— THE ROLE OF TRADERS AND SMALL BUSINESSES IN URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:
The Case of London's Workspace Struggles

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Abstract

This article focuses on the role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements by exploring three examples of opposition to commercial displacement in London. While the work of Castells, Lefebvre and the wider field of urban social movement research has radically expanded the terrain of struggle beyond the workplace to take in a wide range of community and grassroots groups and concerns, little attention has been paid to the potential role of traders and small businesses, particularly in the global North. The article focuses specifically on the mobilization of traders and small businesses in response to the threat of commercial displacement which, as one of the ways in which surplus value is extracted from cities, is a potentially significant site of urban contestation. Drawing on the author's research and involvement with one metropolitan and two local 'workspace struggles' in London, the article demonstrates that commercial displacement may mobilize threatened traders and small businesses to play a role in broader urban social movements with wide-ranging goals and concerns. Further research on workspace struggles has the potential to offer much-needed insights for radical urban politics and possibilities for developing alternatives by challenging and working across divides between economy and society.

Introduction

This article explores the role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements, taking by way of example one metropolitan-wide and two local cases of opposition to commercial displacement in London. Lefebvre ([1968] 1996), Castells (1977; 1983) and later Harvey (2008; 2012) established the urban as a critical part of the production of capitalism, and therefore as a significant site of struggle and for the realization of alternatives. While urban social movement and related research has since explored a wide range of struggles and alliances, the potential role of traders and small businesses in urban struggles and movements has received little consideration, particularly in the global North. The article suggests that this warrants further attention, given the importance of challenging and re-working capitalism's divides between economy/society and production/reproduction as part of radical urban politics (Gough in Çelik, 2014b). I focus here specifically on opposition to commercial displacement— or 'workspace struggles'—in light of the role of commercial property development and the removal of undesirable and unvalued commercial activities and their replacement with more desirable and valuable ones as part of wider capital accumulation strategies (Gough, 2014a).

My argument draws on research and involvement in some of London's workspace struggles undertaken as part of my broader doctoral research between 2012 and 2017

(Taylor, 2017). During this period, London's escalating workspace crisis contributed to the proliferation and intensification of specific struggles over industrial and retail displacement and gentrification—extending to the metropolitan scale for the first time—facilitated by the Economy and Planning group of the London-wide Just Space network, commonly known as JSEP. Collaborative and activist research methods were used to develop mutually beneficial research and other activities with JSEP, as well as with two site-specific mobilizations which emerged in response to threats to the Carpenters Estate and Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market. Both sites are located within 'Opportunity Areas' designated by the Mayor of London in the London Plan to provide the majority of the new residential and commercial space to accommodate London's growing population and economy, placing particular pressure on existing low-cost workspace. In each case, my research and other activities emerged through involvement and engagement, extending across and challenging traditional boundaries between research and activism and between researcher and researched. These collaborations produced (with the participants' consent) data for academic analysis and writing as well as a wide range of other knowledge and resources, including a handbook on fighting commercial displacement (JSEP, 2015), published online alongside this article.

The article proceeds by reviewing the terrain of struggle as explored by urban social movement and related research, making the case for greater consideration of the potential role of traders and small businesses. It introduces the specific case of opposition to commercial displacement, defines 'workspace struggles' as struggles over access, ownership and other rights in relation to relatively low-cost spaces of work in cities, and examines the potential for such workspace struggles to play a role in wider urban social movements. The article then moves on to consider the specific case of London's workspace struggles, tracing the emergence and escalation of a workspace crisis between 2008 and 2016. Three case studies are introduced and analysed in relation to three key findings from urban social movement and related research. While elite and powerful sectors and interests have played a significant role in shaping London's metropolitan plans and strategies, this article reveals how marginalized and threatened traders and small businesses are attempting to shape urban development processes in other ways. More broadly, the article demonstrates the potential for commercial displacement to mobilize traders and small businesses to play a role in wide-ranging urban social movements, extending across usually separated 'economic' and 'social' issues in pursuit of alternative approaches to urban economic development. It concludes by calling for further research into the role of workspace struggles—and traders and small businesses more generally—within broader urban social movements in order to generate new insights for radical urban politics and the possibilities for developing alternatives.

The role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements

The importance of the urban as a site of struggle against capitalism was established by Lefebvre ([1968] 1996) and Castells (1977; 1983) and subsequently taken up by Harvey (2008; 2012), inspiring a wider field of research on urban struggles and movements (Pickvance, 2003; Nicholls, 2008; Gough, 2014b). Castells focused on the potential to bridge labour struggles with struggles over sites of collective consumption such as housing or transport, coining the term 'urban social movement' to describe the coming together of 'trade unions, political groupings and urban-based groups' (Pickvance, 2003: 103). Castells was firstly optimistic (1977) but later more pessimistic (1983) about the potential for urban social movements to bring about structural change without fragmenting into localism, a debate which continues to rage within urban social movement research. Lefebvre's notion of 'the right to the city' has also had a significant influence, not only within urban social movement research but also within specific urban movements and alliances (Uitermark et al., 2012). Whilst often used to signal a right to use and inhabit the spaces of the city, Lefebvre's conception extends much

further to encompass the collective right of the working class to reclaim and redesign urban production and reproduction processes from the logics of capitalist exchange (Gough, 2014b). However, while 'it is always important to fight for rights, even as, in the process, we fundamentally redefine those rights' (Smith in Çelik, 2014a: 425), Lefebvre's focus on rights has been seen as too limited—too embedded in neoliberal capitalism—by some Marxist geographers. Sociologists and other social movement researchers have also raised concerns that the popularity of Castells' notion of urban social movements and Lefebvre's right to the city have led them to be unthinkingly and too easily applied, distracting attention from important questions about how cities incubate movements and struggles and from the wider field of social movement research (Pickvance, 2003; Nicholls, 2008; Uitermark *et al.*, 2012).

Whilst these debates about the potential and limits of urban movements continue, the work of Castells and Lefebvre definitively established the urban as a critical part of the production of capitalism, and therefore as a significant site of anti-capitalist struggle and for the realization of alternatives. This perspective radically challenges the centrality of labour struggles to anti-capitalist struggles, taking in a wide range of community and grassroots movements. The extent and boundaries of this terrain of struggle, and its different actors and interests, is my particular focus here.

Urban social movement research has explored struggles over sites of collective consumption, such as housing, public space, public and community services and the environment (Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017), while labour geographers have focused specifically on unions' experimentation/collaboration with community organizing and organizations (Wills, 2001; 2008; 2012; Ruiters, 2014; Holgate, 2015). Research on the growing number of worker-recuperated companies, including as a response to financial crisis in parts of Latin America since the 1990s, has also revealed close connections with surrounding neighbourhood organizations along with examples of housing and community projects and joint worker/community takeovers (Azzellini, 2018). There is also a well-developed body of work spanning development studies, urban policy, and informal economy research on the struggles of informal and street traders in the global South (Jones and Varley, 1994; Bromley, 2000; Mitullah, 2003; Skinner, 2008; 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2010). This expanded understanding of the terrain of anti-capitalist struggle has brought with it a particular focus on the crucial but extremely difficult work of building and maintaining coalitions and alliances across different interests and groups (Wills 2001; 2008; 2012; Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Mayer, 2007; Marcuse, 2009).

The potential role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements has received little consideration thus far, particularly in the global North. This is understandable given the well-documented, wide-ranging and long-standing influence of elite and powerful business groups and interests on exclusionary and exploitative urban development processes (Peck, 1995; Peck and Tickell, 1995; North *et al.*, 2001; Raco, 2003; Wood, 2004). Nonetheless, the complexity and diversity of urban economies (Jacobs, [1969] 1972; Amin and Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2006) at least opens up the *possibility* that there may be other business groups and interests whose concerns may more closely align with community and grassroots struggles. On a more fundamental level, the possibility that (petty) capitalist traders and small business owners might also play a role in anti-capitalist urban struggles is difficult and uncomfortable to conceive. However, it is not unusual for urban movements to include unexpected and uneasy alliances, as Wills' (2001; 2008) research on union and community organizing shows. Furthermore, challenging and working across divides between the economy/society and production/reproduction—which are themselves a product of how capitalism separates the realm of waged work from the rest of social life—is an essential aspect of radical urban politics (Gough in Çelik, 2014b). It is this imperative which makes the role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements such a potentially important and generative question.

–   Workspace struggles

In this article I explore the role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements by considering opposition to commercial displacement in London, which I term 'workspace struggles'. Gentrification is one of the processes through which surplus value is extracted from cities (Gough, 2014a), firmly placing anti-gentrification campaigns and movements within the frame of urban social movements and right-to-the-city struggles. Whilst the term 'gentrification' was coined to describe the class transformation of residential neighbourhoods, Smith subsequently expanded its meaning to 'an increasing dominance of *all* aspects of the inner *and* central city by professional work and workers' (Gough, 2014a: 417, emphasis in original). Importantly, in relation to this article, this expanded understanding of gentrification includes the removal of undesirable and unvalued commercial activities and their replacement with more desirable and valuable ones, as well as the flow of investment into commercial property development as part of wider capital accumulation strategies (*ibid.*). As such, it is possible that mobilizations against commercial gentrification and displacement, just like mobilizations against residential gentrification and displacement, might also play a role in wider urban social movements.

So far, however, gentrification research has paid little attention to *commercial* displacement, and even less to opposition or possible alternatives to this process (Curran, 2007; Slater, 2009; Zukin *et al.*, 2009; González and Waley, 2013; Ferm, 2014; McLean *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, there is a small but growing body of research which demonstrates that, as with residential gentrification, commercial displacement and gentrification are active and political processes—rather than inevitable—and therefore open to contestation and struggle. Curran's research on industrial displacement in Brooklyn, New York, for example, demonstrates that '[d]isplacement is an active process undertaken by real estate developers, city planners, policy-makers, landlords and even individual gentrifiers' (2007: 1428). An emerging body of work on industrial displacement in London provides further evidence for this (Ferm and Jones, 2015; 2016; Ferm, 2016), as does González and Waley's (2013) research on retail gentrification in the UK, focusing in particular on traditional retail markets. Also relevant is McLean *et al.*'s Toronto-based research, which examines how creative city strategies are used to revitalize commercial streets in disinvested suburbs by 'coding existing spaces as undesirable, dangerous, and indeed as "empty space"' (2015: 1293; see also Borén and Young, 2017).

Marginalized and threatened traders and small businesses often make a contribution to urban economies and urban life more generally beyond their narrow financial interests by providing access to goods, services, employment and social spaces to local, low-income, migrant and ethnic minority communities (Curran, 2007; Zukin *et al.*, 2009; Raco and Tunney, 2010; Hall, 2015; McLean *et al.*, 2015; Ferm and Jones, 2016). These connections open up the possibility for threatened firms to establish solidarity and common ground with the communities they serve, which are often similarly marginalized, excluded and threatened by urban development plans and proposals. These possibilities are supported by a small body of research on opposition to industrial and retail displacement in London (Raco and Tunney, 2010; Roman-Velazquez, 2014; Hall, 2015; González and Dawson, 2018) and contested marketplaces in the UK, Spain and Latin America (González, 2018).

The potential to form alliances is perhaps less surprising when viewed in relation to research on the struggles of informal and street traders in the global South (Jones and Varley, 1994; Bromley, 2000; Mitullah, 2003; Skinner, 2008; 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2010).[1] This work has taken place largely within development studies, urban policy and informal economy research, reflecting broader disciplinary and geographical divides between urban studies and development studies (Robinson, 2006). As Devlin (2011) and González (2018) have already shown, however, it can be productive to work across such

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1   A detailed review of this substantial literature is unfortunately not possible within the confines of this article.

divides between studies of the informal economy and critical urban research. In this case, while informal and street traders in the global South are generally in a much more precarious and dangerous situation, their experiences and achievements are helpful in drawing attention to the potential for similarly marginalized and excluded traders and small businesses in the global North to play a role in wider urban social movements as well.

From this point, I use the term 'workspace struggles' to refer to struggles over access, ownership and other rights in relation to spaces of work in cities. While my focus here is on struggles over London's remaining reservoir of relatively low-cost workspace, including markets, shops, offices and workshops, the term 'workspace struggles' could include struggles over the right to work and trade informally in streets and other public spaces in other contexts. I use the term 'workspace' rather than 'workplace' in order to focus on struggles over access, ownership and other rights in relation to formal or informal relatively low-cost spaces of work in cities, not struggles over labour conditions within workplaces themselves. Low-cost workspace supports the livelihoods of all those who work there, including traders, small business owners and workers, and also enables them to provide goods and services to local communities, including low-income, migrant and ethnic minority groups. The removal of relatively low-cost workspace from cities therefore threatens not only livelihoods but also other valued aspects of urban life.

The roles and positions of traders, small business owners and workers may or may not be clearly distinguishable from one another. For instance, traders and small business owners may work alone, or they may formally or informally employ or subcontract other workers, who may be in a more or less precarious position than themselves. While such relations are central to understanding labour conditions and struggles within workplaces, they are not so central to understanding struggles over workspace itself. Although some traders, small business owners and workers will clearly be in more powerful positions than others, commercial displacement presents at least the potential for strategic collective action amongst all those whose livelihoods depend on the threatened workspace. Furthermore, workspace struggles may extend to include a variety of different grassroots groups active in the communities who use and value the goods and services provided by the threatened traders and small businesses. In some cases, the struggle over workspace may be just one part of a larger contestation or movement. As in the case of union and community organizing (Wills 2008; 2012; Holgate, 2015; Ruiters, 2014), researching workspace struggles will involve moving beyond the employer/employee relation and grappling with other processes of dispossession and the often unlikely, strategic and partial alliances between differently positioned actors which they produce.

In exploring these issues, I examine the workspace struggles which intensified, proliferated and extended across London as the city's housing crisis escalated into a workspace crisis during Boris Johnson's two terms as Mayor of London between 2008 and 2016. I focus on the London-wide Just Space network and specific struggles over the Carpenters Estate and Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market. In each of the cases, the struggle over workspace not only involved threatened traders and small businesses but also concerned residents, community organizations and other grassroots groups; it articulated goals which extended well beyond the interests of individual traders and small businesses to encompass economic, social and environmental concerns; and it represented just one aspect of a wider contestation or movement. These cases demonstrate that commercial displacement can mobilize threatened traders and small businesses to play a role in wider urban social movements.

To explore the potential role of traders and small businesses in urban social movements, I examine London's workspace struggles in relation to three key findings from urban social movement and related research. First, in light of the crucial but extremely difficult work of building and maintaining coalitions and alliances across

difference (Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Wills, 2008; 2012; Mayer, 2007; Marcuse, 2009; Ruiters, 2014; Holgate, 2015), the article pays particular attention to the nature of the alliances established between threatened traders and small businesses and other actors through the workspace struggles. Second, it reveals that workspace struggles—like many urban movements and struggles—combine multiple strategies of opposition, alternatives and engagement (Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Oldfield, 2015). Third, it draws out the new knowledge and possibilities generated through workspace struggles even when, as occurs in many other cases, the 'room for manoeuvre' to influence plans and developments has been extremely limited and activists' efforts have been overwhelmingly rejected (Colomb, 2008: 158; see also Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Edwards, 2009).

The emergence of London's workspace crisis

Concerns that the reduction in supply and rising cost of workspace was leading to business displacement and/or closure in London date back to the 1990s (Ferm, 2014) but they received more attention after a series of deregulatory changes introduced by the national Coalition and Conservative governments since 2011. While in the 1970s and 1980s both the Labour and Conservative governments and the Greater London Council (GLC) took a protectionist stance towards industry in the inner city, in the 1990s and 2000s industrial areas were seen as ripe for redevelopment for new economic and housing uses (Ferm and Jones, 2015). The pressure to release employment land increased throughout the 2000s due to the limited supply of land for housing, increasing residential values, and national planning policy with its focus on housing over employment and market forces (Ferm, 2014). Although 'benchmarks' are set in the London Plan to manage the release of industrial land, they have been consistently and substantially exceeded (Ferm and Jones, 2015).

Local authorities were given further encouragement in this direction by the Coalition and then Conservative governments during the 2010s, most significantly by bringing the conversion of employment sites for residential use within the range of 'permitted development' (PD) which did not require planning permission. The rationale behind these changes was that the planning system was imposing costs and delays on developers, slowing down housing delivery and preventing the re-use of 'redundant commercial premises' (Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2011: 7). At the time of writing, only the conversion of B1 business space[2] for residential use has been brought within PD rights, but the government has at different points proposed extending this to the conversion of light industrial, industrial, storage and distribution and retail spaces (DCLG, 2011; 2013; DCLG and Lewis, 2015).

The new PD flexibilities provoked broad and diverse opposition—including from real-estate experts, almost all the London boroughs, the London Enterprise Panel[3] and the London Assembly—because they posed such an extensive threat to London's economy. While the new PD flexibilities assumed that the commercial property being converted for residential use would be 'redundant' (DCLG, 2011: 7), there was no mechanism for ensuring this was the case. London's high and rising residential values––outbidding employment uses even in the City of London—made it particularly likely that the flexibilities would displace viable businesses throughout the city. Two per cent of total office floorspace had already been lost through office-to-residential conversions in London between 2009 and 2012 (Ramidus Consulting Ltd with Roger Tym and Partners, 2012: 132). So far, these concerns appear to be justified, as approximately 40% of the offices converted to residential use under the new PD regime in London between May 2013 and May 2015 were fully occupied prior to conversion (London Councils, 2015).

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2   Land and buildings designated for B1 business use can include offices, research and development, and light industrial uses suitable for residential areas.
3   Re-named the Local Enterprise Partnership for London by London's next Mayor, Sadiq Khan, elected in 2016.

In parallel, higher than anticipated population growth figures prompted new rounds of policy debate about whether and how London could continue to accommodate its own growth. In response, Boris Johnson—Mayor of London between 2008 and 2016—initiated work to explore new approaches to delivering and financing infrastructure and housing to support London's longer-term growth (London Finance Commission, 2013; Mayor of London, 2014a). In the meantime, he also introduced changes to the London Plan in order to deliver more housing in the short term, including (amongst other things) encouraging the redevelopment of well-located 'surplus' industrial land and retail space for high-density housing (Mayor of London, 2014b). In this way, Johnson's use of London's low-cost workspace as a release valve for London's escalating housing crisis further accelerated its extension into a workspace crisis.

The proliferation, intensification and extension of London's workspace struggles

While specific development proposals involving commercial displacement have been contested since the early 2000s, during Boris Johnson's Mayoralty the growing pressure on workspace motivated increasing numbers of businesses to organize themselves into informal groups, business associations or neighbourhood forums, often together with residents and other local groups. Many groups and alliances emerged in 'Opportunity Areas', where the pressure to redevelop existing low-cost workspace is particularly great. Importantly, in 2013 these groups began to learn from and support each other through a sub-group of the Just Space London-wide network on 'Economy and Planning' (JSEP). Over the next few years, JSEP played a significant role in revealing the threat to low-cost workspace in London, explaining why it mattered and facilitating strategic action at the metropolitan level.

This article draws on specific research and other activities which emerged out of the author's involvement with Just Space and two separate struggles, one over plans by University College London (UCL) for a new campus on the Carpenters Estate (in the Lower Lee Valley Opportunity Area), and the other at Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market (in the Upper Lee Valley Opportunity Area). In each case, my praxis extended across and challenged traditional boundaries between research and activism and between researcher and researched (Katz, 1994; Routledge, 1996; Fuller, 1999; Benson and Nagar, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Taylor, 2014; Wills, 2014; Oldfield, 2015). My approach combined everyday organizing work (e.g. making links, building relationships, sharing information, organizing meetings and events and facilitating discussions), action-oriented interviews with local firms and traders (e.g. to generate information, proposals and/or support for community plans) and embedded critical engagement (e.g. summarizing planning documents, identifying areas of concern, gathering evidence, drafting consultation responses, and providing support and giving evidence during public examinations and public enquiries). These activities generated data for use in academic research in the form of 155 research diary entries, six folders and 1,400 electronic documents of collected notes and papers, and 38 transcripts of meetings, events and interviews. They also contributed to a wide range of other knowledge, resources and possibilities, including a collectively produced handbook on defending low-cost workspace (JSEP, 2015; published online alongside this article).

The research and other activities reveal an intensifying and expanding terrain of struggle over London's remaining reservoir of relatively low-cost workspace, offering an alternative narrative about the role of business groups and interests in shaping urban development processes in London. Previous research on business politics in London has focused on the role of the financial service and property development sectors in establishing and embedding a global city oriented agenda in the Greater London Authority (GLA), which was established in 2000 (Budd and Edwards, 1997; Gordon, 1999; 2003; Edwards, 2001; Thornley et al., 2002; Syrett and Baldcock, 2003;

Syrett, 2006; Massey, 2007; Clark and Moonen, 2012). While these elite and powerful sectors and interests continue to play a significant role in shaping London's metropolitan plans and strategies, this article reveals how a range of other economic actors are attempting to shape urban development processes in other ways. Building on and contributing to the small but growing body of work exploring specific instances in which industrial firms (Raco and Tunney, 2010), market traders (González and Dawson, 2015; 2018) and migrant and ethnic minority retailers (Roman-Velazquez, 2014; Hall, 2015) in London have contested specific development schemes that threatened to displace them, this article explores the mobilization of traders and small businesses threatened with displacement at the metropolitan scale for the first time.

–   Just Space

Just Space is a London-wide network of grassroots, community, voluntary and independent groups which has its roots in the Examination in Public on the London Plan. Unlike other Mayoral strategies, the London Plan is subject to the same intense public scrutiny process required by legislation for all development plan documents. The possibilities for direct and democratic citizen participation in spatial planning in London therefore exceed those in other spheres of public policy, albeit limited by the time, knowledge and resources needed to take them up (Edwards, 2001; 2010). Over the years, these opportunities have motivated increasing numbers of grassroots, community, voluntary, independent and business groups and organizations to participate in the public examination process, mobilizing metropolitan, borough and local networking and a host of other campaigns, projects and initiatives through an alliance which eventually became the Just Space network (Brown *et al.*, 2014; Lipietz *et al.*, 2014). Having had some success in mobilizing participation in the 2010 Examination in Public on equalities, regeneration, housing and environmental issues (Brown *et al.*, 2014), Just Space decided to develop its campaigning efforts proactively around economic issues. Economy workshops held at successive Just Space conferences led to a focused day-long event in March 2013 and the formation of a spin-off Economy and Planning group in June 2013.

JSEP enabled the mobilization of firms and traders threatened with displacement and their supporters and allies at the metropolitan scale for the first time. Groups which were already campaigning against retail or industrial displacement, such as Wards Corner Community Coalition, Friends of Queen's Market and Latin Elephant, were able to form closer links with each other. They were also able to connect with a wide range of small business groups (e.g. the London branch of the Federation of Small Businesses and the East End Trades Guild) and other campaign groups involving threatened small businesses (e.g. Peckham Vision, Camley Street Neighbourhood Forum and the People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House). Through JSEP, these groups were able to support one another's campaigns as well as to mobilize at a metropolitan scale. For example, the People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House was able to seek advice from groups facing similar threats in Elephant and Castle and Newham on how to negotiate a traders' charter for a major regeneration scheme. Several JSEP members went on to join Just Space, including the East End Trades Guild and the People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House. JSEP therefore not only created a London-wide alliance of community and small business groups but also began to transform the wider Just Space network.

Regular JSEP meetings provided opportunities to make connections with new groups, identify common goals and develop a shared agenda which could accommodate a broad alliance. The group pursued multiple strategies and activities, including participating in the consultation and public examination process on the London Plan, engaging with the GLA's economists, undertaking research (Ferm and Jones, 2015; Ferm *et al.*, 2017), holding public events on alternative economic development strategies,

contributing to Just Space's community plan for London, and developing a handbook for groups combating commercial displacement (JSEP, 2015). While several JSEP members were sceptical that attempts to influence or engage with the Mayor and the GLA would have any impact in the short term, they felt these were important routes for building alternative, socially just and environmentally sustainable approaches to urban economic development in London in the long term.

In fact, JSEP's efforts to mobilize community and small business groups at the metropolitan scale were significantly boosted by the Mayor of London's proposal to encourage the release of well-located, so-called 'surplus' industrial and retail workspace for high-density housing development. With JSEP's support, an unprecedented 16 representatives of community and small business groups challenged the proposals at the Examination in Public on the proposed changes in September 2014. While JSEP's efforts were overwhelmingly rejected, small changes were secured to London's town centre planning policies which offered campaigners some policy support to bolster their efforts. The consultation and public examination process was also productive and generative in other ways. As the proposals motivated new groups to participate in JSEP's activities, they brought new evidence and experience with them, enabling JSEP to reveal the pressure on low-cost workspace, the displacement of valued small businesses and the impact of this on wide-ranging social, environmental and economic goals at the metropolitan scale. These arguments were developed further in JSEP's handbook on commercial displacement, where the group argued that London's escalating workspace crisis impacted not only on individual businesses but also everyday lives, livelihoods and the kind of city London was becoming, by removing decent jobs, increasing carbon emissions and travel times, damaging local supply chains and resilient local economies, removing industrial workspace suitable for repair, recycling and redistribution activities, stripping out valued high streets and town centres, and evicting small businesses, industrial firms, migrant and ethnic minority retailers and market traders. As JSEP members supported each other through the demanding, lengthy and intimidating consultation and public examination process, they also built solidarity and confidence which supported and drove their subsequent activities.

–   The Carpenters Estate

The Carpenters Estate is a 23-hectare site adjacent to Stratford Station and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park which includes 709 council homes across three 22-storey towers, low-rise flats and terraces, various commercial buildings, green and play space, two community centres, a primary school and a construction college (Watt, 2013). Since 2000/01, the London Borough of Newham has been considering options for addressing various problems concerning the quality and standard of the homes on the estate, settling on demolition of all three high-rise towers and some of the low-rise buildings in 2008. In 2011, University College London announced that it would be developing a new campus on the Carpenters Estate. This decision attracted intense opposition from Carpenters residents and UCL students and staff over its neglect of the concerns and wishes of the remaining community and the loss of social housing. In May 2013, UCL withdrew its proposal, announcing it had been unable to agree commercial terms, although it became clear that controversy, opposition and anticipated costs had also been important factors. Rumours that UCL would instead take up a place within the Olympic Park were confirmed in November 2013. By then, however, the threat of UCL's plans had spurred one of the residents' groups, Carpenters Against Regeneration Plans, to begin working on a community plan in order to articulate its own vision for the Carpenters Estate, supported by London Tenants Federation and Just Space through a scholar-activist project on the gentrification of council estates and alternatives to demolition and displacement (London Tenants Federation *et al.*, 2014; Lees and Ferreri, 2016).

The threat of commercial displacement mobilized several local small businesses to participate in the process of developing a community plan. The director of a local construction firm, PA Finlay, and the owner of a local car mechanic, Universal Automobile Engineers, helped to establish common ground and solidarity between Carpenters residents and businesses early on by sharing their previous experiences of displacement and redevelopment through the Olympic Games. PA Finlay and another local construction firm, BMA Ltd, went on to make substantial and sustained contributions to the community planning process, including attending meetings with local planning officers and speaking on behalf of other local businesses. Five additional local business representatives—a car mechanic, newsagent, barber, pub landlord, agent in a communications firm and a community centre manager—also attended community planning meetings and provided support and endorsement in various ways. Through a series of meetings, events, interviews and conversations, specific areas of shared interest and concern between residents and businesses emerged and solidified, providing a basis for further collaboration which continued long after UCL withdrew.

The Carpenters Community Plan was exhibited and extensively consulted upon during the summer of 2013, culminating in a launch event at the Carpenters and Docklands Centre in September. The local economy section of the plan set out a vision for the 'healthy growth' of the local economy that would be gradual and incremental and which existing residents and businesses could contribute to and benefit from. Specific proposals included repopulating the Carpenters Estate, reversing the damage done by the Olympic Games (e.g. re-opening roads and station entrances), retaining and supporting local small businesses and industrial firms, creating more workspace, improving links between local residents, businesses and education and training facilities, and generating more living wage jobs, local employment policies, apprenticeships and work placements (London Tenants Federation, 2013).

The community plan group then worked towards becoming a formally constituted, statutory Neighbourhood Forum. After a lengthy, challenging and complex process supported by the London Tenants Federation, amongst others, the Greater Carpenters Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated in July 2015 and published its draft plan in February 2017. By summer 2017, eight local businesses had joined the Forum. The Forum's draft plan reiterated residents' support for existing businesses, set out a vision for local economic development which benefits existing residents and businesses, and prioritized building strong and active relationships between residents and businesses (Greater Carpenters Neighbourhood Forum, 2017). Its local economy policies included developing a Neighbourhood Education Partnership, establishing the Carpenters Centre for Learning Support, converting garages into low-cost workspace, and supporting and developing small-scale industry and social enterprise.

In parallel, Carpenters residents, businesses and other local actors also attempted to influence the new local plan being developed by the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), which gained responsibility for planning functions for the Olympic Park and surrounding areas following the 2012 Olympic Games. Although some people felt participating in the consultation and public examination on the draft local plan would be a waste of energy and risked legitimizing the process, others were more hopeful because of the LLDC's emphasis on securing socio-economic improvements from the Olympic Games for historically deprived communities. Whilst the Forum and others succeeded in opening up a debate about aligning the local plan with their own community and emerging neighbourhood plans, the minor changes made fell well short of what had been requested. Nonetheless, the consultation and public examination of the LLDC's draft plan drew more businesses into the community and neighbourhood planning process and opened up connections with other groups in the wider area. More recently, the Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana Fiaz, who replaced Sir Robin Wales in May 2018, met the Forum to hear concerns; the first such meeting in many years. In

the continued absence of any other specific plans or proposals, it is possible that this dialogue may yet open up a more significant role for the local residents, businesses and community organizations in shaping the future development of the Carpenters Estate.

–   Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market

Wards Corner is a city block at Seven Sisters in Tottenham, Haringey, which includes one of two markets which have come to play an important cultural, symbolic, social and economic role for Latin Americans in London. This market is variously known as Seven Sisters Market, Latin Village or *Pueblito Paisa*, after the Paisa region in Colombia where many traders come from, some fleeing political violence and persecution. The market and the wider city block includes traders and businesses providing specialist goods and services for other local black and minority ethnic and low-income communities. Wards Corner has been earmarked for redevelopment since 2003 and threatened with demolition and redevelopment by Haringey Council's preferred developer, Grainger, since 2007. This threat has mobilized a 15-year campaign by market traders, local businesses, local residents and their supporters.

The threat of demolition at Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market mobilized multiple overlapping and evolving campaigns and initiatives from a wide range of groups and interests. Throughout, Wards Corner Community Coalition has provided a vehicle for solidarity and cooperation for different groups and interests to come together to challenge the Grainger plan and to develop and pursue an alternative community plan. The Coalition has no formal constitution, leadership structure or process (Allen *et al.*, 2012); instead, collective decision-making occurs informally through weekly meetings, email list discussions and individual efforts. Working alongside as well as through the Coalition have been several market traders' associations; Latin American organisations (e.g. Save Latin Village, Pedro Achata Trust, London Latinxs and Amigo Month); the West Green Road/Seven Sisters Development Trust (a vehicle for community-led development at the West Green Road/Seven Sisters town centre set up in 2007 by four Latin American traders and community leaders); local business associations (e.g. Tottenham Traders Partnership and the North East branch of the Federation of Small Businesses); local residents' associations; and local and London-wide campaign networks (e.g. the Our Tottenham community planning network, Stop Haringey Development Vehicle, the Radical Housing Network and Just Space). While these various groups have been more or less active and connected with one another at different times, they have consistently and strongly mobilized in support of one another at key moments.

In this way, market traders, local businesses, residents and their supporters and allies have pursued a wide range of tactics and activities in response to the threats they have faced, including participating in consultations and public examinations on proposed plans and development proposals, legal challenges, alternative community plans, demonstrations and fundraising. The Coalition is perhaps best known for bringing a successful judicial review of Haringey Council's decision to award planning permission to Grainger's first development proposal, which found that the Council had failed to consider its potential impact on ethnic minorities. When Grainger received planning permission for revised plans incorporating a (limited and inadequate) market space within its development proposal, the Coalition again turned to the courts, this time unsuccessfully. In parallel, a succession of community plans were developed, one of which finally received planning permission from Haringey Council in April 2014.[4] This extremely unusual and significant achievement opened the door to community-led development and self-management at Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market and the wider West Green Road/Seven Sisters town centre.

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4   Under the planning system in England and Wales it is possible for a local planning authority to give planning permission to more than one proposal for a single site.

Since then, however, traders and campaigners have faced intensifying and multiplying threats relating to the Grainger plan, placing traders (in particular) under further stress and triggering renewed efforts to save the market, which have in turn generated much-needed support and resources. These threats include a neighbouring Grainger development at *Apex House* incorporating an alternative temporary or permanent market; the transfer of the market lease to Market Asset Management (Seven Sisters), a subsidiary of Quarterbridge, the consulting firm acting as market facilitator for Grainger in relation to the Wards Corner redevelopment; and Haringey Council's proposal to use Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers to facilitate Grainger's plan. The extent of opposition to the proposed CPO triggered a public inquiry during the summer of 2017, during which an independent inspector heard evidence from a wide range of traders, residents, community organizations and expert witnesses. Traders not only secured and funded legal representation for the public inquiry but also forged stronger links with other groups and secured an intervention from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They also obtained an offer to purchase the existing market building and deliver the community plan from a renowned Colombian-born artist living and working locally, Oscar Murillo, and raised over £10,000 to progress work on further developing and re-submitting the community plan after planning permission had expired. At the time of writing, campaigners have launched a last-ditch legal effort to stop the CPO, and Haringey Council (which underwent a change of leadership in 2018) is mid-way through a Scrutiny Committee review of its previous decisions, current issues and future options. If these efforts are successful and Haringey Council has the confidence to think again, the relationships, knowledge and resources built through 15 years of campaigning will be powerfully re-directed towards delivering the community plan.

Workspace struggles as part of wider urban social movements

The cases of JSEP, the Carpenters Estate and Wards Corner/Seven Sisters Market demonstrate that traders and small businesses threatened with commercial displacement can form alliances with community and grassroots groups and play a role in wider urban social movements whose goals and concerns extend well beyond these firms' individual interests. Faced with top-down, centralising and transformative agendas, all three groups developed alternative visions for gradual, healthy, inclusive and geographically distributed economic development which existing residents and businesses could shape, contribute to and benefit from. They also demanded a stronger role for existing residents and businesses in planning and development processes through, for example, participatory reviews of the underpinning evidence, neighbourhood plans, community-led plans and self-management. These three cases therefore confirm the need to extend the reach of urban social movement research to include workspace struggles and, more generally, traders and small businesses.

The gradual, open and partial approach to alliance-building pursued by London's workspace struggles offers insights into how urban social movements can work across difference (Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Mayer, 2007; Marcuse, 2009; Edwards, 2010; Wills, 2012). The three cases explored in this article were loose, ambiguous and partial alliances which accommodated a wide range of groups and interests in various ways. None of the three groups were formally organized or constituted, relying instead on open and adaptable coalitions shaped over time through successive discussions and encounters amongst an evolving group in meetings and events. These arrangements left participating individuals and groups free to pursue their own specific initiatives and agendas while also shaping, supporting and drawing on the networks and resources of a broader coalition.

Like many urban social movements (Leitner *et al.*, 2007; Oldfield, 2015), London's workspace struggles combined multiple strategies of engagement, opposition

and alternatives. The three groups engaged with local or metropolitan planning authorities through the consultation and public engagement process required to finalize proposed plans. This involved lengthy, demanding and technical work to analyse planning documents and their underlying studies, gather alternative evidence, formulate responses and participate in the hearings. The groups also contested proposed plans and development proposals in other spheres, including through public protests, demonstrations and legal challenges. Strategies of engagement and opposition were always twinned with generating alternatives, through the development of community plans in particular.

London's workspace struggles have already achieved a great deal, despite not (yet) being successful in their ultimate aims. Even so-called 'failures' have produced new knowledge, resources and possibilities which each group has put to work to progress their alternative plans and proposals. Therefore, while it is certainly the case that those engaged in London's workspace struggles, like so many other urban social movements, have faced extremely limited 'room for manoeuvre' and the overwhelming rejection of their proposals (Colomb, 2008: 158; see also Leitner *et al*., 2007; Edwards, 2009), they are also continually in the process of building new connections and relationships and pursuing new openings and possibilities. London's workspace struggles therefore offer some hope for the potential for urban social movements to build power and resources over the long term. Developing research and other activities through engagement and involvement has proved an effective method for bringing these new openings and possibilities into view, offering a longer-term perspective which guards against moving too quickly to identify failure and closure (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Wills, 2012; 2014).

Conclusion

An escalating workspace crisis has changed the terrain of contestation and struggle over urban development in London. The increasing pressure on London's remaining reservoir of relatively low-cost spaces of work has mobilized industrial firms, migrant and ethnic minority retailers and market traders to challenge the plans and development proposals that threaten to displace them and to propose alternatives. While such economic actors have contested specific development proposals before, during Boris Johnson's Mayoralty they began mobilizing across London and at the metropolitan scale. While the elite and powerful sectors and interests which succeeded in embedding a global city oriented agenda in the GLA in the late 1990s and early 2000s continue to play a significant role in shaping London's metropolitan plans and strategies, this article has revealed that threatened traders and small businesses have begun to shape urban development processes in other ways. Small businesses, industrial firms, migrant and ethnic minority retailers and market traders who rely on the city's remaining reservoir of relatively low-cost workspace feature in many urban struggles in London in the late 2010s.

While workspace struggles are relatively new to London, informal and street traders' groups have long played a role in urban contestations and struggles in the global South. Extending urban social movement research to encompass workspace struggles will therefore involve learning from both emerging research on opposition to commercial displacement and gentrification (largely) in the global North and also long-standing and well-developed research on informal and street traders' struggles in the global South, which can be found within research on development, urban policy and the informal economy. In so doing, research on workspace struggles may contribute to wider efforts to move beyond these disciplinary and geographical divides, opening up new opportunities for learning and collaboration between activists and researchers across the global South and North.

Further research on workspace struggles as part of wider urban social movements might explore in particular the potential for alliance-building between

different economic and social actors and issues. Traders and firms threatened with commercial displacement often provide goods, services, employment and social spaces to low-income, migrant and ethnic minority communities, which are also often threatened by urban development processes. These connections and shared experiences offer a basis for gradual and patient collaboration, cooperation and solidarity amongst marginalized, excluded and threatened firms and residents, working across usually separated 'economic' and 'social' interests and issues in urban policy and politics. Such coalitions and alliances therefore challenge the idea that the economy is separate from the rest of social and political life, and as such may offer much-needed ideas and insights for radical urban politics and possibilities for the development of alternatives.

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