

# The Significance of Riga Neighbourhoods for the Sustainable Economic Development of the City

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**Abstract**— One of the chief factors for the development of a country is the development of its cities, and one of the chief factors for a development of a city is the development of its residential districts or neighbourhoods, but the very core and pillar of the development of a country, city and its neighbourhoods is their residents. The given article looks into the significance of Riga neighbourhoods in the sustainable economic development of the city. Riga is the capital of Latvia. It is located next to the Gulf of Riga. The city is more than 300 square kilometers large and a population of it is about 700 thousand inhabitants. Within the framework of this article, one can see that current development rates of the neighbourhoods and steady development of the city as such do not exist or are not observed. The article considers basic deficiencies of Riga planning documents and provides a brief insight into the history of the city and its general characteristics.

**Research methods** - logical-constructive method - expressing judgments and analyzing the results, the monographic method was used to analysis of literature and information, analysis and synthesis method was used too. Comparative method was used in town planning documents and the housing market analysis research.

**Keywords**— *neighbourhoods, sustainable development, city, city planning, Riga*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In view of the fact that nowadays, when cities are the biggest consumers of natural and human resources, the sustainable economic development of cities, with a resident being in the focus of attention, becomes the increasingly more pressing and significant issue. Thus, one of the key factors is the involvement of residents and their cooperation with municipalities, both from the economic and social viewpoints. The basis of sustainability is providing qualitative living conditions with regards to not only the current generations, but also the next ones. By considering that multi-storey residential areas, or the so-called “*bedroom communities*”, occupy the biggest part of cities, such areas have to be developed in accordance with the set sustainable development goals of the cities.

Urban environment is continuously developing, experiencing transformations and adjusting to the requirements of the corresponding era. With time the environment degrades, and people are influenced not only by its physical depreciation, but, to a much greater extent, by the moral depreciation and non-conformity of the living environment to the modern requirements, which directly threatens to transform the city neighbourhoods into “ghetto” regions, as it happened, for instance, in the USA. Europe started drawing attention to the development of city neighbourhoods since the mid-1920s, whereas Latvia only recently. The public outdoor space of the residential environment is primary among other urban areas, since it is directly related to the daily life of people and, hence, serves as an indicator for the life quality and a tool for its improvement.

By considering the significance of this problem not only on the city level, but also on the national and international levels, a decision was taken to write about this currently pressing problem and find out why the cooperation between the city residents and Riga municipality is so inefficient. What is the obstacle we cannot overcome, in order to facilitate the joint equal development of entire Riga, which, in its turn, could contribute to the economical and sustainable development of the city? This fact is confirmed, when seeing how slow the development is in separate neighbourhoods, which also contributes to the uneven development of the city, as stipulated by the city planning documents. The goal of the article is to find out the significance of the Riga neighbourhoods in the sustainable economic development of the city.

The bulk of the neighbourhoods face similar problems, which pertain to depreciation of the housing fund, ageing of residents and changeable socio-economic circumstances. A number of earlier studies point to the relation between the decreasing quality of the living environment, with the existing variety of property rights, and inefficiency of management structures. This causes concern regarding ageing of the city and arrearages in its development, regardless of the fact that one of the goals in all city development documents is to create a convenient, safe and pleasant environment for its residents.

Although support instruments for renovation of residential buildings are available in Latvia, both informatively and financially, they are not used sufficiently. Inspections of residential buildings and public outdoor spaces in Riga

neighbourhoods in most cases demonstrate the inefficiency of the current management system and the inability to improve the quality of the living environment in the long-term perspective; therefore, a considerable part of the residential fund is subjected to a risk of degradation. The present model and rate of developing the neighbourhoods are not sustainable, i.e. neither the current nor next generations can live comfortably in such neighbourhoods, because, with the currently existing development, they will turn into slums. Therefore, an example of European countries must be considered, where the main principle of the development is to make the living environment more attractive, at the same time not forgetting about the condition of the surrounding environment, which is significant, since an aesthetically pleasant environment around a residential area must be retained, so that a resident would like to return to his neighbourhood.

There are 58 neighbourhoods in Riga in total and each neighbourhood is different. Each has its own history. For example, Pļavnieki is a neighbourhood where earlier there were only meadows and developed farming, Kengarags “surfaced” from water depths. Thus, the city neighbourhoods, as well as their history, are different and varied, and every neighbourhood has its own identity.

Riga has played a significant role in the development of Latvia, which was influenced both by historical trends and the advantageous geographical location. The status of Riga as the capital city of Latvia assigns the undisputable responsibilities – Riga has to organise different significant state and international events, take care of well-being, health and education of the residents of Riga and Latvia, as well as to contribute to the development of national economy.

During the period between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the historical fact regarding Riga neighbourhoods was proven again that earlier farmlands and pine swamps had been located beyond the centre of the city. With regard to housing, there were small one-storey houses, plenty of green areas and meadows. Agriculture was very well developed. At present, these territories are occupied by residential districts, or the so-called “bedroom communities”, where multi-storeyed panel and brick residential buildings predominate.

The early construction in Riga dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, however until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the strict division of Riga into two parts – the downtown and the suburbs – left an impact on the city housing and development, regardless of the fact that 20% of residents, who were well-to-do, lived in the downtown and 80% of residents, who were middle class and low-income, lived in the suburbs in wooden houses. In the 1940s expansion of the city was observed, occupying more new territories, and this process continued until 1990, when housing of the neighbourhoods on the nature areas beyond the city centre was started.

During the period from 1990 to the present time a tendency of the city to move beyond its current borders has been observed, increasing the impact on the visually attractive nature areas, as well as moving towards the city centre, increasing the housing density at the expense of garden squares, parks and inner courts. In the rest of the territory, the housing density increases in the neighbourhoods, due to the construction of inner courts on free areas. With the economic downfall in 2009, many construction processes were suspended or even not started. At present, construction projects are gradually restarted, but they are not as intensive as they were before 2009.

The agglomeration of Riga in its structure is expressly monocentric, as Riga is the absolutely dominating centre and links between other local agglomeration centres are very weak. This is also confirmed by the fact that 88% of the pendulum migrants from the agglomeration internal area arrive to work to Riga. To promote the regional development, it is required to facilitate the formation of polycentric and multifunctional residential structures in the Riga agglomeration area. The polycentrism must be formed following the decentralised concentration principle, when multifunctional residential areas (houses, workplaces, services and recreation environment) are located near chief transport thoroughfares – railway and main roads. Based on theory and European experience, such spatial development is more sustainable and efficient, both from the environmental and economic viewpoints.

Next, deficiencies in the city planning documents will be discussed, demonstrating that the development of the city neighbourhoods does not happen the way it is anticipated by the Riga planning and development documents, which has some important consequences.

## II. EVALUATION OF THE RIGA PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Planning is an aggregate of coordinated events that lead to the achievement of goals. In city development planning, it is most complicated to divide the process into stages. Usually it consists of project studies, construction of buildings and other capital objects, which are singled out as recreation or other development type areas. There are quite many different concepts of city planning structures.

One cannot speak about development by using only quantified indicators, social indicators also have to be taken into account; for example, a developed city is a city of spiritually and physically developed residents. Whereas sustainable development is defined differently and its definition is interpreted in various ways, since the sustainable development process is topical during the entire period of the mankind existence and this concept receives the increasing popularity.

The sustainable development is the development when in the course of time none of the development dimension capitals is reduced. It is also important for the development to take place by not exhausting the resources that make it possible.

The term “sustainability” (Nachhaltigkeit) was for the first time used in 1713 in an article on sustainable use of forests: “As much can be taken from a forest, as it can grow again.” (Hans Carl von Carlowitz, 1713).

The Riga Development Plan, in total, consists of three mutually related main documents, which include also the Riga Territory Planning for 2006-2008 with amendments (hereinafter in the text – RTP 2018). The second of these documents is the Riga Long-term Development Strategy until 2030 (hereinafter in the text – Strategy Riga 2030). The third document is the Riga Development Programme for 2014- 2020 (hereinafter in the text – RAP 2020). Hierarcially, the most important planning document is the Riga Long-term Development Strategy until 2030, which can be seen in Fig. 1.

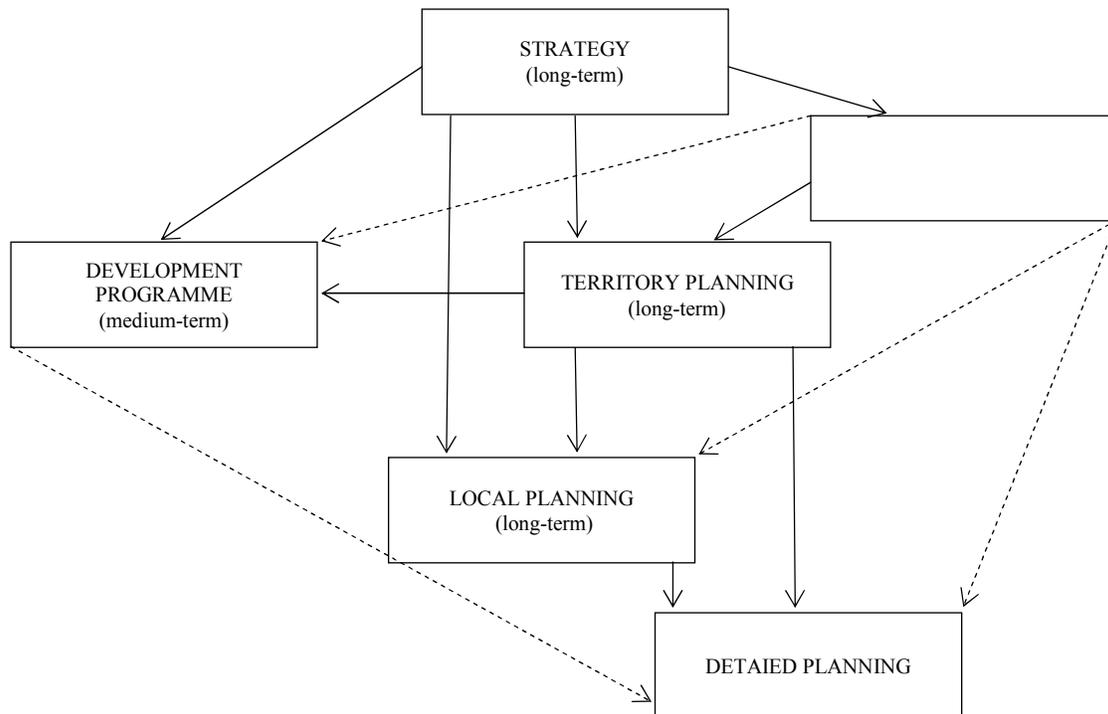


Fig.1. Interconnectedness of the Planning Documents [developed by authors]

Thus, it is necessary to develop the Strategy Riga 2030 document, so that the current and next generations could have the qualitative environment and a balanced economic development, which is based on the retained and developed nature and cultural heritage. To successfully and strategically correctly develop the aforementioned strategic document for such a long period of time, the future vision of not only the city but the entire country was taken into account, which is also displayed in the Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030, with account of the future development document of the international scale – the EU Growth Strategy unit 2020, which stipulates that all management levels are responsible for ensuring that a potential of cities and agglomerations of cities in full is used for the benefit of all residents of Europe, as well as one of the chief goals is to reduce poverty in cities by 25% and increase the employment level in the group of residents aged 20 to 64 until 75%, instead of the current 69%.

And RAP 2020 is the medium term development planning document of the city municipality, where the medium term priorities and a complex of measures are determined for reaching the goals and objectives set by the Strategy Riga 2030.

RAP 2020 comprehensively describes 19 lines of action set for achieving the goals, which further provide 111 objectives and planned events to successfully achieve the set goals. The lines of action are related to the extensive competence of the municipality, where their linking is provided for achieving each goal.

The main task of RTP 2018 is to serve as an efficient tool for implementing the Riga long-term development policy in conformity with Strategy Riga 2030 and in accordance with the Development Programme, by evaluating the territory development potential and providing the corresponding conditions for the city development in the aspect of territory usage. Thus, the general goal of RTP 2018 is to facilitate the sustainable development of Riga, ensuring the highest possible quality of life for all the people who live, work, invest in Riga, or just visit it.

Following the brief aforementioned insight regarding the most important planning documents for the sustainable economic development of Riga, one can see that all three documents are significant and interrelated. Apart from them, there are other types of the municipal territory planning documents, which are also interrelated, and namely:

- ✓ Detailed planning – a detailed plan for the territory development and use at specific places;
- ✓ Local planning – the long-term territory development planning document of a local municipality, which a local municipality develops for a part of its administrative territory (for example, a part of a city, village or rural territory) to solve a planning task or providing details or amendment to the territory planning.

The next is thematic planning, which is a document, within the framework of which the development of sectors (for example, education) is planned or issues of a thematically defined field development are solved (for example, planning of landscape valuable territories). Such documents can reflect planning of the usage of human and financial resources. Besides, within the framework of the thematic planning, the usage of a certain type of territories (watersides) or natural resources (recreation resources) can be anticipated. In many cases, it is expedient to develop thematic planning also as a preparatory work or a basis for processes of development of a sustainable development strategy, a development programme or a territory planning, or the content of the documents.

Already starting from 2012, the development of thematic plannings is provided for approval of the new Riga Territory Plan for 2018-2030 (hereinafter in the text – RTP 2030). In May and June 2015 one of the community involvement events was held – “Guide to Neighbourhoods”, when Riga specialists went to neighbourhoods to inspect problematic territories jointly with active residents of these neighbourhoods and to talk about possible solutions, in order to include them as much as possible in the thematic plannings.

In September and October the competition of drawings “My Neighbourhood. My Neighbourhood Story” was scheduled for children and youth. The competition is arranged as one of the community involvement events, to promote the belonging of children and youth to their neighbourhood, to involve them in the city planning processes, as well as to popularise the new Riga territory planning both among children and youth, and among their parents. Up to now these competitions have not yet taken place.

The developed thematic plannings are scheduled to be provided to the community for reviewing in October and November. Later, at the end of the year, the plannings are anticipated to be approved at a meeting of Riga City Council. One of the goals of all planning documents is to facilitate the sustainable development of Riga, which is based on the well-being of its residents and the qualitative living environment, i.e., a convenient, safe and pleasant urban environment for its residents. Therefore, it is very important to have an active involvement of the community in the implementation of such thematic plannings.

In total, there are four goals for the city development, which are mutually interacting and which are aimed at the long-term economic development of the city. The pillars of the city are: the community, the urban environment and economics, but, most importantly, the residents of Riga themselves. Wherever we come across the planning development and implementation, the city residents are at the basis of everything, they are the core for the city development and progressiveness. However, when we look at the development of Riga neighbourhoods and Riga in general, it has to be concluded that principlism is not felt, which does not match together with the city sustainable development regulations and visions. This happens due to the intention to adjust to interests of investors, private owners and resellers, thus causing instability for the city sustainable economic development. There is lack of principlism in achieving the goals and lines of the Riga development documents, as when subjecting to wishes of investors, the city development in accordance with the set goals is stunted. The presence of investors in the city is a positive economic indicator, but the most important thing is for ideas of the investors to coincide with the city development visions, and this is not observed at present.

The process of development of Riga planning and development documents is one-sided, i.e., without participation of Riga residents, though they are invited for elaboration of thematic plans, but the popularity and availability of thematic calendars is small, since not everyone will search through internet portals to find out when and where a meeting on the future the city development and planning will be held.

It is also required to understand that “a pleasant and safe neighbourhood is one of the most important factors of ensuring the social well-being of the community. A pleasant environment causes people to wish to retain it and to stay in it also further on. Therefore, a special attention in Riga must be devoted to a unified housing policy issues in interests of the community in such a way that an offer of qualitative housings could be available in the city for various groups of residents, having different income levels.”

The elaboration of the European cities development was started in the 1950s. In Latvia, after the restoration of the independence of the country, Riga elaborated its first Development Plan in 1995. This plan was clearly structured, with the precisely determined construction strategy for the period for up to 2005, and its name was not changed historically – Riga

Development Programme for 1995-2005. Still, it has to be acknowledged that the same errors were admitted at that planning period as in RAP 2020, as the implemented city neighbourhood projects did not fit in the general city image. The main goal, which was to take care of a feeling of comfort of people, was forgotten in this case, ignoring provisions of the Riga development documents, where a lack of principlism is also seen, as it is clearly written in the urban environment development statements of Strategy Riga 2030 that a harmonious inclusion of the city environment objects and elements in the Riga image must be ensured, which regrettably was not observed in the aforementioned cases.

The objective of planning in a developed and sustainable city should be – developing such spatial infrastructure that provides all citizens with suitable and comfortable housing, welfare, including employment opportunities in the city, versatile care, possibilities to move easily and a good choice of options for spending their free time.

Many of the constituent elements of urban environment serve for centuries; however, some of them have to be developed annually. Only trustworthy long-term plans and programmes ensure a stable and trustworthy development. If the plans are edited during the period of planning, it poses a threat to the achievement of the objectives, since it shows the destabilisation of the plans or programmes; however, the editing of urban development planning documents is necessary, since, at the initial stage of their development, the participation of citizens in the deliberation of thematic plans is not active enough. The planning process should be continuous, transparent and realistic, and needs and possibilities should meet in it.

A characteristic feature of favourable economic environment of the country is in the case when the city is developed and the construction implemented mainly by the private sector. It is important for both large and small investors to be sure that they can trust the activities of the municipality. It should be a mutually fair process in order to create a stable environment with predictable and secure future; however, unfortunately, all participants try to maximize their benefits by maximum implementation of their interests, forgetting about the main objective of the investment project – steady development of the citizens and the city. The main condition, if the city planning policies, such as a green future and green environment, are not violated, is to give the owners and builders an opportunity to implement their ambitions and realise the grand projects, since it definitely will develop economics and create more favourable and more friendly environment as well as improve employment, at least for the duration of the project.

While analysing city planning documents, the conclusion can be made that in the city planning there is lack of a programme for urban development. Very little has been done in developing the Soviet period neighbourhoods in order to meet contemporary requirements and ownership structures in this area due to imposing a moratorium on the construction of inner blocks; however, when looking at languishing courtyards, children's areas with flaking concrete and broken swings from the Soviet period, it seems that we are stuck in the Soviet days. Arranging just one new children's playground with two swings, a sand box and a slide for 100 children will not resolve the question because everything will quickly get used up as it will be the only well-arranged playground in the whole block. However, this is only a small insight into a major problem. Definitely, it cannot be expected that all funds will be invested only in the development of neighbourhoods, but at least it should be developed according to subordinate order to avoid creating a chaotic and inadequate urban landscape with an incompatible architectural construction.

Similarly with the process of implementing the project in Purvciems: the re-cultivation of Riga City dump, which does not comply with regulatory requirements, is lagging behind in terms of time as, according to the home page of Riga City Council and also according to RDP-2020, the project was to be completed on 1 January 2015; however, the information on the home page of the European Union projects shows that the implementation term of the project is 30 December, 2015. The improvement of social housing in Purvciems has not been started either, though, according to RDP-2020, it had to be completed in 2015. Similarly, in Ķengarags the improvement of social housing has not been commenced yet, even though the deadline of the project is 2017 and it had to be started in 2014. In Ziepniekkalns works for the improvement of a social house has not been started yet either; during the inspection of the house it was found that the windows had been concreted.

Of course, there are also projects that have been implemented, for example, in Annīmuiža forest in Imanta a project of Riga City Council has been implemented, the yard has been improved and lighting has been installed in the forest, renovation of Imanta Library has been carried out, renovation of Riga Annīmuiža Secondary School has been done, as well as Purvciems Secondary School has been renovated. In Ziepniekkalns, a new kindergarten has been built. It is most important to motivate people to improve their living environment and, for example, to insulate apartment buildings.

Insulation of buildings reduces heating consumption by an average of 40-50% in the heating season, because the building becomes more cold-resistant and more energy-efficient, ensuring the status of an environmentally-friendly building. Consequently, in the municipal city planning documents, one of the courses of action should be the involvement of people in improving their living space; however, the residents should estimate by themselves how insulation will affect the residential building and inhabitants taking into account both visual and internal indicators, since, quite often, insulation may cause allergic reactions. If the inhabitants are satisfied with the insulation rates of their residential building and its consequences, the municipality should support the residents in solving this issue in order to ensure both visual attractiveness and the status of an environmentally-friendly building, that, in its turn, would result in lower costs of heating for the inhabitants.

Summing up all the above mentioned, it appears that document review, planning and acceptance are incomplete, a lot of things are being done insufficiently, without assessing the risks and opportunities. Of course, in theory, everything seems to be optimistic, but the reality shows that the planning is subjective, since public participation is low and this fact points to the real situation in the city. If Riga residents were more active, then priorities in urban planning would also be reviewed. Looking at the list of public toilets in Riga, a question arises: is Centre the end of Riga? If in Soviet times playgrounds for children were in every courtyard and children had no problem to relieve themselves with their homes next to the playground, at present the situation is different and children's playgrounds are in a remote area or in another courtyard. Similarly, it is problematic for elderly people to go out for a walk, because there is nowhere to sit down, except on the sidewalk or lawn because the number of benches in neighbourhoods is insufficient.

One of the major positive development indicators is the presence of investors in the city, as well as the fact that urban construction does not stop but continues to develop. Therefore, Riga faces a big challenge because sooner or later we will have to pay attention to the high-rise buildings of Soviet times; otherwise these neighbourhoods may eventually share the fate of "ghetto" districts – dangerous slums that have led to segregation of society, which is also reflected in the spacial environment. In all planning periods, the main objective has been to take care of the citizens' health and well-being, however quite often such a situation has been faced when the city planning is more focused on the city planners' interests rather than those of citizens. If some time ago there was a possibility of contact with the neighbours in children's playgrounds, laundry drying sheds or in the stairwells, at present it is no longer so, and the contact between citizens that existed in Soviet times is not possible anymore. It is due to the stratification of population that started at the end of the 20th century and has been continuing up to this moment.

When analysing the city planning documents, which are based on sustainable urban development, it is clear that the efficiency and effectivity of the present-day activities are not sufficient. It may be due to lack of vision for urban development, funding limit and weak cooperation between the municipality and the private sector and citizens as well as lack of experience and expertise in urban planning and development in the future. It appears that one of the major problems in terms of urban development is the distrust of Riga City residents to the municipality; therefore, the main task should be to increase citizens' confidence in the municipality in order to promote cooperation, since the citizen of Riga is the key factor in sustainability and economic growth of the city.

### III. EVALUATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF NEIGHBOURHOODS IN THE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The importance of neighbourhoods in the sustainable economic development is great due to a number of factors and indices. One of the factors is the number of population, which is large enough to compete and provide economic benefits to the budget of Riga Municipality in the form of budget revenue. The number of economically active residents is a not less important factor; at present it is approximately 63% of the total population of the city.

In future, Riga Municipality should consider how to preserve and promote youth activity, as well as their staying in Riga agglomeration rather than leaving it for abroad. Goals and tasks should be set not just on paper, but also to reflect them in the reality of the labour market. One more important factor is the presence of investment in neighbourhoods; it is of great importance as well. In Riga, 196 projects have been implemented for a total amount of 500,285,342 million EUR on the study project activities and sub-activities that directly develop the city and improve the living environment in neighbourhoods. According to the data of the Central Statistics Bureau, on 1 January 2015 there were 643,368 inhabitants in Riga; consequently, by implementing the EU projects, 777.6 thousand EUR has been invested per capita. Out of 58 neighbourhoods, the projects have been implemented in 37 neighbourhoods. The activity of EU funds in the neighbourhoods of Riga confirms that both investors and entrepreneurs are interested in the development of neighbourhoods, because a large number of inhabitants is concentrated there. It is very important to take into account the benefits of Riga neighbourhoods, shown in Fig. 2, as they promote the development of urban population.

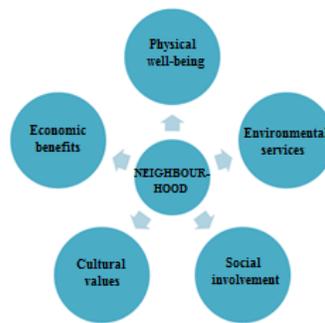


Fig. 2. Benefits of the neighbourhood in Riga [developed by authors]

As shown in Fig. 2. the image of Riga and particularly its five neighbourhoods is affected by five interrelated factors:

- Economic benefits mean that there are reduced costs of commuting to work, kindergarten, outpatient clinic, hobby groups and sports clubs as well as other activities because everything should be in the neighbourhood. In addition, the development of business and investment attraction increase the value of real estate, as a result increasing the added value in the neighbourhood.
- Cultural values – an opportunity to attend cultural events, including festivals, libraries, concert halls, exhibitions, etc.
- Social involvement – an opportunity to participate in social life in your neighbourhood: cleaning the territory, participating in public discussions organised by the Riga City Council and the identifying residents’ needs and questionnaires.
- Environmental services include sorting of waste, catching sick or abandoned animals, planting greenery, improving and arranging playgrounds, courtyards, etc.
- Physical well-being includes freely available sports areas, bike paths and sports competitions among the local population that definitely would create solidarity among the people of the neighbourhood.

Taking into account the above mentioned factors, the feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood will be developed, which, in its turn, would decrease the migration activity among neighbourhoods as the residents will feel good, with the feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood, thus raising the quality of life of the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood also possesses a social function and it can promote mutual communication and interaction of inhabitants that, in their turn, will promote the emergence of new contacts. In this way, the inhabitants of Riga will relax in their neighbourhood that will also contribute to cultural functions, thus strengthening the inhabitants’ identity and sense of belonging to their place of residence. Neighbourhoods are essential symbols for creating the image of the city, and they are important cultural legacies for future generations; therefore special attention should be given to their development and the guidelines and priorities of Riga Territory Planning-2030 (RTP-230) in order to avoid the situation, as it is at the current planning period, when a lot of work for sustainable development has been done on paper, however, when inspecting the work done in reality, a lot of shortcomings and backlog are identified that do not correspond to the plans. The solution to this problem might be the development of a separate electronic program to reflect in detail the implementation of the action plan for urban development.

The creation of the system of neighbourhoods is one of the tools for developing and improving the urban environment in Riga. Thus, the creation of neighbourhoods is also a tool, which enables the municipality to introduce and manage sustainable urban development, but to make it work properly, it is necessary to review the competence and expertise of employees in implementing their duties related to urban development because at the moment the impression is that the activities are chaotic, lacking a concrete plan and strategies or future vision.

In Riga Long-term Development Strategy until 2025, the priority objective has been defined – “Life in urban environment with qualitative residential neighbourhoods”, however in 2013, while developing the new Strategy Riga 2030, as one of four long-term objectives in the context of neighbourhood development, the following one has been put forward – “Comfortable, safe and pleasant urban environment”. To achieve this target, the municipality has identified eight strategic guidelines for urban development. These guidelines directly affect residents’ satisfaction with their living space.

There are certain doubts about whether the Riga Municipality fully understands the concepts of sustainable and economic urban development, because the goal of neighbourhood development was to ensure qualitative, comfortable, pleasant and environmentally friendly living environment to enable the citizens to develop in terms of economic and cultural aspects rather than do what they do at present -degrade both themselves and the environment. Therefore, in order to fully achieve the overall economic and sustainable urban development in the future, 8 objectives for neighbourhood development should be taken into account (see Fig. 3).

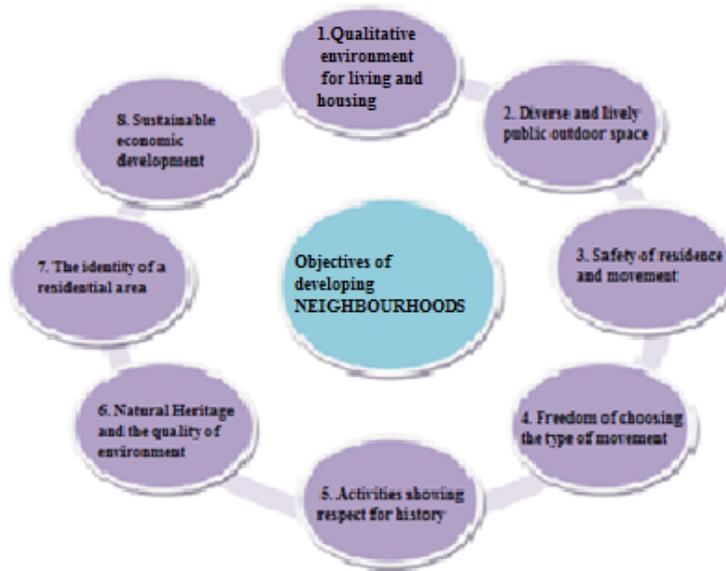


Fig. 3. Objectives of developing neighbourhoods [developed by authors]

Fig. 3. shows that the first objective is qualitative living environment and housing; it also clearly shows that the centre of urban environment for a person is housing and its nearby neighbourhood – common space for living side by side with neighbours – household plots, courtyards and other nearby areas. These are the places for everyday communication, appointments, possibly – common local undertakings; however, in reality there are no activities for uniting the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. All the undertakings are usually organised in the City Centre. It is very important to comply with this objective, since the biggest problem today is the lack of children’s playgrounds or their bad condition.

It must be taken into account that the outdoor living environment in general, and the children’s playground in particular, is the space where children start exploring the environment outside their homes, gaining first experience of neighbourhood perception, which includes cultural, design, functional, aesthetic, a.o. aspects that have to promote socialisation, the creation of positive experience, collaboration and social communication. That is why it would be advisable to implement in Riga a differential development of the quality of the living environment, in accordance with the historically created diversity in housing and the needs of residents, simultaneously ensuring high standards of urban environment design, facilities and nature integration. In addition, the costs of the works should be indicated in detail for every accomplished activity, so it can be clearly seen how much work has been done, in what amount and of what quality.

Taking into account the fact that children are our future, the indicators of such development threaten further sustainable economic development, because a child’s development will take place in a degraded outdoor space, and his or her wish to develop will be lost and degrade together with the outdoor space.

There would be added value for implementing such a project, because it would increase the total value of the neighbourhood in the view of both, the residents and investors. This kind of projects would make the residents think about improving the exterior of their building, because this already is a big step towards development and visual attraction.

The second goal of neighbourhood development is a diverse and lively public outdoor space. It is important that the public outdoor space can be developed and created as the network of common social life space of the city, holding meetings, joint activities, fulfilling recreational and other needs of the residents. However, the real situation can be seen in all Riga neighbourhoods, especially in Ķengarags, because Ķengarags stands out with the smallest amount of improved courtyards,

and after examining this neighborhood, it must be concluded that courtyards in Kęngarags are in the worst condition, because for 9 courtyards there is only one playground.

The public outdoor space as a qualitative neighbourhood space is the one where people enjoy staying, which is full of their presence, with proactive activities taking place there, different social groups becoming a part of it, but, unfortunately, the researched neighbourhoods lack such possibilities.

The neighbourhood development includes vitality, activity and participation, which make the city more diverse, in this way attracting new groups of residents to the public outdoor spaces. In future, Riga Municipality should pay particular attention to the fact whether the residents have possibilities to spend their time in a qualitative manner and practice healthy lifestyle; for example, to the possibilities of active leisure and sports in the city parks, forests, sports centers, on water and near it, as well as to the development of cycle routes, joining not only the the neighbourhoods, but also the neighbourhood streets on the whole, so that residents would develop physically in their neighbourhood as well. An essential precondition for the development of a neighborhood is the creation of diverse and lively neighbourhoods, which would make people enjoy urban environment.

It would be essential to bear in mind the quality of buildings that now are in a post-soviet condition and approaching the level of development comparable to ghetto areas (the United States of America fight against the problem of ghetto areas). Studying the situation in the real estate market in Riga, it can be clearly seen that the demand for serial apartments prevails in the apartment market. For this reason, in future, a bigger resident involvement in the upgrading of their houses' exterior would be desirable, because the EU fund activity in this field is too low; also, during the examination of neighbourhoods, it was noted that only some residential buildings were heated or renovated. This kind of activity, however, would improve both the environment in the neighbourhood and aesthetic, visual and economic situation, because, alongside with the improvement of buildings' exterior, the value in the apartment market will rise and the neighbourhood competitiveness will increase. This will happen because the residents are attracted to an outdoor space that is beautiful, well-organized and environmentally friendly; this, in its turn, could increase the number of residents in the neighbourhood in future, including the number of employed people, because the real estate transactions take place among the employed people. The present employment level in Riga is approximately 35% of the total number of residents, which is a rather high number, but in order to raise the employment level, the situation must be solved at the state level by concluding cooperation agreements with investors and local enterprises to integrate young people in the labour market according to their speciality. This would motivate them to stay in the state labour market instead of emigrating abroad.

The third goal of neighbourhood development is the safety of residence and movement, where the main condition is that the Riga urban environment must be safe for its residents. That includes the creation of such neighbourhoods where people would be safe to reside and move. The residence safety is accomplished by means of social control of the urban environment, where design, infrastructure a.o. solutions must promote the universal accessibility, openness and suitability of space for diverse activities. Urban transport infrastructure must be planned in such a way that the interests of pedestrians come first, followed by these of cyclists, the public and private transport. That means that the safety of pedestrians and cyclists should prevail over the comfort of motorists. The creation of a safe neighbourhood space is an essential precondition for a city to reach its strategic goal related to urban environment – ensuring the urban environment that is comfortable, safe and pleasant for its residents.

The fourth goal of neighborhood development is the free choice of the means of transport, where urban environment should be developed to ensure that Riga residents and guests are provided with a comfortable and, from the point of view of choice, diverse transportation possibilities. It is essential that the possibility to choose the preferred mode of transport is provided in all Riga: walking, cycling or the use of public transport. This means that the infrastructure and urban planning must be well-developed to ensure good connections between open spaces and parks, as well as the easiness of finding the way and ability to orientate oneself in the city. This, in turn, will improve Riga in general and its neighbourhoods in particular, providing it with the comfort, safety and vigour of the living environment. At present, the design of bicycle routes is in progress; nevertheless, the connectivity of the existing bicycle paths with the parks, forests and green zones of neighborhoods, where people spend their free time most willingly, is incomplete.

The fifth goal of neighbourhood development is such activity that would respect history, where, while planning the development of the territory, the development and planning of neighbourhoods would be taken into consideration and the elements creating the value of neighbourhoods would not be violated and changed, including the historically preserved identity, as well as water and green zones, parks, buildings and other publicly accessible places that are part of the identity and character of the neighbourhood. Examples include the Annīmuižas Forest and culture center Imanta in Imanta, the Kęngaraga Park and Daugavas Promenade in Kęngarags, the Pļavnieku Park in Pļavnieki, the furniture store Mēbeļu nams that is historically associated with Purvciems, whereas Ziepniekkalns has its own historical Ēbeļmuižas Park. Particular attention should be paid to cultural and historical neighbourhoods that characterize the essence and history of the city. The fifth goal is well illustrated by the Strategy Rīga-2030 guidelines for the development of urban environment: cultural, historical and neighborhood values. The main task in planning the next RTP-2030 is to adhere to the planning of city's

cultural and historical territory, creating and developing the neighborhoods in such a way that their historical identity remains valid, because, as mentioned above, each neighborhood has its own history and its own historical identity. A good example of when the historical formation of the city was violated is the department store Stockmann that was built by violating all the preconditions of RTP-2018 to develop the city in accordance with its structure. That is why the construction of Stockmann caused concern regarding the fact that this project damages the overall view of the historical city center, and now groups of buildings are being renovated in a way that would make them merge, not with the common image of Old Rīga, but with the project initiated by Stockmann. Therefore, in order to avoid this kind of problems, the main task is to gather information from residents on both aspects: whether they are ready for such non-standard changes and how these will influence the environment in the neighborhood.

The sixth goal of neighbourhood development is the natural heritage and quality of the environment that is based on the sustainability principle in the planning and managing of neighbourhoods and includes a continuous and sustained preservation of the quality of nature by developing the quality of green zones. In order to reach the desired outcome, the technologies, materials and methods should be used to improve the quality of the neighbourhood environment with minimum work and costs. Particular attention should be paid to the greening of neighbourhoods, preservation of biological diversity, stabilisation of microclimate, reduction of noise and pollution, as well as optimisation of rain water systems. In order for the neighbourhoods to become a healthy living environment to its residents, the sustainability principle must be observed while planning, developing and maintaining them. For example, this principle is not observed in many places in Riga, because in place of a green zone there are newly erected trade stalls, even though a sufficient number of shops is located nearby.

The seventh goal of neighbourhood creation is a strong neighbourhood identity, including the physically material sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Riga must be directed towards the creation of neighbourhoods and their space identity. In this case, particular attention should be paid to the creation of neighbourhood identity. Resident participation in the creation of their neighborhood space, in its development, changing and preservation is essential, because the awareness and identification of the interests and preferences of residents can create a strong sense of belonging to their neighborhood. It should also be mentioned that respect for the neighborhood identity is one of the implementing principles in the Strategy Riga-2030.

The eighth goal of neighbourhood creation is sustainable economic development, based on neighbourhoods with low maintenance costs, and these neighbourhoods must be sustainable and durable. The main rationale for the Riga Municipality to invest in neighbourhoods is the fact that, in the case of investment, the market value of the land the neighbourhood stands on will increase. It is precisely for this reason that the municipality's investments must act like a tool to make the value of the land in all Riga neighbourhoods equal, paying particular attention to broaden, diversify and develop tourist services in all neighbourhoods. If the municipality approaches this issue strategically, this kind of economically viable investments in neighbourhoods can help the city reach its strategic goal related to international competitiveness. Riga is an internationally recognizable, significant and competitive Northern Europe metropolis, and the goal is to create a sustainably economic urban environment in the whole city and in each neighborhood that would create equal life conditions for every resident of Riga.

In Riga the strengthening of identity in neighbourhoods should promote the development of multi-functional local centers subordinated to the existing city center in both existing and new neighbourhoods, thus supporting the territorial balance and improvement of the living environment not only in the neighborhoods, but in Riga agglomeration on the whole. The key to the sustainable economic development of Riga is its residents' awareness of belonging to their neighbourhood and the possibilities it offers. In future, it would improve the situation in neighbourhoods by decreasing the demand for movement to other cities, because, for example, in Ogre, Salaspils and Jūrmala (Kauguri) the prices per square meter in an apartment are 30 to 50% lower in comparison with Riga, in both the new project apartment and serial apartment markets.

Taking into account the significance of neighbourhoods in sustainable economic development of the city, it should be considered how to increase the number of active residents, because this would provide the residents with an opportunity to create a pleasant living and work environment themselves. It is important to involve the residents in both the development of the city and promotion of business, because it could help to increase employment and contribute to the development of common socio-economic environment in Riga, creating good conditions for the development of neighbourhoods.

It is essential to increase and attract investment in the city, including the neighbourhoods, because the investment amounts act as indicators for the development of a city. The biggest number of investment projects to date were realized in the center, which was followed by Purvciems and then, with significantly lower numbers, by Ziepniekkalns, Imanta, Pļavnieki and Ķengarags. However, in order to develop a city equally and harmoniously, there should not be any difference in investment, and the Riga Municipality should develop equally beautiful and magnificent advertising campaigns for each neighbourhood of the city to make them more attractive for investors.

At least 5% of residents from each neighborhood should be involved in Riga planning; at the moment, however, their number reaches only 1%, because, in the best case, 100 residents from the whole Riga take part in the activity. Of course, the participation of all residents would be a positive indicator. It can be organized by means of a face-to-face survey or working,

groups, or else by giving the residents the possibility to fill in the survey electronically by logging into the personal data system, as it happens during the population census, to acquire the reliable data. Of course, this is a large-scale process, but the result will help to achieve the long-desirable goal. Most importantly, however, it will raise the capacity of urban planning documents and make the residents take the responsibility for the development of their neighborhood, because by not participating in public discussions the residents demonstrate a certain irresponsibility. The municipality may also be said to act irresponsibly, because the times and places of public discussions are intentionally not well publicised. This can be illustrated by the executed surveys, as well as the survey carried out by the City Development Department of the Riga Council, where the respondents clearly indicated that they wished to receive the information about public discussions and neighborhood development by post and e-mail; however, nothing has changed since then. Also, within the framework of this research, carrying out the resident survey in 2015, the residents were not informed about the public discussions when the reconstructions were planned.

This explains the sceptical attitude of the residents towards the present system in Riga planning: they think that their opinions will not be taken into account. A special system should be created where a resident can let the municipality know about the present situation in the neighbourhood that, in his or her view, needs some improvement (by attaching pictures); the municipality, in their turn, should provide the detailed information on the accomplished works in each neighbourhood with attached pictures and dates. This kind of system would solve the present neighbourhood improvement indicators, and the written-off resources would be used appropriately and effectively. Also, this kind of activity would increase the residents' trust in the municipality and strengthen their sense of belonging to their city and neighborhood.

In free face-to-face discussions with the residents of the studied neighbourhoods, it was established that, overall, they were very satisfied with the fact that Riga was one of the greenest cities in Europe and hoped it would remain so. Also, in these face-to-face discussions and an electronic survey, the residents named the critical condition of roads and courtyards among the biggest drawbacks, because many places still have old playgrounds or their remains.

The fact is that it is not one courtyard in neighbourhood where the condition can be described as critical. This is confirmed by the survey carried out by one of the authors of this article in 2015, where 91.8 % of the respondents indicated that the utmost attention should be paid to the improvement of courtyards, 89.1 % thought that the functionality of buildings must be improved and 90 % had an opinion that the exterior of buildings must be improved. Therefore, in order to promote high-quality construction in neighbourhoods, the public outdoor space must be developed in the whole city evenly and more actively than it has been done before. The Riga Municipality is responsible for the improvement of courtyards, and, taking into consideration that enough funding is allocated annually to this kind of activity from its budget, the management of these resources should be delegated to the person who understands the main issues and the intended use of this funding, not in the way it was reflected.

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The neighbourhoods of Riga are an essential part of the city, at the basis of which are their residents. First of all, it is important that city planners comply with the existing city planning documents and involve the residents of neighbourhoods in their development more actively, because Riga city planning and development documents serve as a tool for a sustainable development of the whole city, including the neighbourhoods. Also, the involvement of the residents in the sustainable development of the city and their neighbourhoods, will provide them with the awareness of belonging to the neighborhood, the opportunities it offers, and, in future, it will improve the situation in neighbourhoods by decreasing the dissatisfaction and migration to other cities.

The development and creation of planning documents is quite a complex and extended process, but, unfortunately, there are imperfections in the existing documents, that have a significant impact on the the development of the city. One of the reasons could be the work done unprofessionally during the process of document development, because, after the changes that were carried out in 2010 in the Sustainable Development Strategy of Riga until 2025, which was renamed the Sustainable Development Strategy of Riga until 2030, no changes were carried out in RAG-2020 and RTP-2018, which is essential, because these documents were developed on the basis of the Sustainable Development Strategy of Riga until 2025 and this seems to be one of the keys to the imperfections in the development and planning of the city.

The present city planning and development does not comply with the proclaimed objectives, action or investment plans, because Riga is developing unevenly and chaotically, which denies the neighborhood residents the opportunity to develop equally and fully and live in a developed and arranged environment.

In order to avoid objections and misunderstandings with the city planners and operators in future, a special publicly accessible system should be created where a resident can let the municipality know about the present situation in the neighbourhood that, in his or her view, needs some improvement (by attaching pictures); the municipality, in their turn, should provide the detailed information on the accomplished works in each neighbourhood with attached pictures and dates. This kind of system would solve the present neighbourhood improvement indicators, and the Riga Municipality budget would be used appropriately and effectively.

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