EDITORIAL PREFACE

Web-Based Public Participation, Crowdsourced Information, Electronic Brainstorming, and Blogging in Urban E-Planning

Carlos Nunes Silva, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

As we have seen in previous issues of the *International Journal of E-Planning Research*, spatial planning systems in different countries and cities around the world are increasingly adopting a variety of web-based tools to increase and to improve the quality of the information available for planners and policy-makers, but also to increase citizen engagement in the planning process, thus enhancing the overall capacity of the urban planning system. The research articles included in the first issue of volume four of the *International Journal of E-Planning Research* cover four key and innovative issues in the field of Urban e-Planning: the opportunities and challenges offered by web-based public participation tools in urban planning; the use of crowdsourcing tools to capture volunteered historical information relevant for urban planning; the application of electronic brainstorming in different stages of the urban e-planning process; and the use of blogging with the aim to develop

research, collaboration, and citizen engagement in Urban E-Planning. In other words, all these articles deal, in one way or another, with the role citizens can play in urban planning, through the use of web-based tools, in the increasingly deep-rooted post-rational and post-modern planning paradigm that characterizes planning practice in most countries and cities, namely in the cases examined by these authors.

The first article, "*Web-based Public Participation in Urban Planning Competitions*", by Susa Eräranta, Maarit Kahila-Tani, and Pilvi Nummi-Sund, examines and discusses the use of web-based tools in the process of planning competitions, which are used in Finland as a way to determine alternatives in the early stages of the planning process. However, since in its traditional form these competitions do not consider the views of local citizens, those likely to be more directly affected by plan proposals, methods of web-based evaluation have been

developed and tested to register public opinion in several of these competitions. It is this process of increasing use of web-based public participation tools in planning competitions in Finland that this article examines and discusses, based on two case studies. The main focus of the article is on how public participation can be organized within the competition process and how the competitors use the information produced by that process. The evidence provided shows that web-based tools can indeed augment public participation in the several stages of the competition process thus nourishing the decision-making process with valuable and citizen sensitive information.

The second article, written by Jennifer Minner, Michael Holleran, Andrea Roberts, and Joshua Conrad "*Capturing Volunteered Historical Information: Lessons from Development of a Local Government Crowdsourcing Tool*", explores and discusses the strengths and opportunities offered by a municipal web tool – the Austin Historical Survey Wiki – developed by a university research team, with the aim to produce information about historic resources to be used for long range planning and development review purposes, as well as the barriers this tool is confronted with. The experiment can also be seen as a valuable and replicable model for other planners and city governments in other cities and countries.

The next article, by Paul B. Paulus, entitled "*Electronic Brainstorming Research and its Implications for E-Planning*", discusses possibilities offered by electronic brainstorming to generate ideas for urban planning, efficiently and effectively in groups, overcoming the limitations of face-to-face meetings, typical of traditional planning processes. The article examines how computer based group decision support systems, which have been developed to facilitate both idea exchange and evaluation, can lead to effective decisions with beneficial outcomes in urban planning processes. The evidence provided suggests that electronic brainstorming may be a useful addition to the planning process, although face-to-face groups seems to be better in the decision phase of planning, a conclusion the author claims still requires further research.

In the last article of this issue, "*Blogging the City: Research, Collaboration, and Engagement in Urban E-Planning. Critical Notes from a Conference*", an extended and critical conference report, Pierre Clavel, Kenneth Fox, Christopher Leo, Anabel Quan-Hasse, Dean Saitta, and LaDale Winling examine and discuss the use of blogs in academia as a worthwhile platform for bringing research and academic perspectives to a broader audience, in this case with an audience with an interest for urban planning issues. The evidence provided reflects the experiences of each of these six authors in the use of blogs for their scholarly communication. The evidence offered in the article, including the lessons one can take from these personal experiences, are certainly relevant to urban planners, sociologists, geographers, architects, historians, and anthropologists, who study the social, economic, and historical elements of the city.

This issue includes a book-review on urban complexity and planning, a theme that has attracted increasingly the attention of planning theorists and practitioners. As the review suggests the book offers an innovative perspective of the relation between complexity and planning.

In sum, the empirical evidence collected in these articles and the theoretical and methodological insights offered by these authors provide a valuable contribution to the emerging field of Urban e-Planning, which we think will prove helpful for all those working in the field of urban and regional planning.

Carlos Nunes Silva
Editor-in-Chief
IJEPR

Carlos Nunes Silva, PhD, is Professor Auxiliar at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests are mainly focused on local government policies, history and theory of urban planning, urban and metropolitan governance, urban planning ethics, urban planning in Africa, research methods, local e-government, and urban e-planning. His recent publications include the following books: 'Emerging Issues, Challenges and Opportunities in Urban e-Planning' (2015), 'Urban Planning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial and Postcolonial Planning Cultures' (2015); 'Fiscal Austerity and Innovation in Local Governance in Europe' (2014, co-edited); 'Citizen e-Participation in Urban Governance: Crowdsourcing and Collaborative Creativity' (2013); 'Online Research Methods in Urban and Planning Studies: Design and Outcomes' (2012); 'Handbook of Research on E-Planning: ICT for Urban Development and Monitoring' (2010); 'Portugal: Sistema de Govern Local' (2004). He is also the author of the book 'Política Urbana em Lisboa, 1926-1974' (1994). He is member of the Steering Committee of the International Geographical Union Commission 'Geography of Governance' (2012-2016). He is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR).