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London Case Studies  
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## **Temporary Intervention and Long Term Legacy: Lessons from London Case Studies**

### **Abstract**

The paper explores the issue of temporary projects on vacant land focusing on London in the 2007-2012 downturn. Using a case study approach, a link has been identified between the success of temporary projects and a longer-term vision, as well as a move toward better integration between temporary occupants and developer/land-owner. Within this paradox the whole idea of temporariness is put under question, as is the traditional mainstream depiction of bottom-up in opposition to top-down action. These trends are contextualised within the dynamics of recession that has triggered new types of creative conversations between parties traditionally considered in opposition and may contribute to reframing urban development as an incremental, organic and collaborative process.

*Keywords: urban development; vacant land; public realm; reclamation*

### **Introduction**

From 2007, in the aftermath of a recession-hit Europe, London responded in a number of ways, some of which have been outlined elsewhere in this volume. The purpose of this paper is to identify and explore a trend towards the installation of temporary projects on vacant land, using evidence from two case studies in London: the Skip Garden at Kings Cross and Cody Dock in Newham. Although both case studies appear to be temporary they are, in fact, part of longer-term projects, but in very different ways; two key questions this research is thus seeking to address are first, the dimension of ‘temporariness’ and, second, the integration of temporariness into a longer term regeneration process. In doing so, it is also trying to address the question of whether, for temporary projects to succeed, a longer term legacy or vision is in fact necessary.

One of the key reasons for this trend was a shift in developers and landowners attitude towards vacant land due to the recession. Traditionally developers' attitudes had been characterised by reluctance towards temporary use, fuelled by fear of risk of undervaluing future development and creating a precedent difficult to override, as well as liability concerns. In the recession years this started to change and led to a number of major landowners opening up their stalled sites to creative proposals<sup>i</sup>. This was supported by publicity through key trade journals such as Property Week<sup>ii</sup>, as well as by a change in planning policy to introduce 'meanwhile leases'<sup>iii</sup> for temporary projects, providing both parties – developers and temporary users - with a formal legal reassurance. A number of initiatives supported by the Mayor of London, such as Capital Growth, followed suit.

Urban design is a balancing act, responsive to a range of factors, physical, financial, social, and environmental. Each case study presented here is assessed on its contribution to urban design, particularly in relation to the public realm. The research aims to identify emerging and shifting relationships of urban design actors, such as, for example, that of integration between activism and business, or temporary occupants and developer/land-owner. Through this potential synergy and the coming together of two seemingly oppositional forces, what can urban design learn about developing public spaces that intersect in the middle ground between community and development needs?

The two case studies were selected from a small group of relevant projects investigated under a [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process] research grant on [title deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]. The methods of this research consist of background desk top study, site surveys, filming and primary data collected through 20 semi-structured interviews with key initiators, volunteers and participants.

In order to frame the issues researched, the two case studies are introduced by a brief discussion of their local context and issues, followed by an analysis of each project's aims and methods of initiation, a review of their associated policies and processes, and a discussion of related timescales, funding and management issues, before highlighting the projects' social impact. The comparative element of the case studies is then discussed in a section that underlines the challenges faced by, and lessons for urban design learnt from, these temporary projects.

Alongside this comparison, the paper will discuss the impact of recession. Although the consequences of the global economic crisis have been unevenly distributed between the European North and South, this research explores its nuances even in a city where 'business as usual' has largely continued to be the norm. The paper concludes that the dynamics of recession have enabled new types of creative conversations to happen between parties traditionally considered in opposition, and that has been demonstrated in different ways in the two case studies. The success of both projects studied points to a longer-term vision and aptly links to a conceptual framework that considers temporary urbanism as a viable method of more adaptable and incremental urban design. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **Framing the temporary**

Temporary land uses have been historically associated with vacant land and buildings left unused due to dereliction or abandonment. Such vacant urban spaces first featured in literature in the 1980s-90s with notions such as 'lost space' (Trancik 1986), 'urban voids' and 'cracks in the city' (Loukaitou-Sideris 1996) pinpointing the failures of modern movement and advocating processes of elimination of 'wastelands'. A further reading was promoted through the notion of the 'terrain vague' (de Sola-Morales 1995). Referring largely to derelict post-industrial landscapes and decommissioned infrastructure works, the term implies that

vacant spaces offer possibilities for informal appropriation by people and nature, away from the highly controlled public spaces of the late 20th century ([name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]; Lees 2010).

### ***Theories on temporary urbanism***

Indeed, theories on temporary urbanism have been arising from debates regarding urban restructuring in the post-Fordist city, and in particular worries about “commodification, monofunctionality and control” or entrepreneurial approaches to city planning that tend to homogenise and aestheticize space (image marketing) (Groth and Corijn, 2005, 504); and the ‘divided city’ characterised by ‘inequality, segmentation and alienation’, but also by ‘a very real crisis of urbanity itself’ in relation to the ‘values that should regulate urban life’ and what ‘civic identity’ might mean (Robins 1993, 313-314). The ongoing debate is therefore centred on the quest for ‘alternative’ definitions of ‘Urbanity’ .

Temporary spaces fall under these ‘alternative’ definitions of urbanity that exist outside “hegemonic visions of configuration of urban space” common in formal urban planning (Groth and Corijn, 2005, 506). A variety of terms have been used to demonstrate the processes that lead to it. ‘Insurgent urbanism’ (Sandercock, 1998) embraces uncertainty, potential, radical openness, and experimental culture. ‘Differential’ space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991) refers to space shaped by its users and their informal occupation within the context of the space’s physical conditions. The term gives prominence to the ‘lived’ experience of space and people’s ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre [1968] 1996). Differential space enables temporary uses to take place in the context of ‘weak planning’ occurring under conditions of crisis as opposed to masterplanning (Andres 2013).

More generally, the term ‘weak urbanism’ is used to describe ‘an open-result, process-oriented approach to development’ usually ‘in response to problems that can no longer be

solved using conventional planning methods and development policies' and to offer a critique of the assumed certainties of formal urbanism (Hubacher 1999, 16). Such a process-oriented approach includes 'tactics' that may unsettle the accepted power distribution and "shape a long-term collaborative process which can be more or less inclusive" (Andres 2013, 761). The use of the term 'tactic' goes back to de Certeau's definition in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: "A tactic is determined by the absence of power, just as a strategy is organised by the postulation of power" (de Certeau 1984, 38). 'Tactical urbanism' (Lydon et al 2011) has often moved from unofficial to authorised status and is often endorsed in top-down approaches to regeneration as "a way to start conversation"<sup>iv</sup> with the public (Khawarзад, interview, 2012, quoted in Radywyl and Biggs 2013, 162).

The concept of the 'makeshift city' (Tonkiss 2013) highlights "a mode of urban practice that works in the cracks between formal planning, speculative investment and local possibilities [...] to contrast the temporary or provisory with the cataclysmic investment cycles and distorted timeframes of urban development as usual" (Tonkiss 2013, 313). It is juxtaposed to 'austerity urbanism' (Tonkiss 2013) or 'neo-liberal urbanism' (Keil 2009; Long 2013) to suggest "a rethinking of certain orthodoxies of urban development as usual" (Tonkiss 2013, 313). What is evident in this term, as well as in similar terms such as 'interstitial urbanism', 'crack urbanism', or 'improvised urbanism', is a critical stance towards what is seen as a hijacking of pioneering land uses by neo-liberal or 'ameliorative urbanism'. The concern is that such uses lose their experimental and critical edge and become 'alibis' for profit-focused development (Tonkiss 2013, 318).

Despite this ambivalence, temporary urbanism has potential for urban design as it can "re-center urban vacant land as a critical element of the processes that create urbanity and urban life" (Németh and Langhorst 2014, 149). The following section will explore this using empirical research from two case studies in London. [Figure 1 near here]

## **Case studies**

### ***Skip Garden, Kings Cross***

#### *Context and issues*

The Skip Garden was inaugurated in 2009 and forms part of the regeneration at King's Cross, a very central London area and one of the biggest regeneration schemes in Europe. [Figure 2 near here] The King's Cross scheme is being delivered by the King's Cross Central Limited Partnership (KCCLP), who is the single land-owner, and includes developers Argent, London & Continental Railways (a UK Government-owned property company) and DHL (the well-known supply chain company). The scheme consists of 67 hectares of brownfield land surrounding King's Cross and St Pancras railway stations. The Skip Garden is run by the sustainability education charity Global Generation (GG) and has received support from local authorities, local businesses (eg. The Guardian newspaper) and the developers of the masterplan.

The site where the Garden is situated falls between Camden and Islington Borough Councils, two Central London Local Authorities. The area is typical of many inner-city areas with a mix of uses and mixed communities, with many born outside the UK or from a black minority ethnic group (London Borough of Camden, 2012). At the time when the Kings Cross regeneration was initiated, ten local wards fell within the 20% most disadvantaged in England (Argent et al 2001). Parts of the adjacent wards to the Kings Cross site had been identified in Camden's policy as among the most disadvantaged parts of the UK and hence as targeted Areas of Community Regeneration; likewise in Islington's policy, King's Cross and adjacent areas were designated as Areas of Community Need. Both Councils hence supported regeneration initiatives addressing the themes of social exclusion, education, training, and employment, and promoting a safe place with facilities encouraging ambition, healthy

lifestyle and self-confidence in young people and an enterprise culture for all with recognition of businesses' social responsibilities (Argent et al 2001).

In 2002, an extensive public consultation process carried out by architectural consultancy Fluid for the developers brought up the issue of development as a process, rather than a fixed output: "what happens in the meantime?" (Fluid, 2004a, 82, 90). Consultation with young people found that, with regards to facilities, "young people appreciate a 'rich mix' of usages", that "local, affordable resources are needed", and that there was "not enough detached youth work in the area". A "demand for neutrally situated spaces where young people have a sense of ownership", and a "need for stimulation and motivation" were also noted (Fluid, 2004a, 16). In connection to youth opportunities, the community suffered from "insufficient linkages between youth clubs and career paths", (Fluid, 2004a, 17). The consultation indicated a concern about the uncertainty of funds in relation to youth projects and a hope for the developers' involvement in partnership with Camden and Islington (Fluid, 2004c, 37). The findings hence pointed to the need for 'meantime' social projects to be incorporated into the longer-term regeneration process.

### *Initiation and project aims*

The Skip Garden project consists of gardens planted in skips and maintained by young people, often from local schools, employees from local businesses, and other volunteers. It was initiated by Jane Riddiford, currently CEO of GG, and the CEO of developers Argent who supported "the idea that business and activism don't have to be either end of the spectrum" (Riddiford, interview, 2013). Following his request that the gardens on site be portable, so as to be moved around the site as the development progresses through its phases, garden manager Paul Richens came up with the idea of gardens in skips<sup>v</sup>. The idea seemed very appropriate given the building site context. The skips were donated by the construction companies on site, and bear the companies' colours. The first skip garden was opposite St

Pancras Station, and lasted for two years (2009 – 2011). The mobility idea was put to the test in 2011 when the skip garden was moved from its first location to another part of the site awaiting development. In 2012, it moved to its third location just off York Way. This site hosted the garden until May 2015 when the garden moved to Tapper Walk near the new natural swimming pond. [Figure 3 near here]

The main focus of the project is to educate volunteers in the importance of sustainability. The project aims and educational philosophy go beyond the physical site, and are transportable broadly, while the ‘skip’ design relates to the particularities of this specific site. The project has continued to expand with additional elements such as a series of polytunnels<sup>vi</sup> for food growing, and portakabins<sup>vii</sup> (donated by Bam Nuttal, contractors on the Kings Cross development site) for the growing number of workshops and educational events. As Paul Richens, Garden Manager, confirms, mobility is “intrinsic to the design, you design for that mobility and you make sure that nothing is done that can’t be moved somehow” (Richens, interview, 2013).

For Richens, the Skip Garden is a ‘teaching garden’ in the sense that each skip is demonstrating one function - an ‘orchard’ skip, three ‘crop rotation’ skips, a greenhouse ‘poly skip’, a herb garden- so people can start to understand how a garden works. The activities in the Garden have been built over the years, gradually allowing for more public accessibility, encouraging social interaction, and educating about the origins of food. [Figure 4 near here]

### *Policies and processes*

The owner of the site is the developer, Kings Cross Central, who bought the land and achieved planning permission after a lengthy process that lasted nearly 10 years. During this time, “they had definitely changed in their approach, which had to meet certain community

needs” so that now the garden gets funding from them in the form of Section 106 contributions (Riddiford, interview, 2013). GG have a 3-year temporary lease for renting the land, with no rental costs, the expense being borne by the developers in full. As a charity they also benefit from tax rates relief.

The temporary lease has serious break clauses, which the developer could choose to use if in their financial interest. Riddiford confirms that GG “just accepted that and knew that it was in [their] interest to be compliant and flexible” and show that they can move, which they have done twice already. “The big fear,” Riddiford suggests, “is that you will claim squatters’ rights and you won’t move on”. Although there have been other similar successful projects with temporary leases, such as ‘Capital Growth’, an initiative by the London Mayor, “not that many sites are on commercial premises” such as the King’s Cross site (Riddiford, interview, 2013).

The lease secured by GG for the Skip Garden was one of the first of its type and as such it left an important legacy as it formed the basis for the development of what is now in the UK called ‘meanwhile lease’. The liabilities and the appropriate health and safety requirements, both for working with young people and school children, but also for working on a development site, were also determined at the outset of the project. However, means were sought to avoid these becoming disabling constraints.

The contribution of Islington and Camden Borough Councils has been varied. Islington are supporting a lot of the youth possibilities. Camden’s support has been more sporadic due primarily to significant resource cuts as a result of the recession. They are also more ‘policy driven’ with expectations “to fund projects that could be rolled out across the borough”, while the approach of the Skip Garden project is more incremental and hence slower (Riddiford, interview, 2013). Over time, both Islington and Camden Councils put money into the project’s programmes for adolescents. [Table 1 near here]

### *Timescales, funding and management*

Development on the King's Cross site has been scheduled to 2020, and split into phases during which different parts of the site would be built. This phased approach enabled a project such as the Skip Garden to emerge, as it could always move to the next available part of the site, as development proceeded. Things however change during such a long process, and events such as the 2008 recession play a role in or delay development decisions. Rachel Solomon, Youth Manager of the Skip Garden youth programmes, mentions "decisions from people who will buy or lease offices", for example "Google have postponed their build because they want to decide how to make their building better and more relevant to the community" (Solomon, interview, 2014).

Funding played a key role at the point of initiation. In 2009, the charity was in quite difficult financial situation, having just secured a lottery grant that required match funding from other sources. Fortunately *The Guardian* had just moved into the area and were looking to link with the local community through involving their staff in food growing:

*"The Skip Garden was ideally suited to offer a training scheme for their staff. This partnership brought in some of the funding while the developer came up with the rest. In about 2 weeks the project had miraculously secured £40K"*

(Riddiford, interview, 2013).

According to Riddiford, currently the project is "about 65% grant funded and probably 35% through commissions, through venue hire, through the business training days", or more generally through "relationships with businesses", which are not, in a traditional way, just "money hand outs", but include the project "offering them something as well". So the project is partly social enterprise and partly grant funded. Donations contribute to a very small part of

funding. The project costs amount to about £190K, while turnover is about £300K. The budget is around £200K, which includes all the programmes, camps and workshops, salaries as the main expense, and costs of buying materials.

Funding affects the mix of people the project attracts, with users shifting from the Lottery funded years, when specified activities meant working mainly with local schools, to the current self-funded situation with focus on the Generators: young people in their late teens who join for a year, and go through a programme of public speaking and learning about green issues. This is currently a more successful way, as through this the project can reach out to local businesses who then will actually pay to do workshops, acknowledging thus that “these things don’t run on their own” (Richens, interview, 2013).

The garden is a unique project and is managed through the charity structure, with a Board of Governors and a Board of Directors. The latter supervises the three main parts of the work and their respective managers: the garden, the youth work, and the food café and kitchen work. The Trustees are of a more advisory role, although “technically, legally, they are ultimately responsible” (Riddiford, interview, 2013).

The funding and management of the project points to the ideological tensions (as discussed by Tonkiss 2013) between the objectives of such temporary projects and the relationships and resources necessary for them to succeed. A certain degree of ‘realism’, evident in the Skip Garden approach, has been confirmed by Solomon in her interview:

*I’ve come across some charities where the chief executive would [say] we are not going to engage with that business, because it makes it look like we are selling out to the big guy... But we are realistic about where we are based, and what we want to achieve, and I think that’s very powerful...going into places like the Guardian newspaper, places like Argent, a developer which is huge...Having that engagement*

*allows you to be able to bring those people into that space, to be able to see other people's point, and to take that feedback in'.*

The project relies on keeping its community-oriented educational values and principles intact but compromising over the type of space used and the frequent uprooting that this may imply, as well as over the source of funding to keep the educational programmes running.

### *People and impact*

The garden programmes involve primary school children, young people and school leavers (the Generators), business employees from the nearby construction companies, advertising and publishing companies and newspapers, people interested in the training workshops and visitors to the site.

The 'Generator' programme involves 13-18 years old local children from Camden and Islington that come to learn about themselves, about communities and about the practical things they can do environmentally speaking. The programme focuses on linking them up with businesses across the King's Cross site that they wouldn't have found out about otherwise. As a result, young people feel that potentially they have a place in the business world, while before "this would have been out of reach for them, either because of their background, or their schools or what aspirations are accessible to them in their minds already..." (Solomon, interview, 2014). The project runs workshops on gardening and food growing and runs the local school Business BTec. It also works with one or two primary schools at any one time in a more consistent way. Other activities include working with the nearby textile department of Central St Martin's, usually accommodating 80 students over 2 days every year, "rounding out many manual skills that they may not have had before" (Richens, interview, 2013).

Since 2013 the garden has been open to the public on specific week days. Additionally people may drop by the hatch cafe, or on the first Saturday of the month when the Garden opens its doors to everybody. This diversity of types of people or age groups has gradually come to be “the main marker of the project” (Richens, interview, 2013). Overall the Skip Garden has managed to enjoy a healthy relationship with developers, local businesses, local youths, volunteers and construction employees alike.

### ***Cody Dock***

#### *Context and issues*

The site is part of the Borough of Newham, south of the Olympic site, and northeast of Canary Wharf. It borders the River Lea (at Bow Creek). The Gasworks area used to host industrial activity such as creating gas from coal, as well as chemical industries. [Figure 5 near here]

The main dock area is owned by Thames Water. The access, and only way of getting to the Dock by land, is owned by Newham Council. Previously, a ‘squatting’ building company used the site as a store for their building waste. This company was eventually evicted.

In 2005, the site was heavily contaminated and littered with building waste, oil drums and chemical drums: “nearly two million [British] pounds worth of waste” (Myers, interview, 2013). The site has since been cleared of waste.

Simon Myers, the founding director of Gasworks Dock Partnership, the charity that now manages Cody Dock, describes Cody Dock as “in the middle of the largest regeneration zone on the planet, [that] stretches from Beckton waterworks through the Royal Docks, Canning Town, through [the] industrial zone [around Cody Dock], up to the Olympic Park in Stratford” (Myers, interview, 2013). Despite this immense regeneration activity there is little

engagement with the local population, often because locals are suspicious of regeneration as irrelevant to their needs and leading on to gentrification. Indeed, Newham is the third most deprived local authority area in England (Flowers 2012). It is also one of the most ethnically diverse in London (Newham London 2010), largely due to international migration (Flowers 2012). This causes high population churn, a significant issue for Newham in relation to “retaining its skilled and entrepreneurial talent” as people often leave the Borough because of the lack of quality of life (Newham London 2010). So the project sought to create a sense of place and sense of ownership for the locals, aiming for local partnerships and community-led development. By this, as Myers puts it, people might feel “proud of being a Newham person, and actually wanting to stay because something had been created from them there for the long term”.

#### *Initiation and project aims*

Simon Myers discovered the place around 2001, while living on a boat on the River Lea. Four years later he set out to find out whom it belonged to. He entered into a dialogue with the key stakeholder and was offered a five-year lease on the site, limited to the time before the possible Olympics redevelopment of the area. He turned it down because “five years was not enough to do anything with the site” (Myers, interview, 2013).

When the Lehman Brothers crash happened (2008) and observing that “the Olympics were only a few years away and [...] nothing was happening with the site” Myers restarted negotiations with the key owners, who now appeared more flexible and keen for the project to happen. The Gasworks Dock Partnership was formed (as a social enterprise in 2009 and as charity in 2011) to act as a vehicle to regenerate the site.

The project aims to “turn the dock into a vibrant working marina for London’s under-served boating community and a hub for the arts” (Gasworks Dock Partnership 2013). This will be

done through the provision of moorings for live-in river boats and by building and renting artists' studios. These rental spaces are unusual in that the tenant artists and the moorers agree to contribute in kind to the local environment, either through offering arts and crafts training and skills to local community and schools, or through bringing their exhibitions to the site.

A second aim is to restore access to the River Lea, which has been chronically hindered by heavy industry occupying its riverbanks. As part of this, the project also seeks to contribute to the protection of wildlife habitats that have developed on the brownfield land over 25 years, since the industries ceased operating. There is also a special educational purpose – to educate the local community and school children on the history of Newham and River Lea, on the specific industrial history of the area, and on the local flora and fauna.

The project aims to achieve all these through the engagement of local community volunteers involved in building the site and in a series of social enterprises to make the space viable, so that after two years of seed funding the project can become self-funded. [Figure 6 near here]

### *Policies and processes*

There is currently a 999 year lease agreement for the Dock. This was achieved in agreement with Thames Water and Newham Council, after much assistance from the regeneration agencies and a meeting at the House of Lords. The conclusion was that this project was so critically beneficial to the transformation of the area that it should be offered a peppercorn rate for the site for 999 years. This enables the Gasworks Dock Partnership to actually do structural work to the site and to raise capital off the back of the site, as well as by subletting the site, in other words to incrementally raise finance and get to the point of self-sufficiency. The long term lease was also a preferred option compared to being given the property, because “the landowner would retain responsibility for some of the critical flood defences and structure of the built works” (Myers, interview, 2013).

A shorter-term, ten-year lease is also in place with regards to the council owned access strip. This is on a peppercorn rate for the first four years, and then a percentage of profit made afterwards, specifically on that strip of access land.

The Council's and other public organisations' attitudes towards the project have been varied. London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC) is a useful example of the power dynamic and politics within organisations, especially as they no longer exist. As Myers confirms, LTGDC were in charge of all the Olympic planning and of overseeing development in 5 different London boroughs [Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney]. "So for the first time you had the possibility of bridges to be built between boroughs" (Myers, interview, 2013). LTGDC provided important mentoring through the then head of community regeneration in various respects of the project: from an overarching knowledge of existing and future projects in the area so as to avoid the risk of duplication or redundancy, to initiating links to the Council and providing funding for masterclasses on social enterprise so that Gasworks Dock Partnership could develop a comprehensive business plan. On the other hand, as appears to also be typical with Councils and other organisations in this context, different departments within LTGDC were frequently "at loggerheads with each other": some were not behind the project while others, particularly within the business and community side, were funding and helping the project. As Myers suggests, "You just have to find your allies and work with them and appeal to people's human nature."

One of the key factors in Newham is the support of the first publicly elected Mayor who can bypass the very dynamic but pyramidal hierarchy in the Council to ensure that "not everything is watered down with bureaucracy" and "to enable property and planning, finance, community [...] to get on with work" (Myers, interview, 2013). [Table 2 near here]

### *Timescales, funding and management*

Gasworks Dock Partnership is the sole holder and guardian of the site. As an incubator to social enterprises it is a limited company, not for profit, as well as a charity. As each social enterprise becomes profitable, then it becomes its own CIC (community interest company), with its own micro-board and its own agenda.

There are currently nine social enterprises in the core of the project, and a number of other voluntary organisations that utilize the space and resources, in order that the place can be shaped in partnership. For example, Thames21 (one of London's waterways charities, responsible for clearing up the Thames and its tidal tributaries) use the place and facilities, while also helping to undertake work on this stretch of the river. Other similar collaborations include Anchor House, the homeless hostel, or the Wildlife Trust. This interesting mix has been achieved by having "an open door policy" (Myers, interview, 2013) enabling people to take initiative and approach the charity.

Much of the work going on in Cody Dock depends on corporations supplying volunteers as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes. The process was initiated in partnership with Thames21 and environmental regeneration charity Groundwork London. These supplied the first volunteers as part of 'Transform', a scheme funded by the legacy package in the lead up to the Olympics. The success of this resulted in repeated 'business' with organisations wanting to come back and solely supply staff as they felt that there was a possibility for a long term relationship. Although the activities may be temporary, the project is a long-term one, and also a place where "they can actually bring their families to on the weekends, they can engage with it outside just the volunteer day they put in once a year. It was something slightly more meaningful perhaps" (Myers, interview, 2013). Some have gone on to provide additional pro bono support, for example "Freshfields (an international law

firm) supplied a mentor for leading staff through the *Arc business in the community programme*, as well as legal, financial and business support to help grow social enterprises” (Myers, interview, 2013). Funding is also sought from Council Grants and through crowdfunding.

While the longer term vision is developing in partnership with the above mentioned organisations, in the meanwhile the project encourages and supports temporary activities, such as music events, a community boat for private hire, and for Friday nights’ bar open, film nights, pub nights, Arts and crafts days, and a Lugus event every month (Lugus is the ancient name for the God of the River) with singing, chanting and story-reading (Neilson, interview, 2013; Grisenti, interview, 2013). [Figures 7 and 8 near here]

### *People and impact*

There are three main groups of volunteers. First, corporate volunteers are from large and small scale businesses that are based locally, as the site is “in the shadow of Canary Wharf”: for example, in the summer 2013 the site hosted volunteers from “HSBC, whose building is visible from the site, Barclays, BP, KPMG, Freshfields, Egis, the insurance company, and Lloyds, the underwriters” (Myers, interview, 2013). Similar to the Skip Garden, the corporations pay for the Cody Dock staff to manage their volunteers for the day and help subsidise the costs for days when local volunteers are involved. The subsidies also help to train some of the community volunteers up to be volunteer co-ordinators and subsequently pay them for that role. The site has hosted about 700 corporate volunteers overall. Site tasks that have been, or will be, completed with the help of corporate volunteers include the site waste clearance and rehabilitation, landscaping work, and also designing, in partnership with various universities and architects and with the local community, structures that can be constructed by people who are unskilled.

Local volunteers from the community are a second group now starting to be integrated in Cody Dock's activities, normally because they have 'discovered' or 'randomly found' the project. The estimate is that about 800 local people have volunteered at the site in 2013 (Myers, interview, 2013). The project involves local volunteers on the principle of 'self-build' to help construct community garden plots, furniture, studios and workshops, as well in the landscaping for the footpaths.

The third group is made up of creative artists and crafts people who have worked in the voluntary sector, and who either live on site or have links to the site and the people who live there. The project uses arts as a tool for engaging people, trying to reverse Newham's unenviable statistic of "the lowest participation rates in arts, culture and sport" (Myers, interview, 2013): local schools come and use the place for field studies about rivers, flora and fauna, geography, local history, while being exposed to art on the site. Temporary events also attract a variety of people. The clearing of waste has created public space with all the fences and gates coming down by the end of 2014, so people can walk through.

### **Discussion: challenges and lessons learnt for urban design and planning**

The two case studies are characterised by many commonalities and some uniqueness. Both present a strong sustainability agenda, in economic, environmental and social terms. They engage the private sector as well as local councils in supporting the initial funding of the projects, while working towards establishing longer term training programs (Skip Garden) or social enterprises (Cody Dock) to self-fund in the future. Environmentally, they both involve gardening and food growing, with the Skip Garden using this as a preface to educate on deeper issues to do with a more ethical way of living in harmony with nature and the earth. Cody Dock provides allotments for its local community as well as engaging in a larger environmental restoration project to do with the reclamation of the riverbanks of the river Lea

and the protection of the brownfield habitats developed there over the dereliction years.

Finally, socio-culturally they both engage local communities, including the local business and corporate communities, but also communities of interest: those wanting to learn more about food growing, sustainability and ethical business (Skip Garden), or artists, moorers, and those interested in self-build (Cody Dock).

### ***Planning policy and timeframes***

The limitations and slowness of current planning policy and procedures for setting up temporary projects are a key challenge. The uncertainty surrounding the timescales of temporary uses can be discouraging for many looking to invest energy and resources on a temporary project. Reynolds states that “the decision to allow interwhile use is often delayed much too long. A perfectly viable project may be stymied or made too risky by the loss of time at the front end. [...] an interwhile use plan should be considered before the space is emptied or likely to be made redundant” (Reynolds 2011, 374). For Reynolds, there needs to be a way to balance the risk for both sides: the land owner, who “needs to maintain flexibility in the time that their space will be available” and the interim tenant who “needs some certainty in order to justify the expenditure of effort and resources” (Reynolds 2011, 374). This is the case in both King’s Cross and Cody Dock, as confirmed by the interviews. Both projects rely on a longer term vision, despite their seemingly temporary character.

### ***Spectrum of Temporariness and Long-Term Regeneration***

Each case study is unique in its timescale, the Skip Garden being at one end of the spectrum with its ability to move sites at short notice, while Cody Dock represents temporariness as part of a very slow process of redevelopment of one particular site. Both are however positive examples of their respective timeframes. The position of the Skip Garden in Central London highlights the possibility of producing fertile temporary ‘edgelands’ even within the context

of high value business and an existing and successful ongoing regeneration project. Cody Dock in East London shows a different way to do regeneration and the opportunities offered by short term projects for long term development to grow organically rather than be imposed on a place.

### ***Legacy and long-term vision versus temporariness***

Both case studies are very much in support of a long-term vision and legacy. Local volunteers like to put their energy and admittedly limited spare time into a worthy cause, “they don’t necessarily want to make somewhere look pretty because it’s a derelict site, so that it enables big corporations to then sell it and make money” (Myers, interview, 2013). So, although Cody Dock currently works as ‘a temporary style project’, “it was very important to communicate the message that the community would be securing this long term and could begin building a legacy” (Myers, interview, 2013). Fittingly the Olympic legacy has also played a role, as the “brick wall of [lack of] funding and engagement from any of the local authorities or regeneration agencies” has changed dramatically into a belief that the area is “ripe for regeneration” and Cody Dock is “pivotal to this area’s transformation now” (Myers, interview, 2013).

Similarly, there are plenty of short-term food growing projects, or art installations, but Jane Riddiford does not see the work being done at the Skip Garden as temporary. Rather the “physical location is temporary” while the work itself is not, because its permanency is not based on its physicality, but on its philosophy. This is a very important point, because it distinguishes this from other projects that are really intended to be temporary and everybody knows it – including the people who are involved in them. Perhaps this long term vision creates a different mind-set.

### ***Urban design and the public realm***

Both projects suggest a different public realm to that proposed by mainstream urban design in the context of the post-Fordist city, where emphasis is on commercial activity and which is often eroded by privatisation and the exclusion of lower income groups. This ‘other’ public realm is brought to being by the gathering together of like-minded people of all ages and walks of life with a common interest or purpose. The birth of this alternative public realm is enabled by activities that connect rather than divide, such as gardening, food growing, waste clearing, and social events, which create a platform where people can reach each other bypassing assumed divides. The makeshift nature of the projects, as opposed to the highly aestheticized ‘finished and polished’ public projects in city centres, makes it easier for people to engage with, as they can see how their physical involvement can have an impact.

The importance of both public realms, and how they can coexist in harmony rather than in opposition, is showcased at Kings Cross, where the Skip Garden is juxtaposed and often compared to Granary Square, part of the Kings Cross regeneration. There is a striking aesthetic difference between this high quality, ‘manicured’ public realm project, and the Skip Garden, which may seem “ramshackle” by comparison: the point is that the latter’s approach is “still professional” and striving to find “ways to meet in the middle” between what works for “official public realm and what works for a space like [the Skip Garden]” overcoming the usual separation and alienation assumed between the two approaches (Solomon, interview, 2014). This diversity is much needed in the public realm of today, as it caters for a variety of people with different disposable income, social status, ethnic background, age, gender or more generally interests.

### ***Recession***

Historically temporary land uses have periodically emerged at times of recession, but what is different today is the “far wider range of temporary activities” they accommodate and the

commercial interest shown in them (Bishop and Williams, 2012, p. 47). They may no longer be exclusively the “escape from capitalism, ... towards something more illicit, subversive, personal and warm” (see Jupiter quoted in Cochrane 2010) but instead can be used as part of a marketing strategy. This double face of temporary projects is not without its critics, who disagree with the use of temporary land uses for marketing; their “temporary, impromptu nature” should be an alternative to capitalist workings, not an accomplice (see Jupiter quoted in Cochrane 2010). Indeed, this criticism may be exposing a broader trend to do with commodification. Reportedly big corporations are quietly behind small, independent brands (see Wheeler and Barford 2013). Anti-corporate campaigners warn about corporations not only buying into an existing brand, but also “attempting to build one from scratch” (Wheeler and Barford 2013), “masquerading [it] as a little, independent shop” (see Hitcham quoted in Wheeler and Barford 2013). In urban design under Neo-liberalism, there is a “fine margin that at times separates the pioneer use from the urban land-grab, or the creative incubator from the developer demonstration project” (Tonkiss 2013, 315). A similar trend is also represented in the move from activist to legitimised uses. As Németh and Langhorst (2014, 148) put it, “activities such as urban agriculture are quickly losing their transgressive image, legitimizing the people that engage in such activities”. They argue that “[t]his legitimization – whether welcomed or not – is challenged if temporary uses are suspended in favour of more profitable endeavors” that may sideline community participation (Németh and Langhorst 2014, 148). Legitimation is not per se bad, on the contrary as the case studies confirm it is often welcome, and helps make more people aware of the important objectives of such uses by ‘mainstreaming them’. It is however contested if it acts purely as tokenism, as a top-down tick-box exercise that in reality does not engage the community in any meaningful way, or provide the financial and practical support through which such engagement may be achieved.

More moderate voices accept that some, non-controlling involvement of corporations, that does not ‘ruin’ a project’s ‘authenticity’, is necessary to financially back projects at a time when this support is not forthcoming from banks or the state (see Millar quoted in Wheeler and Barford 2013). The specific studies presented here showcase this trend.

Both Myers and Riddiford agree that recession has actually enabled conversations to happen that might have been impossible in affluent times. Although ‘cash strapped times’ are a challenge, recession has worked in Cody Dock’s favour as it has forced public organisations to develop partnerships, steer away from ‘grandiose plans’ controlled by few, and look into how communities can “take ownership of stretches of the Lea valley, give it personality, but also lever in funding” (Myers, interview, 2013).

Within the King’s Cross context, the recession, if nothing else, has made things easier and changed the power balance, says Riddiford (interview, 2013). It has presented opportunities: more openness, from the side of the developers, to having temporary projects on a regeneration site and to let go of control, due to decrease in funds.

The recession seems also to have fuelled creativity, in particular with regards to recycling of materials at all scales of deployment: from the donated skips, to the design of the Skip Garden, and from the reuse of community boats to upcycled ship containers and portakabins. At the larger scale, the sites themselves could be said to be a ‘land recycling’ of sorts, reclaiming post-industrial, brownfield land for alternative uses. Temporary uses bring life not only on stalled sites but also on sites of longer term development that has slowed down or where phasing would create the appearance of similar physical conditions to stalled sites – antisocial hoardings, inactivity, spaces inaccessible to public life and community.

## **Conclusions**

Within the context of recession and urban design, this research sought to address, first, the dimension of ‘temporariness’ and, second, the integration of temporariness into a longer term regeneration process. In doing so, it also tried to assert whether, for temporary projects to succeed, a longer term legacy or vision is in fact necessary.

As Németh and Langhorst put it, there are at least three occasions when temporariness may be usefully implemented, first due to the cycles of ‘boom and bust’ that characterize the capitalist development model, second because “the fixing of capital to a particular place is never absolute or permanent”, and third while “significant lag time exists between development intent, planning, and the implementation of physical change (often in excess of 5 years)” (Németh and Langhorst 2014, 145). All three assert the opportunities for temporariness in urban design.

Reynolds argues that “there is no suggestion that interwhile uses should be a barrier to the bigger schemes. Rather, where possible, a twin track of activity should be followed, with the interwhile taking place alongside the sometimes protracted planning process” (Reynolds 2011, 374). This happens naturally in the case of Cody Dock, as both temporary and long-term processes lie mainly in the hands of the same organisation, while the Skip Garden is a fine example of how Reynolds’ suggestion can have successful application in more mainstream development.

This research has found that, in the case of London, the dynamics of recession have enabled new types of creative conversations to happen between parties traditionally considered in opposition. A longer-term vision appears to be important in ensuring local support and funding; the creation of a legacy seems to be a major motivating factor in engaging communities with all aspects of temporary projects, from hands-on site activities to management and lobbying.

In conclusion, temporary interventions reassert an active role for time and the transient in urban design. Under this prism, temporariness is viewed not as an unavoidable glitch in the development cycle, but as a necessary and creative condition for better, more pluralistic, sustainable and human-centred development.

## **Endnotes**

i See, for example, the Leadenhall competition, initiated by British Land.

ii See, for example, the Site Life campaign

iii See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/meanwhile-use-leases-and-guidance-for-landlords>

iv ‘As described by Aurash Khawarзад, founder of Brooklyn-based Change Administration, an urban planning and design civic engagement studio, tactical urbanism is increasingly adopted by bureaucracies as “a way to start conversation” when needing to engage the public about significant urban transformation’ (Radywyl and Biggs 2013, 162).

v According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 3rd Edition (2008) a skip is ‘a large metal container into which people put unwanted objects or building or garden waste, and which is brought to and taken away from a place by a special truck when requested’.

vi According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2008) a polytunnel is ‘a long, curved plastic structure that plants are grown under in order to protect them from the weather’.

vii According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2008) a portakabin is ‘a small building that is designed to be moved from place to place and is used as a temporary office, school, or home, especially when building work is being done’.

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### **Figure Captions**

Figure 1 Case studies' location map

Figure 2 The Skip Garden location within the wider King's Cross Central Regeneration area

Figure 3 Temporary layout of the Skip Garden as in July 2013

Figure 4 Planted skip with residential block in the background

Figure 5 Cody Dock's location map

Figure 6 Cody Dock's temporary layout as in July 2013

Figure 7 Cody Dock 'Dome' installation

Figure 8 Temporary activities at Cody Dock: bird workshop

### **Table Captions**

Table 1 Skip Garden project profile

Table 2 Cody Dock project profile

WORD COUNT: 8,780