

# TBILISI TEA TROLLEY



# ENJOY TEA

# PROJECT CONTEXT

## SPACES

Sustainable Public Areas for Culture in Eastern Countries

SPACES is  
funded by the  
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[www.euroeastculture.eu](http://www.euroeastculture.eu)

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SPACES caravan  
Arts and culture maps  
Social research  
Virtual spaces, pool of knowledge  
School of missing studies  
Artist in residence programme  
Cultural policy debate  
SPACES film



EUROEAST  
CULTURE

Eastern Partnership Culture Programme  
funded by the European Union

[ ENGLISH ]

**Get connected  
Get visible  
Get stronger**

\*

**Opening urban  
public spaces  
for artists,  
cultural workers  
and researchers,  
residents  
and youth**

## **SPACES - Sustainable Public Areas for Culture in Eastern Countries**

The recovery of public spaces for art, culture and urban residents is the core topic in SPACES. The project's activities take place in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, where local artistic communities offer strong potential and represent the dynamics of change in the art world. They are promoters of processes in community rehabilitation, economic development and social change. SPACES has chosen to convert these challenges into actions.

With SPACES, artists and cultural workers in these countries are putting on participatory arts events. These are accompanied by processes of networking, self-education, social research and policy debates. SPACES will strengthen this vibrant example of contemporary cultural production, open up new possibilities for artists and residents, and develop new concepts for cultural policies in the region.

## **SPACES - Մշակութային կայուն հանրային տարածքներ արևելյան երկրներում**

Արվեստի, մշակույթի և քաղաքային բնաչիկների համար հանրային տարածքների վերանվաճումը SPACES - ի հիմնական գաղափարն է: Ծրագրի գործողությունները տեղի են ունենում Հայաստանում, Վրաստանում, Մոլդովայում և Ուկրաինայում, ուր տեղական արվեստային համայնքները հզոր ներուժ են հանդիսանում՝ մարմնավորելով արվեստի աշխարհում փոփոխության դինամիկան: Նրանք համայնքային վերականգնման, տնտեսության զարգացման, ինչպես նաև սոցիալական փոփոխության խթանիչներ են: SPACES - ի նպատակն է վերածել այս մարտահրավերները գործողությունների. SPACES - ի շրջանակում այս երկրների արվեստագետներն ու մշակույթի գործիչները իրականացնում են մասնակցային արվեստի միջոցառումներ՝ ուղեկելով դրանք ցանցային հաղորդակցման, ինքնակրթության, սոցիալական հետազոտության և հայեցակարգային քննարկումների գործընթացներով: SPACES - ը կուժեղացնի ժամանակակից արվեստի արտադրության առկա աշխույժ հատվածը, նոր հնարավորությունների տարածություններ կստեղծի արվեստագետների և բնակիչների համար և հանդես կգա տարածաշրջանում մշակութային քաղաքականության նոր հղացքներով.

[ ARMENIAN ]

**ARM**

**Կապի մեջ մտիր  
Դարձիր տեսանելի  
Ուժեղացիր**

\*

**Քաղաքային  
հանրային  
տարածքների  
ստեղծում  
արվեստագետների,  
մշակույթի  
գործիչների և  
հետազոտողների,  
բնակիչների և  
երիտասարդների  
համար**

# OUR PROPOSAL

28/05 = 31/05

ვაკის პარკის მიწისქვეშა გადასასვლელი

Vake Park Underground

ჯონათან კარკუტი | ჯული სკოტი | ტორანჯ ხონსარი /  
Jonathan Karkut | Julie Scott | Torange Khonsari

ჯონათან კარკუტმა მიიღო მაგისტრის ხარისხი ანთროპოლოგიასა და სოციოლოგიაში მოგზაურობის და ტურიზმის განხრით, მუშაობს ლონდონის მეტროპოლიტენ უნივერსიტეტში.

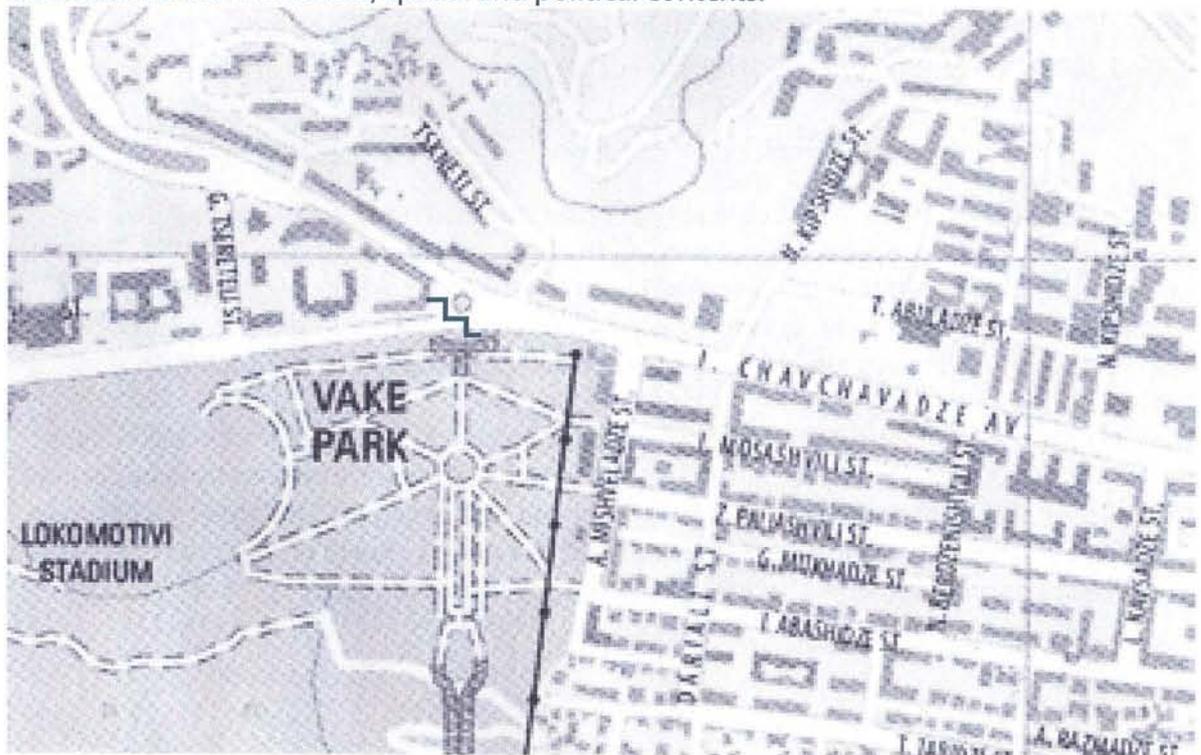
ჯული სკოტი არის ტურიზმის, კულტურისა და განვითარების უფროსი მკვლევარი ლონდონის მეტროპოლიტენ უნივერსიტეტში. თავის შრომებში იგი იკვლევს მახსოვრობის და არაცნობიერი მემკვიდრეობის როლს კონფლიქტურ და პოსტ-კონფლიქტურ საზოგადოებებში.

ტორანჯ ხონსარის საქმიანობის და საგანმანათლებლო კვლევის საგანს წარმოადგენს ხელოვნებისა და არქიტექტურის და არაფორმალურ სოციალურ, სივრცობრივ და პოლიტიკურ კონსტექსტს შორის კავშირი.

Jonathan Karkut completed an MA in the anthropology and sociology of travel and tourism and has since been based at London Metropolitan University.

Julie Scott is a senior research fellow in tourism, culture and development at London Metropolitan University. Her work explores the role of memory and intangible heritage in conflict and post-conflict societies.

Torange Khonsari's practice and research pedagogy lies in relational art and architecture theories and informal social, spatial and political contexts.



28/05 = 31/05

ვაკის პარკის  
მიწისქვეშა გადასასვლელი

Vake Park Underground

High Tea

ოთხი დღის განმავლობაში მოძრავი 'ჩაის სადგური' უფასოდ გაუმასპინძლდება მიწისქვეშა გადასასვლელების გამვლელებს ინგლისური ჩაით და სახლში გამომცხვარი ნამცხვრებით. ეს იქნება ერთგვარი პლატფორმა მასპინძლობისთვის, სადაც მიიპატიუბენ ადამიანებს და შეაგროვებენ სტუმრების მიერ მოყოლილ ამბებს ადგილობრივი მიწისქვეშა გადასასვლელების ისტორიის შესახებ. შეგროვდება მოგონებები და ისტორიები, რომელიც ქმნის ყოველდღიურობის 'ხელშეუხებელ მემკვიდრეობას' და საგნებს, რომელთა გარშემოც ეს ყველაფერი ვითარდება. ასევე, 'ჩაის სადგურის' გარშემო შედგება არაოფიციალური შეხვედრები მაცხოვრებლებთან და კულტურის მოღვაწეებთან, რათა მათი მხრიდან მივიღოთ შემოთავაზებები, თუ როგორ შეიძლება მოხდეს ქალაქის გამოუყენებელი და მიტოვებული ადგილების განახლება და გამოყენება თავიდან. მცირე სოციალური სივრცე უმასპინძლებს საუბრებს, დისკუსიებს და ამ დიალოგების ფონზე, დილის ან შუადღის ჩაის და ნამცხვრის მირთმევის ტრადიციის შედეგად, სპონტანურად შეიქმნება საფოსტო ბარათები და თვითნაკეთი წიგნები.

For four days, a mobile tea station will serve English tea and homemade cakes (from the women's institute recipe book) in and around the underground passages in Tbilisi. This will become a platform for hosting, inviting people and collecting local narratives and traditions, and people's stories about the passages. We will gather memories and stories which make up the 'intangible heritage' of everyday life and objects around which they revolve.

Small informal meetings and discussions with residents and cultural practitioners will be staged around the tea station to generate a range of proposals concerning how underused or derelict spaces of the city may be rejuvenated and utilised again. This small social space will be a venue for conversations, discussions and the production of ad hoc postcards and fanzines, all around the relaxed setting of morning or afternoon tea and cakes!

The proposal in this underpass was to share our narratives from London underpasses, past and present. We wanted to exchange local stories about the underpass in Vake park for home made British tea and cake.

This went down very well and the space very quickly became a site for gathering, discussion, heated political disagreements, street musicians and students wanting to take part.



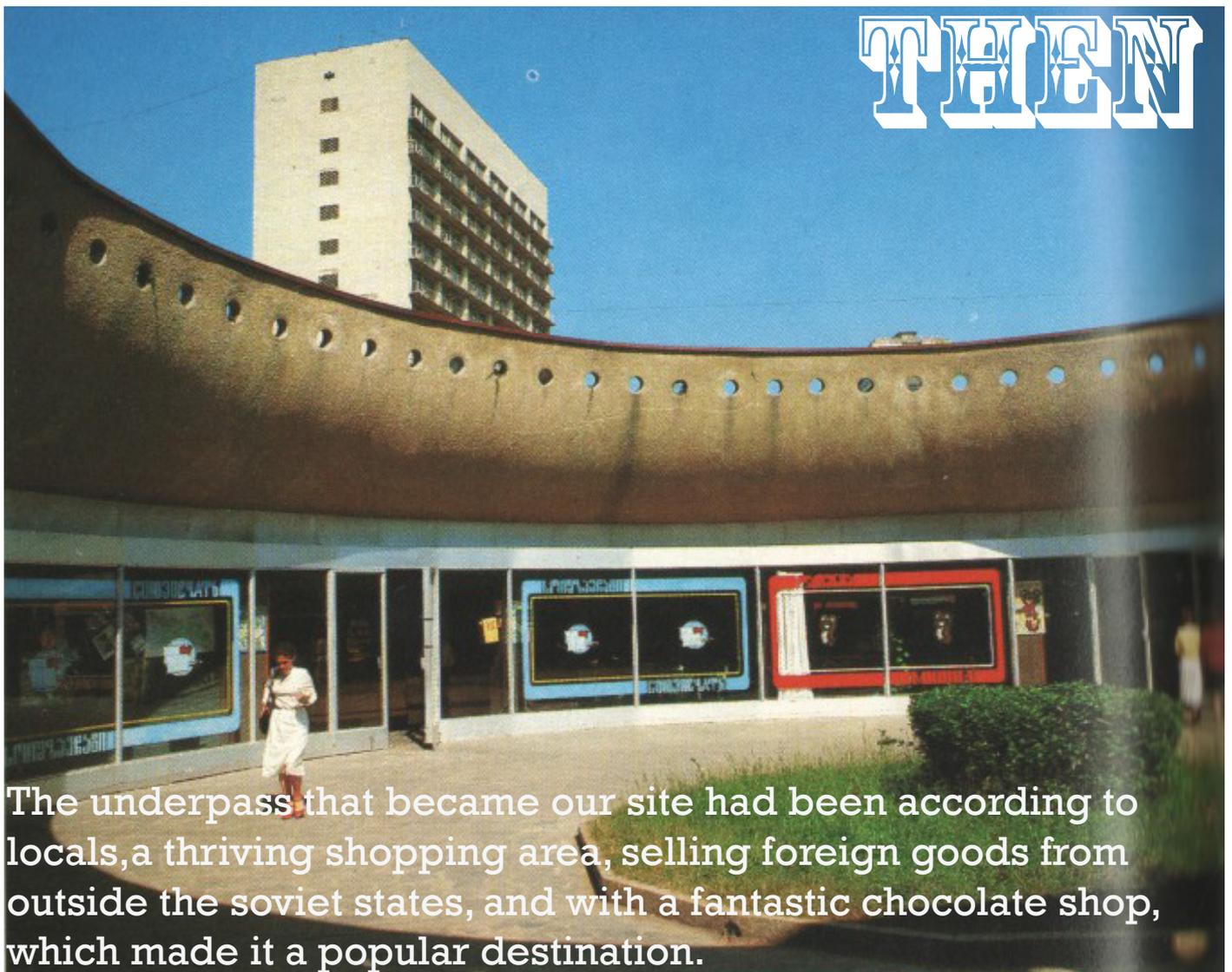
# TBILISI





# OUR LOCATION

There is hardly any material that describes Vake Park or its adjacent underpass. The park which is walking distance to embassies of Russia and Ukraine as well as the Tbilisi State university was built in 1946 in the area called Vake. Vake is said to have been built over the graves of the victims of the 1930s Purges.



The underpass that became our site had been according to locals, a thriving shopping area, selling foreign goods from outside the soviet states, and with a fantastic chocolate shop, which made it a popular destination.

Today it consists of shops which are there, not due to its popular location, but because of close friendships between the workers and shop owners. The underpass belongs to them emotionally as they socialise there and inhabit it everyday.



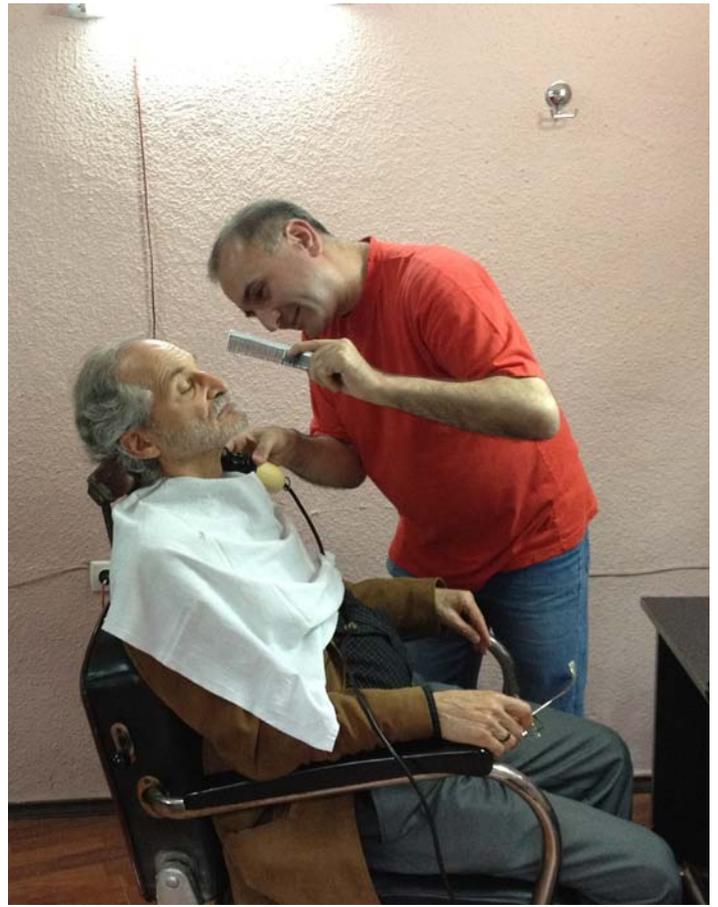
We find ourselves in a central underground space that radiates out from the substructure of the fountain of the roundabout above our heads. Four shops are open and functioning in the underground passage: a food shop (pies and pastries); a second hand dress shop; a barber/hairdresser; and in a cupboard-like room with no windows, a cobbler works. One small premises is being worked on for conversion to a sports bar, offering beer and TV for watching football. It is to be ready in time for the European Cup in June. The premises we are using to keep the Tea Trolley is being fitted out as a bakery and is due to open soon. Another couple of premises are closed and shuttered. There is some graffiti, and CCTV cameras (which Lasha the barber tells us were fitted 3 months ago).

Three different passages lead off in different directions. We learn that there is a university nearby, and banks above. People use the passage to transit – to get to the park or the bus stops. Others use it because they are regular customers of businesses here, or to visit their friends who work in the shops and businesses. The longest running business here has been open for five years.

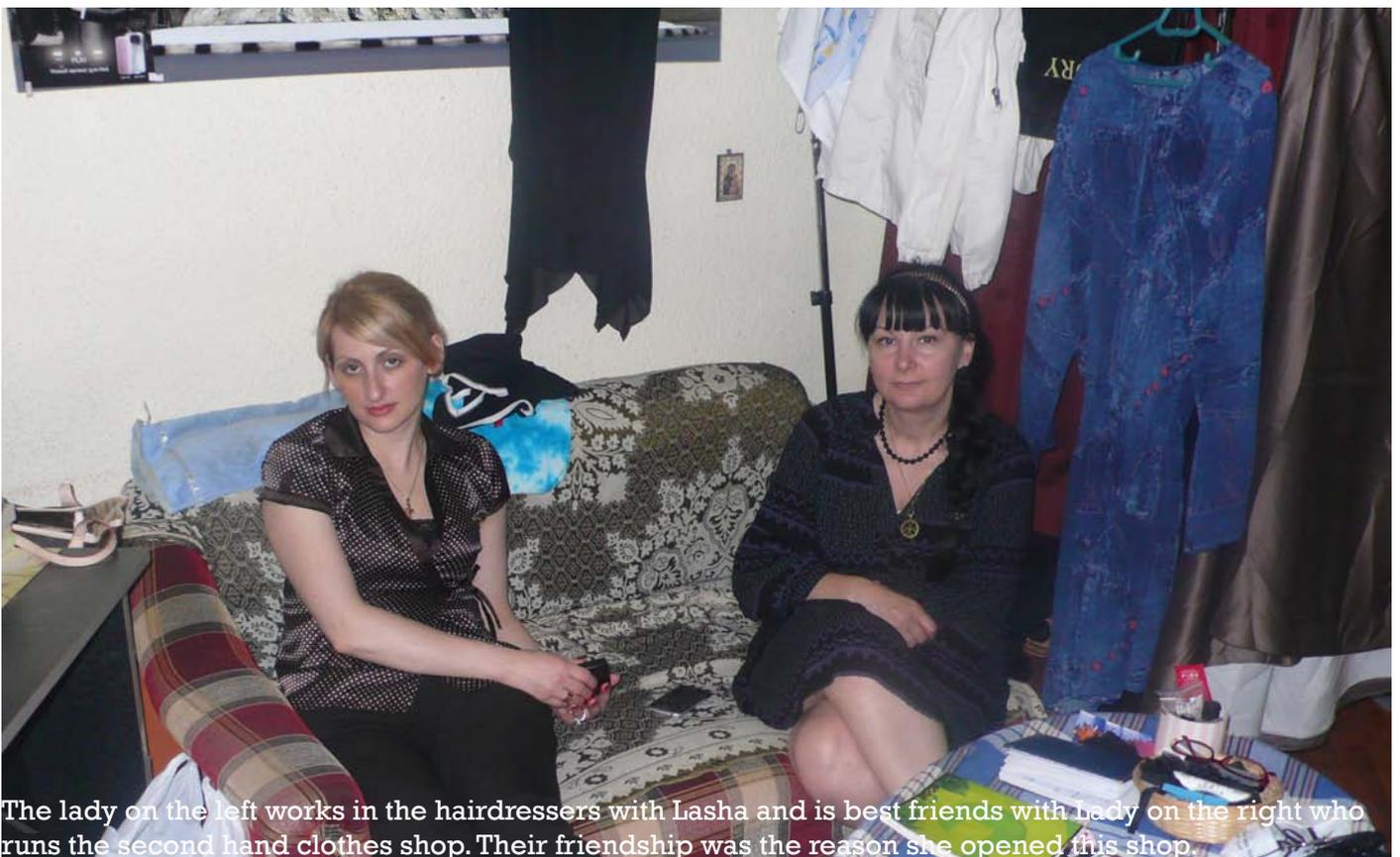
We wheel out the Tea Trolley and get it ready, hanging out the bunting, displaying the postcards of London Underpasses, and setting out the tea, cakes and biscuits. Some of the passers-by are interested and allow themselves to be drawn in to the welcoming space of the Tea Trolley. Others are interested, but keep their distance, whilst yet others glance quickly and hurry by, paying little attention.



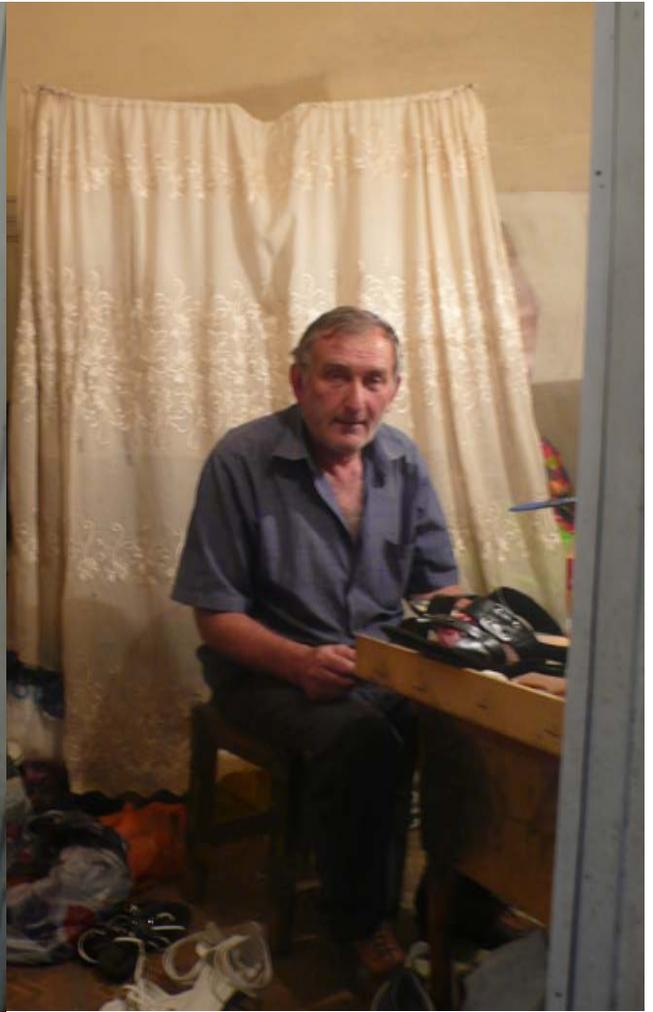
# OUR LOCALS



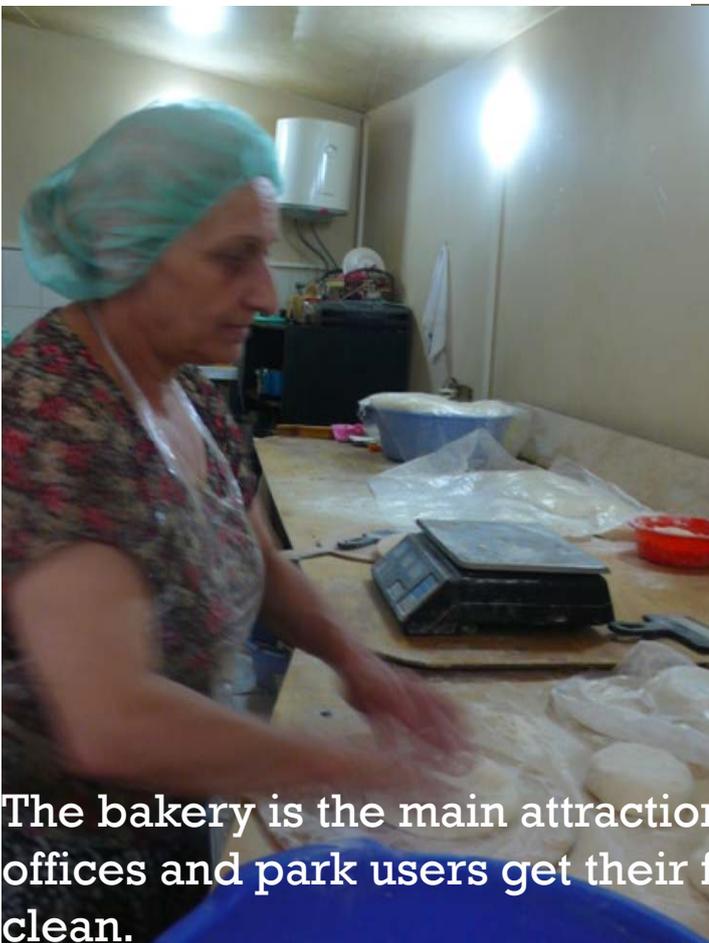
Lasha is the local barber who is extremely social, puts music on that blasts in the space chats to everyone and knows all the gossip. He trained as a lawyer but thinks there is more money in hairdressing.



The lady on the left works in the hairdressers with Lasha and is best friends with lady on the right who runs the second hand clothes shop. Their friendship was the reason she opened this shop.



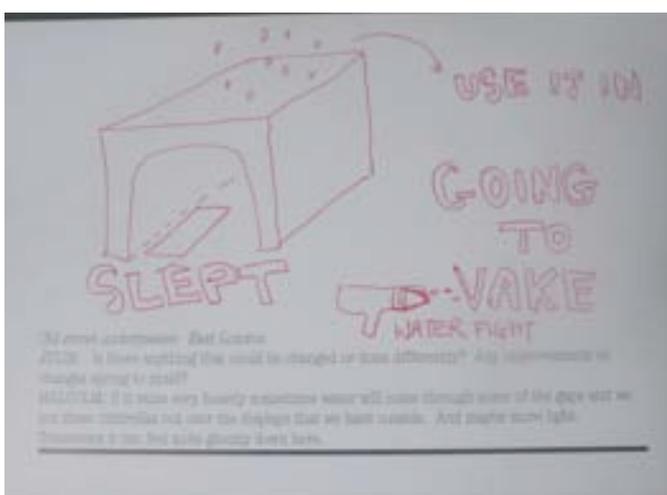
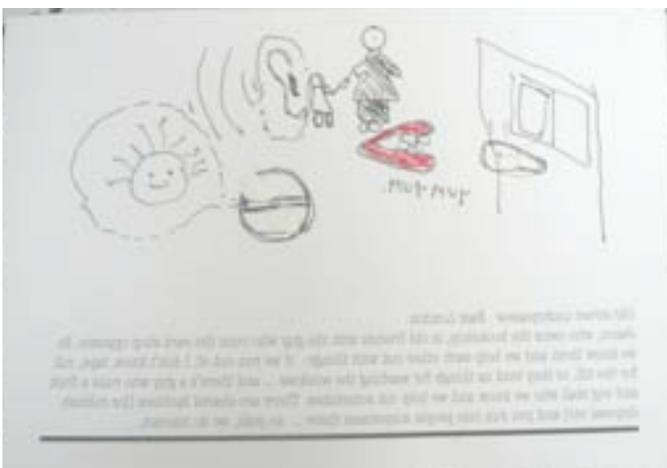
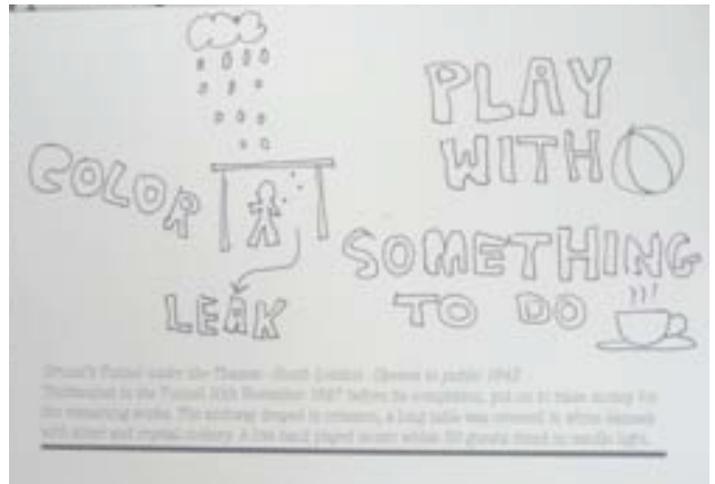
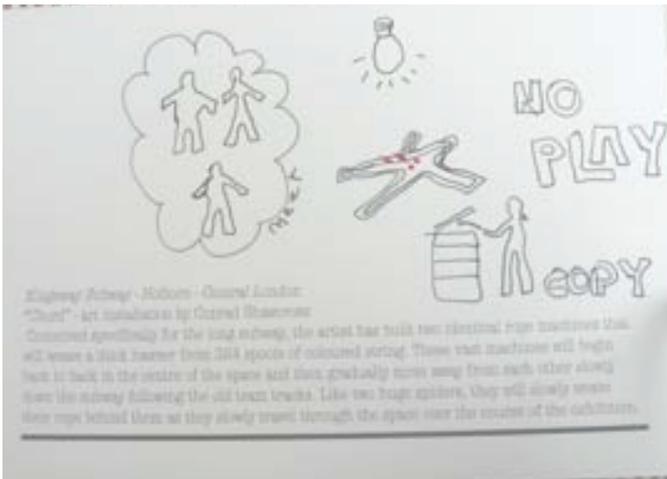
The Cobbler has worked near Lasha for 15 years. They used to have a shop next to each other above ground, but when the prices increased they moved to the underpass.



The bakery is the main attraction. People from the university, offices and park users get their food there as its good, fresh and clean.

# OUR STORIES

most of the narratives were drawn on the back of our London postcards and given to participants as a gift.





# A DAY .....

A steady stream of customers comes to the shops in the underpass, in particular, to the pastry shop and the hairdresser. A middle-aged woman passes by the trolley, not wanting to stop for tea – she goes to one of the windows of the pastry shop, she has a bag of what look like children's clothes – is she selling them? I walk around the other shops introducing myself – in the hairdressers, where I already know Lasha, I meet three ladies who are working there with him – a child is having his hair cut. Next door to them is the clothes agency – the operator of the business is sitting inside with her friend, who works next door at the hairdressers. The business has been open two years, it is 'normal, OK, so-so'. In the cobbler's little shop, he is sitting with a couple of friends, three middle-aged men together – old childhood friends, who all live in the neighbourhood. They have dried fish to eat, and in response to my invitation, tell me they are not interested in tea, they want beer to drink with their fish. They insist that I take a little parcel of fish with me to try. The fish are salty and oily.

The afternoon is wearing on. There is a rhythm to the day below ground – certain busy times, at other times, very quiet. And when there is a torrential downpour of rain, which we can hear beating down on the fountain above our heads, more people come to take shelter. As people pass through the underpass they stop to exchange a few words with friends and acquaintances. Everybody seems to know Lasha, in particular.

Lasha brings over one of his colleagues, and makes a great fuss of sitting her down so she can have tea and cake and a chat with us. She is 44 years old and has a son in his 20s. She has been a hairdresser for 19 years. She doesn't like being a hairdresser – she LOVES it!! When she is working, she is very happy. She does cuts and colouring too. She lives nearby. When she first moved 'underground' from the premises where she was working above ground, many of her clients did not follow – because it is a rich, posh neighbourhood, so they won't use the services in the underpass.

A man passes through on his way to the park with his two huge, bear-like dogs. Lasha tells me these are a traditional Georgian breed. By 4.40pm, things are pretty quiet, and we pack up the trolley to leave.



# LASHA

Lasha skirts around the edges of the tea trolley for a while, not making a direct approach to any of us, but 'being around' and chatting with our visitors and with Tako and Irakli – until suddenly, there he is at the centre of things! Lasha has been in the hairdressing business for about 12 years, having trained as a lawyer – but hairdressing pays better. For 7 years he had a business somewhere else (above ground), and he has been in the Vake Park underpass for 5 years. Business is good here, and he has his regular clients. He used to live nearby, but now comes in from his home by bus.

Lasha is keen to chat. He tells us that he used to dance with a Georgian dance troupe which toured internationally. He came to London on tour, and had his photograph taken next to Big Ben. He doesn't dance anymore because, he says, he is too old (in his 40s) and the dance is very physically demanding – you have to be very fit. But he knows many Georgians living in London, many students.

Lasha does not have (or does not tell us about) many specific, personal memories of the underpass. It seems to be for him a fairly uneventful, routine place – he recalls a few events that have been organised there, an exhibition or display which brought a few extra people to the underpass. It is a quiet, trouble free place – he did not refer to the need for the recently fitted CCTV cameras. However, the underpasses are for him part of a larger narrative about good governance in the country. Under the Soviets, for example, everything was terrible, including the underpasses. During the civil war, this underpass was destroyed. Since the Rose Revolution, everything has become much better, and the future looks great. The underpass has been restored, and the prospects are good, under Sakishvilli.

Lasha's account was roundly challenged by one of the members of GEOAIR who was present. Everything is NOT fantastic thanks to Sakishvilli. The underpass has never been destroyed, although many of the shops were burnt out during the fighting. Their discussion became very heated and animated, demonstrating how a discussion about an underpass is filtered by national political discourse.



# STUDENTS

Two young women – students at the nearby university, on a break between lectures. They frequently come during their breaks to buy something to eat from the ladies at the pastry shop. They are keen to practise their English, and intrigued by the idea of ‘joining us for tea’. They both live far away from Vake Park, in the suburbs about an hour away by bus. Neither of them really likes the underpasses, and they are taught by their parents to be afraid of them as dark places where crimes happen. And ‘Didn’t your parents ever tell you about the MAD MEN in the underpasses?’ one asks the other. They like the pastry shop in the underpass, but they don’t use the other businesses – the clothes in the clothes shop are not to their taste or style. But they like the tea trolley – ‘It should always be like this!!’



# MOLDOVAN LADIES

Sweeping through the underpass in a large, noisy gaggle, pouncing on the trolley and digging enthusiastically into the cakes. They say they are not gypsies, but Moldovan. They carry with them bags of clothes, which they sell on the move – they are not allowed to stop and unpack their stock. They made some sales to the pastry shop ladies.

# THE ACCORDIONIST

Nico had passed by yesterday when the trolley was being put together, and had promised to come again today to play for us. Sitting down on the bench, he played several songs for us, punctuated by quite formal speeches welcoming us to Tbilisi, and telling us that the people here are 'good people'. Nico doesn't usually busk in this underpass because there are not enough people – he passes through it on his way to other subways, buses or streets. Nico explained about his poverty, and how he had started to play the piano accordion. He is self-taught, and started when he was a little boy, listening to old songs on the radio. His repertoire is formed of these well known, traditional Georgian songs. His instrument is old and battered, and parts of it are held together with tape.

As we sit and talk, Nico's partner periodically disappears and comes back with a couple of cigarettes, one each for herself and Nico.

Eventually, they stand up and Nico formally takes his leave, thanking us for the tea and cake – however they reappear from time to time, to watch the proceedings, and play a few tunes.

Nico Stopped by again, and made several formal speeches expressing hospitality and touching on national politics. His partner arrived and eventually they went off together, after sitting for some time just joining in the conversation. Later they returned occasionally and sat a little distance away watching what was going on.

A busker crosses the underpass with his guitar, on his way to the park. Nico knows him, they are not really friends, but he knows him, as he knows all the other musicians in Tbilisi.



# TWO YOUNG MEN, A WOMAN AND A BABY

Happy to sit down and join us for tea, cake and a chat. One young man is particularly keen to talk with us and try out his English – the young woman says nothing, but occupies herself with the baby.

They tell us they want to study in Russia, and are on their way to the Embassy to try to sort out visas. The young man who speaks English offers lengthy and well thought-out ideas on the subject of underpasses. He recounts the case of one passage he knows which was cleaned up with decorations and glass panels with new lighting – but it was immediately utterly destroyed, therefore he believes that at the current state of development in Tbilisi they should not make any nice glass cases, structures and embellishments for the underpasses, only strong, robust things out of unbreakable materials.

He gives another example of an underpass which the Town Hall had cleaned up and repaired, and it was destroyed all over again; again, it was cleaned and repaired, with new lighting, CCTV and police patrolling regularly nearby. That was two months ago, and it is still undamaged, so this has evidently worked.

How and why do people make this destruction? ‘There are a lot of orphans in this society. It has been a violent, war-torn society, and there are many people without the love and care of a family, who are lost, frustrated, and angry. And this is how they take out their anger. But what they really need is to be looked after. Someone should take care of them and help them to change. Perhaps the church should take the lead, because people in Georgia are very religious, and the Church has a lot of influence.’



# ENGINEER, IN HIS SIXTIES

He rarely uses the underpass, and when he does, just for transit, so he thinks it is a spot of luck that he came down the underpass today and found us! Normally he prefers to go over the top – because, he says, ‘I am lazy!’ It is quicker and easier to go over the top, and he doesn’t have to deal with steps.

Now he is on his way to catch the bus to go to a photo exhibition in town. He rarely visits Vake Park himself – he thinks it is for ‘younger people’, although some older men meet in the Park to play backgammon, chess and dominoes.

He and his friends tend to use another green area, outside the park. He links the state of the underpasses to poverty. I ask if he is working himself. Not at the moment. Work has dried up. He had been involved recently in three projects. One has been completed, another, the money ran out before the project was completed, and the third one never started.

All the construction going on in the city centre gives the appearance of prosperity and industry to outsiders, but actually the contractors bring their own workers – there are no opportunities for local people.



# FILM STUDENT

By now a lot of the people from the SPACES project have come to join us to launch the Trolley, and the crowd around the Tea Trolley attracts even more attention.



A film student from the University joins us, and starts taking a lot of pictures of the Trolley and all the people. This student also comes for food during breaks from the University, as well as using the underpass for transit, but generally does not like underpasses – they are dark, dangerous, unpleasant places, to be avoided where possible, particularly at night time, even in a group. I ask: 'Which is more dangerous, the traffic, or the underpass?' The student smiles – 'The traffic is more dangerous, but the underpasses are more scary at night'

# ROCKERS

A group of teenagers (about 8 in total, only one boy) comes through first thing, are drawn to our cakes and ask if they can buy some. They are on their way through to the park, where they plan to spend the time together, and they want snacks for their picnic.

These kids are 'rockers' – they have T shirts and badges with rock bands (Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd), and they met at an open-air rock festival. So they are from all over Tbilisi, and they get together in the school holidays in Vake Park. They like Vake Park because 'it is quiet' and the boy likes to roller blade there.

They always pass through this underpass, and buy food from the pastry ladies – they also shop at the supermarket above the ground. Most of the girls do not like the underpasses – they are dark, smelly, and unpleasant. A couple, however, including the boy, like the underpasses – they find the dark and the whiff of danger edgy and gothic.

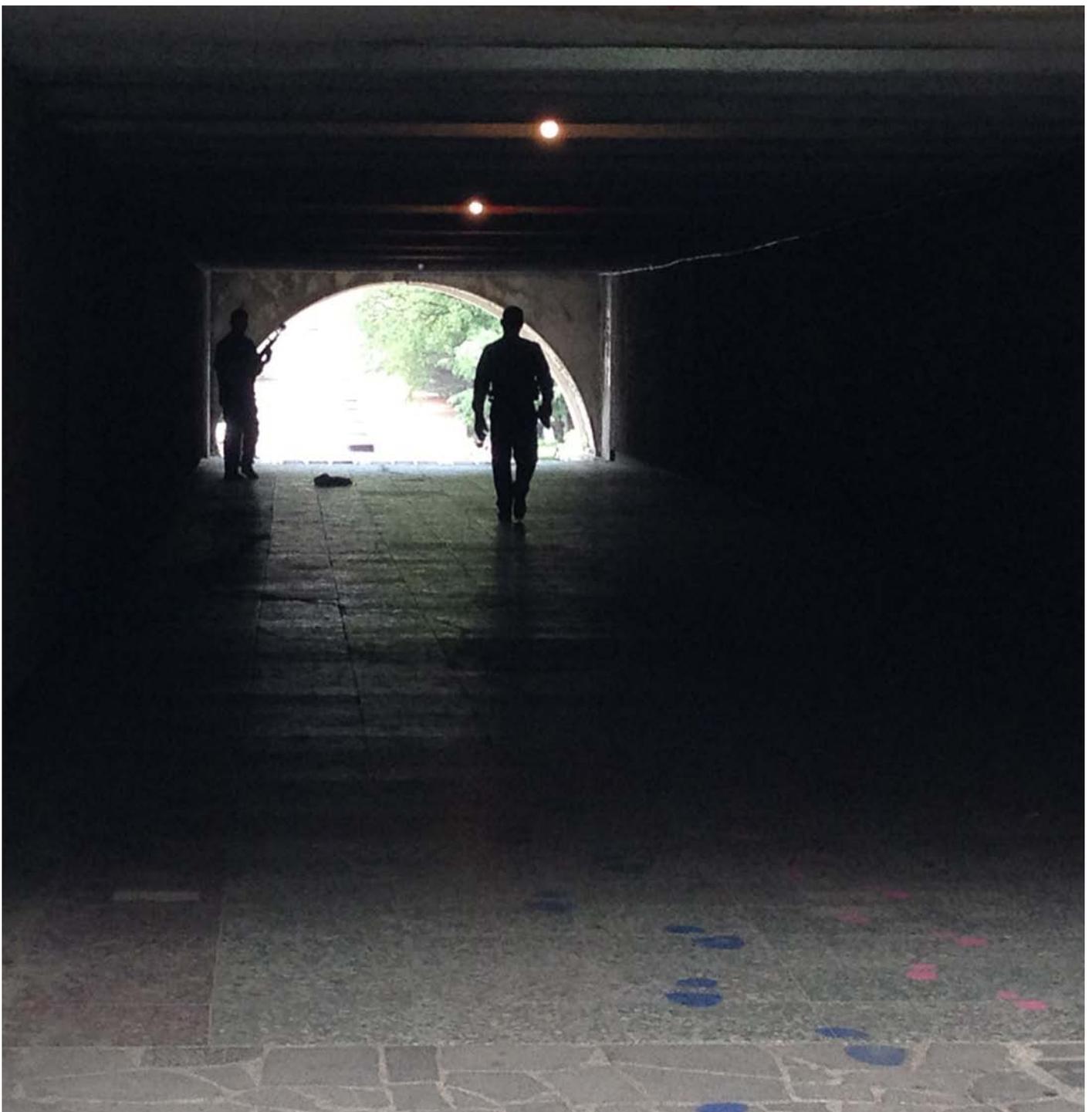
At night they are more scary – they don't like the scary noises – but the boy has also frequented the underpasses at night. However, the boy also – for this reason – likes to go to the underpasses at night, even on his own. Especially the Rose Revolution underpass. Red Bull organised an event at the Rose Revolution underpass – everybody was able to spray graffiti on the walls, but they were all cleaned up afterwards. They have also held their own, less commodified activities there, dressing up at Hallowe'en and 'haunting' the underpasses – including this one – collecting money (but only from each other, they don't bother members of the public generally). They tell me the underpasses have their own legends – for example, Rose Revolution underpass is said to be built on the site of a morgue – but they don't really believe that. They like the postcards from London – the ones they choose are all of the Victorian tunnels.



University students, with Sex Pistols t-shirts – one studying philosophy, others business studies. They met through a music event in the Park, and like to spend time in the park because it is 'quiet'. They all smoke, and ask us what people think of smoking in England. They are very interested in our postcards, and take several away with them. One chooses the picture of the dirty modern subway 'because it is like Tbilisi's passages'. The philosopher chooses the picture of the bookshop in Old Street underpass – he likes the idea of a bookshop in the subway. The subways stink of pee, although Vake Park subway is better – it smells better, and there is usually some guitar music to listen to there. They would only go down the subways at night in a group.

# MAINTENANCE WORKERS

Two men in their 30s/40s pass through the underpass on their way to the bus stop – they work for a maintenance company who send them out on jobs, and they have just finished a job in the neighbourhood. (They live ‘far away’, near the reservoir in the north-east of the city. They always use the underpasses because it is safer than braving the traffic - but it is unpleasant, because the underpasses are ‘toilets’. However this one, at Vake Park, is nice because it is light and spacious. They only use the underpasses for transit – I ask them if they ever use the shops – they reply ‘There are no shops!’ They tell me there used to be a fast food place down here, with tables and chairs, but that closed – they don’t know why. Probably because of money problems, it is hard times for everyone. I tell them that a sports bar is going to open down here soon – that is fine, they say, if it is a good bar.



# THE PASTRY LADIES

The pastry ladies bring over some treats for us. They have been in business for two years, and business is good. Their customers are primarily the students and the workers from the banks and offices above ground.

The pastry shop ladies often stand at their window in empty moments, looking out at what is happening. Lasha goes for a chat at their window, leaning in from the outside, with his head through the window. We hear the constant clicking of the 'soundscape' that has been installed in the underpass, and the sound of a guitar, being played in the passage leading out to the park, drifts through. Just being in the space.

Suddenly, midway through the morning, we hear the sound of close harmony singing from the pastry shop – one of the ladies has a birthday, and they are all singing together in celebration. (However, as we discover the following day, they also sometimes just sing to pass the time whilst they are working together.) They bring out chocolates and brandy to share.

A sociology student, regularly eats at the pastry shop – would love somewhere to be able to sit down and have a cup of tea. Although she will not herself use the new sports bar when it opens – which is likely to be a male space for beer and football – she says it is a good thing that it will be there.



# LA PROFESSEUSE FRANCAISE

A French lecturer from the University, an admirer of the French and the English, stops by, and enjoyed having our conversation in French. She does not live nearby, but uses the underpass to get from the University to the park, and often comes with colleagues to buy her lunch from the ladies. The ladies' pastry shop is very popular, she says. She chooses two postcards from the trolley – one of Old Street underpass – 'This passage could be like that one!' – and the bookshop. It would be wonderful to have a bookshop like that in the underpass! Sometime afterwards, she pops in again to ask about the tea we are using – it is delicious!



# THE WAR VETERAN

He was walking through the underpass on his way to meet his friends in Vake Park and allowed himself to be persuaded to come and have tea at the trolley, asking, as he was handed his cake and cup of tea 'Am I dreaming?' He is 86 years old and he doesn't stray very far from this district of Tbilisi where he lives 'because I am very old'. The friends he meets in Vake Park to play chess are all about 10 years younger than he is. They meet in a kind of club in the park, where players pay to get a board and pieces, which you give back at the end. People come from all over Tbilisi to play chess in the park, because Vake Park is 'the best park in the world – although England also has beautiful parks'. He is sad, and his life is rather difficult. His wife has been bedridden for 8 years, and he is her carer. He had two sons living abroad, but one died. He and his wife now care for their grandchildren on his pension. He talks about his experiences in the second world war. He fought in Ukraine, and many were killed, including many of his friends. He himself was shot in the arm and leg, and nearly drowned, but was rescued by a comrade who hoisted him over his shoulder and carried him away. He was invalided out of the army. After sharing these dramatic and tragic stories, he gets up to go and meet his friends, beaming at us, and saying in English 'Thank you very much!'



# GRANDMA AND GRAND DAUGHTER

The little girl is five years old, and is passing through the underpass with her grandma on the way to the park. 'She is shy', says her grandma '...and she doesn't play much with the other children in the park, but she will be starting school this year, and already knows some of her letters and has been able to use the computer since the age of two.' The family has lived in the neighbourhood for a long time. It is quite an affluent neighbourhood, and lots of the ladies can afford nannies for their children. You can find lots of them in Vake part with their charges. Vake is a popular park – not the MOST popular, maybe, because others have more facilities and attractions for children, but they charge for them, quite expensive, and Vake Park is free. Grandma tells us that the underpass opened about 25 years ago, and she remembers it for having particularly nice chocolate shops. The underpass was destroyed during the 1990s – now it has been restored, but it could do with refurbishing and brightening up. The only change that has been made to it is the addition of statues on the roundabout above ground. She doesn't much like the underpasses. She uses this one just for transit, but she does like some of the shops in the underpasses in the city centre. They are convenient, because they enable her to shop on the move i.e. whilst she is on her way somewhere, because she doesn't really have time to shop. Whereas her daughter loves shopping – she likes fashion, and she goes to the smart shops on the big boulevards. This under pass should really be brightened up and made nicer. Perhaps they could add activities or facilities for children.



# ABKHAZIA LADY

People going to the park – nannies and child minders with their children; people walking their dogs (usually the big Caucasian breeds). A refugee/internally displaced lady from Abkhazia, on her way to the Ministry to try to sort out her housing – she has been staying with relatives since 1991. She sits, drinks tea, and relates her experiences and her dreams of her home by the way. 'I am an optimist', she tells us. A Turkish family is now living in her house in Abkhazia – the Turkish population was forced out a long time ago, and some have now returned. She keeps in touch with her home through facebook.



# NANCY THE DOG AND HER OWNER

Nancy flops down in front of the tea trolley at the feet of her owner. He comes through the underpass every day on his way to the park with Nancy, and to see his friend Lasha. He seems to share Lasha's political opinions too – when Torange asks him what memories he has of the underpass, he says he has none really. Everything is better since 1991! Nancy's owner doesn't give his name. He says he is shy. But he loves his dog – 'pit bull! pit bull! he exclaims, pointing to her – and she walks through the underpass with him off the lead. The dogwalkers in the park all know each other, because they see each other every day. Sometimes he also plays backgammon, chess, and dominoes.



conversation around dog poo  
who should clean it, who is  
responsible?  
Is the shop keeper responsible

**TEA**

For dog  
poo?

the dog?

the owner?  
or the council?

LASHA + Bakery  
ladies singing

Sitting here I feel I  
am in a dream

# TWO BUSINESS STUDIES STUDENTS

On their way from the Park to a lecture. They are both from the nearby town of Rustavi. They don't have underpasses in Rustavi – the underpasses in Tbilisi stink, they are dark and dangerous, especially when it has been raining. They don't shop in the underpasses, because they like the big modern shops, like NEXT. Perhaps if the environment and the shops were better, they would shop in the underpasses. They love Tbilisi, and both plan to stay here – their home town is BORING! One of them has a business idea – but keeps it to himself.



**A GROUP OF STUDENTS - THEY PUT  
STICKERS UP IN THE SUBWAYS, TO MAKE  
PEOPLE SMILE. THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE  
INVOLVED IN CLEANING AND PAINTING  
THE SUBWAYS.**

**'WE LIKE IT BECAUSE IT IS COOL IN  
SUMMER AND WARM IN WINTER'**

**'YOU CAN ESCAPE FROM THE RAIN IN THE  
PARK'**

**ONE YOUNG WOMAN REMEMBERED  
PLAYING FOOTBALL IN THE  
UNDERPASSES AS A CHILD.**

# TWO DELIVERY WORKERS

They live in Rustavi, and deliver supplies to beauty parlours in Tbilisi. Their only comment on the underpasses:

## They stink!



For most people the Vake Park underpass is a place of transit. The tea trolley created a space for people to stop and sit and talk, and share their stories and their thoughts with us, and we met a wide range of people, from refugees and war veterans, to gypsies, buskers, students and office workers. The tea trolley also enabled us to carve out a place for ourselves in the underpass, to spend time there and become temporary members of the community who earn their living in the underpass. The people who work in the Vake Park underpass have known each other for years and several of them are friends. The dress shop lady is best friends with one of the hairdressers. She and the cobbler previously had shops above the ground, and moved below when the district 'went up' in the world and rents became too high. The elites of the city now shop in the global chains that now line the boulevards of Tbilisi, but in the Soviet era, the underground shops had the reputation for quality and style, because they sold western, not Soviet goods.

Below ground extends and reflects above ground developments and social, political and economic relationships – in the park, in the houses and businesses of the neighbourhood, and in the changing nature of the shops and businesses in the city. The darkness and marginality of the underpasses encourage reflection and interpretation – in the conversations we have been part of over the three days we were in the underpass, the subway has been a way of talking about religion, politics, and poverty.