

**NAMING SCARCITY:  
SOCIOMATERIAL, TRANSCALAR AND TRANSLOCAL**

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**Summary:** This paper presents emerging insights from the collaborative research project Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment (SCIBE), funded by the HERA Joint Research Programme, which explores how sociomaterial scarcity in London can be addressed creatively. Based on structured and in-depth photo-elicitation interviews in one of UK's most 'deprived' wards, Bromley-by-Bow, this paper traces how various interrelated scarcities are produced and reproduced across time, space and scales and examines the potential of built-environment-related indicators of deprivation, used the English Indices of Deprivation, to serve as indicators of the real needs of 'deprived' communities. The paper suggests that relatively 'deprived' neighbourhoods may hold some lessons to be learned when it comes to the resilience and resourcefulness of cities in times of scarcity.

**Key Words:** Sociomaterial scarcity, deprivation, London, Sylhet, resilience

## **NAMING SCARCITY: SOCIOMATERIAL, TRANSCALAR AND TRANSLOCAL**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents emerging insights from a trans-European collaborative research project, Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment (SCIBE)<sup>1</sup>, which explores how the architectural process operates under conditions of scarcity – defined by socially, culturally, geographically, and temporally differentiated insufficiencies. The overall research project can be seen as an endeavour to name scarcity in the context of its sociomaterial, translocal and transcalar reality. It asks if and how designers and design thinking might contribute to a better understanding and the solution of issues associated with scarcity (see Goodbun, Till et al. 2012).

Just as critical resources can be natural, socioeconomic, and cultural, their management and governance is subject to particular social institutions, social cycles, and social order and thus linked to socially constructed identities, norms, and hierarchies (see Machlis, Force et al. 1997). Scarcity is defined as the condition when demand for a resource outstrips supply. The demand-to-be-met can be ‘real’, i.e. it must be met in order to secure the continued existence of the system producing it (‘need’); or it can be ‘artificial’, i.e. optional for survival (‘want’). The supply of a resource (or good, or service) can be based on its natural availability; or it can be the result of human management and distribution processes. Accordingly, when scarcity is the result of artificial supply or artificial demand, it cannot be regarded exclusively as a function of the natural abundance of resources or goods (see, for instance, Zimmermann 1951; Harvey 1999; Castree 2003; Schoenberger 2011).

Gold offers an interesting example on which to examine these propositions: the physical qualities and (relative) natural scarcity of gold led to its association with high social value and later to the restriction of its ownership; despite its increasing availability in the course of history, it had to remain ‘vanishingly scarce for most’ and ‘comparatively abundant for some’ (Schoenberger 2011). Thus, the natural scarcity of gold was ‘significantly amplified by a wholly artificial scarcity produced by the way gold has been used by those who possessed it’ (Schoenberger 2011). Here, real (natural) and artificial (engineered, constructed) scarcity are coupled. Working from this understanding, the paper contributes to the recent debate on the nature of scarcity (see, for instance, Meadows, Meadows et al. 1974; Perelman 1979; Matthaei 1984; Xenos 1989; Homer-Dixon 2001; Bookchin 2004; Mehta 2010) in identifying the condition as always intrinsically both – social and material, and hence only to be addressed effectively in the context of its sociomaterial reality. Using findings from empirical research in Bromley-by-Bow, east London (a contested urban territory with many aspects of social and spatial inequality) to

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illustrate the translocal and transcalar dimensions of systemic scarcity, the aim of this paper is, ultimately, to begin to expose its triggers, instances and effects.

## **II. SCARCITY OR DEPRIVATION?**

The case study area, Bromley-by-Bow, is located in east London – historically known as home to London’s worst slums (see Young and Willmott 1979; Dench, Gavron et al. 2006; Hanley 2007; Wise 2009) – and in-between the City, the Canary Wharf Estate and the site of the London Olympics. Over eighteen months, door-to-door interviews were conducted with 104 residents (see Table no. 1 for the socioeconomic composition of the sample) to develop an understanding of local conditions, resources and needs. In order to understand the experiences and perceptions of residents better, 33 participants were asked to take photographs of instances of scarcity in their day-to-day lives and to speak about these in in-depth photo-elicitation interviews. An initial synthesis of the collated material was published in a report entitled ‘Scarce Times: Alternative Futures’ (SCIBE and The Architecture Foundation 2012) and constituted the basis for teams of designers, architects and other interested individuals to develop approaches to the documented themes and present during two events in July 2012. Four teams were selected to begin implementing their proposals (see [www.scibe.eu/category/staf/](http://www.scibe.eu/category/staf/) for more information).

Often, the notion of scarcity is used to explain or justify the phenomena of poverty or deprivation, and thus the three concepts are closely interrelated and frequently confused. Assuming that it would hold a number of existing and emerging scarcities in the context of its built environment, Bromley-by-Bow was chosen as the case study area because it was ranked London’s most deprived out of 628 wards in 2007 in the Indices of Deprivation (Leeser 2008). Deprivation is defined as the lack of material standards/access to social activities which are normally available or commonly experienced and accepted in a society (Townsend 1987), i.e., the concept is not based on the supply of material or social resources in response to actual demand, but rather on material or social (and always socially constructed) standards. This exposes the concept’s relativity and suggests a clearly normative dimension. The achievement of accepted social or material standards (measured, of course, by the consumption of goods, services and, necessarily, resources) is taken as a precondition for membership in society. Poverty is defined as the lack of or access to the resources needed to obtain the material or social standards which allow membership in society, i.e., money (Townsend 1979). In other words, living below the socially accepted material standards in a society makes us by definition deprived; if this, then, is not a matter of choice but rather resulting from the lack of income to obtain socially constructed material and social standards, we live, by definition, in poverty. Yapa (1996) summarises the relationship between the three concepts brilliantly: the material deprivation experienced by the poor is a form of socially constructed scarcity.

Having briefly looked at the relationship between the concepts of scarcity, deprivation and poverty, before turning to the relevance of built-environment-related deprivation indicators and the Indices of Deprivation in the context of Bromley-by-Bow for building an understanding of the real needs of low-income neighbourhoods in the remainder of this paper, the following section will explore the translocal links between east London and Sylhet (Bangladesh).

		N %	Count (N = 104)
Gender	Female	66.3%	69
	Male	33.7%	35
Age	<20	3.8%	4
	21-33	46.2%	48
	34-59	41.3%	43
	60+	8.7%	9
Cultural Background	British	17.3%	18
	Bengali	68.3%	71
	Other	14.4%	15
Place of Origin	UK	24.0%	25
	London	13.5%	14
	Other	10.6%	11
	Bangladesh	59.6%	62
	Sylhet	38.5%	40
	Other	21.2%	22
Marital Status	Other	16.3%	17
	single	29.8%	31
	co-habiting	2.9%	3
	married	60.6%	63
	separated	2.9%	3
Children	widowed	3.8%	4
	Yes	67.3%	70
Education	No	32.7%	34
	primary school	11.5%	12
	secondary school	30.8%	32
	A levels	26.9%	28
Working Situation	college graduate or beyond	30.8%	32
	unemployed seeking work	7.7%	8
	unemployed not seeking work	31.7%	33
	employed full time	19.2%	20
	employed part time	20.2%	21
	volunteer work	1.0%	1
	student	10.6%	11
Annual Income	retired	9.6%	10
	<10K	46.3%	44
	10-20K	29.5%	28
	21-30K	12.6%	12
	31-40K	5.3%	5
	41-50K	4.2%	4
	51-75K	1.1%	1
Benefits	>75K	1.1%	1
	Yes	65.4%	68
Housing Benefit	No	34.6%	36
	Yes	39.4%	41
	No	60.6%	63

Table no. 1: Socioeconomic composition of the interview sample. Source: Author's elaboration

### III. SYLHET IN LONDON IN SYLHET

It is worth noting here that only about one quarter of those we interviewed in Bromley-by-Bow were born in the UK; the majority were born in Bangladesh (59.6%), with 38.5% of all participants originating from Sylhet, a district in north-east Bangladesh (the 2001 Census reports 40.1% people of Bangladeshi origin in Bromley-by-Bow; Office for National Statistics 2001). As early as the late nineteenth century, many Sylhetis began to settle in the UK, not returning from ship journeys to the island. The majority arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, following the encouragement of the British authorities who acted in response to the scarcity of local labour. As

in many other cases of chain migration, ‘men from particular villages and lineages gained employment through the patronage of their relatives and neighbours’ (Gardner 2008), and the links between them remained strong long after arrival in Britain. Among the main reasons named by interview participants for living in Bromley-by-Bow were the established Bangladeshi community, the closeness to relatives and friends and the rich availability of mosques. Never entirely tackled, however, housing shortages and overcrowding (re-)appeared in east London (these problems had been addressed earlier in that east London families were resettled to new-built homes in the suburbs outside of the city (London Borough of Tower Hamlets 2009)). In this way, at the risk of oversimplifying complex relationships, it can be said that the demand for human labour in this case led to the ‘import’ of labourers from now-Bangladesh and elsewhere, and the need to house these labourers led to a renewed scarcity of housing, particularly in east London.

Migrants remained rooted in social networks in Bangladesh, and even after decades of living in London, the ‘home country’ is still an important part of their social life. For instance, Sonara<sup>2</sup>, 61, stayed on in the two-bedroom council flat after her husband’s death in 2006. Together with his wife, her son had moved back to Bangladesh to teach their two children Bengali culture and language. Sonara’s nephew moved in with her to help her with her daily deeds and to house-sit when she is away on visits to Bangladesh:

*My son pays for my ticket to Bangladesh. There is nothing left after I pay for all the bills here. But it is comfortable to live here with all the benefits and doctors. All my memories are here. (Interview with Sonara, December 2011).*

Often, living below the poverty line in Britain and having to depend on benefits, like 65% of our interviewees, is still seen as desirable when compared to the potential insecurities and desperate poverty back in Bangladesh (see Dench, Gavron et al. 2006; Gardner 2008). Take Jhuma and her husband Ziaul, who arrived in London in 2003. They have been bidding to move from their two-bedroom council flat to a three-bedroom flat ever since the arrival of their second baby – which lead to the increased frequency and duration of visits by Ziaul’s mother from Bangladesh. Ziaul used to make furniture back ‘home’, insisting that he was better off there:

*I have a family business in Sylhet – and shops. I rent them out. But you know how it is. In Bangladesh, you don’t know what happens next. In the UK, life is secure. (Interview with Ziaul, December 2011)*

Those who remain in Bangladesh often depend on the money that their relatives send back – and on their help to set up their own businesses. Some Londonis<sup>3</sup>, Gardner (2008) reports, build multi-storied houses made of stone and featuring foreign architectural styles (see BBC News Berkshire 2011 for an example). They also invest in the construction of mosques, apartment blocks and shopping centres that carry names reminiscent of their UK counter parts, such as ‘Tesco’ or ‘Harrods’ (Gardner 2008). Hardly the centre of Sylheti community life in London, as

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to maintain anonymity.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Londoni’ households are those with members in Britain.

the interviews in Bromley-by-Bow show (more than half of the respondents with Bangladeshi background stated that they *never* take part in events organised by community centres), mushrooming community centres in rural Bangladesh form a curious translocal trend. Most strikingly, in certain areas of the Sylhet region affording to buy land has become intrinsically linked to access to British income, with prices for an acre reaching more than ten times of prices elsewhere in the country; this has led to a hierarchy of place, where land is owned in the majority by Londonis and often no longer cultivated (Gardner 2008). Thus, Londoni investment activities have contributed (and continue to contribute) to fuelling potentially wasteful lifestyles and, more or less directly, to a scarcity of arable land.

#### IV. MEASURING DEPRIVATION

The Indices of (Multiple) Deprivation are based on a number of indicators, including those directly related to the built environment, namely household overcrowding; the ratio of owner-occupation; the proportion of housing which fails to meet a decent standard; and the accessibility of GPs, supermarkets and convenience stores, primary schools and post offices (Communities and Local Government 2008). The following sections will examine these indicators in more detail in the context of Bromley-by-Bow.

##### 1. Overcrowding

The Office for National Statistics (2003) measures overcrowding and under-occupancy using the ‘occupancy rating’, which assumes that ‘every household, including one person households, requires a minimum of two common rooms (excluding bathrooms)’. The occupancy rating poses that a household consisting of three grown men would have the ‘right’ amount of rooms if they had two common rooms (living room and kitchen) in addition to one bedroom for each member: five rooms in total. According to this definition, Apon, for instance, lives under severely overcrowded conditions. Apon is a full-time university student who moved to Bromley-by-Bow in 2010 to share a two-room flat (i.e., a sitting room and kitchen) with two others. However, he explains why and how sharing space with his flatmates is usually not a problem:

*This is my study desk. [...] My radio is my only entertainment. Sometimes I want to listen to a song when my roommates come home and want to sleep. I use my headphones. [...] If they want to meet their girlfriends, they meet at a relative's place. [...] I don't know what other kitchens are like, [but our current] kitchen is better than my last kitchen, for instance. [...] We had five rooms there and one kitchen. Ten people! Now, it's easier. (Interview with Apon, December 2011)*

In 2001, 34.35% of households in Bromley-by-Bow were rated as ‘overcrowded’, i.e., they occupied one or more rooms less than they were thought to require (Office for National Statistics 2001). The average household size in our interview sample was 4.37 people (roughly 2.33 for people of English and 4.85 for people of Bangladeshi origin), but only about one third of the housing stock in Bromley-by-Bow offered five rooms or more (Office for National Statistics 2001). This hints at a possible mismatch between the demand for family-sized homes and their supply – a scarcity of adequately sized homes that becomes manifest in high levels of

overcrowding. The Council has recognised and attempted to address this through small-scale strategies, such as plans to build social rent homes on land within existing estates; buying back large Right to Buy (RTB)<sup>4</sup> properties; or offering incentives to under-occupiers to vacate their homes (London Borough of Tower Hamlets 2009). These strategies, however, come under increasing threat because of decisions made at higher levels of governance: for instance, the replacement of ‘Social Rent’ as the main type of all new ‘social’ housing supply with ‘Affordable Rent’ (which offers property at 80% of average market rent for the respective area) will show impact on the capability of low-income families to rent in sought-after areas – contributing, in effect, not only to a widening gap between rich and poor in London and beyond, but also, potentially, to further segregation based on ethnic or cultural preferences. Take Ann’s story: now 60 years old, she was born in Bromley-by-Bow. After taking over from the Council a few years ago, the Housing Association (HA) begun moving her old neighbours out and replacing them with new:

*We’ve been together for 30 years; we’d celebrate Eid and Christmas together. All my neighbours moved out because of the refurbishment. They offered them money and a house elsewhere. [...] The new ‘affordable’ rents, at which they are offering the flats, now, are not affordable for most. But people started moving in again. I can tell you, the newcomers do not care about where they live. They buy the flats and receive welcome packs – like in the development next door they offer them a ‘buy four get five’ deal! It’s mostly Hong Kong investors that go for it. (Interview with Ann, January 2012)*

In the UK, the much-cited housing shortage (see, for instance, Steele 2010; Hanley 2011; McCann 2011) is rooted to a great extent in shrinking household sizes – the result of decreasing fertility rates and growing numbers of divorces and single households. Bahiya, a 31 year old single mother from Sierra Leone who lives with four children in a two-bedroom flat, further summarises the importance of context and the tendency toward individuation in London:

*Where I come from, sharing is good. But here, I am waiting for me to have my own room! (Interview with Bahiya, November 2011)*

What appears problematic is the acceptance of living standards that are based on the preferences of and tendencies within a dominant group (i.e., single or small family households) as the living standards for *all* members of a society. Failing to respond to the needs of ‘minorities’ (such as the demand for larger homes that are suitable for extended families) could even be interpreted as the missed opportunity to take advantage of possible benefits arising from the preservation of culturally specific lifestyles in a multicultural city like London, be it the willingness to share one’s home with and provide care for the older generation, or the provision of other forms of informal support. In short, it may be that some aspects of ‘minority’ lifestyles that are frequently associated with poverty and deprivation should, rather, be regarded as examples of resilience and resourcefulness when it comes to addressing existing and emerging scarcities.

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<sup>4</sup> In Britain, housing stock has been continuously transferred from public to quasi private ownership ever since the 1980s. This was essentially facilitated by the ‘Right to Buy’ policy, introduced in 1980 to give public tenants the right to buy their homes at a discount and only recently revived by the current Government.



Figure no. 1: Apon's study desk in the bedroom/living room he shares with two other men.  
Source: Apon/SCIBE.

## 2. Owner-occupation

The Indices of Deprivation consider the difficulty of access to owner-occupation, measured by the proportion of households under 35 unable to afford owner occupation, as another indicator of deprivation. Notably, this defines owner-occupation as the *only* desirable form of dwelling. The preferential treatment of owner occupation blatantly signifies the growing commodification of housing in England. The consequences can be felt on the ground.

Only less than 15% our sample owned or leased their homes; those who did saw themselves faced with a number of challenges, much to the contrary of the assumed higher socio-economic standing of owner-occupiers. For instance, 'only' around 40% of tenants stated that they sometimes used less energy than needed because of their energy bills, in stark contrast to 73% of the owner-occupiers. Coming up with repayments on mortgages or other debt was stated frequently as problematic. Take the example of Ahmed, a 47 years old homeowner who lives in one of the ubiquitous new-built, gated developments of Bromley-by-Bow. He arrived in London in the early 1990s, hoping for a good job, after marrying his British-Bangladeshi cousin. The Council assigned a flat to the couple, but Ahmed found himself in debt because of the loan he had taken out in a (failed) attempt to complete a university degree, and his marriage ended. He had moved out and lived in shared accommodation for years when he learned from a colleague about the opportunity to buy – and of the promise that market values in the area would rise immensely with the Olympic Games 2012. He borrowed the money for the deposit from his ex-wife and moved into the new-built one-bedroom flat with open-plan kitchen/sitting room in

2009, spending the majority of his salary on repayments to his wife and a £700/month, interest-only mortgage. These days, he finds himself sleeping on the couch in the kitchen/sitting room (see Figure no. 2), having sublet his only bedroom for £750/month, to ease his financial burden.



*Figure no. 2: Ahmed's (owner-occupied) open plan kitchen/living room/bedroom. Source: Ahmed/SCIBEDecent Homes Standard*

The Indices of Deprivation take into consideration ‘the probability that any given dwelling fails to meet the decent standard’ (Leeser 2008), defined by ‘the statutory minimum standard for housing’, being ‘in a reasonable state of repair’, having ‘reasonably modern facilities and services’ and providing a ‘reasonable degree of thermal comfort’ (Department of Communities and Local Government 2006). Almost one quarter of the people we interviewed in Bromley-by-Bow stated that they were not happy with at least one aspect of their homes, but the local HA (who took over from the Council in 2007) appeared determined to improve grim housing conditions for residents and to bring all homes up to the decent homes standard, replacing kitchens, refurbishing bathrooms and attempting to give estates an overall facelift.

In one particular case, routine maintenance with a focus on aesthetics and cost effectiveness turned into a complete retrofit promising to reduce ‘residents’ energy costs by as much as 25% while achieving greater comfort, reduced energy consumption and lower carbon emissions’ (Saint-Gobain Weber Ltd. 2012). The HA’s builder delivered the retrofit (including thick external insulation) on top of the standard maintenance work for which they were commissioned, at no added cost to the HA, claiming that this was achieved simply by getting ‘the best

performance from the least intervention' (McCabe 2012). Laudable as the strife for energy *and* cost efficiency may seem, however, the retrofit project left some residents disappointed.

Housing blocks on the estate had been quite airtight even before the intervention, and homes suffered from problems with ventilation and, in effect, condensation and mould. Residents thus had hoped that especially issues around dampness and mould would be resolved as a result of the retrofit and were surprised to see these grow even worse after the intervention. Claire's flat, for instance, had just been refurbished – in fact, the scaffolding was still up at the time of the interview – but Claire and her sister had to share a mattress in the sitting room because both had problems breathing in the only available bedroom; the walls and ceiling there had become overgrown with mould (see Figure no. 3). In this case, striving to reduce energy demand in order to satisfy primarily technical criteria has helped to exacerbate existing issues with respect to the health and wellbeing of individual residents. This makes explicit the need to explore the effects of an intervention at different scales and to acknowledge the sociomaterial nature of the problem.



*Figure no. 3: Tidy on the outside, mouldy on the inside. Walls in the entry hall of Claire's recently refurbished flat. Source: Claire/SCIBE*

### **3. Availability and Accessibility: Food**

The accessibility of GPs, supermarkets and convenience stores, primary schools and post offices serves as another indicator of deprivation for the Indices of Deprivation. In this case study, residents of Bromley-by-Bow were asked how they perceived the availability of facilities and services (such as coffee shops, community centres, libraries or nurseries, see Figure no. 4) in

walking distance from their respective homes<sup>5</sup>. According to the interviewees, Bromley-by-Bow lacked a library (the public library had been sold off and converted into private flats some years ago) as well as street food, sit-down restaurants, farmers markets and urban farming opportunities— in short, ‘healthy’ food seemed difficult to come by.

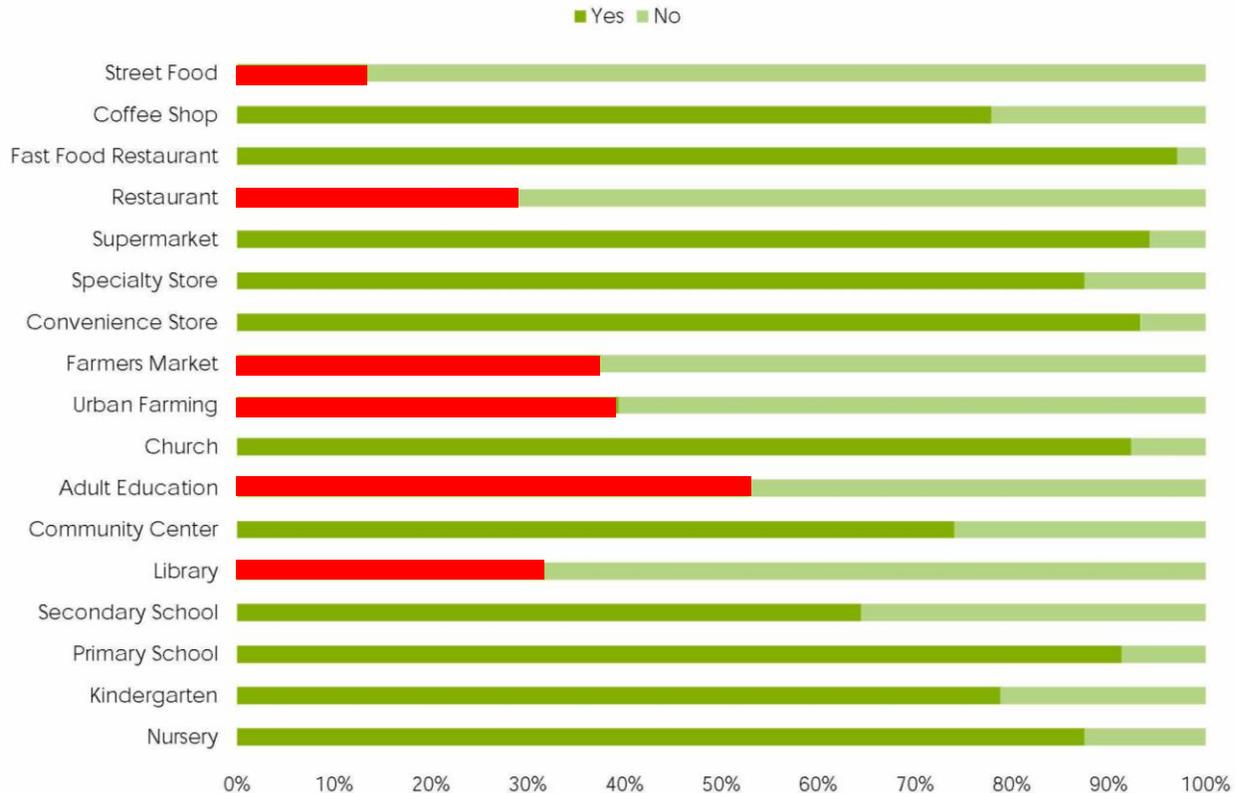


Figure no. 4: Perception of facilities and services availability in Bromley-by-Bow. Source: SCIBE

More than 91% of our interviewees stated that they ate out more or less frequently, and three quarters ate (mainly) fast food. One interviewee blamed the size of her kitchen<sup>6</sup> for having to feed her children take-out food from the local chicken and chips shop. About one third of our interviewees ate out once and another third two to six times per week; almost 7% daily. Were it not for some reassurance which emerged from in-depth interviews with those who seemed hooked on fast food, these numbers would be a cause of very serious concern. However, we found that many of the residents in ‘deprived’ Bromley-by-Bow who often ate out also kept herb and vegetable gardens in their backyards and balconies, growing anything from fresh salad to tomatoes and zucchinis themselves – and not requiring organic box schemes, farmers markets or the alternative forms of local food production usually associated with higher incomes and (at

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, of course, that this indicates the supply with facilities and services – but not the demand for them, i.e., whether these facilities and services were actually needed from the viewpoint of residents. The results are thus not in any way indicators of ‘scarcity’, but merely of perceived supply.

<sup>6</sup> Kitchens were pointed out as very important by many interviewees (81% stated that the kitchen should be very spacious!).

least) middle class residential areas. Many respondents had acquired the necessary skills in their childhood and did not feel the need to be taught how to work the soil or when to plant seeds – evidencing a startling resilience to the shortages in locally available fresh food. For instance, Romana, 40, spends two hours a day in her backyard, tending to her garden (see Figure no. 5). She buys the seeds at the nearby superstore and grows pumpkin, peppers, cucumber, tomatoes, spinach, mustard and coriander:

*I grow everything I need to cook a fresh meal in my garden. My mother taught me how to do that, back in Bangladesh. (Interview with Romana, November 2011)*



*Figure no. 5: Romana's garden. Herbs and vegetables gardens are a common phenomenon in backyards and balconies in Bromley-by-Bow. Source: Romana/SCIBE.*

Unravelling **SCARCITY**The instances of scarcity assembled in this paper begin to sketch a more systemic view of scarcity and its sociomaterial, transcalar and translocal dimensions. The paper illustrates how scarcity is translocal: the materiality of individual realities is connected across time and space and thus processes initiated in one place can impact on the trajectory of development in another. The scarcity of local labour in Britain, for instance, led to the ‘import’ of labourers from now-Bangladesh and elsewhere, and the need to house them and their families contributed to new scarcities of housing in east London. Remittances to their extended families in Bangladesh led to the accumulation of wealth and redistribution of land ownership, triggering new local inequalities there and making arable land scarce.

Resource flow and decision making processes transgress national, regional, local and architectural thresholds, and the paper reveals the transcalar dimension of scarcity in relating decisions made at the scale of the Central Government, the city, the borough and the ward to the experience of scarcity at the scale of the human. The scarcity of adequately sized homes in the study area, for instance, becomes evident in high levels of ‘overcrowding’; but the local Council’s strategies to remedy this situation are not only undercut – their effect is reversed by political decisions at higher levels of governance, and the most recently introduced reforms are thus likely to exacerbate the scarcity of low-income housing further. Financially weak households that succumb to the commonly propagated ideal of owner-occupation as the only desirable form of tenancy (an instance of consumption as a precondition for membership in society) may be forced to prioritise their limited resources in ways that eventually may lead to extreme poverty.

## V. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that existing practices of policy, planning and design at various scales do not even begin to address scarcity and that thus, alternative approaches are direly needed. Deprivation indicators that fail to measure demand can, at times, indicate nothing but low levels of participation in the consumer lifestyles expected for membership in society – indicating socially constructed deprivation rather than real scarcity. Just as critical design practice is rooted in the ‘unravelling of the social reality of the given condition so as to be able to understand how to transform it into something better’ – embracing the radical ‘possibility of doing otherwise’ (Schneider and Till 2009) – it is necessary for governance bodies to understand the day-to-day dynamics and activities that take place *locally* in order to pre-empt jumping to the wrong conclusions (as the example of common individual food growing activities in the case study area shows). Whilst it is certainly useful to establish and use a set of common indicators in order to compare different regions and allocate resources better, these indicators must reconsider the original meaning of ‘scarcity’ (i.e., demand outstrips supply), rather than label areas as deprived based on assumptions about standard demands. In order to address scarcity, governance at all scales must study the particular needs of ‘local people’ (unfortunately, especially in the British context, an over- and misused term). The labelling of communities or areas as ‘deprived’ carries the danger of facilitating large-scale gentrification and, ultimately, depriving areas of their place-specific identity and communities of their intrinsic resourcefulness and resilience. A more systemic approach based on an understanding of scarcity as the trigger or effect of more complicated sociomaterial processes across different scales and between different locations is necessary in order to address real need and genuine scarcity through policy making and design.

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