ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY AS A COMMON CONCERN

European conference on architectural policies

0 Introduction

For over 20 years, the European Conferences on Architectural Policies (ECAP) have been a means of sharing, on an international stage, the main concerns regarding the quality of our built and unbuilt environment, and its evolution.

Over the past few years, these policies have been widely developed at both European and national levels. As the climate transition has gradually become part of political agendas, numerous declarations and initiatives stress the importance of considering a more cultural perspective in favour of a technical-economic one in this transition, based on the development of a common, high-quality 'Baukultur'.

However, while tools have been created to provide a better understanding of this quality, the spaces where it can be tangibly established together have yet to be developed.

One of the many questions raised is that of the 'co-construction of public action', in terms of the ability to mobilise the various actors in a project. Although they have been invited to review their practices, many public organisations are still largely at a loss as to how to implement this renewal.

In project development, how can public project leaders interact with such diverse actors as private developers, designers and, even more so, citizens? What role do these different actors play? When? And through what mechanisms? Above all, how can we make the question of project quality central to these interactions?

By looking at each of these actors in turn, **the conference aims to examine how they can be mobilised by the public authorities.**

In preparation for the conference, **we hope to be informed about interesting projects by the EDAP and NEB partners.** Can you in one sentence describe the case study, indicate why the project fits the theme and provide us with a contact (mail and phone)? **We look for two supplementary projects per roundtable session.**
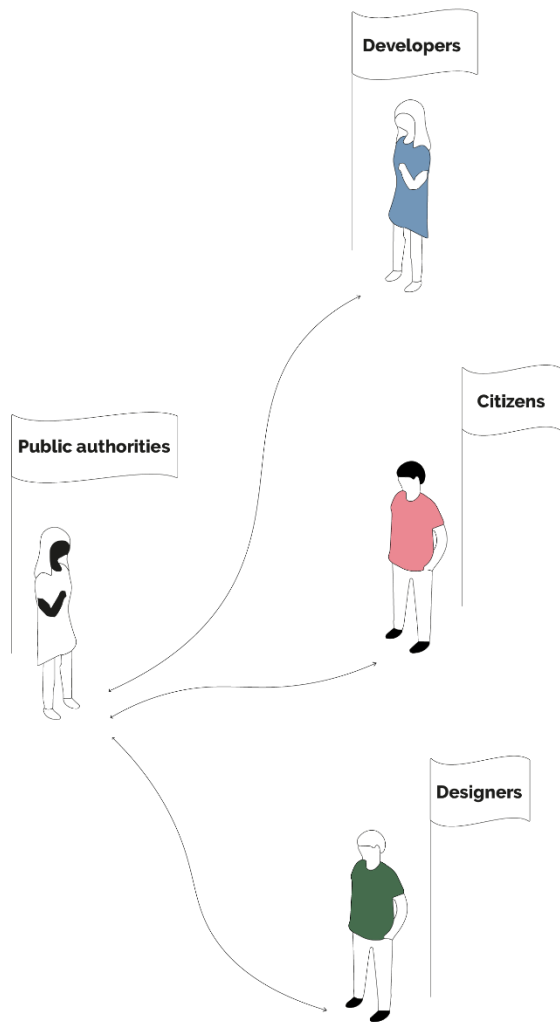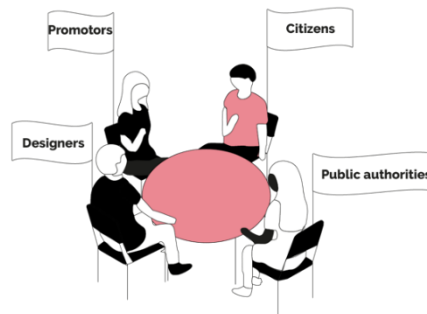
Three interactions, seven thematic workshops
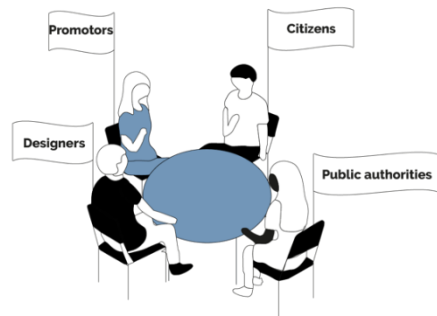
Interactions with Developers

Workshop 1.1.
Providing support for the private project of a developer/investor

Workshop 1.2.
Getting support from the investor developer for a public project

Interactions with Citizens

Workshop 2.1.
Getting support from citizens for a public space project

Workshop 2.2.
Getting support from users for a housing project
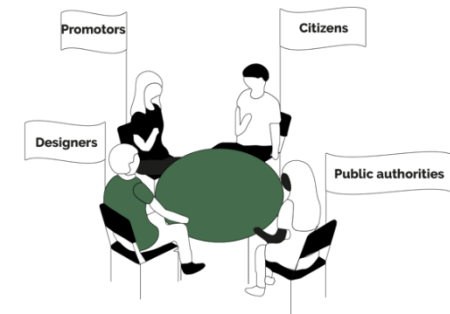
Interactions with Designers

Workshop 3.1.
Designers assisting public authorities

Workshop 3.2.
Design Expertise embedded in a policy context

Workshop 3.3.
Design Research informing policies

03 Theme 3 Interactions with Designers

Introduction

We distinguish three possible roles here:

1. Designers assisting Public Authorities : Public authorities or local administrations – e.g. of smaller or mid-sized towns - might lack specific design expertise to tackle certain spatial questions and processes and hire designers to assist them. What kind of assistance, which procedures or tool kits allow for leveraging a good outcome?

2. Design expertise embedded in a policy context: This topic investigates how civil servants trained in architecture, and urban or landscape design are assigned responsibilities in a policy context. We refer to architects working within public administrations, City or Government Architects, architects, planners and engineers within technical services. How does their design-focused expertise support policy-making?

3. Research by design informing policy-making: How can research by design inform (long-term) policy? This topic reflects on the role of experimental studies and actors like think-and-do tanks in informing policy. Often, this kind of interaction engages with complex spatial questions or tries to develop innovative approaches to, for instance, issues of climate change.

3.2: Design expertise embedded in a policy context

- How can 'design knowledge' be embedded in administrations?

- For which kinds of expertise do administrations have/need sufficient in-house capacity, and which expertise can be found externally?

Belgian Case: Ghent City Architect

- Ghent: pooling expertise in City Architect Team, in the Urban Archeology and Heritage Service, and in external study team
- Example of 'spatialising' challenges and chances to develop policy vision for central historic patrimony
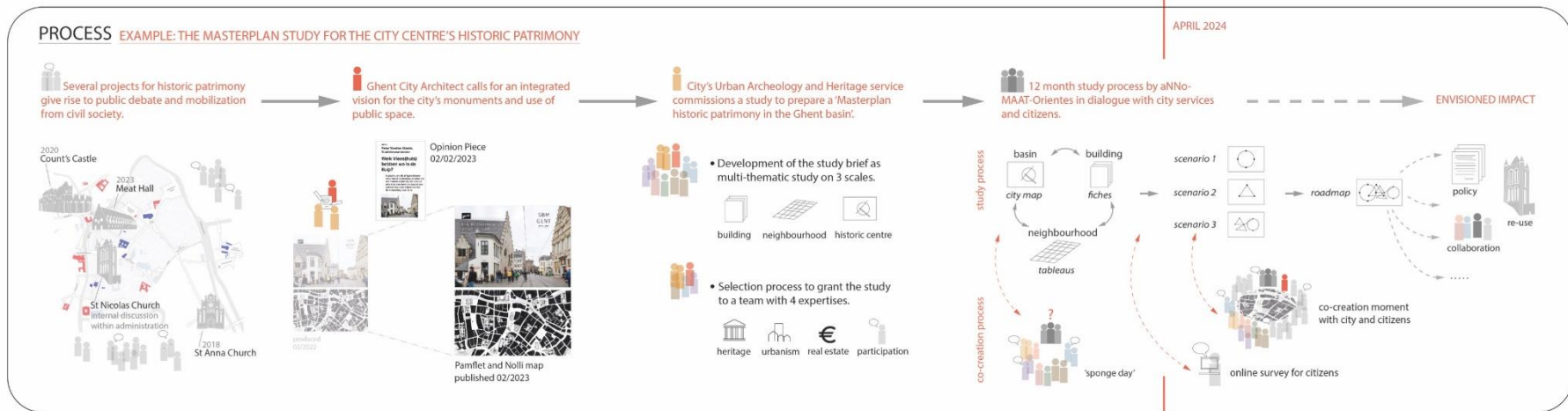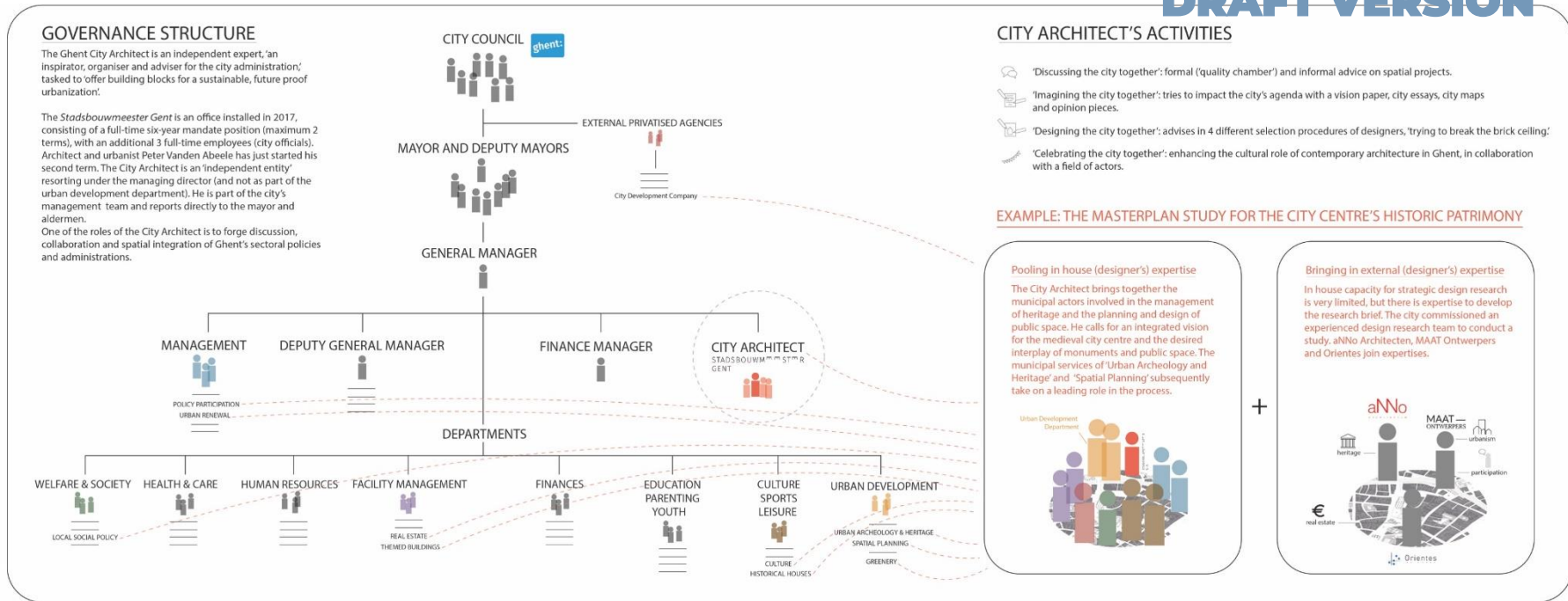

Medieval Meat Hall, Count's Castle, pedestrians, bikes and tram tracks on the cover of the city architect's publication: City Map 03, 'Mo(nu)mentum voor de Kuip van Gent', Feb. 2023.

Ghent City Architect:
central historic patrimony

- Infographs (discussion sheet available in large prints in roundtable session)

DRAFT VERSION

Ghent City Architect:
central historic patrimony

- Narrative

The Ghent City Architect (*Stadsbouwmeester Gent*) is a semi-independent office advising the mayor and aldermen. The preparation of a masterplan for the central historic patrimony illustrates how the City Architect takes initiatives to bring city administrations into conversation with each other, and with urban stakeholders, about sites and challenges. The service's limited size means it does not have the capacity to develop strategic design research itself.

In Feb. 2023, the City Architect published a call to consider the future of Ghent's historic patrimony in relation to the surrounding public space, and to valorize and develop patrimony and city together.

On the initiative of the City Architect, the Urban Archeology and Heritage Service subsequently commissioned a design study, pursuing this perspective, to survey and inform a long-term strategic vision for the use and management of the central historic patrimony the city owns.

3 firms MAAT ontwerpers, aNNo architecten, and Orientes, were commissioned with this study (Sept. 2023 – Sept. 2024). Together they cover the expected expertise when it comes to architectural heritage, public space, real estate, and participation, but also capacities of visualising and rethinking processes.

Ghent City Architect:
central historic patrimony

Graphic visualisation is a subtheme in this case. Various kinds of maps help to 'spatialise' sectoral policies, and challenges and chances in urban sites. Infographs also help to communicate and to mobilize stakeholders:

2 years ago, the City Architect had a 'Nolli map' drawn up for Ghent's city center, visualizing public space and the plethora of historic monuments and public buildings together.

Ghent's city centre as a 'Nolli map', published as part of City Map 03, 'Mo(nu)mentum voor de Kuip van Gent' © Ellen Verbiest / Team Stadsbouwmeester Gent (2022).

Subsequently, (conservation) architects in the city administration have pre-structured the current study procedure, by distinguishing 3 levels of analysis and scenario development, supported by 3 types of documents, to be made by the external designers/consultants:

- heritage value and potential on building level is to be screened and compiled into '*building files*';
- the potential of (sets of) historic buildings for different neighborhoods are being visualized graphically into narrative 'neighborhood panels*'*
- Analyses of economic and policy contexts should be drafted, accompanied by comprehensive scenarios for managing the city's patrimony.

Ghent City Architect:
central historic patrimony

- ## Glossary
- **Ghent Basin** (NL: Kuip van Gent): historic city center defined by two crossing river valleys, medieval monuments, and a late 19th-early 20th-C. restoration/urban redesign campaign (*dégagement*)
- **Ghent City Architect** (NL: Stadsbouwmeester Gent):
  The Ghent City Architect is an independent expert, 'an inspirator, organiser and adviser for the city administaration', tasked to 'offer building blocks for sustainable, future proof urbanization'. The office comprises a full-time 6-year mandate position + 3 employees.
- **Service for Urban Archeology and Heritage** (Dienst Stadsarcheologie en Monumentenzorg), part of the City's Department of Urban Development
- **Quality Chamber** (NL: Kwaliteitskamer): in Belgium, Design Review Panels (grouping independent experts evaluating and advising projects for local authorities) differ from city to city qua membership profile and qua role. The Ghent Quality Chamber advises the municipal executive on the spatial quality of concrete architectural projects - both buildings and public spaces - when applying for planning permission. The quality chamber consists of six independent experts; the City Architect himself is chairman. Clients and designers are advised in fortnightly meetings, and in consultation with the city departments.
- **City essays** and **city maps**: outreach tools of the Ghent City Architect to foster urban *baukultur* and forge policy/administrative initiatives. Through short and incisive thematic essays, the City Architect zooms in on concrete challenges, trying to influence the urban agenda and to point at building blocks (tools) for policy development. For each essay/map, the Ghent City Architect Team collaborates with one or more city departments and external experts and actors.
- **Roadmap**: more sexy term advanced by the aNNo-MAAT-Orientes design research team, rather than the term 'note with strategic recommendations' in the study's specifications document.
- **Sponge day**: During a **sponge day** early in the study process, the design research team of aNNo-MAAT-Orientes held conversations with the different municipal departments, to quickly gain insight in the different sectoral policy contexts, perspectives and expectations of the masterplan study present, and to learn from the expert knowledge present within the municipality.

Latvian Case: Riga City Architect's Service

- Riga City Architect's Service, integrated within the Urban Development Department
- Neighborhood Center Masterplans are aout drafting urban development/design visions, before tendering (architectural) design projects

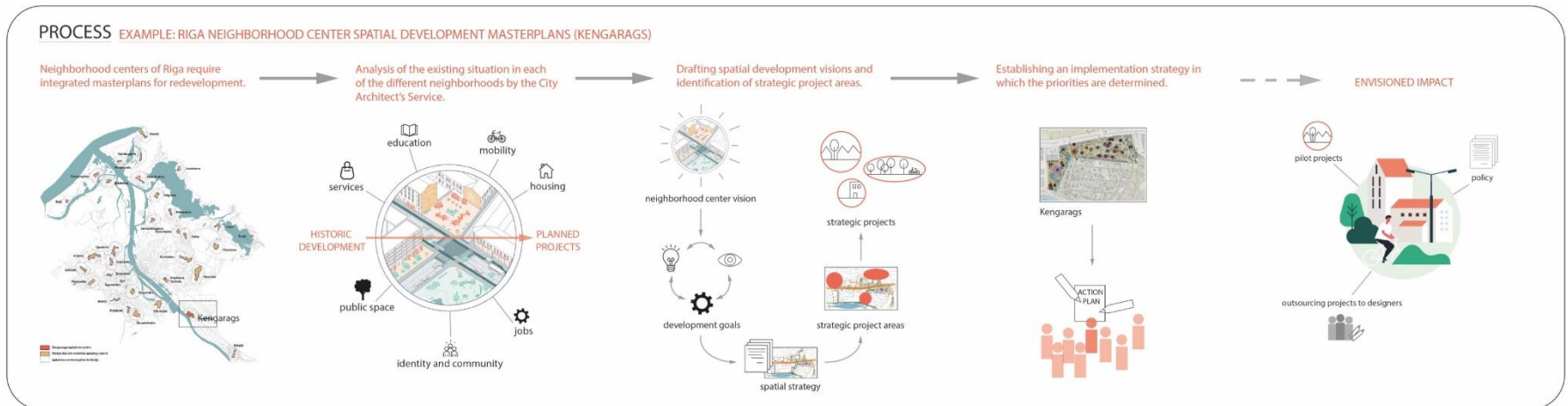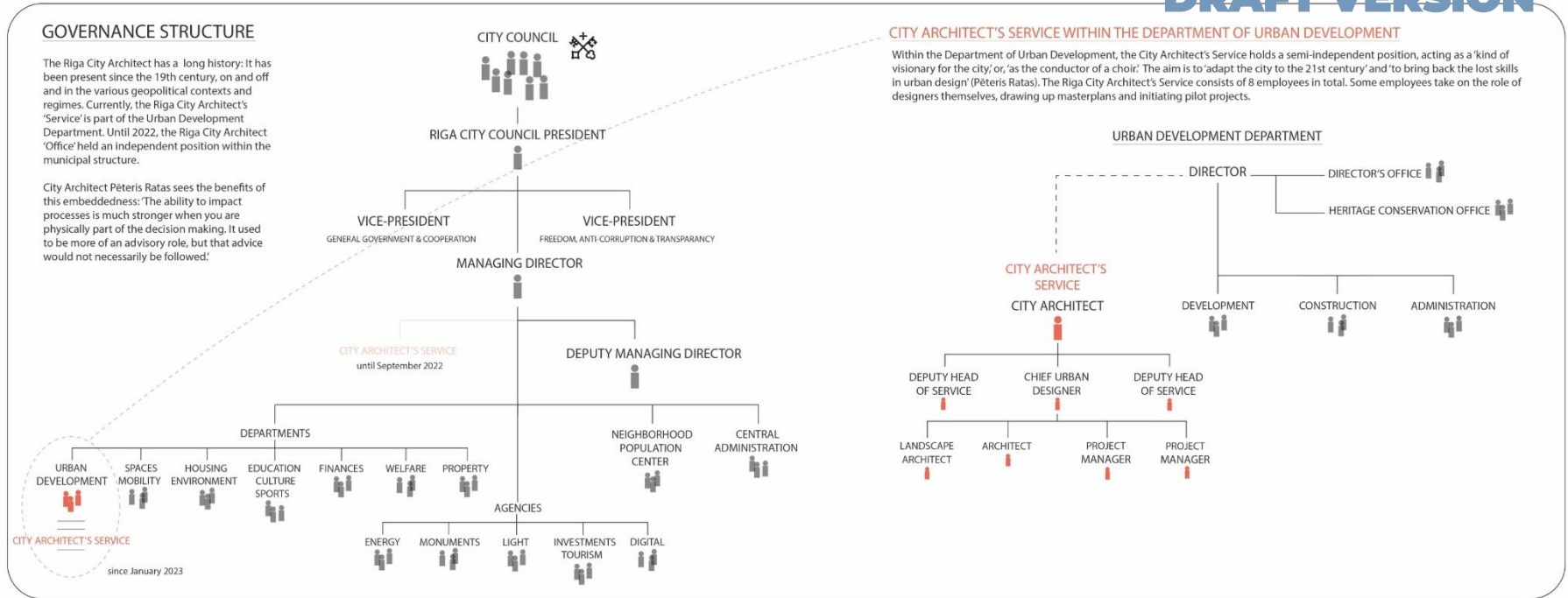
Kengarags neighborhood center, Riga.

Project area from the Neighborhood Center Masterplan process – currently under review.
© Riga City Architect's Service

Riga City Architect's Service:
neighborhood center spatial development masterplans

- Infographs (discussion sheet available in large prints in roundtable session)

DRAFT VERSION

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Riga City Architect has a long history: It has been present since the 19th century, on and off and in the various geopolitical contexts and regimes. Currently, the Riga City Architect's 'Service' is part of the Urban Development Department. Until 2022, the Riga City Architect 'Office' held an independent position within the municipal structure.

City Architect Pēteris Ratas sees the benefits of this embeddedness: 'The ability to impact processes is much stronger when you are physically part of the decision making. It used to be more of an advisory role, but that advice would not necessarily be followed.'

CITY ARCHITECT'S SERVICE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Within the Department of Urban Development, the City Architect's Service holds a semi-independent position, acting as a 'kind of visionary for the city', or, 'as the conductor of a choir'. The aim is to 'adapt the city to the 21st century' and 'to bring back the lost skills in urban design' (Pēteris Ratas). The Riga City Architect's Service consists of 8 employees in total. Some employees take on the role of designers themselves, drawing up masterplans and initiating pilot projects.

PROCESS EXAMPLE: RIGA NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT MASTERPLANS (KENGARAGS)

Riga City Architect's Service:
neighborhood center spatial development masterplans

- Narrative

The Riga City Architect has a long history, present since the 19th century, on and off, during the various political regimes. Currently, the Riga City Architect's Service is part of the Urban Development Department. City Architect Pēteris Ratas sees the benefits of this embeddedness: 'The ability to impact processes is much stronger when you're part of the decision making.'

The Riga City Architect's Service has competence in urban planning, architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture. It consists of 8 employees, some taking on the role of designers themselves, drawing up masterplans and initiating pilot projects.

Ratas stresses the goal to '*adapt* the city to the 21st Century', the need to formulate (re)development visions, and (in relation to) the need 'to bring back lost skills in urban design' in the administrative and professional field.

The development and implementation of Spatial Development Masterplans for the central areas of Riga's neigborhoods is but one of the current tools and processes the City Architect's Service invests in. Another example is a Street Design Guidelines Manual.

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