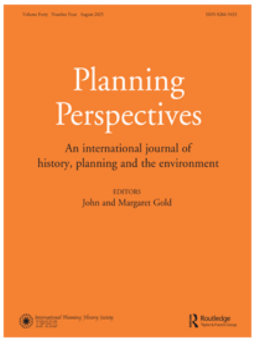

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Where there's a will, is there a way? Reflections on the institutional afterlife of the London Docklands Development Corporation

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ABSTRACT

In planning systems across the world, there has been a renewed interest in time-limited agencies as vehicles for delivering urban regeneration. While widely promoted for their effectiveness and efficiency, such organizations also raise important questions about the long-term governance of place. This paper makes a conceptual and empirical contribution to debates about urban development and time-limited planning. It introduces the notion of an 'institutional afterlife' to explore how development corporations behave when faced with their own demise. We draw on interviews, policy documents, and archival material to examine the case of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), which operated from 1981 to 1998. The paper explores how the LDDC approached its 'institutional death' and sought to shape its afterlife. It reveals how exit strategies were shaped by temporal awareness, inter-institutional conflict, and political and reputational concerns. We argue that a deeper understanding of the relationship between death and afterlife in typically time-limited organizations can help clarify the temporal dimensions of urban governance and planning.

KEYWORDS

Development corporations; urban planning; urban regeneration; institutional afterlife; London

Introduction

For decades governments and neo-liberal commentators have been highly critical of the speed with which the English planning system makes decisions. It is repeatedly characterized as being too slow to deliver on urgent outcomes and out of sync with private sector investment cycles and timelines. Testament to this engrained perception are the numerous attempts at reform – from the levelling-up agenda of the Johnson government[1]; to the short-lived Growth Plan of the Truss administration[2]; to the subsequent consultations over the National Planning Policy Framework.[3] The common thread is the argument that planning gets in the way of delivering regeneration, housing, and economic growth. Although the specific solutions to this problem have varied from one administration to the next, establishing the right agencies to bring about change, whilst addressing the speed of decision-making are common goals.

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[1]Airey and Doughty, "Rethinking the Planning System for the 21st Century".
[2]HM Treasury, "The Growth Plan 2022".
[3]DLUHC, "National Planning Policy Framework"; MHCLG, "Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework."

In many countries, this search for new governance models has found expression in renewed enthusiasm for Development Corporations [DCs], modelled on earlier rounds of planning reform.[4] First introduced in England in 1946, they were conceived as arm's length government bodies responsible for the coordination and delivery of New Towns. Their projects oversaw the transformation of large areas of land to house thousands of families who had either lost their homes during the Second World War or lived in poor-quality accomodation.[5] Since then, several iterations of the DC model have been introduced across the UK and internationally. Their single-purpose focus (be it the delivery of a New Town or the regeneration of an urban area) has made them attractive options for policymakers seeking to streamline decision-making and insulate delivery agencies from democratic scrutiny.[6]

It is therefore timely to re-visit the historic work of these organsations and reflect on the relevance of their experiences for contemporary planning. Whilst much has been written on their activities, there exists relatively little research on how Development Corporations end their lives in different contexts or how they were tasked to plan for what comes after them. With notable exceptions,[7] there have been few attempts to look back at what time-limited institutions achieved and/or what their longer-term impacts have been over decades. It is unclear, for example, what impact the awarenes of time-limits had on their everyday activities and whether or not knowledge of a 'wind-up date' made DCs more or less focused on getting regeneration projects completed.

In this paper, we contribute new research on the largest and best-resourced time-limited Development Corporation of the post-war era, the London Docklands Development Corporation [LDDC] 1981–1998. Although there is an ample literature on the LDDC, research has paid relatively little attention to how knowledge of its temporal finitude influenced actions during its lifetime and what the legacies of this were for the governance of development and regeneration in and around its area of operation. To explore these connections we draw on the work of philosopher Samuel Scheffler[8] on what he terms 'afterlife thinking' – not a meta-physical sense of eternity, but the belief that 'others will continue to live after I have died'.[9] Following this logic, we develop the concept of an *institutional afterlife* to explain how time-limited planning bodies, such as DCs, shape their activities to achieve long-lasting change within a finite temporal existence.

We use this philosophical discussion to frame the analysis of our empirical data, based on in-depth documentary archival work. Once its executives knew the end was coming, they set in motion a series of strategies and actions to ensure that LDDC's priorities and reputation would be sustained beyond its death. This resonates with what Sorensen[10] has argued in relation to understandings of institutional change – that it does not take place synchronically, in an instant, but diachronically, stretched out over time. We argue that LDDC's desire for an institutional afterlife was the process by which new actors and place factors entered the stage. This explains why many aspects of the LDDC's vision for the future of London Docklands were reassessed and/or dropped following its demise. The paper concludes with broader reflections over 'the profound but elusive influence of time'[11] on urban development and regeneration planning. We reflect on the ways in which considerations of institutional afterlives constitute an under-researched part of the

[4]Savours, "The Planning Premium."
[5]Hall et al., *The Containment of Urban England.*
[6]Colenutt, *The Property Lobby*.
[7]Brownill and O'Hara, "From Planning to Opportunism?".
[8]Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife.*
[9]Ibid., 15.
[10]Sorensen, "Taking Critical Junctures Seriously".
[11]Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 16.

contemporary landscape of public policy delivery, which is becoming more and more dependent on complex assemblages of time-limited organizations.

Change and continuity in urban regeneration interventions

Debates over the temporalities of planning have intensified in the recent decades. Multiple writers have explored the links between the timings and phasing of planning and development projects and power.[12] For Laurian and Inch time represents 'a fundamental feature of human experience'[13] whereby individuals make sense of their lives by constantly revisiting their past and future from their present moment.[14] The authors argue that the technological acceleration of modernity is generating a continuous stream of 'short-term futures'. This means that planners, policy-makers, communities, and real estate actors have little room for experiencing the present, which in turn impacts on their capacity to revisit and learn from the past or imagine the future. It is an approach grounded in literatures ranging from the sociology to 'retrotopias'[15] to the impacts of rapid modernity on governance systems.[16]

These reflections chime with recent contributions within project management scholarship, such as that of Schoper and Ingason[17] who claim that since the 1980s urban projects are increasingly driven by short-term, time-limited considerations. The authors link this phenomenon to the dissemination of a corporate way of thinking about business innovation within public organizations, whereby the deployment of projects – understood as well-defined tasks with clear objectives and specific timings – is seen as a more efficient way to bring about positive change. The authors argue that seeing projects in this light, as effective creators of the future, has become the mainstream way of conceptualizing and delivering any type of change, especially in contexts that are becoming increasingly financialised and subject to market-led forms of development.[18] The consequence is a paradigm shift in the way institutions and actors think about the future – from a long-term imagination that is periodically revisited and updated, to a continuous succession of short-term projects that are easier to measure, manage, and complete. They describe this paradigm shift as the 'projectification of society'.[19]

An expression of projectified thinking about urban change is that of *legacy*. Juliet Davis' work,[20] for example, is critical of the way legacy narratives are principally concerned with aligning actors' priorities to ease the delivery of stated policy positions. In reflecting on the London Olympics 2012, she argues that statements of long-term futures were used to develop a series of narratives that would justify a finance-led regeneration agenda for the Games, the benefits of which were imagined to trickle-down to communities and a range of social groups. Such approaches were embedded in UK urban policy planning documents such as the *New Deal for Communities* programmes of the early 2000s, in which much was made of how interventions would generate local legacies, but only if actors gave their support and worked in partnership with central government. In this way, the concept of legacy illustrates how planning outcomes and programms are viewed in a projectified manner—willingly suspending ongoing deliberation and consultation over uncertain and ever-changing futures in favour of the short-term delivery of specific projects and priorities.

[12]Raco, Durrant, and Livingstone, "Slow Cities, Urban Politics and the Temporalities of Planning"; Abram, "Contemporary Obsessions with Time"; Dobson and Parker, "The Temporal Governance of Planning in England".
[13]Laurian and Inch, "On Time and Planning", 269.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Bauman, *Retrotopia*.
[16]Jessop, *The State – Past, Present and Future*.
[17]Schoper and Thor Ingason, "Projectification of Society".
[18]Ward, "Political Economy in Housing Studies"
[19]Schoper and Thor Ingason, "Projectification of Society".
[20]Davis, *The Caring City*.

However, the legacy concept does not get to the heart of the problem – i.e. the temporal tensions embedded in projectified modes of delivery. It is in exploring how this temporal dimension influences practices and outcomes that the work of philosopher Samuel Scheffler on ‘afterlife thinking’ is especially valuable. Scheffler explores the ways in which everyday actions are formulated ‘against a background of scarcity, and, in particular, temporal scarcity’.[21] It is a part of the human condition to consider what comes after death and seek out mechanisms to influence how lives are remembered, and how priorities and ambitions are sustained after death. The writing of legal wills or the setting up of (financial) foundations and bequests represent attempts to ‘extend the reach of our own agency beyond death in an effort to help sustain the people and things that matter to us’.[22] The desire for an influential afterlife influences actions in the present. This, in turn, draws attention to the significance of a ‘collective afterlife’, as during their lifetimes individuals cultivate social networks that will, in turn, memorialize and extend their influence into the future.[23] In this way, we could argue that Scheffler’s work displays a diachronic take on human existence, which connects the synchronic moment of death with a diachronic process of creating an afterlife for ourselves while we live.

Scheffler’s reflections resonate with planning theorist Sorensen and his writings on institutional change and time. He highlights how the reasons for key turning points in the institutional arrangements of any given place can only be explained diachronically, not synchronically.[24] Whilst change is usually thought of as a sudden and marked alteration of conditions at a given point in time, Sorensen highlights the relevance of historical factors in shaping how change will happen. He posits that urban institutions related to land, infrastructure, and governance co-evolve, influencing and reinforcing each other over time.[25] This interconnected evolution contributes to the unique planning arrangements and assemblages observed in different jurisdictions at different times. Therefore, understanding why institutional arrangements change requires both a snapshot analysis of the turning point itself (what he calls the ‘critical junctures’[26]) as well as a historical analysis of the conditions that underpinned the previous arrangement.

Drawing on Scheffler’s work, we take Sorensen’s discussion further. To understand urban change, we need to look at the co-evolution of governance and projects in a place over time, and we also must examine actors’ and organizations’ afterlife thinking about the future, and how that influences the evolution of programmes and agendas in the present. Combining these insights, we offer a diachronic analysis of how time-limited institutions cope with their finite existence and long-term goals. As with individuals, an organization’s institutional death becomes a significant synchronic moment with wide-ranging repercussions that can only be grasped through a diachronic analysis of the run-up period to that end. From this point of view, all activities, tactics, and strategies during the life of an organization are underpinned by an inherent tension between its temporal scarcity and a desire to ensure the longer-term impact of its actions, which we term an *institutional afterlife*. But as with individuals, such afterlives depend on the arrangements put in place to carry on their visions and sustain their actions after their death. Whether or not institutions are able to act synchronically and develop strategies and tactics to extend their diachronic impacts, depends largely on how they are established, what resources and powers they are given, and

[21]Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*, 10–11.
[22]Ibid., 23.
[23]Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism (L’existentialislisme Est Un Humanisme)*.
[24]Sorensen, “Taking Critical Junctures Seriously”.
[25]Sorensen, “The Routledge Handbook of Planning History (Carola Hein Ed.)”.
[26]Sorensen, “Taking Critical Junctures Seriously”.

the extent to which actors given priority to, or even consider, the afterlives of the institutions they work for.

The remainder of the paper focuses on the specific example of the London Docklands Development Corporation. It critically assesses the organization's institutional death and afterlife. We use new evidence to shed light on how knowledge of their wind-up date of 1998 shaped their activities, objectives and strategies over a period of six years before closure in an attempt to create an 'institutional afterlife'. Looking back at the run-up period to their closure also helps to explain why that afterlife barely materialized after 1998. The evidence draws on a systematic discourse analysis of LDDC, local, and central government policy documents as well as strategies and frameworks from the time, accessed from the Bartlett Library at University College London and the Docklands Archive at the Docklands Museum. We triangulate this historical analysis with reflective conversations with actors involved in the LDDC's wind-up, carried out in 2023–2024. These were used to clarify the insights developed through the historical work.

The next section focuses on the analysis of afterlife planning strategies that took place during the final years of LDDC's existence, in which it tried to ensure the continuity of their visions. Strategies included qualitative attempts to build alliances with local authorities and regeneration agencies as well as other legalistic and financial tools to formalize relationships, through the setting up of Foundations and the promotion of anchor developments. We demonstrate that it was through the latter measures that more effective modes of afterlife influence were propagated and sustained. Attempts to foster more collaborative engagements with local authorities and others in their final years, and efforts to curate positive narratives of the LDDC's work, were much less effective. Finally, in the conclusions, we reflect on the potential implications that afterlife strategies of time-limited organizations may have on public policy delivery.

The institutional death and afterlife of the LDDC

The LDDC before 1992

During the 1980s, thirteen Urban Developments Corporations [UDCs] were established in inner city areas across England and Wales to facilitate nationally defined regeneration programmes and projects. Local governments, with their open-ended timeframes and democratic mandates, were viewed by the Thatcher government as a brake on much-needed economic development and private investment.[27] These were followed by a second round of UDCs under the Labour government in early 2000s, dedicated to the task of project delivery, and the subsquent introduction of Mayoral Development Corporations and Local Development Corporations in reforms after 2012.[28]

The LDDC was the largest and most significant of the first round of UDCs.[29] Its remit (Figure 1) covered an area that had been formerly occupied by commercial docks, which had been fundamental to the functioning of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, the introduction of maritime containerization and the opening up of cheaper labour markets across the world brought about a rapid decline of this once bustling area. By the time the LDDC was set up, none of the docks were in operation. Its juristiction covered 200ha of land, just 350ha of which

[27]Imrie and Thomas, *British Urban Policy*.
[28]Raco, "A Step Change or a Step Back?".
[29]Brownill, "Turning the East End into the West End"; Brownill and O'Hara, "From Planning to Opportunism?".

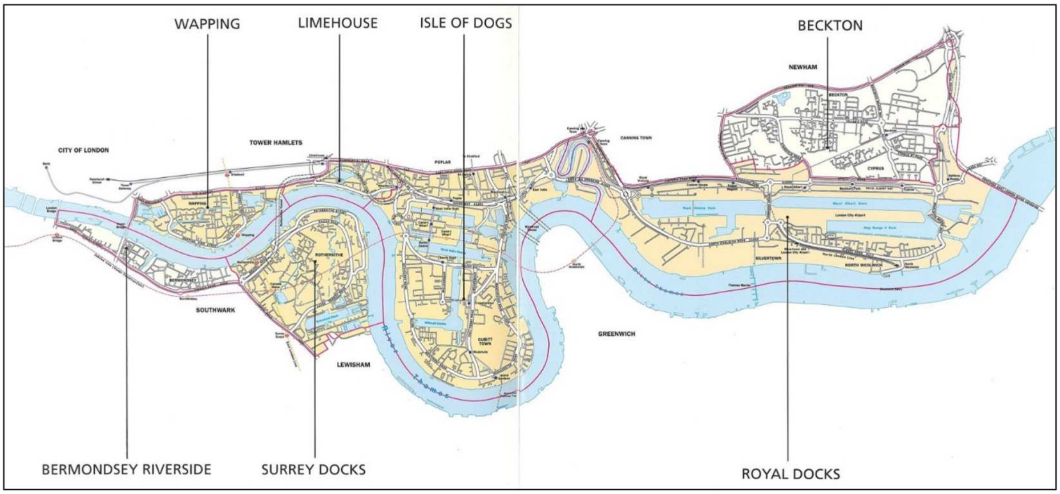

Figure 1. The area under the LDDC's remit, with the boundary in red. (Adapted from LDDC).
Note: LDDC, 'Investment in the Community'.

were publicly owned, and straddled three boroughs in East London – Southwark, Tower Hamlets, and Newham – superseding them as the planning authority in that area, a factor that created an antagonistic relationship from the start.[30]

LDDC's principal role was to acquire land and get on with its:

> orderly preparation and disposal [as] the basic keys with which to achieve the changes necessary for the permanent, speedy regeneration of Docklands. The LDDC does not regard land ownership as an end in itself but an essential part of the urban renewal process.[31]

The quote, taken from an early LDDC *Annual Report,* illustrates the very different approach to planning that characterized the organistion in its first years: an approach that did not believe in masterplanning, but was focused on finding and preparing sites for the market to develop.[32] This first period represents an early example of a projectified approach to urban change, in which the future was not even imagined but simply assumed to follow from the completion of market sales and investment. LDDC's first *Corporate Plan* provided a list of objectives for the transformation of the area, but it did not include any land use plan.[33] The list reveals LDDC's projectified mindset and role as a broker and enabler of the market, shifting long-term planning aspirations to opportunistic investments.[34]

The LDDC operated under a statutory duty to 'pursue its regeneration strategy in the knowledge that it would be wound up', but the *Local Government and Planning Act 1980* that created the UDCs did not provide any details about how long they should operate for. Nor was there any reference to how they should plan for their wind-up and afterlife in terms of what material assets and governmental frameworks should be passed on, and what mechanisms might be put in place to transfer financial liabilities and risk. Michael Heseltine, the minister responsible for their implementation,

[30]Brownill and O'Hara, "From Planning to Opportunism?".
[31]LDDC, "London Docklands Development Corporation," 8.
[32]LDDC, "Initiating Urban Change."
[33]LDDC.
[34]Brownill and O'Hara, "From Planning to Opportunism?".

argued in his memoirs that 'as local economies revive in areas covered by UDCs, the alluvium of special government funding should be withdrawn and the renewed land handed back to the local authorities',[35] but the actual time-frames of withdrawal were left open-ended. Similarly, a summary evaluation report on the LDDC further indicated that:

> Docklands regeneration did not have a fixed life programme and when it was established in 1981 no termination date was stipulated. It was not until 1992 that a wind-up date of 1998 was decided by the Government, although LDDC favoured a closing date of the year 2000.[36]

The extracts document the level of uncertainty over the lifespan of the LDDC. It was only after the deep property recession of 1988–1992, and the re-election of the Major government in 1992, that termination dates and wind-up plans for all UDCs started to be seriously discussed. That period was also identified by LDDC executives as a turning point in their plans for the area.[37] The housing market collapse as well as the publication of a highly critical report by the National Audit Office[38] forced the LDDC to prioritize community and social development programmes. But this community shift ended as soon as the wind-up date of 1998 was announced. The next section explores LDDC's actions to create and implement a purposeful afterlife strategy that would ensure the continuity of their market-led vision for the area.

The run up to LDDC's institutional death (1992–1998)

The Department of Environment (DoE) started having conversations with UDCs about their wind-up dates as early as 1989.[39] During those protracted negotiations, it was agreed in 1992 that the LDDC would cease to function from 31 March 1998, although it wanted to continue until at least 2000, arguing that anything earlier than that would leave many things unfinished, especially in the Royal Docks. The size and scale of the LLDC area meant there was not a obvious that their existed any other planning organization in London with sufficient resources to complete any unfinished infrastructure programmes and regeneration projects. But the policy culture at the beginning of the 1990s was moving on from the idea of an independent delivery agency towards one of partnerships,[40] which meant the days of UDCs were over.[41]

It became clear to LDDC executives of this last period that the afterlife of its vision depended on the outlooks and activities of other local state actors, most notably local authorities 'buying into' into its projectified and wider visions for urban regeneration. This realization had a significant impact on how the LDDC approached all aspects of its wind-up, not least the date of their complete closure. Our evidence reveals that the knowledge of institutional death instigated a new urgency to get things done and make an impact on the area as wind-up approached, with attempts to make sure that projects were completed. This resonates with Oatley and May's understanding of 'tombstone planning',[42] or a rush to get projects done and money spent within an artificially imposed time-window. There was a fear that the LDDC would become a zombie organization seen by others as no longer possessing agency or authority. A

[35] Heseltine, *Where There's a Will*.
[36] DETR, "Regenerating London Docklands," 10.
[37] Ibid.
[38] NAO, "Department of the Environment."
[39] NAO, "The Achievements of the Second and Third Generation Urban Development Corporations."
[40] "Beyond the Urban Development Corporations?"
[41] DETR, "Regenerating London Docklands."
[42] Oatley and May, "Out of Touch, out of Place, out of Time".

similar reflection highlighted the lack of transition between organizational life and death fuelled by the reflection that the regeneration of the Royal Docks had barely started by the time the LDDC wound-up.

Once their end date was fixed, the LDDC set in place a five point strategy to manage the wind-up process,[43] focusing on the completion of infrastructure projects and handing over of assets and liabilities:

- All development land should have the future nature of its development secured before wind-up;
- Liabilities should be reduced to the absolute minimum;
- There should be no major infrastructure projects outstanding or in progress;
- Arrangements should be secured to maintain continuity and momentum in the provision of public amenity and social and community infrastructure;
- The chief criterion for the assessment is that the work of the LDDC is nearing completion and that the process of regeneration should have reached the point where it can be self-sustaining and the regeneration momentum can be maintained.

The document provides details about the necessary compensation that boroughs would receive for accepting outstanding liabilities – i.e. 10 years worth of funding to cover maintenance costs for all new assets and infrastructures.[44] But those compensation calculations failed to properly account for the scale and scope of known and unknown liabilities, and what would happen once the funding ran out. Government guidance for City Challenge partnerships, in 1994, urged local partnerships to actively plan the transition from publicly funded programmes and projects to self-sufficiency from the start.[45] But that had not been the brief for the LDDC, who assumed they would be around until the area's regeneration was complete – that is, after they had released all the land to the market. Instead, LDDC's activities and strategies in its final years focused on finding and coaching adequate 'heirs' who would maintain and continue LDDC's regeneration efforts and vision. To achieve this aim, we argue that LDDC adopted three approaches: (i) a phased withdrawal and the building of cordial relationships with local and city authorities; (ii) the curation of a reputational legacy; and (iii) the shaping of long-term governance arrangements. Collectively, these interventions sought to sustain LLDC's institutional afterlife in qualitative and legalistic/financial terms. As we show in the next sections, the latter approach had a more profound afterlife and set of impacts than the former.

(i) A Phased Withdrawal

One of the most important parts of LDDC's afterlife approaches was a phased withdrawal from their areas of juristiction and a voluntary handing over of powers and resources back to local boroughs. Once the end date of 1998 was fixed, it became clear to LDDC that the boroughs had a pivotal role in sustaining its afterlife, despite many years of conflict. They were also mindful that they should not 'be transgressing into what local authorities should be doing' and there was a strong sense that operational boundaries had to be maintained. Government documents,[46] supplemented by interviews, show that LLDC was careful not to set up social infrastructure, like community

[43]DETR, "Regenerating London Docklands," 45.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Oc, Tiesdell, and Moynihan, "The Death and Life of City Challenge".
[46]DETR, "Regenerating London Docklands."

centres, before wind-up as there would be no financial support when they were gone. Instead, they prioritized the completion of key transport infrastructure projects such as the Limehouse Link road tunnel and upgrades to the Docklands Light Railway, to attract investors and visitors to the area in the future.[47]

The final timescale for withdrawal (Table 1) resulted from perceptions over the (in)completeness of regeneration work in different parts of the Docklands as well as levels of commitment from local boroughs to continue the work that LDDC had been doing. On the western side, around London Bridge and Surrey Docks, it was felt that the regeneration work had generally been completed and that Southwark Council had adopted a 'positive approach' to the area's redevelopment. Similarly, on the eastern side, areas around Beckton had been significantly redeveloped and the LB of Newham had agreed to support projects that included investments by major landowners and institutions such as the University of East London.

Conversely, slower transfers took place in areas where the LDDC executives felt that there was still much work to be done, where the liabilities attached to the assets were too big for local boroughs to take on, and/or where conflictual relationships undermined confidence that LDDC's regeneration plans would be continued after their death. There was concern that LDDC would leave assets which were probably not going to be practical for others to easily take on, meaning that during the organization's lifetime it was seeking to evolve its programmes so that future agencies would be protected from unexpected liabilities and damaging costs This required a high degree of afterlife support from public bodies, even though the UDCs were originally established with the purpose of acting independently of the perceived constraints of place politics and partnerships. The building of an afterlife therefore required the 'buy-in' of the very agencies that UDCs were designed to override.

Documentary evidence provides further insights into some of the conflicts and development politics that shaped the LDDC's withdrawal. In Newham, the council committed itself to 'working in partnership with LDDC's successor … to ensure that future development meets the council's needs',[48] implying that the LDDCs priorities had been quite different. In its *Unitary Development Plan* it promoted the development of the Royal Docks as a significant opportunity zone for new housing and investment and sought to re-prioritize areas that the LDDC had left underdeveloped. It was generally critical of the focus on Canary Wharf in Tower Hamlets and the perceived lack of interest in Newham's less commercially valuable sites within what was then known as the Thames Gateway. The council argued that it had been marginalized in deliberations over these larger projects and that the winding-up of the LDDC gave them an opportunity to re-centre their own development priorities within a broader London context, 'to grasp the enormous development opportunities as they arise or can be generated, by securing development that meets the borough's needs and by exercising careful control over the adaptation of existing land and buildings',[49] part of what later became termed an 'Arc of Opportunity' across the east of London.

The response to the LDDC's demise was quite different in the case of Tower Hamlets, who had had a conflictual relationship with the LDDC from the start. The council made clear that its *Unitary Development Plan 1997* should influence the wind-up decisions of LDDC and that it 'was required to take account of its policies and proposals'.[50] It is remarkable how little the borough's UDP commented on the hand-over process. The LDDC's withdrawal from the Isle of Dogs in 1997 was by far

[47]DETR.
[48]London Borough of Newham, "Unitary Development Plan," 7.
[49]Ibid., 9.
[50]London Borough of Tower Hamlets, "Unitary Development Plan," 11.

Table 1. The transfer process 1994–1998.

Site	Date of transfer	Recipient organization
London Bridge to Rotherhithe	Oct 1994	LB Southwark
Beckton	Dec 1995	LB Newham
Surrey Docks Peninsular	Dec 1996	LB Southwark
Limehouse and Wapping	Jan 1997	LBTH
Isle of Dogs	Oct 1997	LBTH
Isle of Dogs docks	Oct 1997	British Waterways
Royal Docks	March 1998	English Partnerships/LB Newham

Note: LDDC, 'Regeneration Statement'. Sources: Adapted from LDDC.

the biggest and most difficult part of the de-designation process, with complex negotiations over how ownership of the newly constructed infrastructure should be bequeathed to different public and private sector interests and agencies.

Some liabilities were considered too big to be passed on to a borough – most notably the Limehouse Link and East India Dock road tunnels as well as the Royal Docks and the Isle of Dogs dockside spaces. In these cases, responsibilities were transferred to existing quango bodies: the Commission for New Towns, English Partnerships [EP], and the British Waterways Trust, respectively.[51] The unwillingness of central government to hand-back LDDC's powers and resources to the boroughs was indicative of a continued lack of trust in their capacity to efficiently manage strategic infrastructure.[52] Organizations such as EP were poorly resourced and equipped to take on new projects. Its corporate statements and strategies of the time promoted some of its most successful projects, such as the regeneration of Greenwich Peninsular [outside of the Docklands zone], with no reflection or acknowledgement of its new LDDC sites.

While LDDC's phased de-designation approach made sense from a synchronic and projectified perspective, it did not achieve the institutional afterlife they anticipated. This is particularly evident in the Royal Docks, where LDDC's *Royal Docks Development Area Framework 1992* was not followed through by EP.[53] The move towards a more complex governance landscape, with the return of local authorities and the appearance of new public bodies on the scene, explains the discontinuity that followed LDDC's demise. The changes that turned 1998 into a 'critical juncture'[54] were introduced during the last years of the LDDC, not after.

(ii) Reputational Curation and the Commissioning of Research

A second tactic employed to extend the LDDC's afterlife was an ambitious programme of *reputational curation*. This approach connected with wider debates at the time about the power of narratives in shaping institutional reputations and resonates in more recent writings on information technologies.[55,56] Such writings emphasized the power of perceptions in creating and shaping the reputation of organizations, and argued that successful storytelling– that is providing a compelling sequencing of events that link actions with desired outcomes– is a key factor behind the perceptions of any organization.

[51]Select Committee on Environment, Transport and the Regions, "Supplementary Memorandum From the Department of the Environment".
[52]Brownill, 'Turning the East End into the West End".
[53]English Partnerships, "Space for Growth"; English Partnerships, "Greenwich Peninsular – Investing into the 21st Century."
[54]Sorensen, "Taking Critical Junctures Seriously".
[55]Vendel, "Narrating Corporate Reputation".
[56]Harari, *Nexus – A Brief History of Information Networks*.

It was in this context, and with this purpose, that the LDDC commissioned and published ten monographs (Table 2) in its final years, covering various aspects of its activities and practices. The publications had two objectives. First, to generate positive narratives and representations of the organization during its lifetime. And second, to create a representation that could be used to influence the activities of subsequent agencies, both within the Docklands but also nationally and internationally. As recalled by one executive in an email exchange, these monographs would provide:

> a scholarly account of its history and outcomes. (…) a comprehensive and reasonably objective statement of the regeneration of London Docklands and how it was achieved, as seen from 1998.

These 'publicity puffs', as they described them, followed a logic of effective storytelling, providing a coherent sequencing of events, actions and outcomes.

The first document, *Initiating Urban Change*,[57] set out an overview of the unsuccessful plans and proposals for the Docklands during the 1970s. It presented a story of long-term decline and failed attempts to redress the situation through masterplanning. Against this background, the document set out a justification for the creation of the LDDC and their more 'entrepreneurial' focus. This line of argumentation was developed in a third monograph, *Regeneration Statement*, that provided a detailed summary of LDDC's key activities and outputs, listing and quantifying all the elements delivered and the costs involved in developing new forms of transport access; land reclamation; utilities provision; environmental improvements; commercial development; housing; community infrastructure; private investment levered; and employment. It provided evidence to support the LDDC's record of accomplishment in terms of delivery.

The remaining monographs added further depth to these summaries, elaborating in technical detail on its diverse areas of activity. Of particular interest was the publication *Starting from Scratch*, which identified the accessibility constraints of the area as a key factor in its decline and elaborated the many different transport infrastructure improvements delivered by the LDDC. It used mechanisms of storytelling by combining tangible evidence of successful delivery with a careful sequencing of action and results.

Only a very deep knowledge of the events would be able to identify the key narrative tweaks that, if acknowledged, would paint a different picture about the area's transformation. For example, the monographs included the improvement of housing choice and amenities as one of LDDC's original five objectives. But this represents a revision of what took place in the early phases of regeneration,[58] as scholars and government reports from the time[59] demonstrate. Another example of narrative tweaking and forms of 'tombstone planning' was the delivery of five footbridges in the run-up period to 1998. The LDDC's monographs present their construction as part of a well-thought-out plan to improve accessibility across the Docklands. However, documents reveal that this intervention represented an opportunistic enterprise after LDDC had an unexpected financial windfall following a court decision over VAT payments that led to a financial windfall. The footbridges were one of the easiest ways to spend this extra money before March 1998. Investing in the construction of footbridges was the optimal solution due to their low engineering complexity and quick construction time. It also reflected their priority to develop transport infrastructure although the social

[57]It draws heavily on three reports that had previously looked into the state the Docklands and opportunities for regeneration that remained unfulfilled – the Rochdale Report (1962), the Travers Morgan's Study (1973), and the Docklands Joint Committee's Strategic Plan (1976).

[58]Ryser, "Gentrification or Local Gain?"

[59]NAO, "Department of the Environment"; Florio and Brownill, "Whatever Happened to Criticism?"

Table 2. Chronological list of LDDC reports commissioned by the LDDC at the end of their existence.

Year	Title
1997	Initiating Urban Change. London Docklands before the LDDC.
1997	Starting From Scratch. The development of Transport in London Docklands.
1998	Regeneration Statement.
1998	A Strategy for Regeneration. The Planning and Development Strategy of the LDDC.
1998	Attracting Investment: Creating Value.
1998	Employment: New Jobs and Opportunities. The Employment Strategy of the LDDC.
1998	Regeneration and the Arts in London Docklands.
1998	Housing in the Renewed London Docklands. A Major Contribution to Capital Living.
1998	Learning to Work and Live Together. The LDDC and the local communities.
1998	Laying the Foundations for Regeneration. Engineering in the London Docklands.

Source: Authors.

impact was less clear at the time, and in some cases remains unclear – some of the bridges lack accessibility and have high maintenance costs.

Vendel describes reputation as 'a kind of social memory'.[60] In that sense, the monographs provide the medium to archive and cement a positive social memory about the corporation. They were devised to emphasize how,

> the Corporation will be leaving a development programme which will take the Royals [Royal Docks] through to completion. (…) the momentum of regeneration will carry on taken on by English Partnerships in collaboration with the London Borough of Newham.[61]

The propagation of a positive reputation sought to influence the actions of subsequent agencies, especially local boroughs and future Mayors of London. Nevertheless, these efforts were, at best, only partially successful. It was up to others to sustain these narratives and, in the context of the late 1990s, very few policymakers or civil society groups were prepared to do so. The Labour governments of 1997–2010 saw the LDDC's approach to regeneration as a model *not* to be followed, as explicitly argued by regeneration Minister, Richard Caborn, at the opening of University of East London campus in 1998.[62] Arguably, the experience of areas such as Canary Wharf also helped usher in an era of socially-oriented urban regeneration policy. So-called 'benign' UDCs were established in the Thames Gateway in the early 2000s and explicitly designed to be local authority-led.[63] In other projects in London, development agents have sometimes made a conscious decision to avoid using any association with Canary Wharf or the LDDC as this might generate conflict with communities.[64] International comparisons of waterfront regeneration similarly focus on the strengths of projects in cities such as Hamburg and Copenhagen, that have explicitly modelled their projects to differ from the London Docklands model[65,66]

In large parts of the Royal Docks, whole areas have yet (by 2025) to be regenerated. The *Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside Opportunity Area Framework* was only approved in July 2023, with an emphasis on 'industrial intensification', thus representing a very different vision to LDDC's plans

[60]Vendel, "Narrating Corporate Reputation," 122.
[61]LDDC, "Regeneration Statement," 8–9.
[62]LGC Contributor, "Partnership – Key to Future Docklands Regeneration".
[63]Raco, "A Step Change or a Step Back?".
[64]Raco, Street, and Freire-Trigo, "The New Localism, Anti-Political Development Machines". The authors discuss how Canary Wharf Group tried to keep their role and name in South Bank to a minimum during 2010–2015 to avoid Docklands associations and negative stereotyping.
[65]Lord et al., "Planning as 'Market Maker'".
[66]Bruns-Berentelg, Noring, and Grydehøj, "Developing Urban Growth and Urban Quality".

for retail-led projects. The change in government in 1998 also meant that there was little support to properly archive the LDDC's report, which meant copies of the reports were scattered across different libraries and no copies were handed to EP or local authorities, as one interviewee only found out years later. The ability of the LDDC to curate its history and control external narratives was thus limited.

(iii) Shaping Long-Term Governance Arrangements.

The LDDC's most significant afterlife strategy involved the establishment of legal and financial structures that would support its activities and approaches to regeneration in the long-term. Future developments would be 'locked-in' so that they would be in line with LDDC priorities and objectives. This was particularly important in the Royal Docks, the most underdeveloped area, where the LDDC combined three different lock-in mechanisms: attracting and permitting last-minute projects by anchor developers; implementing risk mitigating strategies; and establishing charitable/financial entities. We discuss each in turn.

First, the LDDC sought out *anchor developers* who would implement large-scale projects in line with their vision for the Royal Docks, captured in the *Royal Docks Development Area Framework*[67] [RDDAF]. After the collapse of three initial consortia agreements,[68] the LDDC managed to secure two consortia with private and third sector organizations for the construction of an 'urban village' to the south – i.e. West Silvertown, delivered by Peabody Trust and Wimpey Homes[69]– and an exhibition centre to the north – i.e. the ExCel exhibition centre, eventually delivered by a firm led by Sir Robert McAlpine.[70] While both consortia were delivered by English Partnerships and the new Mayor's London Development Agency, the projects maintained the vision set out in the revised LDDC strategy.[71]

To ensure buy-in from these investors, the LDDC had to solve the perceived (and real) financial and environmental risks associated with the Royal Docks, especially in relation to the physical stability of renovated dockside walls. Interviewees recalled difficult negotiations where developers refused to take on the liabilities for waterfront sites and this created a governmental problem as 'you couldn't just leave them … with no responsible owner'. Where there could be any 'revenue consequences' of wind-up, private interests became extremely cautious, and market confidence started to erode. As the *Royal Docks Development Area Framework* noted '[in a] market-led initiative … developers need to be assured that they are building within an ordered and secure environment which ensures consistency of design and commitment, but which also allows enterprise to flourish'.[72] A series of legal-technical instruments were therefore introduced to establish long-term guarantees. These took the form of rental payments for leaseholders of land or service charges for those who acquired freeholds. Moreover, guarantees were arranged so that the UK government would act as the ultimate guarantor of risk.[73]

In Canary Wharf, British Waterways were given responsibiliy to cover the anticipated liabilities attached to the dock walls and their long-term maintenance. But in the Royal Docks, the same organisation refused to take on these roles as there were too many unknown risks

[67]LDDC, "Royal Docks".
[68]Brownill, *Developing London's Docklands.*
[69]Biddulph, Franklin, and Tait, "The Urban Village"
[70]Excel Centre, "The Building of London's Royal Docks."
[71]LDDC, "Royal Docks Development Area Framework".
[72]Ibid., 2.
[73]Ibid., 5.

associated with the area's continued development. LDDC therefore established the Royal Docks Management Authority [RoDMA] in 1989, 'to manage the marine infrastructure and water areas of the Royal Docks for the long term'.[74] The company holds a 225-year lease over the entire water area of the Royal Docks, including the King George V lock, five bridges, an impounding station and some limited land areas. It is partly funded by the owners of the land surrounding the water and partly through commercial income raised by RoDMA for the provision of services.[75]

RoDMA's principal activity is 'to carry out maintenance obligations connected with the Royal Docks' including 'the water areas … together with all marine infrastructure including locks, bridges, impounding equipment and surrounding land areas'.[76] These assets were handed over at zero cost by LDDC, in the run up to its wind-up, with personnel acting as Directors, all of whom terminated their positions on 31st March 1998. At that point, the LDDC's control of a 'Special Share' was transferred to English Partnerships and central government before further reforms in the 2000s saw it transferred to Mayoral organizations (Table 3). Under its formal Articles of Association 1991, RoDMA was given a long-term 'impounding station lease', with a 'peppercorn rent' to oversee 'internal parts of and equipment in the Impounding Station at the Royal Albert Basin'.[77] The extended lease enables RoDMA to charge a service charge on users of its services, including development agencies and developers/landowners in the area. The charges sustain it as a non-profit company.

RoDMA's activities have evolved over time, and it continues to play a key role in regeneration programmes and plans. In the *London Plan 2024,* the Royal Docks along with neighbouring Beckton are identified as an Opportunity Area and described as a potential 'vibrant new London quarter, creating a world-class business, industrial, cultural and residential district'.[78] The ambition is to provide 38,600 new homes and create 55,800 new jobs. Major investors and developers include St William, Lendlease, and ASI. In 2022, RoDMA was awarded £150,000 to boost its staff to implement a *Place and Connectivity Activation Programme 2022–2024* in the Royal Docks. It is claimed that 'RoDMA['s] input is essential to Delivery Plan projects' and to 'support the development sites'.[79] In its most recent financial report, RoDMA states that the costs associated with the refurbishment of the King George V dock over the next nine year is expected to cost in the region of £5million, a cost that will be paid for by service charges made on landowners and developers.[80]

RoDMA was designed to provide market certainty by institutionalizing the risks associated with the physical environment. If the LDDC were to sustain its preferred afterlife for the Docks, it was imperative that developers and investors could feel secure about the risks and of their actions. It required a stretching out of governmental authority over time to package-up potential sites and ensure that any unknown hazard could be managed by an agency, thus deflecting financial costs that might undermine the viability of proposals or projects. In this sense, the LDDC succeeded in mitigating a negative perception of the Royal Docks as a risk investment, as the numerous regeneration proposals for the area since 1998 can confirm.

[74]RoDMA, "Briefing on Royal Docks," 6.
[75]"London Docks – Learn about London's Royal Docks".
[76]Ibid.
[77]LDDC, "Articles of Association – RoDMA".
[78]GLA, "Royal Docks and Beckton Riverside Opportunty," 2.
[79]GLA, "Royal Docks and Connectivity Expenditure," 2.
[80]RoDMA, "Annual Report and Accounts 2022/2023".

Table 3. Special share holder for RoDMA, 1991–2023.

Agency	Dates of Ownership
LDDC	1991–1998
English Partnerships	1998–2000
London Development Agency	2000–2012
Greater London Authority	2012–2023

Note: RoDMA, 'Annual Report and Accounts 2022/2023'.

Conclusions

The paper has used the historical example of the London Docklands Development Corporation to examine how and in what ways time-limited organizations plan for what we term an *institutional afterlife*. We have moved away from the project-focused concept of 'legacy' to assess the ways in which the finite nature of temporal organizations shapes actors' activities and practices *during* its lifetime. Following Sorensen's work, we have critically examined the LDDC's last six years to highlight the reasons for the continuities and discontinuities that followed its demise, which we show are not found in the years that followed, but in the strategies and actions of LDDC members in the preceding years, shaped by their desire to ensure the continuation of a strong institutional afterlife.

We have drawn on Scheffler's work examining the concept of afterlives to frame our analysis. The purpose of a time-limited development agency is that it clearly defines and delivers synchronic project outputs, which in turn are expected to generate positive long-term diachronic impacts after a regeneration programme has been completed and the organization no longer exists. However, we have shown that time-limited organizations actively plan for what comes after. Like individuals who establish legal wills to stretch their influence out into an unknown future, these institutions similarly seek out mechanisms to influence what comes when they are no longer present.

The paper demonstrates that formal, legal and financial interventions, such as the setting up of foundations and or corporate bodies, have a longer-term effect than qualitative attempts to curate reputations. Moreover, the ways in which organizations shape their alliances and arrangements with other agencies, especially local governments, has a profound effect not only on the effectiveness of their synchronic actions but in ensuring that they impact on what comes after. Partnerships can therefore be seen as better forms of stretching influence over time, not only as (con)temporary phenomenons. But, as we have shown in the paper, the form and character of relationships between temporal and more permanent institutions, such as local authorities, determines the continuity or discontinuity of change over time and space. In this respect, time-limited organizations have a stronger afterlife if, from the outset, they plan for the re-integration of their projects into broader frameworks, contexts, and planning strategies. The reality is that, in a climate of increasingly financialised and projectified urban development, there is insufficient attention given to the impact that the 'exit' of output-centred time-limited agencies, such as Development Corporations, has on the future governance arrangements and long-term maintenance of those new places. The emphasis instead is on their role in expediting delivery in the short term.

The institutional afterlife concept also provides new perspectives on contemporary planning debates. Since the global finance crisis and the Covid pandemic, governments in the UK and across the world have looked to time-limited UDC-type models to boost growth.[81] In the UK, the Conservative government's *Levelling-up White Paper 2023* introduced the idea of local authority led

[81]Liu and Yau, "Urban Entrepreneurialism VS Market Society".

Development Corporations, claiming that they would 'improve transparency about the ownership and control of land'.[82] Mayors and local authorities across England have responded to this possibility, with proposals for new UDCs in multiple contexts.[83] The election of a Labour government, in 2024, has similarly opened up debates over how best to expedite the delivery of housing and infrastructure with immediate attempts to increase the speed with which decisions are taken. The projectification of urban planning is built on the assumption that change is best brought about through clearly bounded spaces and times of action.

But within such narratives there is relatively little discussion over how any time-limited institution should plan for an afterlife and what their influence will be on the strategic priorities of other planning bodies. Regeneration thinking and planning is overly-focused on the synchronic actions of agencies, but less concerned with how time-limits are arranged and implemented. It is easier to set up new organizations and give them resources and objectives than it is to take them away in a strategic and thought-through manner. Planning for the transformation of a place requires a long-term temporal imagination and continued support. Yet, the focus on speedy delivery is creating fractured institutional timescapes, with the growth of time-limited organizations operating under a diversity of timeframes, targets, and resource-limits. It is urgent that the cumulative impact of these multiple temporal arrangements on the delivery of long-term public policy goals is properly researched.

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[82]DLUC, "Levelling-Up White Paper".
[83]Mitchell, "Mayoral Development Corporations".

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