Participatory planning and other models of citizen participation in the planning process are key features of post-rational and post-modern planning paradigms, although the practice of urban planners, as some of the articles in this issue exemplify, do not yet reflect the full potential of digital technologies in the field of citizen e-participation. The idea that the use of new participatory e-tools is a simple technical issue is not supported by the evidence provided by these articles. On the contrary, the evidence available suggests the need to frame the use of e-tools within new procedures and practices in different layers of the planning system. For these reasons, it is not surprising to see citizen e-participation, in its multiple forms and models, as one of the issues that attract the attention of researchers in the field of e-Planning, a theme the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEP) will continue to address in future issues.

The question of what nontraditional forms of citizen participation are available for e-Planning is addressed in the first article. Joanna Saad-Sulonen challenges, in “The Role of the Creation and Sharing of Digital Media Content in Participatory E-Planning,” the long held perspective that citizen participation in urban planning is a process confined to the existing formal urban planning structures and processes, and proposes that another type of participation exists, associated with the creation and sharing of digital content through new media technologies.

In the second article, “Public Screens: From Display to Interaction,” Scott McQuire, Sonja Pedell, Martin Gibbs, Frank Vetere, Nikos Papastergiadis, and John Downs deal with a different issue, the use of large video screens in public spaces, which can be used, among other applications, to engage citizens in the planning process. The article provides an example of the use of large video screens situated in public spaces and explores the possibilities for urban planning created by the new applications supported by these urban screens, claiming that there are now vast “possibilities...
for public screens to become sites that incubate innovative modes of urban communication” relevant for urban planning. The case study in which the article is based is part of a larger research program exploring the impact of new media technologies on how people interact with each other in public space, a situation that raises new issues and challenges for urban planning.

In the following article, “The SUREgen Workbench: A Web-Based Collaborative Regeneration Tool,” Yun Chen, Yonghui Song, Samantha Bowker, and Andy Hamilton explain and explore the potentialities of a new Web-based tool to support sustainable urban regeneration, one of the most challenging tasks faced by urban planning in our contemporary cities, a tool much more developed and holistic than the traditional Planning Support Systems (PSS), developed and implemented over the last two decades by the planning community, since it looks at every social, environmental, and economic aspect that has an influence on sustainable regeneration. In fact, as the authors argue, sustainable urban regeneration requires a comprehensive action in order to tackle urban problems with a lasting effect in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of the area, a circumstance that puts new demands on the decision making process and on knowledge sharing by urban planners, local authorities and other urban stakeholders. The case examined in this article, the Sustainable Urban Regeneration (SUREgen) project, funded by the UK Government, a prototype that addresses key challenges in the regeneration practice and provides a flexible and integrated e-platform for professionals working in the complex regeneration process, is a significant example of the changes introduced in the urban planning process through the extensive use of information and communication technologies.

Wayne Williamson and Paul McFarland in “Investigating the Role of Electronic Planning within Planning Reform” explore some of the conditions and determinants of e-Planning implementation, with a specific focus on the 2007 Australian Planning Reform Package, in particular the e-Planning recommendations. The authors provide ample empirical evidence on the attitudes of planners in the New South Wales planning system towards information and communication technologies, as well as on their perception of the 2007 e-Planning recommendations. Among other conclusions, the survey confirms an attitude supportive of ICT use in the planning process and sympathetic of the e-Planning recommendations issued by the Australian government.

In “There’s an App for That: Mobile Applications for Urban Planning,” Jennifer S. Evans-Cowley offers ample evidence on the rapid increase of mobile device users worldwide, and applications to serve these devices, seen as an opportunity for urban planners and other urban stakeholders to enhance productivity, to add value to what they do, to share information, and to engage with citizens more deeply and more frequently, as the author argues. In addition, Jennifer Evans-Cowley provides information on applications that can be developed to support planners in their efforts to research, plan and manage the city, and to connect with citizens more closely as well.

As the authors of these articles show, planning tools and planning processes are important in e-Planning, as they were before in conventional paper-and-pencil urban planning. Nonetheless, as Susan Fainstein and Edward Soja argue, in Just City and Seeking Spatial Justice, the two books reviewed in this issue, it is the content and the outcome of urban policy and the coalition among social organizations that ultimately shapes and enhances spatial justice and the just city. For that reason, urban e-Planning requires innovation in methods, tools and process (communication / participation), as much as it needs to be focused on policy content, on the diversity and equity of urban policy outcomes, and on the Right to the City.

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Carlos Nunes Silva
Editor-in-Chief
IJEPRI
Carlos Nunes Silva, PhD, is Professor Auxiliar at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal. He has a degree in Geography (University of Coimbra), a post-graduation in European Studies (University of Coimbra - Faculty of Law), a master degree in Human Geography: Regional and Local Planning (University of Lisbon) and a PhD in Geography: Regional and Local Planning (University of Lisbon). 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, e-government and e-planning. Among his recent publications are the books Handbook of Research on E-Planning: ICT for Urban Development and Monitoring (2010) and Online Research Methods in Urban and Planning Studies: Design and Outcomes (2012). He is the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR).