

DEVELOPMENT AND LOCATION PATTERNS OF CREATIVE QUARTERS IN RIGA

RADOŠO KVARTĀLU ATTĪSTĪBAS UN IZVIETOJUMA IEZĪMES RĪGĀ

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Abstract

While investigation of the phenomenon of creative quarters in Western cities has long been widespread, city quarter development, both the process itself and discourse on this subject, is rather new in the post-socialist space. The aim of this research is to provide a general insight into the development of creative quarters in Riga, focusing on their evolution in terms of geographical location and development patterns, such as timeline and trajectories. This study identified nine creative quarters in Riga. The findings indicate that six out of nine quarters are located in the inner city of Riga, and seven out of nine are located in industrial areas. Furthermore, this research revealed that most of them have been established during the last six years, with at least one new quarter each year. It also reveals that eventually the creative quarters experience capitalisation and expand beyond creative industries, beginning to offer other services.

Keywords: *creative quarters, creative class, gentrification, inner-city, Riga*

Introduction

The study of urban spaces is continuously experiencing the emergence of new and broad discourses and concepts that seek to brand urban spaces based on ongoing urban development processes. We have seen smart cities (Silva et al., 2018; Batty et al., 2012), global cities (Clark, 2016; Sassen, 1991), eco-cities (Cugurullo, 2018; Joss, 2011) and others. In this paper, the concept of a creative city will be explored through the lens of quarter formation.

It has long been debated that creatives have an impact on shaping urban areas by either creating specific creative enclaves or contributing to various urban development processes (Bader & Bialluch, 2008; Florida, 2017; Gainza, 2017). Creative enclaves – or, as they are known, creative quarters – can be either organically originated or purposefully developed – or both, in cases where a top-down approach is implemented and an organically originated quarter eventually receives an influx of capital to boost its development. Place-making strategies and policies intend to develop spaces for the creative economy (Evans, 2009). However, it is yet to be explored how exactly strategically planned urban spaces and non-planned venues can be compared in terms of “success”, their impact on neighbourhood-scale processes and shaping the city as a whole.

While investigation of the phenomenon of creative quarters in Western cities has long been widespread, city quarter development, both the process itself and the discourse on it, is rather new in the post-socialist space (Jocic et al., 2017; Neducin & Krkljes 2022). Whether refurbished industrial heritage sites, perforated urban areas turned into music and arts spaces, or several venues forming a multifunctional creative cluster, creative quarters are no longer limited to large-scale urban metropolises.

With reference to the fast-growing number of creative quarters, Riga is often compared to “Berlin some fifteen years ago” – and the booming trend of quarterisation is hardly unnoticeable. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has left an impact on creative and leisure industries worldwide (Khlystova et al., 2022; Vitalisova et al., 2021), previous research suggests that creative quarters in Riga were able to successfully adapt to these unprecedented struggles, by, for instance, re-structuring their operational strategies and introducing new services, such as delivery during lockdown (Feizaka, 2021). While some were forced to shut down their operations for a while, it is worth mentioning that the pandemic did not reduce the number of creative quarters in Riga – on the contrary, two new quarters were established during the pandemic.

The aim of this research is to provide a general insight into the development of creative quarters in Riga, focusing on their evolution in terms of geographical location and development patterns, such as timeline and trajectories. This case study of creative quarters in Riga was conducted primarily by an analysis of creative and cultural venues in Riga, including publicly available information and media publications, which was followed by semi-structured interviews with representatives of several different quarters.

Location patterns of the creative quarters in Riga

This study identified nine creative quarters of commercial characteristics in Riga: Kalnciema quarter, K. K. fon Stricka Villa, Tallinas Street quarter, Lastadija, Provodnik, VEF quarter, Sporta 2 quarter and Vagonu terrace. Given the scale of Riga, it does seem that calling a venue a quarter has become a trend. There are other venues in Riga carrying the word “quarter” in their name (e.g. Magdalenas quarter, Barona quarter); however, they were developed for other, non-creative reasons, such as commercial and residential purposes.

The location of the creative quarters reveals several patterns. Firstly, six out of nine quarters identified are located in the inner-city of Riga (Figure 1). Andrejosta quarter, Sporta 2 quarter, K.K. fon Stricka Villa, Tallinas Street quarter, Vagonu terrace and Kalnciema quarter are located in inner-city neighbourhoods that are adjacent to the centre, yet are not in the centre itself, which is a common gentrification scenario, as centre-adjacent ex-working-class neighbourhoods are usually undergoing a process of gentrification, and Riga is no exception (Feizaka, 2021). While the other three quarters – Provodnik, Lastadija and VEF quarter – are technically outside the

inner-city, Lastadija and VEF quarter are in close proximity to it. It is also worth noting that only one creative quarter – Kalnciema quarter – is located on the left bank of Riga.

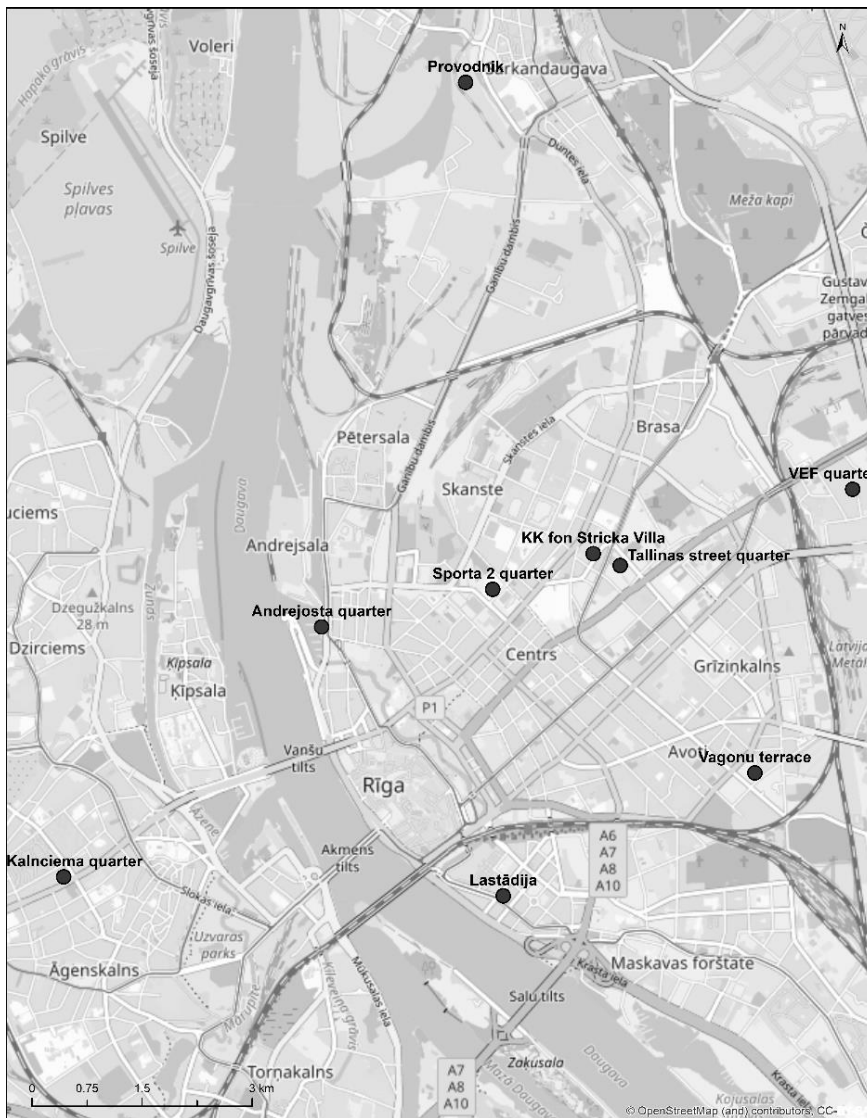


Figure 1. Location of creative quarters in Riga (author's figure)

Furthermore, the findings suggest that seven out of the nine creative quarters were established in areas that have either historically been or currently are industrial. These are mainly former factories, breweries or other large-scale production premises that have either undergone renovations and been refurbished, or have simply offered space for creatives. Kalnciema quarter and Lastadija, both of which have no industrial heritage, used to serve as residential premises.

Development patterns of creative quarters in Riga

The findings suggest that more than two thirds of the creative quarters in Riga have emerged over the last six years. The first creative quarter in Riga – Kalnciema

quarter – was established in 2006. An ensemble of wooden architecture, it was a part of government-sponsored refurbishments of Kalnciema Street before the then-upcoming NATO Summit. Moreover, this was the only creative quarter established in 2000s, which can partially be explained by the financial crisis at the end of that decade. More intensive development of creative quarters in Riga emerged some ten years later, especially since 2017, with at least one new quarter emerging every year since then (Figure 2).

Figure 2. **Timeline of the development of creative quarters in Riga** (author's figure)



Creativity, however, is not the only driving force behind their development. Rather, it is used as a catalyst, initially establishing the quarter as a creative venue, with potential for eventual capitalisation, whether this is intended or unintended. First, the idea, the image, the myth of the venue is created. Then, once word has spread and the venue has gained enough attention, it provides a space for creative strategies and manoeuvres for income attraction. The scenarios for eventual capitalisation are diverse. It could be, for example, the introduction of entrance fees, offering to rent their premises for video or movie production, opening more sophisticated bars onsite (e.g. offering gimlets and oysters instead of the usual cider and fries). However, one of the quarters in Riga demonstrates an opposite example. At first, a brewery was established in a historical industrial area, which was then followed by a crowdfunding campaign with the aim of creating a diverse and creative quarter, which, eventually, would be a place for socialising.

Furthermore, the development patterns of some of the creative quarters suggest that it won't stop just there. While they generally start operation as creative, sometimes slightly alternative venues, there is a growing tendency – or maybe even an urge – towards multifunctionality. In other words, after a while, creativity alone is not enough, and thus the quarter experiences further development. This further expansion typically includes options such as offering office space, space for co-working or storage options for creative businesses; hosting NGOs; or even developing residential buildings.

It is worth noting that the quarterisation process in Riga also bears the characteristics of revitalisation. On one hand, the development of creative quarters in gentrifying neighbourhoods positively affects the image of those neighbourhoods, thus contributing to the process of gentrification. On the other hand, at a local neighbourhood scale, they can be regarded as examples of urban revitalisation, contributing to improvement of the quality of life and general conditions for local communities, as some of the quarters were initially established due to active social movements. Besides, it should be noted that Riga has both quarters that emerged and developed somewhat organically, and others that were purposely planned and developed as a part of the culture economy. There is no evidence that one type in some way outshines and outcompetes another, and thus at this point it can be agreed that they co-exist in urban space, providing visitors with a wide range of choices.

Conclusion

The development of creative quarters in Riga has intensified, amounting to nine quarters as of 2023. Given Riga's scale, it does seem that including the word "quarter" in a venue's name has become a trend. Two thirds of the creative quarters in Riga are located in inner-city neighbourhoods of Riga, close to the centre, which correlates with the process of gentrification in these neighbourhoods. Furthermore, seven out of nine creative quarters identified are located in areas that have had industrial characteristics, either currently or historically.

This research revealed that creativity and the arts are the initial purposes for developing creative quarters in Riga. Eventually, as the image and the myth around the venue is created, it enters the stage of capitalisation. In other words, income-generating activities, such as introducing entrance fees or renting out the premises of the venue for various creative activities, become part of the development of the quarter. While this is a common scenario, it does not apply to all the creative quarters in Riga.

The findings also suggest that while creative quarters initially serve as creative venues, there is a growing tendency for further, broader development, eventually transforming them into multifunctional spaces. Potential strategies for further expansion can include – but in the case of Riga are not limited to – offering space for co-working, offering storage space options for creatives and their businesses, hosting NGOs etc.

To sum up, the general development patterns of the creative quarters in Riga so far can be described in three words: inner-city, industrial, evolving. The latter provides room for further debates regarding the strategies and trajectories for further development of creative quarters in Riga; thus, considering the findings of this study, the question can be posed: are capitalised, multifunctional quarters the future of urban development in Riga?

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Kopsavilkums

Radošo kvartālu attīstības un izvietojuma iezīmes Rīgā. Radošo kvartālu pētniecība rietumvalstu pilsētās jau izsenis ir plaši izplatīta, savukārt postsociālisma telpā gan radošo kvartālu attīstības process, gan diskurss ap to ir visai jauns. Šī pētījuma mērķis ir sniegt vispārēju ieskatu radošo kvartālu attīstībā Rīgā, koncentrējoties uz to attīstību, pievēršot uzmanību ģeogrāfiskajam izvietojumam un attīstības tendencēm. Šajā pētījumā tika apzināti deviņi radošie kvartāli Rīgā. Iegūtie dati liecina, ka seši no deviņiem kvartāliem atrodas Rīgas iekšpilsētas apkaimēs, bet septiņi no deviņiem kvartāliem atrodas industriāla rakstura teritorijās. Turklāt pētījums atklāja, ka lielākā daļa radošo kvartālu Rīgā ir radušies pēdējo sešu gadu laikā, katru gadu veidojoties vismaz vienam jaunam kvartālam. Tāpat rezultāti liecina, ka ar laiku radošie kvartāli piedzīvo kapitalizāciju un to darbība attīstās arī ārpus radošajām nozarēm, piedāvājot arī citus pakalpojumus.

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