Turning the Post-Industrial City into the Cultural City:
The Case of Toronto's Waterfront

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From films and Hollywood to paintings and Montmartre, the link between place and culture is well established in the popular imagination and in scholarly research (Lloyd 2004; Molotch 2003). The culture we consume often contains the trace of its geographic origins, which can be a valued part of the experience. Likewise, places are heavily shaped by the kinds of culture they produce. Just as Los Angeles makes films, the film industry 'makes' Los Angeles by giving it an identity, contributing to the local economy, and drawing international attention to the city. The Louvre and the Musee d'Orsay do the same for Paris.

In the post-industrial era, regional policymakers have frequently turned to cultural production and consumption in order to create places that are economically and socially viable (Miles and Paddison 2005; Zukin 1995). Unique architecture and design (Julier 2005; Evans 2005), new museums (Shoval and Strom 2009), and arts districts (Mommaas 2004) are just some of the strategies that policymakers hope will create more liveable and productive cities. It is a perspective popularized in books such as Richard Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class* and Charles Landry's *The Creative City*.

However, cultural policies are far from an obvious choice. Their popularity is a recent phenomenon, and their success is still unclear (e.g. Gómez 1998; Evans 2005; Markusen 2006). Additionally, critics have charged that such policies divert attention and money from important social problems such as poverty and inequality (Peck 2005). Given these issues, how do we explain the rise and continued popularity of cultural policies?

In this chapter we address this question by examining the role of culture in the redevelopment of Toronto's central waterfront. Not traditionally known as an international centre of cultural production like Los Angeles or Paris, by the late-1990s Toronto's municipal government had embraced cultural policies with particular zeal. The first decade of the 21st century saw a host of culture-related projects throughout the city from "starchitecture" (Patterson 2012), to "creative districts" (Catungal, Leslie, and Hii 2009), to arts festivals (Grundy and Bourdreau 2008). Even Richard Florida relocated to Toronto to head a government-funded research institution. As a relative latecomer to the culture scene, Toronto offers an illuminating case for understanding the uptake of cultural urbanization strategies.

How did Toronto come to stake so much on cultural policy? We argue that the collapse of the industrial economy and other significant social changes in the late-20th century plunged Toronto into an "identity crisis". As old development policies and existing infrastructure appeared increasingly obsolete, policymakers were forced to grapple with

the question of what kind of city Toronto should be in the 21st century. Amid this crisis, members of the cultural sector provided a convenient solution in the notion of the "cultural city". Steeped in "creative class" discourse (Florida 2002), this new urban planning model offered a vivid depiction of the urban good life characterized by artists' studios, sidewalk cafes, and the like. It was an image that resonated with a growing group of cultural organizations, knowledge workers, and downtown residents who had the capacity to put this vision into practice and codify it in municipal policy – a group that we call the "cultural city consensus".

Despite the success of this group, the cultural city has not received universal support or gone unchallenged. For others in the city, particularly those in the surrounding suburbs, different notions of the good life prevail. Thus, the rise of cultural policy is also a social and political phenomenon dependent not only on its economic appeal, but also on the support of actors with the power to implement it even against opposing visions.

These factors – the identity crisis, the cultural city model, and the consensus behind it – are particularly evident in the decades-long redevelopment of Toronto's central waterfront. Originally planned as an industrial port, by the 1990s the waterfront sat largely vacant. Today it is currently undergoing a dramatic transformation that has seen the rise of condominiums, office buildings serving the knowledge and "creative" economy, theatres, galleries, and even the largest soundstage in North America. Along the way, successive planning regimes cast about for ideas to revitalize the area, often without success or a clear notion of what revitalization would mean. Starting in the late-1990s, "culture" gained momentum as a potential answer, providing a legitimizing concept that appealed to influential organizations and actors both locally and internationally. The story of culture's arrival on Toronto's waterfront provides a lens not only into the rise of cultural policy in Toronto more generally, but also how post-industrial cities around the world are attempting to transform themselves into cultural cities.

Part I. Toronto's 21st Century 'Identity Crisis'

In the three decades leading up to the 21st century, two contradictory trends – rapid social change and stagnant urban development – disrupted existing notions of Toronto's identity and plunged urban planning into a state of ambiguity. Among the social changes was the decline of the industrial sector and its replacement with a rising service and knowledge-based economy (see figures 1 and 2). By 2000, members of the "creative class" had eclipsed the traditional working class. However, this shift also came with increased inequality (Walks 2010), and wealth became geographically divided as gentrification in the core pushed poverty into the formerly middle-income suburbs (Hulchanski 2007).
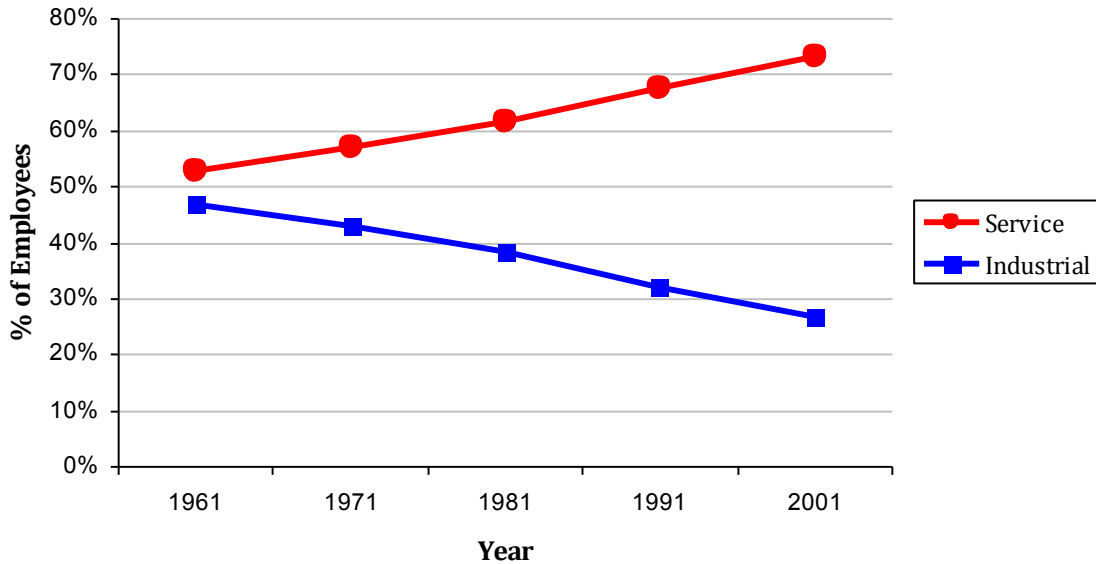
Employment Sector in the Greater Toronto Area

Figure 1: Data is recorded for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) in the Canadian censes for the years listed. The industrial sector includes primary industries, utilities, construction, manufacturing, transportation and storage. The service sector includes as all other listed industries.
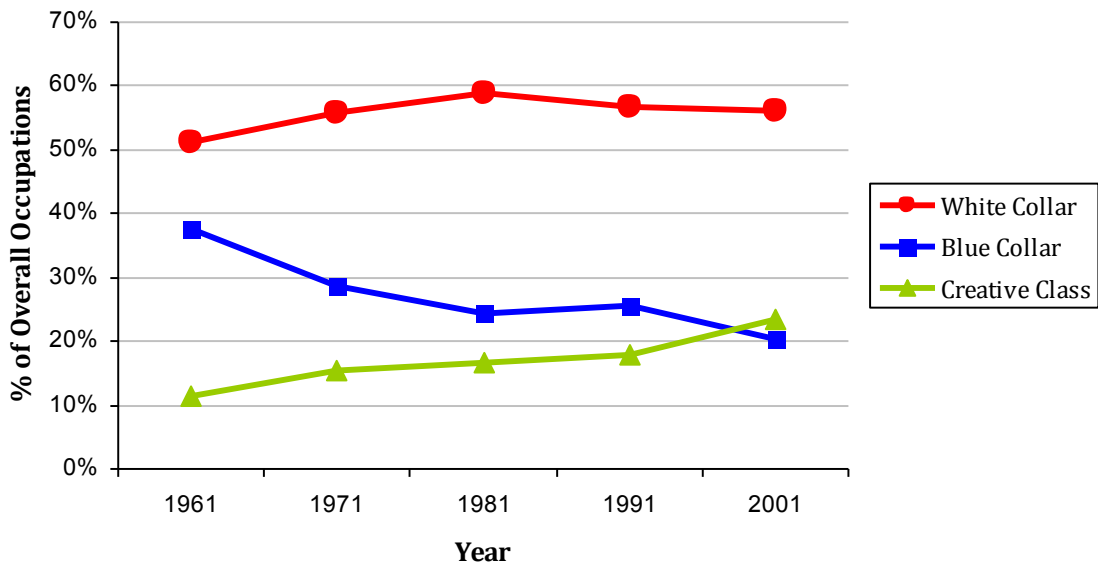
Occupations in the Greater Toronto Area

Figure 2: Data is recorded for the Toronto CMA in the Canadian censes for the years listed. The "creative class" includes occupations in art, culture, and

recreation, and the natural, social and applied sciences. Blue collar occupations include trades, primary industry and manufacturing. White collar occupations are all other listed categories in the census.

Cultural changes were equally dramatic. In the mid-20th century Toronto was known as a conservative city dominated by White, Protestant Tories. Beginning in the late-1960s, successive waves of non-European immigration and the arrival of American war-resisters transformed the city into a hotbed of social liberalism and one of the most ethnically diverse places on the continent (McIsaac 2003). Finally, capping off this period of change, Toronto's municipal government was dissolved in 1998 and amalgamated with its closest suburbs, quadrupling the city's population from 700 000 to 2.4 million and expanding its area from 97 to 630 km^2. Within the new "megacity" urbanites and suburbanites found themselves voting in the same mayoral elections, fighting over the same meagre municipal budget, and forced to decide whose lifestyle and interests should take priority.

In contrast to the dramatic changes occurring to its population, urban development in Toronto was stagnating. Twin recessions in the 1980s and government austerity measures imposed by the federal and provincial governments in the 1990s meant there was little investment in the urban form. The municipal government, occupied by the complications of amalgamation, had neither the time nor the resources to undertake major city-building initiatives.

By the early-2000s the tide slowly began to turn. The new municipal government began to work out its most immediate funding and organizational problems, assisted by renewed investment from the federal and provincial governments. David Miller, a downtown city councillor, was elected mayor in 2003 and undertook an ambitious city-building agenda. Meanwhile, an unprecedented condominium boom drew billions of development dollars into the city.

However, reinvestment in Toronto's built form faced a major obstacle. Given how fast the city had changed and how long it had gone without major city-building projects, there were few obvious precedents to guide new development. The existing urban form, with its industrial waterfront, decaying brutalist buildings, and overloaded transit system, was clearly designed for a city that no longer existed. But what exactly had Toronto become? This "identity crisis" opened up the possibility for new policy models to provide an updated account of the city's economic, cultural, and political characteristics and guidance for city-building in the 21st century.

Part II. The Rise of Cultural Policy and the 'Cultural City Consensus'

During this period a more subtle transformation was occurring as culture moved from the margins to the centre of the city's policy portfolio. Throughout most of the 20th century what little municipal support existed for arts and culture in Toronto was largely the product of fierce lobbying by artists and their wealthy patrons. City Hall typically saw

the arts as "a luxury and a frill which affected the lives of few people and were thought not to be widely available or desired by many" (Silcox 1974:5). Things began to change in the 1960s as dedicated organizations and sustained funding were established, such as the Toronto Arts Council, which was founded in 1964 to distribute arts grants. The Canadian centennial celebrations of 1967 also set off a flurry of publicly-sponsored cultural activities. However, it was not until 1974 that Toronto adopted its first official plan for culture, which set out modest goals such as dedicating 0.25% of Toronto's budget to arts grants and having the city's Convention and Tourist Bureau promote local cultural services to visitors. Within the plan, culture was discursively constructed as a public good that enriched lives, and the primary purpose of cultural policy was to ensure this good was accessible to all Torontonians.

The late-1960s were also a time when culture was becoming a larger part of Toronto's private and non-governmental sector. As in other cities, new social movements emerged that were heavily tied to cultural and artistic expression. Assisted by the influx of American war-resisters, Toronto's hippie movement spawned many associated scenes in music, visual arts, and theatre. Ethnic and sexual minority groups also turned to festivals and parades as a way of seeking recognition and asserting their rights. Though some of these movements were at first seen as threatening to Toronto's political establishment, they soon became entwined with mainstream institutions as artists and organizers began to take advantage of newly available grants.

In the 1980s, cultural policymakers began to recognize the impact that the cultural sector was having on the local economy and arguing that cultural production was now a fundamental part of Toronto's identity (Hendry 1985). By the late-1990s, culture was becoming recast from a public good to an economic development tool. Following international precedents such as Florida (2002) and Landry (2000), concepts like "liveability" and "creativity" now infused policy discourse not only as an end in themselves but also as a strategy for attracting investment and spurring entrepreneurialism (e.g. Toronto Economic Development 2000). Shortly after, Toronto merged its Cultural Services and Economic Development divisions.

In the era when public policy is increasingly conceived through the lens of global economic competition (Kipfer and Keil 2002), this new "cultural city" paradigm helped to shift culture from the margins to the forefront of municipal policy. This shift was further buoyed by the election of Miller, a personal champion of the arts, and the 2005/06 "Live with Culture" campaign, which provided grants and programs designed to promote local cultural organizations (City of Toronto 2005).

As more public funding became available, the cultural sector became better organized and able to put the vision of a cultural city into practice. Soon organizations such as the Toronto Arts Council and Artscape (a non-profit organization dedicated to building and managing artist residences and studios) were participating in a variety of development projects from private condominiums, to public housing, to community parks, and waterfront redevelopment. Joining together artists, cultural organizations, city officials,

real estate developers and others, this "cultural city consensus" took on characteristics akin to an urban regime (Mossberger and Stoker 2001).

Amidst Toronto's identity crisis, the cultural city model provided a new vision that resonated with a growing segment of the population who were also capable of putting it into practice. Culture now became an all-purpose lens through which policymakers viewed issues as diverse as economic prosperity, urban design, and social welfare. As money began to flow back into the city in the 2000s, much of it was heavily guided by the cultural city model. Condominium developers traded public sculptures and gallery space for increased height allowances. The federal and provincial governments dedicated hundreds of millions of dollars to expand Toronto's largest cultural institutions in a project dubbed the "Cultural Renaissance" (Jenkins 2005). However, perhaps the clearest sign of culture's new prominence was its role in the ongoing $34-billion campaign to redevelop Toronto's waterfront.

Part III. Cultural Policy in the Remaking of Toronto's Waterfront

Urban waterfronts have historically been important regional nodes of commerce, production, and public life and the subject of overlapping jurisdictions and intense political conflict. Their development or decline provides a window into how cities organize priorities, mediate competing interests, and define their collective identities. The regional importance of Toronto's waterfront was evident in 2001 when the federal, provincial, and municipal governments announced a joint campaign to redevelop 800 hectares of largely abandoned land in what was described as "one of the largest waterfront revitalization efforts ever undertaken in the world" (Waterfront Toronto, n.d.). The guiding vision for the new waterfront was centred on cultural amenities and creative industries, which were expected to help draw visitors and residents to newly developed neighbourhoods and act as a sustainable source of employment.

Toronto Harbour Commission and the Industrial Waterfront (1911-1967): The Passing of an Obsolescent Image

What makes its place in the 2001 plan remarkable is that culture has not historically had any role in waterfront planning. Since the late-19th century, Toronto's central waterfront has been cut off from the rest of the downtown by a corridor of railways (with an expressway added in the early-1960s). Under the Toronto Harbour Commission (THC) – a public corporation founded in 1911 to oversee Toronto's port – waterfront development in the first half of the 20th century was focused on basic infrastructure and filling in marsh to create industrial land (Reese 1992). Leasing new landfill was the THC's economic lifeline and it continued to pursue this goal despite the absence of demand in Toronto's modest industrial sector (Desfor 1993). Recreational uses, envisioned mostly as passive parkland rather than programmed cultural space, were pushed to the peripheries of the city.

A turning point came in 1967 when an updated waterfront report declared for the first time that the oldest section of Toronto's port be de-industrialized and opened to commercial and residential development. Outside this small section, however, the report renewed calls for more landfill to accommodate "the ever-increasing trade in the port" (Proctor, Redfern, Bousfield & Bacon 1967: A10). In reality, port activity increased for only two more years before declining throughout the 1970s and '80s (Desfor 1993:172). Though the THC attempted to pivot to real estate development, their efforts were limited to a few partially-realized projects that faced significant opposition from City Hall. In effect, THC's efforts to abandon its obsolete vision of Toronto were too little and too late.

Harbourfront and the Arrival of Culture (1972-1991): From Obsolescence to Uncertainty

Culture first arrived on the waterfront in the mid-1970s as the unintended consequence of a vague promise made in the heat of the 1972 federal election. Fearing defeat, the governing Liberals announced a plan to convert 35 hectares of Toronto's industrial waterfront into open public space (Winsor 1974:27). They would go on to win the election and then create the Harbourfront Corporation, tasked with acquiring and developing the land for the project. Right from the beginning, confusion reined over what exactly Harbourfront was. News reports and even Toronto's own planning documents indicated that it would be a large urban park (e.g. Baird 1974; *Globe and Mail* 1980). However, it soon became clear that the space would need to have other purposes as well. Harbourfront Corp. was required to become economically self-sufficient, which meant that some of the land would need to be leased to private developers. It was also feared that passive parkland would not be enough to draw the public past the expressway, rail yards, and still-operating industrial sites to get to the water's edge. Harbourfront needed landmark amenities, but what?

Early reports of Harbourfront Corp.'s public consultations reveal a diversity of suggestions, mostly related to traditional recreation (Miskian 1975; O'Malley 1975). However, being relatively simple to produce, the first few amenities were cultural. When the first park was opened in 1974, a concert series was held to draw crowds (*Globe and Mail* 1974). Soon after, an art gallery, studios, and a theatre were opened in some of the existing industrial buildings that Harbourfront Corp. had acquired. Cultural amenities allowed for the reuse of these spaces and could be run year round, which was a major goal of the project (Miskian 1975).

Despite these new cultural amenities, into the late-1980s Harbourfront was still struggling with what it called the "absence of a coherent character or vision" (Hack 1987:7). For many in the press and at City Hall, Harbourfront Corp. seemed more interested in condominium development than public space (O'Malley 1976; *Globe and Mail* 1980). By 1987 only 7 hectares of parkland had been created while five high-rise condominiums had been built, with several more on the way (Nichols 1987). City Hall responded by placing a development freeze along the waterfront, effectively cutting off Harbourfront Corp.'s source of income. In 1991, the federal government (now under the Conservatives) dissolved Harbourfront Corp and created a new non-profit organization,

Harbourfront Centre, to maintain the collection of cultural amenities that had already been created. Harbourfront Centre proceeded to re-brand itself firmly as a cultural organization and distance its previous incarnation as the controversial land developer (Harris 1992; Hume 1995), eventually embracing the discourse of the cultural city.

While the THC suffered from an obsolete understanding of Toronto, Harbourfront Corp.'s problem was that it had no clear vision to begin with. In the three decades since the port began its decline, the THC and Harbourfront Corp. had succeeded in developing only a handful of offices and condominiums. Disapproval of these buildings led to a growing distrust of the two organizations, particularly within City Hall (Reeves 1992:125). This loss of trust, combined with the general decline in urban development throughout the 1980s and '90s and the rapid disappearance of the city's industrial sector, meant that the waterfront sat in stasis; a material embodiment of Toronto's identity crisis. Describing it in 1994, architectural critic John Bentley Mays called the waterfront "a strange landscape [which,] if not picturesque, ...is graced with a subtle melancholy" (1994:2-3).

Waterfront Toronto (2001-Present): From Stasis to Action

Of all the projects that emerged as city-building returned in the early-2000s, waterfront revitalization was by far the largest and most ambitious. The project began with the founding of yet another public development corporation, Waterfront Toronto (WT). As the first stages got underway, initial public scepticism gave way to a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety. Writing in 2006, journalist John Lornic laid out the stakes as seen by many policymakers:

> Post-industrial cities face two starkly different choices... One leads to privatized waterfronts dominated by controlled-access view-oriented condo projects and theme-park-style uses such as casinos; the other produces public waterfronts organized around generous open spaces and landmark heritage and cultural venues, supported by mixed-use neighbourhoods. (Lornic 2008 [2006]:296)

Contrasted against past failures the cultural city model provided a clear vision for WT. Embracing this vision, the first major report in the WT era described Toronto as "one of an elite group of world cities which act as gateways to commerce, culture and tourism for their respective countries" (Fung 2001:13). Unlike previous waterfront planning documents, this report was filled with references to other "world cities" such as Barcelona, London, and New York. What its authors found in these cities were clear precedents for culture-centred, post-industrial waterfronts. Images of the Sydney Opera House and the Museo Guggenheim Bilbao were contrasted with the vacant lots along Toronto's lakefront, providing evidence that the city was lagging behind and demonstrating what it could become.

Along with this new vision, WT benefited from the emerging networks of cultural organizations within the city. Unlike Harbourfront Corp, WT could focus exclusively on

development and leave public programming to the specialists. Whenever an industrial heritage building needed to be preserved through reuse or when an empty lot was to be set aside for public space, they could be handed over to a cultural organization. For example, Artscape turned several industrial buildings into galleries and studios. Toronto Cultural Services worked with a local record label to use vacant city-owned land for an annual music festival. Among the members of the "cultural city consensus", there appeared to be no shortage of players who had the knowledge and capacity to take on waterfront revitalization.

WT also embraced cultural and creative industries as a source of economic production and employment. Making room for what they called the "new economy" – tourism, technology, media, and professional services – was the primary justification behind the revitalization effort. Under the cultural city model there was widespread agreement among local policymakers that these industries now constituted the "core" of Toronto's economy. Thus, waterfront revitalization was not just a frill or election-time gift as it had been in 1972. Just as in the industrial era, the waterfront now seemed essential to the city's economic future. The existence of 800 hectares of largely vacant land so close to downtown was ideal to accommodate the new economy which, the report argued, would require a "technologically modern, flexible live/work space in an attractive and interesting context" (Fung 2001:23).

Fulfilling this ideal meant pursuing businesses that embodied the new economy. Two major developments – Corus Entertainment, a major Canadian media company, and Filmport, a film studio that features the largest soundstage in North America – were actively encouraged by City Hall through tax breaks and other support to relocate on the waterfront.

Alternative Visions for the Waterfront

Conversely, realizing this new culture-centred waterfront has meant protecting it from alternative uses. Despite culture's centrality in the official plan, it continues to compete with alternatives proposed by those outside the cultural city consensus. Among these outsiders is current mayor Rob Ford (elected 2010). Two alternative approaches in particular have produced some of the most heated political controversies along the waterfront.

First, heavy infrastructure has continued to survive, including power plants, an expressway, (much reduced) rail lines, and the Toronto Island Airport. Efforts by other public agencies to expand this infrastructure for the 21st-century have been strongly opposed by Miller and his allies with only partial success. The Ontario government, ignoring the protests of Miller and WT, built a power plant along the waterfront in 2008. And though Miller was successful in opposing a new bridge connecting the airport to the mainland, the airport has continued to expand its capacity (with support from Ford). Finally, City Council has been deadlocked over whether to rehabilitate or remove the now-dilapidated waterfront expressway.

A second alternative is what Hannigan (1998) calls "fantasy city" development: self-contained, heavily-branded, consumer environments aimed at outside visitors and isolated from surrounding neighbourhoods. Though Toronto's waterfront has seen a few of these developments in the late-20th century, they have never been popular among the downtown residents or members of the cultural city consensus. Part of the motivation behind the 2001 WT plan was to prevent private developers from building "big box" and other large, regional retail outlets (Fung 2001:20).

While fantasy city projects were virtually nonexistent under Miller, Ford has proposed or supported a variety of them including a casino, a "megamall", and a stadium (Rider and Dale 2011). Despite his efforts, these plans have consistently been rejected by City Council with public encouragement from the same academics and urban planners who have been instrumental in popularizing the cultural city model (e.g. Cities Centre 2011).

Whatever their outcome, the conflicts between WT's plan and its alternatives remind us that culture is not the only way to develop the post-industrial city. Due to the vast amount of empty land so close to the core, Toronto's waterfront will continue to be a valuable resource over which a diversity of communities and interest groups project their own vision of urbanity.

Conclusion

While policymakers themselves often argue that the cultural city model is simply the most rational way to plan Toronto for the 21st century, we argue that rational planning alone does not explain the zeal by which this model has been embraced. In this chapter we have argued that three factors in particular have paved the way for the rise of the cultural city. First, rapid social change and the breakdown in conventional planning plunged Toronto into an "identity crisis", creating opportunity for new policy models to emerge. Second, policymakers developed the notion of Toronto as a "cultural city" which provided a clear set of associated policy guidelines. Finally, this policy model appealed to a particular segment of the population – the cultural city consensus – who had the power to put it into practice.

However, the conflicts that have erupted over the waterfront, as well as the election of Mayor Ford on a low-tax, pro-car platform, highlight the fact that many Torontonians have different priorities when it comes to urban governance. Ford's political base of suburban and lower-educated voters may find little appeal or real opportunity in the cultural city. Indeed, data show that the "creative" economy is much more likely to be situated downtown, whereas traditional blue-collar industries are more likely to be located in the suburbs[1]. These cultural and lifestyle differences compound the geographic divide in wealth. As inequality in Toronto becomes greater, it is reasonable to expect further conflict over the direction of urban planning and greater challenges to establishing

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[1] These statements are based on an analysis of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) survey for 2006. Data available upon request.

models that achieve widespread consensus. Indeed, this is a trend that is occurring in cities across the world.

Though we cannot say for sure what the future will hold for the cultural city model, understanding the conditions that gave rise to it will put us in a better position to grapple with new challenges, the possibility of future breakdowns, identity crises, and the formation of new policy models.

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