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The LSE Cities Programme

The Cities Programme at the London School of Economics is an innovative centre for graduate education and research on urban issues. The Programme focuses on the relation between the social and physical organisation of cities and urban spaces. We understand design as a process of research and practice that shapes urban environments, responds to urban problems, and integrates social and material forms in the city. We take a multi-disciplinary approach to these issues, drawing on expertise and insights from the social sciences, architecture and urban design, engineering, planning, law, economics and other fields. The faculty team includes social scientists, architects and urban designers, transport and planning experts. Our MSc City Design and Social Science aims to support the development of critical and committed urbanists who can work across disciplinary boundaries and have a positive impact on the making of cities in the future.

The City Design Research Studio is the centrepiece of the Master's programme, linking critical debates and research with the detailed analysis of problems of city design and development, and advancing original proposals for urban intervention. It promotes an understanding of the city as a social as well as a built environment. In 2015-16, the Studio focused on urban infrastructure as a context for analysing and responding to current urban conditions and future challenges. Our central concern was with infrastructure as urbanism, engaging with different forms of infrastructure in different site contexts across inner London. Our interdisciplinary teams explored how infrastructures help to 'make up' the city, and how spatial and social arrangements might in turn be transformed through infrastructural interventions. Their work was based on an expansive and critical understanding of infrastructure, examining how different elements of infrastructure are materialised within the built environment, as well as how they make legible logics of investment and disinvestment, diverse urban histories, strategies of regulation, and patterns of social interaction. The infrastructural forms we consider involve different spatial morphologies and support diverse aspects of urban experience: everyday mobilities and transit connectivities; environmental affordances and social exchanges; livelihoods and living spaces.

The Studio group worked in interdisciplinary teams to define and research their site contexts, to develop sensitive accounts of existing conditions and potential futures, and to propose original strategies for urban intervention. Their analyses, insights and propositions form the basis of this year's publication.

Fran Tonkiss
Director, LSE Cities Programme

Infrastructural Urbanism

Infrastructure has been central to the work of architects, urban planners and technical experts for a long time. But it is only more recently – with the 'material turn' in sociology for example – that it has also become a key concern for social scientists. Our investigations in the City Design Research Studio this year involved an expansive and critical understanding of infrastructure and its social, spatial, cultural, economic and political dimensions. 1 |

1 | See, e. g., Bennett, T. and Joyce, P. (eds) (2010) *Material Powers: Cultural studies, history, and the material turn*. New York: Routledge.

2 | Larkin, B. (2013) 'The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, pp. 327–343.

Urban infrastructure can be defined as an "architecture of circulation" or as "matter that enables movement to matter"; it is usually seen as merely playing a supporting role, as a complex collection of "objects that create the ground on with other objects operate". 2 | For many, infrastructure is invisible and only becomes visible when it breaks down. 3 | In this way, urban infrastructure is often seen as something that allows the city to function but which is in some sense separate from the life of the city itself. It is imagined as a tool, a means to an end with little or no embedded 'cityness'.

In contrast, our overall approach emphasises an understanding of infrastructure not merely *for* but also *as* urbanism. We explore how spatial and social forms are being transformed through infrastructural interventions. And we trace the social life of infrastructure and its spatiality. We are interested in the interplay between social and spatial aspects of infrastructural systems within the current economic and political context. And we are attuned to the ways in which this interplay may produce new economic and political relations.

Approaching infrastructure as urbanism allows us to explore some questions that are crucial for understanding and intervening in today's contested, unequal cities. To what degree are infrastructural systems 'neutral'? How are they economised and socialised as sites of investment and disinvestment? How do built infrastructures relate to social practices? 4 | How can small-scale interventions centred upon infrastructures speak to larger scale urban challenges, such as uneven patterns of social integration and fragmentation? What political projects are encapsulated within infrastructure, i.e. in what ways are particular infrastructures compatible with and 'require' certain social and political relations to sustain the city? 5 |

Students focused on five different infrastructural types, with three different spatial and physical morphologies, which we understood as linear, hub and network geographies. Research was carried out in three different site contexts across inner London: Railway Infrastructure in Elephant and Castle, Social Infrastructure in Somers Town; Green Infrastructure in Elephant and Castle; Street and Pavement Infrastructure in Hackney; and Canal and Waterway Infrastructure in East London.

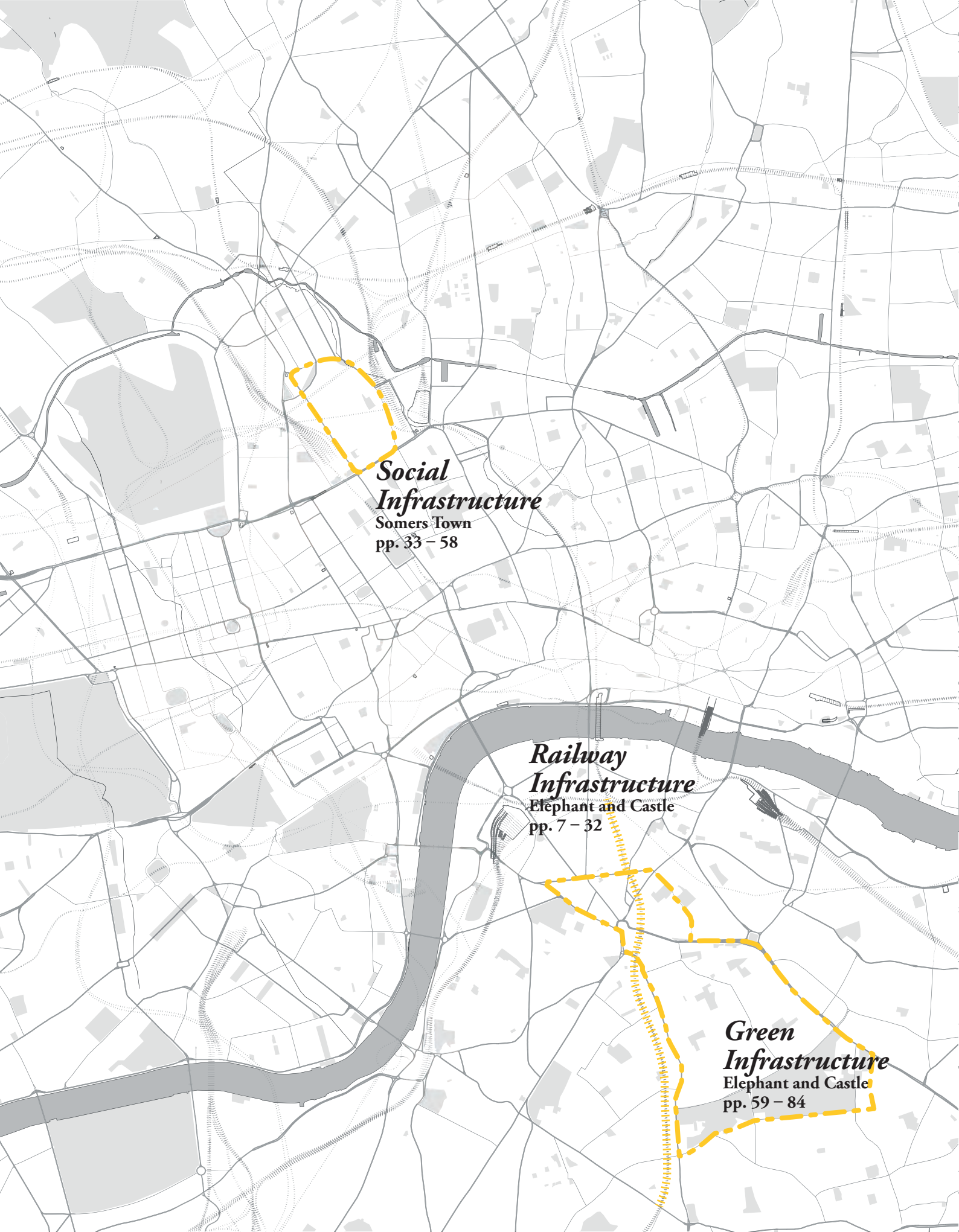
The different projects pose unique challenges to our understanding of infrastructure as urbanism. These projects exhibit wide diversity in terms of site, scale and objective. But they share a set of underlying challenges and recurring motifs. We have identified and highlighted five of them: **Governance** , **Visibility** , **Capacity** , **Connectivity** and **Diversity** . These motifs cut across individual projects and encourage us to read beyond different infrastructural types, morphologies and site contexts. Taken together, these projects offer an important insight for urbanists and urbanites today: infrastructure is not marginal but central to understanding and shaping the urban experience.

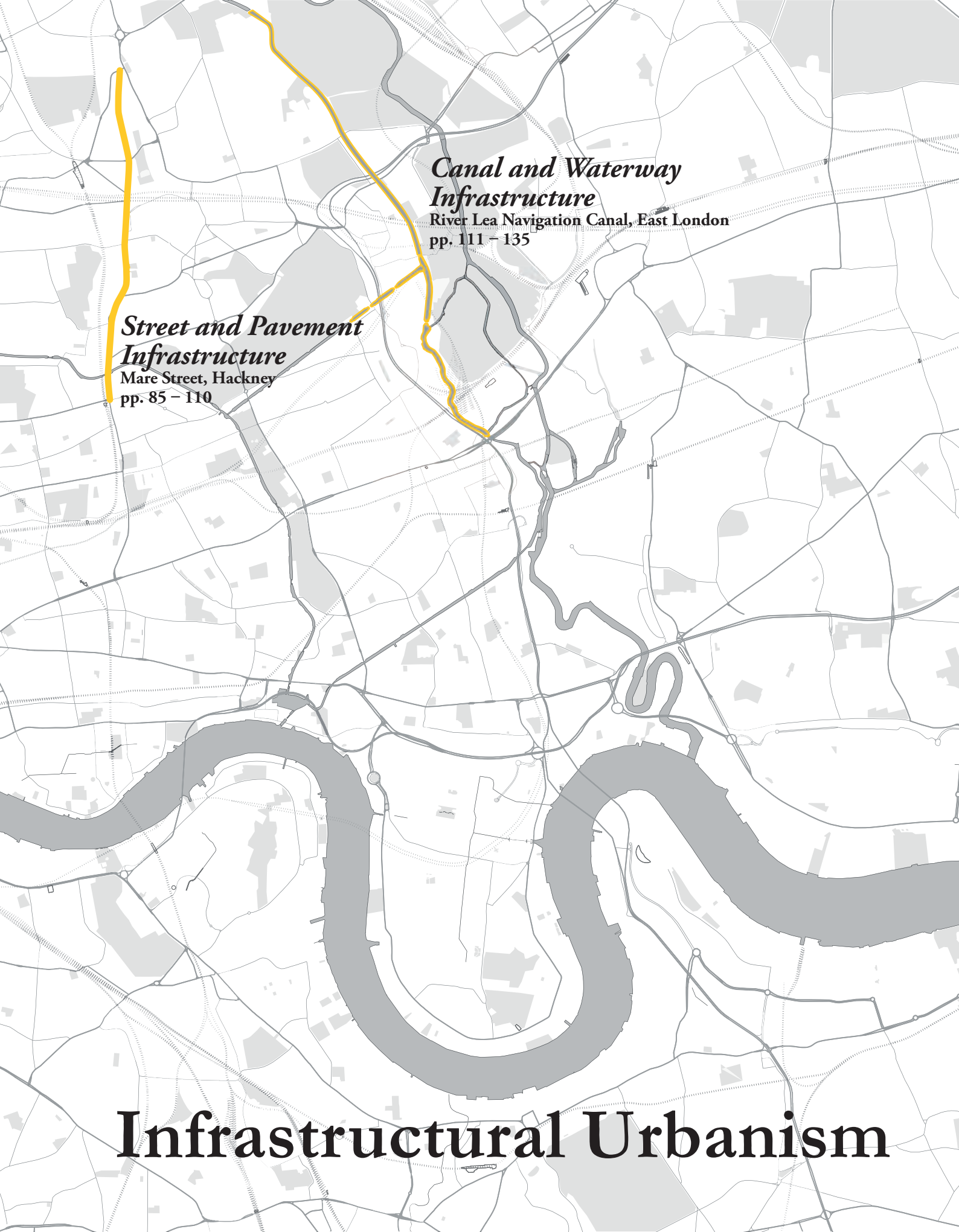
Günter Gassner, David Madden, Don Slater, Fran Tonkiss
Convenors, City Design Research Studio 2015-16

3 | Leigh Star, S. (1999) 'The Ethnography of Infrastructure, *American Behavioral Scientist* 43(3), pp. 377–391.

4 | See Simone, A. (2004) 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', *Public Culture* 16(3), pp. 407–429.

5 | See Winner, L. (1980) 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?', *Daedalus* 109(1), pp. 121–136.


Social Infrastructure
Somers Town
pp. 33 – 58
Railway Infrastructure
Elephant and Castle
pp. 7 – 32
Green Infrastructure
Elephant and Castle
pp. 59 – 84



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