



Blank Space
Case Study 01 : *Gasholders*

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THE CLOVER DESIGN STUDIO is an independent studio run by four creatives from various fields in art & design. Established in 2023, The Clover Design Studio aims to find sustainable solutions for adaptive reuse architecture. With collaborations across various international practitioners, local councils and institutions, like Gasworks and RIBA, The Clover Design Studio is dedicated to kindle conversations and envision opportunities for the conceptualization of accessible public spaces.

BLANK SPACE is a collective workshop methodology that we have developed in Clover Design Studio. The aim is to envision speculative future possibilities of unused/abandoned spaces across London.

BLANK SPACE: CASE STUDY 01 *GASHOLDERS*

What?

Our initial plan began with repurposing abandoned spaces in London.

Discussions took place on:

- Re-using existing spaces
- Sustainability
- Gentrification
- Adaptive reuse architecture
- Public/pseudo public spaces, and their accessibility
- Community and creative solutions to social trends

We then funnelled our idea to a specific type of space, being **Gasholders**.

Project premise: To select 3 Gasholder locations around London, and repurpose/re-imagine them.

Further on we developed our idea to become into a module for use by the education/civic centre, as a means for development or innovation. In doing so, this project on Gasholders would be the first case study, of many more abandoned spaces to examine in London.

Why?

As international students we have come to appreciate London's repurposing culture in terms of spaces. Its re-use of old structures and buildings, to create new spaces is quite an intriguing site to see and experience. What is most stimulating is how the character of original buildings are somehow kept intact.

Keeping this in mind, we thought it to be a relevant mode of ideation.

In bringing together a practice that is already exercised in the city (repurposing), *we propose to create inclusive public spaces using structures which are existing redundantly.*

Why Gasholders?

Given the time constraint of the project, we chose to narrow down our space, so we could have a specific location to work on.

The rich history of Gasholders in the landscape of London, and their strange insistent existence in today's world, caused for an interesting dialogue between past/present/future realities. It seemed to be quite a relevant choice, in terms of our discussions.

How?

- Researching about Gasholders in London generally. Specifically studying the chosen Gasholders, their histories and present day role.
- Bringing together a group of creatives, including artists, designers and architects to contemplate the use of digital technologies, to re-imagine these spaces
- Conducting a co-creation workshop to think about:
 - a) The history of these Gasholders and what can we take from the past as a way to reflect on the future
 - b) Possible future ways on utilising these spaces
 - c) Ways of representing those possible futures
- Choosing an accessible AI tool like Dall-E, to generate our ideas of repurposing through a digital lens
- Possible collaborations/dialogues with Gasworks or Artangel **(cont. on slide 18)*
- Developing an intervention to bring to life the results of the workshop, as one of the three options:
 - a) a physical curated exhibition (with our collaborator)
 - b) a digital exhibition
 - c) an educational module*

*As a result of the workshop, we chose to go for **option c) an educational module.**

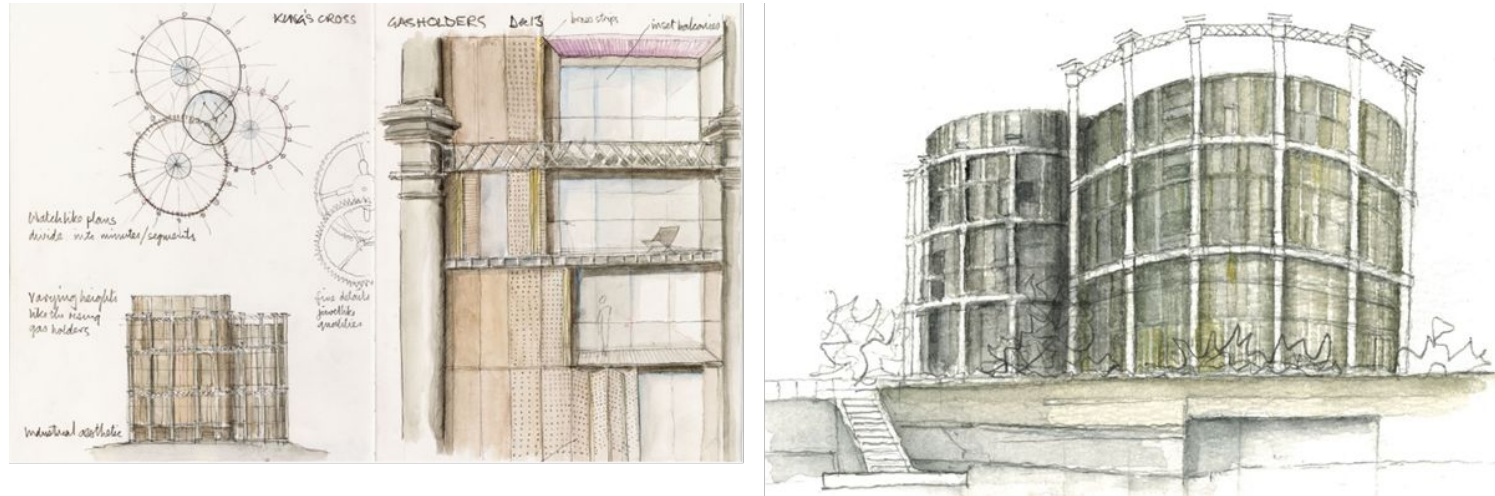
This would be in the form of a *clickable website* with our research and data collection. It will also include documentation and information about the workshop conducted for this project, as one of the plausible case studies.

History of Gasholders

Gas holders first appeared in the British landscape in the **19th century**, and they were used **to store enormous volumes of coal gas**. The early gas holders were simple structures made of wood and metal, but their design evolved over the years to become more sophisticated and efficient. Gas holders played a crucial role in the **distribution of gas for lighting and heating in urban areas until 1965**, when natural gas was discovered in the North Sea. As a result of this factor as well as developments in gas distribution, gas holders became outdated, and **their removal started in 1999**. These structures are in jeopardy due to London's severe housing shortage and high land values; half have already been demolished, and others are set to be torn down in the near future.

Only a small number of the about twenty gas holders that remain in the Greater London area are expected to be preserved as part of upcoming developments. **The Kings Cross complex** is a great example of repurposing these structures; three of the gas holders have been converted into residential flats, while a fourth has been turned into a public green park. These repurposed gasholders now house apartments, offices and retail spaces, contributing to the revitalization of the King's Cross area.

History of Gasholders

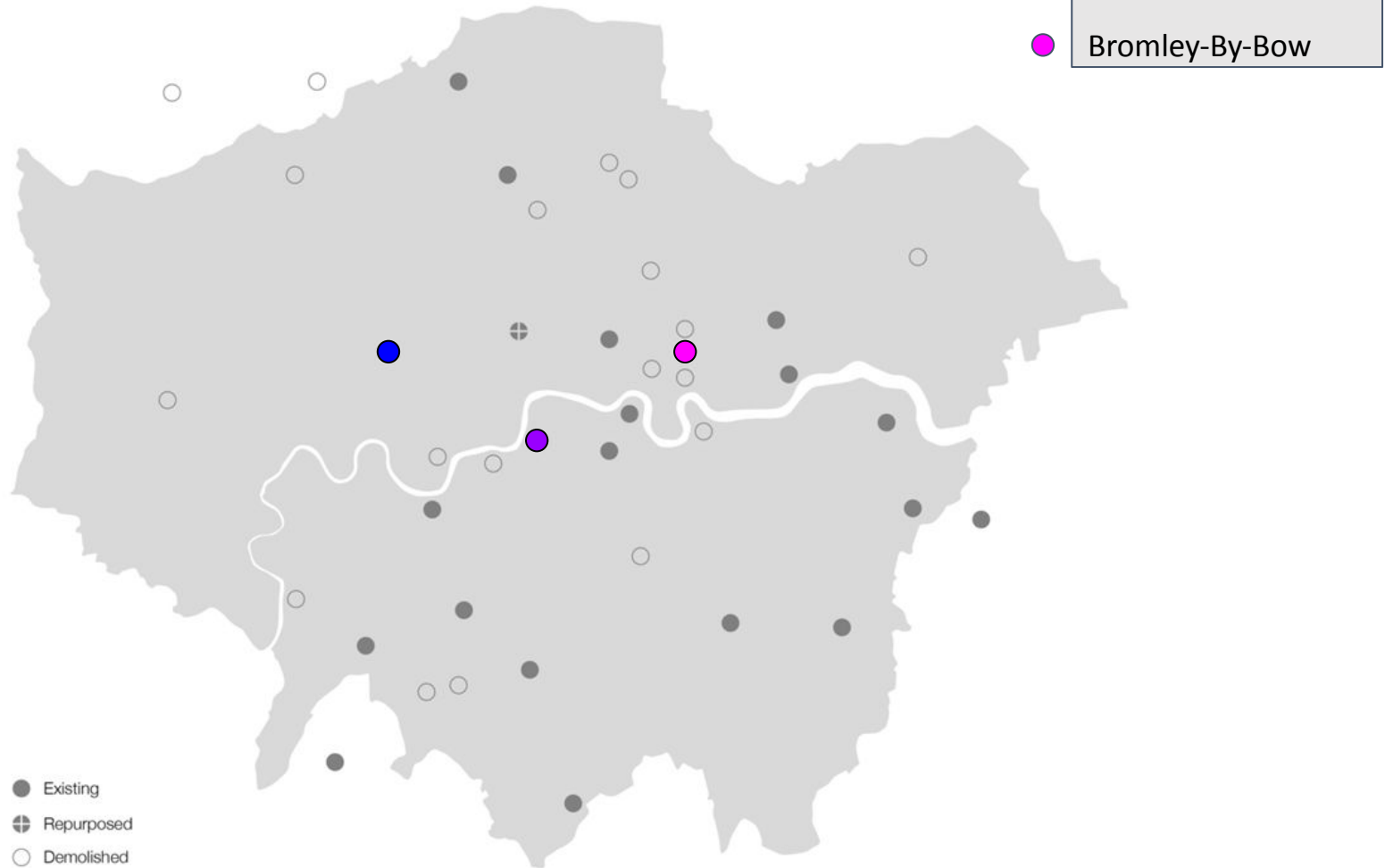


Design Development. Courtesy of WilkinsonEyre

Morwenna Wilson, who was in charge of this heritage project, said that “When we took down Gasholder No.8, we discovered that the middle of each column had originally been bolted together from the inside. We think it’s likely that kids were sent inside these narrow spaces to tighten up the bolts. Health and Safety practices today don’t allow people – let alone small children – to work in such confined spaces, so we had to work out ways to put it all back together from the outside, while retaining the aesthetics of the frame. If you look closely today you’ll see a simple strapping detail on the columns. We think it works well and we hope most people do.”¹

Similar plans are in place for the gas holders at Haggerston, Old Kent Road, and Kennington. However, the majority of gas holders are currently on the verge of disappearance in history. Although their practical purpose has been lost, should we honour the past and praise their aesthetic and navigational beauty, offering an alternative course of action?

Current Status of Gas Holders



Among 21 existing Gasholders, we decided to focus on three of them in **Bromley-by-Bow, Kensington, and Kennington.**

Current Status of Gas Holders



Gas holder in Kensington. Courtesy of Francesco Russo



Gas holders in Bromley-by-Bow. Courtesy of Francesco Russo (left)

Current Status of Gas Holders



Gas holder in Kennington. Courtesy of Francesco Russo (left)

These three Gas holders appeared to be the most appealing to us because of their accessibility and compatibility with the surrounding environment. Unfortunately, we discovered that the Kensington Gas holder, which overlooked Kensal Green Cemetery from the other side of the Grand Union Canal, was demolished in 2022 as part of a new housing development. The Gas holder in Kennington is currently undergoing construction to be repurposed as a new residential area similar to King's Cross. The Gas holders in Bromley-by-Bow are now also ready to be transformed into a habitable, dynamic, and thriving neighbourhood that encourages natural biodiversity and facilitates future positive growth.

World trends

We believe that a new use of this spaces needs to be informed by what is currently happening in the world and what will or could happen in the future. This allows us to better understand the current and future needs, challenges and opportunities for the site.

During our process we looked at:

Lifelong experiences:

Population is living longer and people in their senior years are having healthier lives. They want to remain active, and continue expanding their knowledge and experiences.

Climate crisis: We feel the effects of the climate crisis more clearly every year. By 2034, the world will be 1.5 degrees warmer than during pre-industrial times. This poses a great challenge for life on earth in general and force us to rethink our habits.

AI as part of our daily lives: AI is becoming more common everyday and is entering spaces in every aspect of our lives.

Work life balance: Younger generations value more their time and freedom, and are looking for development in their personal, spiritual and social spheres, not only professionally.

Ongoing Urbanization: Population in cities continues to grow. The share of the world population living in urban areas is expected to rise to 80% by 2050 – up from 55 percent in 2022. This means we will have to rethink the way in which we plan our cities and interact with them.

Gas Holders Around the World

To further develop our approach, we investigated gas holders across the world to gain inspiration on the varied design possibilities to reimagining the unused/abandoned gas holders.



Gaswerks, Berlin (Germany)
Multi purpose event space



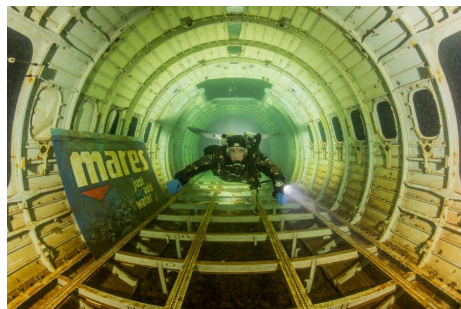
Gasometer City, Vienna (Austria)
Shopping mall, residential flats and
offices



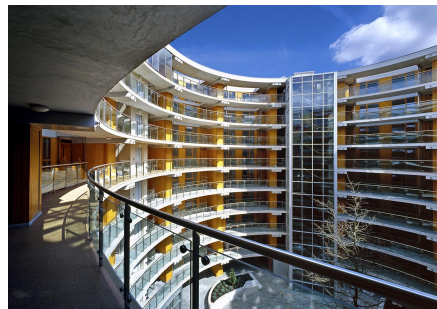
Gaswerks, Augsburg (Germany)
Museum



Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam
(Netherlands)
Multi purpose event space



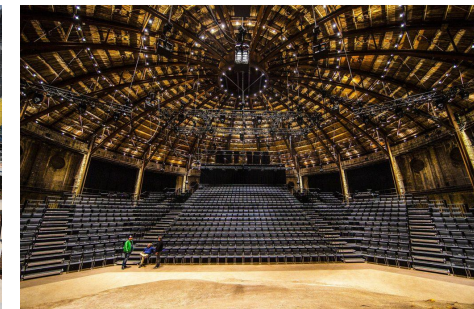
Tauchrevier Gasometer, Duisburg
(Germany)
Indoor Diving Center



Gasworks, Dublin (Ireland)
Residential Building - 240 flats



Gasworks Plaza, Newstead (Australia)
open air public plaza



Oestre Gasveark Teater, Copenhagen
(Denmark)
Theatre

Workshop

Our project seeks to trigger conversations and reflections around the **actors involved in ideation and decision making related to public space** in the city and to **explore new and disruptive ways of using space**.

We considered it crucial to generate a space where diverse participants can envision new possibilities for the collective use of these places. Allowing for different perspectives, practices, experiences and connection to the spaces.

We structured a workshop in 4 phases:

Understand

Understand the **context and history** of the site to which the workshop will focus on (in our case study the gasholders) as well as the **communities** living nearby and other **relevant stakeholders** in the surrounding environment.

Inspire

Ignite creativity in the participants to enable them to think of **new ways of inhabiting these spaces**, to contemplate unexplored possibilities through the review of **trends and precedents**.

Ideate

Generate conceptual proposals of possible transformations of space and **translate them through visual communication tools**. In this particular case we decided to explore generative **AI tools** to facilitate these **visualisations**.

Share

Share the new proposals with an **external audience** to allow more people to **reflect on the questions and proposals** that rise from the workshop.

Workshop activities

Day 1

Understand

Site recce: The participants visit the location to get familiar with the place, the atmosphere and the surroundings.

Guest talk: A specialist in public space gives a lecture to the participants. Ideally this would be carried out by one of our partners.

Day 2

History gallery: Participants review some history of the space.

Group discussion: Participants hold a group discussion regarding public space, filter and accessibility.

Team formation: Based on common interests the group

Inspire

Trends and precedents review: Participants review flashcards summarizing inspiring projects in similar spaces and trends related to public space, lifestyle, environment and other relevant topics.

Day 3

Ideate

Direction definition: The team defines a concept to develop further.

AI demo: Participants receive a quick demo of how to use generative AI tools to create images and get familiarized with the software.

Visual brainstorming: The team explores their ideas with the help of generative AI tools.

Share

Presentations between teams: Each team show the others what they have come up with.

Final reflection: The participants share their reflections and impressions.

Day 4

Share

Exhibition: The process of the workshop and its results are exhibited for the community and general public to see the proposals and reflect on them.

Workshop prototype

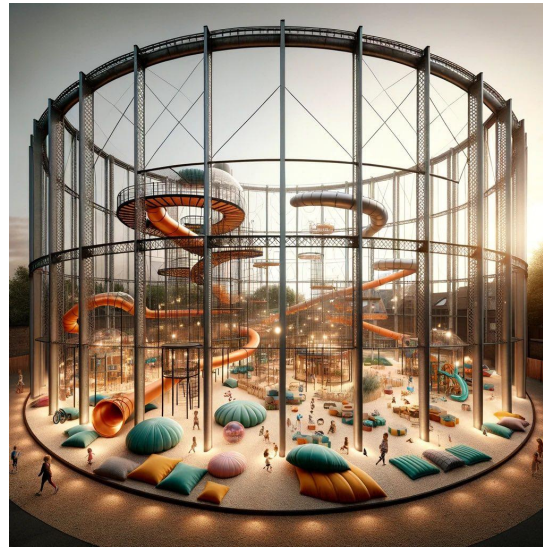
In its ideal form this workshop has a duration of 4 days and gathers 12 participants from different backgrounds such as artists, creatives, architects, urban planners and neighborhood residents, among others.

In the framework of the Across RCA project we decided to run a shorter version of the workshop within the group, using the gasholders as a case study, in order to test the methodology and the use of generative AI tools as part of the process.

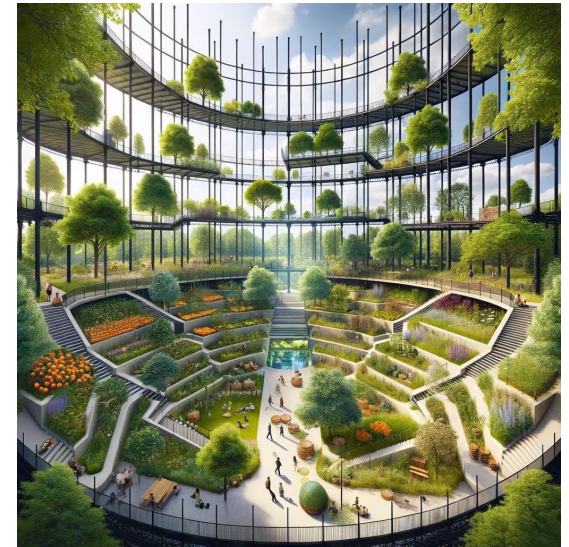
As a result of our workshop, we generated **4 new concepts** for the re-purpose of the gas holders and visualised them using Dall-E. This helped us bring to life our ideas in a way that exceeded our expectations.



Public library



**Urban playground for
children and adults**



Park and urban farm

Reflections

Participating in the Gasholders workshop was an enriching and collaborative experience that underscored the importance of collective creativity and shared learning. Bringing together a diverse group of individuals with varying design backgrounds and perspectives, the workshop provided a platform for collaboration and exchange of ideas. Throughout the session, we engaged in lively discussions, sharing insights and inspirations as we collectively explored the possibilities for reimagining and repurposing the selected gas holders in London.

One of the most valuable aspects of the workshop was the opportunity to hear about the different ideas and visions that each participant brought to the table. By openly discussing our ideas and listening attentively to one another, we not only gained new insights but also discovered common threads and shared goals for the under appreciated/unused spaces we have identified.

Some of the questions and concerns that came up during the course of our project were:

- **What constitutes a public space? And who decides?**
- **Why, the Gasholders that are being developed are being transformed to mostly residential areas only?**

Furthermore, the integration of AI tools, particularly DALL-E, added a new dimension to our creative exploration. By translating our ideas into visual representations, DALL-E facilitated communication and collaboration, allowing us to iterate and refine our concepts more effectively. Seeing our abstract ideas take shape in digital form not only sparked excitement but also provided a valuable starting point for further exploration.

In essence, the first Gas holders workshop exemplified the power of collaboration and collective creativity in driving innovation and sparking transformative change. By coming together, sharing our expertise, and learning from each other, we were able to generate fresh ideas and envision new possibilities for these neglected spaces in London. The experience served as a testament to the value of collaboration in tackling complex challenges and harnessing the collective imagination to shape the future of our cities.

Future Collaborations/Routes

*As a future objective it would be great to form a collaboration with an institution such as **Gasworks** or **Artangel**, for a joint and ongoing research project. Having an established institution involved in the project will allow for an array of resources valuable for our development.

- This will give way to having in depth analysis and research on each of the Gasholders in London, their history, location, surrounding area, present role, environmental data, etc.
- It may ideally involve various professional practitioners like scientists, council workers, architects, urban planners, creatives and the locals of the area to come together. This would allow for a proper examination of the area, the land/soil, the social aspects, the gasholder structure and so on
- The culmination of which would be a curated exhibition of the results within the institutions venue

Our ultimate goal would be have all of our resources (workshops, talks, exhibitions, research, collaborations), readily available on a **website**, open for all. Making it a module for both educational aspects, or to be the reference point for the actual development of these spaces.

Prototype

[https://www.figma.com/proto/40Es9ZmoPruPProZhCA88S/UX-Portfolio-website-template-\(Community\)?type=design&node-id=102-463&t=Go7jzQDxZ7IVJqzQ-1&scaling=scale-down&page-id=1%3A4723&starting-point-node-id=102%3A463&mode=design](https://www.figma.com/proto/40Es9ZmoPruPProZhCA88S/UX-Portfolio-website-template-(Community)?type=design&node-id=102-463&t=Go7jzQDxZ7IVJqzQ-1&scaling=scale-down&page-id=1%3A4723&starting-point-node-id=102%3A463&mode=design)

Home

Resources

Projects

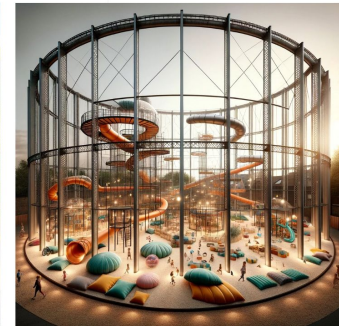
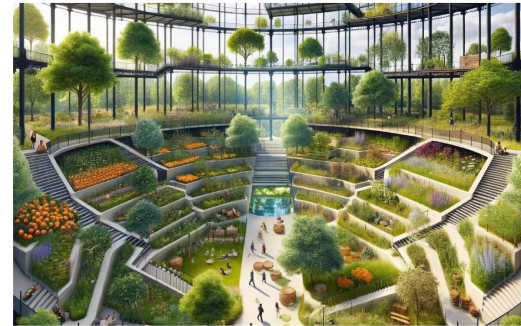
About

Blank Space.

By Clover Studio

Blank Space is a collective workshop methodology that we have developed in Clover Design Studio. The aim of which is to help organisations and citizens envision speculative future possibilities of unused/abandoned spaces across London.

Our projects



Case study 01: Gas holders

London / 2024

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Case study 01: Gas holders



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About

Blank Spaces in your community

If you are interested in using our approach and methods within your community or organization you can use our resources to plan and execute your workshops.

Our approach

Before doing a workshop

Workshop schedule and checklists

Workshop templates

Appendices

Below is the google drive link to process images, of our workshop, site visits, data visuals etc.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TE8b5FA_YKH0QlfrMpPzW_Q_jA2y2TwB?usp=sharing

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