e-Planning Seminar at MIT, Fall 2023

• What is it? • Why is it relevant? • What is expected to be obtained from it?

June 2023

• What is it?

In 2003, MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) offered the first e-Planning Seminar. Its rationale emerged from the need to study in-depth the impacts of a new generation of information and communication technologies (ICT) on urban planning and local governance. The intent was to improve our multi-disciplinary understanding of ICT-driven changes in our daily lives and the ways in which we construct and regulate our communities. These interests were reflected in formulating the original agenda:
e-infrastructures, e-government, e-governance, e-city & territory, e-citizenship.

20 years later, the concept of e-Planning has matured. At MIT-DUSP, it originated the cross-disciplinary PhD area Urban Information Systems (UIS) led by Joseph Ferreira Jr. and was a precursor to the new multi-disciplinary MIT Schwarzman College of Computing, that reflects e-Planning concerns. In Portugal, it gave birth to a Joint PhD Program on e-Planning offered by 4 Universities, within an e-Planning Consortium (http://www.e-planning.org), coordinated by Pedro Ferraz de Abreu, in close cooperation with MIT-DUSP. Complementing paths in both countries accumulated what constitutes a valuable legacy, one that we must make sure a younger generation in Academia – and society at large – can benefit. The 20th anniversary provides such an opportunity. Benefiting from the interest of previous participants in the first e-Planning Seminar, but, most importantly, mobilizing the interest of several younger faculty and researchers – including students, at MIT and in Portugal.

It is therefore timely to offer a new e-Planning Seminar at MIT, on its 20th anniversary, that will provide a great opportunity to reflect on the accumulated experience, the lessons learned, and how that should inform our teaching and research agenda in the future. It has 3 components:

a) Seminar Speaker Series on "Urban Science & Digital Transition: e-Planning twenty years later", weekly session, 1.5h, as a "lunch guest speaker series" with MIT faculty discussants; from 11 September 2023 to 4 December 2023

b) "International Conference on Public Participation & Information Technologies", international symposium, 9-10 November 2023

c) "e-Planning and Digital Transition", joint undergrad/graduate course, 1.5hr / week. from 7 September 2023 to 7 December 2023

• Why is it relevant?

The post-covid world has highlighted the centrality of a Digital Transition Agenda. The covid-19 pandemic proved how critical were not only our Information and communication (ICT) infrastructures, but equally how important it was to have them well adjusted to the real conditions and requirements of all sectors of society it affected. Together with the global challenge of an Energy Transition for sustainable development within climate change, world wide public policies now recognize it must be joined by a "Digital Transition". This implies we understand not only the "Digital" facet, but also the "Transition" itself. In other words, besides the engineering and "hard" science of technology, we need also social sciences and humanities; since a Transition requires understanding both where we stand, and where the transition will lead us. Digital Transition is in effect, the core of what e-Planning is about.

Technology ubiquitous presence, favors dissemination, accessibility, participation, and empowerment. And yet, instead of decreasing, social inequalities increase and imbalances in society's relationship with nature are accentuated, even putting the sustainability of human life at risk. Today, we have evidence of more and more serious abuses of this ubiquity, side by side with its benefits (and the covid-19 crisis is no exception). UN Strategic Report on Technology states: "New and rapidly developing technologies... hold incredible promise for advancement of human welfare. They also hold the potential to generate more inequality and more violence" (UN General Secretary Guterres, 2018). So what makes the difference?

In order to identify and characterize this potential, as well to understand and judge the new challenges and corresponding risks, the emergence of transdisciplinary areas like e-Planning, articulating the in-depth study of the technological leap, especially in ICT, with the study of its transversal impact on the whole of Society, is essential.

The e-Planning Consortium acquired a wide and rich experience, with the joint PhD Program and connecting with institutions of civil society, like ANAM - National Association of Municipal Assemblies of Portugal - (www.citidep.net/act/protocolo_citidep-anam_20211106.html). MIT faculty participated in Public Hearings held in the Portuguese Parliament (Assembleia da Republica), on how e-Planning can help society deal with new challenges posed by the Digital Transition, with well informed Public Policies.
(www.citidep.net/act/audiencia_ccc12_20211019.html)

MIT (and DUSP in particular) is at the forefront of research addressing such issues, and the unprecedented investment of 1 billion dollars in the new multi-disciplinary MIT Schwarzman College of Computing, with half of its resources dedicated to build bridges with all scientific areas, is good example.

• What is expected to be obtained from it?

Besides the Seminar itself, recorded and available world-wide on-line:

- Book. Preliminary contact has been made with publishers.

- Papers. We expect multiple individual or collaborative papers submitted to refereed journals.

- Syllabus for current and new course offering: the Seminar and Symposium experience may provide material for modular sections of curricular topics that can be adopted by faculty in future teaching, or even new courses, mainly both in US and in Portugal, but also in Brazil and E.U..

- Case study dossiers: The compilation of past and current key research will be organized to provide support for future case-based research and teaching.

e-Planning transdisciplinary nature is innovative and a source of inspiration. But 20 years of experience also show how difficult it is to frame its research and teaching within traditional "silloed" academia. As Professor Alexandre Quintanilha said, as Chair of the Committee in *Assembleia da Republica de Portugal*, that presided over an e-Planning Hearing, "There is a lack of multi-disciplinarity reach in Portuguese Universities, e-Planning is an important contribute".

In 2006, MIT Report (Dan Roos) for Portugal advised, on its first page, the Portuguese Government to consider the "e-Planning Initiative". MIT renewed commitment to e-Planning will be a powerful boost of support, to help to overcome the difficulties in its path.

The e-Planning Seminar at MIT, Fall 2023, will play a key role to support a new breath and depth of this approach, encouraging a new generation of students and faculty, both at MIT and Portugal, but also in the world-at-large, to build on this rich 20-year experience.

e-Planning Seminar Coordination:
Joseph Ferreira Jr. MIT
Pedro Ferraz de Abreu, U. Lisboa (MIT Visiting Scholar)

www.e-planning.org/