

What Should Our City Look Like?

During London's recent extraordinary development we have witnessed a growing enthusiasm for architecture and more interest in the quality of public space, but also an increasing concern for the social implication of a city moulded by the pressures of speculation.

Some ideas have been implemented, such as affordable housing initiatives and the consolidation of public spaces, yet the quality of architecture goes undiscussed.

There is little dialogue about architecture in itself; our city's development is left to the panicked negotiation between planning committees and developers. Architects seem to hide behind their professional role. Planners and developers are set against each other in confrontation. The media only discuss architecture in the most superficial and patronising manner. In such an environment the best we can hope for is better pavements and more icons.

London has an undeniable energy, without doubt the result of deregulation and the encouragement of development. It must also be possible to find ways by which shared concerns and ambitions can be formulated and incorporated.

The design of buildings is more technically and formally unrestricted than ever before. The proliferation of stranger shaped buildings with their own nomenclature (spiral, gherkin, shard, vortex, walkie talkie) is testament. We cannot legislate for the quality of architecture but we should be able to discuss what sort of city we want, rather than see the city only as a consequential collage of accidental negotiation.

It is important for us not just to manipulate development into 'acceptable' forms, but to define the criteria within which a dialogue should develop.

Whilst the planning process stops the worst developments, shouldn't it encourage the best?



Am Kupfergraben 10, the James Simon Gallery and the Neues Museum, Berlin. 1997 - 2013