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Globalisation and the urban studio: evaluating an inter-university studio collaboration in Nairobi

This paper explores some implications of globalisation for planning education and presents faculty and student reflections on an international urban studio and three policy workshops in the Municipality of Ruiru, located outside of Nairobi, Kenya. This learning was embedded in a long-term partnership between the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Nairobi and Columbia University. We argue that carefully structured international studios and workshops are rich learning experiences that can help teach respect for local learning and knowledge. Our findings also suggest the importance of transformational and 'authentic' partnerships between universities, faculty and local urban players. These are partnerships characterised by equality in the way of working with all partners changing and learning in a reciprocal manner as they work together. We also underscore the importance of more explicit theorisation and evaluation of the growing number of international partnerships in urban planning.

Keywords: globalisation, Africa, urbanisation, universities, development, knowledge networks, partnerships

Introduction

Globalisation is reshaping the practice and pedagogy of urban planning and the related fields of architecture and urban design. Global dynamics of urbanisation in an era of climate change and excessive carbon fuel dependency add urgency to the challenge of preparing young planners for work in cities that will be expanding in population as well as economic, environmental, cultural and political importance. By the mid twenty-first century there will be about as many people living in urban places as live on the entire planet at present (Population Reference Bureau, 2010; UN-DESA, 2012). Indeed about two-thirds of the world's population will be in urban areas by 2050 (UN-Habitat, 2010). These trends point to the urgent need for more and better global collaborations and learning around urban planning. Indeed, many multi-lateral institutions such as

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UN-Habitat¹ and the World Bank are increasingly focused on building global urban knowledge networks,² and cities as well as slum dwellers themselves are trying to organise and conduct global exchanges to learn from each other.³

The ideologies that define professional urban planning practice are not immune to these trends. They are increasingly shaped by the flows of people and ideas that are a part of globalisation. However, while often profoundly influenced by global forces, the substantive concern of urban planners, urban space, is by definition local and specific. Increased global engagement heightens awareness of the deep complexities and specificities of urbanisation in different regions and locales (Sanyal, 1990; Sandercock, 1998; Garau et al., 2005). At the same time, it can reveal the power of global forces to impact these highly diverse local dynamics (Angotti, 2008; Davis, 2006; Rakodi, 1997). Within the planning discipline itself, grappling with globalisation as well as responses to it via collaboration, empowerment and citizen participation are a core part of planning theory debates and sometimes practice (Angotti, 2008; Healey, 2003; Innes and Booher, 2010; Irazabal, 2009). An ongoing struggle exists to move away from relationships within planning processes that reproduce asymmetries of power and reinforce problematic 'rationalities of governing' including high modernist ideologies that have been a part of globalisation historically and persist today (Scott, 1998).

As urban knowledge exchange accelerates, this critical theory and insight should inform and animate how we structure our international exchanges and partnerships. By now, the notion of a one-way flow of 'technical support' has been solidly critiqued (Abdel Hai, 1981; Sanyal, 1990; Watson, 2009); recognition exists that planning innovations are geographically diverse, travel in many directions and are capable of hybridity and local adaptation. Prominent examples that inspire debate and fuel urban imaginations include the Bus Rapid Transit in Bogotá, Colombia (TransMilenio) and participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre in Brazil,⁴ among many others. Attempts to facilitate the migration of ideas and to emphasise the less hierarchical and fluid flow of learning have led to a deliberate focus on 'global

- 1 See <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=657> and the World Urban forum <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=584>.
- 2 See <http://www.urbanknowledge.org/> and <http://www.citiesalliance.org/ca/> and <http://www.globalplanner-network.org/> and <http://www.gpean.org/index.htm>.
- 3 Some examples include C40: <http://live.c40cities.org/>; UCLG: <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/>; Sister Cities International: <http://www.sister-cities.org/>; WHO global network of age-friendly cities: http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities_network/en/index.html; WHO European healthy cities network: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/activities/healthy-cities/who-european-healthy-cities-network>; Cities Alliance: <http://www.citiesalliance.org/ca/>; SUD-Net: <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=5990&catid=570&typeid=19&subMenuId=0>
- 4 See how this Brazilian innovation is being adapted and used in Chicago <http://www.ward49.com/participatory-budgeting/> and <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/chicagos-1.3-million-experiment-in-democracy>.

urban knowledge networks', which universities as institutions, faculty and students strive to participate in or create in their own fashion. At the same time universities themselves are undergoing globalisation pressures reflected in attempts to attract an increasing number of international students and set up programmes or components of programmes abroad.⁵ Not surprisingly these developments are raising concerns about the need to internationalise curricula at home (Pezzoli and Howe, 2001), and the content and structure of programmes abroad (Nayyar, 2008). Such programmes include international studios that are part of core curricula in many planning departments and take place within international or global collaborations (Abramson, 2005; Rubbo, 2010).

While these trends offer many new and exciting opportunities to enrich the theory and practice of urban planning through trans-cultural, multi-directional learning and nuanced, comparative understandings of the diversity of planning cultures, approaches and challenges, clear dangers also exist. Unless the pedagogy and structure of collaboration are well thought through, holding studios in diverse locales with internationally integrated teams may reinforce global asymmetries of power and knowledge production and existing inequalities between foreign and local universities and communities.⁶ This asymmetry is linked in part to the resource gap between partners. Another 'clear and present danger is that an internationalised higher education system may overburden or stifle rather than develop domestic capabilities in the higher education systems of the developing world, particularly in the least developed countries' (Nayyar, 2008, 13). Yet these higher education systems are critical for the production of locally relevant urban knowledge as well as for training the next generation of urban planners and policy-makers. Supporting them should be a major goal of global collaboration. This takes on particular significance in Asia and Africa, the most rapidly urbanising world regions, which need knowledge, tools and professionals to tackle particularly acute urban challenges (Campanella, 2008; Myers, 2011). In this context, international partnerships should explicitly aim to both stimulate trans-cultural, multi-directional global knowledge flows and strengthen local institutions, research and pedagogy. This would enable more equitable participation in constructing and leveraging global, as well as local, urban knowledge.

In response to this complex context, many urban theorists and practitioners are embracing the notion of critical global engagement through such organisations as Architects for Humanity and the Global Planning Educators Interest Group. In

5 For some examples of these efforts see the Research Universities Going Global Research project at the Center for Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley (<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/research/rugg/>), Studio X at Columbia University (<http://www.arch.columbia.edu/studio>) and NYU's Global Network University (<http://nyuad.nyu.edu/about/index.htm>).

6 This point was raised at the World Urban Forum 2010 Universities Round Table at Rio de Janeiro on 24 March 2010 by participants from Jamaican and African universities.

addition, within the academy a form of international studio is also emerging as a way to express and deepen engaged understanding and reciprocal learning as well as confront local implications of globalisation, including increasing numbers of urban poor and their complex living conditions (Rubbo, 2010).

In the United States, studios have a long history of working closely with local actors using a community service model (Checkoway, 1996; Giles, 1994; Lang, 1983; Raokes and Norris-Tirrell, 2000; Vakil et al., 1990; Wetmore and Heumann, 1988). More recently, some are beginning to reflect and theorise on the international studio. How well does it transplant as an international version of the ‘community service model’? While such engagements appear to be growing – at least among well-resourced universities and professional associations – systematic reflections and analysis of these varied experiences are just emerging (Abramson, 2005; Bull, 2004; Dandekar, 2009; Rubbo, 2010). This is despite the fact that there are challenges stemming from dynamics of culture, histories and institutional differences in planning systems

By exploring and analysing an engaged collaborative studio and three complementary workshops involving the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) at the University of Nairobi and Columbia University (primarily the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning Preservation (GSAPP) and the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)) and the Municipality of Ruiru, Kenya, this paper aims to contribute to the growing discussion on international studios and partnerships and distil lessons for how to better structure them to avoid reinforcing power hierarchies and to obtain the desired positive impacts for all participants. The pedagogic aim of integrating DURP and Columbia students was to bring Kenyan students⁷ from the University of Nairobi and multi-national Columbia University students together in a collective inter-disciplinary project that responded to the demands and needs of an actual municipality facing serious urbanisation pressures. More specifically the pedagogy sought to:

- a) Provoke students to think about how to work together respectfully and effectively across cultural, disciplinary, material and institutional differences;
- b) Foster an appreciation of the need to build respectful partnerships *across institutions* including universities and cities and to co-produce and circulate knowledge;
- c) Teach critical reflection, the value of local knowledge and more collaborative and communicative approaches to planning;
- d) Familiarise students with the complexities of politics in planning.⁸

We felt these skills would serve both sets of students whether they worked in the international/global realm or not, since economic inequality, cultural diversity and polit-

7 Most of the students at DURP are Kenyan. Two of the Columbia University students were also Kenyan.

8 This reflects some of the key skills recommended by Diaw et al. (2002) for improving African planning, including ‘the ability to work with plan methodologies which allow for the collaborative development of both problem definition and solution by a wide spectrum of people’.

ical complexity are parts of most cities, including Nairobi and New York (Sandercock, 1998; Healey and Upton, 2010). The skills would also be valuable for participating in growing global urban networks of increasingly cosmopolitan cities, multi-lateral institutions and people. We were also conscious of the fact that while coursework in planning theory teaches about the need to be aware of power, inequities, local context and their impacts on planning, studies time and again show learning in a classroom setting does not easily translate into improved practice outside the classroom (Resnick, 1987). We wanted to exploit the power of learning in an actual work context while recognising that how we learn in context – passively or more actively and self-reflexively – also matters (Zetter, 1981, 30).

It is important to note that in our own experiment in pedagogy and partnership, we did not at the beginning explicitly and rigorously think through our assumptions and approach and discuss them with our students. This emerged later on through trial and error and discussions. Even though we consider the ongoing partnership, pedagogy and some of the impacts in Ruiru itself to be quite fruitful, in hindsight it has become clear that it would have been extremely valuable to learn more systematic lessons from other experiences of joint work and partnership and discuss these with students prior and throughout the learning process as well as set up a more rigorous system of evaluation, not just of end products but also of process. In this spirit, this paper aims to share some insights from our work through reflections from both faculty and students with the goal of furthering the body of knowledge on international learning within planning.

The Partnership, studio and workshops

The idea of a joint studio in metropolitan Nairobi emerged out of a collaboration between the University of Nairobi's Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) and Columbia University. At Columbia University the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) has been conducting international studios for some time. These tend to involve working for a client abroad – usually a client a faculty member knows. Students travel for a short time as a team where they learn from local urban actors and try to address a problem or conduct a project proposed by the client. They then return to New York to produce a studio report with planning, architecture or urban design ideas, which they typically present at Columbia University and for the client. Thus, local partners in negotiation with faculty and sometimes students from the university typically define the project aims and the students do site visits, collect data and create a final project report under faculty guidance.

While this form of 'community service' model at the international level can be useful to varying degrees for local partners and can play into their own agendas, it

often entails a great deal of logistical work and time. Further, while there is no doubt that students and faculty find such engagements enriching, and knowledge is accumulated and stored at Columbia University, these tend to be short, one-off engagements, and it is questionable how much clients gain from the process and whether the knowledge produced is disseminated or accumulated in host countries beyond the project partners. Within the studio process new ideas no doubt emerge and are discussed, but the short time frame of the studio, often without strong engagement with local context and dynamics, limits their utility in practice. In the end, typically the studio benefits Columbia University and the learning of its students but falls short as a vehicle for fostering broader urban knowledge co-production and sharing.

Similarly, policy students at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University have been conducting workshops abroad for some time along the same lines as the studio. However, policy students have much more rigorous pre-travel training in methodology, cross-cultural issues and the importance of local context and are much more autonomous, travelling for longer periods of time and without faculty. The teams, which tend to be international and inter-disciplinary, also have local language skills and experience. These workshops have attracted GSAPP students who want to get a deeper experience from travel than the typical planning studio offers. As a result, the team at Columbia University thought a studio combined with complementary workshops would be a good way to achieve a stronger overall engagement in Kenya.

Without explicitly theorising around what might be done differently but knowing that the aim was long-term involvement and greater spread of collaboratively produced urban knowledge, a group from GSAPP started working with the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University on a more partnership based approach to urban planning engagement in Nairobi.⁹ This was prompted by the desire to transcend as much as possible the limitations of a short studio, to avoid extractive research and also to more actively support local institutions, including universities.

In the first trip to Nairobi in 2005, the Columbia University team went to visit DURP with the explicit idea of developing a partnership and possible joint studio that would support DURP, its research and students. DURP was very open and supportive of the collaboration, and we looked at where we might work together. It was clear that there was a mutual concern with Nairobi's burgeoning problems of rapid sprawl and unplanned peri-urban growth. As Watson notes,

It is these sprawling urban peripheries, almost entirely un-serviced and unregulated, that make up the bulk of what is termed slum settlement and it is in these areas that most urban growth is taking place. (2009, 2265)

In the Nairobi region, following this global trend, 'ruralopolitan' development has

9 This work was spearheaded by the Center for Sustainable Urban Development, a small research centre at the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

been providing affordable housing to the burgeoning urban populace but also appears to threaten satellite towns with spill-over impacts that produce serious peripheral slum growth and environmental damage. Relative to the attention received by Nairobi's informal settlements like Kibera, this problem of peri-urban growth, including its dynamics, consequences and linkages to Nairobi's core dynamics is under-studied (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer, 2002; Memon, 1982; Watson, 2009).

DURP itself had been working both in informal settlements and in peri-urban areas and had accumulated an impressive amount of work by faculty and students in the Nairobi region. However, it had not yet been engaging with the idea of metropolitan planning, which was part of Columbia University's interest coming into the process. Further, the idea of a more active 'community service' approach and more collaborative planning, while part of the theoretical discussion, was rare within the department. Teams of third-year BA students do studios where they are taught how to create a skeletal draft local physical development plan as required by the Physical Planning Act¹⁰ in Kenya. Rarely were students asked how well this process works and the role of citizens in this process. Usually, while there would be a site visit to look at a particular problem, most data collection would be done using secondary sources without consulting key actors, and the draft plans would be presented to the department and then archived in the library. The following year students are required to do individual attachments to gain practical experience. The work together in Ruiru would change the dynamics and teaching in both DURP and Columbia University.

DURP and Columbia University discussed where they might work together. As it happened, one of us had contacts at the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company and Athi Water Services Board where officials suggested working with the local municipal council of Ruiru, approximately 18 km north of the capital, Nairobi. The officials knew the municipality was having serious problems with water and sewerage (which also were problems for them) and felt that the council would be open to working with a joint DURP and Columbia University team. The officials spoke to the council and arranged a visit for both DURP and Columbia University to meet in Ruiru (see Figure 1).

Ruiru is a rapidly growing town of about 240,000. Like Nairobi itself and many other towns in Kenya, its development owes much to the building of the railway as part of colonial conquest and hence the opening of the area for European settlement and farming. Ruiru grew from a railway substation town to a service centre for the settler population engaged in farming and the Africans who laboured on these farms. After independence, Ruiru would continue to grow surrounded by private farmland including coffee farms. In 1997, Ruiru was made a full municipal council and under the new constitution of 2010 and the Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011 it is likely to remain a municipality.

10 The Physical Planning Act has serious short-falls and is rarely followed. It is now under review as part of land policy reforms.



Figure 1 Location of municipality of Ruiru

In our initial discussions with Ruiru Municipal Council, a key topic was the urgent need to improve water and sanitation; serious public health concerns existed including the fear of typhoid outbreaks from sewage getting into the water supply. This problem was emerging out of the rapid, uncontrolled subdivision of farmland leading to spread out residential areas without service provision, which were, however, providing cheap housing for many people working in Nairobi. Many of the former farm workers were also within the municipality, living in very poor conditions. We agreed we would start to work together in partnership with the Municipality, beginning with their priority area.

The decision to work in Ruiru was somewhat serendipitous but it turned out to be an excellent choice. The municipal council was indeed very open to working with our universities, which was very new for them. It also turned out that DURP had been conducting studies in Ruiru on various aspects of the town's urban development for many years and had accumulated a lot of knowledge. However, DURP had not yet thought to look at the processes occurring outside of formal boundaries of the municipality, had focused on the urban core of Ruiru and had not really looked at the problem as a broader metropolitan planning issue linked to Nairobi's rapid growth. Yet the municipality was concerned about metropolitan issues even if they did not frame their concerns in that language (in part because at the time no metropolitan institutions existed, and this remains a problem as in other cities across the world) (Fuchs, 2012).¹¹ Instead the council members talked about the pressures and problems coming from proximity to a rapidly growing Nairobi (4 per cent annual population growth per year). In particular, many people come to Ruiru to live because it is less

11 Since that time a Ministry for Nairobi Metropolitan Development has been set up and when they sponsored a competition for a spatial plan, Columbia University joined a Kenyan led team through its work with DURP. The spatial concept they developed won first runner-up and now is being developed into a teaching tool. More recently, this ministry was subsumed into a new Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development and as in other parts of the world, Kenya is still in need of developing metropolitan institutions (Fuchs, 2012).

expensive, but commute to Nairobi for work. This creates traffic and pressures on services without a reliable influx of new tax revenue. Services and infrastructure – including water and sewerage – were inadequate for the growing numbers of people, leading to dumping and serious public health concerns.

In the past DURP would go to the council to get permission to do research in its jurisdiction but would not engage further than this. Talking directly to the council members, starting with their concerns and getting their commitment to cooperate with the universities, comprised a new approach. DURP had also not put into practice more collaborative planning practices promoted in contemporary urban planning theorising or lent its formidable local expertise to directly working with the council in part because Kenya was only recently moving out of authoritarian and top-down processes inherited from colonial times that affected both cities and universities (Klopp and Orina, 2002; Southall and Wood, 1996). Democratic space had since opened, making collaborative planning possible.

Another factor at play was that the actual planning system in Kenya, as in many parts of Africa, is itself a top-down model, a legacy of both its British and colonial heritage (Anyamba, 2008; Njoh, 2006). The extensive bureaucratic requirements around planning, including central approval from the Director of Physical Planning and the Minister of Lands, makes the whole formal planning process unwieldy and rarely followed. This institutional structure from the very beginning led to strategies, especially by those excluded from the system, for accessing land irregularly and building homes and businesses outside the expensive and cumbersome planning system, leading to what Kenyan architect Tom Anyamba calls ‘diverse informalities’ (2008). The failure to transform this system in the post-colonial period has led to informal systems for land delivery and building (Musyoka, 2010; Klopp, 2000; Republic of Kenya, 2004) and the related failure of important kinds of development control (Architectural Association of Kenya, 2011), including for managing water, sewage and solid waste. This makes the context of planning in many cities in Africa fundamentally different from that in the ‘Global North’ (Odendaal, 2012).

After consultations with the municipal council, the Columbia-DURP team decided to experiment with joint studio work that would deal with the specific water and sanitation concerns and the overlapping planning issues at the municipal and metropolitan level. The policy students’ workshop would concentrate on the water and sanitation issues. All students were either at the BA level (DURP) or the MA level (DURP, GSAPP and SIPA), usually between 18 and 26 years of age. The majority of students were planning students (DURP and GSAPP), and the workshop students were international affairs students from a wide variety of professional backgrounds. We also included a public health student.

Part of the process involved discussing with the municipality what planning meant and whether it was linked to some of the problems the council was trying to address. It

also meant engaging an institutional context that in practice made planning in a formal sense very challenging, although the extent and details of these institutional challenges would unfold over time and required a great deal of learning, particularly on the part of Columbia University students and faculty, not used to such high levels of informality where planning laws and formal, legal processes are simply ignored. At the time, like many other municipalities, Ruiru had no one trained in planning on staff and no plan of any kind. Most issues were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. For a growing city of 240,000 people, this represented an institutional gap with serious consequences.

Between January and May 2006, students and faculty worked together and directly with the municipality of Ruiru with a specific division of labour. With the complexity of different academic calendars and the lack of actual exchange (Kenyan students did not come to Columbia University¹²), we decided to conduct the regular studios but with joint faculty advice and shared fieldwork. The DURP studio by MA students focused on Biashara ward (the business district). The Columbia MA studio involved BA students from DURP focused on five strategic areas: land-use, economy, public health, transportation and governance/institutions within the municipality and looked specifically at the metropolitan dimensions of planning in these sectors. The Columbia studio members travelled in February 2006 to meet with their Nairobi counterparts. Prior to that time, they were utilising the library services at Columbia University to do a literature review, but much critical information was not documented. Hence, the students gathered local information in communication with their counterparts and faculty in Nairobi who possessed a fine-grained understanding of local context and dynamics but did not always have the same access to a wide range of published literature. In exchange, the faculty and students of Columbia University would start a process that continues to this day of forwarding articles and bringing books to Nairobi for faculty and students. This became a form of knowledge exchange that reflected the ongoing inequality in access to existing *academic* urban knowledge.¹³

The short period of time of the Columbia studio group's presence in Kenya (two weeks) did not easily allow for in-depth joint fieldwork, an issue a number of DURP and Columbia University students raised. However, it did allow for extensive discussions between the two groups on methodology (one memorable discussion was on how best to conduct focus group discussions in Ruiru), the nature of the issues facing Ruiru and what recommendations made sense. The combined faculty guided them through this. The small amounts of resources supplied by Columbia University

12 DURP students raised this as a gap in the collaboration. It was initially budgeted in but was later cut when funds were also cut. Instead, we had a number of faculty visits. Ideally, there would be Kenyan students coming to do studio work with Columbia University in their context. This is still something we all aspire to.

13 With movements towards creative commons and a global digital library this should help counter this situation. However, there are also problems of copyright law and also administration at the university since journals that were supposedly purchased seemed unavailable.

through its grants¹⁴ allowed the students to conduct joint fieldwork on their complementary projects for ten days. This included a number of meetings with administrators and elected representatives in Ruiru, including the mayor, to hear their views and concerns. The students also interviewed local residents, business owners and farmers together. They conducted a survey of about 60 owners/officials of local industry and small, including 'informal', businesses, which fed directly into the DURP studio project. Together the students also were able to talk to a number of national level policy-makers on metropolitan planning issues. Overall, they were able to have many conversations with the administrators, politicians, businesses and residents who would be responsible for actually dealing with problems and planning and also get a sense of the conflicts and tensions. This challenged students to come up with ideas that were actionable and relevant and to also think more deeply about the complexities in the politics of implementation.

The School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University was brought into the collaboration to specifically work with the council to carry out assessments on the water and sanitation problems, work that carried on for three years and became quite detailed. This work was also based on many discussions and formal interviews with the council, residents and public health officials, and in the first year it supplemented and enriched the studio process. It also allowed for more interaction between Columbia and DURP and the council as the first round of policy students travelled in January, February and March for periods of two weeks each, making for a continuous presence in Ruiru, especially as the students elected to stay there rather than Nairobi. For both DURP and Columbia University the time for studios and workshop was constrained by the fact that this was going on during the semester when students had other courses. However, the energy and commitment of the students in both countries was impressive, and they also learned to ably coordinate among different teams and disciplines, an important practical skill.

The actual project outputs of each team were different but complementary. The DURP BA student team, in addition to having individual products for their portfolios, worked on a synthesis report in the framework and form of a draft physical development plan, and the MA students from DURP produced a plan for the Biashara ward that was also integrated into the local physical development plan. The GSAPP studio produced the report 'Nairobi Metropolitan Expansion in a Peri-Urban Area', which spoke to the metropolitan aspects of the planning issues, and the workshop report 'Meeting Basic Needs in a Rapidly Urbanizing Community: A Water, Sanitation and Solid Waste Assessment in Ruiru, Kenya' was even more detailed and would also be incorporated into the local physical development plan draft, which was turned over to the council.

At the end of the collaborative studio and first workshop the students shared their final, cross-fertilised products (a DURP studio report, a GSAPP studio report and a

14 Rockefeller Foundation and Volvo Research and Education Foundations.

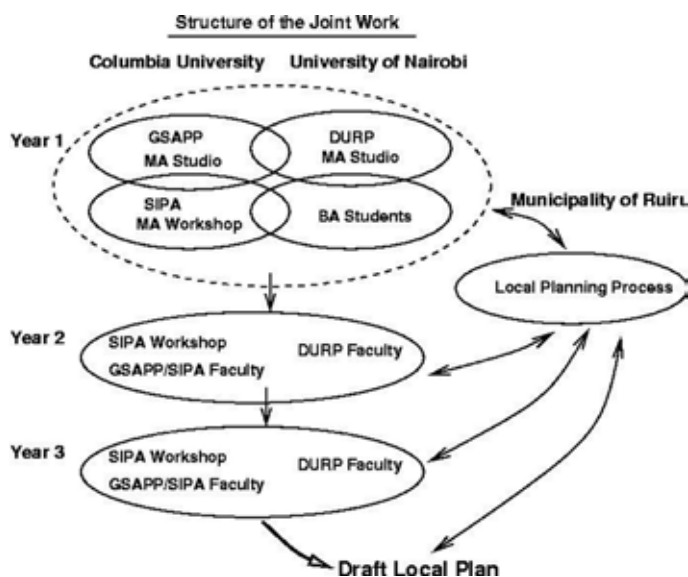


Figure 2 Structure of the joint studio and workshops

workshop report) and delivered their findings to their respective academic settings as usual. In addition, GSAPP and the workshop team were able to present their work to the Ruiru Municipal Council with whom they had been working closely. This was part of the learning process for both the students and the Council, and the reports were given to the council to keep and use. They were also put online for public access, except for the draft local physical development plan, which was only a framework and not yet ready for public consumption. Building on the relationships at DURP and at the Council, a second workshop team went to Ruiru the following year and did much more extensive work building on the relationships at DURP and at the Council. This work included a household survey on water and waste and joint water quality testing with the Department of Public Works. The second workshop took place the following year when the DURP students involved in the joint studio process were to find attachments, and the Kenyan students were pleased to find Ruiru welcomed them back in this capacity. Overall, the new approach has made the whole process of finding attachments for DURP easier. Finally, updating and expanding this draft plan could become the basis for further collaboration between the universities and the council.

Impacts on pedagogy from student perspectives

A key question we asked ourselves was: Were the pedagogic goals met? Besides observing and talking to the students throughout the process and evaluating their final products, as faculty advisors from Columbia University and DURP we also conducted

a small survey of participating students after they had left university. Few attempts exist to actually survey students who are involved in a cross-disciplinary and international urban learning setting. We felt this could contribute to the need for more of this work.¹⁵

As a first step we devised a survey that sought to find out whether in fact the students, now several years out of the programme, felt learning in context through the studio/workshop made any difference in what and how they learned. We also wanted to know whether they learned about local and global power dynamics through the collaboration and, if so, what they learned and if they felt the inter-university partnership and the work directly with the municipality enhanced their learning.

In the future, it would be very helpful to ask the students questions prior to and directly after the experience and also pose more targeted questions that get them to think critically about their role, actions and the process as a whole in its social context. Such questions might include: who do they think will benefit or benefitted most from the studio and why? What kinds of power asymmetries do they imagine exist between them, their university partners and local community actors (prior to studio) or experienced (after or during studio)? What strategies, if any, could help avoid negative consequences stemming from various kinds of unequal power dynamics? How could these be addressed longer term and how (if at all) did they influence the studio process and outcome? Such questions might be followed up by interviews to get a richer understanding of how students were experiencing and reflecting on their engagement as well as the power relations they encountered within the planning process itself. Such questions could help encourage critical reflections on social context and on professional ethical responsibilities when confronted with unequal power relations (Sletto, 2012, 230).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students who were surveyed felt that the direct work with the Municipality of Ruiru and the more collaborative approach were very valuable and useful in their current professional lives. This corresponds with the positive student learning experiences documented in other cases of international studios (Bull, 2004; Dandekar, 2009; Rubbo, 2010). Here are some of the written responses from students (survey results are in the appendix):

The studio was a special eye-opener in dealing with real life planning work, integrating problem identification and solution-finding, in an environment of different actors'

15 One is the study by Bull (2004) of an international programme and workshop in Bangkok (University of Melbourne, l'Ecole d'Architecture et Paysage, Bordeaux and Faculty of Architecture at Kasetsart University, Bangkok). A survey of thirty students probed whether the programme attained its goals. These included skills much like the ones we envisioned in our joint work: navigating other cultures, capacities in reflective and critical thinking and enriched personal and professional networks. The survey revealed a relatively strong consensus across nationality and institution that the workshop helped them 'develop awareness of how other cultures and their disciplines address social and environmental problems' (Bull, 2004, 76). However geographical differences emerged; the Thai students were the least satisfied that their expectations were met (Bull, 2004, 83).

participation ... the studio teams from UoN, and from Columbia University, the local stakeholders in Ruiru. (DURP student)

It's one thing to learn about metropolitan planning from the desk. It's entirely another to learn about it on the ground. By immersing ourselves in meetings and informal chats with residents, community groups, professionals, academics, and local government, I learned about the complexities, nuances, and attention to local issues that make good planning. (Columbia University student)

Through the workshop, I learned a great deal about water access and governance, the political landscape of Kenya, participatory planning and community development, and the benefits and challenges of working with a local university and across disciplines. (Columbia University student)

Some noted in particular that the experience allowed them to give voice to some local people who might not normally be given the opportunity, suggesting an awareness of power hierarchies where they were working.

While students clearly learned a great deal and appeared to appreciate the concept of the partnership across universities and with the municipality, for Columbia University students it was their final year project, and it was clear that more critical theory about universities and long-term institutional partnerships might have been included in their preparation. Overall, for all students more systematic debriefing and discussion of not just the project work but process would have been valuable as part of trying to attain our pedagogic goals. The surveys helped us de-brief but not in an entirely satisfactory way.

Impacts on institutions

The joint work had impacts on faculty thinking and larger impacts at the institutional level, including on curriculum. For both sides, the importance of ideas of process and partnership became more central both practically in setting up joint research projects and for pedagogy. In the past for both institutions, studios were in practice more about 'sites' than places and relationships with people in those places. The joint studio built relationships between the universities, Ruiru municipality and its residents through numerous informal conversations, public consultative forums and knowledge sharing which made Ruiru much more than a 'site'. Faculty members involved in this work from both universities are now actively promoting and spreading this action-oriented and partnership approach to other studios. We also continue to collaborate in the writing of policy and peer-reviewed papers, and Ruiru remains an important part of this research agenda.

This collaborative research and educational work revealed institutional weaknesses

on both sides and disparities in access to equipment and knowledge across DURP and Columbia University. The joint work with students and long-term interactions within a partnership brought these to the fore. We already mentioned the lack of access to journals and books, which is related to many factors including copyright issues (Armstrong et al., 2010). We also found when trying to do background research at DURP that the rich urban and local knowledge accumulated by its students was also difficult to access in its library, and it was not digitised to create more global access and sharing. This remains an important goal moving forward in institutional support for DURP. Enhancing access to this reservoir of research serves a broad audience including Kenyan students, faculty and policy-makers along with external partners of various kinds; many could benefit from this rich urban knowledge getting recognition and becoming a part of global knowledge networks and circulation.

Another key issue that the partnership brought to the fore is that technology for planning is rapidly changing with growing computer-based tools and new ways to access and produce maps and related databases. The exchange with Columbia University helped bring this into focus. Rarely did DURP students have access to good maps and spatial data for their work. The exchanges helped DURP faculty and students see the range of new options available, even if their department was handicapped by slow internet connectivity,¹⁶ and few instructors to teach GIS and other relatively new and highly useful skills. In addition, once Columbia University realised this gap, it supported a team to adapt a GIS map of Nairobi initially developed for Columbia University's use and have it put it on a wiki where many Kenyan students are using it for their research.¹⁷ Columbia University also donated five GPS devices to the entire department for use in all its studios. Finally, in discussions with Ruiru and the town planner who was eventually hired, and after very difficult and expensive attempts to access satellite data of Ruiru for planning, it became clear that Google Earth Pro was a more affordable alternative for some planning needs. Thus, part of the exchange became a conversation about technology and the new opportunities it offered for planning and for levelling some of the information access problems (e.g., spatial data for planning). This too is an area for more active exploration.

Columbia University also listened to a number of DURP students who recognised the inherent asymmetry in having Columbia University students travel to Kenya but not the reverse. Many suggested that an exchange where they travelled to New York would have helped, and they were disappointed not to have the equivalent experience of learning about planning processes elsewhere.¹⁸ Learning from the Kenyan feedback,

16 This may be due more to university administration than the state of Kenyan telecommunications since high-speed connectivity is readily available in Nairobi. However, see Adam (2003) for a more comprehensive discussion of this problem.

17 <http://nairobigismaps.wikischolars.columbia.edu/>. See Williams, Marcello and Klopp (forthcoming) for details.

18 The original grant from the Rockefeller Foundation included this component, which has since been cut with the

Columbia University, during a joint studio in Accra, brought Ghanaian students to New York to discuss and critique the final project and also to learn about the city and its urban challenges.¹⁹ This visit revealed that even as Columbia University was trying to be at the forefront of being a ‘global university’, it had policies that made it hard for faculty and students from places like Kenya to visit. For example, visitors are expected to bear the costs up front and then wait for reimbursement at a later date. This made visiting onerous for many because they could simply not bear the cost. It is clear the guidelines are modelled on the assumption that visitors will be of a certain socio-economic status. Overall, this has pushed DURP and Columbia University to think more rigorously and carefully about how it constructs its collaborations and to push for internal institutional changes at their respective universities.

Impacts on Ruiru municipality

Studying the impacts of international learning on host communities and clients is an understudied element of international learning in urban planning including approaches that aim to do ‘community service’ (Netshandama, 2010; Winkler, 2013). Thus, we asked for an independent assessment of our work by the Kenya Alliance of Resident Associations. We have also discussed our work with our partners in Ruiru. Overall, the DURP/Columbia studio and workshops, stakeholder consultations, research and ongoing dialogues with the Ruiru Municipal Council appear to have raised the profile and engagement with planning by the council, which moved to hire a town planner over the course of our work. After the studios and workshops in Ruiru, DURP with the town planner and support from Columbia University worked with the council to conduct ward-level forums and workshops with councillors and officers. This was essential to making a more complete plan that the council and citizens owned. The council would eventually approve the plan. It is now in the process of being updated and revisited, especially given the impacts of a large highway project through the municipality.

While major institutional changes continue to create barriers to better planning and the planning system is undergoing reform, the overall engagement that started with the studios and workshops still appears to have improved local discussion about key issues. A major output of the studios and workshops is a draft local physical development plan that serves as the basis for more dialogue on an improved planning process. For example, as part of the discussion around making the plan and activities around planning more public and widely accessible, we supported a small ICT start-up with

amount of the grant under the current financial crisis. It is interesting that the Columbia students did not seem to notice the asymmetry in travel and power between the local and American-based students.

19 After learning how important and valuable this symmetry in travel is from the Nairobi work, the Ghana workshop team made sure to budget in travel for Ghanaian counterparts.

a social agenda, I-pasha, to assist the council with the creation of a website.²⁰ We also held focus group discussions with citizens that the council supported. After learning about the kinds of information citizens wanted, the council responded by opening up and making this information available online, although this involved a complex negotiation process (Klopp et al., 2013). The work has also shown the council that local residents associations in both lower- and middle-income areas would very much like to be more involved in the planning process. Thus, the ‘unsanctioned mechanisms of the planning studio’ supported ‘the invention of spaces’ that may disrupt old patterns and facilitate new ways of working (at least temporarily) (Sletto, 2012, 299).

To their credit, students surveyed worried that they gained more from the studio than Ruiru, which was left with, in the words of one student ‘solving the problems’. All of the Kenyan students from DURP raised concerns about the usefulness of the studio for the Ruiru community. They articulated sensitivity to ‘involving the community fully in the planning process’ and a strong desire for continuing engagement ‘throughout the life of the studio from conception to implementation of the plan’ (which is a long-term process that extends beyond the studio). These students expressed concern about the extent to which their work, which became part of the basis for a local physical development plan, would have an impact on the municipality. Some raised concerns about insufficient engagement with the council and also about managing the expectations of the diverse actors within the municipality. This suggests that students had in fact developed relationships in Ruiru and were feeling a sense of professional responsibility. Of course, they are also correct that studios and workshops can only achieve limited impact on their own (and, of course, can also have negative effects including unrealised expectations on the part of the community) (Winkler, 2013). When these studios are embedded in long-term engaged partnerships that involve relevant research, ongoing policy discussions and active reflexive learning, they have a better chance of being successful both as a learning experience and as genuine support for needed urban change. It is thus important to discuss these ethical and process-oriented issues and the importance of continued institutional engagement up front with the students as part of an engaged pedagogy in planning (Sletto, 2012).

Conclusions

Globalisation and ongoing, and in some regions extremely rapid, urbanisation are creating pressures and demands on planning education. Along with more self-interested attempts to ‘brand and sell’ global education as an export, more genuine attempts at international learning and urban knowledge networking are occurring

20 <http://www.ruirumunicipal.or.ke>. For details see Klopp et al. (2013).

and should be encouraged. At the level of the studio, these efforts include Global Studio (Rubbo, 2010), the Sino-Canadian collaboration described by Abramson (2005), the Mexican studio at the World Urban Congress (Dandekar, 2009) and the Thai-Australian-French workshop (Bull, 2004) as well as the decades-long Beijing Urban Design Studio involving a partnership between MIT and Tsinghua University.²¹ Our reflection on the joint studio and workshops within a long-term collaboration between DURP and Columbia University reinforces findings in these cases that international studios are rich experiences for students and can be, when structured well, very important for teaching cross-cultural skills, respect for local learning and knowledge and the importance of building genuine partnerships across unequal and different higher educational systems.

Our findings reinforce the importance of lasting ‘transformational’ partnerships between universities, faculty and cities, ‘where all partners change as they work together’ (Sutton, 2010, 61). It also reaffirms the value of ‘maintaining long term relations and trust as a basis for collaboration’ (Abramson, 2005, 99). Our model for the DURP-Columbia University partnership was based on the notion of a transformational and ‘authentic partnership’ that aspires to produce relationships of trust, honesty, transparency, respect and equity and the genuine co-production or facilitation of knowledge for positive local change.²² Fowler succinctly characterises ‘authentic partners’ versus relations involving ‘clients’ or ‘counterparts’ as involving ‘an equality in ways of working and mutuality in respect for identity, position and role’ (1998, 141). Within this model, we found constant challenges to creating equal access to knowledge, technology and opportunities. In response, we tried to develop fruitful mechanisms for explicitly discussing and addressing these problems. This process of joint problem-solving enhanced mutual learning and mitigated some of these problems as they arose.

Overall, we conclude that a need exists for more targeted theorising and engagement on how to genuinely support local institutions of higher education (and their planning departments) through joint studios and research along with ‘capacity enhancing’ efforts.²³ Moving forward it will be important to more explicitly theorise the process of building more symmetric international partnerships in a context of asymmetric power and the role of joint studios and research in this process; we must also continue to accumulate more rigorous evaluations and critical reflections and

21 See http://sap.mit.edu/resources/portfolio/beijing_studio_anniversary/.

22 See ‘Achieving the Promise of Authentic Community-Higher Education Partnerships: A Community Partner Summit’ 24–26 April 2006, Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, WI. Available at http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/FINALCPS_Executive_Summary.pdf.

23 African scholars and university administrators are increasingly speaking out for such authentic and institution-building partnerships in contrast to ones that involve ‘annexed sites’ and extraction of faculty and resources (Holm and Malet, 2011; Costello and Zumla, 2000).

invent spaces for multiple perspectives including those of students, faculty, participants from within cities, among others. This will help to better structure partnerships and also to transmit increased awareness around the importance of building equitable transnational networks and supporting local institutions, students, faculty and, hence, future and present policy-makers who hopefully will be more critically engaged in urban transformation.

In our case, we implicitly began with the ideal of ‘reciprocal learning’ and assumed that: (1) local knowledge is critical to developing and testing how planning theories and approaches developed in one region of the world may or may not be applied to another region and, if applicable, what adaptations or new concepts may be necessary; and (2) deep local knowledge and global collaborations can also lead to new ways of looking at problems all together (Qadeer, 1990). Through negotiation, we experimented with a ‘community service’ model of learning and together used this approach to try more collaborative and communicative planning approaches in a country emerging from authoritarian control but with a vibrant tradition of ‘self-help’ by citizens (Hake, 1977). We found this model resonated with the democratisation and reform process underway and achieved some success especially in the realm of pedagogy. At a practical level, the DURP-Columbia University team found citizens eager to engage. However, we also confronted and gleaned a more intimate knowledge of the very real barriers present in the inherited institutions of top-down and centralised control in planning. All parties in the work came away with a new appreciation for how history and the form of governance and procedural institutions really matter for planning – even in places that seem to be dominated by the ‘informal’. Thus, a key focus moving forward will be planning reform.

Drawing on our experience with the Nairobi studio, workshops and ongoing collaboration, we believe that approaches to international planning research and education, based on reciprocal learning and embedded in such longer-term authentic, transformational partnerships among universities, can help higher education systems manage globalisation better as well as create mutual improvements in university learning and curriculum. Ideally to better grasp the dynamics of globalisation at the local level, universities might strive to create lasting networks of transformational partnerships that involve inter-disciplinary planning work in multiple places on a long-term basis, much as in the Global Studio described by Rubbo (2010) but supported by long-term institutionalised and authentic partnerships. Finally, an engaged global planning community that experiments in novel internationalised and interdisciplinary learning must continue to grow; this is critical if we are to better learn how to empower local communities, governments and transnational networks confronting formidable forces of globalisation and urbanisation in the twenty-first century.

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