

Test Unit Evaluation Report



Civic House
17th - 23rd June 2018

INTRODUCTION

Test Unit is a summer school exploring cross-disciplinary approaches to city development. Through an intensive week we aim to turn talk into action by testing ideas in public space. Each year we inhabit a building or site and learn through engaging with ideas, materials, people and place.

The project is based in Speirs Locks, an area linked to the canal in north Glasgow. It is a post-industrial area close to (but in many ways separate from) the city centre. Since its industrial decline it has gone through significant change. The latest masterplan, which included large-scale building works and huge capital investment, didn't materialise after the economic crash of 2008. Since then an alternative approach has been developed, placing cultural activity, alternative use and temporary activation at the heart of the regeneration process.

This process is ongoing and Test Unit aims to be a method of ongoing enquiry and learning. Through a week of collaborative experimentation, the summer school will take ideas from conception to realisation through a week long build-test-learn development cycle.

Each year we invite skilled facilitators to lead a unit exploring different themes which address local issues through focusing on a specific site to give a defined framework for experimentation. By bringing together people from various disciplines and skill levels we aim to create an open forum for critical dialogue and peer-to-peer learning for all participants, partners, local stakeholders and audiences.

We also programme a public facing events and symposium programme to connect with people who can't attend the summer school – this includes talks, debates and a symposium for the participants to present their work to local audiences and strategic partners.



Unit 1. Source Material Baxendale



INITIAL BRIEF:

How can the act of site responsive making be used as a tool for engagement?

Through sourcing local material we will use this as a tool to map/register the social, cultural and economic condition of the area and construct a new scenario for the occupation and use of the Phoenix Nursery site.

One core methodology of our practice is using the act of making as a means of teaching agency and insight within contested and marginalised contexts. This method introduces an active and performative scenario that forces a multi-faceted mode of engagement with context. In this scenario the act of making is not used as a means of teaching people how to make but instead learning about a place by doing within that place. Key outcomes are experiencing how to engage with a variety of local actors/stakeholders, being resourceful, participating in the economy of a place, mapping the economy of a place, mapping the sociology of a place, mapping the culture of a place. In the context of Test Unit that learning will often be revealed to the participants gradually or at the end of the project so the acquisition of knowledge become naturally attained and embedded through the process of participation rather than being forced in the form of a 'lesson'

METHOD:

The methodology will consist of 4 stages:

Observe – the existing condition of the site with a particular focus on the edge condition and how that facilitates or denies engagement and interaction

React – to our findings by speculating on how a manipulation of the existing edge condition might transform the way in which the public utilise the site

Gather – the materials required to create and intervention to prototype our idea

Make – an intervention on the site in response to what we have seen, how we have reacted and the material we have gathered.

PROCESS:

Over the course of this week the Source Material Unit has been exploring and determining the context of Speirs Locks through the acquisition of objects and material. These objects contain memories of existing and former activity in this location; being redundant props from cultural institutions or stone or slabs left over from landscape regeneration projects.

This material provides a means of documenting the local condition and then presents that not as a map or media but as physical form on the Phoenix Nursery site.

OUTCOME:

The completed project is a 1:1 sketch that suggests a transformation of the edge condition; creating an invitation to move beyond the existing path into the site where a series of large steps provide the opportunity to pause, gather and experience the sound and movement of the M8 motorway.

LEARNING:

Our project has developed iteratively as we react to particular observations with each act informing the other. The process is one of continuous reaction, reflection and action. Pragmatism is followed by a creative interpretation. First acts in the week involved collecting litter, weeding and revealing existing paths and seeking to address very obvious and immediate issues before applying creative interventions. This project has been physical, relentless and ambitious but both collaborative and empowering.

FACILITATED BY:

BAXENDALE - Lee Ivett & Ambrose Gillick

GROUP MEMBERS:

Reuben Martindale
Rachel Marshall
Theo Vass
Itea Mourla
Freyja Harris
Anna McEwan
Rhiannon Moylan



Unit 2. Learning Platforms A Feral Studio



INITIAL BRIEF:

The designer Paul Elliman said 'a school is a building with a school in it'. Do we agree? Where next for creative education? What would independent creative learning, embedded in place and context, look, act and feel like?

When the mechanisms of mainstream school, college and university education seems to increasingly answer to a transactional neo-liberal logic – of skills (in return for payment and debt), 'employability', and a job-based economy that might not even exist in 20 years time – people naturally become more interested in possible alternatives. As part of this unit we will interrogate this assertion, form our own group position(s), and devise – minimum of 2, maximum of 4 – prototype 'platforms for learning' – these may take a physical form, or could be system-based proposals, or exist in digital spaces, or a combination of all and more of these.

This unit will be underpinned by the idea of thinking through making – we will be focussed on realising proposals, in whatever form seems appropriate to the ideas generated. Through creating an intensive, studio-based learning environment, participants will generate new skills and learning through this active social learning process. Though the unit is devised and led, participants will learn just as much from themselves and each other. We will engage hands and heads, sometimes at the same time. In the time available, we will be open and honest about the context and limitations of our proposals, while remaining very ambitious in terms of what can be achieved with the resources we have and what can be learned from this.

METHOD:

The project will consist of 4 stages – sometimes happening in parallel:

Observe – in smaller sub-groups; researching, observing and documenting the site, the local context, (district, city), and the global context

React – using our findings (combined with our previous experiences and knowledge) to form a range of positions or proposals.

Discuss – as a group we will discuss our findings and make plans

Make, enact, test – a range of prototype proposals will be created on, or in relation to the Phoenix Nursery site, the location of this years Test Unit. We will actively seek to connect these ideas with a public, and learn from this interaction.

PROCESS:

The nature of this unit meant that from the outset we were keen to look at how the group self-organised, the types of things we might like to investigate and discuss. Initial activities were scheduled, such as small team tasks, and a movement workshop with Glasgow Open Dance School (GODS)

OUTCOME:

There were two physical outcomes to the weeks activities - a circular area created by the group by collectively digging out and reforming the earth outside civic house, (sited in relation to a nearby tree), creating a space to gather, and a publication of the weeks ongoing discussions and activities which has since been printed and distributed to group members, and was shared with the broader group at the end of the week.

LEARNING:

There was so much learning in this project for the facilitators, and we hope for the participants too. The structure of the unit was devised to try and facilitate lots of different modes of learning, from hands-on and immediate thinking-through-making, to more discursive activities, sharing ideas and references. It's also important to note the intended self-directed nature of the group*, and that there was a lot of peer-led learning as participants were from

different backgrounds, and the connections made and conversations had are an important part of the overall learning outcomes.

* this worked on some levels, but also created interesting frictions on other levels - to say the group was entirely autonomous and self-led would be slightly misleading, but there was a conscious effort to ask the group to think about what it wanted to do and how it wanted to do it. This can be slightly difficult to engender in such a short space of time, but it was still a useful approach and ethos to try and engage with, and was very productive in a lot of ways.
Facilitated by: Neil McGuire & Sophie Dyer

NEXT STEPS?

We'd like to think about how the learning from this unit might influence future test units - in terms of the structure and the type of activities we engage with.

FACILITATED BY:

A Feral Studio - Neil McGuire & Sophie Dyer

ASSISTED BY:

Bill Sempsis
Fiona Hunter

GROUP MEMBERS

Briana Pegado
Robert Mills
Charles Myatt
Rosalind Peebles
Miranda Stuart
Lauren La Rose
Gemma Crook
Maeve Dolan
Giovanni Sambo

Unit 3. The Co-op Protocol Stealth.unlimited



INITIAL BRIEF:

Glasgow's canal area is bringing its future into collective hands. But how to enact something that is yet to be imagined?

Over the next 10 years the Glasgow Canal Co-op is expected to bring a much-needed impact to Glasgow's canal area. At its start, today, it is a coalition of 12 small and larger actors. What are the most challenging changes to take on? And how will the decisions on these be made?

For a week, we playfully 'hijack' the canal area and explore how to form and run the prototype organisation that is to govern the area in the time yet to come. Well before the actual Glasgow Canal Co-op comes into action this year, we will already start practicing its daily assemblies, its decision-making processes, investment strategies, and its principles of co-design. Not tightly bound by the limitations encountered, but rather open towards possibilities still to be 'carved' into the area. A collective act of future fiction that might well inscribe itself into the future to emerge.

METHOD:

We have been working on instituting an economy of land, as commons, in the Glasgow Canal Area, as part of the Land and Water Co-operative (LAWC, Glasgow).

A substantial part of the Glasgow Canal Area is currently subjected to practices of land-banking, whereby absent landlords retain control of derelict or underused land with the aim of making considerable financial gains in a future market. This has become an alarming reality, as it increasingly prevents local communities from benefiting from the (affordable and accessible) land asset in the area.

Recently, the LAWC has made the landmark decision to counter practices of land-banking, (whereby absent landlords retain control of derelict or underused land with the aim of making

considerable financial gains in a future market). It has called on the workgroup participants to guide the LAWC through the critical period of laying out the groundwork as well as implementing the practical aspects of this. As workgroup, while exploring the canal area "rituals, our days have been organised around research and thinking-up possibilities for such an economy of land, collectively discussing and making decisions on its implementation trajectory.

PROCESS:

Upon arrival at the scene, with the workgroup we started a visual check-up of the entire perimeter of the area (within 300 meters of the Glasgow Canal between Pinkston and Firhill) to get an understanding of the challenges at hand. To actively start engaging in the land-politics of the area, not only impacts LAWC's modus of collaboration and collective governance in the area, but necessarily includes the rather bold move of transferring land ownership into collective hands. At the Annual General Meeting held on Monday, 18th June 2018, it has been decided that action will be taken to seize and subsequently recommon freeholds which are not being actively used by their current owners. With the workgroup, we have proceeded to detail the setup of such an approach, broadly along the model of a Community Land Trust.

OUTCOME:

The activities of the workgroup have resulted in postulating a Protocol for the Commons, outlining the powers and responsibilities of the Land and Water Co-operative and which has subsequently adopted by the co-operative. To make sure for the adopted policy to come into immediate effect, during the remainder of our period in Glasgow with the members of the LAWC, measures have been taken to counteract land-banking taking place at Phoenix Nursery and the neighbouring (former site of the municipal) Department of Cleansing, where Notices of Seizure for Recommonage have been installed. The activities have been documented to further facilitate public mediation of the objectives and protocols of the co-operative.

LEARNING:

The facilitators have chosen to enter the work with the LAWC and the workgroup members with an open agenda, and instead have encouraged the workgroup members to actively envision and take on required roles, tasks and responsibilities. It has led to several workgroup members stepping beyond their conventional comfort zone, and at times stepping beyond the here-and-now. It has also made clear that the complexity of the urban issue at stake can be addressed in a provocative, but equally thorough going manner in the short time at hand.

NEXT STEPS?

The Land and Water Cooperative is today still a fictitious entity. However, in early 2018, the Glasgow Canal Coop has been established. In an encouraging unfolding of a possible future, the LAWC's objectives may get boldly embraced and implemented by the current co-op. The necessary protocols are now available, as well as a workgroup keen on collaborating with the Coop to achieve such an ambition.

FACILITATED BY:

Stealth.unlimited - Ana Džokić & Marc Neelen

ASSISTED BY:

Abigale Neate-Wilson

GROUP MEMBERS:

Rachael Clerke
Julie Murray
Andrew Corletto
Gaelen Britton
Issy Arnold
Louisa McGuigan

Unit 4. The Severed Hand Assemble



INITIAL BRIEF:

A week long experiment in thinking through building, without models or drawings. How do mainstream cultures of construction impact on our shared experience of the city, and day-to-day possibilities of urban life? What might building together offer as way of thinking differently in or about our environment?

Design is increasingly developed through digital technologies which are enabling and powerful, but like any tool, they have limitations. And the tools we use form the way we think. How might we think, design, even behave differently if we had more intimate relationships with materials and the things we make? And how might the place we live be different if we did?

PROCESS, OUTCOME & LEARNING:

We developed our construction skills through a collective process of making - using hand tools only (hammers, saws, nails, an unmarked 'measure' stick, some masking tape, pencils, and a set square) without making or referencing drawings or models.

Firstly we worked in pairs to copy a saw horse. Then used the existing object as a blueprint: holding our principle material, wood, against it to gauge the height and width of our version; and observing it's construction to deduce the order in which to build our own. Through action our muscles began to know themselves as 'tools'.

Next we were presented with images of two tables from Enzo Mari's book "Autoprogettazione". We had to make these tables without the accompanying design plans. Through discussion, gesture, risking actions without being able to predict the outcomes, then learning from the physical results of this, we felt our way through the process of building these tables. We started to build a common material language. As we were pushed to make without a tangible set of instructions and reconcile our different minds-eye

plans, we began to liberate themselves from the anticipation anxiety of taking action.

Our final task was to create 'bleachers' (tiered seating) to seat 15 people, using our tables for reference and extrapolating key elements to create our yet unseen structures. We had to listen hard, explain slowly, and exercise patience, and work through miscommunication and frustration. We had to place trust in our actions and the materials to bring forth mutual understanding, surprising ourselves with the results.

FACILITATED BY:

Assemble –
Amica Dall, James Binning, Joe Halligan

ASSISTED BY:

Lauren Coleman

GROUP MEMBERS:

Erin McQuarrie
Teodor Hadirca
Natasha Kurth
Jack Cardno
Ceola Tunstall-Behrens
Harriet Morley
Zoë Pearson
Neil Stevenson





PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

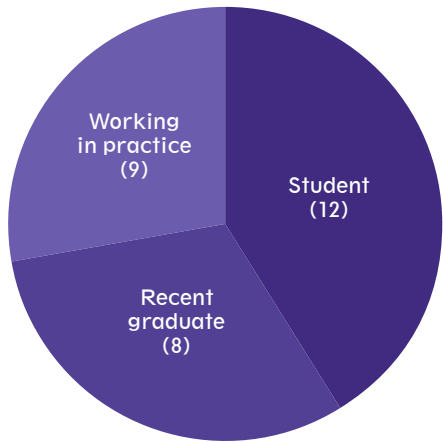
Participant total:

29

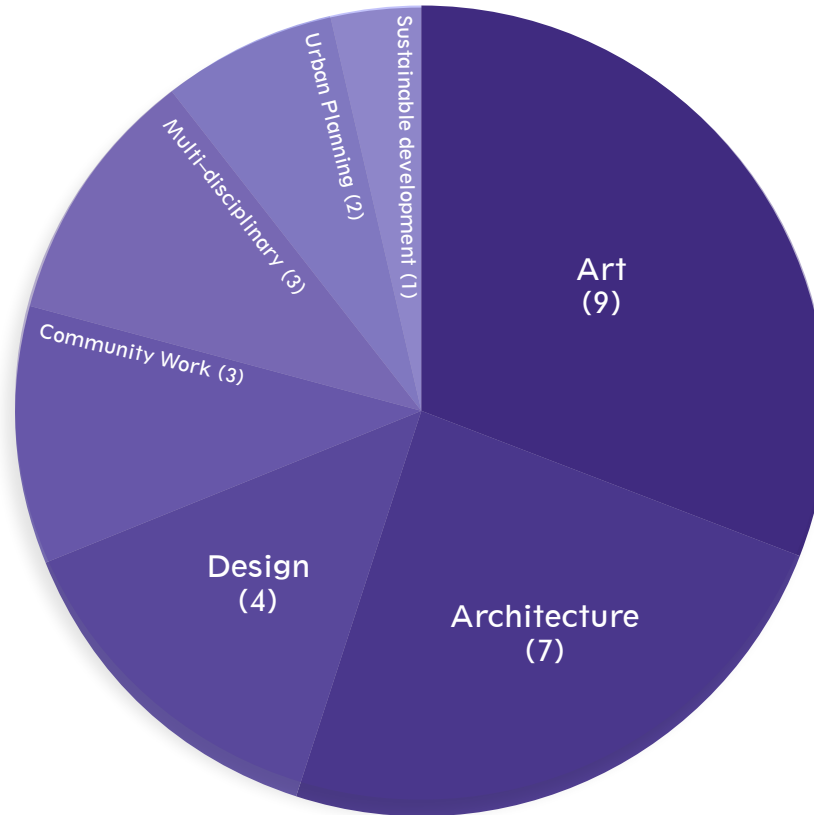
Female:21

Male:8

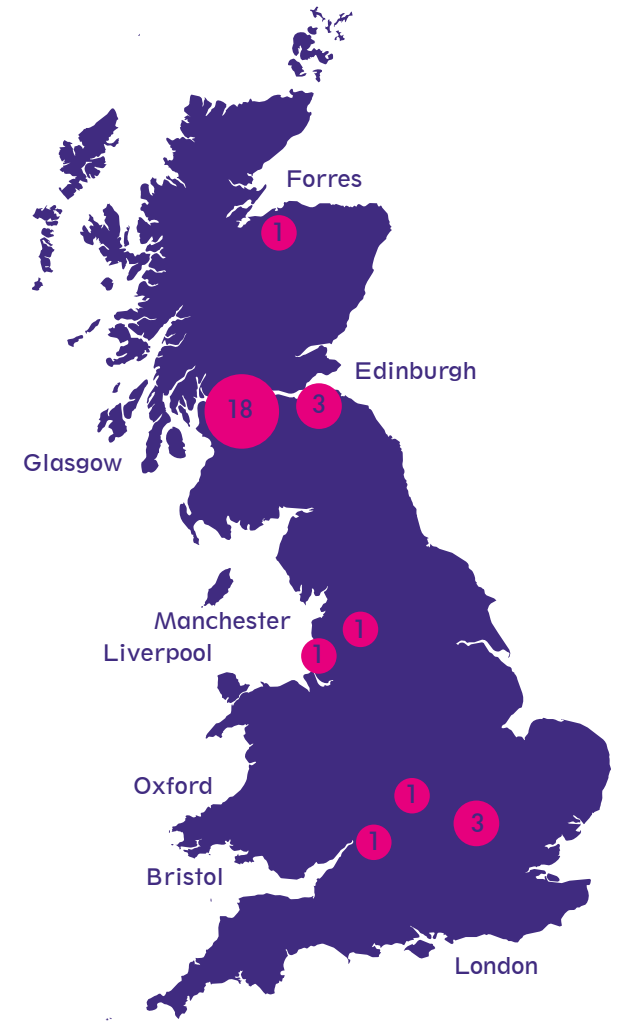
Experience Level:



Discipline:



Location:



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

18/29 participants answered the survey
Scores taken on an average
Scale of 1 – 5 (excellent)

Overall experience of test unit:



The most valuable part of participating in Test Unit:



Working with people from mixed disciplines



Working collaboratively



Improved theoretical understanding on the theme of unit



Exploring ways of developing and realising ideas



Learning about new materials / processes / tools



Developing ideas for the future development of the site and/or area

The most valuable part of your unit:



Opportunities for collaboration



The theme



Learning Experience



Role of facilitator



Structure of the week

EVENTS PROGRAMME



Opening symposium: Cooperative City Development

What are the challenges of working co-operatively? What are the models for inclusive city development that link strategic city vision with grass-roots activity? For our opening symposium we hear from a range of voices to discuss these issues and set the tone for the week's activities.

Chaired by Ellis Woodman,
Architecture Foundation

Speakers:

- Neil McGuire & Sophie Dyer
A Feral Studio (Glasgow)
- James Binning & Amica Dall
Assemble (London)
- Lee Ivett & Ambrose Gillick
BAXENDALE (Glasgow)
- Ana Džokić and Marc Neelen
STEALTH.unlimited
(Rotterdam & Belgrade)

Pecha Kucha: Community consultation fatigue?

Have we now reached a point of saturation whereby engagement, consultation and participation is used to produce activity, without producing change?

Speakers:

- Louise Nolan
New Rhythms for Glasgow
- Jane Lamont
Beith Community Trust
- Francis Thorburn
Artist
- Mark Langdon
Botanic Concrete
- Jonathan Clarkson
Urbantu Design
- Daniele Sambo
Artist
- Lynn Molleson
Development Trust
Association Scotland

Tahl Kaminer talk

Tahl Kaminer is a lecturer in Architectural Design and Theory at the University of Edinburgh. Specializing in ideology, political economy and architecture in the city.

Tahl gave a presentation and led a group discussion exploring the theme of the Efficacy of architecture.

Turncoats debate: Schools Out

Creativity is what makes us human. Learning how to be creative = big business. It's time to cash in for art schools.

Arts education is a process enhanced through generosity, experimentation and critique – fundamentally underpinned by the relationship between creativity and the taking of risks. This is at direct odds with the business model it exists within.

Is it time for new models of arts education to emerge?

Chaired by Ambrose Gillick,
BAXENDALE

Speakers:

- Lewis Prosser, School of the Damned
- Ethel Baraona Pohl, dpr-barcelona
- Neil McGuire, A Feral Studio
- Susannah E Haslam,
Creative Exchange research
- Chaired by Ambrose Gillick

Test Unit: Closing Party

Showcasing work developed through the week-long summer school led by:

A Feral Studio
Assemble
Baxendale
STEALTH.unlimited

Daytime creative workshops by:

- Gloss Food
- Glasgow Tool Library
- Risotto
- dpr-barcelona
- Akiko Kobayashi

Live music and performance in partnership with HEALTHY!

Line up:

- Andrew Thomson
(Huntleys + Palmers)
- Becky Marshall (SO LOW)
- Clean Shave (live)
- HEALTHY DJs



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

Once it was understood that the facilitator was also experimenting and that knowledge was co-constructed between us all - that was as valuable to them as it was for us - everything felt purposeful

VALUE

The model of learning through discovery is much more effective than the traditional lecture based teaching of which I was more familiar.

VALUE

Even more opportunities to step back and reflect on how things were going and talk about the methodology we were taking would have been great.

VALUE

Meeting people from a range of academic backgrounds/fields of work was really interesting, alongside the opportunity to complete something very tangible and pick up new skills over the course of a week.

VALUE

It would be hard to be critical of the things that "went wrong" because without that risk taking or sense of unknown at times, we wouldn't have experienced all the things that "went right".

VALUE

For me the mixture of people was key to actually having a conversation and understanding different points of view because it wasn't really an echo chamber.

VALUE

I feel we did not benefit from the experience of our facilitators as much as we could have. However, the week was still very educational and enjoyable.

DELIVERY

Really inspirational facilitators

DELIVERY

The week felt quite jam packed and full on. Could add in some talks in the morning to break up the day and avoid people not coming to the evening talks as they are tired.

EVENTS

Having public events throughout the week was great. Maybe worth having more opportunities which encourage participants in different groups to interact, as a lot of the value of Test Unit is meeting other people working with similar motivations.

EVENTS

Our facilitators did not impose any structure upon us. This was an interesting experiment however it, at points, resulted in too much sitting around a table unable to reach conclusions and missed opportunities for more practical experiments and research. I also think more structured activity for the first day or so would be good.

DELIVERY

Extra kudos for the food & technical support

DELIVERY

SUMMER SCHOOL:

REFLECTIONS:

- The most valuable aspect continues to be the cross-disciplinary make up of the participants and facilitators along with the chance to work across a variety of experience levels.
- This year there was more independence between the units and therefore the programme as a whole. While this did produce strong individual Unit outcomes it also highlight a missed opportunity for greater connectivity between the themes being explored.
- More collaboration throughout the groups needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Our intention is to redesign the format of the week to support more collaboration, explore different approaches to learning and bring in more space for discussion and critique of ideas and processes.
- We will explore a theme for each year's programme - to create a more cohesive line of enquiry throughout all the groups, while also allowing space for creative exploration and individual modes of learning. This will allow us to create cohesion through the project as a whole while capitalising on the unique skillsets and expertise of the facilitators.

EVENTS:

REFLECTIONS:

- The structure of the final day was more successful than previous years - in creating a platform for the groups to come back together, share and reflect on what had been produced, the process they'd take and any challenges they'd encountered. It also acted as a great way to open up the site up to a wider audience and run a public facing workshops programme.
- It's important to retain the events as publicly accessible - to ensure there's a variety of means through which people can engage with Test Unit, but also to connect the summer school with a broader audience. How the events are then positioned publicly is key.
- Creating space around the events programme for informal discussions is important.
- There was a general consensus that Turncoats wasn't successful. The original provocation 'Art School is Dead' was unfortunate due to the GSA fire that happened a week before. This set a bad tone for the discussion. There was lack of genuine divide of opinion between the speakers, which undermined the success of the Turncoats debate format. This should be considered when choosing a theme in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Schedule within the week - the length of each event and where they sit within the schedule should be revised and considered. By placing events mainly at the end of the day meant some participants felt too tired by this point to really engage with the subject.
- How speakers are briefed and how each talk positioned is very important to ensure the event stays true to how it's been promoted publicly and that it's coherent as an independent event.

FUTURE PROGRAMMES:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- If Test Unit is more clearly described as a programme of learning within an urban context alongside a published theme to be examined, our ability to describe the professional development opportunity should be more greatly enhanced.
- Currently the level of production staff is disproportionate to the participants and facilitators. This creates a large amount of financial expectation and burden on the project. Refining the delivery structure should also account for the number of production team, facilitators and assistants. Co-facilitation across groups will be explored to alleviate this, but also support a new format and design of the week.

Thanks to all
involved in Test
Unit 2018!





Test Unit is collaborative project produced by Agile City
with strategic support from Baxendale & A Feral Studio



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Jack Paton (Catering)

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BAXENDALE



A
FERAL
STUDIO



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Project partners & supporters:



LOTTERY FUNDED



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DOWNLOAD PUBLICATION

Cooperative City Development 17-23rd June

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Find out more about Test Unit at agile-city.com/test-unit