Guest Editorial

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Biographical notes: Anastasia Stratigea, Professor, Dipl. Eng., PhD in Spatial Planning and Policy, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, School of Rural and Surveying Engineering, National Technical University of Athens. She has participated in a number of National and EU Projects. She is member of scientific national and international associations and networks; reviewer in international journals and conferences; and member of scientific committees of international/national conferences. She has published her work in book chapters, international journals and conference proceedings. Her main research interests are spatial planning and policy, integrated urban/regional planning and development, participatory planning, e-planning/e-participation, smart cities and citizens' engagement.

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In the current, globally witnessed, escalating *urbanisation wave*, the issue of strengthening capacity of urban systems and their constituents for effectively tackling contemporary challenges and risks in a rapidly evolving, complex and uncertain global environment; and creating value for local communities in a sustainable and inclusive

way, brings to the forefront the concept of smart governance, i.e., a noticeable global trend, addressing the need for cooperation among different actors and levels of government in order complex problems of urban areas to be properly addressed and solved.

Cities nowadays are in front of a variety of challenges and risks that are mostly case-specific. Nevertheless, they share an overriding planning goal, i.e., the struggle for reaching *urban sustainability objectives*, implying the pursuit of prosperity and innovation; the establishment of conditions for social cohesion, inclusion, health and safety for their communities; the adaptation to climate change risks; etc. The scene, within which sustainability objectives in urban settlements have to be reached, is marked by a range of current transitions, namely:

- The evolving *collaborative, decentralised and smarter governmental structures* that are largely grounded on institutional rearrangements and political will/vision, establishing wider partnerships and coalitions for better grasping risks and policy options ahead.
- The revolutionary *technological developments* permeating all different dimensions of urban life/management and supporting the establishment of effective means for strengthening interaction among urban actors; gathering of intelligence and new ideas emerging from synergies' creation among them; broadening (e-)participation potential; etc.
- The changing *societal environment*, where issues like: empowerment and motivation to engage and participate in more substantive ways in decision-making processes; increase of awareness and sharing of responsibility; shift in power structures; consensus building etc., become key aspects of policy concern and planning practice, rendering *citizens and communities' engagement* as a no longer optional choice, but an imperative one.
- *Economic recession*, where scarcity of financial resources introduces the need to explore new, innovative and more resource-efficient urban problem-solving ways for producing wealth and services for citizens.

Within such a scene, management of complex urban problems in the 'Urban Age' is a subject of *collaborative endeavours*, seeking to pool knowledge and resources from the variety of urban actors, with the support of technological advances and ICT developments; and use them for urban problem-solving purposes in a democratic society.

Along these lines, this special issue incorporates five papers that were presented in the *2nd Euro-Mediterranean Conference on 'Smart, Inclusive and Resilient Small and Medium-sized Cities and Island Communities in the Mediterranean: Exploring Current Research Paths and Experience-based Evidence'*, held in Heraklion-Crete, September 28–29, 2017. These papers elaborate, one way or another, on issues of participatory urban governance as well as citizens' participation and empowerment, by focusing on tools, approaches, as well as new concepts emerging from contemporary smart urban environments, such as gamification, 2.0 citizenships etc., which are perceived of great value in implementing collaborative urban planning endeavours.

More specifically, in the first paper Angelidou and Psaltoglou, in their work on 'Social innovation, games and urban planning: an analysis of current approaches',

explore the relationship between social innovation and urban planning; and analyse how gaming approaches can support a more collaborative and inclusive urban planning process. Building on literature review at the intersection of gaming and urban planning, the authors investigate how gaming approaches improve people's understanding with respect to urban planning aspects; and empower them, thus opening up new promising options for collaborative urban planning approaches.

Next comes Skelton et al., who, in their work on 'Citizen informatics: integrating urban data and design for future stakeholders', describe a range of existing software tools and prototypes for ICT-supported participatory urban design and planning as a subset of participatory governance; and outline key features of a future software architecture, capable of supporting urban planning and pre-design practices that are both more inclusive and more rigorously evidence-based than the current state of the art. Moreover, they propose a scenario in which existing tools and practices can be adapted to co-evolve with complementary developments in the realms of data literacy and collaborative design media, towards the evolution of expert public realms, i.e., societies whose lay citizens could be as expert and engaged in matters of design and governance of complex built environments as researchers and professional experts are today.

This is followed by the paper 'Experiencing the soundscape with mobile mixing tools and participatory methods' by Neuvonen, which aims at shedding light on urban space as a sonic surrounding and raise interest and participation, especially of young people, towards exploring this environment. The paper examines the issues of creating and experiencing soundscapes by means of a soundscape platform and a mobile soundscape workshop, experimenting on the use of mobile and participatory methods in order sound and sonic experiences in the urban context to be explored.

Next, follows the work of Murgante et al., entitled 'Innovation, technologies, participation: new paradigms towards a 2.0 citizenship'. This elaborates on the new citizenship perspective – 2.0 citizenship – rising in the information era; and the value of newly emerging interaction means (social networks and VGI) for gathering information on citizens' perception as to dimensions of urban space, in order more informed urban planning decisions to be made. As claimed by the authors, enrichment of these perspectives with traditional participatory and design approaches opens up opportunities for the development of effective, case-specific, more integrated, urban planning practices.

Last, but not least, comes the work by Krommyda et al. on 'Integrating offline and online participation tools for engaging citizens in public space management: application in the peripheral town of Karditsa-Greece'. This elaborates on the combination of traditional (offline) and web-based (online) participation tools for dealing with public space management. These tools are structured in a participatory framework, targeting inclusive, vision-driven, strategic public space management; and are implemented in a lagging behind, peripheral small town of the Greek territory for informing the development of a strategic plan for public space management in this specific urban context.