Planning Canadian Cities to be Smart and Inclusive

Betsy Donald with Morgan Sage, Queen’s University
April 26 2018
SFU, Vancouver
Can Canadian Cities be Smart and Inclusive?

• ‘Smart’ Visions of Today – Sidewalk Toronto
• Putting these visions in historical context
• Planning as a political and place-based process
• Making ‘inclusive’ an integral part of city techno-design
• What policy experiments can be part of ‘smart’ city design from the beginning?
“It is more important than ever to retain spaces for in-depth debate of emergent phenomena that have disruptive and transformative potential....this requires attention to...diverse economies with clear links to past practices.”

‘Smart’ City Context

- Cities as key sites of contradiction
- Digitization is disrupting all aspects of the urban planners’ toolbox – housing, education, transportation, food systems, waste management, public space, etc.
‘Smart City’ Visions of Today

B. Donald - Geography and Planning
Google Spin off - Sidewalk Labs, Toronto
Tuesday at Corus Quay that included Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google’s parent company Alphabet.

Sidewalk Toronto, which is a joint effort by Waterfront Toronto and Alphabet’s Sidewalk Labs to create a new kind of mixed-use, complete community on Toronto’s Eastern Waterfront, beginning with the creation of Quayside. (PHOTO PROVIDED BY SIDEWALK TORONTO)
Official Plans
Sidewalk Toronto

• “Google Founders Wanted To Shape a city. Toronto is their Chance”, New York Times, October 18, 2017

• “Wouldn’t it be nice if you could take technical things that we know and apply them to cities?” Eric Schmidt, the executive chairman of Alphabet (now Google’s parent company)

• 12 acres of waterfront (with hope to scale up to 800 acres) – one of best opportunities in North America to rethink at scale how housing, streets and infrastructure are built

• City of the future
Sidewalk Toronto
By Emily Badger
Oct. 18, 2017

Google's founders have long fantasized about what would happen if the company could shape the real world as much as it has life on the internet.

"Years ago, we were sitting there thinking, Wouldn't it be nice if you could take technical things that we know and apply them to cities?" Eric Schmidt, the executive chairman of Alphabet (now Google's parent company), said Tuesday. "And our founders got really excited about this. We started..."
Media Coverage of Sidewalk City

**Pros**
- Environmentally friendly
- Carbon neutral
- Sensors that separate waste from recycling
- Modular buildings
- Flexible land-use
- Self-driving transit shuttles
- Shared-ride taxibots
- Adaptive traffic lights
- Delivery robots
- Heated bike paths and sidewalks
- Affordable Housing

**Cons**
- Concerns about data use, privacy and surveillance
- Concerns about lack of genuine public participation
- What does a technology giant know about place making?
- Technology giants known more for contributing to urban problems rather than solving them
- Cities are organic and unpredictable
- Gap between technology and city government types
- Who is Sidewalk really for?
City planning context

• Important to remember that urban planning as a practice came out of the challenges of the industrial revolution.
Planning and Social provision

• Planning has always played an important part in sustaining economic development in cities by providing housing, education, and basic services.

• Local authorities have to support collective consumption.

• There are always political struggles around who does what, who gets what and why. Urban planning is a political process.

• Urban planning is inherently political.
# A Brief Intellectual History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Planning Idea/Key author</th>
<th>‘Classic’ Example</th>
<th>Bad Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>The Garden City/Ebenezer Howard</td>
<td>Letchworth, UK</td>
<td>Bland suburbs/auto-dependent all over US and Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>The Modernist City/Le Corbusier</td>
<td>Plan Voisin, Paris</td>
<td>Pruitt Igoe and many other post-war social housing projects in US and CND cities (old Regent Park, Toronto; Rideau Heights, Kingston)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>New Urbanism/ Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk</td>
<td>Seaside, Florida; Intensification in Downtowns</td>
<td>Rapid condo-ization of downtowns; gated communities using new urbanist architecture but lacking in social diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See for example, Dr. Scott Campbell’s timeline [http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sdcamp/up540/timeline12.html](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sdcamp/up540/timeline12.html)
The Garden City
Bad Applications
'Physical' Failure, Community ‘Success’

Pruitt – Igoe, Failed Public Housing Project

- contested narrative, strong sense of community in place despite physical failure

Cabrini Green (Chicago, old Regent Park (Toronto))
“You can’t make people watch streets they do not want to watch. Safety on the streets by surveillance and mutual policing of one another sounds grim, but in real life it is not grim. The safety of the street works best, most casually, and with least frequent taint of hostility or suspicion precisely where people are using and most enjoying the streets voluntarily and are least conscious, normally, that they are policing.”
- Jane Jacobs, 1961
Diversity and Human Scale Cities

The point of cities is multiplicity of choice.
Jane Jacobs
New Urbanism

- New Urbanism/ Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk
- Bringing back the human scale to planning
- Walkability, transit-supportive land use, compact urban form, interesting and varied architecture, public space
- Often lack social diversity
Social diversity and inclusivity

• The $1 B Regent Park Redevelopment Project, Toronto
• Ray-Cam Co-operative Centre, Vancouver
• Housing Coops, Co-housing, other more inclusive mixed-used, mixed income communities
• Success requires deep community and citizen engagement planning (Brail, 2018)
Planning for inclusive and smart city spaces

• Making ‘inclusive’ an integral part of city techno-design
• But the question becomes: what specific policy experiments can be part of ‘smart’ city design from the beginning set within a diversity framework?
  • Co-operative housing
  • Housing First
  • Basic income experiments?
Conclusions

• Sidewalk Toronto has the potential to set the bar for a truly smart and inclusive space
• Canadian cities like Toronto have a history of institutional innovation and deep citizen-engaged planning
• Municipal democratic institutions are strong and have withstood significant political and economic challenges
• The question is how transferable are these ideas?
Thank you CDO Network!