The urban design of new residential areas in the Soviet Union has long been criticized for creating open spaces both too large and lacking in clear structure. These qualities of the built environment are blamed for negatively impacting public everyday life in open spaces of the housing estates. Objective of this thesis is to revisit these assumptions and trace the development of open space aesthetic in Riga in order to assess the possible impact of spatial aesthetic on everyday life in particular areas.

I have narrowed the vague concepts of “largeness” and “disorderliness” by introducing measurable physical categories of space that virtually cover all possible spatial configurations: “spacious, well structured”, “open, undefined”, “enclosed”, and “blocked views”. In the theory of evolutionary aesthetics – the premises of which I use – the former category is known for its likability, the latter ones – for their dislike amongst lay-men. Hence, the spaces that are spacious and well structured possess potential to attract people, and the spaces that belong to other categories are assumed to avert humans. Accordingly, this paper poses the research question: which of the above mentioned categories are prominent in the open space of residential areas in Riga in various decades? Four cases studies are examined: Agenskalna priedes, Kengarags I, Zolitude, Lenina iela. My hypothesis suggests that three of the categories – open, undefined, enclosed and blocked views – were gradually brought to their climax in the period of the 1960s and 1970s in Riga - as shown by the case studies of Kengarags I and Zolitude housing estates. By contrast, the residential areas of the Latvian capital planned in the late 1950s and early 1980s were dominated by the use of the category called spacious, well structured, as exemplified by the Agenskalna Priedes and Lenina Iela projects.

To conclude, such areas as Agenskalna Priedes, Lenina iela from the stand point of spatial aesthetic have great potential for vivid every day life in the areas and so do smaller parts of Kengarags I and Zolitude. However, in latter ones due to the presence of category “open, undefined” at greats portions of these residential complexes the potential of diverse and vivid everyday life is rather small.