

# Symbiotic Cities

## Leaders

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Image: U-TT, Torre David, Caracas, Venezuela © Daniel Schwartz/U-TT at ETH  
<https://www.bmiaa.com/si-no-the-architecture-of-urban-think-tank-retrospective-at-tu-munich/>

## Goals

Sustainable cities and communities **UN SDG 11**  
Reduced inequalities **UNSDG 10**  
Responsible Consumption and Production **UNSDG 12**

## Objective

We find ourselves in unprecedented times where the regular commute to city centres and our social interaction has been radically altered during the pandemic. This has given many of us a new found appreciation for our locality, it's amenity spaces (no matter how small), and a true appreciation of our neighbours and local community facilities.

This year Symbiotic Cities DTT seeks to develop proposals to maximize these new opportunities and ways of living, working and playing within the lens of a 15minute city approach that can enable and foster community. Our Think Tank will explore the new norm, what this could be going forward, and how this can be fed into the built environment to create sustainable and resilient communities with a positive lifestyle balance encouraged by intergenerational living and inclusive spaces. We will investigate how communities can have a part in placemaking, as well as how these new relationships can expand symbiosis into our built environment by researching possible economic models.

## Why

The city is often a place of anonymity which has its benefits but at times it also means that local people and communities have little say in their surrounding environments and what happens there. The role of architecture in shaping and enabling communities has been much debated over the years. Throughout history and across different geographic, political and social contexts communities can inhabit many diverse forms. Grand monuments to modest market places and village squares can all in their way provide the complex and diverse elements that sit within the definition of community. Communities are an essential part of our society, which can offer people a sense of belonging but also offer economic advantages in

reducing demand on health services, policing and productivity. Disconnected communities have been estimated to cost the UK economy £32 billion every year, our proposals will look to address this and provide a solution which not only offers economic but also social benefit.

Communities have been present in London since its foundation. Whether born from geographic location, a common interest, tribalism or a need for a dynamic form of organization. The benefit of community has been well documented throughout history. This is still true today with shared social and amenity spaces becoming even more critical to address issues of loneliness and isolation in an international pandemic. Our current reduced ability to 'congregate' has given us a new found appreciation for neighbours and that impromptu chat with someone at distance in the park. A community is a social unit that shares commonalities such as religion, values, customs or identity; they allow people to share unique experiences or to solve common problems.

With models of living, working and learning in the city becoming increasingly unaffordable, inaccessible and isolated, what role does community have to play? If communities are about place, how can communities be central to place making in a post-Covid world where priorities and orders of importance have shifted to provide new opportunities.

This Design Think Tank will look to explore the role of architecture and design in shaping communities, and also how the existing built environment can be adapted to facilitate existing communities.

## What

At this time of great change, we have the opportunity explore what future modes of living and working might be. We will test how the built environment can be designed or adapted to provide spaces which facilitate symbiotic relationships at a city, neighborhood, and a building scale. With many people being able to work from home and at any location at that, many people are moving out of the city meaning there will be vacant or underused buildings such as offices and also housing. At the same time there are missing facilities in these more local areas which will now come to the fore in the concept of a 15-minute city.

1. We will explore what is community? How is community perceived in current times?
2. We will explore how under-occupied or vacant buildings can be adapted and repurposed for a wider range of uses within your 15minute city
3. We will investigate how a variety of user groups can be accommodated within one building or a series of buildings that can create symbiotic relationships, which will include an element of intergenerational living
4. The building as prototype will be tested and explored
5. We will research the changing policy and financial models available to support and promote your proposals

## Where

Following on from your Design Cities Module, we will continue our studies in the Hoxton area to capitalise on your research and understanding of local communities. We aim to choose an existing building or set of buildings to adapt for your new proposals. By looking at your proposal as a prototype for future adaptations/ interventions to the city, bear in mind that this proposal could be applied elsewhere in the city.

During the course of this Think Tank study of community you will be invited to explore the issue from many different viewpoints. We will be seeking answers to a number of questions including: What is community? What role can community take in the city? How can architecture impact society? How does community address different social contexts?

What role could innovative spatial design and architecture take in providing solutions?

The following provides a checklist of issues to be explored and a rough outline of our anticipated direction of enquiry for the Symbiotic Cities Think Tank.

### **Theme 01 - What is Community and why is it important?**

- Identify the root causes of social isolation, loneliness and physical detachment which cause disconnection in communities and within the City
- Research connections between 'community' and societal welfare
- Consider how rapid urbanization, evictions, economic growth and market driven development has impacted communities. How might the built environment expand community networks and address urban poor movements
- Understand the communities of Hoxton, where do they work well, where they might be improved?
- Consider the non-physical aspects – cultural, social, economic, political, environmental
- Consider alternative living and working models which could offer Symbiotic relationships - Intergenerational living, co-living etc should be considered
- Understand how your proposals can learn from the communities in place, and how design might be developed collaboratively to empower people
- Define your chosen existing and future site user groups – workers, homeless, young families, elderly, young professionals, students, children, craftsmen, industry etc.
- Identify a 'needs' and 'values' matrix to establish where symbiotic relationships could be facilitated in your design project

### **02. Theme 2 - How can the built environment create community?**

- Create a 'set of design ingredients' for your building project - the proposed user group(s), the required building use(s), types of community benefit(s) and the required architectural components.
- Consider how proposals might be replicated across a number of sites.
- Consider the 24-hour use of the site and its transformation throughout the day
- Define a design programme and design brief to meet the needs of the varied user groups and the neighbourhood (user guidelines)
- Define how proposals might be commercially viable, by exploring community land trusts, potential funding and a general reciprocal approach amongst the users and owners of your site.

### **03. Theme 3 - The site**

- Research the 'typologies' of existing buildings which are underutilised in the City - Create a matrix of building typologies - score pros and cons
- Define a framework for selection of your site. This should have the ultimate aim of finding an existing building or structure suitable to meet the users' needs as defined above
- Select your neighbourhood site - Consider how its location might provide economic, social and practical support to the surrounding locality.
- Develop a people based architecture which caters for the unique situation of each relevant community group
- Design a self-supporting neighborhood at a building scale. This should include spaces to live, work and spaces for community interaction
- Develop a narrative to explain how this could be implemented successful-

ly in any London location - consider flexibility, social responsibility, implementation, buildability etc

- Develop a series of drawings/ models / visuals etc to 'sell' this proposition to local boroughs / the GLA / developers etc

<b>Who</b>	Architecture for all...
<b>Impact</b>	We find ourselves in times with a real need, desire and capacity to change large societal constructs and parts of our urban fabric. As designers we have a central place in these big discussions and should not let the opportunity pass to shape the future of our how we all inhabit and interact in cities.
<b>Relevant Policy/ Guidance</b>	GLA Good Growth by Design NHS Healthy New Towns Initiative Town & Country Planning (Use Classes) Order Use Class E & F
<b>Additional Resources</b>	Housing Learning & Improvement Network <a href="https://www.housinglin.org.uk/">https://www.housinglin.org.uk/</a>  OWCH <a href="https://www.owch.org.uk/">https://www.owch.org.uk/</a>  APPG Intergenerational Living <a href="https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Policy_documents/Healing-the-Generational-Divide.pdf">https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Policy_documents/Healing-the-Generational-Divide.pdf</a>
<b>Reading List</b>	Walkable City, Jeff Speck  How To Kill A City, Peter Moskowitz  A Theory of Good City Form, Kevin A. Lynch  Spatial Agency: Other ways of doing architecture, Awan, Scheider & Till  Thinking about Cohousing: the creation of intentional neighbourhoods' M Field, Diggers & Dreamers, 2004  Radical Housing: Designing multi-generational and co-living housing for all, Caroline Dove  Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing, Josh Ryan-Collins
<b>Articles/Films</b>	2020 June 'New Ground' Cohousing Community, High Barnet: resilience and adaptability  2020 1st LGBT co-housing scheme in the UK, 30/7/20 by Amanda Girling-Budd  2020 The New Generation of Self-Created Utopias New York Times Style magazine Jan 22nd 2020  2018. Happy together: lonely baby boomers turn to co-housing. Anna Leach. Guardian Aug 15  2018. Rowan Moore A Blueprint for British Housing in 2028. Observer Jan 21st  2018 Living Closer. Je Ahn, Olivia Tusinski, Chloe Treger. Studio Weave/RIBA Jun 2018