The Idea Stores as Urban Catalyst to uplift the Life of Residents in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Koichiro AITANI*1

1 Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, Texas A&M University, USA

Abstract
The Idea Store of London is a unique type of educational community center that offers library services along with adult learning courses. It was initiated in 1999 by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, where the usage of library was far below the average of residents in the Greater London. While the national average was around 50%; more than 80% of the residents are not using the library there. The new concept, “Idea Store”, was come up with after the in-depth surveys for 600 residents to ask the reason why the residents do not visit the library, and what will make the residents to go to the library. More than 50% of residents are immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the strong character of the Borough is the mixture of “Rich” and “Poor”. Response to the answers of the questionnaires, Idea Store team came up with the strategic solutions to make residents to familiarize to the new library, “Idea Store”. Since the first “Idea Store” opened in 2002 in Bow, several others have opened in London: Chrisp Street (2004), Whitechapel (2005), Canary Wharf (2006), and Watney Market (2013). This paper will discuss about the impact of Idea Store.

Keywords: Idea Store; Library; Learning; Urban Regeneration; Strategy Relocation; Urban Catalyst

1. Introduction
The Greater London area is composed of the financial district; the City of London is known for the St. Paul Church and the London Stock Exchange Incorporated; it has 32 districts. The City of London is the center of the economy, and originated from the ancient Romans. The city and 10 districts from inner London, and the outside part of the city are surrounded by 20 districts. This part is called outer London.

The population of Greater London is about 8.2 million, the upper classes and the middle classes who have a high income tend to live in the West End (the west side of the city), or the Northwestern or Western

*Contact Author: Koichiro Aitani, PhD,
Associate Professor
3137 TAMU, Bldg. A –431
College Station, TX 77843-3137
USA
Tel: +1.979.845.3218
e-mail: kaitani@arch.tamu.edu
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area. On the other hand, immigrants and people with low income live in the Southern or Eastern area over the Thames River.

London Borough of Tower Hamlets is the subject of this paper. Tower Hamlets, which adjoins the East area of the city has 238,000 people. Its public order was bad historically, it was known as the area which many poor people live in London. Half of the residents were Black of Asian immigrants, 15% were Pakistani and 22% were Bangladeshi. People deserved to improve the public order and looked for a way to enhance the education level. The Idea Store was established in order to meet their request.

In the time of the British Empire, there are a lot of harbor facilities along the Thames in the Tower Hamlets. The districts on the East side of the London Bridge are called Docklands. The core of them is the West India Dock, it is known as Canary Wharf today, and it was a spot to trade with the West Indies. Although the British Empire reigned over some parts of the globe in 18th and 19th centuries, the Empire declined in 20th century. In addition, the West India Dock was too small to transport goods by trucks or container ships, and as a result a container terminal was built along the lower reaches of the Thames, such as Port of Tilbury. Therefore, Docklands has declined remarkably, and there were a lot of unemployed people in 1980’s due to the closing of all the docks in Tower Hamlets.

When the Prime, Minister, Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) took power, the government created Enterprise Zone and made the Docklands special economic zone as a relief measure. Thus, Docklands were promoted to large-scale development and renovation of the local warehouses and factories. A special feature of the redevelopment was the addition of the Canary Wharf. Multinational companies such as banks and securities companies were anxious to build a financial district which had modern skyscraper. Taking the demand, Olympia and York, an investment company in Canada, redeveloped the West India Dock into a financial city subcenter. The master plan was one of the largest redevelopments in the world and was made by Skidmore, Owing & Merrill, commonly known as SOM. The author worked from 1999 to 2007.

It seemed that the project progressed with smooth sailing; however, it was on the verge of business collapse due to some accidents, such as delay in beginning service of Jubilee Line. In addition, it lacked transportation capacity because it only had access to Docklands Light Rail (DLR). But it recovered after the opening of the Jubilee Line in 2000, and the management conditions had been on the rise due to hosting the London Olympics 2012 despite getting damaged in the financial crisis of 2007-08. In recent years, the pace of construction accelerated for the condominiums for the wealthy classes around the city and multiple redevelopments along the Thames. Therefore, the Tower Hamlets is a unique area in Greater London in which the wealthy people and poor immigrants coexist.

2. Idea Store

Idea Store is a “Library” that has many new ideas, just like a store. In 1998, the utilization rate of a library was 55 percent in the UK; however, that is 18 percent in Tower Hamlets. The fact that more than 80 percent of the residence didn’t use the library shocked the government. Therefore, it was concluded that the library was not needed by the residents.

The government tried to increase the rate of the library. Sergio Dogliani, a responsible person of the library, made a plan: The Idea Store Project. This project capitalized at 2 million dollars on April in 1999. In addition, they did market research to get the public feeling. The research was done for around 600 people who didn’t use the library by the private corporation. It distinguished between location, income, race, age and gender.

The staff visited the objects for about 1 hour. They received feedback about why they do not go to the library and what inclines them to go. After that, they considered how to solve using the requests. As a result
of research, 98 percent of the residents felt the library was important. However, they also received the
response that they didn’t get suitable, high quality services there. In addition, it has bad circulation and other
negative aspects. These are the main 5 reasons people do not go to the library.

1. Don’t have time (50%)
2. The opening time is too short (31%)
3. Have no interest (30%)
4. Lacks book variety. (30%)
5. Bad environment (12%)

In addition, these are the main 7 suggestions on how to improve the library.

1. To extend the opening time (63%)
2. To locate nearby shopping streets (59%)
3. To have a service to get the district information (58%)
4. To open on Sundays (56%)
5. To exhibit art
6. To be able to rent DVDs
7. To have more books

As a result, Tower Hamlet district made these 5 countermeasures

1. To buy more books and have well-stocks.
2. To invest to IT
3. To change the opening time more useful for the residents
4. To support education
5. To make new services about rentals

The feedback about the location influenced the decision to consolidate the existing facilities and create
one location for the Idea Store. They extended the time they were open from 46 hours a week to everyday.
For example, the opening times changed

Monday-Tuesday: 9 am - 9 pm
Friday: 9 am - 6 pm
Saturday: 9 am - 5 pm
Sunday: (depends on the library): 11 am - 5 pm (case of Whitechapel district)

Like this example, the opening time was extended at 150 percent.

3. The Strategic Locations and Capital Investors

Now, there are five Idea Stores in London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The first one built was the Idea Store
Bow, which was built in 2002. The second Idea Store built was Chrisp Street, which was built in 2004. The
third Idea Store, Whitechapel, which is the largest in the area, was built in 2005. The fourth Idea Store
Canary Wharf, was built in 2006. The fifth Idea Store, Watney Market, was built in 2013. Cubitt Town Library,
Bethnal Green Library and Tower Hamlets Local History Library, still exist, and continue to open. Therefore,
there are eight libraries in all. Fig-1 shows location of Tower Hamlets and the eight libraries. Each library is
built near commercial facilities, such as markets and shopping malls, because the residents demand this. In
order to reduce the cost and the number of employees, some existing libraries are integrated. Moreover,
each library opens for all residents to visit easily in the area. Also, the location is near a main street or station.
The investor of each library varies. Table-1 shows five Idea Stores, while Table-2 shows each capital funders.
Fig-1 Location of London Borough of Tower Hamlet and 5 Idea Store and 3 Library

Table-1 Brief of 5 Idea Store

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea Store</th>
<th>Architect</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Floor Area (Style)</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Study Desk • PC</th>
<th>Cost GBP (JPY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idea Store Bow</td>
<td>Bisset Adams</td>
<td>M-Th: 9am to 9pm</td>
<td>1,125 m²</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>28 • 37</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(May, 2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>F: 9am to 6pm</td>
<td>(Renovation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(376,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: 9am to 5pm</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: 10am to 4pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Store Chriss Street</td>
<td>Adjaye Associates</td>
<td>M-Th: 9am to 9pm</td>
<td>1,033 m²</td>
<td>53,138</td>
<td>20 • 46</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(July, 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td>F: 9am to 6pm</td>
<td>(New)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(990,000)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: 10am to 4pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idea Store Whitechapel</td>
<td>Adjaye Associates</td>
<td>M-Th: 9am to 9pm</td>
<td>3,400 m²</td>
<td>82,380</td>
<td>134 • 55</td>
<td>16,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(September, 2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td>F: 9am to 6pm</td>
<td>(New)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3,200,000)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>S: 9am to 5pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: 11am to 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idea Store Canary Wharf</td>
<td>Dearle &amp; Henderson</td>
<td>M-Th: 9am to 9pm</td>
<td>960 m²</td>
<td>28,461</td>
<td>Unknown • 39</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(March, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
<td>F: 9am to 6pm</td>
<td>(Renovation)</td>
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<td>(642,000)</td>
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<td>S: 9am to 5pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: 12pm to 6pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idea Store Watney Market</td>
<td>Bisset Adams</td>
<td>M-Th: 9am to 9pm</td>
<td>1,300 m²</td>
<td>21,463</td>
<td>78 • 41</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>(May, 2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td>F: 9am to 6pm</td>
<td>(New)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>(612,000)</td>
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<td>S: 9am to 5pm</td>
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4. From Information Center to Lifetime Education

The Idea Stores believe it is important to form relationships with the habitants around them. They also have three concepts: an interesting environment (engage), a system that searches habitants needs and promotes them to join (empower), and a service that can lead them to a more comfortable life (enrich). Books are no longer the only source of knowledge. The Idea Stores evolved from the concept of a library. They have supplied the services of lending media, such as CD’s and DVD’s since they opened. As you know, lending CD’s or DVD’s is common now. People from the outside of Tower Hamlets can borrow by 5 pounds; however, people inside of Tower Hamlets can borrow for free. If people don’t return their items in on time, they must pay extra money. The loan period is three weeks; people can borrow twelve books at once and only four movies at a time. People can re-new their loan period online, five times for books, and only once for CD’s and DVD’s, unless others request to borrow them during this period. The late fee for a book and a CD is 20 pence per day, for adults from the ages of 16 to 64 years old, while the late fee for a DVD is 1 pound per day. The maximum fee is 10 pounds. People over the age of 65 years old are free from the fee.

At that time, the internet was not widely used in Tower Hamlets. Only 31% of the population used the Internet. The Idea Stores encouraged people to want to use the internet by installing free terminal units. In this area, less than 35% of people had reading and writing skills. However, only 5% of them participated in adult education programs, such as lifetime. In short, because of the low educational standard, and the shortage of people available to work, the chance of working is limited. However, the jobs they could receive were low-paid ones. They couldn’t escape from this negative chain. The Idea Stores have enough lifetime and family learning programs in order to improve the habitants’ education level. Also, these programs meet their needs.

The programs are roughly divided into four groups: the employment support, the health support, the child rearing support, and the hobby or lifetime learning. These are composed of fourteen courses: preparations for lives or jobs, qualified courses, fitness, health and welfare, family learnings, business or finances, fashions or fabrics, foreign languages or translations, cooking, IT, theater arts, photos, technical lectures, visual arts, and so on. There are many various courses, courses for increasing their chance of getting jobs by raising their skills, or programs for enriching their hobbies that can lead to interactions with others, and more comfortable lives. For example, aromatherapy, yoga classes, language classes, such as foreign languages, software courses for Photoshop or Illustrator, massages for infants, mixing of DJ, theater,
creative dance, food, hygiene management, English learning as the second language, flower arrangement, accounting, music or animation, web design, art history, palmistry, business know-how, mask productions, health food or recipe, reading for children, relaxation, gardening, kite productions, driving licenses, tea, time managements, and so on. There are over 900 courses. Nowadays, many staff members have knowledge of complementary medicine that supports people’s health. You can get details of the kinds of administrative services provided by the government of Hamlets from the Idea Stores.

In order to keep these systems, the idea stores have many qualified librarians, lecturers teaching the lifetime learning programs, and staff members that habitants can feel free to consult with their troubles or questions. Some employees are not only teachers, but also people from bookstores or the service industry. Librarians with special knowledge work at the back side, which is also known as the office spaces. On the other hand, staff members whose job is service for habitants usually work on the frontline. These members always communicate with habitants, and give them appropriate advices. In short, not only are objects offered for support, but human interaction is also offered for media that introduces information or knowledge. We can easily find staff members because they all put on the same outfit with their logo of the Idea Store. Moreover, they are employed and educated by the Idea Stores to improve their face to face communication skills. Therefore, they look very kind so that we can talk to them casually.

5. Two Idea Stores by Sir. David Adjaye

Sir. David Adjaye consulted in an investigation in a market and was the design architect of two Idea Stores. As a son of a diplomat, he was born in 1966. Later in life, he became an architect in Tanzania and later moved to British Tsutomu. He began working independently in 2000 after that. He created Idea Store Crisp Street, and in 2004 he opened a second Idea Store Crisp Street. The idea for the store spread all over the world. The image of the White Chapel was unique to the flag ship store and it was completed in 2005. David Adjaye has been valued as the best architects under 40 in the United Kingdom.

The plan of the Idea Store Crisp Street is to design a space for people in the area to use whenever and however (Photo 1). The libraries in the old days were solid and formally styled. On the other hand, the libraries now have casual outward appearance. The outer walls are made of glass and have blue, green, and clear glass alternately arranged. This is a design common to the Whitechapel. The striped design of the Tower Hamlet District expresses a modern architecture design. The name of the libraries in the Tower Hamlet District is “Idea Store” because they can be entered casually. In addition, the casual appearance is familiar to the nearby inhabitants. As you can see in Photo 2 and 3, in the existing shop district of the Crisp Street, they plan to design a second floor of the store, called an extension. This idea of high-rise commercial establishment housing for low-income people developed after the war. A parking lot and a store equal a low-rise ridge. This is also called the super block on a roof. Idea Store Whitechapel has five stories and is quite a huge building (Photo 4). The exterior is same as the exterior of Crisp Street. There are many stores on the sidewalk of the frontal road. This area has a diverse atmosphere. There is also a post office and a hospital in this area. Many immigrants such as people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Africa visit the Whitechapel frequently. This building matches another building that is nearby. The location of the building is good, and people tend to drop in. The surface parking lot was also recently enlarged to the structured parking lot (Photo 5).

As you can see from Photo 6 and 8, when people walk to the White Chapel from the station, they are invited to enter the building by the glass wall similar to a banner advertisement. This is because the outer wall on the west side is faces the front road. It also has a staircase on the side of the outer wall. This enables people to access the second and third floor. The space of the stairwell is an atrium in order to connect the building and exterior space. As you can see from Fig-2, which is a plan view and a sectional view of the Idea
Store White Chapel, it looks five stories from the avenue and two stories from the back street. There are 2 elevators, an evacuation staircase (which is called Sea the Stair), and restroom in the center of the middle story. This area serves a variety of functions, such as storage for many CDs and DVDs (Photo 9), a corner for people to search the Internet (Photo 10), classrooms, nurseries, dance studios, medical centers, an outdoor terrace, and advertisement signs (Photo 11). Wooden furniture in the interior and louvers make the space soft. There is a café to have inexpensive breakfast and a beverage; there is also a community library (Photo 12). In order to respond to the desire for correspondent IT people, there are computers in most rooms. It can be a meeting location or a place of relaxation between residences.

Fig-2 2nd Floor Plan & Cross Section

Photo 1 Idea Store Crisp Street (1), Photo 2 Idea Store Crisp Street (2), Photo 3 Idea Store Crisp Street (3)

Photo 4 Idea Store Whitechapel (1), Photo 5 Idea Store Whitechapel (2), Photo 6 Idea Store Whitechapel (3)
6. Conclusion

The Idea Store influenced the Tower Hamlets District, and the effects caused the synergy of the increased number of visitors to a shopping center. In fact, the percentage of those who use the libraries is about four times as many as when the Idea Stores first opened. It appears the economic effect in aspects of culture and creativity improved the lifelong education program. Of course, it goes without saying that improving visitors’ skills required in working places provides them with the opportunities to enter some companies and also contributes to increasing their incomes. The more residents improve their quality of life, the less the number of crimes there is. As a result, the Tower Hamlets District became recognized as a place where people are comfortable to live and work. The image of danger and poverty has been gradually eliminated and the negative effect is turning into a positive effect.

The government of the United Kingdom was so stimulated by the moment that they have tried changing existing normal libraries for the past ten years into the Idea Stores. However, at this stage, the Tower Hamlets District only has the Idea Store, unfortunately. Though the challenge was failed, many groups all
over the world demand to observe the system and the operation procedures of the Idea Store. In order to respond to these demands, there is a simple free tour in one of the buildings and a variety of tours that cost a small fee. Participants can choose the number of buildings they observe, listen to staff presentations, and select the quantity of information and time; some options are one hour, three hours, half day, and all day. This movement causes the ambition to spread the brand of the Idea Store around the world.

The British are good at reading the change of the ages or residents' needs correctly, and achieve remarkable results by carrying out plans quickly. The character helped the success of the Idea Store. Moreover, the construction and operating costs rely on not only its funds, such as taxes, but also some foundations and organizations. This project is a pioneer to unify a continuity-growth process and business by giving profit to everyone who has something to do with it and raising added value. This is a British philosophy of management, and there are a lot of things to learn from this urban strategy.

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