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About e-Planning

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to connect, and joint the discussion with Pedro (Ferraz de Abreu) and folks who are present, about e-Planning.

Actually it goes from quite some time ago. I remember discussions in the '90 around MIT when we were still trying to figure out and experiment with GIS computer technology and I am pleased to see the progresses with the e-planning efforts' in Portugal; where this explicit effort to connect interdisciplinary thoughts, across different schools, show that the "elephant" can be explored; and prevents that the idea that constituted e-Planning does not become too narrow.

I think it makes sense to spend a few moments reflecting on some of the issues with computing and analytic use of technology in Planning, to see where we come from and where it may takes us, hopefully to connect a bit with the kinds of projects and discussions that we have today.

We focused on GIS and digital government ideas that computer based analysis and modeling is at the core of planning decisions, and the things planners worked on. The idea of what difference computing is making to urban planning, regional planning, is frequently quite limited. Many thought - it is a source of information, it is improving the productivity of individuals, and little else. But there is a change in the way we view information as impacting the process of deciding how to improve the metropolitan area, or who should have a voice, regarding databases about living conditions, sustainability, regarding how introduce the sustainability in the future, etc.

And I think that's a common issue, because for a couple of decades, the public and private sector have invested in maps, and in the dataset, the collectivity of the information that is needed to do urban planning; so it is really now the time we can begin to think about e-Planning.

To think that e-Planning is more than digital maps, it's really beginning to enable the discussion of the work flow, and it becomes clear as well that it is intelligent for the business' to borrow, from the management organ, what we can think about the data regarding the future, in a little bit different way. Because we can now count on how much richer

information and capacity to communicate we have, through information technology. How much it reached several issues and possibilities, regarding who should be doing what to make the world better.

I think the idea of how using computing in planning changes the set-up, is relevant. How we institutionalize the way, and which, knowledge about who's doing what activities in the city, and what options exist for the future, and who has to be at the table of the discussion. It is not an easy question.

I think it is an exciting time to try to engage people who come from different areas of expertise, in the discussion of what form of public debate should be facilitated, regarding the way we get to our future with the assistance of information and the tools to manipulate it. Without this idea that if we have enough time and money, we can make the best of all plans, we would have a change of notion of what do constitute public participation. So, as a result,

I think is a kind of exciting time to think about which way and which information technology can enable people to cross disciplines, to have a richer and deeper discussion about the ways to plan the future. And the institutions that can facilitate that; in a way that addresses some of the never-ending problems. So planning issues where there is this kind of problem, when you laid out the social choices about what is best, you need to do more than the obvious. Where there are a lot of the issues, you need to identify which one is framing the dialogue about what the possibilities are.

Let me just give one example. I am here in Singapore now and I am working on the future mobility project and I am one of the few people from urban planning background with as well a computer background. There are several others engineers of technology and computer science, and it's easy to sort out a frame to the question about future urban mobility.

In a place like Singapore, they invest in infrastructure, they govern the congestion crisis and public transport system, but they still have a growing number of cars, they still have the lock of the congestion. It feels very developed, the government dictating the land use and the first four thousand housing units, because 60% of the people live in public housing, so they control a lot the development pattern in a system of density providing the infrastructure. Well, what can they do with the next couple of decades?

When you look at the land-use planning models, you can see a lot of ways in which to improve urban mobility -- that's the name of the project: future mobility. Everybody wants more mobility. When you think about it a little bit, what happens when you have more mobility? You move around more. And if you move around more, it may be not quite sustainable, so should it be a surprise that people move further out when you improve the transportation infrastructure? What kind of growth to control? More freedom of choice? And how to improve mobility, without digging a hole from the sustainability point of view?

Now you have a lot of data through which you can observe what kind of choice people made, what's happening when you have many subway lines, etc. but it still is a very complex picture to figure out how to improve mobility. So, e-Planning is an improved

approach to these issues, we can't ignore all the data we have nowadays, we have to process them, observing them from a more complex point of view and dealing with that in a more realistic way.

Realistic. means we need to look at these complex problems with a larger set of bodies of knowledge than the traditional planning specialist; we need in depth understanding of "classical" planning knowledge, but also in-depth understanding of what technology can and can't do, and what data we can gather and how to harvest, filter and digest it; we need to know how to use such wealth of data to address the many dimensions of the problem. We need e-Planning.

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More information and multimedia documentation:

www.e-planning.org/jornadas11video.html

www.e-planning.org/jornadas11.html