



The Public Spaces and Public Life survey in Riga consists of three parts

Part 1: Public Spaces - problems and potentials

A survey and an analysis of the problems and potentials in the city centre.

Part 2: Public Life - how the city is used

A study of usage patterns and an analysis of the pedestrian movements and stationary activities as well as cultural and commercial activities in the streets and other urban spaces.

Part 3: Recommendations

The third part is conclusions and recommendations based on the surveys presented in the previous parts.

Potentials:

Riga has rich historical and cultural characteristics as well as a unique location. These exceptional qualities are a natural foundation for the creation of one of Europe's most attractive cities.

The city centre is well preserved with beautiful streets and much variation in the buildings. Outside the Old Town there are many fine examples of Art Nouveau architecture with beautiful details, which add significant qualities and experiences to the streets and spaces.

The old ramparts are used as a ring of parks around the centre. They offer generous recreational possibilities, which supplement and enrich the city. Outside the ramparts is another set of parks, which offer further variety of recreational and amusement activities especially for children.

Riga is located at the Daugava River, which connects the city to the Baltic Sea and offer further valuable recreational areas for the city.

The central market is an exciting public space and busy with people all day.

The many pedestrians in Riga city centre contribute to a good city environment.

The Old Town has many intimate and beautiful old squares with great potential for a diverse public life.

Problems:

The city centre's exceptional potentials are at present not fully exploited.

Main roads create boundaries and produce difficulties for pedestrians. They significantly limit the urban quality and divide the city centre.

The pedestrian network is not sufficiently developed and pedestrians are not respected.

The quality of important squares and routes are low. The urban spaces are run down and in need of renewal or refurbishment.

The contact between the city and the river is weak as a major road separates the city from the river.

The city area facing the river has much unused potential.

The number of inhabitants in the city centre is relatively low compared to other cities of a similar size.

The street furniture is in need of renewal. There is no co-ordination of design of the street furniture.

The outdoor restaurants, bars and cafés are expanding in an uncontrolled manner. The furniture is often of poor quality.

Recommendations for improvement of Riga city centre:

The following suggestions could be implemented as single measures in phases. They could significantly contribute to the improvement of the urban quality in Riga's city centre.

1. Capitalize on Riga's unique qualities
2. Reduce traffic through the city centre
3. Create a better city to walk in
4. Create a better city to stay in
5. Improve the contact between the city and the riverfront
6. Introduce general quality improvements
7. Invite more residents and more diversity to the city centre

1. CAPITALIZE ON RIGA'S UNIQUE QUALITIES

Riga is blessed by a fortunate location near the river Daugava, a beautiful well-preserved Old Town with narrow, winding streets that are lined with fine buildings and many large parks. These qualities give character and charm to the city centre and offer the possibility to develop a fantastic city that can optimize these qualities.

Strengthen the history and the architectural heritage

Restore the cities valuable Art Nouveau buildings and renovate the medieval city streets in the Old Town. Make the cultural monuments visible and attractive to visit.

A waterfront city

Develop the riverfront by improving the access for pedestrians, renovate the buildings facing the river (especially the ground floor facades) and reduce the traffic. Explore the possibilities for activities near the water and on the water.

A city with fine green belts

Make the continuous fortification ring more visible by improving the ramparts at the market and at the citadel. Restore the citadel as an important part of the fortification by renovation of the old buildings and the square. Improve the connections between the different parts of the ramparts by improving the pedestrian access where roads cross the ramparts. Improve pedestrian connections between the residential areas and the parks.

A great market

Improve the pedestrian connections between the Old Town and the central market by reducing the traffic on 13. janvara iela. Demolish the pedestrian tunnels and establish pedestrian crossings instead. Improve the access from Gogola iela by widening the sidewalks. Improve the access from Maskavas iela and Krasta iela at the riverfront by introducing pedestrian crossings and improving the sidewalks.

A city for walking

A beautiful compact city with a great tradition for walking. This is of major importance for the city quality. Improve the connections in the city and develop a good pedestrian network. More streets and squares should be pedestrianized to develop a peaceful pedestrian network in the Old Town. Improve the pedestrian connections between the Old Town and the parks by decreasing the traffic in Basteja bulvaris, Aspazijas bulvaris, K. Valdemara iela and 13. janvara iela.



The main attractions in Riga city centre are the well-preserved Old Town, the large parks and the river.



The Old Town.



The river.



The parks.



The market.



The pedestrians.



The squares.

2. REDUCE TRAFFIC THROUGH THE CITY CENTRE

The traffic is rapidly becoming heavy in a number of important streets around the Old Town. The traffic divides and creates boundaries in the city and must be reduced. The character of the streets should be of a city street or a boulevard not a highway.

Establish a ring road

- which can lead the traffic around and away from the city centre
in order to reduce the traffic interventions on regional and local levels. To be able to secure a peaceful and friendly city centre, through traffic and lorry traffic must be avoided. Warehouse storage could be located at the ring road to minimize the number of lorry journeys to the city centre.

Establish traffic calming measures

- introduce phased traffic lights and reduce speed on selected routes.

Establish a distinct traffic hierarchy

- of highways, city streets, traffic calmed streets and pedestrian streets. Clarify the system through paving, street furniture, planting, city lighting and signage.

Campaign for improved traffic safety

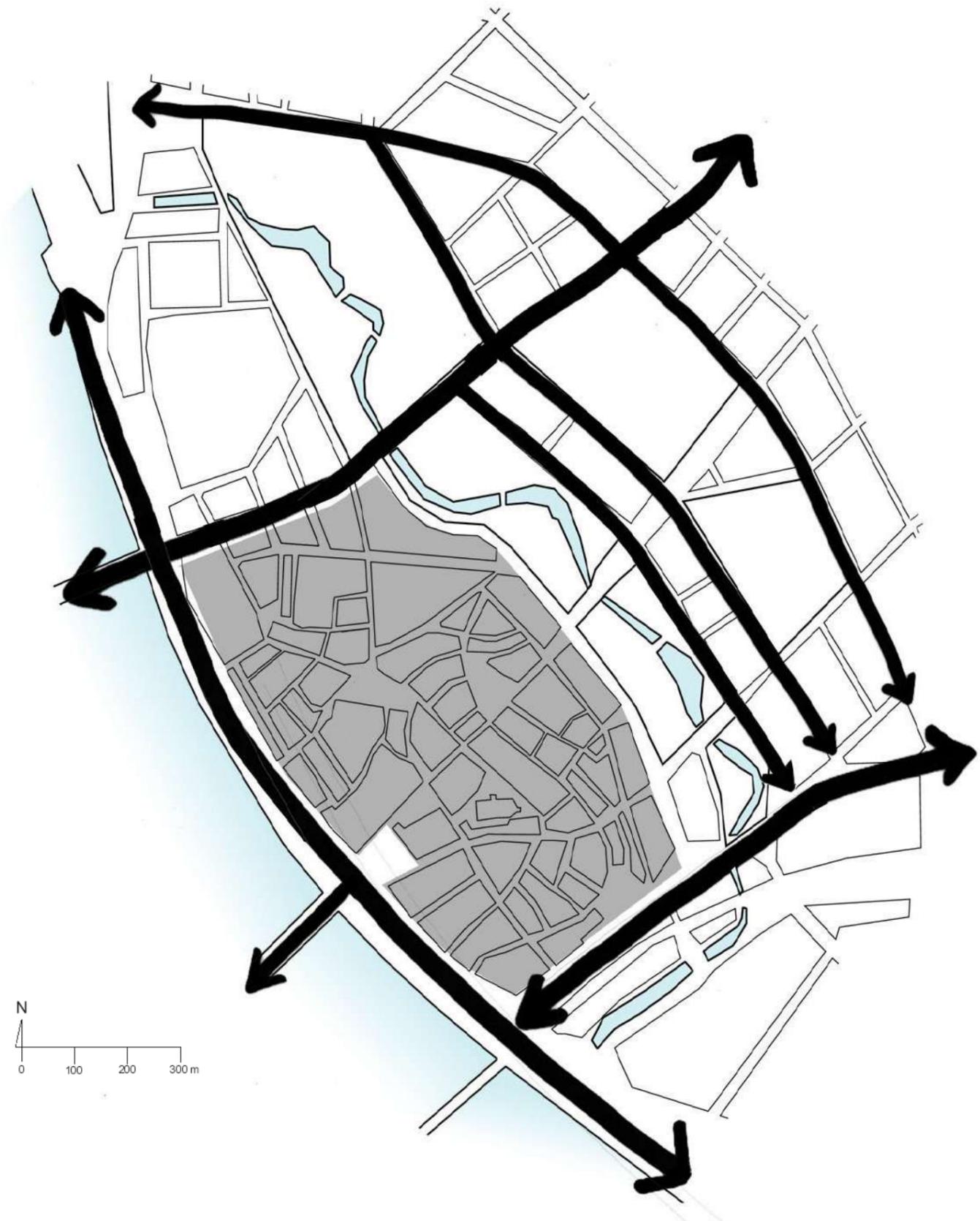
- improve consideration and respect for pedestrians.

Establish a continuous network of cycle paths

- in order to reduce the use of the car other forms of transport have to be made attractive. The bicycle is an environmentally friendly and cheap way to get around in the city. If more people cycle a reduction in traffic could be expected.

Improve Public transport

- introduce mini busses to service the Old Town. Improve the facilities for people travelling by bus such as, improvement of the bus stops and signage, introduction of bus shelters and establishment of raised platforms by the tram stops. Strengthen the trams as an environmentally viable form of traffic. Replace the old busses and trams.



The traffic in Riga has reached a level, which is pressurising the city environment.

3. CREATE A BETTER CITY TO WALK IN

An improvement of the connections in the city and the development of a pedestrian network can create a snowball effect. The different routes will be more attractive, the number of pedestrians will increase and the situation for the businesses will improve.

Create good walking routes

- which can make it attractive for people to walk to and in the city. Few interruptions, short waiting times at traffic lights. Improve the connections between the Old Town and the city outside the ramparts.

Create more car free pedestrian streets and squares

- develop an inviting pedestrian network that connects important destinations by pedestrianizing all of Kalku iela and Valnu iela as the main pedestrian streets. Make Doma laukums a car-free square to make it safer for pedestrians and to encourage more diverse activities.

Improve pavement

- all streets in Riga are with cobblestones which are quite uncomfortable especially for children, elderly and disabled persons. A strategy could be created for replacement of the rough cobblestones with an alternative stone pavement with a more smooth surface yet still according to the historic tradition. Another option is to widen the sidewalks which in many cases are too narrow for walking or to introduce lines of clear cut stones to be used for walking.
- clarify pavement and signage to clearly define where to walk and where to drive.

Ensure good quality and interesting ground floor facades

- where people walk to create an interesting, lively and safe street environment.

Improve pedestrian crossings

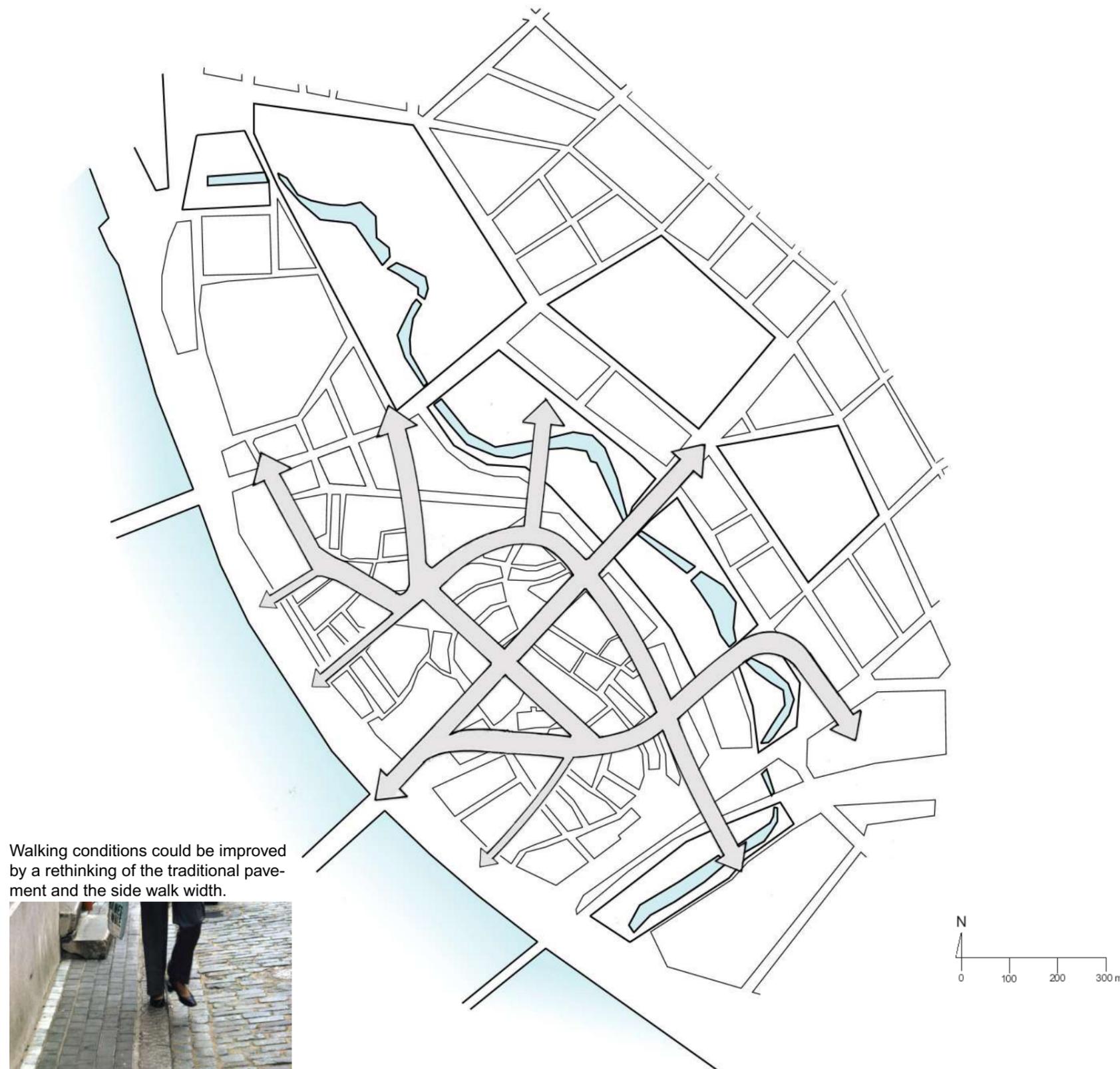
- by introducing more pedestrian crossings at important pedestrian routes.
- improve existing crossings by introducing lights and markings and clear and visible signage. Make pedestrian crossings in a straight and direct line and minimize the number of stops.
- introduce controlled parking to avoid cars in pedestrian crossings.
- remove the pedestrian tunnels.

Provide good quality lighting for the city streets

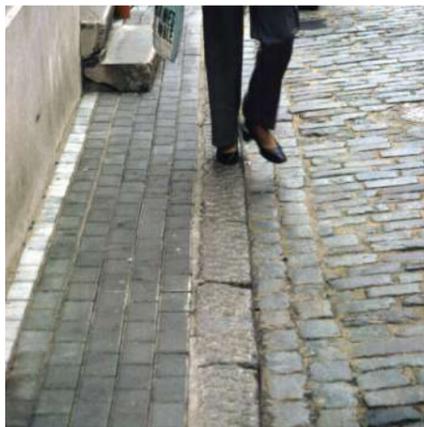
- to improve safety and to ease the pedestrian traffic.

Provide places to rest

- on squares and along streets with reasonable intervals.



Walking conditions could be improved by a rethinking of the traditional pavement and the side walk width.



The future pedestrian network should include the main squares and connect the important destinations in the city

4. CREATE A BETTER CITY TO STAY IN

Giving people the option to stay in the city creates possibilities for social interaction, which can bring people closer together and contribute to a good city environment. To make people stay in the city certain parameters have to be fulfilled. There need to be spaces of a reasonable quality, possibilities for resting and something or someone to look at. Riga has many spaces where there are great possibilities for public life. Common for all the spaces are that they need renovation and improvement.

Upgrading of the city squares

- to create a sense of ownership and pride and give people a feeling that the city is being carefully looked after.

Develop and complete the squares

- improve the damages caused by the bombings during the War. Especially Filharmonijas skvers suffers from undefined spatial boundaries where new buildings at the edge of the square could help create a well defined square. Other squares such as Doma laukums, Ratslaukums, Alberta laukums and Stacijas laukums suffer from similar problems and are in need of renewal. An architectural competition on e.g. Filharmonijas skvers could raise a public discussion about the squares and give different ideas to a future refurbishment.

A city for all seasons

- make the best of the climatic conditions. Extend the outdoor season where possible by providing public benches in good climatic locations and by providing guests at outdoor cafes with blankets and heaters. This can help to prolong the outdoor season and thereby secure a lively city environment for a longer part of the year.

Integrate functional and recreational pedestrian activities

- by offering good conditions to stay where people pass on their way to do necessary activities such as going to the market or to the station. This can tempt people to engage in social activities and to stay for a longer time than they originally planned.

Improve the possibilities for resting

- by providing more public benches in the public spaces. Place public benches in nice locations with sun and shelter from the wind and public life to watch.

Locate outdoor restaurants and bars in sunny and attractive locations



Existing and potential areas for stationary activities in the city centre.



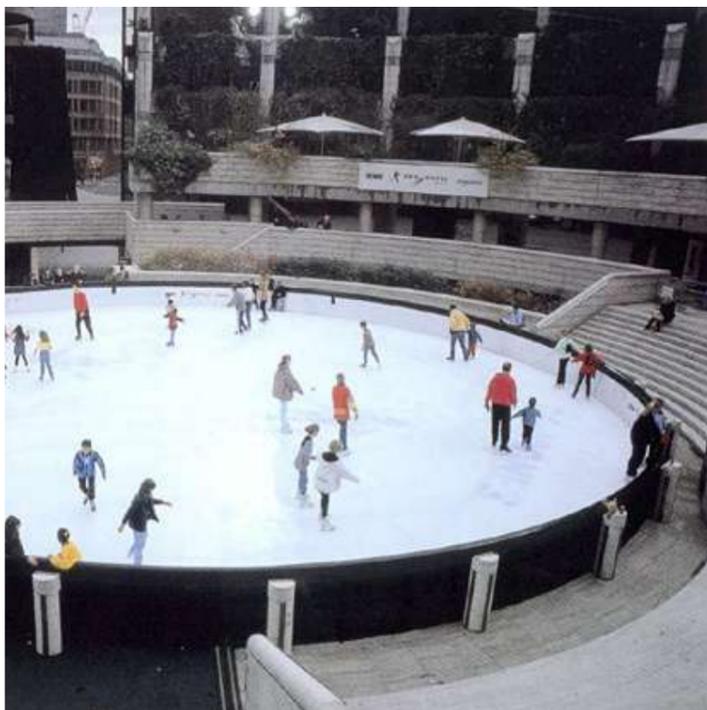
Copenhagen, Denmark.



Portland, Oregon, USA.



Toronto, Canada.



Broadgate Arena, London, England.



Lyon, France.



Oslo, Norway.

5. IMPROVE THE CONTACT BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE RIVERFRONT

Today the city is disconnected from the riverfront by a major highway, which limits the pedestrian activities by the river. The heavy traffic restricts future development of the buildings facing the river, where an attractive mix of uses could be located.

Strengthen the connections to the riverfront

- by improving and adding new pedestrian crossings to ease access to the river promenade. Reduce the traffic and improve the connections between the different parts of the promenade.

Strengthen the small-scale city streets

- leading from the city to the river such as Biskapa gate. These streets often present a direct visual connection to the river. This helps to minimize the perception of distance to the river.

Pedestrianize a part of the riverfront

- from Vansu tilts to Akmens tilts. This will enable free pedestrian access to the river. The buildings facing the river will be in a much improved position, which will encourage renovation and be inviting for a wide range of activities.

Develop the ground floor facades facing the river

- to create a lively promenade for walking with interesting experiences and a wide range of activities. Create a lively building frontage to the river with a mix of uses.

Develop Ratslaukums to a public space in close contact with the river

- the current state of Ratslaukums is poor. The taxis and the parked cars ought to be relocated in order to create a peaceful square with space for people and the connection to the river improved.

Improve the area behind the market next to the river

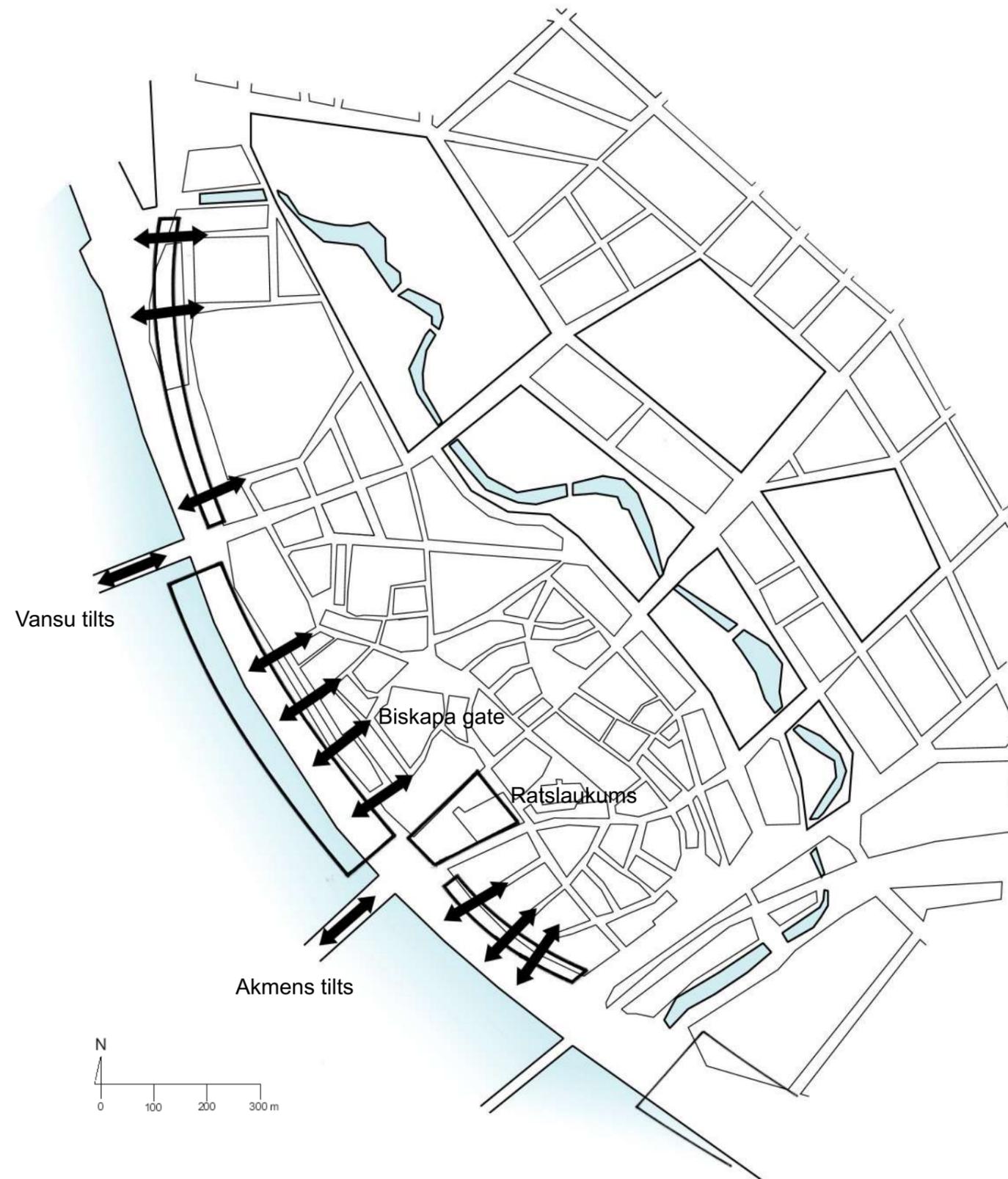
- today this area is used only for parking, although it holds great potential for new buildings on a prestigious site located in close contact with the river. The area is at the end of the fortification ring of parks and has recreational possibilities to be explored.

Improvement of the bridges

- by creating better access for pedestrians to the bridges. Provide wider pavements and cycle lanes in both directions.

Use the river for recreational activities

- such as sailing, canoeing and windsurfing.



Development of the riverfront should include the adjoining streets and square as well as the bridges.



Aerial photo of Riga City Center and the connection to the river.
Riga City Council
Photographer Juris Kalnins

6. INTRODUCE GENERAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

Introduce a local design profile for Riga

- which can give create a strong city image and a sense of ownership of the public spaces.
Choose a city colour for the street furniture.

Renew street paving and furniture

- the paving is generally broken or of a poor quality.

Avoid man made materials and use natural stone as granite, which gives quality to the public spaces.

A renewal of street furniture is needed as most of the furniture is in a poor state or of a poor quality.

In other European cities such as Oslo or Copenhagen design and maintenance of street furniture is sponsored.

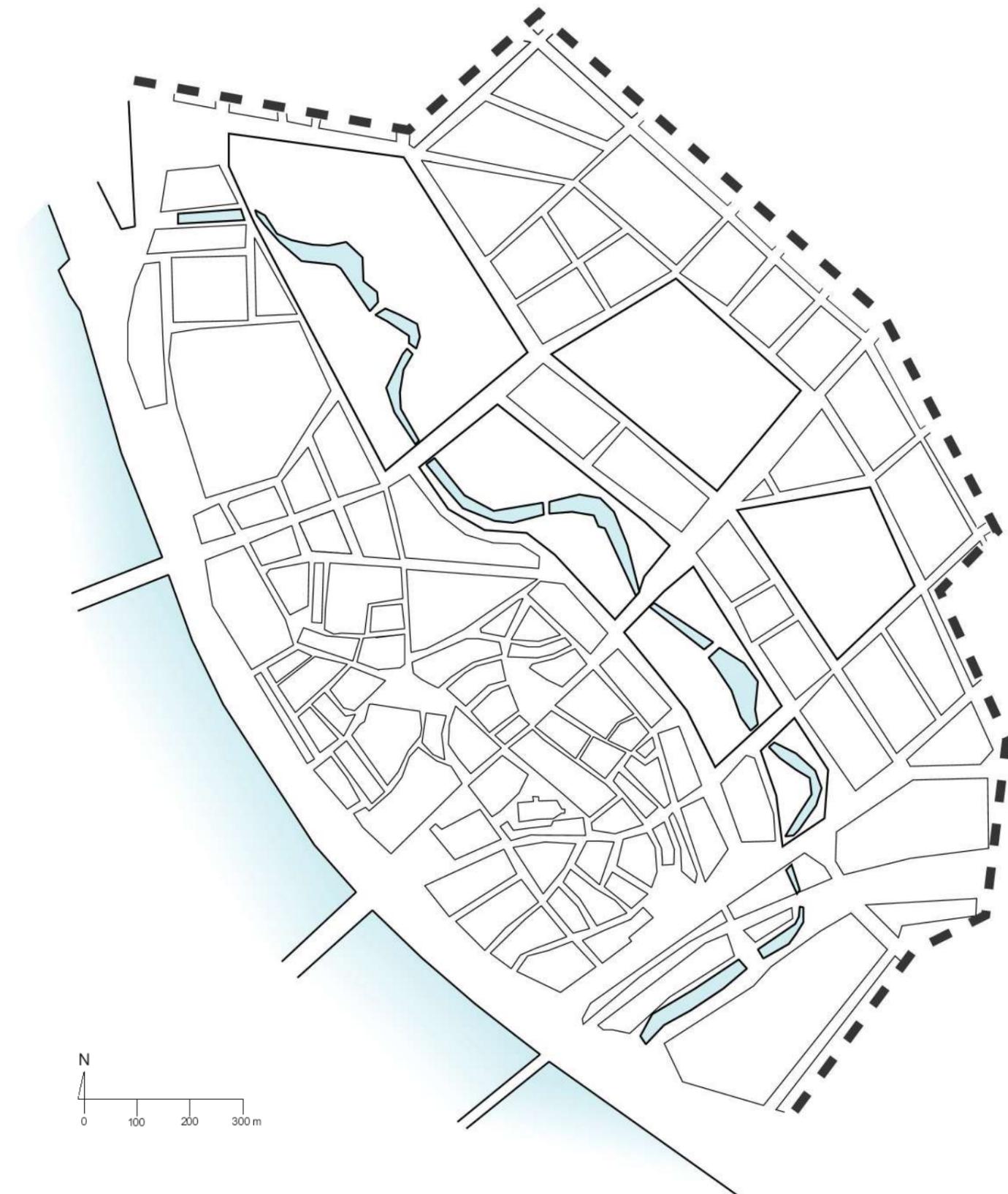
Create an overall lighting plan for the city centre

- as a part of a strategy to reduce crime and improve the street lighting. There is no public lighting in many public spaces or it is of poor quality. Good, beautiful lighting contributes to the feeling of safety and create a good and friendly street environment.

Coordinate and adjust the areas used for outdoor cafes

- ensure that the outdoor restaurants and cafes do not block pedestrian routes. Outdoor restaurants and cafes should not limit the spatial qualities of the public spaces by dividing the spaces or creating new spatial boundaries.

Introduce guidelines for good quality furniture.



A renewal of the street furniture should take place in the whole city centre, with a special treatment of the most important streets, squares and parks.



Example: Bus shelter, London, England.



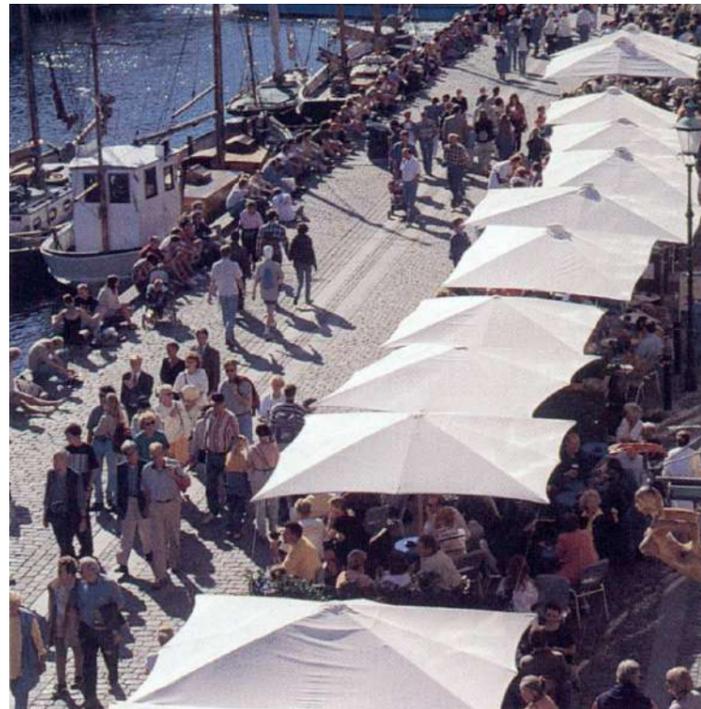
Example: Public benches, Copenhagen, Denmark.



Example: Advertising pillar, Prague, Czechoslovakia.



Example: Outdoor café, Copenhagen, Denmark.



Example: Parasols at outdoor cafés, Copenhagen, Denmark.



Example: Streetlight, Kuovola, Finland.

7. INVITE MORE RESIDENTS AND MORE DIVERSITY TO THE CITY CENTRE

Encourage more people to live in the city centre

- by establishing new flats of a high quality in attractive locations at the riverfront, the citadel and central city areas.

Start the process of urban renewal in the city centre to update the existing flats.

General improvement of the public spaces will make it more attractive to live in the city centre.

Create a lively and safe city also at night time

- by increasing the number of dwellings in the city centre.

Develop the Newtown area

- and similar areas characterized by many empty buildings, decay and a lack of use.

Develop student housing

- redevelop existing buildings in the city centre for student housing.

Strengthen the educational institutions

- to maintain Riga's many students in the city centre. They use the squares and parks extensively and contribute to a valuable public life.

Create a good mix of different uses

Integration of shops, offices and dwellings in the city quarter and in the different buildings. Shops can be located on the ground floor, offices on the first floor and dwellings on the upper floors. A mix of uses can secure life in the city streets and squares at all times of the day.



Dwellings can be introduced in New Town and other less developed areas



Senior citizens resting in Riga, Latvia.



People relaxing and socializing in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Children playing in Freiburg, Germany.



Lived in houses with friendly facades.



Lively street environments.



Light in the windows from the residences in the city.

REFLECTIONS

Based on the studies of the public spaces and how people use the city it is possible to see important structural potentials and problems.

This report analyses the public spaces and how people in Riga use their city based on observations and data collected. From this recommendations and guidelines can be extracted of measures needed to improve the pedestrian network and the public spaces.

Riga has in the past years taken a remarkable step to improve the Old Town by introducing pay-tolls. This has created new possibilities for public life to evolve. The main challenge at present is to limit the traffic in the centre if the city's streets and squares are to be maintained as pedestrian squares. The traffic in the centre has to be reduced by redirecting the traffic around the centre and alternative modes of transport as busses, trams and cycling has to be made more attractive.

The conditions for pedestrians are at present difficult and it is necessary to improve the crossings and give priority to the pedestrians in the central squares. The pedestrian network must be developed to create better connections in the city and Kalku iela extended and upgraded to be the main pedestrian street. The improvement of the squares is part of a development of the pedestrian network to strengthen the public life in Riga.

There are many qualities in Riga and the potential for a better city is so great that there will be large investments to improve the city in the coming years. It is important to prioritize the actions to achieve good results for people in the city.