

How civic food projects can build health equity and create the conditions for neglected communities to improve their environments

Explored through the case study of Angell Town Estate, Brixton

1 ABSTRACT

This project is about the re-wiring of existing assets and using design to rework latent opportunities. Strategic design is applied to tackle the critical problem of health inequalities, whereby a broken urban food system has produced unequal geographies of surplus and deficit, creating malnutrition and food and finance deserts. Meanwhile, the health system tackles the symptoms of bad health - failing to address its socio-spatial determinants. This system treats citizens solely as recipients of services, with little done to empower people to craft the improvement of their socio-economic surroundings.

tive on a whole system redesign through an alternative, and more transformative health model. Critiquing the mistakes of physical, urban design-led, regeneration of 'hardware' of post-war social housing estates, this project employs a toolkit for building a civic economy by designing the 'software' of social processes and activities.

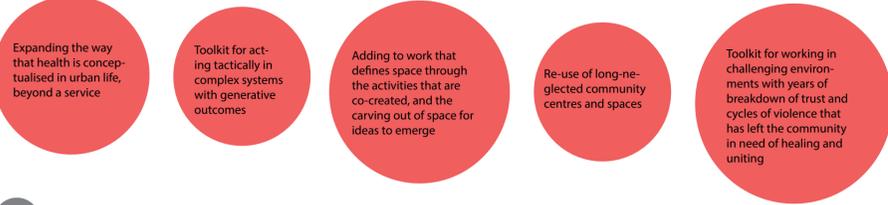
Multiple scales and typologies of civic food projects are explored in designing participative and inclusive, low-barrier community food projects with generative potential to unlock further socio-economic activity and build social capital in contexts of deprivation, insecurity and cynicism.

The proposed 'Food Buying Group' intervention works as a 'seed' project to build social capital and kick-start participation and the harnessing of latent assets and abilities towards socio-economic empowerment. Rather than a service provided by an outside body, the crux of the project is the co-production of the process and outcome, diversifying the conceptions of building health and wellbeing in communities, and the forms this could take.

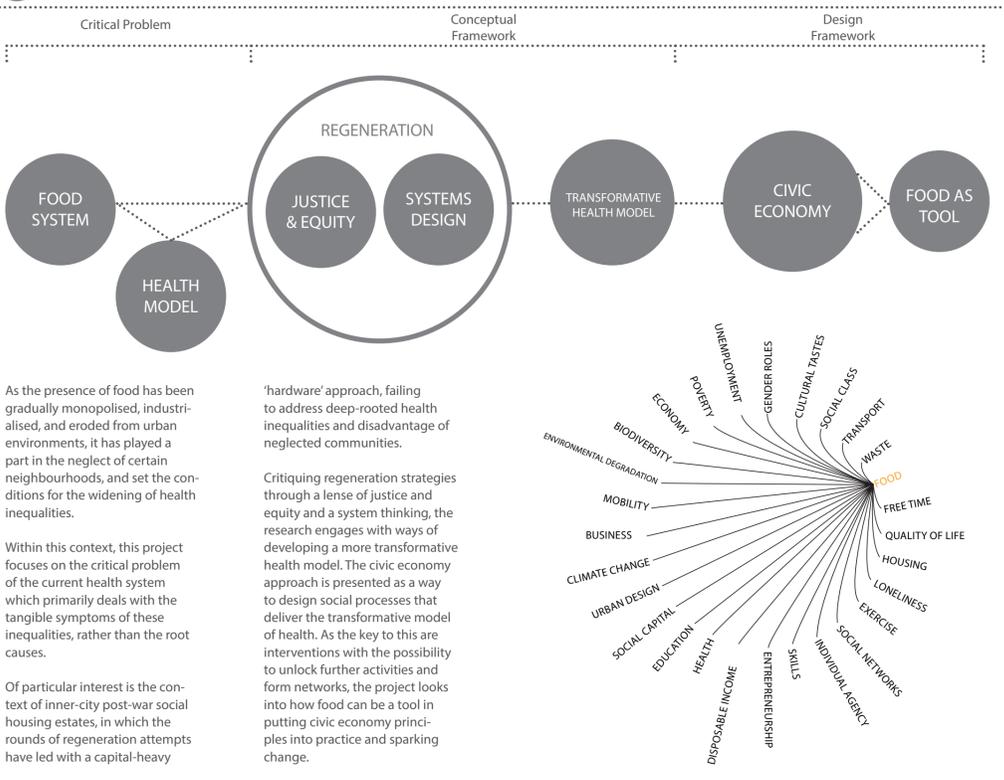
The project concludes with a scaling strategy, linking the hyper local initiative with broader strategies of the centre, from which the housing estate has long felt disconnected.

The research offers a perspec-

3 CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE



4 LITERATURE



As the presence of food has been gradually monopolised, industrialised, and eroded from urban environments, it has played a part in the neglect of certain neighbourhoods, and set the conditions for the widening of health inequalities.

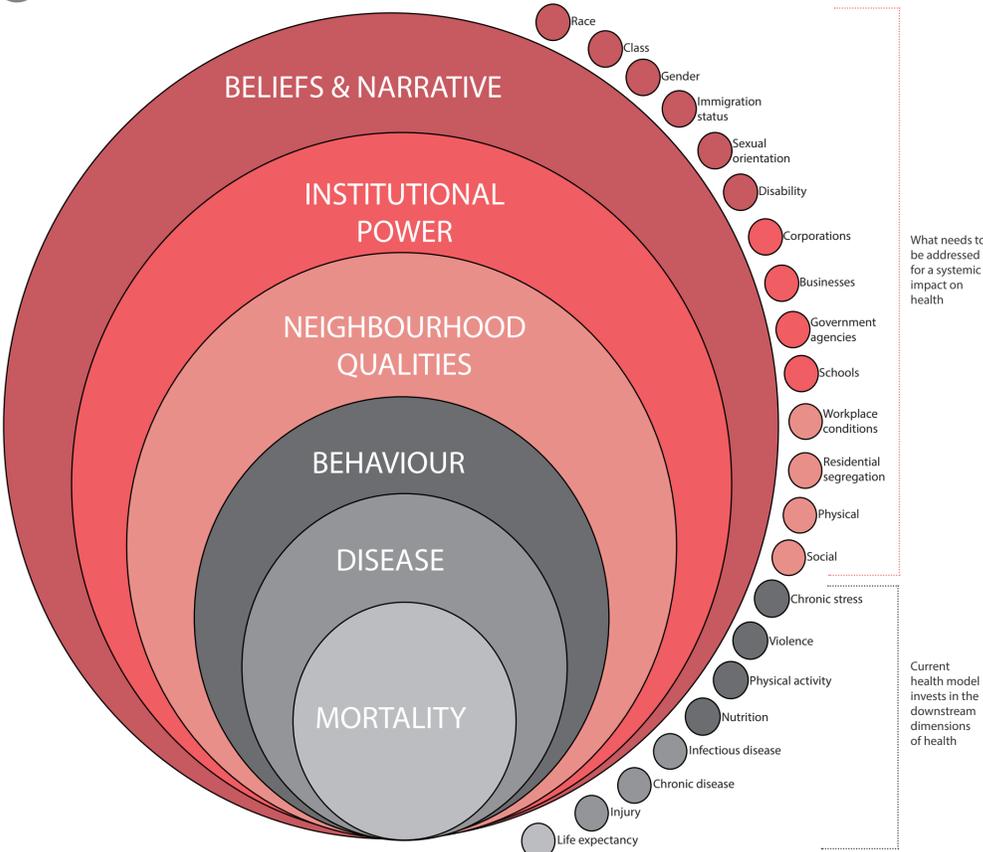
'hardware' approach, failing to address deep-rooted health inequalities and disadvantage of neglected communities.

Critiquing regeneration strategies through a lens of justice and equity and a system thinking, the research engages with ways of developing a more transformative health model. The civic economy approach is presented as a way to design social processes that deliver the transformative model of health. As the key to this are interventions with the possibility to unlock further activities and form networks, the project looks into how food can be a tool in putting civic economy principles into practice and sparking change.

Within this context, this project focuses on the critical problem of the current health system which primarily deals with the tangible symptoms of these inequalities, rather than the root causes.

Of particular interest is the context of inner-city post-war social housing estates, in which the rounds of regeneration attempts have led with a capital-heavy

6 TRANSFORMATIVE HEALTH MODEL



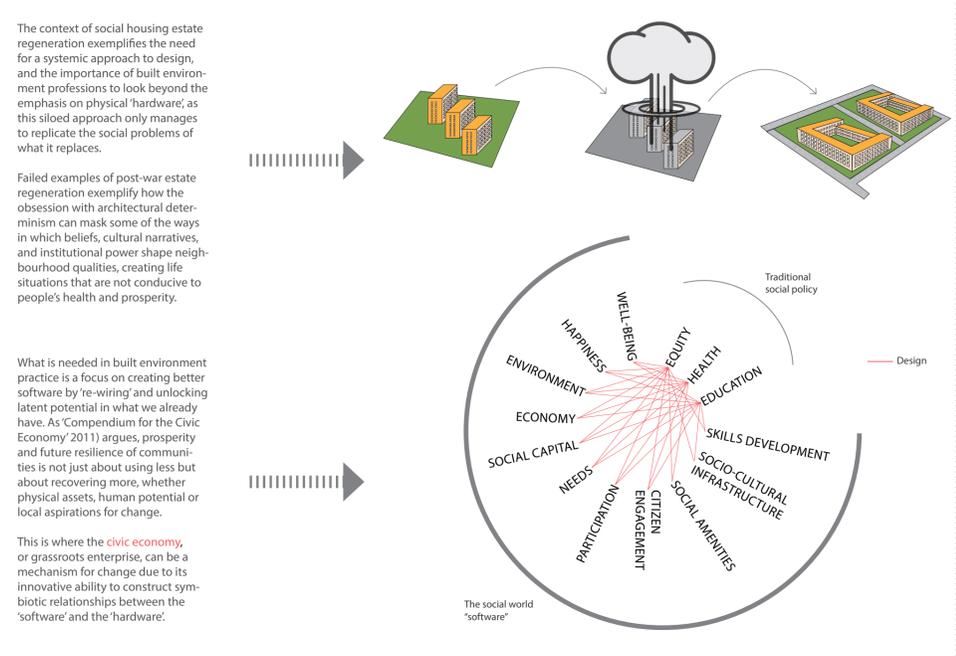
What needs to be addressed for a systemic impact on health

Current health model invests in the downstream dimensions of health

2 OBJECTIVES



5 THE 'SOFTWARE' APPROACH



The context of social housing estate regeneration exemplifies the need for a systemic approach to design, and the importance of built environment professionals to look beyond the emphasis on physical 'hardware', as this siloed approach only manages to replicate the social problems of what it replaces.

Failed examples of post-war estate regeneration exemplify how the obsession with architectural determinism can mask some of the ways in which beliefs, cultural narratives, and institutional power shape neighbourhood qualities, creating life situations that are not conducive to people's health and prosperity.

What is needed in built environment practice is a focus on creating better software by 're-wiring' and unlocking latent potential in what we already have. As 'Compendium for the Civic Economy 2011' argues, prosperity and future resilience of communities is not just about using less but about recovering more, whether physical assets, human potential or local aspirations for change.

This is where the civic economy, or grassroots enterprise, can be a mechanism for change due to its innovative ability to construct symbiotic relationships between the 'software' and the 'hardware'.

7 TOOLKIT



Tools gleaned from literature (dark grey) | Tools added from case studies (light grey)

BELIEFS & NARRATIVE

- Recognising the protagonists
- Engendering collective behaviour
- Realising where value lies: measuring change
- Platform for political and democratic change
- Providing platform for those the market excludes
- Creating chain of complementary urban activities

INSTITUTIONAL POWER

- Participation beyond consultation: inviting citizen co-production
- Financial co-investment: diversifying funding streams
- An open-ended approach: frameworks for emergence and flexibility
- Generating change through networks: the scaling challenge
- In direct competition with state and market
- Integrated services, one stop shop style
- Operating at multiple scales and typologies
- Redesigning existing established model

NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITIES

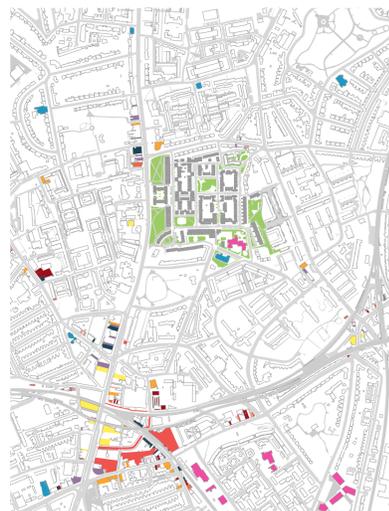
- Re-using existing assets: recognising latent opportunities
- Experience of place: setting physical conditions
- Density of projects to increase participation
- Addressing local choice
- Providing training incubator
- Expanding upon existing program of activity

8 SITE IDENTIFICATION / ANALYSIS

Site: Angell Town Estate



Food Desert Map



Health and Food Projects



Opportunity spaces on Angell Town Estate



History of Angell Town's Regeneration

1. Angell Town Estate was built in 1974-78 as a medium-rise, high-density estate with grids of yellow brick maisonettes, stacked over car parking garages, and linked with long decks and high level bridges. By the late 70s the estates experienced high levels of crime which Lambeth attributed in part to the ease of circulation, multiple points of entry, and unsupervised spaces (Franklin and Harwood, 2014;15).
 2. In 1987 residents formed the Angell Town Community Project (ATCP), pressing Lambeth Council to redevelop the neglected estate. By 1998 they won £67m in funding for the regeneration project. Residents participated in selecting architects to deliver both new housing and refurbished older blocks - completed in 2006, totalling 632 dwellings for affordable rent; density of 9.3 u/ha (CABE, 2011).
 3. "The urban design objectives were to reintegrate the estate with the surrounding areas of Brixton by re-establishing a street based urban layout; an active public realm at ground level; a hierarchy of public and private space; to de-industrialise the estate; clear, safe routes for people who use and live on the estate; and to solve a variety of related problems to do with security... and the general hostility of the surroundings" (Burrell Foley Fischer LLP, 2012).
- Mistakes of the 'urban design-led' physical regeneration
 - A few years later the ATCP fell into disrepute - an audit reporting fraud by a few corrupt individuals.
 - In 2010 the council took back control of the 33 business units, but the money is re-invested elsewhere in Lambeth, and generally let to the highest bidder
 - The 'Boiler House' was closed
 - down in 2010 by the Council due to 'gang crime' and violent incidents.
 - The fetishisation of the regeneration's design fixates solely on the physical transformation, neglecting the unresolved social realities that contradict, and render these new, apparently "lively streets", predominantly empty, with many business units vacant.
 - The gap in Brixton's community
 - created by decades of neglect is amplified by the wave of regeneration and investment in Brixton town-centre. Gradual redevelopment, combined with an influx of majority white, affluent young professionals, has produced spaces that are exclusionary to the existing community. Cohen (2015a) documents conversations with youth on Angell Town in which they discuss Brixton centre - "Dem places Brixton New York! Dem places not our Brixton."
 - A strong case can thus be made for the necessity of social processes to accompany urban design-led regeneration, as the physical development alone does little to address socio-spatial inequality and exclusion.

9 PROJECT PROTOTYPE

FOOD BUYING GROUP

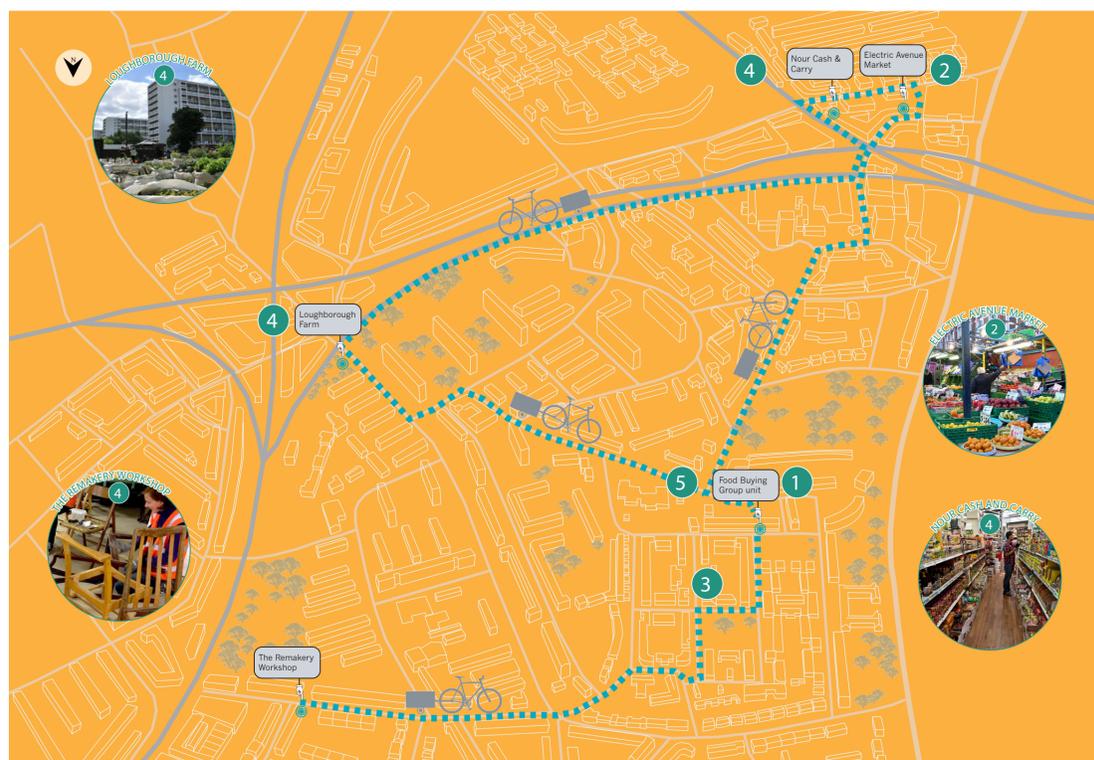
How it works...



Questions raised...

- Managing the long-term running of the project?
 - An option of appointing an organiser each week to process the orders and deliver payments - rewarded through 5% discount on their shopping. Operational cost built into weekly shop.
- Using software for making orders?
 - A paper printed list for those without easy access to computers
 - Cutting down options (such as types of oil) to increase bulk?
 - Establish key products and gradually expand.
- Publicising?
 - Relying on word-of-mouth and recommendation from neighbours to gather participants.
 - Engagement events to grow members
- How many grocers to purchase from?
 - Gradually expanding or rotating.
 - Expand to local producers and community gardens
- Managing transportation?
 - Volunteers for cycling the produce
 - Make trailers at The Remakery
 - Need for a van if demand increases
- Management of the space?
 - Host spaces such as at the church, school or Angell Delight unit
 - Re-opening the Boiler House
- Other activities?
 - Inviting other initiatives and groups in the area to co-host activities

The idea being that this activity provides a hub for other activities to form around it, such as communal cooking, eating, or access to health services.



10 SCALING THE SEED PROJECT

This section approaches the research questions, looking at how the initial project can be scaled to produce multiple effects - all of which build power in the community.

1. Scaling through self-replication
2. Project attaching itself to a wider strategy
3. Growing in scope and sparking further activities



1. Opening of Brixton Pound Food Waste Cafe on Brixton high-street.
2. Developing the food waste cafe into a hub for all the food waste initiatives in Brixton.
3. Connecting Angell Town into the network by setting up a food waste project, in addition to the FBG.



1. Food Buying Group based in the Angell Delight Unit each week
 2. Resident-owned food business in the Boiler House Community Centre
 3. Food growing projects on underused green spaces of St. John's Church
 4. Community food activities spread to Loughborough Road
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11 CONCLUSION

In approaching the critical problem of health inequality, this project has argued, the focus should be on the neighbourhood qualities, institutional monopolies, and socio-cultural narratives and prejudice that create neglected communities.

The project sought to combine a critique of urban food systems and social housing regeneration strategies, with the proposed approaches of the civic economy, in the aim of designing civic projects that utilise the diverse potential of food as a tool. The research question of how civic food projects can create the conditions for neglected communities to improve their environments, explored inclusive and participatory food activities that are firstly transformative of current food desert and loneliness realities, and, secondly, generative in unlocking local socio-economic activity, collaboration and creativity. Civic food projects can work within contexts of deep insecurity and cynicism to build social capital, empower, and equip communities with the tools to make their neighbourhoods more liveable, while making a living.

The key finding has been that a capital-heavy, urban design-led, physical regeneration of hardware does very little to address the deep rooted socio-economic conditions and health inequalities of long-neglected communities. This has meant expanding the understanding of space beyond the physical, to the space created by social interaction, collaboration and ritual.

The proposal of a Food Buying Group is, therefore, a design of the 'software' of social processes as a way to connect these neglected communities into the process of change and, through scaling strategies, to connect this hyper local activity to wider strategic food and health systems.

This study builds on the work that sees urban designers' roles as not so much about the making of new 'hardware' but the rewiring of existing assets currently underutilised and latent, combining disparate disciplines, and building thick networks of projects to create systemic change. It is through these collaborative open-ended approaches that we can stop replicating cycles of exclusion and neglect that have created such socio-spatial health inequalities and compromised the ability for many to make 'space' and express their right to the city.