INTENSIFIED OPERATION OF URBAN ENVIRONMENT RENEWAL BY ENHANCED MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION
LOCAL POTENTIAL

INTENSIFIED OPERATION OF URBAN ENVIRONMENT RENEWAL BY ENHANCED MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

MSC GRADUATION STUDIO:
DESIGN AS POLITICS

MENTORS:
WOUTER VANSTIPHOUT
LEO VAN DEN BURG

AUTHOR:
MIKAS KAUZONAS / 4254880
M.KAUZONAS@GMAIL.COM

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro / Motivation</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context Analysis</td>
<td>6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Definition</td>
<td>16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Research</td>
<td>22.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Methodology</td>
<td>24.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Paper</td>
<td>27.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Research</td>
<td>33.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Relevance</td>
<td>37.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Conclusions</td>
<td>38.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Design: Spacebank</td>
<td>40.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Design: Dalston</td>
<td>62.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions / Reflection</td>
<td>76.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>78.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

MIKAS KAUSONAS / 4254880 / Msc Design as Politics /

INITIAL PROBLEM

Due to recent shift towards service economy, area of Hackney (originally industrial) in east London is now well known for the abundant numbers of empty properties and underused land. Meanwhile, right next to the vacant properties new developments are constantly popping up. Latter almost without exception follow generic design patterns filling the area with built mass that does not add value to the local identity, but is slowly transforming Hackney into what could be called a non-place. Moreover, the designs of additional developments often house gated communities of upper class individuals. This is diminishing even further an already weak sense of community in the area. The whole process is constantly being guided by the external developers who in fact have nothing to do with the area but the need to exploit it for development profit. Meanwhile locals who actually live in the area have less and less say in the process. Project permissions area being signed by the local government without consulting the inhabitants and without integrating the developments into clear long-term vision/masterplan for the area. Given the future predictions of London and its residential areas like Hackney becoming substantially denser in the future, one can imagine the poor state of urban environment quality if no solid changes are implemented in the planning process.

RESEARCH. DALSTON

I knew that in order to understand the problem specifics in more depth I had to zoom into a smaller area. Due to more intense economic activity and high numbers of vacant property a commercial center called Dalston Central was chosen for a case study. I started mapping the vacant properties and underused elements in the urban environment; looking for reasons they became empty in the first place. Accordingly I looked into current planning applications for new developments, submitted by external investors. I noticed quite soon that there is a big gap between interventions of different scale and function. Generally, projects are being implemented in a very isolated manner, when nothing outside the site boundary is taken into account. That becomes especially visible when looking into residential developments. After a chat with employees of the Hackney council on a site visit, I realized that even though there is an official development framework for the Dalston area, it is being constantly "overlooked" when approving an external investment. Well established free-market trends and rules brought the urban development to a state where local officials are forced to agree with aspirations of the investors because that seems to be the only way to get any solid development happening at all. Additionally it seems like the only rapid solution to dealing with national problems like lack of housing and others. Meanwhile, all the smaller interventions that are actually related to sustaining local identity and community seem to be left in the background. Most importantly they are treated like interventions which are completely unrelated to large housing developments right next to them. In the case of Dalston Central the local community market is treated separately from the newly designed commercial/retail centre while a community garden/park seems to be unrelated to the new housing block just on the other side of the road. Judging even from the writings on the local urban development blog (curated by the residents) It seems obvious that that "two sides" could easily benefit from each other and make their interventions work more efficiently if just there was a more decent physical/political connection between them. Current division of the people involved in the process is what prevents the sustainable urban development from happening. Right now all the projects just try to bypass the problems and disagreements rather than look for shared interests between the parties. Of course we could just blame the greedy developers, ignorant designers and corrupt council officials, but the core problem is not them on their own, it is lack of communication between all of the groups involved at the same time.

APPROACH: to develop an altered planning system and apply it in a specific site (as a design task)

STRATEGIC DESIGN QUESTION: Under what conditions the development of the same area of Dalston could become a more democratic process, including more parties and ensuring more efficient use of existing urban elements?
PARALLEL SYSTEM: SPACE BANK

Performed research made it clear to me that the solution does not just lie in better urban design proposals. There have to be changes made in the institutional and organizational level of planning processes. Therefore a decision has been made in the project process to introduce a new institution called SPACE BANK. It works in parallel to Hackney Council and takes over all land/property use and development related matters. The core concept is that all the potential parties have to use the same online system in order to proceed with any possible changes in the urban environment and the alterations made/proposed are visible also to all the parties – making the system more transparent. System ensures a more democratic planning process which includes residents as well as external investors when making decisions about local environment. The main task for the employees of the SpaceBank is to find the potential mutual benefits in projects and ensure: level of freedom for investors, efficient use of existing local assets (enhancing) and that only sustainable and sensible interventions happen within Hackney.

URBAN DESIGN METHODOLOGY

In parallel to the political and economic aspects of the new system I was also developing urban design/planning methodology under which SpaceBank would guide the system users that are engaging an intervention. As a long term vision on Urban Scale (Borough of Hackney) SpaceBank engages a Transit-Oriented development. First, the system approaches and tries to enhance the commercial-cores/town-centres. By improving their role as transit nodes for commuting and increasing the pedestrian/cyclist traffic inside the cores the system increases general activity within them. Hence, more commercial, leisure and other opportunities for residents and people visiting. The funds generated from the projects in the cores are then used to enhance the elements in the residential areas between the cores (parks, vacant structures, etc.). Finally routes that connect the cores and the elements are identified and enhanced; routes that are alternative to main car-roads and would be used for pedestrian/cyclist traffic.

LOCAL SCALE DESIGN WITHIN THE SYSTEM

As a design task on the local level I have decided to alter current development proposals in one of the cores - DalstonCentral and simulate the co-operative processes necessary between different parties to produce an alternative design for the area. I have concentrated on one urban core block of the area, trying to find specific problems in the built environment as well as potential connections between the existing developers and other users/residents. In the process I have identified various generic design methods/tools that enhance local environment in Dalston and could in fact also be used in other commercial cores of Hackney to enhance those areas in a similar manner. (e.g. enhancing the frontages of the historic commercial streets inside the block).

These tools would be used for initial guidance of the potential users but would not be mandatory. Of course, each area has its own site specifics and for that the system would set site rules which would be implemented in the planning application in the system. In order to submit a planning application, the developer would have to meet certain regulations (of that specific site) produced after analyzing existing environment and consulting the local knowledge (e.g. ratio of greenery to built mass on site). This way the investor is given freedom to pursue his aspirations, meantime ensuring that his interventions do not have undesirable effects to the environment. After the submission the co-operation would start between other parties and the developer to make the most of his investment as well as enhance the surroundings of the local people.

Finally, forethoughts are given about the potential design solutions on architectural level. The system stresses out the importance of structural flexibility to allow adjustments according to the future needs; preventing constant appearance of monumental monofunctional designs of latter day.
INTRODUCTION:

HACKNEY / Dalston
- observations
- research
- analysis
Introduction

Today the development of every city in the world is a mechanism driven by private money and various stakeholders. Urban and architectural projects became objects of vast speculation as well as reasons for socially unjust and generally unsustainable development of our cities.

Even with tight regulatory system, London is not an exception. It’s urban fabric is being exploited by the corporate schemes, deteriorating quality of living environment. It is gradually being filled with repetitive urban/architectural patterns facilitating urban growth and users with big pockets. Meanwhile the inhabitants have less and less say to influence the process. Its constantly getting harder to find an affordable home or an actual green space which would be more than just a residue part of a commercial shopping development.

However, despite the competitive market and constant need for space, London is still full of empty and underused properties. Buildings and parcels of land, which could be used to add essential functions to local communities, are being left to rot due to outdated planning policies, inactive landowners and general lack of incentives.

Aim of the thesis is to analyze one of the most densely inhabited borough of Hackney (London) in more depth and look for ways to shift the planning process towards the local community itself; using the existing assets in the area as catalysts which would spark a more versatile design approach and include the locals in the process.

Key words – urban expansion; increasing density; unbalanced urban developments; vacant buildings; adaptive re-use; temporary architecture; collective design; local communities; alternative urbanism; shared ownership;

Motivation for the study

There are various reasons for choosing this topic. Firstly, i grew up in a post-socialist environment in Vilnius, Lithuania. I was constantly surrounded by a huge stock of underused industrial structures even in the core of my hometown and had nothing but admiration for the individuals who took the courage to use the spaces in unconventional ways; integrating skate-parks in previous factory buildings or even using laboratory building for residential purposes.

After starting my studies i started analysing urban processes in more depth and from time to time was reminded about the radical notion saying that maybe there is no further need to build new architecture. Maybe we need to rethink what we already have and look at it from other angles ? I started strongly believing in this concept and that it could someday become a more conventional method of planning urban space; designing more efficiently and most importantly without a bag of money. Following academic projects of mine all tried to follow these principles of using existing assets at least as a base.

After my studies i resided in Hackney, London for two years and got familiarized with the surrounding area, its people and the processes happening in the borough. Discussed issues were very evident there due to irrational top-down redevelopment plans and very mixed local society resulting in degrading sense of community (together with the actual urban fabric).

It seemed like a perfect case study to analyze further and develop an alternative future model dealing more efficiently with areas inevitable densification. What is even more motivating is that the area is one of the most socially problematic areas in London, as well as one of the most deprived in the whole of United Kingdom. Issues that could be solved with the alternative design go way beyond the actual empty buildings themselves.
Figure 1: "Proposals for the construction of a 56-metre tower on Bethnal Green Road has been criticised by a community group which claims it fails to meet the mixed housing needs of the Tower Hamlets population." Source: eastlondonlines.co.uk

Figure 2: Monumental Soviet Sports-Hall in Vilnius, now completely abandoned; source: http://fotokudra.lt/
Figure 3: “£100m plans to transform central Hackney into an “international shopping hub”, Source: eastlondonlines.co.uk

Figure 4 Dormant Queen Elizabeth Children’s Hospital (Hackney Road, London); source: http://derelictlondon.com
London Borough of Hackney is an area located in the inner north-east part of the metropolis. It’s southwestern boundary is touching the financial city of London and is home to cultural and financial businesses as well as very wide variety of constant activity while areas towards the north of the area are much more residential.

The area was changed a lot by the industrial period. Especially the eastern part of the borough, which was filled with industrial structures where most of Hackney’s population were employed. After the war the area was highly affected by the extensive national redevelopment schemes influenced by the modern movement and the ideas of very dense living. The latter developments were eventually used to house the vast immigrant population who came to England in the post-war period.

**Figure 5:** Position of Hackney in London; Source: author’s reproduction

**RACIAL DIVERSITY**

Current population estimate for Hackney is 246,300. The profile of Hackney is one of the most diverse in the city, with sizable White British (36.2%) and Black African communities (11.4%) but also a large and increasing group of residents from mixed ethnic backgrounds, emphasizing the hyper-diversity of the borough. Although at 36.2% the White British population remains the single largest ethnic group in Hackney, this group has decreased significantly as a proportion of the borough from 44.1% in 2001 especially in the context of 20% growth. Out of the broader ethnic groups, the White group (which includes White British, White Other, Irish and Gypsy and Irish Traveler communities) is the largest at 59.4% with 60% growth in the White Other group. The second largest
broad ethnic group is Black/Black British at 23.1% followed by Asian/Asian British at 10.5%, Mixed Ethnic Groups at 6.4% and Other Ethnic Groups at 5.3%, a figure that represents a 222% increase from 2001. (2011, Hackney.gov.uk) Very mixed racial profile resulted in formation of ghettos and social groups who tend to keep their activities inside their group and not act for the gain of the community as a whole.

Hackney is well known for being one of the most diverse areas in the country. It is a place where you can walk past Turkish supermarkets, Jamaican take-aways, fish and chip shops or Nigerian restaurants on one road. It is an area where mosques, synagogues and churches lie within five minutes of each other. Living in Hackney means having diversity at your fingertips. And living in Hackney for a long time can mean that we take these things for granted.

Hackney Gazette, 2008

The whole area acted as a cultural centre for London; bringing various events, hotspots or even rock-bands to life. Even though at the end of 20th century the whole of Hackney was known for this - now only the southern part, connected to the city of London is still being very active. Due to changes in economy and planning laws it became more and more difficult to sustain those activities in the northern areas of Hackney.

In the last few decades, Hackney’s economy has shifted from traditional manufacturing and warehousing firms operating in employment areas towards service industries, in particular creative, arts, tourism and leisure, focused in Shoreditch and around Hackney’s town centres.

Hackney Council, 2012

The activities and urban intervention projects that are actually happening are not much related to the local people and their activities. In fact urban space that could potentially be used to house locals and their activities is getting more and more limited. Which is odd as the numbers of vacant properties in the area are actually record high.
Previously mentioned modernist housing developments and the need to house constantly growing population of the borough, brought the area to the state in which more than half of the residential units were located in the monumental and often brutal housing estates. Because of constantly changing political groups that were responsible for those developments, the maintainence of them became very weak.

Concentrated communities of various nationalities were concerned about the social well being of their community, however not so much about the general “well-being” of the area and its environment. Deprivation levels were constantly rising in the Hackney eventually making it one of the most deprived areas in the whole of UK. Now there are quite a few “ghetto” formations as well. This issue was intensified by the fact that most recent developments in the area were actually oriented towards middle class group of people who can actually afford purchasing a new apartment. Issues related to enhancing the quality of existing developments were secondary as they don’t bring any visible profit anytime soon.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
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<th>London</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Count</td>
<td>101,690</td>
<td>3,266,173</td>
<td>22,063,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household is Not Deprived in Any Dimension</td>
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<td>1,287,458</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Count</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household is Deprived in 2 Dimensions</td>
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<td>626,841</td>
<td>4,223,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household is Deprived in 3 Dimensions</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>9,308</td>
<td>204,345</td>
<td>1,133,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household is Deprived in 4 Dimensions</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>29,567</td>
<td>115,935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 (top): household deprivation in Hackney; source: londonspovertyprofile.org.uk (visited 2014.01.09).

Figure 8(right): Holy Estate, Because of the footprint of the buildings the estate earned the nickname ‘The Snake.; source: http://lovelondoncouncilhousing.blogspot.nl/ (visited 2014.01.09).
Figure 9 (right): Indices of deprivation in Relation to post-war housing estates; source: author’s reproduction.
Recent financial situation brought the whole Britain to a housing crisis. Banks wouldn’t lend the money anymore, resulting in construction companies ceasing to build additional housing as well as inhabitants not being able to afford to buy houses. Meanwhile the population was still increasing at staggering rates.

“Births in England between 2001 and 2011 totaled 6.9 million, a rise of 22 % on the same period a decade earlier, but only 1.6 million new homes were completed over the same period.” (Independent.co.uk, 2013)

“Britain is heading for a property shortage of more than a million homes by 2022 unless the current rate of housebuilding is dramatically increased, according to reports from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)” (Jrf.org.uk, 2013)

“It’ll take at least four to six months for the supply chain to respond. The construction industry is 50 percent of what it was. The overseas workers have all gone home.” (uk.reuters.com, 2013)

“...have increased by almost twiceinflation since 2001; 4.5 million people are on the waiting list for social housing, the average age of a first time buyer now 37...”(telegraph.co.uk, 2013)

The next step for the local governments was to deal with the so needed additional housing units all over England (and especially in London) quickly and efficiently. In the case of Hackney the proposals usually included major housing schemes on the land of the demolished post-war estates. However, the problem is that those schemes were actually proposing buildings with market properties which were far from affordable, thanks to the private developers who were dealing with the projects(figure 10). Of course, according to the official development plans the properties had to include affordable (social) housing units, but in reality the ratio between the two was the opposite of what it was supposed to be.

Moreover, due to critical circumstances, the housing scheme proposals were often huge high-rise proposals, which in a way was natural, given that there is such high demand for housing. However, the infrastructure along with those developments was not planned rationally or even aesthetically pleasing. Proposals usually included a structure for a small shopping mall and a small residue square with few greenery elements. Basically, the solution to the huge problem is being solved with temporary solutions, at the expense of general urban quality of the environment, further increasing previously mentioned problems (social segregation, lack of communal identity, etc.). Most of the new market oriented developments actually are designed to house a new gated community inside of an already segregated environment, further diminishing any possibility of an act towards communal gain.

Figure 10(top): Colville Social Estate / Hackney; source: http://www.whatarchitecture.com/project.php?id=122 (visited 2014.01.06).
Moreover, even when talking about the actual architectural design of the proposals, they are more than insensible; repeating very similar design patterns regardless of the place or the context (Figure 13). Sense of continuity and connections between the essential urban elements like parks and public squares are being slowly weakened. Additionally, the potential public gathering spots are also losing importance due to the new developments. Sadly, those are “the only places where people truly meet as equals and develop a sense of belonging and public identity” (Oktay, 2012).

Nonetheless, overall budget cuts in the system should be taken into account, when discussing residential areas like Hackney, which are not on primary investment list. That was one of the main reasons why such insensible proposals are even discussed. Often, greedy private developers were the only way to start any sort of development.

“This Budget has been set in the context of the deepest spending cuts to local government since the Second World War. Over £80m has been cut from the Council’s Budget over the last three years, with the Coalition Government’s cuts falling hardest on the most deprived areas in the country.”

welovestokenewington.org / 2013
Figure 13 (left): Conversion of the street elements into a repetitive design pattern all along the street // authors photos / edit Table 3 (right): ‘Revenue Spending Power’ (millions) hackney council / 2012 //
All of TfL’s public land will be privatised by enclosure within the sites, with no open or green space accessible there to the public. Dalston is one of the most densely populated wards, and one of the most deficient in green space, in London.

Of 106 ‘units’ to be built on the two sites there will only be 9 flats for social rent. There are some 9,000 overcrowded families with children living in Hackney.

The developers are trying to maximise their returns by overscale buildings - at the permanent expense of our local environment. The buildings exceed the heights prescribed by the government approved Dalston Area Action Plan. The new blocks will loom over the surrounding buildings.

TfL will be providing no play space for children living in the new development or locally.

Hackney has contributed over £1 million to strengthen the tunnels to support taller buildings. Hackney and TfL have both ignored OPEN’s Freedom of Information requests for details of their deal.

http://opendalston.blogspot.co.uk (2013); regarding proposals in Dalston area of Hackney

hackney is hoping to become London's most popular shopping location with the development of a 75,000 sq ft fashion outlet named the hackney fashion hub

archdaily.com
Over 700,000 homes in England are empty, and around 270,000 of those have been empty for over 6 months.

People on a waiting list for a dwelling in Hackney (2013.10.25) - 14,171

Last official number of empty dwellings in Hackney - 3,064
Introduction

Figure 14/15: Empty structures in Hackney. Left: 86a Dalston Lane, source: maps.google.com; Right: 16 ashwin street // Source: maps.google.com

Figure 16/17: (left) Half empty Kingsland Estate in Hackney; source: lovelondoncouncilhousing.blogspot.com; Its buildings are used mostly by local artists. (right) source: http://now-here-this.timeout.com/
Sadly, it was not just the dwellings or commercial structures which were standing empty. Other urban elements inbetween those structures were being ignored far too long as well. Underperforming parks, huge backsides of industrial buildings just to name the few. They all add up to huge parcel of the whole of Hackneys territory. Local officials and investors see them as problematic and assume that approaching them would be difficult and most importantly not profitable enough. That really shows short-term-oriented urban planning approach from all the parties involved and quite sad prospects for Hackney if the situation continues.
The Division of parties involved

Through good communication between parties (currently very limited)

DIRECT COMMUNICATION - JUST BETWEEN TWO PARTIES

investor / developer

local authority

acquire land

develop proposal

landowner

estate agent

social landlord

local commerce

corporate commerce

large family of 3+ kids

small young family

students working professionals

Figure 20 (top): Limited communication example in major schemes in Hackney. Figure 21 (bottom) Division of the to party groups resulting in limited communication and poor project integration.
London / Hackney

- National population growth
- Constant Immigration / Inner area population growth
- Budget cuts / Limited urban development financing
  - National Housing Crisis
  - Racially / Socially mixed population -> ghetto formation
    - Individualistic post-modern society
- Lack of local Identity / Diminishing sense of community
  - Market/Developer driven urban development
  - Repetitive architectural / urban design patterns
    - GENERIC CITY formation
- New proposals generate further social segregation
  - Lack of affordable housing
- High percentage of deteriorating post-war housing
- New developments preferred rather than restoration
  - Lack of public & green space
  - Underused valuable urban elements

- lack of communication between the parties involved

Continuous destruction of local identity and sense of community as well as the vitality of urban environment.
Figure 22 (top): showing communitys concern towards abandoned buildings being demolished in order to build a new housing block with units not meeting the needs of the local environment. Source: http://opendalston.blogspot.co.uk/; Figure 23 (bottom) showing the attitude of the locals; source: http://opendalston.blogspot.nl/ (2013)
Research

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION:

How to transform borough of Hackney into more independent and sustainable urban unit, by intensifying the use of its dormant local assets?

SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

How can the area benefit from its arrangement, connections and location in the city?
What is Hackney in the context of London and how can it benefit from its close proximity to the CITY? What are sociological and general predictions for the area? What is its position and guidelines in Regional and London plans?

What are the urban implications of the post-modern society and the free-market?
How did the borough evolve during the post-war period? What are the urban form/design implications of the current market based economy?

What urban elements does Hackney consist of and how do they work together?
What are the major typologies of existing built structures? How are different types of built structures spread out in the territory of Hackney? Are there specific patterns which could be taken into account when planning additional functions/structures? What are the main activity points in the area? What and where are the connections between the major elements? Which are the most important transit routes?

What are the typologies and locations of the dormant elements?
Where are the dormant structures and urban elements located? Is there an arrangement pattern? What are the main reasons for vacancy? What are the policies and law enforcements related to the issue? Which of them could be used to enhance the efficiency of the urban environment? How could they be improved?

What planning and design method alterations would be appropriate to solve the current problematics?
What methods could be used in order to redevelop underused commercial properties? residential units? green elements? What are the existing strategies? What implications could make the elements more adaptive to potential future changes? What are technological methods / issues for making more adaptive and inter-connected built structures?

What could be the incentives to integrate the community and enhance the communication between the parties involved in the urban development process?
What incentives could be used to make inhabitants more integrated in the local planning / redevelopment process? How could the existing dormant assets be used to strengthen the sense of community? How could the property ownership rights be modified in order to prevent selfish activities being practiced at the expense of communal good and the quality of local environment?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The base of the research is focused on general proven theories of dense urban form, compact and sustainable city development and critique of modern city planning. Main authors include Jane Jacobs (1961), Charles Jenks(1996) and Jahn Gehl(1987).

Additionally, works which analyse local people and their perception of the built environment are studied. How could the resident have more influence in the design process of his local environment and more importantly - start questioning it? This includes Kevin Lynch(1960), David Harvey(1973) as well as Henry Lefebvre(1968).

Moreover, some latter-day authors are analysed who are more concentrated on the idea of adapative reuse and temporary architecture as an alternative. This includes authors like Martina Baum(2012) and her idea of ‘City as a Loft’ as well as Philipp Oswalt(2013) and his book ‘Urban Catalyst: The power of temporary use’.
Lastly, various academic papers are analysed in order to extend the methodology framework and explore the potentials of existing urban elements.

**PROJECT AIM:** To develop an urban development strategy for the borough of Hackney, which would use dormant urban elements inside to stimulate a more responsive/adaptive environment as well as generate stronger local identity/community sense.

‘Good urbanism protects what is valued, enhances what may be underperforming, and then builds on this tabula plena (full slate) rather than a tabula rasa (erased slate).’ Additionally, it measures its success in terms of quality of life, not by the ‘3 P’s: power, profit, and prestige.’ (Ellin, 2013)

‘…cities need a mingling of old buildings to cultivate primary-diversity mixtures, as well as secondary diversity. In particular, they need old buildings to incubate new primary diversity.’

Jane Jacobs (1961)

Through their architecture, history and identity, locations are replete with meaning and have stability. In each city, they have a significance that influences the city’s character; they refer to the past and are anchored in the collective memory. They are locations that have a name, that are rooted in the city’s structure and thus enable people to identify with them.’ (Martina Baum, 2012)

Good urbanism preserves buildings, neighbourhoods, and natural landscapes that are valued; reclaims, rehabilitates, restores, or renovates what is underperforming; and then adds new elements—all informed by effective community involvement. (Ellin, 2013)

‘…However, the concepts with most potency still lie in the hands of the locals. To achieve notable urban prosperity with currently evident material assets one has to consult the ‘local knowledge’ (Geertz, 1983) or more precisely – encourage local inhabitants themselves to take action when developing the environment.’
Methodology

METHODOLOGY APPROACH

1. Literature Review.
Firstly, thorough Literature review will be done in order to familiarize better with existing theories and methods dealing with issues of post-modern urban developments and adaptive reuse of dormant urban elements. This method will be used throughout all the process of the project and evolving: starting with general planning issues on a larger city scale and gradually zooming in towards smaller elements in the territory of Hackney.

2. Statistical Analysis.
This method will give a better understanding of the actual situation of Hackney as an area in context of London, U.K., and other post-industrial cities in Europe. Numbers regarding population growth, economy, deprivation levels, greenery, transportation as well as many others will allow us to compare Hackney with other projects and implement certain concepts more expediently. Additionally, it will allow comparing different areas inside Hackney and see which ones are better or worse regarding specific aspects.

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<th>House Prices</th>
<th>Hackney</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>England</th>
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<tr>
<td>Detached</td>
<td>£535, 145</td>
<td>£587, 915</td>
<td>£256,879</td>
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<td>Semi Detached</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maisonette / Flat</td>
<td>£298,629</td>
<td>£299, 188</td>
<td>£153,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>£353, 875</td>
<td>£333, 394</td>
<td>£164,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5(top): Continuously rising House Prices in Hackney - a process, which could initiate additional incentives to look for alternative housing solutions, 2012, Source: hackney.gov.uk/

3. Juridical Analysis
National Urban development policies as well as ‘Local Development Framework’(Hackney Council) will be analysed in order to better understand how the legal process works inside the borough; how the laws could be used more efficiently ?; to what extend could they be improved/changed to shift the planning process towards a more sustainable and equal process.

4. Mapping
This method will be closely related to the Statistical Analysis. It will give a much clearer view of the numbers and facts. This will allow a more direct comparison of different areas in Hackney as well as areas relation to other cities and projects.
It will be used to map: racial groups and how they are spread, commercial activities and town centres in contrast to residential areas, green-natural elements and their use, different morphological typologies as well as many other factors which would allow determining problems, causes and possible solutions. It will further be used to make predictions towards future development of Hackney and compare it with the one with alternative designs in action.

This method will be one of the most crucial in the whole project as it’s the way to actually show were the vacant and underused properties are located in the area. That will help understand the reasons for vacancy, location patterns as well as potential further actions.
7. Zoom IN/OUT

Working on a large territory like Hackney could be hard and inefficient when trying to develop a strategy. To get a better understanding and to be able to handle the processes, a specific area of smaller scale will be chosen in order to analyse it in more depth and try to develop alternative development scenarios. At this scale even specific buildings will be taken into account to find general design methods which could be applied to other buildings in other locations. Existing master plan as well as all the current planning permissions and design proposals will be analysed in order to predict a vision for a local site. The impact and possible outcomes of the existing designs will then be compared to the aims and theories discussed in the thesis. Alternative plan and design methods will then be proposed accordingly.

7. Prototype / Testing

Designs of different urban elements and adaptively re-used buildings will then be put into local design proposal in order to see how they all work together. What are the effects created by igniting the elements and what are the future predictions for their use. How do the effects solve the problems discussed in analysis stage?

8. Extrapolation

After certain design approaches are established on a specific site in the borough, similar methodology will be applied to other areas in Hackney in order to develop an overall strategy for the region.
5. Case Studies

After using the latter methods, the area can be understood to much greater extent and thus compared to other similar areas and projects. Successful practices in other cities can then be translated and used to strengthen the design proposal. Cases will be studied from post-socialist cities in central and eastern Europe, where the numbers of brownfields and post-war industrial developments are quite substantial.

6. Site Visit

Another crucial empirical method of analysing the surroundings in more depth is visiting the chosen area. This would allow to get a better perception of the buildings and get the feeling when using the environment for one’s local/personal needs.
Local Potential

Power of dormant elements in contemporary urban environment

Mikas Kauzonas
4254880 _ m.kauzonas@gmail.com
Delft University of Technology, Department of Urbanism
6th Graduation Lab Urbanism Conference
2014 01 10

Abstract – The nature of urban environment has changed radically in the past century. We all became part of a huge global network of urban cores; all tied up by physical connections and more recently – virtual layers of the digital world. Urban design mechanism became much more complicated and at the same time harder to steer. Cities and their elements became objects for vast speculation, especially in the real-estate and land-development market. In the decade of 1997—2006 the price of housing in Spain had risen about 150% in nominal terms, equivalent to 100% growth in real terms. (Bank of Spain, 2011) Cities are quite often “sliced” by the developers who then exploit urban fabric in the ways not always rational or aesthetically pleasing. Towns are gradually filled with repetitive urban/architectural patterns facilitating urban growth and users with big pockets. Meanwhile, the availability of affordable housing together with identity in local environments is being gradually reduced. However despite the competitive market and constant need for space in the dense cities there is still always a considerable amount of vacant buildings and land which could potentially be re-used with a different function and maybe have an altered target group thus making a more diverse and poly-functional environment. The aim of this paper is to explore current urban development trends and develop a theoretical background for possible alternative urban design approach. Focus will be given to shifting the planning-decision making towards the community groups and individuals away from the purely top-down approach as well as using the existing assets in the urban environment more efficiently.

Key words – urban expansion; increasing density; unbalanced urban developments; vacant buildings; adaptive re-use; temporary architecture; collective design; local communities; alternative urbanism; shared ownership;

Introduction

It has been quite a while since we stopped believing in the ideals of modernism. Even today we have to deal with monumental planning issues that the period created. However the era that followed after the Second World War brought even deeper impact on our cities and radically changed the perception that society has towards their living environment. Powerful globalization trends brought us to a postmodern period which suggests an urban process driven by a global restructuring and permeated and balkanized by a series of interdictory networks; whose populations are socially and culturally heterogeneous, but politically and economically polarized; whose residents are educated and persuaded to the consumption of dreamscapes even as the poorest are consigned to ‘carceral’ cities; whose built environment, reflective of these processes, consists of edge cities, ‘privatopias,’ and the like; and whose natural environment is being erased to the point of unlivability. (Dear, 1998)

It is necessary to look at cities afresh and rethink priorities, requiring an understanding of the nature of urban trends, their paradoxes and contradictions if solutions for tomorrow’s world rather than yesterday’s are to be found. (Landry, 2008) It is clear that in order to sustain stable and rich environments in the future we have to look beyond modernist or post-modernist design principles. The aim of this paper is to firstly analyse current city development trends in more depth continuing with a more precise problem statement. Latter is followed by identification of elements and processes that have potential to improve the living conditions in our cities. Finally, certain existing theories and sample projects are considered in order to suggest an alternative model.

‘How can a city or a district acquire stability while at the same time remaining open to different usages, new models of living and to the future?’ (Martina Baum, 2012)
2 Current development trends

Due to technological progress in recent 50 years the world became a symbiotic system of cities; ‘each of them playing different roles within an overall hierarchy of economic, political or symbolic power.’(Dear, 1998) Additionally they became more important as urban units as now more than 50% of world’s population resides in cities.(W.H.O., 2013)

Nonetheless, regardless of the size of the city at some point they all start to follow similar rules of approaching new urban developments. They all have to facilitate the overall urbanization, constant addition of virtual layers (new technologies), free-market endeavours and often just irrational greed of plutocrats. In the context of urban design that means that ‘Cities tend to adopt generic models of success without taking into account the local characteristics and conditions that contributed to those successes. The result is a homogeneous pastiche of buildings … that prove to be remarkably similar the world over.’(Landry, 2008)

Information technology has shown place to be an impermanent and opaque entity rather than a fixed one and virtuality can sever our sense of anchoring. A diminished sense of locality, of shared space and identity has meant that community is increasingly defined by interests as much as by geography. Even at the level of neighbourhood there may be little sense of community, because the factors which nurture it – social homogeneity, immobility and the need to cooperate – are gone.(Landry, 2008)

Not surprisingly, the bigger the city – the more evident these tendencies are. Urban cores became mechanisms which enable the diverse population with knowledge and social skills to support whatever turns out to be the next growth sector. ‘The city provides the possibility for interactivity which force-feeds the exchange of information, ideas and projects.’ (Graham and Marvin, 1996)

Constant complication of cities and their systems together with radically changed mentality of modern society made the work of urban planners and related specialists very hard. More precisely - conventional planning methods are becoming obsolete in order to cope with today’s processes and prepare cities for the future.

‘What’s beginning to emerge is very different from what’s gone before: we can’t entirely eliminate things like hierarchy, but what’s coming may have no tops or bottoms, or even a name.’ (Hillman, 2011)

3 Problem Statement

Over the last decades, many urban design projects have even opted to begin with a tabula rasa, a blank (or, more precisely, “erased”) slate, privileging pristine land upon which to erect master plans or razing what was already there. While that approach may succeed in adding the new requested elements, it often does so at the expense of what was valued. (Ellin, 2013)

These changes also produce a new geography of exclusion. Vibrant, wealthier enclaves stand beside ghettos of poverty where cycles of deprivation lock people in. The role of neutral space in city centres is undermined by corporate blandness, and patterns of use which exclude many people.(Landry, 2008) The idea that action should only be taken after all the answers and the resources have been found is a sure recipe for paralysis. The planning of a city is a process that allows for corrections; it is supremely arrogant to believe that planning can be done only after every possible variable has been controlled.(Lydon, 2011)

Today the city acts as a machine. An authoritarian image reflecting a closed system with controlled and measurable causes and effects with little room for humans. It betrays the assumption that someone must always be in charge, directing the machine, but the conditions for machine-like organizations no longer hold. Systems cannot be kept closed. A machine is inflexible, built for one function. (Greenhalgh et al, 1998) Additionally, the system also has an iconic communication, which, if not leavened by an understanding and acceptance of deeper principles, can be dangerous and can turn into manipulation and propaganda.(Landry, 2008)

Spatial planning and design fields have traditionally been occupied with trying to exercise control and limit the inherent uncertainty and open-endedness of urban transformations. Yet such top-down control has tended to result in monochromatic developments exercised of difference or identity.(Németh and Langhorst, 2012) For a long time, owing to the effects of the Modern Movement in architecture, it has been common practice in the development of new districts to prioritize the buildings themselves, then, if possible the public life. The results are deserted city behaviors and deserted landscapes in urban spaces, where one gets the impression that the city is for cars, not for people. As a result today we have urban cores which a lot of specialists of the field started calling ‘generic cities’(Koolhaas, 1996), where even untrained eye can notice the repeated patterns of urban and architectural design regardless of different contexts.

This has a lot to do with the fact that the logic of politicians and other officials is oriented rather towards short-term results than longer-term solutions to urban issues. There is a global tendency to go for “flagship projects” to suggest that a lot is happening. While these can motivate or create momentum, a city’s situation can benefit more from a simple training programme or additional partnerships with the private and non-governmental organizations (NGO). The urban strategist has to find ways of making such low-profile projects visible.(Landry, 2008)

‘Good urbanism protects what is valued, enhances what may be underperforming, and then builds on this tabula plena (full slate) rather than a tabula rasa (erased slate).’ Additionally it measures its success in terms of quality of life, not by the ‘3 P’s: power, profit, and prestige.’ (Ellin, 2013)

William McDonough (2002) has developed a formulation, suggesting we start with values (asking what we hold dear), and then establish goals, strategies, tactics, and metrics. Instead, most practices begin with metrics and go backward to propose tactics, strategies, and goals, but never get values.(McDonough and Braungart, 2002)

Consequentially, as cities have grown larger and spread wider, urban functions have disintegrated and public spaces, for example, which are important to a democratic and inclusive society, have lost much of their significance in urban life. They became “empty spaces”, zones of abstract freedom but no enduring human connection (Sennett, 1994) Sadly, the traditional public realm today is too often just the residue after the planning process. In fact, so are the traditions in general; elements on the other side of the contemporary planning world, which (even those newly invented) normally make the backbone of healthy survival. However,
attention to cultural identity and expression is the last thing on the urbanization agenda. Today, the pace of change can overwhelm people and lead to reactive, impulsive responses. (Landry, 2008)

One of the reasons for the latter issues is the lack of general urban awareness in the society. The individual human being, the most significant urban figure, is being buffeted by global trends but mostly unaware of them or seeing them as personal experiences concerned with the exigencies of daily life and survival – going to the shop, posting a letter…. (Landry, 2008)

Reason for this is the lack of actual analysis on urban scale. What is commonly published and discussed usually regards to the “green building” itself and the ways to make your house more sustainable. However, when it comes to society’s awareness about urban sustainability the information flows are quite limited. In a way community has been excluded from the urbanism.

However, it would be safe to say that the additional issue is the ignorance of the actual inhabitants who (ironically) are the ones affected by the developments. During the past century certain values and perception has settled in the minds of most individuals making more or less individualistic society. Concern about certain issue is only expressed when the individual himself is affected directly. In many cases one acts only if there is a possible gain he can achieve.

Surprisingly, on top of the issues mentioned, and despite the constant growth and intense urbanization, there is a constant number of vacant land, underused or even vacant property, often inside the urban core of the metropolis. Much of it is a result of previously mentioned shift from industrial to service economy. Expensive clean-up and negative image of environmentally degraded land pushed the owners to just move away. Suburban migration, shift to a more mobile workplace, weak economic cycles, disinvestment in infill property and most importantly the tax policies encouraging speculation and property holding by investors – all stimulated the abandonment as an alternative to underperformance. More distinguished practices of such tendencies caused a continuous disrepair of public parks and other infrastructure as well as redevelopment projects which resulted in formation of “ghettos” and “transitional zones”, often foregrounding race as a factor (Németh and Langhorst, 2012). In some cases like U.K. this became a nationwide problem. Hackney - one of the most densely inhabited boroughs in London officially has around 3000 empty properties, while close to 15,000 people are on a waiting list for an affordable house. Not surprisingly this situation can look absurd given the fact the most of the properties are owned by the government. However, with current zoning system, planning policies and various stakeholders it is far from easy to initiate a rational response to the problem.

4 Potentials

One of the major problems in contemporary city planning is that existing urban assets are not always used to full extent. Even 50 years ago Jane Jacobs noted (1961) that “…cities need a mingling of old buildings to cultivate primary-diversity mixtures, as well as secondary diversity. In particular, they need old buildings to incubate new primary diversity.’

Moreover, the location’s identity is shaped not merely by prestige buildings, but also to a considerable extent by the everyday buildings used for residential purposes, trading and production. These buildings contribute just as much to identification and orientation and equally represent a social value. If the existing buildings are appropriately converted, they can remain as an active part of the urban structure and as a node in the network of relationships, interlacing and increasing movement in the urban space. Through their architecture, history and identity, locations are replete with meaning and have stability. In each city, they have a significance that influences the city’s character; they refer to the past and are anchored in the collective memory. They are locations that have a name, that are rooted in the city’s structure and thus enable people to identify with them. (Martina Baum, 2012)

Luckily, every city today has a significant amount of empty properties or even land plots which are underused or even empty. Historically, of course, empty plot was seen as problem that must be “fixed”, but the upsurge of the amounts of vacant land, as a result of deindustrialization, as well as the challenges currently associated with planning has given rise to approaches that consider this problem more as a resource, one that can even provide opportunities for transformative social and ecological processes. (Németh and Langhorst, 2012)

‘The simultaneous quality of stability and openness is what makes the locations so extraordinary and invites engagement with them. The resistance that has to be overcome during a conversion process seems to act as an inspiration to the users’ imaginations in many cases. New patterns of usage and lifestyles often develop at precisely those locations in the city in which it is possible for people to appropriate and modify spaces.’ (Martina Baum, 2012)

Most of the alternative projects related to adaptive-reuse, community gardening, and various creative ventures are happening in the neglected plots in cities. These parcels of land represent tremendous opportunities for smart growth principles like infill, brownfield and greyfield redevelopment, and the creation of open and green space in dense cities (Bowman and Pagano, 2004). However, the most important potential element here is the fact that this under-used land/structure can bring together disparate parties, including homeowners, neighbourhood advocates, fire departments and realtors, around shared interests to address perceived negative externalities. (Hou, 2010)

Good urbanism preserves buildings, neighbourhoods, and natural landscapes that are valued; reclaims, rehabilitates, restores, or renovates what is underperforming; and then adds new elements—all informed by effective community involvement. When people are invited to share what they value, they become empowered and creative. At the same time, this process builds trust and mutual respect, allowing a range of stakeholders to learn and evolve along with the facilitators, co-creating proposals that are neither divisive nor lowest common denominators, but larger than the sum of their individual parts. (Ellin, 2013)
More open structures, which enable greater participation, as well as locality will become more important in the context of a shared global humanity. (Landry, 2008)

Mentioned theories are often implemented in short-term interventions. They are generally not too expensive and yet, if thought through, can generate revenue quite fast. This benefits landowners, developers and most importantly creates business opportunities for individuals or groups who would usually be excluded from these sorts of processes. This would allow a more thorough and equal community integration into urban development process.

Temporary uses may empower thus far marginalized communities and instil in them a sense of participation in the creation of “place”, as the traditional regulatory and planning systems and rules governing land tenure excludes them from many forms of land use and occupation (Németh and Langhorst, 2012)

However, it should be stressed that the reason why these innovative processes are initiated in the first place is due to the same local individuals and community groups. People who see the potential behind the system of policies and top-down developments happening around them. Of course, it’s difficult when related efforts and experimentation are ‘stifled by entrenched interests, inflexible bureaucracies, corruption or maladministration.’ (Landry, 2008) However, the concepts with most potency still lie in the hands of the locals. To achieve notable urban prosperity with currently evident material assets one has to consult the ‘local knowledge’ (Geertz, 1983) or more precisely – encourage local inhabitants themselves to take action when developing the environment.

Beyond elected bodies there are always groups of commited individuals willing to contribute to making urban life better, which is allowing the concept of stakeholder democracy to gain currency, in turn leading to new forms of municipal departmental structures being set up. (Landry, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Perception of urban blight, city down on its heels, result of uneven developmental patterns, systematic disinvestment, marginalization of whole neighbourhoods and demographics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Diminished revenue, ongoing costs (tax liabilities, maintenance), liabilities from environmental impacts, lowers surrounding property values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Appearance/image (broken windows are sign of social breakdown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Environmental hazards, contamination environmental justice issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active involvement in urban society and the added social value of projects and locations contribute to sustainable urban development. (Martina Baum, 2012) Additionally, the ability to use spaces and structures in urban environment for specific activities empowers individuals and communities to increase their quality of life and assert their “right to the city” (Harvey, 1973). Living components of the city can arise that create effects in the form of networks, value-creation chains and increased attractiveness that often go well beyond the location itself. (Martina Baum, 2012)

These are, of course, concepts which are not easy to implement. However, it could be said that today ‘no single master plan can anticipate the evolving and varied needs of an increasingly diverse population or achieve the resiliency, responsiveness and flexibility that shorter-term, experimental endeavours can’. (Arieff, 2011) The pace of urban change demands that policy makers be forward looking, proactive and address issues which are not yet problematic. Trends need monitoring accurately to detect little changes that may become significant in the future. (Landry, 2008) In the context of local neighbourhoods even in big cities the executive power has to be shifted more towards local officials from the central government. Alternative planning is needed.

5 Action

It would be impossible to make quick radical changes in the way cities are designed these days. With all the regulatory systems in action it is very difficult to make planning a more creative process. However, steps can be taken to gradually improve the position of the inhabitants and add sensibility to the hierarchy of the planning system.

It does not mean the regulatory process has to be abandoned, rather that the regulatory process needs to be more flexible and matched with innovative incentives and recognition devices. The process can become more effective in a market economy if it is underpinned by a principled ethos with regulation at a minimum and a forceful and ingenious incentives structure focused on taxation and other fiscal control measures. Moreover, value accruing from planning decisions should be brought back to a fund of benefit to the community as a whole. As a democratically driven process planning should energize representative local democracy by being linked to a strategic community vision. (Landry, 2008)
Another essential step towards a more flexible urban development is altering the existing policies which right now are often in favour of top-down planning approaches. Tools like commercial rent control, community land trusts, community benefit agreements, home value insurance, displacement-free zones, and many others can potentially be used by community-based organizations to transform local environments into more flexible urban sectors; areas which combine manufacturing, residential, and commercial uses, and housing for people of all incomes. Community land trusts, for example, safeguard land from external market factors in order to provide affordable housing to families with limited resources. (Martina Baum, 2012)

Urban planning and design is a shared responsibility and putting aims into practice depends on evaluations within a far broader political-economic context. For this reason, a common vision shared by every strand of society needs to be determined and for this to materialize in the long run, uncompromising efforts must be made that do not resort to low quality and cheap solutions. (Oktay, 2012)

Furthermore, it's very important to recognize the existing urban assets in the area, instead of blindly looking for new development opportunities. 'Good urbanism enhances places by leveraging these assets, which include natural landscapes, history, culture, buildings, neighbourhoods, businesses, cultural institutions, schools, and the talents, ideas, and skills of community members.’ It all begins with an appreciation for existing assets, in contrast to the modernist genre of criticism. ‘The process and product of good urbanism create synergies, efficiencies, and relationships. It sets a generative and dynamic self-adjusting feedback mechanism into motion, enabling communities to build creatively on their strengths in an ongoing fashion.’ (Ellin, 2013)

Therefore, the action should really be shifted towards promoting the possibilities of the existing under-used properties in the local areas. Everyday activities of local planning officials as well as architects should really start including mediation between the inhabitants and necessary stakeholders to achieve a more efficient use of the urban elements. Related method already used in practice quite extensively is adaptive re-use (temporary use) of existing underused structures and land parcels.

6.1 Local Methodology

Good examples of latter developments already implemented in urban environment often appear with the help of the arts communities. Aside from grasping the real-estate question, they have taken on the logic of space management. In contrast to commercial developers, who want to maximize rental income with regular upward price reviews, art-building managers are curators of relationships; they are people managers and network facilitators, making sure tenants connect with one another where possible and identifying real services from which they can collectively benefit. (Pratt, 2012)
Consequentially, the temporary use model needs to operate on multiple scales, from an individual lot to a block to a
neighbourhood to a city-wide or even regional scale. (Németh and Langhorst, 2012) This way the individual lots could
become a much more beneficial part of a larger system.

Another model of adding functions and mixed-use development is Hybrid buildings, when additional structures/functions
are attached to existing buildings, thus saving space and developing a compact city.

Figure 3: The chocolate factory art studios / adaptive re-use initiative / London. Source: chocolatefactorywoodgreen.co.uk

Figure 4: Greenpoint’s box house hotel, where hotel units were built on the roof of an existing industrial warehouse / Source: http://blogs.villagevoice.com

However, firstly the task is to convince the vast majority of humanity, who got used to the existing planning processes, that
vacant office space, for example, is actually a feasible alternative to constructing a new family housing unit on a green-field site.

‘The users play a central, active role and in many cases they also contribute financially. Instead of being consumers, they
become producers of spaces who actively contribute to shaping the city.’ (Martina Baum, 2012) Hence, we need to get beyond the
incentives paradigm and develop approaches which continuously recognize new reasons for action.

6.2 Tasks for the professionals

Naturally, the big challenge lies in the hands of all the professionals in the field and how they mediate between the
stakeholders and the people whose environments are affected by the planning. Truth is - none of them are powerless and can use
variety of already proven methods to work towards a more sustainable urbanism.

One of the examples would be the main street which historically functioned as a communication channel, connecting the
main activities to each other and top the less important. It created a vivid public realm in a spatial continuum. These characteristics
can be re-interpreted as a model when planning and/or re-designing our cities whose central parts are deteriorating owing to the
lack of diversity of main functions (business, commerce, housing, recreation) and the effects of privately owned, intraverted spaces
of modern urban commerce and design. Moreover, the idea of the shopping strip could be revived in order to prevent the shopping
malls to be the norm, ‘and the street pattern could be organized in a way that each street has an identity through the continuity,
design and functional layout of buildings.’ (Oktay, 2012)

Equally important are the connections between the urban elements. The streets outside the major arterial roads should be
transformed into very slow streets encouraging urban life instead of traffic. Good example would be the Dutch model – woonerven,
where the same street space is shared between traffic, pedestrians and cyclists; usually giving the priority to the latter two. This way
the possibility of social interaction is increased, hence amplifying the neighbourhood feeling as well as overall social sustainability
in the area.

Additionally, pedestrian nodes should be identified and expressed more in every region. Solid pedestrian paths should be
laid out to connect those nodes and ‘reinforce a connected complex of urban spaces’. Parking ribbon should ‘snake around’ these
sort of developments and buildings – and not the other way around. (Salingaros et al., 2005)

Often underestimated are the third spaces in cities which are neither home nor work; places which act as gathering spots
for people. ‘In contemporary city, streets, squares and public parks are the only places where people truly meet as equals, … high-
quality public realm may help create a sense of belonging and collective identity.’ (Oktay, 2012) Moreover, it helps develop creativity
because it allows people to go beyond their own circle of family, professional and social relations. The idea of the public realm is
bound up with the ideas of discovery, of expanding one’s horizons, of the unknown, of surprise, of experiment and of adventure.
(Landry, 2008)

These are just few tools and methods out of a huge list, which is being constantly updated by the few innovators of the field.
Hopefully they will be used more intensely in the future bringing our local environments closer to what they once were - “a finely
grained mix of primary land uses, namely a variety of dwellings and workplaces with housing predominant, closely integrated with
all other support services, within convenient distance of the majority of the homes” (Oktay, 2012)
Alternative theories have been research on the topic of enhancing current urban development and planning process. Recently commenced farrel review states that our planning system has become too reactive and relies on development control, which forces local authority planners to spend their time firefighting rather than thinking creatively about the future shape and form of villages, towns and cities. Everything is open to negotiation for every planning application and, as a result, huge amounts of time and resources are spent on issues that could have been predetermined by a collective vision shaped in collaboration with local communities, neighbourhood forums and PLACE Review panels. Proactive planning would free up valuable time for local authority planners to develop masterplans and design codes which are supported by local communities, whilst reinvigorating the planning profession and its public perception.

At the present time, Design Reviews tend to be triggered by new planning applications, the majority of which are made by the private sector. Every public body should have access to an independent PLACE Review Panel, with their results published online, and they should operate at a more strategic level. PLACE Reviews should be radically extended to what is already there, including existing high streets, hospitals and housing estates.

The farrell review, 2013
Rule based systems

Realised systems that challenge the existing planning culture were analysed in order to find other ways to commence planning processes in Hackney.

Scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements are transforming urban planning from a product-oriented artistic endeavor towards a process-oriented scientific discipline. As the focus is shifting from what we design to how we design, we need a more experimental approach towards new technology. Digital tools allow planners to think and act on a fundamentally larger scale. However, they also require the ability to express our ideas and objectives using computational language.

http://www.steep.fi/cases/research/2013/05

KAIERSROT was a research project at ETH Zürich led by architect and computer scientist Ludger Hoverstadt. The project explored a bottom-up approach to computer-aided urban planning and resulted in a series of applications that utilize agent-based simulations to find solutions to various design problems.

System addresses a problem of traditional top-down urban planning, where planners specify a public structure of open spaces, infrastructure and other collective facilities and where individual housing is left to ‘fill in’ this predetermined neighbourhood structure. Kaisersrot is based on a bottom-up principle of urban planning. Although the program defines various parameters and rules, the plan begins to take shape by entering individual needs and wishes.

“....the individual plots are represented by agents that are assigned certain rules and constraints. The agents are aware of factors such as their building type and size, their preferred neighbors and their desired proximity to water, parks, shops and other external attractors. The agents start from random locations and are then allowed to push and pull each other until they find a position that suits their built-in preferences. The overall plan for the area emerges in less than a minute through the agent interactions, without any assistance or intervention by the user. It is important to notice, though, that the computer itself is not deciding what to design. It simply does what a computer is best at doing: very quickly working out the consequences of the constraints and criteria defined by the user. This enables the planner to create an unlimited amount of valid proposals and manually work further on the most interesting ones.”
Wijnhaveneiland Rotterdam [NL]
Transformation strategy of monofunctional innercity area

This dynamic transformation model is a zoning scheme that achieves a balance between the market's demand for maximum building capacity and the realization of an acceptable urban appearance. It is not a design but an open-ended strategy, a variant on the American 'zoning laws'. The rules of the transformation model dictate that the existing urban block structure will be maintained to a height of 20 metres. High-rise construction is allowed above this height, providing it meets specific conditions, which pertain to freehold boundaries, daylight penetration, sunlight, views, setbacks and wind nuisance. A maximum built volume of 22 cubic metres per square metre of land has also been laid down. This stipulation results in buildings that become more slender as their height increases, which benefits sunlight and daylight penetration at ground level. Because slender buildings are financially unattractive this automatically regulates the construction of high-rise in the area.

http://www.kcap.eu/
SOCIETAL AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Societal relevance

Today, when the process of urban development is driven by the free-market, local residents have less and less influence on their local environment. Existing elements of the cityscape, which form the identity of a specific locality and allow locals to relate to it, are being gradually abandoned. Meanwhile, the focus is given to enclosed residential blocks, stimulating gated communities, and making sure that there is space for a ‘mall’; processes which are initiated at the expense of urban vitality in cities.

Individualistic post-modern society has grown into these sort of developments and stopped even questioning the top-down decisions because they are to busy with their daily routines. ‘A diminished sense of locality, of shared space and identity has meant that community is increasingly defined by interests as much as by geography. Even at the level of neighbourhood there may be little sense of community, because the factors which nurture it – social homogeneity, immobility and the need to cooperate – are gone.’ (Landry, 2008)

Keeping in mind that the population density is just going to rise its quite obvious that new sorts of incentives are needed in order to convince residents to act as a community and participate in the development of their own environment; keeping it vibrant and sustainable; producing spaces which are actually needed and not necessarily by building new structures.

Scientific Relevance

The problems which our cities are currently facing are not just caused by greedy market endeavours and events like credit-crisis. Architects and urban planners are to be blamed as well. It’s obviously not easy to deal with constantly evolving cities and their complicated systems. However, its clear that the conventional planning methods are becoming obsolete in order to cope with today’s processes and prepare cities for the future. ‘There is an urgent need for a radical shift towards a more holistic approach to sustainable urban planning/design, combining ecological and social-cultural aspects. This calls for sensitivity to traditional urbanism and impact of global ideas, practices and technologies on local social and cultural practices.’ (Oktay, 2012)

‘Today the city acts as a machine. An authoritarian image reflecting a closed system with controlled and measurable causes and effects with little room for humans. It betrays the assumption that someone must always be in charge, directing the machine, but the conditions for machine-like organizations no longer hold. Systems cannot be kept closed. A machine is inflexible, built for one function.’ (Greenhalgh et al, 1998)

The work of related professionals has to be shifted from concentrating on monumental designs towards the process of mediating between the residents, government and the already built urban environment. Adaptive Architecture and planning is an already known practice in quite a few
countries. However, it is still presented as experimental and futuristic approach and used only in on-off buildings. More rapid and efficient use of the built environment has to become a conventional ordinary process in general. This thesis and the related design project will sum-up existing theories and use the local environment of Hackney to implement political and economical adjustments, hence, creating conditions for a more strategic and systematic approach to sustainable urban design.

**INTENDED END PRODUCT**

After establishing a thorough theoretical framework for the project and analysing a specific territory of the chosen district, conclusions are made, describing the problematics of the site as well as stating future predictions for it. All the latter elements act as base on which altered design prototype is build for a local area. The successful methodology is then extrapolated to the whole borough of Hackney. Reoriented planning and design strategy is proposed with approaches to different typologies described in more detail.
Conclusions

Lack Of Communication

Even though there are various specific reasons for each one of previously mentioned problems, the principal issue is lack of communication and transparency between different parties involved in the current urban development process.

Current system is continuously facilitating free-market endeavours. There is an assumption the investors/developers need space for their agendas and the only way to stimulate urban renewal is to let them develop their acquired parcels of land. However, the way they proceed with their plans is usually by communicating with only specific parties and just one at a time. Investor develops a proposal with the help of an architect and then he goes to local authorities to actually approve it. In many cases that is all the process in order to initiate even major development projects. Meanwhile, other parties like the actual users are seen as secondary parties and are not involved in the process. Accordingly on the other side of the latter users there is an assumption that there is no way they could ever influence those processes; that is something done “from above”. This means that most of the additional developments are designed based on assumptions from basically just one party, not involving the knowledge or opinions of others. As a result we have poor integration of new projects into existing environment as well as risk for the actual developer.

On the other side of the divided party system we have the actual users of the environment. There is another assumption that in order to acquire a residential or a commercial space one needs to approach estate agents or other companies and pay the extreme price of London market to get it. Local authorities are well aware of the price range as they are aware of all the vacant structures and space alternatives that would easily suit local students or individuals looking for a workshop space. However, due to lack of communication between the users and the authorities, everyone continue living on the assumptions; without questioning the current system and approach.

That is the main issue resulting in current environmental decay and high deprivation levels in the areas of Hackney, which will continue as long as all there will be short-term project oriented developments happening in the area. Projects which try to bypass the problems and disagreements rather than look for shared interests between the parties.

“it’s a matter of detachment of rules from their bureaucratic torpor and from the deterministic context of building ordinances and laws, of the possibility of converting them into the active and powerful design and steering instruments of an operational, project-based urban design…..”
Alex Lehnerer, 2013
STRATEGIC DESIGN:
A new urban development operation and communication system
Performed research made it clear to me that the solution does not just lie in better urban design proposals. There have to be changes made in the institutional and organizational level of planning processes. Therefore a decision has been made in the thesis process to introduce a new institution called SPACE BANK. It works in parallel to Hackney Council and takes over all land/property use and development related matters. The core concept is that all the potential parties have to use the same online system in order to proceed with any possible changes in the urban environment and the alterations made/proposed are visible also to all the parties – making the system more transparent.

System ensures a more democratic planning process which includes residents as well as external investors when making decisions about local environment. The main task for the employees of the SpaceBank is to find the potential mutual benefits in projects and ensure: level of freedom for investors, efficient use of existing local assets (enhancing) and that only sustainable and sensible interventions happen within Hackney.
All urban environment is divided into sites/elements which are all put onto one database of SpaceBank. The latter is being constantly updated by analysing the environment in various ways and detecting changes in physical environment as well as in the opinions of the locals about the elements. Residents can use the system to get any required information regarding built environment and potential development opportunities. They can accordingly report any changes and misuse of the environment.

All that information acquired from the research/analysis and the knowledge of local people is then used to formulate a development framework to be used by anyone who wants to engage any sort of development in the area. This allows the planning process to be less time consuming. External developers are informed before even starting of necessary steps to be taken in order to proceed with any project. They are accordingly informed of any related elements in the urban environment that could actually enhance their investment and bring more profit to them.
Planning “shift”

EXTERNAL INVESTOR

HACKNEY

plan/regulations

residents

residents

FACILITATING FREE-MARKET

DEPENDANCE ON EXTERNAL INVESTMENT INITIATIVES

SHORT-TERM PROJECT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENTS

DIVISION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

POOR INTEGRATION - HIGH RISK

INVESTOR HACKNEY RESIDENTS

PLAN / REGULATORY SYSTEM

SPACE / PROJECT SHARING

VALUE INCREASE-ORIENTED INVESTMENT MODEL

FOSTERING SHARED INTEREST

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION

SHARED PROJECT COMMITMENT LOWER RISK
private sector application/proposal

consultation negotiation

DESIGN REVIEW

applying for permission

- no certainty for applicants

- exhausting planning resources

- applying for permission

- re-apply

- sell?

- hold?

PLACE REVIEW

environment strategy

consultation

applying for permission

- certainty provision

- efficient use of planning resources

- #strategies

- #design codes

- #development guidelines

- #masterplan

- scale

- use

- timescale

- budget

- env. impact

- traffic

- etc.

- scale

- use

- timescale

- budget

- env. impact

- traffic

- etc.

- scale

- use

- timescale

- budget

- env. impact

- traffic

- etc.

- system

- planning

- resources

- systematic environment development

- environmental quality reduction

- no certainty for applicants

- certainty provision

- efficient use of planning resources

- environmental quality reduction

- granted

- re-apply

- sell?

- hold?
RESPONSE OF THE SPACEBANK:

In return SB also constantly operates in the surrounding areas making sure other elements and structures are used to full potential - preventing urban decay and sustaining property values as well as an area image.

SB will use any additional infrastructural projects to enhance the pedestrian and other connections to the new developers project, thus making it a more integrated element in the environment.

FOR DEVELOPER IN SPACEBANK SCENARIO:

Because of SPACEBANK system -
Investor identifies the potential of
existing local element - public green
( community garden )

Enhancing the existing urban element,
brings added value to the nearby property
of the developer.

Identified potential of
having affordable housing

Investor under-develops certain parts
of the project to allow locals to invest
their own time and man-power to finish
the housing units by spending less money.

Allowing more mixed community to
form in the new development brings
employees to the commercial units and
ensures a more stable market for a
varied commerce.

€

€

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brings added value to the nearby property
of the developer.

€

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Identified potential of
having affordable housing

Investor under-develops certain parts
of the project to allow locals to invest
their own time and man-power to finish
the housing units by spending less money.

Allowing more mixed community to
form in the new development brings
employees to the commercial units and
ensures a more stable market for a
varied commerce.
SB will give priority to the investor who successfully developed a project inside the spacebank territory. Allowing him to engage with other potential sites more easily.

If part of the new development is underperforming - SB can take over the use of the space on a temporary basis for locally initiated functions. Hence avoiding dramatic capital loss for the investor.

For Hackney Council?

- More efficient use of the environment!
- Re-use of vacant structures!
- Enhancing vital urban elements!
- More rational use of external capital!
- Sustaining healthy habitat!

For Hackney Resident?

- Ability to influence the development of their environment!
- Constant enhancement of vital urban elements!
- Creation of IDENTITY for Dalston / Hackney!
- Sense of being part of the area!
SMALL SCALE / potential scenario sample:
ASHWIN STREET 16 / VACANT PROPERTY

individual proposals

investigate development opportunities / potential SB_SUBSIDY offers

advertise / look for potential users

SPACE BANK

+ ADDED VALUE

external investment

60% 20% 20%

SHARED INTEREST / SPACE / GAIN
LONDON PLAN
NATIONAL FUNDING
INVESTOR
connections
added value
through indirect investment
MAJOR PROJECT
primary investment / direct profit
secondary investment / indirect profit / long term
£ £ £
elements
connections
added value through indirect investment
primary investment / direct profit
secondary investment / indirect profit / long term
MAJOR PROJECT
LONDON PLAN
NATIONAL FUNDING INVESTOR
Urban Design Strategy: Hackney within the system of Spacebank

In parallel to the political and economic aspects of the new system I was also developing urban design/planning methodology under which SpaceBank would guide the system users that are engaging an intervention.

As a long term vision on Urban Scale (Borough of Hackney) SpaceBank engages a Transit-Oriented development. First, the system approaches and tries to enhance the commercial-cores/town-centres. By improving their role as transit nodes for commuting and increasing the pedestrian/cyclist traffic inside the cores the system increases general activity within them. Hence, more commercial, leisure and other opportunities for residents and people visiting. The funds generated from the projects in the cores are then used to enhance the elements in the residential areas between the cores (parks, vacant structures, etc.). Finally routes that connect the cores and the elements are identified and enhanced; routes that are alternative to main car-roads and would be used for pedestrian/cyclist traffic.
On local scale the area of DALSTON CENTRAL was taken for a further analysis and SPACEBANK model implementation. It is one of the most economically active areas in the whole of Hackney. However, at the same time has a lot of underused land, empty properties and not surprisingly big number of external investment coming towards it. As a design task on the local level I have decided to alter current development proposals and simulate the co-operative processes necessary between different parties to produce an alternative design for the area. I have concentrated on one urban core block of the area, trying to find specific problems in the built environment as well as potential connections between the existing developers and other users/residents. In the process I have identified various generic design methods/tools that enhance local environment in Dalston and could in fact also be used in other commercial cores of Hackney to enhance those areas in a similar manner. (e.g. enhancing the frontages of the historic commercial streets inside the block).

Here SPACEBANK application users are first presented with the core activation strategy. Essential existing elements are identified and the system tries to enhance them by integrating external investment money from the nearby development projects. Spacebank tries to find mutual benefits between the residents and the investors. For instance, money invested in the local community garden located next to a new residential development is beneficial to both: the residents and the developer himself.
Online application system is created to contain all the information about urban environment inside Hackney. It is constantly updated with new projects implemented as well as potential space that could be used or is required. Owners of a certain land inside Hackney are required to use the system to indicate any changes they wish to make within their parcel. Other residents/users are then informed of them. This way the process becomes more transparent: residents are made aware of implications of certain projects and development strategies in general.
Users are supplied with information regarding the potential plans for the area as well as information regarding the nearby underused properties and land.
After being presented with the suggestions for further development, users of the SPACEBANK system are presented with the planning application. This part of the system is used when changes are made in the urban environment. In order to proceed with any developments, external parties have to submit planned changes in the application and indicate the function and contents of the massing. This way the system is able to keep the balance of different functions in the site on the core area of the local territory. Additional rules that were set by the SpaceBank design panel are integrated in the application preventing the developer from engaging with designs that would be completely contrary to the ideas of the local residents or SPACEBANK design panel.

SITE: SB.DC.01

Example site notes given to the site owner from the SPACEBANK design panel after analysing the site and consulting the nearby residents and neighbour owners.
To commence any changes within the territory operated by SPACEBANK the owner has to submit the new plans using the planning application. He has to indicate the land use as well as functions within the structures. This way the system keeps the balance of functions within the environment. Certain “hard” regulations / rules are integrated in the account for every site in Hackney.

Pre-set “hard” site rules

FLOOR AREA INDEX: 1.5 or higher

gross floor area
≥ 1.5

site area

< 22 m.

min 2 fl.

max 9 fl.

MIN. RATIOS:

3

10

4

10
urban tools / suggestions

System uses a number of urban development strategies. Within the system they are simplified to certain symbolic elements. These are designed to help the site to be integrated better within the environment and activate its function more. If the tool applied also enhances other urban elements nearby - SPACEBANK offers certain subsidies in order to implement the development sooner.

**BLOCK tools**

- Enhance arrival point
- Invite / neutral space
- Open block
- Identify landmark elements
- Gradual height growth
- Multiple options
- Low car penetrability
- Clear pedestrian crossings
- Celebrate existing / irregular

**STREET tools**

- Enhance path continuity
- Bottom facade transparency
- Mixing day and night economies
- Similar adjacent structure height
- Distinguished green / public element
- Commerce continuity
- "Mono-block" prevention
- Prevent blocks too long
- Front diversity in similar scale
ARCHITECTURAL tools

prefabrication/re-useable structure

planned underground parking

structural "set-back"

percentage of affordable units

vertically "stacked" activities

max 2-hour shadow casting

"DIY" structural units

personalized units/exterior

residential uses always on top
All the changes and images indicated in the system can be commented / discussed upon. Therefore, through the system people are made aware of public opinion and needs. People can constantly follow the development of certain projects and areas. This way making a much more democratic and full.

SPACEBANK initiates these discussions to make people aware of new projects within their area. System allows people to vote if there are several design proposals. Application also makes competitions if for instance there are more than few applicants to use a vacant structure operated by the spacebank.
SITE DESIGN:

Within the SPACEBANK system in operation, an alternative urban design scheme is proposed for the area of dalston central.
Existing Site
Proposed Scheme
various commerce
private residential
mixed use
DIY elements
arrival now
Proposal is to shift existing massing towards the inside of the site to allow people to enter more freely, to a neutral park-like space.
community
cluster
green corridor
the “street”
Conclusions / Reflection

PROJECT REFLECTION
MIKAS KAŽUONAS / 4254880 / Msc Design as Politics /

LOCAL POTENTIAL: adjusted systematic model of urban development operation within Hackney, London

WHY
The project started purely from my personal interest in the huge numbers of empty properties which I saw in London while living there few years ago. Friends of mine illegally lived in squats as they have been left empty for years while other locals organized illegal events in warehouses. Properties and land stand empty and yet somehow it continues to be illegal to do something about it even when one really wants to. Meanwhile, new developments keep popping up in the urban environment, though not always required. It was obvious this was a money related issue and a solid flaw in planning and political processes. When I saw the DesignAsPolitics graduation studio theme, I knew this would be a perfect time to investigate the process a bit further. Even though it all started from interest in empty structures in a residential area in London, during the research process I realized it was a much larger issue common worldwide. The whole urban development process is being driven by the external developers who in fact have nothing to do with the area but the need to exploit it for development profit. Meanwhile locals who actually live in the area have less and less say in the process. It’s getting harder and harder for them to actually do any interventions within their living environment. While external project permissions area being signed by the local government without consulting the inhabitants and without integrating the developments into clear long-term urban design strategy for the area. Given the future predictions of London and its residential areas like Hackney becoming substantially denser in the future, one can imagine the poor state of urban environment quality if no solid changes are implemented in the planning process.

RESEARCH
I knew that in order to understand the problem specifics in more depth I had to zoom into a smaller area. Due to more intense economic activity and high numbers of vacant property a commercial center called Dalston Central was chosen for a case study. I started mapping the vacant properties and underused elements in the urban environment; looking for reasons they became empty in the first place. Accordingly I looked into current planning applications for new developments, submitted by external investors. I noticed quite soon that there is a big gap between interventions of different scale and function. Generally, projects are being implemented in a very isolated manner, when nothing outside the site boundary is taken into account. That becomes especially visible when looking into residential developments. After a chat with employees of the Hackney council on a site visit, I realized that even though there is an official development strategy for the Dalston area, it is being constantly “overlooked” when approving an external investment. Well established free-market trends and rules brought the urban development to a state where local officials are forced to agree with aspirations of the investors because that seems to be the only way to get any solid development happening at all. Additionally it seems like the only rapid solution to dealing with national problems like lack of housing and others. Meanwhile, all the smaller interventions that are actually related to sustaining local identity and community seem to be left in the background. Most importantly they are treated like interventions which are completely unrelated to large housing developments right next to them. In the case of Dalston Central the local community market is treated separately from the newly designed commercial/retail centre while a community garden/park seems to be unrelated to the new housing block just on the other side of the road. Judging even from the writings on the local urban development blog (curated by the residents) it seems obvious that that “two sides” could easily benefit from each other and make their interventions work more efficiently if just there was a more decent physical/political connection between them. Current division of the people involved in the process is what prevents the sustainable urban development from happening. Right now all the projects just try to bypass the problems and disagreements rather than look for shared interests between the parties. Of course we could just blame the greedy developers, ignorant designers and corrupt council officials, but the core problem is not them on their own, it is lack of communication between all of the groups involved at the same time.

I started analyzing the actual system itself. What are the steps that one needs to take to initiate any intervention? I noticed instantly the actual outdated system in operation of urban environment within Hackney. It is simply drowning in various levels of bureaucracy. Basically it seemed that the system is only for the people that actually work in the same system. Meanwhile other people have an image of it being too complicated and do not even look for alternative approaches to using their urban environment. I started asking myself if this was really the only way? Seeing other industries flourishing with IT innovations making complicated processes more and more easy to operate, it was hard to understand how the industry that literally shapes our lives is so out-of-date. The idea for a new system started taking shape in my head. System which would merge different layers of urban environment and allow simple interactions between different parties involved.

APPROACH: to develop an altered planning system and apply it in a specific site (as a design task)

STRATEGIC DESIGN TASK: Under what conditions the development of the same area of Dalston could become a more democratic process, including more parties and ensuring efficient use of existing urban elements?
SPACEBANK
Performed research made it clear to me that the solution does not just lie in better urban design proposals. There have to be changes made in the institutional and organizational level of planning processes. Therefore a decision has been made in the thesis process to introduce a new institution called SPACE BANK. It works in parallel to Hackney Council and takes over all land/property use and development related matters. The core concept is that all the potential parties have to use the same online system in order to proceed with any possible changes in the urban environment and the alterations made/proposed are visible also to all the parties – making the system more transparent. System ensures a more democratic planning process which includes residents as well as external investors when making decisions about local environment. The main task for the employees of the SpaceBank is to find the potential mutual benefits in projects and ensure: level of freedom for investors, efficient use of existing local assets (enhancing) and that only sustainable and sensible interventions happen within Hackney.

In parallel to the political and economic aspects of the new system I was also developing urban design/planning methodology under which SpaceBank would guide the system users that are engaging an intervention.

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DALSTON CENTRAL DESIGN
As a design task on the local level I have decided to test the new system and alter current development proposals in one of the cores – DalstonCentral, simulating the co-operative processes necessary between different parties to produce an alternative design for the area. I have concentrated on one urban core block of the area, trying to find specific problems in the built environment as well as potential connections between the existing developers and other users/residents.

SYSTEM METHODOLOGY
In the design process I have identified various generic design methods/tools that enhance local environment in Dalston. I realised that they could in fact also be used in other commercial cores of Hackney to enhance those areas in a similar manner. (e.g. enhancing the frontages of the historic commercial streets inside the block). Therefore within the new system I have additionally developed a systematic toolset which allows an easier operation of urban assets with the reach of the system. They would be used for initial guidance of the potential users and regulation of their aspirations. In order to submit a planning application, the developer would have to meet certain regulations(of that specific site) produced after analyzing existing environment and consulting the local knowledge (e.g. ratio of greenery to built mass on site). This way the investor is given freedom to pursue his aspirations, meantime ensuring that his interventions do not have undesirable effects to the environment. After the submission the co-operation would start between other parties and the developer to make the most of his investment as well as enhance the surroundings of the local people.

IN CONCLUSION
This method allowed me to develop a design strategy that successfully deals with the initially stated problems and shows a working systematic approach on urban scale as well as a specific example on a local site. In the process I have developed better knowledge of the political processes related to the issues as well as familiarity with related systems, software and approaches able to enhance the urban environment process. Even though I have only created a scenario for one specific site, I am quite confident that the system could be enhanced and applied on a much larger scale; enhancing the life of a city and not just an urban block. In fact during the past year, I was inspired by these issues and have developed a particular interest in the influence of IT systems on urban environment development. I am quite confident the whole process is inevitably heading towards a completely computer/online based methods. The question is how quickly and to what extent can we implement them and allow people to finally become active participants in the development of their own places?
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