

Mixed-use retail and urban change: insights from the transformation of Toronto's Waterfront

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Toronto is Canada's largest urban market. Located on the shoreline of Lake Ontario, the city has an extensive waterfront that has transformed from industrial to mixed-use over recent decades. Beyond converting the Toronto skyline, the redevelopment of Toronto's Waterfront has resulted in a marked increase in employment and residential population. Various forms and functions of retail and service activities are integrated within many of the redevelopment projects. This paper provides case-study based insights into recently completed, under-construction and planned development projects in the Toronto Waterfront area. The rapid transformation of Toronto's Waterfront raises many questions about integrating retail within mixed-use developments. From a market perspective, questions primarily relate to ensuring that retail meets the needs of the various consumer groups that form the marketplace, along with structural questions related to the future needs for physical retail space. At a societal level, and given the significance of the Waterfront in defining the vista of the city, there are many questions about inclusivity, equity and the public realm and how the Waterfront more broadly serves the city and its citizens. The paper highlights the critical role of an applied geographic lens in triangulating multiple perspectives on urban change and commercial activity.

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