

The project proposes to develop a recreational space network in the city of Riga which would supply the residents with local daily-use recreational spaces and simultaneously provide access to large seaside, woodland and lake landscapes outside the city. The city centre waterfront which combines the benefits of the 'green' and the 'blue' landscapes is designed as a flagship development.

Problem statement

Introduction

The city of Riga has abundant green/open and water landscapes which constitute 28,0% and 15,7% of the total city area. However, most of these spaces have peripheral location and are cut off the city centre by infrastructure (highways, railways and rail yards) and/or industrial and brownfield sites. Furthermore, public amenities in these spaces are scarce or absent. Therefore, most of potentially recreational arias are either unused or used occasionally for special events only and do not attract visitors on a regular basis.

At the same time, there are relatively few recreational areas in the city centre and the waterfront is a short narrow strip with limited access. That is why during hot days in summer the inner city turns into a place which is not suitable for living due to air pollution and urban heat island effect. Moreover,

during heavy rainfalls when the sewage system is not capable to cope with the amount of water there are not enough overflow areas and the city becomes flooded.

According to the 'Riga development plan for the years 2006-2018' (Rīgas attīstības plāns 2006.-20018. gadam) the significant part of vacant city centre sites is to be built up. Namely, green river islands in the city centre are meant for mixed use development with residential and commercial functions. Industrial areas at the waterfront which will become vacant in the future after port relocation towards the estuary are meant for mixed use development.

However, Riga is a shrinking city and the real estate market is in a state of crisis. It is a big question weather in the future the city will need extra residential, office and commercial areas. Furthermore, there are brownfield areas, degraded industrial and residential districts and low density districts all over the city where it is possible densify and built new residential, office and commercial spaces instead of building up the islands and the waterfront. Therefore, the author suggests to use the valuable green/open and water landscapes not for development, but for recreation.

To solve recreational space fragmentation and inaccessibility problems and take the opportunities that the abundant green/open and water landscapes offer the city vision on recreational spaces is developed. The recreational space network would supply residents with local daily-use recreational spac-

es and provide access to the landscapes on the periphery.

The vision consists of 'green corridors' interconnected by 'green links' and small public sub-spaces. Current industrial sites that form a ring around the inner city and disconnect it from the periphery are redeveloped into mixed use industrial and commercial spaces with significant amount of green. Railway is put underground and highways that cut through city parks and forests are downgraded. To improve the connection between the recreational spaces and the neighbourhoods, a new traffic hub in the north of the city is proposed and several additional train stops are introduced.

Waterfront scenarios

The waterfront in the city centre is designed as a flagship project. The potential public recreational space at the riverside benefits from proximity of traffic hubs, water, green islands and central position. Furthermore, the waterfront as a whole can be redeveloped into a green corridor which would reconnect city centre and multiple neighbourhoods adjacent to the river. Currently the waterfront is cut off the city by a busy highway and the quality of public spaces at the waterfront is low. Besides, there are no public amenities at the waterfront, except for a passenger port and two small yacht clubs. That is why, the waterfront most of the time is lifeless.

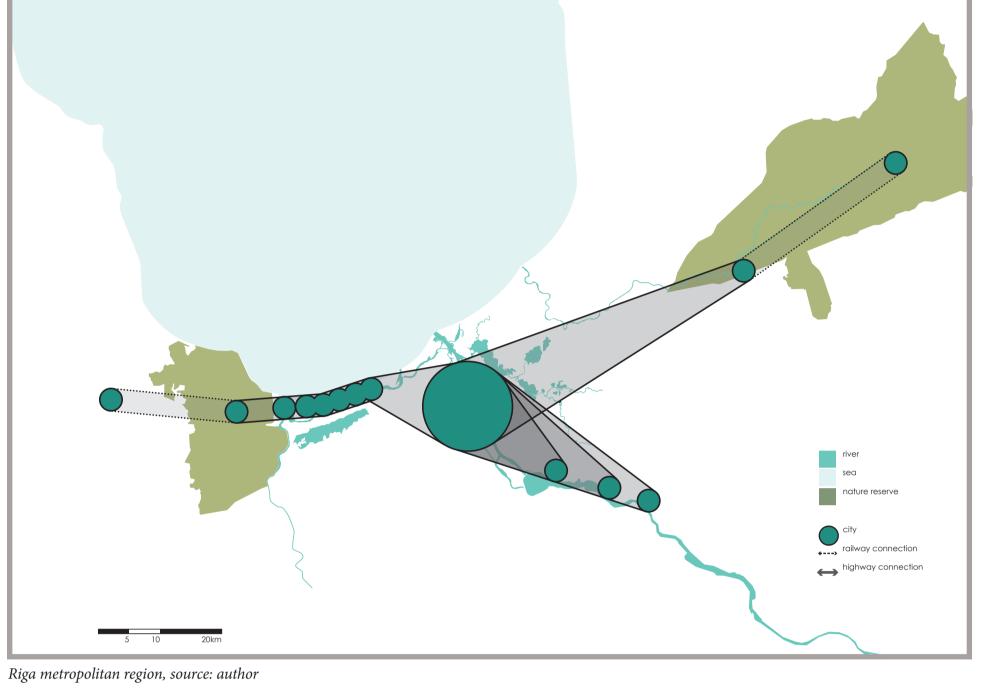
The author has suggested four design scenarios for the waterfront redevelopment: (1) slow traffic road; (2.1) highspeed traffic tunnel with an urban park on the surface; (2.2) the same as 2.1, with public transport on the surface; (3) highspeed traffic tunnel and a slow traffic road on the surface. For a strategic design intervention scenario 2.2 is chosen.

Since there is no through traffic in the old town, the high-speed tunnel does not have a significant influence on the traffic system of the city. The cars cross the river via the bridges flanking the old town, while the public transport which crosses the river through a bridge in the centre of the old town stays on the surface. This way the waterfront is made free from heavy high-speed traffic, the river and the old town are reconnected.

Strategic design intervention

For a strategic design intervention an area between the old town, central city market and central train station is chosen. This area has undergone dramatic changes in the 20th century and currently is a node where multiple centralities, traffic and pedestrian flows come together. The area has a low spatial quality because it is intersected by train and tram lines and highways. The city channel which goes through the heart of the are is neglected.

In the framework of the chosen development scenario the author proposes to free the area from car traffic and redesign public transport lines, so that they intersect the area as little as possible. The city channel is opened up to the river with a small boat harbour. On the reclaimed from the traffic territory a landscape park is designed which completes a park semi-circle around the old town.





Design location, current situation, source: Google Maps



Design location, historic development; plans, conceptual sections; source: author



Strategic design intervention: redevelopment of an area between old town, central city market and central train station; plan, sections; source: author

fresh water

highway

land use & traffic, proposed

park with sport facilities

community garden

semi-open green space

private garden

cemetery

green space with certain function

mixed industrial/commercial area

with significant amount of green spaces

public amenities with commercial function

residential area with significant amount of green spaces

woodInd with public amenities

residential area

cargo port area, planned source: www.rdpad.lv

secondary links public space

commercial space

industrial space

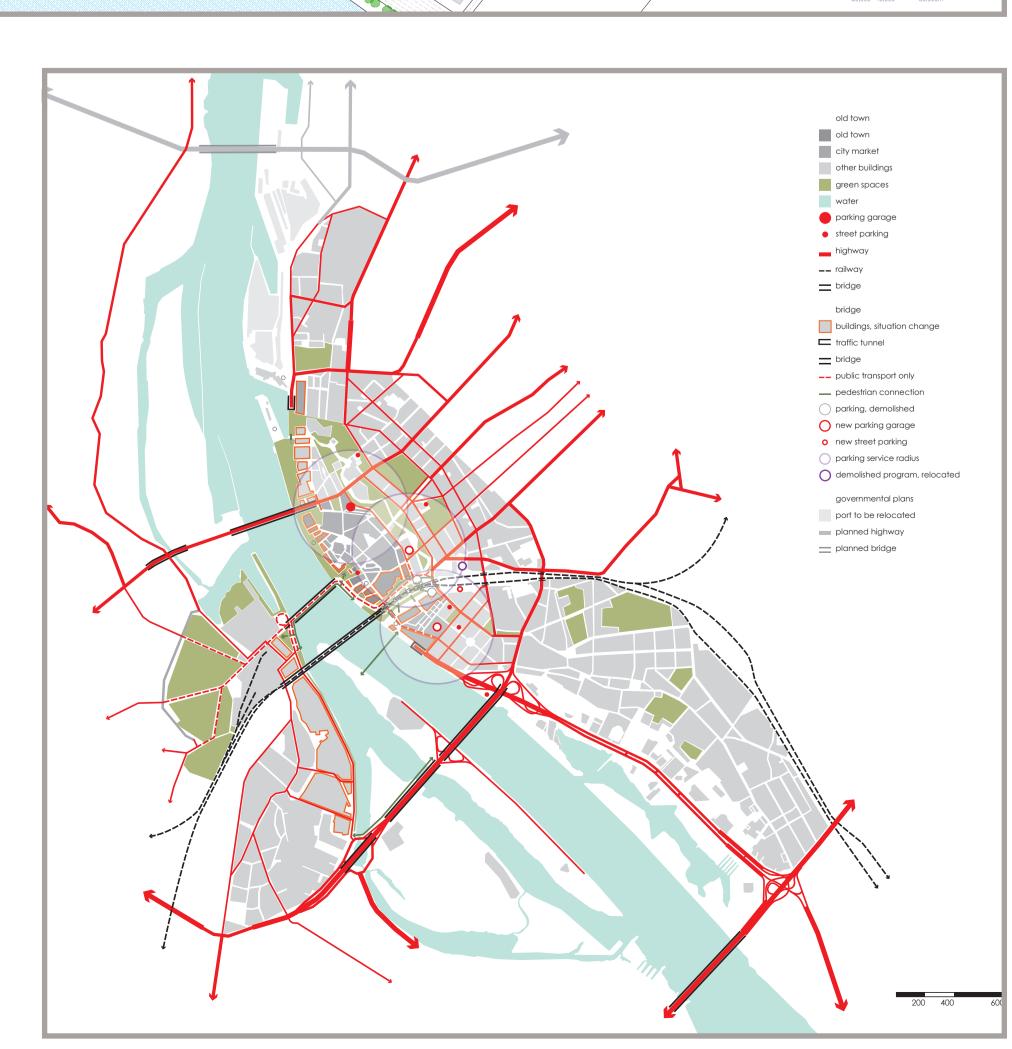
parking space

green space

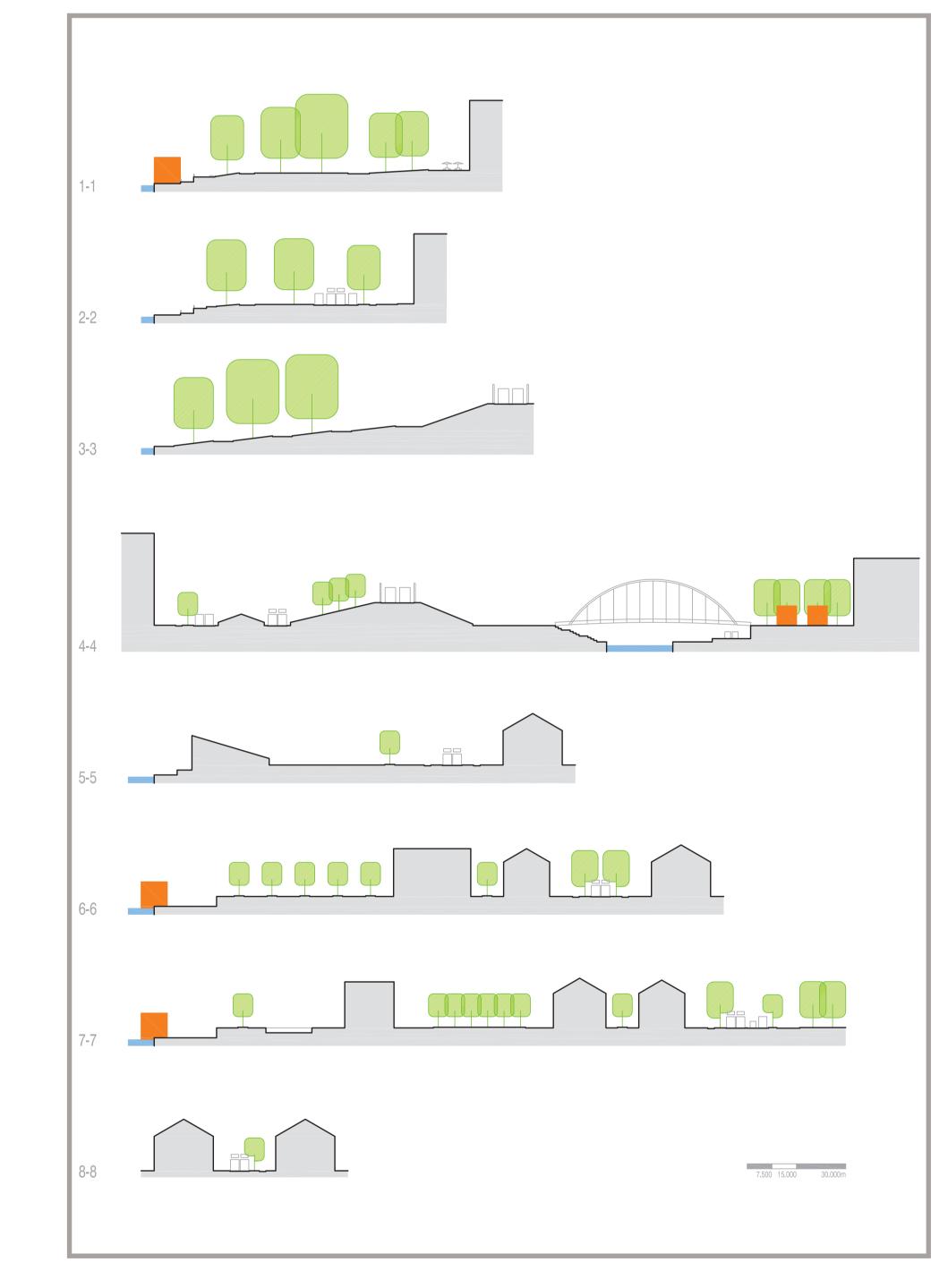
park space

traffic node, proposed

train station, existing



Waterfront development scenario: high speed traffic tunnel, public transport traffic and urban park on surface, source: author





Design strategy and phasing, source: author