

Town of Valga: Urban planning in a context of shrinking

VASAB Workshop on Urban Revitalization



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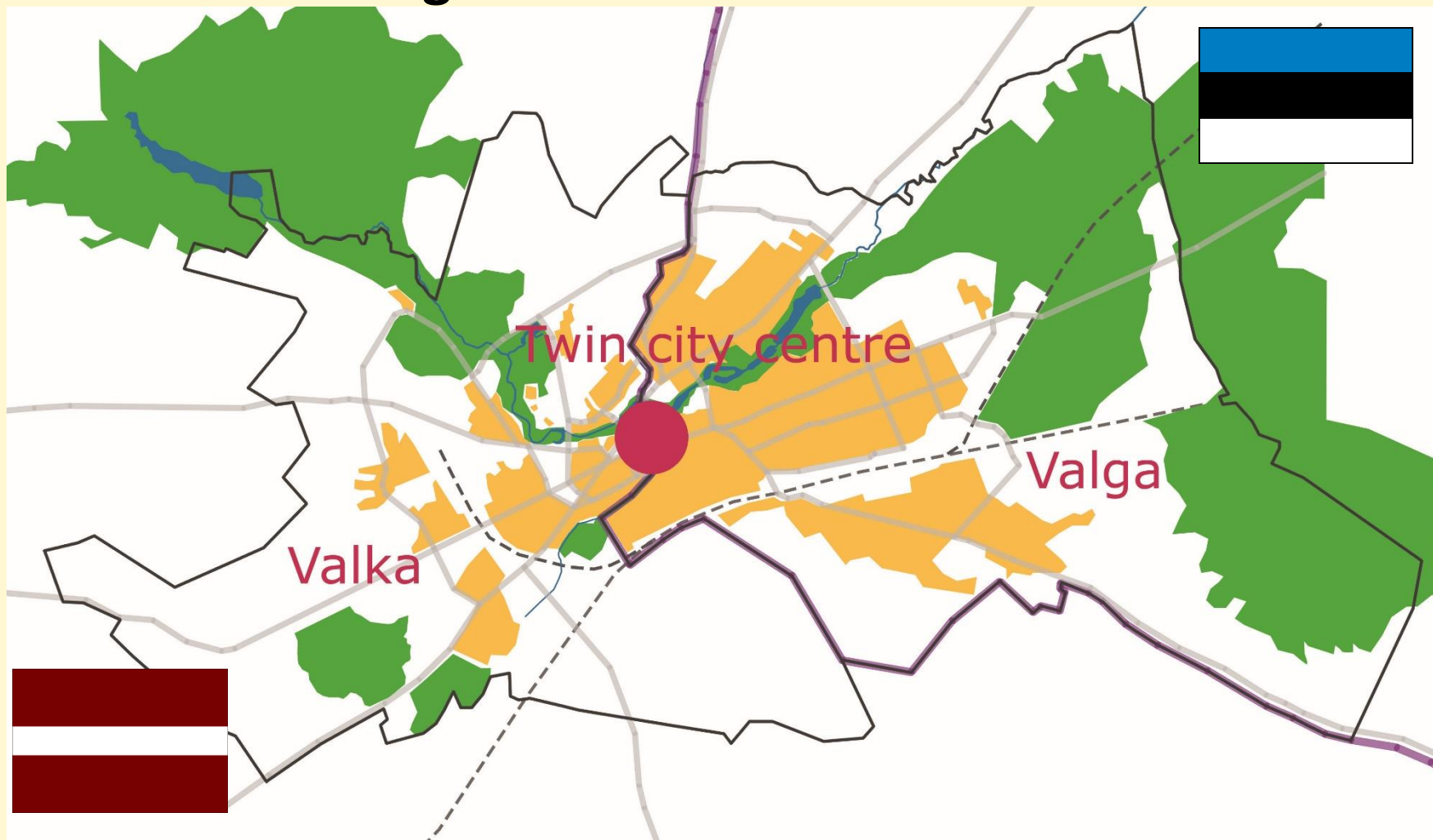
Town architect at Valga town government
doctoral student at Tallinn University of Technology



Location of Valga



Twin towns Valga and Valka



Valka: area 14.0 km²
Population 5 590

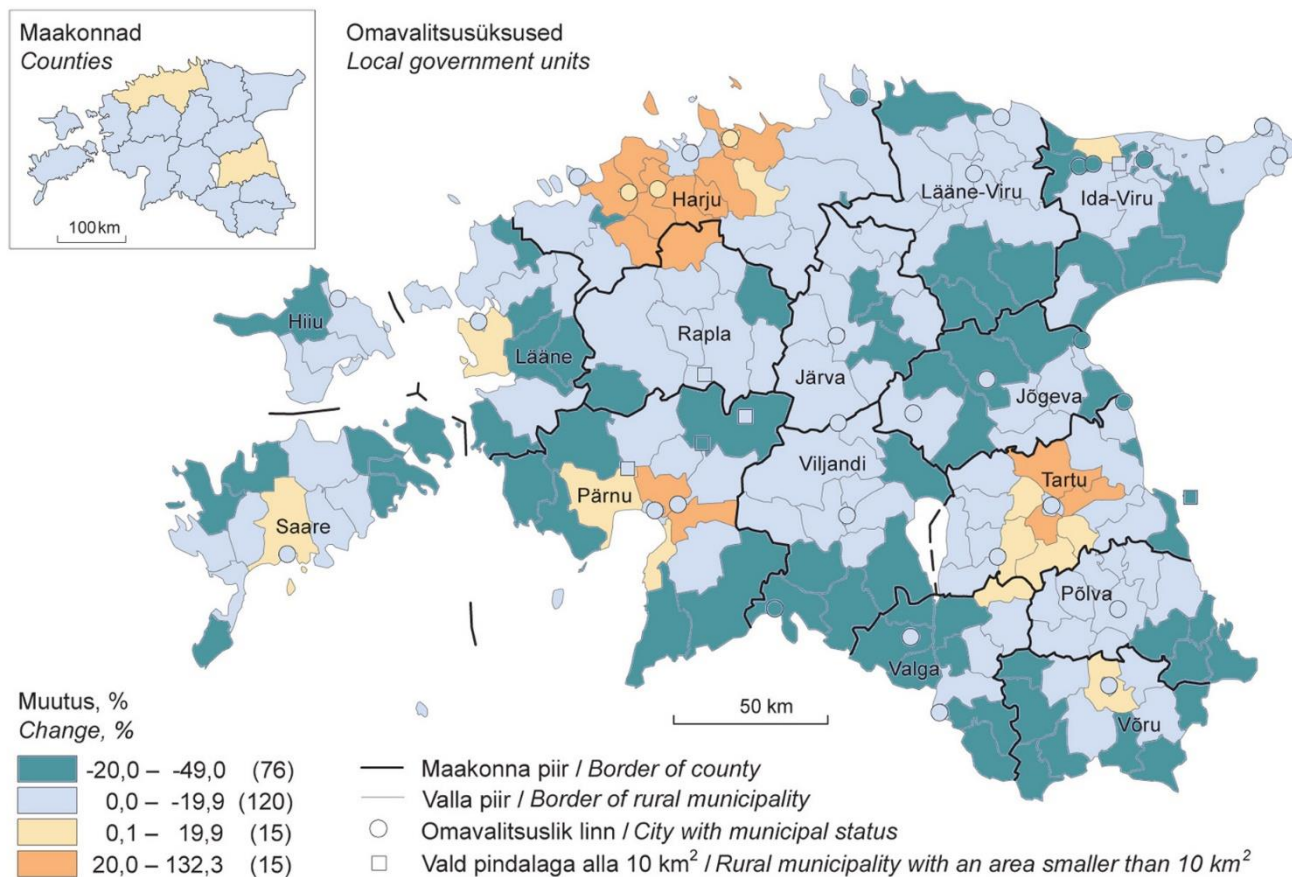
Valga: area 16.5 km²
Population 12 352



Migration of population in Estonia

Kaart 6. Rahvaarvu suhteline muutus, 31.03.2000–31.12.2011

Map 6. Relative change in population, 31.03.2000–31.12.2011



Source: Statistics Estonia (2013): Regional Development in Estonia



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	5,607	-413	-6.9
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	-2062	-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
Kärdla	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

■ 1881: 4 200

■ 1897: 10 900

■ 1913: 16 000

■ 1917: 20 371

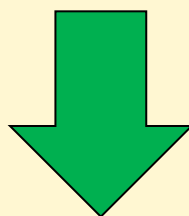
■ 1922: 9 455 (without Valka)

■ 1934: 10 842

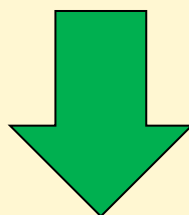
■ 1939: 10 419

■ 1959: 13 354

■ 1979: 18 474



wood



concrete

■ 1989: 17 700

■ 1990: ~15 000

(Soviet military troops are leaving)

■ 2000: 14 550

■ 2005: 13 480

■ 2011: 12 655 (with Valka 17 732)

■ 2040: 8 934

Source: Statistics Estonia



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Outcome of shrinkage: abandoned properties



Need for inventory

The situation apparently complicated, town did not have accurate overview

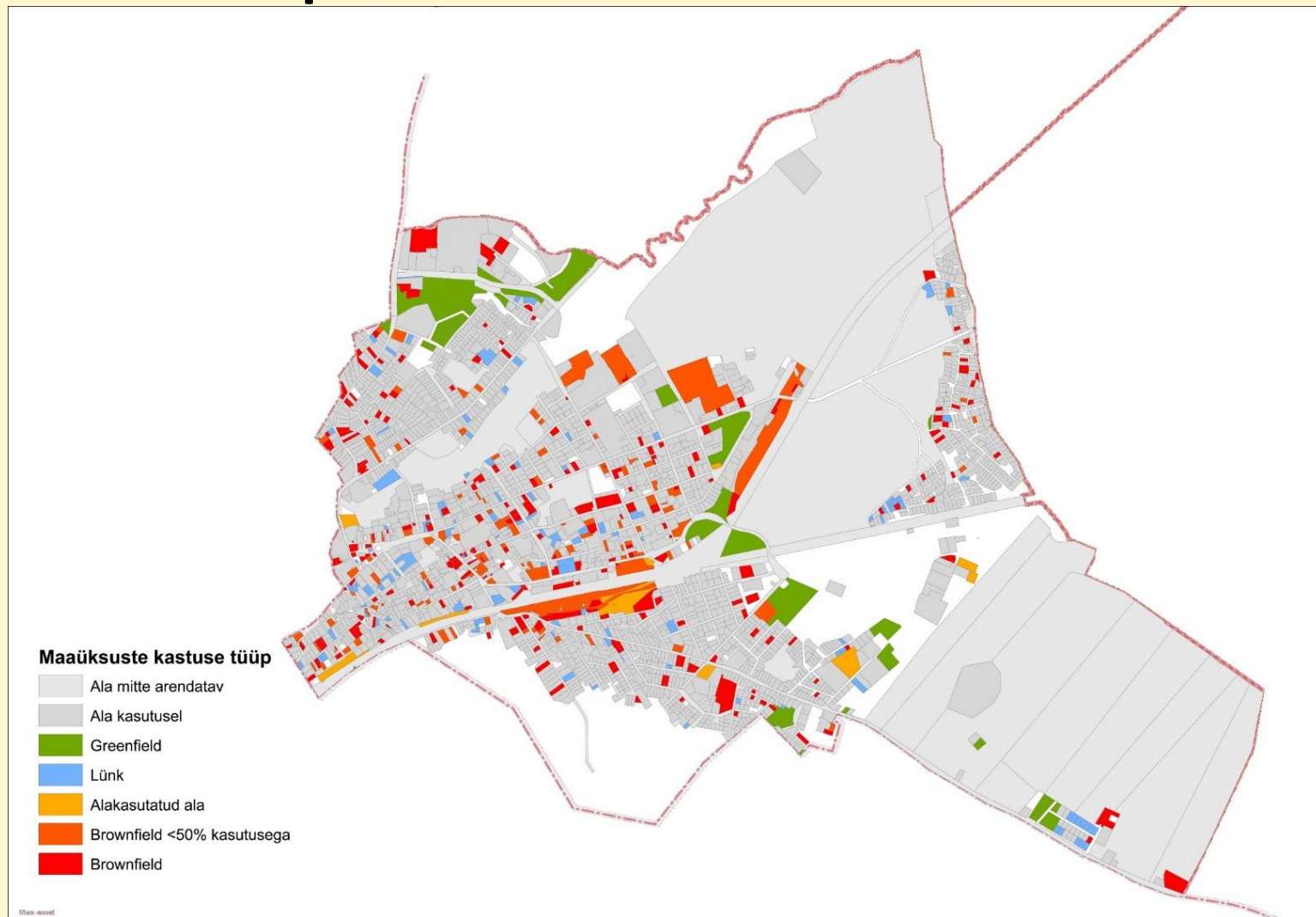
➤ Database of real land use

Type of area

- greenfields with development perspectives
- vacant and underused land
- gaps in built-up areas
- brownfields



Overview maps: real land use



Source: author's survey



Results

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)
- 81% in private property

private: Brownfields X public: Greenfields



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Results: apartment houses

- total: 389
- more than half of the apartments empty: 50
- abandoned: 52
- in use 74%

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, in use 64%



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Consequences (1):

Economic:

- surplus of housing on the real estate market influences prices: currently 130 €/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, from 32 apartments 27 are empty
- quality of housing is low, in wooden houses even critically low



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Consequences (2):

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

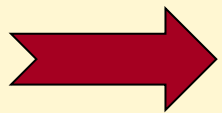
Psychological:

- urban space is unattractive, abandoned derelict buildings have negative influence on its neighbourhood, desolation and abandonment is to grow
- few small businesses, cafes, hairdressers, small stores, etc.



Psychological consequences:

- 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



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Solutions:

there are no easy solutions

- Valga population will not grow to the former level
- deceleration 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 plan to deal with shrinking:

Three courses of actions:

- I. revitalization of town center
- II. adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs
- III. industrial and commercial brownfield redevelopment



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I. 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



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VALGA
1 linn, 2 riiki

A. Revitalization of the historical Valga town center:



B. Reunification of Valga-Valka twin-town center :



II. Adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs (1):

selection of 24 buildings, mainly apartment houses:

- with important negative impact on urban space aesthetics
- in serious technical condition
- abandoned or underused

buildings form two groups:

- buildings to be reconstructed (important for urban space, within the area of heritage protection) – max 3 buildings
- buildings to be demolished



II. Adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs (2):

private properties, proposals for owners:

- to make us a gift (building has close to zero or negative value, the property tax, local government controls in case of dangerous technical condition of building)
- to sign with us the site use authorization agreement for 15 years (demolition of buildings, site maintenance)
- to exchange the property for our property of similar value, which is located in a sustainable building (apartments)
- to rent an apartment in the reconstructed municipal apartment house (as a vision)
- exceptionally to sell us property at market price (low)



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Demolished buildings:



Valga town greening strategy:

Public green space to replace demolished buildings



Source: authors' survey



Main barriers to such development:

- lack of human resources within the city administration
- state funds to support greenfield investments
- private sector's limited possibilities of financing (real estate with low value not to be suitable as loan guarantee)
- legislation limiting local government's competences
- current system of heritage protection (use of building is not prioritized)
- inadequate recognition of the problem in Estonian society (no town can tackle shrinkage alone)



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