

Re-scripting the streets in the sky

Shifts in the typology of a listed building in Park Hill, Sheffield

Abstract

Inspired by Le Corbusier's ideas for vertical living, the concept of "Streets in the Sky" was created in the UK in the 1950's to describe large-scale circulation at a level above the ground in high-rise buildings. The term was originally coined by the Smithsons, in their 1952 entry for the Golden Lane competition, but the first built manifestation in British social housing was in the design of Park Hill, Sheffield, in the late 1950's.

Park Hill was designed to encourage social interaction between residents and even allowed vehicles to move on the elevated decks. The new "Streets in the Sky" were the nearest social housing ever got to imitate ground level street conditions. In 1998, English Heritage assessed the building as being of international importance, and included as a listed entry. The importance of the elevated decks is evident throughout the listing report, and the historical significance of the "Streets in the Sky" clearly stands out.

A visit to one of the recently redeveloped flanks of Park Hill, however, reveals otherwise: the "Streets in the Sky" have been significantly altered. This paper will discuss the shift that I have observed in Park Hill's redevelopment. What started as a listing based on a historical concept, shifted during the reconstruction in ways that have changed the typology of the building. Interactions between developers, altering user needs and limitations from existing materials have impacted on the historical associations of the new development and have re-scripted the narrative of the "Streets".

Keywords

Social Housing, Heritage, Streets in the Sky, Sheffield, Park Hill, Le Corbusier, Smithsons