

Talking over the waterfront:
A qualitative study of Waterfront Toronto's public engagement practice

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Talking Over the Waterfront:
A Qualitative Study of Waterfront Toronto's
Public Engagement Practice.

by

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***Talking over the waterfront:
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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study of Waterfront Toronto's (WT) public consultation practice, a hallmark of its work leading the redevelopment of Toronto's urban waterfront, since 2001. Motivated in part by the absence of similarly focused studies on one of the longest and most sustained public engagement efforts by a public agency in Canada. Data was gathered by interviewing a purposive sample of key informants all of whom participants in, or close observers of WT's public engagement practice. This is an appreciative though not uncritical 'insider' study, one that accepts its adjacency to the research topic. The key informants offered their views on what worked, what was missed and could be improved in the conduct of WT's public consultation practice. The predominant view being that WT has set the gold standard for public consultation and could serve as model for public agencies to emulate. The key caveat to this positive finding was the issue of adequate inclusion: a question of who is or is not 'in the room'. It is recommended that deficits of inclusion be remedied by proactive meliorative approach to enhancing outreach, while recognizing the limits of consultation, which is seen as a supplement to, not a replacement for representative democracy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a qualitative study of one of the largest, sustained public engagement programs in Canada informed by the perspectives of key citizen stakeholders and senior staff from the Waterfront Toronto, the organizational sponsor. Waterfront Toronto (WT), is a tripartite agency, jointly owned by the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto, which has been leading the redevelopment of Toronto's central urban waterfront since 2001. While I will outline the significance of WT and its program in more detail, suffice it to say WT is leading the largest urban waterfront revitalization initiative in North America, a defining feature of which is broad and ongoing public consultation program. A program that has largely gone without focused study in the academic literature.

To make a modest effort to address this absence, I set out to examine four interrelated questions: 1) What are the key strengths of WT's public consultation practice? 2) What might be missing in its public consultations? 3) What might Waterfront Toronto do to change or improve its consultation practice? 4) Are there lessons to be derived from the WT's work to-date, that are relevant to similar civic engagement efforts and to the practice of public consultation? By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of WT's public engagement practice and offering recommendations for improvement, this study hopes to make a modest contribution to enhancing the understanding of the practice of public consultation through the examination of a large-scale public engagement program.

To investigate the first three questions I interviewed a purposive sample of those who had participated in WT consultations and those who had sponsored them, specifically citizen-

stakeholders and senior WT staff, using a semi-structured qualitative interview, informed by an approach that integrates elements of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), and Critical Appreciative Inquiry (CAI) model (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Cockell, Jeanie, McArthur-Blair, J., 2012; Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015). To examine the fourth question, I combined the information derived from the research interviews, the relevant academic literature, along with my own knowledge gained from 18 years of professional public engagement practice and direct participation in many of WT's consultations over two decades. To uncover the key ideas that each of these questions elicited I used the thematic analysis approach informed by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2012).

In any examination of public consultation, it merits acknowledging the perennial complaint that is all too often a practice that is rife with pacification and tokenism (Arnstein, 1969) as opposed to a genuine participatory process aimed at uncovering legitimate viewpoints and incorporating these into the subsequent actions undertaken by the consultation sponsors. So, was WT's work a just that or pace Arnstein, was it a model to be emulated by any department, agency, or organization seeking to communicate with, learn from its publics and stakeholders? My findings suggested the latter was closer to the mark. In the predominant view of the research participants WT has done an exemplary job—set the gold standard—for engaging and consulting its public. There was a strong sense that WT had exemplified procedural competence, while taking the feedback its consultations garnered to directly inform the largely successful realization of its key waterfront projects. Many other positive comments were clustered in the theme “leadership matters.” This was true in respect to the founding leadership of WT that set the tone

for its public engagement. It was also true of the shadow side of this positive finding. Specifically, the break in the pattern of WT's work and approach between 2017 and 2019 in the Sidewalk Labs period, which I will touch on briefly for the sake of context. However, this is not an essay about WT and Sidewalk Labs, it is mentioned herein only as an example of the vulnerability organizations can face when there is an overreliance on a specific leader's approach to communication and engagement strategy.

There were criticisms and dissenting viewpoints ranging from those who did not share the general enthusiasm for WT's work, as well as critical points raised by those who had generally lauded WT's work. The theme of "who is and is not *in the room*" details a concern with demographic inclusion and its apparent lack. Some participants also offered normative comparisons of 'actually existing' consultation practice to more idealized versions, as captured in a discussion of the "from small potatoes to structural reform" theme. A cluster of comments ranged from critique that underscored practical recommendations for changing how WT's and other similar organizations conduct public consultation, to broader critiques that engaged elements the Arnstein's (1969) famous concern with tokenism and pacification versus empowerment and control. These key caveats regarding process, representative participation, and the conceptual scope of WT's consultations speak to a set of concerns with the efficacy of consultation efforts in general. An emergent consensus formed around the idea that WT and all public agencies, should do more to seek out and maintain appropriately representative participation. As to how WT should allocate and expend resources to engage a broadly

representative a socioeconomic, ethnocultural, and geographic demographic as a city or Toronto's size and diversity would warrant, that was left for further investigation and thinking.

It is also fair to say that a measure of cynicism emerged from some of the interviewees regarding participation exercises in general, especially where the final, determining decisions, may lie elsewhere: at City Hall or with another level of government. Overall, though the dominant view of research participants was that WT provided a model of effective consultation. That the outcomes the agency's project work was in line with public and stakeholder feedback. I will also note that much the positive comment was based on comparisons to other, real world, Toronto public consultation exercises interviewees had participated in.

Before strolling farther along Toronto's redeveloping Lake Ontario shoreline, I will outline the structure of what follows. To begin I discuss what drew me to this topic and how both I and those I interviewed are involved and implicated as participants in WT consultations, as urban activists, or as WT staff who commissioned the consultation program being examined. Following this, I provide a review of relevant literature focusing on public consultation and its evaluation, a discussion of WT's significance as research topic, and a brief review academic literature that has discussed WT's urban development work. A short explanation of the 'Sidewalk Labs period; in WT's recent history concludes the literature review, as that period informed the context of responses that I received from the research participants.

In the subsequent sections, I will outline the research design, methodology and data gathering approach I used, along with the strengths and limitations of this approach. The research outcomes will be presented through the lens of a reflexive thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun

2006, 2013, 2019). In concluding, I discuss recommendations WT may wish to consider, in order to enhance its public engagement efforts. As well, I will briefly review the strengths and limitations of this study, suggest modest contributions it may make to furthering discussion and research in the practice of public consultation. Finally, I will comment on the limitations of public consultation, that is indeed not replacement for formal democratic procedures.

PARTICIPANT. PRACTITIONER. RESEARCHER.

I chose this research topic because of my personal and professional interest and connections. Connections that can be framed as a threefold adjacency to the research topic: as a participant in many of WT's consultations; as a peer-colleague of many of the research participants; and as public engagement consultant for seventeen years. As is the case with the many of the research participants who generously gave of their time to make this study possible, Since the 1980s I have enjoyed many decades of voluntary citizen involvement in urban redevelopment issues. Since WT's inception at the start of this century I have been involved in several of the agency's consultation exercises, primarily as a citizen-stakeholder and tangentially as a professional consultant. While I have never been professionally contracted by WT, I did work for clients between 2005 and 2016 who as real estate developers and landowners were directly involved with WT's urban redevelopment program; a fact well known to those I interviewed for this study. Since 2005, I have worked as a professional public engagement consultant for public sector, nonprofit and private sector clients, adding a professional interest in WT's work to my preexisting civic interest.

Through these various forms of involvement with WT's work, I have come to have a working grasp the agency's leading projects, become acquainted with some of the key stakeholders involved in their consultations as well as some WT's management team. Given this depth of familiarity a reflexive approach is not so much a choice as a necessity as I am adjacent and connected to the subject I am writing about, as I am connected to the research participants who participated in this study. This standpoint is discussed by Koopman in his 2009 book *Pragmatism as Transition*. He cites Walzer's concept of connected criticism—from Walzer's 1998 book *The Company of Critics*—which Koopman describes the place from which may develop an effective, pragmatic criticism:

Walzer says of his critic that “he never quite stands free and freely chooses his commitments but struggles instead to sort out the commitments he already has” (1998, 226). The critic is not best thought of as impartial or neutral. The critic, rather, is already situated, which is to say that their criticism is adjacent. It is both internal to practices in which the critic finds himself or herself and at the same time external to those very same practices in achieving the distance needed for sorting them out. (Koopman, 2009, p. 29).

In addition to its stated goals, taking on this research, interviewing the study participants, serves an additional reflexive goal: a way for me to sort things out in dialogue with the research participants in respect to our shared professional and civic commitments, concerns for the practice of public engagement, and specifically WT's public engagement practice. My adjacency to the topic determined my choice to write about, warrants, as it simultaneously informs my hybrid methodological and analytic choices. As it warrants my choice of those I

selected to interview, each of whom are also 'insiders' who share my adjacency to the research topic: staff, citizen stakeholders, consultants, activists engaged in urban waterfront issues, or academics.

As a further warrant for my position and approach I am guided by Donald Schön's statement: "I begin with the assumption that competent practitioners usually know more than they can say" (pp 8-9, 1983). Schön famously wrote persuasively on the value of reflective practice and the knowledge, often implicit, that is embedded in the work that professionals do. As he also notes "Through reflection, he [sic] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to practice" (Schön, p. 61, 1983). My use of Schön is appropriate even though I am not a practitioner in WT's work, which is of course is the subject of study here, but it is from the twin point of view as a practitioner in the field of public engagement and as participant in WT's public engagement exercise that I am writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a brief overview of relevant literature on public consultation in four sections. In the first I provide a quick sketch of its history in Canada. I then give a short overview of common public consultation methods. Following from that I look at the evaluation of public consultation, which is far from settled as there is a lack of universally accepted standards or benchmarks, though there are certainly some useful guidelines. Finally, I look at the

contested terrain of consultation and its uncertain connection to the formal procedures of representative democracy. For the purposes of this paper, I am explicitly not emphasizing the abundant literature on formal public deliberation, such as citizen assemblies or citizen juries, as these practices, estimable as they may be, have been employed by WT.

Public Consultation in Canada

Public consultation is a common communication practice though both its intrinsic merits and methods to satisfactorily evaluate its utility are contested. Despite misgivings and critiques in the academic literature, face-to-face and online public consultation through facilitated public meetings, continues to be ubiquitous in 21st century Canada. Even with the rise of social media and the use online web-based public engagement tools, in-person events remain the paradigmatic standard for public consultation. The tradition of Canadian public participation has been a feature of 20th and 21st century communal life of Canada, emerging from democratic theory, parliamentary traditions, and early 20th century social movements such as the co-co-operative movement (Watling, 2007). Since its early development, public consultation or participation processes have become ubiquitous and are often required by statute or regulation in areas of government policy making and service delivery (Bryson et al., 2013), urban planning (Shipley & Utz, 2012) and Environmental Assessments (Sinclair & Diduck, 2001). Public consultation is also required or recommended by Federal or Provincial statutes. As just two examples, the province of Ontario requires public consultations for Environmental Assessments and for proposed renewable energy developments (Government of Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate, 2014). The Province of Ontario's *Planning Act* (Planning Act RSO 1990) requires a

single public meeting for real estate development applications, however, municipalities, such as the City of Toronto frequently recommend additional public consultations (n.d. City of Toronto), especially for those of a significant scale, or make approval of real estate developments contingent on public and stakeholder engagement.

Public Consultation Methods

There are a wide range of public consultation methods (Abelson & Gauvin, 2006; Bryson et al, 2013; Carpini et al, 2004; Rowe & Frewer, 2000) ranging from a variety of in-depth deliberative processes, town halls and public meetings, a variety of surveys or simply direct information provision. Examples of in-depth processes are citizen juries or design charettes. In the former a random selection of citizens is gathered to reflect and discuss a specific issue in depth, one such recent example in Canada was 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Participedia, n.d.) in which a group of 160 citizens were gathered to determine recommendations for electoral reform that were then put to a vote in a referendum coinciding with the 2005 B.C. general election. In the latter, charettes (World Bank, n.d.) are usually events that focus on designing processes, parks, places and buildings, or policies, featuring an interdisciplinary gathering of experts, stakeholders and/or members of defined, invited, or self-selected, public; though in some cases (Participedia, n.d.) it may be an open house event that all are welcome to attend. WT has made use of design charettes to test ideas for master planning key precincts within its mandated redevelopment area.

WT has general employed four basic forms of pre-consultaion and consultation exercises:

1) information provision, largely through its website; 2) facilitated public meetings; 3) facilitated

stakeholder meetings comprised of invited individuals who are deemed to represent designated geographic areas adjacent to WT's territory of operation and/or landowners with development rights in WT's territory; 4) deliberative design exercises—known as charettes—with invited stakeholders and experts (e.g. planners, architects, urban designers) that are tasked with imagining approaches and solutions to specific planning challenges. WT's most common engagement methods have been facilitated town halls or public meetings open to all interested citizens, combined with parallel with regular, by-invitation, stakeholder meetings to gather feedback, and road test ideas and plans. One of the areas, as noted in the research interviews discussed in the subsequent section of this paper, where WT has gone beyond typical practice, is involving stakeholders in the forming of briefs for design competitions for specific sites: planning precincts or park sites; a role usually reserved for the design competition sponsors. This can be seen as a moderate innovation, a halfway house between influence and power, and an extension of WT's embrace of stakeholder participation. There is always a question of stakeholder and identification and selection, and this will be discussed in the review of research outcomes.

In WT's case, final decisions on program design, on program management, and indeed on the extent to which public and stakeholder input would be included in the design and implementation of waterfront projects were made by WT's senior management team with oversight by its Board of Directors. The City Council of Toronto is responsible for approving all planning and zoning for WT projects, with the ultimately therefore resting with elected city councillors. Additionally, decisions approving major public funding for infrastructure required

for WT developed projects are made by the Provincial and/or Federal governments, who are accountable to the voters. While being removed from the day-to-day operations of WT and more specifically the consultation discussions of plans, designs and project implantation with stakeholders and the public, it would, if we take the norms of representative democracy seriously, be disingenuous to ignore this level of accountability. At the municipal level of government there is also a level of consultative engagement as citizens can depute to relevant committees of City Council in respect to approvals of specific waterfront redevelopment projects. Additionally, the Waterfront Design Review Panel (DRP), made up of professional architects and landscape architects, provides input on proposed building and landscape designs on the waterfront and their meetings are open to the public. As well, meetings of the WT board of directors are also open to the public. The board and DRP meetings add a layer of direct information provision (Rowe & Frewer, 2000), while adding another layer of passive citizen scrutiny. By the standards of the relevant literature, the ensemble of methods and venues of active and passive consultative participation available to citizens interested in WT's work meets, if not exceeds current standards.

Public Consultation as a Contested Practice

The case for the prosecution of public consultation rests in large part on Arnstein's "Ladder of citizen participation" (1969) Arnstein's classic 1969 article "The Ladder of Citizen Participation" she divided the elements of what public participation into three major categories. One she deemed non-participation manipulation and therapy, the second was tokenism, which would be informing and consultation, and finally varying degrees of citizen power which she

defined as partnership, delegated power, and full citizen control. It was full citizen control that had the highest rank and was her aspirational goal. It is worth noting that Arnstein was thinking primarily of lower income, largely but not exclusively African American communities in the context of American Great Society programs of the 1960s, intended, whatever the ultimate success or failure, to address inequality and poverty but largely designed and delivered onto communities rather than with those communities. Notwithstanding this the "... metaphor of the ladder has become an enduring part of academic enquiry and policy practice as a device to critique, design, implement and evaluate participation and practices for stakeholder engagement (Collins & Ison, 2009, p. 361). The symbolic ladder image has dominated much of the literature (Collins & Ison, 2009) arguably obscuring more than it informs. The political consideration of the placement of consultation in the context of our established if imperfect representative democracy needs to be considered seriously "... because granting formal power to a participatory arena is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for influencing the content of a public policy. Moreover, claiming that a decision made by a mini-public or by a public meeting should be binding for the larger community is bound to be controversial" (Bobbio, 2019, pp 50-51).

Accountability for decisions is the weak link in any view of 'decision-making power as participation'. Displacing the role of elected and accountable officials is the goal of public engagement then a whole armature of democratic procedures would need to be created to replicate, if not perhaps improve upon, the already existing City Councils, Provincial Legislatures and indeed the Federal Parliament. It also bears thinking upon Cornwall's observation that 'if empowerment' boils down to 'do-it-yourself', and where the state abnegates

its responsibilities, then resistance rather than enthusiastic enrolment might well be the result of efforts to engage citizens.” (Cornwall, 2008, pp. 272-273). Along with Collins and Ison (2009) we may well question the assumption that people necessarily want decision making power, nor the accountability that such power entails. Unlike elected officials who despite the limitations of representative democracy are formally accountable to voters and scrutinized by the media, admittedly at varying levels of effectiveness, citizen participants, often self-selected or recruited by sponsors because they are seen to be salient stakeholders, are neither accountable nor inherently demographically representative. Demanding that a public consultation exercise be decision-making body risks empowering ad-hoc, self-selected and/or unrepresentative groups to make binding choices on their neighbours and fellow citizens, who have had no say in selecting those who decide nor actively participating in the consultative discussion.

Cromwell (2008) offered an important counterpoint to the tendency of framing consultation as decision-making: there is value in information sharing even if there are limits on more active engagement. She further argues that the effective communication of information between sponsors of consultation and their publics may provide the resources necessary for further action. Collins & Ison (2009), concur, noting that social learning, an ability to weigh in on issues as one wishes to, can be sufficient to the self-understood needs of participants argue that power is not a flat commodity that one has more or less of.

There's a further problematic in Arnstein's take on public participation as power and control (Cromwell, 2008). While as as Minnich (2010) aptly noted, power is at stake in our discursive practices, the power to define issues, what and who matters, it is perhaps well to recall

Foucault's observation that power is not inherently a singular thing: "We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1991, p. 194). Following Foucault, Collins & Ison (2009), argue in complementary vein, that power is not a static commodity that one has more or less of. It circulates and varies depending on an often-overdetermined number of contingencies.

Taking cues from Collins and Ison (2009), as well as Cromwell (2008) and Bobbio (2019), we are nudged toward a path that leads away from the rigidity of Arnstein's paradigmatic ladder and brings us closer to the real and messy world of consultation practice. A world of practice that better conforms to my professional experience as a consultation facilitator for 18 years.

A more positive view of public consultation supports the idea that public engagement should take place because it can let organizations and stakeholders interact, creating the possibility for understanding, goodwill, shared views of 'reality' (Taylor & Kent, 2014). This view of teasing out shared views of reality stems from the phenomenological tradition of dialogue theory, exemplified at its most ideal by Martin Buber's I-Thou conception of dialogue (Buber, 1958) in which dialog unfolds in an active present of shared recognition and understanding. This can be contrasted with I-It dialog (Buber, 1958) which is centred on a sense of utility to the self rather than the mutual recognition between two selves. An ideal sense of consultative dialogue is also consistent with Habermas' sense of communicative action centred on achieving co-understanding and attaining a "we-perspective" that embodies a shared social rationality and opens to dialogic compromise and understanding (Habermas, 1985). Habermas

has contrasted this with his concept of strategic action which is focused on achieving specific goals. Habermas' typology of normatively regulated action that embodies moral-practical knowledge, practical discourse, and legal and moral representations of knowledge (Habermas, 1984). As Habermas observed in 1995, non-coercive dialogue between participants who are taken to be both free and of equal status can lead to a "we-perspective" rather than a collection of self-interested special pleadings that exclude consideration of mutuality.

This vision of communicative action in practice, is a necessarily ideal one. One that Habermas has also delimited somewhat in his book *Facts and Norms* (1996). He admitted to a more fluid space between the purely strategic approach associated with a focus on winning position or gaining power and an open discourse that is synonymous with his concept of communicative action focused on an unconstrained examination of ideas and arguments leading to mutual understanding and agreement. In accepting that a process of bargaining or negotiation could operate to achieve a result compatible with a purer form of communicative action (Habermas, 1996) comes closer to a description of what can happen in deliberative processes or in 'town hall' consultation exercises. Though even so Habermas remained ethically committed to ensuring the equality of participants. In the real world of public consultation this remains a normatively idealistic view of discursive processes. The resources to required and the regulatory framework to ensure, equality of participants in such bargaining, and the how a judgement of what is indeed "more advantageous to all" (Habermas, 1996, p. 169), is arrived at are nonstandard, especially in public discussions of city planning matters and specific land use and real estate development proposals.

The character of these forms of public conversation, speaking especially from my professional experience, have more the agonistic character of the “the political, which is linked to the dimension of antagonism present in human societies – an antagonism that can emerge within a large variety of social relations ...” (Mouffe, 2014, p. 150). Even hotly contested issues or plans can be amenable to discussion that seeks to create understand and permit better arguments or better compromises to prevail. Though anyone who has attended a development proposal for a homeless youth shelter, a halfway house, or even a luxury condominium tower adjacent a more low-rise residential neighbourhood might hope that discussion could be kept at the very least to Mouffe's (2014) condition of the democratic discourse: “it must also enable the agonistic expression of conflict, which requires that citizens genuinely have the possibility of choosing between real alternatives (p. 151). Experience of such hotly contested public meetings, might make anyone wish that agonistic discursive practices were the wall beyond which talk did not wander off into intractable hostility.

I would argue that we can do without fetishizing ideal discursive practices, accept the reality of Mouffe's agonism, and still hold out reasonable hope for public discussion that achieves more than competing lists of grievances, while being wary of the pitfalls of public discussion, the possibility that participants in consultative processes, will only focus on their perceived self-interest (Mendelberg, 2002) rather than any sense of a general interest. This is a challenge to an optimistic or naïve view of hope the better angels of public deliberation that would lead us to communicative action. Mendelberg (2002) suggested we pay attention to the failure of deliberative processes, even those that are well-resourced and facilitated. If we take a

more relaxed sense of what is strategic and non-strategic (Rorty, 2021) some of the worries of self-interest and special pleading can be accepted without abandoning the hope that public discussion can produce fruitful results. Knowing that we may "... use any dirty trick we can ... to convince ... [while at] ...the other end we talk to others as we talk to ourselves when we are most at ease, most reflective, and most curious. Most of the time we are somewhere in the middle between these two extremes (Rorty, 2021, p. 55)."

Rorty seems to describe better our 'actually existing circumstances', the very circumstances in which the operation of the political in Mouffe's sense is always present. Especially when the stakes are perceived to matter to participants for ideological and material reasons. Even such everyday preferences, such as the predominance of park space on an urban waterfront versus development, for a particular mix of housing types, or the balance of commercial and institutional space, the level of affordable housing to be provided, etcetera. These are all inherently political preferences, ones that are likely to be pursued strategically by their proponents and opponents. We are more in Rorty's mix of seeking to persuade, gain advantage, while also exchanging information and seeking to understand. We can accept the likely manifestation of the soapbox presentation (Sinclair & Diduck, 2001) of information, exemplary of Buber's concept of disguised monologue understood as "propaganda and asymmetrical communication [which] are dedicated to achieving only one goal, that of the message creator" (Bryson et al., 2013). Yet still see the content of everyday talk, including strategically motivated talk, is an essential building block of informal and formal public spheres (Dahlgren, 2006; Kim & Kim, 2008, Wyatt et al, 2000).

There remains the question of who is and who is not in the room. Catt and Murphy (2003) noted the importance of selection in framing public consultation exercises. Booth (1996) also questioned the inclusion in public consultation in respect to gender and class. Ideally, we would layer in Nancy Fraser's (1998) concept of parity of participation, wherein the respect of identity and economic equity are given equal weight. If we public consultation processes were truly run by Fraser's ethic, then we would ensure that relevant diversity would be included as mandatory condition to the extent that the democratic ethic of voluntary participation permits; and that economic circumstance (class position) would pose no effective barrier to participation in consultative process.

Yet to achieve this, consultation sponsors would have to deploy fit-to-resources. If we suggest the state should require it, then the state must fund it for government, public agency, or nonprofit sponsored consultations, or require that private sector organizations budget accordingly for their mandated consultations (such as Environmental Assessments or real estate development proposals). We are, to be sure, not there yet. Given the constraints of budgets, resources, and objectives, most consultation exercise can at best or at least aim to achieve clarity of purpose (Bryson et al., 2013), spelling out what is at stake, what the parameters of discussion are, who has been invited to participate and why.

Properly conducted public consultation should be able to focus and leverage the everyday talk of citizen participants while mitigating the strategic tendencies of sponsors and organized stakeholder groups. Starting from a place of clarity can help set the table for an exchange of views that gets somewhere, even to successful bargaining and acceptable compromise, despite

the persistence of conflicting agendas and political agonism. Even so, we are still in an unequal world having to hash out 'matters at hand' within the tug of contingency and the scope of 'what's on the table' because of course practical consultation exercises are focused ones.

Knowing attention should be paid to the different levels of access, information, and economic status among citizens in general and identified stakeholders is one thing. Going beyond such limitations but still seeking to ensure an approximation of adequate representation is another. However, if even it is not often achieved, keeping the goal of ensuring that everyone who is interested and affected has the access to public consultation events, remains a valid and important goal. But "the social construction of reality" (Craig, 2014) through publicly accessible discursive practices is not free. It comes at the cost of staffing and resources. Ethical comfort comes at the price of the material cost that would permit the removal of obstacles to participation for all who wish to. This would move us closer to parity of participation but not compromise the principle of voluntary choice, rather it would make such a choice real for the maximum number.

Laying down Arnstein's one-dimensional view of power, accepting that parity of participation is an elusive goal, and that public discussion will be fraught with agonistic conflict does not entail abandoning the practice of public engagement. Just as recognizing that public consultation is not a replacement for our formal democratic procedures does not mean it is useless exercise.

Evaluating Public Consultation

When the evaluation of public participation or consultation is discussed in the academic literature it is frequently a story of uncertainty at best, absence at worst. Rowe and Frewer (2000)

noted 22 years ago: "Unfortunately, there is little comprehensive or systematic consideration of these matters in the academic literature, and hence whether any particular application of a particular method may be considered successful usually remains undetermined" (2000, p. 10). Abelson and Gauvin wrote sixteen years ago that "[d]espite decades of documenting public participation experiences, the practice of public participation evaluation is still in its infancy ..." (2006, p. 37). Following this theme, Quick et al noted: "Unfortunately, methods for evaluating public engagement are not well established and are rarely implemented" (2014, p. 4). Emery et al, wrote seven years ago in respect to public engagement on science and technology issues: "There is widespread recognition in the literature of a lack of credible evidence to measure and demonstrate the policy impacts of public engagement ..." (2015, p. 422). Perhaps most damning is Rayner who argued when writing about consultative exercises with the public regarding issues in science and technology that: "There have been almost no credible outcome-based evaluations that a public participation technique has led to a technically or socially sound outcome that otherwise would not have been reached" (2003, p. 167). Though it should be noted that Rayner's critique also cites issues with representation and the political decision-making that is separate from the considerations of consultative exercises, which is not unexpected as imperfect as they may be, elected democratic governments have a legitimacy and accountability that no ad hoc collection of citizens nor selected group of stakeholders possess, no matter how demographically representative such a grouping may be. Another evaluative complaint is that public consultation (Jollymore et al, 2017) is sideshow, going through the motions exercise, which in the end allow government and industry to make decisions they would have anyway.

Despite this 'evaluation credibility gap' and the acknowledgment of a 'legitimation gap', there is growing body of work that sets out to study public consultation (Abelson et al., 2006; Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Rowe & Frewer, 2004) and many authors have made persuasive attempts to establish criteria and methods for effective evaluation, without reaching a consensus. Still the view that both process and outcome (Rowe & Frewer, 2000) be given equal weight has been born out in several analyses of public consultations (G. Rowe, Horlick-Jones, Walls, & Pidgeon, 2005) but this and other studies have predominantly looked at public consultation generically (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004) or at a specific consultation or engagement event (Rowe, Marsh, & Frewer, 2004).

These studies include a mix (or a recommended mix) of quantitative and qualitative interviews of consultation sponsors, practitioners, and participants, the research activity is positioned in an empiricist framework: the 'researcher' designs questions and administers semi-structured interviews and/or structured questionnaires to subjects (e.g. sponsors and participants) and/or the researchers observe the consultation process and make field notes. All of which may be used to assess the perception of participants and sponsors regarding the depth of engagement. the extent to which consultation summaries outcomes matched the stated input of participants, and most importantly, to what degree where recommendations acted upon by the sponsoring government or agency.

Another measurement of effective public engagement is the degree of participation and empowerment granted to those who do participate, following Arnstein (1969). In their paper looking at the 'ladder typology' in the context of natural resource management Ross, Buchy &

Proctor (2002), argued that a unidimensional ladder typology of participation oversimplifies the range of possibilities for influence and information exchange in public consultation and the positive impact of formal or informal community-government/agency partnerships that can flourish. Bobbio (2019) makes the cogent point that while Arnstein accurately demonstrates there are varying levels of influence and intensity that can obtain with citizen engagement, these are not the only salient dimensions to consultative processes. Following this, we can see that, pace Arnstein, public participation cannot be ranked on a single scale. Bobbio (2019) aptly suggests, citing Fung (2006), that levels of inclusion and quality or intensity of information exchange are highly relevant criteria with which to evaluate public engagement exercises.

If we evaluate public consultation without considering its broader political context then not only may we miss something essential, but we may also misconstrue its role and purpose, either because we elevate it to another level of governance or denigrate it as mere therapeutic chat. As Webler (1999) argued that it is not unreasonable to disagree with the idea of granting decision-making power to unelected citizens. Citizen participants have no legal or political accountability in the broad sense, even if they claim or indeed can be shown to be members of duly constituted association, or are indeed salient stakeholders impacted by the policy, program or project that consultation exercise is addressing.

First, reasonable people still disagree about the appropriateness of empowering a group of citizens that are not legal representatives to make public choices. Second, the concept of power in this application has not been adequately worked out. None of the above sources, Arnstein included, developed a detailed theory of power that would allow

a precise characterization of participatory techniques. Third, it is not resolved that the empowering ability of different participation techniques can be reliably estimated (Webler, 1999, p. 61).

The indeterminacy of evaluation is perhaps something that cannot be avoided. However, it is here where we can make a pragmatic choice to evaluate by a two-fold sense of outcomes. In the first sense by the perceived satisfaction with outcome of the process, as described by those who participated. Then by a more empirical analysis of how and to what extent the consultations influenced the project outcomes both from participant testimony and by comparative analysis to similar projects and programs, with comparable levels of consultation efforts or indeed with little or no public engagement.

From the standpoint of a practitioner or a seasoned stakeholder the cliché—do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good—is best kept in mind in any investigation of the practice public consultation specifically and public engagement more broadly. As a practitioner, the normative discussions of the merits of, and conceptual frameworks for, evaluating public involvement seem to have a somewhat optimistic take on the potential availability of resources to conduct such evaluations. Despite admonitions to evaluate. Despite the hopes this will be generally adopted. Evaluation is often the poor cousin in the process of defining, designing, and delivering public consultations. Despite the challenges in how best to evaluate public consultations (Rowe et al, 2005), it is hoped that more attention will be paid to incorporating third-party evaluations in public engagement exercises of any scale.

Waterfront Toronto's Significance

WT is a tripartite agency, with the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and City of Toronto as its shareholders (Waterfront Toronto, n.d.), that has been leading the revitalization of Toronto's central urban waterfront for 21 years. This project is the largest waterfront redevelopment program in North America, covering an area 800 hectares (Waterfront Toronto, n.d.) throughout much of Toronto's central urban waterfront. The scale of its core work and the duration of its work, which is continuing at least until the mid 2020s, suggests that WT is indeed possessed of sufficient significance to warrant more than local interest. This underscored by another data point: Toronto is the fourth largest municipality in North America, as well as the largest urban region in Canada, and along with Chicago, the largest urban region in the Great Lakes.

As befits a public agency, WT has its mandate and mission posted on its website and it is summarized in its 2022 Annual Report:

Waterfront Toronto was created in 2001 by the governments of Canada and Ontario and the City of Toronto to catalyze public and private investment on the waterfront. Then, as now, there was a need for a single organization to clear barriers to waterfront revitalization and drive progress on government city-building objectives. In addition to attracting private investment and jobs, Waterfront Toronto promotes the social and ecological health of the area, making it a landmark of 21st century urbanism (Annual report, Waterfront Toronto, 2022, p. 13).

The mandate is focused on urban development priorities that are common in liberal democratic mixed-economy capitalism. The acceptance of private sector involvement balanced with the pursuit of public good is taken as a given. Depending on one's ideological preferences this will be seen variously as obvious and good, practical, and noncontroversial, or perhaps as no more than polite veil for unabashed neoliberalism. It is though the background frame for all of WT's work that their work. It is also worth noting that after an initial funding of from the three levels of government that launched the agency, WT has largely had to fund its operations and much of its project work, through the sale of lands it was entrusted with. Lands, one notes, that it has done detailed planning for with the ongoing input of stakeholders, such as those interviewed for this paper.

Remaking a large lakeside city's core waterfront, over more than two decades, billions of dollars of public and private investment, and with the direct involvement of thousands of citizens and stakeholders, is of obvious interest. As is the commitment WT made under its founding CEO, John Campbell who was among those interviewed, that a key part of its work would be ongoing public consultation. This commitment led to WT to engage in a multiyear public engagement effort across multiple projects, which arguably constitute one of the largest sustained urban consultation efforts in Canada.

Public Consultation's Role in Toronto's Waterfront Redevelopment

Waterfront Toronto (WT) is a tripartite agency formed in 2001 as the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, subsequently known as Waterfront Toronto, with the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and City of Toronto as its shareholders. WT is responsible for

planning the revitalization of 800 hectares of Toronto's central waterfront: the largest waterfront redevelopment program in North America (Waterfront Toronto, n.d.). WT's consultations and engagement efforts are core to the agency's communication strategy and serve to ground its public legitimacy. A growing body of studies (Bellas & Oliver, 2016; Bunce, 2011; Eidleman, 2011; Lerher & Laidley, 2009) have examined the WT's work in the context of urban geography, urban planning and broader waterfront development contexts. However, these studies make little direct or indirect reference to the WT's consultation practices, to-date no academic work has been produced that directly examines, evaluates, or investigates this sustained public consultation effort. References to WT's public engagement do so within the context of addressing issues of civic governance, political legitimacy, and broader concerns with the role of the neoliberal state and urban waterfront redevelopment.

Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront (Desfor and Laidley, eds., 2011) is arguably the signature example of a modest but growing body of academic work that examines WT's work in conjunction with the overall development of Toronto's waterfront. This collection of essays looks at the historical buildout of the city's waterfront. The volume is divided into two main sections with the first tracing the key structural and organizational developments from the establishment of the Town of York in 1793 through to the early 20th century. In the second part the essays focus on more recent development including planning issues underpinning two ultimately failed Olympic bids (Laidley, 2011), the government and civic actions that led to the creation of WT (Eidelman, 2011), and the co-operation between public and private sector actors

that were involved in sustainability planning for the West Don Lands, one of the key redeveloped waterfront neighbourhoods (Bunce, 2011).

In separate articles by Bellas and Oliver (2016) and Lerher and Laidley (2009), questions of legitimacy and neoliberal corporatist development are counterpoised with the stated city-building goals of the government agencies charged with revitalizing Toronto's waterfront. Bellas and Oliver (2016) look at the development of the Athletes' Village in the West Don Lands neighbourhood of Toronto, a former industrial brownfield site adjacent to the waterfront. They note the positive reports of the impact of citizen engagement with direct interviews with key individual community members involved in the redevelopment consultations. However, Bellas and Oliver remain largely unpersuaded by the relative autonomy and agency of the citizens and community and question their impact vis-à-vis broader ideological and economic forces they ascribe to the neoliberal turn in Western capitalism. Similarly, Lerher and Laidley (2009), question the degree to which lower or mixed-income neighbourhoods are represented in consultations on redevelopment, without recourse to interviewing members of the community and its various representative organizations, which were and remain actively engaged in WT's consultations. Eidleman (2011) in his article in *Reshaping Toronto's Waterfront* (Desfor and Laidley, eds., 2011) notes WT's active engagement in public consultation but wonders if it is more a rearguard move to secure and maintain political legitimacy in the face of constraining circumstances and a circumscribed mandate, than a genuine attempt to involve citizens in the construction of policy and the determination of planning.

Had, these studies focused more precisely a broader spectrum of demographic exclusions, most tellingly race and age, the observations made about a lack of inclusion of black, indigenous and people of colour, as well as younger adults, then indeed, the preponderant demographic characteristics of participants in the late 2000s, and even on into much of the 2010s, were older and white. To the extent that the thrust of these studies contradicts my lived personal experience of the consultations sponsored by WT, it is that they elide the participation of mixed-income residents from the only populated neighbourhoods that are adjacent WT's geographic focus area. Of these neighbourhoods, St. Lawrence is an intentionally mixed-income community, Corktown was a historical working-class neighbourhood, but it is one that has been relentlessly gentrifying, The Distillery District, is middle and upper middle class sub-neighbourhood, and York Quay is also a largely middle and upper middle-class neighbourhood. Of these downtown neighbourhoods St. Lawrence was by far the most populated and had the greatest diversity. East of the downtown core, the neighbourhoods of Riverside and Leslieville hosted well-attended public consultations as these both are geographically closest, and located in the same City of Toronto Ward, to the Port Lands district, a key focus of WT's revitalization agenda. Both are neighbourhoods that were historically working class and predominately white, though both have rapidly gentrified since the 1990s.

It is apt to query the historical lack of diversity in WT's consultation processes but by economic class, WT's consultations were arguably more representative than many urban development consultations I have been variously involved with in the past 23 years. Which is not say that there are not structural impediments to participation. Participation requires time,

means, and linguistic competence, both in the basic ability to communicate effectively in the dominant language and an effective comfort level with the discursive practices of the consultation process.

The onus is arguably on the sponsoring organization to facilitate the broadest participation of citizens to achieve equitable demographic representation or at least be able to document such efforts to reasonable satisfaction of a critical analysis of their process. Some people may simply not want to be able to be involved, even if every accommodation has been made to make it possible for them to participate. When there are systemic barriers to participation it complicates the notion that participation is and should be voluntary and that those who 'don't show up' are freely choosing not to.

Despite the all-too-common limits to the demographic makeup of the citizens in the with these studies is that they minimized the importance and impact of citizen involvement in shaping an agenda for waterfront redevelopment in Toronto, which in some cases predated the formation of WT, such as the work of the West Don Lands Committee discussed above. It is therefore both the lack of academic work directly focused on WT's public consultation and what one might argue is a form of ideological tunnel vision of the studies that do exist that has informed my desire to conduct this research study.

A Note About Sidewalk Labs

My goal has always been to talk about WT's public consultation practice and to draw some general insights about the broader practice of public consultation. This is not and was never intended to be a paper about the 2017 – 2020 'Sidewalk Labs period' in Toronto's and WT's

civic history, despite the media and scholarly attention that WT and Sidewalk's ill-fated relationship generated.

In the fall of 2017, Sidewalk Labs, a subsidiary of Google's parent company, Alphabet Inc., announced a deal in Toronto [in partnership with Waterfront Toronto] to build a dream city "from the Internet up," as CEO Daniel Doctoroff put it. The company's 220-page proposal was heavy on the physical aspects of contemporary urbanity; its colorful illustrations showed gondolas, waste-disposal robots running underground, and mixed-use modular buildings. (Bozikovic, 2022)

When the qualitative research interviews for this paper were conducted in March and April 2020, the Sidewalk Labs proposal was still in play, after three years of debate, controversy, and revisions. In May of 2020, Sidewalk Labs walked away from the deal. Those who had opposed the proposal, including some of the research participants interviewed for this paper, claimed victory. Others, simply felt that Sidewalk had been unable to come up with a workable scheme that met the original guidelines set by WT, which were reinforced by WT's then recently recomposed Board of Directors:

At the end of October 2019 Waterfront Toronto issued its response to the MIDP and subsequent agreement with SL. In a two-page open-letter Waterfront Toronto Chair Steven Diamond provided a harsh rebuke of key aspects of the proposals, stating "concerns were rooted in our public interest mandate" (Waterfront Toronto, 2019b, para. 6). This led to an agreement with SL that saw the amount of land reduced back down to the original 4.9 hectares, elimination of the Urban Data Trust proposal, decline of SL

request for new governance mechanisms, reversal of SL from lead developer to partner ... (Morgan & Webb, 2019).

By the end winter of 2020 the Sidewalk Labs proposal had already run into a variety of headwinds—data privacy concerns, the ability to manage a development of this scale, its relationship to the municipal government—which the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic was but one more. As Bozikovic (2022) noted: ‘As the project limped forward, it became clear that many of its ideas were either half-baked or relied too heavily on rewriting the rules.’ Even some of those who had been open to the project, were concerned about its viability, including, it should be noted, myself, as well as several of those interviewed for this paper.

As the research interviews were loosely structured conversations and, as noted, Sidewalk Labs remain a live proposal when they were conducted, some research participants wished to discuss the Sidewalk Labs proposal as a subset of their experience with WT's public engagement efforts. While I have not included most of these discussions, some responses that cited the discussions of Sidewalk Labs' proposal have been included, as these address the participants' perceptions of a shift in how WT conducted its public consultation process, under the then leadership of CEO Will Fleissig, in 2017 and 2018. As a closing note, from the vantage point of 2023, not only has WT launched an entirely new, and to-date largely uncontroversial redevelopment plan for the Quayside area, it has also revived its broadly participatory consultation practice, though subsequent to the Covid-19 pandemic, WT's consultations are conducted primarily on-line.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for this study follows a Critical Appreciative Inquiry model (CAI) combining elements of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) with elements of Critical Appreciative Inquiry (CAI) (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Cockell, Jeanie, McArthur-Blair, J., 2012; Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015). While arguably still somewhat unusual, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has been demonstrated to contribute evaluation practice when "... there is a desire to build evaluation capacity—to help others learn from evaluation practice; ... [w]hen there is a desire to build a community of practice; ... [and w]hen it is important to increase support for evaluation ... (Coghlan et al., 2003). However, my reasons for pursuing a critically appreciative inquiry were more specific: political context and adjacency to the research topic and the research participants.

There was a politically fraught context to WT's work at the time this project was conceived which still obtained during the research period. The issue complicating conversations about WT was the Sidewalk Labs proposal to build a 'smart city' development on a parcel of waterfront land owned by WT, which I have discussed briefly to set the scene. It was also not the first time WT's work had been fraught: many of the research participants had been involved in the conflict over the future development program for Toronto's Port Lands that Mayor Rob Ford had attempted to alter significantly in 2011 (Gee, 2011). An effort that failed in large measure because of a citizen-based pushback led, as it turns, by several of the research participants I interviewed for this study.

It was also an appropriate model, given my acquaintance with the research participants, which suggested a sympathetic and open approach to interviewing them. One of the strengths of AI, especially in its initial phases, is the gentleness and openness of seeking affirmative and positive insights. I also knew my participants well enough to know they would likely balk at an overly forced positivity, past a certain point, and therefore space for explicitly 'critical' responses would need to be part of the conversation. Relying on a more convoluted evocation of the 'shadow side' of appreciation (Bushe, 2011) at the post-data-collection analysis stage could have been a viable approach given time and resources that this study did not have. Suffice it to say I wanted to 'get the goods' from those I interviewed rather than interpret it after the fact. Hence my embrace of the the critical dimension typical of CAI.

The initial a subset of AI's 4-D Cycle and layer in a CAI element as its primary investigatory method following the model of Ridley-Duff and Duncan (2015). The typical 4-D Cycle in AI will lead participants through questions that explore: 1) *Discovery* 'best of what is,' plus, "what might have been" and 2) *Dream*, a visioning process to elicit "what might be" (p. 1595, 2015). The other 2 steps of AI's 4-D cycle—3) *Design*, which generally asks participants to suggest how their 'Dream' can be implemented, and 4) *Destiny*, which asks participants to reflect on how the design of their dreams can be realized and sustained. In the CAI model the *Discovery* phase adds in a consideration of 'what is missing' or "what might have been" (Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015).

This is unusual but not unprecedented as AI has been shown, in adapted forms, to be useful as a field research tool (Carter, 2006, Michael, 2005). Carter (2006) used AI as a way of

reframing research, employing the 'Discovery' and the 'Dream' stages of AI for individual interviews, that the stage for the 'Design' and 'Destiny' stages in group workshops that followed the initial stages. In Michael's study, she used semi-structured appreciative interviews that focused only on the *Discovery* phase of AI. She conducted these with NGO leaders in Africa. Michael (2005) found AI to be useful field research tool in tense situations and that the appreciative protocol eased tensions and "made respondents more willing to interviewees lost their fear of having their words come back to haunt them and were willing to speak much more freely" (Michael, 2005, p. 228). It is argued that this ability to reframe the negative or shadow side of the positive and intentionally focus on what people see as desired outcome (Ludema & Fry, 2011) it is argued provides the generative power of AI. A point that I do not contest but following Bush (2007), who also emphasized the generative capacity of an AI approach to bring out new meaning and new insights, rather than relying on the implicit shadow side of appreciation, we could as Bush suggests: "... ask them what is missing, what they want more of, what their image of what the organization ought to be" (p. 5).

In keeping with Bush's insights of the core AI approach, CI adds a critical dimension as Ridley-Duff and Duncan (2015) note a "shift from Hegelian to a Marxian view of dialectics through an acceptance that knowledge-generating capacities are intimately linked to the social system in which they occur." (p. 1583). There is also a sense of embracing the Habermas' (Grant & Humphries, 2005) contrast between the desired freedom of the *Lifeworld* and the constraining actuality of the *System* (Habermas, 1984). Following (Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015), I incorporated a focus on "what may have been" (Ridley-Duff & Duncan, 2015, p. 1595) or "what

was missing” to elicit a sense of gaps and critique, while remaining within an appreciative or constructive context.

Participant Selection & Data Gathering

Soon after my thesis approval was received, I began contacting the prospective research participants. Twelve people agreed to participate from an initial list of sixteen. All the prospective interviewees were ‘insiders’ who had direct and prolonged involvement with WT’s public consultations or with related/adjacent waterfront redevelopment issues in Toronto. Hence a purposive sample, that is a sample chosen for a specific purpose, in this case for the knowledge and familiarity each research participant possessed. Six of the selected research participants were citizen-stakeholders who had both an individual interest as residents of adjacent downtown neighbourhoods, as well as acting as representatives of neighbourhood & community associations. To these, I added two citizen activists who had significant familiarity with WT but whose main engagement on waterfront issues had been successfully opposing the introduction of jets to Billy Bishop Toronto Island Airport, an airport that anchors the western end of the downtown inner harbour.

In the original plan for this project I had considered focusing this research solely on consultation practitioners, because persuaded by the observation Cooper & Smith (2012) “... that practitioners have intimate practical knowledge of working with public authorities ... they are in a privileged position to provide an account of the barriers and opportunities to more systematically and effectively embed public participation ...” (p. 5). However, the consultation practitioners I contacted refused to participate citing conflicts of interest and ongoing work that

they had been or might be contracted to do for WT. To ‘replace’ their perspective, I added two additional interviewees, one who has done significant academic work on the history redevelopment of Toronto’s urban waterfront and another who is an internationally recognized urban designer, who’s work includes projects on Toronto’s waterfront. Finally, as it was important to hear from consultation sponsors (Rowe et al, 2004), two key WT staff, were included in the purposive sample, including WT’s founding CEO.

Table 1. Research Participants

Participant Type	Code Type	Relationship to WT	Gender	Ethnicity
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Male	European Canadian
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Male	European Canadian
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Female	European Canadian
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Female	European Canadian
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Female	European Canadian
Citizen Stakeholder	CS	Consultation Participant	Female	African Canadian
Citizen Activist	CA	Observer of WT. Active in non-WT waterfront issues.	Male	European Canadian
Citizen Activist	CA	Observer of WT. Active in non-WT waterfront issues	Male	European Canadian
Activist Academic	AA	Waterfront Activist & Academic Researcher	Male	European Canadian
Urban Planning Consultant	CT	Consultant, Observer of WT.	Male	European American
WT Staff	WS	Senior Manager	Male	European American
WT Staff	WS	Founding CEO	Male	European Canadian

Interviews were conducted in February and March of 2020. The initial Covid-19 pandemic stay-home order was issued by the Government of Ontario just prior to the completion of the final research interview. The last interview was therefore conducted on Zoom, all but one of the in-person interviews were conducted at the residences or offices of the participants, the remaining in-person interview was conducted at the Toronto Reference Library.

Research Goals

1. Identifying what has worked well in Waterfront Toronto's public consultations.
2. Minding the gaps—what may have been missed—in the public consultation programs they have been part of.
3. Discovering what ideas for changing or improving future consultation programs by Waterfront Toronto or similar public agencies.
4. Considering some of the implications and limitations of WT's public consultation and the practice of public engagement in general.

Research Questionnaire Design

The research interviews were therefore be structured as three-fold conversation that seeks to discover what is and what works, what may have been missed, and what may be improved or what ought to be added to or changed. In a typical AI exercise multiple participants would be brought together to work through each stage of the four stages and collectively build on the *Design* and *Destiny* phases, which would have also, most commonly, come from group settings. Given that I conduct a series of individual, one-on-one interviews, I focused on the first two

instances of *Discovery* and *Dream* following the approach taken by Carter (2006), while layering in a critical question per the model of Ridley-Duff & Duncan (2015) between *Discovery* and *Dream*.

The questionnaire (below) acted as an interview guide, in keeping with its semi-structured status. I did not always follow it precisely as I let the interviews flow freely as much as possible while still focusing on the key *Discovery*, *Critical Reflection* and *Dream* elements. While I had planned to capture a qualitative sense of the experience of the research participants had through their involvement with WT, this was a less salient element in the bulk of the interviews, given the passions and interests of the participants, and of course the mundane reality of time constraints: my promise to the interviewees was that the conversations would be approximately 1-hour in length. This time limit was in the main adhered to.

Table 2 Interview Guide: Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Discovery – the goal of this phase was to elicit open-ended ‘positive’ comments. The questions
<p><i>Thinking of the Waterfront Toronto’s public consultations you have been involved in:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was most compelling and constructive for you in Waterfront Toronto’s public consultation programs (prompts as required): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In terms of the process or organization of the consultations? ○ In terms of the impact on policy and program outcomes? ○ In terms of the experience of individual participants?
Critical Reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What could have happened in Waterfront Toronto’s public consultations that did not but ought to have?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What would you change to address such a gap or gaps? ○ How would such changes apply to other, similar, public consultation programs?

Dream
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What could make Waterfront Toronto's public consultations more effective in relationship to both participation and outcomes?</i>• <i>Given the power and resources, what is one critical thing you would change in how Waterfront Toronto and other similar public consultation programs are designed and delivered?</i>
Do you have any Final Comments?

Theoretical Considerations

The original research design privileged Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), with its concomitant social constructivist epistemic perspective (Gergen, 1987). That constructivist orientation is retained; however, my theoretical focuses has shifted its emphasis to a pragmatic one: in straightforward terms, seeking to understand the effect and the outcomes of the process under study. A modest bricolage then of social construction and pragmatism. As described by Rogers (2012) following Levi-Strauss (1966) bricolage may be understood as using materials at-hand to construct an object. In this case: "when the metaphor is used within the domain of qualitative research it denotes methodological practices explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality" (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). The addition of critical appreciation within the research questionnaire is itself a move that is consistent with a critical pragmatism (Kadlec, 2006; Hall, 2013; Koopman, 2011; Morgan, 2014; and Rosiek, 2013). Also, from a common-sense pragmatic position, it fit, as I have noted, the real-world circumstances that obtained when the research was conducted and the sociopolitical knowledge base and the reflexive self-awareness of the research participants themselves. In this

If adding a critical element to the AI procedure is better suited to capturing various power dynamics and differentials that are structurally inherent in the 'political space' that public consultation occupies and that the participants and sponsors inherently occupy, adding a further layer of critical pragmatism strengthens the hermeneutic robustness of the approach. As even the application of Critical Appreciative Inquiry can be passive: explicitly asking for what is missing or what was, lacks the even the power of traditional AI's 'Dream' phase to push beyond mere 'it was like this' reportage. This was more easily avoided as most of the participants were 'already there' in that they openly and enthusiastically discussed power dynamics and political agendas. The layering of AI, Critical Appreciation and a critically pragmatist analytic, supports the basic goal of letting the research participants speak while appropriately taking into account their relative political sophistication and self-awareness as 'actors' in communicative social process.

Regardless of the care taken there are potential hazards in conducting qualitative research within any form of constructivist paradigm (Gergen & Gergen, 2008) but these risks are manageable. For instance, concerns that scientific validity may put in peril in qualitative work (Gergen & Gergen, 2008), are fundamentally a non-issue. Given my relationship to the topic and my acquaintance with the research participants I was not overly concerned that meaning would be jeopardized by its theoretic dependency on a speaker's particular semantic intent. This goes hand-in-hand with the reflexivity of my own position as a researcher (Cassell & Johnson, 2006) and fellow participant. My interpretative stance was guided by Seale's (1999) sense of "subtle realism" which he described as '... maintaining a view of language as both constructing new

worlds and as referring to a reality outside the text, a means of communicating past experience as well as imagining new experiences (Seale, 1999, p. 470).”

I was persuaded that an open embrace of a pragmatist analytic was warranted by the deficiencies of AI, in that it lacks a politics, as well as the obviousness that AI is arguably understood as an applied form of pragmatism, with its anti-foundationalism, embrace of social constructivism, and its emphasis on outcomes as the measure of effectiveness and, if you will, ‘truth’. There was also a need, given the content of some of the research interviews and my own involvement WT’s public consultations, primarily as a citizen and peripherally as a professional consultant, to find a method of problematizing the findings while providing an adequate theoretical perspective. I had already committed to the inclusion of an emergent branch of AI that styles itself most commonly as Critical Appreciative Processes (Grant & Humphries, 2006) or Critical Appreciation (Ridley Duff & Duncan, 2015).

This approach to AI offers some help toward such problematizing by including a ‘what’s missing’ and ‘what might have been’ to complicate the positive orientation of classical AI, which focusses ‘what gives life’, ‘what is working’ and ‘what can be made better’. This was useful in giving me a sense of permission to include explicitly the ‘shadow side’ (Bushe, 2007) of AI that is usually implicit, in the semi-structured questionnaire. Yet, when I looked back on the research interviews, it became clear to me that a theoretical tool kit that had a more obvious political dimension was required. So, I chose a critically oriented pragmatism (Shalin, 1992; Kadlec, 2006; Rosiek, 2013, Koopman, 2009) as a congenial and apt frame for my concluding remarks.

My status as an adjacent researcher (Koopman, 2009) informed my choice to adapt a model of reflexive thematic analysis, inspired by the work of Clarke and Braun (2006, 2013, 2019), as additional layer to the basic frame given by the critical appreciative inquiry approach of the research interview, which inherently provides a raw thematic template based on questions that sought out what was constructive and compelling in WT's public engagement work, what may have been missed, and what could be imagined to improve it.

My epistemic tendency to view knowledge as something we produce together through discourse, as opposed to discovering it wholesale, commits to a fundamentally pragmatic and constructivist point of view. My theoretical orientation follows Craig's (2014) take:

“My kind of social constructionists—let's call them *pragmatists*—believe instead that real things can be socially constructed but that social construction is both enabled and constrained by material conditions, just as an artist's free creations are both made possible and yet limited by material properties of the medium in which the artist works” (p. 2).

So, in considering a process or project or program public, it is sensible to evaluate these in terms of the effect of their outcomes, understanding, that such considerations are operationalized within contingent and limited conditions. As for the simplicity of my approach, I leave the final 'theoretical' word to Seale (1999):

“I have tried to show that people often make strong claims that philosophical, political, or theoretical positions ought to lie behind—indeed ought to determine—the decisions that social researchers make “on the ground” so that quality is underwritten by

adherence to a particular position. ... I see things differently: Research practice, in fact, should be conceived as relatively autonomous from such abstract and general considerations (p. 476)."

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

It is a given that qualitative interviews produce qualitative responses. There are various ways of coding, sorting, and analyzing such data noted in the research design section. While acknowledging the conceptual indeterminacy that attends to qualitative work in general, the research interviews established a de facto template (King, 2004) following the structure of the AI-inspired questionnaire: what was compelling or constructive, what was missed, what might change or improve. researcher has a reasonably clear idea from a combination of reading relevant literature and conducting research interviews to make a list of topic codes. Rather this laid down a raw structure to organize the data but which by itself provided an insufficiently robust way to get at what was most interesting and relevant in the data.

Had this project been a full AI exercise, such as one that WT might theoretically have conducted, a likely outcome would be a report outlining the best of what their consultation program had achieved. It would, if a critical element was included, also note key missing elements or gaps. This would be followed by documenting the 'Dream' section of the discussion highlighting what participants wanted to see in future public engagement processes. Finally, this would be followed by a summary of action steps and implementation recommendations, following AI's 'Design' and 'Destiny' phases. But my intentions here, particularly as they have

evolved in response to the data, are to offer a form of evaluation and reflexively critical commentary. To get the 'goods' out of the data, the commentary that would provide insight and critique, I have layered on a simplified adaptation of thematic analysis following the work of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2019). Their approach to thematic analysis involves beginning with a close reading and/or listening to the research interviews to create a thorough familiarization with the data. This is followed by generating initial codes. Researchers are advised to search for themes within the coded qualitative data. They recommend clarity on theoretical approach, for example has evolved since 2006 (Braun & Clarke 2012, 2019) to include a more explicitly reflexive character. Such a reflexive engagement is necessary given my adjacent status as a fellow participant in WT consultations and as consultation practitioner, and as a citizen advocate for waterfront revitalization.

Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data in order to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. It is a widely used approach in qualitative research and can be applied to a variety of data sources, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and written texts. In their schema (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the work of analysis involves the identification of patterns or themes within the data one has gathered via coding, that is breaking the data down into smaller chunks and then labeling these with descriptive tags, codes. These codes are then categorized into themes through a form of close reading. While staying faithful to the process recommend by Braun & Clarke, I followed my own version of their 5-step process, with a double coding approach.

1. Familiarization with the data: This began by reading and rereading the verbatim transcripts of the research interviews. I then did a further close reading according to the semi-structured AI/CAI questions.
2. Coding the data: Using keywords from AI/CAI questions I used the Quirkos software application to code and sort the text of the interviews. This created a report output from Quirkos which I read through looking for patterns and connections within the qualitative data. I applied a round of codes based on this reading.
3. Recoding the data: I entered the sections of the data that broadly fell within the Compelling/Constructive & Critical Reflection/Change categories, as initially coded in Quirkos, following the semi-structured AI/CAI questionnaire, in Open AI's ChatGPT application, with the instruction to identify keyword codes and themes derived from those. I compared the ChatGPT output to my initial coding, editing, and rewriting the output to refine my findings. I chose to use this machine learning or AI tool to provide additional distancing from the data, given my depth of familiarity with the material. The ChatGPT output largely validated my manual coding. However, it did highlight some differences, such as collaboration, which were interesting but not of compelling salience.
4. Identifying themes: This was a fuzzy process. Some themes emerged almost readymade from the initial coding process. Others emerged or were refined by comparing the Quirkos output, my manual reading and coding, and the ChatGPT output.
5. Describing the themes and interpreting their import.

The following sections detail this process from coding and theme development, description, and analysis.

Coding and Theme Development

In approaching treatment of the qualitative data, I had as my starting point the framework given by the questionnaires. While I did not precisely follow the model of template analysis described by King (2004), I was inspired by it as it helped me make the transition from the questionnaire codes listed above to the more robust interpretive codes that were developed into themes. Still this procedure followed the spirit if not the letter of King:

The essence of template analysis is that the researcher produces a list of codes ('template') representing themes identified in their textual data. Some of these will usually be defined a priori, but they will be modified and added to as the researcher reads and interprets the texts. The template is organized in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher ... (King, 2004, p.256)

Indeed, I have taken 'researcher definition' to heart as I have hybridized what seemed useful in elements of both template and thematic analysis.

The Coding Process

The coding approach I have taken is follows the rough template, discussed above, formed by the adapted AI/CAI questionnaire, focusing on what was compelling or constructive, what was missing and what might be changed or improved. I have eliminated the track of conversation that touched on social learning and experiential considerations as the bulk of my research

participants just, as the vernacular has it, didn't want to go there; the salience was therefore lacking. Those that did 'go there' provide interesting observations but if followed up would have extended the length of this paper and distracted from its core purpose.

To further simplify and focus I divided responses into two broad sections. The constructive and compelling, consistent with the Discovery phase of AI or the 'what works/gives life' phase in a traditional AI process. The second section combined the 'what was missed'—an element of the critical appreciation approach—with the 'change or improve', consistent with both elements of the critical appreciation and the core AI Dream phase. This was in line with the bulk of the discussion in virtually all the interviews which were predominantly about what worked well, that is what was compelling and constructive, along with missing elements that needed to be addressed by meliorating change. It was also in line with a core evaluation approach which seeks to diagnose what went wrong, what went right, and how to shift the balance toward the positive in future efforts.

This was supported by my initial raw coding process. I used key words from question prompts in the semi-structured interview guide: 'Critical Reflection', 'Change', 'More Inclusive', 'Improve', 'What's Missing', 'Constructive', 'Compelling', 'View of Consultation', 'How it Was', 'Role of Stakeholders', and 'Social Learning'. Using these raw template codes in the Quirkos qualitative analysis software, I coded the raw coded the transcribed research interviews. I then manually read through the Quirkos output to refine the selections for salience and concision. Then these sections of text were run through ChatGPT 4.0 with the instruction: "Develop codes and theme descriptions from a thematic analysis of the text in quotation marks,

following the model developed by Clarke & Braun (2006).” The output from ChatGPT did not differ significantly from my own manual coding work. It was, it should be noted, more literal in the approach taken. The machine learning algorithms treating the text as if, to anthropomorphize, a person seeing it for the first time. While possibly controversial in this instance I concur with the conclusion of Tabone & de Winter (2023): “ChatGPT is a valid and robust tool for qualitative data analysis ...” (p. 12). There are cogent ethical and reliability issues with ChatGPT when used as research tool (Zhuo et al, 2023), however, I did not employ this machine learning tool for research uses, only as a supplementary textual analysis tool. Therefore, its adequacy as a secondary analysis tool is, in my view, following Tabone & De Winter (2023), valid.

In both my human reading and the machine's, consistent key points emerged regarding the exemplary quality of WT's consultation practice, the significance of stakeholder influence and participation, the procedural competence of consultations, and the importance of WT's initial leadership by founding CEO John Campbell (who is also a research participant). On the critical side—'what's missing' and 'what can be improved and changed—leadership issues were consistently, contrasting the shift under the Will Fleissig the CEO that followed Campbell. Two other key ideas emerged: the issue who 'who or who is not in the room'—the demographic make-up of WT's consultation public and stakeholders—and the broad concern with structural and process reform, engaged concerns reaching beyond WT's specific public engagement work to public consultation as general practice.

From a raw list of codes or key ideas, I formed developed thematic codes and built the key themes from these codes. Table 3 and Table 4 below capture the key coded texts that I have used to discern the key themes described in the following section.

Coding – Compelling and Constructive

The question that formed the overarching template for this section was: “Thinking of the Waterfront Toronto’s public consultations you have been involved in: What was most compelling and constructive for you in Waterfront Toronto’s public consultation programs?”

This raw list of key ideas or initial codes was developed from both the ‘human’ manual reading of the Constructive & Compelling text:

- Involving Stakeholders from the Beginning
- Earning Public Support
- Establishing Credible Consultation
- Listening to Community Stakeholders
- Driving Public Awareness of the Waterfront
- Creating Opportunities for Informed Participation
- Collaborative Approach to Project Development
- John Campbell/Leadership
- Gold standard for consultation.

With these codes in mind, I reread the text to intuitively test these phrases as thematic codes. The first—Gold Standard—is self-explanatory but as a discussion of theme will highlight, the sense of Gold Standard is a comparative one. The second—Stakeholders as Staff—is derived from statement in the text that captures the tight involvement of key stakeholders in WT’s consultative process. The third—Collaborative Competence—captures the twined ideas of the competence of exhibited by WT staff and their consultants and their commitment to

collaboratively engaging stakeholders and the broader public. The fourth—Without John Campbell/Leadership—highlights key significance of the role of WT’s founding CEO. Table 3 provides key quotations from the research interviews that correspond to these thematic codes. Each quotation is marked with the participant type: Citizen Stakeholder-CS; Citizen Activist-CA; Activist Academic-AA; Urban Planner/Consultant-CT; and WT Staff-WS.

Table 3. Compelling/Constructive Codes with exemplary quotations

Gold Standard.	Stakeholder As Staff.	Collaborative Competence.	Without John Campbell/Leadership.
So, I think I almost always describe Waterfront Toronto’s consultation process as having set a gold standard for consultation in Toronto. - CS	I’ll start off by just talking about quality, because I’m struck by the kind of sophistication and thoughtfulness of the people who participate in community consultation here in Toronto. - WS	And so the team that actually did the urban design had a pretty strict brief, actually, from the community. “This is what we want to see.” And then, when they came back with their preliminary plans, there were meetings over months: some public, some stakeholder. - WS	Under John Campbell they had a somewhat informal process, it seemed, which really seemed to arise partly out of his own personality. He was a guy who could kind of talk to really almost anybody and elicit their views and take it into account. - CA

Gold Standard.	Stakeholder As Staff.	Collaborative Competence.	Without John Campbell/Leadership.
<p>“they’ve managed to keep large segments of the public abreast of what they were doing and to really get people to provide significant input. And they’ve done that consistently and very credibly over quite a long period of time.” - CT</p>	<p>It was up to the stakeholders to be at the public meetings and hear what people said and make sure they got into the smaller meetings. And you actually saw a change in the plans from month to month, as they listened to people. - CS</p>	<p>Waterfront Toronto has been able to develop without a great deal of NIMBYism and ‘not-in-my-back-yard-ism’, etc., because people have had their say before it gets to the stage of doing anything. And it worked really well. - CS</p>	<p>“... without John Campbell having been at Waterfront Toronto, we wouldn’t feel the same way about Waterfront Toronto. He set the agenda in a way that obviously the board supported.” - CA</p>
<p>“they’ve managed to keep large segments of the public abreast of what they were doing and to really get people to provide significant input. And they’ve done that consistently and very credibly over quite a long period of time.” - CT</p>	<p>It was up to the stakeholders to be at the public meetings and hear what people said and make sure they got into the smaller meetings. And you actually saw a change in the plans from month to month, as they listened to people. - CS</p>	<p>Waterfront Toronto has been able to develop without a great deal of NIMBYism and ‘not-in-my-back-yard-ism’, etc., because people have had their say before it gets to the stage of doing anything. And it worked really well. - CS</p>	<p>“... without John Campbell having been at Waterfront Toronto, we wouldn’t feel the same way about Waterfront Toronto. He set the agenda in a way that obviously the board supported.” - CA</p>

Gold Standard.	Stakeholder As Staff.	Collaborative Competence.	Without John Campbell/Leadership.
<p>Well, I would say that Waterfront Toronto set a new standard because the other bodies I’ve worked with on public consultations have operated quite differently. - CA</p>	<p>I also think, you know, from a sort of professional practice point of view, we’ve [WT] set up this system where we have not just public meetings but what we call our stakeholder group meetings. And what’s great about those is that we almost start to bring in people who represent interests in the community almost—and I think of it as almost quasi-staff. - WS</p>	<p>So I attribute that to Waterfront Toronto’s very good connection and the tools they’ve put in place, both through the consultation and the videos, the website. - CS</p>	<p>John Campbell would ask you about, which were just much more sort of mundane, down-to-earth, understandable things that just had to do with what people thought of things and whether they liked this or that or not. - CA</p>
<p>I think there was a real desire to meet—for minds to meet about the projects, for people to feel that they not just feel that they could engage, but so that they actually could engage constructively. - CS</p>		<p>When we actually started out we always had a third party facilitator ... And so it gave people—I think a little bit more confident we were listening. - WS</p>	

Gold Standard.	Stakeholder As Staff.	Collaborative Competence.	Without John Campbell/Leadership.
<p>So, I think that with all the kind of participatory exercises ... the biggest—to me, the biggest contribution was making people aware that something was happening on the waterfront and that they had a chance to say something about it. - AA</p>	<p>We already knew about, the flood protection requirements. We knew about the groundwater and soil contamination. We knew what kind of strategies. So we were able to work very quickly with the consultants & understand the issues. - CS</p>	<p>“I think the consultations are very well-organized. Each time I’ve attended I’ve found there was a thorough, comprehensive background provided, which I think is really important.” - CS</p>	<p>I just have a huge amount of respect for the community and, you know, at this point, I don’t even like to propose something until I’ve—or advance something until I’ve heard from the community, because I feel like the odds are we’re going to get it wrong if we don’t listen to the community and respond to them. - WS</p>
<p>Waterfront Toronto, which I’d been observing at close hand for quite a while, has served as a kind of a model, in my mind, for how decisions around the Toronto Waterfront should be done. - CA</p>	<p>It was complete community input from a blank page. No plans were made, no RFPs, nothing. It was just simply, “Tell us what you dream of having on your waterfront or on the West Don Lands. - WS</p>	<p>Waterfront Toronto’s consultations really make it really accessible for almost anybody to just join in, and have a decent understanding of what’s been done, what the goals are, what we’re trying to achieve. - CS</p>	<p>... when John Campbell was the CEO. And he was absolutely terrific. He was our friend, really, and we could talk to him officially in meetings, on the record, about details of Queen’s Quay in our area, which is the central waterfront. And also, we could talk to him off the record. - CS</p>

Gold Standard.	Stakeholder As Staff.	Collaborative Competence.	Without John Campbell/Leadership.
<p>...[WT} understood the need for participants to actually have the chance for informed participation, they acknowledged that people might come to the table not actually understanding the technical issues. So there was space for actual kind of learning or teaching. - CS</p>	<p>[Having established community groups like the West Don Lands Committee at the table] meant that there could be, you know, a two-way communication process that would both benefit the work of developing the precinct plan, and Waterfront Toronto. - CS</p>	<p>So they clearly put a strong value on effective communication and effective listening and taking what’s said to them by the community to heart and actually acting on it. That’s pretty impressive for a public agency. - CA</p>	<p>[A more typical approach among some public agencies could be characterized as:] You go stand. You talk, you don’t listen that well. You move on. “Okay, I’ve done that. I’ve done my consultation, so let’s get on with the job.” Whereas I think our [WT] approach was different. We’re going to listen. And we did. - WS</p>
<p>Waterfront Toronto has a strong reputation for actually listening to the community, as opposed to other organizations that have a strong reputation for going through the motions of consultation but not actually listening - CA</p>	<p>... we suggested that it made sense to include [volunteer community organizations such as the] West Don Lands Committee members because .. they were accountable back to their community, and they could bring community issues forward to Waterfront Toronto - CS</p>	<p>They have so much online to allow anyone who’s interested, no matter what your education level is, in terms of understanding what’s going on there. There are so many ways for you to sort of learn what’s going on there, based on the resources and materials they’ve put out there. - CS</p>	<p>I think that the—one of the things that we did well, and I would all it almost attitudinal—when we started a lot of agencies—public agencies, as you mentioned, were not doing this. But it seemed to be very much a tick-the-box exercise. - WS</p>

Coding – Missed/Change

As with the first grouping, the coding for this was achieved by first sorting data by the 'template' given by the semi-structured questionnaire. However, in this section I combine two of these 'template codes' based on the relative dominance these interrelated questions had in the responses from the research participants. "What could have happened in Waterfront Toronto's public consultations that did not but ought to have?" and "What is one critical thing you would change in how Waterfront Toronto and other similar public consultation programs are designed and delivered?" These gave me the logically connected what was 'missed' and what ought to be 'changed'. The latter being consistent with AI Dream phase, and the former being consistent with CAI's permission to openly asking for a 'negative' or 'constructive' criticism.

This raw list of key ideas or initial codes was developed from both the 'human' manual reading of the Change & Missed text: Involve marginal and diverse communities.

- Improve geographic and demographic outreach.
- Engage new Canadians, indigenous peoples, youth.
- Leadership change: consultation practice changed with new CEO.
- Maintain and expand public engagement.
- Resources to support citizen participation.
- Public consultation limitations.
- Reform the process.

Again, with these ‘raw codes’ in mind, I reread the text to intuitively test these against phrases of vies These were three ‘ideas’ that emerged as thematic codes: Gold Standard, Stakeholders as Staff, Collaborative Competence and Without John Campbell-Leadership. I built the themes directly from these intuitively refined codes. The first— Leadership Gaps —responds to the fragility of relying on sole leader, the CEO, to determine public engagement practice. The second—Who’s Not in the Room—is derived from concerns that despite the quality of WT’s consultation practice, there are significant demographic gaps in who participates. The final— Small Potatoes—evokes the Arnstein problematic regarding the limits of public consultation. Table 4 provides key quotations from the research interviews for each of these codes. Once again, each quotation is marked with the participant type: Citizen Stakeholder-CS; Citizen Activist-CA; Activist Academic-AA; Urban Planner/Consultant-CT; and WT Staff-WS.

Table 4. Change/Missed Key Codes with exemplary quotations.

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
First of all, let me say that I think that participatory—the citizen participation exercise that Waterfront Toronto runs doesn’t acknowledge the problem of who’s paying the piper calls the song. - AA	... you mentioned who’s in the room and who’s not in the room—I have—I never did a systematic count or study, but it seems to me that the people who were participating until very recently don’t reflect the diversity that’s in Toronto. - AA	It’s a resource thing and it’s a habit. There are certain ways that we do public consultation. We hire facilitators and we hire a room and we get lots of flip charts and things like that. That’s how it’s done. - CS

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
<p>During the Will Fleissig regime there was a widespread feeling that people that had previously gone in and talked to Waterfront Toronto on a kind of an ongoing basis were no longer being invited in. There seemed to be a lack of interest. - CS</p>	<p>... but we didn’t get visible minorities, we didn’t get young people, didn’t get young people, didn’t get immigrants. And that was a real challenge. We tried. We went into community newspapers and all the kind of stuff. But I think the reality of it is, first generation immigrants are too busy working two jobs to make a living. - CS</p>	<p>Well, public consultation is really kind of small potatoes to actually engaging stakeholders and governance. We’re of the view that—or certainly I am of the view that public agencies should have substantial engagement of the stakeholders, including the community, in their governance. - CA</p>
<p>... the stakeholder advisory groups—every 3 months, has a different leader. So it’s hard to compare. But I always get the feeling that whoever is leading is doing a job, as opposed to trying to get answers. - CS</p>	<p>As a lawyer, in the legal clinic that we worked in—we had a professional organizer who is used to working with low-income people because our focus was poverty law. And so the techniques she used to partner with organizations, to create environments in which people who normally don’t speak up felt comfortable—it’s an area of expertise and, you know, commitment and requires resources. So Waterfront Toronto would have to really think about that. - CS</p>	<p>So we came in and tried to reassure all the people who had been upset about that [Sidewalk Labs], that we were going to do it differently and I think we did it differently. But I think—and that worked for quite a while but then I think we—you know, maybe we stopped focusing on the positive themes or we didn’t focus as much on the positive themes that might appeal to a broader membership in the city. - WS</p>

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
<p>No. It seems—it seems to have been—I mean, my view is still fairly negative and despite—despite Waterfront Toronto’s apparent openness, apparently trying to get the local wishes—I don’t think it’s—what they’ve achieved has been any different from any other consultation, to be honest. - CS</p>	<p>Certainly, someone who has no job and has marginal housing situations—all the people who we hope these things really make—that we do, really make life better for in the long run. But you know, in a sense, they don’t get much of a voice in deciding a number of projects that Waterfront Toronto’s been involved with.- CS</p>	<p>Maybe you would have people register from the very beginning. You know, make sure you publicize it wide and far and say, “You know what? We’re going to have consultations, but for this to be productive, we need to the same people, as much as possible, to stay involved throughout the process,” much like they do at the stakeholder committee. - CS</p>
<p>The former CEO left and Will Fleissig, the new CEO, came, there was a dramatic change in Waterfront Toronto’s connection with the community. And that was very concerning to anyone who’d been actively involved in Waterfront Toronto. And it’s still, to this day, mystifying. So Waterfront Toronto’s seemed to turn inward for two years. - CS</p>	<p>What disturbed me was when you look at our city parks, they’re heavily used by visible minorities. And I think it’s because immigrants, coming from those parts of the world, don’t have the backyard and the pool in Etobicoke that I had. They live in apartments and are used to smaller spaces and are used to having their functions—family gatherings in public spaces. And so we should have—it would have been much better if we’d been able to tackle that market and get that input - WS</p>	<p>Well, public consultation is really kind of small potatoes to actually engaging stakeholders and governance. We’re of the view that—or certainly I am of the view that public agencies should have substantial engagement of the stakeholders, including the community, in their governance. - CA</p>

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
<p>He [Will Flessig] was a very different personality from John Campbell, clearly. He did have a couple of meetings. He’s a big picture kind of a guy. He’s a big thinker. And I remember meetings with the sort of big arrows and big circles up on the projector screen and very cerebral sort of concepts, which were not the same as the kind of things that John Campbell would ask you about. - CS</p>	<p>It’s going to—you don’t generate the interest, I don’t think. It may be possible to go into schools, perhaps universities, and talk to the young people at that level, where you go into an urban planning class, for example. That might sort of get, you know, more input. But I don’t know if there’s an answer as to how you can generate interest in people, if in fact they’re not there. - WS</p>	<p>There’s nothing like having people diverse opinions sitting around the table and looking each other in the eye and saying, “Okay, I understand what you’re saying and, you know, okay, I’ll change my view in accordance with that, because now I appreciate what you have to say.” And ‘those kind of people’ who are willing to be flexible and change their view and not be locked into a particular view are hard to find. - AA</p>
<p>Maybe what they need to be doing is some community development work to ensure that communities other than, you know, ones like the West Don Lands member group communities are included. That requires some community development work - CS</p>	<p>So how do we find ways to actually really begin to speak to new Canadians, to indigenous Canadians, to youth, to elders, etc., etc., who don’t have all the time to come to—out to these? This is, I think, a real issue. And Waterfront Toronto has done some yeoman’s work and tried to figure out ways to do it through social media, how to do it with the intercepts in malls and things like that. - CS</p>	<p>We just can’t know everything. And that sense of indeterminacy and a modesty about our own ability to be predictive comes very hard to planners and designers. Planners, especially, are just obsessed with the idea of wanting to nail down as much as they can in advance to avoid mistakes. - CT</p>

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
<p>[Campbell was] just much more sort of mundane, down-to-earth, understandable things that just had to do with what people thought of things and whether they liked this or that or not. So there was a feeling, I think, for most of his tenure that people weren’t having the same input that they had been used to - CA</p>	<p>But, you know, I still think that the biggest, loudest voices tend to be voices of people who have—like me, have been doing it for seventeen years. They know where to find me and I seem to always be available when they want to have someone come and go over their plans in great detail and provide chapter and verse critique. So I don’t have an answer, but that’s, to my way of thinking, still a piece that’s out there to be resolved. - CS</p>	<p>So I think this is a hanging question, there, in terms of how processes like this should be run, and whether in fact agencies and/or proponents, in this case, should be asked to pony up money so communities can do it themselves. - CA</p>
<p>So I think there have been issues where I would have liked to see Waterfront Toronto step up and more forcefully take a stand on some of the issues. And that’s where citizens probably were able to do that more effectively that Waterfront Toronto, for fear of running afoul of usually the provincial government or even city hall. - CA</p>	<p>I was doing a presentation at the school of architecture at U of T on community engagement. And one of the students asked me, “With the West Don Lands, what are you doing to engage youth and, you know, what’s the transition planning and that sort of thing?” And, you know, it’s something I have to say—like, we are not good at that. We don’t have—we haven’t been—we’ve been motoring away in our own lane - WS</p>	<p>I think also Waterfront Toronto. I mean, their mandate, essentially, is to increase the land value of the waterfront and provide jobs. That’s what their mandate is. So anything that provides jobs is fulfilling their mandate. - AA</p>

Leadership Gaps	Who’s not in the room?	Small Potatoes
One of the things about an agency which is funded by three levels of government and has a board of directors appointed by the three levels of government is it has to tread very, very carefully. - CT	That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t keep trying. But you’re right, there is that aspect and we have been criticized for the sort of demographic being a little bit narrow and also the geography - WS	I think that the amount of— money needs to be allocated to community groups, so that they can compete on an equal footing with large corporations like Sidewalk. - AA

The Four Key Themes

To finalize the four key themes, I engaged in a two-sept process was a two-step procedure, guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2012, 2019) admonition not to be satisfied with surface level accounts and look for underlying meaning, to dig into the research data and see where it leads and create insightful and critically salient conclusions. The first step was to compress the coding results into ‘key idea’ clusters.

- *Gold Standard in Public Consultation:*

WT’s consultation process was described as the setting the gold standard in Toronto due to its emphasis on involving stakeholders from the beginning, fostering informed participation, and encouraging collaboration. This approach has led to broad public support and a strong connection between the organization and the public. WT’s work compares favorably to urban development and waterfront related consultation processes.

- *Collaborative Development and Design Competitions:*

One of the key aspects that was seen to set WT apart was its collaborative approach to project development. A key example of that was highlighted was WT's direct involvement of stakeholders in design competitions so that they helped define the terms of reference for these competitions as well as giving direct feedback to the architects and designers prior to the selection of the winning teams.

- *Credibility and Responsiveness:*

WT has built credibility through consistent and effective communication and by actively listening to the community. Incorporating feedback from the community and acting on it, so that projects reflect citizen input. It was also noted that WT has been responsive constructive criticisms which has also helped to has fostered trust among stakeholders and citizens and allowed WT to be seen as acting in the public interest.

- *John Campbell's Influence & Leadership:*

The success of WT's consultation process can be attributed, in part, to John Campbell, the founding CEO. He was a key in setting the agenda for active stakeholder and community engagement. He was felt to have an informal, approachable style that made people feel heard and included.

- *Issues with Diversity and Inclusivity:*

Persistent concerns were raised that for a more inclusive, diverse, and geographic representation of Toronto in the waterfront development process. Some suggested that there may be a need to consider allocating resources to community groups to help

them actively participate. Though how this would be done and who would fund it was left hanging.

- *Framing a Waterfront Narrative:*

Related to the idea of greater involvement of a broader demographic in WT's consultations, the importance of framing the narrative around the waterfront as mattering to the city as a whole.

- *Leadership Change and Community Connection:*

A change in leadership, after the first CEO, John Campbell completed his tenure, led to a dramatic shift in WT's connection with the community. This was at the time the, subsequently abandoned, Sidewalk Labs Quayside project was being considered.

Long-time stakeholders felt estranged from the process which led to a sense of frustration and more importantly a concern that WT was compromising its "Gold Standard."

- *The Limits of Consultation*

Is public consultation just "small potatoes" compared to citizen participation in decision-making and governance? Should citizen groups receive funding and resources to conduct their own research and 'compete' on an equal footing with government agencies?

From these 'idea clusters', and a review of the coding I had already done I settled on the final four key themes:

- 1. Setting the gold standard: Collaborative Competence.**
- 2. Leadership matters: "Without John Campbell"**
- 3. Who's In/Not in the room? Stakeholders as Staff vs. "We Tried"**
- 4. "Small Potatoes" – The Limits of Consultation**

While my numbering of these is arguably somewhat arbitrary, in keeping with the appreciative approach of the semi-structured questionnaire and especially the lead off question, I have chosen this strong positive message—Setting the Gold Standard: Collaborative Competence—as "Theme 1." This theme also, obviously, falls within the Constructive and Compelling category of the appreciative template derived simply from the questionnaire. A hallmark of the reasons given for this "Gold Standard" was the view of WT as being responsive both in attending to citizen and stakeholder concerns but also in the more significant sense that their views were reflected in the outcomes of WT's work. Additionally, I have collapsed the code "Collaborative Competence" into this theme, which, despite its distinct focus on the positive operational features of WT's public engagement practices, is straightforwardly demonstration of how WT's consultation methods are exemplary of the "Gold Standard.

The second theme—Without John Campbell: Leadership Matters—is precisely descriptive capturing the key significance of Campbell's, the founding CEO of the agency, leadership in establishing WT's positive public engagement ethic. This theme also crosses the boundaries of questionnaire template as the hinge of "leadership matters" pitches both to the

positive and the negative. As the more detailed discussion of theme 2 will show, if there's an overreliance on a leader, the founding CEO, to set the organizational and communication culture of an organization the more vulnerable its reputation and effectiveness may be to a change in leadership. If leadership matters, then gaps or perceived 'failures' in leadership matter just as much. The code groupings that support this theme, therefore incorporate the positive or appreciative side of leadership along with critical or deficit view of leadership.

The third theme— Who's In/Not in the room? Stakeholders as Staff vs. "We Tried"—as with the previous theme, emerges from both the Compelling/Constructive and Changed/Missed template categories. It highlights the justly lauded work that WT did to engage and involve identified stakeholders and its shadow side, those who were not in the room: youth, marginalized and racialized communities, and broadly those not living in neighbourhoods adjacent to Toronto's central waterfront.

The fourth and final theme—"Small Potatoes" – The Limits of Consultation—captures the concern that consultation, no matter how well conducted, has limitations. Not the least of which is the agreed upon lack of any method to ensure broad demographic representation among participants in consultative processes, nor a means of determining who participants are accountable to. These limitations need not be fatal but are to be expected given that decision-making role of democratically elected governments the municipal, provincial, and federal levels, which have the legitimacy, though not uncontested, to make decisions in the public interest.

Theme 1. Setting the gold standard: Collaborative Competence.

“So, I think, I almost always describe waterfront Toronto's consultation process having set a gold standard for consultation in Toronto the only organization that has similar consultation quality would be the Toronto Region and Conservation Authority.”

Of all the themes this one came the closest to emerging as if readymade during the thematic coding of the interview transcripts. It is the ideational standard bearer of the Compelling/Constructive code “Gold Standard.” As such it reflects the predominate view of participants that WT has been exemplary in their public engagement practice based on their comparative experience with other, similar processes. As a research participant noted:

“Waterfront Toronto, which I'd been observing at close hand for quite a while, has served as a kind of a model, in my mind, for how decisions around the Toronto Waterfront should be done. So that, for example, there appears to be a contrast between how Waterfront Toronto decides things and how Ports Toronto decides things.”

Similarly, another highlighted the comparative contrast between WT's consultation practice with that of other agencies and organizations: “Waterfront Toronto has a strong reputation for actually listening to the community, as opposed to other organizations that have a strong reputation for going through the motions of consultation but not actually listening.” Despite the indeterminacy of evaluation procedures, noted in literature review (Abelson et al., 2006), there is a broadly shared view, also articulated in Rowe and Frewer's 2000 article, that perceptions of being heard are key part of quality. Along with this critical element of ‘listening’

there is also need for procedural competence, which reinforces the sense that what is heard will be acted on and that sufficient information is provided to participants. A research participant put this plainly: "I think the consultations are very well-organized. Each time I've attended I've found there was a thorough, comprehensive background provided, which I think is really important."

Even the more critically nuanced views of some participants noted the significance of WT's participatory outreach in the neighbourhoods adjacent the waterfront. That have largely avoided the Arnstein (1969) trap of engaging in performative therapy or manipulation but have both listened and acted upon community input. Indeed, the balance of responses to what was seen to be constructive or compelling about WT's consultation practice was, far more positive. One might expect a rosy outlook from senior WT staff, which is where I now turn, but it was largely supported by most of those interviewed for this project, where there was convergence in viewpoints with much of the citizen participants and WT Staff. As the founding CEO noted, citing an example from the early days WT's public engagement:

... everyone sat around tables then we actually you know extracted from the group that worked what worked in the community what didn't work and what were the sensitive points? And a lot of that got built into the plan so I think it's hard to pick one specific example that really jumps up because I think in general, we basically listened to the community and to a large degree executed on a lot of the input that they gave us.

It was clear that Campbell's approach influenced key WT staff, as this interview excerpt, quoted at length to emphasize the importance of this approach:

I see sort two broad approaches to engagement or to consultation. And one is the kind of 'do what you're required to do,' 'give people chance to express their concerns,' and then 'more or less continue doing what you were doing'. And then there's another approach, which is 'be open to changing your plans, changing your direction' and 'you're not doing it to check the box to say, "I did my statutory requirement, I'm actually doing this to make the project evolve in a good way.'" And those sound sort of self-evident, but I think that they're not so self-evident to a lot of the actors who do. And I think taking the latter approach is better for the community, because they're getting—they're actually seeing some of their comments reflected back in what happens, but it also makes the process a lot more rewarding, because if you just kind of go out and say, "I'm just doing this tonight because I've got to do this but I'm pretty sure that my project is exactly the right project as the way it is, so they couldn't really have too much to offer," it's not a very rewarding or engaging experience for the person doing it.

This view that was echoed by many of the research participants, especially respect to the initial years of WT's work under Campbell's leadership. highlighted the core ethic of collaboration she experienced as stakeholder working with WT's project team:

The projects felt like they were developed—being developed collaboratively, as opposed to—they were being developed somewhere else and then they were brought to us for commentary, but after they'd been pretty much developed. And that was the kind of consultation we were used to, for instance, with the City [of Toronto].

The generally positive view of WT's work was echoed by most of the research participants I spoke with, as exemplified with this quote from the perspective of the independent urban planner and consultant who was key informant among the participants:

I think it's been one of the real strengths of Waterfront Toronto. I think it's why they've developed credibility, which has enabled them to survive many political administrations, different governments—which, as you know, given that you've got three levels of government which have shifted and changed, in terms of political orientation. But somehow, through all that, they've managed to keep large segments of the public abreast of what they were doing and to really get people to provide significant input. And they've done that consistently and very credibly over quite a long period of time.

WT's approach dovetails with Cromwell's (2008) concern with the key role consultation plays as means of information sharing among participants and sponsors, which dovetails with the importance of social learning highlighted by Collins & Ison (2009).

Resistance to urban redevelopment is common, the Not In My Backyard Yard (NIMBY) phenomena is well known and in real estate development in the communities adjacent the downtown waterfront has been a constant over the past thirty years in Toronto. Given this one citizen-stakeholder noted that: "Waterfront Toronto has been able to develop without a great deal of NIMBYism and 'not-in-my-back-yard-ism', etc., because people have had their say before it gets to the stage of doing anything." It should be noted that in accomplishing this we see evidence of the creation of reciprocal 'shared reality' (Taylor & Kent, 2014) as ground for action. That action being jointly creating informed public support for transformational urban

redevelopment, which, per Syahrir (2021), should be a hallmark of effective waterfront revitalization projects.

Theme 2. Leadership matters: "Without John Campbell"

"... without John Campbell having been at Waterfront Toronto we wouldn't feel the same way about Waterfront Toronto. He set the agenda in a way that obviously the board supported."

As this lead quote makes clear, the founding CEO of WT, John Campbell, set a tone for the organizations work that they would be open to hearing from the public and from key stakeholders, many of whom were interviewed for this paper. Campbell found them readymade. Key stakeholders had long been engaged in community-based work on waterfront related issues and were primed to engage with his new agency from its inception. WT's initial engagement with stakeholders intersected with processes that were already underway: discussions and debates about the West Don Lands and the Port Lands, had been current throughout the latter half of the 1990s. When these became two of WT's key focus areas a 'public' was already established waiting to engage with them. Notwithstanding, Campbell gained a reputation for approachability and openness. As a citizen activist who had close if indirect relationships with WT noted: "Under John Campbell they had a somewhat informal process, it seemed, which really seemed to arise partly out of his own personality. He was a guy who could kind of talk to really almost anybody and elicit their views and take it into account." Individual community members and community-based organizations shared a similar view:

We the York Quay Neighborhood Association had tremendous influence in a way early on when John Campbell was the CEO of Waterfront Toronto; he was absolutely terrific he was our friend really and we could talk to him officially in meetings on the record about details of development along Queens Quay in our area which was a central waterfront also we could talk to him off the record and that was very reassuring because a lot of things going on behind the scenes.

It became clear that key stakeholders expected the organizational culture inculcated by Campbell to continue after his tenure. In the wake his departure it became clear to many that this was not necessarily going to be the case: "The former CEO [John Campbell] left and Will Fleissig, the new CEO, came, there was a dramatic change in Waterfront Toronto's connection with the community." This points to the 'fragility of leadership' in any organization that relies too much on one person to determine its culture and practices.

"During the Will Fleissig regime there was a widespread feeling that people that had previously gone in and talked to Waterfront Toronto on a kind of an ongoing basis were no longer being invited in. There seemed to be a lack of interest. And that was at the time when the Sidewalk Labs."

From praising the openness and collaborative engagement that had been the hallmarks of WT's work stakeholders became "... shocked by this [change] ... because there had been just no communication." "It didn't compute. He just—he did not grasp that what had been happening in the past was that we were collaborating and now we were no longer collaborating." These quotes refer to the period when Fleissig was CEO and he was introducing and shepherding the

Sidewalk Labs proposal. That the first quote came from a stakeholder who opposed the Sidewalk Labs proposal and the second came from one who supported it, demonstrates that WT could be seen, regardless of the merits of initiatives it was developing, to have lost its way. After the Fleissig left, and in the wake of Sidewalk Labs withdrawing its proposal, WT has regained much its esteem for collaborative engagement, though the Covid-19 pandemic saw no in-person public or stakeholder events for over two years. To the present moment WT relies on online consultation to an extent that was unimaginable a few years ago.

Undeniably WT strayed from its consultation ethic and for a time was not seen, even by its most ardent supporters, to work transparently and collaboratively with key stakeholders nor with the public. Public agencies like WT can benefit from strong leadership but they if they are seen to act like private corporations, trust can be lost. It appears this is a lesson that WT has learned but the proof will be as it proceeds with new projects and continues its post-Covid reengagement with stakeholders and the broader public.

Theme 3. Who's In/Not in the room? Stakeholders as Staff vs. "We Tried"

"I also think, you know, from a sort of professional practice point of view, we've set up this system where we have not just public meetings but what we call our stakeholder group meetings And what's great about those is that we almost start to bring in people who represent interests in the community almost—and I think of it as almost quasi-staff."

"But somehow from a consultation perspective it has been a local issue only. I think it should be a local issue because it affects the people who live here but we haven't figured out how to get the rest of the city as interested and engaged even though it's their waterfront too. o that is—so those two things. I think there is the demographics which might or might not have to do with geography because I think even the downtown is pretty diverse—and you're right we've gotten the more homogenous demographic. But we also haven't gotten all the other parts of the city engaged. But we have tried you know. We've tried doing outreach we've tried doing meetings in other areas."

This theme ties together the double-sided reality that WT was exemplary in engaging identified or pre-existing stakeholders with the concern with having accurate representative demographic participation both for its own sake and for the quality of any decisions by WT taken as a result of consultation. As one participant put it: "[H]ow do you privilege certain people to participate in a stakeholder process?" This question is the central hinge of this theme. Key citizen stakeholders who had been seized on waterfront and urban redevelopment issues before WT was created, were happy to suggest who should be in the room:

"we suggested that it made sense to include West Don Lands Committee members because they were organizations. They were accountable back to their community, and

they could bring community issues forward to Waterfront Toronto—that there could be, you know, a two-way communication process that would both benefit the work of developing the precinct plan, and Waterfront Toronto.”

One of the key elements of WT's approach to consultation has been a mix of open public meetings, and selective stakeholder meetings made up of a mix individuals appointed by community interest groups focused on the waterfront or adjacent areas or from neighbourhood organizations located on or near the urban waterfront, such as the Bring Back the Don Task Force, the Corktown Residents and Business Association, the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association, the West Don Lands Committee, and the York Quay Neighbourhood Association. While this approach made eminent sense, as these groups provided well informed people, many of whom had a long history of involvement with waterfront and urban development issues, it left many out. Of course, the public meetings were well advertised and promoted through legacy media, through WT's website and increasingly through its social media channels, questions persist regarding who may be not be reached by these methods.

In my interview with WT senior staff, I raised the issue of 'who's not here': "One person I spoke to said to—he looked me in the eye and he said, 'Too many people who look like us.'" The response I received was appropriately frank: "That's actually very fair. The reason that didn't pop into my head is because we've actually tried to broaden it and we haven't been successful. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't keep trying." He acknowledged that WT has been criticized for both its demographic geographic narrowness. As he said "But somehow, from a consultation perspective, it has been a local issue only." WT did hold meetings and public

engagement activities in parts of the city that were not near its project catchment area. Though it has been acknowledged that these efforts did not lead to consistent participation by a broader and more demographically representative segment of the city's population. A city, it should be noted, that is famous for its diversity. As the other senior WT staff member noted somewhat ruefully:

What disturbed me was when you look at our city parks, they're heavily used by visible minorities. And I think it's because immigrants, coming from those parts of the world, don't have the backyard and the pool in Etobicoke that I had. They live in apartments and are used to smaller spaces and are used to having their functions—family gatherings in public spaces. And so, we should have—it would have been much better if we'd been able to tackle that market and get that input.

Yet when I politely challenged this point, he felt that WT had done enough to publicize its work and its public meetings. He was satisfied that at some point one had to accept that if people did not show up, they were not sufficiently interested. While it is a commonplace that 'democracy is who shows up' it is not necessary to be satisfied with this. I probed further and asked if more money, as in more resources for WT to do the kind of work that could be needed to expand the breadth of participation he replied: "No, I don't think so. I just think you're looking for people to spend their time with you and give you input and if they're not interested in doing that, nothing you can do."

The concern with the demographic gaps in participation was echoed by several participants with a mixture of empathy and regret: "And people who are, you know, struggling with things like recreation or education and they have kids—you know, the waterfront

redevelopment is a bit abstract. It's a bit removed. Is it okay to say: "Well, okay, I have the time to pay attention to it." Others noted the obvious, that they were retired and had time to attend public meetings and devote themselves to the knowledge acquisition that was required to be an informed and active stakeholder.

There were some who challenged the idea of inclusion for the sake of inclusion: "They almost want—there's almost too much consultation." "They include as many as possible and sometimes people who seem sort of irrelevant to the process"

One might draw from these remarks that thoroughgoing outreach and accessibility was surplus to requirements or that having uninformed or uninterested people involved in consultations is waste of time. The latter point, while not particularly felicitous, has the benefit of a narrow honesty. Though it echoes concerns raised by Catt & Murphy (2004) with representation. Certainly, it seems that an assumption of equality of access was ultimately taken for granted, in a way that would not sit well with any aspiration to reach even the outer suburbs of Fraser's (1998) ideal of parity of participation. It certainly can be tiring for long-time participants to sit through rehashes of what for them are established points of agreement, of decisions taken that they had signed off on. However, if what is lost if we do not proactively recruit and make room for new people to join in discussions of major, multiyear city-building efforts? It would not be hard to argue that a commitment to fulsome public engagement is compromised. As one citizen stakeholder observed, tellingly: "There's nothing like having people diverse opinions sitting around the table and looking each other in the eye and saying,

“Okay, I understand what you’re saying and, you know, okay, I’ll change my view ... because now I appreciate what you have to say.”

None of this takes away from the moves WT has made to deeply involve the stakeholders who were part of the process. The fact that some of them came to be seen as ‘staff’ is not an indictment of ‘Stockholm Syndrome’ but arguably a step on Arnstein’s ladder toward full participation, which without valorizing it, is still a persistent call out to all those conducting public engagement.

For those who got to be in the room, through interest, availability and cultural competence, WT staff described a key example of this level what ‘being in the room’ was like:

We have used a special stakeholder group that we’ve created for each competition to actually participate in the whole process. So for the central waterfront design competition for Queen’s Quay, we created a terms of reference or a competition brief, which is basically setting out the assignment or setting out what the competition is and what the designers need to do. So halfway through their competition time, they put their pencils down, they came to Toronto, and they presented their work in progress and they presented it to the stakeholders, and they actually got direct feedback from community members before they finished their design. I’m not aware of anybody having done that in a design competition before. And it had a huge impact on the design stuff. Of course, they were already into their thinking. I don’t think anyone threw their ideas out completely and started over, but it gave them time to actually adjust.

In my role as a fellow civic participant, I was also as all too guilty of being able to choose to participate, was in possession of the social capital, modest but sufficient resources, and all-too-clearly fitting the profile of White, middle-aged, middle class, university educated citizen. I am left with the ethical view that it is not sufficient to say “they’re just not interested,” much as I understand that perspective, it is not a stretch to argue that we need to do better in public engagement, even if the material outcomes—new parks, new affordable housing, new employment, improved public transit—warrant a positive justification and will benefit all. Nor perhaps can we be satisfied with one citizen stakeholder’s lament: “Well, if I had a silver bullet to deal with my concerns about access, I would have offered it. I’ve always found that it troubles me that it’s almost baked into the consultation process that you deal you consult with people who are more privileged than many of their contemporaries.”

Theme 4. Questioning process: “Small Potatoes” – The Limits of Consultation

“Well public consultation is really kind of small potatoes to actually engaging stakeholders and governance. ... I am of the view that public agencies should have substantial engagement of the stakeholders including the community in their governance.”

When we confront the limits of public consultation we come up against differing perspectives on what matters. Are the opportunities for influence and social learning sufficient? Is there a need for something closer to the delegated power or active participation in decision-making and governance? I have reviewed these differing perspectives in the literature review and am persuaded that governance and delegated power are fraught with issues of selection and

accountability. However, these concerns, were echoed in the interviews. "I mean, my view is still fairly negative and despite—despite Waterfront Toronto's apparent openness, apparently trying to get the local wishes—I don't think it's—what they've achieved has been any different from any other consultation, to be honest." A view that suggests that larger economic and political structures impede or pre-empt the validity and effectiveness of the public involvement. Which if one things consultation is equal to deciding, would make sense.

Several research participants pointed to practical differences in resources between agency staff and project proponents and everyday citizens. "So when we say the process is broken, do we mean we didn't get the result we want or do we mean the process is broken? Because those are two separate concepts." And indeed, as that observation has it, these are two distinct concepts. In my years of professional experience, I have heard many a disappointed consultation participant, express the thought that the process was deficient because they did not get the result they wanted. However, in wanting the kind of empowerment that Arnstein (1969) would have argued was necessary to ensure meaningful participation, it is not clear to me that those desiring it are prepared to consider having the kind of accountability and scrutiny that attends to elected representatives, nor that they should have such. As Bobbio (2019) and Webler (1999) noted it is not at all clear that such empowerment is warranted or desirable.

If we say as that we need "structural reform" or that we need to "change the political system" we are heading into territory where there be dragons, and far beyond most public consultation practices. The dragons being the very issues who chooses who decides and to whom do they answer. There were though suggestions that are in keeping with expanding reforming

public consultation practices. Noting that public engagement all too often does not operate on a level playing field, there were suggestions that resources both educational and monetary be allocated to citizens groups to empower them to engage on equal footing with larger public agencies. Connecting back to issues of inclusion but with the focus on what it means to the function and worth of consultation there was a call to consider the process as inclusion: "I'm very much interested in process. So, you know, I'd say the process is the product. So, I would say that the diversity of Toronto needs to be involved in what's happening on the waterfront." That broader inclusion would provide a different or better result, or one more in keeping with a particular ideological agenda, is not an uncommon view but the empirical backing for it is inconclusive.

That participation should involve empowerment and indeed some level of being able to exercise that power, through access to knowledge persists in discussions of consultation. But as Collins & Ison (2009) aptly observed, social learning is itself a form of empowerment. As is being part of the process that identifies and shapes a new shared sense of possibility and action (Taylor and Kent, 2014). Certainly, work needs to be done to provide the ability the information necessary to form technically and theoretically informed questions and thereby influence the direction of research and planning. In WT's case this was largely available only to the long-term, highly involved stakeholders, who while they required and received an adequate level of technical briefing, did not perhaps need empowerment given their status and social capital, is something that begs for more attention and work.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

To conclude this study, I will touch on its strengths and limitations, and note some tentative contributions it is hoped this modest work can offer. As well as suggest steps for further research on 'actually existing' consultation practices: the common ones, not just the more rarefied and occasional moments of deliberative practice (Mao & Adria, 2013), no matter their merit and conceptual richness. Though to begin, I will pay the respect due to WT and its work as well as offering perhaps the most key constructive advice garnered from the research interviews.

Waterfront Toronto's Achievement and its Task Ahead

Acknowledging that perfection is an unattainable ideal in practice, and guidelines striving for it may prove counterproductive, we're left grappling with defining the 'good' or perhaps the 'good enough' in the realm of public consultation. Embracing the messy realities of this domain, one cannot be overly optimistic about the 'good', which is as elusive as 'truth' but one can risk being optimistic about achieving a provisional 'good enough'. As this modest examination has made clear, from the perspective of key informants, Waterfront Toronto has achieved the 'good enough'. A multiyear public engagement effort that has provide the public, at least the public that showed up, and key citizen stakeholders, the opportunity to inform, influence and shape the redevelopment of Toronto's central waterfront. Setting a gold standard in public engagement while implanting collaborative planning processes are achievements worthy of celebration. WT benefited from having a strong and approachable founding CEO who defined their approach but an overreliance on a key leader to maintain robust public engagement can be a weakness.

Moving forward WT has the task of recapturing and continuing all that its initial years of public engagement made it exceptional.

We have seen that a focus on involving already interested and available citizen stakeholders can lead to positive outcomes where community goals, as they define them, are made an integral part of project outcomes. Yet a less than thorough and broad outreach effort can lead all too many outside this conversation. It is arguable WT should make a much greater effort to engage communities beyond its immediate catchment area, to reach out to more marginalized and racialized communities and frankly to find better ways to engage younger audiences. As one citizen stakeholder noted:

As a lawyer, in the legal clinic that we worked in—we had a professional organizer who is used to working with low-income people because our focus was poverty law. And so the techniques she used to partner with organizations, to create environments in which people who normally don't speak up felt comfortable—it's an area of expertise and, you know, commitment and requires resources. So, Waterfront Toronto would have to really think about that.

I would argue that this is a positive challenge to WT to indeed “really think about that” and determine if additional resources can be harnessed to expand the reach of its engagement and expand its discursive terrain. While such an effort may not, despite the hope or conviction of some of those interviewed for this project, lead to substantially different planning decisions it would likely lead to a richer and more representative conversation. One well worth having, if only for its justificative satisfaction, and a goal that would address the weakness identified in

Theme 3: “Who is/is not in the room;” while building on Theme 1: “Setting the Gold Standard” in public consultation. Finally, WT may wish to reflect on the strength and weaknesses of having the organization overly identified with a single leader—Theme 2: With/Without John Campbell—and how its best public engagement practices can be nurtured and extended so they are fully identified as an organizational practice and not dependent on any one staff member.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

As discussed in the introductory sections of this paper, touched on tangentially in the literature review, and detailed more thoroughly in the research design section, this is a qualitative study, and ‘insider’ study, and a critically appreciative one. In some measure the reader is essentially listening in on the frank observations shared among participants: you are in the room, as it were. No claims are made to the forms of validation or generalization that mark quantitative research work (Gergen & Gergen, 2005, Hall, 2013, Seale, 1999). This is a particularly modest piece of work, inspired by the absence of perhaps better, more thoroughgoing work by more qualified academic researchers. Akin to the way in which a focus group can be used to tease out issues that may be explored in quantitative polling research or other methods of extended research, this study can be seen as an invitation to further investigations of public engagement programs, especially ones carried out over an extend period of time by public sector or non-profit agencies or organizations. It is also, rather obviously, offered as an evaluation of WT’s public consultation practice, and is for the moment the only study I am aware of that is solely focused on this topic. I ask the reader to take it for what it is, an opening, a starting point, that sheds light

on some aspects of what successful consultation consists of, as well as pointing to weaknesses that bedevil many consultation exercises.

Practical and Theoretical Contributions

As Rorty (2021) observed tartly: "I recognize, of course, that domination-free communication is only a regulative ideal, never to be attained in practice. But unless a regulative ideal makes a difference to practice, it is not good for much (p. 80)." There may be an abundance of goodwill towards inclusion and accountability, but that such inclusion will achieve better or different ends as if by magic is untested: a hope not falsifiable assertion. Thinking of Rortyan pragmatism and Mouffe's (2014) agonistic framework, I suggest there are feasible ways to improve our consultation practices without resort to magical thinking or petitioning rigid ideological frameworks. A point of departure in studying looking at both common public consultation and more formal deliberative processes is accepting that consensus is never going to be achieved, or if temporarily achieved it may be more mirage than fact. What Mouffe (1996) wrote of pluralist democracy in general is arguable as applicable to consultation practice, we need "... also to make room for the expression of dissent and for conflicting interests and values. And those should not be seen as temporary obstacles on the road to consensus since in their absence democracy would cease to be pluralistic. This is why democratic politics cannot aim towards harmony and reconciliation (p. 17)."

Making room for the critical for the dissenting outlier, as I have attempted to do, in this largely appreciative study, let alone a more traditional evaluative investigation of public engagement seems an essential step, one that avoids imposing an false ideal upon existing

pluralistic discursive practices. Taking a critically pragmatic approach to analyzing public consultation does not preclude an appreciative orientation but it should centre our focus on what is actually happening and whether practice leads to outcomes that meet both a majority of participants needs and desires in manner that is consistent with meeting the demonstrable needs of the broader public. To paraphrase Rorty, if a public consultation practice does not make a difference to social, economic, and environmental practice, then it is not good for much. In investigating public consultation evaluating process is important but outcomes are more important. The predominant view of those interviewed for this study would not have been that WT set the 'gold standard' for consultation if the outcomes of their stakeholder and public engagement had not led to socially positive and tangible outcomes that reflected both participant input and civic needs.

The Limits of Consultation: An invitation to further reconstructive research.

When one thinks beyond WT's case, to the broader terrain of public consultation in general, it is fair to acknowledge that the often-unattained goal of genuine inclusion haunts most formalized public engagement initiatives. Neither the equal participation so eloquently advocated for by Nancy Fraser (1998) nor the ethically untainted public discourse devoid of strategic considerations described by Habermas (1984) as communicative action can be ensured. In fact, an oversimplified interpretation of the Habermasian objective of ideal speech conditions may not be only unnecessary but likely to cloud procedural justice and obscure achievable outcomes. Public consultation focused on "projects" is inherently fraught with strategic considerations and goals. Even if we could convince ourselves that our forms of public engagement on key public

interest matters more closely adhered to such persuasive and admirable ethical standards, it would be unsubstantiated by available evidence and fail to seriously consider the agonistic character of democratic public discourse, as convincingly highlighted by Chantal Mouffe (1996, 2014), or the enduring claims of the democratic state as the ultimate, accountable decision-maker.

In participatory endeavors, evaluating the significance of outcomes versus the process itself or, as one research participant posited, acknowledging that process is the outcome is challenging. Embracing the latter perspective may impose lofty expectations for effecting social change, both broadly and in specific programs, potentially overlooking the pragmatic orientation of evaluating any process by its effect on actual practice, that is on outcomes. As I, along with many of this study's research participants would agree that adequate demographic representation and extensive inclusion are arguably socially desirable. Independent expert advice is also likely crucial. A process that allows, facilitates, and fosters a variety of voices to be heard and acknowledged (the latter being critical) is apt to yield not only political buy-in but also more outcomes that are less open to challenge or reversal, despite the often chaotic and uncertain nature of change processes. But that is not to say that process is outcome.

In my interview with the urban planning consultant, we digressed from the semi-structured questionnaire into broader reflections that are relevant to considerations of public engagement, even if they seem initially tangential. These interrelated remarks of his resonated with salience:

We just can't know everything. And that sense of indeterminacy and a modesty about our own ability to be predictive comes very hard to planners and designers. Planners, especially, are just obsessed with the idea of wanting to nail down as much as they can in advance to avoid mistakes.

He went on to give two examples of what change happens outside of plan or preconception:

One was Corbusier, in response to a village called Pessac, that he designed. I'll tell you what it was, first, and then I'll tell you the other one. So he designed this beautiful white-cube, modernist village in a French rural area. And over time the occupants basically transformed the houses into their local vernacular. And they put on all the touches and the roofs and the dormers and the outside materials. And someone named Phillippe Boudon wrote a famous book about this.

And Corbusier's response was fantastic. He said, "Life is right." I had the same experience with Jane Jacobs. Jane Jacobs, at one point, wrote, based on everything she knew at the time, that lower Manhattan could never become a residential area, because the force of Wall Street and the extent of the economic development was so overpowering as a monopoly use—homogenous use, that it just—it just could never work. And in fact, what happened is the class B and class C office buildings have turned into a thriving residential neighbourhood at the heart of the financial district. And I talked to Jane about that, and she said the same thing. "Life is right."

I have been part of loosely run, even perhaps shoddily run consultations that produced positive results. Conversely, I have been part of elegantly structured, meticulously facilitated and generously inclusive processes that amounted to nothing, that did not make a difference to practice. The former worked because there was in each case sufficient intuitional and community support to make 'something happen'. The latter 'near perfect processes' failed because the normative dreams of the sponsors were disconnected from material resources and political support. Life is right when good outcomes that make a difference in practice happen.

Aiming to improve processes and develop better theories of public engagement are worthwhile endeavors and ought to be encouraged. But we I would say we should not get hung up on whether we can realize the deliberative perfection. What can we do to answer concerns with WT's consultation practice and similar engagement exercises? The issue revolves around three shortcomings: 1) the absence of incentives or regulations to promote representative participation; 2) the lack of more tangible connections to formal democratic systems 3) the poverty of established criteria for evaluating public consultation, as highlighted in the literature review.

The first issue can be addressed, even without a formal change in regulation, by a commitment from agencies such as WT to put its resources where its hopes are. Expand outreach. Develop narratives that connect with broader publics. Publish background and promotional material in multiple languages, though endogenous channels and through community media that publishes in representative languages. Speak truth to power by telling funders, in this case tripartite owner of WT, the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and the

Government of Canada, that broad-based outreach is necessary and urgent. The second point is one best taken up by citizens themselves. Continuing to expand the democratic realm by experimenting with mechanisms that can better connect more informal consultative processes with our legislative ones, that foster inclusion and lessen exclusion and the oppressive effects it can have. Suggesting specific ways this can be achieved is beyond scope of this paper, but it is an area worthy of more research, more thinking, and more activism. As a starting point in thinking about the social benefit of enriching the layers of democratic practice I find this observation by Colin Koopman (2009) instructive and inspiring:

The point should not be to develop a democratic community in which we all feel like neighbors to one another. The point should be to develop a plurality of polities in which we lessen relations of oppression and increase relations of inclusion day by day, whether we be next-door neighbors or distant strangers whose eyes shall never meet. (p. 180).

As for the third point, the lack of consistent evaluation criteria, as discussed in the literature review. I am suggesting a reconstruction of our thinking about what matters. How do we work backwards from outcomes to process? How do we unpack the history of consultation without assuming we already have answers? The many successes and some shortcomings of Waterfront Toronto's consultation programs serve as evidence for why we should consider changing public consultation practices. We are not served by public engagement becoming a tale of privileged groups—predominantly older, white, and male—exerting influence on policy and planning decisions based solely on their own perspectives, no matter how well intended. Nor are we served well by privileging process over outcome or necessarily equating the two.

Taking on a reconstruction of public consultation is a project that is sorely needed. Following Koopman (2009, 2011) a path for such a task might benefit from blending Dewey's sense of reconstruction with Foucault's method of genealogical inquiry. Dewey, in his introduction to the 1948 edition of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, described his method of reconstruction this way: "Reconstruction can be nothing less than the work of developing, of forming, of producing ... the intellectual instrumentalities which will progressively direct inquiry into the deeply and inclusively human—that is to say, moral—facts of the present scene and situation (p. xxvii)." Koopman (2009) reframes reconstruction as a process that "begins with a problematic past situation and fashions transitions to a reconstructed future situation. The dynamic movement from past to future, where it is meliorative, is the heart of reconstruction (p. 188). In developing his sense of "genealogical pragmatism" as an assemblage of Foucauldian problematizing and Deweyian reconstruction, Koopman (2009) suggests a key limitation of inquiry modeled on classical pragmatism: "Dewey's theory of inquiry as he developed it makes it quite difficult to say where problems come from, how they are generated, and what contribution inquiry itself makes to the recognition of a situation as indeterminate and then problematic (p. 190). It is in aid of locating, discovering, and comprehending 'problems' that Koopman (2009) sees the merit in adding the aid of Foucault:

The aim of his genealogies was rather to critically show the way in which certain of our practices, beliefs, and conceptions have become severely problematic sources of tension. To say that our practices are problematic is not to say that they are wrong. It is to

insist that they constitute a fraught field on which we find that we must continue to work (p. 210).

While in the scope of this paper, I cannot provide a comprehensive genealogical critique of public consultation practices, it is in my view a fruitful and necessary goal for further research. Future work should scrutinize the quotidian realities of 'actually existing' consultations, exploring how we arrived at a point where much of the academic literature celebrates outliers and overlooks everyday practice, all through the lens of a reconstructively pragmatic approach.

To return to the core subject of this work, WT's consultation practice. Therefore, even with the high quality of their public engagement work, it remains arguable that WT has more work to do to ensure comprehensive outreach and empower all who desire a voice in shaping their ongoing work. It is reasonable to say that within the scope of their practice to-date and in comparison, to many typical urban planning consultations, WT has, as most of the research participants have noted, done a broadly exemplary job. As they move forward more WT should consider making every effort to pursue all practical means to ensure that the broadest range of stakeholders have been invited, enabled, and encouraged to participate in the remaking of their city's urban waterfront. As a tripartite public agency, it is not unreasonable to hold WT to this goal. For only then can one rest easy with the assertion that those who chose not to get involved, or not to get more involved than they desire to, are just not interested and are therefore, de facto, happy to 'delegate' their right to participate to those who are willing to.

Greater and boarder levels of public buy-in might in their past work have swayed public decision-makers to advance transit planning—the eastern section of the central waterfront still

lacks the higher-order public transit that has been proposed and planned for well over a decade—and remains in planning stages today. Greater engagement might have persuaded City Council to tear down a section of Toronto's downtown expressway, replacing it with more park space, more space for housing etcetera. Or it might have validated the decision that City Council took to rebuild the expressway at great cost. As it is a topic that has returned to civic debate in the present day it remains hotly and divisively debated. As well a more representative inclusion might have rejected the premise of an urbanized central waterfront, as the continuation to Lake Ontario of the central downtown core, perhaps instead a pure park strategy—Chicago-style—might have been insisted upon, regardless of practicality and cost; or indeed a higher value might have put on greater levels (rather than the 25% mandate) of purpose-built affordable housing along the waterfront. More shockingly to the general sentiment of progressive urbanists like me, more representative inclusion in WT's public consultations might have seen support for big box stores—proposed and rejected by planning authorities and active participants—or more nightclubs and entertainment uses.

The salient point is that we do not know for certain. For lack of a more concerted, more robust, and more resourced effort to reach out to publics beyond the already interested, the geographically adjacent, and those readily able to participate in hours of public and stakeholder meetings, read reports, and be conversant in the language of urban planning and its conventions, we are left with only the hope that 'life is right' and we has been done to-date on the waterfront is the best we could do. But settling such questions to the full extent possible may lead to improved civic discourse and to even better outcomes. WT's long-term program, with its

reasonably generous timelines and broad geographic canvas, leaves time to improve its outreach and foster a more inclusive approach to public engagement. Still, what has already been achieved on the Toronto waterfront demonstrates the importance of well-facilitated and ongoing public engagement to inform and help shape major urban redevelopment projects.

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