



Priorities and cooperation needs in Estonia-Latvia border-area



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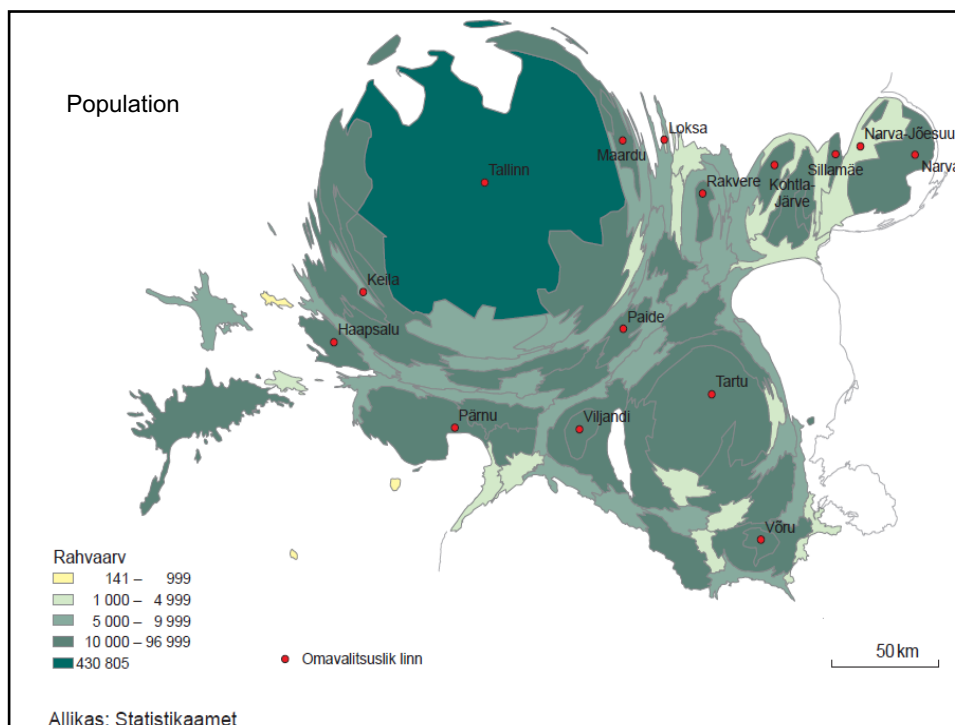
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Focus areas of the presentation

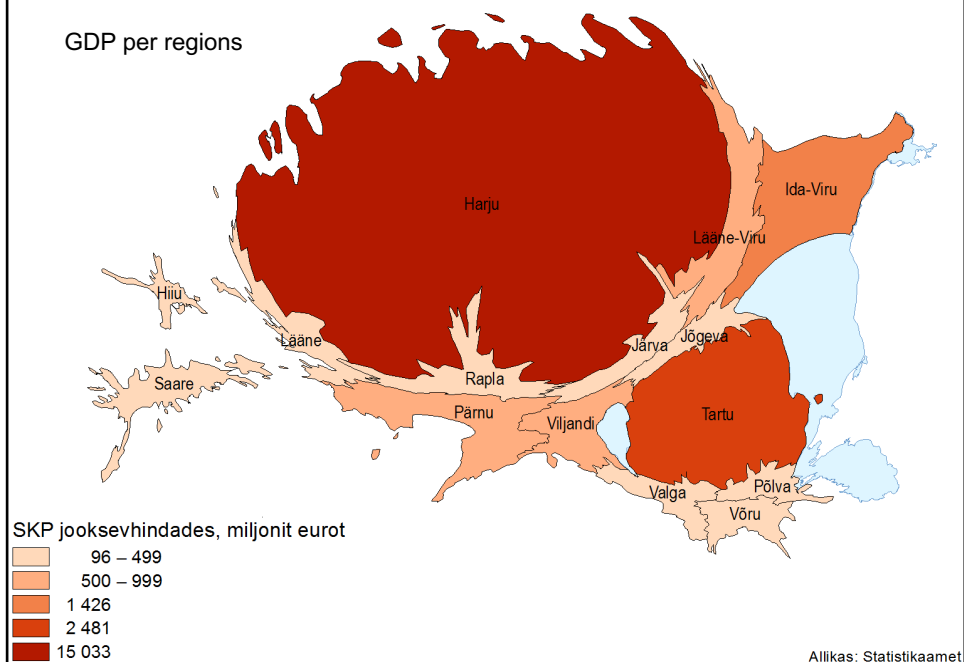


- New challenges for Estonia with regards to the administrative reform and the developments in the European Union
- Estonian-Latvian cooperation on state level and municipal level
- Suggestions for cooperation development between Estonian and Latvian local municipalities

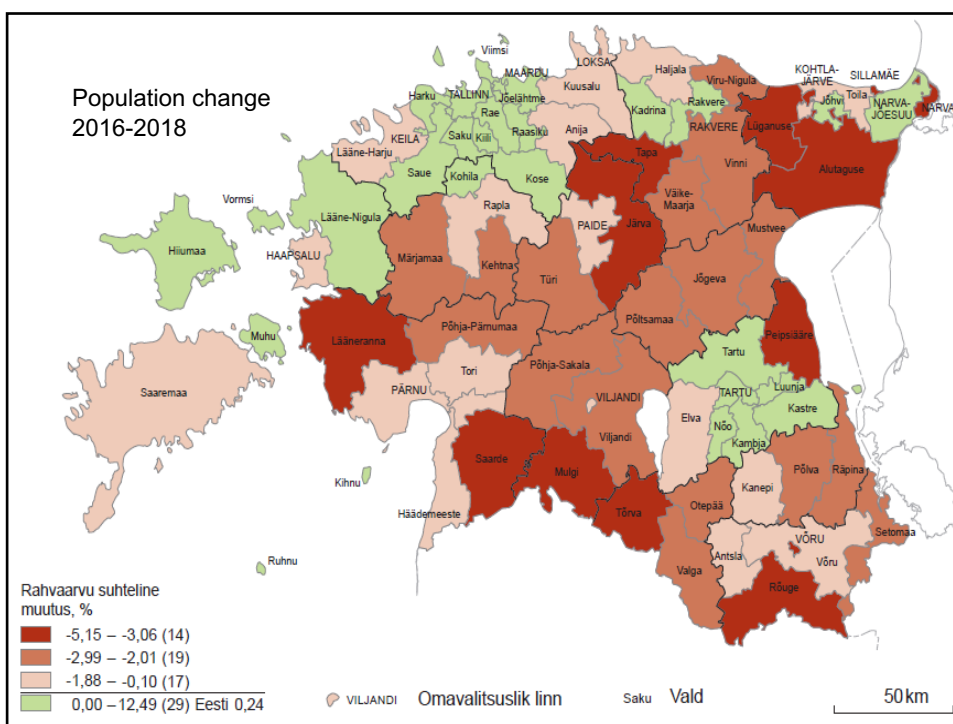


SKP jooksevhindades, 2017

GDP per regions

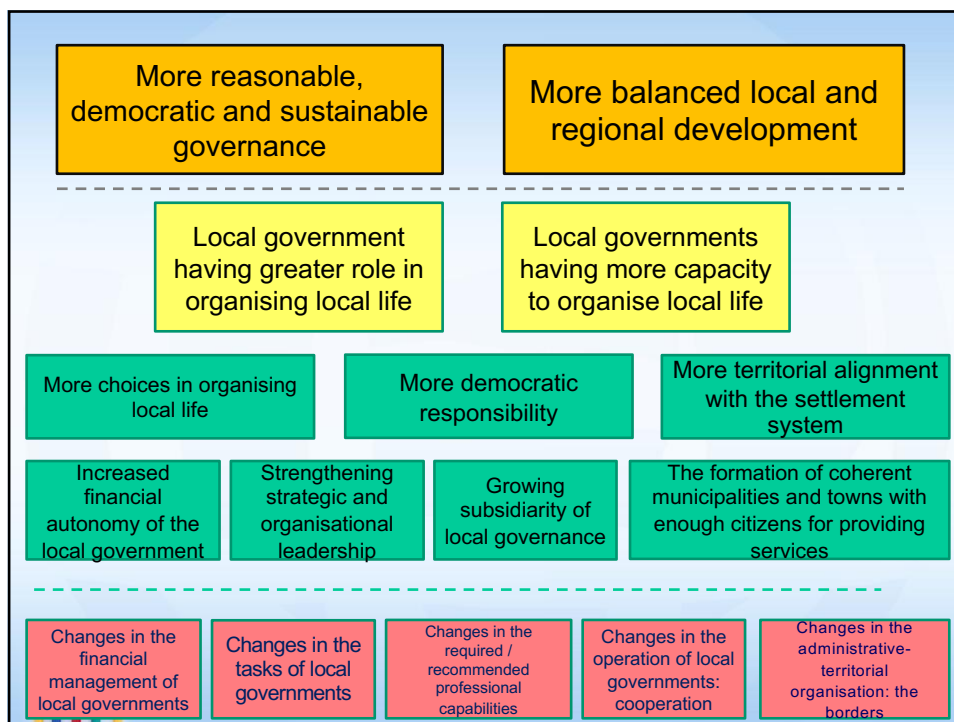


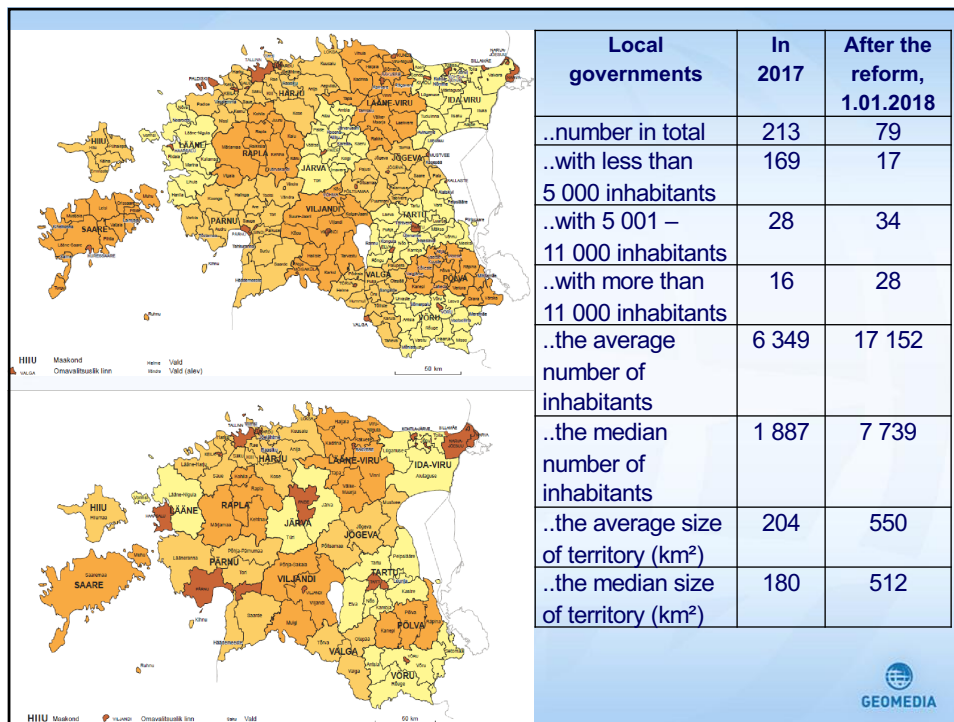
Population change 2016-2018



Administrative-territorial reform in Estonia

- There is a one-tier local government system in Estonia since 1993. All local government unit, towns and rural municipalities, are equal in their legal status.
- Administrative Reform Act was passed in June 2016 and administrative-territorial reform was forced 1. January 2018. All local governments must have at least 5,000 residents (*criterion for the minimum size of a local government*).
- The goal is the establishment of capable local governments that can develop every aspect of local life, so that people can live well: offering high quality public services, using regional prerequisites for development, increasing competitiveness, and ensuring a more consistent regional development.





Latvia-Estonia cooperation (1)



- There are national cooperation institutions, e.g **Estonia-Latvia parliamentary group**, **Government Commission for promoting Estonia-Latvia cross-border cooperation**, **Estonia-Latvia cross-border cooperation program**
- On 20 December 1995, **Valga and Valka signed cooperation agreement**: to remove barriers and obstacles between the towns and to develop the cooperation potential holistically, and to create cross-border cooperation network between Valga and Valka

The fields of cooperation include economics, transportation, city planning, tourism, education, culture, sports, health care, environment and town administration.

NGO Estonia-Latvia Institute was founded on 19 February 2001; **NGO Latvia-Estonia Institute** was founded on 11 October 1999. The latter is operational.



Latvia-Estonia cooperation (2)

- In 2005, in the framework of EL INTERREG III A project 'Valga-Valka: 1 town 2 countries', **Valga-Valka common secretariat** was created, but it has faded away by now. Currently, there is a regular once-a-month **Valga-Valka round table**.
- On 4 December 2015 **the municipalities from Estonia's side** (Valga, Hummuli, Tõrva, Helme, Karksi, Abja, Saarde, Häädemeeste, Taheva, Karula, Mõniste, Varstu, Rõuge, Haanja and Misso), and **the municipalities from Latvia's side** (Aluksne, Ape, Valka, Naukšeni, Rujiena, Mazsalaca, Aloja and Salacgriva) signed **the cooperation agreement** in the field of economics, tourism, culture, education, sports and social sphere.
Additionally, **two-sided cooperation agreements** have been made **between municipalities**, for example Mõniste and Ape.



Estonian municipalities with Latvia-oriented developments (1)

Valga municipality:

- smart Estonia-Latvia cooperation border area, a twin town.
- Valga-Valka urban integration, being South Estonian and Northern Latvian common economic, educational and social centre, and an example of cooperation between two countries:
 - Transportation hub, fast train Tallinn-Riga, also the direction of Russia
 - nationally unique economic models, uniting the potential of the regions
 - common labour market, training as preparation for labour market (vocational education)
 - cooperation in education, language studies
 - best practices of different cultures living together
 - environmental protection
- common marketing: investment climate, tourism



Estonian municipalities with Latvia-oriented developments (2)

- **Tõrva municipality:** Estonia-Latvia cross-border impact has to be taken into account in labour market and in the buying of products and services.
- **Rõuge municipality** has friendship contract with various international partners, including Aluksne in Latvia.
- **Häädemeeste municipality:** Via Balitca and Rail Baltic, Baltics hiking trail 1 100 km (European Long Distance Path E9); nature tourism routes and cooperation with Ainaži in Latvia.
- **Saarde municipality:** to install wideband fiber-optic cable, including at the strategically important border-crossing point at Jäärja village, where there is no quality mobile and data connection; border crossing migration.



Conclusions from municipal development plans

- Currently the municipalities' development plans pay rather little attention to Estonian-Latvian cooperation development, excluding Valga municipality. Valga-Valka have a special place in Estonian-Latvian cooperation.
- Potential areas of interest for cooperation: tourism, labour market, provision of public services, transportation, education, movement of products, environment, health care, police, ambulance, rescue services, security etc.
- There is no need for declarations, but to develop real content for cooperation, to give it economic dimension. It is important to clarify what is the expected benefit from cooperation.



Actions related to cross-border cooperation

- Using the special nature of Valga-Valka twin town and increasing the international competitiveness of the economic environment.
- Forming Valga-Valka cross-border cooperation committee with the objective to form common cooperation space in concordance with the regulation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union nr 45/2001. Taking a lead position in municipal cross-border actions.
- The preparation of the concept for increasing regional economic growth and employment.
- The development of everyday common activities: services, cultural and environment space, leadership of the officials of municipalities.



Suggestions (1)

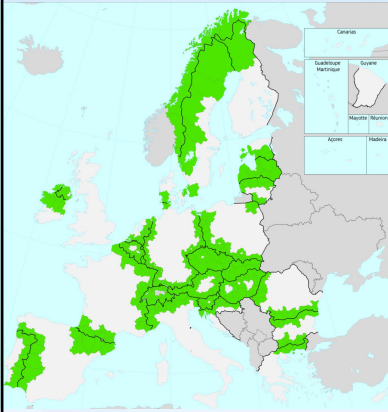
Potential topics in further detail:



- Public transport accessibility
- Labour market (vocational education, regional training / re-training of the labour force)
- Critical response (rescue, police, ambulance) optimisation
- Public service provision (education, health care,)
- Tourism (light traffic routes, hiking trails, common marketing efforts etc)
- Cross-border planning (incl connecting Valga-Valka urban spaces)
- Enhancing digital connectivity
- Estonian-Latvian house in Valka to empower the activities of Estonia-Latvia Institute (language and culture studies and events, business contacts)



Suggestions (2)



- Valga-Valka as the leader in Estonian-Latvian border cooperation: bringing together the round table of local governments of Estonia-Latvia border area, also the Estonia-Latvia / Latvia-Estonia parliamentary groups.
- Activating Estonia-Latvia Government Commission cooperation. Among other topics there could be the preparation for the new EU programming period, for funding cross-border cooperation. Private sector should be actively involved!
- Political will is the most important element to successfully implement the cross border solutions.



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Thank you!

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