

## City profile for Riga

### Main characteristics of the town

Riga is the capital of Latvia and the main industrial, business, cultural and financial centre in the Baltics. Over 700 000 people live within the city boundaries, whereas the number of inhabitants in the Riga agglomeration is 1.15 million, which is almost half of the population of Latvia.

The land area of Riga is 304 km<sup>2</sup>, mainly dwelling areas (29.9%) and green areas (28%). The rest of the city land is divided in port areas (5.5%), technical building spaces (2.9%) and industrial areas (2.3%).

Riga is a city with a unique cultural and historical heritage – the Historic Centre of Riga has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List and is remarkable with Art Nouveau architecture. Riga is a beautiful European city that develops large and small businesses. Great attention is paid to the tourism industry. Riga City Council and its leadership is making every effort to create favourable conditions for business development.

### Main characteristics in terms of temporary use practice

Up to the global economical crisis in 2008 Riga was the fastest growing capital of European Union with booming property development market and emerging repurposing processes of old industrial and harbour areas around the city centre.

The first experiments in temporary use were spearheaded by the interest of private investors in revitalizing degraded areas. For example, after the initial plans for the development of Andrejsala, former dock-land area just next to the historical city centre, the investors in 2005 opened the area for temporary use by artists and social projects, making this area of Riga attractive again for the population. Similarly smaller scale temporary use projects have been implemented by private developers in VEF factory area and Spīķeri area rehabilitating former industrial buildings.

Due to the crisis, many construction projects in Riga have been frozen turning boom into full-scale bust. Taking into account the economic situation, Riga faced the problem of large numbers of vacant property (more than 350 vacant properties have been mapped mostly in the city centre), as well as degraded territories and property (ruins). This gives rise to another motivation for implementing temporary use projects, namely, to cover the maintenance costs and preserve existing buildings in the areas that are waiting new development opportunities.

Up to now Riga City Council Property Department which deals with administration and management of the entire estate owned by the city, had no experience in temporary use projects. The economical situation is motivating the city to examine opportunities and find models to support and initiate temporary use projects.

## Temporary use as a asset for neighbourhood revitalisation

Riga city administration has a past culture of top-down urban development, characteristic of the booming expansion of the city up to the 2008 economical crisis. Citizens' participation is taking off now with consultation in the neighbourhoods and urban development taking into account citizens' aspirations and implementing their ideas.

The requalification of Deglava city dump is an example. In the late 90s, the city expanded in this area around a city dump with habitations at a walking distance from dangerous toxic waste. The consultation of the populations living around showed needs for green and recreation area. A project was developed by the city in order to bridge between the current situation and citizens' expectations. The dump is now covered with a thick layer of land making a small urban mountain of green grass where families living nearby are expected to develop recreational activities (see box Deglava street recultivated city dump).

### Deglava street recultivated city dump



Deglava area has been used as a dump during the Soviet period. Since the 70s, Riga city has grown up and developed around the dump that both was an unpleasant and dangerous area in the neighbourhood for the hazardous wastes it contained. Local inhabitants around pushed to turn it into a usable green place for the neighbourhood. A regeneration project was started based on a mixed funding from Riga city and from Europe. The dump has been covered by the large thickness of land and planted with grass. It looks now like a small hill in the city that after stabilisation will be used as a ski resort in the winter and picnic area in the summer.

Another recreational area, the Kipsalas beach shows an example of urban development of green space nearer to temporary use topic. The Daugava river

traversing the city has been used by Riga inhabitants for bathing during summer time in particular the sandy river bench in front of the Lucavsala neighbourhoods. With the success of this popular practice the area progressively developed into a temporary inner-city summer resort equipped for recreational and sport activities. It is now fully part of the touristic offer of the city in the summer and is a good example of informal temporary use benefits that turned progressively permanent (see box Lucavsala, Kipsalas beach).

### Lucavsala, Kipsalas beach



The summer in Latvia is very short and if you want to swim in the open water but you don't have enough time to go to the sea, Kipsala Beach is a perfect solution. The Daugava river naturally accumulated sand near the Vansu Tilts bridge. This place has been used as beach in the summer season. The temporary use of this municipal land has now been turned into an urban summer resort area with beach volleyball, beach football and other outdoor activities. It offers Riga a recreational area available at just 5-10 minutes walking from the Old Town with a nice view towards the rest of the city.

Beyond use of unused land, the large quantity and variety of vacant buildings in Riga stimulated temporary use experiences aimed at reintegration and redevelopment of former industrial areas. The collaboration with the artistic and creative scene in particular allowed revitalizing urban areas and attracting the city population. The former warehouse buildings of the Spikeri area near the city central food market is a successful flagship project. A good collaboration between the warehouse owners, developers has been organized with the mediation of the Executive Board East of the city of Riga. The place was offered with cheap preferential rents to cultural and creative projects that played a determinant role in the requalification of the area known now as the Spikeri Creative Quarter (see box Spikeri Creative Quarter).



## Spikeri creative quarter



Spikeri is a new creative quarter settled in former warehouses near Riga's central food market. It is an example of owner initiated creative temporary use to facilitate development of a new creative-culture quarter. Spikeri developers negotiated backing of the City with Development Department organizing EU funded investment. Warehouses have been refurbished and the degraded outdoor space has been developed into a quality public outdoor space with organizational support of Executive board "East" of city of Riga.

Cultural initiatives benefited from temporary use of spaces during the transition period. They contributed to the requalification of the place. Main ones as the Dirty Deal Teatro, after end of tenancy in Andrejsala, moved activities to the new privately developed Spikeri creative quarter in 2009 where it is still operating.

In the Spikeri project the collaboration with temporary users served more the interests of developers: in the end only strong artistic projects such as the Dirty Teatro involved in the temporary use scheme managed to resist the gentrification process and remained as a flagship of the creative quarter.

In the case of Andrejsala docklands the opposite happened: the redevelopment project failed and artists and cultural creatives involved flew away to more attractive zones of the city. The Andrejsala former harbour area of Riga was chosen for the construction of the new contemporary art museum. Private developers start investing in the redevelopment process and open existing buildings for temporary use hosting artists in residence and exhibitions. The process worked and the area began to gain reputation as a new artistic hub attracting Riga's youth population. The museum project was cancelled by the municipality and all the redevelopment strategy failed: Developers accept more commercially oriented temporary users to try to cover their lost expenses. The area began to be less attractive for artists that settled elsewhere. The temporary use did not finish because it reaches time limits but because the meaning of the place changed (see box Andrejsala docklands area).

Both Spikeri and Andrejsala cases shows the subtle balance needed to keep synergy and fair collaboration between temporary users and requalification of urban areas.

### Andrejsala dockland area



Andrejsala is one of the first implementations of creative temporary use for development of large-scale private property project in Riga. This former dock-land area just next to the historical city centre was effectively planned to host a whole new neighbourhood on the waterfront with residential, commercial and recreational functions, including contemporary arts museum built in PPP with the state. The investors opened the area for temporary use for arts, culture and social projects in 2005. The initial, more socially oriented temporary use continued up to 2010. It was a successful to put the area back on the map of Riga, attracting large numbers of visitors and manifesting the creative energy of many grassroots groups and collectives. Although the crisis has stopped development plans of the area and the contemporary art museum project has been relocated in another part of the city. The initial temporary use strategy has attracted a next wave of more commercially oriented tenants to the area provoking the migration of the artistic scene to more attractive area of Riga.

## Temporary use as an asset for social change

Due to stagnant market conditions and large numbers of vacant property there is in Riga a sizable opportunity to introduce temporary use for privately owned property, as well as city and state owned property. Additionally, since the financial crisis and especially since the financial crisis and especially since Riga 2014, European Capital of Culture year, the number of creative and social initiatives in Riga have been visibly increasing while the rent-market is very often not serving their needs and prices are still too high.

In this context, Free Riga, an organization for temporary creative use of abandoned spaces was created in the beginning of 2015. Free Riga emerged as an artistic initiative. One of their founding actions was to print 5000 yellow stickers with "Occupies-me" written on it and stick them on all empty properties in order to give visibility to this phenomenon in Riga. The about 15 founding members of Free Riga coming all from the creative and artistic arena leveraged on Riga 2014, European Capital of Culture year and the need for the city to find enough spaces to host all cultural and artistic initiatives to promote temporary use of vacant spaces.

Free Riga made a first map of vacant properties in Riga. It also set a strategy for temporary use implemented on 2 first projects with an idea to build up a scalable model of temporary use of the abandoned spaces in Riga.

The core idea of Free Riga model is to work as a temporary use intermediary. Free Riga takes from owner a vacant building on contract and commits to find suitable initiatives interested to use the space for the time available.

One of the first two projects is Puskina 11, an empty group of buildings in the Puskina street. Free Riga settled there its own workshop and office spaces. It also organized spaces sub-rented at preferential prices for other artistic and social initiatives (see box Puskina 11 - Free Riga workshop and office space).

### Puskina 11 - Free Riga workshop and office space



Dzivnieku Briviba is a volunteers-based ngo active in the field of animal protection living from some donations and memberships. They are among the different social, entrepreneurial and art initiatives that rent a space at Puskina 11, one of the first examples of organized temporary use by Free Riga. Puskina 11 is a group of 2 floors' houses around a courtyard belonging to a rich owner and that has not been sold yet because of the economic crisis. In the mean time he gave the place for temporary use in exchange of tax reduction from the municipality. Free Riga opened its workshop and office spaces there in autumn of 2015. Since then they sub-rented the space to other initiatives, host regular cultural activities, curate one art festival per year and organised collective cooking once a month.



Free Riga second activity is to organize cultural events and an artistic festival every year. It is then very well connected with the artistic scene of the city. This helps them a lot to achieve their brokerage role in temporary use and find adequate match between owners' expectations on one side and users' profile on the other side.

In the case of Zunda garden their broker role led them also to mediation between the 2 parties. The owner of a former tractor factory wanted to promote the nice garden around as a small park open to the public with fruit trees available for free picking in the summer. Zunda garden organized concerts, exhibitions in the building and outdoors activities in the garden in exchange of the promise to take care and improve the garden. The temporary use collaboration allowed attracting youth during all the summer 2015 although it did not match completely the owners' expectations of promoting an attractive community garden in the perspective of future residential redevelopment of the area. Free Riga is now busy mediating between the owner expectations of maintenance service and the temporary use initiative for better convergence and to obtain another year of temporary use (see box Zunda garden - concerts, exhibitions, outdoor).

### Zunda garden - concerts, exhibitions, outdoor



"Grivas mebeles" is one of the first creative temporary use examples in Riga. A former tractor factory with plans for residential development or expansion of the neighbouring university was opened to contemporary theatre and music festivals and other cultural activities. In total more than 50 concerts, exhibitions and festivals in summer 2015. Zunda garden nearby the former factory building was opened in spring 2015 and used for recreation activities and outdoor picnics throughout the summer season. In the same area, underutilized new ponton developed on the waterfront were used to organize the "Empty space" arts installation workshop.

In the temporary use mediation model developed Free Riga plays the role of an intermediary in a form of a temporary use broker organizing the match-making and ensuring the best collaboration between parties all along of the temporary use period. The Kanepes Cultural Centre is a good example. After 10 year of temporary use of a large building in the centre of Riga the initiative strengthened and became a well-known cultural place in the city. The building was progressively renovated parts by parts. The Cultural Centre enlarged its range of activities organizing for instance "Sunday brunches" more accessible to the neighbourhood beyond the art and culture community. As one of the founding member of Free Riga, it made several proposals to extend its contract but since then, none of them have been accepted. Despite its recognized success the Kanepes Culture Centre has no views on its future (see box Kanepes Culture Centre).

### Kanepes Culture Centre



A run down wooden 3 floor building was previously hosting music school. It was standing empty since 2000. Owner, student fraternity "Lettica", entered a 10 year temporary use (without rent) contract with Davis Kanepes and his family in exchange for investment into renovating the building. What is now well known as the Kanepes Culture Centre was created. It works as an independent cultural centre organizing more than 250 cultural events per year including concerts, exhibitions, cinema, conferences and talks.

## Temporary use as an asset for governance evolution

Facing the challenge of large number of degraded property Riga City Council Property Department in 2013 established a special Division to facilitate improvements of the condition of the degraded property. The Division maintains records and inspects degraded territories and buildings, as well as oversees a Commission that levies increased rate of property tax on the degraded property.



This regulation focuses security for the citizens passing by as well as the impact on the aesthetic of the city. Degraded properties are classified in 3 categories: buildings which structures represent a danger because they can crawl down; buildings structurally fine but with a facade in bad state; buildings that doesn't represent a danger but which facade is degraded and not good looking. The implementation of this regulation is based on a participative website where citizens can signal degraded properties and vote to give priorities to different building refurbishment (see box [www.grausti.riga.lv](http://www.grausti.riga.lv)). The buildings signalled on the website are then visited by 2 municipality inspectors that confirm the level of degradation and set the increase of the tax rate.

**www.grausti.riga.lv**



A Division of municipality Property department ensuring real estate proper maintenance has developed a map based internet tool where the citizens can get information about the activities, projects, perspectives to tackle the challenge of degraded property. The portal has a map, photos and addresses of sites that require renovation. People can signal degraded property in their neighbourhood to the municipality and vote which properties should be reconstructed first.

Up to now Riga city has had no projects or strategies developed to facilitate temporary use. But the Division is looking for other ways to motivate and support owners to bring their property in a better condition and to recognize temporary use as one viable option. Therefore in 2014 Property Department and "Free Riga" entered into a partnership agreement with a common aim to find ways how to cooperate to revitalize the degraded property of Riga. The core idea of this agreement is to build a win-win exchange between owners, initiatives looking for space and the municipality: owners of degraded properties hosting temporary users may get reductions on their tax rate; temporary users are encouraged to pay a rent in kind in particular by contributing to the maintenance and refurbishment of the property; the municipality get then both a renovation dynamic of

degrading property as well as support to cultural and social economically weak projects.

This virtuous circle agreed and tested between Riga city administration and Free Riga NGO is fostering temporary use practice. Although successful so far this practice has not been yet systematized. The city administration switched from repression-only with the increased tax rate to incentive of temporary use. But more is needed to systematize this practice. *"We need information and supports on how to deal with organization and security in temporary used places"* says Kaspars Lielgalvis, initiator of Totaldobze arts centre, Riga. Kaspars' experience is characteristic of the grey zone in terms of legislation of temporary used vacant places: when starting Totaldobze he voluntary called the fire security services of the municipality for inspection of the place. Their expectations to reach security standards for public access were much too high to be reachable within a temporary use context. But if Kaspars wouldn't have asked them, the municipality services wouldn't have checked the building. Between complying with full security requirements and no security controls at all, an average should be found to facilitate the diffusion of temporary use practices.

Totaldobze case shows also the limits of maintenance by temporary users with no economical support and only their workforce to invest. There is here a paradox: the more temporary users succeed in renovating the place, the more it recovers its commercial value, attract more economically robust projects and the more they are likely to trigger increase of renting price by the owner. The subtle balance between virtuous win-win circles and self-created gentrification is difficult to keep (see box Arts Centre "Totaldobze").

### Arts Centre "Totaldobze"



Kaspars Lielgalvis is initiator of Totaldobze arts centre and also one of the founders of Free Riga. In 2009 Kaspars loosed his job and decided to dedicate to the organization of artistic activities. He created Totaldobze arts centre first installed from 2010-2013 in premises of former factory VEF and later moved to another large scale temporary space "Press house". Totaldobze's temporary users benefit from

preferential rent in exchange of basic maintenance and some improvement of the building equipment (electricity, water, etc.). Totaldobze is not robust enough to negotiate a global price for the space and sub-rent it to the different users. Rents increase with more financially stable activities coming in such as a photo studio or a group of architects. A form of gentrification of the place developed and Kaspars decide to leave his own studio because he cannot afford the rent anymore.

## Opportunities and challenges for temporary use in Riga

### Giving visibility to temporary use experiences

The main proportion of the degraded territories and property (about 89%) is owned by private owners (8% by the municipality and 3% by the state). Although there have been successful experiments with temporary use, owners don't have experience and recognition of temporary use as a viable model for using, maintaining and increasing attractiveness of their property. Furthermore many investors believe that they will soon get financing for starting development of their property, while the market situation is not improving and reality is demonstrating that many properties stand vacant, "waiting" already for many years. In order to build trust in temporary use practices a dissemination of the success stories is needed. Good cases should be put forward as demonstrators. Temporary use should be given visibility as valuable solution likely to serve mutual interests of owners, cultural and social projects with benefits for citizens and for the city.

### Setting a temporary use framework for the city

A temporary use model has been experimented and tested with positive results but it has not been established and publicly recognized as a viable solution for use of vacant or degraded properties. The memorandum agreed between the municipality and Free Riga should be confirmed and strengthened. It should leverage on the degraded property tax reduction for temporary use in order to incentive private owners to give access to vacant properties on the one hand and, on the other hand the function of temporary use agency should be developed and amplified. The rich experience of Free Riga in the cultural and artistic field should be expanded in social, sustainable initiatives and projects oriented to entrepreneurship. The services provided by the agency should also include information on temporary use experiences and practices of counselling on critical issues like security and rehabilitation. The agency should develop skills as a facilitator and broker between owners and temporary users.

### Developing temporary use as a service.

Beyond a mutual agreement between a property owner and a cultural or social initiative, temporary use can be described from the different experiences developed in Riga as a form of service both to owners and to the redevelopment of the city.



The definition of such a service supposes a change of posture. Temporary users are not anymore the demand side: they represent the offer. Taken one by one they provide - and potentially sell - a service of light maintenance of vacant properties to owners in the form of house sitting: they occupy the space; pay the energy to warm it and keep it safe from decay in winter; they ensure maintenance of the basic habitation functions (water, electricity, heating, etc.) as any tenant do.

Taken as a whole they represent a service of redevelopment of unused or dismissed urban areas. Coordinated between each other and with the urban redevelopment plan, they are likely to attract population interest in previously non-frequented zones, requalify an area into a cultural, artistic place, a place for gathering and socialization. They are likely to help the refurbishment of the social fabric and the integrated development of communities.

Such a form of professionalization of temporary use could be another asset provided by a temporary use agency.

## Approach and composition of the URBACT Local Group

Currently Property Department is considering setting up the Local Group on the basis of cooperation with "Free Riga" and the existing Commission for Inspection of Degraded Property, which is composed of representatives of the Property Department, Construction Board, Financial Department, 2 elected councillors, Police, the Riga Architectural Bureau, State Inspection for Heritage Protection.

@Riga, could you please develop these first considerations on the ULG? The city visit allowed meeting a series of stakeholders that could be invited in the ULG (consider in particular to have at least 10-15 stakeholders from different horizons...). You could provide here a first list of them...

## Initial focus of the Integrated Action Plan

The scope of Integrated Action Plan for Riga could be:

- To introduce temporary use model to wider audience in the city government and connect different stakeholders to facilitate its implementation.
- To develop a research on viability of temporary use model and conditions for its implementation.
- To develop a pilot project idea for implementing the temporary use model for the city-owned property.

@Riga, could you revise/enrich this initial focus of the IAP considering our discussions during the city visit (in particular our meeting with M. Burov) and the consideration of this draft city profile?