EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MULTIMEDIA TOOLS IN POST REPRESENTATIONAL COMMUNITY PLANNING

by Sandra Vigil Fonseca

School of Community and Regional Planning, The University of British Columbia
RE-IMAGINING WHALLEY: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MULTIMEDIA TOOLS IN POST REPRESENTATIONAL COMMUNITY PLANNING.

by

SANDRA VIGIL FONSECA
B.Sc., Universidad de la Habana, 1999

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We accept this project as conforming to the required standard

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Summary

Re-imagining Whalley is an academic inquiry as well as a storytelling map, a social media application hosting a series of collaborative short films reimagining.surrey.ca. It aspires to become an open platform for the exchange of stories about Whalley (a neighbourhood in North Surrey) and its people. This application will allow users to upload their own written comments, audio podcast, and videos about Whalley.

The participatory short films can be accessed through the dedicated website online reimagining.surrey.ca. These short films were produced throughout 2011 and 2012. Participants (storytellers) were given 35 mm cameras to photograph places of personal resonance to them. These photos together with personal interviews were edited into short videos that are available in Youtube and can be streamed from reimagining.surrey.ca.

The project was carried out in partnership with the City of Surrey Social Planning Department, the Web and New Media Team, and residents of Whalley.

As an exercise of academic inquiry Re-imagining Whalley explores the potential of communicative planning as an interactive and interpretative process for dealing with multiple systems of meanings about place. This project aims to escape the permanence of representation, the contingencies of time and space, and the politics of voice by creating an open medium (an interactive online platform) where potentially all users can produce new meanings. This kind of project could facilitate (post) representations of shifting realities and multiple positioning.

As a planning intervention, the purpose was to build on the feelings of community pride in Whalley, to portray a positive image that can attract residents to the new developments in the area, and to create a bottom-up communication channel between the City of Surrey and Whalley residents to facilitate participatory planning practices.
Credits

Storytellers:
Alana Barron
Bessi Bonar
Desiree Brett
Patrick Walsh

Alysen Cameron
Brenda Sayers
Ernie Cardinal
Roselin Coca Marin

Amos Kambere
David Sandler
Nina Somolenko
Travis Brownrigg

Original Music:
Bruce Drummond

Web and New Media Team:
David Peacock
Geoffrey Daniel

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Introduction

In 2011, while working as an intern with the City of Surrey Social Planning Department and as a student at The University of British Columbia’s Master of Arts in Planning program, I participated in various community events in Whalley, Surrey. Through this perspective, I witnessed community members expressing an eager interest in community art projects and in sharing stories of their neighbourhood. Spurring my own filmmaking passion, this interest in collective arts and storytelling inspired the conception of my Master’s project, Re-imagining Whalley.

This project is an academic inquiry as well as a collective art piece, a storytelling map, and a social media website reimagining.surrey.ca. It aspires to become an open platform for the exchange of stories about Whalley and its people.

The processes of filmmaking, and the interactive Internet application were designed as avenues for individuals to articulate their relationship with their physical and social environments. Articulating this relationship can become a vehicle for personal and community development (Binns, 2005).

The need for this kind of project in Whalley emerged from the recognition that there is stigma associated with the area. Until quite recently, it has seen high-risk lifestyles, open drug market scenes, and crime problems (Colebourn, 2007). Re-imagining Whalley’s process of storytelling is designed to reveal and disseminate the stories and meanings that community members produce and experience in their everyday life. Ultimately, this project aims to build on Whalley’s positive reputation and spread the residents’ buoyant associations to the place. Furthermore, these positive stories could be used in the future image promotion and marketing of Whalley as a thriving place to live.
The area is currently undergoing a deep physical transformation, and this is yet another reason for this project to be undertaken. The City of Surrey aims to develop a ‘downtown’ near the Skytrain and SFU campus vicinity and transform its suburban fabric into a dense urban core, a ‘transit village’ (Bula, 2008). Sadly, with regards to its physical environment, Whalley’s recent urban design efforts resulted in a landscape where ‘spaces’ and not ‘places’ were created (Natrosony & Alexander, 2005). The area is not pedestrian friendly, and at times, feels sterile, impersonal, and characterless (Natrosony & Alexander, 2005). More recently, the municipal government has focused on increasing the area’s livability, and building a vibrant and inclusive community (Surrey, n.d.). From my perspective, in order to turn an area into a livable, vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood, a transformation in the symbolic realm must also be realized. The symbolic connections that residents attach to the places where they live; and the community’s sense of pride are key elements in producing this vibrancy and livability. Further, because these connections are shared amongst different individuals, they can act as a ‘glue’ that brings people together within a place of inclusivity. Re-imagining Whalley is geared towards this kind of symbolic transformation.

In Whalley’s rapidly changing context, the City of Surrey’s Planning Department recognizes the importance of engaging community members through participative planning processes. With this participatory approach, communicative tools become planning tools. Thus, stories, films, social media, and community-originated maps have gained relevance as communicative mechanisms to capture the way individuals experience urban life (Sandercock & Atilli, 2010a). Participatory planning processes could help generate a spirit of cooperation, ownership and responsibility that makes planning and design more efficient and effective (Hamdi, 2010). Thus, Re-imagining Whalley was also conceived both as a prelude, and as a continued methodology, for the planning and future interventions within Whalley.

Overall, this project proposes that a rich cultural diversity and proud sense of identity of a community can be boosted for social development, planning, and place-making purposes. Following this idea, Re-imagining Whalley was undertaken with four main objectives: (1) to satisfy the requirements of the Professional Project for the Master of Arts in Planning of the University of British Columbia’s School of Community and Regional Planning, (2) to build on the feelings of community pride in Whalley, (3) to portray a positive image that can attract residents to the new developments in the area, and (4) to create a bottom-up communication channel between the City of Surrey and Whalley residents to facilitate participatory planning practices.
This report forms the written component of *Re-imagining Whalley*. It begins with an overview of Whalley to familiarize with the conditions and context this project is engaging with. It is then followed with a section outlining the theoretical roots of the project in order to elucidate a paradigm to frame the project’s assumptions and findings. This is followed by a methodology section which specifically examines the role of multimedia as a planning tool. The report ends with a reflection on the process and suggests ways in which this project may continue.
Whalley Community Profile

Whalley founding communities

Whalley is one of Surrey’s oldest neighbourhoods, home to First Nations communities for countless generations, and immigrants from all over the world.

The area is within the traditional territory of four of the largest First Nations groups in Metro Vancouver: Katzie, Musqueam, and Tsawwassen, and the Kwantlen Nation. Whalley is also home to many urban aboriginals from other Nations. Self-identified aboriginals constitute 2.7% of the population in Whalley, and the majority of them live in City Centre (Surrey, n.d.).

In the late 19th century, immigrants from Europe and Asia settled in Whalley as it developed in tandem to the growing number of transportation routes, farms, and sawmills. Whalley contains places of historical significance for the Ukrainian, Japanese, and Chinese communities among others.

Whalley’s people and their homes:

Whalley is a unique and thriving community due in part to its incredibly young population. The proportion of children and youth in Whalley (27%) is larger than the Metro Vancouver average (21.6%) (Surrey, n.d.). There are also fewer seniors (9.8%) (Surrey, n.d.) in Whalley than in Metro Vancouver (13.5%) (Surrey, n.d.).
A mix of ethnicities makes Whalley a multicultural hub. The community is home to a high proportion of immigrants. Of Whalley’s population, 52% were born outside of Canada. Most of this diversity comes from South Asia, Europe, and Southeast Asia. The most commonly spoken foreign language is Punjabi with 19,600 speakers (Surrey, n.d.).

With regards to housing, Whalley contains the biggest rental housing stock in Surrey; this translates to 10,485 of the 32,485 rental units that exist in Surrey (Surrey, n.d.).

Whalley is also the most densely populated community in Surrey. Its housing form consists of apartment buildings, townhouses, and single detached houses, but albeit a much smaller number than in the rest of Surrey. With this high concentration of residents, Whalley could provide exceptional opportunities for walking and cycling, and support a local economy with spaces for social interaction.

However, the community also faces many challenges. Whalley has a high percentage of low-income families (21%); this number is higher (27%) in the City Centre area of Whalley (Surrey, n.d.). By comparison, the proportion of low-income families in Metro Vancouver is 17.1%. In addition, the number of people with Bachelor degrees is significantly lower (11.4%) than in the rest of Metro Vancouver (24.6%) (Surrey, n.d.). Moreover, there are residents with high-risk lifestyles, drug addiction, and mental health problems. Complex issues regarding the open drug market, crime, and homelessness are being addressed collaboratively through different policies and programs (Surrey, n.d.).

**Whalley going forward:**

The City of Surrey plans to develop a ‘downtown’ in City Centre near the Skytrain and SFU campus to transform this area into a dense urban core, or ‘transit village’ (Surrey, n.d.). The municipality is focused on increasing the liveability of the area and building a vibrant and inclusive community. The construction of a new library, City Hall building, and a Performing Art Centre are examples of these efforts.

The social aspects of community development are being tackled through the Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents (Surrey, n.d.). This plan provides strategic direction on how to build the future of Surrey by focusing on five priorities: children and youth, community development and inclusion, homelessness and housing, substance abuse and addictions, and crime and public safety. With the implementation of all these initiatives and the City Centre Plan (Surrey, n.d.), Whalley aims to become a thriving, sustainable, and creative urban centre.
I recognize that theory does not rule the way practice is performed, as much as praxis does not directly determine theory, but they are essentially intertwined. I think of Re-imagining Whalley as an empiricist constructivist (Roffe, 2005 cited on Hillier, 2008) project. The empirical, in other words the act of doing, is crucial in the construction of theories and concepts, and vice versa. It is “a system of relays with ... a multiplicity of parts that are both theoretical and practical” (Foucault, 1977, cited on Hillier, 2007, p. 206). It is an exercise of what Sandercock and Attili call digital ethnography,

A qualitative inquiry using film and multimedia languages and informed by collaborative planning theory and situational ethics (Sandercock & Attili, 2010,

p. 25)

In the following section I present what I consider the most relevant theoretical discussions of the post positivist positions in which Re-imagining Whalley is immersed. Namely, concepts found within communicative planning, and concepts related to communications in the networked age.
Post-positivist epistemologies:

Those who have taken on the responsibilities of this craft (storytelling), and are committed to the numen behind the craft, are direct descendants of an immense and ancient community of holy people, troubadours, bards, griots, cantadoras, cantors, traveling poets, bums, hags, and crazy people (Clarissa Pinkola Estés)

Planning is concerned with crafting the path of future actions and the management of public affairs. Communicative planning is a relatively recent approach to planning found in academic and practice literature. It evolved from postmodern critiques of positivist and rational planning. Patsy Healey, building on John Friedmann, writes that modernist planning is related to concepts of democracy and progress, but is also explicitly based on scientific rationalist principles (Healey, 1992). The modernist idea of systematized reason applied to the management of public affairs was not only widely extended, but it was dominant (Foucault cited on Healey, 1992). Before the 70s, the privilege of systematized reason dominated most methodologies, institutions, and discourses in planning. It ruled out other ways of knowing and decision making in the management of public affairs.

Postmodern philosophers came to challenge this privilege of systematized reason in modernist thought. According to Beth M. Milroy the postmodern challenge to traditional planning functioned in a deconstructionist mode because it pointed at who was deriving power and benefiting from such positivist framework (1989). It deconstructed the power structure. It was also antifoundationalist in the sense that it established no universal truths. The deconstructionist approach was also non-dualistic and encouraged plurality and difference (Milroy, 1989).

The focus of planning has since shifted from positivist analysis to a concern with culture, community, and “placeness” (Healey, 1997). Healey notes that this approach steams from Habermas’ communicative rationality in that, it maintains that reasoning occurs through intersubjective communication (Healey, 1992). In other words, there is not a universal system of understanding through which knowledge can be produced, rather it is in the process of communication, in the interpersonal linguistic exchange, where knowledge becomes available to participants (Habermas cited on Healey, 1992). This is the empiricist constructivist position that Re-Imagining Whalley operates on.

A post-positivist approach to planning would be one that fosters communication, even in antagonistic forms. And if the ultimate purpose of planning is to act in matters of real life, which is often
messy, planning can be understood as finding a contingently acceptable agreement amongst a multitude of representations which can include antagonist political, social, and economic positions (Massey, 2005). Knowledge produced through a communicative planning process can guide the production of actions, which are also based on mutual understandings of (in) a specific place and time (Healey, 1992).

In her summary of this new planning direction, Healey explains that planning is an interactive and interpretative process that entails the use of more than one type of discourse and representational forms. In this sense, the planning process needs to be inventive and creative, and incorporate self-reflection. Participants from multiple communities with different systems of meanings come together in virtue of finding common understandings. However, it should be recognized that not everybody will understand or accept all meanings, and this is to be respected. The process of interaction is not just a way of coming to an agreement, but, when we try to listen and reconstruct others’ interest, we engage in a process of mutual learning by reconstructing our own biases and assumptions. And lastly, the incorporation of continued critique, self-reflection and interaction with others is formative because it can highlight the hegemonic forces at play that limits the proliferation of meanings, and move on to bring the best stories and metaphors forward. This communicative process has the potential to articulate differences rather than constructing a one-dimensional discourse (Healey, 1992).

Particularly relevant to Re-imagining Whalley is the representation of place. From my perspective, our understanding of place is populated with symbols and subjective associations. As Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau explain, the practice of everyday life, our daily happenings and urban rituals produce meanings, albeit unconscious and intangible (1977; 1980). Meanings become part of the collective imaginary in the significance of public spaces, common areas, and as a reflection of our neighbours’ rapport. It is in this interaction, in these common places that the image of an area, and the feelings of community, of belonging and attachment to place begin to emerge (Putnam, 2000). We live in “places of mind” where spatial qualities are related to the social, ecological and biological dimensions (Healey, 2004). The idea of place, placeness (Healey, 1997) is a social construct that emerges from the meanings given to the materiality of particular areas, sites, and locations (Friedmann, 1993; Healey, 2004). Following Healey, I recognize two key qualities of place: as an experienced materiality, and as mental construct derived from the production of individual and collective identities (2004).

In Re-imagining Whalley I engage with participants’ (storytellers) mental constructs in order to unearth and interpret some of the
meanings related to Whalley. New to the area, I discovered through their stories special places: parks, corners, train stations, beautiful and hidden beaches. I hear the history of Whalley from different perspectives, the names of the first families, the farms, and the changing layout of streets. I recognize feelings of pride and community and they are easily recognizable in the short films that are part of this project. These images of Whalley stand in sharp contrast to my previous imagery of Whalley based on TV reports of crimes and other problems in the area. It also greatly differs in tone from other descriptions of the community presented in maps and official documents (Surrey, n.d.). From my perspective, this collaborative process gives participants a chance to depict their community with their own voice.

Re-imagining Whalley is a collection of photos, films, words and other modes of representation. Part of the potency of a communicative approach to planning is its ability to expose the construction of a representation – a symbol, an image, etc. As Jean Hillier writes, “conflict of spatial planning and governance are often conflicts of representation” (Hillier, 2008, p. 25). For Hillier, representations objectify that which is represented, and in doing so they infuse a permanence in the identity of a place, region, or group (Hillier, 2007, p. 20). By collectively producing an alternative set of words, films, and photos Re-imagining Whalley brings to awareness the conflicts of representation at hand; it shows that Whalley extends beyond its dominant representation that is often put forth by the media. It shows the multiplicity at play in Whalley.

Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attili (2010b) also recognize that traditional discourses in planning practice have been shown to be inadequate at representing the multiple dimensions of urban life. Official documents and maps written only in technical and analytical language hardly depict the character and vibrancy of the communities we live in (Attili, 2010). Sandercock and Attili call for new methodologies and epistemologies in the study of the urban context; these are new ways of knowing that focus on individuals and the activities through which they create collective environments (2010b). They propose the transgression of old representational codes in order to explore new languages for dealing with a multiplicity of meanings, sensitivity, and interests (Sandercock & Attili, 2010b).

Transgressing old representational codes can be done through storytelling, particular storytelling that supports multiple voices. Experienced practitioner and academic Nabeel Hamdi explains the relevance of storytelling in place making and planning. For her, storytelling is important at establishing a narrative of the history of the place and building a spirit of cooperation (Hamdi, 2010).
As such, the use of participants’ (storytellers’) own still photos in *Re-imagining Whalley*’s short films is an attempt to transcend old planning codes, and find new languages of communication between the municipal government and the people it serves. Distributing a disposable camera to each storyteller so they can document the places that are important to them is my project’s way of trying to capture the multiplicity of meanings related to Whalley. In an effort to create a collective narrative about the place I interweave my own views of the community with those of others. These symbolic associations and its repercussions for life in Whalley can be reinterpreted not only in the short films, but also on the intersections of multifold stories that are contained in the online interactive map.

Planning theorists over the past few decades have examined the importance of stories for planning (Churchman, 1971; Rahder & Milgrom, 2004; Sandercock and Atilli, 2010b; Forester, 1989; Sarkissian et al. 2010). Sandercock’s work has been especially important at opening a space for storytelling in planning (See Sandercock 1998; 2003a; 2003b; 2010) For her,

> In order to imagine the ultimately unrepresentable spaces, lives, and languages of the city, to make them legible, we translate them into narratives. The way we narrate the city becomes constitutive of urban reality, affecting the choices we make and the ways we then might act (Sandercock, 2010, p. 18).

Storytelling can also be conceived not just as uni-directional flowing from storyteller to audience. A multi-directional mode of storytelling is especially prominent within the context of today’s Internet where content is often user-driven. *Re-imagining Whalley* as a Web 2.0 social media website facilitates multi-directional storytelling. It can be conceived as an impetus for a network of new lines, if not web, of communication to form. *Re-imagining Whalley* as opening new lines of communications can be further elucidated by Manuel Castells’ notion of “network concept”, which particularly discussed issues of network communication such as the Internet (Castells, 1996).

Castells argues that our contemporary culture is interconnected through a system of electronic media (1996). The Internet has created a new space in which all individuals are potentially connected, and this space is not characterized by homogeneity but rather by diversity. With the emergence of WEB 2.0 and its interactive platforms, news and opinions are no longer emitted in one direction. Communications travel from multiple emissaries and can be received by multiple audiences. Online, individuals can express their opinion in what Castells calls mass self-communication or horizontal networks of communications (Castells, 2007, p. 55). Consequently, new cultural
narratives, political debates and public opinion perceptions are constantly produced and reproduced, supported by the Internet (Castells, 2007).

How is network communications important for democratizing planning? Since planning is inherently a political activity, the use of online interactive platforms as communicative tools for planning is also related to politics and power. According to W. Lance Bennett, the main channel of communication between the political system and its citizens is mass media, mainly the printed press, television, and radio (1990). However, this kind of communication often disseminates political/cultural messages in a top-down fashion. On that account, Douglas Rushkoff recognizes the importance of interactive media in progressive politics and democracy. He writes, “interactive technologies offer us a ray of hope for a renewed spirit of genuine public engagement” (2003). Although not completely devoid of control, many software applications for online interaction are designed and can be used for the participation and expression of many (Rushkoff, 2003).

According to Foth et al. multimedia tools, in particular Web 2.0 technologies and ICTs, have increased the possibilities of communication between planners and the communities where they work (2009). Evans-Cowley recognizes the potential of online engagement tools not only for planning, but also for social mobilization (2010). His study of planning related Facebook groups found that most groups were created by citizens in opposition of planning issues, and not by planners (Evans-Cowley, 2010). Literature regarding the recent events of the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement also depicts the potential of social media as a citizen engagement and mobilization tool (Blair, 2012). The use of social media is one of the fastest growing online behaviours. By the end of 2011, 59% of Internet users were engaged in some kind of social networking website (Pring, 2012). There are currently 1 billion social media profiles and many more by the time you finish reading these lines (Bennett, 2012).

Moreover, online interactive platforms can also foster community feelings. According to Pippa Norris, members of online communities often cite that this kind of participation meaningfully reinforces their social ties and allows them to interact with people holding different views (Norris, 2004).

However, online interaction is not the communication panacea for planning and citizen participation. Internet and social media websites sit over the unequal structural base of society, and differences to Internet-access mirrors other inequalities of education, gender, race, income, etc. This is what is known as the digital divide (Norris, 2001).
Robert Putman further argues that elite networks can become less accessible to the disfranchised (Putman, 2000). There is significant evidence suggesting this digital divide actually exits in North America (Kerr, 2009).

Despite the digital divide, the use of Internet for communications offers diversity, “flexibility and ephemeral symbolic communications” to the networked society (Castells, 2000). Thus, though not all channels are opened, the number of channels opening up are increasing.

To summarize this theoretical reflection, one may suggest that with the use of new media there is at least a starting attempt to break from the old top-down mode of meaning dissemination, and toward a more democratic mode of planning. The advent of new media within the Internet opens up even more new channels for citizen participation in planning. Through a variety of media and languages, videos, music, texts and images, a community produces for itself not just more representations but more modes of representations. Each community member can participate in their own way, with their own style. Planning in this networked environment becomes a more flexible and inclusive process. It begins to break down the traditional discourses and modes of planning.

In conclusion, it is my hope that Re-imagining Whalley can be a platform that offers participants a chance to communicate with each other and to build new narratives of Whalley that may influence future planning actions.
Multimedia tools as planning methodologies

“Planners work on problems, with people. The problem-work is potentially technical (...); the people-work is always political...” (Forester, 1989, p. 2)

Re-imaging Whalley is, in part, a collection of short films that were created in a collaborative approach following what Sandercock and Attilli describe as digital ethnographies (2010a). For them, digital ethnographies are reflexive, interpretative practices in which filmmakers (planners, multimedia producers) portray the stories and meanings presented to them through a process of interaction and communication.

Digital ethnographies are self-reflexive analytical practices aimed at portraying lives and stories, transgressing objectified urban representations, and creatively expressing meaningful narratives. The polyphonic ethnographic narrative is the result of a series of in-depth interviews, acquired after a process of building rapport and trust, an activity based on a deep interaction with the people who entrust their stories to us as filmmakers. (Sandercock, and Attilli, 2010a, p. 26).

This practice requires establishing interpersonal relationships with community members. As such, it extends beyond the traditional process of data collection, and moves into a collaborative mode of editing, and decisions on the future uses of the films. Such a practice is
normative and demands self-reflexivity, thus bringing the ethical question of authorship and what constitutes community into light.

Sandercock and Attili suggest that the most important ethical considerations of this methodology are related to the politics of representation (who speaks, who speaks in behalf of who), and issues of authorship/ownership (who has final saying in the film, and about the film) (2010). They recognize the intrinsically uneven power relationship between filmmakers (planners or multimedia producers) and the community (or participants), and propose that ethical matters be discussed openly. For them, a process and outcome crafted collaboratively and based on a “shared sense of purpose and meaning making” can help address this disparity (Sandercock & Attili, 2010a, p. 28).

The following paragraphs detail Re-imagining Whalley’s different digital ethnographic tools as well as how they were use in the preparation and creative processes.

Re-imagining Whalley videos were completed in approximately 18 months. Storytellers (and I will use this word from here on to refer to participants) were sought out through advertisement posters placed on public notice boards in strategically identified locations to maximize contact. Storytellers were also recruited through personal contacts and individuals who were already interested in this project (e.g. librarians, community festival organizers, City of Surrey staff, etc).

Collaborative filmmaking:

A few storytellers (16) contacted me expressing their interest in the project. I gave all of them a disposable 35 mm photographic camera and asked them to take photos of three places of significance to them. After our initial contact, I continue to build rapport through emails, phone, calls, and conversations over coffee. Once the photos were taken, I collected the cameras, printed the photos, and scanned them. Then, I interviewed each of the storytellers asking them why they had chosen these specific places.

I encouraged storytelling by asking them questions about either special memories or their daily routines. These stories and reflections were recorded with an audio recording device. For some participants, the use of a microphone and audio device was unsettling. In this case, I
appeared to be relaxed, clarified that we could always make another take, and repeated the same questions in another way until I sensed a more natural tone in their voice. Most storytellers however, were comfortable with the voice recordings. They appeared to be at ease and seemed to be enjoying their own narration.

The photos and voice recordings were then edited together in short video clips. For this, I selected the final photos from all the ones that were given to me. I added my own pictures of the specific places when storytellers did not collect enough visual material. In some of the clips, I also layered old family photos and newspapers clips that helped me weave historical narratives of the place. Some of the pictures were animated in post-production in order to provide an interesting screen dynamic and an enhanced visual appeal.

The length of the clips was kept short in virtue of the short attention span that seems to characterize most social media websites. The editing process required me to make a series of aesthetic decisions as well as choosing the final content (sometimes from a few hours interview) and pace of the films. Bruce Drummond composed twenty original songs for Re-imagining Whalley from which I selected and used only twelve. Once the films were completed, I sent the Youtube links to storytellers. When I obtained their approval, I made the videos public.

To address issues of authorship/ownership, storytellers were informed that their photos became public domain once they have turned them to me. I also discussed that the full version of their voice recording might not be displayed on the final editing of the films. We (storytellers and I) talked about the time constraints that came with this project being a Master of Arts student Professional Project. I disclosed that I was going to make final editing decisions as I did the montage films myself. They agreed to have their stories interpreted and edited by me based in our conversations about the community. In that sense they trusted me and left aesthetic, structural, and content decisions to my discretion.

Issues of personal image rights were also considered and discussed with storytellers. I obtained signed approval for the photos that portray people’s images. Bruce Drummond, the musician, also signed a release form with details about the use of his songs.
Social Media:

*Re-imagining Whalley* goes beyond digital ethnography as described by Sandercock and Attili (2010b) because these films are actually embedded in an Internet application developed by the City of Surrey, a social media website reimagining.surrey.ca

I understand social media as any kind of self-generated or user-generated content for sharing perspectives, insights, opinions, symbols, stories, etc with multiple purposes. Social media to me is a “mass self-communication tool” (Castells, 2007, p. 55). Self because is self-generated and mass because it has the potential to reach a mass global audience.

*Re-imagining Whalley* is a social media experiment. Following communicative planning and Castells’ network communication theories, I have begun an exploration about social media engagement as an emerging planning tool.

From my perspective, social media can be a horizontal, polyphonic and polymorphic communicative tool for planning. *Re-imagining Whalley* has the capacity to support different mediums (multimodal hypertexts for Castells, 2007 p. 57). Users will be able to upload written comments, audio podcast, and their own videos. A moderator from the City of Surrey’s Web and New Media department will be controlling for abusive content or behaviour.

This application was conceived to allow the pervasiveness of communications. Striving to maximize exposure and interaction, this website streams video content from the very popular social media website Youtube and will be linked to Facebook as well. Its domain is at the same time local and global.

At the moment of writing this report, the social media application was being developed by the City of Surrey’s Web and New Media team. So far the videos that were created by storytellers and me as part of *Re-imagining Whalley* can be accessed on Youtube following these links.

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<tr>
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Final Reflections

To help me spur a reflection and look at this work through another theoretical lens I bring a Deleuzeguattarian perspective via Hillier’s relational approach to planning thought. In her “multiplanar theory of spatial planning”, Hillier critically questions the capacity of words, images, and texts to describe or represent real life, “they rather perform its bringing into being” (2007 p. 61). As such, words, images and texts also have the capacity to inspire the creation of new meanings. They move from mere representation toward performance. Hillier’s position reaffirms this project’s empiricist-constructivist approach where meanings and concepts are created through doing (performing), rather than taken as a priori.

Thus, Hillier proposes a post-representational approach to planning and spatial management that allows for change, mixing, and openings. This is

A multiple, relational approach of dynamic complexity to understanding and working with contingencies of place, time and actants (actors, participants) behaviours (Hillier, 2008 p. 24).

What Hillier proposes is a way of dealing with multiple systems of meanings by highlighting its relational, contextual and contingent quality (Hillier, 2008).

In Re-imagining Whalley I explore a non-representational approach to placeness. I intended to escape the permanence of representation, the contingencies of time and space, and the politics of voice by creating an open medium where potentially all users can produce new meanings. From my perspective, this kind of online platform facilitates this (post) representation of shifting realities, and multiple positioning.
Re-imagining Whalley’s social media application and collaborative videos have the intention of fostering discussions about placeness. The website is designed as a platform or open forum for the expression of multiple voices and perceptions of place. Its strength is in the intersection of languages, stories, and its potential for meaning making, meanings that can be ever evolving as a result of users interacting and uploading new content.

One of the main weaknesses of this project is that it did not include a framework for success evaluation. In my opinion, studies of social media as a planning tool and its potential for public engagement deserve our urgent attention. In his Professional Project, Master’s student Erik Blair analyses how different factors influence the success of social media in civic-oriented engagement process (Blair, 2012). To Blair, the success of vlogging (video logging on a social media application) as an engagement method depended on how well the discussions were supported by organizers of the campaign and other participants. Trust was an important issue. Blair also suggests that both online and offline interactions feed into each other’s effects, and this multi dimensional connection was important in network communications (2012).

This was my first attempt to use multimedia tools for planning, and my fascination with these tools is probably noticeable throughout this report. I will continue to work in the promotion of Re-imagining Whalley together with the City of Surrey’s Planning, Web and New Media teams, and residents of Whalley. I am excited about linking this project with other storytelling initiatives that are currently being carried out by community organizations. I continue to be interested in further experimenting with multimedia tools and exploring its transformative potential.
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