

Riga: Entering the 21st Century

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Abstract. The history of Riga is long and rich in events. Archeological excavations have revealed that already eight hundred years ago the bank of the river Daugava was inhabited by the Livs and Latvians – it was an urban settlement with a vast port. The name of Riga village („locus”) first appeared in the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia in 1198. The naturally protected, inhabited by various nationalities settlement created favorable conditions for the German expansion which in 1201 with the foundation of Riga as a city led its development towards traditions of the European urban construction (Fig. 1).

Key words: Form creation synthesis, sustainability, harmony, balanced environment.

Research methodology

Nowadays Riga – the capital city of the Latvian nation, has become a beautiful and expressive city of the northeastern part of Europe near the Baltic Sea due to more or less targeted actions of many generations. Alongside with creation of a corresponding to their time and traditions living environment, they have built the city such as we see and know it today. And as shown by experience, over time the political intrigues, struggle and the economic considerations are forgotten but the footprint left by the architects and urban builders with their gentle attitude to the natural environment remains and affects life of generations to come. Not for nothing in the world, ways were searched to reduce the impact of the political struggle in the urban development, how to involve a wider community in solving vital problems. Democracy and transparency are notions often heard today from both the high European podiums and the domestic legislators' mouths. However, in the real practice, they quickly become easily overcome, formal attributes which complicate the development process but the situation does not improve. What we have gained or lost and what else we can lose as a result of such a policy and “aggression” of government representatives, we can see analyzing the urban development in these circumstances of globalization and socio-economic conflicts (Fig. 2).

Here, it is worthwhile to note the idea emphasized in the Beijing Charter¹ that only following own ways, own development principles and environmental protection can provide stability of the modern civilization in the conditions of further intensive development. There may not be common ways but there should be a common better future which we are already making today. Therefore to observe the general humane principles in developing urban environment and planning its separate fragments – a buildings or construction architecture forms, it is necessary to become the basis of the aesthetic code of the modern architect in its theoretical and scientifically methodological work [2].

The principles set out in the Beijing Charter for the development of the 21st century architectural and urban planning are topical for all, inclusively for the future of our Riga.

Riga as a flat, located on the sandy banks of the Daugava River aesthetic development and intensity of the use of the area and image are fully reflected in the silhouette of the city, especially in its centre and in Old Riga. It's well perceived both when approaching by the Daugava River waterway and it has become a widely known symbol of the city of Riga. A more expressive and typical urban silhouette provides a good visual perception and orientation opportunities in its complex spatial environment and contributes to the understanding of its structure and link of its separate parts in a general building system.

In the development plan of Riga, there are highlighted the main functional units of the urban structure in connection places of separate zones to the main and visual perception axes. It should be noted that the basis of the structure and spatial improvisation of the planning of Riga is the Daugava River but the main cross-axis Brīvības iela (Brivibas Street), Akmens tilts (Stone Bridge), Brīvības bulvāris (Boulevard) in the segment up to Uzvaras laukums (Uzvara Square) – is the most important not only for perception of the internal structure of the historic centre of Riga (HCR) but also the memorial accent, including the location axis of the Monument to Freedom. The Daugava River aquatorium and its islands' and peninsula opportunities, greenery in the middle of the blue water - the embankment landscaping and improvement of the widely visible landscape contribute to the overall environmental security and the aesthetic quality and attractiveness of the urban environment.

HCR inclusion in the list (1997) of the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage confirms the specific and exceptional value of the historic centre of Riga and the left bank center part as a cultural object, the conservation of which is not only in the interests of Latvia but also the mankind as a whole (Fig. 3).

¹ Beijing's Charter was adopted by the International Union of Architects at XX Congress in 1999.



Fig. 1. Panorama of Riga from the National Library building (2012) [Source: photo by J.Krastiņš]



Fig. 2. Panorama of Riga from the National Library building (2012) [Source: photo by J.Krastiņš]

The HCR conservation and development plan approved by the Latvian Government's decision specifies the mission of perception of the silhouette of Old Riga. In 2007 the panorama and silhouette of Riga Historical Centre was assigned a European Heritage Label. The view to Old Riga from the bridge when entering the city from the airport along Kalnciema iela (Kalnciema Street) or also by train from Jurmala and Jelgava is the largest visual value with an outstanding cultural and historical significance. In contrast, the overall town planning situation, the Daugava River ship path turns and the main axes of perception of the left bank center part create favorable preconditions for creating a new Riga centre part directly opposite Old Riga – in the southern part of Agenskalns district and Kipsala and in the district of Kliversala and Tornkalns, highlighting the creation of new high-rise buildings.

Here, there is already finalized construction of the new National Library, closer to the popular Tornkalns new municipality centre and the newly erected building of the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Latvia University.

It is well known that one of the main elements of the urban environment is expressiveness of the building silhouette. In their practice and theoretical reasoning, many world-famous architects and urban planners have marked and proved the significance of vertical accents in creating the city structure and its image. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), the great Italian architect of the Renaissance period, in his treatise emphasizes that only the verticals can achieve special beauty in the cities, if only they are located in necessary places and have appropriate form.



Fig. 3. The housing on the left shore of the Daugava River near the Vanšu tilts (Cable-stayed Bridge) [Source: photo by J. Krastiņš]



Fig. 4. Greenery area in the left shore landscape of the Daugava River [Source: photo by J. Krastiņš]

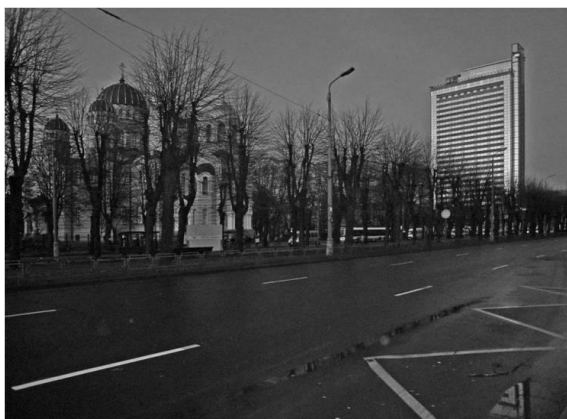


Fig. 5. The search for form creation synthesis in cultural and historical urban space (2012) [Source: photo by J. Krastiņš]



Fig. 6. National Library building
(Presently still in the stage of construction)
[Source: photo by J. Krastiņš]



Fig. 7. Rīgas Brāļu kapi (Riga Brother's Cemetery). Architecture, sculpture, green landscape – as a harmoniously united symbol of the visually aesthetical and philosophic quality [Source: photo by J.Krastiņš]

By the ever-wider expansion of the city, even more important becomes the issue of the necessary locations and developing shapes of these accents. In Riga, in this respect, an attempt is made to respond by over 300 m high, impressive TV Tower

in Zaķusala and over 100 m high cable-stayed bridge pillar built on the left bank of the Daugava River. But what can you do next, how to proceed when the city is continuously growing (Fig. 4) [1].

Conclusion

Chaos or harmony? Anarchy or Order? It seems that choosing between these opposites, any member of the community will decide on harmony or order. But how does this theoretical prerogative affect our practical lives, our real choices when there is charged a price? Can we refuse from a quickly obtainable benefit in the name of harmony or order? Although there are differences in the development of different cities that depend on the contradicting forces and national and economic structures involved in their construction, their developing principles have to be similar [3]. The concept of the 21 st century architectural development is based on the conceptual link: the building, blocks of houses in a city, district, city as a whole, the State, believing that only linking of all these elements in the design, implementation, operating cycles can provide you with modern harmony of the urban environment (Fig. 5, 6, 7). Exactly, at this level there should be also viewed the architecture, design, garden art and applied art

synthesis as one of the means of creating a harmonious, aesthetically valuable environment. Architecture, as well as the whole development of the urban space goes hand in hand with the person's as an individual's requirements for its living environment. Besides, the urban outdoor territory is the place where a person can experience the informative field of the housing, natural environment, and different artistic elements [4].

It is understandable that the idea of developing self maintenance enforces people to base their lifestyle primarily on the nature's provided possibilities in order to ensure the social righteousness, sustainable self maintaining economy, and create a surrounding environment. A self maintaining environment, primarily, is maintenance of natural elements. The observation of balanced, environment and human friendly development principles in planning the future of the cities needs to become essential in the whole world.

References

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Kopsavilkums. Rīgas vēsture ir gara un notikumiem bagāta. Arheoloģiskajos izrakumos konstatēts, ka jau pirms vairāk nekā astoņiem gadsimtiem Daugavas krastā šajā vietā bijusi lībiešu un latviešu apdzīvota vieta – pilsētveida apmetne ar plašu ostu. Rīgas ciema vārds pirmo reizi minēts latviešu Indriķa hronikā 1198. gadā, kad laukā blakus lībiešu ciemam tika likti pamati vācu apmetnei. Pašas dabas aizsargātā ar dažādām tautībām apdzīvotā vide radīja labvēlīgus apstākļus vācu ekspansijai, kas 1201. gadā dibinot Rīgu kā pilsētu, ievirzīja tās attīstību Eiropas pilsētībūvniecību tradīciju gultnē.

Šodien Rīga – Latvijas valsts galvaspilsēta ir kļuvusi par skaistu un izteiksmīgu Eiropas ziemeļaustrumu daļas pilsētu pie Baltijas jūras daudzu paaudžu vairāk vai mazāk mērķtiecīgas darbības rezultātā. Radot savam laikam un tradīcijām atbilstošu dzīves vidi, tās ir uzcēlušas pilsētu tādu, kādu mēs šodien redzam un pazīstam. Un kā liecina pieredze, laikam ejot, politiskās intrigas, cīņa un ekonomiskie apsvērumi aizmirstas, bet arhitektu un pilsētībūvnieku atstātās pēdas, saudzīgi attiecoties pret dabas vidi, paliek un ietekmē nākamo paaudžu dzīvi.