‘Pedagogies of Hope’ Contribution by Hannah Riley

Walking Conversation: Finding Commonality with Common Reeds

My photo was taken during a walk I co-facilitated as part of the *Walking Conversation* workshop by Centre for Sustainable Fashion at the 2025 IFFTI conference, hosted by London College of Fashion (LCF), UAL. The reflections below emerged from the walk, where we, local and international participants, shared perspectives shaped by LCF's East Bank environment. Collective hope was cultivated through this pedagogical practice of walking-conversing:

As we walked, we wondered, what does belonging mean in a place defined by metamorphosis, characterised by change and juxtaposed in its urban and ‘natural’ landscape? Our legs take paces matched to each other's rhythm, while whispering reeds breathe in the wind by the River Lea. These towering reeds feel comforting, a blanket of ecological wisdom encompassing it’s tangible and impalpable surrounds.

Walking side-by-side through conversed exchanges, I come to understand from a fellow walker that these reeds, *Phragmites australis*, are ubiquitous across continents, found globally on the edges of estuaries and wetlands. Deemed native to over 260 countries, the common reed challenges what it means to belong. We notice a slate-coloured sign reading, ‘BIRD BREEDING AREA’. The birds are only one among many species to call the reeds home. To belong, and to be from, need not be singular or rigid, but plural and in flux. These reeds know no borders, why should humans? The only partitions between us being the swaying reeds nestling against waterways…

What connects us is what is common; to belong is to *be* with each other, to understand that we are all distinct but familial. The common reeds now appear accentuated amongst the mossy grasses and sprouting flora. The heaviness of the tumultuous state of the world felt a little lighter. Curiously meandering with familiar faces and strangers, in words and walking, I unlearned and relearned what it meant to notice and to belong.