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**Urban Inequalities and Democratic
Disenchantment in Europe:
Emerging Lessons from Fairville**



The Bartlett
Development Planning Unit

Focus On

Urban Inequalities and Democratic Disenchantment in Europe: Emerging Lessons from Fairville

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On boat dwelling and displacement pressures, a view from the Lea River (Credit: Julie Plouhinec, 2024).



The Impact of Urban Inequalities on Democracy and Its Crisis

If the development agenda of the 20th Century has been characterised by rapid urbanisation and poverty reduction programmes, that of the 21st Century is arguably defined by growing inequalities (World Inequality Report, 2022). Numerous scholars contend that the steep rise in the ratio between the top one per cent and median incomes stems from a type of globalisation that has prioritised financialised urbanisation and private property at the expense of universal access to essential public services (see, inter alia, Rolnik, 2019). In practice, this trajectory has resulted in a concentration of inequalities

through processes of territorial exclusion and segregation, which manifest as barriers to accessing basic social goods such as decent and affordable housing, public transport, dignified employment, healthcare, education, and protection against climate- and health-related risks (Yap, Levy and Cociña, 2021).

As inequalities grow across all domains of social provision – the so-called urban polycrisis (Madden, 2023) – they profoundly affect how citizens experience political structures in their everyday urban lives. Across most political systems, from democracies to authoritarian regimes, growing inequalities are catalysing the disenchantment of residents and communities, and contributing to increasing political polarisation. Indeed, some have even begun to question whether greater

equality is possible, casting doubt on the very foundations of liberal democratic societies (Therborn, 2020).

Against this setting, the Horizon Europe-funded Fairville¹ project, led by Agnès Deboulet at Université Paris 8/CNRS, seeks to reformulate how we understand urban inequalities and address the challenges they pose to democracy in Europe. Fairville, also known as ‘Facing inequalities and democratic challenges through co-production in cities’, does this by intervening in predominantly low-income urban neighbourhoods through the action-research agendas of eight Fairville Labs. These labs engage in multiple modes to build new approaches for how communities, researchers, activists and local institutions may co-produce more equitable urban outcomes.

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1 | Facing inequalities and democratic challenges through co-production in cities (Fairville).

Fairville is grounded in the belief that existing participatory frameworks and instruments used across various levels of governance fall short in both understanding and addressing the complexity of urban inequalities.

Co-production as a Means and as an End

Fundamentally, Fairville is grounded in the belief that existing participatory frameworks and instruments used across various levels of governance fall short in both understanding and addressing the complexity of urban inequalities. Practices to reimagine participation within the boundaries of existing representative liberal democracies have served mainly to confirm decision-making structures, rather than foster a more profound democratisation of urban governance (Fung and Wright, 2001). Thus, although meaningful participation is a necessary component of co-production, alone it is considered insufficient to achieve the transformative promise of co-production.

Noteworthy in the development of this collective stance has been the work of epistemic dialogue across the large programme consortium, encompassing academics, CSOs and activists from 18 organisations across eight countries. And whilst the work of defining co-production and its multiple localisations remains an area of ongoing activity within the programme, Fairville is broadly working with what it terms a *community-driven co-production approach*, or 'co-production as a form of community mobilisation around alternative urban strategies, policies and projects through engagements with community facilitators, NGOs and Universities.'²

As Fairville foregrounds co-production both as a process and as an outcome, it works from within the hypothesis that centring the co-production and co-design of research processes, data collection, knowledge production and action-research, is a critical step in redressing the long-term impacts of multi-faceted inequalities on democratic participation. Accordingly, Fairville deploys co-production practices in six European cities as strategies of socio-spatial justice aimed at testing renewed planning policies and service delivery practices. Two additional Labs – in North and West Africa - act to provide an international comparative perspective and provocation for what is a largely European-focused conversation.

Eight Fairville Labs Experimenting with Co-production

In this context, the project focuses on three key urban challenges: the unequal environmental impacts of climate change and urbanisation, the regeneration of public housing leading to the displacement of marginalised groups, and the risks and vulnerabilities tied to climate-related hazards such as flooding, including health and environmental inequalities.

A map showing the location of the eight Fairville labs



² | This definition is part of a multi-entry glossary developed within Work Package 2. A version of the glossary will be included in a forthcoming publication (2026). This definition contrasts with a more 'classic' definition of co-production linked to forms of collaborative engagements between civil society and state institutions ('state' in the broad sense of public authorities), referred to in the glossary as 'institutional co-production'.

Unequal environmental impacts

Western Attica, Greece. In Greece's most disadvantaged urban area (dubbed Athens' backyard), the lab co-produces strategies with regional authorities to tackle environmental degradation, industrial pollution, landfill exposure and the compounded risks of flooding and wildfires.

Giza, Egypt. Focusing on Mansheyat Dahshur's deteriorating waste systems, this lab works with local authorities and communities to co-produce inclusive action plans to address pollution, improving waste governance and strengthening participatory environmental initiatives.

Planning and housing inequalities

Călărași, Romania. This lab engages Roma communities in two marginalised neighbourhoods to co-produce strategies that address housing and service inequalities, testing inclusive urban practices in the context of urban shrinkage and advanced marginality.

Berlin, Germany. At Rathausblock, the lab investigates a model of co-production through activism, where civil society and city authorities collaboratively shape spatial infrastructures, promoting commons-based planning and urban justice practices.

Marseille, France. Two labs experiment with multiscalar co-production involving civil society and municipal actors, aiming to ensure affordable housing and socially just ecological transition across different neighbourhoods and stakes in public space.

Risk and participatory governance

Brussels, Belgium. Residents in flood-prone Gray Street co-develop responses to recurring disasters. The lab seeks to strengthen participatory governance, foster institutional trust, and propose citizen-led strategies to manage flooding in an increasingly urbanised valley.

Dakar, Senegal. In response to chronic suburban flooding, this lab supports co-production at scale through participatory mapping and community savings funds, offering a reflective 'mirror' for European strategies on environmental and infrastructural justice.

London, UK. The London lab has opened up multiple theatres of action in order to pilot and deepen engagement on three areas centred in the Just Space Network 2021 Community-led Recovery Plan.

What Have We Learned So Far?

By September 2025, the Fairville research programme will enter its final phase (the programme spans January 2023 to December 2026). After two and a half years of collaborative work, Labs and researchers are focusing on the production of a range of outputs and deliverables. Among these, the blog series hosted on the Fairville website³ presents lab-centred stories and initiatives, which provide localised insights into this large, multi-partner⁴ and multi-faceted action research programme.

In what follows, we zoom in on three specific processes in which the DPU team has played an active role. These three entry points illustrate the diverse ways in which Fairville has been exploring the links between inequalities, democracy, and co-production—working at various scales (from the neighbourhood to the city and the region) and through diverse modalities (including systematic reviews and primary data collection, localised action research, and advocacy).

3 | See: <https://www.fairville-eu.org/blog-fairville>.

4 | Fairville research partners include: Aix-Marseille Université, APPUI, Attica Region, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Commonsplace, École des Grands Ensembles Bruxellois (EGEB), ICLEI Europe, Ixelles Municipality, Just Space, Knowledge and Innovation (K&I), Laboratoire Architecture, Ville, Urbanisme, Environnement (LAVUE), National Society for Community Engagement (NSCE), The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), Un Centre Ville Pour Tous, Urban Regeneration Group (UREG) and UrbaSen.

A Framework for Understanding Inequalities and Democracy Through Meaningful Co-Production

A first entry point relates to work undertaken to develop a conceptual framework linking inequalities, participation and democratic quality. This synthesis draws on an impressive breadth of research conducted across the Fairville project, combining extensive analysis of quantitative datasets on inequality and democracy across Europe with rich qualitative insights from diverse local contexts. The result is a compelling synthesis of ‘hard’ (systematic review) and ‘soft’ (experiential) evidence, offering a conceptual framework of how inequality and democratic participation intersect. This work was carried out as part of Work Package 1 and led by Fairville member Knowledge and Innovation (K&I) with CNRS and DPU collaboration. Based on a systematic literature review on inequalities, the analysis of 68 biographies of engagement and 25 additional interviews, four key patterns emerge, summarised in the table below.

A key lesson emerging from Fairville is that co-production can either reinforce or challenge inequalities, depending on how it is designed and implemented. This highlights the importance of critical, reflexive and inclusive approaches within the Fairville Labs (and beyond), because who participates is shaped by existing power structures. Therefore, co-production must be attuned to intersectionality and actively seek to redistribute power, rather than merely inviting communities to participate in urban governance. Moreover, since inequality itself can act as a catalyst for engagement, particularly when communities mobilise around shared experiences of exclusion, we should recognise and support these grassroots initiatives, building alliances that can sustain and amplify them. Finally, and following this last point, the transformative potential of co-production lies in its ‘scaling’: embedding co-production into structures so that it becomes a routine and systemic practice. This directly aligns with the DPU-led Work Package 5 focus on the multiple forms of scaling discussed in the final section below.

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Pattern	Observation	Implication
1. Inequalities may discourage engagement	Structural barriers such as racism and lack of trust, undermine people’s agency, especially for already marginalised groups.	For co-production processes to be inclusive they need to recognise power asymmetries in who participates and how.
2. Inequalities may motivate engagement	Experiences of exclusion, especially when intersectional, can also trigger mobilisation and political organising, often via collective or place-based strategies.	For co-production to address inequalities and build equality it needs to support community-led mobilisation.
3. Engagement may fail to reduce inequality	Participatory mechanisms can reproduce existing hierarchies or create new exclusions when not critically designed.	Co-production must embed accountability mechanisms to avoid reinforcing inequalities and democratic disenchantment.
4. Engagement may reduce inequalities	When resourced, recognised and sustained, co-production can empower communities and foster more inclusive outcomes.	Co-production, when meaningfully designed, resourced and sustained, can enhance democracy and equality.



Queens Market, Newham - Street markets are essential infrastructure for a caring city (Credit: Julie Plouhinec, 2024).

Grounding Fairville: The London Lab story

Alongside cross-cutting research on the key themes central to Fairville – inequality, democracy and co-production – Fairville has been working through concrete local action-research projects/co-production alliances in all eight Fairville Labs. In London, the Fairville project has provided scope to consolidate and evolve a longstanding research, teaching and advocacy partnership between the DPU and [Just Space](#).

Active since 2007, Just Space is a city-wide network of around 80 voluntary and community groups working to (re)shape planning policy at London's regional, borough and neighbourhood scales. Aligned around a common commitment to amplifying community knowledge and participation in planning, alongside a shared diagnosis that London's diverse communities and neighbourhoods are poorly served by the city's dominant growth-first development model, Just Space and the DPU have been collaborating actively since 2013. This collaboration has materialised via the active

participation of individual academics in Just Space-led initiatives such as the co-production of alternative, community-led planning documents (see [Just Space 2016](#); [2021](#); [2024](#)), as well as through an annually renewed MSc-level [teaching initiative](#), which connects students of Urban Development Planning with community groups struggling for planning justice across London.

Fairville represents a further maturation of this relationship, with DPU researchers engaged in an advisory and supportive capacity to a programme of action-research activities designed and led by Just Space through the London Lab. Designed to test pathways towards meaningful, community-led co-production in London - and bring lessons and learnings from their experience into dialogue with Fairville's wider European networks, the London Lab's activities have coalesced around three interrelated workstreams – care, food and co-production of the built environment – centred in the [Just Space 2021 Community-led Recovery Plan](#). To take three examples:

- In the London Borough of Hackney, the Lab has worked with Equal Care Cooperative, a cooperative social care provider, and Clapton Commons, a community-interest company (CIC) in Lower Clapton, to evidence and share the unmapped value of autonomous community spaces in creating resilient care networks and promoting food security.
- In the London Borough of Newham, the Lab is working with the campaign group Friends of Queens Market to engage with traders and market managers and advance a call for the co-production of public policies that not only protect Queens Market's social function but also produce a model of shared management and community stewardship.
- In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the Lab has worked alongside the Save Brick Lane Campaign, a diverse community-led coalition seeking to contest a public-private-led development of the Truman Brewery site and put pressure on the Council to activate opportunities for co-production within existing public planning and management functions.

Whilst often motivated by pragmatic, opportunistic readings of the challenges and opportunities opened by London's evolving and fragmented planning landscape, the London Lab's activities are all linked by a common commitment to reclaiming co-production from the many vacuous, 'co-washed' forms at play in the city. Considered too important a concept to cede, the Lab, with support from DPU Fairville staff and MSc Urban Development Planning students, has sought to (re)define and enact meaningful co-production as a radical practice of *commoning* land, property and decision-making power (the right to regulate) towards the production of a more just and caring city. As one Just Space member engaged in the project noted:

'Co-production is flavour of the month. Language is open to interpretation, but we know what we want, which is: control, not individually, but collectively over the means of production. We want to involve as many people as possible, and we want no more ennui. And that comes from common ownership.'

Threading together these multiple strands of neighbourhood activity and reconnecting with Just Space's founding objective to 'act as a voice for Londoners at grass-roots level during the formulation of London's major planning strategy' (Just Space, no date), 2025-26 will see the Fairville's London Lab and DPU orientate our joint activity back towards the city-scale, supporting Just Space's broader efforts to influence Mayor Sadiq Khan's Review of the London Plan – a 20-25 year Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London.

In June 2025, the DPU and the London Lab co-produced a [joint representation](#) with Just Space calling on the Mayor's team to give due consideration to the idea of the caring city as a 'reasonable alternative' (MHCLG, 2024, p.12) plan for London. Anticipating an opportunity to present a vision for a more caring London, one oriented around a rejuvenated urban commons, the challenge for Just Space, Fairville's London Lab and the DPU is to further grow a coalition of interest around this concept and produce a set of evidence-based demands and propositions with the potential to transform London planning. This objective will be central to the design of this year's teaching collaboration between Just Space, the London Lab and the DPU's MSc Urban Development Planning programme.

The aim of Fairville is to explore and enable pathways through which isolated initiatives with grassroots organisations, aimed at improving living conditions in cities, can be recognised, consolidated, supported or, even, become routine practices of urban democratic governance and planning.

Scaling Co-Production Practices In, To and Beyond the City

Echoing the London Lab's evolved orientation towards city-wide advocacy for a more equitable, democratic and co-produced – *caring* - city, the Fairville programme comprises a sizeable advocacy component. Led by the DPU, with the collaboration of the CNRS, ICLEI-Europe, Fairville Labs, community and academic partners, this project strand seeks to explore pathways for embedding and/or scaling co-production processes.

This cross-Lab Work Package 5 builds on the premise that collaborative practices in urban action and research are developing at local levels and in transnational networks, reflecting broader shifts in the relationships between state and non-state actors. These alliances and co-production practices with grassroots organisations often act as instruments of urban democratisation and more equitable public policies. However, too often, they remain as pilots or are limited to the neighbourhood scale. The aim of Fairville, therefore, is to explore and enable pathways through which isolated and/or exceptional co-production initiatives with grassroots organisations, aimed at improving living conditions in cities, can be recognised, consolidated, supported or, even, in some instances, become routine practices of urban democratic governance and planning.

Following a similar synthetic effort by Work Package 1 in the analysis described above, an initial grounded diagnostic with the Fairville Labs confirmed that, across contexts, attempts to 'do things differently' face a multitude of challenges. These can broadly be synthesised as located within the state (at different scales), within community structures, and at the interface between these entities.

Identified barriers include institutional opposition to ceding power, fragmented governance structures, unsupportive regulatory frameworks,

lack of resources (within state structures and amongst collectives), and other challenges connected to the fostering of collaboration between diverse stakeholders with often competing intent or cultures of organising. Opportunities for co-production practices do exist, albeit constrained by a context marked by democratic backsliding and growing austerity politics. Connected to the various entry points, challenges, and understandings of the tactical rationales for scaling within the Labs, opportunities for co-production and its scaling are often located on the flip side of identified barriers.

Over the next 18 months, action research within this strand of Fairville activities aims to work synergistically across three approaches:

- Analytical deepening of the conditions that may catalyse the embedding or scaling of diverse co-production practices.
- Networking activities to foster exchange, support mutual learning, build solidarities, and strengthen burgeoning communities of practice around the co-production of more equitable and democratic cities. Such an approach is seen as critical to helping overcome the fragmented landscapes of community networks and mobilisation and fostering shared alternative narratives of city-making in the EU context.
- Advocacy campaigns and policy recommendations to facilitate the recognition, consolidation and scaling of co-production practices.

To operationalise this multi-faceted process, the DPU and its partners have developed a transnational learning platform under the anchoring name of 'Dialogues in Co-production', with a schedule of curated, web-based and in-person Dialogues. Whilst web-based interactions have focused on exploring the mediating work of academics and 'sympathetic' professionals in oiling co-production processes, four additional webinars will be held monthly from January to April 2026. These will explore in turn mechanisms for: *grounding/establishing* co-production practices (the pre-conditions for establishing co-production alliances); *resourcing/investing* in co-production practices (across time, supporting both the construction of co-production alliances and the implementation of co-production strategies/proposals, etc.); regulating in favour of meaningful co-production; and mechanisms to defend, secure and/or enforce meaningful co-production, recognising the work involved in maintaining co-production gains, and routinising co-production as a practice.

Complementing these online exchanges, Fairville is convening several in-person Dialogues, which are essential in consolidating networks of solidarity in favour of co-production and facilitating the construction of common advocacy strategies. Specifically, a vital advocacy strand is emerging around the exchange and consolidation of recommendations for alternative housing and habitat solutions in the context of Europe's housing emergency. As the EU embarks on developing its Affordable Housing Plan – led by the new EU Housing and Energy Commissioner, Fairville has been developing a series of events to facilitate exchange and the construction of clear proposals towards more equitable, sustainable and democratic approaches. The next step in this endeavour is scheduled for 4-5 October to coincide with Habitat Day and entails an important in-person Dialogue in Roubaix, France - a key European epicentre in the battle for other ways of doing regeneration and housing.

How To Get Involved

As Fairville activities gain momentum towards the finishing line, we invite you to follow our activities and get in touch if you are interested in learning more or getting involved. You can follow the project on LinkedIn to stay updated on the Dialogues and other upcoming events. New and long-standing DPU partners are part of this process, so watch this space as we continue building momentum for equality, democracy and co-production in cities.

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Head On

Julio D Dávila participated in a **one-day colloquium and field visit in the Colombian port city of Barranquilla** on the potential for socially mixed development in newly built urban neighbourhoods. Organised by Grupo Argos, a leader in large-scale housing projects and the agency coordinating the design and construction of Ciudad Mallorquín, the event brought together architects, urban designers, planners, economists and developers. Ciudad Mallorquín is a vast mixed-use development of 16,000 low, middle and high-income housing units, complemented by sports and commercial services, educational facilities and interconnected green spaces. The discussions, which also featured DPU alumni Diana Cantillo (MSc DAP 2015) and Ricardo Plata (MSc UED 2018), examined the benefits of creating high-quality collective and green spaces for middle and low-income households close to new high-income areas. In Latin America's highly segregated cities, such initiatives often face political criticism, yet they present valuable models for building more tolerant, diverse and liveable urban futures.

Julio D Dávila with DPU alumni Diana Cantillo (MSc DAP 2015) and Ricardo Plata (MSc UED 2018) during their visit to Barranquilla (Credit: Daniel Sarabia, 2025).



Top: Collective amenities within a low-income housing area in Ciudad Mallorquín, where flats range from 53 to 57 m² (Credit: Julio D Dávila, 2025).



Left: Cycle routes and leisure spaces integrated into low-income housing neighbourhoods in Ciudad Mallorquín, Barranquilla (Credit: Julio D Dávila, 2025).



In July, the DPU hosted **a roundtable with staff and a select group of alumni working in the international development and aid sector**, convened by Alexandra Panman, Daniel Oviedo and Barbara Lipietz. The discussion was prompted by major shifts in the sector this year, including the closure of USAID, significant cuts to overseas development assistance (ODA) by the UK and other major donors, and the United States' announcement at the UN that it no longer subscribes to the Sustainable Development Goals. Held under Chatham House rules to encourage open and candid exchange, the event brought together alumni from multilateral organisations, bilateral aid agencies, NGOs and civil society groups. The roundtable was structured around three main topics: what has happened, and where is it going? How should current and future alumni working in the sector navigate this change? And what should the university's role be in shaping debates? A complete summary of the discussion and emerging action points will be available on the DPU website.

Several DPU students participated in this year's **Bartlett's Building a Better Future (BABF) Consultancy Project**. This employability initiative brings together undergraduate and postgraduate students from across the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, forming multidisciplinary teams to tackle live industry briefs set by leading organisations, including Sutton Council, Hoare Lea, Gensler, Buro Happold, and Ealing Council. The briefs address some of the most pressing challenges in the built environment today, from reimagining London's town centres to enabling the future of sentient buildings and designing for psychological safety. Throughout the project, students collaborated with peers from diverse degree backgrounds and gained insights from industry professionals. At the end of the project, teams presented their innovative solutions to their host organisations and a panel of judges. This scenario-based learning experience offered students practical, real-world exposure, helping them develop essential skills, broaden their professional networks, and enhance their career prospects.

Bartlett students' consultancy project 2025 (Credit: unknown).



Research

In May 2025, a week of arts-based research took place in Borgo Mezzanone, Foggia, Italy, led by members of the Inappropriate collective, including DPU's Stefano Mastromarino and Camillo Boano, working with artist Luigi Coppola and the Chilean-Argentinian collective La Escuela Nunca. Within the context of **the REFRAME project**, the field visit brought together speculative design, critical spatial practices and collective reflection to examine the layered realities of a settlement of agricultural workers built on a former NATO airstrip. The activities were built on previous engagements through Azioni apripista, which had initiated community clean-ups and

tree planting, and extended into new terrain through *Las cosas que perdimos*, a symbolic construction of an aircraft using salvaged materials sourced within the settlement. Rather than aiming for fixed outcomes, the week was conceived as an open-ended inquiry into displacement, memory and spatial production. Daily workshops, site visits and communal gatherings fostered dialogic modes of thinking and doing, while questioning the boundaries between art, architecture and displacement research. By embedding themselves in the rhythms and negotiations of the site, participants explored how artistic methods can generate new conceptual tools for understanding contested spaces, particularly in contexts shaped by migration, marginalisation and planned destruction under EU policy frameworks. More information is available at: inappropriate.com.

Participants with a symbolic aircraft art installation built from salvaged materials in Borgo Mezzanone (Credit: Frédérique Gélinas, 2025).



The YUP Project explored how young people's areas of interest in urban development and modes of participation were strongly influenced by gender.

A report led by DPU for the [Co-producing Digital Platforms for Youth Inclusive Urban Governance](#) (YUP) Project explored how young people's areas of interest in urban development and modes of participation were strongly influenced by gender. Girls and young women were more concerned with issues of mental health and with the need for safe spaces in cities. They were also more subject to family and community controls on their city-shaping activities. Research found that despite their strong interest in urban issues, young people face significant barriers to engagement in formal governance processes. Many lack direct opportunities to participate in decision-making, particularly those from groups such as refugees (in Lebanon) or migrants (in Indonesia), and those from economically disadvantaged communities. In Lebanon, a deep distrust of government institutions has led many young people to become disengaged from traditional governance structures, turning instead to social media and grassroots activism as alternative spaces for civic engagement, and working with non-governmental, community and

religious initiatives. While government-led youth participation initiatives in Indonesia exist, they often fail to align with young people's priorities, leaving them to seek more informal and self-organised channels for activism and advocacy. Julian Walker, one of the authors and School Director, said, 'This report presents findings from the YUP Project about how young people in four cities in Lebanon and Indonesia are taking action to shape their cities. The report highlights the creativity and active engagement of young people on urban issues. However, notably, a key finding in common across the four cities is a low level of interest in working with municipal government. This challenge will be a jumping-off point for the next phase of the project, which aims to support young people to co-produce urban digital platforms with key city stakeholders. I would like to thank our partners Kota Kita, CatalyticAction and the SHM Foundation, with special thanks to our funders Fondation Botnar.' Read the report [here](#).

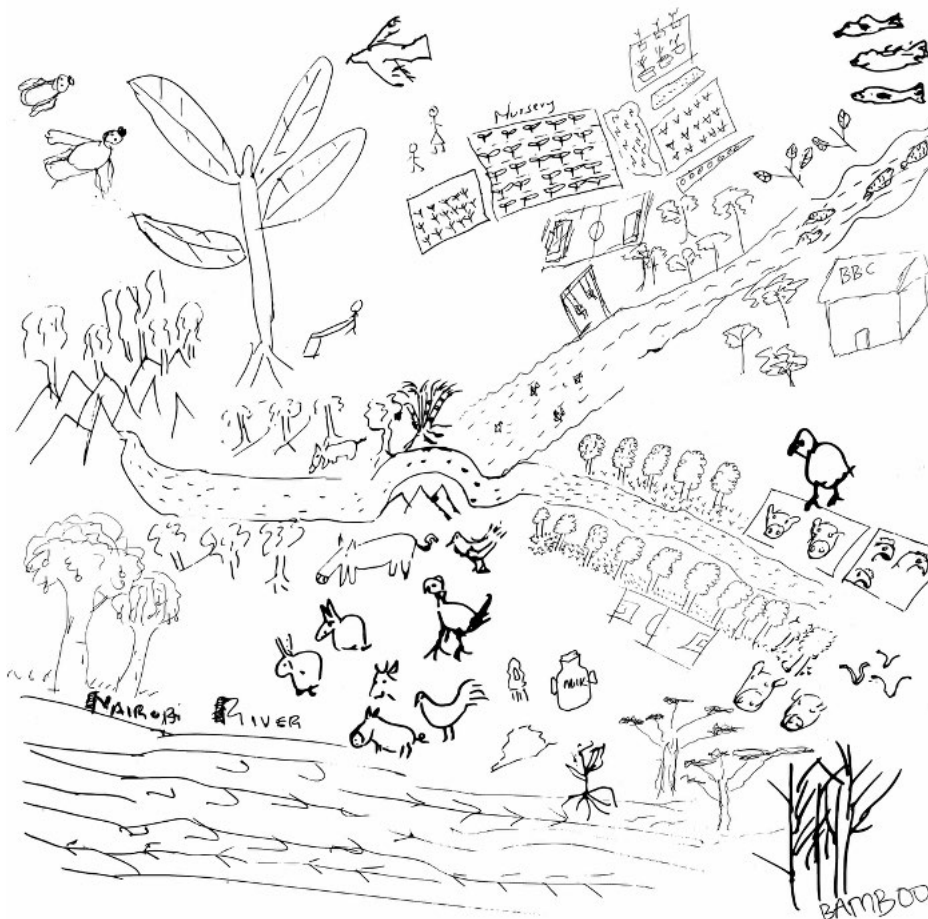


YUP Team members trialling the questionnaire in Denpasar, Indonesia (Credit: Julian Walker).

Liza Griffin and George Reville (Project Lead, Open University) have been awarded £35,000 from the **Open University's Open Societal Challenges funding scheme** for their project 'Sonic postcards for public and policy engagement'. The project aims to embed innovative, arts-based methods into UK coastal decision-making by co-developing processes and protocols that better establish arts-based engagement to support policymaking frameworks. Using oral history, environmental listening and artistic approaches, policy engagements will be evaluated with the goal of strengthening community connection to place, supporting heritage and promoting environmental awareness. Conducted within the context of participation in coastal planning strategy and policy, the work seeks to inform decision-making that is more open, sensitive to place and environmentally attuned.

The research team from the action research project **Listen, Learn and Leap**, led by Jordana Ramalho (Project Lead) and Pascale Hofmann (Co-Investigator), has launched the *Nature+People map*. This platform compiles almost 100 initiatives in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, many led by residents of informal settlements. This documentation builds on the project's earlier contribution to DPU News, which advocated for Southern Perspectives on Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Resilience in East Africa. It offers a living archive of community-led environmental practices, local knowledge and experiences to strengthen climate resilience. Environmental action in these rapidly urbanising contexts is inherently uncertain and dynamic, and often resists conventional categorisation. From informal drainage solutions to community greening efforts, these initiatives are embedded in landscapes of 'everyday durability' (Huq, 2024), shaped by fragmented institutional responses, contested governance and diverse understandings of nature. The platform is the outcome of a co-produced research process in both cities involving rapid assessments, 30 stakeholder interviews and 12 focus group discussions. It is intended as a space written by both research teams and participants, reflecting how they wish to be included and portrayed. The *Nature+People map* seeks to communicate across scales: supporting community advocacy, gaining recognition from policymakers, offering opportunities for scaling-up and institutionalisation, and providing practitioners with grounded insights on nature and people initiatives. The platform invites multiple stakeholders to engage with and learn from the rich, everyday environmental practices shaping Sub-Saharan African cities. It serves as a space for experimentation on Southern perspectives of nature, environment and justice. For more information, visit: listenlearnleap4nbs.com.

Composite drawing: Participant perspectives on nature elements and community-led environmental initiatives in Nairobi (Credit: Listen, Learn and Leap).



Connections

Yousra Salem (MSc ESD 2020–21)

launched her own consultancy after graduating from the DPU, partnering with corporates, leadership institutions and local governments to co-create practical, future-focused programmes. Her work spans energy transition and efficiency models, sustainability and digital innovation, equipping professionals to lead purposefully in complex environments. She credits the DPU's holistic approach to sustainability, bringing the social into the environmental and pushing for economic resilience, with profoundly shaping her design of programmes that are both inclusive and impactful. Yousra is grateful to UCL for instilling the critical, global and systems-thinking mindset that continues to guide her work today.

Yuna Chang (MSc ESD 2018–19)

works as a freelance researcher and workshop facilitator focusing on social movements, surveillance and policing, and climate justice. Current research examines how global architectures of surveillance and policing affect the social fabric of cities, especially around protest. Workshops use experimental media such as zine and banner making. She specialises in analysing large datasets to develop evidence-based narratives on equitable climate action.

Diana Sandoval (MSc ESD 2006–07)

has joined the Government of Bogota's Mobility Secretariat, where she is coordinating the city's work on pedestrian mobility and accessibility.

Swati Shinde (MSc ESD 2006–07)

completed a PhD in Climate Studies and is based in Mumbai. She works across research, policy, and practice at the environment, climate, and sustainability interface. Swati combines roles as practitioner, researcher, and faculty member, contributing to locally rooted initiatives that build climate resilience and inform policy through practice.

José Cepero and María José Gonzales (MSc BUDD 2023–24)

are working in Peru with IntuyLab and the Inter-American Development Bank on a project exploring how stairways in Lima's self-built hillside neighbourhoods can support disaster risk management. Their research investigates how these everyday infrastructures can be adapted to address both climate and daily risks, aiming to improve new and existing stairways as resilient urban assets.

Salma Nassar (MSc BUDD 2016–17)

works at UN-Habitat as an Urban Development Programme Associate in Egypt. Her work focuses on inclusive public space, accessibility, planning, housing, and basic services. Most recently, she led a co-designed public space project in a low-income Cairo neighbourhood—developed with local authorities and communities, particularly women and children—as part of the 12th World Urban Forum legacy, promoting social cohesion and quality of life.

Azul Castañeda (MSc BUDD 2016–17)

is currently undertaking a collaborative doctoral research project as part of the Open-Oxford-Cambridge AHRC DTP-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award at The Open University, in partnership with Future of London. The research critically examines contemporary community engagement practices within the built environment across London and the UK. The project forms part of Engaging London, an initiative that seeks to move beyond tokenistic approaches to engagement by exploring its potential as a transformative and equity-focused collaboration between institutions and communities.

Mahnoor Shah (MSc UDP 2023–24)

is an urban designer working in the housing sector in London. She contributes to the delivery of affordable and market housing and placemaking projects. See her blog on the DPU [website](#).

Apekshita Varshney (MSc UDP 2022–23)

has founded HeatWatch India, a nonprofit organisation working to protect the most vulnerable people in India from the dangers of extreme heat. HeatWatch champions occupational health and safety and worker rights, collaborating with unions, grassroots organisations, and worker groups.

Chris Luthi (MSc UDP 1992)

is on sabbatical at Oxford University's Reuben College after 30 years abroad. Chris is researching equitable transboundary research partnerships and conducting interviews with research institutions in Britain. In 2005, he joined the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Research and Technology as leader of the Strategic Environmental Sanitation Planning Group. From 2015, he headed the Sanitation, Water and Solid Waste for Development research department. He has published widely and teaches postgraduate courses at IHE Delft, EPFL in Lausanne and ETH in Zürich.

Narjes Zivdar (MSc DAP 2020–21)

has received funding from Landscape Research along with Maryam Bidmeshgipour to pursue a project called 'Grassroots Insights into Mobile Landscapes: Reconciliation by Revisiting Climate Resilient Development and Sustainable Livelihoods for Displaced and Host Communities'. Their study seeks to reimagine cultural landscapes as spaces of reconciliation, belonging, and sustainability amid climate change.

Stefan Feuerstein (MSc DAP 2006-07) leads a career in humanitarian work shaped during his MSc at the DPU. After graduating, he directed Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos Honduras for twelve years, serving as legal guardian for more than one thousand orphaned and abandoned children and partnering with the Honduran government and United Nations agencies on family reintegration and support for children displaced by violence. In 2016, he was named to Oprah Winfrey's inaugural Super Soul 100 list. He later served as Operations Chief of the largest temporary shelter in US history for unaccompanied migrant children at the border between the US and Mexico. He is the author of A B C Delegation: The Manager's Guide to Effective Delegation.

Xuechao Tan (MSc SDP 2023-24) now works in sustainable growth, in a role related to responsible supply chains, sustainability strategy, and sustainability disclosures.

Laura Hirst (MSc SDP 2013-14) recently received a PhD from the University of Manchester, titled 'Fire (in)justice in informal settlements; exploring the dynamics of fire risk in Nairobi, Kenya.'

Ignacia Ossul (MSc SDP 2011-12) and PhD (2018) has been seconded from UN Women to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as a Gender Advisor in Syria as part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee scale-up and transition period following the regime's fall at the end of December. She's currently co-leading the development of the Gender Strategy for the Humanitarian Country Team, which brings together UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and women-led organisations working in Syria.

Johanna Flórez (MSc HUD 2022-23) is now working in Bogotá's public health sector as part of their innovation and data analytics team. Her role focuses on auditing and validating high-cost health technologies financed with public funds. Johanna says that the MSc in HUD has been essential in shaping her systems thinking and capacity to navigate institutional complexity while keeping equity and spatial justice at the core of her work.

Sigi Atteneder (PhD DPU 2011-17) is now working at his alma mater, the University of Art and Design in Linz, Austria, as a professor of sustainable architecture and spatial development and the Head of the Architecture Department.

Hands On

Liza Griffin was part of a team, along with Bala Nagendran, Aishwarya Soni, Ian McKinnon, Mikaela Patrick, and Aryn Lalji, who organised a roundtable on **'Disability-Inclusive Solutions for the Climate Crisis'**, hosted by the Global Disability Innovation Hub and DPU, for London Climate Action Week 2025. Their event, 'Disability-Inclusive Solutions for the Climate Crisis: Leveraging Urban, Infrastructure, and Assistive Technology,' was funded by UCL Grand Challenges to foster innovative research methods and solutions for disability-inclusive climate action. The event brought together disability and climate practitioners, researchers and activists to share ideas and lived experiences, fostering innovative, inclusive approaches for climate action. Key messages from the event suggest that embracing lived experience and local knowledge is crucial to appropriate and resilient solutions, and that integrating inclusive design principles and accessibility at a project's outset helps to ensure more equal participation and equitable outcomes.

Participants of the 'Disability-Inclusive Solutions for the Climate Crisis' roundtable (Credit: Sophie Glickman, 2025).



Co-producing solutions for the roundtable (Credit: Sophie Glickman, 2025).



Discussion at 'Disability-Inclusive Solutions for the Climate Crisis' (Credit: Sophie Glickman, 2025).

Between November 2024 and May 2025, Stefano Mastromarino and Camillo Boano collaborated with artist and agroecologist Luigi Coppola, residents, local activists, and the collective *Inappropriable* in Borgo Mezzanone, Foggia, Italy, as part of the **REFRAME project**. In making the work *Azioni apripista*, they co-developed shaded gathering spaces using participatory art that involved community clean-ups, planting, and iterative field-based engagement, strengthening local connections.

From 11–21 May 2025, also within the **REFRAME project**, Stefano Mastromarino and Camillo Boano worked with the *Inappropriable* team and the Chilean/Argentinian collective *La Escuela Nunca* in Borgo Mezzanone. Engaging with the site's militarised history and present-day precarity, they co-created an 'aircraft' from repurposed local materials, inviting residents to explore spatial memory, mobility, and future imaginaries. The *Las cosas que perdimos* project fostered shared reflection on displacement, resilience, and community identity.

The design research workshop on Multigenerational Entrepreneurialism explored the coexistence of long-term residents and newcomers, traditional and contemporary activities, and the contrast between dilapidated housing and ongoing small-scale upgrades.

Constructing shaded gathering spaces in Borgo Mezzanone as part of *Azioni apripista* (Credit: Frédérique Gélinas, 2025).



In April, Pascale Hofmann, Giorgio Talocci and Michael Walls were in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, to run a short course on **Financing Sustainable Infrastructures for Environmental Sanitation**. Co-designed by the DPU and the Fundação Escola de Sociologia e Política de São Paulo (FESPSP), the five-day course was attended by employees of the Empresa Baiana de Águas e Saneamento (EMBASA), Bahia's public water and sanitation company. DPU staff convened most sessions, delivering lectures and introducing colleagues and research partners from a range of geographies and backgrounds, who contributed online inputs on topics including water justice and transformative re-municipalisation, technological innovation in sanitation and its links to the SDGs, and the application of ESG standards in the planning and delivery of significant infrastructure projects. Participants took part in site visits, group work and discussions. They presented a set of key trans-local learning points that could inform their day-to-day work in Salvador and other urban and rural municipalities in Bahia.

In July, Giorgio Talocci travelled to Qujing, Yunnan province, China, to run a design research workshop on **Multigenerational Entrepreneurialism, Living Heritage and Participatory Urban Regeneration**. Part of the DPU SummerLab programme was co-designed with DPU's Colin Marx and delivered with long-term partners Urban Synthesis China Ltd., an urban design firm specialising in participatory methods. Thirty-three undergraduate students from design-related disciplines, recruited by SFK International Art Education, participated. Centred on Ximen Street, the only historic area of Qujing to survive demolition and now part of an Urban Synthesis micro-regeneration masterplan, the workshop explored the coexistence of long-term residents and newcomers, traditional and contemporary activities, and the contrast between dilapidated housing and ongoing small-scale upgrades. Activities included fieldwork, Q&A sessions with public and private stakeholders, studio work, lectures and site visits to comparable areas in LiaoHu village and Kunming. The final exhibition drew strong local attendance, with residents and business owners offering valuable feedback on proposals for regenerating private, semi-private, semi-public and public spaces.

Staff News

Alessio Koliulis has been promoted to Associate Professor, and **Kamna Patel** is now Professor of Critical Development Studies. Huge congratulations to both of them on their new roles and achievements.

After over ten years at the DPU, **Michael Casey-Gillman** has left his role as Research and PhD Programme Administrator to become Programme Administrator for the MSc course at the Bartlett School of Architecture. Michael has been a brilliant DPU colleague and a massive support to our PhD community. He will be greatly missed but will remain part of the DPU family.

We are delighted to welcome **Dan Hawksworth** as our new Research and Enterprise Administrator.

Neele Wiltgen Georgi has left her role as Graduate Teaching Assistant in the ESD team. We thank Neele for her dedication and support of colleagues and students and wish her well in her upcoming travels and endeavours.

Nigel Harris celebrated his 90th birthday on 4 July. Nigel was a member of the Unit's academic staff for 25 years (1973-98) and served as DPU Director from 1982-89. He remains a member of DPU-Associates, which he co-founded with others in 2008 and remains closely connected with the Unit.

Laia Garcia has left her positions as BUDD and acting HUD GTA to take up a position in Freiburg with Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI). We would like to thank Laia for her fantastic work with the Department and congratulate her on her new role. BUDD has welcomed **Milagros Vidal** as the new BUDD GTA.



Michael on a HUD trip to Marrakech in 2025 (Credit: Michael Casey-Gillman).

PhD News

From 2 June to 21 July 2025, **Sara Granados Ortiz** was Artist-in-Residence at El Boga Mompox, a local organisation engaged in cultural and regional development in Colombia. During her residency, she conducted fieldwork for her PhD research on amphibious cities. She worked with planners, farmers, fishers, historians, artisans and local residents using various methods including convivial tables, listening walks, go-along walking interviews and sound ethnography. She also collaborated with the municipal archive to collect memories of Mompox, its waters and culture. The residency provided an opportunity to exchange ideas with students and academics from 'Escuela de Agua y Tierra', organised by the Faculty of Creation at the University of Rosario, where she presented her project and initial findings. She also participated in the 'Laboratorio de Escucha Anfibia', a listening

laboratory led by sound artist Leonel Vasquez in collaboration with the Latin American art and education platform La Escuela. Across four sessions, participants shared their experiences with sound in research and practice. Sara's Mompox project was among the works presented. Looking ahead, she is helping to organise a high-level event in Manaus with local authorities and social organisations working on food justice and resilience in Amazonian cities, contributing to the Belém Cities Declaration in preparation for COP30 in Belém. Scheduled for September, the event will include field visits to engage with Amazonian amphibious communities.

On 8 July 2025, **Stefano Mastromarino** was invited by the University of Trieste to present his research at the 'Tourism and Heritage from the Border' festival. Stefano contributed to the 'Perspectives on Overtouristification and Heritage' roundtable with a presentation titled 'Khandwala, Porto Vecchio, Porto Vivo: Transitional Narratives of Redevelopment'. As part of the same festival, he also designed and co-organised a mapping workshop with theatre artist Clara Fedi. The workshop, 'Walktapes: Tracing the Border Gimmick', guided 30 bachelor's, master's, and PhD students from across Europe on an urban *dérive* through Porto Vecchio in Trieste. Using various audio-walks and mapping techniques, participants produced and performed a theatrical script composed from a montage of diverse narratives shaping this city area.

On 11 July 2025, **Stefano Mastromarino** presented his initial research findings at the 10th Ethnography and Qualitative Research International Conference at the University of Trento in Italy. He participated in the panel 'Lines, Traces, Streets: Writing Urban Ethnography', where he delivered a presentation titled 'Archives of Errant Refuge: Site-Writing Khandwala, Trieste'. His talk explored a series of creative experiments conducted in Trieste over recent months, investigating the multiple discourses, affects, and performative practices shaping makeshift refuges for people on the move and those seeking asylum in the Porto Vecchio area.

In July 2025, **Hanadi Samhan** participated in the [Shapes and the City symposium](#), organised by UCL Urban Laboratory and the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment. The symposium brought together artists, architects, and urban researchers, reflecting on urban form, politics, and possibilities. Drawing from her doctoral research on the verticality of Palestinian refugee camps, Hanadi contributed both visually and intellectually, with her hand-drawn spatial mappings featured in the [UCL Urban Lab's](#) online exhibition and shared widely on social media. The event offered a generative space to reframe spatial practice as critical inquiry and material storytelling, as reflected in the final [report](#).

Hanadi Samhan was invited to serve as a juror for the Entente Cordiale University Challenge (2024–25), an international initiative exploring design and policy responses to pressing global issues. This year's theme, Climate Change, Biodiversity, and the Developing World, brought together interdisciplinary student teams from UK and French institutions. Hanadi's expertise in urban resilience and refugee spatialities was drawn upon in evaluating finalist proposals, particularly those engaging with adaptation in the MENA region. The full report can be found at [the Urban Lab's website](#).

This quarter, our PhD community saw several researchers successfully defend their theses, each contributing valuable new insights to their field.

In May 2025, **Matan Flum** successfully defended his [PhD thesis](#) on how the discourse of the Israeli housing block ('shikun') reflects and reproduces processes of the de-Arabisation of Israel.

In July 2025, **Catalina Pollak Williamson** successfully defended her [doctoral thesis](#), introducing Radical Play as a conceptual and methodological framework for rethinking urban transformation.

In July 2025, **Fernando Toro Cano** successfully defended his PhD thesis, which examined the financialised debt relations generated through and by Chilean highway infrastructure.

In July 2025, **Jonas Le Thierry D'Ennequin** successfully defended his PhD thesis, 'The Multiplicity of Infrastructure: Exceeding Uniform Waste Management in the World's Second Most Beautiful Bay'.

Networks and Meetings

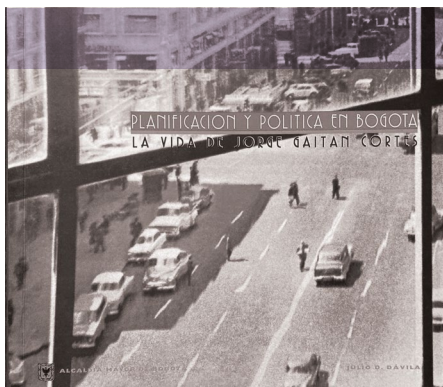
The Urban Transformation Cluster at the DPU has launched a public seminar series titled **Urban Development Planning and Violence**. Beginning in March 2025 and continuing throughout the 2025–26 academic year, the series brings together scholars and practitioners to centre discussions of violence within the field of urban development planning. It is grounded in the recognition that violence and conflict are widespread — and are likely to intensify in a world increasingly shaped by climate stress and political polarisation. The first two seminars have explored questions such as: How do planners enact violence? What is the difference between urban violence and violence in cities? Is addressing violence central to better planning? The next seminar will take place in October 2025, and more details will be announced via the DPU website.

Julio D Dávila participated in an expert group discussion on **regional mobility policies with a focus on care**, coordinated by the University of Chile on behalf of the Regional Government of Santiago, Chile. The wide-ranging conversation brought together leading transport experts from Spain, Chile, the UK, and Mexico to examine issues affecting individual mobility in the transport systems of major urban regions. Topics discussed included the negative impact of urban sprawl in increasing daily commuting times and consequently reducing the time available for self-care and the care of others; gender inequalities in the allocation of household transport resources; air quality and noise pollution; regulatory mechanisms; and incentives to encourage the use of public transport systems, among others.

Julio D Dávila participated in a panel discussion in Bogotá on the current significance and long-lasting planning and **governance legacy of Jorge Gaitán Cortés**, former mayor of Colombia's capital city. The event was held at the historic Museo El Chicó and chaired by Carlos Roberto Pombo, former Director of Planning for the city. Julio, who published a biography of Gaitán Cortés in 2000, spoke alongside Maarten Goossens from Universidad de los Andes, who has published extensively on the history of modernist urban planning in Latin America. Gaitán Cortés served as mayor from 1961 to 1966 across three national administrations, becoming Bogotá's first urban planner to hold the position. Before his appointment, he built a distinguished and varied career as an architect, urban designer, construction entrepreneur, university professor, insurance company employee, and city councillor. This experience gave him the insight and political capacity to guide long-term infrastructure plans — including roads and sewerage — and to strengthen the city's planning office. He died tragically young, soon after leaving office.

Julio with joint panellist Maarten Goossens and chair Carlos Roberto Pombo (Credit: Cecilia Vargas, 2025).

Cover of Julio's biography of Mayor Gaitán Cortés (Credit: Felipe Solarte).



In May 2025, Liza Griffin was invited to present her mental health research at a sell-out session of the **International Science Festival 'A Pint of Science'** held in London. Her talk on 'Cities for Mental Health' discussed the ways in which noise, crowding, spatial design, racism, poverty and precarity influence mental wellbeing. Liza explored how urban environments can actively shape brain function and mental health. However, she argued that we cannot assume a simple causal connection between dwelling in cities and poor mental health. The relationships between our minds and environments are complex and contextual, requiring insight from multiple disciplines, from the neuro- and social sciences to the humanities. 'A Pint of Science' is a grassroots non-profit organisation that hosts an annual festival in informal venues around the world, creating opportunities for researchers and the public to come together and discuss research in a relaxed setting outside of traditional laboratories or lecture theatres.

In May 2025, Azadeh Mashayekhi and Barbara Lipietz participated in a three-day workshop hosted by the **Cairo-based Built-Environment Institute for Applied Studies – Africa and Middle East (BIAS-AME)**. The workshop was supported by a grant from UCL's Africa and Middle East Teaching Fund and brought together a range of local NGOs, including 10 Tooba — an organisation focused on housing and spatial justice — and Megawra, which specialises in place-based cultural and urban development. It also welcomed the new cohort of BIAS-AME fellows, composed mainly of young urban practitioners. The programme included site visits to ongoing projects led by the participating NGOs, along with exchanges with local community architects and organisers. It provided a valuable platform for dialogue between UDP teaching staff and BIAS-AME educators and practitioners, enabling them to explore methodologies and pedagogical approaches to local placemaking practices, and to revisit teaching tools and materials addressing housing justice, urban regeneration, and the lived experiences of displacement.

Liza Griffin presenting Cities for Mental Health (Credit: Beth Longley, 2025).



In June 2025, Daniel Oviedo and María José Nieto-Combariza participated in the **VREF (Volvo Research and Educational Foundations) Global Summit: 40 Years of Transport Research**, contributing to high-level discussions on equitable urban mobility. As co-lead of the 'Walking for Transport NextGen' network, María José co-organised the Next Generation (NextGen) Scholars workshop with partners from India, Namibia, Kenya, the US, and the Partnership for Research on Informal and Shared Mobility. The workshop gathered early-career researchers worldwide to exchange insights on walking, access, and mobility in African cities, as well as on informal and shared transport systems. Within the main conference programme, she presented preliminary findings from her VREF-funded project 'Mainstreaming Walking for Transport from an Intersectional Gender Perspective in Urban Governance'. She separately shared doctoral research on two- and three-wheeler mobilities in the webinar 'Safety and Security of Popular Transport'.

Daniel presented the trajectory and key outcomes of the six-year **Walking Cities Lab**, supported by the UCL–Osaka University Strategic Partner Funds, outlining its research on walking conditions in African cities and the latest project on governance and walkability in Accra, Ghana. He also contributed as a member of the VREF Partnership for Research on Informal and Shared Mobility, moderated the closing panel of the NextGen workshop, and delivered public lectures at the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales on transport and equity in the Global South, drawing on work from the T-SUM project, the Walking Cities Lab, and studies on e-scooters and social exclusion.

The Stitch for Change: Community as a Superpower exhibition showcased hand-crafted superhero capes created by refugees and artists, conveying messages of strength, solidarity, and belonging.

Clémence Cavoli (Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering) presented on the **T-SUM (Transitions to Sustainable Urban Mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa)** project, emphasising the importance of long-term cross-sectoral partnerships in advancing mobility justice. The project team includes Emeritus Professor Caren Levy, Daniel Oviedo, and Alexandria Chong.

From 18 to 20 June, as part of **Refugee Week 2025**, the REFRAME team — including Giovanna Astolfo, Harriet Allsopp, Camillo Boano, Mahsa Alami Fariman, and Stefano Mastromarino from the DPU, DPU Dissertation Fellows Ananya Jain and Hasina Zadran, Estella Carpi from UCL's Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction (IRDR), and partners from Chemnitz University of Technology (TUC) and the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) — held a three-day workshop across London and Hastings to celebrate refugee experiences and amplify collective knowledge. The workshop focused on co-producing knowledge on the politics, spaces, and effects of displacement, laying the groundwork for a forthcoming collaborative publication.

On 20 June, the REFRAME team joined UCL partner the Refugee Buddy Project Hastings, directed by Rossana Leal, for the **Stitch for Change: Community as a Superpower exhibition** at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex. This UCL-supported exhibition showcased hand-crafted superhero capes created by refugees and artists, conveying messages of strength, solidarity, and belonging. It also featured sculptures and recorded stories reflecting on home, housing, and community, as part of a healing and empowering creative process. Now in its fourth year, Stitch for Change is a refugee- and migrant-led initiative using textile-making and storytelling to foster connection and amplify underrepresented voices across Hastings, Rother, and the Wealden area.



Textile artworks at the Stitch for Change exhibition (Credit: Mahsa Alami Fariman, 2025).

On 12 June 2025, a delegation from **Shanghai Jing'an District Government** visited the Development Planning Unit (DPU) at UCL. Led by Deputy District Mayor Yang Yi, the twelve-member group included officials from urban development, land resources, and municipal management, as well as Ms. Han Yi, CEO of Shanghai Suhewan (Group) Co., Ltd. and a DPU alumna. The visit, hosted by Le-Yin Zhang, Margarethe Theseira and Colin Marx, facilitated a dynamic exchange on urban planning, commercial district renewal, and community-focused development. The Jing'an delegation presented initiatives such as Nanjing West Road's vibrant commercial hub, the '15-minute living circle' for accessible services, scenic riverfront urban landscape design, and progressive low-carbon city regulations. In turn, DPU faculty shared theoretical-practical guidelines and case studies, including London's planning guidance prioritising reuse and retrofit, illustrated by regeneration in the City of London's historic core and balanced urban renewal in Mayfair, as well as Colombia's community-driven care blocks — all highlighting approaches to sustainable urban economic development. The meeting, coordinated with the support of MPhil student Mingyuan Li, fostered mutual learning on shared challenges and innovative solutions, and reaffirmed DPU's commitment to global urban innovation and its strong alumni ties. Jing'an District, home to the Suhewan waterfront CBD, is one of Shanghai's most internationally engaged and economically dynamic areas, covering 37 square kilometres in the city's central core.



Shanghai Jing'an District delegation with DPU faculty at UCL (Credit: Liu Chang, 2025).

In June, Catalina Ortiz, Liza Griffin, Robert Biel, and DPU Graduate Diana Salazar gave readings at the **Festival of the Commons in Architectural Writing**, hosted by Lidia Gasperoni, Jane Rendell, and Polly Gould from The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. The festival explored the idea of the commons in architecture and writing, reflecting on what we have in common and the practices of 'commoning' found in writing about the built and unbuilt environment.



Catalina Ortiz, Liza Griffin and Robert Biel at the Festival of the Commons (Credit: Diana Salazar, 2025).

Liza Griffin and George Revill's film 'Creative Practice and the Anthropocene', directed by Chris Bonfiglioli (2021), has been selected by Film Geographies for this year's **Royal Geographical Society—Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) Shorts Programme**. The RGS-IBG will take place in Birmingham from 26-29 August.

Liza Griffin gave the keynote lecture at the **Open-Oxford-Cambridge AHRC International Conference on Borders and Boundaries**, held in September at the University of Oxford. In her address, 'Planning for environmental change and learning from engaged creative practice,' Liza examined the value and pitfalls of integrating arts engagement and planning practice in pursuit of more flourishing, socially just and environmentally sustainable futures. Liza discussed examples of arts-informed engagement, asking of each what epistemic boundaries and fields of expertise are transgressed and challenged in their advancement and how the roles of stakeholder, artist and planning practitioner are troubled and transformed in their enactment.

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Cover photo: Common Rooms in Clapton Community Space as Neighbourhood Care Nodes (Credit: Julie Plouhinec, 2024).

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