

Interns' reports from Trinidad

In order to provide Canadian young people with international working experience, and at the same time to offer useful assistance to other countries, CIP has entered into an arrangement with the Government of Canada to select, finance and place planning graduates in internships around the world. The WorldLink program has sent young Canadians to Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Far East. Two of the students involved have recently been working in the Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago. They have encountered a culture far different from their university experiences in Ontario and British Columbia, and have worked on planning projects in one of the fastest growing West Indian countries.

The Carnival and Planning in Trinidad and Tobago

by Clare Mochrie

With its development accelerating rapidly, Trinidad and Tobago prides itself on being the most industrialized country in the West Indies. It is a hotbed of infrastructure and development projects, and a rich learning environment for a recent planning graduate.

I arrived in January to begin a six-month WorldLink internship. This was allegedly the brief lull between Christmas and February's carnival, but there was no shortage of major projects in process or awaiting government approval. My host agency, Planning Advisory and Consulting Services (PACS), were engaged in a number of contracts, the majority of which entailed outlining the planning context and potential impacts of development. I became involved in a number of these, researching their environmental and socioeconomic effects.

Trinidad and Tobago is small in both size and population, and the planning community there consists of a limited group of private and public firms and agencies. As larger projects tend to be handled collaboratively, I quickly gained exposure to most of the significant planning initiatives in the country. I was overwhelmed by a portfolio that included a resort development in an environmentally protected area, a major science and technology park, and the expansion of an offshore gas line.

The scope of these projects and their associated effects are considerable, but they are addressed and relayed to clients in a manner that reflects the indisputable pro-development atmosphere in Trinidad and Tobago. Owing to the rate of new development, impact assessments do more to outline the issues to be addressed, ensuring the smooth implementation rather than shaping a terms of reference or set-

ting limitations for a project. Similarly, the public participation and communication that in theory comprise a critical component of impact assessments take the form of debriefing sessions (at best). As is often the case elsewhere in the world, the concerns and futures of local communities are generally superseded by the agendas of big developers. For example, even in an area where full-scale community protest thwarted a major port development in a small fishing village, a massive resort development is still moving ahead.

While the pace of development at the national/regional scale is extraordinary, the day-to-day planning work is conducted in leisurely Caribbean style, with ample time for animated political debate, discussion of cricket scores and unlimited snacks. During the two weeks leading up to Carnival, work in Trinidad and Tobago came to a halt altogether, as everyone was caught up in the calypso contests, fêtes, and pan competitions. On the two days that

Carnival took place, offices closed as thousands of people took to the streets of Port-of-Spain for "liming and wining" (partying and dancing) in a flurry of feathers and beads, glitter and sparkle.

The Carnival experience was a fantastic expression of the Trini love of life, music, food, drink and romance. I returned to my daunting portfolio of projects with a sunburn, sore feet and an interminable love for the Trinidadian way.

I grow increasingly ardent for Trinidad and Tobago as I learn more about the country and culture, and I have concluded that it may be through my Trinidadian enthusiasm that I stand to make my greatest contribution to planning. With the quick pace of change and development there, a foreign perspective on the environment and local culture is critical.

Site visit at Point Lisas Industrial Estate. The estate has developed over a thirty-year period and continues to expand today. It comprises approximately 800 hectares of land around Couva and Point Lisas Bays and is home to petrochemical and steel-making industries. Much of the land has been reclaimed from the sea. Issues of carrying capacity, cumulative and synergistic effects, and liquefaction (in the event of an earthquake) have not been addressed in the development of the estate.

Photo: Darren Gault



Clare Mochrie *is a graduate of the master's program at the School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia, where she focused on international community development, particularly regarding Southeast Asia. She did her thesis research in the Philippines, examining the impacts of a multinational corporation on local social capital. Clare also has a bachelor's degree in commerce from McGill University.*