

THE PUBLIC METROPOLIS

THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF URBAN
EXPANSION IN THE TORONTO REGION

1924-2003

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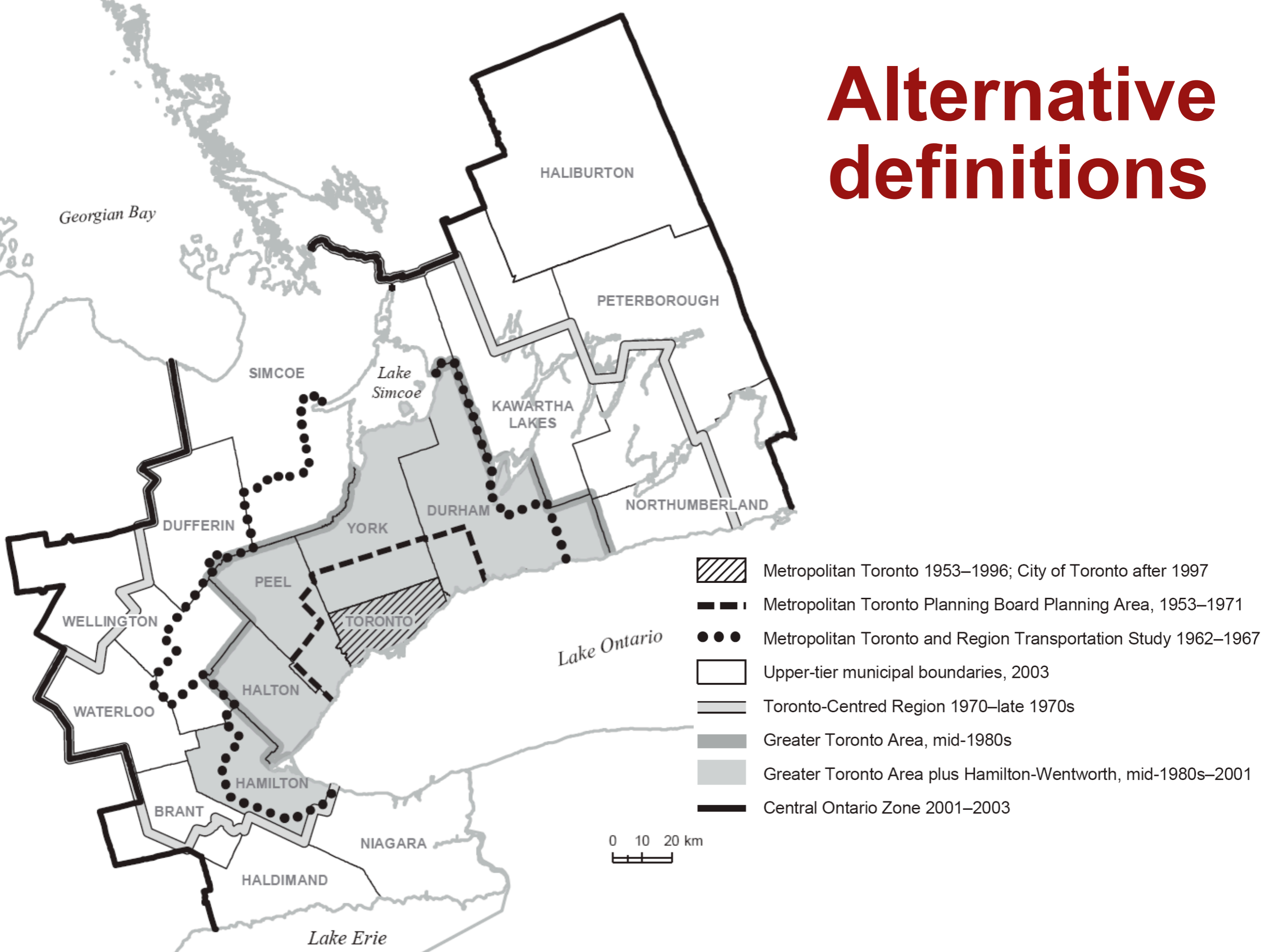
What is a city region?

At least one large city

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**Surrounding cities, towns,
rural areas, open space**

Alternative definitions



Regional Governance:

**several levels and units of governance
make decisions that affect the city region**

Decisions are often made with little or no regional awareness and without regional intent

Regional Government:

a politically-constituted body with legal authority to make and implement policies for a city region

Policies considered

- Policies to provide basic infrastructure (e.g. transportation)
- Policies to control or manage spatial organization and/or outward expansion (e.g. regional and local planning)
- Policies that affect the ability of less affluent residents to participate in economic and community life (e.g. social services, immigration policy)

The situation in 1971:

Cleveland and other U.S. cities

- Inner city commercial areas not rebuilt after rioting in 1966
- Population declining
- City tax base declining
- Blighted inner city neighbourhoods
- Growing city-suburban income gap
- Large disparities in the quality of local services (particularly education)

The situation in 1971:

Toronto

- Downtown building boom
- Organized opposition to high rise, high density development in urban core
- gentrification of inner city neighbourhoods (middle class moving in, not out)
- city population stable (and would increase)
- vibrant downtown shopping and entertainment core
- core city had strong tax base; well-funded schools

Research Question #1

**Why is Toronto different from
Cleveland and other U.S. cities?**

Important developments in Toronto Region governance, 1969–1974

The Ontario government:

- surrounds Metropolitan Toronto with five regional governments (York, 1969; Durham, Halton, and Peel, 1974)
- adopts a land use strategy for the Toronto-Centred Region (1971)
- appoints a Royal Commission to review Metropolitan Toronto government (1974)

Research Question #2

To what extent can differences between Toronto and U.S. cities be attributed to actions of the Ontario government?

Evolution of regional governance

- Make the city larger (annexation, amalgamation, consolidation)
- Metropolitan or regional federation
- Special purpose authorities
- Reliance on the private sector (or public-private partnerships)
- Direct action by a central government
- Inter-local cooperation (Council of Governments)
- Intergovernmental and government-community consultation (regional councils)

Canadian-U.S. differences

- Ontario government had remained fully in charge of municipal institutions
- Federal government had never been an important presence in Toronto region governance
- Racial issues prominent in U.S. urban policy-making at all levels of government

Research Question #3

To what extent can differences between Toronto and U.S. cities be attributed to actions of the Ontario government *and its interactions with other levels of government?*

Rationale for regional government

In general, to reduce political fragmentation

Political fragmentation has increased, despite municipal consolidations

| City Region as defined in (year) | # municipal gov'ts |
|---|--------------------|
| Metropolitan Toronto (1953) | 13 |
| Metropolitan Toronto (1953) | 7 |
| Greater Toronto Area: Metro Toronto, Durham, York, Peel, and Halton (1974) | 36 |
| Greater Toronto Services Board: GTA + Hamilton (1998–2001) | 31 |
| Central Ontario Zone (2001) | 115 |
| Greater Golden Horseshoe (2004) | 110 |

Rationales for regional government

- Provide infrastructure to support economic growth
- Keep public service costs as low as possible
- Control or manage growth and or outward expansion
- Distribute the costs and benefits of city-region growth or decline more equitably among municipalities
- Give a city-region's residents and or local governments a strong and united voice in regional policy making

Incompatibilities and inconsistencies

Working through these = “The political dynamics of urban expansion”

- Supporting growth vs. managing growth vs. stopping growth
- Financing infrastructure vs. financing social services vs. keeping taxes low
- Equity vs. efficiency (or controlling government costs)
- Achieving equity vs. responding to greatest need vs. responding to loudest demands
- Achieving a unified regional voice vs. preserving local autonomy

Five periods of Toronto Region governance

- 1924-1966** Debating and creating metropolitan institutions
- 1966-1975** Three-tier regional governance under provincial stewardship
- 1975-1985** Provincial retrenchment and local inaction
- 1985-1995** Regionalism revisited
- 1995-2003** Charting a new course for regional governance

Findings

Objective #1

To provide new infrastructure

- This (especially transportation congestion) was the most common catalyst for regional initiatives
- Metropolitan Toronto most successful at achieving this objective
- Other arrangements worked as long as they had authority and necessary funds
- ***Least effective approach:*** reliance on inter-local co-operation or intergovernmental consultation

Objective #2

To control service costs

- If new or more services are provided, costs do go up (is this a waste of money, or an investment in a stronger region?)
- Not spending on regional services is one way that governments try to keep their costs down
- Beginning in the 1970s, controlling government costs took priority over all regional objectives
- Beginning in the 1970s, spending on regional services lost out to spending on health care and education

Objective #3

To manage or contain growth

Frequently conflicts with a) economic goals, b) provincial financial interests, and c) municipal government priorities, with the result that regional planning often loses out → increasing “sprawl” and automobile dependency

But there have been some achievements:

- a good regional park system
- a strong downtown core and viable inner city neighbourhoods

The downside: the decentralization of poverty

Objective #4

To reduce inter-municipal disparities

- Was an important objective of earlier changes to the region's system of government (Metropolitan Toronto; regional municipalities)
- Importance attached to it has declined as the region has expanded
- This objective commands little political support. Some recent examples:
 - Reactions to Metropolitan Toronto's amalgamation
 - Reactions to the provincial governments takeover of education
 - Opposition to GTA-wide cost-sharing

Objective #5

To give the region a unified political voice

This objective has become increasingly difficult to achieve because

- **Municipal governments have very different aspirations**
 - Lack of agreement about fundamental issues, for example
 - Roads vs. transit
 - Regional transit vs. local control
 - Regional cost-sharing
 - Distribution of “affordable” housing
 - Matter most likely to produce agreements:
 - Preservation of open space (as long as municipalities don’t have to pay)
- **Municipal officials don’t want it (jobs are at stake)**
- **Provincial government doesn’t want it**

Conclusion

The government of Ontario has always been, and will continue to be, the government that makes the policies that determine the character of the Toronto Region.