

Rural-urban Interaction Inclusion in Ongoing Latvia Regional Reform

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Abstract. The ongoing process of regional reform in Latvia involves the vision of both rural and urban territories. The nexus between the city and the countryside and inclusion of it into realistic policy is deemed a good approach for solving failures of the European cohesion policy. To study cohesion between rural and urban areas, there is a need to identify the meaning of two concepts – the city and the countryside. The field rural and urban territories interact is the regional spatial level. And to manage regional development the normative framework is important. Aim of the research is to find does the new regional reform in Latvia is in close cohesion with the New Urban Agenda, especially linkages of rural and urban. Development politics included in research tend to include a question regarding rural-urban interaction, but only in some points. Documents of the United Nations included in research provide a very clear definition of the actions to be taken to ensure cohesion between urban and rural territories. The next step would be to assess and understand how to achieve. The issues of creation and opportunities of cohesion have been discussed in Latvia. It is not clear does the ongoing regional reform in Latvia will achieve declared goals regarding rural-urban interaction after ongoing discussions with the local municipalities.

Keywords: rural territories, spatial planning, urbanization, rural-urban interaction

Introduction

In Latvia, it is an ongoing process of regional reform. In the reform process, it is possible to define the vision of country development. In the regional development process sustainability of both rural and urban territories should be included. Human development processes are complex, and not quite predictable in all aspects. Thus, in a way, some actions are aimed at rectifying faults, such as, for example, climatic changes caused by human activities, which now jeopardize the existence of the entire planet. The inclusion of the nexus between the city and the countryside into realistic policy is deemed a good approach for solving failures of the European cohesion policy – specifically, the isolation of rural development from the cohesion policy [17]. Urbanization is an issue of concern in landscape and spatial planning nowadays, but does that mean that rural territories are unimportant or less important? Evermore people come to live in urban territories. In 2018, city inhabitants accounted for 55 % of the world's population, and forecasts predict this number to rise to about two-thirds of the planet by 2050. A democratic society cannot prohibit a person from choosing a specific place to live, so forecasts in respect of migration processes and numbers are rather tentative. The shortage of detailed forecasts makes it hard to take any preventive actions associated with greater numbers of people living in cities and other large inhabited localities. An essential circumstance is that it is not just the urban population that is growing, but also the size of cities and the number of cities with a population above 1 million. Rural and urban

territories meet at the regional level. Regional development has to be sustainable and in theory are widely used three elements of sustainable development – economic, environmental, and social. Scientist Munasigne has defined not only elements of sustainable development, but also practical actions involved (Fig. 1) [6; 9; 12].

Economic aspects are related to income, production, investment, market development, price formation, etc. Social aspects refer to the distribution of equality, such as income distribution, market access, welfare and power positions of certain groups or regions, etc. And environmental dimensions refer to the quality of life, resource scarcity, pollution, and related variables. The key issue of sustainability policy is related to how sustainability is identified in the regulatory framework [11].

Social, environmental and economic bounds are studied in planning documents of different levels within the context of the past, the present, and the future. The process of developing binding documents in the domain of spatial planning requires the involvement of various experts. Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda are a result of consequential actions and processes. New Urban Agenda is a document presented at the United Nations conference Habitat III in 2016. As early as at this conference, this document has already sparked several discussions and outlined the issues to be solved for that policy to be implemented in practice. New Urban Agenda is aimed at fulfilling the progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal

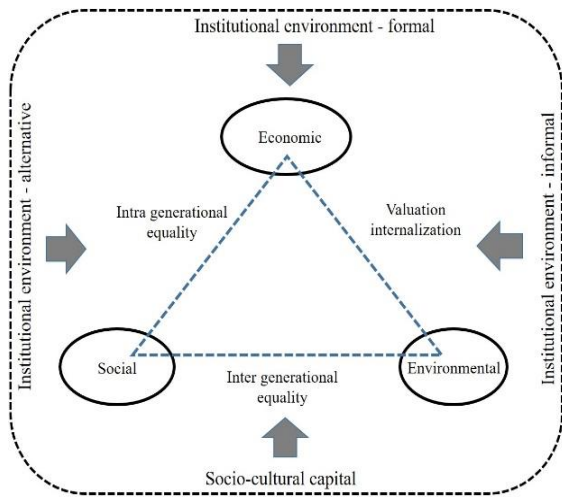


Fig. 1. Munasinghe's Approach to Sustainable Development [6; 9; 12].



Fig. 2. Toronto city borders [16]

number 11. The main aim of the research is to find does the new regional reform in Latvia is in close cohesion with the New Urban Agenda, especially urban-rural linkages. The broad-scale spatial document framework being developed calls for the assessment of the following points in the research:

- are the population dynamics unambiguously oriented towards urbanization;
- what is most essential for ensuring cohesion;
- are there any trends in Latvia that would be indicative of the development of cohesion between cities and rural territories?

Materials and Methods

Research analysis of the subject is based on literature research in three dimensions – applicability or the current subject in the latest comprehensive planning documents, qualitative assessment of documents in scientific publications, cohesion between cities and rural territories in Latvia. In research is used theoretical research papers and political documents, which influence territorial planning in Europe as New Urban Agenda and documents related to the implementation of New Urban Agenda.

Results and Discussion

The reason that makes the issue of urbanization so important nowadays is the increasing urban population. Profound research into various data, however, indicates that the information is not that explicit. An important aspect is that the number of people living in inhabited localities increases rapidly worldwide, yet the decrease in rural population is minimal. At that, the number of people living in rural territories is still expected to decline dramatically over the next few years [16]. In turn, another study reveals that over three billion people in developed countries live in rural territories; their numbers grow and are expected to maintain growth until 2028 [5]. Thus, there is also a great number of

people living in rural territories, so the development of these areas may in no way be deemed less important for the public. Given that the three dimensions of planning are usually defined as the environment, the public and the economy, these three dimensions are of equal significance as pertains to the planning of both urban and rural territories. Different documents, studies and process characteristics show a trend toward separating these two concepts – the city and the countryside.

To study cohesion between rural and urban areas, one has to identify the meaning of these two concepts – the city and the countryside. A more precise study makes it clear that different statistical data on urban population cannot be interpreted unambiguously, as this process addresses the varying definitions of what a city is, and where city limits are deemed to be exactly [16; 17]. The definition of a city often stems from the wish to ascertain the population. For instance, 2.6 million people were living within the administrative boundaries of Toronto in 2011. In turn, the inclusion of suburbs into the calculation resulted in the number being almost doubled, to 5.1 million. Along with the metropolitan territory, the number rose to 5.6 million (Fig. 2) [16].

These different definition shows, it would be essential to comprehend the possible definition variations and, respectively, definitions of territories adjacent to cities. It is important to emphasize the value of working on more sustainable development of rural territories, along with solving the issues of a much greater number of people living in cities, even though the countryside is not that populated. The question of where life would be more sustainable does not have an explicit answer – cities are more compact, but rural territories offer each specific person greater opportunities to make individual choices and be more elastic. Even though there is no single specific definition of a city, the

available definition is more like a "recipe", which lists the ingredients of a city [3]. In spite of the complicated definition, the focus remains: it is the urban population that shows rapid growth. Along with the increase in population, it becomes ever more important for urban spatial planning documents to address the issues of city quality and planning, such as, for instance, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 11 – making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable [16]. In this aspect, the emphasis is placed unevenly, as, even though the number of people living in rural territories does not decrease (not everywhere, however), the relevance of these territories has diminished.

In turn, territories adjacent to cities – urban regions – are territories where the links between one or several cities and the surrounding rural territory are more intense and functionally (economically, socially, politically and geographically) connected [5]. If rural territories are also defined using the cellular principle, these are territories with over 50% of the population living in the rural sections of the network, but cells are to be identified outside the city clusters [3]. Therefore, unlike cities, rural territories are not an independent value but are rather in close cohesion with the city. The definition of rural territories is essential specifically within the context of cohesion research, but, as it can be seen here, the rural territory cannot be defined before defining urban territory – not with this methodology, at least. Cohesions between urban and rural territories have been discussed for over a decade by now, since the first scientific report of the EPSON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network); studies have provided definitions for different types of rural territories and the development visions becoming possible due thereto. Close cohesion involving cooperation between urban and rural territories is also deemed polycentric cooperation [4]. The EPSON study of 2016 describes Latvian potential in an ambivalent manner – the eastern part is regarded to as a territory with poor urban structure, low accessibility, and territorial cooperation, whereas the western part is deemed a territory with a prominent urban structure, but low accessibility and territorial cooperation [14]. In turn, the latest OECD document examines several cohesion examples between urban and rural territories – travelling to work, migration, provision of public services, etc. It is deemed that the management of these relations may partially be based on functional regions [16].

In my opinion, the issue of cohesion is essential and requires a clear definition at the global level. Habitat III, the United Nations conference that took place in 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, addressed the issues of development of dwellings and sustainable

inhabited localities and emphasized the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The conference was attended by representatives of several countries, practising planning experts and scientists. An insight into the content of the conference with a focus on the cohesion between urban and rural territories reveals that this subject is mentioned in several sections and, which is essential, there was also a separate session on the cohesion between regions and cities. The importance of cohesion is stated in such aspects the following ones:

- **rural territories are important**, as these provide such resources as water, energy, food, and other services, and these are essential, especially in case of disasters;
- to make the development of inhabited locations truly sustainable, **one must think of cohesion** between cities and urban territories, conducting cooperation, and dialogue between the involved stakeholders;
- it is necessary to rethink strategic planning, ensuring the involvement of all concerned stakeholders and creating a **human-centered approach**, local knowledge must be integrated into the decision-making process, including that of farmers;
- **polycentrism** is essential for development planning, and it includes cohesion not just between inhabited localities of different levels, but the involvement of rural territories as well, to mitigate the social and economic inequality in the region in general [18].

Within the boundaries of a separate session of Habitat III on the cohesion between regions and cities, essential findings and inferences were defined in reliance upon discussions between experts and representatives of nations. The main goal to aim towards, even if it is never achieved, is to leave no territory and no individual neglected – this, in my opinion, is a powerful and significant focus, absolutely required to be taken into account in spatial planning. Separate findings are oriented towards identifying the importance and necessity of rural territories, but the major focus remains with the needs of cities:

- to conduce a territorial development approach where the **major role would belong to cities**, especially small and medium ones;
- reinforcing cohesion between urban and rural territories is going to improve the living and subsistence of the rural population and ensure **access to food** for the most vulnerable population groups in the meantime;
- fresh food mostly comes from rural regions, and, as cities grow larger, the rural and urban **food supply chain** becomes longer as well, implying that food travels longer distances;

- we have to improve **synergy** between industries, actors and spaces;
- **partnering relationships** are required between the UN agencies, the academic community, government, and local authorities and the private sector, including residents involved in the discussion, to work together on the solutions for improving the lives of inhabitants of both urban and rural areas [18].

Three emphases can be derived from these key findings – that the central object of interest is cities nonetheless, that rural territories are important particularly within the context of the provision of food, and that cooperation at different levels is important.

The New Urban Agenda is a document that is already being adopted by countries, so each one bears its responsibility for implementation of the principles thereof in practice – that is, in the local planning documents as well. Two key points of the document are more specifically oriented at cohesion between urban and rural territories. One of these declares that countries that endorse the document commit themselves to support territorial systems that integrate the functions of cities and rural territories in the national and regional spatial framework, thus conducting sustainable management and usage of land and natural resources. The second key point draws attention to long-term urban environment and territorial planning processes and the spatial development practice, which includes integrated water resource planning and management, considering the continuity of urban and rural areas on the local and territorial scale [10].

The greatest emphasis is placed on strengthening cohesion rather than consolidating and developing the regions themselves, but the importance of regional development within the context of equality and resource availability is also mentioned. Having secured the involvement of several international organizations and experts, the United Nations have jointly developed a situation assessment to define tools for creating cohesion between urban and rural territories. The defined tools outline the main points to be worked towards by different territories – product flow, services and exchange of information, mobility and migration and partnerships between urban and rural territories, as well as the food provision system and "sustainability chain" for all; urbanization of rural territories – formation of small and medium cities; the aggregate of cities and rural territories within the context of conflicts and disasters; integrated planning; increasing the capacity for cooperation; inclusive investments; environment impact mitigation.

TABLE 1
Document content regarding rural-urban interaction

No.	Document	Connection of rural and urban territories	Main point concerning rural-urban interaction
1.	EPSON, 2010	displayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definitions for different types of rural territories and the development visions. ▪ Polycentric cooperation.
2.	EPSON, 2016	displayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defines development potential by urban structure, accessibility, and territorial cooperation.
3.	OECD, 2017	displayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examines cohesion between urban and rural territories.
4.	New Urban Agenda, 2016	displayed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integrated territorial systems. ▪ Long-term urban environment and territorial planning.

The United Nations deems large-scale activities to be the most essential at the beginning stage:

- aggregation of data and evidence on the cohesion between urban and rural territories, including a compilation of examples and good practice;
- definition of indicators for cohesion between urban and rural territories;
- establishment of the global partnership for the development of cohesion between urban and rural territories;
- development of tools for supporting the Member States in the process of strengthening cohesion between urban and rural territories on various scales [19].

Table 1 visually displays, that development politics tend to include a question regarding rural-urban interaction. However, not all studies are carried out to implement and use the New Urban Agenda. Deficiencies can often be identified in the course of document examination, and the researchers who analyse the New Urban Agenda have noticed some deficiencies as well. One of these would be the ambiguous effect on such locations as fields, islands, suburbs, small countries, cities of small and medium-size. The currently evolving opinion is that

a coalition was formed by the involved parties that developed the SDG 11 and continues to propagate the importance thereof in the urban dimension [1; 2]. Another substantiated discussion would be the one on the issue of what makes the New Urban Agenda better and more useful than the previous ones, and whether it contains any genuinely new ideas [15]. Objectives set in the course of development of strategies and policies are usually intended to create a better situation, but these are no more than words and smart terms without reference to the actual situation. Planning must be a territorial dimension. Many national development policies adhere to the idea that the development of urban and rural areas is a binary choice.

The territory of Latvia is 64589 km² and here live approximately 2 million inhabitants. As it is said in materials from Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Republic of Latvia, that after reform made in 2009 have been understood, that one of the positive effects of done reform is areas of local governments that were created around regional development centres have benefited from increased urban-rural cooperation. Unfortunately, also is mentioned, that there are local municipalities without regional development centres, and they are limited in urban-rural cooperation [21]. There is no data in which proportion is positive and negative tendencies.

The government of the Republic of Latvia, at its sitting of 21 March year 2019, decided to continue the territorial reform initiated in 1998 and to establish economically viable administrative territories by 2021 with local governments, and after consultation with local governments. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (VARAM) emphasizes that Latvia has also adopted an integrated outlook on the issues of urban and regional development, without addressing these in isolation from each other. The VARAM admits that it is the Territorial Agenda for the European Union that identifies the need to conduce polycentric development using cooperation networks between cities and urban regions, and another priority set therein is the search for new forms of territorial administration and cooperation, mostly between urban and rural territories. The National Development Plan of Latvia for 2007–2013 has identified polycentric development as a prerequisite for the development of a balanced country. This polycentrism approach is intended for implementation in Latvia by reviewing the general regional policy framework [13]. The "Assessment of Interaction between the Urban and Rural Territories of Latvia" study carried out by "Konsorts" LLC summarises the good experience of the EU Member States, analyses interaction between the urban and rural territories of Latvia and identifies the most

characteristic forms of interaction that affect the development of the respective region. Findings of the study point to the necessity of cooperation and diversification of rural territories [7]. It is important to note here that the study addressing the necessity and opportunities of cohesion was performed several years before the New Urban Agenda. The study offers some tools that could be specifically applicable in Latvia in the course of the development of interaction between urban and rural territories. It must be noted here that the definition used within this study is rather simple – cities are all administrative territories with the status of a city, whereas all other territories are rural areas.

There are seven objectives set for the ongoing administrative and territorial reform. Conceptual report about administrative reform describes the criteria for creating counties, which include:

- the area is geographically uniform;
- there is a development centre of regional or national importance in the territory of the county;
- the vicinity of Riga is the vicinity of Riga, with at least 15,000 permanent residents;
- the sustainable economic development of the area is possible and the municipality has the ability to attract significant investments to the area;
- it is possible to set up an effective network of educational, health and social services, public transport and road networks, and a utility network;
- the area is optimally created for the municipality to carry out autonomously its statutory autonomous functions, unless otherwise provided by law;
- sufficient pupils for at least one prospective high school [8].

About rural-urban interaction is more thought under the point about the importance of development centre in the territory is included. In this case, development centres are the thirty most important cities in Latvia. Considering mentioned above, as well as the functional connection of these development centres with the rural areas adjoining them, the establishment of such a criterion by law would ensure polycentric state development, also considering the possibilities of the state budget [8]. This objective is centered at larger inhabited localities, whereas another objective emphasizes the importance of the competitive performance of municipalities [20]. Therefore, the inference is that the administrative reform is not in line with the New Urban Agenda, as competitive performance is contrary to equality and levelled opportunities. The reform is also based on studies, which mostly aim to deliver an assessment of the existing situation from an economic standpoint.

Conclusions

One cannot help the feeling that we are still far from achieving the goal of not leaving any territories or individuals neglected, yet this, of course, does not mean that we should stop trying. Population dynamics tend to deteriorate in rural territories, yet this trend is not as drastic as to make us act as if there would be no one living there, which would only conduce unidirectional dynamic processes. To create cohesion, it is important to realize at the moment that it must be uniform rather than oriented in just one direction – the countryside supplies the city. Regardless of how the documents would be called, these do emphasize inhabited localities, deeming that rural territories provide the city and, if the cooperation is good, the advantageous economic and environmental situation of the city provides support to rural territories. All documents lay great emphasis on rural territories as suppliers of

food to the city. This emphasis could rely on the consideration that urbanization is a major influence factor that has a great effect on the environment, economy, and society of urban and rural territories alike. Documents of the United Nations provide a very clear definition of the actions to be taken to ensure cohesion between urban and rural territories; the next step would be to assess and understand how to achieve it and whether any of the defined objectives can be fulfilled in the current situation. Just like elsewhere, the issues of creation and opportunities of cohesion have been discussed in Latvia for over a decade. The new regional reform in Latvia is declared goals also regarding rural-urban interaction, but it is not clear do it will stay like that after ongoing discussions with the local municipalities.

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Kopsavilkums. Latvijā notiekošais Administratīvi reģionālās reformas process ietver gan lauku, gan pilsētu teritoriju redzējumu. Saikne starp pilsētu un laukiem un tās iekļaušana reālajā politikā tiek uzskatīta par labu pieeju Eiropas kohēzijas politikas kļūmju risināšanai. Lai izpētītu sasaisti starp lauku un pilsētu teritorijām, jāidentificē divu jēdzienu nozīme – pilsēta un lauki. Lauku un pilsētu teritoriju mijiedarbība ir reģionālais telpiskais līmenis. Un, lai vadītu reģionālo attīstību, ir svarīgi normatīvie akti. Pētījuma mērķis ir noskaidrot, vai jaunā Latvijas reģionālā reforma ir ciešā sasaistē ar Jauno pilsētu programmu (*New Urban Agenda*), īpaši lauku un pilsētas saikne. Attīstības politikas, kas iekļautas pētījumā, nereti ietvert jautājumu par lauku un pilsētu mijiedarbību, bet tikai dažos punktos. Pētījumos iekļautie Apvienoto Nāciju Organizācijas dokumenti sniedz ļoti skaidru definīciju darbībām, kas jāveic, lai nodrošinātu pilsētu un lauku teritoriju kohēziju.

Habitat III, Apvienoto Nāciju konference 2016. gadā Kioto pilsētā Ekvadorā bija veltīta mājokļu un ilgtspējīgas apdzīvoto vietu attīstības jautājumiem, kur tika akcentēta Jaunās pilsētu programmas ieviešana. Šajā konferencē tikās vairāku valstu pārstāvji, plānošanas praktiķi un zinātnieki. Ja papēta konferences saturu, fokusējoties tieši uz pilsētu un lauku teritoriju sasaisti, var redzēt, ka dažādās sadaļās šis temats ir minēts un, kas būtiski, bija arī atsevišķa sesija, veltīta tieši reģionu un pilsētu sasaistei. Sasaistes nozīmīgums minēts tādos aspektos kā:

- lauku teritorijas ir nozīmīgas, jo sniedz tādus resursus kā ūdeni, enerģiju, pārtiku un citus pakalpojumus, un tie ir būtiski, īpaši katastrofu gadījumos;
- lai apdzīvoto vietu attīstība būtu patiešām ilgtspējīga, ir nepieciešams domāt par sasaisti starp pilsētām un lauku teritorijām un veidot sadarbību un dialogu starp iesaistītajām pusēm (*stakeholders*);
- nepieciešams pārdomāt stratēģisko plānošanu, veicot visu ieinteresēto pušu iesaisti un veidojot cilvēkos centrēto pieeju, lemlēšanas procesā jāintegrē vietējās zināšanas, arī tās, kuras ir lauksaimniekiem;
- policentriskums attīstības plānošanā ir būtisks, un tas ietver sasaisti ne tikai starp dažāda līmeņa apdzīvotajām vietām, bet arī lauku teritoriju iesaisti, lai mazinātu sociālo un ekonomisko nevienlīdzību reģionā kopumā.

Latvijā ir pārrunāti jautājumi par saliedēšanas radīšanu un iespējām. Latvijā ir pārrunāti jautājumi par saliedēšanas radīšanu un iespējām. Pašlaik, kad notiek diskusijas ar vietējām pašvaldībām, paliek neskaidrs, vai Latvijā notiekošā reģionālā reforma sasniegs deklarētos mērķus attiecībā uz lauku un pilsētu mijiedarbību.