## Mas-Piece / Body-Architecture

# Collaboration between Tropical Isles Carnival Group and UEL BSc Architecture, Unit A

### **Principle Researchers**

Carsten Jungfer, Senior Lecturer, SFHEA, unit A tutor Fernanda Palmieri, Hourly Paid Lecturer, unit A tutor

#### **UEL Students**

Daryl Ignacio Eugene Yu Jin Soh Halima Ali Tashan Auguste

### **Partnership Organization**

Tropical Isles Carnival Group (120 members 13-25 years old)

### **Duration of collaboration**

January 2019 - December 2019

### **Events**

Notting Hill Carnival, August 2019
Hackney Carnival, September 2019
Hackney Festive Light switch-on, December 2019

### **Project summary**

Tropical Isles is a carnival youth group that provides activities all year round and works with approximately 120 active members aged 13 to 25. The charity's aims to assist local young people to build life skills, confidence and healthy wellbeing. It delivers a range of art-lead and performing arts projects as well as it makes the headquarter space available for young people to meet, work, study and create, encouraging youths to work together in a safe space. At the centre of their activities is the year-round production and planning for Notting Hill Carnival, Hackney Carnival and Bielefeld Carnival (Germany) as well as other carnival related events and performances. As a registered mas-band Tropical Isles takes part in the carnival parade and competition in Notting Hill which has became the second biggest carnival in the world just after Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

Tropical Isles was one of the stakeholders that participated in a Public Engagement project we developed in 2018 in collaboration with London Borough of Hackney's planning department (Information about this public engagement project can be found on a separate UEL PE Awards Partnerships Category Application Form 2019). Shortly after this engagement Tropical isles invited us to collaborate in the production of a Mas-Piece for the Carnival 2019. Mas-piece is a piece of bespoke body-architecture that is worn as the signature costume leading the carnival group in the parade / performance.

Between January and September 2019, four UEL architecture students engaged with the art producer and young people of Tropical Isles and assisted by us tutors, worked to collectively co-design and prototype a 5x5 meter large Mas-Piece for the Carnival 2019.

### Working methodology:

We held a number of collaborative design workshops at Tropical Isles in Hackney and at UEL Docklands Campus. We experimented with various materials and constructed full size prototypes to develop a lightweight hybrid structure. Students worked on a life project and had to consider the constraints and potential of different materials and understand how to put them together. The Mas-Piece had to follow that year's theme, it had be light enough to be carried by a young women for several hours as well as be as big and tall as possible, it had to perform equally well under rainy or windy conditions and it had to be taken apart for transportation. In addition, there was a special effect requirement, during the Carnival parade the Mas-Piece had to open and somehow release numerous helium balloons into the air at judging point. This was a real architecture project.

### What were the aims of the project and how did your new or innovative approach to public engagement complement the aims?

The initial aim of the collaboration was to provide an opportunity for this two different groups of young people to work together and to collaboratively design a piece of architecture. But this project really stands out and, on reflection, our understanding is that as multi-layered live project it operated at multiple scales and combined parallel strands of engagement across a diverse range of audiences:

1

As a co-design and collaborative working approach this project positively impacted the two groups of young people and its participants by helping to build confidence and expand individual horizons and aspirations in relation to future expectation of achievements (maybe even in connection with career paths)

2

As a live-build project, the project became an example of UEL design teaching culture "learning through making", promoting direct action and engaging with topics that are relevant to the needs of the local community and that can support and enable meaningful change.

3

Although the wider context of the public engagement project was pre-embedded into high levels of exposure (and also potential risk) with large audiences of 1.5 million visitors at Notting Hill Carnival and 60,000 at Hackney Carnival, the initiative have been indeed highly valuable for everyone involved, Tropical Isles was awarded several prizes for their performance in 2019 Carnival and conversations of future collaborations are ongoing.

## Which audiences who do not normally engage did you intend to reach and how successful were you in reaching this target audience?

The project engages with multiple scales of events (1.5million to 300 visitors) and we believe it impacted across a wide range of audiences:

1

As we mention above providing the opportunity for university students to work together with young members of the community expands individual horizons and aspirations. We understand that only a small proportion of Tropical Isles youth members continue into Higher Education. Working together allowed ALL of us to create a common ground that connected and inspired each other. Recently, we heard that one young member of Tropical Isles carnival group has enrolled in the Interior Design course at UEL.

2

For all UEL architecture students, including the ones that did not actively participate in the collective design and construction of the Mas-piece, being exposed to innovative ways of producing architecture and of engaging in real social and cultural contexts can be very inspiring and again expand individual horizons and aspirations.

3

The Carnival community itself which either experienced the performance of Tropical isles or became aware of their achievements in 2019 through the awarded prizes and press. This recognition goes beyond the London wide community as Notting Hill Carnival receives carnival groups from the Caribbean, North America and other parts of the globe.

4

The general public, visitors to Notting Hill Carnival, Hackney Carnival and Bielefeld Carnival, as well as the general public via press & social media.

As mention before Notting Hill Carnival is the second biggest carnival celebration in world in the overall number of people participating

5

Another audience that seems to emerge comes from within the academic field. Based on interest from UEL and internal use of this initiative as good example of civic engagement, we understand there is appetite for a discourse on innovative approaches to design learning. We have the idea to produce a documentation, that makes alternative working methods available to the wider academic community.

## What evaluation did you undertake and what were the outcomes?

1

Participation in Notting Hill Carnival, August 2019
Audience: approx. 100 participating carnival groups and 1.5 million visitors
Awards / recognition:
3rd place on Sunday – category: Traditional
3rd place on Monday – category: Traditional

2

Participation in Hackney carnival, September 2019
Audience: approx. 25 carnival groups and 60,000 visitors
Awards / recognition:
Carnival Band of the Year - 1st prize
Dissemination: The Mas-pieces was featured in various local newspapers, including Hackney Gazette

3

December 2019
Festive community event at Hackney Town Hall when the Mas-piece was lit up with hundreds of Christmas light and performing in the evening as part of the event that featured a range of local community organisations.

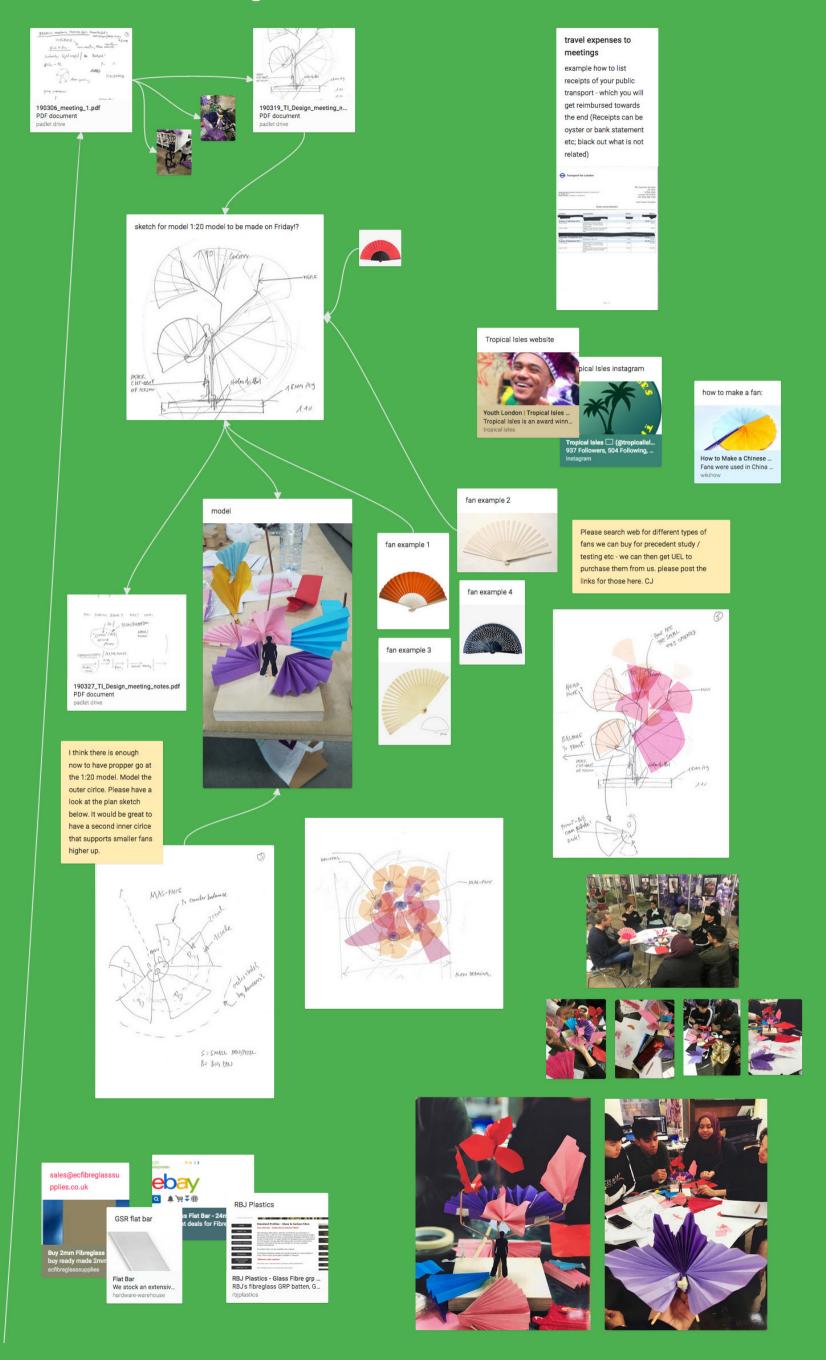
Audience: approx. 8 community groups and 300 visitors

We worked closely together with UEL press office and a number of press releases were issued. The outcome was featured nationwide in The Times online and in a number of local newspapers, including Hackney Today and Bangla Mirror.

We intend to further scale this research by producing an analytical documentation on collaborative design process (further funding allowing). Can this methodology become a new tool for collaborative learning and knowledge exchange? The aim is to produce a 'guidebook' to inspire and support others at UEL and beyond, to successfully deliver future public engagement projects.

The project so far received a total of £1,950 in funding during 2019.

## Collaborative Design Process



## Co-Design Workshops







## Testing and Prototyping



































## Mas-Piece Rehearsal







## Notting Hill Carnival

August 2019

















## Hackney Carnival

September 2019















tropicalislescarnival Hackney Carnival results



## Festive Light Switch-on Hackney Town Hall

December 2010

















