

The Urban-Rural Dimension of the Riga City Region Building and Spatial Planning

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Abstract

The paper examines the national discourses of 'rural' and 'urban' and their impact on the region-building and on the spatial policies in Riga city region, Latvia. As one of the city-region in the post-socialist country the rural-urban discrepancies are path-dependent. The discourses are based on the elements of Socialist ideology as well as on the features of much longer settlement history. Despite strict political and administrative division of rural and urban populations and physical planning at local level since 1960ties Soviet regional planning technically supported regional planning of Riga City functional region although respective governing institutions and procedures were not established. In Soviet period urban hinterland planning was subordinated to the central city master plan and was prepared mainly for the needs of the Soviet central and republican government and only partly served to the needs of the central city. With the adoption of the new municipal law in 1994 all local level municipalities both rural and urban received the same rights and responsibilities, including responsibility to prepare and implement local spatial policy.

Since mid 1990ties regional and local municipal institutions of the Riga City and its hinterland cooperated informally and focused on solving environmental type of problems. This cooperation was formalized along the initiation of the regional level government reform with the aim to adjust the scale of Latvian regions to the ones of the European community. The building of Riga Planning Region in 2003 was implicated by the rural-urban discrepancies. The dominant role of Riga city in Latvian urban system and the specific role of rural areas to be perceived as a part of national identity had particular role. That led to the supporting policies ignoring urban aspects of the spatial development. In 2007 new spatial planning policies have been prepared at all levels. Despite of anti-urban attitude in formal political discourses, at local level rural identities and its spatial elements are not preserved.

Key words: urban-rural, Latvia, city-region, spatial planning

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Introduction

The paper examines how national discourses of 'rural' and 'urban' made an impact on the region-building and on the spatial policies in Riga city region, Latvia. As rural and urban discourses, particularly those who perceive rural and urban as place identities are path-dependent they influence the spatial policies of urban region over the years. The article is based on the interviews with planners as well author own observation during numerous planning process. For the purpose of the article the spatial planning documents and other municipal information have been studied. The first part of article

provides short information on the specifics of Latvian settlement pattern and characteristics of Riga urban fringe. Statistical information as well as rough estimations of municipal councils are used to estimate the spatial pattern of changes in the number of population after 1989 in adjacent municipalities of Riga city. The following part provides insights in the development of urban pattern of city's hinterland and its meaning in various periods of time. The last part of a paper is devoted to the course of development of Riga planning region. Planning documents produced by local and regional municipalities are studied to identify if they contain policies toward the development of rural areas in the city's hinterland. In the conclusion the consideration regarding the role of rural as a place identity concept is discussed in the context of Riga hinterland planning.

Rural and urban as regional identities

There are many studies by geographers and sociologists on conceptualizing rural and urban spaces. There is continues academic discussion between seeing rural-urban as dichotomy of contrasting concepts and seeing rural-urban as continuum where rural elements gradually and fragmentizing change with urban ones (Mann, 1965; Pahl, 1966; Tuan, 1978; Gilbert, 1982; Harrington and O'Donoghue, 1998; Cloke and Johnston, 2005). Both urban and rural as bipolar concept are being exposed to other bipolar concepts of society and nature. Rural and urban are complex, fluid and blurred concepts where both are ideal abstractions or simplifications of the real world still important as metaphors for communicating among social actors particularly in the contexts of policy preparations and implementations.

This is based on the assumption that there are fundamental differences between people who live in cities or towns and those who live in the countryside or the populated territories thereof. On this assumption rural and urban stereotypes are created and widely used (Wirth, 1938, Frankenberg, 1966; Wiggins and Proctor, 2001, Hugo et. al 2003, Champion and Hugo, 2004) and they grasp such issues as physical environment, housing, accessibility, human and natural resources, type of economical activities, governance, innovations, quality of life, communications, values, opportunities and other aspects. Rural and urban stereotypes are rooted in the traditional development preconception and thus can create obstacles to employ such innovative spatial policies that tackle the cause of the problems despite of the location in the formal rural or urban space.

In recent decades the rural and urban have been studied as mental construct or social representation or imagination, the meaning of the actual space and social community. Rural as concept has been studied more detailed as being exposed to the social change that has been perceived by the majority of social groups as a part of modernity and growth related. Rural sociologist particularly see rural as social representation of space (Hoggart et al, 1995; Halfacree, 1993, 2003, 2004, Brown&Cromartie 2004). As social representations are created by distinct social groups each of them have different rural and urban discourses – the most studied ones are discourses by lay persons, academicians, mass media, land agents, politicians and other decision makers. As activities of social agents are affected by the abstract meaning of rural and urban the gap between social and physical reality can be observed (Eyles, 1987; Hopkins,1998; Kellerman, 1996).

Rural and urban is also seen not only as metaphors but also as a place identity (Tonnie 1887, Huigen&Meijering, 2005, Groote&Haartsen, 2005) and in this discourse the setting, meaning and activity (Relph, 1976 Aitken, 1990) are central notions that constitutes distinctiveness of places. As place identity's categories, rural and urban are contextual – distinctive spatial and socio-cultural contexts are characterised by prevailing societal norms and values. Place identity is based on the past, as future is unknown; there always are obtainable for selected reading the information about the past events. Past is important to create such social notions as nostalgic sentiments and rural idyll. Current situations are rooted in the past: „many social phenomena can only be adequately explained in terms of path dependency” (Gartland, 2005). Although the reading of the past events is done by various social actors in thus wide variety of meanings can be created. Rural and urban as place identities are continuing process, where identities are all the time constructed and reconstructed by social agents.

Latvian national and Riga City and its region settlement pattern features

Latvia with 2,29 millions inhabitants has a monocentric urban system with the capital city of Riga dominant in the settlement structure (32% of total population per country in 2006). Riga City is two-tier level municipality and its administrative boundaries there are 728 thousands inhabitants in 2006. The 2nd-largest city of Latvia - Daugavpils with 109 thousands inhabitants is 7 times smaller in population than Riga; and third largest Liepāja have 86 thousands in the West Latvia (2006). 70% of all 77 towns have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants in 2006. Despite the central role in the national settlement system and active suburbanization processes Riga is shrinking town as well all Latvia is characterised with depopulation processes. The population in Riga City in its administrative borders has decreased by 20% since 1989 when it reached the highest ever level – 910 455 inhabitants.

Agglomeration processes and particular daily commuting of Riga City have been studied in since 1960ties and particularly by geographers of the University of Latvia. These studies showed that Riga and its hinterland constitute clearly defined metropolitan region. Riga metropolitan area is home to nearly 1/2 Latvia's residents on less than 10% of its territory. In the Riga daily commuting region there are estimations that there reside 1148 thousands inhabitants on 6984 km² (Krisjane, Bauls, 2004). Two large cities on Latvian context are within Riga's metropolitan area – these are Jelgava with 66,1 thousands inhabitants and Jūrmala with 55,6 thousands inhabitants. There are some twenty smaller satellite settlements in the metropolitan area – Ogre town with 29 thousands, Salaspils town with 21 thousands, Tukums town with 20 thousands, Sigulda town with 15 thousands, Olaine with 13 thousands residents and other smaller towns and larger villages in adjacent districts (2006).

Riga District is the first level regional municipality (expected to be reformed in 2009) that includes local municipalities that are adjacent area to Riga City municipality – satellite towns and rural municipalities, now with numerous suburban villages, “greenbelt's” forests (forests, wetlands, waters cover 62% of Riga District's territory) and agricultural land of which high percent is abandoned particularly closer to the city borders due to land speculation and subdivision for construction purposes. Riga District municipality with 167,7 thousands registered inhabitants at the beginning of

2008 has the highest population increase in Latvia - more than 10% since 1989. This increase is caused due to population inflow from other parts of Latvia.

It has admitted by planners' community that population growth can be characterized as sprawling tendencies – that new housing and new inhabitants are settling in the rural area at the fringe of the city. The data population data approves this tendency for some rural municipalities but for more it show that municipalities cope with the population growth by locating them within the formal boundaries of villages – although the number of villages have been increased as well the area within the formal boundaries of existing ones have been extended. Newcomers are more than 50 to 10% of all inhabitants in Riga urban fringe rural municipalities (data of Latvian Statistical Board).

Riga Planning Region is the second level regional municipality that includes Riga City (with area of 307 km²), Jurmala City (100 km²), Riga District (3132 km²) as well as three of next circle adjacent districts of Tukums (55 thousands residents on the area of 2457 km²), Ogre (63,5 thousands / 1843 km²) and Limbaži (38 thousands/ 2602 km²). Riga Planning Region covers 16% of Latvian territory and had 1097 thousands or 48 % of all Latvian inhabitants in 2006. Riga Planning Region includes distant rural areas and settlements that are outside Riga daily commuting area and thus does not correspond to the Riga functional region that is the slightly more compact in territory. Daily commuting was observed in Riga city region since 1960ties and for instance in 2004 in total 26% of all working population from urban fringe commuted for work purpose to Riga city (Krišjāne and Bauls, 2004). Functional Riga city region includes also Jelgava City that is the centre of other planning region – Zemgale. In this way Jelgava City has dual role being a part of Riga functional region it also serves as administrative centre of the southern Latvia.

In Latvia after structural reforms in 1990ties more than 60% of employees are in services, and in all regions the employees in agriculture and industry have been diminished. In total per country the tertiary sector (G-Q) have 641,2 thousands, secondary sector (C-F) 294,3 thousands and primary sector (A-B) 110,5 thousands employees (2006). At the same time Riga city tertiary sector have 264,3 thousands employees or more than 70%, secondary sector 97,7 thousands and primary sector 2,5 thousands employees. Adjacent area of Riga or Pierīga statistical region 92,1 thousands in tertiary sector that is less then national average, but there are higher percentage than national average in secondary sector with 50,3 thousands employees and primary sector with 21,9 thousands employees (data source is the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia). In total Pierīga statistical region still counts for almost 20% of all employees per country in agriculture, forestry and fisheries and it is second largest concentration of employees in industry and in services after Riga city and despite of recent suburbanization processes observed and abundance of vacant agricultural land in the hinterland of Riga the agriculture plays an important role by producing products and employing people in smaller areas in more intensive and manner. As consequence Riga and its hinterland is not only concentration of population and employees, but also and the wealth. Riga City had 20219 Euro GDP per inhabitant in PPP in 2005 (data from Eurostat), at the same time national average was 11180 Euro and Pierīga statistical region that is capital city hinterland 3rd higher 7795 Euro after Kurzeme region with 8862 Euro where two important port cities are located. Other regions are less wealthy – Vidzeme 6562, Zemgale 6230 and Latgale

5428 Euro GDP per inhabitant in PPP. In the percentage Riga City gave 57,3% in 2005, Pierīga statistical region 11,1%, Kurzeme region 10,7, Latgale region 7,6%, Zemgale region 7% and Vidzeme region 6,2% of total GDP.

The development of urban pattern of Riga City hinterland and its meaning

Riga City has been established in 13th century as a trading post. As sign for its wealth and power since early 14th century Riga City owns a patrimonial region outside city borders. In 19th century it was as 750 km² large and included farming area and forests. In 1940 city owned 701 km² of forests - agricultural areas was exchanged during the national agrarian reform with lands inside city's borders (Lejnieks, 1989). After restitution in 1995, city owns 561 km² forests outside its current administrative orders (2004).

Despite of Riga's wealth its administrative borders were delimited and the extent of local rights were controlled by powers outside the city and most often by foreign powers. The discrepancy between the wealth and the opportunities of urban expansion was particularly acute in rapid industrialization period and after rural serfs liberation when population increased from 193 thousands in 1881 to 517 thousands in 1913 (Mieriņa, 1978). New suburban settlements for affluent urbanites were established mainly on city owned land but outside its administrative borders – satellite settlements of Ogre, Jūrmala, Baldone, Sigulda was established in the second half of 19th century, particular after the construction of railway lines. Sandy beaches of the Baltic Sea, rolling rural landscapes with dry pain forests and sublime glacial origin Gauja River valley provided natural amenities for affluent early suburbanites (Berzins, 1978). In 1905 Latvian architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns wrote that each Latvian inhabitant if he wants can have a part of land with small house maximum two floors and that only way to improve urban hygiene is the English housing tradition (Kraštinš, 1992).

In the period of independent Latvian Republic (1918-1940) suburbanization started despite the strong political support to agriculture, although older and new satellite settlements in the Riga hinterland grew. Riga City administration responded by preparing a Large Riga regional plan in 1926. The leading planner was Arnolds Lamze who highly prized ideas of English regional planning. In the draft plan of 1924 the city's borders were foreseen for 718 km² in radius of 25 km and for 1500 000 inhabitants after the period of 50 years. In comparison currently Riga city municipality has less then half of this area within its administrative borders. The draft plan of Lamze included planning principles to create new satellite-type garden cities with density 70 inhabitants per hectare as far as to Ropaži, Babīte, Dole and Ķekava (Lamze, 1927, 1932). Latvian planners believed that population and economical stagnation of Riga in the interwar period was only temporary. Due to its good geographical position they expected that Riga will develop in the projected size (Kraštinš, 1992). Lamze promoted that these low density new suburban areas have to have the same planning regulations as central city's outer zone in order to prevent low quality growth. He also pointed out that wetlands have to be excluded from the suburbanization due to technical restrictions and forests due to environmental and recreation considerations as "city needs to breathe" (Lamze, 1927, 1932). Due to the active participation against the new grand plan of Riga expansion particularly from the Riga Suburbanites Union the draft city plan was not adopted until 1936 when the

plan projection was reduced to maximum 750 thousands inhabitants and still it was consider from landowners to grand for a small country with rural ideals as a national ideology (Krastins, 1992).

During Soviet Period by centralized planning codes and norms the emphasis was put to concentrated urban development in both urban and rural environments particularly since 1960ties when new ideology was centrally approved for all- Soviet territory although implementation differed as an initial status of existing settlement pattern differed in various parts of socialism empire. In theory the Soviet planning was supporting polycentric settlement development by restraining spatial development in larger centers with more than 200 thousand inhabitants and by creating new satellite towns in large city hinterlands. In Riga region during Soviet period several new satellite towns were created. These satellite settlements differed form ones established in the capitalism era as these ware not only places for new residencies but also new enterprises were built inn order to provide new settlers with employment places – urban type like Vangaži (building industry), Baloži (peat extraction), Olaine (chemical industry), and rural type with agroindustry - Salaspils (also scientific institutes), Ķekava, Valdlauči, Mārupe, Jaunmārupe, Ādaži, Kadaka, Carnikava, Ulbroka, Saurieši (also building industry), Jaunolaine, Babīte, Lapmežciems and others. Some of the settlements were also settling the population that was employed in the Soviet military sector that was located in high densities at the fringe of Riga City. Some settlements despite of close proximity to the Riga City border like Skulte up to nowadays are not revitalized for new functions.

During Soviet period Latvian planners community was recalling the planning ideas of prewar capitalist society and surprisingly was highly valued in spite of central Soviet ideology that was emphasizing other values. Melbergs (1969, 1979) who was a leader of Riga plan preparation in Latvian planning academic publications was writing “Latvia has no scarcity of space as new land is drained for agricultural purposes, and thus new houses can be built dispersible. Soviet urbanites from high-rised prefabricated buildings are using garden allotments and second houses in the city hinterland and as the fact transport problems are increasing. The solution is suburbanization, as Lamze proposed in 1920ties.”

National rural discourse was still prevailing in the planners and geographers community despite of official rurality discourse communicated by official Soviet ideology (Tisenkopfs, 1999; Shubin, 2006) and physical planning and urban development statutory norms. Seeing national identity in rural settings and in this ways it has bee continually produce and reproduce in various contexts showing strong path depended character. The discourse to see the rurality as a part of the national identity of Latvia - has been supported since 1970ties by the environmentalist rurality discourse. In this discourse the rurality is seen as a contrast to urbanity, particularly that is represented by densely built parts of Riga (Grava, 1993) – this discourse emphasis the values of quality of life, access to nature, particular to forest and waters, cleaner and healthier environment (air quality, light and noise). And this less dense building (single detached) is possible on vacant land that is more abundant in rural areas.

The concept of rurality as the core of national identity is particularly strong - “Latvian national identity based on rural and natural symbolism” (Bunkše, 1978, 1992, 1999;

Unwin 1999; Melluma, 1994; Schwartz, 2007). Individual family farms surrounded by gardens, trees and cultivated mosaic type landscapes are in the centre of this narrative of rural space - there always have been villages in Latvian rural space but these do not have such strong notions and symbolic meaning in national classical literature and art as single farmsteads. This symbolic rural landscape was romanticised even further under the complicated political and socioeconomic conditions of the Soviet period, thus becoming a particular source of nostalgia for nationalist movements in the end of 1980ties. For both rural and urban inhabitants the countryside is perceived as an important aspect of Latvia and a contributor to the sense of identity (Bell, et al., 2007: 360). By fifty years (1941-1991) of the Soviet period development realities this symbolic rural landscape left the space of physical realities to the mindscape and more often the gaps between the rural life reality and Latvian national values of rural was reported. With the regaining national independence and return the institutionalization of the values of the national identity the rural became a part of national policies in such manner where values of favour to single farmsteads and scattered inhabitation in the rural space was again in the core political decisions. In reality these national policies of 1990ties did not faced with the realities of rural space where large settlements was built and inhabited as centres of socialist-type agro-industry and supported with other activities to diversify the employment opportunities in these settlement centers. In rural spaces new and old actors appeared both having different values and thus identities of place. All these diverse social actors should be taken account if post-socialist rurality to be created (Tisenkopfs, 1999:427). In the reality the Latvian national policies with spatial outreaches in last two decades coupe rural space in its symbolic meaning often avoiding the realities of rural space and the way how populations is inhabiting it. This is particularly visible in the rural areas on the fringe of the Riga City where besides transformation of rural space, its activities and meanings, these areas are exposed to the influence of the large urban center like Riga City by transforming their economical basis and activities by inflow of settlers that use this former rural space as residential area where rural plays only the role of amenity and now often perceived as nature or suburban space despite the formal approach to classify these new residential villages under rural space.

Rural and urban in Riga region building and spatial policy planning context

As mentioned above regional planning was commenced by the Riga City building and planning authority in 1920ties. This type of planning can be characterized by city centered view on its hinterland and it was led by city authority and highly influenced by personalities of leading planners, although land owners of the impacted rural areas had opportunity to take part in political discussion on the future of the rural areas in proximity to the capital city. In the early Soviet period coordinated spatial activities were focused on rebuilding areas that most suffered from the ravages of the war. In later decades it was admitted that self-building activities of population was not controlled adequately up to 1960 although due to low economical status of population and oppression of former wealthy and creative groups of local population the residential building activities were in small volumes. In 1960ties with certain softening of autocratic regime and efforts to modernize the Soviet spatial planning the more emphasis was devoted to regional planning particular in the resource rich areas and large metropolitan regions, like Riga. Soviet planning is characterized in all its

period with strong top-down approaches although the top was confusing as formal one was the Soviets – the councils of representatives of local people in reality appointed by ruling and only one communist party. In reality the power was split among communist party, leaders of military sector and priority industries as well as the executive power of larger urban settlements. There were closed discussions among these power with planners as mediators but public was not involved and spatial plans and policies was secret to the majority of inhabitants.

Since 1960ties Riga city-region boundaries was defined on the basis of research by central physical planning and building institutes by the communist party decisions and economical programs. The implementation of the spatial policies were controlled and coordinated by central government authorities. Riga as a capital city and Jurmala as a resort town of all-Soviet Union relevance had all-union relevance and special legislation towards spatial development. Soviets treated formal urban localities differently from rural areas as their ideology differed to the population involved in the agriculture, industry and services – the policies and legislation including planning and building norms were diverse although general principles were common and with introducing regional planning the policy frame over urban and rural areas within the region was created. In 1966 the Latvian SSR State Urban Building and Planning Institute prepared the Riga Suburban Zone Plan, the plan was adopted and later re-approved in 1972, 1976 and 1978. This was a plan which provided political justification to built new satellite towns around Riga. The rural areas had been seen as space for agriculture and recreation – collective farms' centers were improved, agricultural land was drained and improved, gardening associations for urban and rural residents were created by subdividing land. Since the end of the 1980ties the Soviet Union leaders commenced democratization and openness processes.

As consequence to re-introducing democratic and open elections at regional and level levels and delegating more powers to these municipal-type authorities the spatial development policies started to diversified and to cope with the aspirations of local population. At the time of transitions the rural idyll as a part of national identity was treated particularly strongly. With the regaining the national independence the policy towards re-establishing pre-war agricultural production was based on the myth of economically strong farmers in scattered farmsteads. Up to 1994 urban and rural still had policies enforced by legislation and spatial planning regulations separated in rural and urban. Riga and Jurmala cities in this period become equal to other districts and cities and towns as Soviet legislation making them specific was abolished. In Soviet settlement classification there were cities, towns and villages including urban-type villages as intermediated form towards urbanization of the space. The local councils of these urban-type villages had to decide to become urban or rural settlements – these who are located in Riga urban hinterland in became pure urban (Baloži, Vangaži) or urban core with incorporated rural areas (Saulkrasti, Ikšķile, Ķegums, Lielvārde, Baldone), while outside Riga hinterland were cases that these became pure rural.

Period of 1994-1997 can be characterized with deeper democratization and the beginning of voluntary cooperation among municipalities. The turning point was the adoption of the Law on Self-Government (1994) that with amendments is still in the force. The law provided general principles for municipal work and distribution of power, handed definite rights and less clearly indicated responsibilities at both regional and local levels. This law abolished the split between rural and urban in

legislative context and remove any particularities for capital city that despite its large size and respective political and economical power was treated equally to all other local municipalities in the nation. However Latvian legislation still contains some traces of former split between rural and urban in the legislative documents that have been adopted before 1994 like laws on land reform and environmental protection regulations. The first version of the municipal law included the direct elections at both local and regional municipal levels that were granted some years before. In 1994 following newly established municipal system the first spatial planning regulations were adopted by the national government. These regulations were later substituted with laws in 1998 and 2002.

Municipalities that have been more powerful and equipped with human and financial resources started to prepare new spatial plans earliest - in 1995 Riga City, Jurmala City and in 1997 Riga District adopt their prepared comprehensive spatial plans following the guidelines of new planning regulations like public participation and consultations with neighboring municipalities. Both to solve common infrastructure problems and foreign consultant encouraged Riga City, Jurmala City and Riga District started to formalize their cooperation in 1994 and sign agreements in 1996-1997. First decade after regaining independence rural was more often perceived as a core of national identity and that was supported by the political will to focus policies to rural areas – like a national rural development program had been prepared involving large national consultation. Many measures that was proposed or even adopted were not implemented as this rural image was not transferred from mindscape and powerscape to matterscape (Jacobs, 2004). In such political context Riga District Spatial Plan of 1997 included spatial policies to protect agricultural areas away from residential development. Such plan was adopted as a district council was not directly involved in the local control of spatial development or land use transfer.

Due to lack of coordination of implementation of spatial plans between administrative levels and due to the fact that spatial development control was in the hands of local municipalities the building permits were issued in former agricultural lands and land use transfer took place in many places where regional plan was prescribing other spatial policies. Forest and high nature quality areas were not threatened as often as these areas were preserved by sectorial laws with stronger enforcement instruments. The forwarding of spatial development activities outside capital city borders to formal rural ones were supported by dominating belief at that period that Riga is too large for Latvian development context and that its development should be controlled. Another aspect played important role is that land restitution and privatization brought numerous new actors – land owners and users in to the game land development and than neither local and regional municipalities, neither national institutions did not have knowledge to deal with land control in such new socio-economic context.

Period after 1997 is characterized with persistent dispute over the role of regional municipal level. With the amendments in the municipal law the district level direct elections were abolished as too costly activity. As leaders of local municipalities now constituted the district council they required amendments in the Riga District Spatial Plan, that were adopted in 2001. With these amendments some control over transfer of agricultural areas and construction in rural areas was removed. This is a period when Latvia municipal authorities are first time faced with opportunities of transnational activities that are perceived that one that might bring more economical

activities to the regions. Foreign consultants helping integrate Latvia institutions into European frameworks and national institutions warned on fragmented municipal space with too small players. As reaction the Riga Region Development Council is established in 1997 and as there is a lack of formal regulations a nongovernmental organization was established and registered under title “Riga Region Development Council” in 1998. In 2001 a development agency of the region was also as a non-profit organization. In these nongovernmental organizations all local and district municipalities both small rural and small and extreme large urban are members. In 1999 other adjacent districts joined this voluntary organization. As this cooperation is based on the common goal to foster the growth the Riga Region Development Strategy was prepared and adopted in 2000. As building activities are still on low level the local municipalities supported all investments even on former agricultural areas. Speculation of land is increasing but that is not visible as these are connected mostly with subdivision of the land.

In the couple of years before the accession to the European Community Latvian national government fostered the institutionalization of voluntary created planning regions and their bodies – as based on example fro Riga such “planning regions - nongovernmental organizations” were created also in other parts of the country. National government emphasized these tasks of planning regions that are related to socio economic planning and coordination for the purpose obtaining the EU assistance. By the recommendations of the national government the new planning regions were made on voluntary basis out of local level municipal representatives where district level municipalities were neglected. For Riga functional area the decision making body is renamed as the Riga Planning Region Development Council (2002) and its members became all local municipalities that are today in the planning region except two. More application were submitted by other distant rural municipalities as the Riga name provided the branding that was perceived as such could bring more economical activities to even remote places. Period is characterized with reassessing the role of rural in modern economical activities as it is recognized that farmers from Latvian rural past cannot compete with modern European agriculture industry. Narrative to perceive rural as a part of national identity is connected more often to the lifestyle aspects not economical and spatial policies.

In 2003 central government intervened and stop the voluntary process of region building by issuing regulations on the composition of planning regions. The main reason for the government involvement is that the form of these planning regions not always a rational one and the borders are not smooth. Despite the fact that municipal reform in institutionalized manner started as early as soon after regaining the independence and that the law on the municipal reform was adopted in 1998, the political decision was reached only recently that district municipalities will be abolished from 2009. Although it is not clear yet how functions of present districts will be subdivided among national, planning regions and local municipal levels, particularly to control spatial development in both rural and urban areas. Other task of municipal reform – to create larger local level municipalities by amalgamating territories are more clear and it is expected that this will be finalized in the end of 2008. This amalgamation in general ignores the rural and urban split and as this is strong identity for some of the localities in Latvia it is expected that some of local municipalities are not satisfied with national government proposals as these do not indicate how these rural-urban discrepancies will be taken account and carried on of

these are connected with place identity. As proposed merger is not foreseen in the local municipalities in Riga districts such tensions against municipal reform is not acute, although there was a discussion on Baloži town that declared that it have strong place identity not to be incorporated in any surrounding rural areas.

The regulations of 2003 legally defined the shape and institutions of planning regions. Riga Planning Region Development Council that consists of 18 deputies is voted in general meeting of chairmen of municipalities of Riga planning region. The members are all local municipalities although larger urban entities – cities that are two-tier municipalities received more political power than other ones: Riga city is represented by 3 deputies, Jurmala city - by 3 deputies, the rest of local municipalities by one deputy. Planning regions' development agency changed its status and became a foundation. In 2004 Riga planning region opened an office in Brussels and commenced its work to attract the EU funding. In 2005 new Riga Planning Regional Development Program 2005-2011 was adopted for the same purpose.

As economical situation improved in the country the municipal competition became more visible. With the EU accession the funding for building became available and the increase of properties values was doubled and tripled in short time. Even new member states' farmers are receiving European subsidies; the agriculture is still on the decline as contracting aspects are substantial. Subsidies for new member state farmers are at lower level than for others and despite of that there is agricultural overproduction as attractive foreign markets are difficult to reach. That caused the notion that agricultural land is worthless and that transfer it to other uses could be accepted, particular to residential areas as such type of change will not be in conflict to the rurality discourse as unpolluted space. As a consequence to the former Soviet industrialization policy that was coupled with immigration the independent Latvia governments did not supported industrial activities for more than decade and due to that no specific spatial policies to preserve land for industrial production was not even discussed.

Rural and urban dimensions of the Riga's hinterland in spatial plans

Policies supporting suburbanization are legitimized in local municipal comprehensive spatial plans on the hinterland of Riga although as explained above there are different models how local municipalities coped with population growth in spatial aspects. Riga planners and politicians recognized that widely accepted perception that capital city is too large and powerful and need not have national level support is harming the development prospects of the territory where almost half of countries population live. Riga City Council adopted new comprehensive spatial plan in 2007 and in this plan designated areas for single family housing building in order to keep up in the competition with the urban fringe rural municipalities who by releasing agricultural land to development attracted each year more former Riga inhabitants.

Riga City Spatial Plan includes a section on Riga city border and proposals for to the changes as Latvian national planning legislation requires identifying the common interest areas with adjacent municipalities. Explanation part of the comprehensive plan contains such arguments as the importance of Riga functional area and the fact that the taxes paid by the employers located within the borders of Riga City less than 60% stayed in the municipality of Riga as population income tax follow the

employees to their registered residence place. This planning document states that one of the reasons why suburbanization started so intensively in Riga city hinterland is that the capital city had stronger planning and building control that exceed of one in the adjacent rural areas obtained rights of planning and building more than decade ago. In the comprehensive plan it is underlined that even politicians of Riga City are reconsidering actively the administrative boundary changes of their municipality (there have been publications in national daily press on this issue) more emphasis will be devoted to the improving the urban morphology within the city borders by releasing new areas for housing and to use existing land rationally – brownfield developments will be supported. There is an argument that territorial expansion of Riga City municipality would not bring expected results as more investments would be needed to develop these new incorporated territories equally to other parts of the city as well there would be certain price of such expansion as adjacent municipalities would be expecting the compensation for the loss of the territory. The spatial plan is advising to support municipal cooperation over the municipal boundaries. In the graphical material such common interest territories are mentioned as follows: landfill site Getliņi, expansion of cemetery Jaunciems, noise zone of airport Riga (that is located in Marupe rural municipality), forest owned by Riga city outside its boundaries, the management of Piejūra coastal nature park (partly located in Riga City), the development of river transport, railway passenger carriages, main transport roads and arrangements, drinking water intake places and the sanitary state of water catchments basins that are connected to Riga City well as five hundred meters zone on both sides from Riga City and adjacent municipalities boundary where all objects to be build are to be concerted. Some cases are listed in which city boundary shift would be acceptable although only if an assessment of economical benefits of possible annexation is prepared. These cases are certain specific areas for cemeteries and new and existing infrastructure objects as well if better boundary alignment will be reached in the cases when it goes through a shared street. It can be concluded that measures to coordinate spatial development with adjacent areas exists also quite selective to certain aspects. These are different from aspects once coordinated in the framework of Soviet regional planning. Currently such issues as the location of recreational areas including second homes and garden associations, industry and residential areas as well as rural areas are not included in the list of common interest areas and aspects. For Riga city government the value is not attached to the rural space that are located on the fringe of the city where up to recent years agricultural activities took place. This approach is contrasting to general public attitude that was develop already in Soviet period to such branding names as Ādaži, Mārupe, Ķekava, Carnikava and others as an indication for high quality food not only in Riga region but the whole Latvia.

Recently adopted regional plans Riga Planning Region Spatial Development Plan, adopted in 200, and the Riga District Spatial Plan, adopted in 2008, contain more specific policies towards agricultural areas on the fringe of Riga however both plans have weak juridical basis and not sufficient human and financial capacities to follow up and control their implementation. Riga Planning Region Spatial Development Plan recommendations for urban fringe includes such proposals for measures as to reserve in the local plans areas for the needs of national, Riga city and its region and particularly for waste and water, energy and transport infrastructure, logistics and storage facilities, recreation, resorts and other areas relevant to safeguard the quality of life in Riga City and suburban zone. Open, not built up areas between forested

areas are mentioned – rural activities is not mentioned - so it difficult to imagine in which way these will be kept open. The regional spatial plan suggest that new offices, industrial sites and residential housing have to built by using existing technical and environmental infrastructure and structures. Another policy underlines that sprawling type settlements – residential villages or single industrial plants are not permitted and existing villages have to be provided with adequate infrastructure, services, employment places and recreational possibilities by foreseeing relevant measures in spatial plans. As regional spatial policy does not define that is meant by sprawling it is not expected that such guidelines will have any real impact on policies of local municipalities. Some other measures are mentioned like to prevent creation of linear type of settlements along major roads, to prevent conversion from seasonal to yearly residents in the former garden associations without detail planning and constructing adequate road network and energy and water infrastructure. The policy towards the creation of new farmsteads are stated clearly – that these need to have more than 4 ha of agricultural land and that such are not permitted in forest lands – however the policy towards existing farmsteads – on size and connection with agricultural activity - is lacking.

Riga District Spatial Plan (2008) follows and specifies the policies of regional planning spatial development plan. The term rural is substituted with term open space and it is divided between suburban (in Latvian – *Pierīga* – means “adjacent to Riga”) and other open space. Adjacent areas to city border are fragmented in 1) urban development area where not only formal urban but also formal rural settlements are included; 2) nature protection and recreation area and 3) coastal urban, recreational and environmental protection area and 4) coastal environmental protection and tourism area. Other open space of the Riga District includes coastal protection area with various conservation regimes, tourism development area in traditionally rural area and in national parks, nature protection areas, Riga city green belt’s environmental protection and recreation areas, industrial and transport and logistics areas and agriculture development areas. For instance areas with rural as spatial policy priority are delimited in farther distance from Riga border, that are on better quality soils. Both newly adopted regional levels spatial plans of Riga region reviewed the state of the development of urban and rural settlements in the descriptive part of the documents however policies towards housing control are left to local municipality comprehensive and detailed plans. Consulting some of the spatial comprehensive plans of rural local municipalities seems that also they are not sure how to perceive densely built up villages in close proximity to the border of Riga City - spatial plans had described these are urbanized areas although spatial policies directed are such that would fit to rural places – the place identity gap can be detected by studying these spatial policy documents.

Conclusion

By studying spatial policy documents and population data the conflicting policies toward new settlement pattern in Riga city region and particularly at the urban fringe can be revealed. Riga City Spatial Plan contains incentives to concentrate residential areas within the city municipality boundaries. The city spatial plan ignores any notion of rural – both 1) inside the boundaries of the city - even there are still vast un-built or not-forested areas that need to be managed, and 2) outside the city boundaries as

common interest areas lists nature protection and wide spectrum of infrastructure needs. For instance Riga District Spatial Plan list similarly nature protection and infrastructure issues but also adds tourism aspects as basis for cooperating with Riga City. Riga Planning Region Spatial Development Plan foresees Riga green ring for recreation and nature protection purposes and seaside urban, recreation and nature protection belt and as well as areas with rural as priority therefore this spatial plan more control oriented but with weak juridical status and too general for successful implementation. Both levels regional spatial plans of Riga area have policies to open space that is a new term used for formal rural areas – depending on distance from both Riga City and Baltic Sea Coast that are fragmented and includes priorities from strict nature conservation up to urbanization; where rural is perceived as space with diverse activities. As the power to control spatial development is in the hands of local municipalities - the implementation of regional level plans will depend on them. The review of local spatial plans demonstrated that rural municipalities that on the urban fringe of Riga are facing challenges towards identity change, particularly in their larger settlements. It is up to local municipalities to recognize that some of rural settlements are now densely built up and becoming extended over large area that the place identity change from rural to urban settlements could be discussed together with what kind of social, spatial and technical transfer are needed for backing up. In thus the gap between powerscape and matterscape might be diminished. If gap exists with the mindscape needs to be studied further. That means that studies are needed to find out if people perceive their places as rural or urban; what these places signify for them; and what are their attitude toward these settlements that are on the way to change their place identity.

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