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Appropriateness, usefulness and impact of the contemporary Higher Education urban planning curriculum in South Africa
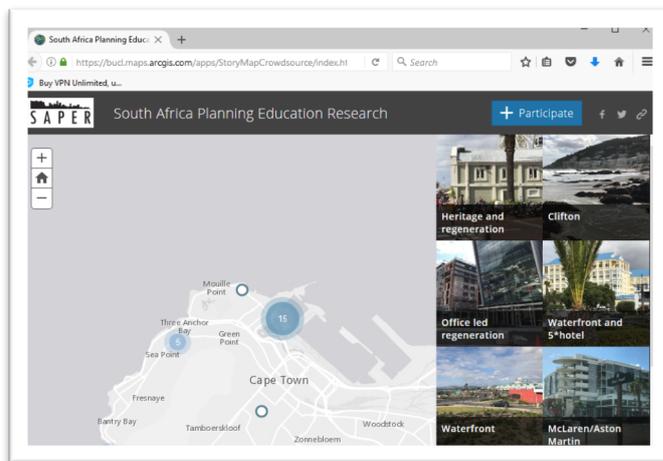
SAPER Briefing Note: Teaching App & Platform

December 2017

Teaching app

A key output for the SAPER project is the production of an interactive platform allowing the exchange of best practice in planning across the Global North and South. The first stage of this was piloted in 2017 with the production of an app for use by planning students in South Africa and the UK.

Operating across the desktop and mobile web, the teaching app allows students to collect data in the field and automatically upload this to a shared map. Photographs and text comments uploaded by individual students can then be seen by the wider group and serve as a prompt for discussion.

Initial testing was undertaken in the autumn of 2017 with students undertaking the planning masters courses run by University of the Free State and University of Birmingham. Students found both the desktop and mobile versions of the mapping app simple to use and gathered a range of information about their local areas, focussing on the theme of sustainability. South African students highlighted topics around water use, informality and solid waste management. UK students highlighted topics around mixed use development, sustainable transport, and nature conservation. This testing phase had some limitations in terms of student buy-in for non-assessed work and difficulties with timing meant that online discussions between the South African and UK students could not take place.

The next phase with the teaching app will take place in spring 2018, using undergraduate groups of planners and urban geographers exploring questions around neighbourhood poverty. This phase will also include discussions between groups of students across South Africa and the UK in order to develop greater cross-cultural understanding of the challenges facing communities in the Global North and South

Next steps: Best Practice Platform

Developing the teaching app has been a technological testbed for the SAPER team. Based on this work the Commonwealth Association of Planners have agreed to work with SAPER to develop a best-practice platform to be embedded within the CAP website. Initially focussing on CAP's awards programme, the platform will host details of different best-practice projects across the Commonwealth, searchable by geography and type. The technical design as well as the 'look-and-feel' for this platform will be developed in spring 2018 for a soft launch in the autumn and content to be added on an ongoing basis.

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