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.”

Jiří Tintěra
Town architect at Valga municipality
doctoral student at Tallinn University of Technology
Twin towns Valga and Valka
Migration of population in Estonia

# Population change in towns of Estonia in 2000-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2011–2000 (change)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saue</td>
<td>4,958</td>
<td>5,514</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maardu</td>
<td>16,738</td>
<td>17,524</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keila</td>
<td>9,338</td>
<td>9,763</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>400,378</td>
<td>393,222</td>
<td>–7,156</td>
<td>–1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindi</td>
<td>4,179</td>
<td>4,076</td>
<td>–103</td>
<td>–2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>101,169</td>
<td>97,600</td>
<td>–3,569</td>
<td>–3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paldiski</td>
<td>4,248</td>
<td>4,085</td>
<td>–163</td>
<td>–3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elva</td>
<td>6,020</td>
<td>5,607</td>
<td>–413</td>
<td>–6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakvere</td>
<td>17,097</td>
<td>15,264</td>
<td>–1,833</td>
<td>–10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Põlva</td>
<td>6,467</td>
<td>5,767</td>
<td>–700</td>
<td>–10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuressaare</td>
<td>14,925</td>
<td>13,166</td>
<td>–1,759</td>
<td>–11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narva-Jõesuu</td>
<td>2,983</td>
<td>2,632</td>
<td>–351</td>
<td>–11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunda</td>
<td>3,899</td>
<td>3,422</td>
<td>–477</td>
<td>–12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pärnu</td>
<td>45,500</td>
<td>39,728</td>
<td>–5,772</td>
<td>–12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Põltsamaa</td>
<td>4,849</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>–661</td>
<td>–13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jõgeva</td>
<td>6,420</td>
<td>5,501</td>
<td>–919</td>
<td>–14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valga</td>
<td>14,323</td>
<td>12,261</td>
<td>–2,062</td>
<td>–14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narva</td>
<td>68,680</td>
<td>58,663</td>
<td>–10,017</td>
<td>–14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paide</td>
<td>9,642</td>
<td>8,228</td>
<td>–1,414</td>
<td>–14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tõrva</td>
<td>3,201</td>
<td>2,729</td>
<td>–472</td>
<td>–14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Võru</td>
<td>14,879</td>
<td>12,667</td>
<td>–2,212</td>
<td>–14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haapsalu</td>
<td>12,054</td>
<td>10,251</td>
<td>–1,803</td>
<td>–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viljandi</td>
<td>20,756</td>
<td>17,473</td>
<td>–3,283</td>
<td>–15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sillamäe</td>
<td>17,199</td>
<td>14,252</td>
<td>–2,947</td>
<td>–17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Võhma</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>–282</td>
<td>–17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kärdda</td>
<td>3,773</td>
<td>3,050</td>
<td>–723</td>
<td>–19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loksaa</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>2,759</td>
<td>–735</td>
<td>–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohtla-Järve</td>
<td>47,679</td>
<td>37,201</td>
<td>–10,478</td>
<td>–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustvee</td>
<td>1,753</td>
<td>1,358</td>
<td>–395</td>
<td>–22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiviõli</td>
<td>7,405</td>
<td>5,634</td>
<td>–1,771</td>
<td>–23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Möisaküla</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>–340</td>
<td>–29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallaste</td>
<td>1,211</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>–359</td>
<td>–29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Püüsi</td>
<td>1,872</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>–789</td>
<td>–42.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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%
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
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
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 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 constrains:

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
- 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)