

[www.e-Dialogues.ca](http://www.e-Dialogues.ca)  
Royal Roads University

## **Youth Engagement in City Planning**

May 27, 2008

Moderated by Ann Dale

### **Participants**

**Dr. Ann Dale**, Canada Research Chair on Sustainable Community Development, Royal Roads University

**Doug Ragan**, University of Colorado-Centre for Children Youth and Environment

**Erica Lay**, United Nations Safer Cities Youth Engagement Coordinatr, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

**Ashley Pelletier**, Americorps Vista for the Cityof Montpelier's Planning and Community Development Department

**Amber Zirnhelt**, Youth Engagement Program Manager, International Centre for Sustainable Cities

**Royce Alvarez**, Architect, Town Planning Office, Municipality of San Jose, Costa Rica

**Jacque Leblanc**, Americorps Vista for the Cityof Montpelier's Planning and Community Development Department

**Angus Joseph**, Imagine Durban, South Africa

### **Dialogue**

---

#### **Ann Dale**

Welcome to our e-panel, we certainly represent a diverse cross section of experience and expertise on the critical topic of youth engagement and urban sustainability. Could I ask you to briefly introduce yourself and a little of your background?

#### **Amber Zirnhelt**

---

My name is Amber Zirnhelt. I am the Youth Engagement Program Manager at the International Centre for Sustainable Cities. I oversee our youth internship program, youth-led development initiatives and youth & city planning projects. I have extensive experience working on community asset mapping and youth visioning projects in cities such as Port Alberni, BC with the Tseshaht First Nation, Iqaluit, Dawson Creek and Edinburgh, Scotland. I am excited to be here and look forward to hearing from all of the other panellists.

## **Doug Ragan**

---

Hi. My name is Doug Ragan and I currently am taking my PhD in planning and design at the University of Colorado through the Children, Youth and Environment Centre (<http://thunder1.cudenver.edu/cye/>). I as well am a consultant with UN HABITAT Partners and Youth Section working on the Global Partnership for Urban Youth Development (GPI) (<http://hq.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=4224&catid=5&typeid=6&subMenuId=0>). I worked previously with UN HABITAT and ICSC on organizing the youth program for the world urban forum. You can access the final policy paper on youth and cities at [http://www.wd.gc.ca/rpts/research/youth/intro1\\_e.asp](http://www.wd.gc.ca/rpts/research/youth/intro1_e.asp).

## **Royee Alvarez**

---

Hello, My name is Royee Alvarez I am an architect with a Masters in City Development Strategies, currently work for the Town Planning Office in the Municipality of San José — Costa Rica's capital city —where I'm in charge of a multisectorial approach particularly with the urban renewal plan, with several PPP'S incentives, projects on LED, ICT-trends, youth involvement in community development and I'm very excited for being here..

## **Jackie LeBlanc**

---

Hi, I'm Jackie LeBlanc. Myself and Ashley Pelletier are AmeriCorps VISTAs who work at the City of Montpelier's Planning and Community Development Office on a project called enVision Montpelier. The project is in its first year of working to develop a 30-100 year sustainable plan for the city. We serve as Community Outreach Staff and focus on getting youth involved in the project.

## **Ann Dale**

---

Welcome Jackie, our research on community sustainable development is showing that communities who have a 100 year planning time line are on the path to more sustainable integrated planning than others.

Welcome, Royee, from Costa Rica, one of the benefits of these trans-disciplinary on-line spaces that we are trying to develop is to stimulate more local and global

conversations. Are you looking at engagement strategies around the implementation of your plan, specifically with youth?

## **Royee Alvarez**

---

Hello Ann:

I completely agree with you with on stimulating these kind of dialogues... In Costa Rica's case this is actually an almost brand new subject, however we have developed a positive youth development policy framework (Young citizen Law, May 2002) that focuses on providing the services and opportunities needed to develop a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment in young people.

The main role of this law is to provide "equity" among sectors of the city's population, particularly youth, not only to improve their quality of life but also to let understand they are the solution for their own future.

## **Amber Zirnhelt**

---

Royee: Where can we find a copy of your 'Law of Youth'?

## **Royee Alvarez**

---

Hello Amber!

You can find this law here:

[http://www.msj.co.cr/archivos/reg\\_ext/RE-19.pdf](http://www.msj.co.cr/archivos/reg_ext/RE-19.pdf)

## **Erica Lay**

---

Hello, Erica here. Through the International Centre for Sustainable Cities, I worked as the Youth Engagement Coordinator for Safer Cities Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I facilitated a youth community asset mapping project on Youth-friendly Services in Dar es Salaam, which focused on youth defining youth friendly services, mapping and gathering information on these services, and compiling this information into 'City Guides' to share with peers. I'm currently beginning work on an engagement process on carbon neutrality with the BC government.

## Angus Joseph

---

my name is angus joseph.

currently seated in a coffeeshop called yossi's. it is 6.15 pm in Durban South africa

I am part of the Imagine Durban information team, conducting a social experiment through the Facebook mechanism. We are trying to stimulate discussion around the Imagine Durban Themes through the blogsite and facebook group.

[www.imaginedurban.org](http://www.imaginedurban.org)

I also represent an urban collective called the Circle Center Collective, who are participating in the upcoming United Nations Conference on Youth and Urban Safety (Safer Cities)

this is being hosted at the ICC in Durban this June [june 17-21]

<http://yourcitysummit.co.za/programme.html>

## Ann Dale

---

Welcome, Angus, is the coffee good:) I am fascinated with your project, how do you plan to connect what you are doing with Facebook and blogging to your political decision-makers?

## Angus Joseph

---

Re: coffee... tea is good...

Re: Project. At this stage we are looking to see if the Facebook group can instigate action in real life. We are also testing the networking and databasing capacities of web 2.0 models, with the likely outcome being an event that Facebook members are exclusively invited to. In this way, we create a sense of the engagee feeling special and on the 'inside' of the information loop. This may help us bridge communication breakdowns;

the way it's being operated is very grassroots, street-level information activity.

we came up with this cool 'Law '...

KNOWLEDGE + ACCESS = SUCCESS

## **Erica Lay**

---

Angus,

So neat! I am definitely somewhat technologically impaired, particularly around mobile phones, so this is great to hear about! We were definitely hoping to have more photos of each 'asset' in our project. It's also particularly relevant because I found so many youth used mobiles in Tz.

Doug-perhaps you can integrate this into the continuation of the project in Kigali and Kampala, if that's still going on? Might reduce the number of GPS units you need?

## **Ann Dale**

---

Our first question for today is "What are some of the roles and responsibilities that can be assigned to youth in cities and how does delegation/accountability occur?"

## **Amber Zirnhelt**

---

From my experience, youth and adult partnerships in city planning and development seem to work best.

Youth can assign themselves to roles or the city can approach young people to be involved in planning processes through creative, engaging means (ie. photography, art work, youth forums etc.).

## **Jackie LeBlanc**

---

Here are three main ways that we have worked to involve youth in our project:

- 1) Youth On Boards - Youth apply to be part of city boards and as a youth representative they give feedback to the boards at meetings
- 2) Youth Agenda - Through discussions and meetings with youth an agenda is developed that is presented to boards and councils and their ideas are included when developing plans
- 3) Youth Ownership - Collaborate with youth by including them in the creation and implementation of projects to give them ownership of their city so change is visible to them

## **Ann Dale**

---

Jackie, how do you ensure your ideas are integrated into planning? This is a key question for all communities, and another, how to ensure the plans don't sit on shelves and gather dust, that they are actually implemented, is there a special role for youth here?

## **Jackie LeBlanc**

---

To ensure youth ideas are integrated into long-term planning it is important to have tangible projects for youth to contribute to that they can begin to see short term change, but also contributes to long-range goals. By taking their ideas to improve the future and creating a small-scale project that they can begin to work on now, students don't lose interest and take ownership. This gives them an active role in planning.

For example, many students in the area are interested in alternative energy and energy efficiency. Although city-wide changes in these areas take years, if not decades, students have been very involved in supporting this topic through the distribution of CFL lightbulbs. Students also organized themselves and presented the case for supporting alternative energy to the legislature.

## **Erica Lay**

---

I think you're very right about the importance of tangible projects Jackie. Planning processes can take an incredibly long time with little visible change over that same period. Having shorter-term projects that are embedded in these longer plans serves to work towards the short and long-term goals. We found that youth mapping what they considered to be youth-friendly services combined the generation of important information on schools and clinics that was otherwise unknown to municipal governments, with an outlet for what youth felt was valuable and positive in their communities.

Youth involvement in Dar es Salaam has been approached in a similar manner as the Youth on Boards approach Jackie spoke about.

Dar es Salaam has used a Youth City Council, a mirror image of the Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC). The city council has been effective in networking and joining youth in Dar es Salaam, however the ideas generated at Youth City Council (YCC) meetings face the exact challenge that Anne has brought up: moving them from the YCC meetings to the Dar CC meetings and having them integrated into planning process has been a challenge.

## **Doug Ragan**

---

Interesting. I am going to switch between my academic and NGO worlds here. Academically, there are many articles that reference youth involvement in cities and how they can be involved. The best for a quick overview is by Kathryn Frank titled The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning and Barry Checkoway's Youth Participation in Community Planning: What are the Benefits? There are four areas identified by both in which youth are involved: social action; community planning; public advocacy and local service development. One area that I think is exciting about youth involvement in cities is their ability to produce information and planning resources that can be utilized by that city, especially in regards to mapping and GIS. I will leave that to some of the experts such as Erica and Amber who do great mapping work.

## **Royee Alvarez**

---

Jackie:

I like really much your comment, because right now we are using some ideas from students to stimulate the use of green building concepts in the San Jose... Its a great opportunity to involve urban developer and the future "users"!... for the LG is also a great opportunity to integrate a long term vision of sustainability.. :)

## **Doug Ragan**

---

I agree with Jackie, the challenge is the timeframe of youth engagement, the involvement (or non-involvement) of city staff and planners, and what form the engagement takes for the youth.

For example, in my former incarnation working with the Environmental Youth Alliance in Vancouver B.C. we began working on the South East False Creek site (the site where the new Olympic village is going) to propose developing it for the community. Our first land use proposal went in 1995. It took 10 years, well after the youth who were initially involved were no longer youth, before anything began to happen.

Secondly, the EYA as a youth agency was challenged to continue on in the development process. The barriers of this both were our own funding, as well as the politics around the site (condos or no condos etc). Municipal politics, as it has to do with land and developers, is a blood sport. Makes it challenging for youth to stay involved.

On a positive note the site is now very progressively designed. Unfortunately, the activism of the youth on the site has been forgotten.

## Doug Ragan

---

here are the articles I\* am talking about.

---

File attachment [The Potential of Youth.pdf](#) (170.13 KB)

---

File attachment [Youth Participation in COmmunity Planning - What are the Benefits.pdf](#) (581.67 KB)

## Ann Dale

---

It seems to me you guys are very modest, in my dealings with younger colleagues, although why the need for labels, they bring critical intellectual capital to the table that is often innovative, and more visionary without the pessimism and failure that older colleagues have experienced. I also think it is very important to empower all levels of civil society to believe they can make a difference. What barriers, if any, have you encountered to your own ability to make a difference and influence change, and do you have any solutions?

## Amber Zirnhelt

---

I agree that it is important to have demonstration projects that young people can work on to see their ideas in action and continue to feel inspired. When I worked with the Tseshaht First Nation, we did a community visioning process with the youth and they identified areas they value and things they want to see changed in the community. One of their suggestions was to have a mountain bike park on the Reserve and to build it themselves. Their Chief and Council listened to their ideas and right away helped them develop and implement a mountain bike park. We developed the program as a work-training program for the youth as well. It was really exciting and I won't forget one young man saying "I can't believe they are actually listening to us."

I here again and again in conferences and community forums that people don't want to be just listened to 'again'. They want to see action. Often young people need mentorship and even a bit of seed funding, but they have incredible ideas and energy to bring to the table.

## **Ann Dale**

---

That seed funding is so critical for all civil society groups, and often, a little at the right time can go a very long way for building critical social capital.

## **Erica Lay**

---

I recently got directed to the quantumshift.tv website, where a local school in our community, McTavish, focused on recycling to engage youth and other community members in making their community more sustainable. (quantumshift.tv/schools) This example seems to bring up an important element of youth engagement as well: making sure that there are positive adult-youth relationships that will provide youth with mentorship, if that's possible, or at least the connections to direct youth where they may be able to obtain relevant mentorship and guidance if they are seeking it.

## **Angus Joseph**

---

/erica

We found that youth mapping what they considered to be youth-friendly services combined the generation of important information on schools and clinics that was otherwise unknown to municipal governments, with an outlet for what youth felt was valuable and positive in their communities.

We have found that system is quite useful, and recommend the GPS positioning of mobile phones. There is an application available in South Africa called the Grid

it is a GPS positioning platform that allows users to sms a picture from a location. This picture is now available from a GPS map. All of this is accessible from your mobile phone handset.

[www.thegrid.co.za](http://www.thegrid.co.za)

## **Ann Dale**

---

What are some of the best practices around supporting long-term engagement with youth? Dare to dream, based on your expertise, how can we accelerate the rate of change through youth involvement in city sustainability? What about guaranteed seats on local decision-making bodies, making your voice louder?

## **Doug Ragan**

---

One key partnership for EYA was environment canada -- working with champions within the system like ann, mary beth berube, etc was important as they gave us initial seed funding, and as well, had programs structured to support youth and give them resources. It doesn't take much money for youth projects to get up and go. We did a great program under the voluntary sector initiative called youth action effecting change where we support youth led projects across B.C. What we found is that a. they did amazing work and b. often had no idea how amazing it was, and didn't tell people about it. For example, the initial focus of YAEC was to get youth involved in policy. We spent the first year trying to figure out how to do that, and most of the groups pushed back saying they didn't do policy. What we found out is that they did do policy, but at the local level, with planners and city councils, and not as much at the national and provincial level. They just called it "action" or "advocacy". My experience is that the most profound changes are at the municipal level, both in Canada and internationally.

You can see the site at [http://www.eya.ca/wuf/eya\\_tools.html](http://www.eya.ca/wuf/eya_tools.html), though the site was modified for the World Urban Forum.

## **Jackie LeBlanc**

---

Best Practices:

- 1) Go to them - try to use existing successful groups and collaborate with those groups on projects
- 2) Involve a teacher or role model that students respect in the project
- 3) Reinforce that their opinion matters - talk to them like adults
- 4) Work with teachers in schools to include city planning and projects in class curriculum
- 5) Offer free food!

Specific ideas for projects to get youth feedback:

- 1) give kids cameras to take pictures of what they like and don't like about their city
- 2) do a youth design charrette where students are asked to redesign their city as they would like to see it ideally
- 3) Do a Peace Tiles project with youth: <http://mixedmedia.us/peacetiles/>

## **Royee Alvarez**

---

<http://mixedmedia.us/peacetiles/> is a really great link..  
I'm pretty sure we could use some ideas from here

## **Amber Zirnhelt**

---

A really useful resource for cities for engagement of youth is "Creative Tools: Civic Engagement of Young People" from the Growing Up in Cities Canada project. See: [www.uvic.ca/iicrd](http://www.uvic.ca/iicrd)

Also, the 2005 World Youth Congress put together an outstanding youth-led development starter kit manual. It's available at: <http://www.peacechild.org> (under resources: 'Nothing for us...Without us.')

## **Ann Dale**

---

I keep 'hearing' connection and communication, are youth, or is this asking too much, important bridge builders, what in my research, we call critical nodes, that is people who because they are open and transparent communicators facilitate connections between diverse networks? I love the idea of visuals, imagine if every city published huge photos outside of some of the youth pictures, a different lens of what is important. What about guerrilla art and guerrilla graffiti, guerrilla gardening, I know some of this is controversial, but highlights different use of city space?

## **Doug Ragan**

---

sorry folks .. the system froze there for a second ..

I think the use of GPS systems, GIS, google earth, and cell phones are the wave of the future. What we are now able to do is take what was initially paper based mapping, which has been around for decades initially popularized by Kevin Lynch (founder of the Growing up in Cities program) and David Driskell and Louise Chawla - and now we can move that same mapping process online, through cell phone technologies such as eric has mentioned, and I know erica has done in Dar.

two aspects that to me are amazing:

1. geospatial "language" -- youth now understand space differently, and move through it differently, since the advent of these new technologies we see whole new discourses possible, and the experts are the youth, who are often (as in the case of Erica's work in Dar) way ahead of the cities.
2. bridging the technological divide - as we can see by the work that eric is doing in SA, and the use of facebook by angus (who is, by the way, going to the same conference I will be at in durban in 2 weeks), the technological divide is being bridged because of the cell phone. I now daily talk with youth from the Korogocho slums in Nairobi that I am

working with on facebook through the cell phone. Africa is the fastest growing cell phone market in the world.

(drop comma off the link [http://www.eya.ca/wuf/eya\\_tools.html](http://www.eya.ca/wuf/eya_tools.html) )

## **Erica Lay**

---

Similar projects, like the green maps in East Austin, Texas, and in Cuba, made murals where the maps were actually painted in central community locations.

<http://www.greenmap.org/greenhouse/en/maps>

Not guerrilla graffiti, but definitely claiming local spaces by adding to them visually.

## **Doug Ragan**

---

I did a study in my masters (oh so long ago now) on bridging. We basically found that youth agencies are key bridging agents -- between youth, and different systems. I am trying to hunt down the study I did ... but it is quite interesting.

So, yes, youth are bridgers, because, I would conjecture, they are immersed/focused in relationships (a la facebook), and are often transparent and open to new experiences.

## **Ann Dale**

---

I would love a copy, Doug, but how do we connect the old technologies and probably age use variables with the new technologies? An interesting question, but probably don't have time to delve deeply into it, as some of you have stated, we need diverse networks, perhaps more densely connected for sustainable community development?

## **Doug Ragan**

---

sorry -- unclear on the question -- age use variables?

## **Ann Dale**

---

Trying not to be ageist, older people use email, not facebook, nor text messaging, how do we connect?

## **Erica Lay**

---

The challenges I see with the advent of this new geo-spatial language and new ways of interacting through IT are how to limit the divide based on access to technology. This information that is being collected by Doug and can be captured through cellphones on the GRID landing page is being gathered in a way that is more accessible to youth, BUT, once it's up on the web, it's not necessarily easy to access. Again, I'm going to emphasize my narrow understanding of IT here, so correct me if I'm off the mark, but I think there is still a challenge in getting the multi-media websites that capture youth generated information with photos and videos (that make that information more tactile and easier to relate to), through when internet access is sloooow, and not as prevalent as in NA. The other issue I see here is making sure that the opinions of youth and their work can still be communicated to older generations who are not as tech-savvy. Or do we just stick with having different media for different audiences?

## **Ann Dale**

---

This has been a very rich dialogue, lots of great ideas for greater engagement of youth in city sustainability, to bring about desired sustainable future(s). The e-audience will be kept open for another 24 hours for people to continue to converse given time differences. Could I ask each of you to please complete an on-line survey that is examining the capacity of our platform to facilitate transdisciplinary research (research between universities, civil society actors and government and business). Chris, can you please give us the web link? Any concluding ideas, comments, observations, dreams for city sustainability?

## **Jackie LeBlanc**

---

This has been a great source of inspiration and new ideas for our project! Thank you everyone!

## **Erica Lay**

---

Slow in the typing and thought process....

I was just thinking about the concept of diverse-strategic partnerships in long-term youth engagement. If partnerships between agencies which are both youth-oriented and more broadly oriented are carefully fostered, perhaps there will be a smoother transition for engaged youth. These youth can shift their engagements in relevant NGOs, agencies,

projects etc. based on how their interests grow and change.

### **Amber Zirnhelt**

---

Thank-you for everyone's participation and great input in the e-dialogue. I found it very useful. One of our interns will be putting together a summary report including a resource list which I am happy to distribute to any of you who are interested.

### **Doug Ragan**

---

I agree with the issue of age and the issue of technology access. There are also other barriers - gender and class. There is as well a global age divide - an increasingly older developed world vs an increasingly younger developing world. the potential to bridge the divides are there, but we will need to assure that we don't forget those most marginalized as we move forward.

Anyways, it sounds like we are closing this off. Great conversations and great resources. Angus, I am really interested in connecting at or before the durban conference.

### **Ann Dale**

---

It is hard to summarize such a rich dialogue, new geo-spatial technologies, diverse strategic partnerships with deliberative planning, evolving internet communications continuing digital divide, GPS systems, green mapping, youth as bridging agents, GIS, google earth, cell phones, connectivity, geospatial language, and the rich, rich sources of information and websites embedded in your conversation. Thank you for your time and commitment.

### **Doug Ragan**

---

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/dailyem>

### **Erica Lay**

---

Thanks to everyone-these are some great new resources and some very succinct

summaries of issues surrounding youth engagement. I'd love a copy of the resource list/report you put together Amber.  
Erica

### **Royee Alvarez**

---

Thanks to all for this dialogue, I'm pretty sure it will be really useful for San Jose's case. Thanks for the organization and invitation.

### **Doug Ragan**

---

hi. is it possible that people put together a quick link of resources they have - web and print - that could be appended to the dialogue summary? This is both from my academic side as well as my "I have you all in one place so I thought I'd ask side".

### **Chris Ling**

---

Hi all

This forum is now closed - feel free to carry on conversations in the audience forum which will remain open for 24 hours - and panelists - please complete the survey at <http://www.survey.crcresearch.org/?sid=7>

Thanks

### **Ann Dale**

---

We will send you the archive of our conversation and as well, it will be posted on the website, it is your direct voice, unedited, the real conversation without interpretation and we will append the sources at the end. May we all have coffee and tea in a cafe somewhere together in the future.