EDITORIAL PREFACE

Social Media, Spatial Representation and Citizen Engagement in Urban Planning

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The International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR) ends volume 4 addressing three main themes: social media for citizen involvement in local and international policy issues; semantic spatial representation in citizen e-participation processes; and concerns management systems for urban planning. In the first article, 'Social Media for Public Involvement and Sustainability in International Planning and Development', Laura Willems and Tooran Alizadeh, both from Griffith University, Australia, explore social media's potential to improve public involvement and sustainable practices on an international scale across planning and development projects. Based on a case-study approach, the authors explore how international institutions, such as the World Bank, UN-Habitat, Unilever, and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, engage the public with the demands for sustainability of each of these institutions. The analysis is focused on the Facebook pages and official websites of these organizations, and based also on a questionnaire data from the institutions' digital media administrators. The main findings of this research highlight strong public demands for increased sustainability in international development, and great support for the efforts of getting and improving citizen online engagement at the local level. This article thus offers a promising application in the field of urban e-planning, as an alternative form of citizen engagement through social media that goes beyond traditional local community policy boundaries.

The second article, 'Semantic Spatial Representation, an Experimental Proposal in the Framework of e-Participation', written by Angioletta Voghera and Rossella Crivello, both at the Politecnico di Torino, Italy, explores the theme of collaborative construction of territorial knowledge through the use of new information and communication technologies, proposing a new approach to spatial representation based on semantic ontologies. This new methodology proposed by the authors was applied in a recent experimentation conducted jointly by the Politecnico and the Università di Torino, called OnToMap – Community Maps 3.0. The article discusses theoretical

issues associated with the practice of e-Participation and specifies the perspective adopted in this study. Based on this theoretical perspective, the authors explore the web-based application OnToMap. This tool relies on a territorial ontology that aims to encourage the construction of a collective and shared knowledge of specific places. For that, the authors propose a definition of Social Semantic Mapping based on the integration of GIS tools, VGI practices and Web 3.0 applications, and discuss this form of semantic and cartographic representation of urban space and its potential for citizen empowerment in urban e-planning.

The third article, 'Concerns management, E-Government and E-Participation: Experiences and findings from Germany', written by Tobias Vaerst, Theresa Steffens, and Robert Lokaiczyk, all from wer denkt was GmbH, Germany, is a research note on a specific platform developed in Germany as a nationwide service channel for local citizens' concerns. It is a good example of how customized systems tend to facilitate further citizen participation at the local level.

As the authors show, these recent advances in internet technology deeply changed the way citizens and government communicate. In the case of the 'Mängelmelder' platform, in whose development and management the authors have been directly involved, citizens use it for reporting public infrastructure defects.

This last issue of volume 4 includes also two book-reviews on recent developments in spatial planning systems in Europe. The first of these books offers a comparative study of planning systems and planning practices in twelve countries in Europe, including Turkey, and the second book a more detailed analysis of the spatial planning system and practice in the Netherlands, often seen as a model planning system by the planning community. The knowledge of the planning systems in these countries and the way they evolved in the last two decades is mandatory for all those working in urban planning in Europe, as they provide ample evidence of the changes and continuities that have occurred in these rather complex processes, which may also be helpful for researchers, planners, and other policy makers in other parts of the world.

With this issue, the fourth volume of the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR) is complete. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the authors of the articles published during 2015, to the members of the editorial board, and to the external reviewers invited to participate in the double-blind peer-review process. This important contribution of reviewers and members of the editorial board is acknowledged in the list of IJEPR reviewers for 2015 included in this preface. I also wish to express once again my recognition to the IGI editorial staff for their excellent work in every stage of the publication process.

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