The Truth and Bias of The City of Toronto's Acclaimed Art Hotspots in 2022*

An exploration and criticism of The City of Toronto's acclaimed popular art spots

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Abstract

In this paper, I will discuss the 2022 cultural hotspots of artwork in Toronto within the 5 boroughs; Scarborough, York, East York, North York, and Etobicoke. I examine the influences of these art hotspots around Toronto, and more specifically, examine public and private funding, and bias within the municipal government. Although there are 187 artistic points of interest around the city, lack of transparency of data collection methods and failure to include popular art communities proves this is not accurate information about Toronto hotspots. This data set was collected from Open Data Toronto, an open source site from the City of Toronto, and updated as of January 2022.

1. Introduction

Toronto is a city which is well known for its variety of events, locations, and cultural hotspots. While there are many different forms of activities to attend to in Toronto, a core region of interest is the city's dynamic arts and entertainment scene, whose galleries and exhibits make up 70 percent Canadian artists (Lee et al., n.d.). Although the art scene has historically skyrocketed in the city, there are regions of Toronto which lack creative surplus. Area's become very popular because of their local traffic wave, and how many people they bring in. However, influences such as funding, may indicate whether or not an area has the facilities to be titled a point of interest. Art exhibitions with higher points of interests, declared as cultural hotspots, may not receive the credit they deserve due to other influences. Bias from the City of Toronto towards specific artists, government grants, and personal inclination are important aspects regarding nominated hotspots.

In this paper we analyze the potential state of bias towards specific art zones and works around Toronto. Differentiation in public attendance greatly contributes towards the success of a hotspot. The accuracy of this data from Open Data Toronto (Gelfand 2020) may be raised in concern, especially in regards to how the information has been gathered. Questions arise, such as: How do they decide which hot spots to include? Is there further communication or additional funding which contributes to the dictating of hotspots? In light of this, I further research the background behind municipal funding, and the correlation between boroughs with large art counts in the data set and the funding they receive. In addition, an analysis of popular art pieces in 2021 that gained a lot of traction, but were not included in the data set, will be debated.

Alongside the concern of bias, which is representative through repeated artists included in the data, I consider the art works which are not reported to the City of Toronto. There is a lack of contribution from an extremely important borough; the Toronto Centre, or "Old Toronto." Raging hotspots are in major demand within the main city area, maxing at a population in 2016 at 797, 642 ("Wikipedia" 2022). This is the 6th borough of the city which is not included in the data set, nor does it contribute to the art, culture, or point of interest count by population ratio. This paper was written and constructed on `RCloud`, using `RStudio` (R Core Team 2020). Packages which help develop the data include `opendatatoronto` (Gelfand 2020), which allowed me to

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/princesspeach539/Art-Hotspots-Toronto-2022.git

extract the information required, as well as `tidyverse` (Wickham et al. 2019), and `dplyr` (Wickham et al. 2021).

2. Data

2.1 Source

The City of Toronto Cultural Hotspots - Points of Interest was collectively published on the Open Data Toronto Portal by the department of Economic Development & Culture. This department is led by acting manager Cheryl Blackman and, under the arts sector, Julie Frost (Gelfand 2020). Its content of hotspots include: public art, murals, restaurants, architecture, and green spaces. I am specifically focusing on the art hotspots in the city. The boroughs of data included are Scarborough, North York, East York/East End, Etobicoke, and York (Gelfand 2020). The data was refreshed and updated as of January 1st, 2022. Data is analyzed by tracking the boroughs of Toronto which create the largest public interest and intrigue.
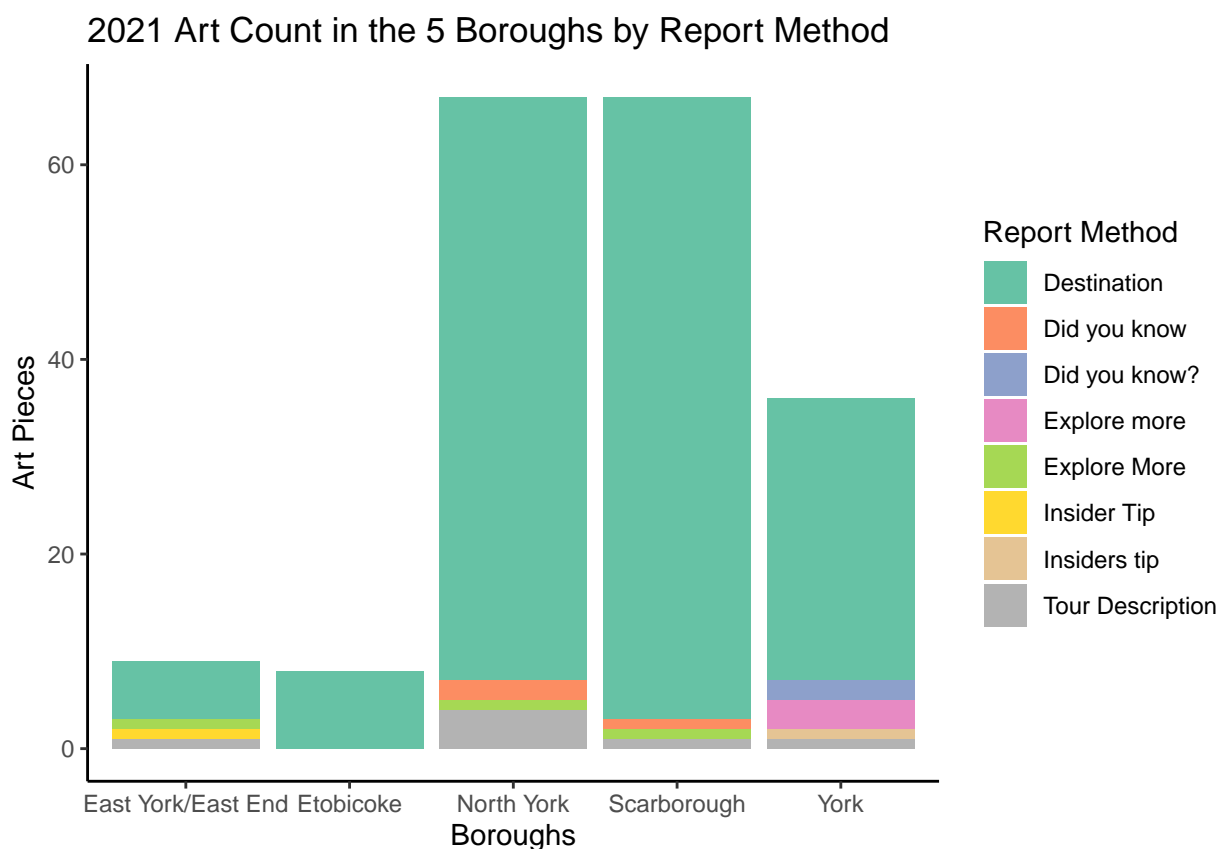
2.2 Methodology and Approach

Figure 1: 2021 Art Count By Borough

The Toronto city is full of artistic and cultural sectors. Its large population of 6.8 million ("Toronto Population," n.d.) offers a wide variety of activities and interests that could potentially be categorized in the data. More specifically, across the 6 boroughs, art hotspots are constantly changing depending on attendance, funding, and upkeep. I began my research and analytic process by cleaning the raw data of points of interests around Toronto. My goal was to uncover the count of art pieces in Toronto in accordance with their borough. I simulated the raw data using `simulated_data` and broke down the 5 boroughs of Toronto. By cleaning the data with `clean_data`, a function from `janitor` (Firke 2021), I was able to `select()` the headers (Wickham et al. 2021) and `filter()` the art hotspots (Wickham et al. 2021), required for my first analysis. There are

187 art pieces contributing to the hotspot and points of interest data collection. I used `ggplot2` (Wickham 2016) to create a graph of the art count in ratio to the included 5 boroughs of Toronto (`Figure 1`). Marked by colour is the `report method`, which demonstrates how the hotspots were reported according to website and data entry intake. Why is there such a large difference in art count?

The City of Toronto deciphered hotspots - points of interest based on data that was reported directly to them. We can see that the highest art counts are North York and Scarborough, which are discussed in `section 2.4`. North York and Scarborough did not receive the most city mandated funding - Etobicoke did, who remains with the city's lowest hotspot art count. Data Entry Method demonstrates that the discovery of hotspots was most often found through the art destination themselves, which is extremely embedded in bias. If an art hotspot - point of interest claimed its title by the department of Economic Development & Culture, this is then not an accurate statistic, but perhaps a claim of opinion and preference. The art pieces included in the database may have association with the City of Toronto or obtain a former relationship in order to gain status. This includes the `Toronto Public Library` and `City of Toronto Archives` (Gelfand 2020). Art that receives a high amount of public intrigue may not be reported to the City of Toronto, demonstrating the lack of authenticity which is highly likely applicable to hotspot identification.

2.3 Frame and Sample

As mentioned in `section 2.2`, data was collected by online entry and direct destination consultation. The art pieces selected per hotspot are not further discussed in the Open Data Toronto data set. In order to figure out if location bias contributed to hotspot selection, I implemented further research into the arts and culture funding each borough receives. The City of Toronto non-profit art committee's work under the same collective branch. Each year, a designated amount of money is allotted to each of the arts councils. They function within a series of 6 municipal branches (Toronto 2022):

- Arts Etobicoke
- Lakeshore Arts
- Scarborough Arts
- UrbanArts Community Arts
- East End Arts
- North York Arts

As of 2021, the borough with the highest funding was Etobicoke, under their non-profit Arts Etobicoke, which received $407, 936 in 2021 from the city (Toronto 2022). They are marked as the area with the least art hot spots in Toronto from all 5 boroughs included in the data set. This high amount of funding must have been used somewhere, if not towards public uses of artwork. According to their 2021 impact report, Etobicoke Arts completed and published over a dozen art projects, including 57 commissioned art pieces and 64 public visual works ("Arts Etobicoke," n.d.). One large project includes The North Etobicoke Mural Project which was conducted over the span of a year, and included over 40 female and non-binary artists, with aid from StreetARToronto and Dulux paint ("Cultural Hotspot" 2022). This project ranged over 570 feet of public murals across Etobicoke (Shephard 2021) and obtained news traction from major city channels, such as CTV News, CBC, and CP24. However, this mural project is not included in the Toronto Hotspots - Points of Interest data set.

In order to depict which art pieces were openly provided directly from the City of Toronto, meaning the credit of the publication, I created a table using knitr (Xie 2021). From the data set, I selected: borough, interest, publisher, and piece title. I then filtered according to interest, which is the artwork, and the publisher, City of Toronto. According to the data (`Table 1`), there is only one piece published openly from the City of Toronto. This is in the York borough, titled "Outside the Box" (Gelfand 2020). Outside the Box did not gain nearly as much attention as the North Etobicoke Mural Project did. The public funding towards non-profit institutions does not add up with the art hotspot count of the data.

Table 1: Hotspot Art Funded by the City of Toronto

Borough	Interest	Publisher	Piece Title
York	Art	City of Toronto	Outside the Box

2.4 Strenths and Weaknesses

Art exhibitions displayed effectively demonstrate hotspots in the 5 boroughs of Toronto, which includes Scarborough, York, Etobicoke, East York, and North York. However, one very important borough is missing, the Toronto Center. This area is home to many iconic art centers, including the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum, both which hold historic and iconic pieces. BlogTO, a major and popular website in Toronto, often creates blogs about the hottest art spots in the city. An Immerisve Frida Kahlo exhibit was due to take place in the upcoming months of 2022 (Payot 2021), following the major popularity of the Immersive Van Gogh Exhibition from 2021. The immersive exhibits take place in the Downtown Center and have become one of Toronto's most popular interests over the past year. Since it is an extremely popular hotspot, the lack of its presense in the Toronto Hotspot - Point of Interest data is quite suspicious. This proves that the selection process is not based on popularity or public opinion.

The inclusion of titles, location, and publisher in the data set offers a lot of insight to how the art pieces are categorized and cycled. There is also a detailed section that describes what each media looks like under the raw_art_data called ImageAltText (Gelfand 2020), which can be beneficial for visualization. However, there is a very broad consideration of what is considered "art." With little to no specifications, the City of Toronto Open Data leaves open a large window in regards to media type. Toronto is known to obtain a myriad of paintings, murals, graphic art, sculptures, video, photograph, and much more. A count of only 187 is very minimal to consider all kinds of popular hotspot art interests across Toronto boroughs. Additionally, there is no estimation of visitor count or information specifying what is considered to be a "Point of Interest." A more thorough explanation of tourist count would make the data set much more credible.

3. Discussion

Although the City of Toronto only publicly published one art piece that gained hotspot clarification, there is still a question about private funding, an extremely important consideration. There is potential bias towards the City of Toronto, in which specific publishers or image credits may have paid or been promoted to include themselves on the Hotspot - Point of Interest data set. There are a few names which frequently show under the art sector, including Ann Brokelman, who appeared 6 times under the art hotspots of the data set (Gelfand 2020). By constructing another graph using ggplot2 (Wickham 2016), I was able to create a proper count of art pieces conducted and produced by Brokelman in three boroughs; Scarborough, York, and East York (`Figure 2`). Brokelman is proclaimed to obtain 17 art hotspots in Toronto, which is the highest from any art contributor in the data set (Gelfand 2020). According to latest works, Brokelman is a photographer who has worked for the City of Toronto on many projects, including an upcoming assignment on street murals and public art in the city this winter (Toronto 2022). It is therefore assumed that the City of Toronto is biased to choose artists they have formerly employed. This is a very unfair approach, as hotspot artists are picked based on connections, rather than the contributors who deserve it most.

4. Conclusion

Although this data set provides some insight into popular art hotspots around specific boroughs, it is not an accurate demonstration of the entirety of the City of Toronto. There is a great amount of bias towards the selection process of art hotspots around the city, as exhibited towards pieces that are missing in the database, but are included on popular Toronto sites (Payot 2021). However, very less known artists such as Ann Brokelman, who has a very minuscule social media presence, obtains over 17 hotspot pieces. Additionally, the City of Toronto and Department of Economic Development & Culture are not very transparent about
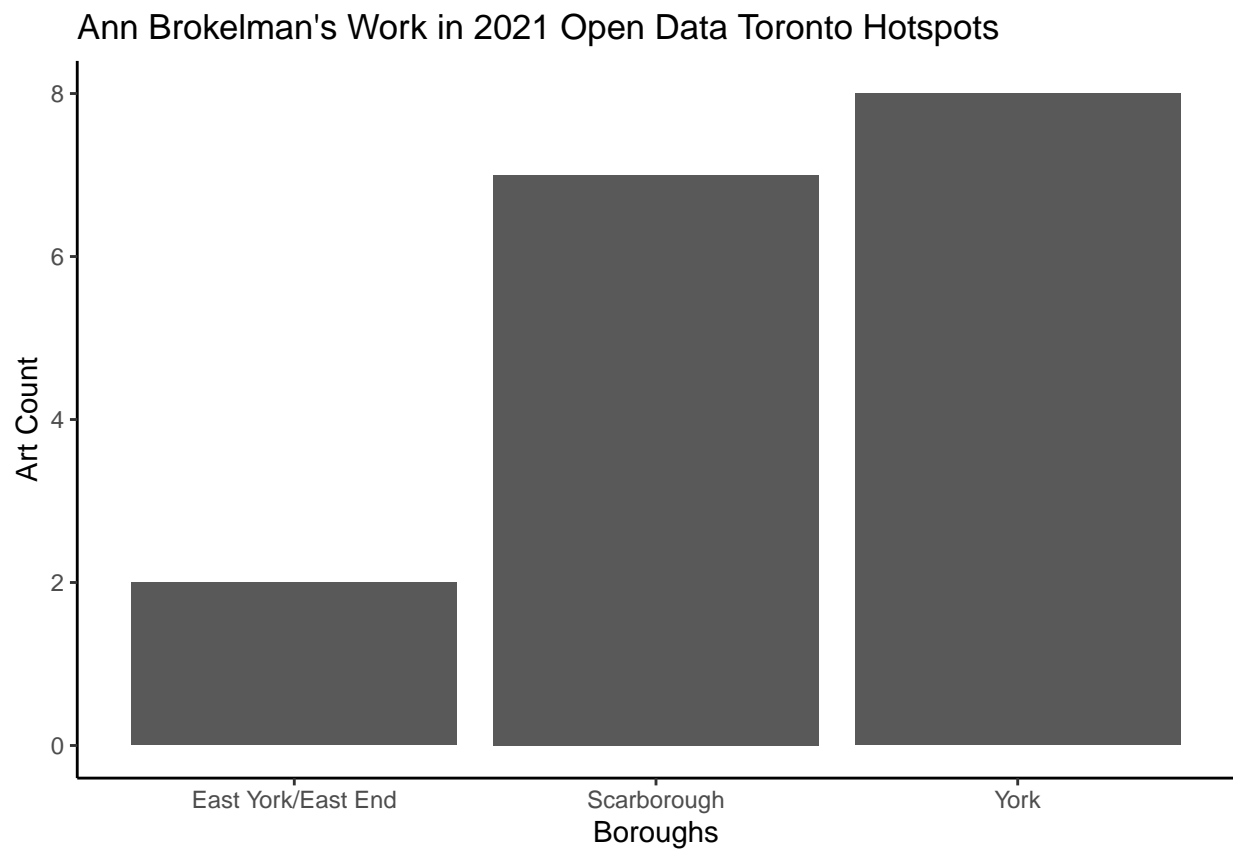
Figure 2: Ann Brokelman's Work in 2022

data collection, other than the fact they receive data by destination and direct website applications (Gelfand 2020). The selection process of art hotspots around the boroughs of Toronto must be stronger and more thorough in order to provide an accurate representation of points of interest. Information regarding the visitor/tourist count of the hotspot would make the data set much more credible. The boroughs with the highest art counts had the smallest amount of municipal funding (Toronto 2022), demonstrating the lack of association between popular up-and-coming artists from Toronto, and pieces that are titled "hotspots." This further solidifies the City of Toronto's absense of accuracy, and unfair distribution of government funding. Lastly, the 6th and important borough, the "Toronto Centre," is not included in the data set. This borough obtains the largest art community in the city, thus, must be a part of the hotspot analysis. Therefore, this data set does not accurately demonstrate the 2022 art "Hotspots" or "Points of Interest" of Toronto.

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