

MRP Overview

People, Place and Landscape

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

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The process of renewing 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 urban renewal, 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 a bottom-up, adaptive and catalytic approach 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. The project looks to improve the conditions of the city's modern high-rise apartment buildings and their surrounding neighbourhoods. Currently, these areas face a range of interrelated socio-economic and spatial problems, such as tenuous housing conditions, income polarisation, poor physical environments and lack of urban vitality. But, despite the pressing need to produce changes in these neighbourhoods and the exciting opportunities that will result from their improvement, finding workable solutions is not a straightforward task. As such, Tower Renewal provides an opportunity to examine the complexity of urban renewal and demonstrate 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 provides a set of directions advancing the goals of the Tower Renewal Project. It also 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.

