

MAKING BRENT

Words by Marianna Janowicz

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Nestled in the shadow of Wembley stadium's iconic arch is SAMOVAR SPACE:

a lively, colourful place
made for – and by – the
young people of Brent.

On the backdrop of the stadium and within the wider Wembley redevelopment site it appears as a small space. But it is a **prominent** one, where amid dramatic urban transformations, the young people of Brent have had a say in the future of their borough and the design of their local area.

In 2019, the London School of Economics was commissioned by Brent London Borough of Culture in collaboration with developer Quintain, to work with **young people** from the Blueprint Collective and Brent Youth Parliament.

We're living
under the shadow
of the arch!!



'Seen & Heard' engaged young people in city-making, inviting youths from the borough to share what they wanted a redeveloped Brent to look like.

It set itself apart from other ways of involving the public in urban processes where it is common for children and young people to be **overlooked**.

After the programme finished, LSE and Quintain continued working together and created the 'Apprenticeship in City Design' at LSE Cities, a longer project with five locals between the ages of 16 and 24 who were **hired to design** a new public space located at the end of Olympic Way, just in front of Wembley Stadium.

Through discussions and site visits, the apprentices were engaged to consider the **future** of their borough and of this specific site in Wembley Park.

They all shared the experience of growing up in Brent and were involved in their local **communities** in various ways, from campaigning for free school meals to setting up a podcast with Vice Magazine exploring their **passions and fears**.

Despite their active participation, they often felt like they did not necessarily **belong** in the borough's public spaces.

Brent is a borough that borders many boroughs. It is located in North West London and stretches all the way from Barnet and Harrow in the north to Westminster in the south. Brent is home to almost 300,000 people, with large Asian, Indian, African, Caribbean, Irish and Eastern European diasporas living side by side.

MORE BRENT!! IN BRENT!!

Coining the phrase, the apprentices explored what 'more Brent in Brent' could mean in such a vast and diverse area. They tasked themselves with the ambitious aim of responding to this cultural abundance with a project that could hold and include all young people of the borough.



For them, the development of Wembley Park with its tall buildings and chain restaurants, seemed alien to the cultures and communities already there. Full of opportunity and tenuous all at once.

It felt like Wembley Park changed so much but without any involvement from local young people. This was their opportunity to contribute.

With the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown as a backdrop, the apprenticeship moved online and conversations took place virtually.

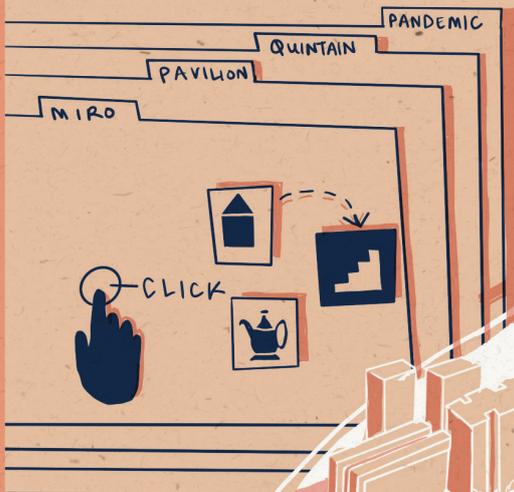
Strangely, the momentary pause and the remote way of working provided **fertile ground** for reflecting on the now eerily empty urban space. There was time to confront big and small questions about the borough the apprentices thought they knew so intimately.



Is Wembley the centre of Brent?

There were surprises and dilemmas;

How did I not know Brent is SO massive?



The jury was out on whether Wembley is the centre of Brent;

In people's hearts, I don't think this is the centre of Brent.

The apprentices were **mindful** of designing for all young people in the area, not just themselves, and they recognised the challenges and **limits of representation**. For them, the diverse and multicultural Brent needed a space where everyone could belong.

From melting pot to salad bowl: **Everyone can coexist**



They came up with 'Samovar Space.'

Where is
MY space
in this big
city?!



Some of ours?

No, Samovar

Samovar Space takes its name from a large, communal kettle popularly used to brew tea in Iran and across the region. Associated more with family events and community gatherings than cafes or restaurants, it epitomises the welcoming and non-commercial spirit that the apprentices wanted their proposal to embrace. Samovar Space was devised as a sociable, open-air place complimenting the neighbouring library, somewhere where people could spend a long time without having to spend any money.



Something to do without having to do anything.

The apprentices' themes of 'Collaborate,' 'Calm,' and 'Consume' emerged as three budding, loose ideas, devised to provide intention without strict definitions or rules for the project.

'Consume,' also known as the kitchen, was to become the most public space, with movable furniture allowing for multiple social setups.

'Calm' was the most private zone, where the desire for domesticity and intimacy led to the design of small, sheltered booths.

Finally, 'collaborate' became a raised platform, a place to see and be seen, a playful landscape.

A space to chill, linger and take over. Adaptability and providing shelter from the weather, as well as designing distinctive zones facilitating different atmospheres and various uses were important in delivering Samovar Space.

All this in an attempt to answer the question at the heart of the project:

Where is my space
in this big city?





Samovar Space as a built place does not do justice to the hours of meetings, ideas, conversations – how could it?

The thing with young people is you can't shove it down our throats



There were some **compromises** that had to be made, the biggest one being the fence erected around the site for security after the disruptions following the Euro football championship in 2021. But despite compromises and design ideas lost in translation, the **apprentices recognised how far they have come**. They had space to voice their ideas, even the slightly far-fetched ones, like a communal kitchen. They had a stake in the process and were paid at standard researcher rate, which provided **clear boundaries and balance** to the relationship with the developers. They have navigated the choppy waters of engagement in city-making which **too often turns tokenistic**. In the end, one of the most important aims of the project has been fulfilled. The process was full of learning but also **unlearning**. Wembley Park might be alien, new and full of CCTV but despite that, or maybe precisely because of that it delivers a **safe, non-territorialised area of Brent**.

The traditional understanding of an architectural object is not capable of measuring the impact beyond the built form.



I feel like I can spend some **TIME** here...



Here, a space for young people was carved out of land which is subject to much larger forces. This is **only the beginning** of the story, for spaces may be designed by architects and apprentices but they are **made by people**.

This text has been written by Marianna Janowicz and the illustrations are by Sabba Khan. The work has been commissioned by Julia King at LSE who led the project with young people. The words in this text are based on multiple conversations with the group of apprentices involved in the design of Samovar Space.

Whilst Samovar Space is a meantime space the process of working with young people is being carried forward to four other permanent spaces at Wembley Park by Quintain. Samovar Space itself will also live on in the way it informs the future design of the spaces when its current location is developed as part of the consented Wembley Park masterplan.