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TOMORROW STARTS TODAY

Youth Engagement in the City-Building Process

Supervised Research Project
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Abstract

Youth of the ages 13 to 18 remain one of the least represented and most marginalized group in city building and civic affairs. Lack of urban planning education at the secondary school level and lack of political engagement prevent youth from becoming effective advocates in their communities. This Supervised Research Project explores a variety of strategies for educating and engaging youth in the city-building process through a case study in Ontario. A methodology of planning and delivering a youth conference is developed to test these strategies and collect data. The results show that a conference appears to be an effective platform to provide an intensive learning experience for youth. The conference addresses some of the barriers of youth engagement, while giving youth confidence and tangible tools to participate in civic affairs. Lessons learned from this project are summarized as recommendations for researchers, planners and civic officials interested in organizing future youth conferences.

Résumé

Les jeunes entre 13 et 18 ans représentent un des groupes les moins représentés et plus marginalisés en ce qui a trait à l'aménagement urbain et aux affaires civiques. Le manque d'éducation en urbanisme dans les écoles secondaires et le manque d'engagement politique empêchent les jeunes de devenir des porte-paroles efficaces dans leurs communautés. Ce projet de recherche supervisé explore une variété de stratégies pour l'éducation et la participation des jeunes dans le processus d'urbanisme à travers une étude de cas en Ontario. L'organisation et la tenue d'une conférence pour les jeunes sont utilisées comme méthodologie pour tester ces stratégies et recueillir des données. Les résultats montrent qu'une conférence semble être une plateforme efficace pour donner une expérience d'apprentissage intensive pour les jeunes. La conférence permet d'aborder certains obstacles à l'engagement des jeunes, tout en donnant aux jeunes la confiance et des outils concrets pour participer aux affaires civiques. Les conclusions tirées de ce projet sont résumées sous forme de recommandations pour les chercheurs, les professionnels en aménagement et les fonctionnaires municipaux intéressés à organiser des conférences pour la jeunesse à l'avenir.

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1. Introduction

Researchers and decision-makers have observed a decline in civic engagement in the last several decades in Canada and the U.S. (Bowman, 2011). The success of liberal democratic societies, however, is fundamentally dependent on civic engagement of its citizens (Bowman, 2011; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). When citizens meet, share ideas and make plans for change, they can successfully address a range of social and political issues (Wulff, 2003). Civic engagement is particularly important to the urban planning process. The planning process is undeniably political, as it affects the interests and circumstances of various stakeholders, there is a need to enable these stakeholders to participate in the process and have an influence on the outcomes (Whitney & Kitchen, 2004). Increasingly, citizens appear to be no longer satisfied merely being on the receiving ends of government actions (Whitney & Kitchen, 2004).

1.1. Problematique

Youth of the ages 13 to 18 are one of the least represented and most marginalized group in city-building and civic affairs (Checkoway, 2011; Cushing, 2015; Frank, 2006; Perlman, 2013; Stuart, 2013; Sutton & Kemp, 2002). Although teenagers lack maturity, knowledge and experience, they should, nevertheless, have opportunities to engage and learn (Frank, 2006). Many adults working within civic processes also acknowledge that they lack professional knowledge of how to deal with youth and address their needs (Frank, 2006; Freeman & Riordan, 2002). Yet, by ignoring the needs and opinions of youth, decision-makers are excluding an important group that contribute to our society (Frank, 2006).

Lack of youth participation in civic affairs also is reflected in the political process. Voter turnout in elections historically has been low among those of 18 to 29 years of age, as many young voters feel disengaged from and disillusioned in participatory democracy (Adsett, 2003; Pasek et al. 2006; Print, 2007). Youth generally report a lack of civic knowledge that would prepare them to vote, and they are not likely to participate as they age if habits are not developed in their formative years (Adsett, 2003; Print, 2007).

One might presume that secondary schools are the best context for addressing this issue of youth non-participation. However, formal civic education in many developed countries has largely failed to promote youth engagement (Adsett, 2003; Print, 2007). At the local scale, most civics or geography courses taught in secondary school do not educate students on affairs within their own cities (Perlman, 2013). A growing body of literature has shown that there needs to be a varied approach, including informal education and alternative learning methods such as open discussions and service learning, to effectively promote public participation (Kahne, Crow & Lee, 2013; Print, 2007). As a result of the lack of secondary school education in urban affairs, most youth have very limited knowledge about how the built environment around them is shaped, and how they themselves can influence these decisions. As they age, youth become decision-makers themselves, as well as voters who place politicians in power. It can be argued that the public as a whole is ill-equipped to tackle complex issues of their communities (Perlman, 2013). Their lack of knowledge and awareness are ever more evident as the public discourse today on important urban issues and planning decisions remains at an elementary level and is often detracted by political

rhetorics and NIMBYism. Therefore, Perlman (2013) argues that through education on urban planning issues, students can gain the necessary skills and tools to become better advocates for and stewards of their communities in the present and in the future.

Youth engagement today mostly exists as part of a larger public consultation process on a development project or legislation, and only recently are youth recognized as important stakeholders. There is a significant potential in developing effective tools and practices catered to this group (Frank, 2006). As such, the goal of this Supervised Research Project is to empower youth in the collaborative process of city-building. The anticipated benefits of this research are threefold. Through education, youth can be equipped with the knowledge they need to take part in the discussion, planning and design of their communities. By identifying transferrable tools and strategies, this project hopes to build on the work in youth engagement previously done by researchers and officials such as Perlman (2013), Spier (2013), Diakun (2009), Frank (2006) and Rajkovich (1997). By producing a practical how-to guide with recommendations for decision-makers and other actors in the field of city-building, similar to the work done by Kleinman et al. (2007) for the scientific and technological disciplines, this project hopes to serve as an aid by making youth engagement easier and more effective.

1.2. Research Objectives

This Supervised Research Project (SRP) explores strategies for educating and engaging youth in the city-building process through a case study in Ontario. This SRP draws on secondary sources to understand the state of the debate on youth engagement and context-specific experiences. Key pieces in the scholarly and

professional literature on urban affairs are reviewed to focus on different methods and tools used to identify the interests of youth in the city, to promote meaningful discussion on urban issues, and to implement youth-driven urban planning and design interventions. The core of the SRP is based on primary research, developing and executing a methodology to achieve the following objectives:

1. to identify and test methods to educate youth on urban issues,
2. to identify and test tools to engage youth in participatory planning, and
3. to examine whether the development of a conference to address Objectives 1 and 2 can change youth attitudes toward civic engagement.

A case study centred in Ontario is particularly valuable and interesting. According to Perlman (2013), very few secondary schools in Ontario offer a grade 12 urban geography course, while most secondary school students opt to take the grade 9 geography course as a minimum requirement¹. Most students would not be exposed to urban issues such as sprawl and public transit before some choose to pursue urban planning or other related fields in post-secondary education (Perlman, 2013). This is a stark contrast to the past, where in 1988, over 7,600 grade 11 and 12 students enrolled in urban studies geography courses (Perlman, 2013). Chauhan (2005), exploring the potential of incorporating community planning into the grade 10 civics curriculum, has identified many challenges to such implementation, including the inefficiency of government bureaucracy and the issue of locality applied in a province-wide curriculum.

¹ Ontario public secondary schools follow a 4-year system, from grade 9 to 12.

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is a rapidly growing urban region with intense real estate development in the downtown core, a diverse and multicultural population, aging infrastructure, a dire need for affordable housing and an overcrowded transit system. In particular, transit became the central issue of the 2014 mayoral elections of Toronto as candidates had very different visions on how to solve the city's problems of congestion (Travers, 2014). As many of these issues are directly related to long-term planning of the city, it is crucial for youth to be engaged in the decision-making process.

There are five chapters in this SRP report. Chapter 1 outlines the challenges faced in civic engagement and the overall research objectives of the project. Chapter 2 is a scan of existing literature, providing an overview of the current state of debate in youth engagement as well as tools and strategies that have been used in previous studies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of planning and delivering a youth conference as a testing and data collection platform. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of the event and discusses its effectiveness in achieving its research objectives. Chapter 5 provides recommendations; it reiterates the importance of incorporating effective youth engagement strategies and breaking down barriers to participate by various actors in the city-building process.

2. State of the Debate

This literature scan first provides a broad overview of youth engagement principles in civic affairs, focusing on particularly the general propositions laid out by Checkoway (2011) and the recently published Youth Engagement Strategy document by the City of Toronto (Toronto City Planning, 2015). The review then turns to two recurrent themes in youth-related urban design literature: healthy, active lifestyle and skate parks. Different methods and tools of youth participation used by previous research studies are discussed. Finally, three case studies of projects and initiatives in Ontario are examined in terms of their methodology and potential impacts on youth engagement.

2.1. Youth in the Literature on Urban Affairs

The involvement of youth in urban affairs can be categorized into two major areas: youth engagement principles and urban design. While the former provides broad but important direction to how youth engagement should be conducted, the latter deals with specific design qualities and spaces that are related to youth. Particularly, youth-related urban design has a strong focus on ensuring a healthy and active lifestyle for youth through walkability and recreational spaces.

2.1.1. Youth Engagement Principles. As discussed in the first chapter, the urban planning and decision-making process often excludes many groups, including youth. Barriers include timing of events, accessibility to meeting venues, use of written materials and presentation style (Cameron & Grant-Smith, 2005). As a result, although

youth are an essential part of a city's population and citizens of their communities, their needs and concerns are often not heard by planners and officials.

Checkoway (2011: 340-343) identifies a number of important propositions for youth participation based on a review of other studies. The Toronto Youth Engagement Strategy (Toronto City Planning, 2015: 14-15) outlines the City's guiding principles that inform the design of methodology for including youth in civic processes. Relevant propositions and principles from the two works are combined into one list to form a foundation for this project:

1. Youth participation is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.²
2. Youth participation is both a short-term and long-term process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives.
3. Sparking a person's interest in participation early in their formative years as youth makes it much likelier they will become active participants later in life.
4. Youth participation refers to the active engagement of youth in positions of influence, not to their passive presence or token roles in adult agencies.
5. Youth participation assumes that young people are competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services.
6. While many young people are uninvolved or minimally involved in public affairs, small groups of youth are extremely active.

² "The first declaration of rights was adopted by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva in 1923, and endorsed by the League of Nations General Assembly in 1924, as the World Child Welfare Charter. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1959, and was the basis for the Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989" (Checkoway, 2011).

7. Youth from different life stages, geographies and income levels participate differently.
8. Youth participation is facilitated by youth leaders and adult allies, and fostered by partnerships between actors and organizations.
9. There are obstacles, such as intimidation, to youth participation, and also opportunities for strengthening their involvement in the future.
10. Youth are more likely to participate in a process that is fun, creative or social.

Planning professionals are beginning to recognize that because youth's needs are often different from adults, the traditional planning approach has to change and needs to directly engage youth (Frank, 2006). An official youth engagement strategy, such as that of the City of Toronto, is key to improving youth participation in this city.

2.1.2. Youth and Urban Design: Healthy and Active Lifestyle. The literature on youth-related urban design is uneven, and research that discusses both youth participation and urban design is sparse. Most urban design literature related to youth focus mainly on the provision of public spaces or changes to the built environment, whether by the government or other actors, made for youth. Prior to the discussion of tools and methods used for the purpose of youth participation, it is important to examine what has been done for youth in the realm of urban design.

Promoting a healthy and active lifestyle has been a large part of public policy research oriented towards youth in North America, and walkability has been a focal point of past studies (Carlson et al., 2015; Cook, Bose & Main, 2014; Epstein et al., 2006; Fusco, 2007; van Loon & Frank, 2011;). These researchers argue that improving

neighbourhood walkability will promote walking among the youth population, thus reducing negative impacts of a sedentary lifestyle. A habit of walking during childhood is a positive determinant of adult behaviour (Cook, Bose & Main, 2014). Design qualities such as density, housing typology, connectivity, land use mix, and public space and play space design contribute to encouraging youth to walk (Carlson et al, 2015; Epstein et al, 2006; van Loon & Frank, 2011). In addition, Cook, Bose and Main (2014), comparing urban and rural groups of youth, found that their preferred design qualities differ. For example, safety, opportunity for social interaction and maintenance of public spaces are some of the qualities that urban-oriented youth would consider first. In contrast, rural youth are more inclined to prioritize factors such as scenery and landscape, smells of nature and sounds of animals. Despite these differences, the researchers found that the top considerations for youth in general are maintenance and cleanliness, variety of public social spaces and presence of amenities along the street (Cook, Bose & Main, 2014). Van Loon and Frank (2011) also highlight that both the child's and the parent's perceptions of safety, as well as familial factors such as car ownership, affects the lifestyles young people lead. Fusco (2007), however, critiques the 'healthification' of public spaces in the name of promoting physical activity of youth. She sees the increasing focus on this issue in policy as a top-down, prescriptive approach that youth may reject.

In light of the public health aspect of public space for youth, skateboarding and skate parks are a particular focus of many urban design research studies (Bradley, 2010; Dumas & Laforest, 2009; Freeman & Riordan, 2002; Howell, 2005; Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012; Németh, 2006; Taylor & Khan, 2011). Assessments are

divided. Many officials and members of the public regard skate parks as a nuisance; they become the gathering places for non-conforming youth, often associated with graffiti artists, bullies and drug users (Bradley, 2010). Anti-skateboarding laws have been passed in many cities because of these perceptions of skateboarding as a dangerous and undesirable behaviour (Bradley, 2010). Some also see it as a burden on the health care system because of the injuries that skaters sustain (Dumas & Laforest, 2009). Németh (2006) and Howell's (2005) case studies of LOVE Park in Philadelphia, the 'mecca of street skateboarding' which saw a ban of skateboarding in 2002, illustrate the conflict over the right to define public space in a youth-related context. Skate parks can still be dangerous at night and conflicts often arise between different groups of users (Taylor & Khan, 2011). As a solution, cities have constructed purpose-built skate parks to keep skaters out of other public spaces, thus outside of the public eye (Németh, 2006). However, skaters lose interest quickly in these static, purpose-built skate parks and continue to use other public spaces for skateboarding (Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012).

Many researchers point out that skate parks are a valuable health resource, physically, psychologically and socially (Bradley, 2010; Dumas & Laforest, 2009; Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012; Taylor & Khan, 2011). Skate parks are usually unstructured, unsupervised and informal public spaces for youth to socialize and learn from each other (Bradley, 2010). They are spaces that foster creativity and entrepreneurship among youth, notably photography and videography of their performances (Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012). Howell (2005) even suggests that the existence of a skateboarding culture may be a sign of the creative class and

gentrification in a city. In order to design better spaces for skaters, Freeman and Riordan (2002) notes that it is important to incorporate skaters and youth in the planning and design process of skate park projects. After using participatory methods with youth such as mapping, interviews and observations, Jenson, Swords and Jeffries (2012) have identified four key elements of skateboarding spaces: accessibility, 'trickability', sociability and compatibility. Similarly, through interviews and observations, Taylor and Khan (2011) have identified different functional amenities that youth would like at skate parks. These examples illustrate, through the context of skateboard parks, the significance of youth participation and engagement in the urban design process.

2.2. Strategies for Engaging Youth

A number of studies identify and evaluate strategies to engage youth, ranging from conventional, passive methods to more creative, interactive approaches. In Ontario, in particular, there are three noteworthy examples where multiple methods and tools were implemented.

2.2.1. Methods and Tools for Promoting Youth Engagement. Methods and tools were identified via a literature scan on research articles and case studies of youth engagement, and categorized into five groups based on their purposes: need-finding, formal and complementary curriculum, experiential and immersive learning, participatory design, and digital tools for communication.

1. ***Need-finding:*** As the needs of youth are different from those of adults, it is important to first identify them through gathering input from youth and those who

have experience working with youth. The most conventional research methods employed in social sciences, including interviews, focus groups and surveys, are mainly used for need-finding in the context of youth participation. Specific tools include:

- a. One-on-one *interviews* are conducted to obtain specific knowledge from experts to ask participants more personal, reflective questions. For example, Perlman (2013) conducted in-person and phone interviews with educators, including secondary school geography teachers, university professors and officials from the Ministry of Education, to ask their opinions on including urban planning topics into the secondary school geography curriculum. These semi-structured interviews were necessary because it is the easiest way to reach these experts. Similarly, Cushing (2015) interviewed key informants in youth work to help evaluate the youth master plans in their communities. Taylor and Khan (2011) interviewed skateboarders, posing reflective questions such as how they perceive themselves, other skateboarders and the parks. By contacting these skateboarders individually, no peer influence and other factors that may affect their responses were minimized. Valaitis and O'Mara (2005) interviewed youth participants at the end of their project to probe for any positive and negative feedback towards different aspects of the process. The responses helped in evaluating the success of the project and identifying areas of improvement.

- b. *Focus groups* are used by researchers to gain insight into the beliefs and attitudes of larger populations through selected representation. Focus groups can be run prior to, during or after an activity. Stuart (2013) used a youth focus group to help identify which types of social media that they used. The youth participants also helped her to generate the idea of hosting a video-making contest for her research. To compare urban and rural youth, Cook, Bose and Main (2014) formed focus groups based on the location of the schools participants attended. Each group ranked different design qualities of the built environment, allowing researchers to find similarities and differences between the groups. Spier (2013) asked youth participants in focus groups to reflect, and express their opinions and feelings on a specific experience.
 - c. *Surveys and questionnaires* are a systematic way of asking participants to respond to a predefined set of questions. In Perlman's (2013) research, he asked educators to complete a questionnaire, in which they rated the relevance of urban planning issues to secondary school curriculum. Though the sample size was small, he was able to get a glimpse of the attitudes of educators towards different planning themes.
 2. ***Formal and complementary curricula:*** A direct way of empowering youth in the city-building process is to educate them through including urban planning and design topics into the secondary school curriculum. Since the 1990s, researchers such as Rajkovich (1997) have already begun suggesting to teach theories and techniques of developing and redeveloping of American cities at the secondary

school level. Different areas of study within urban planning and design would promote critical thinking skills amongst the students (Rajkovich, 1997). He provided a sample course syllabus to illustrate how urban planning and design topics can be incorporated. Perlman (2013) makes a similar case and argues that by integrating urban planning into the geography curriculum, connections to the theme of sustainability can be made. It would also help shift geography education from the 'old' methods of fact memorization to a 'new' paradigm of human-environment interaction, technology, hands-on learning, critical thinking and problem solving (Perlman, 2013). In terms of content, educators whom Perlman (2013) interviewed say that topics should promote critical-thinking while including basic material such as vocabulary and facts. They rated the topics: 50% found urban design somewhat important and 50% very important; housing was somewhat important to 83% and very important to 17% to those surveyed (Perlman, 2013). There are many challenges, however, to the route of making changes to the curriculum. In Ontario, education is a provincial responsibility, and the same secondary school curriculum is applied everywhere across the province. It is difficult, therefore, to design an appropriately general curriculum when urban issues are often geographically biased (Perlman, 2013). Another challenge is that it is very difficult and time-consuming to incorporate new changes into the curriculum; as one university professor said it took decades for Ontario to adopt environmental protection as a topic into its secondary school curriculum (Perlman, 2013). The biggest challenge is the lack of interest in senior geography courses beyond the grade 9 level. Schools therefore do not meet the

required minimum class size to offer those courses. Even if the courses are offered, teachers often lack expertise to teach those topics (Perlman, 2013). An alternative to address these concerns is to adopt a short, external course plan to complement the existing curriculum. Urban Land Institute's UrbanPlan is one such example in the United States (Urban Land Institute, 2014). UrbanPlan is designed to challenge students to work in groups and respond to a request for proposal (RFP) as a development team (Urban Land Institute, 2014). Although its focus is on the economics side of urban planning, the site planning aspect of the project is directly related to urban design.

3. ***Experiential and immersive learning:*** Experiential tools and methods can play an important role in helping youth to learn and understand their community. Just as planners and designers can make site visits in their study area, students go on trips, walks and tours, and map the observations about the built environment. They learn through the interactive experience.
 - a. *Walking and touring:* Rajkovich (1997) suggests field trips as tools for learning. For students in Michigan, for example, he recommends that students go to Detroit to "travel the grid and radical patterned streets of the city" and gain knowledge on topics such as historical preservation (Rajkovich, 1997). Based on landscape architect Lawrence Halprin's concept of a consultation walk, Spier (2013) asks the students to conduct walks in pairs through the park they are studying, with activities to complete at different checkpoints that align with previously identified themes. An example of an activity is to read a story about the traditional

indigenous owners of the land where the park is located, and note anything that acknowledges their history (Spier, 2013). The researcher's intention is to move beyond the verbal discussion in typical participatory design sessions and appeal to the senses and emotions of the participants, maximizing their creative and imaginative potential (Spier, 2013). Spier acknowledges several limitations in the research design. By appealing to senses and emotions, the researcher establishes ambiguity between facilitation and manipulation. The project is also, for the most part, adult-led without any early involvement of the youth in the design process (Spier, 2013). The design of the route and activities might differ if youth were the designers of the walk. Spier (2013), aware of the potential difference, suggests reversing the roles of the adult and the youth, having young people write a scored walk for adult decision-makers and planners, and examining the outcome.

- b. *Mapping*: Another common experiential activity is mapping, where youth participants are asked to map an area with which they are familiar. This mapping can be done precisely, with technical tools such as geographic information systems (GIS), or by mental mapping. Santo, Ferguson and Trippel (2010) have worked with university planning faculty to provide training for youth in urban planning, community development and GIS through a series of training modules. The teams of youth participants have then used their newly-learned skills to identify assets and liabilities in their study areas (Santo, Ferguson & Trippel, 2010). The researchers found

that the mapping exercise eventually changed the youth's perception of the neighbourhood's identity. Using technical tools such as GIS is resource-intensive, however. It not only requires computers and software, but also personnel available to train the participants and sufficient time to do so. For many research projects, this may be difficult to plan. Jenson, Swords and Jeffries (2012) asked youth to create mental maps based on their experiences with skateboarding. The researchers found that many skateboarders enjoyed the experience of creating these maps as it was a form of creative outlet (Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012). Illustrating their stories and experiences in different public spaces, the maps helped the researchers identify places important to this group of youth (Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012). As a gesture of appreciation to the skateboarding community, the researchers held an art exhibition to display all the mental maps created by the participants (Jenson, Swords & Jeffries, 2012).

4. **Participatory design:** Many participatory design examples are charrettes, which are short but intensive design challenges, often done in a group setting. The level of involvement by youth varies from project to project. Youth may play the role of an informant or consultant to being the sole designers. Sutton and Kemp (2002) experimented with two different student charrettes where university students were the primary designers and younger students were involved as informants. Elementary school students were involved in the first one, while secondary school students participated in the second. The charrette with elementary school

children was relatively successful, however, the one with secondary school teens encountered many difficulties; Students lacked enthusiasm and involvement because the charrette conflicted with the time schedules of the students, who often had athletic or employment commitments after school (Sutton & Kemp, 2002). Furthermore, teachers of the school were unwilling to allow students to miss class to participate. Lessons from this experience include: first, the researchers should design an activity that would fit the schedule of a secondary school student; and second, the researchers should emphasize the benefits the activity brings to the students in order to get the buy-in of the educators.

5. ***Digital tools for communication:*** Technology plays a large part in many young people's daily lives and digital tools are mostly used as a form of communication in youth engagement research. In the context of civic participation, Bennett, Wells and Bank (2009: 106) suggest that the new generation is more likely to be 'actualizing citizens' rather than 'dutiful citizens'. This characterization suggests that youth, rather than remaining as passives consumer of mass media, are enabled and empowered with new digital media to participate through social networking, and become both a producer and a consumer of content (Bennett, Wells & Bank, 2009). Going digital is inevitably an attractive way to researchers who would like to engage with this population group, but since these methods are relatively new, there is still ample room for improvement in the execution of these projects. Stuart (2013) attempted to run a video-making contest with teenagers on urban design in their communities. She used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WordPress to reach out to youth. However, she

found that it was difficult to attract youth to submit videos as it involved a significant amount of their time and effort. The timing of the contest, which was in the summer, was also not ideal as many teenagers who were interested were away for the holidays.

2.2.2. Case Studies of Youth Engagement in Ontario. There have been multiple successful examples in Ontario where youth were engaged in the urban design process. The three following case studies combined multiple tools and methods to create a comprehensive experience for the participants. Two case studies are from a summary written by Perlman (2013). A third case study is from the Ontario Growth Secretariat's Places to Grow Youth Engagement Project (Diakun, 2009).

- **OPPI:** The first case study examines an Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) initiatives run by a volunteer planner on World Town Planning Day in Toronto. A lecture was given to a grade 9 geography class, followed by an assignment for students to complete. Students were asked to conduct an investigation in their neighbourhood and take photographs of the places they liked or felt needed remediation (Perlman, 2013). They were then to perform a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis based on their findings (Perlman, 2013). Finally, they were to design a land use plan in a mini-charrette setting (Perlman, 2013). The exercises helped students learn the critical thinking, analysis and design skills they need for engagement in the urban design process. The expert-led and hands-on approach of the assignment helped spark the students' interest.

- **Maximum City:** The second case study involves Maximum City, a non-profit initiative which started at the University of Toronto schools by Josh Fullan. It is a summer education program offered to students in grade 8 to 11. The program, running since 2011, recruited many urban planning and architecture professionals to collaborate in designing training modules. The modules varied in focus, from public space to active transportation, and introduced tools such as charrettes, site visits and mapping. Similar to the OPPI initiative, the Maximum City program emphasized engagement, hands-on learning and establishing linkages between theoretical and practical knowledge (Perlman, 2013).
- **Places to Grow:** Ontario Growth Secretariat's Places to Grow Youth Engagement Project was a part of the consultation process of Ontario's Places to Grow Act and its Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The goal of the project was 'to provide an active learning experience where students analyze, plan and design part of the built environment in their hometown through independent assignments and group work' (Diakun, 2009: 17). Similar to the first two case studies, this project used multiple practical methods and tools to educate and engage youth in urban design. Students had the opportunity to go on a walking tour with a city planner to learn what works and does not work in their city (Diakun, 2009). It was a much more interesting and engaging from the students' point of view. The project also used an online forum as a digital communication tool. A moderator, usually a past participant of the project, reviewed the postings and answers questions (Diakun, 2009). Furthermore, students were challenged through a design charrette to create a three-

dimensional model of their study area as the final part of their project; they illustrated the groups' ideas and concepts (Diakun, 2009). Planners and officials were also invited to meet these students and see the final products of their work. Even though it was unclear whether the students' work had any impact on the outcome of the implementation of the Act or the Growth Plan in Ontario, the design charrettes appeared to be well organized and executed every year. The project was carried out in 16 cities across Ontario from 2007 to 2009 and a great number of students were reached through this initiative.

2.3. Summary

Numerous research studies and real world examples suggest that there are several consistent trends in strategies that engage youth in urban affairs. First, many youth engagement studies and projects deal with multiple issues, including urban planning, policy and governance, and urban design. Many urban design projects that involve youth, particularly with the examples of skate parks, inevitably also have to address issues of advocacy and civic rights. Ideally, youth should be invited to take part early in the research design process in order to maximize the project's relevance and impact. Second, logistics play a major role in determining the scale and the type of tools and methods to use for a research project. While curriculum changes may be a long-term endeavour, brief course plans and educational programs are more feasible for short-term research. Resources such as availability of experts and informants, the location and timing of the study, as well as access to computers and other materials, would determine what tools would be best to use. Third, as seen in the three

comprehensive case studies, they all involve a combination of tools and methods to achieve their educational and engagement objectives. While it is reflective of the complex nature of urban affairs, it is also important to create an engaging and multi-dimensional program that would help equip youth with different types of skillsets. Lastly, some of the case studies examined in this paper, especially those that are connected to school courses, involve a considerable amount of work for the participating students. Although the intensive workload can yield many learning opportunities, one should be careful not to discourage participation from youth because of the amount of work needed. Researchers should strive to provide an interesting and interactive experience for youth. It is essential to carefully consider these factors when designing the methodology of this project.

3. Methodology

The empirical questions used to structure this research project were explored through the development and analysis of a youth conference, where methods and tools were tested for their effectiveness in educating and engaging youth. The methods used are described here within four specific themes: the rationale for organizing a conference; the preparatory steps leading to the conference; the specifics of how the event was designed and delivered; and details on the collection of data during and after the event.

3.1. Overall Strategy: Why A Conference?

Rose-Krasnor (2008) argues that short-term, “high-density” experiences, such as summer camps, retreats and conferences, can be “turning points” in life with a significant impact in shaping the self and social development of youth. Pancer et al. (2002) believe that youth conferences can be effective means of engagement in many policy areas, ones that they bring mutual benefits to youth and their community. Youth participants gain a sense of empowerment through meaningful connections with others, while the community benefits from the energy, ideas and values contributed by youth (Pancer et al., 2002). Though in the context of science and technology, Kleinman et al. (2007) have demonstrated the importance of establishing the mechanics in organizing a conference to address barriers to citizen engagement. Drawing from these past experiences of researchers and professionals, and considering the limited amount of time and resources available for this Supervised Research Project, a short-term project was designed to incorporate a multitude of youth engagement tools and methods.

Therefore, rather than tackling the school curriculum or embarking on a long-term outreach campaign, this project would be framed as a one-time, one-day event, in the form of a youth conference.³

Designing and organizing a conference yields many unique advantages. A conference provides a platform to test and evaluate different formats of youth engagement at once. A conference is easier to organize compared to workshop series or brief courses because it requires less preparation by the organizer and speakers. A conference is also easier to market because it does not require as much commitment from the participants. To youth, a well-organized conference can be perceived as a valuable experience that is both fun and educational.

3.2. Preparation for the Conference

In preparation for the conference, a research ethics application was submitted to ensure that proper procedures were taken to protect the privacy and dignity of the youth participants. General guides to social research methods (Bailey, 1987; Bryman & Teevan, 2005) and to community planning (Wates, 2000), as well as various research studies in the literature, were consulted to formulate initial ideas for the project. A work plan⁴ was developed to identify key milestones of the project, such as the focus group study, and to make sure the preparation tasks were completed in a timely manner.

³ The event is named Tomorrow Starts Today Conference because the underlying message of this project is to build up young people to become not only leaders and city-builders of tomorrow, but leaders and city-builders today. They should not have to wait to start participating in civic affairs, their voice as youth is just as important as adults in society.

⁴ See Appendix A.

3.2.1. Focus Group. A focus group was an essential step of this project as an opportunity to seek youth input early in the process. The purpose of the focus group study was to gather youth perspectives on city-building and ideas on conference design. Direct discussion with youth was intended to help inform the conference topics and to shape the overall flow of how the conference would be run.⁵

The focus group was set to last for 1.5 hours, and it was run as an open, casual discussion with 5 to 10 youth participants. The facilitators asked open-ended questions while listening and taking notes of the responses and dialogues. Participants were rewarded with community service hours and free refreshments as incentive.

Prior to the study, a question guide⁶ was developed to help facilitate the group discussion. The introduction and ground rules outlined the rights of the participants as specified in the ethics approval of the project, set the tone for the discussion and laid out the general objectives of the study. The participants were then introduced to a series of terms and were asked to define them to their best ability. This enabled the facilitator to quickly assess the level of knowledge of the participants before moving on to the rest of the discussion. After revealing the standard definitions of the terms, the facilitator probed which topics interested the participants the most. The participants were also asked to share their thoughts on what barriers prevent them from participating in the city-building process.

⁵ The marketing and recruitment effort for the focus group study began on Tuesday, February 2, 2016, as soon as the focus group venue was confirmed. Through daily Facebook posts, an online poster, a short video, and cold-emailing, a call was put out to invite secondary school students in the Greater Toronto Area to participate in the study. With the assistance of the City Youth Council of Toronto, Committee Room 3 at the Toronto City Hall was booked as the venue for the study in the afternoon on Sunday, February 21. A registration form was set up on Google Forms, where applicants were asked to provide their name, age, grade, school name, email address and first three digits of their home postal code. They were also asked where they heard about the focus group.

⁶ See Appendix B.

The second half of the discussion shifted the focus to conference design. After describing the purpose of the conference, the facilitator asked the participants what they would like to learn through the conference. The participants explored activity ideas together that they thought would be effective with their generation. In addition, the facilitator asked the participants to provide suggestions on marketing and incentives to attract conference attendees, as well as any follow-up steps to take to extend the impact of the event.

The responses of the participants and any general observations were recorded by a note-taker. The discussion also was audio-taped. The ideas and comments from the participants informed the conference planning and design process to ensure that the experience would remain relevant and interesting to youth.

3.2.2. Developing Content. In order to generate interesting yet educational and empowering content for the conference, organizers consulted experts and professionals in urban planning and public engagement, and recruited different speakers to the event. From December to March, several individuals were contacted by email to request a short, informal interview (done by phone, Skype or in person). The subsequent conversations revolved around the interviewees' experience in youth engagement and their recommendations to be used at the conference.

Speakers were recruited during the months of January and February through public events, introductions and professional connections. Since the focus group study was postponed to the third week of February, the only criterion for the search of speakers was to cover a wide range of topics related to urban planning. Once participation was sought through email or in person, an initial meeting was held to

discuss the purpose of the conference and to explore topics each speaker would cover.⁷

Follow-up meetings were held with each speaker to confirm the fit of the presentation with the conference objectives, and to minimize redundancy among speakers. These topics were determined based on the expertise and interest of the speakers as well as considerations from the focus group study.

3.2.3. Venue. The conference was held at a planning school in a downtown university.⁸ The location of the building is central and convenient; it is located within short walking distance from a subway station and other iconic destinations such as a large downtown shopping mall and a public square. The classrooms in the building provided sufficient space for a large group gathering and their physical capacity helped define the maximum number of participants for the conference. The chairs and desks were all movable, which enabled the organizer and volunteers to reconfigure the space for different activities. Audio and video equipment were present and accessible, which eliminated the need to rent extra equipment.

As this is a short research project, there was no aggressive plan to search for sponsors. Sponsorship was only mentioned during the search for speakers when

⁷ Among the topics were local politics and the political process; public transit and transportation planning; open data and civic technology; the role of cities in climate change; placemaking, power, and youth activism; processes of land development; universal access and inclusive design; and youth issues specific to the Toronto metropolitan region.

⁸ Toronto City Hall was originally the preferred choice when searching for a venue for the conference because of its central location and civic significance. However, after using the facilities at City Hall for the focus group study, it was found that the overall environment and ambiance were too rigid and formal for a youth conference. The committee rooms also lacked the flexibility needed for different activities. Furthermore, the labour disruptions in February 2016, including a threat to strike and the subsequent work-to-rule action, added uncertainty to the process of reserving a space. Eventually, the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson University agreed to offer their space at the South Bond Building for the conference.

opportunities arose. Nonetheless, organizations supported the event through various means, including donating money and providing free giveaways. In return, the sponsors and supporters were promoted by acknowledgment during announcements and providing booth space for sponsors to interact with participants.

3.2.4. Recruitment and Registration. The registration process, which started on February 26, was done through the Eventbrite website, where participants entered their name and email address to register for the conference. On the Eventbrite page, they were also asked to print and complete a consent form before bringing it to the event. Upon arrival, the participants signed in at the registration desk set up in front of the elevator and stairwell. They received a program book with a simple rundown of the day, as well as brief descriptions of the sessions and biographies of the speakers. The exact time schedule was deliberately withheld from participants in the program books⁹ to allow flexibility to adjust timing of sessions and prevent distractions among participants because of time.

Eight youth volunteers, including a photographer, were recruited through Project 5K, a youth-run organization that connects secondary school students with volunteering opportunities. A food catering company, found through personal connections in the culinary industry, provided lunch service at a reasonable rate. Adjustments were made to accommodate different dietary needs, such as vegetarian and halal meals.

Getting the word out to the targeted audience was a significant challenge in conference planning. Multiple channels, in both active and passive approaches, were

⁹ See Appendix C.

used for this project in order to maximize reach to the younger generation. As a passive approach, social media platforms, including Facebook¹⁰ and Twitter¹¹, were the main tools used to promote the conference. Other websites were used to manage and create content¹² for social media. Posters were shared online and printed¹³. Two other organizations, Engineers without Borders and Yonge Street Media, also helped to promote the event.¹⁴

In a more active approach, a number of youth organizations¹⁵ in the Greater Toronto Area were contacted through cold-emailing. These organizations included youth councils, non-profit youth organizations, as well as school boards. The emails

¹⁰ A Facebook page for the project was started on January 26. A logo, a cover photo and a profile picture were designed before the page went public on January 31. The focus group study announcements started on February 2. Daily posts of interesting articles and videos related to urban planning and cities were published, and a full week of daily urban 'fun facts' were posted the week prior to the focus group study on February 21. Additional posts to introduce each speaker was also created in the week leading up to the day of the conference to generate more interest and traffic. Almost all the posts made through the project page were also shared through my personal Facebook account.

¹¹ A Twitter account (@TSTconference) was created on February 24, in response to the feedback received from the focus group study. While the content of most posts on both Facebook and Twitter were identical, some of the posts on Twitter or 'tweets' had to be shortened because of the 140 character limit.

¹² Hootsuite, a social media managing website, was used to manage the content and timing of the posts. Most posts were posted in the after-school hours on weekdays to accommodate the school schedules of secondary school students. Posts on the weekends were scheduled to be published after noon as a way to achieve visibility to a greater audience.

Wideo, an online video-editing website, was used to create short, animated videos promoting the project. As a free video-editing tool, Wideo has a number of animated video templates to use but it limits the length of the video to 30 seconds. Two videos were made: the first video was made as an introductory video of the project as a whole, the second was made to recruit participants for the focus group study. Since the conference registration process was facilitated through Eventbrite, a listing was automatically created in the website's event directory which was location and category-specific. Eventbrite also helped to place the conference amongst the top results of a Google search when searching for 'Tomorrow Starts Today Conference', which greatly increases the visibility of the event.

¹³ Two posters were made for the project (See Appendix D). One was made for the focus group study and another for the conference itself. Both posters included details of the events, including time, date and location, as well as the benefits and incentives of participation. The posters were posted online through Facebook and Twitter, and were printed as physical posters posted on walls and doors at the two events.

¹⁴ Engineer Without Borders, one of the conference partners, agreed to help promote the event by also creating a listing on their National Engineering Month event directory. Yonge Street Media, a digital media website based in Toronto, has also interviewed myself as the organizer and published an article about the project in the week prior to the conference.

¹⁵ See Appendix E for list of youth organizations contacted.

contained (a) a brief description of the project, and (b) a request to forward the information to their youth members or their networks of young people and invite them to participate in the events. The conference organizer did not contact schools and teachers directly; the aim was to prevent any unintended pressure from teachers and educators on students to participate. However, a conference partner, RU a Planner from Ryerson University, as well as other personal connections of the organizer, contacted teachers about the event, which may have an effect on who eventually participated in the conference.

Incentives was seen as key to attracting participants to an event, according to the focus group participants. The conference itself was a free event to eliminate any financial barriers to participate. Free refreshments were provided at the focus group study. A free lunch was also provided for all participants, volunteers and speakers. Seven volunteer hours or community service hours were awarded to participants, while an additional three hours were awarded to youth volunteers for their work.

3.3. Design and Execution

The design of the conference sessions was central to the research objectives of the project. The comparison and contrast between sessions and activities helped assess the effectiveness of different methods and tools for youth engagement. There were multiple variables at play when designing each session: the length of the session, the level of interaction, and the use of digital tools.

1. **Length of Session:** The length of each presentation was varied to test for an optimal duration given the attention span of youth. There were four 'lightning talk'

sessions, where speakers had only 10 minutes to present their topic, with 20 minutes of question and answer (Q&A). The two long-format guest presentations lasted 45 minutes in total, with approximately 30 minutes of presentation and 15 minutes of Q&A. The workshops, the lunch activity and the panel discussion were all designated for an hour. Observations of the participants' behaviour, such as their attentiveness, during the sessions, as well as their feedback and comments afterwards, provided insight to determining an effective time length for presentations.

2. **Level of Interaction:** The level of interaction ranged from session to session.

The long-format presentations, lightning talks and the panel discussion were designed to be more passive, with the speakers sharing most of the information through speech and some visual aids. The only interactive element in these sessions was the opportunity for participants to ask questions during the Q&A periods. The lunch activity, although designed to be a background activity while lunch was served, invited participants to have their own input in the form of post-it notes on the wall. The workshops were the most interactive, where facilitators ran activities that required participants to engage in discussion, answer questions and complete tasks. As literature has shown that youth tend to prefer greater interaction and experiential learning, despite the format of the sessions, speakers were encouraged to incorporate some elements of interaction in their sessions. In addition, the rundown of the conference was designed to build up from the most passive activity (long-format presentations) to the most active (workshops), then back down to passive (panel discussion) at the end of the day to create a

flow according to the participants' energy level. By observing the participants' behaviour throughout the conference, interactive elements used in different sessions and the overall flow of the day were further analyzed for their effectiveness.

3. **Usage of Digital Tools:** the use of digital tools differed across speakers. With the exception of a speaker presenting virtually from Florida via a Skype video call, all speakers presented in-person and had access to the same set of equipment, which included a laptop, a projector screen, a microphone, speakers and access to the Internet. The way the speakers chose to utilize the equipment would have changed the way information was conveyed to the participants. These differences, including the differences between physical and virtual presentations, were evaluated to determine any factors that may affect the effectiveness of the sessions.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Several methods were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data before, during and after the conference.

- **Online analytics tools¹⁶:** The analytics tool of the project Facebook page revealed important marketing data about the visitors and 'fans' (users who have 'liked' the page), such as time of visit and demographics. The analytics tool of Eventbrite also helped track page traffic and registration data, including time of

¹⁶ See Appendix F.

visits and approximate locations of registrants. Postal codes were mapped using Google Maps to show the geographic distribution of the participants.

- **Pre-conference surveys¹⁷:** The primary purpose of the pre-conference surveys was to establish a reference point from which the impact of the conference could be measured. The survey asked the participants to self-assess how much they knew about urban planning prior to the conference, and whether they have participated in the urban planning process before through events or public meetings. The survey also asked the participants to identify where they have heard about this conference to identify effective methods of marketing and distributing information. Participants were asked to provide basic personal information¹⁸ for the purpose of demographic analysis. The pre-conference surveys were given to the participants when they first arrived at the venue as they signed in. The survey was intended to be simple and quick, as participants would complete and return the form to the volunteers at the registration desk before entering the lecture room. Results were cross-tabulated and made into graphs to identify any trends or patterns.
- **‘A Day in the Life.’¹⁹:** Inspired by a similar activity done by Co-design Engage in Vancouver (King & Chung, 2016), this lunch activity was designed not only to showcase the diversity of how people use and interact with the city throughout the day and spur discussion amongst participants during lunch, it was also a tool to collect data on youth’s typical daily routine. A timeline was created on a wall,

¹⁷ See Appendix G.

¹⁸ Name, age, grade, school, and the first 3 digits of the participant's home postal code.

¹⁹ See Appendix H.

with post-it notes evenly spaced out and marking each hour of the day from 6 a.m. to 6 a.m. the next day. Participants were asked to use at least 3 post-it notes to write down what they would be doing and where they would be at a certain time of a typical day. They were asked to be brief but descriptive with the notes. The notes would then be posted according to the time of day that activity takes place. Photographs were taken to document the notes for further analysis of any consistent patterns among the participants in their daily routine.

- **Post-conference surveys²⁰:** The purpose of the post-conference surveys was to evaluate the impact of the conference on the participants. The surveys were completed at the end of the conference. Ratings were on a 5 or 10-point Likert scale, the participants were asked to self-assess their level of knowledge, readiness to participate in the urban planning process, and level of satisfaction with their experience at the conference. From a list of all the sessions of the conference, participants were also asked to identify from which session they have learned the most, and which session was the most fun and engaging. Since the participants were divided into two separate workshops, the survey asked them to identify which workshop they attended for the purpose of data stratification. Additional space for comments and feedback was provided at the end of the survey. Quantitative data were cross-tabulated and graphed to identify trends or patterns, while personal accounts provided qualitative information of the conference experience.

²⁰ See Appendix I.

- **In-situ observation:** Observation notes of the participants' behaviour, expressions and interaction with speakers and others were taken throughout the conference. Particularly, attention was paid to their reaction and receptiveness to different parts of each session as a way to evaluate the effectiveness of certain methods and strategies being used by the speakers. Notes were summarized into themes and categories for better organization and readability.
- **Debriefs and interviews:** Throughout the conference, notes were taken from the comments given by speakers, volunteers and participants. Follow-up debrief discussions were set up with the speakers during and after the conference, focusing on what they thought went well and what areas to improve. Speakers, volunteers and participants also contributed in suggesting new ideas and methods to improve the conference experience. These notes were combined and analyzed together with the in-situ observation notes.

3.5. Summary

The process of organizing the conference has been complex and non-linear, there were many moving parts involved and many tasks were carried out simultaneously. As the rationale for running a conference was established, preparation and design work for the event went hand-in-hand to ensure a seamless delivery. Data were collected throughout and after the conference, and analyzed to generate insights. The results and findings from various parts of the conference would inform whether the methods and tools tested were effective in educating and engaging youth.

4. Findings

This chapter summarizes the results from various data collection tools and analyzes the implications of the findings in three major themes linked to the research objectives of the project: youth education on urban planning, youth engagement in civic affairs, and the mechanics of planning and delivering the conference.

4.1. Educating Youth

A review of the curriculum for Ontario secondary schools revealed that there is no standard material on the topic of urban planning. It was therefore deemed important, before designing any materials or sessions for the conference, to establish an understanding of what youth already know and are interested in learning. From the findings of the focus group study and pre-conference survey, youth showed a basic understanding of concepts and processes. They were able to identify topics they felt relevant or interesting to them as youth. However, they displayed a low sense of confidence in what they knew as there was no formal validation of their knowledge by educators or experts prior to this conference.

4.1.1. Past Knowledge. In the beginning of the focus group study, the participants were asked to define a series of terms related to city-building processes, to the best of their knowledge. Their responses are summarized below:

- ***Urban Planning:*** All participants thought that urban planning was about how to make communities better and more liveable. Individuals also suggested

improving accessibility and attractiveness of the city were part of the work of urban planning.

- **Urban Design:** Only a couple of participants were able to describe urban design as a term, stating that it was about planning the way buildings and cities look. One participant included transportation, i.e. developing new transit systems such as buses, as part of urban design.
- **Community Development:** Participants saw community development as the process of gathering ideas and opinions from the public to develop their community, making them stronger and better. It was about making people more involved and more accustomed to the growth in their communities.
- **Public Engagement:** The group described public engagement as the process of considering the public's ideas and gathering feedback from people on what to change or add to the city.

It was evident that despite the lack of formal education in school on urban planning processes, the participants in the focus group were able to provide general definitions of these concepts.

4.1.2. Relevant and Interesting Topics. From a list of topics that on which most urban planners focus, participants were asked to identify those that they felt were relevant to them as youth. The participants selected the following three and explained their choices:

- **Housing:** Some participants cited affordability as a concern, especially for people living in poverty. They were concerned about their own ability to move out of home after secondary school, for purposes such as post-secondary education.
- **Public Space:** All participants agreed that public spaces are important in building a community and keeping people engaged. Some said it was especially important in small communities where there was not much else to do. Urban participants found a lack of public spaces in their neighbourhood, such as a community centre for sports. Suburban participants, on the other hand, found an abundance of public spaces, such as community centres and parks, but pointed out that these spaces were often underused. The participants agreed that the location of public spaces should be convenient. According to them, good examples of public spaces included libraries, for its work-friendly environment, as well as restaurants and malls.
- **Transportation:** Participants all agreed that transportation has greatly affected secondary school students. Not everyone would have a driver's license. The suburban participants also complained that it could be difficult and time-consuming for them to go downtown because of distance and the lack of transit options.

It was noteworthy that land use and heritage were not identified as particularly relevant topics to youth. While the fact that heritage was not identified may be expected as it often had little impact on youth issues, it was surprising to see that land use planning was not chosen either by the participants.

When asked what they would like to learn as youth to better their community, the participants' responses varied. Some wanted to learn more about the roles of public and private sector in the planning process, and who to go to when they wanted to push for change. Participants wanted to know how their opinions could be taken to decision-makers, who could make these changes happen. Some wanted to know ways to accommodate different people in a diverse city such as Toronto. Others wanted to know how to get more youth like themselves involved and how to gather more people to support a cause. Finally, all participants wanted to know "what exactly urban planning is". This part of the discussion went noticeably slower as participants took more time to think of things they would like to learn about. It was admittedly a more difficult question, but their responses showed that sharing knowledge on stakeholders' roles, government structures and processes in urban planning would be useful.

4.1.3. Lack of Confidence. In the pre-conference survey²¹, participants were asked to self-assess their level of knowledge in urban planning. The average score was very low, at 1.5 out of 5. A third of the participants selected the lowest score on the scale. This confirmed the assumption that most secondary school students were both unfamiliar with urban planning as a subject, and lacking confidence about what they know. A few individuals who gave themselves a higher score presumably had learned through other sources, and therefore were more confident. The conference, it was concluded, needed to both educate youth on the subject of planning and validate their

²¹ See Appendix J for results of the pre-conference survey.

knowledge to give them more confidence as people who could engage in urban processes.

4.1.4. Increase in Knowledge and Confidence. After a full day of sessions and activities at the conference, the participants were asked to self-assess their level of knowledge in urban planning once more. Compared to the average score of 1.5 out of 5 in the pre-conference survey, the average score of their post-conference²² self-assessment has increased to 3.4 out of 5. Although the score was still relatively low on the scale of 5, the score more than doubled from prior to the conference. This jump demonstrates that even a short-term initiative, such as a one-day conference, can be effective and successful in educating youth participants on the subject of planning.

4.1.5. Usefulness. When asked to evaluate whether they learned something useful about urban planning at the conference, the average score that participants gave was 4.0 out of 5. The high score is an indicator that the emphasis on tangible tools and methods of participation was deemed useful by participants.

4.1.6. Effective Learning. Participants were asked to select one or more sessions where they felt they learned the most. The responses indicated that the first presentation on civic governance and the workshops tied for first, followed by the panel discussion at the end of the conference. It was interesting that the first presentation has done significantly better than the others even as a long-format session. This was ranked highly because the speaker effectively outlined how the city government works and the

²² See Appendix K for results of the post-conference survey.

roles of different officials, information that they had not learned in school. The fact it was first meant the participants probably were fresh and attentive; the 45-minute duration gave the speaker more time to present information. In comparison, the 10-minute sessions were high-level overviews of specific topics and themes that might only be interesting to some, therefore receiving fewer votes from the participants. It was not surprising, however, to see the workshops at the top of the list. Studies have shown that hands-on, experiential learning can be very effective in helping students empathize with others and maximize their creative potential (Spier, 2013).

While most youth had little previous exposure to basic urban planning topics and issues, some participants displayed much greater interest and knowledge. A small number of participants requested advanced learning experience as they already knew much of the information that was covered. Consideration of differing levels of knowledge and interest would be important in designing any future conferences or engagement events. Nevertheless, the conference was successful in educating youth on urban planning and giving them more confidence as citizens with their newly gained knowledge.

4.2. Engaging Youth

The second objective of the project was to empower youth to participate and engage in civic affairs. As such, understanding of how involved youth are currently and what barriers they face is important as a baseline. Post-conference assessments explored their readiness and interest in engaging in urban processes.

4.2.1. Past Experience in Public Participation. The focus group participants had very little experience in public participation in general. Only two out of five participants had related experience. One participant recalled having a University of Toronto planning student run a classroom activity when he was 16 years old. However, he did not remember much of the activity. Another participant came across a survey for parks in her suburban municipality, but she did not participate because the proposed park was not located in her own neighbourhood. In the pre-conference survey, 81% of the participants said they had not participated in any urban planning events or public meetings. These findings are consistent with the observations made in other studies; urban planning is lacking engagement or outreach work targeted towards youth.

4.2.2. Participation through Youth Organizations. 9.5% of participants at the conference had been involved in public participation in the past. Most of this group were involved through youth organizations. The real percentage of non-participation among the youth population in the city might be even higher than 81%, as there was a self-selection bias (many of those at the conference were invited through youth organizations).

4.2.3. Barriers to Public Participation. Echoing the work done by the City of Toronto for their Youth Engagement Strategy, participants in the focus group were asked to identify barriers that prevented them from participating in civic matters. This topic sparked a lively discussion among the participants. Responses included:

- **Lack of knowledge:** Participants said that urban planning was never taught in school, neither in geography nor in civics. They agreed that the lack of knowledge subsequently leads to apathy. One individual suggested that it could be “laziness” on the youth’s part for not getting themselves educated urban planning issues; only some would take the initiative to learn.
- **Lack of awareness:** Participants also cited a general lack of awareness among youth. They did not know what was happening in the city or where planning-related events took place. They would not know unless they were informed by others such as educators.
- **Lack of transparency:** Some participants complained about the lack of transparency in the decision-making process; that they did not know how many ideas suggested by the public had been “brought to life”.
- **Poor outreach:** The group pointed out that there have been very few events such as this project where youth could get involved. Some simply said that “this kind of thing just doesn’t happen” and they speculated that “maybe not many people organize [similar] events”. The individual who made the previous comment about “laziness” also suggested the same could be applied to the City, for failing to educate and reach out to youth.
- **Perception of marginalization:** The participants felt they had been marginalized by older generations in the society as they believed that most of the public engagement work has been focused on adults instead of youth. One participant said: “They won’t put money on people my age. They won’t take our ideas seriously, so people don’t bother.”

Participants had relatively strong opinions expressed and some discontent as they described the barriers they faced. Their comments confirmed barriers identified by the City of Toronto's Youth Engagement Strategy document, such as trust and transparency in government processes, and promotion of planning-related events. The findings suggest that planners and officials need to find better ways to address these barriers to youth participation.

4.2.4. Readiness and Hesitation. In the post-conference survey, participants were asked whether they felt more ready to participate in the city-building process after the conference than before. The average score was only mediocre, at 3.3 out of 5. Many comments written in the surveys mentioned a realization of how much power they actually have to create change, although some were still hesitant to participate. Reasons given included that city-building was not within their interest after learning what would be involved. Others said that they were too shy to work with so many people. While these comments provide insights into the reasons for non-participation, they demonstrate that work needs to be done in the long-term to address these issues.

4.3. Conference Planning and Delivery

4.3.1. Marketing. Multiple channels have been used to promote the event with an aim to increase the visibility of the conference and maximize the number of participants. Significant time and effort were spent in the months leading up to the conference on marketing. The methods that worked best and yielded the greatest results in reaching the targeted audience are summarized below.

In the 42 completed pre-surveys received, there were indicators of how participants found out about the conference:

- 20 people through friends (48%)
- 19 people through school or teacher (45%)
- 8 people through youth organizations (2%)
- 5 people through Facebook (1%)
- No participants selected family, Twitter, or other event directories

These results show that word of mouth is still the most valuable method to promote an event, while interestingly, social media appears to have a smaller impact than anticipated on bringing participants to the conference.

The findings from the post-conference survey suggest that Facebook only acted as a marketing tool in the early stages, reaching a small number of people who then brought in a larger group of participants. Publishing posts in more established groups related to city-building and youth in Toronto quickly brought attention to the project as people began to 'like' and share these posts with others. The Facebook project page then acted as a substitute for a website and was very effective in distributing key information quickly to a wide mass of audience. The analytics tool of the page was also valuable in tracking information about visitors and posts, enabling the page manager to adjust the timing and content of the posts for optimal impact. The limitation of Facebook, however, was that the page manager's personal network of connections (many were in their 20s, living in Toronto or Markham) inevitably affected the demographics of the audience reached.

4.3.2. Registration and Turnout. The original goal of the conference was to have 50 participants, believing that a modestly sized crowd seemed sufficient for the purposes of the project. However, by the beginning of the second week of registration, it became clear that the goal of 50 participants would soon be surpassed. After visiting the venue and verifying the physical capacity of the space, the total number of tickets was capped at 75. All tickets were claimed within two weeks and a waiting list was created in response. In the end, after counting the number of sign-ins, there were 56 participants and 8 youth volunteers in total. The turnout rate of participants was about 75%, which is reasonable as people are generally less committed to attend when tickets are free. The waiting list was not effective this time as most of the absent registrants did not notify the organizer that they would not attend. Allowing an overbooking of 10 to 15% may be a possible solution to this problem.

4.3.3. Demographics. Two methods were used to track the demographics of the participants. Both showed a significant presence of suburban youth. The analytics tool on the Eventbrite page revealed that 56% of the registrants were from outside of the boundaries of the former Metropolitan Toronto, concentrating in suburban communities such as Markham, Scarborough, Thornhill and Brampton. Participants were asked in the pre-conference survey to provide the first three digits of their home postal code. Consistent with the findings from the Eventbrite analytics, these postal codes were concentrated in Markham and Scarborough.²³ The significant turnout of suburban youth was curious, as these participants had to travel great distances to attend this

²³ See Appendix L for a postal code map of survey respondents.

conference in downtown. There can be many factors that contribute to this phenomenon. In a study conducted by van Vliet (1983), suburban youth tend to have a greater “home range”, or range of activity than their urban peers. Suburban youth often perceive downtown as a “third space” for social interaction, while urban youth have easier access to such spaces on main streets within their neighbourhoods (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; Mehta & Bosson, 2010). This dynamic may explain why more suburban youth are willing to travel further for different purposes. Suburban communities such as Markham and Scarborough have a higher concentration of visible minorities and the composition of the audience at the conference is reflective of such diversity. Many teenagers from these minority communities showed to be keener and academically competitive, who may be more motivated than others to attend a conference (Krahn & Taylor, 2005).

The average age of the participants was 15. A large proportion (64%) were in grades 9 and 10. The greater turnout of younger students may relate to the teaching of geography and civics courses in grades 9 and 10 in Ontario. Students in those courses may have interest in this type of conference, while the interest of older students may have faded as very few of them would take related advanced courses (Perlman, 2013). Furthermore, since the conference venue is close to the Eaton Centre, a destination shopping mall, it is reasonable to speculate that some younger participants would use the conference as a reason to visit the mall. Older students may have greater independence and would not need to rely on this opportunity to travel to destinations. Older students may also have part-time work on the weekends which would prevent them from attending.

4.3.4. Conference Design. As part of the conference design process, the focus group participants were asked to provide suggestions to help make the conference experience more relevant and engaging to youth. The focus group participants were mostly concerned about how information should be presented to young people and the kinds of interactive activities that would be interesting to them. Organizing the focus group was also a test of logistical details; the experience informed the planning of the subsequent conference.

Overall, all the conference sessions were successful in sharing knowledge of city-building with youth and providing them with methods and tools to participate as a member of the public. The following discussion evaluates the conference sessions as a whole on three main criteria; comments on individual sessions are summarized in a table.²⁴

- ***Length of sessions:*** Observing the receptiveness of the audience, as well as hearing feedback from the participants and volunteer, made clear that the 45-minute duration of the long-format session should be the maximum amount of time for a passive activity. Towards the end of the session, the speakers were beginning to lose the attention of the audience. In contrast, the shorter lightning talks were successful in keeping the attention of the audience since the topics and speakers changed every 10 minutes. The 1-hour duration of the workshop was an exception because of the level of interaction involved. Interviews and

²⁴ See Appendix M for summary table.

debriefs indicated that youth participants preferred a shorter session of 10 to 30 minutes for sit-down talks.

- ***Level of interaction:*** Participants and volunteers generally agreed that interactive elements were effective in keeping the audience engaged, and that overall the level of interaction throughout the conference should be higher. Interactive elements, such as posing questions to the audience and role-playing games, were effective, while others, like group discussions and Jeopardy quizzes, were only interesting to those who were outgoing or confident. Despite the individual differences, many good questions were asked during Q&A periods. Participants were particularly interested in how the speakers themselves got involved in urban planning or civic activism. Some speakers suggested afterwards that instead of having participants raise their hand to ask a question in front of the crowd, some of the intimidation or stage fright could be further reduced if questions were submitted through anonymous paper slips or digitally through tweets. Yet even without these tactics, many youth participants were more proactive and outspoken than initially expected. The energy level of the audience remained quite high for the majority of the day. Participants visibly enjoyed the interactive workshops the most but also appeared tired after the hour-long workshop, which affected their attentiveness in the last session of the day.
- ***Use of digital tools:*** The speakers' use of digital tools varied. On one extreme, one of the workshop facilitators relied mostly on physical props and only used the laptop and projector to show a quick video to conclude her activity. Most other

speakers used PowerPoint slides with text and images to illustrate their points. One group of speakers also used a YouTube video as part of their presentation, while another speaker went on a website to demonstrate the use of digital tools in civic technology. At the other end of the spectrum, a speaker presented via Skype video call and a series of GIF images with the assistance of the organizer. In line with the suggestions from the focus group study participants, images and videos, as opposed to long lines of text, were successful in capturing the attention of the participants. The novelty of the props and demonstrations, as well as the unconventional use of GIF images, also piqued the audience's interest. Similar to the suggestions raised in the focus group study, some participants at the conference proposed a greater use of social media platforms, such as a live Twitter feed projected on the screen or use of image-sharing apps like Instagram and Snapchat. The caveat of using digital tools is that there is always a risk of running into technical difficulties. There were several minor problems with the sound and the projection of the slides but they were resolved without causing much delay.

4.3.5. Conference Logistics. Findings and observations related to logistics were important to note.

- **Venue:** Most of the conference sessions were held inside a lecture room with a theatre-style seating arrangement. The space was effective in accommodating the presentations and the equipment available satisfied all the needs of the speakers. However, a few participants commented that it felt like a typical

classroom setting and said they were hoping for a more “professional” setting. Some volunteers and speakers also noted that the lounge space outside of the lecture room acted as a beneficial “third space” for participants to relax and socialize; participants were able to eat lunch inside the room or outside in the lounge area. One of the speakers suggested that there could have been more interaction with the venue space itself, in the form of a site tour or place-based activity, which resonates with previous studies (Diakun, 2009; Rajkovich, 1997; Spier, 2003). Another interesting observation was that the WiFi networks at the venue were only available to university students, and hence most participants had no access to the Internet in the absence of mobile data. This constraint might have reduced the amount of distractions during the conference but also prevented them from posting or tweeting about the event.

- **Time:** A time change took place in Ontario the night before the conference, where the time was pushed one hour forward to Daylight Savings Time. As this meant an hour of sleep was “lost” and the change might be confusing to some, an additional email was sent to remind the participants of the time change. Despite the reminder, there were still a number of latecomers, which delayed the start of the conference. One of the workshops also lasted longer than the allotted hour. These delays caused the organizer to cut lunch short and wrap up the conference in a shorter amount of time. Some speakers voluntarily brought a timer with them to the podium to keep track of time, which appeared to be an effective strategy and could be applied to all other activities.

4.3.6. Satisfaction. The average score for the level of satisfaction with the conference experience was 3.7 out of 5. Even though it is an acceptable score, it indicates that there is still ample room for improvement in the design and logistics aspects to create a more engaging and fun experience for youth.

The interactive workshops won by a large margin when participants were asked to select sessions where they found the most fun and engaging. Many participants indicated that they preferred interactive activities. These activities were often immersive and engaging, providing opportunities for youth to work with their peers in different scenarios. Interactive workshops involve two-way communication and sharing rather than the typical one-way approach of teaching. This result shows that, for similar projects in the future, there needs to be more interactive workshops and activities to increase youth's levels of engagement and enjoyment.

4.4. Summary

The findings confirmed that although there was indeed limited knowledge of urban planning among participating youth, they demonstrated their capability to absorb new knowledge and concepts within a short period of time. The results also showed, except for those of youth organizations, that most youth had minimal involvement in civic affairs before this conference, except for those who were already members of youth organizations. The conference was found to be an effective platform to test various tools in their effectiveness in engaging youth. It was encouraging to see that there was a positive change in youth's attitude on becoming active citizens in their communities.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This SRP has three main research objectives: to identify and test methods to educate youth on urban issues, to identify and test tools to engage youth in participatory planning, and to examine whether the development of a conference addressing Objectives 1 and 2 can change youth attitudes toward civic engagement. This report has outlined the challenges in youth engagement, provided an overview of the current state of debate in the literature, and evaluated engagement strategies used in previous studies. It has covered the organization and delivery process of the conference, as well as the methodology involved in data collection and analysis. By analyzing data and observations from different points of the project, various tools and methods have been evaluated for their effectiveness in achieving the three research objectives.

The results show that a conference seems effective in educating youth and giving them confidence through knowledge via presentations, workshops and discussions. Interactive tools and strategies were shown to be crucial in engaging youth. Many participants have demonstrated a newly found understanding of their power as citizens. The development and delivery of the conference highlights a clear gap in the Greater Toronto Area for more and better work on youth engagement in urban affairs and an important opportunity for encouraging active citizenship. The enthusiasm of many participants also indicates a demand for knowledge and action: a desire to learn more and to participate in the city-building process as citizens. This chapter evaluates how well such findings align with the City of Toronto's official Youth Engagement Strategy, how the research has addressed some of the barriers identified in youth engagement, and where there is room for improvement. The report concludes

with recommendations for researchers, planners and civic officials interested in organizing future youth conferences in city-building.

5.1. Reflecting on Youth Engagement Principles

A conscious attempt was made in designing the conference to adhere to the guiding principles outlined by Checkoway (2011) and City of Toronto's Youth Engagement Strategy (Toronto City Planning, 2015). The objectives, design and delivery of the project are reviewed to assess their alignment with these principles:

1. **Youth participation is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.** The objectives of the project were explicitly framed to promote youth participation. By giving them knowledge and tangible tools, the conference aimed to help youth exercise their right to participate in the city-building process.
2. **Youth participation is both a short-term and long-term process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives.**

Although the conference was a short-term project, the hope was to create a "high-density" experience for youth, which Rose-Krasnor (2008) described as a turning point in the self and social development of the participants. The lessons learned from this experience could also be extended and applied to future events, initiating a long-term impact on youth engagement work.

3. **Sparkling a person's interest in participation early in their formative years as youth makes it much likelier they will become active participants later in life.** Secondary school years had been recognized in the conference planning process as a crucial period in developing people's interests, beliefs and attitudes

(Toronto City Planning, 2015). Therefore, it was important to take advantage of this window of opportunity to engage youth and build them up as active citizens of their communities.

4. **Youth participation refers to the active engagement of youth in positions of influence, not to their passive presence or token roles in adult agencies.** At the conference, youth's role in the decision-making process and points of input were identified by speakers in their presentations. Youth were involved early in the design of the conference through the focus group study. A number of youth presenters, including three secondary school students, also spoke at the conference. There was a deliberate effort to make the project as youth-driven as possible.
5. **Youth participation assumes that young people are competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services.** Youth at the conference were respected as fellow citizens and were encouraged to participate actively by asking questions and challenging ideas presented by speakers. Interactive components of the sessions also required youth to not remain as passive recipients but active learners contributing their own ideas.
6. **Many young people are uninvolved or minimally involved in public affairs, while small groups of people are extremely active.** The findings demonstrated that the majority of youth are minimally involved but those who are already members of youth organizations are notably more knowledgeable and involved. This small group of youth have also contributed to the project as partners, speakers and volunteers.

7. **Youth from different life stages, geographies and income levels participate differently.** Since the approach with youth in secondary school would be considerably different than with those in post-secondary levels, this project exclusively targeted secondary school students. The conference was organized as a free-of-charge event at a central location to maximize its reach to different geographical areas and income levels. Understandably, some groups of youth remain hard to reach because of factors such as timing and accessibility; they may require an entirely different approach.
8. **Youth participation is facilitated by youth leaders and adult allies, and fostered by partnerships between actors and organizations.** Partnerships with various organizations in the city were key to the success of the project. Youth leaders provided input and suggestions, while professional partners coordinated on the design and delivery of the conference.
9. **There are obstacles to youth participation, and also opportunities for strengthening their involvement in the future.** Emphasis was placed on creating a youth-friendly event, and the younger average age of the speakers seemed to reduce the potential for intimidation among participants, who in turn felt comfortable speaking up and asking questions. Follow-up information on related events and volunteering opportunities were presented to encourage youth to continue their participation.
10. **Youth are more likely to participate in a process that is fun, creative or social.** The conference was promoted and intended to be both a professional and fun event for youth to learn and discover the city-building process. The event

was also an opportunity for youth to meet and socialize, building a network of connections that would be valuable beyond this experience.

5.2. Barriers Addressed

The urban planning process, over the years, has failed to include youth primarily because conventional approaches to public engagement inadvertently have created obstacles to youth participation (Cameron & Grant-Smith, 2005; Frank, 2006). Kleinman et al. (2007) demonstrated that a conference can be effective in removing or lowering barriers for marginalized groups to participate in a subject matter that would otherwise be solely expert-driven. In the context of youth engagement in civic affairs, this SRP has addressed several barriers to participation, as expressed in the City of Toronto's Youth Engagement Strategy, to varying degrees of success:

- **Trust and transparency:** Speakers and workshop facilitators demonstrated real examples of how and where to get involved and submit ideas, and how their actions would lead to tangible results. There was evidence from the comments that participants have a stronger sense of the power they could wield to meaningfully affect outcomes.
- **Intimidation:** During the opening speech at the conference, participants were encouraged to ask speakers questions and challenge their ideas if they did not understand or agree with them. Speakers made themselves as accessible as possible to the participants by providing contact information. Nonetheless, the Q&A format could be improved to reduce intimidation youth often feel in front of a crowd.

- **Youth representation:** All the conference speakers were under the age of 30 and came from various backgrounds; some were even secondary-school students themselves. As most participants were in grades 9 and 10 and because many of them were visible minorities, seeing their age groups and diverse backgrounds represented at the front of the room seemed to boost confidence and generate reassurance that they too could be part of the engagement process.
- **Branding and promotion:** Rather than a typical public meeting or a course, the project is branded as a youth conference, in the hopes of creating a professional yet appealing event. Different formats of promotion and outreach, both physical and digital, were used to market the conference. However, better use of word of mouth and social media could be used to try to reach as many young people as possible.
- **Relevance and importance of planning:** All speakers made the effort to ask the audience to think about their experiences in the past and related these experiences to topics and issues in urban planning. It is important for youth to understand and see the connections between the role of planning and their lifestyles in the physical and social environment to counter sentiments of disillusion in the planning process (Adsett, 2003; Print, 2007).
- **How to engage:** Speakers were asked to provide tangible tools and methods, such as organizations and initiatives to join, to increase participation and engagement. This would make it easier for youth to understand how they can have an impact with concrete actions.

- **Timing conflicts and accessibility:** Both the focus group study and the conference were held on Sundays in downtown near subway stations for ease of access from different parts of the city. The conference was on the first Sunday of March Break for most secondary school students in Ontario to accommodate as many participants as possible. Since the conference was an all-day event, some students may have been unable to participate because of other scheduled activities, such as part-time jobs or religious services. Furthermore, the locations likely were very far for many suburban youth. Some participants indicated that the building where the conference was held was somewhat hard to find.

5.3. Recommendations

Overall, the Tomorrow Starts Today conference was successful in achieving the objectives that were set out from the start: to educate and to empower youth in the city-building process. The event was effective in reaching youth in a professional and interesting way, while addressing many barriers to youth engagement. Running a conference was an effective platform to test different formats and strategies through presentations and activities. The observations and data provided valuable insights for areas of improvement and fine-tuning. To share the many lessons learned from the entire process of designing, planning and executing this project, these experiences are summarized in ten key recommendations:

1. **Involve youth early in the process:** Use tools such as interviews and focus groups to involve youth in the design and planning process of the project. Their unique insights will keep the project relevant to youth.

2. **Brand, market and connect:** Brand the conference as a one-time, fun opportunity for youth to learn and discover the city-planning process. Market extensively through multiple social media platforms. Use powerful images and videos. Cold-call or cold-email youth organizations. Building strong relationships with individuals and organizations will help with many aspects of the project.
3. **Break out of the classroom setting:** Get youth outside of their classrooms and learn through various kinds of activities at different places. Find a youth-friendly venue that provides flexibility for quick reconfiguration. The novelty of the experience will keep them interested and engaged.
4. **Accommodate youth's schedules and locations:** Organizing the conference on a weekend or holiday will allow more youth to participate. Avoid exam months. Reserve a venue that is accessible and easy to find.
5. **Invite young presenters from different backgrounds:** Inspire youth and help them feel empowered. Close the generational and cultural gaps by inviting a diversity of young presenters, including secondary school students, to speak at the conference.
6. **Keep it short, interactive and relatable:** Limit presentations to 10 to 30 minutes. Cover a wide range of topics with multiple sessions and lay a broad foundation of knowledge. Incorporate interactive elements. Use real world examples relatable to youth. Include clear, catchy visuals.
7. **Organize multiple workshops:** Hands-on, interactive learning is the most effective method to educate and empower youth. Integrate design and experiential elements. Vary group sizes to help youth participate in discussions.

Adjust content to accommodate different levels of knowledge among the participants.

8. **Maintain an ongoing dialogue with participants:** Plan many Q&A sessions between speakers and participants. Encourage participants to ask questions and challenge ideas presented by the speakers. Overcome intimidation by collecting questions submitted anonymously or digitally.
9. **Collect data, creatively if possible:** Actively observe the behaviours and receptiveness of the participants. Collect data through creative means, such as games and activities. Avoid long surveys and interviews.
10. **Empower youth through knowledge and awareness:** Share knowledge and provide tangible ways and tools to engage. Identify quick fixes and “low-hanging fruits” as starters. Emphasize that youth have more power than they think.

These recommendations can help improve the experience of future conferences for youth. To be useful, they can be taken into consideration by planners and civic officials who may be currently poorly equipped to deal with youth and address their needs (Frank, 2006; Freeman & Riordan, 2002), but are interested in expanding their public engagement efforts to include youth as a stakeholder group. These recommendations can also help educators, non-governmental organizations, and activists with a youth-oriented mandate to fill the void in formal curriculum in geography and civics (Adsett, 2003; Perlman, 2013; Print, 2007) and bridge the gap between youth and civic affairs. A conference is but one appropriate form for youth engagement, community actors should remain flexible and attuned to the specific needs of the group they are working with, and design suitable projects or events.

When youth are actively engaged, they benefit the community by bringing in their fresh perspectives and ideas with great energy (Pancer et al., 2002). Their needs and concerns at the local level, such as transportation and the design of public spaces, will more likely be heard and dealt with if they are effectively included in the municipal decision-making process. Similar to the purpose of other public initiatives to encourage an active lifestyle, recycling habits and energy-saving practices, positive civic values developed in people's formative years will carry forward as they eventually become adult decision-makers in their communities (Toronto City Planning, 2015).

As suggested by the City of Toronto's Youth Engagement Strategy, there are a wide array of youth-focused organizations in the GTA already doing good work in educating and engaging youth in civic affairs, such as Toronto Youth Cabinet, City Youth Council of Toronto, RU a Planner and Maximum City. City agencies should build meaningful partnerships with such organizations, leveraging their knowledge and experience to create programs and events that would help different stakeholders understand the importance of and strategies for youth engagement (The Learning Partnership, 2016). Although more work is needed in educating and engaging youth in the city-building process, there has been great enthusiasm witnessed during this SRP experience in both the youth participants and the proactive involvement of other community actors. With greater knowledge and power in our new generations of citizens, the tomorrow of this city is bright and will only get better.

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Appendix A: Work Plan

	1/4/2016	1/11/2016	1/18/2016	1/25/2016	2/1/2016	2/8/2016	2/15/2016	2/22/2016	2/29/2016	3/7/2016	3/14/2016	3/21/2016	3/28/2016	4/4/2016	4/11/2016	4/18/2016
Ethics	Jan 4: Submit ethics application	Approved														
Literature Scan	Lit scan writing		Debrief on lit scan		Final lit scan due											
Focus Group	FG research design	FG questions	FG final questions due		FG invites	FG invites	FG invites	FG session	FG analysis due							
Conference Design			Create list of topics to cover	Facebook page content			Design activities	Draft session plans due	Mar 4: Final session plans due							
							Guest speakers invites		Finalize guest speakers	Meet with guest speakers						
										Final pre- & post-conference surveys due						
Conference Logistics	Search for venue	Contact venues			Feb 5: Confirm venue booking											
						Create registration form	Feb 19: Registration open	Registration	Registration	Mar 10: Registration close						
										Mar 13: Day of Conference						
Post-Conference											Mar 19: Post-conference interviews	Mar 25: Conference review due				
											Review observation notes	Mar 25: Report outline due	Apr 1: Draft toolkit due	Apr 8: Draft report due	Editing	Apr 25: Final toolkit and report due

Appendix B: Focus Group Question Guide



Welcome!

Tomorrow Starts Today 2016

Pre-Conference Focus Group Study | February 21, 2016

Facilitator: Ryan Lo
Note taker: Swathika Anandan

Ground Rules

1. We want you to do the talking.
2. There are no right or wrong answers.
3. Mutual respect.
4. What is said in the room stays here.
5. We will be tape recording the group.

Processes

Urban Planning	Urban Design	Community Development	Public Engagement
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Topics

Land Use	Housing	Transportation	Public Spaces	Heritage
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Notes

THE CITY-BUILDING PROCESS

Processes

Urban Planning

Management of resources and tools (e.g. land, services, policies)

Urban Design

Design of the urban and natural environment

Community Development

Collective action of community members to generate solutions

Public Engagement

Involving the general public in the decision-making process

Topics

Land Use

Management of different human activities on land

Housing

Shelter or dwelling for people

Transportation

Movement of people and goods

Public Spaces

Physical spaces shared and enjoyed by all people

Heritage

Tangible and intangible things of commemorative value

**To improve people's quality of life
and the welfare of the environment**

Appendix C: Conference Program Book

Workshop 1: RU a Planner?
Putting Planning into Practice!
Learn how the development process works from a project's inception to its finish! Planners have to examine the cost and benefits of how stakeholders, the surrounding neighbourhood, and the city are impacted by development projects.

Ryerson University's RU a Planner
Dominic, Kailey, Catriona, Jordan, and Michael are members of RU a Planner, which is a joint initiative between RAPS (Ryerson Association of Planning Students) and the RINGSA (Ryerson Planning Graduate Student Association) within the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Ryerson University. Our goal is to inform high school students about urban issues and the development process to get them to think critically about the environments around them and their role in shaping the city. This past November, a larger group of 30 Ryerson students facilitated workshops in 12 different classrooms in collaboration with City of Toronto Urban Planners.

Workshop 2: Inclusive Design 101
Identifying and Removing Barriers to Access
What does it mean for something to be accessible? In this workshop, you will be challenged with carrying out an everyday task as someone with a different perspective, in order to understand barriers to access that are experienced by various users of spaces. In so doing, you'll gain a better understanding of what considerations planners must make in the design of the built environment.

Rebecca Tan
Currently a Studio Y Fellow at the MaRS Discovery District, Rebecca Tan is a community builder at heart and by training. An accessibility consultant, and health and social services community planner, she is working with the City of Toronto and Indigenous communities to remove social barriers to accessing space. At her workshop, you will learn about user-centered design and why creating spaces that work for everyone is worthwhile but easier said than done.

Toronto's Unheard
A Panel Discussion on Youth Issues
Committee directors from the City Youth Council of Toronto will discuss the biggest issues facing the city in the areas of public health, community and social development, finance, and transportation, focusing on how youth are affected and what youth can do to alleviate them.

City Youth Council of Toronto
The City Youth Council of Toronto is a not-for-profit organization geared towards empowering communities and increasing youth civic participation. Modeled after Toronto City Hall, it is an opportunity for youth leaders of Toronto to convene and represent the voices of young constituents as Youth Councilors, directly influencing public policy and contributing to their communities.

Tomorrow Starts Today.

Youth City-Building Conference

3.13.2016

9:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Organized by:
McGill School of Urban Planning

Venue: Ryerson School of Urban & Regional Planning

#TST2016 Rundown

- Welcome
- Lunch
- Lightning Talks
- Workshops
- Break
- Panel Discussion
- Wrap-up

Community Solutions Lab

"In the absence of political will, how could you empower a community?" CSLabs wants to empower marginalized communities to use models and techniques that help to strategically influence social and economic development, and to become co-designers and co-implement sustainable community programs and services.

Chloe-Marie Brown
Finishing service with Toronto Youth Cabinet as Director of Policy and Advocacy, Chloe-Marie is currently working as a Project Support Officer with George Brown's Community Partnership Office to do recruitment and job coaching. She is interested in community economics, open data, project management, international mobility and social justice.

Catch the Last Train Home
Have you ever wondered about what goes on behind the scene to get you from A to B (and everywhere between)? This session focuses on discovering how transportation shapes how citizens of a city, especially youth, can access opportunities. Delegates can expect to leave this session with new tools and frameworks to understand transportation in their community.

Patrick Miller
Patrick Miller (PhD) is passionate about creating sustainable, resilient, compassionate, and creative communities. As a transportation planner and consultant, Patrick has worked with public, private and non-profit clients across North America and around the world to innovative transportation strategies. His body of research has focused on pushing boundaries in both sustainability and public transit planning to develop novel holistic approaches for sustainability analysis. With planning experience in urban areas across Canada, the USA, Japan, and Zambia, Patrick brings a global perspective to sustainability and urban transportation.

The Role of Open Data and Technology in Our City
Technology is an ever-present part of our lives- how is it impacting the city we live in?

Lia Milito
Lia is finishing a master's degree at the University of Toronto in urban planning with a specialization on social planning and policy. She has worked for the New York City Department of Transportation in the intergovernmental and community affairs unit, and is particularly interested in public participation, open governance, and the role of technology in the city building process. Lia became a planner after earning an undergraduate degree in the humanities from the University of King's College and working in education for three years. She firmly believes that cities are best when they are built for and by a diverse range of people.

Cities and Climate Change

The climate is changing - What does this mean for our cities? This session is all about connecting YOU to climate change and the role we can each play to support leadership in our cities at the local, regional and international level.

Rahul Mehta & Alexandra Graham
Rahul Mehta and Alexandra Graham are both students in their final year at the University of Waterloo, completing a Master of Environmental Studies in the School of Planning. Rahul's research focuses on energy planning in Ontario communities, and whether municipalities are making sustainability a priority in their energy plans. In his spare time, he enjoys gardening, exploring the city, and volunteering with local environmental organizations.

Alexandra is studying climate change adaptation in mega-cities, advocacy in municipal planning, and social innovation. In her spare time she enjoys hiking with her dog, Willow!


Placemaking and Power in City-Building
Does Toronto feel like your city? Ever heard of yarn-bombing, guerrilla gardening, or Park(ing) Day? Let's explore placemaking as a city-building tool that puts the city's public spaces at everyone's fingertips (i.e. not JUST urban planners!)

Alan Chen
Alan works as the Director for the McGill Spaces Project, a placemaking organization that seeks to reimagine underused campus spaces and transform them into vibrant hubs that better suit the needs of the community. While pursuing an honours degree in Sustainability and Urban Systems at McGill, Alan is also a facilitator alum of the ECOLE project—a living collective, community space, and budding research institute for sustainability at McGill—as well as a member of the McGill Sustainability Project Fund Working Group which works to assess sustainability project funding applications. Alan is an infectious enthusiastic individual that delights in complexity and nurtures an earnest intent to create positive change. He is profoundly passionate about sustainability and its intersections with urban design, social innovation, and their roles together in building strong communities.

It's Raining (Old White Men)
How do we get youth on board in small town politics dominated by the older generation?

Dylan Gentile
Dylan Gentile, a 15-year-old resident of DeFuniak Springs, Florida, offers inspiration in the form of proactive, positive engagement with the built environment, and already an impressive resume of accomplishments. Dylan Gentile is the founder of Bike Walk DeFuniak, an organization spearheading projects to deliver safe pedestrian access to the local school, adding shade trees, and developing wayfinding signage for his hometown of DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

Appendix D: Posters



Sunday, February 21, 2016 | 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
 Toronto City Hall Committee Room 3 | 100 Queen St W, Toronto, ON M5H 2N2


High School Students Needed

FOCUS GROUP


Help us design an **exciting, engaging and relevant** experience **for youth** at the

Tomorrow Starts Today Conference!


THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT



**Urban Planning
and Design**




**Public
Participation**



**Event/Conference
Planning**

+ FREE FOOD and COMMUNITY SERVICE HOURS!

REGISTER AT: <http://bit.ly/1KontQy>



Tomorrow Starts Today is a Supervised Research Project for the School of Urban Planning, McGill University. If you have any questions, please contact Ryan Lo at ryan.lo@mail.mcgill.ca or Prof. Nik Luka at nik.luka@mcgill.ca. If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at +1 (514) 398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

Focus Group Poster



3.13.2016

Tomorrow Starts Today

Register Now!
<https://tst2016.eventbrite.ca>

Find us on
 f 
#TST2016

Youth City-Building Conference

FREE Event
Lunch Provided +
Volunteer Hours

Interactive Workshops +
Inspiring Talks To
Educate + Empower
Youth in
Our Cities

Ryerson University
105 Bond Street
Toronto, ON

Tomorrow Starts Today is a Supervised Research Project for the School of Urban Planning, McGill University. If you have any questions, please contact Ryan Lo at ryan.lo@mail.mcgill.ca or Prof. Nik Luka at nik.luka@mcgill.ca. If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at +1 (514) 398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

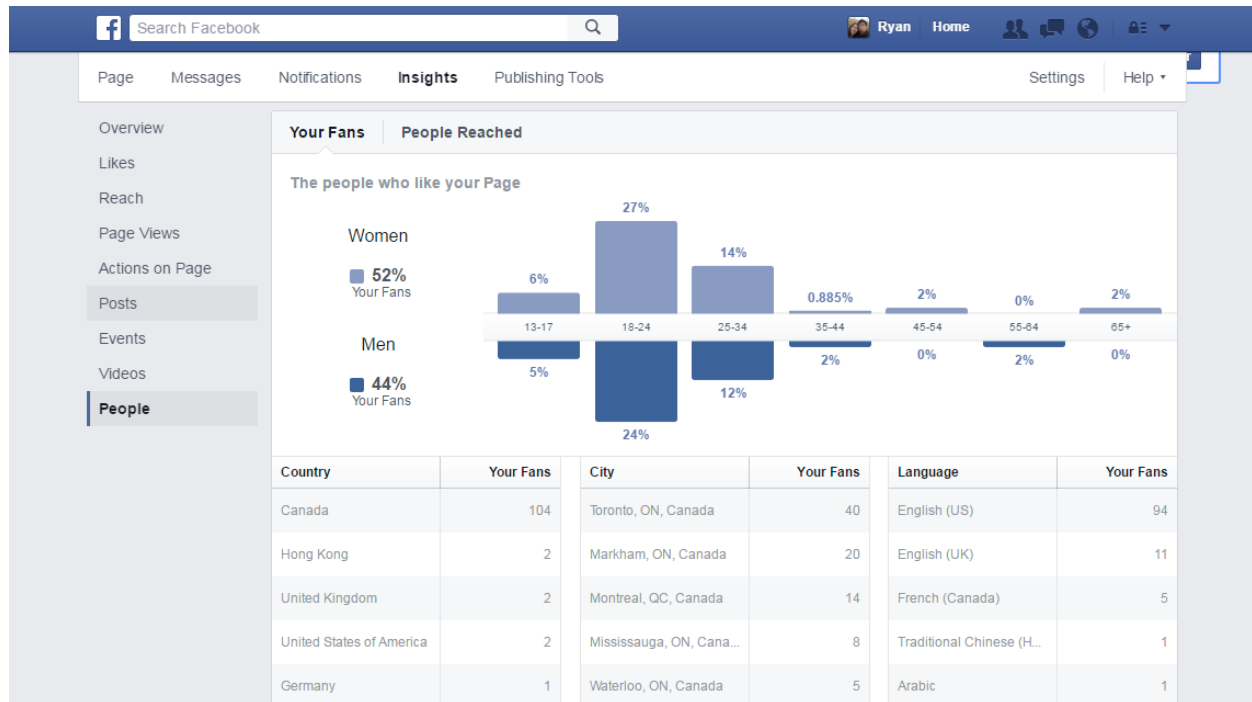


Conference Poster

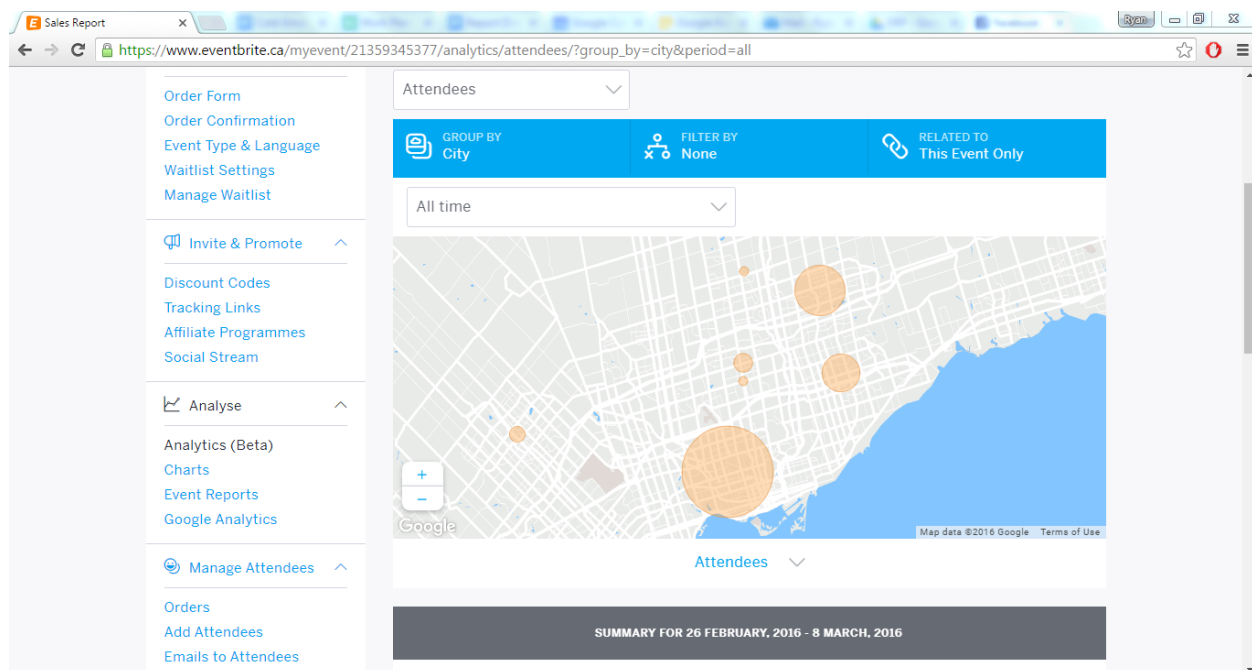
Appendix E: Youth Organization List

- City Youth Council of Toronto
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- Toronto Multicultural Youth Council
- Toronto Youth Ambassadors
- Toronto Youth Environmental Council
- Toronto Youth Food Policy Council
- Brampton Youth Council
- Markham Youth Council
- Markham Mayor's Youth Council
- Milliken Mills Youth Council
- Thornhill Youth Council
- Unionville Youth Council
- For Youth Initiative
- Habitat for Humanity
- Scouts Canada
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Ontario
- YMCA
- Vision Youth Leadership Program
- Project 5K
- Toronto District School Board
- Toronto Catholic District School Board
- York Region District School Board
- York Catholic District School Board
- Durham District School Board
- Durham Catholic District School Board
- Peel School Board
- Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
- Halton Catholic District School Board

Appendix F: Online Analytics



Example of Facebook Page Insights, breaking down the demographics of “fans” who “liked” the project page.



Eventbrite Analytics, showing the spatial concentration of ticket holders.

Appendix G: Pre-Conference Survey

Tomorrow Starts Today Conference Pre-Conference Survey

How did you hear about the Tomorrow Starts Today Conference? (Circle any that applies)

Friends

Family

School/Teacher

Facebook

Twitter

Eventbrite Directory

National Engineering Month

RU a Planner

Youth Organization (please specify): _____

Other: _____

How much do you know about urban planning?

(Nothing) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (a lot)

Have you participated in any urban planning events or public meetings before?

Yes No

Name: _____

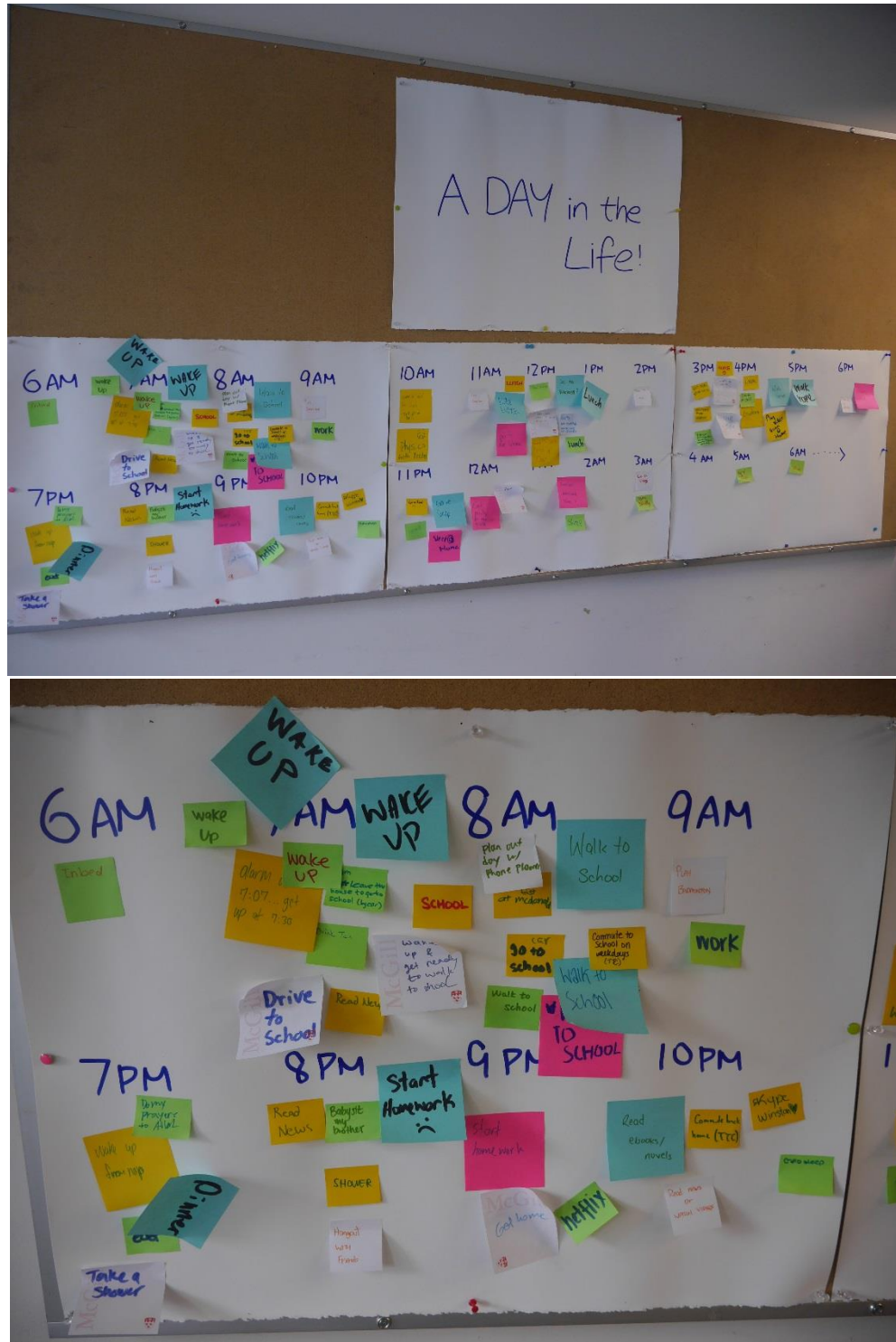
Age: _____

Grade: _____

School: _____

First 3 digits of your home postal code: _____

Appendix H: A Day in the Life



Appendix I: Post-Conference Survey

Tomorrow Starts Today Conference Post-Conference Survey

How much do you now know about urban planning?

(Nothing) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (a lot)

Do you feel that you have learned something useful today about urban planning?

(Not at all useful) 1 2 3 4 5 (very useful)

Do you feel more ready to participate in the city-building process in the future?

(E.g. joining committees or organizations, attending public meetings or events, etc.)

(Not at all ready) 1 2 3 4 5 (a lot more ready)

Please tell us why:

Are you satisfied with your experience today at this conference?

(Not at all satisfied) 1 2 3 4 5 (very satisfied)

Which workshop did you attend?

Workshop 1 (RU a Planner) Workshop 2 (Inclusive Design 101)

Was the workshop you attended your first choice?

Yes No

Which activity today did you learn the most from?

Presentation 1 (Chloe-Marie Brown)

Presentation 2 (Patrick Miller)

Gentile)

Lunch Activity (A Day in the Life)

Lightning Talk 1 (Lia Milito)

Lightning Talk 2 (Rahul Mehta & Alexandra Graham)

Lightning Talk 3 (Alan Chen)

Lightning Talk 4 (Dylan

Workshop

Panel Discussion (CYCTO)

Which activity today was the most fun and engaging?

Presentation 1 (Chloe-Marie Brown)

Presentation 2 (Patrick Miller)

Gentile)

Lunch Activity (A Day in the Life)

Lightning Talk 1 (Lia Milito)

Lightning Talk 2 (Rahul Mehta & Alexandra Graham)

Lightning Talk 3 (Alan Chen)

Lightning Talk 4 (Dylan

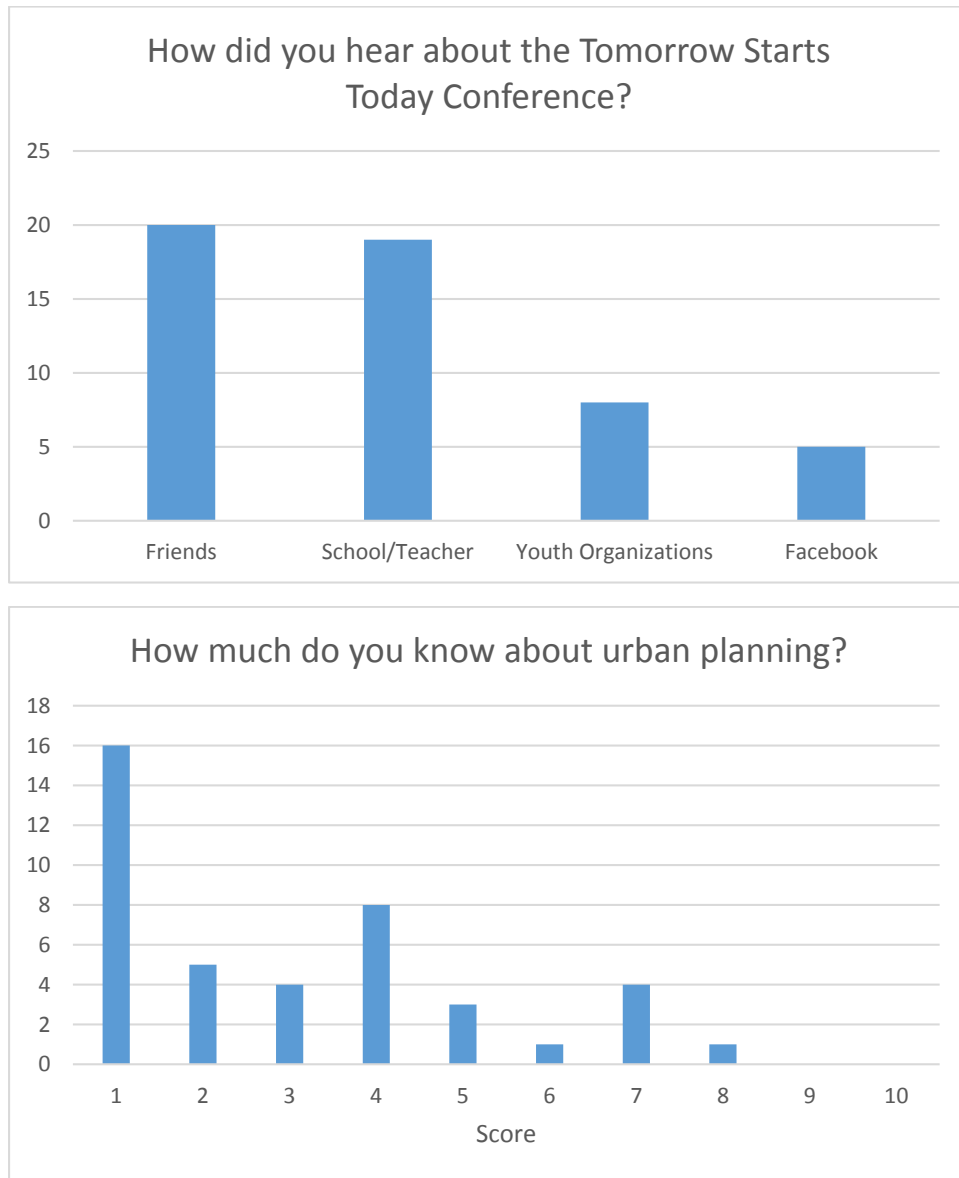
Workshop

Panel Discussion (CYCTO)

Name: _____

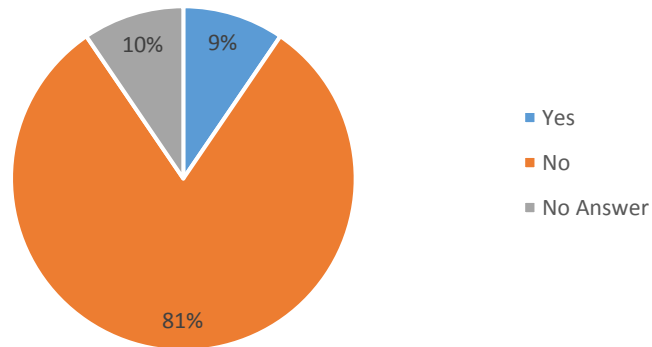
Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Appendix J: Pre-Conference Survey Results

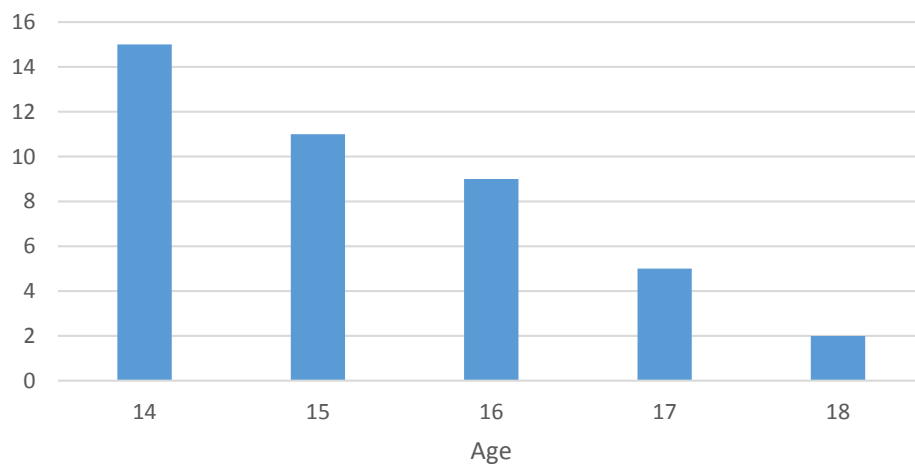


The mean score is 3.0 out of 10, or 1.5 out of 5.

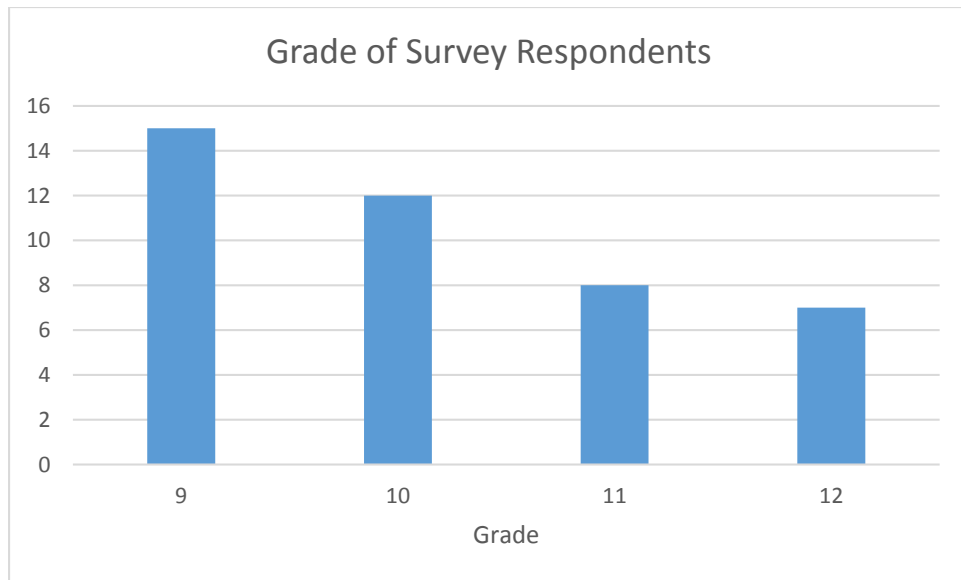
Have you participated in any urban planning events or public meetings before?



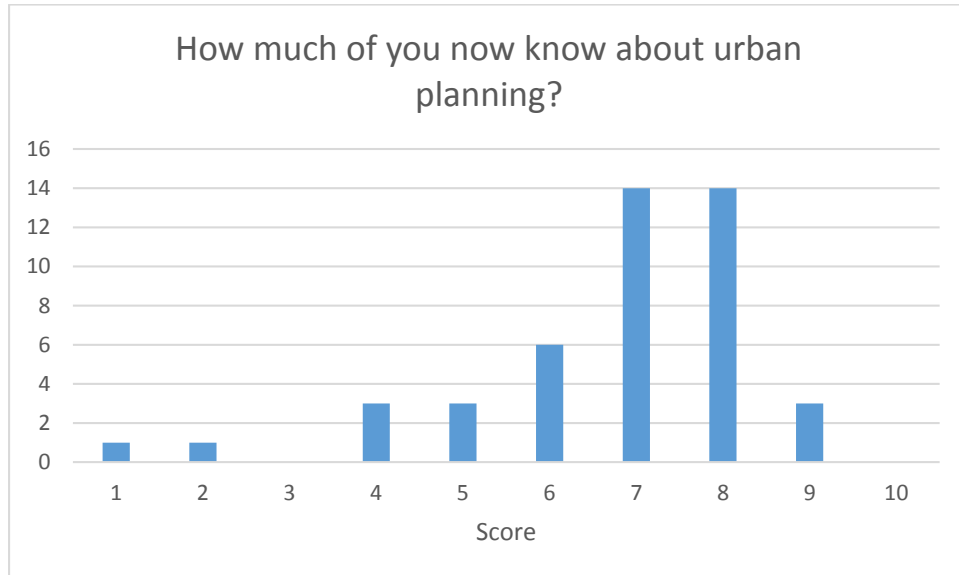
Age of Survey Respondents



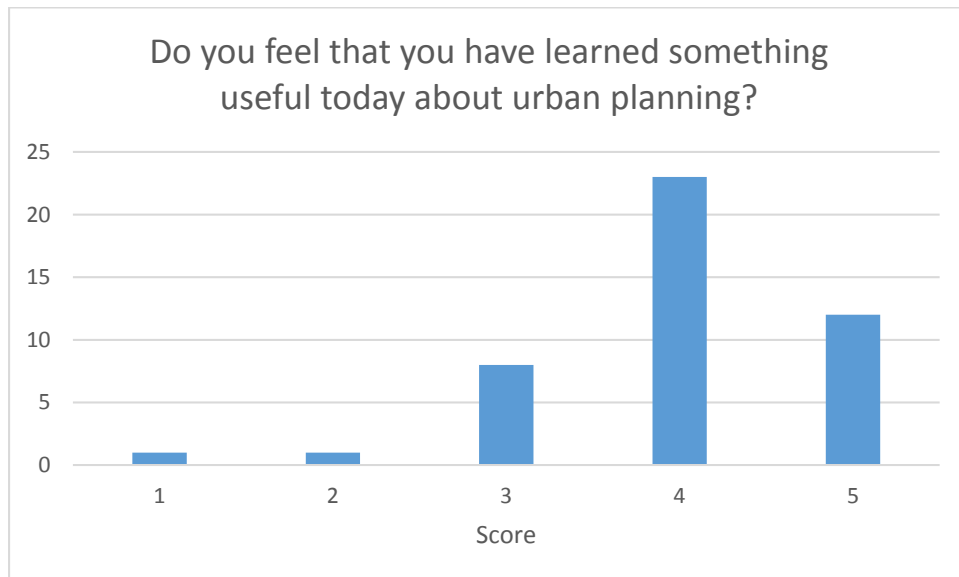
The mean age of the survey respondents is 15.2.



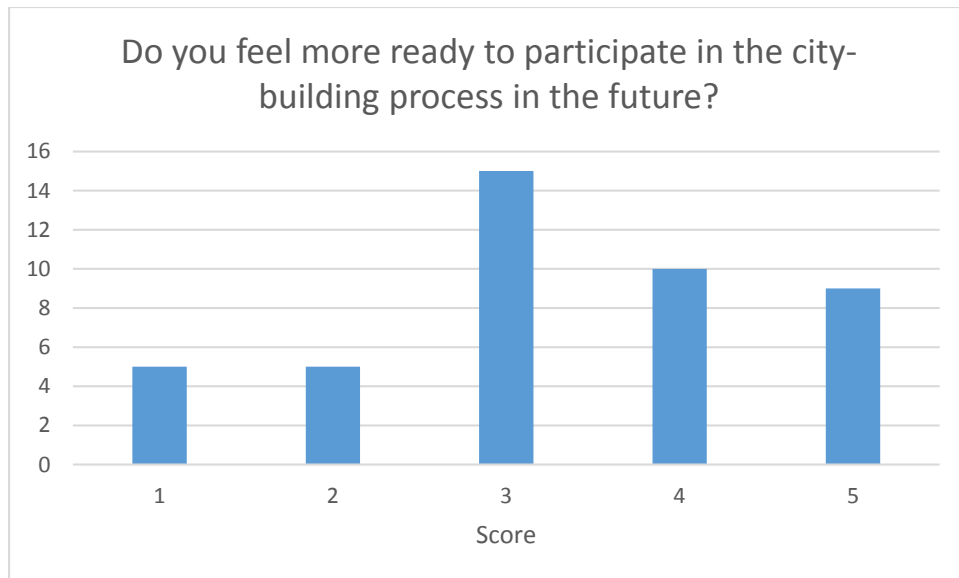
Appendix K: Post-Conference Survey Results



The mean score is 6.7 out of 10, or 3.4 out of 5. The median score is 3.5 out of 5.



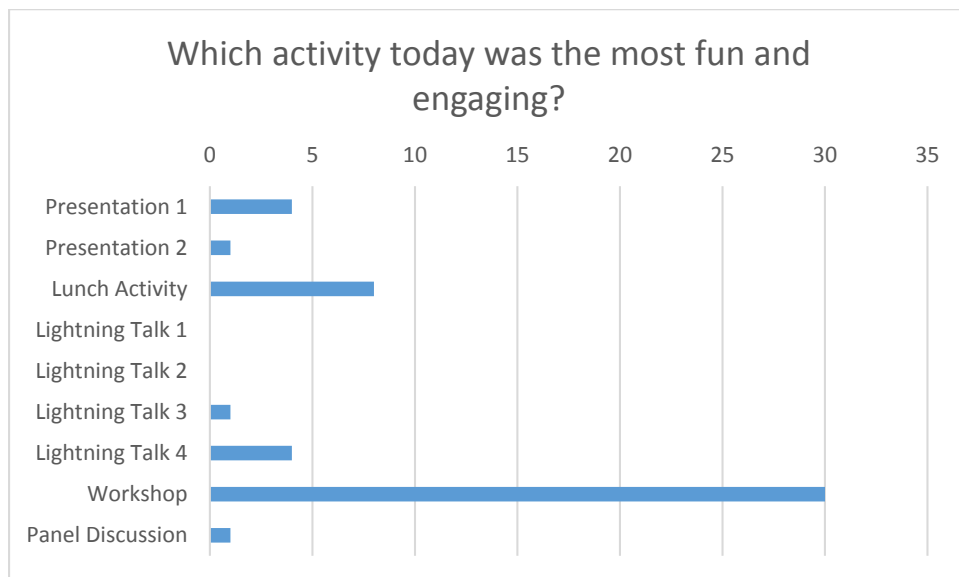
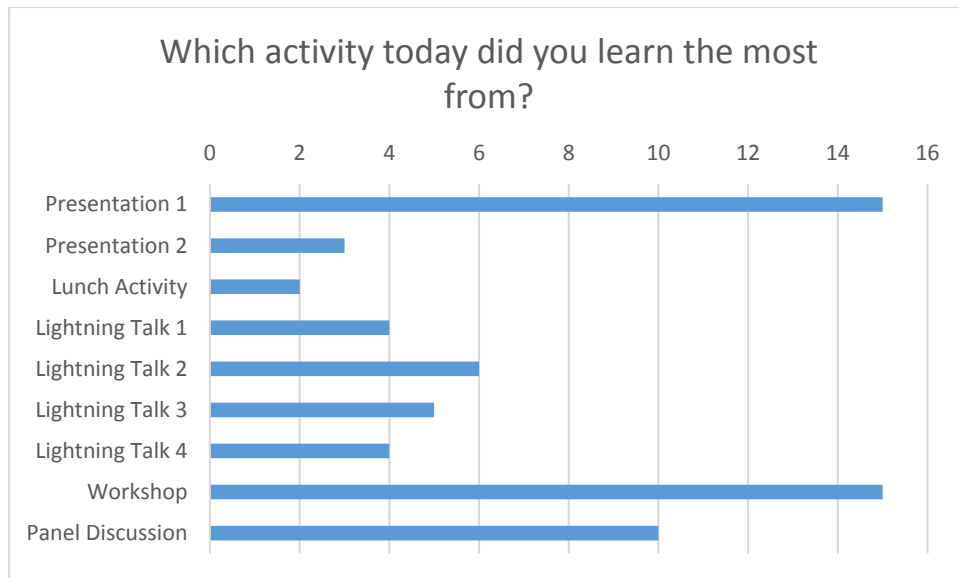
The mean score is 4.0 out of 5. The median score is also 4 out of 5.



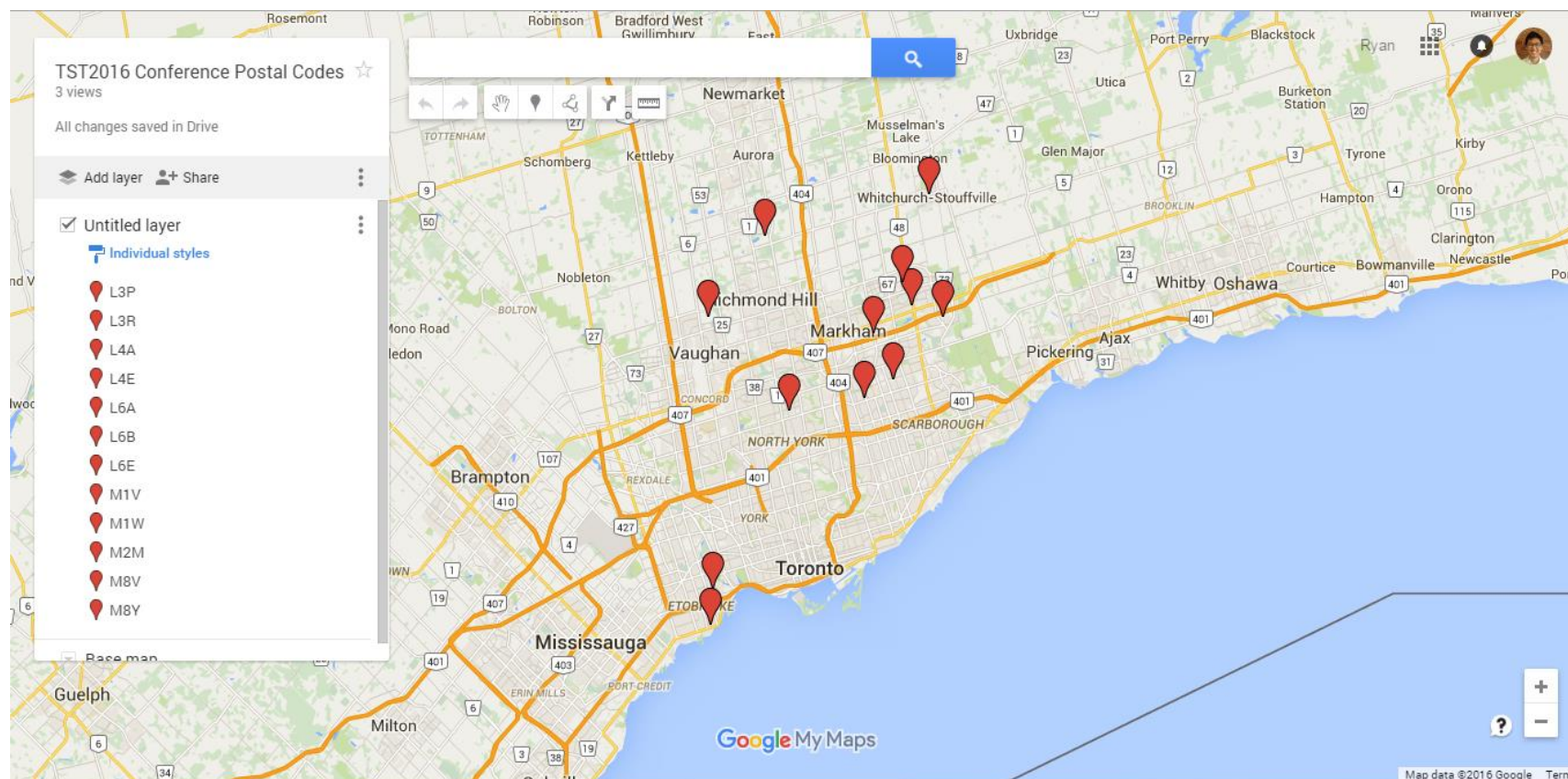
The mean score is 3.3 out of 5. The median score is 3 out of 5.



The mean score is 3.7 out of 5. The median score is 4 out of 5.



Appendix L: Postal Codes of Survey Respondents



The postal codes of the pre-conference survey respondents are distributed across Markham, Scarborough, Richmond Hill and Etobicoke.

Appendix M: Conference Summary Table

Session Name	Ideas, Actions, Voices	Catch the Last Train Home	A Day in the Life	The Role of Open Data and Technology in Our City	Cities and Climate Change	Placemaking and Power in City-Building	It's Raining (Old White Men)	Workshop 1: RU a Planner	Workshop 2: Inclusive Design 101	Toronto's Unheard
Presenter(s)	Chloe-Marie Brown	Patrick Miller	Ryan Lo	Lia Milito	Rahul Mehta & Alexandara Graham	Alan Chen	Dylan Gentile	Ryerson University	Rebecca Tan	City Youth Council of Toronto
Format	Presentation	Presentation	Lunch Activity	Lightning Talk	Lightning Talk	Lightning Talk	Lightning Talk	Workshop	Workshop	Panel Discussion
Presenter Profile	Activist	Professional	Grad Student	Grad Student	Grad Student	Undergrad Student	High School Student	Grad/Undergrad Student	Graduate	High School Student
Scheduled Length	45 min	45 min	60 min	10 min	10 min	10 min	10 min	60 min	60 min	60 min
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civic governance - Division of powers - Accountability of officials - Methods of public participation - Importance of youth engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic concepts of transportation - Transforming speeds of movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create timeline of daily activities using post-it notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open data, smart cities - Toronto Meeting Management Information System (TMMIS) - Civic Tech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brief explanation of climate change - Case studies of Vancouver, GTA - Shared experience of COP21 - Groups/committees to join 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Placemaking as a city-building tool - Power and politics - Right to the City - Placemaking by public vs. private 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal experience of becoming involved in city hall - Starting organization and blog - Ways to get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation on development process, official plan, job of a planner, etc. - Participants to review development proposal from the perspective of planner - Knowledge of the city and planning through jeopardy game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical and social barriers in public spaces - Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social issues such as homelessness, drug/alcohol abuse, mental illness, income inequality, transit inequality, etc. - Role of CYC
Interactive Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking audience (where they are from) - Charades (role-playing and guessing) to demonstrate political process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking audience (mode of transport, incidents of frustration) - Worksheets (did not complete) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants writing and posting notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstration of the TMMIS and Civic Tech map tools - Asking audience questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Video clip on climate change - Asking audience questions - Brainstorm ideas of mitigation and adaptation strategies, write and post notes of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking audience questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of GIFs to illustrate points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asked audience questions - Small group discussions - Jeopardy game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role playing game - Each participant has some difference in ability - Tasked to "shop" for an item within the building - Video about deaf space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audience ask panelists questions
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good opening, interactive part of session was effective - Strong message asking youth to get involved, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relating back to his own experiences as a teenager, and asking participants what their experiences are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Passive activity that requires little facilitation - Can be done at participants' own pace - Creates a visual representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good real-life demonstration on how to use digital tools, easy to understand - Good presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of video and case studies to illustrate points - Showing examples of community groups and committees that youth can join 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good use of graphics and symbols to represent concepts - Good use of examples and images 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relatable language, tone and images - Novelty helped retain attention (American high schooler calling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gives a detailed overview of the development process - Helps participants understand the perspectives of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audience receptive to suspending belief, becoming someone else during the game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real life example of how a youth organization works - Youth themselves showing their

	and provided ways to participate or voice opinions	- Straightforward concepts	from the input of participants	length, slides are easy to read			in via Skype, rather than someone older presenting in front of them)	different stakeholders - Understanding the importance of consensus building	- Able to pick up key themes - Able to challenge individuals to come out of comfort zone - Able to challenge assumptions made before the game	involvement in the city and what issues they're dealing with
Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Latecomers became a distraction since this is the first presentation of the day - 45 mins may be too long, attention span may only last for 30 mins max. - Some sections still too word-heavy - Overall, too much of a lecture-style presentation - Could use real life situations to illustrate when to go to a specific official for concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language somewhat technical and jargony, not as accessible to youth - More time should be dedicated to the interactive activity - Actual crowd size larger than speaker has expected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Required more time to explain the activity and debrief afterwards - The daily life patterns of youth are more routine than expected, creates less of a diversity - Needed more incentives/encouragement for youth to participate 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to give participants more time and guidance during the activity, difficult for them to come up with ideas when the concepts are still new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questions asked were too abstract at times which make it difficult for participants to answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many questions from the audience were directed to him, some were somewhat unrelated (about Donald Trump and the American presidential elections) - More guidance (e.g. on lighting) to improve the Skype call experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Passive, classroom-like design, which may not be appealing to some - Some individuals who appeared to be more knowledgeable in urban planning tended to dominate the discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instructions can be given more clearly (verbally, rather than on paper) - Could use some help setting up, introducing and facilitating the game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More time and patience needed to work with younger presenters - Required more guidance to help presenters prepare their presentations and materials - Energy decreasing as it was the last activity of the day, difficult to get audience to ask panelists questions

Appendix N: Ethics Approval Certificate



Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West, Rm 429
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Website: www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board III Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 313-0116

Project Title: Tomorrow starts today: youth empowerment in the city-building process

Principal Investigator: Ryan Lo

Department: School of Urban Planning

Status: Master's Student

Supervisor: Prof. Nik Luka

Approval Period: January 13, 2016 – January 12, 2017

The REB-III reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

Lynda McNeil
Manager, Research Ethics

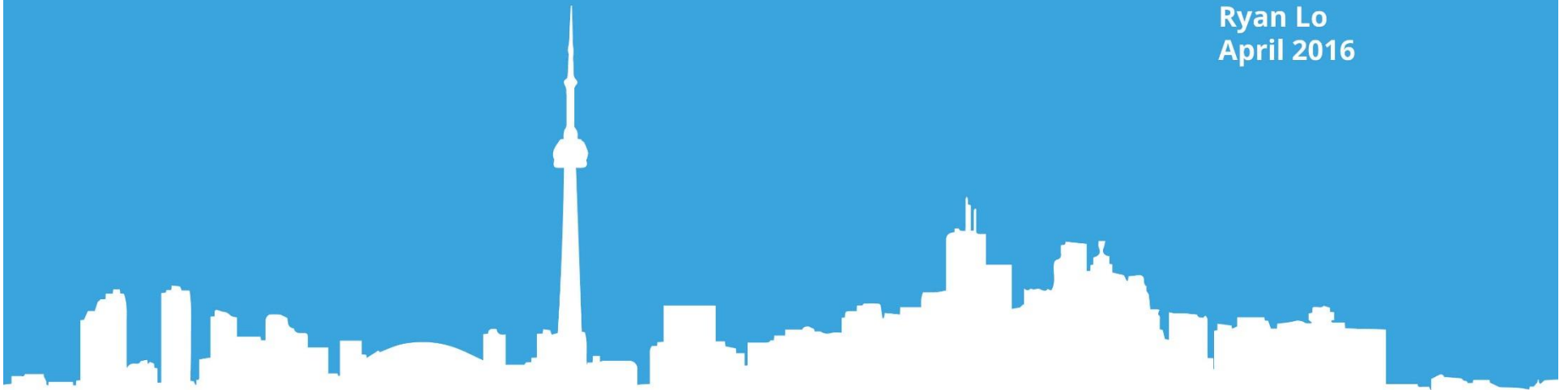
-
- * All research involving human participants requires review on at least an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval.
 - * When a project has been completed or terminated, a Study Closure form must be submitted.
 - * Unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications must be promptly reported to the REB. Serious adverse events experienced by a participant in conjunction with the research must be reported to the REB without delay.
 - * Modifications must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.
 - * The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
 - * The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this project.
 - * The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

Appendix O: Conference Toolkit

TOMORROW STARTS TODAY.

YOUTH CITY-BUILDING CONFERENCE **TOOLKIT/**

Ryan Lo
April 2016



CONTEXT/ TOMORROW STARTS TODAY.

Tomorrow Starts Today is a youth conference with a goal to **empower young people in the city-building process**. Using various formats and methods, we hope to educate and engage high school students (gr. 9-12 or ages 13-18), equipping them with knowledge and tools to drive positive change in their communities.

THIS IS A CONFERENCE TOOLKIT/

For urban planners, city officials, educators, non-governmental organizations and activists with a youth-oriented mandate. Through this toolkit, we hope to share the lessons learned from planning and delivering the TST2016 Conference, and in youth engagement in general.

CONTENTS/

2	CONTEXT/
4	OVERVIEW/
6	STRATEGIES/
8	PLANNING/
10	DESIGNING/
12	DATA COLLECTION/
14	RECOMMENDATIONS/
16	REFERENCES/

Youth Engagement in the City-Building Process

ISSUE/

 Youth Engagement
in **civic affairs**
at the **local level**
is **DOWN.**

LACK OF EDUCATION/



Urban planning is not taught
in Ontario secondary school geography or
civics curriculum.

Survey respondents gave
themselves an average score of:

1.5 out of 5

on their **knowledge of urban planning.** 1/3 of them
said they knew nothing at all!

BARRIERS TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT/

Perception
Marginalization
Accessibility
Intimidation
Awareness
Transparency
Trust
Irrelevance
Scheduling
Outreach
Branding
Youth Representation

LACK OF PARTICIPATION/



Less than 10%
of respondents have participated in
urban planning events or
public meetings.

4/ How might we **EDUCATE** and **ENGAGE** youth in this process?

Tomorrow Starts Today Conference: a short-term, high-intensity experience for youth.

METHODOLOGY/

- 1. PREP WORK** Focus Group, Content, Venue & Time, Recruitment
- 2. DESIGN + EXECUTE** Length of Sessions, Level of Interaction, Usage of Digital Tools
- 3. DATA COLLECTION + ANALYSIS** Analytics, Surveys, Observations, Interviews

FORMAT/

-  Presentations
-  Lightning Talks
-  Brainstorming Activity
-  Interactive Workshops
-  Panel Discussion

TOPICS/

-  Politics
-  Transit
-  Technology
-  Climate
-  Place-making
-  Activism
-  Accessibility
-  Development

IMPACT/

64 participants attended TST2016.

3.4
out of 5
New average score of **urban planning knowledge** after the conference.

4.0
out of 5
Average score of **usefulness** with what they have learned.


Interactive Workshops were voted as the **most effective and engaging** format.

"I've realized that I have more power than I thought!" - Participant, 15.

STRATEGIES/ TO EDUCATE + ENGAGE YOUTH

1 Need-Finding



Interviews



Focus Groups



Surveys

2 Formal + Complementary Curricula



Geography



Civics



Economics



Design

3 Experiential + Immersive Learning



Walking + Touring



Mapping

4 Participatory Design



Youth as Informants or Consultants



Youth as Designers

5 Digital Communication



Social Media



Videos



User-Generated Content

Mix + Match
strategies that
best suit
your project.

From a literature scan of research articles and case studies in youth engagement, five groups of tools and methods are identified:

- 1. Need-finding:** The most conventional research methods in social sciences, including interviews, focus groups and surveys, are mainly used for need-finding in the context of youth participation.
- 2. Formal and complementary curricula:** One of the most direct ways of empowering youth in the city-building process is to provide them with education through the inclusion of urban planning and design topics into the secondary school curriculum. While changes to formal curriculum may be a long and arduous process, many have succeeded in designing complementary lesson plans for youth on these topics.
- 3. Experiential and immersive learning:** Experiential tools and methods can play an important role in helping youth to learn and understand their community. Just as planners and designers would make site visits in their study area, students

should also immerse themselves in the built environment by going on trips, walks and tours, and mapping to learn through the interactive experience.

- 4. Participatory design:** Many participatory design examples come in the form of a charrette, which is a short but intensive design challenge often done in a group setting. The level of involvement by youth varies from project to project, where youth may play the role of an informant or consultant to being the sole designers.
- 5. Digital communication:** Technology plays a large part in many young people's daily lives. From social media and blogs, to videography and graphic design, digital tools are used as a form of communication and content generation in youth engagement research.

Many successful case studies involve a combination of these tools and methods based on the purpose of the project and the expertise of the researchers. Use and adapt different strategies to fit your own objectives.

PLANNING/ LOGISTICS

1 Focus Group



2 Content



3 Venue + Time



4 Recruitment



These processes are often **non-linear** and many take place **simultaneously**.

Ayouth city-building conference typically takes at least three months to plan and involves handling multiple tasks and processes simultaneously.

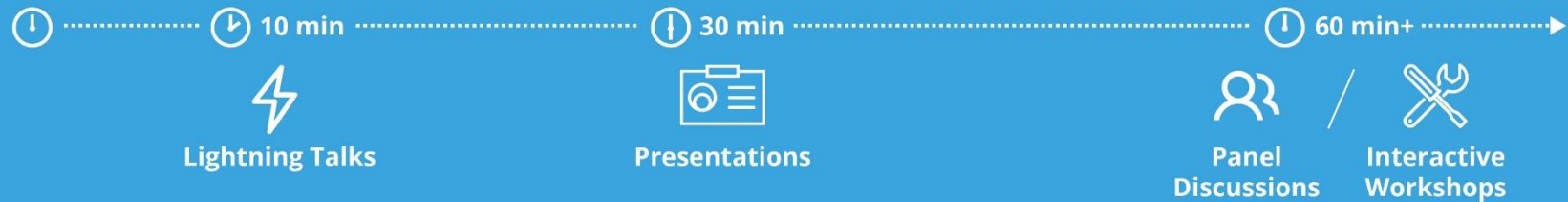
- 1. Focus group:** Running a focus group study is an essential step of this project and an opportunity to seek youth input early in the process. The purpose of the focus group study is to assess youth's levels of knowledge and experience in city-building, and their perception of barriers to participate; as well as to explore their interests, ideas and find effective incentives for the purpose of conference design.
- 2. Content:** In order to generate interesting, educational and empowering content for the conference, organizers need to both consult experts and professionals in urban planning and public engagement, and recruit different speakers to the event. Follow-up meetings should be held with each speaker to confirm the quality and fit of the presentation vis-à-vis the objectives of the conference, and to minimize redundancy among speakers. These topics should be determined based

on the expertise and interest of the speakers as well as considerations from the focus group study.

- 3. Venue and time:** The venue was centrally located for optimal accessibility from different parts of the city. The space was ideal because it allowed for flexible reconfigurations and had sufficient room for a large group of people. Look for a venue with audio/video equipment to minimize external rental costs. The event should be held based on the schedules of typical high school students, e.g. after school, weekends and during breaks.
- 4. Recruitment:** Although social media and event management websites such as Facebook and Eventbrite are great tools to use, word of mouth is still found to be the most valuable method to promote an event. Cold-email youth organizations to tap into their youth networks. Recruit youth volunteers to help at the event, and these volunteers will also spread the word. Finally, arrange catering services should food be provided as an incentive to participate.

DESIGNING/ FLOW

1 Length of Session



2 Level of Interaction



Be conscious of the energy levels required throughout the day

Variety is key to engaging a **diverse** group of learners.

3 Usage of Digital Tools



How should information be presented to young people? What kinds of sessions or activities would be interesting to youth? We found out through testing different variables and formats during the TST2016 conference:

- 1. Length of sessions:** From the observed receptiveness of the audience, as well as the participant and volunteer feedback, it was clear that any passive activity should last no more than 45 minutes; 10-30 minutes would be ideal. Lightning talks were successful in keeping the attention of the audience since the topics and speakers changed every 10 minutes. Hour-long workshops worked well because of the level of interaction involved.
- 2. Level of interaction:** Participants and volunteers generally agreed that interactive elements, such as questions posed to the audience and role-playing activities, were effective in keeping the audience engaged. It should be cautioned, however, that activities or workshops that require high energy may tire participants and affect their attentiveness.

- 3. Usage of digital tools:** Speakers at the TST2016 conference used a variety of tools, ranging from physical props to presenting virtually via Skype. Images and videos, as opposed to long lines of text, were successful in capturing the attention of the participants. The novelty of the props and demonstrations, as well as the use of GIF images and memes, also piqued the audience's interest. Some participants at the conference proposed a greater use of social media platforms, such as a live Twitter feed projected on the screen or image-sharing apps like Instagram and Snapchat. The caveat of using digital tools is that there is always a risk of running into technical difficulties.

Variety is key. Having too many of the same type of sessions or workshops, no matter how well-designed they are, will likely become monotonous to young participants. Establish a flowing experience, with a mix of passive and active activities for different personalities and learning styles.

DATA COLLECTION/ TOOLS



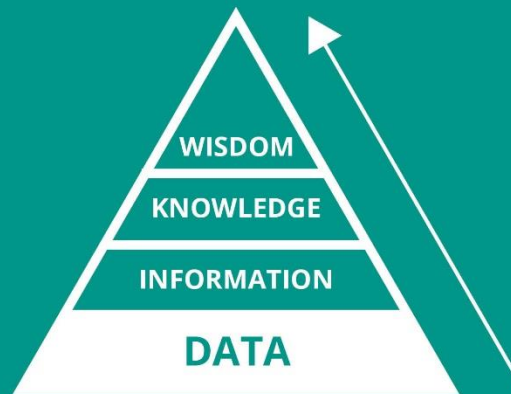
Analytics



Pre-Conference Survey



Post-Conference Survey



Interactive Activities



Observations



Interviews + Debriefs



Conferences present great opportunities for data collection. A significant amount of qualitative and quantitative data can be gathered from a target group through passive observation and active tools.

- 1. Analytics:** The analytics tools on social media and event management websites (Facebook, Eventbrite) can reveal important marketing data about the page visitors, such as time of visit, geographic location and demographics.
- 2. Pre-conference surveys:** The primary purpose of the pre-conference surveys is to establish a reference point from which the impact of the conference can be measured.
- 3. Post-conference surveys :** The purpose of the post-conference surveys is to evaluate any changes in the participants from the impact of the conference. Ensure that the metrics of the pre- and post-conference surveys are aligned for meaningful comparisons.
- 4. Interactive activities:** Activities can be designed to gather quantitative and qualitative input from participants in a

creative, unconventional way. At the TST2016 Conference, participants were asked during an activity to share their daily routine and whereabouts on a typical day through sticky notes, which were then photographed and documented for analysis.

- 5. Observations:** Observation notes of the participants' behaviour, expressions and interaction with speakers and others should be taken throughout the conference. This is a good way to evaluate the effectiveness of certain methods and strategies being used.
- 6. Interviews and debriefs:** Follow-up debrief discussions should be set up with the speakers, volunteers and participants after the conference, focusing on what they thought went well and what areas to improve.

Data are only powerful when they can tell stories. Further analyze the collected data to track any informative patterns, and translate them into insights relevant to the objectives of your project.

RECOMMENDATIONS/

1

Involve youth early in the process

Use tools such as interviews and focus groups to involve youth in the design and planning process of the project. Their unique insights will keep the project relevant to youth.

2

Brand + market + connect

Brand the conference as a one-time, fun opportunity for youth to learn and discover the city-planning process. Market extensively through multiple social media platforms. Use powerful images and videos. Cold-call or cold-email youth organizations. Building strong relationships with individuals and organizations will help with many aspects of the project.

3

Break out of the classroom setting

Get youth outside of their classrooms and learn through various kinds of activities at different places. Find a youth-friendly venue that provides flexibility for quick reconfiguration. The novelty of the experience will keep them interested and engaged.

4

Accommodate youth's schedules and locations

Organizing the conference on a weekend or holiday will allow more youth to participate. Avoid exam months. Reserve a venue that is accessible and easy to find.

5

Invite young presenters from different backgrounds

Inspire youth and help them feel empowered. Close the generational and cultural gaps by inviting a diversity of young presenters, including secondary school students, to speak at the conference.

- 6 Keep it short, interactive and relatable**
Limit presentations to 10 to 30 minutes. Cover a wide range of topics with multiple sessions and lay a broad foundation of knowledge. Incorporate interactive elements. Use real world examples relatable to youth. Include clear, catchy visuals.
- 7 Organize multiple workshops**
Hands-on, interactive learning is the most effective method to educate and empower youth. Integrate more design and experiential elements. Vary group sizes to help youth participate more in discussions. Adjust content to accommodate different levels of knowledge among the participants.
- 8 Maintain an ongoing dialogue with participants**
Plan many Q&A sessions between speakers and participants. Encourage participants to ask questions and challenge ideas. Overcome intimidation by collecting questions submitted anonymously or digitally.
- 9 Collect data, creatively if possible**
Actively observe the behaviours and receptiveness of the participants. Collect data through creative means, such as games and activities. Avoid long surveys and interviews.
- 10 Empower youth through knowledge and awareness**
Share knowledge and provide tangible ways and tools to engage. Identify quick fixes and “low-hanging fruits” as starters. Emphasize that youth have more power than they think.

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Tomorrow Starts Today is a Supervised Research Project for the School of Urban Planning, McGill University. This is a short, illustrated version of the original report. If you have any questions or would like to request for the original report, please contact Ryan Lo at ryan.lo@mail.mcgill.ca or Prof. Nik Luka at nik.luka@mcgill.ca.