

Urban redevelopment and market in London (1980-1995)

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The aim of this research is to consider the urban changes in London over the two last decades, starting from the impact of Thatcher's neoliberalistic policies on town planning to the latest approaches on urban regeneration problems.

Since 1979, the year in which the Conservative Party won the election, there has been a gradual process of simplification and weakening on land planning at a national level. At that time the planning system was still based on post-war legislation, and was no longer able to work in changed social, economic and political surroundings.

The slogan "*Free market-strong State*" lies at the origin of the relaxation of planning controls on natural market trends, of a growing private action in urban regeneration, and, in the meantime, of strong centralization at the strategic level together with the public participation reduction. The "*Local Government Act 1985*" abolished the *Greater London Council* and the other six Metropolitan County Councils, institution at the top of the metropolitan planning hierarchy and responsible for the strategic plans. As a result a new planning system was established in these areas: a *Strategic Guidance*, prepared by the Department of the Environment (DoE), and a *Unitary Development Plan*, prepared by the Metropolitan local authorities (boroughs), conforming to the DoE strategy. The previous *Structure* and *Local Plans* were unified under a single one which could be completely or partially revisioned by the Secretary of the State for the Environment (SoS).

In the same direction a number of government initiatives towards the urban regeneration were adopted; the *Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980* introduced two main features in order to stimulate and encourage economic activities: the *Enterprise Zones* - government selected areas with the aim of regenerating private sector initiative, through strong fiscal exemptions and a simplified planning system - and the *Urban Development Corporations* - QUAGOs (Quasi Autonomous Governmental Organizations), whose members were appointed by the SoS, to pursue the regeneration of particularly derelict urban areas.

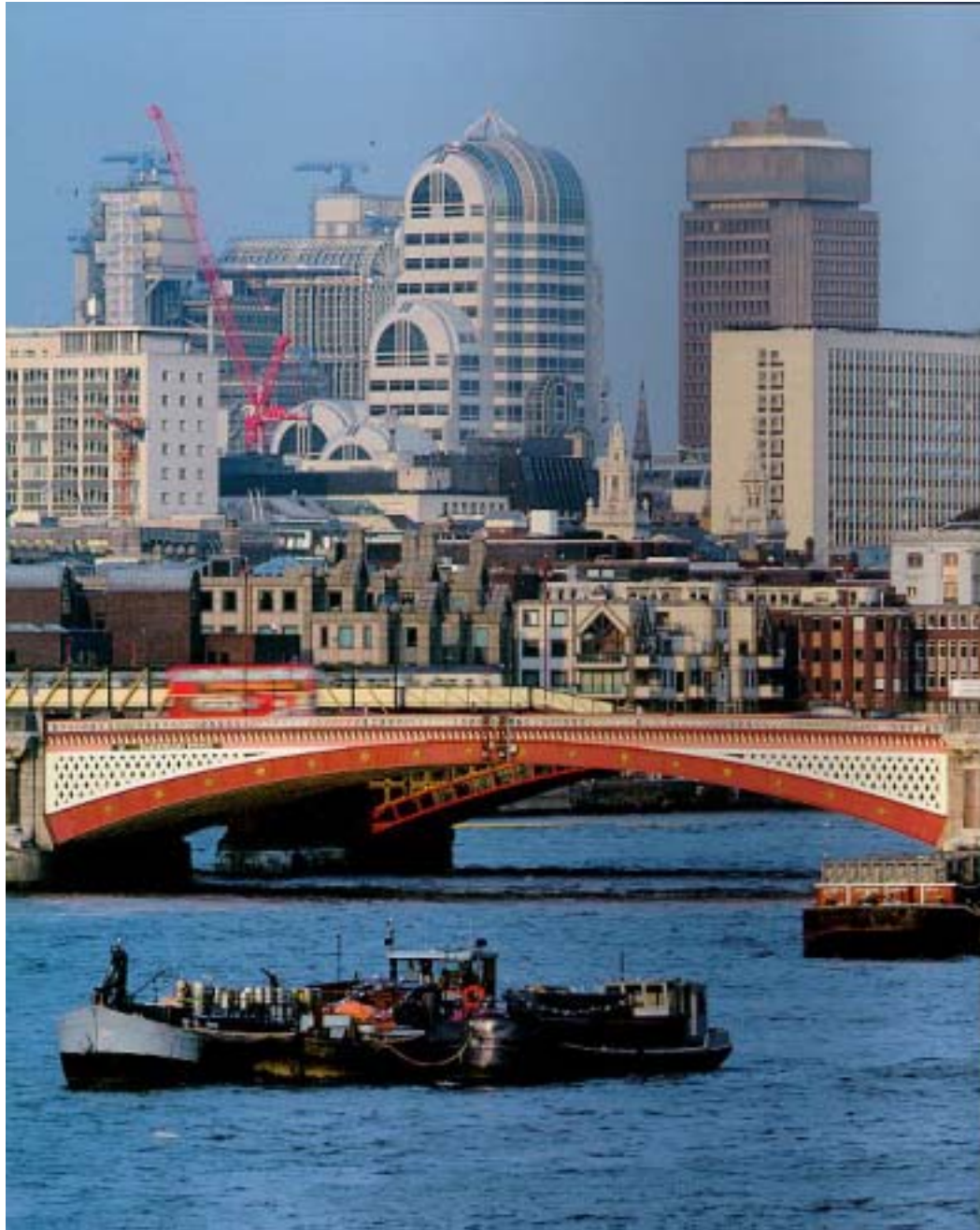
Fig1

Examples of this new planning approach include the heavy redevelopment which have taken place in the London Docklands(pict.1) since the early eighties and the series of projects for the regeneration of King's X area.



picture 1

These two particular cases have been analyzed in depth as they emphasize the evolution of urbanistic approaches over the last decade. After having proved the failure of a style based exclusively on urban regeneration connected with the stimulation of private enterprises (*leverage planning*), in the nineties new governmental initiatives have been promoted towards a broader partnership between public and private sectors (*partnership planning*) and towards a planning style both responsive to market trends and to community interests (*responsive planning*): the *City Challenge*, the *Single Regeneration Budget* and the *Private Finance Initiative*.



picture 2

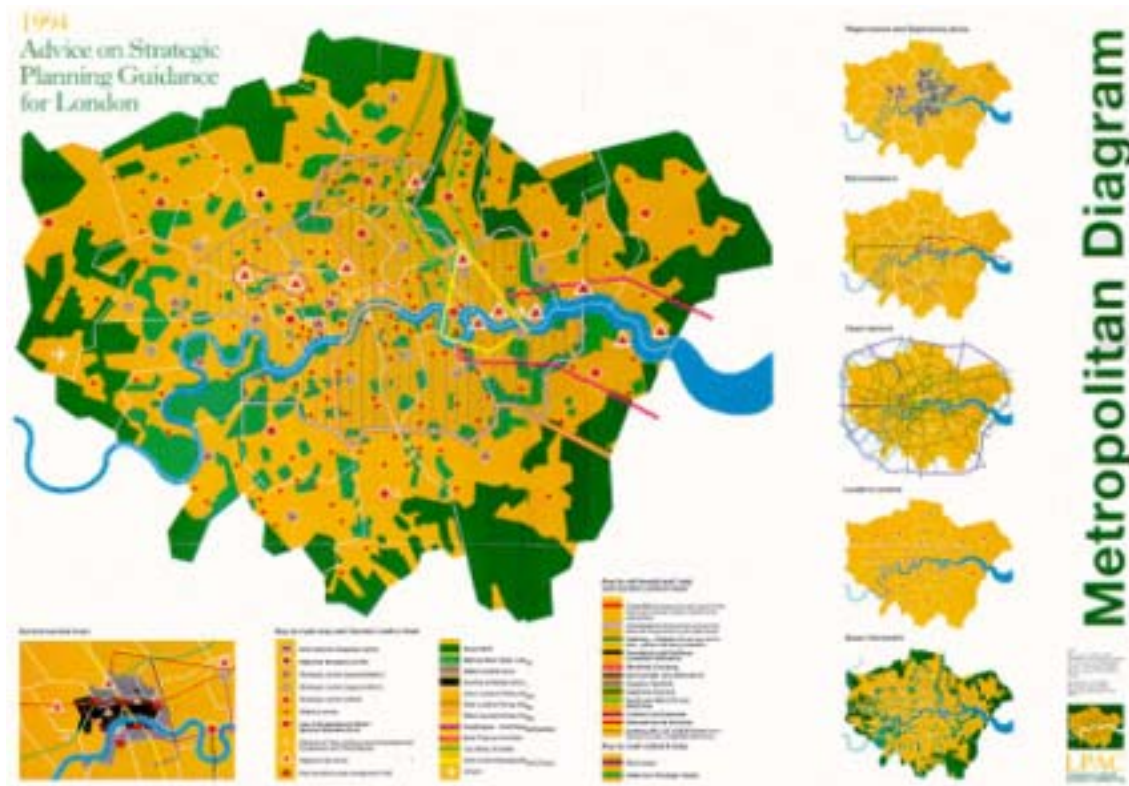
The eighties showed London in its competitive race with other "world cities" and in its conforming to the global economical restructuring; the latter had dramatic effects on land use: the first reason for the decay of *Inner City Areas* has to be recognized in the strong manufacturing crisis, together with the increasing power of the *FBS* sector (*Financial-Business-Service*) and the following office market *boom* (pict. 2).

The real estate market *boom* supported by the financial deregulation and the employment restructuring represented the main factors at the base of

redevelopment in London during the eighties; actually this was not supported by efficient investments for infrastructures, particularly for transport.

Since 1987 a series of new projects has been carried out in order to improve the existing transport network and in so doing to help economic growth: the *Jubilee Line extension* to Stratford (to be opened in March 1998) and the *Regional Metro Network* (still in the project phase).

Finally the growing importance of the environmental issues lies at the heart of the *sustainable development* and of the *Advice on Strategic Planning Guidance for London 1994*, published by the *London Planning Advisory Committee* (pict. 3).



picture 3

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