

Article

## “DALSTON! WHO ASKED U?”: A Knowledge-Centred Perspective on the Mapping of Socio-Spatial Relations in East London

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### Abstract

Since the turn of the millennium, Dalston in the London Borough of Hackney has experienced fundamental change through public and private investment in new infrastructure and processes of urban restructuring. This was paralleled by the reform of the national planning system, which aimed to devolve decision-making to the local level and increase the possibilities for residents and stakeholders to participate in planning processes. However, the difficulty of translating local needs and aspirations into policy goals and broadly accepted area action plans resulted in a crisis, which, in 2018, led to the introduction of the Dalston Conversation and subsequently the revision of planning goals. It is in this context that the Relational States of Dalston mapping project generated and assembled local knowledge about the web of socio-spatial relations between different local actors and in this way highlighted the significance and fragility of the communities' networks and their spatial dimensions. The collection, ordering, integration, and production of knowledge can be seen as part of the core work in urban planning processes and policymaking. Which forms of knowledge are routinely used in planning contexts and define the relationship between planning action and urban transformation? To what extent could the mapping of local community relations add to this knowledge and help to improve decision-making processes in contested spaces of knowledge? In what ways could a relational understanding of space and architectural modes of research and representation contribute to the analysis, conceptualisation, and communication of local community relations? This article engages with these questions, using the mapping project in Dalston as a case study.

### Keywords

East London; local knowledge; mapping; Relational States of Dalston; socio-spatial project; urban planning

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

In September 2007, when the burnt-out shells of the Georgian terraces at 60–64 Dalston Lane in the London Borough of Hackney (LBH) were demolished, the widely visible graffiti “DALSTON! WHO ASKED U?” (Figure 1) was also removed (“Run to ruin,” 2016). It gave expression to public discontent with local policymaking and the processes through which decisions had been made by the authorities. The slogan was used in local campaigns that

support communities, safeguard heritage, and work to enhance the quality of the urban environment in the Dalston area of Hackney. The Dalston Lane controversy lasted for almost two decades and was closely linked to other contested projects in Dalston, including the Dalston Junction infrastructure project and the Dalston Square development, as well as the recent proposals for Ridley Road Market and sites around Ashwin Street known as the Dalston Quarter. Critics of the dominant market-led redevelopment strategies in Dalston town

centre expressed concerns about the loss of the area’s identity as a characterful, diverse, and vibrant place for people (OPEN Dalston, 2007a).



**Figure 1.** Key moment during the Dalston Lane controversy: Demolition of historically significant examples of early 19th century Georgian terraces on Dalston Lane after years of neglect and fire damage, 2007. Source: OPEN Dalston (2007b).

The Dalston case should be seen in the broader context of the substantial urban restructuring of the eastern part of London and the challenges faced by the city as a whole, as well as within the specific context of the LBH (Figure 2). Historically, the area today defined as the LBH has been a place of arrival and diversity. Its residents have different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, speak 89 different languages, and are members of different religious communities (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 12). The 2011 Census records Hackney’s population at 246,300, of which around 40%

come from Black/African/Caribbean/Asian/mixed ethnic groups (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 10). Hackney is home to large Turkish/Kurdish and Charedi Jewish communities (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 3). While ethnic, cultural, and social diversity are seen as a prime source of local pride in the borough (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, pp. 3–4), rising costs of living and the lack of affordable space are putting local households, businesses, and cultural and social organisations increasingly under pressure (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 33) and are contributing to persistently high rates of deprivation (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 4). The Hackney Profile states that, while East London has become an “area of growing economic opportunity” (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 22), as a result of processes of economic concentration in Southeast Britain and local improvement of transport infrastructure and public services, “this growth sits alongside significant deprivation. Some local people continue to face persistent inequalities and are disproportionately affected by child poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency” (LBH Policy and Insight Team, 2020, p. 22). The coexistence of very different dynamics and problems in the LBH poses a major challenge for planning and policymaking, in particular where they directly affect the dense and often fragile web of socio-spatial relations.

The situation in Dalston exemplifies the difficulties in connecting local needs to planning action since the aspirations and issues at stake are diverse and difficult to identify, measure, and communicate. In the case of Dalston, the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, far-reaching national planning reform, and criticism and opposition from local stakeholders and campaign groups did not seem to result in more comprehensive planning processes and broadly accepted outcomes. This culminated in a crisis, which, in 2018, led to the introduction of the



**Figure 2.** Dalston town centre in 2017–2018. From top left to right: Kingsland High Street, Ridley Road Market, Ashwin Street, Dalston Square development, Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, and Rio Cinema.

public consultation, titled the Dalston Conversation (LBH, 2018) and subsequently to the revision of planning goals.

Knowledge is assigned a key legitimising role in urban planning contexts and decision-making in the public domain. If we assume that actors, organisations, and stakeholders use, produce, and relate to different kinds of knowledge forms and claims to knowledge, the processing of knowledge will not be straightforward in planning contexts and therefore is subject to contestation and negotiation. The complexity of urban situations seems to be mirrored by the complexity of knowledge both about and within urban conditions, especially if the focus is on the fine grain of socio-spatial relations at the neighbourhood level. Local community exchanges and their spatial dimensions are hard to grasp, making it difficult to communicate and evaluate the social values that are generated within their respective contexts. However, it is on this level in particular that the effects of urban planning and policymaking become entangled with everyday life in the most consequential ways, since multiple aspects of people's lives—including the social, environmental, spatial, and economic dimensions—may be directly affected.

In this article, we employ Dalston as a case study to connect the local perspective with the broader level perspectives of the production, control, and use of knowledge in planning and urban transformation. We discuss shifts in the demand for knowledge, in particular local and locally embedded spatial knowledge, before we present the project of mapping socio-spatial relations as a means of generating and processing local knowledge. In the final section, we expand the discussion about knowledge through a reflection on the transformation of knowledge during the mapping project.

## 2. Knowledge and Planning

Like architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, and other spatial disciplines, urban planning operates within transdisciplinary settings and conflict-driven spatial processes, while being closely related to the norms of policymaking and politics. In the following sections, we argue that the relationship between knowledge and urban planning has been subjected to repeated re-framing and adaptation, whereby the more recent changes resulting from diversification, digitalisation, and multiplication of knowledge, as well as from the polarisation of knowledge claims, have produced new conditions that are currently challenging urban planning practices and processes. We further argue that the cross-disciplinary sharing of histories of epistemic re-conceptualisation opened new possibilities for interdisciplinary work and the exchange of methodological framings. We will briefly introduce representations of forms of knowledge by Becroft et al. (2018), Healey (2007), and Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011) before we discuss the more specific framings of knowledge as local knowledge and spatial knowledge, arguing that they could play a

more decisive role in the development of locally grounded concretisations of planning goals. We conclude this section by drawing conceptual connections between local knowledge and Löw's (2016) theory of relational space.

### 2.1. Multiple Framings of Knowledge

The relationship between urban planning and knowledge is not static and has changed considerably since the dissolution of the modernist paradigm that entailed the questioning of knowledge as a reified object (Rydin, 2007, p. 52) together with the technocratic empiricist orientation in policy analysis (Fischer, 2003, p. vii) and "naïve objectivism" (Sayer, 1992, as cited in Brenner et al., 2011, p. 233). The "rational model" (Innes & Booher, 2014, p. 197) gave way to more complex understandings of knowledge. Philosophers and sociologists like John Dewey, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, and Niklas Luhmann, among others, are understood to have influenced these shifts in epistemic orientation by offering their pragmatist, interpretive, constructivist, autopoietic, and critical perspectives to the conceptualisation of knowledge in planning theory (Healey, 2007, pp. 239–240, 244–245; Innes & Booher, 2014, p. 196; Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, pp. 96–97). This, in turn, required the revision of the formal and informal processes through which knowledge is gathered, constructed, distributed, justified, and communicated in planning and policymaking.

Different concepts have been developed to represent the multiplicity of knowledge together with the related actors, networks, and processes, be it as producers, brokers, or bearers of knowledge. Based on the understanding that dualist concepts like explicit/tacit knowledge capture only a part of the knowledge universe and its entanglements with power structures, processes, and networks, more complex concepts evolved such as "epistemic communities" (Haas & Haas, 1995, p. 261), "communities of practice" (Healey, 2007, p. 27; Wenger, 1998), or "discourse coalitions" (Hajer, 1993). They share the assumption that knowledge is socially produced, related to power structures, and mediated, and that different forms of knowledge and knowledge claims compete with each other.

Because knowledge is tied up with numerous institutional settings and modes of processing and production, its successive waves of reframing have contributed towards differentiation. Digitalisation and the growing significance of "*zone[s] of knowledge transactions*" (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 95, emphasis in the original) are considered a means of multiplying the amount and heterogeneity of knowledge produced (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 104), as well as controversies about the validity of knowledge claims.

Drawing from the analysis of different situations in which knowledge and action unfold in planning contexts, Healey (2007, p. 255) suggests that "policy groups, scientific teams or local neighbourhoods" are likely to



draw on different forms of knowledge rather than only one, whereby differences occur in the combination and mix of knowledge and the “processes through which what counts as valid knowledge and legitimate inference is established.” Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011, pp. 97–98) speak of regional variations of “knowledge cultures” as defining the structural and interpretative framework for the translation of locally produced forms of knowledge.

The successive reframing of knowledge has established new epistemological intersections between disciplines, which has opened new possibilities for the cross-disciplinary application of theory, research methods, and thinking. Over the last two decades, modes of enquiry in urban research experienced significant changes through technological innovation and new methods of data generation, accumulation, and processing. At the same time, the possibilities for the methodological framing of urban research and analysis diversified, for example through the migration of theory/methods packages and multi-site research designs that integrate elements of urban ethnography (Schwanhäußer, 2016), assemblage theory and actor-network theory (Blok & Farias, 2016; Yaneva, 2012), grounded theory (Harnack, 2012), and social worlds/arenas and situational analysis (Kling, 2020).

## 2.2. Ordering and Integrating Knowledge

Urban planning and other spatial disciplines are increasingly challenged by the integration of knowledge produced by a growing number of specialist sub-disciplines, data generation processes, administrative requirements, and the opening-up of fields of urban practice. Different models have been conceived to structure and categorise these forms of knowledge. The model proposed by Healey (2007) in the context of strategic regional planning consists of four axes: explicit, implicit, experiential/practical, and systematised (Healey, 2007, p. 244). The quadrants contain forms of knowledge that draw from its two adjacent axes. “Local knowledge,” for example, is positioned between the implicit and experiential/practical axes, while “good practice guides” are between the experiential/practical and explicit axes. Healey’s (2007, p. 243) understanding of knowledge is closely linked to interpretive and constructivist perspectives, emphasising the relatedness of knowledge to action. “Knowing” is conceived as an activity, a process (Healey, 2007, p. 244). Accordingly, the category “practical engagement” is positioned at the centre and intersects with all quadrants (Healey, 2007, p. 245). The model implies the possibility of movement and stresses the co-presence of multiple forms of knowledge.

The categorisation of knowledge by Beecroft et al. (2018) is used in the context of processes of urban transformation and real-world laboratories. It distinguishes between systems knowledge, target knowledge, and transformation knowledge (Beecroft et al., 2018, pp. 79, 149; CASS & ProClim, 1997, p. 15).

The model developed by Matthiesen and the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space aims at elaborating “a more adequate working concept of knowledge in technological, research, government *and* everyday life contexts” (Matthiesen, 2005, p. 4, emphasis in the original). Its flower-like shape initially integrated eight forms of knowledge. Matthiesen and Reisinger adopted this conceptual framework for the study of knowledge transactions in the Governance for Sustainability project (Atkinson et al., 2011) and expanded it to 10 forms of knowledge (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, pp. 99–102):

1. Knowledge of everyday life;
2. Expert/professional/scientific knowledge;
3. Product knowledge;
4. Steering knowledge, including management and leadership knowledge;
5. Institutional knowledge;
6. Economic (market) knowledge;
7. Local knowledge;
8. Milieu knowledge;
9. Reflective knowledge;
10. “?,” an open, non-specified form of knowledge that is represented as a question mark.

Within this categorisation, knowledge of everyday life and reflective knowledge are assigned special roles. Knowledge of everyday life is “serving as a resource of general reference and as a starting point of knowledge differentiation” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 103). Accordingly, this form of knowledge is presented as the referential backdrop in the diagram. Reflective knowledge rests at the centre and overlaps with the other forms. It is defined as “a product of learning and evaluating of knowledge-in-action, coupling and re-coupling the whole process and the different knowledge forms involved” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 103).

In a further conceptualisation, Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011, p. 105) cluster the different forms of knowledge within institutionalised settings and represent them as operationalised knowledge in action. The authors refer to the clusters as “knowledge domains,” whereby they distinguish between (a) the “science, research and expert domain” (with an emphasis on expert/professional/scientific/product knowledge), (b) the “policy and governance domain” (with an emphasis on steering/institutional knowledge), (c) the “market domain” (with an emphasis on economic knowledge), and (d) the “life world domain” (with an emphasis on everyday/milieu/local knowledge). The work of each domain includes the collection, control, and storing of relevant forms of knowledge, while actions between the domains include the joint filtering, trading, and translating of knowledge, which is facilitated by the “media” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, pp. 105–106). Reflective knowledge is shown as a transversal category that spans above and between the domains.

Among the three models, Healey (2007) establishes the most direct and numerous conceptual links with design, while the models of Beecroft et al. (2018) and Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011) seem to offer various implicit options for such connections, in particular in the fields of target and transformation knowledge, as a further transversal category that relates different forms of knowledge with each other, or as a companion to reflective knowledge. From the perspective of architects, urban designers, and other design-related disciplines, the connections are of significance because large parts of their professional, research, and expert contributions are centred around design work. Theorising on the re-conceptualisation of design as a reflexive research practice, Buchert (2014, p. 20) speaks of an “understanding of the process of design as a particular form of knowledge production and as a projective practice, as a highly integrative and creative knowledge culture that combines various forms of knowledge with reflection and production.” This idea is also present in “design build,” “live projects” (Anderson, 2017), or real-world laboratories (Beecroft et al., 2018) in architectural education.

The models by Beecroft et al. (2018), Healey (2007), and Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011), as well as the concept offered by Buchert (2014), mirror the interrelatedness of knowledge and action. Their conceptual frameworks share the understanding that much of the knowledge involved in processes of urban transformation is located outside the institutionalised and formalised domain of planning. In the following section, we focus on the interrelatedness of knowledge and space, and on the conceptualisation and processing of local knowledge.

### *2.3. Local Knowledge and Spaces of the Everyday*

From the perspective of knowledge theory, “DALSTON! WHO ASKED U?” could be read as the failure of the expert and institutional knowledge domains to identify and integrate relevant local knowledge through the political process and planning. The construction of “local knowledge” as a legitimate form of knowledge in European planning processes and policymaking is related to the broader shifts in basic assumptions about knowledge formation, democratic processes, and governance as mentioned above. The question of what counts as local knowledge is not fixed and is subject to agreement, negotiation, and controversy. Matthiesen and Reisinger’s (2011, p. 98) multi-level approach and concept of “knowledge cultures” offers an interpretive framework for representing higher-level influences on local knowledge that is related to the ordering power of legal and institutional conditions, as well as cultures of governance and politics. Based on the understanding that forms of knowledge do not occur in isolation, Matthiesen (2005, p. 8) suggests that “local knowledge addresses locally situated forms of knowledge-based competencies, integrating more or less systematically fragments of different knowledge forms on the local

level. This knowledge form operates in close contact to everyday and professional experiences.” The forms of knowledge that are of particular relevance in this context are, according to Matthiesen (2005, p. 8), “knowledge of everyday life,” “milieu knowledge,” and “product knowledge.” If knowledge is closely related to action, local knowledge will be discernible in actions performed on the local level, urban quarter, or neighbourhood, in particular in everyday activities, social relations, conflicts, processes, goods, materialities, and everyday spaces, including actions that establish and maintain trans-local connections to broader discourses (Zimmermann, 2009, p. 60).

In this respect, spaces of the everyday qualify as prime sites for the analysis of local knowledge. If we assume that both knowledge and space are socially produced and that the production of space is based on processes of “spacing” and “operation[s] of synthesis” (Löw, 2016, p. 134), that is, positioning, connecting, and integrating, we may conceptually position the production of local knowledge in close proximity to the production of space, if not within the production of space itself. Producing local knowledge could then be considered an act of producing space. Löw (2016, p. 191) stresses that “the constitution of spaces in action” is a collective effort that “takes place in processes of negotiation with other actors.” If, as Löw (2016, p. 191) continues, the “negotiation of power structures is an immanent aspect of this process” and if spaces of the everyday are affected by and closely related to macro-level processes (Lefebvre, 1961/2002, p. 141), the analysis of local spaces, knowledge and relations will not end with questions that are of local relevance but include political issues of broader concern. In this sense, the reframing of local knowledge production as a process of spatial production opens up modes of analysis that consider the relational aspects of knowing together with its spatial, social, and political dimensions.

### **3. Shifts in the Relationship of Knowledge and Planning in the UK**

The Localism Act 2011 was adopted to “devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions” (House of Commons, 2011, para. 2). It could be seen as part of the gradual process of decentralisation of governmental and administrative powers in the UK, as well as part of ongoing changes in the culture of governance and local decision-making towards more inclusive processes and higher levels of participation (Healey, 2007, p. 18). We argue that this shift went hand in hand with changes to expectations about the use of knowledge in planning, in particular local knowledge, its production and filtering, the negotiation of local knowledge, as well as the discursive formation of local “KnowledgeScapes” (Matthiesen, 2005, 2009; Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011; Zimmermann, 2009).

### 3.1. Changing Demands on Local Knowledge

The summary of the bill of the Localism Act 2011 emphasised the expected mutual benefit for all parties involved in urban transformation, in particular investors, local authorities, and the local communities, based on the understanding that localised decision-making would produce better decisions about resource allocation and investment, ensure high levels of acceptance in the local communities, streamline planning processes, and reduce bureaucratic overheads (House of Commons, 2011). Addressing the problems that led to the reform, the Department for Communities and Local Government stated in the impact assessment of the proposed bill on housing supply, that “the planning system has been too top-down, marginalising local communities from decisions and causing delays to local authority plans” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p. 2). It also highlighted potential problems of authorship, local identification, and democratic responsibility caused by the partial rewriting of development plan documents through external inspectors (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p. 2). Summing up the reform’s objectives, the report stated the aim “to return control over planning decisions to local communities by allowing local authorities the choice to adopt plans which are the right reflection of local aspirations for development in their area, in line with national policy” (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p. 2). However, critics observed that local governments continued to be highly dependent on grants controlled by the central government, which sought to maintain its powers through funding regimes in which local councils compete with each other (Harris, 2021; Pipe, 2013). They suggested that the promise of decentralisation and the reduction of administrative work has yet to be fulfilled.

Where mayors and new bodies of local representation were introduced, regimes of local governance did change. The legislation increased both the possibilities and responsibilities for communities and stakeholders to act more independently and be actively involved in local policymaking and planning processes. At the same time, council officials and elected mayors had to respond to increased levels of personal accountability as demanded by the act (Harris, 2021; Pipe, 2013). While local knowledge is often assigned the role of challenging and counterbalancing expert and institutionalised forms of knowledge within constellations of hierarchical organisation, it will have to contribute towards the legitimisation of far-reaching formal decisions and actions in the new planning situation, thus changing general expectations about its capacity, reliability, and grounding.

Furthermore, the devolution of power seems to have opened up new arenas in which different local communities and groups engage in conflict with and against each other over planning goals (Geoghegan, 2013). While conflicts continue to be present within the hierarchy of

administrative and political powers, we may see a growing number of controversies on the horizontal level and within the local knowledge category. In such constellations, the idea of a single, homogeneous local knowledge gives way to more complex concepts in which different local groups confront and negotiate their respective claims. Analysis and mapping of “KnowledgeScapes” must then take this multiplicity into account both in terms of conceptualisation and methodology.

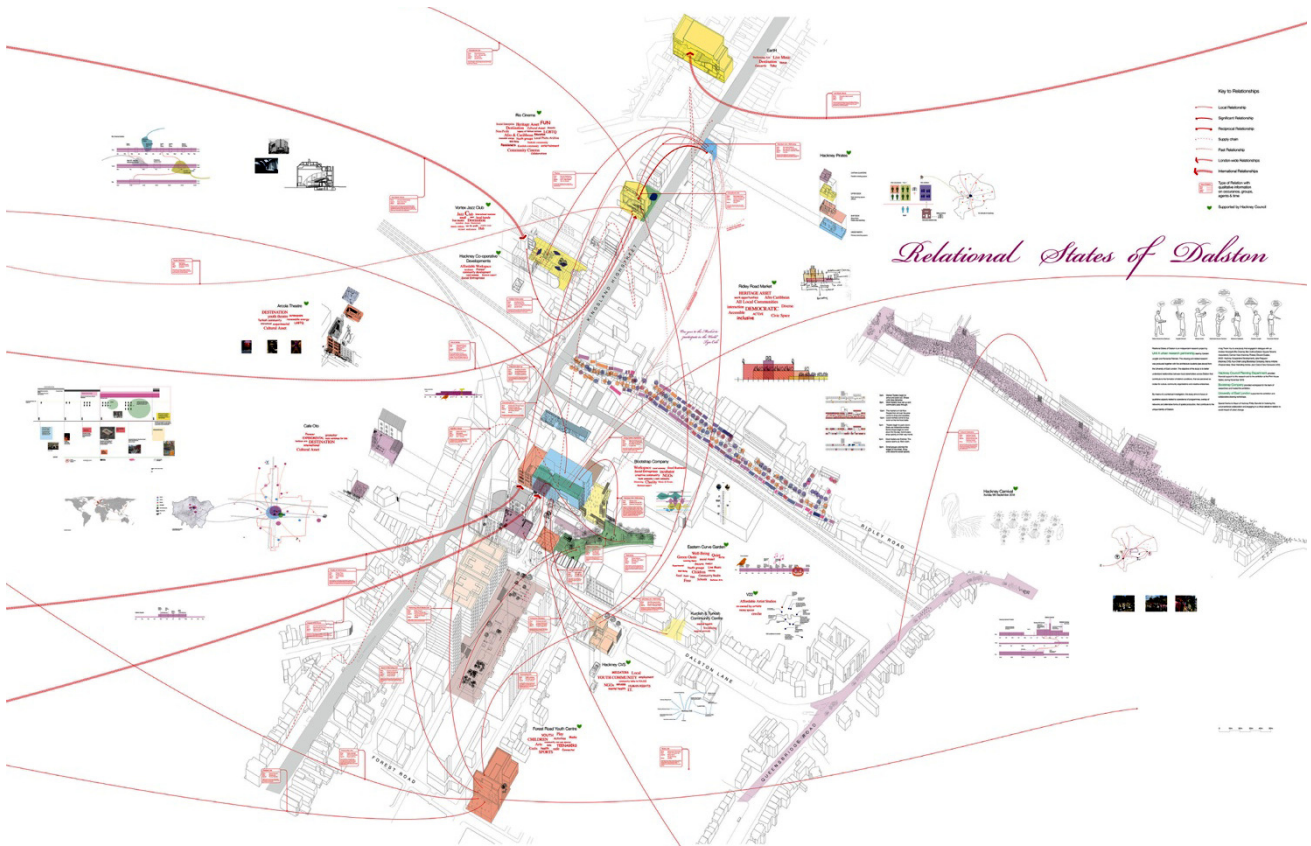
### 3.2. Crisis of Adaptation: The Dalston Case

The Dalston Quarter (LBH, 2017a) in Dalston’s town centre (Figure 2) is home to a vibrant mix of community stakeholders, which have established themselves there over several decades. However, in 2017, the LBH put forward a narrowly framed public consultation about their plan to redevelop a number of Council owned sites in the Dalston Quarter, driven by pressures to capitalise on increased land value as a result of the Council’s ongoing financial difficulties (Rayner, 2000). All sites proposed for redevelopment were occupied and used by rent-subsidised, cultural, and social enterprises, including the Arcola Theatre, Café Oto, Dalston Eastern Curve Garden, V22, Bootstrap Charity, and HCVS.

The Dalston Eastern Curve Garden is a small green space that has operated as a social enterprise since 2012 and is an example of an initiative valued by the community. The Council’s proposals to displace the garden caused a considerable outcry, resulting in a successful campaign that established a case for the garden’s community value. The final consultation report stated that many respondents felt “strong distrust in the motives of the Council” and that “the [consultation] document was deliberately written to be unclear...to allow for the introduction of commercial development to replace existing organisations” (LBH, 2017b, p. 11, para. 4.17) and that the “importance [of the Dalston Eastern Curve Garden] to the community had not been recognised” by the Council (LBH, 2017b, p. 9, para. 4.6). Due to the strong opposition, the Council eventually stepped back from its redevelopment plans and embarked on a second public consultation that ran between 2018 and 2020 and was titled the Dalston Conversation (LBH, 2018), with the aim to collect further local knowledge and engage in public debate.

## 4. Mapping Socio-Spatial Relations in Dalston

The research project Relational States of Dalston (RSD; Figure 3; Jungfer & Palmieri, 2019) aimed to gain an understanding of the “the complex inter-relation between place qualities and multiple space-time relational dynamics” (Healey, 2006, p. 542) and respond to the limitations of institutional knowledge in relation to socially produced spaces, which Healey (2006, p. 541) refers to as the “institutional challenge” in governance.



**Figure 3.** RSD map showing socio-spatial relationships between 15 community stakeholders across Dalston town centre: Axonometric drawing, original size 3.5 m by 2.4 m, third iteration, March 2019. Source: Courtesy of Unit A research partnership.

#### 4.1. Starting the Mapping Project

Just before the launch of the Dalston Conversation by Hackney Council, design studio Unit A (Jungfer & Palmieri, 2019, p. 2) at the Architecture Department at the University of East London took the controversy created by the failed Dalston Quarter proposal (LBH, 2017a) as a starting point for an alternative design-led enquiry for the 2017/2018 academic year. Twenty-one architecture students were asked to engage with and research the stakeholders based in the Dalston Quarter, then threatened with displacement by the Council’s redevelopment plans. The brief focused on the situation with an emphasis on locally rooted social-spatial relationships to discover local knowledge that would consequently inform the students’ design proposals. The students’ observations, findings, and the analysis of the stakeholders’ everyday activities, spaces, social relations, conflicts, and connections were collated and translated into analytical spatial drawings and diagrams, which allowed multiple streams of information to be overlaid and visualised in context, building a collective socio-spatial understanding of the area. During this design research process, it became apparent that the actors’ formal and informal activities produced formal and informal spaces, which actively shaped the urban environment, and that those different activities intersected and supported each other at various points

in time and space, revealing the “necessity of a relational understanding of space” (Löw, 2016, p. xiii), especially in connection with dynamic processes of spatial production in urban conditions under change. The local knowledge, which was produced by students working with a relational approach, was recognised by members of Hackney’s planning department when they saw this work at the end of the academic year. As a result, the Council commissioned the Unit A research partnership to carry out further research by expanding the study area from the Dalston Quarter to the Dalston town centre.

#### 4.2. Local Communities and Urban Transformation in Dalston

The context in which the RSD project was commissioned was very specific and seemed to be defined by the conflict between two different modes of space production, one of which is profit-oriented and operates on a large scale, while the other is led by small scale initiatives, which draw on their local knowledge to unlock development opportunities within the specific social and spatial contexts of the area (Kling & Jungfer, 2018). The stakeholders threatened by displacement through the Council’s controversial masterplan for Dalston Quarter in 2017 represent the small-scale agents of change, some of whom have been operating in



Dalston for nearly four decades, while the Dalston Lane renewal scheme and the Dalston Square development are representatives of the large-scale process of spatial restructuring. The Dalston Square development was an infrastructure-driven development completed in 2011 by Hackney Council, the London Development Agency, and Transport for London, in partnership with Barratt Homes, the largest residential property development company in the UK. It delivered the biggest redevelopment of the town centre, demolishing and reshaping part of the historic centre of Dalston, despite objections from the community and local heritage groups (OPEN Dalston, 2007a). More than a decade after completion, the mixed development still fails on the scale of the street to capitalise on the vitality of the town centre; thus, its merit and the value it brings to the local community are increasingly questioned.

The Dalston Quarter masterplan controversy in 2017 showed that the planners seemed to have an understanding of the concept of a large-scale market-led mode of space reproduction in practice but found it difficult to grasp the existing dynamics of the small-scale initiatives, their relational social-spatial complexities, and their significance for the quality of the town centre as a place for people. This awareness and the necessity to find new responses to the urban questions posed by the considerable urban changes in the area created the conditions in which the RSD project became possible.

#### 4.3. Mapping Design Concept

If the significance of a place can be described as a relationship between cultural, social, economic, environmental, and spatial values, for local authorities that manage change through governance it seems critical to gain an inclusive understanding of an area prior to recommending interventions that support responsive, sensitive, and sustainable planning outcomes. Drawing from cultural heritage methodologies (Avrami & Mason, 2019), where understanding a place and assessing its cultural significance are the two first steps that should be taken prior to any policy development or recommendation, the main goal of the RSD project was to contribute to the understanding of Dalston town centre as a place and to assess the social and cultural significance of key locations in Dalston that are perceived as nodes for innovative culture, community organisations, and creative enterprises. In order to achieve this, the project proposed to research and map all social and cultural stakeholders interacting within a network of shared and coexisting programmes, where the collective diversity of place-stakeholder relations seemed to generate intrinsic value for the area and wider community.

Architectural tools of analysis and spatial representation, in combination with research instruments used in urban ethnography and other fields of qualitative research, offered the ability to survey, map and analyse. However, it was from the cultural heritage field that

a methodology to evaluate the tangible and intangible qualities of the existing urban conditions was found, leading to the compilation of a list of assessment criteria, including activities (formal, informal, indeterminate), transactions, timelines, ownership, scale, grain, openness, access, inclusivity, uniqueness, rarity, destination, and vulnerability. This evaluation was then communicated with the map (Figure 4) through diagrams and tag clouds where words change in size and weight to represent their value at that moment and place.

The multiple method-based RSD mapping made use of the “relational complexities approach” (Healey, 2006, p. 542) and drew from “community mapping” (von Unger, 2014, pp. 78–83) and “live project” design pedagogy (Anderson, 2017) as ways to produce and exchange knowledge. The conceptual design also drew on a previous study of spatial production around Ashwin Street, Dalston (Kling & Jungfer, 2018), and proposed to engage in a “transdisciplinary understanding of urban knowledge,” “situated knowledge of citizens,” and local “knowledge cultures” (Giseke et al., 2021, p. 7) through co-production and collaboration between numerous community stakeholders, the local planning authority, and a higher education institution, with cycles of communication and consultation across all its different phases.

#### 4.4. Relational States of Dalston: The Project

The research process evolved over five phases, whereby phases two to four advanced in a series of consecutive loops (see Figure 5).

##### 4.4.1. Initial Access to the Field

This phase comprised a selection of stakeholder groups and sites that were perceived as vulnerable and acutely threatened by transformation plans. It also involved working with an open sampling approach. The expectation was that initial interviews would offer direction to further groups and stakeholders and, in this way, gradually enlarge and evolve the relational network.

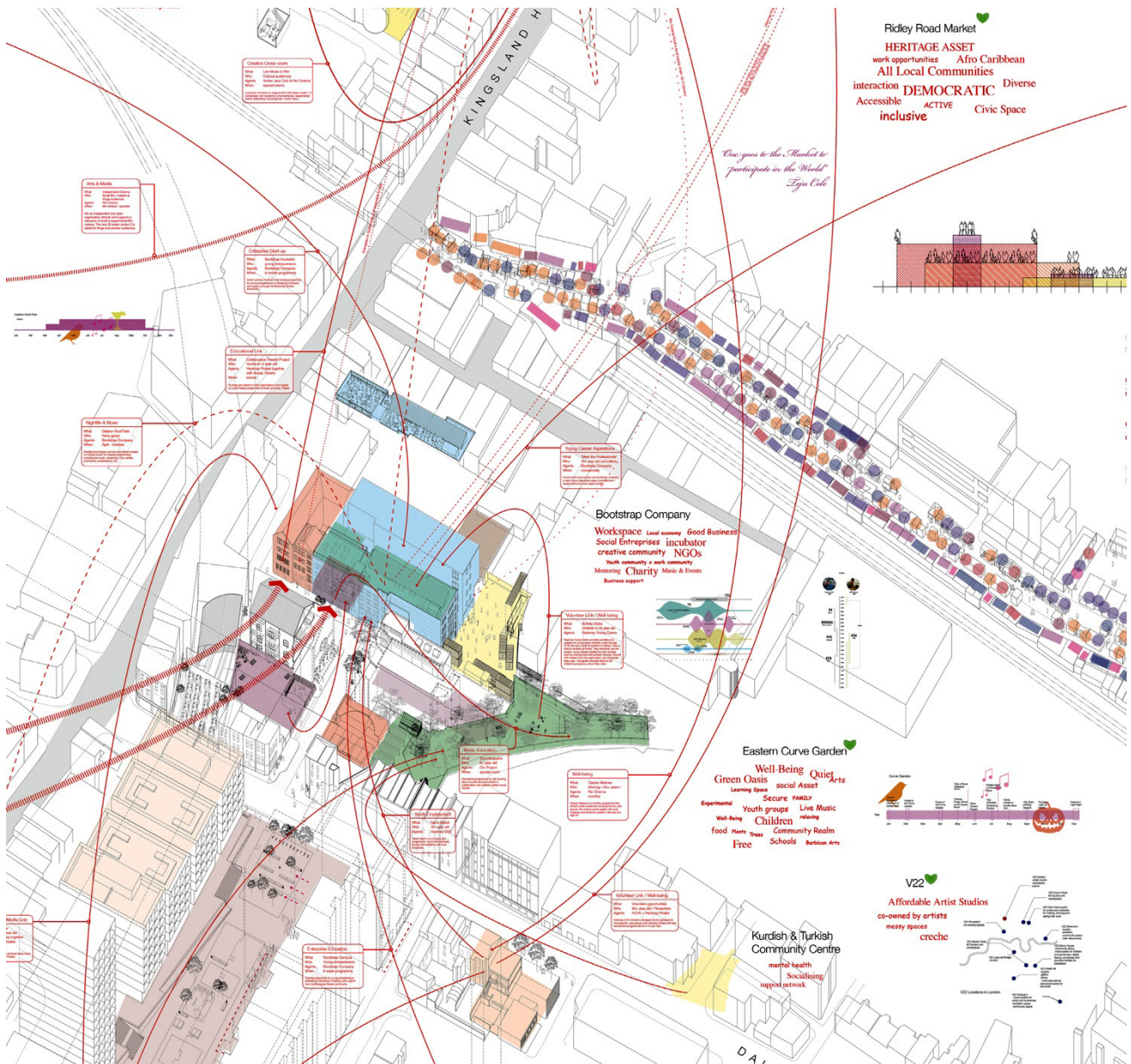
##### 4.4.2. Data Collection

Stakeholder organisations were visited and interviewed and key architectural spaces, their uses, their relationships with other stakeholders and the public realm, and wider community impact were surveyed and documented.

##### 4.4.3. Contextualisation and Representation of Observed Relations

Observations, findings, and collected data were internally reviewed and discussed by the group of researchers at the same time as concepts were translated and contextualised using hybrid-drawing and graphical techniques over a scaled spatial axonometric map of the town centre.





**Figure 4.** Extract from RSD map with stakeholder Bootstrap Charity’s relations and activities across the Dalston Quarter using “tag-clouds” and Ridley Road Market that was found to have a significant status and which became subject to further research during 2019. Source: Courtesy of Unit A research partnership.

#### 4.4.4. Consolidation of Interpretations and Representations

Stakeholder representatives were invited to participate in co-design drawing workshops to revise, debate, and draw over the initial drafts of the map. The map was continually reviewed, expanded, and amended, thereby collaboratively consolidating local knowledge.

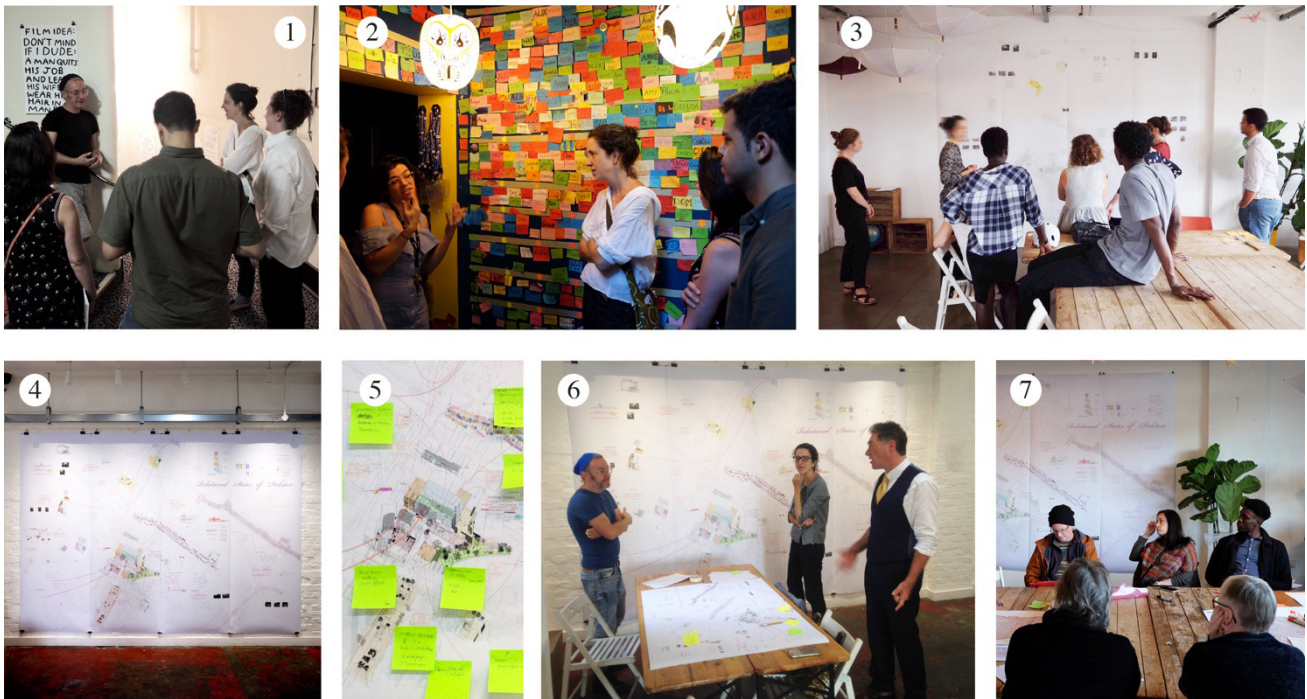
#### 4.4.5. Migration of Research Outcomes

The mapping outcome—a 3.5 m wide by 2.4 m high drawing—was formally presented to the Mayor of Hackney and members of the planning department

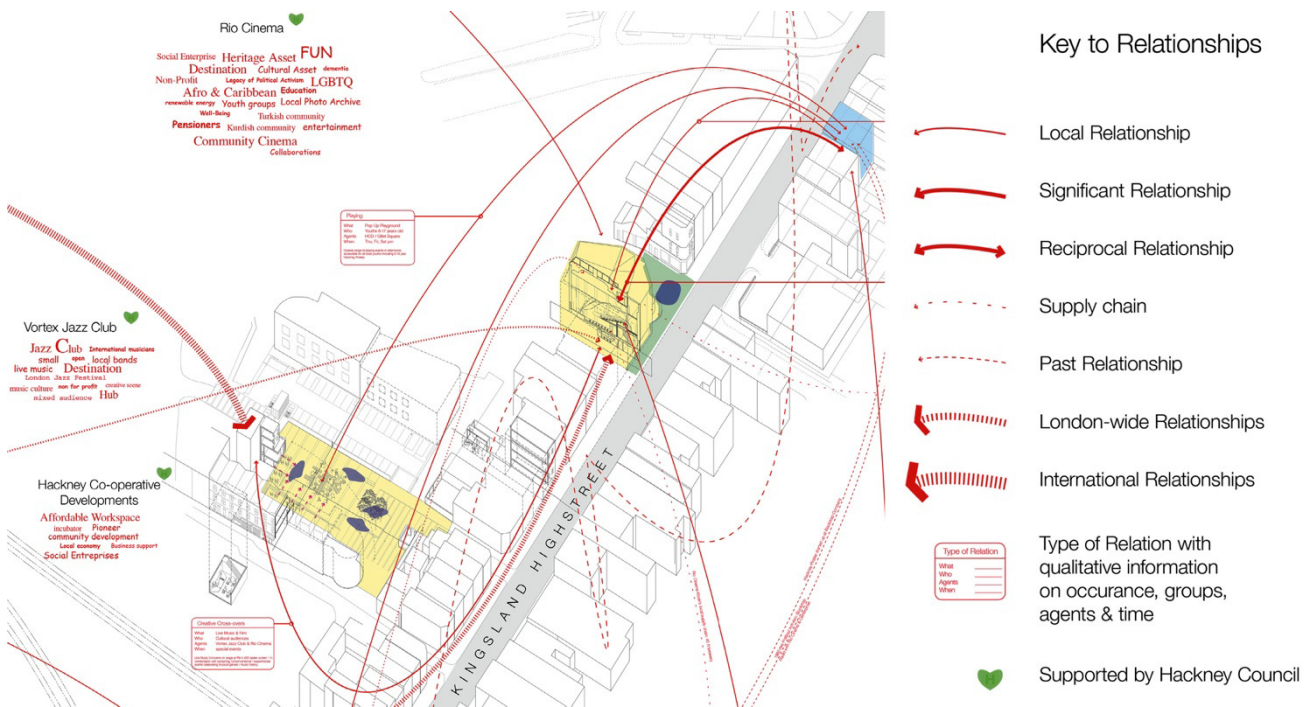
and exhibited to the public on two different occasions. The first exhibition was at the Bootstrap Gallery as part of the research and consultation process, the second in a shop on the High Street as part of the Dalston Conversation consultation process. After a series of further iterations informed by the open exhibition feedback, the final drawing was integrated into the evidence base studies of the Draft Dalston Plan, a plan that sets out the spatial strategy to guide new developments and change in Dalston over the next 15 years (LBH, 2021).

The final drawing presents a non-linear narrative that synthesises multiple relationships between stakeholders (Figure 6). For example, Hackney Pirates, a social enterprise supporting children who are falling behind at





**Figure 5.** Documentation of engagement during the mapping process: The student researcher team interviews stakeholders, September 2018 (1 and 2); interim review with LBH in Dalston, September 2018 (3); public exhibition at Bootstrap Gallery, October and November 2018 (4); feedback workshops with stakeholders, October 2018 (5 and 6); the student researcher team participates in LBH’s “Dalston Unique” stakeholder consultation event, February 2019 (7).



**Figure 6.** Detailed extract of RSD map showing labels with stakeholder information, including council subsidies, together with key to different types of relationships. Areas shown: Gillett Square and Kingsland High Street. Source: Courtesy of Unit A research partnership.

school, is based across the road from the Rio, a community cinema. Hackney Pirates works with local volunteers to provide one-to-one literacy support to the children, and the Rio Cinema puts on regular “classic matinees” that are popular with the elderly and an opportunity to recruit local volunteers. Also, films written and produced by the children are screened at the Rio Cinema, and a nearby partner sound studio records podcasts of readings of the children’s stories and poems. The Arcola Theatre, just down the road, helps to produce and perform plays written by the children.

While the initial focus of the research was the Dalston Quarter, it became clear that Ridley Road Market, a daily street market that has existed for more than 150 years, was the most inclusive and most democratic territory in the town centre, serving “as an extended home to many” and “a place of community” (Stoll, 2019, p. 7). Its significance and high level of vulnerability against the pressures of private-market urban redevelopment in the area led to a shift in the drawing, placing Ridley Road Market at the centre of the map. The understanding of Ridley Road Market as instrumental in the anchoring of cultural, social, and community activities in Dalston was unexpected but crucial in the dialogue with the Council. Recently, responding to a long-standing campaign to Save Ridley Road Market (Save Ridley Road, 2019), which focussed on the opposition to the redevelopment of the privately owned and strategically located Ridley Road Market Shopping Village, the Council declared it an asset of community value. To ensure long-term affordability for market traders, LBH acquired the ground floor of the building (LBH, 2022).

#### 4.5. Informing the Dalston Plan

In the published Draft Dalston Plan (LBH, 2021), the RSD project is listed alongside 25 technical studies commissioned by the Council. The RSD mapping drawing is reproduced in the chapter titled “Vibrant Dalston, Evening, Night-Time Economy, Culture and Safety,” and, in wider parts of the planning document, the sensitive terminology from the RSD project has been adopted in reference to existing community stakeholders with the use of words such as uniqueness, identity, asset, inclusive, safeguarding, and vulnerability, among others. This was the result of various processes of knowledge exchange and institutional learning, involving meetings, workshops, presentations, reviews, and formal stakeholder consultation events. According to a member of the Council’s planning team, an “in-depth understanding of networks” was gained, which was “informing future planning and regeneration decisions for Dalston town centre” (Hay, 2018). The Mayor of Hackney stated that “unconventional knowledge exchanges are in critical need in contexts of public debates relating to the social impact of urban development and gentrification” (P. Glanville, personal communication, October 17, 2018).

## 5. Migration and Transformation of Knowledge in Action: Reflections on the Process

In the following section, we draw on the empirical elements of the mapping project and the experience of the overall process to expand the earlier theoretical discussion about knowledge in urban planning contexts. The focus is on the dynamic nature of knowledge, its migrations, and transformations, as well as the relatedness of knowledge and knowledge producers and users.

### 5.1. Maps as Sites of Knowledge Encounters and Transactions

When the research team—consisting of students and teaching staff—entered the field with a mixed set of analytical and conceptual tools and research questions and preconceptions about the context in which their activities would be situated, they did so with different kinds of knowledge on board. The fieldwork included many direct encounters with community stakeholders and local organisations for interviews and discussions, or participant observations, as well as more indirect encounters through the study of the physical elements of spatial arrangements or the materialised traces of interactions. These encounters could be conceived of as the sites where knowledge transactions between different “bundles of knowledge forms” occurred (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 105).

The map produced in the RSD project assumed a special role in this process (Figure 3). Next to observing, the key work of mapping was related to selecting and abstracting, since not all of the data gathered or observed in the field was included in the final map. In this sense, the mapping equals the transaction process of filtering in which local and practical knowledge about socio-spatial relations is transformed into a more visible form of knowledge that can be shared and debated. If this supports processes of joint learning and empowerment, based on developing a better understanding of the social and spatial dimensions of local lifeworlds, as intended by the practical research approaches of “community mapping” (von Unger, 2014, pp. 78–83) or “live project” pedagogy (Anderson, 2017), the transformation of knowledge from one form to the other could be seen as an inclusive act. Since the bearers of local knowledge were actively involved in the research process, by providing essential information and feedback on the mapping and its evolution, they assumed active roles in both the “lifeworld domain” and the “science, research, and expert domain” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 105).

We argue that the relational map could be seen as the vehicle, or “media” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 105), through which the knowledge and the bearers of knowledge could make the transition. While action-centred models like social worlds/arenas emphasise that actors may participate in different social worlds at the same time (Clarke et al., 2018, p. 72), which in our case could be



the social world of producers of local knowledge and the social world of producers of expert knowledge, institutional frameworks, and social constructs set limits on such intersections between different knowledge domains.

### 5.2. *Permeability and Rigidity of Boundaries*

In their graphic representation of knowledge domains, Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011) use solid lines to define the boundaries of knowledge bundles, which could be read as the protective layers constructed by the respective domains. Here, we may draw parallels with earlier concepts in the sociology of knowledge, where the science-related knowledge domains have been traditionally associated with “boundary work” (Gieryn, 1983) or the maintenance of “protective belts” (Lakatos, 1978/2012). Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011, p. 105) suggest that among the different knowledge forms expert knowledge “has acquired the undisputed position of the meta-referee,” since it asserts to deliver both the solutions to major problems and the instruments for their evaluation. Given the complexity of filtering mechanisms and boundary work, we can only speculate on whether a representation that differentiates between degrees of permeability would show the “science, research, and expert domain” and the “policy and governance domain” to be less permeable than the “lifeworld domain.”

Referring to the economic and political relevance of expert knowledge, Matthiesen and Reisinger (2011, p. 100) suggest that the “expertise of professionals, administrators, planners and lawyers often becomes encapsulated into access-restricting exclusive knowledge cultures,” a condition which they refer to as “knowledge regimes” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 104) if it is coupled with excessive powers. They suggest that “these exclusive formations of knowledge are in constant danger of becoming too homogenous and too hermetic, therefore diminishing creativity and innovation” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, pp. 100–101). Hence, one of the main difficulties for organisations and actors, which operate with bundles of expert and other knowledge forms, is the definition of the right degree of permeability, or porosity, of their respective boundaries since they need to reconcile their institutionalised protective layers with knowledge exchange.

In the field of planning, rigid boundaries may result in difficulties to respond to change and develop an understanding of the less visible social and spatial processes and qualities affected by decision-making, whereas the waiving of all filtering is likely to cause problems with the justification of knowledge claims and the accumulation of data.

### 5.3. *Closing and Re-Activating Processes of Knowledge Migration*

In the case of the RSD project, the planning authority admitted the relational map—after stages of refinement,

public scrutiny, and filtering—to the body of its institutionalised and formalised knowledge as a supplementary document to the Dalston Plan. According to one planner involved with the Draft Dalston Plan, it informed not only the final policy but was also used to strengthen the argument in internal discussions by making visible the existing web of local socio-spatial relations which was, until then, part of the common knowledge but inaccessible to other knowledge domains (B. Hay’s interview with Fernanda Palmieri, March 3, 2022).

However, the moment of internalisation has effectively withdrawn the mapping from the domain in which it was produced. The transition has placed the project behind a protective layer that is maintained by the institutionalised mechanisms of filtering and access control. Since the mapping project took place, the constellation of actors in the administration has changed, not without consequences for the planning department’s approach to knowledge production. For the time being, the continuation of projects that engage with local knowledge in the described way have become uncertain. Hence, we may speak of a condition of closure that results from the institutionalised fixing of knowledge as part of formalised planning processes, as well as the control of knowledge through shifts in the constellation of the “gatekeepers” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 108) in the knowledge transaction zone.

Since knowledge is increasingly negotiated in semi-public or public settings (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 109) and the field of knowledge producers is diversifying and growing, the concluding question could be how the situation in Dalston may have to change in the future so that the continuous and intensive exchange between different knowledge domains and knowledge forms is seen as an integral necessity to enhance planning decisions and policymaking.

## 6. Conclusion and Further Research

Shifts in the cultures of governance and urban planning, as well as the ongoing diversification, digitalisation, multiplication of knowledge, and the polarisation of knowledge claims are producing new conditions, which are challenging urban planning practices and processes in the UK and other countries. Socially produced spatial relationships are difficult to understand and their significance difficult to evaluate. The RSD project contributed to the planners’ and policymakers’ understanding of the area but also invited local stakeholders and the wider community to reflect on the socio-spatial dimensions of the communities. The collective assembling and production of local knowledge, through mapping and exchange, drew from the participants’ “capacity to ‘see,’ ‘hear,’ ‘feel’ and read the multiple dynamics of a place” (Healey, 2006, pp. 541–542). The mapping project experience demonstrates that the shared understanding of socio-spatial relations and local knowledge, and their integration into public discourses and

planning processes, could contribute towards the permeability of knowledge domains in planning contexts. Relational maps can inform public and institutional learning and perform as a “zone of knowledge transaction” (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 95) with the capacity to integrate different knowledge forms, discourses, and actors. Since mapping is an abstraction of the observed urban reality, its strength lies in the capacity to highlight specific aspects, and in this way include them in the shared bodies of knowledge that inform debates in different domains. At the same time, it excludes information and simplifies urban complexity. Hence, if integrated into planning action and policymaking, mapping becomes a political act.

The observed and mapped relations can be seen as part of large, densely constructed and never fully comprehensible socio-spatial networks that are at the basis of everyday life and which link the everyday with the urban and beyond. The models of knowledge under discussion emphasised the dynamic nature of knowledge transactions as well as the coevolutionary process that interrelates knowledge and space (Matthiesen, 2005, p. 2) and knowledge and society (Matthiesen & Reisinger, 2011, p. 94). Further research into relational mapping could address time as an object of analysis, looking at the changes in socio-spatial relations over time, for example, or as a question of representation. Another potential field for time-sensitive maps could be their operationalisation in scenario and strategic planning.

The growing recognition of conflict and agonistic conditions (Mouffe, 2013) as constituent elements of processes of urban transformation seems to call for a better understanding of the role of conflict in the production, filtering, and application of knowledge, including local knowledge. Further research into this topic could involve the application of conflict theory and analytical tools like the social worlds/arenas model or situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2018).

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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