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PEOPLE, PLACE & LANDSCAPE

A bottom-up, adaptive, catalytic approach to Tower Renewal

By

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ABSTRACT

The process of improving poor, declining urban neighbourhoods is essential for the health and well-being of individuals as well as the prosperity of cities and nations. Despite the clear practical and ideological reasons for doing this, throughout history, governments and planners have struggled to find workable solutions. Today, it is becoming increasingly clear that in order to achieve equitable, substantive and sustainable improvements in poor urban neighbourhoods, the solutions must be layered and account for the interrelatedness of social, economic, and physical realms. Given the complexity of this process, this research suggests that bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approaches to urban renewal can help planners to achieve substantive and sustainable change. Further, as contemporary urban theory suggests, the notions of landscape and place are uniquely well-suited mediums for supporting and producing change in a complex world. The Mayor's Tower Renewal Project in the City of Toronto, is an urban renewal initiative that demonstrates both the importance and complexity of urban renewal. As such, it provides an opportunity to understand how bottom-up, adaptive, and catalytic approaches which engage the urban landscape can result in significant improvements to the conditions of a declining urban area. Based on this analysis this research paper offers a new lens for thinking about and reacting to the process of urban revitalization in a way that produces equitable, long-lasting and meaningful change.

Keywords: urban renewal, landscape, place, neighbourhood, adaptive, bottom-up

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Introduction

Neighbourhoods are the foundation of social development. Their conditions affect individual health and well being, as well as local and national prosperity (Bradford 2005; Torjman 2006; Meegan and Mitchell 2001). Ideally, neighbourhoods are places for social interaction, learning and innovation. They provide people with a sense of belonging and place in the world. A darker scenario is also possible however, as neighbourhoods can be the sites of concentrated poverty and deprivation, where multiple factors interact to foster complex socio-economic problems (Torjman 2003). What follows then, is a need to improve the conditions of weaker neighbourhoods, in order to make them just as engaging, inclusive, and rooted places to live.

Urban renewal is the process of improving the conditions of failing neighbourhoods. Throughout history, this has been a challenge for governments and planners, as they have struggled to find approaches that achieve equitable, substantive and sustainable change (Carmon 1999). Shockingly, there was once a time when governments thought that the way to solve the problems of concentrated urban poverty was to completely tear down the buildings in poorer neighbourhoods and replace them with newer forms of housing. After several decades of changes to the urban renewal process, it is now clear that creating equitable, long-lasting change in declining urban areas requires social and economic interventions, as well as physical ones. It is also becoming increasingly clear that these various components of urban renewal are interrelated and require solutions that account for the relationships between them.

Given the complexity of this process and the importance of building strong neighbourhoods, there is an urgent need to develop creative solutions for urban renewal. This research proposes that bottom-up, adaptive, and catalytic solutions can help planners and practitioners to produce significant change in depressed urban neighbourhoods in face of this complexity. Further, given this finding, it is proposed that the dynamic urban landscape and the notion of place are extremely well-suited for supporting and producing change.

Toronto's Tower Renewal Project presents an opportunity to closely examine the complexity of urban renewal and understand how bottom-up, adaptive, and catalytic approaches that engage the urban landscape can result in significant improvements

to the conditions of a declining urban area. This urban renewal initiative looks to improve the quality of the city's stock of modern high-rise apartment buildings and their surrounding neighbourhoods, which are characterised by tenuous housing conditions, income polarisation, poor physical environments and a lack of urban vitality. As the project continues to move forward, it is clear that there are no easy answers to Tower Renewal and that creative solutions are needed to advance its goals. The intention of this research is then to give guidance on this issue and provide solutions that will not only improve the quality of the built-environment, but to produce the social and cultural changes that ensure the viability of tower neighbourhoods over time.

Method

The research begins with a discussion on the importance of neighbourhoods and establishes the need to renew those that are in decline. Looking then to the Tower Renewal Project, the paper examines the history, current challenges and opportunities facing Toronto's tower neighbourhoods. In seeking to find some direction for Tower Renewal and planning of poor urban neighbourhoods in general, the research looks at the history of urban renewal and the lessons it has provided.

The nature of these findings, which is that urban renewal is a complex process, suggests the need for a bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approach to urban renewal. Here, adaptive refers to an iterative renewal process that anticipates and is open to change. Bottom-up refers to strategies and processes that are locally conceived and more organic than top-down ones. They start small and gain richness and completeness over time. Finally, the term catalytic is used to refer to strategies and interventions that are generally small but trigger further change.

The need for a more process and dynamic urban renewal process demands a secondary literature review which pulls together ideas and urban revitalization strategies from a range of disciplines, such as planning, urban design, landscape architecture, design and community development. These areas of practice, although for the most part conducted separately, are brought here together because of their unique ability to engage people, place and landscape. They are supported in this paper by a series of international best-practices that support and substantiate the

claims being made in the research project. Taken together, the theoretical argument, the series of strategies and the associated best practices, lead to a set of recommendations for creating meaningful improvements in Toronto's Tower neighbourhoods.

A Working Definition for Urban Renewal

'Urban renewal' was once a term used to refer to the aggressive form of redevelopment and slum clearance that occurred across North America in the 1950's. Since this time significant progress has been made to the way planners and policy makers approach the renewal of depressed urban areas. The theoretical and practical improvements that have occurred over the past several decades parallel a continuum of terms used to describe the different ways to approach the issue. Today, the literature has largely replaced the term 'urban renewal' with 'urban regeneration', 'urban revitalization', 'gentrification', or 'rehabilitation'. Little consistency exists however as to their particular meaning of each term, making it difficult to know when one term ends and the other begins (Broudehoux 1994, Ch.1). Rather than be concerned with finding the precise term, this paper will use 'urban renewal' to discuss broadly the process of improving depressed urban areas. This consistency will allow for a critical reflection on the history of urban renewal and the ability to learn from the many accomplishments and failures of the past.

Why Focus on Urban Renewal?

Areas that are the focus of urban renewal likely face a range of complex problems. These may include things like deteriorating infrastructure and housing, the concentration of poverty, lack of safety or high unemployment rates. Such areas may also possess a shortage of commercial, retail, and financial institutions, as well as poor physical and environmental conditions (Zielenbach 2002, p. 1). Together, these factors can also lead to a decline in social capital and a reduction in individuals' ability to access the social and financial support they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives (Infrastructure Canada 2005).

Research has shown that when these factors interact at the neighbourhood level, there are 'neighbourhood effects' on individuals and families. These effects

include things like "poorer health, lower educational achievement and shorter life expectancy" (UWGT and CCSD 2004, p. 6-7). Children are especially vulnerable to these effects, as they have been found to have more behavioural problems and are more likely to be in trouble with the law (Beauvais and Jenson 2003).

On the other hand, when neighbourhoods are functioning well, Torjman (2003) argues that they are places where learning and innovation take place. They introduce new knowledge into society which contributes to prosperous communities and a strong local economy (p. 4). The Strong Neighbourhood Task Force Report (2005) expresses this notion:

If our city is to remain strong, vibrant and competitive in the years to come, then its neighbourhoods must be places where people want to live. Parents must feel that neighbourhood streets are safe for their children to walk, and that local parks are safe places for their children to play. They must be assured that there are places for their teenagers to meet and get involved in sports and social events. They need to be confident that the shops and services that are a necessary part of daily life will be nearby and accessible. And they want to know that they will be welcomed and have a connection to their neighbours. Where we live matters to all of us (p. 5).

Thus, there are clear ideological and practical reasons for working to improve the conditions of poor, declining neighbourhoods.

How to define success

It is important at this point to briefly discuss what defines a successful urban renewal project or more generally, what constitutes a strong, healthy neighbourhood. For decades, researchers have been developing schemas which attempt to measure these things. Some use quantitative indicators, such as crime or unemployment rates, housing costs, or number of facilities (Diener and Suh 1997). Others take a more qualitative approach to measuring success by using systematic observation or by surveying people's perceptions of their quality of life in different dimensions such as housing, the physical environment, infrastructure and services, safety, employment, natural environment, as well as things like leadership and governance, social inclusion,

and image and identity (Winnipeg 2006). Certainly, an increase in housing prices and an improvement in the way people perceive their quality of life are important factors to consider when measuring success of an urban renewal project.

In more recent years, research on neighbourhood well-being has started to focus on other critical elements of a community such as social capital, engagement, individual skills, willingness and hope (Meagher 2006, p.18-24). For example, in looking to define what makes a strong neighbourhood, Blach and Hughes (2001) note that the well-being of a neighbourhood is based on its capacity to act. They state,

The notions of sustainability, resilience, capacity and health, as applied to communities, all point to the 'capabilities' of communities to maintain and enhance outcomes ... not just for the present, but for future generations ... maintaining outcomes in the face of shocks and stresses which might otherwise diminish the capacity of a community (quoted in Meagher 2008, p. 16).

What they have identified is that strong communities need to have active, willing, engaged residents, with skills, knowledge and energies that they can use to produce outcomes and substantial change (Meagher 2008).

This idea, that a successful neighbourhood is one with the capacity to act and produce change, is strongly related to the ecological concept of resilience. Such a scientific underpinning is valuable, because it grounds the argument in laws natural science and allows us to draw upon research and expertise from such fields. According to landscape ecologist Nina-Marie Lister (2007), long-term sustainability of an ecological system demands the capacity for resilience; it must have the ability to recover from disturbances and to accommodate change. Lister (2007) adds, that notion of sustainability here is not limited to merely the act of surviving; it actually refers to a system that is "thriving" and grows in richness and strength over time (p. 36).

When considered in the context of urban renewal, it becomes clear that a successful urban renewal project is one that builds the capacity of a neighbourhood to capitalize on opportunities, change undesirable circumstances or find ways of working with whatever issues emerge. Meagher (2008) makes a similar case: "there are neighbourhoods that can make change because they have resources to do it. And others with fewer resources but a conviction they can make change, and strong social

networks with an ability broad support” (p. 23). What is clear from this discussion is urban renewal projects should not only work to improve housing conditions and reduce crime, but should also work to build capacity and create resilience within a neighbourhood. This notion will guide the following research.

Introducing Toronto’s Tower Renewal Project

The Mayor’s Tower Renewal project is an urban renewal initiative that aspires to improve the liveability and environmental sustainability of Toronto’s modern apartment buildings and the neighbourhoods that surround them. Like all urban renewal projects, improving Toronto’s tower neighbourhoods is critical for the health and well-being of residents, as well as the prosperity of the region.

In 2007, the proposal for Tower Renewal was presented to Mayor David Miller with academic research from the University of Toronto (Miller 2008, 5). At this time, it was shown that there were over one-thousand residential apartment buildings within Toronto’s inner suburbs that were extremely energy inefficient. The report also showed that these buildings sat within declining, polarised, and poorly serviced neighbourhoods. It was suggested that by retrofitting the deteriorating buildings, in combination with community planning, Toronto could achieve significant economic, environmental, and social benefits (Miller 2008, 5). The project was then adopted and endorsed by the City of Toronto in 2008 and a Tower Renewal Project Office was created in City Hall to conduct research and coordinate partnerships during the development and implementation of the project. The Project Office now works in partnership with ERA Architects, the University of Toronto and numerous other firms and organization that contribute and conduct research on the project.

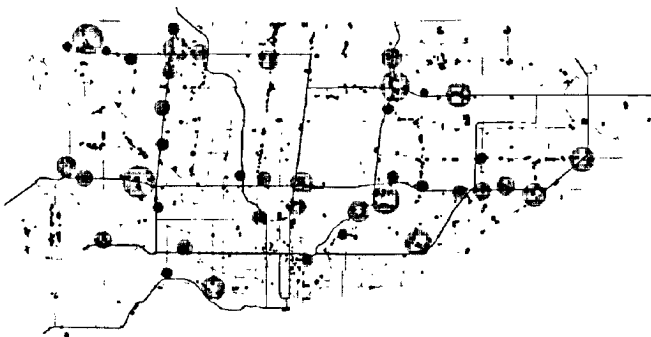


Figure1: Location of potential renewal sites and confluence with transit

Source: ERA Architects Opportunities Book

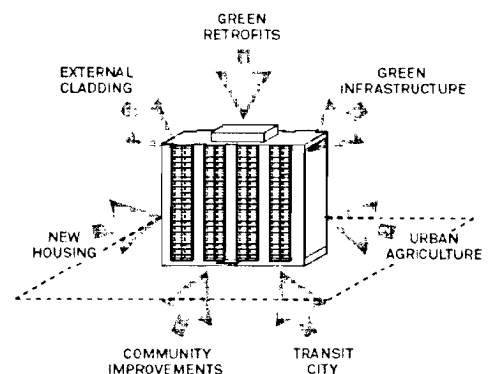


Figure 2: The Mayor’s Tower Renewal Project has broad environmental, economic, and cultural goals

Source: MayorsTowerRenewal.ca



Figure 3: Aerial View of Flemington Park

Source: The Suburban Tower in GreenTOpia



Figure 4: Tower Neighbourhood in Toronto at Jane and Warden

The 'Tower in the 'Park'

For a 20 year period, starting in the early 1960's, high-rise apartment buildings were the most popular housing type in Toronto's inner suburbs (Stewart 2007). This has set Toronto apart from other North American cities, because there are now clusters of tower blocks, co-existing with bungalows and single family residences all across the Greater Toronto Area.

These buildings were planned and built based on modern planning ideas, such as those of famous architect and planner, Le Corbusier. The belief at this time was that the way to create good neighbourhoods and cities was to build hundred story apartment buildings surrounded by large expanses of green space, often referred to as 'tower in the park'. This design was meant to provide high levels of density, make better use of infrastructure, conserve land from development, as well as provide people with easy access to greenspace for recreation and respite from the city. Clearly, the ideas were not ill-conceived, as they provided an alternative to sprawling suburbs and have transit supportive densities.

Unfortunately, the 'towers in the park' were never really used effectively. The surrounding open spaces are now largely neglected and underused, acting more as

large expanses of lawn, than areas of communal gathering, amenity or recreation. In many cases, they contain mostly surface parking lots, abandoned swimming pools, dumpsters and chain-link fences (ERA 2008, p. 139). Poor planning, neglect from landowners and residents and lack of programmatic diversity are some of the reasons for this failure.

Another issue facing tower neighbourhoods is that they lack the mix of uses needed for creating walkable, animated, interesting neighbourhoods. Without a mixture of different uses and establishments it is difficult for residents to access services and amenities, leaving them socially and spatially disconnected from the surrounding areas. This distinctive feature also makes it difficult for entrepreneurship and investment to occur directly within the neighbourhood (p. 36). Similarly, being built during a time when it was assumed that most people living there would have access to a car and would be able to drive the places they needed to go, they have poor walking environments (Hess 2009).



Figure 5: Poorly kept grounds; dumpsters and parking lots



Figure 6: Lack of mixed-use and poor accessibility

Opportunities for change

Despite facing significant challenges, tower neighbourhoods contain remarkable physical, natural and human potential (ERA 2008, Stewart 2007). This idea is strongly supported by *The Tower Renewal Opportunities Book* (2008) prepared by ERA architects and the University of Toronto. This important piece of research identifies the main goals, challenges and opportunities for Toronto's towers and the surrounding public realm.

The report suggests that tower neighbourhoods exhibit many of the characteristics which are often seen as the solution to sprawl, such as nodes of high density housing close to transit corridors and efficient use of infrastructure (p. 98). They also provide an abundance of affordable to mid-market rental housing for individuals and families, especially new Canadians (p. 36). The argument is that with the right improvements, these groupings of towers are well suited to become complete communities, where there are a range of housing types and tenures, opportunities for recreation, services and amenities in close proximity to each other (p. 76).

Another opportunity presented in the Opportunities Book (2008) is based on the unique natural heritage of these neighbourhoods. Only a generation ago, the land underneath these areas was used for agricultural purposes, meaning that they are likely well suited to support urban agriculture and permaculture uses. Also, in many of the neighbourhoods, up to 80% of the area surrounding the buildings is un-built green or open space, giving them significant potential for supporting these agricultural uses as well as other local sustainability initiatives, such as community gardens or local markets (p. 82). This space also presents the opportunity to hold a range of community events, activities or exhibits.



Figure 7: The conceptual framework for district urban agriculture, farmers market and new infill

Source: ERA Architects Opportunities Book p. 82



Figure 8: Conceptual Framework for Mixed-Use

Source: ERA Opportunities Book p. 78

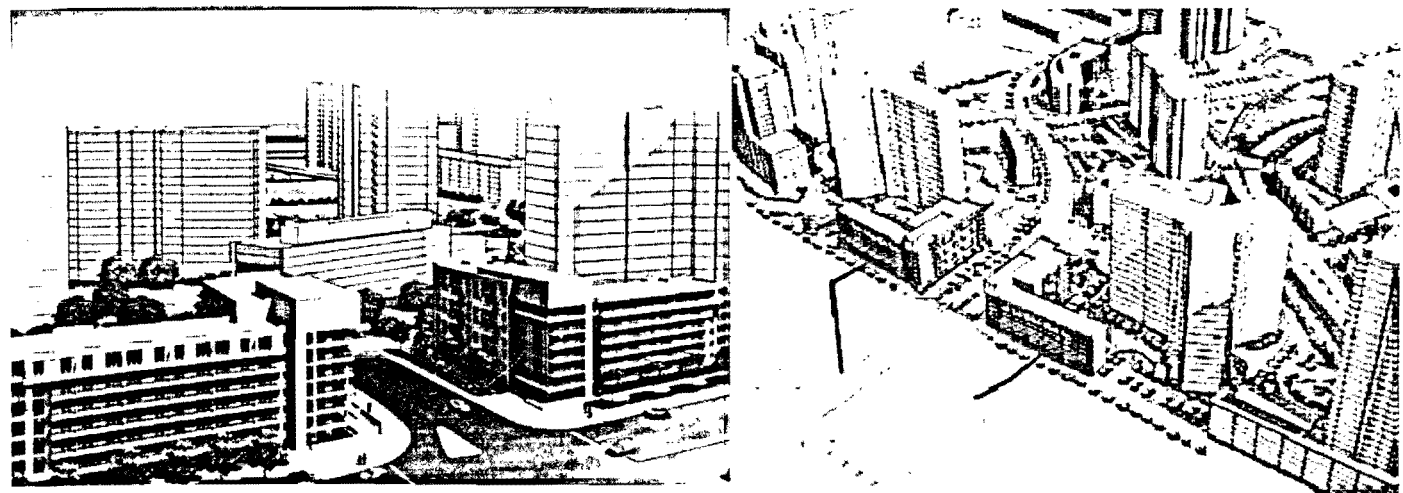


Figure 9: Urban Design conceptual plan for Parkway Forest

Source: WZMH Architects, Parkway Forest Plan 2007

Perhaps the most significant opportunity is the potential for new infill development and intensification (Stewart 2007, p. 141). Strategically filling in some of the empty spaces can help these neighbourhoods make the transition into more mixed-use areas, and provide the opportunity for investment and local entrepreneurship. This strategy would also make services and amenities more accessible and could bring a new sense of urban vibrancy to an area. In the north end of Toronto, the Parkway Forest tower neighbourhood is now experiencing this type of redevelopment. A plan to re-urbanise the area was developed by WZMH Architects in partnership with the City of Toronto with strict urban design guidelines to work within the existing urban fabric (WZMH 2007). The redevelopment of this neighbourhood is likely due to its strategic location at the intersection of the 400 and 401 series highways, and the Sheppard East subway corridor. Other neighbourhoods that are not so well located are likely not going to be as attractive to developers and therefore not as likely to be redeveloped in the near future.

In addition to the opportunities that are presented by the physical and natural environments, tower neighbourhoods also contain significant human potential. Their density alone suggests that they are embedded with a significant stock of skills, knowledge and talent. And being places of immense ethnic diversity, an opportunity exists for developing culturally rich and inclusive neighbourhoods that empower cultural communities and act as welcoming grounds for Toronto's growing immigrant

population. Additionally, many of these areas contain large youth populations (TDSB). Such significant youth population provide a chance to develop strong leaders and capitalize on the creativity and ingenuity of young people.

These opportunities offer Toronto the ability to create a much greener, more inclusive and culturally rich city. They call on planners and governments to focus their efforts and resources on developing creative solutions that work to build strong, resilient tower neighbourhoods. What logically follows is the question of how planners and practitioners can facilitate or advance this process.

Historical Approaches to Renewal



Figure 10: The demolition of housing in 1940 and 1950s

Developing solutions to advance the goals of urban renewal can benefit from taking a critical look at how the issue has been approached throughout history. In North America, early urban renewal programs of the 1940's and 50's were defined by what Carmon (1999) calls "the era of the bulldozer" (p. 145). Essentially, intolerable housing conditions in growing cities and the desire to make better use of central urban land initiated large-scale renewal projects. Public authorities would demolish an entire neighbourhood and replace it with big block public housing,

shopping centers, office buildings and cultural and entertainment centers (Relph 1987, p. 145). For example, in 1934 the *Bruce Report* surveyed thousands of dwellings in the City of Toronto and found that a large majority of housing was below the minimum standard (Purdy 2003, p. 65). The report, considered at the time to be at the forefront of urban renewal, called for comprehensive 'slum clearance' (p. 65). The allegations were that wiping out these areas and cleaning up the unsanitary, unsafe and overcrowded conditions would foster social and economic progress, even if it meant displacing existing residents or destroying their homes (Relph 1987, p. 148).

This generation of urban renewal was criticized for destroying the vitality of urban areas, uprooting communities and creating problems of social disaffection, violence, vandalism and displacement (Jacobs 1961). 'Clean sweep planning' is Alison Ravetz's (1980) term for this sort of redevelopment. It is planning, without regard for physical or historical or social constraints; essentially eradicating what exists and creating something new (p. 23).

It was also criticised for relying on notions of technical rationality (Purdy 2003) and revolving around the modernist notion that problems had single, agreed-upon solutions and a linear logic (Smith and Moore 1993, p. 385). It demonstrated the danger of top-down approaches for losing public voice, the diversity of human and reinforcing power structures.

The other major criticism of this approach was that it relied solely on physical changes to a neighbourhood to bring about social and economic change. Essentially the planning, layout and design of the housing was seen as a way of stabilizing the social structures of the lower-income families and individuals and allowing for the "development of a sufficiently 'normal' community and social life" (Purdy 2003, p. 50).

The mounting appreciation of these notions brought about major changes to the urban renewal process. A new generation emerged, which took a more comprehensive approach and emphasized social issues (Carmon 1999, p. 144). It took place during a time of economic growth; (Harrington 1962; Cullingworth 1973), when public opinion was favourable towards giving large allocations of funding towards welfare activities (Carmon 1999, p. 145). This approach aimed to improve, rather than demolish existing housing and local environments and focused heavily on addressing social problems through things like the provision of better social services, education and employment (p. 146). It also marked the beginning of the involvement of local residents in the decision making processes (p. 146). In many cases however, participation was somewhat superficial and failed to give residents the ability to meaningfully participate in their revitalization of their neighbourhoods.

Carmon (1999) describes an urban renewal project in Jerusalem, Israel, that reflected the ideological approach of this generation. *Project Renewal* was a comprehensive neighbourhood rehabilitation plan, involving a high level of participation from local residents. The program resulted in some improvements, such as

better physical conditions and the stabilization of some households; however, overall the project was deemed unsuccessful (p. 152). Families who gained higher socio-economic status continued leave the neighbourhood when they had the opportunity and young people of low-socio-economic status took their place. Researchers found that the image of the neighbourhood, in the eyes of its residents as well as other residents of Jerusalem, did not improve. The neighbourhood continued to be unattractive for investment and housing prices remained low. This meant that the improvements that took place would likely not last over the long term, especially once the programming was stopped.

One of the conclusions that can be made from this project was that the image of the neighbourhood depends not so much on the instrumentality of a neighbourhood, but rather on the perception of it is a place for residents and the wider community (Firey 1947, quoted in Carmon 1999, p. 152). The process of neighbourhood renewal must therefore involve more than just incremental improvements to the social and economic well-being of residents, it must also accommodate for the interconnections between the social and physical aspects of a neighbourhood. Without this sensitivity to the social and cultural experience of a neighbourhood, and an appreciation of the subjective mental representations of it as a place, it is unlikely that the renewal process will not result in significant or lasting change.

Despite the valuable improvements to the urban renewal process that had occurred over these few decades, many people were unimpressed with the results. Gibson and Prathes (1977) for example, surveyed the evaluations of numerous social programs and reached the conclusions that 'nothing works'. As a result, many of the existing urban renewal programs were cancelled and were given very little attention or resources from right wing governments (p. 147).

What followed was a generation of urban renewal policies that took mostly a 'business-like' approach and emphasized economic development (Carmon 1999, p. 147). Albrechet (1991) states that "in the 1980's the state has become more ideologically conservative and more subservient to the needs and demands of capital, turning away from the simultaneous pursuit of both economic growth and welfare" (123). Under this political ideology, renewal programmes consisted of mostly economic incentives that sought to activate local economic markets. They included things like

training programs; assistance and support for entrepreneurs in establishing and expanding their businesses; relaxation of planning and rent controls; and financial leveraging to stimulate property development to attract inward investment (Solebury 1987). Planners and regulators also removed barriers to economic development, such as allowing mixed-use developments where they could previously not exist. The idea was that stimulating the local economy and attracting investment to an area would provide widespread benefits and eventually lead to improved social and environmental conditions.

The criticism of this approach is that social equity and public voice can be lost in pursuit of economic goals. Researchers who have investigated the distribution of benefits from economic-based programs generally agree that they can contribute to the widening gap between the “haves” and “have nots” (Carmon 1999). Carmon (1999) states, “in its common patterns of gentrification, property-led regeneration, has frequently resulted in rapid improvement of the neighbourhood status and a rise of property values, but in most cases has hurt, or at best has not helped, the incumbent residents” (p. 154).

There are certainly advantages to using entrepreneurialism and private investment to renew a neighbourhood. Planners can support people, households, or business owners through incentives or they can work to create partnerships between private investors. Both processes can effectively stimulate economic activity, generate tax revenue and create job opportunities that benefit the community. In order to equally distribute the benefits of this process however, economic based initiatives must be applied with caution and in conjunction with other more socially driven policies and programs. Other researchers also recommend strong linkages between economic development initiatives and the local residents would help to better redistribute the benefits (Frieden and Kaplan 1990).

Lessons for Contemporary Planning

The preceding historical analysis provides important feedback for planners and practitioners about how to programme a successful urban renewal project and build resilient neighbourhoods. Such an exercise allows for the contemporary definition of

urban renewal to be informed by several decades of successes and failures. Similarly, for the purposes of this research, these lessons will help to substantiate the response to the Mayor's Tower Renewal Project.

For one, history has shown that making physical changes to a neighbourhood will not alone improve quality of life for the individuals who live in poverty-stricken areas. It can also be concluded that top-down approaches to urban renewal can result in the loss of public voice and fail to account for the diversity between individuals within a neighbourhood. Urban renewal must therefore provide meaningful opportunities for members of the community to participate in the decisions that affect the change to their physical environments. History has also pointed to the need to take a gradual approach to urban renewal that is sensitive to the existing social and physical conditions. Rather than large-scale radical changes, a gradual approach that is focused on the renewal process as oppose to only the outcome, can help to provide more stable, longer lasting results.

Another lesson learnt, it that that social policies, focused on issues like education, health, and safety are important components of any urban renewal project. Taking a fragmented approach to these issues however, will only incrementally improve individual quality of life in these areas and will likely not have lasting effects on the neighbourhood itself. As recipients of these programs gain access to more resources, they may simply move on to other, wealthier neighbourhoods unless a connection exists between them and their neighbourhood. Similarly, the effects of economic-based urban renewal initiatives are often unequally distributed and fail to create the necessary connections between the neighbourhood improvements and the local residents. A more inclusive approach to entrepreneurialism with

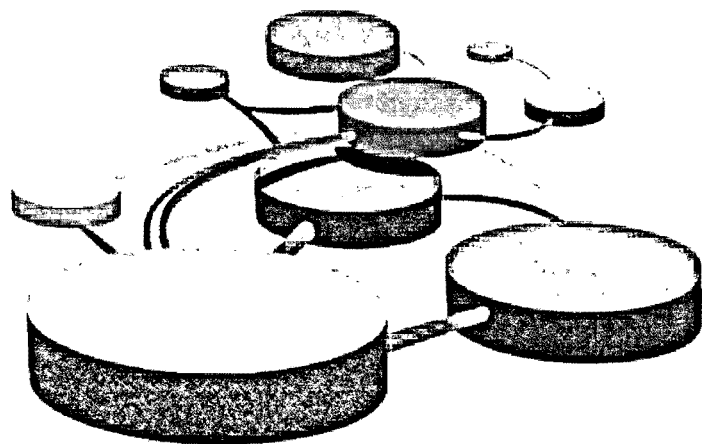


Figure11: Urban renewal as a complex process with interrelated components

strong links to the existing community is a way to potentially avoid this issue.

A more general conclusion from the preceding analysis is that most urban renewal projects sit within shifting political systems that have changing priorities, economic circumstances and social ideologies. For example, changes in national policies, the economy, elections, or housing market fluctuations can affect the provision of a project's funding and resources. These uncertainties speak to the danger of relying too heavily on external or government funding.

Perhaps the most critical lesson that history has provided is that the various components of urban renewal; social, physical, and economic, are interrelated and interact in a non-linear fashion. This idea has been demonstrated in the preceding historical analysis and is supported by the current literature on planning and urban revitalization. Schorr (1997) states,

The new synthesis rejects addressing poverty, welfare, employment, education, child development, housing and crime one at a time. It endorses the idea that the multiple and interrelated problems of poor neighbourhoods require multiple and interrelated solutions... [its proponents] insist on combining physical and economic development with service and education reform, and all of these with a commitment to building community institutions and social networks (p. 319).

Today, Comprehensive Community Initiatives, which have been the focus of a growing body of research in North America, are attempting to bring this interrelated nature of urban renewal into focus. Proponents of these initiatives advocate for integrated solutions that weave together the various components of a neighbourhood (Torjman and Levit 2003). These initiatives also call for an increasingly diverse group of planners and practitioners from the public and private sectors to work together and take on new roles, responsibilities and capabilities.

Based on this understanding, urban renewal has become known as a complex problem. Gorman (2006) states,

Strengthening neighbourhoods is an example of a *complex problem* – problems that have neither agreed upon descriptions or solutions. Complex problems involve multiple factors and diverse partners that continually shape and re-shape one another (5).

The complexity of urban renewal is in no way an invitation to surrender efforts. Rather, it suggests that finding workable solutions must not employ a simplistic view of linear causality or rely on a simple method of control. It means that in order to be effective, urban renewal projects require critical, creative thinking and careful implementation. The challenge is then for governments and planners to devise solutions and strategies that accommodate for the complexity of urban renewal and the interrelationships between the spatial, social, and economic elements.

Tower Renewal as a Complex Project

Toronto's Tower Renewal Project embodies the complex nature of urban renewal. Although its objectives are clear, achieving significant and long-lasting change is a difficult and messy process.

As mentioned in the previous section on Tower Renewal project, the challenges they face are a result of a number of spatial and socio-economic factors. Their design, poor planning, neglect and changing socio-economic circumstances over the past several decades are interrelated factors that contribute to their decline. This interrelatedness can be seen more clearly by looking at the issue of mobility. Paul Hess (2010) conducted a series of walkability studies which examined mobility in six of the tower neighbourhoods. He found that the socio-demographic characteristics of many of the residents suggest a population that is dependent on walking and transit to get around, with only 38% of people having access to a car. The report also found that a number of people did not feel safe walking and moving about their neighbourhood. Access to transit in these areas is limited because of the spatial form, but it also depends on political will and availability of government resources to fund transit. The nature of mobility is emblematic of the interrelatedness of the different components of Tower Renewal.

Additional levels of complexity come from that fact that Tower Renewal involves multiple actors and players from the public, private and community sectors, who are required to interact and work together on the project. Depending on the particular initiative, the Tower Renewal Office will work with the other city departments, such as Public Works and Infrastructure, Licensing and Standards, and Community

Development. They also work with external private organizations and NGO's from the community. Funding from tower renewal comes from all levels of government and is received on an ad hoc basis. Further, some towers are public buildings, owned by Toronto Community Housing Corporations, however the majority of them are privately owned. Working with private property owners, who are mostly interested in making profit, adds a significant level of complexity to Tower Renewal.

Tower Renewal Project also sits within a larger political context. Being an initiative of the Mayor of Toronto, there is no guarantee that the project will be carried forward or maintain financial support after the municipal elections taking place in the fall of 2010. Many tower neighbourhoods also coincide with other city initiatives such as the Mayor's Transit City and the Neighbourhood Action Teams (Miller 2008, p. 1). The connections between Tower Renewal and the implementation of these initiatives bring additional uncertainty to the renewal process.

The scale of the Tower Renewal adds another layer of intricacy. Over one-thousand buildings have been identified by the project in neighbourhoods across the Toronto region. Each cluster of towers, scattered throughout the city, is different in terms of its spatial, social and political context, bringing a different set of challenges and opportunities. Once again, the question becomes how to create meaningful and sustainable change given such complexity.

Dealing with Complexity from the Ground Up

There is a growing body of research that looks to understand and find workable solutions to complex problems. It is the ideas of natural science, which come from the disciplines of biology, and chemistry, and theories of evolution, that are increasingly being used by managers, policy makers and problem solvers to develop effective policies for large complex issues (Ramalingam et al 2008; Dale 2001; Margaret Wheatley 1992). The systemic nature of life and the vast webs of interconnections described in these sciences offer valuable conceptual tools for thinking about and framing complex problems. For example, ecology is a natural science that focuses on holism, and the relationships and connections between different elements within a system (Wheatley

1992). Ecological systems thrive when they are able to self-organization and reorganize themselves into greater order (Wheatley 1992).

The laws of natural science therefore demonstrate that a more adaptive approach to managing complex system is essential for maintaining resilience. Instead of control, this means allowing a system the ability adapt to multiple future and gain richness over time. Lister (2007) confirms, “adaptive ecological design is by definition, sustainable design: long term survival demands adaptability, which is predicated on resilience” (p.36).

Such adaptive management, which allows for learning, self-organisation, and different possible futures and a more organic process of growth and change, is what researchers are finding most fruitful for finding solutions to complex problems. It substantiates the claim that, if we anticipate, plan, and understanding that there will always be change over which we have no control, the goal becomes giving that system the ability to adapt to change and to grow in strength as these changes occur. The key message in the context of urban renewal is that bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approaches can help to accommodate the inherent complexity and create sustainable change. The idea is to allow patterns and solutions to emerge, rather than impose them from above.

None of this is to say that governments should take a hands-off approach to renewal and attempt to let neighbourhoods improve themselves. What is suggests is that one of their jobs is to facilitate and activate change, rather than to devise one-size fits all solutions. Kooiman (1993) argues that effective problem solving is about societal self-organization and “the key tasks of governance are to influence the processes of social interaction, seek to balance social forces and interests and engage social actors and systems so as to facilitate such self-organization” (quoted in Sanderson 2002, p. 8).

Landscape as a medium for change

Given the need for a bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approach to urban renewal, ‘landscape’ becomes an extremely valuable medium for producing and supporting change. Landscape, in this context, goes beyond simply referring to the horizontal ground plane. It refers to the dynamic urban surface which supports the many interrelated relationships and agencies that exist in contemporary cities (Wall

1999, Corner 2006, Waldheim 2006). Alex Wall (1999) states, "here the term landscape no longer refers to prospects of pastoral innocence but rather invokes the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organizes not only subjects and spaces but also the dynamic processes and events that move through them" (p. 233). This consideration of landscape goes well beyond its material form and envisions it an active, performing system that supports, orders and connects the interrelated processes of urban life (Wall 1999, Corner 2006, Waldheim). Under this premise, landscape offers an opportunity to strategically structure, design, and plan the urban landscape in a way that triggers and activates the renewal of declining urban areas.

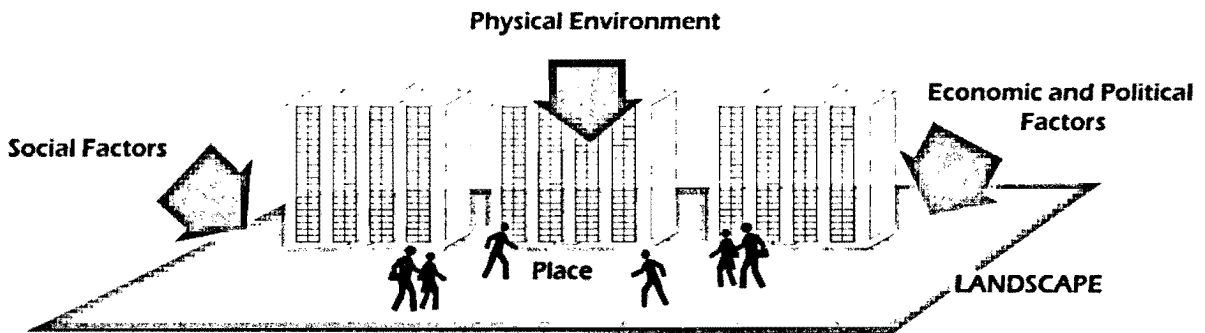


Figure 12: Conceptual drawing of the concepts of landscape and place

A focus on place

In recognizing the importance of landscape in producing and supporting change, the concept of 'place' also becomes important. Essentially, 'place' is where the social, spatial and political aspects of a city meet. According to Relph (1976) a place is a physical setting, but it is also the meanings and activities that impart identity to that place (p.47). He clarifies this by stating "...it is possible to visualise a town as consisting of buildings and physical objects... but a person experiencing these buildings and activities sees them as far more than this; they are beautiful or ugly, useful or hindrances, home, factory, enjoyable, alienating; in short, they are meaningful" (p. 47). Boudieu's (2005) notion of "habitus" is also helpful in explaining the importance of place, arguing that the power of place is not only in being able to locate oneself in the physical world, but also understanding and conceptualising the role they play in the

context of the place. Bradford (2005), adds that places are dynamic locales, with their own characteristics, physical and non-physical assets and set of power relations; they are where “the larger forces that structure daily life are contested and given meaning” (p. 7).

These claims have inspired a rich and growing body of research that identifies how the notion of place can be incorporated into planning, community development and urban revitalization. It is suggested that place-based solutions are those that are conceived and targeted towards particular geographical areas, and because of this they are able to capture the local circumstances and particular priorities and concerns of the local community. They are, by extension, more attuned to the specific needs and capacities of residents and rooted in the history, meaning and local identity of a place (Bradford 2008). Residents are brought to the core of the issue rather than left on the margins as merely recipients of a service (McMurty and Curling 2008). Place-based solutions literally work from the ground up are inherently more adaptive and emergent approaches, making them fundamental to building community capacity and resilience within a neighbourhood.

Bradford (2005) suggests that it is through these localized citizen-based efforts that people can develop a sense of meaning and belonging. Place-based interventions can also help to develop active citizens and teach people new skills (Holston, 2001, p. 326). People can learn about the political process and become better able to influence local decision-making. A community can also develop a collective voice and strong individual leaders through a place-based planning process (Bradford 2005).

A focus on places also provides opportunities to develop new relationships and strengthen social networks, both within the neighbourhood and with the wider community. This can lead to an increase in social capital which is increasingly being considered as critical for the well-being of individuals and communities (Coleman 1988, Putnam 1993). According to the Commission for Social Justice (1994) social capital consists of ‘the institutions and relationships of a thriving civil society— from networks of neighbours to extended families, community groups to religious organisations, local businesses to local public services, youth clubs to parent- teacher associations,

playgroups to police on the beat' (p. 307– 308). The emphasis is placed on trust and cooperation, as a way of building community capacity.

Thus, places-based solutions work to develop the non-physical resources that are essential to building strong and resilient neighbourhoods. Planners and practitioners should therefore not only look at the social issues or the spatial forms of a neighbourhood, but also focus their attention towards the relationship between them. Finding workable and long-lasting solutions to urban renewal should explore the ground beneath a community.

New Strategies for Contemporary Urban Renewal

Given the ability of landscape and place to build resilience and community capacity, an effective approach to urban renewal would be to make instrumental, strategic, moves that engage the neighbourhood's landscape and place qualities. The following is a collection of strategies that can help practitioners and planners of urban renewal projects to do this. These strategies define a process that incorporates the interrelationships between the various elements of urban renewal and works with complexity rather than against it. They show how being open to change can allow the creativity and energy that exists in a community to emerge; and how a bottom-up, adaptive, and catalytic approach to urban renewal can contribute to significant, long-lasting change.

This secondary literature review, which pulls together research from the disciplines of planning, urban design, community development, architecture and landscape planning, helps to fill a gap in the current research on urban renewal that focuses solutions on people, place, and landscape. These strategies are accompanied by best practices from around the world and the details about how they started can be considered a toolkit for planners and policy makers.

These strategies are not meant as a panacea for urban renewal or the larger societal issues of social and economic inequality. They should be considered approaches that can be used alongside other levels and models of project delivery and urban policy.

a. Participatory Design and Engagement

There is a growing recognition of the value of civic engagement and participation in the process of urban planning and neighbourhood revitalisation (Alexander, 1997; Innes, 1995; Mandelbaum, 1996, Umenoto, 2001). Engagement, in this sense, goes beyond the 'tick box' approach to participation and advocates for meaningful and deliberate dialogue between citizens and practitioners. This means giving residents the ability to affect and contribute to the decisions that are made about their community and their physical environment.

Research has repeatedly found that authentic dialogue and meaningful discussion with the public improves the capacity of decision makers to plan and implement successful urban projects, as well as empowers the local population. Innes and Booher (2005) lay out some of the claims of participative planning, suggesting that: it helps decision makers to discover what the public's preferences are; it improve decisions by incorporating local knowledge; it advances fairness and justice; and gives planner's decisions more legitimacy (p. 422-423).

Engagement in the urban renewal process builds individual and collective knowledge, skills and resources (Cumberlidge and Musgrave 2006, p. 16). It can also increase a community's ability to influence the allocation of economic resources, political power, and legal rights (Innes and Booher 2005). It is a means of building civic capacity from the bottom-up and creating an active, engaged polity that is capable of obtaining resources, taking action and solving problems.



Hotel Neustadt – Halle, East Germany

Hotel Neustadt was a project that took place in Halle, former East Germany which demonstrates the power of engagement in the urban renewal process. The area was one of the largest socialist housing estates in the country, planned in the 1960's and built over the course of 25 years. At one point, the buildings were home to 100,000 chemical factory workers. Due to changes in the economy, the neighbourhood started to decline and experience a very high unemployment rate, leaving about one third of the buildings vacant. In recognizing this issue, the architecture firm and the Thalia Young people's Theatre Company came up with the idea of turning the vacant apartments into a hotel. The project was implemented by over 100 people from the community, starting with the renovation of the abandoned building into a fully functioning hotel. It also involved art installations and projects within and around the building, as well as a game based circuit including a Big Slide and a mini-golf course. Hotel Neustadt had a major impact on bringing the community together. It began a discussion about the condition of the neighbourhood and what it meant to improve it. It also garnered political support and media attention. But, most importantly for this discussion, the project led to many of the young people who were involved in the project becoming engaged in entrepreneurial activity of their own. They set up film or arts companies, started running bars and other businesses – and contributing “in a very direct way” to the regeneration of the area (Cumberlidge and Musgrave 2007, p. 92). Hotel Neustadt demonstrates the long-term effects and resilience that is built into a community by giving them the opportunity to take part in and contribute to the renewal process. (Cumberlidge and Musgrave 2006, p. 89-94)

a. Art and culture

Art and culture can play an important role in urban renewal. Broadly, bringing art and culture into the planning process can help project leaders and the community to develop responses to problems with high levels of vision and imagination (Griffiths 2001). More specifically, there are a range of benefits can be derived from community-based cultural activities, which include thing like: 'Theatre, music, dance, museums and galleries, arts education, electronic media, literary arts as well as large cultural organizations, neighbourhood-based arts centers, schools, or festivals (Novak 2007, p. 1). Community based cultural programming can provide opportunities for expression and creativity; reinforce and build social capital; facilitate social connections within neighbourhoods as well as with the larger community (Nowak 2007). These participatory cultural programs and initiatives can foster personal growth, build confidence and promote skill building. They can also contribute to social cohesion by developing mutual understandings, creating social networks and addressing issues of class, ethnicity, age and gender (Novak 2007). There is also potential to empower a community by strengthening its local image, identity and developing a sense of pride in its uniqueness. Finally, arts and culture can operate as an entrepreneurial activity that employs and supports local artists.

Art is also a valuable tool for urban renewal, as it can animate a neighbourhoods public spaces, enhance its characters and contribute to the enjoyment of public spaces. Public art, which can be either publicly or privately run, might include things like fountains, murals, mosaics, banners, environmental, figurative and abstract sculptures, play sculptures, or decorative seating (PPS Public Art). They programs and can be temporary or permanent. According to the Project for Public Spaces, public art is especially effective when it reflects a community's heritage or local identity. It has also been proven to create economic and cultural value in a neighbourhood and can provide opportunities to support local artists (PPS Public Art).

This brief overview of the role of art and culture in the renewal process suggests that it is a valuable tool for activating the public realm and supporting a more bottom-up approach to renewal, Thus, the social benefits derived from arts and culture at the local level should offer direction for imaginative and substantive urban revitalization.



Mural Arts Program, Philadelphia

Philadelphia's nationally recognized Mural Arts Program demonstrates the value of using art and creativity in the urban renewal process. Over the past 10 years, the program has created nearly 2500 murals and employed over 3000 local artists. The murals have become a focal point of the city and sources of social capital for the city, as well as the individual neighbourhoods where they exist. For a neighbourhood to get a mural approved, they must organize themselves and apply to the city. They have to contribute time and energy and agree on the themes and imaged the want represented. The murals are a relatively low-cost, high-impact form of place-making. They are symbols of civic care and public commitment to revitalization. Jane Golden – founder of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program states, "At the heart of community revitalization is our ability to touch peoples' hearts and souls. So when you talk about neighbourhood and community rejuvenation, I don't know how you leave art out of the equation". They are also help people to remember what is important to them and their neighbourhood. Art has created an authentic place out of nothing. The Mural Arts program attracts visitors and tourists. (Novak 2002, 10-12; City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, 2010)

b. Flexible and open urban landscapes

Incorporating flexibility and openness into the built environment is a valuable strategy for creating social and cultural change. The origins of this idea might be traced to Koolhaas's (1987) design submission for the Parc de la Villette in Paris, France. He designed the park to be open to multiple possible futures and develop the more the park was used; "The underlying principle of programmatic indeterminacy as a basis of the formal concept allows any shift, modification, replacement or substitution to occur without damaging the initial hypothesis" (Koolhaas and Mau 1998, 921).

When applied to the process urban renewal, the idea is to design and plan spaces that are open and flexible to different uses, interpretations, or changes over time. It proposes that rather than make improvements to a neighbourhood or based on singular notions, formed by external actors, flexible, indeterminate design can allow for multiple interpretations, expressions of difference and possibilities of use. This does not suggest doing nothing and hope something happens, but that there should be multiple interpretations of a place as well as sufficient meaning to stimulate a reaction among the people that use them.

This strategy can have numerous effects on the process of change in these neighbourhoods. For one, it allows individuals become personally involved with their environment. People become immersed in a place where natural actions, drives and desires are allowed to exist (Levit 2008, 5). Flexible urban spaces can also encourage exchange, play, and creative ways of thinking about one's environment. Flexible spaces can also accommodate difference within ethnically and culturally diverse cities, working towards creating more equitable public realm. The conclusion is that open and flexible uses can connect people and place and encourage them to interact. This allows patterns to emerge and allows the urban renewal process to gain richness and acceptance gradually over time.



Maurice Rose Airfeld, Frankfurt, Germany

This project involves the conversion of a former airfield in Frankfurt Germany into an area for local recreation and natural preservation. It demonstrates how flexibility and openness in the development of community space creates a more equitable, inclusive and resilient change process. The airfield, built in 1930's, once consisted of a large area of hard surfaces, airfields and adjacent buildings, was abandoned by the US armed forces in 1992. After they left, the area was left vacant. The conversion of the area used a used open and flexible approach to determine its program and design. Planners set hardly any parameters in the design of this area. They left it open to be used the way that the people from the surrounding community wanted or decided to use it. The construction of the park was extremely minimal; benches, barriers and the edges of the park were taken from the areas old hangar. The designers of this community park argue that 'citizens clubs, school, kindergarten, playgroups, circles of friends, fitness and nature lovers' who used the space were encouraged to bring their ideas for the space to the site. They let the community decide what that the future of the area might be. Presently, the park is used by a diverse group of used in a wide variety of ways, showing how great things can happen when community programming encourages spontaneity rather than just the same old thing. Such unrestricted creative appropriation of space is valuable strategy for urban renewal.

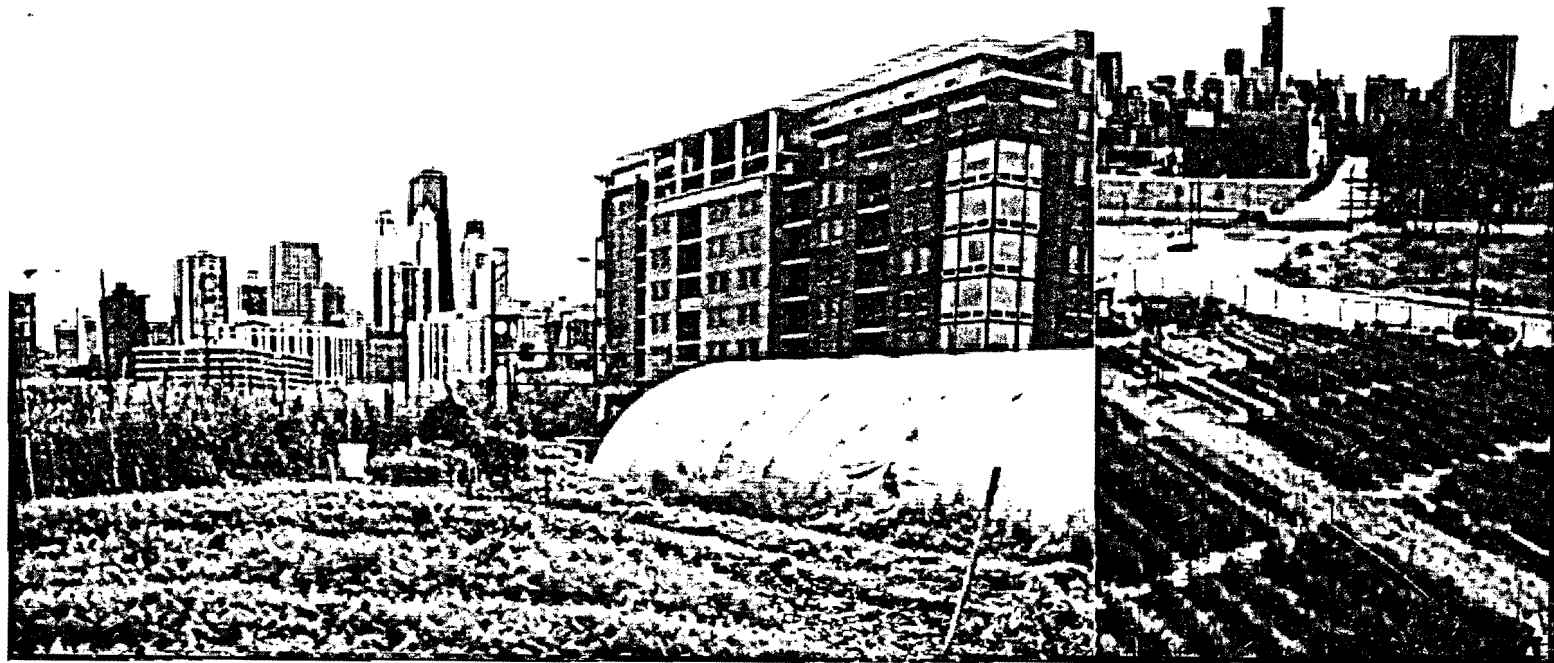
(Karow-Kluge 2009)

c. Temporary uses

Temporary projects, also referred to as interim uses, are another adaptive, catalytic strategy that can advance the urban renewal process. These are projects that temporarily activate unoccupied urban spaces, such as infill sites, former industrial sites or housing settlements, vacant infrastructure or empty shops (Blumner 2006, 9). Some of the potential uses include: gardens, parks, playgrounds, urban farms, art installations, performance spaces, artists' studios, installations, skate parks, adventure courses, or urban beaches (p. 8). They can include entrepreneurial uses, like start-up businesses, open-air markets, bars and night clubs. They can provide spaces for artists or entrepreneurs looking for cheap temporary space or for demonstrations or political statements. In most cases, these projects are based on an agreement between the property owner and the users, and are permitted until an investor emerges.

Temporary projects are a valuable strategy for the revitalization of declining urban areas. For one, they can provide individuals or group within the community with access to proximate space at little to no cost. Second, they can strengthen the image of an area use and perception of a place. Kampshoff (2008) suggest that "temporary projects are a bit like an urban laboratory... What is fascinating about this type of work is that we can use the projects to transform, improve, disrupt, ignore or reinterpret spaces for a short period of time. The projects may disappear, but the spaces are never the same again" (quoted in Schwiontek 2008)

Interim uses provide a valuable tool for dealing with the complex and unpredictable nature of urban renewal. They can make productive use of space while awaiting development or other larger changes and can adapt to changing circumstances better than permanent projects. There is also an opportunity to receive feedback about how a temporary project was received by the community and how successful a similar more permanent project might be. What is perhaps most interesting and exciting about temporary project is their ability to bring about further change in the way an area is perceived or the way it is treated by residents and city officials.



Mobile City Farm, Chicago, USA

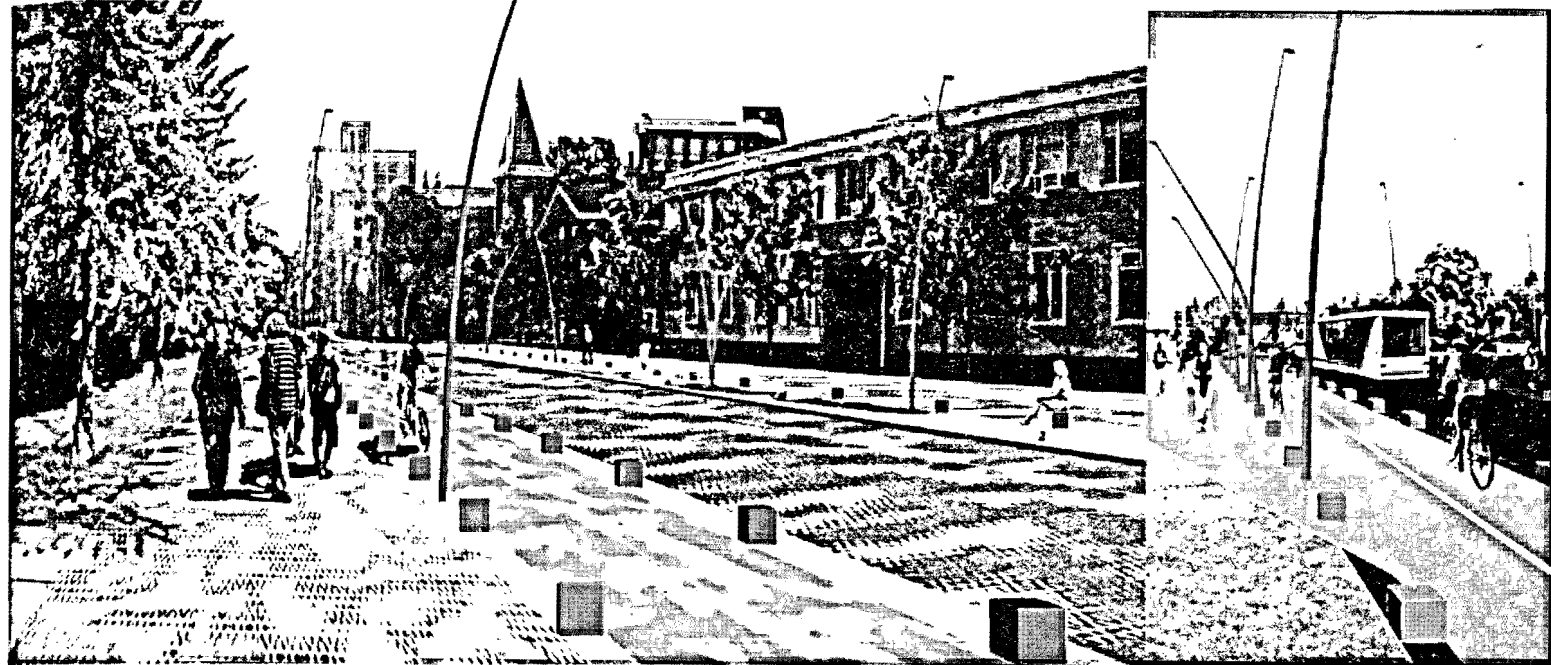
The non-profit organization, Resource Center Chicago, has developed a strategy of transforming vacant lots into working, organic farms. The process involves clearing the site, laying a protective clay barrier, and then adding fresh fertilized soil and compost collected from local institutions. Then homeless people from the community are invited to learn about organic farming and apply for apprenticeships. Each farm employs a few people, and hosts educational programmes, slow food events and gatherings for the community. Produce from the farm is sold to from an on-site market at a discounted price as well as to local restaurants. When the site is sold, or developers are ready to move in, the farms are literally 'rolled up' and relocated, leaving a perfectly clean site that is ready for development. Interestingly, the activity on the site has actually been shown to make it more appealing to real-estate developers and potentially cause increase in property values. The Mobile City Farm is an example of how engaging with the uncertainty and change, can produce significant community benefits. (Cumberlidge and Musgrave 2007)

d. Urban acupuncture and low-cost tools

According to architectural critic Kenneth Frampton (2002), the term urban acupuncture refers to “the reparative potential of compact, catalytic urban interventions, with the provision that these should be realizable within a fairly short period of time and be capable of spontaneously restructuring their immediate surroundings” (12). In the context of urban renewal this idea can be applied by using quick-win projects and low-cost tools to catalyze the process of change and allow new opportunities to unfold over time.

In Malcolm Gladwell’s (2000) book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, he concludes that “little things can have big effects”. He draws from a range of cultural and sociological research to support his argument. He discusses the “Broken Windows Theory”, developed by criminologists James Wilson and George Kelling (p. 22-28). This theory was based on the study that found that a successful strategy for preventing vandalism in New York City was to fix problems when they are small, such as repairing the broken windows. The study found that vandals were much less likely to break further windows or do further damage if the windows were fixed. Gladwell’s final conclusion was that societal actors should look to identify these small stimuli and deliberately adjust them in order to achieve beneficial results (47).

This is a valuable theory for urban renewal because it concerns the perception of the surrounding environment, and suggests that smaller projects might be effective in changing the way a neighbourhood space is perceived or used. It is therefore important for supporting a more bottom-up and adaptive approach that is not overly dependent on the resources or ideas of external agents. What is important to note however is that these urban catalysts must have sufficient meaning and be strategic (Shieh 2006). Change in this case, occurs not from simple intervention but through careful calculation. Shieh (2006) recommends that urban small urban catalysts are precise in the location and in the design (p. 65). Thus, to ensure a positive and sufficient reaction, the catalyst must be considered, understood, and accepted.



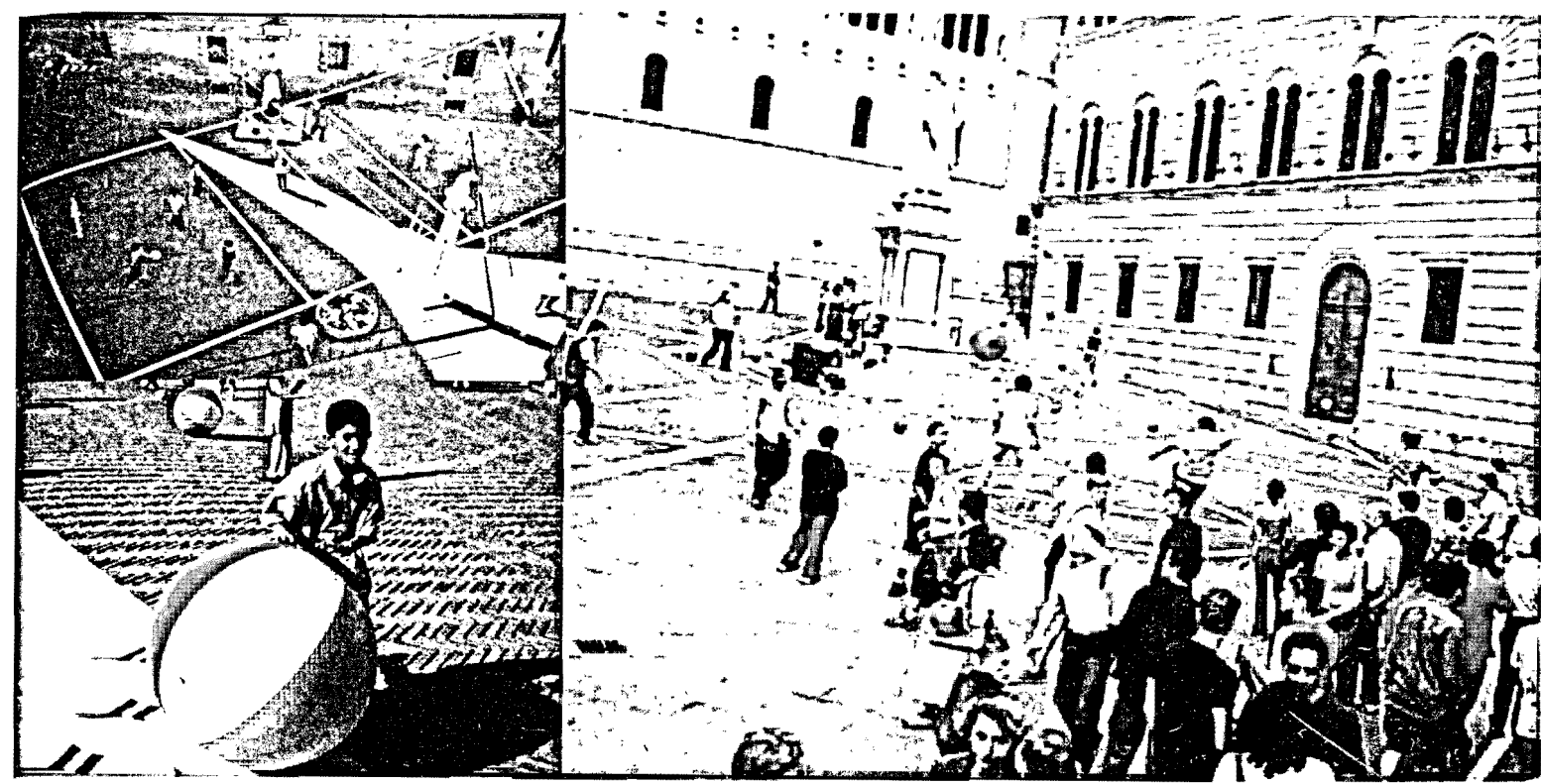
The Connective Corridor, Syracuse NY

The Connective Corridor in Syracuse, New York is an urban design strategy for a 1.5 mile strip of the city that uses the ideas of urban acupuncture and low-cost tools. Its objective is to regenerate and connect various parts of Syracuse's declining downtown. Although it is a larger infrastructure project, there is an important lesson to be learned from its strategy, which can be applied to successful urban renewal programmes. It reveals how to plan for a declining area, with fewer resources, less political support and less control; or achieving maximum effect with minimal means. The plan incorporates things like bike paths, imaginative lighting, public and interactive art, signage and way finding systems. Low cost materials such as colourful paint are used to bring vibrancy and new life to the space along the corridor. Julia Czerniak, Director of UPSTATE at Syracuse University, led a team of designers who work on the project. In her lecture *Doing More With Less* (2008), she argues that the connective corridor uses "optimal and catalytic sites" to activate certain areas and encourage further development. She spoke of tapping into the energy sources that exist in an area, using smaller 'catalytic projects' to ignite economic development, tourism and residential growth. The project demonstrates the value of quick-win projects and low-cost tools, making the argument that they can lead to social and economic change. Using this principle in the revitalization of declining in urban neighbourhoods will contribute to its success. (Czerniak 2008; Cardic 2009)

e. Place-making in public spaces

Public spaces can be streets, parks, vacant lots, waterfronts, derelict buildings and other public spaces, essentially any place that acts a gathering place for the community (Bradford 2005). The importance of public spaces is an argument possibly as old as planning itself, valued for its ability to create community interaction and active recreation (Jacobs 1961). This is still a laudable goal, as public spaces can provide room to negotiate how people live together and encounter different, races, classes ages and ability on a daily bases. This can help to cultivate citizenship and tolerance of diversity. Landry (2008) states, "Public space is the territory of humanity. It is in this arena that we can raise our awareness of the connection we have to each other. It is here that we may realize that in all our diversity, we actually have more similarities than differences".

Place-making goes beyond the creation of public spaces for gathering and recreation. It refers to the process of planning, design and management of public spaces in a way s that and create emotional attachments to a particular place (Project for Public Spaces). It does this by understanding the local community and building on its assets, strengths and potentials and involving the community in the design and construction of these places. As such, 'placemaking' builds common ground, and helps to nurture and define a neighbourhood's identity. It creates emotional links to places, and through this process empowers the community. Additionally, place-making can activate economic and community development, as public space improvements can work to catalyze investment and small-scale entrepreneurial activities. They are places for meeting new people, celebrating local culture and entrepreneurship.



Play or Rewind, Sienna, Italy

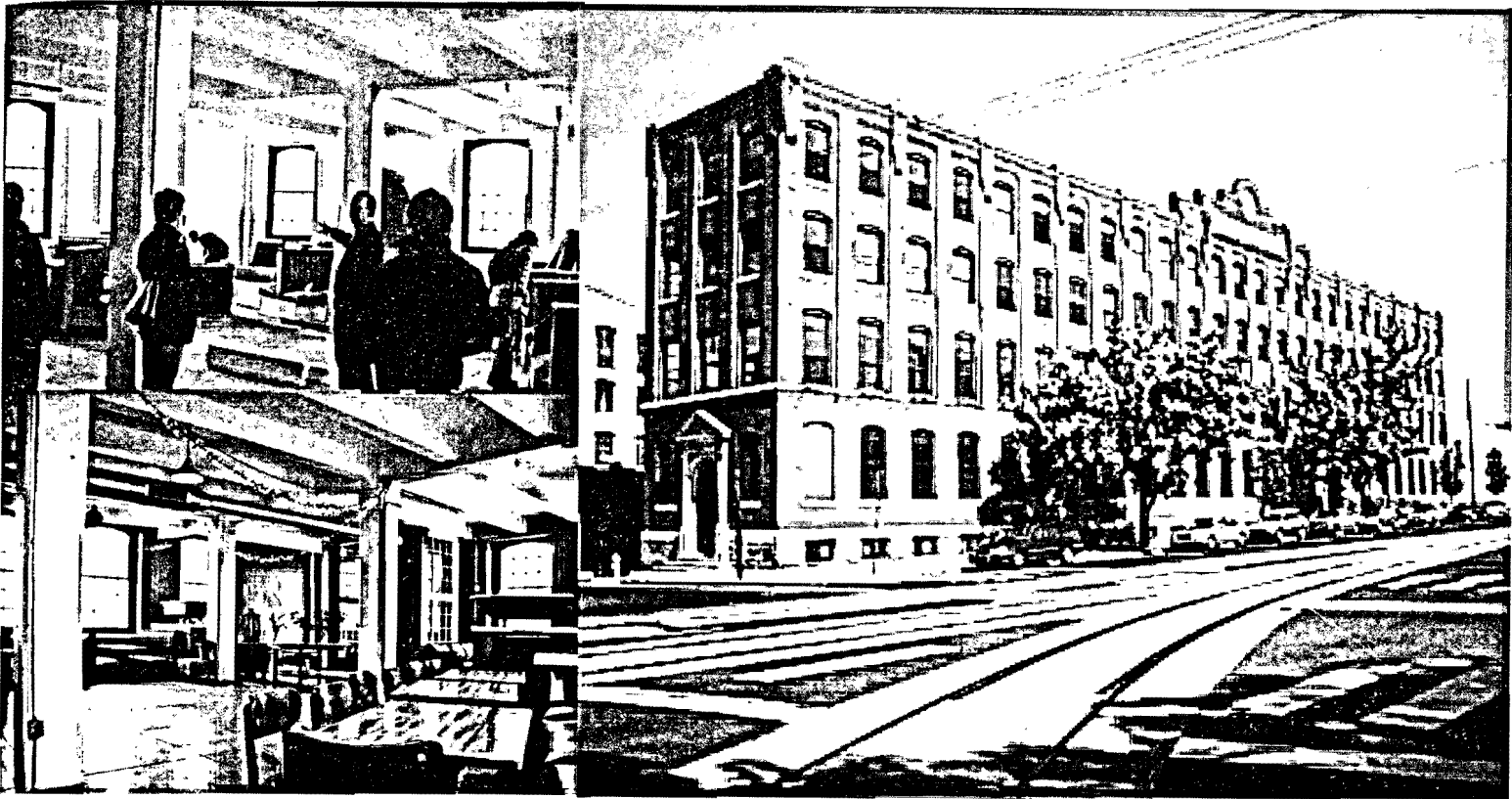
The historical town of Sienna, Italy is a year round tourist destination and has been described as a “frozen museum”. Play or Rewind was a temporary installation designed by architecture firm Cliostraat and graduate students from Arsonova Academy which demonstrates the power of place-making in changing the perception of a neighbourhoods as well as bringing people together in the public realm. The project was created to encourage interaction between people and the historical fabric of the town in a playful and joyful manner. It looked at the city as a place of spontaneity and amusement and turned it into a playground made up of a volleyball pitch, a soccer field and a 10 pin bowling alley. The marking for the games took weird shapes in order to match with, intersect or overlap urban spaces. This project demonstrates how an area that had become worthless or derelict could become a place for pleasure, play and fun and how using the city’s public spaces as a place for unplanned uses and amusements can provide the community with a fresh look at its physical space. The project shows how public spaces have the power to transform places, individuals, and communities. (Cumberlidge and Musgrave 2006)

f. Adaptive re-use

Adaptive re-use refers to the process of giving new meaning, value and function to derelict and abandoned urban spaces (Dickenson 1996). These spaces may include things like parks, facilities, community centres, or old-industrial buildings and may involve a range of conversions, from large-scale official projects to smaller vernacular examples.

Urban renewal can derive significant benefit from the imaginative transformation of a neighbourhood's physical assets. For one, adaptive re-use can help to avoid the need for costly new developments and provide a community with a local gathering space. The use or re-use of aged cultural venues within a community can also bring new life to a neighbourhood and act as a foundation for further community development (Griffiths 2001).

In addition to providing cost-effective community amenities, adaptive-re-use has significant social benefits, as it can connect the renewal of a neighbourhood to its historical past. Making use of old buildings can also help to ensure the changes that occur during the renewal process are truly integrated into local community life. Cumberlidge and Musgrave (2006) state, "adaptive transformations, which use, re-use and shift exiting infrastructure, become more appropriate forms of vision – visions building on and working with existing contexts and meaning and culture" (p.13). The Highline in New York City is likely the most well-know and successful adaptive re-use project. It involved the transformation of the city's former elevated freight railroad into a 1.45 mile long elevated park space. Today the highline attracts tourists from around the world as well as provides space for recreation and leisure for New York City residents (Highline). It is clear then, that the process of adapting existing physical assets in a community relies less on top-down proposals and lets the solutions come from within; projects can be innovative and radical without relying on sweeping change.



The Crane Arts Building, North Philadelphia

The Crane Arts Building is located in the old manufacturing center of Philadelphia, a neighbourhood that has been experiencing significant decline since the end of the industrial era. In 2002 the former plumping factory and warehouse was converted into a new arts center which holds artists facilities, studios and exhibition spaces. The conversion of the building was a real-estate deal and partnership between a developer and two artists. Today, the building is a source of interaction among artists, local institutions, and social networks. It features exhibitions, fundraisers, and performances, which brings people into the neighbourhood. A local institution provides fellowships, and gives artists the opportunity to access the facilities and gallery space. This is an example of adapting and using the physical assets of a community can build civic capacity and social capital and contribute to urban renewal. (Novak 2005)

New Rules for Collaboration

These strategies and their associated best practices involve a diverse group of actors from the public, private and community sectors. They show how that collaboration and cooperation is critical for the implementation of these types of projects. Further, they reveal that there are no rules or limits with regards to who can implement these projects or what types of partnerships might work. Likely, it is in part, because of these cross-discipline, creative partnerships and models of collaboration that some of these projects were able to exist and secure financial and political support. What this suggests is a need to go beyond the traditional ways of initiating and implementing renewal projects and engage in new types of partnerships, agreements and affiliations.

Recommendations for Tower Renewal

The following planning response to The Mayor's Tower Renewal Project reflects the need for a bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approach to urban renewal. The suggestions are based on the need to build capacity and resilience into tower neighbourhoods in order to create sustainable change. The intention is not to solve the Tower Renewal issue; rather it is to provide direction for planners and practitioners looking to make significant, long-lasting, and equitable improvements to conditions of tower neighbourhoods.

It appears that the current focus of tower renewal is on improving the energy efficiencies of the tower buildings, as well as some incremental improvements to the community facilities. These are certainly laudable goals; however as history has shown, there is great danger in single-focused, incremental renewal interventions. This research has proven the importance of integrated, process driven solutions to urban renewal that connect people and place and work from the bottom up. It is through these interventions that the changes in tower neighbourhoods will be substantial, equitably distributed and stand the test of time.

Based on this understanding, the recommendations emphasize meaningful engagement between people and place, as a way of building civic capacity. The goal is to generate social capital, citizenship, and other skills in order to improve the ability of the tower communities to solve some of their own problems. Low-cost tools and quick-win projects are used to get the renewal process moving, to initiate conversations about Tower Renewal within the neighbourhoods and in the wider community and get feedback on different possible projects. Catalysts and activation projects in the public realm are used with the intention of triggering changes to the way people use and perceive their neighbourhood spaces. Activating the public realm also works to bring positive attention to tower neighbourhood and improve their image in the eyes of resident and the wider public. Temporary projects are suggested for making productive use of the surrounding greenspace and accommodating the slow change process. The recommendations also reflect the idea that renewal should build on and adapt the existing physical assets, such as parking lots. With a real commitment to these ideas, in the long term it is possible that these bottom-up, catalyst projects will

lead to increased property values and perhaps even gain the interest of developers wanting to develop in the area. A general sense of openness and adaptability is present throughout each of these recommendations, allowing for patterns and solutions for Tower Renewal to emerge as time goes on and tower neighbourhood to gain strength and resilience through the renewal process.

a. Use the renewal process to build civic capacity

Over the next several years, as the Tower Renewal project continues to gain momentum and support from private owners, the goal of practitioners should be to engage residents in the renewal process. Meaningful, yet transparent, engagement with individuals and families will build civic capacity and help to give the communities the ability to solve some of their own problems. Residents might become more knowledgeable about how to affect the renewal process, how to get support from their landlords and property owners and how to approach the political process. Engagement will also help to give residents the tools and opportunities to contribute to the ideas about how redevelopment will look in their neighbourhood. This will also ensure that the urban renewal process will be more stable in the face of uncertain futures. Through the engagement process, residents may also develop social relationships with other residents or influential community leaders. Value mapping and engagement games, or other creative forms of participation are also encouraged in order to make the participation process interesting and relatable to residents.

b. Engage the youth

In many tower neighbourhoods there are significant youth populations who can provide valuable support and creative ideas for the tower renewal process. The value of youth should not be overlooked in this process as they have incredible imaginations and often have significant time to devote to community building activities. This might involve working with elementary or high schools, summer camps or church groups. Perhaps, providing youth groups with small financial incentives for creative projects or cleaning-up a neighbourhood space could engage them in the renewal process. Another possibility is to give children visual media, such as cameras and video-recorders as a way for them to express their thoughts about the issues in their neighbourhoods as well as generate new ideas about tower renewal.



c. Use quick-win projects and low-cost tools

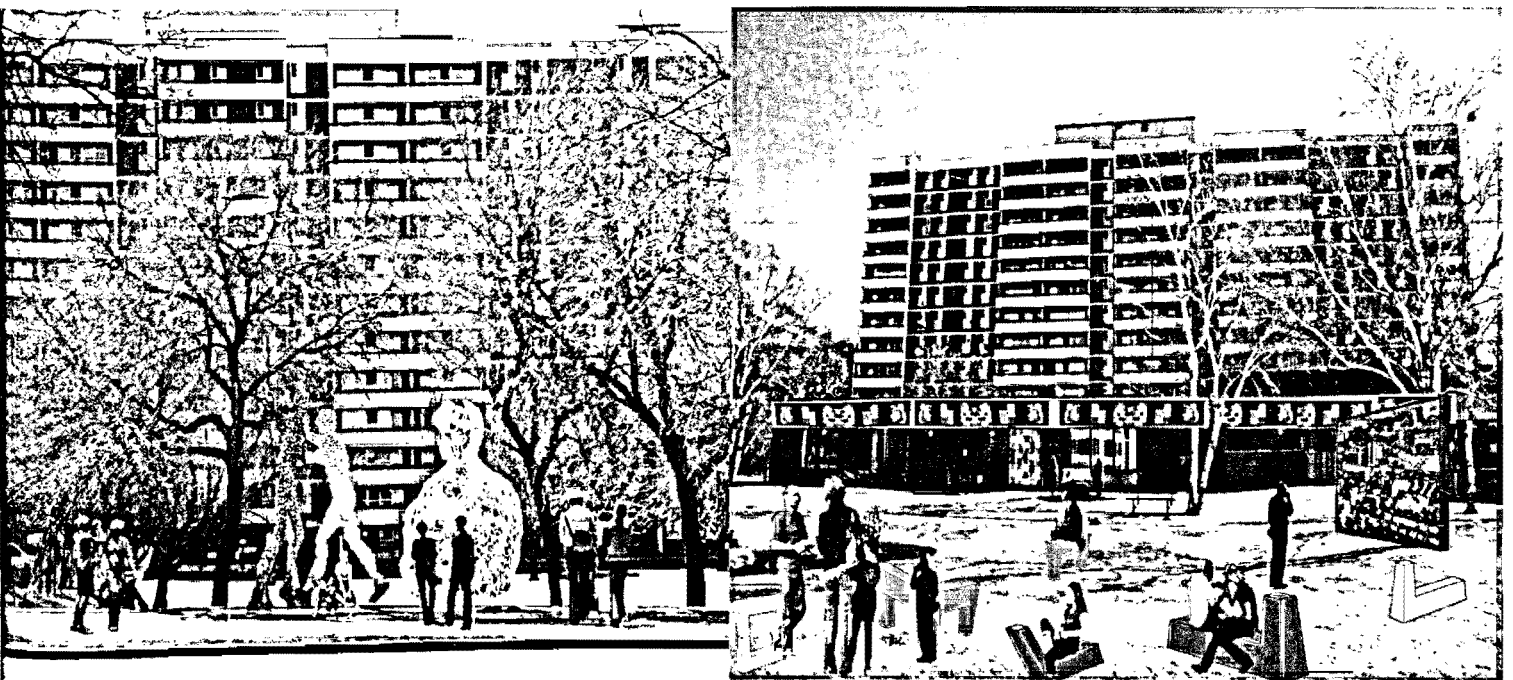
The research points to the fact that there are no easy solutions to Tower Renewal. Quick-win projects and low-cost tools are suggested as ways to supplement longer term plans as well as catalyze further social, economic or even political changes within a neighbourhood. Single, well thought-out initiatives or improvement, such as public art, a new community amenity are suggested as ways to alter the perception of a neighbourhood or bring new urban vitality to an area. Although further research would need to be conducted as to what these catalysts could be and where they would go, it is possible that simple things like a new basketball net or bus station may produce significant change to way a neighbourhood is used and perceived.

d. Encourage temporary uses while awaiting change

In recognizing that Tower Renewal is a complex process and that changes to all neighbourhoods cannot be expected right away, temporary uses are encouraged to make productive use of space while awaiting change. Specifically, temporary agriculture projects, like that of Mobile City, are suggested. Less permanent urban agriculture initiatives can provide feedback to project leaders as to its success and the possible issues that may arise. Although initial start-up costs might be high, the program could be used in different tower neighbourhoods and eventually evolve into a profit making business. Other temporary uses such as skate parks, yard sales, and markets, are also recommended. The hope is that these temporary uses can improve the image of the neighbourhood in order to increase their value and even gain the interest of potential developers. Another potential temporary project is a travelling exhibit about tower renewal itself. This would help to engage residents in a conversation about their neighbourhood as well as provide feedback to community leaders.

e. Make public space the platform for change

It is suggested that public space be considered the platform for change in the Tower Renewal process. This goes beyond incremental improvements to lighting and landscaping, but refers to the making of places that trigger new relationships between residents and their physical environments. It is recommended then that public spaces be improved through a process of information collecting, workshops and surveying of the community and a subsequent translation of these ideas into action. This process will help to create connections between residents as they work together on this task as well as ensure that the neighbourhood's public spaces are places that have significant meaning. Further, it is recommended the public spaces should be fun and exciting places that engage with people's senses, encourage interaction and create strong connections to place. For example, rather than build a conventional playground, the suggestion is for more flexible public spaces that encourage risk-taking, adventure and imagination in order to truly engage residents with their physical environments.



f. Adapt the parking lots

All tower neighbourhoods contain large surface parking lots. Although concrete is feared by many planners, it has unique potential for recreation and adaptive re-use. The recommendation is to experiment with the parking lots and encourage creative appropriation of these spaces. Some sort of catalyst such as paint or new urban furniture could potentially facilitate the adaptive re-use of parking lots.



g. Experiment with local markets

It has been established throughout the research on Tower Renewal that local markets are a valuable opportunity for improving the public realm and supporting local economies (ERA 2008). This recommendation supports and builds on this idea. One suggestion is to provide economic incentives to local market vendors in order to act as a catalyst for local entrepreneurship and encourage people to participate. More research would be needed to support this argument. It is also suggested that the introduction of markets into tower neighbourhoods take a gradual approach, experimenting with different models and learning from what happens on the ground.

h. Engage local artists and create a distinctive image for Towers

The value of art and culture in the renewal process has been established by this research and is supported by a wide range literature. The recommendation is then to use art to enhance the identity and image of tower neighbourhoods and encourage continued conversation about them in the public. A distinctive theme for tower renewal, like that of Philadelphia's Murals is recommended as a valuable strategy. Holding a public art event, festival or longer-term projects are also possible ways to engage local artists and the community in a conversation about Tower Renewal as well as improve their image to the rest of the community. Both of these practices can employ and support local artists, driving economic as well as social and cultural change.



Limitations

The preceding research concludes that participatory, place-based strategies should be at the heart of urban renewal programming. It is important at this point to acknowledge certain limitations to the model. These do not suggest that the model itself is flawed, but rather that it must be applied carefully and supported with broader policies and community actions.

a. Finding support and funding

Specific to the Mayor's Tower Renewal project, there is a question of who will implement these types of projects. The Tower Renewal Office operates largely under that assumption that tower renewal initiatives must have a business case in order to obtain buy-in from the property owners. As such, they are unlikely to initiate the types of projects mentioned above. Thus, there appears to be a potential gap in the Tower Renewal organizational structure, in the sense that there is no one body that would initiate these projects or programs. More research is required here to determine who and how these projects would be implemented.

b. Cause and Effect Measurement

It has been recognized in this paper that measurement of the outcomes of urban renewal are difficult yet important to measure. One of the limitations of this model is that it is especially tricky to measure. Results are more easily recorded through interviews with citizens and community leaders rather than through hard statistics. This is not to say that the results are any less important or valid, but it does leave some room for uncertainty as to their effectiveness.

c. Multiple publics

Another limitation of this model is the potential for people within the community to disagree about certain things within the renewal process. Especially when residents are given such an important role in making decisions and carrying out actions within their community, the concern is whether there will be consensus between community members. On the one hand, it is fairly normal for these tensions to exist within a community change process; however, they can also prevent or prolong change from occurring. This observation speaks to the need for good leadership and careful implementation of the renewal process.

d. Too focused on place

The strategies suggested by this research have a strong focus on place. Research on place-based policy approaches have begun to catalogue some of the issues that occur when efforts are focused on places. For one, policies may become fragmented or difficult to coordinate as interventions proliferate (Perri 6 *et al.*, 2002). Working in all the different tower neighbourhood for example would be a difficult process to navigate. Also, neighbourhoods may begin to compete for a city's investments and resource, potentially leading to tensions and arguments of equity or need (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2001). Further, place-based policies can stigmatize neighbourhoods and bring unwanted attention from the community (Walsh, 2001).

Concluding Thoughts

This research highlights the importance of incorporating bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approaches into the urban renewal process. They are valuable for their ability to deal with the complexity of urban renewal and the interrelatedness of its different elements. Such an emergent approach to urban renewal works to strengthen civic and institutional capacity at the local level, enhance social capital, and develop personal networks, leadership and new skills. The research also demonstrates the value of landscape and place in facilitating and supporting such long-lasting change processes.

Although there are limitations to the effect that these approaches can have, this research encourages policy makers, community leaders and researchers to reflect on the possibilities they provide for solving complex problems. When decision makers accept this and devote themselves to devising layered, creative solutions that engage people and place, significant and sustainable results will occur. Given the importance of neighbourhoods for the health and well-being of individuals and the prosperity of cities, planners must continue to learn and expand their notions of what is meant by urban renewal what is means to build strong, resilient neighbourhoods.

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Image References

- Figure 1: <http://www.towerrenewal.ca/>
- Figure 2: ERA Architects Opportunities Book (2008)
- Figure 3: The Suburban Tower and Toronto's First mass Housing Boom in Green TOpia.
- Figure 4: Personal image collection
- Figure 5: Personal image collection
- Figure 6: Personal Image collection
- Figure 7: ERA Architects Opportunities Book
- Figure 8: ERA Architects Opportunities Book
- Figure 9: WMZH Architects – Urban Design Concept Plan

Figure 10: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/daveglass/2282851644/>

Figure 11: n/a

Figure 12: n/a

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Play or rewind

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