For the conference: *Present and Future of Residents of Riga in Post-war Large-scale Housing Estates – Possibilities and Challenges of Urban Transformation*

**Description of the presentation:**
Edgars Bērziņš

**Objectives and criteria in the context of revitalisation of post-war residential districts of Riga**
(Reflections after the study *Possibilities of Improvement of the Quality of Residential Built-up Areas in Post-war Housing Estates of Riga*)

Let’s start with housing estates as such.

In the post-war Europe large-scale housing estates (in some places in satellite cities as well) emerged as a solution to the housing shortage as the countries were recovering economically. With the emergence of private ownership, this type of mass construction of residential areas was not long-lived due to the lack of demand. Yet the completed buildings underwent several improvements as the quality of life and the housing standards improved. Whereas in the countries with restricted private ownership, commonly referred to as post-socialist, the construction of large-scale housing estates continued up to the 1990s, accounting for a large proportion in the housing stock, however, under democracy this type of homes fails to satisfy the interests of the majority of residents. The abovementioned also applies to us and presents a problem not yet properly recognized in the development scenarios.

Let’s not forget that during the occupation years the State determined the scope of the construction boom, location of housing estates, type of buildings and their design, type of flats and their size; and when the buildings were completed, the State issued keys to the new flats processing the queues of potential residents. The potential resident had a right only twice to refuse or exchange the offered type of home and its location (condominiums existed in a limited amount).

Unfortunately, as it turns out, the incorrectly performed processes of land denationalisation and privatisation actually transformed the large-scale housing estates into urban spaces of limited development. The results of this transformation are evident today. We have flat owners, who are not able to agree on privatisation of one building, let alone privatisation of a group of buildings, which would at least partially allow organising and renovating the lost shared public open space. Whereas the interests related to the forced land lease prevent rational use of the built-up area in a socially acceptable manner. The aforementioned implies that a certain re-transformation would be required as a short-term objective, as well as the instruments for its implementation, especially the legal ones.
Let’s continue with objectives and criteria.

“A good home in an appealing environment” is a general objective because anyone would choose it. Yet “good” may mean different things to different people. The same refers to “appealing environment”. So, the criteria will be different and the specific objectives must be different as well. Whereas the objective will be real only if it is based on justified and motivated desires (interests). What about the interests today in the large-scale housing estates? Naturally, private ownership dictates that interests of the owner should prevail, and to a certain extent they need to comply with the interests of tenants.

Let’s review the groups of real estate owners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal subject</th>
<th>Owns land</th>
<th>Owns flat</th>
<th>Rents land</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Owner A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>There are virtually no owners of this group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner B</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>There are many such owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>This is the majority group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothetically, what interests may the owners of these groups have?

**Owner A** (there are virtually no owners of this group in large-scale housing estates):

A.1. The interest to improve quality of the environment, increasing the value of the property and thus the income from the rent, to attract wealthier tenants.
A.2. The interest to manage the property more efficiently, increasing the profit.
A.3. The interest to extend the property (adding additional space).

**Owner B** (owners of this group are mostly those who have recovered land property under the privatised buildings (or their parts) with forced land lease):

B.1. The interest to increase the value of the land property and thus, the amount of the forced rent payment.
B.2. The interest to find a more profitable use for the unused part of land (establishing an independent land unit with building rights).
B.3. The interest to increase the rentable area, improving a proportion between the “unused” and the rented part.

**Owner C** (the owners of this group are mostly the owners of privatised flats or the municipality):

C.1. The interest to improve the quality of the housing (flat, shared spaces of the house and public open space), improving the living conditions, increasing the value of the flat.
C.2. The interest to reduce operational costs and amount of the rent.
C.3. The interest to improve the quality of the housing (use bigger area) through external investments.

As you can see, many interests overlap, while the problem may actually pertain to the fact that the interests as such are not adequately acknowledged and there is no real motivation for taking action to implement them. The aforementioned not only outlines the short-term objectives but also the area for research.

In conclusion I would like to touch upon the criteria or more specifically one of the criteria that is very important but which has been excluded from the official term “housing standard”.

Claus Georg Schöning writes in his book *Städtebau im Übergang zum 21. Jahrhundert (Urban Construction Approaching the 21st Century)*: “If we agree to the statement that the first and ultimate goal of urban construction is to satisfy the need for housing in general, then the prevailing desire most definitely is the wish to have a house with a private garden. Unfortunately, it is impossible from many viewpoints, yet it is desirable for private houses to constitute at least two thirds of the housing stock, while improvement of cramped flats should continue to avoid co-habitation problems, so that they would become more acceptable than before”.

This quotation in itself is worth a separate discussion, as it points to a very important question that can be answered finding out if we wish for the same things? How persistent they might be? What factors and how would affect them? I could go on, but these, as well as all above mentioned questions are the housing policy issues.

**Abstract**

Edgars Bērziņš  
**Objectives and criteria in the context of revitalisation of post-war residential districts of Riga**

The presentation contains author’s reflections after the study *Possibilities of Improvement of the Quality of Residential Built-up Areas in Post-war Housing Estates of Riga* that was performed in 2011. In the presentation a home in post-war large-scale housing estates is described as a progressive product of its time, whose share in the housing stock of post-socialist countries has become disproportionately large. As a result of faulty denationalisation and privatisation processes today large-scale housing estates have been transformed into an urban space with a limited development potential. The presentation outlines the objectives for further action to solve this problem as well as criteria for evaluation of housing policy.