

# The place to just be

LSE is being pedestrianised. Houghton Street, slowly, slowly, is being paved, and even when it is not being paved, it is being dug up, so the effect of barring it to anything but people on foot is much the same. But turning roads into plazas and piazzas is only part of a major and hitherto undisclosed plan. As befits an institution which is deeply concerned about globalisation, and sensitive to all the benefits, and all the damage, it may entail, LSE is constantly learning from the experiences, good and bad, of societies outside the United Kingdom. One of the most imaginative and innovative changes in contemporary living is taking place in Italy with the slow cities movement, and LSE is now pursuing its own slow campus programme with the London Organisation for Renewable Innovative Scenarios (LORIS).

Slow cities are an attempt to enable people to savour the moment, to pay attention and not to rush past every experience, ticking off the list of life at such a speed that days, weeks, months, years, are over almost before they've begun. The movement began with slow food, a campaign to recover the pleasure of eating from the mere utility of nutrition. It is appropriate therefore that part of LSE's slow campus programme is concentrated on food, and particularly on lunch. The various eating places in LSE are at the moment crowded, hurried, and frenetic. As part of a rolling, or at least ambling, programme of slowness, three new bistros, two restaurants, and four cafés are being created by changing the use of selected committee, seminar and lecture rooms. Continued global warming will enable palm trees to be added to the shrubs and primroses on the rooftop dining areas. At the same time no teaching will, after the end of the current academic year, take place between 12 noon and 2 in the afternoon and lectures, which currently begin at five past and end at five to the hour, will begin at ten past and end at ten to. Fast food is to be replaced by slow food, or rather, leisurely food.

In moving towards a slow campus, LSE is part of the wider London movement to make the city a more leisured and pleasant place. The congestion charges introduced by the Mayor are intended to create, on a broader scale, a calmer, more relaxed capital. Some opponents of the charges imagine that by replacing horseless carriages, which incur the charge, with horsed carriages (or simply carriageless horses), which don't, they are frustrating the Mayor's plans. But of course they are assisting those plans, and it may well be that the Mayor has more to his plans than just deterring cars. The unobtrusive installation of hitching posts and mounting blocks around Trafalgar Square may be a clue to the hidden equine agenda.

There are other signs of the way LSE is going. Users of computers on the School's net may have noticed that the old pre-slow messages such as 'You have performed an illegal action. This programme will now be terminated' or 'Wait while Outlook exits' have been replaced by 'Hi there. That wasn't very nice now was it,' and 'I'm so sorry but would you mind just having a cup of coffee while we get rid of this problem?' And although they have not yet been switched on, the mobile phone jamming masts are now installed on top of the main buildings. The software for an enforced 24-hour delay on the transmission and receipt of all emails is already being put in place.

The old motto 'LSE, the place to be' is slowly revealing its full meaning. Not 'the place to rush' or 'the place to engage in lots of energetic activity', 'the place to be forever doing' but just the place to exist, to savour life, simply to be. The chiming clocks and the ravens have already been ordered, and will be positioned at key points on the roofs around the campus.

If you haven't finished this article yet, or can't make up your mind whether it's too good to be true, don't worry. There's no hurry. It's six months till the next issue. Take your time. ■

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hey... slow  
down... take  
it easy

