

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Brunel University London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 21 Sociology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Urban Experiences: evaluating senses, time and emotions in the making of cities		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 - 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Monica Degen	Reader in Cultural Sociology	01/2004 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Dr Degen's research on the organisation of sensory and temporal experiences has shaped strategies for the spatial design, curatorial practices and activity plans of the Interpretation Masterplan of the New Museum of London, the Cologne City Museum's permanent collection and the London's Charterhouse interiors and activities. In 2018, the Department of the Built Environment at the City of London Corporation used her research in their public realm redesign which subsequently improved the livelihoods of 10% of Greater London's working population. In 2020, Dr Degen's research supported Barcelona's council plans to redesign Las Ramblas boulevard which is visited by approximately 1,000,000 people every year. Both planning departments have benefitted from being able to monitor the importance that experiences play in shaping the quality of life in cities and have incorporated these insights into their planning policies.

**2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

In order to compete globally, city planners must create unique neighbourhoods for visitors and tourists. To create appealing destinations, much care goes into the planning, design, and branding of cities; a process of curation termed 'placemaking'. Urban sociology has explored processes and the impacts they have on the wider environment and population.

Dr Degen's research advances this work by demonstrating how the management and organization of urban experiences - in her words, 'urban aesthetics' (Ref. 4, 5) - is central to these processes. Her projects have analysed how sensory and temporal dynamics have become tools to frame different stages of urban development resources for place branding (Ref. 2, 5, 6) and contested terrains for users of public spaces that deeply frame their attachments to place (Ref. 3, 4, 5). These processes are increasingly digitally mediated, rearticulating people's engagement with cities (Ref.5, 6). Dr Degen's research findings demonstrate that urban experiences are political, socially shaped, and underpin power relations between the manifold actors in the city, whether architects, planners, residents or visitors.

Dr Degen's research has demonstrated that sensory and temporal dynamics are integral to the production of the built environment. For example, Dr Degen's ESRC funded research 'Architectural Atmospheres' (Grant 3), analysed how digital visualizations have changed the design process of cities and their future planning, showing that evoking sensory atmospheres is key to selling these future places. However, the digital depictions represented a limited range of future possibilities and a problematically narrow portrayal of social life (Ref. 6).

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Her project: ‘Timescapes of Urban Change’ (Grant 1) further demonstrated how urban regeneration processes are underpinned by temporal dynamics that stand in conflict with temporal patterns and perceptions of residents and visitors (Ref. 3, 4). The study confirmed the deep political nature of urban experiences, highlighting how some people and institutions exercise particular power over regulating and changing what is sensed and perceived in the city (Ref. 2, 3).

As sensory and temporal urban research remains in its infancy, a robust methodology to better research, represent and curate sensory-experiential aspects of urban living is needed. Addressing this gap, Dr Degen established an EU-wide AHRC research network ‘Sensory Cities’ (Grant 2), bringing together city museum curators, urban professionals and academics for practical workshops to design new methodological approaches. Methods to research qualitative sensory and emotional relations in the city (e.g. sketching the senses, evocative interviews and social media analysis) are summarised in an online Sensory Toolkit (Ref 1).

The spaces that urban professionals create are used by a wide variety of people (residents, workers and visitors) who each form different connections to the city. Dr Degen’s research demonstrates that sensory atmosphere, embodied perceptions of individuals, and temporal rhythms have significant impacts on how people relate and move through the city (Ref. 2, 3) and points to the need to include experiential and temporal considerations into understandings of community cohesion (Ref. 3, 4). Dr Degen’s focus on the experiential dynamics of the city (senses, time, emotions), was elaborated in 2017 through research in the Smithfields Market Area, London, the new home of the new Museum of London. To inform the new museum’s design and curatorial content, the study analysed the changing identity of the Smithfield area, drawing on new digital and experiential methodologies quantified for the museum in a series of evocative digital maps (Ref. 1; Ref. 2).

### **3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

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**Ref. 1** Degen, M. & Barz, M. (2019) Mapping Urban Experience Digitally. In K. Ward (ed) *Researching the City*, London: Sage.

**Ref. 2** Degen, M. & Lewis, C. (2019) “The changing feel of place: the temporal Modalities of atmosphere in Smithfield Market, London”. *Cultural Geographies*, published online. [10.1177/1474474019876625](https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474019876625)

**Ref. 3** Degen, M. (2018) “Timescapes of urban change: the temporalities of regenerated streets”. *The Sociological Review*. 66(5), 1074-1092. [10.1177/0038026118771290](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118771290)

**Ref. 4** Degen, M. (2017) “Urban Regeneration and ‘Resistance of Place’: Foregrounding Time and Experience”. *Space and Culture* 20(2) 141-155. [10.1177/1206331217697136](https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331217697136)

**Ref. 5** Degen, M., Melhuish C., Rose, G. (2015) “Producing Place Atmospheres Digitally: Architecture, Digital Visualisation Practices and the Experience Economy.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 17(1) 3-34. [10.1177/1469540515572238](https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515572238)

**Ref. 6.** Rose, G., **Degen, M.** & Melhuish, C. (2014) “Networks, interfaces and computer-generated images: learning from digital visualisations of urban redevelopment projects”. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32(2) 386-403. [10.1068/d13113p](https://doi.org/10.1068/d13113p)

### GRANTS

**Grant 1** Monica Degen (PI) British Academy (MD140041) January 2016 – January 2017, *Timescapes of Urban Change*, GBP135,000.

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**Grant 2** Monica Degen (PI) Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/M006379/1) April 2015 – April 2017, *Sensory Cities: researching, representing and curating sensory-emotional landscapes of urban environments*, GBP36,198.

**Grant 3** Monica Degen (CI) and Gillian Rose (PI) (The Open University) Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-3305) October 2011 – October 2013, *Architectural Atmospheres: The impact of digital technologies on architectural design practice*, GBP181,523.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Degen's research has shaped new ways of thinking and informed new approaches to curatorial and design practices of museum curators and urban planners in 3 countries across Europe (England, Germany, Spain), which benefit approximately 1,400,000 people per year.

**1. Informing the City of London's approach to public realm improvements, and Barcelona's remodelling strategies for Las Ramblas**

Dr Degen's research on the experiential and sensorial nature of urban life and qualitative digital mapping techniques and sensory toolkit "provides new ways to examine and understand urban dynamics" (E1) which is shaping London's and Barcelona's most iconic public spaces.

By highlighting the importance of urban atmospheres to the daily experiences of City workers (10% of London's working population, equivalent to 500,000 pedestrians) and residents, as well as the power of professional bodies to influence and regulate the sensory urban environment, the research shaped "the strategic long-term vision document for the East of the City: The City Cluster Vision" (E2). It "influenced the development of public consultation methodologies...aimed at understanding the needs and aspirations of the City's occupiers and visitors" (E2). This new strategy from 2019 incorporates new insights about the importance of sensory experiences in shaping people's engagement, with places, with sensory interactions now integrated into the redevelopment of the City's public realm. In particular, Dr Degen's sensory urbanism research has changed the City's public realm team's approach to 2 key areas of the Cluster Vision: 1) the impact of public realm improvements "to target specific issues around well-being, inclusivity and experience of local places...for examples, we have developed a project focusing on climate change and well-being ... [consisting] of green interventions...to improve the livelihoods of the nearly 300,000 daily users of the City." 2) the inclusion of "culture and local place engagements within place activation activities as a core element of our strategy...to change perceptions" (E2). As a manager in the Department of the Built Environment stated, "We have used her work to enhance our working practices, urban analysis and consultation practices..." (E2).

Barcelona's Foment de Ciutat – a municipal company of Barcelona City Council – have used Dr Degen's research to incorporate temporal and sensorial perceptions in urban development projects and improve community cohesion. As the Director states: "Degen's [research] has given us the tools to change our strategies in the last decade and motivating us to focus very much on the qualities of urban experiences... [this] has supported a change in the strategy and philosophy of Foment...as a result...qualitative research and participatory approaches are fully incorporated in our design process" (E6). Foment recently launched a public tender to remodel the famous Ramblas boulevard which is visited by approximately 1,000,000 people per year and has been struggling to accommodate ever rising numbers of tourists alongside resident users of this space.

Liquen Data Lab, a research consultancy group, designed a proposal that used Dr Degen's research as "a theoretical and practical framework" (E1) to evaluate and monitor the new urban strategies for the Ramblas. The director of this winning proposal stated: "because of [Dr

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Degen's] work, we can now capture feelings and perceptions of urban space, which is essential to design inclusive and democratic cities". This has allowed the team to "scale up our research and design the Qualitative Observatory of Las Ramblas with the main goal to incorporate qualitative and sensory standpoint knowledge of this complex main street...and contribute to the transformation of the dynamics of Las Ramblas and benefit residents and tourists alike." (E1). The execution has been halted due to Covid-19 and is planned for 2022.

### 2. Influencing new approaches to designing city museum spaces and curating collections

Through improving museum curators' understandings of the significance of the senses in a) shaping urban development and stratifying social relations in the city and b) how audiences experience space and interact with exhibitions, this research has directly led to museums incorporating sensory experiences in their curatorial practices and strategies for the design of new museum buildings at: Museum of London (E4), Charterhouse Museum London (E3), Cologne City Museum (E5). Through these changes, curators have been able to use sensory activities "to reduce barriers in participation" within community engagement (E3), reach broader audiences, and make visible underrepresented themes around love and hate (E5). Furthermore, the Centro de Cultura Contemporània Barcelona states that Dr Degen's work "has offered qualitative tools to assess the prestigious EU Prize for Urban Space by...adding a cultural and social dimension to the judgement criteria" (E7).

The workshops and toolkit produced by the Sensory Cities project (Grant 2) have been used to influence the strategies and financial plans for the redesign of the Charterhouse Museum London interiors and development of their public engagement programme featuring "sensory awareness." This enabled them to win Heritage Lottery Funding (GBP391,000) in 2018. The research was used to shape the approaches to the redesign of Charterhouse's new museum and "the new space was designed with a specific sensory awareness that included leading visitors through time with use of different textured and aged floor tiles such as modern floor-tiles to ancient flag stones" (E3). The museum's new public engagement programme includes a multi-sensory programme for children with special needs and "puts sensory activities to the fore as a way of reducing barriers to participation to access hard to reach groups. The sensory toolkit was used to devise sensory and participatory events and activities such as weaving, drawing, and creative activities, which are increasingly seen as a key tool for museum professionals..., leading to more visitors (from the current 27,500 visitors a year - in 2017-8; to 40,000 a year), and more emphasis on participation and visitors developing their own ways of enjoying the site's heritage" (E3).

The Museum of London (MoL) is moving to a new site in 2024 which includes the renovation and redesign of large parts of Smithfield meat market and surrounding streets. Dr Degen's research on Smithfield and "her expertise in the sensory city resulted in the incorporation of such experiences in parts of the Interpretation Masterplan" (one of the key documents for the delivery of the new museum requiring an investment of GBP337,000,000). It directly references Dr Degen's research findings: "With its relocation to the West Smithfield site, the Museum of London now has a unique opportunity to connect to the surrounding streets and people and make its history visible and tangible by explicitly focusing on its existing sensory landscape" (E4). The sensory understandings in the Interpretation Masterplan have directly "led the museum developing ideas about the experience and usage of its main entrance...the museum has decided to retain West Poultry Avenue as a distinctive street, ...retaining its sensory characteristics" (E4). Overall, Dr Degen's research "resulted in the much-needed incorporation of sensory dynamics in the design of the new museum" (E4).

The head of the New MoL stated that the participation of his staff in Dr Degen's Sensory Cities and Sensory Smithfield workshops has further contributed to the strategic goal of 'Stretch

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Thinking' by encouraging them to test "new models of curation to capture underrepresented aspects of contemporary London and to enable visitors to think about city life in new ways" (E4). Dr Degen's research "influenced our approach and expanded our perception especially of the 24-hour life and rhythms of this locality". It "has taught us new ways to capture the complexity and vibrancy of the museum's new site..." (E4). Since the workshops, curators have used more interactive curatorial practices to engage visitors by "conveying the sensory experience of London in the past and providing a good sensory experience in the museum itself" (E4).

In 2017, the Cologne City Museum (approximately 70,000 visitors per year) had to relocate temporarily to new premises following water damage. While this threatened their survival "insights from Degen's project and the Sensory Toolkit inspired and guided us to experiment with new curatorial practices and exhibition designs...centred around themes of senses and emotions, such as love, fear and hope. Because of this we could include aspects of Cologne's history, which previously hadn't been represented" (E5). The museum was seriously concerned about the loss of visitors following the damage, however, "Sensory Cities has provided us with new skills and tools to engage a wider audience, and therefore enabled us to create new experiences and avoid that scenario" with special exhibition visitors increasing by 30%. The new understandings and practices learnt from Dr Degen's research have improved engagement with a wider audience through "the development of more innovative tours that go beyond traditional museum tours... For example, we now offer tours...that ensure visitors physical wellbeing...This has allowed us to increase our visitor profile, improve visitors' experiences and attract new groups of guests." (E5)

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)
 

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- E1.** Corroborating letter from Lliquen Data Lab, Barcelona, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- E2.** Corroborating letter from the Department of the Built Environment, City of London Corporation, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020
- E3.** Corroborating letter from the Charterhouse, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019
- E4.** Corroborating letter from the Museum of London, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- E5.** Corroborating letter from Cologne City Museum, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- E6.** Corroborating letter from Foment de Ciutat, Barcelona, October 2020
- E7.** Corroborating letter from Centro de Cultural Contemporània Barcelona, 15 October 2020