

The “Tate Effect” on the South Bank: Urban Regeneration through the Bankside Urban Forest

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ABSTRACT: Opening in 2000, the Tate Modern presented a compelling type of museum building. Housed in a former power station, the industrial character of the original structure was maintained, even celebrated, in the conversion. In addition to providing much needed space for the Tate’s growing twentieth-century art collection, the transformation of the building into a museum of modern art was intended to have larger urban implications with the ambitious goal of stimulating regeneration in South Bank, “the Cultural Heart of London.” As a flagship of the South Bank’s Millennium Mile and directly linked to St. Paul’s Cathedral by the new London Millennium Footbridge, the Tate Modern would infuse culture and money into a depressed part of London.

In the decade and a half since the publication of Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* and the opening of the Tate Modern, the role of culture in urban reimagining efforts has been exploited, debated, and problematized. This paper explores select exemplars of the spillover benefits of the Tate Modern’s success and positive externalities that produced modest and sometimes ephemeral installations that breathed new life and joy into the South Bank. Considered through the lens of educational reformer and philosopher John Dewey’s call to reposition art within the realm of the everyday, the Tate multiplier effect is considerable. In particular, works created within the *Bankside Urban Forest* framework, a collaboration-driven initiative of Better Bankside Business Improvement District, are foregrounded as remarkable and authentic examples of how a design framework can employ urban heritage, contemporary art and design, and ecological expertise to generate urban improvements at all scales. From these evidences, it is clear that the instrumentality of the museum is rightfully a strategy that should continue in public policy and museological discussions as governments attempt to curate architecture, heritage, and history in urban regeneration initiatives.

KEYWORDS: museum, regeneration, multiplier effect, spillover benefits

INTRODUCTION

Peter C. Rowe’s 1999 book, *Civic Realism*, posits that urban spaces that are truly civic in character “belong to everyone and yet to nobody in particular.” Rowe argues that a joyfully vibrant, viable civic space is

...as much about the broad processes and attitudes behind civic place making as it is about urban architecture per se, and it reflects a concomitant belief that civic place making cannot occur successfully without a propitious conjunction of local opportunity, community wherewithal, and design capability (Rowe 6).

What is particularly compelling in Rowe’s approach is how the process of urban “making” is foregrounded with a particular emphasis on community and the local context. In their research on neighborhood change and cohesion in urban regeneration policies in Liverpool, Richard Meegan and Alison Mitchell, identify ‘place-based community’ and the ‘neighborhood’ as appropriate spatial scales for understanding the operation of ‘everyday life-worlds’ (Meegan and Mitchell 2167). Quoting from the Social Exclusion Unit’s report, ‘Bringing Britain Together,’ the importance of community bonds are further reinforced:

The most powerful resource in turning around neighbourhoods should be the community itself. Community involvement can take many forms: formal volunteering; helping a neighbour; taking part in a community organisation. It can have the triple benefit of getting things done that need to be, fostering community links and building the skills, self-esteem and networks of those who give their time (Meegan and Mitchell 2168).

Participatory planning, local opportunity, design capability, community identity, and neighborhoods: all of these features come together in a productive way on London’s Southbank. In particular, works created within the *Bankside Urban Forest* framework, a collaboration-driven initiative of Better Bankside Business Improvement District, are foregrounded as remarkable and authentic examples of how a design framework can employ urban heritage, contemporary art and design, and ecological expertise to generate urban improvements at many scales.

1.0 URBAN HERITAGE

In 2000, Tate Modern opened on the south bank of the Thames River. It was a primary feature of London’s Millennium Mile, a mile-long stretch of riverbank stretching from the London Eye Ferris Wheel down past the Tate to the new Shakespeare Globe Theatre. The riverfront was renewed with a new pedestrian walkway, plantings, and the Norman Foster designed Millennium Bridge – a pedestrian suspension bridge linking the

Tate with St Paul's Cathedral on the opposite shore. The Tate and many of these other projects were funded in part through the National Lottery's Heritage Lottery Fund (Gilmour Chapter 3).

Bankside, one of the oldest settled areas in London, offers an urban palimpsest with traces of its gritty history including brothels, the Globe Theatre (a replica of which was built in the 1990s), and a variety of industries including warehouses and docks. Bankside featured a power generating station since the late nineteenth century which was replaced in 1947 with a design by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the well-known architect of the Liverpool Cathedral and the Battersea Power Station. This monumental and impressive structure was in active service from 1953-1981 at which point it lay mostly unused for decades. Transformed into the Tate Modern by the Swiss architecture firm Herzog and de Meuron, the museum opened to great acclaim (Fig.1). The thoughtful adaptive reuse approach provides a memorable frame for the viewing of the modern collection. With its tall chimney and industrial skin, the Tate Modern provided a functionalist vernacular architecture; the perfect iconography for a growing museum brand.



Figure 1 Tate Modern. Source: tate.org.uk

As a canvas for contemporary art, the industrial building offered an ambience not unlike the loft spaces in which the works were produced, allowing for continuity in context. In addition, for some art genres, the juxtaposition of the pieces and the rough spatial frame offered a pleasurable sense of shock. This disjuncture between the culture of art and the raw or downbeat surroundings accentuated the experience of the art and provided an edgy contrast to the older structures (Williams 115).

In the Tate project, as with many other industrial adaptive reuse cultural initiatives since, the museum as an institution is instrumentalized to act as anchor, as well as beacon, for economic development. While the Thames riverfront saw considerable development for the millennium, one of the goals of the Tate project was to see the urban and economic benefits of the new museum permeate further into Southwark. This desire resulted in the Tate hiring Richard Rogers and Partners to develop an urban strategy that would complement the adaptation of the power station being designed by Herzog and de Meuron. While elements of the Bankside Urban Study were implemented, the study also laid the groundwork for continued efforts in Southwark, specifically the *Bankside Urban Forest*, an initiative involving many different planning agencies and community groups.

2.0 ROOTED IN PLACE: THE *BANKSIDE URBAN FOREST*



Figure 2 Bankside Urban Forest. Source: wmmarchitects.co.uk

We wanted to create the kind of public spaces you find in nature, where you sit under a tree or on a rock.” Jacques Herzog on the opening of the Switch House extension of the Tate Modern in 2016 (Wainwright).

The *Bankside Urban Forest* is an urban design and landscape architecture framework designed by the British architecture firm of Witherford Watson Mann (WWM). The name “Urban Forest” is a metaphor that evokes the network of streets, scattered open spaces and strong local identity of the area (Fig. 2). Unlike top-down masterplans, the *Bankside Urban Forest* advocates a “User Centered Design” approach to researching and designing urban projects. Using ethnographic studies as a guide, WWM worked with a historian to write a local history and had a photographer capture parts of Bankside that were of particular importance to the community. The framework included a number of illustrative projects including the creation of a Tate Modern playground and a planted arch, improved landscaping and pedestrian access, and the widening of several public gathering spaces including Flat Iron Square. The framework, instead of being prescriptive, is designed to manage incremental changes across Bankside. At a recent Greater London Authority regeneration conference, Alistair Huggett, a Project Manager in Southwark discussed the implementation of the *Bankside Urban Forest’s* micro-development strategies as tools of renewal:

We did not approach Bankside with the ‘dead hand’ of master planning. You will not find anywhere a masterplan for Bankside. There has been much more of an organic approach to our way of dealing with the area. Architects must focus on people, not masterplans, if they want to reinvigorate failing town centers (Huggett).

Continuing the participatory agenda that emerged in the 1980s, the Bankside planning agencies and the Tate management considered not just the substantive value that design can play in a community, but also the value of a design process that includes the various stakeholders.

Bankside has seen tremendous growth since the Tate conversion. Emerging from the *Bankside Urban Forest* framework, landscape and streetscape improvements continue throughout the area bringing pockets of light, green, and activity. Mixed-use business and residential construction persist unabated with a consistent tempo of improvement despite the difficult economy in Britain. While not all of the projects are large in scale, the positive multiplier effect of the Tate Modern is indisputable.

3.0 IDENTITY: THE STREET AND NEIGHBORHOOD

In his 2002 seminal work, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida wrote about the powerful force of creativity that was shaping cities. Specifically, Florida focuses on creativity and diversity as the primary drivers of innovation and growth. His thesis is that creative people are drawn to and create vibrant civic spaces; spaces with a “quality of place” that emphasizes the hegemony of the street.

The culture is “street-level” because it tends to cluster along certain streets lined with a multitude of small venues. These may include coffee shops, restaurants and bars, some of which offer performance or exhibits along with the food and drink; art galleries; bookstores and other stores; small to mid-sized theaters for film or live performance or both; and various hybrid spaces—like a bookstore/tearoom/little theater or gallery/studio/live music space—often in storefronts or old buildings converted from other purposes. The scene may spill out onto the sidewalks, with dining tables, musicians, vendors, panhandlers, performers and plenty of passersby at all hours of the day and night (Florida 182-3).

These clusters are expressions of cultural identity that enliven the street with music, art, and people.

Bankside is a place historically associated with bawdy entertainment. Nevertheless, in keeping with Florida’s emphasis on the street as the primary unit of a healthy civic space, the *Bankside Urban Forest* framework has been focused on incremental street-level improvements. One example of how the spillover benefits of the Tate Modern have energized the streetscape is powerfully illustrated in the Low Line project, an adaptive reuse initiative currently in development (Fig. 3). The Low Line, evoking Manhattan’s High Line, focuses on the rail arches that have been part of Bankside’s heritage for over 150 years. The multi-stage project aims to transform the public realm by opening up a walkway that runs along the base of viaducts.

3.1 The Low Line

As with many of the projects that have emerged from the *Bankside Urban Forest*, the Low Line is a simple idea – to work in partnership with local residents, businesses and community groups and Network Rail to reinstate the common spaces that run along the base of the viaduct, connecting London Bridge with Waterloo stations through a traffic-free route. Historically the viaduct that extends between these two stations has contributed to the segregation of the urban interior at Bankside from the active river edge. The route which runs adjacent to the arches, once provided easy pedestrian access across Bankside but development, both planned and informal, has blocked access along its length.

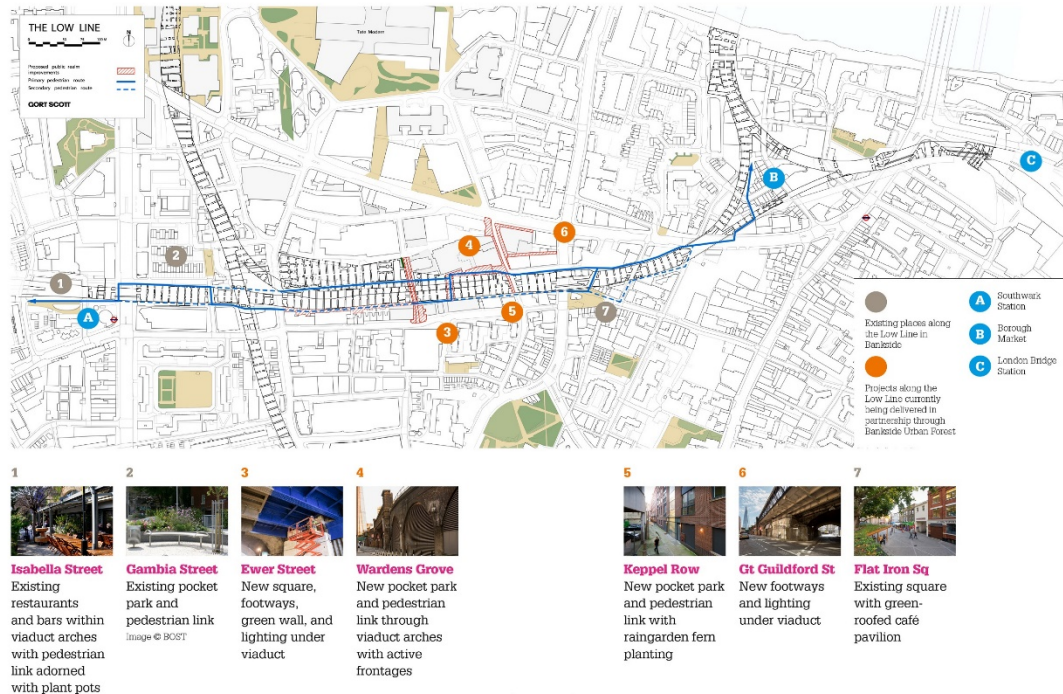


Figure 3 The Low Line. Source: todolist.org.uk

The Low Line design will stitch these disconnected spaces back into the urban fabric through a range of large and small projects. With Better Bankside’s push for an ecologically sound and artistically resonant streetscape, the Low Line project aims to bring economic, social, and environmental vitality while developing a strategy that allows for the creative and sensitive regeneration of the arches, coupled with an ambition to bring creativity and vitality to the public spaces that run along the base of the viaduct.

4.0 ART AS CATALYST, ART AS EXPERIENCE

While visitors in the first decade of the Tate Modern might best remember the immersive and spellbinding impact of the Unilever Series installations – featuring artists including Anish Kapoor and Rachel Whiteread – in the sublime space Turbine Hall, outside the walls has experienced equally powerful changes that can be read as extensions of those museum-sanctioned creative exploits. In an effort to capitalize on the success of the Tate Modern, the Better Bankside Business Improvement District, worked to extend the revitalizing power of culture deeper into the borough of Bankside through a multi-pronged approach involving partners engaged in all aspects of urban living. Specifically, the stated mission of Better Bankside is to “improve the public realm” and “to make Bankside a thriving place to work, live and visit.” From art installations to green walls and botanical gardens to pop-up business ventures and sustainability ventures, the *Bankside Urban Forest* projects demonstrate over and over again the positive multiplier effect of the Tate Modern.

American social philosopher and educational reformer, John Dewey, argued for the repositioning of art within the realm of the everyday. As “carriers of meaning” art had the potential to profoundly affect daily life and to bring joy and connectedness.

In art as an experience, actuality and possibility or ideality, the new and the old, objective material and personal response, the individual and the universal, surface and depth, sense and meaning, are integrated in an experience in which they are all transfigured from the significance that belongs to them when isolated in reflection (Dewey 301).

A key aspect of Dewey’s argument in *Art as Experience* was that engagement with art was fundamental to progressive social goals and to cultural improvement.

4.1 Colourful Crossings

Encounters with contemporary art and design have also been leveraged with significant success in Bankside. A recent series – Avenue of Art: Colourful Crossings – which launched in 2016 and is ongoing, saw the introduction of public art into the streetscape in a very direct way. “The aim of the Colourful Crossings commission is to explore how everyday infrastructures in the city, such as pedestrian crossings, are perceived

and can be transformed" (Better Bankside). In this project, Better Bankside commissioned three international artists to bring color and animation to Southwark Street. The goal was to take art out of its traditional gallery contexts and use it to transform public spaces. The Avenue of Arts initiatives include:

- Commissions in the public realm will contribute to the creation of a lively and multi-faceted urban environment, which re-tunes the 'place' functions of Southwark Street over the 'movement' functions.
- Commissions will contribute to Bankside's identity and create a cultural content that will give a sense of co-ownership to the diverse groups of people who work, live and visit the neighborhood.
- Commissions will strengthen the ties between public realm projects and cultural activities both locally and more widely.
- Art will be supported for its own intrinsic value as art.(Better Bankside)

One of the first Colourful Crossings was a temporary, interactive art installation, "Performer," by the New York artist Adam Frank. Visitors to Bankside received a spontaneous round of applause as they pass under the railway bridge at the junction of Redcross Way. The more movement, the louder the applause, encouraging people to dance and interact further with the installation. If the viewer is still, the virtual audience calms and eventually goes silent except for an occasional cough. When the viewer leaves the illuminated area the viewer hears applause proportional to the total amount of movement in that session.



Figure 4 Colourful Crossing. Source: betterbankside.co.uk

A second Colourful Crossing are the semi-permanent installations called the "Crossing Stories" – a series of vivid graphic image applied to the streetscape outside the Menier Gallery. This series of pavement applications have completely transformed a pedestrian crossing. One resembles a playful board game on the pavement, another is composed of pictograms associated with Bankside urban history. "The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations" (Jacobs 50). The streetscape is now host to endless possibilities of energy and encounter.

The most recent design, installed in 2016, is by the artist Camille Walala (Fig. 4). In these works, Walala's signature graphic style is applied to pedestrian crossings along Southwark Street. As one of the busiest streets in Bankside, Southwark Street can sometimes be a barrier to people exploring the neighborhood. "We want to make Bankside a better place to live, work and visit," said Donald Hyslop, Head of Partnerships at Tate and Chair of Better Bankside. "The Colourful Crossings project will transform the public realm to the benefit of the local businesses and visitors to the area. We aim to draw footfall further south from the busy riverside stretch, encouraging people to explore Southwark Street and discover Bankside's full cultural offer" (Better Bankside). Tasked with reimagining the everyday experience of crossing the road, Walala used bold colors and shaped to delineate the crossing zone. The project aimed to increase pedestrian footfall along the street, changing the way it is used and perceived by the public and motorists. Evaluation from the Colourful Crossings delivered to date have found that nearly 70% people felt happier as a result of the creative project, and 85% wanted to see more creative projects along Southwark Street (Better Bankside).

5.0 ECOLOGICAL INSERTIONS

A forest is a place with a strong overall character, which allows diverse activities, freedoms and places within it. The aim of the *Bankside Urban Forest* is to achieve this quality in a city context. The strategy is not literally to turn the area into a forest, although it does create opportunities for greening, using trees, planted walls, and other means (Bankside Urban Forest).

5.1 Bankside Urban Orchard

Commissioned by The Architecture Foundation and built by the Bankside Open Space Trust and hundreds of volunteers, the Bankside Urban Orchard was a temporary installation part of the London Festival of Architecture in 2010. Designed by the American landscape architect Heather Ring of the Wayward Plant Registry, the project transformed a derelict site into a public garden with planters, raised garden beds, and a



Figure 5 Bankside Urban Orchard. Source: architectsjournal.co.uk

timber pavilion (Fig. 5). The pavilion was presented by the Finish Institute and designed by students and in-house architects from the Aalto University Wood Program. Constructed from reclaimed materials, fruit trees, and plants, the orchard became the site of a series of workshops and discussions on urban agriculture and biodiversity, a plant adoption and exchange program.

A point of particular interest is that the Wayward Plant Registry organized and ran the 6-week community build where they taught local volunteers skills in gardening and carpentry. In addition to the educational objectives which were handsomely met, the Urban Orchard hosted film screenings, musical performances, and local community gatherings. At the end of the summer, the garden was dismantled and all the trees were given to local estates and other community gardens to remain as a lasting legacy of the project. As a place for encounter and a “meanwhile space”- a redundant space temporarily brought into productive use – the Bankside Urban Orchard is a potent exemplar (Meanwhile Space).

Reclaiming and animating disused corners of Bankside is a key component of *Bankside Urban Forest's* strategy to enhance the area. A recent green infrastructure audit of green spaces and assets in the Bankside neighborhood which was carried out by Better Bankside and the Ecology Consultancy highlighted a range of opportunities for increasing green cover in the area in line with Mayoral targets. The Mayor of London is working to increase green cover in London by 5% by 2025. In Bankside they are working to exceed these targets through initiatives like *Bankside Urban Forest* and the Bankside Neighbourhood Plan. In 2017, Bankside applied for and was awarded funds from the Mayor of London to focus on a “Clean Air Mini Neighbourhood” (Giordana).



Figure 6 Verdant Viaduct. Source: betterbankside.co.uk

5.2 Verdant Viaduct

A green effort that spearheaded these most recent successes can be seen in the 2013 Verdant Viaduct project, funded by Network Rail and Skanska. Unlike the transient Bankside Urban Orchard, the Verdant Viaduct project is a longstanding initiative seen as an important step in improving the ecological health of Bankside. This effort transformed an existing masonry viaduct in Borough Market into a green wall; a piece of green infrastructure to improve the public realm in Bankside (Fig. 6). The access stairwell on the viaduct on Stoney Street was transformed into a lush green wall featuring nearly 200 plants. The wall was created by building a modular frame on the existing access stair to the new railway viaduct. The planting was performed over a number of weeks by the vertical garden specialists Treebox and is continually maintained.

CONCLUSION

It has become increasingly important in recent years for public museums and galleries in Britain and elsewhere to justify their share of government funding by demonstrating that they function for the benefit of a broad public rather than a privileged few. At the same time, museums have come to be seen not simply as more or less worthy recipients of subsidy, but as potential generators of income for the communities in which they are located. The museum that does not prove an outcome to its community is as socially irresponsible as the business that fails to show a profit. They are crucial to the cultural policies adopted by many local governments and other official bodies in order to improve the quality of life in the city or region, and to promote economic growth.

To create the *Bankside Urban Forest* framework, the designers worked with local constituents and groups to find common needs and a productive vision for future urban development and improvement. Resonating with Rowe's call for a "civic realism" focused on people and the process of making, the framework is especially notable for its focus on community involvement, an approach favored by the Tate leadership. As an institution, Tate Modern has been very active in its outreach activities. It plays a significant role in its locality, working closely with other employers businesses and community organizations. It has been actively involved in developing in tourism and marketing initiatives (Bankside Marketing Group) and the development of the business sector (Better Bankside, Tate Trustees, 2002: 20). Not satisfied with simply opening their museum, the Tate simultaneously set into motion the urban studies and evaluations that would result, ultimately, in the *Bankside Urban Forest*. The resulting framework, intentionally not a masterplan but instead a guiding force, has been implemented in myriad ways big and small, permanent and ephemeral, to improve the quality of life for Bankside inhabitants. From the select design exemplars presented here, it is clear that the instrumentality of the museum to bring joy is rightfully a theme that should continue in current public policy and museological discussions as governments attempt to curate architecture, heritage, and history in urban regeneration initiatives.

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