An aerial photograph of Toronto, Canada, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The city extends to the waterfront, where the water is visible. The image is slightly dark and has a vintage feel.

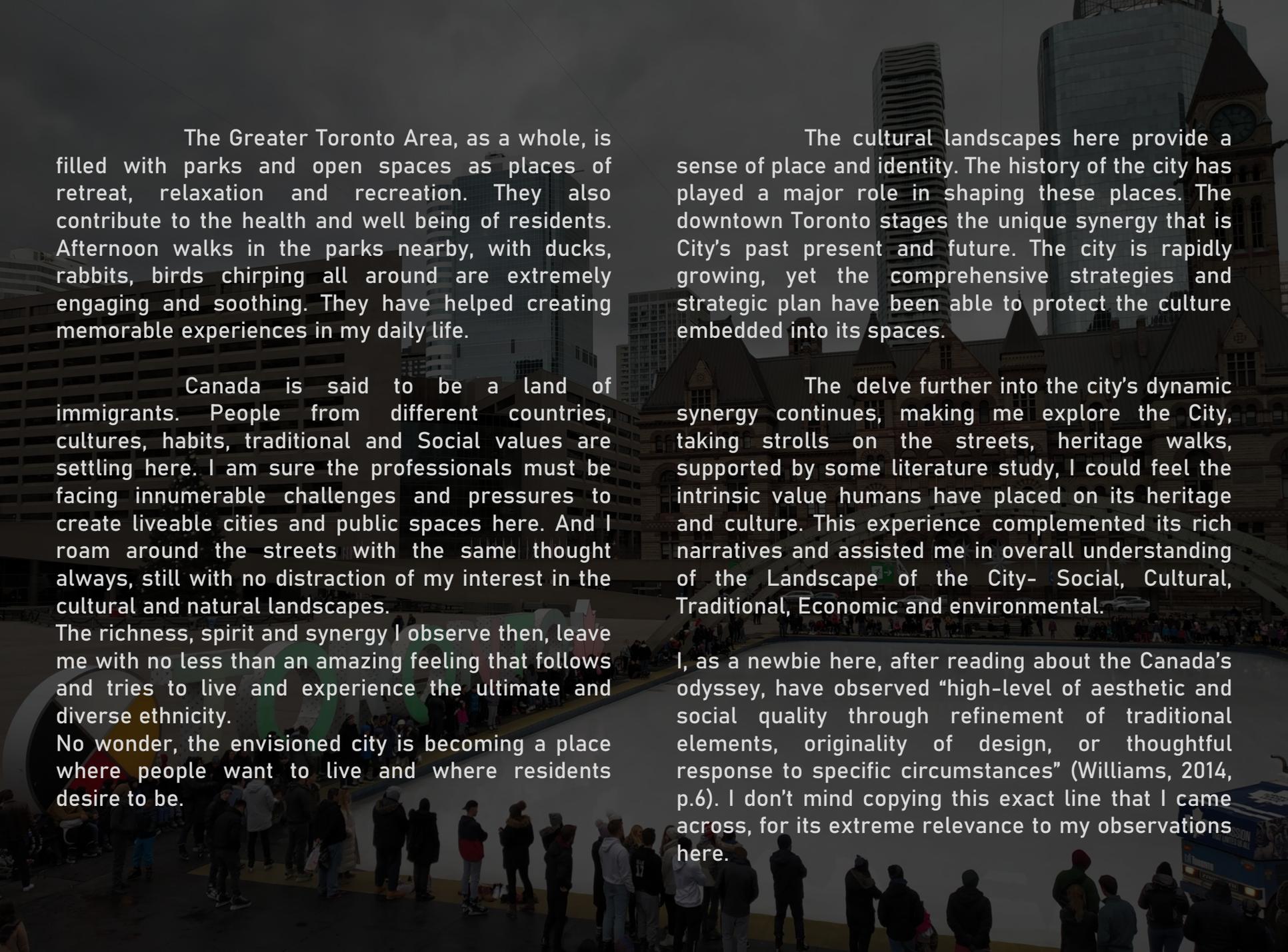
One of the first things I had read about Toronto before landing here was- “Toronto is the most ethnically diverse city on the planet”, which I find is true and justifies official Slogan of Toronto being: Diversity our strength. I was in awe of the inherently rich, aesthetically beautiful and unique public spaces in the city, and wondered how the professionals managed to create synergistically a truly livable city. It is difficult to not fall for and appreciate the most famous, impressive and heavily designed spaces. Although, the historic, vernacular, ethnographic and mildly designed spaces have their own importance and beauty.

The Greater Toronto area (GTA), the most populous Metropolitan Area in Canada, consists of Central City of Toronto, along with 25 surrounding suburbs distributed among four regional municipalities: Durham, Halton, Peel and York. The GTA anchors a much larger urban agglomeration known as the Golden Horseshoe, which has got its name for its shape that wraps around the western end of Lake Ontario, one of the 5 great lakes of America. However, the waterfront was occupied for more than a century by impassable port facilities, railways, and industry.

The beauty of the natural landscape lining the water’s edge was difficult to be left unobserved. Thus, Toronto Waterfront Revitalization project was taken up, which proves to be a perfect example of the steps being taken to reconcile urban citizens with the city through the creation of public spaces.

The Toronto Waterfront is said to be one of the most extensive urban rebuilding projects in the North American history. Humber, Don and Rouge Rivers meandering through Toronto’s landscape, and flowing into Lake Ontario, together, create Toronto’s intricate ravine system and foster a unique relationship between natural and urbanized environments. The Greenbelts observed in the city, along with the watersheds seem to have an influence, not only on Toronto but the entire Greater Golden Horseshoe. These landscapes are environmentally sensitive geographical landforms that function to contain urban sprawl, as well as to protect and restore the region’s natural resources.

The landscapes here never fail to charm me, it always has something new to offer. The landscapes seem to shape the lives of people here. They have been consciously planned, either by professionals, or by the traditional of particular communities. In doing so, the City gained publicly accessible, natural green buffers that weave through Toronto’s urban fabric.



The Greater Toronto Area, as a whole, is filled with parks and open spaces as places of retreat, relaxation and recreation. They also contribute to the health and well being of residents. Afternoon walks in the parks nearby, with ducks, rabbits, birds chirping all around are extremely engaging and soothing. They have helped creating memorable experiences in my daily life.

Canada is said to be a land of immigrants. People from different countries, cultures, habits, traditional and Social values are settling here. I am sure the professionals must be facing innumerable challenges and pressures to create liveable cities and public spaces here. And I roam around the streets with the same thought always, still with no distraction of my interest in the cultural and natural landscapes.

The richness, spirit and synergy I observe then, leave me with no less than an amazing feeling that follows and tries to live and experience the ultimate and diverse ethnicity.

No wonder, the envisioned city is becoming a place where people want to live and where residents desire to be.

The cultural landscapes here provide a sense of place and identity. The history of the city has played a major role in shaping these places. The downtown Toronto stages the unique synergy that is City's past present and future. The city is rapidly growing, yet the comprehensive strategies and strategic plan have been able to protect the culture embedded into its spaces.

The delve further into the city's dynamic synergy continues, making me explore the City, taking strolls on the streets, heritage walks, supported by some literature study, I could feel the intrinsic value humans have placed on its heritage and culture. This experience complemented its rich narratives and assisted me in overall understanding of the Landscape of the City- Social, Cultural, Traditional, Economic and environmental.

I, as a newbie here, after reading about the Canada's odyssey, have observed "high-level of aesthetic and social quality through refinement of traditional elements, originality of design, or thoughtful response to specific circumstances" (Williams, 2014, p.6). I don't mind copying this exact line that I came across, for its extreme relevance to my observations here.

Toronto's concrete architecture represents an exciting era of ambition, cultural investment, city building, and design innovation. The Modernist movement produced structures and landscapes that shared the monumentality of classical architecture and established a modern urban language in the City of Toronto that sought a purity of form in pursuit of a common purpose.

The Cityscape recognizes values and relationship between these structures and surrounding landscapes. Perhaps, this modernist Legacy is a symbolism in an era of progressive politics and social change. The steel and glass minimalist influence of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, consistently a statement of modern elegance and simplicity, is juxtaposed by Le Corbusier's sculptural medium-concrete. Although the influence of steel and glass is undeniable, the impact of concrete during this era is overwhelming.

There is a variety of styles and materials that dictate Toronto's urban and suburban landscapes, and a better "appreciation of our architectural past gives us greater continuity with the intent, knowledge and ambition of previous generations and a stronger sense of our direction as the City continues to grow" (Stewart, 2007,p.12).

Many of Toronto's historic and ethnic neighbourhoods are immediately identifiable by their street and road signage styles as commuters pass through on their streetcar, bus or car. The City of Toronto has been creative in the way it facilitates commuter wayfinding on city streets.

During the 1970's the City erected signs in several ethnic neighborhoods which give both English and the local groups' language for the street designation this further enhancing the commuters sense of place (Barc, 2011). And in 2012 the City of Toronto had adopted a City wide wayfinding strategy, which includes neighbourhood and district information (City of Toronto, 2012, City of Toronto, 2013). These wayfinding signs communicate valuable information regarding significant historical and cultural places in the neighborhood while also having short historical blurbs on the area and projected walking times on all signs.

These components provide Toronto with a unique position on the world stage that separates it from "the curse of modern day uniformity" (Fulford, 1995, p.14). Whether by accident or on purpose, Toronto has evolved through the fusion of nature, human intervention and socio-political values.

- Devaki