Democracy in a Digital World:
Integrated Media for Youth Urban Design Engagement
DEMOCRACY IN A DIGITAL WORLD:
INTEGRATED MEDIA FOR YOUTH URBAN DESIGN ENGAGEMENT

by

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Thank you to all the youth in Revelstoke who expressed interest or participated in our contest. Your zest and vigor made this research my absolute pleasure. I hope you continue to remain involved in the magical place we have all been fortunate enough to call home.
Forms of urban design engagement (i.e. public workshops, town hall meetings, neighbourhood association meetings) are often ineffective at providing residents with the opportunity to contribute to urban design decisions. The average resident does not have the experience, technical expertise or vocabulary necessary to visualize the spatial implications of different design proposals. Involving youth aged 10 to 19 in these typical forms of urban design engagement can be particularly challenging because the format of such participatory activities are not attractive to most youth.

Partnering with the City of Revelstoke Planning Department to test and apply research methods on the ground, this project seeks to discover how digital media tools such as social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook), blogs (Wordpress), and web-based video (YouTube, Vimeo) can be used by local governments to increase youth involvement in urban design decisions.

Through a summer video contest that asked contestants to convey how they move around Revelstoke, it was discovered that youth were most responsive to the digital medium of film. Facebook was determined to be a useful social media tool for promoting urban planning engagement activities and generating buzz around planning topics or issues among youth.

We learned a variety of lessons while designing the video contest, recruiting youth, promoting the contest, and reviewing submissions. These lessons have been translated into a number of key recommendations for local governments like the City of Revelstoke to consider in future youth-oriented participatory planning events.

Recommendations:

- Ensure engagement activity occurs during school year;
- Work with schools to explore synergies between topic of engagement and their curriculum;
- Meet and approach youth in a youth-oriented environment or event;
- Request initial input from youth in-person and in an environment where they feel safe and open to expressing their opinions such as in a small group of peers;
- Invite youth to become Facebook friends during first contact;
- Establish a strong list of local youth friends on Facebook that can then be invited to urban design or planning engagement events;
- Use unique hashtags on Twitter that convey key information related to the event;
- Post interactive material where possible to draw first time users to a blog. Examples may include polls or other voting platforms;
- Use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to promote a project blog or website;
- Incentivize youth involvement by offering an honorarium or prize when possible; and
- Make contests or participatory events interesting by utilizing tools youth are familiar with and interested in such as digital video.
2.0 QUICK LINKS

All of the social and digital media links contained within this document can be quickly located here:

Facebook Group: facebook.com/groups/myrevelstoke2030
Facebook Event: facebook.com/events/316291501798928
Facebook Profile: facebook.com/jessica.p.stuart

Twitter Account: twitter.com/myrevy2030
Wordpress Blog: myrevelstoke2030.org
YouTube Channel: youtube.com/user/myrevelstoke2030
The Stoke List: list.thestoke.ca

Video Contest Winner:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loQZvlIWE
Video Contest Second Prize:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PVDwY4Jnws

1 Website no longer online
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3.0 INTRODUCTION
3.1 Public Participation in Urban Planning

For over forty decades, public participation has played a key role in urban planning decision-making at the local government scale. Public participation in urban design or planning allows those that might be affected by a decision to be involved in the decision-making process by offering their feedback (Roussopoulos, D. and Benello, C.G., 2005). Involving the public in local planning projects and development can empower citizens and can add local knowledge and subsequent richness to such processes (Buss, 1994; Checkoway, 2011). In the democratic society we live in, all citizens, regardless of age, class, race or gender have the right to make their voices heard (Young, 2000). This notion is one of the fundamental underpinnings of what democracy in a local government represents. Yet youth are just one example of a segment of the population whose voices have been historically underrepresented and undervalued in planning engagement.

In urban planning, there are a number of venues to voice one’s opinion on a local plan or development proposal such as a town hall meeting, neighbourhood association meeting, or public workshop. But in this modern age, are they the only places to exercise democracy? And do these forums appeal to all ages?

3.2 Defining Youth

The term ‘youth’ can encompass a wide range of age groups, from elementary aged children to university students. For the purposes of this paper and my research, I am interested in exploring the potential for engaging elementary and high school aged youth from age ten to age nineteen. This fragment of the population is of particular interest because they can often be one of the most difficult age groups to engage (Karlene Loudon, personal communication, June 5, 2012), and little research exists on the potential of youth input in planning processes through accessible forms of technology they might use in their everyday lives.

3.3 Defining Youth Participation

Youth participation is not unlike public participation in planning described above. As the name suggests, youth participation works towards including the opinions of the youth demographic that is historically under-engaged and undervalued in typical participatory planning processes.

3.4 Research Problem

Youth represent a unique cross section of the population in that it is often their parents and grandparents that make the decisions about how their urban futures will be shaped, yet it is youth that ultimately have to live with the outcomes of these decisions. Historically, it has been difficult to engage this demographic. This could be attributed to a lack of effort to involve youth in engagement processes or perhaps a lack of interest on youths’ part to become involved in their community. Whichever the case, this research is interested in understanding whether forms of digital media can be combined to offer alternative ways to approach participatory urban design and planning for youth.
3.5 Research Question

This project asks the question, how can integrated media be used by a local government to advance youth-oriented participatory urban design?

3.6 Definitions

Integrated media combines a variety of accessible digital media mediums that include: social media such as Facebook and Twitter; forums for sharing personal reflection and narratives such as web-based videos, blogs and vlogs; and user friendly and editable versions of a Geographic Information System (GIS) such as Google Maps and Google Earth. These mediums will be explored in the research methods for their relevance and applicability to participatory urban design.

For the purposes of this research project, urban design can be defined as “the process of giving physical design direction to urban growth, conservation, and change. It is understood to include landscape as well as buildings, both preservation and new construction, and rural areas as well as cities” (Barnett 1982; 12).
4.1 Democracy and The Right to the City

Public participation strengthens not only urban planning and design processes, but also adds value and trust to democracy. While a democracy is intended to be participatory through elected officials and representatives, oftentimes members of the community or society with more power (in terms of wealth, stature, et cetera) end up having a stronger voice (Roussopoulos, D. and Benello, C.G., 2005). This may reveal why citizen trust in government is steadily decreasing all over the world (Kathi and Cooper, 2007). However, in a participatory democracy, all citizens are entitled to be a part of decision-making around specific issues that affect them most (Roussopoulos, D. and Benello, C.G., 2005).

But what type of process can enable participatory democracy? If democratic equality is desired, Young (2000) suggests that a more inclusive process needs to be designed that allows the voices and perspectives of all members of society to be heard, rather than a select representation. The deliberative democracy model is an example of an inclusive process in that it allows citizens to discuss and debate an issue and make a decision based on a collective agreement rather than an individual vote for what is deemed the ‘best’ proposal (Young, 2000). Amin and Thrift (2002) propose that urban democracy can be strengthened through participation and empowerment in everyday activities and places. They suggest that cities should be settings for practicing multiple forms of democracy and that there is no one-size-fits-all process for approaching the contemporary democratic city. Kathi and Cooper (2007) have concluded that collaboration and trust building between citizens and government are key components to truly equal and democratic participatory processes.

Other authors have also discussed democracy and the city in terms of citizen rights. Henri Lefebvre imagines all urban dwellers are afforded an equal right to shape the city and that class, race, gender and other dividing distinctions should not affect this right (Attoh, 2011). Other authors point to the importance of democratizing urban space (Attoh, 2011) and allowing all citizens the right to shape and alter the city “after our heart’s desire” (Harvey, 2003, p. 939). Participatory planning processes can be seen as an example of a forum to exercise one’s right to the city that Lefebvre, Harvey and Attoh discuss.

Embedded within democracy is a right for all citizens to help affect change. Key to this is that all citizens should have the equal right to participate in these processes and influence decisions. Yet, in local government engagement processes, more often than not, adults play a stronger role in decision making than youth.

4.2 Approaches to Youth Oriented Participatory Planning

While theories of democracy and right to the city discuss the importance of empowering all types of citizens, how to do this is another question. How to engage citizens that differ in age, gender and culture is unclear, yet is crucial to the success of inclusive participatory processes. Youth represent a unique cross section of the population in that it is often their parents and grandparents that make the decisions about how their urban futures will be shaped, yet it is youth that ultimately have to live with the consequences of these decisions. This is perhaps a result of planning that has not attempted to involve youth or that is not sensitive to their unique needs in engagement. In order to propose solutions, we must first attempt to define youth participation, understand why their opinions...
are important, and lastly study the opportunities for youth-oriented participatory processes and the barriers youth face related to these processes.

4.3 What is Youth Participation?

Youth participation is a broad term that centers on the idea of youth organizing around an issue, either by their own accord or in conjunction with adults or agencies. As Checkoway (2011) explains, “as long as people are involved in the institutions and decisions that affect them, it is participation” (p. 341). Youth participation can help empower a group that is typically underrepresented in political processes. This participation can occur through a number of forums such as community organizations, schools, or government (Checkoway, 2011). To achieve empowerment, residents must participate at the individual, organizational, and community levels. To put it simply, “individuals participate, organizations develop, and communities change” (Schulz, Israel, Zimmerman and Checkoway, 1995).

Checkoway warns that the presence of youth in participatory processes is not enough. The most benefit comes when their input has a “real effect on the process” (Checkoway, 1998). As such, legitimate participation can be considered the process by which youth influence the opportunities and outcomes of the larger society (Arnstein, 1969). Other studies reveal that there is not one model for participation, but that processes must be catered for different groups (Rivera and Erlich, 1998). Such processes must also be unique to youth preferences and needs rather than replicates of effective planning for adults (Talen and Coffindaffer, 1999; Terrible, 2000).

Many authors agree on the importance of including youth in urban planning. For some, youth inclusion in public participation is considered part of their fundamental human rights (Knowles-Yáñez, 2005) and rights as citizens (Checkoway, 2011). Others have discovered that youth input adds another dimension of information for planners to consider (Buss, 1994), while also allowing youth to gain knowledge and practical skills (Checkoway, 2011). Youth have also reported to feel more connected to their community and environment through participation, and adults gained a better understanding and appreciation of young people (Frank, 2006). Some research has also shown that planning engagement improved youths’ ability to envision the future and helped them realize the role they could play in shaping that future (Baldassari, Lehman, and Wolfe, 1987). After participating in planning projects, some studies have shown youth to demonstrate further interest and enthusiasm in planning by participating in future events, recruiting friends to join, and even developing their own opportunities for participation (Schwab, 1997; Corsi, 2002; Sutton and Kemp, 2002). Providing youth the opportunity to be a part of planning conversations not only improves their self worth and sense of community, but can also inspire them to lead and organize future participatory processes.

The merits of involving youth in planning processes are evident, but understanding how they can be included is also important. Can one invite a youth to a meeting as you would an adult and expect the same level of engagement? Many approaches to participation exist, but some that have been specifically designed or suggested for youth stand out in research.

Youth Councils are becoming more widely developed around the world. The councils “consist of a group of children or pre-adolescents, who, for a period of variable duration, collaborate actively with the
Town Hall in order to improve the quality of life in their own city” (Alparone, F.R. and Rissotto, A., 2001, p. 422). Town Councils then either implement the ideas of the Youth Councils, or consult with them for information (Alparone, F.R. and Rissotto, A., 2001).

Another model of youth participation entitled ‘Participation in Planning’ allows youth to become involved in the development of planning and environmental action. Youth determine their own needs and work with adult technicians to learn about the community and environment, which they can then play a role in modifying (Alparone, F.R., Rissotto, A., 2001).

School-based service is also gaining popularity among public schools as a way to enable youth to learn through action and help “foster civic responsibility” (Billig, 2000, p. 659). In examples of this model, students have helped manage the environment of their school and community by conducting interviews and surveys on community needs and developing initiatives such as recycling programs and community gardens (Hart, 1997).

4.4 Barriers

Despite the current forms of participatory models for youth that exist, many still remain disengaged. Some youth feel their demographic can’t create change, while others want to participate but are not sure how or do not have the resources to do so (Checkoway, 2011). Adults can also threaten youth engagement when forms of ‘adultism’ are displayed; that adults are better than young people and therefore their opinions are more important or valuable (Checkoway, 2011). Recent studies attribute a lack of participation by middle and upper class youth to technology, telecommunications, and decline in social capital (Zukin et al., 2006). These are important factors to consider when researching or designing public participation oriented towards youth.

If local governments aspire to better include youth input in planning processes, they must understand the merits of and opportunities for youth input and the barriers youth face in participatory engagement. With this information in mind, it is then that local governments can feel better equipped to develop their own model for youth oriented participatory planning, one that is adaptable rather than concrete. Integrating participatory urban design and planning with integrated media youth use on a regular basis may offer one potential model for better involving youth in planning processes.

4.5 Potential of Digital Media in Participatory Planning Processes

While digital media is not new to participatory planning (Levy, 1995), the accessibility of digital media to the average person presents the opportunity to more formally integrate such media into planning engagement processes (Senbel and Church, 2011; Sawicki, and Craig 1996). Facebook, for example, has over 1.15 billion users worldwide, 699 million daily users, and 819 million mobile users (Facebook, 2013), and over 50% of Canadians use the social network (Oliveira, 2011). Twitter has over 500 million total users, with over 200 active users (Smith, 2013), and the blogging site Wordpress boasts over 70 million blogs (“Stats”, 2013). YouTube has over 1 billion users and 4 billion hits a day (Smith, 2013).

Some research has indicated the availability of technology has led to the disengagement of middle and upper classes of youth (Zukin,
2006); however, what if the more common types of digital and social media described above were used as a forum to solicit input among citizens, and in particular, youth?

Facebook has shown significant potential to be used as a forum for involving citizens in planning processes (Evans-Cowley, 2010). In terms of youth, one study has found that most interact with people they already know when online; however, some youth were willing to reach out to adults involved in subjects or areas that interested them. In these social networks, youth expected to be treated and respected as experts (Ito et al., 2008).

One barrier planners face with social media networks such as Facebook is how to translate online support or opposition into something that can be used in the public hearing process (Evans-Cowley, 2010). In Calgary, Alberta, a Facebook group was created by the public that displayed a great deal of support for the relocation of a popular nightclub. However, the planning department received 250 letters opposing the development. Unfortunately, few of those that had supported the project online ever conveyed this in-person at the Board of Appeals (Toderian, 2008). In response to situations like this, the City of Toronto has “determined that any comment received via their Facebook group would be treated the same as an e-mail, phone call, or in-person comment” (Evans-Cowley, 2010, p. 415). After creating a Facebook group for a popular corridor in the city, it posted this privacy statement to all group users:

Personal information is collected under the City of Toronto Act, Sections 8(1) and 134. Environmental Assessment Act, Part II.1 (Class Environmental Assessments). The information is used for the purpose of accepting comments from the public to study and develop streetscape improvement plans and traffic lane modifications for the Jarvis St. corridor (as noted above). By posting to this page, your names, your postings, and any personal information that you choose to include in your postings are available to the public. If you have any questions about this collection, please contact the Supervisor of Public Consultation, City of Toronto, 55 John Street, 19th Floor, Toronto ON, M5 V 3C6, 416-392-2990. (Evans-Cowley, 2010, p. 415-16)

The Facebook group has proven successful for the City of Toronto. The group generated thoughtful discussions and comments of a less hostile nature, attributed by staff to the public nature of the forum. Many users of the group reported they would participate in public meetings in the future (Evans-Cowley, 2010). Social media has the potential to enable more citizens to engage in planning conversations on their own terms and in their own environment which could lead to more inclusive participatory planning.

Other forms of digital media may also improve democracy in traditional planning processes by helping improve visualization and communication. As climate change planning intensifies in communities across British Columbia (Bill 27, 2008), planners often seek to advance rapid and radical changes to land use. A common scenario, for example, is one in which a planner briefs a group of residents on a development proposal that changes a typical sprawling single-family home neighbourhood into a compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood. For the average resident without a design background, imagining this change is not a simple task (Kathi and Cooper, 2007; Warner, 2006). However, certain tools may help the resident more easily envision such a transformation.
Digital model making software such as Google SketchUp is one example of a free, accessible digital media tool (Wolk, 2008) that can help bridge the communication gap between planning experts and local residents. Rather than only explaining the difference between a single-family residential neighbourhood and a compact, mixed-use neighbourhood, a planner or consultant could also three-dimensionally model the two configurations. Presenting visuals that illustrate proposed change offers residents a better opportunity to understand the issues and potential solutions surrounding a design (Elwood, 2002).

Not only do these digital media tools help residents visualize planning, but they also enable participation and equal opportunity among participants (Al-Kodmany, 1999; Kyem, 2000). More open, inclusive, and equal planning engagement processes help advance “the democratization of planning” (Sawicki and Craig, 1996).

4.6 Theoretical Context Conclusion

While local governments in North America typically employ a democratic process, it can be argued that democracy is not synonymous with equality. Within the discipline of planning, democracy can be exercised through participatory processes, yet youth have often been excluded from such processes or engaged at a superficial level. Involving youth in planning can add value to their lives and new information to local plans and development. However, in order to be successful, youth input must be truly valued and included within the decision-making process. In addition, while youth represent a unique segment of the population, it cannot be concluded that all youth are the same and only one model for participation is not enough. Planners in local government should aspire to create robust engagement processes that appeal to a wealth of youth.

While some cities have attempted to engage youth through forums such as youth councils, the availability of digital media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Google SketchUp and Google Earth is an exciting possibility to widen the horizon for planning engagement and include a greater concentration of citizens in planning decisions. In terms of the potential of youth involvement in such processes, research indicates an interest in Facebook planning initiatives. However, more research is needed on youth involvement with the other forms of digital media mentioned above to discover their potential in planning. Furthermore, the potential to integrate various forms of digital media such as Facebook, blogging, vlogging, and Google Earth provides exciting potential in the field of planning, particularly in terms of youth involvement. Existing research on some of the barriers local governments face in terms of using online input in hearing processes will be important to consider when moving forward with a more digital approach to engagement.
5.1 Context: Revelstoke, BC

Revelstoke overlooks the Columbia River between the Selkirk and Monashee mountain ranges in the interior of British Columbia (City of Revelstoke, 2009). Situated along the Trans-Canada Highway and the Canadian Pacific Railway, Revelstoke is approximately 640 kilometers (km) northeast of Vancouver, 200 km northeast of Kelowna and 400 km west of Calgary (City of Revelstoke, 2009). In 2011, Revelstoke experienced a year-round population of 7,139 within city limits (Government of Canada, 2013a) and 7,720 residents including the Columbia Shuswap Regional District Area B (Orlando, 2013). In 2011, there were 785 youth between the ages of 10 and 19 in Revelstoke, which represents 11% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2012). There were 1,225 families with children at home reported in the 2006 census, and 920 of those families were couples while 305 were single parents. The average family income in 2005 was $69,735 with 59.6% of families earning between $20,000 and $79,999 and 35.2% of families earning over $80,000 (BC Stats, 2012). Revelstoke also experiences very little diversity in terms of race with only 1.8% of the population considered a visible minority and 3.1% Aboriginal people; well below BC’s visible minority average of 24.8% and slightly lower than the province’s average Aboriginal population of 4.8% (BC Stats, 2012).

5.2 Partners

City of Revelstoke

The City of Revelstoke Planning Department was a funding partner and target receiving audience for this research. This city and planning department were of particular interest because of the innovative planning work currently underway that requires extensive public engagement to be understood, supported and adopted. Examples of such work include a new Official Community Plan, Transportation Plan, Parks, Recreation and Culture Plan, and a new zoning bylaw and land use plan.

Mitacs-Accelerate Program

Mitacs was the second funding partner that helped make my research possible. Mitacs is a non-profit, Canadian organization that supports innovative research at Canadian universities through funding initiatives such as the Mitacs-Accelerate Program (Mitacs-Accelerate, 2013). I approached the City of Revelstoke Planning Department with this potential funding opportunity in March 2012, and shortly after myself, research supervisor Maged Senbel, and the Director of Planning John Guenther2 formulated a research proposal that was approved for funding by Mitacs in May 2012.

2 John Guenther left the City of Revelstoke in May 2013.
6.0 METHODS

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The following section outlines the methods used to consider the research question: how can integrated media tools be used by a local government to advance youth-oriented participatory urban design? Qualitative methods were employed while working with a small group of youth to gain an in-depth understanding of the potential for integrated media use in planning engagement. Such methods include engagement scoping, recruitment, contest design, participation, information dissemination, video submissions, and monitoring tools. The project considers the research question above through three major goals:

1. To learn if integrated media could be used to engage youth in urban design conversations;
2. To learn what forms of digital media youth are most responsive to in engagement processes; and
3. To provide youth with the opportunity to critically reflect on urban design and planning in their community.

Given that the research occurred over a three and a half month period, it was not possible to monitor participants or their use of digital tools over a long period of time; however, the data collected contributes answers towards the research question while also illuminating areas where more research is needed.

6.1 Engagement Scoping

To gauge interest in a participatory urban design project for youth, it was necessary to reach out to our target audience in the community. A research project lead in part by the research supervisor and funded by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) entitled Revelstoke Measured Visualization Project (MyRevelstoke2030) was occurring simultaneous to the research on integrated media. The visualization team held a workshop in Revelstoke in June 2012 that, in its simplest form, gathered a number of participants to measure their preferences for local neighbourhood design using a touch table to visually display their preferences. I helped recruit youth for the workshop through the Revelstoke Secondary School. I coordinated with the Principal and Work Experience Coordinator to enter classrooms that were studying geography and computer technology to discuss the MyRevelstoke2030 June workshop. A group of five students signed up to participate in the workshop. Once at the workshop, we recruited these students for a focus group that sought to understand the types of digital media they were using in their everyday lives and how they were using it.

6.2 Preliminary Recruitment

We conducted the focus group with five youth on digital media. During this session we asked youth questions as a group about the types of digital media they use such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube. Youth responses helped generate the idea for a video contest as a means to test digital mediums among youth. Their responses also encouraged me to create a Facebook group and invite the youth participants to join in order to keep them updated on the video contest as it unfolded. Four of out the five participants already used Facebook and agreed to be added to the Facebook group during the focus group. The remaining participant did not wish to be involved.

An interview with Youth Liaison Karlene Loudon\(^3\) confirmed the

3 Karlene Loudon left her position of Youth Liaison in 2012 and was replaced by Megan Shandro in 2013.
potential of Facebook as a tool to communicate with local youth. She also recommended creating a Facebook profile through which one can become Friends with youth and then invite them to Events or Groups or to Like a Page.

6.3 Contest Design

In order to understand how youth would utilize various digital mediums in response to an urban planning issue, an activity was formulated. Based on a previous discussion with local youth in the focus group, we learned that competition and prizes would incentivize participation. From there, a contest was created. Discussions with the local Director of City Planning John Guenther and Youth Liaison Karlene Loudon helped focus on a topic youth could explore through this contest that would be both broad enough to appeal to a variety of youth but also simple enough to hold their attention and interest over the summer. Some contest idea generated through discussions with Guenther and Loudon included a design competition for a closed school lot that was going up for sale, an ideas competition on youth services missing in the community, and a web design or social media boot camp to build skills that could be used towards helping maintain a community youth website. In the end, a contest on how youth moved around Revelstoke was chosen because it was deemed a topic most audiences could relate to and have experience with while also addressing our research interests in urban planning and design.

A contest poster was created with further details posted on Facebook and Wordpress as follows:

MyRevelstoke2030 IN MOTION video contest

Details:
> Must be a resident of Revelstoke between the ages of 12 and 19
> Work by yourself or in teams up to a maximum of 3 people
> Include any and every mode you use to get around (i.e. foot, bicycle, unicycle, skateboard, rollerblade, bus, scooter, kayak, canoe, car, etc)
> Get creative and have fun!

All entries MUST include the following:
> A GoogleEarth map that shows your movement patterns and stopping points (don’t worry if you’ve never done this before – we’ll provide tutorials!)
> Photographs or video clips of how you move and the places and spaces along the way that enhance or detract from your movement
> Photographs or video clips of the best street for walking, in your opinion, and an indication of why and photographs or video clips of the worst street for walking, also in your opinion, and an indication of why. Photos and videos must be your own and taken within the last year.
> A video between 2 and 5 minutes long, with audio, that combines all of the above to tell a cool story about how you MOVE!

Submission:
> Upload your video to YouTube or Vimeo and post the link on the ‘MyRevelstoke2030’ Facebook group by 5:00pm on Friday, July 27, 2012
> After you’ve submitted your video, begin promoting it through a central blog created by the organizers until August 7, 2012 (more details to follow in July)
> Video screening and final winner selection on the Village Idiot Restaurant on Wednesday, August 8, 2012
Building off momentum already created by the supervisor’s visualization project in Revelstoke, we recycled their branding of MyRevelstoke2030 to stress to the visionary nature of contest while also using a phrase some of the community had already become familiar with.

Initially, we opened the contest to high school aged youth (age 12 to 19). Interest from youth outside that age range required us to expand the age limits to any local youth from the age of 10 to 25. We also encouraged youth to work as a team with up to three people to allow for collaboration and inspiration among peers.

6.4 Information Dissemination and Secondary Recruitment

In order to continue recruiting youth and provide those already recruited with more information on the contest, I created a number of websites and social media profiles. In addition to the Facebook group mentioned earlier (facebook.com/groups/myrevelstoke2030), an event (facebook.com/events/316291501798928) and profile (facebook.com/jessica.p.stuart) were also created. I generated a Twitter account (twitter.com/myrevy2030), Wordpress blog (myrevelstoke2030.org) and YouTube channel (youtube.com/user/myrevelstoke2030) as well. I also utilized a local classified site (listthestoke.ca) that half the community visits on a daily basis (Kempton, 2013) to post information on the contest and direct traffic to the blog and Facebook.

To help better explain the contest, it was decided that the Wordpress blog would provide the best platform for posting updates, tutorials,
and information that could then be linked to the Facebook and Twitter accounts. I made several posts a week to accomplish different goals. First, it was important to generate interest in the topic and clarify what was meant by ‘How do you move around Revelstoke?’. I prepared a photo-montage of my journey through a neighborhood using my favorite transportation mode; foot (myrevelstoke2030.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/strolling-around/). I also created a poll asking viewers what their favorite way to get around Revelstoke was during the summer and during the winter (myrevelstoke2030.org/2012/07/06/how-do-you-move-in-revelstoke/)

It was also important to further clarify some of the contest requirements that not all participants might be familiar with. For example, the contest asked participants to prepare a GoogleEarth map showing movement patterns and stopping points. Using screen shots and YouTube videos, I created a tutorial on the blog outlining how to do this (myrevelstoke2030.wordpress.com/2012/07/19/google-earth-tutorial/). To provide inspiration on different ways participants could capture their movement patterns I posted three videos I found on YouTube that creatively showed different journeys through a city by skateboard, bicycle and walking (myrevelstoke2030.wordpress.com/2012/07/11/youtube-inspiration/). Lastly, I created a ‘Video Tips and Trick Guide’ to give ideas for shooting, editing and promoting videos (http://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/41400433/Video%20contest%20guide_071912.pdf)

Loudon also recommended attending an upcoming youth event as a way to connect with more youth and spread information on the contest. The event, Youth Fest, was an outdoor, open-microphone night for all youth that occurred on the last day of school before summer. A number of booths were set up on the closed street where the stage

![Figure 6.4.1](image-url)
was located; all of which related to some youth initiative in the community. At the MyRevelstoke2030 booth, I answered questions and handed out small, business card sized handouts derived from the contest poster with links to our Facebook, Twitter and Wordpress sites.

Posters were also placed around town in strategic locations where it was thought both parents and youth would notice. Locations included coffee shops, grocery stores, a bike store, a skateboard and snowboard shop, restaurants, the recreation centre, and the arena.

The youth liaison was able to circulate information on the contest to her youth and community contacts, and she directed interested youth to follow up with myself.

The City of Revelstoke’s existing engagement email database was also utilized to notify parents in the community that had participated in previous planning workshops. An email with the contest poster and information was sent out to over 300 local contacts including City staff.

Although a number of youth expressed interest in the contest through the above methods, it was important to continue recruitment throughout the summer to generate as much interest and potential submissions as possible. I visited a nightly concert popular among youth to pass out contest handouts. I also directly Facebook messaged eighteen youth identified as having an interest in digital media by a City employee with two children in the target contest age range. I also
set up an information booth on the main street on three occasions to answer questions and provide handouts.

6.5 Video Contest Submission

Contestants were to upload completed videos to YouTube or Vimeo and post the links on the Facebook group wall. I would then post links to the submitted videos on the Wordpress blog in the form of a poll, and the video with the most votes would win a $300 cash prize with $50 for the runner up. A $200 prize would be awarded to the video best promoted on social media with $50 as the prize for second place.

Contestants were encouraged to use Facebook to promote their video and solicit votes by posting a link to the voting page on their Facebook walls, on friend’s walls, on pages, and on groups. Facebook would be the central place where we would judge promotion, so contestants needed to link any promoting they did onto their Facebook account. Youth working in a group could do this through one Facebook account.

I also encouraged contestants to utilize Twitter to promote their video to the broader community as there are many local residents on Twitter that youth would likely not be friends with on Facebook, and as such would not see their posts. Youth could create an account or use their existing one and tweet a link to the voting page with the hashtag #Revelstoke.

Those 13 or older could also create or use an existing blog (like Wordpress or Blogger) to post the voting link and were encouraged to keep their audience coming back with follow-up posts on all things Revelstoke. Those under 13 would just use Twitter and Facebook.

A video screening party and final winner selection was scheduled to occur at the Village Idiot Restaurant in early August that would be open to all contestants, family, friends and members of the public.

6.6 Monitoring Tools

Facebook, Wordpress and YouTube offer analytical tools that provide data on website viewers in various forms. Facebook provides information on the number of views each group post receives which is viewable to all group members. For example, a post could say ‘Seen by 3’ and when you hover over the text, the names of the viewers will appear. Wordpress offers comprehensive statistics information on blogs including information on number of visits, number of views, views by country, top post or page, comments, referrers, and search engine terms. Statistics on referrers provides data on the numbers viewers that visited the Wordpress site after reading about it from another online source such as Facebook, Twitter or The Stoke List. Statistics on search engine terms provides information on the terms people search on Google to find out more about the project. Such terms might be ‘MyRevelstoke2030’ or ‘Revelstoke video contest’. I gathered all statistical data from Wordpress once the contest ended.

YouTube shows how many views a video has received and also allows viewers to comment and like and dislike videos.

The results of these statistics (p. 59-62) will be discussed in the following section.
7.0 FINDINGS

1.0 Executive Summary

2.0 Quick Links

3.0 Introduction

4.0 Theoretical Context

5.0 Background

6.0 Methods

7.0 Findings

8.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

9.0 Bibliography
The research question and goals from section 6.0 were primarily realized through a youth video contest on an urban design subject held over the summer of 2012 that asked youth aged 10 to 25 to work in teams of one to three people to create a 2 to 5 minute video on how they move around Revelstoke, whether that be by foot, bicycle, skateboard, car, et cetera, using digital video or photographs. Participants were required to reflect on their favorite and least favorite street for walking and were also asked to create a Google Map that documented their movement patterns and key stopping points such as school or a store. Links to the submitted videos would be posted on the Wordpress blog in the form of a poll, and the video with the most votes would win a $300 cash prize with $50 for the runner-up. A $200 prize would be awarded to the video best promoted on social media with $50 as the prize for second place.

Because only two videos were submitted and social media was not used to promote the videos as stipulated in the contest details, the winner and runner-up were selected by myself and my research supervisor based on which video we deemed to have met the most contest requirements.

The winning video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ic0QZVhliWE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ic0QZVhliWE)

Second prize: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PVDwY4Jnws](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PVDwY4Jnws)

Due to the lack of submissions, the $200 and $50 social media promotion prizes were eliminated. Also because the submissions were by family members of planning staff we felt that the monetary prize may be seen as a conflict of interest. In hindsight we should have more clearly stipulated that the organizers reserve the right to not award the cash prizes.

Our research outcomes revolve around this video contest and the submissions in a number of key themes described below.

### 7.1 Recruitment

First, we learned a number of ways to connect with youth and involve them in our research.

The most useful resource for contacting youth was the Revelstoke Secondary School. Through the Principal and Work Experience Coordinator, I was provided the opportunity to enter classrooms that were studying geography and computer technology to garner interest and participation in the MyRevelstoke2030 June workshop held by the research supervisor that was a stepping-stone to this research project. While we were able to utilize the high school as a resource to connect students to the workshop, unfortunately by the time the video contest launched, students were on summer vacation. In future engagement process, it will be crucial to ensure the event occurs during the school year.

Another immeasurable asset to connecting with youth was the local youth liaison with many youth contacts. The youth liaison was able to circulate information on the contest to her youth and community contacts and direct interested youth to follow up with myself. The youth coordinator also has a good sense of youth-oriented activities occurring in the community and was able to suggest events to attend such as a youth open-microphone night.

I discovered that meeting and approaching youth in a youth-oriented environment or event was much easier than letting the youth approach...
me. The intern set up information panels and handed out leaflets on the contest on a major pedestrian street on three occasions, but youth were difficult to locate and timid to request more information.

The City of Revelstoke’s existing database of community contacts was a useful tool for connecting with parents of youth. A well-used local classified site was identified as useful in directing web traffic to our Facebook event and Wordpress blog.

In the MyRevelstoke2030 focus group, youth indicated that the social media website Facebook was the best method to stay in contact about upcoming research. As such, I used Facebook extensively to post information on the contest on both my wall and on the group wall. However, it was discovered that Facebook was most useful after having already established a connection to youth. Facebook groups and events were particularly useful in advertising the video contest; however, without being friends with youth on Facebook, we were unable to directly share information and resorted to posting such information on the walls of mutual friends (i.e. the local youth liaison) or social clubs (i.e. skateboard association). For future recruitment processes, it is important to have a strong list of youth friends on Facebook or connections to someone on Facebook that does such as a youth liaison or a high school teacher.

It is also important to consider the ages of the target audience because younger youth are less likely to use social media sites such as Facebook. In my research, about half of the video contest submitters (ages 10 to 13) were members of Facebook. However, during our focus group, four out of five youth (ages 13 to 15) used Facebook. It is possible that older, high school aged youth are more likely to use social media, especially given the rising popularity of smart phones.

Twitter was more useful for broadcasting messages if a hashtag was used (such as the name of the city or contest, i.e. #Revelstoke) because Twitter users can subscribe to the hashtag and receive notifications on any posts with that hashtag without following the poster; however, few youth seem to be members of Twitter in comparison to Facebook.

7.2 Participation

Overall we learned that while youth often expressed interest in participating, a more formal partnership might have increased actual participation such as a partnership between the high school and the Planning Department. We were able to recruit youth for the MyRevelstoke2030 June workshop and focus group by visiting
classes at the high school, but once the video contest launched in late June, that opportunity was no longer available.

It was easier to have meaningful discussions with youth in-person rather than online. Most youth would respond to private messages on Facebook but often did not comment on discussions or questions presented in the Facebook event or group. We received the most helpful input from youth when we were present at the MyRevelstoke2030 workshop focus group and had already been engaging in conversations between each other and with the research team on urban planning issues in their community. It was concluded that better input could be received in-person from youth and in an environment where they felt safe and open to expressing their opinions such as in a small group of peers.

We also learned that summer was not the ideal time to engage with youth. With high school no longer in session, it was difficult to locate new youth and propose our video competition. Youth that had previously expressed interest in remaining involved in our research became silent over the summer months despite our efforts to reach them through the Facebook group and private messages. Other youth expressed interest in the contest but lamented they were “away for the summer”.

Moreover, we learned that while a cash prize is desirable, it was not a strong enough motivator for most youth in relation to the amount of work required to complete the video. Many expressed initial interest in the competition with some even starting their video, but they later dropped out of the contest citing being “too busy” and the competition being “too much work”. It can be concluded that youth engagement activities should be simple enough to complete in a relatively short amount of time in order to retain their interest. Additionally, a more tangible, physical prize such as a GoPro camera might be a more exciting reward than money. Prizing should be discussed with youth in initial conversations to brainstorm ideas that would appeal most to them. A desired and sought after prize could also translate into better participation.

In the end, the five youth that participated in video contest were recruited by word of mouth.

7.3 Monitoring Effectiveness of Mediums

Analytical tools available on Facebook and Wordpress allowed me to monitor how the community was accessing and utilizing the websites.

Wordpress offers the most comprehensive statistics information of the two including information on number of visits, number of views, views by country, top post or page, comments, referrers, and search
For the purposes of my research, I was most interested in information on number of views and visits, top posts, and referrers.

The blog was launched on July 4, 2012 and by the end of August had a total of 14 posts and 27 tags. The site was viewed 121 times in July with an average of 4 views per day. In August, the site was viewed 42 times with an average of 1 view per day.

Through their analytical tools I learned that the overall top post was the homepage with 432 views. The contest details page received 26 views.

The highest number of hits ever received in a day was when I posted the poll asking how viewers get around Revelstoke in the summer and winter, which brought 23 viewers to the site. 33 people voted in total; 16 votes for how they got to school or work in the summer and 17 votes on how they did so in winter. I advertised the poll on my Facebook wall and The Stoke List. The interactive nature of the post seemed to resonate well with audiences. While such a post might not always be applicable, it is certainly a useful way to bring viewers to a website or blog where they might explore further after voting.

Referrers were helpful for directing viewers to the blog from other websites. Facebook proved to be the most useful site in this category, referring 33 viewers in total. Search engines such as Google sent 19 viewers to the blog, a Stoke List post 2 viewers and Twitter only 1 viewer.

Facebook provides far fewer analytical tools for the way in which I was using the site. Because I mainly used Facebook for to create a profile, event and group, the only data I was able to access was information on the number of viewers on posts in a group. For example, a post could say ‘Seen by 3’ and when you hover over the text, the names of the viewers will appear. This information is viewable to all members of the group.

Through this Facebook technology, I found that although youth from the focus group initially expressed interest in a Facebook group to receive updates, only one of thirteen groups members ever actually read any posts. During the contest this feature was not available and, as such, went undetected.
7.4 Video Submissions

From analyzing the submitted videos, I discovered that youth were most responsive to the digital medium of film. Both submissions used exclusively digital video shot by the youth on inexpensive handheld digital cameras. Although we asked participants to produce a Google Earth map showing their movement patterns, no submissions contained this. This task was potentially too challenging or intimidating for the ages of youth involved (aged 10 to 13) and perhaps would be better suited to older youth or would require a hands on tutorial rather than the tutorial blog post we provided. We also asked participants to reflect on their favorite and least favorite streets for walking, but both submissions chose to interview subjects and ask these questions rather than filming their own responses and ideas. After discussing this with the participants, I learned that the youth misinterpreted the purpose of the reflection piece and were not aware they were to film and discuss their own preferences.

YouTube statistics were helpful in gauging how many people viewed the completed videos. The winning video received 197 views to date while the runner up received 50 views. It is difficult to gauge why one video was viewed more than the other because neither groups of participants sent me evidence of promoting their video as stipulated in the contest rules. However, it is interesting to note that the video with more views is also the winning video. In order to draw conclusions from this discovery, more information is necessary on whether the participants actively promoted their videos among friends and family and how they went about sharing the video.

7.5 Digital Media Tools and their Potential for Integration

While the youth did not combine forms of digital media in the video contest as anticipated, there were still lessons learned from how I combined social and digital media to promote the video contest.

As described above, there is power in posting on various websites and social media pages to direct traffic to another website or social media pages. While Wordpress was the only site that offered statistics on how often this was done, there is potential that Facebook and Twitter could also provide similar results and perhaps similar data.

From a storytelling and information sharing perspective, there is great potential in combining various digital media. Having the ability to embed YouTube videos into blog posts allowed me to simplify complicated information. It also allowed me to share inspiration with viewers that could then motivate them to search deeper on YouTube for filming and story ideas for their videos.
CONCLUSION &
8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.0 Executive Summary
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This research aimed to provide new information on the potential of integrating accessible forms of digital media as a means of increasing youth involvement in urban design. From my research in Revelstoke, I have learned a number of key lessons about using digital media in youth engagement processes. Forms of digital media present a significant opportunity to increase the size and scope of audience in planning processes that require public input. Websites like Facebook and Twitter have the ability to reach community members that might never attend typical forms of municipal engagement such as town hall meetings, public hearings, or neighbourhood meetings. Youth are becoming increasingly adept and involved in various forms of digital media, and as such present an interesting opportunity to examine how local governments can increase youth involvement in urban design decisions through integrated media.

While many lessons were learned, there are certainly limitations to consider as well.

8.1 Limitations

First, as previously discussed in the background, the majority of Revelstoke youth come from middle to upper class families. This has the potential to increase their access and exposure to the forms of digital and social media discussed.

Revelstoke also experiences very little ethnic diversity, which has potentially created research results that cannot be assumed to be relevant or applicable to groups of youth in other towns or cities with differing backgrounds.

Lastly, as a young, female researcher with existing ties to the community, it is also possible it was easier for me to work with local youth than it might be for an outside researcher.

8.2 Recommendations

Despite these limitations, a number of key recommendations stand out in my research on how integrated media can be used by local governments to advance youth-oriented participatory planning:

8.2.1 Timing

In order to draw the largest sample of participants it is important to ensure engagement activity occurs during the school year. While summer may seem like a favorable time to reach youth because they potentially will have more free time, many students work and travel during the summer months. Moreover, many teachers are open to working engagement activities into their curriculum with enough warning. For instance, a video contest could incorporate forms of digital media being taught in a high school and potentially be a project that class works on.

These sorts of engagement pieces would clearly need to be formulated in advance if intended to become part of curriculum, but nonetheless present opportunities for discussions and partnerships between school districts and local government. If engagement needs to occur with less warning, the high school is still a worthwhile platform to explore in terms of recruiting youth.
8.2.2 Recruitment and Participation

In order to begin recruiting youth or gauging their interest in participating in an urban design or planning engagement processes, initially this should be done in person in youth-oriented environments or events where they will feel safe and open to expressing their opinions such as in a small group of peers. Youth appear to be more responsive to small gatherings with a conversational approach as opposed to larger groups with more formalized speaking opportunities or public situations where they might be expected to approach adults with questions or comments.

8.2.3 Facebook

When making first contact with youth in person, consider also gauging their interest in becoming Facebook friends to stay informed on engagement processes. After a Facebook friendship is established, it is appropriate to use the forum to follow-up and provide more information on an event or process. Having an established list of youth Facebook friends will significantly improve the chances of youth seeing posts and information on a subject. Posting on mutual friends walls or on Pages youth might Like is another option, although it does appear that youth are less responsive to and likely to read posts in groups or pages they do not visit often. Posting information on a personal profile is more likely to be seen over youths’ newsfeed. Moreover, any links to outside websites or social media sites used in a Facebook post can increase traffic or hits on those websites as well.

8.2.4 Twitter

Depending on the demographic of interest, Twitter may be an appropriate social media forum to explore. Youth in their younger teens seem to be less involved in Twitter; however older teens and youth in their 20’s are oftentimes frequent Twitter users.

Using unique hashtags on Twitter with key information related to the event is likely to generate more interest. Examples include the name of the city or event title and branding. Twitter users can then subscribe to hashtags of interest and receive notifications on any posts with that hashtag without following the poster.

8.2.5 Blogging

Blogs provide great potential when more information needs to be conveyed than is possible or practical on social media. Links to blogs can be posted on social media to draw users in, and once there, users may explore the blog more. Interactive posts like polls are a good way to draw users to a blog. Links to a poll blog post can be posted on Facebook, Twitter and other websites and have shown success in drawing users to the blog.

8.2.6 Prizing

When possible, consider offering some sort of prize or honorarium to youth in exchange for their participation. This can incentivize the activity and create friendly competition.
Consider the audience when choosing prizing. While a cash prize would seem desirable to youth, sometimes a physical prize can be more exciting and desirable. Other factors to consider are the number of participants and how or if that prizing can be divided.

Also consider the prize value in relation to the time or energy required of participants. If the prize does not seem worthwhile for the amount of work required, it will be difficult to recruit participants and hold their interest.

### 8.2.7 Digital Video

From analyzing the submitted videos, I found that youth were responsive to the digital medium of film. Digital video has become increasingly accessible given the popularity of smartphones, digital cameras and digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras. This accessibility combined with digital video’s popularity among youth makes it a sound choice to incorporate into youth engagement strategies.

### 8.3 Further Studies

There is significant potential for local governments to use accessible forms of digital media to engage youth in participatory planning processes. Social media can allow new voices to be heard in a less intimidating environment than a public form and other forms of digital media can help ease communication and visualization barriers between residents and planners; however, further research is also needed to understand if these forms of digital media can engage all youth, not just the middle and upper classes. Moreover, online forums should not be relied on as the sole means of communication with youth, and face-to-face communication is equally useful and important.

While there were many lessons about the successes and shortcomings of digital media gleaned from this research, less was discovered about their potential to be combined by youth. Assumptions and predictions can be made about their potential given the findings on how they worked individually; however, more research is needed to fully understand their potential for integration, particularly with youth.
9.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY


