

The ambiguity of 'public interest' - Torontonians Heritage Conservation District redevelopment

Pablo Nicolas Robassio
University of Toronto

Abstract

Canada's reputation as an established power and welfare---inclined agent on a global scale is epitomized in the makeup of its largest city, Toronto. This financial hub not only boasts to be the most multicultural city in the world, but it also has an impressively expanding skyline in which to house its two and a half million residents from all walks of life. However, this exponential growth has resulted in significant backlash towards urban planners and developers due to their apparent disregard for an integral aspect of the city's history – its distinct neighbourhoods.

Despite the repetitive denial of any connection to political interests, projects such as the revitalization of gentrified Cabbagetown, a site distinctively outlined as a Heritage Conservation District due to its rich immigrant history, raise an ever growing debate in the field of planning: determining the extent to which progress should yield to heritage preservation and, ultimately, allowing these two contradicting forces to coexist.

The drastic change in demographic groups in Cabbagetown is an explicit example of the growing sentiment throughout Toronto. Coupled with other rapidly expanding projects such as the condominium development in the downtown core and on the Lakeshore waterfront, these changes have led to a public mistrust of municipal and provincial regulations. Residents argue that heritage conservation has a much weaker voice in bureaucratic processes such as the Ontario Municipal Board and the Committee of Adjustment, which increasingly appear to support rampant development and private industries that will bring capital to the city.

With a 'Baby---Boomer' population departing from these neighbourhoods and looking to retire in Toronto's suburbs, a worrying lack of attention to heritage conservation threatens to rob Toronto of its historic Cabbagetowns, East Annexes, and Riverdales, including their unique narratives and identities.