

Evolution in Latvian Contemporary Architecture: Thirty Years of the Latvian Architecture Award

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of contemporary Latvian architecture by analysing the Latvian Architecture Award Grand Prix-winning works from 1995 to 2024. Using the Davos Baukultur Quality System (DBQS) as an analytical framework, the research integrates discourse analysis of jury statements and architects' narratives with image analysis of architectural drawings and photographs. The study identifies 44 design issues across eight criteria – governance, functionality, environment, economy, diversity, context, sense of place, and beauty – demonstrating the shift in architectural priorities over time. Notably, functionality and aesthetics dominated early discussions, while later projects increasingly emphasized sustainability, cultural identity, and social inclusion. The introduction of the DBQS in 2021 marked a significant period, with projects showing heightened attention to community engagement and environmental challenges. This analysis highlights Latvian architecture's dynamic engagement with cultural, social, and environmental concerns, offering significant insights into contemporary architecture's evolving professional and societal role through the lens of the Latvian Architecture Award.

Introduction

Architecture plays a crucial role in shaping the built environment, reflecting society's cultural, technological, and economic advancements. Beyond fulfilling functional needs, it serves as a medium for conveying complex architectural concepts [1]. Quality of architecture has always been a significant question for discussions at different audiences and scales [2], [3]. Architects leverage the external form of buildings to embody underlying ideas, reflecting broader cultural and intellectual currents. To celebrate these contributions, hundreds of architecture-related awards are presented annually worldwide [4]. These awards range from prestigious global recognitions such as the Pritzker Architecture Prize, which honours lifetime achievement, to regional accolades like the Mies van der Rohe Award, which highlights exemplary European architecture, as well as student honours like the AIA Student Design Awards, which support emerging talent. They not

only serve as platforms to recognize outstanding architects but also act as catalysts for fostering architectural creativity and public awareness and stimulate discourse on architectural quality and development. National-level architecture awards, in particular, offer unique insights into a country's innovative capacity, technological progress, and economic resilience. They often reflect a nation's architectural identity and development and serve as key entry points for observing broader socio-cultural transformations.

In Latvia, the Latvian Architecture Award (Latvijas Arhitektūras gada balva, LAGB) represents the nation's highest honour for architectural achievement. It aims to honour high-quality buildings of the year and emphasize the importance of architecture in daily life and society to the public. Established in 1995 by the Latvian Association of Architects, this award reflects the current architectural landscape in Latvia, highlights major trends, and underscores key processes and developments within the

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industry [5]. After thirty years of awarding, the LAGB has accumulated a series of noteworthy winning projects, offering a unique lens through which to examine the evolution of Latvian architecture. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the Grand Prix works of the Latvian Architecture Award from 1995 to 2024 to trace the development of contemporary Latvian architecture.

To bridge abstract architectural ideas with tangible expressions, this study proposes a new approach for architectural case analysis, grounded in the Davos Baukultur Quality System (DBQS), introduced in 2021 by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture as part of the Davos Declaration [6]. This framework, structured around eight criteria for evaluating Baukultur quality, serves as the foundation for assessing architectural design aspects within the LAGB Grand Prix cases. In this sense, another central aim of this research is to evaluate whether the DBQS can effectively reflect architectural quality and function as an analytical tool for works produced both before and after its inception.

The methodology involves “discourse analysis” of jury statements and architect narratives, from which keywords are extracted and categorized according to the DBQS criteria, serving as sub-levels within eight architectural design aspects. Additionally, “image analysis” is used to assess design practices within each project, allowing for a structured reading of architectural drawings in alignment with the analytical framework and the discourse. Finally, a diachronic genealogical diagram is constructed to explore the evolution of conceptual thinking and design trends over time, providing insights into the progression of architectural concepts, design methodologies, and the broader cultural significance reflected in the award-winning projects. This article then provides a comprehensive background on the LAGB. Following the methodology section, the results demonstrate the potential of this architectural case analysis method and reveal notable trends in the development of winning projects across the eight criteria. Furthermore, this article explores the diversity of design strategies in the LAGB Grand Prix projects, underscoring the evolving nature of contemporary Latvian architecture.

I. An overview of the Latvian Architecture Award

The predecessor of the Latvian Architecture Award was the LAS Best Works of the Year (LAS Gada labākā darbu skates), initiated by the Latvian Association of Architects (Latvijas Arhitektu savienība, LAS) board in 1995. The board clearly defined the following four objectives as guiding principles for this award: (1) identify and promote contemporary Latvian architecture in society; (2) promote the development of Latvian architecture; (3) determine

the relatively best achievements in Latvian architecture; (4) publish the results of the show in the Latvian press and submit them for publication in international architectural yearbooks and other publications [7, 61].

Each year, the award-winning works are announced in the bi-monthly professional magazine *Latvijas Arhitektūra*. The first result of the award was announced in the March 1996 issue. Besides the magazine, the LAS official website has become a more real-time information platform recently. The selection and evaluation process and the categories of submissions have evolved over time. Initially, the award's evaluation process was conducted by a selection jury of 5 to 9 local architecture professionals in a single stage. However, in 2005, ten years after the award's inception, a significant reform was introduced, transitioning to a two-stage selection process. In the first round, a local jury would nominate works to advance to the second round, where an international jury of experts would evaluate the selection jury's nominees and select the finalists and the Grand Prix winner [8]. Additionally, the composition of the jury changes annually, offering a more diverse perspective on the latest achievements in Latvian architecture and the built environment.

Regarding the categories for submission, according to the record in the LAS XIV Congress booklet (1993–1996), the initial submission categories were divided into four main types: *new construction*, *renovation*, *restoration*, and *interior* [9, 11]. Over time, as economic development and architectural trends evolved in Latvia, the award categories have expanded or contracted to reflect these changes. For instance, “Industrial Buildings” appeared in the categories in 2007 and 2008, and “Landscape Architecture” was introduced as a category upon the recommendation of the Latvian Association of Landscape Architects. Currently, the accepted submission categories are divided into two main types. The first is *Objects*, which comprise buildings or other works created as a result of construction. These can include new construction, heritage transformation, renovation, or restoration. This type is further divided into seven categories: Public Buildings, Commercial and Industrial Buildings, Engineering Structures, Individual Residential Buildings, Apartment Buildings, Interiors, and Landscape Architecture (including outdoor facilities and environmental objects). The second type is *Processes*, which comprises work that the candidate considers to be an event in the subject of architecture. This type includes softer programs related to architectural issues, such as exhibitions, television broadcasts, research findings, book publications, etc. [10].

To better promote Latvian contemporary architecture and enhance the international prestige of the award, the LAS Best Works of the Year was renamed the *Latvian Architecture Award* in 2014. Submissions are now open to works located within Latvia (regardless of the author's nationality) or to works by Latvian authors (regardless

of the work's location globally). The awards are granted in three tiers: first, the shortlisted nominees selected by the first-round jury; second, the finalists chosen by the second-round jury; and third, the highest honour, the Grand Prix awarded. The latest evaluation criteria adopted by the LAGB jury are based on the *Eight Criteria of the Davos Baukultur Quality System* introduced in the 2021 Davos Declaration, which assesses high-quality architectural culture, as well as the criteria outlined in the *Architecture Strategy 2022–2027* developed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia [10]. Since the award's establishment in 1995, a total of 30 Grand Prix works have been awarded, comprising 28 works in the type *Objects* and two works in the type *Processes*.

From a sociocultural perspective, the significance of the Latvian Architecture Award extends beyond the professional field of architecture; one of its core missions is to elevate public awareness of architecture's importance in daily life. As one of the largest architectural events in Latvia, the award actively promotes architectural knowledge across society through the selection and public exhibition of outstanding works. In recent years, the LAS has collaborated with local media platforms to encourage public engagement in discussions on the year's best architectural projects through online voting initiatives [11]. The award ceremony is open to the public and includes live streaming, which fosters a deeper understanding of architectural spaces and the built environment, thus positioning architecture as a vital, collective concern in Latvian society. Over the past three decades, LAS has continuously championed socially aware architectural initiatives. This effort, combined with Latvian civil society's active and enthusiastic involvement in public affairs, has contributed to the socialization of architectural events, showcasing Latvia's democratic spirit and grassroots

engagement in architectural development. These features distinguish the Latvian Architecture Award as a unique emblem among national architecture awards worldwide, reflecting a distinctive commitment to public awareness and civic involvement.

II. Research Method

This study employs both discourse analysis and image analysis to examine 28 awarded architectural works of the LAGB Grand Prix between 1995 and 2024, using the eight criteria outlined in the Davos Baukultur Quality System as the framework (see Fig. 1). The eight aspects of architectural design issues include governance, functionality, environment, economy, diversity, context, sense of place, and beauty [6]. The discourse analysis focuses on the jury's evaluations and the architects' design concept narratives, extracting relevant design issues through keyword identification and categorizing them under eight criteria. In this way, the discourse analysis of individual cases allows for an exploration of the potential sources of design concepts. The identified design issues not only facilitate an analysis of whether awarded works and their architects over the years tend to concentrate on specific recurring design topics, but also comparisons between different works can be made. Additionally, through image analysis, including architectural drawings, photographs, and on-site experiences, further analysis of variations in design approaches when addressing the same design issues is enabled. Finally, by constructing a diachronic genealogical diagram linking awarded architectural cases with the eight criteria and design issues, the study investigates the evolution of architectural design trends over time.

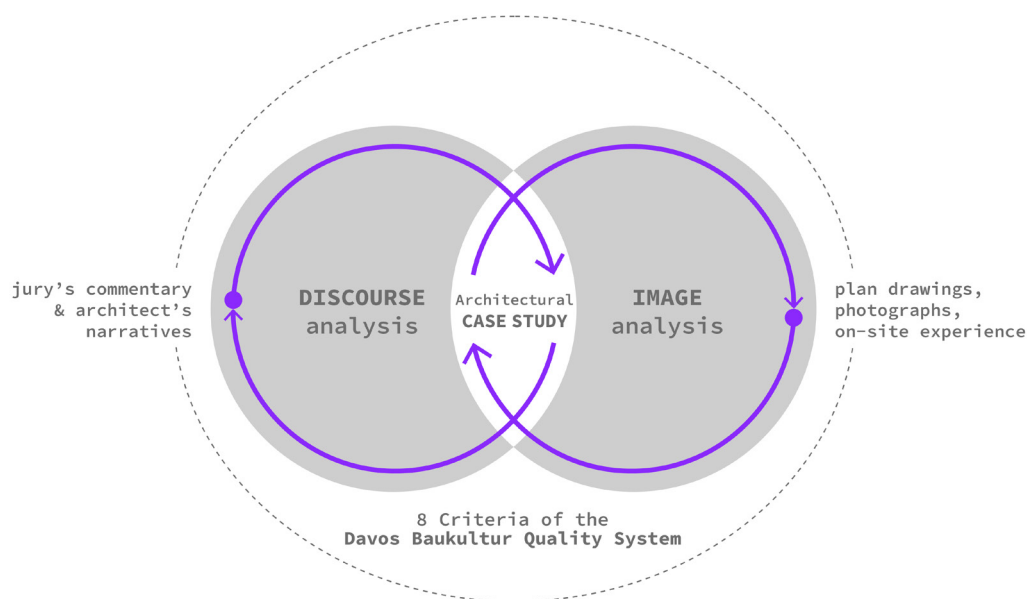


Fig. 1. The methodology of architectural case studies [created by the authors].

A. Analysis framework: Eight criteria of the Davos Baukultur Quality System

The Davos Baukultur Quality System (DBQS) was initiated as part of the broader Davos Process, stemming from the Davos Declaration titled “Towards a high-quality Baukultur for Europe”. The declaration was adopted by the European Ministers of Culture to address the importance of culture in shaping the built environment [6]. The term “Baukultur” in the declaration is a German word composed of “Bau” (building) and “Kultur” (culture). In English, there is no direct equivalent that fully captures its meaning. It is considered a concept “*which includes architecture, heritage, public space, landscape, infrastructure, and a culture process, among other aspects*” [12, 18]. This term has been broadly applied in the German-speaking world to encompass a wide range of senses since the turn of the millennium [13].

To better convey the meaning of this term to non-German speakers and to widely promote the concept of Baukultur across Europe, the 2018 Davos Declaration defined the overarching concept of Baukultur through three core aspects:

1. The existing construction, including cultural heritage assets, and contemporary creation must be understood as a single entity. The existing construction provides an important Baukultur reference for the future design of our built environment.
2. All activities with an impact on the built environment, from detailed craftsmanship to the planning and execution of infrastructure projects that have an impact on the landscape, are expressions of Baukultur.
3. Baukultur not only refers to the built environment but also to the processes involved in its creation [13, 9].

Following the International Conference on Baukultur Quality Standards held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2019, the Swiss government, in collaboration with several international partners, officially launched the Davos Baukultur Quality System in 2021. This tool aims to better define the concept of Baukultur and enable users to assess the quality of Baukultur in specific places. It is structured around eight core criteria: Governance, Functionality, Environment, Economy, Diversity, Context, Sense of Place, and Beauty. Each criterion is linked to principles derived from the Davos Declaration and is supported by questions designed to help users objectively evaluate places. The system is intended to be comprehensive and adaptable to various types of spaces, including buildings, public spaces, cultural landscapes, and infrastructure [6]. Besides, it addresses traditional aspects of the built environment, such as technical, environmental, and economic factors, while also emphasizing its social, cultural, and emotional dimensions. The evaluation framework elevates these “soft”

criteria to the same level of importance as conventional factors, promoting a holistic vision for spatial development and evaluation.

Although the DBQS was officially launched in 2021, the eight criteria it encompasses are rooted in architectural thought and have appeared in multiple contexts over time. According to research on architectural policies across European countries, various nations emphasize the importance of technical, functional, aesthetic, social, and environmental quality aspects within their policies, aiming to support multiple quality requirements in architectural design [14]–[16]. As well as in evaluating the quality of landscape architecture projects, scholars have identified environmental, social, economic, aesthetic, and operational criteria as essential for holistic quality assessment [17]. Furthermore, numerous international sustainable building certification systems, such as LEED, BREEAM, and DGNB, reflect recent quality assessment requirements that address environmental, economic, health and well-being, and sociocultural dimensions [18]–[20].

Historically, architects and scholars have continually addressed these core aspects of architectural quality. From Vitruvius’s principles of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas* in *De architectura*, it already encompasses the aspects of environment, functionality, and beauty in ancient Rome [21]. In reviewing the architectural history of the past century, we can observe that, during the development of modern architecture from the late 19th to the early 20th century, leading modernist architects placed significant emphasis on considerations of economy, environment, functionality, and aesthetics [22]–[24]. As modern architecture reached its peak, a growing wave of critique began to emerge, leading to a more pluralistic approach to architectural styles. One of the earliest movements in this pluralistic evolution was regionalism, which began in the mid-1950s as a reaction against globalization and industrial standardization [25]. Regionalist architecture advocated that buildings should correspond to the geographical features of their sites and use locally sourced materials to reflect the natural conditions and cultural heritage of the area.

Later comes postmodernism, which emerged in the late 1960s as a response to the constraints of modernist architecture. Architects during this period focused on the cultural dimension of architecture and within its environment. The cultural considerations extended beyond broad historical contexts to include classical styles, popular culture, and even the memories of ordinary people [26], [27]. The 1970s, marked by the rise of multiculturalism in Western society, saw architecture influenced by semiotics, positioning it as a medium for social communication. This period also saw explorations into the possibilities of innovation in architectural form and decoration [28]. These architectural and social movements of the 20th century repeatedly underscored the importance of environmental

considerations, diversity, context, and sense of place in architectural design thinking. Similarly, beginning in the 1960s, the United States initiated a new wave of the Modern Environmental Movement [29], which aimed to raise public awareness of land ethics and ecological issues. In this context, various international declarations and cultural heritage conventions were established, prompting the architectural industry, among others, to place greater emphasis on environmental concerns [30], [31]. New architectural principles, such as sustainable architecture, green building design, and adaptive reuse, emerged during this period as central tenets of architectural discourse.

Considerations of governance and economic aspects have likely been present since the development of city-states in human society. For example, in the early 15th century, the construction of the dome for the Florence Cathedral (Santa Maria del Fiore) was planned through an architectural competition. The competing models were displayed on the streets of the city, allowing not only the judges but also the public to envision the future dome. The competition-winning architect was designated as the chief architect and collaborated with the deacons to oversee the cathedral's construction [32]. These points demonstrate that the eight criteria of high-quality architecture outlined in the DBQS are not arbitrarily established but rather reflect core requirements in the historical development of architectural quality assessment. Its systematic organization underscores the DBQS's value not only as a guideline for designing new buildings but also as a robust framework for case studies and architectural analysis, integrating enduring architectural values to support both contemporary projects and evaluations of past architectural works.

B. Study cases: LAGB Grand Prix works from 1995 to 2024

This study analyses the LAGB Grand Prix-winning works from 1995 to 2024. However, as two of the 30 awarded projects, from 1999 and 2010, are categorized as *processes* and do not represent actual buildings or architectural spaces, these two cases have been excluded. Table 1 summarizes the basic information of the remaining 28 projects. Among the 28 cases, 18 are public buildings, including five school buildings, two libraries, two sports facilities, two museums, two theatres, one church, one airport, one open-air concert hall, one healthcare centre, and one outdoor plaza planning project. The remaining 10 cases are private buildings, comprising five residential buildings, two office buildings, two commercial buildings, and one mixed-use building (see Table I). Additionally, 13 of the 28 projects involve design issues related to the restoration, renovation, or integration of existing structures, including case numbers 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26 and 30. Some of these cases not only need to

address the construction of new buildings but also consider the interface between new and existing structures, while some other cases need to address authenticity issues related to historic buildings.

III. Findings

Through discourse analysis, 44 architectural design issues were identified based on eight criteria, as shown in Table II. This section builds on these eight criteria and 44 design issues to construct a diachronic genealogical diagram of the case studies, aiming to explore trends in the awarded projects. Additionally, image analysis is employed to investigate how different winning projects across the years addressed these design issues in their design strategies.

C. Aspects Reflected in the Evolution of Architectural Design Issues

In overall trends, as shown in Table II, 18 out of the 44 design issues across the eight criteria received responses from more than half of the cases (14 cases or more). Among these, the most frequently addressed issue falls under “material, colour, and texture” in the criterion **Beauty**, which was met by all winning works. This highlights the importance of material, colour, and texture choices in creating aesthetic value during the design process and construction. Additionally, materials can be seen as crucial elements reflecting the national industrial conditions of the time and interpreting the architects' design concepts.

Besides, there are four design issues addressed by more than three-quarters of cases (21 cases or more). Firstly, two design issues can be found within the criterion **Functionality**: “natural lighting design” (23 cases) and “visual interaction” (21 cases), both categorized under the sub-criterion of “safety, health, and comfort.” The former emphasizes the need for natural lighting to ensure indoor environmental quality, particularly in terms of health and comfort, while also contributing to the atmosphere of the space, such as creating a sense of sanctity. The latter concerns the visual interactions between the building's interior and exterior, as well as between different interior spaces, fulfilling the users' needs for safety and emotional connection. Both issues add significant diversity to spatial experiences. Another widely addressed design issue is found under the **Economy** criterion, the “social and cultural value” (23 cases). This issue relates to the deep meaning of buildings as carriers of social, cultural, historical, and value-based significance, showing that many of the award-winning projects go beyond physical space to embody broader societal meanings. Similarly, the design issue “architectural form” (22 cases) in the criterion **Beauty** addresses the shape, structure, proportion, and

TABLE I

LAGB Grand Prix Works from 1995 to 2024. The information source of the table was compiled by the authors from the LAS website [33]

Nr.	Year	Work title	Location	Architects	Access	Usage type
1	1995	St. Gregor's school in Saldus	Saldus	A. Andersons, I. Andersone	Public	Education
2	1996	Residential building in Riga, Bajāru iela 59	Rīga	K. Alksnis, A. Kļaviņš, S. Fogle, E. Miķelsone	Private	Residential
3	1997	Vecpiebalga Church renovation	Vecpiebalga	A. Skujiņa	Public	Religion
4	1998	Ice hockey hall in Liepāja	Liepāja	<i>Arhitekta U. Pilēna birojs</i> : U. Pilēns	Public	Sports facility
5	1999	Project <i>Ventspils' Linear Centre Games</i>	Ventspils	<i>Architecture and Planning Department of Ventspils City Council</i>	Public	Process
6	2000	Office building in Riga, Palasta iela 7	Rīga	<i>Arhis</i> : A. Kronbergs, A. Dīmiņš, Ģ. Kilēvics	Private	Office
7	2001	Riga International Airport renovation	Rīga	<i>Arhis; Kronbergs, Kārklīš & Partners</i>	Public	Airport
8	2002	Āgenskalns High School in Riga	Rīga	<i>Brīnišķīgo projektu birojs</i>	Public	Education
9	2003	RIMI Shopping Centre in Riga, Valdemāra iela 112	Rīga	<i>Kubs</i> : Z. Kalinka, P. Venckovičs, J. Lauris	Private	Commercial
10	2004	Private House in Sigulda, Gulbju iela 6	Sigulda	<i>Arhis</i> : A. Kronbergs, J. Lasis, assist. architect K. Šulcs	Private	Residential
11	2005	<i>House of Ruins</i> in Saka Municipality	Liepāja Region	<i>f.l.tadao&lukševics</i> : U. Lukševics, M. Ošāns	Private	Residential
12	2006	A Six-apartment Residential Building in Jūrmala, Jūras iela 32	Jūrmala	<i>Modus Mood</i> : J. Alksnis, N. Saulespurēna, A. Rubenis	Private	Residential
13	2007	<i>Britania</i> Printing House in Daugmale	Rīga Region	<i>Arhis</i> : A. Kronbergs, R. Saulītis, assist. architect U. Jaunsubrēns	Private	Office
14	2008	Gymnasium of the 2nd Secondary and Primary Schools of the Town of Talsi	Talsi	<i>UPB</i> : U. Pilēns, G. Pilēna, Dz. Heinsbergs, I. Ķauķe	Public	Sports facility
15	2009	Pārventa Library in Ventspils	Ventspils	<i>India</i> : P. Bajārs, I. Kalvāns, R. Jansons, I. Baumanes, D. Sotņikova, I. Ļuļe, interior: A. Ķibilde	Public	Culture
16	2010	Exhibition <i>Behind the Curtain</i> . Architect Marta Staņa	Rīga	Curator I. Zibārte, <i>Arhitektūras veicināšanas fonds</i> , architect M. Pilēns <i>1PLUS1</i> , graphic designer E. Zvirgzdiņš <i>Associates, Partners & Sons</i>	Public	Process
17	2011	17 th Century Warehouse Building in Riga, Aldaru iela 5	Rīga	<i>Arhitektes Lienas Griezītes studija; Sudraba Arhitektūra</i> : L. Griezīte, L. Apine, R. Liepiņš, A. Rozentāle, K. Līcis, R. Valdmanis	Private	Commercial
18	2012	Saldus School of Music and Art	Saldus	<i>MADE arhitekti</i> : M. Putrāms, L. Krūmiņa, E. Ozola, U. Sedlovs, L. Amoliņa	Public	Education
19	2014	Riga Design and Art School building renovation	Rīga	<i>Zaigas Gailes birojs</i> : Z. Gaile, L. Griezīte, I. Atavs, A. Šmite, Ģ. Kalinkevičs, I. Solzemniece-Salieniece, D. Gasuls, K. Riba, R. Siņicins	Public	Education
20	2015	Latvian National Library	Rīga	G. Birkerts, M. Ģelzis, M. Mežulis, D. R. Šmits, S. Laganovska, A. Arbidāns	Public	Culture
21		Rundāle Palace Museum	Bauska Region	<i>Rundāle Palace Museum</i>	Public	Culture
22	2016	Latvian National Art Museum renovation and extension	Rīga	<i>Processoffice UAB; A. Skiezgelas Architecture; Arhitektoniskās izpētes grupa SIA</i>	Public	Culture
23	2017	Shaolin Flying Monks Theatre	Zhengzhou, China	A. Mailītis, V. Murāns, I. Menģelis, K. Melzobs, D. Suhanova, A. Odumāne, J. Olonkina	Public	Culture
24	2018	Liepāja State 1st High School	Liepāja	I. Mekša, <i>SIA Wonderfull</i>	Public	Education
25	2019	<i>Salt House</i>	Pāvilosta	B. Bula, <i>Brigita Bula arhitekti</i>	Private	Residential
26	2020	Three Buildings in Riga, Miesnieku iela 13, 15, 17	Rīga	<i>Arhis Arhitekti</i>	Private	Mix-use
27	2021	Mežaparks Open-Air Stage	Rīga	<i>Austra Mailīša and Jura Pogas arhitektu birojs</i>	Public	Open-air concert hall
28	2022	<i>Pērle</i> Social Services Centre	Cēsis	<i>SIA Ēter</i> ; partner <i>SIA Rigers</i>	Public	Health care
29	2023	Daile Theatre Square	Rīga	<i>MADE arhitekti</i> : M. Putrāms, L. Krūmiņa, M. Starka, M. Vaskis, K. Lūkins, L. Šiliņa, J. Slava in collaboration with E. Ozola	Public	Square
30	2024	New Riga Theatre renovation	Rīga	<i>Zaigas Gailes birojs; Sarma & Norde arhitekti</i>	Public	Theatre

spatial configuration of buildings, impacting both visual perception and emotional responses. This reflects not only aesthetic ideals but also the relationship between the building and its surrounding environment.

Other design issues addressed by more than half of the projects include “greening” (20 cases) in the **Functionality** criterion, “climate responsive” (17 cases) and “implementation of the 5 Rs” (16 cases) in the **Environment** criterion, “investment and operation models” (15 cases) in the **Economy** criterion, “vibrant and mixed uses” (16 cases) and “social communication” (20 cases) in the **Diversity** criterion, “history and regional specificities” (15 cases), “cultural landscapes” (18 cases) and “public open space” (14 cases) in the **Context** criterion, “foster place and culture identity” (20 cases) and “social cohesion” (14 cases) in the **Sense of Place** criterion, “façade decoration and building skin design” (19 cases) and “tectonic” (14 cases) in the **Beauty** criterion. Most of these design issues are linked to sustainability, indicating that natural and socio-cultural sustainable development has become a dominant trend in contemporary architecture.

Looking at individual cases in multidimensional responses, 12 cases addressed all eight criteria, with the winning years concentrated after 2002. These include projects numbered 8, 14, 15, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30. In terms of the intensity of design issues, 10 cases met more than half of the 44 design issues. These include projects numbered 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. Among these, seven cases, the *Parventas Library in Ventspils* (2009), the *Saldus School of Music and Art* (2012), the *Latvian National Art Museum renovation and extension* (2016), the *Mežaparks Open-Air Stage* (2021), the *Pērle Social Services Centre* (2022), the *Daile Theatre Square* (2023), and the *New Riga Theatre renovation* (2024) demonstrated both multidimensional and high-intensity responses. All these seven works are public buildings, making them particularly worthy of further exploration.

D. Noteworthy Shifts in Different Year Periods

Reviewing the prominent characteristics and design issue trends across different year periods, the varying number of design issues covered under each criterion necessitated presenting the data in two ways: the percentage of responses relative to the issues and the absolute number of responses to the total number within each period. In the first five-year period (1995–2000), the criterion **Beauty** had the highest percentage of responses at 0.76, while **Functionality** had the highest total number of responses (22), followed by **Beauty** (19), indicating that functionality and aesthetics have long been key concerns in architecture. Notably, there were no responses related to the criterion **Governance**, as neither jury comments nor architects’ design theories discussed this criterion during this period.

In the second five-year period (2001–2005), the criterion **Beauty** again had the highest percentage (0.52), followed by the **Environment** at 0.46. In terms of absolute numbers, **Functionality** had the most responses (26), followed by the **Environment** (16) as well. This period saw an increasing trend in responses to environmental issues, particularly in relation to the built environment on “implementation of the 5 Rs,” which appeared consistently between 2000 and 2005. Other recurring design issues during this period included the “visual interaction” in **Functionality**, as well as “architectural form” and “material, colour, and texture” in **Beauty**, the latter two design issues being consistently addressed throughout all years. In addition, responses related to the criterion **Governance** began to emerge, with a response rate of 0.20. Next, in the third period (2006–2009; Since the award-winning work in 2010 was in the *processes* category, there were only four cases in this time period), the criterion **Beauty** remained dominant with the highest percentage (0.70), followed by criteria **Diversity** and **Context**, both at 0.42, reflecting an increased awareness of cultural and social issues in the winning projects. In terms of the total amount of responses, the criterion **Functionality** remained the most prominent (29), showing a rising trend compared to previous periods. Notably, the design issue “Open floor plans” on the adaptable spatial organization appeared consistently from 2005 to 2011.

In the fourth five-year period (2011–2015), the criteria **Economy**, **Diversity** and **Context** surpassed 0.8 in response percentage, while the criterion **Sense of Place** also showed a significant rise to 0.67. Certain design issues became mandatory responses in nearly every project after 2008 and 2009, including “social and cultural value” in the **Economy** criterion, “social communication” in the **Diversity**, and “foster place and culture identity” in the **Sense of Place**. In terms of total responses, the criterion **Functionality** had the most, up to 40. Overall, response rates and absolute numbers for each criterion were higher than in previous periods, making this a particularly noteworthy phase in Latvian architectural development. In the following five-year period (2016–2020), there was a slight decrease in response percentages across the eight criteria, but the distribution remained similar to the previous period. The criterion **Economy** had the highest percentage, with 0.73, followed by the criterion **Context**, with 0.67. Finally, in the most recent four years (2021–2024), coinciding with the official launch of the DBQS in 2021, there appears to be a significant jump in response percentages. Seven of the eight criteria had the highest satisfying rates across all periods, including **Governance**, with 0.63; **Functionality**, with 0.61; **Environment**, with 0.50; **Economy**, with 0.83; **Diversity**, with 1; **Sense of Place**, with 0.92; and **Beauty**, with 0.89. This indicates that the implementation of the DBQS might have had a considerable impact on the response to design issues and on the jury’s evaluation standards.

A diachronic genealogical diagram of the LAGB Grand Prix 1995–2024 and architectural design issues [developed by the authors]

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E. Trends in Each of the Eight Criteria

When analysing trends in each of the eight criteria, first of all, it is evident that discussions related to the criterion **Governance** began to appear in jury comments and architects' discourse after 2001. Governance-related issues have rarely been incorporated into architectural concepts by architects, making it more challenging to understand and recognize them in retrospective architectural case studies. In terms of the criterion **Functionality**, most projects met this criterion from the very first five-year period, then showing a steady growth trend over time. The design issues covered under this criterion are broad, including spatial organization, traffic flow, indoor environmental quality, building technology, and accessibility design. Newer design issues, such as "community integration" under architectural traffic flow and "smart interventions" under techniques, have gradually emerged in later years, indicating a trend towards more diversified functional design approaches. Under the **Environment** criterion, the design issues are divided into two categories, "natural environment" and "built environment". Overall, more responses addressed built environment issues than natural environment concerns across the years. In the **Economy** criterion, besides the long-standing design issue of "social and cultural value", two other issues, the "resilient and sustainable construction" and the "investment and operation models", were more frequently considered in later award-winning projects, showing a gradual increase in response rates over the years.

The next three criteria, **Diversity**, **Context**, and **Sense of Place**, share similar developmental trends and response patterns. These three criteria were widely applied in design concepts starting from the fourth five-year period (2011–2015). They are primarily related to cultural and social issues in architecture. As an artefact, architecture is not only the creation of physical space but also a reflection of the culture, values, and social composition of its time. During the design process, architecture is imbued with the responsibility of communicating messages from architects or clients to the users and the broader society. Topics such as the declaration of cultural and identity values, historical preservation, and the distribution of social structures in space are widely discussed in this context. Finally, the **Beauty** criterion had more than a 50 % response rate in each year period. Of the five main design issues under this criterion, three received responses from more than two-thirds (18 cases) of the award-winning projects. As one of the three major visual arts, architecture inherently involves aesthetic considerations. It is well-known that artistic expression goes beyond mere appearance; beauty may carry emotional resonance or symbolic meaning through form and style. Additionally, choices in materials and textures, as well as construction techniques, can reflect the architect's interpretation of nature, history, and culture.

IV. Discussion

In this section, the discussion focuses on design approaches, analysing how award-winning projects from different periods have addressed various design issues. It can be observed that different design issues exhibit interactive influences on design approaches. The following highlights representative design issues from several criteria.

First, within the **Functionality** criterion, the design issue of "visual privacy" of the main issue of safety, health, and comfort by most projects is addressed by incorporating design strategies related to "architectural form" and "integration with the natural environment". For example, in the 2002 project, the *Āgenskalns High School*, a multi-story green wall was used along the site boundary to act as a visual barrier between the school and its community surroundings [8], ensuring privacy for the campus while also providing greenery that enhances the comfort of the public environment. In the *Private House in Sigulda* (2004) and the *Britania Printing House* (2007), both designed by architect Andris Kronbergs, the two building volumes were integrated into the natural landscape to create natural barriers with elevation changes [34], [35], resulting in effective visual privacy. Similarly, in the case of *Pērle Social Services Centre* (2022), the entrance level was lowered below the surrounding road [36], and the main activity spaces were oriented away from the street to protect the privacy of the users. The design issue of "community integration" of the main issue of architectural traffic flow, which emerged later in 2009, focuses on creating interactions between the building and the surrounding neighbourhood. This strategy often indirectly promotes the creation of public open spaces and a sense of place. Many of these projects are public buildings that link external plazas or garden spaces within the site to adjacent pedestrian pathways, allowing pedestrians to traverse the site or linger in the plaza. This not only integrates the pedestrian network but also increases public interaction with the buildings.

Another noteworthy issue under the **Functionality** criterion is "furniture and furnishing design", which holds different meanings across various building types. The projects addressing this design issue across the winning projects can be categorized into three types. The first is renovation cases, such as the renovation of *Liepāja State 1st Gymnasium* (2018), where large-scale spatial or structural changes to historical buildings are often restricted. In these cases, architects introduced flexible furniture design to create versatile usage scenarios in response to contemporary needs [37]. The second type is new construction projects, such as the *National Library of Latvia* (2015), where the architect personally designed a series of custom desks and chairs for the library [38], ensuring a cohesive design experience from the exterior

to the interior. The third type appears in outdoor street furniture design, as seen in the *Daile Theatre Square* (2023), where the furniture was used to define activity areas and create spaces for rest and gathering in the public realm.

Within the **Diversity** criterion, “social communication” is the most frequently addressed design issue. The architectural expression of “social communication” is often intertwined with the design issues under the **Beauty** criterion, where symbolic building forms, construction techniques, or decorative elements serve to establish an intellectual dialogue with the site’s context, historical background, and the broader public. Among the 20 cases that addressed this issue, the majority employed symbolic design strategies. For example, the *National Library of Latvia* (2015) conveys national identity with bright and hopeful meanings through its building form, inspired by the “Glass Mountain” from Latvian folklore or the “Castle of Light” [39]. Similarly, the *Salt House* (2019) uses a cross-section roof and a single-story building form to evoke the traditional fishermen’s houses in Pāvilosta [40]. Other projects, such as the *Pārventa Library in Ventspils* (2009), use spatial expression to convey inclusivity through a high-ceiling central hall, while its façade features text-carved decorative elements to express cultural identity [41]. Besides, some projects focus on historical buildings, utilizing authentic materials and construction techniques to convey the significance of a particular historical period within the contemporary urban context, such as the cases of the *17th Century Warehouse Building in Old Riga, Aldara Street 5* (2011), the *Three Buildings in Old Riga, Miesnieku Street 13, 15, 17* (2020) and the *New Riga Theatre renovation* (2024).

The second most frequently addressed issue under the **Diversity** criterion is “vibrant and mixed uses”, which was addressed using a variety of design strategies. These can be broadly categorized into three approaches: “spatial division”, “time-based shared usage”, and the provision of “neutral spaces”. Spatial division can be further subdivided into strategies such as separating functions by building volumes, by floors, or through traffic flows within the same floor. For example, in the case of *St. Gregoras School in Saldus* (1995), different functional spaces are housed in two separate building volumes connected by a central hall [8]. In the *Pērle Social Services Centre* (2022), individual traffic flows were used to divide areas for different functions. The time-based shared usage approach is mostly seen in sports facilities or school buildings, where spaces are allocated to different user groups based on time. The third approach, providing neutral spaces, which is common in libraries or plazas, provides public, non-specific spaces that can accommodate the activities of diverse user groups.

Regarding the **Beauty** criterion, the second most frequently addressed design issue, “architectural form”, exhibits diverse design expressions in award-winning projects. The factors influencing the distinctive building

forms are varied, primarily linked to the architect’s intent to respond to natural topography, cultural history, and social movements or to showcase innovative engineering techniques. This approach to architectural expression is one of the most direct ways to visually convey ideas. Among the 22 projects that addressed this design issue, these distinctive architectural forms can be categorized into three main types: technical expression, functional expression, and sculptural expression. For example, the *Mežaparks Open-Air Stage* (2021) and the *Pērle Social Services Centre* (2022) fall under technical expression, while the *Ice Hockey Hall in Liepāja* (1998) and the *Saldus School of Music and Art* (2012) are examples of functional expression. Besides, projects such as the *National Library of Latvia* (2015) and the *Shaolin Flying Monks Theatre* (2017) exemplify sculptural expression.

Conclusions

Reflecting on thirty years of the Latvian Architecture Award, the winning projects have gradually shifted from initially focusing on functionality and aesthetics to addressing broader concerns such as environment, economy, governance, diversity, cultural context, and sense of place. This evolution not only reflects architectural innovation but also highlights the Latvian architectural profession’s growing concern for social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Two critical time periods are revealed in the diachronic genealogical diagram. The first is between 2011 and 2015, during which the focus on architecture-related cultural and social issues surpassed 0.8, and the overall response rate and proportion of design issues addressed increased compared to earlier periods. This reflects the architectural progress achieved in Latvia after 20 years of regaining its independence. The second notable period is after 2021, coinciding with the introduction of the DBQS. In the years following its launch, all four winning projects were public buildings selected through architectural competitions, with a heightened emphasis on community engagement, cultural identity, and sustainable development. These works not only excel in the aspects of functionality and beauty but also aim to address social and environmental challenges more effectively. However, whether this outcome can be directly attributed to the impact of the DBQS is difficult to conclude based on just four years of case studies. Further verification is needed as more award-winning projects emerge in the coming years.

The precedent-winning projects have had a positive impact on both the architectural community and society, driving design innovation, improving the quality of the built environment, and enhancing public appreciation of architecture and design. Case studies of these award-winning works hold multiple meanings for architects,

students, clients, and the public. By integrating architectural discourse into the analysis, the study reveals that essential insights are often missed when analysing only through drawings. Contemporary architecture, as a physical interpretation of abstract ideas, may reflect an architect's ideals, a collective belief, a historical event, or the spirit of an entire era, urging us to approach architecture from a broader perspective to understand the deeper meanings it conveys. Good architectural quality is not limited to evaluation indicators but can stimulate feelings and inspire people the moment they step into the space and provide belonging during the long-term or short-term use of the space. This quality transcends materiality and instead incorporates culture, emotion and the uniqueness of the place into the design, thereby creating an architectural space with soul.

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