Urban Regeneration and Strengthening of Local Neighbourhoods – the Way of Riga
(Spatial Planning Challenges and Ideas of Riga)

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- Main reasons for the urban sprawl around Riga;
- Conclusion – Riga’s approach in dealing with the urban sprawl and risks that should be considered;
Location of Riga

Basic facts about Riga:

- 717,000 inhabitants in the city (~30% of the national population);
- ~1,15 million people in Riga agglomeration;
- Total area of the city - 304,2 km²;
Objectives and Focus of the Study

• The main objectives:
  – To understand the main spatial development problems of Riga;
  – To evaluate the city government’s chosen way for overcoming these problems;

• Focus:
  – Ideas for slowing down (or even stopping) the ongoing urban sprawl process;
  – Planned changes in the city’s spatial structure;

• Methodology for the study:
  – Analysis of Riga’s spatial planning policy in context of the city’s spatial structure and measures defined for further development of the city and its surroundings;

• Structure of the article:
  – Introduction;
  – Explanation of the historical development of the spatial structure of Riga;
  – Description of the actual spatial structure of Riga;
  – Review and critics of the actual Spatial Development Strategy of Riga;
The Complex Historical Urban Structure of Riga

Riga in the end of the 13th century

The Daugava riverbank next to the Old Riga, 2008
The Complex Historical Urban Structure of Riga

Riga in the end of 18th century

Riga in the end of 19th century

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The Complex Historical Urban Structure of Riga

One of the most specific large scale architectural legacies from the Soviet times are mikrorayons (large scale housing projects) that were created outside the city’s railway ring in accordance with the master plans of 1955, 1969 and 1983.

A new Riga City Development Plan was adopted in the year 1995 but it faced enormous implementation problems due to:

• Chaos in property structure due to the land reform that didn’t consider the urban planning issues;
• Unforeseen growth of economy that had a huge impact on rapid growth of the real-estate market;
• Inappropriate spatial planning system (laws and regulations) in Latvia;

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The New Riga City Development Plan

• The New Riga City Development Plan consists of the following main documents:
  – Long-term Development Strategy of Riga until 2025 (defines the city vision, 17 strategic goals and 14 basic concepts of spatial planning of Riga);
  – Comprehensive Plan of Riga City 2006-2018 (defines zoning as well as the territory utilisation and construction regulations);
  – Development Programme of Riga 2006-2012 (defines tasks and projects financed by the municipality according to the strategy).

• The spatial perspective of the city results from the overall city’s long-term development vision that “Riga is an opportunity for everyone” thus defining quite a liberal approach also for guiding the spatial development processes;

• Reasons for the defined liberal approach:
  – To get most out 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.);
  – To promote the city development in general (e.g. construction of new housing, strengthening the identity of the local neighbourhoods etc.);
  – To be flexible in reacting quickly to the changes in the socio-economic situation and market demands;
  – To correspond to the ideological actualities in urban planning (e.g. requirements of the legal acts, guidelines and examples from other cities in developed countries).
Assumptions for Development of Housing Fund in Riga

- Lack of appropriate choice for housing inside the city borders:
  - The city of Riga is dominated by small flats, and the share of detached family housing is disproportionately low (~5.5%).
  - The general structure of housing in the year 2002 in the city of Riga was 280.5 thousand living units from which 265 thousands were flats and solely 15.5 thousands were houses of one or two apartments.
  - The average number of people in one room in the city of Riga as stated by the data of population census in the year 2000 is 1.16;
  - Just ~24 m² (in 2002 – 22.3 m²) of housing floor-space per 1 inhabitant.
- Target for the year 2018 is to have 1 room and 28 m² of housing floor-space per 1 inhabitant.
- Population number is decreasing but it shouldn't be less than 700,000 in 2018.
- In order to reach the set target, 3 130 800 m² (20% from the existing housing fund) of housing fund will need to be built in Riga until the year 2018.
- 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.
Basic Concepts of Spatial Planning of Riga

1. Facilitation of **territorially balanced development** of the city that is based on sustainable development concepts.

2. Implementation of **balanced, effective urban development policy from long-term aspect** should ensure **expropriation** by municipality of the land necessary for ensuring the municipal functions.

3. In developing new vacant areas preference should be given to **revitalization and development of rundown and other urbanized territories**.

4. **Riga should avoid expansion of the city**; it should rather use the administrative territorial resources of the city and building methods aimed at economy of space, envisaging construction on the land adjacent to transport hubs, facilitating internal development of the city, increasing the quality of living and housing in the urban territory, and preserving to the practicable extent functionally, biologically valuable as well as scenic natural areas.

5. The city of Riga should facilitate **the development of multifunctional local centres subordinated to the present city centre** in both the existing and new neighbourhoods thus furthering the strengthening of local communities, supporting territorial balance and improving the living environment.

6. **Development of Riga as a logistics and commerce centre** should be promoted and importance of Riga as a gateway city of Europe should be increased by strengthening the modernisation and development of transport and communication infrastructure.

7. **Versatile use of territories, buildings and development possibilities** should be ensured while maintaining the balance in the fields of working places, housing and services, giving preference in the use of city centre to the housing function.
8. Preservation, renovation and use of the culture heritage of Riga should be provided.

9. Requirements should be determined in respect of sustainable use and building of territories, while promoting the emerging of high quality architecture and the use of up-to-date building technologies.

10. Development and accessibility of waterfronts should be ensured by arranging a high-quality business and living environment there as well as the public space.

11. Use of water objects shall be promoted for diverse public recreation.

12. The functions of commercial port should be directed outside the city centre by concentrating the economical operation of the port to the North from the planned Northern crossing of the Daugava thus facilitating multifunctional development of the central part of the city and decreasing the potential environmental pollution.

13. Every owner is free to choose the way manner of use of their property, insofar it does not contradict with the officially restrictions imposed on the management and ownership of property not harming on society interests. Setting new restrictions on the management of property, municipality should strive for compensating the loss caused to the owner. Compensation mechanisms may take the most various forms: reduced taxes, accelerated depreciation, redemption at future market price, funding of certain obligations (research, obtaining of painting certification or building permission, special planting, etc.) from public sector funds. Alternatively, the property may be redeemed by municipality for the planned development purposes.

14. The authorized parameters of use of a territory should be based on the permissible effect by the managed property on the surrounding environment/living space and the overall society interests.
Further development of Riga’s spatial structure is grounded on its historical basis at the same time providing new development possibilities for the city.

**Legend**
- **Roads**
  - highways
  - important city streets
  - the main crossing axis of composition - Brīvības iela
  - railway
- **Borders**
  - 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
- **Neighbourhoods**
  - 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

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Particularities of Riga’s Perspective
Spatial Structure

- The Old Town of Riga surrounded by the territory of the historical centre of Riga – UNESCO World Heritage Site;
- New Centre of Riga – motivation for such a development:
  - To facilitate development on the left bank of the river Daugava;
  - To create some new vertical accents in the generally calm city skyline;
  - To decrease the transport load on the existing city centre that has very limited capacity as the historical street network may not be changed.
Particularities of Riga’s Perspective
Spatial Structure

- New development areas (Andrejsala, Skanstes street) around the historical centre:
  - Need for regeneration;
  - Extension of the city centre with new multiform territories;
  - Transformation of former port and industrial areas.
Particularities of Riga’s Perspective
Spatial Structure

• Local centres:
  – Strengthening the identity and multifunctionality of the different city neighbourhoods;
  – Densifying and distinguishing the central parts of the neighbourhoods;
  – Providing additional motivation for development of concrete areas by introducing a special zoning type – “Centre building areas” that allows multifunctionality, higher building intensity and demand to have at least 30% but not more than 70% of the buildings as housing stock;
  – Differentiation of the types of the local centres (e.g. historical, Soviet, new-built).
Main Reasons for the Urban Sprawl Around Riga

• The unwanted urban sprawl process around the borders of Riga city is mainly caused by:
  – The fast growth of the personal income level and economy in general;
  – More stringent rules and more bureaucratic process for building in Riga than in its surroundings;
  – Predominantly short-term (quick profit) thinking of society;
  – Lack of appropriate choice of housing;
  – Rapid increase in car ownership;
  – Low efficiency of spatial planning system;
Conclusion

- The main chosen spatial planning tool for dealing with the urban sprawl is densification of the existing urban tissue of the city that includes:
  - Allowing to densify the existing housing areas;
  - Allocating land for mixed-use development in derelict industrial and port areas as well as in all centrally located allotments;
  - Introducing a special zoning type – “Centre building areas” that allows to build much higher and dense;
  - Allocating sites for development of detached family housing areas thus somehow compensating the shortage of this housing segment in Riga;
  - Paying more attention to public transport system improvement;
  - Paying more attention to accessibility of social infrastructure and green & blue open spaces;
- Possible risks:
  - 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 are perceived by society as the potential threats for losing seemingly public open space (after the land reform most of it has become private);
  - Unfinished construction fields lacking the adequate social infrastructure and unattractive, fragmented cityscape in case if the population number will continue to decrease and economical growth will stagnate;
Thank you for attention!