

Public Spaces & Public Life

- in Riga City Centre



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INTRODUCTION



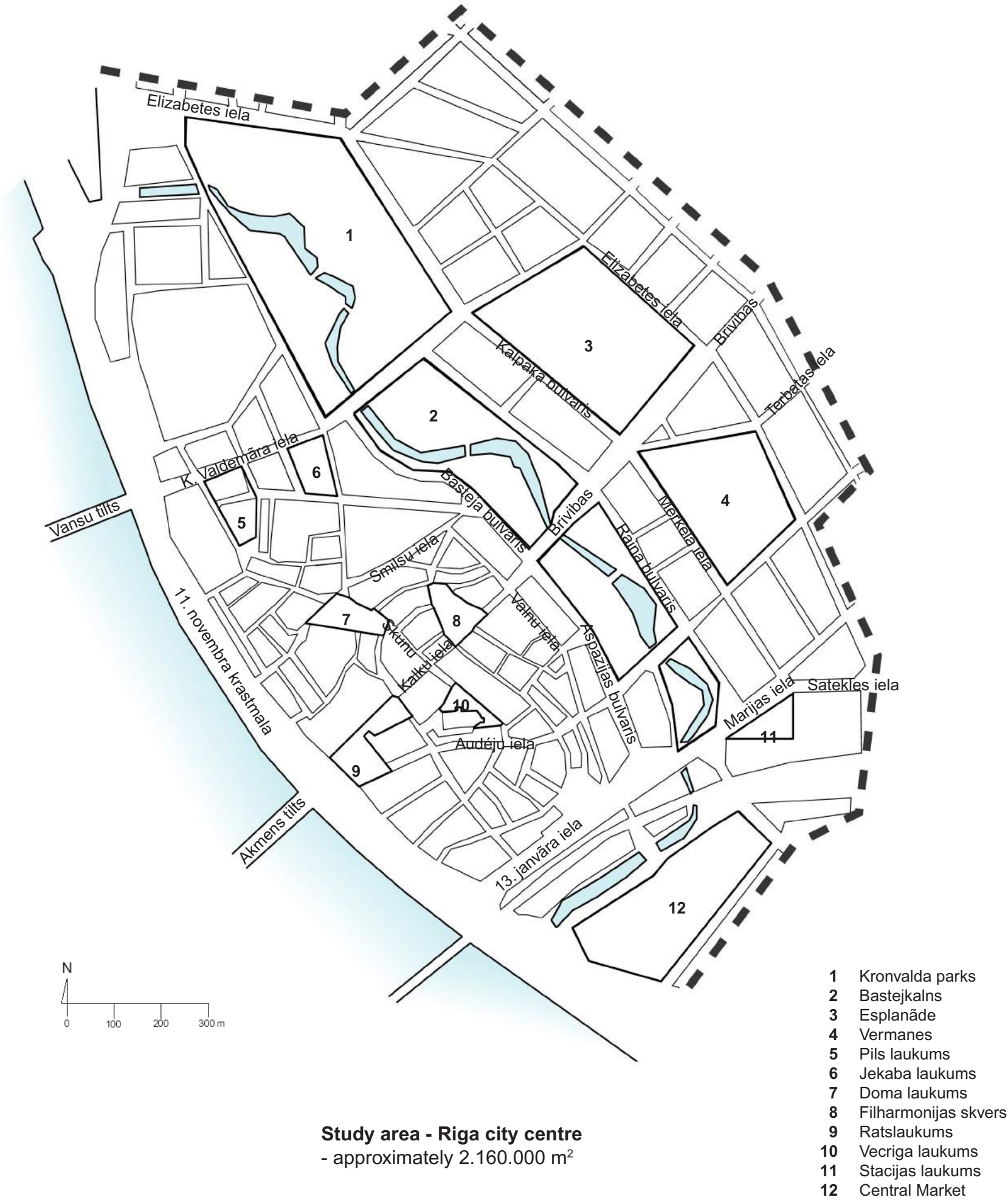
Aerial photo of Riga City Center.
Riga City Council
Photographer Juris Kalnins

Most cities have excellent statistics about traffic flows and parking patterns. Thus the issues of traffic and parking are generally well represented in the planning process. When it comes to insight and information about city quality as seen from a pedestrian point of view and about how the public spaces actually function for the people who use the city, only very little information is usually available.

The comfort and the accessibility for pedestrians and public life is of special importance in a valuable historic city like Riga in order to preserve and highlight the unique qualities of this city. People make the fine old city come alive. In all planning activities utmost care must be taken to respect and celebrate the history of the city.

In this context it is the purpose of this study to collect such information and make it easily accesible to the citizens, politicians, city planners, business associations and other groups who work to improve the quality of the city centre. The collection of such information will serve as a useful tool for the ongoing work of improving the quality of the public spaces. It will make it possible in the future to follow new trends and changes in the use pattern of the city, and it will create a general public awareness of people in the city and the city quality.

The study area is defined as the central parts of Riga where the public spaces, the shops and the cultural institutions are concentrated. It is approximately 2 million m² and includes the Old Town, the parks, the railway station and the market.



The report is in three parts:

Part 1. PUBLIC SPACES - problems and potentials

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

How are the public spaces composed ?

How large are the areas available for pedestrian traffic and public life and where are they situated ?

What are the conditions offered for walking and spending time in the city?

What is the traffic situation like? What are the major conflicts with pedestrian movements ?

This part is based on observations and surveys.

Part 2. PUBLIC LIFE - how the city is used

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

How is Riga's city centre used on typical summerdays ?

How many people are walking in the streets ?

How many activities are going on ?

How are the streets, squares and parks used ?

Who are walking in the city centre ?

This part is based on countings and observations on typical summerdays.

Part 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above mentioned analysis and use surveys a general evaluation of the pedestrian activity patterns as well as the quality offered for people by the public spaces will be carried out.

Finally problems and potentials in Riga city centre will be outlined and suggestions and broad strategies for quality improvement will be presented.

Comparison with similar cities

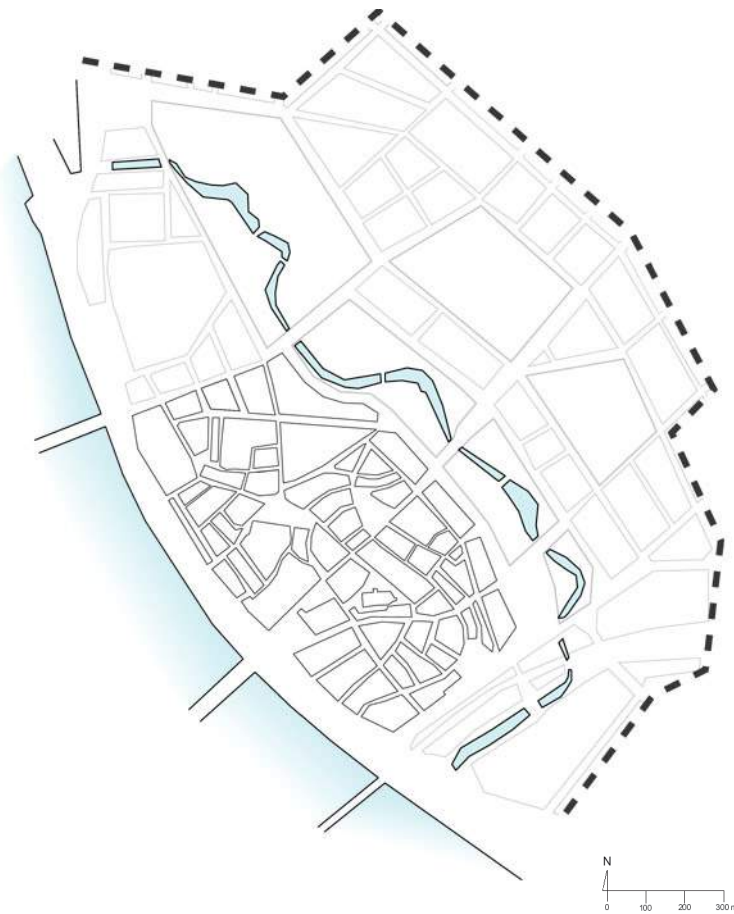
Surveys from other cities will be used for comparison and will be the frame of reference in future discussions of the development in Riga.

Similar studies have been carried out in the three Scandinavian capitals: Copenhagen, Denmark (1996), Oslo, Norway (1987) and Stockholm, Sweden (1991).

A comparison with these cities will present insight into the public life in other North European capitals of comparable size.

The illustrations on this page are shown in 1:20.000.

The size of the city centre and its population is given as well as the population in the city region.



Riga Old Town
(the study area is marked with a dotted line)
660.000 m² (Old Town area)
3980 inhabitants in the Old Town.
(1.2 mio. inhabitants in the city region).

*Note: **Old town** is the locally used word for the inner city.
This part of the city is the historically oldest part of Riga.
The area is accentuated on the plan above.*



Copenhagen city centre
1.150.000 m²
6.800 inhabitants in the city centre.
(1.35 mio. inhabitants in the city region).



Oslo city centre
980.000 m²
900 inhabitants in the city centre.
(920.000 inhabitants in the city region).



Stockholm city centre
1.250.000 m²
900 inhabitants in the city centre.
(1.2 mio. inhabitants in the city region).



Part 1 - Public Spaces - Problems and potentials

WHAT DEFINES A GOOD CITY ?

Three types of activities in public spaces

There are three categories of activities found in public spaces: Necessary, Optional and Social activities.

The Optional and Social activities are the all important keys to city quality.

Necessary activities

The things that have to be done:

Going to school, waiting for the bus, shopping and going to work. These activities occur regardless of the quality of the physical environment because people are compelled to carry them out.

A Good City provides good conditions for the many necessary activities.



Optional activities (urban recreation)

Activities people are tempted to do when conditions as the climate, surroundings and the public situation are generally attractive. These activities are specially sensitive to quality. They only occur when quality is high.

A Good City is characterized by a multitude of optional activities. People come to town, find the places attractive and stay for a long time. A great, attractive city can always be recognized by the fact that many people choose to spend time in the public spaces.



Social activities

These activities occur whenever people move about in the same spaces. Watching, listening, experiencing other people, passive and active participation.

A Good City offers a wide range of attractive social activities, and because so many people are present in the city, there are many people to experience, watch and speak to. The city becomes a lively and wonderful city. A people's city.



In order to carry out a qualitative analysis of the public spaces, a yardstick for the evaluation will be applied. The quality of the public spaces are viewed from a pedestrian perspective and a good city is defined in the following:

A Good City to walk in and to stay in for a while

- Room to walk with dignity, integrity and without overcrowding
- Comfortable climatic conditions. Sun and shade depending on the season and protection from the wind
- Pleasant facades at street level to stroll alongside and observe
- Good conditions for the disabled persons and people with prams
- Clear structure in the pedestrian system. It should be easy to find your way around
- A pedestrian system that connects important destinations
- Ability to promenade through the city
- Good walking rhythm with few interruptions
- Few and short waiting times at intersections with traffic
- Many well placed benches
- Widespread secondary seating such as steps and edges of planter boxes
- Well-situated cafes and outdoor restaurants
- Beautiful and effective lighting

A Good City for social and cultural exchanges

- Space for cultural activities and communication
- Space for street theatre, clowns and jesters, music and small scale commercial activities
- Democratic public spaces for all

A Good City for listening, talking, watching and experiencing in

- Low level of noise and few disturbances
- Intimate public spaces
- Fine views and good details
- Interesting facades, window displays and exhibits

A lively, diverse and safe city to move around in

- A wide variety of functions both day and night
- Housing to ensure a 24 hour use
- Educational institutions to ensure life and vitality
- Open in the evenings with lit window displays
- Safe places and streets both day and night

PEDESTRIAN STREETS AND SQUARES

A rich and diverse public life needs space. Pedestrian areas provide more and better space for public life and also a safer, more dignified and calmer urban environment.

Riga has taken the exceptional measure of introducing pay-tolls in the city centre which has reduced the traffic significantly. As shown on the right some pedestrian streets and squares have also been introduced. These two measures have created a peaceful city with good capacity for pedestrians.

One of the key elements for a high quality urban environment is a pedestrian network that connects important places and enables people to walk easily through the city. In Riga such a pedestrian network has not yet been fully developed. The frequent changes between pedestrian and non pedestrian status of streets and squares in the city centre cause some confusion and dangerous situations.

The car free pedestrian streets are:

Kalku iela (part of the street), Valnu iela (part of the street) and Torna iela.

Total area: 8.350 m²

Total length: 580 m

The car free pedestrian squares are:

Filharmonijas skvers, Brivibas laukums, Ratslaukums, St. Peter Square, Jekaba laukums, Pils laukums, and Stacijas laukums.

Total area: 44.000 m² - (car free areas)

The central market is for pedestrians during the day except for access for services.

Area: 20.000m²

Total area of pedestrian priority squares and streets
(Where traffic is limited): **96.000 m²**

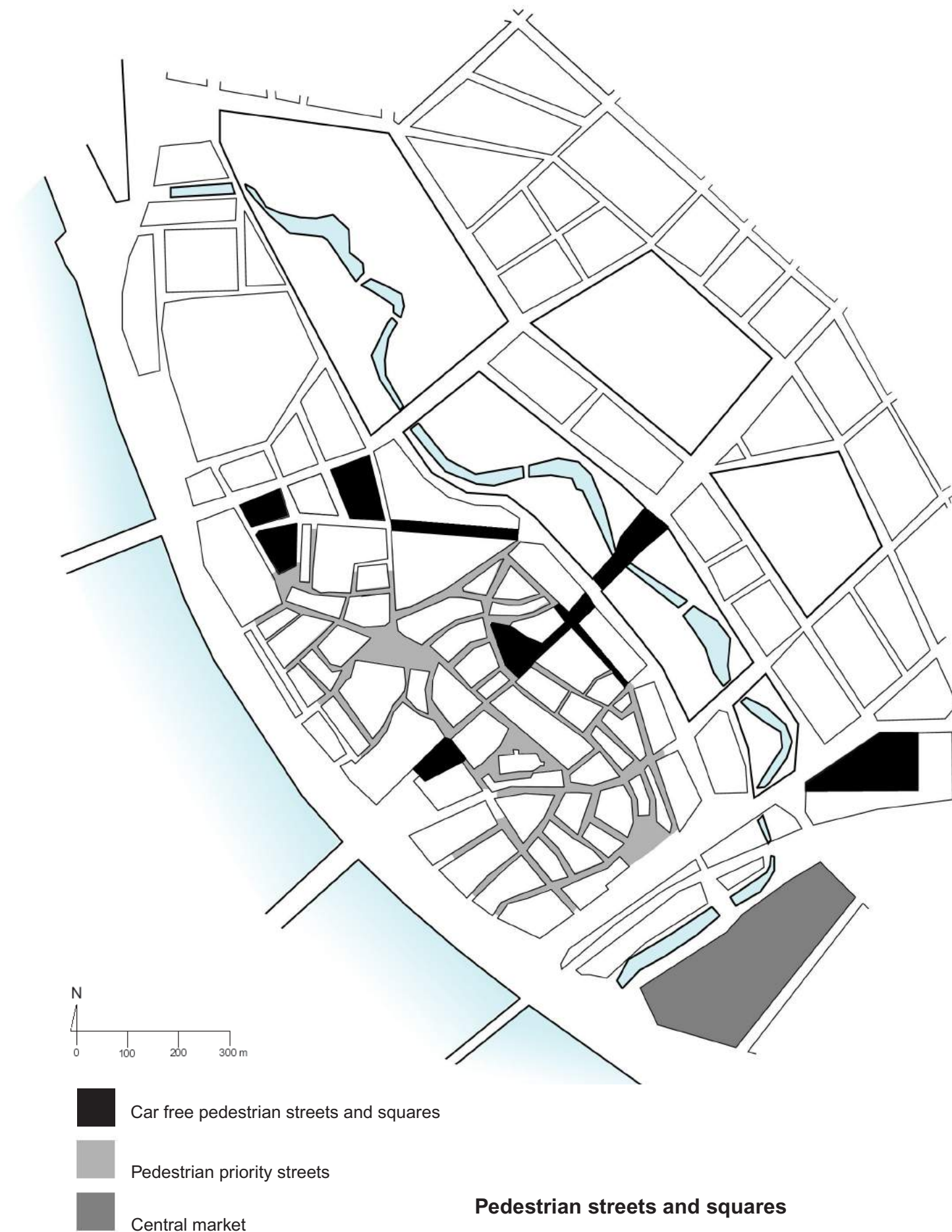
Comparison:

On the opposite page is shown a comparison between the car free pedestrian streets in Riga, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo.

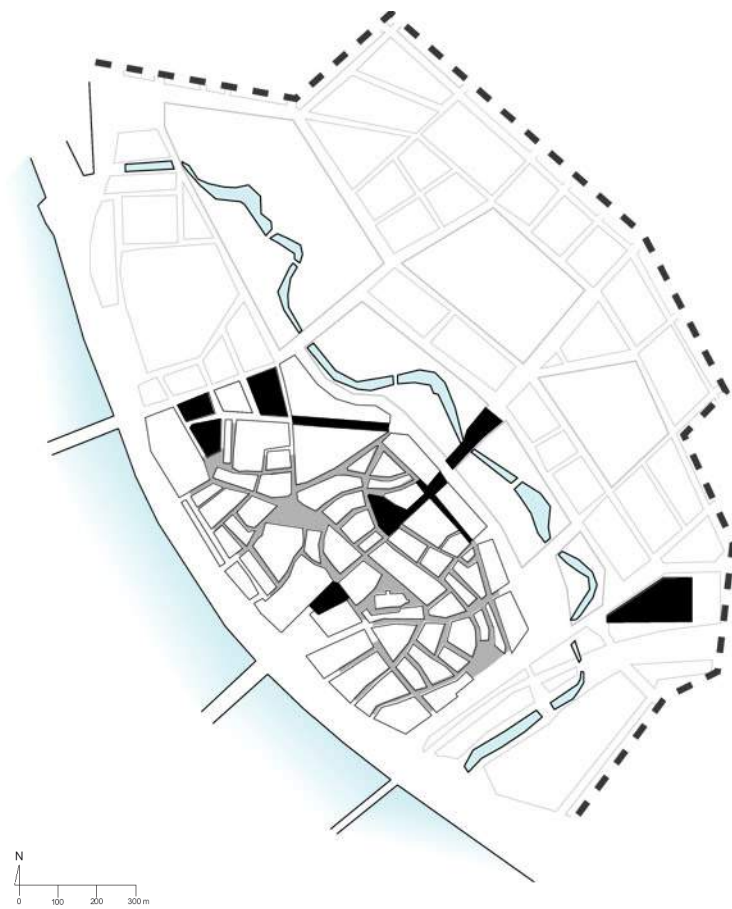
Riga has achieved a large number of streets where traffic is limited, but still needs to develop a coherent pedestrian network.

Summary:

Riga has with the introduction of pay-tolls and the consequent reduction in traffic already taken the first and very important step to create a Good City. The challenge is now to improve the quality of the car free pedestrian streets and the connection between the many pedestrian squares.



PEDESTRIAN STREETS AND SQUARES



Riga

580 m (car free streets)

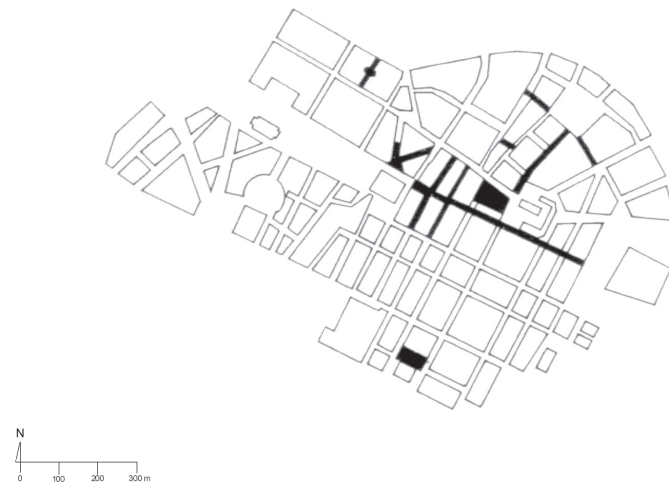
Pedestrian priority streets: 5.700 m



Copenhagen

3.200 m (car free streets)

Pedestrian priority street: 400 m



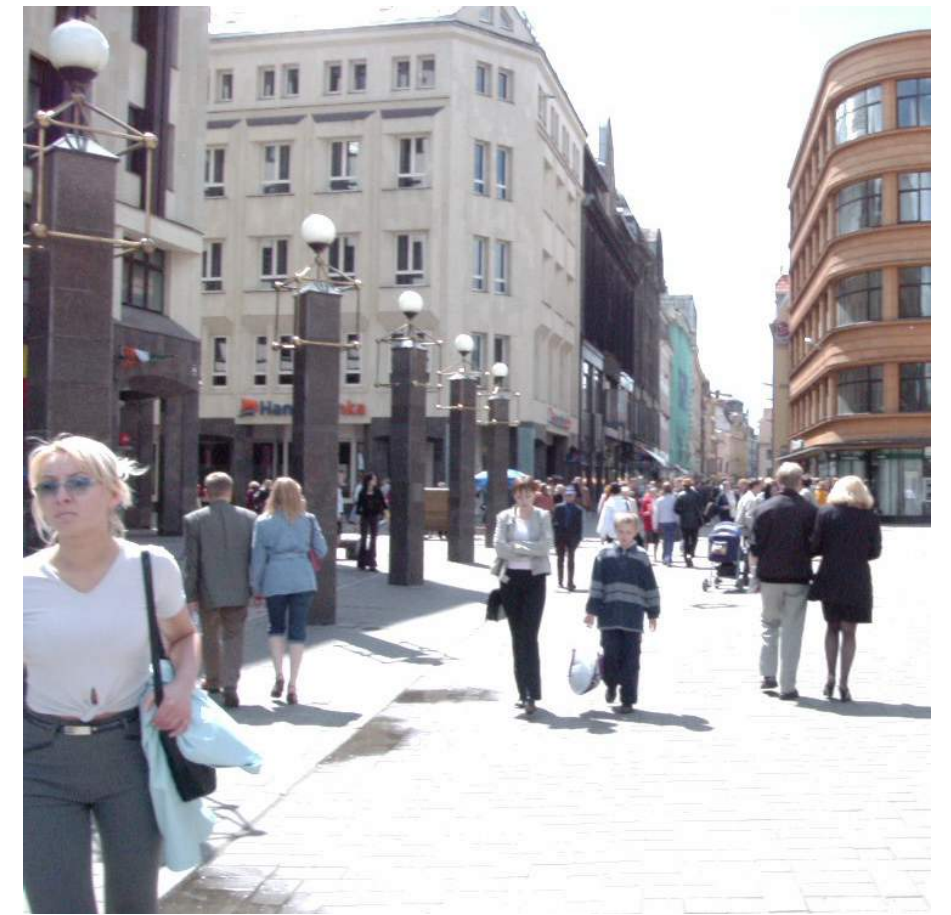
Oslo

2.450 m (car free streets)



Stockholm

2.300 m (car free streets)



Kalku iela is the city's main street and popular to stroll along.



Pay-tolls have reduced the traffic in the city centre.

SQUARES

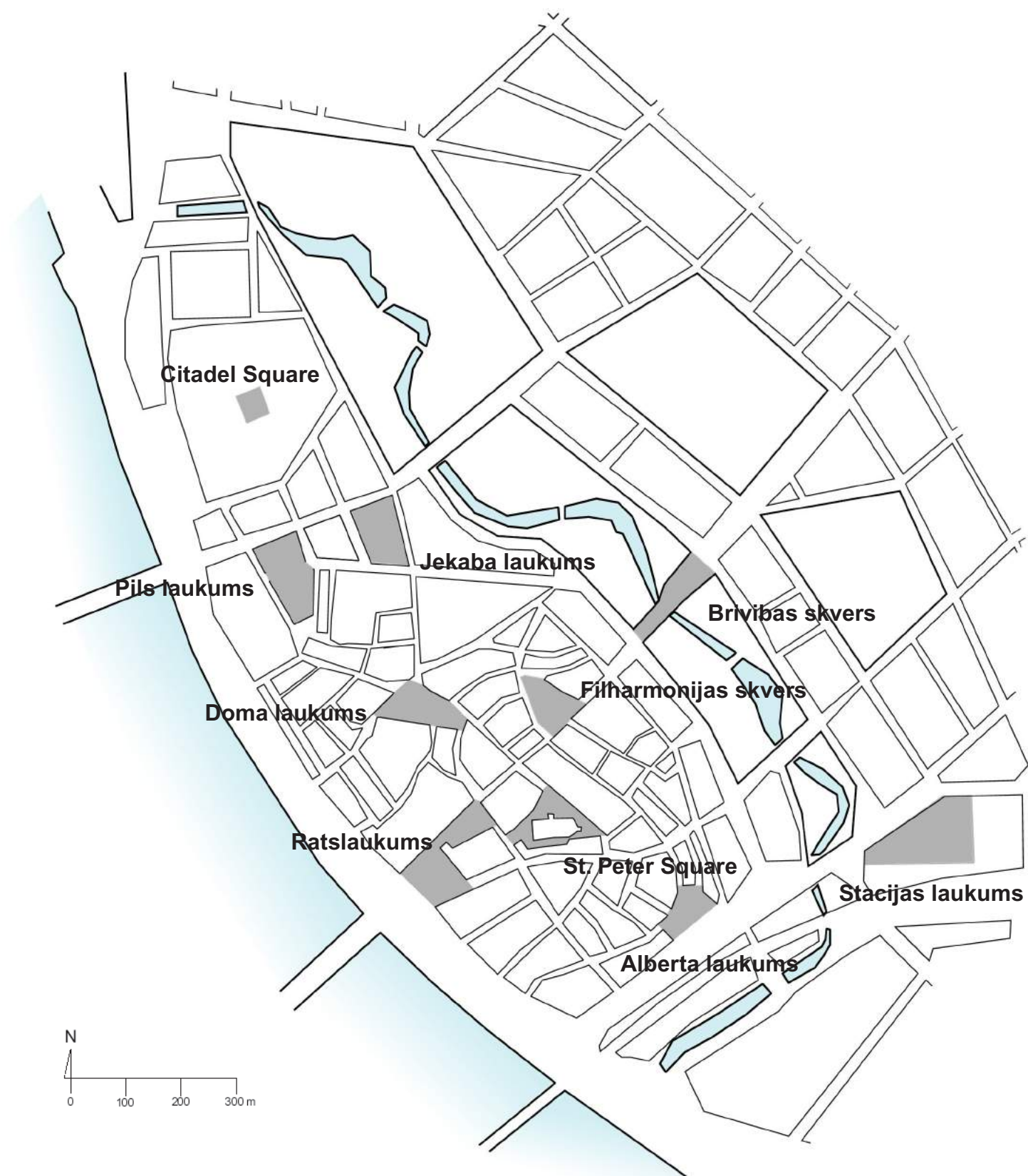
The squares are the natural oases in the city mesh of narrow streets and pathways. Every square has its own characteristics and is used for individual purposes. Some squares are situated close to an important pedestrian connection and are because of this filled with pedestrians crossing. These primary squares are: Filharmonijas skvers, Doma laukums, Brivibas laukums and Stacijas laukums. Other squares are more hidden in the city structure and are only visited by people for the attraction they hold in their own right. These secondary squares are: Brivibas laukums, Ratslaukums, St. Peter Square, Pils laukums, Jekaba laukums, Alberta laukums and the Citadel square. Squares which have a good linkage to the pedestrian network and offer possibilities to stay for a while and opportunities to watch city life are popular and used throughout the day and throughout the year.

The following pages present an overview of the public spaces in Riga's city centre. By setting up different criteria for public use, it is possible to compare the squares and the attractions they hold. The following criteria have been used:

- the characteristics of „Go through“ and „Go past“ squares are the squares you pass through on your way to other destinations.
- A „Go to square“ is the destination for your journey.
- the theme which is the main attraction of the square.
- the total area and pedestrianized area is given.
- the total number of seats available on benches, the number of outdoor restaurants, food outlets or bars and their number of seats available.
- the average number of stationary activities is the average number of people that are staying in the square at any given time on a summer afternoon between 12 am and 4 pm.
- the use ratio is an index of the number of people staying per 100 m² given to enable a comparison of how much each square is used.

The illustration shows the location of the different squares in the city centre and illustrates public spaces that are well spread out in the city centre. The squares have been created in various ways through time. Stacijas laukums is the only modern square situated outside the former city fortification. Every square in Riga needs quality upgrading to various degrees. Stone beds in several squares obstruct the experience of the square as a whole and only narrow paths are left open for people to move along. The street furniture is in many cases in need of renewal.

Still there are many wonderful places in Riga which offer space for city life. A further development of the city centre should improve the spatial qualities and strenghten the possibilities for pedestrian use of streets and squares.



Squares in Riga city centre

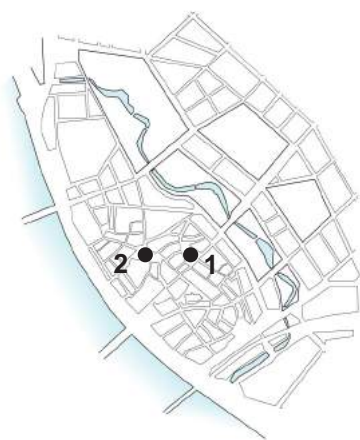
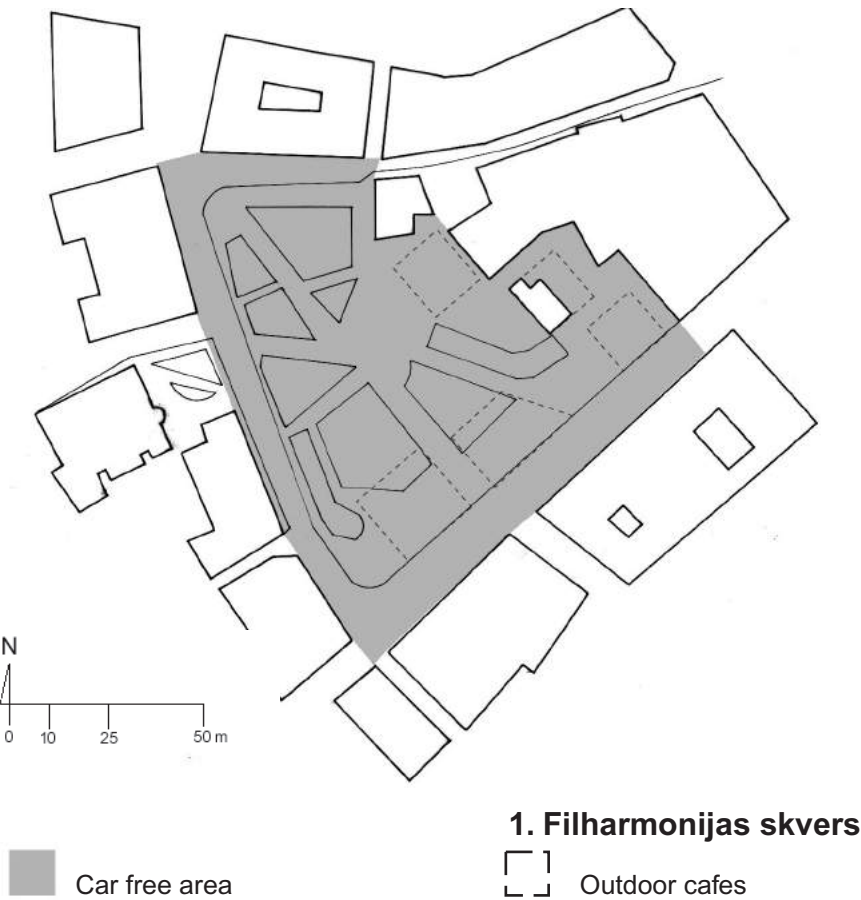
FILHARMONIJAS SKVERS

Characteristics:	„Go to“ square
Theme:	Restaurants, street traders
Total area:	10.325 m²
Pedestrianized area:	10.325 m²

Seats on benches:	45
No.of outdoor restaurants:	5
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	796

Average no. of stationary activities:	74
(Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	
Use ratio (use /100 m²):	1

The main attraction of this square is the enjoyment of public life in one of Riga’s most busy places. It is a wonderful square which serves as the city’s most important meeting ground. The pedestrians cross the square on the south side along Kalku iela or use the diagonal north-south connection. The square has a good local climate with sun all day. Filharmonijas skvers is at present divided into two parts separated by a wall of outdoor cafes along the main street. Bombings during the War created this square and has left the south-east corner of the square open and undefined. The street furniture is of poor quality and in need of upgrading.



Location of Filharmonijas skvers and Doma laukums.



Many find their way to Filharmonijas skvers where they come together, look at city life and rest for a while. Filharmonijas skvers is a very important square with a great potential.

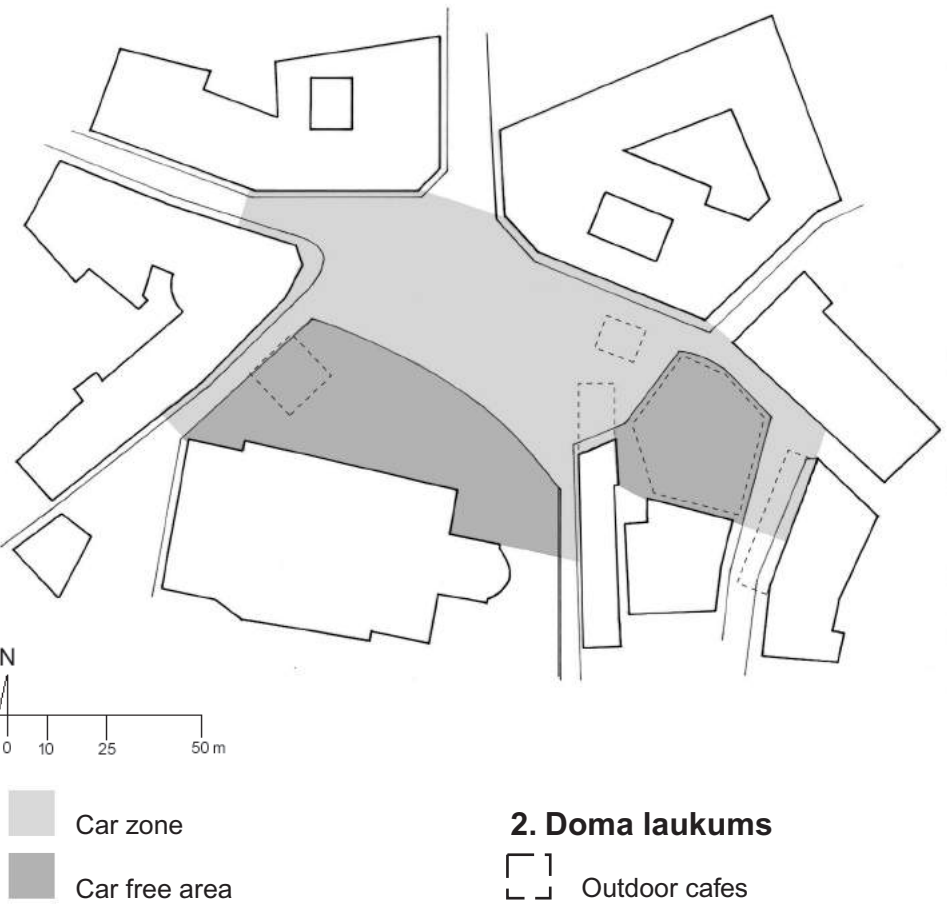
DOMA LAUKUMS

Characteristics:	„Go to“ square
Theme:	Significant square, civic events
Total area:	9.000 m²
Pedestrianized area:	3.675 m²

Seats on benches:	15
No. of outdoor restaurants:	8
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	858

Average no. of stationary activities:	195
(Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	
Use ratio (use /100 m²):	5,3

Doma laukums is dominated by Riga’s dome which gives character to the square. The whole space has not been pedestrianized, only the area east of the dome and the lowered area near the dome. Due to historic events connected with the creation of Doma Laukums the eastern part appears somewhat incomplete. The square is used for outdoor serving by several restaurants and bars, some of which are in a poor location and with furniture of poor quality.



Doma laukums is a place for important events, happenings, concerts and a popular place for outdoor serving.

ST. PETER SQUARE

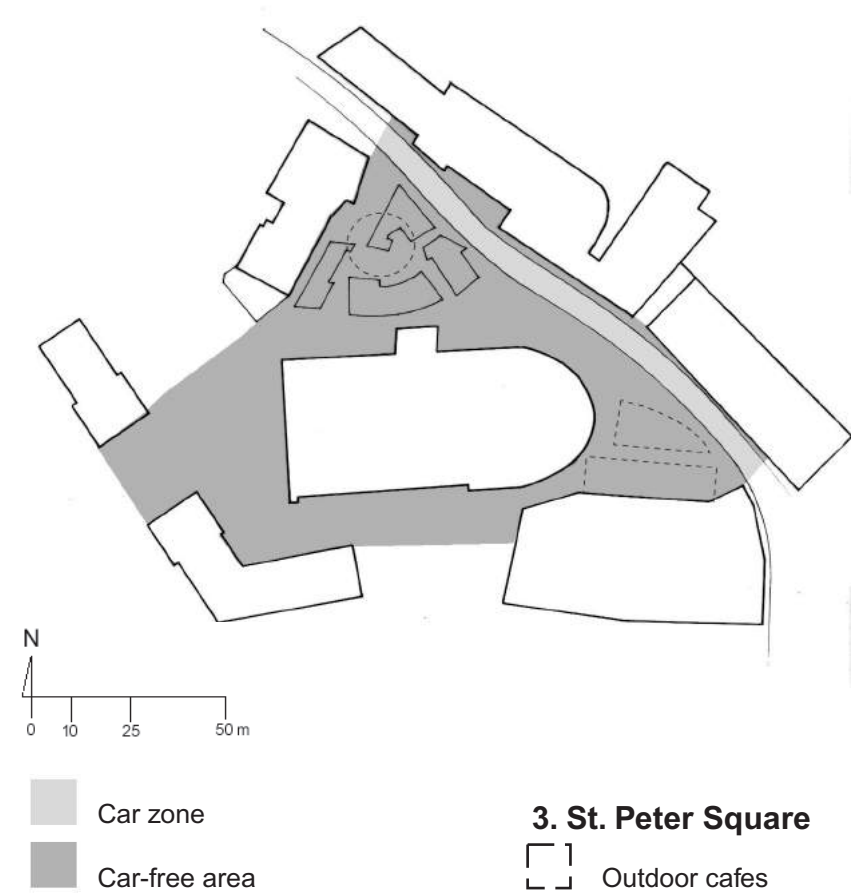
Characteristics:	„Go past“ -square
Theme:	Street traders, recreation
Total area:	4.700 m ²
Pedestrianized area:	3.500 m ²
Seats on benches:	18
No. of outdoor restaurants:	3
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	198
Average no. of stationary activities: (Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	44
Use ratio (use /100 m ²):	1,3

An intimate square at St. Peters basilika where many street traders gather. A through road creates the boundary for the pedestrian area to the north-east .
 The eastern part of the square get sun in the morning while the western part gets sun in the late afternoon and evening .
 The square is subdivided into three small spaces. The spaces east and west of the church are used for outdoor serving. The northern space is taken up with stonebeds.
 There is potential for the square to be used more.

RATSLAUKUMS

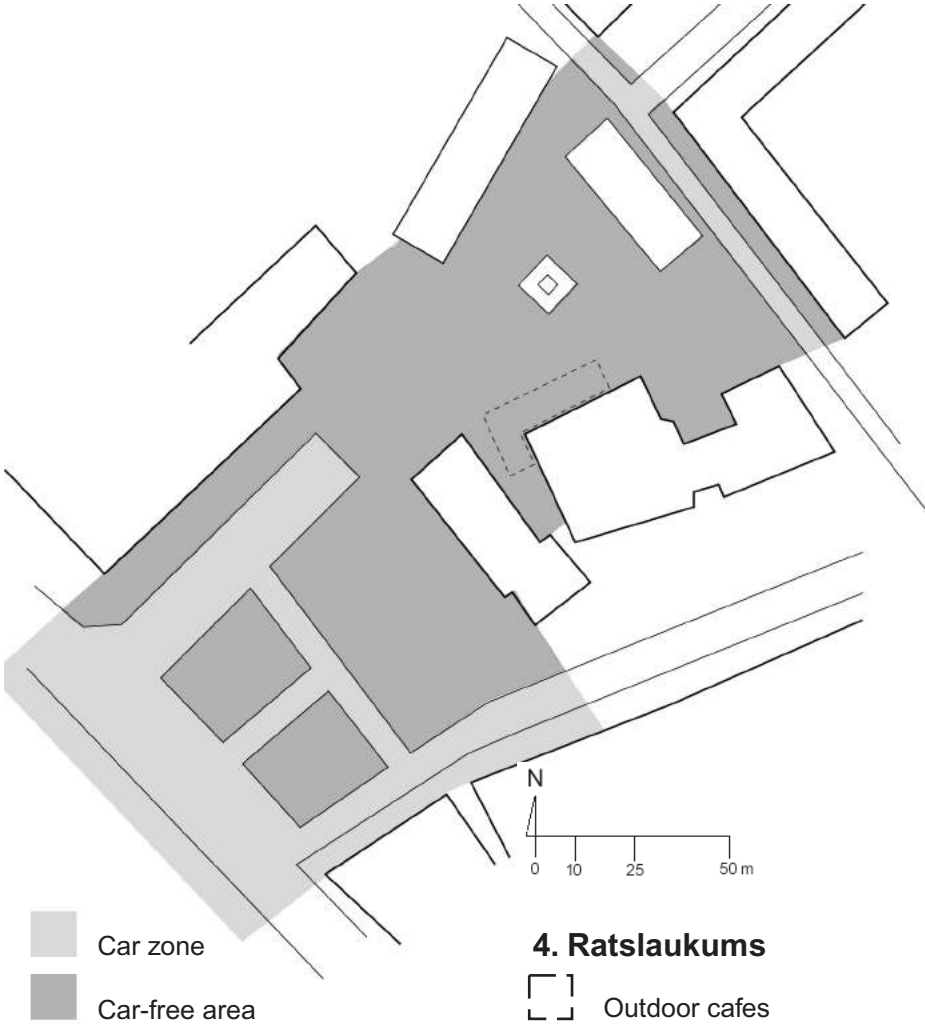
Characteristics:	„Go through“ square
Theme:	Formal, building site
Total area:	4.600 m ²
Pedestrianized area:	4.600 m ²
Seats on benches:	0
No. of outdoor restaurants:	1
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	66
Average no. of stationary activities: (Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	23
Use ratio (use /100 m ²):	0,5

The old town hall square is being recreated by reconstruction of the demolished buildings that were destroyed during the War. The square has much sun though this is not exploited at present.
 The square was in the summer of 2001 a building site with few possibilities to sit down and spend time.



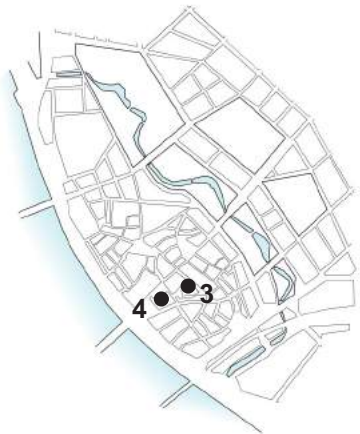
3. St. Peter Square

Outdoor cafes



4. Ratslaukums

Outdoor cafes



Location of Vecriga laukums and Ratslaukums.

Aerial photo of Ratslaukums and St. Peter Square
 Riga City Council
 Photographer Juris Kalnins

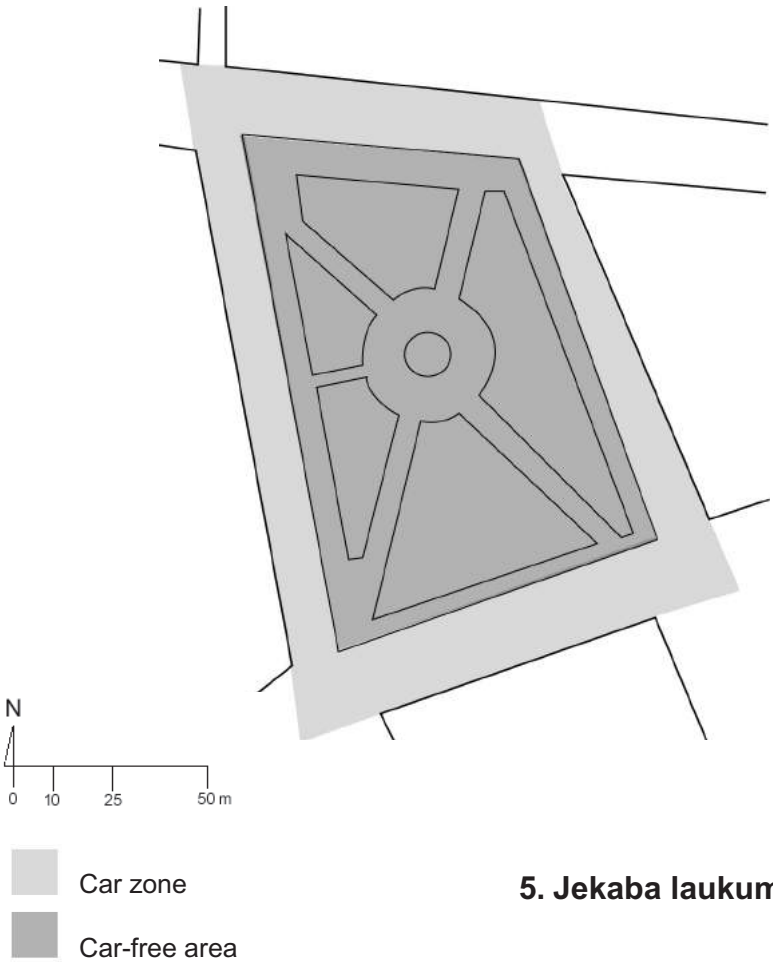


Close to the river Ratslaukums gives spectacular possibilities for a public space in close contact with the water. Today this is made impossible by a major road separating the square from the river. The square is divided into two parts where the southern part is used for taxis and car parking.

JEKABA LAUKUMS

Characteristics	„Go through“ square
Theme:	Young people, recreation
Total area:	6.000 m ²
Pedestrianized area:	5.000 m ²
Seats on benches:	30
Average no. of stationary activities: (Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	25
Use ratio (Use /100 m ²):	4,2

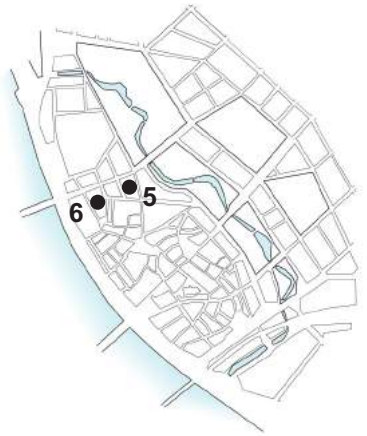
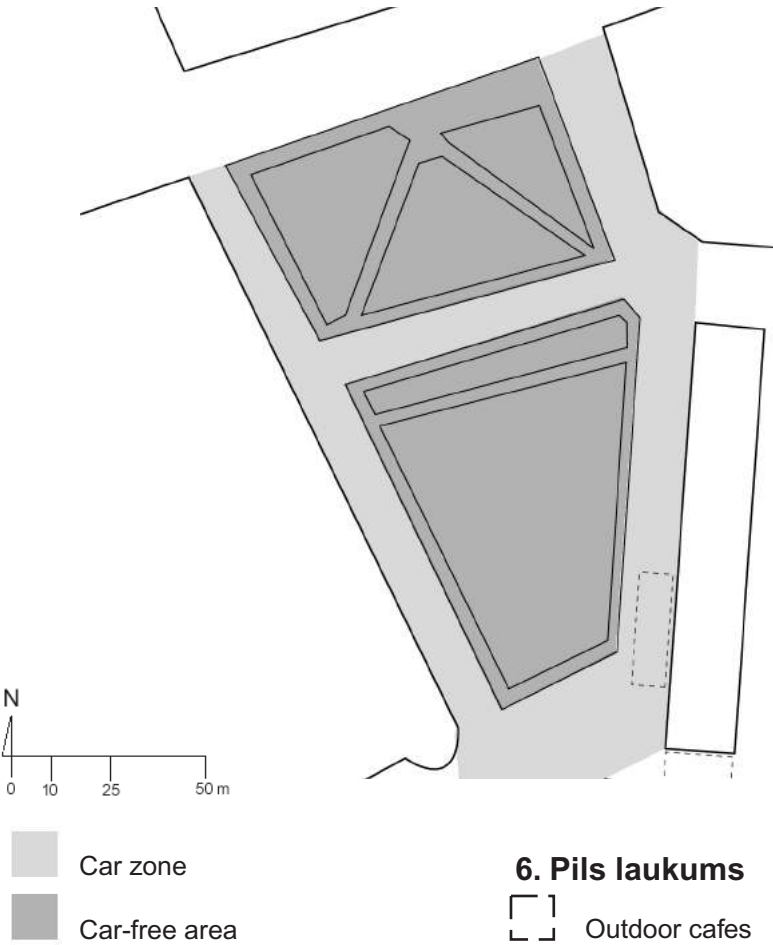
This park like square is used for art installations and is mainly visited by young people. The pedestrian area is surrounded by roads and crossed by paths. The square is shaded by old trees most of the day. People move the benches to different locations and the total number of thirty seats are well used although the benches are generally in a poor state.



PILS LAUKUMS

Characteristics:	„Go through“ square
Theme:	Historic, the Riga Castle
Total area:	8.500 m ²
Pedestrianized area:	7.000 m ²
Seats on benches:	42
Outdoor restaurants:	1
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	100
Average no. of stationary activities: (Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	30
Use ratio (Use /100 m ²):	0,4

A quiet square with beautiful old trees that create a characterful spot for recreation. People mainly go through this square, but some use the benches for a short rest. The trees give shade to the pedestrian areas while the lawn and flowerbeds are in the sun.



Location of Jekaba laukums and Pils laukums.



Jekaba laukums.



Pils laukums.

STACIJAS LAUKUMS

Characteristics:	„Go through“ square
Theme:	Gateway to the city
Total area:	26.400 m²
Pedestrianized area:	11.200 m²
Seats on benches:	104
Outdoor restaurants:	2
Seats at outdoor restaurants:	168
Average no. of stationary activities:	115
(Summer weekdays, 12 am - 4 pm)	
Use ratio (Use /100 m²):	1

Stacijas laukums is a modern public space where the traffic and the large number of people throughout the day create a strong city pulse of a metropole character.

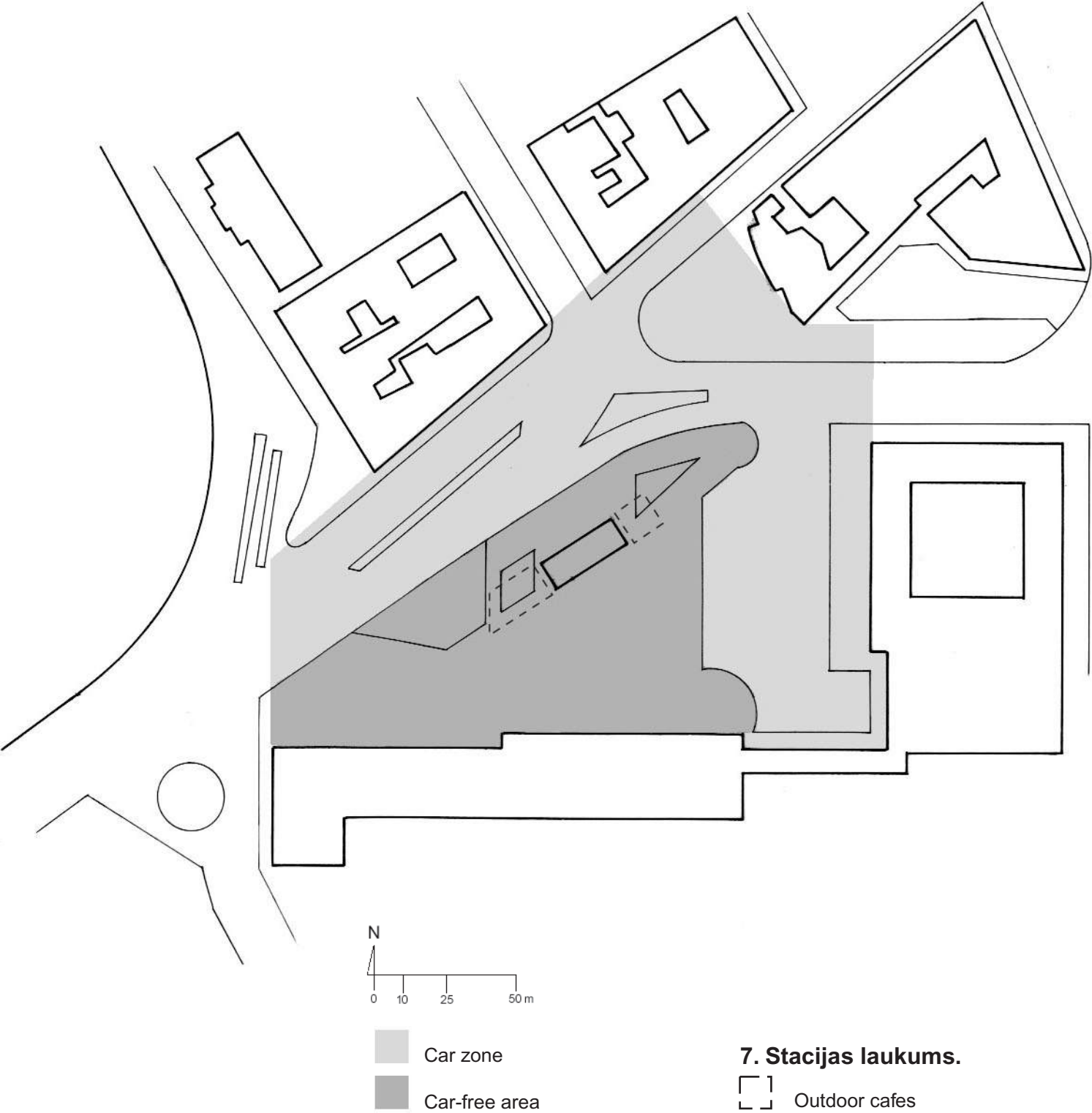
The pedestrian area has a triangular shape. A major road and parked cars create the boundary to the east and west and the station the boundary to the south. People cross the square to get to important destinations such as the train and bus station, the central market and the city centre. The northern part of the square has much sun where as the southern part lies in the shadow of the station.

The overall problem concerns the bad connections across this important public space. Traffic and unfortunate solutions for pedestrian crossings have separated the square from the surrounding buildings to the north which serve as important space defining boundaries.

Both paving and benches are in a poor state. The existing kiosk building is in a dominating position and obstructs the visual connection between the station and the city.



Location of Stacijas laukums





A wide road with heavy traffic separates Stacijas laukums from the city centre. Visually the square is a big, impressive urban square. Functionally it consists of small strips and triangles left over from the traffic streets. The connections between the pedestrian areas are very unsatisfactory.



The wide area of traffic streets separates Stacijas laukums both in a practical and psychological way from the city centre. Tunnels and pedestrian crossings give access to the square, but both links are of a poor, unattractive quality. The buildings in the north-eastern corner are unable to define a clear boundary for the square.



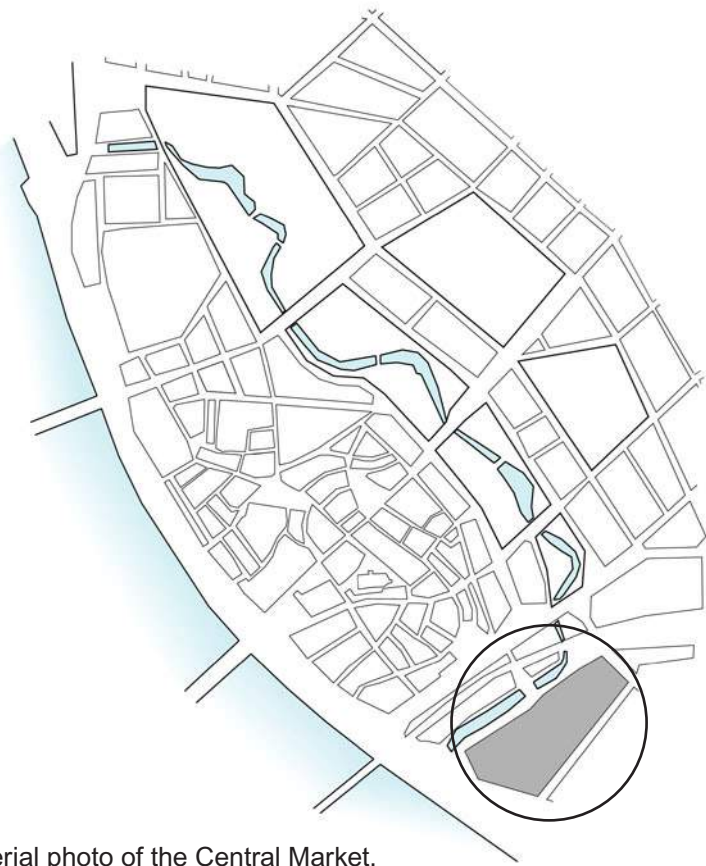
Stacijas laukums is paved with concrete slabs which are at present in a poor condition. A rather long restaurant pavillion is placed between the street and the square and divides the space further. A refurbishment of Stacijas laukums is presently being planned and will be carried out in the coming years.



CENTRAL MARKET



CENTRAL MARKET



Below: Aerial photo of the Central Market.
Riga City Council
Photographer Juris Kalnins



Riga's central market is unique in Europe. It has been and still is the main supplier of goods to the city of Riga. Shopping at the market is very much part of the city's culture. At the central market you can buy everything, food, electrical goods, textiles and live stock. Along with the hustle and bustle of the many people working and visiting, it makes the market a very special place with an enormous impact on the senses. Here you can feel city life.

The concentration of people is high at all times during the day. People come from afar to look for good offers and experience city life. The large number of people going to the market also has an impact on the nearby areas such as Stacijas laukums which many cross to get to the market area.

The market buildings were used to store the Zeppelins. The buildings represent the beginning of the industrial age and have many architectural qualities. The present use for market stalls allows a full experience of the building structure and the area seems perfect for this use.

The connection to the rest of the city is poor as the market is separated from the city by the railway embankment and a major traffic road. The main objective for an improvement of the connection between the city and the market is to ease access for pedestrians to this important and vital area.

The market area with its many architectural and urban qualities has potential for further development. Today the closing time at the central market marks a distinct difference between the day and night situation. During the day the market is perhaps the most lively and vital place in the city. During the evening the area appears to be unsafe and inactive and people avoid going there.

A future development of the buildings adjoining the central market could change this by offering activities which are open in the evening.

As the aerial to the left shows there is a great potential for a development of the riverfront also in this location and for a unique public space along the ramparts where a combination of the water, the market buildings and a developed bank with restaurants and cafés could represent one of the most popular and well visited public spaces in the city.

PARKS

Riga's many parks are a unique asset to the quality of city life. The parks cover an area of approximately 500.000 m² and offer recreational opportunities for a large number of people. Only few cities of this size provide such generous recreational possibilities in the centre of the city.

The inner circle of parks used to be the fortification ring around the city and has been redeveloped for public use. This continuous park band offers an extraordinary clue to Riga's historical development. In other European cities as e.g. Copenhagen, the fortification ring has been interrupted by buildings and the sensation of the whole scenery is lost. In Riga the whole element is preserved though some parts by the citadel to the north and the market to the south are in poor condition.

The central ramparts are enjoyed by people passing through to other parts of the city. During public festivals they are used for markets and events. Kronvalda park is the largest with space for activities such as concerts, sports and performances which attract big crowds.

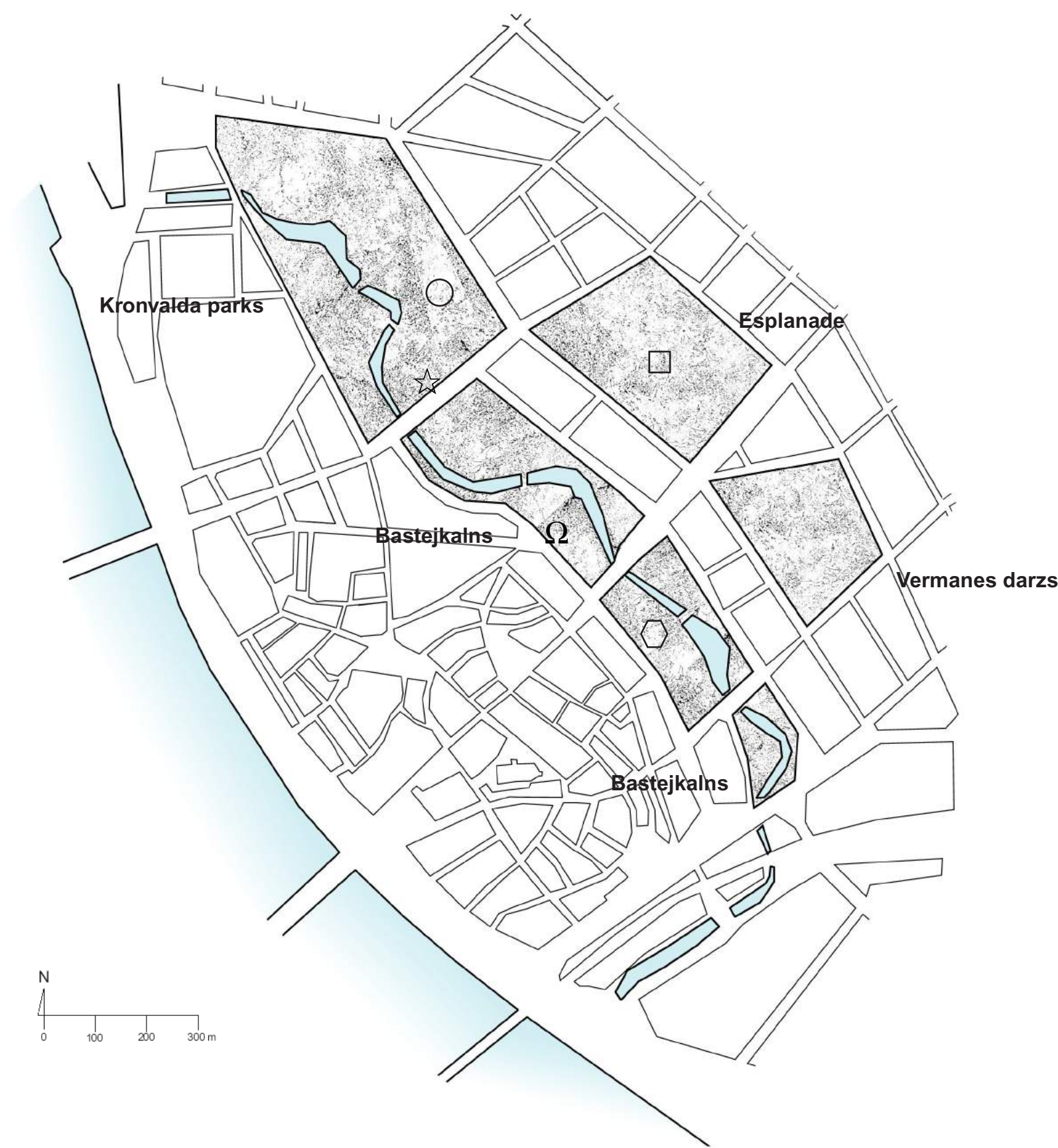
Outside the circle of the inner city is another set of parks, Esplanade and Vermanes darzs. These two parks offer a variety of recreational and amusement activities especially for children.

In general the parks are used extensively throughout the summer both for formal public arrangements and for more informal social activities. The parks offer valuable recreational space which is needed in a dense city like Riga.

Comparison:

A comparison with Copenhagen shows a similar situation where large parks are situated at a short distance from the city centre.

Riga: 500.000 m²
Copenhagen: 480.000 m²



Parks in Riga

□



○



☆



⬡



Ω



TRAFFIC AND PEOPLE

Conflicts between motor traffic and pedestrians are one of the major problems in cities today. In many cities traffic has steadily increased without any overall strategy or control. As a result there are frequent conflicts between pedestrians and motortraffic. It is important to look at the traffic in city centres with a critical eye and take care of the people who want to walk in their city and thereby contribute to the creation of a lively and friendly city environment.

Although there is heavy traffic through Riga and the amount of traffic is constantly increasing, Riga's Old Town has as part of a progressive city centre policy been spared major traffic development. Pay-tolls have been introduced at access ways to the Old Town. These traffic regulations have limited the number of cars in the narrow old streets and have improved the environment for pedestrians who can walk more freely. However, there are still conflicts between pedestrians and cars also in the Old Town and a lack of respect for pedestrians can be observed in many places in Riga.

The pedestrian crossings in Riga are few. Car drivers tend to drive aggressively and pedestrians quite often have to run to cross the streets or make unpleasant or hazardous detours to get to their destination. Cars have first priority and pedestrians are kept behind fences and led into tunnels.

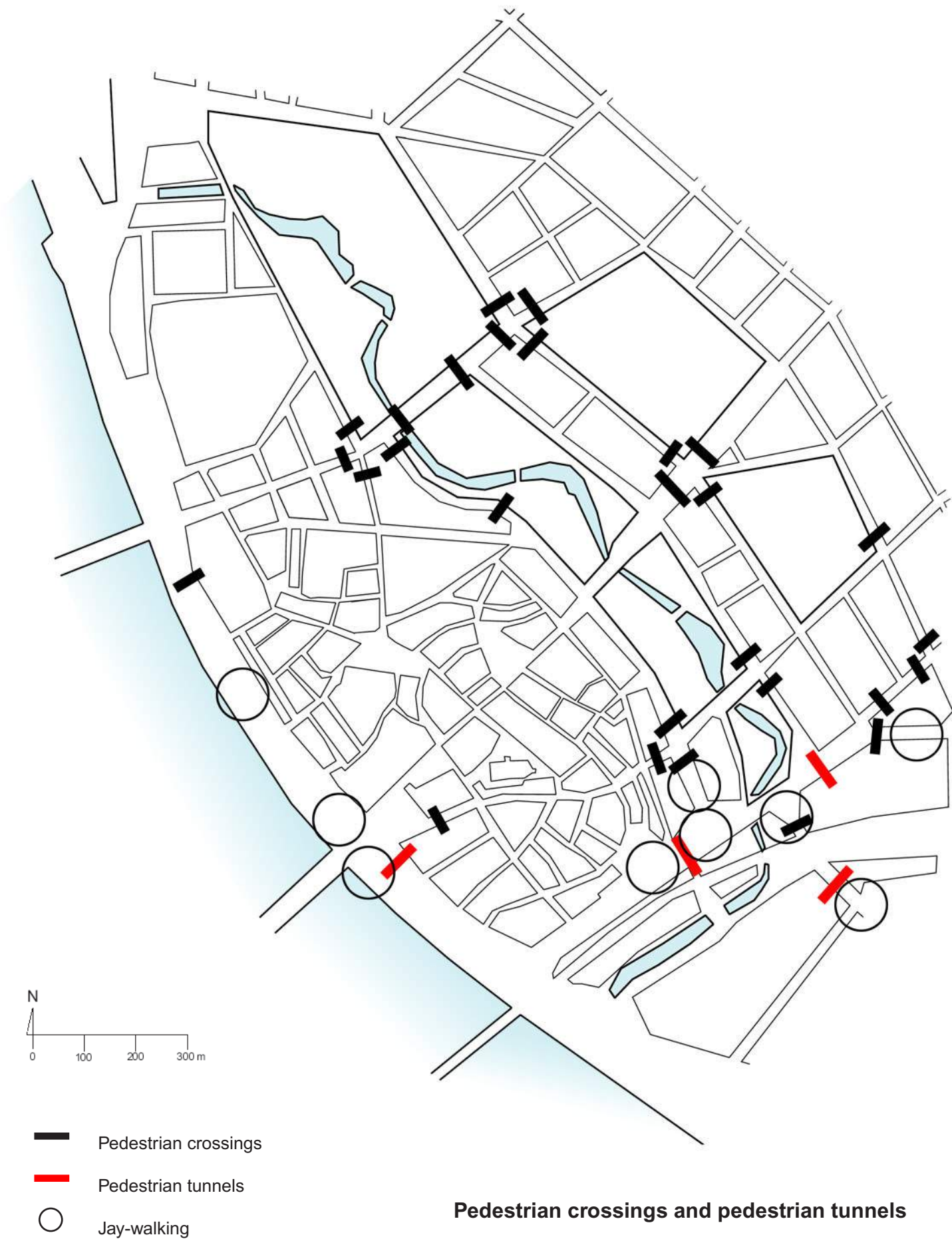
The map to the right show a recording of light controlled or marked pedestrian crossings and tunnels in the city. The number of crossings are few and it is striking to note that the probably most used road crossing in the city from Brivibas to Kalku iela has no lights or marks which leaves the many pedestrians crossing here everyday on their own.

A pilot survey on a summer morning disclosed that 420 cars were parked in the Old Town. Many were parked very carelessly in pedestrian crossings, on the pavement and thus creating difficulties for the pedestrian movements.

The busses and trams mainly service the major roads surrounding the Old Town. Getting on and off the trams is in a number of places connected with difficulty as many lanes of traffic have to be crossed.

Riga only has a few cyclists. There are few provisions for the cyclists and in most places riding a bicycle is rather unpleasant and dangerous.

To improve the quality of the city the present conflicts must be addressed.





Pedestrian tunnels are seldom used any more in the city centres of European cities. Pedestrians do not like to be forced up and down while walking in the city. The city streets become more friendly and people oriented if people cross at pedestrian crossings. The crossings have to be properly constructed and properly marked. This is seldom the case in Riga city centre.



Pedestrian tunnels constitute a practical and psychological problem for the pedestrian traffic. Many people prefer to cross the traffic streets by „jay-walking“ rather than by using the tunnels. The percentage of people crossing as jay-walkers are between 15% and 25% of all pedestrians crossing.



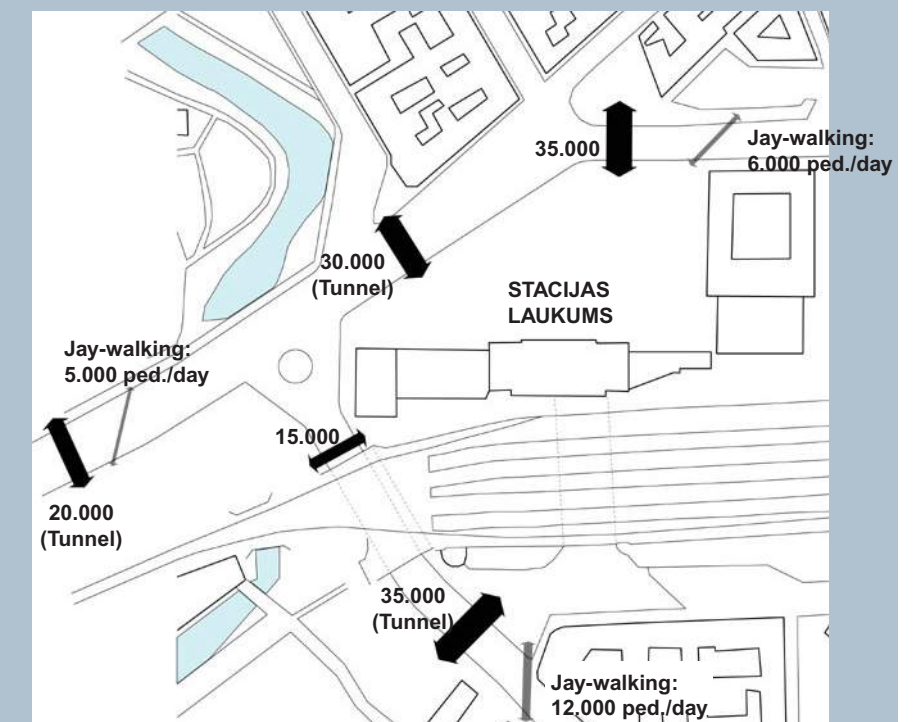
Pedestrian tunnels

The many pedestrian tunnels in Riga were constructed on the basis of traffic planning philosophies which grew out of modernism. It was believed to be safest to separate people and cars.

Contemporary planning principles indicate that tunnels are largely avoided because they act as barriers for pedestrians especially disabled persons and people with prams. The atmosphere in the city is more relaxed, safe and friendly if people walk on the surface and are able to cross the traffic streets at pedestrian crossings. Further the city streets change character and are perceived as friendly city streets rather than urban motorways if people dominate the sidewalks and cross at pedestrian crossings.

It can be noted that many people choose not to use the tunnels, but jump the fences and cross at street level as so-called „jay-walkers“ at danger to themselves and others. What was seen to be a safe solution has in real life turned out to be a more dangerous solution because it disregards the fact that people prefer not to use stairs if this can in any way be avoided.

In many european cities pedestrian tunnels are being closed and pedestrian crossings installed in their place as part of a policy to make the city streets more friendly and at the same time reduce the speed of car traffic.



Jay-walking

Above a study of pedestrian traffic in the station area on a winter weekday (10 am to 6 pm). A substantial number of the people who cross the traffic streets, cross outside the tunnels and the pedestrian crossings. Near the tunnels 20-25% of all pedestrians cross illegally at street level. Near the pedestrian crossing 15% cross the street outside the crossing.

POINTS OF CONFLICT

The first steps to secure a good city environment have been taken by introducing traffic restrictions in the Old Town. The main challenges now are the connections to the river, the station, the central market and the citadel, where major roads have to be crossed to get to these destinations.

Barrier between the city and the river

Riga has grown along the riverfront and the city centre is in close proximity to the water. Today the city and the river are separated by a major road which creates difficult situations for pedestrians and the few cyclists. There are two crossing points. One is a tunnel that leads halfway across the street, whereas the other is a pedestrian crossing with no traffic lights. This appears to be insufficient if the riverfront is to be accessible and widely used as a recreational area for the people of Riga.

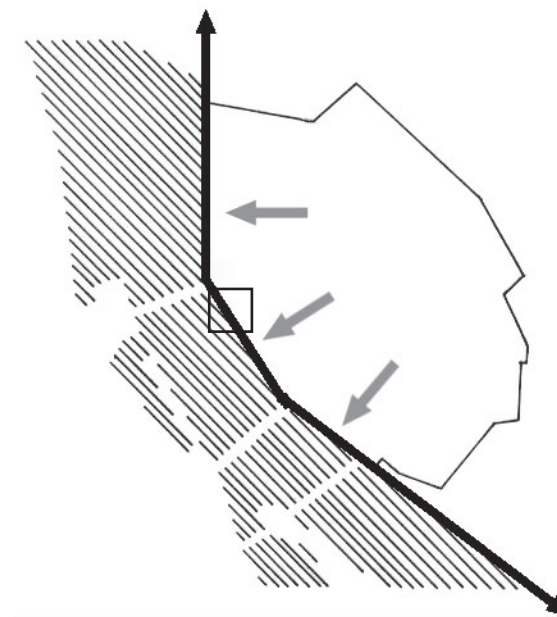
The riverfront in Riga is rightfully conceived as a dangerous place to get to. This prevents people from using the promenade along the river. The survey shows that the promenade along the river is only used by few pedestrians and that the majority are young people while elderly and children are seldom to be found.

On a weekday in June (20th of June 2001, 10 am to 12 pm) 1580 persons were walking by the riverfront. Of all counting positions this is where the fewest people were registered. During daytime (10 am to 6 pm) 450 persons passed. During night time (6 am to 12 pm) 1130 persons passed.

To create a better link between the city and the river it is necessary to reconsider the traffic solution for this part of the city.

Barrier between the city and the citadel

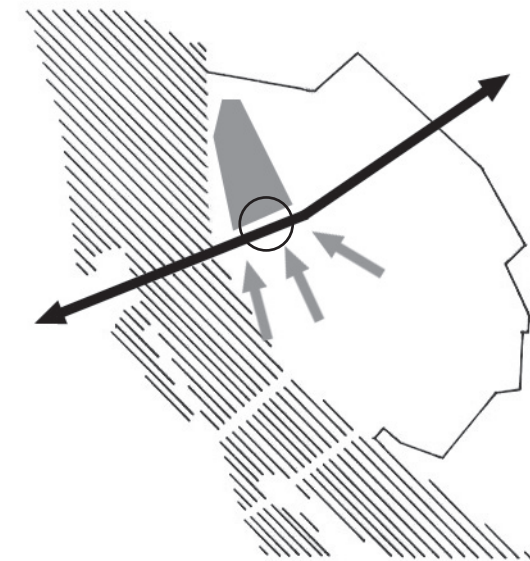
The citadel is today a detached part of the city and separated by a major road from the Old Town. It is at present largely unused. With its fine buildings and unique location close to the river, the ramparts and the old town it is an area with great potential. With an improvement of the connections to the city, an enhancement of the existing qualities and an introduction of a mix of uses this could be developed into a lively and exciting place.



Barrier between the city and the river



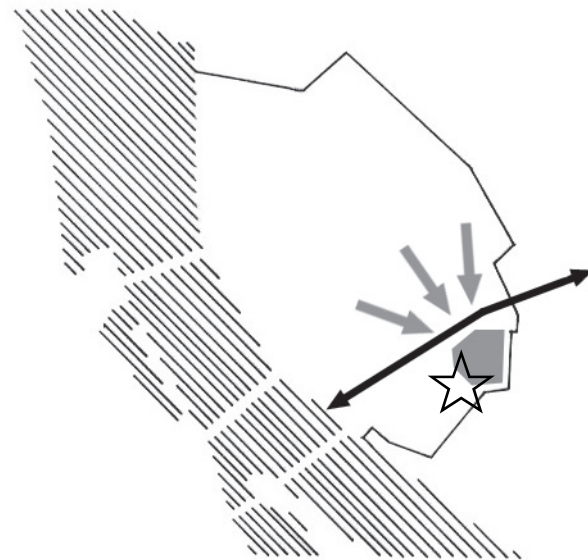
11. Novembra krastmala



Barrier between the city and the citadel



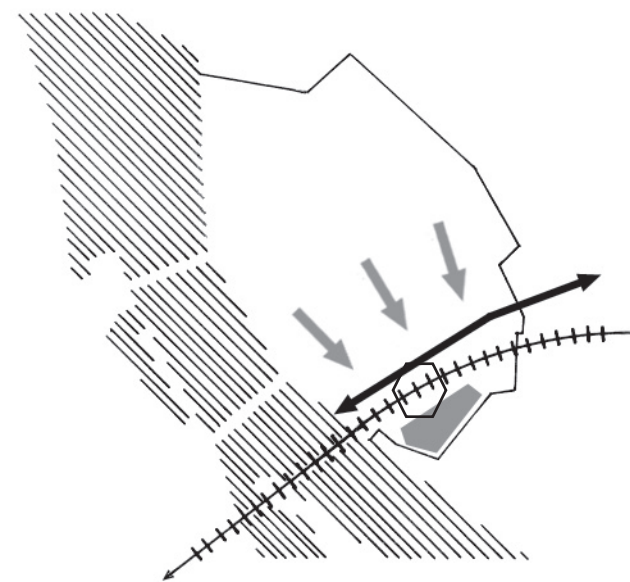
K. Valdemara iela



Barrier between the city and the station.



Marijas iela



Barriers between the city and the market.



13. janvara iela

Barrier between the city and the railway station

The railway station and the nearby busstation play an important role in the city. Thousands use these traffic links every day to get to the city. The station is separated from the Old Town by major roads leading traffic from the eastern suburbs, across the river, to the western areas of Riga. The area around the station and the adjoining streets is dominated by traffic and the environment is stressful because of the noise and the fumes.

The city centre and the station area are linked by a pedestrian tunnel leading people under ground. This has been done mainly to avoid accidents. One of the major problems with the linkage between the station and the city is exactly the tunnels. In leading people under ground the direct connection between the city and the station is lost.

Barriers between the city and the central market

The central market is, as mentioned previously, a great attraction in Riga. However, the railway embankment and 13. janvara iela create major barriers between the city and the market. There are only three access points from the city centre to the market. All are dominated by much traffic and insufficient space for pedestrians.

An important part in keeping the central market active is to ensure that it is well connected to other parts of the city.



Above: Example from Copenhagen, H.C. Andersens Boulevard, where 50.000 pedestrians cross a road with 60.000 cars a day. Crossing is done in a pedestrian crossing in street level.

PARKING





Parking on the sidewalk in the Old Town
The sidewalks in the Old Town of Riga are very narrow. The sidewalk paving is more comfortable to walk on compared to the cobblestones in the street. Of course there is also a feeling of safety associated with walking on the sidewalk. The sidewalks however, are frequently occupied by parked cars which cause problems for the pedestrians. Car parking in the streets in the Old Town ought to be much better controlled.



Parking in pedestrian crossings
Frequently in Riga one can see cars parked in the middle of important routes for pedestrians such as in pedestrian crossings. Cars are parked so that it becomes impossible to move in comfort. People with prams and wheelchair users have great difficulties.



Parking and other obstacles on sidewalks
The phenomena of „sidewalk-eating“ cars are known in many cities. The parked cars are pushed up on the sidewalk and only leave narrow corridors for pedestrians to walk in. Street furniture, traffic signs, parking meters and other city equipment clutter the sidewalks and frequently turn the walking routes into unpleasant obstacle courses.



CITY SCALE

With its medieval city structure, the Old Town is blessed with a fine scale of spaces, buildings and details to which people can relate to directly. Streets are narrow and the squares relatively small. There is an attractive relation between building heights and street widths. When space is limited, it brings people closer to each other and to the building facades which gives an environment rich in sensory stimulation.

Narrow buildings have the fine effect of making streets more interesting because narrow units mean many doors and many different uses to look at, even on a short walk through town. The many narrow buildings also provide a predominantly vertical facade structure which has the important visual effect of making distances feel shorter. This makes it more pleasant and comfortable to walk around in the city. Buildings in Riga also have many niches, stairs, stones and recesses. These small places give people opportunities to sit and stand.

Other fine attributes resulting from the scale and structure are the attractive ground floor facades that dominate the city centre of Riga. Good ground floor facades are an important city feature. They make the city interesting to walk through, interesting to look at, to touch and to stand next to. Activities inside buildings and those on the street can enrich each other. In the evenings, friendly light shines out through the windows of shops and other ground floor activities and contributes to a feeling of security as well as provide genuine safety. Interesting ground floor facades also provide good reasons for walking around in the city in the evenings and on Sundays, engaging in the age-old pastime of window-shopping. In contrast, blank walls underline the futility of visiting the city outside shopping hours.

The illustrations on this page show an example of the many attractive streets and facades in the Old Town.

The illustrations on the opposite page show examples of some of the unattractive facades.

The map clearly indicates that the main problem in Riga is not the few unattractive facades but rather the many empty buildings and the many vacant building sites in central parts of the city.

Generally the Old Town is fortunate to have a fine city fabric of great attraction and a good quality of the ground floor facades that face the streets. It is very important that this valuable quality in the city is maintained and strengthened when future development in the city takes place.



Above: A row of columns provide places to meet and places to stand and watch public life.



Above: A good city to stay in have many details, which can support peoples' activities (example: Copenhagen)



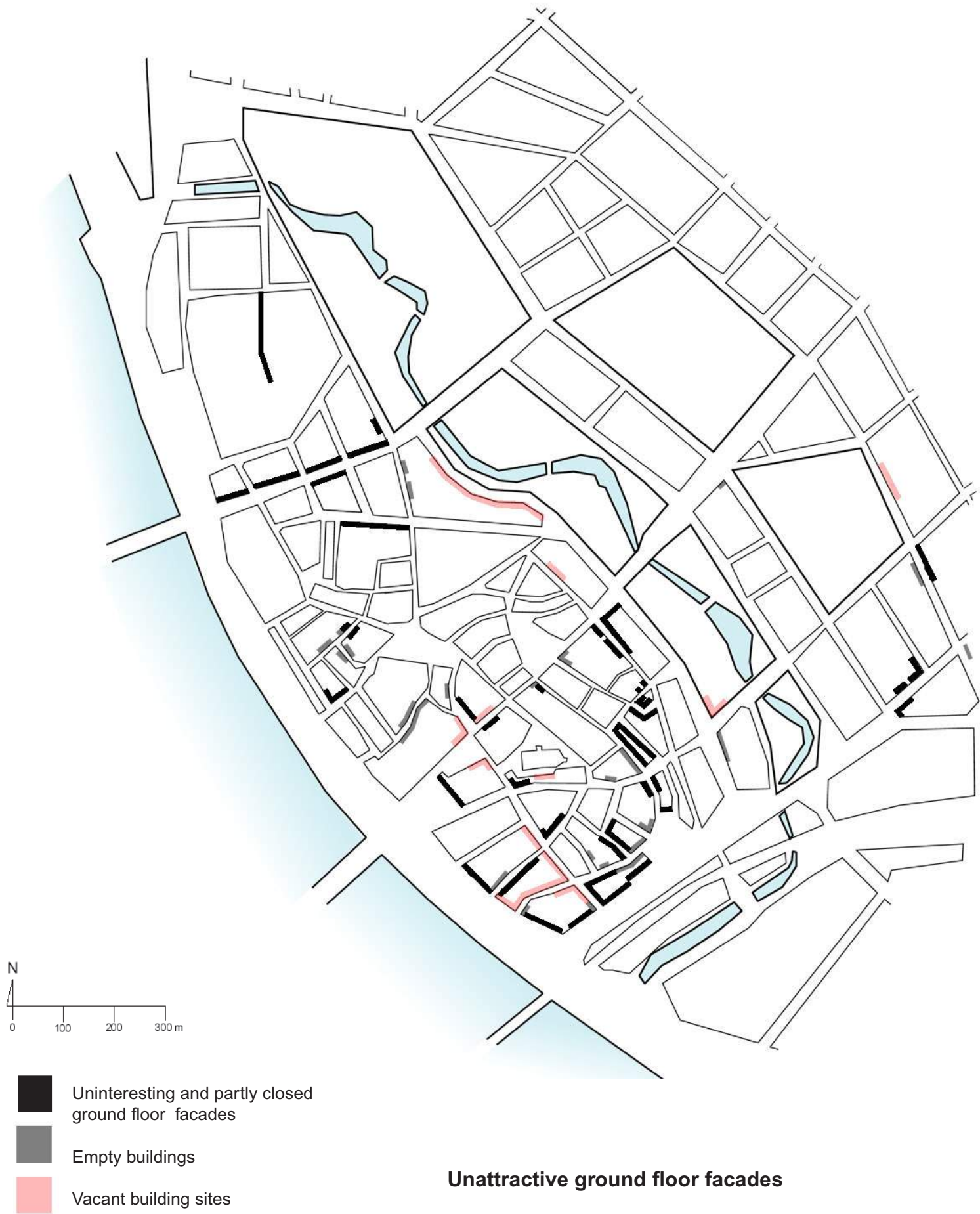
Unattractive ground floor facades are inactive facades which generally are perceived as damaging for the street environment. The features of most unattractive ground floor facades are: Large units with few or no doors, no visible variation in function, closed or passive facades, monotonous facades, lack of detail and nothing interesting to look at.



The Museum of Occupation at Ratslaukums represents a brutalistic period in the history of architecture.



Blank facades add no life to the city streets. Their lack of details and the lost contact with the activities inside the buildings are destructive for the quality of the street environment.



DEVELOPMENT AREAS AND SAFETY

At present major changes are taking place in the Baltic countries. The capitals are undergoing an impressive development where new businesses are established, the cultural heritage is renovated and the city environment is being improved. This development will secure a lively and friendly city environment for the years to come.

In Riga there exist at present a number of problems in parts of the city where buildings are left unused and derelict. This is due to changes in the political situation and in the economy. The problem is particularly wide spread in the New Town area and by the citadel. People avoid these areas at night, partly because there is no reason at present to go there and partly because the areas are seen as unsafe.

The illustration shows areas of perceived unsafety in Riga. The New Town area near the river in the south western part of the Old Town and the area around the central market feel unsafe when it is dark. These areas are also the districts where there are many unused and derelict buildings.

They are areas for potential development. A friendly atmosphere can be created with a successful mix of uses and attractive ground floor facades.



Areas of perceived unsafety at night

EVENING ACTIVITIES

The number of evening activities and their location are important factors in the perception of safety. If there are few activities the visitor gets the impression of a deserted city and avoid going there in the evening.

The structure and scale of Riga enables the present mix of uses in the centre. In the four to five storey buildings it is common to find shops or restaurants at ground floor level and offices or flats above. This gives a good mixture in each building, and at the same time provides valuable integration of different uses in the various districts.

In Riga many activities continue to be open until 10 pm and this secures a lively city in the evening. On the left is shown the evening activities which are open and active in the evening hours and contribute to the night time life in the city centre. The survey was carried out on a weekday between 9 pm and 12 pm. There is a concentration of activities around Kalku iela og Audeju iela in the Old Town and around the station. There are very few evening activities in the northern part of the city centre and no activities by the river, the market and the citadel.

There is an unequal spread of evening activities where the central and south-eastern part is lively while the north-western part is less so. To achieve a more uniform location of the evening activities and improve the perception of safety it is recommended to extend or spread out the night time activities to all parts of the city centre.



Evening activities on a weekday night
(Recorded on a weekday between 9 pm and 12 pm).

CLIMATE

The cities around the Baltic Sea are characterized by a two-season culture. A dark, grey winter and a green, lively and light summer. The winter is a time for formalized and organized indoor activities as evening classes, courses and meetings. The summer is a season for the informal and spontaneous outdoor activities. The attractive parts of city life are concentrated in the summer period. This is the season for tourists to visit and for people to come and stay for a while in the city.

Located in a part of the world with low sun angles and lots of wind during winter, central Riga is well equipped to make the best of these conditions. The dense, homogenous mass of buildings in the Old Town makes the wind pass over the city. The small spaces and narrow, winding streets give a sheltered climate more gentle than the areas outside the city centre.

However, the narrow streets make it difficult for the sun to penetrate specially in the winter and the public spaces that do get sun are precious. Most important are the open areas around the city as the riverfront and the large parks. They offer recreational opportunities with space, light and possibility for sun all year round. Whenever there is a ray of sunshine in Riga the riverfront will be sunlit.

Winter is very harsh in Riga. The temperature drops radically and snow and ice cover most of the city. Only necessary walks, as to go to work or to shop, are undertaken outside in the winter. It is particularly necessary to ease access for pedestrians to key destinations as the central market, the station and the Old Town during winter. When the climatic conditions make walking difficult the lack of public transport in the Old Town is felt more and the tunnels are perceived as worse obstacles when snow and ice cover the steps and make them dangerous.

Inspiration to improve conditions in the winter for pedestrians can be found in Norway where it is common to heat the most extensively used sidewalks to prevent ice and snow.



The riverfront and the parks are important recreational areas in a city with a dense city structure.



A walk in the city

To walk in the city during summer is a pleasant experience where one can watch city life evolve in every street, square and park.

To walk during winter can be a tough experience in a city where it is very cold and snow and ice cover the ground.



A rest in the city

City benches are used extensively during most of the year. Benches placed in the sun, sheltered from wind and with life to watch are always the most popular.



To spend time in the city

The culture of outdoor cafes are gaining popularity in cities in all parts of the world as a way of relaxing and watching other people. Cafe and restaurant owners can extend the outdoor season if they provide the guests with blankets, cushions and gas heaters. As a result of this effort Copenhagen has an outdoor season from April to November. *Below: Heaters in a cafe on Jauniela*





Part 2 - Public Life - how the city is used