

Development of workplaces and urban industries – a study trip to London

With this semester's studio in the master program of Bergen Arkitektthøgskole – Think Thank Bergen 3- we study civic buildings with a focus on workplaces and industrial buildings. The location for final projects of the studio are periphery areas of Bergen, Sotra and Askøy, idyllically located sites next to water and mountains with single family houses as the dominant typology.

So what could be a future urbanisation and densification of these areas?

Therefore the 20 of us students in this course went to London for a study trip during late September to study industrial buildings in a complex and huge city grid as in London. Together with our studio teachers, Jérôme Picard and Jonathan Woodroff, we spent the days in 3 different areas – walking – talking and drawing.

The first day we visited the AA school of London, then we went to see the 1:1500 big model of the whole of London that was made in 2008 and that is used over and over again for city planners and investors acting in London where one can see all over upcoming new projects represented in white buildings.

Further on we walked in the area of Fitzrovia where many buildings have turned into small scale industry in media and film, interesting here was to register the small passages and backyard that became social spaces for a network of common industries and workplaces. We passed as well big educational centres as the University of London and ended the day at Kings Place, a fairly new project in the area behind Kings Cross that not so long ago was more of a dead end with only industrial buildings that has now been invested in with several new buildings – among them this Kings Place that includes a mix of civic amenities as lecture/concert hall, studio places, galleries and eating place.

Next day we spent in the Olympic Games area from 2012, near the metro of Stratford. This area was before a kind of wasteland with an industrial historical identity that is now including Europe's largest shopping mall, a public swimming pool designed by architect Zaha Hadid and a large sculpture tower, after the games this area seems to have become a popular place to spend the weekend for all kinds of people – so in one way it's well revitalised as the same time as it might have lost something of its former identity.

Just across this kind of urban landscape are the areas of Hackney Wick where a cluster of industrial red brick buildings has turned into different small businesses as food resales and catering, studio places for artists – as well as new housing projects.

From here we walked south by the canal to enter another former industrial area – Three Mills – that had a more polished master plan where the buildings now host schools and TV / film studio.

The last day we spent in Shoreditch and among Brick Lane that since 15 years ago has turned from a rather slummy area to a quite "gentrification one". It's like the rest of London, very multi-cultural, and there is a good mix of Bangladeshi restaurants and food markets and small pop up stores of all kinds. The area had several times a new master plan worked out by the municipality but was always blocked by the association of the different actors in, the creative industry.

Overall it was a very great experience to use London areas references how new and old workplaces can sustain the liveliness of an urban landscape.

By Winnie Westerlund, 4th year student at Bergen School of Architecture

