

Sensing the city



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Young people and regeneration in London

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Cities are endlessly changing but who is change for? How do young people feel about regeneration of their neighbourhoods? How can we ensure young residents have a voice - and are heard - in critical planning decisions that affect their lives and their communities?

In 2020, **The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (UCL)** and community organisations **Pempeople** and **The Ubele Initiative** came together to explore new methods of public voicing for young people. The result was a series of on-line, open-call participatory workshops with young people from Peckham and Brixton. Facilitated by poet and performance artist **Kat François** and interdisciplinary media artist **Daniel Oduntan**, the sessions explored notions of belonging, change and displacement, race and labelling, Covid lockdowns and mental health, voicelessness and the importance of active listening when designing tools to empower. Participants experimented with poetry, spoken word, storytelling and mobile filmmaking, inside and outside the workshops.



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This visual letter - ***Sensing the City: Young People and Regeneration in London*** - captures the essence of the workshops. Designed and edited by **Daniel Oduntan** in portrait as opposed to landscape, the video letter lends itself to mobile viewing, with the option of reading or listening to each voice note as chapter.

Poems and footage contributions from (and with gratitude to):

Tyreece Asamoah, Romey Skye, Eliseo, Faruq Hashi, Jaffar Aly @thatspaghattibrand, Kelsea Delatango @_delatango, Sofia Whilby @sofiawhilby, Mattia Guarnera @mattia.guarnera, Alka Suralia @alkacin0, Shay casonova @shaycasonova, Hammed Oyefuwa @hammed_oy and Kadz Woods @kadzwoods.

“The future, is bright, but not yet in sight, a phantom pain, arm reach away.

Context

Peckham, The Old Kent Road and Brixton, like other parts of London, have experienced rapid change in the last 10-15 years. Ongoing regeneration and new planning proposals mean that radical change is likely to remain a defining feature for these neighbourhoods, that have long held particular significance for the African and Caribbean communities and black history in London. What is the place for young adults to shape the future of these neighbourhoods?

Young people are frequently absent from formal planning consultations that affect their lives – ignored in official processes or self-excluding from procedures they do not trust. This is particularly true in areas of rapid generation where the speed of change in housing profile and land use often leaves young people with difficult decisions on how best to adapt, as their communities fragment. How can they avoid exclusion from evolving community, health and support services, or from entrepreneurial and creative spaces in their neighbourhood? Against this backdrop Pempeople (with the **Livesey Exchange**) and The Ubele Initiative (with the **Lloyd Leon Community Centre** aka the Dominos club) are currently working to retain and/or develop community spaces that resist this trend.

The project



© Jaffar Aly

“The future,
everyone steps
up, everybody
rises, everyone
benefits.

The future,
bring back
youth clubs,
community
centres, bring
back the heart.

Sensing the City: Young People and Regeneration in London is an experimental collaborative project between Barbara Lipietz @The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, Pempeople and The Ubele initiative to explore the role of creative expression in amplifying the voice of young adults in community-led approaches to planning in London. Adjusted to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the project facilitated online discussions between young people from Brixton and Peckham, brought together by Pempeople and The Ubele Initiative. Together they explored 'owned' media – spoken word, film, photography – as modes of shared expression, and means of speaking truth to power, on their own terms.

“She thought it
was better
to bring "the
boys" - what she
calls her sons,
the boys
downstairs to a
pool table,
rather than
have them out
late at night, on
the streets.

Conversations and creative outputs, facilitated by poet Kat François and multi-media artist Daniel Oduntan, speak of **belonging** and **loss**, the **ambiguities** of and unequal abilities to cope with **regeneration**, displacement and community **erasure**. **Race**, **age** and **labelling** hover over shared experiences of regeneration, as is multi-dimensional **trauma**. The frustration of enduring **voicelessness** – or rather, of repeatedly being ‘unheard’ – is palpable. But so is a thirst for **co-creating** safe and caring neighbourhoods, where ‘**people like us**’ can thrive.



She always talks about the sense of community there used to be.

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Sensing the City's visual letter captures key themes from the workshops .

Check the full project website [here](#).

Acknowledgments

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