Post-war mass housing: From utopian ideas to dystopian realities.

A comparative case study of the demolished Robin Hood Gardens vs. the thriving Park Hill.

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TU Delft
March 2023
Architectural History Thesis (AR2A011)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THESIS SUBJECT

After World War II, as Europe was slowly reviving from the subsequent housing shortage, numerous architects emerged with bright ideas and ambitious plans that aimed at providing people with better living conditions.[1] These architects often saw architecture as a tool for societal change and believed that their designs could go beyond simply addressing the housing shortfall but to promote social interaction and community cohesion. However, despite the promising ideas behind, various factors have quickly led to turning housing schemes from the post-war era into areas of crime and decline, which often led to their eventual demolition. Numerous estates from this period have followed the same trend – from once being envisioned as the ideal place to live, to ultimately being torn down. One eminent example of this is the Robin Hood Gardens, designed by Alison and Peter Smithson, which despite the huge controversy and divided public opinions[2], was demolished in 2017. This thesis aims at understanding the reasons behind the decline of post-war mass housing schemes by cross comparing the mentioned project to another exemplary for that period housing development – Park Hill in Sheffield, by the architects Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn, which however followed a different development path and has recently been refurbished. By juxtaposing these two projects, this thesis will investigate the notions of failure and success of what once seemed to be utopian ideas for housing. It will accomplish this by providing a comprehensive analysis of the viewpoints of the architects behind the projects, architectural critics, and the occupants of the buildings, opposing the professional perspective to that of the people. The main objective of this research is to find patterns in the underlying design thinking, ideas, and practice of the architects behind these projects, which could potentially help in understanding the symptomatic decline of post-war housing. The significance of this thesis lies in its potential to prevent undesirable outcomes of future mass-housing projects by revealing recurring patterns from the past.

1.2 METHODOLOGY, LITERATURE AND STRUCTURE

Although a lot has already been written on post-war mass housing, the two projects selected for this thesis – Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill, have not often been analysed in comparison to each other, despite having similar characteristics. The novelty of this research also lies in its methodology, which structures the argument by incorporating the viewpoints of the architects, the critics, and the occupants of the buildings. By contrasting the professional perspective to that of ordinary people, this thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis on the subject. This approach also acknowledges the

[1] This will be elaborated in Chapter 2.
[2] There is a lot of media coverage on this subject available online, an example is an article by Frearson (2015), published on Dezeen.

significance of multiple perspectives in historical research, thus contributing to the notion that history is a compilation of diverse viewpoints.
The primary sources – writings (Smithson & Smithson, 1965; Smithson & Smithson, 1968; Smithson & Smithson, 1972; Smithson & Smithson, 2001) and interviews (Johnson, 1970) by Alison and Peter Smithson, and by Ivor Smith (Smith, 1967) and Jack Lynn (Lynn, 1962; Lynn, 1965) are the foundation for constructing an image of how the architects saw their role as changers in society at the time, which will be presented in Chapter 2.
In Chapter 3, the previously cited sources, in addition to original architectural drawings of the projects, will serve as the basis for a comparative architectural analysis in the design of the buildings. This chapter forms the promise of the architects – what they had hoped for and intended their designs to achieve.
Secondary literature of various critics will be used in support of Chapter 4, which will examine the development of the projects and their decline. Some of the secondary sources used here stem from academic conferences held at TU Delft between 2001 and 2006. These events brought together a variety of experts and researchers who engaged in in-depth discussions on post-war architecture and Modernism. Among the researchers whose work has been incorporated in this thesis are Max Risselada, Dirk van den Heuvel and Hilde Heynen. Additionally, to represent the perspective of the inhabitants, interviews recorded by various researchers and journalists (Cooke, 2008; Furse, 1982; Taher, 2011; Thoburn, 2018) are used in Chapter 4.
Based on the findings from the previous chapters and following the developments of the projects in retrospective, Chapter 5 will provide a comprehensive discussion, where patterns in the practice and thinking of the Smithsons, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith will be synthesized. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE CASE STUDIES

The two projects, Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill have been found relevant for a cross comparison, due to several reasons, which will be presented in this subchapter. Being located in Britain and built during a similar time frame, in the 60s and 70s, the projects share a similar context. Critics point out to different sources of inspiration that have informed the design for the Robin Hood Gardens, some saying it has been influenced by Le Corbusier's design for Unité d'Habitation, while others claiming that it embodies ideas from the unbuilt Golden Lane project which the Smithsons have designed in 1952 for a competition. For Park Hill sources often point out that Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn were inspired by the Smithsons and particularly by the Golden Lane project. However, the similarities of the two projects go beyond their shared context and inspiration. Park Hill is the first built project to employ the walking decks or "streets in the sky", however this concept has first been developed by the Smithsons for the Golden Lane competition but for the first time they realized it in Robin Hood Gardens. This proves that Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith were certainly aware of the work of the Smithsons, leading to the question whether the architects knew each other. Although it is not often discussed in literature, it is important to note that Jack Lynn and Alison Smithson were actually acquainted with each other, as they were classmates at the Newcastle

University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape[3] (Alison and Peter Smithson - Something Concrete + Modern, 2014).

1.4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To provide a comprehensive portrayal of Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill, it is essential to situate the projects in their specific historical context and to gain a thorough understanding of the social-, political- and economic- developments of that time.

During the 20th century the government's focus in the UK has been changing between two main objectives – building new houses to address the shortage caused by the Second World War and redeveloping old slum areas (University of the West of England, 2008). These slum areas were the result of a development dating back to the years of industrialisation in the 19th century, when workers from the rural areas migrated to cities in search of employment, which demanded a rapid provision of new housing. The houses built then often lacked consideration for overcrowding or providing basic amenities such as adequate water supply, ventilation and daylight. These conditions led to the enactment of The Housing Act of 1930 which aimed at eradicating the slums and replacing inadequate housing by newly constructed and improved housing units (University of the West of England, 2008). However, as documented in the Slum Clearance Compensation Bill (1956) with the outbreak of WW2, as the efforts were concentrated on the war, the slum clearance programs took a temporary halt and were suspended for approximately 15 years after the outbreak of the war. In the aftermath of the war, the government had to concentrate its efforts on rebuilding the cities, as the war had brought damage of an unprecedented scale - from the 98 000 dwellings which were managed by the London County Council (LCC), only 9250 had survived without any damage, 61 150 required slight repairs, 25 113 faced serious damage or were uninhabitable and 2487 were completely destroyed (Bullock, 1987). The destruction caused by WWII, combined with the need to revive the slum clearance efforts prompted the government to intervene and to seek new methods of construction that would meet the demands of the created housing shortage (Hashemi, 2013). Authorities considered flats as a viable solution to the problems due to several factors (Vale, 1995, as cited in Hashemi, 2013). Firstly, the residents of the former slums could be re-housed in the same area, which could subsequently result in savings in infrastructure since the existing water and electricity supply could be utilized in the new development. Secondly, as the price of land would be shared by all flats occupying it, this would decrease the prices. Also, a new building technique was introduced to the governmental reconstruction plans - the use of prefabricated components, which was particularly popular among the proponents of the Modern Movement who believed that mass production was the answer to coping with the crisis (Hashemi, 2013). The post-war conditions, presented the Modernist architects with the opportunity to become involved in the governmental reconstruction programs and to implement their theories on prefabrication, mass building and high-rise construction (Finnimore, 1989, as cited in Hashemi, 2013). As a result of this opportunity, the architects adopted a social role which became part of their duty.

[3] then known as King's College, Durham

2 ARCHITECTS AS DRIVERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: EXPLORING THE VISIONS OF POST-WAR ARCHITECTS THROUGH THE THINKING OF THE SMITHSONS, JACK LYNN AND IVOR SMITH

This chapter aims at exploring the thinking and visions of the Smithsons, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, as architects who can be seen as representative for the post-war period. With this analysis, this section aims at providing a better ground for understanding the underlying principles that have informed the architects' designs for Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill respectively.

The post-war period saw the emergence of a new generation of architects, for whom architecture was not merely to provide an answer to the housing shortage but it was to play a bigger role, namely, to contribute to the development of a better society. As noted by Henket (2002), architects during that period "felt a strong sense of social responsibility, in that architecture should raise the living conditions of the masses." (p. 10). A similar opinion is also shared by Sharp (2002), according to whom during the post-war era slum clearance was the responsibility of the municipalities, which sought to hire architects with social commitments, instead of private architects who would not accept such commissions. Sharp (2002) also notes that during that period achieving social equality was a common aim shared by both politicians and architects.

Team 10, a group of architects, active in the years between 1953 and 1981, which formed as an opposition to the approaches of CIAM (van den Heuvel & Risselada, n.d.), shared a similar understanding on the role of the architect as carrying a responsibility towards society. As Alison and Peter Smithson were key members of Team 10, exploring the ideas and beliefs behind the group is necessary for gaining a deeper understanding of the Smithsons' architectural vision and thinking. Throughout their active period Team 10 have been conveying their visions through manifestos, which are used here as the primary sources for exploring the group's ideas and beliefs. In the first edition of Team 10's Primer, they express that the architect must stay between the client and society and that the role of the architect is to "produce a comprehensible community" (Smithson, 1963, p. 353). According to the 1968 revised edition of the Primer, which was edited by Alison Smithson, for them "to build" holds a unique significance, as they consider the action of building to entail the architect's complete responsibility towards both the individuals or the groups, and towards the collective structure to which those belong (Smithson, 1968). The Doorn Manifesto, which was revised for the second edition of the Primer, also reflects this idea of the collective. Here Team 10 emphasize on the importance of community and state that it is futile to think of the house as a separate unity, as it can only exist as a part of a community (Smithson, 1974). These statements from the manifestos highlight Team 10's strong commitment towards society, and their shared belief on the role of the architect as being responsible for ensuring the unity and coherence of the community.

Besides sharing their collective ideas in the Manifestos of Team 10, throughout their career Alison and Peter Smithson have been actively communicating their visions through personal writings and interviews. They have emphasized on the importance of the collective also outside the writings of Team 10. The Smithsons have shared their belief that towns must be viewed as a collection of individual acts and the thinking must be shifted towards developing disciplines where these individual acts can also serve the collective (Smithson & Smithson, 1965). In a BBC documentary, commenting on the widespread vandalism that occurred in the UK, Peter Smithson states with regards to their attitude to building for the society that they "feel under an obligation to provide the best possible quality irrespective of what people expect and what treatment it's going to get" (Johnson, 1970).

Fig 1. *Alison and Peter Smithson* [Photograph]. Something Concrete + Modern. https://www.somethingconcreteandmodern.co.uk/people/alison-and-peter-smithson/

Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith have similarly strived towards achieving a sense of community through their designs, a goal that was also central to the design of Park Hill. Although it has proven challenging to locate primary sources that encapsulate the architects' views, particularly as they were not as vocal as the Smithsons, their considerations on Park Hill, described in Lynn (1962), point to their visions on architecture functioning as a catalyst for social improvement and community building. With regards to the eagerness during that period of eliminating the negative consequences of the unsanitary living conditions, Lynn claims that entire streets have been destroyed which despite their flaws, have fostered a social community of kindness and cooperation (Lynn, 1962). Lynn also expresses how the plan for Park Hill was to be carried out in such a way, that the minimum number of residents would need to be moved out of the district and most of the people could be re-settled in the district itself, to preserve the existing community in the area (Lynn, 1962). Smith (1967) has also provided a description on the design for Park Hill and in regard to the project site he has expressed how housing cannot exist in isolation, but it is the interrelationship between housing and the broader context what gives meaning to both. Smith's belief resonates with Team 10's vision on the impossibility of the house to exist as a separate unity and its interdependence on the community (Smithson, 1974). Smith (1967) further expresses how in architecture circulation space is often seen as a residual space and its potential to host communication is disregarded, however together with Jack Lynn, they saw it as space which could foster community building.

Fig 2. Jack Lynn [Photograph]. The RIBA Journal. https://www.ribaj.com/culture/jack-lynn-1926-2013

Fig 3. Ivor Smith [Photograph]. The RIBA Journal. https://www.ribaj.com/culture/professor-ivor-smith-architect-and-teacher-1926-2018

This chapter has explored the thinking and visions of the architects Alison and Peter Smithson as well as Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, presenting their shared belief in the architect's responsibility towards society and the importance of designing architecture, which promotes community building. As architects from the post-war period who have seen the consequences of the war, they had developed a strong sense of social responsibility and sought to contribute to the betterment of the society through their designs.

3 INVESTIGATING THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN OF ROBIN HOOD GARDENS AND PARK HILL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

After analysing the architects' visions and beliefs in the previous chapter, with a particular focus on their commitment to social engagement and community cohesion, this chapter will delve into how these ideas are manifested in the physical design of the two projects – Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill. The following comparative analysis is drawn only from primary sources, consisting of interviews, writings and drawings of Alison and Peter Smithson and Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith respectively, to provide an accurate portrayal of what considerations guided the architects in their designs and what they intended to achieve. It should be noted that during the design process the architects may have taken additional considerations that have guided their design but this chapter is based on descriptions that can be drawn solely from published primary sources. This analysis is provided in three sections, shifting from larger to smaller scale and from public towards private.

3.1 SITE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

As described by the Smithsons, a central theme in Robin Hood Gardens is "protection" which they have achieved through careful considerations of handling the noise levels on the site (Smithson & Smithson, 2001). This was a crucial challenge to overcome because as described by Peter Smithson, the site was surrounded on three sides by heavy traffic, which resulted in significant incoming noise (Johnson, 1970). He reveals the different design strategies that they have employed, and one approach was to create an acoustic wall alongside the busy road, to function as a sound barrier (Johnson, 1970). Additionally, by arranging the buildings to face each other, a noise-free area is created in the middle of the plot, what the Smithsons describe as a "'stress-free zone' central zone" and "a quiet, green heart which all dwellings share and overlook" (Smithson & Smithson, 1968, p. 452). As Peter Smithson explains, further considerations with regards to the noise disturbance are also taken in the design of this area, where the Smithsons have up lifted the ground, in order to discourage people from playing football there and creating excessive noise (Johnson, 1970). The Smithsons have also provided a brief description of the available public amenities that were in proximity of the Robin Hood Gardens – a market and a shopping zone in the Lansbury area, and eleven shops along the Poplar High Street, situated close to the southern boundary of the site (Smithson & Smithson, 1968).

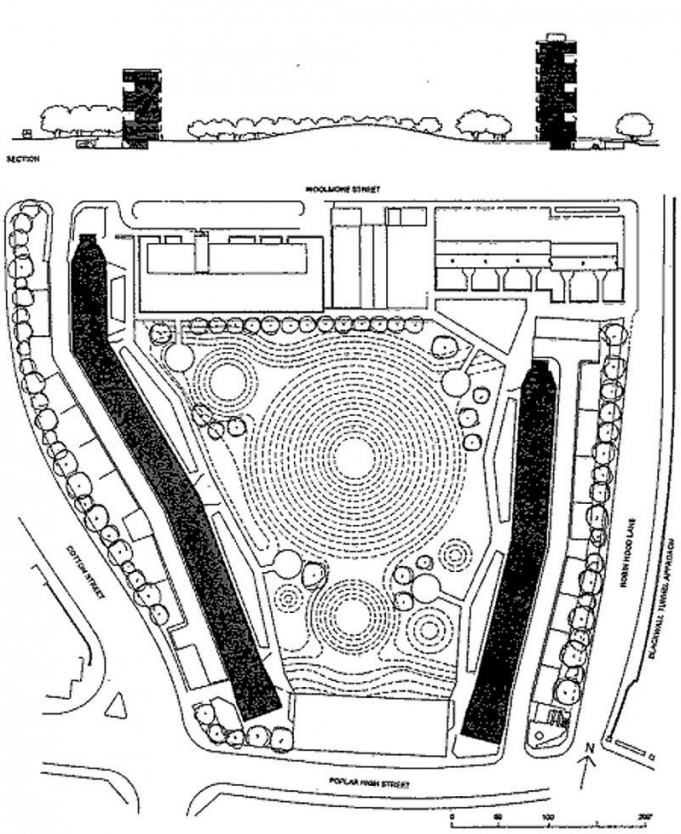

Fig 4. Robin Hood Gardens site plan by Alison and Peter Smithson [Drawing]. Archdaily. https://www.archdaily.com/150629/ad-classics-robin-hood-gardens-alison-and-peter-smithson

The site on which Park Hill was constructed used to be a slum area and Lynn (1965) describes the condition of the area as the one that was in most need of

redevelopment in Sheffield. While in Robin Hood Gardens coping with the noise levels on site caused by the heavy traffic that surrounded it was a major concern, a main characteristic of Park Hill's site, which also played an important role in the design, was the topography of the terrain. Lynn (1962) describes the site as slopping irregularly to the North and being surrounded by a green area filled with trees. However, the architects saw huge potential in the uneven land conditions of the site and Lynn (1965) states that the unevenness of the terrain created the opportunity for developing "an entirely different kind of place" (p. 59). The site also had good connections to the city, as it was in proximity to retail markets, the canal, the railway, and industrial facilities and besides that the existing pubs, shops and small businesses fostered a strong sense of community in the area (Lynn, 1962). In addition to the available communal facilities, it is also stated that there was already an existing school on Park Hill's site which was to be replaced and additionally a Nursery School and a shopping centre were also planned.

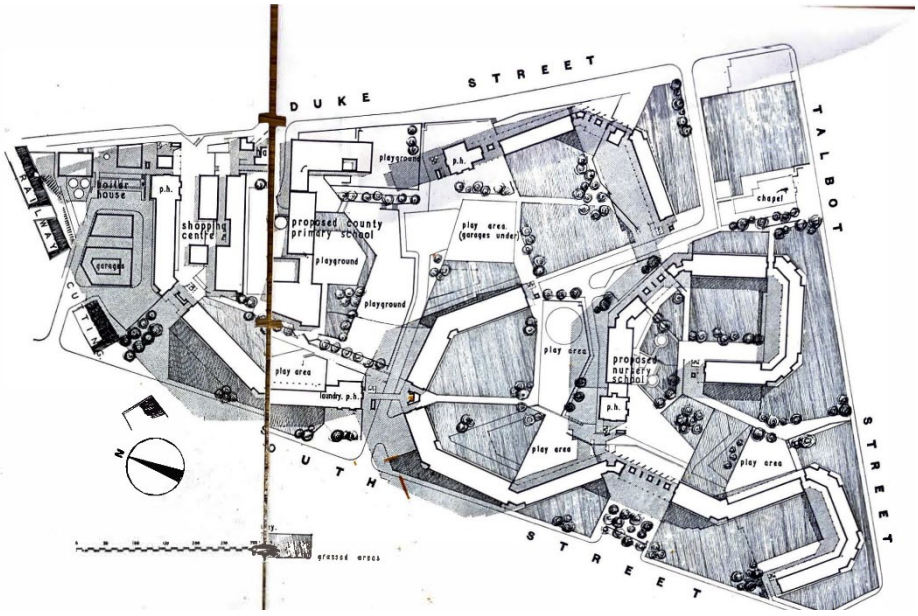

Fig 5. Park Hill site plan by Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn [Drawing]. The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 69(12), 447-469

3.2 THE PUBLIC REALM: THE DECKS

For Alison and Peter Smithson, an important consideration for Robin Hood Gardens was how the design of the buildings is read by their occupants and they point out that in architecture there are certain symbols that indicate to people how a building is intended to be used (Johnson, 1970). They refer to this as the "form-language of the building" and explain that in Robin Hood Gardens, the walking decks feature a clear separation of horizontal and vertical movement, where the decks themselves serve as the former and the lifts as the latter (Smithson & Smithson, 1972). Besides facilitating the flow of movement Peter Smithson also adds how the decks are intended to be a social space, where children can play and neighbours can meet, as he states, "the deck itself is wide enough for two women with prams to stop for a talk and still let the postman by" (Johnson, 1970). Another intention for the walking decks was to design them in such a way to allow the occupants to claim a part of the space

in front of their doors as private, where they could place their doormats or other personal items (Johnson, 1970).

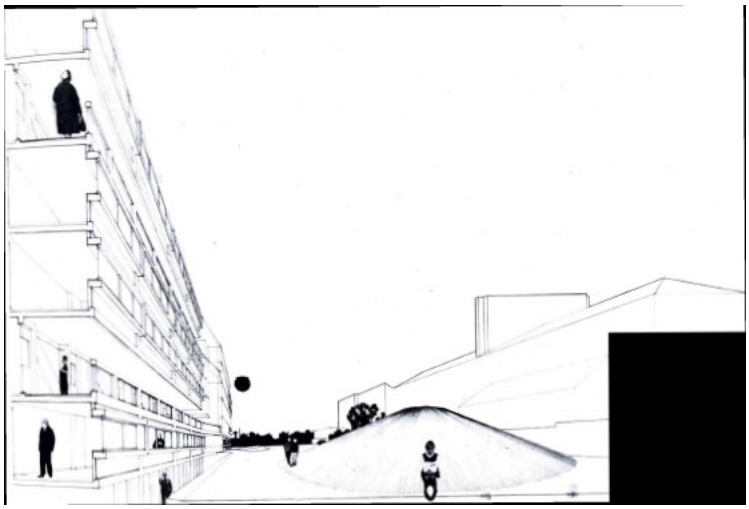

Fig 6. Collage by Alison and Peter Smithson showing the decks in Robin Hood Gardens. *The Charged Void: Architecture* (pp. 296-313). The Monacelli Press.

Similarly, to Robin Hood Gardens, walking decks were also employed in Park Hill, however due to the topography of the site in Park Hill, here the decks were designed in a different manner. They were used for horizontal movement but due to the sloping terrain, they always remained connected to ground level on one side, while lifts were incorporated on the taller edges of the buildings on the opposite side (Lynn, 1962). Like in Robin Hood Gardens, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith also intended for the walking decks in Park Hill to be used not merely as a means of a routing system that connects the different dwellings, but to foster communal activities. Lynn (1965) points out that the decks were also to serve as play areas for children, where they could roller skate, with the intention that they can play in proximity to their dwellings, instead of going further from where they live. In addition, he mentions that the walking decks are vibrant spaces that can foster communication between the buildings' occupants.

3.3 THE PRIVATE REALM: THE INDIVIDUAL DWELLINGS

In Robin Hood Gardens the theme of noise protection extends also to the individual dwellings, as Peter Smithson describes, the living rooms are arranged alongside the walking decks, which is the noisier area and the bedrooms are positioned towards the inside of the plot, to be protected from the noise (Johnson, 1970). Additionally, the Smithsons also state that the specific internal use of the dwellings is intentionally left open to interpretation, in order to accommodate the flexibility which is required in living spaces (Smithson & Smithson, 1972).

In the design for Park Hill, similarly to the Smithsons, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith were also focused on incorporating flexibility in the dwellings. Their aim was to design a repetitive structure with standardized units that met the housing requirements of the time but also allowed for various layouts by adjusting the positioning of partition walls (Lynn, 1962). Smith (1967) points out to the

benefits the mixing of different dwelling types has. Firstly, he notes that this approach promotes a mixture of different family types, avoiding the concentration of a specific family type or single occupants in a certain area. Secondly, he mentions that by designing different basic units, a consistent structure which fosters maximum repetition can be achieved and thirdly, that this system allows for adaptability and change.

4 THE PROMISE VS. THE REALITY

Following the architectural analysis of the buildings, this chapter will explore how the projects were received after being realised and what developments they underwent. To provide a comprehensive view on the reasons behind the eventual decline of Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill (both of which have faced such a period), the issue will be explored from two different perspectives – that of regular people (the occupants of the buildings) and that of architectural critics and researchers. By juxtaposing the professional perspective to the non-professional, the reasons of decline can be understood as a complex synthesis of design-, social-, economic- and political-related issues.

4.1 In Robin Hood Gardens

From the Smithson's statements it becomes evident that Robin Hood Gardens started facing problems with vandalism already during its construction phase (Johnson, 1970). In the documentary Peter Smithson remarks how upsetting it was for the architects and professionals involved to see their effort disrespected, to which in visible disappointment Alison suggests to "just leave people where they are to smash it up in complete abandon and happiness". Smithson (2008 as cited in Chin, 2015), their son, also points to the vandalism encountered on the site of Robin Hood Gardens, as shortly after the occupants started moving in, he witnessed an elderly centre on the site being vandalised and subsequently shut down. This trend continued over the next decade, as marked by Furse (1982) who conducted interviews with tenants on site. People on the upper floors were seen throwing their garbage out of the windows, common areas were troubled by noise and broken windows were a common occurrence. An eighty-year-old resident has stated the following:

> They throw all their rubbish out the window - hot fat - you can see where it's burnt the grass, right by the pathway: there. That should have been a garden, we would have looked after it, sit outside, not now. I tell them but they don't listen - kids too they all do it. And they play football when they come home from school. It says 'No Ball Games' up there . . . . She's had her windows broken - ball right through three times, they don't care, none of them. (Furse, 1982, p. 137)

However, Furse (1982) remarks that the people interviewed tend to talk in terms of the typical challenges they are facing but that there is no indication in the design of the buildings being a factor to the "general air of social despair" (p. 136). He argues that the Smithsons have assumed that the occupants would understand the importance of maintaining their residence in a good shape and follow the rules, as "to them 'No Ball Games' meant just that." (p. 138). In his research he sets his on-site observations and the tenants' testimonials against Alison and Peter Smithson's essay "Criteria for mass housing"[4] and concludes that even though the design of Robin Hood Gardens meets the Smithson's ideals, it has failed socially (Furse, 1982). However, as more recent interviews show, not all residents were dissatisfied by the conditions they lived in. After interviews conducted between 2014 and 2017, Thoburn (2018) concludes that in 32 out of the 38 conversations, residents had a positive attitude towards the social life, architectural design, living spaces and public areas at Robin Hood Gardens and often described their living experience there with enthusiasm. Almost all residents that were interviewed, spoke with great enthusiasm about the walking decks. Khaled Elgahari, who has lived there since childhood views the decks more positively than the dwellings which as he describes had "rows of doors crammed together like a prison." (Thoburn, 2018, p. 623). Another interviewed couple, William and Laetitia Fakamus, when asked whether they would prefer private balconies, instead of the walking decks, expressed that the

[4] an essay written by Alison and Peter Smithson for Team X, first published 1957, revised 1959.

former encourages a more isolated lifestyle, while they appreciate the sense of community that the latter brings. Motiur Rahman who has lived at Robin Hood Gardens for 23 years also supports the opinion that the street-decks promote community interaction and states how the decks reminded him of Bangladesh. As he recalls:

> People did unbelievable things on them, like riding bikes – I don't mean one bike but four bikes going past each other. They played Carrom Board – it was so wide. In Eid, the doors would be open in every house and you would have all these people, swathes of people going up and down the corridors in their glitzy outfits, going to people's houses, eating samosas. It gave you the opportunity to live an outdoor life. (Thoburn, 2018, p. 623)

Prior to examining the perspective of the critics, it is worth to note an observation by Thoburn (2018), who has pointed out that when discussing Brutalist architecture critics tend to adopt to one of two strongly contrasting positions, either describing such projects as "concrete monstrosity" or as "modernist masterpiece" (p. 613). The divided opinions on the subject are further evident in the public response, where in support of listing Robin Hood Gardens hundreds of architects, including Richard Rogers, Zaha Hadid, Robert Venturi and Toyo Ito have joined a campaign in 2012 to save the buildings from demolition (Frearson, 2015). Richard Rogers (2008, as cited in Thoburn, 2018) has attributed the decline of Robin Hood Gardens to the governmental neglect, as well as to the occupants, stating "Whilst the Economist Building has been maintained and upgraded, Robin Hood Gardens has been appallingly neglected and, from the beginning, has been used as a sink estate to house those least capable of looking after themselves – much less their environment." (p. 620). Eisenman (1973) on the other hand, despite admiring what principles the Smithsons' stand for, admits that he is often critical of their work. According to him Robin Hood Gardens has not failed in its built form but rather in sustaining the embodied ideas. He adds that this phenomenon is a larger issue in architecture from the post-war period and specifically in the works of Team 10: "There has always seemed to be a fundamental incongruity in the Team 10 position, a disparity between what is said and what is done." (p. 219). In addition to Eisenman's belief of the Smithsons' actions being disconnected from their intentions, he also acknowledges certain faults in the architectural design of Robin Hood Gardens. He argues that the Smithsons' have not paid much attention to the design of the individual dwellings but to the public areas instead, as he states, "given the choice of one or other, but both, the Smithsons, it would seem, have opted in favour of the public domain" (Eisenman, 1973, p. 221). He is also critical of the design of the walking decks, arguing that any horizontal connection between them is lost. This opinion is also supported by Zeifman (2015), who states that despite the "wide, open-air access decks, the potential of these to link to other buildings as "streets" is suppressed through the articulation of the ends of the slabs" (p. 37). In addition, he is critical of how Robin Hood Gardens has been documented, stating that the project has not been significantly re-evaluated in relation to new advancements in the architecture field and that it is is often judged in relation to the Golden Lane project, despite clear distinctions between the two.

4.2 In Park Hill

Even though Park Hill similarly to Robin Hood Gardens subsequently also followed a decline, unlike the Smithsons' project, after its realization, Park Hill was met with positive reactions both from critics and from the recently moved in inhabitants (Chin, 2015). Cooke (2008) who used to live close to Park Hill, revisits the site 20 years later to examine the impressions of the inhabitants. Grenville Squires, who has worked as a caretaker at Park Hill for 26 years, shows high appreciation of the architecture of the project, describing it as a "feat of engineering" (para. 12). He further recalls the large number of communal amenities that were provided on site, including "four pubs, a hardware shop, a butcher's, a ladies' shoe shop, a chip shop" which gave the site of Park Hill the communal feeling of a "medieval village" (para. 13). Brenda Hague also expresses positive impressions towards the estate, describing how once she moved in with her family, the apartment with three bedrooms, hot water and heating felt luxurious compared to the back-to-back houses they used to live in before that (Cooke, 2008). Additionally, Brenda mentions that Park Hill has always felt safe to her, even when it started facing a decline in the 80s. In another interview (Taher, 2011), a Park Hill resident of over 50 years also supports the opinion that the estate has never felt dangerous, saying:

> It's lovely. I have a great view over the city. I'm part of a community where everyone knows each other. When I first moved in there were loads of young families and all the families grew up together. I had three children and they started school at the nursery on Park Hill, and stayed in schooling here until they were 11. So for me this has always been a great place to live. I've never felt that it was dangerous or difficult. (para. 4)

As reported by Empsall in the early years of the construction of Park Hill, the architectural critics echoed the positive impressions shared by the residents (2020). Pevsner (1967, as cited in Empsall, 2020) states that the technical press has praised Park Hill as a socially and visually successful design. He has also commented positively on the innovative design of the decks and the idea that they would create encounters between the residents but has nevertheless claimed that the development would turn into a slum due to its high density. Banham (1975) expresses his astonishment with the scale of Park Hill and believes that the social concepts behind the design are more important than the statistics. He describes how Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith have promised a "street-like channel of communication and social encounter" where "mums could gossip, teenagers do their things, dads could hash over union affairs and the football pools" (p. 143).

However, Pevsner's claim that Park Hill would become 'a slum in half a century or less' (1967, as cited in Empsall, 2020, p. 37), eventually became true. Signs of the low-quality building materials and poor maintenance eventually started emerging. Between the 1970s and 1980s the buildings started facing a number of issues, including the heating and other essential systems breaking down, the concrete causing sicknesses due to excessive dampness and pest infestations. These issues caused the development to take again a form similar to that of the slums that it intended to replace (Tuffrey, 2013, as cited in Chin, 2015).

5 IDENTIFIED PATTERNS OF SIMILARITIES IN POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE – A DISCUSSION

By interpreting findings from the previous chapters, this chapter will provide a discussion in which commonalities in the thinking of Alison and Peter Smithson, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith and in the development of their projects are identified. it is important to note that this research does not aim at providing a single correct answer for the decline of post-war mass-housing projects. Rather, it aims to contribute to the historical discourse by presenting the subject through narratives from different perspectives. In doing so, this thesis seeks to present the reasons of the decline of such projects as a complex and multi-layered synthesis of social, economic, and political aspects, rather than solely as a result of design and implementation faults.

The examined primary sources reveal the architects' perception of themselves as carrying social responsibility and striving to design for a better society. Both the Smithsons', as well as Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith developed new design concepts which were focused on bringing the community together and creating places for social encounter. However, influenced by the ambitions resulting from the post-war era and the desire for creating a better world, the architects' intentions might have been overly utopian in certain aspects, and not always practical or applicable for their context and time. This trend, as noted by Eisenman (1973) in the context of the Smithsons' works, has led to inconsistencies between the architects' beliefs and goals, and the actual outcome of their designs.

From the findings in the previous chapters, it appears that both the Smithsons' and Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith had certain expectations on how their buildings would be understood by the occupants. The Smithsons' have been especially explicit on that, advocating for the idea that a building speaks a certain language (Smithson & Smithson, 1972). However, the notion that a building conveys a universal language and the expectations that its occupants will understand it as intended, might have partially contributed to the outcome of the projects. Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill were built during a time when intense re-construction and slum clearance programs were taking place. These times have introduced a new housing form - the flat (Hashemi, 2013). While people were offered better living conditions, they were relocated to unfamiliar urban structures. Therefore, the resulting vandalism and crime may not solely be a failure of the buildings to communicate how they should be used, but they may also stem from a misinterpretation by the occupants, as their life had been shifted to a new urban form.

The outcome of these post-war housing projects raises important questions on the role of the architect in society. Despite the Smithsons', Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith's efforts to create a better society through their designs, they had no control over the social and political developments of the time. As evident from the previous chapters, Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill housed some of the most deprived people in society. The decision to house only people from low social-economic classes in these housing developments was a governmental one. Perhaps if the projects had offered a mix of social and owner-occupied apartments, as it is often the case in current housing developments, they would have had a different outcome.

Zeifman (2015) argues that by judging the success of an architect or a product of his work on how successfully it can resolve the social, economic and political forces of the time, an opportunity is missed to appreciate the possibilities that architecture can bring within a wider context. Even though the architects might have allowed for certain design faults or might have been unrealistically optimistic in certain aspects, it is undeniable that the Smithsons', Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, as well as many other architects from the post-war era, have made significant contributions to the field of architecture by introducing innovative concepts and ideas.

6 CONCLUSION

This thesis presented a comparative case study of two exemplary for the post-war period projects – Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill. The main objective was to uncover commonalities in the development of the projects, as well as in the design thinking, ideas, and practice of the involved architects. Despite the extensive existing research on post-war mass housing and on the projects individually, they have not often been compared to each other even though they share similar characteristics. The projects were analysed on different layers, beginning with the historical context they were built in, the thinking and beliefs of the architects involved, the intentions behind the designs and the reception of the projects.

This multi-layered analysis incorporated different perspectives, from professionals to residents, revealing that historical discourse is a collection of various narratives. Rather than providing a simple answer to the decline of the projects, the thesis demonstrates that the outcome of Robin Hood Gardens and Park Hill is a complex synthesis of social, political, and economic reasons. The architects Alison and Peter Smithson, Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith, were taken as representatives for the post-war period, and their desire for bringing societal change through their designs was explored through their thinking and beliefs and how those take a physical built form.

The shared vision of the architect as an actor in society has brought up the question of to what extent the architect can successfully implement their ideas in a historical context fuelled by issues caused by the World War II. While the thesis does not overlook the architectural faults in the design of the projects highlighted by critics, it argues that the decline of the buildings cannot be attributed solely to that. It is essential to recognize the contributions that architects from the post-war period have brought to the field of architecture, even when their buildings have eventually faced demolition.

Currently, when the need for affordable housing continues to grow, looking back in history and learning from past developments of social housing can prevent undesirable outcomes in future mass-housing projects. Ultimately, this knowledge may help in designing progressive housing that meets the needs of society and endures for a long time.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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