



WILLOWBANK

Re: PG18.2 Official Plan Five Year Review: Official Plan Amendment to Adopt new Heritage and Public Realm Policies

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Toronto's Official Plan Amendment to Adopt new Heritage and Public Realm Policies. This is an important document that deserves careful consideration for the future of heritage in the city of Toronto. It is a timely opportunity to heed the well documented call to rethink traditional approaches to heritage and define a progressive new vision of heritage that respects contemporary thinking in the field.

This submission identifies a contemporary perspective on heritage with which the City's policy amendments should be aligned. It further offers the concept of cultural landscape as a framework for approaching and understanding heritage in Toronto. It concludes by recommending the City of Toronto consider the designation of cultural heritage landscapes under the framework of the Provincial Policy.

The New Heritage

In his closing remarks at the recent US/ICOMOS Symposium, Gustavo Araoz, the president of ICOMOS, argued for a better set of heritage conservation tools that responds to the "new social role of heritage" as the "pivot of cultural identity and heart of community development". "Values," he went on to say, "no longer reside exclusively in the tangible fabric of history but in intangible concepts in constant flux."

It stands to reason that conserving and commemorating heritage using concepts and tools developed in order to preserve historically distinct artefacts or events is unlikely to attend to the myriad ways in which people render the past meaningful and relevant in the present - as part of their everyday lives. Therefore, Araoz suggests that heritage experts share the responsibility and rewards of heritage practice with local communities by allowing people to define their own heritage.

According to Graham Fairclough of Newcastle University (formerly of English Heritage), democratizing and diffusing heritage in this way "may require us... to find out what people themselves value," rather than "finding the most important buildings on a national or expert scale and then looking around to see who might feel 'ownership' of them".

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A contemporary perspective on heritage that is aligned with recent theory and discourse in the field recognizes that heritage value is not something that can be ascribed to things or events based on enumerated criteria. Instead it is derived and maintained through everyday practice and engagement in place.

Consequently, it is important for communities to have an opportunity to identify those elements of the past (both material and immaterial) that are relevant to contemporary social, cultural and economic life. This implies breaking away from the idea of heritage as protecting a selection of discrete historical artefacts to one that sees heritage conservation as supporting the ongoing valorisation of the past in relation to the contexts and objectives of the present.

Ultimately, the City of Toronto should heed Araoz's advice by adopting new and more appropriate concepts and tools that chart a different path forward - one that seeks to respond to the diversity and diffusion of heritage values at play on the ground and in the imagination of Toronto's inhabitants.

Cultural Landscape

At Willowbank, we believe that the concept of cultural landscape provides a strong framework for contemporary heritage policy and practice. In the broadest sense of the term, a cultural landscape describes the fusion of culture and place derived from sustained interaction between the two. That is to say, cultural landscape implies the co-creation of a new form, at once cultural and physical, real and imagined, that is greater than the sum of its parts. How the field of heritage conservation conceptualises and mobilises the idea of a cultural landscape has considerable implications to the promotion of community-based heritage, social inclusion and cultural vitality. Indeed, Fairclough argues that "at the frontiers of [a] new heritage is a very strong solidarity between the concept of heritage and that of landscape".

Concretely, Willowbank advocates adopting a cultural landscape framework that incorporates the following elements as the conceptual basis for heritage policy and practice in Toronto:

1. A sustained relationship between culture and place

A cultural landscape, in the broadest sense of the term, is an inextricable relationship or fusion between culture and place that grounds cultural identity and continuity. This relationship is expressed in a wide range of often intersecting tangible and intangible elements. A cultural landscape implies the co-creation of a new form, at once cultural and physical, real and imagined, that is greater than the sum of its parts.

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2. Cultural meaning produced through practice

The relationship between culture and place that defines a cultural landscape is produced and reproduced through embodied practices that result in lived experiences, material forms, imagined attachments, daily activities, cultural expressions and all manner of other tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural landscapes are sustained and remain relevant by everyday inhabitations, rituals and interventions that renew and reinvest meaning and value in place.

3. A dynamic heritage

As the product of embodied practice, cultural landscapes are dynamic and constantly adapting relationships with place. They evolve over time, remaining vital as long as the cultural connection to place has relevance to contemporary life. Thus, change is an integral and inevitable part of cultural landscapes, which are never finished or complete products that can be preserved in their current form.

4. Plurality of meaning in place

The cultural landscapes of different cultural groups and sub-cultures may overlap or intersect, creating a richness and diversity that stems from parallel relationships with the same place. Similarly, the social diversity within cultural groups may result in cultural landscapes that are characterized by a multiplicity of contrasting practices and experiences of place that resist being captured in a single narrative. The plurality associated with cultural landscapes is often part and parcel of a contested politics of place.

5. Interrelationship of elements

A cultural landscape is defined by the interrelationship of cultural elements in or associated with place that resist being divided into discrete categories such as moveable/immoveable, material/immaterial, or physical/cultural. A cultural landscape is the assemblage of buildings, structures, public spaces, private spaces, and imaginary spaces, as well as the practices, performances and rituals of inhabitation and use that map and interconnect these spaces. In other words, a cultural landscape is the 'ecology' of cultural ideas, objects, places and practices.

Policy Framework

As a concluding observation, the current definition of 'cultural heritage landscape' in use in Ontario is found in the 2005 Provincial Policy Statement. One of the strengths of

this definition, in light of the above discussion, is its recognition that a cultural landscape is 'a significant type of heritage form, distinctive from that of its constituent elements or parts'. It specifically mentions heritage conservation districts as a sub-category of cultural heritage landscape. We would recommend that the City of Toronto consider the designation of cultural heritage landscapes under the framework of the Provincial Policy Statement, outside the limitations of either the Planning Act or the Heritage Act. Provisions drawn from both of these Acts and from other legislative and policy frameworks could then be used to support these designations. This might give the City the flexibility to adopt a more creative and holistic approach to managing urban development.

The framework for such an approach, suggested in the recent UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes, puts cultural heritage and natural heritage, together with creative contemporary development, as interrelated parts of an overall approach to sustainable development.

References

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Fairclough, Graham, 2009. 'New Heritage Frontiers' in *Heritage and Beyond*. Council of Europe Publishing, pg 29 - 52.

UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape Recommendation:

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48857&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html