

**LOCAL
CITY**

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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 physical and social structuring 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 and political theorists, 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 cross 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 2012-13, the Studio focused on the inner London borough of Hackney as a site for thinking about the challenges of the local city. Against the backdrop of current political designs for 'localism', we aimed to explore in more imaginative ways various local capacities for city-making. Beginning at Hackney Central and the dense commercial, residential, social and mobile environments that surround it, the Studio groups analysed the connections and contexts, the actors and interests, the problems and potential which constitute this complex locality. The map of the local city that emerges is a rich one: from Hackney Central as a point of arrival and interchange, to the fragile vibrancy of a high street under the dual pressures of economic downturn and rapid urban change, the generative environments of 'problem' housing estates, geographies of local youth, differential patterns of access and mobility, and the connective potential of the area's 'backyard'—the canal that links this local place back into an extended urban network. We arrive on the train, and we end at the water. In between, we explore a diversity of ways of being 'local': selling and shopping, growing and growing up, cycling and lingering, co-operating and contesting. The Studio group worked in interdisciplinary teams to identify and research their site contexts, and to propose strategies for urban intervention. Their analyses, insights and propositions form the basis of this year's publication.

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LSE CITIES
STUDIO

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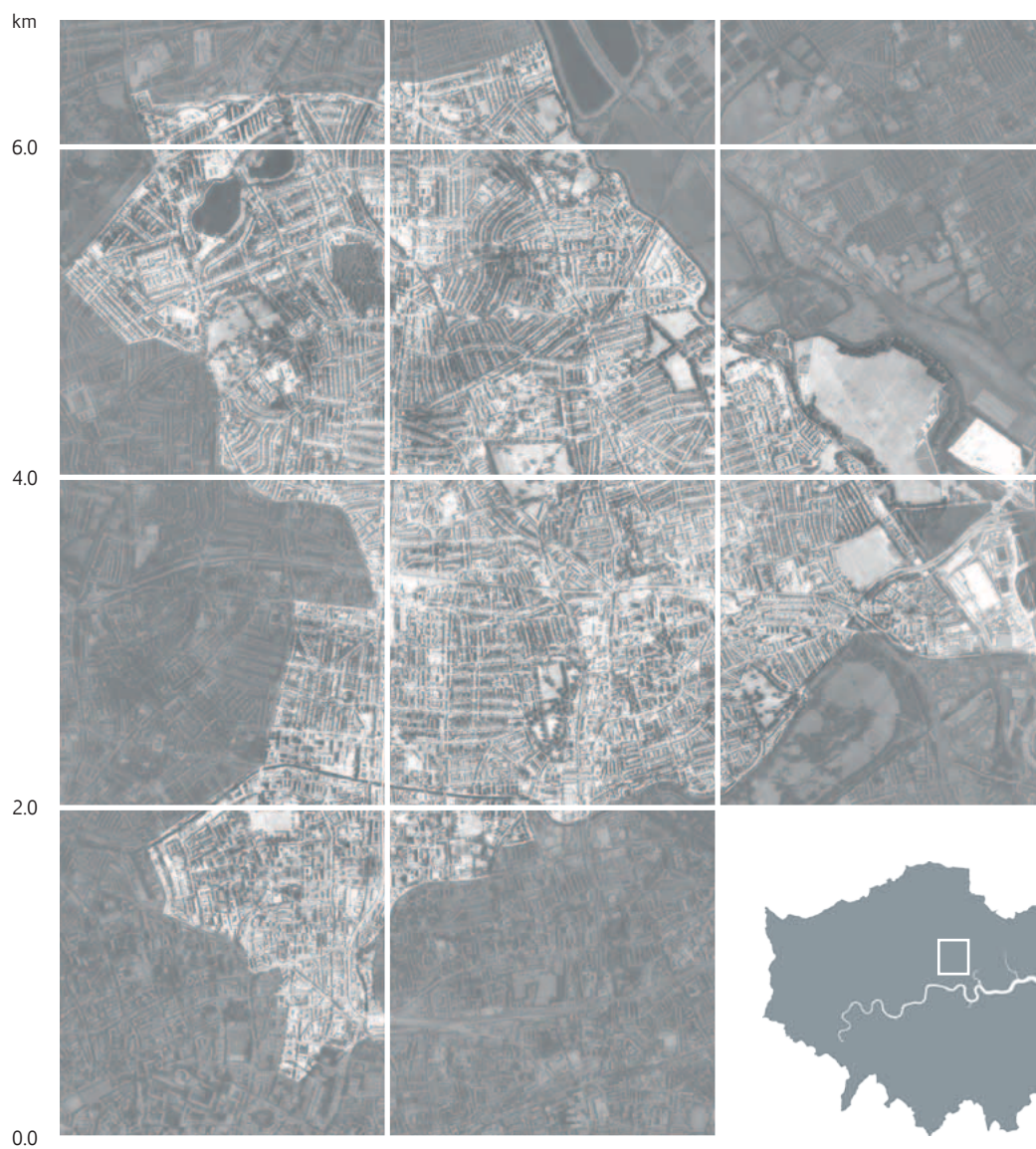
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LOCAL CITY/ A studio exploration of Hackney Central

Suzi Hall (Studio Co-Convenor)

What does it mean to be 'local' in a global city? Our 'Local City' studio exploration addressed this question from the base of a dense, inner city area in east London: Hackney Central. Hackney sustains established and emerging forms of economic and social vitality, while simultaneously surfacing contestations around urban transformations and rupture. Hackney's local worlds exemplify the convergence of working-class histories, urban multicultures and gentrification. It is portrayed both through processes of protest, including the August 2011 riots, and strategies for cohesion such as the "I love Hackney" campaign. Its local politics are actively shaped by prominent personalities, established community groups, charities and NGOs, as well as the local borough council.

With the economic crisis of 2008, coupled with the ideological advance of 'The Big Society' and its legal promulgation in 'The Localism Act' as introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, new questions emerge: How is 'local' urban life understood?; What are the elements of local power?; How are local initiatives resourced?; What are the boundaries and connections of local space? In their studio explorations over two terms, students engaged with these larger political concerns, while paying close attention to the lived realities within Hackney Central.

In Phase 1 of the studio, our students were encouraged to actively engage with the full political, social and spatial dimensions of the site: from policy documents and archival material, to interviews, observations and spatial mappings. Students worked in interdisciplinary groups and identified an issue that resonated both with the project brief and their own intellectual and creative interests. In a detective-like *modus operandi* contextual leads were followed and critical links were drawn. In Phase 2 students focused on varied forms of intervention, such as design policy directives, participation protocols and modes of urban governance, all of which have spatial translations. Strategies for intervention integrated spatial and procedural dimensions over short to medium time frames.

Spatial strategies explored such questions as:

What leads? What generates? How much is necessary in the first instance? What contributes to the site as a whole? Which parts might be most important or productive to focus on?

Procedural and programmatic strategies explored issues including:

Who is this intervention for? Which actors or institutions need to be involved and who should lead? What are the uses of policy? What are the possible funding sources and mechanisms?

This studio publication represents the work of seven groups that explore and expand our understanding of what it means to be an urban 'local'. The diversity and relevance of issues include: redefining physical and perceptual centers of urban neighbourhoods; expanding the cultural economy of high streets; developing alternative models of social housing estate renewal; producing sites for productive protest; expanding school curricula beyond the school gates; imagining alternative modes of public transpiration; and assembling new structures of power between citizens and authorities.

LOCAL CITY

The sense of arriving in a place lies at the core of the Hackney Heart project. The act of arrival as one of destination versus transit is explored in this project through conceptualising 'font door' versus 'back yard' space. The project articulates both a symbolic and programmatic approach to building a heart in Hackney, and pursues the fiscal, social and cultural aspects of arrival through the spatial language of legibility and flexibility.

This project focuses on the 'slowing down' of the urban high street's pulse rate, as affected by combined pressures of the economic crisis and an increase in on line shopping. It explores what approaches are required to revitalise urban high streets, turning to the spatial and cultural prospects on the street, as well as new structures to mediate the interests of local government, civic groups and street proprietors.

The potential for 'local politics' to engage with tenants and residents of social housing estates is the central focus of this project. By actively communicating with local residents, this group identified the potential of residual open space within the Pembury Estate as providing a means not only to redefine the space, but to activate it through a variety of gardening projects ultimately coordinated by residents and relevant civic groups.

What shapes public controversy, and how can protest and voicing be productively sustained in urban spaces? Starting with the representation of the riots in Hackney, and reflecting on the oppositional perspectives between youth in Hackney and 'authoritative' accounts of the riots, this project seeks to find and make space for agonism in the public sphere. Specifically, it explores curatorial opportunities for young people to lay claim to public space, and to make visible their views and perspectives.

This group tests the idea that learning is necessarily a 'widespread' process that occurs within and beyond the boundaries of any one school. By focusing in on the restructuring of education in Hackney, largely from state to independently managed academy schools, the group explores measures of successful learning beyond more narrow definitions offered by school Ofsted reports. The project develops a curriculum that takes learners on a journey from school to the urban locale beyond, thereby expanding engagement with the vitality of the city.

How does the idea of a 'whole journey environment' translate in Hackney, and how can a wider array of individuals be involved moving through and accessing the city? This project develops a 'Fourth-Generation Bikeshare' public cycling system by adapting the current public bike share scheme, London Cycle Hire. While the LCH has a disproportionate rate of use by higher income, educated, professional males, this project explores economic, cultural and spatial opportunities to adapt the LCH scheme to allow for its wider reach and more equitable use.

Would a more inclusive development process lead to a more 'democratic' appropriation of city space? This question guides the re-imagination of a portion of the Regent's Canal in Hackney. The canal is both a metropolitan extent of infrastructure and a consecutive series of particular places that have attracted fragmented development responses along its diverse edges. This project seeks to establish a cohesive canal agency to envisage, engage and enact the activation of the canal and its edges in ways that include diverse user groups and that mitigate private interests over public good.

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