

# Land Body Ecologies: The London hub

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## Abstract

This photo essay and accompanying text visualize and represent the work that was based in London, UK of a collective project called Land Body Ecologies (LBE), a global transdisciplinary network exploring the deep interconnections of mental health and ecosystem health. LBE's research and action work combined science, art, and public engagement to understand and redress the ongoing crisis of land trauma among land-dependent and Indigenous peoples who nonetheless display remarkable resilience. The research and action have been rooted within communities seeking resilience for their interlinked culture, environment, and land rights, so that they could comprehend, document, and overcome the crises and traumas endured when their land suffers. LBE's London-based work is presented through photos of the arts-science-community space that anchored the work around the world.

*Keywords:* eco-anxiety, eco-inspiration, hope, solastalgia, trauma

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## 1. Background

This photo essay visualises and represents the work that was based in London, UK of a collective project called Land Body Ecologies (LBE), a global transdisciplinary network exploring the deep interconnections of mental health and ecosystem health. The work combined science, art, and public engagement to understand and redress the experiences of land trauma (Ahmad et al., 2022) among land-dependent and Indigenous peoples (Ahmad & Gosling, 2021). LBE's research and action have been rooted within communities addressing their interlinked culture, environment, and land rights issues. Through a variety of outcomes and outputs seeking and supporting continuing collaborative successes, it sought to comprehend, document, and overcome the traumas endured when the land suffers (Ahmad, 2022).

The key verbs are “comprehend, document, and overcome” rather than merely examine and suffer. As such, the activities depicted in the photo essay are specifically about tackling, addressing, and redressing “Resilience in Crisis”. The importance of positive action is partly to take on board the severe critiques of resilience framings (Pugh, 2014; Reid, 2012) and crisis constructions (Hodder & Martin, 2009; McHugh et al., 2021) in order to move beyond their detriments for constructive outcomes. Another major part of this work is using different presentations, representations, and voices in order to work together to identify and solve the challenges (e.g., Van Auken et al., 2010; Wang & Burris, 1994).

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To achieve these goals, LBE asked and answered:

- How is the mental health of marginalized, land-dependent communities affected by changes in their ecosystems?
- To what extent does the definition of 'solastalgia' (adverse mental health impacts induced by environmental changes; [Albrecht, 2005](#)) encompass the lived experiences of marginalized, land-dependent communities?
- How do historical and contemporary violences faced by marginalized, land-dependent communities feature in their lived experience of solastalgia?

The LBE collaborative aimed to understand the traumas endured when the land suffers, focusing on the entanglement of psyche and environment paralleling the interlacing of physical, mental, emotional, community, and environmental healths.

LBE was initiated and led by Invisible Flock, an arts studio in Yorkshire, UK. In 2021, the Wellcome Trust, based in London, UK, accepted LBE for its Hub Award (grant number: 220767/Z/20/Z). This £1 million grant included a two-year residency until mid-2023 in part of the fifth floor of Wellcome Collection in Euston, London. The space, termed the London Hub for LBE, was anchored by Invisible Flock and Minority Rights Group International.

This photo essay documents the London Hub with the purpose of showing how it has become a living space, for working and creativity, as well as for the community and for art. It brings to life the experiences of LBE's team around the world while learning from and being inspired by those local to or visiting the London Hub.

## **2. Ethics**

Ethics approval for the entire project was led by co-author Ayesha Ahmad, so that it was reviewed and granted by St George's University of London (number 2021.0230). Local ethics approvals were led by the other Hubs to be reviewed and granted locally in each location. All research and activities were conducted in line with guidance on the feedback of health-related findings in research ([MRC & Wellcome Trust, 2014](#)) and were closely monitored and commented on by the Wellcome Trust.

Part of the ethics process ensured full accreditation for all artistic outputs, while adopting an inclusive authorship ethos, as espoused by [Castleden et al. \(2010\)](#). This authorship ethos was put into practice for [Gougsa et al. \(2023\)](#) and is reflected in this piece about the London Hub, while still accrediting each photo to the photographer as part of the appropriate ethical process. In fact, the production of this article highlights our collaborative approach to accreditation, not just ensuring that all those involved receive due recognition, but also requiring authors to have been part of the lived experience of what the London Hub represents, by working from it, attending the events, and supporting the location as a community space for working, interacting, learning, and exchanging.

## **3. A Collaborative Space**

The London Hub was used as a collaborative working and community space for LBE. The focus was exploring more widely health-related research and engagement through creative and innovative approaches ([Gougsa et al., 2023](#)). In addition to being the core working place for LBE's UK-based team members, it was used for project meetings, especially to welcome non-UK team members; it became an experimental and creative arts studio; Wellcome staff worked at desks interacting with and supporting LBE team members; project outputs such as podcasts were launched; open workshops were held to draw on the London community's creativity; and it served team members, such as Minority Rights Group International holding its annual meeting in 2023 and University College London staff holding research discussions. The space was set up to be welcoming and to encourage creativity, including through furniture permitting a flexible working environment

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with lighting and objects from team members around the world (the other hubs) to inspire interaction and innovation.

The London Hub is one of six LBE hubs. The other team members have their own hubs in:

- Arctic (in Finland and Sweden) (Autti, 2022; Szpak & Ochwat, 2021).
- Bannerghatta (in India) (Clarke et al., 2021).
- Ban Nong Tao (in Thailand) (Szpak & Ochwat, 2021).
- Bwindi (in Uganda) (Mitchell, 2023).
- Mau Forest (in Kenya) (Redvers et al., 2020).

Each of these hubs and peoples, as evidenced in these citations, is struggling with their own crises, displays their own resiliences, and continually aiming to determine what form of resiliences can be applied to deal with the various forms of crises. In the Arctic Hub, the main river has been dammed, changing its flow, its sounds, its ecosystem, and its use for livelihoods—changing the river's being and connection to the land and people. Responses for resiliences include art, storytelling, advocacy, science, and adjusting livelihoods as best as feasible. In the Mau Forest hub, the people are being forcibly and illegally evicted from their land. Resiliences have involved taking the government of Kenya to court and winning in the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights alongside international lobbying with Minority Rights Group International.

The backgrounds of the people involved in all this work are artists (including sound, video, and visual artists), communicators, conservationists, designers, Indigenous and land-dependent community and non-governmental organization representatives, researchers (with specialties including climate change, environmentalism, health, indigeneity, law, and rights), and technologists. Many of the team members use their profession for policy influence, action on the ground, and activism. Whereas this photo essay highlights the London Hub providing a collaborative, local-to-international space for dealing with "Resilience in Crisis" / "Resiliences in Crises", other publications document the other hubs' work in this regard (e.g., Autti, 2022; Gougsa et al., 2023).

#### **4. Meaningfulness for Resilience and Crisis**

The photo essay is divided into four sections, demonstrating how all the people involved come together for a collaborative space. The photos have been curated and ordered to be representative of the people of the London Hub, the shifting dynamic of the fifth floor of Wellcome Collection, and the variety of activities occurring there. As such, the images offer a balance of people, place, process, object, and action, illustrating how the Hub was used without being comprehensive across all uses, events, and interactions.

##### *4.1. The Hub's Space*

The space is an open plan working environment with one glassed-in office, one lockable storage room, and a kitchen. Different sections of the open-plan area are set up with different workspaces, including rows of desks that move vertically and horizontally, different-sized tables joined or separated, corners that individuals sequester, and couches creating a cloister like a living room or coffee conversation space. Some people typically use the same desk or location while others move around during the day and across different days. This variety is expressed in the photos, perhaps presenting various "resiliences" within a working environment while providing various modes of "crises" working, such as for impending deadlines or personnel problems.



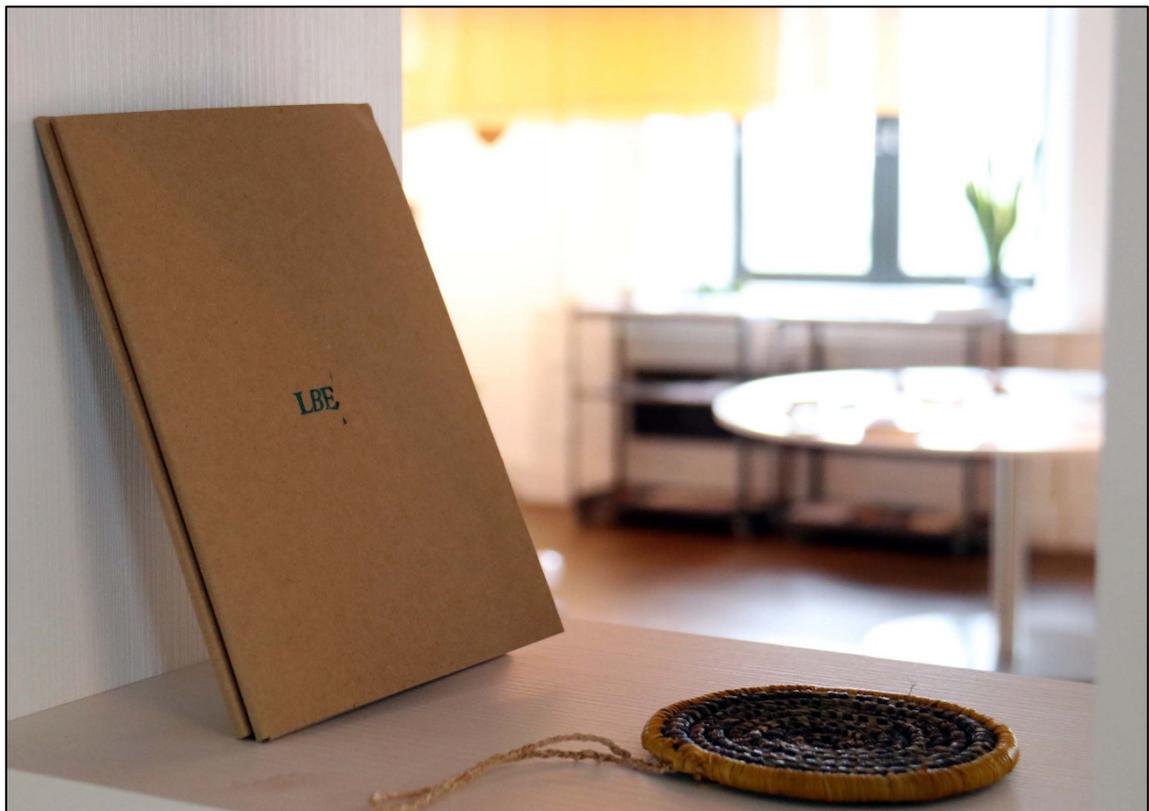
**Figure 1** The London Hub (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 2** Starting to set up the London Hub (photo: Samrawit Gougsa).



**Figure 3** Presenting Land Body Ecologies (photo: Ilan Kelman).

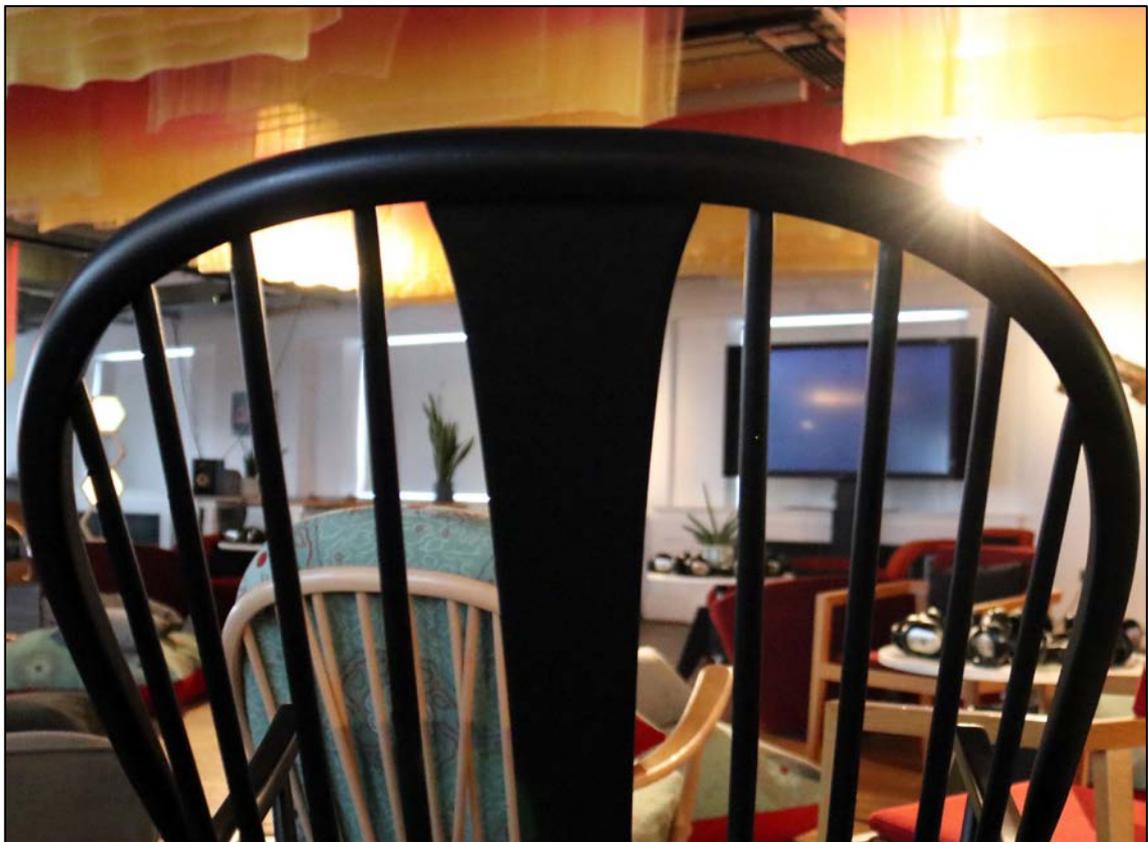


**Figure 4** Presenting Land Body Ecologies (photo: Ilan Kelman).

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**Figure 5** Listening to a Plant (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 6** The London Hub (photo: Ilan Kelman).

#### 4.2. The Art Hub

Art and cultural pieces from all the hubs are showcased, improving the working conversation and exchange environment aesthetically while reminding all of us why we are there and who we serve. Some pieces represent varying forms of crisis, some represent varying forms of hope, some represent both, and some represent neither, demonstrating the two concepts' vagueness, presence, and interlinkages. The photos display how some of the art is interactive and/or useable, such as a stool suitable for meetings and letters for spelling out feelings of the day.



Figure 7 Wood (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 8 Constructing Art (photo: Victoria Pratt).



**Figure 9** Bee Sculpture (photo: Cecilia Vilela).



**Figure 10** Fungus (photo: Ilan Kelman).

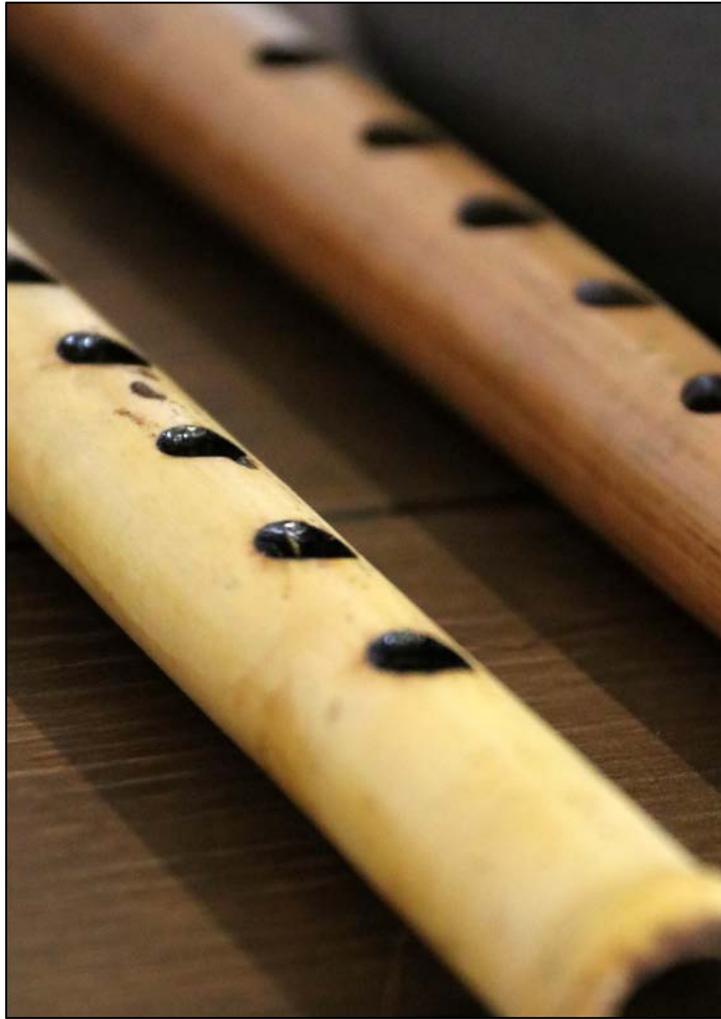
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**Figure 11** Letters (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 12** Insect (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 13** Flutes (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 14** Stool Manufactured by Mischief Plastics (photo: Ilan Kelman).

### 4.3. The Community Hub

People from around the world joined the hub for meetings, presentations, events, displays, and a week-long festival in June 2023, all connected to and critiquing of “Resilience in Crisis” themes regarding land trauma, solastalgia, and action on them. The photos indicate different ways in which the space can be set up, depending on needs, such as rows of chairs for an annual meeting or ad hoc beanbags surrounding by screens for an immersive podcast listening experience. Other examples included academic talks, artistic speeches, clay molding, tarot card readings, and food and drink representing one of the other hubs.



**Figure 15** Readyng for the community (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 16** Welcoming People (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 17** Readyng for a Podcast (photo: Victoria Pratt).



Figure 18 Collaborating and Learning (photo: Ilan Kelman).



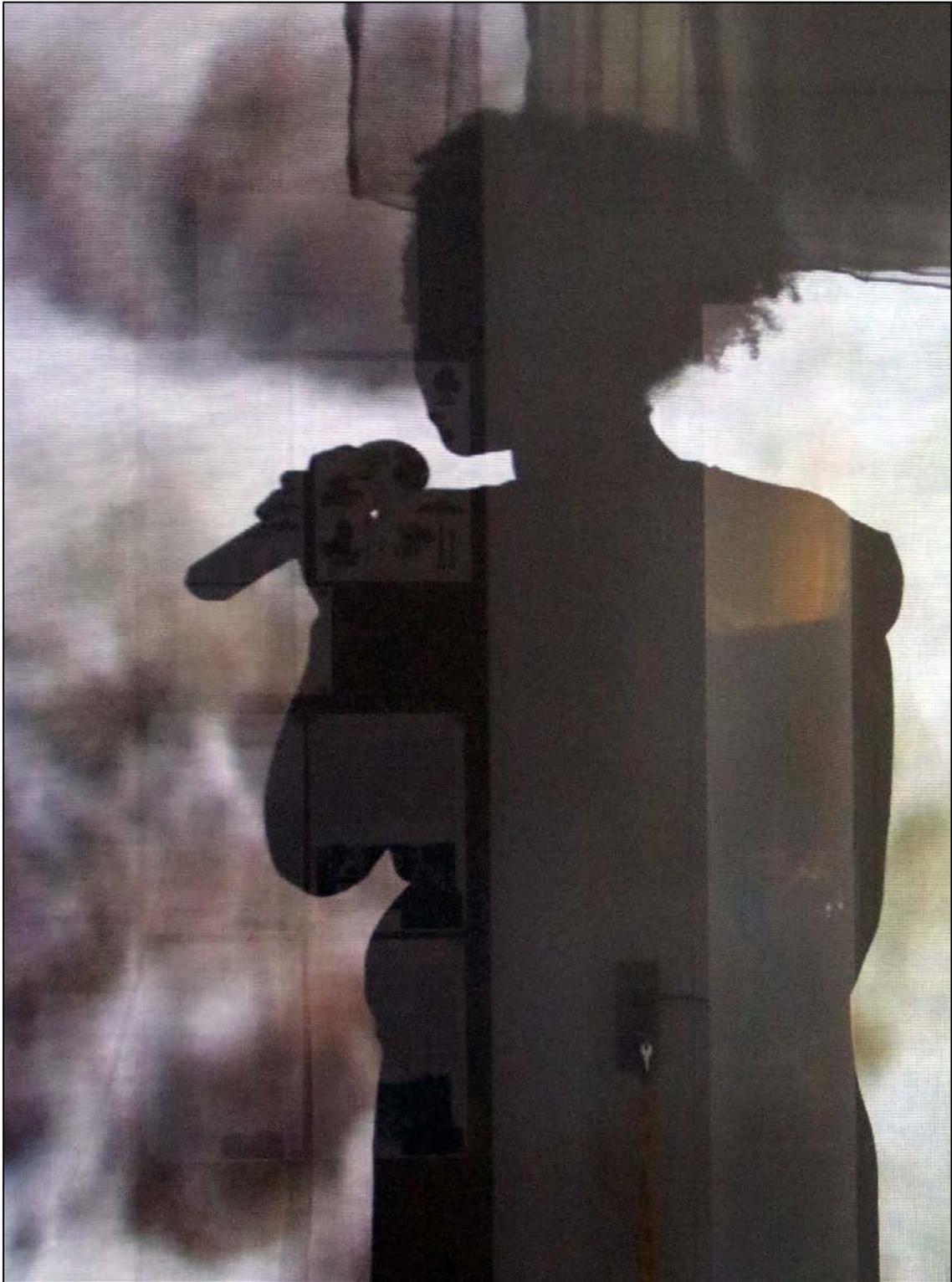
Figure 19 Inviting Exchange (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 20 Food and Drink for a Podcast Launch (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 21 Food and Drink for a Podcast Launch (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 22** Launching a Podcast (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 23** The Listening Experience (photo: Ilan Kelman).



**Figure 24** The Audio and Visual Experience (photo: Ilan Kelman).

#### 4.4. The Idea Hub

The Hub's different spaces bring together different communities in different ways to generate different ideas, using research, art, conversation, interaction, and communities. The photos show individual and team laptop working, creating art, conducting science, greeting people, and socializing.

Page | 17

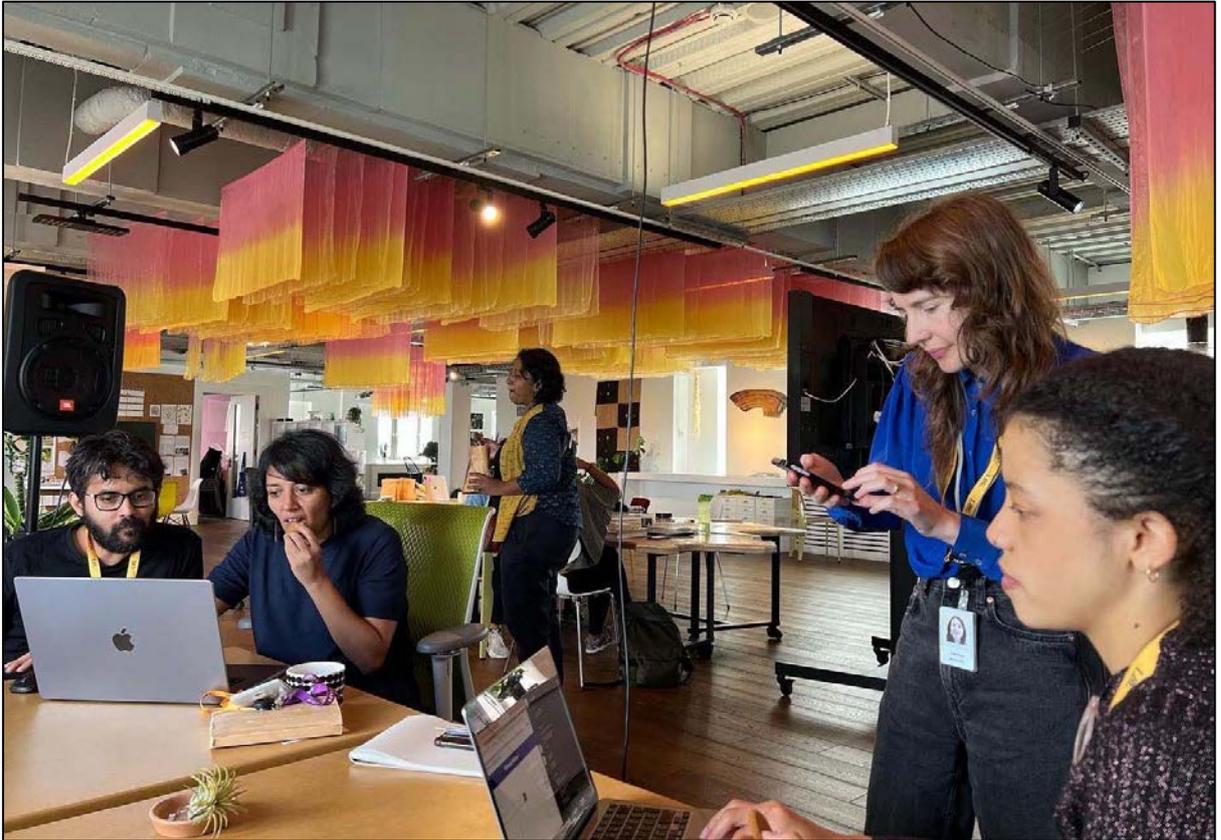


Figure 25 Developing Ideas (photo: Victoria Pratt).



Figure 26 Illustrating Ideas (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 27 Building Ideas (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 28 Presenting Ideas (photo: Victoria Pratt).



**Figure 29** Implementing Ideas (photo: Victoria Pratt).



Figure 30 Technical Direction (photo: Ilan Kelman).

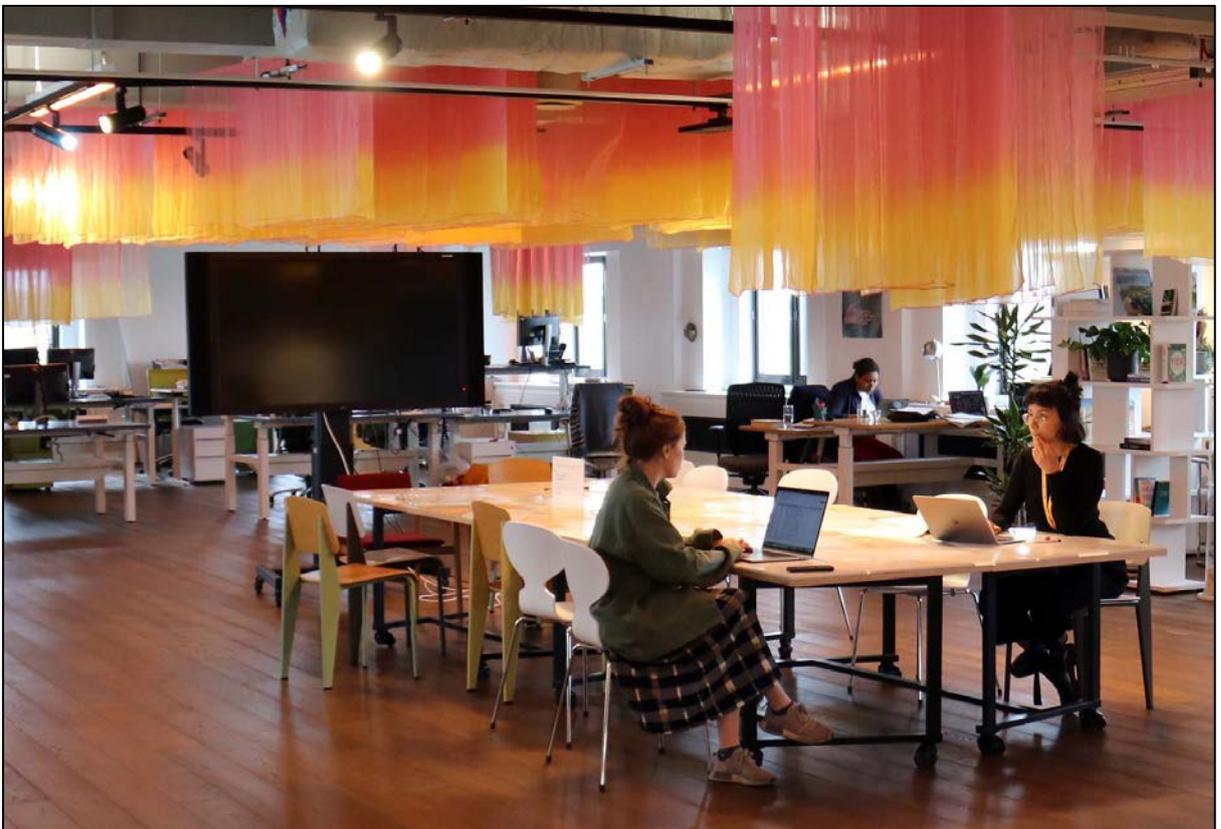


Figure 31 Creative Direction (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 32 Creating Inspiration (photo: Ilan Kelman).



Figure 33 Using Inspiration (photo: Ilan Kelman).

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Figure 34 Relaxing (photo: Ilan Kelman).

## 5. More Than Crisis and Resilience

These sections of the photo essay and the photos comprising them cannot be viewed linearly. As with resilience and crisis, they are not neatly compartmentalized as required by the structure of a photo essay and accompanying text in an academic journal. Instead, as The Hub does, they show how art, science, and community are mixed and melded, so the photo essay needs to be viewed in this way, despite its presentation.

This exchange and interaction aim to deliver balance. The violence and trauma to this planet, to the people on it, and to their land and environments are terrifyingly real. The hopes nonetheless remain inspiringly real. Across peoples, languages, cultures, continents, knowledges, and wisdoms, Land Body Ecologies is not the three autonomous concepts in its name, but is rather a single process and connection for bettering and healing (Ahmad et al., 2022; Gougsa et al., 2023). Rather than becoming mired in the indisputable solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005), with wider social and environmental devastation impacting people's mental health and well-being (Albrecht et al., 2007), The London Hub and the photos representing it aim to center support and pathways for moving forward by linking people who are going through challenging times based on local-to-global changes that they have not enacted.

They aim to help themselves overcome the difficulties, using local processes based in their peoples and environments, with others including *Buen Vivir* from Latin America (Caudillo-Félix, 2012) and *Falepili* from Tuvalu (Chambers, 1983). These processes acknowledge the negative vocabulary expressing horror, including climate grief, eco-grief, eco-anxiety, climate crisis, climate emergency, and climate catastrophe. They also acknowledge the cycle of destruction that this crisis-laden vocabulary imbues and foists (Hodder & Martin, 2009; McHugh et al., 2021) including adverse

impacts on mental and physical health and well-being. Land Body Ecologies has been working with knowledge-based alternatives for balance, moving beyond the ubiquitous doomerism to suggest evidence-based and action-based eco-inspiration, climate hope, and positive activities (e.g., Flores et al., 2022; Johnson-Jennings et al., 2020) including the Symbiocene which refers to nature and humanity obtaining mutual benefit by living together (Albrecht, 2020).

Page | 23

Despite the contradiction of being in the center of a megacity on the fifth floor of a large edifice, the London Hub hopes to epitomize and embolden exploration and implementation of conceptualizations such as the Symbiocene, Buen Vivir, and Falepili—and far beyond, notably drawing on the needs and offerings of the other hubs. Learning from each other and exchanging what is happening and what ought to be done, from teaching/learning to legal action, from academic papers and blogs to photo essays and performances, forms, melds, shapes, and extends Land Body Ecologies for the world.

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## Resume

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