

Waterfront News

The newsletter of *Changing Urban Waterfronts*, an SSHRC-funded research project hosted at York University
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Welcome to the first edition of Waterfront News, a newsletter about the researchers in Toronto and around the world who are working together to better understand our changing urban waterfronts

Our Project: 'Changing Urban Waterfronts'

In April 2005, we began a three-year research project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We are a multi-disciplinary group of seven faculty members from four universities in North America and Europe. As well, several PhD and Masters students are associated with the project and their research is vital to our work.

Drawing on the ideas of social nature and political ecology, we are studying Toronto's waterfront as an interactive space in which the social and the natural are constantly remaking one another. That is, urban waterfronts are always both social and natural and need to be studied as such.

The overarching question this project seeks to address is: How have various discourses and practices combined to produce and regulate Toronto's waterfront as a socio-economic and ecological place and space? This question is framed temporally through an investigation of a hundred year historical period, and spatially by focusing on the eastern part of Toronto's waterfront, including the Port Lands, the Don River Valley and the Leslie Street Spit.

Quays to the City - AAG 2007

Gene Desfor, Jennefer Laidley, and Tuna Tasan-Kok, a member of the International Network of Urban Waterfront Research, have organized three paper sessions for the 2007 Association of American Geographers meeting being held in San Francisco in April.

Papers in these sessions, called *Quays to the City: Critical Analyses of Urban Waterfront Transformations*, include cases from North America, the Middle East, Europe, and the Caribbean, and topics of study range from governance to heritage, from sustainability to ethnicity, and from sexual politics to nature.



Construction of the Parliament Street Slip, circa. 1926

With the help of two Research Assistants, **Tenley Conway** has completed much of her Lower Don River groundcover mapping and analysis project. Aerial photos and maps from 1814 to the present are almost fully digitized, and a textual analysis of key planning documents is complete. The next phase will relate the mapping analysis to the textual analysis to identify the relationship between groundcover change and planning decisions made during the period.

Gene Desfor is working with MES student and Research Assistant **Lucian Vesalon** on research that investigates the ways industrial nature was constructed and institutionalized in Toronto with the formation of the Toronto Harbour Commissioners and the adoption of its 1912 Waterfront Plan. A paper on this research will be presented at the Association of American Geographers conference being held in April in San Francisco.

Gail Fraser is investigating the population dynamics of waterbird species on the Leslie Street Spit. Three Research Assistants conducted fieldwork this past summer on conflicts between great blue herons and cormorants, as well as on the diets of cormorant chicks. This work may lead to joint publications with researchers from the Canadian Wildlife Service, and will assist Gail in future investigations into the representations of nature and ecology that inform wildlife management decision-making.

The project's advisor on inter/multidisciplinary methodology, **Adrian Ivakhiv**, has been very busy writing six articles for publication, as well as working on a book, tentatively entitled *Ecologies of Identity: Culture, Nature, and Enchantment in Global Spaces*.

On the archival front, **Michael Moir** is currently working with a local environmental planning agency to determine the feasibility of having its large archival collection managed by the York Archives. This collection is a wealth of information that our research

Calling All Waterfront Researchers: The International Network of Urban Waterfront Research Needs You!

In June 2006, a two-day workshop was held in Copenhagen as the first phase in establishing a network of researchers on urban waterfronts. The workshop generated lots of enthusiasm for collaboration, setting out a broad range of research themes and providing an important basis on which to continue waterfront research around the world. A second meeting will be held in April at the Association of American Geographers 2007 annual meeting in San Francisco. For more information, contact Gene Desfor at desfor@yorku.ca.

team - as well as future researchers - will be able to use. Michael also recently led a Don River renaturalization tour organized by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Scott Prudham most recently worked collaboratively with Gene Desfor to investigate the ways in which the idea that nature can be 'improved' upon has been used as both a reason for and justification of particular urban development strategies. Generally, Scott's research lies at the intersection of political economy, environmental politics and environmental change and examines the ways in which biophysical nature is mobilized for the purposes of commodity production. His interest in the Toronto waterfront primarily concerns the ways in which Toronto's ecological setting was understood and represented during the 19th century, and the ways these understandings informed and fueled ambitions for industrial and urban development.

Jennifer Bonnell recently co-led a tour of the waterfront with Gene Desfor for a group of environmental historians and, in association with the Place-Based Computing Initiative at Western University, produced a pilot walking tour for the Don Valley, linking GPS coordinates for sites of interest with archival images and textual content describing these sites and their history. She is beginning her dissertation research in January at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Her dissertation will explore the environmental history of the Don River in Toronto, and the ways different groups of people have responded to and shaped the river over time.

Susannah Bunce has been conducting doctoral dissertation research on the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation's sustainability framework and how sustainability is defined and integrated into the development plans and designs for the West Don Lands and East Bayfront areas. She has also recently published a co-written paper with Deborah Cowen of York University on urban waterfront agendas since 9/11, which looks at the conflicts and

convergences between new port security initiatives and waterfront gentrification processes.

Paul Jackson recently completed his PhD comprehensive exams in Geography at the University of Toronto, exploring such diverse topics as genetics, degeneration, and class formation in the 1800s. He is now working with the Comparative Program on Health and Society, a research institute based at U of T's Munk Centre for International Studies, which supports innovative, interdisciplinary, comparative research on health, broadly defined. He recently presented both his recent work on cholera and his older work on SARS to this group. He also helps organize the Intersections Speaker Series in Geography at U of T and teaches a course at Innis College in Urban Studies - but he can't wait to get back to doing his own work.

In addition to her role as Project Manager for CUW, **Jennefer Laidley** has recently collaborated with FES faculty member, Ute Lehrer, on a paper that situates Toronto's current waterfront development project within a morphological and ideological paradigm that they call 'the new megaproject'. She contributed a paper to the special issue of *Cities* being co-edited by Susannah and Gene, and spoke recently to Journalism students at Concordia University about the impact of spectacular sporting events on urban development, with particular reference to Toronto's 2006 waterfront-related Games bid.

*** Special Issue of *Cities* ***

Gene Desfor and Susannah Bunce have co-edited a special issue of the journal *Cities: The International Journal of Urban Policy and Planning*. The theme of the special issue is 'political ecologies of waterfront transformations' and indications are that the issue will be available by mid-2007. See future issues of *Waterfront News* for more information.