

Candidate Number: TBBX5

The Toronto Zombie Walk: A Form of Unconventional Creativity in the City

“Zombie Walks,” a recent cultural phenomenon, have grown in popularity over the past few years, primarily in North America. The first official “zombie walk” was held in October 2003, in Toronto (Meehan, 2010), and has since become an annual event with the city’s 2010 walk reaching almost 6,000 participants (Toronto Zombie Walk). The Toronto Zombie Walk consists of participants dressed up and acting like zombies making their way around the city. It began as and is often still considered an underground activity, promoted mainly through word of mouth and online message boards.

Zombie Walks are a form of creative practice – individuals create their own ‘zombie’ characters (see below) and put on a performance. These zombies interact with public space in the city in creative and unexpected ways that counter conventional understandings of creativity in the city.



Zombie smurfs. Flickr: Susheela Willis.



Zombie bride and groom. Flickr: nechaipphoto.com.

The zombie walk is a not-for-profit activity. But according to Florida (2003) and Landry (2000), creativity is meant to boost a city's economy. The creative city by Florida's and Landry's conception, tends to 'promote only those cultural activities whose products are easily commodifiable... preclude[ing] the consideration of "alternative creativities" whose cultural products are not so easily commodifiable' (Edensor et al., 2009, 4). Zombie walks, a fun, playful, and at times unsettling, 'alternative creativity,' may be shown to result in non-economic products such as civic identity, unity, a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, community cohesion and sociality (Edensor et al., 2009, 11).

Furthermore, the zombie walk is not organized by, associated with or used by the City government for self-promotion or marketing purposes. Florida, Landry and others are seen as contributors to a 'burgeoning business of manualizing local creativity strategies' (Peck, 2005, 766). Landry (2000) presents the creative city like a toolkit for policy makers. The zombie walk, initiated by citizens and separate from government, counters the notion that the creative city results from policy-makers implementing the steps from a toolkit.



Children as zombies. Flickr: nechaipphoto.com

Finally, the purpose of the zombie walk is not to attract a 'creative class', nor are the participants necessarily part of the 'creative class.' According to Florida, creativity in the city is meant to attract a 'creative class' through means of cultural and artistic areas, industries and events (Florida, 2003). The 'Floridian' notion of *the* creative class suggests that other classes are not creative (Edensor et al., 2009, 6; Florida, 2003). The beauty of the zombie walk is that it brings people together in the city from different backgrounds and ages – children who creatively engage in the walk would certainly not qualify as

part of Florida's creative class.

The zombie walk prompts the realization that some forms of creativity simply cannot be instigated, formed or harnessed through policy. The zombie walk appears more authentic than other parades or events in the city due to its lack of public advertising or City involvement. There is no clearing of streets or police detail, so that the walk looks like an actual impromptu zombie outbreak, reinforcing the allure of the event. The involvement of a government body – through policy or implementation – could potentially destroy the authenticity of the event.



Flickr: Smitten Kitten / Amy

As Malanga points out, Florida ‘doesn’t seem to recognize that the cultural attributes of cities he most admires are not a product of government planning but have been a spontaneous development’ (2004, 45). The future of the Toronto Zombie Walk may depend on the way the City addresses it in the coming years, as it grows even bigger. There is a risk that formal policy may do more harm than good.

References:

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