

## “e-Planning” Seminar at DUSP, MIT

DUSP Seminars on Technology and the City have contributed to understanding the urban planning implications of modern information and communication technologies (ICT). The new Seminar / Speaker Series on “e-Planning” builds on this experience and focuses on the new challenges and opportunities for ‘e-planning’ as the reach of ICT extends far beyond the automation of traditional tasks.

### Towards a research agenda on e-Planning

1. In the last few years, e-government efforts have become fashionable both in the US and abroad.

Initially, we saw a multitude of independent initiatives towards improving the use of ICT in public services and public administration, mostly focused on using the Internet to facilitate information access and automation of services. More recently, the trend has been toward centralization and consolidation of e-government efforts and, in some cases, a restructuring of the agencies involved.

We are now beginning to observe the emergence of central plans and central authorities, or even multi-national regional plans and agencies, which reach far beyond the traditional government IT branches, and are developing e-government strategies and policies touching all sectors in society and all branches of government.

2. Examples of this are: the “e-Government Task Force for Ibero-American Countries”, created at the level of central ministries at the VII Ministry Summit of the 21 Ibero-American countries (September 2002); the “e-Europe” initiative, launched by the European Commission in 1999, and adopted as policy by the European Council Summit in Lisbon, March 2000, requiring “public administration at all levels to use new technology to give public access to information for all citizens, promoting, at the same time, on-line interaction among citizens and public administration” (e-Europe 2002 Update, 2000).

3. In the USA, there are no less significant investments, reflected for instance in the NSF-funded “Digital Government” program and the US Federal government’s restructuring efforts (the Vice President Gore’s ‘Reinventing Government’ project and the ‘E-Government Initiatives’ of the current Office of Management and Budget).

4. As expected, these “e-Government” efforts are impacting planning and setting the agenda for what might be called ‘e-Planning’. Such a trend is forcing planners to look beyond the (relatively) simple and obvious examples of service automation or public access to government information.

One leading example is the “e-planning Group” fostered by Scottish Executive (September 2001). In his document “e-Planning: Turning the Organization Inside Out”, Peter Thorpe writes:

“The ‘Modernizing Government’ Agenda has set a target for Planning Departments, like other Government organizations, to ensure that 100% of their dealings with the public are capable of being undertaken electronically by 2005. This places the onus on Planning Authorities to rethink the way that their services are organized and delivered” (Thorpe, P. University of Exeter, Planning Summer School 2001, UK)

In effect, will the centralized services move beyond efficient publishing and broadcasting in ways that promote meaningful dialogue among citizens and public/private interests? Shouldn’t e-planning differ from e-government in that improved planning processes might involve many partners and *less* government?

5. This evolution raises many new questions that go beyond re-shaping services.

The trend towards a more central role of technology in Government and in Planning has come, somewhat paradoxically, as the technologies have greatly enhanced the prospects for disaggregated, spatial analyses and decentralized, community level planning.

Reduced cost and improved technology has stimulated the rapid expansion of detailed, disaggregated data about land use and ownership, geography, infrastructure, environmental conditions, etc. along with new, sophisticated analytical tools and visualization techniques to make the best use of them.

6. This dual trend poses new intellectual challenges at community/neighborhood as well as city/global levels, and it raises research questions on a breadth of issues, with emphasis on Public Participation, Privacy, Security and Freedoms, Institutional reform, and Environmental Planning. Furthermore, its study requires considerable knowledge and understanding of ICT’s potential, not only of hardware and software, but also of powerful analytical tools, data mining, and communication strategies.

7. Technology is bringing to the table a new wealth of data and parameters, at multiple levels, that were not available to planners before. Besides the well known issues of data filtering and evaluation, how does this data availability impact planning processes, levels and scope? How does it relate to the emergence of “neighborhood planning”? Can ICT facilitate de-centralization of urban revitalization and development efforts? Will it enable new forms of measuring the “performance” of a City, and of City Plans? Will these measures benefit ‘outside’ regulators and funders or ‘inside’ residents and community organizations?

8. 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?

9. Technology is facilitating citizen access to information at levels never experimented before. But this new trend towards government centrality, and IT business consolidation, may inform citizens without empowering them.

What forms of public participation in decision-making are sought, enabled or deterred by the new policies? Are current technology development policies favoring citizen participatory models, or pushing back citizens to a consumer role?

10. Technology is rapidly changing the public administration landscape. How is it impacting institutions and regulations? Is the new technology challenging the current institutional and regulatory framework for plan-making and urban development? What are adequate paths towards institutional and regulatory reform?

11. New challenges in Planning, with or without an “e”, cannot be understood separated from the challenges faced by the people that embody it. What is the role of a planner in this new scheme, between e-Government oriented policies and increased citizen pressure towards interactive planning? 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?

### “e-Planning” Seminar goals

The MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning has been at the forefront of the new thinking concerning the use of technology by planners and the impacts of technology on planning. Examples include our research on GIS web services, neighborhood information systems, and collaborative planning tools, and our use of these technologies to study urban spatial structure, community development, social capital formation, digital divide issues, and urban design methods. We must continue to provide leadership by fostering a research agenda on the next generation of problems facing “e-Planning”.

One goal for this Speaker Series Seminar is to advance the research on Planning and ICT at DUSP. The topic has long been the focus of the Planning Support Systems research cluster.

But the expanded ICT use and the far reaching implications of ICT choices and strategies have brought one or another aspect of ICT onto the agenda of all groups across DUSP.

The seminars are intended to facilitate dialogue across a broad cross-section of the department about some of the shared issues, methods, and implications of “e-planning”. By doing so, we also hope to stimulate debate about an e-planning research agenda among an international community of our peers, not only in Planning but also in closely-associated fields.

In consistency with these goals, the final product of the Seminar will be a Book on “e-Planning”, incorporating MIT-DUSP contribution to the new intellectual challenges we face today; and the “e-Planning” Speaker Series link to the International Conference on Public Participation and Information Technology (ICPPIT03), hosted by DUSP on the 10-12 November 2003, and co-organized with CITIDEP (Research Center on Information Technology and Participatory Democracy, and international non-profit).

### Session Topics

- 1) Community level: **e-Community Planning**
- 2) City level: **Enhancing City Performance**
- 3) Global level: **The Fading Borders between Regional, National and Local Planning**
- 4) **Public Participation**
- 5) **Privacy, Security and freedoms in the e-World**
- 6) **Urban Modeling and Urban Design**
- 7) **Environmental Planning**
- 8) **Institutional Reform**

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Department of Urban Studies and  
Planning**

**MIT-DUSP Seminar / Speaker  
Series on**

# e-Planning:

**Fall 2003**

*Fridays, 12-14 PM, Room 3-401*

*chair:* Pedro Ferraz de Abreu (pfa@mit.edu)

**with an International Conference**

**on**

**Public Participation and  
Information Technologies**

**(ICPPIT03)**

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<http://web.mit.edu/dusp/uis/e-planning/>

<http://web.mit.edu/uis/icppit03/>