Conference Report

The 4th International Conference on Urban e-Planning – 2019

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As referred in previous reports, the IJEPR Annual Conference seeks to provide a multi and an inter-disciplinary forum for the critical discussion of new perspectives, approaches, methods, and tools in the field of Urban e-Planning. This fourth conference, convened by Carlos Nunes Silva, Editor-in-chief of the International Journal of E-Planning Research, held in the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, in the University of Lisbon, Portugal, on April 23 - 24, was no exception. It explored and discussed critically recent developments, emerging issues and future challenges in the field of urban e-planning, and examined the state-of-the-art of Urban e-Planning research, both theoretical and empirical, and explored innovative research and new directions in the broad field of Urban e-Planning. All told, this fourth conference confirmed, once more, in the opinion of those that took part in it, the importance and value of an annual international scientific meeting focused on the problems, challenges and opportunities raised by the widespread use of cutting edge Information and Communication Technologies in urban planning, the core focus of the International Journal of E-Planning Research.

The program of the 4th Conference was organized around four main themes, or tracks, although with a concentration of papers in themes 1 and 2: Theme 1 - Governance and Planning of Smart Cities; Theme 2 - Citizens e-Participation in Urban Planning; Theme 3 - The Real and Virtual in Urban e-Planning; and Theme 4 - Data Analytics and New Decision Support Tools for Urban e-Planning. Some papers crossed more than one theme and most of them provided new empirical evidence and innovative perspectives on Urban e-Planning. The final program of the two-day conference was structured in 13 sessions, of which 1 plenary meeting and 12 parallel panels, besides the welcome and closing sessions, a number of sessions similar to the previous three conferences. In all sessions, plenary and parallel panels, the debate, led by the respective session chair, was initiated by two discussants, followed then by an enlarged discussion with other participants, which allowed a fruitful and liveable exchange of perspectives among participants in the conference, a model we intend to continue in the 2020 conference. The opening plenary session, with two papers, discussed, in the first of them, the nature of the process leading to e-planning and e-governance in the UK, questioning whether it represents a real culture change or if, instead of that, it is just an empty rhetoric. The second paper

discussed an innovative Analytical Visualization Application for the Study of Urban and Regional Demographic Change.

As in the previous conferences, participation required the presentation of a paper in the conference. The 4th Conference had a number of participants and papers similar to the three preceding conferences, as well as a similar number of authors, a little over 120, engaged in these papers. The number of submissions and the proportion of papers selected for oral presentation, around 60%, were similar to those of previous conferences. The delegates - researchers, students and planners from academia and other organizations - came from 23 countries, from Europe, Africa (North and sub-Saharan), America (North and South) and Asia, and work mainly in the field of urban and planning studies. Important to note is the number of the papers co-authored by PhD students and, as in the previous conferences, the relatively balanced number of participants by gender.

Overall, the quality of the papers presented and the lively discussions held mean that once again the annual conference of the IJEPR completely met its initially stated goals. Most of the papers challenged and discussed, from different perspectives, well established or mainstream ideas about smart cities or about citizen participation in urban planning. New approaches, methods and tools have been presented and critically examined from different angles as in the previous three conferences. Papers presented in the 2019 Conference, while endorsing the advantages of the new digital technologies also challenged established perspectives, highlighting the need and advantage to articulate technology with face-to-face contacts in the different stages of the planning process, conclusions that reinforce the findings from the previous three conferences.

It is expected that a selection of the conference papers will be published in upcoming issues of the International Journal of E-Planning Research in the 2020 volume. The selected papers will undergo the IJEPR standard double-blind peer-review process. It is also anticipated that some of the papers presented will be developed into full book proposals to be submitted to the newly established book series on Local and Urban Governance.

The conference was again an opportunity for informal networking, for researchers to meet and to discuss future research initiatives, during the breaks and at lunch time. The UEPRN – Urban e-Planning Research Network (https://sites.google.com/site/uepnet/home), closely associated with these conferences, will continue its role of active disseminator of information on Urban e-Planning. The joint dinner, in downtown Lisbon, in the first day of the conference, was also an opportunity for informal and collegial interchange, as in the previous IJEPR conferences.

The Conference was endorsed by ISOCARP and by the IGU Commission on Geography of Governance.

A word of appreciation is due to all those engaged in the organization of the fourth IJEPR 'Urban e-Planning' Conference in 2019 at the University of Lisbon: authors of the papers presented; members of the conference scientific committee; session chairs and discussants; the hosting institution, the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning – University of Lisbon, and the staff directly engaged in the conference organization; and the group of students who acted as volunteers in the supporting activities during the two days of the conference. More information is offered in the 'Closing Session' presentation available in the conference website.

Additional information on the 4th IJEPR Conference, its full program, abstracts, oral presentations, and a photo gallery, among numerous other aspects, is available in the conference website (https://sites.google.com/view/uep2019-conference/home).

The IJEPR will continue involved in the organization of an annual international conference on Urban e-Planning. In 2020, the 5th IJEPR Annual Conference on 'Urban e-Planning', to be held in the University of Lisbon, Portugal (https://sites.google.com/view/uep2020-conference/home), will continue the exploration of new perspectives, approaches, methods, and tools in the field of Urban e-Planning. It is also being planned the organization of thematic sessions on urban e-planning, endorsed

by the International Journal of E-Planning Research, in the American Association of Geographers 2020 Annual Meeting, in Denver, United States, in early April 2020.

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