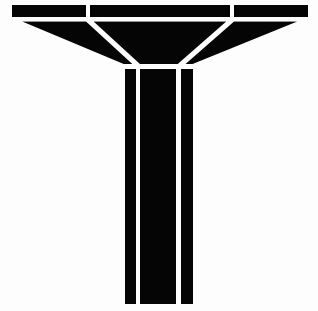


# Space and Why It Matters



**Thoughts from the Long Live Southbank community  
and independent projects concerning creative space**



This report has been written by Long Live Southbank following over 8 years working in support of free creative space in London. It is both a celebration and a critique but above all, it has been written to invigorate change. We have a great belief in the grassroots, in the community based and in **the organically developing spaces of creativity as the lifeblood of London's cultural future**. At the Southbank Undercroft we have been fortunate to see our cultural space protected and strengthened. Unfortunately this is far from the usual; we believe the current circumstances necessitate **action and change**.

Over the pages that follow, we outline the great benefits of free creative space, how **London's cultural future is at risk** and what changes we think must be made. Amongst further and more detailed recommendations, we believe the following points are of crucial importance:

- There is a need for **'blank slate spaces'**: spaces without prescribed usage which can be repurposed and used to build organic and creative communities. While 'blank slate spaces' have come about naturally, we propose the creation of 'deliberate blank slate spaces'.
- Far more concern must be taken to the **longevity** of organic creative spaces when they develop.
- Greater encouragement should be given for **community involvement in placemaking**.
- Developers should more readily engage with groups promoting **meanwhile usage** for a community benefit and local authorities should lend support in this process.
- Often unaffordable rent prices must be addressed to **ensure London remains culturally sustainable**.

Long Live Southbank, July 2021





This page: Professional skateboarder Lucy Adams rising high at the Undercroft in 2013, a time when the future of the world famous skateboarding spot was in serious doubt.  
*Photo credit: Jenna Selby.*

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Front cover: The Southbank Undercroft community relax in the evening sunshine on the 20th July 2019, the day historic sections of the space reopened following 5 years campaigning.  
*Photo credit: Rich West.*

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Financialisation:** In this context, financialisation is used to describe a process of increasing economically driven exploitation of land.

**Meanwhile space:** A disused site owned by developers or the public sector, which is temporarily given to usage by community groups, arts organisations, associations, charities or recent start ups. An example would be a temporary community garden on a development site.

**Organic:** As used in this report, a space, community or initiative that develops, growing naturally over many years, without being kick started, planned or promoted by a large and officialised institution.

**Public sphere:** As used in this report, spaces which generally are open to all.

**Securitisation:** A trend of increased security presence around spaces such as private security guards, CCTV cameras and more imposing fences.

**Skate park:** A space specifically and professionally designed for skateboarding, BMXing or inline skating.

**Skate spot:** A space that, usually by chance rather than design, can be used and enjoyed by skateboarders.

**Southbank Centre:** The Southbank Centre (SC) is one of the UK's largest art centres, ordinarily hosting events that span from orchestral to contemporary music, dance, poetry and more. In 2013 SC proposed turning the Undercroft into retail units in order to help fund a redevelopment of the site. Having changed perspective, from 2016 SC worked alongside LLSB to help restore historic sections of the Undercroft.

**Southbank Undercroft:** This is the space located underneath the Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer and Purcell Room. Designed by the radical architects Archigram as an architectural experiment, it has been used by skateboarders alongside others since the 1970's. It is one of the most well known skateboarding spots in the world.

**The Undercroft:** See Southbank Undercroft

**Southbank:** In the interviews with local skateboarders, Southbank refers to the skate spot itself, not the broader locality.



## Executive Summary

This report has been written by Long Live Southbank (from here on LLSB) following 8 years spent working for the future of one of the world's most important skateboarding spots: the Southbank Undercroft. Following a successful campaign to save it from destruction, amassing the largest number of planning permission objections in UK history, LLSB worked in partnership with Southbank Centre, raising over £1m to restore historic sections of the space.

Over this time, LLSB observed the state of grassroots and community based creative culture in London. As individuals rooted in these communities and as an organisation negotiating the world of large cultural institutions, we have seen the grassroots and the community based spaces in London suffering, even as they are able to flourish in small patches. We believe that change is needed. Having successfully engaged planning systems and cultural institutions whilst staying rooted to our community, we believe LLSB are well placed to encourage conversation and suggest changes to the way London approaches space.



With a UK record 30,000 planning permission objections boxed up beneath him, local Tommy TG ollies over. Later in the day, hundreds of local community members delivered the objection forms to Lambeth Council.

*Photo credit: Sam Ashley.*

This report is structured in 4 sections. We begin by sharing 10 key takeaway observations from LLSB's 8 year campaigning experience. We then share 5 interviews with skateboarders local to the Undercroft, discussing both the influence this space has had on their lives, and also their relationship with free creative space in London more generally. Following this there is a series of interviews with individuals and collectives who have developed space for creativity in London from the grassroots, often in an organic manner. Many concerns about London's relationship with space and how this stifles the potential of its inhabitants were echoed over and over again. Following notes on meanwhile usage and anti-skateboard devices, we develop a series of recommendations.

Each of the eight recommendations we make is directly rooted in either the interviews with those developing creative space in London, local skateboarders at the undercroft or our own observations. These recommendations are for systemic changes that will allow organic, grassroots based creative space to thrive in London, the sort of space we see as essential for London's continued creative and cultural vibrancy.

Our first recommendation is to address rent prices. Almost every interviewee suggested that rent prices must be addressed for London to remain a creatively competitive city. People viewed the damage caused by rent prices in different ways. Multiple interviewees, talented spatial practitioners who could have played a valuable role in London's creative future felt instead pushed away from London due to this. As Andrea Cippo Rosso, founder of Fritto FM told us, 'the cost of life is way higher than the actual possibility of the people. The housing system is killing the citizen.' This recommendation is furthest from LLSB's ordinary field and expertise, but is also inseparably linked to many other issues discussed. As such, we feel it is important to explore solutions from a grassroots cultural perspective, with change seen as a necessity.

*'Organic creative spaces should be afforded more protection and longevity... a number of interviewees have seen spaces curtailed before their full potential could be realised.'*

We believe that organic creative spaces should be afforded more protection and longevity. Many organically developing spaces of creativity exhibit greater inclusivity and originality than those resulting from top down approaches. However, they often have life spans too short to properly realise their potential. A number of interviewees have seen organically developing spaces of creativity curtailed before their full potential could be realised. These include Jimmy Wheale of the Nomadic Garden, a community project that could only be realised as a 'meanwhile project' and Darryl Nobbs, who has seen multiple DIY skate spots demolished. We also speak from our experience campaigning for the future of the Southbank Undercroft, the world's longest continually used skateboarding spot: 'We believe that the London of today often neglects the importance of longevity with communal and creative spaces...As development in London keeps its rapid pace, it must be kept in mind not just the current communal value of a space, but also what it could grow to be for the community if allowed to last for a decade or decades to come.'





**'We believe that the London of today often neglects the importance of longevity with communal and creative spaces.'**  
*Photo credit: Ben Stewart.*

We discuss the need for 'blank slate spaces': sites that do not prescribe a specific usage but instead allow local people and communities to adapt them for their own creative usage. We discuss how the Southbank Undercroft was an architectural experiment 'found' by early skateboarders in the 1970's and this heritage as a 'blank slate space' 'allows (the Undercroft) to remain creatively fresh through the decades, with users developing a deeper relationship with the space'.

Local skateboarder Harry Turner also speaks about such spaces, saying 'they naturally come to facilitate the people who need it the most.' Blank slate spaces allow for a truly bottom up approach and encourage forward thinking cultural movements and creativity. We believe that the high levels of development in modern day London necessitate specific policies for their encouragement, an idea developed within the recommendations section.

***'We propose that a number of suitable sites should be identified for the removal of anti-skateboarding devices.'***

We propose that a number of suitable sites should be identified for the removal of anti-skateboarding devices, an element of exclusionary architecture which changes many young people's relationship with their city.

Better practices in community consultation are encouraged: placing a focus on long term ongoing conversations, rooted in a physical space and with a focus on listening, understanding and willingness to adapt plans. These recommendations are based on both the inadequate consultation which led to the proposed destruction of the space in 2013, and also our far more positive experiences of in-person, on going and physically rooted consultation following this.

***'The ability to campaign is a privilege and local authorities themselves must be proactive to protect community spaces.'***

We share an important point for councils and all other decision making bodies: the ability to campaign is a privilege and local authorities themselves must be proactive to protect community spaces. We note the advantages and privileges that LLSB had as a campaign, aiding its eventual success. Unless councils actively consider and work to balance such privileges, inequality in access to community and creative space will become increasingly entrenched.

We recommend that developers should be far more strongly encouraged and enabled to consider meanwhile usage in pre-development phase. Jimmy Wheale, an organiser instrumental in the Nomadic Gardens project described both the great benefits meanwhile spaces can bring to communities and also the hesitancy many landowners feel towards the idea: 'If (councils) get behind meanwhile use and encourage developers to consider meanwhile use in their development proposals, it will mean a lot more space becomes available... Projects like the gardens provide a social good...(Developers just need) the will and the imagination.'



We also support greater community involvement in placemaking: the process of protecting, supporting and improving people's own local public sphere. We believe the roots of this can be through greater discussion of public space issues within the education system, with the number of small scale financial grants available increased to make placemaking projects more realisable.



May 2019: Local skateboarders enjoy the restored sections of the Southbank Undercroft for the first time in 14 years.  
*Photo credit: Rich West.*

## Introduction and Background of LLSB

LLSB was established in April 2013 as a campaigning group to save the world renowned Southbank Undercroft Skate Spot from a planned redevelopment into retail units.<sup>1</sup> LLSB worked as a group firmly rooted in the local community with local skateboarders, BMXers and artists becoming activists, creating films and generating considerable media attention. By February 2014, LLSB had gathered the largest number of planning permission objections in British history and had received the support of the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. By September 2014, LLSB had secured a legal guarantee for the space's long term future through a Section 106 agreement.<sup>2</sup>

With 150,000 people signed up as members, LLSB continued to campaign for the reopening and restoration of historic sections of the skate spot which were closed without consultation in 2004 and 2005. In 2016, following a series of reports,<sup>3</sup> LLSB partnered with Southbank Centre. A fundraising campaign was launched, with £1.1m successfully raised towards the restoration. In July 2019, the historic 'little banks' were reopened, restoring an integral section of the world's most historic skateboarding spot.



In January 2014, the Undercroft community gathered at the skate spot with boxes containing over 30,000 planning permission objections, the largest number in UK history. Subsequently hundreds of locals skated the boxed objections to Lambeth Town Hall in protest against the attempted closure.  
*Photo credit: Sam Ashley.*





By spring 2019, following legal protection for the space previously threatened, LLSB had raised over £1m in partnership with Southbank Centre to restore historic sections of the skate spot, closed without consultation in 2004. Following 4 months of work, the space opened in July 2019.

*Photo credit: LLSB.*

## Motivations

There are a number of motivations behind this report. After 8 years campaigning on issues of public space and creative communities, LLSB have significant experience from a grassroots perspective not always heard by authorities. As LLSB no longer operates as a campaigning organisation day to day, it was felt important to gather what we have learnt within a formalised document, and share recommendations that LLSB believe could shape London for the better.

Furthermore, LLSB believes that social, economic and political trends in London are moving against community orientated creative spaces, causing damage to the city's creative and cultural future, giving this report an urgency.

Changes in the way London's institutions and large landowners consider space can radically improve the quality of life for many within London. This report aims to sow seeds for higher quality community and creative space in order to give this city the best possible creative future.

## The experiences of Long Live Southbank

LLSB has spent extensive amounts of time working with young people, many of whom are from disadvantaged and socially marginalised backgrounds. LLSB also had extensive experience working within highly professionalised upper echelons of cultural institutions, architects and urban planning organisations. LLSB team members regularly observed the discord between how officialised culture is organised and funded, and the real experience of culture and creativity on the streets.



The LLSB campaign table facilitated a broad range of conversations and allowed a regular dialogue with many sections of the community.

*Photo credit: Nicholas Constant.*



## Intentions

LLSB hope that through sharing our own experiences and amplifying the experiences of others, the campaign can contribute to a vigorous public debate about London's cultural future. LLSB hope for a meaningful debate with the potential to make changes to prevailing attitudes and policies, in order to create a city where access to culture and creativity is more democratic.

## A Note on the Impact of Covid-19

This report has been written during the coronavirus pandemic, at a time when many of the activities and practices discussed in the report have become impossible. We have opted to consider but not give undue focus to the impact of the pandemic. Whilst uncertainties remain, we believe that communal spaces and experiences will be more important than ever over the coming years.



LLSB contributed to public debates around intangible heritage, rights to the city and provisions for young people in a variety of ways. In March 2019 we launched our second film made with the University of Sussex and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Young people from the Undercroft community debate the values of spaces like the Undercroft before the premiere.

*Photo credit: Jenna Selby.*

## Section 1: Thoughts from LLSB's Experience

**Point 1: The Southbank Undercroft became a hugely important space both culturally and for the local community and it is highly valued. However the London of 2020 does not give enough space or opportunity for similar spaces to develop. Unless changed, this will cause problems for London's culture and communities for decades into the future.**

The Southbank Undercroft today is a cultural icon. It is one of the most important skateboarding spots in the world and one of the UK's most famous legal street art and graffiti spots. It is well loved by locals and is a major draw for tourists. It is a space of daily creativity with hundreds of users everyday. Within skateboarding, the Undercroft has been a global hotbed of progression since the 1970's. The friendships that have formed at the Undercroft have formed communities and movements impacting far beyond skateboarding. Some, for example Palace Skateboards, have made a global impact.<sup>4</sup>

LLSB see two main reasons for the success of the space. Firstly it is a found space, not designed for any specific activity. It was an architectural experiment, left as a space for users to interpret in what ways they saw fit.<sup>5</sup> This has allowed the space to remain creatively fresh through the decades. Users develop a deeper relationship with the space and it remains welcoming for non-skateboarders, diversifying and strengthening the community.

Secondly, the 'scene' at the Undercroft has been able to develop gradually over many decades. It has been used near-continuously for over 45 years, leading to a genuinely intergenerational community, which is often rare for young people to find and feel at home in. Older skateboarders are able to teach the younger skateboarders and can act as role models, helping with career and life advice. This has many positive and stabilising effects for young people, many of whom come from difficult backgrounds.

The intergenerational aspect also allows for a sense of heritage in the space. This was extensively explored by a team of academics as part of two projects titled 'You Can't Move History' and its follow up 'You Can Make History'<sup>6</sup>. As part of their 2016 report 'Engaging Youth in Cultural Heritage: Time, Place and Communication', the team of academics found a community of young people deeply engaged in the heritage of the space.<sup>7</sup> Because of the space's longevity, young people feel a far greater sense of rootedness, feel more eager to contribute positively to the community and are far more likely to come back year after year.

Southbank has become a landmark cultural space with a deep sense of community, heritage and a degree of worldwide fame which it has accumulated over more than four decades. However it is hard to imagine the London of 2020 allowing a space to develop organically, as the Southbank Undercroft was allowed to develop, especially not in a location with the centrality and connectedness of Southbank.



London, especially the central zones, is highly financialised, even down to very small plots of land. Space is highly policed and securitised with little acceptance of activities not officially solicited. Cultural development often relies on 'blank slate' space.

If London can identify and utilize the potential for 'blank slate' space, our cultural development over the decades to come will be much richer.



When the first skateboarders 'discovered' the Undercroft in the 1970's, it was a semi-abandoned space. As an architectural experiment, never designed with skateboarding in mind.

*Photo credit: Stéphane Decool.*

**Point 2: The Southbank Undercroft is an organic community and from its strengths we can learn about creating a city with better social harmony, cross cultural understanding and creative dynamism.**

LLSB have often highlighted the diversity within the Southbank Undercroft community. It is a space which is home to many from both disadvantaged and well off backgrounds, to those who were born in London and those who have recently arrived. Those who have all kinds of perspectives and experiences of life have come together and formed a well gelled community. Beyond anecdotal evidence, recent evaluatory surveys from Flow Associates have consistently shown a diverse user group. After surveying over 150 users in March and July 2019, professional evaluators Flow Associates found 56% of users were from ethnic groups which were not white British, with users regularly travelling from all areas of London and much of South East England.<sup>8</sup>

Although hard to measure statistically, anecdotally LLSB believe the Southbank Undercroft is an exceptionally good place for genuine social mixing. As one interviewee said, 'at Southbank...you get so many people from all over the world, you get to learn about where they're from and their life perspectives.' Beyond people of different class and ethnic backgrounds simply sharing a space, people are able to bring their own cultures to mixed friendship circles with long lasting friendships forming.

LLSB believes the autonomy of the Undercroft makes it such a good place for breaking down social boundaries. Southbank is a rare space where people can partake in creative activities with no regulation as to what the activity is, when it takes place and how long it should take place for. The space is traditionally self managed and self regulated<sup>9</sup> with an emphasis on cooperation and building an atmosphere the community collectively desire. The self regulated nature is attractive to many.<sup>10</sup> A situation of self management within a varied community naturally leads to social boundaries being overcome.



A crew of local skateboarders in the 1980s. There is continuity with many retaining close links to the community through the decades.

*Photo credit: Rob Ashby.*



The Southbank Undercroft also benefits from its longevity, with many people coming back regularly over the course of a decade or longer. In more fleeting circumstances, people may mix with those they can instantly see come from a similar class or ethnic background, perhaps because they suspect they will share similar experiences. However when people are using a space together over longer periods of time, friendships form in a less discriminatory way through shared experience.

One highly important failing, both of the space and of wider cultural attitudes, is the low proportion of female users. There are some positive signs, with the proportion of females using the space doubling from 7% of total users to 15% in between 2019 and 2020.<sup>11</sup> However, this is clearly still far from balanced. LLSB have made a number of interventions in the space, such as running female only skate schools led by female instructors, to address this imbalance. LLSB hope that increases in female usage can gain momentum, alongside a wider inclusion of women in skateboarding more generally. With every increase in female usership, yet more females may feel comfortable using the space. However this is clearly a complex issue which LLSB within the community must continue to address.



LLSB have used free skate schools to encourage female participation, which is rising significantly although much work still needs to be done.

*Photo credit: Nicholas Constant.*

### **Point 3: Communal and creative spaces need far more longevity than we currently give them.**

Beyond the benefits mentioned in points 1 and 2, there are many other important benefits of longevity.

Longevity brings an intergenerational community, with older community members giving life advice and career opportunities to younger generations. At Southbank it is common for people to be given a helping hand getting into careers such as graphic design, film making, photography or jobs in the skateboarding industry by older generations. The sense of heritage and custodianship helps younger users act more responsibly. People are far keener to respect the space and invest in its future.

The Undercroft has become one of a small number of skatespots famous across the globe. This status gives great inspiration to users of the space but would have been lost if Southbank had been closed after just a decade or two of existence. However the London of the 1980's allowed it to survive and grow to become what it is today.

We believe that the London of today often neglects the importance of longevity with communal and creative spaces. A large number of spaces have been allowed to close over recent years, from skateboarding spots to night clubs, from spaces for performance to community gardens. Far too many creative and community based spaces are forced to grow where there are not guarantees for longevity or legacy. As development in London keeps its rapid pace, it must be kept in mind not just the current communal value of a space, but also what it could grow to be for the community, if allowed to last for a decade or decades to come.



Some of the first skaters at the Undercroft around 1976. The decades of maturing as a culture and community may not be possible for similar spaces in highly financialised modern London.

*Photo credit: Brian Gittings.*



**Point 4: It is often the spaces that are original and atypical that have the broadest positive impacts and the most longevity.**

Southbank is a truly unique space. It is the underbelly of a large brutalist construction, a deliberate architectural experiment. Despite its imperfections, over time it has become far more well known and well loved for skateboarding than the vast majority of purpose built concrete parks, many of which have features with 'perfect' sizes, dimensions and materials.



Through countless conversations with those who signed up as supporters of the campaign, LLSB found many were concerned about the 'smoothing out' or 'homogenisation' of London. Many spoke of their own favourite buildings or areas that had some strange aspect or unique feelings to them, but were often at risk of redevelopment.

Unique spaces can often play a role in creating or inspiring highly important creative and cultural movements, which bring benefits to a wider society. In the coming years we hope that London can protect unique and interesting sites, allow more to be built and move away from a trend towards homogenisation.



The Undercroft's unique architecture has enabled decades of creative interpretation. Even after five decades there is still constant innovation.  
*Photo Credits: Ben Stewart and Nick Constant.*

**Point 5: The best way of discussing cultural and community spaces is through person to person interactions.**

For LLSB, the campaign table was hugely important, both for listening to the broadest range of public possible and also for sharing our message widely through mutually beneficial conversation. The campaign table was physically a trestle table, at first with just a few leaflets and membership sign up sheets. As a means of creating a forum within public space there are a number of elements worth noting.

The first important point to be taken here is the importance of real life discussion in helping resolve the democratic deficit. Sections of the public may feel removed from the decision making process and real life discussion can give a far greater feeling of involvement than online methods.

The regularity of the table's presence was essential. It allowed for sustained and ongoing conversations, it showed commitment to a cause and symbolised reliability. This earned the respect of many more traditionally minded passers by, who may not usually have supported a skate spot campaign.

The table also helped break down social boundaries. A large number of the campaigners were from marginalised backgrounds whilst many passers by were from wealthier backgrounds, perhaps commuting or attending highbrow arts events in the area. Public debate naturally increases cross community conversations and leads to increased understanding.

Even as a campaigning group that benefited greatly from the digital age, we believe that face to face communication and conversation should be at the heart of public consultation. We believe this style of consultation is a public good, increasing rootedness and connectedness in an area.



LLSB campaigners collect planning permission objections in 2013. The table also functioned as a space for public discussion.  
*Photo credit: Sam Ashley.*



**Point 6: Concerns over increasing volumes of commercial space should be taken seriously and measured regularly.**

One of the most commonly heard points when talking to the public on the campaign table was that this area of London had ‘enough commercial units anyway’, and that it needed to start prioritising community. Conversations often continued to discuss how London is becoming homogenous, with the same chain coffee shops replacing more ‘authentic’ spaces. It was often stated that a tipping point had been reached. Many of the 150,000 who signed up as members of Long Live Southbank were supporting general sentiments against commercialisation of community orientated space, as well as LLSB on the given issue.

In 2013 the proposed redevelopment of the Southbank Skate Spot gained a huge amount of public and media attention, partly because people used the issue as exemplary of wider issues in London around privatisation of public space, homogenisation of the city’s landscape and reduction of community spaces.

To deal with such concerns effectively, a number of issues must be addressed. There is a lack of a mass movement or large scale pressure group working for public space in London. This makes it too easy to ignore the issue and too easy for the public to feel defeatist. It may have been a failure of LLSB to not point this out when the spotlight was on the issue at the Undercroft.

- There is a lack of understanding from those with the ability to affect change about the scale of public feeling. LLSB exposed that the redevelopment of the Southbank Undercroft was proposed after almost no consultation of locals whatsoever. However since 2013 little has changed and genuine consultation can be viewed by developers as burdensome or tempting potential barriers, rather than the right thing to do for anyone claiming to work with responsibility to the local community. Consultation on how London is used and shaped should be far more prevalent and far more readily acted upon.
- There is a lack of enthusiasm to present alternative visions of the city with vigour (of course with notable exceptions). This may be due to the perception that the status quo is too firmly established.



January 2014: local skateboarders celebrating after delivering 30,000 planning permission objections to Lambeth Town Hall.  
*Photo credit: Sam Ashley.*

**Point 7: The most important point when campaigning on social and community issues is to work with confidence and optimism.**

This point is of vital importance to campaigners and also to those who have contact with campaigners. LLSB is a rare example of an uncompromising and successful grassroots campaign. We believe that one key to this success was the confidence and optimism with which we approached the issue. Both when working to save the space and subsequently when working to reopen further sections, we believed our aims were totally achievable. We refused to accept the acquired knowledge that ‘*money always wins.*’ This kept motivation high and allowed momentum to build.

This is also valuable knowledge for those in positions of power over the public realm. It is important to not allow the ‘money always wins over community’ storyline to proliferate, as it can become a self fulfilling prophecy.



Locals at the July 2019 opening of the restored historic Undercroft.  
*Photo credit: Rich West.*



**Point 8: Community involvement in placemaking can become a lot more prevalent, and there is great untapped potential.**

By placemaking we mean the improvement of a space in the public sphere by adding interest, possibilities for education, possibilities for creativity or exercise, by improving it aesthetically, by adding nature, by adding elements that make it more community orientated or better for socialising with friends or strangers, or by making any other changes that improve a space or give it greater character. Southbank Undercroft is an example, having been energised through the organic formation of a community, the creation of heritage and through constant creative exploration.

There is a huge well of potential for place making in London, through personal and community talent, which goes largely untapped. Local authority structures and owners of publicly accessible privately owned space generally do not encourage people to engage in placemaking. Permission is often hard to obtain and securitization often discourages DIY approaches. More encouragement could be given in school curriculums to care for and seek opportunity in local public realm spaces and such topics could become more common in public discussion.

There are many spaces in cities which go unused. Large patches of land may be left awaiting development and small patches exist which are of little use to a landowner. More encouragement should be shown for their use and improvement. A general climate where active placemaking is viewed positively can be created through the education system and through encouragement from councils, community leaders and the built environment more widely. Small and easily accessible grants should be made available where a public good can be demonstrated, as even very small sums can make a big difference to DIY style projects. It is encouraging to see some small scale placemaking projects receiving funding, but more encouragement and enabling work must be made.

In tandem, local authorities and the government should actively encourage commercial landowners to be permissive to those who have positive ideas for temporarily unused sites. Successful projects on meanwhile sites could be helped to find more permanent homes to continue their work through grants, when an original site must be returned to the landowner.

Meanwhile use of space is not an ideal solution. Creative and community spaces need permanence to thrive and be of most help to the most marginalised. However the use of meanwhile space is a strong and practical option in the present reality of London.



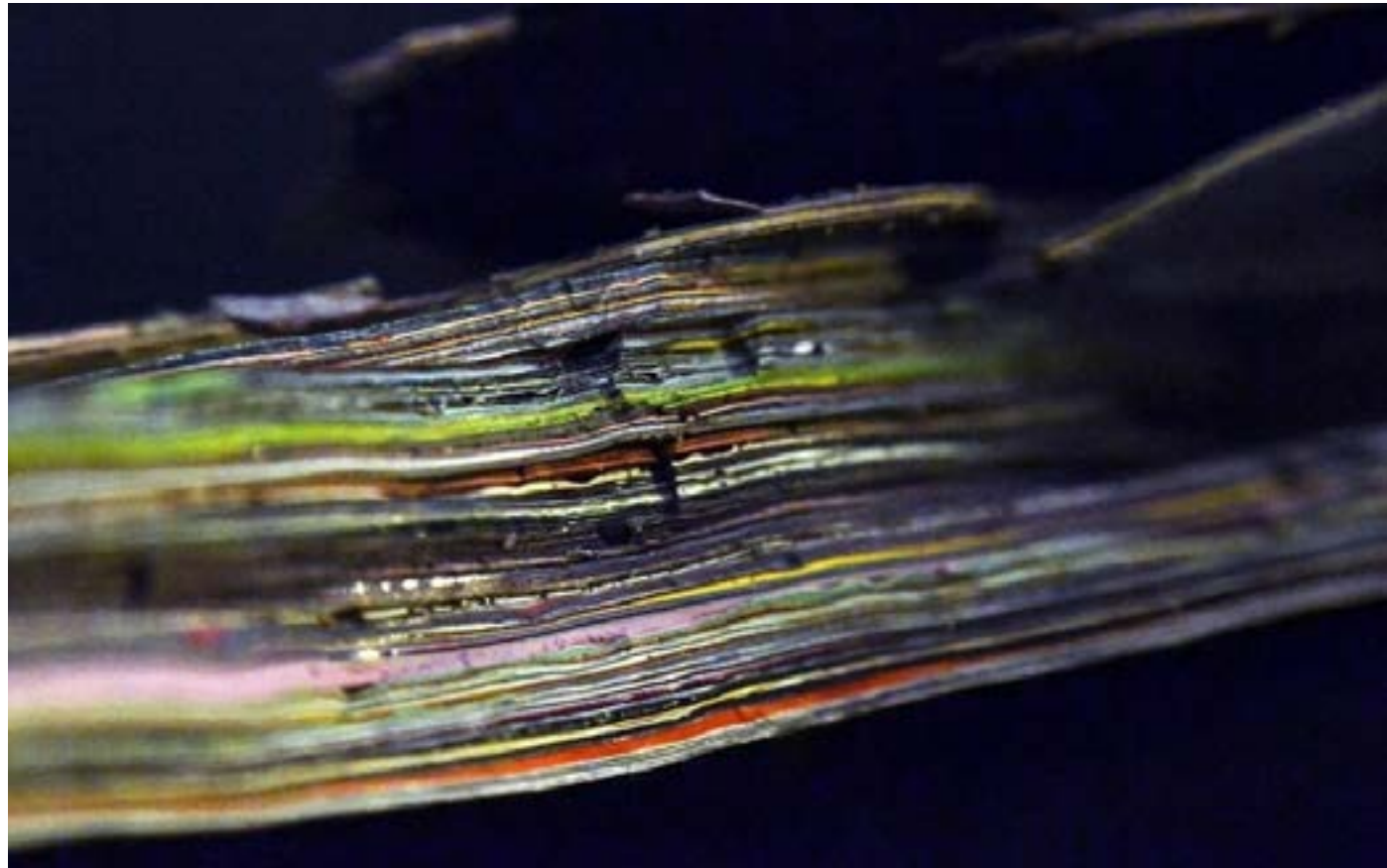
Since the 1970's, improvised obstacles have been an important part of Southbank's culture. In the mid-2000's, the 'Moving Units' project was organised by the local community, bringing in a number of semi permanent concrete blocks, which have since been moved a number of times.  
*Photo credits: Rob Ashby and Dominic Marley.*



**Point 9: The ability to campaign is a privilege and there are many reasons why community campaigns will not always emerge.**

Many community spaces in London have been lost to redevelopment without strong community based campaigns, despite large amounts of anger around the issues. To be able to campaign should not be a privilege, however in the London of 2021 it certainly is. To make change requires a huge dedication of time, equivalent to a full time job in many cases. It also often comes with huge stresses on mental health. Many core members of the LLSB campaign suffered mental health problems due to the stresses of the campaign. This was due to feelings of pressure for the campaign to succeed, the pressure of adapting to communicate with authority and due to pressures of workload. Many do not have supporting networks and financial cushions to deal with such issues, making campaigning work much harder.

To an extent, both councils and media networks rely on campaigns to highlight injustices and problems for communities. This reliance risks a democratic deficit whereby those without the privilege to campaign are ignored. It is vitally important that media networks and authorities find their own means of researching injustices. Opportunities should be taken to listen to and empower those who are from disadvantaged sections of society, who may not have the means to campaign.



This photo shows a chip of spray paint layering from the walls of the Undercroft. This object offers some hint of the space's intangible heritage. This however, could easily have been destroyed in 2013.

*Photo credits: LLSB.*

**Point 10: The scales are dramatically weighted against any community centred organisation trying to create significant change in the way our city is used and viewed.**

LLSB's apparent success, which has been broadly welcomed by politicians and the public alike, should not be viewed as proof that city planning and governance is just. In reality it was an against the odds success, helped by a lot of hard work and highly significant strokes of luck.

There are a number of factors which gave LLSB advantages many community campaigns do not see. Firstly, LLSB were protecting a space with a huge number of daily passersby. Most community spaces do not have this footfall, and would not have been able to raise awareness through in person activities with such success. Secondly, Southbank is close to many of the biggest media hubs in the UK. The large amount of television coverage we received was greatly beneficial to the campaign, but was probably due to our close proximity to the headquarters of both the BBC and ITV. Thirdly, LLSB were supported from an early stage by a philanthropist whose generosity made it possible to pay staff a small wage. This gave campaigners the support needed to persevere and doubtlessly made a huge difference. Crucially, the philanthropist also funded a legal campaign that ran in parallel to the grassroots campaigning. Ultimately it was a combination of the two which led to the success of LLSB's campaign to save the space in 2014.

Therefore, we don't believe that the positive result at the Southbank Undercroft can be hailed as proof that the structures and systems that govern planning necessarily deliver justice for community campaigns. In fact there have been many campaigns for community space over the last 5 years which have not achieved their ultimate aims, such as the Save Reginald Save Tldemill and Open Nunhead Reservoir campaigns.

We believe that the systems in place for delivering planning and public space justice to communities need to be reviewed to ensure that significant funding and access to the media are not so essential to success.



Professional Skateboarder Ryan Decenzo visiting Southbank in 2017. Ability to garner media coverage was a great help to LLSB.

*Photo Credit: Lee Kirby.*



## Interviews with the Southbank Undercroft Community

Throughout the campaign, LLSB was run by the Undercroft community with a broad group inputting to the decision making process. We believe that giving a platform to community members benefits both the community and institutional decision makers.

LLSB include here five interviews with those who have used the Southbank Undercroft regularly over the restoration period. The interviews highlighted the deep benefits community orientated creative spaces have for young people from a wide range of backgrounds, the benefits of investing in them and thoughts on how London can best create spaces to benefit more young people in similar ways.

Included here are edited transcriptions, full interviews are available on request.

**Atlantic Johnson, 17, a skateboarder from Tooting who has been skating at Southbank for 5 years.**

**We spoke about the role Southbank played in Atlantic's upbringing:**

*'It's probably played the biggest role out of anything, it's given me a lot of opportunities... When I was younger I used to get in some trouble, getting into fights... probably the longest I spent in (one) school was a year and a half, then I just spent two years out of education and I spent that whole time skating. I feel if I didn't have Southbank, I don't know what I'd be doing. Having everyone around me made me feel like I had a purpose. Being around people who skate for a living made me realise I can do what I love and do that for a job as well, so that kept me on track, it made me realise I don't need to do something stupid or chill with dumb people. I want to be like the people I look up to. Skateboarding has changed me as a person in a lot of ways... Because there's older people around you so much, they play a real role, they tell you right from wrong, when you're just around younger people you don't really know too much.'*

*'Since just before quarantine I've been getting (free) boards and some clothes through Supreme (one of the largest brands within skateboarding). That came through Grant who I met at Southbank. With those lot, they are the reason that I'm still able to skate, because I go through boards quite quickly and I wouldn't have the money otherwise, so I'm quite blessed to have that opportunity.'*

**We spoke about how friendships at Southbank resemble family connections:**

*'Southbank makes a brother and sister type community, and you have the uncles... You wouldn't really have that anywhere else, young people don't have older friends...having these people around me as family members, it teaches me a lot...It helped me to mature as a person into a young adult. At Southbank, everyone is a teacher because everyone has their own way that Southbank has shaped them.'*

*'If coronavirus can be dealt with properly, we're going to need a lot more open and creative spaces...When you are in a space that doesn't feel like it's controlled in anyway, you feel like you can express yourself more.'*

**Atlantic finished by discussing the importance of free creative spaces in London:**

*'If coronavirus can be dealt with properly, we're going to need a lot more open and creative spaces. We're all going to come out of it and there's going to be quite a few people who are feeling lost. Currently it's hard to get a job and there's not a lot to do if you're not studying, and having that open space that doesn't feel like it has ropes attached to it, it breeds more creatives. When you are in a space that doesn't feel like it's controlled in anyway, you feel like you can express yourself more. London is such a fast paced city with so much going on, finding that nice place where you feel at home and comfort is so hard. For instance in my area we don't really have a lot, there's a lot of young people who don't really have a lot to do. A lot of kids have heart at the moment, but it's just finding the places to show that, or find things to express that with.'*



*'Southbank makes a brother and sister type community, and you have the uncles'* Atlantic Johnson, 17  
Photo credit: Jeeba.



**Rohan Manderson, 23 and from Brent  
has been skateboarding at Southbank for 6 years.**

**Rohan told me about the role community at Southbank has played in his upbringing:**

*'It's kind of changed my entire life and my entire perspective on things...because Southbank is so important in the scene, you get so many people from all over the world, you get to learn about where they're from and their life perspectives. You're never quite tied down to any particular narrative, because everyone has a perspective and everyone's going to be heard at Southbank...it's just a real learning experience, learning to be tolerant of people no matter where they come from, no matter what they do.'*

*'The community stretches way further (than the skateboarders). It goes to the people who used to work in Eat, Pret, YO! Sushi, up in the Southbank Centre...The people in the market were fighting alongside us (to save the space), doing interviews to support us, they love it. It's nice to know I'm part of something that is bigger than myself and bigger than just skateboarding. It makes me feel like I'm actually safe...You can go to other skateparks around London and see the same people, be a part of this community where you know people. I feel this is something not a lot of people have always had and it's great to have this now. It's helped me become a better person and I'm grateful. I don't know where I'd be without this. You can't take this for granted in London.'*

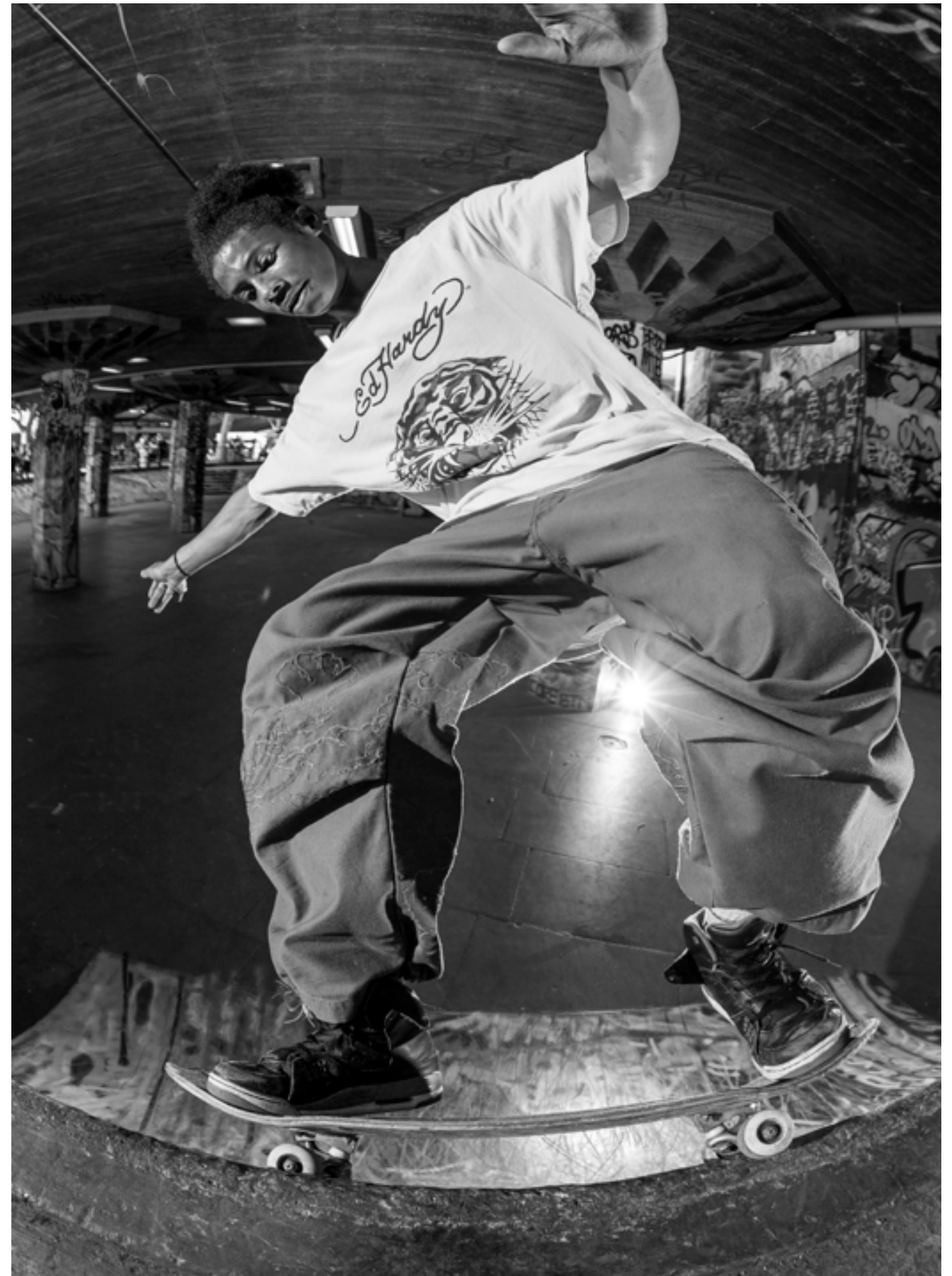
*'A lot of spaces for kids, teenagers, disenfranchised adults, they've always been stripped away. I guess all (the authorities) can do is open their ears to the community because I don't feel it always can come down to a load of people coming together to scream for change.'*

**We spoke about how the restoration had brought benefits to the space:**

*'It brought in so many people, it added a whole different dimension. People can come here and find a place that's comfortable to them. I think it diversified the community...Now it feels like a new generation who are perhaps on their way to becoming the best skaters in London...The power of the people makes you feel proud to skate at Southbank, and to have Sadiq Khan supporting the space.'*

**I asked about the benefits he saw of free creative space to the city more generally.**

*'The benefit of something free, is that it's going to benefit all of our communities. Because not everybody comes from a place where you can go to somewhere (a commercial skate park) like BaySixty6...Those things need to be encouraged because it keeps a lot of people out of trouble, it keeps a lot of people grounded. A lot of spaces for kids, teenagers, disenfranchised adults, they've always been stripped away. I guess all (the authorities) can do is open their ears to the community because I don't feel it always can come down to a load of people coming together to scream for change.'*



**'The benefit of something free is that it's going to benefit all of our communities' Rohan Manderson, 23.  
Photo credit: Ben Stewart.**



**Aimée Gillingwater, a 22 year old skateboarder from West London who has been a local at Southbank for the last 4 years.**

**Aimée told me about how the community and experiences of Southbank have impacted her life.**

*'Honestly skating at Southbank has given me everything, all of my closest friends basically, literally opened up the entire world of skateboarding for me. It gave me connections for work but also a real insight into life. I grew up as a white girl going to private school, and there was a lot I didn't understand about the world until coming to Southbank.'*

*'At Southbank you get every type of person from every stretch of life. I've never seen someone be turned away from Southbank unless they are causing trouble and I think the skateboarders bring a real sense of security to that area as well, because there are troublemakers that come through, but I think the skateboarding community keeps that in check.'*

*'I actually went through quite a lot of health struggles growing up...I went to a lot of doctors and had tests and they couldn't really help, and the only thing that really helped was skateboarding. Literally, if I didn't skate it would have destroyed my life and I'd have got really depressed...There are a massive amount of psychological benefits.'*

**We spoke about how Southbank had changed for the better since the restoration.**

*'It made Southbank a lot more accessible to beginner skaters...and it gave the whole park more flow.'*

***'You've got to have places where people can be creative and express themselves otherwise we lose sense of who we are.'***

*'Since the restoration I think it's made younger people and also women more comfortable being there. Now when you're skating through it's more open...it took away a lot of the dark dinginess.'*

**LLSB asked about the importance of free creative spaces to London more generally.**

*'I think these spaces are invaluable, the city of London is built on all of this culture. I think if you don't protect spaces like these and you don't continue creating more ones then the ones we have are taken over by developers and people trying to gentrify the space. If you don't continue to have these places then the true culture and the joy of London will start to die. You've got to have places where people can be creative and express themselves otherwise we lose sense of who we are.'*



*'Since the restoration its made younger people and also women more comfortable being there'*  
**Aimée Gillingwater, 22.**  
**Photo credit: Jenna Selby.**



**Chris Komodromos is a 30 year old filmmaker and skateboarder. He has been a regular at Southbank for the last 5 years.**

**LLSB asked about the role Southbank has had on his life.**

*'It's developed me as a filmer mostly...because there are so many different skaters there that want to film, it allowed me to progress pretty quickly and get used to filming different skaters with different styles...Skating wise, it's sick (really good) because you can go to a space and you know loads of skaters are going to be there, it hypes you up to progress, get tricks and to push other people.'*

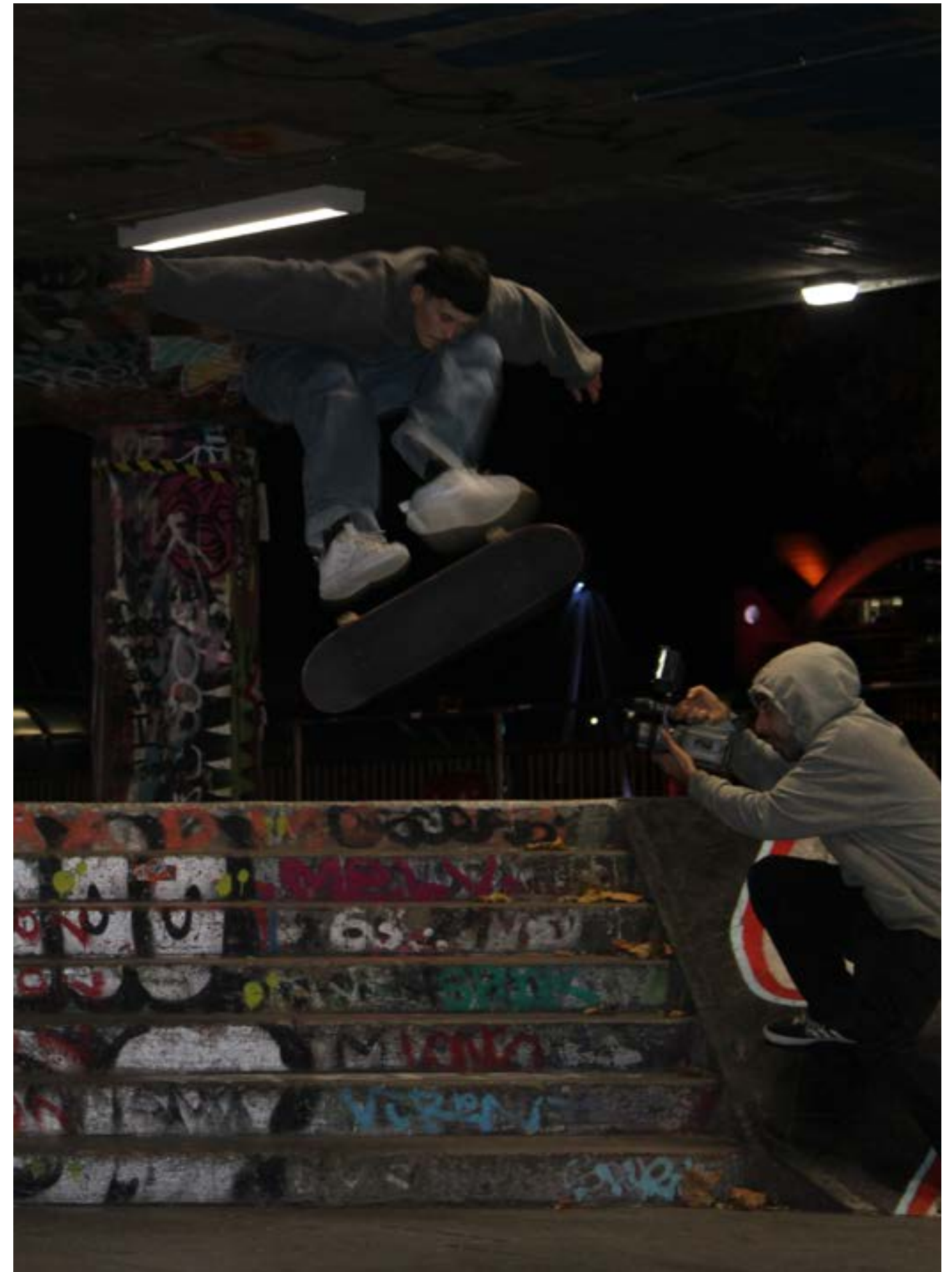
*'You have all types of people who come to Southbank, all ethnicities...I feel really appreciative that everyone has welcomed me.'*

*'Mentally, you're taking in the vibe and the energy from the last however many years that people have been skating there, I'm really happy when I'm skating there. I definitely see it as exercise as well, after a day of skateboarding you are knackered and you definitely push your body quite a lot.'*

*'I think it's pretty cool because you have all types of people who come to Southbank, all ethnicities...I feel really appreciative that everyone has welcomed me.'*

**Chris told us about the important role free creative spaces play in the city.**

*'It's very important for these spaces to be there, as you can see with Southbank, all of the things to come out of there are pretty cool, all the videos all the timeless clips, all the people who have met, all of the friendships that have been made, even brands that have come out of it. It's really important that these spaces exist so people can integrate with people they might not have met before. It allows people to network and for creative ideas to spark. It allows people to evolve and keep going.'*



*'It's really important that these spaces exist so people can integrate with people they might not have met before', Chris Komodromos, 30.*  
Photo credit: Bitcoin Baj.



**Harry Turner, 27 is a skateboarder, photographer and filmmaker from Australia, who has been a local at Southbank since moving to London 8 years ago.**

**We spoke about the importance of Southbank as a community space.**

*'If it wasn't for Southbank I might not have the same understanding of the world...Southbank is like a crossroads where people meet each other and communicate...people at Southbank are not there because of how much money they've got or what their job is...it's a space that caters for all. It gives you a broader understanding of where people come from, why they say what they say and why they feel what they do, without passing any judgement on that person.'*

**We spoke about the importance of Southbank as a space of physical exercise and recreation.**

*'I think physically you get out what you put in. Like most forms of physical exercise, skateboarding has a big mental element to it, sometimes you might need an hour or two a day to maybe not even talk to anyone but just to sweat and feel your body working... We're always repeating the same things over and over again, trying to do them faster or smoother or cleaner, to have a space that's large enough to revisit, there's no real limit to how far or how fast, so there's always that opportunity for progression, even if that's personal, feeling good about skating well just for yourself.'*

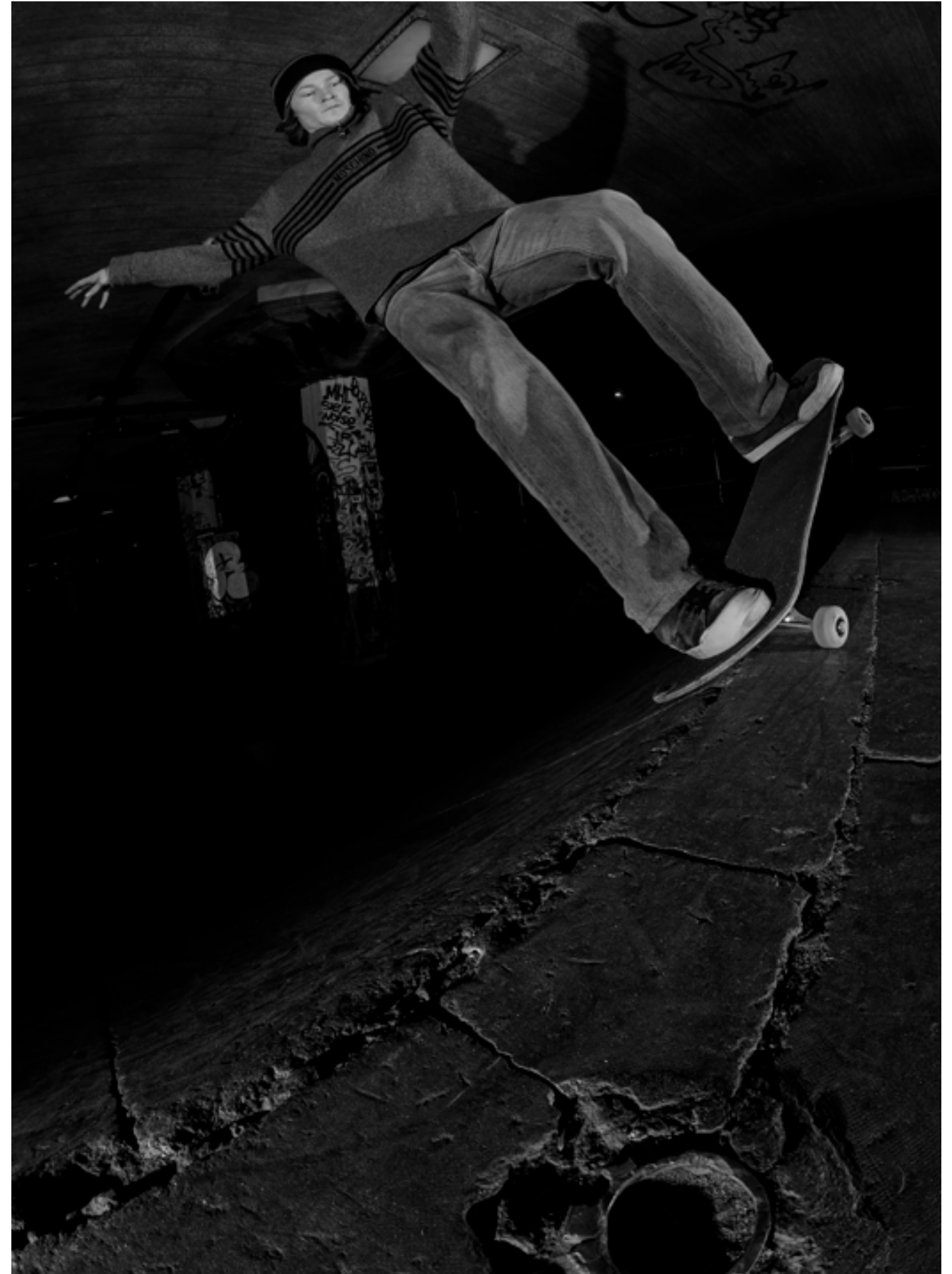
**Harry also spoke about the importance of free creative space beyond Southbank and possible approaches in the future.**

*'(What Southbank as public space means to me) is being able to not feel well or not be happy but having somewhere to go that's not a pub, not a bookies, you know you can meet people and you know someone can say do you want to skate, it's so important to have that location always open. You don't have to pay for a membership, there's no dress code, there's no rules really.'*

***'You only need a length and a width and if that space is public...it will naturally come to facilitate the people who need it the most.'***

*'It gives a lot of people a space where they feel safe, where they can be themselves and not get too weirded out by this busy cityscape where everything is like a sign or a sale or an opportunity to spend money. It's quiet of all of that consumerism. It can be noisy as hell there but you can sit down and read a book. There's no disturbance. And I think the public appreciates that.'*

*'If we're looking to the future with public space... you only need a length and a width and if that space is public, especially if it's concrete, the people who need it will build what they want around it, it will naturally come to facilitate the people who need it the most.'*



*'It gives a lot of people a space where they feel safe, where they can be themselves and not get too weirded out by this busy cityscape', Harry Turner, 27.*  
Photo credit: Ben Stewart.



## London's Creative Future: Community Based Initiatives

LLSB interviewed 10 individuals and collectives who have dedicated themselves to increasing public space, building grassroots spaces for creativity or increasing community cooperation and support. Whilst the range of occupations is broad, we have focussed on the underground, those who look to build communities organically and those who wish to broaden the public realm and explore it creatively.

Whilst these individuals offer fresh and progressive ideas for London's cultural life, many were frustrated by developments within London and some spoke of leaving the city altogether.

This can be seen as a survey on community and creative spaces originating in London, the positivity they can bring and the climates that can help and hinder their work.

### Jimmy Wheale: Co-founder of Nomadic Gardens

From 2015 to 2019 the Nomadic Gardens in Shoreditch was given the temporary use of a site for development. The project was orientated around community gardens. It developed into much more than this becoming a well known street art spot, a community theatre, art project space and generally a creative and social space for the community. The space was exceptionally successful at bringing people together from a range of class and ethnic backgrounds in a setting of genuine social mixing and reduction of boundaries.

Jimmy told me the story of its establishment.

*'We wanted to channel our passions for social change into something more physical, we were both gardeners and a community garden was the logical step. Junior found the land back in June 2013, it was then owned by Network Rail, we tried and failed for two years to get them to lease it to us with no joy. Then we found out they were selling it to property developers. When the sale took place in Oct 2014 we got in contact with the developers (LondoNewcastle) and luckily they...agreed to give us a short term lease, six months at first.'*

*'We were able to demonstrate a lot of community support. It really helped that we went in confident...we had a good looking presentation and we convinced them that we knew what we were doing.'*



*'The main vision of the gardens was to be a community empowerment and development space.'*  
Photo credit: Nomadic Gardens archive, photographer unknown.

**We spoke about the vision for the gardens, as a community and 'nomadic' space.**

*'The main vision of the gardens was to be a community empowerment and development space. It was important to just say 'yes' (to anyone who came with an idea for the space), however bonkers the idea was...This was crucial to letting it be organic.'*

*'The gardens were always meant to be meanwhile. Therefore everything we built didn't have foundations...and could be moved elsewhere.'*

*I asked about the garden's particular success as a space for social mixing.*

*'It's important to just let people be, to do this you need to be open. Which is what set us apart from other community garden and allotment type spaces (which) are inherently exclusive. Gardening was definitely the motivating force behind getting the project started but very quickly we understood that in order to be as inclusive as possible we need to provide or at least host and be open to other 'universal' activities... in particular street art we actively encouraged. (We had) community cook outs...all the free seating, our children's play area, entertainment...'*



**We talked about the obstacles encountered by those wishing to bring positive community use to meanwhile or alternative spaces.**

*'The main obstacle is that the people with the most land don't have the will or imagination to consider meanwhile use as useful or beneficial. These in particular are the large infrastructure companies such as Network Rail, TfL, British Gas and Thames Water...second are local authorities who are clunky...and lastly developers who, if not sympathetic to your cause or vision, won't even give you the time day. This strips down how much land is actually available to host something like the gardens from taking place.'*

*'I would definitely try to set another one (site) up if the opportunity arose...I think local councils and the GLA have a big role to play in the meanwhile use industry. If they get behind meanwhile use and encourage developers to consider meanwhile use in their development proposals it will mean a lot more space becomes available. They also have land and empty buildings and would need to look at reducing the red tape around using them, even potentially having a dedicated meanwhile use officer or team in each borough and even in City Hall.'*

***'What would change...our urban landscape itself would be if planning law was changed to make meanwhile use in the predevelopment stages of any development compulsory.'***

*'What would change...our urban landscape itself would be if planning law was changed to make meanwhile use in the predevelopment stages of any development compulsory. The reason why it should be is because projects like the gardens provide, an albeit temporary, social good that offsets the negative impact of development taking place.'*

**Finally I asked more generally, how London can foster similarly communal and creative minded spaces.**

*'Space is crucial, we are the sum of our relationships. Relationships can only happen through dialogue. Dialogue is created when people partake in meaningful activity together. You need space to be able to host this kind of activity. However these spaces need to be free, open and therefore empowering. They need to be able to act as incubators for local, individual or communal creativity. In order to achieve this you need to run a space that isn't prescriptive, it doesn't tell you what to do and though there's organisation, there doesn't feel like there's anyone in control. This is how you create the right atmosphere for people.'*



*'Space is crucial, we are the sum of our relationships...these spaces need to be free, open and therefore empowering'*

**Photo credit: Nomadic Gardens archive, photographer unknown.**



## Arizona Smith: Co-founder of the Lurner Prize for Self Taught Artists and the New Earth School

Arizona Smith is a self taught artist living in South London, interested in community work. She has previously run projects with groups on the margins of society such as young homeless people. She recently co-founded The Lurner Prize for self taught artists and The New eARTh School, a community based creative space.

The Lurner Prize was established in 2019 to give some of this support and encouragement to other self taught artists (who had developed practices without studying at art school). *'We started The Lurner Prize because...we wanted to give people the physical opportunity of an exhibition and a cash prize but also the metaphorical hug of - "we get it, we are here and with you, let's make something together"...It's not something that's anti-establishment, it's just not establishment. We had realised how tired we are of waiting for the approval of establishments and actually why wait? Make a show, do your own promotion, be what you want to be. We wanted to make a community to support that in all people, from all walks of life.'*

*'We found the space to have a huge effect on people.. people realising that they could go for their dreams. We wanted to make a space that wasn't about us teaching anyone but was about sharing.'*

We also spoke about the importance of regularly coming together with like minded people, especially for those who do not have the resources to pay for art school or rent a studio. *'Physical space...to work makes a huge difference, but also a space which is like a cocooning symbol of acceptance is really important...Sam (Mead) and I started The new eARTh School with our own money because we were lucky enough to be offered space for a bit at cheaper than normal rent...we offered free or low cost workshop, event and exhibition space as well as open space to work with us in the studio. We...put on 32 events in 5 weeks. We found the space to have a huge effect on people... people realising that they could go for their dreams. We wanted to make a space that wasn't about us teaching anyone but was about sharing.'*

We spoke about physical spaces and their potential for social mixing more generally.

*'When a space is truly authentic and just full of positivity there are no barriers, people mix..I think creativity is an excellent tool for bringing together community because it moves you past negative emotions and into positive ones by a process of doing, being seen and making...(In London) it would be great to have more truly organic space for people and creatives, there isn't currently enough provision for young people by any stretch...Southbank is excellent in this way, though it would be amazing to see more spaces with this openness, but allowing for different mediums of expressions... (in other cases) I have otherwise found a lot of 'creative spaces' to be inauthentic and largely dictated by funding targets and chains of people with rules.'*

Finally, we spoke about the barriers of London's high cost of living and the often rapid pace of gentrification.

*'If you're tired, you're working and all your money goes on essentials it's hard to create, creation takes energy and we only have so much. Space is also a factor, It's important to have space to drop some paint or try out clay or make 18 paintings in an hour...(issues stemming from the high cost of living) can be really limiting to confidence.'*



*'Physical space to work makes a huge difference, but also space as a cocooning symbol of acceptance.'* Arizona Smith.  
Photo credit: Sam Mead.



## Filippo Moia and Pietro Fareri, founders of Feet First Fair

Feet First Fair is a zine fair series focussed on bringing together young people who self publish their creative output on a non-financial, community focussed basis. Run without a budget, they provide free accommodation and display space for all attendees, utilising networks of friends. Run from London, it held its first edition on home turf in 2016 before moving to Milan in 2017 and Bruxelles/ Oostende in 2019. LLSB spoke to the two founders Filippo Moia and Pietro Fareri.

I asked about how the idea for Feet First Fair originated and grew.

*F: 'So during the first year that I was in London, I guess we were not very happy with what we were seeing at zine fairs around.'*

*P: 'Another reason was that...we knew there was a network of people who followed each others work (on Instagram) but had never met in person, so we thought it could be a good chance to get all of these people in one room so they could meet and potentially do work later on.'*

*F: 'It was just 30 something people (exhibiting) at the first one in London, then around 70 in Milan and around 150 in Belgium.'*

We spoke about some of the ideas and values Feet First Fair proposed.

*F: 'For the Fair, the final objective was always creating a community because I think there were some things that were too weird about how social media was acting for us at the time, and it was really in confrontation for that. Why are we following each other (on social media) but we don't manage to do things together?'*

*P: 'The system was extremely simple. We tried to design it in a way so that there wasn't any money feeding into it. (We didn't search for grants or sponsorship) because we didn't want third parties to have a stake in the outcome of the event.'*

*'I think both me and Fillipo have got to a stage where it feels like in London it's just not possible to do these sorts of initiatives anymore.'*

We then discussed London, which has provided the organisational base for the Fair. Both Filippo and Pietro are planning to leave the city and spoke of frustrations.

*P: 'Everything we did had (community at its core), but I think that's just very difficult to sustain in a place like London...(London has now) got to a stage where it's so overdeveloped... (these creative possibilities and opportunities) can't happen...The factors that allowed this to happen are now gone. It's extremely expensive to live anywhere, it's extremely expensive to do almost anything. The regulations that run the city are extremely restricting so it's very difficult to grow anything organically...I think if anything, we're at a stage where people are starting to realise that and move away, to places where it's a lot cheaper to live and it's a lot easier to organise stuff, where there's a lot less regulation to get around for people to do the creative projects they want..I think both me and Fillipo have got to a stage where it feels like in London it's just not possible to do these sorts of initiatives anymore.'*



The second edition of the Feet First Fair was held in Milan. The fair grew internationally from a foundation in London.

Photo credit: Andrea Rosso.



## Louis Pailler: Founder of the Percy Mingle party series

Louis Pailler is the 25 year old founder of the Percy Mingle party series. These parties typify a seam within underground dance music, which offers a community routed alternative to high price events with international dj's, whilst keeping a focus on the music and artistry.

I asked about the general health of the underground dance music scene in London, as it stood before the current Covid-19 crisis, and with regards to this.

*'I think it's sick (really good) at the minute...there's a lot of good things going on with events and venues as well, small venues are doing well for themselves. (We've seen) the birth of venues that have been bridging the gap between warehouses and proper clubs... creating a really nice space. So they have proper licensing but a lot of the same freedom as a squat party, which is really good. (It's really important to have smaller venues) where you can do something without having a massive investment or the pressure to fill it out with loads of people, because that just eliminates the ability for newcomers to come through and do something fresh...(The current crisis) is a scary one definitely. I've got a lot of sympathy for owners and I really hope they get the support they deserve from the government.'*

*'You've really got all types of people coming there, everyone is together and able to mix with each other.'*

He told me about London's dance music culture in comparison with other cities of global importance.

*'With most of the other cities that I've visited, it's just made me really love the London music scene even more...(however) cities like Berlin embrace it far more with regards to licensing and opening hours. I think London needs to see it as far more of a positive thing.'*

We also spoke about dance music culture as a site of genuine social mixing.

*'With Percy Mingle and raves in general... you've really got all types of people coming there, everyone is together and able to mix with each other. I think that's what these new emerging venues have been able to offer, a real mixture of events and a really safe space, no matter what sort of person you are, you can enjoy yourself without worrying about it.'*



*'You've really got all types of people coming there, everyone is together and able to mix with each other'; a flyer for a Percy Mingle event in 2019 sub titled 'Connecting People'.*



## Andrea Cippo Rosso: Founder of Fritto FM online radio station

Andrea Cippo Rosso, 29, is the founder of Fritto FM, an online radio station that came to prominence in Milan in 2015 and was relaunched from London in 2020. The interview took place less than a week before he moved back to Italy. This interview stands to show reasons why a talented creative individual may feel blocked or put off from contributing to London's cultural life. Much of my conversation with Andrea centred around his disillusionment with London's cultural life after living in the city for almost 2 years.

*'I think it's been pretty rare for me to relate to people with the same (creative) mindset because there is a lot going on in London, but most of the time it is like a solo thing... People are really too conscious that here they can blow up, so that they really rush themselves, which can be really toxic for collaborations or building up a community, I think this creates a lot of problems for creative personalities to have a healthy relationship with themselves...(and) their mental health...It's really stimulating but at the same time it's not good for people in a more essential way.'*

*'For sure the cost of life is actually way higher than the actual possibility of the people. The housing system is killing the citizen.'*

I asked about whether economic factors in London contribute to this, such as the high cost of living.

*'Well if you want to carry on with your creative works and your creative process in London and you can't get immediately a money income from that, and you want to live in a decent way, you actually have to work full time: 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. Bruv, you don't have much time to take care of (your creativity). For sure the cost of life is actually way higher than the actual possibility of the people. The housing system is killing the citizen.'*



*'You don't have much time to take care of your creativity. The housing system is killing the citizen.'*  
*Andrea Cippo Rosso's frustrations with London led to him moving his Fritto FM project back to Italy.*  
*Photo credit: FM.*

We talked about how the pace of gentrification affects the ability of creative scenes to put down roots. *'Well they are always going to have to move in a different direction, like every 2 years, always in a different postcode. You always get further and further away from the centre... that's a bit too much.'*

## Bert McLean: Founder of Do Your Own Thing Space

I spoke to Bert McLean, 21 year old founder of Do Your Own Thing Space, an arts space and cafe in Dalston from 2018 to 2019. We spoke about how such a strong sense of community and a 'scene' was fostered in such a short amount of time.

Bert began by telling me about how the project began.

*'I was walking past the Rose Lipman Building 2 minutes from where I lived, when I saw this crazy sign with Mariah Carey on it. I went in and I ended up with a job there, in what was a little restaurant, run by Neil. When the building was vacant the owner asked me what I was up to and offered me the space to run as a cafe. I only had £900 saved up to do this. After a month I was being asked for the rent which I didn't really have, so I sent the lady a proposal saying that I could do events every week and she was up for it. I was there for 5 months in the end.'*

*'It could only exist because of the commitment of people who were coming every week and telling their friends to come as well'*

I asked about Bert's vision for the space, and how people were brought together in a way largely separated from the promotional cycles of social media, relying far more on word of mouth and human relationships.

*'I just wanted my friends who made good things to be able to show their work, I didn't want a pressured space to do an exhibition...There were shows every single Friday, and it could only exist because of the commitment of people who were coming every week and telling their friends to come as well. (The physical location) 'brought in a lot of people from the local community, with a lot of people coming from the two estates just next to where I live, even where there was originally the preconception of it having "white boy running a cafe in East London vibes".'*



*Do Your Own Thing Space brought weekly events led by young people to an otherwise unused cafe. 'I just wanted my friends who made good things to be able to show their work.'*  
*Photo credit: Bert McLean.*

We finished by discussing how London could change to encourage similar spaces.

*'The circumstances I had were very odd, I managed to needle my way into this space, sort of by fluke. But there should definitely be more financial support for people to do things that benefit other people and the community. There are a lot of spaces that are not being used, empty buildings.'*



## Tom Andrews: Co-Founder of Done London

Tom Andrews co-founded Done London, an independent design and print studio rooted in the BMX, skate, graffiti and rave scenes. It is an example of how organic coming together through creative communities can become sustainable business models.

I asked about how London felt both as a space for creativity and a space to run a small business.

*'Yes I believe it is (a good place to be creative) but it's also highly competitive and it's very easy to become distracted from your own personal mission...'*

*'I'd like to see more spaces like the House of Vans which give great opportunities for people with creative ideas to have a platform on which to showcase their ideas... and more grant schemes made available to small businesses to help them with cash flow so they can keep their focus.'*

*'You've got to have a place to hang out, work on and develop your ideas. I see the internet as a means of promoting what goes on in these spaces, not as a replacement for them.'*

He told me about the availability of physical space in London.

*'The physical space is where the magic happens. Ideas are manifested into reality in these spaces and people are brought together for a common cause...You've got to have a place to hang out, work on and develop your ideas. I see the internet as a means of promoting what goes on in these spaces, not as a replacement for them.'*

*'It has been extremely challenging getting to where we are and it continues to be challenging as we move*

*forward. Real estate in this city is a hot commodity which goes to the highest bidder. Once you find a sacred haven, hold onto it and make the most of it whilst it lasts.'*



*'The physical space is where the magic happens', Tom Andrews of Done London.*  
Photo credit: Done London.

## Rosanna Thompson: Founder of the Friends of Nunhead Reservoir

Rosanna Thompson founded Friends of Nunhead Reservoir in 2015. Nunhead Reservoir is a large green space in South London with panoramic views, widely used by locals for many decades until 2015 despite access through a hole in the fence technically being trespass. Between December 2014 and June 2015, new and larger fences were erected and a permanent security presence was installed including guard dogs. The campaign raised over 7000 signatures in favour of making the reservoir publicly accessible. The group engaged Thames Water at several meetings, although the case was dismissed due to apparent security concerns. The reservoir remains closed to the public.

The reservoir is highly significant as a creative space. It provided a home for many meetings of the musicians and artists who coalesced to form the South London scene in the early 2010's. It was also a significant home for graffiti writers, street artists and other visual artists.

I spoke with Rosanna about the history of the space.

*'Nunhead Reservoir for...perhaps around 75 or 80 years, was used by the more adventurous as public space...The reservoir is underground. Then there is all of this amazing green space on top of it, which is like a playing field, or just beautiful green space to hang out with these amazing panoramic views of London.'*

She told me about the significance of the space and how the campaign grew.

*'I saw it as a microcosm of all of the issues we have regarding public space, that there isn't enough of it, at least in the centre. There are a lot of green spaces, but not many which are wild...I started advertising meetings for people to attend. I hadn't expected all of these young people to get involved...who were even more passionate about the reservoir than I was. They'd spent their teenage years up there.'*

In an essay Rosanna authored at the time of the campaign, she linked the securitization of the space to wider trends of privatising previously public or semi-public space.

*'The increased security around the reservoir is indicative of a trend towards increased securitization of the city, brought about by an increase in 'private/public' spaces in London. (It has been argued) that 'the privatisation of the public realm, through the growth of 'private-public' space, produces over-controlled, sterile places which lack connection to the reality and diversity of the local environment, with the result that they all tend to look the same.'*

*'The increased security around the reservoir is indicative of a trend towards increased securitization of the city.'*

Thames Water often cited security concerns, as there was evidence on one occasion that a manhole cover was compromised. I asked whether it would have been possible to have the space accessible to the public while keeping the reservoir as a water supply secure. *'They could have added a small padlocked building above the manholes and it would have been very safe. The other thing I was arguing, there is another reservoir just next to Brenchley Gardens, very local, directly below the Aquarius Golf Course...if you had enough money to afford a golf club membership then you would be free to do as you like. It seemed like there were double standards.'*

We discussed other examples where green spaces used by the community had been compromised by large corporations. Rosanna mentioned Tidemill Gardens in Deptford. *'A garden run by the community with local groups, open to anyone. Lewisham council sold the space off to private developers. They don't have any green space in that area.'*





Young people enjoying sunset views at Nunhead Reservoir before new security measures were brought in early 2015.  
Photo credit: Jude Woodhead.

## Daryl Nobbs DIY skate spot builder and lead designer with Betongpark

Former professional skateboarder Daryl Nobbs, 29, is a prolific builder of unofficial DIY skate spots, both in London and across Europe. Most recently he was part of a team that turned Hackney Bumps from a semi-abandoned former skatepark into one of the most well frequented skate spots in London. He also works with Norwegian based company Betongpark.

*'When the locals got laid off (other jobs due to Covid-19), a lot of the guys just started working on the skatepark. We're just trying to raise the last bits of money to do the last passes professionally so it will last really well. We've started building some new stuff. Maybe there will be an awkward conversation at some point but everything has been done to such a high standard, I think they'll (the council) be fine with it.'*

*'The reaction from the local community has been so overwhelmingly positive. We've done a huge amount of free skate lessons for local kids, to make sure it's really involving the local community rather than being just another spot for the London skate scene. We've been knocking on doors, leafleting all of the estates around there, trying to get lots of people involved who've maybe never even thought about picking up a skateboard before. At the same time it has attracted some amazing skaters every single day. It means local kids are able to have free lessons and also be exposed to some of the best skateboarders in London every single day. They get inspired and they are learning more, it just has this amazing energy. We get given free power and water from the house of one of the neighbours who has no connection to skateboarding. He just thinks we're amazing.'*

*'We've done a huge amount of free skate lessons for local kids, to make sure it's really involving the local community... leafleting all of the estates around there, trying to get lots of people involved who've maybe never even thought about picking up a skateboard before.'*

LLSB asked about what the community can learn from DIY build projects.

*'The younger kids who might just see what's going on and maybe carry a few bags of concrete, they are learning the merits of being involved and learning that hard work actually pays off, and I think that that is so incredibly valuable in the age we live in, to see something actually coming from hard work, rather than sitting around and complaining.'*

*'Tons of people have picked up so many skills. (Many of those involved with the now bulldozed DIY Spot in South London's Burgess Park) actually know how to use concrete now, and they've been able to help build other spots, a lot of them have got into building parks professionally, myself included. Thanks to doing DIY I've got a career building skateparks and I sit in a room of landscape architects doing the design side. It's pretty good to be taken seriously after quitting school at 15.'*



Daryl Nobbs is a prolific builder of unofficial DIY skate spots. The Hackney Bumps renovation project went to great lengths to engage the local community.

Photo credit: Greg Holland.



*'I was quite involved in the Hullet DIY spot in Copenhagen. Before the park was really grotty and only dodgy stuff happened. We dug a huge hole and built a really big bowl there, which has now existed for 7 or 8 years. It's quadrupled in size and now it's a huge part of the city's skate scene, and has been given the thumbs up from the city.'*

**We also asked Daryl about his more officialised work with Betongpark.**

*'A lot of the things we do with our company is putting skateparks and skate spots in places that are a lot more public than they are traditionally in the UK. We work with a lot of schoolyards, making active spaces that are schoolyards, but also spaces for the community. Rather than waiting for these projects to happen...it helps to be in the conversation earlier than we traditionally would be...we've become this missing link between landscape architects and the skateboarding community.'*



**Broad community involvement at a build day in summer 2020 at Hackney Bumps. Despite being a DIY project, the quality of construction would meet professional standards.**

*Photo credit: Greg Holland.*

## **The Steamship Project Space**

**The Steamship PS is an artist run project space located in a disused pub in Blackwall. Founded in 2017, the 12 resident artists put on exhibitions, performance and theatre events and film nights. We spoke to 5 members of the collective Anna Ciarini, 28, Abigail Burt, 30, Femi OW, 27, Ieva Stakaite, 25 and Johanna Trost, 31.**

**We began by speaking about the philosophy of the Steamship PS and the events they hold.**  
*Anna: 'We invite...musicians and artists to come and make use of the space, for free. The Steamship PS is a place where people can meet, hang out, exchange ideas... We want to open our doors to as many people as possible, expand our network and community...last year we organized '100', a show that included 74 artists from all disciplines and backgrounds.'*

*Johanna: 'We want to offer fresh perspectives as a less established underground art space... to be an inclusive space in a society and art scene that is structurally not very inclusive, whilst still trying to fit into London's art scene just enough to be seen. We are still learning and it's a balancing act for an independent art space, or people with an alternative mindset in general, to utilise the system's premises (to make) a change for the better.'*

**Despite some change, the 'arts community' is still disproportionately from privileged income backgrounds and is often overwhelmingly white. We asked for suggestions to help change this for the better.**

*Johanna: 'The reason for this is, in my eyes, mainly to blame on our unequal society and the elitism of our art scene. Less privileged people who work in the arts will have a really hard time to be seen or heard by a system that values status, wealth and academia more than anything else.'*

*'My suggestion for solutions would be making funding opportunities more accessible, supporting free education and placing less value in university education, actively reaching out to less privileged communities... more inclusivity all around. All of us share the responsibility to change the arts community, even less established places like The Steamship PS.'*

*Abi: 'Enabling more funding for artists to continue courses in higher education. MAs for instance are mainly attended by the privileged, because even the government student loan doesn't cover the fees, so without grants or family support, students are left seeking bank loans, or not sleeping to pay their way through!'*

*Femi: 'More free art resources for people from less privileged backgrounds. Less showcasing of white cis-gendered men. Open forums for aspiring artists to communicate and form collectives.'*

**We spoke about the barriers creativity faces in London with regards to the cost of living.**

*Anna: 'It's hard to find easily accessible funding. We all have very low salaries and try to invest in the space however we can. I often think that if The Steamship PS had access to even a few hundred pounds for each project we have organized it would have made our life so much easier.'*

*Abi: 'The abandoned buildings that artists inhabit to survive and be able to have enough space to make their projects happen, are often in insecure contracts that prevent a really strong and committed development. The strength behind the Steamship has been the duration that we have been able to stay there, giving us time to grow...It is hard for artists to throw themselves into making a space really productive when they know they may have to leave the following month.'*



*'Thinking specifically about improving grassroots spaces, the first step would be recognizing that they are the foundation of tomorrow's arts and culture movements.'*

We closed by asking what creatively and culturally most excited the Steamship PS about London, and what could be changed to make London a better city for creative culture, especially at grassroots level.

*Anna: 'Because it is a big city there's a convergence of ideas, people, goods, opportunities and events. This diversity, all contained in one city, is London's strength and what attracts me to it....Thinking specifically about improving grassroots spaces, the first step would be recognizing that they are the foundation of tomorrow's arts and culture movements.'*

*Abi: 'I totally agree with Anna, can't really sum it up more beautifully. The diversity of London and the vibrancy of the art scene is what draws people to it from all over the world. You feel the total hard working dedication...there is a wonderful solidarity and joy in being part of an art scene that carves out its own space in whatever ways it can.'*

*Femi: 'We need more pools of funding for emerging creatives...more platforms to exhibit and present work...more forums for dialogue...more support networks so that artists can call out organisations that are not treating/paying them fairly.'*



The Steamship's '100' exhibition was an open call, with the aim of highlighting 100 local artists from a diverse range of backgrounds. They were exhibited at the project space, a disused pub in Blackwall.

*Photo credit: Anna Chiarini.*

## Emerging Policies and Alternative Uses of Space

Whilst London has not seen far reaching discussions over alternative uses of space, there have been some significant areas of research. The Centre for London's 2018 report: 'Meanwhile, in London: Making use of London's empty spaces' contains valuable statistical research and analysis.<sup>12</sup>

One key finding was the vast number of potential meanwhile sites in the capital. They estimated that 24,400 commercial properties in London are currently empty, with around half having been unused for more than two years. Additionally they found around 2,700 hectares of land (the equivalent of the Borough of Lambeth) has planning permission to develop, but with construction yet to start. A large proportion of this land will be vacant for over a year.

The report also found that while meanwhile usage was growing and increasingly understood, there were a number of barriers to improving its reach. They found a general lack of mechanisms for facilitating the use of meanwhile space, with only one London council, Barnet, keeping a list of groups interested in vacant spaces. They are also sometimes accidentally discouraged by existing regulations. Currently meanwhile activities are liable for business rates if the space they occupy was previously liable to pay, even if the meanwhile activity is a non-commercial community project. They also found some landowners held misconceptions which would discourage them from being open to meanwhile usage, although attitudes were generally becoming more favourable.

Of course it is important to note that the majority of meanwhile space usage does not largely fall within the realm of 'culture and creativity'. Much is commercial or residential, through guardianship agreements. However there are significant examples of meanwhile space being used for grassroots creativity and culture, and it is becoming a clear avenue for exploration.

There are some issues with meanwhile usage which need noting. Whilst for some types of usage, the relatively short term nature can be positive and lead to innovations, for many users wanting to use spaces in a creative and community orientated way, the lack of long term stability and ability to put down roots will be an issue. When leases come to an end, without astute continuation plans, the networks, communities and associated social and educational benefits built up over years can disappear rapidly.

There is a fine line between the use of meanwhile spaces being a positive one and their usage being a sticking plaster, which provides a public good for too limited a time. For their use to be positive, there must be an ability to provide groups who have proven to use space successfully with more permanent spaces to put their roots down and develop in a more long term manner. This must run concurrently with enough long term planning to allow a smooth transition without networks breaking down. There must be an even balance between meanwhile spaces and more long term rooted spaces, so that the benefits of the flexibility and dynamism of these spaces can be utilised whilst maintaining a rooted community with a sense of continuity.



The Centre for London made a series of recommendations for better using meanwhile space's potential. We would echo their following recommendations:

- 'The Mayor of London should lead the growth of meanwhile use through guidance, investment and use of Greater London Authority (GLA) Group land.'
- 'London boroughs should publish their registers of empty commercial units, and seek to rationalise planning and licensing processes for meanwhile use.'
- 'Government should provide stronger incentives through tax and regulatory systems for community use of "stuck space" and underused space.'

### A Note on Skate-Stoppers

Skate-stoppers are a prevalent feature of the modern urban landscape, designed specifically to prevent skateboarding. Their increasing occurrence sits alongside other trends that make community based and creative usage of space, especially in the financialised centre, increasingly discouraged.

Often referred to as 'hostile architecture', anti-skateboarding devices or 'skate stoppers' often take the forms of metal caps or bars placed on ledges or benches, or grooves placed at the top or bottom of stairs, designed specifically to prevent objects from being skated. Since their origins in the 1980's, they have gained such prominence that the vast majority of architectural features in the centre of London include them.

Whilst the space is often privately owned and landowners have the legal right to include anti-skateboarding devices, placed alongside high usages of private security, they are a clear statement that the centre of London is not welcoming for creative usage by communities. For many young people, skateboarding and similar urban arts are their only way of engaging with the architecture of their wealthy city centre, so they are an exclusionary measure. There has been a growing debate about the use of hostile architecture, and many would disagree with the view that skateboarding in the city centre has significant negative effects and needs preventing.

Lorraine Gamman, professor of design at Central St Martins, commented that '*spikes are part of an outdated fortress aesthetic not welcome in communities, where there is recognition that urban design needs to be inclusive.*'<sup>13</sup>

In recent years a number of cities have embraced skateboarding in certain public spaces and have worked alongside groups of skateboarders and designers to make their public space more friendly for skateboarding. For example the city of Bordeaux has worked alongside skateboarding consultancy firm Dedication on a number of projects as part of the city's master plan for skateboarding. This included making the Place de la République and Terrasse Général Koenig more suitable for skateboarders through subtle redesigns.<sup>14</sup>

LLSB would support increased debate around the use of anti-skateboarding devices, increased willingness of figures of authority and institutions to question their installation and the encouragement of a number of suitable sites of experimentation where anti-skateboarding devices can be removed, as has been trialled in many European cities.<sup>15</sup>



Two examples of anti-skateboarding devices. Critics view their usage as an aggressive tool attempting to prevent creative interpretation of the city by different communities.

Photo credit: Will Harmon.



## Concluding Thoughts

8 years ago, LLSB was founded as public frustration mounted with the way London could disregard well established community spaces. Whilst much progress has been made at the Southbank Undercroft, the general climate of disregard for organic community and creative spaces has shown few signs of changing, despite continuous pressure from a wide variety of groups. Although relatively few have been interviewed, clear patterns emerge. Whilst London can be seen as a space of opportunity, it presents many frustrations for those wishing to undertake creative initiatives and grow spaces in an organic and community orientated way. The challenges and barriers London presents are so strong that many feel driven to move elsewhere.

London has long been a world leader across many creative practices, and has as much potential as any other global city for nurturing world class creativity into the future. Of equal or perhaps greater importance, community based creative spaces can improve the quality of life for huge numbers of people, providing opportunities to those marginalised and increasing cross cultural understanding. However the current climate of London, especially the high cost of living and the over financialisation of space, risks damaging the future of grassroots and community based creative culture in London for decades to come.

This report should be seen as a call for change, rather than a statement of negativity. It is clear many have found great opportunity in London and there is much to celebrate. However there are clear systemic problems that need addressing urgently.

We would like to be able to take this research further, to identify more specific opportunities for improving the situation in London. Given the depth this report is currently able to take, our recommendations will be more general, with the hope of exploring them further with stakeholders, decision makers and the wider public.

These recommendations are for changes that will allow ordinary people, operating outside of large institutions, to build the best possible future for London in terms of free, creative and community based space.

## Rent prices must be addressed.

Almost every interviewee suggested that rent prices, as well as high costs of living, must be addressed for London to remain a creatively competitive city. A large number of creative young people who have a great deal of potential to offer London, instead are being forced to move away. The inflated housing market would leave any normal person choosing to live in London with little time and energy for creative or community based work. It also gives those from wealthy backgrounds a huge advantage when pursuing careers in the arts, as they are able to work creatively in a cultural capital without initial income worries. As one interviewee said, 'the housing system is killing the citizen.'

This also affects artistic venues or potential artistic venues who have far less security due to the rapid process of gentrification. They often have to move regularly and will struggle to put down roots.

Solutions to this stretch beyond the scope of LLSB, however we believe that policies such as rent controls should be vigorously explored with change seen as a necessity.

## More concern must be taken to the longevity of organic space.

Community based creative spaces that develop organically must be allowed to exist for far longer so the full extent of their benefits can reach the wider community. Whilst there is a role for meanwhile sites to play, successful initiatives established on meanwhile sites should be given help to find new homes when the land use changes again.

Beyond this, councils should give greater protection to community spaces when sites are cited for development. They should be unafraid to evaluate the merits of any particular redevelopment and act vigorously when there is concern for the long term cultural life and spaces in a given local area.

## There is a need for 'blank slate spaces'.

Blank slate spaces are sites which do not prescribe a usage to those who originally come to the space. They may be totally empty sites or have existing architecture, however they allow their users to build or use as they see fit. They may become allotments, DIY built skateboard spots, community exercise spaces or something entirely different. Their usage is developed from the bottom up and any 'infrastructure' is community built.

Southbank Undercroft, as an example, was 'found' by early skateboarders in the 1970's and its culture was built from the bottom up. The Undercroft was designed as an architectural experiment, a space without pre-prescribed usage.

Similarly the Nomadic Gardens to some extent operated as a 'blank slate space', as Jimmy Wheale described. 'The main vision of the gardens was to be a community empowerment and development space. It was important to just say 'yes' (to anyone who came with an idea for the space), however bonkers the idea was... This was crucial to letting it be organic.'



Blank slate sites are hugely important for the development of creative cultures and organic movements. They allow young communities the independence to develop as their own needs and wishes for expression necessitate, and create forward looking and progressive cultures which are often exciting and exert a highly positive influence on the mainstream.

London's highly financialised treatment of space must not squeeze out such possibilities. Instead, action must be taken to specifically facilitate the existence of such spaces.

Where local authorities have access to land, they should consider either leaving sites as blank slate spaces, or designing blank slate spaces into redevelopments through architectural and planning innovation. The Southbank Undercroft was a successful architectural experiment in this sense, yet there have been few comparable spaces following this in London.

Given the extent to which land in London is financialised and securitised, LLSB would support the enabling of one to two flagship 'deliberate blank slate spaces'. These would be spaces with minimal architectural prescription or predesign and would not necessarily require amenities beyond local waterpoints and toilets, which could be constructed communally. There would be no activities prescribed for the space but instead a large scope for the community to build in the space as they see fit. This would allow local people to create the spaces most appropriate for them. Depending on the land found, guarantees of permanence may or may not be possible. If the space is meanwhile, there should be some guarantees of local authority support for finding follow on space if the first iteration is successful. They would need to be in effect managed by the community themselves, with a few basic rules to ensure they are used positively and without discrimination or exploitation. The variety of potential uses would be endless.

**A number of suitable sites should be identified for the removal of anti-skateboarding devices as part of a London wide experiment.**

A steering group of skateboarders could work alongside a team from the GLA to identify a number of suitable spaces where skateboarding would not be a risk to the public. Some sites may be publicly owned, and with the support of the GLA, private landowners may also be encouraged to take part.

**When consulting communities, place a far greater emphasis on person to person dialogue.**

Whether the consultation is undertaken regarding a potential development, or whether just to gauge the feeling towards public space in the area, prolonged in-real-life consultation has great advantages over online.

Rather than undertaking one off consultations, people should be free to return to the same accessible space for continued discussion day after day.

Needless to say, consultation should be done with the intention of properly listening to and understanding the views of the local community, and then feeling free to modify any plans, having taken the community's views on board.

**Councils must not be reliant on campaigns and should instead be proactive when community space is threatened.**

If councils are not proactive, as the ability to campaign is a privilege, inequalities with regards to community and creative space will only become more entrenched.

**Developers should be strongly encouraged to consider meanwhile usage in pre development phase.**

Whilst meanwhile usage has pitfalls, as has been discussed, it must be considered given the current highly financialised climate within London. To help meanwhile usage to bring the most positivity, councils can help play an encouraging and enabling role. Councils should keep registers of groups interested in using meanwhile space and should be given powers to strongly encourage developers to allow this in situations where this is reasonable.

**More encouragement should be given to community involvement in placemaking.**

Community members can be encouraged to protect, support and improve their own local public sphere in a number of ways.

The number of small grants available, with values of £2000 and lower, should be increased to make small scale local projects more easily realisable. There should be greater discussion of public space issues and placemaking in the education system and changes to liability laws could be considered to remove a common objection of private landowners to place making initiatives.





Nelly Mayele landing a hardflip at a 2014 jam organised in resistance to the Undercroft's proposed destruction.

*Photo credit: Sam Ashley.*



LLSB activist and local skateboarder Savannah Keenan.

*Photo credit: Jenna Selby.*





The Southbank as seen from Waterloo Bridge.  
*Photo credit: LLSB.*

## A Long Live Southbank report

Direction and author: *Louis Woodhead*

Editor: *Stuart Maclure*

Design: *Gavin Polding*

Special thanks: *Fiona Williams, Matt Nelmes, George Toland, Henry Edwards-Wood*

Photography: *Rich West, Jenna Selby, Sam Ashley, Nicholas Constant, Stéphane Decool, Rob Ashby, Bryan Gittings, Dominic Marley, Lee Kirby, Jeeba, Ben Stewart, Bitcoin Baj, Nomadic Gardens, Natasha Quarmby, Sam Mead, Andrea Rosso, FM, Bert McLean, Done London, Jude Woodhead, Greg Holland, Anna Chiarini and Will Harmon.*



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<sup>8</sup> Flow Associates Research commenced in 2019. Data collection is ongoing.

<sup>9</sup> Importantly the space is cleaned by Southbank Centre staff

<sup>10</sup> Resisting relocation and reconceptualising authenticity: the experiential and emotional values of the Southbank Undercroft, London, UK 2018 by Pollyanna Ruiz formally reported how users reported far more enthusiasm for using Southbank than more regulated skate parks.

<sup>11</sup> Flow Associates 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile in London: Making use of London's empty spaces. Nicolas Bosetti and Tom Colthorpe, The Centre for London, 2018. <https://www.centreforlondon.org/publication/meanwhile-use-london/>

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<sup>14</sup> Dedication, Designers of skateable public spaces. Website available in English and French. <https://www.dedication.website/projets>

<sup>15</sup> Numerous projects in Bordeaux, for example the removal of anti-skateboarding devices at Terrasse Général Koenig. <https://www.dedication.website/projets/terrasse-gnral-koenig-bordeaux-mriadeck-2020>