

way, the carriers of high ideals—yet they were not built on a deep understanding of the everyday life of the people they were to house (after all, the idealists were planning to change that). The overwhelming focus was on speed and scale. Whole new towns were rolled out in the landscape outside of our old cities in a forbidding and anonymizing modernist architecture. They were often very cheaply built, with the new techniques of precast concrete slabs allowing quick assembly on site. Some of the high-rises are system building at its worst. After an optimistic, bright and sunny start, these estates began to get run down. The working class, which made up the vast majority of the population on these estates, was particularly vulnerable to changes in society in the 1970s and 1980s as many Western economies moved away from resource industries like mining and eventually also from manufacturing toward a service economy. This brave new postindustrial world required a completely different skillset from its workers. People who were never rich to begin with found themselves on a downward slope, without any means of reversing the steady decline (Bourdieu et al. 1999). At the same time, the boom in property prices caused city life to become increasingly expensive. The housing estates were often the cheapest places to live within this new ecosystem, and consequently they attracted an influx of people who, through nature or nurture, could not connect to the new economy—bringing mental issues, poverty, drugs, and crime into these areas. Bourdieu's chilling description of the plight of people in a region in the south of France where new management practices and a general economic shift led to decreasing employment in a once-thriving industrial area makes for extremely depressing reading. Social suffering becomes entrenched as it is passed on from generation to generation. Immigrant workers (legal and illegal) coming into these areas often raised a new generation growing up in poverty, with a general frustration at the lack of opportunities easily leading to lethargy and a harsh, cynical street culture.

In many estates crime surges, creating an even grimmer situation (Hanley 2007). The incredibly complex network of factors conspiring together to create these problematic situations makes them almost impervious to change. The buildings themselves become very visible symbols of failure, as “slums in the sky.” The stigma that became associated with them reduces the life opportunities of their inhabitants even further. Ill-conceived public spaces create a soulless atmosphere, and the relative isolation of many estates (poor transport, poor shops, and most importantly poor schools) contribute to a downward pull on the inhabitants. Young families who can move away do so, and the people