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Exchange: Freie Universität Berlin - University of British Columbia

Duration: 10/2018 - 12/2018

Program: VIRS/SEEDS Project Participator

Themes: Climate, Water

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Motivation

Due to my growing interest and involvement in sustainability-related research at FUB, I decided to follow the UAS Call for Applications in late 2018 and applied for an exchange to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, in hopes of being able to complete a three-month research stay overseas.

I specifically applied for the UBC because, having had a guest speaker from the University in one of my sustainability modules at FU, I was already aware of them being an exceptional pioneer in sustainability research and advancement of sustainability in their campus management. I was also aware that, similarly, the city of Vancouver lives up to according standards and constantly pushes towards a further decrease in its carbon footprint.

Correspondingly, it was very exciting for me when my application for the UBC was accepted on relatively short notice and the UAS proceeded to provide me with

information on the different available SEEDS projects. I was very lucky to have my application accepted for the program I was most interested in.

Research Stay and SEEDS Project

The Living Breakwaters Resilience Project (LBRP) I was involved in during my time at the UBC is a SEEDS program that is funded by the Canadian government. It is concerned with the topics of climate change and sea level rise, and how the future developments will affect and negatively impact the densely populated area of Greater Vancouver, a site that is characterized by its deltaic river and marine environment.

The LBRP recognizes the disadvantages of conventional, hard infrastructure solutions to sea level rise, which are commonly associated with problems that range from disrupting ecosystems to being very costly and maintenance intensive. Therefore, the project aims to explore natural-based solutions that can provide an efficient alternative with co-benefits, while still offering a cost-effective and appropriate protection against rising water levels and further coastal erosion of Canada's coastlines.

My project, the Archival Project and Aerial Photography Study, was a subproject (SP1) of the LBRP.

Under this framework, I researched, gathered and systematized accounts on the history of coastline interventions in the Lower Mainland region of Vancouver, which was a challenging and interesting task. Recognizing the transdisciplinary, multi-year scope of the LBRP umbrella project, my main objective was to provide a comprehensive overview and baseline of information that can be accessed for, and further expanded by, future work and case studies relating to the project.

Personal Conclusion

Working in the topical context of further advancing appropriate and matching adaption strategies for the region was immensely interesting to me during my whole stay. My project team consisted, amongst others, of landscape architects, civil engineers, and other in-field experts and researchers. During frequent meetings and a workshop with invitees from various relevant organizations, I was able to gain extensive and transdisciplinary insights that helped to really extend and inform my understanding of

the different actors at play and how alike projects intersect between different bodies of organizations and government, legislation, and funding.

During my involvement in this project I learned that it is immensely difficult to effectively and quickly synthesize the broad spectrum of information provided by different fields of research, and that it can feel like an overwhelming task to enter a high-performance work environment that is a hub between academia, transnational companies, and different levels of government.

Therefore, my retrospective analysis of my time at UBC is that the most important approach as a new intern in alike projects is to combat “silo” structures – that means to find effective and strategic solutions that allow you to learn about and access the resources of the different actors with the necessary expertise, and then to facilitate the knowledge-sharing. I regard different online management tools (e.g. Asana) to be a great help for that and I can recommend them to anyone who feels that a close and timely communication and exchange of ideas is crucial to their work.

This was my first time participating in such a large-scale and multi-year project, and I am very happy I was given the opportunity to join specifically the LRBP – for me, it certainly further strengthened my wish to work in the field.