

# 5. Urban planning and democracy in post-Soviet Jelgava

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## 5.1 HISTORY OF JELGAVA

### 5.1.1 The early history of Jelgava

The urban design history of the city of Jelgava is very similar to many other old European cities. First written record of the city is dated in 1265 AD when German Orden Mister Konrad from Mandera started to build a castle. The castle was built on the island between the Lielupe and Driksa waterways. Later, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the wooden castle was rebuilt using stones and bricks, and small buildings for storage and living were built nearby. After the 14<sup>th</sup> century, buildings were constructed along two streets which later became a market place. The city had its own laws at that time.

Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city continued to grow and in 1573, Jelgava received the rights of a city. Five years later the city became the capital of Kurland Dukedome with 9,000 inhabitants and a Ducal castle residence. The borders of the city became larger. The streets had regular planning, with a rectangular market place in the centre. In



Figure 5.1 A panorama of Jelgava Town in the 16th century.

1578 there were 175 one-story wooden buildings with wooden or stroll roofs. The first stone and brick buildings were the two churches of St. Trisvienibas and St. Annas.

In 1607, a big fire devastated the city. Later, in the period of Duke Jekabs (1642-1682), there was great development in Jelgava. Ditches and ramparts with four gates were built as defence for the city. A channel was dug across the city to connect the Svetes river and the Driksas river in order to supply inhabitants with fresh

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water. The channel was also used for transportation of goods from ships to shops and storage. In 1652, Tobias Kruss made the first city survey. There were 20 streets structured regularly, 800 wooden buildings, and just a few made of brick and stone.

In 1700, the Swedes made a new city plan, with restored city ramparts with 13 bastions. The number of buildings was less than in previous periods, and the castle of the Duke was connected with the other side of the Lielupe River by a bridge. In 1737, the family of Biron came into power in Kurland, and in 1738 they put a stone foundation, in the new baroque style, on the castle. In 1775, the first institute of higher education in the territory of Latvia was built and opened in Jelgava. There were 23 streets - four of them were like main streets, paved with stones and led to the gates. The city had 10,000 inhabitants and 630 buildings of which 137 were located outside the city walls.

### 5.1.2 Creating the modern city

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by the erection of many small, in particularly public, buildings. In 1802 the first theatre in Latvia was built at the marketplace in Jelgava. On the bank of the Driksa river, opposite the castle, the Brunnecibas



Figure 5.2 The ortodox church in the centre of Jelgava.

building, a meeting place for rich landlords, was constructed. Wastewater pipes were laid in the old defence ditches which were covered and built over with houses. The market place panoramas changed in the 1830s. The western part was decorated by a hotel in classic style, and the southern part with market houses with colonnades on three sides. The green, closed, outside courtyards of houses, became overbuilt with dense complexes of buildings with galleries on the second floor and outer stairways.

## JELGAVA

Jelgava is the fourth biggest city in Latvia, located 42 km from the capital, Riga, in the central part of Latvia on the Zemgale plain, on the banks of the second biggest river, the Lielupe River. The total area of the city is 6,032 ha, of which 272 ha are open water, 1,244 ha are forest, 162 ha are parks and there are a total of 192 km of streets (Figure 5.3).

Thanks to its good geographical position in Latvia, Jelgava is the junction point of 6 main roads and railways from 5 directions. Jelgava played a significant role in the Riga agglomeration with close ties between workplaces and cultural activities. Jelgava is also the fourth largest industrial centre in Latvia. Most of the industry is connected with agriculture and local material use for the region is concentrated here. As well, Jelgava and its surroundings are rich with cultural heritage of interest for tourism.

In Jelgava there are two institutions for higher education, The Latvia University of Agriculture and The Business Centre, which can have a great impact on agricultural production, and industry and building material production.

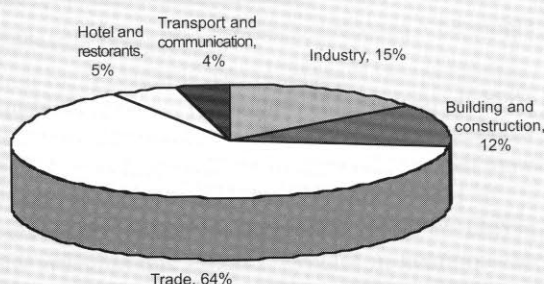


Figure 5.4 The working population of 72% are active within these fields. 12% are unemployed and 16% are looking for work.

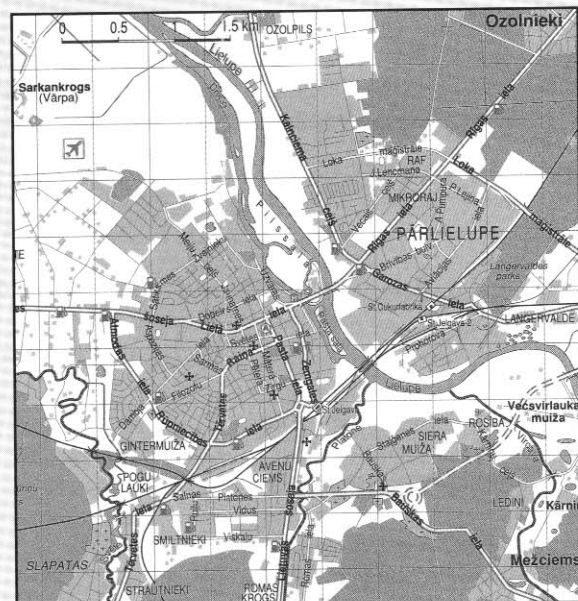


Figure 5.3 Map of Jelgava.

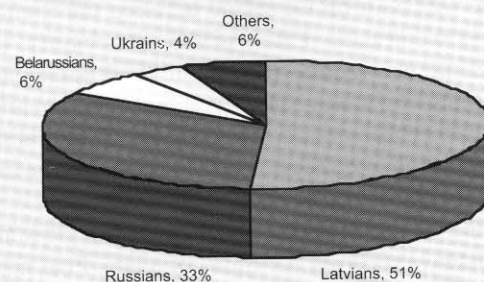


Figure 5.5 The "nationality" structure i Jelgava is divided as in the diagram, 60% of the total population are adults, and pensioners and children 20% each .

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Economic activities of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the impetus for new building initiatives. Factories and industrial buildings – which are still in use today – were then added. Luxury and highly artistic buildings lined the Driksa river bank and many small buildings were erected around the town. Beginning in 1868, Jelgava became an important railway junction. It was then the third largest city in Latvia with 35,000 inhabitants.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great building and construction explosion in Jelgava. In the city centre, small wooden buildings were replaced by 3-5 storey residential buildings, finance company offices, churches and schools. In 1910, there were 59 streets with 2,000 residential buildings. Streets had their own special economic function and architectural character. For example, Liela street was a market and shopping street with galleries. Katolu street was a business street with financial companies' offices and objects of culture. In Palejas street, there was a concentration of law and insurance offices. Ezera street was characterised by the presence of woodwork and furniture factories. Some of the streets extended over the city boundaries. The town lost its clay coloured roof character and became a city with multi-storey buildings.

### 5.1.3 Damaged by war

Three years of World War I, 1914-17, left the city in a damaged state. Many factories, bridges and the railway station were lost. After the war, in newly independent Latvia, a monument was erected in the centre of the city. The first sugar factory in Latvia was built together with new schools and residential areas with single family homes on the right bank of the Lielupe river. In the 1930s, many technical improvements were made in the city – a new concrete bridge, a new hospital building, a new large power station for electricity, and a water reservoir in the Lielupe



**Figure 5.6** The State three union church tower a symbol of the town, damaged in World War II, is slowly reconstructed thanks to the donations of the inhabitants of Jelgava.

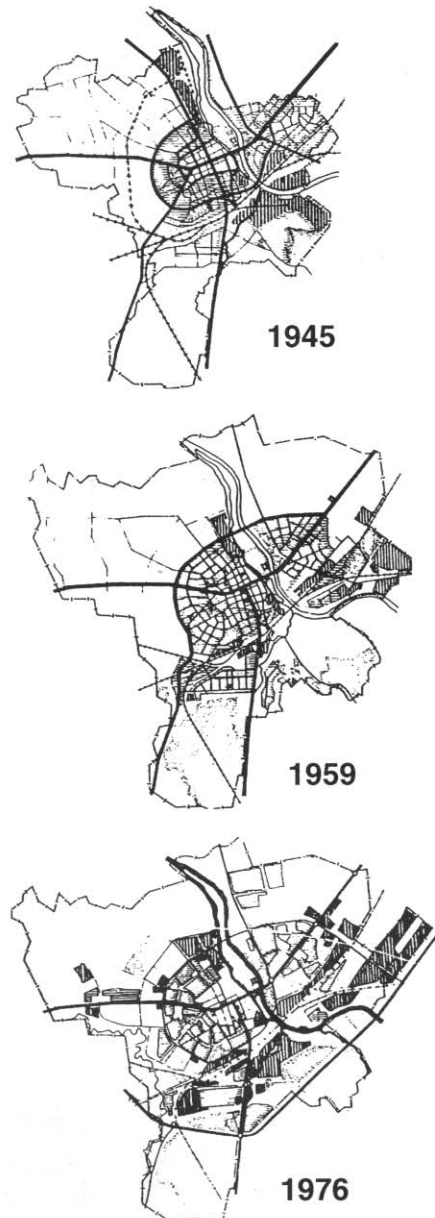
River. Some of the streets were covered with asphalt. The city had 30 ha of parks and smaller public green spaces.

World War II also became disastrous for Jelgava. In 1944, at the end of World War II, fire destroyed 80% of the town including most of the buildings of historical value.

### 5.1.4 The Soviet reconstruction of Jelgava

Latvia now was a part of Soviet Union. It was going to have devastating effects on the urban plan and city development. The new town plan, drawn up by the city architect O. Tilmanis, gave more attention to the central part of city. In place of the former market, a central square for parades was created. The street structure in the new plan was regular without any reference to historical features.

In the 1960s, Jelgava became an industrial giant. The development was part of the Soviet five year plans. Most of the factories were made to provide goods to be used in the entire the Soviet Union. Together with factory



**Figure 5.7** City plans of 1945, 1959 and 1976.



enlargement, new multi-storey apartment block areas with slabhouses were built on the city outskirts to provide housing for the workers of the factories. The old buildings in these areas were destroyed. City planning was based on large scale development of industry, however many of these plans were not realised. (Figure 5.7)

In the city centre four to five and nine story building were built after the 1950s in renovation work carried out to repair war damage. At first, buildings fronted the streets, but later in the 1960s, a free planning system was used for the location of buildings in order to achieve better insulation of flats. In the 1970s, new building areas were created on free lands on the periphery of the city. Separate enterprises started to build their own residential districts for workers complete with infrastructure, service buildings and schools. In the 1980s, new building activity began in all parts of the city.



**Figure 5.8** Multi-storey residential housing.

## 5.2 DEVELOPING A NEW URBAN PLAN

### 5.2.1 First steps in independent Latvia

When Latvia became independent again in 1991 the master plan in use was the one from 1976. It was based on growing industrial development in the city. Analyses made of that plan by the city administration concluded that development of the city according to the town planning principles and general conception of the 1976 master plan was currently possible, but revisions were necessary.

Revision began in 1997 with the creation of a working group and by holding public discussions about relevant topics about the city master plan and city development. A revised Jelgava city master plan was finally worked out according to the city's social-economic development plan and the Latvian national rules of territorial planning (according to the Council of Ministers in the Republic of Latvia).

The new plan was accepted in 1999.

### 5.2.2 Developing the housing areas

The areas in Jelgava built during the 1960s and 70s with housing as well as factories is a major concern in city planning. Some of these complexes have still not been finished, and the cityscape seems too large and impersonal, with low technical and aesthetic quality. The buildings are of low quality and require much financial input from inhabitants and the city (Figure 5.6).



**Figure 5.9** New built housing area.

The Jelgava city Dome (city hall) has concluded that the following steps are required in order to improve these areas:

- 1) It must be done step by step, improving the social and technical quality of some buildings.
- 2) District service structures need to be developed.
- 3) Recreational opportunities need to be developed by improving green areas and planting plants.
- 4) The areas outside of buildings need to be made more attractive, especially at ground level. It is very important and necessary to involve the flat owners, and the flat co-operatives in the process. This is the main aim of the city administration. In this process the public will have real input to improve their living conditions.

The residential districts are built with identical buildings. In the new proposed master plan it is suggested that in the future, the building style for 3-5 story buildings be varied, because new building areas are close to single family housing areas (Figure 5.9). It is suggested that soft links should connect these two areas.

A total of 25% of Jelgava's inhabitants live in single family dwellings which are concentrated in six separate areas. Historically, these areas have been located along the axis of main streets. These areas are characterised by undeveloped infrastructure. The new master plan suggests construction of these areas more in line with current Latvian thinking and desires, i.e., providing increased recreational opportunities, more green plants, and opportunities for gardening near the buildings, as is found near multi-flat houses. As well, areas for renovations and new construction have been suggested.

The new master plan suggests that the aim of city development is to give inhabitants a variety of housing choices depending on their lifestyle, social, and economic situation. This aim seems difficult to realise in the near future due to the hard economic situation.

### 5.2.3 Development and improvement of city infrastructure

The Jelgava city planning structure consists of centres and sub centres. The city structure is mono-centric,

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meaning that all inhabitants living outside the centre need to come to the centre often. Public and private transportation and overcrowded streets in the central part of the city increase pollution (Figure 5.9).

The city centre has a dense building structure, and all the significant functions for the city are concentrated here: dwellings, shops, administrative, business, culture, and educational buildings. There are also some factories, which it is proposed should move from the centre to the outlying industrial areas. The city centre also has a dense network of streets and communication lines and well kept parks and squares (Figure 5.10).

The new master plan proposes the development of sub-centres in order to increase services and workplaces. As well, shopping-pedestrian streets are proposed for the city centre in order to change the functional organisation.

Another proposal for the city centre is to create more attractive first floor premises for shops and offices. Special attention is given to heritage objects in the centre: churches, historical streets, and the rebuilding of some lost architectural monuments.

### 5.2.4 Green structures

The green spaces of the city of Jelgava include forests, meadows, forest parks, parks, gardens, alleys, squares, open stages, protected areas around the rivers, birds sanctuaries, cemeteries, and small rivers and ditches.

The significant function of green spaces in the new master plan is devoted to recreation. For this reason it is suggested that schoolyards be used. A new feature in the city is the idea of using the Pasta sala Island, between the Lielupe and Driksa rivers, for recreation. Thanks to improvement of ecological quality, it is once again possible to use the rivers for swimming.

Beside the existing forest park near the residential districts of RAF factory in the northern part of Jelgava, other parks in the forest beside Rubenu road are planned. The green structure plan also includes the inner areas of apartment block territories, which are currently partly damaged and lack vegetation.

Restoration of green areas was mentioned by inhabitants in their proposals for city development. The city budget plans to increase financing for restoration of old parks and green features of the city. It is proposed that the grass cover, bushes and trees is restored by involving inhabitants, and that playgrounds for children and sports fields are created in suitable areas (Figure 5.11).

Inhabitants' vegetable gardens are located in 5 places, mainly in the southern part of the city, and cover 160 ha of the city. These gardens are lovely places for family recreation, but are used primarily by older people, many of whom live there all year around. Most of the small houses in these gardens are used as permanent dwelling places. The new master plan includes improvement of infrastructure and the rebuilding of these houses to make them suitable for living in all through the year.

Cemeteries comprise 51 ha of Jelgava's green areas. These are places of memories and cultural heritage. The master plan proposes enlargement of cemetery territories and improvement of existing cemeteries. One suggestion is to preserve the traditional cemetery landscape.



Figure 5.10 The black lines indicate the public transportation net.

### 5.2.5 Improving the design of green areas

Until now, the green structure of Jelgava was created without a special system. The quality of public spaces is low in residential areas. Too many trees are growing close to buildings, and trees in the streets create areas which are dark, wet and monotonously similar. Currently, regular maintenance of city alleys is underway. There are 7 historic parks in Jelgava totalling 162 ha, which were created from 1900-1920. All these parks need renovation, which is also one of the proposals from inhabitants. People use many parks and green areas intensively every day.

The most problematic area in terms of use and a new planning and design concept is the central square, formerly the market place, and during the Soviet period, a parade square. Many inhabitants have given proposals for this central area, as have landscape architecture students who have made numerous proposals for the square's appearance

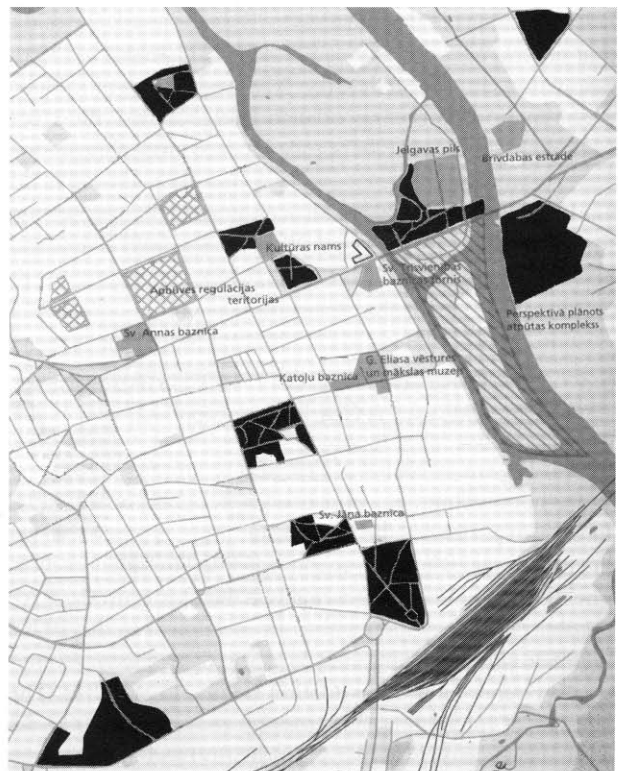
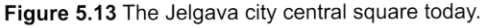


Figure 5.11 The black areas mark where parks are located.

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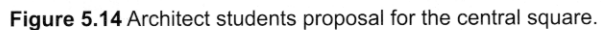
Creation and preservation mosaic style green structure is important for people's emotional and aesthetic behaviour and well-being, as well as for the development of biodiversity in the city. In the new master plan, green structures include the creation of buffer areas along roads, railways, and areas with heavier environmental pollution. The development of green structures must coincide with education and information about biodiversity, involving NGOs and inhabitants active in the creation and maintenance of different elements of green structure.

Geographical situation of Jelgava city created unique situation for city. In the centre part of city the flood meadows and grassland beside river Lielupe are internationally protected (WWF) water bird reserve, which consist from 3 separate parts. The level over Baltic Sea here is only 1.0 till 2.5 meters, but during flood it is 4.3 till 4.7 meter above Baltic sea level. These areas are significant also due rich biodiversity, natural biotops. The problem is that after building the new dams see in map no1. these areas of wet meadows will be reduced. We think that natural areas in city centre as it is in Jelgava is very important feature for city life and identity. Here problematic is planning of new bridge across the river Lielupe in the North part of city. How to cross this unique water bird reserve?

### 5.3 CULTURE AND THE CITY – REESTABLISHING JELGAVA AS A CULTURAL CENTRE

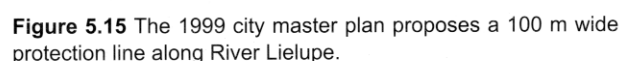
With the development of a market economy after 1991, Jelgava experienced the same difficulties as other Latvian towns. About 28% of the workers needed to find new jobs. The most complicated situation was the closure of the RAF minibus factory, which was built in Jelgava in the 1970s together with adjoining new housing districts.

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In the first version of a new city master plan, there are three key areas considered in relation to achieving sustainable development: 1. The transport structure inside the city, especially risk management of chemical transports through the city by railway. 2. Pointing out the significance of the town centre. 3. Economic stabilisation and increasing the role of Jelgava as a cultural and economic centre, not only in terms of the Zemgale region but for all Latvia.

Culture as a policy field can be integrated with the concept of sustainable development. It includes improvement of architectural qualities, retention of archaeological heritage, improvement of public space and support of a vital cultural climate. There is a need to strengthen the education of the public with regard to aesthetic qualities as well as partnerships between different levels and sectors of society. Culture has become more like an industry, and economic as well as social and environmental agendas often miss linking with cultural development. It is important to integrate cultural development with urban sustainability through improved urban management, goals





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Figure 5.14 Location of cultural objects in the urban landscape.

for city life, and urban planning and design that is based on sustainable principles. Efforts that are sensitive to the different settings within the urban area and that include culture in all its definitions is an essential component. During the public discussions about the Jelgava city development, one topic was the contribution of culture in the revitalisation of the city and the potential of cultural projects for visualising the sustainable city of tomorrow.

But there is the need for politicians to think in new terms as well as a need for broader public participation. Architects must be aware of the importance of politicians, and professionals must learn to speak the same language.

The overlap of environmental sustainability and cultural development in Jelgava city development are illustrated in the following areas:

- The promotion of city centre living and of urban public life especially in the evenings and on weekends, through cultural events' contribution with programs and which could make the city more sustainable by reducing demand for travel, making public transport more viable, reducing the need for new housing in green spaces, and increasing use of existing buildings.
- The promotion of civic pride – through both flagship and community based cultural projects – which could engender greater awareness of and care for the local environment and could encourage the public to spend more leisure time in their locality.

Cultural production is often valuable for the attractiveness of the city. Culture can generate both income, visitors and a more human and varied social environment. Culture can be regarded as part of the city's soft infrastructure. The culture of the city is also the expression of its people. Culture is far from being something which confronts people as having been produced by others, rather it is produced by people themselves.

Besides a good physical environment, i.e., rivers, parks, shopping, and dining areas, the city must also constitute a good cultural environment with galleries,

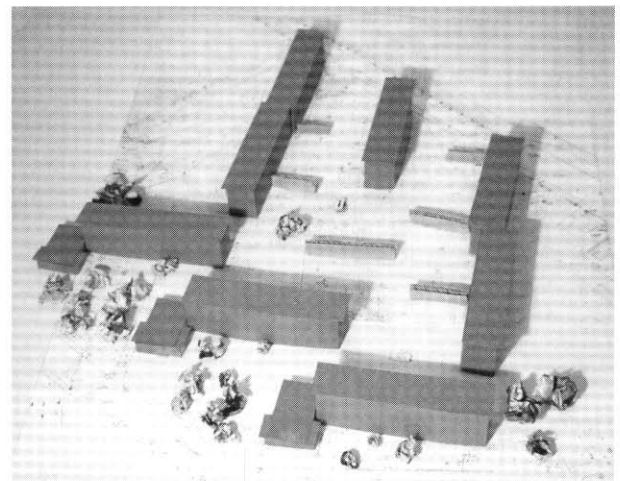


Figure 5.15 Proposal for humanisation of a multi-storey residential area (Landscape architect's Diploma project).

museums, concert halls, sport clubs, etc. The city must have a distinctive identity – an actual or invented history, a unique style or ambience.

If the built environment is seen as a complex system of buildings, the cultural value of a certain object to a substantial part is dependent on the environmental context. Each individual property has an external impact on the surrounding buildings. This external effect can be negative or positive, and will indirectly impact upon the value of adjacent properties. In this way the surroundings add to and compound the real value of each building or area (Figure 5.15).

### 5.3.3 Public space and cultural diversity

Public space is one of the most important instruments of democracy, simply because it belongs to us all collectively. It is the expression of values held in common, an arena for the exchange of vital information on how to be a citizen, and how to relate to others.

But in public space, this freedom of choice does not exist. Every day on your way to work you see an ugly facade facing the park or a large billboard. It has an impact on everyone. City centres have retained their importance as spaces for face to face interaction, transaction and creativity. City authorities have boosted their performance through cultural regeneration projects, but meanwhile the arts, culture and entertainment industries are becoming an increasingly important part of the city's economy.

But the quality of city centre is not only about its commercial operations. It is also about the way it is used, who comes to it, the meeting places and places of congregation. Its social and commercial life and its symbolic existence is continually being moulded and re-moulded by the dynamics of the different relational worlds of those who conduct business or visit the centre.

Cities can promote diversity by supporting the carnivals and festivals of cultural minorities. There are many opportunities available for a city to promote cultural freedom.

### 5.3.4 Making history accessible

The development of the built environment is a slow and incremental process. New buildings will be constructed, buildings will be rebuilt to fit new purposes and buildings

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Figure 5.11 Views from central Jelgava.

will be demolished and replaced. During the last decades, the interest for preservation has gone from an interest in preserving single monuments to an interest for buildings in a wider physical context.

From this perspective, it is reasonable to regard almost all urban outdoor environments as an infrastructure, since it is impossible to prevent someone from enjoying the environmental qualities. General use over time means that it is possible to alter the functions of a building over time. It is critical to find new sustainable uses for derelict buildings with cultural value, especially when public resources are scarce. The optimal degree of public intervention and financing of preservation activities with regard to privately owned buildings is dependent upon the values of individuals. Throughout its history, the city has been the primary centre of cultural production, exchange and consumption.

### 5.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE FOR DEMOCRACY

#### 5.4.1 The roles of culture

The psychologist Cole (1995) claims that "the basic function of cultural artefacts is to co-ordinate human beings with the environment and each other." Objects and the physical environment carry not only a personal meaning but also carry one which is common to the people living at and using that very place. In architecture and planning, the goal becomes that of creating legible, meaningful, and sacred places, i.e., place making, in contrast to the anonymous rational spaces that were products of the post-war period.

Contacts between cultures have become closer. They seem to have come to resemble each other. Factors that can explain this development are, for example: the effects of modern technology and modern media, travel and

everyday intercultural contacts, as well as the experience of different patterns of everyday behaviour and standards.

Artists can generate new life in run down areas, despite limited financial resources. It is necessary to attempt to make horizontal links between the different action groups and the various communities in the territory, exploiting spatial continuity and communications. Horizontal relationships within the district may be encouraged by links contained in the plans themselves, following rivers upstream, pursuing the green threads of the land, seeking building continuity, and strengthening morphological and environmental connections.

As a result a conflict situation might occur in the planning process, since different actors have different interests to guard or values to protect, hence complicating the goal of achieving consensus in the planning process. The public sector planner is a key actor. Their task is to consider public as well as private interests in planning. This calls for consistently accounting for the complex values that the built environment, existing or planned, has or will have in the future.

#### 5.4.2 Cultural diversity and sustainability need to be linked

The location of cultural facilities is also vital for social interaction, for example, attracting audiences from two or three different and possibly socially segregated neighbourhoods. This is more significant than proximity in the sense of simple closeness, because increasingly, there is social segregation within neighbourhoods which cannot be overcome by placing facilities for social and cultural life centrally within that territorially bound space. It is important to identify the overlap between two or more neighbourhoods.

One should insist on the complexity of human-environment relationships and on the fact that these relationships are formed in a cultural context. Inhabitants have a specific knowledge of a place and of the problems, substantial, qualitative knowledge. Local knowledge is the pivot of the territorial and social analysis developed in participatory projects. The experiences of participation have strongly positive features - they translate conflict into proposals and complaints into constructive work. They emphasise the prevalence of positive collective action.

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#### Traditional cultural events in Jelgava

Theatre festival	Days' of Art
Wine Festival	Ice Sculpture Festival
Students' Day	Easter day swings
Easter promenade	Freshmen Festival
in the yard of Palace	for students
New Year parties	Folk Festival
in Palace	1001 nights' festival