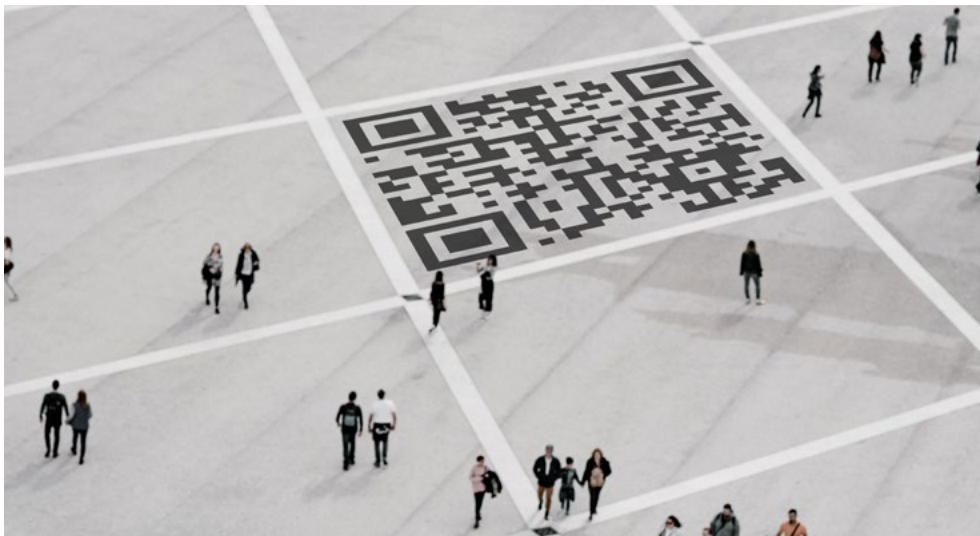# pnd 2/2021

Editorial

Martin Bangratz, Agnes Förster

A QR code superimposed on an image of a public square, symbolizing the various layers of urban space and technology. Source: Annie Spratt (modified from original), Unsplash.com.

pnd – rethinking planning once again places a spotlight on an important issue: digital transformation. For us, it was not so much about a fascination with technology or its supposed potential to optimize cities. Observing citizen-led projects such as a community asset map in Tottenham, London, we started paying attention to the way technology and data are actually applied by people in cities. So digital transformation has been occupying us and many others in city-related disciplines since long before the global pandemic. But these past years, marked by severe global challenges, did accelerate these transformation processes. They ultimately moved us to start the blog and podcast What/Next. *Digital citymakers* was the title of one of the core series, in which we interviewed actors who use digital technology to impact cities in some way. We continued to deepen this discourse at the virtual Pt.Seminar event in November 2020 by connecting more than 50 experts from around the world. This edition of pnd – rethinking planning represents another opportunity to reflect on contributions by a range of authors from academia and practice.

Digital transformation touches on all areas of life, but hardly anywhere is it discussed as much as in the context of cities and urban development. Amidst all the clamor about *Smart Cities* – for or against, hopeful or critical – there is still a perspective that is often overlooked. How does technology actually impact city dwellers' everyday lives? How is it

used to engage people in urban development from top-down, bottom-up or the collaborative middle-out? Do new forms of local democracy emerge that potentially empower communities, or are existing inequalities further entrenched? Evidence can be found that suggests either avenue is possible, some of which are presented in this edition: critical reflections on digital governance, surveillance and access to technology are juxtaposed with examples of co-creative projects and tools such as crowdsourcing platforms, makerthons and community mapping.

Whether we lean towards a critical or hopeful stance vis-à-vis these developments, planners would be well advised to keep an eye on the challenges and opportunities technology provides for making cities more sustainable and inclusive. The enduring global pandemic has accelerated many processes related to digital transformation and has made some of its effects more evident than ever before.

We are excited to share contributions by researchers and teams across a range of vocational and geographical backgrounds. We hope that you enjoy reading the articles and that they inspire you to reflect and to carry the conversation forward.

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