

APRIL 2012

# SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia



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The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of landscape architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of those of the BCSLA.

# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS *Abroad*

This issue of SITELINES presents a variety of narratives by landscape architects involved in the growing field of overseas development.

By Thomas Llewellyn, MBCSLA, MAIBC

**Andrew Wilson, MBCSLA (Inactive) went to Curitiba, Brazil, for a workshop dedicated to innovative planning** for the famously unplanned *favelas*. Stephen Vincent, MBCSLA lived and worked in Dubai during the high-profile development boom that abruptly ended in 2008. Edward Stanford, BCSLA Intern describes The Urban Systems Foundations' provision of water service to communities in rural Uganda. James Taylor, FCSLA, FASLA has worked with IFLA over many years in building the profession's capacity to operate and contribute in the developing world. Katherine Dunster, MBCSLA, R.P.Bio., also through IFLA, is working with a task force to define and develop Landscape Architects Without Borders. Mark Vaughan, MBCSLA's volunteer visits to Mexico have revealed a story of plans and projects sidelined as a collateral consequence of political ambition. I went as a member of a volunteer team to design a children's home in post-earthquake Haiti.



The wide diversity of experience and activity described in this issue is nevertheless a very small piece of what is happening around a developing world in rapid transition. Overseas development is a much larger field than I, at least, had previously realized. In addition to those who travel there are, as Edward Stanford notes, many people in the background supporting the endeavour.

With ever increasing activity, and well-publicized disaster response snarl-ups, questions inevitably arise about efficacy and success. I recently spoke with representatives of Engineering Ministries International Canada, the organization with which I volunteered. They have experienced varying degrees of success with completed projects, due to many variables in evolving local conditions and organizational change. On the development organization side, Engineers Without Borders Canada made a bold and honest move with the publication in 2008 of their first annual "Failure Report". The willingness to expose their own mistakes – lack of understanding, miscommunication – presented with the opportunity for others to learn from the experience, has been widely acclaimed.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their contributions to this issue of SITELINES. My thanks also go to our BCSLA staff for their ever-ready support and guidance. **sl**



Cover: On site: sugar cane & coconut trees. Image courtesy of Thomas Llewellyn.

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# VOLUNTEERING ALTERNATIVES

By Andrew Wilson, MBCSLA (Inactive)



Sao Paulo, Brazil. Images courtesy of Andrew Wilson.

**“You can’t go down that way. It’s not safe.”** We’re standing on a dirt road peering down a hill at a jumble of houses: a conspicuous group of 20 students and 6 faculty. A car comes along, the driver stops, has a word with the community leader shepherding us, the passenger checks us out, they move on down their hill. This was a voluntary excursion through a Brazilian *favela*, or in local planning language, *ocupações irregulares*. To think of Sao Paulo or Rio de Janeiro in this regard is understandable, we’re in Curitiba though, a city renowned for its urban planning and design achievements.

*Universidade Positivo*, a university in Curitiba hosts a biannual seminar and urban design workshop or charrette. The theme of the last one in 2010 was Social Housing and Unregulated Land Use. My colleague in Fanshawe College’s School of Design, Adriana MacDonald, grew up in Curitiba where she’s

established an institutional relationship with Positivo’s architecture program. Architecture study in Brazil is more comprehensive than architecture programs in North America: students study architecture, landscape architecture, interior design, and urban planning. It’s a strong model for undergraduate education shared by the students and faculty from Venezuela, Columbia, Mexico, and Spain that attended the seminar. Four students from Fanshawe’s Integrated Land Planning Technologies degree program and one from Waterloo’s architecture program volunteered to accompany me to Curitiba.

Architect John F. C. Turner commenting on his mid-20th Century work in Peru’s *barriadas*, the equivalent of Brazil’s *favela* contended, “The notion that the *Barriada* is a slum varies between a half-truth and an almost total untruth.”<sup>21</sup> Fifty years later, Turner’s words were substantiated at the social

housing seminar in Curitiba. Images and descriptions of planned social housing designed to provide better living conditions than those within a *favela* were shared in conjunction with admissions of failure. It took a design failure to learn that a particular population required food preparation to be performed in a space separated from a main building for cultural reasons. Providing housing is an architectural, social, cultural, economic, and ecological problem. We learned of individuals relocated and given title to a property which they then sell to move back to their *favela*. The possessive is intentional because though an irregular occupation in planning-speak, a *favela* is a legitimate and meaningful community for its residents. In Brazil, 75 percent of houses are resident-built, proving that people do act for themselves. This was further corroborated by a map we were shown covered with hundreds of dots marking *ocupações irregulares* throughout Curitiba’s metropolitan region.

For a sense of unregulated land use in Brazil, imagine the slopes of West Vancouver covered in makeshift housing. It wouldn’t actually happen, and we may feel good about that but then an urbanizing Canada with 33.5 million people is so different from an urbanizing Brazil with its 192 million people. Metropolitan Sao Paulo alone has a population of 20 million. In Curitiba, if an individual occupies private property for five years and the land owner does nothing about that, then the squatter is entitled to the land. Further to that, by law, the state is obligated to provide municipal services to unregulated settlements. The tolerance and support of unregulated land use by Brazilian officials is a necessity because there is no easy alternative.

Public officials and planners in Curitiba have changed their approach to social housing and unregulated land use. Evolving social ▶



Vila Ulisses, Curitiba.



Universidade Positivo, Curitiba.



Universidade Positivo, Curitiba.



Vila Ulisses existing condition.



Proposed.

justice policies mean that a top-down relocation of whole settlements or the imposition of new housing forms on residents is being replaced by context-based or sustainable plans worked out with particular populations and often cooperatively between the private and public sectors both in terms of direction and funding. This was presented during the seminar. The intent of the workshop was to test new policies and funding models in practice; accordingly, participants were divided into four multi-national teams and each assigned an unregulated neighbourhood to consider. The neighbourhoods were chosen because of associated planning policy and the availability of funding for public housing but also because they included stream corridors. Curitiba's regional landscape is defined by four major river systems. Within Curitiba's core, riparian land has been protected as public parks that also serve a water management function. Away from the core park system the riparian land considered marginal for land development is where most of the unregulated land use is located with predictable and detrimental results. Ecological considerations

demand action in the subject neighbourhoods. The specific problem was to create a riparian corridor free of buildings while continuing to house displaced people in their neighbourhood. *Vila Ulisses*, my group's neighbourhood, had a residential population of 1,651. The image below shows how many buildings were suggested for removal.

New housing ideas for the neighbourhoods were required so architectural expertise was essential. I was the lone landscape architect in my group with four architects led by a renowned Brazilian architect. Little distinction was made between disciplines generally; however, the lead architect was determined to impose his design will on the project. He offered housing he had developed as public housing for another setting for use in *Vila Ulisses*. The relevance of multi-unit buildings with owner-modifiable configurations for

varied ways of living was indisputable but the solution did deprive students of an opportunity to explore their own architectural ideas. This led them to concentrate more on site design and especially the green space. For example, we took our scheme outside the neighbourhood "boundary" proposing the appropriation of vacant land for park space to protect the sources of the neighbourhood streams. Existing housing was removed from riparian corridors that could then be restored to their ecological function. Multi-unit housing was located where housing was removed but with a generous setback and public realm providing for protection and general enjoyment of the neighbourhood's two defining waterways. A community centre and public plaza proposed at their confluence was a strong counterpoint to the new park space serving the wider urban community. As ►



Students on a site review in *Vila Ulisses*.



*Vila Ulisses*, unregulated buildings to be removed (red), buildings to remain (purple) based on the water course buffer established by COHAB, Companhia de Habitacao Popular de Curitiba.



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with the other neighbourhood schemes, a reasonable, creative, sustainable alternative to the existing situation resulted.

The proposed neighbourhood designs were to test emerging housing policy and especially context-based solutions to unregulated land use. Our group leader's inclusion of housing from a project elsewhere was questioned during the review by federal, provincial, and local housing officials; nevertheless, the architecture did offer a way to house hundreds of displaced individuals at a higher density while still allowing for individual expression. Genius was evident in one group's proposal for a simple, flexible, do-it-yourself building system using basic, local materials that could be connected to a standardized, utilities hub. No idea better responded to the tradition of resident-built homes, or more broadly, sustainability given the values acknowledged and represented. It was a concept with universal applicability — though for *Vila Ulisses*, the compromise would have been reduced housing density and less green space.

Flying to Brazil is unsustainable. The compromise is in the value of the experience contributed and gained by me and everyone else that volunteered to attend the *Positivo* social housing and unregulated land use seminar and workshop. Acting locally in Curitiba, a group of informed volunteers demonstrated the relevance of alternative landscape and architectural solutions to housing authorities. The ideas developed could influence housing policy at the local, provincial, and federal levels in Brazil and if implemented, contribute to improved living conditions for millions. For those from Venezuela, Columbia, Mexico, and Spain, the lessons learned were applicable to housing issues in those countries. The applicability of the experience to Canada became clear to me upon hearing of the living conditions of some of Canada's indigenous people and even clearer when the response to that was to truck conventional, factory-built houses over ice roads for delivery to unprepared sites. We can do better. It may well be a matter of volunteering to help. **sl**

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Footnote:  
1. Peter Hall, 1995. *Cities of Tomorrow*, p. 251.

# DUBAI: Memories of a Landscape Architect

By Stephen Vincent, MBCSLA

**I recall my first day in Dubai. It was July 3, 2005 and the temperature was 44 degrees Celsius. As I left the hotel on my way to the new office, it suddenly hit me how different my world was about to become.**

**The small Emirate is one of seven in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).** The local language is Arabic; however, demographic statistics indicate that about 85% of the population is made of expats from all over the world – a cultural melting pot. Of the 1.5 million people in Dubai, Canadians represent approximately 20,000. We found the culture to be very respectful, friendly, and hospitable. The winter season was exceptional with daytime temperatures in the 20 degree Celsius range. On average it would rain two or three times per year, often very heavily. Flooding and leaking roofs were common inconveniences.

Dubai is most well-known in the design world for some very ambitious projects, with hundreds of kilometres of shoreline reclaimed from the sea, a ski resort in the desert, glamorous hotels, the Dubai Marina and the tallest building in the world at 828 metres. The ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (commonly referred to as Sheik Mohammed), has a vision to create an entertainment and business hub to attract tourists and develop a prosperous economy that is not dependent on oil. The oil and gas reserves in this small emirate are not significant. Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, ruled by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (President of UAE and ruler of Abu Dhabi) is the wealthy neighbour with a healthy oil and gas resource. The two leaders are often seen as competitors in the race to build colossal projects and to become internationally recognized. With the initiative of Sheikh Mohammed, Dubai was the first emirate in the region to implement bold, large scale developments and consequently has been able to establish excellent transportation infrastructure and tourist and business facilities.

Images courtesy of Stephen Vincent.  
All images shown top to bottom:

Photo Taken near the Al Qasr Hotel at the Madinat Jumeirah.

Photo taken from the observation deck of the Burj Khalifa (120th floor of 160) and Old Town Burj Dubai. On the left is the Dubai Mall and the Address Hotel (60 floors).

The built history of Dubai dates back to around 1800. It started as a fishing village and pearl diving centre. The “New” Dubai has evolved recently over the last ten years and has developed mostly along the coast towards Abu Dhabi. Landscape architecture has played an important role in transforming Dubai. Over the past few years, with the influence of foreign designers (and the vision of Sheikh Mohammed), there has been a shift in promoting urban spaces, pedestrian connections, and public art. However, although there are many public projects that support this movement, there are still many challenges:

- Financial – Several of the larger scale projects have been cancelled or have a longer implementation period due to the financial crisis in 2008.
- Public Perception and Attitude – Walking, cycling, and public transit use is increasing, but this is a relatively small portion of the population – generally for those who can't afford to have a car.
- Planning and Implementation – Most of the large private projects are planned and built in isolation and usually surrounded by walls, gates, and security.

Landscape architecture in Dubai and the UAE is an altogether different process compared to British Columbia and Canada. Besides the obvious – the plant palette and construction techniques – the most significant difference was the approval process. For private projects, the approving authority was the CEO of the development company. If the CEO liked the design, it would be implemented immediately. From a landscape point of view, Sheikh Mohammed was very interested and involved. “Landscaping” and “greening” Dubai was given high priority. He wanted the landscape vernacular to have an “exotic” flare, especially the views while driving along highways. They spared no expense. At each interchange on the highway, Sheikh Zayed Road (extending about 20 kilometres from the Trade Centre Roundabout to Jebel Ali), for example, elaborately designed patterns of planting were installed, covering thousands of square metres.

Plant nurseries in the area were able to provide some of the plants. At the peak of construction, however, many plants had to ▶



be imported. There are a few species of native plants that would survive without water, but they are not commonly used – it is not the aesthetic that people expect. They are also difficult to propagate and transplant. For example, the Ghaf tree has a taproot that extends several metres down (sometimes to 30 metres) in search of groundwater. For irrigation, sewage water is recycled and treated, and is known as Treated Sewage Effluent (TSE). The combination of TSE and drip irrigation helps to save thousands of cubic metres of water per day.

Fresh water (potable water) is produced through desalination which is an extremely energy intensive process using fossil fuels. It essentially involves heating seawater to boiling. The steam rises (fresh water) and is collected. Sheikh Mohammad and project developers support and encourage innovation and are introducing other methods of desalination, such as reverse osmosis. They see innovation as the key to moving away from dependency of oil. One thing that always amazed (and shocked) me, being surrounded by sea and being in one of the driest areas of the world, was the lack of understanding (education) of how the water was produced. I recall asking several different people, “Where does the water come from?” Most people would respond, “It comes from the tap”. This lack of education and understanding translated to excessive use and waste of water. One could drive

down a residential street and witness streams flowing into gutters and drains as people (maids) washed and polished their employer’s cars every morning. It was very important for cars to be spotless.

Even though the financial crisis was devastating to Dubai it has been able to stabilize over the past years and has remained a strong “design hub” of the Middle East with many international consulting companies retaining offices. In the five years (2005 to 2010) spent in Dubai, I saw incredible change. The speed and intensity of the design, the approval process, and short construction periods was impressive. From a personal point of view, it was rewarding, educational, and memorable. We found Dubai to be an accommodating family environment. However, we are now glad to be back in Vancouver enjoying the beautiful weather, taxes, and politics. **SL**

Illustration of the Walkway and running track extending from the Za’abeel Palace roundabout to the Trade Centre.’

Model of the Palm Jebel Ali, which was re-masterplanned.

Construction of Villas on the Palm Jumeirah with the Dubai Marina on the horizon.

Rendering of Za’abeel Palace Roundabout.

Construction of the Zaa’beel Palace Roundabout landscape with gold leaf gilding on the planter bowl and dome.



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# VOLUNTEERING OVERSEAS

By Edward Stanford, BCCLA Intern

can be done as easily deep in the jungle or off the side of one's desk at work!

**Helping communities to be the best they can be starts** with providing the basics of human requirements. When much of one's day is dedicated to sourcing, collecting, and transporting water back to the home, then this is a necessary distraction as survival for many children in the Kinyamufura Valley in southwestern Uganda, Africa. Hauling water is a task repeated several times a day that takes one away from school, homework, working, and playtime. When that supply is two kilometres away by foot, occasionally runs dry, or worse still dirty, this exacerbates an already fragile situation of having to travel even further or succumb to a pathogenic product that perpetuates a vicious circle of additional wasted time and diarrhea.

The Urban Systems Foundation (USLF) ([www.urban-systems.com/foundation.htm](http://www.urban-systems.com/foundation.htm)) developed a unique relationship through some integral partnering with the federal Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

([www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/home](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/home)) and the African Community Technical Services (ACTS) ([www.acts.ca](http://www.acts.ca)) organizations to explore the opportunity to bring some of the community wellness developed with communities across western Canada to benefit a single valley in Africa. The focus was always to help children. It is the child's lot to carry the water home every day that sustains the whole family and yet this perpetuates a cycle of poverty where time for education is compromised which will never be recaptured to give the next generation a break to improve the situation.

The Kinyamufura Valley is a typical rural setting of subsistence farming in the valley bottom and dense forests across the higher ground. The valley is home to several small communities with no potable water system. Since 2006, the USL Foundation has assisted with eight individual trips into this remote valley to help design, build, and manage three water systems.

An individual water system can comprise of sourcing a viable spring high in the hills, free from grazing cattle or human traffic to avoid faecal contamination, while having enough elevation to charge a trunk line with several spur lines. A sedimentation settling tank is built that feeds an above ground reservoir, constructed of brick and cement, all carried into the hills by village children. The villagers then hand dig the 0.6 metre deep trench down to the valley bottom which has the HDPE (high-density polyethylene) pipe at 75 millimetres down to 25 millimetre size laid in it. These trenches can be 30 kilometres long, and can service up to 50 taps. Each person is allocated approximately 25 litres of water supply from the strategically placed

community standpipes between settlements.

The USLF team members worked on every aspect of the layout, installation, and commissioning in the field to realize the individual projects. Not everybody gets the opportunity to go to Uganda, nor do they want to. There is a massive amount of highly satisfying work that goes into preparing for such a venture that takes a whole team of volunteers. Developing the partnerships with CIDA and ACTS was a critical component of realizing any successful project. The ACTS have been operating on the ground in this region of Uganda for over 30 years and have a vast knowledge of expertise ready to share. The Canadian government overseas development agency greatly assists in matching at-home fundraising by contributing 3:1 ratio dollars. These projects can total \$590,000 to realize, and there is a great deal of planning that goes in well ahead of any treks through the forest sourcing springs of fresh water.

Volunteer Chris Town describes the a hard work as well worth it, "If you could improve public health, increase family wealth, and improve educational opportunities for children – all through one simple project requiring no mechanical source of power – wouldn't you jump at the opportunity? I am grateful to have been part of a simple yet vital project to improve community welfare in Kinyamufura. I spent several days on that second trip assisting crews to install the 75 millimetres diameter pipe. It was very physical work. On one day, we installed 2,000 metres of pipe. Apparently this was an all time ACTS record! Constructing the reservoirs at elevation on side slopes was a tremendous feat of human will power, and gives one a renewed appreciation of the pyramids, and local schools arranged for all the children to come out and contribute to the task. It was a personal pleasure to be able to assist in bringing this water supply system to fruition."

As individuals and on teams, we can have massive positive impacts in developing countries by helping out without having to ▶



Images top to bottom:

Kinyamufura construction camp. Image courtesy of Chris Town.

Chris Town assisting with the laying of water lines in Kinyamufura Valley, Uganda. Image courtesy of Gerry Tonn.

Couplings of waterline. Image courtesy of Chris Town.

leave one's desk at work. The logistics of projects, design, raising money and associated projects can all be undertaken as contribution off the side of one's desk. The satisfaction is no less diminished for those that stay at home in western Canada while working on development aid projects overseas.

Providing water to villagers in the Kinyamufura Valley is just a portion of what the USLF can do in partnership with ACTS on the ground. We have developed an education program that assists 60 students right through high school and on to college. High school is an expensive undertaking in Uganda with fees being about \$ 910 per year for tuition room and board. Where \$ 6 a day is a great working wage in rural areas, then understandably, schooling seldom gets the attention it deserves for a family.

Community development focused on the single valley villages has blossomed into numerous other initiatives that enlighten individuals to the satisfying opportunities of helping abroad. The resale of crafts

produced by a Ugandan widows co-operative, auctioning off toys made by local school-children, having a long term pen-pal letter writing campaigns, and distribution of school supplies all strengthens the bonds between our community and theirs.

The experiences that the USLF staff members have been exposed to in Uganda are shared in-part to all employees, so that they too can feel well connected to the challenges as well as the exhilaration of volunteering overseas. Volunteer Jonathan Lowe describes his experience, "We often hear that 'the best things in life are free' and after volunteering in Uganda to assist with the installation of a new water system, that quote could not ring any louder. My time was free but the personal reward immeasurable. That short two week position as a volunteer permanently influenced my values, goals, and outlook in life. I left thoroughly convinced that one's personal time, is the greatest of gifts. I can't wait to do it all again!" **SL**

## February 2012 SITELINES Correction

Please note that there is correction for the February 2012 issue of Sitelines. On Page 12, in "Abbotsford Gets the Raspberry" by Tamaka Fisher, the sentence, "It is estimated by the City, that for every dollar spent on culture, \$1.68 is returned to Abbotsford in direct and spin of revenue," should read,

"According to a report prepared for the Government of BC, investments in arts generates up to \$1.36 in tax returns for every dollar spent. Also, for every two jobs created in the arts sector, three are created in the local economy. The report, Socio-Economic Impacts of Arts and Cultural Organizations in BC, was written in 2006 for the then Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts."<sup>1</sup>

1. Article by David Charbonneau for the Kamloops News on February 16, 2012, titled 'Charbonneau: Arts centre the right investment for city'.



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# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE INTERNATIONALLY

By James Taylor, FCSLA, FASLA

## Observations on a growing profession

◀ On the road in northern Nigeria with local landscape architects.  
All images courtesy of James Taylor.

In 1978 I attended an International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) World Congress in Brazil. It had been a dream of mine to see Rio de Janeiro and the conference presented an opportunity. Rio did not disappoint and I have been back several times but it was the gathering of global landscape architects that really opened some doors for me. As with many, my scope of practice was provincial in nature (Alberta at that time) with a growing interest in the profession on a national level as the incoming CSLA president that same year. After attending subsequent Congresses in Australia and Thailand I was hooked and began to devote some of my energy to the international level. Why? The developmental period of the profession in Canada was well underway by that time and our membership growth was beginning to level off. Internationally, however, when looking beyond the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand: the profession was just beginning to establish by 1978. There was a need and a passion held by our international colleagues to expand our capabilities globally!

A few years ago, I was given the opportunity to serve as guest editor of an issue of *Landscapes/Paysages (L/P)* that explored what I called “international service”. This fourth area of practice (in addition to private, public, and academic) provides new opportunities to volunteer or work in areas of international development related to our profession. That issue of *L/P* presented examples of Canadian landscape architects volunteering on capacity building projects; engaging with United Nations agencies such as UNESCO, UNEP, UN Habitat, and IUCN; or working on community projects through IRDC and CIDA. IFLA is active as a United Nations recognized professional NGO and provides opportunities where landscape architects can make significant contributions. Ongoing

IFLA initiatives have included member volunteers advising UNESCO on Urban Cultural Landscape criteria, promoting an International Landscape Convention to establish national policies on landscape (see Summer 2011 issue of *Landscapes/Paysages*), and developing Landscape Architects without Borders with guidance from BCSLA’s Dr. Katherine Dunster, MBCSLA, R.P.Bio.

From my own direct experience, I would like to chart the growth of the profession in three global regions: Latin America, the Asia Pacific, and Africa. At that first World Congress in Brazil I was asked to moderate a session that included papers from Europe featuring highly detailed “elite” landscapes. An animated discussion, largely lead by students in the audience raised the issue of why the profession

was not addressing important social and environmental issues such as housing conditions in Latin America. The debate became the front page story in the local paper on the following day with a photograph of me trying to provide order and make sense of it all. This issue moved to the foreground at a follow up World Congress in Brazil in 2009 where Christian Werthmann of Harvard GSD presented a range of work by landscape architects focussing directly with the subject of informal housing and environmental improvement. In 2003-4, a capacity building programme was organized by IFLA with financial assistance from UNESCO to introduce concepts of landscape architecture to architecture professors and facilitate the establishment of academic ▶



Images clockwise from top:  
African landscape architects at the IFLA regional organizing meeting in Nairobi last October.  
Participants in a workshop session with Cuban design professionals as part of the CSLA 2007 conference in Cuba.  
A capacity building programme sponsored by UNESCO and IFLA that was held in Sao Paulo in 2003 and 2004.

opportunities in Brazil. In fact, new schools now exist in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. During that period, educational programmes have been added in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Venezuela to follow previously established schools in Mexico. Professional associations now exist in a majority of Latin American countries.

The Pacific Rim region has presented perhaps the most dynamic and astounding growth in landscape architecture in the past 25 years. Building on a strong foundation in Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, the countries of South Korea and Malaysia experienced great growth in schools and numbers of practitioners during the late 1970s and the 1980s. Landscape architecture was fully embraced through national policy as an agent to deal with environmental improvement. China, however, has been the big story. At Guelph, we had a number of Chinese students in the MLA programme in the late 1980s and 1990s who all indicated that the profession was not well recognized and there were limited opportunities to study in their country. IFLA worked for a number of years to establish the profession in China leading to a breakthrough with the

central government by 2005. As with Korea and Malaysia, landscape architecture became recognized as an essential profession to enhance the rapid urbanization. Even so, it was amazing to hear from the Chinese representative reporting at an educational conference held in Malaysia last year, that there were five million working in the landscape industry of which 175,000 has education in the field. He further reported that there are now 300 professional university schools in landscape architecture including 30 departments with PhD programmes. IFLA was also successful in establishing a national association of landscape architects in India. In contrast to China, the profession in India faces great challenges due to limited recognition by government, educational opportunities, and small numbers.

Perhaps my most rewarding experience as an IFLA volunteer was in Africa. Previously, African nations that were members of IFLA were a part of Central Region which was comprised of both the European and African continents. When the European Region was reorganized to focus on the common interests of that area, Africa became an orphan. My committee's objective was to

investigate the ways and means to form a new region to serve Africa. The first step was to identify landscape architects in all parts of Africa. This growing list developed through contacts and the internet has become the African Network that includes both educators and practitioners from throughout Africa. In 2008, we brought together the leaders within the profession from Africa to examine key issues, opportunities, and needs for the region and to develop an action plan. This was followed by a mission to Africa that was organized to meet the profession "on the ground", expand contacts, and review the state of the profession. It all came together in Kenya last year at a conference attended by nearly 200 delegates from throughout the continent. On the final day, newly elected IFLA Vice President, P.G. Ngunjiri held the inaugural meeting of the IFLA African Region. It was a proud moment for the profession. **sl**

*The 49th IFLA World Congress will take place in Cape Town, South Africa, September 5-7, 2012. For more information, please visit [www.ifla2012.com](http://www.ifla2012.com).*

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# Landscape Architects Without Borders:

## An IFLA Task Force and a CSLA

By Dr. Katherine Dunster, MBCSLA, R.PBio.

**The idea for Landscape Architects Without Borders (LAWB)** was initially launched by Perry Howard, former ASLA delegate to International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA). This led to a workshop at IFLA's 47th World Council Meeting in China in 2010 and participants were asked to consider questions such as:

- a) Is there a need?
- b) Is there an interest among landscape architects to participate?
- c) Is this a concept that should be supported?
- d) If so, what should IFLA's role be?
- e) What should be the next steps?

The 2010 IFLA workshop participants discussed types of natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis and the possible role of landscape architects in the recovery efforts. Improving awareness of decision-makers and aid agencies regarding the capacities of landscape architects was also discussed. The participants identified another category of need which, while not related to

natural disasters, included special projects of assistance within developing countries or disadvantaged communities. It was noted that a significant number of landscape architects from all sectors of the profession (from students to practitioners and educators, to retired or senior landscape architects) would be interested in participating. The workshop concluded with an agreement to re-convene in 2011 at the IFLA World Congress in Zurich with the notion of discussing the steps to forming an IFLA Committee.

At the 48th IFLA Congress 2011 in Zurich, Switzerland, two meetings were held to continue discussions regarding Landscape Architects Without Borders. In the previous months we realized that many landscape architects have already served in natural disaster recovery efforts and some, such as our colleagues in Japan, were directly affected by the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami and were urging IFLA to take a greater role in recovery efforts.

While IFLA's resources are too limited to launch a comprehensive stand-alone organization, it is willing to act as a broker or facilitator, helping to link landscape architects to disaster recovery, act as an information disseminator, and begin liaising with other professional organizations, NGOs, and governments at all levels. The LAWB Task Force was given direction to further investigate need, resources, modes of delivery, promotion, partnering, budget, and liability concerns.

The Task Force would collect examples of completed projects demonstrating the potential role of landscape architects to help promote and shape an operational model for LAWB. The project examples would be posted on the IFLA website which would allow the greatest access to IFLA member countries unable to use social media. In time, a registry of landscape architects with languages and skills would also be developed. The meeting participants recommended that the task force be composed of two members from each region of IFLA including at least one from an emerging economy. Members from each of IFLA's regions were appointed to serve in the start-up and include:

**Chair:** Dr. Soehartini Sekartjakarini (Indonesia)

**ASIA PACIFIC:** Hiko Mitani (Japan) and Puspita Resi (Indonesia)

**AMERICAS:** Dr. Katherine Dunster (Canada) and Diana Henriquez (Venezuela)

**AFRICA and MID EAST:** Hitesh Mehta (Kenya/USA)

**EUROPE:** Natalie Daniels (UK) and Christain Tschumi (Switzerland)

Working with other volunteers at the international level requires a great deal of patience as there are many time zones, languages, and levels of commitment and expectations. I would add to that the observation that five of us live on islands and when you add "island time" into the work plan the pace is understandably slow, but is finally making progress in connecting with other aid NGOs and developing the webpage for IFLA. This year the 49th IFLA World Congress is in Durban, South Africa and the LAWB Task Force will meet again to continue the discussions. ►

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In the interim, I have been in charge of creating a Facebook page to raise awareness and provide a point of connection and outreach to interested landscape architects – search for “IFLA - Landscape Architects Without Borders (LAWB)”. We have connected with over 150 interested landscape architects already and every day we post items of interest gleaned from around the world. In the coming months we are hoping the Facebook page will become more interactive and conversational as we build capacity within the profession.

The concept of Landscape Architects Without Borders is simple: connect willing and able volunteer landscape architects to places on this planet in need of our skills during post-disaster recovery efforts, and potentially become involved in other humanitarian activities that could benefit from our expertise in everything from site planning for temporary refugee settlements (which have a habit of turning into permanent settlements in not the

best of locations) – to assisting communities in need of anything requiring the skills and services of a landscape architect.

Social landscape architecture is nothing new to members of the BCSLA – an example being the good works of Community Studio, who received the 2010 BCSLA Community Service Award and recently received a 2012 SEED (Social Economic Environmental Design) Honorable Mention for Excellence in Public Interest Design <http://communitystudio.org>. The Community Studio model is one that could be replicated by IFLA-LAWB for communities in need projects.

Another example that could serve as an IFLA model is the 2007 CSLA/Cuba design workshop on the Plaza del Cristo in partnership with the Office of the City Historian in Old Havana. In this case, professionals from Canada and Cuba joined Cuban students in the Masters Program in Architecture for an afternoon design

charette. When the location was moved from indoors to outdoors on-site, an all-ages group of neighbourhood residents who use the plaza as an outdoor living room joined in a co-design effort to clarify the site’s heritage character (originally built in 1640), define site uses, and develop design concepts and guidelines which the Historian could use in planning future restoration work on the Plaza del Cristo. The experiences in Cuba have led to thoughts within the CSLA of creating a Canada-LAWB that offers the volunteer skills and services of landscape architects wherever there is social need in the country. It is very likely that the volunteers working on Canada-LAWB will find a way to organize a national model and get some projects underway which IFLA can then use to build capacity across its regions and advocate globally for the greater involvement of landscape architects in humanitarian efforts. [SL](#)



**During the World Urban Forum** in Vancouver in 2006, I was offered the opportunity to join a multi-disciplinary team to explore sustainable long-term development options in Matamoros, Mexico. The City of Matamoros is in the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico, on the US border at Brownsville, Texas, just off the Gulf of Mexico. This area had traditionally been a major centre in the cross border smuggling of drugs and for this reason, had been ignored by the development community. Through the late 1990s up to 2010, there was significant stability in this region of Mexico and coupled with several progressive municipal governments and community leaders, had led to some significant local developments and a desire for long term sustainable, stable, and forward thinking development plan.

During my first visit to Matamoros, I was able to get support from staff and the Mayor

to explore the City and its surrounding landmarks, characteristics, opportunities, natural resources, and many constraints. I was amazed. I had no idea how much opportunity could be in one location.

- Matamoros sits right between the Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas, the only coastal, hypersaline lagoon system in North America. The Laguna Madre cannot be overstated for its importance as a habitat for migratory birds. Unfortunately, the area around the Tamaulipas Laguna Madre suffers from contamination from excessive adjacent agricultural uses along with the clearing of more than 95% of the original native brushland in the lower Rio Grande Valley.
- To the east of the City is the stunning Playa Bagdad, a beautiful long barrier island beach, reminiscent of South Padre Island without any significant development.

- To the north of Matamoros is the Rio Grande River, which winds itself through the outskirts of the City Center.
- The City itself has benefitted from its close proximity to the City of Brownsville and has been positioned as a local tourist destination.
- The City itself has a beautiful town square with a historical cathedral, an “old Mexican” outdoor market, multiple historical and art museums, and examples of interesting architecture.

This was the first work I had done with NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in an international arena and I quickly learned how blessed I have been to work in such a stable and healthy development environment. I must admit though, I was surprised by where I found the obstacles in this process.

I had not worked in Mexico before and I was immediately confronted with what I have ►

## Landscape Planning and the Political Process

By Mark Vaughan, MBCSLA

◀ Construyendo El Futuro Ahora (Building the Future Today) Symposium.

taken to be the biggest obstacle to long-term or even short-term planning in the country:

On the principle that the most important thing about the mayor's office is that as many candidates as possible should have the opportunity to hold it, mayors in Mexico (with the exception of the Mayor of Mexico City, who has a six-year term) are elected for one brief, three-year term, and cannot be re-elected.<sup>1</sup> There is thus little incentive, if it is needed, to do the job in such a way as to make likely one's return.

The tremendously short-term lens of the mayor's office (officially known as the *presidente municipal*) is a significant problem for Mexican cities, but the political situation has even more dire consequences for long term planning.

The municipal council and the city staff are often connected to the Mayor and will leave office with him or her. There were stories of entire municipal buildings being gutted by the outgoing council as if this were not an uncommon practice.

The reason for the animosity between outgoing mayors and incoming mayors is the fact that for many, the mayor's office is a stepping stone to state politics and eventually federal politics. Any successes of the future mayors could be used against the current mayor so the incentive to leave good projects under development, yet uncompleted does not exist. So, not only does the new mayor start from

nothing, but he or she only has three years to complete their legacy. This was the impetus for searching for projects that could be completed quickly by a mayor who understood the value of long-term planning and wanted to capitalize on his commitment. Anyone who has worked in the arena of long term sustainable planning knows that quite often, the only outcome from these processes is plans and more plans and although Matamoros was committed to this process, they wanted projects, not plans.

The flip side to this problem is that almost complete control rests in the Mayor's office. Because the term is short, yet the intention is that municipal government should be democratic and in charge, the fear would be that any non-governmental group could usurp the municipal power by slowly gaining control through longevity, if any group had influence. So the power in the Mayor's office is extreme, and the Mayor's focus for the three years of power is essentially the entire city's focus.

I continued to work with the City of Matamoros after returning from this first visit. The mayor had a desire to develop a small man-made lagoon at one of the border crossings and they had asked me to explore options. Later that year I returned to Matamoros with the Sustainable City Initiative as well as the International Centre for Sustainable Cities to host a session on integrated design. The lagoon was the focus

of my portion of the session and the plan was to take the attendees through a mock design process, outlining the methods, possible participants, and opportunities afforded by an iterative and inclusive design process. The mock session took on a life of its own as it quickly turned into a real integrated design session once it became clear that most of the possible stakeholders were present at the meeting and were prepared to talk about the opportunities for the site, as well as identifying additional participants for future sessions. The landscape architects, engineers, architects, farmers, fishermen, ecologists, business people, City, State and Federal stakeholders, and planners were all prepared to discuss and develop future design sessions to move this specific project forward.

It was fascinating to see the energy and enthusiasm of this group, but at the same time it highlighted the problems with development in Mexico. Because this project had not been a priority of the local government, it had not moved forward at all, despite the desires and hard work of those associated with it. The stakeholders had all been working behind the scenes to suggest fantastic and creative solutions for the urban fabric of Matamoros, but without the blessing of the Mayor, none of these projects could proceed. With the blessing of the Mayor to meet and discuss the Lagoon, all of this unbridled enthusiasm could pour forward, or so it seemed.

In the end it became clear to me that the mock design session was the real intention of the Mayor. As soon as the session morphed into a real design process with next steps, the mayor was sent for. He showed up frantically towards the end of the session to thank everyone for their participation, to remove the next steps boards and to tell everyone that he was going to handle the design process from this point forward. We were all to wait for his next move. Unfortunately for the lagoon, no next step was made. [SL](#)

Footnote:

1. [www.citymayors.com/government/mexico\\_locgov.html](http://www.citymayors.com/government/mexico_locgov.html).

The man made lagoon in Matamoros, Mexico. Images courtesy of Mark Vaughan.



# A Children's Home in HAITI

By Thomas Llewellyn, MBCSLA, MAIBC



Images top to bottom: On site: mango trees and pasture. Street in Mirebalais. All Images courtesy of Thomas Llewellyn, except where indicated.

**Mirebalais is a three-hundred year-old town of about 9,000 people**, located 65 kilometres northeast of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. The original French layout of the town remains visible in the formal central square and grid pattern of the immediate surrounding streets. Also visible, when I arrived in June 2011, was an extensive amount of rubble and ruin from the January 2010 earthquake.

I was the architect/landscape architect member of a volunteer team of design professionals with Calgary-based Engineering Ministries International Canada (eMiC). The project was to provide a site master plan and Phase 1

building design for the Haiti Children's Home (HCH).

Engineering Ministries International Canada, a non-denominational Christian group, has sent volunteer design teams to over 800 projects around the world since 1988. They have a rigorous project application and vetting process, intended to ensure that the projects they take on are feasible and worthwhile. In this case, HCH's Canadian sponsor, the Haiti Children's Aid Society (HCAS) of Wetaskiwin, Alberta, applied to EMI for help in designing the new children's home on a recently purchased 1.62-hectare parcel just outside Mirebalais.

Nobody knows how many orphans there are in Haiti; one pre-earthquake estimate had the number at 380,000. There are hundreds of privately run orphanages caring for babies and children who in many cases arrive sick, malnourished, and/or permanently disabled. The focus is on getting the children adopted out of country as early as possible. Meanwhile, the job is to feed, shelter, and provide care for the children; and, if they stay long enough, provide them, at least in HCH's case, with the best education that local resources can allow. Adoption processes are long and arduous. Many children will not be adopted anyway – prospective parents favour girls over boys; the disabled stand little chance. The orphanage becomes the long-term childhood home for the majority.

Patricia Smith, an American nurse, founded HCH in 1988. Ms. Smith was still actively involved last year, but had passed the management to her daughter, also a nurse, and Haitian son-in-law, a church minister and radio broadcaster.

The existing home sits in a walled compound – guardhouse at the gate, and a central two-storey building with outside kitchen, garage, sheds, and playground. The main building is of typical Haitian construction – locally made concrete block walls, poured concrete floor slabs, and slab roof. Quality control in materials manufacture, structural design, and building regulation is generally deficient, indeed absent, in Haiti. The collapse during the earthquake of many buildings such as this added significantly to the death toll. HCH's building did not collapse outright. But UN structural engineers subsequently inspected, and declared it unsafe for occupancy. Children and resident staff now live in the outbuildings.

The visiting team consisted of the eMi project leader/civil engineer, an HCAS board member, and ten design professionals and interns from Alberta, BC, and points around the US. A number of factors enabled the team to get moving quickly. There was ample communication and time for research in the weeks between team assembly and departure for Haiti. Once on the ground the team gelled quickly. HCH was readily available, clear on what they wanted and ▶





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at the same time open to suggestions and constructive discussion, of which there was plenty. We had the (almost) exclusive use of our hotel's meeting room and were thus able to set up our "office" and work efficiently together as a team without distractions and external interference.

The new site fronts the main road to Port-au-Prince. The area of site feasible for built development, and options for site planning, are somewhat constrained by topography, a river flood plain, and the site's irregular, pinched shape – a legacy of idiosyncratic traditional land subdivision practices.

The HCH's approach is to be a children's home rather than a "baby farm". They must house children of varying ages; and, unlike a school, age group distribution is unpredictable over the years. The solution is the children's house, accommodating six to eight children in three bedrooms with two rooms for live-in staff, a central living/dining area with small kitchenette, and a large covered porch along the front of the building. Meals are brought in from a central semi-open kitchen. At build-out there will

be six houses in the eastern part of the site, located away from the main road with space for outdoor play. In the west part of the site are the administration office, two medical clinic buildings, a multi-purpose building, and a visiting parents' guesthouse. Everything is enclosed within a perimeter fence, with controlled access through the front gate and gatehouse. Outside the compound, up

next to the highway, there will be a water pump – accessible to all – as a practical goodwill gesture to the local people.

The programme and resulting design reflect how HCH works with the resources available through its management and visiting and local staff. The site and building designs also endeavour to respond to local conditions: the tropical climate, the traditions and ▶



Haiti Children's Home – Site Plan.



available skills in local construction, the current lack of available expertise for maintenance and repair of equipment and systems, and the need to build in phases as private fundraising allows.

The team's work process was intense and concentrated. We started with topographical survey and test holes, moving quickly to design on tracing roll and drawing on laptops, and culminating with a PowerPoint presentation to client and staff.

We did nevertheless manage a few walkabouts around Mirebalais. There is a lot of life happening on the muddy streets and roadsides: people getting by on very little, and seeming generally cheerful, or at least stoic, about it. We walked back and forth on the damaged bridge over the all-important river. We visited the town soccer pitch and the new hospital with the cholera isolation camp right behind it. We attended a wildly musical church service in a jam-packed steaming hot marquee.

And then we came back to the familiar world, following up with more work and drawings over the succeeding months. It was an intense and unforgettable experience, but that's not the main point. Fundraising has progressed well; HCAS is looking for a project manager to oversee the construction of the perimeter wall, the first component. The first houses come next, and HCH will start moving to its new home. [SL](#)

Mirebalais: the river.  
Children's Homes Looking South. Image courtesy of eMi Canada.

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