

INTRODUCTION

Every day, Americans use enough plastic straws to wrap around the earth 2.5 times (Siniauer, 2017). Plastic enters the environment through careless actions of humans, leachate from landfills, and the fishing industry and causes harm to aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems as well as human health and is nearly impossible to decompose in the environment (Wolchover, 2011). Bans on plastic straws have been put in place in cities across the US, but Palo Alto still has yet to act.

The questions I will be researching include: If this plastic waste is so harmful to ecosystems, why do humans continue to pursue it? In what ways does plastic enter ecosystems and cause harm to organisms? How can policies that reduce the use of plastic straws effectively be put in place in a manner that is both impactful and economically viable?

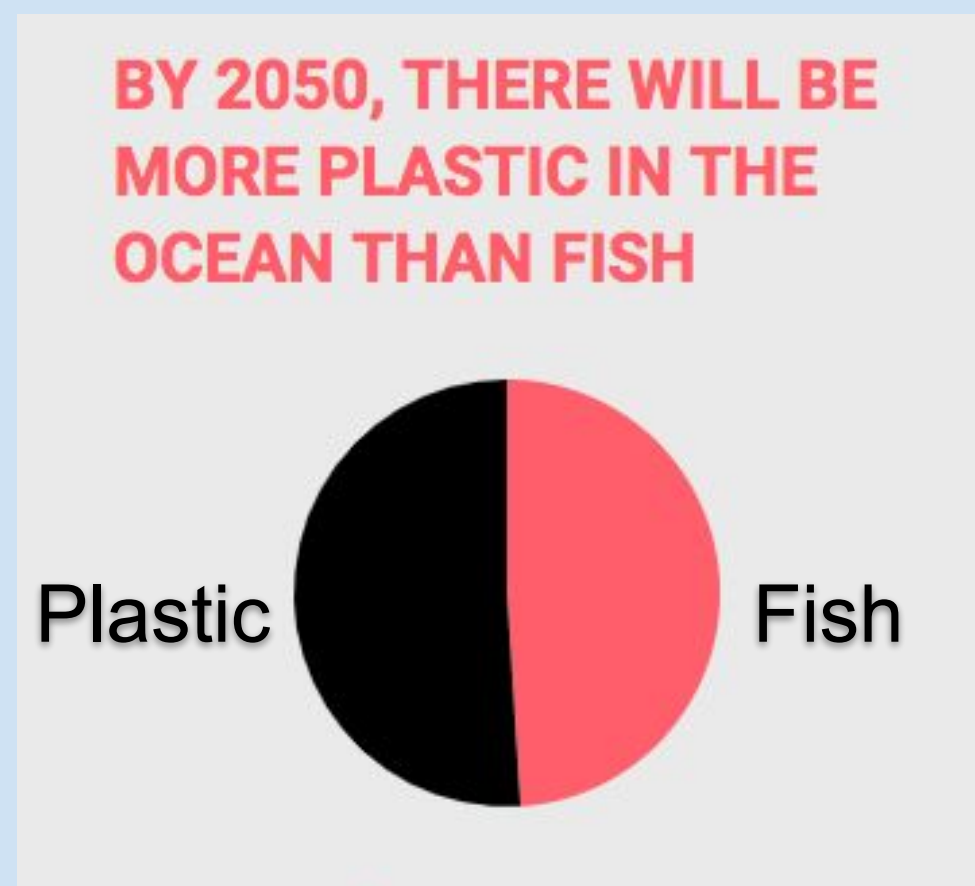


Figure 1. This graphic shows that plastic consumption is an immense problem in the US (Kaplan, 2016).

DATA AND FINDINGS

Why Do We Use Straws?	What Has Been Done?	Next Steps
<p>"straws are extremely important to the elderly."</p> <p>"Whenever I have the flu or something it's kind of one of my go to things."</p> <p>"People don't see straws as a really big thing when compared to the big plastic cups."</p> <p>"My grandchildren like to eat at fast food and if you get a drink you always get a straw"</p> <p>"they [people] think the permanent dishes aren't clean."</p>	<p>"since the plastic bag ban that's gone state of CA now, that there's little to no plastic bag pollution anymore in the bay."</p> <p>"Coronado is not the most liberal city but they were the first city in California to pass it [a straw ban] starting in April of 2018."</p> <p>"I have noticed that at some starbucks, they don't always stick the straw in- they have you do it yourself- so you have that option to say no."</p> <p>"in Carmel and Monterey now, they have to use paper straws."</p>	<p>"Well I would like to support the concept that I think you can move faster than slower these days because of social networking."</p> <p>"get young people aware of just how incredibly wasteful single use items are."</p> <p>"learning that Carmel beat us to the punch is an important feature to get city council's attention"</p> <p>"I think a good way to do it might be to tap into the Palo Alto weekly"</p> <p>"have some merchants in town kind of be leaders on this"</p>

Figure 2. This table includes quotes from my focus group that represent the major topics of discussion. The various questions represent the different participants in my focus group of six leaders in the community.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

Most of the backlash to getting rid of straws comes from a fear of inconvenience. However, one takeaway from the focus group is that if people are educated on the issue, they will be willing to sacrifice their convenience. This has been shown time and time again through action to reduce plastic consumption in cities across the US. For example, Palo Alto's plastic bag ban, which initially received some backlash, is now praised for its efforts and is widely accepted across the city. Therefore, in order to make change, we must promote awareness.

Implications

This study may be publicized to educate people on the effect of plastic straws in the environment. Additionally, strategies for making change mentioned in this project may be used to promote action on this issue and more.

Next Steps

After conducting research, I led an Earth Day event at Paly where students pledged not to use straws in May, I distributed stickers to spread awareness, I spoke at a city council meeting, and I wrote a letter to the editor for the Palo Alto. Community members should write letters to city council and continue to speak up at meetings and opt out of using plastic straws in the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

- ❖ Inquiry Approach: I used action research with the goal of starting a conversation about plastic straws within city council and in the community at large.
- ❖ Data Collection: I held a focus group with community leaders about the relevance of plastic straws in the community and how policy makers and community members should take action.
- ❖ Data Analysis/type: I transcribed and coded my qualitative responses from the focus group. Refer to Figure 2.

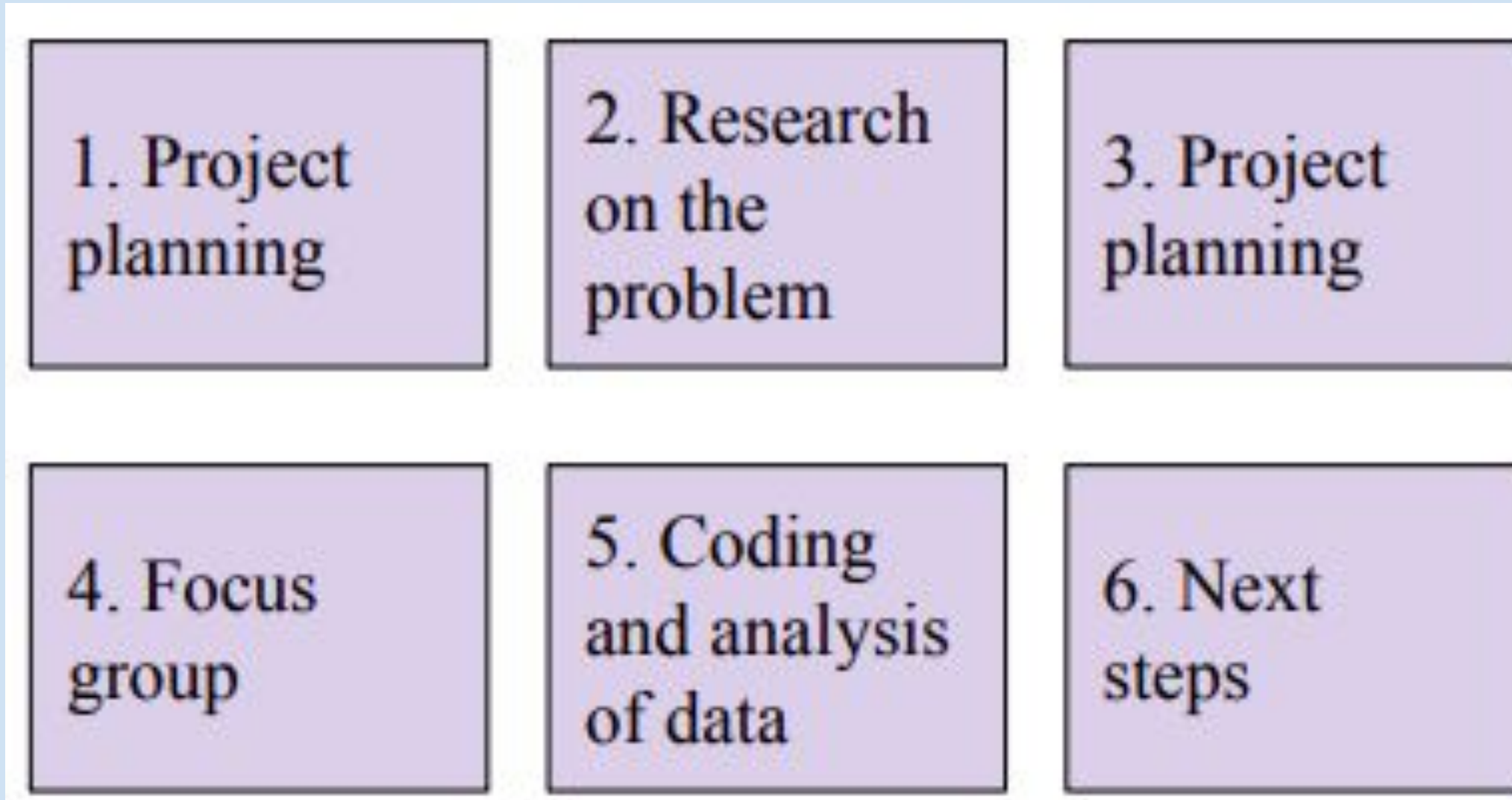


Figure 3. This table shows the steps I took to complete this project

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

1. Why Do We Use Straws?

As shown in figure 2, straws are commonly used in special circumstances, for their convenience and satisfaction, and for the reassurance that the disposable items are sanitary. Additionally, people are unwilling to sacrifice straws because they are not aware of the environmental effects.

2. What Has Been Done?

As described in figure 2, there have been plastic straw bans across the US including in Seattle, Carmel, and Coronado. Additionally, some cafes do not put the straw into your cup for you, but rather give you the option to say no. Many food services are also moving toward more sustainable options such as paper straws.



Figure 4. This image has been used in campaigns to eliminate plastic straws and represents their prevalence in the environment (Fears, 2017).

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