

■
Emmanuelle
Borne

EDITORIAL

THE EXCEPTION AGAINST THE RULE

Patrik Schumacher, principal at Zaha Hadid Architects, delivered his solution to addressing the London housing crisis at the World Architecture Festival in Berlin, from 16 to 18 November: "Housing for everyone can only be provided by freely self-regulating and self-motivating market process", he said. Urging for the elimination of public urban regulations, which he believes suppress architectural creativity, Patrik Schumacher called for the privatization of all forms of social housing. Although the ultra-liberal views of this pro-Brexit architect are well known in the field, they nonetheless appeared to be more provocative a few days after the election of Donald Trump. If you consider them from a French point of view, they are all the more so.

Some might argue that "Réinventer Paris" call for innovative projects and its successors "Réinventer la Seine" or "Inventons la Métropole du Grand Paris" are a first step towards privatizing the city. However, we are far from seeing a French starchitect rebelling against the SRU Act (Solidarity and Renewal), or more to the point against its article 55, which, since 13 December 2000, requires that towns with more than 1,500 inhabitants in the Paris region (and more than 3,500 in other regions) should have at least 20% social housing by 2020 (25% since January 2013). Imagine a French architect recommending the end of social landlords as the 3F group, Paris Habitat OPH or Grand Lyon Habitat. Taking this a little further still, imagine French architecture deprived of Nemausus, in Nîmes, or even the Bois-Le-Prêtre tower, in Paris. In France, social housing is not only the result of quotas and public incentives. It also stems from visionary policies, it is a field of experimentation, and a testing ground for the whole of the city. Whereas Schumacher talks about a "tragedy" when referring to land dedicated to social housing in the city centre, French architects see in it a "mixed-use" that benefits all sectors of society.

Admittedly, if we continue to refer to it every other minute - by calling the slightest programmatic layering "mixed-use" - the term gradually becomes devoid of meaning. The fact is that mixed-use building projects, that not only concern social but also functional mix, continue to flourish throughout the world and especially in France. Many of these are not just a variety of openings in a façade. The city that Schumacher advocates does not resemble a city freed from normative constraints, but is closer to one in which the market would only favour one "parametricist" feature. Although mixed-use is proposed too often as a justification, some building projects show, here and there, that it has many fine days ahead of it - on condition that it is not limited to a regulatory or typological catalogue.