

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Riga (Latvia)

No 852

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The historic centre of Riga
<i>Location</i>	City of Riga
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Latvia
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The historic centre of the City of Riga is considered to be of outstanding universal value because it represents a unique artistic value, comprising aesthetic achievements from all the historical styles from Romanesque to Functionalism. It contains a large number of historic buildings of monumental importance from the three national groups involved over the centuries in its creation: Latvian, German, and Russian. Riga was a member of the Hanseatic League and was strongly influenced by northern Germany during the early centuries of its growth. In the 17th and 18th centuries, as part of the Kingdom of Sweden, it acquired buildings by Swedish engineers and Swedish place-names. The cultural influence of Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian minorities can also be identified in some buildings. The proportions of its townscape constitute one of the features of Riga, which is comparable in its multicultural character with Prague.

Criterion i

Riga has exerted a considerable influence within the Baltic cultural area on subsequent developments in architecture. As one of the largest ports and trading centres on the Baltic it provided the meeting place for the achievements of the western and eastern European cultures. As the only technical university for architecture in the Baltic States until World War I, the Riga Polytechnic promoted the dissemination of its own characteristic architecture to Tallinn, Vilnius, and the towns of western Tsarist Russia.

Criterion ii

The historic centre of Riga is among the most characteristic examples of a European capital city, representing significant cultural, social, artistic,

scientific, and industrial development throughout its eight-hundred-year history.

Criterion iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the historic centre of Riga is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Archaeological excavations in the Old Town have shown that there were settlements of the local tribes, the Livs and the Cours, along with some foreign trading posts, on the peninsula formed by the confluence of the Ridzene and Daugava rivers by the late 11th century, and the place became a cross-roads for trade between east and west. Livonia was christianized in 1184 by the German monk Meinhard, but early chronicles attribute the establishment of the city to Bishop Albert in 1201. However, almost nothing is known about the layout of this first city. Its simple wooden buildings were concentrated on the tip of the peninsula around the harbour and the streets were made of logs. There appears to have been no defensive enclosure wall.

German settlers brought stone building techniques with them, and two castles were built, one for the Bishop and the other for the knights of the Teutonic Order, who accompanied Albert on his mission to Livonia. A stone defensive wall was constructed in 1210, to enclose all the existing settlements, including the foreign trading posts. Vigorous opposition from the merchants forced the Bishop to accept the Visby Law, which assigned important rights to citizens.

However, strife between the Bishop and the Order on the one hand and the merchants on the other persisted, and in 1221 the inhabitants successfully rebelled against German domination. A town council was elected by the body of the citizenry to become its legislative and executive body. The independent city prospered, becoming the third largest mercantile centre on the Baltic (after Lübeck and Gdansk), and in 1282 it formed an alliance with Lübeck and Visby to become a member of the Hanseatic League. Its wealth increased as Riga assumed the role of the principal port handling Russian furs, wax, timber, tar, potash, tallow, and leather going westwards and cloth, salt, herrings, wine, beer, and spices moving into the Russian heartland.

The 13th and the early 14th centuries saw Riga grow in size to some 28ha. Work began on the three main churches that survive to the present day and on a number of imposing public and commercial buildings. Regulations promulgated first in 1293 prohibited the use of wood for construction and north German stone techniques were brought in. By the 15th century Riga was a typical large Hanseatic town, with winding streets and densely packed dwelling houses, a large

market square in the centre on which the town hall was situated, and strong fortifications (which were to be radically reconstructed from 1537 onwards to counter the new weapon, artillery). By the end of the 16th century the population had risen to over ten thousand.

The mid 16th century saw two strong forces acting on Riga. It embraced the Reformation and the teachings of Martin Luther and successfully resisted the Counter Reformation in the 1530s and 1540s. However, it was unable to stand up to the forces of Ivan the Terrible in 1559. Russian occupation was followed by Polish domination, and Riga stood between Poland and the ambitions of Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden. In 1621 Riga became part of the enlarged Swedish kingdom, and experienced many years of war during the struggles between Sweden and Russia. In 1710, following the defeat of Charles XII of Sweden at the battle of Poltava, Riga fell to the Russian army after a siege of nine months, to remain part of the Tsarist Russian Empire until the creation of the first Republic of Latvia in 1918.

Both Sweden and Russia made Riga the administrative capital of the Baltic countries. During the Russian period, the administrative centre moved from the Old City to the former castle of the Teutonic Knights outside the walls. There was also considerable suburban expansion, in 1769 and again in 1815, on a checkerboard layout. Throughout this period Riga experienced changes in its building styles. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries the emphasis was on Classicism, expressed in the form of single-storey wooden buildings, especially in the new suburbs but also replacing earlier buildings in the Old City.

The advent of Russian rule in the mid 18th century resulted in a short period of economic stagnation, but by the end of the century booming foreign trade led to considerable industrial development. The population rose from over 60,000 in 1857 to over 300,000 forty years later. Riga was the fifth largest city in the Russian Empire (after Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev, and Warsaw) and its largest port, whilst its factories were responsible for 5.7% of the gross industrial production of the Empire.

This new prosperity led to a radical new approach to the city's urban structure. The fortifications were levelled in 1857 and a new plan for the reconstruction of the city was implemented in 1857-63. As a result, the whole spatial and structural design of the city changed. The space occupied by the walls was replaced by a green belt of gardens, and outside these a new semi-circular sweep of broad boulevards was laid out. The new city that developed beyond these boulevards was endowed with many public buildings - theatres, schools, the university, the central post office, and the central railway station.

The bourgeoisie of Riga used their wealth to build imposing private residences and apartment blocks in the expanding suburbs, where an earlier ordinance forbidding the use of stone for building was rescinded. Latvian and Russian architects adopted the European movements enthusiastically, and in

particular *Art Nouveau*, which came from Finland. This developed its own characteristics in Riga, where a national style was created by graduates of the Riga Polytechnic.

During the two decades of the first Latvian Republic it was Functionalism that dominated the architecture of Riga, adding to its stylistic diversity. The project for modernizing the medieval Old City, as part of which a number of blocks were completely rebuilt and several streets widened, came to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of World War II. During that conflict the Old City suffered grievously from bombardment, and only the most outstanding monuments, such as St Peter's Church and some medieval houses, were restored.

Description

The area of the historical centre of Riga nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List consists of three elements: the medieval Old City (35ha), the 19th century semi-circle of boulevards, and the 18th and 19th century former suburban quarters lying outside the boulevards, with a checkerboard layout.

There are several major churches in the *Old City*. Building of the Cathedral, dedicated to the Virgin, with its adjacent monastery, began in 1211; it was largely reconstructed in the 14th and 15th centuries and underwent renovation and restoration in 1886-1906. In its present form, there are elements of Romanesque and Gothic side by side with Late Renaissance Mannerism, Baroque, Classicism, and Neo-Gothic.

St Peter's Church is first mentioned in 1209, but construction of the present building began in 1408. Massive reconstruction work was necessary after World War II damage. Its spire, originally raised in 1690, is one the major landmarks of the Old City. The three elegant Baroque portals on the west facade are a notable feature of this building, now in use as an exhibition and concert hall.

St John's Church was, in its original role as the church of the Dominican monastery, in Late Gothic style. However, in 1582 after the Reformation it was enlarged and rebuilt in the Renaissance idiom to the design of a Dutch architect.

The narrow-fronted building plots, typical of medieval European towns, survive to a considerable extent within the Old City. However, few medieval houses are still intact; of these one of the most interesting is the House of the Three Brothers, an impeccably restored group from the 15th century now combined to serve as the headquarters of the State Inspection for Cultural Heritage. The late 17th century Reutem's House and Dannenstern's House are more monumental buildings, notable for their interior decorations and fittings as well as their impressive facades.

The towns walls were demolished in the mid 19th century, but one section has been reconstructed, complete with bastion. The last gate surviving is the attractive Swedish tower (1698), which now serves as the House of Architects. Elements of the Riga Castle, begun by the Teutonic Knights, are still extant, but

have been extensively reconstructed. The Arsenal, built by the Russians in the 1820s, is a handsome structure in Russian Classicism style.

The impressive sweep of the *boulevards*, lying outside the gardens and the canal on the site of the former defences, provides an attractive frame around much of the Old City. The boulevards have many important 19th and early 20th century public buildings fronting on to them, including the National Theatre and the Museum of Latvian Art. The creation of the boulevards coincided with the reign of Eclecticism in Europe, and this movement is abundantly represented. The gardens themselves are excellent examples of municipal garden planning, laid out between 1879 and 1914.

The *suburbs* that expanded and developed so rapidly from the mid 19th century onwards are notable for both the surviving wooden buildings in the classical Russian style and the extraordinary wealth of buildings that arose after the removal of the fortifications and the implementation of the new city plan, and in particular in the closing decade of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century. The era of Eclecticism allowed architects to produce many flights of fancy, well illustrated by the "House of the Cat" on Meistaru Street.

However, it was *Art Nouveau (Jugendstil)*, which reached Riga via Finland at the very end of the 19th century, that provided the suburban area with its most noteworthy feature. There are countless examples, perhaps the most outstanding of which are the works of Mikhail Eisenstein in Alberta and Elizabeth Streets. National Romanticism evolved from *Jugendstil* in Latvia, again on the Finnish model. This movement is represented by the work of architects such as E. Laube, K. Pekšens, and A. Vanags, with some striking examples of their work in Alberta and Brivibas Streets.

Riga was a major industrial city, and it also possesses an impressive heritage of workers' housing from the 19th and 20th centuries. The workers' housing estate bounded by Tallinn Street and Valmiera Street, complete with its own church and school, is an outstanding example of this type of residential unit.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The legal status of the area covered in the nomination is provided by the 1992 Law concerning the Protection of Cultural Monuments (with amendments 1993 and 1995) and the 1992 Regulations for Listing, Protection, Use and Restoration of Cultural Monuments. It relates to both individual buildings and to areas (of which the nominated historic centre is one). It is necessary for authorization to be obtained from the State Inspection for Heritage Protection (major projects) or from the City of Riga Inspection for Monument Protection (minor projects) for any interventions on protected monuments or in conservation areas. At the present time there are 1674 protected monuments in the historic centre of Riga - 3 urban monuments, 6 archaeological sites, 39

historical monuments (18 cemeteries, 21 buildings), 459 artistic monuments (28 sculptures, 37 interior paintings, 24 icons, 111 monuments in cemeteries, 259 other works of art), and 1167 architectural monuments (41 public buildings, 28 churches, 8 estates, 2 castles, 743 dwellings, 4 parks, 341 other buildings). Each cultural monument has, where appropriate, a protection zone around it, determined by the State Inspection, in which further development is prohibited.

Management

Owners (whether individual, corporate, or official) are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of their property.

The State Inspection has the power to stop any economic activities within the cultural monuments or their protection zones where unauthorized activities are taking place. Monitoring of all protected properties is carried out regularly by the Riga City Inspection for Monument Protection.

All new construction within the historic centre of Riga is prohibited.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

There have been individual actions involving conservation and restoration in the historic centre of Riga for more than a hundred years. However, conservation as a central component of urban planning began with the Regeneration Plan for Old Riga (1976-83). Among its provisions were the return of the Old City to its late 19th century appearance, with the removal of low-quality later structures, the restriction of vehicular traffic, and limitations on the height, roof, form, materials, etc of any new buildings. This has been largely successful (though some insensitive buildings from the Soviet period remain), especially with the banning of virtually all vehicles from the Old City.

The current overall City Plan (1995) and its complementary Strategic Development Plan extend and strengthen the earlier Plan, especially in those parts of the historic centre lying outside the Old City. Specific provisions relating to the built heritage are prescribed in the Building Site Plan and Zoning Regulations, and these appear to be respected in considerable measure.

The area nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List is all covered by conservation area regulations, as is the adequate buffer zone proposed by the State Party. These are confirmed in the City Plan. There are certain buildings within the designated conservation areas that are of recent construction and low architectural merit, such as the Latvija Hotel.

All designation is based on survey and inventory. A detailed architectural inventarization of the entire city is currently in progress, but it is proceeding slowly, owing to problems in funding.

Authenticity

Whilst the overall urban fabric of Riga has retained a high degree of authenticity, some reconstruction and restoration work, especially in the past two decades, has not respected current conservation principles, with the use of inappropriate materials. It is important that the powers available to the State and City Inspections in this respect should be more rigorously applied.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Riga in September 1996. ICOMOS also consulted DoCoMoMo and members of the UNESCO Joint Cultural Study and Action Project to Preserve and Restore World *Art Nouveau/Jugendstil* Architectural Heritage on the architecture of Riga and the coordinator of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Project on the towns of the Hanseatic League on the city's historical and cultural significance.

Qualities

Riga has indisputably played a key role in the economic, commercial, and social history of northern and eastern Europe. It was a leading member of the Hanseatic League and one of the most important industrial cities in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This is reflected in its urban fabric in terms of its street patterns and the quality and style of its buildings. However, damage by war and insensitive demolitions of historic structures in peace-time have adversely affected the character of the Old Town in particular.

Nonetheless, Riga does possess qualities of outstanding universal value in the form of its 19th and early 20th century buildings, particularly its wooden buildings and those of the *Art Nouveau/Jugendstil* movement, which, taken with the overall urban fabric mentioned above, give it qualities not present in any other European town.

Comparative analysis

As a Hanseatic city, Riga does not compare in terms of completeness and authenticity with Lübeck (Germany) or Visby (Sweden), which are already inscribed on the World Heritage List, or with Tallinn (Estonia), nominated for 1997.

If it is evaluated for its importance in European architectural history as an assemblage of *Art Nouveau/Jugendstil* buildings, however, it is impossible to cite any city to compare with Riga. There are outstanding examples of buildings in this style in a number of cities, such as Barcelona, Brussels, Glasgow, Helsinki, Moscow, Paris, Prague, and Vienna. However, these are all single works of art.

It is relevant in this context to note that the Final Report of the 7th Plenary Meeting of the UNESCO International Joint Cultural Study and Action Project to Preserve and Restore World *Art Nou-*

veau/Jugendstil Architectural Heritage, held in Turin (Italy) on 4-9 October 1994, includes "the central part of the town" of Riga in its second list of "buildings for consideration to be included into the World Heritage List." It should be noted in particular that Riga is the only ensemble on either of the Project's lists, all the remainder being individual buildings.

Riga also has a remarkable heritage of fine wooden buildings of the 19th century.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS mission suggested that the area nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List should be amended slightly so as to include the workers' housing settlement, with its church and school, in the area bounded by Tallinn and Valmiera Street. This is of high architectural and historic significance and lies within a conservation area. This proposal was accepted by the State Party.

The inventory of buildings should be completed with the minimum of delay and used as the basis for a detailed programme for the rehabilitation and restoration of the buildings outside the Old City, especially the 19th century wooden structures, whose state of preservation is poor in a disturbing number of cases.

Incentives for investment and restoration should be provided by the State and City administrations. These could take the form of tax exemption and, in certain cases, free transfer of ownership, in return for undertakings that the necessary repair and restoration work will take place, under the supervision of the relevant monuments inspection.

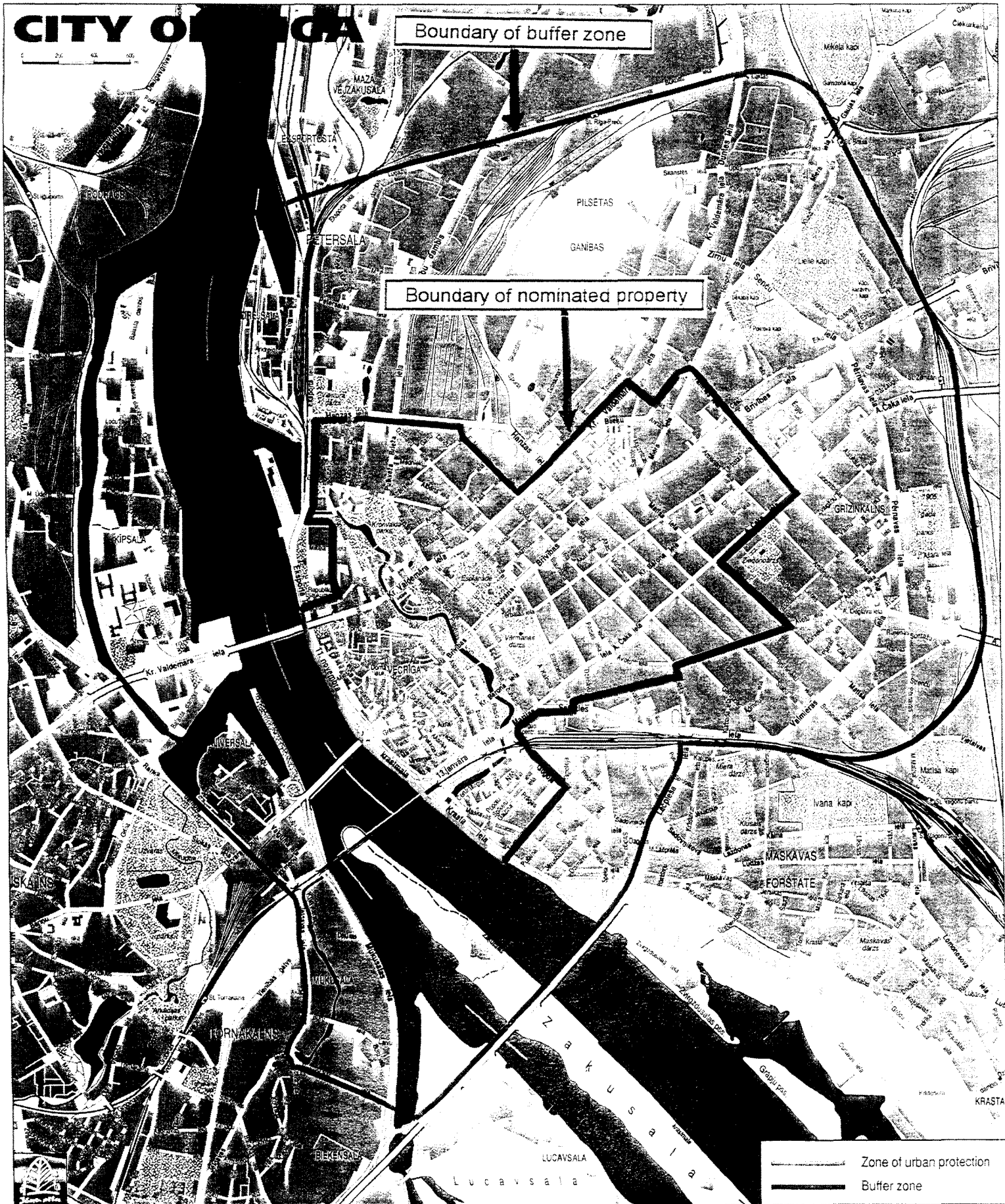
Whilst ICOMOS understands the need for the State Party to benefit from the restoration and rehabilitation of some of its finest buildings by foreign investors, it feels that the relevant authorities should be given greater support in enforcing the regulations governing historic monuments.

Recommendation

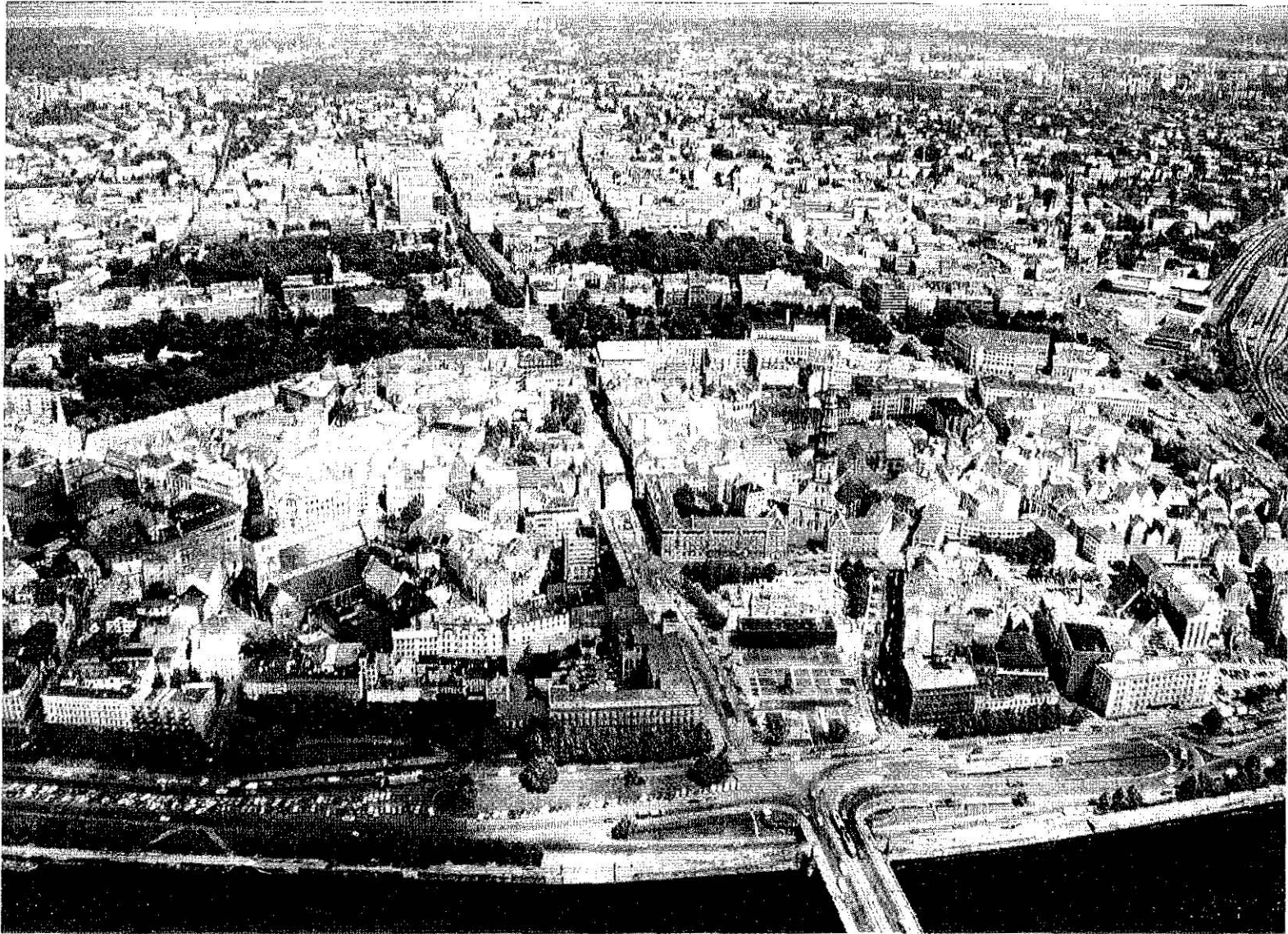
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i and ii*:

The historic centre of Riga, while retaining its medieval and later urban fabric relatively intact, is of outstanding universal value by virtue of the quality and the quantity of its *Art Nouveau/Jugendstil* architecture, which is unparalleled anywhere in the world, and its 19th century architecture in wood.

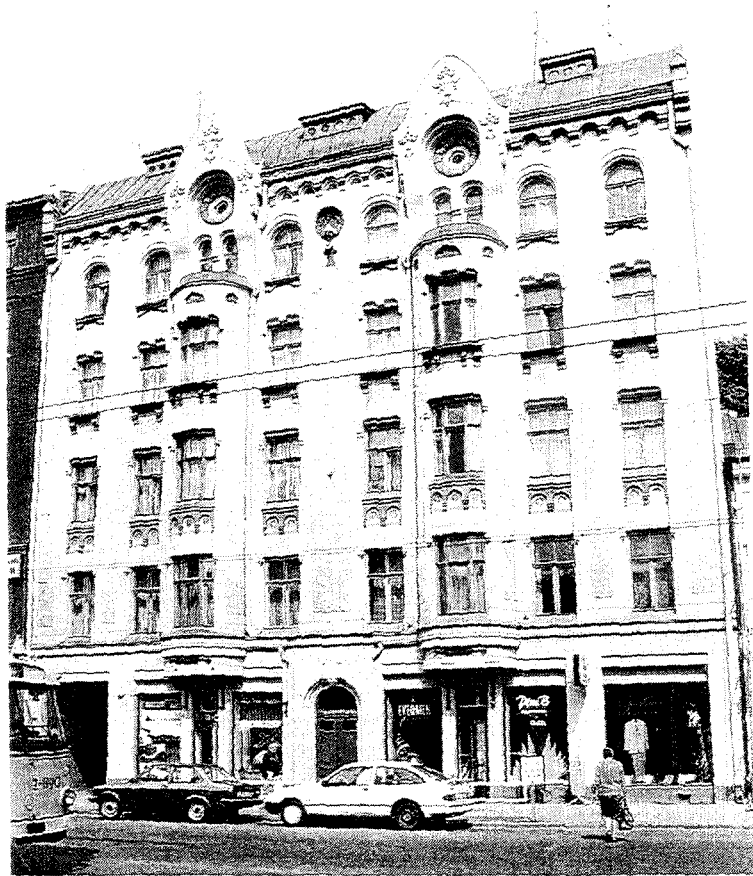
ICOMOS, September 1997



Riga :
Carte indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon /
Map showing nominated area and buffer zone



Riga :
Vue aérienne du Centre-ville /
Aerial view of city centre



Riga :
Édifice Jugendstil de la rue Brivibas /
Jugendstil building in Brivibas Street



Riga :
Bâtiment en bois du 19ème siècle /
19th century wooden building