Proposal

Digital Transition and Urban Planning:

e-Planning twenty years later

Summary; Rationale; Objectives; Structure; Products; Conclusion

Summary

In 2003, MIT - DUSP offered the first e-Planning Seminar.

20 years later, e-Planning Science matured. At MIT-DUSP, it originated the UIS PhD area, initiatives like urban computing and was a precursor of the reasoning that led MIT to create a new multi-disciplinary College (Schwarzman). In Portugal, it gave birth to a Joint PhD Program offered by 4 Universities, within an e-Planning Consortium with other Institutions, also in Brasil.

Post-covid world brought the centrality of a Digital Transition agenda; e-Planning is well placed to contribute, with a broad, rather than "technocratic", view.

It is therefore timely to offer a new e-Planning Seminar at MIT, an opportunity for young faculty and students to benefit reflect on the accumulated experience, the lessons learned, and how that should inform our research agenda in the future.

1. Rationale

20 Years Ago, MIT - DUSP offered the first e-Planning Seminar, as both a regular course and a cross-Department Fall Speaker Series (Friday Luncheon Seminars).

20 years later, e-Planning Science has matured.

At MIT-DUSP, it originated the Urban Information Systems (UIS) PhD area, led by Joseph Ferreira Jr., built upon the experience of the "Planning Support Systems" area at DUSP.

The 2003 MIT e-Planning Seminar was also a clear precursor of current initiatives like "urban computing" new course at DUSP and the new "MIT Schwarzman College of Computing", that reflects e-Planning concerns that we cannot look at Technology just as a tool, we need to understand its impacts, how it shapes every

other facet of society, and is (its own development), influenced by society.

In Portugal, MIT 2003 e-Planning Seminar – and its related 2003 International Conference on Public Participation and Information Technologies", gave birth to a Joint PhD Program, offered by 4 major Universities, and an e-Planning Consortium, joined by several other Universities, Research Centers and Public Administration Institutions, mainly in Portugal and Brasil, in close cooperation with MIT-DUSP.

Today, the world recognizes the centrality of the e-Planning Agenda, under the designation of "Digital Transition", specially after 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 and climate changes, world wide public policies now recognize it must be joined by a "Digital Transition".

Digital Transition is in effect, the core of what e-Planning is about. Recognition we face a Transition, shows we cannot address it only by understanding Digital technology innovations, we must understand where we are now – our "base line" - and in which direction we must go. So, we must understand how ICT impacts and is, itself, impacted by society.

The Ubiquity of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), confront our society with new challenges - in some cases in unexpected leaps.

Their increasingly ubiquitous presence, give us evidence how their ***intrinsic nature*** 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). And yet, the path that technology development has followed, is presented to us as inevitable.

In order to identify and characterize the potential of the growing Technological Ubiquity, finding the way to its realization; as well as to understand and judge the new challenges and corresponding risks, the emergence of new scientific areas is

essential.

This is what gave rise to 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.

Which brings with it its own challenges - such as that of transdisciplinarity. Because the articulation of these studies, requires combining engineering curricula with that of social and human sciences.

Technology is also the focus of attention in a world troubled with increased levels of insecurity and conflict / competition. How can Planning and IT contribute to a better grasp of the trade-offs among issues of security, human rights and freedoms? What are the new threats to privacy posed by the level of detail and accuracy of data collected in planning procedures and policy implementation? What new technology and analytical skills and competencies are required for the new generation of planners? How can we improve our current school curricula to correspond to these new requirements?

The e-Planning Consortium acquired a wide and rich experience, with the joint PhD Program and connecting with institutions of civil society, like the National Association of Municipal Assemblies of Portugal - ANAM. 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.

20 years later, e-Planning Science has matured. But so have their "founding fathers" :-) .Both Joseph Ferreira Jr. and Pedro Ferraz de Abreu, have led a rich and rewarding experience of cooperation. In complementing paths, it was 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, in USA (f.i Berkeley U.), and in Portugal and Brasil.

It is therefore timely to offer a new e-Planning Seminar at MIT, that will provide a

great opportunity to reflect on the accumulated experience, the lessons learned, and most importantly how that should inform our research agenda in the future.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this proposal is therefore to use a new e-Planning Seminar, as a structural framework for compiling and discussing the accumulated experience in this approach - e-Planning - and contribute to build a path forward. In what concerns a Research Agenda in Urban Studies and Planning, but also in what concerns related Public Policies and Institutional inputs.

3. Structure

The structure of the proposal is simple, and mirrors the successful model used 20 years ago:

The Teaching component is a regular graduate course "e- Planning and Digital Transition" offered at MIT Fall Term, for credit, with a weekly meeting schedule. The syllabus is presented in separated document.

This course will be linked to an Open Speaker Series with guests and Faculty discussants, for the regular course students but also a wider audience, including DUSP Faculty, cross-campus and even International.

There is also the possibility in a few universities in Portugal and Brazil, for current advanced students (including current e-Planning PhD students) to register for this course as if offered by their own institution as well, or accepted for credit. The specifics must be defined ad-hoc.

Also, e-Planning partners in Portugal and Brasil (engaged in digital transition for local municipal governance and for citizen digital inclusion), stated their interest to contribute to this Seminar.

The Research component is also simple: we will engage in a structured compilation of main research project results in this domain, that will be organized by topics, for book chapters.

Two specific topics are of particular nature: the challenges of research methodology for transdisciplinary science, and the challenges of building a

multiinstitutional - cross- departmental science collaboration. We learned the hard way this is often more difficult than building a transdisplinary research agenda. We will establish in particular a dialogue with the new MIT College, since we can both benefit from it.

4. Products

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

- Book. Preliminary contact has been made with publishers, like Palmgrave McMillan, which expressed interest. We will also consult with MIT Press.

- 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.

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

Conclusion

This proposal is well in line with MIT-DUSP strategic priorities: achieving racial justice, enhancing mutli-racial democratic governance, tackling the climate crisis, and closing the wealth gap.

All these priorities are deeply affected by the path that Digital Transition will take: e-Planning, given its transdisciplinarity, and demonstrated by its 20 year practice, is well placed to deal in-depth with both technology and social challenges, with focus on planning to empower citizens.

Some references

http://www.e-planning.org/mit2003/index.html

http://www.e-planning.org/news_e_bookeplanubiq20210219.html

http://www.citidep.net/eindex.html