



**Royal College of Art**  
Postgraduate Art & Design

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# Eco-co

Keywords: Canal, Community, Ecological, Wellbeing

Brief: Establish a long-term sustainable pathway between the London Canal Organisation and the community

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**Service Design | IRP Interim Reviews**

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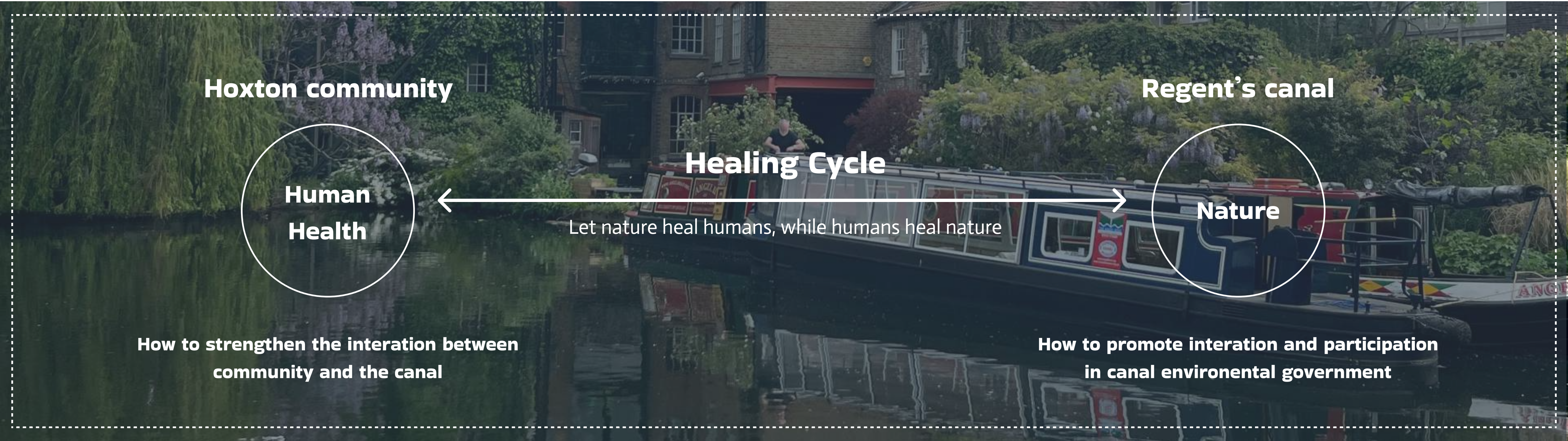
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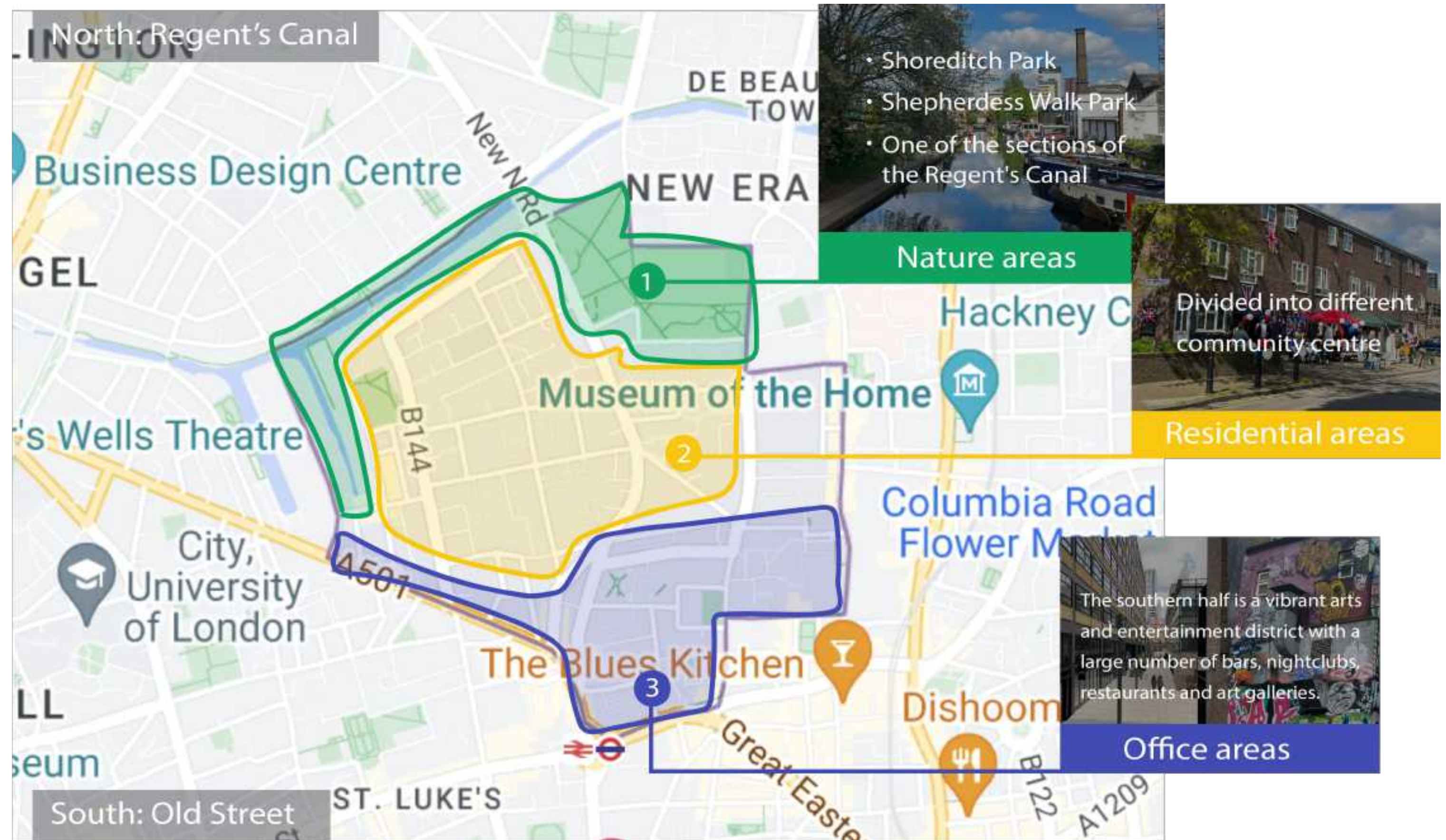




# HOXTON

Hoxton is a district in east London with lots of street art and hipsters, with many office buildings in the south, becomes an emerging art and commercial center in London.

However, the area has few natural resources and is located in the north, including two parks and a section of the Regent's River.





# Hoxton's environment

## Natural areas



- Soothing vibe
- Crowded
- Useless houseboats
- Plants along the riverway
- Polluted river

Regent's Canal

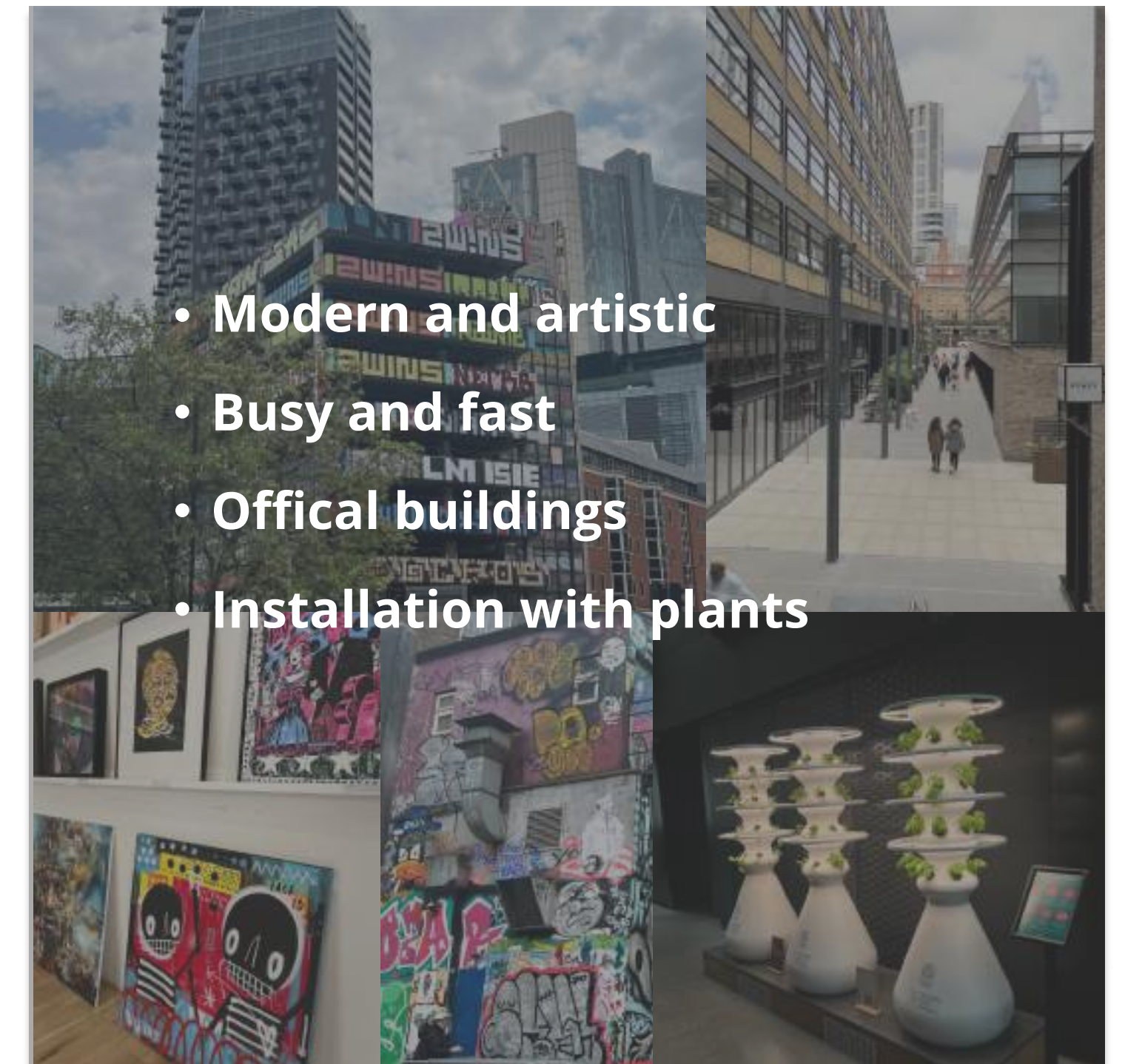
## Residential areas



- Parks
- Friendly residents
- Many community centres
- Plentiful signs and posters

Local community

## Office areas



- Modern and artistic
- Busy and fast
- Official buildings
- Installation with plants

Near Old street station



# Canal & Health

**74%**

of UK adults have felt so stressed at some point,  
they felt overwhelmed or unable to cope

**76%**

of employees report moderate-to-high  
or high levels of stress

When levels of stress become unmanageable, it becomes an issue which can damage health.

## Green prescriptions

connect people to nature-based interventions and activities, aim to :

1. improve mental health
2. increase physical activity
3. strengthen social
4. connection, promote human well-being

People with good nature connectedness tend to be happier

Benefits to be close to Canal:

1. An aggregation of the benefits associated with green and blue spaces.
2. Encountering more wildlife is good for mental well-being.
3. People describe the surrounding environment as beautiful, historic, peaceful, and inspiring.

Compare with other places, visiting canals and rivers have more mental health benefits



# USERS RESEARCH

We did three times field research in Hoxton community, exploring the different groups from space setting, service delivery, and individual experience.

## User insights



**RESIDENTS**

### Frustrations

- The path along the canal is crowded
- Only walks and chats along the river
- Community activities are rarely targeted
- See a lot of litter around the canal, but don't know how to take action

### Needs

- Live in a richer natural environment
- Have more information about the natural environment
- Join events in the community and connect with people around
- Discover more interesting activities around the canal with new perspectives



**WORKERS**

### Frustrations

- Busy work schedule and no time to get into nature
- Fixed daily routes, no opportunity to explore nearby natural resources
- Existing nature activity platforms are scattered and complex, no accessible and personalized choice of nature-related activities

### Needs

- Want to get more in touch with nature
- Get information and participation in nature-related activities easily
- A new way to relieve anxiety, improve physical and mental state, work and live better



## Research Process

### Approach

- 1v1 interview
- observation
- mapping
- space
- day-in-the-life
- case studies

### Scale

- 3 local community
- 8 community residents
- 4 shopkeepers
- 2 houseboat owner
- 4 staff
- 1 ecological company (Square Mile Farms)



# Canal & River Trust Volunteering



Desk Research

Types of canal activities available in London

## Canal protection activities

- Canal clean-up
- Tractor maintenance
- Biodiversity protection
- Water Quality Monitor
- Historic preservation/restoration
- Conservation awareness and education

## Canal activities

- Walking/cycling
- Boat trip
- Kayak/Canoe
- Water market
- Bars / Restaurants
- Bookstore
- Fishing
- Festivals/Events
- Social Walking

## LAERNING

1. Existing voluntary activities for the conservation of traditional canals are carried out in the following manner: We make it clear about the whole procedures and matter needs attention of conducting the volunteering activity about canal protection and the main categories of activities.
2. Restricted nature of canal conservation activities: CRT, as the largest canal management organization, also undertakes canal conservation activities, but has limited resources to cover all areas
3. Potential commercial value: canal conservation activities can be partnered with private investors such as companies to obtain commercial investment
4. Single channel for participation and publicity: the only way to find out more about the campaign is through the website



# London Rivers Week 2023: Take Me to Your River Showcase



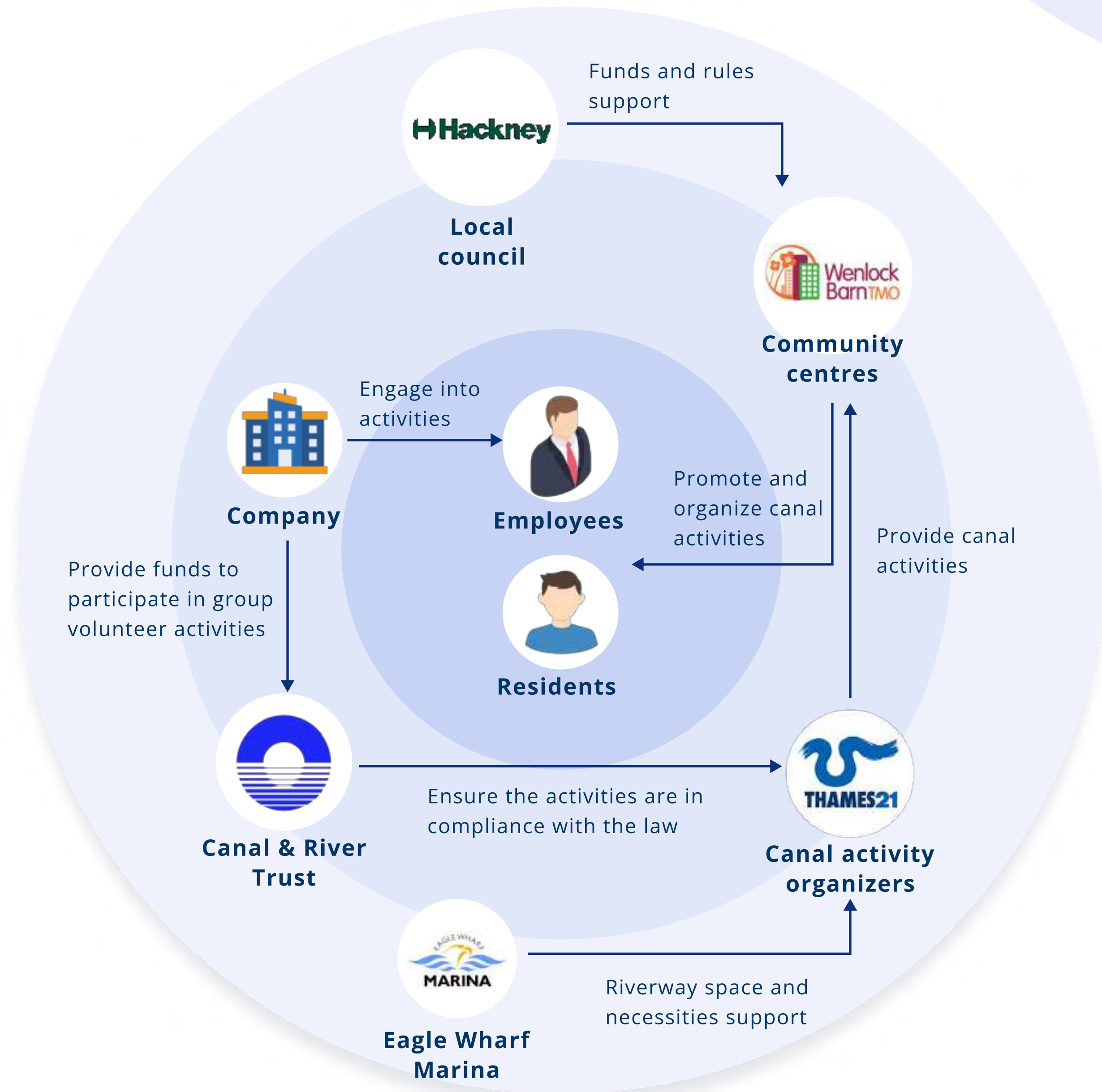
## LAERNING

1. Promote interaction between people and nature through different river interaction devices, helping children to experience the river and thus raise awareness of the need to protect nature
2. Many interesting and meaningful canal conservation activities exist, but participation in small-scale canal activities is low due to a lack of publicity channels
3. The lack of management of canal activities makes it difficult to choose the right venue for them
4. Specific canal conservation activities have a limited and fixed group of participants, making it difficult to find a specific group of people



# STAKEHOLDERS

Our goal is not only to improve the experience of interacting with nature but to empower a sustainable nature-healing cycle for all. Besides our main target group – nearby residents and employees, we include canal activities organizers and community centres as the key stakeholders in the ecosystem.





# INSIGHT

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## **Individual unfulfilled needs:**

**Few activities around the canal, difficult to further interact with the canal.**

High life pressure leads to people's unmet needs to interact with nature. Due to the lack of canal activities around Hoxton, people's interaction degree with the canal is limited, resulting in the lack of motivation for residents living nearby to be involved in the canal.



## **Canal engagement:**

**Not making full use of canal resources.**

The canal organization has limited promotional channels, making it difficult to find collaborating institutions and carry out activities targeting specific community needs. It is challenging to attract more community participants, resulting in low engagement. As a consequence, both canal activities and natural resources cannot be fully utilized.

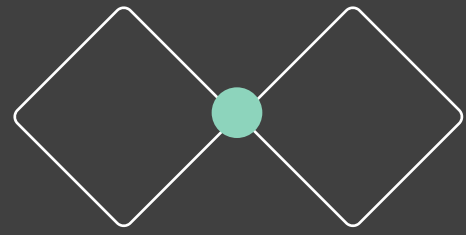


## **Community overview:**

**Lack the connection with the canal and nature.**

Most residents mention environmental issues around the canal, while the community centre lacks awareness of canal conservation and how the canal can enhance the well-being of residents. There are no resources to organize nature activities related to the canal, providing an opportunity to introduce canal conservation organizations.





# Problem Statement

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**People in the city face high life pressures and have low frequency of contact with nature, leading to unfulfilled needs to enjoy the nature space.**

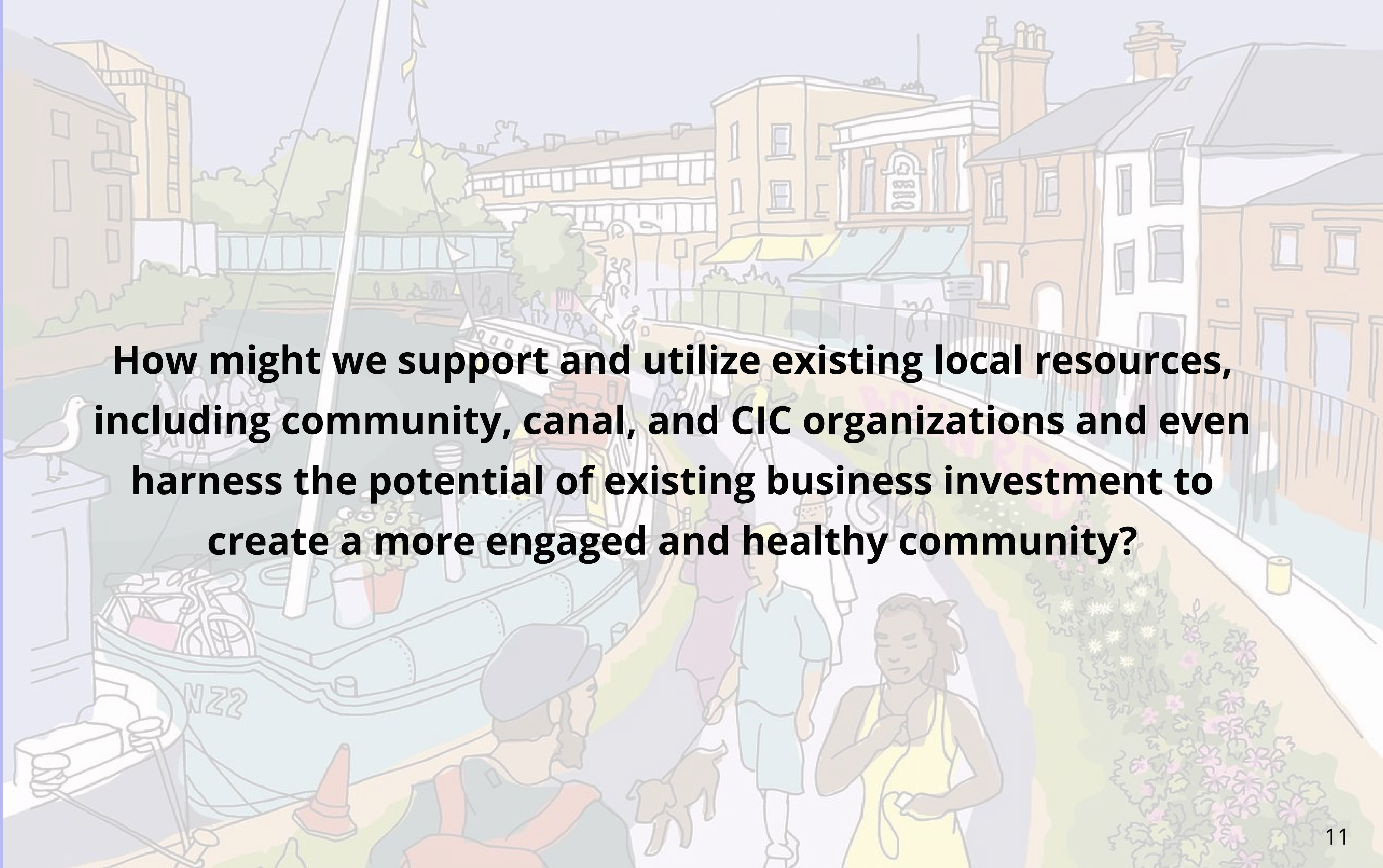
**In the Hoxton area, there is a lack of motivation for people to join the canal activities. Community centres lack knowledge of the canal and rarely organize canal-related activities. The high-quality meaningful canal activity lacks effective propaganda way to engage the community residents to join. Leading to the underutilized of existing canal resources.**





# MISSION

**How might we support and utilize existing local resources, including community, canal, and CIC organizations and even harness the potential of existing business investment to create a more engaged and healthy community?**

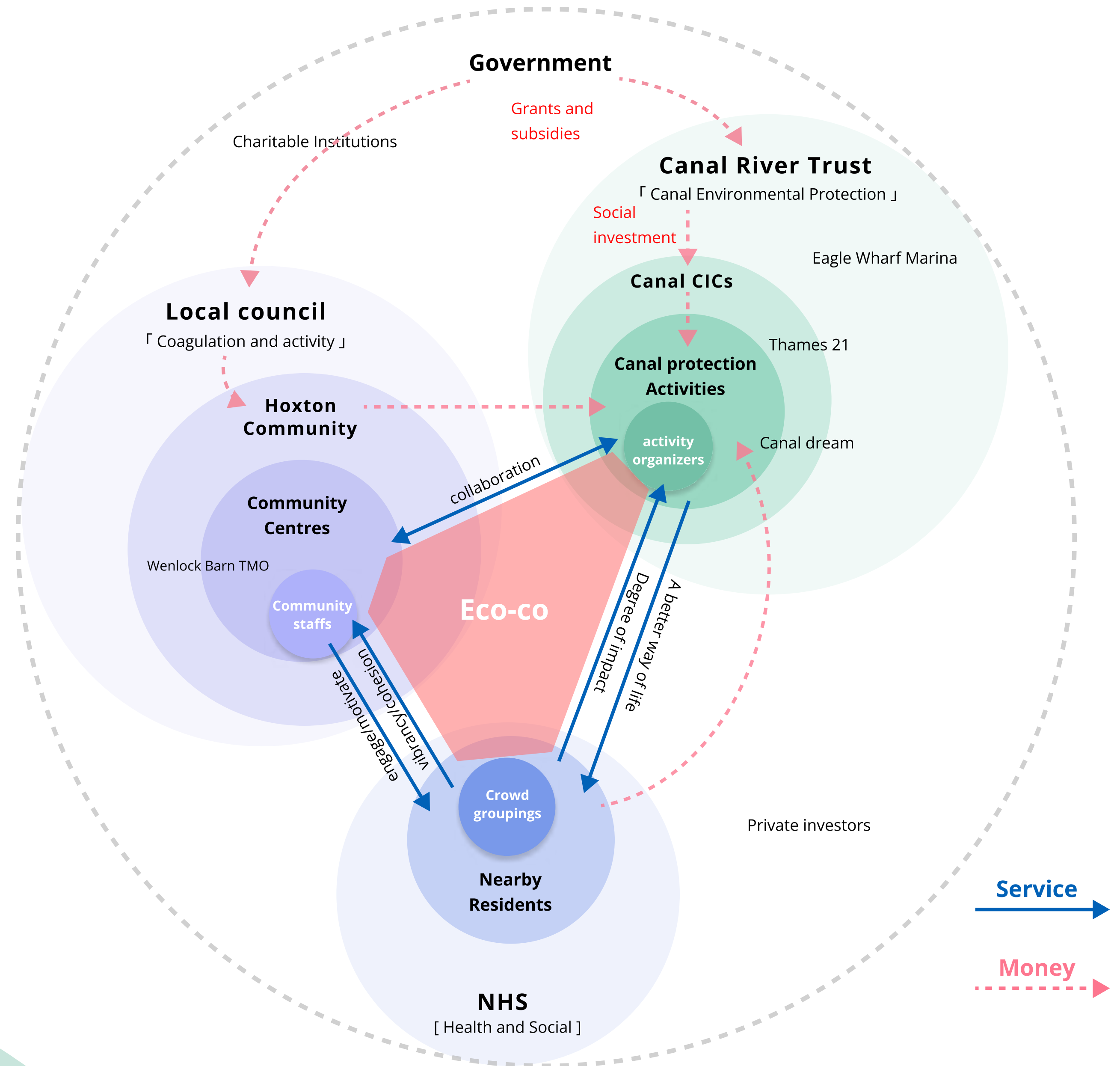




# SERVICE SYSTEM

## Model

- Eco-co is an agency connect three target stakeholders: Community centre, residents, and Canal CICs. Positively influence the community with nature and wellbeing by promotig the engagement of canal activities.
- As a non-profit social enterprise founded by local council, Canal & River Trust, Local community, and Private investors.





# PROPOSITION



## Promote Local resources integration and utilization:

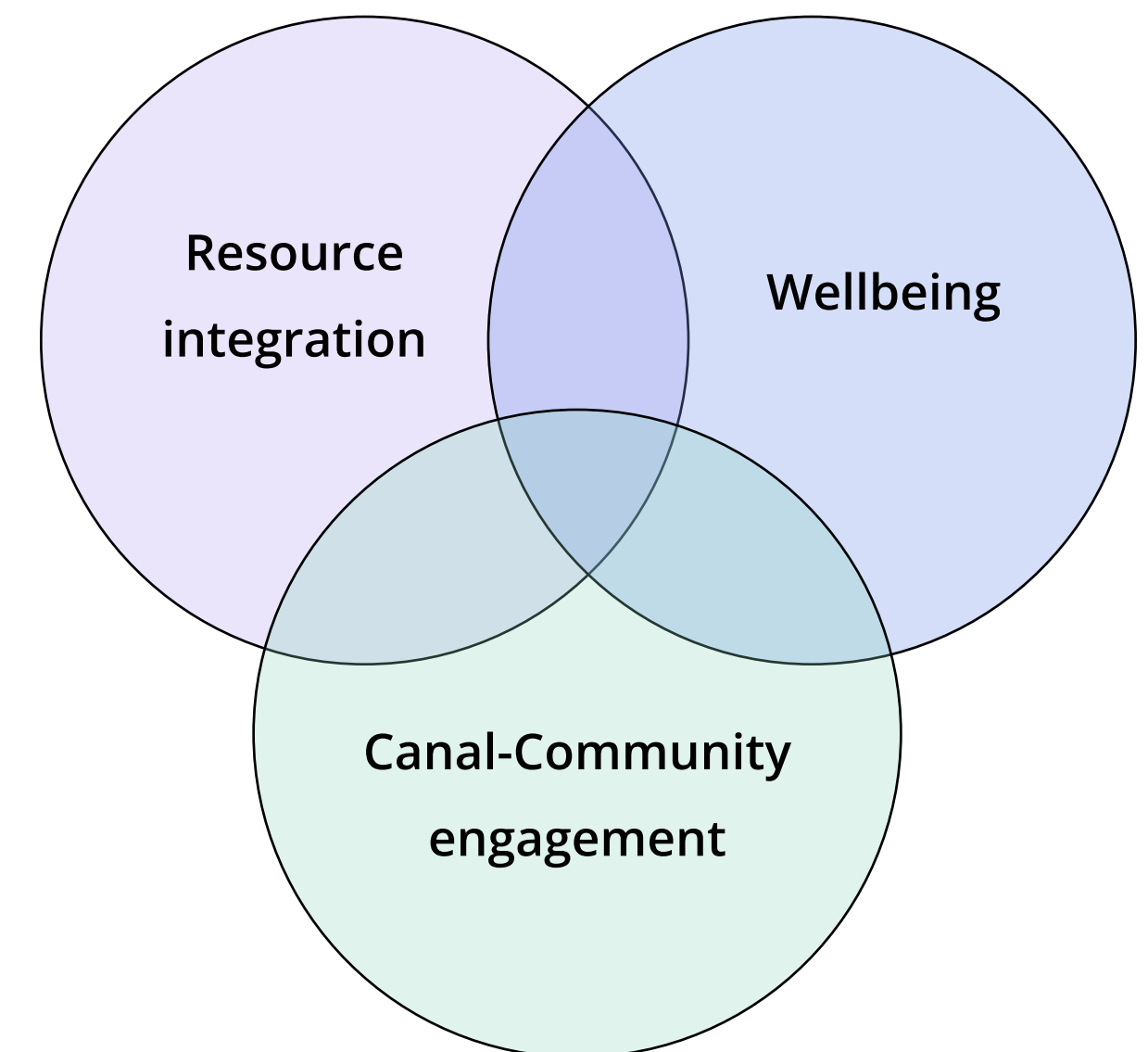
Establishing a new collaborative network among residents, communities, and canal conservation organizations to promote the utilization of existing natural resources in the surrounding communities.

## Create Canal-Community new opportunities:

Targeted promotion of canal activities to communities, enhancing residents' awareness and interest in nature conservation. Meanwhile, increasing community participation in activities and enhancing community engagement and cohesion.

## Optimize Lifestyle:

Conducting a new operational model for blue spaces based on green prescribing that encourages a healthier way of life.





# STRATEGY



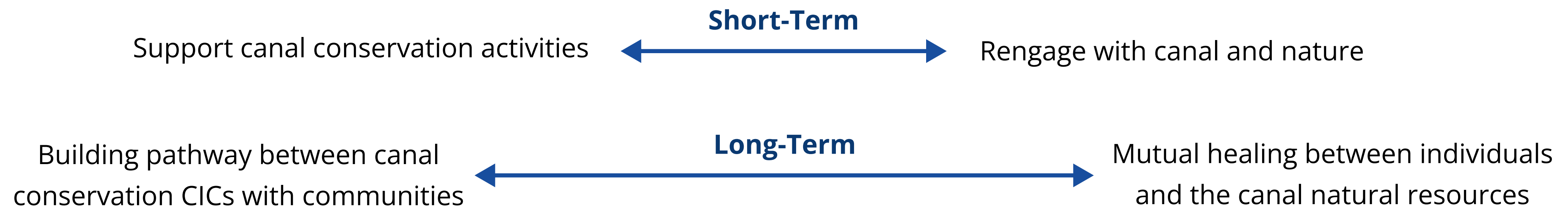
## Stage 1

Promote the collaboration between community centre and canal CIC to introduce existing canal conservation activities to the community through portable service toolkit. Enhance people's motivation to interact with canal and let them engage with the existing activities and reengage with nature.



## Stage 2

Establish a long-term sustainable pathway connecting UK canal conservation groups with the community, further enabling people's healthier lifestyles towards the mutual healing between individuals and the canal natural resources.



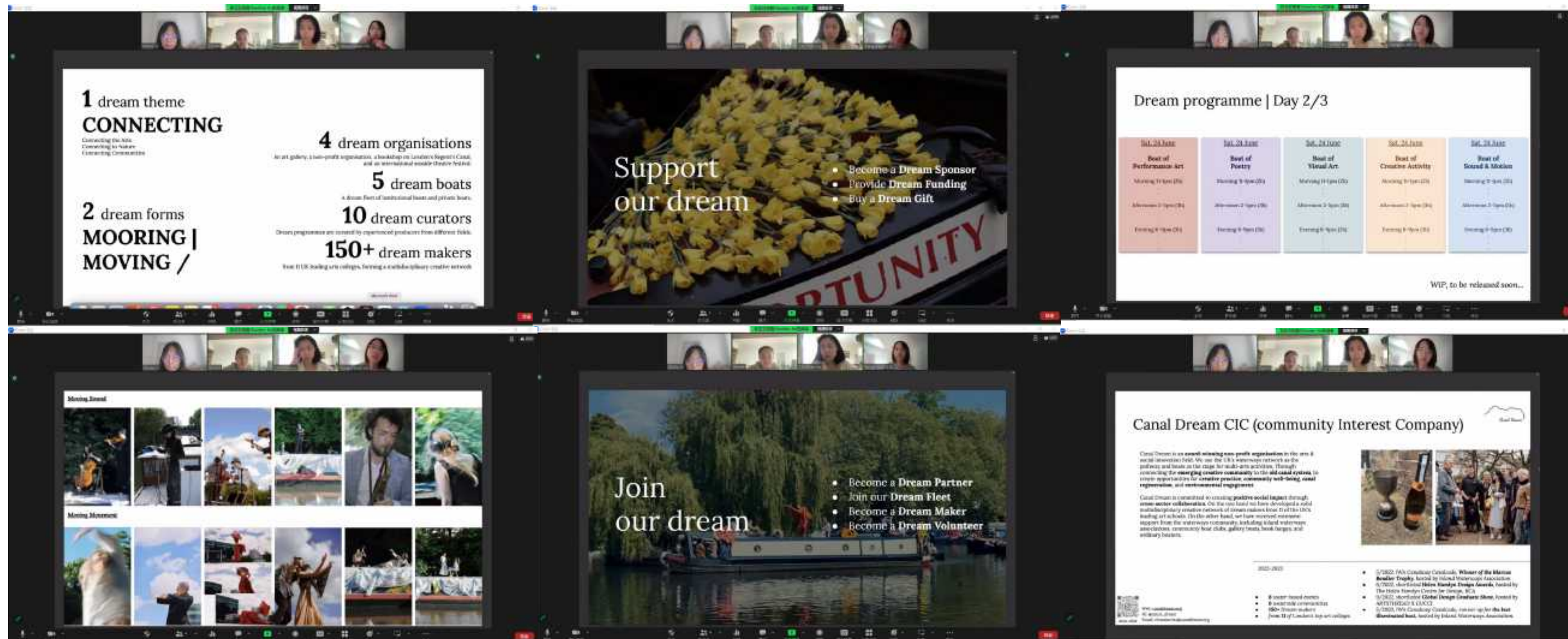


# CONCEPT VALIDATION



## Focus group interview with Canal activities organizers

We conducted the focus group interview with the founder of canal CIC organization: Canal Dream and their investors to get their other needs and problems for the service and test their willingness to join our service.



## Canal Activity Organizers Feedbacks

- Focusing on working effectively with the community. Would like to publicize the event widely and intensively for residents.
- Many restrictions and limitations when selecting event venues.
- Other needs: necessary equipment to organize the event, technical support, sponsors, and coordination of the planning of the event schedule.





## First meeting with Centre 151

We collaborated with the centre manager Pierre and Cam Tu Phan to test and improve the service flow of the concept. We learned about the main group of this community centre is Southeast Asian elderly people and their daily activities. Further reached a follow-up cooperation agreement with Centre 151.



## Interview with Islington Council Ecology Centre

We interviewed Corral, the staff in ecology centre to test our concept. And we got more contact information about the potential partners from different community centres.



## Community Centres Feedbacks

- Existing community events focus on arts and health and rarely involve environmental activities.
- environmental events difficult to attract community residents and are time-consuming.
- Activities determined by the interests of the residents, but the current method of gathering residents' needs is to hold annual meeting to exchange ideas and feelings face-to-face, which is a single format and ineffective.
- Each community center operates independently.



# PROTOTYPE



## Canal Workshop (Cocreate)

We held a Co-create workshop by the canal to test residents' opinions about our service and developed a detailed form and setting for the service toolkit that enhance people's motivation to get involved in the canal.



## Residents Feedbacks

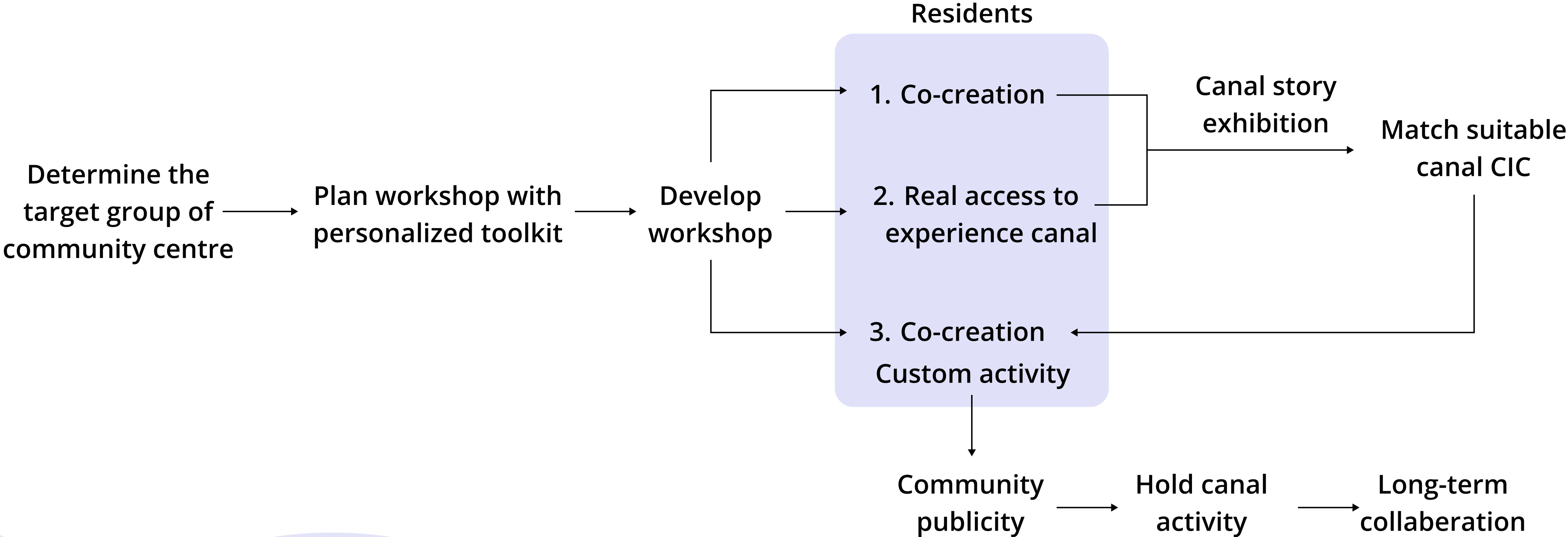
- Residents are interested in the expansion of canal activities.
- Different groups of people have different needs for canal activities and require targeted design for different groups in the community center.
- Residents have limited awareness of canal conservation and need to be guided to promote it.



# Service Flow



## Stage 1: Introduce and promote existing canal conservation activities to the community





# Touch point

## Workshop 1:

Let participant portray their ideal canal through the creative co-creation to improve their willingness to interact with canal and collect their needs and expectation about canal activity.



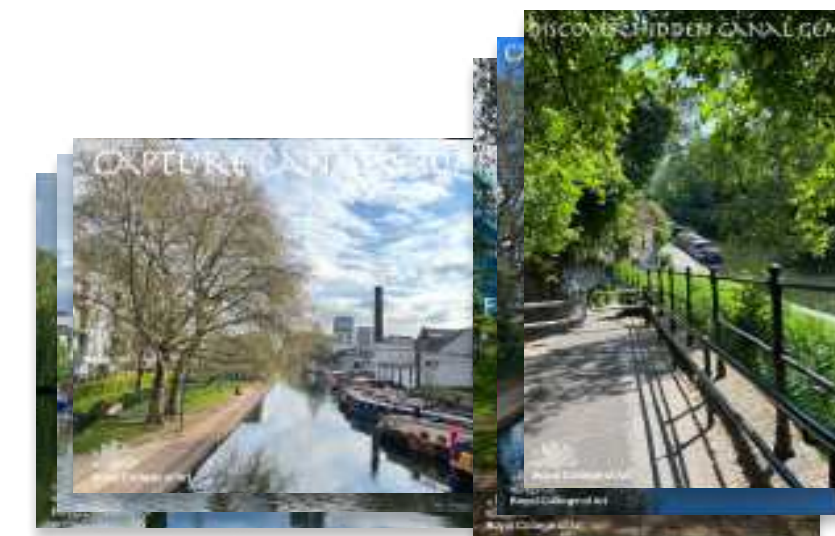
Canal Map



Canal Collage



Canal Questionnaire



Canal Postcard



Canal Poster

## Workshop 2:

According to the first workshop result, take residents out of their rooms and experience the canal's surroundings, quickly establishing a connection between residents and the canal environment with more concrete activities.

## Workshop 3:

Based on the process and output results of the first two workshops, write the canal story belonging to this community centre and sent it to different canal CICs in the form of small exhibitions as publicity materials, helping organizations to fully understand the characteristics and needs of this community. Then bring together residents, community centre staff and CIC organizers to conduct co-creation workshops. Develop the custom activity for this community centre.



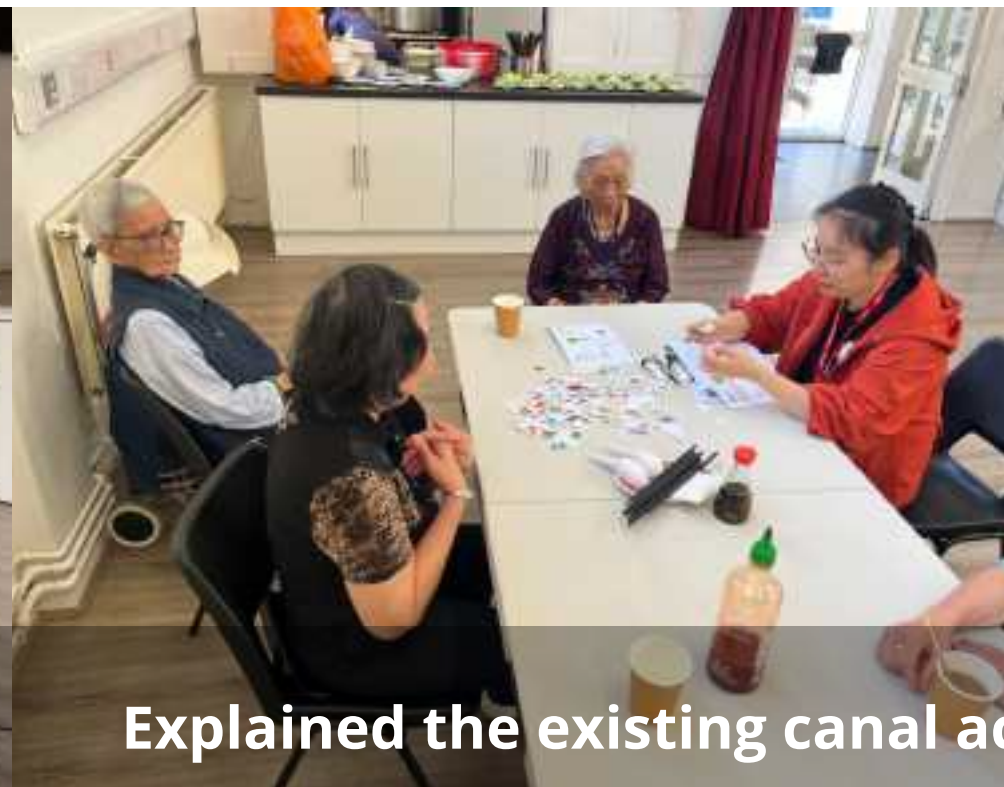
# MVP Test



Workshop preparation



Service introduction



Explained the existing canal activities



Collage workshop



Portray their own perception of the canal



Canal impression exhibition



Questionnaire and feedbacks



Group photo

Collaborate with the Centre 151, we conducted the first Community-Canal creative workshop in Hackney as the MVP test. Through meetings with the community staffs, we confirmed that the main target group is the elderly Vietnamese, and most of them passionate about the integration of art and culture. So we held this collage workshop to engage more participants involve with canal including 20 community residents.



