

Issue N°.2

London ideas

A magazine about urban innovation

Inside this issue

Connecting people to green spaces / An interview with Mexico City's think tank / The Mayor's Civic Innovation Challenge / Empowering youth activists / A spotlight on civic innovation in Paris, and more...



Introduction

Welcome to the second issue of *London ideas* - Centre for London's magazine on urban innovation. As with the first issue, this one includes three new ideas for London presented at our latest *London ideas* evening, kindly hosted by KPF.

In addition, a number of articles explore the role that city governments can play in fostering and supporting 'civic innovation' - new technologies and approaches that can help address social problems. Theo Blackwell, London's Chief Digital Officer introduces the Mayor's Civic Innovation Challenge, which offers support to organisations and individuals that come up with the best solutions to a range of health, transport and other challenges facing London.

This issue looks to a number of international examples for inspiration. Gabriella Gómez-Mont talks about the work of the Mexico City think tank, Laboratorio para la Ciudad. The lab stands out for the way it has sought to engage the public in its work, and foster conversations about the values and culture of the city.

Nicolas Bosetti provides an overview of some of the exciting new approaches to development and participation pursued by the Mayor of Paris. And Laura Bliss, from CityLab, profiles the Toronto based urbanist, Bianca Wylie, who raises difficult questions about the role of technology companies versus municipal government in shaping the cities of the future.

This issue's rant comes courtesy of Eric Klinenberg, Professor of Sociology at NYU and author of *Palaces of the People*. Eric quarrels with the idea that tech-enabled digital networks are any substitute for local ones. But this is not to say that there is no space for innovation when it comes to social infrastructure. *Palaces of the People*, for instance, makes much of the way in which the new environmental infrastructure that we will need to prevent and mitigate climate change can double up as social infrastructure, with roads becoming tree-lined avenues and levies becoming parks.

I'd like to thank the partners who make *London ideas* possible, above all our New Ideas Partner, Capital & Counties Properties PLC. I hope you enjoy the issue.

Ben Rogers
Director, Centre for London



Foreword

The world's leading cities are built and thrive on ideas.

We understand from history how the greatest civic spaces were not only an expression of local power, pride and commerce but also of creativity. Our own recent experiences underline how we cherish the inventive and the original – and quickly tire of chain cafes, bland corporate vegetation and invariably pointless public art. In both Capco's great estates, in Covent Garden and the new neighbourhood that is emerging in Earls Court, we remain true to these principles of ideas and creativity – a celebration of the local, as well as the global; helping the quirky and the unique to flourish alongside the spectacular and dramatic.

Four years ago, Capco supported Centre for London in the publication of *The London Recipe: Systems and Empathy* – a manifesto for what makes London special. This latest edition of *London ideas* builds on that mix, illustrating that “smart city” systems and an over- or endless reliance on technology will never be enough. Justine Simons, in one contribution, escapes the fashion for tech fetishism and makes the case for art instead. Elsewhere, authors explore aspects of the pedestrian, playful, open and global city – fighting back against the encroaching danger of Silicon Valley-led, dystopian and dominant urban behemoths. No city dweller wants to be soulless, however efficient their city operates otherwise.

Ideas and creativity will continue to shape make the greatest of future cities, just as they have done through the centuries. With this in mind, *London ideas* further explores the relationship between green spaces and mental wellbeing; the power of youth in democracy; and the vitality of de-centralised decision-making and innovation. All these factors blend within the all-important London Recipe and make the capital special.

Everyone recognises that we live in uncertain times. The future city – powered by technologies that we don't yet see and jostling with demographic, political and economic forces that we don't yet know – will inevitably look radically different from the past city, just as the newer pockets of London look nothing like their medieval precedents. But the spirit of London will no doubt endure: the essence of innovation and enterprise, culture and creativity, diversity and resilience will prevail. That is why Capco continues to proudly invest in the world's greatest city and support important initiatives, such as *London ideas*. The best idea – as the saying goes – always wins.

Ian Hawksworth

Chief Executive, Capital & Counties Properties PLC

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London ideas recommends...

At the second *London ideas* event in September we asked attendees to recommend the people to follow, as well as the podcasts, apps, and websites that will keep your finger on the pulse of innovation.

Listen

Invisible City

Hosted by Jennifer Keesmaat, a former city planner, this podcast gets beneath the surface of what makes cities tick. Recent guests included Euan Mills, an urban designer who is currently advising the Mayor of London on major redevelopments across the city, trying to bridge the gap between technology and planning. invisiblecitypodcast.com



© TED Talks

Follow

Feargus O'Sullivan

A contributing writer to CityLab, Feargus focuses on housing, gentrification and social change, infrastructure, urban policy and national cultures in Europe. He's explored why London has so much empty space, why British people feel locked out of the capital and what London's 'Night Czar' actually does. [@FeargusOSull](https://twitter.com/FeargusOSull)



Read

Doughnut Economics

Economics is broken and the planet is paying the price. Or so says Kate Raworth. Unforeseen financial crises. Extreme wealth inequality. Relentless pressure on the environment. Can we go on like this? Is there an alternative? In *Doughnut Economics*, Raworth lays out the seven deadly mistakes of economics and offers a radical re-envisioning of the system that has brought us to the point of ruin. penguin.co.uk



Read

Smart Cities Dive

This digest offers an overview of the smart cities industry in 60 seconds. It looks at trends in urban sustainability, green building, transportation, connectivity and environmentalism. If you've got a little longer than a minute, the deep-dive investigations are worth checking out too; recent topics include improving safety on the streets around schools and pitfalls in regulating the gig economy. smartcitiesdive.com

Listen

After the Fact

This podcast from The Pew Charitable Trusts brings their experts together with other guests to discuss the numbers and trends shaping some of society's biggest challenges, and to delve into the stories behind the facts with nonpartisan analysis. The latest issue considered the statistic that seven out of 10 babies born in London have at least one parent who wasn't born in the city, featuring an interview with Centre for London's Ben Rogers and Denean Rowe. pewtrusts.org



Listen

People Fixing the World

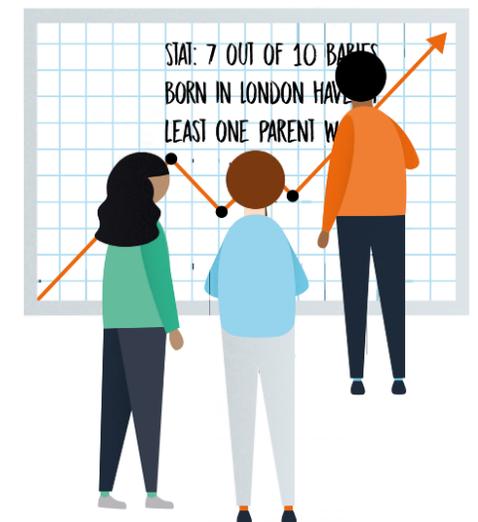
Listen to this podcast to hear brilliant solutions to the world's problems. Ideas range from generating power from roads to teaching babies kindness. This podcast will introduce you to the people with ideas to make the world a better place and tests out whether their ideas actually work. bbc.co.uk



Take part

The School for Social Entrepreneurs

Get involved with the School for Social Entrepreneurs, a charity that supports people using entrepreneurial approaches to tackle complex social problems. Each year they help more than 1,000 social entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs and charity leaders transform their communities by equipping them with the skills and networks to create lasting change for people in need. [@SchSocEnt](https://twitter.com/SchSocEnt)



The best idea London ever had

We ask a leading Londoner to tell us about the best idea they think the city ever had.

What is London's greatest idea? You might think first of an architectural or engineering achievement, or an invention that has changed the world – and, of course, there's no shortage of great innovations to choose from.

So why choose an art project?

The Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square is arguably the world's most renowned sculpture commission. It puts contemporary art in the middle of one of London's most famous locations. And it's kind-of bonkers.

At once stellar public art, and the source of much argument, the Fourth Plinth is uniquely London. In what other national square, in which other global city, would you see such a bold move? We've seen a naked, pregnant, disabled woman; a giant blue cockerel; and a big bronze thumbs-up, all at the very heart of London life.

Far from the white-walled, rarefied environment of an art gallery, the Plinth is never in a vacuum or disconnected from the real world. Trafalgar Square is not only the geographic centre of the city – the point from which all distances from the capital are calculated – it is also the place where the nation comes together

to celebrate, commemorate, protest and mourn.

Putting bold contemporary art in the midst of this loaded and symbolic environment is not without risk. But the Fourth Plinth artists have embraced the conundrum of what to put there and tackled such thorny and diverse subjects as beauty, identity, sexism and religion. Artworks have included a ship in a bottle that seeks to unpick colonialism; a skeleton of a horse that critiques global capitalism, and, a re-creation of an ancient monument that was destroyed by war.

For artists, making a sculpture for the Fourth Plinth means exposure on many levels – to the wind and

rain, to pigeons and to people. Taxi drivers, tourists, schoolchildren and the great British public all become art critics, creating a debate about contemporary art that is unparalleled. The Fourth Plinth is the public-realm equivalent of a Twitterstorm.

Debate is not new to the Fourth Plinth. Before it was home to contemporary art, it was meant to support a statue of William IV, which would be funded by public donations. After the sponsors failed to raise enough, it was left empty for 150 years. Arguments raged intermittently about who should appear upon it, with suggestions ranging from Shakespeare to David Beckham, Diana to Darwin.

Then one day in 1994, the celebrated chef and businesswoman, Prue Leith, then the Chair of the RSA, was travelling past the empty plinth when she decided to grasp the nettle with a call for action. A government report followed, and recommended rolling contemporary art commissions. At the same time, responsibility for Trafalgar

Square (inclusive of all plinths) was transferred to the newly elected Mayor of London, and I found the project sitting on my desk to take forward.

A Fourth Plinth Commission now oversees the choices, putting decisions about artists and projects in the hands of experts. We have seen an array of wonderful and thought-provoking sculptures. Anthony Gormley took the idea of "public art" to the extreme – the public became the art. Some 2,400 members of the public, chosen through a lottery, spent an hour each on the plinth. They could do whatever they wanted as long as it was legal. The work became an eccentric portrait of the nation, capturing the imagination with its 24/7 live stream, millions of web hits, marriage proposals, and nakedness. When the work made it onto BBC Radio 4's *The Archers*, I remember thinking, "that's it: The Fourth Plinth has officially gone mainstream."

Marc Quinn's Alison Lapper Pregnant, on the other hand, confronted all the taboos: Alison was naked, pregnant and disabled. Opinion was polarised: some people were offended, others thought it was ugly; but then a letter landed

on my desk that said: "Thank you ... I am a disabled woman and have always wanted to have a child and this sculpture has given me the permission to do that." It made me cry.

So, for me, the Fourth Plinth is a brilliant, very London institution. It regularly appears on lists of "reasons to love London" and, given that most of the statues in the capital are white, male and military, it offers a refreshing perspective. London is the global centre for visual culture, home to Frieze Art Fair, and the most visited museum of modern art on the planet, Tate Modern. And it's fitting that contemporary sculpture has a place amid the capital's historic monuments. The Fourth Plinth keeps us on our toes and makes us stop and look at our surroundings instead of rushing past, lost in our phones.

The Fourth Plinth speaks to our values: we are an open, international and creative city. It makes me proud that London has the confidence and guts to put bold, contemporary work in such a space. For all these reasons, I love the Fourth Plinth. It's definitely one of our capital's greatest ideas: democracy in action and the ultimate artistic challenge.

The Fourth Plinth

Left: Marc Quinn's Alison Lapper Pregnant occupied the Fourth Plinth from September 2005 to late 2007. A large replica featured in the 2012 Summer Paralympics opening ceremony.

Interview with an innovator: Gabriella Gómez-Mont

Geraldine Bedell talks to *Gabriella Gómez-Mont*,
the Founder and Director of Laboratorio para la Ciudad,
the experimental arm and creative think tank of the
Mexico City government.



© Laboratorio para la Ciudad

Before setting up Laboratorio para la Ciudad, you were a journalist, a documentary film maker and a gallerist. Was it a culture shock to move into working for the city government?

Absolutely! In the first four months of setting up the Lab I developed kidney stones and typhoid. Five years later I am black and blue! But it's been one of the most fascinating adventures of my life.

What was your brief?

The Lab is the experimental arm-slash-creative think tank for the Mexico City government. I report directly to the Mayor and I have a team of 20 people, half of whom are urban scientists - geographers, data analysts, civic tech experts - while the other half are from the creative fields: artists, designers, film makers, writers, architects. The average age of the team is 29, which happens to be the average age in Mexico City, so I like to think that one of our meta-conversations is what city government looks like for a new generation.

The world over, we see a growing mistrust between government institutions and civil society, but at the same time - and this is very palpable in Mexico City - we're seeing a new generation truly wanting to engage with their neighbours and shape the world around them. That is where we come in.

Mexico City is the largest city in the Western hemisphere. Does that present particular problems when it comes to thinking about urban systems?

The size of the city - nine million people - is both a problem and a strength. We have some of the richest men in the world here, and one of the lowest minimum wages in the world. This raises some particular challenges. How do we have city-wide conversations with such a diverse population? How do you create a vision for a megalopolis at the same time as acknowledging the idiosyncrasies of micro-territories? How do you begin to talk about the combinatory possibilities, about an urban commons?

In the five years you've been running the Lab, have your ideas and ambitions for it changed?

Yes: in the first two years we thought we'd be a lab for citizen ideas. We'd create a way for people to send in their proposals, we'd incubate them, and we'd change the city. Looking back, that was quite naïve: some ideas that citizens brought in weren't that solid, some were too ambitious, some had no traction in government. The ideas became isolated - a little thing here, a little thing there.

We needed to think about about creating systemic change and ask: how does this lead to something

larger than itself? How do you find the points of intervention that will shift not only what's happening but also the way people imagine the city? How can we set things going that are so appealing that people will replicate them on their own?

What are your priority areas?

Urban innovation is often preoccupied with the smart city, with efficiency, speed and productivity. Personally, I'm less interested in that and more intrigued to have a collective conversation about how we want to live together, how to be healthy together, how to play together.

We identified six areas of priority. We are a tiny organisation with baby budgets and only two people working on each team, whereas the Mexico City bureaucracy has 260,000 civil servants. We looked at the gaps, at where there was an ecosystem to take it to the next level, at where we could make a difference. It's not that Mexico City doesn't have other priorities: I am often asked about water, but what can we do about that? We really need to get new pipes.

So, our areas of focus are as follows:

Pedestrian City, which looks at mobility. This is the first city department, certainly in Latin America, to look at the city through the lens of pedestrians. The starting point is that pedestrians should be the kings of the city.

Playful City looks at play as a tool for city-making and tries to rescue the city for kids, promoting their right to public space.



© Laboratorio para la Ciudad

Above: A playful city project

Open City has crowdsourced the constitution of Mexico City, and an unofficial bus system. We also dealt with the row between Uber and the city's taxi drivers, which was very angry here, because we have the largest fleet of cab drivers in the world, 130,000, and there was violence... we had to work out whether innovation was inimical to inclusion, or whether we could have both at once. We created a platform for civil society

to debate with itself – is Uber good, should Uber be in cities? We came out at the other end with policy recommendations that are still being implemented, one of which was that regulation needs to be dynamic: we need to figure out year by year what is happening and adjust for it. Another was to make taxi cabs more competitive: Uber is now taxed 1.5 per cent on every journey and the money will go to giving cab drivers similar technology.

Below: Reimagining Mexico City's bus system



© Laboratorio para la Ciudad

Global City is rethinking how Mexico City wants to relate to the rest of the world and experimenting with city-to-city relationships.

Creative City is about how arts and cultural projects can be part of social action.

Participatory City is about involving citizens in policy and action.

Your team is more weighted towards the humanities than one might expect of an urban think tank. What effect does that have?

We have seen with Brexit and Trump that in a sense, our belief system is where reality is born. My team seeks to understand the subjective city, the urban imaginaries. We have surveyed people across the city, asking them what three words come to mind when you think of Mexico City, what three things pain you most, how do you think about the future of Mexico City? And we can overlay this type of data with statistical data and figure out a little bit more about the symbolic infrastructure of the city.

You are nearing the end of your term. What has been your greatest challenge?

It's really difficult to be experimental within the rules of government as they are now. In Mexico, if

something is not forbidden in writing, you can do it – but in government it's the complete opposite. If it's not written down that you can do something, you're liable. We have the number one obesity rate for kids from 14 to 19 in the world but when a civil servant tried to put potable water into schools and public spaces he got into huge legal trouble, because it wasn't part of his mandate. Unfortunately, it wasn't part of anybody's mandate.

What has been your greatest achievement?

Bringing a new kind of conversation into government. There was understandable scepticism at the beginning, but people inside government can see now that we add value, that citizens gravitate to us even when they mistrust government.

I'm also proud of bringing the humanities back into the conversation.

What comes next for Laboratorio para la Ciudad?

It's great that Mexico City is going to have its first elected woman Mayor, Claudia Sheinbaun Pardo. We're still waiting to hear what she's thinking. She's been reviewing the urgent things first: police, security, earthquake reconstruction, urban planning.

I would love to carry on working on our agenda, with very close ties to government, but I'd like to do it in a more independent institutional form.

I've spent 60 per cent of my time here dealing with

Below: Laboratorio para la Ciudad, a cross-disciplinary working group



© Laboratorio para la Ciudad

bureaucracy. I knew it would be like that and I took it on as a creative challenge, but I think my team's time could be better spent. Governments are trying to think about more distributed forms of action but we're still clinging on to the same conceptual forms, and I think this needs to evolve.

Even in the cities that are thinking most creatively about urban governance, there's still a tendency to think of government or civil society or academia as discrete institutions. What happens when you design institutions to be shape-shifting and mutating?

That is my next preoccupation: what does this institutional form look like? I still don't have the answer, but I'm taking a couple of months off from December and then I'll be back with a specific proposal.



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Three ideas for London

In September, 70 urbanists joined Centre for London at the second *London ideas* evening. Five innovators stood in front of the crowd to put forward their ideas for the city, setting out the challenge, their idea and its potential impact. The ideas went from making the most of London's disused spaces to putting forward a new form of local journalism and a radical crash-course in democratic engagement for young people. Here we ask three of the innovators to explain their ideas for the city.



Above: Attendees at *London ideas*, September 2018



London ideas event, Covent Garden, September 2018



LOOP: Connecting people to green spaces

Simon Hicks, Urban Planner, Foster + Partners

The problem

Access to nature is an important determinant of mental health and wellbeing. In many respects, London has been a global leader in the provision of public green spaces since the industrial era, when pioneering social reformers such as Octavia Hill safeguarded great public parks, including Hampstead Heath and Parliament Hill. In the 20th century, policies – such as the City of London Plan (1943) and Metropolitan Open Land (1969) – reinforced the benefits of access to green space for Londoners.

Using the City of London as a testbed for ideas, we conducted a survey of green spaces, evaluating their characteristics and levels of activity. We found that you are never more than five minutes away from a green space in the City. Every day, workers pop out for daytime meals and celebratory drinks in pocket parks, and visitors navigate medieval streets to reach public spaces beside famous landmarks, such as St Paul's Cathedral. Yet, despite their abundance, many green spaces remain hidden and waiting to be discovered.

The idea

LOOP is an app that connects people to nearby green spaces. Even the shortest of LOOPS – a walking meeting or a lunchtime stroll – can have a positive impact on wellbeing. LOOP offers the opportunity for residents to connect with their urban environment, and, in Leo Tolstoy's words, to “stop a moment, cease your work, look around you.” From the palm of your hand, the app will generate curated walks based on how much time you have available and the kind of experience you seek, be that in historic churchyards, or on a quiet, sunny bench.

To support the app, LOOP will use a system of sensors to create a dynamic database of green spaces in London. In addition to existing Internet of Things monitoring systems in London's greenspaces, LOOP will provide sensors to track local factors such as temperature, sunlight, pollution and human occupancy.

The potential

LOOP will aggregate real-time environmental data (sun, shade, wind, rain, pollution and pollen)

with social data (how many people are at a place, how many benches are available) to create a customised walk for each user. LOOP will also enable the user to track their time spent exploring the outdoors, along with its associated benefits, promoting an awareness of how nature can nurture our health and wellbeing.

The idea is for LOOP to become part of a wider network of data creation and analysis, headed by local government partners or service providers. Over time, every green space will have a unique data identity comprising its key amenities. As a city management tool, LOOP will provide an evidence-based framework for protecting, financing and improving green spaces. By pooling user, environmental, and maintenance data in real-time, the interactive LOOP management dashboard will allow decision-makers to make the most of resources and to respond.

We see this project as an opportunity to collaborate with local governments and other civic-minded organisations to develop a new tool that could celebrate green spaces and promote wellbeing to all citizens of London.





The Advocacy Academy

Saba Shafi, Director of Development, The Advocacy Academy

The problem

Civil society is dominated by the privileged few. Valuable voices are missing from the debates shaping our society, leading to policies and provisions that fail to reflect the diverse experiences and interests of all our communities.

Today, 88 per cent of young people feel their voices are unheard and 60 per cent do not understand how decisions are made about local or national issues. Worryingly, it is those from less affluent families and Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds who feel least able to challenge the problems in their communities: young people from working-class families are 30 per cent less likely to participate in our democracy than their wealthier peers, despite being at the blunt end of most political decisions.

Not having a voice in the big conversations that directly affect them, like housing, crime and education, has a dangerous impact on the confidence and aspirations of these young people. The Advocacy Academy exists to give them that voice.

The idea

The Advocacy Academy aims to empower young people with experience of injustice and

inequality to tackle some of the most pressing challenges of our time. We specifically target students who face multiple disadvantages: 75 per cent of our participants are from Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, 70 per cent are women, and 80 per cent identify as working class. None of whom have a history of civic participation.

Our flagship programme is our Social Justice Leadership Fellowship, an immersive six-month crash-course in democratic engagement. Young people engage in more than 300 hours of activities, experiencing what it takes to lead system-level change by lobbying in council chambers and in parliament, running grassroots campaigns, and building broad-based alliances. The Fellowship is made up of four intensive residential retreats and three evening events a month, delivered by an outstanding team from more than 30 partner organisations.

We are incredibly proud of each of our advocates. Some examples of the campaigns include:

- Shiden, Liv, Bel, and Kofi campaigned for better black representation in our media as part of Legally Black, which went viral earlier in the year, receiving international acclaim.

- Amina and Milena led workshops for teachers across Lambeth on what they can do to combat sexual harassment and violence in schools.

The potential

There is huge potential to reach more young people. After years of working from our living rooms, trawling the land registry and chasing false starts, we are ready to open the doors to the first campus for youth activists in the UK in a former restaurant in Brixton. We are incredibly grateful to our donors and all of our crowdfunding backers who have helped us raise the necessary funding to complete renovations.

The Campus will create a space for nightly meals and community meetings, screenings, and round-the-clock youth programmes, enabling new generation of change-makers to connect, and to find safety, support, and solidarity, regardless of race, class, immigration status or gender identity. They will arrive with individual stories of alienation and oppression and find that, in collectivising our experiences and voices, we can build the power to change not just one case but entire systems.



The Bureau Local

Megan Lucero, Director, The Bureau Local



The problem

Local investigative reporting, in London and beyond, is under threat. The traditional commercial model for local news is collapsing and, as a result, scrutiny of power at a local level is in a critical state. We believe that holding power to account locally and nationally is crucial for a just and equitable society. And we believe local journalism is integral to this.

Information about every area of public and private life that was previously found on paper now exists on computers. That means there is far more of it stored – often in ways that are inaccessible to the average person. Important stories become hidden in a morass of data that is too time-consuming or technologically complex for reporters working alone to sift through.

The idea

The Bureau Local is a collaborative, investigative network that aims to uncover stories that matter to communities across the UK. It was launched in March 2017, and we have since built a network across the UK. Our members include regional and national news outlets, local reporters, hyperlocal bloggers, technologists, community-minded citizens, and specialist contributors.

By joining forces and investigating collaboratively, it becomes

possible for our members to hold power to account at both a local and national level. With each investigation, we make relevant information accessible to everyone in the network and help members find out how the issue plays out in their area. As reporting takes place across the country, we connect the dots to create a national picture. This collective reporting method produces broader and deeper investigations than would be possible by any individual newsroom, allowing us to shine a light on systemic issues and hold those in power to account.

The potential

The way people access information is changing and so is the trust people have in the news. We believe new models are needed to safeguard the future of quality news reporting. We aim to support, reinvigorate and innovate accountable reporting in the UK, and we collaborate across organisation and industry lines. By building a community of journalists, techies, designers, concerned citizens and people with specialist knowledge that contribute to investigative reporting, we believe all of us will benefit from new “acts of journalism”.

We collaborate with journalists from all backgrounds, platforms and sizes, but also work with people outside the news industry.

Coders help journalists with tech tasks; designers build visualisations for newsrooms; members of the public crowdsource information; and experts bring contacts and insider knowledge, all with the common goal of shining a light on the truth.

The Bureau Local’s work has led to calls from MPs across the country for changes to immigration spot checks¹; a parliamentary debate, citations in a House of Commons Library report; a government consultation on domestic violence²; new government guidance, and work on deaths among homeless people by the Office for National Statistics.³

We are now looking at potential topics for investigations, ranging from council finances and accountability in council spending through to the impact of algorithms on public services.

You can join the network at thebureauinvestigates.com/explainers/join-our-network.

References

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2. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/blog/2017-10-19/refuges-at-breaking-point-stories-from-around-the-country>
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London ideas event, Covent Garden, September 2018

A rant: Facetime

Social life in the digital age is organised around a paradox: on the one hand, we've never been better connected because the internet allows us to engage with countless people from all over the world at all hours of the day. On the other, our lives have never been so replete with unsatisfying interaction. Pointless text messages. Obligatory "likes." The mad pursuit of "friends" and "followers" we'll never meet in person.

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, tells us to celebrate these developments. He claims that his company, which also owns Instagram, is driven by a mission to "develop the social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us." He plans to "help connect one billion people with meaningful communities" and pledges that his products will "strengthen our social fabric."

I have only one response to this argument:



Okay, I also have some words for the man.

To begin, Zuckerberg cannot possibly believe that Facebook is a better social infrastructure than actual, physical places that promote face-to-face interactions. Why? Because he (like his fellow CEOs at Apple, Google and Amazon) has spent billions of dollars

building a state-of-the-art campus in Silicon Valley; a worker's paradise where the carefully-designed social infrastructure includes lush gardens, open air eateries, bike paths, private spaces, recreational facilities and inviting gathering places of all shapes and sizes. None of this would be necessary if Facebook were, in fact, the kind of social infrastructure Zuckerberg insists that it is. But of course, it isn't, nor can it ever be. There's one, simple reason: most relationships can only become meaningful, sustainable and fulfilling if they are consummated in real life, face-to-face.

Social infrastructure – the physical places and organisations that shape our interactions – can either promote or discourage the development of social bonds. When we invest in this infrastructure, as Zuckerberg has in his company, it fosters all kinds of connections, including serendipitous encounters with strangers (who may eventually become friends), as well as planned engagements with colleagues or friends. When we neglect or abandon social infrastructure, our shared spaces are degraded and become unpleasant. Each of us becomes more likely to hunker down into our private burrows. Instead of seeking out live human companions, we sit in our rooms, swiping, tapping and clicking the icons on our phones.

Today's political climate, defined by enthusiasm for market-based, high-tech solutions and austerity measures that undermine public goods, is hostile to social infrastructure. Libraries, parks, and schools are

shuttered and sold to developers. Expensive coffee shops and wine bars substitute for what used to be the commons, but access is limited to those who can pay the fare.

Companies like Zuckerberg's need to be investing in the social infrastructure in the city. They need to recognize the value of proximity, authenticity and flexibility.

In London, there are signs of change. Institutions, universities and businesses are increasingly being drawn away from the rigid typologies of traditional offices and into dense urban spaces and buildings that can evolve alongside the organisations that inhabit them. Innovative businesses are increasingly establishing themselves in urban centres, rather than in suburban business and science parks.

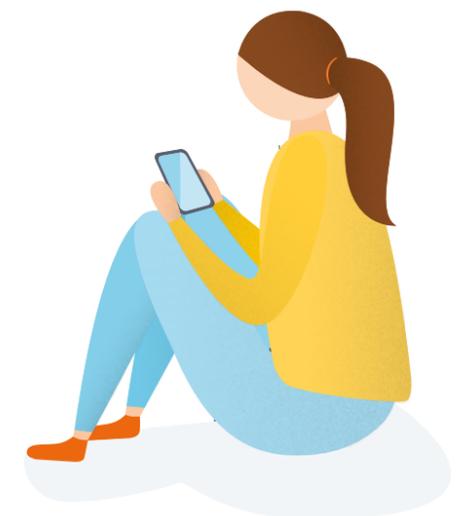
But while we're seeing clustering, these districts are re-creating city cliques. Tech City in Shoreditch. The Knowledge Quarter in Kings Cross. These emerging districts need to be aware that they have borders that welcome some and exclude others. And they often develop in more affordable parts of the city – run-down inner-city areas where local people need opportunities rather than to be shut out.

The way these districts are planned, designed and programmed can shape the interactions that develop in and around them. Companies like Facebook should be investing in the city – and they

should be doing it in partnership with public and civic institutions, for their own good as well as everyone else's. Collaboration between different kinds of institutions not only creates opportunities to integrate, and new forms of public space that become engines of economic and social inclusion; it also opens up new types of innovation ecosystems.

We need to move away from building palaces for the privileged, but not for the people. This exclusivity may work for tech companies in the short term, but it is ultimately self-defeating, creating an "us-versus-them" world that threatens to commodify large swathes of the population. No wonder society seems so broken, and so many of us are clamouring for change.

*Eric Klinenberg (@ericklinenberg) is the author of the new book, *Palaces for the People: How to Build a More Equal and United Society*, published by the Bodley Head.*



Introducing the Mayor's Civic Innovation Challenge

Theo Blackwell, Chief Digital Officer, Greater London Authority



Above: Theo Blackwell speaking at *London ideas*, September 2018

Innovation prizes are a new way for cities to meet citizens' needs, offering a way to get tech communities involved in improving public services and solving the urban problems that have been identified by the city and its citizens.

In other cities, such initiatives have successfully co-designed and tested ideas that can be scaled up to meet the needs of the whole city. Examples of similar schemes include Amsterdam's Startup in Residence, New York's NYCx Challenges and CivTech Scotland.

London's Civic Innovation Challenge is one of the first big actions of the Smarter London Together Roadmap (intended to be a flexible digital masterplan for the city). It reflects our ambition to create more user-designed services and it is funded by the Mayor; the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP)'s Growth Hub; Transport for London; and EIT Climate-KIC (Europe's leading climate change innovation initiative).

What is the Civic Innovation Challenge trying to achieve?

The Challenge recognises that services in London are delivered across decentralised boroughs, as well as by Transport for London and NHS bodies, with the Mayor of London and the GLA assuming a wider strategic policy role. It also reflects the fact that the private sector provides many of the services that fall under the environmental and socioeconomic purview of the Mayor.

The Civic Innovation Challenge aims to address huge issues. Tackling climate change, reducing inequality and supporting the capital's ageing population are all complex, multi-faceted challenges that won't be solved by a single solution. This means that the Civic Innovation Challenge needs to be both strategic and specific, allowing for work with partner organisations across London while breaking down the huge environmental and socio-economic issues into smaller, more solvable propositions.

Partners:

We began by working with seven "challenge partners" to define broad issues on which there is strategic alignment. TfL, for instance, identified two areas in which technology clearly had a role to play – in encouraging active travel and in helping to make the best possible use of their vast datasets to speed up and improve the process by which housing is planned and developed.

For the London Borough of Hackney, tackling loneliness and social isolation were a key priority.

For Our Healthier South East London (the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Partnership), a key issue was the lack of dementia resources for people from BAME backgrounds.

Each of these challenge partners had a policy issue or opportunity that they 'owned', that could be clearly articulated, and that could potentially be solved by one of London's many tech SMEs.

A real need:

Clarity of purpose, need, and desired outcome are important for those seeking the help of innovators.

Each of our seven challenges has a sponsor organisation, and the wording of their particular challenge was drafted by them, so we know that (a) they reflect a business need, and (b) we are connecting innovators directly with the right people. Those challenge partners then sat on the judging panels – along with domain experts, and tech-for-good experts from Bethnal Green Ventures – so they

have not only designed the problem, but have also been involved in the selection process.

The Challenges for the 2018 Civic Innovation Challenge were:

- Ensure dementia care works for all – with Our Healthier South East London
- Reduce pollution and unnecessary car journeys – with Transport for London
- Prepare London for zero emissions transport – With National Grid and Shell
- Ensure housing is available for all – with Transport for London
- Ensure Londoners can manage their money well – with Lloyds Banking Group
- Make London the most socially integrated city in the world – with the London Borough of Hackney
- Make London the world's most physically active city – with the London Borough of Ealing

We were clear from the start – and this was reflected in the wording of the challenges – that the role of the city and challenge partners is to articulate need. It is not up to us to know how the problems should be solved. London's tech sector is a great resource, and if you want innovation, then it is important not to restrict it or arbitrarily rule out solutions.

The process:

We had more than 100 applications following our launch at London Tech Week, which were then whittled down to a shortlist of 14 companies. These innovators each received tailored business support from Bethnal Green Ventures and spent some time learning from the challenge partners in their market to co-design their product.

The winners were announced at an event at City Hall on 1 October, chosen by the challenge partners on the basis of a short proposal on which they had worked during the previous month. The winning companies will now each receive £15,000 so they can directly test and pilot their projects with our partners.

Case study

Ensuring Dementia Care Works for All

More than 25,000 older Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) people live with dementia in the UK.

While people from BAME backgrounds are no less likely to be referred to Memory Assessment Services than the white British population, there is some evidence that people of Black African and Caribbean heritage, in particular, may develop dementia at an earlier age and yet be referred at a later stage of their illness, indicating that there are barriers to engaging with dementia services.

Feedback from people with dementia and their carers suggests this could be because some services are not sufficiently person-centred, or because they lack access to culturally appropriate resources: for example, reminiscence resources may not reflect the culture and history of the community the person comes from. (Reminiscence therapy uses items from the past to trigger long term memories.)

The Our Healthier South East London STP Dementia Services Challenge is calling for startups and SMEs to develop solutions to improve dementia treatment and support services for under-represented communities. In particular, it is looking for ways to create more personalised reminiscence resources and services that reflect local BAME community history and culture.



Above: Elderly residents meeting volunteers

Who will back your brilliant idea?

Geraldine Bedell

As Theo Blackwell outlines on previous pages, the Mayor's Civic Innovation Challenge offers new sources of funding and support for innovators in several crucial areas of concern to Londoners. But by definition, challenge prizes set parameters and narrow the field – and this might not quite work for your brilliant idea. So what can you do if you're an innovator with a great idea for London that doesn't fit into one of these categories? Where do you start to look for backing and help?

The short answer is that it's complicated – because innovation is complicated. We don't even agree about what it is a lot of the time. 'The common view of innovation,' says Manny Hothi of Trust for London, 'is that it's all about shiny new things. But a radical idea might have been around for 20 years and simply not spread from one population to another or found a way to scale. Credit Unions are an example: they haven't exploded. But if they did, they would represent real system change.'

In the early stages of an initiative, it's not always possible to predict whether it could deliver system change. The voluntary sector has understandably pushed back against the belief that money should always go to ideas that aren't tried and tested, given that large systemic social problems are troublingly persistent and it's often left to charities to mop up. Hothi says that in 10 years of working first at the Young Foundation and then at Nesta (so being at the forefront of such conversations) there has been repeated discussion about whether to stop talking about social innovation altogether – because the kind of disruption that we see from tech initiatives rarely extrapolates to social change.

Nesta has developed a model of innovation:

- Identifying problems
- Generating ideas
- Developing and testing
- Making the case
- Implementation
- Growing and scaling
- Changing the system

What point you're at in this cycle will determine the kind of funding that's available. At the very beginning, it may be possible to get, say, £10K to demonstrate proof of concept. But to qualify as innovative, a project must usually have been to some degree tested – which means that most funding that is specifically designated for innovation is not actually for shiny new ideas at all, but for something that is already working, and then it's usually either intended to pay for evidence-gathering, or to scale.

Where you can look for funding also depends on what kind of organisation you have behind you. For an urban innovator with a commercial application, there are accelerators and venture funds, and the judgements about funding will be relatively straightforward business decisions about whether the market is ready for your idea.

Civic and urban innovators driven by social purpose will have to sift out which funders back what kinds of business (some will only support charities or Community Interest Companies). If you're a small social enterprise, there's no point in approaching Bloomberg Philanthropies, interested as they are in urban innovation; their role is to support Mayors and civic leaders. Many foundations are restricted in the areas of work they can fund and may require you to be working with young people, for instance, or in education. And then there is the question of how to assess the value of what you're offering. 'We struggle to find organisations that can demonstrate both social impact and financial return,' Manny Hothi says. In practice, Trust for London prioritises social impact, although any organisation they fund has to have a demonstrable business model.

Innovation is a slippery concept, especially taken out of the tech context and applied to other attempts at system change, often prefaced with the epithets 'social' or 'civic' or 'urban.' But there is support out there, both in kind and in money, for all kinds of attempts to improve the city for the better. What follows is not a comprehensive review of the funding landscape in London (that is a larger piece of work) but something that might, with luck, offer some starting points.

First call:

London Funders – a good place to start: brings together (and lists) public sector funders, foundations, social and corporate investors, lottery funders and others. Not all of these are interested in innovation, but London Funders provides links to all of them, and it is worth fossicking around to get a picture of what's on offer relating to the capital.

Good Finance – set up to help charities and social enterprises navigate social investment. An extremely useful list of around 70 funders and business advisors/accelerators.

Beehive – a quick online questionnaire that assesses your suitability for grant funding and matches your eligibility with more than 120 grantmakers.

Early stage:

The Fore – grants of up to £30K for one to three years, as development funding for early-stage charities and social enterprises; plus business support.

Bethnal Green Ventures – an early-stage investor in ideas that use technology to solve social problems, with £20K investments and a place in their accelerator workspace, providing an intensive three-month support programme.

Paul Hamlyn Foundation – the Ideas and Pioneers Fund supports unusual or radical ideas to improve life-chances with grants of up to £10K.

Vodafone Techstarter (working with Social Business Trust) – supporting startups and early-stage ventures using tech for social good. Two separate funds (for profit and not-for-profit) each offering four awards of £35K and 12 months' business support.

Scaling:

Social Finance – structure and raise debt and equity capital (typically between £1m and £20m) for social businesses, plus advisory services to enable organisations to become investment-ready. Pioneered Social Impact Bonds.

Social Business Trust – investment and development for businesses with a turnover of £1m+ and strong growth potential.

ClearlySo – impact investment bank. Introduces successful social businesses to investors.

Nesta – various funding opportunities at different times, including significant Challenge Prizes. Currently, for example, calling for ideas from cultural and creative organisations developing digital ideas to generate social impact.

UK Research and Innovation – runs the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, investing in businesses working with the UK's science base. Investing £4.7 billion over four years.

Innovate UK – various calls for projects suitable for grants, for example, improving local service delivery by capturing intelligent data. Also provides loans.

Various stages:

Trust for London – makes grants of £8m a year, supporting up to 300 organisations working to reduce poverty and inequality in the capital (the average grant is £80K) across seven areas of activity. Also has a social investment fund, Capital for London, investing typically between £100K and £1m.

City Bridge Trust – Innovation Stepping Stones fund helps innovators pilot ideas and become social-investment-ready as part of their wider grant-making activities. Also makes grants totalling around £20m a year to charitable organisations working across three strands of work of benefit to London.

Big Lottery Fund – a variety of grants and partnerships, ranging from the small (£300-£10K) to significant (Reaching Communities England has £190m to spend this year on up to five organisations). Includes a Digital Fund.

Esmée Fairbairn – grants plus a £45m social investment fund: particularly interested in innovative approaches.

Lankelly Chase – concerned with systems change and intensive place-based work, seeing relationships as at the heart of system behaviours. This innovative way of working means they tend to focus tightly on a small number of projects rather than fund widely.

UnLtd – small startup grants of £5k-£15K to test and develop ideas; and an Impact Fund investing up to £150K in organisations that have been operating for between two and five years with proof of revenue and impact.

If you are a funder and think you should be on this list, please contact hello@centreforlondon.org and, in due course, we will update the online version.

Spotlight on Paris: Old city, new ideas

Nicolas Bosetti, Research Manager, Centre for London

Anne Hidalgo worked for 13 years as Deputy Mayor before becoming Mayor of Paris in 2014. One might be forgiven for thinking that her ideas would have been blunted by the time she arrived in office. Instead, she is showing that Paris can be a thriving centre for civic and social innovation.

There is an urgency to promote civic innovation in Paris. Income, wealth and opportunity divides run deep in the region. France's richest and poorest communes are only a few kilometres away, and in the latter, youth unemployment is close to 40 per cent.¹ The city has also been shaken by fears of homegrown terrorism, and by the refugee crisis – in the year to March 2018, 60,000 refugees arrived at the Paris 18e Registration Centre.² Despite this increasing need, the city's charitable sector is eroding. The number of new associations created in the city has been declining for several years in a row.³

Innovation policies designed to tackle these social problems are often hit-and-miss – but Paris offers

up some interesting examples. Under Hidalgo's leadership, the city has encouraged liveliness and nurtured enterprise in the city's overlooked spaces. New spaces for innovation have been enabled and funded, as at Station F. Existing projects have been supported, as at Les Grands Voisins; and there has been effort to stimulate new ideas (Réinventer Paris, Budget Participatif).

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Left + below: Station F, Paris



© Sharon VanderKaay



Right + above: Les Grands Voisins, Paris



© Guilhem Vellut

Les Grands Voisins – a Moveable Feast

A public developer has opened up a disused hospital as temporary homeless accommodation, with 600 beds. Rather than gating the site to prevent interactions with neighbours, the associations managing it have turned the hospital into a lively neighbourhood with offices, shops and bars with a social purpose: providing employment for people returning to work or for refugees who haven't yet secured the right to work. A programme of events draws in neighbours as well as visitors from all over Paris. The public subsidy is no more than the cost of renting out temporary accommodation in the private sector, and the office space let out to 250 companies covers the project's running costs. According to organisers, Les Grands Voisins experiment has become one of the most diverse spaces in inner Paris, and is boosting the morale of the city's charitable sector.

Le Budget Participatif

Between 2014 and 2020, Parisians can decide how 500 million euros (five per cent of the city's investment budget) should be spent. Citizens put forward propositions, which are vetted by City Hall according to their feasibility, and then voted upon. As projects only come out of the investment budget, most are improvements to public spaces, for instance through greening and street redesign. Paris has spent much energy encouraging participation, and the large funding pot is gradually raising interest: the number of voters has risen to 200,000 in 2018, a third of them high school students.

Réinventer Paris

The City of Paris has pioneered a competition to revive disused sites and unloved public spaces. For its second edition in 2017, the City auctioned leases on 34 sites owned by public bodies in the capital – from power and metro stations to a 17th century mansion – in exchange for architectural, economic, cultural and social value. In a city that is short of space, Paris hopes to unleash creative energy by giving access to vacant sites rather than keeping hold of them.

Station F

Paris opened the world's largest startup hub in 2017 – 3,000 workplaces, support services for entrepreneurs, and several restaurants and bars. The City of Paris facilitated the project by making compulsory purchase of the site to sell to a developer who financed it with support from a public financial institution.

Interview with an innovator: Bianca Wylie

CityLab's *Laura Bliss* talks to *Bianca Wylie*,
the Jane Jacobs of the smart city



© Bianca Wylie

A little over a year ago, a short article in the *Toronto Star* announced that Sidewalk Labs, a subsidiary of Google's parent company Alphabet, was planning to build a digital neighbourhood on the edge of Lake Ontario. Data-gathering sensors and cutting-edge urban design would together eliminate congestion, unaffordable housing, and excess emissions.

Dan Doctoroff, CEO of Sidewalk Labs, and Will Fleissig, the then-CEO of Waterfront Toronto (the body overseeing the district's development) proposed a year of initial project planning, with a \$50 million investment from Sidewalk, and insisted that the public's input would be vital. "Sidewalk Toronto

is about improving people's lives, not developing technology for technology's sake," they wrote.

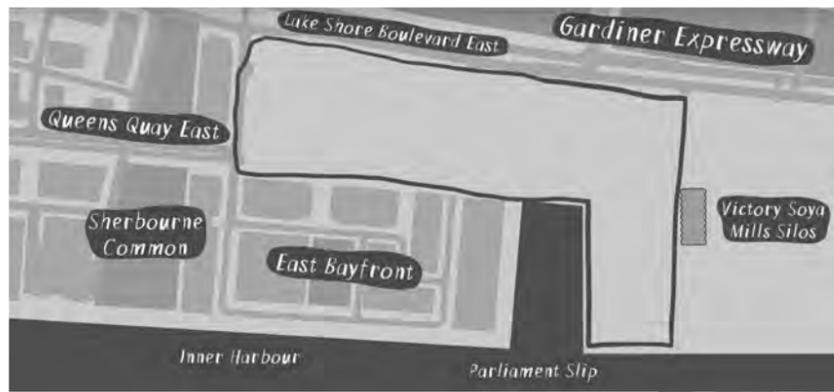
Despite the upbeat promises, alarm bells rang for Bianca Wylie, a Toronto resident with a background in open government and technology. "Neither of these people are the government," she remembers thinking. "So why are they using all the words that a government would use to plan for the city?"

A year later, Wylie has become a key focus of opposition to Sidewalk Labs' vision for Toronto, and an increasingly prominent critic of smart-city developments worldwide. She has campaigned in newspaper articles and blog posts, addressed the Toronto City Council and the Canadian House of Commons, and spoken at nearly every open event Sidewalk Labs has hosted over the past year. She is sometimes described as a privacy advocate,

because she talks a lot about how companies and governments use citizens' data. But "civic tech reformer" might be a more appropriate label, because she is concerned by the wider question of what is lost when governments cede power to private companies.

"It's about our neighbourhoods, our cities, how we want them to work, and what problems should be solved," Wylie told me over Skype from her home office a few miles west of downtown one recent Saturday morning, while her husband entertained their two toddlers downstairs. "I reject the technocratic vision of problem solving."

The redevelopment of Quayside, as the project site has been dubbed, seems to her to be wrong in its very conception. Waterfront Toronto, a government-appointed body, is responsible for 800 acres of prime urban real estate on the lake, and



Below and right: Area of Quayside development



© Ken Lund

has by Wylie's account allowed a private company to take the lead on shaping its future. Sidewalk Labs will determine questions of policy that, she says, should be the province of governments and people, not of a startup: "A city is not a business."

Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto took the unusual step of forming a joint entity called Sidewalk Toronto; and it is this organisation that has largely led public consultation on the development, rather than Waterfront Toronto or government itself. Wylie believes the result is a planning process that has had more to do with generating PR than garnering opinion. She argues that there has been little opportunity for citizens to learn about alternatives.

The various ideas that have been proposed, such as self-driving vehicles; "smart" pavement tiles that sense traffic and absorb rainwater; and tall timber constructions containing micro-dwellings sound like a positive vision of the future. But for Wylie, that is not quite the point: they have been framed as the

only option for developing what is, after all, a piece of public land.

It didn't help that the terms of the agreement signed by Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto were not made public until after months of agitation by her and others. "I was sceptical a year ago that we could pull off a really democratically informed process," Wylie said. "I have found the process to be thoroughly anti-democratic."

For much of the past year, it has been unclear what Sidewalk Labs wants to do with the information it will gather, Wylie claims. Until recently, project documents have been short on details about what types of data will be collected, who will own it, and whether it might be somehow monetised. In media interviews, Doctoroff has been reported as saying that the intention is not to make money, but Wylie says explicit written commitments have been vague.

Quayside has become increasingly controversial in recent months. Over the summer, there were three high-profile resignations from the project, including one board member who told the

Toronto Star that Sidewalk Labs was "short changing" the city; and the CEO, Fleissig, although he later rejoined as an advisor.

In October it was revealed that Ontario's Auditor General was conducting a value-for-money audit of Waterfront, a rare intervention in a public agency, designed to gauge whether there has been "due regard for economy and efficiency, and whether procedures to measure and report on the effectiveness of programs and organizations exist and function properly," according to the Auditor General's website. There are, in short, concerns about how a non-profit development corporation procured Sidewalk Labs as a developer and whether it has retained enough control.

More recently, three more advisors to the project have withdrawn. Saadia Muzaffar, a volunteer advisor and the founder of Tech Girls Canada, stated in a letter that she was stepping away because of "apathy and a lack of leadership regarding shaky public trust" on the part of Waterfront Toronto. The Mayor of Toronto, John Tory, who has been a supporter of the

project, reportedly met former Alphabet executive chairman Eric Schmidt and Doctoroff to discuss "the need for Google to give Toronto residents a better understanding of the details of its plans for urban innovation and their data privacy commitments as soon as is practical."

Most recently, Ann Cavoukian, a former privacy commissioner of Ontario, resigned from a paid consulting role, citing recent proposed guidelines for how data would be used which revealed that third-party companies could potentially access identifiable information. "I imagined us creating a Smart City of Privacy, as opposed to a Smart City of Surveillance," she wrote.

Bianca Wylie believes that what is happening in Toronto is one example of how urban democracies everywhere can be blindsided by the sheen of digital newness. "The smart city industry is a Trojan horse for technology companies," she told *Washington Post* in August; "they come in under the guise of environmentalism and improving quality of life, but they're here for money."

The Jane Jacobs of the smart city

Wylie's background has given her a powerful vantage point. She dropped out of university to start a software business creating educational games during that earlier era of techno-optimism, the dotcom boom (and learned that private interests don't always align with social objectives: the enterprise failed). She worked for an early webcasting platform and became interested in the politics of urban planning, in particular in how unversed most civilians are in its language. She began making short videos of public planning forums with the idea of starting an educational series, and was hired as a public consultation expert.

Wylie has opposed Quayside with some institutional backing from the Center for International Government Innovation, a nonpartisan Canadian think tank where she is a senior fellow. (Its founder, Jim Balsillie, the former Co-CEO of Blackberry, has also come out as a harsh critic of Sidewalk Labs and Waterfront Toronto.) She is also the Co-Founder of a non-profit called Tech Reset Canada, which advocates for the use of technology for public good, and has been coordinating with others around the country in a group called the Canadian Open Smart Cities Forum to discuss the issues raised by the Sidewalk Labs project.



Cities have always involved the public and the private and we've been able to manage that in physical space: that's what planning is about. But we don't have an equivalent for digital, and it turns out it matters just as much.

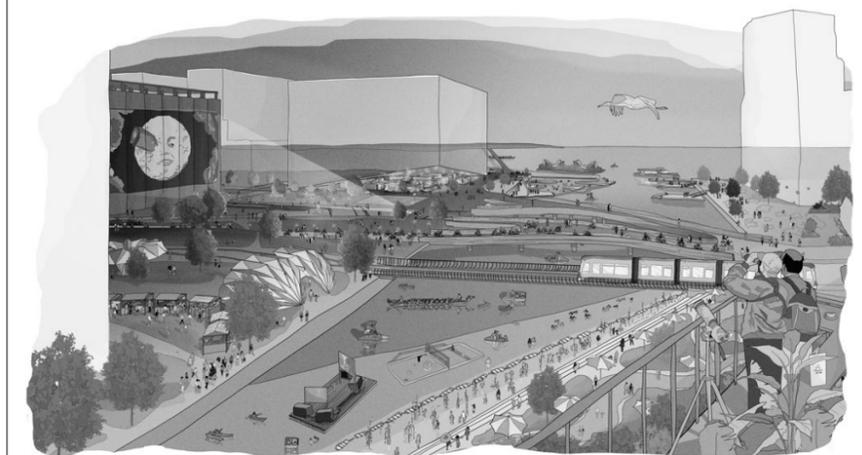


She remembers attending her first meeting on open data in government, "listening to everyone saying this is going to resolve problems with democracy, that now there was going to be transparency and accountability." She quickly realized that the combination of technology and urban planning would be "horrific" for sensible public discussion. "They're both full of jargon and elitism and privilege," she said. Data trusts, platforms, APIs - these are inaccessible terms to the average citizens, she suggests.

Elected officials lack clear language to talk about what it means to integrate technology into government, Wylie believes. She isn't against sensors and software in the public realm. She just thinks the people should be in charge of how they are being used. Government officials and politicians get intimidated and tantalised by the novelty of digital technology and they cede power to make the decisions about what tools they want and why. "I really think there's opportunity for governments to use technology well. It's a question of confidence in government - how to make the politicians and the officials realise that they're in charge, they're the ones driving."

Her criticism of the Quayside

Below: Illustrations of plans for Quayside Silo Park



© Sidewalk Toronto

project has focused primarily on Sidewalk Labs, but she has not spared the government proxies in Waterfront Toronto who invited in Sidewalk Labs to begin with, nor the public officials who could intervene. And she has done as good a job as anyone of articulating what is at stake if cities allow themselves to become the tools of companies, according to Kevin Webb, who has worked both for the World Bank and Sidewalk Labs, and is a leading commentator on data and open government. The promise of integrating technology into the public realm has huge potential, he says, but if it's going to happen democratically, for the benefit of city dwellers, conversations need to happen in words everyone can use. "Cities have always involved the public and the private and we've been able to manage that in physical space: that's what planning is about," he says. "But we don't

have an equivalent for digital, and it turns out it matters just as much." Anthony Townsend, the urban futurist and technology consultant, who has also worked with Sidewalk Labs, told me he thinks of Wylie as "the Jane Jacobs of the smart city."

Sidewalk Labs' paper on data use, published in October, proposed a civic data trust, a neutral third party that would "approve and control the collection of, and manage access to, urban data originating in Quayside." The proposal is lengthy and detailed, and states emphatically that the data gathered in public spaces on the site would be stored and available for public use – not for the sole ownership or purposes of any one company. It also affirms that Sidewalk Labs would strip personally identifiable information from any data it plucked from this repository, and that it would not turn it into any kind of product.

But what other companies that set up shop at Quayside might do is another story. Micah Lasher, Sidewalk Labs' Head of Policy and Communications, and a former New York City official in the Bloomberg administration, explained that it is likely to be outside their authority to establish guidelines for other players – that, probably, would be for the government to decide. "We are not going to be the central collector of data that I think some people fear," he said. "But that puts us at some distance from what rules would exist in this place."

A detailed proposal on data governance, plus a clear acknowledgement that the government needs to have role in regulating it, would seem to be a major turning point in the narrative surrounding the Quayside project – and perhaps a victory for Wylie's advocacy. But she argues that the timing speaks to a deeper problem. "Why does it take a year for them

to talk to the public about this stuff?" she said. "They're trying to figure out, 'what will you let us do?'"

Another way of interpreting the saga, though, could be that they are trying to figure out what to do, period. It is possible that they are earnestly convinced that an Alphabet-owned startup can successfully come into a foreign city and build a happier neighbourhood – a genuine belief that when technology, design, and lots of capital come together, top-down planning can achieve the public policy goals everybody seems to want.

It's also possible that Quayside's team of self-proclaimed urbanists – many of them alumni of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration – simply weren't focused on the seemingly arcane topic of data governance at the start. "We're not a technology company. We view ourselves as a place-making

company," Doctoroff recently told a convening of city officials, civic tech workers, and foundation leaders at CityLab Detroit. Maybe there was no nefarious data plot. In all the time that passed without detail, maybe they just didn't have a coherent plan.

"We're dealing with an enormous amount of really complicated questions that have taken time to sort out," said Micah Lasher. "There is no question that in the vacuum that that has created, there have been a range of voices that

include very legitimate concerns." Undoubtedly, the Quayside project is mired in complicated questions. A reason for that could be that they're not questions designed for a company to solve. That's the thrust of Wylie's crusade: that cities are places people live, not in themselves grounds for product-making. "The question is, how do we think about how we want cities to work?" she said. "That's what should be driving opportunities for business. Not the other way around."



© Sidewalk Toronto / Michael Green Architects

Below and right: The public realm area, Stoa is designed to be accessible for year round use



© Sidewalk Toronto

New Centre for London research launching in 2019

London & the UK

The capital has long played an outsized role in the economic, political and cultural life of the UK. But over the last few decades London's dominance of the UK's economy has become particularly pronounced. Critics complain that its magnetic power sucks talent and investment away from other UK cities, making it hard for them to thrive. Centre for London is developing new thinking on how London can connect with the rest of the country.

This research will look at how the capital's relations to the rest of the country have changed in recent years; how London has positioned itself in the past; how it is perceived; and what the city could do to address national misgivings. The research will also explore deeper questions about what London should be doing to spread prosperity as widely as possible to other cities and regions.

The final report will be published in early 2019.

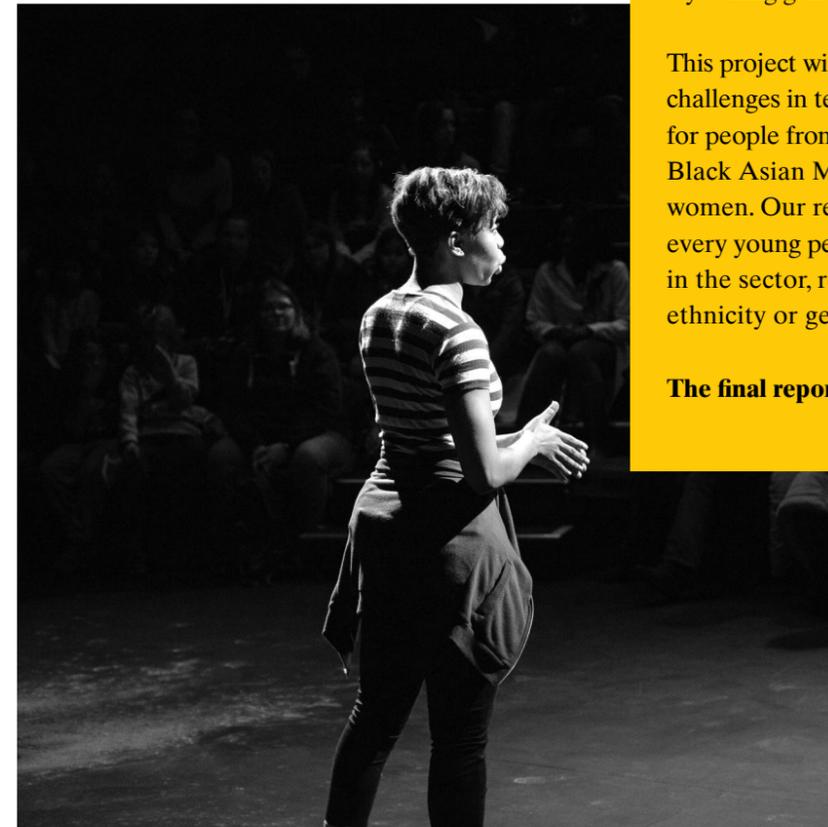


Cultural industries and social mobility

The cultural industries is a significant contributor to London's economy. But despite the sector's importance, recent research from the Greater London Authority highlighted that the creative industries are not open to or representative of all Londoners. The sector also has a yawning gender and socioeconomic imbalance.

This project will focus on the creative sector's challenges in terms of accessibility and social mobility for people from less privileged backgrounds, including Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and women. Our research will propose new ways to ensure every young person can make the most of opportunities in the sector, regardless of their social background, ethnicity or gender.

The final report will be published in early 2019.



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Find out more about our research and events at centreforlondon.org

About London ideas

London ideas is a magazine about urban innovation. It is published by Centre for London and generously supported by Capital and Counties Properties PLC.

The magazine champions innovations that could transform London – and other cities around the world – for the better. Running alongside the magazine, Centre for London is holding a series of events at which entrepreneurs and innovators present and discuss their ideas.

Find out more and to get involved:

centreforlondon.org/project/london-ideas/

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Centre for London

Centre for London is the capital's dedicated think tank. A politically independent charity, our mission is to develop new solutions to London's critical challenges and advocate for a fair and prosperous global city. Through research, analysis and events we generate bold and creative solutions to improve the city we share.

Find out more at centreforlondon.org

Capital & Counties Properties PLC

Capital & Counties Properties PLC (Capco) is one of the largest listed investment and development property companies in central London. Capco owns two landmark London estates – Covent Garden and Earls Court – and as a significant investor in the capital drives long-term value through a strategic and distinctive approach to placemaking.

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