

Pains and gains in border-town planning, Valga-Valka example



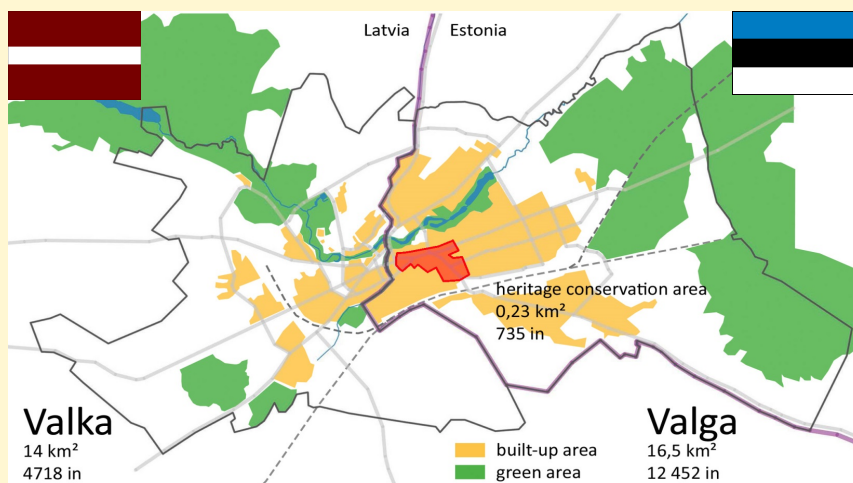
Jiří Tintěra

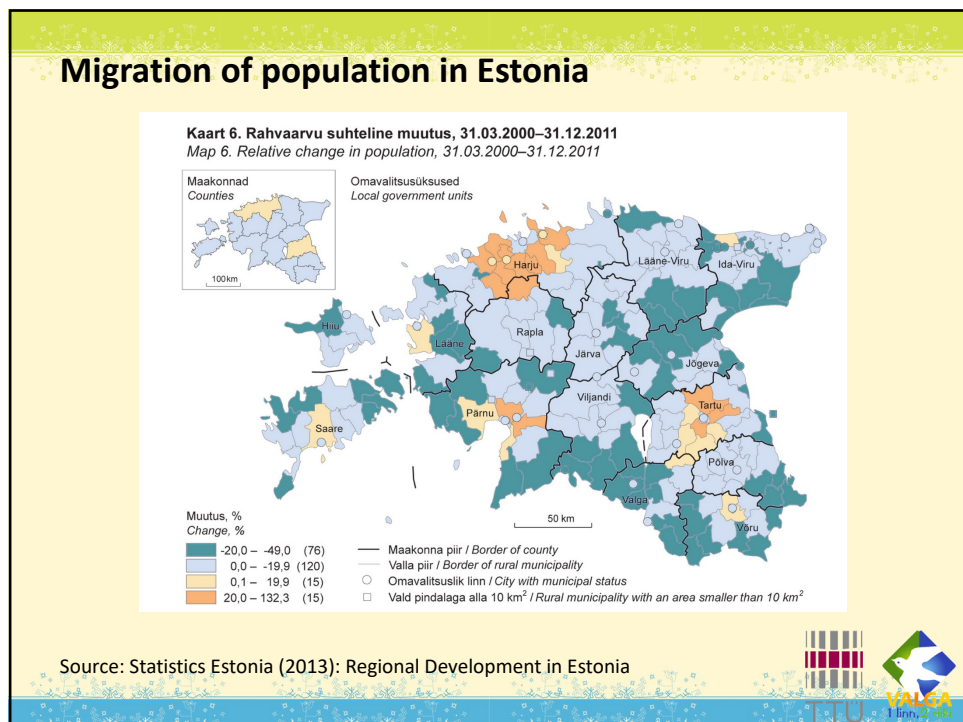
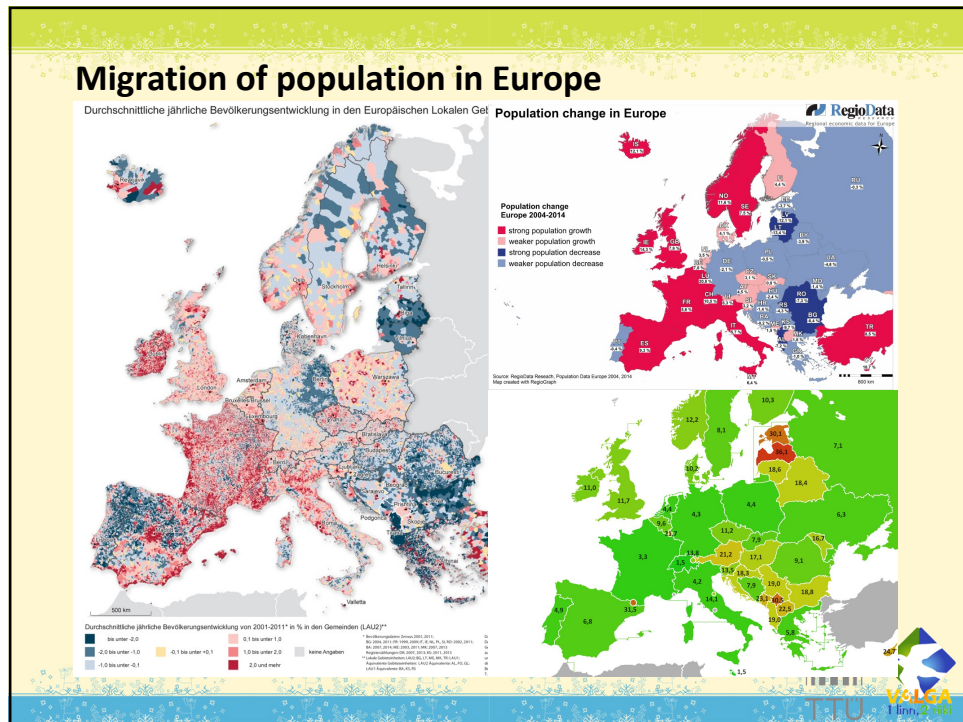
Town architect at Valga municipality

doctoral student at Tallinn University of Technology



Twin towns Valga and Valka





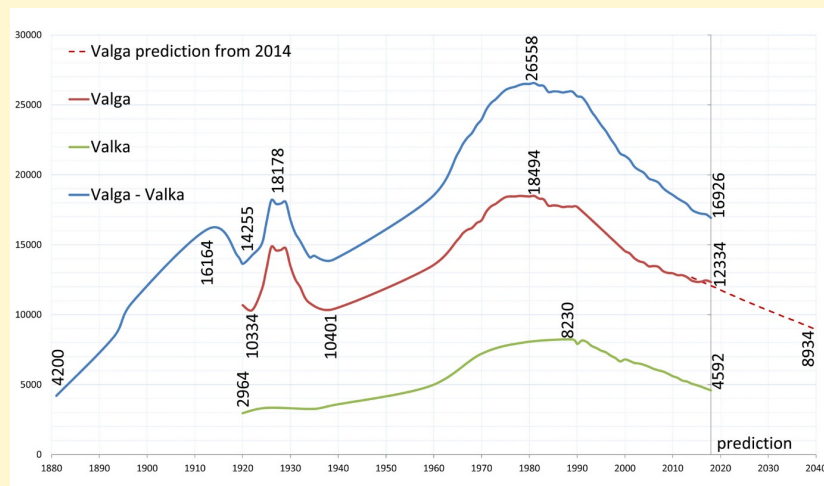
Population change in towns of Estonia in 2000-2011

Cities	2000	2011	2011-2000 (change)	%
Saue	4,958	5,514	556	11.2
Maardu	16,738	17,524	786	4.7
Keila	9,388	9,763	375	4
Tallinn	400,378	393,222	-7,156	-1.8
Sindi	4,179	4,076	-103	-2.5
Tartu	101,169	97,600	-3,569	-3.5
Paldiski	4,248	4,085	-163	-3.8
Elva	6,020	5,807	-213	-3.9
Rakvere	17,097	15,264	-1,833	-10.7
Põlva	6,467	5,767	-700	-10.8
Kuressaare	14,925	13,166	-1,759	-11.8
Narva-Jõesuu	2,983	2,632	-351	-11.8
Kunda	3,899	3,422	-477	-12.2
Pärnu	45,500	39,728	-5,772	-12.7
Põltsamaa	4,849	4,188	-661	-13.6
Jõgeva	6,420	5,501	-919	-14.3
Valga	14,323	12,261	-2,062	-14.4
Narva	68,680	58,663	-10,017	-14.6
Paide	9,642	8,228	-1,414	-14.7
Tõrva	3,201	2,729	-472	-14.7
Võru	14,879	12,667	-2,212	-14.9
Haapsalu	12,054	10,251	-1,803	-15
Viljandi	20,756	17,473	-3,283	-15.8
Sillamäe	17,199	14,252	-2,947	-17.1
Võhma	1,596	1,314	-282	-17.7
Kardla	3,773	3,050	-723	-19.2
Loksa	3,494	2,759	-735	-21
Kohtla-Järve	47,679	37,201	-10,478	-22
Mustvee	1,753	1,358	-395	-22.5
Kiviõli	7,405	5,634	-1,771	-23.9
Mõisaküla	1,165	825	-340	-29.2
Kallaste	1,211	852	-359	-29.6
Püssi	1,872	1,083	-789	-42.1

Source: Statistics Estonia (2012): PHC 2011: the population of Estonia is concentrated around larger cities



Development of Valga population



Source: Statistics Estonia



Outcome of shrinkage in urban space



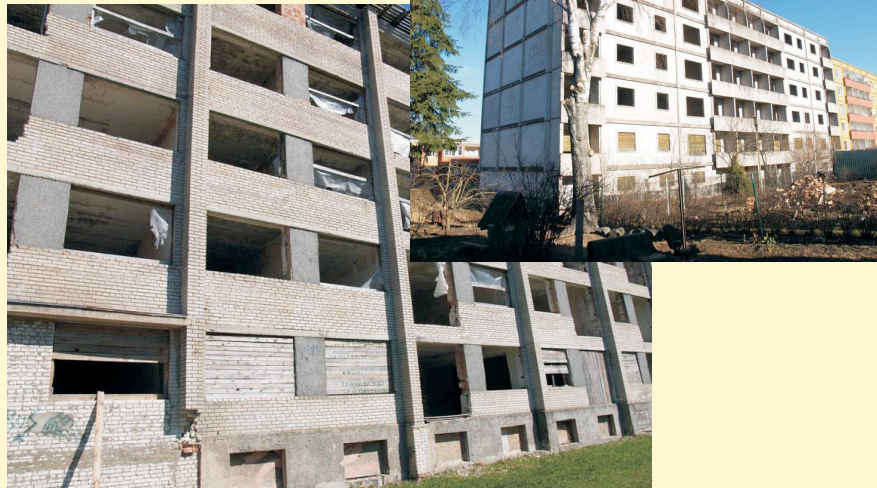
Valga town centre: abandoned buildings



Abandoned buildings (1)



Abandoned buildings (2)



Land use inventory

site of development (SD): site already developed or with planned development

- does not include streets, parks, cemeteries, woods, agricultural fields, etc.

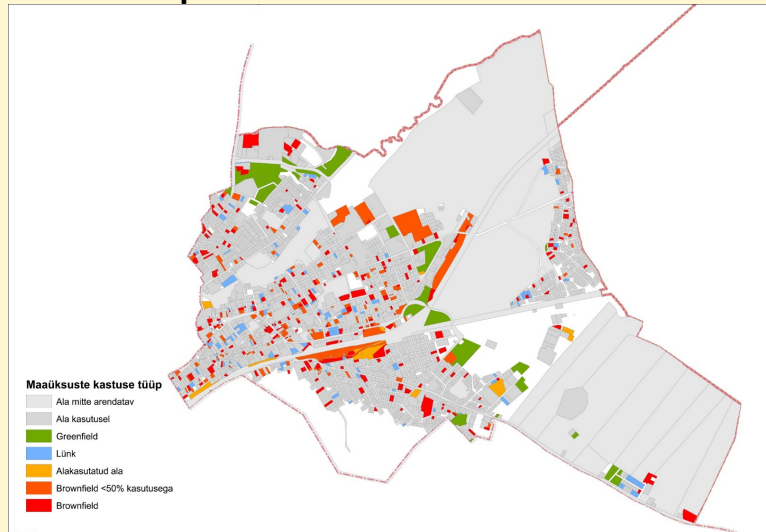
Actually in use in Valga:

- 80% of sites of development (in terms of the number)
- 72% of sites of development (in terms of surface)
- 83% in private property

private: Brownfields X public: Greenfields



Overview maps: real land use



Source: author's survey



Results: apartment houses

- total: 379
- more than half of the apartments empty: 34
- abandoned: 45
- in use 78%

Abandoned or underused apartment houses:

- almost half (39) wooden
- typically built in the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century, without sewage and water equipment
- in various parts of the town, often in the town center
- town center under the heritage protection



Valga town centre - conservation area

- land use of sites with a monument: 53%
- sites inside the conservation area: 64%



Economic and social consequences

Economic:

- surplus of housing on the real estate market influences prices: currently 150 €/m² (3-room apartment in concrete panel house 9000 €, in wooden house 500-3000 €)
- low price impedes selling of real estate, investments in building reconstructions are not profitable and new apartments are not built up
- during the past 25 years only one apartment house was built in Valga
- quality of housing is low, in wooden houses even critically low

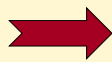
Social:

- low-income apartment owners are forced to live in an apartment, even if the majority of apartments in building is empty and the building in uninhabitable condition



Roll of the quality of public space in the city centre

- a **psychological bond** between the individual and his/her place of residence significantly affects individual activity in the community
- **unattractive** environment undermines such bond:
 - it's difficult to be **proud** of home town
 - citizens are losing confidence in the town's **future**
 - citizens are less willing to contribute to environmental protection, preservation, improvement, etc.



environmental degradation is accelerating



Solutions

there are no easy solutions

- Valga population will **not grow** to the former level
- deacceleration of depopulation process would be success
- the size of the town has to be adjusted to meet the **needs** of the current 12 500 citizens
- part of the building stocks needs to be demolished, part of the developed sites turned into open green spaces or returned to the nature



Valga's spatial policy tools to deal with shrinkage

Types of actions:

- I. development of new master plan
- II. revitalization of the town centre
- III. adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs
- IV. housing revitalization



I. development of new master plan (1)

- initiated 29.4.2016
- only master plan in Estonia that aims to adapt to shrinking

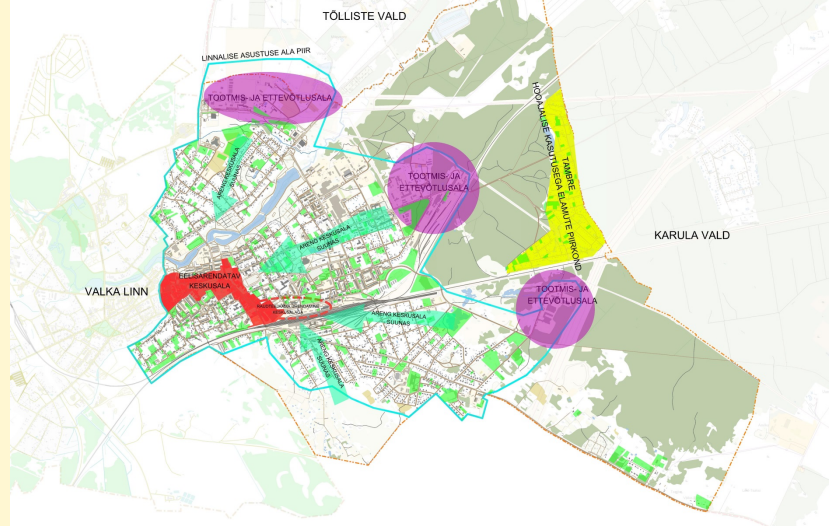
The aims of the plan:

- more compact town territory
- revitalization of the town centre
- public space regreenment
- urban space adapted on aging population
- adaptation of traffic to be friendly for pedestrians and cyclists



I. development of new master plan (2)

STSENAARIUM 2



II. Revitalization of the town center

focus on urban revitalization of town center:

- A. revitalization of the historical Valga town center, funded by EU programme „Improvement of regional competitiveness“
- B. reunification of twin town center of Valga-Valka by new Central Square and Pedestrian Street, funded by EU „Estonia-Latvia programme“

revitalized urban space should increase:

- attractiveness of the town center
- value of real estate in the town center
- activity of the real estate owners



A. Revitalization of the historical Valga town center



B. Reunification of Valga-Valka twin-town center



III. Adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs

Strategy to overcome ownership constraints:

A. Buildings privately owned or co-owned as a whole

- take-over (2)
- authorisation agreement (1)
- purchase of the property (1)

B. Apartment buildings privatized by apartment units

- complicated negotiations (tens of owners, apartments are often mortgaged, indebted and some owners live abroad)
- a technical expert analysis of the building that declares it unsuitable to inhabit, withdrawal of the right of use from the building, real estate value evaluation of the building
- Demolition (3)



Demolished buildings



IV. Housing revitalization



Main barriers to such development

- lack of human resources within the city administration
- state funds to support **greenfield** investments
- the private sector's limited possibilities to finance or co-finance revitalization
- lack of insolvency legislation
- low problem **awareness** within Estonian society
- current system of **heritage protection** (use of building is not prioritized)



Heritage protection and urban shrinkage

the conflict between society's need to **preserve heritage**



and to **adapt a shrinking city** according to the expectations of its current population

There is need to develop a new **set of heritage conservation rules** for shrinking cities and to adapt current heritage conservation system to urban shrinkage.

- Heritage preservation of historical buildings can be successful only if development of the town itself is successful.
- The key to success for any city is its residents and their **quality of life**.



New set of heritage conservation rules

- allow of selective **demolitions** within the heritage conservation area;
- create a mechanism enabling National Heritage Board to mothball or use other **interim stabilization** measures for historical building in case of owner inactivity;
- **assist property owners** with the required design work;
- allow material and element **alteration** to keep the historical building in use;
- increase public sector **subsidies** for owners for revitalizing of the most valuable cultural monuments;
- set mandatory preferences for the use of incentives from **state and European funds** for rehabilitation of historical bindings.

