

Editorial

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It is becoming increasingly evident that planners and urban designers ought to think creatively and critically in order to come to grips with the barrage of unfortunate problems besetting twenty-first century cities from the climate change and safety issues to hacking government databases and stealing sensitive information from people's social media accounts, and from creating more pedestrian-friendly and energy-efficient cities to engaging the public in local politics. The onslaught of new problems demands new research methods that enable planners and policy-makers to catch up.

The current issue of UDI has compiled five articles that address different planning and urban design issues with distinctive research methods. Planning is embracing a burst of user-generated content in social media platforms as web 2.0 technologies (i.e., Twitter and Facebook), and as part of a broader movement in diverse applications and modeling of big data analytics from business enterprises and engineering to social sciences and political science. Researchers find similarities between using social media data and grounded theory for observing social and behavioral patterns. To avoid possible biases in data collection, scholars are finding social media data less biased in detecting larger behavioral and social patterns in public spaces, as they are easy to collect and allegedly less costly.

Hashtags identify tweets on common themes that reveal behavioral trends on popular topics. Using the Highline as a case study, Jin Kim et al. analyze twitter data and carry out content analysis (word frequency), network analysis

(scattered and diverse group of users mentioning High Line, New York in their tweets), and spatial sentiment GIS-based association analysis. This type of research certainly contributes to the more traditional methods of analyzing public sentiments toward the use of public space in their everyday lived experience.

As in the previous paper, Mahmoudi Farahani, et al., use real-time data on activities and behaviors at the neighborhood level in Geelong, Australia. Focusing on diversity of uses and users, these authors collect and analyze data from three streets and identify three activity zones that form vital areas for clusters of public activities and uses. These clusters, in turn, help identify the degrees of characters of publicness in those suburban settings (Belle Vue Avenue, Parkington Street and Separation Street). Activity zones define the diversity of uses and users and street character in different settings.

The third paper proposes a new research method in a case study in India. Planning is complex and “wicked” (Rittel and Webber 1973) by nature. Eshkol and Eshkol explore a participatory method that they call “emergent planning” in Auroville, India. This method involves three interrelated and sequential stages of engagement and sharing knowledge where diverse groups of planners, municipal clerks, company managers, and local craftsmen form sectors that represent and emulate urban functions in its entirety. Five-to-eight individuals and a facilitator represented each sector. Highlighting what works or does not work constituted the change within each sector. Constructing critical engagements among all the involved sectors helped to initiate and maintain productive dialog among all stakeholders. Through this critical planning, the authors observed a productive, intersectoral dynamic and self-appraising mechanism of planning and engagement.

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This method may, according to the authors, hold merit for other social and cultural contexts.

The next article presents yet another way of engaging planners and designers and stakeholders in the microclimate assessment method for urban design. In this method, designers and stakeholders communicate through microclimate maps that integrate “comfort concerns into the design process” in Sweden. Ebrahimabadi, et al., do this in two stages. Assessing the wind comfort for the whole year occurs in the first stage, whereas in the second stage, they add the solar access into the wind conditions. The analytical maps provide evidence for a year-round microclimate assessment study for urban designers by showcasing the solar and wind conditions in the selected urban area. The utility of these supplemental maps in making urban design decisions would help policymakers and stakeholders to allocate local physical resources more efficiently—especially when it comes to creating more walkable environments for the residents during favorable seasons. The decisions would help urban designers to exert more control

during the earlier stages of the design process by taking into account variables such as building mass, density, street furniture, and landscaping.

In the fifth paper, Gunay et al. examined the impacts of four criteria including distance as the crow flies, average speed, alternative routes, and angular deflection to rationalize urban road networks. Comprehensive transportation networks method can help to rank and prioritize the cities within a country or a larger state or region in terms of their infrastructure quality. This method can help the policy and decision-makers to allocate resources more efficiently and effectively and more evenly, especially in cases where resources are scarce and limited.

Reference

Rittel, H.W., and M.M. Webber. 1973. Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences* 4 (2): 155–169.

