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### índice

# REVISITING PUBLIC SPACE IN POST-WAR SOCIAL HOUSING IN GREAT BRITAIN

REPENSANDO EL ESPACIO PÚBLICO DE LAS VIVIENDAS SOCIALES DE POST-GUERRA EN GRAN BRETAÑA

Pablo Sendra

**SUMMARY** This paper addresses the issue of the urban obsolescence of public space of social housing neighbourhoods built during the post-war period in Great Britain. Great Britain has been chosen because of the active role played by modern architects in the construction of the welfare state advocated by post-war governments, which involved building large areas of social housing. The aims of this paper are to understand the context in which these neighbourhoods were built as well as their evolution and the complexity of their obsolescence. To achieve these objectives, it first looks at the causes that prompted the slum clearance process, at its implementation during the post-war reconstruction and at the effects that this process has had on contemporary cities. Secondly, it is illustrated through a detailed analysis of a case study, Loughborough Estate in Brixton, London, looking at the initial conditions of the council estate when it was built, investigating its evolution over the past five decades and factors that may have contributed to the obsolescence of its public space and to its social problems. The paper concludes with a warning that a generalist critique of modern architecture does not solve the problems of such neighbourhoods, but a substantial intervention on the public space is needed to bring them to life. These interventions should focus on the spatial configuration of public space and its design and maintenance.
**KEY WORDS** public space; slum clearance; neighbourhood; urban obsolescence; regeneration; London

**RESUMEN** Este artículo aborda la cuestión de la obsolescencia urbana del espacio público en las barriadas de viviendas sociales construidas durante el periodo de post-guerra en Gran Bretaña. Se ha escogido el caso de Gran Bretaña debido al papel tan activo que tuvieron los arquitectos del movimiento moderno en la construcción del estado del bienestar, por la que abogaron los gobiernos de post-guerra y la cual implicó la construcción de una gran cantidad de viviendas. Los objetivos de este artículo son comprender el contexto en el que se construyeron estas barriadas así como su evolución y la complejidad de su obsolescencia. Para alcanzar estos objetivos, primero se examinan las causas que dieron lugar al proceso de demolición de infraviviendas, su ejecución durante la reconstrucción de post-guerra y los efectos que este proceso ha tenido en las ciudades contemporáneas. En segundo lugar, esto se ilustra con un análisis detallado de un caso de estudio: Loughborough Estate en Brixton, Londres. Se examinan cuáles eran las condiciones iniciales de la barriada social y se investiga su evolución durante las cinco últimas décadas y los posibles factores que han contribuido a la obsolescencia del espacio público y a sus problemas sociales. El artículo concluye advirtiendo que una crítica generalista a la arquitectura moderna no resuelve los problemas de estas barriadas, sino que es necesaria una intervención sustancial en el espacio público para fomentar la vida urbana. Estas intervenciones deben actuar sobre la configuración espacial del espacio público y sobre su diseño y mantenimiento.
**PALABRAS CLAVE** espacio público; demolición de infravivienda; barriada; obsolescencia urbana; regeneración; Londres

Persona de contacto / Corresponding author: psendra@us.es. Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura. Instituto Universitario de Arquitectura y Ciencias de la Construcción. Universidad de Sevilla

## INTRODUCTION

Social housing neighbourhoods built during the post-war period in many European cities have fallen into a state of obsolescence. In many cases, these urban typologies, developed mainly between the 1950s and 1970s, are places with no urban life suffering from social problems. The factors that contribute to their obsolescence and their social problems are quite diverse. Some of them are related to urban design and the evolution of built environment. In fact, even at the time when they were being built during the 1950s, some urban sociologists such as Young and Willmott[1] and some architects critical with modern architecture started to blame modernist urban designers for creating alienating spaces where communal life was not possible.

Since then, much has been written in urban theory literature about the disadvantages of such urban design and many of these urban places require urgent intervention, especially in their public spaces, which have been left abandoned. It is necessary to understand the origins of post-war reconstruction and the complexity of the obsolescence of these urban areas to avoid falling into a repetitive criticism of modern architecture and urban design.

In many European cities, the housing shortage after World War Two (WWII) led to the construction of large tracts of social housing. In Great Britain, the post-war governments took on the responsibility of building the welfare state and providing housing to slum-dwellers. The unhealthy Victorian city of slums had raised the alarm at the end of the nineteenth century about the need to provide housing for the poor. Building the welfare state involved demolishing working-class districts and moving their inhabitants to newly built housing estates. This process, known as slum clearance, became more intense in the post-war period, carried out in conjunction with the reconstruction of urban sites damaged by WWII bombings.

The British case is relevant due to the role that modern British architects played in the reconstruction process. It is significant that some of them[2] such as Sir J. Leslie Martin, who was Chief Architect of the London County Council (LCC)[3], held positions in public administration. This close

1. Young, Michael; Willmott, Peter: *Family and Kinship in East London.* First published in the U.S.A: 1957 and in Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957. Middlesex (England): Penguin Books (revised edition), 1962, reprinted 1972.
2. Mumford, Eric: *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000, pp. 169-170. Quoting Richards, James Maude: "Report on MARS Group: War and Post-war", May 1947 (CIAM 42-HMS-305/307).
3. Hall, Peter: *Cities of Tomorrow.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988. Reprinted in 1994, p. 225.

relationship between architects and governments made the participation of modern architects in the construction of many of these housing estates possible.

At the same time that this reconstruction was taking place, many reactions emerged against this kind of urban design and against the slum clearance process. These reactions proliferated to the point that British council estates and their characteristic architecture came to be associated with social problems, poverty and criminality. This stigmatisation has contributed to the abandonment of such neighbourhoods. Until today, despite some attempts at regeneration, many of these neighbourhoods are in urgent need of a regeneration process to bring urban life to their streets.

Thus, the objectives of this paper are:
1. To understand the process through which these neighbourhoods were built.
2. To comprehend their evolution since their construction and the complexity of their obsolescence, outlining weaknesses and potentials. Since the article is approached from the standpoint of urban design, the analysis focuses on their public space and not on the dwelling typologies.

To achieve these objectives, the paper uses the following work methodology:
1. Literature review of British history and theory of architecture and urbanism, focusing on the post–war period and on the urban theories that emerged in reaction to post–war reconstruction.
2. Using a case study to understand the process that these neighbourhoods have undergone since they were built, and their current problems. This case study is Loughborough Estate in the London Borough of Lambeth, designed and built in the 1950s by the LCC Architect's Department. Firstly, a historical analysis has been carried out on the area, including the consultation of historical maps, old photographs, original plans and documents of the scheme, and planning information about the subsequent interventions on the estate from the

following sources: Digimap Historic Map Service, the Lambeth Archives, the London Metropolitan Archives and the Planning Application Database of Lambeth[4]. Secondly, a qualitative analysis was carried out on the estate through nine site visits between January and June 2009. This included observations on the use of the public space, unstructured interviews with twenty–five people, including neighbours and workers from the area, as well as key agents such as members of the community panel, staff of the neighbourhood housing and management offices, local youth facility staff and police officers.

POST–WAR RECONSTRUCTION AND SLUM CLEARANCE IN GREAT BRITAIN
The slum clearance and the post–war reconstruction processes led to the displacement of more than four million families and the construction of ten thousand large council estates over a fifty–year period[5]. Different factors prompted a socio–political situation where modern British architects were offered the opportunity to participate actively in the reconstruction process after the war: firstly, the unhealthy and overcrowded working–class districts of the Victorian city, and secondly, the socio–political situation that emerged after World War One and that was consolidated after WWII, subsidising and encouraging public housing built on cleared sites[6] and promoting the construction of the welfare state.

*From the slum city to the welfare state*
The reasons for this massive operation of replacing slums with new housing estates had their origins in the situation of late–nineteenth century British cities, with abysmal living conditions in working–class districts, with large families living in single–room dwellings and sharing facilities with other families. As Hall describes[7], the pamphlet published in 1883 by Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, was quite influential, as it made the middle–class and authorities realize the need for a solution to the

deplorable situation of the working classes. It seems that there were two issues derived from these poor living conditions that particularly worried the British middle class, the clergy and the authorities. On the one hand, Mearns's publication drew a picture of certain situations in the slums to raise the alarm about how these people lived. He laid particular emphasis on the immorality and the criminality of the slums: drunkenness, prostitution and highly disadvantaged situations for children[8]. The second main concern of the middle class was the threat of insurrection: the economic depression of the mid–1880s led to riots and mobilizations that also made the need for a solution for poor districts evident[9].

As Hall highlights, the immediate consequences of these perceptions were the Royal Commission of 1885 and the Booth survey[10], which quantified the problem. The conclusions were that it was necessary to build new working–class neighbourhoods to rehouse the slum–dwellers.

*Post–war reconstruction and British modern architecture*
Since the beginning of the twentieth century, public administration has tended to favour public housing and support the construction of new neighbourhoods to rehouse the working class. This tendency became more marked after WWII when the slum clearance process was reinforced with the reconstruction of the bombed sites. The war left London with a serious housing shortage, to the point that in 1951 the LCC estimated that there were 250,000 families waiting for new homes[11].

British modern architects had an important role in the construction of post–war social housing, both because

of the presence of major modern architects in the LCC and because other authorities worked with private firms on designing public housing. In addition to this, members of the British CIAM group, MARS, held positions in public administration, allowing them to lead the reconstruction process. Moreover, MARS started to play such an important role in CIAM meetings that it led to the celebration of the first post–war CIAM meeting in Bridgewater, England in 1947[12].

At this point, Abercrombie and Forshaw's County of London Plan (CLP) started to be implemented. This marked the beginning of a major slum clearance process[13] accompanied mainly by two operations for housing provision: the construction of new satellite towns and the reconstruction of inner–city working–class districts with council estates that mixed high–rise and low–rise buildings. Both operations had the same objective: to lower the density of the inner city.

The LCC was the largest housing authority in the country[14], so it played a very important role in implementing the CLP. It was considered the largest architectural practice in the world and employed over 750 architects[15]. From 1949, Robert Matthew directed the Architect's Department –later, in 1953, Sir J. Leslie Martin succeeded him as Chief Architect– and organized it into "*groups with specific projects and tasks*"[16].

The Swedish style as a model for the welfare state –known as the "New Empiricism"– inspired many of the LCC housing schemes. However, within the Architect's Department, there was another sector that was deeply influenced by Le Corbusier's recently built *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille. This resulted in British adaptations of the

4. London Borough of Lambeth. Planning Application database [online]. London: London Borough of Lambeth, n.d. [Quoted on August 5, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://planning.lambeth.gov.uk/online–applications/>.
5. Rogers, Richard; Power, Anne: *Cities for a small country*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000, p. 76.
6. Rogers, Richard; Power, Anne. Op. cit., p. 76.
7. Hall, Peter. Op. cit., p. 16.

8. Ibídem, p. 16–19.
9. Ibídem, p. 26.
10. Ibídem, p. 19–31.
11. Harwood, Elain: "The road to subtopia: 1940 to the present". In Saint, Andrew (Ed.): *London Suburbs*. London: Merrell Holberton in association with English Heritage, 1999, p. 131.
12. Mumford, Eric. Op. cit., p. 168.
13. Ibídem, p. 167.
14. Bullock, Nicholas: *Building the post–war world: modern architecture and reconstruction in Britain*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 232.
15. Carolin, Peter: "Sense, sensibility and tower blocks: the Swedish influence on post–war housing in Britain". In Harwood, Elain; Powers, Alan (Ed.): *Housing the twentieth century*. London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008, p. 106.
16. Partridge, John: "Roehampton Housing". In Harwood, Elain; Powers, Alan (Ed.): Housing the twentieth century. London: Twentieth Century Society, 2008, p. 115.

*Unité* following the recommendations of the CLP and LCC housing standards. This made the architects combine slab blocks, low–rise and medium–rise housing in their schemes to meet the CLP recommendation of mixed developments and design a cheaper and smaller version of the *Unité*[17]. These British versions of the *Unité* resulted in the construction of council estates such as Loughborough Estate, which is the case study for this article.

The reactions to these processes soon emerged. They came from both urban sociologists and architects. In 1953, the *Architectural Review* edited by Richards published an editorial denouncing the disadvantages of the new towns for their lack of urbanity[18]. In addition, Young and Willmott's work[19], which criticised the slum clearance process for breaking the bonds of family and communal life in working–class districts, was quite influential in urban sociology.

The critics also came from within the CIAM, where Team 10, led by British architects Allison and Peter Smithson, challenged the CIAM discourse on the Functional City and proposed an alternative discourse to the Athens Charter based on the "*hierarchy of human associations*"[20]. This was presented through the non–built project for Golden Lane "Urban Reidentification", in which they explained this hierarchy of associations: the house, the street, the district and the city. With this project, they were trying to suggest new forms of building and ways to associate people without destroying the street life characteristic of working–class districts[21]. In the later CIAM congresses the Team 10 discourse focused the discussion on the concept of habitat[22], an issue that had scarcely been discussed in the CIAM. Their concerns were with public space, places for human relationships and not just with housing units and the organization of functions.

Despite the many critics, the processes of slum clearance and reconstruction lasted until the mid–1970s. Because of the need to provide extensive housing and the government's interest in controlling urban growth[23] and avoiding moving former slum–dwellers into outer suburbs[24], the authorities started to prioritise the construction of inner–city neighbourhoods in cleared and bombed sites. Many of these were carefully designed by well–known architects, although their results have not been shown to be very satisfactory. However, this was not always the case, and on many occasions the design was devoid of architectural interest, so that these were standard council estates, with inadequate communal space and no services or amenities[25], a hindrance to social relationships in the public realm.

*The legacy of the reconstruction process*

The urban discourses against modern architecture and the slum clearance process which emerged in the 1950s became stronger in the following years. Various urban studies criticised the reconstruction process and modern architecture for being antisocial and not facilitating human relationships. However, the approach to this criticism was not always the same. Whereas some focused on the importance of recovering human contact in the public space and on encouraging public life, other approaches concentrated on designing urban configurations to avoid anti–social behaviour and prevent crime.

The idea that modern architecture led to anti–social behaviour was widespread not only in certain sectors of academia and urban thinking, but also among the general public, who observed the social problems and criminality associated with council estates, which led to the stigmatisation of post–war neighbourhoods. This has affected the public conception of people who live in London and other British cities, where until the present day, post–war high–rise housing is still seen as housing for the poor.

Although many of the critics have unquestionable arguments about the negative effects of modern urban design, some theories have led to certain effects that have not improved poor conditions in these areas but have been even more of a hindrance to life in the public space. Firstly, one of the effects of the decreasing interest in social housing was the abandonment of these urban areas, attributed to the difficulty of the authorities in assuming the cost of the maintenance of the large housing stock built in the post–war period. Secondly, another output was the corrective urban design measures to prevent crime, first promoted by Newman[26] in the 1970s and later implemented in Britain by Coleman[27] in the 1980s. As Minton[28] suggests, these have had a strong influence on policy–making until today. Thirdly, the stigmatisation of these neighbourhoods and their relation to crime and deprivation has also led to their demolition and redevelopment recreating traditional street patterns and, in some occasions, recalling vernacular architecture.

The initial lack of amenities in the open spaces in many of these neighbourhoods was not supplemented with later interventions. Most of the interventions that took place in the council estates just after their construction did not deal with the outdoor spaces, but with repairing the construction problems in the buildings. The public authorities had difficulty in maintaining the large housing stock built in the post–war period. Moreover, when the Greater London Council (GLC) –the former LCC– transferred its housing stock to the boroughs, they had to face the management of a large number of dwellings.

The stigmatisation of housing estates also led to relating its urban design to crime. In 1972, Newman proposed

corrective measures to prevent crime based on "*territoriality*", "*natural surveillance*"– easily identifying strangers and undesirables–and "image and milieu"[29]: avoiding architectural designs and urban images contributing to the stigmatisation of an area. Newman's ideas were taken up by Coleman[30], who held that there were certain architectural features in modern architecture that encouraged crime, and proposed some corrective interventions such as eliminating the elevated pathways or creating enclosures by adding new buildings to provide surveillance to the street.

This focus on preventing crime in council estates has led to prioritising investment in security measures such as providing a single safe access to the tower blocks, installing CCTV cameras, fencing off the gardens and placing barbed wire on walls and buildings. Minton identifies the main difference between Newman's approach and that of others such as Jacobs and Sennett. She states that, while Jacobs and Sennett consider interaction with strangers as something positive, Newman's measures try to avoid the presence of strangers on the public realm, considering them as intruders[31].

In some cases, the stigmatisation of the architecture of council estates has resulted in their demolition[32]. The idea that modern architecture leads to crime has led to a return to vernacular architecture as a more appropriate style for human relationships. This can be appreciated in certain processes of urban renewal that have carried on the partial or complete demolition of council estates and redeveloping the sites following Victorian street patterns. However, as Sennett suggests[33], the historic city cannot be created from scratch by imitating architecture from the past. The historic city is the result of a process of overlapping different moments in time and the character of public space comes from how people use it.

17. Bullock, Nicholas. Op. cit., pp. 103–105.

18. Hall, Peter. Op. cit., p. 222. Referencing Richards, James Maude: "The Failure of the New Towns". *Architectural Review*, Nº 114, 1953, p. 29–32.

19. Young, Michael; Willmott, Peter: Op. Cit. They compared family and communal life in a working–class district in Bethnal Green in East London with that of a newly built council estate in Essex, where many of the families from Bethnal Green had been rehoused.

20. Mumford, Eric. Op. cit., p. 225.

21. Mumford, Eric. Op. cit., pp. 232–235.

22. Team 10: "The Door Manifesto", 1954, reproduced in Smithson, Alison (Ed.): *Team 10 meetings*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991, p. 21.

23. Hall, Peter. Op. cit., p. 223.

24. Rogers, Richard; Power, Anne. Op. cit., p. 76.

25. Hall, Peter. Op. cit., p. 225.

26. Newman, Oscar: *Defensible space: crime prevention through urban design*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

27. Coleman, Alice: *Utopia on trial: vision and reality in planned housing*. London: Hilary Shipman, 1985. Revised edition 1990.

28. Minton, Anna: *Ground control: fear and happiness in the twenty–first–century city*. London: Penguin, 2009.

29. Newman, Oscar. Op. cit.

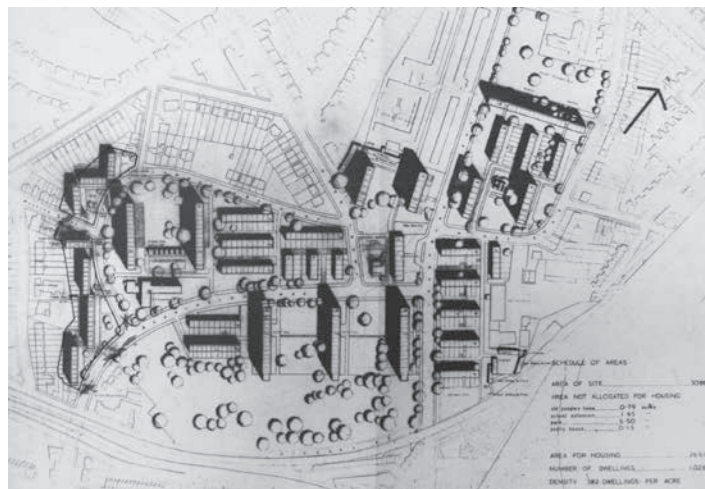30. Coleman, Alice. Op. cit.

31. Minton, Anna. Op. cit., p. 142.

32. Rogers, Richard; Power, Anne. Op. cit., p. 81.

33. Sennett, Richard: "The public realm." Paper presented at BMW Foundation Workshop on Changing Behaviour and Beliefs. Lake Tegernsee (Germany), 2008. [Quoted on February 2, 2011] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://www.richardsennett.com/site/SENN/Templates/General2.aspx?pageid=16>.

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1. Loughborough Estate, 1961.
2. Loughborough Estate extension, Civic Trust Awards 1961.
3. Loughborough Estate model, 1952.
4. Brixton before WWII, 1886.
5. Brixton: damage caused by WWII bombings, 1952.

The transformations–or lack of transformation–that council estates have undergone since the 1980s have focused on preventing crime through interventions in the existing built environment or through demolishing and developing a traditional urban street design featuring street frontage, natural surveillance and, on some occasions, vernacular architectural style. However, the magnitude and scope of these interventions has been different in each case and it is impossible to generalize. That is why it is necessary to use case studies.

PUBLIC SPACE OBSOLESCENCE: LOUGHBOROUGH ESTATE, BRIXTON
To understand the current situation of the public realm in British council estates, this article analyses a neighbourhood designed by the LCC Architect's Department in the 1950s: Loughborough Estate in the London Borough of Lambeth, South London. The case study is an inner–city neighbourhood built on a site damaged by WWII bombing and its design is an adaptation of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* (figures 1, 2, and 3).

The neighbourhood houses over 3,000 people[34] and is located in Brixton, a major town centre known for its vibrancy and multiculturalism, its street life and its street market on Electric Avenue. Between the 1940s and the 1950s, Brixton experienced a great influx of Afro–Caribbean immigrants, which came to be known as the "Windrush generation". Currently, it has large African and West Indian populations. This is representative of what happened in Great Britain, where post–war immigration had given rise to a large number of ethnic minorities living in social housing by the 1980s[35]. Brixton was also one of the hotspots of the riots at the beginning of the 1980s. The Brixton Riots in 1981 resulted in the report by Lord Scarman, who denounced the disadvantaged situation of black culture[36].

The street life of Brixton Town Centre contrasts with the dead streets of the social housing neighbourhoods. The image of housing estates is associated with crime and deprivation and has contributed to the area's poor reputation.

34. Source: Office for National Statistics. National Neighbourhoods Statistics [online]. Newport (South Wales, U.K.): Office for National Statistics, 2011. [Quoted May 29, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>.
35. Hall, Peter. Op. cit., pp. 395–396.
36. Scarman, Lord: *The Brixton disorders 10–12 April 1981*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1981.



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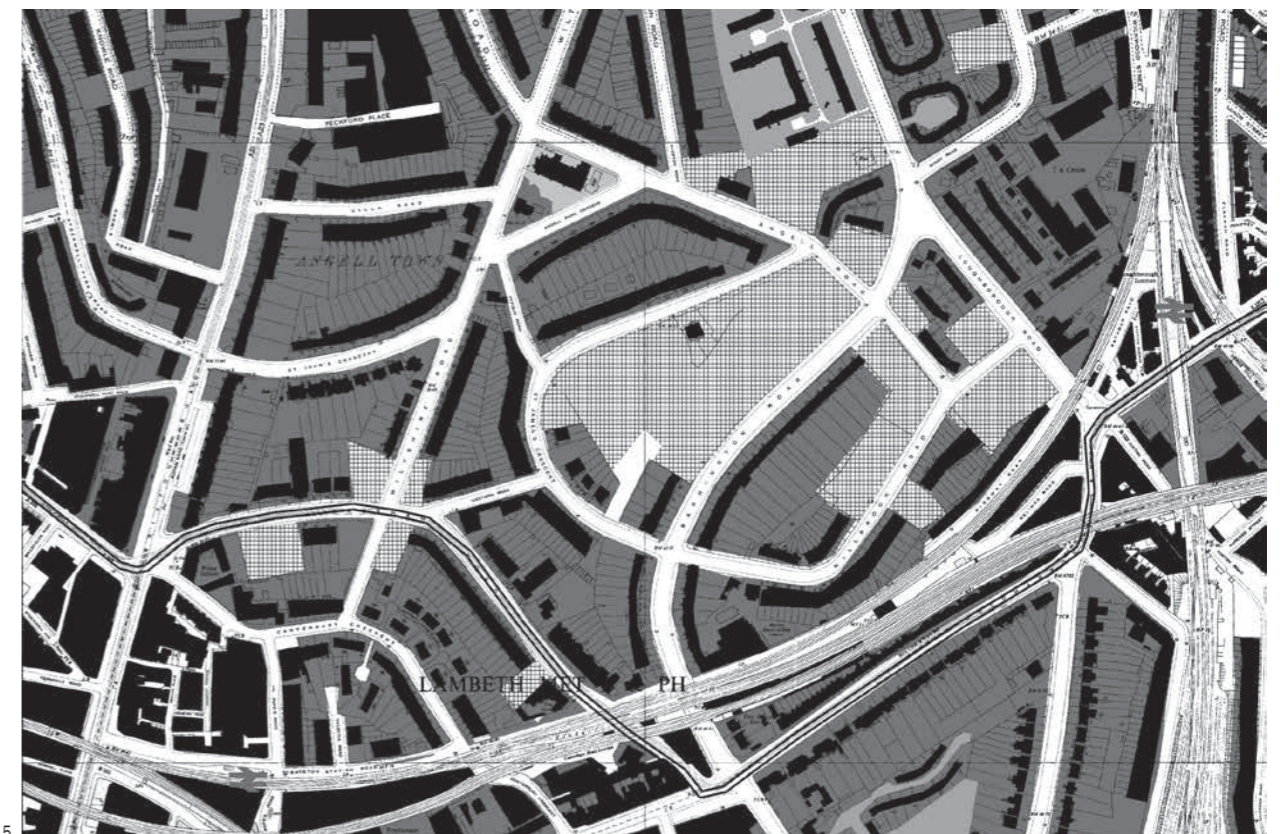


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6. Construction of Loughborough Estate, 1958.
7. Loughborough Estate, 2009. (The cameras featured on this plan are illustrative and do not correspond to the actual number and distribution. In actual fact there are many more cameras distributed throughout the estate).

*Construction and evolution of Loughborough Estate*
The area currently occupied by Loughborough Estate was destroyed during the Second World War (figures 4, 5). The neighbourhood was designed and built in the 1950s (figure 6) next to an existing council estate from the 1930s. The scheme is a mixed development that combines *Unité*–inspired slab blocks with terrace houses and four–storey maisonette blocks (figure 3). A park–Wyck Gardens–was built together with the housing estate. Three of the large slab blocks face the park perpendicularly. The scheme was planned with an open layout: the slab blocks were standing on large open areas of grass. The ground floors of the slab blocks stood on pilotis and were open. Little attention had been paid to design in the public realm of the original development, which consisted basically of large areas of grass where communal life was supposed to take place.

During the first decades, the interventions in Loughborough Estate concentrated on repairing specific problems stemming from the construction of the estate[37]. It seems that the initial interventions did not deal with the public space and this fed the process of decay. Between 1992 and 1994[38] a major scheme was implemented in the housing estate, which included fencing round all the originally open gardens (figure 7). In addition to this, the open ground floors of the towers were closed off to create concierge spaces and secure single–access entrances. Recently, CCTV cameras have been installed all over the estate and the headquarters of Coldharbour Lane Safer Neighbourhood Team (Metropolitan Police) is located at Loughborough Junction.

Since the creation of the Loughborough EMB community centre in the 1990s, some repairs have been carried out in the houses, and the internal gardens are in better condition. While the fieldwork was being carried out in 2009, United Resident Housing applied for funding for a project to meet the Decent Home Standard[39]. This project focuses on the refurbishment of the dwellings, not on the public realm.

*Complexity of Loughborough Estate's obsolescence*
The main symptom of obsolescence of the public realm is its disuse. From the site visits, it can be concluded that there is a lack of life in the public space: it is rare to see people sitting, standing, socializing or enjoying the outdoor spaces.

Crime is regarded as one of the main problems of Loughborough Estate, it is within the 21.71% neighbourhoods of England with the highest crime rates[40]. Youth criminality and gang membership are major concerns. However, the factors that contribute to these social problems are very complex, since they derive from structural problems, the concentration of poverty and other socio–economic issues, which this article does not aim to analyse since its approach is from the standpoint of urban design. Trying to tackle crime directly with urban design measures can lead to similar interventions to those proposed by Newman. These measures can reduce crime in the short term but may hinder the use of the public realm.

Alternatively, if urban design interventions concentrate on creating a more meaningful public realm, they can encourage people to use it and this may have an indirect long–term effect, producing a positive change in the neighbourhood: a change that comes from how people use public space. Gehl explains the importance of qualifying public space to develop the three kinds of activities that he describes: "*necessary activities, optional activities and social activities*"[41].

Gehl explains that social activities take place when people share the same outdoor space. He states that

37. Lambeth: Angell Ward profiles 1979–1982. London: Lambeth, 1982. Source: Lambeth Archives.
38. London Borough of Lambeth. Planning Application database [online]. London: London Borough of Lambeth, n.d. [Quoted on August 5, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://planning.lambeth.gov.uk/online–applications/>.
39. This analysis shows conclusions from the site visits in 2009. During four site visits between May and June 2013, it was observed that the façades and roof of the large and small slab block have been repaired. Accounts of other improvements such as the installation of solar panels in some of the buildings can be consulted in the United Resident Housing website. [Quoted August 20, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web http://www.urh.org.uk/about–us/decent–homes.
40. Indices of Deprivation 2010, Crime. Source: Office for National Statistics. National Neighbourhoods Statistics [online]. Newport (South Wales, U.K.): Office for National Statistics, 2011. [Quoted May 29, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>.
41. Gehl, Jan: *Life between buildings: using public space*. Revised edition. Washington DC: Island Press, 2011, p. 9.



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when two people share the same space, the passive contact of seeing and hearing which arises may spark off a more intense social interaction[42]. This brings the idea of the importance of co–presence in the public space, which has been studied in–depth in the Space Syntax approach to the relationship between the built environment and society. Space Syntax was founded by Hillier, Hanson and other academics at the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, UCL, in the late 1970s. Since then, they have developed a methodology that "*investigate(s) how well environments work, rigorously relating social variables to architectural forms*"[43]. Hanson states that co–presence is a "*precondition for face–to–face human social interaction without in any way determining what takes place*"[44]. She explains how cities and towns structure co–presence and identifies certain terms such as "*permeability, integration and constitutedness*"[45] that facilitate co–presence in urban space.

However, how people perceive strangers and interact with each other does not only depend on a spatial configuration that facilitates their presence on the public realm. As Sennett states, "*(s)patial engineering in the form of the pressurized street cannot alone induce people to interact*"[46]. There are also other kinds of physical features of the environment that can influence the way people perceive strangers or the possibility of activities taking place. These factors have to do with the materiality of public space, its design, and the existence of elements that facilitate the emergence of processes. Because of the need to address these two scales of physical factors which contribute to the lack of use of public space, this article will examine "*spatial configuration*"[47] and the design and maintenance of the public realm.

*Spatial configuration*
The socio–spatial segregation, provoked by the low–income concentration deriving from the post–war reconstruction process, is on some occasions exacerbated by the spatial configuration of neighbourhoods like Loughborough Estate. The spatial configuration can hinder the presence of people in the public realm both because of how the neighbourhood relates to its surroundings and also because of the layout of the buildings and open spaces within the neighbourhood. Firstly, regarding how these neighbourhoods relate spatially to the adjacent areas, although in some cases their location in the inner city and the polycentric character of London mean that they are close to the town centre, which normally provides amenities and different activities, they are usually segregated by physical barriers and discontinuities in the urban fabric. Secondly, concerning the relation of the different spaces within the neighbourhood and how these relate to the surrounding streets, as explained by Hanson, the post–war urban transformations involved a change from the traditional urban street fabric–which is continuous and integrating, with buildings in a direct relationship with the street–to an estate layout, which is fragmented and segregated and where the buildings have no direct relation with the street[48].

The relationship between Brixton Town Centre and the surrounding council estates can be explained through Pope's concept of "*ladders*"[49]: in the twentieth century,

certain "*centripetal developments*"[50] have caused the erosion of the urban grid. These urban developments have generated serious socio–spatial segregation problems by creating some areas that are integrated and others that are not. The discontinuities produced by these urban projects create physical barriers that translate into social division. Pope also identifies the disadvantages of modern urban design and the disappearance of the street arguing that while modern architecture tried to open up the enclosed spaces of the nineteenth–century constructions, in actual fact what it achieved was a closure of the urban field[51].

Loughborough Estate is a five–minute–walk away from Brixton Town Centre, a place full of amenities, street markets and local retail businesses that give Brixton a vibrant street life. However, that street life does not reach Loughborough Estate due to physical urban barriers such as the elevated railway, walls and a tangled and discontinuous urban fabric north of the town centre. The way Loughborough Estate relates to its surroundings can be visualised using Space Syntax methodology, which uses different measurements to relate built form to social variables. The measurement calculated here is "*through–movement potential*", which "*assesses the degree to which each space lies on the simplest or shortest path between all pairs of spaces in the system*"[52]. This is considered the most appropriate measurement for this study since it can give an idea of the people that pass through Loughborough Estate[53]. Movement potential can be calculated with different radii depending on whether the study needs to consider a local area or a bigger scale area[54]. Since the analysis aims to understand the relationship between Brixton Town Centre and Loughborough Estate, movement potential has been calculated using a radius of 800, which takes local structures into consideration.

As figure 8 shows, there is an urban void between Brixton Town Centre and Loughborough Junction. This void marks the location of Loughborough Estate. The analysis also suggests that Barrington Road has movement potential which could be enhanced by introducing street activities to encourage people using this street as a cross–path from Loughborough Junction and Brixton Town Centre.

To find out ways to encourage the co–presence of people in the public realm, it is also necessary to analyse the relationship between the different spaces within the neighbourhood and how these spaces relate to the streets outside the neighbourhood. Drawing a detailed axial map with all the pedestrian paths counting the axial steps[55] from the main roads that delimit the neighbourhood to the entry door of the buildings can provide additional information on how the spaces within the neighbourhood relate to their surroundings (figure 9). Furthermore, overlapping this axial map with the classification of private/public space can help to visualize the spatial relationships within the neighbourhood.

This map can show how the post–war urban transformations[56] influenced co–presence. Whereas in the pre–war urban fabric of Loughborough Estate (figures 4, 5, 6) the street was delimited by buildings whose entrance doors faced it directly, the post–war Loughborough Estate is composed of buildings in an open landscape. From these buildings, the slab towers have one single access, which is not directly to the street, and many of the low–rise houses are built perpendicular to the street or with a grass verge in front of them that prevents direct interaction between the private and the public (figure 9). Although the axes of the streets are almost the same in the pre–war and post–war period, the street pattern is totally different and the access to the dwellings is much more indirect.

42. Ibídem, p. 13.

43. Hillier, Bill and others: "Space Syntax. A different urban perspective". *The Architect's Journal*, 30 November 1983, Nº 48 (178). London: Architectural Press, 1983, p. 49.

44. Hanson, Julienne: "Urban transformations: a history of design ideas". In *Urban Design International*, August 2000, Nº 5 (2). Basingstoke, (Hants, U.K.): Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, p. 120. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.udi.9000011.

45. Ibídem, p. 97. According to Hanson, a street is "*constituted*" when "*space forms a direct interface with the facades of the buildings, mainly houses, whose doorways give directly onto (…) the streets*". Ibídem, p. 98.

46. Sennett, Richard. Op. cit., n.p.

47. Hillier and Vaughan define "*spatial configuration*" as "*relations between spaces which take into account other relations, and so in effect relations between all the various spaces of a system*". Hillier, Bill; Vaughan, Laura: "The city as one thing". Progress in Planning, April 2007, N º 67 (3). Oxford: Pergamon–Elsevier Science, 2007, p. 207. DOI: 10.1016/j.progress.2007.03.001.

48. Hanson, Julienne. Op. cit., p. 100.

49. Pope, Albert: *Ladders*, Houston: Rice University School of Architecture, 1996.

50. Ibídem.

51. Ibídem.

52. Hillier, Bill; Vaughan, Laura. Op. cit., p. 214.

53. The software calculation has been carried out using segment line analysis with road centre lines.

54. Hillier, Bill: *Space is the machine: a configurational theory of architecture*. Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996. Electronic ed., with a new preface, 2007, p. 127. [Quoted on March 2, 2013] Available at the World Wide Web: <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/3881/1/SITM.pdf>.

55. In Space Syntax terminology, an axial step is each necessary turn or change of direction for going from one space to another.

56. See Hanson, Julienne. Op. cit.

8. Through-movement potential of the area of Lough-borough Estate. Calculated with UCL Depthmap software - Space Syntax.

9. Axial steps from the surrounding main roads to the entrances of the buildings, 2009.



8



9

The sense of living in a street is totally lost. Further interventions on the neighbourhood have attempted to establish some hierarchy between private, semi–private, semi–public and public space by placing fences and building paths towards the entrance of the towers. Most of the interventions have focused on preventing crime and increasing security, understanding the presence of strangers as something threatening and unexpected situations as something unwanted. Furthermore, these interventions have not solved the problem of the lack of activities on the ground floor directly related to the street, which means that the streets and public spaces are still disused.

From this it can be concluded that the spatial configuration originating from the construction of the housing estates and from the subsequent transformations hinders the co–presence of people in the public realm. Conversely, strategies should intervene in the spatial configuration of the streets to encourage outsiders to pass through the neighbourhood, instead of creating spaces that discourage the presence of strangers. However, as stated previously, merely looking at the spatial configuration can lead to overlooking specific aspects of the public realm that deal with its materiality, its design, its maintenance, its capacity to host different types of activities and the process through which people may start using it.

*Design and maintenance of the public realm*
These disadvantaged initial conditions have been exacerbated by the evolution of the estate. There are two main

Legend:
- PRIVATE
- FENCED COMMUNAL AREAS
- OPEN COMUNNAL AREAS
- PUBLIC PARKS
- GRASS VERGE
- CLEARED SITES
- SURROUNDING MAIN ROADS
- 1 STEPS FROM MAIN ROAD
- 2 STEPS
- 3 STEPS
- 4 STEPS
- 5 STEPS
- BUILDINGS

10. Loughborough Estate, no date. According to material found in the archives, it is circa 1958.
11. Loughborough Estate from Wyck Gardens, 2009.
12. Barrington Road. Loughborough Estate, 2009.
13. Fenced gardens and playgrounds in Loughborough Estate, 2009.
14. Restricted use of the public realm. Loughborough Estate, 2009.




11 12



13



14

aspects of the evolution of the estate which have contributed to its obsolescence: firstly, the lack of investment and the abandonment of the public realm during the initial decades; secondly, the interventions that have taken place on the estate since the 1990s, which restrict the use of the public space and contribute to the over–determination of functions and a sense of over–control and surveillance.

The fact that the new urban design was configured by *"pavilions in a landscape"*[57] also implied that this landscape was in many cases just a grass surface with very little treatment. The 1950s photographs of Loughborough Estate found in the archives (figure 10) reveal the absence of design of the urban surface, which provided big green spaces but did not provide any kind of infrastructure that could be used by the residents to develop activities in the public realm. The only concessions to recreation in the public space were hard uninviting playgrounds in the centre of these surfaces. The public space did not have any kind of upgrade for decades, which meant that the ideal situation of people enjoying nature in the inner city imagined by LCC architects turned into disused, abandoned and neglected grass areas where people did not feel safe.

The state of abandonment that the public space reached in the 1990s called for interventions. These were straightforward responses to the main concern of neighbours and authorities at that time: security. They also attempted to give answers to other concerns by providing car parks, introducing amenities in the public realm and establishing some hierarchy between the private and public spaces.

The interventions regarding security included closing off the ground floors to create concierge spaces and creating new secure single–access entrances to the slab blocks. They also included the erection of tall fences between the large slab towers (figure 11). Later, in the early 2000s, CCTV cameras were installed in the neighbourhood. These interventions also dealt with the maintenance of the outdoor spaces. The decision to fence off the

gardens is also related to preserving the gardens and avoid vandalism or any unwanted presence in them. Currently, the gardens between the large slab blocks are well maintained. The gardens surrounding the smaller tall blocks are in poor condition: they are just grass areas and since they have lower fences neighbours use them for walking dogs.

Another concern that has driven some of the interventions in Loughborough Estate is the lack of amenities in the public realm[58]. This lack of amenities seems to be one of the factors contributing to youth criminality and gang membership. There are some youth facilities and amenities inside and near the neighbourhood, but since they are inward–facing areas and are not directly connected with the street, they do not encourage a more active use of the public space. The Marcus Lipton Youth Centre has been near the neighbourhood since the 1970s[59]. Later interventions have included fenced playgrounds between the big blocks, which have only rarely been seen to be used during site visits. There is also a fenced playground between the community centre and one of the lower slab towers (figure 13), which has been seen to be used coinciding with site visits when children come out from school.

The security interventions described have resulted in an uninviting ground floor, which discourages people from walking or staying near the buildings or fences, since there are no activities or possibilities of carrying out any kind of activity there. Furthermore, in some of these open areas, some activities such as ball games are explicitly prohibited (figure 14). Some of these interventions are influenced by Newman's *Defensible Space*, since they attempt to create some hierarchy between the private and the public space by using fences to mark off space and discourage outsiders from walking around the neighbourhood. Such interventions have probably reduced burglaries, but have not solved the problem of the lack of use of the public realm. Most of the spaces surrounding the buildings are disused gardens and a large proportion of the public realm is used as a car park (figure 12).

57. Hanson, Julienne. Op. cit., p. 100.
58. This shows the conclusions from the site visits carried out in 2009. During four site visits carried out between May and June 2013, a new significant intervention on the public space was observed: a horse–riding club, Ebony Horse Club, which was built in Wyck Gardens. From recent site visits, it can be concluded that this intervention has had a positive impact on the use of the park, and during two of the site visits the park was observed to be intensively used.
59. Mentioned in Lambeth: Angell Ward Profiles 1979–1982. Op. cit.

In conclusion, as a result of the initial conditions and the subsequent interventions, the urban surface of Loughborough Estate does not encourage people to stay in the public realm or develop outdoor activities there. Cars and grass verges dominate the street. The public space does not provide any possibility for the development of activities, especially since when the weather is not good, there is no protection against the elements. Interventions have focused on the over–determination of functions by dividing the original open green spaces to fence them in. Instead of these limiting strategies, there is a need to provide public space to help neighbours to develop outdoor activities. The strategies should work on creating this enabling public space by looking at the existing possibilities and attempting to enhance them by redesigning the public realm.

## CONCLUSIONS

The negative social effects of the construction of British social housing neighbourhoods provoked an initial reaction against modernist architecture in urban studies in the 1950s which became stronger over the following decades. This reaction resulted in the association of the architecture of housing estates to crime and deprivation, and led to the abandonment of these neighbourhoods and interventions that focused on preventing crime and restricting the use of the public realm and, in some

cases, to the demolition and redevelopment of these neighbourhoods.

Through the analysis of the case study, the article concludes that, in addition to the decrease of urban life caused by the post–war urban transformations, subsequent interventions on the public space have not helped to encourage social relationships and the use of the public realm. On the contrary, when interventions have been carried out, they have focused on increasing security and on restricting and over–determining the use of public space.

What this paper highlights is that a generalist critique to modern architecture does not solve the problem of these disadvantaged urban areas. Demolition and redevelopment is not an answer since it would repeat the mistakes of the slum clearance process. Local authorities, planners and urban designers must understand the importance of proposing a radical reconfiguration of the public realm without destroying the existing social capital of the place. From the analysis of the case study, it can be concluded that strategies should aim, firstly, to provide a spatial configuration that connects the neighbourhood to its surroundings and invites people to pass through it. This could be achieved by providing ground floor activities and amenities with a direct relationship with the connecting streets. Secondly, strategies should also work to provide an urban surface that encourages the emergence of processes and activities in the public space. ■

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**Pablo Sendra** (Sevilla, 1963). Personal Investigador en Formación y Doctorando en el Departamento de Proyectos Arquitectónicos de la Universidad de Sevilla. Es miembro del Grupo de Investigación HUM666: "Ciudad, Arquitectura y Patrimonio Contemporáneos" adscrito al IUACC. Es docente de Proyectos Arquitectónicos en la E.T.S. de Arquitectura de Sevilla. Su actividad docente e investigadora la combina con la gestión cultural. Es socio fundador de Lugadero y es organizador autorizado por KDA de PechaKucha Night Sevilla.

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