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RIO DE JANEIRO: ENERGY AND CLIMATE PARTNERSHIP OF THE AMERICAS

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Energy conservation and climate change impacts are priority issues for planning in the US and are becoming so around the world. Adrienne Greve writes about her experience as an invited speaker in the first international conference of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil which discussed the planning and housing needs of the low income populations.

“As Latin American countries experience continued growth and urbanization, there is a realization of the need for integrated, humanistic, and climate-proof planning. Virtually every city in Latin America and the Caribbean is in need of comprehensive planning to address the challenges of energy production, natural disasters, and climate change.”
American Planning Association (www.ecpapanning.org)

In November 2010, the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) Urban Planning Initiative kickoff event was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The meeting, titled “Sustainable Urban Planning and Energy Efficient Construction for Low-income Areas of the Americas,” provided a forum for academics, politicians, practicing planners, and non-governmental organizations to exchange ideas regarding some of the most pressing challenges facing cities throughout the Americas including housing, climate change, hazards, and energy production. It served to set the agenda and priorities for the 30 month duration of the ECPA Initiative. Participants came from countries throughout North, South, and Central America, which provided breadth to both the problems and potential solutions examined at the meeting.

I participated in the kickoff event as part of a panel focused on climate change adaptation and mitigation. I focused on the approaches to climate change utilized in California to complement the perspectives of those joining me on the panel who discussed climate vulnerability assessment in Rio de Janeiro and the United Nations’ efforts in South America regarding climate-resilient planning. The discussions that followed the presentations examined not only populations who were most at risk through an examination of hazards exacerbated by climate change, but the manner in which to devise policy in the face of scientific uncertainty.

Figure 1
Adrienne and other panelists at the forum.



In addition to the opportunity to listen to a diversity of perspectives from experts throughout the Americas during the formal sessions, the conference provided the opportunity for participants to visit examples of urban planning efforts in low-income areas of Rio de Janeiro with City planning staff. One of the most enriching of these trips focused on the city’s efforts to improve conditions in the favelas (or slums), for which it is famous.

Nearly one in five residents of Rio de Janeiro live in a favela (CNN, 1997). These communities, some of which have been in existence for over 100 years, often have limited access to basic infrastructure such as water, wastewater, stormwater facilities, and power. The City of Rio de Janeiro has been pursuing an ongoing effort to “upgrade” these neighborhoods that included

community development, introduction of basic infrastructure, the hiring of local residents to implement the construction to serve as job training, and, most importantly, construction of a local daycare to take care for children between the ages of six months and six years, when they enter school. The addition of a daycare to each favela selected for upgrade allowed adults in single-parent households to more easily enter the workforce.

In addition to learning from the efforts of the city to restore these neighborhoods, conference participants were able to enjoy many other aspects of the city's iconic setting from the beaches in Copacabana and Ipanema, the view from Corcovado, and the architecture and history that characterizes downtown. I left Rio de Janeiro grateful for the opportunity to exchange ideas with leaders from throughout the Americas and for the chance to experience the beauty and vibrancy of the city.

References

- American Planning Association. 2010. Join the Partnership. Retrieved from <http://ecpapanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/2-pager.pdf>.
- CNN World. 1997. A century of poverty in Rios favelas. Retrieved from http://articles.cnn.com/1997-08-07/world/9708_07_brazil.favela.anniversary_1_favelas-slums-rio-de-janeiro?_s=PM:WORLD.



Figures 2 & 3
Ipanema Beach (top) and a view from the Corcovado Hill showing the Sugar Loaf Hill and the entrance to the bay.



Figures 4 & 5
A pathway in one of the favelas currently being upgraded (left) and a view of one of the favelas visited by conference participants.

