



SECOND YEAR CAPSTONE PROJECTS

What is a Capstone Project?

A Capstone Project is a requirement for all second year MPA students. It is a client-based consultancy whose subject is a concrete policy issue and that is carried out by small groups of students (between three to five students). It is based on a series of parallel and complementary activities: research, tutoring, policy study visits, and a professional outcome or “deliverable”.

This project is a professional group experience that demands effective team work. Each group receives a collective grade. The learning experience of a Capstone Project consists of managing the sometimes difficult interaction within the group, as much as applying in practice the theory learnt in the courses.

A Capstone Leader supervises, advises and monitors the work of the students and their exchange with the representatives of the client organisation. Each Capstone Leader meets regularly with the students and guides them throughout the project: from the initial research, to the fieldwork and contact with the client.

The Capstone Project consists of three stages:

- Phase I or Project Design (end of October – mid-December): elaboration of the client demand and of the corresponding detailed project design for the Capstone, including a budget for the projected field work.
- Phase II (mid-December – mid-March): field work for first-hand data gathering; the field trips are expected to be undertaken during the two-week vacation between semesters.
- Phase III (mid-March – end of April) : analysis and write up of the deliverable to be presented to the client and to be credited academically.

By the end of the year a two-day Capstones Forum is held for each team to present the process and the outcome of their project to a larger audience.

Examples of Capstone Projects undertaken at the MPA

2007-2008

Micro-credit Activities

The objective of this project was to analyse the performance and motivation of the stakeholders involved in personal micro-credit operations in order to make recommendations to the French government for improvements of personal micro-credit operations. The client, the Caisse des Dépôts et des Consignations (CDC), is a public sector financial institution in France that performs public-interest missions on behalf of the French government and focuses on the use of microfinance as an instrument to reach people at the grass root level. The bank provides micro-credit to individuals with the dual purpose of allowing social inclusion and encouraging employment.

The students carried out an in-depth assessment of efficacy of personal microfinance in France in comparison, with four other European countries, namely, the UK, Spain, Finland and Belgium.

Human Security: Lessons Learned from Regional Approaches to Peacebuilding

This capstone addressed the topic of regional approaches to peacebuilding with an actor-centred focus. This project was conducted under the guidance of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), a section of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). The purpose of this project was to deliver concrete recommendations on regional peacebuilding approaches to the PBSO, other UN agencies, and international actors.

Through field trips to the two countries of study, Burundi and Sierra Leone, the students identified and extracted lessons from a variety of experiences, examined promises and limitations, delivered concrete recommendations to UN Peacebuilding Commission, and identified areas where regional approaches have proved useful and analyze the range of factors that contribute to the success or failure of regional approaches to peacebuilding.

Trust in State

This capstone consisted of the composition of one of the chapters of the book "Trust in State", a forthcoming publication of the client, the Institute for Research and Debate on Governance. It was carried out in the context of the client's joint editorial program on "Challenges to democratic governments", together with the Ash Institute of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the University of Leiden (the Netherlands) and the University of Warwick (United Kingdom). The IRG is aimed at giving rise to, confronting and bringing together new debates on governance, which move away from the monolithic and Western-based notions of "good governance", and which constitute a source of renewed proposals on regulating societies.

The students travelled to Venezuela, Chile, and Washington in order to gather data to make a comparison of the situation in these three countries. They examined the level of satisfaction or disappointment people feel vis-à-vis the effectiveness of health services and analysed how it can affect trust in the State itself. They also reflected on the conditions and ways to create or restore this trust.

Organisation and Governance of Research and Education Institutions

The client for this capstone project was the French Atomic Energy Commission (Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique/CEA). The CEA is a leading European public research organisation with over 14 000 employees and an annual budget of 3 210 million euros.

The objective of this project was to identify and deliver recommendations for the development of refreshed organisational structure for coordination of industry, academic and research actors at the CEA Grenoble site where they are undertaking an ambitious regeneration project. The main project aims were to derive best practices underlying the financial, legal and governance modalities in science and technology "centres of excellence" in locations across the world. The field work involved research visits to Caltech and the Nasa Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, Ecole Polytechnique Federal de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland and Otaniemi Science Park in Finland. Through performing an analysis across many dimensions from organisational culture to performance incentive structures and resource flows, the group extrapolated cross-contextual findings from each site and provided an analytical synthesis. The findings were then incorporated into the development of the Grenoble site structures through a workshop with the client and its partners in Grenoble as well as representatives of the directors of the sites in the study.

Liveable Cities

The objective of the liveable cities capstone was to identify innovative 'good' urban practices contributing to the liveability of cities. Ten policy areas affecting liveability were selected, including Transportation, Water, Waste, Air, Culture and Cities, Family and Leisure, Safety, Access and Social Cohesion as well as Economic

Development. Five case studies were identified within each policy area with a specific focus on policy solutions from developing countries and the problems of ever-growing mega-cities. In conjunction with the Bureau International des Expositions and the Shanghai 2010 Urban Best Practice Institute, the identified good practices were assembled into a booklet for potential distribution. Students travelled to conferences on the identified categories in Europe as well as a study trip to New Delhi and Mumbai, India, to research the urban problems facing large urban areas in developing countries.

Contribution to the OECD Review on Rural Development in China (to be published in 2009)

With the Review on China's Rural Development, the OECD Directorate is continuing to reach out to China. After their previous Review in 2006 on the general governance structure of China, this review focused specifically on the political, economic and social mechanisms of rural development. Due to diverging living conditions between urban and rural areas in China, tackling the challenges of rural development is of special importance for China's future. The capstone was meant to support the OECD experts on their research by taking responsibility for a chapter of the review.

The capstone group consisted of three students. Each of them brought in their specific expertise to contribute to the OECD Review. One part described how service provision is organized in rural China and drew theory-based conclusions and recommendations for each sector. Another part gave a profound description of the historical development of today's rural strategy and integrated the institutional set-up for the future development. A last part evaluated the fiscal process in China, and processes relevant fiscal data for further analysis.

The MPA capstone team accompanied the official exploratory OECD mission to China, interviewing experts on rural development in Beijing, and practitioners in rural areas in the province of Shandong. At the international OECD conference on rural development in Cologne, the team gathered additional information on best practices and perspectives in rural policies.

2008-2009

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The capstone on Corporate Social Responsibility provided the students with a general knowledge of corporate social responsibility policies, their evolution and the different types of challenges to which they have to respond.

The CSR project focused on wages and working conditions along the supply chain and was carried out with the Fair Labour Association, the most prominent NGO in the CSR field. The NGO was created by the Clinton administration in 1999 after it recognized the need to complement national and international labour laws and to address questions of ethical and socially sustainable trade.

Specific enterprise case studies were carried out collectively by the students in a few Asian and Latin American countries. The students carried out comprehensive analyses of CSR within the individual companies through a series of interviews with the managers and workers. They prepared a collective report on CSR that summarizes all the contributions done for the class (Overview of CSR), as well as incorporating the case study findings (Field work) in a comparative manner. The final report was distributed to the companies that have participated in this project.

An Evaluation Framework For Major World Exhibitions

All exhibitions have a major impact on the urban structure in which they take place. These implications are similar for other major international events such as the Olympic Games, although their duration is longer and their impact on urban structure much greater.

This capstone's principal focus was the development of an evaluation structure for measuring the impact of exhibitions in a comprehensive and rational manner. The client was the Bureau International des Expositions based in the 16th district of Paris presided by Secretary General Mr. Vincente Loscertales.

The evaluation framework provided a range of perspectives, including those from the city, the region and the country concerned as well as from the diverse groups of stakeholders interested in the event. It paid particular attention to the Lisbon World Exhibition and its impact on urban regeneration, on the Alchi Exhibition and its impact on the cultural and educational outlook of the city and the Hanover World Exhibition.

Human Security Capstone : The Convention on Cluster Munitions and Victim Assistance

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) was negotiated and adopted at the Dublin Diplomatic Conference on 30 May 2008. It is a legally binding international treaty that prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions and is in accordance with international human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Capstone clients are Handicap International (Nobel Prize winning INGO) and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The capstone team will undertake the analysis of Article 5 on victim assistance in order to:

- Highlight the most important implications of the article
- Assess the potential implementation challenges
- Build an action plan for what is needed: mechanisms for assessment, field vs. policy, etc.
- Propose concrete mechanisms for smooth implementation that will have the greatest positive benefit for the affected populations
- Build a country profile for some of the most cluster munition-affected countries (TBD)

The HS capstone team contributed to the overall HI publication on the implication of Article 5 on Victim Assistance. In addition, the HS capstone team participated in advocacy planning and activities related to promoting strong implementation of Article 5.

Regulation of nuclear safety– A comparative analysis of nuclear electricity production in the UK, Finland and France

The French electricity producer and nuclear operator Electricité de France (EDF), the client of this capstone, sought to gain a better understanding of the regulatory changes undertaken in other European countries and to anticipate trends which will affect its institutional environment.

The capstone group carried out a comparative analysis of the evolution of risk governance of nuclear electricity production in three countries: the UK, Finland and France.

The capstone explored the following points:

- analyze the regulatory regime in each country for the nuclear electricity production cycle
- analyze how general principles of risk governance have inspired and are integrated in the new frameworks
- analyze in detail the implementation of risk governance

The capstone entailed three main steps:

- desk research on the history of nuclear electricity production, nuclear electricity policy and existing regulatory frameworks
- interviews with key actors: nuclear safety authorities, risk assessors, nuclear energy operators, stakeholders and academics
- preparation and presentation of the final report

Eastern Europe and Great Mekong Sub region: A Comparative Perspective

Eastern Europe and the Great Mekong sub-region have a series of characteristics in common. Several reasons justify the comparative approach in both areas. Almost all the countries are former communist states (except Thailand and Myanmar), nationalism is endemic and relations within each region have been tense and conflictual to say the least. On the other hand, all these countries are now involved in a supra-national community of rules (EU / ASEAN) which is paving the way for the collective economic and social development and cohesion policies.

Undertaken with the support of the Asian Development Bank, this capstone therefore compared concrete policies to describe similarities and differences in order to understand the meaning of cohesion policy in each area.

The goals of the capstone were: to increase knowledge about different regional policies (e.g., EU and South East Asia), using a comparative perspective; to develop a methodology of the comparison of some public policies; and to deliver recommendations for the client on tools for development and governance in both areas.

The Future of the Financial Sector – New Developments in a time of Financial Turbulence and Triple Bottom Line Sensitivity

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)'s Commission on Financial Services and Insurance (FSI) is a global non-sectorally based financial services body. It looks at the full spectrum of regulatory and business issues facing the financial services and insurance sectors, and formulates ICC policy positions on key issues.

The FSI Commission wants the MPA students to explore the potential implications that the recent financial turbulence and trends in sustainable business could have for the regulatory framework and practice in the financial sector. The aim of the study was to create a report to be presented at the May-June 2009 FSI Commission meeting. This report would bear on two main subjects:

1. It contained alternative scenarios for the future of the financial sector with respect to the above trends until 2015. Particular attention was paid to driving forces and the long-tail risks underlying the financial system. The role of regulation, whether to reduce financial risk to the financial institutions or to promote sustainable business, will be specially examined.
2. It also explored alternatives to direct government intervention, as regulation is one of the primary means that governments use to shape the environment in which businesses operate. Furthermore, models for engaging public and private interests involved in regulation will be discussed.

The capstone team participated in the ICC FSI commission meeting in May-June 2009.

Producing a background report for the Ministerial Conference for Regional Policy, for the Governance Division, Directorate of Public Governance and Territorial Development, OECD.

The capstone team carried out research on the institutional framework and recent and previous reforms on Regional Policy for all 30 OECD member countries. A group of countries from among the members were picked and analyzed in terms of the effectiveness of their regional policy with policy recommendations as a conclusion. The capstone was proposed by the Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development at the OECD, and the work of the capstone team was used as background work for the preparation of the OECD Ministerial Meeting on Regional Policy in April 2009.

2009 – 2010

Living on the Edge: An Analysis of Park & City Planning for the Table Mountain National Park

A multitude of National, Provincial, Municipal, Parastatal and Scientific actors are actively working to develop and implement policies that respond to the interrelated aims of preserving this mountain environment while managing the urban growth pressures of the City that surrounds it. Although nearly a dozen different agencies share responsibility for various aspects of this task, there is no formal mechanism for coordinating their individual efforts, and none have enough spare capacity to take measures stock of the complex institutional landscape in which they operate.

This capstone for the South African National Parks and the City of Cape Town, explored that gap, by producing an Atlas of Aims, Effects, Synergies and Contradictions of Park & Urban policy along the Table Mountain urban interface. The Atlas aimed to:

1. Identify actors that influence park and urban policy and inventory the aims and effects of their individual efforts.
2. Assess the relationships between the specific policies and management actions identified above, specifically analyzing how contradictions between them are resolved, how synergies between them are maintained and what tradeoffs are inherent in this balance.
3. Appraise the overall integration of park& urban policy, any opportunities for further integration and the apparent cost-benefit to various actors of doing so.

The four students travelled to Cape Town to carry out field work.

The European Investment Bank: from Energy Bank to Green Bank

In 2007, the EU recognized that a low carbon and resources efficient economy was a priority. The European Investment Bank (EIB) is traditionally a key player in supporting the EU member states Policy. As the « EU bank », it is the largest public lending institution in the world in terms of loan volume. However, the bank has been criticized for providing financing that undermine the EU's climate strategy by supporting fossil fuel development and other ventures that lock in high-carbon infrastructure.

This capstone project for the European Climate Foundation aimed to provide an evaluation of the current EIB strategy and policies towards financing the transition to a clean economy, and to provide recommendations on leveraging EIB's lending policy to a low carbon economy. Particular attention was given to how the EIB could be most effectively harnessed to help Eastern Europe meet its ambitious climate and energy targets. Research questions focused on key issues in the EIB portfolio profile, its evolution in the last decade, the policy changes required by the EIB and implementation of future policy changes.

The students travelled to Brussels, Luxembourg, London and Poland to carry out their research.

Impact of ICT on Citizens and Enterprises in Spain

This capstone for a recurring client, the OECD Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate, aimed to design and execute a research project to analyze the impact of Spain's "Plan Avanza" policy. The policy intends to foster the "Information Society" for citizens and enterprises across all sectors and levels of government.

Having already completed the first phase of the project in which the governance of the policy framework and its Implementation were assessed, the OECD has asked the capstone team to the second phase of the project. The team worked on defining the project methodology that can be used to measure the impact of ICT and increase the "evidence base" used to evaluate the program. The final capstone report was included in the final OECD publication (due late 2010).

The team of four students travelled to Spain for field work as well as Seoul and Estonia. The latter two countries provided for a comparative analysis as they also have significant public policies in ICT and are typically perceived as "models" of the "Information Society".