

Urban Regeneration and Strengthening of Local Neighbourhoods – the Way of Riga

Introduction

The main objective of this study is to review the spatial development processes in the Baltic metropolis – the city of Riga in context of the city's actual spatial planning policy. Review from such a perspective may help us to understand the main spatial development problems (on the other hand those may be also interpreted as challenges) of Riga and to evaluate the city government's chosen way for overcoming these problems. In this particular case only the most important and larger scale spatial development planning challenges and ideas of Riga are described – e.g. strengthening the liveability of the local neighbourhoods through building densification and greater mixture of different functions, planning of new development areas as new and complex local neighbourhoods, transformation of the former industrial and port areas and restructuring of the city's transport system. Some of these are strategic initiatives that probably wouldn't face any big problems in an empty field, but we should take into account that Riga as a city has developed for more than 800 years and under different ideological regimes (like many cities in the Eastern Europe). Therefore implementation of any new spatial ideas in Riga is more complex process, and its guidance must be very careful. Only in such a way we can ensure balanced long-term development of this city and preservation of the valuable heritage from the earlier times.

Historical Development of the Spatial Structure of Riga

Riga is a city with clearly perceptible, precise spatial structure and rich architectural heritage from different ages. It is located on the Eastern part of the Baltic Sea (more precisely in the southern part of the Gulf of Riga) at the mouth of the river Daugava. As written by Grava (1993) the Daugava has been a major penetration route into the large land mass of extreme Eastern Europe since ancient times. Tribal settlements existed here long before the city of Riga was founded in 1201 by the Teutonic invaders and colonizers who subjugated the indigenous populations. Riga assumed considerable prominence during the Middle Ages as a Hansa town, being a key member of this dominant North European trade league in the 15th century. The old town of Riga is still the metropolitan core, with the historical street pattern intact and many buildings surviving the wars and fires that have punctuated the city's history. The old town got its present shape during the 14th to 16th centuries. It covers about 35 hectares large area between the Daugava riverbank and the Riga Canal. Bunkse (1979) describes that the city core bears strong resemblance to northern German medieval towns, sharing with them a fine grain of texture of layout and physical mass. However, Grava (1993) argues that in Riga there is a tradition of and much experience in rebuilding districts and restoring buildings when resources and politics have permitted. It can be seen also now. In some cases such a process raises different opinions in the society – mostly because the private landowners want to rebuild houses on their properties that were destroyed in the Second World War, but society has already got used to those squares as a public space created during the Soviet time.

Further development of Riga's spatial structure starting from the middle of the 16th century was strongly influenced by the introduction of fire-arms that, as Grava (1993) writes, necessitated the rebuilding of fortifications in a broad band around the city, resulting in a series of earthwork embankments and bastions, further protected by a wide moat and open fields for gun battles. These fortification efforts culminated at the end of the 17th century in the construction of a citadel north of the city. We may even say that the first professional urban planning in Riga started after the year 1641 under the Swedish rule, when the city

fortification plan with 12 new bastions, system of defensive moats and a network with regular streets in areas outside the Old Town was worked out. As Bunkse (1979) writes, baroque concepts of open space and horizontality of architectural masses provided complementary, cosmopolitan areas in and around the medieval core. Nevertheless in the first half of the 18th century development of Riga was hindered by the Russian tsar's (Peter the Great) policy who in the year 1714 issued an order that limited building of masonry houses elsewhere in the Russian Empire except for St.Petersburg. A new city development plan was worked out in the year 1769 under the rule of the Russian queen Catherine II. Quite similarly to the Swedish plan it also foresaw regular street network in the suburbs, but directions of some streets were arranged for a joint spatial composition – orientating the main streets to the church spires of the Old Town and thus marking their importance in the cityscape. It was a typical town building approach during the baroque and classicism period. (Krastiņš and Strautmanis, 2002) During that period the cityscape of the inner Riga became denser and the buildings became higher. Dominance was taken by the new type 3-4 stories high residential buildings with high mansard roofs, big windows, balconies and shops located in the ground floor. (Krastiņš a.o., 1988) Most of Riga's suburbs severely suffered during the great fire in the year 1812. Ironically this fire was caused by an official order of the governor general M.G.Essen who was threatened by the possible arrival of the Napoleon's army. However, it didn't come to Riga. Soon after this fire a dynamic reconstruction of Riga's suburbs began.

As Grava (1993) writes, Riga started growing rapidly and steadily in the second half of the 19th century when the Industrial Revolution reached the Russian Empire (at that time the Baltic states were part of the imperial provinces). The regime of the tsars began to emulate European modernization models, at least in the development of machine-driven industry and large economic enterprises. Industrialization transformed Riga from a trading town to a principal manufacturing center. Extensive railroad and port construction ensued as the city assumed the burdens and reaped the benefits of being the urban center closest to the Central Europe. The city's industrial and railroad belt of that period clearly separates the central commercial and apartment district from the subsequent, horizontal expansion.

An important incentive for further development of the cityscape was demolition of the outdated fortification system (ramparts, dams and buildings) during the period of 1857-1863. As a result the picturesque Boulevard ring was created and in the change of 19th and 20th century, due to the rapid development in building the multi-storey rental houses, unique Art Nouveau examples appeared. In addition to that in some neighbourhoods of Riga also wooden architecture complexes of that time have remained. That is unique phenomenon in the beginning of the 21st century. Thanks to these architectural values in the year 1997 the historical centre of Riga was included in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. (Krastiņš and Strautmanis, 2002) The total area of this listed historical centre of Riga is 439 hectares – that is slightly less than 1,5% of the actual area of Riga (304,05 km²).

The city grew to more than a half-million people by 1914. Riga became the undisputed urban center of the extreme western edge of the Russian Empire truly the window to the West across the Baltic Sea. It was a cosmopolitan city, but also the center of growing Latvian national awareness and political activity to break the hold of foreign powers. (Grava, 1993) In the year 1918 Riga became the national capital of the independent Latvia. Bunkse (1979) mentions that Riga's landscape acquired yet another aspect in that time. Commensurate with its capital status, the center of Riga took on a degree of monumentality through governmental structures and symbols of nationhood such as statues and memorials. Monumentality was restrained, in accord with the diminutive size of the nation and with a deeply ingrained, self-conscious tradition of austerity and simplicity.

As Grava (1993) argues, the World War II had a devastating effect on the city, and population dropped again below 200 000 (during the wars the population number of Riga was between 350 000 and 380 000). The political scene changed drastically once more. Subsumed by the USSR, Riga, as the principal managerial and administrative center on the

western frontier, was to keep an eye on the friendly socialist nations nearby and the threatening NATO forces over the horizon. Most important, the central powers in Moscow decided to build on the Baltics relatively strong manufacturing and infrastructure base at an accelerated pace. This deliberate USSR policy affected Riga and resulted in a steady stream of immigrating professionals, managers, and crowds of factory workers with their families, who were only too glad to have access to the city's superior living conditions, as compared to Belorussia, the Russian Federation and other republics to the east. Riga also became the headquarters of the Baltic military district, the home of two special military colleges, the hub of the Baltic rail and air travel network, the center of the fisheries industry, and the home of a number of other all-union level management units. The population climbed to 900 000 by 1985. Bunkse (1979) precisely indicates that the face of the city was transformed according to the projected ideals of the Soviet planners. The critical element in that transformation was the construction of apartment buildings on large scale, usually on the periphery of urban cores.

During the Soviet time all USSR cities (also Riga) had to develop a regularly updated master plan (or Genplan in the Soviet parlance). Such master plans on the scale of 1:10 000 were worked out in the years 1955, 1969 and 1983. The main achievements of these master plans were creation of numerous large scale housing projects situated outside the railway ring that encircles the inner city.

After regaining the independence of Latvia, as Grava (1993) argues, Riga had no mechanism in place to make adjustments to the Soviet urban heritage. It was not because of the fact that the master plan of the year 1983 was not acceptable or bad from the town building point of view, but mostly because the socioeconomic situation had changed and there were no tools or resources to carry on with implementation of the Soviet time plan. Planners had to face a completely different reality that was based on the democratic principles in the free market economy.

A new Riga City Development Plan was worked out and adopted in the year 1995. Ideologically it was modern and its goals were very ambitious. However, it couldn't foresee the big chaos in the property structure caused by the land reform and the sequence of the economical development processes that had so big impact on spatial planning in all type of municipalities of Latvia. More and more real-estate objects became privatized, and the land reform didn't respect any spatial planning principles. As a result the land property structure became so complex (e.g. private land plots are crisscrossing the large scale housing areas quite often irrespective to the location of inner yards and houses) that it was very difficult and in some cases even impossible to carry on with implementation of this development plan.

Actual Spatial Structure of Riga

Simply describing the spatial structure of any settlement we may generalise that it consists of natural basis and human created or built-up areas. As regards Riga we may talk about the river Daugava (and water systems linked to it), dunes, forests and meadows as well as about built-up areas (neighbourhoods) and roads - a complex system that have been developing for 800 years. In every period the cityscape has been forming at different social, economical and technological possibility conditions. Every period has brought its specific changes both creating new parts of the city and reshaping the existing ones.

According to the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018 the administrative area of the city of Riga is 304.05 km². More than 45% of the city area is covered by the natural areas (including waterways) but 10% is taken by the roads and streets. Residential area covers 26% of the land in Riga, and it is mostly concentrated in the central part of the city on either side of the railway ring that is located on both sides on the Daugava. Taking into account the entire area of Riga, population density is 2407 (inhab./km²); taking into account just the land area – 2855 (inhab./km²), but the average floor-space per 1 inhabitant in Riga is 23,4 m² (2005).

The share of the natural areas in Riga is remarkable if compared to many other European cities of a similar size. According to the given data (Projektcentrs, 2004) the share of green areas on the dry land of Riga is 44%, while in Stockholm - 40%, in Helsinki – 35%, in Tallinn – 20%, in Dublin – 12% and in Amsterdam – 7%. However, one should mention also the fact that many of these green areas in Riga are neither parks nor forests, but quite unattractive greenfield land. As for the residential areas, Riga's number is quite similar to Helsinki (21%) and Amsterdam (30%) but much smaller than in Copenhagen (46%). Also the area covered by roads and streets in Riga (10%) is similar to that in Helsinki and Amsterdam (in both cases 8%) but much smaller than in Stockholm (25%) and Copenhagen (26%).

Development of Riga's built-up areas has been forming mainly in a way of circles or rings starting from the historical centre and stretching towards the periphery. Thus the spatial structure of the city of Riga has become highly mono-centric with the main city core on the right bank of the Daugava, where the historical centre of the city is located.

Patterns of a poly-centric city structure in Riga has been developing just starting from the beginning of the 20th century when the building areas began to grow outside the city's railway ring on the both sides of the Daugava. In such a way the former historical suburbs (e.g. Ciekurkalns, Sarkandaugava etc.) one by one were incorporated in the growing city structure. This tendency was especially intensive after the World War II, when all around the contemporary city centre – the Old Town, boulevards and the former suburbs – another one layer of cityscape was formed – the huge residential districts built during the Soviet era. Grava (1993) argues that Riga's "socialist city" is an almost continuous ring of thick band within the concentric pattern. More than a half of the total city population lives in these projects today. In terms of quantity of housing, this has been a tremendous accomplishment. In terms of the quality of urban life, there is room for vast improvement.

Roze (2004) writes that Riga has seven main arterial roads (including the river Daugava). All these roads lead from the periphery to the city centre. Moreover the railway with the industrial areas linked to it supports this radial star form, but due to its physical structure that is difficult to cross it divides the city into several sectors and parts.

The Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018 identifies a following typology of the actual structure of built-up areas in Riga:

- **The Old Town** (see Figure 1) that, interacting with the Daugava, is physically, as well as culturally and historically the most important part of Riga's built-up areas. It may be characterised by intensive building structure located in small quarters.



Figure 1 - View to the Old Town of Riga
Source: Kublacovs, 2008

- **The Boulevard ring** - the green park belt of which encloses the Old Town and is in direct contrast with it. The Boulevard ring also separates the Old Town from the 19th century grid structure.
- **The 19th century grid** that is the largest architectonic ensemble of a town planning value in Riga built according to a coordinated plan. Together with the Old Town and the Boulevard ring it forms the core of the historical centre of Riga.
- **The historical suburban housing** that has been formed in the 19th century is typically a brick and wooden low-storey (usually not higher than 3 floors) urban environment. It forms almost a full ring around the historical centre. This type of housing has low intensity and usually much greenery, and therefore these predominantly low-storey neighbourhoods are nice contrasts to the intensive multi-storey housing.
- **Micro-districts** (mikrorayons) form a very strong spatial composition. These areas are in a complete contrast with the core of Riga's built-up areas. These parts of the city have been built in other scale, with other technologies, in other economic and political system. The houses usually are combined in large ensembles of various geometrical configurations. As a result it has created a big scale monolithic environment. Nowadays some yards have many trees that form a zone of greenery between rigorous and grey walls of the multi-storey houses. For example, in Ķengarags neighbourhood there is a poorly facilitated but practically usable promenade that is easy accessible from the big block houses. Such examples prove that by simple landscaping works it is possible to improve substantially the environment of the existing micro-districts
- **The industrial belt with the railway ring** dividing the city and forming linear and hard crossing barriers. Historically along the railways there are located industrial warehouses and buildings that serve for various economically important functions, at the same time polluting and creating a visually unattractive environment. There are wide derelict and rundown zones on both sides of the railway in Riga. Nowadays the former industrial areas are being replaced by commercial structures, including the shopping malls and warehouses.
- **Commercial buildings along the arterial roads** are a form that has been developing since the ever increasing role of cars (starting from mid 90-ties). Those usually are detached houses of a big size with large parking lots creating visually unattractive and from the town planning perspective unwelcoming form of the city structure. However, this type of buildings is spread around Riga already now, and it is foreseen that it will stay so also in the near future.
- **The Freeport of Riga** that covers a big part of the city in the lower reaches of the Daugava between the historical centre of Riga and the mouth of the Daugava. The port and activities linked to it has been one of the most important pillars for the economic development of the city of Riga since its foundation. A further development of the port is planned also in the future. Therefore it is a very important statement for planning the development of the entire city structure.

For a generalised visualisation of the above described structure of Riga's built-up areas one of the best examples is a picture shown in Grava's (1993) article (see Figure 2). Despite the fact that in some details it is out-dated or not very precise (e.g. the mikrorayons that were built adjacent to the existing residential areas in already quite urbanised environment are not shown), in general it reflects also the actual spatial structure of Riga. The inner city area that is named like "capitalist city" is an area that was mainly constructed before the World War II (most even before the World War I), and it corresponds to the Boulevard ring, the 19th century grid and the historical suburban housing areas inside the industrial belt.

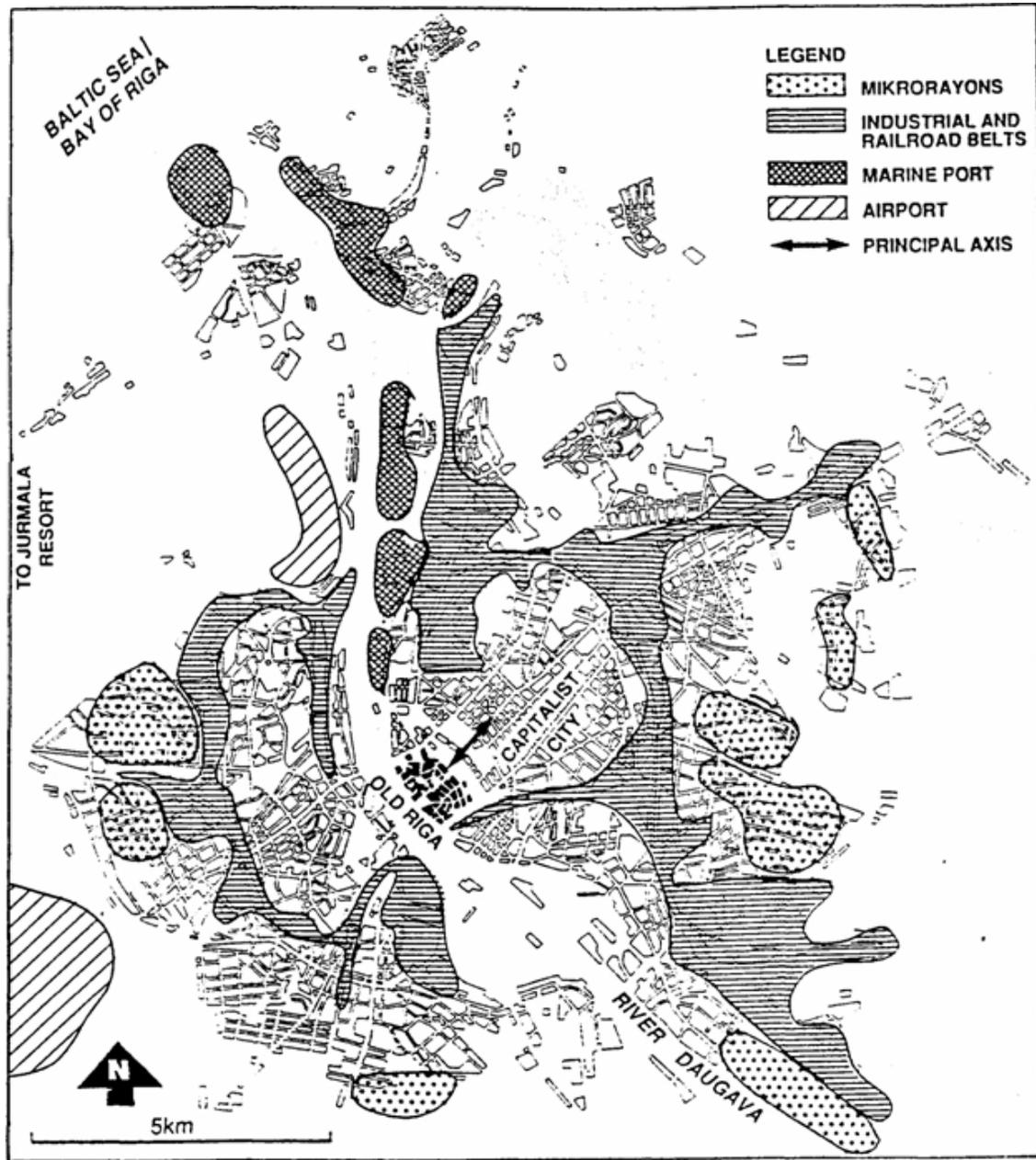


Figure 2 - Generalised Spatial Structure of Riga
Source: Grava, 1993

Review of the Spatial Development Strategy of Riga

In the beginning of the year 2006 a new Riga City Development Plan went into force. It consists of a set of several documents that should be used as a basis for Riga city development in the coming 12 years. The spatial development ideas of the city derive from the general Long-term Development Strategy of Riga until 2025, defining the city vision, strategic goals and 14 basic concepts of spatial planning of Riga that formed the ideological ground for the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018.

Describing the current spatial development strategy of the city of Riga it is worth to cite the worldwide recognised town planning theoretician Kevin Lynch (1960): „Not only is the city an

object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While it maybe stable in general outlines for some time, it is ever changing in detail. Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases.” In context of the spatial development planning of Riga this citation can be interpreted as an argument or a logical explanation for the new patterns in the spatial structure of the city, which are shown in the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018 and are derived from the contemporary specific requirements.

The spatial perspective of the city that is shown in the new comprehensive plan results from the overall city’s long-term development vision that “Riga is an opportunity for everyone”, thus defining a comparatively liberal approach also for guiding the spatial development processes. The choice was made in favour of this approach for achieving the most efficient use of the current socio-economic situation that is favourable both for the effective attraction of private investment and for solving some specific issues (e.g. revitalisation of rundown areas, functional transformation of some port areas etc.) and also for facilitation of the city development in general (e.g. construction of new housing, strengthening the identity of the local neighbourhoods etc.). Also Roze (2005) argues that with the new plan we can not just preserve the existing values but “it is a unique possibility to supplement and improve the general spatial structure of the city and to set foundation for the city image creation”.

In addition to the requirements of the Latvian legal acts, among the so called ideological factors for creation of the new plan was following of the Aalborg Commitments. Already in the year 1994 the Riga City Council signed the Aalborg Charter promising to put forward the sustainable development principles for grounding the city development. On 30th November of 2004 the Riga City Council made the decision N^o 3672 approving the city’s joining to the Aalborg Commitments and decided to promote following of these Aalborg Commitments at the Riga City Council’s institutions in working out and implementing the city’s environmental and development policy.

In a way all 10 Aalborg Commitments relate to setting up of the city’s spatial development policy, though the most direct of them is the 5th Commitment “Planning and design” and the 6th Commitment “Better mobility, less traffic”. The requirements set in these commitments have been directly or in a specifically adapted way incorporated in the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City. In a concentrated form these requirements are described in the 14 basic concepts of spatial planning of Riga.

In context of the Aalborg Commitments among the most important principles or ideas worked into the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City referring to development of the city’s spatial structure one should mention the efficient and also balanced use of the city’s existing territorial resources (also for development of built-up areas) not extending the city’s administrative borders; creation of a compact urban environment and promotion of multifunctionality of the neighbourhoods; revitalisation of the rundown areas; promotion of mixed land uses; preservation of functionally and biologically valuable territories with attractive landscape, and development of waterfront areas; development of an integrated city traffic plan and decreasing necessity for the use of private motor-vehicles et al.

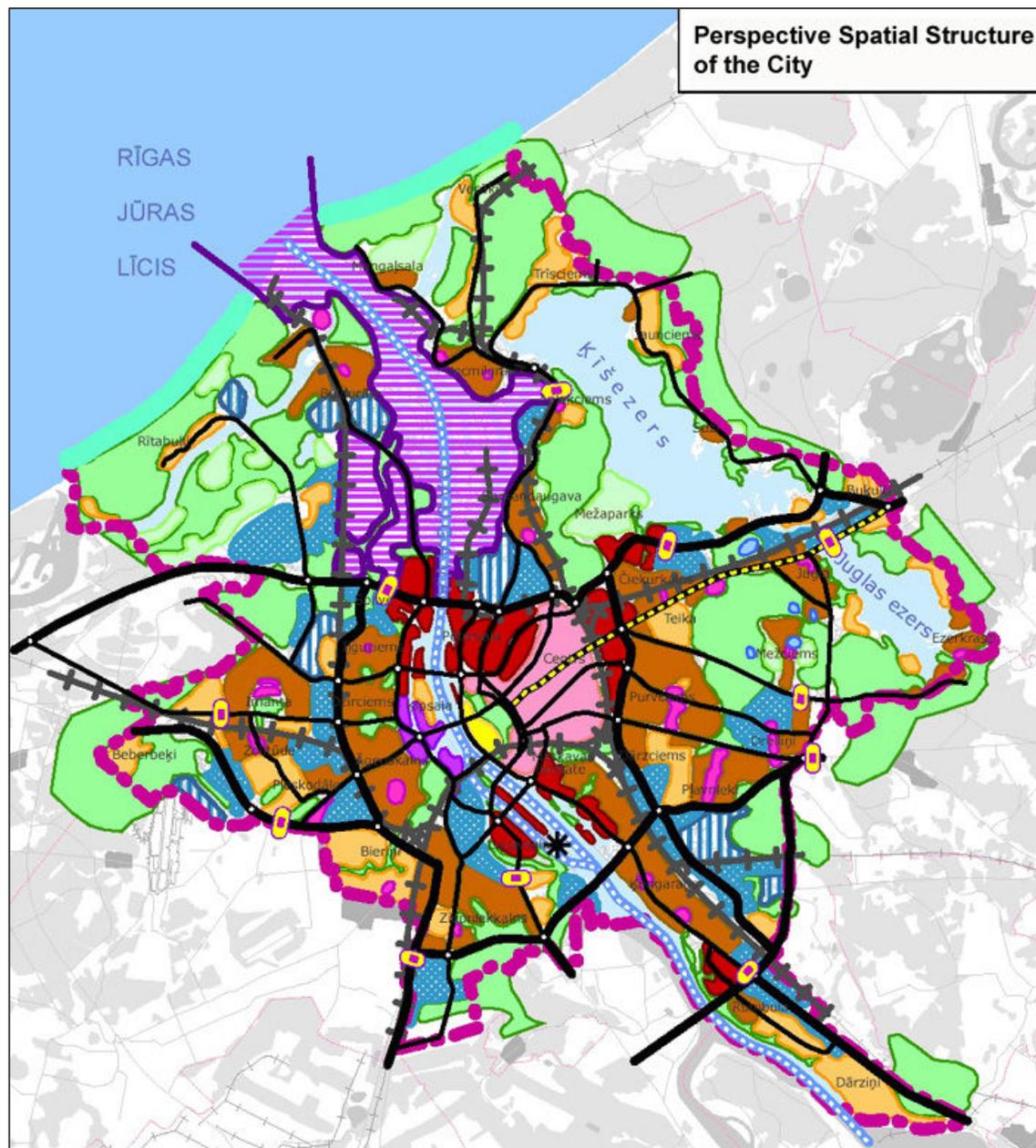
The population number in Riga city is decreasing since the beginning of 90-ties. According to the data of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia the population number in Riga in the beginning of 2008 was 717 371 but in 2000 – 766 381. At the same time population number in Riga district and also in some municipalities of other districts is slightly increasing (e.g. in the year 2000 there were 144 876 people living in Riga district but in the beginning of the year 2008 – already 167 774). Knowing that the population number in Riga region is quite stable (about 1,15 million people) and that the birth rate is about the same as the mortality

rate, it is quite clear that there is a strong correlation between decreasing population in Riga city and increasing number of residents in the neighbouring municipalities. In practice we can see this process as the urban sprawl. There are several reasons for this sprawl but one of the most important reasons is lack of appropriate choice for housing inside the city borders. For example, an important argument for renewal of the existing housing stock and development of new building areas is linked to comparatively small size of housing (in the year 2002 the average size of housing per 1 inhabitant in Riga was just 22,3 m²) that is substantially smaller than in the cities of Europe's developed countries (>35 m² per 1 inhabitant).

Basing on the guidelines given in the Development Programme of Riga City, it is assumed that in the year 2018 there will be ~700 000 inhabitants in Riga and that the planned housing stock in that year will be 28 m² per 1 inhabitant. In that case the total area of the housing stock in Riga will be 700 000 x 28 m² that corresponds to 19 600 000 m² or 1960 hectares. It means that for reaching this goal 3 130 800 m² or 313 hectares of housing stock must be built in Riga until the year 2018, and the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City should foresee an adequate land for this development. Another one reason for urbanisation of larger land resources is also the small share of one family houses in Riga (~5.5% of the total housing stock). To reach the goal stated in the city's long-term development strategy – in 2018 the share of one family houses should reach 8% of the total housing stock – there should be built 6940 new family houses. If we take into account that the minimum size of the land plot for building a private house in Riga is 600 m², there is a necessity of at least 416 hectares large area.

The Comprehensive Plan of Riga City also in perspective (see Figure 3) foresees to ground the development of Riga's spatial structure on its historical basis, in the same time providing new development possibilities for the city. The perspective spatial structure of Riga is based on following main types of different areas:

- 1) The **Old Town of Riga** surrounded by the **territory of the historical centre of Riga**, which is included in the list of the world heritage of UNESCO, is the basis of the spatial structure of the city's urbanised areas. Specific regulations defined by the Comprehensive Plan of the Historical Centre of Riga and Its Protection Belt must be followed in the development of these territories in order to protect values of the cultural and historical heritage. In the territory of the historical centre the variety of functions is being maintained, having the main emphasis on the representative, cultural, tourism and housing functions.
- 2) The so called **new centre of Riga** is planned as the contrasting, modern accent on the left bank of the river Daugava on the opposite side to Old Riga. It is the territory, which is similar to the historical centre as concerns the variety of functions, though business functions take more important role, which are supplemented by the corresponding housing, recreational and representative functions. It is planned that this area will house the new National Library, the Acoustic Concert Hall and also the Administrative Complex of Riga City Council that currently is situated in many buildings inside the historical centre and even beyond its borders. One of the main motivations for development of such a new centre of Riga is not just to facilitate development on the left bank of the river Daugava and to create some new vertical accents in the generally calm city skyline, but also to decrease the transport load on the existing city centre that has very limited capacity as the historical street network may not be changed.



Legend

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>paths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> highways important city streets the main crossing axis of composition - Brīvības iela railway <p>edges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Daugava - the main element of Riga's spatial structure waterfront area of the Gulf of Riga public waterfronts Riga Freeport waterfronts with restricted public access | <p>districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> historical centre of Riga new development areas residential areas industrial areas / mixed-use areas Riga Freeport nature and greenery areas building areas with higher share of greenery | <p>nodes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Old Riga the new centre of Riga local centres gates of Riga <p>landmarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TV tower |
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Figure 3 – Perspective Spatial Structure of Riga
 Source: Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018

3) **New development areas around the historical centre of Riga inside the railway ring**

in the territory of former port or industrial territories. To a great extent these are the territories, current economic use of which does not correspond to their potential use, and there is a need for their revitalization. Thus the historical centre of Riga will be widened with new multiform territories, by fully utilizing the already urbanized resources of the territories of the city centre, by facilitating them and by making there pleasant mixed-use residential, commercial, services and recreational environment. We may call this process also as the urban regeneration of the city centre and the old industrial belt areas. Among



Figure 4 – Development in Skanste neighbourhood
Source: Kublacovs, 2008



Figure 5 – Former allotments in Skanste neighbourhood
Source: Kublacovs, 2008

the biggest examples of this tendency one should mention transformation of Andrejsala area – a southern part of the Riga Freeport, and the very intensive development of a neighbourhood around Skanstes street (see Figure 4). Despite the fact that this area is located close to the beautiful Art Nouveau district of Riga, it was never developed as a built-up area because the geotechnical situation there is quite problematic. Instead it was used as allotments (see Figure 5). Now, the situation in the real estate market and construction sector has completely changed and this Skanstes street area is being transformed into attractive and multifunctional centre type neighbourhood of Riga (it also accommodates some very important public buildings as the multifunctional arena “Riga” and the Olympic Sports Centre).

4) **New development areas or centre building territories outside the railway ring**

– Podrags neighbourhood („Northern centre”), Lucavsala neighbourhood and Ciekurkalns neighbourhood („Ezermala centre”). The character of the current use of these territories to a great extent is the same as to the territories mentioned in the 3rd point, but they are located a little bit distant from the city centre in the nodes of the perspective transport junctions. As the basic functions in these areas should be commercial, services and residential functions. Assigning the status of the centre building areas, very flexible construction regulations are provided for these territories – e.g. higher building intensities, bigger number of storeys etc. According to the plan such an approach should attract attention of investors to otherwise rundown and geotechnically problematic areas.

5) **Local centres**

– the centres of other predominantly residential neighbourhoods of Riga, where the set of various services would be preferable, thus improving the functionality and attraction of these areas. It would promote the awareness of the inhabitants about their identity to the neighbourhood and the opportunities provided by it. As a result it could decrease demand for the movement to the other districts in order to receive the necessary services. As tools for fostering development of these local centres are also the Land-use Map and the Construction Regulations of the Comprehensive Plan of Riga City. Most of these centres (both existing and preferable) are shown on the map as the centre building areas that not only allow multifunctionality and high building intensity but

also demand to have at least 30% but no more than 70% of the buildings (this proportion may be also within one building) as housing stock. There are neighbourhoods that already have well developed local centres (e.g. Agenskalns historical neighbourhood on the left bank of the river Daugava – see Figure 6) but more are those, which are still developing (e.g. the central axis of Purvciems neighbourhood (G.Astra street) – see Figure 7) or cannot be found at all (e.g. in Dreilini that is a new, undeveloped neighbourhood, currently mainly with some multi-storey residential houses surrounded by rundown, mostly greenfield areas – see Figure 8).



Figure 6 – Centre of Agenskalns neighbourhood
Source: Kublacovs, 2008



Figure 7 – Centre building area along G.Astra street
Source: Kublacovs, 2008



Figure 8 – Multi-storey housing and undeveloped land in the new Dreilini neighbourhood
Source: Kublacovs, 2008

- 6) **System of highways and arterial roads of the city**, which would provide the convenient movement among the neighbourhoods of Riga and the link of the city with the places outside its borders. The system of highways and arterial roads will be created comfortable and understandable for everyone, by making compatible with the effective system of car parking places and public transport, by reducing the demand for the use of the private motor transport in the historical centre of Riga to the extent it is possible. One of the biggest current problems is that the road structure in Riga is very fragmented but the traffic is ever increasing. Therefore the new plan suggests to create two transport rings within the city borders – the big ring (at the moment just some parts of it are functioning) that is located right outside the railway ring and the small ring inside it (it is already partially built but is not functioning properly due to different street profiles and problematic crossings with other streets).

- 7) **Other building territories** (for example, industrial territories, some residential areas, commercial areas, utility areas etc.), which have the character of the supplementing element of the basic built-up structure of the city. One should mention here the relocation of the Riga Freeport territory closer to the estuary of the river Daugava, intensifying the port's commercial functioning in a smaller area and transforming the historical harbour areas in the central part of the city as multifunctional and publicly accessible new neighbourhoods. The total area of industrial territories is being diminished by transforming them to generally mixed-use building areas that may contain also some manufacturing functions. However, in some specific locations (e.g. in the noise zone of the Riga International Airport) new areas are planned exactly for development of manufacturing industries.
- 8) The joint spatial structure of **nature and greenery areas** that is formed of functionally different units – greenery (parks, squares, street plantings etc.), forest-parks, forests, specially protected nature territories, cemeteries, water objects and allotments. The biggest of these areas are located in the periphery of the city.

Such an approach for reaching the defined goals and preferable city's spatial structure clearly shows the tendency that Riga's cityscape will become more urbanised by densification of buildings. From the rational point of view it cannot be criticised as the land use will be more energy efficient, many areas will be regenerated, the city life will become more dynamic also in remote neighbourhoods and that is an option how to find space for building different types of new housing for people who otherwise would be participating in generation of the urban sprawl process. On the other hand this densification process is not generally acceptable by the local society, which has already got used to the original scale and density of Riga's traditional cityscape and even to the large housing estates built during the Soviet time. Most of the new projects therefore are perceived as the potential threats for losing seemingly public open space (after the land reform most of it has become private). What are the best tools and approaches for guiding this building densification process (taking into account that most of the land is private) and finding the best balance for creation of an attractive and dynamic city environment is a subject for further research and discussion.

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All photos taken by Andis Kublacovs, 2008.

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