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NEW HOUSING  
ESTATES IN LONDON  
– IDENTITY OF HABITATION

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NOWE ZESPOŁY  
MIESZKANIOWE W LONDYNIE  
– KSZTAŁTOWANIE TOŻSAMOŚCI  
ŚRODOWISKA ZAMIESZKANIA

A b s t r a c t

The article presents proposals of research on the newest, selected housing estates in London – their specific place identity and architectural context. The described buildings and housing complexes were the subject of systematic field research in 2011–2016. On this basis, an attempt was made to formulate a paradigm of contemporary living space, while referring to the traditionally understood “domesticity”, social needs and housing policy in London.

*Keywords: housing development, place identity, London*

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule przedstawiono wnioski z badań dotyczących wybranych, najnowszych realizacji mieszkaniowych na terenie Londynu pod kątem występowania odrębnej tożsamości miejsca i kontekstu architektonicznego. Opisane budynki i zespoły mieszkaniowe były przedmiotem stałych badań terenowych w latach 2011–2016. Na tej podstawie podjęto próbę sformułowania paradygmatu współczesnej przestrzeni mieszkaniowej, odwołując się jednocześnie do: tradycyjnie pojmowanej „domowości”, potrzeb społecznych i polityki mieszkaniowej Londynu.

*Słowa kluczowe: zabudowa mieszkaniowa, tożsamość miejsca, Londyn*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The housing crisis in London consists in a shortage of new homes in relation to the increasing population (8,6m in 2015)<sup>1</sup> and a problem with the obsolete and non-functional existing, old residential buildings. It is estimated that 20–25 thousand new homes are built every year – about 25 thousand too few in relation to the needs<sup>2</sup>; therefore, currently, many spectacular estates are realised and planned in London, which is a cause for further studies. The scale of the phenomenon<sup>3</sup> is a result of an increasing population in the great metropolis and is comparable to post-war time when the housing crisis was the most important problem of architects and politicians. This fact allows to review and give some opinions about the trends in housing development in London, and finally, formulate the paradigm of contemporary housing.

## 2. HOUSING POLICY

The housing policy in London is based on detailed data and professional analysis of the housing market and the land for housing (SHMA – Strategic Housing Market Assessment; SHLAA – Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment). The results are monitored and analysed in terms of new places for housing development and potential inhabitants needs<sup>4</sup>. Planning perspectives takes into account other aspects of living like recreation areas (parks, gardens, playgrounds), public services, and in particular transport. The diversity of conditions in districts is standardised in acts, such as: *The London Plan, Local Plans* (for areas in districts), *The London Housing Strategy* and *The Housing Zones*.

The lands for a variety of housing purposes were identified in *The London Plan*<sup>5</sup>. In Great Britain, there are three kinds of housing: social housing (for rent); intermediate housing (partly for rent, rest private) and private housing from the open market. At present, the supply of private homes is half of all the market. In the definition of “affordable homes”, the cost of rent cannot exceed 30% of the income. The shortage of land for housing causes further exploration of post-industrial areas, residential intensification or rebuilding. This causes that many kinds of buildings are realised in the city – from a typical housing estate to original, small homes – pocket living. The London Plan defines housing standards – minimal usable area for various types of homes, among others. As the priorities also include playgrounds for children, high quality of architecture and social aspects – offering a common and proud living place through the activity of local residents for place identity (e.g. by neighbourhood planning).

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<sup>1</sup> Projections of population growth in 2030 for London shows the growth to over 10 million; *World Urbanization Prospect. The 2005 Revision*, ONZ, New York 2006.

<sup>2</sup> New Architecture London (NLA) estimated annual deficits for at least 49 thous. Apartments; *The London Plan*, Greater London Authority, March 2015.

<sup>3</sup> 260k homes have planning permission in London (April 2016); *Mayor of London*, WWW, <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/>, access: 15.04.2016.

<sup>4</sup> For example, based on SHMA research, from 2011 was changed Average household size from 2,47 to 2,34, what has impact on number of needed homes.

<sup>5</sup> *The London Plan*, Greater London Authority, March 2015.

In the act *The London Housing Strategy 2014*<sup>6</sup>, the Greater London Authority declares to build more than 100 thousand affordable homes for 250 thousand people during the next two tenures. In London, but out of the City, there are 31 housing zones<sup>7</sup>, where 77 thousand new homes are planned. For these investments, about 150 thousand new workplaces, new schools and social infrastructures are also planned, along with the development of public transport, which is a priority for connecting these parts of the city with the London urban structure. The positive aspect of the regeneration of residential districts is preventing their isolation in relation to the City.

### 3. DOMESTICITY

A living space is focused on the basic needs, which concern everyday life. The living area is not enough for something that Rybczynski names ‘domesticity’<sup>8</sup>. The sentimental aspect, especially attachment to the place, is one of the indications telling about the feeling of support<sup>9</sup>. The social relationships are formed for a long time and it is natural that they cannot occur in new places. In most of the designed housing estates, special attention is paid to solutions that are friendly for the habitat. There, where the apartments are purchased as an investment of capital, it is impossible.

### 4. IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

While going to Hopton Street in London, the passerby’s attention is drawn to a small, traditional house with ash brick, covered with rotten roofs. It is a house with side outbuildings, landscaped gardens from the frontal, planned on the symmetrical layout, which additionally gives them some grandeur. The whole area is fenced. And then it disappears... on the background of modern, huge towers of Neo Bankside, designed by Richard Rogers. They attract attention. The contrast of the scale in the view is identity with the contrast of these buildings’ histories, and consequently shows the problem of neighbourhood relations in the centre of a great metropolis (pic.1).

The house was built in 1752 as a poorhouse for men thanks to Charles Hopton, who was the founder and left money in one’s will. The general function of the object has been the same for ages. Building pressure, increase in the value of the land, building intensification in the centre of London have an influence over the development of the neighbourhood (area of Tate Gallery of Modern Art.), which is a threat for the poorhouse<sup>10</sup>. The process of gentrification contributes to a reduction of the security sense, which undoubtedly is related to the prospect of living continually in the same place. The research of factors related to residential satisfac-

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<sup>6</sup> *The London Housing Strategy*, Greater London Authority, March 2016.

<sup>7</sup> *The Housing Zones*, Greater London Authority, March 2016.

<sup>8</sup> W. Rybczynski, *Dom. Krótka historia idei*, Karakter, Crakow 2015.

<sup>9</sup> K. Pawłowska, *Idea swojskości miasta*, Cracow University of Technology, Cracow 2001.

<sup>10</sup> O. Wainwright, *Neo Bankside: how Richard Rogers’s new ‘non-dom accom’ cut out the poor*, WWW The Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2015/jul/21/neo-bankside-how-richard-rogers-new-non-dom-accom-cut-out-the-poor>, access: 29.04.2016.



III.1. Hopton's Almhouse and the towers Neo Bankside in the background (photo: R. Józwick, 2014)  
III.2. Waterfront development and building of the Royal Military Academy (source: Royal Arsenal Revised Master Plan 2013) III.3. Royal Arsenal – Pavilion Square (source: Pavilion Square, Berkeley, 2015)  
III.4. Greenwich Millennium Village, London (photo: R. Józwick, 2011) III.5. George Wharf Tower, London (photo: R. Józwick, 2015)

tion in social areas in is proven that a high level of privacy and small residential units have a positive impact on the satisfaction<sup>11</sup>. In the isolation, like in the case of the Hopton House, it can't be realised. The contrast of both places is greater because of the fact that people living in Neo Bankside towers are wealthier.

## 5. OLD IDENTITY – NEW IDENTITY

The problem of neighbourhood is also related to the problem of landscape preserved in the historical context. The case showing the issue of the building scale is the development of the former Royal Arsenal in Woolwich (Royal Arsenal Riverside). The investment – a building of 5 thousand new homes – is planned for 2007–17. The layout of the arsenal was determinant for the new masterplan. Elements of the old identity became part of the public space – some places are accentuated by cannons and similar objects of military heritage. Some old buildings became part of the new development. The problem of the building scale is visible in case of the Royal Military Academy or the pavilion (former laboratory) where the surrounding buildings are much higher – 14–21 storeys and 6 storeys accordingly. Despite this, the context of place is strongly stressed by design. The new residential program changes place identity, but not separate from the past. The new buildings used materials typical of England – mostly brick. Initially, the development of this section was to have a much smaller scale due to the presence of historic buildings. Consent to build such a number of new apartment buildings is often referred to as a 'difficult compromise' (pic. 2, 3).

## 6. RESIDENCE ON POST-INDUSTRIAL AREA

The shortage of lands for new buildings determines new development in the centre of London and causes the search for new residential areas, even those whose location conditions are unfavourable. At present, post-industrial areas are being restructured on a mass scale. The cases of the developments are North Greenwich on the East of London and situated close to them Royal Docklands, which until the 70s were related to the chemical and the shipbuilding industry. In the last years, it was decided to allow for residential buildings. The new home estate near Thames Barrier Park (Waterside) is realised on former land belonging to a leading petrochemical company. The adverse conditions are compensated by access to recreational areas and sports. Thanks to the 2012 London Olympic Games, the sport infrastructure and other public facilities have been priorities. However, there is a new place without the 'urban' past.

The first home estate in the area, on former industrial lands, was Greenwich Millennium Village designed by Ralph Erskine in 2000<sup>12</sup>. The estate is integrated with the Greenwich

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<sup>11</sup> G. S. Rent, C. S. Rent, Low-income housing: factors related to residential satisfaction, [in:] "Environment and Behaviour", (10) 1978, p. 459–488.

<sup>12</sup> R. Józwiak, *Współczesne realizacje parkowe związane z nowymi zespołami mieszkaniowymi na przykładach: Parc de Billancourt w Boulogne-Billancourt koło Paryża, Ecology Park i Central Park na półwyspie Greenwich w Londynie*, [in:] *Czasopismo Techniczne: Historyczne i współczesne ogrody w krajobrazie miasta, Zakład Sztuki Ogrodowej i Terenów Zielonych Instytutu Architektury Krajobrazu w Politechnice Krakowskiej; Sekcja Sztuki i Architektury Ogrodowej Komisji*

Peninsula Ecology Park (Pic.4). The park has become a place integrating people from a neighbourhood, who volunteer to take care of it. The pavilion inside the park is the lesson of ecology and also serves an integrating role. The solution of the housing estate provides a sense of privacy with small courtyards, squares and spatial diversity.

Similar restructuring of great urban areas is carried out in the King's Cross Station area (67 acres) and the Battersea Power Station (42 acres).

The post-industrial King's Cross area was restructured as a local multifunctional centre where it is planned to build 1900 new homes as a supplementing program. Consent to build such a number of new apartment buildings is often referred to as a 'difficult compromise'. The reference of post-industrial place identity to new realisation can be found in the adaptation of old gasholders to the residential function close to Regents Canal (arch. Wilkinson Eyre Architects). Within this complex are planned: roof garden and many objects of landscape architecture that show a trend to combine architecture with nature.

In the Battersea Power Station area, it is planned to build more than 3450 new homes designed by Norman Foster and Frank Ghery. The investment is a result of the cooperation of the Greater London Authority and the Malaysian consortium. During the construction of the estate, there were allegations that, due to the high price of apartments, ordinary residents will not be able to purchase them. More than 16% of them are destined as affordable homes for lower cost of rent than on the open market – about 80% of the value. The requirement is a right family income.

This realisation draws attention to: the quality of architectural solutions, environmental protection and preservation of sustainable development, multifunctional program, access to green areas (including Battersea Park, greenery inside the residential and green roof), to create a coherent community associated with the place.

The problem of access to affordable homes in new estates is illustrated by Neo Bankside penthouses. At the beginning, the investor obliged to destine about 40% of homes as affordable. The share of these homes decreased to 27,5% after a professional expert assessment of the viability<sup>13</sup>. Finally, the developer offer was sent to a specific group, affluent buyers, which was contrary to the city policy that imposes requirements of sharing apartments. Affordable homes (40%) were provided in another place (in the same district), but out of the new estate – 182 homes, including 82 for rent and 50 as intermediate homes<sup>14</sup>.

## 7. HOME IN A TOWER

Increasingly, a popular form of the residential buildings is a tower. In the centre of Inslington, a new high-rise building is proposed for the intensification of its structure and density. The residential complex 250 City Road designed by Foster and Partners is realised on the former decapitalised business park from the '80s. The new investment involves the construction of two towers of 42 and 36 storeys and lower 7-storey buildings, which forms a buffer zone because of the height of the neighbouring buildings and the need to ensure adequate illumination. In

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Urbanistyki i Architektury o/PAN w Krakowie; Instytut Botaniki im. W. Szafera, Polska Akademia Nauk w Krakowie, Crakow 2012, p. 255–263.

<sup>13</sup> *NEO Bankside Affordable Housing Provision*, [in:] Native Land, WWW, <http://www.native-land.com/news/neo-bankside-affordable-housing-provision>, access: 29.04.2016.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

addition to the housing program, it proposed additional functions related to servicing residents (shops, cafes, etc.), as well as offices and a hotel. The authors of the project pay attention to the diversification of residential and architectural solutions – large windows, references to the traditional building material in Great Britain – the use of brick and natural stone. The form of the high-rise building has no relation with the surrounding, which is a deliberate action aimed at the introduction of a new type of spatial arrangement. An integral part of the estate is the internal green square with trees and street furniture (landscape architecture: Gillespies).

A similar scheme of buildings is presented by the complex of Neo Bankside, Riverlight, One Hyde Park (architecture: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners), City Island (architecture: Ecoworld, Ballymore), Strata Tower (architecture: BFLS), Baltimore Tower (architecture: Galliard Homes) etc.

The declared inspiration for the authors of the complex of City Island was: towers from Chicago located in the Burnham Park area, buildings from Makuhari Bay in Tokyo, and Manhattan<sup>15</sup>. The residential form is built on the former docklands area. This is one of the few parts of London that is actually dynamically restructured. Despite this, over 1700 new homes are planned in local centre and at the heart of the complex – the headquarters of English National Ballet, which considerably increases the attractiveness of the location and changes the identity of the place. It is an intentional strategy to activate this area in the evening time and ensure safety. The fronts of buildings are located at waterfront side, which provides better exposure.

In 2012, a new masterplan was created for high-rise buildings in the Wood Wharf area (over 19 acres) (Allies & Morrison), which increased the number of planned new houses up to 3000. It planned new offices (more than 240 m<sup>2</sup>), a school, a green area and a green embankment. The area will be a new centre for Canary Wharf. One of the most spectacular buildings planned there is a cylindrical residential tower (210 m, 57 storeys, 468 homes; arch. Herzog and de Meuron).

Many high-rise buildings are planned in the Vauxhall area. At present, there are planned 5 complexes of towers with a residential program as the main function: St. George Wharf Tower (181 m, 50 storeys, arch. Broadway Maylan), two towers of One Nine Elms (200m/161m, arch. Kohn Pedersen Fox), two towers of Vauxhall Island (170m/100m, arch. Squire & Partners), Vauxhall Square (168m/168m, arch. Allies & Morrison), New Bondway Tower (170m, arch. Kohn Pedersen Fox).

Social results of the location of so many people in separate high-rise buildings will be known in the future. Experience of the post-war Modernism gives some arguments against the solutions, which serve anonymity. An example of an estate in the Vauxhall area (over 1100 homes) is the St. George's Wharf estate (arch. Broadway Maylan), which won the Architects' Journal's 'Worst building in the world' award twice. The impact on this assessment included: form, architectural solutions, the scale of the object, the exposure from the side of the Thames (pic.5).

## 8. THE STRATEGY

The area of the London Olympic Games (2012) is converted in stager – partly for the residential program. The strategy includes large parts of the city and three periods: 5 years, 10

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<sup>15</sup> *London City Island*, brochure, PDF, A joint development: Ecoworld, Ballymore, 2015, p. 57.

years and long-term. There are the following planned areas: Chobham Manor, Sweet Water, East Wick and Pudding Mill Lane. Successful and effective development is possible thanks to the decision to extend the subway – Jubilee Line.

The first estate in this area is the East Village, which includes: approx. 2800 homes, 25 acres of the park, more than 30 shops, schools, housing estate club. Apartments for sportsmen were rebuilt for normal residential needs. There are still Olympic motives on the stone facades. The ground floor homes by the street are affordable housing. The great advantages of the place are sports and recreational functions.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

The resulting new residential development in London shows the following trends shaping this type of assumptions:

- residential towers with an additional program are built in urban area with a high plot ratio. There are designed green areas and a social infrastructure if only it is possible;
- in post-industrial areas, the high plot ratio is much lower. The main problem is communication of new urban estates with the city centre;
- most new residential buildings have a share of affordable homes, which is a result of the London strategy;
- in developer offers, the following are stressed: individual place identity, social and architectural solutions for creating a community, architectural quality, location;
- in the housing policy, creating socially separated units is avoided, but they are realised where living standards are higher.

## POST SCRIPTUM

The main guidelines that are now established for contemporary settlements have been implemented in the 70s on post-war, bombed area – in Barbican estate (over 2000 homes, from 2001 on the Grade II listed buildings, arch. Chamberlin, Power, Bon). In this sense, it can be argued that Barbican was an indication of the solution that has become characteristic of the formation of residential buildings in London – assumed as a self-sufficient unit. At that time, the complex of 7 – storey buildings with the participation of high-rise buildings (42 floors) was built, along with carefully planned green areas, a complete social infrastructure – a large cultural centre – all in the post-war brutalist style, coherently planned. The market value of apartments in this location increased in recent years, despite a period of bad glory.

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