

Purposeful travel: a model for initiating international planning collaboration

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The Problem

Pronounced international disparities in income, accessible resources and training are widespread. This compounds meeting the sustainability agenda and targets set by COP-21 (Conference Of Parties).

The American Planning Association's Development Plan, 2014-2015, further describes the problem as:

"Globally, communities are challenged by the lack of planning capacity. We seek national and international partnerships to advance the planning movement and exchange the best ideas in order to build communities of lasting value and to advance the principles of sustainable urbanization . . . We must inspire our members . . ."

Although many wish to, there are very limited opportunities for planning professionals and students to work together and gain international planning project experience. Thus, overcoming existing constraints and testing new innovations to further cooperative planning across borders are both problems and opportunities addressed in this paper.

Objectives

As an outgrowth of five successful international planning tours conducted by the American Planning Association's (APA) California Northern Section from 2003 - 2014, an international collaboration program was recently enacted that builds upon the experiences and contacts gained from such tours. The main objectives of this expanded purposeful international travel programs are:

- Initiating a pilot project in São Paulo, Brazil, with São Paulo municipal government, APA California Northern Section, Mackenzie University and one or more California universities
- Involving more planning professionals, municipal governments, university faculty and students in real international projects
- Securing additional international agreements with overseas planning organizations and universities, and
- Preparing instructional materials and sample agreements for use statewide in California and nationally by other APA Chapters

Methodology

The methodology employed in this paper is participant observation of an ongoing case study; namely the above listed pilot project initiated in 2014. Toward this end, all parties convened and then signed a formal international cooperation agreement, supplemented by a mutually agreed upon work plan.

Initial steps included:

1) Defining mutual interests

Initial progress on defining mutual interests took place largely as a result of the newly established professional relationships, further assisted by several international Skype conference calls and a visit to São Paulo by incoming APA California Chapter President Hing Wong. The recent adoption of São Paulo's new Master Plan and the Association of Bay Area Government's Regional Sustainable Community Strategies Plan further provided a general framework for considering mutual interests. As a result, a longer list of potential topics was winnowed down to a feasible number focusing on planning and development implementation practices regarding:

- Simulations and related land use and transportation modeling
- Innovative urban development financing techniques, such as purchasing air and development rights.

2) Setting the scope for ongoing cooperation

The first step was identifying the legislative background for cooperation. This led to a format where participants are responsible for their own costs, although third party funding may also be obtained and used. The time frame was set for three (3)

years, enabling professionals, students and researchers time to collaborate per mutually agreed work plan.

São Paulo colleagues are interested in the implementation of an integrated land-use and transportation simulation system (named SIDU - *Sistema de Inteligência em Desenvolvimento Urbano* or Urban Development Intelligence System) that would support the deployment of plans under São Paulo's new Master Plan, Urban Operations and Zoning laws. Simulations are desired to accelerate urban project development and implementation, providing a powerful tool to understand the impact on sustainability of different public policies and at the same time increasing transparency and enhancing negotiations between stakeholders. Use of *UrbanSim*, an open source land use and transportation simulation engine, is proposed. At a later stage the system could also include a 3D visualization tool.

The technical cooperation agreement and work plan is intended to assist São Paulo municipal government in the above. APA California Northern Section, through its members and their correspondent organizations, have applied a number of applicable planning techniques, including the use of *UrbanSim* for developing scenarios in the San Francisco Bay Area's Sustainable Community Strategies Plan (Plan BayArea). Thus, a main objective is cooperatively pursuing a pilot project with Mackenzie College of Architecture, SPUrbanismo and SMDU and APA California Northern Section – through at least one California-based university.

São Paulo municipal government has robust experience in innovative development rights programs, currently not used in California. For several decades São Paulo city government has been developing urban regeneration projects for specific areas of the city through its Urban Development Secretary (SMDU - *Secretaria Municipal de Desenvolvimento Urbano*) and its Urban Development Company (SPUrbanismo). APA California Northern wishes to learn more about the application of these development rights programs in São Paulo.

Results and Contributions

Although the expansion of APA California Northern Section's purposeful travel tours to include ongoing international cooperation activities remains a work in progress, as of October 2015 initial results and contributions are summarized as follows:

- A \$2,000 APA National Chapter Presidents Council (CPC) “micro” grant was received, along with \$2,000 cash match from APA’s California Northern Section and a commitment for at least \$2,500 in-kind pro bono work contributions. Grant-funded activities began in December 2014 and will be completed by December 31, 2016;
- Updated technical cooperation agreements were signed by 5 participating organizations
- Frequent consultations with existing and prospective project participants
- Progress reporting and related activities were completed
- English subtitles were added to video on São Paulo’s recently adopted master plan, in order to publicize the background of the work plans to potential participants

The remaining work previews the intended involvement of each participant’s resources, as well as the preparation of the tools to disseminate the program:

- Complete tool kit for use by other APA Chapters (as presently envisioned this should result in templates for model agreements, work plans and other informational products)
- Secure participation of at least one California-based university to assist with completion of the São Paulo’s pilot project
- Develop more detailed mutually agreed work plans among the participants
- Enter into one or more additional international planning collaboration agreements

APA California Northern Section’s purposeful travel tours have led to professional contacts and an international agreement involving professional planning organizations, municipal government and universities. The case study described in this paper is intended to further assess and shape this model for international cooperation and also contribute to the planning profession.

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