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Making Great Communities Happen

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CROWDSOURCING URBAN FORM IN MOSCOW

David Bollier, Commons Strategies Group

Can participation in urban development be open to all citizens online? Andrei Goncharov has devised a model for how this could work. As a student at the new Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design, Goncharov developed a game prototype called “Crowdsourced Moscow,” which envisions a compelling approach to technology-enabled urban governance.

The game allows users to propose development projects, receive notifications of proposed projects, vote on the proposals of others, delegate votes to trusted leaders and participate in budgeting. It collects and displays real-time data so that participants can make informed decisions. It offers a way for anyone to take part in co-creating the city. Although the game is not yet “playable,” the concept is designed to spark dialogue about using technology to engender more direct democratic participation in city planning.

Goncharov produced a video that explains the game and profiles sample participants, including developers, planners, citizens, artists and government officials. It also simulates potential scenarios that could take place if the game were used for participatory planning. The video can be viewed on the game’s Facebook page, which presents the game as a vehicle for improving communication between stakeholders in the development of public space.

Moscow is perhaps the best and worst place to apply Goncharov’s idea. After the past two decades of rapid, authoritarian, corrupt, massive, and awkward urban development, there is an undeniable need for change. At the same time, the vast majority of citizens have no way of influencing planning decisions. Thus, while the idea is very much needed and desired, the likelihood that the current government will yield decision-making power to all citizens is practically nonexistent.

Despite the challenges to realization, “Crowdsourced Moscow” resonates with local viewers, generating a promising dialog and expanding what is considered possible. It reflects a substantive understanding of technology, human needs, and the critical relationship between the two. This understanding is rooted in Goncharov’s research process, which included a diverse review of literature — on gaming, design activism, networked cities, public space, democracy and civic engagement — along with

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Harsh Prakash
Senior GIS Manager
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**Chair, APA Technology
Division**

2011 was a good year for our division:

In the summer, our division led the “Options for Division Webinars” report for the APA Divisions Council’s Education Committee. This report provided a description of existing external and in-house services available to divisions for hosting and broadcasting webcasts to their members and other interested professionals, and specifically looked at the external Planning Webcast series. In addition, it included an analysis of options for expanding these services. The report was produced in response to a request from the Divisions Council.

In the fall, we presented that report at the Divisions Council Leadership Meetings in Washington DC. Refer to page 7 for our recommendations on revenue and co-ownership, or www.gisblog.org/options-for-division-webinars for the full report.

In the winter, we submitted our “Annual Performance” report. Our major accomplishments included creating and nurturing social media channels for membership outreach, and successfully representing the division at the 2011 National Conference. I invite all of you to join us on Twitter (@APA_Technology) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/pages/

APA-Technology/218923968143539) - We are already reaching about 29% of our membership total via these channels.

Please refer to page 8 for a summary of our major accomplishments.

In view of these initiatives, I am also happy to announce that we have filled nominations for the following new Sections Chair positions:

Corey Proctor (incoming GIS Chair): Responsible for spreading awareness about the application of GIS and mashups.

Ayanthi Gunawardana (incoming Social Networking & New Technology Chair): Responsible for spreading awareness about the application of participatory and handheld technologies.

We are working on new initiatives for 2012. I look forward to discussing them with you in Los Angeles at the 2012 National Conference. In the meantime, you can contact me directly at harsh@gisblog.org or Twitter (@gisblog.) Again, I look forward to working with you for our members’ professional development.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Transportation Camp: DC
January 21, 2012
Washington, DC
www.transportationcamp.org

Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting
January 22-26, 2012
Washington, DC
www.trb.org/AnnualMeeting2012/AnnualMeeting2012.aspx

New Partners for Smart Growth and Livable Communities: Building Safe, Healthy and Livable Communities
February 2-4, 2012
San Diego, CA
www.newpartners.org

Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute Conference
March 1-2, 2012
Denver, CO
www.law.du.edu/index.php/rmlui

American Planning Association National Conference
April 14-17, 2012
Los Angeles, CA
www.planning.org/conference

Where Conference
April 2-4, 2012
San Francisco, CA
www.whereconf.com

Real CORP 2012: Re-Mixing the City
May 14-16, 2012
Schwechat, Austria
www.corp.at

American Institute of Architects 2012 National Convention
May 17-19, 2012
Washington, DC
www.aia.org/conferences

DEVELOPING DIGITAL COMMONS FOR CITIES

David Bollier, Commons Strategies Group

There is a little-known struggle going on right now over how a new series of “top level domains” (TLDs) on the Internet shall be used by cities of the world. TLDs are the suffixes at the end of Web addresses, such as .com, .org and .edu. The international body that oversees TLDs is expected to announce a new series of TLDs in 2012 that would give cities their own TLDs (e.g. .nyc or .paris). The new TLDs could make it easier for people in the same metropolitan areas to find each other and interconnect on the Internet and in physical spaces.

The question is, who shall have authority to manage the city-based TLDs, and under what terms? Very few people understand that the anticipated city TLDs represent a world-changing urban infrastructure that could well be squandered through short-sighted privatization. For example, New York City’s IT department has control over the TLDs, and they are currently planning to sell them off. So, for example, the address www.restaurants.nyc or www.bronx.nyc could be privately owned by the highest bidder.

Imagine if these TLDs were used to promote the economic, social, or cultural life of a city, and were treated as critical infrastructure of the

same order as roads and bridges. For example, what if neighborhoods or regions of a city could have their own name connected with the TLD, as in Brooklyn.nyc? That website, operated as a commons, could be a portal into the businesses, civic spaces, and resources of that neighborhood. The website www.brooklynlibraries.nyc could give you a listing of all of the libraries in Brooklyn, and www.brooklynrestaurants.nyc could give you a list of all restaurants, without having to use Google and getting 50 million answers.

In essence, localities could claim their identities on the Internet, which would have enormous ramifications for the governance of real spaces in neighborhoods and cities. Fortunately, we have a pioneer to emulate in this regard – the City of Linz, Austria, which has long been at the forefront of civic-minded uses of the Internet and digital technologies. It pioneered free wifi hotspots in dozens of places throughout the city and provides free email service to residents for non-commercial purposes.

A few months ago, Linz announced that the city would create a regional information commons. Linz Open Commons is an attempt to build a technological and policy infrastructure to enable

easy, cheap sharing of information – from government-wide uses of open source software to open street maps and open data platforms, to open educational resources and the use of Creative Commons licenses. The city sees this initiative not just as a civic initiative, but as an economic development initiative.

The commons doesn’t try to roll everything up into standardized, commoditized, fungible units that can then be centrally controlled – the way that global markets and governments aspire to do. Rather, the commons seeks to re-embed market activity within a social community so that resource management can become socially responsive and accountable. It is about making the management of ecological resources more sustainable.

All of these capacities of commons hold a great deal of promise in rejuvenating cities. But first we need to teach ourselves to see through the prism of the commons and imagine the possibilities.

The author can be reached at david@bollier.org.

RESOURCES

This article is an excerpt from a blog post available at:
www.bollier.org/re-imagining-urban-design-and-city-life



AGING AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES *an APA Division Initiative*

APA Divisions are helping to guide the critical conversation on creating communities that are livable for all, especially, for a rapidly aging America.

Please join us in this transformation by sharing best practices, success stories, tools and other resources available from your communities that can enrich the discussion and be highlighted on the Division Initiative web pages:

www.planning.org/leadership/divisions/initiatives/aging/index.htm

Email your contributions to: ramonamullahey@hawaiiantel.net

Thank you!

THE URBAN NETWORK ANALYSIS TOOLBOX FOR ARCGIS

Andres Sevtsuk, Singapore University of Technology & Design (SUTD)

The spatial analysis of city environments has come a long way in the past decade. The increasing availability of geographic data and advances in software and computation power have now made computerized spatial analysis tools commonplace in most planning firms and city governments. Despite these advances, however, the available software tends to describe urban environments in a simplified way, typically estimating spatial relationships between places and people in straight lines, not as one perceives them while walking or driving on an actual street network. Instead of following the labyrinth of roads, facades and public spaces, proximities and adjacencies on maps are often measured 'as a crow flies'. Doing otherwise involves a lot of work.

In September 2011, the City Form Lab at MIT and the Singapore University of Technology & Design (SUTD) released a new open-source software tool that can help change that. The Urban Network Analysis (UNA) toolbox, which works as a plug-in for ArcGIS and allows one to measure five types of accessibility metrics on spatial networks: Reach, Gravity, Betweenness, Closeness, and Straightness. Reach, for instance, can quantify how many residents, jobs, or merely square feet of built space one can access in a given walking radius from each building along the actual street network.

The tools incorporate three important features that make them particularly suited for spatial analysis on urban street networks. First, they can account for both geometry and topology in the input networks, using either metric distance (e.g. Miles) or topological distance (e.g. Turns) as impedance factors in the analysis. Second, unlike previous software tools that operate with two network elements (nodes and edges), the UNA tools include a third network element - buildings - which are used as the spatial units of analysis for all measures. Two neighboring buildings on the same street segments can therefore obtain different accessibility results. Third, the UNA tools optionally allow buildings

to be weighted according to their particular characteristics - more voluminous, more populated, or otherwise more important buildings can be specified to have a proportionately stronger effect on the analysis outcomes, yielding more accurate and reliable results to any of the specified measures.

The tools are aimed at planners, urban designers, architects, geographers, and spatial analysts who are interested in studying the spatial configurations of cities, and their related social, economic, and

environmental processes. The toolbox is built for easy scaling - it is equally suited for a small-scale and detailed network analysis of dense urban areas, as it is for sparser large-scale regional networks. It requires ArcGIS 10 software with an ArcGIS Network Analyst Extension and it can be freely downloaded from the City Form Lab website.

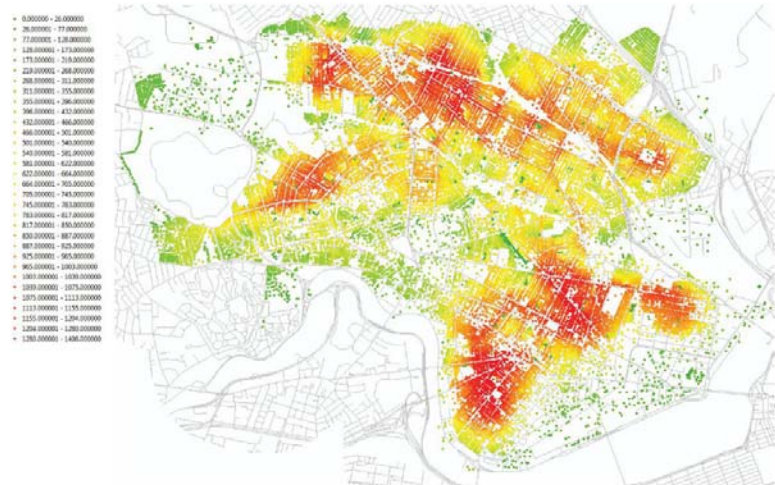
The author can be reached at asevtsuk@mit.edu.

RESOURCES

City Form Lab Urban Network Analysis
<http://cityform.mit.edu/projects/urban-network-analysis.html>

Compute Reach (optional)

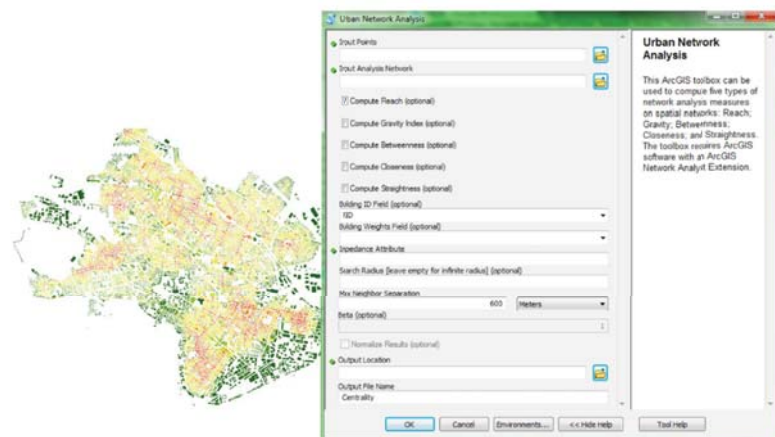
How many surrounding destinations | can be reached from building | within a given network radius?



The Urban Network Analysis Tool can determine the "Reach" of destinations from an origin based on a given network radius

A new toolbox for ArcGIS 10

Urban Network Analysis



The interface for the Urban Network Analysis Tool makes it easy to use with existing data

THE COMING URBAN DATA REVOLUTION

Rob Goodspeed, APA Technology Division Newsletter Editor

Historically, data sources for urban planning have remained relatively stable. Planners have relied on a collection of well-known government-produced datasets to do their work, including statistics and geographic layers from Federal, state, and local sources. Produced by regulatory processes or occasional surveys, the strengths and limitations of these sources are well known to planners and many citizens. However all this is beginning to change. Not only has the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey introduced a bewildering variety of data products, all with margins of error, three interrelated categories of new data are growing rapidly: crowdsourced, private, and "big" data.

First, crowdsourcing projects like Open Street Map and tools like Foursquare have created new spatial data. Although tapping these sources currently requires technical skills beyond most users' capabilities, it seems likely access will become easier. Although not created through systematic surveys, they can often fill in blanks with higher levels of detail on topics previously difficult to study.

Second, private consultants are peddling data to planners, often from proprietary sources and methods. ESRI's business and demographic data are notable examples. The latter is the result of projections from U.S. Census data that cannot be independently calculated. At the American Planning Association (APA) conference in Boston, the marketing firm Buxton advertised their services in the expo. The representative I spoke to admitted their products were similar to other marketing firms that stitch together public and private sources using proprietary

techniques for market analyses.

Finally, the much-discussed "big data" may finally be coming to planning. Big data refers to large datasets that usually describe people and places, and are generated from administrative systems, cell phone networks, or other sources. Often created or compiled by the private sector, these datasets require specialized software to analyze and visualize. Some scholars are confident this data will shed new light on existing problems. However, the data are also useful if your aspirations are more prosaic -- illustrating a trend or creating a thematic map.

As consumers of this new data, planners and other public-sector clients are in a position to set expectations for data providers, as well as shed new light on old problems with new sources of information. Three guidelines are below.

Demand transparent, replicable sources and methodologies. If the data will inform a public decision, even indirectly, the public interest demands it come from known sources and methods. Too many private data sources are rife with variables derived from "proprietary methodologies," which public clients can and should demand explanations of. All too often, what is hidden inside the black box is no better than a guess.

Use crowdsourced data thoughtfully. Although people may trust private data too much, the reverse is true for crowdsourced data. It can often be more accurate and detailed than the "official" sources. Therefore they should be used, but with a special effort to compare them to "known" sources and explain the variations and biases discovered. If no advantage is discovered

their use can be abandoned, but often these sources can be amazingly detailed and useful for planners.

Link "big data" sources with planning issues.

Too often data wonks are enthralled with the new sources of data, spending hours making pretty maps or visualizations that are interesting but ultimately irrelevant to substantive policy or planning questions. Although there is a place for a visual exploratory data analysis for complex data and good design to communicate clearly with stakeholders, planners can play a key roll in these discussions. Instead of dismissing these efforts, urban planners should engage with data analysts and designers, guiding them towards relevant questions and policy issues. The Columbia Spatial Information Design Lab's projects epitomize this approach, mining public data to tell policy-relevant stories about issues like prison spending or industrial zoning.

This article originally appeared on Planetizen at www.planetizen.com/node/51158

The author can be reached at rob.goodspeed@gmail.com.

RESOURCES

Buxton
www.buxtonco.com

Columbia Spatial Information Design Lab
spatialinformationdesignlab.org

ESRI Demographic Data
www.esri.com/data/esri_data/demographic.html

CROWDSOURCING URBAN FORM IN MOSCOW (CONTINUED)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

interviews, case studies and assessments of potential technologies.

After watching the video, it isn't difficult to imagine the game becoming a Facebook application, or combining with other participatory planning tools developed by OpenPlans, SeeClickFix or Urbanscale. Goncharov is currently working to realize the idea, and he encourages anyone interested in collaboration or more information to contact him at [goncharov@](mailto:goncharov@strelkainstitute.com)

strelkainstitute.com.

Peter Sigrist is a doctoral candidate in city and regional planning at Cornell University researching privatization and urban green space in Moscow. The author can be reached at pcs85@cornell.edu.

RESOURCES

Crowdsourced Moscow
www.facebook.com/crowdsourcedmoscow

REVIEW: VISIONING AND VISUALIZATION: PEOPLE, PIXELS AND PLANS

Karen Fung, University of British Columbia

Michael Kwartler and Gianni Longo. *Visioning and Visualization: People, Pixels and Plans*. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA, 2008. 94 pages. \$35.

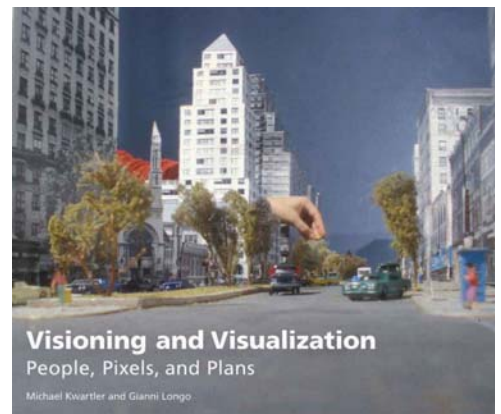
Regular readers of *Planning and Technology Today* will recognize Michael Kwartler and Gianni Longo's names from Anthony Flint's previous review of resources about new technologies for visualizing sustainable planning (April 2011). In this large-format and highly visual book, Kwartler and Longo make an effective case for the use of visualization technologies for engaging the public on planning issues, then provide a guided tour of the options and key questions to be asked for practitioners seeking to integrate visualization tools into a planning process. The book is divided into six parts that contextualize the use of visualization technologies for planning, alongside colorful examples of the tools in action.

The third chapter on Public Involvement Techniques in Planning is particularly valuable as a concise yet comprehensive review of what is possible in the design of public involvement processes. By presenting examples of tools through the frame of what the goals of the

process are — be it education, generation of ideas, conveying analysis or indicating preferences — the authors re-emphasize the importance of understanding the needs of the process over the glamour of the visualizations themselves.

The final section describes four cases of these tools being applied in a variety of contexts, such as a master plan, an economic revitalization process, a community development plan, and a Transportation Board vision process. Each of these case studies are structured to highlight how specific directions for the technology, such as what to show and how it should fit into the public process, flowed from overarching goals for engagement, as well as the potential pitfalls that come with technology and the resulting (sometimes harsh) lessons learned.

If one criticism can be made of *Visions and Visualizing*, it is the sometimes excessive presence of user interface screenshots. With their small text, they have the unpleasant side effect of dating the book fairly quickly and obfuscate rather than draw the reader's attention to the wide array of options available in customizing what is seen. This suggests that



future publications in this genre might benefit from what is more commonly seen in other technical book genres, where the printed book focuses on conceptual information and technical detail are provided in appendices or websites.

While the authors identify urban professionals, public sector leaders and the public as the audiences for this book, I would argue that this book can serve as a piece of context for those who come to the use of technology for planning with experience or expertise in visualization tools. As we can readily observe from the occasional online infographic run amok, visuals need to be wielded with a mindful awareness of their purpose and context.

The Technology Division is charting the use of new technologies for the American Planning Association.

Planners everywhere need to understand the use and planning implications of new systems: computer simulation, GIS, telecommunications, and computer-based information resources.

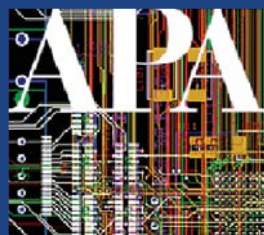
Planning & Technology Today is the Division's newsletter, bringing you current information that is useful for making decisions on how to use the new technologies.

If you are presently a member of APA, it costs only \$25 to join the Division; students \$10; non-members \$40.

To Join: Send your name, address, and payment to:

AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION
LOCK BOX 97774
CHICAGO IL , 60678

You may also join at
www.planning.org/joinapa



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: PLANNING AND TECHNOLOGY TODAY

The Technology Division newsletter includes feature length articles, as well as shorter "spotlights" on various technologies and tools of interest. Our regular one page spotlights will cover Public Participation, GIS, Online Tools, Visualization, and Scenario Planning.

We are always accepting submissions for our feature length articles on a rolling basis. For these articles, we are looking for case studies that demonstrate how planners and/or communities have used technology in planning.

What are the innovative tools and techniques applied; what worked well and what did not?

In particular we are soliciting articles and sidebars that focus on: Case studies directly from communities; Lessons learned (both positive and negative) regarding the use technology in public participation.

Please submit your ideas to:
Rob Goodspeed at:
rob.goodspeed@gmail.com.

OPTIONS FOR DIVISION WEBINARS

Harsh Prakash, APA Technology Division Chair

In Summer 2011, the Technology Division led the “Options for Division Webinars” report for the Divisions Council’s Education Committee. The report was presented at the 2011 Divisions Council Business Meeting in Washington DC.

This report provided a description of existing services, both external and in-house, available to APA divisions for hosting and broadcasting webcasts to their members and other interested professionals, and specifically looked at the external Planning Webcast series. In addition, it included an analysis of options for expanding these services. The report was produced in response to a request from the APA Divisions Council (DC).

Recommendations:

DC should seek ways to complement the external Planning Webcast series.

Revenue

1. While the external webcast series offers advanced and allied webcasts, the bulk of its offerings cover introductory topics that attract a large participation. By achieving the necessary critical mass of participants, it becomes feasible to keep the registration free while keeping fees low and benefits high. Thus, DC should encourage a limited revenue model of paid webcasts only for advanced topics that typically attract senior planning professionals within the external webcast series. For this purpose, DC should consider a separate market survey on topics and their associated price-points. Also, towards such a limited revenue model, DC has proposed simple calculations for prospective webcasts. It is estimated that after offsetting for the decrease in participation as a result of a paid model, smaller divisions could likely make yearly profits of a couple of thousand dollars.

2. It is estimated that any loss in participation resulting from a paid model could partially or completely be offset by some increase in participation resulting from APA’s marketing and outreach. Thus, DC should consider leveraging APA’s organizational size, 501(c)(3) status and mailing lists to help market a paid model within the external webcast series while helping limit operating costs.

3. Alternatively, DC should consider proposing a “public broadcasting” model to generate revenue. Under this model, divisions would not directly charge fees for their webcasts. However, they would actively encourage their participants to pay for the service. This is similar to the business model used by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) to offset some of the costs of its programming.

Co-ownership of the Planning Webcast series

Currently, APA does not have any significant co-ownership of the external webcast series. Increase in its co-ownership would likely enhance acceptability and quality of this series, thus benefitting the participants. Thus, APA should consider collaboration with the instructors and co-sponsors to gradually assume a mutually acceptable level of co-ownership.

Phase I

DC should encourage all participating divisions to link to their webcasts from their home pages on www.planning.org.

Phase II

DC should encourage all participating divisions increase their visibility. Towards this, DC should actively encourage participants to join its ranks, e.g. by adding links for joining divisions to registration emails sent to the participants of the external Planning Webcast series.

Phase III

It is the committee’s understanding that APA attempted adding logos to the landing page (www.utah-apa.org/webcasts). APA should reconsider this identity branding via targeted banner advertisements with more flexible logo requirements. Additionally, APA should consider promoting the webcasts on www.planning.org/webcasts via mirroring etc. Note that this would require APA to be prompt in updating its website with regards to webcast schedules.

Since it is currently not feasible to have APA run the registration instead of GoToMeeting’s integrated system without introducing unpredictability and high fees, APA should consider copying the registration data for marketing purposes- including ratings, topics, speakers and traffic, to www.planning.org.

More information is available at www.gisblog.org/options-for-division-webinars

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WEBINAR

What does open government and social media mean for urban planners?

Crystal Wilson, PlaceVision and APA Technology Division

<http://media.planning.org/stream/SocialMedia/SocialMedia/SocialMedia.html>

What does open government mean for urban planners?



SUMMARY OF MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS - FY 2011

We repeated successful activities from previous years, namely:

- Conducted the Division Business meeting at the 2011 National Conference to interact with our membership.
- Participated in the Divisions Council booth at the 2011 National Conference to promote division activities and recruit new members.
- Solicited papers and selected the winner as part of our “Best Student Paper on Technology and Planning” competition (Category 4).
- Sought nominations for our “Outstanding Use of Technology in Planning” awards.
- Published 3 electronic newsletter editions and 1 hardcopy newsletter edition, which was distributed at the 2011 National Conference.
- Applied for Planning Webcast series and co-presented session for APA.

We also initiated activities, namely:

- Led “Options for Division Webinars” report for the Divisions Council. This report was presented at the 2011 Divisions Council Business Meeting in Washington DC.
- Created social media channels for membership outreach.
- Redesigned our newsletter (group) blog at <http://planningtech-today.org/>.
- Redesigned our newsletter PDF.
- Sought nominations for Sections Chair positions to increase our Leadership Committee.