

Riga, Latvia

A former soviet military base turns into the city's cultural scene

The Spīķeri Block, a former soviet military base located in the historic centre of Riga, has been lain derelict for more than 10 years and is a socio-economic burden for the city administration. Now, as a result of a number of interventions and a successful public-private partnership, it has turned the corner. It is becoming an important player in the city's cultural scene, and is attracting an increasing number of Riga's inhabitants and visitors.

A former soviet military base turns into the city's cultural scene

The Spīķeri Block – the area between the Maskavas, Krasta and Turgēņeva Streets – is a former Soviet Army base located in the heart of Riga. For more than a decade it has been derelict and a socio-economic burden for the city administration. At the same time it is part of the historical centre of old Riga and part of a UNESCO-listed World Heritage site. Most of the buildings are now privately owned, whereas the land and one of the buildings are owned by the City of Riga.

The revitalisation of the area started back in 2005 with investments made by the private owners in the renovation of the buildings under their ownership. At that time also the first discussions between the private owners and Riga City Council began. Over the years this has developed into a successful public-private revitalisation partnership and has led to a project co-financed by the ERDF as part of the national Structural Funds programme's 'infrastructure and services' priority for 'polycentric development', implemented by Riga City Council.

The project aims to develop the public infrastructure of the Spīķeri Block to provide the basis for the sustainable and integrated urban development of the derelict area. It mainly comprises the reconstruction of the block with substantial adjustments of the urban environment – making the territory and the adjacent bank of the river accessible and safe, and developing a port which can be further used as part of the city's public water-transport system.

The revitalisation of the Spīķeri Block provides a good example of successful public-private partnership and cooperation among a fairly large number of actors representing diverse fields of operation. The process integrates a number of projects funded from different sources that are implemented by various actors – enterprises, NGOs and the municipality – all leading to the successful regeneration of the former derelict area. It also demonstrates how 'soft' activities and 'hard' investments can run in parallel to increase the visibility and recognition of the Spīķeri Block among Riga's inhabitants and visitors.

Revitalisation of the Spīķeri Block

Like other cities of the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern block, Riga – the capital of Latvia – inherited a number of Soviet Army bases. Many of these areas were left to rot after Latvia gained its independence in 1991 and the Soviet Army left the country. Many were located in the centre of the city and became a socio-economic burden for the city administration.

The block between Maskavas, Krasta and Turgēņeva Streets in the historical centre of Riga was one of them. The area is called the Spīķeri Block after the *Spīķeri* or warehouses in which the Hanseatic merchants stored their goods in the 14th century. It now contains 13 warehouses built in the 19th century that are included in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.

The Spīķeri Block, which sits between the city's central market on one side and the heavily-trafficked bank of the River Daugava on the other, initially became state property. Part of the territory was and still is used by the City of Riga as a night market, attracting the socially disadvantaged population of the city. At the same time most of the area's buildings have been privatised and have now been renovated by their new owners, thus changing the area from being socio-economically disadvantaged into the city's centre of contemporary culture. How did it happen?

Preserve Everything! Demolish Nothing!



Figure 1 Spīķeri Block with the buildings of Central Market (in white above) and the road of heavy traffic on the bank of the river Daugava below.

Discussions between the private owners of the buildings and the city administration regarding the development of the Spīķeri Block started in 2005. At that time the area was derelict, whereas the buildings were (and still are) brick-built art nouveau architectural monuments. The land was (and still is) owned by the City of Riga, but most of the buildings are owned by the private company Spīķeri Ltd. At that time the private

owners of the buildings had started to invest in renovating the buildings and to let out the renovated space to various enterprises and NGOs.

Over time Spīķeri Ltd, together with the tenants of the buildings – enterprises and NGOs – established an umbrella NGO called Rīgas Spīķeri to represent the interests of private partners in relation to various development activities in the block.

In 2006, the first step was taken to find the best solution for developing and upgrading the infrastructure of the Spīķeri Block by organising an international workshop – a competition for architects. The idea generated by the Norwegian company Snøhetta – ‘Preserve Everything! Demolish Nothing!’ – was selected as the winning proposal among seven others. The evaluation committee was made up of representatives of both private and public partners, including the departments of transport and city development, and head architect of Riga City Council and the State Inspection for Heritage Protection.

In parallel to this, a public opinion poll was also carried out to hear Riga's inhabitants' ideas and expectations for the development of the Spīķeri Block. This revealed that 92% of those surveyed wanted to see more active social facilities on the bank of the River Daugava where the Spīķeri Block stands. Most of the respondents preferred various cultural and entertainment activities, as opposed to a shopping area that was supported by only 2% of respondents.

Based on the results of the international workshop of architects and the public opinion poll, in 2007 Riga City Council turned the development of the public infrastructure of the Spīķeri Block into a project idea, entered it into their internal project management system and started to search for funding.

In 2008 the NGO Rīgas Spīķeri together with Riga City Council organised another international seminar with the participation of 11 experienced architects and urban planning specialists from Germany, Belgium, Norway and Latvia to further discuss and develop the revitalisation concept. The concept included the composition of public space, a unified functional plan for the riverbank and infrastructure for pedestrian and cycle paths. In the following year the council officially supported the implementation of the proposed revitalisation by including the Spīķeri Block as one of the four derelict areas in the Revitalisation Programme of Derelict Buildings and Areas of Riga City.

In 2010 Riga City Council carried out a feasibility study for the implementation of the project, prepared the project proposal and submitted it for ERDF cofinancing under the national Structural Funds programme 'Infrastructure and Services', priority 3.6 'Polycentric Development', measure 3.6.1 'Support for Sustainable Development of Urban Regions' and sub-activity 3.6.1.2 'Sustainable Development of Riga City'. In the same year the project was approved for ERDF financing by the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government, and in October 2010 it could begin implementation. It will run for 39 months and will be completed in December 2013.

An active public-private partnership

The project aims to develop the public infrastructure at the Spīķeri Block to provide a basis for the sustainable and integrated urban development of the derelict area. It mainly comprises the reconstruction of the block with substantial adjustments to the urban environment – making the area and riverbank accessible and safe, and developing a port which can be further used as a part of the city's public water-transport system.

The project was proposed and is implemented by Riga City Council, which is the main driving force behind the regeneration of the public part of the Spīķeri Block. This ensures smooth implementation, as well as the necessary financial contribution. The steering group involves different units of the council: the City Development Department which is responsible for implementation, the Executive Board of East Riga which is responsible for maintaining the project results after its completion, and the City Development Committee, which ensures the link with the city's politicians.

At the same time the development also involves private partners – the owners and tenants of the buildings, which include more than 20 private enterprises and non-governmental organisations working in the fields of culture, design, entertainment, food and services. While the City of Riga is investing in developing the public infrastructure, the property owners are investing in renovating the buildings and the tenants are organising different cultural and entertainment activities which breathe life into the area.

The active involvement of all these actors has resulted in an operational public-private partnership that has been formed between Riga City Council and the private partners – the owners of the buildings and their tenants. The tenants are involved in the project through their membership of the umbrella NGO Rīgas Spīķeri. Within the project activities Riga City Council organises public consultations with the participation of Rīgas Spīķeri, at which the opinions of private partners is noted and can be taken into account during the project implementation. For example, the project's technical specification was adjusted to meet the tenants' needs.

Since the Spīķeri Block will act as one of the cultural hotspots when Riga becomes a European Capital of Culture in 2014, the national Ministry of Culture, one of the organisers of the cultural events on this occasion, has also joined the partnership.

Public and private partners are equally interested in the development of the block. Therefore inspiration and creative contributions to the project are initiated by both Rīgas Spīķeri – representing the private partners – and the city. Taking into account the complex nature of the Spīķeri Block, which is on the UNESCO world heritage list of architectural monuments, the expertise of external architects and urban planners was invited via the organisation of two international seminars.

The activity and high motivation of the private stakeholders was the crucial reason that Riga City Council chose this project idea for further elaboration, and presented it for ERDF cofinancing. This can also be considered as an innovative aspect of the project, since the proactive involvement of private stakeholders ensures transparency and an easy-going public-private partnership. In addition, the activity of private partners also assures better sustainability of the project results achieved by the public partner.

Planning for sustainability

The development of the Spīķeri Block as one of the most derelict areas in the centre of Riga is set out as a priority in both the Development Programme of Riga 2010-2013 and the Territorial Plan of Riga 2006-2018. Both documents contribute to the achievement of the long-term Development Strategy of Riga up to 2025. Thus the project is clearly integral to the city's planning vision. Besides the public planning documents, the project also follows the Development Strategy of the Spīķeri Block developed by the private stakeholders, which sets out the vision, priorities, measures and positioning of the block in the future landscape of Riga, Latvia and Europe. Specifically it aims to:

- promote the international recognition of the Spīķeri Block as an area of culture and creative industries;
- develop high-quality public space within the block and on the bank of the River Daugava;
- develop a high-quality environment for work, socialising, culture, sport, leisure for children and youth, and recreation;
- develop tourism activities.

The project activities selected have been developed on the basis of research and studies carried out previously by public and private stakeholders. They provide an infrastructural basis for further socio-economic development of the derelict area in accordance with the planning documents of the City of Riga and the Development Strategy of the Spīķeri Block itself.

The project focuses on restoring the public part of the block's infrastructure. Its two specific objectives are firstly to develop the technical specification, and secondly to reconstruct the area by demolishing temporary buildings and fences, creating footpaths and cycle paths, as well as greening the block – all of which contribute to upgrading the derelict area into a safe and attractive place. In addition, the project foresees the reconstruction of the bank of the River Daugava, which flows alongside, improving its accessibility through a foot tunnel underneath the busy road.

The project activities started with the development of the technical specifications required for improvement of the infrastructure, and are then followed by the reconstruction works. During the technical analysis phase, the architects introduced additional possibilities for improvement that cost an additional €2.5 million, to carry out reconstruction works not foreseen in the original project budget. Even though it would have been possible to implement the project – fully achieving the initially planned results – without this additional funding, the city provided extra funds from its own budget, allowing the derelict area to be rehabilitated to an even higher quality than originally planned.

As a result, the total project costs increased from €4.32m to €7m. Since this increase was met by Riga City Council, the ERDF contribution of €3 628 323 was left intact. The only effect was to decrease the ERDF cofinancing rate from 84% to 52%.

This project's interventions supplement other 'hard' investments to improve the buildings in the block, mainly carried out by the private owners of the buildings. In addition, two complementary ERDF-cofinanced projects are under way in parallel. On one hand Riga City Council is implementing the 'CO₂OL Bricks – Climate Change, Cultural Heritage & Energy Efficient Monuments' project funded by the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013, which is reconstructing a city-owned building for use as an information centre. On the other hand Rīgas Spīķeri is implementing the 'Repairs of the Spīķeri Building including front and external walls' project funded by the Programme for Support of Private Owners of Cultural Heritage Objects, which is renovating of the walls of another building.

These 'hard' measures are accompanied by 'soft' activities carried out by the tenants of the block which are breathing life into the block. These are funded by various donors – the EEA-Norway Financial Instrument, the Ministry of Culture, the State Culture Capital Foundation, Riga City Council and private commercial banks. They include a number of one-off and ongoing cultural, educational, entertainment and service activities organised by the tenants, which include two museums, three bistros/restaurants, five organisations related to music – a concert hall, choir, orchestra, recording studio and information centre – as well as a theatre.

All these projects are supplementing each other, following the development strategy of the Spīķeri Block and leading to the socio-economic development of the formerly derelict area. These activities do not overlap with each other due to clear division of ownership, interests and function of different stakeholders. They also contribute to the development of the block's role when Riga becomes a European Capital of Culture in 2014.

Expected results

The project will result in developing the public infrastructure of the Spīķeri Block including equipped pedestrian and cycle paths, as well as linking the block with the adjacent bank of the River Daugava. Specifically, this means:

- demolishing 2 908 cubic metres of temporary buildings and 200 metres of fencing;
- reconstructing the bank of the River Daugava including a foot tunnel, stairs and an 800-metre wall to separate the busy road from the block's recreation area;
- developing footpaths and cycle paths covering 7 000 square metres;
- greening the reconstructed area.

In addition, the project will provide a platform for innovative services. For example, the previously derelict block will offer a charging station for electrical cars, as well as giving access to the dock that can be used as a central station for the city's public water-transport. At the same time the further development of these possibilities will depend on the interest of the respective players.



Fig. 2. Visualisation of the revitalised Spīķeri Block

The €7m investment made by the project constitutes only 28% of the total funds invested in the revitalisation of the block by private partners and other funding programmes. At the same

time, the project will lead to an increase of investment in the regeneration of the Spīķeri Block to €25m.

It is expected that as a result of this project this derelict area will be revitalised into a modern public space suited for culture, education and entertainment. In particular, the project will make the following socio-economic impact:

- it will increase the proportion of good quality infrastructure in the block from 30% to 90%;
- it will raise the attractiveness and competitiveness of the block, increasing the number of enterprises registered and operating in the block from 40 before the project to 60 after its completion. The number of employees in the block will rise from 50 now to 300 in the future;
- it will increase the proportion of adequate and good quality pedestrian and cycle paths in the block and the adjacent area from 40% to 90%, which should intensify the flow of visitors to the block;
- the reconstruction of the tunnel will increase road safety on the riverbank, minimising the number of road accidents and traffic offences;
- the indirect beneficiaries of the project – Riga’s inhabitants and visitors – will gain access to the bank of the River Daugava, to historical architecture monuments, and to various cultural, educational and entertainment activities provided in the block.

Lessons to take away

The success of the project builds on the following five aspects that can also be used as lessons in urban regeneration by other cities facing similar urban development challenges.

First, **effective public-private partnership** is needed. A clear division of responsibilities and ownership assures effective public-private partnership, transparency of the implementation process and sustainability of the achieved results. Public-private partnership should be understood not so much as a formal approach based on a public procurement process, but as a more practical process of cooperation and equal co-leadership.

Secondly, a **strategic approach** should be taken to the urban development and regeneration of the derelict area that is rooted in both public and private development strategies, all supported by the involved parties. Private initiatives can be used more actively in planning and managing the strategic development of the city, and the private sector can be involved more actively in developing and implementing EU-funded projects. This ensures more sustainable results and reduces resistance by the population towards changes in the urban environment.

Expert advice should be sought from architects and urban development planners, in order to find the best, most suitable and innovative solutions to develop the infrastructure of the derelict area. Regeneration of the derelict area, being a large-scale and complex process, should start with setting out a clear development strategy. This will provide a framework for developing various projects that are complementary to each other, as well as welcoming initiatives and new ideas from any interested player.

The **wider public** should be involved through opinion polling to check users’ preferences for the regeneration and their expectations for its operation. It is important to work with the wider public from the very first days of planning the regeneration, so as to ensure a two-way communication process where stakeholders and public can both be active and express their opinions. This will raise the area’s visibility and identity, as well as minimising any public opposition to the changes foreseen. If the development process of the area is deliberate and sequential, this does not require any expensive communication.

Lastly, take a **step-by-step** approach to developing and implementing the investment, starting with a sketch design and feasibility study for upgrading the infrastructure, followed by a detailed technical analysis of the specific improvements of the infrastructure, to be used as a

basis for construction work. The detailed technical analysis should preferably be developed before preparing the funding proposal, since the total project costs could be much larger than the initial estimate.

The revitalisation of the Spīķeri Block provides a good example of successful public-private partnership and cooperation among a fairly large number of actors representing diverse fields of operation. The revitalisation process integrates a number of projects funded by different funding sources that are implemented by the various actors involved – enterprises, NGOs and the municipality – all leading to the successful urban regeneration of the formerly derelict area. It also demonstrates how 'soft' and 'hard' activities can run in parallel to raise the visibility and recognition of the Spīķeri Block among Riga's inhabitants and visitors.

The key success of the relatively smooth development of the Spīķeri Block lies in its central location, well-renovated buildings and ability to attract young and creative people – artists, actors, musicians, etc. As a result, the block has been transformed from a derelict area into an important player in the cultural scene of the city, and is now host to exhibitions of contemporary art, modern theatre and music, as well as gourmet restaurants.

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