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The High Street and Localism in the era of home working

Higher Goals

UN SDG 08 Decent work and economic growth
UN SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities
UN SDG 12 Responsible Consumption

Project Objective

Imagine new high street building typologies ingrained in the characteristics of their local neighbourhoods that promote and develop the local economy and create a socially inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Why do we think architecture can help?

2020 has highlighted the vulnerability of our societies to large scale pandemics. It has also shown us how adaptable our jobs are to the shift from the office to the home office. During the height of the lockdown 49% of the adult workforce were working from their homes. Technology has played a crucial role in enabling this but the question remains: if work can be conducted from the comfort of our own homes, then what is the need of the office in the future? This move to the home office may present a lifeline to our dying high streets. If the long term trend is towards spending more time in our localities then this may serve as a catalyst to repurposing the High Street.

With the centre of gravity shifting to our local areas, it provides us a chance to view the high street through a different lens and affords us the opportunity to explore untapped latent potential and realise the social and economic benefits.

Globalisation has divorced the metropolitan high street from the communities and networks they serve. Most of the retail property on our high streets is developed on behalf of large, institutional investors with control coming from the boardrooms of distant corporations instead of being nurtured in the hands of local communities. High streets and their immediate surrounds are home to over 200,000 businesses equating to 41 per cent of all businesses¹ in London, hosting nearly 1.5 million jobs². Our High Streets need better ideas and infrastructure to ensure their true potential as hubs of social interaction, civic value and employment for our local communities. As architects we have the passion, knowledge and skill set to develop solutions to the problems we perceive around us.

Work/place aims to question the ecology of the local retail stock by engaging, empowering and guiding the civic economy - the ideas, resources, passions and expertise of the people. How can a focus on human interaction and new technologies, rather than a retail monoculture, create a relevant urban future?

¹ UK Business Count. ONS, 2018

² Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). ONS, 2017

What are our objectives for this Design Think Tank?

Work/place aims to:

1. Question the current context of the high street and working along with associated legislative context.
2. Investigate how social patterns and interactions can be reflected in architecture.
3. Create new typologies that embrace the ever-changing needs of working and our localities
4. Engage with society, commerce and poetics while fostering the growth of small business and local communities.
5. Look at how the existing infrastructure and environment can be leveraged to promote the high street and localism.

How will we achieve these aspirations?

In order to redefine the high street, you will undertake research and design in tandem. *Work/place* will experiment with spatial proposition throughout the whole project, feeding research into your designs as you progress. Your research will be a gathering process, filtering and interpreting the work of existing experts. This will enrich your architectural output, informing urban explorations and observations, creating a propositional output that challenges and develops published research.

Who are our proposals aimed at?

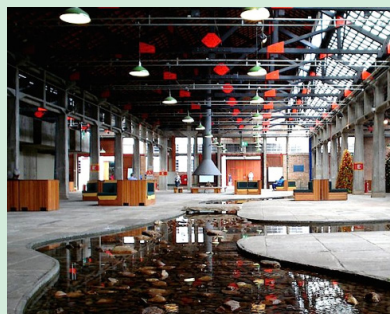
Work/place aim to promote community inclusion, the importance of social activity and engagement by integrating the possibilities of home working within Hackney. Whilst home working may be the catalyst in regenerating our localities, we also want explore want impact our localities have on our work. We want to build up a narrative that spans from maker spaces to offices, from kebabs to supper clubs and from cinemas to civic centres and create innovative propositions that respond to local environments, challenges and needs of local communities.

Where will we test these theories?

Work/place aim to promote the high street. Using Church Street, Stoke Newington as a test bed to start our investigations, *Work/place* will create prototype architectural proposals that write the story of our city, giving London its character and authenticity. As our world becomes more virtual, intimate personal contact and artistic expression will be what we treasure. It is the hallmark of humanity and the high street is at its heart.



Beer Street and Gin Lane, William Hogarth, 1751



SESC Pompéia, Lina Bo Bardi, 1977



The Lamp of Sacrifice - Natham Coley, 2004

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How will the project unfold over time?

The think tank will follow 5 key stages:

[Vacancy] Tuesday 17th November
The first task will be to understand the current context of the high street and work. Using tools such as drawings, diagrams and photography, you will aim to understand what gives the high street a sense of place. You will assess the current model of gentrification as a means for development and question the politics and finances of this model. You will also assess the impact of home working post COVID-19 and research the impact it has had on the high street. Through a series of diagrams and maps you will quantify and convey how our cultural, social and economic centre-of-gravity has shifted to our door-steps. You will present your findings and ideas for the charette during the DTT tutorials.

[Probation] Tuesday 1st December
You will conduct a charette to refine your ideas and findings from your mapping exercises. The purpose of the charette will be to work towards an architectural proposition by honing down your research into a definitive question. You will present your findings to the symposium. At this point you will have taken your findings and research to shape a narrative. You will evaluate the current state of the high street and propose how you will go about shaping its future.

[Career Development] Tuesday 16th December
You will reflect on and present your findings from symposium one. You will be looking to fix the brief in order to work towards an architectural proposition. You will also start looking at and studying historical precedents.

[Overtime] Tuesday 6th January
Building on early design positions and research, you will strive to understand how design propositions manifest themselves architecturally within Hackney.

You will also be looking to fix the graphic identity of the DDT.

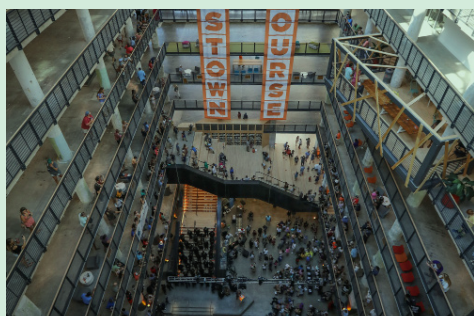
[The Nightshift] Monday 22nd February.
Work/place shall present a final research proposal which will be centred around Church Street in Hackney. As London expands at a rate not seen in a century, you will outline how architecture can help reconfigure the balance of the city. You will illustrate your architectural tactics and expressionism with exquisite models and measured drawings that demonstrate your understanding of place and programme. You will demonstrate how the proposals will develop over time, grow, age and adapt. This will be an iterative process where your designs will constantly evolve alongside research. Your final proposals will rediscover the high streets and home working for the 21st century and embody a sense of progress.

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Collaborators

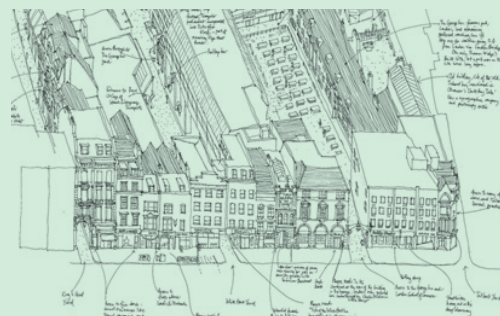
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Beispiel
Studio Weave
Orms



Crosstown Concourse - DIALOG



Open All Hours, BBC Worldwide, 1977



Hackney, Fiona Scott, 2013