

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Frontiers of Architectural Research

[www.keaipublishing.com/foar](http://www.keaipublishing.com/foar)SOUTHEAST  
UNIVERSITY

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Between city and home: Spaces of transition in London Postwar Housing

Gerardo Semprebon<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Wenjun Ma<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup>Department of Civil Engineering, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China<sup>b</sup>Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, Milan, Italy<sup>c</sup>Department of Architecture, School of Design, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

Received 8 January 2018; received in revised form 11 May 2018; accepted 31 May 2018

**KEYWORDS**London;  
Housing;  
Space of relation;  
Transition**Abstract**

In the period between the idealistic vision of the 'Reshaping society' and Thatcherism, in the so-called 'Swinging London', the second wave of modernism is facing the demands and the quantities of bombed cities. The architects of that season, moved by political ideals and interpreting the cultural ferment, have been responsible for shaping the city on the collective dreams and aspirations of the society and for forging the identity of London as unique experience in the international panorama. This paper focuses on the spatial relations between city and home, how they raised in that specific historical context, in which form they realized, and what are the architectural implications for current design culture. The methodology, based both on the literature review and on the graphic comparison of six case-studies, is articulated in four steps. First, the six case-studies are selected according to specific criteria. Second, the sociohistorical background is reported. Third, the cases are shortly introduced using text descriptions and graphic tools. Fourth, the cases are compared. This process leads to the definition of four transversal architectural items: the density, the settlement pattern, the basement, and the threshold, intended as elements able to raise connections between past and contemporary design culture.

© 2018 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

The result of Postwar London election sees an unexpected victory for Attle's Labor Party over Tories led by Winston Churchill. By performing a dominant role after World War II, the Labor Party encourages relevant renovations in the administrative and legal framework, which become the

\*Corresponding author at: Department of Civil Engineering, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China.

E-mail address: [gerardo.semprebon@polimi.it](mailto:gerardo.semprebon@polimi.it) (G. Semprebon).

Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2018.05.006>

2095-2635/© 2018 The Authors. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

fertile ground upon which social policies can grow and reshape many aspects of urban living (Mikaelyan, 2017). The idea of the Welfare State is promoted by authorities through both the realization of important public facilities and Housing Estates. Indeed, London experiences a steady increase in the population, as the adopted term “*Baby boom*” suggests (Bonvalet, Clément and Ogg, 2015). Despite the alternation of governments, the role of the public administration remains essential in the process of transformation until the overcoming of Margaret Thatcher, when various public institutions began to be partially privatised (Lowe, 2004). The Abercrombie *Greater London Plan* of 1944 enlarges the power of the municipality, which is involved in the promulgation of a series of *Housing and Town Act* with the purpose of guiding the transformation of the city to face problems rising from slum conditions housing and bombed areas. For instance, the Housing Act of 1949 removes the obligation on local authorities to provide housing only for the working classes, marking a turning point in the development of mixed typologies. Many scholars focused on the history of the welfare state in Britain (Gladstone, 1999; Fraser, 2002; Harris, 2004). MacMillan, who was Housing Minister in the first 1950s, declared the ambitious will to build 300,000 houses per year. The spirit of that period was a rush against time to provide homes for people and comes out clearly in a booklet published by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, where Macmillan declared, “the people need more homes. They need them quickly. This is the most urgent of all social services. For the home is the basis of the family, just as the family is the basis of the nation. We have to try to meet their needs at a time of great economic difficulty. For we have to expand in a period of general restriction. This surely means that we must try to build the greatest possible number of houses out of the available labor and materials. At the same time, since we are not dealing with ephemeral or temporary projects, we must preserve standards. For we have to think of the future as well as of the present. Our object in this booklet is to suggest ways in which we can do both things - that is, build good houses and more houses. If we can together help to build the People’s House in the quantities that People need, we shall have done something to be proud of. We shall deserve, and receive, the gratitude of thousands of our fellow-countrymen, young and old. It is in this spirit that I ask you to study this handbook. It is a guide, not an instruction. I hope it may be an inspiration” (Pepper, 1977). In that period, England and London experienced the second wave of modernism, characterized by the need to supply housing for an increasing number of people. On the one hand, this scenario leads to the realization of housing models based on the serial repetition of elements, such as slabs and towers that start reshaping the city’s landscape, due to the introduction of bonuses for high-rise buildings. On the other hand, even if the Garden City imagined by Ebenezer Howard<sup>1</sup> is far to be realized inside the city boundaries, the New Town Act of 1946, following the principles stated by Abercrombie’s Plan, states the guidelines for the construction of new

settlements in the countryside around the main cities. As addressed by Rodney, “the State subsidized housing policy developed as a brave utopian socialist experiment during the interwar period in Britain, reaching its zenith in the mid-1970s, at which time the state supplied almost a third of the nation’s housing. The postwar London, between the rebuilding demands and the economic boom, experienced unparalleled levels of new construction of schools, hospitals, public housing, transport infrastructure and new towns. (...) More than any other, this period defined and created the landscape of modern Britain. (...) Public housing projects became an area of experimentation in the realization of modernist ideals of high-density private accommodation and in the use of new building technologies and materials” (Rodney, 2009). A turning point is represented by the establishment of the Greater London Council (GLC)<sup>2</sup> in substitution of the LCC, which, together with the different boroughs, was in charge of coordinating the process of reconstruction according to the concept of welfare state. The welfare state can be synthesized with five key points belonging to different areas of society: health care, education, social security (and employment), personal social services, and housing (Jones and Lowe, 2002). This new attitude can enjoy the new formal alphabet from technology’s progress. Architecture experienced new syntactic variations on the expressive topics of constructivism, modernism, and its overcoming. This paper investigates the spatial relations between home and city in London’s postwar housing experience, how they were raised in that specific historical context, in which form they were realized, and the architectural implications for current design culture.

## 2. Methodology

This research moves from the assumption that a qualitative approach to space, based on comparisons, is a fruitful tool for a critical understanding of the highlighted architectural season and testing the design issues of the past with the challenges of contemporary living. The adopted methodology is articulated in four steps. First, six case studies were selected based on the following criteria: a) geographic location (London downtown area), b) realization time span [estates whose realization take place between 1965 (establishment of the GLC Greater London Council) and 1980 (the implementation of the right-to buy, introduced in the Housing Act of the same year marks the beginning of a new economic cycle in the realm of building construction) are considered], c) search for heterogeneity in terms of morphology and typology, and d) innovative character of adopted solutions. These criteria led authors to choose the following estates: Lillington Gardens by John Darbourne and Geoffrey Darke (Pimlico, 1961-1972), Brunswick Centre by Patrick Hodgkinson (Saint Pancras,

<sup>2</sup>Greater London Council. It was the top-tier local government administrative body for Greater London from 1965 to 1986. It replaced the earlier London County Council (LCC), which covered a much smaller area. The GLC was dissolved in 1986 by the Local Government Act 1985, and its powers were devolved to the London boroughs and other entities.

<sup>1</sup>Howard (1945).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11021291>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11021291>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)