

## Vicente del Rio

Associate Professor  
City & Regional Planning Department  
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

# Global Thinking, Local Planning: International Views on Environmental Planning and Design Reflections on a Symposium

*The beginning of the 2003 academic year was marked by CAED's symposium GLOBAL THINKING, LOCAL PLANNING INTERNATIONAL VIEWS ON ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND DESIGN. This first event of its kind at CAED was organized by the City and Regional Planning Department, and co-sponsored by the Architecture and Landscape Architecture departments, in collaboration with the Central Coast Section of the California Chapter of the American Planning Association and CCAPA's 2003 Conference.*

In the first two weeks of the quarter, six speakers from different countries presented their projects and perspectives on environmental planning, sustainability, globalization, and design at different scales and for multiple audiences.

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro world leaders have committed to stronger environmental concerns in their political agendas. An increasingly global economy, with open border policies, and a rapidly changing urban society, have turned sustainability and multiculturalism into fundamental issues in international and California planning and design. The symposium explored many of these important questions and fostered a rich discussion among faculty and students.

In introducing the symposium, Dean Tom Jones stressed the importance for California planners, designers and students to engage in global concerns, not only as a quest for more sustainable development patterns, but also to participate in a growing professional market of worldwide proportions.

The first speaker was Javier de Mesones, a leading planner and urban designer from Spain, professor at three universities in Madrid, President of Honour of the Spanish Association of Planners, and former president of the International Society of City and Regional Planners. Don Javier talked about the city of the future and the many issues that planners have to face, from ethical and political to economic and social.

The Brazilian environmental planning system was the main theme presented by architect-urbanist Marcia Junqueira, a professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Marcia showed three recent projects in Rio de Janeiro and discussed how community concerns and local environmental groups were pivotal in denying them development permits.

Werner Brog, a sociologist and principal of SocialData in Germany, presented his successful individualized marketing approach to diminish the population's dependence on private

vehicles and to increase the use of transit alternatives. By showing his work in several cities in Europe, Australia, and the US, Werner proved the effectiveness of this approach, and how enduring its effects are on behavior patterns.

In the second week of the event, Richard Stevens, Planning Director of AEI-CASC Consulting, professor at Cal Poly Pomona, and vice-president of the CCAPA, presented on his experience in Japan, Europe, and Latin America. He discussed globalization and a number of international planning issues, venues and organizations that appeal to Californian planners and designers.

Iffat Qamar, an environmental planner originally from Pakistan and now at Sapphos Environmental in Pasadena, made a comparative analysis of the environmental planning systems in Pakistan, New Zealand, Great Britain and California; showing their advantages and limitations and fostered a discussion on what needs to be done for a better system in California.



*Conference organizer Vicente del Rio at the opening session.*

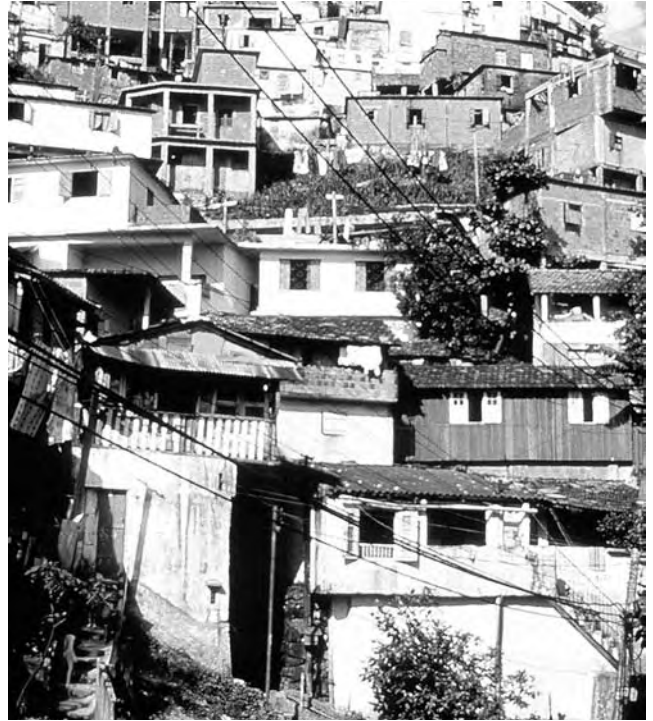
In the last day of the symposium, Rogerio Penido, a Brazilian architect-urbanist and project director at Oger International in Paris, presented his firm's current project which brings new infrastructure and roads into the historic medina in Fes, Morocco. His presentation showed the complexity and the wide social and cultural implications of a project meant to increase the quality of life of a community, and foster tourism development in a settlement considered a world patrimony landmark by UNESCO.

The success of the symposium may be measured by the large numbers of students and faculty in every session (an average of 100 per day, that is 600 total!). The main message was clear and agreed upon by participants: the environmental design culture is moving away from urban sprawl, leap-frog development and fragmented planning processes, toward the pursuit of ecological, social and economic sustainability, integrated land use planning, and urban form management.

As the global community provides both opportunities and new issues for environmental design professionals, this event made the university a more global place, brought new knowledge and six different "sets of eyes and minds" to the California central coast. The discussion of new perspectives and cross-cultural comparisons will always play an extremely important part in better preparing students and professionals for their roles as planners in California, the US, and the world. This event demonstrated the value of working together with our professional associations.

Two of the speakers in the symposium stayed longer and participated in classes and activities in CRP. Javier de Mesones spoke on the social roles of planners and presented his urban design project for Arganda del Rey, an area around a new transit station in Madrid. Marcia Junqueira, coordinator for the Brazilian side of CRP's exchange program with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, presented research on environmental planning and spoke about some of her students' projects.

By bringing together six different international "sets of eyes and minds", the event provided participants with a more global perspective on both opportunities and new issues for environmental design. The discussion of new perspectives and cross-cultural comparisons will always play an extremely important part in better preparing students and professionals for their role as planners and designers in California, the US, and the world.



*Rocinha, a hill squatter settlement with 100,000 residents in Rio.  
(Photo: V. del Rio)*



*Javier de Mesones with students in a design lab.*