

RESOURCEFUL 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 2013-14, the studio focused on Elephant & Castle as a context for exploring the potential of the 'resourceful city'. These explorations ranged from large-scale renewal and redevelopment strategies associated with the major transit interchange, the shopping centre, and the clearance of the Heygate Estate, to less visible patterns of interdependency and exchange in the network of local streets and spaces that radiates from this urban centre. These projects put into question the conventional language of urban analysis and intervention: critically examining concepts of regeneration, consultation, density, diversity, gentrification and centrality. They also sought to go beyond orthodox conceptions of urban value - too often defined in narrow terms of property and profit - to highlight the assets, the potential and the everyday resourcefulness of city environments that support different uses, different populations and many different meanings. The studio group worked in interdisciplinary teams to define and research their site contexts, to develop critical 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.

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CITY|DESIGN STUDIO

RESOURCEFUL CITY | A STUDIO EXPLORATION FROM THE ELEPHANT & CASTLE TO ST. GEORGE'S CIRCUS

Our studio exploration this year was based between the Elephant & Castle and St. George's Circus, two historic pinpoints on the map of south London. Within this historic stretch are a host of territories and interests, including a recently vacated and demolished, large-scale social housing estate called the Heygate Estate, the London College of Communication and London South Bank University, and the Elephant & Castle transport intersection. A number of pieces of land in the area are subject to private redevelopment, including the Heygate Estate and the Elephant & Castle Shopping centre. Urban renewal within this historic stretch takes on multiple forms and values, all of which are defined by the current economic crisis and a new political momentum for regeneration. It is an area in which the large-scale displacement of people has been further amplified by the soaring land values in London together with the dismantling of inner city social housing stock.

Only a ten-minute bus ride to the prestigious city to its north, this highly strategic area hosts varied and competing interests. Through the complexities of the site, students were to focus on understanding the area's resources including its people, practices and institutions. The focus in the first term was an analysis of the area drawing on relevant data and documents, and engaging with a range of different methods. These included London and local demographics, tracing local voices from oral histories and everyday practices, visualisations of the urban, and engagement with planning and policy frameworks. Students established their own conceptual frameworks for 'the resourceful city' in relation to the site, and the momentum of time and place.

In the second term of studio, students focused on selected issues and respective sites from which to develop their strategies for intervention. Strategies for intervention included integrated spatial and procedural dimensions over short to medium time frames. Questions explored included: 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? In developing their procedural or programmatic strategy, issues included: 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 of 'Resourceful City' represents the work of five groups and expands our understanding of what it means to be resourceful in a period of economic austerity. The diversity and relevance of issues include: redefining the terms of agreement between local authorities and private developers; exploring the social and economic dimensions of density; imagining the cultural resources required to enhance the role of the high street; challenging the idea of an urban centre; and focusing on education and the capacity of public institutions as a major source of renewal.



NEGOTIATING REGENERATION

Historic processes of urban regeneration in the Elephant & Castle area have relied on rupture and the ongoing displacements of layers of social life. This project explores a more considered approach to large scale urban renewal, and specifically focuses on the nature of partnership agreements between local authorities and private developers. It seeks to define a genuine process of participation in which a wide range of stakeholders are given greater voice in the process of urban renewal.

RELATIONAL GRAIN

Relational grain refers to a more expansive approach to understanding and designing for urban density. It begins with the notion that density as a conventional planning measure is an inadequate description of complexity. The project explores how to capture social and economic measures of density as process and not simply as form. Through a detailed analysis of an existing area in which there is a diversity of tenure, form, management practices and activities, the project proposes a new articulation of density to serve urban regeneration projects.

URBAN ECOLOGY OF THE HIGH STREET

Drawing on the language of urban ecology as advanced by the Chicago School, this project explores the high street as an ecosystem, exploring the residential and cultural landscape of the street and its hinterland. Working from the core understanding that residential density in the Walworth area is likely to double over the next decade, the project proposes dynamic forms of adaptation.

A CASTLE FOR THE ELEPHANT

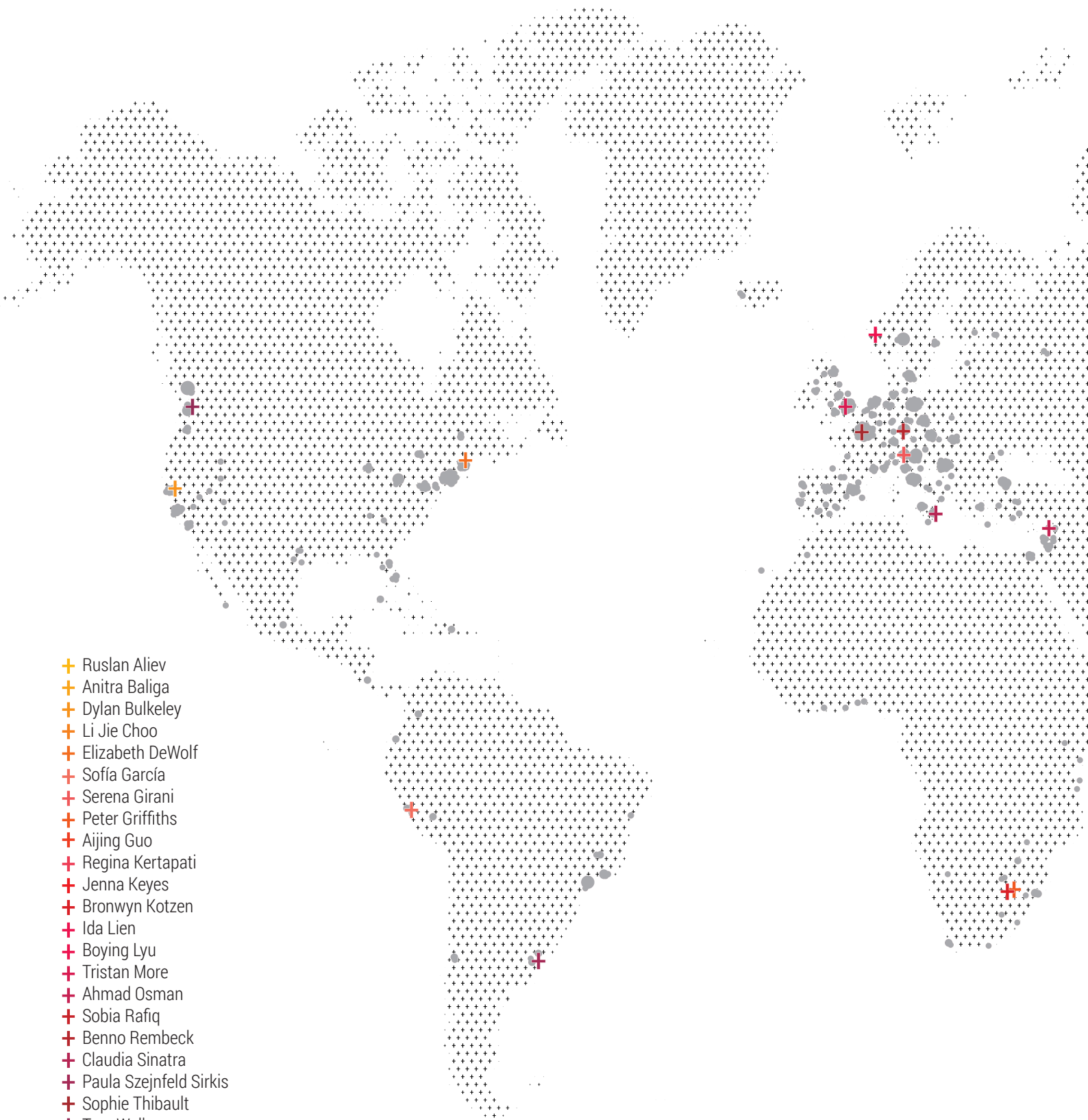
There is a high density of intuitional investment that currently exists in the Elephant & Castle surrounds, and more particularly a significant number of important education institutions. This project explores how the resources of both education and institutional capacity could be key to the process of urban regeneration. A 'castle for the elephant' is therefore both an approach to harnessing public resources in renewal processes, as well as a proposal to create a spatial symbol of learning at the core of the redevelopment plans.

AN OPEN SYSTEM

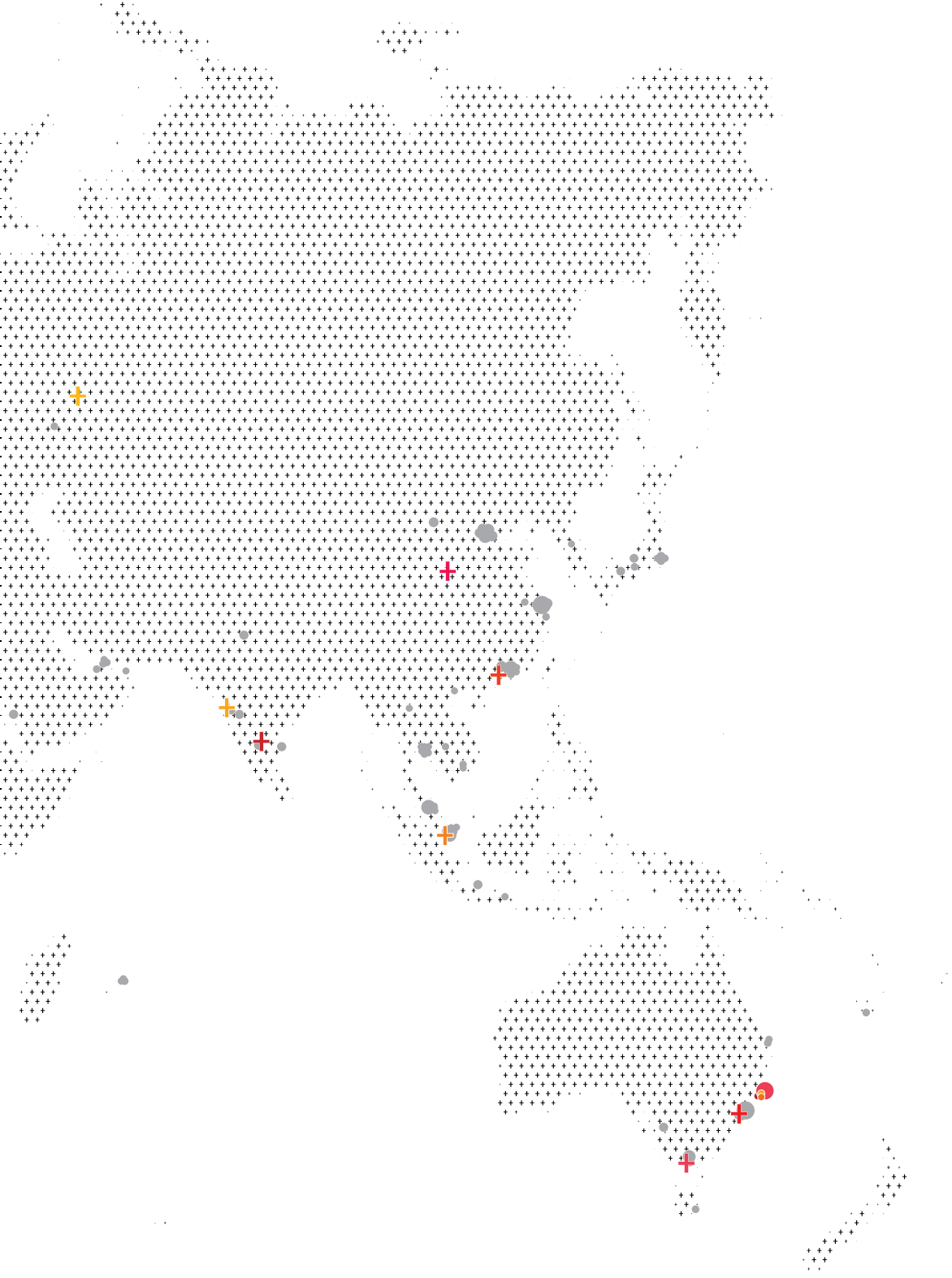
This project engaged with the question of 'What is an urban centre?' Through an exploration of the urban systems of transport and location of public facilities leading out from the Elephant towards the river, the group revealed that the idea of a singular 'centre' is more productively understood as a series of 'ripples' or layers in which there are logics of investment that can and should be worked with, to effectively distribute additional resources across the area.

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