# What you see is what you (may) get: Using visual props to promote engagement and storytelling

a Supervised Research Project
as part of the degree requirements for the
Master of Urban Planning

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# Abstract

This Supervised Research Project explores how visual props could be used to promote engagement in urban planning projects. Visual props refer to the tools that are used to trigger memories and convey content. In the planning context, these are typically going to be found in the form of plans, schematics or drawings, perspectives, or photographs. Engagement, on the other hand, refers to the process of and state of being interested in a planning project. The idea of “engagement” is often intertwined with the idea of “public participation”. The differences and nuances between these two terms are further clarified and described throughout this report.

This project bridges the gaps between theory and practice when it comes to the links between visual props and effective engagement strategies. The theory comes from an interdisciplinary literature scan and a definition of key concepts. Meanwhile, the practical elements emerge from interviews with 13 professionals who are involved in the process of making, using, or sharing visual props. The report begins by defining engagement, participation, and communication, and exploring the pros and cons associated with engagement. It then examines the role and use of visual props in engagement strategies, exploring the limits associated with their use both identified by the literature and practitioners in the field.

This project presents 15 design tips when using and creating visual props for engagement strategies. Considering how engagement is an obligation, yet a way for everyday citizens to impact how cities and spaces are planned, it is important to equip planners and practitioners with the right tools to improve public outcomes. This report explains that a wide-range of effective and well-designed visual props could be used to tell useful stories of (and to) the future, and which are important ways to promote engagement (Aberley, 2000).

# Résumé

Ce projet de recherche supervisé explore la manière dont les supports visuels peuvent être utilisés pour promouvoir l’idée de la participation publique dans les projets d’urbanisme. Les supports visuels sont des outils utilisés pour déclencher des souvenirs et transmettre le contenu. Dans le contexte de l’urbanisme, ils sont présentés sous la forme des plans, de schémas ou de dessins, de perspectives ou de photographies. Les différences et les nuances entre ces termes sont clarifiées et décrites à travers ce rapport.

Ce projet couvre les aspects théoriques et pratiques en ce qui concerne les liens entre les supports visuels et les stratégies de participation. La théorie provient d’une analyse préliminaire et interdisciplinaire pour définir les concepts clés. Les élements pratiques viennent d’une série d’entretiens avec 13 professionnels impliquées dans le processus de création, utilisation ou de partage des supports visuels. Ce rapport commence par définir la participation publique et la communication, et explore les avantages et les inconvénients associés à la participation publique. Il examine ensuite le rôle et l’utilisation des supports visuels dans les stratégies de participation, en explorant aussi les limites associés à leur utilisation, identifiés à la fois par la littérature et les professionels.

Ce projet présente 15 conseils de conception pour l’utilisation et la création des supports visuels pour les stratégies de consultation. Comme la participation publique est considéré comme une obligation, mais aussi un moyen pour les citoyens d’influencer la façon dont les villes et les espaces sont planifiés, c’est important d’outiller les urbanistes et ceux qui travaillent dans des domaines connexes avec les bons outils pour améliorer les stratégies de consultation. Ce rapport explique que souvent il y a plusieurs supports visuels par projet et s’ils sont bien conçus, ils peuvent être utilisés pour raconter des histoires sur (et vers) l’avenir, et ceci c’est une des façons pour améliorer la participation citoyenne.

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# Acknowledgements

I want to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to completing this Supervised Research Project and my master's degree requirements over the last two and a half years.

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# Preamble

In my first urban planning studio, we were asked a simple question: theory or practice? This question is one that I often come back to because, in urban planning, we work with both. Theory informs practice, but practice equally informs theory. The other question that often comes up as a planning student is: generalist or specialist? That is a tough one and I would say that I am more of a generalist. Before diving into my research project, I wanted to explain my background a bit and explain what led me to pursue this project. This Supervised Research Project is part of the requirements to finish my Master's degree, but it is also something tied to my educational and professional experiences to date. Planning is a little bit of everything, whether it is history, art, communication, math, politics, engineering, or biology. It truly is an interdisciplinary field, something that meshes well with my experiences and interests. Planners are typically seen as land use specialists, but there is an argument to be made that we can also be seen as generalists and those who are just trying to change the world step by step and project by project. Every day, planners engage with different tasks, skills and disciplines/

**Academic experiences**

When it comes to my academic path, in CEGEP, I was unable to decide between sciences and social science, so I did a double DEC. During my undergraduate degree, an Honours in Urban Planning, I took electives like acting, the history of science, economics, psychology and biology. It has been over five years since I started doing research and I worked on projects looking at the interactions between mycelium and fungi, between jobs and accessibility, or bike shops and income. For my Honours thesis, I wrote a Python code to scrape over 16 million data points. I have made maps and analyzed countless data sets during that process. It is an important skill, and I could have done something similar for my Supervised Research Project. However, I felt that I had already learnt those skills and I wanted to develop some new ones.

Over the last five years, I have taken five studio classes, some of the highlights of both of my degrees. Across these projects, I have worked on neighbourhood changes made possible by reconfiguring land uses and transportation systems. These projects include well-known projects in the Montréal context, Gorilla Park in the Mile-End, the Bridge-Bonaventure neighbourhood, the redevelopment of the Royal Victoria Hospital and its surrounding area, the Hippodrome and the reorientation of the curve out by the Hochelaga Yards. Some of the projects focused on housing, others on parks and institutional spaces, but the majority, focus on the idea of transportation. For these projects, I presented to different groups of people, including politicians, community groups and developers, one of the best tools would have to be 'before-and-after' pictures.

School cannot teach you everything, after five years of planning school, it is safe to say that there are many ‘soft’ skills and ‘hard’ skills that I learnt, whether it is map-making, paper writing, presenting or theories of urban planning. One thing that I also learned is the value of participatory planning and engagement strategies. No project can happen without them. Through school, I never really had a chance to work through these skills and develop them. As a result, I would find some time to attend public consultations or design workshops. In my spare time, I also consulted for community groups like Save the Fairview Forest in the West Island or contributed to the development of Concordia’s Master Plan. My desire to learn more about public engagement is part of the reason that I chose to work on this kind of project.

**Work experiences**

When it comes to work experience, my first job was as an assistant photographer. I spent hours sorting pictures and comparing them to find the best one. I could say that I have been professionally trained to play Where’s Waldo, spot the details and compare a picture pre-edit to one post-edit. Other jobs included working with youth and teenagers and developing games and workshops for them. Down the line, I want to get youth interested in planning projects and this comes through understanding public engagement and the effective ways to engage different audiences. Over the last year and a half, I have been working at Exo, in their project development office and now I am one of their accessibility consultants. I have been exposed to a whole slew of projects, whether it is new TOD-style projects, renovating train stations to make them more accessible, writing planning norms or guidelines, and of course improving our network’s accessibility intervention by intervention and project by project. With my colleagues, we always say that the client and user are at the heart of everything we do. At the end of the day, people matter, and I am a big believer in this mentality.

**Positionality statement**

As somebody who works in the realm of universal accessibility, I should probably state that I am an able-bodied individual who can see decently well, especially when I am wearing my glasses. I have had a few injuries over the years, but thankfully, nothing permanent and lasting. I will never fully understand what those with physical limitations or social limitations live through daily, but as a person I could learn, listen, and admit that our systems are flawed and that there is work to be done to make our places and systems more inclusive and accessible. I am an ally in this process, and I will admit that there is a lot to learn. As a result, this project also includes some of the best practices that favour inclusion and universal design.

**Rationale**

As an accessibility consultant and future planner, one of my goals is to find ways to plan for everyone, seniors, youth, and those with visual, physical, or social limitations. My goal is to also plan for those who come from different backgrounds or those with different goals. To plan for all these people, there is a need to find ways to engage with diverse publics and promote inclusion.
Over the years, I have found that people have a hard time communicating with each other. However, the moment you use visuals, things get easier. If you are trying to explain why there is a need to change the status quo, first, there is a need to understand it. People can understand how you got from point A to point B when you use visuals. People can relate to seeing progress over time, and they can even see how their ideas have been incorporated from the onset of a project. There is the cliché, a picture paints 1,000 words, but it also tells a story. By no means have I perfected the art of making visuals, but I appreciate them, and try making them when I can.

# Introduction

Change is inevitable. For some people, the thought of change can be daunting, scary, or intimidating. For others, change may also be a sign of hope, progress, or optimism. Change happens almost each day in cities, which are ideal places for experimentation because there is a large concentration of stakeholders and wealth (Urban Europe, 2016). To give a few examples, buildings get torn down and replaced, trees get planted, parks get created, bus stops get relocated, roads get narrowed, and bike lanes get tweaked. By no means is this a comprehensive list of the changes that take place in our cities; there are countless more. People learn about changes happening in their neighbourhood through online forums, social media, word of mouth, walking the streets, being briefed by elected officials, or other tools of communication. Interacting with these changes can be passive, where people just notice new developments happening, and carry on with their daily lives. In other cases, there may be more active interactions, where people talk about the changes, purposely go out of their way to see a space, and use it, or these changes may significantly alter daily behaviour.

As an example, take the recent opening of Montréal's new light rail system, the Réseau express métropolitain, or the REM. On opening weekend, thousands of people lined up to try the new system. Daily commutes were changed, those who used to take a bus directly from Longueuil or Candiac to downtown, now must take a bus and transfer to the REM. The project also brings a significant amount of noise, something that residents in Griffintown have been complaining about through newspapers and social media. When projects of this amplitude take place, some residents need to be walked through the changes, or they want platforms to express their thoughts and opinions. Residents and users may also want to have a say in decision-making processes because they want to limit how they are impacted. One way this happens is across public engagement initiatives.

Public engagement is defined as the way that levels of government meet and invite the public into the process of governing and decision-making (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). This process is a fundamental aspect of the human condition (Luka, 2018). There are many ways to engage


**Gare Centrale Station, Opening Weekend**

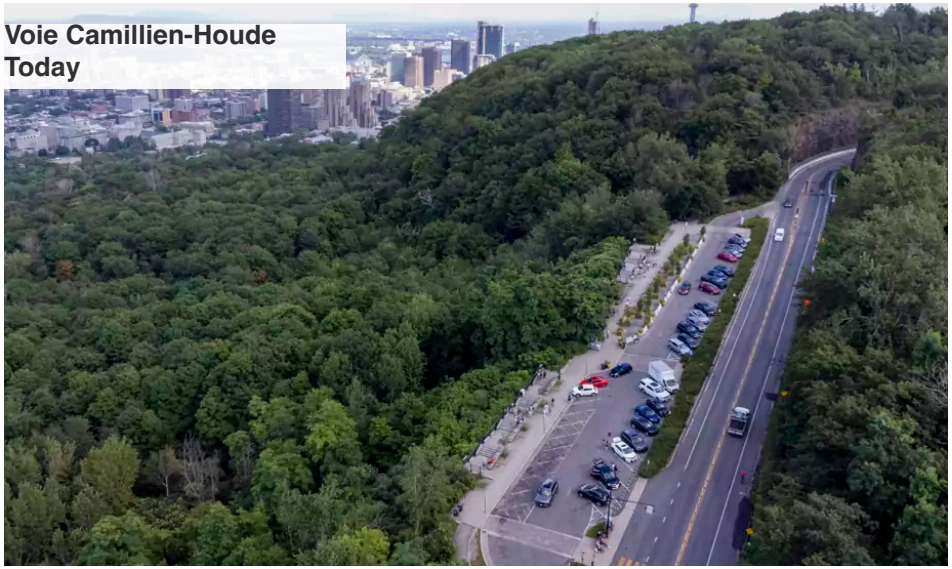
Source: Bensmihen (2023)


**Picture of the REM, Opening Weekend**

Source: Bensmihen (2023)

diverse publics and the methods to do so vary greatly and differ from project to project (Quick & Bryson, 2016). The number of cities and citizens turning towards engagement strategies is on the rise. Part of this could be attributed to the growing sense that different levels of government are unresponsive to and unrepresentative of public needs (Engle et al., 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2016). Engagement is also tied to the idea of interest, and this connection is quite complex to understand. People tend to be the most engaged and interested in a planning project when it is first announced. When it comes time to make decisions, there may be a sense of fatigue. As time goes on, people become less interested in a project as they get busy or get carried away with other things (Felt, 2014). Interest fades over time and shifts to something else, maybe more pressing issues or the hot topic of the day.

To demonstrate how interest shifts over time with a planning project, consider the case of closing the road that runs through the Parc du Mont-Royal, Voie Camillien-Houde, to private cars. In 2018, the idea gained popularity when cyclist Clement Ouimet lost their life. Two separate petitions circulated, one in favour of closing the road to cars, which garnered 8,300 signatures, and a second petition opposed to closing the road to cars, which received 39,000 signatures. These two petitions mean that at least 47,000 people were aware of the project and signed a petition. There may have been more people who read about it or chose not to voice their opinions. The City of Montréal then mandated the Office de consultation public de Montréal (OCPM), to hold hearings on a pilot project to close the throughway to cars. Over 13,000 people participated and reacted to the pilot project through various means, including an online survey, and the OCPM analyzed over 1,800 comments. At the time, this was a record turnout for participation in Montréal. It remains unclear whether the people who responded to the initial petition were the same people who reacted through the OCPM platform, but interest declined. After the round of surveys and comments, seven creative workshops were held in August-September 2018 to come up with different strategies and proposals, where 124 people showed up across the seven workshops (OCPM, 2019). One workshop that took




Source: Roy (2023)


Source: Ville de Montréal (2023)

place on the mountain only had five people show up. From 47,000 people down to just over a hundred suggests a decline in interest. In September 2023, despite the high (and historic) amount of opposition, the City of Montréal announced that the road closure was proceeding and that by 2029, Camillien-Houde will be closed to cars and reconfigured for cyclists, pedestrians, and emergency vehicles (Macdonald, 2023). The fading and changing interest is commonly seen across urban planning projects, especially those that take a long time to materialize. Other examples of these projects include the Cavendish extension, the metro's blue line extension, and the Hippodrome redevelopment.

In the Canadian context, engagement (more commonly defined as public participation) is a legal and procedural requirement before any development project gets approved (Nared, 2020). If public participation is an obligation, some actors see that it as something that simply entails being checked off a to-do list. Other people see it as a process that is unproductive, tediousok, or unnecessarily time-consuming. John Forester, a key thinker in this realm of work, notes that participation "scares the daylights out of many planners" (1998, p.8). Engagement allows people to have conversations and promotes deliberations leading to better decision-making (Fung, 2003; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). This process is crucial in the realm of urban planning as it enables legitimacy and allows everyday citizens a chance to have a say in how their cities and spaces are planned. Civic engagement is one of the ways in which residents or activists can transform developments and imagine future possibilities (Healy, 2008), this comes when people can share their stories and experiences (Russell, 2020). Brainstorming solutions to cities' problems and talking about change is something that should be fun. Yet planners and practitioners fear or dread engagement (Lyles & Sweraingen White, 2019). Some may even call it "scheduled train wrecks" (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2018), part of it is also because the engagement process is tied to emotions (Sundaresan & John, 2021).

This Supervised Research Project explores some of the effective strategies to keep people engaged in planning projects over time, particularly by using visual props. As planners are true interdisciplinarians, this project builds off theories explored in psychology, education, marketing, graphic design, visual perception, and urban planning to develop recommendations.

Section 1 reviews the existing literature to answer the following questions:

- What is engagement? ;
- What is public participation? ;
- What are the strengths and barriers associated with engagement? ;
- And what is considered successful or effective engagement?

Section 2 answers the questions:

- What are the limits of visual props? ;
- And how are visual props used in engagement and in the planning context?

From here, Section 3 uses interviews to answer the questions:

- How do professionals define and measure engagement? ;
- And what are the challenges faced with engagement?

Section 4 also uses findings from the interviews to answer the questions:

- What are the limits to the visual props? ;
- How could we improve visual props for engagement?

The literature review in Sections 1 and 2 defines the key concepts for this project, informing the content found in Sections 3 and 4. Sections 3 and 4 present findings and recommendations that emerged from thirteen interviews with professionals and practitioners who have experience using, producing, or sharing visual props. To select the interviewees, my supervisor, Professor Nik Luka, and I developed a list of potential interviewees based on professional networks. The interviewees are not only planners, but also people who work in the realms of marketing, visual arts,

graphic design, interior design, communications, architecture, community organizing, and research. As a result, this project is not only tailored to urban planners, but it is also useful for those who use or produce visual props to engage with decision-makers and the public. For the most part, the people interviewed have significant experience in their respective fields. The point about how many years of experience was not necessarily something that came up, however, retrospectively, it may have been interesting to document.

The interviews took place between August and September 2023 through Microsoft Teams or in locations around Montréal and lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour each. After receiving consent from the participants, conversations were recorded and after the interviews, I transcribed notes from the interviews. Considering how the interviews were semi-structured in nature, I developed a general list of questions and probes, but there was no specific order to these conversations. The list of questions and consent forms that I used throughout my interview can be found below in Appendix 1. From there, I took a thematic approach to reorganize and restructure the notes in a similar way to the information presented through the literature review. All the findings have been anonymized to protect the identity of the participants, and throughout the rest of the report, I refer to them as one interviewee or a few interviewees. I should also specify that the interviews were mostly conducted in English, but throughout the interviews, both French and English were used. For simplicity, I kept my notes and thematic notes in English.

Other papers in the field inspired the methodology used for this project. Corbett & Le Dantec's work (2018) led to 34 interviews to define community engagement and its outcomes. The idea of defining community engagement inspired one of the questions I asked throughout my interviews, how do you define and measure engagement? The idea of interviewing key stakeholders is also something that has been done by Everett & Lamond (2018) to look at the values associated with the implementation of blue-green infrastructure or Kleinhans et al. (2022) which look at how digital participatory platforms target engagement.

To better facilitate the interviews, I prepared some briefs and pulled up some visuals for two projects in the Montréal context, the transit-oriented development next to the Rosemont metro and the pedestrianization of Saint-Viateur. These briefs be found in Appendix 2. These two projects were selected through consultations with my supervisor, as these are representative of some of the projects that planners tend to work on. During the interviews, I quickly realized that the interviewees ended up talking about other projects that they worked on and what they have seen throughout their experiences because that was what they were more familiar with. Since most of the interviewees were working in the Montréal area, it was not difficult to become familiar with most of the projects on which they were working.

# Section 1
# Key concepts

One of the first steps in any planning endeavour is to empower all stakeholders with a basic understanding of key terms and concepts before discussing new ideas, options, or proposals. This section does exactly that through a literature scan and review of key works. Section 1.1 builds off Rowe & Frewer's (2005) work to define three key concepts: "public engagement", "public participation", and "communication". Before doing so, it bears noting that the term "public" is often used interchangeably with the terms "civic" or "community". There are various nuances for each of these different terms, but they are all important to processes of involving people who live in a particular context space, as well as non-residents who may have legitimate claims (e.g. merchants, property owners, etc.). There is a need to adapt strategies to diverse publics and to tie them to local contexts (Engle *et al.*, 2021; Participatory Canada, 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2016). As a result, this section also bounds the definitions of "engagement", "participation" and "communication" to the Montréal context. For a greater understanding of how public participation is done in the Montréal context, Appendix 3 presents a primer that was written as part of my Urban Governance class in Fall 2022. Section 1.2 looks at some of the strengths and the barriers that are associated with engagement. Then, Section 1.3 defines what is considered successful and effective for engagement strategies.

The terms "engagement" and "participation" are often used interchangeably. Even after five years of planning school and having attended quite a few public workshops or town halls, I am still guilty of making this mistake and confusing the two terms. They are two separate terms that remain heavily linked. In the Montréal context, it is relatively easy to make this mistake, especially when switching between French and English. In French, the term "engagement" refers to the action of committing to undertake a certain action. As an example, after COP15, Montréal invited cities to protect their biodiversity and their ecosystems (Ville de Montréal, 2023). By agreeing to this invitation, cities are committed to tackling biodiversity issues, and cities are engaged to act. The French term "participation" refers to the idea of "engagement" in English, where the government involves the public in decision-making (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018; Montréal Space for Life, n.d.). In English, "participation" refers to how dialogues take place (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). For engagement and participation to happen, there is a need to for communication, a way to share information. The three terms "engagement", "communication" and "participation" go hand in hand; one does not exist without the other (Healey et al., 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). The rest of this section draws on the literature to define each of these three terms in greater detail.

**Engagement**

Engagement is a complex term. To build a definition applicable in the Montréal context, it is important to mix the French definition, the state of being, with the English definition, the process of getting people involved in decision-making. Engagement as a state refers to the idea of being committed to something. People can be engaged or invested in something over time. Psychologist John Dewey argues that the state of being engaged is the same as the state of being interested in something (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2009). When people are engaged or committed to something, there is a certain level of buy-in. Interest is an

emotion, in a similar way to being happy or angry, the state of being interested or being engaged changes and fluctuates with time. Emotions vary depending on the day, the season, an individual's motivations, and their past experiences (Silvia, 2006). For planners to build interest, there is a need for expertise, knowledge and developed competencies (Leardini et al., 2019). The responsibility of targeting people's attitudes, hopes, and aspirations indirectly counts among the roles and responsibilities of urban planners, but there is an argument to be made that there is a need for a new profession of specialists in public engagement (Bherer et al., 2015). This merits consideration because planners are often seen as generalists, the people who bridge the gap between different people and professions, and thus may not have the capacity or focused skills to do the complicated work of public engagement.

The process of engagement, on the other hand, refers to the ways that government involves the public in decision-making (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018; Montréal Space for Life, n.d.). People interact with each other through dialogue, debate, and conflict resolution to identify interests and negotiate change (Hügel & Davies, 2020; Ortiz Escalante & Gutiérrez Valdivia, 2015; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Considering how municipalities are facing austerity measures and increased fiscal pressures, engagement aims to reduce inefficiencies by finding ways to improve the city (Bornstein & Leetmaa, 2015; Kleinhans et al., 2021). Engagement also recognizes that others are different, have different interests and cherish different things, something crucial to keep in mind when planning our cities (Forester, 1998). Engagement is more than a short-term strategy or a one-off intervention; it is a continuous process (Engle et al., 2021). The process of engagement influences the state of engagement.

Getting people engaged in planning projects is crucial. Simply put, things are getting increasingly complicated. There is a growing need to rethink our values and address unbalanced power dynamics (Participatory Canada, 2021). With the climate emergency, and the aftermath of the pandemic, the infrastructure built now for the future needs to be different than what already exists (Engle et al., 2021). If engagement is not done properly or if there are any failures or shortcomings, negative participation legacies develop and future engagement is limited (Kleinhans et al., 2021).

**Participation**

Participation refers to the settings where information can be exchanged, and dialogues can take place (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Participation sparks, fosters, and supports engagement as change can be negotiated between different stakeholders to improve the status quo (Arnstein, 1969; Fainstein, 1999; Konsti-Laasko & Rantala, 2018; Ortiz Escalante & Gutiérrez Valdivia, 2015). Ideally, stakeholders with less power have a chance to change the actions and decisions of those with more power (Fung, 2003; Senbel & Church, 2011). One of the goals is to include diverse publics to reach joint decisions in the planning process (Nared, 2020). Participation requires multidirectional information flows and exchanges to develop an enhanced understanding of public problems (Hügel & Davies, 2020; Quick & Bryson, 2016).

**Public information session, La Prairie**

Source: Bensmihen (2023)

Participation comes in many different forms and sizes (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), shown in Figure 1, is one tool that shows the different ways that citizens participate in planning projects.

The fourth rung in Arnstein's ladder, consultation, where external stakeholders consult the local population is one of the most common forms of participation, yet it is often misused (Galuzka, 2018). Historically, consultations were developed for specific tasks such as developing and fine-tuning zoning by-laws, and they have a specific format:

1. Issues are stated and the project is presented.
2. Through a question period, residents can ask questions about the project at hand.
3. Council members comment on the project.
4. The report is produced based on the council's decision.

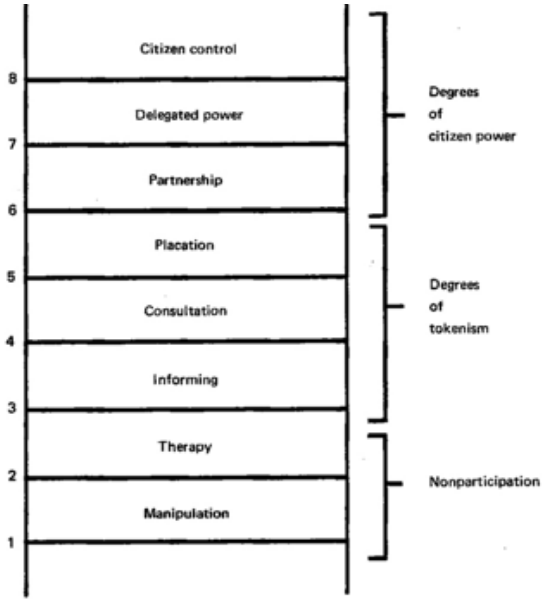



Figure 1 - Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation

Consultations are mandatory, but they limit participation (Kong, 2010; Nared, 2020). In these instances, professionals rely on a decide-announce-defend model, where they select their preferred solutions before giving the community a chance to voice their thoughts. Instead, there should be an emphasis on the idea of the engage-deliberate-decide approach where the public is maximally involved in developing solutions (Everett & Lamond, 2018). This would be higher on Arnstein's ladder of participation towards the 6th rung of partnership.

The City of Montréal adapted Arnstein's ladder to come up with a public participation and community engagement scale shown in Figure 2.


Figure 2 - City of Montréal's Public participation and community engagement scale

The following table presents some of the different ways that participation happens based on the City's scale:

| | Learning more | Expressing yourself | Co-creating | Deciding | Taking Action |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Example | Information sessions, kiosks | Public or educative forums | Participatory problem-solving sessions | Participatory budgeting | Using the City of Montréal's Right of Initiative |
| References | | (Bornstein, 2010; Fung, 2003) | (Fung, 2003) | | See Appendix 3 for more information |

The city's third category of "co-creating", which is synonymously used with the term co-production (Galuzka, 2018), is worth exploring in greater detail. With co-production, the public sector works with citizens to make use of assets and resources to improve efficiency (Kleinhans et al., 2021). It is a tool that strengthens dialogues and empowers resident groups to challenge constraints and negotiate improvements (Mitlin, 2018). Through co-production, different groups can have a say at decision-making tables, one of the end goals associated with participation.

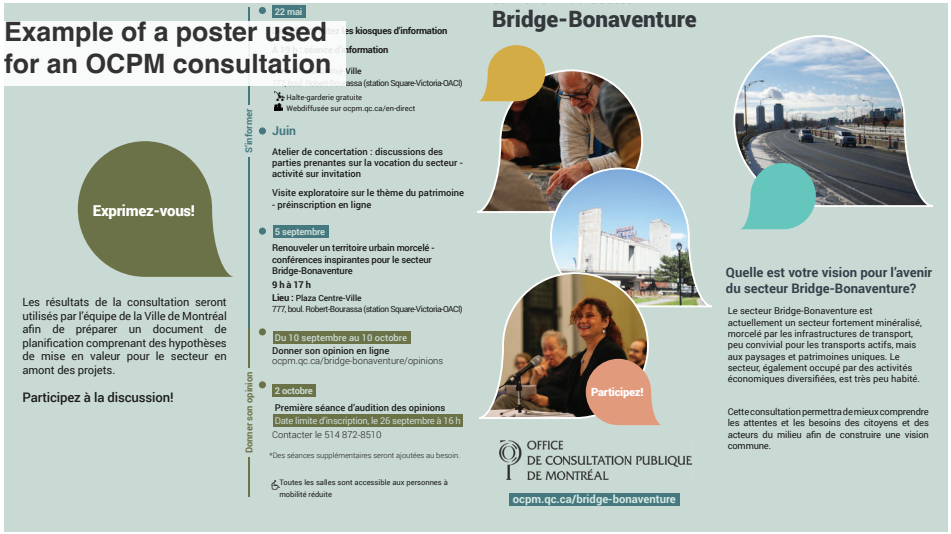
**Participants during a co-creation workshop**

Source: Maison de l'innovation sociale (2023)

## Communication

Communication refers to the unidirectional flow of information and knowledge (Hügel & Davies, 2020). There are many ways to communicate and share information. To give a few examples, information can be shared through posters, presentations, newspapers, videos, graphics, websites, or through word of mouth. These tools, among many others, share what is happening with respect to a planning project, or the ways that residents can participate. These tools also get people thinking and talking about a planning project, which could lead to new ways to see ideas and ultimately spark engagement (Quick & Bryson, 2016). The nature, function and identity of the city are ultimately defined by the idea of communication (Drucker, 2016). Cities are sites where messages are created, carried, and exchanged (Drucker & Gumpert, 2018).

**Example of a poster used for an OCPM consultation**




Source: OCPM (2020).

## 1.2 Engagement: strengths and barriers

With a better understanding of what engagement means, it is possible to look at some of its strengths. Engagement promotes negotiations and allows for different viewpoints to be shared. As citizens take ownership of community problems, there is greater buy-in, public support heightens, and novel solutions to existing problems emerge (Everett & Lamond, 2018; Nared, 2020; Quick & Bryson, 2016). Decision-making is brought to the nearest and most immediate scales of government, and people can interact on equal political terms (Kong, 2010; Kontsi & Rantala, 2018; Luka, 2018). When there is greater engagement, issues associated with gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy can be solved (Leardini et al., 2019). As legitimacy increases, project outcomes become more visible and more tangible, and through trust-building, there is a greater level of accountability (Engle et al., 2021; Forester, 1998; Fung, 2013; Participatory Canada, 2021). When citizens are engaged, resources are more equitably distributed, and there is a heightened awareness of sustainability issues (Nared, 2020; Quick & Bryson, 2016). Consequently, social justice goals could be advanced, and there could be better outcomes for individuals and their communities (Engle et al., 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2016).

There are clear benefits to getting people engaged in planning projects; however, there are a few barriers. Engagement requires a significant investment in resources, runs the risk of exclusion, and most importantly to this research project, it often faces difficulties maintaining interest over time. The rest of section 1.2 elaborates on each of these barriers in greater detail.

### Resource implications

The process of engagement requires many resources (Luka, 2018). There is a need for trained facilitators with negotiation, mediation, facilitation, and collaborative problem-solving skills (Nared, 2020; Forester, 1998). These skills are not necessarily something that can be taught through textbooks or coursework; they instead come from experience and practice. This idea calls back to Bherer et al.'s call for public engagement specialists (2015). Content and engagement strategies need to be adapted to local contexts (Engle et al., 2021; Participatory Canada, 2021; Quick & Bryson, 2016). This process takes time, significant effort and patience. There is also a need for funding. Currently, funding for engagement and participation strategies is fragmented, ad-hoc, and lacks long-term sustainable options (Participatory Canada, 2021). After a project is planned and built, there are very few funds for follow-up or regular maintenance. As a result, there is inevitable deterioration, especially for infrastructure projects (Everett & Lamond, 2018).

### Equity implications

Engagement strategies aim to include those who are normally excluded from planning projects (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Though the goal is inclusion, there is still exclusion. Participatory initiatives are technically open to all, but those who show up tend to be more well-educated, wealthy, and knowledgeable about decision-making processes (Fung, 2003; Kong, 2010). People with higher levels of formal education often have an easier time expressing themselves and presenting their opinions at consultations or public meetings (Kong, 2010). There are also difficulties for vulnerable groups who wish to attend participatory events: transportation costs are high, and parents may need to arrange for childcare (Bornstein, 2010; Kong, 2010). If some of the platforms used to engage the public rely on technology, there may also be difficulties accessing them (Felt, 2014). Seniors and those who lack the technical know-how or those who speak a different language, have a hard time interacting with these technological platforms. Children and youth are often excluded. Then, factor in those who have time for public participation processes, and there is a very slim percentage of the population that attends these sessions. Corbett & Le Dantec thoroughly sum this up with a compelling statement: "There's only so many people that have so much time to deal with community stuff. Most folks are just trying to go to work, pick up the kids, get

the groceries, go to the gym, do their normal routine." (2018, p.6). There is a presumption that citizens have the extra time, interest, and knowledge to participate in neighbourhood planning initiatives (Felt, 2014). Often, this is not the case.

With participation strategies, there tends to be a drive for consensus, which also leads to exclusion (Goodman et al., 2020). The process is often about finding winners, which implies that there are losers (Kong et al., 2023). There may also be some tensions between different groups wanting change in their communities (Bornstein, 2010). Due to a lack of knowledge, there is often resistance to power redistribution (Arnstein, 1969).

**Difficulties maintaining engagement and interest over time**

Getting citizens interested and invested in a project at first is one thing. However, there is very little in the literature on how to maintain interest and engagement over time. Interest and buy-in inevitably fade and shift with time. Humans have a limited amount of attention (Carrasco, 2011). Maintaining interest over time is something that is difficult due to varying conditions and new needs that develop (Leardini et al., 2019). People move and change neighbourhoods very often in the North American context, and it is hard to develop a sense of place and community (Luka, 2018). In other cases, there may be a sense of fatigue when decisions are to be made (Felt, 2014). When there are hot or contentious issues, citizens are more likely to be drawn to voice their opinions (Fung, 2003). Planners play and build off people's emotions, yet they may not necessarily have the right toolset to do so.

John Forester (1998) explains that engagement is successful if projects can continue without being attacked or without too much opposition. Others would argue that effective engagement requires government involvement (Bornstein & Leetmaa, 2015) or that there needs to be expert mediation (Senbel & Church, 2011). Fung (2003) argues that successful engagement is defined by the quantity of participation. It is possible to count how many people show up to a consultation process, how many people fill out a survey, and interact with a picture or a social media link. However, just because 39,000 people fill out a survey, it does not necessarily guarantee that there is long-term engagement. Effective engagement relies on rich exchanges that lead to good policies and decisions that could be implemented easily (Quick & Bryson, 2016). The effectiveness and appropriate level of engagement varies from context to context, and from project to project (Hügel & Davies, 2020). The local context dictates the terms of engagement (Engle et al., 2021; Kleinhans et al., 2021; Nared, 2020). Based on the Montréal context, the City's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities considers engagement to be effective, credible, and transparent if they follow, adopt, and maintain the appropriate procedures (2021). The Charter does not go any further than that to spell out what counts as the appropriate procedures. However, based on the literature, there are a few strategies that lead to effective engagement: better preparation, promoting quality exchanges, focusing on the local scale, and using visuals.

**Better preparation**

The first strategy to promote engagement is for planners to prepare better before participatory initiatives. Forester (1998) explains that knowing the interests of those who would show up to consultations or public workshops, and understanding how different groups will be affected by different propositions goes a long way in keeping people engaged. If different groups have questions that cannot be answered, they are less likely to show

up and ask their questions. To better prepare, there is a need to develop an understanding of the local context, collect data and actively manage conflict between different stakeholder groups (Kontsi-Laasko & Rantala, 2018; Quick & Bryson, 2016). There is also a need to learn from the communities that use a given space to see what works and what is lacking (Engle et al., 2021).

**Promoting quality exchanges**

A second strategy to promote engagement is to create opportunities for participation that promote quality exchanges, where residents can explain themselves clearly and use logical arguments to evaluate options, scenarios, and outcomes (Quick & Bryson, 2016). There should be hybrid approaches to participation, including a mix of virtual and in-person methods (Shin et al., 2022). Quality exchanges are also possible when people can learn from others (Fung, 2003). Involving the public at the beginning of a project builds trust over time, which ultimately promotes participation and engagement (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018; Forester, 1998; Quick & Bryson, 2016). There is also a need for cooperation, which gets built through long-term relationships (Galuzka, 2018).

**Focusing on the local scale**

A third strategy to promote engagement is to work and focus on the local scale. Larger scales baffle participants, and people have a harder time relating to discussions and debates. At the local scale, there is easier access to decision-makers and tighter feedback loops; moreoever, people have a stronger tendency to self-identify with their local places (Luka, 2018). The local scale is something that is rather difficult to define because it is not something administrative like a borough or a municipality, instead, it is where themes could be developed beyond the scope of a single property (Wissen Hayek et al., 2015). The term local is best defined by looking at examples. For instance, a project like the pedestrianization of Saint-Viateur, a 5-block project, would be something local in scale. Another project, like the transit-oriented development at Rosemont metro, with a project to build 193 units on top of the Rosemont metro station, would be considered local. These two projects are going to be explained in greater detail below in Appendix 2. The Camillien-Houde project explained in the Introduction is larger than the local scale because its impacts are felt across the City.

**Using visual props**

Another strategy that planners can use to provoke engagement and action is using visual props such as images and physical models (Nassaeur, 2015). These translate ideas into a format that is more easily accessible for diverse publics (Downes & Lange, 2015). Lynch's foundational book for the realm of urban planning, The City and Its Elements, (1960), describes five elements that are key to the image of the city: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Quentin Stevens (2006) builds off Lynch's term landmarks to describe the idea of a prop. Props are elements that trigger memories, convey content and spark interest (Stevens, 2006; Nurul Mujahidah et al., 2021). These are tools that hook and captivate audiences or foster and promote understanding (Astrachan, 1998). Props are also one of the ways to develop a common language, something that is useful for exchanging information and opinions (Nurul Mujahidah et al., 2021) or to triangulate social interaction between strangers (Whyte, 1980 in Stevens, 2006). Props also "serve desires for sensory pleasure, escape into imagination, testing bodily limits and engaging with strangers" (Stevens, 2006). Stevens' point about bodily limits is useful when there are physical models or structures in the city.

Mitchell (1986) describes five families of images: the graphic as in the picture, the optical as in the mirror, the perceptual as in the cognitive sense, the mental as in dreams, memories or ideas and the verbal as in descriptions and metaphors. These five families of images provoke ideas and values (Hansen & Machin, 2008). Specifically, graphics can also target sight, one of our most

powerful and seductive senses (Hulté et al., 2009). Pictures are one of the more effective ways to share information and they offer a method to see the unseen (Lewis et al., 2012; Tufte, 2007). With visual props, there can be greater buy-in, leading to greater engagement, and there may also be changes in behaviours, actions, and beliefs over time (Nassauer, 2015), or greater dialogue (Senbel & Church, 2011).

This section explored the ideas of engagement, participation, and communication. Engagement is the state of having people be bought into projects and the process of getting citizens involved in decision-making processes. Participation refers to the ways in which citizens can get engaged and have dialogues. Communication refers to the tools to share information about projects. When it comes to engagement, a few problems commonly emerge. Concerns and issues associated with engagement were reviewed briefly, notably how it requires significant resources, how exclusion is a perennial challenge, and most importantly to this research project, how there are difficulties maintaining public interest over time. If we are to promote engagement, there is a need for better preparation, promoting quality exchanges, focusing on the local scale and most importantly for the rest of this paper using effective visuals. The next chapter elaborates on how visual props play a role in engagement strategies.

## Section 2

# The roles and uses of viusal props in engagement strategies

As explained above, visual props are tools that support engagement, and which can keep people engaged throughout planning projects. Section 2 defines the process of visualization in greater detail. Section 2.1 details some of the limits that are associated with both the production and the use of visual props. From here, Section 2.2 looks at some of the dominant types of visual props used in the realm of urban planning, particularly plans, 3D renders, sketches, diagrams, and photographs. There are many other visual props to consider, such as websites, videos, and advertisements, but arguably these are platforms for sharing the dominant types of visuals, and thus do not need to be examined in detail here.

Corner (1998) defines visualization as the exposure to images to help construct landscapes. The two terms, “images” and “landscapes” go together. As Corner explains, landscape, a term that comes from Landschaft or Gemeinschaft, refers to the forms and ideas that structure society. Raaphorst further defines landscapes as “the result of collective processes where multiple perspectives and perceptions engage in conflict and negotiation” (2018, p. 654). As a result, visualization is defined as the process that aims to facilitate understanding by simplifying complex information (Downes & Lange, 2015). Images and graphics, the result of the visualization process, allow for issues to be framed, and for people to have a better understanding of scales and dimensions (Corner, 1998). Considering how the practice of planning consists of organizing objects in space, visuals are heavily used (Söderström, 1996). Images bring people to a point where they can speak a common language and have dialogues (Nassauer, 2015; Roque de Oliveira & Patidário, 2020; Senbel & Church, 2011). With advances in computer processing and computer power, visual props are being used more frequently to embrace novelties and to invent future landscapes (Al-Kodmany, 1999; Downes & Lange, 2015; Lewis et al., 2012).

Visual props facilitate communication, they are considered effective visuals if they generate responses from stakeholders and decision-makers (Lewis et al., 2012). However, visuals have some important limits: they represent a single snapshot in time, serve as a deceitful tool for persuasion and coercion, can be interpreted differently, lack production standards, and come at high costs. The rest of this section explains the limits associated with visuals in greater detail.

**Visual props represent a single snapshot in time**

Visual props are carefully selected representations of landscapes, and they are snapshots at specific moments in time (Downes & Lange, 2015; Nassauer, 2015; Tarlao et al., 2023). Visuals do not reflect the most up-to-date changes in a neighbourhood. For instance, take a bus stop. If you have a picture of a bus stop in 2019, it might not be the same today in 2022. There might be a new building going up, or the sidewalk may have been widened.


Source: Google Maps (2019)


Bus stop in 2022
Bike path and construction

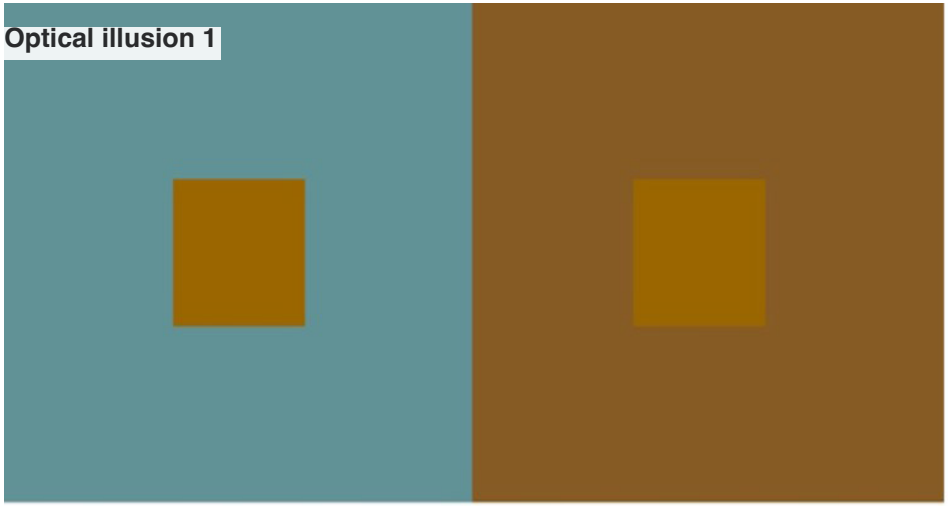
Source: Google Maps (2023)

**Visual props may serve as deceitful tools for persuasion and coercion**

Visual props are sometimes deceitful because they may act as ‘sales devices’ showing unrealistic realities (Downes & Lange, 2015; Nassauer, 2015). As an example, movement and sound are not elements that can be captured through visuals like plans or renders. Promoters or developers may push the limits of images to manipulate the outcomes in their favour (Senbel & Church, 2011). In other cases, visuals can be manipulated to “persuade the public of its value” (Appleyard, 1977, p.48). Downes & Lange’s article (2015) really demonstrates some of the ways in which visuals could be manipulated between renders and what gets built. Visuals typically show the beautiful weather as opposed to heavy rain showers, snow falls or extreme cold that is experienced daily in cities. They also tend to show the proposed project as opposed to the business-as-usual approach or the do-nothing approach, as in what would happen if there were no interventions (Lewis et al., 2012). One of the other ways that visuals are deceitful is when community members are in positions where they can produce visualizations, they may end up creating unrealistic proposals (Senbel & Church, 2011; Sheppard, 2001). As an example, there is this article on archdaily that compares proposals to actual projects. Follow this link here.

**Visual props can be interpreted differently**

Previous sensory experiences and memories influence the interpretation and the understanding behind every image (Hultén et al., 2009). One of the best ways to illustrate this point is through the example of optical illusions.


Optical illusion 1

The two small squares are exactly the same colour

Source: HowToDoEasy.com (n.d.)

**Optical illusion 2**

Source: Ely Hill (2015).

**Render from the Old Port Master Plan**

Source: Daoust Lestage Lizotte & Stecker (2017)

Everybody will see different things from the two illusions. For some people, the second picture shows an old lady, and others see it as a younger lady.

People also interpret visual props differently, their interpretation depends on their social roles and their experiences (Raaphorst, 2018; Tufte, 2007). Professionals or those working on specific details of a project have a trained eye to look at certain details versus the everyday citizen or the local stakeholder (Raaphorst, 2018). People who have physical limitations or who work with those who have physical limitations may notice the lack of ramps or railings next to a set of steps. As an example, on the right is a seductive perspective view created by the architect firm Daoust Lestage Lizotte + Stecker for the Old Port Master Plan in 2017. Part of this project is to bring people directly to the level of the water through steps. Yet, from the image, there seems to be no ramp, or no railing, which can be slightly problematic for those with a mobility impairment.

The other thing with visuals to remember is that those with visual deficiencies will have difficulty using these tools (Cinderby, 2010). More and more, some tools correct these problems, whether it is colour contrast checkers (one is available here), or providing alternative text next to an image for those who use screen readers.

**Visual props lack production standards**

Visual props lack production standards, frameworks, or guidelines for designers to follow (Downes & Lange, 2015). Designers, or as Lewis et al. (2012) call preparers, have different ways to skew pictures. The preparers can render the output by changing the viewpoint selection, they can over-colour, or they can populate a given space with too many people. The designers can also decide how they choose to light a space or on what size they present this information. This adds a layer of subjectivity to the decisions behind some of the visuals (Sheppard, 2001; Sheppard et al., 2005).

To address these issues, Sheppard (2001) proposes a code of ethics to improve conventional landscape visualizations:

1. Accuracy – Visuals should stimulate the actual or expected appearance of the landscape. This point ties to the point earlier about how visuals serve as a deceitful sales tool.
2. Representativeness – Visuals should represent typical viewpoints. As an example, Downes & Lange (2015) explain that designs and renders should illustrate a fixed height that represents the average eye level as opposed to the unrealistic views that we tend to get.
3. Visual clarity – The details, components and content should be clearly communicated.
4. Interest – Visuals should engage and hold the interest of the audience. This idea is something that the rest of this project aims to explain in greater detail.
5. Legitimacy – The visual should be defensible and the steps and decisions should be made clear. Senbel & Church (2011) explain that there is a need for accountability behind the steps in the design process.[1]

**Visual props come at high costs**

Visual props are also expensive to produce (Söderström, 1996). Since the 1990s, the pace of software development has made the production of high-quality visual props easier (Lewis *et al.*, 2012). To make such props, there are complex setups, costly hardware, software subscriptions, and steep learning curves. Often, the design interfaces are not multi-user collaborative, so decision-makers and stakeholders cannot actively be involved in iterative design processes (Noyman & Larson, 2020). Due to the high costs, in some cases, community groups may not be able to rely on these kinds of visuals to spark conversations with elected officials about some of the changes that they want to see in their neighbourhood.

In the planning context, many different types of visual props get used. Roque De Oliveira & Partidário (2020) explain that plans, schematics, drawings, aerial or satellite photos, photographs, and three-dimensional models are mainly used to engage stakeholders. This first set of tools is considered the basic visuals. Other tools like virtual reality, augmented reality, animations, documentaries, and interactive GIS platforms also exist. This second set of visuals is more complex. More and more, complex visual props are being used in participatory settings (e.g. Chowdhury & Schnabel, 2019; Papadopoulou & Giaoutzi, 2021). Due to the high technological resources, costs and skills that are required to use, share, and produce complex visuals, the rest of this paper focuses on the basic visuals. There is some merit to using complex visuals, but based on my experiences to date, engagement and participation should happen at sites close to where projects are to take place. There is a need to have opportunities to participate and engage “out in the field” or out in the city, to talk to people in the streets as opposed to town hall sessions or Zoom meetings (Cinderby, 2010). With these kinds of opportunities, it is rather difficult to use complex tools to integrate people’s needs and comments on a project. Similarly, to one of the points elaborated upon in section 1.3, planners need to prepare better for engagement opportunities. Part of this comes through curating the visuals to be used, especially if they are shared in the field.

Each type of basic visual prop has specific use cases for engagement strategies. Considering how everybody learns and processes things differently, an effective engagement strategy includes multiple visuals. As an example, 3D visuals, like renders, need to be paired with 2D visuals, like plans, for observers to be able to orient themselves (Herbert & Chen, 2015).

Planning projects often involve learning from the past and borrowing from the present to come up with a vision for the

1It should be noted that Sheppard uses the idea of visuals as opposed to visual props.

future. Inherently, there is a need to compare across different contexts, whether it is through before and after visualizations or presenting different scenarios. If there are no known standards or comparable, it is difficult for people to understand and grapple with distances and scales (Downes & Lange, 2015). Using principles of psychology, Cohn (2013) explains that using sequential pictures, like before-and-after scenarios, helps construct narratives, and people can develop their interpretations and meanings for projects. People will have a harder time understanding one picture presented in isolation compared to a sequence of images that paints a story (Collie, 2011; Lee, 2010; Roque De Oliveira & Partidário, 2020). When considering planning projects, multiple issues can arise in project development, consequently, there is a need to layer issues and separate them through different visuals (Corner, 1998). The rest of this section looks at some of the basic visual props and how they can be used for engagement strategies. The examples come from a public space project in the Montréal context, Place des Montréalaises.

**Two-dimensional plans**

Plans or maps are one of the best ways to show visions to demonstrate what could be done to transform a neighbourhood (Kong , 2023). These two-dimensional representations present many bits of information on a single page (Corner, 1998; Tufte, 2007). The information presented varies from context to context, depending on the available data sources and the designer's intentions. As an example, plans show different zones or themes, including land use, zoning, social demographics, patterns, flows and movements. These themes are represented through symbols (Herbert & Chen, 2015). Designers make deliberate choices about what is shown on a map, and some of the relevant information may be excluded (Roque de Oliveira & Partidário, 2020). Plans are bird-eye perspectives and have become one of the ways to represent the city to the everyday person, specialists, and decision-makers (Söderström, 1996). These kinds of visuals are very useful for looking at basic measurements whether it is height, setback, building footprints and lengths (Herbert & Chen, 2015). If people are guided through maps and encouraged in the process, people can physically engage in an area (Cinderly, 2010).


**Example of a plan view, Place des Montréalaises**

Source: Lemay (2022)

**Schematic diagrams and drawings**

Schematic diagrams and drawings, even if they are just a few lines, transform ideas into something more realistic (Al-Kodmany, 1999). Freehand drawings allow focus to be placed on the substance, rather than the details and the ideals of a finished product (Bradecki & Stangel, 2014). An example of a schematic and drawing would be a cross-section. Cross-sections are effective at describing relationships between different objects, whether it is the street concerning nearby buildings, or how streetscapes could be changed (Manchester Urban Design Lab, 2020). If the public has a chance to draw out their ideas too, it allows for a storyboard to be developed (Al-Kodmany, 1999). In some cases, there is also a need to show relations between different stakeholders, and this comes through schematic diagrams.

**Perspectives**

Over time, there has been a shift in using a 2D representation system, towards a 3D system (Herbert & Chen, 2015). Renders are used to clarify some of the outcomes associated with complex design decisions (Noyman & Larson, 2020). Perspectives present a partial view of what can be seen (Söderström, 1996). These three-dimensional representations demonstrate the effects of shadows or lighting, they can also look at how something integrates with the existing environment (Herbert & Chen, 2015). They tend to be hyper-realistic as they show a third dimension, whether it is height or depth (Papadopoulou & Giaoutzi, 2021). Corner (1998) explains that perspectives are “instruments of power, enabling mass surveillance, projection and camouflage” (155).

**Example of a sketch, Place des Montréalaises**

Source: Lemay / Amdrew King (2021)

**Aerial view, Place des Montréalaises**

Source: Lemay (2022)

**Photographs**

Among hyper-realistic tools used to promote engagement are photographs, photomontages, and videos. These can be prepared by amateurs or professionals, using devices such as phone cameras, drones, and multi-camera setups. With widespread access to good cameras, anybody can now visualize their surroundings at any given moment. Photographs are close representations of reality, so there is little interpretation needed (Al-Kodmany, 1999). These tools are effective at describing the social context and connecting it to a human scale. Compared to 2D drawings or 3D visuals, photos have the power to show how people use a given space. They can also show some deficiencies and where there is room for improvement (Campkin et al. 2014). Photos get shared across social media, sparking conversation and debate (Lee, 2010).

Photographs may be taken from an aerial level, or they may be at the ground level. Aerial photographs are best used to show the whole picture or a vue d'ensemble, of the city and its surrounding landscapes (Vidler, 2011). Photos from ground level can show the situation as it is and spark conversations.

Through photomontage and using different layers, different design elements could be shown concerning the look of the neighbourhood. For instance, different façade treatments could be readily compared. However, photo manipulation is not easy to do in real time (Al-Kodmany, 1999).

**Render / street-level photograph, Place des Montréalaises**

Source: Lemay (2022)

## Summary

This section briefly explained some of the limits associated with visual props - notably how visual props represent a single snapshot in time, can be deceitful, can be interpreted differently depending on people's backgrounds an experiences, lack production standards, and come at high costs. These are crucial to look at before using visual props could be used for planning projects. This section also explained some of the basic visual props used in the planning context: plans, diagrams, perspectives and photographs. The next section chapter elaborates on how professionals view the idea of engagement.

# Section 3

# Engagement defined by professionals

Section 3 presents key findings that emerged from the 13 interviews, with a focus on the work of engagement. Section 3.1 builds off the notion of the public presented at the beginning of Section 1 to define the audience. It turns out there are more nuances than what came out of the literature review. Section 3.2 presents some of the problems identified by professionals when it comes to engagement, building off what was found in the literature as identified in Section 1.2. Then, Section 3.3 defines the ways that engagement can be measured and promoted, building off Section 1.3.

At the outset of any planning project, there is a need to define the user, the client, the audience, or the broader public. Throughout the interviews, these four terms were used interchangeably. In web design and marketing, design crits profile the expected demographic that would use a certain product or service. This phase consists of significant research to define the target demographic. One interviewee explained that it is difficult to reach a target audience with which they may not necessarily be familiar or have a direct connection. They said: “You have to adjust depending on who your demographic is.” When planning for universal design and inclusion, this is important to remember. In these cases, it is a matter of doing thorough research and looking at trends in what has been done across other contexts, by other organisations, or other professionals. This task gets easier with work experience and knowledge of which references to consider. Another interviewee also said that “we can only speak for ourselves, we cannot speak on behalf of everyone.”

In urban planning, the end users are the people who will use a space. Identifying the end user requires developing knowledge of public needs through careful demographic studies and through extensive participation. Planners also face situations where they are working for a public that does not yet exist. Many interviewees explained that the audience and public change from project to project, and throughout the interviews, respondents stressed how there is often more than one audience. There are the everyday users or the public at large. In French, this translates to the notion of the grand public. Then, there are the key stakeholders and the technical experts who turn projects into reality. This nuance is easily forgotten, yet must be kept in mind because each audience requires different levels of detail. The everyday users might have a harder time understanding visual props and need more explanation. Technical experts, on the other hand, require very nuanced details. One example that arose in the interviews concerns a kitchen cabinet, for which the user needs the colours and how it fits with the rest of the kitchen;

meanwhile, the contractor needs details on how to securely install the cabinets. In the planning context, planners and consultants are going to evaluate projects based on plans, meanwhile, the public is often going to judge them based on impressionistic images such as renderings and photomontages suggesting what to expect.

There is a third category of the audience of which we must be mindful: elected officials. In terms of expertise, they are a group that lies between everyday users and professional specialists. Some may have technical expertise, others may not. Local councillors and senior politicians alike often have a slew of files and projects on their dockets. One of the interviewees explained that to reach politicians, there is a need for multi-year strategies that are built through partnerships and connections. Tailoring these messages is something is very strategic. We might also consider the need to explain why there is a need to intervene and act today or tomorrow, not somewhere down the line.

Section 1.2 addresses some of the equity implications that limit engagement. One interviewee explained that not everyone has the same level of experience, so there is a need to check on what sorts of awareness participants already have. The people who end up attending participatory sessions are those who have time and those who have the experience to speak up—often because they tend to have higher levels of formal education. Two interviewees explained that those who speak up are also typically those who oppose a project, noting that in their experience, the people who are indifferent, or who support a project, will not tend to voice their opinions. As a result, the interests that come out of participatory sessions are typically negative. Furthermore, when media coverage is involved, the information that is reported tends to be negative, with anticipated positive impacts only mentioned in passing. As practitioners, we should find ways to encourage and highlight the good stories and the positive attributes of projects as preoccupations for engagement.

> *"You have to adjust [your content and engagement strategies] depending on your audience."*

> *"We can only speak for ourselves, we cannot speak on behalf of everyone."*

### 3.3 Measuring and promoting engagement

Section 1.3 defines effective engagement and identifies the ways to promote engagement. The literature does not define how successful engagement could be quantified and measured. The interviews confirm this point. One interviewee gave the example of a store, where the number of people that walk by a display or through an aisle is not something that could be easily measured. Other interviewees explained that from an online standpoint, there are ways to measure click-through, to track eye-level movement or the number of individuals who join an email list. Through social media, it is possible to track the number of 'likes' and comments associated with specific posts. One interviewee explained that influencers or powerful people could share the posts and pictures. Another interviewee said: "La consultation publique principale en milieux municipales, le plus grande consultation publique a lieu chaque quatre ans et c'est les élections municipales. Le taux de participation est nulle." In English, this translates to the idea that the best way to measure engagement is through the number of votes cast in referenda or elections, but low voter turnout is a perennial concern (see Hajnal & Lewis, 2003; Holbrook & Weinschenk, 2014). Also, if engagement were restricted to the number of votes, this would happen very infrequently, once every four years or when elections take place. In all these cases, there may not be long-term buy-in.

Section 1.2 refers to some of the psychology behind how interest fades over time due to limited attention spans. This point was confirmed throughout the interviews, and the fact that attention fades is inevitable. One interviewee explained that if somebody remembers something from 20 minutes before and can recount that information to someone else, there is some interest or buy-in. The idea of remembering something from 20 minutes ago is linked to another principle of psychology, that of recall. Over time, through association and experiences, people build memories (Montgomery, 1998). Then, there is a prompt that gets people to remember the memories that were formed (Josselyn & Tonegawa, 2020). When memories are shared with others, something stuck and there is some kind of buy-in. Another interviewee explained that it is possible to track the number of people who show up to participatory sessions, but in some cases, people might not have anything to say, and they may just want to listen to what is being said by officials and other attendees.

Section 1.3 also explains that to promote effective engagement, there is a need for better preparation, promoting deliberative exchanges, focusing on the local scale, and using effective visual props. In the interviews, the first two points were not spontaneously mentioned. Instead, the interviewees explained that to promote engagement, emphasis should be placed on continuity, explanation, and expert involvement. These three strategies promote the art and concept of storytelling. One interviewee said: "Inherently, humans are storytellers"; people have an easier time understanding narratives and through continuity, explanations, and expert curation, planning projects can be seen as stories (see Aberley, 2000; Engle, 2018; Throgmorton, 1996). The idea of focusing on the local scale is something that came up but could be tied into these three strategies. The rest of this subsection explains each of these three strategies in greater detail. The point about developing effective visuals, as stated in the literature review, is covered in Section 4.

> "*Inherently humans are story tellers.*"

#### Aim for continuity

One of the ways to promote engagement is through continuity and consistent messaging. To demonstrate an example, I am going to borrow from one of the interviewee's examples from the domain of marketing, particularly commercials. Initially, there is a longer TV spot that lasts between 30 to 60 seconds. This ad is going to run for about a month, Then, a shorter clip, running between 5 to 15 seconds, will be released; this calls viewers back to the initial clip. The shorter clip tends to live longer through social media and ends

up becoming something easier to share over time. Sometimes the switch from the longer ad to the shorter ad happens in the same event. When watching the Superbowl or a hockey game, at the beginning of the game, there will be longer ads, then there will be shorter ads recalling the initial message.

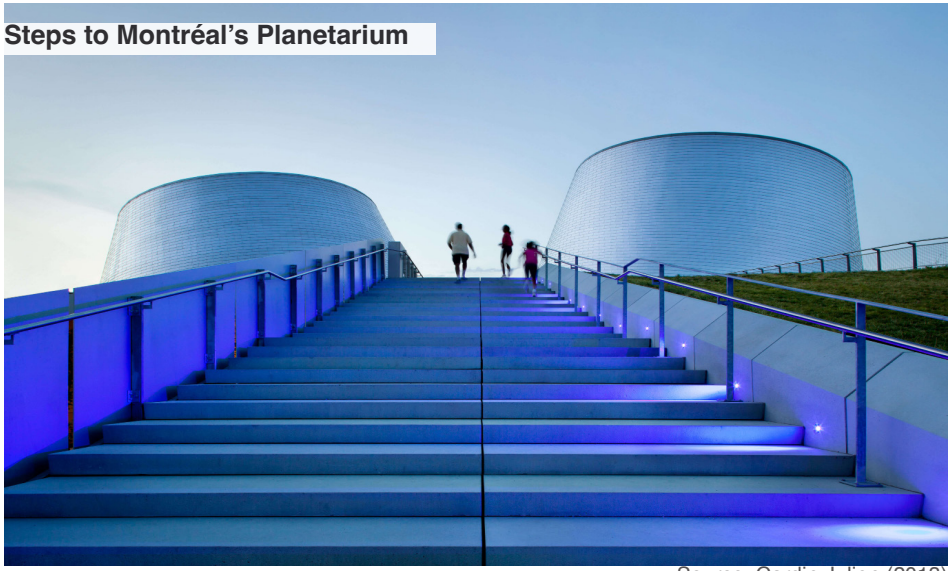
Those who work in the realm of urban planning do not have $7 million to spend on Super Bowl advertisements (Elbaba, 2023). Considering how many planning projects are directly supported by public funds, this idea would be problematic. However, there is still something to borrow from the realm of advertising, the need to share messages and project goals across different platforms and release them over time. One interviewee explained that the message could be shared through different formats, whether it is mémoires, public information sessions, kiosks, news interviews, or other sources. Two other interviewees elaborated upon this point and said that messages should be shared with consistent fonts, sharp design, and consistent colour palettes. A fourth interviewee commented on how messages should be easily digestible to the viewers. A fifth interviewee elaborated on this point and said that to have easily-digestible work, there is a need to avoid over-punctuation. At the end of the day, there is a need for bite-sized information bits. A sixth interviewee explained that there is a need to release things slowly, at planned intervals, because otherwise people will get overwhelmed if the whole project is shown. As an example, on social media, things get posted every week and a half or every two weeks, but this is not something realistic for planning projects given how they tend to take a long time to materialize.

Another way to develop continuity is to look at street scales as opposed to neighbourhood scales. One interviewee explained that when looking at a couple of blocks, maybe between 500 m or 1.5 km, people have an easier time associating and identifying with it. Streets already have a certain identity, especially when compared to a neighbourhood which has many different identities. As an example, consider rue Sainte-Catherine as opposed to all of downtown Montréal. People will relate easily with walking Sainte-Catherine as opposed to walking in downtown Montréal. People might associate downtown with a student hub, a tourist destination, or a place for businesspeople. For a neighbourhood, it is hard to develop a singular identity. Along these lines, one interviewee commented that “once you kill everything at street level, you kill everything else”—stressing the need to work at the human scale of the street level. This idea ties to section 1.3 which explains that one of the strategies to promote engagement is to work at the local scale because participants have an easier time grappling with it.

> *“Once you kill everything at street level, you kill everything else.”*

**Explain what is possible, the raison d’être, and the need**

To promote engagement and interest, there is a need for more detailed explanations. This idea ties to Forester’s point that if different groups have questions that cannot be answered, they are less likely to participate (1998). First, there is a need to explain what is possible and feasible with a project. One interviewee explained that before starting any planning project, the available space, the possible budget, and some of the technical constraints that could limit the scope of a project need to be identified. This practice avoids overpromising and sets the stage for realistic projects. To demonstrate this point, take a fictitious example of converting a public space in the heart of a downtown core to a dark sky observatory. Lights, nearby buildings, and trees would have to be darkened or removed. Transport systems and roads would be unsafe because there would be no lights to guide drivers. Crime rates would probably rise because there is less light. While this project is ambitious, it is not feasible. Instead, it would be possible to have buildings like the planetarium that promote learning about dark skies. According to the same interviewee from earlier in this paragraph, this process can be referred to as the idea of setting boundaries or creating a sandbox



**Steps to Montréal's Planetarium**

Source: Cardin Julien (2013)

Second, there is a need to explain the raison d'être or to explain the purpose behind projects. One interviewee claimed that by explaining the raison d'être, citizens have a better understanding of why there is a need for a certain project and how it fits with a given need or the strategic visions set out by officials and decision-makers. To explain the raison d'être, the interviewee said that two questions should be asked: "What is the challenge? What is missing from the current situation?" In the realm of planning, we often use SWOT or SWOC tables to look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats/challenges of a given problem. With these two questions, it is possible to identify some of the challenges and opportunities for a given project, as opposed to just identifying the strengths and weaknesses. Using the fictitious example of the planetarium again, if there were a project to build a new planetarium, there is a need to explain why it should be built and how it ties to larger strategies or orientations.[2] Another interviewee explained that by presenting the challenges, people may have an easier time understanding some of the constraints associated with a project and they may then appreciate some of the delays involved. There is also a need to drive home the benefits of a project that come from addressing some of the pre-existing challenges.

**Have experts involved and around.**

One of the other strategies that emerged from the interviews is the idea of having experts more involved in engagement processes. One interviewee explained that the people who designed a project should be confident in the work that they did, and they should be able to explain the justifications for different options. Another interviewee took this idea further by saying that there is a need to have designers engage with decision-makers (and vice-versa) so that decisions can be explained more adequately. If there is expert buy-in, there is also a greater chance that the average users or the monsieur-madame-tout-le-monde will buy into a project.

One interviewee used the example of a museum, where some people may benefit from a tour and curated experience as opposed to a free-flow walk-through.[3] People do not necessarily have the same experience or skill levels, but experts can break things into "irreducible components" or find ways to keep things basic and interesting. This point ties to Cinderby's point about how people need to be accompanied when presented with visual props (2010). Another interviewee explained that those with less experience might need more guidance and more direction. A third interviewee explained that at larger scales—for example, when developing comprehensive plans and mobility strategies—

2 Considering it was opened recently, in 2013, there is no real need to build a new one. The planetarium contributes to scientific learning or the City's objectives to be a cultural metropolis, a knowledge city and a UNESECO City of Design (Espace pour la vie, n.d.).

3 For a larger discussion on curated exhibitions, please consult Braae's work (2020).

residents do not necessarily have the competencies to develop recommendations, and this is where experts should also be involved.

To get an understanding of the situation, one interviewee argued that experts should be out in the field or in the planners' case out in the city as often as possible because they will always come back learning something. For citizens to be engaged in planning projects, they might benefit from being able to talk to someone who partially gets what they go through. As stated in Section 1.3, to promote engagement, there is a need for planners and practitioners to understand the day-to-day context. Talking to people is one of the best ways to develop local understanding. This is not necessarily a matter of going out on the fine, comfortable days of summer. There is a need to get out in all conditions, rain, snow, cold or extreme heat. The other thing too is that when there are major changes to people's daily life, be it their commute or how they use a given space, it helps to get information directly from an individual user, as opposed to just reading about it online. In some cases, people may not necessarily have phones or the knowledge to check out a website. It is a lot easier to get citizen input out in the actual spaces where they are, as opposed to the traditional settings like town hall sessions that take place late in the evenings. Engagement best takes place at the local scales, but also on the sites where the changes are to happen. Another interviewee explained that users need to experience change, and they need to see how progress has been made over time.

This section explained how there are planning projects target different audiences, whether it is the everyday citizens, the experts or the decision-makers like politicians. Content needs to be adapted depending on the expert level that a project is being shared with. This section also presents some of the problems identified by professionals that emerge when it comes to engagement. Typically engagement brings out the negative experiences or thoughts. There have to be more ways to develop the positives behind projects. Lastly, this section presents three strategies that came from the interviews to promote engagement: aim for continuity, explain the possible and the raison d'être and have experts involved and present. These three strategies promote the art of storytelling. The next section explains how professionals in the field use visual props to contribute to story telling and gives some tips for practice.

Section 4

# Tips and tricks for using visual props as a way to promote engagement

This chapter continues with key findings from the 13 interviews, focusing on the use of visual props to keep people engaged in planning projects. Interviewees stressed the need to curate stories by using different high-quality visual props, in which various attributes are present (notably simple representations that are easily digestible and that show potential tradeoffs). Section 4.1 builds off Section 2.1 to explain some of the general limitations associated with visuals as told by practitioners. Section 4.2 builds off the different types of visual prop presented in Section 2.2 to further explain some of the use cases and limits for each type of visual prop. Section 4.3 specifically looks at some of the nuances associated with presenting different options and before-and-after pictures. Each of the sections includes design tips for planners and those who work in the realm of planning to improve visual props in the optics of having better story telling. Section 4.4 presents all the recommendations elaborated upon in Sections 4.1 through 4.3 with the recommended visual props through a fictitious example of a street pedestrianization project.

Section 2.1 identified five limitations associated with visual props: they represent a single snapshot in time, they are deceitful tools, they can be interpreted differently, they tend to lack good production standards, and they often come at high costs. Four of these five themes came up in the interviews. The one that did not come up is how visual props represent a single snapshot in time. The idea of visuals serving as a deceitful is something that came up quite frequently across the interviews, especially for photos and renderings. This section explains this phenomenon in greater detail. When it comes to different people interpreting visual props differently, a few concrete examples came up in the interviews. For instance, one interviewee explained that the style of art or content might exclude people. If you show a project with graffiti, people might be turned away by this specific art style, shown on the next page. Another interviewee used the idea of construction to say that people's perceptions depend on their past experiences. Some see construction as a necessity, and others see it as a nuisance. A third interviewee explained that it is not always possible to control people's history, not everyone has a strong visual understanding. This point ties to what was explained by Raaphorst (2018) and Tufte (2007) where people end up interpreting visuals differently based on their social roles, their enculturation, and their life experiences.

For the aspect of costs, one interviewee emphasized the type of visual prop that is used and designed for a project is often limited by the resources available, whether it is time or cost. This idea is consistent with what was noted from the literature review in Section 2.1, specifically in the work of Noyman & Larson (2020). However, another interesting point came up through the interviews. One interviewee explained that visuals do not show the costs of projects, and yet this is what people have a hard time understanding. Another interviewee explained that through visual props, it is rather difficult to show how small-scale needs create large-scale impacts and could increase project costs. As a result, visual props are effective when they show the different

tradeoffs. A third interviewee explained that visual props do not necessarily show some of the things that people want, such as affordable housing or lower taxes, they simply show a vision for neighbourhood changes.

**Picture of modern house without graffiti façade**

Source: Lu (2021)

**Picture of modern house with graffiti façade**

Source: Lu (2021)

This section builds off the tools presented in Section 2.2, plans, schematics, perpsectives and photographs, to develop recommendations to make effective visual props. These findings are also based on the findings from the interviews and lead to the formulation of design tips.

### Plans

As explained in Section 2.2, plan views are one of the most convenient ways to demonstrate what changes are foreseen for neighbourhoods. The interviews instead revealed that plans, while extensively used, “do nothing” for the everyday citizen, as one interviewee explained. Another interviewee specified that plans are flat and are hard for people to wrap their heads around. A third interviewee stated that plans are not necessarily useful for showing some of the fine-grained details or even for showing scales. In fact, by just looking at plans, people might not be able to get a full sense of everything that is in play. Some elements of a plan may look bigger than they are (or will be) in reality. Furthermore, several interviewees noted that plans typically require explanations or walk-throughs; even with the advances in technology using applications such as Waze or Google Maps, people struggle with their orientation in plans. To facilitate understanding, plans should be explained in the space where they are to be realized, which is not necessarily something that happens in engagement strategies today. One interviewee said that there is also a need to provide location markers indicating where you are as a viewer within a space or other orientation points. Finally, many interviewees concurred that plans are more useful for professional specialists than for everyday citizens.

**Design tip #1**

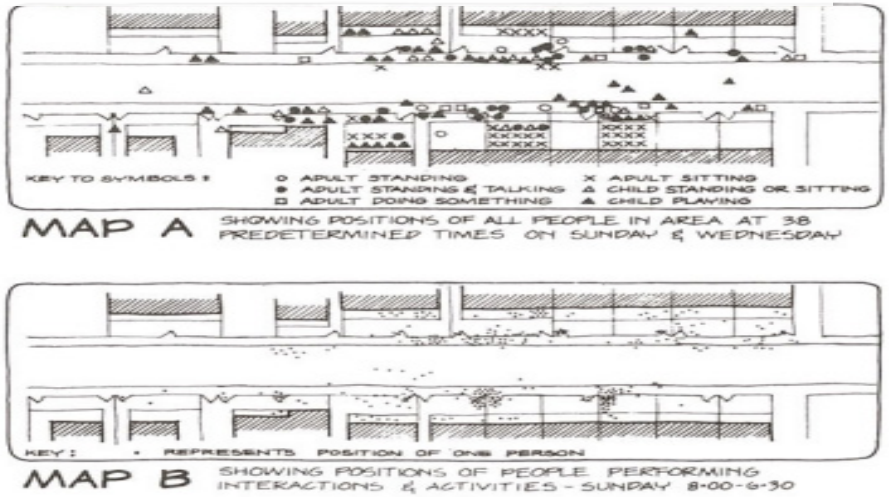
When showing maps or plans views, show points of reference. Plans have their limits, but they show context.

## Schematics and drawings

Throughout my 13 interviews, the ideas of schematics and drawings only came up in three of the interviews. One interviewee explained that they are useful tools to convey and communicate messages, especially in the examples of how-to guides or product brochures. Another interviewee used a schematic to explain something that they were talking about. The third interviewee explained that we need to use schematics and drawings more frequently. Admittedly, schematics and drawings are not as compelling or well-finished as fully-rendered images, but they get the point across. I would argue that this is especially true if they are walked through and done in real time. The third interviewee reminded me that most of Jan Gehl's work is inspired by schematics and drawings.[4]

It is easy to believe that the more refined and 'complete' a visual prop, the better it is. The ready availability of tools such as Sketchup and GIS software can amplify this tendency. One interviewee explained, however, that for some projects, there is a need to ensure that not everything is too polished. This is consistent with the adage 'soft lines, soft ideas—hard lines, hard ideas' (Frederick, 2007). Simple and well-done schematics are easy to understand. If this were to happen live during participation and engagement strategies, people might have an easier time understanding planning projects. Drawing can also serve as a way for others to show their understanding of the project. An intriguing link here is with the growing need to raise awareness in younger generations to inspire long-term interest in planning (Shin et al., 2022). Some professionals lack knowledge on how to deal with youth in planning (Lo, 2016). One simple way would be to use simple drawings and schematics. Even then, children are able to produce these kinds of visual props. This ties to Al-Kodmany's earlier point that if people have a chance to draw out their ideas, storyboards could be developed.

**Maps showing interaction and activities in Melbourne**




Source: Gehl (1997)

**Design tip #2**

Include more drawings and schematics.

**Example of planning sketch**

Source: Phantom (n.d.)

4 For more information and thumbnails, check out Gehl, J. (1996 [1971]).

**Photos and renderings**

For simplicity, fully-developing renderings and photos are grouped together here. Photorealistic 'renders' are used as evocative images for planning projects, showing how a given space could change through a project. One interviewee explained that photos and renderings really show what is happening when people do not understand something. Another interviewee explained that renderings are used as marketing tools, to get people to fall in love with a project and to secure project funding.

Al-Kodmany explains that photographs are a very close representation of reality (1999), and indeed many of the interviewees confirmed that photos and renderings are often hyper-realistic. One interviewee explained that: "there is a lot of sugar-coating and renders are often not representative of the ideal setting." Renderings are often representative of the ideal setting. They do not show everyday weather, especially as winter cities such as Montréal face greater extremes of weather, flash floods, ice storms, or frequent freeze-thaw cycles of temperature change. Winter cities pose unique challenges for residents (see Garvin et al., 2012; Jaffe & Woloszyn, 2014 as examples). A second interviewee explained that these visual props do not show some of the impromptu activities that contribute to daily life in our cities, such as pop-up raves or markets.

From the interviews, it should be noted that renderings tend not to show everyday people, a range of body morphologies, or typical (modest) clothing. One interviewee explained that these tools do not represent the various users of public spaces, including the people who sleep there, or for sex work. Similarly, another interviewee explained that these visuals tend to portray specific types of disabilities over others. The invisible disabilities, for example, a child with ADHD or an older adult who has autism, are not readily noticeable. Take the example of a ramp: it is not only people with wheelchairs who use it but also delivery drivers or people with strollers, something not typically shown with seductive visual props. A third interviewee explained that while the bank of people cut-outs has evolved over the years, it is still not representative of the diverse publics found in metropolitan areas. In some cases, it is even a matter of having the same cut-outs across visuals and in different projects. To avoid the problem of under-representation, some designers turn to silhouettes. In theory, silhouettes remove elements of under-representation, especially in terms of showing ethnicities and class, but in practice, they do not necessarily help show everyday people. There are benefits to showing some spaces without people, particularly to show what spaces and projects look like and how they integrate with the city. This way people can dream about what they can do in a space.[5]

**Design tip #3**

If you ware to use people in your pictures, be mindful of which people you use and use the same person throughout visuals to illustrate a story.

**Design tip #4**

Have some visuals showing empty spaces, it gets people to think a bit about how they can use a space.

"*There is a lot of sugar-coating and renders are not often representative of the ideal setting.*"

5 There is a thought-provoking series called Empty America, which shows some cities that are typically busy, with crowded sidewalks and places filled with people instead as empty spaces—perhaps powerful for getting people to think outside the box in how to represent existing and potential conditions.

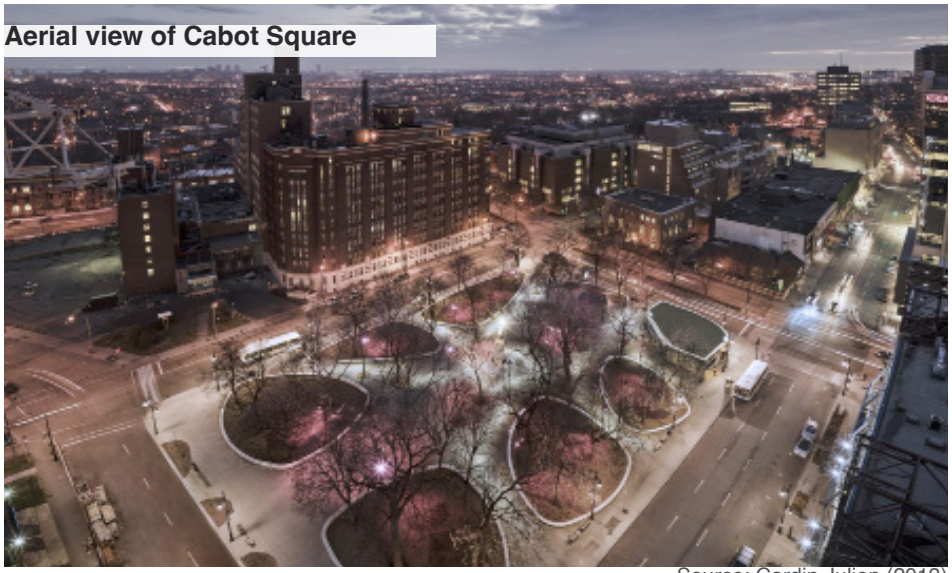
Typically, wide-angle pictures are used, as noted in several interviews. One interviewee explained that by zooming out to a wider angle, the picture does not necessarily represent a realistic view to the average user. Also in these views, designers try to show everything and all the details possible. Another interviewee explained that renderings have a lot of light, especially radiating from buildings, something, which is often not the case.

**Design tip #5**
Avoid using wide-angle pictures.
Change the angle used to create a rendering to make it more representative of human-scales.

**Design tip #6**
Limit the amount of clutter in visuals.

Throughout my interviews, several recent projects in the Montréal context came up, but I am going to avoid using the specific projects that were identified by the interviewees to protect their anonymity. To demonstrate some of the limitations with visuals, it is worth considering the example of Montréal's Cabot Square as redesigned by Affleck de la Riva in 2016. One of the first images on the firm's website to show off Cabot Square is the one below. There is a lot of light radiating from the square, and it is a rather unconventional bird's-eye view never seen by the everyday user.

**Aerial view of Cabot Square**



Source: Cardin Julien (2013)

If you were walking down the street, you would see this second picture, from streetview.

**Street view of Cabot Square**

Source: Google Maps (2023)

The visuals that are used also do not clearly reveal the actual uses of the space. Cabot Square is now used as a bus depot for the STM, but it is also a site for Indigenous gatherings, with a number of service points for individuals experiencing homelessness. The project renderings do not show this level of detail, but these are important characteristics that shape the space. The pictures on the right show the space as it was used following the transformation.

**Indigenous gathering in Cabot Square**

Source: Cardin Julien (2013)

**Street festival in Cabot Square**

Source: Pagano (2023)

### 4.3 Presenting visual props

There are different ways to share plans, sketches, photos, and renderings in participatory processes. One interviewee explained that to get people engaged in projects, we can share photos and visuals through adaptive websites . These are great tools for people who work in offices. Another interviewee explained that projects could be advertised through billboards. The interviewees also used videos or animations to capture and illustrate how people would move through a space after a planning project. However, these are a lot more complex to produce and often go beyond what planners produce and share on their own. One interviewee pushed the idea of maquettes and how it is a lost art—one that could be used to get people to physically engage with a space in ways that go beyond plans and renderings. Two-dimensional images are easily shared on social media. Across social media, videos, websites or billboards, planners tend to use before-and-after visual props presenting different options. These tools are both helpful because they allow for comparison across contexts, which is important in fostering understanding.

**Before-and-after visuals**

As explained in Section 2.2, before-and-after pictures help construct narratives. People have an easier time understanding a logical sequence of events. One interviewee elaborated on this by explaining that before-and-after pictures present the problems, opportunities, and can inspire potential solutions, especially when the context is understood. Another interviewee explained that before-and-after images are showcase different improvements and how the balance of activity can change with different interventions. A third interviewee said that before-and-after comparisons should be used from the start of projects to spark dialogue and to get a sense of community needs. A fourth interviewee stated that before-and-after visuals are not used enough, but they are important to show what projects started with versus what is to come. The interviewee said: “If you show the challenges, people are more forgiving because they have been educated.”

There are several limitations to using before-and-after images. First, similarly to a point brought up in Section 2.1, before-and-after views are snapshots in time. Even if you show the ‘before’ and then the ‘after’, this does not clearly reflect the fact that changes take place through time, often in phases or incrementally. Take the example of construction, which surprisingly came up quite a bit through the interviews. A before-and-after picture only shows what happens before construction, and after construction. The lengthy ‘in-between’ phase of construction is not going to be shown. One interviewee also explained that before-and-after pictures are not necessarily the same quality. The before pictures are not edited compared to the after pictures which are heavily edited. Often, they are not shown from the same angle or point of view, nor do they depict what the scene looks like in the same season—the classic example being a ‘before’ image showing winter and an ‘after’ image depicting the high summer.

**Design tip #7**
Show interim stages of construction
when showing the project.

**Design tip #8**
Use the same angles to show before-and-after pictures.
Aim for the images to be of the same quality,
and depicting the same season.

> *“If you show the challenges, people are more forgiving because they have been educated.”*

As an example, here is another example from the Montréal context, the Royalmount project. The final renderings presented by Carbonleo, the firm responsible for the project, do not fully

show the major transformations to come. Google Earth was used to capture views similar to the renderings to help demonstrate the changes to come. These before-and-after images show the same scene in ways that allow useful comparisons. The first set illustrates the pedestrian bridge over the Décarie autoroute to connect the new precinct to the existing De la Savane metro station. The second set suggests the new neighbourhood as a lush green complex on what is now largely vacant land with

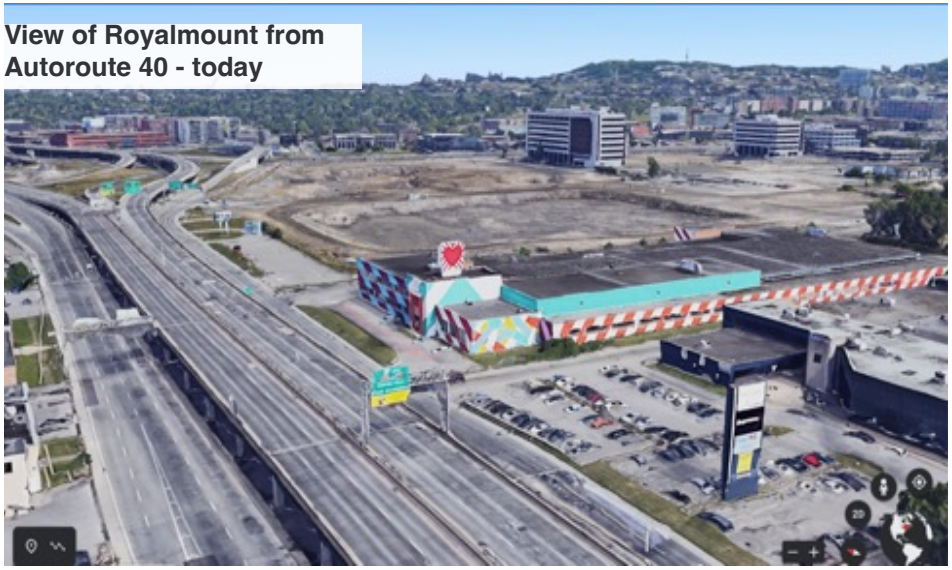
**View of Royalmount from de la Savanne metro - today**

Source: Google Maps

**View of Royalmount from de la Savanne metro - after project**

Source: Cardin Julien (2013)

**View of Royalmount from Autoroute 40 - today**



Source: Google Maps

**View of Royalmount from Autoroute 40 - after project**

Source: Cardin Julien (2013)

disused one-storey buildings. The ‘after’ scenes are more appealing than the ‘before’ scenes, and they are more evocative of the ideal conditions.

**Presenting different options**

One consideration that was not addressed in the literature scanned is how planners present different options to diverse publics. Three interviewees explained that brainstorming and fine-tuning different options are best suited to the specialists, and the public should not have a say in final options. One interviewee even said: “There should be no options”, especially presented to the public. In this case, the specialists and experts must explain their reasoning behind the final option. This principle, where there are no options, would align with some of the lower rungs on Arnstein’s ladder of participation, as mentioned in Section 1.1, the idea of informing. As you climb the ladder, there are different ways to increase public engagement.

Showing different options allows for consultation or placation. Some interviewees explained that there is a need to present different options, so that citizens may have a meaningful way of weighing in on how projects will be done. One interviewee elaborated on this idea and said that citizens do not want things to be shoved down their throats and taken as something accepted. In these cases, the interviewees explained that a maximum of two or three options should be presented; otherwise participants get overwhelmed. Another interviewee explained that in some cases, final options are pre-selected and the way that the options are presented may illustrate that bias. One interviewee suggests that the favoured option should be first or second. If it is presented first, then there will be a wow and let-down with the other two options. If it is presented second, it could be presented like a sandwich, where you have a decent option, the really strong option and then another decent option. Specific attention should be paid to how different options are ordered, and this is heavily dependent on the audience being engaged with, as explained in Section 3.1.

**Design tip #9**

Limit the number of options presented to the public. Keep it to 2-3 options max and be mindful of the order that the otptions are presented.

To foster co-creation or co-production, options should be shown early in the design process. Al-Kodmany’s work presenting different elements and layers through Photoshop could be a source of inspiration (1999). Same could be said for McHarg’s approach to layering (1980) or the work presented by Corner (1998). One interviewee also explained that having an additive effect, where you can add different layers serves to spark ideas and conversations.

**Design tip #10**

Find ways to layer information and give citizens a chance to play with the different options.

## 4.4 Recommendations for effective visual props

The first ten design tips presented on the next page come from the interviews and are presented in Section 5.3. These ten tips have been simplified and to these ten are added five more, stemming directly from the interviews. These last five tips are more self-explanatory or stand-alone and do not need as much detail.

To illustrate these 15 design tips and some of the good practices recommended throughout this report, I developed visuals for a fictitious neighbourhood street reconfiguration project.[5,6] To make the renders presented in this section, I used Montréal's rue d'Iberville as a starting point. This street was arbitrarily selected as I was working through the context map. The base pictures come from Google Earth. Then, I used Adobe Photoshop to remove cars and add some elements that are also commonly seen by using the the website Streetmix.[7] For the examples of the different interventions, I had some of my family members draw propositions for what interventions could be done. For the different section views, I took elements commonly used in Streetmix, played around with their spacing and added more realistic people. I also played around with the buildings.

The first step with any set of visuals is to illustrate the context where a planning project would happen. This fictitious street reconfiguration project occurs on a two-block stretch of Sims Street between Stare Road and Major Commercia Street. All of this is shown on the context map below. This project is a necessity because there are a lot of young students and families that walk from Stare Road or Lane Road up to Major Commercia Street, where there are schools and shops. Ty, one of the nearby residents lives at the corner of Major Commercia Street and Sims Street. He parks his car on Sims Street, and he hopes to continue doing so after the project.

5 Retrospectively, considering how part of my work is on some of the ways to engage people using visuals, it would have been a good idea to test these different visuals on an audience. Had I had the time and foresight when I started my project, I would have gone back to my interviewees and showed them a sample of the work I did based on their recommendations. However, this idea came to me after my ninth interview and a conversation with my supervisor.

6 Considering how I did not use these visuals in a participatory setting, Design tip #10, giving citizens a chance to play with options, was not possible. Also, for Design tip #15, pairing visuals with proformas and budgets, that is not necessarily possible since this is a fictitious project, but the element of storytelling still comes through, by using the same character throughout the visuals.

7 Streetmix is a great tool to play with different sizes and dimensions for street interventions. A link to Streetmix can be found here. Typically, representations are made in 2D, but there are also some GitHub extensions that I have used in the past to turn something more 3D. A link to this GitHub tool can be found here.

# Design tips

## #1
Use plan views to show points of reference and context.

## #2
Include more drawings and schematics.

## #3
Be mindful of the people you use and use the same person throughout visuals to illustrate a story.

## #4
Have visuals that show empty spaces.

## #5
Use more representative, human-scale angles.

## #6
Limit the amount of clutter in visuals.

## #7
Show the stages of construction.

## #8
Use the same angles and quality to show before-and-after pictures.

## #9
Keep it to 2 or 3 options maximum.

## #10
Find ways to layer information.

## #11
“Limit the number and sizes of fonts. Keep it to two or three fonts maximum.”

## #12
Start with a mood board to show project inspirations.

## #13
Follow the principles of graphic design (e.g. the rule of thirds, colour theories, or visual hierarchy principles where people move their eyes across posters or a screen in a Z-like formation).

## #14
“Think about inclusion, enchantment and connection.”

## #15
Have the visuals tell a story. They are going to be paired with other things, proformas and budgets, context analysis, SWOT tables…

**Context map**


Sources: Ville de Montréal (2019)

**Sims Street today**

Before looking at what could happen on this street, it is important to understand how the street is configured today. Presently, Sims Street has one traffic lane in each direction, street parking, and an average-sized sidewalk on each side. Sims Street is 18 m wide, meaning there is room to improve the overall user experience. Typically, the picture used to describe today's activity would be captured from the middle of the street or from some awkward, unrealistic angle. Something like the picture below:

**Streetview today (from middle of the street)**

This picture is unrealistic because people rarely walk in the middle of the street. Sure, Montréal is notorious for having a high number of jaywalkers, but even then, people are unlikely to stop in the middle of the street to see what it would look like. Instead, a more realistic picture would be something like what is shown on the right.

In these two pictures, it is possible to see Ty's car, the black Jeep found on the left.

**Streetview today (from the sidewalk)**

In some cases, there are projects that remove the cars to really demonstrate what the street looks like today. But by removing the cars, you lose a sense of scale, which is important to better understand photographs and renders. Very rarely will a street be empty with no cars or people like the picture below:

**Streetview today (without cars)**

**Elaboration behind citizen proposals**

This “empty” photograph, the picture titled Streetview today (without cars), is useful as a base layer to sketch out some possible interventions. If there were just a blank canvas, people would have a harder time coming up with inspiration for what could be done. When using the “empty” picture as a reference, people can easily draw out some ideas for what could be done. These examples can be found on the next page.

Example A presents a sidewalk expansion on the left-hand side, a raised sidewalk to cross the street with punctual curve extensions to slow down traffic. In this proposal, parking seems to be completely removed. In this case, the drawing shows a raised sidewalk, when a raised crosswalk makes more sense.

Example B is a schematic that shows the desire to add bike lanes in both directions, that separate the traffic lanes from the parking lanes. Given how the space between buildings is 18 m, having two parking lanes, two bike lanes, two circulation lanes and two sidewalks, there is very limited space to fill out these interventions. There is also a desire to add a crosswalk.

Example C seems to remove parking and replaces the street parking with bike lanes. In the middle of the street, there are also flowerpots to slow down traffic and make the street a little prettier. Even though it is not necessarily to scale, the drawing also shows the desire to add more light to the streets, especially at a more human level.

Example D shows a crosswalk to the middle of the street. Across these examples, residents did not add drawings of people to the mix. Even though, there are users and people who live nearby, including Ty.

**Elaboration behind design inspiration**

From these resdient drawings and thoughts, planners will then look at some inpsirations and case studies to develop different options. The pages after the resident drawings illustrate some of the case studies used to develop options and scenarios for this project.

## Citizen proposals for redesign on Sims Street

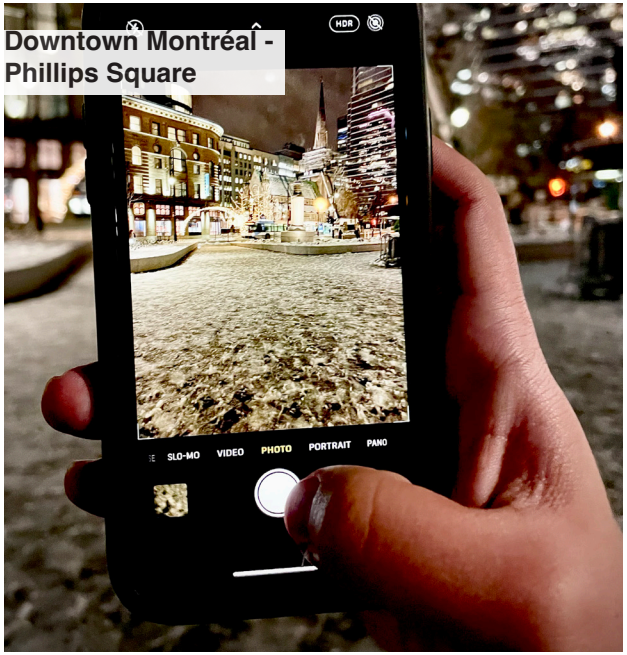
Citizen proposal A


Citizen proposal B

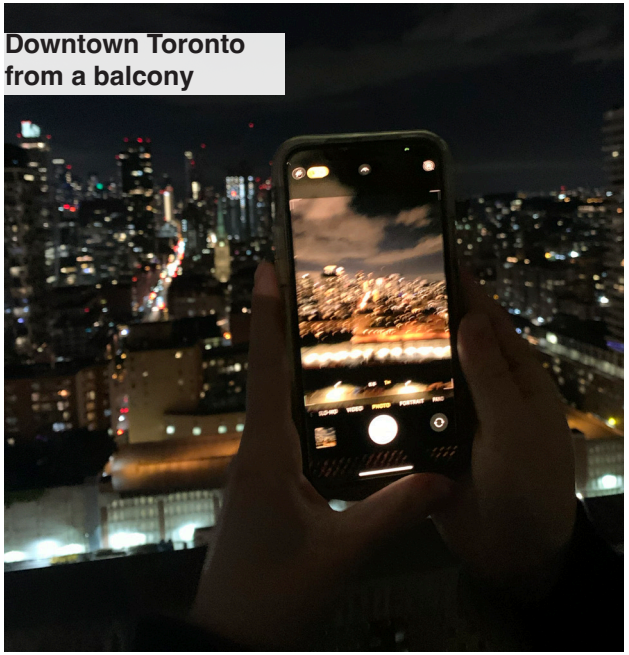
Citizen proposal C


Citizen proposal D

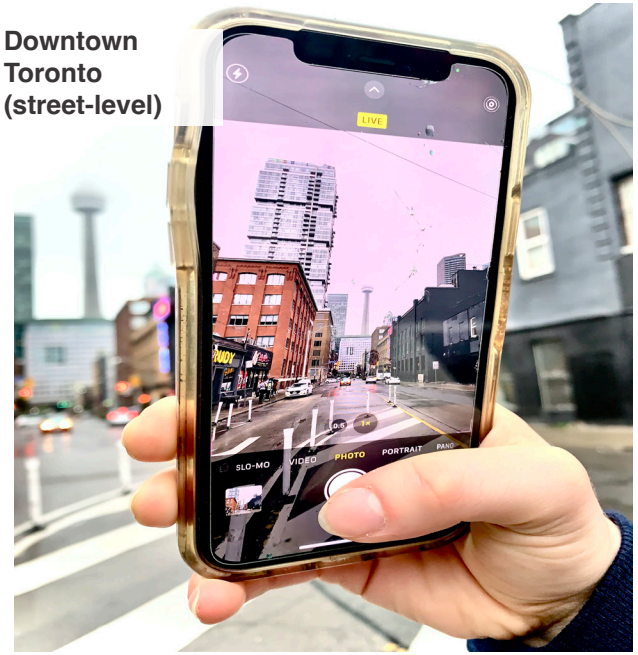
## Design inspiration - Playing with different frames of reference




Source: Bensmihen (2023)




Source: Bensmihen (2023)




Source: Bensmihen (2023)


Source: Cheong (2022)


Source: Doherty (n.d.).

## Effective eye-level renders


Source: Provencher Roy (2022)


Source: TMRW (n.d)


Source: TMRW (n.d.)


Source: Perkins & Will (2019)

## Street pedestrianization projects in the Montréal context


Source: Perron (2023)


Source: Ville de Montréal (2021)


Source: Dohey (2023)


Source: du Bois (2019)

## Bike lane additions in the Montréal context


Source: Ville de Montréal (2023)


Source: Ville de Montréal (2021)


Source: Ville de Montréal (2023)

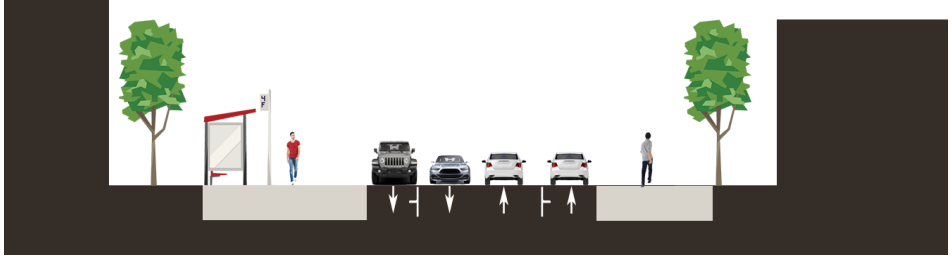

Source: Nakonechny (2020)

## Section views

With these cases studies and several mood boards, it is possible to develop some options and scenarios. To start, it is important to simplify the drawings by removing the 3D component and looking at section views.

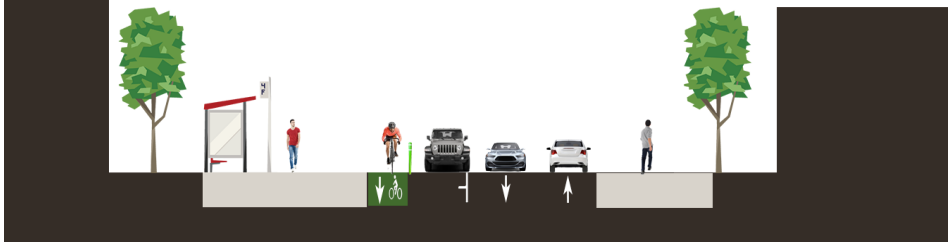
As a reminder, here is a section view of the street today. Ty is walking away from his car in this case after a long day at work.

**Section view of the street today**



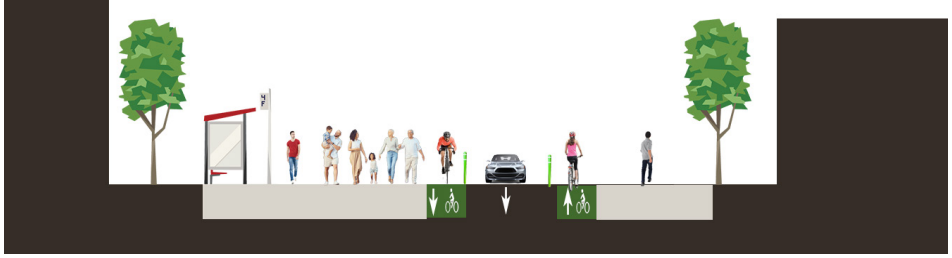
This first option removes the right-hand parking lane so that a bike lane can be added on the left-hand side of the street. The parked car lane is moved over, and to accommodate this change, the right-hand side loses its parking.

**Option 1**



The second option, presented below, removes all parking and adds a bike lane in each direction on each side of the street. In the process, the street is also converted to a one-way street which leads to the larger sidewalk. The section view does not show the raised crosswalk found in the middle of the street.

**Option 2**



**Final renders of Sims Street**

Ultimately, the first options was selected (hypothetically) by decision-makers. The second option was not something well-received by the community because from the beginning of the project, there was a clear desire to maintain some amount of parking on Sims Road, something removed from Option 2. Additionally, there was no need for a bike lane in both directions, since there was already a street over that had that configuration, and it would be something considered redundant.

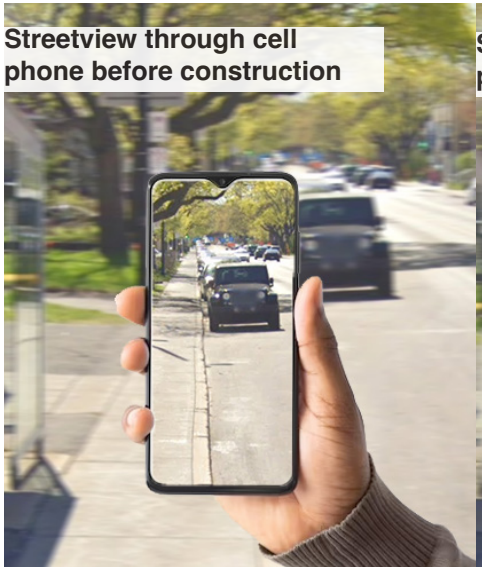
Due to feasibility, the raised crosswalk was not something that was retained because buses circulate on Sims Road. With a raised crosswalk, it is rather difficult for buses to pass. For the public works departments, raised crosswalks can damage the blades of snowplows.

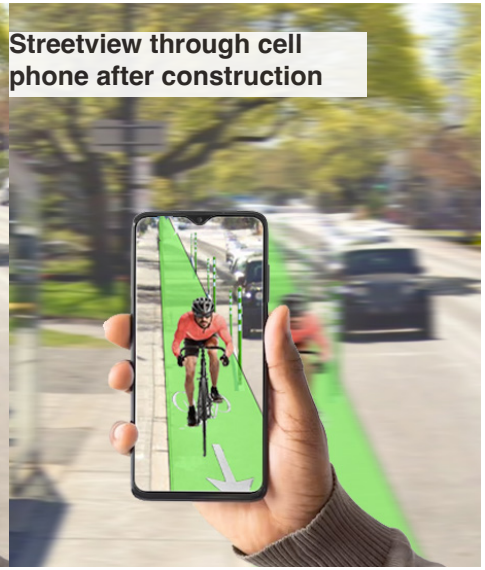
At this point, it is possible to share the final renders of what the project will look like, first during construction and then after construction.


Sims Stret
after construction

To show the effects of the project, two photographs were made showing the project in relation to a phone screen:

Sims Street during construction


Streetview through cell phone before construction


Streetview through cell phone after construction

## Summary

This section confirmed some of the findings found in the earlier sections of the report, notably some of the limits associated with visual props as explained by practitioners. There is also an explanation on the different types of visual props along with their strengths and their challenges.  There is also an emphasis on how visual props could be presented, particularly through before-and-after pictures and when presenting different options. This section provided recommendations for how to make effective visual props by looking through a fictitious example of a street pedestrianization project to demonstrate the design tips practically. The next section concludes the paper.

# Conclusion

This Supervised Research Project took an interdisciplinary approach to explain how visual props could be used to promote engagement in planning projects. The concept of "engagement" is heavily tied to the idea of "public participation", but as alluded to in Section 1, there is an important nuance between the two terms. The concept of "engagement" is both a state of being and a process (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2009; Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018). Meanwhile, the concept of "participation" refers to where information is exchanged and the settings where dialogues take place (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). With engagement strategies, the goal is to include everyone who could be impacted by a planning project, but the people who tend to show up to public consultations or meetings are those with higher levels of education or who have more time on their hands (Kong, 2010). One of the other big challenges with engagement is that there are difficulties maintaining engagement and interest over time because humans have a limited amount of attention (Carrasco, 2011), and there is a sense of decision-making fatigue (Felt, 2014). To overcome these challenges, one of the influential thinkers in the field, John Forester explains that there is a need to understand the different groups that would show up to engagement strategies (1998). To help facilitate this form of understanding, visual props could be used to trigger memories and spark citizen interest (Stevens, 2006; Nassaeur, 2015).

Section 2 expanded upon Nassauer's (2015) influential paper to present some of the limits associated with visual props. Notably, how props serve as a representation of a snapshot at a single point in time and how they depict unrealistic realities. Raaphorst's work (2018) also adds that people interpret visual props differently depending on their backgrounds. Section 2 also presented the different visual props that are used in the planning context: Plans, schematic diagrams, drawings, perspectives and photographs (Roque de Oliverira & Partidário, 2020). An effective engagement strategy targets different audiences, so there is often a need to use multiple visuals.

The literature scanned in Sections 1 and 2 presents a theoretical basis and framework for the rest of this work. Sections 3 and 4 presented the findings and recommendations that came out of thirteen interviews with professionals who have experience using, producing, or sharing visual props. Section 3 highlighted some of the ways engagement is defined by professionals along with some of the major challenges and barriers as identified by the interviewees. One of the points that was confirmed throughout the interviews is that there is a need to adjust and tailor content to the audience, this leads to Forester's point of promoting understanding between different groups. The interviewees also pointed to the fact that there is a need to promote continuity and to do a better job explaining what is possible before starting a project. Inherently, visuals should not be treated in isolation because they are part of a story.

Section 4 demonstrated some of the limits associated with visual props as seen by practitioners, particularly how there are no costs or trade-offs presented. From here, there were suggestions made on how to improve the effectiveness of visual props, these are presented through the 15 design tips, demonstrated through the example of a fictitious street pedestrianization project in Section 5.4.

**Steps for future research**

Considering this project has the theme of public engagement at its core, it would be interesting to test the visuals that were produced on a larger public, or even to have them develop the visuals used throughout the project. Even then, it could have been interesting to have the people who were interviewed to make some drawings. Considering how different people and different groups of people perceive things differently, it would be interesting to take this research and apply it to different population groups. This information should be presented and developed with vulnerable populations, whether it is youth or those with physical or social limitations. It would also be interesting to take a closer look at

some of how these tools can be produced by vulnerable groups. Different groups of people have different ways of learning and different ways of seeing things. This is not something that comes up enough through this current research project.

More and more, planners are trying to incorporate augmented reality or virtual reality in projects. This component would also be interesting to look at, but this paper focuses on some of the tools that are easier to use out in the field, with fewer resources. We might also explore crafting short videos as an inviting another great tool that could be used by planners or those who work in the planning realm to show how a project evolves. People have an easier time engaging with motion and movement than still images, and this point is not necessarily reflected in the findings and the literature scanned, but they should be looked at in greater detail.

**Final thoughts**

Engagement ultimately promotes conversations and leads to better decision-making (Fung, 2003). It is one of the best ways to share experiences, and stories to imagine future possibilities (Healy, 2008; Russell, 2020). Planning and design practitioners should not fear engagement, instead, they should find ways to use visual props to facilitate engagement. It could be as simple as having people draw more. We need to stop creating unrealistic photos and renders because people will just have a harder time engaging with the material. Space is often seen as something that is over-determined and over-planned; there is a greater need for third spaces and flexible uses. People need spaces to work, eat, go to sleep, and go to school, but also to play, explore and grow. As described throughout this report, part of a planner's job is is to create the sandbox, but there is also a need for people to explore and play. This goes beyond any engagement strategy, but engagement and long-term interest are fundamental for people to explore and play, key aspects of the human condition.

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# Appendix

# Appendix 1

# Interview Guide and Consent Form

Interview guide

- What is your experience with visualizations to explain projects? What kinds of projects have you used them for? What kinds of visualizations have you used?
- What are your thoughts on before and after pictures?
- What kinds of scales do you work with? How do you grapple with representing different scales?
- Who do you think your audience is when you use and show visualizations? Would you say that it is effective in reaching them? What evidence do you have that makes it effective?
- How long do the projects you work on tend to last? How many rounds of iteration are there?
- How do you quantify engagement? What do you consider for engagement to be successful?
- When you have multiple scenarios/options, how do you present them?
- What kinds of visuals are the most effective for getting people to start dialogues? (Depending on the case, maybe even take action)
- When you have worked through iterations, how do you keep track of the changes made from say the first draft to the last draft? In what contexts do you present this information?
- What problems have you faced with visuals and people's engagement towards them?
- How do you keep track of how much a proposal evolves over time after hearing public opinion?
- How do you balance the idea of information overload?
- If you had any advice on recommendations to give designers and practitioners with respect to visuals, what would you say?
- What are some of the limits when it comes to visuals that you have witnessed? What have you tried to overcome these issues?
- How do you incorporate user feedback into the design process? How is it shown?

Guide de questions

- Quelle est votre expérience en matière d'utiliser des visuels pour expliquer des projets ? Pour quels types de projets est-ce que vous avez les utilisées ? Quels types de visualisations avez-vous utilisés ?
- Que pensez-vous de montrer les scénarios et les images avant et après ?
- Avec quels types d'échelles travaillez-vous ? Comment gérez-vous la représentation des différentes échelles ?
- À votre avis, qui est votre public lorsque vous utilisez et montrez des visualisations ? Diriez-vous que cela permet de les atteindre efficacement ? Quelles sont les preuves de cette efficacité ?
- Quelle est la durée des projets sur lesquels vous travaillez ? Combien de cycles d'itération y a-t-il ?
- Comment quantifiez-vous l'engagement ? Qu'est-ce que vous considérez comme une réussite de l'engagement ?
- Lorsque vous avez plusieurs scénarios/options, comment les présentez-vous ?
- Quels types de visuels sont les plus efficaces pour inciter les gens à entamer un dialogue ? (Selon le cas, il peut même s'agir de passer à l'action).
- Lorsque vous avez travaillé par itérations, comment gardez-vous la trace des changements apportés, par exemple, de la première à la dernière version ? Dans quels contextes présentez-vous ces informations ?
- Quels sont les problèmes que vous avez rencontrés avec les visuels et l'engagement des gens à leur égard ?
- Comment suivez-vous l'évolution d'une proposition dans le temps après avoir entendu l'opinion publique ?
- Comment équilibrez-vous l'idée d'une surcharge d'informations ?

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Appendix C - Informed Consent Form for Interview Participants
Modified June 30th, 2023

Interviewer:
Aaron Bensmihen, Master's of Urban Planning student, McGill University (aaron.bensmihen@mail.mcgill.ca)

Supervisor:
Prof. Nik Luka, School of Urban Planning (Joint appointment with The Peter Guo-Hua Fu School of Architecture), McGill University (nik.luka@mcgill.ca)

Title of project:
The Role of Visuals in Keeping People Engaged in Planning Projects

Purpose of the study:
My research project aims to explain how planners and practitioners can use visuals and graphics to keep citizens engaged and interested in planning projects over time. I am interested in looking at how visuals can support iterative design practices. To answer these questions, I am interviewing professionals who work on matters related to engagement or those who create and use visuals to get people involved in projects or even product use. The scope of people I am interviewing is rather large, including people who work in the realms of marketing, urban planning, and community mobilization.

What you will do in the study:
As a participant, you will participate in the study as an interview subject. The interview will be held at a time agreed upon with the interviewee, and the questions raised will relate to your experiences with the use and design of visuals to keep people engaged in projects. Interviews could be conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams or Google Meet or in person based on your personal preference and should last between 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews could be conducted in English or French depending on your preference.

Voluntary participation:
Your participation is voluntary in this research project. You may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any questions and may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason.

If you want to keep some segments of the interview confidential or removed from record, it will be done. If you choose to withdraw, the information provided by you will be removed from further use unless you give permission otherwise. The level of confidentiality can be chosen and can be changed throughout the study. You may also withdraw from the study at any point in time. To further minimize possible reputational risks of involvement, I will keep your identity confidential. This means that your name and identity will not be linked to the interview results. Any information used will be attributed to a generic source, e.g., 'a Montreal planner' or 'a Montreal community organizer'. My supervisor and I will be the only ones who have access to your name and identity. We will delete this data once the project is finished.

Potential risks:
If there are certain interview questions that you feel will have a negative effect on your well-being or if you simply choose not to answer them, you may skip those questions, or withdraw from the interview at any point you desire.

Potential benefits:
The potential benefits include developing a better understanding of how to use visuals to keep people engaged in planning projects over time. Findings resulting from the research will be made available through the McGill University Library, and potentially in other forms such as a report or academic paper.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
The interview may be conducted confidentially or include anonymous quotes from interviewees.

Recording:
The interviewer(s) will take notes to record your responses during the interviews. However, to improve the accuracy of transcription, an audio recording of the interview may also be taken. This will not affect the level of confidentiality. Please indicate if you agree or not to an audio recording of your interview by checking the corresponding options below:
☐ I agree to an audio recording being taken for the purpose of this study.
☐ I do not agree to an audio recording being taken for the purpose of this study.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Aaron Bensmihen (aaron.bensmihen@mail.mcgill.ca) or Nik Luka (nik.luka@mcgill.ca)

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. You will receive a copy of this consent form, and the researcher will keep a copy
.

Participant's Name: (please print)
_____

Participant's Signature: _____
___

Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this document.

Annexe C - Formulaire de consentement pour entrevues
Modifié le 22 juillet 2023

Intervieweur :
Aaron Bensmihen, étudiant à la maîtrise en urbanisme, Université McGill (aaron.bensmihen@mail.mcgill.ca)

Superviseur :
Prof. Nik Luka, École d'urbanisme (nomination croisée avec l'École d'architecture Peter Guo-Hua Fu), Université McGill

Titre du projet :
L'utilisation des visuels pour maintenir l'intérêt dans les projets d'aménagement

But de l'étude :
Mon projet de recherche vise à explorer comment les urbanistes et celles qui travaillent dans les domaines connexes peuvent utiliser les visuels pour maintenir l'intérêt des citoyens dans les projets d'aménagement et d'urbanisme au fil du temps. Je m'intéresse à la manière dont les visuels peuvent soutenir les pratiques de conceptions itératives. Pour répondre à ces questions, je vais interroger des professionnels qui travaillent sur des sujets liés à l'engagement ou ceux qui créent et utilisent des visuels pour impliquer les gens dans des projets ou même dans l'utilisation de produits. La variété et le profil des personnes que j'interroge est assez large, incluant des personnes qui travaillent dans les domaines du marketing, de l'urbanisme et dans la mobilisation des communautés.

Ce que vous ferez dans l'étude :
Vous participerez à l'étude en tant que sujet d'une entrevue. L'entretien se déroulera à un moment convenu avec la personne interrogée et les questions posées porteront sur votre expérience avec l'utilisation et la conception de visuels pour maintenir l'engagement des personnes dans des projets. Les entretiens peuvent être menés à distance via Microsoft Teams ou Google Meet ou en personne, selon votre préférence personnelle, et devraient durer entre 45 et 60 minutes. Les entretiens peuvent se dérouler en anglais ou en français, selon votre préférence.

Participation volontaire :
La participation à cette étude est volontaire. Vous pouvez refuser de participer à certaines parties de l'étude, refuser de répondre à certaines questions et vous retirer de l'étude à tout moment et pour n'importe quelle raison. Si vous souhaitez garder certaines portions de l'entrevue confidentiels ou soient supprimés du dossier, cela sera fait. Si vous choisissez de vous retirer, les informations que vous avez fournies seront supprimées de toute utilisation ultérieure, sauf autorisation contraire de votre part. Le niveau de confidentialité peut être choisi et peut être modifié tout au long de l'étude. Vous pouvez également vous retirer de l'étude à tout moment.

Les informations qui seront utilisé seront anonymes. Cela signifie que votre nom et votre identité ne seront pas liés aux réponses de l'entrevue. Toute information utilisée sera attribuée à une source générique, par exemple « un urbaniste de Montréal » ou un « organisateur communautaire de Montréal ». Mon superviseur et moi serons les seuls à avoir accès à votre nom et à votre identité. Nous allons supprimer ces données une fois le projet terminé.

Risques potentiels :
Si vous estimez que certaines questions de l'entretien auront un effet négatif sur votre bien-être ou si vous choisissez simplement de ne pas y répondre, vous pouvez passer ces questions ou vous retirer de l'entretien à tout moment.

Avantages potentiels :
Parmi les avantages potentiels, citons le développement d'une meilleure compréhension de la manière d'utiliser les supports visuels pour maintenir l'intérêt des personnes dans des projets d'urbanisme au fil du temps. Les résultats de cette recherche seront disponibles à la bibliothèque de l'Université McGill, et possiblement sous d'autres formes telles qu'un rapport ou un article académique.

Compensation :
Il n'y a pas de compensation pour la participation à cette étude.

Confidentialité :
L'entrevue peut être mené de manière confidentielle ou comporter des citations anonymes des personnes interrogées.

Enregistrement :
Les intervieweurs prendront des notes pour enregistrer vos réponses pendant les entretiens. Cependant, pour améliorer la précision de la transcription, un enregistrement audio de l'entrevue peut également être effectué. Cela n'affectera pas le niveau de confidentialité. Veuillez indiquer si vous acceptez ou non un enregistrement audio de votre entretien en cochant les options correspondantes ci-dessous :

☐ J'accepte
☐ Je n'accepte pas qu'un enregistrement audio soit réalisé dans le cadre de cette étude.

Si vous avez des questions sur l'étude, contactez :
Aaron Bensmihen (aaron.bensmihen@mail.mcgill.ca) ou Nik Luka (nik.luka@mcgill.ca)

Si vous avez des questions ou des préoccupations concernant vos droits ou votre bien-être en tant que participant à cette étude de recherche, veuillez contacter le responsable de l'éthique de McGill au 514-398-6831 ou lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Veuillez signer ci-dessous si vous avez lu les informations ci-dessus et consentez à participer à cette étude. Accepter de participer à cette étude ne renonce à aucun de vos droits et ne dégage pas les chercheurs de leurs responsabilités. Une copie de ce formulaire de consentement vous sera remise et le chercheur en conservera une copie.

Nom du participant : (en majuscules)
_____

Signature du participant : _____
___

Date : _____
_____

Veuillez conserver une copie de ce document.

# Appendix 2
# Project Briefs

## Project Brief -
## Saint-Viateur Improvements

Project overview:

- 5 block street redvelopment project in the Mile-End
- Originally called for street improvements by adding sidewalks
- Project shifted to be an integrated cycling path and green alley network

Project timeline:

*2005*
Sector identified as area to transform

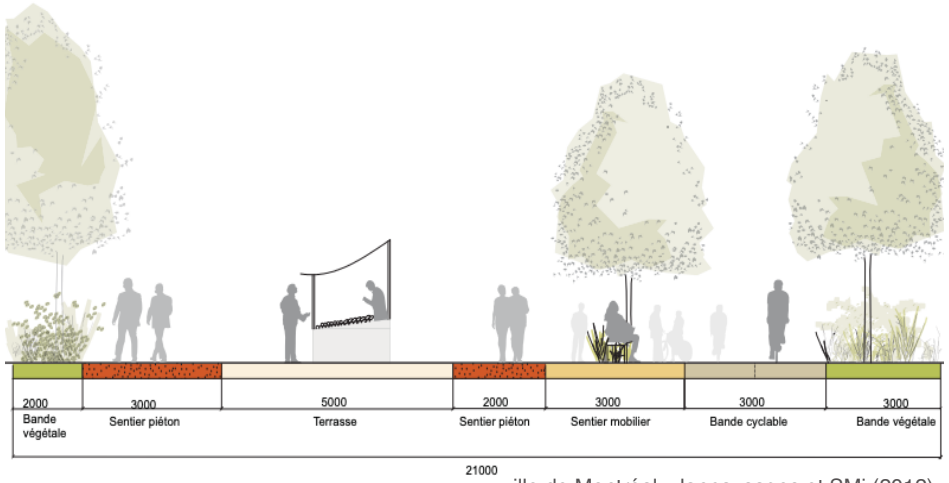
*2008*
Beginnning of construction

*2010*
Change and expansion of project scope

*2012*
Beginning of public consultations for Phase 3

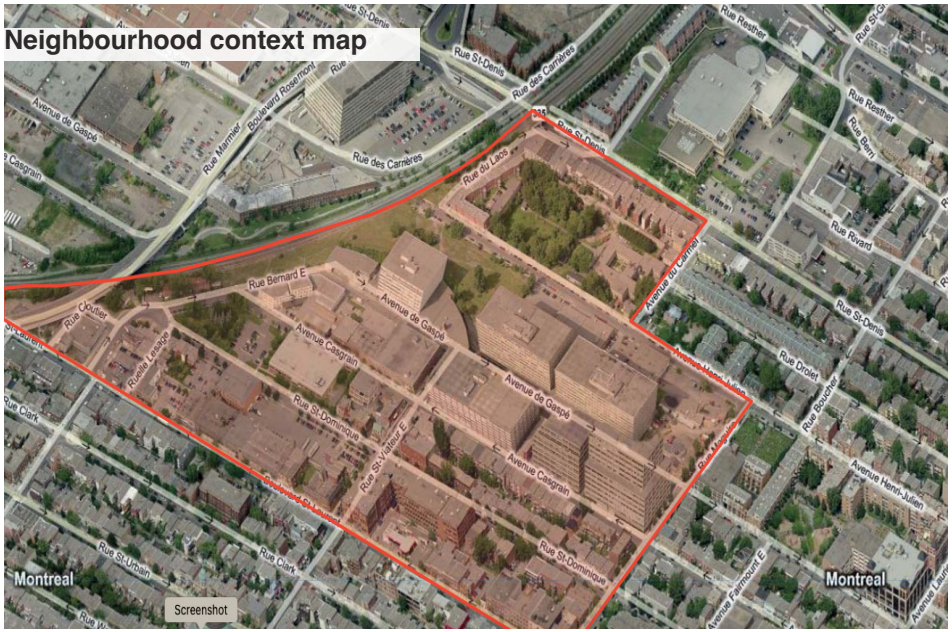
*2015/2016*
Final construction

**Section view of proposed improvements**



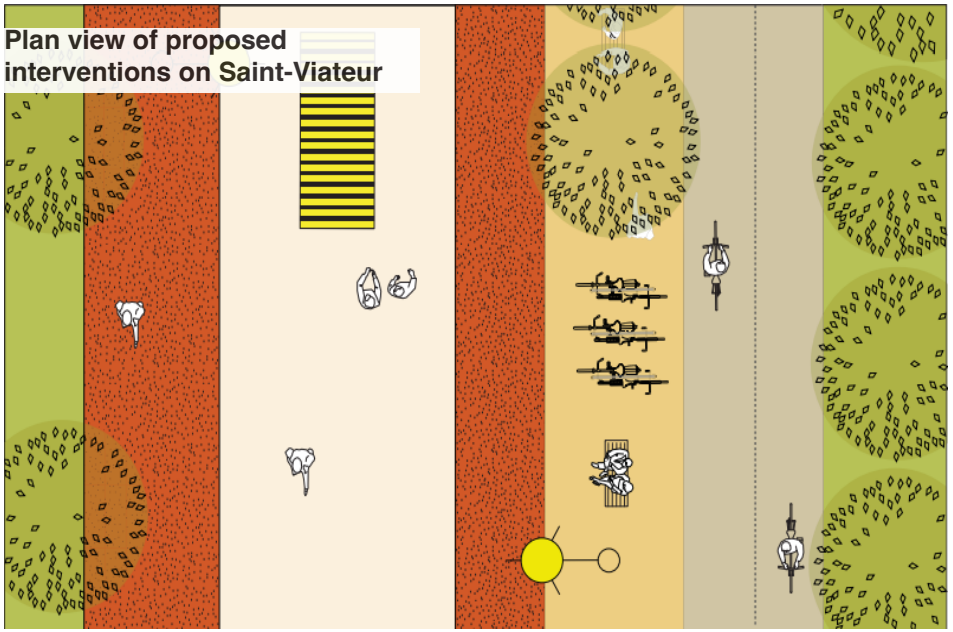

ville de Montréal, vlanpaysages et SMi (2012)

**Neighbourhood context map**




ville de Montréal, vlanpaysages et SMi (2012)

**Plan view of proposed interventions on Saint-Viateur**



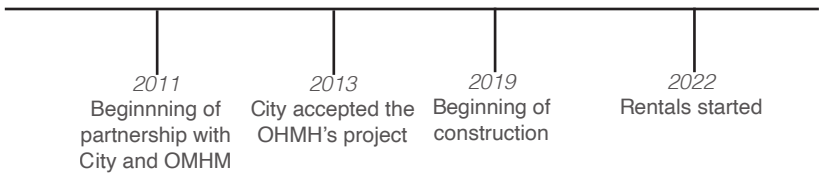
ville de Montréal, vlanpaysages et SMi (2012)

**Project Brief -**
**Rosemont Metro TOD / Îlot Rosemont**

Project overview:

- TAD - real estate project adjacent to a metro station
- 193 affordable housing units for seniors + administrative building of the Office municipale de l'habitation de Montréal
- 10-floor building to the west and 8 floors to the south
- Integrated bus transit and public space

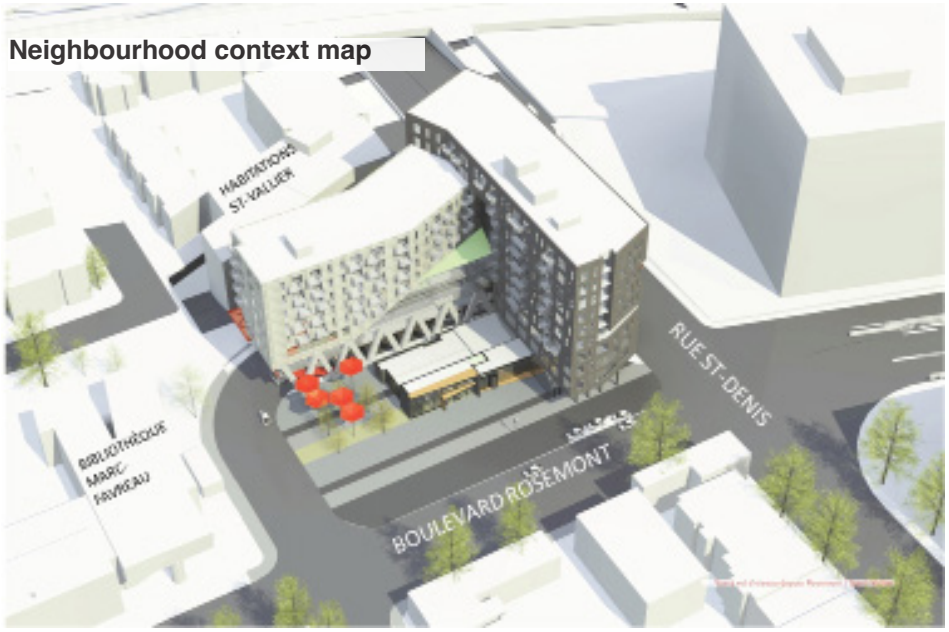
Project timeline:




**Îlot Rosemont 1 - Metro Entrance**

OMHM (2018)

**Neighbourhood context map**




OMHM (2019)

**Îlot Rosemont 2 - Integrated bus terminal and housing**

OMHM (2019)

# Appendix 3
# Governance Paper

**Public Participation and Engagement in the Montréal Context**
**Originally written: December 2022 (modified September 2023)**

Public participation is a “tool of empowerment” where organized groups and citizens identify their interests or needs and negotiate change with other stakeholders (Ortiz Escalante, & Gutiérrez Valdivia, 2015, p.116). The term empowerment is not about delegating power, instead, it is a matter of acknowledging that groups or citizens have powers and have ways they can exercise them. The participation process inherently reflects upon underlying power relations (Angotti, 2011). Hügel & Davies explain public participation as a way of integrating dialogue and debate to implement solutions to improve the quality of life within cities (2020). Each actor brings their own experiences and their developed expertise to a given project. As a result, participation strategies are heavily tied and adapted to local contexts (Engle, Britton, & Glode-Desrochers, 2021; Kleinhans, Falco, & Babelon, 2021; Nared, 2020)

According to Kontsi-Laasko & Rantala (2018), there are four primary purposes of public participation initiatives: (1) data collection, (2) promoting the legitimacy of planning efforts, (3) ensuring that those who are most affected by any decision have a chance to speak up and (4) bringing a wider set of views to the decision-making table. The term public participation is often used synonymously with the concept of citizen engagement. It is worth emphasizing that engagement refers to how different levels of government invite and meet with the public throughout the governing process by building trust and relationships with the larger community. Engagement ultimately sets the terms of participation and is the way of getting people involved in decision-making processes (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018).

Cities, where Montréal is clearly no exception, are increasingly turning to participatory planning strategies to experiment, improve the quality of life, and overcome the numerous challenges they face (Engle, Britton & Glode-Desrochers, 2021; Urban Europe, 2016). These strategies come in many different forms and vary greatly depending on how procedures are designed (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Figure 1, Montréal’s public participation and community engagement scale, highlights some of these different forms. The classic model, where external stakeholders simply present their projects to citizens, without any input, is no longer a viable way forward (Galuszka, 2018). This classic participation strategy violates a fundamental right and the drive for humans to shape the environment they live in (Angelidou et al., 2020). This kind of participation strategy would fall under the city’s first category of “Learning more”. Often, it is simply a matter of meeting a legal requirement to present a project to the impacted communities. Public consultations, another form of participation, fall under the category of “Expressing yourself”. Consultations have the lowest amount of citizen influence, citizens are heard, but there is no guarantee that they are listened to. With more influence, there are also co-creation processes, where city departments collaborate directly with citizens to find and implement solutions. Co-creation refers to the joint delivery of services between residents and a public-sector agency (Mitlin, 2018). Under the city’s category of “deciding”, there is also the idea of participatory budgeting, where a percentage of the total amount of public funds is allocated to projects and initiatives by citizens.


Figure 1: (Source: Ville de Montréal, n.d.).

This paper serves as a primer to explain how public participation works and operates within the City of Montréal. Other stakeholders, whether they are from the public sector or the private sector, also have projects that require extensive community consultations. For example, the STM is currently working through public consultations for its bus network redesign, and the Old Port Authority of Montréal held consultations and workshops to draft its master plan back in 2017. There is no denying that these projects still impact daily life, however, they are beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on participation strategies controlled and managed by the City of Montréal. To better understand how participation works in Montréal, this paper provides an understanding the city's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities and some of the entities that organize and lead the participation strategies.

[Editorial remarks: My thesis focuses on the idea of engagement. Back in December 2022, I was not fully aware of the nuances between the terms participation and engagement. So while this paper focuses on participation, it is still central to the theme of engagement]

Montréal's Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, first published in 2005, is the first charter of its kind in the North American context. The Charter is about "upholding civic values that foster safety, neighbourliness, respect for the social environment and respect for and preservation of the natural environment" (2021, p.4). Articles 15 and 16 of the Charter, as shown below in Figure 1, highlight the different commitments when it comes to participation in the Montréal context. Generally, there is an emphasis on promoting inclusivity, creating respectful environments for exchange and dialogue, and fostering transparency through document sharing or publishing the three-year capital expenditures programmes. Most of the commitments spelled out are straightforward and self-explanatory. However, to better understand how public participation works in Montréal, the nitty-gritty, it is important to analyze some of the commitments in a greater amount of detail. This paper particularly looks at articles 16c – which looks at what defines appropriate participation procedures and who conducts them, 16f – which looks at ensuring representation across different groups and 16h – which looks at the right of initiative. To simplify things, the organization of the rest of the paper follows the three steps of public consultation processes established by the City of Montréal's website:

1. Announcing the public consultation and providing the relevant background documentation;
2. Running the public consultation;
3. Sharing the findings from the public consultations.

As spelled out earlier in the paper, public consultations are one of the many forms of public participation. In Montréal, they tend to cover development projects, special planning programs, draft by-laws, and policies. Based on the charter, there is also more emphasis on consultation as opposed to other strategies like co-creation or participatory budgeting .

Figure 1 – Rights and Responsibilities Spelt out by the Charter

**Defining the appropriate consultation strategies and announcing who is leading the process** Article 16c of the Charter mentions that public consultation strategies are effective, credible, and transparent if they follow, adopt, and maintain the appropriate procedures. Even though Article 16c emphasizes public consultation strategies, it might be a good idea to broaden the conversation to look at what makes public participation strategies effective more generally. Quick & Bryson (2016) explain how the effectiveness depends on ensuring equal representation without any form of exclusion, by promoting rich exchanges and building trust. When it comes to credibility, it is important to realize that proper engagement requires trained facilitators and the use of suitable information platforms (Nared, 2020). Transparency is inherently tied to the procedures that set the guidelines for engagement. With the right procedures, there is going to be higher amounts of transparency. The Charter does not specifically spell out what defines the appropriate procedures, however, there are a lot of details elsewhere specifically for public consultations.

Before formally announcing a public consultation, the city's executive council needs to decide who will take the lead and responsibility for organizing it. These processes can be led by permanent commissions of the City Council, borough councils, the Office de consultation Publique de Montréal, referred to as the OCPM, or any other group designated by the executive committee or the borough council (Ville de Montréal, n.d.). The roles of each of these groups are detailed in the next few paragraphs.

When it comes to council-led consultations, this process is usually chaired by elected officials. They typically are not experts when it comes to engagement strategies. These types of consultations are generally used to revise by-laws. Post-consultation, the council has to summarize the concerns raised, but there is no need or even desire to improve a given project after hearing the concerns (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012). In some cases, consultations are chosen simply to avoid referendums (Paquette, 2020). With council-led consultations, there is typically less complete background documentation to consult (Aubin, 2010).

Since 2002, the OCPM has held over 175 public consultations. Based on an interview with Isabelle Beaulieu, the organization's current President, the organization promotes social cohesion and fosters discussions so that citizens can learn more about the projects underway in their city or share ideas to improve their quality of life (Brabant, 2022). Generally, when issues are city-wide, the OCPM, an independent and neutral organization, should be mandated to lead the participation process (Aubin & Bornstein, 2012). The independent organization also consults on real estate projects, large institutional poles like the MUHC mega-hospital, heritage protection, large sector revitalizations, and rights or by-law modifications (OCPM, 2022). In the early days, the organization held more public consultations, the city and the boroughs had to submit all zoning requests that were being modified to the OCPM. However, this policy was dropped in 2003. In 2003, there were 25 public consultations, in 2004 this number dropped to 20, and then there were only four in 2005. Since, the number of public consultations mandated to the OCPM by elected officials has hovered between five to ten per year (Gyulai, 2022). Considering all of the projects happening in the Montréal context, this is a rather minuscule number. The OCPM is not legally mandated to have equality across the different boroughs in Montréal. Ville-Marie, the Sud-Ouest and Plateau-Mont-Royal mandate far more public consultations than the other boroughs (Gyulai, 2022). This point deserves some more research to better develop the explanations behind it, but from an initial hypothesis, these are some of the boroughs where there are already higher levels of active community engagement. An argument can be made about whether the OCPM should be responsible for providing consultations on more projects, and what that might look like, but that is beyond the scope of this research.

Bherer, Fahmy, Pinksy. (2015) argue that there is a need for specialists in co-production and people who can link institutions with diverse publics. Since the article was written

in 2015, there has been a growing need for these kinds of professionals. Co-production is used to optimize resources and achieve better outcomes and improved efficiency through public sector employees working with citizens (Kleinhans, Falco & Babeln, 2021). These processes are important because “citizens have the living experience, professionals have the knowledge and governments have the power of regulation” (Bérard, 2022). As a result, the city mandates other groups to support and lead participation initiatives.

One of those partners is the Centre d’écologie urbaine de Montréal, or the CEUM. The CEUM is one of the partners relied upon especially when it comes to testing and implementing participatory budgeting initiatives. This group promotes the capacity for individuals and communities to work together to create democratic, healthy, resilient cities that operate on a human scale (Bérard, 2022). The projects focused on touch on the concept of the ecological transition, but they also extend to issues of mobility and public health. Generally, the organization’s roles are more supportive in nature. In the case of the borough of LaSalle’s participatory budget process, the CEUM was mandated by the borough to animate the activities and evaluate the processes after the fact (CEUM, 2021). Their goal is to provide advice. At the end of the day, the CEUM serves as a consultant.

There is also a group like La Pépinière which is another non-profit organization that has a mission to create and manage gathering spaces at the heart of the neighbourhood and to accompany municipalities and local actors to develop their own spaces. Similarly, to the CEUM, la Pépinière strives to promote human-scaled environments. This group relies on placemaking as a tool and way to engage citizens. Neighbourhood life is seen at the heart of city-making. This way of doing things is unique because it acknowledges citizen wisdom and existing relationships while promoting principles of inclusive design (Participatory Canada, 2021).

So far, this section covers how the city initiates participation strategies. The grand majority of the time, it is initiated by the city. However, in 2010, the City of Montréal adopted the right of initiative, found in Article 16h of the Charter, which allows citizens to kickstart the process to launch public consultations. There are two steps to start this process:

1. Submit a draft petition to the city or the borough;
2. Have 15,000 people sign the petition. This number varies depending on the borough.

The city is limited to three right of initiative consultations per year, and each borough is limited to two per year. Petitions are also limited during election years (Ville de Montréal, n.d.). After these conditions are met, the elected officials will decide which group is responsible for running the public consultation. At first glance, 15,000 people might seem like a very high number, but there still have been quite a few right initiative projects launched. Between 2019 and 2022, there were 12 right of initiative consultations launched. Examples include looking at ways to eliminate food waste across the city, to control flyer distributions or to assess the impacts of a new school located right next to the Réseau Express Vélo.

**Running the public consultation**

After deciding who is leading the public consultation, it becomes a matter of running the consultation. Article 16f of the Charter emphasizes that there is a need to ensure that there is representation across Montréal’s diverse groups. This phenomenon is especially true considering how communities, where people live, are sites of transformation (Engle, Britton & Glode-Desrochers, 2021). There is also a growing sense that the government is responsive or not representative of the public or in some cases even the majority (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Based on a document from the Ministère de l’Immigration, de la Diversité et de l’Inclusion du Québec (2016), there is a lower level of citizen participation among people with diverse ethnocultural backgrounds compared to the rest of the population of Québec.

Sometimes increased participation comes through less formal settings, for example, grassroots initiatives (Conseil interculturel de Montréal, 2018). Citizens might get involved in some tactical initiatives or activities like guerilla gardening (Luka, 2018). There is a presumption that citizens have the extra time, interest, and knowledge to be able to participate in neighbourhood or city-scale planning (Felt, 2014). In reality, this is not the case, participatory planning initiatives are rarely used outside the context of the law (Nared, 2020). Presently, professionals rely on a decide-announce-defend model, where they select their preferred solutions before communicating with the public. Instead, there should be an emphasis on a model that promotes engagement, deliberation, and decision-making to develop solutions (Everett & Lamond, 2018).

Public participation processes vary from context to context and from project to project (Hügel & Davies, 2020). There are a few initiatives that can be used to promote engagement from different participants across different projects. For example, hybrid approaches should be mixed with in-person methods (Shin, Hyun Woo & Choi, 2022). This phenomenon grew in popularity, especially with the pandemic witnessed over the last two years. Getting youth involved is also something super critical, especially considering how they have limited knowledge about how they can shape the built environment or influence decisions. If the city wants to have people engaged in projects over time, there is a need to promote youth participation (Lo, 2016). Section 16g of the Charter also calls for equal participation between women and men in participation processes. While this specific section of the Charter might be outdated and probably should be adapted to reflect modern-day gender norms, there are ways that this is upheld. For instance, during the OCPM consultation on the PPU des Faubourgs, there were two microphones set up, one for men and one for women. There was a system that made sure that the same person did not always speak, but also it ensured that there was an alternance between genders (MTElles, 2020). The OCPM also hosts daycare sessions at their consultations, and it also seems like they offer the chance for parents to ask questions first.

Generally, when it comes to OCPM processes, the first part is information sessions, where the developers, city officials, and other relevant stakeholders present the project. Then, there is a question period. After citizens can express their briefs or opinions before the commission. These briefs or opinions can take the form of written briefs or opinions presented in front of the commission. From here, the commissioners write a report with recommendations to the City of Montréal.

**Sharing the findings**

When it comes to sharing the findings from participation processes, more and more, everything is published online. After the end of the consultation, the body responsible for the consultation has 90 days to write up its findings (Ville de Montréal, n.d.).

Through their processes, the OCPM ultimately produces a report explaining the project, and documenting the citizens' qualms and concerns. From there, commissioners write out recommendations for what can be improved, however, there are no formal mechanisms to ensure that they are followed through and implemented (Felt, 2014). Even then, after the recommendations, there is no obligation to act or to provide any explanation or rationale behind the final decisions (Paquette, 2020). This goes against the concept of article 16c spelt out in the Charter, where there is an emphasis on promoting transparency tied to public consultation procedures. The OCPM is pushing for city or borough councils to explain the reasons why their recommendations are followed or why they were not followed. Currently, the borough of Ville-Marie is the only one that voluntarily provides this kind of follow-up (Gyulai, 2022).

When it comes to sharing the findings that come from participation strategies, whether it is consultations or co-production strategies, one major issue is the language barrier. Most of the documents

are produced in French, even though we live in a multilingual community.  Some describe it as alienation (Felt, 2014). This makes it a lot harder for citizens to follow through on projects in which they were involved because they cannot read the follow-up documentation.

**Conclusion**

There are many different actors involved in the process of public participation initiatives organized by the City of Montréal. Depending on the context and the type of participation, each actor takes on different roles. In some cases, initiatives may be led by city councils. In other cases, the OCPM is one of these leading partners. There are also other groups like La Pépiniére or The Centre d'écologie urbaine de Montréal that are mandated to organize public participation processes. Across the different partners, there are new ways to promote diverse participation. However, there is a lack of follow-up on the recommendations that emerge.

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[Editorial note: Some of these references were also used for the rest of this project]


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