

Racial Equity & the City

Experiences of People of Colour in London



Racial Equity & the City: London

A report by Arup, in collaboration with:

decosm

Social Broadcasts

Communities in Thamesmead and Newham

London, UK, 2024

Research team included:

Arup

Rebecca Chau, Participatory Research Project Lead
Felicitas zu Dohna, Research Programme Lead
Agostino Nickl, Researcher & Designer
Anastasia Vikhornova, Researcher & Designer
Rhiannon Williams, Researcher & Designer
Conor Morris, Researcher & Designer
Eleanor Tomlinson, Designer
Sarah Bushnell, Designer
Julien Clin, Copy Editor
Amanda McFerren, Copy Editor
Input from teams across Arup

decosm

Neba Sere, Research Partner
Sanaa Shaikh, Research Partner
Umi Lovecraft Baden-Powell, Research Partner Lead

Social Broadcasts

Lucia Scazzocchio, Radio Engagement & Production

Community collaborators

Smart Women's Group and the DOST Centre for Young Refugees and Migrants from Newham, Research Partners
Individuals from across Thamesmead, Research Partners

Thank you

A big thank you to Smart Women's Group, Newham, the DOST Centre for Young Refugees and Migrants, Newham as well as the individuals from Thamesmead who were not only research partners on the project but also trusted us with their experiences and stories.

Trigger warning

This report contains accounts of racism and discrimination. Some readers may find the content offensive and/or traumatising.

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Who this report is for and how to use it

Calling urban practitioners

This report is for anyone interested in improving their understanding of, and challenging, racial inequities that are created or reinforced through the process of shaping the built environment.

It specifically addresses individuals and organisations who have a role in the shaping or management of the built environment. This includes, but is not restricted to, those who work in architecture, planning, engineering, landscape, urban design, masterplanning, urban policy, and regeneration, as well as those involved in brief writing and funding of urban projects.

For the purposes of this document, **'urban practitioners'** is used as a collective term to describe this broad group. The phrases **'shaping'** or **'creating'** and **'managing'** or **'caring for the built environment'** are used to describe their role. These urban practitioners can operate within the private, public, or third sector.

Challenging racial inequities is not something that can be achieved solely through making changes to the built environment. It requires action across all areas of society. This report focuses on the key areas highlighted above because this is where Arup's expertise lies and where we can provide the most informed and impactful contribution to this issue.

This report shares the findings and the project team's learnings from the research process. This is because we believe a key element of catalysing wider change is facilitating discussion, platforming marginalised voices, and communicating complex challenges in an accessible way that can lead to practical actions.

We hope that our learnings from this process are a useful starting point and support a meaningful and ongoing dialogue in the wider industry and beyond.

Section summaries

Click on the hyperlinks below to jump to each section.

'1.0: Project overview' provides an overview summary and introduction to the project.

'2.0: Research findings' presents the findings from the research process. This is the central focus of this report where you can engage with the experiences of the People of Colour who participated in the project.


'3.0: User guide' provides guidance and suggestions on how urban practitioners can use the research findings to inform their own and others' practices and processes.

'4.0: Behind the scenes' explores the wider context, explains why Arup is approaching this topic, and provides detailed information about the research methodology and process.

'Appendix' offers further reading on related topics and provides the references for this report.

How to use this report?

After reading through the report, the **research findings** can be downloaded as a set of printable and useable resources from Arup's website. These resources are intended for urban practitioners so that they can communicate the learnings from the report, acting as a starting point for developing next steps and actions.

In the report wherever you see this icon  you can **click** on the hyperlinks to find out more information.



On location during a participant-led walk in Thamesmead.

Key concepts

The topics of racism and racial inequities are complex and regionally nuanced. No single terminology nor definition exists that has been adopted globally or across all industries. For the purpose of this report, we use key concepts as defined below.

People of Colour

Throughout this report, we use the term ‘People of Colour’ (or PoC) to refer to racially marginalised individuals in the UK. There are limitations with this terminology, not least that it is more commonly used in the United States; terms such as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) are more prevalent in the UK context. We have chosen to use People of Colour because the community collaborators decided this would be the best term to describe themselves as a group of 35 individuals who expressed a range of racial identities.

All collective terms run the risk of generalising the experiences of racially marginalised people into a singular and uniformed whole. This may fail to reflect the vast diversity of identities within these different communities. However, a collective term can be useful in highlighting the wide-ranging and pervasive impact of racism on all marginalised groups.

Equality and equity

Equality and equity are not synonyms. Equality means ensuring that everyone receives the same treatment and has equal representation, regardless of their need. It does not consider past nor current disparities. Equity seeks to achieve fairer and more just outcomes by treating people depending on their needs. It adapts interventions on the basis of previous and current disparities. The aim of racial equity is a ‘state in which health, social, and economic outcomes are no longer predicted by race’.¹

Terminology in this report

- The terms ‘*initiative*’ or ‘*project*’ describe the whole process from the initial engagement with the community collaborators to the report creation, events, and publication.
- The term ‘*report*’ refers to this report, *Racial Equity and the City: Experiences of People of Colour in London*.
- The term ‘*community collaborators*’ refers to the thirty-five people from Newham and Thamesmead who collaborated in the project.
- The term ‘*project team*’ refers to Arup, decosm and Social Broadcasts, whereas the ‘*research team*’ also includes the community collaborators.
- The term ‘*research*’ refers to the activities and the analysis process that the research team undertook and that resulted in the creation of the research findings presented in Section two of this report.
- The term ‘*Research findings*’ refers to Section 2 of the report. Here, the framework, experiences, community radio, and takeaways are presented. These findings are to facilitate reflection and inform decision-making of urban practitioners during the shaping of the built environment.
- All of the community collaborators’ names have been anonymised. The image captions do not include these anonymised names to ensure conversations and quotes can not be linked back to individuals images.

Systemic and institutional racism

Systemic and institutional racism is the perpetuation of discrimination based on race through political, legal, economic, and/or cultural institutions or systems. This can reside in the policies, procedures, operations, and culture of both public and private organisations. It creates a disparity in the lived experiences of, and socio-economic outcomes between, people from different racial backgrounds. In this report, we are looking specifically at how this manifests within the systems and institutions that create and steward the built environment.

Anti-racism

Being anti-racist² means actively challenging racism and advocating for changes that promote and create racial equity in society. This is opposed to being passively and quietly non-racist, which can contribute to perpetuating discrimination. Becoming anti-racist requires education on race and racism and how they manifest in all aspects of our daily lives, but it also requires taking action to challenge discrimination.

In the context of shaping the built environment, this means we, as urban practitioners, need to adopt approaches and methods that actively address racial inequities in the way that we create and steward the built environment. This begins with identifying and understanding how racial discrimination manifests within built environment systems and institutions in order to oppose it explicitly through our actions. Anti-racism seeks to create lasting change.



On location during a participant-led walk in Thamesmead.

1.0 Project overview

Overview

This report explores what role the built environment has played in creating and reinforcing racial inequity in the lives of 35 People of Colour from various demographic backgrounds living in two areas of London.

These 35 people, collectively named the **community collaborators**, were co-researchers on this project. They explored their experiences of racial inequity alongside the project team: **Arup** (a global built environment consultancy), **decosm** (a London-based collective working to decolonise city-making) and **Social Broadcasts** (a radio maker focused on community stories).

Process

The research team undertook a participatory research study that used qualitative methods. Through interviews, radio discussions, and conversations, the community collaborators shared their personal experiences with each other and with the project team. These personal accounts developed the project team's understanding of the issues faced by the community collaborators and enabled the whole research team to investigate this topic together. The stages of the research process are detailed in the diagram to the right.

These conversations and interviews were analysed by the project team, who drew out key learnings. These learnings form the **'research findings'**.

These findings are presented as a series of **starting points** or **prompts for discussion**. They are to be used by urban practitioners to inform practices, reflect on decision-making, and communicate and contextualise the learnings from the research in a clear and concise way. The findings centre the accounts of People of Colour, so that it is their voices that lead the conversation about racial inequity in the city.

This project was undertaken to inform and develop Arup's own knowledge and practice. The research findings and the learnings from the process are being used within Arup to create educational and practical tools, inform decision-making on projects, and act as a launching pad for further research on the topic.

This report shares our learnings with all urban practitioners as the challenge we face is systemic, and collective action across the whole industry is required. This is a first step on a journey to understand the role that both the built environment, and Arup as an organisation that shapes it, play in reinforcing racial inequity.



Find further information on the methodology and research process in: **'4.0: Behind the scenes'** (p. 66-72).

Find suggestions on how to use these research findings in: **'3.0: User guide'** (p. 62-64).

You can download the resources as separate printable files from Arup's website.

Research process

25x Interviews

Community collaborators were interviewed in one-to-one and group interviews. Conversations explored lived experiences of the city as well as the impact of race, gender, and other intersecting factors. The project team used a set of cards describing types of spaces to unpack what was meant by 'the built environment' and to structure the conversations.

2x Radio sessions

Over two sessions, Thamesmead residents and members of the Smart Women's Group shared their stories, experiences, and ideas of the city in a live-radio discussion format. Research partner Social Broadcasts coordinated, facilitated, and recorded each session in which one person from each group volunteered to lead the conversation with the participants around the table. This was guided by a list of topics and questions identified and workshopped by the group beforehand. This process was key in discussing and exploring the community collaborators' lived experiences and highlighting common themes.

The recordings are collectively named the **community radio series** and are available on Social Broadcasts and Arup websites. Use the QR code below to explore the recordings.



Welcome workshops

7x Community-led interviews

Community collaborators were co-researchers and ran interviews with other members of their community. A short training session introduced how to conduct and record interviews independently.

Observations

The research team went on location visits to contextualise interview insights, better understand the physical qualities of the environment, explore relations to the broader city (such as transport links), and to support the research findings with photographic and other evidence.

Celebration with communities

The process culminated in a celebration. All the community collaborators and their guests were invited to come together for an informal celebration and appreciation of everyone's contribution.

1.1 Meet the Communities

The community collaborators are 35 individuals from three diverse groups who provide a breadth of perspectives across demography (age, gender, faith, ethnicity, background) and local experience.

Find further information on the process of contacting the community partners in **'4.0: Behind the scenes'** (p. 62).



London Borough of Newham

A borough in East London, north of the river Thames.

69%

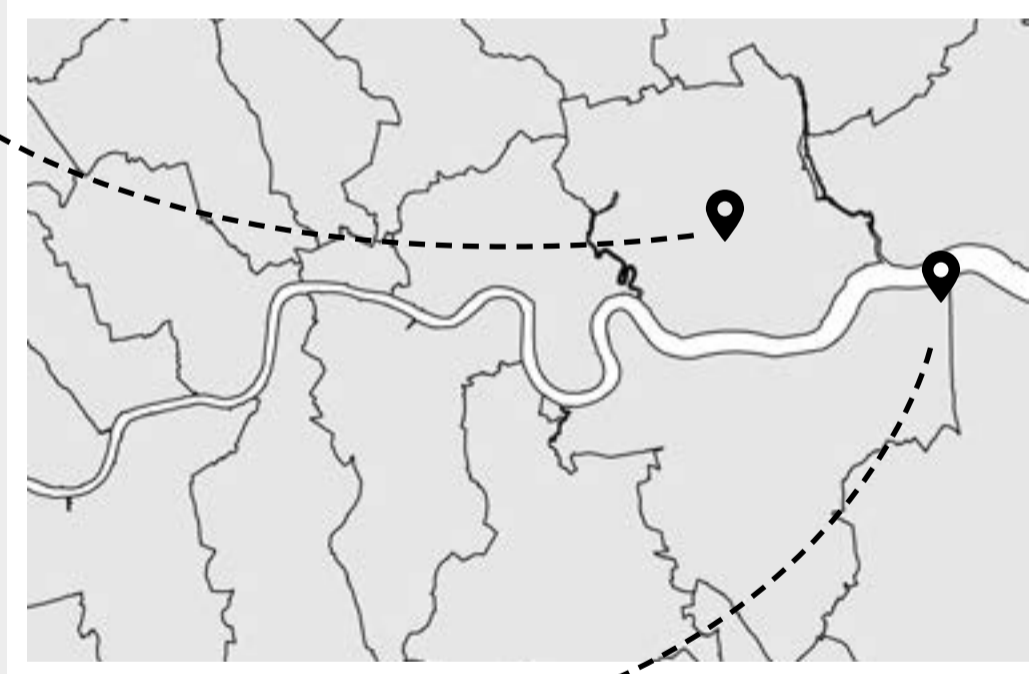
of residents identify as Asian (42.2%), Black (17.5%), Mixed-race (4.7%), or another ethnic minority (4.9%).³

Dost Centre⁴

The Dost Centre is an organisation that provides a safe space for young refugees and migrants. It runs educational and fun activities, sports, and socials. Through the Dost Centre, the project team was able to connect with young people to discuss their unique perspectives and experiences of London.

Smart Women's Group

The Smart Women's Group is a self-organised initiative that brings together women who share the need for a safe space where they can openly talk about their experiences, grow their confidence, and support one another. They meet in Newham and welcome women of mixed ages and backgrounds from the local area and beyond.



Thamesmead

An area of South-East London, straddling the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the London Borough of Bexley.

56%

of residents identify as Asian (5.4%), Black (43.5%), Mixed-race (4.6%), or another ethnic minority (2.6%).⁵

Thamesmead residents

The Thamesmead residents interviewed in this work represent diverse views of people of different generations (the youngest of whom is 13 years old), cultural backgrounds, genders, and occupations. These residents are not affiliated with a specific group or organisation.



Image captions for these photographs can be found in **'Appendix, References, Image Credits'** (p. 81)

2.0

Research findings

Introduction

This section presents the findings from the research process across four chapters.

- **2.1: Framework** visualises the complex structure of the built environment through five categories, which are collectively named the '*Layers of the City*'. This framework provides an accessible lens through which to view the varied and interconnected ways in which individuals can experience inequity in the built environment.
- **2.2: Experiences** are insights drawn from the community collaborators' lived experiences. These assist in developing the reader's understanding of the human impact that urban practitioners' decisions can have.

This chapter uses the five *Layers of the City* as a structure. Each *Layer* contains multiple *Insights* that are associated with this type of interaction with the urban environment. Each *Insight* is evidenced using personal accounts from the research process. This supports the reader in engaging with the issues and empathising with the challenges.

- **2.3: Community radio series** provides another medium for exploring and engaging with the experiences that are presented in Chapter 2.2. These radio episodes platform the community collaborators' voices and provide an insight into the techniques used in the research process.
- **2.4: Takeaways** are a distillation of the core themes that are explored in Chapter 2.2 and 2.3. These provide a concise and digestible summary of each *Layer of the City*. These summaries can aid in communicating the overarching narratives of the findings or provide a guide for project and organisational aims.

The following section '**3.0: User guide**' provides information on how these findings can be used to inform the practices and processes of urban practitioners.

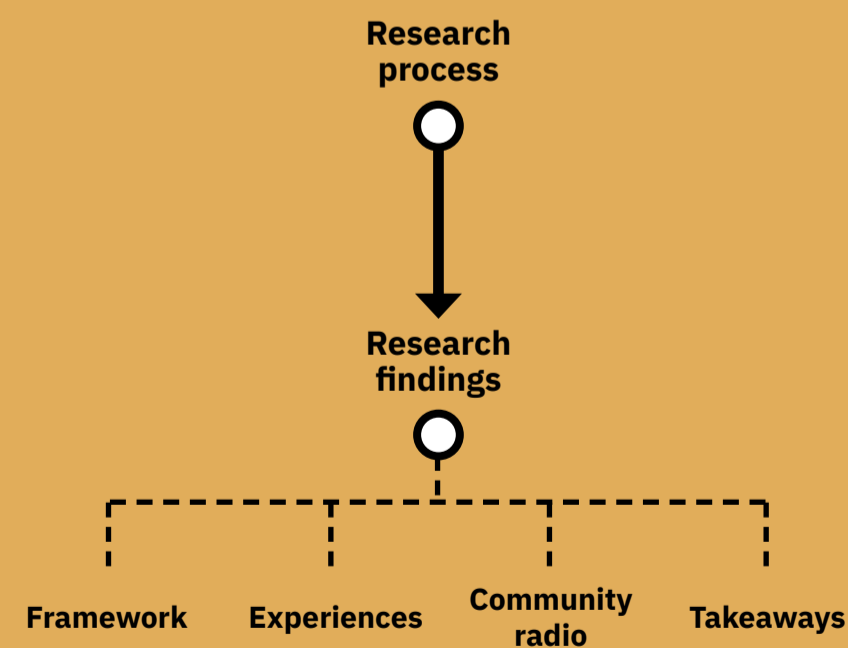


Drawing the link to systemic inequity

The research findings are drawn from individual experiences, which provide insights into the ways that the built environment functions as a broader system. This is achieved by highlighting patterns in how the design or management of the built environment can negatively impact people. These negative impacts are disproportionately likely to affect People of Colour, which illuminates how the processes, practices, and decision-making of urban practitioners play a role in reinforcing broader systemic racism.

Highlighting that these negative experiences are a result of how the system of the built environment is both set up and functions helps to contextualise the challenge. This framing encourages urban practitioners to position themselves within this *system* and reflect upon the impact that their decisions may have.

Deepening our understanding of racial inequity, and identifying how we, as urban practitioners, relate to this, is a first step in understanding how we can take action to address it.



Discussing experience on a participant-led walk in Thamesmead.

2.1 Framework

The Layers of the City

Urban practitioners' decisions directly and indirectly contribute to the lived experiences of people. As is illustrated in the Layers of the City framework, this happens in a diversity of ways — and not solely in relation to physical spaces.

The project team developed this framework from the rich personal accounts of the community collaborators. It simplifies and visualises the complex structure of the built environment and the range of experiences of inequity that can be experienced within it.

These experiences are varied, such as a damaging interaction with a civic service (*Systems*) or person of authority (*Interactions*); a negative perception of an area (*Narratives*); a poorly designed or inaccessible place (*Spaces*), or an individual's power to shape or change these interactions (*Agency & Power*).

Each Layer relates to an aspect of the urban environment which has in some way been informed, planned, designed, constructed, or governed by urban practitioners. All of these layers interact, influence, and depend on one another.

Find further information on the research process that led to the creation of the Layers of the City, in: **'4.0: Behind the scenes'** (p. 66-72).



Insights

The framework illustrated on the right is presented again on the following spread of pages (pp. 20-21), where a series of Insights accompanies each Layer. These Insights describe an experience of inequity that emerged from the research process.

Categorising the Insights under these Layers draws the connection between negative experiences and an element of the built environment that the decisions of urban practitioners informed. It also conceptualises these individual experiences and aspects of the built environment as part of a broader, interconnected framework. This presentation helps to communicate how apparently unrelated or decisions perceived as 'neutral' can impact people's lives or work to reinforce broader systemic issues.

These Layers and Insights can be used to support urban practitioners in determining *which* Layers they operate within or have influence over, *what* broader impact their actions could have, and *where* interventions or alterations could challenge and address racial and other inequities.

Layers of the City – Overview

Narratives

The narratives that influence how communities, onlookers, and decision-makers perceive a place or space.

This includes histories, perceptions, and stereotypes that are held about a place or a group of people.

Agency & Power

Individual agency and power to shape the narratives, interactions, spaces, and systems within the city.

This includes whether someone can influence how something is invested in, designed, curated, and governed.

Interactions

The interactions between individuals who occupy, run, and manage the city.

This includes exchanges with other people or the behaviours of others sharing the same spaces.

Spaces

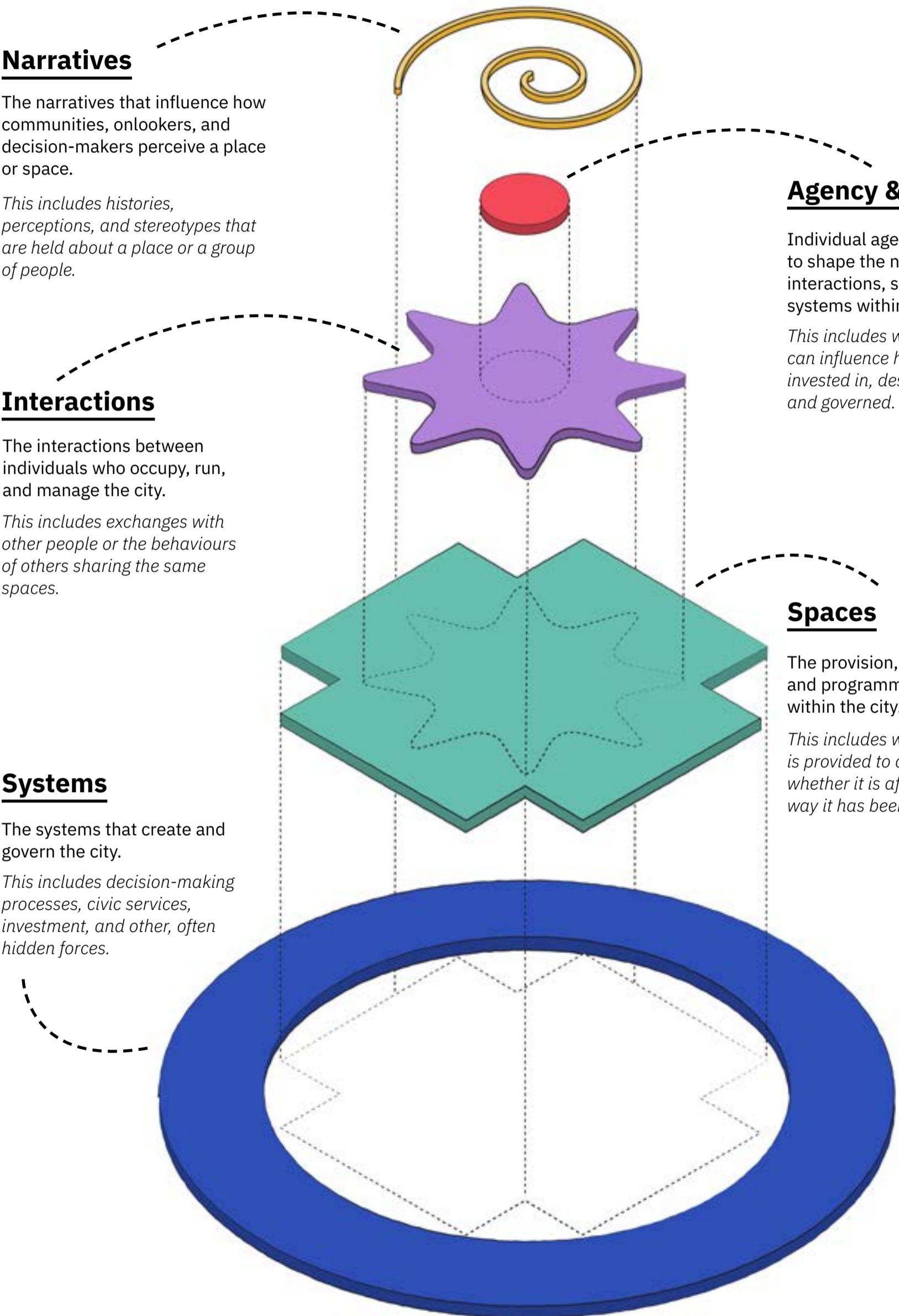
The provision, access, design, and programming of spaces within the city.

This includes whether a space is provided to a community, whether it is affordable, and the way it has been designed.

Systems

The systems that create and govern the city.

This includes decision-making processes, civic services, investment, and other, often hidden forces.



Narratives

Perceptions

- Community collaborators' sense of self is shaped by negative narratives.**
 Perceptions of neighbourhoods not being invested in and valued by decision-makers can make residents feel neglected. This can impact their sense of self and deteriorate relationships and trust with decision-makers.

- Community collaborators are deterred from investing in areas due to negative narratives.**
 Perceptions of, and stories about, neighbourhoods can influence how people engage with places and spaces. These narratives can deter people from settling in areas, developing connections, and investing emotionally.

Interactions

Individuals

- Community collaborators experience discriminatory surveillance.**
 Experiences of discriminatory surveillance and monitoring can restrict people from full use of public and private spaces and can impact their sense of safety and wellbeing.
- Community collaborators experience harassment.**
 Experiences of threat, harassment, and violence can displace people, impact their health and wellbeing as well as limiting their ability to accrue wealth or establish roots in an area.
- Community collaborators mask their culture.**
 Experiences of bias from authorities and wider society can discourage people from authentic cultural, religious and self-expression. This can lead to the masking of defining attributes to avoid mistreatment or judgement.
- Community collaborators experience othering.**
 The prominence and dominance of one culture in society can make people who identify outside of this feel othered, socially excluded, or as though they do not belong.

Ownership and management

- Community collaborators experience discrimination.**
 Implicit bias or discriminatory approaches by those who manage or control spaces and services can exclude people. This can impact wellbeing and limit access to services and amenities.

Systems

Services

- Community collaborators feel that government services fail to meet the needs of People of Colour.**
 Competing funding priorities for public services can lead to gaps in support for communities. This creates an unsustainable reliance on volunteer networks, which cannot always meet everyone's needs.
- Community collaborator feel that their neighbourhoods are disconnected and lack key infrastructure.**
 Neighbourhoods that are not well-connected and lack quality, inclusive services, can isolate and exclude people, limit opportunities, and restrict them from living full lives.
- Community collaborators feel that informal and small businesses in their neighbourhoods are not supported.**
 A lack of support for small and informal businesses can result in neighbourhoods which do not provide for, or support, a diversity of cultural and community needs.

Governance and maintenance

- Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are de-prioritised.**
 When disparities exist between the quality of urban amenities in the neighbourhoods of marginalised communities and those of other, majority-white areas, residents can feel de-prioritised.
- Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are unmaintained.**
 Persistent lack or limited maintenance of housing, infrastructure and public spaces can make communities feel undervalued and reinforce negative stereotypes.
- Community collaborators feel that housing services in their neighbourhoods are not adequate.**
 Experiences of inadequate, low-quality housing, combined with residents' feeling as though their concerns are disregarded, can have long-lasting impacts to financial, emotional, and physical wellbeing.



Meaningful involvement

- Community collaborators' expectations are diminished.**
 Repeated discrimination and sub-standard services can diminish people's expectations and hopes. This can lead to downplaying negative experiences, not raising concerns, and reduced trust in processes or systems.
- Community collaborators feel disempowered.**
 Precarious situations, external pressures, or a fear of repercussion can mean people do not feel safe nor empowered to demand equity.
- Community collaborators feel disconnected from decision-making.**
 A distant and complex system of processes and decision-makers can lead to people feeling disconnected and not knowing how to get involved.
- Community collaborators feel involved only in tokenistic ways.**
 Experiences of broken promises, undelivered plans, and poor communication can make people feel as though their involvement is neither genuinely valued nor impactful.
- Community collaborators feel under-represented.**
 A lack of diversity and under-representation in decision-making positions can make people feel as though their interests and needs are not represented nor considered.
- Community collaborators feel they have no sense of ownership.**
 Restrictions on people's ability to shape and manage their environments can reduce their sense of ownership and agency in the city.

Spaces

Design

- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhood amenities do not reflect the diversity of residents.**
 A lack and limited variety of places, spaces and services that reflect a diversity of cultures, religions and ethnicities can make people feel unsafe and unwelcome.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack availability of appropriate and affordable housing.**
 A lack of stable, affordable and adequate housing arrangements coupled with complex application routes can place a strain on people's mental health and mean they do not put down roots in areas.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods are not safe.**
 Neighbourhoods that are both perceived to be dangerous, and have realities of danger, can create restrictions on people's freedom to move around and impact their quality of life.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack inclusive green spaces.**
 A lack of public and open green spaces that allow for multiple activities and users can make people feel excluded and unwelcome.

Availability

- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces designed for a diversity of users.**
 A lack of spaces that support and provide for a diversity of lifestyles can mean that people feel under-served, and forced to curtail or change their ways of living.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack secular social spaces.**
 A lack of secular social spaces that are free and open to everyone can make people feel isolated or restricted in where they can publicly socialise with family and friends.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack 'third spaces'.**
 A lack of access to, and provision of, 'third spaces' where people can come together and socialise can be a barrier to forming and sustaining friendships and support networks.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack safe spaces for young people.**
 A lack of safe and welcoming spaces for young people puts an undue burden on parents to safeguard their children from crime and restricts young people's independence.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack cultural representation of a diversity of groups.**
 A lack of celebration and representation in the built environment of a diversity of cultures can mean that people are unable to look to the city to connect with their culture and history.
- Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces for cross-cultural celebration.**
 A lack of spaces that provide opportunities for connections to form between different ethnic, cultural, or religious communities can increase the potential of misunderstanding, divisions or conflict.

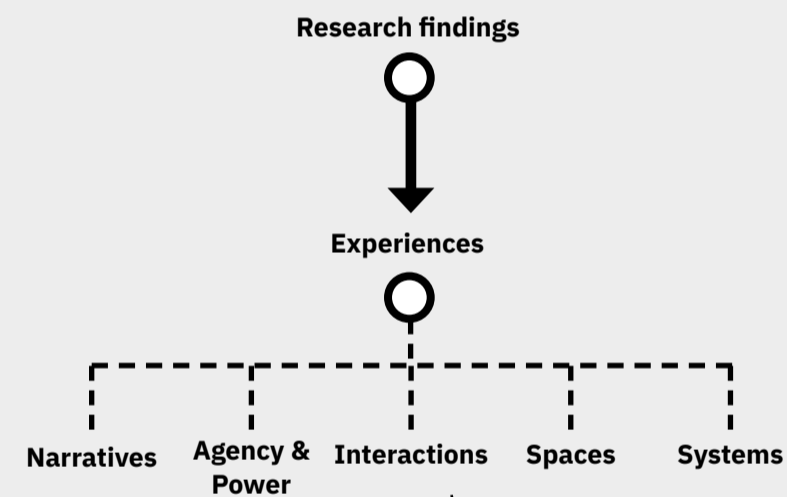
For further information click on the Insight titles.

2.2 Experiences

Structure

This chapter of the research findings, 'Experiences', is structured along the Layers of the City: *Narratives, Agency & Power, Interactions, Spaces, Systems*. A subdivision is dedicated to each Layer.

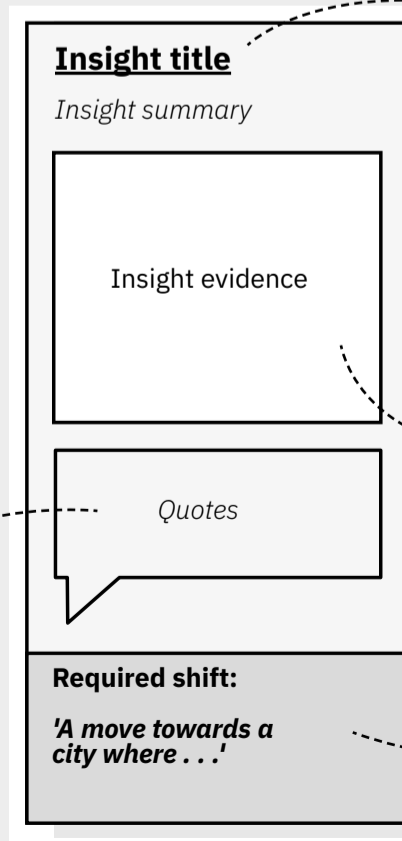
Each Layer forms a sub-chapter that contains multiple *Insights*. These are presented as '*Insight Cards*' which are illustrated below. The information and learnings contained within these cards have been drawn directly from the research process.



Insight Card

Each Layer contains multiple '*Insight Cards*'. Each card contains nuanced and rich findings from the research that have been distilled into a high-level overview.

Supporting quotes present personal accounts of how the city is experienced by People of Colour.



The '*Insight title*' is a collective statement which is drawn from multiple individual experiences of inequity.

This is followed by a summary which expands on the title statement.

Key points unpack the insight in more detail and provide evidence for the *Insight title* from the research.

The '*Required shift*' proposes a future state where this inequity has been addressed.

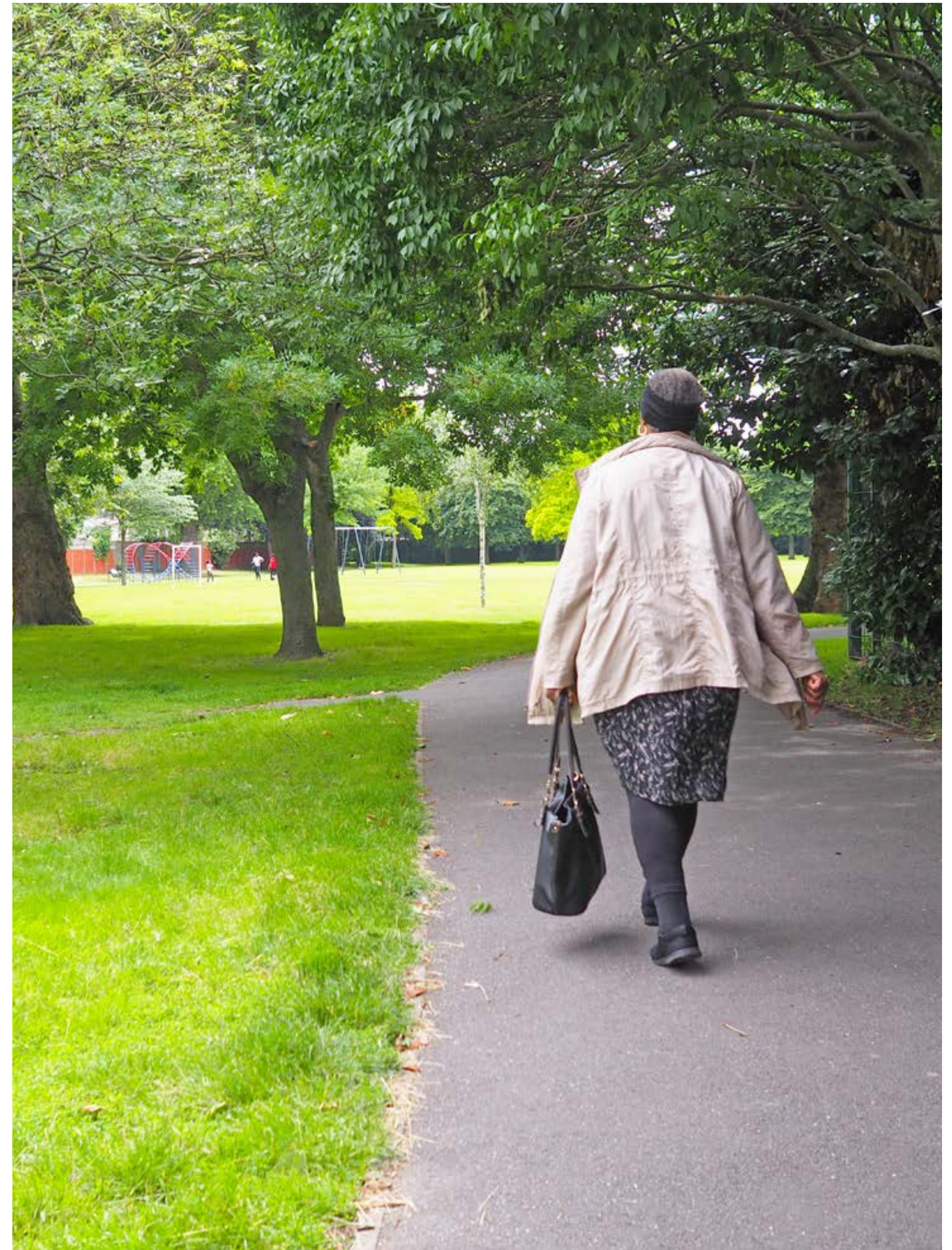
Insight Card structure

Each *Insight Card* contains: an *Insight Title*, a summary of what this title means, and supporting evidence. The evidence is in the lived experiences of inequity drawn from the research process. This comes in the form of short stories and quotes.

The *Insight Cards* conclude with a '*Required shift*'. It identifies a future state where this specific experience of inequity has been addressed. The aim is to stimulate discussion around what actions would need to be taken to reach this future state.

The shifts always begin with the statement: '*A move towards a city where*'. This is to recognise that addressing inequities will take multiple actions across the whole of society and cannot result from changing the built environment alone.

These cards communicate the real-life impact that decisions made during the complex process of shaping the built environment can have.



Guiding a participant-led walk through Newham.

Narratives



Woven through every Layer of the City are the narratives that influence how residents, non-residents, and decision-makers perceive a place. These narratives can celebrate an area's unique identity and qualities but they can also be inaccurate and harmful, especially when they are informed by systemic biases or stereotypes.

These narratives may be disseminated through the media or simply through the stories that we share with each other. Characterisations may be perpetuated by generalisations, assumptions, or a lack of contextual and evidence-based research. Negative narratives can greatly influence what support and services are provided and how an area is managed and cared for.

During the research, many people spoke about the narratives that were held and shared by non-residents and decision-makers, alongside the impact that these narratives have had on residents. There was less discussion from the community collaborators around narratives which have been shared or created from within communities and neighbourhoods themselves, nor of the role that these can play in shaping peoples' ideas of the city.

People's stories

"[People think] they **shouldn't have more lighting or have seating because it's just going to cause more congregation** of young people causing problems."

— Jasmine, 50-59 years old, London



"It almost feels like the council says that **you don't deserve nice things**, because you can't care for them."

— Jonathan, 18-29 years old, London



— "It's almost because it is Greater London, people don't see buskers as something serious – they're more likely to see you as a 'crazy' person. Woolwich isn't taken seriously. But why not? I would love to just go outside my house and sing. But I can't do that. **People are less likely to put value on a place like this.**"

— Hannah, 18-29 years old, London

"It's all of our jobs to change the city. I mean, all of us have a stake in the city. Whether you've come here for two minutes, or you've been here for two years."

— Isaac, 50-59 years old, London



Listen to more voices on narrative in the community radio episode **'A forgotten town'**.



Community collaborators' sense of self is shaped by negative narratives.

Perceptions of neighbourhoods not being invested in and valued by decision-makers can make residents feel neglected. This can impact their sense of self and deteriorate relationships and trust with decision-makers.

People highlighted that their neighbourhoods influenced how they saw themselves and how they experienced the world. Perceptions of high-quality environments raised people's sense of self-worth, while places seen to have a worse reputation or low-quality physical attributes tarnished how people felt.

A young artist, for example, described her reticence to perform on the streets of her neighbourhood as she might be considered 'crazy'. She must travel to what is perceived as a more desirable area where it is appropriate to busk, otherwise her talent will not be showcased and she will not earn a living. Narratives can constrain what is seen as possible, alter residents' behaviour or restrict exposure to a wider range of activities and experiences.

The research outlined how low investment and not having access to basic services, such as a bank, can make residents feel as though they, and their area, are not deemed important to wider society. This can leave residents feeling that decision-makers perceive them as unworthy, undesirable, or untrustworthy. This experience of neglect increased when people saw a disparity between their area and other neighbourhoods, in terms of amenities such as restaurants or transport.

Identity is also important. When local icons are celebrated, for instance, and attract attention from outside the area, many people feel pride and a sense of self-worth. Conversely, some people said they preferred food chains over local, independent alternatives because they represent something that other, more affluent areas have.

"[Thamesmead is] really looked down upon a lot. And as a result, we don't have a lot of [...] basic things that other areas have – we don't have a cinema, we don't have a laundrette, we don't have a local newspaper –

*Are we just **nobodies**?
Why are we so **forgotten**?
Why are we so **neglected**?
Why do they think that we **don't deserve this**?*

We're human beings too, you know!

– Jasmine, 50-59 years old, London

Community collaborators are deterred from investing in areas due to negative narratives.

Perceptions of, and stories about, neighbourhoods can influence how people engage with places and spaces. These narratives can deter people from settling in areas, developing connections, and investing emotionally.

People highlighted how past and present social narratives, stereotypes, and histories all combine with narratives about a locality to inform how a place is perceived by both residents and non-residents.

When an area is considered as undesirable or dangerous, people spoke of how they may only want to be there for a limited period of time and see their time there as transitory. This can result in residents not putting down roots and not emotionally or financially investing in a neighbourhood.

Equally, narratives shared about the displacement of marginalised groups – for instance due to regeneration or urban transformation – can create a sense of temporariness and instability. This can reduce a person's sense of agency in shaping and planning their own future, as they feel they could be forced to leave their homes.

*"I feel like the **decisions for how this area is going [to be] have already been made, for this generation and for the next generation.**"*

– Jonathan, 18-29 years old, London

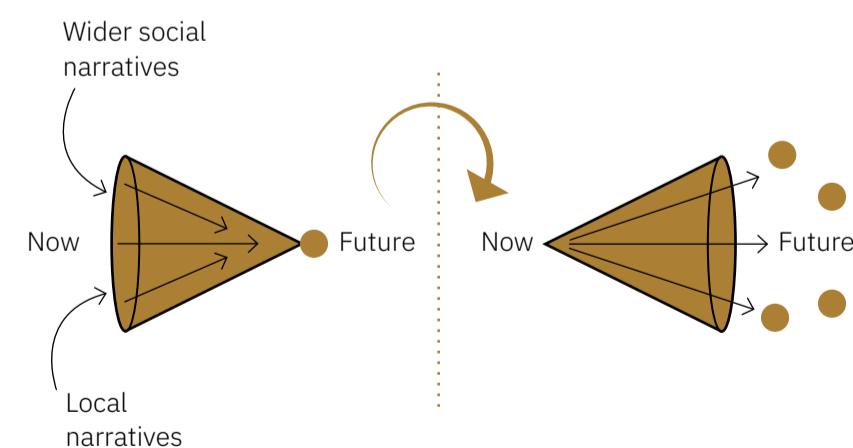
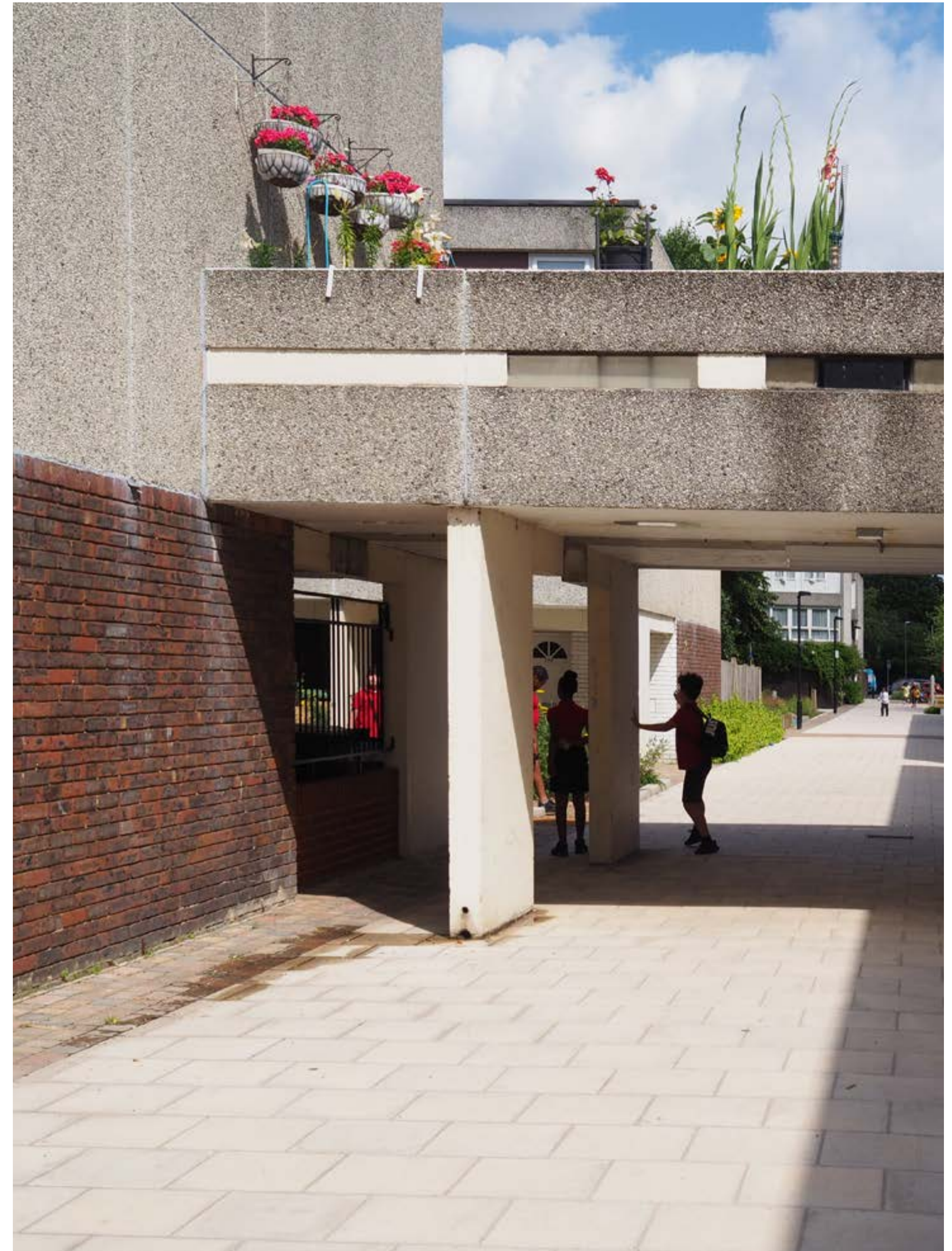


Diagram: Reversing the self-fulfilling prophecy of narratives. A neighbourhood's future should be informed, but not restricted by, past narratives.

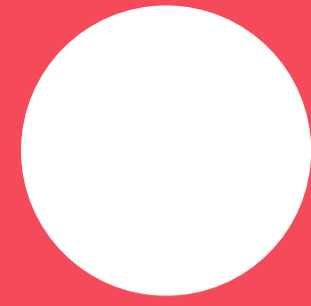
Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour see and experience their neighbourhoods as being valued, respected, and invested in.

Required Shift: A move towards a city where resources are spent on celebrating the existing strengths of an area whilst collaborating with residents to develop new positive narratives.



A location visit on the South Thamesmead Garden Estate.

Agency & Power



Individual agency and the power to shape, and exist within, one's own environment directly influence how all other dimensions of the city are experienced and interacted with.

This could manifest through someone's access to or use of a space, an interaction with an individual, or the ability for a person to be involved in the design and policy decisions that impact their area.

Redistributing power and agency in the process of shaping and managing these environments is an immediate and transformative step towards an anti-racist city.

People's stories

Being dismissed and undervalued

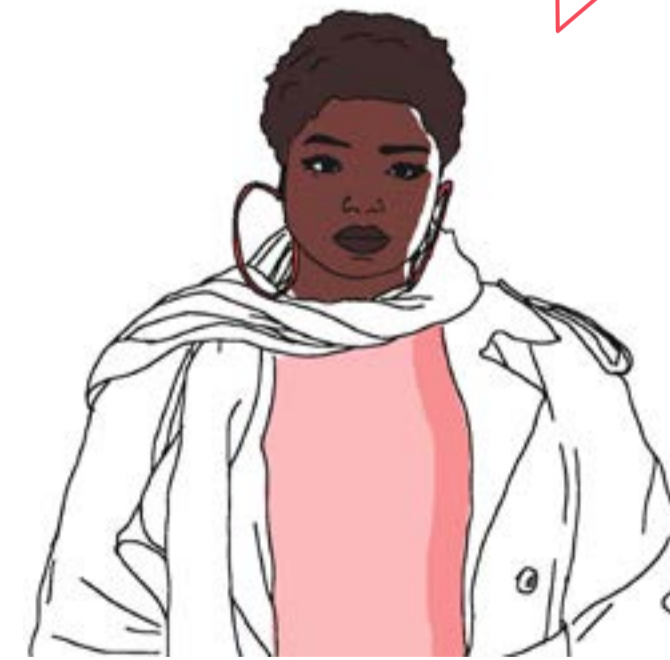
Hannah (18-29 years old, London) used to be very active in the youth clubs in her community, learning to run events, chair meetings, and take minutes. Through hard work and building relationships, she and a group of young people came together to secure a significant grant for a new youth centre.

They felt encouraged by this success, but shortly after the building opened, a new organisation arrived to deliver services, and this side-lined these integral young volunteers. **"We were dismissed"** Hannah says. Whilst she could see some benefits to the new programmes and staff, Hannah still feels hurt when sharing this story years later as she was pushed to the periphery. The experience has made her sceptical of getting involved in future community-shaping programmes.

Experiences like these diminish residents' sense of agency and power. This limits their ability to have a long-term or sustainable role in shaping their environments, which can reduce ownership over spaces and places.

*"It was billed as a community building project. [...] **Once it was built, it was nothing like that, and now it has been taken over by an organisation who don't even live in the area and they charge us so much [money] to use it.**"*

— Hannah, 18-29 years old, London



Listen to more voices on power and agency in the community radio episode **'Having a voice'**.

Not secure to speak up

Sohna (18-29 years old, London) got his **first job** during the Covid pandemic. Finding work had been difficult, so when a friend suggested a job at the local bakery, he leapt at the opportunity. As soon as he started, Sohnna realised that he was the only Black employee and that he was expected to do all the cleaning. He was paid cash-in-hand and well below the minimum wage. The work was gruelling, but he did not feel that he could ask any questions because his mother needed the money.

Not long after, Sohnna got his **second job** at a restaurant. Again, he was the only Black person at work and the only one doing the cleaning. Another person had joined since who was quickly promoted to serving customers and taking payments. Despite being diligent, Sohnna was left wondering: **"maybe there are other people who are [better] at [the job]"** than he was, and that was why he was not being rewarded. He felt angry but he did not want to ask his manager about it, again for fear it would put his job at risk. This experience acted to exclude Sohnna, who now often stands alone while his managers and colleagues socialise.

Sohnna's only friend, Abdul, works in the same building, in an adjoining hotel. Abdul is also Black and Muslim and he offers Sohnna his office space to pray in. One day, after praying for less than ten minutes, Sohnna came back to the break room to see that half an hour had been removed from his timesheet. He did not say anything to his managers nor Abdul, but has not prayed at work since.

Spaces that do not cater to the diverse needs of users, paired with a separation from decision-making and inadequate representation, highlight how the built environment can interconnect with systematic discrimination to impact People of Colour. This can result in the erosion of people's expectations of what amenities they deserve to have access to, restrict behaviour and limit their ability to advocate for change.

"All the clean-up, all the dirty work, they give it to me. Once [...] he [a colleague] finishes his work he takes his bag and leaves. I have to clean all the areas and then I could go. I never knew how much the others got paid, [because] they paid [in] cash."

— Sohnna, 18-29 years old, London





Community collaborators' expectations are diminished.

Repeated discrimination and sub-standard services can diminish people's expectations and hopes. This can lead to downplaying negative experiences, not raising concerns, and reduced trust in processes or systems.

At times in our interviews, people downplayed the inequities they had experienced: they had become accustomed to adverse conditions and treatment. Others felt traumatised by, or ashamed of, their experiences and did not want to share them.

Some people were hesitant to label treatment as racist. They felt they could not be sure that treatment was solely due to race. This was despite being the only Person of Colour in an environment and the only person being excluded, interrogated, watched, or stopped. In some cases, these feelings were compounded, or further complicated, by the legacies of colonialism and generational traumas.

This outlined that for many People of Colour, the downplaying of these experiences was a way to emotionally manage repeated negative experiences with employers, educators, security personnel, institutions, and individuals, when they do not have the power to challenge these actions. Having to ignore the magnitude of these harms can contribute to further disempowering people by diminishing their expectations for change.

This process could lead to people being less likely to raise issues about their environments, perceiving change as unlikely, and feeling that they are not entitled to ask for more.

"I have no power – if I talk maybe someone doesn't like it. I'm very scared to talk."

– Shabnam, 70-79 years old, London

*"There's the lack of education, of inspiration and encouragement. So, **we don't truly know what we're capable of achieving**... I can testify that had a big imprint on me growing up as a young Black person in London."*

– Jonathan, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour consistently receive and can access the same high-standard of service as other members of society.

Community collaborators feel disempowered.

Precarious situations, external pressures, or a fear of repercussion can mean people do not feel safe nor empowered to demand equity.

People expressed how they did not always feel able to challenge inequalities and barriers. The more dependent they were on the person, organisation, or institution in question, the less empowered they often felt.

Those reliant on council housing were sometimes mindful not to provide honest feedback about council services in case their housing situation became more precarious, or maintenance was further left untended to, as a result. Some people also felt pressure to seem **'grateful'** to have a roof over their head, even when the quality of housing, care or security of tenure was inadequate. Financial stresses and reliance on a job also prevented people from speaking up or from leaving a role where they were being exploited or discriminated against.

Some hid their cultural or religious identities to avoid being labelled and did not feel able to take time or space for their practices in the workplace. A woman shared her story of discretely praying in the cleaning cupboard so nobody would notice. Those for whom English is not their first language are also less able to issue formal complaints and are sometimes even unaware that they have the right to do so.

*"My nephew helped me [...] – he emailed to complain. I didn't get a reply so I wasn't very happy, but **because my English is not very good, I can't say anything.**"*

– Sophia, 60-69 years old, London

*"It was very bad. At that time during Covid, there were no jobs. **I had to make money so I decided to stay [at the job]**...it was so tiring. In my new job, I can make what I used to make in two weeks, in two hours."*

Sohna, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are not disproportionately exposed to precarious situations and are empowered to raise issues without repercussions.

Community collaborators feel disconnected from decision-making.

A distant and complex system of processes and decision-makers can lead to people feeling disconnected and not knowing how to get involved.

People articulated how it is only the most powerful people and institutions, such as the government, who are able to shape the city. This illustrates the detachment that people feel from the decision-making which shapes the built environment. When there are multiple councils and/or housing associations responsible for a neighbourhood, as is the case in Thamesmead, the disconnect for residents from decision-making can be further exaggerated due to an uncertainty over jurisdictions and responsibilities.

The management of Thamesmead was moved from a small, local housing association to that of a large UK-wide organisation and since this change was made, some residents highlighted how there was a noticeable weakening of the connection between the residents and decision-makers. Examples included having to go through laborious and daunting application processes for volunteer roles in the housing association, which would enable more involvement in decision-making.

Residents conveyed how they felt this was reinforced by a formalisation of the process, such as moving the application process online, which can further exclude people, particularly those in digital poverty or with lower digital literacy skills. Others felt so removed from the process that they did not know whom to contact, what to do, or what would be expected of them.

*"**Whom do I talk to? Where do I go to?** [There's] that fear of starting something **without the right resources.**"*

– Zinzi, 40-49 years old, London

*"When it was the previous housing association, I used to be involved a lot more in the decision-making. I wanted to get involved in the strategic side of the current housing association's work. But to get that position they are asking a lot. **It is not worth it to fill out the application and then go in front of a panel [...] It's not even a job!**"*

– Jochristina, 50-59 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where the process of shaping the built environment is designed to be welcoming, accessible and communicated to People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel involved only in tokenistic ways.

Experiences of broken promises, undelivered plans, and poor communication can make people feel as though their involvement is neither genuinely valued nor impactful.

It was expressed how broken promises, undelivered plans, and poor communication had all made people sceptical and untrusting of the impact that their involvement in community engagement activities would have. People felt that no one was listening nor interested. For example, a bank engaged with the residents of Thamesmead when it considered opening a branch. After collaboratively selecting a location, the participants were never informed about the decision not to proceed.

While it is not possible to know the reasons that drove this decision, during the interviews some people said they had heard it was due to a perceived risk of fraud that the bank had associated with Thamesmead's large Nigerian community. This left some feeling like the decision had been informed by racist stereotypes. Regardless of whether this was the reason, it illustrates issues that arise from a lack of communication, limited resident involvement in area decision-making and engaging without following through. It also shines a light on how residents feel organisations perceive them.

*"If they tried to get young people involved in the decision making or if they tried to contact me, at first I wouldn't do it. Nothing [has] changed so far. **So, until I see change, I wouldn't get involved.**"*

– Zandra, 18-29 years old, London



Upton Gardens (West Ham United's former football ground), a new development opposite an existing estate on Boleyn Road.

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is transparent communication and the viewpoints of People of Colour are listened to and meaningfully incorporated into proposals.



Community collaborators feel under-represented.

A lack of diversity and under-representation in decision-making positions can make people feel as though their interests and needs are not represented nor considered.

The research underlined how the mismatch between the diversity of the community and that of people in positions of power makes people feel that their interests are not represented. For instance, as the first, and only, West Indian person working at a specific local council, Selina (40-49 years old, London) said that she

"felt like a token Black girl".

— Selina, 40-49 years old, London

People also noted that they felt as though a lack of representation in decision-making bodies made it harder to secure funding as a Person of Colour.

These factors were compounded when people witnessed improvements that were not for them, such as the construction of unaffordable housing, or improvements to the exterior of housing estates, while the interiors were poorly maintained.

Despite this disheartening process, many people were still eager to be involved, to activate disused spaces, and to be part of engagement processes that empower them.

"Even though our area is multi-cultural ... from the photographs there are not many People of Colour in charge of things."

— Jochristina, 50-59 years old, London

*"If it is **diverse from the top**, it will transpire to everything else."*

— Jacob, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are meaningfully represented in decision-making roles, positions of authority and the engagement process.

Community collaborators feel they have no sense of ownership.

Restrictions on people's ability to shape and manage their environments can reduce their sense of ownership and agency in the city.

It was highlighted how having a sense of ownership over a space or place encouraged people to invest their time and care into it and allowed them to customise it to their needs. This could be through formal responsibilities, such as over an allotment, or more informally by giving people long-term access to a space, like a communal living area within assisted living. The research illustrated how, for many people, their home was a rare space where they felt autonomy and agency to personalise as they desire.

*"In the corridor, we had lovely plants and when [the new housing association] came, **they decided [to] get rid of the plants because it [was] a fire hazard. That was 4pm in the afternoon. And by 9am the next morning everything was out.** All of our personal things, I had a little thing to elevate [my] legs, they chucked it all out."*

— Esther, 70-79 years old, London

*"I feel like **with our house, we have a lot more control...**"*

— Rahman, 18-29 years old, London

"The residents receive written notice on 01/02/2016 at 4pm informing them that all plants in the communal areas will be removed. This short notice and very insensitive way of removing all the communal plants, as reduced most of the residents to tears. We are so disaappointed that a high rated company as xxx would provide such substandard service to their elderly tenants.

*We are both shocked and disappointed at the lack of consultations beforehand. If we were consulted and given due notice we would make you aware of the high importance of the communal plants and happily work together with you to come up with a satisfactory solution for all. We care and understand the full importance of Health and Safety, this is not what we are disputing, it is the lack of **respect** for us as tenants, our surrounding, our **well being** and our **ability to make decisions**"*

- An extract from a complaint letter, with organisation names redacted. You can read more about Esther's experiences on p. 47

Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are empowered to shape, manage and develop ownership over their environments.

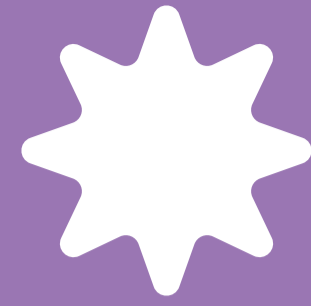
*"I feel that a lot is said, but little is done. That's the issue [because...] **how many times are you going to ask me what I want and then don't give it to me? And then say, 'oh, what do you want?'**"*

Like if you're in a relationship with somebody, and they keep saying, 'oh, just tell me what you want or what you need.' And then they still don't give it to you. You want to just walk away or you're not going to trust them.

*So when they come to you again and say, 'oh, just this time, just genuinely tell us what you want,' you want to say — **'I'm not interested'.**"*

— Jasmine, 50-59 years old, London

Interactions



Interactions with others in the urban environment — be that with members of the public or with those in positions of power — can dominate how someone experiences the city.

Urban practitioners' decisions can make these negative interactions more or less likely to occur but, even when decision-making has had no impact on interactions, it is still important to deepen our understanding of them. This is because these interactions have implications for how people exist within, access, and respond to the built environment. For instance, these experiences may lead to people avoiding places and spaces, actively changing their behaviour in public, being less likely to respond to engagements for project, or act as a barrier for accessing amenities and services such as transport or housing.

Enhancing our knowledge of these interactions allows us to consider these factors in our design decisions, systems of governance, and management of urban environments.

People's stories

Being worried moving house

Sadaf (30-39 years old, London) and her husband are trying to buy their first place outside of London. They are looking for something affordable, safe, close to her husband's work, and near green spaces. Safety has become a priority since their five-year-old son came home and said, **"Mum, I'm going to get a knife when I grow up — for my safety"**. This illustrates how a perception or experience of a dangerous neighbourhood can place emotional strain on people and force them to relocate.

Moving to an affordable and safer area outside of London will mean being an hour and a half's drive from her support network, and being further from the places where her children can be close to their family and culture. This includes proximity, visibility, and access to cultural spaces, food, clothes and language. They also value the diversity of cultural experience that their area brings, as it means access to, and interactions with, a variety of other cultures that are present in the area.

Sadaf and her husband wonder what the new area will be like, whether they will be safe, and whether they will be welcome in a neighbourhood that might be less diverse or accepting of their culture.

"What if they moan that [our cooking] smells? That's what frightens me as well, that if I move out and it's too white...This is why I have nightmares...like I've been tossing and turning.

What if I go and my husband gets picked on because he's Asian? Or we get picked on because we're Asian? And that kind of [frightens] me because you do hear stories about that.

And it happens. So, my cousin, she bought a house in Barking, and someone followed her home. It was kind of a racist attack. And he's like slamming on her door, saying **'I'm going to kill you, I'm going to kill you'**. She... was so scared that she didn't want to live in that house, and they had recently bought it. That's how frightened she was. They had to sell the house for cheaper because obviously if you put a house on the market a couple of months after purchasing it, people start getting worried."

— Sadaf, 30-39 years old, London

Being made to feel unwelcome

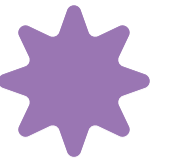
"Obviously there are some places where you feel like, if I go there as a Black person, what are they going to think? You think before you go. Why is it I can access this? You have to be given permission to go to certain places?"

I remember we wanted to go to the Theatre Royal, because my daughter has a love for musicals. We went there, [and] when we got there the lady was like, 'oh it's fully booked.' All you could see was white people, white people. And this gentleman comes and he goes [to my daughter], 'Here you go, here are some tickets.' And the woman goes, 'You can't do that' and she went on and on at him!"

— Zinzi (40-49 years old, London)
being excluded from cultural spaces



Listen to more voices on interactions in the community radio episode **'Together'**.



Community collaborators experience discriminatory surveillance.

Experiences of discriminatory surveillance and monitoring can restrict people from full use of public and private spaces and can impact their sense of safety and wellbeing.

People expressed how being watched by individuals, authorities, or institutions made them feel uneasy and unwelcome. People felt restricted when others monitored or tried to moderate behaviour in public spaces, on public transport, or even in people's own gardens. These are forms of intimidation that can encroach on people's personal space and sense of safety within their home.

Esther's daughter, for instance, has had to endure months of harassment from neighbours. Esther and her daughter are watched over the fence, complained about to the council for noise made by others, accosted every time they park their cars on the street, and told that they have too many cars or that their cars are too nice for people like them.

Other people's experiences included being moved on by security when they were spending time with friends in public spaces or being met with hostility when setting up to busk. These acts exclude people from public areas and spaces and confine them to certain parts of their local area. This generated a feeling that the nicer spaces and areas of London are reserved for someone else. In the most extreme cases, stop and search tactics, which are often applied to young Black men, leave people feeling shaken and cause them to avoid areas or certain walking routes.

"In other areas that I've moved into [...] it's almost like, shock horror, there's a Black person living in our road. And I've picked up on that [...] coming home, going to work, going to the gym, sometimes I just feel like I'm always being stared at. I'm always being observed. What is he going to do?"

— Jonathan, 18-29 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are free to move about the city without being subjected to, or at fear of, discriminatory monitoring or surveillance.

Community collaborators experience harassment.

Experiences of threat, harassment, and violence can displace people, impact their health and wellbeing as well as limiting their ability to accrue wealth or establish roots in an area.

It was highlighted how the usual trajectory of growing wealth and reaping the benefit of emotional and social investments can be interrupted by acts of racist discrimination. It can feel futile to build relationships within your neighbourhood and community when you may have to move because you feel under threat or have been verbally or physically threatened.

"[After a stone was thrown through the window] I couldn't stay there, I put on the alarm at night when my husband was doing a shift. I'm all the time scared...and after I sold [the] house."

— Sophia, 60-69 years old, London

This illustrates how people can be dislocated from their support systems, for instance if you have to move far away for affordable housing or remove children from high-crime environments. It can also impact people's financial or professional life, if moving means they miss business, training, or job opportunities. It can result in the loss of direct investment in property, if people are forced to buy and re-sell quickly after harassment. It can also result in people moving overseas to begin life afresh.

These traumatic events can cause an imprint on an individual's or a family's way of operating and interacting with the city. Parents can become over-protective, and children can develop psychological disorders such as social anxiety due to fears or the cumulative effect of spending most of their time at home.

Required Shift: A move towards a city where the lives of People of Colour are free from direct and indirect forms of threat, harassment, and violence.

Community collaborators mask their culture.

Experiences of bias from authorities and wider society can discourage people from authentic cultural, religious and self-expression. This can lead to the masking of defining attributes to avoid mistreatment or judgement.

Many people expressed how they felt torn between the desire to maintain their cultural self-expression and identity whilst trying to also be accepted by the dominant culture. Sometimes it is not safe for people to publicly show their culture, and this conflict can become amplified if there is pressure from individuals or institutions who expect people to 'integrate' or 'assimilate'.

People's experience was that, the more anglicised someone is in name, clothing, food preferences, or faith, the better they were treated by others and institutions, such as council services. For instance, **Zinzi** (40-49 years old, London) says she was renamed at the registry office because they could not say her name. **Isaac** (50-59 years old, London) described how others suppressed him in social hierarchies because of his dreadlocks.

Racially ambiguous, mixed-race or 'white-passing' People of Colour acknowledged the difficulties they experienced of not being accepted by either community. In some instances, these people were on the receiving end of overt racist remarks as others do not always realise they are a Person of Colour. For example, when **Sadaf** (30-39 years old, London) and her husband were visiting Scotland, she was approached by a man who, without realising she was Asian, told her she was "disgusting and should be ashamed of [her]self" for being with an Asian man.

"You can hide your identity [when you are fairer skinned] — I can get away with it [being a Person of Colour] because I don't get called names."

— Zaina, 60-69 years old, London

"Houses and repairs are taken more seriously the more white you are... the more ethnic you are, the more likely left out you are"

— Hannah, 18-29 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are enabled, encouraged, and celebrated for expressing their identity and culture.

Community collaborators experience othering.

The prominence and dominance of one culture in society can make people who identify outside of this feel othered, socially excluded, or as though they do not belong.

Many people expressed a strong desire to feel a sense of belonging, to feel trusted, respected, and welcome. Small acts of kindness, such as shopkeepers learning a greeting in their language or trusting them to take some bread and pay later, all gave people a sense of place.

This illustrates how, when people feel outside of the dominant culture and are 'othered' by individuals and society, bonds and support can form between cross-cultural or faith groups. For instance, some people interviewed referred to white Eastern Europeans as "not white", feeling a shared experience of being outside of White-British culture.

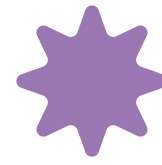
These connections provided vital support systems for some. However, others felt traumas were too significant and did not feel able to come together in this shared experience.

"No matter where you are, when you meet people like you, that have been through experiences like you in a different country or area, you still connect, and those people become a part of your life, they become the people who will fuel [your] strength, for encouragement, and for the day-to-day support you need to fight through all what is going on."

— Zinzi, 40-49 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where one culture does not dominate to the detriment of others and People of Colour are respected as core parts of society.



Community collaborators experience discrimination.

Implicit bias or discriminatory approaches by those who manage or control spaces and services can exclude people. This can impact wellbeing and limit access to services and amenities.

It was apparent that no matter how well designed a space was, people's experiences were often dominated by negative encounters with those in charge of running these places.

This manifested for people in different ways: their children being refused food at a takeaway; council workers asking for passports for no reason; managers referring to people by a racial identity that doesn't accurately represent them; people being treated like they are unintelligent in educational spaces, and buses repeatedly driving past them. Repeated interactions can act to reinforce or create a sense of exclusion for people and in some cases can lead to them questioning their own abilities.

The research illustrates how inherent power imbalances can make these behaviours particularly difficult to challenge. This can come in the form of discriminatory behaviours which prevent people from accessing council and government services, art and culture and other essential parts of city and public life. This discrimination has a cumulative effect and requires people to have considerable psychological and mental energy to persist in these environments.

It was also expressed that taking action to reprimand racist behaviour, and clearly communicating to everyone that this is not acceptable, can help ensure that people felt they were advocated for.

*"[When I came to the UK] I knew somehow that I was not going to be accepted. That I was going to be deprived... [So] **psychologically, mentally, and physically you prepare yourself.** You tell yourself — you know what, I've been there, I've seen it all, and I'm here for this, and this is what I'm going to focus on."*

— Zinzi, 40-49 years old, London

"Without even asking me how I am, [the housing manager] asked me for my passport."

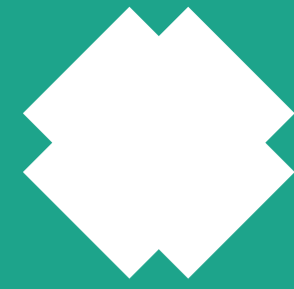
— Esther, 70-79 years old, London
Of the Windrush Generation

Required Shift: A move towards a city where People of Colour are not exposed to, or limited in their use of the city by, the discriminatory views and actions of others.



Discussing experiences in Newham at the home of a community collaborator.

Spaces



Spaces are the core physical manifestation of the built environment and provide the setting for life. Central to everyone's urban experience are the provision of, access to, design qualities, and programming of places and spaces.

To fully understand how racial inequity is created or reinforced through spaces, this Layer must be understood and seen through the lens of the four other Layers.

People's stories

Not seeing your people or culture expressed around you

Growing up in Newham, **Clara** (18-29 years old, London) had been surrounded by different cultures. She could see Afro-Caribbean culture expressed in hair shops, food shops, celebrations, and in the people who surrounded her. When she arrived at university in Kent, it was a culture shock. Surrounded instead by white people, she did not see anyone or anything that shared her culture.

Joining the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS) changed everything. She thought, **"where have they all been hiding!"** There were only a few people, but it was a relief having spaces to get together. Through these relationships, Clara learnt about hair shops and food shops students were running from their rooms, the many invisible services created to meet needs unmet on campus. During the Covid pandemic, the ACS events were put on hold. Many students living with all-white housemates did not have the cultural community spaces they needed.

"People can start feeling really isolated... **I feel like when you meet somebody of the same race, it's like, I don't know how to describe it but it's like an automatic connection, because you mostly have a similar outlook... most people that are Black [on campus] come from London, the majority of them. So it is more than just skin colour, they also relate on the challenge of being in London and being Black British.**"

— Clara, 18-29 years old, London



Listen to more voices on spaces in the community radio episode **'Spaces for adults'**.

Healing in green spaces after a traumatic explosion at home

Zinzi (40-49 years old, London) is living in temporary accommodation after there was a gas explosion and fire in her privately-managed, council-funded flat. It left her in hospital for three months and in need of two throat surgeries. Despite reporting problems with the gas to her landlord several times, no action had been taken. Her mental health has suffered as a result, triggering the PTSD she developed growing up in apartheid South Africa.

She has been living in temporary bedsit accommodation for three years now and is waiting for a council house, having to bid for a place every Friday and Monday. The cooker is beside the bed in the bedsit, so she does not sleep well. It triggers her each time it makes a noise. **"I don't know what they were thinking when they put me there. I told them it is really challenging for me sleeping next to the cooker. I can't sleep, I am awake. I told them sometimes I take my duvet and my pillow and go into the bathroom and close the door. [...] If something is reminding you of something bad that happened, how do you erase that?"**

Spending time in parks and joining a mental health support group at the local orchard has provided Zinzi a refuge from her home, and has been a place to meet people. It helped her heal.



"If I'm attending to the plants, [...] it's a way of appreciating them, because they contribute a lot [...] giving us fresh air. [T]hat's why I always say, **I have a duty to look after them, so that they can look after me, we are meeting each other's needs.**"

— Zinzi, 40-49 years old, London





Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces designed for a diversity of users.

A lack of spaces that support and provide for a diversity of lifestyles can mean that people feel under-served, and forced to curtail or change their ways of living.

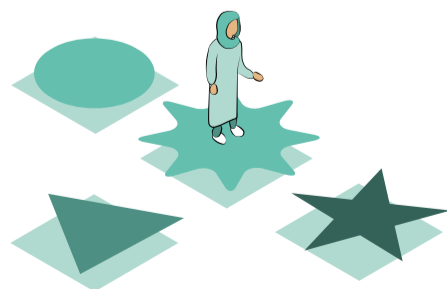
People said that many spaces did not support their ways of living, celebrating, or practicing their faith. For example, council homes cannot typically accommodate larger families. One participant and their family of eleven lived together in a small four-bedroom terraced house. **“For another family that is smaller and doesn’t have any [mobility] limitations, I think it would be an ideal home”**, said **Jasmine** (50-59 years old, London). This lack of space also caused issues later in life such as not having enough room to care for ageing parents. This resulted in people having to rely on care systems.

Other reflections included how venues could not accommodate big weddings, meaning people often had to use the same few **‘run-down venues’** that were located on the outskirts of London. These are difficult to access, especially for older people or those with mobility issues.

This identifies that many cultural and religious spaces were not purpose-built; created instead in disused pubs, bingo halls, or cinemas. Baptisms often happen in back gardens or bathtubs because local churches do not have the correct facilities.

Despite these new spaces being well-loved by some, this can also stir up racial resentment and lead to competition for these adapted spaces. This is especially the case when other locations to host gatherings are scarce. Sometimes, the use of alternate spaces results from planning applications being denied for religious structures. As a consequence, people sometimes have to travel further afield to go to places of worship because local areas lack celebratory spaces of religion or culture.

“He turned a cinema into this church. Another church was a bingo hall. [...] I see this as a positive. The feel of that building is a type of sanctuary. Somewhere where you go to and feel warmth.”
 — Selina, 40-49 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is a varied provision of appropriate and adequate cultural spaces that meet the needs of all People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack secular social spaces.

A lack of secular social spaces that are free and open to everyone can make people feel isolated or restricted in where they can publicly socialise with family and friends.

It was expressed that, while many people used religious gathering spaces, some felt they were restrictive. For example, **Isaac** (50-59 years old, London) felt discriminated against in churches because of his dreadlocks and was unable to host the events he wanted to: **“If I wanted to hold an event that [...] they weren’t happy with because it was not positive towards religion, [the church space organisers] won’t allow me to. If I was going to have a debate [...] to talk about female genital mutilation, they wouldn’t let me. So, the community spaces are not for everybody.”** Non-religious spaces also allow for connection between people and groups who do not share a religion or culture.

Many people indicated that there were insufficient places for adults to gather. Leisure centres, allotments, orchards, homes, or pubs meet some of these needs, but the provision is lacking. Many women mentioned the gym as a freeing place where they could connect with others.

Other people noted how the pub can feel excluding for people who do not drink and who worry about standing out when they already feel hyper-visible. Some people, particularly women, felt that formal religious spaces can be hierarchical, restrictive, or reserved only for men. They gathered instead in the home to express their beliefs more freely and where a dedicated space for women can be created.

This lack of facilities is amplified by low awareness about what projects, spaces, and services are available. Young adults highlighted how social media is an underused channel for promoting local activities and amenities, while those who are less digitally literate want to make sure that not everything shifts online.

“I know there used be a pub. [...] I remember parties there as a kid and it brought a lot of people together. [...] I remember we had a dance show there and 30+ kids came the next day to dance [...] classes because of that show. I think we need to bring that back; it’d be really, really good.”
 — Drew, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is adequate support, provision, and access to secular social spaces for all People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack 'third spaces'.

A lack of access to, and provision of, 'third spaces' where people can come together and socialise can be a barrier to forming and sustaining friendships and support networks.



The term **‘third space’** is used to refer to anywhere that is separate from the two social environments of home (first space) or work (second). This involves public spaces such as squares, parks, and libraries but it also includes semi-public spaces such as hairdressers, shops, pubs, and religious buildings. People highlighted that these spaces gave them freedom and refuge. Third spaces became environments where people with shared experiences gathered, found community, and at times healed from traumatic experiences.

The research illustrated how these spaces can also support women’s empowerment, particularly when they may not feel safe, powerful, and able to fully express themselves at home. They were places where people built relationships and confidence, or found the support they needed to leave abusive relationships. For women who are the full-time carers of children or who are not working, they can also be critical places for social interaction to prevent isolation or boredom.

People spoke of how green spaces can have a healing effect by providing a calming space to meet or by making people feel cared for. People highlighted how tending to plants can create a reciprocal feeling of care. Private gardens or shared green spaces adjacent to housing estates can provide some reprieve from overcrowded housing conditions.

“I like the fact that there was enough space to have the trampoline and the gazebo [...] So, we [could] use that as an extension [of the house] to go out to have a barbecue or just to sit outside.”
 — Jasmine, 50-59 years old, London.

“It’s good for your mental health [...] just looking at those plants, just to hear those birds, that fresh air, less noise [...] It recharges you. It is sort of like you’re being resuscitated at that moment. [There’s] something beautiful about it, [it] is like, ‘come on, wake up! Smell this, feel this, look at this!’ [...] I feel like a baby when I go in there ... waking up again. It’s beautiful.”
 — Zinzi, 40-49 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is adequate support, provision, and access to public communal spaces for all People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack safe spaces for young people.

A lack of safe and welcoming spaces for young people puts an undue burden on parents to safeguard their children from crime and restricts young people’s independence.

Many young adults, parents, and youth workers praised the important role that youth clubs — along with the activities that they run in parks or local centres — have played in their lives. However, many noted how these centres have now been closed. There was a shared sentiment that these spaces **“give people a chance to see a different life than the one they may see on the streets”** (**Clara**, 18-29, London). It was expressed how participating in these activities can also challenge stereotypes about what People of Colour can do.

“My kids would say: ‘Black people don’t do gymnastics; Black people don’t do swimming.’ I tell them ‘no’ [...] it stops you from progressing.”
 — Jochristina, 50-59 years old, London

While parks provided an affordable place to meet, some young people found them intimidating because of poor maintenance, broken lights, motorbike riding, or inadequate police presence; or unwelcoming due to a lack of benches or the assumption that groups of young people must be **“up to something”** (**Sohna**, 18-29 years, London). For organisers, finding affordable and easy-to-access spaces has been difficult because of a lack of available facilities.

When there were opportunities, parents spent money on extra-curricular activities to keep their children occupied and safe from negative influences of crime. Good passive surveillance — such as the presence of trusted others within a space — was noted as being a way to keep kids safe. Other examples included shared green spaces that can be monitored by parents and neighbours, which were preferred.

Without safe spaces, some parents restricted their children’s independence. **Sohna** (18-29 years, London) said **“Mum would never let me go out [before the youth club], now I spend time with my friends and play football.”** This can have a long-lasting effect on people’s mental health, some forming social anxiety. Spaces for young children are equally critical for parents.

“It’s for parents’ mental health, parents that are single, parents that are going through abuse.”
 — Sadaf, 30-39 years, London.

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is adequate support, provision, and access to safe and stimulating environments for all young People of Colour.



Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack cultural representation of a diversity of groups.

A lack of celebration and representation in the built environment of a diversity of cultures can mean that people are unable to look to the city to connect with their culture and history.

People noted how they saw white culture and histories being represented within the public realm but wanted to be able to visit places that helped them to learn and teach their children about their own culture and history. Having this embedded in the built environment is a way of prompting conversations and providing information.

These insights illustrated how culture can be expressed through places, monuments, or public celebrations all of which can give people a feeling of belonging. To see these elements in daily lives is particularly important if the educational curriculum is not teaching Black British and British Asian history.

Whilst people of all generations expressed a desire to connect with, and learn about, their histories or culture, it transpired that this desire can increase from the first to the second generation, when people feel increasingly distant from their culture.

“How can I educate my children about the area because the only thing I knew about it was Henry VIII and Lesnes Abbey and things like that. I didn’t know anything else, which [...] I would love to know more to educate my children.”

— Selina, 40-49 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where the heritage and cultures of all People of Colour are designed for and celebrated in the built environment.

Community collaborators' feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces for cross-cultural celebration.

A lack of spaces that provide opportunities for connections to form between different ethnic, cultural, or religious communities can increase the potential of misunderstanding, divisions or conflict.

There was a strong desire for more opportunities that bring people together; where people can grow their cultural awareness and build empathy. Additionally, there was the acknowledgement that this could be facilitated through gathering places, food, and celebrations.

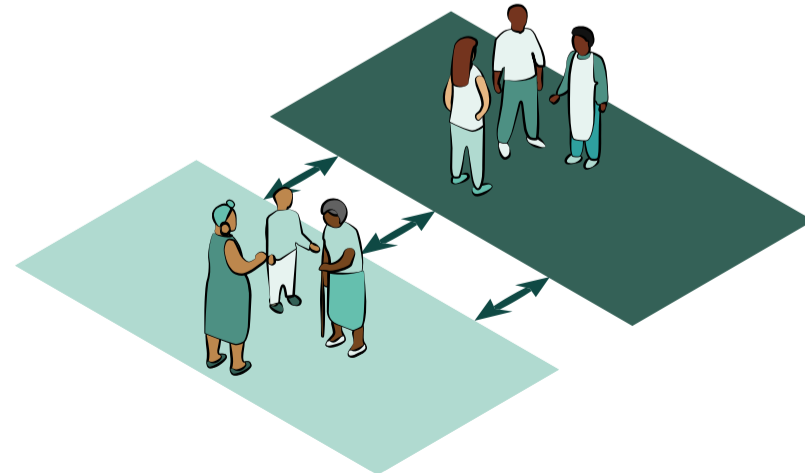
Selina (40-49 years old, London) said, *“I think food brings together lots of people. If there was an opportunity for events and I would bring my food, this would bring everybody together.”*

People outlined how the segregation of spaces and a lack of opportunity to come together made them feel uncomfortable and unsafe. This had the potential to reinforce racial prejudices. Sometimes, this lack of overlap created misunderstandings or conflict. For example, some white people in the community were offended by Nigerians trying to barter in their shops, feeling that they were trying to put them out of business.

Sandra (60-69 years old, London) said, *“It’s a bit like keeping a lid on a pot: nobody talks about what’s really going on.”*

“[Youth activities] helped children get off the streets, that helped individual children learn about different stuff. If it was Eid or Diwali or Christmas we used to celebrate everything, to get the kids used to different cultures, to respect other people so we did a lot of that in the parks.”

— Sadaf, 30-39 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where there are safe places and spaces which encourage and facilitate different communities to come together.



On location after an interview in Thamesmead.



Community collaborators feel their neighbourhood amenities do not reflect the diversity of residents.

A lack and limited variety of places, spaces and services that reflect a diversity of cultures, religions and ethnicities can make people feel unsafe and unwelcome.

People felt most accepted in spaces that reflected multiple cultures and were used by people of diverse backgrounds — spaces that celebrated difference. The dominance of white culture, or any other culture, often made people feel unwelcome. **Selina's** predominantly Black church tries to ensure white people in the community feel welcome. The markets, shops, restaurants, or churches, and the people and activities inside, were seen as expressions of culture within the city. **Jochristina** (50-59 years old, London) talked about her church: **“It feels like I’m back home, the songs, the people, the things they say and do.”**

“My church space has rules, as I am an usher I don’t wear African attire so that everybody feels included.”

— Selina, 40-49 years old, London

“[The flags] tell you that you are welcome”

— Esther, 70-79 years old, London

Conversely, people highlighted how, when they were one of only a few People of Colour within a space or on transport, they were stared at. This made them feel **“not welcome”** or **“uncomfortable”**. **Sohna** compares Aldgate to being in his area: **“there are a lot of white people. It is not the same feeling as in Barking [where] there are Black, Asian, a lot of cultures. I like it [in Barking] because you don’t get as much racism or discrimination.”**



Esther guiding a participant-led walk around shops in Newham

Required Shift: A move towards a city where neighbourhoods appropriately reflect the needs and preferences of the diverse cultures that inhabit them.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack availability of appropriate and affordable housing.

A lack of stable, affordable and adequate housing arrangements coupled with complex application routes can place a strain on people's mental health and mean they do not put down roots in areas.

People emphasised how the home can often feel like one of few spaces where they felt completely safe from racism. However, secure housing is challenging to access. Those unable to afford rent on the private market needed to endure complex and lengthy processes to access alternatives, which often require digital and English language skills. People noted how they often relied on the help of family or others in the community. This often added further delays. **“I’m waiting for my son to do the application. I can’t do any computer work”** (**Aisha**, 60-69 years old, London).

While waiting for housing, some spoke of how they lived in temporary accommodation, while others highlighted how securing a place can even require people to endure homelessness or overcrowded conditions; **“My other daughter lived for two years in an overcrowded place,”** said **Jochristina** (50-59 years old, London), before being offered somewhere to live.

People expressed how, in many cases, housing was of inadequate quality and did not meet mobility needs of the residents. Others noted that it can be located away from support networks or in areas with poor transport links and high air pollution. **“It’s not liveable conditions. We’re talking about mould, infestations, overcrowding,”** said **Jessica** (18-29 years, London). Another example involved a housing association-run assisted living property which did not have basic services that met the needs of the residents. Some rooms only had baths for washing: **“I haven’t had a proper bath in two years. I am frightened if I get in and I can’t get out”** (**Esther**, 70-79 years old, London).

These experiences illustrated how people's needs change over time as factors such as new mobility issues arise, households grow or people require bathrooms on the ground floor. Some of these factors can lead to people needing to move out of multi-storey residences, which are often more affordable. Poor conditions were also exacerbated during the Covid pandemic. In one experience, lockdowns meant that a group of young migrants who were living in a low-quality hostel had been made to isolate in cramped rooms. The effect of insecure housing is that people did not invest emotionally in the place or local area. Speaking about her temporary bedsit, **Zinzi** (40-49 years old, London) said: **“I haven’t changed [it] because I don’t feel like I’m at home. I like displaying my family photos, [but] there’s no photos in there. There’s nothing. I’m just living there.”**

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is reliable, accessible and affordable quality housing provision that is designed to meet the needs of all People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods are not safe.

Neighbourhoods that are both perceived to be dangerous, and have realities of danger, can create restrictions on people's freedom to move around and impact their quality of life.

It was noted that unsafe personal experiences restricted how people behaved. These experiences meant people were unable to move freely or make full use of the city and pushed some people towards increased car use and away from available public transport. Threats to people's safety also meant they avoided going out alone, actively avoiding certain routes, places or travelling at night.

Several people mentioned how **“Hyde park is dangerous, [they] would never go”** (**Chike**, 10-17 years old, Newham) or would leave before dark. People spoke of how they cannot walk their dogs after work once it is dark or have to pay for a taxi at night. Experiences of harassment on public transport also caused people to increasingly use cars. Similarly, after an attempted mugging on his walk home from school, **Sohna** (18-29 years, London) **“was scared walking that way”** and avoided it.

Lack of safety can have an amplified effect on those with high mobility needs. For instance, **Jasmine** (50-59 years old, London) parks her car in a safe location, despite this adding stairs and ramps to her walk. This experience can extend beyond the public realm and into the home. After **Esther's** assisted living home was broken into and then the following day bricks were thrown at her window, she feels **“now it is like a prison, everyone is too scared to open their door.”** (70-79 years old, London) - Read more about Esther’s story on page 49. These experiences illustrate the increased financial, emotional, and personal cost of living in areas where there are higher risks to safety.

External perceptions of crime can further undermine improvements, as quality lighting or seating can be seen to encourage unwanted gathering, yet poorly maintained or underused places were seen to attract anti-social behaviour. **“People don’t want to sit on the ground, but there’s nowhere to sit and they won’t put chairs because they think people will congregate or vandalise it.”** **Jasmine** (50-59 years old, London).

“After dark I don’t go out... I don’t feel safe at all at night.”

— Jochristina, 40-49 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where all People of Colour feel and are safe in all urban spaces.

Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack inclusive green spaces.

A lack of public and open green spaces that allow for multiple activities and users can make people feel excluded and unwelcome.

It was expressed how green spaces provide mental health support alongside being places to meet and play for free. However, people highlighted how they sometimes struggled to find green spaces that they feel welcome in.

One recurring issue is that it is not always clear which areas are private and which are public. Unintentionally using private green spaces for recreation can attract unpleasant or intimidating interactions with security or police and deter people from using public spaces altogether.

People highlighted how, at other times, it felt like designers or managers did not want People of Colour using these spaces at all. A lack of benches for gathering, “No ball games” signs without providing nearby play spaces, and a dominance of white-run community gardens all contributed to this feeling.

“We decided to all join up to have a football competition. I’m guessing it was a private place, [but] it didn’t look private. When the police came everyone ran, and then the police told me I can get a £200 fine for being here.”

— Chike, 10-17 years old, London

“I think it’s more so about the aesthetic of having a green space in a specific community, as opposed to having a community’s green space. [For example,] if it’s known for having homeless people sleep there, they’ll put little spikes on the floor. [...] It’s about moving people on. It’s about not making those spaces to be occupied. So it’s like you’re creating green spaces for no one to use them.”

— Hannah, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where high quality green and blue infrastructure is accessible and welcoming to all People of Colour.



At Queen's Market in Newham, during a participant-led walk.



Systems are the hidden forces that create and govern the city. These are often the most opaque and removed from the everyday person but can have the greatest impact on their lives.

This includes institutions, public services, investment bodies, and decision-making processes.

People's stories

Not feeling cared for

Esther (70-79 years old, London) has been living in housing association-run assisted living for older people. Over many years, the residents had made it their own, enlivening the building with plants and putting personal touches like a poster with flags from around the world in the shared living space. **"They had hanging baskets and everything. I tell you it was a pleasure to live here, but not anymore."**

Esther describes how, when it was taken over by a new housing association, the plants and personal belongings were immediately removed. **"Everything was out, all of our personal things. I had a little thing to elevate my legs, they chucked it all out."** Devastated, the residents came together to write a complaint letter, and the plants were returned with an apology letter. However, for Esther, this was the start of a culture of a **"lack of concern"**.

Many residents do not feel safe as people often tailgate to gain access to the building. One afternoon, somebody got into the building and tried to push their way into Esther's flat. After an altercation, the person left angrily. Esther notified management of what had happened, but no action was taken. Despite this incident, she described how there was no member of staff on the premises the following day. The intruder returned and threw bricks at the glass frontage, cracking Esther's window. The remnants of the bricks still sit in Esther's front garden. After the incident, the police were called, and the front door was changed. The new door has a handle on the outside and Esther **does not sleep well** anymore, especially when she hears people trying the handle on her door.

"Esther recalls the housing manager saying, 'I'm not here for you all – I am here for the building. If you fall down, I can step over you, I don't have to call an ambulance.'"

– Esther, 70-79 years old, London



Listen to more voices on systems in the community radio episode **'Old and young'**.

Being labelled as unintelligent

Amanda (50-59 years old, London) is an avid learner: **"Mum said I was quite a sickly child, so I missed [some school], but I just couldn't wait to go to school when I was allowed. I was even sleeping in my uniform. I just love to learn, even now."**

Because of her mild dyslexia, she was separated into another class in school and told she **"couldn't attend any lessons"**. Instead, a whole day might be spent **"cooking chicken"**. The physical separation made it impossible for her to access proper education. As her schooling went on, she **"wasn't allowed to do her CSE [Certificate of Secondary Education] because they told [her] [she] was subnormal."**

After leaving school, she went to gardening school. She **"was the only Black [person] there"**, though people often mistakenly referred to her as Indian. Amanda said, **"I used to enjoy gardening, so I went to a gardening college. I was spat at [...] there. I saw racism full on [...] even from the teachers. I am hearing 'why are you here?' [...] Sometimes people think I'm Indian [...] they would point at me – I was locked in the shed at times, even by the teacher. [...] If I knew then what I know now, they could have been in trouble, but I didn't know. I was 17 or 18 [at the time]."** Despite the abuse, she persisted for the whole year as she **"loved the gardening concept"**.

After finishing college, she got a gardening job in Westminster. It was a male and white-dominated environment, and they were **"very prejudiced"** and **"horrible"** towards her. Amanda found that Latin plant names were often used to exclude her, despite them working with plants originating from all over the world. At one point, she asked her manager whether she could go on a course to further her learning and was told **"you're not bright enough."**

This experience extended beyond the workplace into community gardens where, even when she was not the only Person of Colour, she felt it was not a welcoming environment. **"I feel like there is a pressure to try and be white"**.



"I was put with really special needs [sic] children, that I couldn't communicate with."

– Amanda, 50-59 years old, London



Community collaborators feel that government services fail to meet the needs of People of Colour.

Competing funding priorities for public services can lead to gaps in support for communities. This creates an unsustainable reliance on volunteer networks, which cannot always meet everyone's needs.

People noted how insufficient provision of government services meant that community organisations and volunteers needed to fill in the gaps. This illustrates how an over-reliance on unpaid work, and the goodwill of community members or independent organisations, can mean that coverage is patchy, and systems are not always resilient or consistent. Independent organisations often did not have the capacity or funds to provide inclusive services. For example, what a local community breakfast can serve is limited by the donations it receives. Consequently, this means that it cannot tailor the food to cultural or religious requirements or preferences.

While it was emphasised that there is a lot of enthusiasm for volunteering and community action, this cannot wholly compensate for the shrinking provision of government services. As volunteering relies heavily on individuals who are able to donate their time, services can suddenly disappear when physical, personal, or financial situations change. This lack of continuity can be disruptive to those who rely on them.

Members of these independent organisations can have a life-changing effect on people. For instance, Selina noted: **"I think knowledge is power. The things I could become part of because of [Jasmine, a community volunteer] are astonishing. People need to have access to individuals like her or thriving community centres to be empowered. For me, this changed so much, also when my son received his diagnosis, and we could set up a fundraiser."** (Selina, 40-49 years old, London).

"I like to volunteer. I find it very important. I see it as giving back to my community. I want to make an impact on my community. There's so much more than working."
 — Jochristina, 40-49 years old, London
 Note: Jochristina is a teacher and community volunteer



Required Shift: A move towards a city where government services adequately and equitably meet the needs of all People of Colour.

Community collaborator feel that their neighbourhoods are disconnected and lack key infrastructure.

Neighbourhoods that are not well-connected and lack quality, inclusive services, can isolate and exclude people, limit opportunities, and restrict them from living full lives.

People spoke of how geographical disconnection, poor quality, or non-inclusive services excluded them from living full lives. Not being physically or digitally connected made people feel isolated. **Hannah** said, **"why can't we have connectivity to the rest of the world, like the rest of the world does?"** (18-29, London).

The impact of this can also be amplified when local public amenities are of a low standard and people must travel to access quality amenities, such as restaurants, parks, or after-school activities. Parents, such as Jochristina (40-49 years old, London) highlighted how she is often in situations where she **"had to take [her children] out of the area to access facilities – better facilities – to East London, or North London."** This has further social implications, as it was noted that friends and family do not want to visit **"the sticks"**, or people cannot use shared bikes with friends since they will not have a drop-off point near their house.

Non-inclusive services can prevent people from using the available public transport options. People voiced experiences of micro-aggressions such as shoving in crowds, being stared at, talked about by others, or impatience or harm from staff. **Hannah** described **"a lack of patience for people who are waiting that are of Colour or of a bigger size. I've had three situations [...] where I've been knocked on the head by the wing mirror."**

In the absence of adequate public services, those who can often use their car whenever parking is available, and many young people get a car as soon as they can.

My car is not for going to Sainsbury's. My car is to take me to places I've never been, to try things that I've never tried, to see things."
 — Isaac, 50-59 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where the neighbourhoods of People of Colour are interconnected with the whole city and have high quality infrastructure provision.

Community collaborators feel that informal and small businesses in their neighbourhoods are not supported.

A lack of support for small and informal businesses can result in neighbourhoods which do not provide for, or support, a diversity of cultural and community needs.

The research revealed how small, often home-based businesses emerged in communities to meet unmet cultural needs. Despite some areas having diverse residents, services such as Black hair shops or specific food shops were not always available locally. These businesses can lack the spaces or support that are needed to provide quality products and services to customers.

Furthermore, when these businesses are set up in rural or predominantly white areas, as **Clara** (18-29 years, see story p. 37) experienced when going to university in Canterbury, they sometimes need to pay a premium as the people selling products need to source them from far away, usually London.

This illustrates how these businesses play an important role in people's lives, ensuring that they can access the groceries, pre-prepared food, clothing and hair products that they need. People referred to these businesses and their importance in areas that are under-served today, as well as when talking about their experiences of arriving in the UK in the 1960s.

While many people leveraged digital platforms like UberEATS and have extensive networks to promote their services, the scale and value of these are not always recognised or visible to city-makers.

"To be honest, there has been a massive influx of businesses, self-owned businesses, because people are not feeling that they're getting the service that they want. Different businesses from hair businesses, because we have not one Black hairdresser in the Thamesmead area! So there is a lot of pop-up people who are doing their own things in their own houses, and there's a lot of catering businesses as well that are doing things from home. It's a good thing, in a sense of businesses are being created. But it's not such a good thing, in a sense of not all of these businesses have been certified and kind of checked over to see how good they actually are."
 — Jessica, 18-29 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where small, informal, and independent businesses in the neighbourhoods of People of Colour are given adequate and equitable support so that they flourish.



Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are de-prioritised.

When disparities exist between the quality of urban amenities in the neighbourhoods of marginalised communities and those of other, majority-white areas, residents can feel de-prioritised.

The research outlined how the disparity in the quality, provision, and maintenance of urban amenities across the city exaggerated feelings of neglect, or of being forgotten in already under-served areas. People observed that these disparities often existed between areas that were home to a majority of People of Colour as opposed to a majority of white people. People expressed how the disinvestment or deprioritisation that they experienced was informed by a perception that these are places with people **"who have no voice"** or are **"bad areas"** already. This illustrates how these narratives about a place can contribute towards the shaping of concrete decision-making.

Many people highlighted their concerns that vulnerable residents or those with more complex or challenging needs were being moved into their areas without increased support for existing services or communities. **Gul** (60-69, London) described her concerns around how a youth detention centre was moved into her area without warning, and **Selina** (40-49, London) described the high-density of people who were struggling with drug or alcohol abuse in her neighbourhood. This illustrates how new residents with complex needs can be seen as a threat to existing communities, especially when this is paired with a lack of existing funding, support or services.

Some people expressed how during the mandatory closure of businesses during the Covid pandemic, People of Colour's needs and services were being de-prioritised by the government and decision-makers. Examples included prayer rooms in universities and Black hair shops being closed, while beauty retailers and pharmacies such as Boots were deemed 'essential'.

"I see there's a difference in the way one park is managed, and the way another park is managed. And for me, it always does come back down to race. Because if we look at the demographic of these areas where there are nice hospitals, nice parks, nice schools, nice housing, predominantly, you see white people there."

— Jonathan, 18-29 years old, London



Required Shift: A move towards a city where the neighbourhoods of People of Colour receive equitable and adequate provision, support and investment.

Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are unmaintained.

Persistent lack or limited maintenance of housing, infrastructure and public spaces can make communities feel undervalued and reinforce negative stereotypes.

The research outlined how the persistent lack of maintenance of housing and the public realm, by the council and housing associations, made people feel undervalued. It was highlighted how, in the absence of adequate street cleaning or rubbish collection, waste can accumulate on streets, in parks, and around housing. As a result, local residents spoke of how they became scapegoats for failing services, which can reinforce racial stereotypes about lazy or disrespectful behaviour and fuel tensions between different racial groups.

People emphasised that while placemaking and public art projects were valued, especially when they were community-led, they could also further frustrate residents. Some of them viewed this as **"decoration"** without attending to long-standing maintenance issues. For others, it demonstrated a lack of genuine care and responsiveness to residents' needs. It also made many ask **for whom** these improvements were being made.

It was expressed that this lack of maintenance had a self-reinforcing effect. Broken street lights or playground equipment, for instance, could lead to anti-social behaviour and graffiti. When the responsibilities for maintenance were not clear, people felt powerless to effect change. When there were multiple parties responsible, either several councils or housing associations, people felt they were **"given the run-around"**.

People also explained how frustrations could be amplified for People of Colour when it appeared that the council was more proactive with complaints **against** them than in supporting them.

"I have a nice garden, and it is utilised. But my neighbour is horrible and keeps complaining about noise, and she complains to the council. She is white and she has a direct line to the council. The council bows in front of her. I have a leak in my sink, and nothing is happening for 6 weeks. I send an email each week to my council, but nothing happens."

— Selina, 40-49 years old, London

Required Shift: A move towards a city where there is long-term sustainable investment and continued maintenance in the neighbourhoods of People of Colour.

Community collaborators feel that housing services in their neighbourhoods are not adequate.

Experiences of inadequate, low-quality housing, combined with residents' feeling as though their concerns are disregarded, can have long-lasting impacts to financial, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

People mentioned that, when reliant on council services such as social housing, they could experience having limited agency or resources to improve their living conditions. **Zinzi** (40-49 years old, London) had complained repeatedly to her private landlord (council-funded flat) about the condition of her cooker. Eventually, there was a **"gas explosion and fire"**. After months in hospital and several operations, she has been temporarily housed (now for over two years) in a 16 square metre room, where the cooker and bed are next to one another. This often triggers her PTSD and affects her sleep. Read more about Zinzi's story on page 37.

Esther (70-79 years old, London) also has trouble sleeping in her council-funded, housing association-run retirement home. After repeatedly raising concerns with the housing manager, but with no action taken, Esther feels that **"no one cares if we live or die, it will be days until anyone realised they are dead."** Without proper building security, welfare checks, cleaning, or waste removal, residents have had to contend with an intruder, a brick being thrown at their windows, and a fly infestation.

People highlighted that beyond serious incidents, inadequate and low-quality social housing also puts a significant burden on them to invest in improvements to their own homes, even though they would not benefit from these improvements in the same way as they would with private housing.

This illustrates how poor living conditions can have severe emotional, physical, and financial impacts on families and individuals.



One of the several windows smashed in an attack on Esther's retirement housing.



Required Shift: A move towards a city where the neighbourhoods of People of Colour have quality, equitable and accessible housing services.

The vicious cycle of a lack of care and the impact it has on racial prejudice

Systemic racism means
People of Colour are
more likely to live in
deprived areas

This can feed into false
stereotypes about
behaviour and poor
perceptions of areas, which
reinforce systemic racism

Local authorities of
deprived areas have
stretched budgets which
can result in less effective
cleaning and maintenance

Increased rubbish in areas and streets
can impact residents wellbeing and can
be blamed on them.

*"This area **wouldn't look so grimy if you just fixed the ditch.** Those things wouldn't need to be on the floor for people to step on."*

— Hannah, 18-29 years old, London



A mural in Thamesmead next to a flooded underpass. Residents explain it has been this way for years

2.3 Community radio series

Overview

As part of the research process Social Broadcasts facilitated two radio sessions with the Thamesmead residents and members of the Smart Women's Group.

These sessions used a 'live' radio round-table format where the community collaborators took the role of both interviewer and interviewee and were encouraged to engage in explorative conversations. The project team's role was to listen to and facilitate these discussions so that they could develop their understanding of the experiences that were being discussed. This created a space where the community collaborators could delve deeper into their experiences and reflect on their lived environment, offering insights and proposing alternatives.

Taking the conscious and unconscious conventions of the radio studio environment out of context and placing them into a less intimidating and familiar setting, encourages contributors to listen deeply to one another and feel listened to. Contributors are compelled to both listen and respond while listeners can access unique insight into wider social contexts.

The richness of these exchanges highlights the value and additional depth that comes from a process of exploring these topics with people who have shared experiences.

1: Thamesmead

Deborah hosts this conversation, with help from Social Broadcasts, inviting Shanaz, Sukeana, Joshua, Jecoliah, Greg, and Joanne to share their stories and experiences.

Episode 1: Nothing for the youth

Episode 2: Thamesmead needs a bank

Episode 3: Spaces for adults

Episode 4: Building trust

Episode 5: A forgotten town

Episode 6: What would make a difference?

This format also challenges the power dynamic, extractive nature, and limitations that are inherent in an approach where the roles are framed solely as '**researcher**' and '**subject**'.

Participants were invited to listen back to the recorded radio sessions, which initiated further discussion and insight as they reflected on what they heard.

Social Broadcasts facilitated, recorded, and produced these radio sessions to create the **community radio series**, which can be accessed through the QR codes below. Each series is derived from one recorded conversation that has been divided into multiple episodes, each one exploring a topic or theme highlighted within the discussion.

Recording and sharing these conversations platforms the experiences and voices of the community collaborators. The episodes provide another medium for the reader to develop their understanding, engage, and empathise with the personal accounts explored in Chapter 2.2.

2: Smart Women's Group

Brenda hosts this conversation, with help from Social Broadcasts, inviting Shamim, Paizah, Naaz, Rachel, Earna, Lucy, and Taibha to share their stories and experiences.

Episode 1: An anti-racist city

Episode 2: Having a voice

Episode 3: Old and young are disenfranchised

Episode 4: Shaping community

Episode 5: Together

Episode 6: Information is key

Episode 7: Dreaming for the future



Sharing experiences during a radio session in Newham.

2.4 Takeaways

Overview

This chapter presents the five *takeaways*, one for each *Layer of the City*. The takeaways provide a concise distillation of the learnings from the research findings.

The takeaways are forward-looking, each one starting with the statement, **'The process of shaping the built environment can'** as a way of proposing a vision of a possible future where experiences of racial inequity are addressed and their causes challenged.

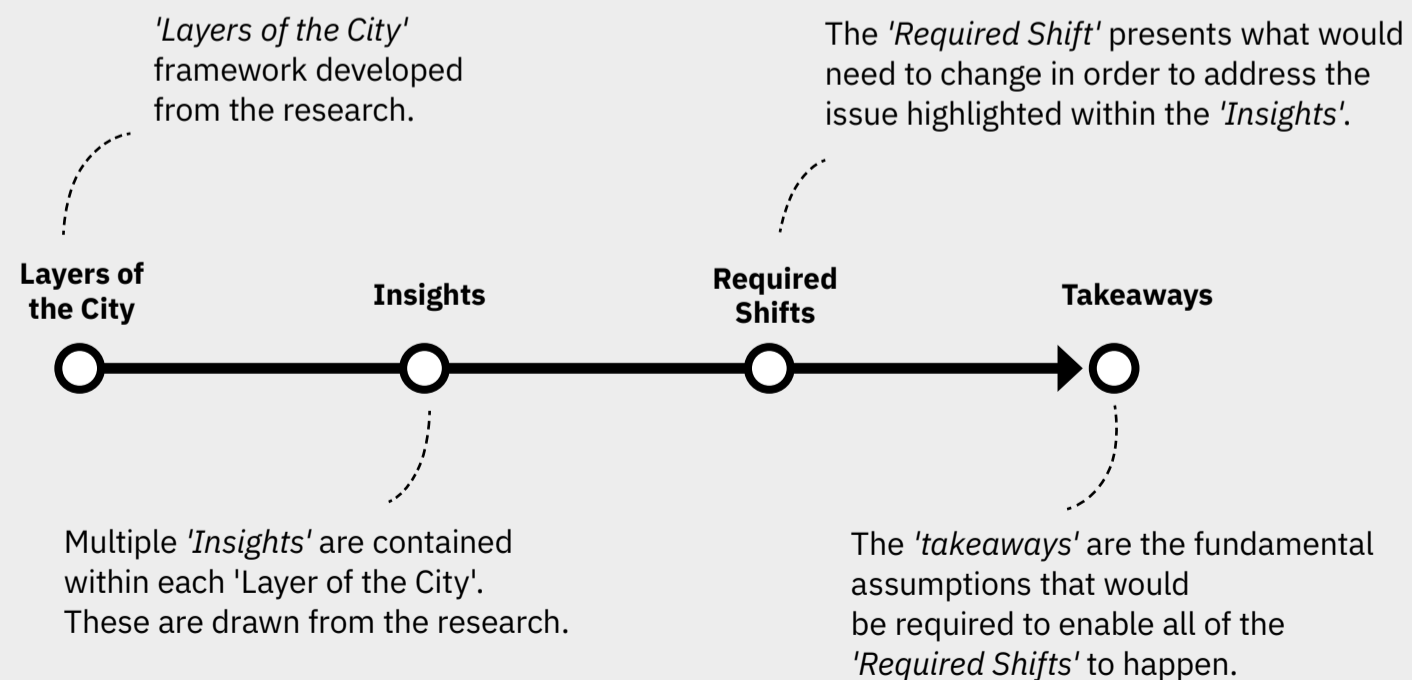
The takeaways can aid in communicating the overarching narratives and themes explored in the research findings alongside providing a starting point for approaching next steps.

Takeaway creation

The takeaways are derived directly from the *'Required Shifts'* which are found at the bottom of each *Insight Card*. They were created by identifying what fundamental assumptions would need to be true during the creation and stewardship of the built environment in order to facilitate the *'Required Shifts'* to happen. This process was informed by a literature review and a series of workshops with different practitioners at Arup.

The steps that led to these takeaways are illustrated in the diagram below. This process is explored in detail in the table on the following pages (p. 60/61).

Takeaway creation process



Overview of takeaways

Layers of the City

Takeaway (The process of shaping the built environment can ...)

Narratives

The process of shaping the built environment can ...

Work to build both narratives and realities that champion, platform, and empower all People of Colour.



Agency and Power

The process of shaping the built environment can ...

Be based upon meaningful representation, engagement, genuine decision-making powers and agency for all People of Colour.



Interactions

The process of shaping the built environment can ...

Act to explicitly welcome and include all People of Colour, whether through challenging racist behaviour or celebrating culture.



Spaces

The process of shaping the built environment can ...

Create safe, accessible, and appropriate places and spaces that reflect and serve the diversity and requirements of all People of Colour.



Systems

The process of shaping the built environment can ...

Establish a sustainable system that is adequately resourced, functions effectively and equitably to meet the needs of all People of Colour.



From Layers of the City to Takeaways

The table below provides an overview of the key statements contained within the research findings. This illustrates the process that led from the Layers of the City to the Takeaways.

Layers of the City	Insight Title <i>(The research identified that ...)</i>	Required shifts <i>(A move towards a city where ...)</i>	Takeaways <i>(The process of shaping the built environment can ...)</i>
Narratives	Community collaborators' sense of self is shaped by negative narratives	People of Colour see and experience their neighbourhoods as being valued, respected and invested in	Work to build both narratives and realities that champion, platform, and empower all People of Colour
	Community collaborators are deterred from investing in areas due to negative narratives	Resources are spent on celebrating the existing strengths of an area whilst collaborating with residents to develop new positive narratives	
Agency and Power	Community collaborators' expectations are diminished	People of Colour consistently receive and can access the same high standard of service as other members of wider society	Be based upon meaningful representation, engagement, genuine decision-making powers and agency for all People of Colour
	Community collaborators feel disempowered	People of Colour are not disproportionately exposed to precarious situations and are empowered to raise issues without repercussions	
	Community collaborators feel disconnected from decision-making	The process of shaping the built environment is welcoming, accessible and communicated to People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel involved only in tokenistic ways	There is transparent communication and the viewpoints of People of Colour are listened to and meaningfully incorporated into proposals	
	Community collaborators feel under-represented	People of Colour are meaningfully represented in decision-making roles, positions of authority and the engagement process	
	Community collaborators feel they have no sense of ownership	People of Colour are empowered to shape, manage and develop ownership over their environments	
Interactions	Community collaborators experience discriminatory surveillance	People of Colour are free to move about the city without being subjected to, or at fear of, discriminatory surveillance	Act to explicitly welcome and include all People of Colour, whether through challenging racist behaviour or celebrating culture
	Community collaborators experience harassment	People of Colour are free from direct and indirect forms of threat, harassment, and violence	
	Community collaborators mask their culture	People of Colour are enabled, encouraged, and celebrated for expressing their identity and culture	
	Community collaborators experience othering	One culture does not dominate to the detriment of others, and People of Colour are respected as core parts of society	
	Community collaborators experience discrimination	People of Colour are not exposed to, or limited in their use of the city by discriminatory views and actions of others	
Spaces	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces designed for a diversity of users	There is adequate provision of a variety of appropriate cultural spaces that meet the needs of all People of Colour	Create safe, accessible, and appropriate places and spaces that reflect and serve the diversity and requirements of all People of Colour
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack secular social spaces	There is adequate support, provision, and access to secular social spaces for all People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack 'third spaces'	There is adequate support, provision, and access to public communal spaces for all People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack safe spaces for young people	There is adequate support, provision, and access to safe and stimulating environments for all young People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack cultural representation of a diversity of groups	The heritage and cultures of all People of Colour are designed for and celebrated in the built environment	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack spaces for cross-cultural celebration	There are safe places and spaces which encourage and facilitate different communities to come together	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods amenities do not reflect the diversity of residents	Neighbourhoods appropriately reflect the needs and preferences of the diverse cultures that inhabit them	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods lack availability of appropriate and affordable housing	There is reliable accessible and affordable quality housing provision that is designed to meet the needs of all People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel their neighbourhoods are not safe	All People of Colour feel and are safe in all shared urban space	
Community collaborators' neighbourhoods lack inclusive green spaces	High quality green and blue infrastructure is accessible and welcoming for all People of Colour		
Systems	Community collaborators feel that government services fail to meet the needs of People of Colour	Government services adequately and equitably meet the needs of all People of Colour	Establish a sustainable system that is adequately resourced, functions effectively and equitably to meet the needs of all People of Colour
	Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are disconnected and lack key infrastructure	The neighbourhoods of People of Colour are interconnected with the whole city and have high quality infrastructure provision	
	Community collaborators feel that informal and small businesses in their neighbourhoods are not supported	Small, informal, and independent businesses are given adequate and equitable support so that they flourish	
	Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are de-prioritised	The neighbourhoods of People of Colour receive equitable and adequate provision, support and investment	
	Community collaborators feel that their neighbourhoods are unmaintained	There is long-term sustainable investment in the neighbourhoods of People of Colour	
	Community collaborators feel that housing services in their neighbourhoods are not adequate	The neighbourhoods of People of Colour have quality, equitable and accessible housing services	

3.0

User guide

Overview

The following section provides suggestion for how the research findings can be used by urban practitioners.

To make the research findings easier to use, the key information from each chapter has been extracted from this report and turned into a concise and usable resources. These can be downloaded from the Arup website. This enables the user to first digest the information in the report and then use and share the findings in their own practice.

The team would like to hear from anyone who has applied the findings from this report to help us adapt and improve the resources.

Arup Foresight

foresight@arup.com



On a participant-led walk in Newham.

3.1

Using the findings

Where to start?

The research findings are a set of starting points for urban practitioners. They are prompts for reflection, informing decisions, starting discussions, and identifying where their work is reinforcing or creating racial inequity. This process of reflection and learning can guide actions, inform next steps, and support the user in developing anti-racist approaches that lead to meaningful change.

This approach is offered instead of providing a set of definitive actions or next steps. This is because the challenge of addressing racial inequity is multi-faceted and continually evolving. Solutions need to be flexible, co-created with those impacted, and able to be developed depending on the context.

The approach of using the research findings can be broken-down into five areas:

1. Introduce the work and concepts

The *Layers of the City* framework is a useful entry point, especially if talking with people who are new to the topic. It can be used to introduce and visualise the key concepts.

2. Deepen understanding and engage with the challenge

The *Experiences* and *Community radio series* support the reader in engaging and empathising with how the decisions of urban practitioners can negatively impact people.



3. Support reflection and catalyse discussion

The framework can be used to identify which Layers of the City the users work within. The Insight Cards can be used as prompts to reflect on where past projects, decision-making, and ways of working may have created similar impacts.

4. Support vision building

The *Takeaways* and *Required Shifts* are future-focused. They can be used as part of the reflection process and as a starting point or guide when informing decision-making, project planning, and proposing changes to ways of working.

5. Encourage further research

The *Process and Methodology* are not part of the research findings but they can be used as a springboard for others to undertake further research into racial inequity and the built environment.

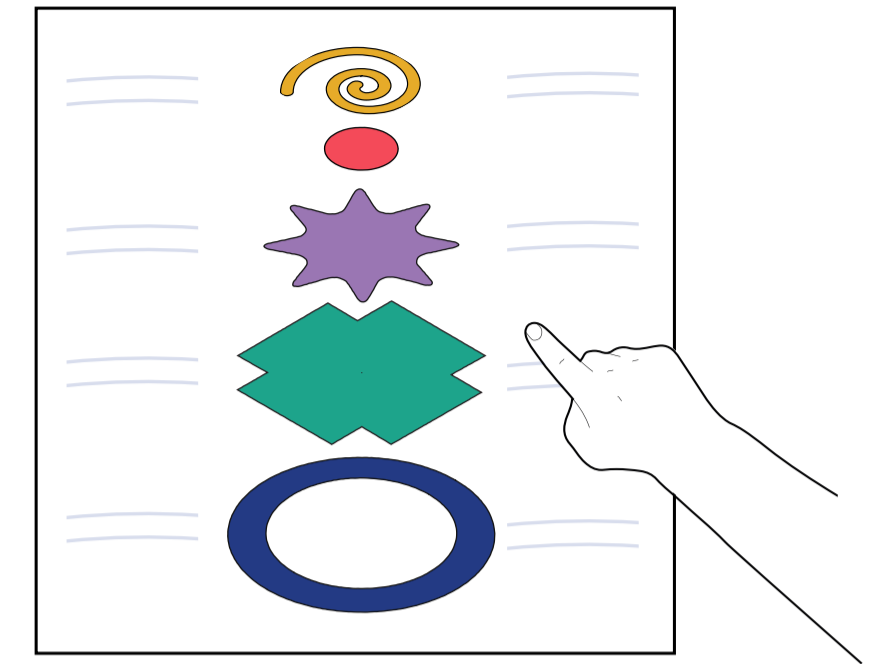
The findings can be applied in a myriad of specific scenarios and they do not always have to be used simultaneously. Examples of suggested specific applications are provided on the page to the right.

Explore the framework

Urban practitioners can . . . position themselves within the framework of the *Layers of the City* to identify which *Layers* their practices and processes influence.

Example . . . use the *Layers of the City* as a guide whilst reviewing your role and the scope of a project. Map out all the different ways in which each task in the scope has the potential to relate to, influence, or impact the five different layers.

Why . . . This task encourages urban practitioners to think about their position beyond that of the '*Spaces*' layer. Developing this understanding of potential broader implications can help to re-frame the urban practitioner's role, responsibility, and range of influence. This can in turn help to guide project decisions.



Engage with the experiences

Urban practitioners can . . . reflect on how past projects have created or reinforced experiences of racial inequity.

Example . . . read and listen to the research findings before undertaking a post-project review. As a team, collectively reflect on how decision-making during the project could have created similar outcomes to those highlighted in the findings. Use these reflections to inform questions to be included as part of a post-occupancy evaluation.

Why . . . This task encourages urban practitioners to reflect on their decision-making and investigate the negative impacts that may have been created. These learnings can be used to rectify issues where possible and change practices and processes on future projects.

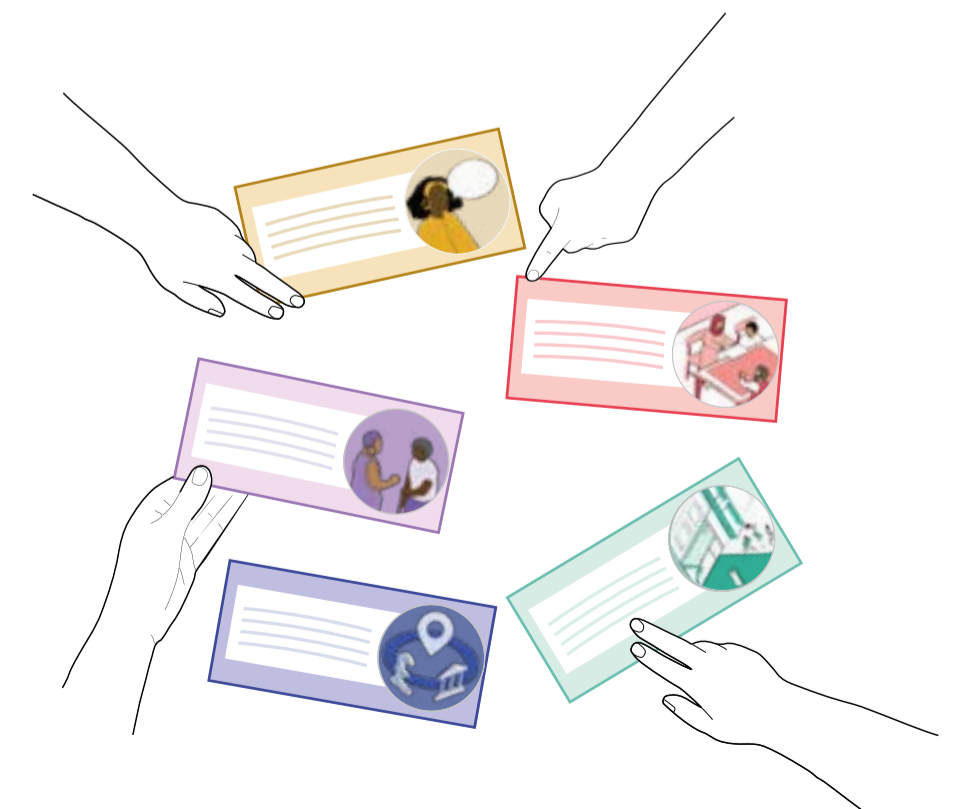


Apply the takeaways

Urban practitioners can . . . use the research findings to shape the scope of future projects.

Example . . . use the *Required Shifts* and *Takeaways* as provocations during the development of a project brief. This could include using the findings as guidance to inform project objectives or to define the metrics for how a successful project would be measured.

Why . . . This task encourages urban practitioners to include considerations about racial inequity at a project's inception. This aims to place addressing inequity as a fundamental factor within any project so that it is not added on as a superficial addition at a later stage.



4.0

Behind the scenes

Overview

Detailed information on the context for the work, the methodology, research process and roles of the team.



Talking through experiences and using text prompts during an interview session in Newham.

4.1

Context and drivers

The connection between racial inequity and the city

Racism in the UK is structural and systemic.⁶ This describes discrimination that is embedded into laws, systems, policies, processes, practices, and beliefs of a society. These entrenched factors can impact the health, safety, wealth, quality of life, and personal fulfilment of marginalised and racialised groups.^{7,8,9}

The impact of systemic and structural racism can be measured through a range of factors. For example, poverty rates of People of Colour in London and the rest of England sit at 39% and 38% respectively, compared to 21% and 19% for white groups;¹⁰ 25% of Workers of Colour pay housing costs that are unaffordable, compared to only 10% of white workers;¹¹ and neighbourhoods in London that have a higher proportion of residents from racialised backgrounds are disproportionately exposed to negative environmental factors such as air pollution.¹²

The discrimination entrenched in today's system is interconnected and compounded by the impact of historic racism, which continues to affect People of Colour. For instance, racist practices in the UK have meant that People of Colour are over-represented in insecure, low-wage employment¹³ and poor-quality privately rented housing.¹⁴ One consequence of this is a reduced likelihood of home ownership within these groups, and thus reduced housing security and not benefiting from increasing property values. As house prices have risen, new home buyers have increasingly relied upon inter-generational wealth to provide mortgage deposits. Disparity in asset ownership, which allows for both accrual and leveraging of wealth, has meant an ongoing gap in ownership of housing between white populations and Communities of Colour¹⁵. This perpetuates discrimination, and continues to impact future generations, even when the original prejudiced practice has stopped.

The built environment is inevitably implicated in this because it plays a fundamental role in how society functions and is experienced by people. This is not just through the creation of spaces and places, but also the systems that govern them, the interactions that are enabled within them, the narratives which are formed and told about them, as well as the agency and power people have throughout this process.

Discrimination due to systemic racism can be found at all levels of the built environment: neighbourhoods that lack access to services and relevant amenities; the erasure of culturally important sites; design codes created with only one demographic of society in mind; decision-making that is informed by stereotypes and pre-conceived perceptions of communities.

Discrimination experienced through the built environment is not inevitable nor fixed. It is the result of processes and decisions informed, or led by, urban practitioners. Where this system creates a disproportionate negative impact on marginalised groups, it reinforces and deepens existing socio-economic inequities.

This underscores the point that — even if, as individuals, we do not consider ourselves racist — our practices, when unexamined, can have negative and inequitable outcomes. Even so, many continue to see the decisions of urban practitioners as 'neutral' and disconnected from this wider context and impacts. Changing this perception is a first step towards accepting our agency and taking responsibility.

Why is Arup researching racial inequity?

The connection between racial inequity, the built environment, and the urban practitioner's role within it, requires interrogation, reflection, and intervention if we are to challenge racial inequity and develop anti-racist cities.

This project is a first step as part of a wider programme of work that seeks to deepen Arup's understanding of these systemic issues, reflect upon our own position as urban practitioners, and ultimately use these learnings to help us develop anti-racist practices.

Arup sees addressing this challenge as a fundamental part of our values¹⁶ and part of our responsibility as built environment experts to shape a better, more just world. Redressing inequity is an essential part of our mission to develop a truly sustainable built environment because inequity impedes the development of sustainable and resilient societies.^{17,18} A resilient society depends on adaptable and robust networks of social, environmental, political, and economic systems that can withstand shocks.^{19,20} Inequity degrades these systems by lowering trust in governmental organisations, fuelling social unrest,²¹ and undermining opportunities for those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.²² These all increase vulnerabilities and instability alongside lowering social mobility and hampering education and skills development.²³

Without resilience and strength in these systems, there can be no sustained and equitable social, environmental, and economic stability or development. This is increasingly being recognised in international aims and agreements: addressing inequity as a core element of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)²⁴ and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).²⁵ As urban practitioners, we need to develop solutions that actively create equity if we are to improve the resilience, health, happiness, prosperity, and sustainability of society as a whole.^{26,27}

Highlighting the inextricable link between the built environment and systemic issues shows how racial inequity is in direct opposition to Arup's values and mission to achieve sustainable development. It makes it part of our responsibility to redress inequities and to become anti-racist in our practice.



A view over Yarnton Way to Jacob, Masham, and Clydesdale House on the Thamesmead estate.

A society-wide challenge

The inequities experienced by People of Colour stem from complex historical, social, economic, and cultural factors. The strategy for addressing these systemic issues is continually evolving and must be broader than just reshaping built environment practices.

By the time a project has reached an urban practitioner, there have been many upstream decisions, such as within financial institutions or government, which have already shaped the parameters and scope of a project. Even once a service or development project begins, there can be major obstacles beyond the remit of urban practitioners. For instance, organisations such as local authorities, who deal with the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations daily, have to contend with challenging funding requirements and significant capacity issues. These factors inform decision-making and hinder their ability to enact the changes that they would like. Addressing these issues cannot be achieved by making changes to built environment processes alone.

Recognition of these wider factors does not leave urban practitioners powerless. Nor does it reduce the need for action. It just highlights their role within a systemic challenge alongside the necessity for change across all sectors and areas of society.

This position is reflected in the framing of the research findings in this report. They are not a definitive guide or a proposed solution, but resources which aim to support understanding, reflection, and exploration: a first step towards creating the anti-racist city.

4.2 Methodology

Guiding principles

The research approach was underpinned by six principles. The research team adopted these principles to guide their work with the aim of empowering, respecting, and valuing everyone involved.

These principles were:

1. **Co-authorship**
2. **Community collaboration**
3. **Anonymity**
4. **Transparency**
5. **Mutual benefit**
6. **Remuneration**

These principles were agreed with the community collaborators to support the creation of a fair and mutually beneficial study.

The guiding principles informed the choice of research methods and how the study was conducted. For instance, some sections of the research, such as the community radio series, were led by the community collaborators. They were also responsible for elements of decision-making, such as choosing the locations for the research activities. This helped create environments where people felt more comfortable in sharing their experiences.

To protect the community collaborators' identities, their names have been anonymised, with each person choosing their own pseudonym. Rather than sharing their ages, the age of each community collaborator is provided as a range to further protect their identities. The people involved in the accompanying community podcast opted to use their real names in the conversations. All of those featured have provided consent for quotes, photos, and stories.

Remuneration was provided for everyone involved in the research, which was offered in the form of gift cards or bank transfers.

A qualitative approach

The research team chose qualitative methods because they prioritise experiences over numerical data, aiming in this case to understand the direct impact that the built environment has on the individuals living in the identified communities. Qualitative methods illuminate the 'why?' and the 'how?' to help us understand these systems, rather than quantitative approaches which focus on the 'how much?'.

Pairing this with a participatory approach where the community collaborators were co-researchers on the project platforms and centres their voices. It enables active participation and recognises the benefits and the value that lived experience brings to the research process. Whilst guiding discussions, community collaborators had a deeper understanding of the context, local area, or shared experiences, which enabled richer insights to be drawn out.

This approach aspires to reduce the extractive nature of the project as it commits to exploring these topics as a collective team, rather than conducting research on one group.²⁸ This process focuses on participation and building trust, both of which are essential to create a space of safety and agency where contributors could share their sometimes challenging or triggering experiences.

Presenting lived experiences was also a key part of effectively communicating the scale and human impacts of the issue to the reader. Individual accounts can help the reader empathise with the community collaborators, allowing them to imagine themselves in a person's shoes. This contrasts with statistics that may feel abstract. Placing the accounts within the framework of the Layers of the City further helps to clarify the link between these experiences and decisions made during the creation and stewarding of the built environment.

While the individual accounts represent the experiences of the community partners, they can provide insights that develop our understanding of how the system functions. The aim is not to suggest that the impact on these individuals is universal, but to instead highlight that the system is functioning in a way that can and does repeatedly impact people.

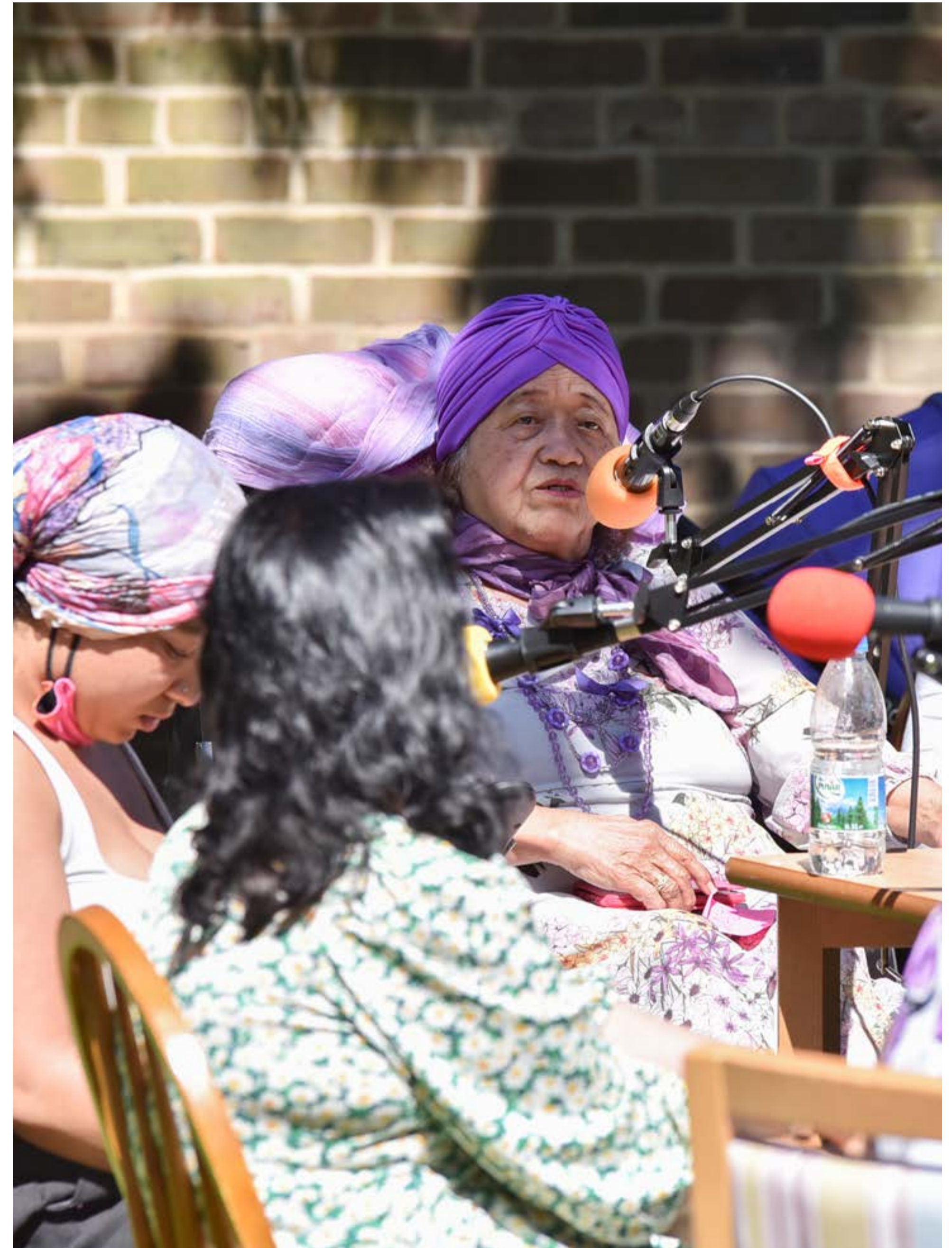
Community based approach

For this study, the project team aspired towards a **community-based approach** for engaging with the community collaborators. This involved using links with community networks that members of the project team already had. It also meant collaborating with established groups. This was instead of using a *demographic-based approach*, where a set of unconnected individuals are engaged with on the basis of demographic characteristics alone.

The team chose this approach because existing connections were fundamental for building and maintaining trust between the project team and community collaborators. This was especially important considering the short time frame of the research process. Collaborating with people who already knew each other also helped create a space where people felt more comfortable leading interviews and sharing their experiences with each other.

The community collaborators were selected from a long-list of fifty by the project team. This long-list included both formal community groups and non-affiliated groups of residents. The project team prioritised groups from areas that were undergoing high levels of urban transformation. This is because extensive new investment and development often bring new affluent residents to an area. This can exacerbate and underline both realities and perceptions of inequity between these new and existing residents.^{29,30} The Thamesmead residents were not part of an official group and the project team connected within them through existing networks that they had in the area.

The principles and approach aim to platform the community collaborators' experiences and enable their voices to become part of the broader conversation in the industry.



Sharing experiences during a group radio sessions in Newham.

4.3 Research process

Research process overview

The research team undertook a participatory research study that used qualitative methods. This process focused on the community collaborators generously sharing their experiences of the built environment and guiding the project team through them. These conversations provided space for the community collaborators to discuss their stories and experiences with one another. These accounts formed the evidence base of the research. This process was preceded by a global literature review and involved five stages.

Stage 01: Participatory research

Over a four-week intensive sprint, resulting in over a hundred hours of conversations, the project team worked with the three community groups to explore personal accounts of experiences of inequity in relation to the built environment. The project team's understanding was developed through listening, spending time with the groups in local community spaces, and walking tours of the neighbourhood. This included twenty-five semi-structured, project team-led interviews; seven community partner-led interviews, and two radio sessions. Learnings were drawn from the interviews, focus groups, and discussions led by both the project team and the community collaborators.

The project team used a range of methods during this process from visual images, written prompts, and physical activities to stimulate conversation and encourage insights. The project team developed their own connections with both the community collaborators and the research locations. These connections informed how the project team approached and discussion and the questions that they asked.

Stage 02: Thematic analysis - synthesis

The project team distilled the information from the conversations through a thematic analysis. This process involved reviewing the transcripts of the interviews and identifying patterns (codes) within the community collaborators' experiences of the built environment.

Stage 03: Thematic analysis - categorisation

The project team categorised these codes into 'themes' depending on how these experiences of inequity related to the built environment. Was it a negative personal interaction, a space that did not meet the user's needs, or the individual's power (or lack of) to shape their environment? Five distinct themes emerged from this process: *Narratives, Agency & Power, Interactions, Spaces and Systems*. The project team collectively named them the 'Layers of the City'.

These Layers are a conceptual framework for understanding experiences of inequity within the built environment. They position each individual's experiences not as an isolated incident, but as part of this broader framework which impacts People of Colour due to the way that it has been set up and functions.

Stage 04: Insight development

The codes within each Layer of the City were further developed into 'Insights'. Each of these Insights is an umbrella statement to describe different, but connected, experiences from the research process. For instance, multiple different accounts of being disempowered became: 'Community collaborators feel disempowered' and this sits within the 'Agency and Power' Layer of the City.

Stage 05: Research findings

'Section two, Research findings' are the culmination and output of this research process. The findings are split into four chapters: **2.1: Framework, 2.2: Experiences, 2.3 Community radio series, and 2.4: Takeaways**. These are the collective learnings from this research and presented as resources that can be used by urban practitioners.

Arup has extracted the findings from the report and created separate downloadable resources. These resources present the findings in a concise and useable format so that they can be used by urban practitioners in their daily practice.

A collaborative team

The community collaborators are the 35 People of Colour from various demographic backgrounds, living in two areas of London. Find further information on three different groups involved in '1.1: Meet the communities'.



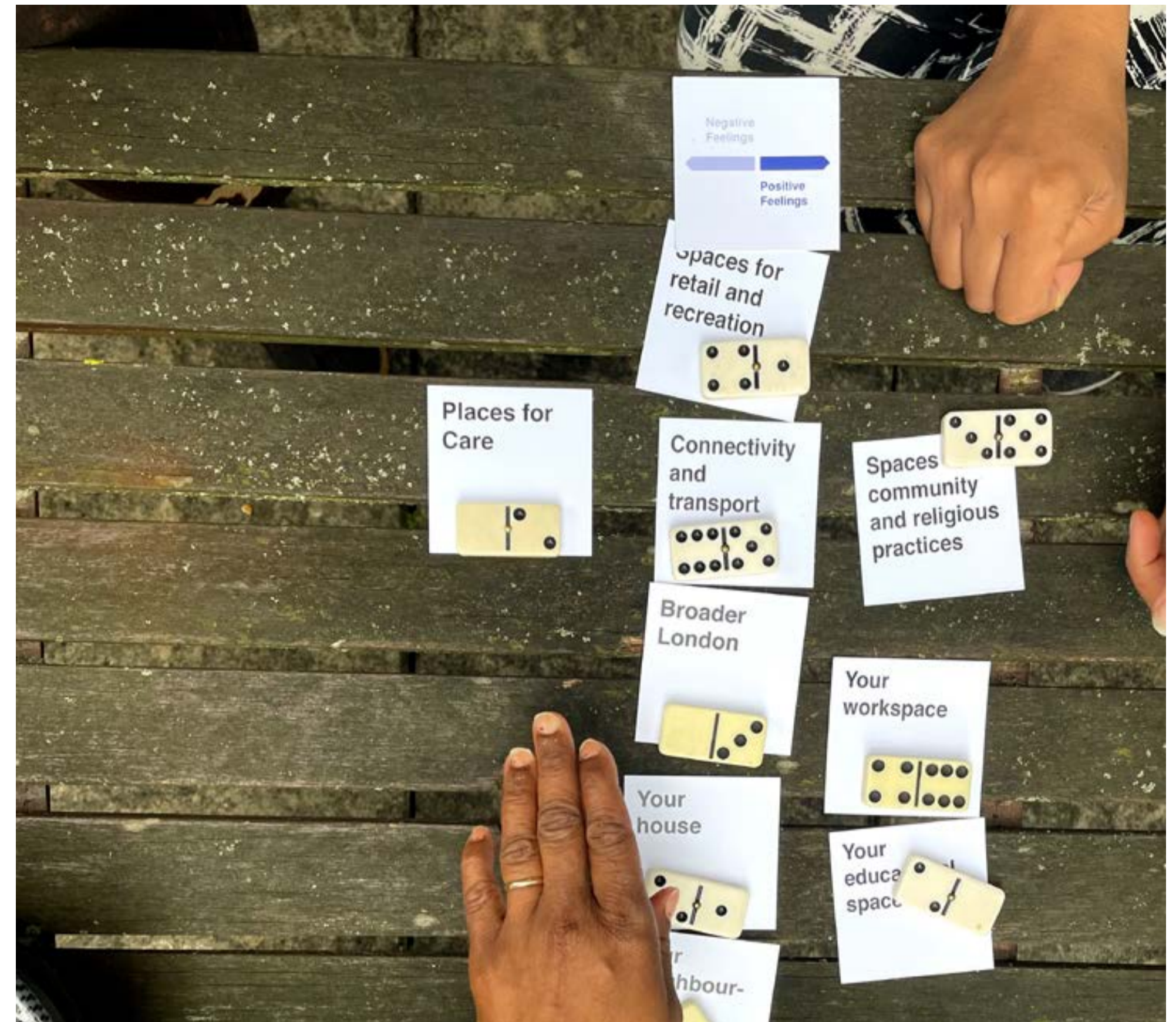
The community collaborators were a key part of defining the approach, leading interviews and discussions, and generously sharing their lived experiences.



Social Broadcasts combines contemporary radio making, community engagement, and participatory art practice to document and present real everyday experiences and conversations.

These approaches invite reflexivity both from participants in real-time and listeners in the future. Developed in response to a demand for an authentic and interactive means of social engagement that was dedicated to micro-communities; Social Broadcasts enables a reclaiming of conversation at their source, providing a counter-point where these micro-communities can control their own narratives. Part of this methodology is the facilitation of mobile radio sessions. These have proved to be an effective way to initiate conversations that both inform and contribute to community research.

Social Broadcasts brought a wealth of experience in coordination, facilitating, recording, and producing the community radio sessions that led to the creation of the community radio series. Social Broadcasts were also the link to some of the 35 community collaborators.



Using text prompts whilst discussing experiences during a workshop in Newham.



decosm are a London-based collective working to decolonise city-making. They sit within a growing network of micro, small scale and grassroots organisations striving to question mainstream methods of urban practice and co-produce alternatives.

decosm were central to the planning of the research methodology, identifying and building relationships with the community collaborators, guiding the research process, and drawing out the insights from this. decosm have offered valuable input and comment into the development and shaping of this report.

decosm also brought their own lived experience to the process, as women and People of Colour from London, who also experience some of the challenges that were highlighted by the community collaborators.



Arup are a global built environment consultancy that includes designers, engineering and sustainability consultants, advisors and experts who are dedicated to sustainable development.

Arup brought our expertise and insight into the way that the built environment is created and managed. We were involved in, and helped facilitate, every stage of the process. We worked with Decosm to draw out learnings from the research to develop the conceptual framework of 'The Layers of The City'. We also developed the Insight Cards, defined the Takeaways, and led on the drafting of this report.

4.4

Call to action

The research findings are a snapshot into the experiences of the 35 community collaborators. These findings are offered as a starting point to support urban practitioners in recognising and addressing racial inequities created through their own practices and processes.

These experiences are not static, they will develop and change over time. They are rooted in the lives of the community collaborators, their local context, and the moment that the research was undertaken. While many aspects will apply universally across different times, people, and contexts, others will remain unique. The findings do not suggest these are the only ways that the built environment can impact people; rather they highlight how it *has* impacted people to illustrate the connection between systemic racial inequity and decisions made by urban practitioners.

The findings can support reflection and inform decision-making, as well as identifying the challenge, the need to investigate the topic of racial inequity in every project, and the value that comes from doing this in direct collaboration with those who are impacted. Sharing the methodology and research process alongside the findings is a demonstration of one approach for exploring this issue.

This report is a **call to action to all urban practitioners**. Use the findings to inform your own work but also to build upon the research, approach, and methodology to investigate how this challenge presents in every project that you work on.

Six key reflections for urban practitioners -

1) Reflect on systemic issues: Consider our role and position within a wider societal system to understand the broader and the hidden impact of our decisions.

2) Learn from lived experience: Develop a deeper understanding of systemic issues by listening to, learning from, and collaborating with lived-experience experts.

3) Create diverse and multi-disciplinary teams: Form diverse, multi-disciplinary teams where people with appropriate professional and lived experience undertake relevant tasks.

4) Value qualitative approaches: Utilise qualitative methods to develop richer insights into complex and nuanced challenges.

5) Ensure clarity and accessibility: Create and share clear and accessible information explaining complex topics that can lead to tangible steps and outcomes.

6) Facilitate discussion: Develop resources that promote discussion and encourage ongoing question-asking to create solutions relevant to specific contexts.



Talking through experiences during a group radio session in Thamesmead.

Appendix

This appendix provides further reading on topics explored in the report and closes with the references for this document.



At the community collaborator celebration event to mark the end of the research process.

Further reading

Further information on aspects of the project.

Systemic issues & Layers of the City

The Layers of the City is a framework for understanding the different elements of the built environments (Layers) that we all experience and interact with. There are five Layers within this framework: *Narratives, Agency & Power, Interactions, Spaces, and Systems*.

None of the Layers operate in a silo. They continually interconnect and overlap with each other. Every moment in the city is informed by our interactions with, and relationship to, multiple of these Layers. This experience is different for each person and how it is shaped depends on a range of intersecting socio-economic and cultural factors that go far beyond the built environment. This is expanded upon in the section '**Intersectional experiences**' below.

The aim of categorising the individual experiences gathered from the research into these five Layers is twofold. Firstly, it illuminates the connection between decisions made during the creation and management of the built environment and people's experiences. Secondly, it highlights how these experiences differ depending on socio-economic and cultural factors — specifically in this project, the factor of race.

This provides a way of understanding how systemic issues play out. It draws the link between the way a system operates and the impact it has on specific communities. This lens frames the accounts in the research not as a series of unconnected individual interactions but as the result of a system — a system which has been designed and put in place. These accounts reflect individuals experiences, but the recurring patterns that emerge can be used to illuminate the obstacles that are structured within this system. The Layers of the City specifically focus on the systemic issues that exist within the way the built environment operates and the role that urban practitioners play within this.

There are several ways that this could manifest in practice. For example, an individual or community may report a lack of '*ownership*' over how a neighbourhood is developed (*'People do not have ownership' — see Agency & Power, p. 32*) and find that a new development negatively impacts them. This lack of ownership and control over the process is more likely to affect certain groups due to the way the current process is structured.

The engagement itself may be superficial in nature, or only consider the voices of those already in positions of power. It may exclude some people, or favour others, by relying on extensive knowledge of the planning or development process, or by requiring substantial time and resources. This highlights how groups who are already marginalised can further be excluded by a process, and how this exclusion from the conversation can further negatively impact them.

This experience of lacking ownership can be changed by the actions of multiple urban practitioners, across spatial scales, disciplines, and seniority. This could include: how design teams plan, structure, interact with, and consider the views of residents in designs; the amount or accessibility of grants available for communities to start projects; or a client's brief that includes an allocation of adequate funds for effective community participation. It could also involve the planning department, who have the power to place more weight on participation when reviewing proposals; what principles are embedded within a Local Plan; or even the amount of power that is afforded to Local Authorities by Central Government to enforce legislation.

At each point of intervention, it is important to consider whom this system impacts negatively, what broader inequities this process might reinforce or create, and what obstacles exist for certain groups — even when solutions are proposed. This example not only shows that there are multiple points for interventions in the system but also demonstrates how the system itself is not set up to assign sufficient value to inclusion or effective engagement with a diversity of residents.

The Layers of the City aim to demystify this complex process. They provide opportunities for urban practitioners to reflect on how and where they can take action. Change can happen at multiple points. The framework, finally, also shines a light on the system itself: with a clearer view, we can design it differently.

Qualitative

The project team chose a **qualitative research approach** that focuses on experience and perception to gather the personal accounts of the community collaborators — as opposed to **quantitative research** that focuses on metrics and data.

Quantitative approaches give an understanding of the scale of barriers and can provide statistics around the outcomes for communities. However, they provide only limited insights into the 'why?' and the 'how' behind these statistics.

Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, also enable active **participation** in the process. This collaboration provides a greater richness and detail of insight. It also helps to reduce the extractive nature of the research by ensuring that the community collaborators are involved in the process and their voices shape the narrative.

Presenting lived experiences was also a key part of effectively communicating the scale and human impacts of the issue to the reader. Individual accounts can help people empathise with situations, allowing them to imagine themselves in a person's shoes — whereas statistics may feel abstract. Placing the accounts within the framework of the Layers of the City further helps to clarify the link between these experiences and decisions made during the creation and stewarding of the built environment.

The individual accounts only represent the experiences of the community collaborators, but they still provide insights that develop our understanding of how the system functions. The aim is not to suggest that the impact to the individual is universal, but instead highlight these experiences as examples that the system is functioning in a way that can, and does repeatedly impact people.

Intersectional experiences

Intersectionality is a concept coined by the scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw. It highlights how everybody's experiences of discrimination, oppression and inequity are different and defined by interconnected socio-economic and cultural factors: nationality, education, disability, gender, sexual orientation, class, and race. None of these factors exist independently of each other. They have cumulative effect on a person's experiences of, and relationship to, the world around them.

When considering how different people are impacted by systemic inequalities, it is important to take into account all the ways they may be marginalised. Only this can provide a realistic picture of what can be done to address this.

In this report, the project team used the collective term '*People of Colour*', but the experiences highlighted in the research all differ depending on the individuals' intersectionality. Some community members found it important to self-identify by race, ethnicity, culture or otherwise, whilst others rejected being identified by race altogether; they instead felt a greater kinship with being a Londoner.

Third space

'Third space' or 'third place' is a term that was coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg. It describes an in-between or hybrid space or place that is distinct from what is termed the 'first space' - the home, and the 'second space' - the workplace.

Examples of a third spaces could include cafés, museums, sports arenas, barber shops, and public parks.³¹

References

APA referencing is used below.

Section 1

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ONS 2021 census data was used to highlight the percentages of people who identified as Asian, Black, Mixed race, or an other ethnic minority in the focus areas - (Newham and Thamesmead). This data is available at several different levels of detail, the Output Areas (OA) the Middle Super Output Area (MSOA) and the Local Authority Districts (LAD).

For Newham the project team were able to select the data at the LAD layer. The Thamesmead area is less well defined and covers multiple MSOA's and two different LAD's. Due to this the project team have chosen to select data from one MSOA - *Thamesmead Birchmead Park* as it is located in the centre of Thamesmead.

Despite variations between the multiple MSOA's across Thamesmead, the chosen MSOA provides a useful reference point for the study. Other MSOA's which Thamesmead could be considered to fall within include 'West Thamesmead', 'Crossway Park', 'South Thamesmead' and 'Abby Wood North' - ONS census data - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps>

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'Disparity in asset ownership, which allows for both accrual and leveraging of wealth, has meant an ongoing gap in ownership of housing between white populations and Communities of Colour'

In the dates 2016-2018, White British household ownership was at 68% while two other ethnic groups had a higher likelihood of ownership. These were Indian (74%), and Mixed White/Asian (70%). Whilst this presents that overall these two groups had a higher likelihood of ownership it is relevant to note that 'in every, socio-economic group and age group, White British households were more likely to own their own homes than all ethnic minority households combined'.

This highlights the importance of understanding race alongside other intersectional factors in determining socio-economic outcomes such as home ownership.

Statistics taken from gov.UK

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Section 5

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Additional sources

This includes sources that the project team repeatedly referred to during the process of writing this report.

The Runnymede Trust is a think tank in the United Kingdom that focuses on racial inequality and seeks to propose authoritative, evidence-based interventions to overcome it. *Sources — <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/about/about-us>*

The BAME Planners network is an initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the planning profession in the United Kingdom and Ireland. *Source — <https://www.bameplanners.org/>*

LSE Planning for Justice is a coalition of graduate students, alumni and faculty in Regional and Urban Planning Studies from the London School of Economics committed to anti-racist planning efforts. *Source — <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/progressingplanning/planning-for-justice/>*

The Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, conducts research on people affected by disadvantage, social exclusion, and associated phenomena. *Source — <https://i-sphere.site.hw.ac.uk/>*

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All photographs in this report have been used with the permission of those photographed. All images were taken by Arup apart from those outlined below which were taken by Umi Baden Powell of decosm.

1. Page 13 - Reading left to right and top to bottom: Image number 4,5,7 and 12.
2. Page 63
3. Page 73
4. Page 82

Below provides the annotations for the photographs on Page 13 due to limited space on that page. Reading left to right and top to bottom:

1. On a site visit in Thamesmead.
2. Sharing experiences during an interview in Newham.
3. Community collaborators during the celebration in Newham.
4. After a radio session in Newham.
5. On a participant-led walk in Newham.
6. Sharing experiences during a radio session in Newham.
7. On a participant-led walk in Newham.
8. During a location visit in Thamesmead.
9. Community collaborators during the celebration in Thamesmead.
10. Sharing experiences during a one-to-one interview.
11. Sharing photographs of memories in Newham.
12. Community collaborators on location in Thamesmead.
13. Discussing experiences during a radio session in Thamesmead.
14. Discussing experiences during a radio session in Thamesmead.
15. On a participant-led walk in Newham.



During a participant-led walk in Thamesmead.

