

*Linda Leitane-
Smidberga*

*25 Years of
Ambivalence:
Architecture
Competitions in
Latvia since 1991*

Abstract

25 years since regaining independence in 1991, Latvia is marked by unprecedented socio economic processes that have distinctively reshaped thinking and practice in architecture, requiring adaptation to the demands of the free market. In the course of this period more than 500 architectural competitions constitute half of the total number of architectural competitions in Latvia since the mid-19th century.

Identifying five consecutive phases of accelerated architecture competition practice over the last 25 years, the paper examines procedures, outcomes and reasons behind success and failures. The specifics of Phase I: *Confusion* (1991-1996) are explained through substitution of state commissions with the first private interests and funding. The information exchange initiated in taking on the latest trends in international experience characterises Phase II: *Acceleration* (1997-2002). This is followed by Phase III: *Controlled Utopia* (2003-2008), when the building process reached its peak momentum. Phase IV: *Lower Level* (2008-2011) was initiated by the global economic crisis, eventually leading to Phase V: *Integration of Knowledge* (2012-2016).

Providing multiple narratives on each of the phases, the paper critically reflects on the current potential of architectural competition practice, arguing that the building processes have not only provoked a spontaneous and hectic architectural and urban environment, but also allowed accumulation of knowledge to challenge good practice guidelines and rigid legal frameworks. The paper concludes with comments on the omnipresent uncertainty about whether competition practice still has the ability to be an instrument to evaluate the potential of the building sites and to be turned into a design tool to acquire the best architectural solutions.

Keywords

architecture competitions, organizational process, competition regulations, competition culture in Latvia

Introduction

The practice of architectural competitions as a democratic model of designing architecture has been in place in Latvia since the middle of the 19th century. Over these 160 years, more than 1 100 competitions in architecture and urban design have taken place under different politico-economic systems (Leitane-Smidberga, 2014). The last 25 years, since the restoration of Latvian independence in 1991, have seen more than 630 competitions take place in Latvia, and over 320 in Riga. The aim of this paper is to determine what features have characterized the last 25 years – change of political system, rapid economic growth, an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) and with it, the development of the construction industry. The paper will reflect critically on the current potential of the practice of architectural competitions, arguing that unique building processes have not only resulted in impulsive and disordered architectural and urban environments, but have also enabled the accumulation of knowledge that challenges the guidelines of good practice and rigid legal frameworks. A number of quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used in the analysis of architectural competitions. The choice of methodological principles is based on data from the research paper *The practice of architectural competitions in Riga. 1991-2013* (Rīgas pilsētas arhitekta birojs, n.d., Leitane-Smidberga, 2015), commissioned in 2015 by the municipal agency Riga City Architect's Office, and is informed by the ongoing doctoral thesis of the author. The most important sources of data are publicly accessible Internet resources (webpages dedicated to architectural competitions, publications and webpages of architects' offices, etc.), archives, periodicals, materials from the archives of architects' offices and other sources previously unpublished.

Five consecutive periods are distinguished in the paper. This division is somewhat conditional, and the periods are not distinctly separable, but they are optimal for the evaluation of the characteristic changes and processes that have influenced the practice of competitions. Thus, each section contains the following:

- an account of the politico-economic aspects

of each period;

- an analysis of the most important changes in legislation through the study of planning instruments and legal acts;
- an evaluation of competition types;
- an analysis of the consequences of completed competition projects and the development of architectural thought.

Phase I. Confusion (1991-1996)

From 1940 to 1990, Latvia was part of the Soviet politico-economic system based on state property and central planning that limited the use of private property. Within a few years of the restoration of independence, countless reforms of state structures and economic systems were adopted. These changes had a considerable impact on processes related to the industries of construction and real estate. Land reforms, transference of state property to municipalities, denationalisation of house ownership and the privatisation of state companies and real estate followed. The way architects worked was restructured from large architectural institutions to, firstly, cooperatives and later private practice and medium-sized offices. The assortment of formerly used prefabricated materials and standard catalogues was replaced by fundamentally different construction technologies and materials.

The practice of competitions in Latvia initially developed as an undefined planning instrument. Professional organisations and unions of architects issued multiple regulations that were in force from the middle of the 19th century. The understanding of the legitimisation of competitions through formal planning instruments (e.g. urban planning, detail planning) and through the regulations of normative legal acts (e.g. regulations of the Council of Ministers, laws proclaimed by the Saeima) formed slowly over time.

During the first years of independence, architectural competitions were held based on Act No. 642 "Par konkursu sarikšanu unikalū eku un kompleksu individuālo projektu izstrādei" (*On the organisation of competitions for the individual design of unique buildings and building complexes*), adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Latvian Soviet Socialist

Republic (Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR Act No. 642, 1965). These regulations were binding from 1965 to 1993. There were attempts to define the goal of a competition – to generate the most economically beneficial proposals with high architectural quality and to develop individual proposals for unique buildings and complexes through the organisation of competitions. From 1995 to 2014, “Noteikumi par kartību, kāda organizējami būvprojektu un teritoriālpianēšanas projektu skicu konkursi” (*The regulations of the order in which building and urban design sketch project competitions are to be held*), developed by the Cabinet of Ministers, was in effect (The regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 324, 1995) [1]. This document adopted the practice of competitions that existed under Soviet rule, defining more precisely the process of an open or closed competition and mandating the inclusion of information about the contractor, the qualification of the participants, the criteria of evaluation, the jury, the prizes, etc. in the brief.

Statistically, most competitions were held for administrative, government and commercial buildings. They related typically to the development of reconstruction, renovation and interior projects. In the early 1990s, the Riga City Council provided support for the first competitions and projects that brought private investment to key areas of the city and marked the beginning of cooperation between local and foreign architects (e.g. the renovation of Convent Yard and the development of Jacob's Barracks in 1993; recurring competitions for the regeneration of buildings on City Hall Square in 1990, 1997 and 1998). Roughly one in three competitions involved private investment – these were typically proposals concerning cafes, retail buildings and hotels. For the first time in over 90 years, competitions were organised for churches. An outstanding example in terms of architectural quality was the proposal for the new Riga branch of the Bank of Latvia (competition in 1994, building completed in 2001, *Kronbergs, Karklins un partneri*). Data on the realisation of most proposals is lacking,

as “there is a lack of a systematic database of the jury members, organizers and participants; therefore, it is difficult to compare the architects' previous work and review their architecture practice development progress” (Leitane-Smidberga, 2015).

Phase II. Acceleration (1997–2002)

The publicly financed demand of the state gave way to strong private investment from both domestic and foreign entities. For architects, this was an opportunity to practise cooperation with developers and other members of the real estate sector, which had been virtually impossible under the Soviet system. A mortgage lending industry was created, fuelling the market with aggressive lending for nearly a decade.

This phase is characterised by the development of the Latvian territory planning system, which combines elements of Soviet planning principles with Western best practice. Masterplans for cities saw regular corrections and changes as planned (legal) use of land was expanded. The bulk of the construction and investment (and most competitions) took place in Riga, the political and economic centre of Latvia and home to a third of its population. The first masterplan for Riga since the restoration of independence, and the first of its kind in the Baltics, was confirmed in 1995, outlining city development up to 2005. Architect Peteris Bajars (2008) said of the plan: “Clear, transparent and conceptual. As such, perhaps, unacceptable to investors. The next version is already in the works without the participation of Mr Andris Roze [2], without succession, full of illogical urban construction mistakes. ‘People vote with their money’, is what the deputy mayor, Ainars Slesers, will say years later. True, that's not the case with the masterplan. But it is precisely in the masterplan where this vote can be influenced the most.”

In 1997, following an initiative by the State Inspection for Heritage Protection (SIHP),

1

The regulations became invalid on 1 October 2014, when the most recent version of the Construction Law was adopted.

2

Andris Roze, architect and urban planner from Detroit and Toronto. Served as Head of the Riga City Planning Office, participated in the creation of the Riga City Masterplan.

the historic centre of Riga was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List due to the city's unique medieval structure of urban construction as well as its wooden and Art Nouveau architecture. The architectural and construction quality of buildings erected in the Old Town, however, was subject to broad discussion in society. In 2002, the responsible authorities decided to issue a moratorium prohibiting construction in the Old Town until the confirmation of a development plan for the historic centre of Riga (Amolina, 2002). Projects already approved or under construction were exempt from the moratorium. Juris Dambis, Head of the SIHP, noted in 2004 that "balanced development of the capital's historic centre is at risk due to a disparity between construction speed and surrounding infrastructure, attempts to build in natural environments and public spaces, the construction of large-scale retail and entertainment centres, unjustified urbanization of the underground, changes in planning to appease investors, the domination of private interests over the public good, and the impotence of NGOs" (Latvijas Vestnesis, 2004).

Over 120 competitions took place in this period (twice as many as in the previous period); roughly half were privately funded proposals for the development of large public complexes with the following functional typology: banking, retail, offices and hotels. The moratorium affected competitions in Riga, which saw only 20% of the total competitions in the period. The most significant competition objects were situated in the historic centre of Riga or its vicinity. An example of this is one of the first buildings in the high-rise cluster [3] in the spatial composition of the river Daugava's left bank based on a concept developed in the 1970s. Several objects saw repeated competitions and a change in developers of the final project – like the reconstruction of Riga Central Station and the adjacent square in 1998-1999. This was usually due to the inability of private investors and proposal authors to reach an agreement on further cooperation.

The state and various municipalities held competitions for administrative and cultural

buildings, including theatres and education institutions. No new theatres were built in this period – instead, competitions were held for the reconstruction, renovation and extension of existing buildings (e.g. the competition for the reconstruction of the Latvian National Theatre in 2000, *Graf-X*). Competitions for education institutions can be divided into several types:

- Renovation of an existing building;
- Reconstruction of an existing building with an extension (e.g. the competition for Agenskalns Gymnasium held in 1999 and realised in 2000 by *Brīniskigo projektu birojs*; or the competition for the extension of the Art Academy of Latvia in 2002);
- Construction of a new, typically multifunctional building – a school (of music or art) combined with a library or a social centre (e.g. the Alternative School of Jūrmala, 2002).

Phase III. Controlled Utopia (2003-2008)

The politico-economic situation in this period was defined by Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004. According to banker Girts Rungainis, "with new crediting opportunities, foreign speculators, and an initial accumulation of capital as well as with people becoming wealthier and foreigners from Ireland, Italy, Russia entering the market, real estate prices in central Riga and nearby Jūrmala started rising" (Korna and Lusiš, 2013). Ill-considered tax policy created a misbalance between the assessed value of real estate and the tax rate applied, which in turn fuelled the rise in housing value, causing apartment prices in Riga to reach and even surpass housing prices in certain Central and Western European cities. For comparison – in neighbouring Lithuania and Estonia, housing prices rose in 2005 but stabilized in 2006. In Latvia, however, the boom continued, as total mortgage value rose 100-fold in the space of a decade (1997-2007) (Korna and Lusiš, 2013). These changes contributed to the rise of Latvian GDP and facilitated the development of the construction industry, which was directly linked to the housing supply. The construction sector expanded by a factor of 2.36 between 1995 and 2004.

3

The competition for the administrative building for Swedbank was held in 2001 (completed 2004, "Zenico projekts").

In 2003, the *Law on Preservation and Protection of the Historic Centre of Riga* took effect, designed to avoid spontaneous, uncontrolled construction and to promote quality architecture in the historic centre. Article 14 states: “Construction of new buildings in the public outdoor space of the historic centre of Riga shall be admissible only according to proposals acquired in open architectural competitions, public evaluation and examination thereof in the Council and coordination thereof with the State Inspection for Heritage Protection in accordance with the procedures specified in regulatory enactments” (LR Law on Preservation and Protection of the Historic Centre of Riga, 2003). Juris Dambis (2007), Head of the SIHP, commented on the necessity of this law: “There were certain problems from 2000 to 2003, when the realisation of architectural objects of poor quality was offered. To achieve a certain level of competition, to improve the quality of architecture, and to prohibit cheap or ill-considered architecture in the historic centre of Riga, constraints had to be placed on project design. We had reached a situation where only about three architects’ offices did all the proposals and the others received no orders. In order to implement an open system and free competition as well as to comply with the recommendations of EU experts and UNESCO, the law prescribed that in the historic centre of Riga, also defined in law, a competition is obligatory. Looking back on competition results since the adoption of the law, the quality of architecture has risen; totally dubious proposals can no longer be pushed through. The practice where developers push for a maximum amount of square meters, a cheaper contractor and cheaper project design has been limited.” The architect Bajars (2008), who is one of the most vocal participants in discussions in the architecture sector, is only partially in agreement with this reasoning, noting that “the law has resulted in the legendary *troikas* – competitions where only three (the mandatory minimum) participants are invited. The holy trinity – in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The latter has often managed to prepare more thoroughly than the other two contestants, bringing a much more detailed

proposal with a broader range of materials submitted”.

In addition to the abovementioned law, the *Spatial Planning of the Historic Centre of Riga and the Protection Zone Thereof* (SP HCR PZT) was completed in 2006 (Riga City Council Act No. 832, 2006), mandating that the programs of open architectural competitions must be approved by the Construction Board, by the SIHP and by the Council for Preservation and Development of Riga Historical Centre. Until 2013, when the planning was amended, competition rules also needed approval from the Latvian Association of Architects (LAA). The most recent amendment to the SP HCR PZT was done in 2013 defining several areas (development areas of bodies of water, islands in the Daugava, greenery and parks) that would require open architectural competitions. Open competitions are also mandated for 17 squares. So far, competitions have been held for Castle Square (2009), Livu Square (2002, 2003, 2012), Dome Square (2006), Freedom Alley (2010), and Theatre Square (2013). None of the competition proposals have currently been realised. The planning regulations also allow for exceptions if a competition results in an architectural proposal of outstanding quality, which has to comply with building standards. This has sparked discussions about the compatibility between, on the one hand, the interests of society and urban development and, on the other hand, the often contradictory, competing and even mutually exclusive laws, regulations, standards, and property rights and the customer’s commercial conditions as set out in the competition manual.

Several towns have followed Riga’s example by adopting municipality regulations – masterplans – which define areas that require an open architectural competition procedure for significant construction designs in order to ensure a conceptual solution that is complete in terms of spatial, infrastructural and architectural (solutions of urban construction accents, number of floors and location) considerations [4]. There is currently no data on whether competitions have been held in areas

4

Such regulations are included in the masterplans for Riga (2006-2018), Jurmala and Liepāja (2012), as well as Ventspils and Daugavpils (2006-2018).

thus defined by the municipalities.

At the turn of the millennium, a common type of urban planning competition (besides open and closed competitions) was the plenary. Plenaries were attended by both foreign and local architects and urban planners, who then solved a certain task for three to five days, presented it to a jury at the end of the plenary, and received immediate evaluation. The possibility of international plenaries and competitions is explained by the increasing openness of Latvia to Western markets, while foreign architects were attracted by a somewhat exotic destination, a polygon for new ideas and attractive prize money. In order to exchange experience and build cooperation with foreign specialists in the practice of organising competitions, the *European* international urban planning competitions for young architects took place in Latvia from 2002 to 2009. The most important competitions and their topics were: *European 7* in 2002, on Kipsala, the Old Town, the vicinity of Livu Square in Riga, and Ostasgals in Ventspils; *European 8* in 2006, near Lake Kisezers, in the vicinity of the so-called Fishermen's Village; *European 9* in 2009, on the development of Rumbula. The victories of foreign architects' offices in these competitions required local architects to realise competitive ideas and to build new cooperation models for the continued development of projects. One example of this was the international architects' plenary of 2003 for the architectural vision of the Tornakalns Congregation House, attended by 7 architects from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Latvia. The project was realised in 2011 by plenary winner Christian Cold from the Copenhagen architects' office *Entasis* in cooperation with the Latvian *Postform projekts*.

The mid-2000s saw several significant urban planning competitions in Riga, e.g. an international competition held in 2007 for the construction of an administrative complex for the Riga City Council and the state in Tornakalns was based on ideas from a 2005 local plenary of 5 architects' offices. The London architects' office *Fletcher Priest Architects* placed first among 17 participants. One of the

first buildings erected in this territory was the University of Latvia Academic Centre of Natural Sciences, completed in 2015. The proposal was acquired in a 2010 competition, when negotiations resulted in the second-place design being implemented. Competitions for the remaining buildings of the University of Latvia campus were scheduled for 2016. Another example was the development proposals of 2004 for the greater Skanste area and for the financial and lifestyle centre *New Hanza City*. In mid-2016, the international closed competition for the design of the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art took place in the Skanste area, commissioned by the private investment fund ABLV. The competition was won by *Adjaye Associates* in cooperation with the Latvian architects' office AB3D (Lynch, 2016).

Ideas from widely publicised local and international competitions are most often included and specified in the detail planning, or included in the masterplan. The most appropriate model for these competitions is two or more stages, which is rarely used. This is an opportunity to obtain a complex proposal for the development of an area, and it allows for more rational development planning in phases, while preserving a common concept. If, however, the development and the physical construction of buildings and infrastructure is not carried out on time, a necessity to update the planning may arise over time, influenced by the changing politico-economic situation. This point is also emphasised by architecture critic Artis Zvirgzdins (2011), who points out that Riga failed to use the years of economic upswing to develop sufficient social capital, which is necessary to realise significant public projects or large-scale commercial complexes that would be successful from an urban planning perspective. Looking back at recent years, it is clear that public spaces were not a priority during this time.

Data on competitions reveals over 270 competitions held in this period, an average of one per week, with roughly half of these in Riga [5]. The amount of competitions peaked at 90 per year in 2006. As there was no

5

Statistics on competitions in Riga suggest that the LAA held 12 competitions and approved 19 competition manuals in 2005. The numbers for 2006 are 8 and 18, respectively. The City Construction Board reports a similar number of competition manuals.

unified methodology or cooperation between institutions, the limited capacity [6] of the Riga City Construction Board and the LAA made it impossible to provide a quality evaluation for each competition object. The LAA thus published a template for competition briefs, the use of which became a technical and professional habit, with competition organisers setting only functional requirements, which participants had to illustrate; this practice became routine. This is particularly striking in competitions for housing projects, most of which (about 100) have been held in Riga. Over 20% of these proposals have been realised. In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, some of the proposals are currently in the detail design phase, while for others construction is in progress. The proposals from these competitions are typically designed as freestanding structures, as filling for street corners in the city centre or a continuation of a perimetrical block, as reconstructions of existing residential housing, or as housing for new city blocks, where the commercial function dominates along with the residential. Competitions have mostly been open, often open with invited participants, and rarely international. Controlled utopia and a gamble – to add to architect Ilvars Metnieks's (2013) description of this period: "The lack of bitter experience in society, the admirable faith in a brighter future shown by experts at banks and various commercial structures, along with the global surge in development of the real estate industry in the new millennium – these factors were the foundation for unprecedented optimism on the borrowers' behalf, and for the surge in new housing in Latvia from 2004 to 2008." The functional and architecturally spatial designs for some housing competition projects were changed and adjusted due to ownership changes and economic and other circumstances. State and municipality investment in the expansion of the housing fund led to public procurement procedures for standardised social housing projects as well as for the renovation of Soviet-period block housing.

This time period also saw a lot of activity regarding closed international competitions for regional cultural objects (concert halls, multifunctional centres and museums) and their construction. This is in part explained by the fact that no significant, technologically complex cultural buildings had been realised since the restoration of independence. For their part, the clients commissioning these buildings saw an opportunity for considerable publicity. Thus, for instance, a closed international competition for the Liepaja Concert Hall in 2003 was won by the German architects' office *Giencke & Company*, whose proposal was realised in 2015 and sparked discussion about construction quality and the architect's ability to adapt the initial design for additional functions. In a different Latvian town, Ventspils, an international plenary was held in 2005 [7] and 2006 for invited teams of participants in order to design the spatial organisation and facilities for the central town square, and to propose an architectural image for the prospective concert hall. The detail design is currently in progress under David Cook from *Haas Cook Zemmrich STUDIO2050*, and the concert hall is to be opened in 2018.

Unlike in other regions of Latvia, competition briefs for cultural objects in Riga in the early 2000s often mention a desire for a "new symbol", an icon – in essence looking for a repeat of the "Bilbao effect". One of the most striking examples of this is the proposal *Lineamentum*, designed by the Riga architects' office *Silis, Zabers un Klava* and awarded first place among 11 participants in the 2006 closed international competition for a new concert hall in Riga. The proposal was never completed due to lack of financing. The Head of the Riga City Architect's Office, Gvido Princis, noted in 2016 that "the lack of an acoustic concert hall in Riga reduces the international competitiveness of Latvia's economy, culture and tourism" (Zvirgzdins, 2016). The alternative proposals that have currently been drawn up – adapting or reconstructing existing or new buildings into transformable, multifunctional concert halls through the creation of a public-

6

For a long time, the LAA competition commission consisted of only one to three members, none of whom worked full-time.

7

The results of the plenary were used in 2006, when an international competition for the design of the concert hall was held, inviting the first and second-place offices from the plenary: the "German Behnisch Architekten" and the Estonian "Luhse & Tuhal".

private partnership – do not indicate a strong governmental interest in the provision of a concert hall of high acoustic quality in the capital.

The foreign education of a new generation of Latvian architects along with increased information exchange have brought changes to architectural design as Latvians adopt the methods of foreign architects, follow the latest trends, and gain local and international recognition and awards in project shows. The architects' office *Jaunromans un Abele*, for instance, began their practice in this manner – having won the 2008 competition, they realised the reconstruction of the closed hall at Dzintari Concert Hall in Jurmala in 2015. Several proposals for educational institutions acquired in competitions have, after construction, received the Annual Latvian Architecture Award (the highest architectural award in Latvia), awarded by members of the LAA and an international jury. One such project is the Parventa Library in Ventspils, erected in 2009. Procurement competitions for the library were held twice – in 2006 and 2007. Both competitions were won by the architects' office *India*. In 2013, the Latvian Architecture Award was given to the new building of the Saldus Music and Art School, completed by *Made Arhitekti*, who won the public procurement competition held by the Saldus District Council in 2007. These examples serve as a testament to the ability of the new generation of architects, engineers and construction workers to complete buildings that are complex from a spatial and design perspective.

Phase IV. Lower Level (2008-2011)

The global financial crisis had a profound impact on the labour market and peoples' standard of living. Latvian commercial banks saw the beginning of the crisis in mid-2008. The construction industry contracted by 60% as a result of the downturn. Looking back at the preceding period, it is safe to say that the experience from real estate crises in neighbouring countries – Finland, 1991-1994;

Sweden, 1992 – was disregarded in Latvia (Ketners, 2013). The 2010 amendments to the *Immigration Law* (Amendments to the Immigration Law, 2010) offered residence permits to foreigners (mostly Russian or Chinese) in exchange for investment or the purchase of real estate worth over 250 000 EUR in Riga or the largest towns. These amendments were intended to combat the consequences of the financial crisis and to reinvigorate the construction sector. Statistics from 2016 suggest that this instrument has been temporary, and that investment in the real estate market by non-residents has fallen. Private investment has only been attracted to Riga and comprises a quarter of the total competitions in this period – mostly for housing, hotels and commercial buildings.

Since Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004, there have been countless amendments to the *Public Procurement Law* [8], the aim of which is the efficient provision and use of the means at the disposal of the state, municipality institutions and state-owned enterprises (procurement objects – construction work, delivery of goods, various services, including architectural design competitions), as well as the promotion of fair competition between participants. This period is characterised by procurement procedures that leave the creation of a quality cultural environment in the background, choosing project costs as a priority.

Most commissions in this period came from local municipalities, which used their own financing and EU funds to realise countless projects for state and municipality representation needs as construction proposals in the form of local procurement competitions. 80% of the total competitions for the reconstruction (or, less often, new construction) of administrative and governance buildings were realised outside of Riga. One of the rare examples from Riga was the 2009 procurement competition for the construction of the Riga District Court, which attracted 25 participants and was won by the Riga architects' office *Mark Arhitekti*.

8

The following laws have been in effect in the past 15 years: Law on Procurement for State or Municipality Needs (2002-2006); Law on Procurement for the Needs of Public Service Providers (2004-2006); Public Procurement Law (2006- ...); Law on Procurement of Public Service Providers (2010- ...).

The building has not been erected due to a lack of financing. Cultural buildings constitute about 20% of all procurement competitions. One of the largest competitions of this kind was the 2010 international competition for the proposal for the reconstruction and annex of the Latvian National Museum of Art. The Lithuanian architects' office *Processoffice* was awarded top place among 28 participants. The building was completed in 2015. Unlike the Riga Concert Hall project, the competition jury for the museum chose to support a proposal which does not stand out visually or change the landscape of the surrounding park (Zvirgzdins, 2010). In other regions of Latvia, competitions were mostly held for the reconstruction and renovation of museums. One of the rare competitions for a new building was the 2009 international competition for the design of the Liepāja Maritime Museum. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the competition attracted 45 participants – the most at any single competition for a cultural building since the restoration of independence. The proposal has not been realised.

Phase V. Integration of Knowledge (2012–present)

In 2014, Latvia joined the Eurozone, introduced the Euro and continued the absorption of EU structural funds. Geopolitical changes in Europe and the unstable economic situation in Russia influenced the Latvian finance and construction sectors. Private investors have become much more guarded in planning potential investments. For the practice of competitions, this means a relatively low number of competitions held – mostly only when mandated by regulation (the HCR law). The global financial crisis of 2007–2010 put the development of many projects on hold. Investment optimisation is taking place in the real estate market – some of the unfinished projects are being reconstructed, while most will never be completed. Juris Dambis, Head of the SIHP, noted in a meeting of the Council for the Preservation and Development of the HCR that “an acceptable solution was reached in a discussion on the evaluation of competition results: competitions that took place over 7 years ago may be considered to have taken place according to the law. This period of time has

been chosen due to the time of the economic downturn, which postponed the development of many projects, leaving proposals of competition winners unrealised. In this situation, the competition could be recognized as having taken place [...]” (The Council for Preservation and Development of Riga Historic Centre Meeting No. 244 protocol, 2014). Considering that many competition objects were not confirmed with the Riga Construction Board, which would allow construction, or that construction permits have run out on projects that were approved by the Board, an increasing tendency to hold repeated competitions is evident in 2016.

Although the Ministry of Culture stated in 2009, in the guidelines “Arhitektūras politikas pamatnostādnes no 2009. līdz 2015. gadam” (*Architectural Policy Guidelines 2009–2015*), that the promotion of architectural quality by improving the regulatory basis and necessary mechanisms is one of the chief policy directions (LR Ministry of Culture, 2009), competition practice can only be positively influenced in those state institutions and municipalities where an understanding of the significance of architecture already exists. This is because institutions have lacked experience and administrative and financial resources. The same can be said of newer players in the construction sector and the real estate business. Even though the “Latvijas Arhitektu savienības konkursa labas prakses nolikums. Rekomendācijas” (*Manual for good practice in competitions. Recommendations*) by the LAA (2010), which explains competition practice, protects the interests of architects in the project design process and outlines the basic principles of fair competition, has been in effect since 2010, the LAA has only taken an active (not merely formal) role in this most recent period by reviewing competition programs and briefs and consulting developers for state, municipality and private projects. Thus, in order to spread an understanding of good competition practice among architects, competition organisers and commissioners, Article 7.11 of the regulations “Arhitektu sertifikācijas kārtība” (*Architect Certification Order*) of the LAA Centre of Certification was amended in 2015 to state that “projects in the architect’s professional practice that have been created as a result of

competitions recognized as non-compliant with good practice by the LAA will not count towards the completion of the certification criteria set out in Article 7.3” (Latvian Association of Architects Regulations, 2015). When a competition has been deemed non-compliant with good practice, the LAA sends a notice to the organisers, requesting amendments in the competition process, and informs certified architects and its members of the consequences. Due to limited resources and capacity, the LAA cannot review all procurement procedure competitions, and there is a lack of information on private, closed competitions.

Conclusion

In five consecutive periods (*Confusion* (1991-1996), *Acceleration* (1997-2002), *Controlled Utopia* (2003-2008), *Lower Level* (2008-2011), *Integration of Knowledge* (2012-2016)) (Figure 1), rapid economic progression in Latvia has provoked spontaneous, not always thoroughly considered urban development that has affected competition practice. Most competitions were held to determine the possible development of areas and to test programmatic solutions. In some cases, this added value to a plot of land and improved investment opportunities. For architects, this was an opportunity to cooperate with private investors; for new talent, it was an opportunity to receive commissions. Zvirgzdins (2011) states that it has beyond doubt influenced both the look of Latvian cities today and the public perception of contemporary architecture. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, as the workload for architects decreased, discussion on whether competitions have a goal and whether winning them is attractive (whether competitions are held to acquire the best potential design and whether this constitutes an opportunity to sign a design contract) has become increasingly relevant, although it existed, on some level, in the preceding periods. However, participation of architects in competitions that do not meet good practice standards, and can be considered intellectual, moral and economic dumping, can, over time, damage architects’ credibility and destroy the possibility of convincing investors and society that competitions can lead to finding adequate partners. Therefore, the main challenges for competition practice in order to

promote competitiveness in the search for the best ideas for more remote long-term goals are currently:

1. The balancing of strict rules and guidelines (recommendations).

Considering that currently (in 2016) the organisational methodology of competitions is formally only determined in the *Procurement Law*, and that approval of competition rules by the Latvian Association of Architects is no longer mandated by law, it is necessary to create an understanding of the various possible types of competitions, carry out a critical, experience-based evaluation of competition rules and programs, and demand the creation of a rational model for cooperation between municipalities, NGOs (like the LAA) and investors.

2. Compliance with international (UIA, ACE) regulations.

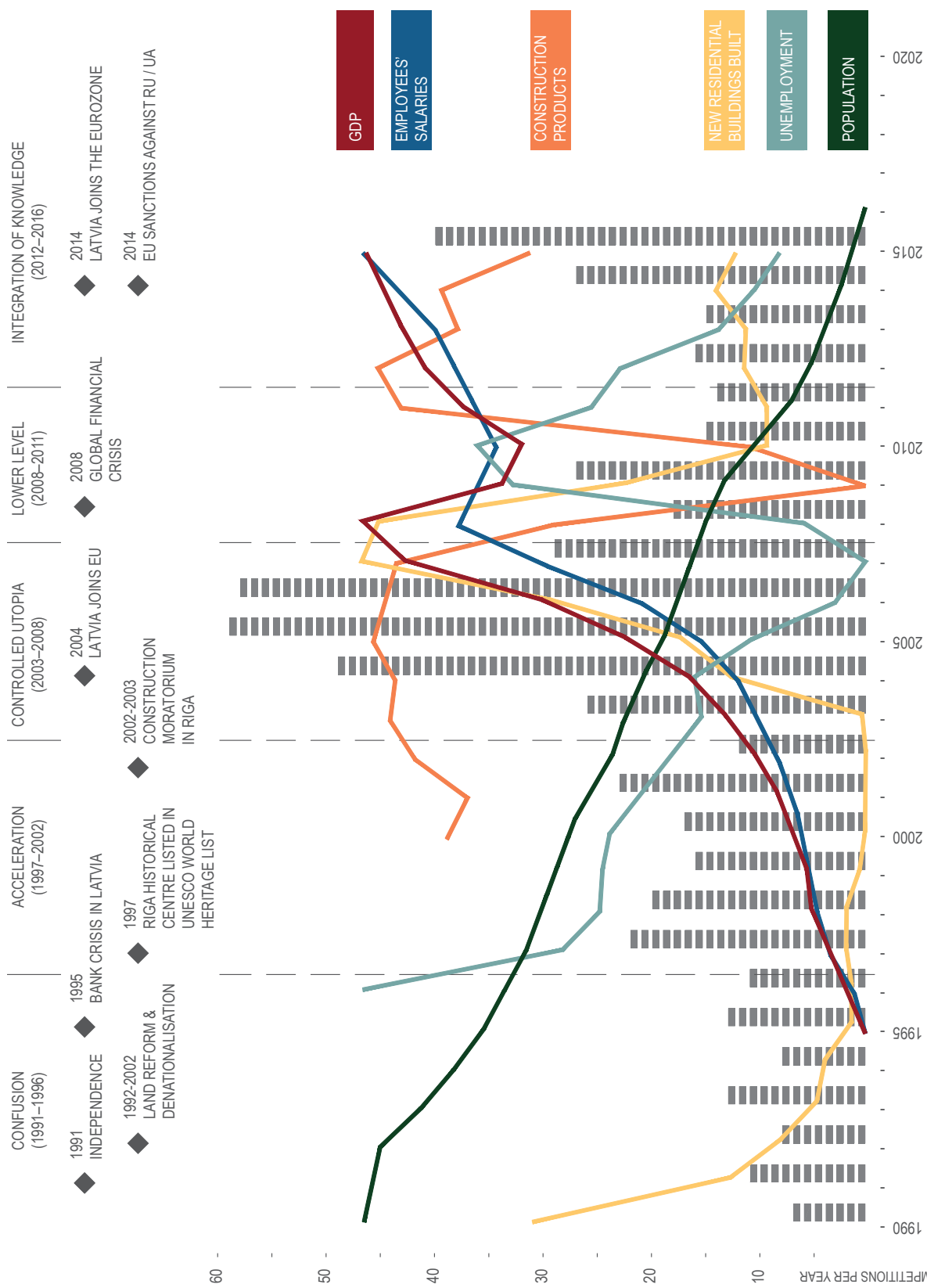
Lowest price, which dominates as a requirement and criterion in public procurement and private competitions, can cause irreversible damage to the search for quality solutions and degrade competition practice. Also, qualification and experience requirements should be commensurate with local market conditions, should not limit competition, and should be clearly defined in the evaluation criteria of competition rules. Competition rules often state that winners forfeit their right to any compensation for the creation and transfer of the layout, and for the transfer of copyright from the author to the commissioner, also transferring all rights concerning any future use of the layout, including the right to change, rework, divide and publish the layout without the author’s permission. Such conditions are also illegal under *Latvian Copyright Law*.

3. Detailed briefs and professionalism.

A detailed listing of the documentation necessary for a competition, which has a significant impact on the proposals offered by participants, e.g. 3-D models of the historic urban environment and surrounding buildings; digitized floor plans of existing buildings to be reconstructed; cross-sections and other technical data.

Next page:

Figure 1. Competition amount per respective period and year (Riga: Linda Leitane-Smidberga, 2018)



ALL STATISTICAL DATA ACCORDING TO THE CENTRAL STATISTICAL BUREAU OF LATVIA EXCEPT DATA ON ARCHITECTURE COMPETITIONS – COMPILED BY THE AUTHOR

Size of the premiums, which would, in the context of the size of the competition object and compliance with the requirements, be brought in line with Western European-level costs and which would cover (at least) the costs of preparing proposal documentation. The composition and professionalism of the jury [9] along with the creation of unified evaluation criteria would allow for the possibility to find a balance between the wishes of the developer and the concept for urban development.

4. **Publicity and transparency.** By informing society on the competition process from the beginning and forming a publicly accessible systematic database, which would contain visual, descriptive and analytically critical information about public procurement and private competition origins, proposals and the complete evaluation by the jury and experts [10], a significant hurdle for a

quality planning process for the development of urban spaces as well as for research on the history of architectural practice can be removed.

The architect Bajars (2008) notes that “all of the freshness of new architecture, all the conceptual solutions are the contribution of a few individuals, who, while going after the possibilities of a broad, united Europe, have not shied away from opportunities to obtain education and experience in foreign offices. And clients, too, have become more educated (read: more demanding). This is why the time has come to offer a new architecture”. This quote may be extended to describe competitions, which are necessary for Latvia as an instrument, as an experimental and conceptual aspect. This would mean innovative solutions through the creation of new situations and landmarks in the city.

...

9

As of 2015, the LAA only nominates its representatives to a competition jury if the rules and program of the competition are in line with good practice.

10

As of 2016, the LAA publishes complete jury protocols and all competition proposals that have been approved by the LAA.

References

Amendments to the Immigration Law, 22.04.2010. (c. 23). Riga: Latvijas Vestnesis.

Amolina, L., 2002. *Moratorijs izsludinats*. Dienas Bizness, [online]. Available at: <http://www.db.lv/laikraksta-arhivs/citas/moratorijs-izsludinats-343403> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Bajars, P., 2008. Elles masina konkursi. In: Zibarte, I. (ed.) *Ka rodas laba arhitektura?* Riga: Arhitekturas veicinasanas fonds, pp. 10-29.

Bajars, P., 2011. Devinpadsmit gadi pirms sakuma. In: Budze, K. (ed.) *V*X: Latvijas arhitektura kops 1991. gada*. Riga: Nucleus, pp. 49-54.

Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR Act No. 642 *Par konkursu sarikosanu unikalumu eku un kompleksu individualo projektu izstradei*, 13.12.1965. Riga: Zinatajs.

Dambis, J., Alksnis, J., 2007. *Diskusiju klubs: Konkursi un to rikosana*, [protocol] March 2007. Riga: Latvijas Arhitektu Savieniba.

Jauns posms Rigas vesturiska centra saglabasana. Latvijas Vestnesis, [online] 07.12.2004. Available at: <https://www.vestnesis.lv/ta/id/97542> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Ketners, K., 2013. Finansu sektora un Latvijas hipotekaras kreditesanas sistemas attistiba. In: Kalpina, R. (ed.) *Nekustamais ipasums Latvija 1991-2012*. Riga: Latio, pp. 123-135.

Korna, K., Lasis, M., 2013. Nekustamais ipasums un valsts politika. In: Kalpina, R. (ed.) *Nekustamais ipasums Latvija 1991-2012*. Riga: Latio, pp. 99-127.

Latvian Association of Architects recommendations *Latvijas Arhitektu savienibas konkursu labas prakses nolikums. Rekomendacijas*, 12.05.2010. [pdf] Available through: <http://www.latarh.lv/f/faili/Konkursu%20labas%20prakses%20nolikums.pdf> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Latvian Association of Architects Regulations *Arhitektu sertificesanas kartiba*, 2015. [pdf] Available through: http://www.latarh.lv/f/Arhitektu%20sertific%C4%93%C5%A1anas%20k%C4%81rt%C4%ABba_NL_03.pdf [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Leitane-Smidberga, L., 2014. *Architectural competitions in Latvia (1860-2013)*. Rigas Tehniskas universitates zinatniskie raksti, [online] Vol. 9. Available at: <https://aup-journals.rtu.lv/article/view/aup.2014.001/658> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Leitane-Smidberga, L., 2015. *Petijums Arhitekturas konkursi Riga 1991-2013*. [pdf presentation] Rigas pilsetas arhitekta birojs. Available through: http://arhitekts.riga.lv/images/prezentacijas/RPAB-PREZENTACIJA_2015.10.20.pdf [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Leitane-Smidberga, L., 2015. *Characteristic features of publications on architectural competition practice in Latvia, 1859-2013*. Science-future of Lithuania, Vol. 7, No. 1. [pdf] VGTU Press. Available at: <http://www.mla.vgtu.lt/index.php/mla/article/view/708/pdf> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

LR Law on Preservation and Protection of the Historic Centre of Riga, 11.06.2003. Riga: Latvijas Vestnesis.

LR Ministry of Culture guidelines *Arhitekturas politikas pamatnostadnes no 2009. lidz 2015. gadam*. [pdf] Available at: http://www.km.gov.lv/lv/doc/jaunumi/KMPamn_arhitektura.pdf [Accessed 30

August 2016].

LR Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 324 *Noteikumi par kartību, kada organizējami būvprojektu un teritorialplanosanas projektu skicu konkursi*, 07.11.1995. Riga: Latvijas Vestnesis.

Lynch, P., 2016. *Adjaye Associates Selected to Design Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art*. ArchDaily. [online] Available at: <http://www.archdaily.com/789619/adjaye-associates-selected-to-design-latvian-museum-of-contemporary-art> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Metnieks, I., 2013. Nekustama ipasuma reklama un marketings. In: Kalpina, R., ed. 2013. *Nekustamais ipasums Latvija 1991-2012*. Riga: Latio, pp. 218-240.

Riga City Council Act No. 832 *Rigas vesturiska centra un ta aizsardzibas zonas teritorijas izmantosanas un apbaves noteikumi*, 07.02.2006. [pdf] Riga: Riga City Council. Available through: http://www.rdpad.lv/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RVC_AZ_TIAN_SN.38_SN.220.pdf [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Rigas pilsetas arhitekta birojs, n.d. *Petijums Arhitekturas konkursi Riga 1991-2013*. [online] Available at: http://arhitekts.riga.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=557:petijums-arhitekturas-konkursi-riga-1991-2013&catid=110&Itemid=262 [Accessed 30 August 2016].

The Council for Preservation and Development of Riga Historic Centre Meeting No. 244 protocol *Viesnicas eka kvartala starp Jana ielu 6, Kaleju ielu 27, Audeju ielu 12 buvniecibas attistibas priekslukums*, 2014. [pdf] Available at: http://mantojums.lv/media/protocols/2.4.7_RUPENHEITE_7442_rvcap_224_26032014.pdf [Accessed 05 July 2016].

Zvirgzdins, A., 2010. *Makslas muzeja konkurss – visi vertejumi*. A4D. [online] Available at: <http://www.a4d.lv/lv/projekti/makslas-muzeja-kokurss-visi-vertejumi> [Accessed 30 August 2016].

Zvirgzdins, A., 2011. Atpakal pie pilsetas. In: Budze, K., ed. 2011. *V*X: Latvijas arhitektura kops 1991 gada*. Riga: Nucleus, pp. 145-151.

Zvirgzdins, A., 2016. *Atskats uz koncertzales projektu diskusiju*. A4D. [online] Available at: <http://a4d.lv/lv/raksti/at-skats-uz-koncertzales-projektu-diskusiju/> [Accessed 30 August 2016].