RYAN KHURANA

THE FUTURE OF QUAYSIDE

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OVERVIEW

- Sidewalk Toronto Background
- Waterfront Toronto’s Remit
- Key Smart City Issues
- Case Study: Taipei
- Key Lessons

Partnership launched by Waterfront Toronto and Sidewalk Labs, a Google sister company, in 2017 to develop the Quayside, a 12-acre stretch of Toronto’s waterfront

Cancelled in April 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic for alleged market uncertainties that made the project less feasible

Plagued during the entire project history by criticisms from citizen advocacy groups and government officials on a variety of grounds

“FORMER WATERFRONT TORONTO CEO WILL FLEISSIG — WHO, IN EARLY 2017, ORDERED THE RFP THAT PUT THIS WHOLE MELODRAMA IN MOTION — WAS CLUELESS ABOUT THE CITY’S POLITICAL CULTURE, AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, THE DEEP HISTORY OF WHY THE AGENCY EXISTED IN THE FIRST PLACE — TWO CRITICAL MISTAKES. CONSEQUENTLY, HE ATTEMPTED TO PERFORM A GRAFT WITH INCOMPATIBLE TISSUE AND THEN COULDN’T FIGURE OUT WHY IT DIDN’T TAKE.”
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WATERFRONT TORONTO’S REMIT

- Established as a tri-governmental agency in 2002 to revitalise Toronto’s waterfront

- Overlapping mandate with municipal and provincial agencies and unclear direct accountability have held up projects

- Limited authority from lack of planning and zoning powers to lack of ownership over the lands affected

- Acted without sufficient oversight during early stages of the Quayside project leading to fraught relationships with municipal, provincial, and federal authorities

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KEY SMART CITY ISSUES

▸ Outsourcing of Expertise
▸ Vendor Lock-In
▸ Administratively Burdensome Pilots
▸ Uneven Bargaining Power
▸ Lack of Democratic Buy-In

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CASE STUDY: TAIPEI

- Problem first, solution second
- Participatory design and execution
- Leverage local startups to implement solutions

KEY LESSONS: OWNERSHIP AND MODULARITY

- Effective Smart City initiatives begin by identifying who the smart city is for and who is responsible for its success. Waterfront Toronto currently has an unclear mandate with tensions that prevent this ownership and accountability.

- The larger the scale of a smart city, the more modular it must be to prevent failure in any aspect from jeopardising the entire initiative. A single innovation and funding partner is counter to this approach.

- Technology should not devolve into spectacle, but should be a means to increase democratic participation in design and execution.

CONCLUSION