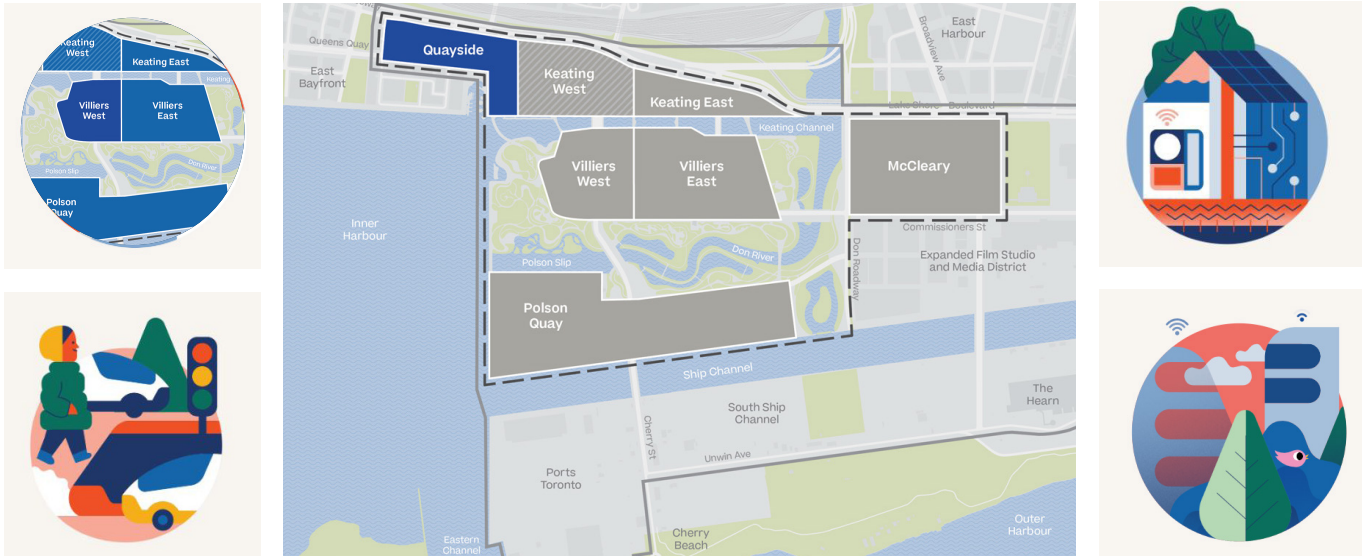


# THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF THE WATERFRONT DOCTRINE

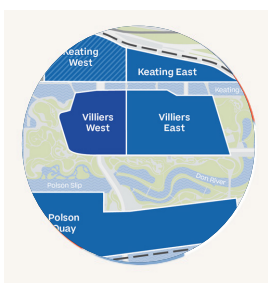
Author: Juan-Luis Suárez



IDEA district plan, digital innovations, Quayside map plan, smart housing, and urban innovations (Sidewalk Labs)

The CulturePlex has identified four areas of interest in the still emerging *Waterfront Doctrine*. These areas result from the set of decisions adopted by the three-levels-of-government (municipal, provincial and federal) corporation as well as from the positions taken by each of the different stakeholders.

## 1. The Partnership



Credit: Sidewalk Labs.

*The Partnership* is the title of volume 3 of Sidewalk Labs' Master Innovation and Development Plan answering the request for proposals issued by *Waterfront Toronto* to develop the Quayside. The volume became infamous as soon as it was made public and it became known that Sidewalk Labs, without an invitation, had expanded the boundaries of the project from the

Quayside to a very large parcel of the eastern waterfront Sidewalk Labs named the Innovative Design and Economic Acceleration (IDEA) District. Shockingly, in Sidewalk Labs' proposal, the project grew in scale from its original size of 4.9 hectares to Sidewalk Labs' newly proposed footprint of 77 hectares.

The allegedly condescending language in the volume (including claims of transparency about Sidewalk Labs' business model) and the perceived bullying of the Google company only added to what for many Torontonians was already unrequited love. It also left *Waterfront Toronto* in a very weak position since it could not cave in to such a bold move by Sidewalk Labs.

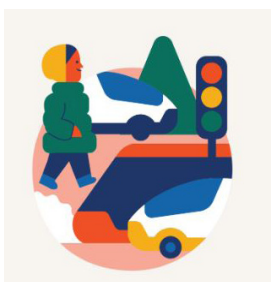
*Waterfront Toronto* seized Sidewalk Labs' apparent misstep with respect to its IDEA proposal, to reframe the partnership with the company while adopting a strong position as steward of the public good, ensuring that the public corporation became a powerful arbiter and decision maker<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> After analyzing Sidewalk Labs' Digital Innovation Appendix, the most recent report of the Digital Strategy Advisory Panel denounces that *Waterfront Toronto* has again become the subaltern in its relation with Sidewalk Labs.

This strong position was firmed up in an open letter from Stephen Diamond, the Chair of *Waterfront Toronto* Board of Directors, dated October 31, 2019. In his letter, Mr. Diamond summarized the main points around the Master Innovation Development Plan's (MIDP) Threshold Issues<sup>2</sup>. Without an immediate correction of these issues, the project would end<sup>3</sup>.

Up until this moment, this is the strongest part of the *Waterfront Doctrine*.

## 2. Innovation



Credit: Sidewalk Labs.

The second area in which the *Waterfront Doctrine* needs to clarify and codify its position is innovation.

“Innovation” is a polysemic term that is used for many, sometimes contradictory, purposes, and that has come to represent

all the good things that digital technologies will bring to society and the economy. In particular, Canada has bet a great deal of its economic future on investments in our innovation destiny.

The problem is that Sidewalk Labs’ Master Innovation and Development Plan uses the term “innovation” in many different ways, depending on the context and the performativity act that it intends to play. *Waterfront Toronto* has not clearly defined innovation either, although the whole project about the Quayside is imbued with an ethereal innovation spirit.

As we will discuss in an upcoming issue of *DataPoints*, the closest we have to an innovation doctrine is the letter Sheldon Levy wrote along with the report of the Quayside Evaluation Committee<sup>4</sup>. Getting the innovation part of the *Waterfront Doctrine* right is very important in order to get out of the dichotomy between innovation and ethics. The CulturePlex believes that if we cannot get both words in the same sentence –“ethical innovation”–, the project on Toronto’s Waterfront will be a missed opportunity to illuminate and lead the digital path that Canada will take in the 21st Century.

<sup>2</sup> The next issue of CulturePlex’s DataPoints will dig into the Threshold Issues.

<sup>3</sup> An opinion piece in The New York Times titled “How Toronto Reined In Big Tech” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/01/opinion/how-toronto-reined-in-big-tech.html>) heralded Waterfront’s new strong position vis a vis Sidewalk Labs.

<sup>4</sup> The letter is dated January 15, 2020.

## 3. Digital Governance



Credit: Sidewalk Labs.

This is the area that has resulted in the most public debate since it was known that a company owned by Google would lead an urban development project in Toronto. The reason for the public’s mistrust of Sidewalk Labs is directly related to the fact that Google’s

business model revolves around the collection and analysis of personal data. Allowing this to happen in a city would imply a renunciation of the government’s obligations to look after its citizens’ digital rights, and one more step in what some experts are describing as a state of digital urgency. It would also mean a radical change in how relations are conceived and lived among neighbours, and between citizens and the government, as there would be a private, intensive data collection company, mediating those relations.

So far, *Waterfront Toronto* has published a draft of its Digital Principles, promised a Guide to Building Intelligent Communities, and formed a Digital Strategy Advisory Panel (whose members demand the urgent creation of a comprehensive digital governance framework before moving forward with the project). In spite of these measures, *Waterfront Toronto* still struggles to offer an overall solution to digital governance.

It is important to note that *Waterfront Toronto* is acting in a vacuum in many of these digital, and data related themes as regulation and citizens’ awareness have not yet caught up with the speed at which technology is advancing. This is an opportunity for the corporation to influence how these regulations will be shaped in Toronto and Canada. If the *Waterfront Doctrine* comes up with a clear, well-defined, and assertive framework for data and digital governance of the Quayside, the *Waterfront Doctrine* could become a world leader in the harmonization of digital innovations and digital governance, at least with respect to smart cities.

## 4. The City is the Platform



Credit: Sidewalk Labs.

Finally, the CulturePlex considers that the most important issue to be resolved in the emerging *Waterfront Doctrine* is not explicit in any document, but will tip the balance one way or the other about what 21<sup>st</sup>-century (digital, smart) cities will be like.

The CulturePlex calls this issue the “platform issue” and describes it as the need to strengthen the laws, regulations and uses that make the city the true platform of urban life. This is what has happened in most of the history of urban development and the cause of the success and growth of this human invention.

However, the digital economy currently favours a model in which the most dominant companies tend to thrive only under the platform model: these companies become the *de facto* platform that connects and regulates the interaction among the different types of participants of the specific social and economic sector the companies work in. If a company is able to become the platform of a neighbourhood or an urban area (for example, by providing all technological

infrastructure along with the systems that will control the delivery of digitally enabled services), it will mean that not only will it be almost impossible to remove it from this position, but that all interactions in that city will happen through it: this includes the actions of the government, private companies and citizens. The city, as we know it, will likely disappear.

The *Waterfront Doctrine* is necessary and urgent. The future of the city depends on it.

### ***Waterfront Toronto Priority Outcomes:***

- ▶ Affordability
- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Inclusivity
- ▶ Economic opportunities
- ▶ Mobility

### ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The current *DataPoints* is part of a series of issues about Sidewalk Labs’ project in Waterfront Toronto. In the following *DataPoints* we will provide criticism and analysis of the most recent news and public documents related to Sidewalk Labs. Along with the analysis we will provide an overview of the project and the ethical concerns that urban data collection may arise.

[www.cultureplex.ca](http://www.cultureplex.ca)

EDITION

Emilio Calderón

DESIGN

Ana Ruiz Segarra

COORDINATION

Daniel Varona Cordero

Yadira Lizama-Mué

COLLABORATORS

Bárbara Romero

Tata Méndez Mahecha

María Paula Espejo

Zeina Dghaim



@cultureplex cultureplex@gmail.com

London, Ontario, Canada



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.