

Spatial Policy Tools for Local Governments in Shrinking Communities: A Case Study of Valga town, Estonia

VASAB Workshop

“Urban dimension in spatial policies in the Baltic Sea Region.
Trends and prospects of urbanization.”



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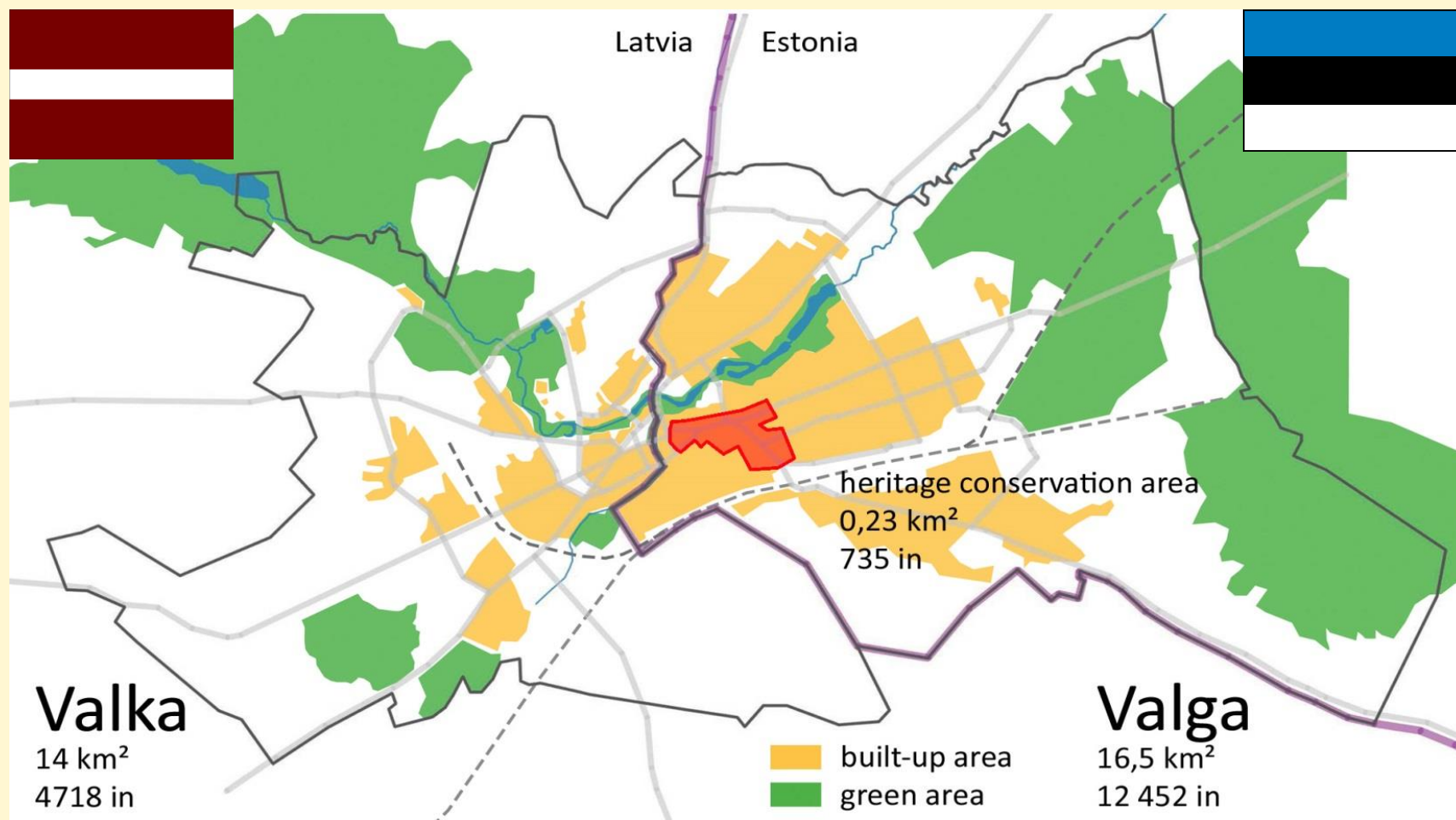
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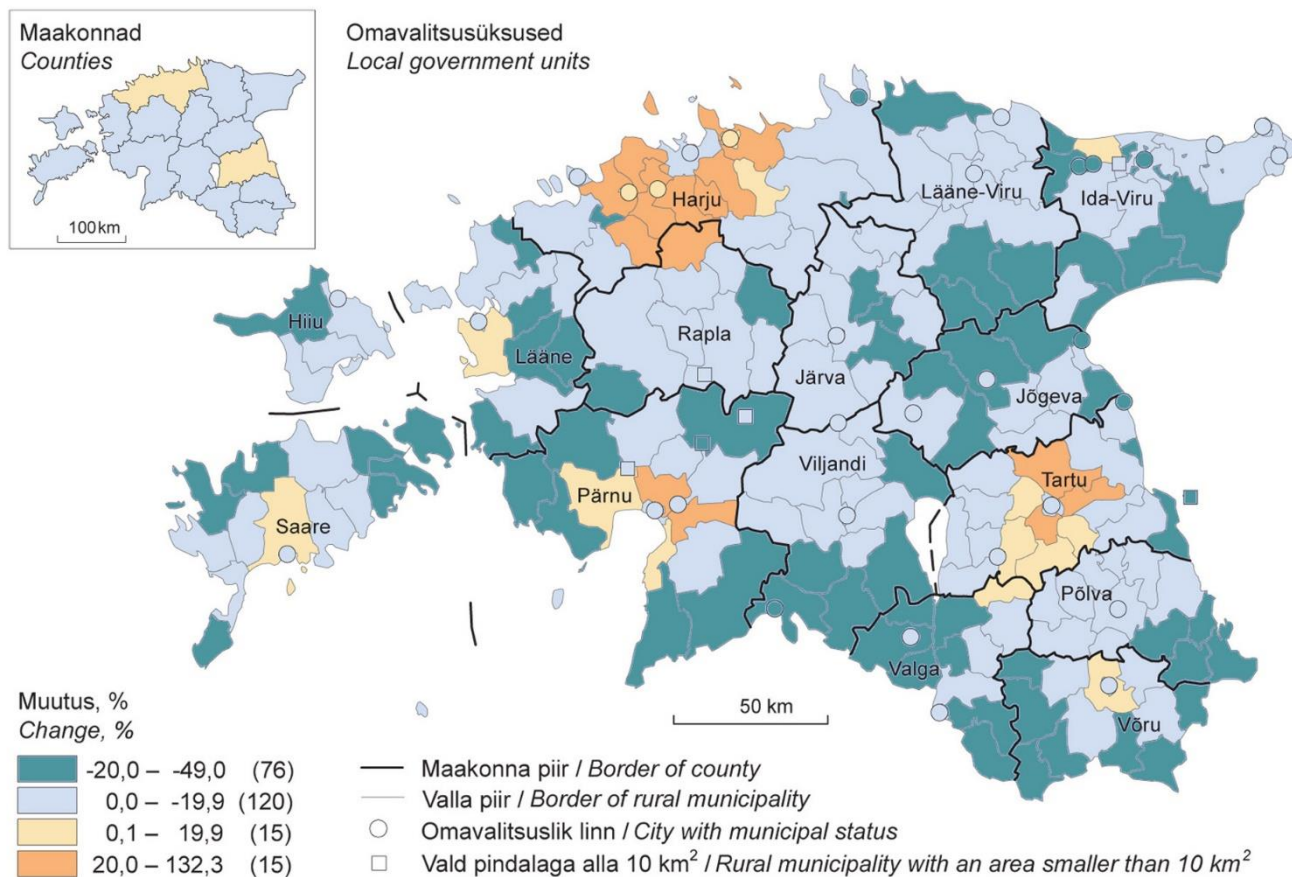
Twin towns Valga and Valka



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



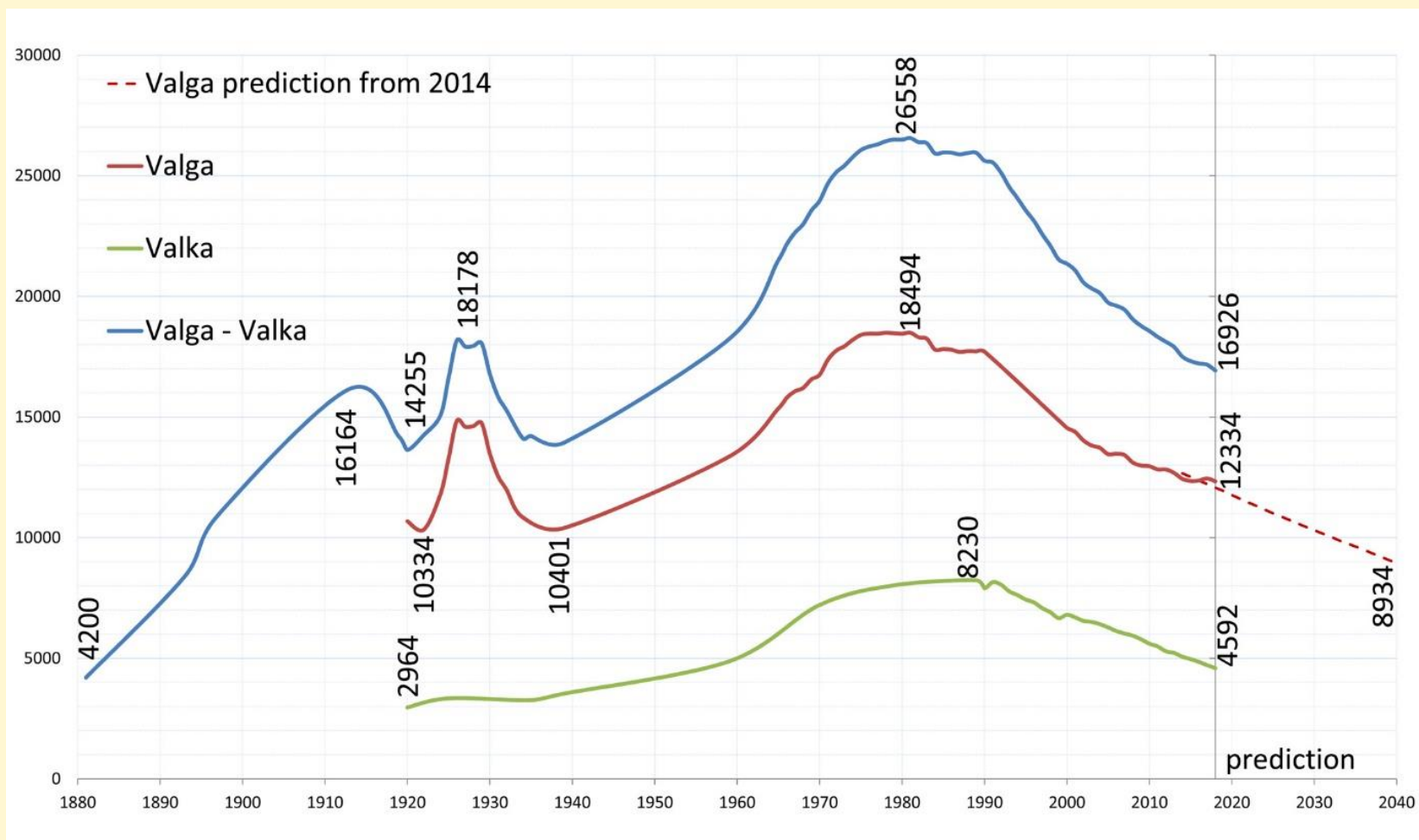
Population change in towns of Estonia in 2000-2011

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



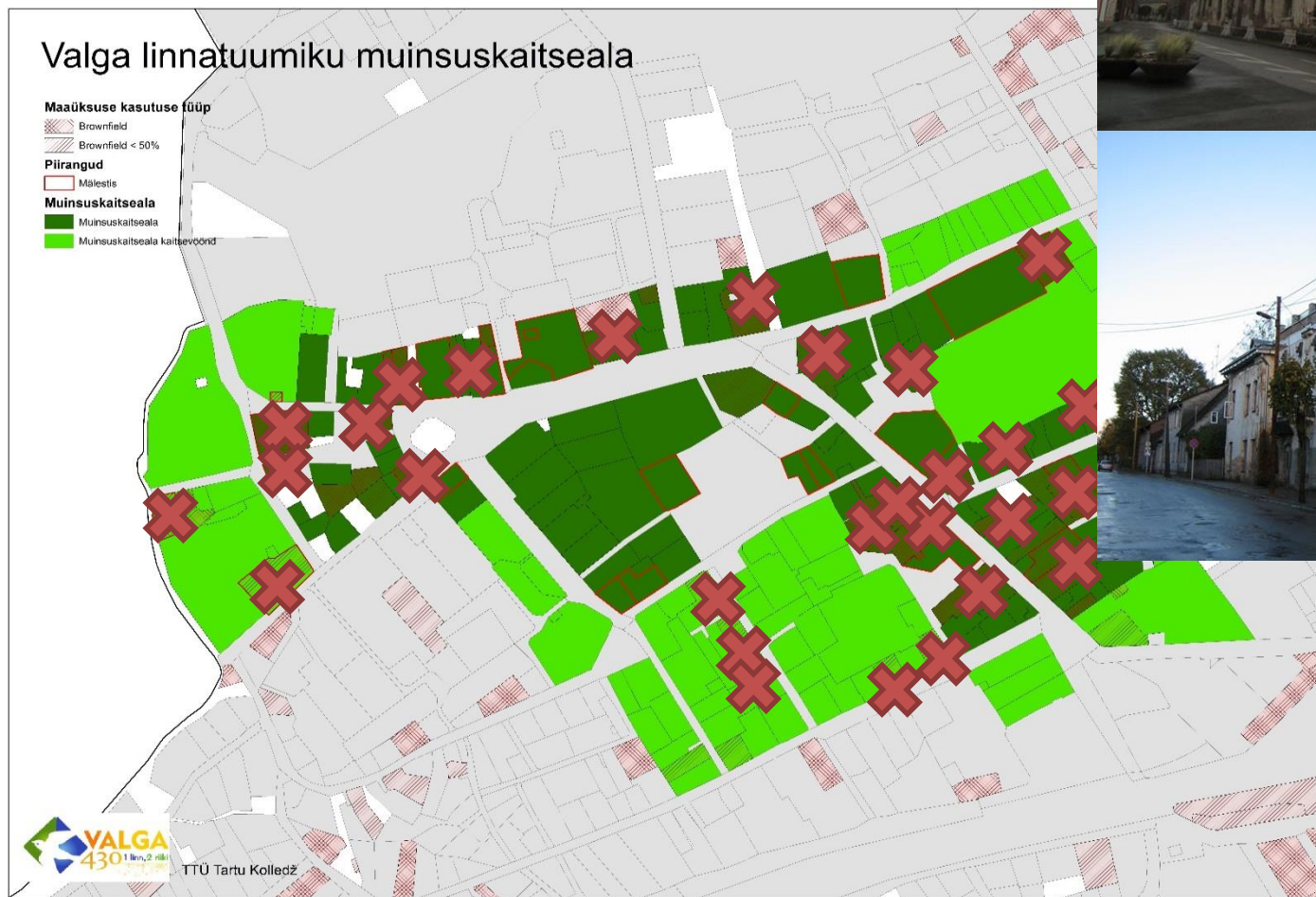
Development of Valga population



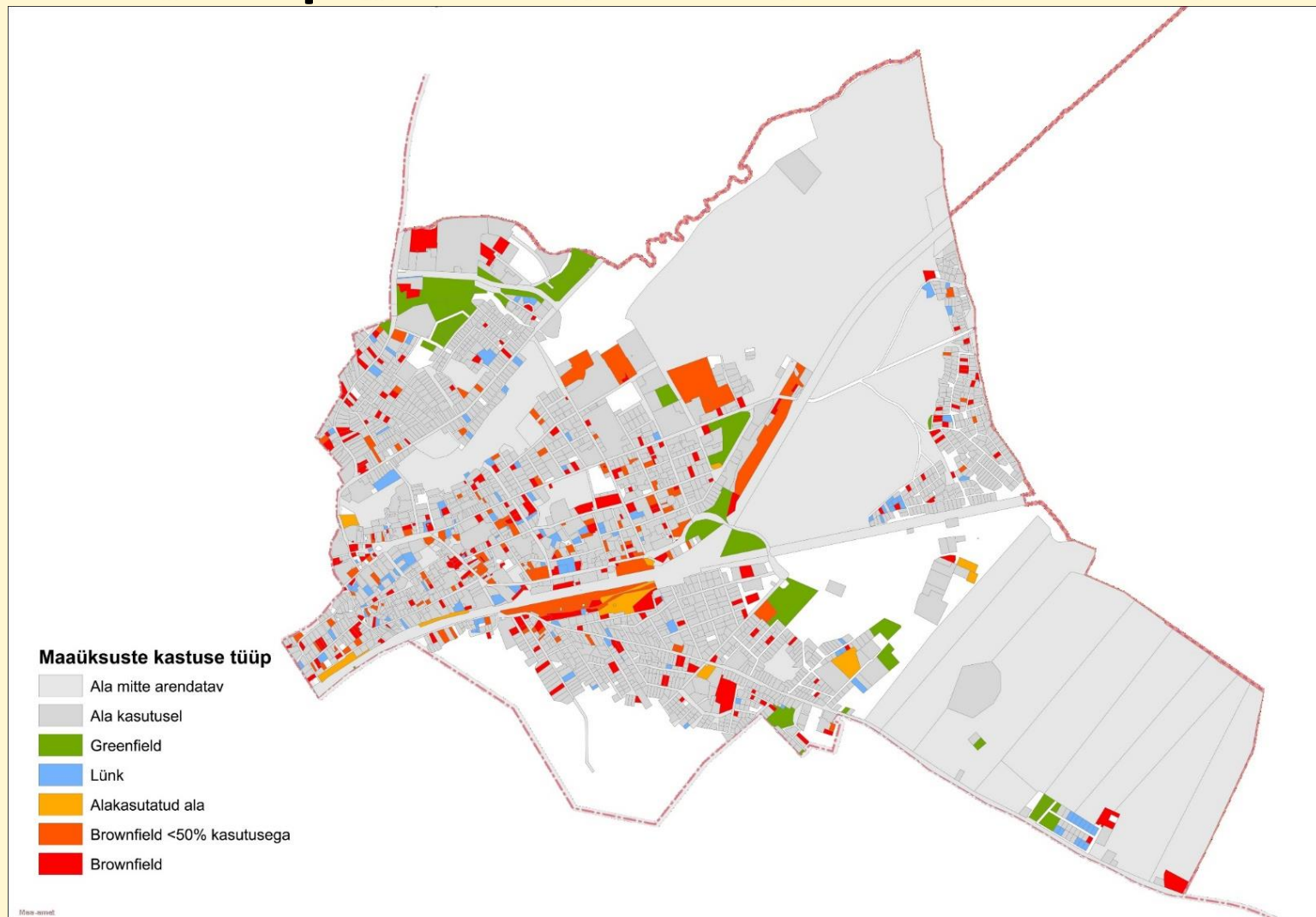
Source: Statistics Estonia



Outcome of shrinkage: abandoned properties



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)
- 83% in private property

private: Brownfields X public: Greenfields



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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, in use 64%



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Consequences (1):

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



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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

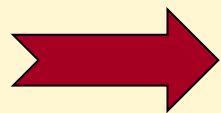
Psychological:

- 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.



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



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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



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Valga's spatial policy tools to deal with shrinking:

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:

- 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



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:

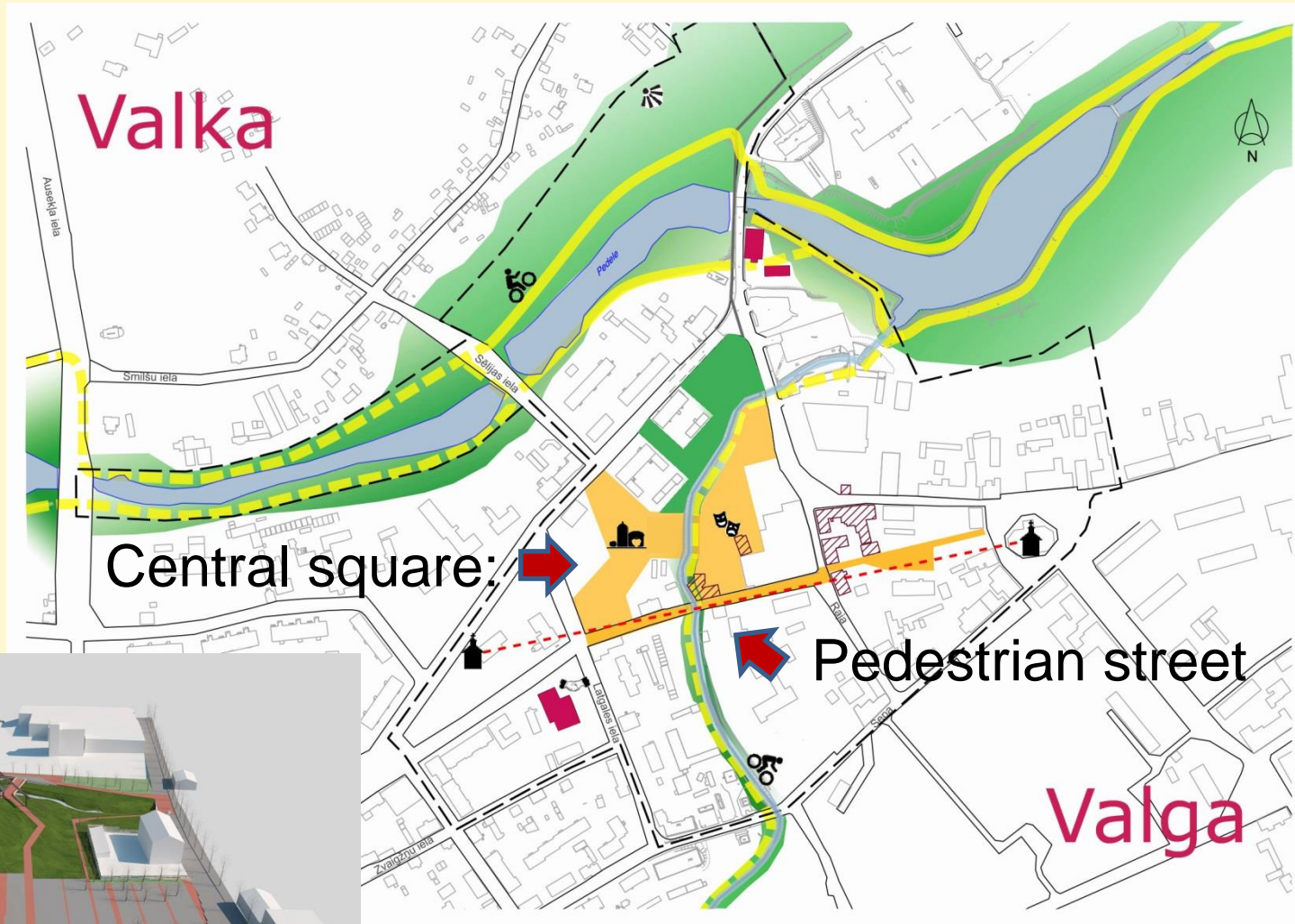
- attractiveness of the town center
- value of real estate in the town center
- activity of the real estate owners



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)



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Demolished buildings:



IV. Housing revitalization:



Main barriers to such development:

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

