

Regnier Traveling Fellowship

Monthly Report: November, 2006

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SUMMARY

The highlight event of this month took place at the very beginning with my trip back to Mexico. Helping out at both the WorldGBC annual summit meeting and the Sustainable Building Congress & Expo was an excellent experience. I met a great deal of people involved in green building from all over the world and have new ideas and avenues for how to make the most out of this research.

After returning from Mexico, I got settled into an apartment in Barcelona. I moved in halfway through the month and have had the opportunity to host three travelling friends since moving into my place.

Right now I'm in Bologna, Italy visiting my sister who is studying at the university here.

WORLDGBC ANNUAL SUMMIT, MONTERREY MEXICO

I arrived in Mexico late on a Saturday night. The next day I joined two members of the GBC Australia, Suzie Guthridge and Romilly Madew, on a tour of caves and mountains on the periphery of Monterrey. I hadn't been to the Grutas de Garcia caves or La Huasteca while living in Monterrey. I enjoyed the chance to finally see them. I also spoke with Suzie and Romilly about contributing some articles to the WorldGBC and GBCAus websites on some of the sustainable buildings I've seen in my travels.

The WorldGBC summit took place on Monday and Tuesday and covered issues such as new membership countries entering into the WorldGBC, rating systems of the member countries and the development of guidelines for new rating systems, and increasing interest levels in green building worldwide. Members from green building councils described the successes they were having with certain strategies in their countries and what limitations they were experiencing. There was a series of workshops in which members brainstormed action plans for their individual countries and for the WorldGBC in 2007.

During the days, I helped with set up and technical coordination. In night events, I got a chance to talk to many of the WorldGBC members. I received advice on my research techniques and contacts worldwide.



WorldGBC Summit Meeting



WorldGBC Summit Closing Fiesta

SUSTAINABLE BUILDING 2006, CONGRESS & EXPO, MONTERREY MEXICO

The Congress was a complete success. For being the first international conference of its kind in Mexico, there was a lot of interest and participation from both Mexico and abroad. The people at the conference came from a wide range of backgrounds, including architects, engineers, and general and specialty contractors. There were also students and professors from universities all over Mexico.

The topics covered went from basic explanations and concepts of sustainable design and construction to in depth case studies on sustainable buildings throughout Latin America. One of the buildings presented was the HSBC tower, which I visited while in Mexico City. The first day there were parallel sessions so that those new to green building practices could learn the basics and people interested in more advanced topics and recent areas of research in the green building industry could opt for the 200 level sessions.

One of the 200 level session topics discussed was green building valuation methodology. This is an approach banks are starting to use to take into account the long term savings offered by many green building methods and strategies when underwriting construction and mortgage loans. The approach before was simply to say, "We're doing the right thing," and hope the banks would show leniency because of the environmental benefits offered by techniques used. Now the plan being introduced is to meticulously account for those benefits financially so that the same calculation strategy can be used to fairly and accurately value the building.

The expo was also a success. There were at least as many Mexican firms with booths as international firms. Internationally, firms came from the U.S. and Canada to demonstrate their products and make contacts. A few exhibitors commented to me that they were a little skeptical at first. With this being the first show, we had no track record to stand on. However, at the end of the show, everyone I talked to said they were pleased with the contacts they made. Especially beneficial for the exhibitors was the technical presentation room we set up for them. The rooms had space for about 45 people and the companies gave presentations on their products, explaining installation procedures, uses, and how those products are sustainable.

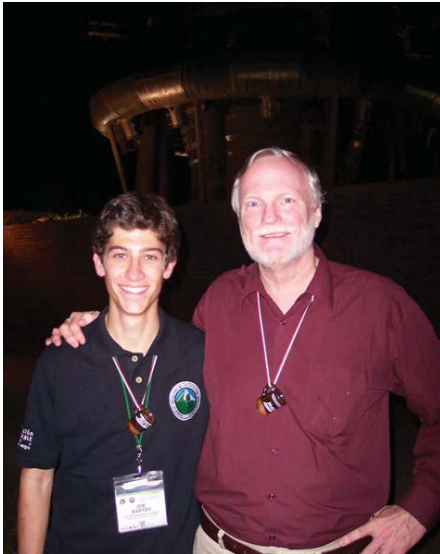
On my side, I also made many contacts. I spoke with the editor of a Mexican construction magazine about publishing a series of articles on my research experiences. I also spoke with Nils Larsson, of IISBE, about collaborating work. He manages a database of sustainable building case studies at www.sbis.info. His searchable database is set up and known in the industry. By posting my case studies there, they will reach a broader audience. I spoke with executive members of A World Institute for Sustainable Humanity who are working on a rating system for achieving sustainable low income housing in Mexico. I also spoke with renewable energy systems researchers from Spain about the presence and popularity of wind and solar power there. I spoke with members of the USGBC about presenting the findings of this research trip at a future GreenBuild conference.

At the end of the show, I had tripled the amount of contacts and friends I have in the industry and feel like my mission of collecting and presenting best practices in the green building industry will be much easier to accomplish now. The great thing about these shows is that everyone is excited about the work we are all doing and the collective benefit of everyone's work.

I got into a scary situation at the airport while trying to board my plane to Europe. The woman at the counter asked to see my visa for Spain. When I told her I didn't have one, she asked to see a flight leaving Spain in less than three months. Since I didn't have one, she told me I couldn't board the plane. Luckily I had arrived early, so I hurried to the nearest ticket counter and bought the cheapest flight to London from Barcelona. With this ticket, they allowed me on the flight. I boarded the plane five minutes before takeoff. I'm pretty sure I would have been stuck buying another transatlantic ticket if I hadn't made that flight. Having met that challenge on four hours of sleep, I took advantage of the 11 hour flight to Madrid to take a siesta.



Early set up on Opening Day of the conference in main presentation hall



Huston Eubank, World GBC, has been a valuable source of contacts and advice since June.



A panel of various green building council directors

APARTMENT IN SAGRADA FAMILIA

It didn't take long to find a room to rent. I'm living two blocks from Gaudí's Sagrada Familia cathedral. The area is fairly well connected with a metro stop in front of the cathedral. My roommates both study and work.

A week after moving in, my sister found a cheap last minute flight out and came to visit. Another friend who has been working on organic farms in Spain came at the same time. So I had a fun couple of days showing them some of the city and my projects.

A day after they left, a friend from Cal Poly (and architecture major) stayed at my place and continued out to Italy the day I left for Bologna. A few days before we both headed out, Eunji, Jose my flatmate, and I took a trip up to Figueras to see the Dalí Museum. It was a beautiful collection of Dalí paintings, sculptures, and jewelry.



Inside the Dalí museum



The man, himself

BOLOGNA & ROME

I stayed with my sister in Bologna where she's studying and took a day trip out to Rome. The only logical conclusion I could make from this trip is that I need to spend more than one day in Rome. The Colosseum, the Roman Forum and the Vatican were all incredible places. With the first two on the list being around 2000 years old, they were obviously quite sustainable in their design and construction, at least from a life cycle aspect.

Bologna is home to the oldest university in western civilization, started in 1088. So the city is full of incredibly old buildings. The sidewalks are almost all hallways under buildings in the old part of town, and some of the new part, as well.



Roman city wall ruins, Bologna



Interior view of the Colosseum.



Sidewalks in Bologna



A view of the Sagrada Familia cathedral from my neighborhood.



Hospital de La Santa Creu i Sant Pau



Another building at the hospital

These pictures are a few examples of the excellent architecture from the Modernist movement right here in my neighborhood. The Sagrada Familia is the famous unfinished cathedral of Antoni Gaudí which is funded only through private donations. The Hospital de La Santa Creu i Sant Pau is a work that was designed by architects Domenech Montaner and Gaudí. It still functions as a hospital and the architecture is incredible. You can see many Gaudí-isms in the details, such as the roof cap detailing and the mosaics.



The convent pavilion of the Hospital