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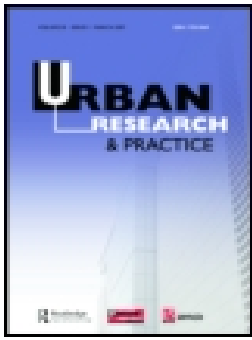# London's King's Cross redevelopment: a compact, resource efficient and 'liveable' global city model for an era of climate emergency?

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Published online: 07 Jan 2020.

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London's King's Cross redevelopment: a compact, resource efficient and 'liveable' global city model for an era of climate emergency?

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ABSTRACT

Cities have long been subject to urban containment policies against urban sprawl. Climate change concerns have recently added to the imperative to densify urban space. Urban compaction is often pursued through the creation of 'exemplar' urban developments that superficially implement 'best practice' ideas from elsewhere. In this paper, we abandon the notion of 'best practice' in favour of context-sensitive 'good practices'. Taking London's King's Cross redevelopment as a case study, this paper draws on qualitative methods to examine the contribution of context and path-dependency, as a product of local and non-local forces, to the emergence of King´s Cross as 'good practice'.

1. Introduction

Policymakers globally are experiencing renewed impetus to create resource efficient places that lighten mankind's footprint on the earth's natural resources to the greatest possible extent. Recent declarations of 'climate emergency' have helped create a new wave of public consciousness that has injected new energy into the worldwide effort to reduce harmful emissions. Given that buildings (Acquaye and Duffy 2010) and transport (Stanley, Hensher, and Loader 2011) directly contribute to over 20% of global greenhouse emissions (IPCC 2014), planners and urban policy managers occupy a vanguard position in relation to the global environmental challenge. The pressing nature of the problem makes the environmental challenge a particularly formidable one to address. A recent UN General Assembly Meeting suggests that climate change will cause irreversible damage by 2030 unless sufficient action is taken (UN 2019), leaving insufficient time to innovate, trial and adopt new approaches at the pace and scale required to address this challenge. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that tried and tested solutions will form the basis of policy to address the immediate climate challenge. Urban compaction has become synonymous with sustainable urban planning (Hofstad 2012), although the term itself is relational, producing a myriad of different forms and functions (Kain et al. 2016) leading to a spectrum of transport and social outcomes.

In this paper, we present London's recently completed King's Cross redevelopment as a product of both the exogenous forces of Britain's long-term urban containment strategy, as

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well as endogenous planning and design processes within the local area and the project itself. We analyse the wider narrative surrounding the King's Cross redevelopment and attempt to identify lessons relevant to the quest of balancing urban compaction with liveability against the specific challenges presented by a large global city. The specific challenges are perhaps best articulated by the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11, to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (UN 2019). These factors can be difficult to reconcile, as our analysis of the King's Cross development process shows. The subjectivity of the term 'liveability' is a significant challenge, given our individual preferences for particular residential environments (Rerat 2012). This paper engages with some of the more 'objective' aspects of 'habitability', notably inclusivity and safety, following Swilling and Hajer's (2017, 3) call for 'urban developments' that 'are designed and inserted into sustainable bioeconomic regions in ways that enhance both productivity and wellbeing'.

We note that urban compaction is often promoted as a policy pathway with reference to ideal urban conceptions with a universal and abstract character, such as the 'compact city' (Adelfio et al. 2018). By doing so, policymakers, urban developers and designers use either 'quantitative mapping' of urban compaction qualities or 'best practices' (Vicenzotti and Qviström 2018, 116) as a vehicle to spread ideas of alleged compact-city exportability. Both approaches fall into an 'over-generalizing' (Healey 2011, 202) trap that overlooks the importance of local context in search of an ideal urban pattern for sustainability (Hofstad 2012). The current preference for abstraction and idealization, inherent in the compact city debate, might lead to a far too shallow understanding of the social, metabolistic, and political complexities of current urban challenges (Tunström and Bradley 2015). The compact city has been legitimized as an 'institutionalized concept' (Gorgolas 2018, 56) but the implementation of urban compaction principles at the local scale is still a challenging and unresolved issue, as 'it is unlikely that the potential benefits in a particular setting will be the same elsewhere in other places' (Rosol, Béal, and Mössner 2017, 1713). In fact, exemplary projects or techniques are superficially transplanted into different contexts with a focus on 'reproducibility resulting from the standardization of practice' (Neuman 2005, 21), but with little evidence of actually improving urban environments (Mosse 2004). Moreover, insufficient attention is given to the 'processes that enable' (Moore 2013, 2371) urban compaction implementation in the local context and the sequence of actions and events occurring in a particular place. A thorough understanding of all such context-related conditions and processes requires a shift from a 'placeless' best practice into a more 'adaptive ´good practice´ approach' (Beza 2016, 244).

Against this background, the paper aims at exploring the relation between the success and replicability of compact city good practices, focusing on the role of local context and process, the latter intended as a local-based path or sequence of decisions/events, in the case of London King's Cross redevelopment. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

(1) Does King's Cross provide an example of 'good practice' model of compact city development?
(2) To what extent has the Kings Cross scheme been shaped by non-local as well as local factors?
(3) What are the key learning/replicable points from this case for other urban intensification schemes, locally and globally?

2. Urban compaction in the UK

In the UK, the idea to restrict the outward urban growth to encourage the efficient use of resources was first mooted almost a century ago. Early discussions from the 1920s focussed on the preservation of the land resource and protection of rural character, leading Sir Raymond Unwin and Sir Patrick Abercrombie to push for legal ordinances to regulate development outside of settlement boundaries (Lock 2019). Indeed, the rapacious outward growth of British cities in the 1930s became a cause of mounting concern, because of its unsightliness and because of a fear that high quality, productive farmland could be frittered away for quick money. A Ribbon Development Act that was introduced in 1934 proved prescient given the state of near-starvation that wartime Britain found itself in a decade later, but it was not until the formalisation of planning in the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act that the multiple objectives of a 'green belt' were articulated. Most relevantly these included 'to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas' and 'to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land' (Gallent et al. 2015).

Today, with the global urban population expected to account for 70% of global demographics by 2050 (OECD 2012), there is a salient need for more resource efficient, liveable and equitable cities (UN-Habitat 2012). To this end, authors note that 'compact city development has (…) emerged as the preferred response to the goal of sustainable development' (Hofstad 2012, 2), providing 'dense and proximate development patterns, built-up areas linked by public transport systems, and accessibility to local services and jobs' (OECD 2012, 19). At the same time, however, urban intensification has been criticised for encouraging 'town cramming' (Hall 2001, 101) that does not automatically deliver the transport and land use benefits that proponents might expect (Melia, Parkhurst, and Barton 2011).

In spite of some critical views (Neuman 2005; Bowie 2016) the compact city is usually presented as a useful and desirable template for present and future cities (UN-Habitat 2012). While a converging definition is still lacking (Churchman 1999; Burton 2002; Neuman 2005), compact city policies have been endorsed by international institutions, such as the UN (UN-Habitat 2012), the World Bank (2009), EU (EU Ministers 2007) and the OECD (2012), focusing on their benefits for the inhabitants, as they promote prosperity and social cohesion and, simultaneously, counteract urban sprawl (EU Ministers 2007). In the UK, urban compaction has manifested itself in recent decades through such movements as 'Urban Renaissance' (Urban Task Force 1999), 'Urban Villages' (Biddulph, Franklin, and Tait 2003) and 'Millennium Villages' (DETR 2000). Bowie (2016) underlines the initial contribution of Richard Rogers and his Task Force, at the beginning of twenty-first century, to the establishment of the compact city principles in the London context, followed by a reference to the most recent London Plans as documents incarnating the compact city ideal. Notwithstanding, urban compaction strategies have been promoted for almost a century in London and, as stated by Edwards (2009, 5) "the Task Force ideas were thus, in much of London, and certainly around King's Cross, reinforcing established trends, not reversing them".

3. Urban compaction as a travelling concept

The compact city idea, in common with other 'leading paradigms' of the policymaking arena (Rosol, Béal, and Mössner 2017, 1710) has experienced a rate of transfer from one

place to another, 'the speed and intensity [of which] seems historically unprecedented' (Tait and Jensen 2007, 107). This can constitute a problematic issue, as the focus on the institutionalization and replicability of the compact city as an ideal urban model 'decontextualizes forms, ideas and processes from the cultural conditions that give rise to it' (Moore 2013). From a theoretical perspective, circulation of urban knowledge (Harris and Moore 2013) has been explored through different theoretical lens, e.g. actor-network theory (ANT) (Tait and Jensen 2007; Ruming 2008; Rydin 2013), circuits of knowledge (McCann 2008; Healey 2013), interpretive policy analysis (IPA) (Healey 2013) and different variants of urban assemblages (McFarlane 2009; Allen and Cochrane 2010). Some of them deal with 'transformative interactions and struggles within a specific institutional context' while others explore 'the way ideas and techniques "travel", and then arrive in many different destinations' (Healey 2013, 1515).

With a critical attitude towards a straightforward and superficial process of replication typical of 'best practice' approaches, the focus of this paper is rather on the conditions and processes that have led to the creation of an alleged 'good practice', using path dependency as underpinning theory. In previous research, the expression 'good practice' has been interpreted in different ways. Here, the use of the term 'good practice' refers to a context-sensitive approach as proposed by Beza (2016) rather than purely assimilating 'good practice' with the 'best practice' discourse as stated by Vettoretto (2009) or Bulkeley (2006). Accordingly, the URBACT EU programme for the sharing of urban policy experiences supports the idea of 'good practice' rather than 'best practice' since 'what is "good" or "innovative" in one context may be less so in another' (https://urbact.eu). With such a context-adaptive focus, taking King's Cross as a selected case study, this work aims to comprehend if it has followed 'a "path dependent" trajectory' (Hensley, Mateo-Babiano, and Minnery 2014, 196) which can restrain transferability/replicability of its urban design/development principles elsewhere.

Drawing on Appelhans (2017, 76), a shift from examining 'the success or failure of certain interventions from a best practice perspective' towards an analysis of 'the underpinning rationales and path-dependency related preconditions for the success of certain interventions' is key to understanding the real value of a context-sensitive good practice (GP) and therefore to success in policy transfer. Originally conceived within the boundaries of other disciplines such as social sciences, politics and economics (Pierson 2000; Gains, John, and Stoker 2005; Mahoney 2000), path dependency has gained importance in urban planning and urban studies. Although not exempt from criticism (Booth 2011), previous research has proven the influence of path dependency on urban regeneration (Couch, Sykes, and Börstinghaus 2011), urban policy for transport, public health and neighbourhoods (Hensley, Mateo-Babiano, and Minnery 2014) and institutional impact on neighbourhood effect (Wu, He, and Webster 2010). According to Mahoney, path dependency occurs when 'contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties' (Mahoney 2000, 508). In other terms, it explains 'how the set of decisions one faces for any circumstance is limited by the decisions one has made in the past, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant' (Praeger 2007 cited by Zhan, de Jong, and de Brujin 2017). Within this sequence Mahoney includes the existence of 'conjunctures', intersecting events with 'enduring' or 'no enduring' consequences (Mahoney 2000, 529) so that final events may not be predicted. Couch, Sykes, and Börstinghaus (2011) associate path dependency with the existence of multiple types of contexts (e.g. spatial, temporal, political, economic, etc., …).
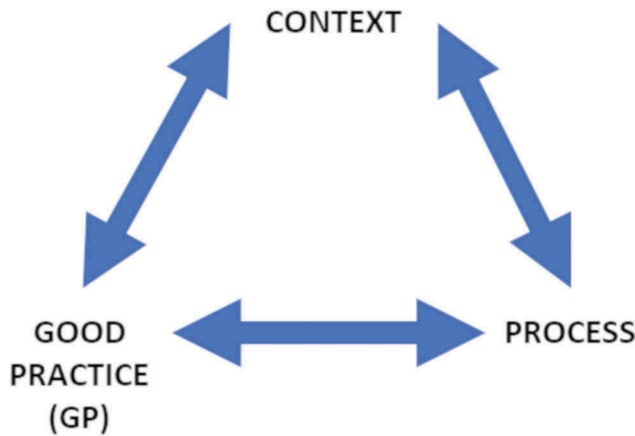
Figure 1. Analytical model (adapted from Walt and Gilson's triangle).

As such, path dependency may be useful to explore how different types of contexts impinge on the success or failure of a GP.

In the literature, different analytical frameworks have highlighted the importance of context and its influence in shaping interventions or their implementation. They frequently appear in disciplines such as public health or health policy – e.g. the Context, Implementation of Complex Interventions (CICI) framework (Pfadenhauer et al. 2017), the Exploration, Preparation, Implementation, Sustainment (EPIS) framework (Aarons, Hurlburt, and Horwitz 2011) or the Context, Process, Actors and Content framework (Walt and Gilson 1994). Here, an adaptation of Walt and Gilson's framework as a more dynamic model with multiple interactions (Figure 1) is associated with the path dependency theory. The rationale and details of such combination are described in section 4.

4. King's cross explored

The redevelopment of the area around King's Cross train station is a compact, mixed-use, regeneration project in a very central location in London, close to one of its principal transport hubs. It has transformed a 27-hectare obsolete industrial and rail-oriented brownfield into a vibrant and thriving area, including office, retail, hotel and residential uses, with an overall 3.1 plot ratio (maximum 4.2 in King's Cross South, same as Broadgate development around Liverpool Street Station) (Bishop and Williams 2016, 206). Buildings average 8.9 storeys in height (Bishop and Williams 2016, 207), which is similar to other redevelopments of central London such as Liverpool Street (8.6) but a lot less than Canary Wharf (19). The King's Cross site has achieved a land-use mix consisting of 47% office space, 10% for education, 25% for residential homes and the remainder as hotels, retail and leisure/other (Bishop and Williams 2016, 207). Specifically, the residential use triples the value of previous Argent's mixed-use development in Birmingham (Brindley Place, 9%) and provides a much wider mix of uses than Canary Wharf and Broadgate in Liverpool Street, which are mostly devoted to offices. Other projects have been mentioned as inspirational for King´s Cross, especially the 'phasing and take-up of other past and present development projects such as

Brindley Place, Broadgate, Paddington, Canary Wharf, Greenwich and Stratford City' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 20).

The choice of King's Cross as a case study (Yin 1994) for this paper focuses on the local scale to explore the issue of context-dependency and replicability of urban compaction good practices. Such an approach draws on Dempsey and Jenks (2010), who declare that 'discussions of the compact city may no longer be appropriate' proposing instead to reorient the debate towards a 'city of compact neighbourhoods' (Dempsey and Jenks 2010, 120). The importance of learning from experiences 'through rich narratives – in-depth cases – rather than through "best practice" summaries' justifies 'why "thick" case narratives are celebrated in the planning field' (Healey 2012, 196).

With this in mind, the paper focuses on one single case study, analysed in-depth, considering that comparative analysis of multiple case studies is not exempt from problems when not properly addressed or justified (Booth 2011). The case study is analysed to discriminate between context-dependent aspects and replicable aspects of King's Cross as GP, highlighting the impact of path dependency on such a case study. This interpretation of path dependency in the context of this paper is useful to understand whether the local situations, events and contingencies behind the selected case study have contributed to the uniqueness of such a project or if replicability is possible to a certain extent. Therefore, in the analysis of the process for the case study implementation, the sequence of decisions and events within such process are filtered through the lens of path dependency and special attention is given to the impact of context on such process and, therefore, on GP implementation (Figure 1).

In this work, the case study analysis has been undertaken using a qualitative methodological approach that uses primary data from 12 semi-structured interviews (conducted between January and April 2018) together with a content analysis of 4 key planning/consultation documents, complemented by an ad hoc use of academic literature and information from websites when needed. Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) of semi-structured interviews aimed to distinguish context-dependent and unique elements from replicable components of the selected case study. Interviewees were identified through a 'purposive sampling' strategy (Robinson 2014, 32) covering a diversity of stakeholders intervening in the creation of the selected case study. The stakeholders represented the following groups: academia (professor or researcher), development professional (architects or developers), public administration (both from the political and technical sides) or local community (residents or representatives of local associations).

The content analysis of key planning and consultation documents focuses on understanding the importance of context and process in the project narrative and if the process displays path dependency in its description and evolution. The analysis was conducted on documents representing different stages of the development: the consultation documents 'Principles for a human city' and 'Parameters for Regeneration' edited in 2001 by the developer Argent St George and the landowners, London and Continental Railways (LCR) and Exel; the planning document 'Implementation Strategy' from 2004; the more recent report 'The Economic and Social Story of King's Cross' (Regeneris 2017). The selection of documents published in different years is consistent with the purpose of the paper and its analytical framework, as it allows to explore the impact of context and process on King´s Cross throughout its development.

Hence, the value of both the document and interview analysis is threefold as it is connected to the three concepts expressed in the adapted version of Walt and Gilson's analytical framework (*context, process* and *GP*). First, it allows to examine the importance of *context* for the development/implementation of King's Cross as GP. Second, special attention is given to *process*, to understand if this occurred in a path-dependent way through highlighting key decisions, events and steps as well as contingencies and conjunctures resulting from the analysis of texts. Third, texts are scrutinized to examine possible direct or indirect reference to the *uniqueness and/or replicability* as contributions to the exemplar character of King's Cross redevelopment as GP.

5. Empirical research and findings

The empirical research presented in the following sections, attempts to identify the relative importance of local and extra-local factors in the shaping of the King's Cross redevelopment, the extent to which the scheme can be considered to be 'good practice' (GP), and the replicability of the model established. It does so by using a theoretical framework identifying path dependency theory as the most suitable for highlighting the local dimension of the case study regeneration process. Accordingly, path dependency is then combined with an analytical framework aiming to highlight the relevance of context in shaping the GP and structure the different components of the GP creation process. Such a framework is an adaptation of Walt and Gilson's triangle and serves to underline the directional interconnections of three elements: context, process and GP. The process component connects directly with path dependency, it is influenced by context and generates the GP. Context may be either composed of contingent elements or conjunctures intersecting the process. The following sections step through the three research questions set out in section one.

5.1. *King´s Cross as good practice?*

King's Cross (Figure 2) has become 'one of the places which is used to sell London to the world' (Regeneris 2017, 47), expected to be "an urban exemplar for a sustainable world city" (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 9), and has been presented as a 'good practice' through the attainment of several high profile awards. For example, the scheme won 'Best Project Five Years On' at the 2017/2018 London Planning Awards (londonplanningawards.com), the Mayor's Planning Award for Excellence at the 2007/2008 and 2017/2018 London Planning Awards; the OAS 'Sustainable Achievement Award' in 2015 (http://oasdevelopmentawards.co.uk); and the 'Most Innovative Development of the Past 20 years' at the Property Awards 2015 (http://www.awards.propertyweek.co.uk). It is also listed in several collections of exemplary urban developments – the Urban Land Institute Case Studies for urban development best practices (https://casestudies.uli.org/kings-cross/); the case study database of the UCL-led International Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in Policy (INTER-CEP. http://www.inter-cep.com/. This webpage was accessed 11 January 2018, although its link is not functioning at the time of publication); a report on best practice in urban renewal commissioned by the City of Sydney (SGS 2014); a World Bank report describing it as a case study representative of 'a strategic approach to urban transformation through Transit Oriented Development' (World Bank 2017, 453).

Figure 2. King´s Cross today (2018). Picture by the authors.

One of the major factors of success for King's Cross is linked to 'Argent's approach to development' that 'has marked itself apart' (Regeneris 2017, vi) for its successful mix of long-term vision, flexibility in management/design/planning, place-making quality focus and stakeholders/community involvement. In particular, Argent's contribution to community living and attractiveness through the promotion of events has been clearly stated in the interviews.

> One of the great success stories (…) – and this is Argent at the other end – is being how they are creating for the community there and of course, underwriting, in a way, the success of the potential of the various uses that are on the site. They have festivals and they have all manner of events and that's good (Interviewee. Architect)

In the literature, Glasson and Wood (2009, 287) explicitly mention King´s Cross redevelopment as an 'overall socio-economic good practice' referring to its Environmental Statement published in 2004 (RPS 2004). Several sustainability features are incorporated in King's Cross including: a low carbon strategy that is expected to attain a 60% carbon reduction between 2000 and 2050; a district heating system which accounts for 99% of heat/hot water needs; more than 80% of recycled public waste; an extensive use of green roofs and walls integrated in a living-landscape approach and some of the buildings (namely One, Two and Five Pancras Square) have been certified with a BREEAM 'Outstanding' rating (Source: UK Green Build Council, www.ukgbc.org). According to Rode (2018), King's Cross has been shaped explicitly by the compact city principles set out in the GLA 2010 strategic planning policy, the 2004 and 2008 London Plans and, less directly, the 2011 London Plan.

King´s Cross has been generally acclaimed positively, although it has not been exempted from criticism, which is in line with defining it as a 'good' rather than 'best' practice. Such critical voices are related to the use of a neoliberal approach that leads to a 'limited provision of affordable social housing to rent (…) few defences against gentrification, few youth clubs or non-commodity meeting places and a very private sort of environment'

(Edwards 2009, 23–24). In fact, 'the development of high-end office space and up-market accommodation create a high probability of rising rental rates in adjacent wards' (Brenner 2014, 17) and 'in King's Cross, gentrification provides the clearest case of conflict' (Brenner 2014, 17) undermining its 'best practice' value in favour of a more reasonable 'good practice' attribution.

The question of gentrification and affordability as a critical factor emerged also in the interviews:

> It is an exemplar. The only bit that I question about it is the collateral damage in it, raising the price of everything in it, around it, so that's very damaging for all the people who live around it (Interviewee. Local entrepreneur)

5.2. *Process and key factors*

In the table below (Table 1), the development process and history of King's Cross are reconstructed, complementing the information from the selected consultation and planning documents with other sources (Van der Veen, 2009; Bishop and Williams 2016). The table shows how the momentum towards regenerating the site begins to build after 2000, when Argent is selected as developer and then the agreement on section 2 of CTRL is signed. Earlier plans/options for redevelopment of the area existed (Figure 3) but all failed (van der Veen, 2009). Such events had a negative influence on the redevelopment process as the 'history, of failed attempts to redevelop the site and deliver regeneration, has influenced local people's perceptions and aspirations' producing frustration and concerns about the 'lack of progress in developing the area and delivering regeneration' (Argent, LCR and Exel

Table 1. Development history. Main events.

1974	Regents Canal designated as Conservation Area (extended in 1983 and 1986)
1978–1985	GLC works on Action Area Plan (left uncompleted)
1987	King's Cross identified as terminus for high speed trains
1988	Community planning brief published by Camden Council
1989	British Rail/London Regeneration Consortium submit planning application for comprehensive development. Application later withdrawn
1989	Second application proposes mixed-use development led by offices and housing
1992	Council's Environment Committee says that it is minded to grant outline planning permission (if conditions are fulfilled)
1993	Government announces preference for CTRL terminus at St. Pancras and halts the progress of the plan. Decision coincides with major economic downturn. BR/LRC plans become unrealistic.
1994	Applications are withdrawn
1991/1994	Local architect and local community group submit alternative applications. The plans had no provision for rail infrastructure
1996	CTRL Act receives Royal Assent. RGP adopted.
2000	**Adoption of Camden UDP and revised Islington UDP. Argent designated as developer.**
2001	**Agreement on section 2 of CTRL signed. Main construction work on new railway infrastructure and St Pancras station starts. "Principles for a Human City" and "Parameters for Regeneration" are published. PPG adopted.**
2002	London Draft Plan
2004	Nine applications submitted by Argent (3 identical applications covering The Main Site and the Triangle) and indicative highway proposals for Pancras Road, Goods Way and York Way
2005	Revised planning applications are submitted
2006	S106 signed for main site in Regent Quarter. Planning permission for the Main Site is granted
2007	Development started
2008	Islington's Triangle Site granted planning permission

Adapted from Van der Veen (2009, 245) and updated with information extracted from Bishop and Williams (2016, 135) and Argent, LCR and Exel (2001b). The period of 'critical juncture' (Mahoney 2000, 512) is marked in bold.
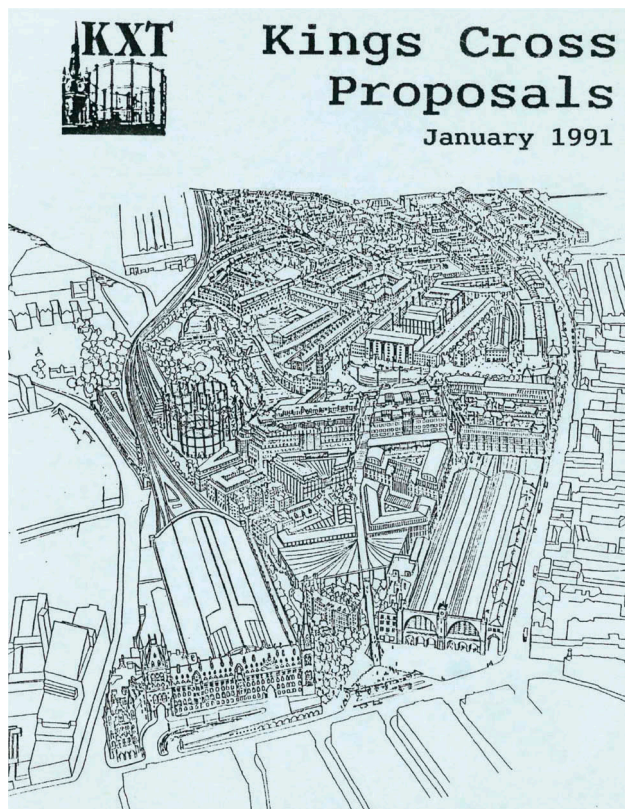
Figure 3. One of the discarded initial proposals for King's Cross. Image: courtesy of Norman Sheppard.

2004, 4). Along with Argent's designation, the most important event which paved the way to the regeneration of King's Cross occurred in 2001. That year, London and Continental Railways (LCR), the Government and Railtrack achieved an agreement on financing Section 2 of the CTRL project, which took the high-speed line to London St Pancras. This event acted as a catalyst facilitating the redevelopment of the area.

Therefore, the 2000 designation of Argent and developer and the 2001 agreement on section 2 of CTRL have to be jointly considered as the 'critical juncture' or contingency (Figure 4) which initiates the sequence of the development process, with a 'self-reinforcing' character in which 'initial steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction' (Mahoney 2000, 512).

For the purposes of this study, the years 2000–2001 are taken as a starting point, and the aforementioned agreement is considered as an essential kick-off step in the process. At that time, all parties were committed to a long-term development, establishing a 'collective ownership structure for the development', a financial structure and the aim to contribute to local development and provision of public utilities (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 25). A clear dependence of King's Cross redevelopment on the CTRL project is expressed in the 'Implementation Strategy', highlighting the importance of 'legal agreements' providing 'for the release of the LCR and Exel land for development, once the Channel Tunnel Rail Link has been completed' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 15). On the same document, it is clearly
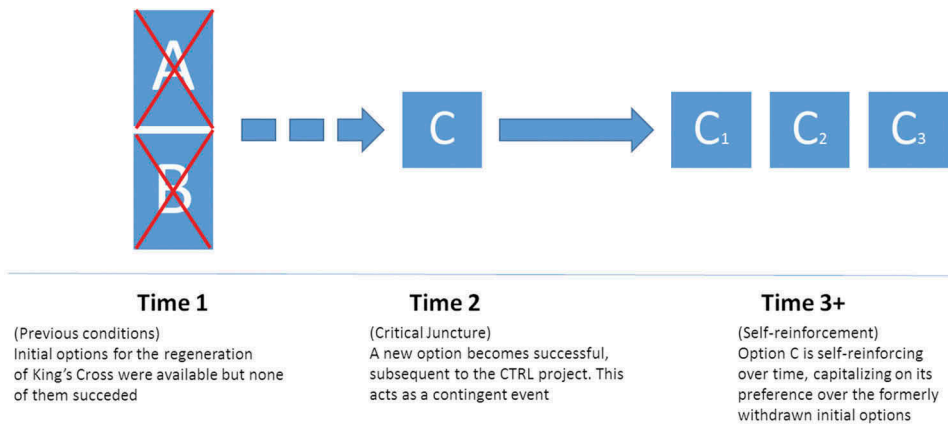
Time 1

(Previous conditions)
Initial options for the regeneration
of King's Cross were available but none
of them succeeded

Time 2

(Critical Juncture)
A new option becomes successful,
subsequent to the CTRL project. This
acts as a contingent event

Time 3+

(Self-reinforcement)
Option C is self-reinforcing
over time, capitalizing on its
preference over the formerly
withdrawn initial options

Figure 4. Illustration of contingency, according to path dependency (adapted from Mahoney 2000, 514).

stated that 'much of the site would only be released for development upon completion and opening of the CTRL' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 19). The CTRL Permanent Works, subsequent relocation of certain land uses and land releases were also mentioned as parts of the 'Parameters for Regeneration' and described from a process perspective, although they might be also examined from a context point of view.

Despite the clear definition of the 2000–2001 kick-off events, some previous key facts are mentioned in the 'Principles for a Human City' document: the 1989 proposals by the London Regeneration for the railway lands development; the 1994 Camden Borough initial intention to grant such proposals, later withdrawn; the 1996 creation of King's Cross partnership, within the framework of the Government's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) initiative; the 1997 publication of the King's Cross 'Emerging Principles' for its regeneration by LCR, Camden Borough and the King's Cross Partnership, defining the stations, the underground and the Thameslink 2000 as catalysts for change. Nevertheless, none of those managed to function as a trigger event for the redevelopment process.

Planning appears as both a part of the process or a contextual condition/limitation for the redevelopment of the area. The adoption of different plans before or after 2001 (e.g. the 1996 RPG; the 2001 PPG; 2001 Towards the London Plan and 2002 London Plan Draft; the 2000 Camden Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which defined the 'King's Cross Railway Lands' as an Opportunity Area for regeneration; the 2000 revised Islington UDP) has also had an impact on the process. Notwithstanding, they were not sufficient conditions for regeneration. Different planning scales are mentioned in all documents to different extents, highlighting how they affected King's Cross development by setting development conditions and land uses (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 11–17). The landowners and developers 'participated in (…) Camden's review of its UDP policies for the King's Cross Opportunity Area and its formulation of a revised draft Planning Brief' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 15). Other preconditions for development emerge in the 'Implementation Strategy', such as the 'necessary agreements and public subsidies being in place' for delivering housing and, particularly, affordable housing units (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 21). Moreover, the development is divided into phases, the first one being focused on significant infrastructure works, which 'require a very substantial, early financial investment' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 22). Phases and

development pattern are established in the same document, with a sequence of times and expectations for completion of each part, still allowing for a certain degree of flexibility and incrementalism.

Even the publication of consultation documents appears as part of a process and may be interpreted within a path-dependent sequence. For instance, the 'Principles for a Human City' document is considered in the subsequent 'Parameters for Regeneration' as an 'important part of the process', since it fostered the creation of consensus and 'shared set of aspirations' to regenerate King's Cross, to create within 15 years a 'successful mixed use development; one that will shape a dense, vibrant and distinctive urban quarter, bring local benefits and make a lasting contribution to London' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b: iii). A clear reference to the documents published from 2001 is expressed in the 'Implementation Strategy' as something that 'must be taken into account and addressed in planning and developing the King's Cross site' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 15). The 2017 Regeneris report (Regeneris 2017) confirmed the role of the principles, defined in the consultation documents, in developing and delivering King's Cross. A similar perspective emerged in the interviews. Although this section of the text is based on document analysis and not on interviews, it seems relevant, here, to mention that one interviewee has touched on process-related path dependency, stating that the early stages were characterized by many interruptions and that a clearer path-dependent sequence in the redevelopment process has emerged more recently, especially after 2007, as one interviewee notes:

> I think that if you look at the path dependency part, I think you may find better proof of this path dependency development after the S106 was closed, so around 2007/2008 up to now. I think this is probably where you'll find many contingencies, that there were delays because of the crisis (…) starting from the 1980s towards 2007 (…) I think that there is just big interruptions, or shocks, so there was this plan and then there were other election outcomes, I think and this is why the Thatcher plan never moved forward. To me, (…) that's like a shock for a project because it then just stopped for 15 years.(Interviewee. Academic expert#3).

5.3. *Key learning points and replicability*

In terms of project replicability, the words *different* and *unique* stand out in interview transcriptions. The in-depth analysis of interviews displayed the emergence of different types of contexts (Figure 5) (historical, political, planning/policy, legislative, physical/geographical, economic and social).

These contexts were used as themes in content analysis to which the more specific topics of the coding process would be referred.

> Brownfield has context, brownfield has history. You very rarely get a completely blank, empty piece of brownfield land, it has structures on it. If it doesn't, its surroundings have structures, so brownfield does give you context
> (Interviewee. Academic expert and former planner)

From a historical perspective, heritage and time in relation to planning and design concepts were particularly relevant. The role of heritage in King's Cross regeneration was meant to preserve the historical character of the area but, according to Brenner (2014), has also posed the question on how the buildings would generate economic growth through their reuse. Time is expressed through history but it is also transversally related to other contexts, such
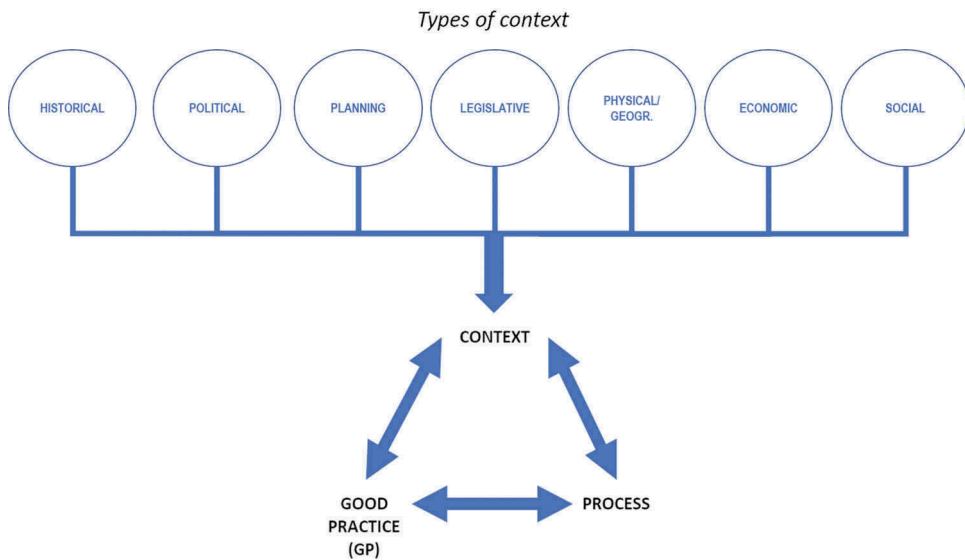
Types of context

Figure 5. Types of contexts contributing to the analytical framework.

as politics, planning and economy. The political context displayed the importance of decisions on the Eurostar tunnel and St Pancras regeneration as catalysts; the existence of a supportive and powerful council in Camden; the influence of a liberal and New Labour approach; the importance of power relationships between developer and politicians and some reference to the recent Brexit as conjuncture. The planning context was impregnated with clear references to the British deregulated system allowing for flexibility and contextual solutions. Certain elements such as the use of Urban Renaissance principles could be referred either to the planning or to the political context. The legislative context was mostly mentioned regarding the use of legal agreements and Section 106 with a specific impact on facilities and affordable housing. The economic context showed the importance of volatility in economy and a strong impact of the 2007–2008 economic crisis which has shifted the development priorities towards affordable housing. The social context emerged through the community role in the participatory planning process and neighourhood degradation as a driver for change.

Although the opinion on the influence of community on the scheme appears as controversial in the interviews, with some of them stating it did not produce substantial changes, it is certainly acknowledged as positive in terms of approach and process. According to Bishop and Williams (2016), the developer actually introduced some revisions, mainly related to landscaping, public and pedestrian areas, in the revised 2005 planning application following the community input.

After exploring the role of context in King's Cross redevelopment, the emergence of unique versus replicable elements from the project was examined. Even though some of these elements could be associated to each type of context – but also to process rather than context -, they have been analysed separately to show the existence of uniqueness or replicability aspects within the King's Cross redevelopment. The emerging unique elements of King's Cross stem from site-related issues, such as the site characteristics, size and location or the

property situation of land; planning and design features, including the adoption of a long-term perspective, the influence of the CTRL project and the inclusion of economic crashes in the planning vision; stakeholder-related issues, such as time availability for development, the availability of affordable housing grant and the collaboration between actors; the co-existence and combination of different elements, forces and conditions. This last element is particularly relevant as it reflect the structures whose components interact in shaping the project. Such structures are influenced by a series of actions/events/decisions, thus connected to path dependency.

> I tend to think what are the structures of power, money, law, land ownership (…) which constrain and enable things (…) at that particular time, but it's not completely pre-determined, it's also influenced by the actions and decisions within all that framework. (Interviewee. Academic expert)

> Any development that anyone does is unique and not just because of its physical location, physical qualities, scale of the opportunity, but also very much the policy, the planning policy objectives … (Interviewee. Developer sector)

> You can't replicate the conditions and the individuals who make a scheme (Interviewee. Academic expert and former planner)

The replicable elements emerging from the interviews are also referable to site issues, such as the integration of the development within its surroundings; to planning and design topics, giving special importance to the use of concepts deriving from urban movements/theories such as the compact city or Urban Renaissance but also to the similarities with other contemporary urban developments; to actor and stakeholder-related topics, including community engagement, consultation process and agreed vision, the use of events to attract visitors, the careful selection of retailers representing fairly unique stores or independent types of restaurants, the creation of new employment and economic gain. According to one interviewee, the King's Cross redevelopment represented:

> A great dialogue, agree a vision, convince people, bring people along, it's an amazing opportunity and you could deliver it in a way that wasn't going to put dust over the local school kids and get people run over by construction lorries, this was genuinely going to be a new piece of city and employment opportunities were going to be available, all of those things are replicable and are happening in the good, big regeneration
> (Interviewee. Developer sector).

The project's organizational model, in particular, has been identified by several interviewees as a source of inspiration for other projects:

> We're now here in Amsterdam, developing what is called the … is it called the Marine, that used to be there? They've just made an excursion to King's Cross and then they wanted to learn about building this specific project organisation (Interviewee: Academic expert)

In spite of all such replicable or inspirational factors and elements, still there is a range of local conditions that have been essential in the redevelopment of King's Cross. The 'physical attributes of the area (location, strategic transport connections, and availability of development land)' have been identified in document analysis as an 'opportunity' (Regeneris 2017, 4). The role of local physical and geographical context is underlined by framing King's Cross within London as city and by knitting it into the 'existing grain of surrounding areas' to define a consistent and 'robust urban framework' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 11). The

accessibility dimension of geographical context is particularly relevant, focusing on the 'physical links and connections' with the surroundings (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 16). Within the 'Parameters for Regeneration' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b), physical and geographical contexts are expressed in terms of 'physical boundaries' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 3) and through the concept of 'building and integrating neighbourhoods', by taking into account the 'existing urban form' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 44–45). Surrounding environmental assets such as the Regent's Canal are mentioned as a relevant part of the physical context. Different transport infrastructures either intersecting or adjacent to the development are also cited as relevant in the aforementioned 'Parameters for Regeneration' document (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b).

Planning appears both as a contextual framework and process in document analysis. From a planning context perspective, King's Cross is set against the background of national (PPG) and regional (RPG) planning guidance, highlighting the importance of the 1996 RPG3 which identified King´s Cross as 'Central Area Margin Key Opportunity' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 11). At the more local level, London Planning and the Islington and Camden respective Unitary Development Plans are mentioned, the latter setting King's Cross Railway Lands' as an Opportunity Area. Within all scales of planning, high-density, walkability and mix of uses are underlined as key features. Specific planning restrictions also play an important role. For instance, local views as a limitation to development (e.g. height restrictions due to views on St. Paul's cathedral). Other types of restrictions are expressed within a more legal type of context – e.g. 'land ownership' or 'legal agreements, rights and obligations' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 5). Planning is also connected to place-making, then to a more physical type of context. For instance, the mix of uses included in planning is meant to foster a unique sense of place as 'different public and private uses can benefit from each other, such that "the whole" is greater than the sum of its parts' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 19). The connection between planning and heritage is also underlined, as 'the spatial masterplan will build on the sense of place afforded by the historic environment, to create a new quarter for London' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 21).

Dealing with other contexts rather than the most common planning/design/physical ones associated with urban development is key, as for instance the 'social, economic and cultural "framework"' may 'complement the physical framework enshrined within the Development Specifications and Parameter Plans, to help visualise, attract and guide the creation of a real place at King's Cross Central' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 5).

The importance of history emerges from the beginning of the 'Principles for a Human City' document. Here, the historical context stands out, highlighting that 'King's Cross is a unique area' with a remarkable historical value stemming from 'the degree of survival of its Victorian townscape' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 5). Such heritage is then considered as a propeller for regeneration. Listed buildings appear as one of King´s Cross 'Parameters for Regeneration' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 63), while a good portion of the development is located within the Regent's Canal Conservation Area or the King's Cross Conservation Areas.

Social context is related to the local community, taken into account by addressing its needs through a coherent mix of uses. King's Cross is expected to 'tackle local issues and concerns', 'respect local values' and 'provide opportunities for existing communities' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 23). Participation of local community, 'social inclusion' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001b, 15) and integration of less advantaged segments of population are explicitly mentioned (e.g. lower-income inhabitants of the neighbouring area of

Somers Town), with 'particular emphasis on engaging actively with children and young people' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 26). Learning from 'the surrounding neighbourhoods and communities' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 11) is considered as key.

Economic context is related to different types of risks affecting its viability, although from a contextual perspective is displayed through a reference to economic and property cycles (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 14) and correspondent volatility of markets. Accordingly, the masterplan considered that redevelopment could take up to 15 years, undergoing at least one economic cycle (Argent, LCR and Exel 2001a, 15). Different socio-economic challenges (Regeneris 2017) affected the redevelopment of King's Cross, linked to the situation of its surrounding area at the beginning of twenty-first century (e.g. unemployment and problematic job market; predominance of social housing over market-price; low incomes; crime and security problems).

Both the risks affecting the deliverability of development and the opportunities arisen in the development process can be interpreted as the aforementioned intersecting events that Mahoney (2000, 529) defined as 'conjunctures' in path dependency. A series of risks related to planning/regulations, construction, letting, sales, finance, the existence of competing areas and political changes are mentioned in the 'Implementation Strategy' (Argent, LCR and Exel 2004, 13) as elements that can have an impact on the deliverability of King's Cross. Hence, they can deviate the normal process when they occur. Examples of negative conjunctures appear also in interviews (for instance, the 2008 crisis) and in the literature (Bishop and Williams 2016, refer to the delays caused by a judicial review in 2007 and Islington's initial refusal to consent development). Document analysis revealed also the existence of positive conjunctures, in terms of opportunities. For instance, the arrival of certain occupiers such as Google or the University of the Arts has 'contributed to the evolution and success of King's Cross' and has 'been particularly important in changing perceptions (and overall placemaking)' (Regeneris 2017, 12–13).

6. Concluding remarks

The prospect of a global climate emergency calls for rapid responses to reducing harmful emissions across all policy sectors (Lenton et al. 2019). For urban planners, the urgency of the task of bringing forward development schemes that minimize harmful emissions in ways that are socially equitable and progressive places an emphasis on reusing existing 'tried and tested' planning solutions. Compact urban schemes have become favoured for their apparent resource efficiency, although the more precise advantages and disadvantages of urban compaction have been a matter of intense debate. In relation to the UK specifically, this paper has viewed urban compaction as an inevitable byproduct of longer-term urban containment and brownfield recycling strategies, from which London's King's Cross redevelopment has emerged after a lengthy gestation period. This paper has therefore focused on establishing, firstly, whether it can be considered an example of good practice in compact city development, secondly, how localized the factors have been in shaping the scheme, and, lastly, what the key learning points are. In addressing the first question, this paper has drawn on the various audits and assessments that have been undertaken on the completed parts of the scheme. Of particular note are the diversity of commendations that the scheme has attracted in different categories, including the high environmental sustainability ratings awarded to buildings and elements of community infrastructure across the site, as well as the strong social vision used to

inform the masterplan. Together these different strands of good practice indicate both a strong design-led development process on the part of the scheme's promoters, as well as robust oversight from regulators, policymakers and community groups. However, we provide only a partial and static snapshot of the King's Cross built environment as it currently stands. This is because parts of the scheme are still being completed and, furthermore, we argue that a more comprehensive assessment taking account of wider lifestyle patterns and travel behavior should be undertaken to provide a more robust analysis of whether the scheme represents good practice in compact city planning. Regarding the second question, *to what extent has the King's Cross scheme been shaped by non-local as well as local factors*, we argue that King's Cross can be regarded as a product of both local and non-local forces, in both cases linked with urban containment policies, which have to be regarded as 'the' critical factor in its own right. On the one hand, in relation to local forces, although the UK's longstanding green belt policies have not stopped the outward or outer development of cities in their entirety, they can be regarded as an important part of a wider discussion about where and how to deliver new growth. From 1997 a much stronger impetus for urban intensification can be detected, as epitomized by the Urban Task Force's preoccupation with the recycling of brownfield land. However, King´s Cross redevelopment is connected with London's long-term legacy of urban compaction strategies rather than an exclusive reference to the compact city debate raised in the 1990s by the Urban Task Force. As Edwards ([2009], 24) notes, 'the developments completed and underway at King's Cross are the outcome of multiple influences and the UTF is probably not a major one. However, we can observe in the new buildings, streets and squares all the strengths and weaknesses of the Task Force's approach'. Local political circumstances, notably the Mayor of London's targets for affordable housing delivery, have certainly had an impact as well. Affordable housing has emerged as a key topic both in the interviews and document analysis, especially in relation to market volatility and the 2007–2008 economic crisis. On the other hand, urban containment policies need to be set against the more general debate on global sustainability. Among non-local forces affecting King's Cross Redevelopment, long-term national planning strategy has helped to direct investment and growth inwards into UK cities, creating a long-term inwards dynamism that would have been otherwise far from guaranteed. Such an inward focus for growth has promoted the conditions for urban compaction nationally. This wider context is important and plausibly contributes to existing commonalities with other contemporary projects that have been affected by it. Finally, in relation to the third question, *what are the key learning/replicable points from this case for other urban intensification schemes, locally and globally*, we found that the setting and position of King's Cross are unusual but not unique. Many cities possess underutilized land within the urban core, particularly around railway lines – e.g. Stuttgart and Madrid. Like Stuttgart and Madrid, the King's Cross story has been far from straightforward, partly because the wide range of stakeholders had different priorities and visions for the site that needed to be taken account of. The protracted development timeline has meant that it has been subject to the changing winds of politics and market forces. Economic cycles and volatility have an impact on premium plots of land located in the urban core, as it is in the interest of landowners and developers to obtain the most advantageous development conditions out of them. Ultimately the King's Cross that has been delivered is generally regarded as 'right' for this site and the inner London context. This shows the value of a delivery process that has had time to 'breathe', mature and be modified and tested against stakeholder demands. These aspects do not make the scheme unique, but the maturity that the development group have displayed in balancing

the range of views has, according to the majority of interviewees, led to an improved scheme. In summary, we believe that the term 'good practice' can justifiably be applied to the King's Cross model of compact development, and the process undertaken to create it.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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