. Initially I hesitated to take free food, but I soon found myself queuing up with a plate alongside professors, staff, and colleagues. It is an excellent practice for energy efficiency. Recycling is a giant unsolved problem in Nepal, but I have learned that a simple behavioral change can have a big impact. The MIT culture encourages people to share data, information, research, ethnic customs, food, materials, gifts, music, and other things without hesitation.

Before coming here, I knew about grocery shopping and dress shopping, but I had never heard of course shopping. It was mind-boggling to see professors promoting their courses to students who have lots of choices. I chose my courses between Harvard and MIT, and at different schools within MIT. The value of courses is linked to this market demand, and professors who cannot sell their research and ideas are antiquated.

It is thus with great pleasure that I have undertaken my astonishing one-year journey through the Humphrey Program. It will always remain a major chapter of my lifetime career experience. My deepest and heartfelt thanks to the SPURS/Humphrey Program, MIT, and Fellows!
WHAT THE HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP TAUGHT ME: LEAN IN TO TRY, FAIL, AND LEARN
By Alka Palrecha, Humphrey Fellow, India

Today is a wintry stormy day, the kind of day I dreaded before coming to MIT. Arriving from warm India, I was a stranger to extreme winters and afraid of Boston’s chills. Now I am, however, stunned by how residents here are attuned to seasonal changes. I too have learned to marvel at evolving weather, watching the Charles River freeze or basking in the sun on Boston Common.

The Humphrey Fellowship opened the door to MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Beyond the professional knowledge and skills I’ve learned, the fellowship has allowed me to delve deeper into what type of professional (and person) I was and to become the professional (and person) I could be.

The fellowship has been a turning point for me: While I had been working as a development practitioner, I hadn’t been as involved as I could be or wanted to be. I kept myself at the edge of events, unsure if I was willing to be vulnerable and put myself out there.

During my fellowship, I found myself all in! I was meeting people knowledgeable across sectors, geographies, and most importantly, cultures. I opened up in discussions, considered new ideas, and craved more challenging experiences. I felt at home during contentious conversations and realized that I had been holding back. I came to understand that freedom and space for expression is a way of life in America. This makes my time at MIT different from my previous educational experiences. The fellowship has given me an opportunity to become more open and authentic.

What I’ve loved most about this fellowship is the flexibility; I realize that you get out of the program what you put into it, and you can choose your own path. We had guidance from our faculty and mentors, but the experience was really about what we wanted to do. I’ve seen others in my cohort do amazing things that are very different than my own choices.

My path this year has taken me through both personal and professional changes. Interacting with U.S. citizens both within and outside MIT and seeing their engagement in efforts to improve the public good has made me realize that the individual pursuit of both happiness and collectivism are entrenched in the lives and work of Americans. Volunteerism, collective action, and sharing are as much a way of life as individual striving for happiness. Let me illustrate this with an experience at a local chess tournament: They play using the Scheveningen system where—two chess teams play against each other, and the motivation is that the team should win. A highly individual game is converted into a team sport, cultivating not only team spirit but the joy of playing a game not for winning but for the love of it.

The biggest lesson I’ve learned from the SPURS/Humphrey classes, training, and leadership sessions is to lean into the uncertainty of trying new things. Sign up for yoga training, reach out to another Humphrey campus program when traveling, agree to do a “pitch session” 36 hours before it starts. If it’s going to make you happy or test you in a new way, stop doubting and overthinking and just do it! I’ve always been cautious, but I’m learning to try things and not let the nagging fear of how things might go awry get in the way of fully experiencing life.

As the fellowship approaches its end, I am sad, but also happy to have had the opportunity of a great year in America. I also have the exciting anticipation of putting into practice in my own country what I have learned here. The fellowship’s multiple experiences teach how much goes into moving ahead—commitment, work ethic, and utmost sincerity without cutting corners on anything.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to be a Humphrey/SPURS Fellow. The fellowship has given me insights about pursuing work differently than I had before; not hesitating to reach out, to try, even to fail; and always to learn. I can’t wait to continue my personal development beyond this year.

Alka Palrecha
Alumni Updates

Carlos Brando Humphrey '80 (Brazil) received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the opening ceremony of the 15th African Fine Coffees Association in February 2017 for being a long-term champion of sustainable coffee.

For a year starting in June 2016, Dwarka Nath Dhungel Humphrey '85 (Nepal) was a senior researcher/consultant for Niti Foundation, a Nepali institution, and dealt with a transboundary water relationship between Nepal and India involving the West Rapti River. Now he is spending a year as a consultant to the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research.

Manuel Delgado Humphrey '88, '00, '01 (Venezuela) has been a faculty member at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston since 2004, and he also does consulting work in Venezuela. He was principal of the international team that won the 2012 La Carlota (Caracas) Redevelopment Competition to build a park in an old air base in Caracas.

Jibgar Joshi Humphrey '88 (Nepal) spent much of his time during the last year preparing the Habitat III National Report of Nepal in his role as team leader. He wrote, "I also worked on the preparation of land-use plans for 20 village development committees of Parsa District of Nepal as team leader. I teach at the School of Environmental Science and Management, supervise masters’ theses, and I am also busy with forthcoming publications."

Fang Chang SPURS '89 (Taiwan) was appointed deputy minister of the Finance Ministry for the Republic of China a few years ago. Last year he changed jobs and is now dean of the College of Finance at Takming University in Taipei.

Arlindo Philippi Jr. Humphrey '90 (Brazil) is currently professor of environmental policy, planning, and management at the University of São Paulo, where he is scientific coordinator of the Environmental Health Interdisciplinary Group.

Semida Silveira SPURS '92 (Brazil) is a professor of energy systems planning at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. Since 2007, she has led the Energy and Climate Studies group at the Department of Energy Technology with a focus on energy and sustainable development. Her most recent activities include bioenergy and climate change policy work, energy and development, energy efficiency in industries, urban sustainability, and promotion of Swedish knowledge and technologies.

Xolela Mangcu SPURS '92 (South Africa) is a sociology professor at the University of Cape Town and has written nine books, including a biography of Steve Biko. He is a leading public intellectual and columnist for South Africa’s major newspapers. In recent years he was a Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Studies at Harvard University and the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, DC.

Nadya Araujo Guimaraes SPURS '94 (Brazil) has been a sociology professor at the University of São Paulo since 1999. She has also been a senior researcher associated with the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning) since 1995. Right now she is also an associate researcher at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, United Kingdom, and at the International and Interdisciplinary Network on “Labor Market and Gender,” a CNRS (French National Center for Scientific Research) research group. Over the years she has published many books in Brazil and has won awards for four.

Ruzan Roald Aghazadian SPURS '95 (Armenia) lives in Vermont and works for the U.S. government. On a Sunday visit to Boston last fall with her daughter, she stopped off at MIT but found most things closed.

Huascar Eguino SPURS '98 (Bolivia) works at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC. He writes, "I began to work with subnational governments just after my year as a SPURS Fellow. Since then, I had the opportunity to prepare development programs and provide technical advice to more than 15 countries and 100 municipalities. Right now, my focus is on finding technical solutions to improve subnational public investment and increase local governments' revenues."

Cecilia María Vélez White SPURS '98 (Colombia) is an economist at Jorge Tadeo Lozano University. She served as Colombia’s minister of national education from 2002 to 2010 and has held many other important government positions.

Jianyu He SPURS '01 (China) reports that his employer, NEA China, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency will hold a series of workshops and other activities on U.S.-China natural gas cooperation. He plans to visit several shale gas companies in Houston as part of this cooperation program.

Paul Altidor SPURS '03 (Haiti) was named Haitian ambassador to the United States in January 2012. During the uproar over immigration and negative comments about Haiti in December and January 2018, he wrote an opinion piece for The New York Times (mobile.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/opinion/our-country-deserves-your-respect-not-your-pity.html), was interviewed on many national news programs, and was widely quoted in a variety of major publications.

The 2017 SPURS alumni notes mistakenly listed Zaklina Gligorijevic Humphrey '04 (Serbia) as being from Croatia. She works at the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade in Serbia and is director of the main city planning office.

Ilac Diaz Humphrey '06 (Philippines) visited the SPURS office in April and met current Fellows. He runs a nongovernmental organization, Liter of Light, that
Alumni Updates

has helped almost 700,000 people turn recycled plastic bottles into an environmentally friendly source of lighting in impoverished neighborhoods and places off the electric grid. His TEDxMaastricht talk on YouTube explains this procedure of providing light while empowering local people.

After MIT, Epstein worked for the Ministry of Education in Ghana. He now serves as a consultant on a World Bank Project. He notes, “The education and training I acquired from MIT has come a long way to assist me in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of educational policies.”

After MIT, Ernest Owusu-Ansah SPURS ’07 (Ghana) completed a master’s degree at Cornell University before returning home. He is now a consultant on a World Bank Project for the Ministry of Education in Ghana.

The education and training I acquired from MIT has come a long way to assist me in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of educational policies.”

Angela Mjoo Humphrey ’08 (Malawi) pioneered the establishment of the Financial Stability Unit in the Research and Statistics Department of the Reserve Bank of Malawi. She later rose to acting director of the bank’s Research and Statistics Department. She says, “I am now studying for a PhD in economics at Loughborough University, England, and seek to impact my country’s development on a macro-economic scale through my research.”

Wan Liu SPURS ’09 (China) teaches courses at Tsinghua University and continues her research on urban design and public spaces. She has led several research projects on urban space regeneration in different cities.

Katia Luli Nakashigue Humphrey ’09 (Brazil) works as an auxiliary coordinator of the architectural and urbanism course and as auxiliary coordinator of the interior design program at Universidade Paulista, a private university in São Paulo. She also teaches architecture project classes and runs her own consulting office for landscaping and architecture.

Maha Malaike Humphrey ’10 (Iraqi Kurdistan) writes, “I am an architect and urban planner consultant busy with research, academic teaching, and practical projects.” She is now head of the Spatial Planning Department at the University of Duhok.

Ugyen Tenzen Humphrey ’10 (Bhutan) says that a major part of his SPURS project, “Mechanism for Management of Preservation and Conservation Areas in Bhutan,” was adopted as a national directive on incentives for the management of protected areas by the Cabinet of Bhutan in June 2016.

Geley Norbu Humphrey ’12 (Bhutan) has been appointed director of the National Land Commission of Bhutan.

Amjad Ali Awan Humphrey ’12 (Pakistan) visited MIT and attended a SPURS Fellows seminar in December 2017. His U.S. visit included attending the International Power Generation Conference in Las Vegas and meetings at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Denver. He is chief economist at the Alternative Energy Development Board, Ministry of Water & Power, for Pakistan. He says that Pakistan’s ranking has substantially improved among the most attractive countries for the investment in renewable energy.

Araya Santisan Humphrey ’13 (Thailand) is now a PhD student in art education at Chulalongkorn University. She has also begun a part-time business making scarves that she describes as wearable art.


Waqar Shah Humphrey ’14 (Pakistan) presented a seminar at DUSP in September 2017 and visited the SPURS office. He is head of engineering at TCF Head Office in Karachi and works on projects for a variety of international organizations.

Latha Chhetri Humphrey ’14 (Bhutan) is an urban development and planning specialist with SMEC International, an Australian firm owned by Surbana Jurong, Singapore. She says, “I am based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and I support the Urban Development Group in Business Development and Project Management across Africa. Recently I have been included in the list of speakers, consultants, and advisors by a new organization, Ecocity World, started by the president of Ecocity Builders, where I went for professional development in 2014.”

A TED talk by Nabila Alibhai SPURS ’14 (Kenya) can be viewed online at: www.ted.com/talks/nabila_alibhai_why_people_of_different_faiths_are_painting_their_houses_of_worship_yellow.

Ahmet Kindap Humphrey ’15 (Turkey) has finished his master’s degree in economics and started working in the World Bank’s Ankara Office as an urban development specialist.

Nil Tuzcu SPURS ’15 (Turkey) was recently a research associate at Harvard University-Mellon Urban Initiative.
and a research fellow/technology lead at MIT. She created and developed the Istanbul Urban Database, the most comprehensive online multimedia archive of Istanbul. She has taught urban and design studios at the Boston Architectural College and expects to begin a new job soon at the Center of International Development, Harvard Kennedy School.

Qiao Liang SPURS ’15 (China) is busy teaching at Chongqing University.

Lucrecia Bertelli Humphrey ’16 (Argentina) is currently studying for an MSc in urbanization and development in London.

Mariano Eriz SPURS ’16 (Argentina) has three new positions: co-director of the Research Program in Socio-Economic Vulnerability to Climate Risk at Buenos Aires University; the Inter-American Development Bank project coordinator at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Public Works, and Housing; and coordinator of price and markets for the secretary of domestic trade at the Ministry of Production.

Brijesh Dixit Humphrey ’16 (India) was selected to work on India’s Mumbai to Ahmedabad high-speed rail project in partnership with Japan. In preparation, he traveled to Japan to learn about all aspects of the high-speed system. He says, “Apart from constructing the railroad, the real challenge is to absorb the technology and replicate the work and management culture that has been so successful in Japan.”

Shah Mahmood Khan Humphrey ’17 (Pakistan) credits his year at MIT for his promotion to three new government positions: additional secretary in the Planning and Development Department, director general for monitoring and evaluation, and executive director of urban policy and planning.

David Gomez SPURS ’17 (Mexico) and Gabriel Lanfranchi SPURS ’15 (Argentina) have published a new book: Steering the Metropolis (publications.iadb.org/handle/11319/8596), edited by several former SPURS Fellows, among others, and including work from several DUSP contributors. The online description says, “The book encompasses the reflections of thought and practice leaders on the underlying premises for governing metropolitan space, sectoral adaptations of those premises, and dynamic applications in a wide variety of contexts.”

Fuad Jafarli Humphrey ’11 (Azerbaijan) translated an article by SPURS head Bish Sanyal, “Myth of Development,” into Azerbaijani, where it was read with enthusiasm by his colleagues.

On a recent trip to Africa, Xingping Wang SPURS ’10 (China) met Berhanu Woldeansae Humphrey ’04 (Ethiopia) at the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building, and Construction.