



e-Planning, Urban Science and Digital Transition

MIT-DUSP Monday Lunch Speaker Series

"City Arena" (9-255)

October 30, 12h30- 2 PM, Talk:

Lunch is available at 12h15

Social media data & elected official priorities: transparency vs curated manipulation

Lucie Laurian

Speaker:

Prof. Lucie Laurian, Chair, Urban & Regional Planning, SUNY Buffalo

Discussants:

Sarah Williams, Associate Professor of Technology & Urban Planning
Cong Cong, Lecturer of Urban Science and Planning

Links:

<https://archplan.buffalo.edu/People/faculty/department-of-urban-and-regional-planning-faculty.host.html/content/authoritative/profiles/laurian-lucie.detail.html>

<https://archplan.buffalo.edu/People/faculty/department-of-urban-and-regional-planning-faculty.html>

<https://dusp.mit.edu/people/sarah-williams>

<https://dusp.mit.edu/people/cong-cong>

<http://web.mit.edu/uis/e-planning2023/speakerseries.html>

Lunch Talk: "**City Arena**" (9-255), **October 30, 12:30 - 2 PM**

**Elected officials' planning priorities and decisions:
Mining social media data for transparency,
not curated manipulation**

Machine-based content analysis of local decision makers' social media posts can identify their planning priorities (e.g., support for transit or affordable housing strategies), and whether those priorities align with local plans. We can also track consistencies and inconsistencies between plans, decision-makers' opinions, and their council votes.

The implications of those results are many. To hold elected officials accountable, voters and civic coalitions need to know which candidates support changes important to them, and how elected officials cast their votes. Planners and academics can use those methods to analyze the drivers of plan implementation.

While machine content and sentiment analysis can analyze social media data efficiently, we do not have systems to analyze and visualize, in real time, candidates' views on specific planning topics. Such a tool would be useful to voters interested in contrasting candidates' priorities, although candidates and elected officials could curate posts to "game" those metrics. This raises higher-level questions about communication distortions in the context of the transparency afforded by social media.

Joint work with Albert Han:

Han, A, and Laurian, L 2023. Tracking plan implementation using elected officials' social media communications and votes. *EPB: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 50(2) 416–433

Han, A, Laurian, L. and Dewald, J., 2021. Plans Versus Political Priorities Lessons From Municipal Election Candidates' Social Media Communications. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 87 (2) 211- 227.

Lucie Laurian

Dr. Lucie Laurian is the Chair of the Urban and Regional Planning Department in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Her research focuses on environmental planning topics, including environmental justice, local decision-making processes impacting the implementation of sustainability plans and practices --mainly with regards to toxic sites and urban forestry, and the role of social institutions for local community resilience, most recently the role of public libraries. Her scholarship has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the New Zealand Foundation for Science, Research and Technology, and most recently by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.