

## Introduction

We are currently witnessing another tall building boom, as the economies of the world's great cities improve, as land becomes scarcer in their central locations and as capital seeks safer locations for investment. This special edition on tall buildings seeks to reflect on the variety of approaches from urban design and planning perspectives that cities have taken in recent years. We can see that the current phase of building tall has a number of characteristics: firstly, the form of tall buildings reflects the particular drivers for development of a specific time and place; secondly, the examples that follow show how the uniqueness of place (country-city-neighbourhood-site) and the dynamics of local planning regimes affect the form of the city through the decisions taken on tall building proposals; thirdly that the particularity of place combined with the characteristics of the local regulatory regime result in complex decision making processes that require the benefits of tall building proposals to be weighed against impacts and the desire to regenerate and re-image; and finally, the examples outlined show, however, that there is potential to actively manage tall building proposals in a way that positively contributes to a sense of place and evolution of the city.

Our special edition starts with a series of articles looking at London. [London is central to current debates about tall buildings and their impact, be it positive or negative; tall building champions are promoting specific proposals across the metropolitan area in weak regulatory environment. Facing a competitive threat from other financial centres the Mayor's desire for London to retain and strengthen its pre-eminent economic position has meant the prioritisation of financial and business concerns in spatial development planning strategies. This approach is being challenged with some of London's constituent municipalities who are concerned that over development and the destruction of the character of their areas might result from poorly regulated tall buildings.](#)

David Mathewson reflects on the tall building boom currently taking place in the city and strategic attempts at managing the consequent change. This is followed by Günter Gassner's article which explores the city's visual appearance and how aesthetic arguments are used in political negotiations about particular tall building proposals. [Chris Williamson examines the intersection of tall buildings and transport infrastructure drawing from a range of examples including Crossrail's Woolwich Arsenal station.](#) Ziona Strelitz then reflects upon any lessons learned from the last tall building boom in the 2000s and whether we have seen any 'good' examples of tall buildings from this period. Tim Catchpole augments that reflection with his own review of tall buildings in the pipeline in the city.

The second part of the special edition starts with Charlotte Nyholm's article exploring the pressure to densify Finland's second largest city, Espoo (itself part of the Helsinki capital region). She reflects upon the city's densification strategy, the political will required for its implementation and need to create high quality built environments. Philip Oldfield then

examines Singapore's engagement with the tall building typology and how they might provide socially sustainable - and even aspirational - housing for a wide sociodemographic. Finally my own article looks at Dublin and the impact of its gradually improving economy on the form of the city. Using Boland's Mills, a hugely significant site of cultural value to the Easter Rising 1916, the article will reflect upon issues of character in debates about new tall buildings in the city.

Together the articles seek to explore the multi-dimensional nature of tall building proposals and the challenges that they present to urban designers. Their reflections are invaluable as we wrestle with the complexities of their design, impact and place in our cities.