

Recreation Possibilities for Residents in the Residential Area Courtyards

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Abstract. The present paper reflects information on the landscape elements in the public open spaces built in the Soviet period large-scale residential area courtyards. The material on recreation possibilities for the residents of these territories were analysed in the scale of courtyards in Latvia. The information obtained is based on the findings from the publically available informative material and from the surveys from territory residents. Consequently, the aim of this article is to study the recreation possibilities for younger residents in the large-scale residential area courtyards built in the second half of the 20th century.

Keywords: courtyards, public open spaces, recreation possibilities for younger residents.

Introduction

A readily accessible public open space is a centre of public activities that may affect the everyday life of people and development to the entire neighbourhood. It is an environment where everyone expands their understanding of a home, through daily activities transferring it from their flats to public open spaces. As the inhabitants are actively using these spaces, they „are appropriating” this physical space and this feeling of intimacy allows people to identify this place as their own, giving a sense of identity [25]. In the researches on the cities in the Western Europe and the North America it is often emphasized that the younger residents are often the cause of trouble, disorder, and crime in the urban environment, degrading the physical and aesthetic quality of the residential areas, which often occurs in the form of damaging different physical objects and elements of landscape, and endangering the safety of the other residents [6]. Consequently, the present paper analyses recreation possibilities for the residents in the large-scale residential area courtyards built in the Soviet period, and the study is based on the researches carried out by the author.

In the worldwide scale, for instance, American urban planner Kevin Lynch, applying empirical researches, has made several significant discoveries in the field of urban planning, as regards, how the individuals perceive and travel about the urban environment, how the urban environment affects children, and how to use the human perception as a physical form as a conceptual basis for a successful design of urban environment in the cities and regions. Kevin Lynch proposes a simplified classification of objects, where the elements are organised in five groups: *paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks* [7]. The Danish architect and urban planner Jan Gehl has performed several significant researches from the perspective of functionality and aesthetics on the public outdoor territory design and improvement

that covers the transport traffic and pedestrian orientation in the cities [8]. Le Corbusier’s ideas became very popular in many parts of the world. According to estimate data in Europe approximately 40 mill inhabitants are living in large scale housing estates [25]. Whereas, several analysis of the spatial composition was carried out in certain Latvian cities. One of such researches is “The Development of the Spatial Composition in Riga” by an architect Andris Roze [7]. According to the author, “a good image of the city can be achieved only, if the city means something to its inhabitants, and if in the urban environment there are elements that cause positive or negative feelings and associations to its inhabitant, because they are a significant part of him as an individual and as a member of society”. For example, the *Commission of Strategic Analysis* has developed the *Quality of Life Index for Latvia*. Prof. Talis Tissenkopf has studied what is understood a good life in Latvia [23, 9]. Several researches were carried out by the author on the development stages of the large-scale residential area landscape in the Baltic Sea region, and on the landscape quality of residential area courtyards in the cities of Latvia. The prof. of architecture Janis Rubins, on the other hand, in his work “The Residential Fund of Riga from the 20’s Century typological perspective” has analysed the close connection between the development of the city and its residential fund, and the social and historical situation in the country [17]. One of the leading architectural organizations is *The Architects Council of Europe*. A 21st important message sent by the organization to the 21st century is “The Architecture and the Quality of Life”, a document that denotes the main guidelines for achieving the effective sustainable development of the residential environment [11, 14]. In any case, the principle of the community structure is not able to provide the social and aesthetic requirements for the inhabitants. This reason in particular over the last

several years in different countries leads to thinking about finding new ways of spatial and functional organization of residential housing [18]. Thus, to study the social spaces from the perspective of inhabitant requirements, it is important to consider the inhabitants themselves and their surrounding environment that affects the development of the mutual interconnection and their attitudes [28]. In the process of research, analyzing the data obtained, an important feature was distinguished; at present, there are no recreation possibilities for the residents of the Soviet period residential courtyards. Consequently, this proves the topicality of the theme selected, which will be analysed further in the paper.

Materials and Methods

The research on the recreation possibilities for inhabitants in the residential courtyards was carried out in the period from summer of 2011 until the winter of 2012. To achieve the set goal a scientific research literature – publications and electronic resource analyses were used. Based on the previous researches performed by the author and the material obtained as regards the landscape quality of the residential areas in the cities of Latvia, the present paper discusses the recreation possibilities for the younger residents of the Soviet period residential areas. Consequently, to qualitatively study the present situation, information was obtained from the younger residents of the large-scale residential areas in Jelgava and Riga. Based on the 200 previously carried out surveys (groups of respondents comprise 20–65 year old residents), a common opinion was distinguished as regards the landscape quality and the personal experience of the residents when spending time in the large-scale residential area courtyards. Consequently, in order to achieve the set goal, the following process required a survey carried out on the younger residents aged from 15–20 years. The aim of the survey was to determine, whether the younger people have any recreation possibilities in the courtyards, and whether they are satisfied with the present situation, as well as – what are their suggestions and wishes to improve the recreation possibilities in these territories. The survey was carried out on 100 younger residents; out of them 59 % were women, and 41 % – men. The group of respondents was comprised of those younger residents who had been living in these territories since their childhood. Consequently, the results are objective. To summarize the results of the survey, a monograph or descriptive method was applied, which was based on the scientific findings obtained during the research. The total volume of photos used reflects the residential area courtyards built in the 20th century Jelgava.

Results and Discussion

Residential areas and their courtyards

For any city in the world, the greatest treasure and the most valuable funds are its inhabitants who create the economic and social life; therefore, one of the most important functions of the city is to provide its inhabitants with qualitative living environment [9]. One of the most common types of housing in many cities is apartments, out of which a significant part is concentrated in separate large-scale residential areas. Such areas can be observed both in Western and in Eastern Europe, but the quality of the living environment and the housing varies significantly [12]. Nowadays, people have more demands not only for more space for simple daily needs but also for a higher quality of living such as leisure, entertainment and harmonious neighborhood relations [10]. Many large-scale residential areas of the cities of Europe are upkept and improved based on the sustainable development principles: how to make more attractive residential outdoor territory, not forgetting about condition of environment. Current topical matter of French urban researchers is how to develop and improve the quality of residential outdoor territory, not forgetting about future generations who will live after us. How to provide urban environment to remain attractive residential outdoor territory even after several decades and even hundreds. It is thought a lot about ecological and aesthetical aspects of residential areas that on increasing modern life standards become more topical. To promote the practical use of this sustainability aspect in urban planning, there are developed *European Common Indicators* providing planning and development of all the cities and suburb area of Europe in accordance with unified principles of sustainable development [12]. Main task for further residential environment development is polyfunctional and intensively used urban environment creation, as well as place identity preservation, its perfection and environmental scale harmonization. Looking from broader perspective of sustainable urban environment, it should prioritize the renovation and modernization of already current densely populated areas, their humanization and accessibility of public transport. Such action would encourage inhabitants not to leave their homes and prevent city sprawl [26]. It has to be noted that landscape architecture as one of the important territorial environment planning elements forms on the basis of progressive functional, economical and aesthetical factors. It solves the development of human private living space quality in the widest urban development aspect. The projects of landscape architecture are integral and as well as impellent territorial environment planning part [19, 5]. The qualitative development of the public outdoor

space is possible if a purposeful functional differentiation is carried out, evaluating every area's specific requirements and preserving the necessary for them territories [4].

Jan Gehl (2001) divided outdoor activities into three types in the book of *Life between buildings*: necessary activity, spontaneous activity and social activity. The requirements of each type for the physical environment are completely different. According to these three types of activities, residential landscape could be divided into three categories [10]. *Necessary activities*, *optional activities* and *social activities*. *Necessary activities* are the activities people have to do, such as walk through outdoor spaces of apartment to get public transport. *Optional activities* are the activities people choose for clear or unclear purposes, such as taking a walk to get fresh air, and standing or sitting outdoor to enjoying life. These activities are chooseable, and especially depend on environmental conditions; a high quality outdoor space will attract people to stop, sit, play, and so on. *Social activities* include physical contact and passive contact. Physical contact includes children at play, greetings and conversations. Passive contacts such as simply seeing and hearing other people [29]. The research of resident opinion would help in projecting and building of new residential area greenery to avoid previous mistakes, would provide solutions that meet the functional and aesthetical requirements of population and would be used more intensively [13].

Modern large-scale residential outdoor territory is complicated polyfunctional landscaped space, which is daily used by thousands of people [22]. Residential outdoor environment is also the most basic space for people's daily activities as indoor environment [10]. In Latvia, the major part of these analysed territories is of low quality, which also reflects on the present situation in these territories. Big accent is put on the proximal large-scale residential areas residents' workload that impedes the residents and the courtyards planning can not function successfully. The range of problems is wide that applies to the requirements of the building standards and regulations LBN 100 in improvement and arrangement of the territory. It was established in the research that the regulating standard of urban development after the restoration of independence was not in force in the state. Though, the requirements regulated in it that were related, for example, to the number of parking lots, new building distance from residential buildings, as well as to the insolation requirements and exploitation, that is important in the context of the urban planning [1]. In activities complex that provides resident comfortable living conditions particular importance is given to the improvement of

sanitary conditions in reconstructed courtyards. It is important to decrease the density of residential courtyards, to provide normal insolation, noise regime and aeration. On providing residential outdoor territory for resident' appropriate recreation [6]. These zones have to be improved, gras-plot and pedestrian pathway covering have to be renewed, children playgrounds – equipment, sandboxes, sheds, fountains, etc. have to be arranged. Sports fields, tennis courts have to be arranged in places allowed by building regulations. Waste collection storages have to be renewed. According to the rules and projects, there have to be courtyard territory greening with trees and bushes [21, 26].

Summarizing last years experience of the in complex approach to the matters of rehabilitation and humanization of residential environment, a string of necessary tasks, methods for its implementation can be formulated. Conditions for the residential outdoor territory improvement:

- 1) vacation of the inner premises of circumferential building courtyard from different subsidiary buildings and low quality residential buildings that do not to correspond with the necessary modern housing sanitary requirements;
- 2) horizontal and vertical zoning of the courtyard inner premises, on finding the places for parking lots in one or several levels and sitting places for residents of different age groups, as well as new and modernly facilitated pedestrian pathways arranging. Improvement and development of the greenery system, using both courtyard inner room levels with terraces, and roof terraces;
- 3) transformation of existing housings, by removing communal flats and replanning nonqualitative flats. In the case of necessity, first floor and second floor vacation from flats, arranging there premises for commerce, offices and other different social functions;
- 4) new building projecting, overbuilding empty spaces in circumferential building, as well as in separate cases forming new residential building group in courtyards. Improvement of the facade visual quality, using colours and modern decoration methods. Roof covering importance has to be taken into consideration either, in visual area of both street, and higher levels [20].



Fig. 1. Example of public outdoor territory in the courtyard of Aizkraukle, Latvia (2011) [Source: photo by the author]



Fig. 2. Example of public outdoor territory in the courtyard of Jelgava, Latvia (2011) [Source: photo by the author]

The qualitative development of public outdoor territory is possible, implementing purposeful functional differentiation, evaluating specific needs of each space and reserving necessary space [4]. The landscaped space of residential area courtyards are supplemented with the improvement elements of the public outdoor territories, which have to provide comfortable exploitation possibilities to each resident of the territories. It was established in the research that in the second half of the 20th century in the cities of Latvia their supply was with a low design quality (Fig. 1, 2). Residential area building creates unique urban building ensemble background, but inhabitants' daily life passes within the area courtyard. Therefore, residential outdoor territory must correspond with not only functional, but also aesthetic requirements [6]. High landscape aesthetic quality is particularly important in urbanized landscape, because it is both living, and working and recreation environment for people, who continuously from different angles and aspects evaluate, perceive this residential outdoor territory [30]. To create aesthetically qualitative residential outdoor territory in the large-scale residential areas it is necessary to provide functionally considered



Fig. 3. Functionally considered vegetation in the courtyard of Roskilde, Denmark (2011) [Source: photo by the author]



Fig. 4. Example of public outdoor territory in the courtyard of Stockholm, Sweden (2010) [Source: photo by the author]

children playground zones as well as comfortable traffic [16]. Successful reconstruction of the large-scale residential area is impossible without comprehension of united and complex solution of these problems. The improvement of services infrastructure, environment protection and arrangement, improvement of the residential area public outdoor territory, the development of inhabitant recreation zones, courtyard replanning, intensification of building, renovation of existing building improving its physical, technical and social quality, are directions necessary to develop in close connection with each other [24].

Zoning as a Planning Instrument

In spatial planning context, zoning is defined as statutory descriptions of the allowable uses of land as set out by local councils or planning authorities. The descriptions set zones that establish permitted, prohibited and special uses within these zones. Land uses in each zone are regulated according to type of use, density, height, lot size, placement, building bulk, and other development standards. Which such a clear description, zoning may effectively act as a planning instrument in spatial development in either urban or rural areas [15].

One of the basic units of any city structure is the residential areas, therefore, in the urban development strategic and operational planning documents big attention is placed on the development and building promotion of these areas. Residential area is an urban environment of appropriate size, which has its own crew, the identity, and character, arising out of building types, physical boundaries, landscape and inhabitants feeling of togetherness [24].

Urbanization gradually takes over more new areas and territories. The deeper is the process, the more sophisticated are the problems concerning this issue. After having regained the ownership rights for certain housing free lands, these areas were freely sold to different investors who proposed projecting and constructing new residential buildings, generally ignoring the common housing principles of the area; thus, excluding the public outdoor space landscape elements, and a common residential area development plan, with a detailed humanization plan. Therefore, it is essential to establish a regulation which would ensure the detailed plan to be mandatory in every large-scale residential area [20]. In the initial period of the large-scale residential area building large courtyards as most significant element of public outdoor territory were planned, that type large-scale housing estates were grouped around. The proper example of the large-scale residential area building of the day is one of the biggest large-scale residential areas in Riga – Purvciems that was built from 1965–1975 (arch. G.Melbergs, R.Paikune, M.Medinskis and others). Pararegular, ie., derivative from regular, complicated, polyangular spatial structures dominate in the planning of Purvciems. There is a regular network of 120° model in the basis of region planning where each edge of hexagon is created by five-storey residential building. Main directions of main roads and zones of social centres are supplemented with a stream of separate nine-storey section building. Large courtyards were meant for inhabitant recreation [25]. Every system needs appropriate zoning of the territory. The principles of functional zoning are in the basis of all territorial planning and general plans of the cities. In the time of the occupation of the 50's these principles had been strictly and consistently implemented in practice of city building. It can be convinced in Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja and Ventspils, where industrial and residential areas are connected with the suburbs garden colonies as recreation zones. In spite of criticism of functional zoning functional zoning is still axiom in designing practice that can not be either to criticized or alternative solutions to be proposed [27]. Zoning of the territory depends on the type of residential building. If residential buildings have

communicating staircase, than it is possible to isolate spatially recreation area and children playgrounds from the territory, where pedestrian traffic, motor vehicle driveways to the residential building entrances and parking lots ment to be. It gives more security to childish sports. On starting the residential outdoor territory formation, is necessary to think, where and how to create landscape spatial borderline – either it will embraces just one, closed courtyard or will unit courtyard group [2]. It should be attained such situation futher for not divesting unconsideredly residential area territory for building that can create optimal conditions for inhabitants' recreation in the residential outdoor territory [3].

Recreation possibilities for younger residents in courtyards

Lately, different researches on the residents' living environment quality have become more topical, because every country's, city's, or other territory's main value is its satisfied residents [9]. Although publice open spaces are treated as an important element of the living environment, their utilization considerably differs from the intended one. The reasons are associated with social as well as economic aspects. In most cases landscape elements and greeneries planned in the original projects were not arranged, open spaces were not regularly tended and improved, what led to their degradation. As a result, they have created an image of a neglected, unsafe, unappealing environment which today is often simply treated as an unused potential of the territory [25]. This is supported by the acknowledgements established in other researches. The free space between the residential buildings, previous greenery areas and children playgrounds, were used for commercial activities. The increasing amount of cars causes problems for the courtyard outdoor territory exploitation possibilities, because it eliminated the recreational function [24]. Consequently, it can be established that presently there are no appropriate recreation possibilities not only for younger residents, but also for any other age group. The evaluation and results obtained from the research from the younger respondents, as regards the recreation possibilities in the large-scale residential area courtyards, are accordingly systemized in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Evaluation of the public outdoor space in courtyards by younger residents

Analysed directions	Respondent evaluation		
	agree	disagree	other
Relaxation possibilities for every age group	13.2 %	86.8 %	–
Free time is often spent outside the large-scale residential area courtyards	65.9 %	24.2 %	9.9 %
The condition of public outdoor space landscape elements	15.4 %	84.6 %	–
The quality and safety of public outdoor space landscape elements	14.3 %	59.3 %	26.4 %

86.8 % of younger residents consider that there are no recreation possibilities in courtyards. 65.9 % of the interviewed residents spend their free time outside these territories and only 24.2 % of them spend their time in their courtyard territory, and 9.9 % chose different ways of spending their spare time. Only 15.4 % of all the respondents are satisfied with the current situation in courtyards, because their residential territories have different public outdoor space landscape elements. Consequently, the established fact proves that Soviet period courtyards presently are not in the best condition in order for the people to be able to use them for active or passive recreation possibilities. In general, 59.3 % respondents consider the public outdoor territory landscape elements to be out-worn and necessary to be renovated. Residents expressed a wish to have extra funding delegated for courtyard renovation, substituting the old and outworn public outdoor territory landscape elements. With the help of specialists, a new plan could be generated for constructing different recreation areas for every age group; where parents with children, teenagers, and retired people could spend their free time. This is also approved by the data obtained from respondents; 72.5 % of younger residents (in one week's period) do not use the territory at all, and only 19.8 % spend their weekends there, but only 5.5 % use these territories daily or every other day.

All these areas are too large and impersonal – often perceived as ‘sleeping areas’ because they often do not offer any long-term work possibilities, as well as they lack services in local scale and open public territories. Such an area development model is not sustainable; neither present, nor future generations will have a desire to live in these areas, therefore they can gradually become neglected and degraded. Because of this, the latest urban planning and development tendencies in Latvia and other European aim at maintaining, renovating, and improving the residential environment quality in current problematic residential areas [12]. Living environment has a great importance in every human being's life because it is an environment and space where he constantly resides, therefore it is very important for a person to feel comfortable in this place [9]. In order for the city to maintain its current inhabitants, and also to gain new ones, it must provide qualitative and attractive

living environment that would satisfy the requirements of not only the present generation, but would also consider the sustainable development and improvement of the area for the future generations [12].

Conclusion

The factors established in the research emphasize the necessity of new recreation possibilities for younger residents in the territories analysed. The information obtained proves that in these courtyards there are no recreation possibilities for the younger people to spend their free time. As a result, the major part of these people spends their spare time outside these territories. Consequently, the data from the sociological surveys objectively reflect the amount of recreation possibilities in the Soviet period residential area courtyards. The conclusion is as follows; these territories require cardinal changes in order to eliminate the issues previously discussed. The Soviet period residential area courtyards are degraded, disorganized, dirty, neglected, and presently do not provide relaxation possibilities for the territory residents. Consequently, this proves the hypothesis of the research that in the modern context the Soviet period courtyards are perceived as unexploited territory resources. The multi-functional residential outdoor territory of these courtyards is a very complex system where, if appropriate functional zoning principles are applied, in the modern perspective, it is possible to eliminate the established inconsistencies.

The younger people consider that the outworn and unused landscape elements of the public outdoor territory need to be removed and replaced by new, safe, and qualitative landscape elements. Respectively, it would be necessary to search for possibilities and options how to create a more attractive residential outdoor space in these territories in order for the younger people to be willing to spend their time in these areas. An organized residential territory could possibly diminish the disorder in the courtyards and the amount of criminal activities. Consequently, it is necessary to carry out additional researches on the Soviet period courtyards from the perspective of these aspects. It is essential to investigate the causes that encourage the younger people to demolish and degrade the analysed territories.

It is necessary to find solutions for the problems established in the research; this would improve the situation, and it would minimize the negative features analysed in the research. The first stage would require the establishment of a unified cooperation between the specialists and the younger residents of the territory. Thus, incorporating appropriate material, tools, and methods, it would be possible to find common solutions to gradually eliminate the negative features in the residential area courtyards; also, integrating the youth, with the innovative solutions, in the active public processes

that concern the recreation possibilities and their own wishes. It is necessary to educate this part of society and to find a common interest, and to gradually change the present landscape elements of the public spaces according to the interests of the younger residents, as well as the interests of other age group residents. Consequently, the amount of the information obtained is significant and relevant also for other following studies on this subject of recreation possibilities for the residents of the Soviet period residential area courtyards.

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Kopsavilkums. Šajā rakstā analizēta informācija par Padomju laikā realizētajiem publiskās ārtelpas labiekārtojuma elementiem lielmēroga dzīvojamo rajonu iekškvartālos. Analizēti materiāli par šo teritoriju iedzīvotāju atpūtas iespējām iekškvartālos Latvijas mērogā. Sniegtā informācija balsfīta uz iegūtajām atziņām no publiski pieejamiem materiāliem un lielmēroga dzīvojamo rajonu iedzīvotāju aptaujām. Līdz ar to, šī raksta mērķis ir izpētīt atpūtas iespējas jauniešiem lielmēroga dzīvojamo rajonu iekškvartālos, kas veidoti 20. gadsimta otrajā pusē. Pētījuma procesā konstatētie fakti liek uzsvērt uz to, ka daudz vairāk būtu jādomā par jauniešu atpūtas iespējām šāda veida analizētajās teritorijās. Iegūtā informācija pierāda to, ka šajos analizētajos iekškvartālos jauniešiem nepastāv atpūtas iespējas sava brīvā laika pavadīšanai. Rezultātā, lielāka daļa jauniešu savu laiku pavada ārpus šīm teritorijām. Līdz ar to, socioloģisko aptauju dati objektīvi parāda cik lielas ir jauniešu atpūtas iespējas Padomju laika dzīvojamo rajonu iekškvartālos. Secinājums viens, šajās teritorijās nepieciešama kardināla pieeja konstatētās problemātikas novēršanai. Padomju laika dzīvojamo rajonu iekškvartālu teritorijas ir degradētas, nekoptas, atstātas novārtā un šobrīd tās pilnībā nespēj atbilstoši nodrošināt atpūtas iespējas šo teritoriju jauniešiem. Līdz ar to, tas pierāda pētījumā konstatēto apgalvojumu, ka šodienas kontekstā šie Padomju laika iekškvartāli tiek uzlūkoti kā neizmantojams teritorijas resurss. Šo iekškvartālu daudzfunkcionālā dzīvojamā ārtelpa ir sarežģīta sistēma, kur izmantojot adekvātus funkcionālās zonēšanas principus, mūsdienu skatījumā, būtu iespējams novērst konstatētās nepilnības.