

Urszula Nowacka-Rejzner (nowacka.rejzner@gmail.com)

Institute of City and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University
of Technology

WATER IN THE CREATION OF REVITALISED URBAN AREAS.
THE CASE OF KING'S CROSS CENTRAL

WODA W KREACJI REWITALIZOWANYCH OBSZARÓW MIEJSKICH.
PRZYKŁAD KING'S CROSS CENTRAL

Abstract

The case study selected to illustrate the author's considerations is the area in the northern part of London – the site of the next stage of the King's Cross Central revitalisation project. The site has been selected mostly because of its location in the close vicinity of the historic centre of the city and because of its valuable cultural and natural assets. The author discusses the spatial transformations of the area focusing primarily on various options of using the qualities and properties of water and its relations with elements of built environment and greenery in shaping urban spaces of a new quality, yet preserving their identity.

Keywords: revitalisation, public space, water components

Streszczenie:

Jako przykład rozważań wybrano tereny w północnej części Londynu, na których jest realizowany kolejny etap projektu rewitalizacyjnego King's Cross Central. Istotnym kryterium wyboru przykładu do badań było położenie rewitalizowanego terenu w bliskim sąsiedztwie historycznego centrum miasta, a także cenne walory kulturowe i przyrodnicze obszaru. Na tle zarysowanych przemian przestrzennych obszaru szczególną uwagę zwrócono na różnorodne możliwości wykorzystania cech i właściwości wody i jej relacji z elementami środowiska zbudowanego i zielenią w kształtowaniu nowej jakości przestrzeni miejskiej i zachowaniu jej tożsamości.

Słowa kluczowe: rewitalizacja, przestrzeń publiczna, elementy wodne

1. Introduction

The New Athens Charter of 2003, outlining the vision of the European cities of the 21st century, speaks of the need to create high-quality sustainable urban structures: “cities, which will connect the past with the future, through a vital and vibrant present” [7, p. 14]. The need to preserve, protect and make a full use of the cultural heritage and natural resources in urban areas has also been emphasised in the Charter of European Planning, Barcelona 2013, where we may find the proposition that: “The relationship between people and their environment is fundamental. It builds a shared identity and quality of life that is based on a shared cultural and natural heritage” [8, p. 8].

Elements of nature occupy a prominent place among the components shaping a space for living, work or leisure, i.e. components determining the quality of the urban environment. One of such elements is water. Nowadays, water is present as an important ingredient making up spaces of urban squares, parks, new housing developments and revitalised former industrial sites alike, not only in their compositional aspect. It is precisely the diverse use of water components in designing developments and public spaces in European cities that has primarily defined their beauty and high quality.

The specific role and various applications of water components in urban spaces, the way they affect humans and the environment we live in, all result from the special character of water – its unique physical features, which are so distinctly different from other components making up the world around us.

2. London – the city with “water history”

Water has always been a part of London history. The “water history” of London has been mostly created by the Thames, its tributaries and the London docks and canals. The London Docklands used to be the symbol of British economic power until the early 20th century. Closing the first dock in 1960 started the slow decline of this once the largest port in the world and the multi-aspect degradation of its area. The early 80s marked a new beginning in the history of London Docklands – the docks and canals were subjected to a complete make-over and they re-emerged as an important component of the city life and image¹. Considerable transformations also took place in other waterfront areas, e.g. on the Thames or in the valley of the Lee River.

For several years now, the Thames, together with its tributaries of different sizes as well as the channelised sections of the rivers and streams, channels, docks and quiescent water reservoirs of various origin, have been covered by the programme *The Blue Ribbon Network*. The programme is a part of the authorities’ policy related to putting London waterways to a new use and the principles governing the shaping and protection of their environment,

¹ The issue was discussed, among others, by S. Kaczmarek in [2].

comprised in *The London Plan*². The document points out not only to the need to put the waterways to transportation, recreation or tourist use, but also to the need of protection and reconstruction of waterfront habitats, floodplains and landscapes. Strong emphasis has also been put on the need to protect and utilise properly the preserved buildings and technical infrastructure components contributing to the identity of these areas.

An important part of this blue network is Regent's Canal – a listed industrial monument and a unique area of greenery and water situated on the edge of the strict centre of one of the largest European metropolises. The plan to build the canal was part of a larger project of 1811, authored by John Nash, featuring development of the areas in north London. The decision to build the canal to the design by Nash was made in 1812. It was executed in two stages. The first section – between Paddington and Camden – was opened for navigation in 1816, and the remaining part was put into operation in 1820. The canal was performing the role of a transportation route until 1969, and the goods transported on its waters included *inter alia* coal, grain and building materials brought to London by rail from northern England.

The barges navigating the canal at present are playing a different role – they transport tourists or provide an alternative, increasingly more popular form of habitation. The almost 14 km long water course, cutting through nearly the centre of the city³ is now beginning to be seen as a special asset. The areas neighbouring on the canal are becoming an attractive place for living, e.g. the area of Primrose Hill or the district of Marylebone, lying on the southern bank of Regent's Canal, between Paddington and Camden. Restaurants, cafés, music clubs and pubs located in revitalised former industrial facilities all open up to the riverfront areas. The former towpath along the bank of the canal is now a route for pedestrians and cyclists. Waterfront areas are a place for recreation, socialising and events of various kinds, such as e.g. festivals organised in Little Venice promoting living on barges.

Areas in the vicinity of Regent's Canal have undergone a special transformation in the recent few years; the area to the north of King's Cross and St. Pancras Railway Stations is the site of the project *King's Cross Central* implemented here for several years now⁴. Accepted towards the end of 2006, the plan to redevelop these areas, amounting to 27 ha in size, featured two components: one referring to *King's Cross Central. Main Site* and the other to *King's Cross Central. Triangle Site*. According to the design guiding principles⁵, the new urban space, which has been under construction since 2007, is going to offer a rich and varied range of functions as well as a number of interesting solutions regarding public spaces design, architecture and environmental protection, it is also to be easily accessible for all and attractive for tourists [3, p. 28]. As regards public spaces, the revitalisation project stipulates the creation of a network of commons. The combined area of the squares, pedestrian routes, parks, gardens and avenues

² See: *London's Living Spaces and Places. Blue Ribbon Network*, Policy 7.24 – Policy 7.30 [9, p. 325–335], Map 7.5 Blue Ribbon Network [9, p. 325].

³ Regent's Canal connects Grand Union Canal in the area of Paddington Railway Station with the Thames in the area of Limehouse Basin in the eastern part of London.

⁴ Since 2008, the owner of the area under revitalisation has been King's Cross Central Limited Partnership.

⁵ The landscaping concept was developed by Townshend Landscape Architects, the master plan was authored by Allies and Morrison & Porphyrios Associates.

making up this network is to constitute 40% of the revitalised site total area. One undoubtedly striking feature of the designs of individual public spaces is the large and diverse contribution of water and greenery to their overall composition.

A water element that makes a particularly strong presence in the area now being revitalised is Regent's Canal. The Canal runs across the centre of the area and cuts it into two parts – the northern part and the much smaller southern one. At the same time, along the direction of the flowing water, it connects the areas of two boroughs in its vicinity: Camden to the west and Islington to the east. The connecting element is the towpath, once used for towing barges along the canal, now – a popular pedestrian and cycling route. This characteristic location of the canal both in the space of the whole city and within the revitalised area has made it an important component of the whole new project and, simultaneously, a special reference point for the currently created public spaces of this new urban development.

3. Regent's Canal – a corridor filled with greenery and water – an urban public space

The revitalised area contains the section of Regent's Canal between St. Pancras Dry Dock and the bridge in York Way⁶. Just outside the area covered by the revitalisation project, the canal opens up to form Battlebridge Basin, on the waters of which is situated the building of the former ice warehouse built in the 1860s – since 1992 the house of the London Canal Museum presenting the history of London waterways.

The waters of the canal and the areas in its direct vicinity together create a new urban space, which is, at the same time, a water space and a space open to water. Water is not only a route for cruise barges, but, first, it plays an important role in shaping spatial, compositional and functional relations of this new urban development; it significantly influences the microclimate of the area. Both the water corridor itself and the areas directly adjacent to it are also the scene of numerous artistic and environmental activities. The new public spaces, which have already been opened for use in the direct neighbourhood of the canal, are: on its left bank – Gasholder Park, Canalside Steps and Wharf Road Gardens, on its right bank – Camley Street Natural Park.

The facilities and areas on the right bank of the canal play a special role in the promotion of eco-friendly attitudes and actions. It was exactly at this site that the local nature reserve Camley Street Natural Park was established in 1985⁷. The area now occupied by the reserve used to be a coal drop until the late 70s of the 20th century. At present, the narrow strip of land of merely 0.8 ha, characterised by large biodiversity, plays an important role in the provision of environmental education. This special place offers contact with nature only a 5-minute walk away from the busiest place in London, which is the area of King's Cross railway station. Just

⁶ The canal in this area initially runs parallel to Camley Street, then it turns at the almost right angle to the east and runs parallel to Goods Way up to the bridge in York Way.

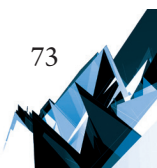
⁷ The park is one of 142 local nature reserves in the area of London (data as of the 11th June 2014, according to the list published by Natural England).

at the bank of the canal, the reserve features two small water reservoirs – hidden in greenery and surrounded by wetland vegetation. The wooden bridge that separates them is fitted with seating areas, which encourage visitors to pause and relax, especially so that the bridge offers the opportunity to look down the canal from a unique perspective.

A narrow path leads from the reserve area down to the waters of the canal, where, since February 2002, an unusual object has been located – a floating platform called *Viewpoint*. In spite of its small size, the geometric form, with walls in the colour of rusty orange, is clearly visible against the background of Camley Street Natural Park greenery and the waters of the canal. The platform, featuring triangular walls sheltering seating places within, has been fixed to the canal bank with the use of a steel structure. The outer side of the walls has been clad in corten steel, whereas the inner side, for the sake of acoustics, with wood, similarly to the seating areas placed between the walls. Small triangular openings have been cut in the walls at various heights offering unique views of the canal and its surrounding wildlife. The platform floor is made of grey concrete slabs decorated with a pattern resembling bird and animal footprints. The *Viewpoint* floating platform is a place for organising workshops and meetings, a chance to experience close contact with the natural environment without interfering into its functioning. The authors of this object, which is an artistic contribution to the ongoing discussion on the relations between the built environment and nature are a team of young Finnish architects: Erkko Aarti, Arto Ollila and Mikki Ristola. The design was developed under the auspices of the Finnish Institute in London and the Architecture Foundation, in cooperation with the London Wildlife Trust, within the framework of Finland UK_Exchange Project dedicated to young architects in Finland and the UK who are especially interested in the problems of shaping the relations between water and the city.

Since August 2014, there have been four more floating objects to be seen on the waters of the canal in the vicinity of the viewing platform. Artificially created floating islands are covered by carefully selected species of water plants. The roots of the plants cleanse the water, at the same time providing habitat for water wildlife. The above-ground parts of the plants, apart from being aesthetically pleasing, play a function in the canal's ecosystem as they provide shelter and nesting site for birds. The islands are situated in a part of the canal separated from the main stream with buoys.

A little further to the north, there is yet another floating object – Floating Forest Garden – which is moored at the bank of the canal. The garden on a barge, composed of over 100 plant species placed in containers, is part of the project called Wildlife on your Waterways. The project covers the areas adjacent to Regent's Canal in the section between Camden and the Islington Tunnel. The aim of the project is to explore and monitor the habitats existing within this unique waterway. The garden, accessible from the area of the reserve, plays an educational and scientific role, promotes organic farming and eco-friendly lifestyles. A footbridge is due to be built by 2017 in the area where the barge is currently moored, which is to connect the reserve and the new information centre facility planned here with the green area of Gasholder Park situated on the other side of the canal. This exceptional park was opened for use in early 2016. The design of the park by Bell Phillips Architects was selected in the contest resolved in 2009. The park is an interesting combination of King's Cross industrial heritage and



contemporary tendencies in designing green areas. The spatial frame of the park is created by the beautiful cast iron structure of the largest gas container Gasholder No. 8, until the year 2000 functioning as part of the Pancras Gasworks. In 2011, the container structure was disassembled, renovated and, in 2013, reassembled at its present location on the left bank of Regent's Canal, opposite St. Pancras Basin. The area of the park, elevated above the waters of Regent's Canal, is a place offering unique views over the canal, the barges mooring at the basin and the greenery of Camley Street Natural Park (Fig. 1.)



Fig. 1. View over the waters of the canal from the *Viewpoint* platform. Floating islands, barge with the floating garden and the cast iron structure of Gasholder No. 8 are to be seen in the background (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2014)

A different aesthetic and visual experience is brought by another space occupying the central place on the left bank of the canal – the Canalside Steps. The function of this space and its relations with the waters of Regent's Canal are also different. Wide concrete terraces stepping down to the waters of the canal have been located at the place where canal barges used to moor if they had some business with the granary building nearby. Now the terraces provide a venue for various small-scale events or happenings. The Canalside Steps are sometimes turned into the audience of a summer cinema, but every day they serve as a resting area for tourists and students of Central Saint Martins University of the Arts (Fig. 2).

The towpath, which as a pedestrian and cycling route running along the left bank of the canal, provides direct visual contact with the waters of the canal and it connects the Canalside Steps with yet another public space created on its waters – Wharf Road Gardens. A slightly inclining ramp running towards Granary Square from the side of the towpath, provides



Fig. 2. View over the Canalside Steps located on the left bank of the canal; in the background the building of Central Saint Martins University of the Arts situated at Granary Square (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2014)

convenient access both to the square and to the Wharf Road Gardens space. The green areas may be reached, also from the side of Granary Square, by smoothly outlined pedestrian routes along Regent's Canal. The green expanses of lawns placed at different heights have been enclosed in *frames* made of corten steel. Numerous eateries occupy the area in the close vicinity, some of them spilling out directly into the space of the garden. This is another place to take a break, eat a meal and watch the barges move along the canal. The opportunity is eagerly seized by tourists, Central Saint Martins students and, at lunchtime, by people working in the offices nearby. The garden, opened for users in 2015, was designed by Townshend Landscape Architects in cooperation with Don Person Studio. Wharf Road Gardens are a continuation and a peculiar functional and compositional link to the part of Handyside Gardens, established earlier, which is situated on the canal. Handyside Gardens were the first public garden opened in the revitalised area of King's Cross. It occupies a narrow space between the Art House and the Midlands Goods Shed. A narrow water canal runs through the middle of the garden towards Regent's Canal. The shining stream of water flowing in a bed slightly sunk below the level of the ground takes its origins in the northern part of the gardens, at the playground area, where the water is a great attraction for children and adults alike. The linear shape of the garden has been additionally emphasised by the arrangement of pedestrian routes and the terrain configuration of the site. Similarly to the above-mentioned design, the spatial organisation of this garden makes clear references to the railway heritage of the area in the characteristic outline of the pedestrian routes, which – like railway tracks – run towards the buildings of King's Cross railway station, visible at a distance. The railway function has

also affected the technical solutions applied in the garden design. The railway tunnels running under the garden grounds to King's Cross railway station determined the way in which all vegetation was planted, the selection of species as well as their amount and distribution in the space of the garden. The landscaping design of this garden, similarly to the Wharf Road Gardens design, has been authored by the team of Don Person Studio. The vegetation used by the designer, typical of rail embankments – various grass species, perennials, shrubs and flowers, has been planted on soil piles elevated above the ground. The edges of the piles have been reinforced with corten steel, whose characteristic rusty colour makes a splendid combination with the greenery, at the same time emphasising the industrial character of the site. The garden area also features various forms of seating places: from wooden seats placed at the edges of piles to wave-shaped bent wooden forms resembling reclining chairs placed on the canal banks. The Handyside Gardens project, combined with its functional and spatial complement of Wharf Road Gardens, has created in the vicinity of Regent's Canal a place of special atmosphere – preserving and promoting cultural values of the area – and at the same time a place with modern spatial expression.

Looking at subsequent projects realised in the area of the canal, we get the impression that, designed by an exquisite designer who John Nash certainly was, Regent's Canal is now regaining its exceptional, though functionally different, significance in the structure of the city.

4. Water in the space of the squares and the park

Public spaces in the direct vicinity of Regent's Canal enter into functional and compositional relations with the squares and green areas located a little further away from the canal, together creating a system of public commons. A special place among these areas is occupied by Granary Square, executed to the design by Townshend Landscape Architects.

Due to its location and area, the square is often referred to as the heart of King's Cross. In its southern part, the square opens to the waters of the canal through the Canalside Steps, from the north – through Stable Street – it is connected with Lewis Cubitt Square and Lewis Cubitt Park, and from the east – through Wharf Road Gardens – with Handyside Gardens. The central feature of the Granary Square space is the four rectangular water plazas, whose shapes have been outlined by 1080 water jets placed at equal distances. The plazas have their narrow sides run parallel to the façade of the former granary building, currently used by Central Saint Martins University students, situated at the northern side of the square. Water appears in the space of the square in 100 different computer-controlled choreographic patterns, the majority of which are dynamic routines using intensive colours of the spouts of water. Water fills the space of the square, it is visible and audible, it squirts up to the height of several metres or just a few centimetres, it ripples and sways, rises in the form of mist or with a thin film covers the stone surface of the square creating four water tables. Diverse water arrangements are adjusted to the frequently changing function of the square, which may be a venue for a large open-air event (accommodating up to 2,000 people), a city beach, or a place for concerts, happenings, art installations and light and sound events. The area of the water tables or among

the squirting jets serves as a platform for dancers to practice their routines, for dance shows or simply as a playground for children and adults alike. The designers have created a vibrant, changing and colourful space, which attracts various users: those who like to just watch and those who actively participate in water spectacles or events organised here, always in a unique atmosphere. Water tables in the space of the square are not only a compositional element but they also bring to mind its water-related past – the reloading basin that existed here in the 19th century. Another reference made to the past of this place is the line of the former canal bank worked into its surface and a preserved mooring stanchion. On the other hand, a renovated rail turntable, covered with a glass panel, located in the north-western part of the square, and a preserved part of the former railway track are reminders of the industrial and rail history of Granary Square. Opening the square to the waters of the canal by the terraces of the Canalside Steps makes the space seem even larger (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Granary Square (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2014)

Two new public spaces featuring water elements have been created in the vicinity of Granary Square, to the north-west of the square. The first of these spaces is Lewis Cubitt Square⁸. The place is connected with Granary Square by Stable Street, which is in turn separated from Lewis Cubitt Square by a green strip of trees, shrubs and various species of perennials with semi-circular enclaves hiding seating areas opened towards the square and the main pedestrian route cutting across the square. A row of wide wooden benches separates

⁸ The square has been designed by Laurie Olin, who is also the author of *inter alia* Bryant Park in Manhattan, New York.



the route from the main area of the square. The linear arrangement of the wooden seats and their distribution is repeated in the arrangement and distribution of five water tables, which have been located in the eastern part of the square. Smooth water tables, like mirrors, reflect the sky and the street furniture featured on the square. Yet, they are not the only water attraction in this space. The designer has also proposed using other qualities of water – its movement and changeability. The water tables outlined in the grey stone paving of the square are accompanied by water jets, placed in two rows along their longer sides, which squirt water to make a water tunnel. The arched water spouts squirting from 55 jets are illuminated at night with white light focused on the water streams highlighting water drops flying through the air. The water jets applied in the space of the square, typical of this designer, are an attraction not only for children, who, as long as the weather conditions are favourable, never want to leave this place. The square, which may accommodate 2,000 people, is a place of recreation and play, but also a venue for various events and happenings. Concerts are organised here, there is an open-air cinema. In June 2015, the square housed a festival of architecture and art, which brought two characteristic pavilions – a yellow and a red one – into its space (Fig. 4).

A green extension of Lewis Cubitt Square to the north is Lewis Cubitt Part⁹ open to users since 2015, the main green common of the revitalised area in King's Cross. The park has the shape of a rectangle of the area equal to 0.65 ha. On both sides of the park, the ground has been raised along longer ends. The gentle variation of the ground levels, defined by soft elevation lines, outlines subtly semi-private places in the space of the park encouraging individual relaxation and leisure.



Fig. 4. Water in the space of Lewis Cubitt Square (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2014)

⁹ The park was created to the design of Townshend Landscape Architects.

At present, the greatest attraction in this part of the King's Cross revitalised area is the pond¹⁰ situated at the end of the green space of Lewis Cubitt Park and with a building site in the adjacent area. The water reservoir, open for use on the 15th May 2015, is a temporary art installation¹¹ promoting water recycling realised within the framework of Relay Arts Programme. Water in the pond is cleansed in a closed cycle with the use of various species of water plants. Vegetation typical of wetland has been planted to the north of the pond, in its direct vicinity. Similarly to the floating islands placed on the waters of Regent's Canal, the Floating Forest Garden or the *Viewpoint* floating platform, the pond is to draw attention to the dependencies and mutual relations between humans and the natural environment as well as to the results human activity brings to the environment. It is yet another place to stop and look for the answer to the question what significance has sustainable development, where is the place for humans, water and greenery in the space of the city. Simply by staying in this space of water and greenery and by looking at it and at the neighbouring building site from the viewing platform located on the northern side of the pond, visitors have the possibility of watching the ongoing transformations and, in a certain way, participating in them (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Art installation *Of Soil and Water: King's Cross Pond Club* in the area of Lewis Cubitt Park (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2015)

¹⁰ The "natural" bathing pond is 40 m long, 10 m wide and it is elevated approx. 2 m above the level of the ground.

¹¹ The authors of the project called *Of Soil and Water: King's Cross Pond Club* are: Eva Pfannes and Sylvain Hartenberg of Ooze Architects from Rotterdam and Marjetica Potrč.

An example of how the phenomenon of water may be used differently in arranging an urban space is Pancras Square, opened to the public in 2015¹². The difference in ground levels between the two ends of this little triangular square of the area amounting to mere 0.4 ha (from the side of Regent's Canal to King's Cross railway station) is several metres. This terrain configuration has been used for creating an extremely interesting water feature. The designers proposed placing three water elements in the space of the square at different levels and shifted sideways in relation to each other. Each of these elements is composed of water cascades separated by flat shallow pools. Such spatial arrangement of the water elements and their form results in that the water feature seems different depending on the place from which it is viewed. When we enter the square from the Gateway of Battle Bridge, we see a very dynamic water system created by water cascades flowing towards us from the side of Regent's Canal. We get the impression that the water flows down from the canal and from the main public space in King's Cross – Granary Square. The same space seen from the north is completely different, water cascades are invisible, and the stepped terraces of water pools create a mirror floor reflecting the greenery of the square and the architecture flanking this urban enclosure. An important component, making this space a top-quality realisation, is the vegetation filling the terraces of the square – carefully selected and sculptured, along with the elements of street furniture. The square lighting design also deserves to be mentioned as it showcases the characteristic components of the water feature and emphasises the arrangement of greenery.



Fig. 6. Pancras Square (photo by U. Nowacka-Rejzner, 2015)

¹² This is yet another project realised in the revitalised area under consideration that has been designed by landscape architects of Townshend Landscape Architects.

The square is both a route leading from King's Cross station to Regent's Canal, flanked by water and greenery, and a place to relax and enjoy services offered by the facilities located at ground floors of the buildings surrounding the square (Fig. 6).

In the future, a footbridge is to connect the square with Granary Square, situated on the left bank of the canal, which will result in creating a chain of public commons – from Granary Square, through Pancras Square and Battle Bridge Place up to King's Cross Square outside King's Cross railway station. At present, the major pedestrian traffic from the area of Granary Square towards King's Cross station takes place over King's Bridge and further on along green King's Boulevard.

5. Summary and conclusions

The water world of King's Cross is created by the waters of the canal and the water features located in the squares, parks and gardens emerging in the area now being revitalised. Water takes different forms in these spaces: brooks, mirrors, cascades or jets, it lures visitors with its murmur and light reflexes, brings cool refreshment, relaxation and vibrancy into the spaces of the squares and green commons, reminds us of the incessant change going on in nature.

The organisation of the canal waterfront areas, as well as the form of the water features installed in the analysed public spaces, promote the creation of diverse relations between water and its users. The options include both direct contact with water – touching it, playing with it or participating in the happenings taking place on water plazas – and more passive visual contact by watching artistic actions performed in the squares or in the space of the canal from various perspectives – from King's Bridge, from the Canalside Steps or from the boulevards of Wharf Road Gardens. A special cognitive experience is a participation in the project *Of Soil and Water: King's Cross Pond Club*. A more intimate form of contact with water spaces: observation and learning the rules and conditions of water eco-systems' functioning, is offered by footbridges over water reservoirs in the area of Camley Street Natural Park and, on the waters of the canal, by the *Viewpoint* floating platform and the barge with Floating Forest Garden on it.

Offering various forms of contact with water – from visual to direct – makes water something more than just a component of the composition; it also acquires a cognitive and educational role, encourages and inspires various types of activity.

Special attention should also be paid to the various ways water elements highlight the identity of the now revitalised area, both the one related to water and rail transportation and the industrial one related to the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company operating in this area in the past. Water also plays an important role in promoting sustainable development of urban structures and creating adequate relations between man and nature. This is precisely the function of the objects located on the waters of the canal, which have been discussed above: the floating islands, the *Viewpoint* platform, Floating Forest Garden and the art installation in the green space of Lewis Cubitt Park.

The projects listed above, which combine in an interesting way the 19th-century industrial heritage of the area and its natural assets, may certainly provide inspiration for seeking innovative design solutions in areas to be revitalised.

The way in which the whole process of the project execution and promotion among the general public is approached may also be an inspiration to implement similar solutions. Since the moment when this long-term project realisation was first initiated, the building site has been treated as an attractive public space and the area where both the industrial past of the site and the contemporary design solutions implemented now could be effectively promoted. There is a system of signposted routes leading to individual public spaces or facilities that have already been completed, which ensures a safe and attractive way of moving around the building site. The system of informing the public of the whole project and the individual stages of its execution also works extraordinarily well, all the desired information is to be found at King's Cross Visitor Centre. There is also an option of viewing the areas under revitalisation from specially built viewing platforms, e.g. the one located on King's Boulevard. Londoners and tourists alike have thus a unique opportunity to participate in the ongoing process of revitalisation of this space, to watch the transformation as it is happening and to use the individual parts of the redevelopment as they are opened to the public one after another.

Besides improving the image of the area, the revitalisation project has also brought environmental, social and economic benefits, to which the various water arrangements installed in the discussed public spaces contributed considerably.

It must be emphasised that water has enormous potential when it comes to the creation of urban spaces, which potential is still not quite fully exploited. New projects, emerging incessantly, proposing ever more ingenious admirable artistic and technological solutions are examples illustrating the above statement.

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