



GeoThink Canada Newsletter

May 2014

In this issue

Welcome to the third issue of the GeoThink newsletter. In this issue, more student introductions will be made below. I am pleased to announce that our student body has grown to a total of 22. We also have some content from students, and updates from recent conferences. Lastly, you will find an updated list for all our GeoThink members.

Reminder for next AGM

Our upcoming Annual General Meeting will be held next month from **12-13 June in Ottawa**. The meeting will be held at the University of Ottawa.

To guarantee a rich discussion, we really hope that everyone will be able to attend. If you are in or around Ottawa at the time, do drop by and join the discussion. We will be presenting our progress to-date, as well as discussing future plans – and, of course, working on improving partner relations.



Themes of GeoThink

Here is a reminder of our six research themes.

Theme 1: Anywhere, Anyone, Anytime

We believe that Web 2.0 and its associated technologies will dramatically shift the way cities talk to their constituents and others. People can communicate with cities from anywhere, outside of a jurisdiction, and at any time, for example, which means outside formal venues like city council meetings. Anonymity implies that you do not know the identity of the contributor. It challenges our traditional definitions of community, citizen, and participation. We will evaluate the processes of technology development and that impact on the city and the citizen.

Theme 2: Spatial Authenticity, Accuracy, and Standards

The moment you bring up volunteered geographic information (VGI) (e.g., with Open 311), you worry about the quality of data. This theme considers questions of data structures, standards, and documentation practices used by public agencies. The research produced by this theme also will affect consensus on terminology, data standards, and dissemination regarding opening up government data and accepting VGI.

Theme 3: Law and Policy Dimensions

Data related to governance is not simply a technical matter. Issues that are policy and legal in nature will be a primary focus as we try to understand the way Geoweb 1) fits in existing law and policy, and 2) shapes new policies and law. Specific legal domains of interest are privacy, intellectual property, access to information, access to justice, and the interplay between norms, codes and technology with regards to governance.

Theme 4: Open Everything

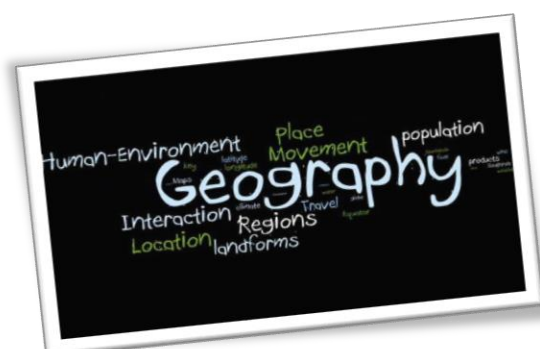
We will track municipal open data engagement over time, theorize about the impacts of open data on governance, and from a practical perspective understand and develop best practices. We also have the opportunity to document best practices and track the evolution of open data practices over time.

Theme 5: Social Justice

We will explore aspects of Geoweb - Society relationships as they pertain to social justice. We will identify the success and failures of Geoweb for community development. Using a case study approach we will use participatory research to identify emerging concepts of place, the intersection of community, engagement and social justice, and the accessibility to Geoweb.

Theme 6: Geoweb Political Economy

This theme will focus on understanding the political economy of the Geoweb as it concerns ownership structures, institutions, and policies. Power relationships between actors and processes of inclusion and exclusion among social media owners and users also will be our focus.



Student Spotlight: PhD Student Rong Wang



Rong Wang is a doctoral student at Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, University of Southern California (USC). Rong received her B.A. from School of Journalism and Communication, Nanjing University, and her M.A. in Communications and New Media at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS).

Before joining USC, Rong worked at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) with the Information Networks and Inclusion program, based in Ottawa, Canada. Her work included assisting research programs in the areas of information and communication technologies for development. Currently pursuing her doctoral degree at USC Annenberg, her research interests are focused on social network analysis, organizational communication, and open development.

For the GeoThink research partnership, Rong is working with Professor Daren Brabham to examine crowdsourcing ventures in Canadian municipalities. Rong's interest in crowdsourcing can be traced to her MA thesis, which examined a creative model of producing music, software and clip art. Her thesis analysed how ideas of large numbers of people are coordinated into meaningful projects through voluntary participation. For the GeoThink project, Professor Brabham and

Rong will focus on institutional, organizational and cultural barriers of the implementation of crowdsourcing in the public sector and also how communication theories contribute to our understanding of this field. They would like to work with GeoThink partners to understand what motivates the public sector to implement crowdsourcing ventures and what impacts these ventures may be on public sector employees and budgets.

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http://annenberg.usc.edu/Faculty/Doctoral%20Students/Wang_Rong.aspx

Student Spotlight: Undergraduate Student Edgar Baculi



Born and raised in the City of Toronto, Edgar Baculi will be entering his third year in September 2014, of undergraduate studies in the Geographic Analysis program at Ryerson University. Before Ryerson, Edgar was actually a Practical Nursing student attending George Brown College. Discovering that nursing was not his calling, he changed course and enrolled into his favourite childhood subject, geography.

Wanting to learn more and be involved in the industry, Edgar found GoGeomatics Canada's Web Magazine and their open door policy for anyone to contribute as long as it was Canadian and regarded geography/geomatics. Since May 1st, 2013, he has published six articles, ranging from topics about research, industry events, company profiles and opinions on the industry and education. He plans to continue to write as long as a story presents itself. Through this work he was discovered by Associate Professor Claus Rinner of Ryerson and began his research and team member status in GeoThink.

Edgar's research is a content analysis of Open Data Catalogues across the country, with special interests in the geographic content available, data formats and growth comparisons, made possible thanks to previous research by Liam James Currie, a Masters student who was doing his thesis at Queens University. He wants to create an

up-to-date inventory of open data in Canada, particularly the data formats and file sizes. This nationwide snapshot will inform those who supply open data and demand open data.

His second year has been of further excitement thanks to winning the Geographic Analysis Endowment Award, being nominated for the Emerging Professional Award through Ryerson's Career Centre, and becoming Vice-President of the Student Association of Geographic Analysis for the upcoming school year. With all honesty, Edgar is not sure of where he would like to be when he graduates. That may be in the world of academia with a PhD or working for a company as a GIS Analyst, for example. For the present time he just wants to learn, be involved, and "geo-think".

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Student Article: Edgar Baculi on Canada's Open Data Catalogues

Below is Edgar Baculi's upcoming article on his work looking at Canadian municipal open data catalogues as part of GeoThink. This text was first published as a feature article in *Cartouche*, the newsletter of the Canadian Cartographic Association, Number 88, Winter/Spring 2014, pp. 8-9, and is reprinted here with permission.

A Geographic Content Analysis of Municipal Open Data Catalogues across Canada

Edgar Baculi and Claus Rinner, Department of Geography, Ryerson University

Open data initiatives by different levels of government across Canada are continuously expanding. The connection of open data to open government and public policy is most often documented in government reports, commentaries, and blog posts such as those listed in Lauriault's (2014) reading list and the posts on her <http://datalibre.ca/> blog. In the context of smart cities research, Roche (2014) positions open data as a requirement for transparency and collaborative governance, while Johnson and Sieber (2011) noted the need for open data policies in Canada to support the development of an "informational" Geoweb.

In his Master's thesis, Currie (2013) conducted a comprehensive analysis of 23 municipal

open data initiatives across Canada. According to Erickson et al. (2013), recording the number and type of datasets "would be useful to have greater detail regarding the file formats in use, giving us deeper insight into the extent of machine-readable data publication" (p.19). For a cut-off date in November 2012, Currie (2013) identified open data with geographic contents and more specifically those that were available in a geospatial format. To qualify as "geographic", a dataset had to include geographic features such as addresses, coordinates, neighbourhood names, or postal codes. The geospatial data formats observed included the computer-aided design ("drawing") format DWG, the Keyhole Markup Language

(KML) and its compressed form KMZ, and Esri's Shapefile format (SHP).

Using the same methodology, we examined the open data catalogues of 11 municipalities participating in a SSHRC Partnership Grant on "How the Geospatial Web 2.0 is Reshaping Government-Citizen Interactions", also known as the "GeoThink" project (<http://www.geothink.ca>). This short report focuses on the year-over-year development of the open data catalogues of the nine municipalities included in both, Currie's (2013) study and our research: Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Vancouver, Regina, Medicine Hat and the Region of Waterloo.

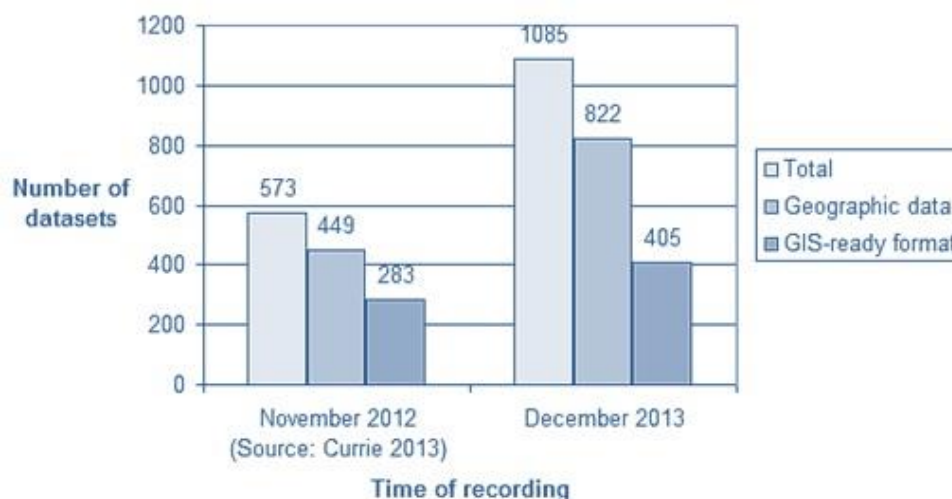


Figure 1: Summary of nine municipal open data catalogues

When compared between November 2012 and December 2013, the total number of datasets offered in these nine catalogues nearly doubled from 573 to 1085. Among these, datasets with geographic features grew from the 449 reported by Currie (2013)

to 822. Finally, as illustrated in Figure 1, the datasets available in a geospatial format showed a slower growth from 283 to 405. The slower growth of these GIS-ready datasets could be due to the increasing tendency to make open data accessible to users regardless

of software access and skill level. Instead of raw data, pre-defined maps are becoming increasingly available to illustrate the information contained in the datasets.

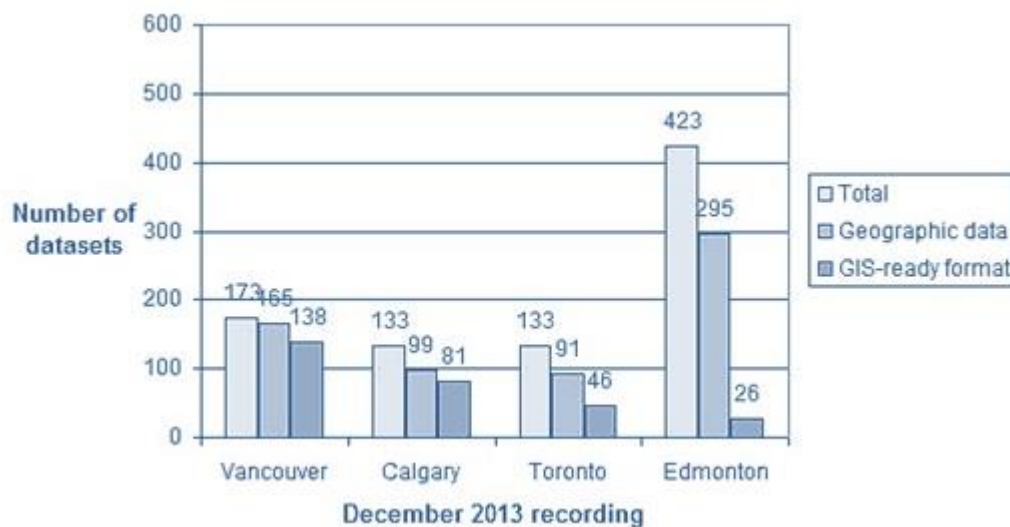


Figure 2: Proportion of geographic and GIS-ready datasets for four largest providers

When examining the four cities with the largest totals and the greatest numbers of geographic datasets in December 2013, we found that 84% of Vancouver's 165, and 82% of Calgary's 99 geographic datasets were offered in a geospatial format. However, only 51% of Toronto's 91, and as little as 9% of Edmonton's 295 geographic datasets were GIS-ready (see Figure 2). The Socrata platform used by the City of Edmonton provides infographics and GIS-like functions, which could explain the low proportion of datasets provided in geospatial format.

It is important to note that we have not assessed the quality, usefulness, or completeness of municipal open data catalogues. For lack of access to Currie's (2013) raw data, we also cannot verify whether increases in the number of datasets are exclusively due to additions of data, or whether any datasets have been updated or removed since November 2012. Some large open data "providers" from Currie's study, such as Niagara Falls and the District of North Vancouver, were not included here. We are planning to continue reviewing the open data

catalogues annually, expand our list of cities, add higher levels of government, and also follow Currie's example to examine the datasets by thematic categories.

Other potential research with co-investigators of the GeoThink project deals with the demand side of open data, data journalism, intellectual property issues around the geospatial Web (Judge and Scassa 2010), and the role of open data in volunteered geographic information systems (Rinner and Fast 2013).

References

Currie, L.J. (2013) The Role of Canadian Municipal Open Data Initiatives: A Multi-City Evaluation. Master's thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Available at http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/1974/8159/1/Currie_Liam_J_201308_MA.pdf

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Rinner, C., and Fast, V. (2013) A Systems Perspective on Volunteered Geographic Information. Abstract and presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), Los Angeles, USA, 9-13 April 2013

Roche, S. (2014) Geographic Information Science I - Why does a smart city need to be spatially enabled? *Progress in Human Geography*, published online 7 February 2014

Partner Spotlight: Nova Scotia Community Counts

The following is an abridged transcript of an interview with Malcolm Shookner, conducted by Peck Sangiambut, concerning Nova Scotia Community Counts' map centre and community asset mapping project. To see the website being discussed, visit:

www.novascotia.ca/communitycounts

Let's talk Nova Scotia Community Counts. Could you please explain what it is and what your role is?

Hello, my name is Malcolm Shookner, and I am the Chief Statistician for Nova Scotia Community Counts. I manage the Community Counts website and the data that goes into it, in order to make it available to the community, governments, researchers, the non-profit and private sectors, and the public.

The data system is based on the Census and National Household Survey that have all kinds of social and economic data, going all the way down to the community level and back twenty years. It includes data for 15 levels of geography for Nova Scotia, from municipalities to school boards; health authorities and watersheds, to quite a variety of geographies in which you can view all this data. It also includes specialized data such as health and crime prevention.

The whole idea of Community Counts is to be a **common platform** for data from a variety of sources that helps communities and others to have the most information they can have, available to them and their communities.

How do people use it? We keep in touch with people who use it in a variety of ways, such as those involved in our ongoing training programme. We hear all the time from people who work for school boards, or municipalities, or a community group, or provincial department. Some of them are academics and students, large and small businesses, entrepreneurs, anyone who can use this data. It's a common platform

for data for the public and anyone who lives in Nova Scotia, and that really makes it a **public information resource**. So that's how we deliver on our mandate to provide statistics for use by government and the public. We make the data available in a variety of formats that make it easy for people to understand, such as tables, charts, maps, and profiles. We also have policy views, specialized lenses for viewing data, for crime prevention and health.

You've been talking about repackaging of data for people to consume. Does this make you more than just a data portal?

I would say so, because we are adding value to the data, and we are not just a window to other sources. We are adding value to data that passes through by fitting it into Nova Scotia's geography that people understand, and modeling the data into geographies that are *unique* to Nova Scotia, including the community level data that we maintain ourselves.

How does your community asset mapping work?

When we released our Map Centre on Community Counts in 2010, we were offering dynamic mapping of thematic information onto maps so you could look at population distribution, or economic indicators, and so on. But we also added in a community asset mapping component to the Map Centre, so people could start looking at what assets they have in their own communities in relation to their population characteristics. In the Map Centre, you can choose from any of 15 levels of geography available and you can choose from about 40,000 map options. Then you can customize it with an overlay to show community assets (of which we have an inventory of about 65 assets), to see whether you [your community] have them or don't have [community assets] where you need them.

There are seven categories of community assets - cultural, education,

environmental, health, infrastructure, social, and socioeconomic. When you view your asset map, you are choosing your geographic boundaries, thematic data, and finally your assets layered on top of all of it.

What about data collection in community asset mapping?

Data collection is a huge task, and many communities have to do this on their own. Usually, they will have extra help in the form of students or volunteers who go out and collect the data. Communities are getting fairly sophisticated these days, with GPS coordinates to mark assets, but also using hands-on tools to map cultural assets. For example, there are groups in Annapolis County and Kings County who are mapping cultural assets on the ground by going and taking pictures of old historic places, marking them down, and writing stories about them. This is the sort of ground level data collection that people are doing.

However, we can't afford to do it. As a provincial organization, we realized we couldn't go out and collect all that information ourselves, so we had to find information *sources*. Many we use are government sources, but some are also non-government organizations or professional associations, as long as they are authoritative.

What about the crowdsourcing element of asset mapping?

What we've done is have training sessions with groups in Annapolis and Kings Counties, who are doing local cultural asset mapping projects in association with Nova Scotia Community College. They were assembling all these locally collected sources of information on what they considered to be culture. Each of them was going to produce their own map, but we are also discussing with

them how to get their data onto Community Counts.

We are also very interested in, and thinking about, other forms of crowdsourcing. What other ways might there be to collect community-based information? Of course, as a public agency we have to maintain quality control in order to ensure that whatever we put up is accurate and current. The format for community data is the easy part – we also have to put data through a review process and find ways to add it into the Map Centre. This work is in the early stages of progress, but we are willing to find ways to get it to work.

So these training sessions are also a way of ensuring that data will be accurate before data collection even begins?

Yes, and we've had other community groups come to us recently, such as the Nova Scotia Gaelic Council, who want to collect data on their cultural assets. They submit it to us and we review their data before we post it online.

Why do you use the term 'community asset'?

The definition we use is that a *community asset is a service or resource that can be used for community or public benefit*. It allows people to think of assets not only as services, but it can be another type of resource, like a place as well, and so broadens our idea of what a community asset can be. We try to be inclusive, and we use this as our working definition. It's a pretty good fit for the most part, in terms of what's in and what's out. In one meeting, I asked people what other assets they would like to see in the Map Centre. One said "cemeteries". So, I asked this person "how is a cemetery a community asset?" The immediate reply was, "history and genealogy". Well, there you go.

We are updating our community assets this spring and we are going to see some new assets added to the inventory. It's a good starting point and a good foundation for communities who want to do their own mapping. We're trying to build that bridge by providing a certain

range of assets that people can rely on. When they want to do their own, they can go ahead and update them or we can harvest what they develop and add it to our own data.

Your definition for 'community asset' came from Community Counts itself, but is there also a negotiation of this definition going on? Is there any back-and-forth relationship between government and citizens?

Yes. The idea for it originally came from citizens saying to government, "We don't have access to data about our communities, we can't write funding proposals, research reports, or collect evidence to demonstrate things because we can't get data". So, in the early 2000s, this government in Nova Scotia, and also the government in Newfoundland and Labrador, decided to embark on these public mapping systems to provide statistics, mostly from Statistics Canada, about communities. So in Newfoundland and Labrador they became 'Community Accounts', and over here we became 'Community Counts'.

Additionally, these training sessions that we offer are ongoing. People come in and we see them face-to-face. We have conversations and we invite people to contact us, such as through social media, to ensure that there is information going out and information coming in as well. This is another aspect of the GeoThink project that I'm interested in – what are some other ways we can engage with communities to enhance the work we're doing? Additionally, these training sessions that we offer are ongoing. People come in and we see them face-to-face. We have conversations and we invite people to contact us, such as through social media, to ensure that there is information going out and information coming in as well. This is another aspect of the GeoThink project that I'm interested in – what are some other ways we can engage with communities to enhance the work we're doing?

So you see some potential benefits [of community asset mapping] for citizens?

I do. People use it for policy change. One example we have is the group called Accessibility Nova Scotia that was lobbying to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board to retain full service gas stations in rural communities. We got the gas station data from another department, and overlaid it with some population data. They took the map to the Utility and Review Board and were able to win their case.

Finally, where is Community Counts right now? What's new?

We have just completed adding *all* of the 2011 National Household Survey data, in all 15 levels of geography, to Community Counts, data suppression and all. That's actually the current focus of our training sessions, National Household Survey data, where to get it and how to use it. This data is very rich, but there are things you have to be careful about when using it.

As we look ahead this year, we want to expand our community asset inventory, add new data from a variety of sources, and develop some new features. We look forward to getting new ideas from the researchers and partners in GeoThink.

Nova Scotia Community Counts is a programme that is part of Nova Scotia's Department of Finance. Thank you to Malcolm Shookner for the interview.



CONTACT MALCOLM SHOOKNER

Nova Scotia Community Counts:

www.novascotia.ca/communitycounts

Contact page:

<http://www.novascotia.ca/finance/communitycounts/contact.asp>

Dr. Teresa Scassa - Canada's Progress on Open Government: OGP Report Open for Comments

Below is a February 2014 blog post from one of our GeoThink members, Dr. Teresa Scassa from the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law. The online version can be viewed here: http://www.teresascassa.ca/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=151:canada%E2%80%99s-progress-on-open-government-ogp-report-open-for-comments&Itemid=81#

The goals of the open government movement – which has spread rapidly around the world in the last five years – are to increase government transparency and accountability, to engage citizens and increase their participation in government, and to improve governance. This is to be done primarily through enhanced access to government information and improved methods of citizen-government interaction. Open government includes three main streams: open access, open data, and open participation. The open data stream also carries with it the goal to stimulate innovation and economic development by making government data available in reusable and interoperable formats and under open licences.

Canada signed on to the Open Government Partnership in 2011. In doing so, it committed to taking a number of steps, including developing an Action Plan for open government that would set out specific goals and commitments. The OGP also requires governments to report on their progress, and provides independent review of each government's updates.

Canada's Action Plan for Open Government set out a series of commitments spread over a 3 year period. It was published in 2012 and Canada submitted its first self-assessment report to the OGP in 2013. This progress report has been the subject of an independent review by the OGP, through its independent reporting mechanism, and a copy of this review is now available for public comment.

The independent review confirms that the Canadian government has made significant progress on a number of the commitments it set out in its Action Plan, and that many of these commitments are either on target or ahead of schedule. Some of these achievements are considered to be "clearly

relevant" to the values of the OGP and of potentially high impact. These include the completion and launch of a new Open Government Licence (commented on in an earlier blog post), measures taken under the International Aid Transparency Initiative, the online publication of resource management data, and the electronic publication by federal regulators of regulatory plans.

The review, carried out by Carleton University Professor Mary Francoli, does note, however, that a number of the government's other commitments are less ambitious and less directly relevant to the goals of the OGP. This does not mean that they are not worth doing, just that they are less impactful. One issue, therefore, would seem to be whether the government's plan has struck the right balance between ambitious and significant goals and low hanging fruit.

A further concern is that the broad commitment to open government has been channelled primarily into developments around open data. While open data is important, and while developments in this area have been meaningful, open access and open participation are crucial components of open government and are essential to realizing its objectives. Indeed, one of the recommendations in the review document relates to the need for the government to broaden its focus so as to give more attention to open access and participation.

Through her consultation with stakeholders and other organizations, Francoli identifies a broad range of concerns over how the federal government communicates with citizens, and how it compiles, shares and archives information. The review is particularly critical of the government's tepid improvements to access to information in Canada, and it suggests that nothing short of legislative reform will deliver necessary improvements. The review also indicates that there have been shortcomings in citizen and stakeholder engagement and participation in the development of the goals and priorities of open government. The review also makes recommendations regarding improved information flows, the need to ensure that data is released in useable formats and with appropriate metadata, and the need to expand integrity commitments. While the

review notes that open government has a strong champion at the federal level in the Treasury Board Secretariat President Tony Clement, it also identifies a need for broader support within the government.

Head over to www.teresascassa.ca to read more about privacy, geospatial data, trademarks and Internet law, all from a law perspective.

CONTACT

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Reminder for RRTT

This is a reminder about our Rapid Response Think Tank.

Our grant includes plans for a Rapid Response Think Tank (or R2T2), which will assist in quickly connecting faculty and students with private, public, and civil society partners to answer short, immediate research questions.

Part of this connection is a response to real world needs in a constantly developing field of our partners.

With a network of domain experts and front-line leaders, for example from cities, we hope R2T2 can aid in the development of more informed, effective, and participatory government-citizen relationships.

R2T2 will act as a bridge between partner and academic communities within GeoThink, and will be a clearinghouse for

ideas and experiences drawn from our co-applicants and collaborators, transferred directly to partners. It is a significant opportunity for communication within the project.

R2T2 will eventually become self-sustaining as non-partner requests are incorporated near the end of the partnership. Our hope is that it will continue after the grant is done.

The person currently heading our RRTT is Prof. Leslie Regan Shade at University of Toronto, with help from Peck Sangiambut. The primary point of contact is the GeoThink account.

If you have any immediate, short-term research questions that need answering, run it by RRTT and we will try to connect you to an appropriate researcher.

CONTACT RRTT

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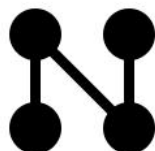
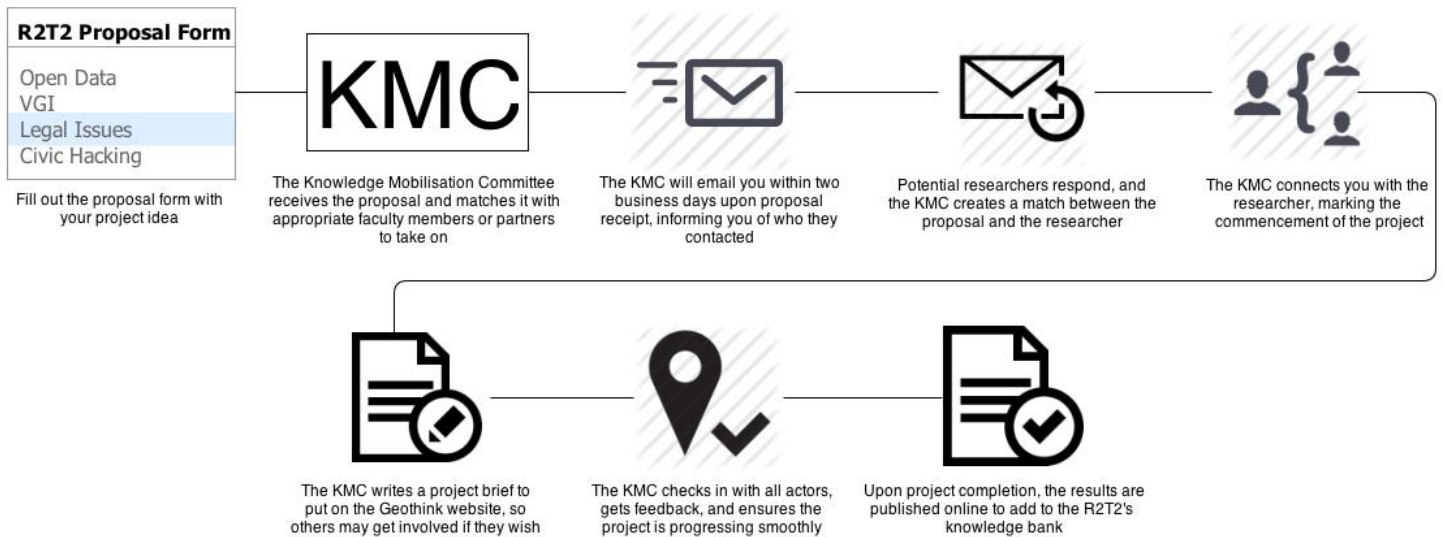
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Got an idea?

Take it through the flowchart to see how the R2T2 research procedure typically works.



Alternative to research, the R2T2 may also be used in a networking capacity. If another partner has already tackled your research question in their work, the R2T2 can serve as an arena for knowledge sharing between partners.

Recent conferences: SKI, AAG, GO Open Data

SKI and GeoThink Pre-Conference

The Spatial Knowledge and Information, Canada conference was held in early February this year in Banff, Alberta.

Fifteen GeoThink students from 9 different universities attended and presented on a variety of topics.

The student workshop (held separately from the conference) was the first time GeoThink students had met. Introductions were made and students conducted exercises to get to know each other and tell each other about their research. Students also discussed the future of the student network within GeoThink and how to benefit from it. Issues of how to go about conducting research within a network like GeoThink; what responsibilities there were on students; and what kind of expectations there were for students, were discussed.

The workshop was very beneficial to students. Students were able to identify those whose research areas were complimentary with their own and the initial introductions have since allowed for continued conversations between students. They were also exposed to colleagues with very different academic backgrounds and expressed considerable interest in research outside of their own fields, especially between 'geographers' and 'non-geographers'.

In subsequent years, we plan to hold 1-week long summer institutes that will be available to partners as well as students inside or outside the GeoThink network. Let us know if you have ideas for the summer institutes.



Banff National Park

GO Open Data - Toronto

By Edgar Baculi

The GO Open Data 2014 Conference was held on 15 May 2014, in Toronto. A number of GeoThink members attended, including researchers, students, and collaborators.

The conference was organised by: the Canadian Open Data Institute, Make Web Not War, CitizenBridge, Ontario Open Data, and Open Data Toronto. It attracted a mix of students, public servants, and representatives from the business and technology sectors. It was a day of speakers, concurrent sessions, learning labs and a panel discussion on the "big elephants" in shifting organisational culture, which critically questioned the control, sharing and management of open data.

Ryerson University Professor Pamela Robinson, with Ryerson School of Planning students Leah Cooke and Lisa Ward Mather, attended the event to further develop work on municipal notification and civic hackathons. Stephanie Piper from the University of Waterloo shared her graduate research on the value of open data by posing questions to the panel as well as engaging in the "Open Mic" session. She invited stakeholders of open data to contribute to her research. Edgar Baculi of Ryerson University spoke to Colin Spikes, the Director of Implementation and Support at Socrata, about his geographic content analysis of open data catalogues across Canada. It was an opportunity to gain behind-the-scenes insight about the nature of Socrata-based open data catalogues, a key observation from Edgar's research. Professor Leslie Shade of the University

of Toronto and Ryerson MSA student Michael Markieta were also in attendance. Finally, a number of GeoThink members were also in attendance, to participate and to speak, such as Jury Konga and Michael Lenczner.

This was a really GOOD (!) conference that allowed the students to identify relevant research, related policies, and ongoing discussions, which was encouraging and informative for research regarding open data in GeoThink.



AAG Conference 2014

By Victoria Fast, GeoThink PhD (Ryerson)

The annual conference of the Association of American Geographers was held this past April in Tampa Bay, Florida.

The GeoThink team had a good presence at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) annual meeting in Tampa, Florida. The AAG annual meeting is the largest gathering of leading scholars, experts, students and researchers for the latest in research and applications related to geography, sustainability, and GIScience. This year, the AAG conference featured over 4,500 presentations, posters, workshops, and field trips.

AAG 2014 also provided GeoThink researchers an opportunity to share their research, network, and strategize future research directions together. Most GeoThink presentations were part of a series of special sessions, called "**The Wicked Problem of Public Participation: What is the Role of the Geoweb - Part 1 and Part 2.**" These sessions, organized by Drs. Pamela Robinson and Renee Sieber, aimed to explore the ability of Geoweb tools and processes to address some of the challenges related to generating participation. The presentations contained included:

- *The Wicked Problem of Public Participation: What is the Role of the Geoweb?* – Pamela Robinson, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University
- *Fear of an 'international' constituency: Jurisdictionality as a constraint on government adoption of the Geoweb for public participation* – Peter Johnson, University of Waterloo
- *Public Participation and the Geoweb: the Wicked Problem of Intellectual Property Law* – Teresa Scassa, University of Ottawa
- *Implied License for Downstream Uses of Copyrighted Information on the Geoweb* – Elizabeth Judge, University of Ottawa
- *Public Participation and Strategy: Does strategy impact the efficacy of geoweb-enabled tools in helping to tame the wicked problem of participation?* – Jessica Breen, University of Kentucky
- *Desperately seeking solutions: trying to understand the inherent wickedness of*

public participation in the context of the geoweb – Jon Corbett, University of British Columbia Okanagan

- *Hyperlocal or Hype? How do communities really make decision?* – Barbara Poore, United States Geological Survey
- *Widgets for Wicked Problems: The Neptis Geoweb Tool and Datasets* – Michael Markieta, Claus Rinner, Kruti Desai, Ryerson University; Marcy Burchfield and Rian Allen, Neptis Foundation
- *Building a Virtual Climate Change Adaptation Community to Promote Urban Agriculture Initiatives* – Victoria Fast, Ryerson University
- *Can we use a crisis mapping platform to help tame the wicked problem of participation?* – Ana Brandusescu, McGill University

Collectively, these sessions provided a uniquely interdisciplinary perspective on the use of the Geoweb, and the participation it can (or cannot) generate. Overall, I think the consensus was that the Geoweb presents many challenges for facilitating participation, which only add to the wicked problem. Among the many highlights, presentations by Drs. Scassa and Judge, both from the University of Ottawa, stood out. They both focused on the legal implications of soliciting participation on the Geoweb, which provided a different (non-geographic) perspective that further highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of GeoThink.

Moving forward, we should start planning for AAG 2015 (April 21st to 25th) in Chicago, and how we want to represent GeoThink. The special session this year was engaging, and provided a great introduction into the goals and challenges we face when studying the Geoweb, open data, and participation. However, it was mostly Canadians in the room.

Partners, you should think about participating, either with your own papers or by co-authoring a paper with one of the researchers! In Tampa, two partners, Barbara Poore from USGS and Marcy Burchfield had presentations. Let's continue to work collaboratively within the grant, but also think about ways we can engage a wider audience next year. Pre-organized sessions are a favourable option, and even better if we incorporate speakers outside of GeoThink. Additionally, Chicago is a fun city that is active in civic and government hackathons. The

more people we can engage in our research, the more engaging our work becomes!

Finally, some advice for students and partners wishing to attend the AAG:

At the AAG, it's easy to get lost with the thousands of attendees and presentations. It is very different from a small conference, such as Spatial Knowledge and Information Canada, where there are no concurrent sessions and only 50-60 presentations total. From my few years of attending AAG conferences, here are some tips I picked up along the way:

1. **Get into an organized session!** If you're interested in presenting, get into an organized session. There's often better networking, presentation/presenter cohesion, and sometimes a better date in the middle of the week. These sessions advertise before the abstract due date via the AAG website, email lists, and to speciality group members. Alternatively, start thinking about organizing your own session with other GeoThink students, researchers, and partners.
2. **Get contact information!** With so many people in attendance, it's important to have the contact info of people you want to see, *ahead of time*. Otherwise, you might not even see them while you're there.
3. **Get data!** For those of us that want to tweet/email/text during the conference, get a US data plan on your phone, because Wi-Fi may be limited to large common areas, and not be available in many of the presentation rooms.
4. **Get the AAG app!** Don't opt for the printed program. Instead, use the AAG mobile APP to find sessions, people, and create your schedule.
5. **Get funding!** Beyond getting conference funding from the GeoThink grant, most universities have numerous options for conference support. At Ryerson, for example, there are opportunities to get conference funding from the TA union (CUPE), Graduate Studies, and Ryerson International, in addition to funding your individual program might offer.

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Type of Organization</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Province/State</u>	<u>Last/First Name</u>	<u>Email</u>
Centre for Law, Technology and Society (University of Ottawa)	Academic Institution	Ottawa	Ontario	Sagunur/Madelaine	Madelaine.sagunur@uottawa.ca
Centre for Public Involvement (University of Alberta)	Academic Institution	Edmonton	Alberta	Cavanagh/Fiona	fiona.cavanagh@ualberta.ca
City of Edmonton	Municipal Government	Edmonton	Alberta	Robb/Janelle	janelle.rob主@edmonton.ca
City of Kitchener	Municipal Government	Kitchener	Ontario	Amaral/Nicole	Nicole.Amaral@kitchener.ca
City of Ottawa	Municipal Government	Ottawa	Ontario	Giggey/Robert	Robert.Giggey@ottawa.ca
City of Regina	Municipal Government	Regina	Saskatchewan	Cochrane/Taron	tacochra@regina.ca
City of Toronto (Information & Technology Metro Hall)	Municipal Government	Toronto	Ontario	McDonald/Keith	kmcdonal@toronto.ca
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City of Waterloo	Municipal Government	Waterloo	Ontario	Bezruki/Garry	garry.bezruki@waterloo.ca
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IBM Canada Limited	Private	Kingston	Ontario	Aldridge/Donald	daldridg@ca.ibm.com
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Neptis Foundation (The)	Charitable	Toronto	Ontario	Burchfield/Marcy	mburchfield@neptis.org
Nova Scotia Community Counts (NSCC), Dept. of Finance	Provincial/Territorial Government	Halifax	Nova Scotia	Shookner/Malcolm	shooknrm@gov.ns.ca
Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC)	Federal Government	Ottawa	Ontario	Millar-Chapman/Melanie	Melanie.Millar-Chapman@priv.gc.ca

Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)	Municipal Government	Kelowna	British Columbia	Sears/Anna	anna.warwick.sears@obwb.ca
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OpenStreetMap - US Chapter	Foreign	Salt Lake City	Utah	Van Excel/Martijn	m@rtijn.org
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Upcoming Events and a Call for Your Participation!

We are in the process of creating a series of webinar and workshops that we hope to hold bi-monthly. In addition to these regular events we are revamping the website www.geothink.ca

For us to have the broadest impact with the GeoThink Project we would appreciate your input. This can mean providing monthly contributions to our social media outlets, writing blog posts, research updates, and being involved in future events.

EVENTS CALENDAR:

AGM: 12-13 June 2014:

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Location: University of Ottawa, Ottawa

Date: 12-13 June

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER @geothinkca, tweet with #geothink

Or email us: geothink.ca@gmail.com