

DRAUDZIGO
R ~~LATVISKU~~
RĪGU

TP 1363



GRAFI
KOP
KOP

RUŠI
RUŠI
RUŠI

REMĒD

ESĒI
DROZI
PAR ~~LATV~~
RĪGI
RĪGI



RIGA,

RIGA!

ESĒI
DROZI
PAR ~~LATVISK~~
RĪGI
RĪGI

Friendly Riga / Draudzīgā Rīga

Oskars Redbergs
Architect, Program Director,
RISEBA Faculty of Architecture and Design, Riga

In order to analyze the presence of Otherness in the urban environment of Riga it is necessary to define the “Otherness” that has traditionally been considered to be an opposite to “non-Otherness” or as being outside its culture. At the end of 2013 Megaphone Publishers published a bilingual collection of essays, *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Riga, in which urban culture was explored. Among the twenty invited authors many spoke about the issue of Otherness and explored the diverse nature of Otherness in the case of Riga that, as a post-socialist, post-colonial and post-industrial city, also serves as capital to a nation state.

Conflicting collective memories, the presence of the alien in culture and, at the same time, the alienation of the non-alien from its own culture, life in two temporalities, communication and everyday life in parallel informative and linguistic spaces, a split information space, transnational mobility, simultaneous life in real and virtual territories, the impact of mass media and disinformation, controversy between global economic flows and local culture, etcetera... These are topics offering a small insight into the conditions in which varied layers of Otherness emerge today in Riga.

Riga is the capital as well as the largest city in Latvia, with a steadily decreasing population (approximately ten thousand per year) of 714 000 inhabitants (2009). There is an almost perfect equilibrium between the number of Latvian (41,5 percent in 2001) and Russian (43,4 percent in 2001) inhabitants of the city. This balance is reflected in each ethnic group’s command of the other’s language; according to National Census data (2000) 81,7 percent of the Latvian population know the Latvian

language, while 84 percent of the Latvian population can communicate in Russian too.¹

Otherness is also the central topic in the essay *On the Limits of Otherness. Intimate Reflections on Ethnicity and Memory in Contemporary Latvia* by the cultural theorist Deniss Hanovs who refers to the permanent presence of Otherness in Latvian society. Hanovs infers that memories associated with nationalities cause the emergence of Otherness, while public and political discourses contribute to its strengthening. The author admits that the creation of a new collective memory, characterized by the diversity of memory and acceptance of Otherness is probably the most challenging task for contemporary Latvian society.²

However, seeing Otherness only through the prism of ethnic affiliation might not give us a complete understanding of its diverse nature. In the essay *Two Temporalities. Everyday Life in Double Temporality* anthropologist Viesturs Celmiņš writes about the existence of local culture and everyday life in two temporalities: in one case, the present is seen through a prism of factual, successive, decisive historical events, while in the other it is the mundane, unremarkable and flowing present that is emphasized. Celmiņš underlines that the clash of these two temporalities is inevitable in Riga and that this kind of interaction is necessary because, unlike the state, the city exists in a more ambiguous nation space, in a united flow of two seemingly contradictory temporalities.³

In his essay *Why is Riga Bigger than Latvia?* historian Leons Taivāns outlines the most significant issues encountered by Riga, struggling to balance its status as the capital of the nation-state with being an ambitious European city with long traditions and a history of multiculturalism.

Taivāns describes the phenomena of an age when the Latvian element existed as Otherness in the urban environment of Riga. That was the exact reason why measures for making the capital more Latvian were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Latvian Ethnographic Open-Air Museum established in 1932 was one such effort. The museum complex spreading out on the picturesque shore of Lake Jugla had to introduce and strengthen the Latvian element in this “Tower of Babel”.

Nevertheless, urban developments in Riga did not draw inspiration from the poetry of the Open-Air Museum and did not reflect its pastoral harmony. Taivāns explains that “Just as the Open-Air Museum makes up only a small although beautiful and snug part of Riga on its outskirts, patriarchal Latvia is still and will be smaller than Riga with its

global ambitions, where many languages have been spoken for centuries, where people of different nationalities have lived side by side and which definitely was part of Europe and only to a lesser extent – part of that eastern coast of the Baltic Sea which was once known as Livonia, Inflanty, the Province of Vidzeme and now – Latvia.”⁴

In his essay *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* urban theorist Krzysztof Nawratek also considers Riga to be an interesting case because of repeated attempts to establish one homogeneous narrative to define the city by different ideologies.

“The structure of the city reflects its 800 years of history. The legacies of Swedish, Polish, Russian, German and finally Latvian rulers tell a lot of different stories, loosely connected to each other and creating a magnitude of chaotic micro narrations. Half of the city was built during the Soviet period and almost 70 percent of its population today live in block-house residential areas – the highest percentage of all European cities. The lack of clear structure is probably a principal feature of this city. [...] This not only reflects the complicated history of the city but somehow also creates an uncomfortable state of unpredictability for the future. [...] Nowadays, the observation of post-modern fragmentation of almost every city is a trivial activity, however, in the case of Riga it is interesting because of repeated attempts to establish one homogeneous narrative to define the city. For many years the Soviets occupying Latvia attempted to impose a modernist narrative of a socialist industrial city. As a result, capitalist Riga was surrounded by an industrial belt and scattered *mikrorajons* (districts) were added. Pre-Soviet Riga did not disappear, but buckled under the pressure from the Soviet narrative.”⁵

Nawratek has also formulated the narratives that have been formed, developed and soon ceased to exist when the independence of Latvia was restored: “There were two – sometimes competing and sometimes complimentary which can be conventionally described as referring to national identity, attempted to erase the traces of Soviet occupation [...] and to build a new Riga in relation to the pre-Soviet urban and cultural landscape. The other opened Riga to the expansion of global capital, as the city searched for a new shape by copying symbols familiar to countless cities in the world – the new identity of Riga was supposed to be based on the idea ‘here is just like everywhere’. Nowadays, both of these narratives are dead. The ‘National’ narrative has shown its absurdity, when it tried to build a ‘Latvian Riga’. The ‘Global’ narrative collapsed along with the bursting of the real estate bubble and with the onset of recession.”⁶

In order to analyze the representation of the newly emerging narratives in the urban environment of Riga, we have to focus on several recent examples of architectural and urban projects, built over the last few years. Several years of research and critical studies have also been reflected in the publication *9 Conditions of Riga: Regeneration and Transformation of the City, Urban Environment and Architecture* (2013) which has provided a basis for the hypothesis of a possible emergence of several new narratives or even paradigms in the architecture and urban environment of Riga city.

Referring to the classification of new urban typologies, examined in *9 Conditions of Riga*, the so-called movement of “New Pastoralism” – the impact of which is increasingly noticeable in the scale of the city – can be considered as an attempt to reflect the Latvian homogenizing culture in the city.

Kalnciema Quarter, Old Kipsala, Berga Bazaar, etcetera are good examples of this movement that could be described as well ordered, controlled and carefully artistically curated urban space. Similarly to the Open-Air Museum it shows the “imaginary absolute”⁷ of Latvian society of Riga and endeavors to restore and improve some parts of the city from the pre-Modernist era. The movement aims to restore the connection between city life and nature while still preserving the very image of a traditional European city. However, contemporary urban culture is exactly opposite; it doesn’t aim for homogenization, but rather enjoys its freedom to remain “jumbled”, where strangers meet, remain in each other’s proximity, and interact for a long time without stopping being strangers to each other and without trying to blend in some unified cultural landscape. These examples remain separated phenomena that are detached from the realities of the everyday city.

Another example of new urban typologies that shows the “alienation” of individual buildings from the city is so-called “Autonomy”.⁹ The buildings which belong to this self-sufficient typological category can be observed in areas close to the city center, which accommodate bank buildings, sports centers and residential clusters with multistorey apartment buildings.

These pretentious buildings and cluster blocks are archipelagos of autonomous objects scattered all around the urban environment. It is interesting that similarly to the bank and finance centers (Rietumu Bank, Swedbank headquarters, Rietumu Capital Centre, DnB Bank building etcetera) developed under the “global” narrative, the National Library of Latvia that was built under the influence of the “National” narrative was also encompassing the qualities of autonomy.

All these buildings are virtually superconnected and superintegrated into the global data and financial networks, but at the same time they are architectonically and physically separated, alienated from the surrounding urban environment and do not have an articulated public open space. The only connection they have to one another and the rest of the city is on the level of public transport infrastructure.¹⁰

The project of the National Library of Latvia, that initially was intended as a representation of the archetypical idea of the Latvian state, is another attempt to represent Latvia in Riga's urban landscape by using a "National" narrative. In order to bridge the gap between the 'imaginary absolute' and the actual everyday life of inhabitants, the Ministry of Culture of Latvia sees its task as developing an advertising campaign or prescriptive system that would help to explain the value and the symbolic meaning of the newly built building and ensure the appropriate interpretation and perception of its "right" meaning thus removing discussion regarding the true qualities of the building, quality of planning and construction processes, involvement of society in decision making, quality of the outdoor public space, feasibility and economically technical issues, maintenance costs, energy efficiency and sustainability issues etcetera.

However, in contrast with other advertising campaigns, in the case of architecture the problem lies in the fact that the building will be present in everyday life and will raise questions regarding the actual qualities of the building and its surrounding public space.

Today these narratives of "Latvian Riga" and "Global Riga" have lost their relevance and Riga is searching for a new and powerful narrative. This narrative must give Riga a strong validation to exist and develop within a challenging post-crisis global context. In the meantime, the absence of such a long lasting narrative is currently replaced by the not yet fully defined phenomenon of "Friendly Riga" (Draudzīgā Rīga).

The narrative of "Friendly Riga" is used by the current ruling party in Riga city government. However, unlike the state political power and the "National" narrative, Riga city government is not obliged to implement and represent the somewhat ponderous "Latvian Riga" ideology in the cityscape. On the contrary, liberated from this mission, the current ruling powers of Riga enjoy a freedom that gives them the opportunity to simultaneously implement the most diverse and controversial micro-narratives, mostly dealing with everyday issues in the fields of entertainment, culture, sports, economics, social services etcetera, but also gaining the freedom to integrate common political agenda issues like the provision of official support from Riga city

to the territories of Eastern Ukraine controlled by separatists or signing a cooperation agreement with Russia's ruling party "United Russia" with great ease.

The narrative of "Friendly Riga" is a creation by highly skilled public relation agencies and it is based on the simple revelation that the only unifying factor for the majority of Riga's post-Soviet inhabitants of diverse ethnic backgrounds is the vocabulary and culture of Soviet animated cartoons. Such a strategy seemingly removes all the difficult and contradicting issues from the daily agenda, giving an opportunity to overcome controversies and conflicts in society and performing a consolidation of the electorate.

Friendliness" is a term that was widely used in the Soviet Union to divert the representatives of different brotherly republics from addressing issues of ethnicity or Otherness, but rather focusing on solving daily social issues. ("Guys, let's be friends!" from the animated cartoon *Leopold the Cat*). Friendliness is a significant topic in literature, songs, films and animated cartoons. In this narrative the city's inhabitant is a hero of the animated cartoon who performs his daily heroic deeds in the background of the scenography like the urban landscape, without requiring his involvement in its planning or creation.

From this perspective of the "Friendly Riga" narrative, Riga has become a city of a Soviet animated cartoon. The main characteristics of it are an ease of relating various sub-narratives – violence and sports, hooliganism and care, attempts to make friends, and where the everyday hero interacts with his fellow citizens in the urban space, in which the public or private space are intersected, and characters are liberated from the burden of private property or establishing a feeling of belonging.

However, the narrative of "Friendly Riga" should not be seen as a solitary topic, but rather as relating to a string of global tendencies in city management and planning that can be described as *Carnival Urbanism*, *Disneyfication*, *Potemkin village*, *Urban Choreography*, etcetera. Some examples are the Riga city boundary sign R.I.G.A. with the colored heart, festivities of Riga 2014 – European Capital of Culture, 9th May festivities and the mid-summer festival at embankment.

The narrative of "Friendly Riga" is also characterized by the "Arrangement"¹¹ of public space and public buildings. "Arrangement" ("Sakārtošana") is a typical post-socialist contribution to the Latvian terminology of urban planning derived from primitive pre-election political rhetoric.

“Arrangement” means the implementation of any evident changes in the environment that are different from the existing/former “unarrangement”. The success of the term “arrangement” lies in the philosophy that “the new is better than the mundane”. The difference between what is “arranged” and what there was before the “arrangement” is automatically seen as a quantitative improvement, nevertheless, at the same time, it does not give any professional or public explanation on whether and how the “arrangement” could have been implemented in accordance with the objective criteria of quality, aesthetics and economics and by involving both the inhabitants and different urban planning and architectural mechanisms. Furthermore, those projects which are related to the improvement of Riga public space are sometimes financed by the European Union.¹² Lucavsala Development Project, Ķīpsala beach, Ķengarags Promenade etcetera are good examples of this movement.

CONCLUSION

The permanent presence of Otherness throughout history in the cultural and urban landscape of Riga city is visible not only through the lack of clear structure, that is probably a principal feature of this city, but also by repeating the attempts of different powers and ideologies to establish one homogeneous narrative to define the city. However, it has never been completely achieved and all these narratives are represented and co-exist today.

The “National” narrative has repeatedly shown its absurdity, when it tried to build a “Latvian Riga”, but also the “global” narrative collapsed along with the bursting of the real estate bubble and with the onset of recession.¹³ But also the “Friendly Riga” narrative has proven itself to be short-lived with its expressed support to imperialistic Russia’s policies in Ukraine and Latvia.

Therefore, Riga now faces a very interesting challenge – the search for a new narrative, it must construct its new, post-Soviet yet not post-modern narrative. The new narrative cannot be a nationalist one because it is contradictory to the daily social processes and might raise inter-ethnic tensions. There can also be neither a “European” nor a “global” narrative, simply because it would not have enough power to give Riga the subjectivity necessary to survive.¹⁴ Similarly, it cannot be a “pro Russia” narrative either as it endangers the development of civil society, national independence and territorial integrity.

Urban culture plays the most significant role in creating social change. And it is in cities where new ideas and concepts are created regarding how new and more successful models of mutual communal cohabitation and economic growth could be made.

Today Riga might be finding itself in the “post-ideological” age, where there is not a unified vision for the development of either the state or the city. The urban planning process is based on a series of defined, but also sometimes still undefined simultaneous sub-narratives, that require the constant harmonization of controversial opinions and overcoming the contradictions induced by the democratic process.

However, new means of urban development are to be found taking into account the challenging post-crisis global context as well as conditions in which new cultures is emerging in Riga and Latvia.

Riga as an economic and culture driving force has to find its own ‘Riga’ narrative and it should take responsibility for the common development of the entire state. Perhaps only because Riga is bigger than Latvia!

1 Nawratek Krzysztof, *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 129–132.

2 Hanovs Deniss *On the Limits of Otherness. Intimate Reflections on Ethnicity and Memory in Contemporary Latvia* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 235–242.

3 Celmiņš Viesturs *Two Temporalities. Everyday Life in Double Temporality* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 223–226.

4 Taivāns Leons *Why is Riga Bigger than Latvia?* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 81–85.

5 Nawratek Krzysztof, *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 129–132.

6 Krzysztof, *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 129–132.

7 Taivāns Leons *Why is Riga Bigger than Latvia?* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 81–85.

8 Bauman Zygmunt *City of Fears, City of Hopes*. – London: Goldsmiths College, 2003.

9 initially defined by Oskars Redbergs in the publication “9 Conditions of Riga”

10 Redbergs Oskars *Curatorial Statement // 9 Conditions of Riga: Regeneration and Transformation of the City, Urban Environment and Architecture* / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 4–6.

11 initially defined by Oskars Redbergs in the publication “9 Conditions of Riga”

12 Redbergs Oskars *Curatorial Statement // 9 Conditions of Riga: Regeneration and Transformation of the City, Urban Environment and Architecture* / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 4–6.

13 Nawratek Krzysztof, *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 129–132.

14 Nawratek Krzysztof, *Contemporary Capitalism and a Post-socialist City: the Bankruptcy of Neo-liberal Riga* // *Mūsdienu kultūras stāvokļi / Conditions for Contemporary Culture*. Rīga / ed. Oskars Redbergs. – Rīga: Megaphone Publishers, 2013. – P. 132.



URBAN
ANTICIPATION

*It's me,
Riga!*

FÄRGFABRIKEN

CONTENTS

- 03** **Aknowledgements**
- 04 Baltic Dimensions
- 05** **Hello Riga!**
- 07 Whispering Walls
Hans Lepp
- 15** **The Sentries of the Empire Invisible**
Michael Azar
- 21 Competing Memories. On ethnicity
and diversity in Latvia
Deniss Hanovs
- 35** **Diversify your memories!**
Think about Pļavnieki
Aleksandrs Feltns
- 45 Silent Night
Ernests Šveisbergs
- 47** **On the Otherness. The Case of Riga**
Jānis Kļāsts
- 57 Hospital Forest
Ernests Šveisbergs
- 59** **Hell and Paradise: Moscow Forstadt
as a Place of Contrast and the
Celebration of Otherness**
Igors Vatoļins
- 70 Urban Realm as a tool for
manifestation
Igors Malovickis
- 85** **The River Daugava and its Islands**
Madara Gibze and Igors Vatoļins
- 93 Friendly Riga / Draudzīgā Riga
Oskars Redbergs