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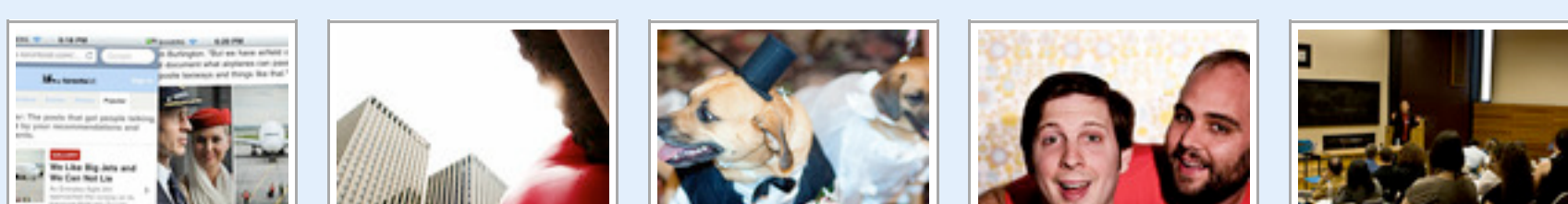
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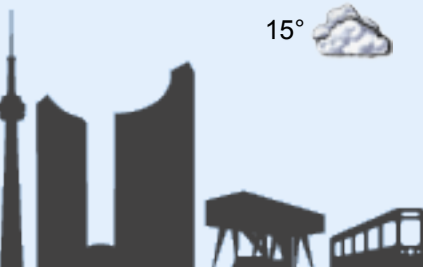


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Minding Toronto's Communication Gap



Haniyeh Khosravi Fard's carpet design that will break the communication void at Bayview Village.

Despite all that Toronto has to offer, it is not a perfect city. Operating under the assumption that Toronto is "unfinished and full of possibility," consulting firm [OpenCity Projects](#) uses bold design in order to create more meaningful experiences for people in the city. Its most recent endeavour, fittingly titled "[Icebreakers](#)," tackles the communication gap between people who live in, work in, and visit Toronto.

To address the void, OpenCity asked third-year industrial design students at OCAD to identify areas of Toronto that they believe lack face-to-face communication and to then create an experience that brings people in those spaces together. Final designs were presented to the OpenCity team and fellow classmates at the end of the winter term, and eleven have since been selected for display in a public showcase (much like 3M's [Scotch tape and Post-it Note competition](#)).



Jenny Soojung's plan for the financial district.

Jenny Soojung's "Throw Your Penny" is one of the praised creations. Focused on the financial district, the idea emerged out of observing people who seemed distracted and rushed while walking through the downtown core. To Soojung's surprise, several on-the-street interviews taught her that many of the people she witnessed also acknowledged the cold downtown atmosphere and wished that the area had more interaction, but did not know how to voice their concerns.

To tackle the problem, Soojung devised a two-part system. Its first component consists of a message box and a bench at the corner of King and Bay: passersby can write suggestions for changes to the downtown core and drop them into the box, and those ideas will be read later by a planning team. The system's second half is donation boxes that will be installed at various locations around the financial district, with money dropped into them being used to realize the suggestions.

Haniyeh Khosravi Fard's "Active-ery" has also been selected for public showing. In contrast to Soojung's downtown system, Fard's design is intended for installation inside of Bayview Village, a shopping centre that she believes is unwelcoming and socially disconnected. To combat that feeling, she created a carpet with kids' games on its surface in order to make the uninviting floor a little more welcoming. Benches will be placed around the carpet's perimeter so that parents and caregivers can sit and chat while their kids play—and, to spice things up, the benches will be created out of a material that is filled with water, so that they sway each time someone sits down or gets up, offering an opportunity for strangers to break the ice.

OpenCity's brief Icebreakers showcase, part of Luminato, took place this past Friday inside of the Luminato Box in Brookfield Place, offering a glimpse of the Toronto that OpenCity envisions. But there is a second, bigger showing that opens this Wednesday and will run until June 20 at the [XPACE Cultural Centre](#). There, attendees can read about the nine other designs and examine the models of all eleven creations (which couldn't all be displayed at Luminato because of space restrictions). With a bit of luck, the designs will get strangers to talk to each other at the event, helping to close a communication gap even before they are implemented.

Photos courtesy of [OpenCity Projects](#).

By [Tim Kiladze](#) in [Culture](#), [Events](#) on June 8, 2009 4:00 PM [0 Comments](#) [1 Like](#)

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