

Book Review

The Virtual and the Real in Planning and Urban Design

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The Virtual and the Real in Planning and Urban Design. Perspectives, Practices and Applications
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This edited volume explores new perspectives, methods and applications associated with the increasing use of digital technologies in urban planning and in urban design, especially the new virtual spaces that are continuously being created and used in the professional practice of planners and urban designers. For that reason, it is a timely book for all those working in the field of urban e-planning, in particular now when the world is becoming increasingly a hybrid space, one in which the physical world is interlinked in complex ways with the virtual, created by an increasingly diversified set of digital technologies. The book is organized in three parts, with 14 chapters and an introductory chapter, offering a broad and well-informed view of recent developments in the discipline of urban planning and design associated with the use of new digital tools, models and games.

In the first part, the book has four chapters that explore different views about the involvement with the virtual and how they affect the use of the virtual and the way planners and designers perceive the space and the social life on which they act. The chapters in this first section of the book shed new light on these complex challenges, most of which associated with new concepts, and with the specific rules that affect the way planners and designers will have to develop their professional practice within hybrid space, the role of games, questioning the traditional role of space and place, and the risks of discrepancies between the real and the virtual urban space. Important for those working in urban e-planning is also the discussion around the challenges of ubiquitous computing or pervasive computing as this becomes part of everyday life of planning professionals and of common citizens as well, and the associated developments linked to big data.

The second part, with five chapters, explore new approaches that will allow urban planners dealing with planning issues, optimization problems, citizens wellbeing and quality of life, taking full advantage of the virtual world, of big data informed urban planning and urban design, fractal geometries, space syntax, among other aspects. This includes the presentation of computational urban design systems, planning support models, and other equally sophisticated planning tools.

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The third and last section of the book has five chapters and explores the different ways in which the virtual and the digital can facilitate or enhance civic engagement in urban planning. In particular this part of the book explores the role of serious games and social media in citizen participation in urban planning, the use of volunteered geographic information for mapping and visualizing the built environment, acoustic simulations to support public engagement, among other multisensory new approaches.

All considered the book shows what and how we can gain from the different types of virtual spaces, such as social media, by comparison with the physical interfaces of conventional urban planning and design, which in some cases may help the more disadvantaged sections of the population to have a voice in the planning decision-making process. The book also shows how real and virtual methodologies could be combined to inform urban planners in their design options and decisions. With the increasing computational capabilities available, planners are now able to handle complex data, which provides new opportunities for the use of virtual realities in urban planning, in particular for the incorporation of people's individual choices. But the chapters in this book also show the urgent need for further research in this rapidly changing field of urban e-planning, in particular on the future challenges planning will have to face for developing further these models, simulations, and the myriad of digital tools. For all these reasons this book is of interest for all those planners and urban designers interested in digital tools, virtual spaces, augmented realities, serious games and the respective application in urban planning and design.