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POSSIBILITIES OF UNIFIED LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL BORDERLAND VALKA-VALGA EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

There are only few border cities over the world and one of them is located at the northern border of Latvia. The purpose of the research was to assess the possibilities of single development of common borderspace areas and a historical centre in Valka – Valga. In the research qualitative research methods: cartographic, descriptive, comparative and analytical methods were used. In the research the green structures in Valka and Valga cities were analyzed, common areas identified and directions for a positive impact on the overall landscape of the border town were determined. Examples of architectural practice in other European border towns were used to provide landscape improvements. Development of the city character is influenced by the architectural infrastructure and esthetical resources. Border towns have experienced different historical processes. Each European border town has different landscape values that sometimes include diversity and contrast.

Key words: border towns, urban landscape, divided cities, architectural and landscape quality, border areas

INTRODUCTION

A border town is a town close to the boundary between two countries, states or regions. Usually the term implies that it is one of the things the town is most famous for (The Free Encyclopedia...).

A pair of border cities consists of two separate but almost adjacent cities on a national border. A major distinction, to be made in relation to such cities, is between duplicated and partitioned border cities. Duplication refers to situations where the establishment of one border settlement sooner or later was followed by the rise of a second settlement on the other side of the border. This type of development could be found along the borders of Mexico and the USA, and Canada and the USA. Partition occurred mainly in the Central Europe after the World War 2, when previously united cities were divided into two different entities by drawing new boundaries.

A new type of paired border cities is connected cities – border cities that have been paired by new infrastructure, for example, Calais and Dover are connected by the Channel tunnel, and Copenhagen and Malmo by the Oresund Bridge (Buursink, 2001).

For many decades while Valka has been developing into the jurisdiction of two states, the quality of the townscape and the condition of the urban structure has significantly decreased (Bratuškins, 2008). Some authors point out that border towns are unique places with historical, national and social interaction between two different countries. Inter borderspace as a unique urban phenomenon in the historical development is not an obstacle, but an overall quality of the property for citizens (Bratuškins, 2008).

To find solutions for Valka – Valga urban problems, it is necessary to set the main goal and tasks to achieve the goal.

The main goal of the research is to assess the possibilities of single development of common borderspace areas and the historical centre in Valka – Valga, which is divided by the current situation.

The main tasks are to describe frontier settlements, their types and inherent properties, to characterize the Valka – Valga physiographic features and their cultural and historical processes, to research territorial planning documents, to inventor the current situation of the green areas and urban territories in Valka - Valga, to compare the architectural and landscape values in six European border towns and to find solutions to challenged landscape and urban problems in Valka – Valga.

So far no one has acted on a theoretical level in the landscape adaptation field, especially in the environment of the border town. Currently, the landscape formation occurs within the same country. It is not so popular to promote united development for several countries sharing a common site. The main objective of all projects is to further the developments of both towns planning together, then the boundary will become merely symbolic. After the Schengen agreement there are many border towns in Europe, which try to go beyond nationalism and create a common cross border identity, for example, Kerkrade – Herzogenrath on the Dutch – German border, which is recognisable with its particular city centre: New Street (Ehlers, 2001).

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The area of the research is Valka – Valga border town between Latvia and Estonia. The subject of the research is architectural and landscape environment in the Latvian and Estonian border town.

In the research Valka – Valga is discussed through different ways of investigation: regional, historical, landscape spatial, territorial planning and Europe border towns context.

The basis of the research was Valka – Valga border town. Landscape survey, photo fixation and inventory were managed in the spot of this Latvian and Estonian town. Historical information about Valka and Valga development in time was found in holdings of the Local History Museum of Valka. At the research territorial plans and programmes of development were analyzed and compared. Information about other border towns in Europe was found on the Internet and in special literature of landscape design. Pictures from border towns abroad were received from people who live in Gubin, Gerlitz and Nova Gorica.

In the research qualitative research methods were used. *The descriptive method* was used for literature studies of Valka – Valga regional characteristics and history. *The cartographic method* was used to illustrate the location and current situation of six chosen border towns, for analysis of the territorial plans and the historical situation of Valka – Valga. Aerial photographies for the cartographic method were used (Google Maps...). *The analytical method* was used for survey of the current situation in Valka – Valga border town, Kevin's Lynch "city image" and "city building" analysis (Lynch, 1960), study of the territorial plans. *The comparative method* was used for literature studies of border towns abroad, green areas, architecture, historical development and territorial plans of Valka and Valga.

The six European border towns were compared with architectural, landscape and historic properties also using geographical, social and economical characteristics. In the present study the following border towns were analyzed: Tornio – Haparanda (Finland, Sweden), Narva – Ivangorod (Estonia, Russia), Guben – Gubin (Germany, Poland), Gorizia – Nova Gorica (Italy, Slovenia), Gorlitz – Zgorzelec (Germany, Poland) and Valka – Valga (Latvia, Estonia).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regional characters of Valka and Valga

Valka is a Latvian town on the northern national border with the Estonian city Valga. The border town is located on the banks of Pedele river. The length of Pedele river is 31 km. The river crosses the border perpendicular and creates a high quality natural landscape and green recreational area.

The area of Valga is 16.5 km² and that of Valka is 14.2 km². Their population are respectively 14153 and 6164 inhabitants (The Free Encyclopedia...). The general characteristics are shown in Table 1. Valka and Valga are located in the node of rail and auto traffic roads. The area of the town is similar in both towns, however, the population is disparity. The nearest town of Valga is Tartu, which is the second largest city in Estonia and a notable Estonian education centre. Closeness of Tartu gives a wide scope to Valga.

Table 1

General characteristics of Valka and Valga

	Valka	Valga
Area (km^2)	14,36	16,50
Population	6164	14153
Distance from cities (km)	Riga – 160; Valmiera – 45; Cesis – 70; Aluksne – 75	Tallinn – 210; Tartu – 75; Otepa – 45; Parnu – 120
Water courses	Pedele, Varzupite	
Common border (km)	4,9	

The border of Valka and Valga has different nature – it goes along streets, nature pavement territories, the river, cemetery, private houses and railway. Varzupite river acts like a border in the centre of the border town. There are public and private spaces on the border.

Historical development of the territory

The Livonian town Valka (Walk) at first was under the government of Poland – Lithuania common state and acquired a status of a town in 1584 (The Free Encyclopedia...). Up to the 20th century the town was ruled by Sweden and Russian. The first division of Valka occurred in 1920 between the newly – born Latvian and Estonian states. The old town centre got into the Estonian town Valga. Latvian Valka had to start new development of the town in earlier suburbs.

In 1941 Valka – Valga was occupied by the German military forces. In 1944 Valka and Valga are released from the German army. The town got into the Soviet Union occupation. (The Free Encyclopedia ...) There occurred destruction of old wooden houses and massive building constructions of blockhouses. The image of Valka – Valga town was modified and disarranged.

The second division of Valka and Valga was in 1990, when the border was restored by the decay of the Soviet Union. On January 1, 2009 all border – crossing points were removed and roads and fences opened between the two countries because of both countries joining the Schengen Agreement.

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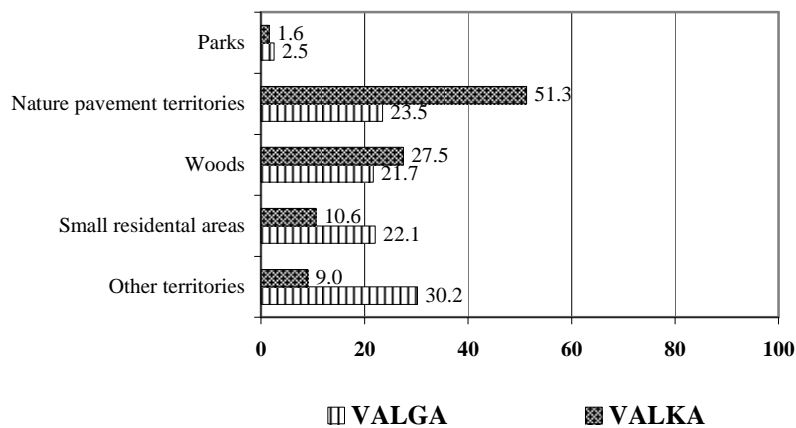
Figure 1. Green structure of Valka and Valga.

Figure 2. Comparison of green structure in Valka and Valga
where   Y – types of areas;
X – amount, %.

Landscape spatial structure of Valka – Valga

The urban landscape structure of Valka – Valga is formed by nature pavement territories, public spaces, watercourses (Fig. 1), street network and links between two separate administrative town centres. Each town has unique objects that attract inhabitants of the neighbour town. Valka – Valga is a town of a dynamical open or linear designing structure, where industrial and residential areas are located parallel. The migration of inhabitants is determined by the placement of the transport roads.

The green structure of Valka – Valga is formed by untouched nature pavement territories, woods, parks and public spaces, watercourses and small private residential areas with cultivated gardens. The majority of green recreational areas are located near Pedele river and in the south of the border town. Most of the artificial green territories parks and squares are situated in Valga town (Fig. 2).

Small residential areas dominate in the building structure of Valka (10.6 %). These areas look like green territories because of the low – rise houses and their small gardens around. There are many parks in the centre of Valka: Lugazu plaza, Eidemana square and Culture – recreation park with the amphitheatre near Pedele river.

In the administrative centre of Valga there are orderly public building greenery and green spaces. Street greenery is shaped where the road is wider. There are two main parks in Valga: Town (*Linna*) park and Sade park. Both parks have watercourses.

The historical development of Valka and Valga border towns are analogical. There are differences between the national statuses of both towns. Valka is a small provincial town but Valga is near the top ten largest towns in Estonia. It reflects in the architectural environment and quality in the common border town.

There are small residential areas in Valka and many multi storey buildings in Valga (Fig. 3).

There are unarranged and unattractive residential areas near Varzupite river on the national border. Clusters of shops and commercial buildings are focused near the border on the Valga side to attract consumers from Latvia.
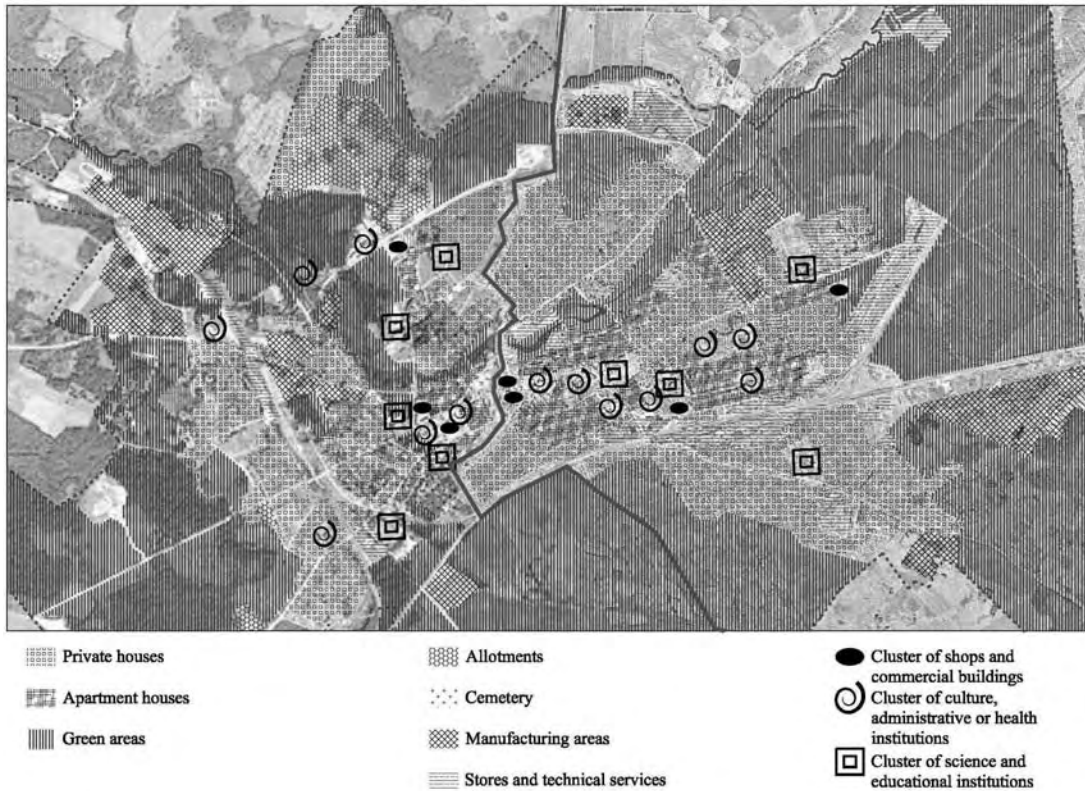

Private houses

Apartment houses

Green areas

Allotments

Cemetery

Manufacturing areas

Stores and technical services

Cluster of shops and commercial buildings

Cluster of culture, administrative or health institutions

Cluster of science and educational institutions

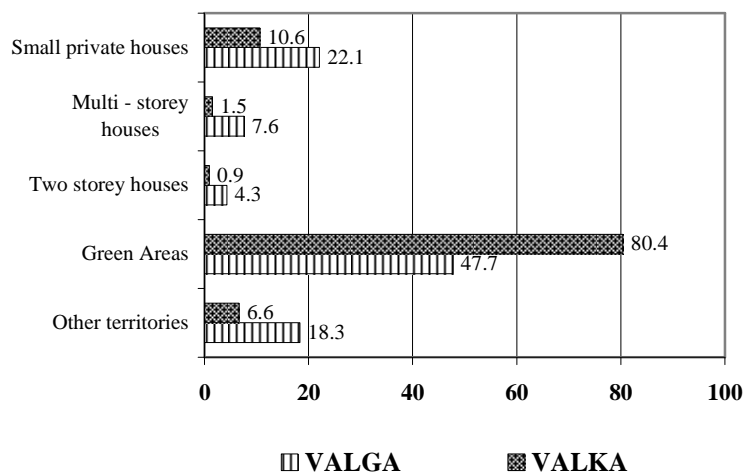**Figure 3.** City building of Valka and Valga after K. Lynch.

Figure 4. Comparison of building structure in Valka and Valga
where   Y – types of areas;
X – amount, %.

Clusters of culture, administrative or health institutions and science and educational institutions are located near the town centers. If the location is far from the center, institutions become few.

Manufacturing areas and stores, technical services are located along the main roads and railway outside the town centers. There are few industrial areas in the centre of Valga. Green areas in Valga are almost two times less (47.7%) and built up areas are approximately three times more than in Valka (52.3% and 19.6%). There are maintained historical buildings in the centre of Valga town. Three heritage valued ensembles are in Valka: Teraudskola, Valka high school, Culture house. The towers of the churches serve as vertical domains in both towns. Although there are many high objects in both towns, mostly industrial facilities: water towers, electrical – poles, the silhouette of Valka - Valga border town are wide and low.

Expansion of the border town is limited by the banks of the river, railway and national border. The building structure of the town is influenced by the natural topography, which is diverse on the Valka side. This is the reason why there is an orthogonal street network system in Valga and free planning street network system in Valka.

A visual space is created by Varzupite and Pedele rivers flowing together (Fig. 5). Varzupite river acts like a border in the centre of Valka – Valga frontier town. It is possible to develop a green territory near Varzupite river as recreational area. There are many different sights in the borderland. Some views contain harmonic natural landscapes, some views uncover misbalanced household buildings and industrial areas. There is a landscaped territory on the river banks of the Pedele.
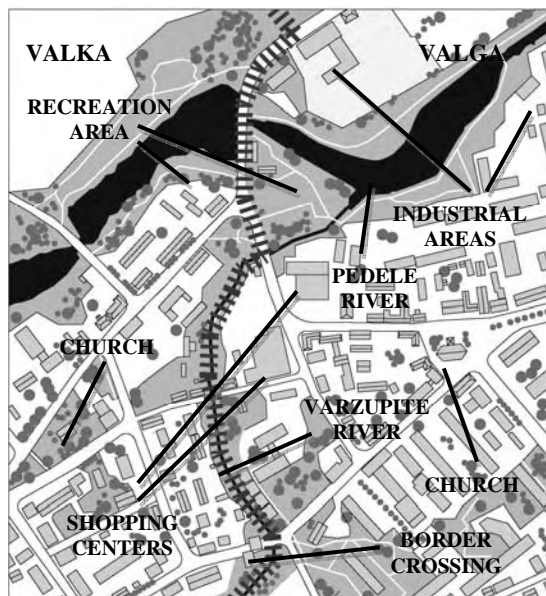

Figure 5. Scheme of Valka – Valga borderland in the centre of frontier town.

The landscape quality is reduced by unattractive private houses and allotment areas. The majority of these areas are neglected and opened to recreational parks.There are also unfinished and tumbledown buildings in the borderland.

The borderland of Valka – Valga is made by landscape elements of high and low visual aesthetic quality. Different unattractive elements are detected at full length of the border.

Landscape architectonic space in context of territorial planning

In comparison between the both towns territorial planning, which occurs separately, the main purpose of Valga is the development and growth of the town in the scale of all Estonia (Territorial plan of Valga...). The main purpose of Valka is becoming an important educational and tourism centre in Vidzeme region of Latvia (Territorial plan of Valka...). International collaboration with Valga is highlighted in the program of development of Valka. There are discussed questions about nature protection and development of green networks in the territorial plan of Valga. As green territories are less in the Valga side, the local authorities started to think about nature conservation problems.

Valga town is more guided to arrangement of green areas. There are listed - formation of street greenery, protective plantation, usage of perennial flowers and shrubs instead of trees.

The central action of landscaping in Valka is adjustment of Pedele river. Lugazu plaza – the central square of the town will be projected and landscaped within the framework of the Via Haensatica project. There is no information about the arrangement of the Varzupite river green area in both regional plans.

Development of the transport infrastructure is provided in the Via Haensatica project. Both towns participate in the project, which provides a ring road construction along the both towns to reduce traffic in the centre of the border town, a new system of bikeways along the border, through recreational areas and in the town centres.

Development of small residential areas is provided in both maps of the planned allowed functional use of the territory. Areas of multi – storey buildings are not provided in Valka and Valga. Many recreational and tourism areas are provided in Valka territory.

The ensembles of cultural heritage in Valga old town have one wide protection zone in the map of the protection zones of Valga. There are many separated protection zones of historical objects in the map of Valka.

The comparison between the regional plans brought out problems, what appear when Valka and Valga are planned and designed separately. The cartographic material, nomenclature of legends and

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applied language in the regional plans also disagree. There were discussed issues about a common process of regional planning in both Valka and Valga programmes of development.

Architectural and landscape quality in European border towns

Valka is one of the cities in the world where the border crosses the city centre and divides it into two parts, creating a twin city Valga and Valka. A similar situation is Tornio in Finland and Haparanda in Sweden, Guben in Germany and Gubin in Poland, Gorizia in Italy and Nova Gorica in Slovenia, Gorlitz in Germany and Zgorzelec in Poland, as well as Narva and Ivangoroda in Estonia and Russia. These six border towns have common and different landscape values that are shown in Table 2. All border towns have a river which has an important aesthetic quality. The important recreational role played by the river channels reflects both their ecology and appearance (Richards, 1982). In five border towns the river or its fragments act as a border. Pedele river flows through the centre of the town, a part of Varzupite river flows on the border. Soča river flows near the border around Gorizia – Nova Gorica.

In some border towns the cultural heritage is maintained that appears in forms of buildings. Tornio – Haparanda has recognizable Finish and Sweedish architecture, also in Gorizia we can find houses from Italian architecture samples. Germany – Poland has a balance between architecture. Architecture in Germany and Poland is similar. Different architecture styles are in Valka – Valga and Narva – Ivanogorod. Most of the buildings in the Latvian side are low-rise residential buildings but in the Estonian side near the town centre there are low-rise and also multi-storey buildings. As Narva is one of the largest cities in Estonia, it has a skyline with many multi-storey buildings and old Baroque houses. There are old soviet style buildings on the Russia side.

Most border towns have public green spaces. There are natural green structures as mountains, woods and islands in these border towns. Guben – Gubin has a very harmonious urban greenery system. Valka – Valga has a nice open-air stage that includes Pedele river. Sometimes the parks would require improvements, for example, in Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Russia.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results:
1) Valka and Valga towns have similar historical development. At the beginning it was a Livonian town Walk, where Latvians and Estonians lived together. After 1920 Walk was divided. The division affected Latvian Valka, it has to start over again the development of the town.

Table 2

Landscape values in European border towns

	Architecture	Landscape
Tornio – Haparanda	T: 4-5 storey buildings; wooden buildings from 19th Century; memorials; commemorative sites; churches, chimneys – vertical domains H: red brick houses; 2-3 storey buildings; modern 21th Century houses; wooden architecture; churches, chimneys – vertical domains	T: location on Suensaari Island; stone retaining walls – parks are created in levels; golf-course; Tornio river H: orderly system of street greenery – birches, perennials, annuals; golf-course; walking path of 5 km; Tornio river
Narva – Ivangorod	N: Herman fortress; 3-5 storey soviet period buildings; 12 storey block houses; coloured buildings from Baroque; churches block houses – vertical domains I: fortress; grey faded 3-5 storey soviet buildings; private houses; monuments; block houses – vertical domains	N: ordered street greenery in town centre – annuals; new small garden architecture forms; Narva river I: watermill; amphitheatre; undeveloped street greenery; Narva river
Guben – Gubin	Maintained cultural heritage; modern multi-storey building and semidetached housing; 3-5 storey soviet style buildings; churches, chimneys as vertical domains	Orderly system of street greenery, landscaped parks with cultivated plantation, new small architecture forms; fountains; renewed historical parks; Lusatian Neise river.
Gorizia – Nova Gorica	G: Italian architecture with red roofs and shutters; stones in facades; 3-4 storey buildings; churches – vertical domains NG: low Italian houses 1-3 storey; 3-9 storey modern buildings with colourful facades; churches, multi-storey houses – vertical domains	G: mountains; geometrical parks; landscape parks; monastery gardens; fountains; narrow streets; Soča river NG: mountains; wild nature territories; valley; vineyards; Soča river
Gorlitz – Zgorzelec	Maintained cultural heritage with colourful facades; 4-9 storey modern houses; 3-5 storey soviet style buildings; churches, towers – vertical domains	Landscaped parks; orderly system of street greenery; hard groundcover usage instead of grass; Lusatian Neise river
Valka – Valga	VK: low residential houses; few 5 storey soviet period buildings; churches, towers - vertical domains VG: low residential areas far from centre; 5 storey buildings with colourful facades; churches, chimneys – vertical domains	VK: wooden paths on river shores of Pedele; open air stage; Pedele, Varzupite rivers VG: asphalt paths on river shores of Pedele; few greenery in parks; orderly street greenery in centre

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2) Analyzing the image of the town, there were many vertical domains found in Valka – Valga, mostly industrial objects. The structure of Valka – Valga is influenced by separate town centres. Tieback works between both town public spaces.

3) Green structure of Valka towns can be developed, because of many untouched nature pavement territories (51.3 %) – meadows, green areas, alluvial lands. The most part of Valga is occupied by buildings. There are contrasts between private houses in Valka and multi-storey buildings in Valga.

4) The visual aesthetic quality of the common borderland is negatively influenced by industrial objects, neglected private houses and household areas. Both towns are participating in landscaping the river banks of the Pedele, but there are many mistakes and no tieback in the Pedele park projecting process.

5) Valka and Valga towns have to participate in common planning, to eliminate the problems that appear when areas are planned separately.

6) Different connections can be found in the comparison between European border towns. When there is no border in the town, usually the border town is divided by a river. There is architectural diversity in duplicated border towns (Tornio – Haparanda, Narva – Ivangorod). There is architectural and landscape unity maintained in partitioned border cities, which were owned by one country at the beginning (Guben – Gubin, Gorizia – Nova Gorica, Gorlitz – Nova Gorica). Valka – Valga is a partitioned city where both nations live together, there are architecture diversity and contrast in this situation.

7) There are many unique potentialities how to use the borderland of Valka – Valga. The nature pavement territory in the south of the border town can be used as a border – crossing park, where visitors could travel by bike, horse or on foot. In the places, where the border crosses the street, the border could be drawn in the road surfacing like in Baarle Nassau – Baarle Hertog settlement in the Netherlands – Belgium. Drawing the borderline serves as an attractive and interesting sideshow for the town visitors. The next step is landscaping the green area near Varzupite river. In many border towns of Europe, divided by the river, the area near the river is created as promenade or esplanade, where the neighbouring town can be seen over the water. The borderland of Valka – Valga is miscellaneously usable for active and passive recreation with visual and functional objects.

ACKNOVLEDGEMENTS

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