

Louis Sauer and the Urban Renewal

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ABSTRACT

It is necessary to emphasise Louis Sauer contribute on the Urban renewal of Philadelphia, where in less than three decades the neighbourhood was completely developed. Even the architect is not widely known, his work has a lot of values on the redeveloping the neighbourhood by improving the biggest problems of the period. He was able to focus on the issue of construction or renovation of historic city centres or built up organized areas. Sauer's strategy on achieving his goals was strongly related with his vicinity with the developers and the context. On one hand, he recovered the urban fabric and restored the area's historic building; on the other hand he constructed new buildings. Louis transformed the area of Society Hill from a slum to one of the most interesting neighbourhoods, by a successful integration between the new, the old and the improvement of the life quality.

Not only on the Society Hill, but even in other projects he was known for:

- The modernism on the form and the shape of dwelling.
- The intelligent relationship between his designs and history of the places, in order to respected the modern concept of the period
- The ability to interpret though design the theme offered by urban scale, by taking into consideration all contexts attribute.
- The originality of his interventions on the process of environmental transformation, found by his cultural and professional position.

Sauer was inspired from the Anglo-Saxon culture and from "sense of dwelling" Kahn lessons, which worked for the middle class by promoting low-rise high-density housing, open spaces, context and old and new (historic and modern) sense. By his work, he improved life quality, psychological and physical wellbeing, peace of mind and environment quality.

Finally, the work of Louis Sauer is interesting because of the possible positive effects it may have in Albanian context. As long as, the major part of Albanian neighbourhoods have a lot of problems with the constructing strategies, with the social and urban context realizing, with the problematic relevant areas, with historical abuse ext., Sauer's strategies are totally applicable. What can be easily realize from Louis approach mentioned in the paper, is the fact that sometimes the solutions are easier than everyone think. According to Albania reality, each method reminds a solution that can take place in different case studies.

KEYWORDS: urban renewal, Louis Sauer, developing strategies, relationship with context, relationship with history, life quality improvement

1 INTRODUCTION

The problem, I would say tragically, is that the famous architects – who are famous because they are gifted and have a powerfully aesthetic – are not interested in mass residential buildings, they design, what I call museum architecture, commissioned by developers hunting for the market elite. But as for the ordinary people's houses, forget it: evidently, for top architects, housing fees are much too low and working with the nitty-gritty housing market place too difficult. So, to get back into uniformity, the question is the other way round: there is no esthetic agreement at all among those who design buildings, which result in a confused medley. The ugliness, therefore, is not the uniformity but the lack of an urban design ethic: no consequently of a fabric that pulls individual buildings together. Today we architects suffer from aesthetic immorality

(Louis Sauer's interview by Stefano Gulamneli, domus 916, July August 2008)

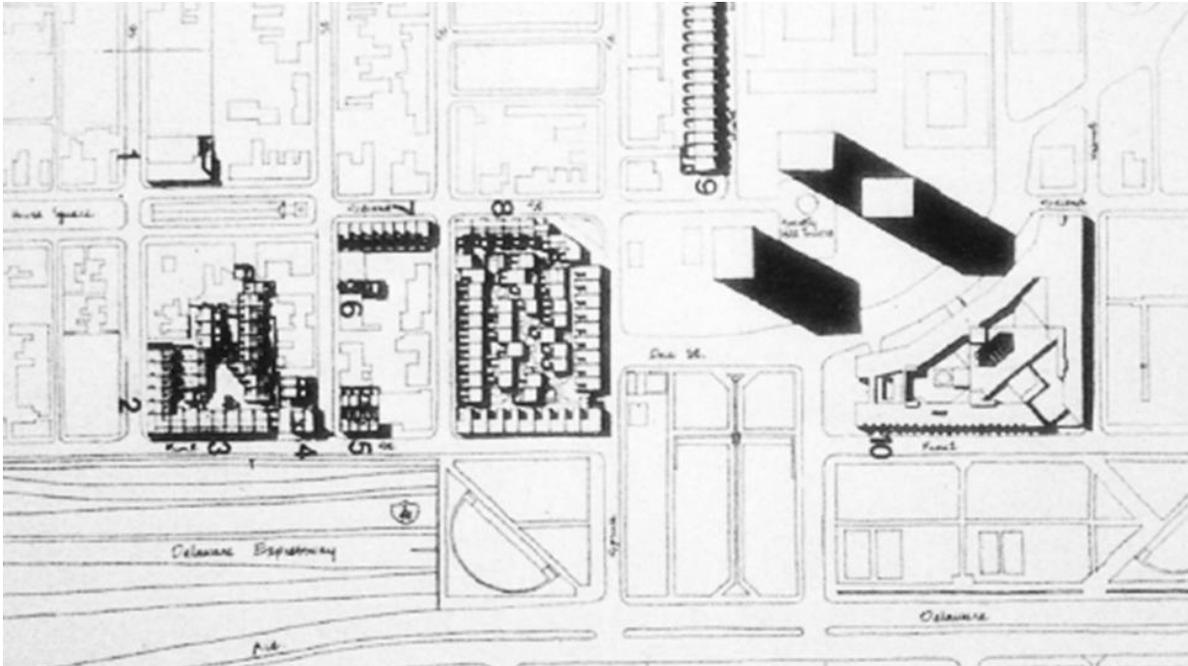
2 SAUER'S PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTING STRATEGY

Sauer is widely known for the renewal of Society Hill, a neighbourhood in Philadelphia. There were a lot of architects that participated in this process, but the most important and significant one was Louis Sauer, not only for the sheer number of projects, the high architectural and urban quality but even for his original solutions.

From 1957-1958 he worked to draw the plan of the relevant area's redevelopment. In this plan were included some topics that helped the process of revitalization, such as:

- A historic study of the zone and the documentation of all architectural needed data.
- What should be stored, renewed or demolished and rebuilt?
- Preparing and studying some other alternative site plans that were designed as low-rise high density construction.

Sauer's work on this project was really intense, but this didn't help him to have a good relationship with authorities and public administration. His disagreeing with Bacon's political program affected even his work with him. Anyway, Sauer had his strongest points, his planning, designing and constructing strategy, which made him a well known architect.



1. Head House Cinema
2. Lombard Condos*
3. Head House East and New market*
4. Twin Houses*, Grant House* and Morrison House*
5. Penn's View
6. Mc Clennen House*
7. Second Street Townhouses*
8. Penn's Landing Square*
9. Locust Street Townhouses*
10. Penn's Landing Motel

Figure 1: Plan of Society Hill illustrating Sauer's commissioned work in Society Hill

Relationship with Context

Sauer was strongly connected with the context. Separated on three different levels of interventions, the context affected on Louis' projects in different ways. During his entire career he worked on urban setting, renovation settings and natural settings. What made his work a successful one was his behavior with the physical characteristics of the place and their combination with other important parts of projection. Thereby, Louis Sauer was a realistic architect. Valuing seriously the settings Louis was able to make meaningful, powerful and realistic operas.

Relationship between Members

In Sauer's opinion public administration were really distant of the population's real needs. This was one of the Louis' strongest points, a really sociable architect which was used to do door to door survey. On this way, he brought the architect closer with the customer, to bring a desirable way of living near the inhabitants. Thereby he still emphasizes that a strong relationship between the project's participants is really crucial.

All members that should be part of decision-making are:

- Public authorities
- Financial institutions
- Land owners
- Builders, trade organization and materials manufacture
- Community representatives
- Residential users
- Planners and architects
- The developers

Sauer believe that no one could be the head of the group and that free enterprise and the laws of the market, as well as real need of the poorest part of population, are the starting points for an architect's work. Every advice or ways of thinking are worth to be taken into consideration. Only in this way of thinking, the context would be near of the architect, and the building near of the inhabitant. He agreed that all his design had one thing in common, they all required him to make a decision if his projects were useful and well desired from the clients.

Relationship between Public and Private

The connection between public and private is strongly related with the inside and the outside of the building, but it is not based in the physical definition of each word. To understand what Sauer meant with this relationship is necessary to comprehend the meaning of both "house" and "home". The two words refer to two different realities: one for the material, physical, public object; the other for the intimate, familiar, private sphere created by the occupants. Exactly this kind of separation helped Sauer to create the plans of the buildings, by promoting outer patios or courtyards that effect on the center house location and on the living privacy. Thereby, the separation between public and private is made by a "curtain", which is designed and constructed less to express the private inner world than to provide a response to the public world that improves both interior and exteriors.

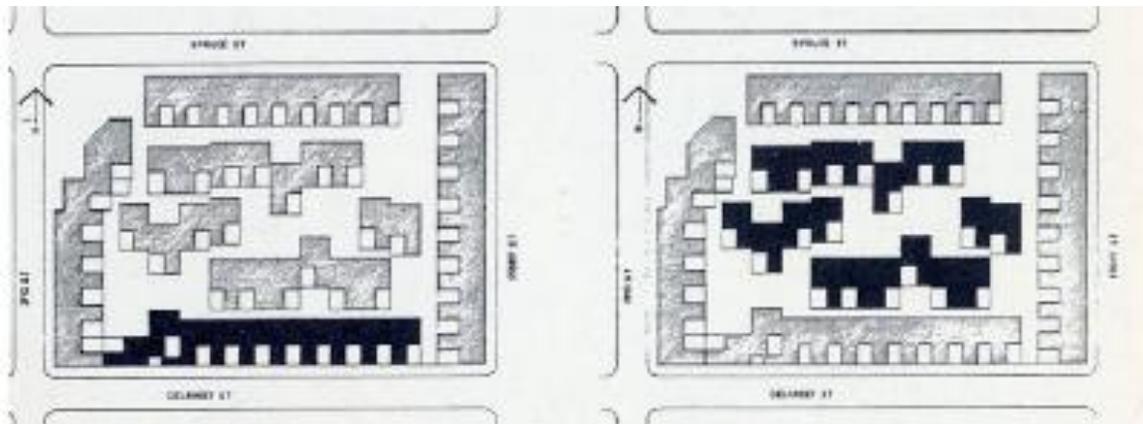


Figure 2: Site Area of Penn's Landing Square

Skin and Spaces

The concepts of skin and space are related with the façade and interior space. This 'skin' image helps us to understand how the facade's rules of formation are independent from the way in which the buildings' interiors are laid out. The term 'spaces', on the other hand, refers to the

total appropriation of all three physical dimensions, which guides the architectural design choices for the interior.

In the most projects of Sauer the façade and the interior spaces do not create a relationship between each other. According to him the first one is related with the relevant context and more connected with public sphere. The second one with the inhabitant's way of living and is related with the private sphere. Due to this approach, different Sauer's projects have different facades.

Low-Rise High-Density Housing

Dense enough to support public transportation, low enough to avoid dependence on elevators were the attempts to bring together the benefits of urban and suburban living. Normally this strategy was improved in existing context and focused in the links between the present situation and the future one. Sauer's challenge was the calculation and the good use of the space, in order to achieve the same numbers of habitants as on a high rise building. n

Continuity and Discontinuity

The concepts of continuity and discontinuity derived from the necessity of inserting a new building or block of buildings into an existing context. There are different settlements where Sauer was forced to use different facades on the same building, because the different parts of the building weren't the same. In this way he not only managed to create an improved landscape, but even to predict a functional and comfortable interior.

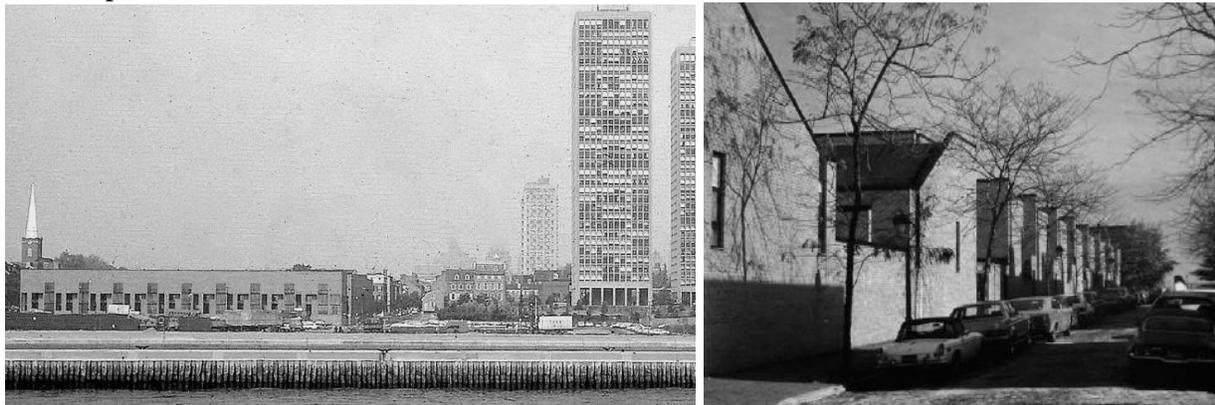


Figure 3: View from Delaware River (North Facade) and view of Front Street Town Houses (North Facade).

Hierarchy of Spaces

In Sauer's projects, there is a hierarchy in the use of spaces, which range from the public space at the street to the common spaces of a group of units, from the semi-common spaces of the entrance-way to the semi-private spaces of the fenced gardens, the interior patios and the terraces.



Figure 4: Interior of Peen's Landing Square

Organization and the Arrangement of the Units

The unit is clearly divided into a 'served area', living room and bedrooms, and a 'service area', which we can define as an area for circulation and services. This separation of the two areas not only solves the problem of how to distribute interior space, but also helps to achieve a plans' arrangement based on placing the buildings farther apart or closer together.

Planning Methodology

For Sauer, key elements on the residential houses aren't different part of the dwelling, but the "housing package", made by horizontal and vertical elements. He connects in his designs the overall project with the setting of the graduated scales for interior room privacy, while he adopts a distribution system (for the most part directly from the ground level). In doing this, he expands the design method to be based on the housing package (rather than on the typical housing unit) as the basic element in the overall housing design.

SOME SOCIETY HILL PROJECTS

Peen's Landing Square

Peen's Landing square is one of the most well-known works of Sauer. Situated near of the Delaware River in Society Hill, the block has a measure of 9300 sqm. It consists in a total of 118 low-rise high-density housing (apartments and row houses), with a density of 4048 square meters, or 460 inhabitant per hectare.

What can be well noticed from the Sauer's work on Peen's landing Square are the:

- Low-rise high-density housing techniques
- Relationship with context
- Continuity and discontinuity
- Open spaces qualities



Figure 5



Figure 6

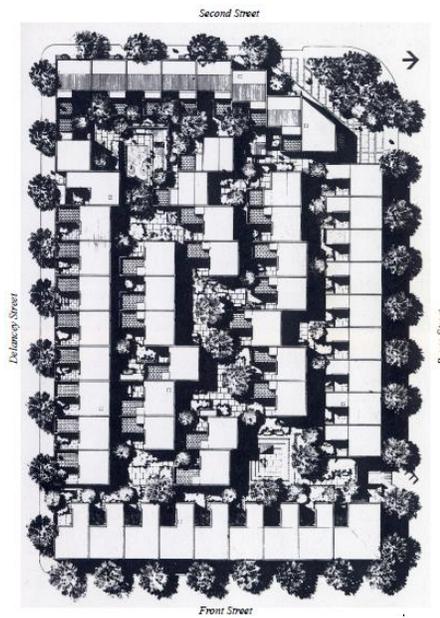


Figure 7

2.1 Locust Street Townhouses (1967)

The Locust Street Townhouses is the first multifamily complex designed by Sauer. It is made by 14 townhouses on the South of the Society Hill towers. The site was part of the competition plan conceived by Pei and Zeckendorf, then sub-contracted by other different local developers who became Sauer's clients.

Due to the vicinity with Pei towers, Louis was forced to have them as a simulation for making both project (Locust Street complex and Society Hill towers) familiar to each other. From an architectural point of view the projects were so far to each other. This made the Sauer's work a challenge on finding a form and a proportion able to dialogue with the imposing scale of the towers without being perceptually squashed by them. Thereby, Sauer was forced to study the site and the Pei's projecting language and then using on his work exterior details and elements that were able to respond to the towers language.

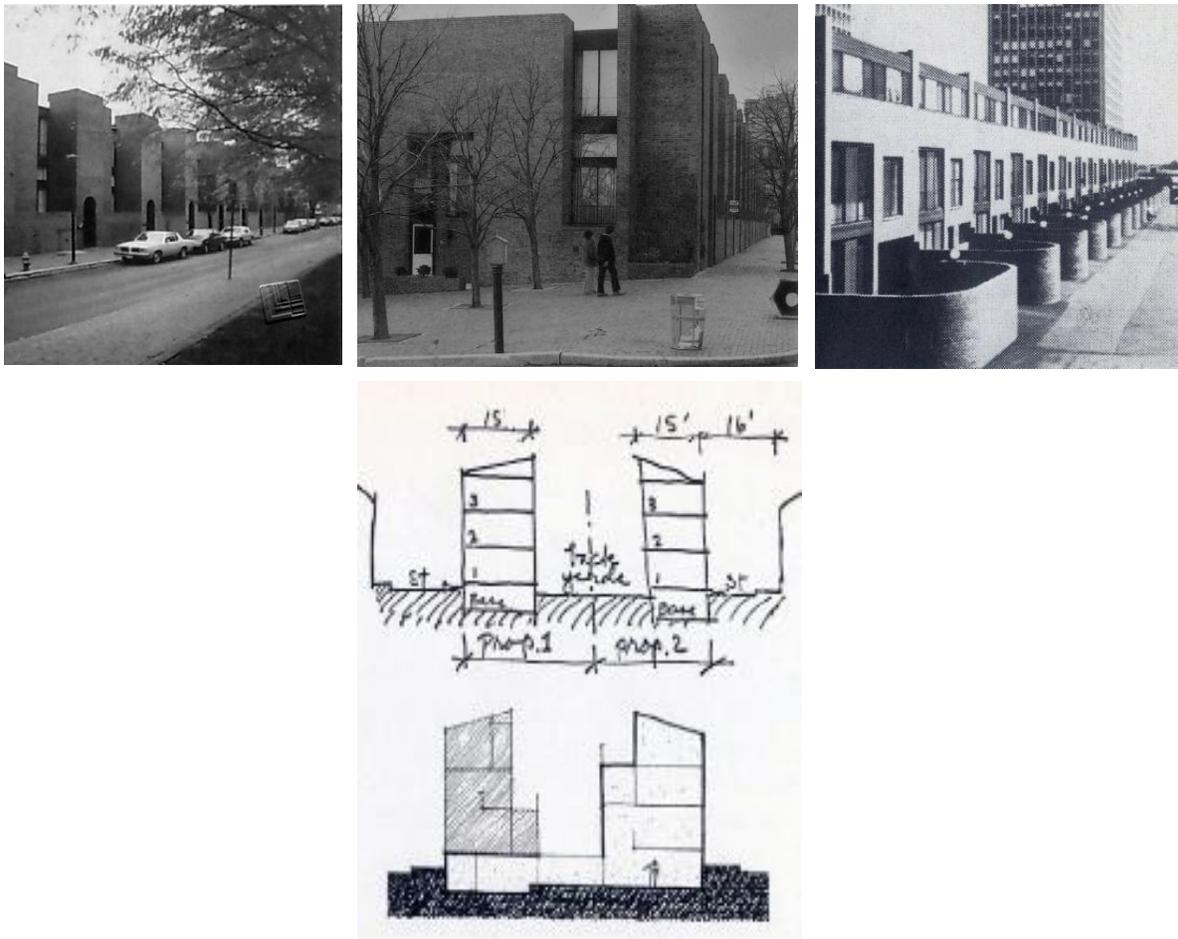


Figure 8

2.2 The Buten House (1962-1964)

The building is placed on the western edge of the Society Hill, on a site 1800m long and 450m wide, and before of intervention it was only one room for each floor. For this reason it was called "Father, Son and Holly Spirit". Sauer advised his client to buy the two residential

buildings (since there were two residential dwellings) to create a large apartment for the Buten family and a small one to rent.

Louis promoted a great use of space, by digging the ground floor and connecting by a large corridor the two buildings. In this way he changed the separating yard into a central one that joins the two apartments. Thereby, it was gained a new idea of interior and facades.

As a conclusion, Sauer with Buten House demonstrated one solution for the renovation of trinity-type buildings by combining two different building in two opposite sides by improving the most demanding architectural requirements in terms of expression, dimensions and distribution.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Society Hill is one of the most significant works of Louis Sauer. What came out from his strategies are:

- **Kahn lessons:** Includes the idea of architecture's "desire to be" in one place, in one time, and in one space, that returned into obsession in his designs. All these can be ascribed to his study with Kahn and to Kahn's entreaties to understand architecture and its social value as an "institution of man".
- **No designer "signature":** He has no particular affinity with "styles" and "trends" because to him the problem is different. For him the birth of architecture is inexorably bound to its social necessity, to its reason for being in a given place, to its embodiment of a plan that is economic and part of the human institution.
- **Architectural form purpose:** It is not the originality of stylistic expression that gives value to architecture, but rather the overall result of an architect's design choices, their ability to extol the setting in which the finished work is situated and to satisfy the different functional, poetic and the societal significance of that setting
- **Regarded to what is above discussed, may Sauer's strategy constitute operative models for Albania?**

The last 20 years, there are a lot of important changes in terms of the construction and the development of the territory, buildings, way of living, mentality ext., all over the country. Unfortunately, the Albanian changes had not been totally successful. Therefore, the major part of the area is now suffering a lack of identity, a lack of choices regarding expression and setting and a lack of research connected with social and urban context.

In Sauer work we can identify some possible effective results his work may have in our context, such as:

- Residential revitalization
- Classy and good quality buildings in neighbourhoods
- New systems of behaving with historic buildings
- Great analyses of what should be stored, renewed or demolished and rebuilt?
- Successful relationship with context, constructing low rise high density buildings or high structures according to the situation
- Effective connection with social context taking into consideration mentality, mental and spiritual wellbeing
- Helpful strategies for different regulatory plans
- The coordination of all the urban planning, regulatory and legislative actions

As a conclusion, the work of Louis is a really well known one because of his own abilities. He was near of community not only because of his planning skills but even because of his social behaviours with it.

Finally, what should be taken into consideration from Sauer's work are:

- His work quality and the success on engagement of stakeholders helped him to resolve what he called a challenge, planning considering both environmental and historical contexts.
- His gained experience on different projects, made him familiar with the techniques and problems connected with urban renewal projects. Therefore he earned the trust of the Redevelopment Authority, community and developers.
- His professional ability, his open-mindedness with regards to the processes involved, and his specific expertise on how to approach a residential planning project in a controlled yet flexible manner.

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