Yr. 1 Short Report

CapaCities: Building Sustainability Implementation Capacity in City Staff and Leadership

Municipalities are increasingly responding to climate change impacts and have a long history of responding to a host of environmental challenges. However, anticipating, mitigating and preparing for climate change and other sustainability problems in cities requires novel solutions that fall outside the normal functioning of municipal governments and necessitate new knowledge and skills. This complexity of sustainability problems and solutions requires that city staff and leadership build new capacities that enable them to take effective and transformational action in their communities. What aspects of transformational capacity are needed and how that is built depends on the unique characteristics of the city, its leadership and residents. Capacity building for transformation can include: (i) training to develop a common language with which to discuss sustainability problems and solutions, (ii) building leadership's expertise in subject areas or processes, (iii) developing a commitment to solving sustainability problems as a part of city operations, (iv) providing energy and time to support the execution of major initiatives, (such as developing a climate plan or executing a series of cross-bureau workshops on resilience) – which, in turn, builds confidence among individuals and the organization to undertake continued transformational action.

Universities are uniquely positioned to help provide these forms of capacity to city staff and leaders as they pursue the development of sustainability outcomes in their cities. The CapaCities project aimed to do just this and launched four pilot projects across four cities: Karlsruhe, Germany; Mexico City, Mexico; Portland, OR and Tempe, AZ, United States.

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Each partner university worked with their respective cities to implement a series of capacity-building activities for city administrators in the form of workshops, trainings or 'city walks'. Portland State, for example, worked across four different infrastructure bureaus to create a process (and resources for the bureaus to participate in the process) that allowed the bureaus to engage and develop integrated planning and action steps in the face of two major disasters (a major flood and 9.0 magnitude earthquake). All capacity building activities took into consideration contextual factors of each location, such as current level of experience and capacity of the city administration, and the established collaboration between the municipality and university researchers.

In this first year, relationships were built or further evolved with municipal partners – with some relationships being more nascent and others being quite advanced. Insights from this collaborative research project were synthesized to create a framework for diagnosing the capacity building needs based on the individual and collective competence, interest, and action within cities and universities. This framework is intended to enhance the success of these city-university partnerships moving forward, while helping to further scale and transfer sustainability solutions from diverse geographic and problem contexts.

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In year two this base capacity and the cultivated stakeholder relationships will be leveraged to develop higher level capacity, specifically related to climate resilience. Each of the case cities has an existing planning process or goal related to climate change, sustainability or resilience, against which the real-world impact of capacity building on sustainability outcomes in the partner cities will be evaluated. In addition, ASU's Future Shocks and City Resilience game will be transferred and implemented in three other locations (UNAM, Leuphana, and KIT). The game was designed to help municipal staff and leaders unpack complex urban issues and learn sustainability ways of thinking to enable inter- and intra-departmental collaboration on sustainability efforts.

The following are reflections and insights on the project process and project outcomes from year one:

- **Building a common language is critical for the effective transfer of strategies across contexts**. Early in the project the team developed a deep understanding of the different universities and city contexts that participated in this project. To work collaboratively, it was essential to develop a common framework and language for how to view effective city-university collaborations.
- **In-person meetings were critical for developing meaningful connections with project participants** and for deepening our understanding of the different city contexts.
- **Capacity-building does not always need to come from university faculty, staff or students**. For example, Portland State brought its partner (City of Portland) to Tempe to serve as an advisor and catalyst for their climate action planning process.
- **Context is important, but it is not a barrier to transferability.** Lessons flow bi-directionally between city-university partners who are more and less seasoned in sustainability action.
- **The GCSO funding was key for leveraging resources.** This includes additional financial opportunities, time and other resources for developing meaningful city-university partnerships, which are foundational for being able to influence sustainability policies, decisions or investments.

ASU's Future Shocks and City Resilience game modified and played in Mexico City

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