



## Housing – A Critical Perspective.

08-09 April 2015

### **Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:**

**1. Paper / Proposal Title:** Precarious Times, Pop-up Solutions? The Place/Ladywell Housing Experiment

**2. Format:** Written paper

**3. Author(s) Name:** Ella Harris and Mel Nowicki

**4. University or Company Affiliation:** University of London

### **5. Abstract (300 words):**

In the past decade pop-up has taken cities by storm. Pop-ups temporarily occupy vacant sites and are celebrated for their ephemeral, unpredictable 'animation' of the urban landscape. Until recently pop-up has been largely commercial; typified by pop-up bars, restaurants, cinemas and shops. However, in an austerity climate, the concept is being extended into the welfare sector, including proposals for pop-up legal aid clinics, libraries and courtrooms. Prominent within this emerging landscape is pop-up social housing. A report from the Greater London Authority recently pitched pop-up housing as "a London solution". But what are the consequences of transposing the logics of 'pop-up' culture, where flux and unpredictability are celebrated, into the arena of social housing? Against this backdrop our paper explores Lewisham Council's 'pop-up' housing scheme 'PLACE/Ladywell'. One of the featured case studies in the GLA report, PLACE/Ladywell is pioneering pop-up social housing, temporarily housing people on the borough's homelessness register. Lewisham is rapidly gentrifying, with various sites earmarked for redevelopment. PLACE/Ladywell provides pre-fabricated

units that can be moved around the borough to make use of periods of vacancy between demolition and redevelopment. The scheme seeks to mitigate the impacts of London's housing crisis at a time of drastic cuts to local government funding. And yet, there are concerns that pop-up housing will only further entrench and normalise precarity for low-income Londoners. This paper addresses the key questions of a newly commissioned scoping study into Lewisham's pop-up housing (funded by the Royal Holloway Research Strategy Grant). The study explores PLACE/Ladywell, with a view to expanding our focus to consider pop-up housing and welfare more broadly. Methodologically, the study will use interactive documentary (i-Docs) as a participatory method to explore resident experiences. i-Docs are web-based forms of documentary film and an innovative geographical methodology. Their nonlinear format, where film sequences can be watched in multiple orders, makes iDocs well-suited to exploring the flux, uncertainty and unpredictability that typify housing in an era of austerity.

## **7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Ella Harris

PhD candidate, University of London, Social and Cultural Geography.

Ella Harris is a PhD candidate in Social and Cultural Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her work explores distributions and imaginations of space-time in London's pop-up culture. She is especially interested in the relationship between pop-up and urban precarity. Her work uses interactive documentary as an innovative method to explore urban spatio-temporality. Ella has published on pop-up's imaginaries of space-time (*Geography Compass*, 2015), immersive pop-up cinema (*Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, 2016) and nonlinear spatiotemporal imaginaries in interactive documentary (*Area*, 2016). She has forthcoming publications on shipping container architectures (*The Craft Economy*) and the cultural geographies of precarity (*Cultural Geographies*).

Mel Nowicki

PhD candidate, University of London, Human Geography.

Mel Nowicki is a PhD candidate in the Human Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research interests centre on austerity, social injustice and housing inequality in the UK. Mel's doctoral research explores the impact of two Coalition housing policies, the 'bedroom tax' and the criminalisation of squatting, on low-income Londoners. She has also worked as a housing policy researcher for Citizens Advice. She has published work on housing in a variety of mediums, including peer-reviewed academic journals (*Geography Compass* and an upcoming special issue in *Cultural Geographies*), policy-faced reporting (*Citizens Advice*) and national media (*The Guardian*).

