Sri Lanka Project: One year of volunteering

It has been a year since our first group of volunteer planners departed for Sri Lanka in September, 2006. Since then, 18 planners and urban designers have been deployed to Sri Lanka with the project, with another five lined up to go later this year. All the volunteers have greatly enjoyed their time in Sri Lanka, relishing the new professional and personal challenges it delivered them. Each team worked with local offices of the Urban Development Authority, and with the National Physical Planning Department (NPPD) in Colombo on regional and national-level plans. The Sri Lankan planners and related design professionals have all been excited and pleased to work with the volunteers and have benefited from the different perspectives they have been able to bring to the projects they’ve done together.

The first team of planners consisted of Steve Dunn (Vic), Wendy Downes (Qld), Mary Hoffmann (Vic), Sam Kernaghan (NSW) and Liz Patterson (Vic). This team established strong working relationships with our Sri Lankan colleagues and prepared work plans for future teams, altogether providing a solid base for future teams. They were also a part of teams which developed a National Physical Planning Policy and Plan for Sri Lanka, 2006 – 2030 and a Context and Structure Plan for the southern town of Hambantota and initiated a Structure Plan for Tangalle.

Work in Hambantota and Tangalle was consolidated by the second team of planners and urban designers, who went to Sri Lanka in February 2007. This team was made up of Yasmine Alliu (SA), Jackie Holm (WA), Rebecca Jerram (Vic), Paul Johnson (SA) and Georgia Vitale (NSW). Paul worked with the NPPD, completing a draft Physical Plan for Sabaragamuwa Region, for the period 2007 – 2030. Rebecca, Georgia were placed in Hambantota and conducted urban character assessments and community consultations as part of preparing an Urban Design Framework while Yasmine and Jackie worked in Tangalle.

Team 3 were fortunate to meet and be briefed by members of Team 2 in Colombo and on site. This handover period proved to be valuable for Jenny Donovan (Vic), Verity Lee (WA), Clare Findlay (NSW) and Alison Rumley (WA). Members of this
team have completed a number of reports in the towns of Hambantota and Tangalle, including a Master Plan for a Beach Park in Hambantota and a Public Realm Enhancement Strategy for a part of Tangalle township. Two guideline documents were also written, which focus on Urban Design principles and practices and Neighbourhood Principles. Clare and Alison have stayed on in Sri Lanka and are completing 6 month stints as volunteers with the project.

More volunteers have recently joined Clare and Alison in Sri Lanka - Stuart Carr (NSW), Peter McEwan (Vic), Jacqui Monie (Vic) and Sanjeewa Ratnayaka (WA). While work continues in Hambantota and Tangalle, some of the volunteers have started working in a new area for the project, and will be developing planning guidelines for the town of Hikkaduwa. From October Toby Philp (NSW), Arun Broadhurst (Vic) and Tricia Shantz (NSW) will take over from Peter and Sanjeewa who will be returning to Australia.

The project is achieving its aims of delivering planning assistance to tsunami-damaged areas in Sri Lanka and is a source of inspiration and energy to all involved. The volunteers have made and continue to make a great contribution and PIA is looking forward to the project continuing in the years to come. Training is a key component of the project, both through one-on-one capacity building and formal training. In 2008 the project will be sending more Australian volunteers to Sri Lanka as well as increasing its capacity-building impact by expanding training opportunities for Sri Lankan planners and related professionals.

If you would like more information on the project and you are interested in volunteering, go to www.planning.org.au or contact amcqueen@planning.org.au.
Photo 1: Children taking part in the community consultation event held in Hambantota

Photo 2: UDA staff in Hambantota on a site assessment
Photo 3. Members of Team 3 (l-r) Verity Lee, Alison Rumley, Clare Findlay and Jenny Donovan with Project director, Stephanie Knox (centre).

Photo 4. Member of Team 1, Liz Patterson (far right), with UDA staff in Hambantota.
Photo 5. Georgia Vitale (Team 2) with UDA staff member B. G. Prabaschini

Photo 6: Some members of Team 1 relaxing: from back: Mary Hoffmann, Liz Patterson, Wendy Downes, Sam Kernaghan
Photo 7. Coastal scene near Tangalle