

the diverse nature of high streets

from fragmented to coherent spaces



Places where the bell always pings as you open the door, the air hits you warm as you walk inside and a smile greets you. Most of all, they are places where people chat and collect news, exchange gossip and advice, meet, greet and love-or sometimes hate-their neighbours. Even as a six-year-old, I know there is a world enclosed in the four tiny letters of the word 'shop'.

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Architectural Design Crossovers Graduation studio
Heterogeneous City London
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1. Prologue

London has continuously astounded and enthralled me with its diversity. For me, it is a location where old and new architecture coexist peacefully, where many languages and dialects blend with the noise of the city, and people of different nationalities, cultures and religions pass each other on the street every day. It is common to see Indian restaurants neighbouring Chinese, Bangladeshi or Mexican ones infusing the

urban space with a multicultural mix of smells. All these different elements are tightly interconnected and interact with each other. They are like a patchwork of seemingly incompatible pieces that, sewn together, form a well-functioning urban organism. This heterogeneous urban structure encouraged me to take a closer look at its presence on the streets of London. And more specifically on London's famous high streets.



figure 2 - heterogeneous London

2. Introduction

High streets are complex and dynamic socio-spatial systems.¹ They are mainly lined with retail and service establishments that have met the needs of the local community for many years.² In addition to their primary functions, these streets provide a substantial environment for cultural exchange and are of significant local and town-forming importance.³

Initially, high street shops used to be only dwellings where artisans could produce and sell their items or provide services.⁴ Dynamic economic, architectural, technological and cultural changes

have disrupted the traditional character of high streets and pose a real threat to their future vitality. The increase in the number of cars in the city, the growth of e-commerce and the emergence of more and more shopping centres and supermarkets are reducing the need and desire to shop in small, independent shops.⁵ Due to a lack of customers, a growing amount of shops are being closed by traders. Empty premises deter the remaining clientele and attract crime. It creates a vicious cycle where more abandoned buildings scare off more clients, forcing more businesses to close.⁶

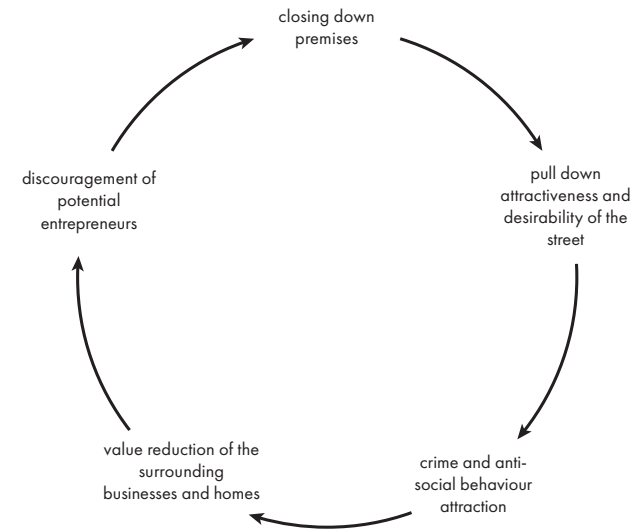


figure 3 - Vicious circle of high streets

¹ Matthew Carmona, „London’s Local High Streets: The Problems, Potential and Complexities of Mixed Street Corridors”. *Progress in Planning* 100 (August 2015): 3. [https://doi.org/10.1016/j-progress.2014.03.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2014.03.001).

² Jan Bagiński and Dominika Kubieniec, “High Street”, *Rzut 17 Ulica*: 34

³ Phil Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street: retail gentrification, class and disgust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 15

⁴ James Richards, *High Street* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2022), 2

⁵ Bagiński, Kubieniec, “High Street”, 41-42

⁶ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 20-21

Deserted shopping streets are becoming an increasingly pressing issue, and numerous ideas for bringing life back to them are becoming more and more prevalent in public discussion. Local authorities are looking at many strategies to encourage entrepreneurs to create businesses that could attract new potential customers. Their primary tactic is to promote the creation of diverse and independent up-markets.⁷ However, these will be largely unaffordable for many community groups, who frequently rely on the ever-shrinking selection of high street amenities. Another idea is the *High Streets for All* mission, commissioned by the Mayor of London and created by LSE Cities and We Made That. It aims to develop new and experimental uses for high streets in collaboration with residents. Their main goals are to diversify the offer that would not just focus on the retail function, promote local employment, or grow London's social economy.⁸

Observing the changes occurring in the high streets and the various attempts to restore their vitality, one might wonder whether the high streets as we have known them today still have any purpose. They are no longer a popular destination for the numerous inhabitants who used to go there to perform their weekly shopping. They are now more often liminal spaces, even non-places (Marc Augé used this term to describe transitional places where people remain anonymous).⁹ Liminal locations, on the other hand, are ideal for those social groups that do not have a suitable place for themselves in the urban space, such as immigrants. In a city as ethnically diverse as London, high streets are often the only opportunity for foreign residents to find work or start a business. Therefore, when discussing the future of shopping streets, we cannot ignore the topic of shops run by different ethnic communities. Empty premises and reduced rents undoubtedly represent a chance for marginalised groups to open their businesses and reach new customers.

⁷ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 21-22

⁸ "High Street for All", london.gov, accessed January 12, 2023, <https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/recovery-context/high-streets-all?ac59087-59086=&ac59091-59090&ac-59115=59114>

⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 103-104

Migrants running their shops are often seen as hard-working and respected city dwellers, but the facilities owned by them are considered a negative aspect that diminishes the quality of the UK's high streets.¹⁰ However, they have a considerable impact on the appearance of the streets, which should not be overlooked or even drowned out in attempts to revitalise high streets. There is often a strong social bond formed around such premises which, despite various problems and sometimes resentment from others, gives the city its unique character. Perhaps, rather than attempting to alter it, it would be wise to use the untapped and hidden potential of areas around high streets as a driver for change in the streets themselves, revitalising them and halting the dynamic gentrification that imperils the city's economy.

Therefore, this research aims to analyse high streets that are not only different from each other in terms of architecture or dominant functions but also located in neighbourhoods characterised by ethnic and cultural diversity. It is in these areas that these streets, despite being only a walk-through space for the majority of residents, still function in their unique way and are relevant meeting and activity places for several community groups. And instead of strenuously and often blindly trying to find ways of attracting potential business to the empty premises on the high streets, it is worthwhile, like Brown, Venturi and Zenour in their book *Learning from Las Vegas* to try to 'learn from the high streets'. Using an innovative methodology, combining urban analysis with a playful sociological study, it will be possible, like the authors of the above-mentioned book, to visually break down the seemingly irrelevant image of high streets and look at them from a different perspective. It will allow an understanding of their phenomenon and potential for further design decisions in the development of an alternative future for shopping streets and to try to answer the research question below:

How can architecture be an active agent in the regeneration of the high streets (by embracing the destination-making and social potential of

¹⁰ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 26

spots along the high streets) to enhance the quality of the streets as integral urban systems?

This research paper first describes the evolution of high streets over the last few hundred years, considering changes in consumerism trends, architecture and technological developments. The data collected will be relevant for further reflection on the future of shopping streets. Afterwards, on selected case studies of four high streets in London, the hot spots where people congregate most frequently were

marked, taking into account the surrounding space and both spontaneous and top-down planned social events. It is done using the following tools: Google Maps, social media data such as Instagram and TikTok, digital photography, online articles and personal observations and interviews conducted. This part of the study aims to understand the importance of these places for the local community and how they are used. Finally, the conclusions of the extensive analysis are included, providing an overview of the opportunities used at a later design stage.

3. High Street Evolution

In his book ,The Strip', Stefan Al outlines how changing trends in American society significantly influenced transformations in the appearance of Las Vegas. Developers successfully exploited every new fashion to attract an ever-growing clientele. If a fascination with the Wild West was in vogue, a cowboy-style gas station or a scaled-down Western church appeared in the city.¹ In the 1980s, when the Disney conglomerate reigned supreme, a casino reminiscent of Sleeping Beauty's Castle was built on the famous strip.² In the following years, fairy-tale buildings were replaced by new ones, mimicking well-known architectural structures such as the Campanile or the Bridge of Sighs.³ The goal of all these modifications using various themed motifs was to pique consumer interest and boost developer earnings.

To introduce any interventions into London's high streets, it is first necessary, like Stefan Al describing the evolution of the Strip, to understand the history of how shopping streets have changed, both in terms of consumerism, marketing and changing lifestyles and consumer habits. It will provide a picture presenting

how the original Roman roads that ran through present-day London and are the foundations of today's high streets evolved over the centuries and gradually became centres of economic, social and civic life. The key developments and events that have significantly influenced high streets in the UK are outlined below.

the origins of high streets

Many of London's high streets trace their history back to when Britain was part of the Roman Empire. These roads linked Roman cities, and their primary function was to allow soldiers to move quickly between urban centres and to transport essential supplies. Over the years, their nature changed. They developed into important components of the infrastructure needed for the growth of trade and transportation.⁴

In medieval times London developed as a concentrated market town with surrounding areas of rural character. Most of these areas could not achieve market town status because, according to the legislation of the time, town markets could not be created closer than a day's journey (approximately 6.2 miles). It resulted in the absence of town markets while, at the same time, the rapid development of street trading underpinning today's high streets.⁵



figure 4 & 5 - high street shops in medieval times

¹ Stefan Al, *The Strip: Las Vegas and the architecture of the American dream* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017), 25

² Al, *The Strip*, 133

³ Al, *The Strip*, 169

⁴ Bagiński, Kubieniec, "High Street", 33

⁵ Bagiński, Kubieniec, "High Street", 33-34

rise of consumerism

The development of transport and production technology has made access to goods simpler and faster. With an increasing variety of products in the shops, buying and admiring the colourful display windows became an essential part of people's daily life and cultural activity. Numerous independent shops were becoming centres of activity for Londoners, and buying in them was a sign of social status.⁶

plate-glass windows

The ability to insert plate-glass windows in shopfronts has significantly improved the quality of high streets in the United Kingdom. Retailers can create more attractive display windows to attract new customers. In addition, larger glazing better illuminates shop interiors and has made premises more open to pedestrians.

electric street lighting

The installation of electric street lighting has immensely impacted the look of high streets in the United Kingdom. Above all, the new technology has allowed for brighter and more efficient street lighting, which has significantly improved safety and security, as well as the subsequent development of illuminated signs that affect the attractiveness of the streets.



figure 6 - appearance of self-service supermarkets

mass production of cheap cars

The appearance of cars on the streets of the United Kingdom is affecting the shape of the high streets. More and more people can afford to own a vehicle and increase their mobility. Many who have this option decide to do more of their shopping in supermarkets, or shopping centres, often located far from town centres. It is having its effect in reducing the number of customers using local high street shops. In addition, the increase in the number of cars on the streets means that shopping streets often turn into traffic corridors and increased car traffic, cluttering up the space for parking, discourages pedestrians from spending time in these spaces.

self-service supermarket

Self-service supermarkets have dramatically changed the way we shop. In the past, when shopping, one interacted with a salesperson who picked our products. A new way of buying sped up the shopping process, but it also enables supermarkets to offer lower prices compared to small, local businesses. Independent retailers often lose out to huge competitors and are forced to close their premises. In addition, the standardised design of supermarkets and large parking spaces, often planned next to them, has a significant impact on the cityscape.

waves of immigrants

Immigrants who came to the United Kingdom have had a significant impact on the development of British cities. They tend to be much more self-employed than white British people.⁷ It is often due to racism and a lack of other opportunities to earn money, hence why so many foreign residents choose to set up their businesses.⁸ They tend to open small shops on the high street offering local products from their homelands. It attracts a new clientele, who often have to follow dietary restrictions or miss home cooking and local products.⁹ Small, independent establishments increase the diversity on the high streets and enhance their economic vitality.



figures 7, 8 & 9 - first shopping centres in the UK

shopping centres

Shopping centres represent one of the greatest threats to the viability and vitality of high streets. The advent of malls in the second half of the 20th century in the United Kingdom provided residents with a new way of shopping - with access to a wide variety of shops under one roof in an air-conditioned environment. Faster and more convenient buying, in addition to a weather-protected facility, meant that many shoppers stopped taking advantage of the range of high street businesses on offer, resulting in many of these premises had to close.

e-commerce

The growth of online commerce has had a significant impact on previously known trade. Today, the UK boasts the most advanced e-commerce market on the continent.¹¹ It is estimated that by 2026, 38% of shopping will be done online.¹² Easier access to goods and more attractive product prices have led many consumers to buy more often without leaving home. It has led to the closure of many physical shops, and those that have survived have to adapt to new trends related to shipping products or the click-and-collect option.

¹⁰ Sam Griffiths et al., „The Sustainable Suburban High Street: A Review of Themes and Approaches: The Sustainable Suburban High Street“. *Geography Compass* 2, no. 4 (July 2008): 5

¹¹ Statista Research Department, "E-commerce in the United Kingdom (UK) - statistics & facts", Statista, November 22, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/topics/2333/e-commerce-in-the-united-kingdom/#topicOverview>

¹² Chloe Rigby, "UK retail sales set to be 38% online by 2026: study", *Internet Retailing*, December 7, 2021, <https://internetretailing.net/industry/uk-retail-sales-set-to-be-38-online-by-2026-study-24132/>

⁶ Matthew White, "The rise of consumerism", *British Library*, October 14, 2009, <https://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/the-rise-of-consumerism>

⁷ Panikos Panayi, *Migrant City: A New History of London* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2022), 87
⁸ Panayi, *Migrant City*, 91
⁹ Panayi, *Migrant City*, 90



figures 10 & 11 - increase in popularity of fast food

fast food

The growing popularity of fast food restaurants offering cheap and unhealthy food has led to more and more of these types of establishments beginning to appear on London's high streets displacing other businesses. Residents, especially in poorer neighbourhoods, are much more willing to visit places where they can eat for little money and on the go.¹³ The standardised design of chain stores has led to a homogenised appearance of shopping streets. In addition, it is believed that fast food on high streets has contributed to the obesity epidemic in the UK.¹⁴

slow food

The growing slow food movement promoting local and traditional cuisine is increasingly influencing the look of London's high streets. People are more often choosing smaller premises for nostalgic and health reasons but also for the desire to meet friends or talk to trusted retailers. Local shops make the shopping streets more diverse and unique. Additionally, the promotion of healthy food positively supports the fight against obesity. However, organic food is also much more expensive, and the customers are usually no longer residents but tourists and the middle class who can afford high-priced purchases.¹⁵

¹³ Patrick Butler, "Large rise in takeaway shops highlights dominance of fast food in deprived areas", *The Guardian*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/jul/25/large-rise-takeaway-shops-highlights-dominance-fast-food-deprived-areas-england>
¹⁴ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 188
¹⁵ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 184

Starbucks culture

Starbucks coffee shops began to popularise the concept of the so-called third place - a space between work and home where you can have a coffee and meet up with friends. Their appearance on London's high streets has, on the one hand, created more and more community meeting places and promoted a coffee culture, while, on the other hand, the top-down design and menus have caused high streets to lose their diverse and unique character. In addition, chain coffee shops started to push out small local businesses that had no chance of competing with the corporate giant.

Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many retailers to close their shops or limit their opening hours. In addition, the restrictions and the fear of people leaving their homes made online shopping with home delivery or personal collection even more popular. To stay in business, many entrepreneurs have converted part of their premises into fulfilment spaces.¹⁶

¹⁶ Keith Nealon, "How Covid-19 Changed Retail - Probably Forever", *Forbes*, July 22, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/07/22/how-covid-19-changed-retail---probably-forever/?sh=4ad89968145c>

Brexit

The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union has also had an impact on the country's retail trade, especially in the short term. There have been problems with the transport of products or border delays. Additional charges have also increased the price of goods imported from abroad.¹⁷



figure 12 - Camden Town before Covid-19



figure 13 - Camden Town during Covid-19

Based on the above-mentioned cultural and economic developments, technological changes and architectural trends, it is clear that high streets have been facing many challenges for centuries. The appearance of significant players in the market, such as gigantic shopping malls, the decline in consumer attendance caused by the rise of e-commerce or the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, have particularly affected the traditional design of the streets and disrupted their original commercial functioning. However, looking closely at the

¹⁷ "Impact of Brexit on Apparel: Retail trends", *Retail Insight Network*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.retail-insight-network.com/comment/impact-of-brexit-on-apparel-retail-trends/>

impact of these events raises the question: **whether the opinion currently appearing in articles and podcasts about shopping streets as dying parts of cities is true?** Nevertheless, it seems that a much more accurate term than dying is the word **changing** or **adapting**. Just as the strip in Las Vegas reinvents itself to meet changing conditions, so too have London's high streets, to survive for centuries, skilfully transformed themselves to attract new types of customers, adapting the visual appearance and adjusting the functional profile to suit them. It is why understanding this incredible ability to adapt is so crucial in discussing the future of high streets.



figures14, 15 & 16 - changes in the appearance and character of Croydon High Street over the century

4. Street Biographies

4.1. Street Locations

In this part of the paper, I present an analysis of four selected examples of London high streets. These will serve as models from which it is possible to learn and explore the hidden potential of these types of places in the urban fabric. As the theme of this thesis is to analyse the diverse nature of high streets, it was essential to select case studies that would be culturally and ethnically various and have different morphology. The first category on which the selection was done was the analysis of boroughs based on the document 'Population by Country from Birth' produced by the Office of National Statistics. It served to pick those parts of London that are most ethnically diverse and through which the so-called 'connected high streets' pass, which are remnants of ancient Roman roads (Figure 16). Then, after adding further layers of information, such as the most culturally

diverse parts of London (Figure 17) and periods of street formation and development (Figure 18), I selected the following examples of high streets: **Brixton Road**, Lambeth (which has both small independent shops, a residential area and larger department stores), **North End and High Street**, Croydon (much of which is occupied by numerous shopping centres and car parks) and **Camden High Street**, Camden (one of London's most popular high streets, frequented by many tourists). The last case study, **Rye Lane** in Peckham (Southwark), was chosen based on an article by Suzanne M. Hall, 'Super-diverse street: a 'trans-ethnography' across migrant localities'. The author of the text describes Rye Lane as 'an intensely multi-ethnic street' along whose one-kilometre stretch you can find localities of people from more than twenty different countries.¹



figure 17 - Ethnically diverse boroughs and connected high streets

¹ Suzanne Hall, "Super-diverse street: a 'trans-ethnography' across migrant localities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, nr 1 (January 2015): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.858175>.

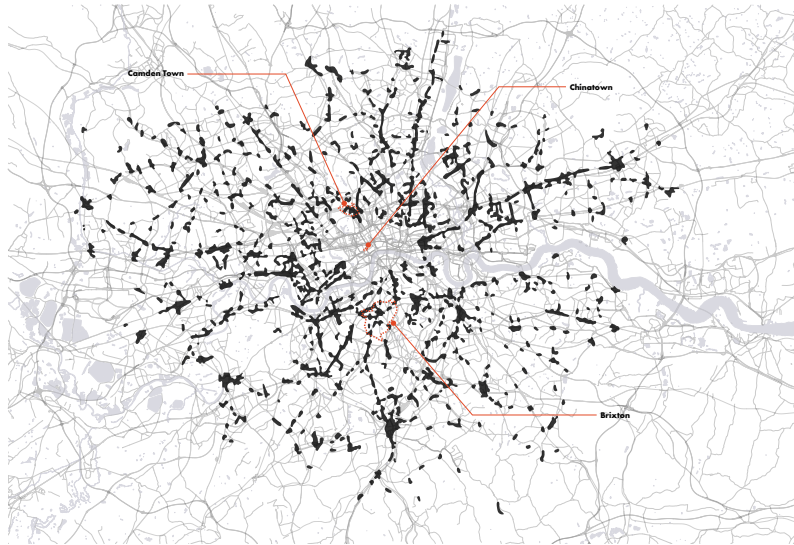


figure 18 - Culturally diverse areas

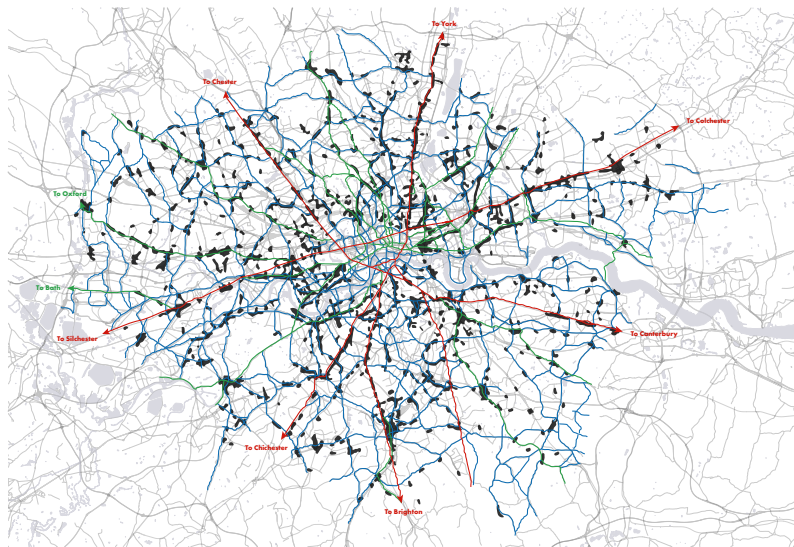


figure 19 - Development of London's road network

4.2. Research Process

The next step after selecting four sample streets was an analysis of the potential of these sites. The exploration process began with fieldwork and ethnographic research. In my preparation, I relied on the book 'Ethnography: step-by-step' by David M. Fetterman, in which the author describes how to prepare for this type of research. Initially, the core of the studies were to be interviews conducted with people using the existing infrastructure and functions located in the investigated high streets and in the areas behind and next to these streets. However, this proved to be almost impossible. Many of these people were either immediately reluctant to talk or, despite their initial willingness to help, upon hearing that I am an architect, they promptly claimed that they were unable to answer any questions. People from the Advocacy Academy organisation ('The Advocacy Academy is an activist youth movement of young leaders fighting for justice and equality.'¹) met by chance on Brixton Road, were very helpful in comprehending this phenomenon. They explained that in these locations, many community groups feel enormous pressure from authorities and developers trying to acquire valuable land and 'push' poorer residents further away from the city centre. It is why they are very distrustful of new people, especially those asking questions. Because of that, further field research is mainly based on personal observations, photographs and collected leaflets. However, to better understand the functioning of the local communities using the surveyed shopping streets,

information gathered from the websites of organisations holding formal and informal events in the area and from social media proved important. Many people post photos and videos online showing everyday situations in the researched locations. Although they may be slightly distorted, and directed, showing sometimes a more 'ideal world' that the person happens to want to share, they are still extremely helpful in gaining a more accurate understanding of the life of the communities concerned on the high streets.

The next step was an urban analysis of the particular streets and finding hot spots on them, in other words, places where more activity of social groups in the urban space is noticeable. These locations were discovered using on-site photography, article analysis, and examination of pictures and videos that people shared on social media. A series of cross-sections were then made, cutting through the studied high streets and the areas behind them. The resulting drawings create a comprehensive image of the city's streets, not just in two dimensions but also presenting their relationship to the heights of buildings and the distances between them. The cross-sections generated are highlighted with hotspots that have already been identified and with supplementary data like transportation and traffic. In this way, it is possible to see the relationship between locations where people are more likely to congregate and activate and the location of public transport stops or traffic flows.

¹ "About the Academy", The Advocacy Academy, accessed January 15, 2023, <https://www.theadvocacyacademy.com/>

The following action is to examine the identified hot spots more closely, comprehend their precise nature, and learn about their potential. To do this, tangible and intangible, planned and spontaneous, common and uncommon elements in specific locations were extracted from the collected photographs and social

media material. The individual components were then superimposed on views of these locations, thus creating collages depicting their distorted and exaggerated representation of them that revealed their character and possibilities, but also negative aspects occurring in the high street.



figure 20 - Printed collage elements



figure 21 - Cut out collage elements

4.3. Brixton



figure 22 - Prepared collages



figure 23 -Brixton Road location

4.3.1. History

Brixton Road dates back to Roman times when the street was part of a road connecting London with Brighton Way.¹ Brixton began to develop significantly in the second half of the 19th century. It was then that railway and tram links to the centre of the capital were established, and the first electric lights were installed on the street in the area (Electric Avenue is next to Brixton Road). Brixton was primarily populated by the middle class during this time, but by the turn of the century, there had been a demographic shift as many of the wealthier people had left to make room for the working class.²

By the end of the 19th century, Brixton was famous for its many cinemas and theatre, and the district itself was inhabited by many artists. Unfortunately, during the Second World War, much of this part of the town was destroyed. It led to a severe housing crisis and subsequent demographic changes.³

Another point in Brixton's history that considerably influenced its appearance and character was the arrival of immigrants, which took place in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴ The region still has a distinctive ambience and stands out from the rest of London thanks to the new incomers. However, today, Brixton is not only well-known for its distinctiveness but also for its drug and crime issues and a sophisticated gentrification process, in which developers have acquired much of the social housing and evicted the poorest people as a result.⁵

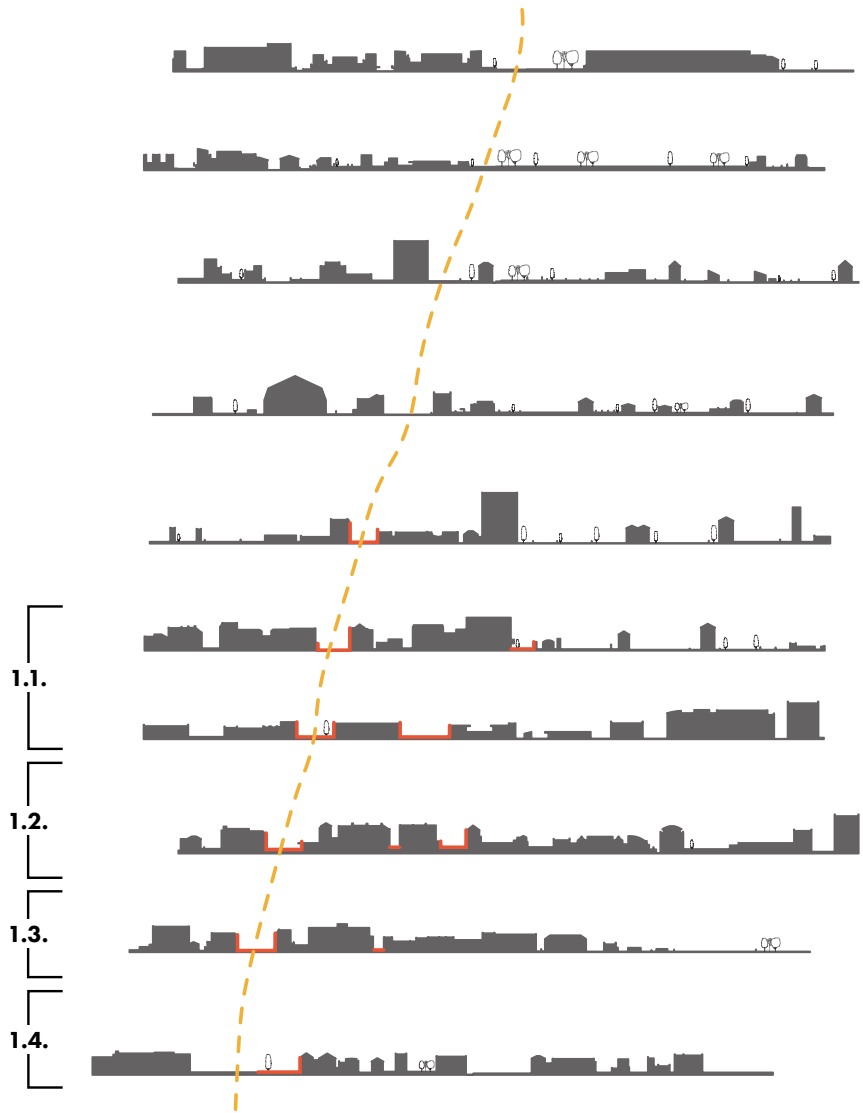
¹ Mike Urban, "Twilight stroll along Brixton Road – history, architecture and the buried River Effra", Brixton Buzz. November 28, 2014, <https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2014/11/twilight-stroll-along-brixton-road-history-architecture-and-the-buried-river-effra/>

² "Brixton: a short history", Urban75. Accessed January 25, 2023, <http://www.urban75.org/brixton/history/history.html>

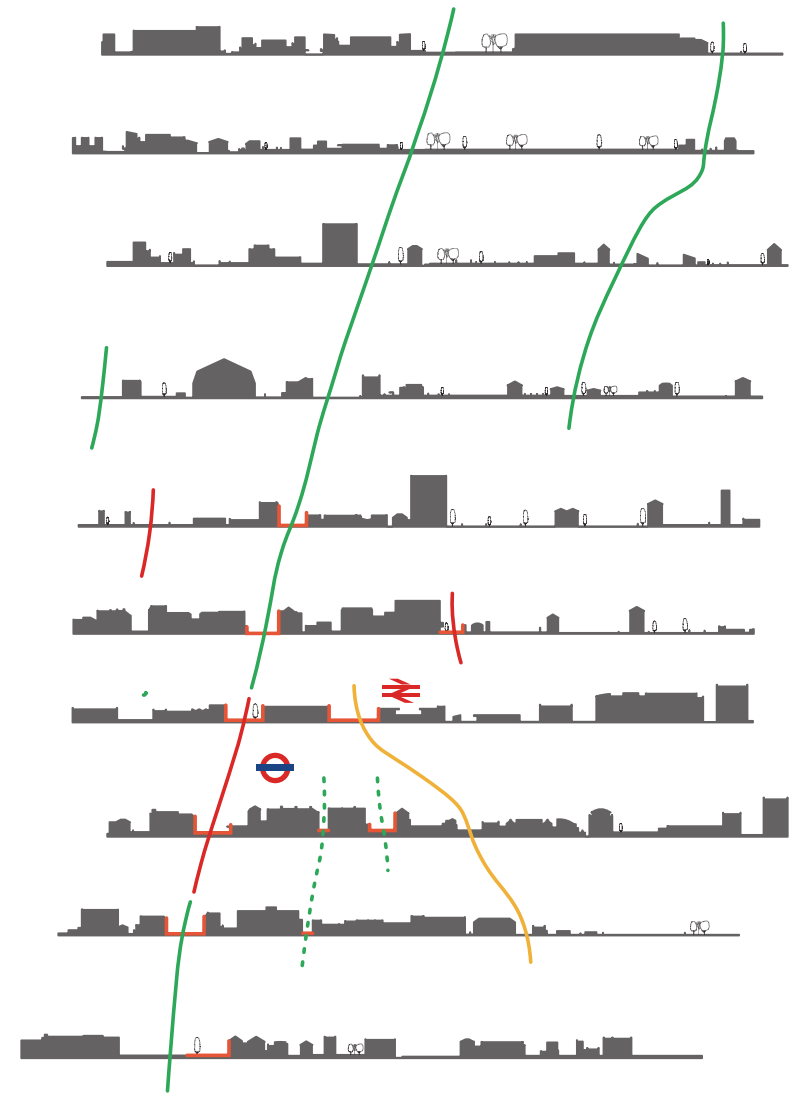
³ Urban75, "Brixton: a short history"

⁴ Urban75, "Brixton: a short history"

⁵ Jordan King, "Not welcome in my own neighbourhood": How gentrification is segregating Brixton", Metro. October 30, 2022, <https://metro.co.uk/2022/10/30/not-welcome-in-my-own-area-how-gentrification-is-segregating-brixton-17587009/>



— studied high street — hot spots



— hot spots — low traffic — moderate traffic — dense traffic — street closed to traffic

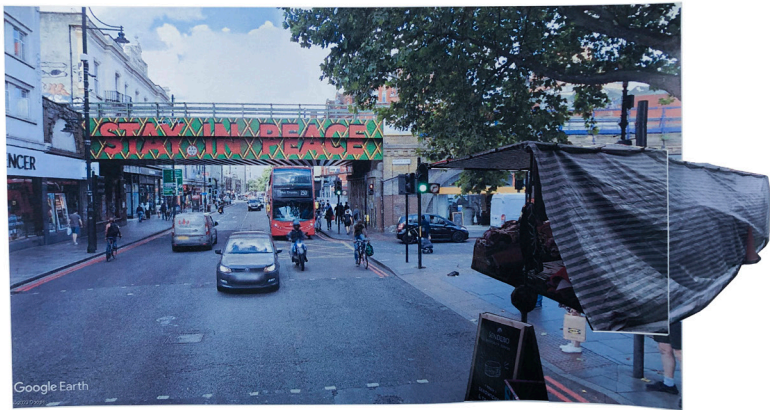


figure 26 - Collage of view 1.1.A



figure 28 - Collage of view 1.2.



figure 27 - Collage of view 1.1.B



figure 29 - Collage of view 1.3.



figure 30 - Collage of view 1.4.

4.4. Croydon



figure 31 - North End and High Street location

4.4.1. History

Croydon was formed on the Roman road leading from London to Brighton. As Brighton gained popularity as a vacation destination in the 1780s and Croydon served as the linking point to London, its significance started to increase. Around the time of the Second World War, slum areas started to be cleaned, and more shops began to appear along the main streets, including fashionable department stores such as Alders and Grants.

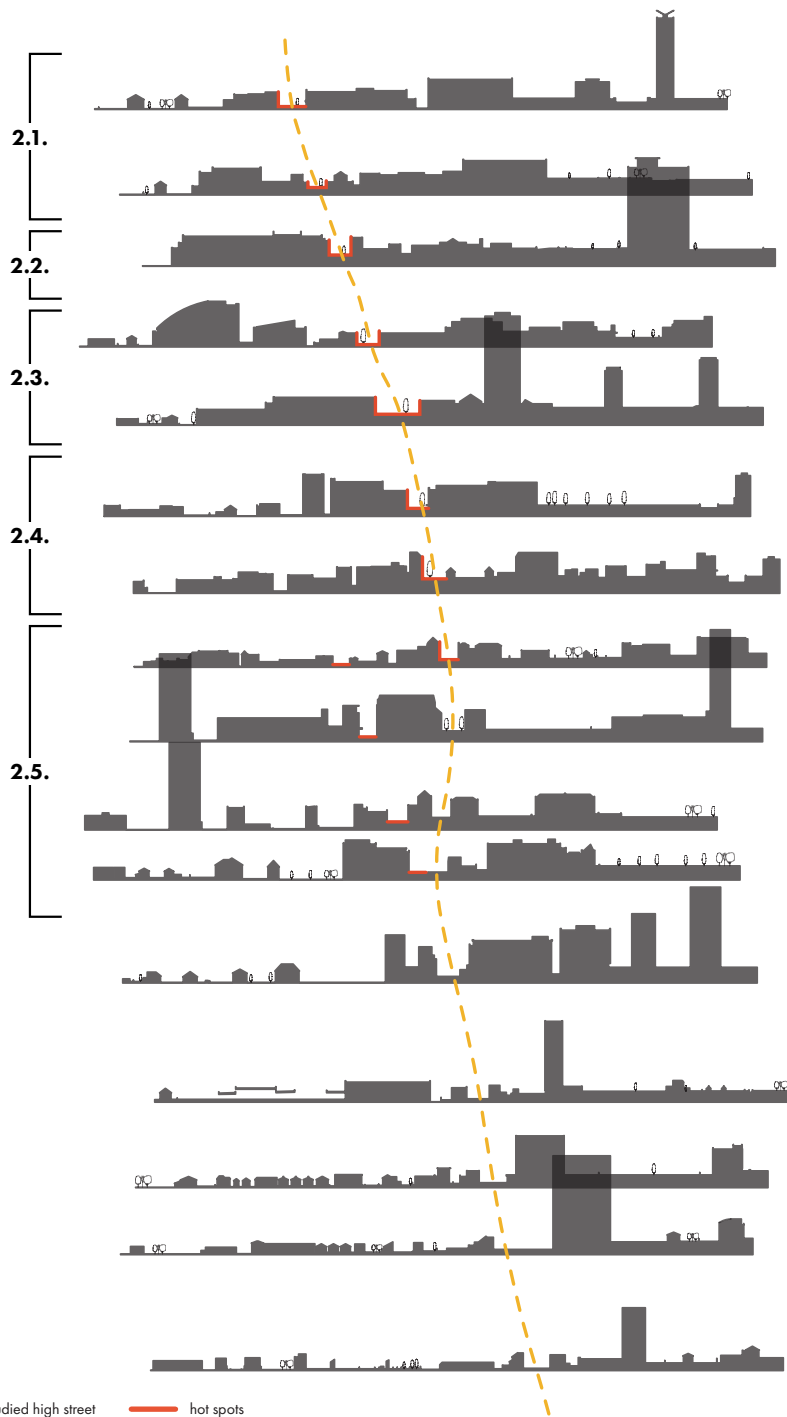
However, the most significant changes in the character of Croydon began to take place in the middle of the last century. As London was expanding rapidly, there started to be a shortage of vacant land in the central part of the city for new developments. As a result, it was decided to relocate certain offices from the center to the outskirts. With the construction of new tall office buildings and multi-storey car parks, the character of Croydon began to change dramatically. The storied Whitgift Middle School building was torn down in 1968, and the Whitgift Centre, a massive shopping complex bearing the same name, was erected there the following year. It led to a further expansion of road infrastructure,

through which many residents lost their homes located on land taken by the new developments. Many blame a particular politician - Sir James Marshall - for these decisions. He was incredibly influential and is regarded as the managing director of Croydon at the time. He was able to offer substantial developers valuable land at an attractive price and with good rail links to central London.¹

Towards the end of the last century, the process of making the town more attractive began. For this reason, North End Street was closed to cars.² But soon after, in 2004, a new shopping center called Centrale was constructed on the same street directly across from the aforementioned Whitgift Centre, which is now poorly fulfilling its original purpose and is currently half vacant.

¹ "Why did Croydon turn into a mini-Manhattan?", Wellesley Road. Accessed December 18, 2022, <https://wellesleyroad.github.io/why.html>

² "Croydon High Street: new permanent pedestrian zone", Croydon, Accessed December 24, 2022, <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/planning-and-regeneration/regeneration/regeneration-projects-croydon/search-regeneration-projects-croydon/croydon-high-street-new-permanent-pedestrian-zone>



— studied high street — hot spots



— hot spots — low traffic — moderate traffic — dense traffic - - - street closed to traffic



figure 34 - Collage of view 2.1.



figure 36 - Collage of view 2.3.



figure 35 - Collage of view 2.2.



figure 37 - Collage of view 2.4.



figure 38 - Collage of view 2.5.A



figure 39 - Collage of view 2.5.B

4.5. Camden



figure 40 - Camden High Street location

4.5.1. History

Initially, Camden consisted of only a handful of houses nestled along the main road, today's High Street. Development of the area began with the opening of Regent's Canal to traffic and the construction of the railway in the first half of the 19th century. Improved transport led to the establishment of new factories and warehouses and encouraged new residents to settle in the surrounding area.¹

Camden began to gain an industrial character. The construction of new factories resulted in an enormous quantity of dust, smoke, and noise as well as a rising demand for labour. So more and more working-class people started to come to the town for whom affordable housing was created. The accommodation's attractive prices and the proximity to central London also attracted numerous artists who began to take up residence in Camden.²

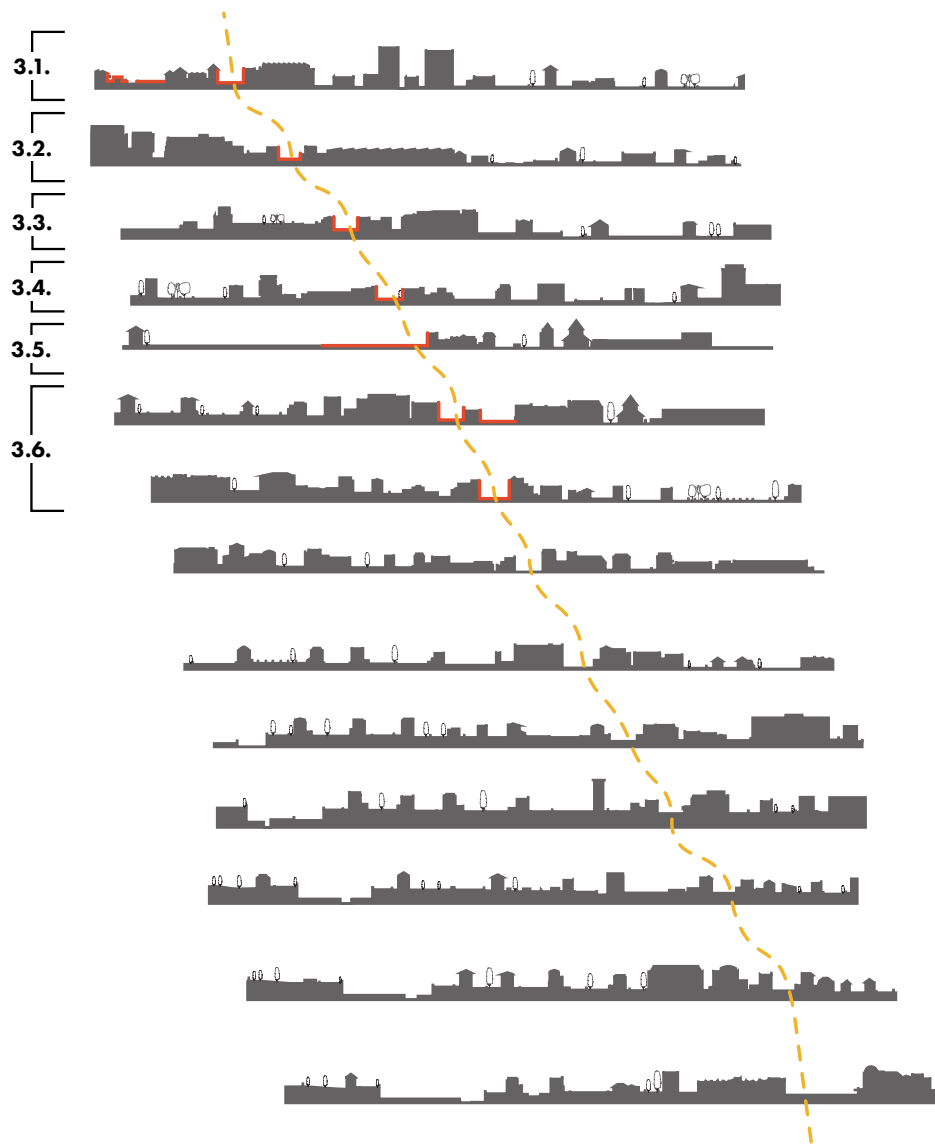
The 1960s saw the pivotal moment that fundamentally altered Camden Town's identity.

The former steam engine building was converted into a gin distillery and then into a cultural venue, which at the time became a cradle of rebellion and revolution. It was on this premises that many bands began their careers, and Camden itself is considered the birthplace of punk.³

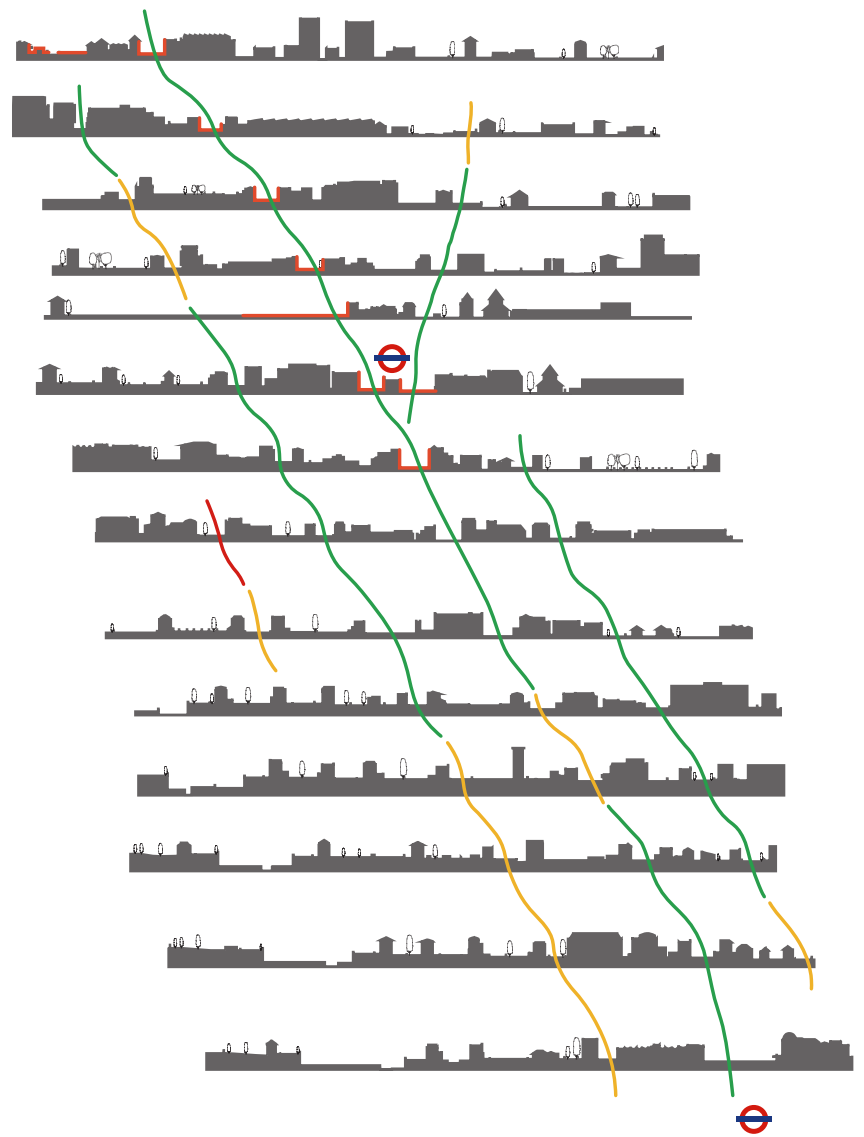
Today, the area described is one of London's biggest tourist attractions. The colourful facades of the buildings, which house a diversity of shops and restaurants, and the resonant and slightly rebellious nature of the place attract numerous customers. Additionally, one of the most well-known marketplaces in the world is Camden Market, which debuted in the latter half of the 20th century and is situated close to the High Street.⁴

¹ "A Brief History of Camden Town", The Camden Watch Company, February 20, 2018, <https://www.camdenwatchcompany.com/blogs/the-camden-watch-company/a-brief-history-of-camden-town>
² The Camden Watch Company, "A brief History of Camden Town"

³ The Camden Watch Company, "A brief History of Camden Town"
⁴ The Camden Watch Company, "A brief History of Camden Town"



— studied high street — hot spots



— hot spots — low traffic — moderate traffic — dense traffic



figure 43 - Collage of view 3.1.



figure 45 - Collage of view 3.3.



figure 44 - Collage of view 3.2.



figure 46 - Collage of view 3.4.



figure 47 - Collage of view 3.5.



figure 48 - Collage of view 3.6.

4.6. Peckham



figure 49 - Rye Lane location

4.6.1. History

In the early 18th century, Peckham was only a village located on the outskirts of London, with a population of a few hundred. It was one of the last stops for traders travelling to the capital, who often stayed there overnight.¹ With the development of transport, including the new railway line connecting Peckham to the city, more and more people chose to live on the outskirts, resulting in much of the local area being converted to housing.²

As this part of the town became increasingly popular, more shops and business premises began to open in Peckham. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Jones & Higgins department store, one of the most fashionable of its kind at the time, and Holdron's department store opened on Rye Lane. The downfall of retailing in Peckham started in 1949 with the closing of the second. The neighborhood's

image was declining as more and more businesses started to close or relocate.³

In the nineties, a process of regeneration of the area described began. It resulted in several trendy bars, clubs and cultural venues opening. One of the more fashionable venues today is the Bussey Building - a former arms factory building that has been transformed into an art and cultural habitat.⁴

The appearance of new functions on Rye Lane has resulted in a partial change in its character. Nevertheless, it is still true that small local businesses, whose owners often have immigrant roots, are still a vital part of the street and play an essential role in the local community.⁵

1 Soreta Puri, "A brief history of Rye Lane - Peckham", South London Club. Accessed 25 January, 2023, <https://www.southlondonclub.co.uk/blog/a-brief-history-of-rye-lane-peckham#:~:text=Named%20after%20manufacturer%20George%20Bussey,home%20to%20several%20art%20studios.>

2 "Historic Peckham", Southwark Heritage. October 31, 2016, <https://southwarkheritage.wordpress.com/2016/10/31/historic-peckham/>

3 Puri, "A brief history of Rye Lane"

4 Puri, "A brief history of Rye Lane"

5 Puri, "A brief history of Rye Lane"

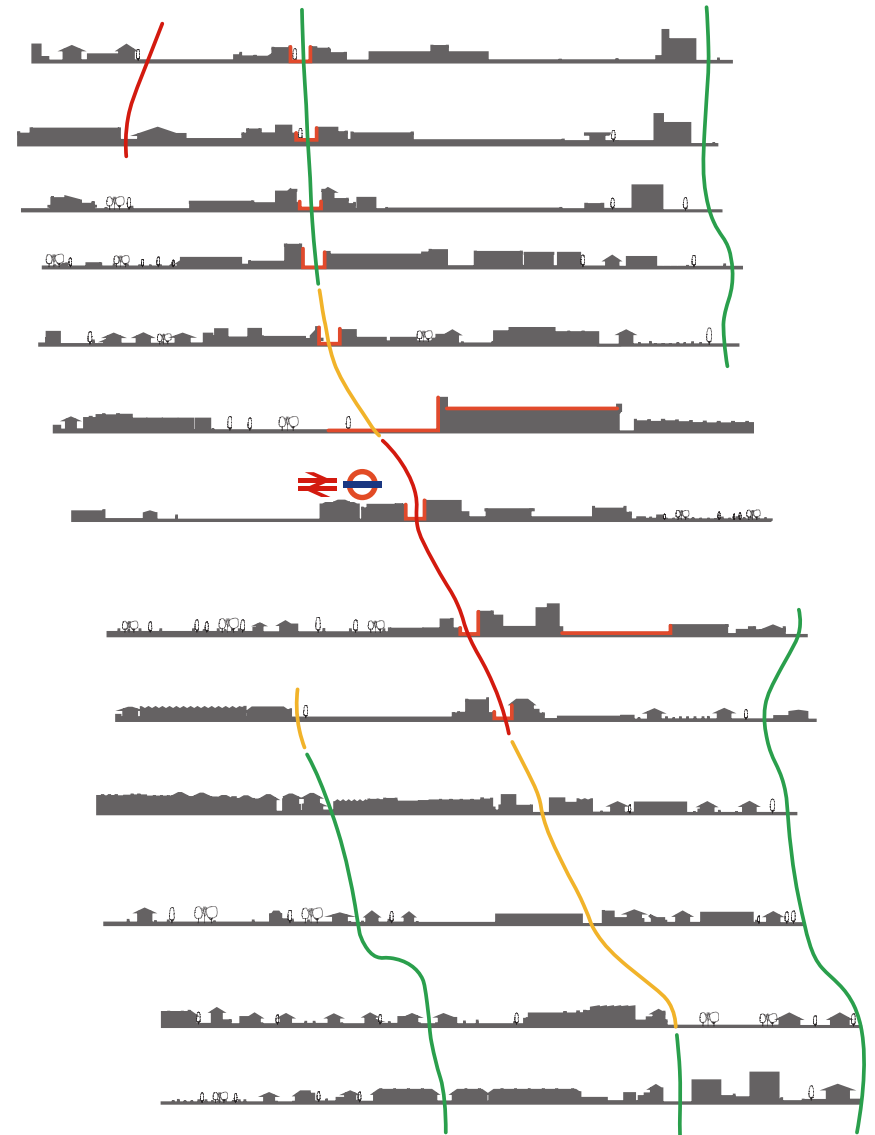
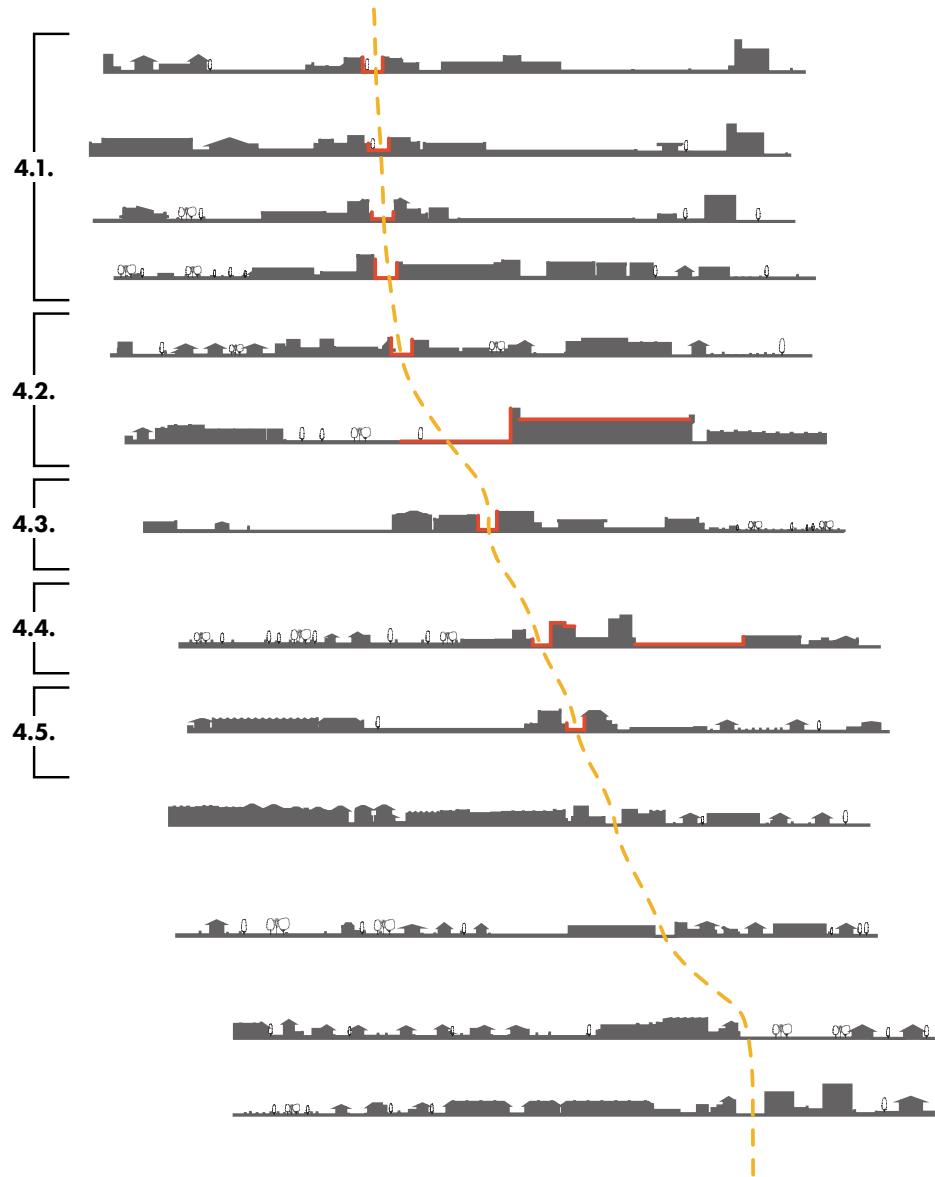




figure 52 - Collage of view 4.1.



figure 54 - Collage of view 4.2.B

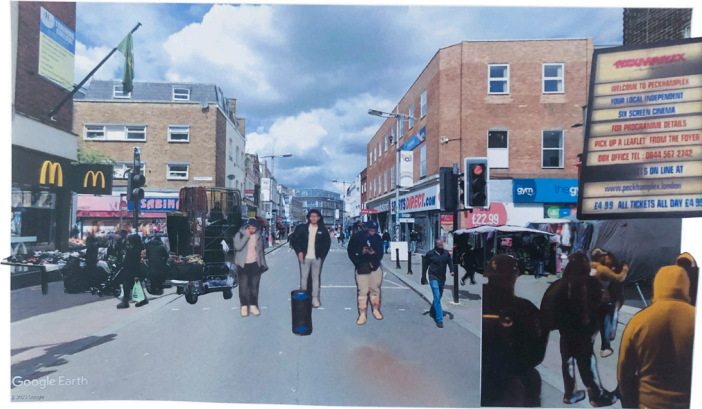


figure 53 - Collage of view 4.2.A



figure 55 - Collage of view 4.3.



figure 56 - Collage of view 4.4.



figure 57 - Collage of view 4.5.

5. Conclusion

Phil Hubbard writes in his book: „There is a well-worn cliché suggesting Britain is a nation of shopkeepers.”¹ Nevertheless, their culture associated with high streets is beginning to disappear, and the once vibrant shops providing core services are becoming empty. Nonetheless, the presented research shows that even with these emptying shopping streets turned into liminal places, it is still possible to find locations treated by many as destinations and distinguished by a strong social and community character. Sometimes these are parts of high streets that have been closed to traffic and which serve as venues for formal and informal events. However, it is usually the hidden places, not visible at first glance, that are most important to citizens. These can be streets perpendicular or parallel to the shopping street with only pedestrian flow or small squares that serve as places for residents to meet and party. It also happens that the roofs of buildings along high streets become such socially significant locations.

Looking more closely at these overlooked places, it is clear that their original shopping function is no longer as essential as it was in the past. It is still visible, often in the form of individual informal stalls or small street markets, but it is no longer a foundation of today's high streets. Present-day shopping streets are increasingly becoming spaces where all other activities that are not shopping take place. It is also evident in the analysis of the evolution of high streets depicting the changing consumer habits of society, especially the growing popularity of online shopping.

I used Vikas Mehta's book *Public Space* to categorise all these activities having placed on, beside and behind high streets. In this work, the author divided modalities into six categories:

- civic,
- social,
- restorative,

- symbolic,
- exchange,
- kinetic.²

Each of these is more or less visible in the surveyed high streets. All of them, naturally, serve to circulate people and, in most cases, cars (kinetic). They also are used for trading goods (exchange). However, in most cases, they are places for meeting friends and strangers, for partying or dining together (social), and for the individual or collective expression of one's identity, often through art (symbolic). Sometimes they are also sites for political and religious expression (civic) and free and open medical and psychological help (restorative).

The combination of the gathered information and the analysis of selected case studies enables London's high streets to be treated not as dying spaces in the city but as still living organisms, able to adapt to the constant changes occurring in the appearance and character of shopping streets. From my analysis, I can conclude that vibrant hot spots near high streets can be found in any part of the city, even the most degraded. Sometimes these places are distant points from each other, and sometimes they form themselves into interconnected systems. It is why I firmly believe that each spot can be treated as an impulse to improve other fragments of urban structures, whether by linking them or continuing existing connections. In my case, I decided to test my architectural solutions on the segment of the high street in Croydon I studied, where the hot spots nearby have the potential to continue, and the numerous shopping centres that no longer fulfil their commercial function await a transformation that takes into account the unique ability of shopping streets to change dynamically based on programmatic, spatial and temporal interventions that go beyond the limitations of window fronts as manifestations of commercial functions.

¹ Hubbard, *The battle for the High Street*, 15

² Vikas Mehta, "Public Space: Notes on why it Matters, what We Should Know, and how to Realize Its Potential" (New York: Routledge, 2022), 49

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8. Appendix 1

8.1. Collages Figures List

The appendix below contains a list of the author's photographs and screenshots collected from websites and social media, from which the individual elements used to create the collages

presented in the research paper were extracted. The list of figures has been ordered according to the order of the presented collages.

8.2. Brixton

8.2.1. view 1.1.A



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.2.2. view 1.1.B



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

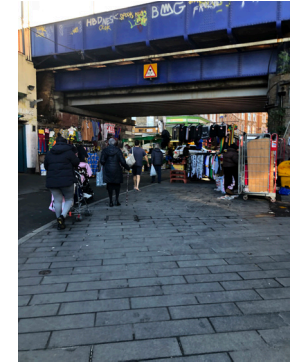


figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.2.3. view 1.2.

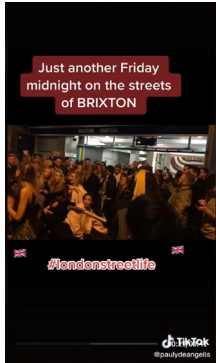


figure 1 - TikTok, author: @pauldeangelis



figure 2 - TikTok, author: @ezramusicgarden



figure 3 - TikTok, author: @ezramusicgarden

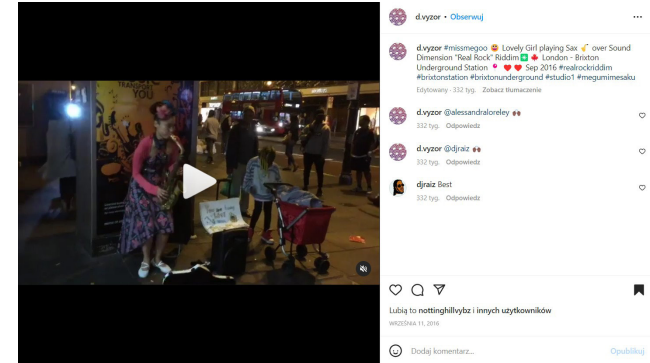


figure 6 - Instagram, author: d.vyzor

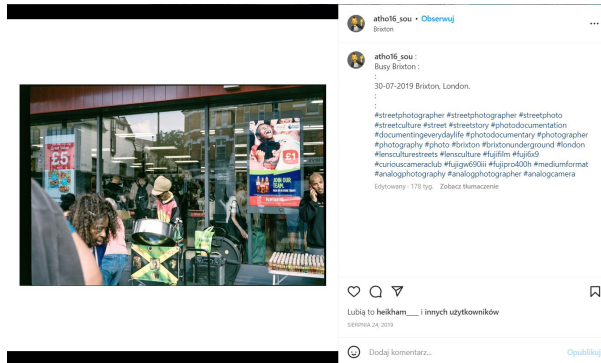


figure 4 - Instagram, author: atho16_sou

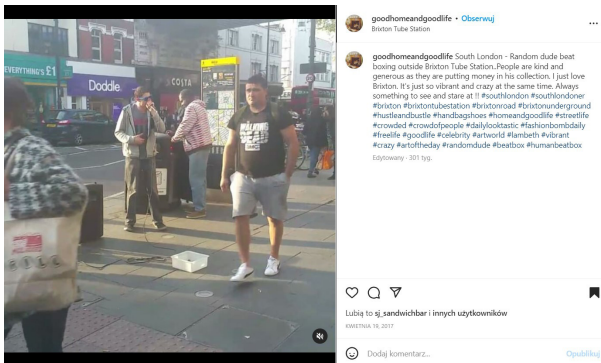


figure 5 - Instagram, author: goodhomeandgoodlife

8.2.4. view 1.3.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 6 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - TikTok, author: @livinglondonhistory



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.2.5. view 1.3.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

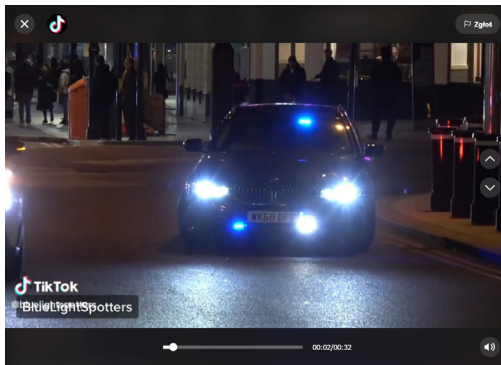


figure 4 - TikTok, author: @bluelightspotters

8.3. Croydon

8.3.1. view 2.1.

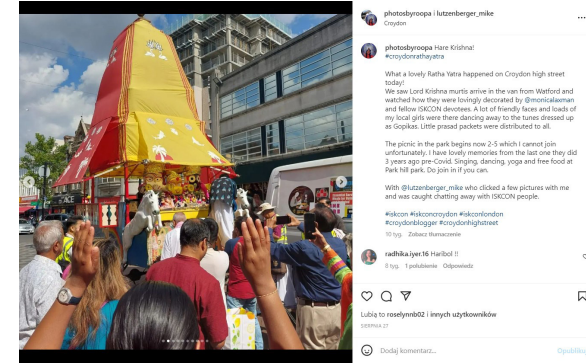


figure 1 - Instagram, author: photosbyroopa



figure 2 - TikTok, author: @cwidz2

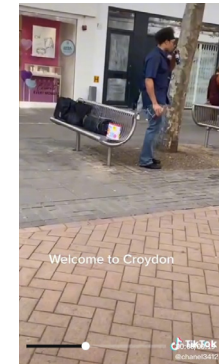


figure 3 - TikTok, author: @chanel3412



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.3.2. view 2.2.



figure 1 - Instagram, author: lilahlilmoves



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.3.3. view 2.3.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

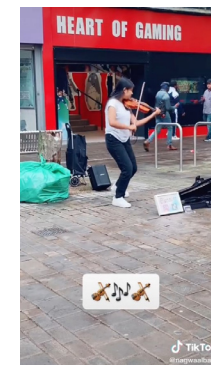


figure 3 - TikTok, author: @nagwaalbahy

8.3.4. view 2.4.



figure 1 - Instagram, author: pride_of_mafrica

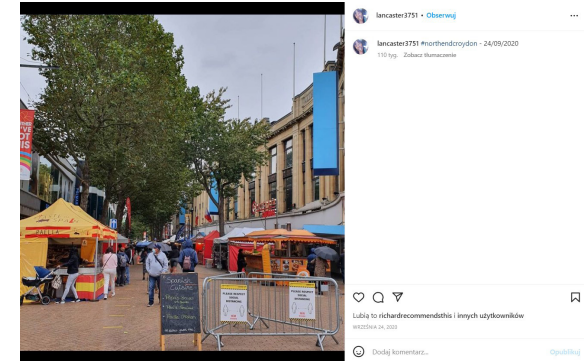


figure 4 - Instagram, author: lancaster3751



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - Twitter, author: @Continent_SM

8.3.5. view 2.5.A



figure 1 - Instagram, author: appreciating_life_



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.3.6. view 2.5.B



figure 1 - Instagram, author: croydon_colours

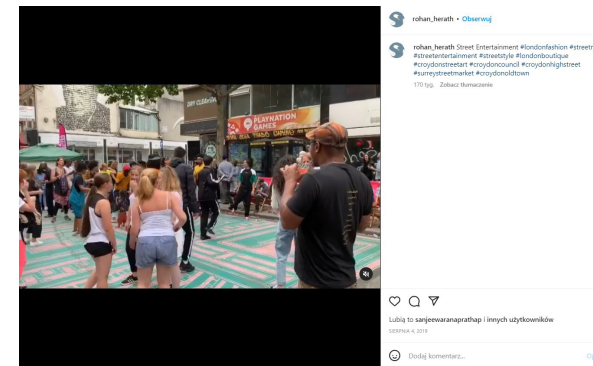


figure 2 - Instagram, author: rohan_herath



figure 3 - Instagram, author: handsnfam

8.4. Camden

8.4.1. view 3.1.



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 1 - TikTok, author: @shawthefoodsheep



figure 2 - TikTok, author: @shawthefoodsheep



figure 3 - TikTok, author: @sali_mamuchadze

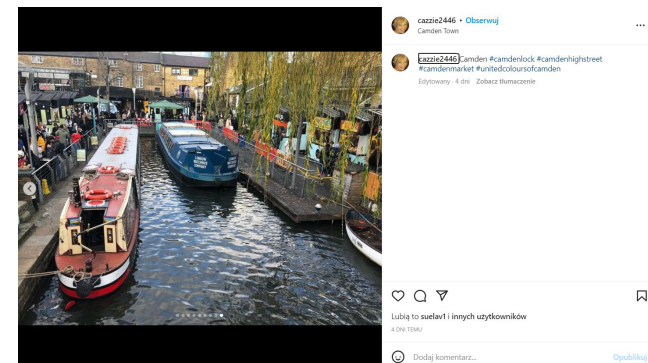


figure 4 - Instagram, author: cazzie2446

8.4.2. view 3.2.

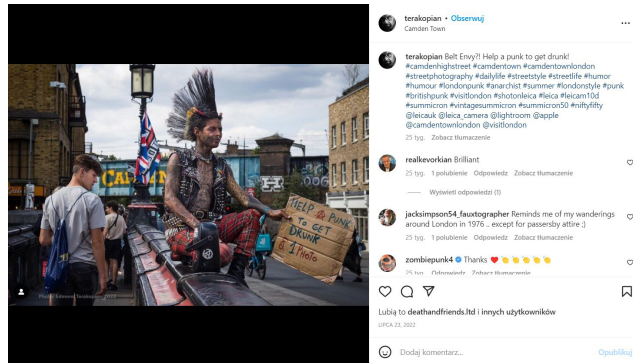


figure 1 - Instagram, author: terakopian



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - video, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - TikTok, author: @erfarrow84

8.4.3. view 3.3.



figure 1 - Instagram, author: londonbyan



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

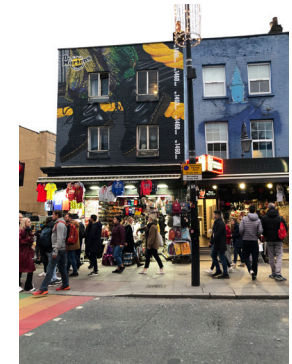


figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - Instagram, author: flimbyrintha

8.4.4. view 3.4.

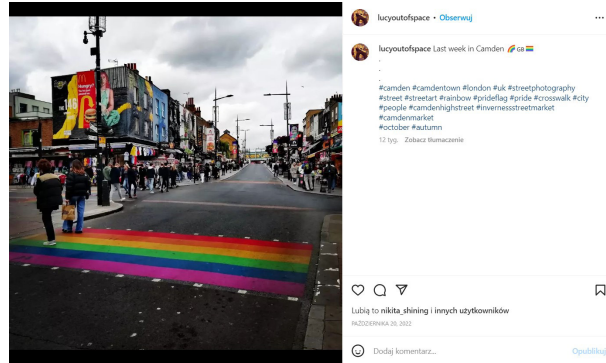


figure 5 - Instagram, author: lucyoutofspace



figure 1 - Instagram, author: thecornerlondoncity



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.4.5. view 3.5.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.4.6. view 3.6.

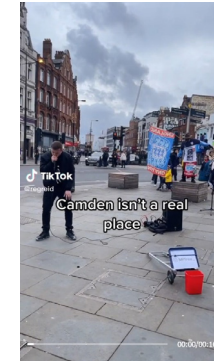


figure 1 - TikTok, author: @regreid



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

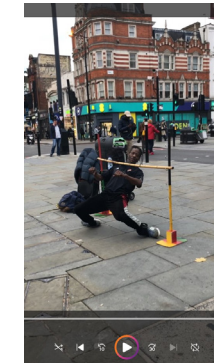


figure 2 - video, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 5 - TikTok, author: @whatdabrunch

8.5. Peckham

8.5.1. view 4.1.



figure 1 - TikTok, author: @mhshin638



figure 2 - TikTok, author: @tessy_og



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.2. view 4.2.A



figure 1 - TikTok, author: @stay.loyal.a.stay.humble



figure 2 - TikTok, author: @stay.loyal.a.stay.humble



figure 3 - TikTok, author: @stay.loyal.a.stay.humble



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 6 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.3. view 4.2.B

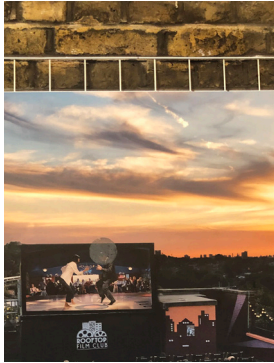


figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.4. view 4.3.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - TikTok, author: @placestogoinlondon



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.5. view 4.4.



figure 1 - photograph, author: copelandsocial



figure 2 - photograph, author: copelandsocial



figure 3 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 4 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.5. view 4.4.



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8.5.6. view 4.5.



figure 1 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 2 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska



figure 3 - TikTok, author: @childsdraw



figure 4 - TikTok, author: @littlesisterpeckham



figure 5 - photograph, author: Weronika Dardzinska

8. Appendix 2

Reflection

The motivation for choosing the MSc Graduation Studio Heterogeneous City - London in Architectural Design Crossovers course as a graduation studio was undoubtedly the desire to understand and gain a closer study of London's incredibly diverse urban fabric, which can provide a compelling testing ground for research and probing new architectural solutions. A further benefit of the studio was its open-endedness, which permitted individual interpretation of the subject and choice of the precise field of inquiry. In addition, my choice of study was also driven by the intention to develop not only in the area of design but also in the area of research, as I knew it would allow me to step outside of my comfort zone and take on new challenges.

The topic of my research paper was born out of an interest in the field of ethnography and people-centred place making. My fascination with the patchwork nature of London's urban fabric, created from many seemingly incongruous elements assembling into a holistic urban structure, encouraged me to take a closer look at this phenomenon on the high streets. The research paper I presented, entitled *The diverse nature of high streets. From fragmented to coherent spaces.* explores how London's famous high streets function in areas of high ethnic, cultural and morphological diversity. Because there is now a greater emphasis on finding solutions to the issues of unoccupied and neglected sites along shopping streets that no longer serve their original function, I chose to concentrate on the research of high streets. They are evolving into liminal spaces, attracting social groups like immigrants who use these places less conventionally since they lack a proper location in the urban context. Since the local authorities and architectural designers and planners increasingly seek new tools to improve and breathe new life into these progressively abandoned spaces along high streets, I hope that my research work and proposed design solutions will provide a different perspective on the hidden potential of shopping streets and the future of their regeneration.

In this regard, I concentrated on creating a research methodology and outlining a theoretical framework in the first quarter. A crucial point in my process turned out to be a seminar in which we were to select one text from among the theoretical works presented and relate it to our research at the time. I decided to choose quotes from Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour's book *Learning from Las Vegas*. The methodology they presented and their approach to holistically analysing architectural forms and exploring the character and hidden meanings on the famous Las Vegas Strip proved highly relevant later in my research work.

The methodology I developed was initially heavily based on interviews conducted on selected sites. But as soon as I got to London, my idea was swiftly changed. In the places I investigated, those marginalised social groups I initially wanted to reach were feeling immense pressure from developers and authorities who, in a bid to acquire valuable land for new developments, were looking for ways to get rid of the 'more problematic' residents. For this reason, many people were distrustful and reluctant to talk. In addition, some of my locations have high crime rate and drug problems, which further did not facilitate any interaction between the two parties. In contrast, I found it helpful to interview the baristas working in cafes on the studied high streets. Buying coffee fostered conversation and although most of these people live outside of these locations, they were able to answer some of my questions due to their work and daily observation of their surroundings.

Another idea I had while working on the methodology was to create a series of sketches made during the fieldwork. However, again due to the relatively dangerous locations and several situations with accosting people, I also had to abandon this idea. Instead, I opted for faster means of documentation like serial photography, recording and logging. In addition, a crucial point in the fieldwork

proved to be visiting local libraries located close to the studied high streets, which initially served as places for me to structure my notes and the data I collected and ultimately allowed me to become inspired to create a functional programme for my project. The same goes for the abandoned shopping centres in Croydon, which also influenced my subsequent design process and determined my site for the project.

The material gathered in London and the data collected from many social media and articles identifying locations where more social group activity is noticeable in the space allowed me to continue working on my research. Again, the 'open' nature of the studio encouraged me to play with, explore and test different, unconventional ways of working with data, presenting research findings and drawing conclusions from them. In my case, I tried to use various visual techniques, including making a series of cross-sections and creating collages, for which I used my photographs taken in London and collected screenshots from different social media accounts. I believe this allowed me to record and capture an intriguing image of how various social groups used the spaces I investigated, which further helped me to draw the conclusions essential for the subsequent design phase.

Presentation P2, meaning the change from the research phase to the design phase, was an extremely challenging point for me in the entire process. Working with the studied urban fabric during this time and conducting people-oriented research made me fear that the project I would make in my chosen site would have the opposite effect of their possible benefits and would be wholly unrelated to the larger professional context. As a result, I continued to try to delve further into other areas of my studies, delaying the beginning of the design phase. Eventually, reassured by my mentors that it was just as important to know what I did not want to design, I created an initial concept that did not quite meet my expectations but made me realise what direction I should not take with my project. Thanks to this experience, I took a step back and re-examined all the aspects I would and would

not like to include in my design. It led to a change in the site, which this time fits appropriately with my principles, which began to clarify while I was still in London. In hindsight, I can now say that my initial ideas worked from the start, but I should have believed more in myself, my skills and not been afraid to make mistakes when working on the research and design.

After breaking through the above-mentioned creative block and the help of mentors to look more broadly at my project and design interests, I was finally able to start developing a project that seems to me to be neatly beginning to combine research with urban, architectural and structural aspects. The diversification of the character and morphology of space that we can see on sites located near high streets has become crucial for me in the further development of my project. I think the combination of different functions will allow for the generation of a variety of activity types, thus encouraging multiple actors to use the area, not just those focused on traditional shopping functions. Additionally, in the spots I have found, I have noticed how crucial it is to create a space that the people can customise to a given degree, making it meaningful, relevant and resonating with local residents. I want my project not to be another physical structure disrupting the community but to become another hot spot on the city map, shaping positive experiences and encouraging interaction.

In conclusion, I am fully aware that I have had many ups and downs during my journey from the beginning of the year to the present moment. However, in the end, each situation has taught me to learn as many lessons as possible and allowed me to gain more confidence in my opinions and skills. I am satisfied with the progress I have made and have begun to believe that the design I will eventually complete will be a socially valuable project that responds to the current and future needs of the residents and that the high streets themselves will finally stop being treated as dying spaces in the city but as living organisms capable of adapting to new conditions.

In the final part of the graduation period, I want to pursue all my design ideas with much more confidence and enjoy the design process itself. Additionally, I want to re-test various visual

representational techniques that will further emphasise the connection between my research and the project.