

# Blogging the City: Research, Collaboration, and Engagement in Urban E-Planning. Critical Notes from a Conference

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## ABSTRACT

*Academic blogging has typically been a form of digital scholarship that is under-utilized in academia. Although there are both costs and benefits to blogging at different stages in an academic's career, blogs can provide a rewarding platform for bringing research and academic perspectives to a wide-reaching and broader audience. This note explores the different experiences of each of the co-authors in terms of using blogs for their scholarly communication. The experiences and lessons gained are of particular relevance to urban planners, sociologists, and anthropologists, who study the social, economic, and historical elements of the city. The findings suggest that the motivations and approaches of scholarly blogging are diverse but overall add value to the academic community. Moreover, each testimony in this note provides examples of the benefits of blogging for research, collaboration, and engagement.*

*Keywords:* Academia, Blogging, History, Scholarly Communication, Social Media, Tenure

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media have transformed how scholars in all disciplines share ideas, consult and collaborate with colleagues, and disseminate their research findings (Bonetta, 2007; Quan-Haase, 2012). Not all academics, however, are embracing the move toward digital communication

with the same enthusiasm. Some argue that established, traditional means of publishing—via print books or journals—are more meaningful and allow for better quality control than digital counterparts (Hurt & Yin, 2006).

Despite these criticisms many academics are utilizing social media for connecting with collaborators and students, discussing important

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topics, obtaining feedback, and disseminating their research findings. In a widely cited blog Dave Parry, Chair of Communication and Digital Media at Saint Joseph's University, argues that social media has become an essential part of scholarship "[n]ot because social media is the only way to do digital scholarship, but because...social media is the only way to do scholarship period" (Parry, 2010, para. 14). This opinion is widely shared by social media advocates. They see these tools as playing a central role in their scholarly practice—not only as a means to connect to other scholars but, rather, as a means of "networking across sectors throughout the entire research process" (Sprain, Endres, & Petersen, 2010, p. 443).

There is no single definition of the term social media. A wide range of different tools are aggregated under its rubric, including microblogging, blogs, social networking sites, and video sharing and streaming websites (Hogan and Quan-Haase, 2010). Despite this proliferation in social media tools, blogs have perhaps played the most central role in scholarly practice. Most scholarly writing on academic blogs notes that academic blogging is a distinctly different form of communication than traditional academic writing. For instance, blogging historian Juan Cole (2011, p. 666) writes:

*I consider blogging to be a genre of writing, which can be endowed with academic attributes, even if it is not like the genre of the academic article. A blog entry is intended to intervene in a debate raging in the blogosphere, and it is best if it is dashed off quickly, incorporating as much original thinking and analysis as possible, and based on the best information, given the constraints of immediacy.*

One of the most comprehensive reports on blogging, conducted by Nielsen Reports in 2011, shows that there are more than 181 million blogs on the Internet (Nielsen Online Reports, 2012). The same study estimates that 6.7 million users publish blogs on blogging platforms and another 12 million publish blogs on social media platforms (Nielsen, 2012).

While blogging has often been dismissed as a pastime activity for teens, in recent years this perception has certainly changed. A report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010) shows that between 2006 and 2010, blogging has moved away from being a medium primarily utilized by teens for self-expression toward a tool for exchanging credible, accurate, and current information among all age groups (Scale & Quan-Haase, in press).

Moreover, academic blogging is distinct from other kinds of blogging. While the content of academic blogs varies from discipline to discipline, three common benefits can be seen across academic blogging as a whole. These are (1) interactive communication; (2) timeliness and personal tone; and (3) broad dissemination of research results.

*Interactive communication.* Blogs, unlike print books and journals, allow for interactive means of engaging with a wider readership. Most blogs allow readers to add comments, and many blogs feature exchanges between readers and blog authors. Kim and Abbas (2010) in their study of Internet use in academic libraries refer to blogs as a "user-initiated knowledge function" permitting both blogger and reader to share knowledge. The authors note that blogs excel at making communication between blogger and reader a two-way exchange, such that 65% of the academic libraries they surveyed use blogging as a form of knowledge exchange. Perhaps most importantly, blogs allow for immediate feedback and for the readership to add not only their opinions, but also original content in the form of data, images, or text; resources in the form of URLs, PDFs, and JPEGs; and additional information on an object, person, or event.

*Timeliness and personal tone.* Blogs are perceived as a supplemental means of publishing academic work and not necessarily as a substitute. There are two reasons why blogs are seen as supplemental and advantageous. First, blogs are timely. There are no delays in the publishing process as is the case with print books and journal articles. This is an important advantage, especially in fields where knowledge

becomes obsolete quickly and where publication delays can span years. Secondly, many scholars note that the informal writing style of academic blogging differs from traditional academic writing in a way that makes ideas more accessible. Heather Cox Richardson (2013) believes academic blogging helps her “distill” complex ideas, allowing her to better communicate them to a wider public. Since many academic blogs have larger and more diverse readerships than scholarly publications, a number of academics feel that this wider audience produces an information version of peer-review that opens their work to public comment and critique (Cohen, 2006; Cole, 2011; Kaufman, 2007; Lindgren, 2006).

*Broad dissemination of research results.* Academics are using blogs to disseminate their research to a wider audience. This includes not only academics in related fields, but also the general public who may have an interest in the data or findings. Cohen states that “[w]riting a blog lets you reach out to an enormous audience beyond academia. Some professors may not want that audience, but I believe it’s part of our duty as teachers, experts, and public servants. It’s great that the medium of the web has come along to enable that communication at low cost” (Cohen, 2006). This move is, for instance, reflected in the call put forward by The Society for American Archaeology to encourage its members to blog about their work. Similarly, Lynn Goldstein, the director of Michigan State University’s Campus Archaeology Program (CAP), has also discussed the importance of blogging to their academic program. She writes that all CAP students are required to blog about their work for the purpose of gaining access to a variety of different publics—academic and non-academic (Meyers, 2011). In addition, many see blogging as working hand in hand with traditional publishing and not in opposition. Lindgren (2006) notes that “Probably the most important contribution of blogging to legal scholarship is informing readers both inside and outside the legal academy of recent work published in a law review or posted to

a website service, such as the Social Science Research Network (SSRN).”

Despite the many benefits of blogging the genre brings some risks. For instance, Goldstein points out that inexperienced bloggers, such as students, may risk offending groups within these publics by sharing sensitive cultural materials (Meyers, 2011). Hurt and Yin (2006) suggest that risks can be particularly acute for pre-tenured scholars if they transmit inaccurate information that has not been properly peer-reviewed. They further note that blogging is not a part of the three primary categories commonly employed to evaluate tenure candidates (i.e. print publications, teaching, and service), and that it may take time away from these primary activities. Vivienne Raper (2011), while more supportive of academic blogging than Hurt and Yin (2006), shares their opinion that blogging can be detrimental to one’s academic career. She notes that some institutions will value blogs that support academic activities toward tenure and promotion, but that most will see blogging as a “harmless hobby.”

Still, many academics, particularly those in historical fields, value blogging. The Canadian website *Active History* (<http://activehistory.ca>) encourages historians to publically blog about their research with the following mission statement: “We seek a practice of history that emphasizes collegiality, builds community among active historians and other members of communities, and recognizes the public responsibilities of the historian.” Heather Cox Richardson writes that despite the perceived risks associated with academic blogging, “Blogging lets you develop a sense of humor in your writing. Hell, it encourages you to. And that is maybe the key to why blogging and tweeting are good for the historian’s craft. They’re fun” (Richardson, 2013).

Thus blogging, like any form of communication, offers specific possibilities and drawbacks. For many academics, blogging provides a platform to hone academic writing and to communicate with a larger public. While blogging has the possibility to offend and may not further one’s academic career, for many

scholars the potential drawbacks of blogging are greatly outweighed by its benefits. The rest of this paper discusses these benefits as framed by each of our co-authors, written in their first-person voice. All of these scholars participated in a session called “Scholarship Blogging: What? Why?” organized by Pierre Clavel for the 2013 meetings of the Society for American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH) held in Toronto. Dean Saitta chaired the session and Anabel Quan-Hasse served as discussant. Saitta and Quan-Hasse teamed up to collect and synthesize the session contributions for this paper.

## **PIERRE CLAVEL: PROGRESSIVECITIES.ORG**

Blogging is given purpose by the blog’s content. [www.Progressivecities.org](http://www.Progressivecities.org) starts from research and writing about “progressive” neighborhood planning in American cities, especially where it concerns the redistribution of resources to poor neighborhoods and the opening of city halls to wider public participation. It aims to produce and preserve an archived collection that can be used by scholars and activists alike.

### **The Collection**

In 2004 I was anticipating five years of half-time work, then retirement. I had ten boxes of documents and interview transcripts from writing about progressive cities like Berkeley, Hartford, Cleveland, Santa Monica, and Burlington; later Chicago and Boston. I found that the Cornell Library’s archives, officially the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections (RMC), would take them as part of its already large planning collection (papers of some 150-200 planners). I named it thematically, as the “Progressive Cities and Neighborhood Planning” collection. I sent them the boxes, and by 2005 we had a nice collection. It grew substantially over time as other people gave materials.

At one point an archivist — Virginia Krumholz in Cleveland — argued that it was wrong to collect documents and bring them

to Cornell. Rather, it was better that they stay in the city where they were created. I was persuaded of this, and tried to promote local archives. In 2006 one of our students, Crystal Launder, organized a trip to Burlington where several students collected reports and other materials and, after making copies, we gave a box of these to their library. There was a big effort in Berkeley in 2009-10 when Kathryn Kasch and later Karen Westmont organized meetings for six months until they suspended operations. I also tried to get something started in Binghamton, with no result. This was — in contrast to focusing single-mindedly on our collection and research — reaching out.

### **Website and Blog**

The collection has been terrific for the scholars already focused on the topic, and there is a nicely designed catalogue on the library website (<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA03414.html>). However, we wanted to supplement the catalogue with brief descriptions of the cities, samples of documents, and commentary. That was the reason we put together the Progressive Cities website. This led us eventually to install the blogging feature on the site. We sought to include a series of short essays commenting on the whole project, and to invite participation more broadly. The website has two main sections: the “Blog” and “The Project.” There are short sections on “The Collection,” and “Bibliography.” We subsequently added “Contributors and Contact,” a section that is about how people in different places can work on their own archives, and with contact addresses for people in each city. We only had 2-3 people listed, but hoped to add others in each city covered by the collection. At one point we added this paragraph:

*I would like to see people work on this website from their own places and perhaps with special angles that cut across places. What might these be? Initially, take a look at the website and see if this is something you fit with, could see doing. Think about it — see if it appeals to you and you*

*have time. Look at the CONTACT page and see who is listed there. Write us and we can talk about it. I'd like to get about six other people involved in this website and project, so I'll see what I can do over the next few months.*

## **Outreach is Difficult, But Worth It**

Because the *Progressive Cities* website originated from a preservation effort, I developed more of a focus on the historical material than on current survivals and implications. However, this created a conflict with the desire to reach out: who, other than the occasional scholar, will be interested in these archives at Cornell, or the website?

Progress was slow for generating interest and collections in the cities. But Virginia Krumholz's idea bore fruit in another way: it began to generate interaction with scholars and activists in the cities we studied. The blog was potentially a way to sustain such interaction. While I found the blog a convenient place to write commentary on the site in general, it was hard to get a response. I tried to touch on topics that I thought people in our cities would find interesting and worth responding to. Here I ran into a problem: it was hard to find people that were interested in the topic, including in the cities I had written about. I encountered many vague memories, while others said they were burned out from the conflict that had been daily fare when they were active.

On the other hand, new potentials began to come from new places and people. A South African research team began collecting oral histories from "Anti-Apartheid Planners who had hoped to implement reforms in Johannesburg. A number of cities in the U.S. were considering the use of eminent domain to relieve "underwater" mortgages that were depleting tax bases and slowing recovery from the 2008-2010 recession. On many fronts activists were finding traction for arguments and devices to combat recession at state and local levels. Perhaps by enlisting these activists as bloggers, we can contribute historical depth to their struggles. Many nations now wonder about increasing

income inequality, but the cities found ways to attack the problem. The collection and blog can reinforce current efforts as they emerge, and increase consciousness at the top.

The collection is also important because it provides a focus and boundaries for the project as a whole. People want to know: What is the "progressive city"? I think the best answer is the focus on inequality, tied to a participatory opening of government. This has much to do with neighborhood housing issues but other things as well: rent control transferred millions to renters in Santa Monica; Burlington's support of land trusts helped create a situation where 17 percent of the housing stock was "permanently affordable, i.e. protected from market fluctuations. In the 1980s, Boston enacted "linkage" fees on real estate developers, supporting an affordable housing trust fund. Chicago took a series of steps to save relatively high paying manufacturing jobs.

These collections required a special focus because progressive city activists worked against mainstream institutions and opinion. They won elections that gave a mandate to redistributive measures, but implementation encountered strong resistance and conflict. In Chicago, Harold Washington encountered two years of "council wars" from a city council majority that fought on racial grounds, but also saw threats in diversion of resources from downtown office construction to neighborhood jobs goals. Boston developers argued the city would kill off a downtown office construction boom if it enacted linkage. It seemed important to collect documents and interview testimony focused around these redistributive issues; mainstream opinion would take care of the other side.

Archivists were allies in these efforts. I noticed a potential division of labor: libraries and archivists represented a whole new world: very professional, terrific at preservation, such that there could be a complementary function. My co-researchers and I provided a focused set of collections that had thematic coherence, while fitting nicely within a much broader set of planning collections and documents. We began to involve RMC in an outreach function. We had

in the collection a set of “readers” put together by the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies in 1975 and 1976. This included 130 short reports, internal memos, policy ideas, news reports, and legislation collected from activists who had gotten into local and state governments and had organized for purposes of sharing ideas. We thought that by putting these online they would attract attention to the larger collection, making it more useful. We researched copyrights, scanned the documents, and got clearance for the great majority of the items (many were in the “public domain” in any case). The items went online through E-commons at the beginning of 2012.

## **CHRISTOPHER LEO: CHRISTOPHERLEO.COM**

### **Filling a Niche that Academia Ignores**

Before I went to graduate school, I spent some three years working for a series of daily newspapers. I was only 22 years old when I started, and I loved the work. Being a newspaper reporter gave me a license to pick up the phone and ask anyone any question that interested me. In those three years, I worked a number of beats: business and labour in Marshalltown, Iowa; education in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and in York, Pennsylvania – at the late *Gazette and Daily*, reputedly the only left-wing daily in the United States – city hall and the courthouse. As a young journalist, I had opportunities that young people rarely enjoy. I became acquainted with bank officials, the president of a manufacturing corporation, labor leaders, judges, city officials, and prominent lawyers. It was fascinating learning about the worlds they inhabited and, through them, gaining a better understanding of business, politics, and law.

As time went on, however, I began to chafe at the daily midnight deadline. On most working days, I had an hour or two to research a “story” – a newspaper article – and write it. After that, it was on to the next piece. I became increasingly conscious of the fact that I was just

scratching the surface of each issue I researched and I wanted go deeper.

So I applied for graduate school, got accepted to political science and political economy programs at a number of universities, and quit the *Gazette*. I liked graduate school even better than newspaper work, but nothing is perfect. I loved researching African politics and city politics, my chosen areas of concentration, but as I began publishing my research, it became clear to me that I was missing something I had taken for granted as a newspaperman: a readership. The bleak reality of academic publishing is that most of us get very few readers. Most of our readers are the same few people we meet at conferences, plus our students – many of whom would not have read what we wrote had we not assigned it to them. Then, a decade or two ago, the Internet changed everything. By then I was a senior academic and secure enough to be able to try something unconventional without having to fear career death.

Combining an academic research career with a few hours a week devoted to blogging has allowed me to scratch my journalism itch – the unfulfilled desire to go deeper – while addressing my dissatisfaction, as an academic, with the inability to reach more than a few readers. Blogging is a wonderful opportunity for academics to fill a niche that conventional academic writing ignores. Academic journals are full of facts and ideas that are bound to be interesting to many non-academics, but that potential readership only rarely delves into journal articles or monographs, because from a layperson’s point of view, academics take forever to get to the point. Interesting facts or ideas that emerge from academic research cannot be laid out the way journalistic research is, for very good reasons. A body of academic findings must be placed in a theoretical context and an academic article or book must set out explicitly how the findings in question are related to the literature. Theory and literature reviews are unlikely to be perceived by a non-academic as desirable reading material.

Blogging allows us to gather the interesting things we have learned in our academic

research, strip them of theoretical discussions and literature reviews, and lay them out for a wider readership. This is not only an interesting and satisfying thing to do, but it is also a potentially important asset for academia as a whole. Although we live in the wealthiest society in world history, attempts to allocate some of those vast resources to public purposes face heavy resistance. Blogging gives us an opportunity, by presenting our findings to the public at large, to demonstrate that the resources universities command are valuable to society.

### **Christopherleo.com: An Overview and Some Samples**

My blog consists of two parts: short articles that deal with research findings and commentary on those articles. A column entitled “The Passing Scene” contains short entries about interesting material I encounter daily in my research and reading, as well as links to that material. Among the issues I’ve addressed in my blog:

- A 2007 blog entry, in an earlier iteration of my blog, documented the techniques a developer used to get city council to agree to substantial and ultimately unjustifiable government subsidies for a major downtown development. Such techniques are widely used and it is important for participants in or observers of local politics understand them.
- Another blog entry showed how city council was misled into agreeing to a bridge project that turned out to be far more expensive than promised.
- In a comparative study of housing and homelessness in three Canadian cities, my research assistants and I showed why a federal government program that made sense in Vancouver was ill suited to Winnipeg and Saint John, New Brunswick, and what that, in turn, teaches us about differences among cities.
- In recent years, in a later iteration of my blog, I’ve found myself devoting more attention to commentary on current affairs.

Thus in November 2013, I offered some critical comments on the urban expansion policies that were being pursued by the City of Winnipeg. A few months earlier, I commented critically on the way the city government communicates (or rather fails to communicate) with its constituents.

### **Academic Blogs and Academia**

Blogging is a service senior academics can perform without worrying unduly about career consequences. Junior academics need to be more careful. If you can write quickly and well, so that periodic blogs don’t take away much of the time you need for career-building activities, you might be able to blog without paying a significant career penalty. If not, you may well want to wait until you’ve reached a less vulnerable career stage.

A more fundamental solution to the time-allocation problem is the formal recognition of blogs containing serious academic findings or discussions as legitimate career activities. On no account should blogs be credited equally with refereed research, but in my view, it would be reasonable to count them the way we count community service, or non-refereed publications. That will not happen overnight. My attempts before I retired to make a similar case in departmental meetings fell on deaf ears. Academia is a cumbersome battleship that turns slowly. However, when and if it does turn in a direction more favorable to blogging, the benefits will soon become apparent.

### **KENNETH FOX: MERTON-COLUMBIAPROJECT.COM**

“Website” better describes what I am posting online than “blog.” I am making my project public while research and writing are in progress. When the project appeared relevant to our SACRPH conference topic, I posted discussion of how the two were related, including original documents of interest. In this intermediate form I am making material available that can be

referenced and linked, as so much material on *Wikipedia* is linked to websites. The relationship of evolving sociological theory of the 1940s, and city planning of the 1940s and prior, was not one I had been thinking about, so relating the two has been very valuable for me. I expect it will be valuable for planning history of the 40s and following. While sociologists were reading planning theory and news, planners were undoubtedly reading sociology. If my site becomes known to planning historians, I want to know who they may be, and to correspond if they wish. Robert Merton is fairly unique in this context. A Columbia sociologist of the next generation, Herbert Gans, was even more involved with planning and published frequently in planning journals. Gans concerned himself with planning “ideology”, a tendentious point of view.

Blogging creates a new relationship with researchers, professionals and activists. Its mutual informality and trust encourages publicizing discoveries of interest mid-course in the project. Since our SACRPH presentation I have discovered that Merton and some associates undertook a major study of two planned communities of the 1940s: Addison Terrace within the city of Pittsburgh, and Winfield Park in central New Jersey. This research was underwritten by the Fred L. Lavanburg Foundation, of which Clarence Stein was one of the trustees. The Foundation was established in 1927 to develop ways that planned housing could ameliorate racial discrimination, juvenile delinquency and poverty. The results of the surveys of the two communities were never published, which accounts for the lack of knowledge about it among both planners and sociologists. My discussion of this discovery in blog form on the website will hopefully generate responses from readers with additional knowledge of Merton’s work on this.

There are pitfalls to be aware of in publicizing projects such as mine, some fairly serious. While Pierre Clavel’s enterprise includes manuscript repositories he is involved in managing, much of my research thus far has been in the Robert Merton Papers housed at Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Rights to the material are controlled by a Merton literary estate and by the library. I am posting selected documents of theirs on my site. Each document must be reviewed and permission granted. The Estate and the Library are concerned that online availability will undermine their control. Any heightened risk requires their time and attention. If sites such as mine are to flourish, as I hope they will, libraries will need to determine how to allocate scarce staff time and resources.

Another danger is the effect of online posting on subsequent publication, especially of monograph books. Despite all the technical advances of recent decades, scholarly book production remains extremely expensive. University presses have become concerned that prior online availability of an author’s ideas will reduce sales. Yet withholding new discovery, theorizing, analysis and argument cannot be the solution. Given that the vast majority of scholarly monographs are purchased by libraries progress may come through new relationships between scholars, publishers, libraries, and audiences. *Wikipedia* is one instance of unexpected, remarkable developments. *Wikipedia* contributors must conform to a set of requirements, yet contributions remain anonymous. This has not deterred participation however. I have become qualified as a *Wikipedia* contributor, which is not difficult, but I have not found time to provide any contributions.

Here are a few words in closing about fear. One must trust web hosting enterprises that exist to be profitable. Having dealt with two thus far I have found them surprisingly helpful with technical details. They also offer methods of promotion, such as how to make your site rank high on Google searches. I have been cautious so far. I was also afraid that negative effects might follow from posting scanned documents, leading the Estate and the Library to withhold further permissions. So far, I have cultivated a spirit of partnership and they have responded positively. I believe cooperation of this sort is going to be central to further progress. Protective as they can be, literary estates and manuscript libraries want their treasures to be

known and appreciated. We, the site founders and bloggers, can become their best new allies in this enterprise.

## LADALE WINLING: URBANOASIS.COM

Blogging by scholars can de-center the traditional emphasis among historians on published research while simultaneously producing a new creative process that yields greater productivity, new outlets, and facilitates connections to a wider array of sources and disciplinary influences. In short, blogging can make better historians by undermining and reordering traditional scholarly processes. Scholars such as William Turkel have written on ways to navigate “the infinite archive,” the increasing amounts of literature, data, and sources informing historical research; blogging serves as a kind of infinite notepad or personal press for discussing and disseminating research.

My blogging project at [www.urbanoasis.org](http://www.urbanoasis.org) mirrors my own professional and scholarly development. Created before I had earned any graduate degrees, the site and blog’s genre would best be considered “placeblogging” rather than history blogging. This effort took the contemporary built environment and development politics of my local communities—the college towns of Kalamazoo and Ann Arbor, Michigan—as starting points necessitating historical inquiry for context and prompted a search for eclectic sources in open, interactive discussion with a local blogging community. In Ann Arbor, in particular, the community news blog *Arbor Update* (formerly [www.arborupdate.com](http://www.arborupdate.com)) and the local commentary site Ann Arbor is Overrated (formerly [www.annarborisoverrated.com](http://www.annarborisoverrated.com)), both now defunct, provided a rich foundation with robust readership to the local blogging community.

As I proceeded through my historical training, blogging and scholarly productivity evolved hand in hand in an idiosyncratic fashion. Where blog posts for the non-historian may start with a news tidbit from the press, a personal anecdote, or another blogger’s prompting, scholarly blogging is just as likely to start with a discovery

from an archive, whether digital or analog. As research became central to my graduate career and my historian’s mentality, discussion of research and writing output became central to my professional life. Blogging before graduate research had helped me create a community for feedback and had set me on a writing schedule—a day or a week without a post was a day I would find no readers and would showcase no research discoveries. A day that I could bash out a half-formed idea in a blog post was a day that prepared me to refine and incorporate that idea into the sub-argument of an article, chapter, or review. Thus, the regularity of blogging helped me become a more productive historical writer and the informality of blogging, often a point of criticism, helped keep me from becoming too much of a perfectionist. Many colleagues have noted that time spent writing for the web took away from other types of writing. I came to believe that a day that I was too busy to write a blog post was a day that I was simply too busy. What Friedrich Nietzsche called the “windless calm of the soul,” boredom even, that enabled productive writing and thinking was impossible in a day chockablock with meetings and errands. Blogging was never the obstacle to writing—taking on too much other work always was.

As Pierre Clavel writes of his *Progressive Cities* project, the historians’ website and blog allow for both the creation and discussion of digital materials—for historians to both draw upon and contribute to the infinite archive. Blogging offers the opportunities to both highlight existing historical materials in digital archives and to create and showcase one’s own digital objects and sources (both born-digital and digitized analog sources). One of my efforts has been to digitize and host city security maps from the Home Ownership Loan Corporation. This New Deal program, created to help rebuild the housing market during the Depression by financing and guaranteeing home mortgages, institutionalized the practice of “redlining” by rating neighborhoods with African Americans, Jews, and immigrants as risky investments. Through several trips to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland where the maps are

housed, I have collected several dozen digital maps—the largest single collection available on the web. Scholars and students contact me about these regularly and in discussions on my site I plumb these materials when I am thinking about cities in the 20th century. Like blogging to publication, digitizing and hosting these maps is the first step in a broader digital history project on HOLC currently in the works.

A blog also helps scholars to manage their identity on the web in addition to its productivity and project sandbox functions—in part because of these two other functions. Colleagues, acquaintances, students, long lost relatives, and prospective employers will search for and find you on the web using Google or another search engine. That is no longer a question. The real question is, what will they find and what role will you play in prioritizing what people find—who manages your identity on the web: you or Google? One could easily start with Dan Cohen's tips on search engine optimization from way back in 2006 to choose an appropriate domain name and work to get authoritative links by creating high-quality, compelling content on your blog. But the most important step is to first decide that taking ownership of your online identity and participating in this digital culture is a worthwhile, even a necessary venture. Once a scholar makes that decision, a whole array of options on what to do next cascades out in front of her—choosing to pursue a highly designed web site, emphasizing social media, or simply sticking to basic writing on the web via a blog. Regardless of the choice, deciding to participate in creation of digital content through a platform like blogging ensures that your activities rise to the top of what the world finds out about you when it searches for you on the web.

## **DEAN SAITTA: INTERCULTURALURBANISM. COM**

It was a pleasure for me to chair the Scholarship Blogging session in Toronto that produced the collaboration that led to this paper. I am one of those Society for American Archaeology

members, mentioned earlier, who has embraced blogging as a way to reach a wider public. My blog *Intercultural Urbanism* is, in many ways, a logical outgrowth of my training as an archaeologist. Archaeologists study the material remains of human societies. It has become commonplace for archaeologists to view cities as the most significant cultural artifact produced by human beings, one that reflects and reproduces human relationships, values, and aspirations. In other words, the city is a receptacle of cultural meaning (Kostof, 1991). Thus, the urban built environment can either enhance or erode the commitments that people make to the places where they live and, of course, the commitments they make to each other.

My blog explores the territory where culture, public policy, urban design, and built environment intersect. It takes stock of the cultural values that shape how ethnically diverse groups of citizens create, use, and respond to the urban built environment. It is predicated on the notion that the more sensitive that urban designers, planners, architects, and developers are to the role that culture plays in how people interact with landscape and built space—especially in today's increasingly diverse urban communities—the better the chances for building neighborhoods and cities that are more inclusive and environmentally and culturally sustainable. The formulation is inspired by the work of Phil Wood and Charles Landry on the *Intercultural City* (Wood & Landry, 2008), Ash Amin on the *Good City* (2006), Leonie Sandercock on *Cosmopolis* (2003), Chase, Crawford and Kaliski (2008) on *Everyday Urbanism*, and many others.

I took to blogging in 2011 because I have always admired scholars who write for the general public (e.g., see Saitta, 2003). Having been part of the typical scholarly grind for the first 23 years of my career—writing for academic journals, edited volumes, and other print publications—the blog has been a perfect outlet for my late career interest in interdisciplinary and publicly engaged scholarship. These aspects of academic work are not always rewarded by the traditional disciplines. Blogging provides an opportunity to range widely across archaeology, anthropology, history, geography,

sociology, ecology, evolutionary science, art, architecture, literature, communication, business, and other fields. It offers an opportunity to export anthropological knowledge to these other scholarly domains and to explore ways of thinking that are *transdisciplinary* in nature. Writing regularly for *Intercultural Urbanism* has both liberated and sharpened my thinking about the city. It has also produced thousands of words and over a hundred essays—already in pretty good substantive and grammatical shape—that I plan to eventually merge into a monograph. Thus, the blog is not only the most fun I have had writing as an academic, but it is also setting me up to complete a more traditional academic project down the road.

Perhaps most importantly, the blog has created multiple opportunities to connect with people in diverse areas of urban research, policy-making, and practice. The invitation to chair the Scholarship Blogging session at SACRPH—a professional meeting that I had never before attended—was one such opportunity. In 2012 my blog drew the attention of leaders at the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities program, which produced a request for participation in an international seminar on culturally conscious urban placemaking. As a consequence, connections were made with individual scholars whose work, up to now, I have only admired from afar. In late 2013 the website *Sustainable Cities Collective* began re-posting some of my essays, and in so doing has given them much wider exposure. In 2014 I was invited to be a regular blogger for the public interest urban planning and design website *Planetizen*. Writing for *Planetizen* has doubled the number of daily visits to *interculturalurbanism.com*. None of this would have happened if I had limited myself to traditional forms of writing within my particular academic discipline.

My teaching has also benefitted from my blogging. Echoing Christopher Leo, blogging has helped me better focus what I do with students in the classroom. All of the major assignments in my course on the anthropology of the city send students into the community to do

original research on various aspects of development in Denver. I will sometimes synthesize and report the results of this work on the blog, something that I pitch as faculty-student co-production of knowledge. To the extent that the urban planning profession wants to know what today’s population of educated young adults (i.e., the “Millennials”) desire in urban living, several of these essays have been re-posted to other urbanist websites. Students appreciate this attention; several have commented to me that my course-based blogging gives them a sense that their thinking and writing about the city really matters beyond the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

The Scholarship Blogging session at the SACRPH conference demonstrated that there is no single best way to do academic blogging. Each of the presenters had different goals and approach. The session produced some consensus about advantages and drawbacks. Still, there was strong agreement about the overriding virtues of scholarly blogging. Blogging is a perfect medium for collecting and preserving scholarly knowledge about the city, especially knowledge that, for whatever reason, has been purposely forgotten or simply fallen between the cracks. It allows dissemination of such work to a broader audience. It is an excellent way for scholars to build up a personal archive of work. Blogging can invigorate a scholar’s writing and boost their productivity. It allows individual scholars to create, manage, and actively shape their online identity; that is, to literally write themselves into being (Sundén, 2003). Blogging also has pedagogical utility by providing reading material for classes and facilitating faculty-student co-production of knowledge. Thus, the question for scholars is not whether to blog, but rather, how to find the right balance between traditional forms of writing and other forms of digital engagement.

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