

# Street and Pavement Infrastructure: Occupy Well Street

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## The Urban Context of Creative Economies: From Global Discourse to Local Hackney

The global popularity of employing ‘creativity’ as an urban-economic strategy has heralded a creative urban age. Cities worldwide are heeding Landry’s ‘Creative City’ concept of harnessing local creative potentials for economic revitalisation; or replicating Florida’s ‘Creative Class’ thesis of place-making to attract highly-skilled creative workers, who are the magnets for knowledge-intensive and creative industries fostering growth. 1 | The UK has also become a renowned model, particularly London, as it was where creative industries as an economic policy and valued sector first emerged with the ‘Creative Industries Task Force’ created in 1998. 2 |

Be it a policy emphasis on the organisational culture of city-making, consumption services or production industries, the synergetic relationship means these creative discourses generally favour particular urban locales, entrepreneurial practices and the ‘creative class’, thereby producing spatial, social and economic inequalities. “Creative advantage presupposes creative disadvantage”, which can play out as uneven opportunities amongst cities but also at a more localised, intra-urban level. 3 |

Within London, Hackney borough extensively pursues a ‘Creative Hackney’ agenda which we have identified as a cause of inequalities and imbalanced power dynamics on Mare Street – best exemplified by the intersections of Westgate Street and Well Street. 4 | Just 250 metres away from each other, they represent two different lifeworlds. Westgate Street sits proximately to the trendy Broadway Market and railway arches, and is surrounded by a growing cluster of creative studios, design offices and artistic pop-ups, along with upmarket café-restaurants to serve the creative workers. On the other hand, the long-established, everyday neighbourhood of Well Street is close to social housing estates and is linguistically and ethnically diverse, providing ‘ordinary’ domestic services to a large, lower-income population.

Our concern is that council support for creative class, enterprises and workspaces overlooks or undermines existing, ordinary businesses and communities. As a result, these areas are either left out of economic regeneration or being subsumed into a ‘creative’ make-over that erases the social diversity of Hackney. Our project thus aims to critique and address the uneven dynamics of creative regeneration manifested on Mare Street, by strengthening the presence/representation of the ordinary Well Street cluster. In doing so, we hope to empower traders and users of Well Street in making

1 | Landry, C. (2000) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. London: Routledge.

Florida, R. L. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

2 | Flew, T. (2011) *The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

3 | Peck, J. (2005) ‘Struggling with the Creative Class’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4), pp. 740–770, on p. 767.

4 | Hackney Council (2005) *Creative Hackney A Cultural Policy Framework for Hackney*. London: Hackney Council.

Hackney Council (2010) *Creative Hackney: Cultural Policy Framework*. London: Hackney Council.

claims for their space, thereby countering the impinging creative force from Westgate Street and omission from the Council's regeneration vision for Hackney.

## Creativity & Infrastructure

The various strands of creative urban strategies are underpinned by particular notions of infrastructure. For Landry, a key element of creative city-making involves shaping creative milieus that comprise both hardware (building, transport, utilities) and software (sensory and atmospheric experience of place) to provide a nurturing setting for innovation, imagination and exchange of ideas.<sup>7</sup> Similarly for Florida, attraction and retention of the creative class is dependent on critical infrastructure/amenities that appeals to their preferences.<sup>8</sup> Even direct promotion of creative industries demands suitable workspaces for artistic appropriation. Hence, the built environment is the physical platform for creative practices to flourish; and it could be reversely argued that creative practices exert prominent spatial footprints.

An infrastructural question of the creative discourse is thus relevant. In this vein, and aligned with the studio theme on infrastructural urbanism, our project uses an infrastructural lens of streets and pavements to examine the everyday experiences and problems of creative urban development in Hackney.<sup>9</sup> This is done through ethnographic observations of activities and materialities on the streets/pavements, mapping of street adjacencies, interviews with traders and users, quantitative exploration of census data to contextualise the site we are focusing on, and qualitative analysis of documents and news related to the issue.

By looking at the effects of creative urbanism on mundane, taken-for-granted infrastructure of streets and pavements, we seek to offer a fresh understanding and

5 | Well Street intersection (left) and Westgate Street intersection (right) on Mare Street



<sup>7</sup> | Landry, C. (2012) *The Origins & Futures of the Creative City*. Gloucestershire: Comedia.

<sup>8</sup> | Florida, R. L. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class: and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>9</sup> | Angelo, C. and Hentschel, H. (2015) 'Interactions with infrastructure as windows into social worlds: A method for critical urban studies: Introduction', *City* 19(2–3), pp. 306–312.

critique of Hackney's creative policy. At the same time, we will demonstrate how solutions to the resulting inequalities correspondingly require an infrastructural approach, in which streets and pavements present a useful medium of reimagining more equitable socio-spatial development.

## Hackney Council's Creative Industries Strategy: Creativity & Infrastructure

The official strategy for Hackney envisions the borough as a future of creative entrepreneurship, and a thriving residence and workplace for artists and designers. The role of Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) remain definitive in this endeavour. The identification of the 14 core creative industries, which was formalised in 2001 by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), are broken down in Hackney in 10 | . As it shows, Hackney's creative industries only generate 7% of borough employment yet the Council places disproportionate emphasis on this sector and uses it to drive the borough-wide regeneration discourse and place marketing.

For example, the document 'Creative Hackney: Cultural policy framework' emphasizes the role of CCIs as vital to the regeneration and identity formation for the borough:

"Hackney is a major provider of the 'cultural offer' in East London through our concentration of practicing artists, major cultural venues and creative industries. Part of our remit as a local authority is to ensure that Hackney remains the creative heart of East London and that our practitioners and organisations are best placed to take advantage of any emerging opportunities...The creative industries are a significant part of the economy of the borough..." 11 |

10 | Subsectors of Creative Industries in Hackney (Hackney Council (2014). *Local Economic Assessment; Employment in Hackney: Sectoral and Spatial Analysis*, London: Hackney Council.)

Creative Industries in Hackney	Total Employment
Advertising, Market Research and Media	2,153
Designers and Photographers	861
Architects	846
Artistic Creation and Performing Arts	745
Clothing, Footwear, Jewelry Manufacturing	407
Film, Music and Sound Recording and Production	373
Other Publishing Activities	212
Media Services and Binding	205
Reservations & Event Organizers	104
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,906</b>
<b>Percentage of Borough Employment</b>	<b>7%</b>

11 | Hackney Council (2010) *Creative Hackney: Cultural Policy Framework*. London: Hackney Council, p. 9.

Also, the ‘Regeneration Delivery Framework’ mentions “innovative and creative economy” as a part of its “long term vision” and the Council has highlighted special requirements in its Development Management planning policies to secure additional affordable workspaces and studios. 12 | This is corroborated by recommendations to continue the ‘Art in Empty spaces’ scheme and convert available council-owned as well as other privately-owned spaces into ‘meanwhile’ or short-term leases for this purpose. 13 |

## Problematic Discourse: Creativity & Class Difference

Hackney has a substantial industrial heritage, particularly in wholesale manufacturing and housing for industrial workers. With de-industrialisation in the 1970s and 80s, only car breaking, scrap dealing and warehousing activities were left. 14 | These traits are still visible in Hackney’s urban landscape today. Furthermore, it is still among the most deprived boroughs in the UK where migrants and low-income, ethnically diverse populations reside. 15 | The wards of Homerton and Victoria, which share their boundary with Mare Street (towards the East), have high deprivation levels, concentration of social housing and ethnic and linguistic diversity. These historical and socio-demographic characteristics inform the label of ‘working class’ we will use

16 | Deprivation levels in Hackney: High deprivation levels in Homerton and Victoria as compared to London Fields and Hackney Central (Hackney Council (2015b) *Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2015 Briefing*. London: Hackney Council.)

12 | Hackney Council (2009) *Regeneration Delivery Framework*. London: Hackney Council, p. 2

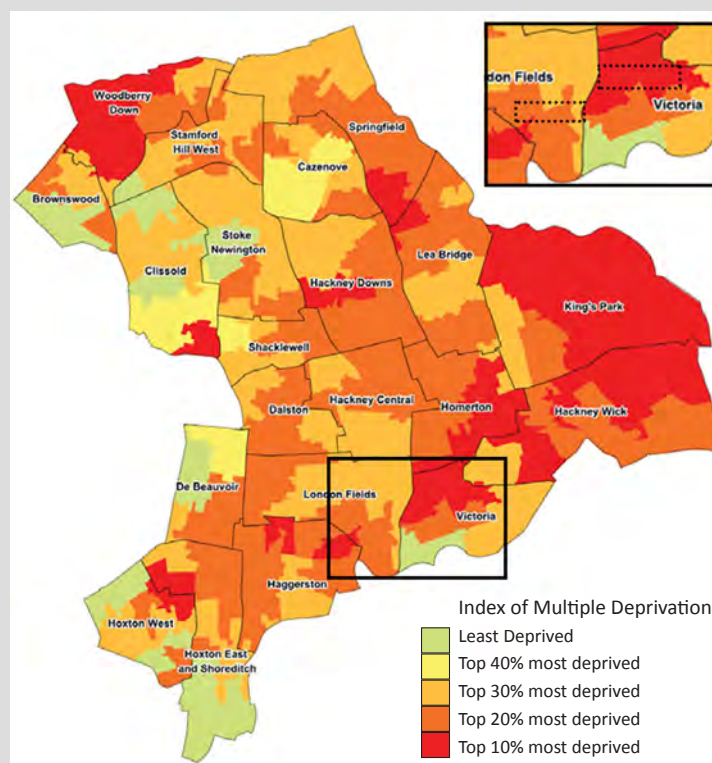
Hackney Council (2015) *Workspace Provider list, May 2015*. London: Hackney Council.

13 | Hackney Council (2012) *Report of the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission*. London: Hackney Council.

14 | Hackney Council (2014) *History and Heritage of Hackney*. Available online at <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/xp-factsandfigures-history.htm#VrxYrF9FDGh> [accessed 5 February 2016].

15 | Hackney Council (2015) *Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2015 Briefing*. London: Hackney Council.

Wessendorf, S. (2014) ‘Being open, but sometimes closed’. Conviviality in a super-diverse London neighbourhood’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17, pp. 392-405.





in this report, which resonate with the demographic majority of Hackney. Conversely, the wards of London Fields and Hackney Central towards the West, where all the creative industries and accompanying retail services are concentrated, have witnessed significant decrease in deprivation levels in the last 5 years, with increase in private-rented housing and White ethnic groups as compared to other wards in the borough. Ethnicity is also bounded with class here as 89.8% of jobs in the creative industries are held by 'White' ethnic groups. 19 |

Despite this context of contrasting socio-economic conditions, the creative discourse of Hackney deploys the class difference between the creative class and working class in multiple, often conflicting, ways. Firstly, we see creative class as a conflation with upper-middle income classes. While official data considers the creative industries as separate from financial and business services, the discourse implicitly relies on their inter-dependence in practice. High-value service economies requires marketing, advertising and design work as supporting services; and their high-middle income professionals drive the demand for creative sub-sectors of retail like restaurants and cafes. Together they constitute a socio-cultural and economic realm that is distinct from the working-class populations of Hackney.

Secondly, Hackney's creative regeneration discourse attempts to bring the multi-ethnic character of Hackney into its fold as if they are mutually reinforcing. For example, lower-income Black and Asian Ethnic Minority (BAME) owned enterprises are

17 | Collage of excerpts from public documents

*What I don't like is the pretense and the assumption that somehow or another Hackney needs to be grateful for all these up-and-coming industries. What's wrong with a proper working class area having proper working class jobs?*

--Grant Kingsnorth,  
Interviewee with 'The Guardian'

*Hackney is now the 6th most diverse borough in London, down from 3rd in 2005.*

--'A Profile of Hackney, its People and Place', January 2016

19 | Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) (2014) *Creative Industries: Focus on Employment*, UK. London: Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

18 | Collage of contradictory excerpts from various Hackney Council documents

## 6 A Dynamic and Creative Economy

### Evening and Night-Time Economy

**6.25** Evening and night-time economy uses such as public houses, cinemas, restaurants, cafés, drinking establishments, hot food takeaways, local night clubs and other leisure uses are an important part of the local economy in Hackney. These contribute towards the customer and visitor experience and provide opportunities for business start-ups and employment, particularly for members of the black and ethnic minority communities. Hackney also has a rich and growing cultural and creative activities sector that is becoming an important part of it's economic base attracting visitors and businesses particularly in the City Fringe areas.

*Hackney's strategic planning policies for 2010-2025*

### Creative Hackney

There has been a real surge in the growth of cultural and creative industries in parts of Hackney, replacing manufacturing as the prime industry in the borough. The offer is immense and varied, and has made Hackney a place people come to visit, a place in which people want to live and work. Many of our small cultural enterprises are black and minority ethnic owned, our rich, diverse cultural heritage.

Micro and small businesses (less than 10 employees), many of which are black and minority ethnic organisations, dominate Hackney's cultural sector. Not all cultural organisations follow the traditional economic growth model so many will continue to operate as Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). We need to ensure infrastructure support is in place to provide small businesses with business advice, access to training and funding. The Black and Minority Ethnic Arts organisation (BEMA) has potential to expand to provide that support in partnership with the Council and other agencies.

*Hackney Regeneration Delivery Framework 2009*

*Hackney Cultural Policy Framework 2010*

mentioned under the label of ‘Creative Hackney’ and are recognised as progressing from traditional manufacturing and warehousing to art and leisure services on the same aspirational level. 20 | This is clearly shown in excerpts from the official position on creative economy vis-a-vis ethnic diversity in 18 | .

Thirdly, in direct opposition, the cultural and creative entrepreneurial character of the place and changing demographics, with specific mention of higher-income residents moving in, are considered as strengths and opportunities; whereas the presence of small businesses and poor retail offer are considered as threats and weaknesses. 21 |

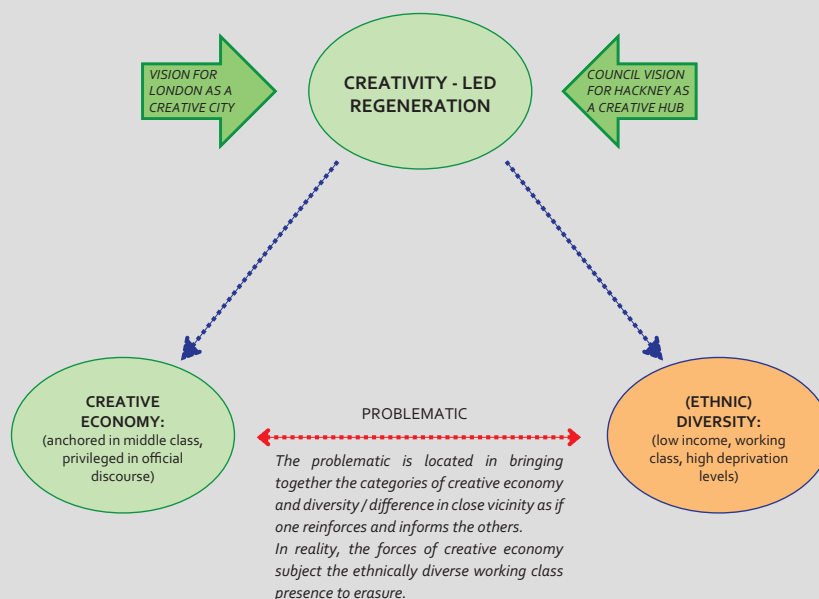
We identify this contradiction in the discourse to be creating serious confusions, as it attempts to conceal the difference or at least bring this vast diversity together under the label of ‘creativity’ as though lower-income, ethnic-minorities are similarly working towards determining Hackney’s ‘creative’ image.

### Implications: Fragmented & Uneven Development of Mare Street

Class differences at the borough level ultimately translate into spatial distinctions at the local scale of Mare Street. As a result, the various segments of the street have different character, thereby breaking its linearity into a series of urban rooms. This fragmentation is most pronounced between Westgate Street intersection and Well Street intersection.

Westgate Street intersection are mainly comprised of creative offices and studio spaces like Netil house, Kelton House and The Laundry, and it is creative workers - noticeably are mostly Whites - from these buildings that activate the area. Also, this part of the region has “distinctive visitor and evening economies”, which is supported

22 | Graphical representation of the problematic



20 | Hackney Council (2009) *Regeneration Delivery Framework*. London: Hackney Council.

Hackney Council (2010) *Core Strategy Hackney's strategic planning policies for 2010–2025*. London: Hackney Council.

21 | Hackney Council (2009) *Regeneration Delivery Framework*. London: Hackney Council.

by our observations. 24 | Interviews with traders at Broadway and Netil House Market reveal that they are frequented by tourists and people from other parts of London. While the official discourse claims that night-time economy of the region is beneficial to BAME businesses, our ethnographic research suggest that this is actually anchored in a distinct market base, such as The Dolphin Pub and other bars in London Fields, not associated with them. 25 |

Well Street intersection, on the other hand, has a context determined by diverse ethnic, multi-lingual and low-income user-groups. It is mostly composed of ordinary retail e.g. salons, pawn shops and money transfers, launderettes, pharmacy and grocers, take-away and cafes, shoe repair, and mobile phone repair. The shops are local in terms of long length of residence in the area, owners' place affiliations and customer profile; with some services like hairdressing particularly catered for Black Afro-Caribbean or Vietnamese communities. The cluster is not formally organised as a traders association or neighbourhood group as is the upper Well Street market, and do not receive any council support. Shop-fronts appear worn-out and owners echo

23 | Well Street Intersection showing year and type of retail establishments



24 | Hackney Council (2010) *Hackney Local Development Framework 2010–2015*. London: Hackney Council, on p. 84.

25 | Hackney Council (2010) *Creative Hackney: Cultural Policy Framework*. London: Hackney Council.

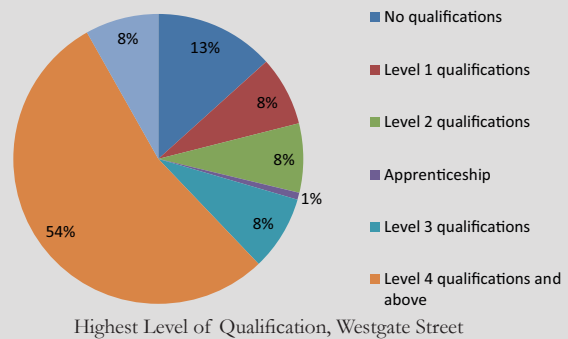
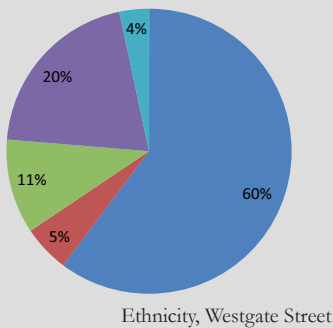
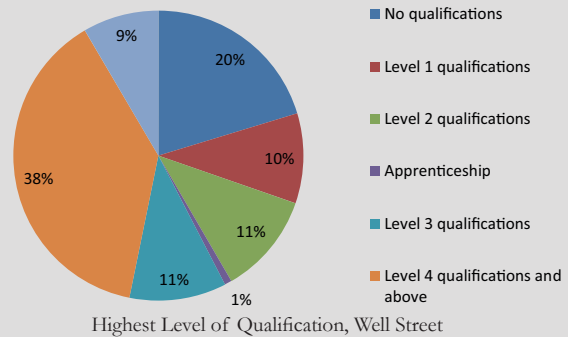
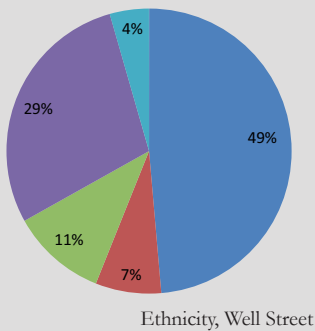
the minimal (physical) changes in the area besides rising rents and instability of more recent shops.

The difference in user-groups and services between the two intersections can be better understood and established by invoking Bourdieu's notion of 'distinction' based on 'cultural capital'. Cultural capital refers to:

“...the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc. that one acquires through being part of a particular social class...But Bourdieu also points out that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality. Certain forms of cultural capital are valued over others, and can help or hinder one's social mobility just as much as income or wealth”. 27 |

Hence, it “plays a central role in societal power relations” and can function as “means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish

26 | Comparison between Well Street and Westgate Street (Authors based on ONS (2011). Available online at <http://infuse.mimas.ac.uk> [accessed 11 February 2016].)



27 | Routledge (2011) *Cultural Capital*. Available online at <http://routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/cultural-capital> [accessed 10 December 2015].



themselves through taste”. 29 | Different cultural capitals and the resultant tastes form part of a collective identity and consciousness that there are social differences and hierarchies; and that each individual belongs to one’s place and habitus. 30 | This is what we are witnessing of the Westgate and Well Street intersection – they are distinct habitus. A closer look at these distinctions can be observed through material culture manifestations.

Westgate Street intersection is characterised by a strong cycling presence and a mute minimalist aesthetic of its shopfronts and signages that serves pricier artisanal food products. On the other hand, Well Street intersection is mostly pedestrian-based with active presences of two major supermarkets – Iceland and Lidl – well-known for their working class customer base. The storefront and signage aesthetic is kitsch and ‘loud’, but products/services here are modestly priced. The respective intersections, therefore, embody two distinct cultural and social realms, and their users exhibit specific contextual familiarity with each respectively.

However, the Westgate Street ‘habitus’ is activated by the official discourse of ‘Creative Hackney’ because of its more marketable image; whereas Well Street intersection remains a mere passive presence sidelined by Council regeneration priorities. This passive presence is gradually subjected to erasure, given the Council-assisted aggressive force of the creative habitus, which potentially unsettles and appropriates ‘non-creative’ spaces of the Well Street intersection.

28 | Westgate Street Intersection showing year and type of retail establishments



29 | Gaventia, J. (2003) *Power after Lukes: A Review of the Literature*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, on p. 6.

30 | Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.



31 | Comparison of Well Street shopfronts showing the different aesthetics



32 | Comparison of Westgate Street shopfronts showing the different aesthetics



## *Cut Across: Diverse Infrastructures*



**Street and Pavement Infrastructure: Mare Street**



**Canal and Waterway Infrastructure: River Lea Navigation Canal**

### **Intervention**

The aim of our invention seeks to address the socio-spatial fragmentation and uneven development manifested on Mare Street, which we have identified as an outcome of Hackney Council's narrow creative/cultural policy. The Council's stance privileges particular creative industries and class for place branding and economic regeneration at the expense of the working-class communities. To this end, we develop an intervention framework that focuses on supporting the disadvantaged, less dominant groups at the Well Street intersection, particularly by strengthening their presence on the street.

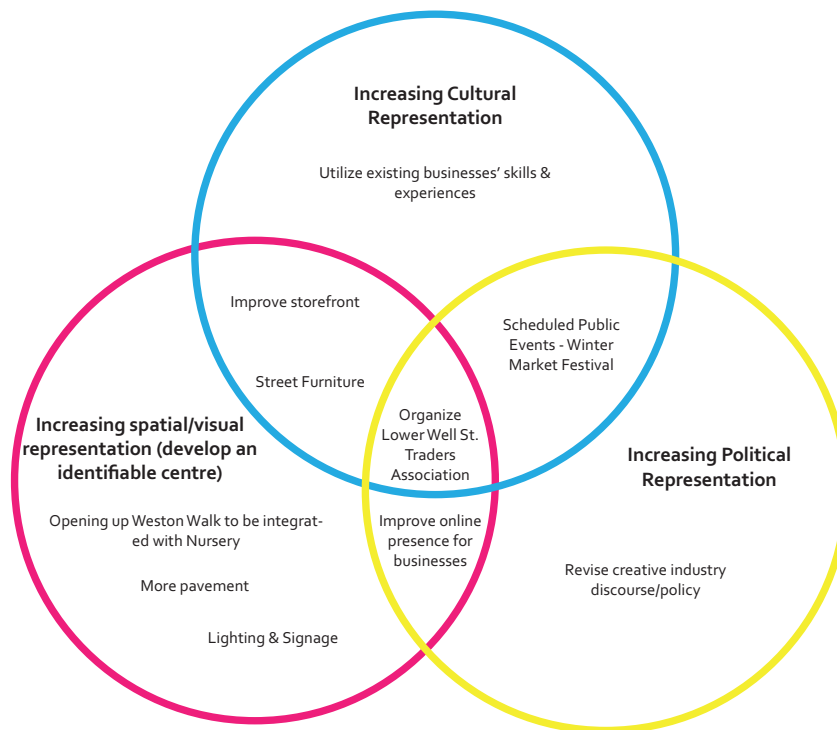
We define 'presence' here as the visibility and recognition of the ordinary retail and urban life of working-class groups (for themselves and others), which will serve as an important basis for marking claims to the space. Due to the top-down policy forces, working-class presence can only be effectively exerted through both structurally intervening with the policy discourse and having bottom-up approaches from working-class groups that assert their agency in the space and in society. Our approach to consolidating presence is approached from multiple dimensions: cultural presence in terms of the style and character of the place (following Bourdieu's distinction), physical presence in terms of the amount of public street/pavement space and thus users, and political presence through representation to negotiate with Hackney Council. 33 | Our three-pronged intervention strategy thus rests within these hierarchical and sectoral framings, which are mutually overlapping and reinforcing, thus delivering a stronger strategy as a whole.

## Social: Somers Town Park Circulation



## Green Infrastructure: Elephant and Castle

## Railway Infrastructure: Elephant and Castle



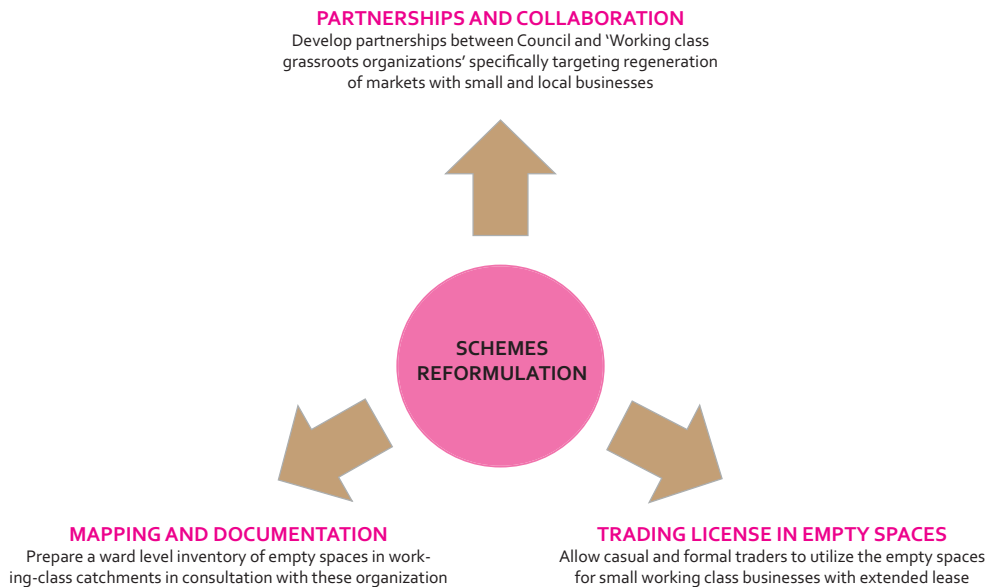
33 | Venn Diagram depicting our three-pronged intervention strategy



Although our intervention (reversely) privileges Well Street intersection and its traders/users, it is not exercised as a zero-sum game that explicitly seeks to take something away from Westgate intersection and the creative class to bolster the working classes. Instead, our goal is the empowerment of a neglected, diverse working class that challenges the power dynamics of an institutionally-supported class conflict, which can be self-perpetuating and thus sustainable in the long-term.

### Revising Hackney Council's Regeneration Policy & Vision

The 'Creative Hackney' vision of the Council needs to be fundamentally changed in order to not hinder the existing diversity of businesses and communities in the Well Street/Mare Street intersection. Instead of using a single dominant label like 'creative', we propose formally envisioning Hackney as a place of multiplicity and difference in the policy literature. This means acknowledging the ethnic, socio-cultural and economic diversity of the borough not just for its passive heritage value, but as active stakeholders for shaping the borough. The focus of economic regeneration should be encouraging and supporting the entrepreneurial spirit of all classes, including the diverse working class which is often overlooked. To put these goals into practice, we propose altering two existing council policies to officially include the work and service requirements of the deprived social classes in the borough.



34 | Graphic representation of Creative Schemes Reformulation

## Cultural Stakeholder Conferences & Creative Cluster Networks

There is a formal framework to ensure two-way dialogue between Hackney Council and creative enterprises through cultural stakeholder conferences and the practitioner-based Creative Cluster Networks. 34 | Under ‘Creative Hackney’, these engagements are confined to a specific audience such as culture houses, creative studios, independent cinemas and non-profit institutions that promote design e.g. ‘Hidden Art’. We propose that Hackney Council should also develop formal partnerships with working-class grassroots organisations to lead regeneration of specific markets with local and small businesses.

### Art in Empty Spaces’ Program

Instead of exclusively providing free or discounted retail spaces to Creative Class art and design entrepreneurs through the ‘Art in Empty Spaces’ Program, the scheme can be reformulated to also promote start-ups of local diverse working-class groups. These vacant spaces across the boroughs, utilised as pop-ups for a few days to a few months, are often the first entry of creative services into a working-class area, destabilising the habitus through their clientele and spatial expressions. 35 | Adjacent market retail play a significant role in determining the vibrancy and quality of public social life on the streets and pavements. By correcting the creative/cultural policy at the structural level, the diversity of everyday experiences of working-class high streets can be sustained. Working top-down is thus important in preventing the overtaking of ordinary urbanism by creative urbanism that is artificially accelerated by Hackney Council.

35 | Excerpt from ‘Hackney Citizen’ News on destabilising creative forces on Well Street (Assanowicz, M. (2011) ‘Hackney artists flock to Well Street’, *Hackney Citizen*. Available online at <http://hackneycitizen.co.uk/2011/11/08/hackney-artists-flock-to-well-street/> [accessed 5 February 2016].)

### Hackney Artists Flock to [upper] Well Street

The recent closure of several shops in the street following rent hikes by the owner of the buildings has generated much ire; it has also led to vacancies, and Hackney Council is in discussion with the landlord about making this space available for pop-up studios and galleries as part of its Art in Empty Spaces programme...

WESTRA Secretary Ian Rathbone was cautious in his reaction to the possibility of the street instead becoming a hive of artistic creativity: ‘Two galleries are OK, but five or six start to make [the street] something different. A lot of people think that it’s being taken over’.

-- Excerpt from Hackney Citizen News, Nov 2011

37 | Hackney Council (2010) *Creative Hackney: Cultural Policy Framework*. London: Hackney Council.

36 | Imagining of Westgate Street as the Creative Class. (InterUrban Studios (2013) *Re-imagine Mare Street Triangle*. Available online at [www.interurbanstudios.com/208931/2022186/projects/london-design-festival-2013](http://www.interurbanstudios.com/208931/2022186/projects/london-design-festival-2013) [accessed 5 February 2016].)





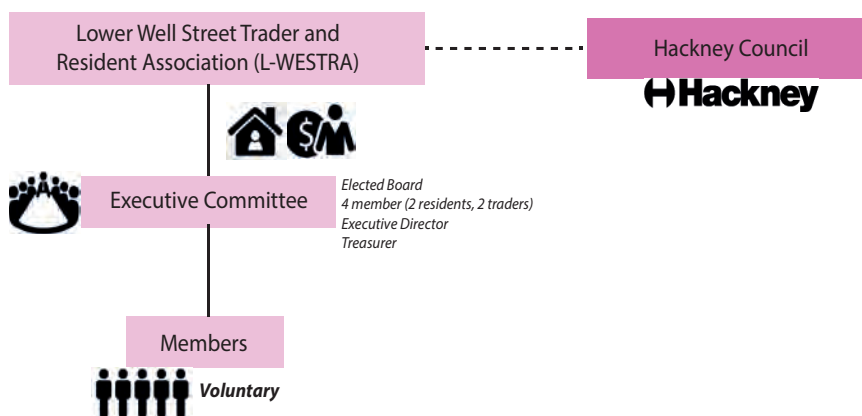
38 | Imagining Well Street as a Working-Class habitus

### Establishing Lower Well Street Traders & Residents Association (L-WESTRA)

To enable effective partnerships at the macro level, active local organisations need to be present to facilitate communication and cooperation. While Well Street does not have any formal traders associations, our interviews with several traders and ethnographic work reveal a close-knit community between various traders and between traders and regular customers. Many hoped for improved business prospects, though traders unanimously commented on the lack of council support for this area and no formal association nor affiliation to the upper Well Street Traders and Residents Association (WESTRA). Establishing a Traders & Residents Association at Lower Well Street would enable cooperation across disparate stakeholders with the agency to convey their presence in multiple ways on the space:

- Create a representation/voice to negotiate for support and establish the presence of Lower Well Street in the eyes of Hackney Council
- Invest funds for social improvement projects and physical upgrading of storefronts or the area in the way they desire
- Build institutional capacity and resources – skills, knowledge, relationships and networks across traders – that will support the socio-economic dynamism of Well Street
- Collaborate with WESTRA (which is currently struggling against landlord rent hikes and the Council's prioritisation of resultant vacancies for creative enterprises) that will strengthen socio-economic improvement opportunities and political clout for negotiations. One possible collaboration with WESTRA to further enhance the cultural presence of working-class groups on Well Street is the co-organisation of the annual Well Street Winter Market Festival. Due to the stiff competition of markets in Hackney, we recommend beginning with markets as a festivity by leveraging on existing event than as a permanent feature at lower Well Street, which could be expanded more regularly over time should the Association deem feasible.

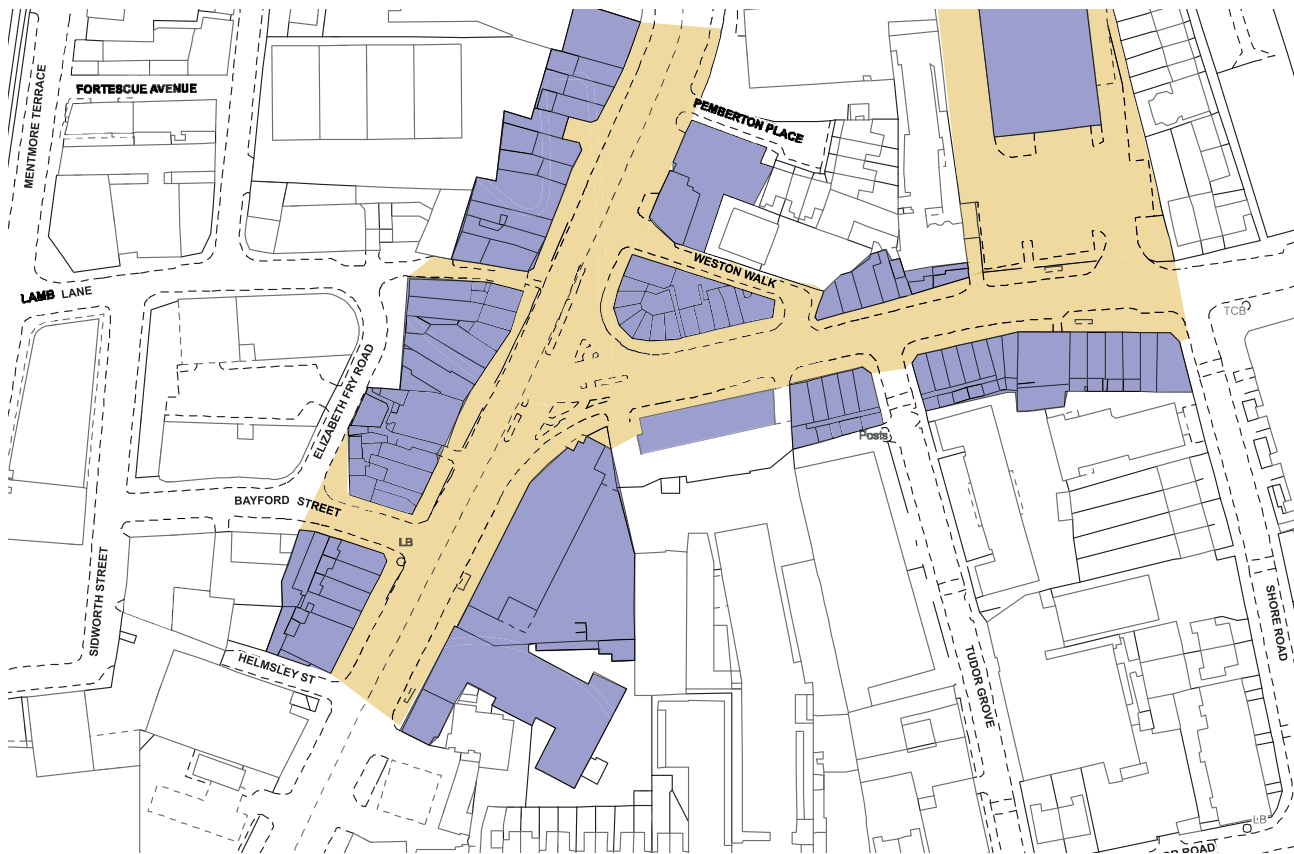
Creating the association is vital in promoting a sense of ownership and control over the future of the Well Street intersection that incorporates the diverse working class



interests. Compared with Westgate Street intersection, the social and human resource of creative industries, along with backing by the Council (and even London) for its development, have enabled the re-imagining of the triangle pavement through the partnering of SPACE, Netil House and The Trampery for The London Design Festival 2013. Redevelopment plans are also in the pipeline for opening up Netil House's building interaction with the street. This goes to show how facilitating different working-class groups with interest in the Well Street junction to come together is equivalent to giving them the opportunity to also imagine and shape their streets, pavements and type of urbanity they hope to see. Our purpose of establishing the Association is as much a spatial tool than a socio-political one, where street/pavement infrastructure becomes the equalising medium.

### Improving Public Space at Well Street Intersection

With the existing narrow pavements and lack of street seating, we recommend increasing the amount of pavement into a plaza space and providing seating objects for users to stay and socialize in the public realm. These physical changes will act as a catalyst for habituation practices and develop the area into an identifiable centre, thereby further highlighting the working-class presence on the Well Street intersection.



40 | Spatial extent of L-WESTRA



## Our Design Thinking

Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Kristine Samson's work on performative urban design, the basis of our design is that an object exist not in its own terms but as a constellation of relations with users and other objects around it. 41 | The design thus draws meaning from its social-material situation and allows for an 'emergent' urban space that works with existing qualities of the space. 42 | Performance is defined as the act of reassembling these relations through material objects that incite new bodily routines and interactions, which itself becomes an aesthetic. 43 |

Our intention is to design, or rather stage, the urban scene of Well Street intersection, by introducing a seating configuration, for a multiplicity of 'performances' by the working-class users, through which their aesthetics are expressed. We view this approach as valuable in reinforcing spatial and cultural presence of the working class groups as it takes into account:

- The plurality of working class (recognises diverse users instead of designing a configuration that is too prescriptive of a particular type of performance)
- The aspirations of the working class and changes of the habitus (does not freeze the place or people in a specific socio-economic condition compared to designing in a specific working-class aesthetic)

While this creates uncertainty in outcomes, we want to ensure an open-ended design that is completed by its users so that the Well Street 'stage' gains meaning only through their participation. In this sense, the spatial intervention is also a way of building spatial agency through engagement with the habitus users, which will better bring out the working class cultural presence.

Ownership is established by involving the community (the Lower Well Street Traders & Residents Association) in the planning and design process of the newly created plaza, which will be administered by Hackney Council. The framework of the process is detailed in 45 | below that comprises guiding questions we have identified in order to realise our design thinking and how community perspectives are incorporated in a feedback loop.

The intention is to phase the design intervention so that the community is involved at multiple steps throughout the process and can visualise the incremental results. Problems with community consultations are that they often end up as mere gestures of tokenism as the public seldom understands the scope of work – often from an inability to read architectural drawings and diagrams. The multiple check-ins, meetings on the site and discussion questions are meant to strengthen the dialogue between Well Street community and the Council, leading to a place-based response that will be recognized by the working-class groups as their own.

41 | Law, J. (2002) 'Objects and Spaces', *Theory, Culture & Society* 19(91), pp. 91–105.

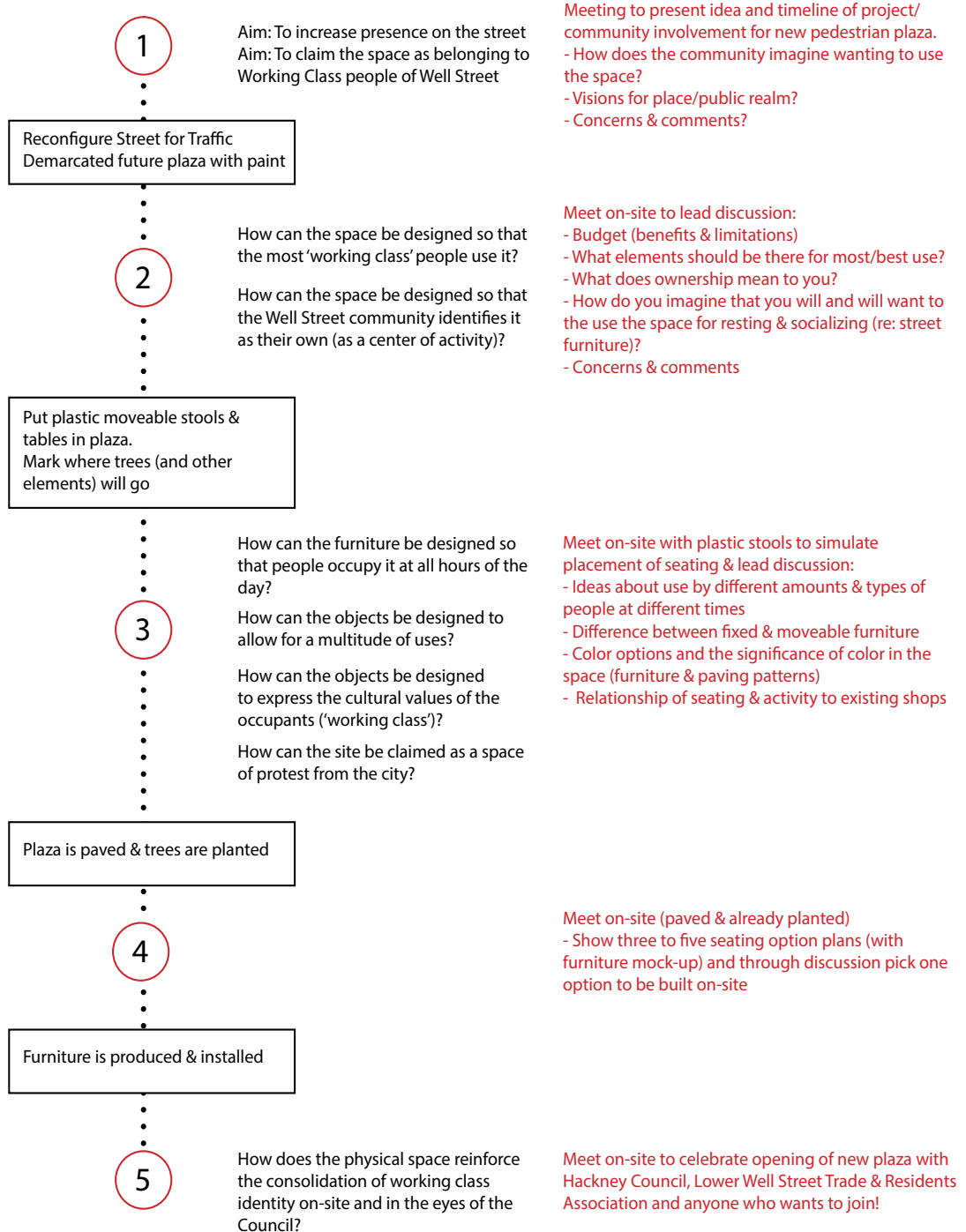
42 | Samson, K. (2013) *Designing in the Emergent City: Assemblage, Acts, Performance*. Available online at <http://www.nordes.org/opj/index.php/n13/article/view/333/348> [accessed 5 May 2016].

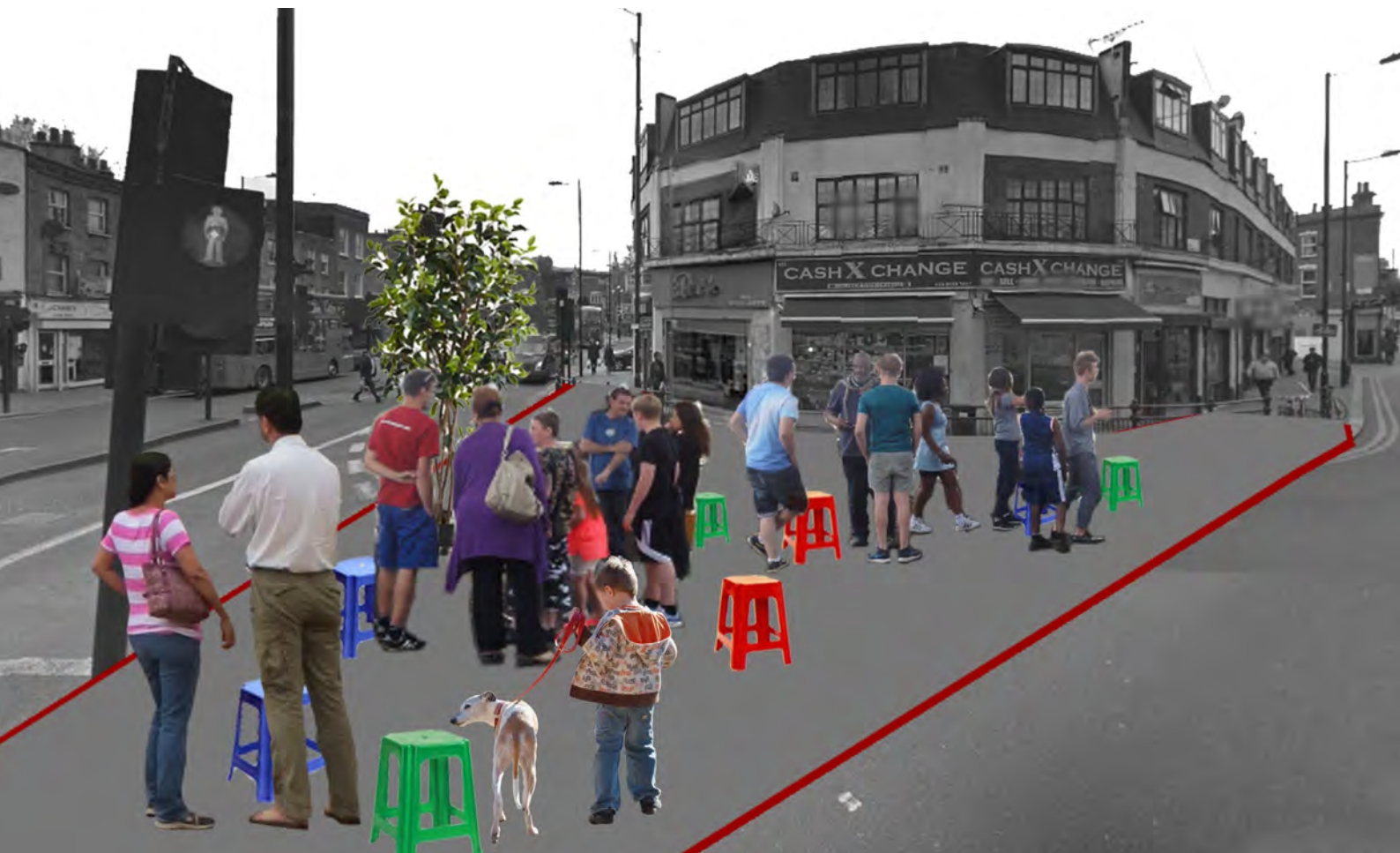
43 | Samson, K. (2011) 'Performative Urban Design: How to do things with the city', in *Engaging Spaces: Sites of Performance, Interaction, and Reflection*, eds E. Kristiansen and Olav Harslof. Chicago: University of Chicago Press



44 | Map depicting our site of intervention at the Well Street intersection

## Design Team Consultation





#### 46 | Scenario 1: Moveable Furniture

Involves the possibility of rearranging the furniture - of light metal or plastic material - by the users; therefore has possibilities of multiple configurations. This typology could also be incorporated as an experimental phase in the intervention: a process by which user behaviour and tendencies can be identified and consequently incorporated in permanent furniture fixtures.





#### 47 | Scenario 2: Fixed Furniture

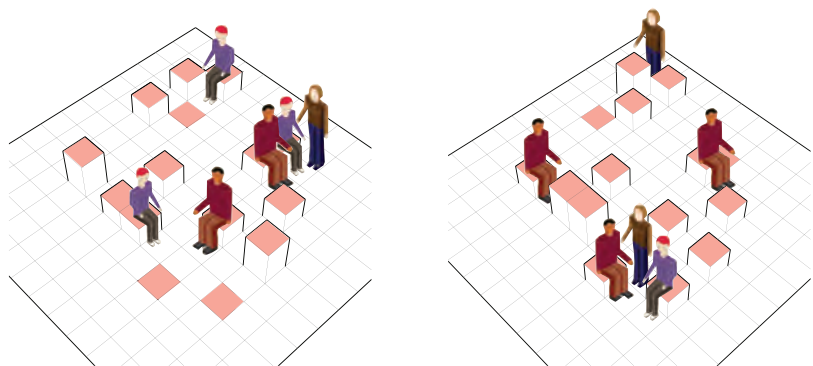
Lets users adapt to fixed concrete square blocks. The users appropriate and subject their performance around the fixed benches; unlike the previous case, where the user performance is not determined around the movable chairs.





#### 48 | Scenario 3: Moveable & Fixed (Hybrid)

Involves concrete blocks inset within the pavement, that can be raised to two different heights - seats 18" and table 30" - or returned to be flush with paving. A control panel on the adjacent storefront will adjust the raising and sinking of the blocks. The paving pattern and block colour will determine which volumes are adjustable. Block surfaces will also have sound and light sensors installed to prevent any accidents. The arrangement is provocative as a symbolic installation on its own and anticipates diverse performances on the Well Street plaza that are hitherto unknown.

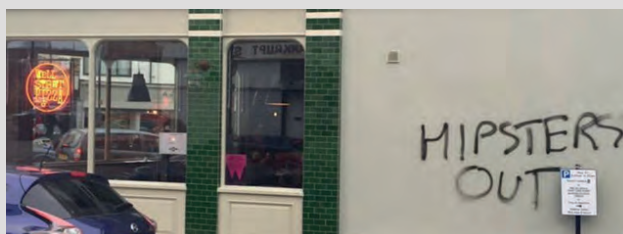


## Limitations

For this hypothetical design exercise of the plaza seating, we will use a mix of ethnographic research and observations to stand in for community participation in order to answer the design questions we proposed. In the spirit of provocation, claiming territory and the metaphor of the street as a place for conflict and social negotiation, we envision three potential scenarios that state a different relationship with the pavement and the habitus users.

We recognise that there are limitations to these interventions. One is that change cannot be stopped. We anticipate that ‘creative’ businesses within the catchment area will partake in the Traders Association and that the Well Street public spaces can be used by everyone. This will lead to further negotiations between classes in the public realm, which we do not wish to artificially restrict. Our stance is not to resist change but empower the working-class groups to open up potentials for different futures. Economic need for inter-borough competition is also one key driver of the ‘creative’ rhetoric in Hackney Council’s policies and branding. Furthermore, at least at the borough level, Hackney is becoming less deprived. There may be great inertia for Hackney Council to replace its economically-driven focus by a socially equitable one. This policy change will have to be worked out over time within the Council, and hopefully within the vision that we have set out in the intervention framework.

49 | Image of Well Street Pizza graffiti and quote  
(Spinks, R. (2015) ‘Long-time east Londoners on Hackney hipsters: “They need a humour injection”’, *The Guardian*. Available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/mar/02/east-london-hackney-hipsters-humour-locals> [accessed 5 November 2015].



“The thing that Hackney people find frustrating is that they read about things in the newspaper and see stuff on the telly and they think ‘That’s not where we live’. Though it may be geographically, it’s not their world, it’s not their environment”

Grant Kingsnorth, Interviewee with ‘The Guardian’

## Rethinking Creative Regeneration Through Streets & Pavements as Infrastructure

Our analyses on Westgate Street and Well Street demonstrate that streets and pavements as infrastructure are perceptible indicators of:

- Social-spatial fragmentation that comprise different habitus characterised by distinct user-groups and styles;
- Spatial aggression/provocation of creative regeneration due to the spread of studio workspaces, art pop-ups and trendy cafes over time;
- Uneven development linked to Hackney Council's cultural-economic priorities on the creative sector.

The relational nature of street and pavement infrastructure, in the context of Hackney's creative policy, are thus not invisible unless broken down, but a constant and visible site where social agonisms are played out. 50 | They reflect power relationships – between ordinary working classes, the creative class and the council – and the importance of place ownership. The working classes feel threatened as though their 'habitus' is being taken over, especially when they are unable to identify with the Council's discourse and new descriptions of Hackney. 51 | Therefore, we can conceive streets and pavements beyond technical and neutral mediums through which vehicles and people flow. Instead, they can be thought of as a series of fragments that different groups of people lay claims on for different urbanisms. Street and pavement infrastructure thus becomes a relevant resource to address the inequalities of creative regeneration. Our spatially-targeted interventions detailed above are thus founded on this principle, with the primary objective of enhancing the abilities of working-classes to lay claims on their infrastructures.

Following this logic of street and pavement infrastructure as social and political, they can serve as infrastructures of equity if re-regulated, creating a more inclusive form of urban regeneration. As Peñalosa argues for public realm as an equalising factor, "parking bays carved where there should be pavements...shows that the needs of citizens with a car are considered more carefully than those people who walk...who make up the majority of the population". 52 | Similarly, streetscapes of overwhelming numbers of designer cafes encroaching a working-class habitus suggest that preferences of the creative class are privileged over needs of residents with lower consumptive power, who are actually the bulk of Hackney's population. 53 | By promoting fragmentation and according working classes their right to place through street and pavement infrastructure, it is possible to retain social diversity and open up different futures for different groups and Hackney beyond an alienating creative label.

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

51 | Spinks, R. (2015) 'Long-time east Londoners on Hackney hipsters: "They need a humour injection"', *The Guardian*. Available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/mar/02/east-london-hackney-hipsters-humour-locals> [accessed 5 November 2015].

52 | Peñalosa, E. (2007) 'Politics, Power, Cities', in *The Endless City*, eds R. Burdett. and D. Sudjic, pp. 307–319. London: Phaidon, on p. 313.

53 | Peck, J. (2005) 'Struggling with the Creative Class', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(4), pp. 740–770.