

Ebury Edge | Westminster | London | 2026

Making Meanwhile Count

notes from roundtable discussion

Meanwhile Foundation

JKA

venue:
Ebury Edge, Ebury Bridge Road, London

presenting:
Rebecca Moroni, PhD candidate, Politecnico di Milano

moderator:
Emily Berwyn, Executive Director, Meanwhile Space and Trustee, Meanwhile Foundation

attendees:
Pablo Sendra, Professor of Urban Design and Public Participation, The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL
Maria Kramer, Senior Lecturer, Architecture and Cities, University of Westminster and Director, Room 102
Tom Dobson, Director, Public Works
Carolina Eboli, Senior Associate Director, PRD
Andrew Catcheside, Place Shaping Team Lead, Enfield Council
James Barrell, Principal Regeneration Officer, Camden Council
Claire Neilson, Senior Project Manager, Bovis
Freddie Broadhurst, Senior Social Impact Manager, British Land
Dan Gregory, Co-Founder, Popular
Oliver Holtaway, Co-Founder, Popular
Jen Storan, Projects Director, Meanwhile Space
Gabriel Warshafsky, Director of Urban Strategy, Jan Kattein Architects and Lecturer, The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

Objective

Meanwhile uses are a tactic of increasing importance in the renewal of neighbourhoods and cities as a means to deliver social value through otherwise vacant spaces. While they can be deployed responsively to make the most of fleeting opportunities, their success in nudging longer-term neighbourhood change requires a community of stakeholders to define objectives which extend far beyond the ‘meanwhile’ lifespan and conventional means of measurement.

This roundtable event was convened to bring together voices from academia, private developers, local authorities, designers and operators to consider how we measure and communicate success against these objectives in the context of wider regeneration, and who needs to be involved. The discussion aimed to identify practical recommendations and seed interdisciplinary dialogue towards methods to understand, articulate and maximise the long-term value of meanwhile uses for communities.

Chatham House rules were in place to encourage frank discussion and bold thinking. As a result, views and quotations below will not be attributed to individuals.


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Presentation

Over a 7-month placement with Meanwhile Space and JKA, PhD candidate Rebecca Moroni (ABC Department - Politecnico di Milano) explored methodologies for assessing the longer-term, place-specific impacts of meanwhile projects. Rebecca presented her emerging research, which includes a case study of our venue, Westminster City Council's Ebury Edge, to stimulate and frame the discussion.

Rebecca's research relates to the Italian government's management of property assets confiscated from organised crime, which often remain vacant through lengthy legal proceedings. Her interest in UK meanwhile uses lies in their potential to generate social value over time, while offering operational and methodological insights for application in the Italian context.

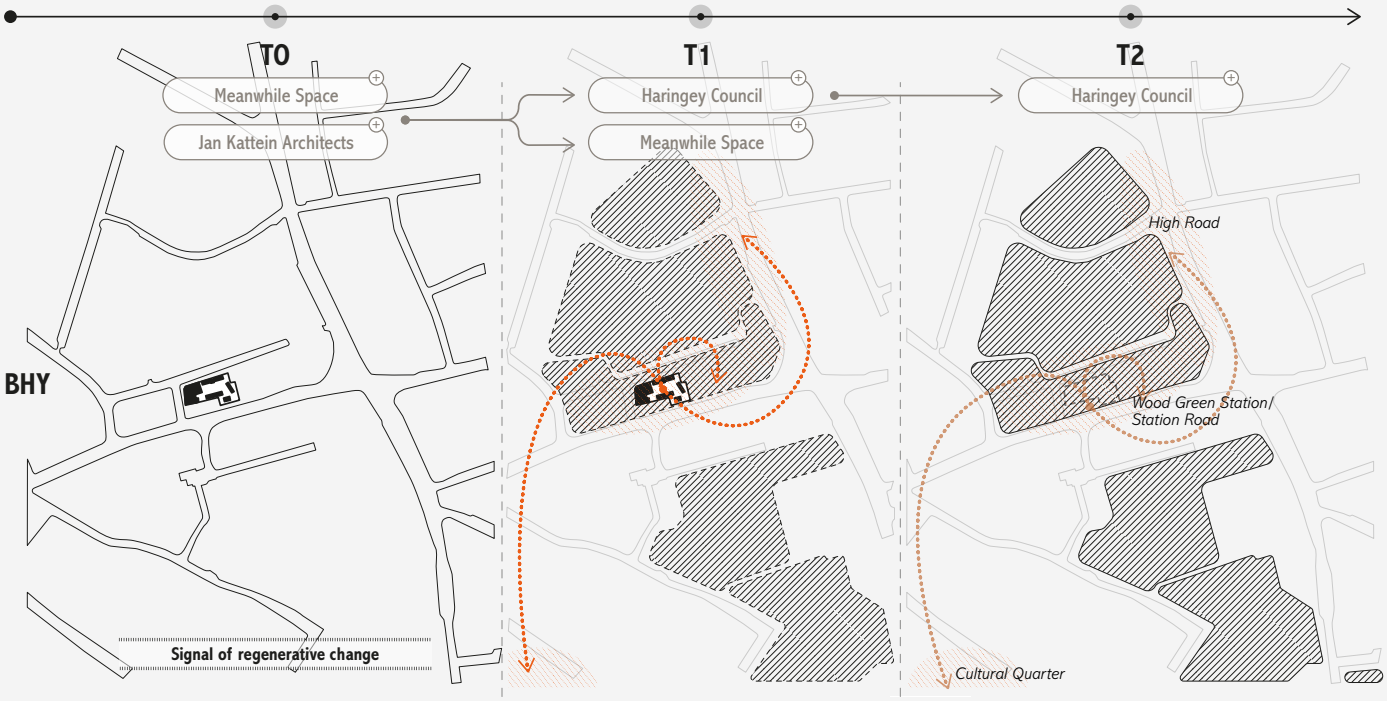
Rebecca used her embedded position at Meanwhile Space to understand the challenges facing an operator in gathering and communicating evidence of social impact. Looking at existing assessment frameworks, including the Social LCA, TOMs, Measure Up and New European Bauhaus, Rebecca found:

- A mismatch between extensive data gathering requirements and limited resources
- Rigid impact categories which miss out key project objectives, as well as important contextual impacts
- An inability to capture relational and evolving dynamics

Rebecca went on to present an analytical method based on a project-specific Theory of Change, which she used to analyse the phases, actors and actions involved in Ebury Edge and so map the pathways to its social impact.

Building on comparative analysis with similar schemes such as Blue House Yard (London Borough of Haringey), Rebecca went on to propose a key set of evaluation metrics tailored to each project's core objectives, aligning with a trend she observes among public sector actors to view meanwhile uses not just as a temporary fix, but a strategic tool to achieve long-term regeneration goals.

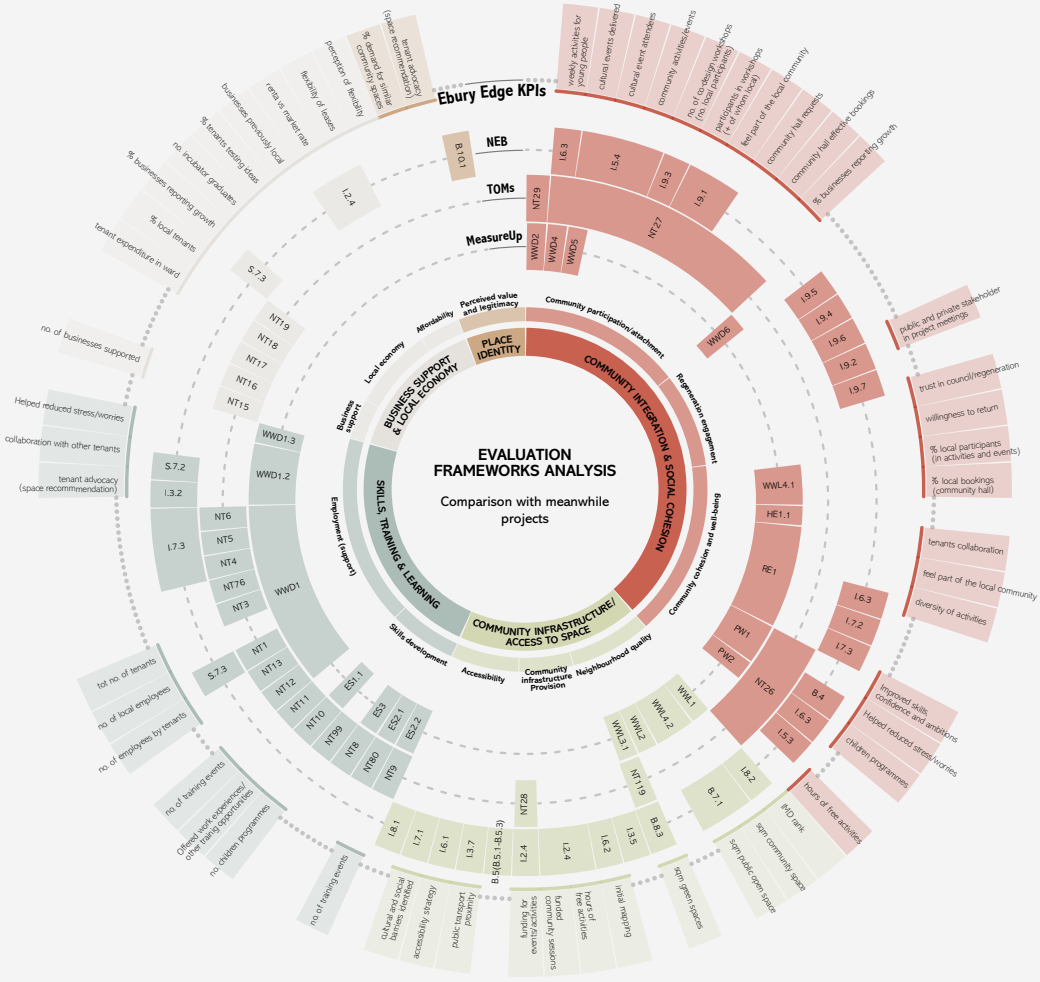
In response to her work, Jan Kattein Architects developed a short series of test illustrations which build on insights from her data-gathering on Blue House Yard to tell a visual story of the project's quantitative, qualitative and spatial impacts.



“The issue is not lack of impact, but lack of shared ways to capture it.”

above: illustration of Blue House Yard’s proposed role in wider long-term regeneration at Wood Green (credit: Rebecca Moroni).

below: gap analysis of widely used evaluation frameworks against regeneration goals at Ebury Edge (credit: Rebecca Moroni).



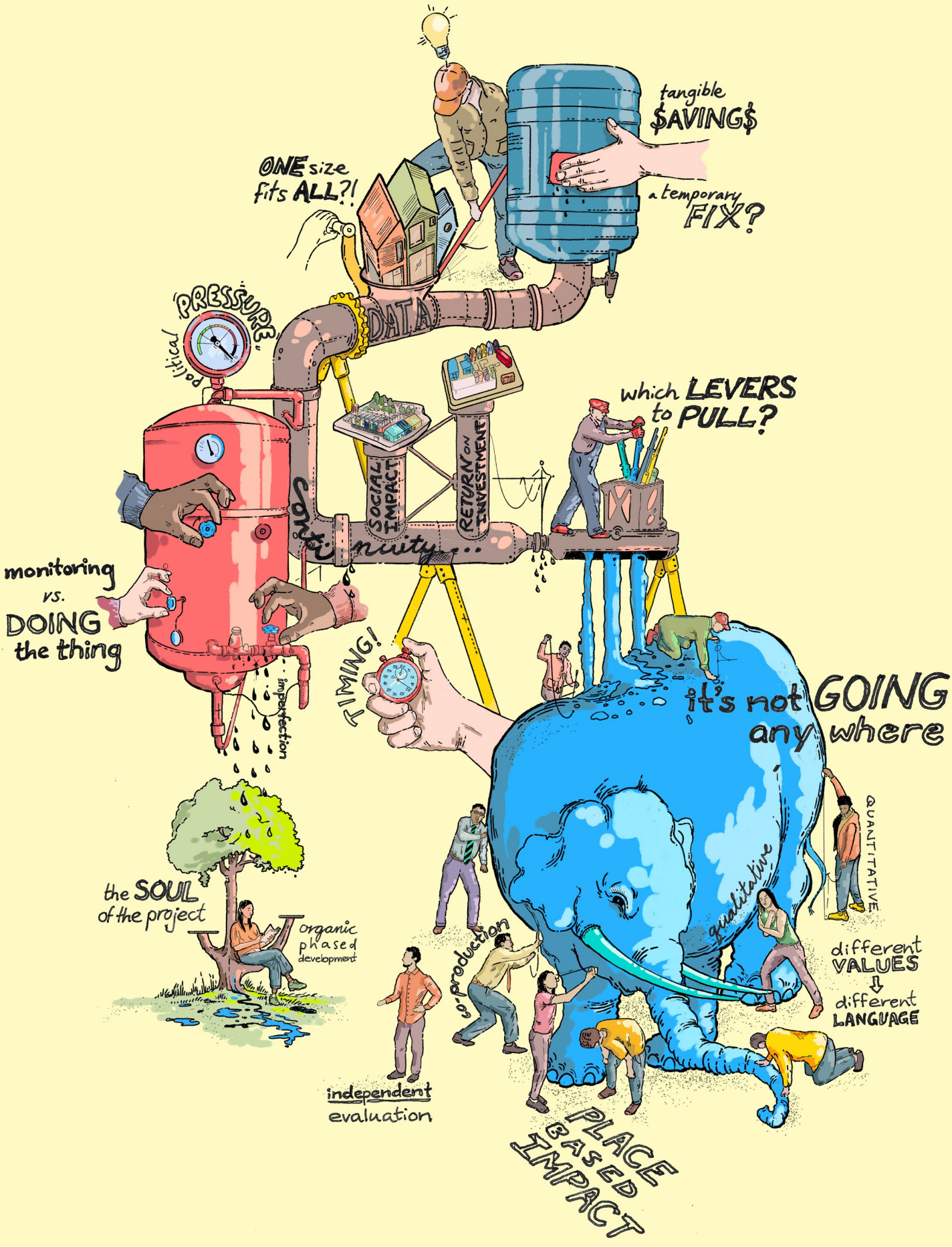


illustration by Jan Kattein Architects

Discussion

Different stakes

The roundtable discussion brought together a group with a strong shared belief in the social potential of meanwhile projects. However, contributors recognised that for each of us, according to industry position or institutional need, there is something a little different at stake.

For private sector developers, there is no avoiding the fundamental need to demonstrate commercial return on investment for any meanwhile use, even where section 106 agreements mandate social value delivery. For local authorities, while investment in temporary projects may speak to long-term place stewardship, a strong financial case also needs to be made, either by demonstrating a tangible saving elsewhere in the Council's budget or leveraging external funding.

For academics and practitioners, there is also a driving interest in the potential of temporary projects to pilot more inclusive methods of city-making and build local agency. While academic institutions may see more immediate educational and research opportunities, practitioners are also motivated by achieving longer-term urban and social impacts.

Different languages

The need to accurately capture and compellingly communicate the value of meanwhile uses is only intensified by our current climate of straitened public sector funding and challenging development viability. However, as we speak to different individual and institutional needs, we lack a consistent, widely understood language.

> "We've allowed ourselves to fragment the way we quantify social value."

Where the social potential of meanwhile uses is poorly communicated and understood, it risks being overlooked or coopted by purely commercial concerns.

Quantity vs. quality

Tough economic times mean that public and private sector commissioners are under increasing pressure to quantify the impact of meanwhile uses, with an increased urgency on payback periods.

"You need to be able to say it in pounds."

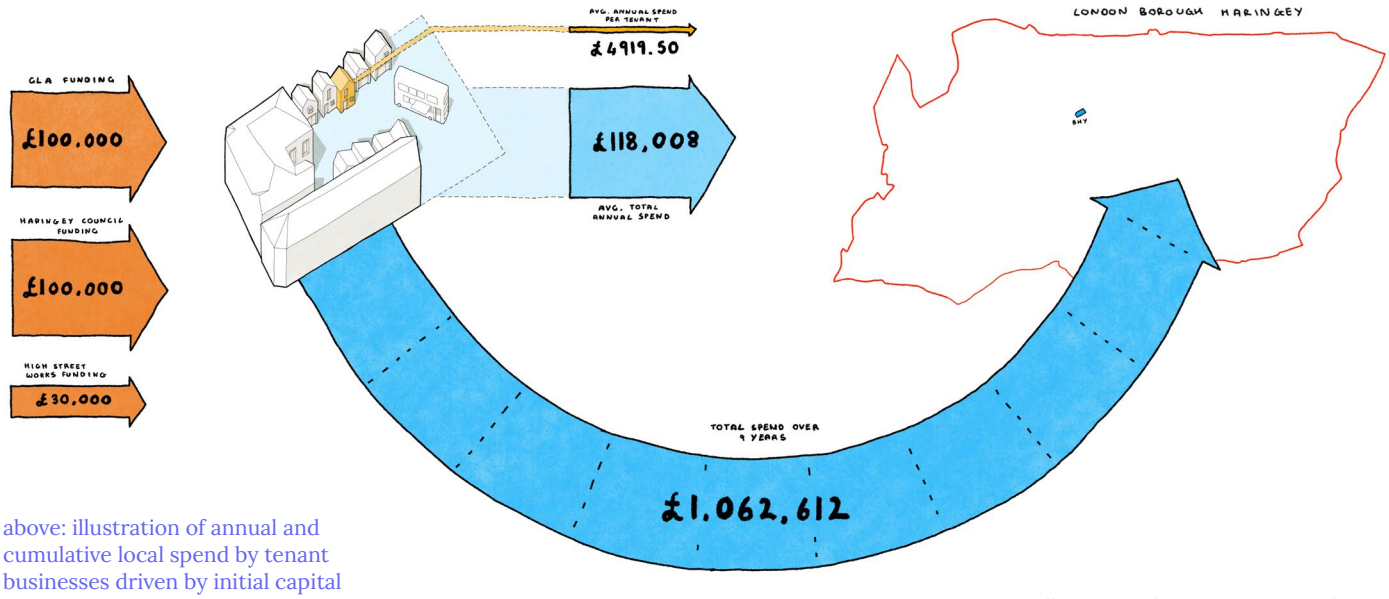
For private sector and local authorities, this requires a bilingual approach between social value calculations and commercial return on investment. However, the most common financial proxies (e.g. HACT, TOMs), which remain central to public sector reporting, will see longer term place-based impacts and even some core activities like affordable workspace provision fall through the gaps.

It will also be difficult to accurately reflect the baseline costs of leaving a site inactive. In short, they fail to capture the 'soul' of a meanwhile project, while presenting onerous monitoring and reporting requirements.

In practice, while systematic data gathering remains central to public sector reporting, a narrative approach is needed to persuade key decision-makers at opportune moments to look further than immediate returns: to a logic of incremental, strategic development.

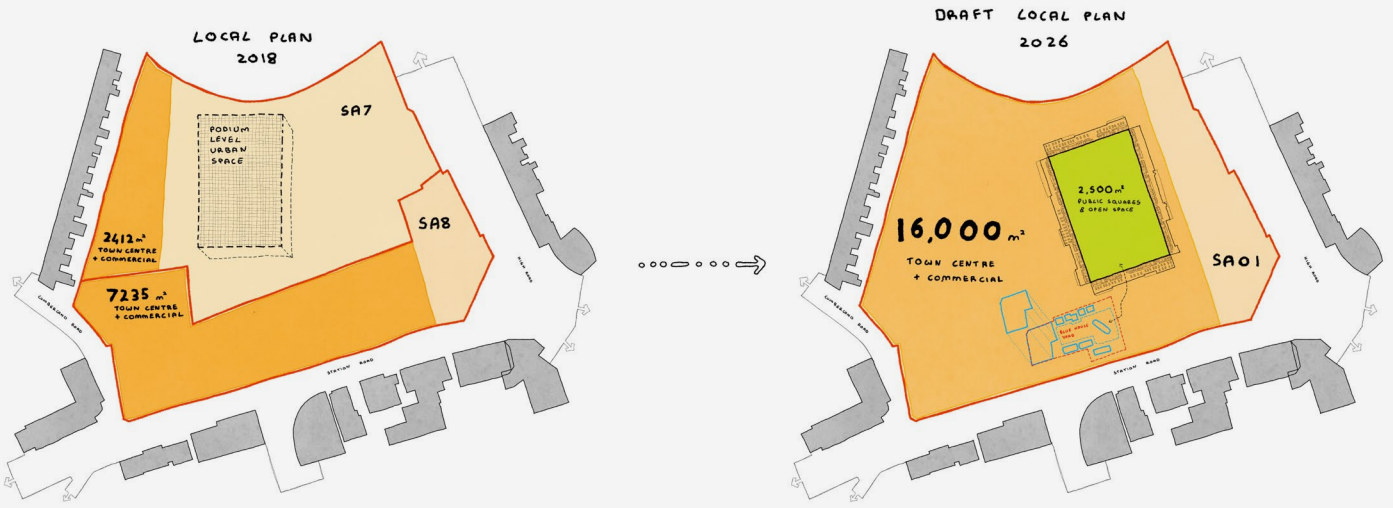
"You do *this*, and you get *that* which leads to *that*."

Practitioners are keen to support a move from considering meanwhile projects as time-limited 'one-offs' to strategic components of an organic, phased development process.



above: illustration of annual and cumulative local spend by tenant businesses driven by initial capital investment in Blue House Yard: a partial and highly selective snapshot of economic impact.

illustration by Jan Kattein Architects in collaboration with Rebecca Moroni.



above: visualisation of long-term spatial impact of Blue House Yard through local planning policy

illustration by Jan Kattein Architects in collaboration with Rebecca Moroni.

Qualitative outcomes are essential both in setting out persuasive stories of impact, and in embracing the unexpected twists and turns of experimental meanwhile uses. However, patience, persistence and opportunism are just as important. We must picture who needs to hear this story, when they need to hear it and what language will cut through to unlock change.

Who should tell the story?

While space managers may be closest to insights on a project's impact, their commercial interest may compromise the authority of their analysis. They also need to keep the project's lights on, the toilets flushing, or get the next project off the ground.

Academics aspire to help bridge these gaps in understanding, but their requirement for independent rigour is at odds with the deliberate and activist construction of narrative.

"We are measured by peer review, not how useful you are."

Effective impact measurement needs to balance proximity to the project against partiality, and is only possible when there is a clear shared purpose with an appropriate resource commitment from the outset of a project. In order to capture detailed local understanding, we can consider training and remunerating local community members and young people to gather and 'co-produce' data. While this approach demands significant investment, it also adds value through educational outputs, capacity building, and local engagement with the meanwhile project, and could form part of a persuasive overall approach to social value.

below: visualisation of each tenancy, business type, employee numbers and legacy at Blue House Yard over the last nine years.

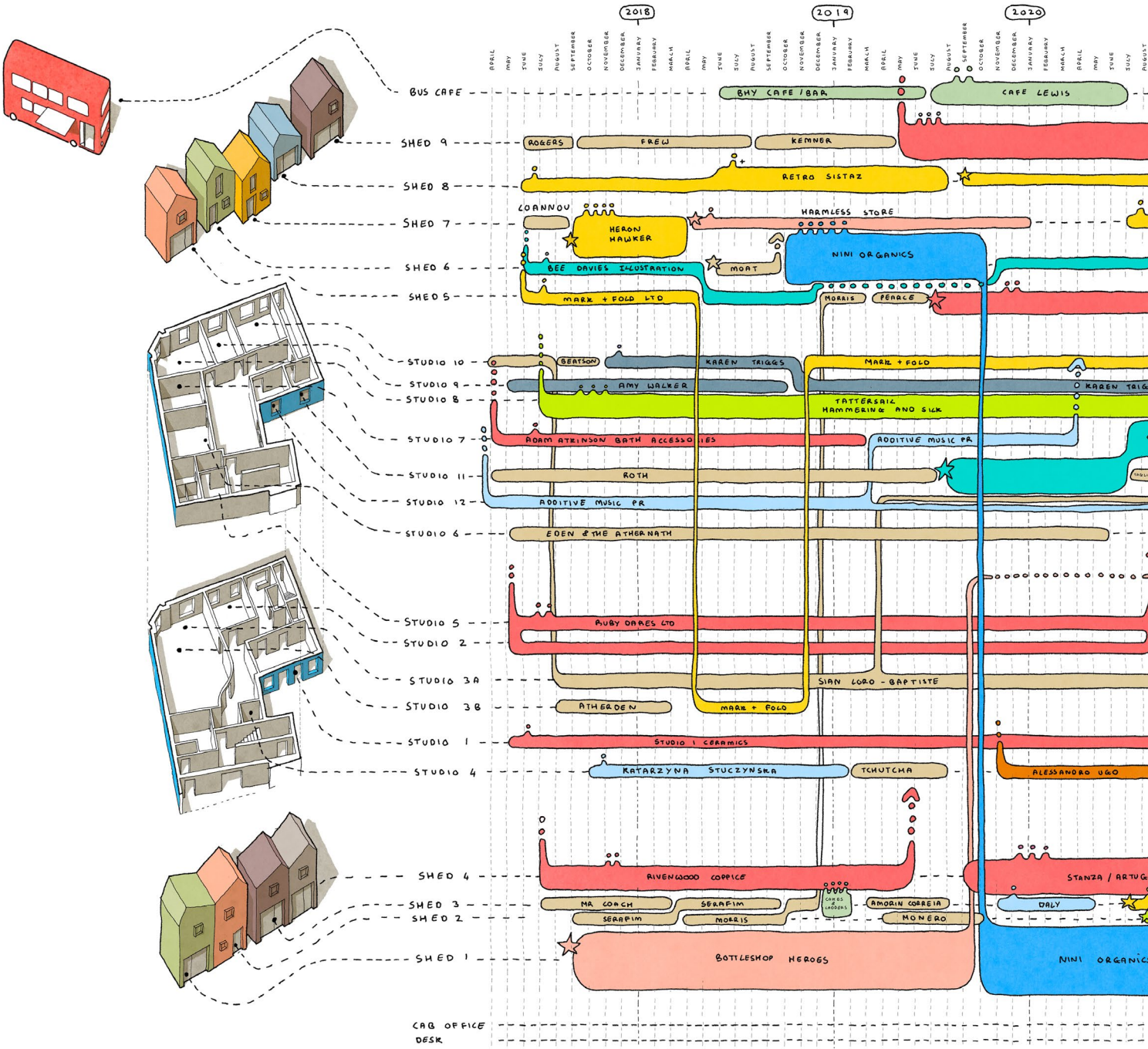
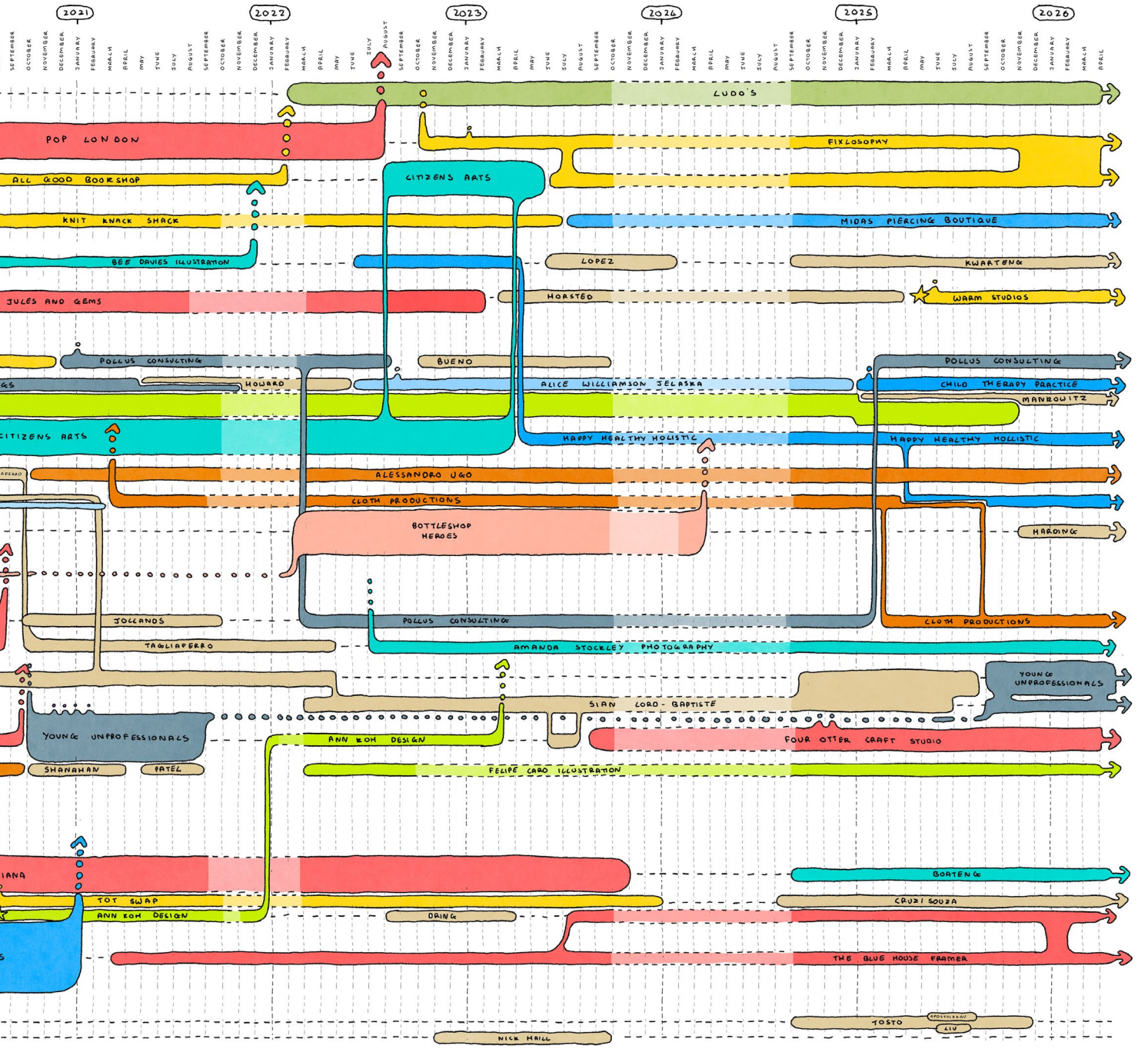


illustration by Jan Kattein Architects in collaboration with Rebecca Moroni.



Key

- UNKNOWN
- BEAUTY + WELLBEING
- FOOD + DRINK (GOODS)
- FOOD + DRINK (SERVICES)
- PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
- FILM
- MUSIC
- FINE ART
- CRAFT
- DESIGN
- RETAIL

- NEW BUSINESS
- BUSINESS ACTIVE ELSEWHERE
- NO. EMPLOYEES



Recommendations

1. Accept (and embrace) imperfection

No single system, set of metrics or snapshot will be able to tell the full story of a meanwhile use, from the experience of individual community members to long-term impacts on policy and masterplans.

> "It will always be deeply imperfect."

We need to be highly selective and pragmatic in choosing a limited range of impacts to monitor which are both feasible and closely aligned with strategic objectives. In order to secure good quality, persuasive data, we need to be ready to measure these from the start, but also prepared to adapt our thinking when experimental meanwhile uses result in unexpected outcomes.

2. One size doesn't fit all

In most instances, a hybrid approach will be needed, complementing authoritatively tracked quantitative data with selected storytelling and qualitative inputs which speak directly to the concerns of key stakeholders. Rather than seeking to achieve comprehensive breadth, a deeper look at selected impacts can result in a more compelling story, especially when resources are limited. In choosing how and what to measure, we need to tailor our approach and timing to the audience who needs to hear it.

3. From collaboration to participation

At the same time, a shared understanding of the diverse and nuanced ways in which meanwhile projects can benefit communities is needed. Even if we ultimately need to speak different languages to different stakeholders, knowledge and methods specific to meanwhile developments should be shared to strengthen our case in a challenging funding environment. This certainly entails continuing the conversation started here, and could go as far as a shared menu or palette of data types and collection methods.

There is compelling potential for securing place-based impacts by inviting community members to co-produce data. Where we can ensure a fair and rewarding working relationship, we can hope to build a picture of impact which is both rooted and understood locally by those with the heaviest stake in its future.

Rebecca's research suggests that it is the local, relational and long-term impacts of meanwhile uses which we struggle to capture through conventional methods. We can best work to redress this through methods which are themselves local, relational, patient and open-minded in their application.

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