As we hunker down at home to avoid the lethal Covid-19 virus, I spend much of my time reading daily newspapers and professional journals seeking to make meaning of the uncertain world outside. There is a new trend in the articles, I’ve noticed, related to the fate of internationalism as we have known it since the end of World War II. An op-ed in The New York Times dated May 4, 2020, by Ruchir Sharma, the chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley and author of The Ten Rules of Successful Nations, sums up the new anxiety about internationalism as we have known it since the end of World War II. An op-ed in The New York Times dated May 4, 2020, by Ruchir Sharma, the chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley and author of The Ten Rules of Successful Nations, sums up the new anxiety about internationalism as we have known it since the end of World War II. An op-ed in The New York Times dated May 4, 2020, by Ruchir Sharma, the chief global strategist at Morgan Stanley and author of The Ten Rules of Successful Nations, sums up the new anxiety about internationalism as we have known it since the end of World War II.

As Sharma argues, under the current circumstances of a global pandemic and a global economic recession, a new form of nationalism is likely to replace the spirit of internationalism that has been marked by the flow of ideas, finance, trade, and people—including international students and fellows—around the globe.
Nations, both wealthy and poor, are beginning to look inward to reduce their vulnerability to global epidemics and economic fluctuations. Going forward, the international laws and norms that guided post–World War II relationships among nations are likely to receive less priority than the self-interest of nations, especially as countries are increasingly led by populist leaders both from the right and the left of the ideological spectrum. Words such as “globalization,” “globalism,” and “internationalism” have suddenly become words with negative connotations, as if they were code words concocted by a small group of elites—one that has benefited disproportionately from global interconnection while the real costs were shifted to the more vulnerable majority.

How is this new sentiment likely to affect international educational programs such as SPURS? Will such programs become obsolete with changing times? On the contrary: International planning expertise and problem-solving are likely to be in more demand as it becomes increasingly evident that problems cannot be contained by national territories, nor can solutions to such problems be crafted unilaterally by individual nation states. This is not to say that globalization of the old kind is the only option going forward: A new kind of internationalism must be crafted, collectively, to address the adverse impact of old-style globalization—such as wide fluctuations in the global economy, increasing income inequalities, environmental degradation, and the spread of pandemics. Old global institutions will need to be reformed to address such challenges, and new institutions may need to be created to address unforeseen problems. The point is: Reform of old institutions and crafting of new practices, laws, and institutions will require a group of committed problem-solvers who understand global interconnection but do not offer “one size fits all” solutions. The social construction of this new approach is not going to be easy, but, hopefully, it will not require a global war of the kind the world witnessed prior to the famous Bretton Woods Conference that laid the groundwork for global integration and decolonization in the aftermath of World War II.

Can SPURS provide an academic setting for nurturing a group of mid-career urban practitioners from around the world to collectively think through what kinds of problems require global attention, and, more importantly, what it would take, organizationally, to address such problems? This new mission would require some adjustments to SPURS’ program structure. For one, the program would have to move away from its original mission to teach North American planning expertise to Fellows from developing countries. Instead, the program would have to focus on group efforts at joint problem formulation and collective problem-solving. Second, the program would need to foster a new inquiry into which organizations should address which problems at what scale, from local to global. This would sensitize the Fellows to the need for global cooperation. Third, SPURS would need to provide a global forum for genuine debates about development goals to subject old orthodox ideas about urban planning to new scrutiny based on the emerging realities of a world that both benefits and suffers from global interconnectivity.

To be sure, no such change in program structure can emerge without full consultation with SPURS’ 700-plus alums around the world. Our successful effort at fundraising last March gives me hope that our alums are eager and willing to join hands to strengthen SPURS so it can continue to serve as a unique educational setting for urban practitioners from around the world.

My sincere thanks to all of you who donated generously to SPURS, and my equally sincere wish is that eventually others will join in our collective effort to strengthen the program’s financial base so we can experiment with innovative programs to fit the needs of our changing world.

I hope you are healthy and able to turn your anxiety of the moment into something creative and life-enhancing. Please know that we are thinking of you and the well-being of the people in your region of the world even as we grapple with our own vulnerability here in the United States. I hope that a global solution to our collective problems will emerge in the near future.
Congratulations to the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows; thanks to Bish and Hashim for their words, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to you on this special day. I thought fitting that we reflect on the lives of two men who are woven into SPURS. These lives represent so much of relevance to this especially unique celebration of this unique program’s 50-plus years of promoting international understanding and education.

First, the Humphrey Fellows – a program which fosters an exchange of knowledge and mutual understanding throughout the world – are named in honor of a US politician. He had a long career in public service, as a politician and an educator. As a Senator he was a key architect in pushing forward the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty in 1963. As Vice President, although he was later vilified for his public support for the Vietnam War, he had in 1965 written a memo to President Johnson calling for the USA to exit the conflict, earning Johnson’s enmity. A liberal leader, who narrowly lost the Presidency to Nixon in 1968, Humphrey started his career as, effectively, a city planner – serving as Mayor of Minneapolis. And, apropos to what we are living today, during that time he presided over the polio quarantine of 1946. In his effort to ensure public safety and, especially, help children, he even took to reading the comics over the radio, because newspapers were not being delivered to homes.

The second man worth reflecting on, is Lloyd Rodwin, the founder of SPURS. Lloyd was a path-breaking academic, and an international man, who was born, raised and educated in the city and who dedicated his life to the city and, especially the underprivileged. He represents so much the world is facing and needs today:

• He understood intimately the impact of global crises. His wife and life partner, Nadine, was a refugee who fled Europe at the start of WWII and whose parents themselves had escaped the Russian revolution of 1917
• He pioneered the ‘modern’ practice of urban planning. He made planning truly
interdisciplinary, bringing in the social sciences and humanities and literally bringing the word studies into the field and, as Head of DUSP in the early 1970s, making it a national and international model for urban planning programs.

- He was collaborative, co-founding the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies.
- He was cosmopolitan in the true sense of the word, epitomized in his seminal book on the relationship between national policies and urban development, *Nations and Cities*, and the global span of his work.
- He was a profound (and productive) scholar, who deeply valued practice and reflective practice. Not only did he start the SPURS Program, but he later co-established together with Mel King, the Community Fellows Program, which we know today as CoLab.

I never knew him, but I know Bish did (as did Nimfa – look at this photo from I believe Rodwin’s last year!). I understand he was, above everything else, a great educator. Reportedly, Rodwin’s students said that “he taught us how to think.” His legacy lives on in DUSP, including in this great program, SPURS.

I have known SPURS Fellows since arriving to DUSP ten years after this photo was taken. They have been my classmates, collaborators, advisees, students, teachers, and still today research and teaching partners. Today, you Fellows are graduating in the midst of a pandemic, which is challenging the world in many ways. But, this is an acute moment, which only exemplifies the broader structural challenges our world faces today and which first brought me to DUSP: Resource depletion. Climate change. Economic inequality. Extremism.

Our main responsibility as a Department is to make sure we are best prepared to meet those challenges today and in the future. And SPURS is a critical part of our mission – thanks to the vision and leadership of Rodwin and the leadership that has followed, including the late John de Monchaux and Bish today. And, thanks to the Program which bears Humphrey’s name. And, especially thanks to all the SPURS alumni, whom you are now joining. To be effective in the world, we must work with others - collaboratively, strategically, reflectively, globally. We have no choice: it is our moral imperative to commit our efforts to these ends and I look forward to this work with all of you for many years to come. Thank you again, and congratulations!
I witnessed something special about how they approached their work: a sincerity, passion, and commitment to making the SPURS experience valuable and meaningful for Fellows.

In my first meeting with Bish Sanyal and Assistant Director Nimfa de Leon last summer, I witnessed something special about how they approached their work: a sincerity, passion, and commitment to making the SPURS experience valuable and meaningful for Fellows. They, along with their team—Louise Elving, Patti Foley, Babak Manouchehrifar, and Debbie Levey—care about creating a welcoming community for the incoming cohort of students; they also work hard to stay in touch with past Fellows. I was inspired to find that Fellows from many years ago were seeking ways to stay involved with the program, and the SPURS team was continually thinking about how to carve out more time to engage with them. Bish and Nimfa were overflowing with thoughts about how to strengthen the program and build a long-term strategy for its financial sustainability.

It occurred to me that the best thing I could do to support SPURS was to be a thought partner, lending a hand to help the team build upon the great foundation they had created and sustained over many years. After a productive introductory conversation about the program, I was eager to begin.

It was our third meeting when I caught a glimpse of what makes Bish such a magnetic person and strong leader of SPURS. At the outset of our conversation, he asked me how my summer was going. I told him about a recent visit to Nashville, Tennessee, to hear live music; I also revealed I was planning to see Yo-Yo Ma perform Bach’s Cello Suites at Tanglewood in Western Massachusetts. Most people would simply acknowledge my remarks and move on to the agenda at hand. Not Bish. Tuning into my passion for music, he invited me to give a presentation on the history of American popular music to the SPURS Fellows. He explained that he is always seeking ways to satisfy Fellows’ hunger to learn more about American culture. Initially I declined, citing my novice background in music history, but he insisted my own enthusiasm for the topic was the only necessary qualification. How could I refuse?

A few months later, and in the midst of a lively SPURS Thanksgiving dinner, I shared...
several weeks’ worth of research, a few of my favorite songs and music videos, as well as some anecdotes about the origins of several musical genres. It brought me unexpected joy to speak publicly about my interest in music to such a convivial, welcoming audience. The Fellows told me they enjoyed it too, and the evening ended with a small dance party. Bish was right all along.

Meanwhile, the meetings with Bish and Nimfa grew more focused. It was clear from Bish’s interactions with SPURS alumni that many of them have a deep affinity for the program. During the October conference and alumni workshop in Gdańsk, Poland, Koit Saarevet SPURS ’09 kindly volunteered his time and talents to help the program stay connected with alumni and to raise funds toward a SPURS endowment. From the initial call we had with him in December, Koit had clearly studied up on alumni engagement, and his dedication to SPURS was contagious. With Koit on board, I knew we had a terrific ally in our work. However, the question remained: How could we best collaborate with him?

Just a few weeks later, something serendipitous happened. Peter D. Cook ’64 (VI), SPURS ’73 and former SPURS instructor (1987-’88), expressed an interest in making a generous commitment to support the program. Cook thoughtfully asked how his gift could have maximum impact. Bish was effusive in his appreciation, and we suggested...
that Peter consider making a challenge gift to enable SPURS to participate in the MIT 24-Hour Challenge (an annual Institute-wide fundraising effort in which donors designate contributions to certain funds, and alumni and friends join them in supporting those funds during a 24-hour period). To our delight, Peter generously committed to making a $10,000 challenge gift.

On hearing the news, Koit was enthusiastic. I relayed to him that since SPURS would be a first-time participant in the 24-Hour Challenge, on March 12, 2020, there was uncertainty around whether we would be able to successfully achieve our goal. Koit replied that he would happily make his own $3,000 gift to help SPURS meet Peter’s challenge. Moreover, he agreed to be a partner in thinking through how we might communicate this effort with alumni. In the coming weeks, Koit and I exchanged upwards of 40 emails on a wide range of strategies, topics, and ideas. All along the way, I was impressed by his generosity and willingness to allocate so much thought and time to SPURS, given his important position with the National Archives of Estonia.

Koit and I shared our communications plan with Bish, who provided welcome feedback, especially as this would be the first time SPURS was inviting the entire alumni community to consider a gift to support the program. As messages from Bish, Koit, Debbie, and me went out to the alumni, we were moved by the response: Many alumni graciously stepped forward to be a part of this effort.

As the day of the challenge approached, there remained much uncertainty. How would alumni respond to the spate of communications they had received? Would we reach our goal? Most importantly, the 24-Hour Challenge was beginning to feel rather insignificant, as the World Health Organization announced on March 11 that it was characterizing the Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic. On top of concerns for fundraising success, we now worried about the health and safety of the SPURS community and their families.

On March 12, I awoke anxious to see if we would hit our goal. I immediately checked
the challenge website and was amazed. Since SPURS alumni live all over the world, many individuals had made gifts before sunrise in Boston. All that day and late into the night, I was inspired by the outpouring of support from Fellows, friends, alumni, staff, and family. I was especially moved by some of the warm, encouraging comments from alumni that accompanied their commitments. We met Cook’s challenge and then some, raising a total of $21,445 from 36 people. It was a real team effort throughout, and I thank everyone who played a part in this great success story.

The 24-Hour Challenge is just one of the energizing projects I’ve undertaken in my time working with the SPURS team and colleagues in the School of Architecture & Planning. It has been particularly meaningful to play a small role in helping Bish and the SPURS team chart a bold course of action for the years ahead. Not only have I felt fulfilled in my duties, but I have been moved to see how this remarkable community can unite behind an important cause.

Even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic—with its massive health, economic, and personal implications—the SPURS family demonstrated its collective commitment to securing the future of this vital program. I am so proud to have been a part of that story, and I look forward to all the good that will continue to come as we meet the challenges of the coming year together.

List of donors

/MIT 24-Hour Challenge/

Peter Cook
Koit Saarevet
Akhmed Baitassov
Sanjay Bhunjun Bissessur
MaryRose Blandino
Carlos F De La Torre
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Bernardo Antonio Perez
Feng Qing
Magdalena Rembeza
Angelito F Santos
Bish Sanyal
Borislav Stojkov
Fazilet Tanrikulu
Fan Tu
Yanyu (Peter) Zhang
Just about everyone and everything was disrupted in 2020 by Covid-19, and the SPURS seminar was no exception. When the SPURS/Humphrey Program’s academic year began with orientation in August 2019, none of us dreamed that we would end the year meeting virtually via Zoom; we had to give up our energized in-person discussions in mid-March 2020. This is the story of both what changed and what persisted.

**Fall Semester 2019**

The SPURS/Humphrey seminar this year had a dual focus on the history of development and current critical issues. The two intellectual goals of the seminar were:

1. To understand how international development theory and practice have evolved since the mid-20th century, what role the United States played in shaping developmental paradigms, and what are the key contemporary debates in the field
2. To foster a series of conversations about the difficult challenges facing cities in North America today related to such issues as automation and the nature of work; deepening income inequalities; continuing racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation; and climate change

The seminar program had an equally important third objective:

3. To make SPURS a shared community of practice through Fellows’ exchange of experiences and reflections on past work and plans for the future; reflection on ethical issues and how they are incorporated or ignored in planning theory and practice; and consideration of what it takes to be an effective leader

These three interconnected goals were addressed through weekly seminars. Early in the fall, SPURS Director Bish Sanyal led a three-part series on how development theory and practice have evolved worldwide over the past 70 years. This series began with an exploration of ideas disseminated by American planners after World War II and culminated with recent criticism of the role and place of the United States in world affairs.

A follow-up series of talks by guest lecturers, from both MIT and elsewhere, centered on the challenges facing American cities today and how similar challenges might affect cities in the newly industrializing world. The impact, both positive and negative, of large institutions such as universities on low-income communities was presented by Kenneth Reardon, professor and director of urban and community planning at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, with O. Robert Simha, lecturer in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) and retired director of planning for MIT. The two also discussed how community-based organizations and residents have responded to large, local institutions and pushed them to be responsive to local interests.

Another talk highlighted the ways that work and job possibilities are being re-shaped by technology. In this talk, Elisa-beth Reynolds, executive director of MIT’s Institute-wide Task Force on the Work of the Future, explained how employment requirements are expected to evolve as multiple kinds of work, from factory jobs to
service positions, become more automated and impacted by artificial intelligence.

Two contrasting views of the benefits and risks of large-scale public infrastructure projects were the focus of two additional seminars. One session focused on how major new water and sewage management systems benefited Boston’s urban area, while the other explored how communities worked to stop potentially damaging highway infrastructure. Paul Levy, former executive director of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, described how a lawsuit in the Massachusetts federal court in the early 1980s was used, along with federal environmental laws, to catalyze the cleanup of the formerly heavily polluted Boston Harbor. Karilyn Crockett, a lecturer in DUSP, also described how a coalition of community organizations in Greater Boston joined forces in the last third of the 20th century to stop a proposed federal highway that would have run through and destroyed their neighborhoods.

The critical topics of climate change and efforts to mitigate its potential harmful impacts in Boston were presented by the commissioner of the City of Boston’s Environment Department, Carl Spector. He described policies and mitigation projects that are both under way and planned for the city. Spector also explained the lengthy and ongoing process of citizen engagement that has been undertaken to prepare the city to adapt to rising oceans, hotter temperatures, and other effects of climate change.

Ceasar McDowell, professor of the practice of community development in DUSP, led an interactive workshop on race that asked Fellows to consider their own attitudes toward racial differences, how these are embodied in the cultures of both the United States and their home countries, and how they deal with these attitudes at work and in their personal lives.
The SPURS/Humphrey seminar was complemented during the fall semester by site visits to three organizations actively engaged in planning in Greater Boston. These site visits allowed Fellows to learn how urban and regional improvements are made in the United States, from the neighborhood to the regional scale. The visits also showed how multiple organizations promote inclusive planning on issues from the built environment to social services.

The first visit was to the City of Boston public agency responsible for both planning and reviewing development projects. Its name encapsulates these dual functions: Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA). The BPDA prepares plans for individual neighborhoods, for downtown districts, and for the city as a whole, engaging in extensive outreach to ensure community participation. The BPDA also has the authority to approve (or amend or reject) major real estate development projects proposed in Boston, so it can shape what is built by for-profit firms, by major nonprofit institutions (such as the many universities and medical facilities in the city), and by community-based nonprofit organizations.

The second site visit was to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the regional planning agency for the entire Greater Boston area, covering 101 cities and towns. While BPDA is a line agency with legal authority over development work within the city limits, MAPC is a quasi-public organization without such legal authority. Instead, it works by consensus, seeking to build support and promote action through discussion, mediation, research, and outreach. Its broad reach encompasses transportation, housing, infrastructure, climate, the arts, economic development, health,
and more. In all areas, the MAPC seeks to promote smart growth and resiliency across the greater metropolitan area.

Fellows traveled to Madison Park Development Corporation (MPDC), one of Boston’s major nonprofit community organizations, for the third site visit. MPDC was launched by local residents more than 50 years ago to combat redlining, disinvestment, deterioration, and arson. Since then, it has grown into a locally owned corporation that develops and owns affordable housing, operates both an arts center and a recreation center, supports economic development, and offers social services ranging from healthcare to job training. Over the years, MPDC has transformed its neighborhood from a place of decay and misery to one that provides residents with well-being and opportunities to improve their lives.
After MIT’s long winter break and Independent Activities Period, the SPURS/Humphrey seminar resumed in early February 2020 with a pair of presentations by Sanyal on “New Planning Sensibilities”; these expanded upon issues raised in his fall sessions. The seminar also featured a combination of workshops—one on negotiation led by DUSP Professor Lawrence Susskind and another on grant writing led by DUSP Lecturer Cherie Miot Abbanat—and other sessions that used challenging American issues as a springboard to discuss similar concerns in the Fellows’ own countries. These included a session on the digital transformation of transportation led by DUSP Department Chair Christopher Zegras and one on gender equity led by Louise Elving, SPURS lecturer.

Then the world shifted. Covid-19 was spreading with increasing virulence throughout the United States, and cases in Massachusetts began to rise rapidly in late February and early March. During the first 10 days of March, MIT decided to suspend all courses, almost all research labs, and most other activities and move them online. Almost everything was canceled for the week beginning March 15, and little had been scheduled for the following week, which was MIT’s spring break. During these two weeks, SPURS/Humphrey Fellows and staff met online for the first time using the Zoom technology platform selected by MIT for continuing work.

Our Zoom meetings focused on how everyone was adapting to the sudden drastic changes in our lives. Not only were formal MIT events becoming “virtual,” but all Massachusetts residents were being asked to stay at home as much as possible, leaving only for essential activities such as work, buying food, and exercise. Suddenly, everyone had to figure out how to make their work, professional affiliations, personal lives, families, friendships—everything—function from home and online. No one was prepared; no one had a similar experience to share; but everyone in the SPURS/Humphrey Program rose to the challenge.
Although the SPURS seminar and other program activities had to move online, the engagement and energy of SPURS Fellows and staff continued. The provocative discussions and questions never stopped.

The SPURS seminar resumed the week of March 29, beginning with an interactive session in which Fellows were asked to identify what key actions they would take in their own countries in response to Covid-19 if they were serving as a city planning director. Wide-ranging recommendations ran the gamut from instituting policies to protect people—such as shelter-in-place directives and eviction freezes—to forming focused response teams for informal settlements where staying at home is difficult and people’s access to food is restricted even in normal times. Some Fellows also promoted strengthening central planning and launching major public awareness campaigns.

We moved the time of the SPURS seminar to accommodate the new reality that four of the Fellows had returned to their home countries in response to growing worldwide restrictions on travel: They were in Bulgaria, China, Colombia, and India. The seminar was moved from 2 pm Eastern time to 10 am Eastern time, so that Fellows scattered across the globe could all participate at reasonable times in their own homes.

The following weeks of the seminar featured additional sessions led by Sanyal on planning cultures and by Elving on public/private partnerships, plus an intriguing presentation on municipal government in the United States led by James Throgmorton. Throgmorton was able to provide the perspective of both an academic and a practitioner because he is a professor emeritus of urban and regional planning at the University of Iowa and the former mayor of Iowa City. He discussed the kinds of conflicts that arise in municipal government and how he tried to resolve them through combinations of argumentation, negotiation, mediation, and collaboration.

If the year had continued in typical fashion, MIT Fellows and staff would have joined with those involved in the Humphrey programs at Cornell and Boston universities for a day of reflection about returning home after their year in the United States. Typically, these meetings give Fellows the chance to discuss the challenges they may face both personally and professionally as they transition home. But, alas, this strange year did not permit such a multi-campus collaboration. Instead, one of the SPURS/Humphrey seminar sessions was used to focus on these issues. The group learned how to use Zoom technology to break into small groups online, then reconvened to consider everyone’s ideas.

The final seminar sessions of the year featured Fellows presenting their own work from this year as well as a final reflective session in which Fellows were asked to share their observations about what worked well for them and what did not throughout the program—especially with this year’s difficult disruptions due to Covid-19. We all hope that none of us will ever again have to live through such a time. But we learned that, together, the SPURS/Humphrey Fellows and staff are a vital, active group that continues to ask provocative questions and debate significant policies, programs, and ideas. Despite all the challenges, we were able to continue sharing ideas, experiences, and arguments as a community of practice.
The New York City trip has been a distinct hallmark of the professional education that has been offered by MIT’s SPURS/Humphrey Program for many years. Tapping into the extended network of MIT alumni and professors serving as planners and policy-makers at different levels in the largest city of the United States, the trip offers the Fellows a unique opportunity to meet with a range of professional planners, community activists, and urban leaders—all of whom generously share their experience addressing key urban challenges in New York City and beyond.

In keeping with this tradition, this year’s trip, which took place between February 27 and 29, had a packed schedule. It included several meetings with the deputy mayor of New York City (NYC), the deputy director of the NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD), and the urban analyst of the Community Development Unit at the New York State Department of Financial Services. The trip also involved a series of collective reflection sessions, socializing events, and group site visits.

The Fellows arrived in New York early on a cold Thursday afternoon. After checking in at their hotel and grabbing a quick lunch, the group went directly to New York City Hall to meet with J. Phillip Thompson, the deputy mayor for strategic policy initiatives for New York City. Thompson—an associate professor of political science and urban planning at MIT who is currently on public service leave—talked to the Fellows about the complicated way the city struggles to meet its progressive goals in relation with and reaction to political trends at both the state and federal levels. The deputy mayor’s passionate and illuminating discussion was followed by an engaging question-and-answer session, during which the Fellows asked a range of questions about urban poverty, immigration, race, and citizen vulnerability to gain practical insight into New York’s efforts to tackle these pressing challenges and plan for the city’s future.

The meeting was followed by an extended tour of City Hall and a visit to the adjacent neighborhood, which includes the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. The group then dined at a Persian restaurant, where they were joined by Thierno Amadou Diallo, an urban analyst at the Community Development Unit of the New York State Department of Financial Services (NYDFS). Diallo, an MIT DUSP alumnus, provided the Fellows with his personal views on a range of policy initiatives and programs launched by NYDFS to attain equality of access to financial resources and institutions in underserved neighborhoods.

Fellows at Brooklyn Bridge
NYC communities. The lively conversation extended in both time (until later in night) and place (at the hotel were the group was staying).

Friday was an equally busy day. It began with a visit to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), a unique repository of design, architecture, and photography that, as one Fellow noted, “serves as a source of creativity and inspiration for how to make our cities more livable and inviting to citizens of all walks of life.” From MoMa, in Midtown, the group went straight to the HPD in Lower Manhattan, to meet with Ross Karp, the director of the HPD’s Supportive Housing Loan Program, and his colleagues. Karp, who is also an MIT DUSP alumnus, discussed the set of policies and programs the city has used to address affordable housing and homelessness. The discussion was followed by collective reflections on the economic justifications as well as moral challenges underpinning the city’s policies. After the meeting, the group made a few site visits, attended social events, and got ready to return to Boston the next day.

This year’s trip also had an unfortunate, albeit memorable, quality: It sadly proved to be the last in-person social event for the 2019-2020 SPURS/Humphrey Fellows. Two weeks after returning to Boston, as the Covid-19 pandemic spread quickly in the United States, MIT canceled all social events, moved its classes online, and introduced strict social distancing for the rest of the Fellows’ stay in the country. At the time, no one knew this would be the case, but our New York night walks, trash talks, and aftershocks will remain in our collective memories for years to come.
Why does a rich country like the United States have so many homeless people? Why are people homeless in a city like Boston with a strong economy?

Fellows asked these questions at the beginning of the year when they were new to America. They learned first-hand who is homeless and why by participating in two evenings of community service at the Pine Street Inn in November and December 2019.

The Pine Street Inn is the largest non-profit provider of services to homeless women and men in Greater Boston. Founded in 1969, PSI operates four overnight shelters for 670 people and provides forty permanent, supportive housing communities for almost 900 men and women.

On two chilly early winter evenings, Fellows volunteered at Pine Street’s Shattuck Shelter, helping to prepare and serve dinner for the 120 men who are there each night. Fellows noticed how nutritious the food was: One evening, it was tacos, plus fruit and chocolate cake; another evening, it was pasta plus green beans and fruit. They also noted the shelter’s cleanliness, good lighting, and clear organization—including lockers for each guest’s personal belongings.

Fellows spoke with Pine Street staff about how the shelter is funded and operated, how guests find it, and the range of services offered, including assistance with addiction, legal, financial, or mental health issues. Fellows saw first-hand that the male guests range from young adults to elderly individuals. They learned that, although Boston had multiple employment opportunities (before Covid-19), jobs were hard to find for people who lacked basic education, had mental health disabilities, were older, or lacked work experience.

Fellows said that serving at this shelter helped them understand better the complexities of American society and persistent issues of social equity. Fellows’ work was greatly appreciated by both PSI staff and guests. As we left the Shattuck each evening, guests gave Fellows a round of applause, as thanks for their time and effort.
COVID-19 IMPACT

HOW COVID-19 CHANGED OUR LIVES

It was early in March when we were all asked to work from home and stay at home because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intensity of this virus necessitated the unprecedented response from MIT and much of the country. Students, Fellows, faculty, and staff were inundated with information, regulations, policies, and advice about Covid-19. We were all asked to observe social distancing, use face masks, and wash hands frequently as a precaution. At the same time, hospitals were filled with sick people and thousands of lives were claimed by the virus.

MIT classes shifted to virtual learning. Seminars, workshops, conferences, meetings, and trips were canceled. Faculty, students, and staff had to learn about Zoom, Webinex, and other forms of virtual learning. MIT was transformed from a bustling university filled with people to a campus of empty buildings, labs, classrooms, and offices.

At the same time, Humphrey Fellows were asked to make difficult decisions about whether to return home before airports and borders closed or to stay on campus. Four Fellows decided to return home and soon found themselves forced to quarantine for 14 days in their home countries. The rest of the Fellows stayed in their MIT dorms and apartments, taking classes and seminars via Zoom and doing professional work virtually.

In spite of this uncertainty, Fellows continued to meet program requirements from the safety of their own homes. The anxiety and stress of all these changes, compounded by worrying about their families back home and the uncertainty of their own return travel made it more difficult for the Fellows to continue to remain strong and positive. But they—like everyone else—began adjusting to a new normal that includes virtual learning, social distancing, and face masks. Here are some photos taken by Fellows during the pandemic.
COVID-19 UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
By Chandra Hada, Humphrey’20 (Nepal)

I was struggling to choose a topic for the SPURS Newsletter as the deadline approached. Then it became clear that it must be about the crisis that is engulfing us: Covid-19. As of today, March 26, 2020, I have decided to write about my life up close and personal since the Covid-19 outbreak. The world is topsy-turvy since MIT prohibited international travel and nonessential domestic travel on March 6, 2020, and restricted interstate travel on March 19, 2020. The Massachusetts governor declared a state of emergency on March 10, 2020. I got that news while on a site visit to Boston Harbor while attending a workshop at Northeastern University. Since then, my mind has not been at ease, and nothing is as I thought it would be.

Up Close
The Covid-19 pandemic has changed my life from a SNAFU (Situation Normal All Fouled Up) a couple of weeks ago to a FUBAR (Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition) drama. Only one month ago, my plan was to finish classes at the end of April, and I was busy arranging much-anticipated travel—to Toronto, Canada; Atlanta, Georgia; Houston, Texas; and Phoenix, Arizona. I was also looking forward to engaging in another professional affiliation in Washington, D.C. I was excited that my parents would come to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to attend my SPURS/Humphrey graduation on May 1, 2020. My parents had already traveled from Nepal on February 4 to be with relatives in Texas and were planning to come to Massachusetts to be with my daughter and me. Suddenly, everything was disrupted. Neither my parents nor I am allowed to meet or stay together. All plans had to be changed abruptly.

My daughter’s public elementary school in Cambridge has closed. MIT has closed for all in-person classes, meetings, and events; even the SPURS workroom for Fellows is closed. All classes for us are now online. MIT has encouraged all of us who live in MIT graduate housing to leave if we can; but this is the U.S. home for my daughter and myself, so we continue living in an MIT graduate building that is now largely vacant, since most American graduate students have left.

 Neither my parents nor I and my daughter can currently fly back to Nepal due to travel restrictions. So, all my plans are uncertain, fluid. I am attempting to determine what is best for my family and professional career while complying with all edicts and regulations. While I know public officials and MIT are attempting to find a delicate balance between prudence and actions that may cause panic, it is hard to live with so much uncertainty. My friend Richard MacIntosh, a local American, also cannot clarify; he relies on clichés and looks to the American character for answers.

Personal
I have had mixed experiences with the government and the university in this Covid-19 crisis. I realize that I am dealing with bureaucracies that are self-protective. I have found at a personal level that Americans are kind, considerate, and generous. People whom I know casually are calling daily to inquire about my well-being. Others are generously helping me with day-to-day activities. However, I am also bombarded with emails and find I am spending an inordinate amount of time reading, interpreting, and worrying about how to comply. I wish that it would all go away, so I could concentrate on my fellowship work.

I have found at a personal level that Americans are kind, considerate, and generous.
I have found myself a very resilient person in the past. Even now, when I get away from the overwhelming communications, I find my sense of reality and humor returning. But then the emails bring contradictory instructions, and I feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of making plans and figuring out what is best for me and my daughter day by day. What I see is that Americans are making every attempt to keep their lives normal. I see them out walking, talking, cycling, wheeling baby carriages, and walking their dogs each time I leave the MIT apartment building. At the same time, the local grocery store, Trader Joe’s in Cambridge, has been full of people who look anxious while maintaining social distance. “Social-distancing,” “self-quarantining,” and “together-apart” are the most-used buzzwords in social media for avoiding spreading the virus.

**Way Forward**

In much of the United States, people have started working from home, closing schools, switching to online classes, canceling conferences, and visiting family only electronically. The federal and local governments are working hard to protect people, but the disease is escalating here. It is distressing to write that the United States has become the epicenter of the global pandemic, overtaking both China and Italy. Scientists are researching for effective, safe medicines and vaccines to stop it. We must hope for the best and prepare for the worst outcomes. The course is not a straight line; rather, it zigzags as the United States does not have strong central planning except during wartime.

It will be interesting, decades from now, to see how the politicians and historians treat the actions of each government around the world and argue about what system was the most effective. I am not rooting for any particular ideology, but I want the human race to be the winner. I hope we learn to use the best that each country has to offer. The United States is finding its way forward in its usual bumbling way. This is OK since we are making progress.

I will start to keep a diary. I will enjoy telling my grandchildren about this great adventure and how it affected our lives. I have taken the road less traveled, and it has made all the difference. (Adapted from the Robert Frost poem *The Road Not Taken.*)

*Note: Chandra, her daughter, and parents were able to return to Nepal on June 23, 2020.*
IN PURSUIT OF SOMETHING NEW

By Samer Wanan, Humphrey’20 (Palestine)

The Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS) has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. My nine-month stay in the United States was filled with unique opportunities that expanded my worldview. The challenges of SPURS pushed me to strive for scholarly excellence, not only in my professional life but also in my personal life.

It is widely believed that living abroad develops a person both academically and professionally. I certainly believe that being out of my comfort zone and living in a situation that continuously challenges me has enhanced and developed my personality and self-confidence. SPURS has helped me to reach far beyond my expectations, combining both knowledge and wisdom to make an impact. As a result, I have become more independent and self-reliant; I have matured both personally and academically.

The nature of SPURS and its approach is characterized by a high degree of interaction with colleagues, professors, and other people from various backgrounds and disciplines. The experience of meeting scholars and professionals from all over the world and communicating and sharing our cultures and experiences was just uplifting. It was a rich experience that cannot be equated with anything. I have found SPURS to be like a small, warm family—supportive through all life’s ups and downs. Being far away from home and trying to adjust in a new environment is, in itself, a big challenge. Having my colleagues with me, from the beginning of the program till the end, has helped me immensely in dealing with various difficulties at different times.

Moreover, I appreciate the program’s flexibility, which has enabled me to explore a wide range of subjects and courses related to my research interests. The opportunity to choose and audit a variety of subjects has helped me to develop a comparative understanding of the theories, methods, and techniques that are applied to the practice of architecture, landscaping, and planning. In addition, the program values a global vision and way of thinking, which is interesting. Brainstorming and thinking collaboratively about different aspects of urban life has enhanced my ability to look at various aspects of research through multiple lenses.

Being at MIT and exploring its spaces, labs, events, workshops, and classes had been my dream since I was 15 years old. To experience it in reality was an intellectually stimulating journey that enabled me to develop my critical thinking around my own research interests—ranging from abstract concepts to practical skills. This acquired knowledge has helped me to navigate my research in a more
challenging way and pushed me to think critically about how to relate what I’ve learned to my home country, Palestine.

During my stay in the United States, I had many opportunities to network and communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Learning about new cultures and new ideas has proven life-changing for me. As a major component of the program, we have been asked to do a “professional affiliation”—collaborating with a local planning organization. I joined a professional architectural studio in Boston (NADAAA), which enabled me to get in touch with the studio’s ways of working. I got a chance to be exposed to their design process, from conceptualization to realization. It was an absolutely inspiring and influential experience.

At a larger level, Cambridge and Boston, Massachusetts, are vibrant, student-friendly and interesting cities, with plenty of things to do and places to visit. It’s been a great experience to live in such a multicultural context. I also consider myself lucky to have a view of Boston’s skyline and the Charles River from the window of my residence. The shimmering of sun rays on top of the river during the day, and the mesmerizing full-moon nights will definitely be missed. Besides that, I had the chance to join a few of the program’s Fellows to visit multiple cities in California. That was a memorable trip that gave me the chance to explore different city planning systems, architectures, cultures, lifestyles, and cuisines.

The end of the program didn’t go as expected due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting closing of campus and cancellation of all activities, as well as the directive to avoid physical interactions with colleagues, professors, and students. Even this, however, was part of our learning process in this exciting journey. Dealing with uncertain times is never easy, but the Covid-19 crisis provided an opportunity to apply what we learned during the program in a practical way.

In the end, I cannot wish for more from this happy and challenging journey. I am sure the experience will benefit both my future self and my community.
The Unusual Year, The Unusual SPURS
By Shimeng Sun, SPURS’20 (China)

It has been an honor to participate in the Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS) this year as the 19th SPURS Fellow from Tsinghua University in China. When I arrived at MIT in August 2019, I was very curious about how this program could have run successfully for half a century. I also wanted to know how it would help mid-career professionals like myself reflect on their work, particularly if they already had clear career objectives. Together with 14 other Fellows from all over the world, I embarked on this unusual journey late last summer.

SPURS’ academic focus, which combines international perspective with a broad spectrum of planning ideas, is what first impressed me about this program. After settling down, we started our academic schedule soon. In the weekly SPURS seminars, we immersed ourselves in debates on a wide range of topics, from the global economy to American exceptionalism, from development theory to community engagement, from professional ethics to reflective practice, from racism to sexism, and from leadership to partnership. The breadth of themes well explained the significance of “reflection” as we are always encouraged to step out of our comfort zones. Moreover, in SPURS we were not only encouraged to reflect upon what happened in our own country in terms of specific planning concepts or theory but also privileged to learn what 14 other countries experienced, thanks to the others in the program. Geographically, SPURS this year had three Fellows from Europe, one from the Middle East, five from Asia, one from Africa, and five from South America. Professionally, we had five architects and urban planners, five public servants, one journalist, one economist, and two urban academics. We have celebrated our differences and our diversity of views and methodologies as well as our commonality—and this has inspired me to gain a better understanding of the world, my country, and myself.

SPURS’ practical orientation, including real involvement with American society and issues, was the second thing that impressed me. In addition to coursework, SPURS included many practical activities in our schedule. We served dinner for 200 homeless people at the Pine Street Inn shelter; we explored multiple social housing properties built by the nonprofit Madison Park Development Corporation; we learned the details of planning collaboration and negotiation from the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council; and we investigated the planning and design of national memorials in Washington, D.C.

Open discussions on the American system and other issues were encouraged daily. We questioned the American government’s indifference to homeless people during our Maine retreat; we argued on our subway trips about appropriate ways for citizens to express their ideas; we commented on the controversial topics raised in the Democratic Party presidential candidate debates in our SPURS common room; and, we discussed the mixed American attitudes about race of both inclusiveness and discrimination on our way to classes.

We were also encouraged to travel to help enrich our experience of the country. In Faneuil Hall in Boston, Massachusetts, we heard the history of Bostonian’s fight for freedom more than 200 years ago; in the bustling night of Las Vegas, Nevada, we reviewed the architectural classics highlighted in the book Learning from Las Vegas through a helicopter window; in the sunset at Hoover Dam, we marveled at this engineering project planned and constructed in the desert in the 1930s; and at the waterfront in San Francisco, California, we saw the run-down pier in the Maritime National Historical Park lacking basic maintenance. Seeing, hearing, and touching the authentic America helped us understand more
directly how the U.S. political and planning systems has been shaped and transformed over time. It also helped us evaluate the pros and cons of these systems and their applicability to other countries.

However, if you think this was the whole story of the year, you are probably wrong. What happened next went beyond everyone’s expectations. In early 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak caused enormous disruption to our lives. Schools were closed, schedules were canceled, and students were required to go back home. While the whole country was flustered coping with this public health crisis, the SPURS team remained calm, rational, and considerate. As some Fellows had to return to their home countries amid the pandemic, SPURS seminars were rapidly switched online to keep everyone connected and engaged. Our faculty leaders, Bish Sanyal and Louise Elving, reorganized topics and led new discussions, while assistant director, Nimfa de Leon and PhD assistant, Babak Manouchehrifar cared for everyone’s physical and mental conditions. This is perhaps a change that is unprecedented in SPURS’ 50+ years history. Nonetheless, the team showed that even at this moment, it remains critical to explore how planning would be affected and how it should respond to the global crisis.

The commitment, courage, and flexibility SPURS has shown during the crisis is my third impression. Looking back on the past year, I had a really fruitful time. I reflected on my knowledge system, career path, and working methodology, and I found new research interests in the preservation and enjoyment of historic environments by visiting historic national parks. More importantly, I gained precious friendships with 14 Fellows across the world, each of whom inspired me with his or her shining humanity. Joaquin Benitez’s concern for vulnerable groups is very impressive; Vineet Abhishek deserved respect for devoting himself to the improvement of Indian transportation; Samer Wanan is full of courage and wisdom in carrying our reform in his work; Sarnai has admirable entrepreneurial and executive ability; Alejandra Gomez’s smile and kindness make everyone around her feel refreshed; Zina Ruzdic is a natural team leader and always takes care of others; Yawa Attiso is sincere, warmhearted and a big fan of China; Oggi Georgiev always has sensitive insights on urban issues; Mili Richards has rich experience and is very compassionate; Andrea is enthusiastic and strong; Paulo Alvarado is amiable and good-hearted; Vakhtang Kasrelish is generous and hospitable; Javed Khoso is smart and has excellent photographic skills; Chandra Hada has a bright personality and the great ability to turn everyone into a friend. I’m thankful to all of them for their companionship and generosity in this unusual year.

SPURS is a unique program that brought us numerous excitements and helped us reflect throughout this turbulent year. I think it is the commitment and resilience of SPURS that has enabled the program to overcome all the difficulties of the past half-century to become what it is now. I hope more faculty members from Tsinghua will have the chance to experience the uniqueness of SPURS in the future.
Alumni Updates

GDAŃSK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY HOSTS THE REGIONAL SPURS ALUMNI MEETING

By Justyna Martyniuk-Peczek, SPURS’05, Gabriela Rembarz, SPURS’12, and Piotr Lorens, SPURS’97 (Poland)

On October 9-11, 2019, the Gdańsk University of Technology (GUT) hosted an international group of alumni from MIT’s Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS).

An outgrowth of last year’s jubilee alumni SPURS convention in Boston, Massachusetts, the event was focused on presenting GUT as a potential partner for the emerging global SPURS network. The key was to show the advantages of the university, a research center located in Poland’s Tri-City area, which is quite interesting from an urban studies perspective. The meeting featured three intentional, integrated components to serve this purpose: the international conference titled HER City: Housing Environment Resilience, the regional SPURS alumni workshops titled Building Models of Collaboration, and field studies titled Confronting the Results of Transformation in Poland.

The regional SPURS alumni meeting ended with official declarations of the will to create a regional European SPURS center at the Gdańsk University of Technology. It was expressed not only by the authorities of both scientific entities—Krzysztof Wilde from the Polish Academy of Sciences and Bish Sanyal from SPURS. The authorities of Gdańsk and Gdynia in Poland as well as the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area Association also declared their readiness to provide substantive and financial support for the future activity of the MIT SPURS-GUT Gdańsk HUB. The initiative of the GUT team coincides with SPURS’ goal of collaborating with SPURS alumni. Out of the 10 Polish graduates of the SPURS, as many as six currently make up the team from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning of the Faculty of Architecture, GUT. This is an exceptional situation, given the elite nature of the program.

The GUT rectors also actively supervised the SPURS activities, participating in the workshop discussion on the formula of interdisciplinary cooperation. The meeting
composition was expanded to include the potential, permanent, external partners in the undertaking—the local authorities as well as representatives of the Tri-City economic sector. The meeting was supported by the vice presidents of Gdańsk, Piotr Grzelak and Alan Aleksandrowicz, and the vice president of Gdynia, Katarzyna Gruszecka-Spychala. Patrycja Nagurski, a representative of the Fulbright Foundation in Poland, was also a guest at the meeting.

To complement the working discussion, a field study day was held to enable the guests to learn about new Gdańsk and Gdynia investment, as examples of the best practices from three decades of transformation in Poland. Guests got to experience some of the local conditions that could constitute an inspiring laboratory for interdisciplinary studies on the dynamics of post-socialist cities, thus advancing planning research.

The possibility of hosting a large, international group of planning specialists who work for the benefit of developing countries was exploited during the international scientific conference titled HER City: Housing Environment Resilience. One focus was the importance of city transformation for the building of a modern, united Europe.

The multifaceted development of internationalization is a key issue for the building of the Polish university’s brand. The need to increase the publication effectiveness of research results requires an increase in the effort to develop cooperation with renowned global research centers. This issue was emphasized by the dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Professor Lucyna Nyka, during a separate meeting with representatives from MIT’s School of Architecture + Planning and Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

Looking ahead, retrospective threads cannot be ignored. The funds obtained in the years 2010–2015 from the European Union is what allowed intensification of the cooperation with SPURS. The competence developed by individual Gdańsk scholarship-holders resulted in a number of new initiatives, improvements, research development concepts, and didactic innovations. The experience gained during their stays in the United States also enabled rapid progress of scientific work; some even acquired subsequent scientific degrees.

The creation of a modern, two-stage training program for urban planners, as part of the new spatial management major offered at GUT, is a direct result of the teamwork. In its Polish-language formula, it has been very popular and functioning efficiently for several years; an English-language version is in the works. A higher level of cooperation with SPURS should lead to a more effective use of the city’s research-competence potential.
When Professor Bish Sanyal invited me to participate in the MIT SPURS alumni event at Gdansk, I was excited for several reasons. First, it would fulfill my dream of visiting Eastern Europe as a tourist; second, the program was planned to coincide with the 30th anniversary of Poland’s structural transformation (1989-2019); and third, I would be participating in an event focused on fulfilling SPURS’ new mission—an outgrowth of the regional visions and strategies developed at the 50th anniversary SPURS meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which I attended in October 2018. That meeting raised fundamental questions about how planning and SPURS could meet the new demands of changing times; crafting a new relationship among the SPURS alumni was part of that discussion.

So, in October 2018, I took a tiring long flight from Kathmandu to Gdansk via Warsaw, where I was met by a faculty member of Gdansk University of Technology (GUT). The following three days of formal activities, from October 9 to 11, would be very significant for SPURS’ renewed mission.

The guided tour of the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk on the first day provided us with new insight into the success of Poland’s victorious Solidarity movement led by Lech Wałęsa. Contemporary spatial planning and development of cities—including infrastructure modernization and the building up of modern institutions—were considered important manifestations of Poland’s three decades of structural transformation. Hence, the international conference HER City: Housing, Environment, and Resilience, drew inspiration from the Polish experience of important relationships between planning and political system change. The papers presented continued the dialogue on “reflective practice” in planning that was initiated at the SPURS 50th, but in a Polish context. The professional study visits that followed on the last day of the program provided evidence of positive transformations taking place in the Polish landscape. The vibrant urban dynamics emerging in the Tri-City metropolitan area (Gdansk, Sopot, Gdynia) pointed to the success of the policies and strategies adopted in the post-Solidarity period, which, I feel, could be replicated by urban planners in other parts of the world, including Nepal.

The regional SPURS alumni workshops on the second day, held on the GUT campus, focused on building models of collaboration...
among academics, local political bodies, and SPURS alumni. The event unfolded new opportunities for regionalizing SPURS activities. What impressed me was the enthusiastic support and cooperation of city governments and the business community in the GUT/SPURS event and the opportunities for realistic collaboration, including the possible creation of a Gdansk SPURS hub.

In the afternoon, there was a workshop focused on "lessons learned" that I felt revived the spirit of the regular SPURS luncheon meetings at MIT—but at a larger scale. Participating SPURS alumni provided very lively presentations regarding their post-SPURS accomplishments. This helped me see the ways in which my exposure to MIT and Harvard as a Humphrey/SPURS Fellow enabled me to contribute to the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements process as Nepal’s national coordinator from 1993 to ’96, and to undertake the post of director general of the Department of Housing and Urban Development within the then Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning in Nepal. MIT has contributed a lot to my ongoing professional work in Nepal.

The other important highlight of my Gdansk experience was the opportunity to interact with the planning students at GUT. Through the kind cooperation of the planning faculty, I shared my planning experience in the Nepalese context. I think my two presentations on climate change and urban regeneration, which invited a fair amount of debate, provided some good exposure as well as a cultural experience for the students there who were not familiar with Nepal. The opportunity to interact with the students from different cultural backgrounds was also a revelation for me. Before flying back to Kathmandu, I also realized my touristic ambition by staying two more days in Warsaw and exploring both its historic and its modern developments.

THE SHIFTS AND CHANGES OF ALLEYWAYS IN SEOUL: MILLENNIALS AND GENTRIFICATION
By Shinwon Kyung, SPURS’15 (Korea)

In the late summer of 2016, when I returned to Seoul, South Korea, after having lived overseas for almost 20 years, the "hot" places were no longer located in Gangnam. They were in the backstreets of Gangbuk. Among those hot places, I found Itaewon to be the most interesting. Itaewon had been a military town next to a U.S. military base, a fun place to buy counterfeit designer goods but not a place to go for coffee or brunch. However, when I revisited in 2016, there were boutiques and independent retailers selling foreign and unusual goods along with restaurants and cafés offering products that reflected the unique tastes of the shop owners. Although still a strange and alienated place, it was no longer a place just for foreigners. It had transformed from a taboo are into a transnational place to enjoy a variety of foreign cultures. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the changes Itaewon had undergone, so I walked and walked its alleyways from late summer 2016 to late summer 2018. I had semi-structured interviews with members of a new group of small business owners, who are considered a direct influence on gentrification. I also conducted a survey with visitors to Itaewon, who are considered a new consumer group, supporting the activities of the business owners.

Editor’s note: SPURS alum Shinwon Kyung, PhD, has published a new book, Searching for Gentrification and Gentrifiers in Seoul: The case of Itaewon—Once a Taboo Place, Now a Hip Location (Parambook, November 2019). Here Kyung explains her inspiration for the book, which explores the driving forces behind gentrification in Seoul, South Korea.
Many alumni have reported working at home due to Covid-19 lockdowns, including Jovita “Peewee” Culaton Viray SPURS ’82 (Philippines), Teresa Parian Humphrey ’86 (Philippines), and Brijesh Dixit Humphrey ’16 (India). Donald (Tuan Kee) Aw SPURS ’02 (Singapore) mused, “We are once again reminded how connected we are as a global community, not only through technology, but as fellow human beings.”

Deyin Luo SPURS ’12 (China) wrote that he has been “staying home in Beijing for over two months, taking classes online and getting used to this new teaching system. Life seems to go on without essential change, in spite of some inconveniences.”

Jean-Bosco Abderamane Humphrey ’15 (Central African Republic) represented his country at the African Clean Cities Platform as part of its second general meeting held in Yokohama, Japan, in August 2019. africanccp.ssrv.jp/acev_actions_2ndGeneralMeeting_of_ACCP.html

Paul Altidor SPURS ’03 (Haiti) returned to MIT in spring 2020 as a visiting DUSP faculty member to teach a course called (Re)Engineering Planning and Diaspora Groups dusp.mit.edu/news/diaspora%E2%80%99s-impact-growth-and-prosperity. From 2012 to 2019, he served as Haiti’s ambassador to the United States. After the catastrophic Haitian earthquake in 2010, he led a team of professors and researchers from MIT’s Community Innovators Lab to Haiti to provide guidance on housing policy and financing.

Locked down in Austria, Eva Balasova Humphrey ’11 (Slovakia) described how borders between Slovakia and Austria, “two countries where we share our personal and professional life,” are closed to reduce movement of people to the absolute minimum. She wrote, “After that pandemic is over, almost every aspect of social, political, and economic life will have to be scrutinized, rethought, and reorganized on the local as well as on the global level. Let’s hope it will be a better place to live for all human beings, not just for the privileged ones.”

Carolina Barco SPURS ’91 (Colombia) has served as the Colombian ambassador to Spain since 2019.

Alberto Blanco Humphrey ’03 (Colombia) recently visited the SPURS office while attending a conference at MIT. He gave the 2020 Fellows some advice based on his experiences.

Daleen Brand Humphrey ’10 (Namibia) is now manager of the Planning Department for the City of Windhoek, Namibia.

“Things that used to be simple and routine are now major undertakings,” as a result of new, virus-related restrictions, says Roberto Bruno Humphrey ’05 (Panama). “There are steep fines if you’re caught outside at the wrong time. After grocery shopping, I have to follow a whole routine of leaving the shoes at the house entrance, spray alcohol or Lysol on the doorknob and objects I bring in, and wash down cans, bags, and other things that end up in the kitchen.”

Ajara Ceesay Humphrey ’19 (Gambia) was selected to participate in the World Bank Young Professional Program starting in September 2020.

During his country’s lockdown, Dwarika Nath Dhungel Humphrey ’85 (Nepal) is editing two monographs. He has also co-edited a new book, Nepal: A Country in Transition (Rupa Publishing House, New Delhi, 2018), which features a variety of authors discussing strategies to deal with the country’s many crises and work toward a future of national unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and economic prosperity. www.amazon.com/Nepal-Dwarika-Dhungel-Madan-Kumar/dp/9353040647

Miguel Dias Humphrey ’19 (Angola) wrote that for the first time in its history, Angola is “under the discipline of an International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment Program. We’ve managed to relocate about 300 slum dwellers in decent housing. Due to the halt on public investment, we are not building anymore, at least for the moment. I’m trying to design a savings scheme to finance the housing program.”

As a leading specialist in fiscal management for the Inter-American Development Bank, Huáscar Eguino SPURS ’98 (Bolivia) has worked in 17 countries in Latin America. Now that he can’t travel due to Covid-19 restrictions, he is concentrating on his research projects.

Kristalina Georgieva SPURS ’92 (Bulgaria) became the managing director and chair of the executive board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as of October 1, 2019. She is the first person from an emerging market economy to lead the IMF. Previously she had been the chief executive officer of the World Bank. www.imf.org/en/About/senior-officials/Bios/kristalina-georgieva

After 13 years with the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade, Serbia, Zaklina Gligorijević Humphrey ’04 (Serbia) joined a team implementing EU technical assistance to improve the social inclusion of the Roma through sustainable housing solutions, better access to the educational system, and strengthening national Roma inclusion mechanisms at the local level. She has found the job inspiring, enabling new insights and providing her with personal and professional growth.

“Many of my projects were related to the tourism sector in Monterrey, Mexico, and that was one of the most affected areas [by Covid-19 shutdowns],” wrote Alicia Guajardo Humphrey ’10 (Mexico). “We are trying to be creative during this quarantine.”

Years ago, K. Locana Gunaratna SPURS ’72 (Sri Lanka)

Heba Allah Khalil Humphrey ’17 (Egypt) has been the coordinator for the Architectural Engineering and Technology program at Cairo University, which was recently revalidated unconditionally for five years by the International Union of Architects/UNESCO validation committee. As an Urban Studies Foundation Seminar Series awardee, she is co-organizing a seminar series titled Gender Equity and Cities of the Middle East-North Africa Region. She wrote, “I thought of sharing this as I started my interest in the topic during my Humphrey/SPURS year at MIT.” urbanstudiesfoundation.org/2019/01/22/usf-seminar-series-awards/; drive.google.com/open?id=1iYMZ9fJ4M5ZHtgn-mVWlFjVPi5_hkJMP

Martin Madekwe SPURS ’86 (Tanzania) retired from the National Housing Corporation in 2008.

Umesh Malla Humphrey ’84 (Nepal) attended the main program of the regional SPURS alumni meeting at Gdańsk University of Technology in Poland in October 2019. For one of the side events, he gave a presentation at the Gdańsk University Planning Department on urban regeneration initiatives in Lalitpur, Nepal, and on a climate change project in Nepal aimed at local adaptation.

At age 85, Bijay Anand Misra SPURS ’77 (India) is professor emeritus at two universities. He has worked as principal advisor on projects with the World Bank, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Development Programme, and the government of India.

Covid-19 shutdowns forced Abdel Mustafa SPURS ’10 (Sudan), met with SPURS Fellows this year to discuss his MIT experience and his research on infrastructure in Sudan. An associate professor in the Industrial Technology Department at Fitchburg (Massachusetts) State University, he is interested in the planning and development of infrastructure in the Global South and in the sociopolitical and environmental impact associated with the planning and development of large infrastructure and state intervention projects.

Fatima Zahra Nkairi Humphrey ’11 (Morocco) is a municipal engineer in Casablanca, Morocco.

In October 2019, Pushpa Pathak SPURS ’90 (India) became a senior visiting fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, a premier think tank in India. She is currently conducting a study titled “Growth Dynamics and Regional Transformation Potential of Small Towns: 40-Year Development Saga.”

Sopheap Phim Humphrey ’11 (Cambodia) continues to work with Save the Children in Cambodia on the Integrated Nutrition, Hygiene, and Sanitation Project (NOURISH), funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development to reduce growth stunting by providing family support for the first 1,000 days after a new baby is born. He said, “It gives me an opportunity to share my expertise with poor, vulnerable communities as well as government counterparts at the national and subnational levels.”

Manoj Srivastava SPURS ’00/01 (India) has retired from the Indian Administrative Service. He is a former distinguished fellow of the JSW School of Public Policy, Indian Institute of Management, in Ahmedabad, India.

Borislav Stojkov SPURS ’71 (Serbia) worked with the Academy of Engineering Sciences of Serbia and the University of Belgrade to help organize an international conference held in October 2019 titled The e-Future of Cities: Between Temptations of Exponential Technology Growth and the Concept of Human City. He and Om Prakash SPURS’71 (India) were among the keynote speakers. The proceedings are available at Proc Belgrade selection%20.pdf. Stojkov has also been nominated to be a keynote speaker for an international conference called Sustainable and Resilient Urban-Rural Partnerships, which will be held in Leipzig, Germany, in November 2020 (www.urp2020.eu). The working title of his presentation is “The Temptation of Urban-Rural Partnership in Transitional European Countries.”

Ave Tolentino SPURS ’19 (Philippines) works online as a consultant to his country’s housing department and the Ateneo School of Government in Quezon City, Philippines. He helped two visiting DUSP graduate students studying the government’s efforts to rehabilitate Marawi City, Philippines, which was badly damaged in 2017 by prolonged fighting between the government and Islamic State fighters. He took the students to key offices to interview national officials, local leaders, and other stakeholders.

Rodrigo Rodriguez Tornquist SPURS ’14 (Argentina) now works as advisor on environmental issues for Argentina’s secretary of strategic affairs.

Perry Yang SPURS ’00 (Taiwan) published a new book, Urban Systems Design: Creating Sustainable Smart Cities in the Internet of Things Era (Elsevier, 2020). He wrote, “I co-edited and co-authored this book that defines urban systems design as an approach to integrate urban design, systems science, and data analytics in the context of the smart city movement. The book quotes Bish Sanyal’s 1999 book with Donald Schon and Bill Mitchell on high technologies and low-income community in the introductory chapter, a theme of urban systems design that I also addressed in our SPURS 50th anniversary panel discussion.”