THE CONTROL OF HOUSING DESIGN

Zurich: A Proactive Planning Approach / René Barownick
VINEX: Housing via Spatial Planning / John Morgan
Housing and Sustainable Communities / Francisca Astaburuaga
Quality Housing? / Liora Stein

1 Comparison of population and surface area at the national, regional and local levels

United Kingdom

Netherlands

Switzerland

London's particular conditions may be understood through a series of contradictory positions: an English obsession with owner-occupation that is becoming unreachable for most first-time buyers; expensive housing prices relative to the ordinary quality of accommodation on offer; and freedom of choice that is compromised by such factors as location, proximity, affordability and supply of new build and refurbished units in the marketplace. Of course, there is no single cause for this problematic, but housing production and design, as a system, has a structural context resulting from how controls are applied and how actors respond accordingly. We might explore this through the themes of economics, the political framework and management of the planning process.

Economics of Housing

From an economic perspective, there is a link between the availability of land for different uses and housing production. In an unregulated market the amount of land provided is determined by an equilibrium of supply and demand. This laissez-faire model, however, would lead to market failures (a disorganised urban system is not very efficient), which planning systems try to offset. An optimally efficient system would constrain supply (e.g. through zoning: not everything gets built that investors want to build), but would also impact on demand, such that land can be used more efficiently. But in London, many economists argue, there is an over-constraint: the results are higher land prices, and less land supplied for housing.

This has wider impacts. If higher land prices cannot be paid for by building higher densities, the price of dwellings rises, which creates affordability problems. Distribution is also a problem: landowners benefit from higher prices through the planning system, which generates a wealth gap. Furthermore, a low supply of housing decreases workforce mobility, as residents are likely to pay more if they change homes. Artificially high house prices also encourage speculation, leading to higher house price volatility, which also has detrimental effects on the wider economy. The only positive effects of less land supplied are less sprawl and greenfield consumption.

The question is, what causes this over-constraint? The fact that this has been a matter of debate for decades indicates that it is a complex interaction of different factors. Based on research in the field, most notably the Barker Review, and our work on European comparisons, it is argued here that two factors are of major importance: the political framework and the planning process.

Political Framework

The UK political framework is marked by extreme flexibility and dynamic policy formulation. Its political culture is one of constant debate, and policies are subject to extensive control by the public and special interest organisations. The strong political focus on media and public opinion is good at identifying problems – but can also lead to organisational structures which are created for their publicity effect, that is: to generate media attention and, at best, to deliver quick results in a given area. For a complex issue such as housing, this has proved not to be beneficial. There are few incentives and even fewer formal arrangements for co-operation and collaboration, but much potential political gain from adversarial debate. And significant parts of the political framework, such as ministries, are re-organised and re-branded every couple of years, which reduces capacities to develop long-term expertise and consistent policies. As a result, there is an overly complex structure of separate organisations competing for media attention, influence and funding, which have little if any formal co-ordination, let alone a streamlined process for the co-ordinated development of housing policy. In the end, the large array of goals and interests in the housing policy arena dilutes effectiveness.

The Planning Process and Management

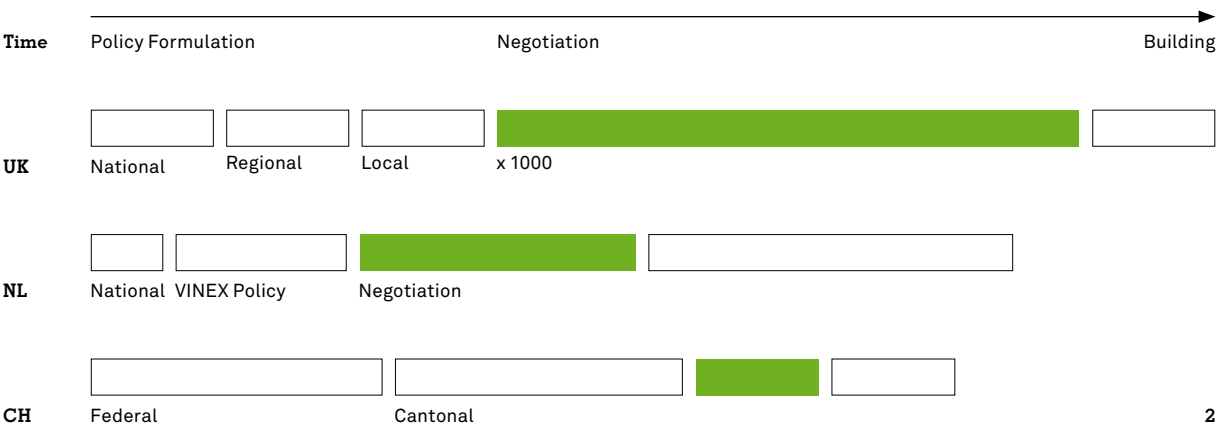
Another reason for London's relatively poor provision of housing is its planning system and management. The very nature of the political framework creates a vast array of aspirational planning goals, which often change. Development projects are then individually negotiated. This drives up uncertainty and risk, which in turn drives up cost, thereby reducing the supply of housing. But negotiation also makes the development of housing much more dependent on the individuals participating. Without a well-managed planning system, outcomes are hard to predict, and are heavily influenced by local authorities' political standing. This, in turn, makes market supply of housing inconsistent, and creates inequalities among boroughs.

We have looked to other European models as examples of reform. In a national and urban-regional context, the Netherlands' planning system is known for its comprehensive approach, structured by its spatial planning practices. Housing forms one of many issues that are considered holistically in terms of land use impacts on the environment (whether urban or rural). If the UK's system is to be reformed, with the aim of boosting housing, then VINEX (1995–2005) offers an alternative gearing of housing production. The national spatial plan set the strategic framework for the decade and also created a public-private house production programme for selected city edge sites across the Randstad in the Netherlands. It must also be examined critically because while quantitative targets were largely met, the policy was less effective at regulating the quality of the product.

AT city level, in contrast, Zurich is an example of a collaborative and managed approach to high quality urban design. Unlike the UK's reactive planning system, the City's Office for Urbanism has been a pioneer in reforming administrative processes that bring together all the relevant stakeholders. It also provides lessons in how a proactive approach and partnerships can yield exemplary results.

In comparison to the UK case, housing policy in the Netherlands and Switzerland involves fewer agents, and policy processes are highly co-ordinated. This has led to little innovation and slows policy formulation down. But the results on the delivery side, it is argued here, are much better – the Netherlands have produced 460,000 houses in ten years, and the Swiss housing market is known to have responded quickly to changing demands for decades – because policy tends to be more consistent, committed, and unitary.

Complementing this comparative approach, our group also researched how the UK system performs in two specific policy areas: sustainable communities and quality housing. In recent years, the UK planning system and specifically the housing agenda has been redefined in the context of the Communities Plan (ODPM 2003), which outlines a development model guided by the wider goal of sustainability. Its aim is to integrate policies and therefore investment in order to create 'sustainable communities'. This laudable aim has been undermined by the lack of specificity in the definition of goals and ways of delivering them, and by the conflict between long term sustainability objectives and short term housing needs. Similar problems of definition and delivery affect issues of housing quality: what benefits come from quality housing; who defines quality at the national, regional and local levels; and, how is housing quality achieved and regulated?



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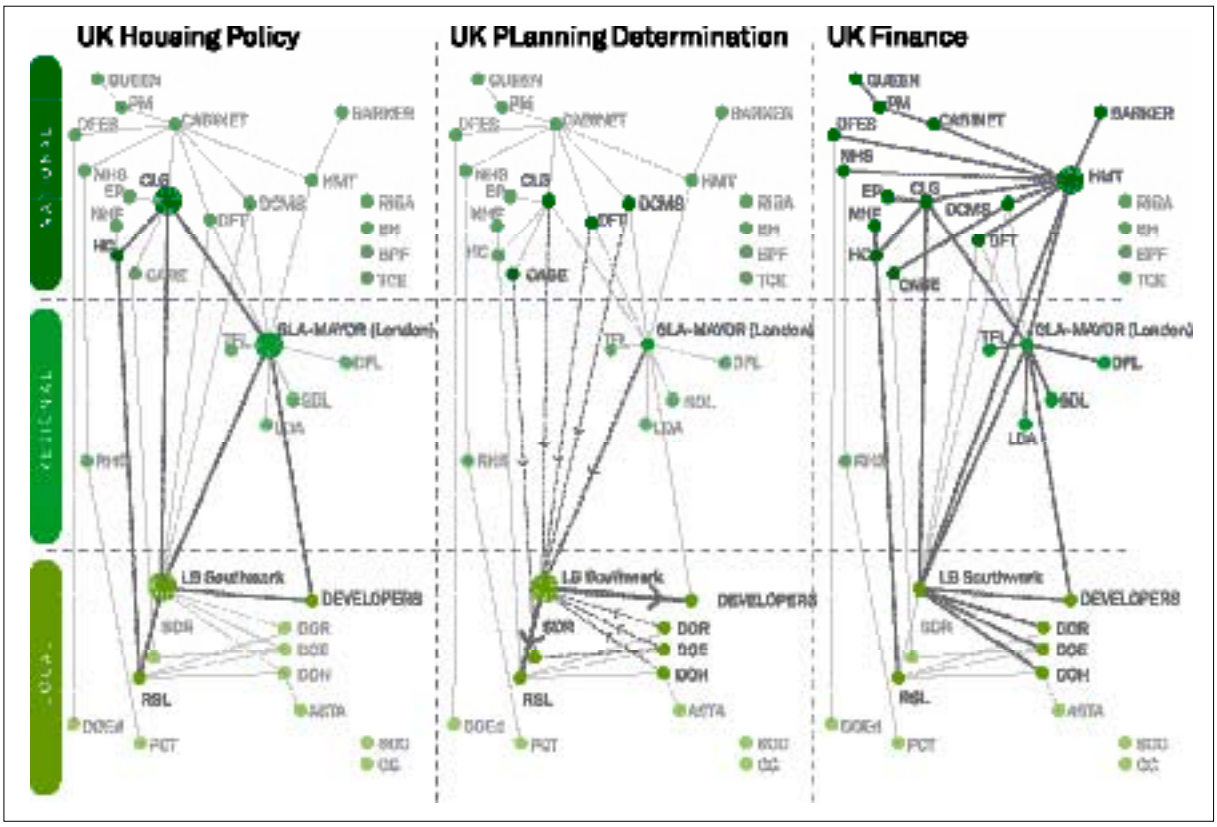

National

DCMS	Dept of Culture, Media and Sports
HMT	HM Treasury
CLG	Communities and Local Gov
DFT	Dept for Transport
BARKER	Independent Reviews
NHF	National Housing Federation
EP	English Partnerships
HC	Housing Corporation
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
DFES	Dept for Education and Science
RIBA	Royal Insitute of British Architects
EH	English Heritage
BPF	British Property Federation
NHS	National Health Service

Regional

GLA	Greater London Authority
TFL	Transport for London
DFL	Design for London
LDA	London Development Agency
RHS	Regional Health Service
SDL	Sustainable Development London

Local

LB	London Borough
SDR	Southwark Design Review
RSL	Registered Social Landlords
DOR	Dept of Regeneration
DOH	Dept of Housing
DOED	Dept of Education
ASTA	Asoc. of Southwark Tenants Asocs.
SCC	Southwark Chamber of Commerce
CG	Community Groups
PCT	Primary Care Trust

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Zurich: A Proactive Planning Approach / René Barownick

Design has been a major concern in English urban politics for almost two decades. Research shows that good design yields so many positive effects that under certain circumstances even the market could provide it to a sufficient extent (CABE 2001). In London, however, housing provided through the market has not done well in terms of quality. The reasons for this are complex, and some of them, like the nature of the political system, demographic change, or the overly rigid planning system, are very unlikely to change.

In this essay, however, I will argue that significant advances in design quality can be made by changing the politico-administrative processes at the local authority level. In a comparison with Zurich, I will show what role local authorities play in determining design quality, and how this role can be improved.

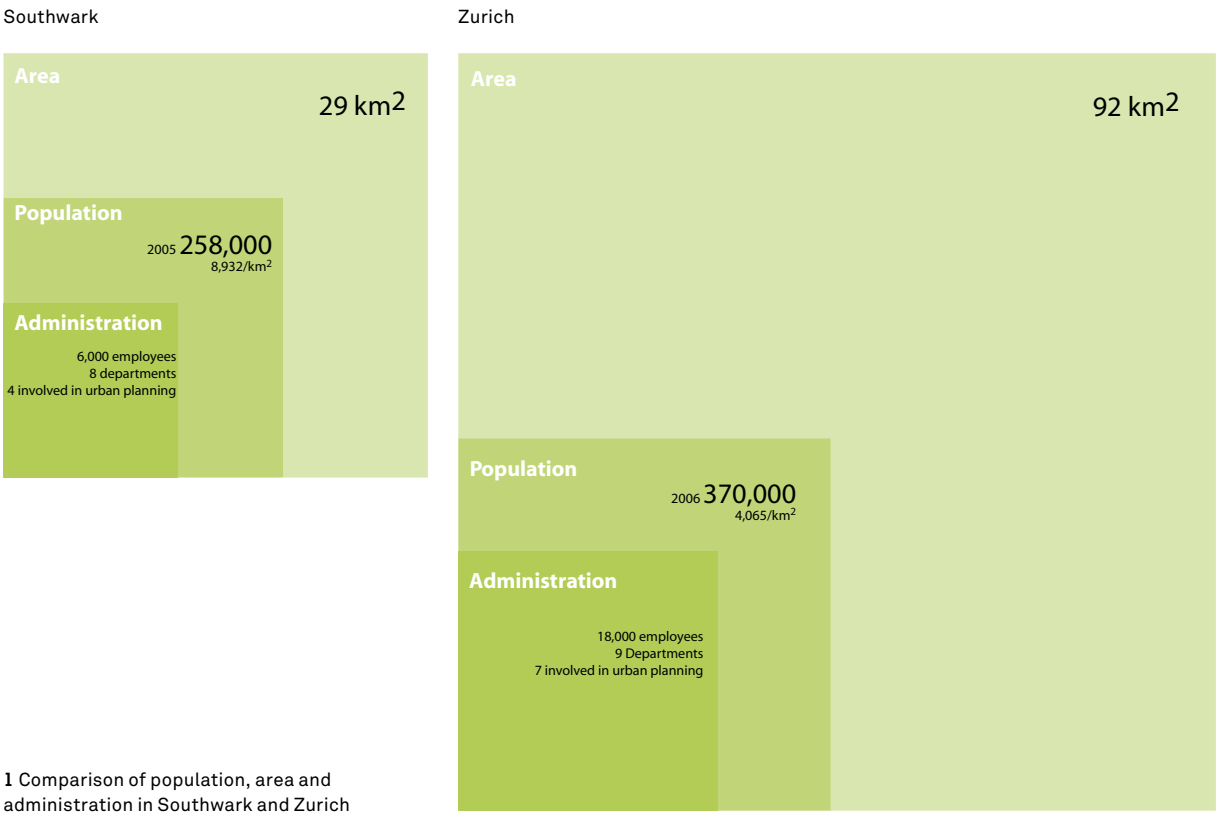
Learning from Zurich

The experience of Zurich shows how an administration can be more proactive, how it can strengthen its design expertise, how developers can be engaged, and how administrative processes can be streamlined to reduce uncertainty and risk. Today, Zurich provides an example of excellence in urban design. But are these lessons actually applicable in the London context?

The first problem in this context is scale. Zurich is much smaller than London, and so is its administration. When referring to local authorities, however, the issue of scale seems less problematic. Firstly, the population of Zurich and London's inner boroughs are quite comparable. Secondly, Zurich's Office for Urbanism has administrated regeneration projects of similar size and financial volume, and the amount of land bound for further regeneration is comparable to that of the London boroughs with the highest degree of future transformation (e.g. Southwark 15%). Thirdly, the structure of Zurich's administration and that of the London boroughs is similar.

Moreover, talking about the size of an administration, can only partly give an account of its potential for organisational change. Administrative structure and culture are also major issues. In general, the Swiss system is known for its high level of unitary, consensual decision making. The British system, on the contrary, is more adversarial and fragmented. Nonetheless I would argue that in the area of urban planning, comparison with Zurich can be fruitful, as since the dissolution of its urban development department in the mid-1990s, Zurich has had an equally fragmented administrative structure. In terms of culture, the higher willingness for long negotiations and collaborative processes inherent in the Swiss system has been undisputedly beneficial for the reform.

Thirdly, Zurich's urban planning is embedded in a specific, quite homogenous planning culture. Zurich's built environment is designed mostly by architects who were trained at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETHZ), as were most of the planners in the Office for Urbanism as well as many developers. In addition, Switzerland has maintained a constantly evolving planning culture geared towards producing quality over quantity. The London context is quite different. First of all, planners and architects in Britain come from all over the world. Also, English planning culture flourished between 1945 and 1975, but in recent decades has been too under-staffed and under-resourced to actively tackle the new problems of governance arising in a globally integrated economy, and to manage their spatial implications proactively.



1 Comparison of population, area and administration in Southwark and Zurich

Fourthly, the nature of the housing market puts different pressures on planning in Zurich and London. Zurich's market has been regulated mostly by high building standards and an elaborate set of tenants' rights. Housing supply is dominated by the private sector and some housing cooperatives, and demand is mostly local. In London, on the contrary, boroughs still operate large housing stocks, many market regulations are in place, and space demand is high from offices as well as global residential buyers. This difference is reflected in planning: whereas Zurich's private housing market is highly responsive, and urban planners' main aim is enhancing the quality of the overall housing stock, London's boroughs operate within the tension of central government's pressure to provide large quantities of new housing, and rising quality goals. As quantity gets measured more easily than quality, the incentives for good design are compromised.

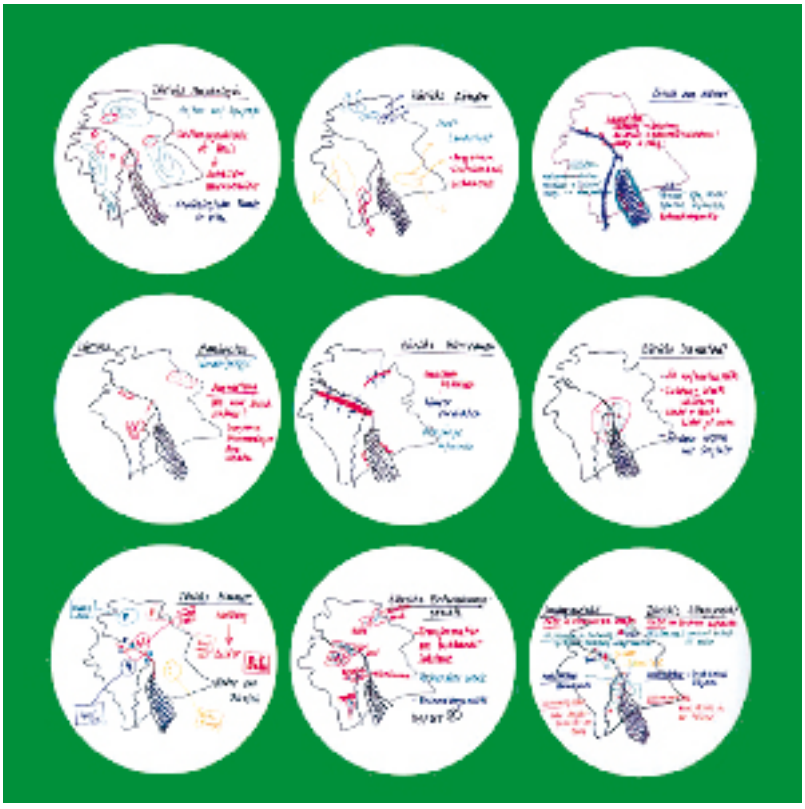
Redefining Planning

The first step in Zurich's collaborative planning reform was to reform the core administration itself. The head of the Office for Urbanism circumscribes his first task as "less bureaucracy, more partnership" or, in other terms, less security, more risk (Eisinger et al. 2007).

The second step was to allow for cooperation with urbanists in the wider sense: historians, conservationists, sociologists. Finally, the office had to liaise with all stakeholders – inhabitants, developers, property owners – to explore the potential of an area, develop solutions for specific sites, and monitor and control their implementation. In short, the Office for Urbanism had to be turned into a creative workshop and an effective network management body at the same time.

The Creative Workshop – 'Developing an Attitude to the City'

To turn a planning authority into a creative workshop may seem a difficult task. It involves the re-establishment of urban planning as a design process. It started with a careful reading of the city's hard, measurable facts and its qualitative aspects, such as topography, settlements and history, and relation to rivers, infrastructure, outskirts and the countryside. Members of the administration (planners, but now also architects, historians, conservationists) were then asked to draw hand sketches to express an interpretation of the city's features and various readings of its potentials and perspectives, taking into consideration history and identity. What emerged were maps of places of high and low attention, a deeper understanding of the transformation processes forming the city socially and morphologically, and a credo for current daily operations. The result of this methodology was a new orientation, which found its symbolic representation in the 'rooms' of Zurich.

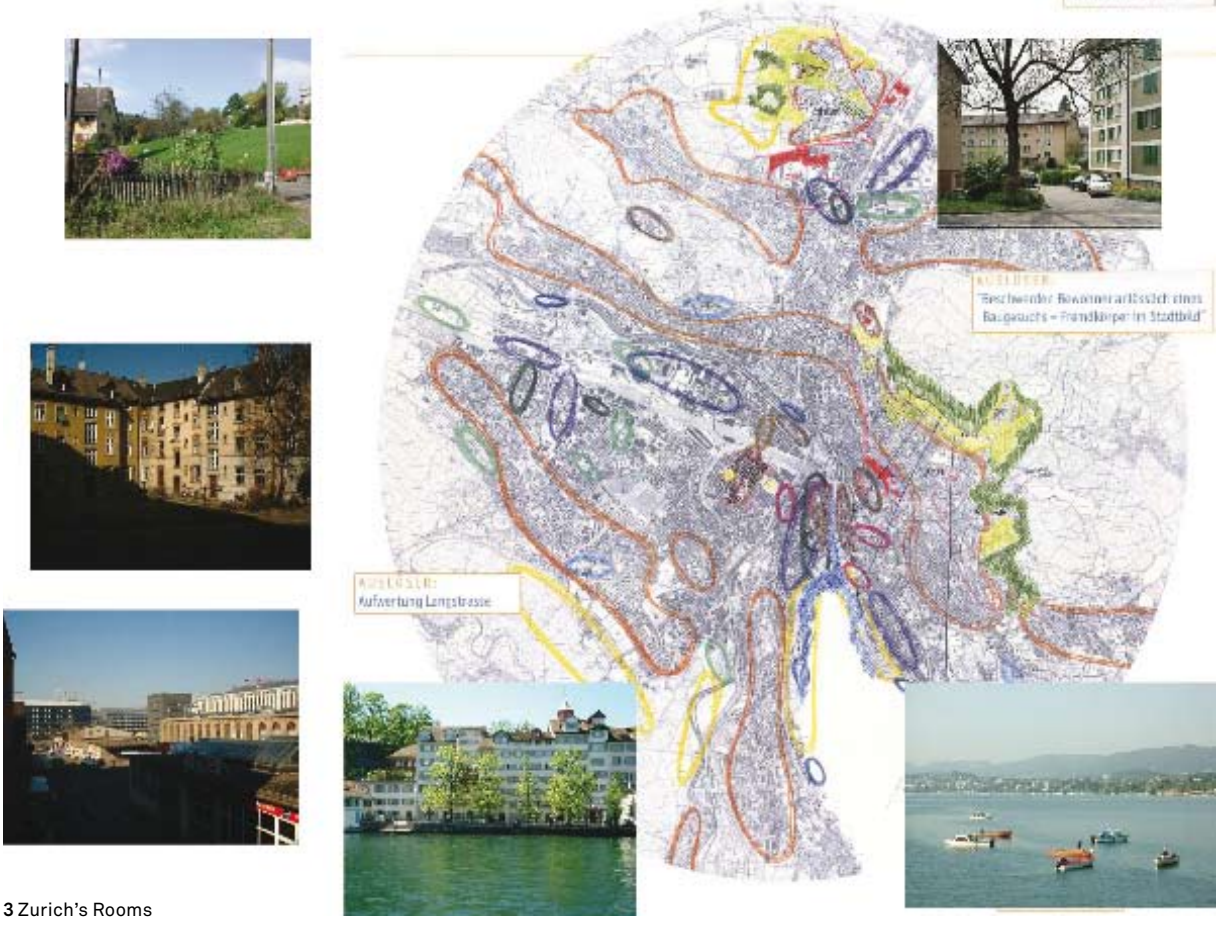


2 Some sketches from the workshop with different readings: morphology, boundary, water, change, tracks, inner city, rooms, development, face of the city. Note the clearly marked topography and infrastructure in all sketches.

This symbolic concept had several strengths. First of all, it provided a first characterisation of how certain areas were more static while others are more dynamic ('salon', 'parlour by the lake', 'living room', 'work-room', 'art salon', 'bar room', 'bathroom'). Emanating from topography and history, the strategy of rooms provided a guide for developing an overall strategy for the whole city that could integrate differentiated but related strategies for its parts. It also provided an instantly comprehensible metaphor to relate the different identities of parts of the city to the individual understanding of home. Therefore its findings could be communicated effectively to politicians (who would better understand and support the Office's decisions) and property developers (who knew what was expected of them, but came to have an assessment of the potential of certain areas and what kind of development would be successful there).

Planning Management – 'Dialogue as a Method'
The complexity of planning also calls for different methodologies not only on the conceptual, but also on the delivery side. As planning is no longer the major driver of urban change, but mostly private interests or social processes such as gentrification, planning authorities can only moderate change. The question is how they do this.

In Zurich, the first task is to start with test planning. Usually, three to four architects are invited to design concepts for an area based on the identities of Zurich's rooms. Their drafts do not take the form of detailed spatial plans, but the proposals frame their ideas for a concept of the area with maps, drawings and models. After that, the Office forms a steering committee, and brings in other external experts and property owners in several workshops, in which agreements and differences were noted, giving a roadmap for further negotiations. The relatively small circle of persons involved allows for effective discussions and building trust. This approach gives developers a first idea of how their project relates to other projects, and how these might – positively or negatively – interact, which usually enhances the willingness for cooperation.



3 Zurich's Rooms

The next step is to develop an urban planning concept for an area, and to formulate principles for it. Based on the abstract goals and the architects' plans, the Office formulates first the 'large lines' of how possible buildings can be incorporated into local space and forms, defining node points and areas.

On that basis, the Office then deals with developers. To reach the best possible solution, a step-by-step with professional, external moderators is started. (In this process, it has to be noted, a British authority has actually more negotiating power, as it can delay the planning process significantly. Swiss planning law excludes most urban design matters from being material considerations of the planning consent.) The outcome of these negotiations is then a fine-grained plan that encompasses public space – and agreements on its financing – as well as individual buildings.

Through such a process, the administration can translate its ideas of identity and potential of certain city areas to what gets actually built. The office continuously monitors areas and traces social and economic changes, as well as architectural ones. District managers are appointed who on the one hand get to know their quarters intimately and are trained to tackle its challenges; on the other hand, they have direct access to the highest levels of the administration, which makes them an important contact point for developers and other stakeholders in the area.

The Pathway to Transformation

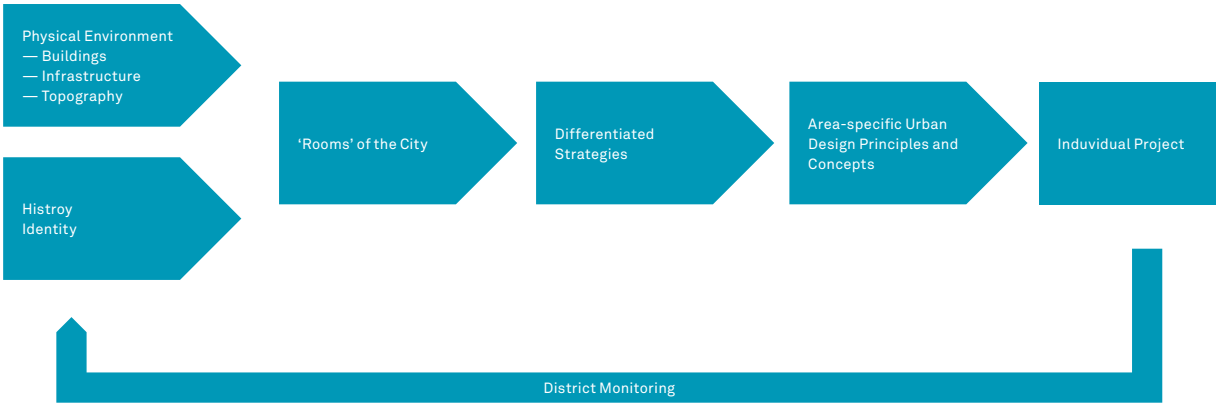
Of course, a programme of change as wide-ranging as Zurich's cannot be implemented overnight. Capacity building, acquiring funding, organisational changes, and building trust among policy makers, property developers and the public takes time.

From Zurich's experience, however, some general lessons can be learnt for the London context. The transformation process should therefore start with experimenting with new structures in a small site. The most important thing is that administrative processes are restructured to develop strengths from the site's architectural heritage and the potential of the existing stock. The result is likely to be fairly conventional, but what is important is to change attitudes towards understanding planning as a creative act.

The next step should be looking at a larger site with existing stock. The administration should examine complex issues of scale, ownership, infrastructural networks and divergent interests, assess its own capacities to deal with them, and then start capacity building, especially in terms of strengthening architectural expertise. What is also of crucial importance is that district management is put in place that researches and monitors a city's distinctive quarters and their everyday life.

Finally, the move to larger urban areas should be made. Urban design competitions and large-scale workshop processes are implemented to find higher-level strategies of place. Capacities should be built to develop district strategies and management schemes throughout the city, and to provide architectural advice for private investors at early stages.

4 The Planning Process in Zurich



VINEX: Housing via Spatial Planning / John Morgan

What are the outcomes of integrating housing production with spatial planning?

There are familiar signs across the UK's south-east region of growing socio-economic disparity in the housing market. The Barker Report analysed the issues affecting housing affordability in terms of macroeconomic factors, such as a chronic shortfall in the levels of product entering the market (new supply comprises only 1% of all stock) and a spatial struggle of planning land for housing (location and quantum). If the planning system is to be reformed for boosting house production, then the focus should not be on the process of determining planning applications; instead, it should take a look at how policy frameworks can be geared to facilitate housing through an alternative set of spatial controls. This alternative approach is embodied by the VINEX policy (1993), which was adopted as the Netherlands' national spatial plan (1995–2005). Space was 'ordered' from the top down through governmental policies for regulating all land uses – housing was co-ordinated with other elements in the built environment, creating a socially focussed house production programme that planned and delivered new housing on 86 'city edge' sites through public-private partnerships (VINEX-locaties 2007).

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That does not imply that such a system may be replicated universally. VINEX, like all spatial planning practices, was constructed within the Netherlands' particular political and social context. It stems from a European tradition of developing strategic frameworks to enable spatial uses, rather than reactive 'Town and Country' approaches that regulates use site-by-site (UTF 1999: 191).

In practice, the Netherlands government renews its national spatial plan through a formal review of 'Physical Planning' every decade. VINEX (Vierde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra) (1993) was the Fourth post-war review and it fulfilled its remit by proposing four strategic themes. They ranged in scale from promoting Dutch competitiveness internationally and in Europe, the status of the urban regions, distinctness of rural areas and the quality of the living environment (Galle and Modderman 1997: 10). Housing and urbanism ranked highly because during the 1980s, the Randstad (and its 'Green Heart') was being subjected to profound social changes that manifested themselves spatially. There were demographic shifts in a growing population due, in part, to growth from inward migration that surpassed a falling birth rate. The average household size was reducing, while at the same time increasing the footprint of its domestic living space, and thus diffusing the population over wider space (1970's 71 pers./km^2 was on a trajectory towards 46 pers./km^2 in 2000) (Engel and Claessens 2005: 34, 36).

All of this was playing itself out within a particular environment that spatial planning was endeavouring to regulate. The social changes and development pressures described above were acting against the Randstad's physical structure. As a region that hosts 40% of the Netherlands' population, it holds special status as its economic core and as a renowned landscaped setting. Its footprint covers a territory similar in size to Greater London, but uniquely, its green belt is the central 'Green Heart'. The major cities and smaller towns form a perimeter ring, or 'polycentric metropolis' (Hall 1984 : 114). Together, the variety of urban, rural, green spaces and waterways are a finely balanced ecosystem that has traditionally preserved the distinctiveness of places, but when VINEX entered the scene the pressures of urban expansion and of suburban housing were threatening to erode this system. VINEX embodied a compromise that compact cities would be more efficient environmentally, but this required a re-definition of the urban footprint. Thus the urban ring's width increased conceptually and the softening of edges between cities and the surrounding countryside was recognised accordingly.

These spatial constraints had a bearing on the resultant strategy for locating new housing supply. Under VINEX's guise, the national government sought to address this issue by proactively establishing a house production programme with prescriptive targets to construct 645,000 new dwellings over the ten years to 2005 (later extended by 226,000 dwellings 2005–2010) and at a rate of 97,000 per year (Needham and Zwanikken 1997 : 46). Finding land for all this development was a challenge, since the sites had to be in keeping with the spatial plan's environmental strategies, along with the requirement that two-thirds of the stock be designated for what were referred to as city edge sites – effectively greenfield land released from the nation's reserve of protected open space.

The most surprising figures of all had to do with the density and affordable housing provision. A very low density of 35 dwellings/ ha was prescribed and along with the eventual allocation of urban edge sites, virtually ensured that the product would comprise mainly detached single-family houses with private gardens. It also stipulated that a maximum 30% of total VINEX units would be required for affordable housing (regardless of location), which coincided with the government's privatisation of social housing services.

This conversion of spatial planning strategies into prescriptive housing requirements has three major spatial implications. VINEX housing catered to a particular social group who could afford to buy into private home ownership at a time when house prices were fluctuating around 10% growth per annum (one of the highest in Europe). The commentator Priemus (1997) went so far as to suggest it heightened 'spatial segregation' between less prosperous inner city residents and more affluent residents on the outskirts. This programme was meant to stimulate sustainable development around compact cities, but it neglected to foster the social mix that would be expected in a true city.

Secondly VINEX's environmental objective to control urban expansion in the green heart limited new housing to designated city edge sites. We may even speculate that the decision to implement house construction in partnership with private developers influenced the selection of virgin greenfield sites over former industrial sites. The selection of dispersed sites within an open landscaped setting was deliberate and it later formed the context for the designs that emerged.

Finally, the focus on delivery and management was detrimental to the quality of space that was created at VINEX developments. Design was the final act to complete the chain from strategic spatial plan down to realisation. VROM's own post-mortem has concluded that quantitatively, it was a robust mechanism that implemented its policies for housing provision, but the houses and neighbourhoods that were generated reflect inconsistent qualitative controls (VROM 2007). Even VINEX's definition of spatial quality within the spatial plan set the bar low, as it focussed on words like 'maintenance', 'cleanliness' and 'spatial diversity' as indicators (Galle and Modderman 1997: 30). Design was either implicit, or an insignificant part of the government's agenda and it was certainly left to the architects' masterplanning ingenuity to interpret the requirements and for developers to sign off on costs.

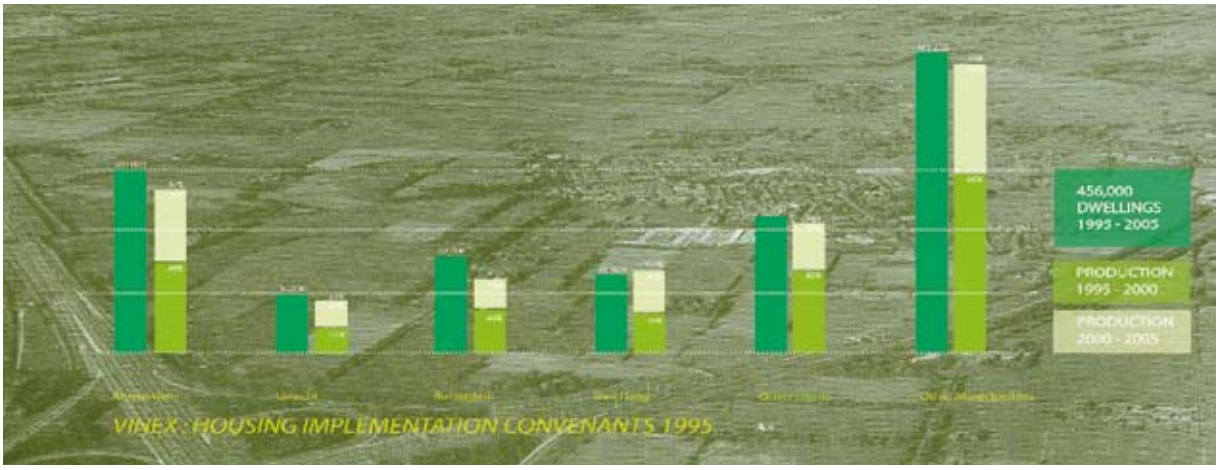
What relevant experience can be drawn from VINEX?

It has already been noted that this programme was constructed through particular spatial planning practices in the Netherlands. Its institutionalised approach is systematic, disciplined, consultative, and tries to serve its citizens' common interests. There is also an overview of all interrelated uses of the nation's space, which in terms of spatial planning is co-ordinated amongst vertical hierarchies and horizontally across space. The London plan is also a spatial plan, but its controlling powers could be re-positioned by making its opportunity areas more concrete spatial plans – they are currently aspirational diagrams.

What was also successful about VINEX was the government's development and implementation of spatial planning into effective production programmes through innovative public management techniques. By taking an active leadership role at the national and local levels, planning policies were mostly co-ordinated and organised with other actors, capital and land to realise these aims. Its greatest success was that the land was developed and that housing targets were largely achieved in the early years; the same cannot be said when housing delivery is left entirely to the free market, non-departmental government agencies and housing associations. Perhaps local authorities should become more entrepreneurial in releasing land for development or be given more powers to facilitate development co-ordination.

The problematic spatial implications are a result of the decision to cater to one of the Netherlands's more self-sufficient social groups. However disagreeable this may be, VINEX's house production programme worked with a reasonably sound methodology to define and to develop solutions to counteract its housing problems. The challenge would be to change the terms of reference from 'single family dwelling', 'greenfield land' and 'suburban' to affordable housing, brownfield land and urban setting.

2–3 VINEX Housing Covenants and Their Realisation Statistics: VROM and Priemus



4 Leidsche Reijn Masterplan, Langerak/ Phase 1, 1,600 Dwellings on Greenfield Lands, KCAP

5 Housing Typologies at Leidsche Reijn, MacCreanor Lavington Architects

6 Housing Typologies at Vifhuizen, Haarlemmermeer, S333

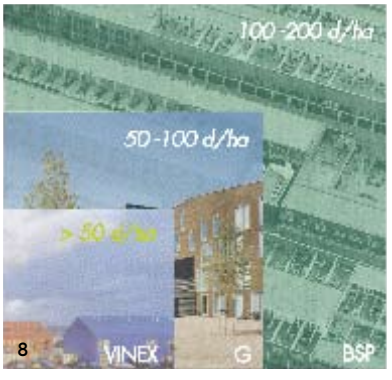
Source: Mozas and Per

7 Leidsche Reijn Masterplan, Langerak/ Site Concept, KCAP

8 Comparative Density Examples: VINEX to Other Housing in the Netherlands

9 Housing Typologies at Ypenburg, Hageneiland, Delft by MVRDV Architects.

Source: Mozas and Per



Housing and Sustainable Communities / Francisca Astaburuaga

The housing and planning system is called on to balance two priorities: securing an adequate provision of housing and ensuring that the outcomes of development match with society's wider needs and aspirations. But in recent years it has become increasingly problematic to balance the contrasting goals of keeping pace with growth and of regulating it. On one hand, the need to tackle housing shortage has boosted a developmental discourse which argues for fewer restrictions for the market to deliver. On the other, increasing evidence about the impacts of growth has strengthened environmental discourse, with claims for a reinforced regulatory framework in order to protect the ecosystem.

The only way of dealing with these tensions is to understand the multidimensional nature of problems and solutions. And this is exactly the discourse behind the idea of Sustainable Development. This concept has driven the definition of integrated policy frameworks – the so-called Sustainable Development Strategies – which attempt to balance the economic, social and environmental goals at a national level. The specific policies in each sector are required to follow the general principles stated in the strategy, and ultimately to define the mechanisms to deliver specific goals.

This essay is an attempt to understand how the planning system has incorporated the integrated national objectives and which specific means have been defined to attain them. This will be done through the analysis of the latest UK policy documents, aiming to detect the main lines of conflict in the achievement of long term sustainability objectives and short term housing needs.

Sustainable Development and the Housing Agenda. The attempt to integrate the concept of sustainability into the planning and housing agenda has as its central objective the creation of 'Sustainable Communities'.

a. 'production/consumption – resources/outcomes' One of the main objectives of the housing strategy is to deliver 1.1 million new homes in the wider south-east by 2016. This target is certainly defined to address current and future housing need and also to avoid further increases in prices that could lead to a shortage in labour supply. But this amount of new development may have a huge impact in terms of necessary resources – such as land, energy, water or infrastructure – and outcomes – waste, sewage, air pollution or noise. So the question is how this goal can be achieved in a sustainable way.

So far, housing policy provides three concrete answers. Firstly, the promotion of an efficient use of land by means of building 60% of new housing on previously developed land. Secondly, the promotion of sustainable patterns of growth by means of concentrated development. And thirdly, in terms of a 'Code for Sustainable Homes'.

The first concept has been part of housing policy since 1998, and was reinforced by the Urban Task Force as part the wider concept of 'urban renaissance'. It is evident that recycling urban land is more efficient than building on greenfields, but research done for the Town and Country Planning Association shows that most of the 'easy' brownfield sites have already been developed, and the remaining sites are those with major problems, such as contamination, poor access, weak demand and high costs. The Urban Task Force argued in favour of governmental incentives for brownfield development, but government has still not responded. And this fact, together with the constraints on the development of greenfields, may constitute one of the reasons for the reduced rates of house building in the South of England.

The key idea is to accommodate demand in areas that already have basic levels of infrastructure and to focus new investment. Government has stated that "planned strategic growth should bring fewer environmental impacts because it allows for environmental pressures to be planned for, accommodated and mitigated at a strategic level".

1 Opposed rationales
2 Links analysed by the essay
3 Sustainable Communities: Key areas of action

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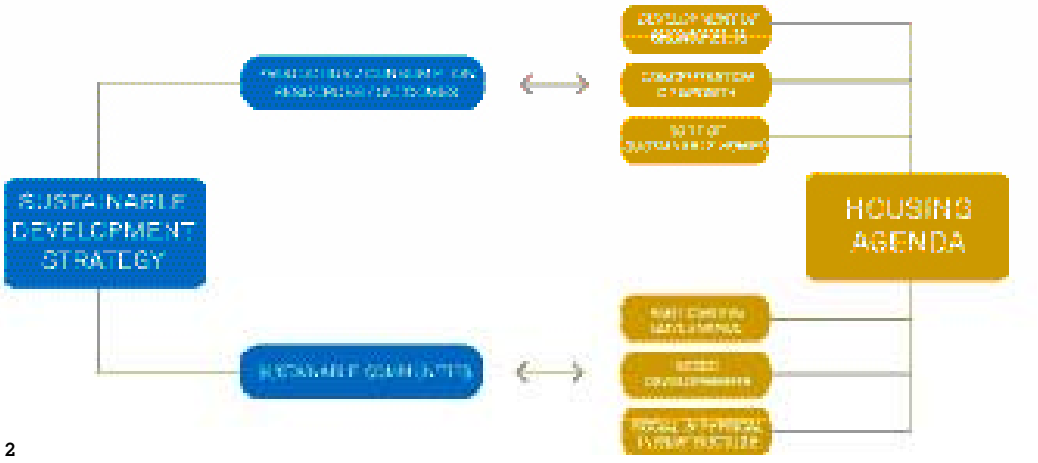

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The government's Code for Sustainable Homes sets building standards – regarding energy efficiency, water consumption and waste production – that are mandatory for publicly funded residential developments, and can be followed by private builders on a voluntary basis. The Home Builders' Federation manifested concern about this code and its probable translation into mandatory regulations, arguing that extra costs are not likely to be paid by house buyers but by the builders themselves, reducing commercial incentives. The different 'levels of sustainability' stated in the code also risk further delays to the planning consent process, exacerbating current shortages in housing supply.

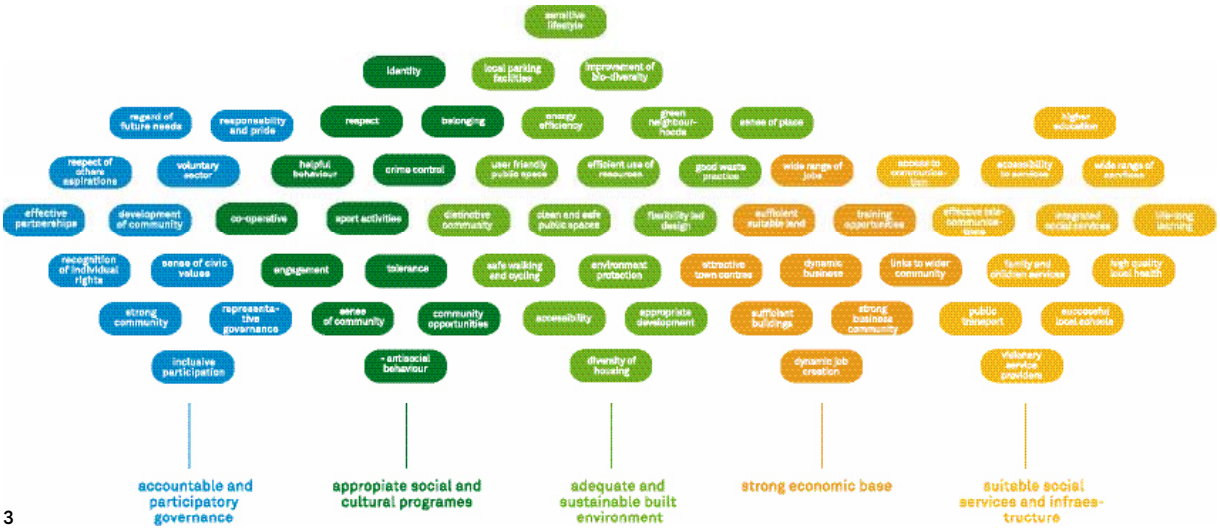
b. Sustainable Communities
This concept, central in the discourse of the planning and housing policy system, is generally defined as creating 'places where people want to live and work, now and in the future'.

But the use of the term community has been highly contested, and it is quite difficult to extract from policy papers a clear definition of it. A second source of ambiguity is the definition of a Sustainable Community itself. Firstly, because of the vagueness between means and ends (e.g. sufficient suitable land and buildings to support economic prosperity... mean or end?) And secondly, because the definition itself contains a number of ambitious goals whose achievement is difficult to measure and to link to a specific policy, plan or programme (e.g. a sense of pride). In an effort to group the numerous objectives behind the definition into general areas of action, we can say that Sustainable Communities should result in interaction between five key components:

1 Accountable and participatory governance.
2 An adequate and sustainable built environment.
3 Suitable social services and infrastructure.
4 A strong economic base.
5 Appropriate social and cultural programmes.

An integrated delivery of these components is not straightforward, and neither is the definition of suitable means for each area of action. The first three components imply a number of direct challenges to the planning and housing system, which mainly relate to achieving goals within the logic of the market. The following examples illustrate some them.

In the first place, not only housing policy but the whole reformulation of the planning system is underpinned by the idea of restructuring governance and giving citizens a greater chance of real participation in the planning process. In fact, the new spatial planning framework is intended to set the appropriate means. But big decisions are still top-down, as was the case in the definition of four growth areas to accommodate new housing development.



In second place, as Sustainable Communities are intended to be mixed and socially inclusive (PPS3 2006), the strategy calls on local authorities to define targets for market and affordable housing and then work in partnership with housebuilders to ensure provision. This is meant to occur by promoting integrated housing developments whose specific mix would be negotiated on a site to site basis as a form of planning gain. The whole concept aims to, on one hand, avoid economic segregation and urban clusters of deprivation and, on the other, to generate an adequate supply that can meet need and stabilise the market. But these goals are very difficult to link. Firstly, because the 'site to site' negotiation cannot provide the certainty and speed that has been identified by Barker as crucial to increase housing supply, and secondly, because of the difficulty in defining a mix that is in tune with the market by local authorities 'with no direct experience selling in the local market, and without the financial discipline of having to get this decision right' (HBF 2007).

And in third place, the success of these mixed communities depends to a great extent on an adequate provision of social infrastructure and transport, but the housing strategy lacks detail about this specific topic. It only states that the government will invest £1.1 billion in homes and infrastructure. But recent research has shown that 1000 extra homes require £38.26 million investment in infrastructure, which at an annual building rate of 28,000 (medium target set by SEERA for the south east only) implies an annual investment of £1.1 billion.

It is true that the planning system is able to dramatically increase the value of land and part of this increase should pay for the externalities of development and the quality of outcomes. But the number and variety of exigencies on development are rising. This is not exactly a way of promoting higher building rates that could cool down the current housing crisis. The Home Builders Federation stated recently 'that there is a growing feeling within the industry that we may be approaching the point where regulatory costs will have a serious impact on housing output' (HBF 2007).

The national sustainable development strategy is mainly concerned with defining integrated public goals, but not enough emphasis has been put on integrating public and private goals. The government has increasing ambitions regarding the quality of outcomes, but is relying on the building industry and its market rationale to deliver them. Of course housebuilders and infrastructure providers have a key role to play, but a new concept of business must be found. And public incentives can make the difference.

An interesting line of research could be to link through business the different needs of a sustainable community, creating, for example, public spaces that generate energy, housing that collects drinking water, waste recycling systems that pay for the maintenance of green spaces, and so on. The challenge is there, but just a few businessmen are taking the risk of being pioneers.

Conclusion

The planning for housing agenda has to deal with an intrinsic conflict: it has to promote and restrict development at the same time. When policy seeks to protect the environment – as for example implementing a sustainable building code, or limiting the land to be released – it risks deepening the problem of housing shortage. When it follows the market requirements – the concentration of housing need in the south – it risks overloading the ecosystem's capacity and generating undesired outcomes for the local communities. And when policy seeks to achieve social goals – the sustainability of communities – it seems to rely in excess on the capacity of local authorities to negotiate the desired outcomes with the building industry, which does not consider those requirements as part of their business.

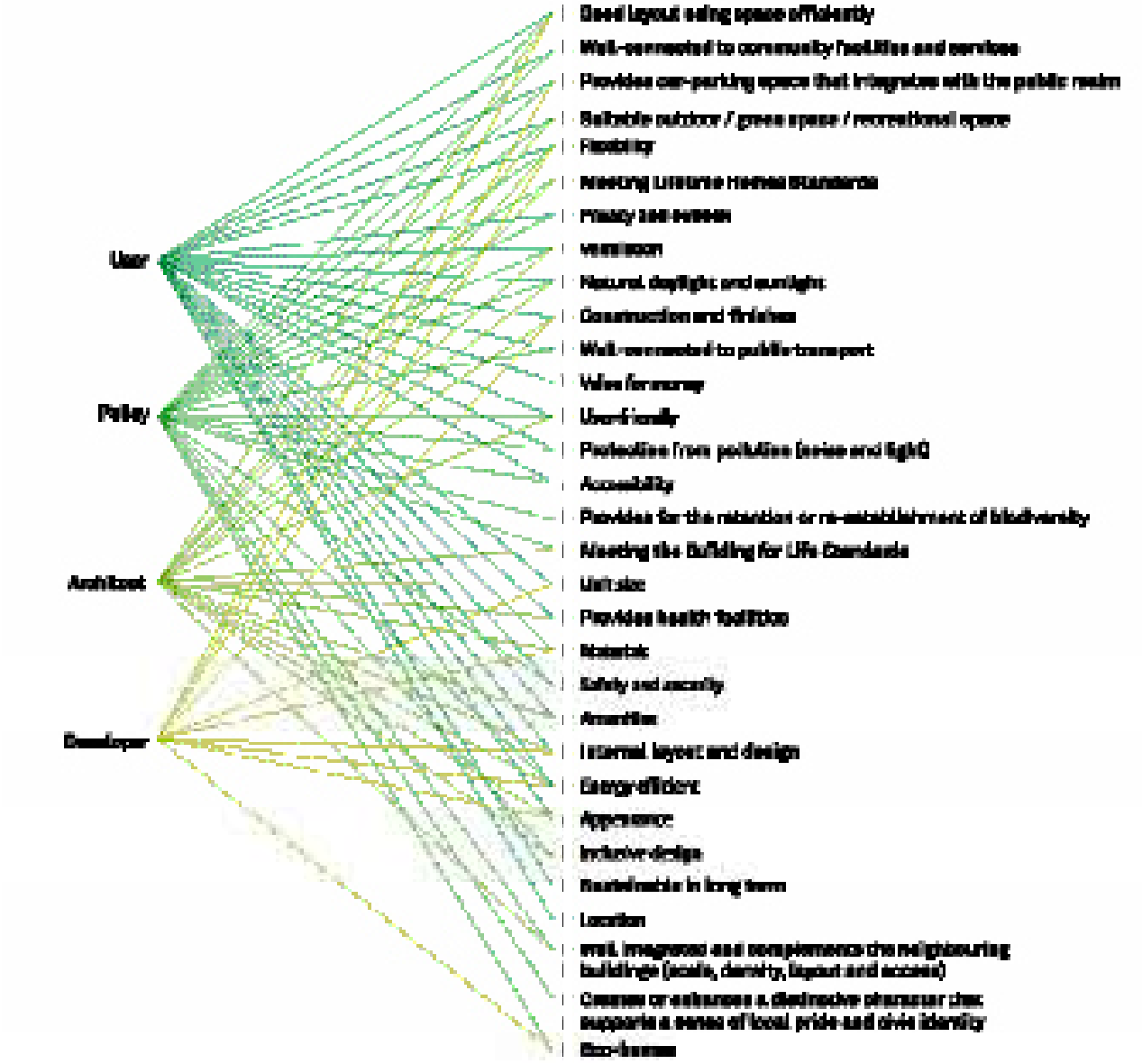
Quality Housing? / Liora Stein

'The special status that architecture holds in our lives demands special vigilance from the citizen, and this requires society to be both informed and prescriptive about quality.' (Rogers 1998: 68). This idea represents the link between users and architectural quality. A central issue in housing in the UK is quality. The increasing interest in quality housing has heightened the need for a clear and realistic definition of quality. Delivering quality housing in the UK is a complicated debate; there are many definitions referring to quality, each responding to different needs and objectives depending on the scale in which it is viewed.

Why is quality important?

Quality is a characteristic which usually attracts people to a product, in this case, housing. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the rhetoric of high quality housing and actually find it. One question that needs to be asked is why quality is important in the first place. In a study of affordable housing, Whitehead (1998) found that there are several benefits resulting from better quality homes. Poor quality can lead to poor outcomes in health, education, employment and safety. Whitehead (1998) has drawn attention to the fact that 'investment in housing has the potential for reducing the costs that government faces with respect to other services, such as health, education and social security payments.' (p. 12). On this basis it can be inferred that there are other benefits that would result from addressing quality in housing. The four most important issues related to poor quality housing are highly correlated. This can be illustrated briefly by the cautionary case of a young person living in poor quality housing. As a child, he lives in a cold, damp and overcrowded space and because of the air quality he consistently gets sick which means he attends school irregularly. When he does attend school there is no space for him to study or play back at home. Consequently, he never graduates making it difficult to find a job. Being unemployed is complicated because of anxiety and stress that builds up. In order to survive he lives in an overcrowded home where there are high concentrations of unemployed people. These places become crime hot spots, increasing insecurity among residents. The evidence seems to be strong that poor quality housing in fact does have other issues attached that would be improved if housing conditions improved. A preliminary approach to tackling this issue could be to define what quality is and for whom.

1 Who defines quality? List of definers and definitions



2 Result of the definitions considered by actors inserted into the corresponding circles

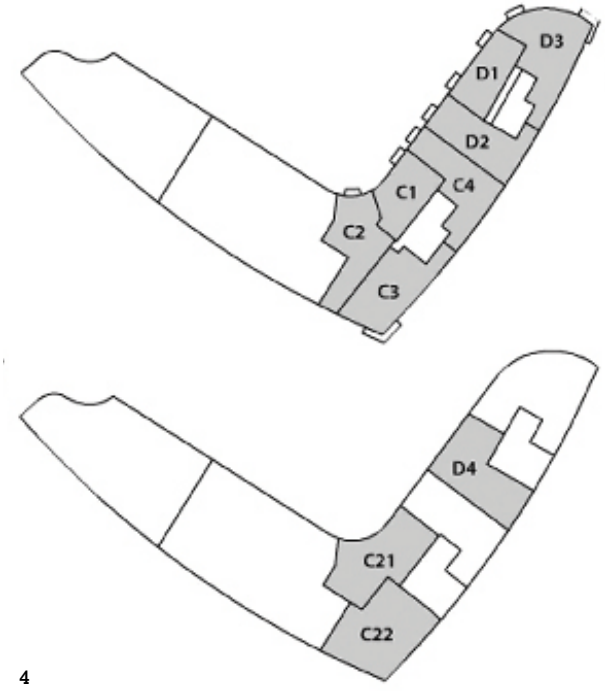
How is quality defined?

A good way to start thinking about quality is to list its various definitions and understandings. Like many other things, quality can mean different things depending on how you define and understand it, or who defines it. According to Özsoy and Gökmen (2005) quality implies the use of diverse criteria used to distinguish good from bad. The problem lies in the fact that the criteria are important in different ways to different individuals. In this analysis, there are four actors who define quality in housing: the user, the policymaker, the architect and the developer. Through interviews and research, a list has been developed with the various definitions of quality. Figure 1 indicates who uses each specific definition. This diagram is revealing in several ways. First, it shows the complexity of the term quality. Second, it illustrates how the different 'definers' share some definitions. Figure 2 takes the analysis a step further. The definitions are separated into four groups depending on how many definers use it. The biggest circle indicates that all four definers agree while the smallest circle indicates that the definition is only used by one definer. There are only three definitions considered by all four definers. These are energy efficiency, flexibility and good layout using space efficiently. Unit size was considered by three definers; however it is clear that the definers think of size in different ways. The user wants a spacious unit while developers try to make the unit smaller to fit in more units. The UK is now building the smallest new dwellings in Europe with an average size of 76 square metres.

How is quality achieved and regulated?

One of the elements of government planning policy such as the London Plan (2004) has been to promote higher quality housing. To better understand how quality is achieved, the Artesian Building in the Bermondsey Spa development in Southwark might be used as a case study. The 73 apartment building was designed by Pollard Thomas and Edwards Architects and Dransfield Owens de Silva and has been recently added to the newly landscaped Spa Park. The building combines different types of tenure: shared ownership, intermediate rent and social rent apart from the 43 apartments for sale. This means that it intends to create the mix of people which according to the London Plan (2004) results in vibrant communities. The seven level building has units that range from one-bed apartments to two-bed apartments with study and penthouses, all of which have unique layouts. The plans of the building and layout for three apartments can be seen in figures 3–7.

3



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The Artesian Building is sold as a high quality housing scheme where the finishes are some of the most important aspects in advertising the apartments available. Finishes and materials are some of the definitions which three definers agree on. This is one way of achieving quality, through materials, finishes and overall appearance. On the other hand, energy efficiency is one of the three main definitions of quality and the designers of the Artesian Building are clearly aware of the impact a building can have on the environment. Therefore it provides energy efficient homes with insulation to conserve heat and a communal recycling store. Consequently, it has been awarded an EcoHomes rating of 'very good'. Another example of how the Artesian Building achieves quality is through the different services it offers such as a health centre with offices and pharmacy. The residential block is not the only building responding to environmental issues, the roof of the health centre is covered in sedum plant to absorb water.

Conclusion

This essay has investigated why quality is important, how it is defined, achieved and regulated. Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that the term quality is used to describe many characteristics of housing. In most cases it is used as publicity and to attract people to the homes available. It varies depending on who is defining quality. However, the result of an analysis of who defines and how, leads to the conclusion that quality housing could be defined as a home that is energy efficient, flexible and has a good layout which uses space efficiently.

Planning policies at the national, regional and local levels constantly promote higher quality in housing developments. If quality in housing were to improve, there are likely to be greater benefits involving health, education and security. Part of the task of improving housing quality may be enhancing our understanding in these social terms.

3 Photograph of the Artesian Building.

4 Plans for levels 1 to 6 of the Artesian Building showing the different types of apartments available.

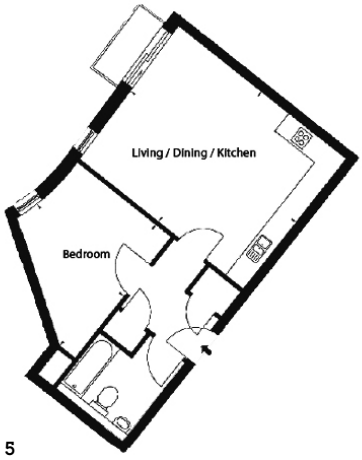
5–7 Layouts for three types of apartment.

5 One bedroom apartment with a total area of 539 sq ft.

6 Two bedroom apartment with a total area of 713 sq ft.

7 Two bedroom apart with a total area of 901 sq ft

Note: plans for illustration purposes, not to scale.



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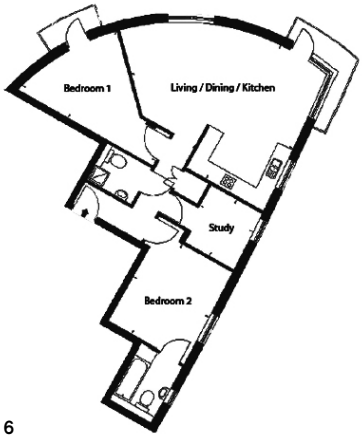

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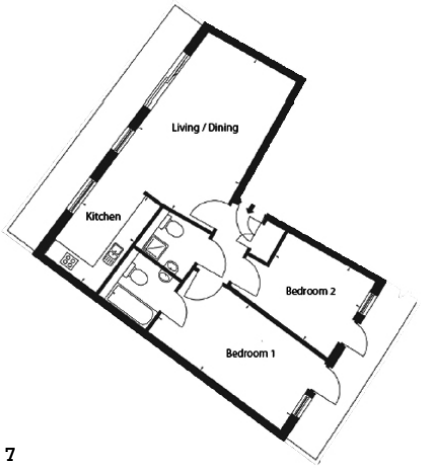

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