

# Conference Report

## The 5th and 6th International Conferences on Urban e-Planning in 2021 and 2022

Carlos Nunes Silva, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

The Annual Conference of the *International Journal of E-Planning Research* (IJEPR) provides every year a multi and interdisciplinary global forum for the critical discussion of new perspectives, approaches, methods, and tools in the field of Urban e-Planning, and explores how the current digital revolution in this field can serve the common good. After a successful series of four conferences, held from 2016 to 2019, the 5th Conference, planned for 6-7 April 2020, had to be postponed, first to June and later to September of that year, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and finally cancelled and postponed to 2021, being held for the first time in digital / online mode on 7-10 September 2021. The constraints on international travel and the sanitary restrictions within the University of Lisbon, which still persisted in early 2022, led to the organization of the 6th edition of the Urban e-Planning Conference also on digital format, on 7-12 April 2022. The online mode that the organization was forced to adopt in these two meetings, given the pandemic circumstances, allowed the participation of more colleagues, some of whom would have not been able to attend, and at the same time reduced the ecological footprint of the IJEPR Annual Conference. This together with the fact that participation in both conferences were free of charge turned the two meetings more inclusive, two dimensions we ought to consider in the organization of future conferences of the *International Journal of E-Planning Research*.

The 5th and 6th conferences were held online, from the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, in the University of Lisbon, Portugal, on 7-10 September 2021 and on 7-12 April 2022, respectively. They attracted more participants and papers and both had almost the double of the sessions, compared to the four conferences held before the pandemic. In 2021 and 2022 more papers were submitted and presented than in any of the previous four conferences: 82 papers in the 6th conference and a little over one hundred in the 5th conference. The rate of acceptance after peer-review was around 70%, a little over that of previous conferences. The two conferences had 160 and 177 delegates, from 42 countries, in 2021, and 37 in 2022, from Europe, Africa, North and South America, Asia, and Oceania. These delegates and co-authors came from different academic and scientific backgrounds - Geography, Planning, Architecture, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Information Sciences - comprising scholars, researchers, students, planners, and other professionals. Also important to note is the number of the papers co-authored by PhD students and the fact that both conferences were once again gender balanced.

The two conferences explored and discussed, as the previous four in the series did, the most recent developments, emerging issues, and future challenges in the field of urban e-planning. In both were discussed problems, challenges and opportunities associated with the increasingly widespread use

of innovative Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in urban planning, a discussion centred on the growing number of digital innovations and its impacts in urban development, in the city form, and in urban public services. Participants also explored the numerous opportunities and challenges for urban and regional planners around the world created by the ongoing groundbreaking and innovative digital transition, in particular those related to the pandemic and post-pandemic city, to climate change, to the energy transition, among other aspects.

The program of the 5th Conference was organized into three tracks, divided into 24 Sessions, in addition to the Opening and Closing sessions: Governance and Planning of Smart Cities (14 sessions); Citizens e-Participation in Urban Planning / Urban Governance (6 sessions); Covid-19 Pandemic: City and Urban e-Planning (4 sessions), while that of the 6th Conference comprised four tracks, divided into 22 sessions, besides the Opening and Closing sessions: Governance and Planning of Smart Cities (with 12 sessions); Urban E-Planning and Climate Emergency (with 3 sessions); Urban E-Planning and the Covid-19 Pandemic (2 sessions); Citizens E-Participation in Urban Governance (5 sessions).

Given the extreme circumstances associated with the pandemic, and its likely impacts on urban e-planning, the analysis and discussion of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on 'Urban Governance', in particular on 'Urban e-Planning' is certainly one of the main contributions of these IJEPR Conferences. The Conferences discussed the actions taken towards the Covid-19 pandemic, its outcomes and impacts, as well as lessons for the future. The Conference thus contributed to advance our knowledge about the new modes of Urban e-Governance, in particular those that seem to be emerging or will emerge as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, and its social, cultural, political, economic and environmental consequences.

But besides this timely topic, the two conferences dealt with two other key issues, one related to the planning and governance of smart cities and the other to citizen e-participation, both central in the previous four conferences. More explicit this time was the inclusion of a specific track on the response of urban e-planning to the challenges of climate emergency. Some papers crossed more than one theme or track.

For example, on the track on 'Smart Cities' papers addressed issues such as the digitalization of the planning culture, local governance platforms, virtual 3D city models, Big Data, spatial justice, ethical issues, PGIS, and case studies in several cities and countries. On 'Citizen e-Participation', half century after the publication of Sherry Arnstein landmark paper on the ladder of citizen participation, both conferences continued to present useful insights on numerous highly innovative cases of citizen engagement in the urban planning process through the extensive use of digital tools: co-creation planning initiatives, co-design geospatial tools, co-planning, crowdsourced open data, participatory budgeting, web-based spatial tools, citizen science tools, serious games, augmented reality, besides other issues. In the case of climate emergency papers focused, among other issues, on climate data for urban e-planning, on the challenges confronting urban e-planning, associated with the energy transition, and examples of a diversity of possible planning actions within climate adaptation policies.

In all sessions of these two conferences, the debate, led by the respective session chair, was initiated by discussants, followed then by the discussion with other participants, which allowed a fruitful exchange of viewpoints among participants, as in the previous four conferences, despite the virtual setting, which at least in the first of these two conferences was still a relatively new environment for some participants.

In sum, the overall quality of the papers presented, and the animated discussions, despite the lack of physical contact, mean that once again the annual conference of the IJEPR achieved the stated goals. Most of the papers challenged, from different perspectives, well established ideas about smart cities, citizen engagement in urban e-planning, climate action by planning authorities and the impact of and the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. New approaches, methods and tools have been presented and examined from different angles and with a critical lens, as in the previous four conferences. Papers presented in the 2021 and 2022 Conferences, did in fact highlighted advantages of the new digital

technologies but at the same time called the attention to the need to articulate technology with face-to-face contacts in the different stages of the planning process, as previous conferences also did.

The two conferences were again an opportunity for informal networking, despite the virtual setting in which they took place. The UEPNET - Urban e-Planning Research Network (<https://sites.google.com/site/uepnet/home>), closely associated with the IJEPR Conferences, will continue its role in the diffusion of information on Urban e-Planning. Both conferences were endorsed by ISOCARP and by the IGU Commission on Geography of Governance.

Additional information on the 5th and 6th IJEPR Conferences, the full programs, abstracts, oral presentations, opening and closing sessions, among other aspects, are available in the websites of these conferences (5th: <https://sites.google.com/view/uep2020-conference/home>; 6th: <https://sites.google.com/view/uep2022conference/home>).

A word of appreciation is due to all those engaged in the organization of the 5th and 6th IJEPR Urban e-Planning Conferences, in 2021 and 2022: authors of the papers presented; members of the conference scientific committee; session chairs and discussants; and the hosting institution - the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal.

The IJEPR will continue engaged in the organization of an annual international conference on Urban e-Planning. In 2023, the 7th IJEPR Annual Conference on Urban e-Planning (<https://sites.google.com/view/uep2023conference/home>), organized in collaboration with the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal, will be held fully online, free of charge, and will be focused on giving continuity to the exploration of new perspectives, approaches, methods, and tools in this fast moving and increasingly complex field of Urban e-Planning.