

The Historic centre of Riga was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage list on 6 of December 1997 as a unique masterpiece, formed by medieval and later urban structure, density and quality of Art Nouveau and 19th century wooden architecture.

The site territory covers 438 hectares and it is 1, 4% of the city area containing more than 4500 buildings. The buffer zone territory forms 6.5% of total city area and its 1574 hectares.

The values of the Historic centre of Riga are:

- town planning structure, system of building principles, city's relation with natural environment;
- panorama and silhouette of the Old Riga;
- historical buildings: medieval architecture, art-nouveau architecture, 19th century wooden architecture;
- open public space - green area, parks, squares, gardens, historical watercourses.

During the inscription process for the Historic Centre of Riga a programme of specific measures was developed. However in 2000 and 2001, before the planning was completed and under significant economic pressure, the municipality accepted several projects that conflicted with the principles of heritage protection. The main problems caused mainly by economic pressure are:

- Collocation of the transport attracted buildings in the city centre disregarding the eventual consequences.
- Demolishing of buildings with the purpose to obtain empty spaces for construction of parking places instead of new buildings.
- Demolishing historical buildings, motivating that it is easier and cheaper to build up a new one than to renovate the historical buildings.
- Construction of big supermarkets that endangers the existence of small shops in the historical buildings thus ruining essential income resource for preservation of these buildings.
- New built constructions that due to their spectrum do not correspond to the character of the Historic Center of Riga.
- Attempts to build up public open space, green zones as well as places where historically there has been constructions, but which have transformed into public acknowledged qualitative open space.
- Renovation of historic buildings by using inappropriate contemporary materials and wares, low-grade complements of buildings;
- Alteration of mansards and attics in the historical buildings changing their volume.
- In order to gain immediate profits, construction activities become excessive, cheap and fast, usually resulting in buildings bigger than the specific site characteristics would normally support or structures located in unsuitable places.
- Demolishing of historical industrial buildings due to lack of awareness and respect.

- Changing the original elements of the buildings to the modern ones (plastic windows, doors etc.) and losing the authenticity.

The State Inspection for Heritage Protection launched a mass media campaign, asked the municipality to hasten the production of the preservation and development plan for the site and then asked the parliament and government to adopt a special law for the protection of the World Heritage site. The Inspection produced a document outlining the heritage values of the site and the development concept "Vision 2020" and its revised version "Vision 2020/2002".

In spite of this, the municipality of Riga gave permission for construction of a tall building in Ķīpsala, in the buffer zone of site, without agreement from the Inspection and without consideration of existing planning guidance.

As a result a law "On Preservation and Protection of the Historic Centre of Riga" was adopted in June 26, 2003 which was a clear signal that cultural heritage has value for society and that the development and preservation of the World Heritage Site is a priority.

The Riga municipality protested and brought an action to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia to annul a number of essential norms. The Constitutional Court, the highest court institutional in the Republic of Latvia, ruled that the law is in accord with the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and approved the demand for demand for cultural heritage preservation.

In October 2003 the Council for the Preservation and Development of the Historic Centre of Riga was created as a public, consultative institution consisting of ten members, including the Head and experts from the Inspection, the City Council, and National Commission for UNESCO, other authorities and architects' representatives. The Council meets twice a month and reviews topical issues concerning the preservation and development of the Historic Centre of Riga.

After several years of discussions, the Riga City Council finally adopted the Preservation and Development Plan of the Historic Centre of Riga and its Buffer zone in 2006.

The creation of these legal instruments and the development plan ensure that all projects in the Historic Centre of Riga and its buffer zone can be reviewed and that all new buildings respect the visual unity of the site. Consequently an affective control system of changes and a dialog between institutions have been achieved.

When the historical centre of town is inscribed in the list of World Heritage Sites, there are mixed feelings in the society – one group of people is usually pleased with the acknowledgment of its value, while the other is concerned about restrictions of development. No town is a stagnating place, if people want to live and work there, and it needs development, however, the quality of development is an important aspect. Cultural heritage is accumulated over many centuries and degrading or destroying any part of it makes the society poorer. In the management of the historic town it is not enough to view a separate monument; a place must be regarded as a whole.

Only the original elements comprise the highest value. By losing the original elements we lose a part of heritage that is impossible to recover. Therefore it is very important to study the values to be preserved, problematic issues and then find a solution for ensuring high quality human living space.

Development is impossible without modifications, and time also leaves its footprints. Modifications to the urban environment should serve as the contemporary contribution to the future quality.

A town is a collective system – democracy is not permissiveness. The society should always place its common interests higher than those of individual groups. Territorial planning is one of the most efficient instruments in developing a balanced living environment. Planning is a democratic agreement on territorial development concluded by and between all groups of stakeholders, where each individual group is open to negotiations and yielding that result in increased value – clear rules of preservation and development of historical town centers. Therefore it is important to clarify the interests of the society:

- What is the value we want to preserve
- What is unnecessary, impeding and should be removed
- What we lack as new and necessary.

Good examples in the world prove that high quality contemporary architecture does not degrade cultural heritage, and good cultural heritage policy does not hinder the development of modern architecture. Good contemporary architecture and design constitute future cultural heritage – it corresponds to the dominating quality level in the particular environment, observes building scale, characteristics, respect traditional materials and atmosphere created by architecture. High-quality contemporary architecture and design is added value to the environment.

Open public space is of important value in the functioning of a city. This man-made environment also forms the person himself/herself. A quality and democratic environment foster the intellectual, democratic and human values in the society.

First we need good ideas and only then the money for development, otherwise with money we spoil cultural heritage.

In case of the Historic Centre of Riga effective legislation has been created. Discussion about sensitive contemporary development and the preservation of cultural heritage should continue in the future as on the one hand we need to preserve the authenticity of the cultural heritage; and on the other, there is the need to support good contemporary architecture to build a bridge from the past to the future. Good contemporary architecture will become a cultural and historic monument of the future.

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