

**New Paradigms of Urban Planning
in Developing Countries and the
Ford Foundation: The Case of the
Special Programs in Urban and
Regional Studies (SPURS) at MIT
(1967-1976)**

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Abstract

This report provides an overview of Ford Foundation (FF) support for the structuring of urban planning theories and methods, responding to the issues facing developing countries during the 1960s and 1970s. My research gathered much data on the FF's support for innovative urban planning and community management in developing countries from the 1950s to the 1990s. However, this report focuses specifically on the support of the Ford Foundation for the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies (SPURS) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), from its establishment in 1967 to the early 1980s. By the early 1980s, SPURS was a durable program which trained dozens of high-profile professionals coming mostly from developing countries. The view of the program provided by the reports and correspondence located at the Rockefeller Archive Center shows the Ford Foundation's contribution and influence in setting up an internationalized professional field for urban planning. The grant records are instrumental for comprehending how this program was both developing an international network of professionals and advocating for housing policies that related to the special needs of self-help squatters' owner-builders. Lastly, my report introduces a discussion regarding the influence of SPURS in the shift of urban planning doctrine for cities of the "Global South" and especially for slums management that was recognized at the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in Vancouver in 1976, more commonly known as Habitat I.

Toward Financing Higher Training in Urban Planning and Development

By the 1950s, booming urbanization in developing countries had become evident as a lasting process. Cities' growth in South Asia and Latin America started to exceed considerably their infrastructures and any city plans previously devised. Latin America, in particular, had become the setting for a major overhaul of urban studies accompanying the urban explosion in the region. The intellectual history of Latin American urban reform and its debates among urban planners is today the subject of retrospective studies, such as the research of Adrián Gorelik on the "cycle of the Latin American city" from the early 1950s to the 1970s.¹ Gorelik's work, like many others, contemplates the making of international networks of urban planners who questioned the validity of the model of the industrialized countries' "city" when applied to developing countries.

My postdoctoral research studies the career paths and the associated fieldwork of these professionals. It also looks at the opportunities and forums they had for exchanging ideas and perspectives about ways to foster economic and social development of the poor migrant populations living in the neighborhoods which suddenly grew from the 1950s onward. My goal is to write a history of the diverse milieu of social workers and engaged professionals in action in slums or shanty towns to document the emergence of an international expertise of social and urban development in the informal city of the Global South. At the Rockefeller Archive Center, I studied the role of the Ford Foundation (FF) in stimulating the creation of this international expertise on social and economic development in the informal city.

The Ford Foundation's interest in issues related to mass urbanization in developing countries started to grow in the second half of the 1950s, particularly connected with the work of the Center for Housing Building & Planning (CHBP) of the United Nations. In October 1956, the FF held a high-ranking informal conference, on urban planning and development.² The conference gathered thirty-six specialists to discuss problems of urbanization. Among the most

influential academics attending the conference were Professor Chauncey Harris and Professor Philip Hauser of the University of Chicago. The purpose of the conference was to explore the major problems of urban development in the United States and in developing countries. The latter issue was introduced by Ernest Weissmann, Assistant Director of the UN Bureau of Social Affairs in charge of CHBP. His paper “The Problems of Urbanism on the Less Industrialized Countries,” emphasized the importance of training professional urban planners and economist from developing countries. The matter drew a great deal of discussion during the conference. The Ford Foundation’s interest in supporting American urban studies and urban planning academic centers to train professionals from developing countries grew from there on, stimulated by CHBP’s work.

The Ford Foundation was engaged in two major urban projects during the next decade, in Calcutta, India, and in Santiago, Chile. For the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning project, the FF supported a team of twenty-seven experts, starting in 1961³. As important as the project proved to be, it did not represent an effort to train professionals in India. Neither did the Ford Foundation’s Urban and Regional Advisory Program in Chile in 1967-1968.⁴ Nevertheless, the latter program followed up on a technical mission organized by the Inter-American Planning Society in 1960 in collaboration with the United Nations and the Ford Foundation. The mission visited some fifty centers of research and higher learning for urban and regional planning and issued a special report on education for planning in Latin America. It concluded that education for planning was not developed enough and should be a major concern of Latin American universities and governments, as well as public, private and international organizations.⁵ The support for higher education and training in urban planning in Latin America in particular, and in developing countries in general, remained throughout the 1960s as an acknowledged stake among Ford Foundation officials and especially overseas program coordinators.

By 1967-1968, the Ford Foundation initiated active programs to support education and training in urban planning in developing countries. Its Mexico City field Office, for example, coordinated surveys of professionals of urban studies in El Salvador and supported the first seminar of urban and regional planning in

Central America held in San Salvador in August 1968.⁶ The same year, the FF considered funding the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies initiated by Professor Lloyd Rodwin of the Department of City Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Twelve years earlier, Prof. Rodwin had participated in the conference on urban planning and development held at the Ford Foundation. His program responded to many of the recommendations brought during the conference by UN officer Ernest Weissmann on transferring US expertise about planning to professionals from developing countries.

Valuing and Passing on the Experience of American Specialists in Latin America: The Creation of SPURS

The Ford Foundation's support for the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies made sense as the program was at the confluence of two lines of the FF's policy in the 1960s. One was to encourage the expansion of US universities overseas and the other was to support development programs in the field of urban problems.

SPURS was founded in 1967 thanks to the support from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Committee on International Affairs, a group created to administer a grant which MIT received from the Ford Foundation in 1966.⁷ Shortly thereafter, the Department of City and Regional Planning of MIT requested a small grant from the Committee to set up the SPURS program on an experimental basis.⁸ The request was formulated and supported by Prof. Lloyd Rodwin.

The program had two main purposes. The first one was to design a program of studies for individuals from developing countries at mid-career level who showed promise after embarking on a professional career in the field of urban and regional studies. The second aim was, in Lloyd Rodwin's own words, "to retain the services of several highly experienced specialists who have worked for several

years on the Guayana program of the Joint Center for Urban Studies” of MIT and Harvard University.⁹ Only one out of the five academics of the original SPURS team, John F.C. Turner, was not a former member of the earlier Guayana Project team.

The Guayana Project refers to the planning of Ciudad Guayana, an industrial new town created in the early 1960s as a very ambitious effort to stimulate regional and industrial development of the Orinoco region of Venezuela. Its planning was achieved in 1964, as a result of a partnership between the Venezuelan Development Agency and the Joint Center for Urban Urban Studies from MIT and Harvard University. This major project led to the creation of a regional capital which had already become, by 1968, a center for industrial growth in the country’s development. Also, Ciudad Guayana quickly acquired an important place in Latin American urban studies. It represented a major laboratory for different, though convergent, approaches of urban planning and urban development, from national and regional planning used for social-spatial changes to housing experiments for the urban poor. The Ciudad Guayana project promoted a more progressive attitude towards the *barrios* – squatter settlements – which paved the way for alternative strategies for informal settlements.¹⁰

The make-up of the faculty staffing the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies perpetuated indeed the Joint Center’s Guayana Project team and its main characteristics, aside from recruiting among MIT faculty and also adopting its multidisciplinary approach. The Ciudad Guayana program revealed a major shift in urban planning theory in the early 1960s which consisted of moving “it from an urban design exercise, into a more social science-oriented discipline.”¹¹ Thus, SPURS’ original staff included one social anthropologist, Lisa Redfield Pettie, and an economist, Alexander Ganz. Both were lecturers in the Department of City and Regional Planning at MIT in 1968. The three other members of the team were urban planners and architects: Prof. Lloyd Rodwin, chairman of the faculty committee of the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard, John F. C Turner, lecturer at the Department of City and Regional Planning of MIT, and William Porter, who was newly hired in 1967 to a position the following year as an assistant professor in the Department of Architecture at MIT, responsible for the development of a new program in urban design. Many were already part of the

United Nations developmentalist milieu: Rodwin was still working for the UN in 1969 as a consultant, Turner was previously employed as a technical advisor for the UN, and Ganz was an economist for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America.

By 1969, when SPURS was awarded its first and decisive grant from the Ford Foundation, it represented already a unique program in the US. According to the FF's responsible program officer, Elinor G. Barber, three American top-ranked academic campuses (Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, and Harvard-MIT) had facilities for students from the developing countries. Columbia and Harvard-MIT had the most "considerable success in producing an international network of exchange of knowledge about the problems of urbanization" but only "a small component of the Columbia program is for the training of professionals from the less-developed countries."¹² Further in her report, Barber quoted Preston Andrade, the FF's program adviser in Delhi on urban and regional planning, who testified about the academic riches available to SPURS fellows: "In terms both of formal courses and the presence of able, active and interested people, Cambridge probably has more to offer than any other center." Andrade was impressed also "with the objective and techniques of the program, the quality of the small "permanent" staff and their dedication to the area of work they have chosen."¹³

In 1969, Ford Foundation officers' appreciation for the staff of the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies was shared by the international specialists of Urban Studies and Urban Planning in developing countries. SPURS staff members were by then the rising stars of alternative urban planning. After the Ciudad Guayana Project, they worked on making this project known as a remarkable laboratory by noteworthy publications. Lisa Redfield Peattie's book, *The View from the Barrio*, published in 1968, had immediately become a reference for new inclusionary alternative strategies for informal settlements.¹⁴ In 1969, Rodwin published his own overview of the Guayana Project. The book, *Planning Urban Growth and Regional Development*, reinforced and confirmed the important place of the Ciudad Guayana case in the Latin American urban studies.¹⁵ John F.C. Turner, had also already published numerous articles based on this experience with the *barriadas* in Peru in which he advocated to support informal urbanization activities instead of jeopardizing them.¹⁶

By 1969, SPURS staff members had become authoritative references not only because of their achievements as planners and their publications as theorists; also, they had already trained one cohort of professionals after the first two satisfactory years for the program. Eleven candidates had followed the training. The fellows came from all continents. In the first year, the members came from Latin America (Venezuela-2) Africa (Ghana), South Asia (India -2), Middle East (Israel and Iran); Europe (Germany and Italy) and the United States (1).¹⁷ SPURS had already become an international program circulating and discussing the Latin American experience of US planners with professionals from different parts of the world.

The Ford Foundation Policy with SPURS: Funding an Academic Program and Expecting It to Become Self-Sufficient

The Ford Foundation records documenting the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies from 1969 to 1984 contain mainly reports from the responsible program officers from the FF and correspondence between the grantees and Lloyd Rodwin. Two main conclusions can be drawn from them on the financial support of SPURS from the Ford Foundation : 1) FF's grants were essential to SPURS from 1969 to the early 1980s and, 2) the Ford Foundation continuously pushed MIT to commit financially to guarantee SPURS' future.

Between 1967 to 1969, with the support of the Committee on International Affairs, SPURS was established on an experimental basis, with approval of two grants totaling approximately \$36,000 a year for a period of two years. These funds made it possible to organize the small staff on a part-time basis to plan the curriculum and administer the SPURS program.¹⁸ For the program to survive and grow, more substantial support had to be found.

SPURS was a high-cost program, partly a function of the fact that each fellow entered the program in mid-career. Also, as a special program, it had no endowment. In 1969, full tuition for a fellow costed \$2,150 after MIT had agreed to waive the difference between regular tuition and what the SPURS program cost per student. In addition to the relatively high cost of the fellowships, SPURS needed funds for salaries, equipment and overhead. All in all, the annual cost of the program was somewhere over \$100,000.¹⁹

Rodwin's original request to the Ford Foundation was for \$1,433,200, over ten years. In response, the FF asked him to reconsider the amount. In late 1968, he made a revised request for \$207,750, over two years. According to Rodwin, the costs had been "trimmed as far as possible and that any further cuts would be truly damaging to the program."²⁰ On January 9, 1969, the president of the FF approved the two-year grant of \$207,750. "It was made, says the report of the program officer, in recognition of the formidable problems created by rapid urbanization in the developing world"²¹. This grant covered almost all the administrative and operational expenses, plus fellowships. It was followed by a one-year supplement of \$112,875, approved on July 1, 1971.²²

In the course of 1971, staff of the Ford Foundation's International Division had become increasingly concerned about mass urbanization around the world, especially in Latin America. These sentiments were a result of a FF survey conducted by John Robin, Colin Rosser and Frederick Terzo.²³ The need to address urbanization issues started to be considered, within budgetary constraints, as a new major field for the Ford Foundation's commitment.²⁴ In the same survey, Robin, Rosser, and Terzo judged favorably SPURS which, along with another program at University College of London also supported by the FF, for responding to the needs of most developing countries for training opportunities for urban specialists.

Staff of the International Division and of the Urban and Metropolitan Development Office of the National Affairs Division then ordered an evaluation of the effectiveness of SPURS. It concluded that SPURS was indeed a good program commanding excellent training resources, but also that these resources could have been used for a more effective training of professionals. The Ford

Foundation had two main concerns: the training itself and the funding of the program. On the first aspect, the FF's officers criticized the selection process for fellows, their guidance from staff, and the program's lack of intellectual focus. On the financing aspect, the Ford Foundation was disturbed that 60% of the amount of the grant was spent on staff and overhead costs which, according to FF officers, revealed that "the M.I.T. view seemed to be that if the Foundation wanted SPURS, it should pay for it (M.I.T. contributed only some tuition remission)."²⁵

In conjunction with SPURS' staff, the Ford Foundation pushed MIT into absorbing most of the costs of the program with "the threat that Foundation would support only one further, terminal year."²⁶ On the academic aspect, the FF officers were "favorably impressed both with the responsiveness of the SPURS staff" which promptly set up new seminars and courses, including on the special problems of low-income and migrants' settlements.

After 1972, the Ford Foundation awarded a final three-year phase-down grant of \$160,000. With agreement from the foundation, the funds from the grant were used sparingly so that they could be folded into a fourth year (1974-1975).²⁷ From then on, the FF's support never exceeded a third of the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies' budget. In 1977, the Ford Foundation renewed its support to SPURS. Over a six-year period from 1978 to 1984, the funding totaled \$479,490. Foundation staff member William C. Pendleton indicated in a letter dated March 9, 1984, to Prof. Lloyd Rodwin that he believed the grant had been a "good investment."²⁸

The Influence of SPURS on the Change of Paradigm in the 1970s for Urban Planning for the Cities of the Global South

Among the Ford Foundation reports that I consulted, those provided by the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies' director Lloyd Rodwin to the FF officers present important details on the profiles of SPURS fellows. Those reports

allowed me to appreciate the influence SPURS had over the international milieu of urban affairs professionals. The reports consulted were dated from 1967 to 1976.²⁹ During those nine years, SPURS trained 111 fellows. For the most part, they had an academic background and a professional career in economics and the social sciences (43) or in city planning and architecture (49). Around a third of them (29) came from Latin America and the Caribbean, another third from Asia (33) and the rest from Europe (15), Africa (15), the Middle East (12), and the US (7).

Even though the first years had a strong contingent of Venezuelan fellows – 7 in total from 1967-1976 – the program successfully saw SPURS staff moving on from its Venezuelan and Latin American common experience to reach professionals from all continents. The program particularly attracted fellow from anglophone countries of the developing world, especially from India (14 fellows) and Ghana (8 fellows) which were the two most represented countries in the program. By 1976, SPURS had trained and brought together in Cambridge, Massachusetts professionals and academics mainly from developing countries but also from the US and Western Europe. Among those 111 SPURS fellows, most of them subsequently occupied influential academic professorships around the world, ran important national or international agencies, or served in government administrations.

While training with the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies, the fellows had the opportunity to choose among twenty-nine courses taught at MIT or Harvard on urban planning, urban design, and methods of urban and regional development.³⁰ They all followed the fall semester core course of the MIT Planning Department, “Urban Settlement, Squatter and Social Change,” taught by British architect John F.C. Turner. In the early 1970s, Turner became known in the field of urban studies for demonstrating the viability of self-help construction in Peru’s *barriadas*. His publications recommended government or World Bank programs to support self-construction. While teaching at MIT, and for SPURS, he wrote, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments*, published in 1976.³¹ In May-June of that year, the book had a preeminent influence over debates about housing for low-income urban populations in developing countries during the first United Nations Conference

on Human Settlements, held in Vancouver, Canada. Turner's paradigm in favor of providing support and infrastructure to informal settlements, rather than financing programs for massive apartment buildings, strongly influenced many of the sixty-four recommendations compiled for the outcome of this first Habitat conference.

Studying the Ford Foundation records on the Special Program in Urban and Regional Studies from 1967 to 1976 thus appears to present a relevant viewpoint to understand why Turner's book seemed to have had such an immediate and important echo in urban studies. Indeed, the change of paradigm in urban planning for informal settlements that characterized Habitat I in 1976 had been already set out by Turner and SPURS staff to dozens of mature professionals and academics from most of the countries represented at Habitat I. The records, however, do not detail to what extent SPURS could have been a place of theoretical maturation stirred not only by its staff, but also by its fellows.

¹ Adrián Gorelik, "A produção da "cidade latino-americana", *Tempo Social*, 17(1): 111-133, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-20702005000100005>.

² "Abridged transcript of conference on urban planning and development held at the Ford Foundation" October 10-11, 1956, Ford Foundation Report 003477, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC).

³ "Program Specialists and Consultants (India): Consultants on Urban Planning for Calcutta", 1961, Ford Foundation Grants E-G (FA732C), RAC.

⁴ "Evaluation report on the Chile Ford Foundation Urban and Regional Development Advisory Program", 1968, Ford Foundation Report 008711, RAC.

⁵ Inter-American Planning Society: "Education for Planning in Latin America", Summary Report, February 1961

[<http://dspace.cai.sg.inter.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/11896/B19c010d001.pdf?sequence=1>].

⁶ "Primer Seminario sobre planificación urbana y regional en centroamerica, San Salvador, agosto 8-10 1968", Ford Foundation Records, Mexico City Field Office Program and Subject Files (FA1530), Series 2: Central America, Subseries 10: Urban and Regional Planning, RAC.

⁷ Lloyd Rodwyn to Mr William Pendelton "SPURS Annual Report and Overall Review, 1974-1975 and 1967-1975", January 30, 1976, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4099, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Lloyd Rodwin to Robert H. Edwards, "The SPURS Program And Its Immediate And Long Term Requirements For Assistance, an informal Memorandum", May 15, 1968, Ford

Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

¹⁰ See Simone Rots, Ana Maria Fernandez-Maldonado, “Planning Ciudad Guayana, An Industrial New Town In Oil-Rich Venezuela, *Journal of International Planning Studies*, 24 (3-4): 353-368, 2019.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

¹² David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy, January 7, 1969, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lisa Redfield Peattie, *The View from The Barrio*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968.

¹⁵ Lloyd Rodwin and Associates. *Planning Urban Growth and Regional Development: The Experience of the Guayana Program of Venezuela*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969.

¹⁶ John F.C. Turner, “Barriers and Channels for Housing Development in Modernizing Countries.” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 33 (3): 167–181, 1967 & “Housing Priorities, Settlement Patterns and Urban Development in Modernizing Countries.” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 34 (6): 354–363.

¹⁷ Lloyd Rodwin, director, to Robert H. Edwards, *op. cit.*, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy, *op. cit.*, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ David E. Bell, June, 25, 1971, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²² David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy, “Internal Memoranda”, July 6, 1972, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²³ John P. Robin, Colin Rosser, Frederick C. Terzo, “International Urbanization Survey : Findings and Recommendations, 1972, Ford Foundation Report 012075, RAC

²⁴ David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy, “Internal Memoranda”, July 6, 1972, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4098, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Lloyd Rodwyn to Mr William Pendelton, *op. cit.*, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4099, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²⁸ Chika Iritani, Letter, March 22, 1984, Grant No. 690-025, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4099, Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

²⁹ Lloyd Rodwyn to Mr William Pendelton, *op. cit.*, Ford Foundation Grants L-N (FA732E), Reel 4099, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 06900255, RAC.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ John F.C. Turner, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments*, London: Marion Boyars, 1976.