

Dr. Suzanne Hall, Assistant
Professor in Sociology,
Department of Sociology,
LSE Cities, London School of
Economics and Political Science

Diversity as urban infrastructure

This is my first time in Zurich. I am very happy to be here. Thank you to Margrit Hugentobler for inviting me, to Daniel Wiener for making me so welcome and to Sylvia Müller for superb levels of organization.

What I want to talk to you about today is a world reality of profound levels of movement, mixing and exchange. To give you an idea, the 2014 Border Agency figure for how many people moved across the landscape of Europe over the last year was 700 million. If you think that approximately 500 million people live in Europe, we have a larger population that moves through it every year than resides in it. What is important here is to think about migration or mobility not as a unilateral process where people settle for very long periods of time, but increasingly as a fluid process where people participate in a place for varied periods of time. This includes a range from a couple of hours to do business, a couple of years to undertake education, as well as when people settle for longer periods of time. In this context, I'd like to think through with you, how migration makes our cities, and how the increased mobility of people it is likely to make our cities in the future.

I want to orientate this thinking through the very ordinary frame of the street. First, I emphasize that there is a real significance in the everyday and the commonplace. Essentially, however, we need to think beyond a kind of «cappuccino urbanism» and begin to think seriously about the everyday lifeworlds of people who are increasingly excluded from the worldclass or prestigious public realm. To begin with then, I take you to a street in South London. What we see is a map of all the independent proprietors who are doing business on this street. This image suggests that we are not evidencing simply the multicultural enclaves of a Chinatown or a Little Italy. To give you a sense of the range of ethnicities on a single street, I am going to read out the proprietors' countries of origin: Pakistan, England, Afghanistan, Nigeria, India, Eritrea, Iraq, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Cashmere, Kenya, Nepal, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam and Yemen. This list of over 20 different countries of origin on a single city street begs the question: What gets made culturally and what gets made economically in this kind of urban space? To begin to explore this question, I am going to argue that we need to understand the city as many layers of making, incorporating a range of different systems of knowledge, as well as different layers of regulation and transgression.

The Symbolic City

I start with the first layer of analysis which I refer to as the «Symbolic City», which is typically how politicians, policy makers and planners begin to comprehend and conceptualize the major forces of change within a city - essentially through references to big data.

If we had to look at changing pattern of ethnic diversity across the U.K. landscape, the map on the left hand side is a map of ethnic diversity in 1991, and on the right hand side is a map showing an increase in ethnic diversity in 2001. What we



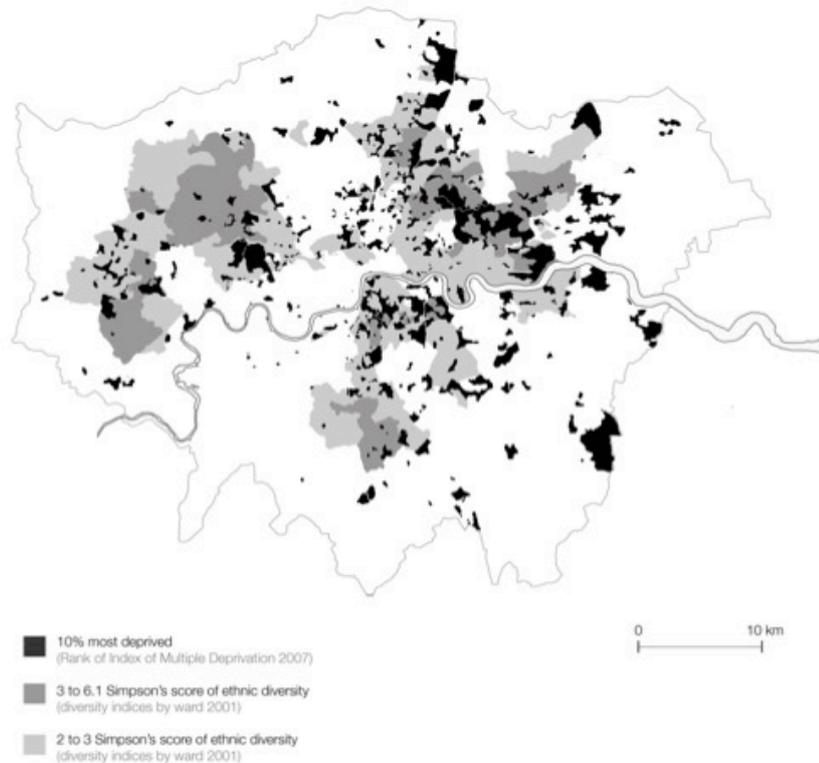
begin to understand in these maps is that migration and ethnic diversity expresses itself significantly as an urban phenomenon in the U.K., and is increasingly more of an urban phenomenon. So, 41.6% of Inner London's population is foreign born. If we had to add to this, other major migrant cities including Leicester (33.6%), Manchester (26.9%), Birmingham (22.9%), and Bradford (15.3%), these urban concentrations total a significant portion of the UK's foreign born population.

In addition to the urban concentration of diversity, we also have to comprehend that the process of migrant settlement is very uneven, as indicated by the latest Census figures for the U.K. Mapping where migrants settle across the UK landscape, we begin to understand that if you came into the U.K. from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or Somalia, for example, then you are very likely to settle in cities, and not only are you likely to settle in cities but you are likely to settle in the inner city of cities. If, on the other hand, you come in from Poland, Ireland or Germany, you are able to settle broadly across the U.K., in villages, in small towns, as well as in large and in small centers. This begins to suggest there is also a racialized and ethnicized pattern of settlement, indicating that not all people have equal access or equal opportunity to where and how they settle. In addition, is the need to begin to understand not just mappings of inequality, but how cities are becoming increasingly polarized. If you look at the graph of the Gini coefficient across the U.K, you will notice that Inner London is the most polarized of U.K. landscapes, concentrating individuals with both the highest and lowest incomes. This is further exaggerated since the 2008 crisis, and plays out in settlementmaking in really profound ways. London's land market has increasingly become a safe haven for national and international speculators, resulting in levels of land inflation that are astronomical, with the urban poor being pushed further and further out of the city. Let's now overlay a mapping of London where we highlight areas that are amongst the most deprived areas in the U.K., indicated as the black spots on the map. We overlay this Indices of Deprivation with the most ethnically diverse areas, and we see a very high correlation. This raises two questions.

1. What kind of challenges does the overlap of inequality, deprivation and diversity generate for planning the distribution of public assets?
2. The map further raises the question of what 21st century skills people need and acquire in comparatively deprived but ethnic diverse urban areas. In the light of this question, do we know enough about how individuals and groups update themselves and the city in the context of living with both diversity and inequality?



1 An overlay of ethnic diversity and indices of deprivation using existing data.
 Plan: Catarina De Almeida Brito,
 Ordinary Streets Project,
 LSE cities, 2013



What we learn about the city at the macro scale are essentially three things:

- The city is a concentrating machine, and increasingly so in a global age. It captures and it focuses global processes of change but often in highly racialized and ethnicized ways.
- The city is also an exaggerating machine. It is the arena of profound levels of opportunity but at the same time, increasing features of inequality.
- Finally, the city disrupts. What we learn from our recent Census in the U.K. is that one in eight households host more than one ethnicity. There are also further identifications with multiethnic compositions at scales of body, household and neighborhood. This permeates places of work, transport, health and education. For example, when our students introduce themselves at the start of a new year at the London School of Economics, students generally narrate their hybrid identities. A typical answer to «where are you from?» would be: «My mum is from Germany, my dad is from Argentina but I have spent the last five years in Paris.» How do we begin to think more productively with these diverse and multilingual citizenships which are going to become increasingly part of our global reality and cities?



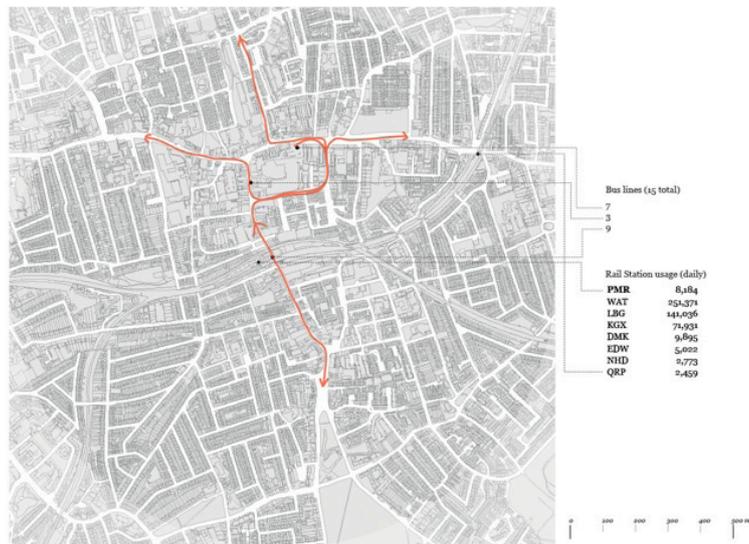
The Collective City

To begin to think that question through with you I would like to move to the next layer of the city that I refer to as the ‘Collective City’, which is really about a recognizable urban area where a shared set of cultural practices begin to emerge.

I particularly love this mapping of London- it is made by a team at UCL and it maps every high street in London, based on the measure of a minimum of 250 meters of retail activity. For me it is a map of «everyone’s London». It is not the Tate Modern, it is not Buckingham Palace, and it is not the Olympic development area. What is really interesting, when we begin to understand some of the data behind this map, is that two thirds of all Londoners live within a five-minute walk of a high street; it is amongst their most common form of urban experience. But also really interestingly, is that once on the high street Londoners are just as likely to participate in some form of economic as they are in some form of cultural exchange. So, people go to high street to pick up a bag of rice and to top up a mobile phone card, but also to visit their GP or to meet a friend.

The streets that we look in our research are ‘ordinary’; they are not the Oxford Streets or the Regents Streets of the city. They are ‘everyday’ places in dense, comparatively deprived and ethnically diverse areas of the city. Part of the reason that ordinary streets are they are so conducive for small independent retail is because they are within dense areas that are very well-connected by public transport, what we call the urban «DNA». In this area in South London, called Peckham, the residential density is twice as high as the London average. But just as important are the little red lines on the map that represent 180 busses going up and down the high street every hour. In addition, we have a rail interchange that connects the street to the city. These structures like density and connectivity are absolutely crucial to sustaining micro-economies.

2 High thresholds of support through Peckham’s urban infrastructure.
Plan: Nicolas Palominos, Ordinary Streets Project, LSE Cities, 2012



To what extent, then, are these diverse micro-economies visible, and how do they shape the economic and social life of the everyday city? When we began our economic survey of the Rye Lane in Peckham in 2012, we became aware that the Council - the local planning officials - were involved with undertaking regeneration exercise of the Town Centre, including the street. Despite regeneration intentions, no detailed economic survey of the street had been conducted. Part of the regeneration proposals were based on more conventional measures of value, which may well result in making the street more like other streets across the country: a phenomenon in Britain called 'Clone Street Britain', where you would expect to see a familiar stock of retail stores. In these homogenized retail strips, you could list a set of the five to ten familiar chain shops that are going to be on that street before you even arrive there.

A key question I want to ask here today is: What kind of understandings and vocabularies do we need to give planners and policy makers a view of other measures of value? Let me outline some of the invisible values and proficiencies on Rye Lane. We learn that about 65% of trade on the street is independent, and is neither chains nor franchises. We also learn that the vacancy on the street was below 10 %, which was very unusual in the U.K. high street retail context at the peak of the recession in 2012. Really interestingly too, was that there were four noticeable areas of retail growth: the first was Hair and Nails (this is one of the largest growing areas of retail across the U.K.); the second was Halal meat; the third was mobile phones; and the fourth was money remittances. All four of these economies are explicitly tied to forms of migration and multicultural. There are also economies that you need human contact for; these are not things that you can typically order over the internet or get delivered by Amazon. At the time of our street survey, we were also interested in how to measure skill. One of the questions we asked proprietors on the streets was many languages they spoke: 11 % of the proprietors on the street spoke one language, but 28 %, or almost a third, spoke four languages or more. This just was not just competence in regional language proficiencies; these were individuals who could speak, for example, French, Spanish, Urdu and English. What are some of the aspects of skill you learn when you look at language practice? We learnt that many traders had not just arrived in London as their first destination. On a migratory route, individuals had for example, traded in Lahore and in Berlin, and had acquired a global network. This is no longer the more familiar notation of the mom-and-pop corner store. On Rye Lane, traders knew that the good aluminum pots and pans come from Afghanistan and that if you want to deal in hair and nails you need a contact in Asia; they had become global operators.

But multi-lingualism is not always valued as a skill. A prevalent migrancy rhetoric from the Home Office in the U.K. uses language to articulate the perceived 'problem' of teaching children at schools whose first language is not English and who speak more than one language. Are there other ways we can think differently about the challenges and opportunities of multi-lingualism? Language might be one of those 21st century proficiencies of citizenship that allow people to be in a place but also to engage effectively across place. In light of this question, we did a comparison, calculating how many languages are spoken by experts at the London School of Economics (LSE). I am delighted to be able to tell you that the LSE, which engages with



cultivating its international proficiencies and networks in order to make and communicate knowledge across the world, is outperformed by Rye Lane in Peckham in terms of languages proficiency in the category of those who are fluent in four or more languages. But let's put this illustrative conceit to one side, to focus on the significant question of how we begin to think about different ways of valuing, different ways of comprehending urban skill, particularly in the context of diversity and inequality.

I have raised the issue of value systems, and how we understand, measure and communicate different kinds of values. For example, we have been involved in a number of policy and planning discussions with planners on the street, and one constraint is that we were speaking about one value system to do with the street, whilst they were speaking about another value system to do with more established planning conventions. We decided to use a comparison to help bridge between the two differing value systems and started with an example of a value system that the planners knew very well. We took the shopping center model and the example of Westfield Stratford, which is the map that you see on the right of the image. This new shopping centre that is an entry to the Olympic site is perceived as a significant economic retail success story in London. We compared that to Peckham Town Center: in the shopping center there are 300 retail units and 8,500 permanent jobs; while in the street-oriented Town Centre there are 2,100 businesses and 13,400 employees (excluding the informal economy). Of course, we can also look at other comparative figures too, such as the business rates that people have to pay to the public authority on a monthly basis. I am not arguing here for an 'either/or urbanism'; I know that there are suitable places for shopping centers and suitable places for streets. But what I am arguing very explicitly is for a kind of planning understanding and recognition that is willing to engage in the value of emerging micro-economies that exists beyond established conventions of economic value and planning process.

Of course it is not that planning officials are simply unwilling to engage with new and emerging values on the street. One of the officers in the local planning authority simply stated: «With all this rapid change it is very difficult to define the role of the local authority». He went further: «We are really good at dealing with aspects like health and safety, and with refuse management. But you are describing a city to us that is inventing itself on a 24-hour basis, and we are working within a bureaucracy that works with planning norms that are established over much longer time frames». One of the questions raised here is to do with different temporalities: when you have a city reinventing itself on a rapid basis, and another city planned and regulated across a much longer duration, the two urbanisms run out of pace with one and other. What then mediates between these two ways or paces of making the city?

What we learn about the city at the collective scale is:

- The valuable role of a common public that has an everyday logic. This is where people go to attend to their day-to-day needs and daily conveniences.
- Secondly, street practice is very much about exchange, it is always pragmatic before it is ideological, with trade and interaction at the core. In the process of economic and social exchange, new forms of culture and creativity are made.

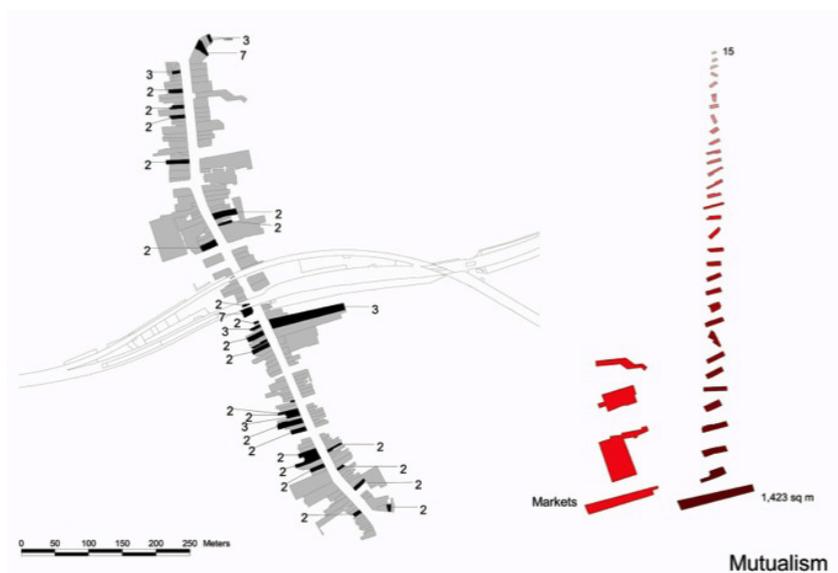


- Also, it is a taken-for-granted kind of city. It has many actors and many value systems, it is fast, and is frequently not legible to the lens of power. One of the reasons why the shopping center model is so strong is not just that it has a singular economic model but it has lobbyists, marketers, economists, all selling a clear and comprehensive ‘view of the whole’. A street like Rye Lane has 199 proprietors and they exist together in a loose cohesion.

The Intimate City

Finally, I would like to move to the analysis of the ‘Intimate City’. Of course, as someone who works with ethnography and sociology, I am very committed to the idea that we need to understand this ‘up-close’ scale of the city and the microcosmic dimensions of interactions and individual expressions.

3 Practices of subdivision and subletting.
Plan: Nicolas Palominos,
Ordinary Streets Project, LSE
Cities, 2012



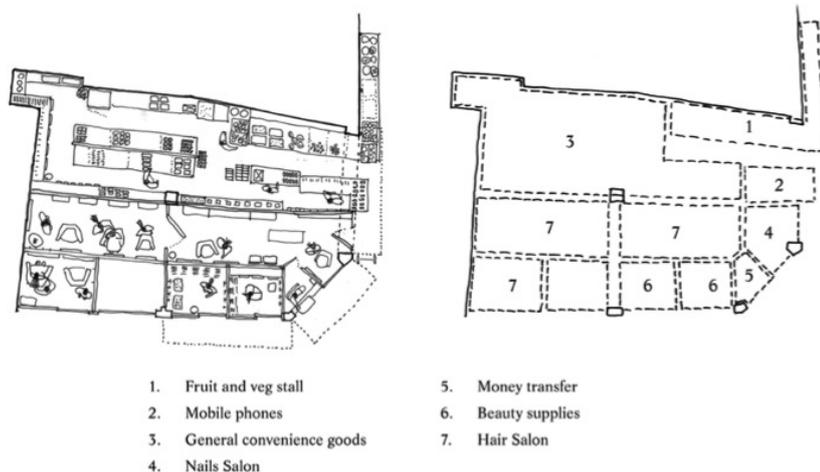
I take you back to another image of the street. The shops highlighted in red mark out that one in four shops on the street are practicing something that we call ‘urban mutualism’, where a shop is divided into many other shops and compatible business practices emerge. This next image is an example of two brothers who arrived from Afghanistan three years ago. They take the head lease of the shop and subdivide it into many smaller shops. Why do they do this? First of all, because the land value in London is rising rapidly proprietors have to meet the demands of paying an escalating rent. In carving the main shops into many other shops, proprietors also quickly learn that it is very good to have many compatible economies in one space. The first example within the subdivisions is the hair and nail bar, where we learn that there is not only a growing demand for smaller shop space, but also for more varied and flexible terms of tenure. The hair and nail bars will typically rent out a chair per week for between 50 and 80 GBP. Also interesting in this mix is the mobile phone shop. Proprietors are typically renting space in the size of a small worktable, and are paying 500 GBP per m² per month (at the time of our survey in 2012). This is amongst the highest retail rate in London comparable only to Knightsbridge which is amongst the highest retail rate in



the world. How do the mobile phone proprietors make it work? First, they only need a small piece of space, and second, it is not simply mobile phones and handsets that are being sold. Many of the mobile phone proprietors are astute in engaging in mobile software technology and are able to do phone repairs, and give you software updates. At the back of the shop you will typically find a money remittance store. This is again a very interesting part of the technology economy. I can walk in to the Western Union at the back of the shop and say: «I have a relative in Cape Town who needs to get to hospital in the next 10 minutes. I need to send GBP 1.38 for them to pay the taxi fare.» The money will get there in this rapid time frame. I will pay a premium for the privilege, but I can do this without a bank account and no formal banking institution in the country can perform that process so rapidly for me.

We learn that it is very productive for these businesses to be side-by-side, and that creativity and innovation also emerges in these mixed spaces. We also learn that there are day-to-day agreements that have to be reached: Who locks up at night? How do you share a toilet? How is it that the money remittance dealer at the back of the shop who is transacting thousands of pounds of cash every day, never gets hit? All of these practices reinforce a kind of pragmatic multi culture where people are in some way reliant on one another.

4 Mutualism on Rye Lane: sub-divisions and sub-letting of shop interiors.
Plan: Nicolas Palominos,
Ordinary Streets Project, LSE
Cities, 2012



What do we learn about the city at the intimate scale?

- Public interior on the street are essentially about processes of adaption that are extremely fast and irregular.
- Secondly, these have a set of interior logics that are very much about face-to-face ne-gotiations. There are not many formal contracts in this kind of urbanism. Its innova-tions and its survival very much depending on cross fertilization.
- It is also a city that flies below the radar. It intersects precarity with innovation. That means that it accommodates many kinds of newcomers but the conditions are always negotiated leaving the most fragile often in the weakest positions.



I'd like to end on what the stories of the street mean for thinking about density and diversity as a function of density. I propose that in the first instance, the act of planning and design is about observation: we need to be lot more astute at understanding what is in place, as well as what is social and economic about space and architecture. Secondly, I think we need to engage more with this idea of «loose infrastructure» rather than the formal/informal binary. With increasing global mobility, we are going to be living in cities where there are growing needs for flexibility and variety. It is a kind of 'hot-desking urbanism' with which we might be engaging, thinking about how different people are able to access both small pieces of space, and smaller pieces of time, while sharing a base infrastructure. Finally, the street prompts us to recognize diverse values. The planning profession has operated off very stable and secure notions of what is economically and culturally valuable. In our mobile and diverse 21st Century, we are undoubtedly going to have to develop much broader understandings, measures and vocabularies of value.

Thank you very much.

Herzlichen Dank unseren Projektpartnern



Medienpartner:

