Passive viewers or active audiences: The complexity of screen infrastructure integration in public spaces

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Presentation Method. I would like to:

i. present in person (with/without a written paper)

Abstract (300 words):
Visions of screens proliferating across the city carry futuristic connotations. Think the floating screens in Blade Runner and the Fifth Element. A projection of the city to come; often dystopian visions of pacified populations, no longer engaged publics but passive audiences. However at the beginning of the 21st century, large screens and projections in public spaces are become increasingly common tools in urban renewal projects. These technologies are being integrated into public spaces with the aim of fostering public participation and engagement.

Recent work in the emerging field of civic communication highlights the growing interest from government and urban planners in creating active, engaging and diverse public
spaces, and how technology is being deployed to achieve these ambitions. This paper explores the emergence of large screens and projections as tools for public participation and engagement, and also highlights the complexity of integrating technology into existing spatial, cultural and economic paradigms of a city. Two case studies are employed to illustrate this argument; a government-led urban renewal project in Dandenong, Australia where a large screen has been integrated into a public square, and a community organised projection festival in Fitzroy, Australia. These contrasting case studies demonstrate how different spatial, social, economic and institutional conditions influence how these technologies are deployed and utilised in public spaces.

Screens are not necessarily the harbingers of dystopian futures that have been projected in our collective cultural heritage. However the ability of such projects to cultivate new modes of publicness are only possible under specific conditions. By taking a holistic view of infrastructure placement and integration that considers design imperatives, as well as local cultural practices, implementation and governance arrangements, we can begin to consider when and how integration of screen technologies can best be utilised for new forms of public participation and civic communication.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Stephanie Hanon is a PhD candidate with the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. She is also a member of the Research Unit in Public Cultures Graduate Academy at The University of Melbourne. Her research is examining how media infrastructure, specifically large screens and projections, are affecting the perceptions and experience of public space. This involves empirical research at two public spaces in Melbourne, Dandenong and Gertrude Street. Part of this research, will also seek to provide recommendations to policy makers and industry about how media can be better used to facilitate greater civic engagement and public participation. Stephanie is also a Principal Adviser on Precincts and Cities policy at the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet.