

**PROPOSAL FOR A LOGICALLY STRUCTURAL MODEL
OF LOCAL TERRITORY/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING FOR THE BALTIC SEA COAST**

**PRIEKŠLIKUMS BALTIJAS JŪRAS PIEKRASTES VIETĒJĀS
TERITORIJAS/KOPIENAS ATTĪSTĪBAS PLĀNOŠANAS MODELIM**

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Abstract

Increasing attention in Europe is being paid to the new territorial development approach or planning direction or “bottom up” planning”, which means that increasingly more decisions regarding local development have to be taken at the lowest possible planning level – at the level of the village, including local communities. A significant problem has been identified in Latvia: rapid internal migration from rural territories to capital-city regions and external emigration to other countries. There are also problems of a social nature, as the unbalanced economic development of the regions leads to decreased quality of life and public activity. To solve these problems, new and modern solutions have to be found for the development of local communities and their involvement in regional development. The goal of this research is to develop an integrated, sustainable and participatory planning model as a new development planning tool at the village level. The main objectives resulting from this research goal are: to research the theoretical and regulatory aspects, to research community involvement and local development planning methods and approaches, and to research the potential of local economy and social aspects. The area where research was conducted was the Baltic Sea region (Latvia, Estonia, Finland (the Aland Islands), Sweden). The results of the research will form a proposal for a sustainable development planning model at the community level and proposals for further opportunities to introduce the village planning level in regional development planning.

Keywords: *regional development, participatory planning, sustainable development, local community planning*

Introduction

In an era of globalisation, when changes to the composition/lifestyle of populations are taking place, the regional development of states is influenced by several factors, which also directly or indirectly affect the further existence/development opportunities of local territorial communities. At the same time, the general development of the national economy is extremely important for regional economic development. A significant problem has been identified in Latvia: rapid internal migration of the younger generation to particular localities in Latvia, as well as emigration to other countries, thus causing negative changes in the development of regional economies in the mid- and long term. The problem has also a social nature, as the disbalanced economic development of the r regions leads to decreased quality of life and public activity. In order to solve these problems, new and modern solutions have to be found for the development of local communities and their involvement in regional development (both economic and social), to ensure increased willingness of the community to be involved and to take responsibility for their community and place of residence.

Increasing attention in Europe is paid to the new territorial development approach or “bottom up” planning”, which means that increasing numbers of decisions regarding local development have to be taken at the lowest possible planning level – the level of the village, including local communities. Village development planning has become a means to create strong local communities.

Such a situation has resulted in unbalanced development of the Latvian regions, as has been identified both by local governments and by the central government in their planning documents. At present, increasing amounts of investment is allocated for regional development – from the state budget and local governments’ budgets, as well as external financial resources (including EU funds). At the same time, there are concerns over whether the planning approach or “bottom up” planning” and the investment policy conducted by the central government will be able to ensure efficient development of local economic potential, which will also directly affect the development of the economic and social dimension of the regions.

The central question of the research: what elements make up and must be taken into account when creating an integrated, sustainable and participatory planning system as a new development planning tool at the village level. The goal of this research is to

develop an integrated, sustainable and participatory planning model as a new development planning tool at the village level.

Area where research was conducted: the Baltic Sea region (Latvia, Estonia, Finland (the Åland Islands), Sweden).

Limitation of research: The village development planning process does not include land management, as laws and regulations already envisage other instruments for land planning: local planning. In other words, if the village development planning process leads to a need to change land use objectives, this can be done through other instruments that are not considered to be within the framework of the research. The research was carried out between autumn 2016 and 2021, but several definitions laid down in regulatory acts date back to 2008, because at that time spatial development planning documents were intensively introduced in Latvia and special attention was paid to these issues.

Basic definitions used in the research are:

- a) village – section of a municipal territory in which a built-up area is present (or is planned), where people live permanently, and where the appropriate infrastructure has been developed;
- b) territorial community – can be defined in various ways; these may differ in size, structure and scale; however, it is possible to distinguish three recognised and fundamental features that characterise all of them – definite location (or common territory); common individual links (common interests, identity, etc.); social interaction between individuals (Kusenbach, 2008).

The main theoretical approaches used in the research are:

- a) New Growth Theory

There were attempts to introduce human resources as a significant factor into economic theories as far back as the 1970s, and later on another factor was introduced: research and development (Audretsch et al., 2006). Over a number of years, outdated economic theories were adjusted to real market situations. The chief factor to be understood by entrepreneurs was that economic development was in their hands – they owned physical capital and, moreover, they owned knowledge and human resources.

The New Growth Theory is based on the idea that every country or region should search for their own way of developing technology. The New Growth Theory was one

of the first endogenous growth theories. Technological progress relevant to the specific level of knowledge regarding the environment, nature and human resources has to be reached, as adjustment to technologies from other regions means repetition of old and already employed ideas, whereas modern buyers are interested only in innovative, efficient and possibly cheaper products or services. And such results can be achieved only through using new ideas and technologies, and efficient materials and management of human resources.

b) Dimensions of Sustainable Development

The main regulatory aspects used in the research are:

- sustainable development (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, 2008) – a concept defined in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development
- balanced development (Legislation, 2008) – planned development by balancing levels and rates in the development of separate territories
- territorial cohesion (European Commission, 2008) – its task is to achieve harmonious development of all residential areas and to ensure that the residents can use the resources of their respective territories in an optimal way.

Taking into account the importance of the concept of sustainable development, the authors of the research have reviewed the definition of sustainable development established in regulatory acts, as this approach has changed significantly over time. Initially, in the 1980s, sustainable development was understood to mean “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Over time the concept has developed and sustainability has become associated with future-oriented changes that mostly depend on people’s own actions and ability to cooperate with each other, because the challenges of sustainable development are of a global nature (Auzins, 2016). Already during the initial phases of the concept, scientists often criticised the fact that the definition of sustainable development ignores other aspects, such as education, occupation, household size, psychosocial characteristics, and marketing, which determine the quantitative and qualitative composition of the goods and services consumed by society to meet the needs in the various stages of Maslow’s pyramid. The classic definition of sustainable development reveals a typically mechanistic approach to tackling a global problem: rescuing the Earth and the ecosystem from destruction requires reducing the consumption of resources to

meet needs (Zvirgzdins, 2020). Thus, the authors of this study conclude that such a narrow approach examines only consumption and economic issues, while largely ignoring social, psychological and public management aspects.

Today, the concept of sustainable development has been further developed by international organisations – for example, the UN has set 17 goals for sustainable development (United Nations, S.a.), which cover a much wider range of rural actions than in the original concept – but at the same time it can be identified that these goals are largely related to solving the problems of low-development countries. Examining different approaches to the concept of sustainability in different places in the world, it is concluded that the achievement of sustainability goals requires an appropriate approach in each specific place or region, as the levels of economic and social development differ, as do natural resources and habits related to consumption of goods. The authors of this study conclude that the concept of sustainability cannot be universally applied; it depends on the level of social and economic development, as well as the consumption habits, and geographical and social characteristics of the territory, in addition to levels of community development and involvement, regional development and many other factors. Therefore, the concept of sustainable development is in continuous development and different approaches to achieving global goals are being sought in different parts of the world.

Taking into account the information above, the authors have chosen to use the sustainability model developed and validated by G.M. Mudacumura, adapting it to the special features of the research area (the village and local community as the basis of development). G.M. Mudacumura in his study *Toward a General Theory of Sustainability* (Mudacummura et al., 2006) defines six dimensions of sustainability. Having studied various economic theories, the authors have concluded that there is no single formula for sustainable development. In order to solve the problem, the authors use six dimensions in this research, which together form the principle of sustainability:

- economic dimension
- social dimension
- political dimension
- cultural dimension
- ecological dimension
- spiritual dimension

After the research was conducted, the new Local Government Law of Latvia was adopted, Section 59 of which provides for the introduction of participatory budgeting in local government, including leaving it up to the local government to define the planning unit (territory), which can be a village. The elaboration of community-led local development strategies for 2021–2027 was also initiated after the research was conducted, and these will serve as instruments for the implementation of the elaborated development model.

To achieve rapid territorial growth and to provide positive social and economic changes in regions and local municipalities, it is essential to involve the wider society, including entrepreneurs, local communities, and citizen groups, in addressing territorial development issues. Because it is the local communities that, on the one hand, are actively involved in the achievement of regional development goals, and, on the other hand, are the main beneficiaries of the achievement of regional development goals. Considering that the local community consists of various community groups – entrepreneurs, employees, etc. – it is directly from their abilities, skills, activities, attitudes, experience, characteristics, etc. that the overall development of the region is formed, especially taking into account the “bottom-up” approach. Community as a part of spatial planning has been thoroughly studied in the UK (Turner, 2009). It has been examined, though less extensively, in the USA (Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014), Australia (Campbell & Hunt, 2013) and Ireland (Gaynor, 2011), as well as in such developing countries as Indonesia (Kenny et al., 2013) and China (Chan, 2013), etc.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, particular attention was devoted to communities in post-Soviet countries, as well as to the study of their development principles, for example, in Georgia (Vasadze & Datuashvili, 2011), Ukraine (Williams et al., 2012) and Lithuania (Macken-Walsh, 2009). There are only a few studies that deal with the development of Latvian communities.

Data and methods

The theoretical and methodological foundation of this research is constituted of general and scientific sources published in Latvia and abroad on regional development and local communities, scientific articles, databases, industry studies, data from the Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia, regulatory enactments of the

Republic of Latvia, and internet resources, as well as the analysis and conclusions of scientific work and research conducted by the authors of this research.

In the research process, generally accepted qualitative methods have been used – analysis and synthesis; induction and deduction; logically constructive, graphical and historical approach methods; information analysis and summary; and comparisons – as well as quantitative methods: statistics collection and analysis and data grouping. Sociological research quantitative methods have been also used in the research – non-reactive method (document analysis and legal framework research), survey, questionnaire, focus group method. The methods have been chosen according to the research focus – spatial development planning, which is a form of social geography.

The following stages of research have been carried out:

- theoretical and regulatory research – identifying the existence and development aspects of villages and communities
- research into society involvement and international experience studying village planning – identifying best practice examples and their possible usage in Latvia
- identification of economic and social development factors to ensure the development of a sustainable and comprehensive planning model
- summarising and analysing the data obtained and making conclusions, providing a proposal for the sustainable development planning model at the community level
- observation of the village plan development and the changes in community development following a trial launch

The research was carried out between autumn 2016 and 2021.

In the research, the local economy or local development is considered to mean sustainable and comprehensive development, based on local resources and needs and on residents' own initiative and including the specific territory (village), while the village is the smallest planned territorial unit with set borders and a local community living there. Villages form the next planning level – local government – and local governments make up regions, which make up the state overall. Thus, a local community is considered to be a group of local residents who are involved in sustainable development of where they live.

The research encompasses the development of Baltic Sea coastal territories, including the development of Latvian coastal villages and communities. Similarly, from the economic development aspect, more attention is attached to the Baltic Sea’s impact on the development of the local economy.

This scientific article is the conclusion of a scientific study conducted by the authors, “Opportunities to Use the Local Community’s Potential to Ensure Sustainable Regional Development in Latvia”, which is also used in the doctoral thesis of one of the authors – Edgars Pudzis – and the developed model is to be published in a scientific periodical.

Results

The authors of the research have developed a research design scheme, reflecting the sections of the research as well as its main activities and findings:

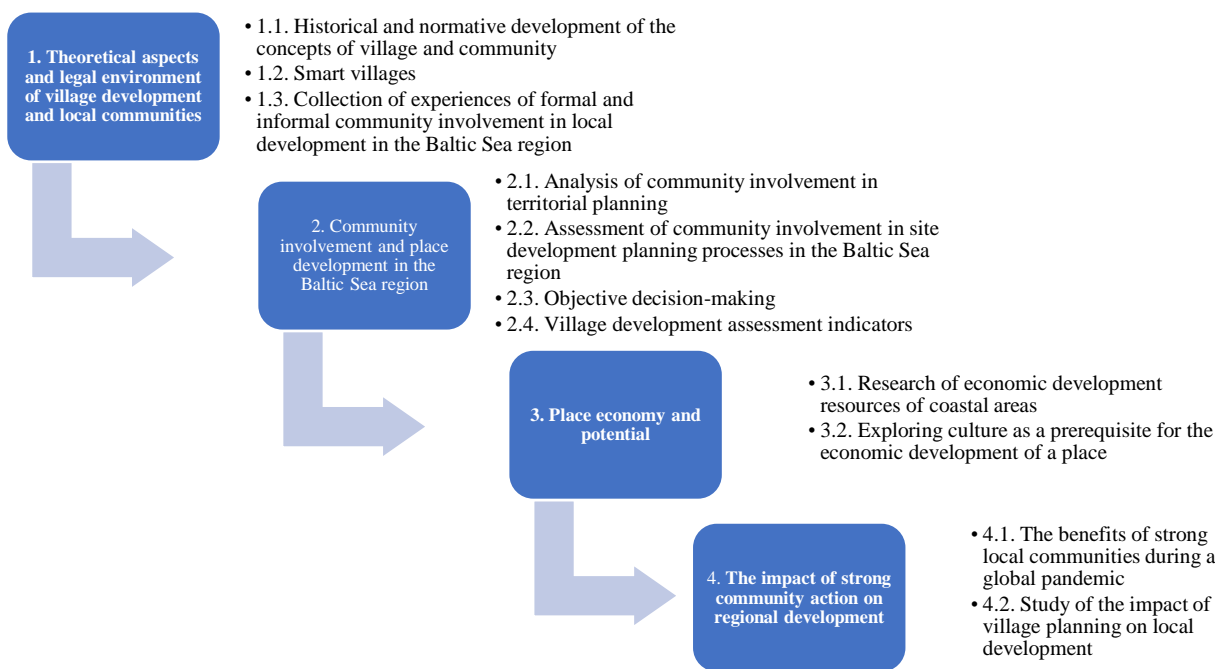


Figure 1. **Scheme of the research design** (authors’ figure)

The central question of the research – what elements make up and must be taken into account when creating an integrated, sustainable and participatory planning system as a new development planning tool at the village level, and integrated, sustainable and participatory village development in the context of regional development – has been answered by the analysis carried out within the framework of the research and based on evidence and scientific findings. In addition, it confirms the ability of a strong

community to react in an extraordinary situation and to create innovative ideas in situations when a local community has managed to agree on a uniform solution regarding its future when elaborating the village development plan.

During research, it was confirmed that the spatial planning systems are in the process of transformation and are *de facto* involving local residents more, as the focus of development is transferred to the needs of specific people in the specific area (local community) by using new informal methods. This research results from wide and deep studies and cooperation between experts from different countries, who have observed the spatial planning traditions of the Baltic Sea region, having a common interest in the formal and informal spatial planning processes in the coastal areas.

The main involvement of different interested groups in the spatial and community planning process and implementation of the development plan should be identified. The involvement of a wide range of community and interest groups in ecological, cultural and social issues, as well as planning processes, ensures better access to information at the planning stage and the possibility of expressing their concerns and proposals during the planning process.

In addition, the authors concluded that the digital skills of local communities, digital equipment and services, as well as the cooperation skills of communities, had a significant role at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and in overcoming the consequences of the pandemic. Smart villages and communities, as well as strong communities, were much better prepared for a crisis, as they were familiar with digital solutions related to different areas of life and could transfer to them, as well as providing mutual assistance. Smart and strong communities could much better adjust to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and overcome the consequences of the pandemic, as digital skills and strong community assistance played a decisive role.

Usage of local community potential in area development provides a significant positive impact on sustainable state regional development, as it ensures an inclusive and comprehensive process of territorial development. Simultaneously, to ensure the participation of such communities in area development, it is essential not only to introduce a new planning level – village planning – but also to introduce informal planning methods, planning and assessment of development based on data and indicators, as well as to promote economic development of the area based on local

resources. To ensure such inclusive and comprehensive development of the area, the local territory/community development planning model should be introduced.

To answer to research question, the authors have also **developed a local territory/community development planning logically structural model** (see Figure 2) that will ensure sustainable, comprehensive and inclusive development of the area.

The model was developed to provide information to its users, in a concentrated and comprehensible manner, about the most essential elements of village planning in order to achieve the goal of the planning process – a sustainably, comprehensively and inclusively developed village. This model includes more elements than a formal and regulated place development planning approach, as it includes both an indication of informal engagement tools, objective and data-based decision-making, and extended dimensions of sustainability.

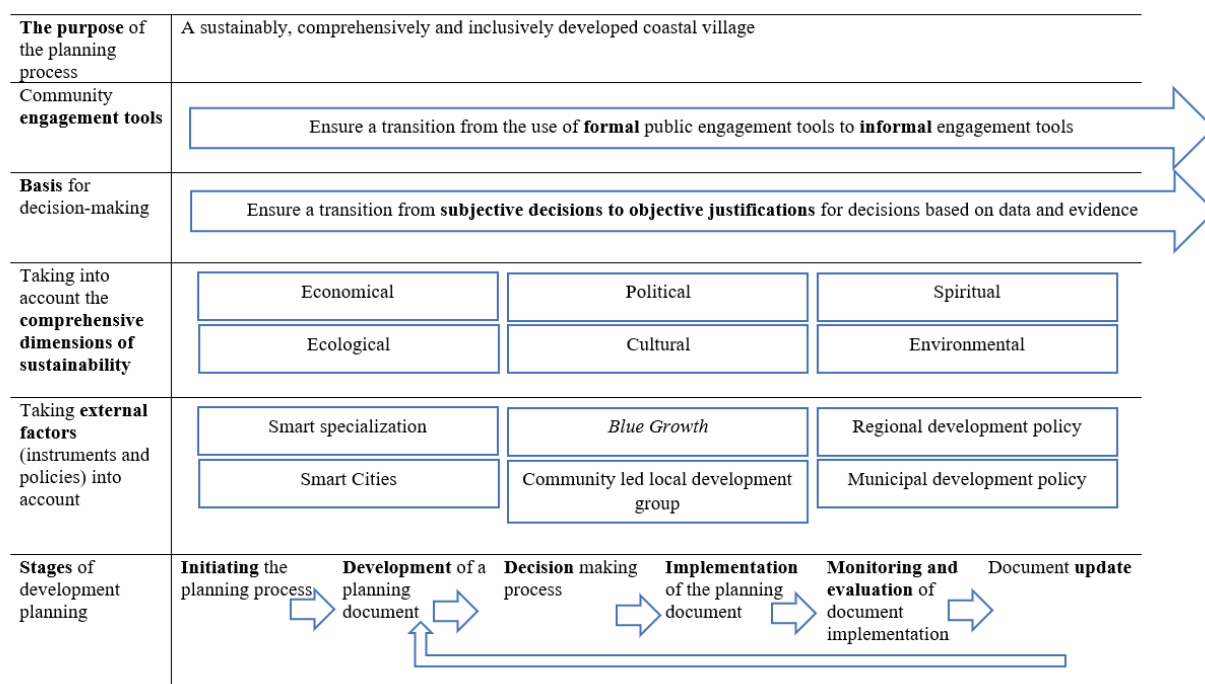


Figure 2. **A logically structural model for local territory/community development planning** (authors' figure)

Spatial planning, implementation and monitoring need to have a certain order to ensure unified processes and results. This clearly indicates that, as a result of societal growth, the planning process must be adaptable and modern, which forces the research community to constantly look for new and appropriate opportunities for formal and informal societal involvement and motivation.

Conclusion

The implementation of village-level development planning must also take into account the factors surrounding the territorial community: regional development principles and conditions for sustainable development, as well as the identification and use of modern and appropriate methods of public participation. By bringing together all these external factors, it is possible to develop a proposal for a planning tool at the village level, and to suggest instruments for its implementation.

It is important not only to ensure the effectiveness of the planning process itself, but also to monitor progress in implementing the development model and making changes in the situation. This requires a comprehensive analysis of the evaluation criteria, the data used to measure them and the sources of the data.

With account of the conclusions of this research, the local territory/community development planning logically structural model includes observation of the following principles in the local development planning process:

- the community territory is defined as being where the development process is planned
- it is essential to take into account and evaluate the six sustainable development dimensions in the planning process, including drawing special attention to the development of the local economy based on local resources
- external circumstances are taken into account when planning local development: local government and regional policies, the Baltic Sea region, and EU-level policies and initiatives. This principle ensures observation of the interconnection and hierarchy between the planning levels, providing that local village development ensures sustainable development of the local government, region and state.
- the following core principles are observed in the planning process: not only formal involvement of the community, but also informal and inclusive methods. The development planning decisions are taken objectively, based on data and knowledge. Clear and measurable indicators must be used in introducing development planning

Kopsavilkums

Eiropā arvien lielāka uzmanība tiek pievērsta jaunajai teritoriālās attīstības pieejai plānošanā jeb “augšupējai plānošanai”, kas nozīmē, ka aizvien vairāk lēmumu par vietējo attīstību jāpieņem zemākajā plānošanas līmenī, proti, ciema līmenī vai vietējās kopienās. Latvijā pastāv sociāla rakstura problēmas, jo nesabalansēta reģionu ekonomiskā attīstība noved pie dzīves kvalitātes un sabiedriskās aktivitātes pazemināšanās. Lai risinātu šīs problēmas, ir jāmeklē jauni un mūsdienīgi risinājumi vietējo kopienu attīstībai un to iesaistīšanai reģionālajā attīstībā. Šī pētījuma mērķis ir izstrādāt integrētu, ilgtspējīgu un līdzdalības plānošanas modeli kā jaunu attīstības plānošanas instrumentu ciemu līmenī. Galvenie uzdevumi, kas izriet no šī pētījuma mērķa, ir šādi: izpētīt teorētiskos un reglamentējošos aspektus, izpētīt kopienu iesaisti un vietējās attīstības plānošanas metodes un pieejas, kā arī izpētīt vietējās ekonomikas un sociālo aspektu potenciālu. Pētījums tika veikts Baltijas jūras reģionā (Latvija, Igaunija, Somija (Alandu salas), Zviedrija). Pētījuma rezultāti veidos priekšlikumu ilgtspējīgas attīstības plānošanas modelim kopienu līmenī un priekšlikumus par turpmākām iespējām ieviest ciemu plānošanas līmeni reģionālās attīstības plānošanā.

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