

Suburban Sprawl in Riga Region: the Rise and Fall of “American Dream”

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Abstract. For the last 15 years, the agglomeration of Riga has expanded and one of the most important problems that Riga faces is movement of middle-class people to surrounding municipalities. This tendency is mostly referable to the processes in the USA during the second half of the 20th century. This research has first identified the history and causes of urban sprawl since the earliest times and has compared it with the situation in Riga Region. Planning documents of suburban municipalities of Riga have been reviewed to find out their future vision and to develop a set of planning policy recommendations and directions for future research.

Keywords: “American dream”, Riga Region, suburbanization, urban sprawl

INTRODUCTION

The sprawl has been widely discussed, but not quite understood. This type of spatial development is often claimed to have major negative impacts on the environment, the social structure of an area and its economy.

In a survey by Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 18 per cent of Americans noted that urban sprawl and land development were the most important issues their local community faced – the top response, related to crime and violence [1].

Classically, urban sprawl is a US phenomenon associated with the rapid low-density outward expansion of US cities, steaming back to the early part of the 20th century. It was fuelled by the rapid growth of private car ownership and the preference for detached houses with gardens. However, sprawl also occurs in Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia in response to the increased affluence and growing dependence on an automobile as a preferred way of intra- and inter- metropolitan travel [2].

Sprawl have varying definitions, and the central component of most definitions is low density, the pattern of land use conversion which exceeds the population growth rate over the specified period and changes of the rural landscape and farmlands, parks and other natural areas into man-made environments.

According to Bruegmann, sprawl is a low density, large-lot residential and commercial development that is scattered across a large land area. This land area is separated into distinctive zones requiring regular inter-zone travel [2]. Burchell and Mukherji define sprawl as low-density, leapfrog development characterized by a strip form along major thoroughfares and tributaries at the periphery of a metropolitan area [3]. Galster et.al. define sprawl as a pattern of land use that exhibits some combination of dimensions, including low density, discontinuity of development and little

open space within the urban area [4]. Residents of sprawling neighbourhoods tend to live in single-family homes and commute to work by car. This process includes human settlements spreading out in poorly planned patterns which occur in response to the population growth and are characterised by decreasing of an average number of residential units in developable land and the land development rate that exceeds the population growth rate.

Berry and Plaut believe that urban growth follows a pattern of urban transition. In the first phase, the fastest growth occurs in the core of the city. The second phase is suburbanization, with the fastest growth just outside the city core, followed by the third phase that is counter urbanization, with population in the core and suburb moving out to more rural areas. The fourth phase is re-urbanization, with an increase in population in the core of the city [5].

According to this hypothesis, sprawl is characteristic of the third phase and several researches confirm that sprawl is more costly than alternative patterns of development.

HISTORY OF SPRAWL

Suburbs are not a new phenomenon. They have existed together with cities for thousands of years. In his landmark work “The City in History”, the famous urban scholar Lewis Mumford writes: “the suburb becomes visible almost as early as the city itself”. Mumford notes that the first archeological evidence of suburbs dates back to the ancient Ur in Mesopotamia and the suburban villas are evident in early Egyptian paintings and funeral models [6].

However, the best example of early cities can be found in the beginning of the Christian era, when the great city of Rome had an estimated population of about one million people, piled up within city walls that enclosed a little more than six square miles. This created the density of something like 150 000 persons per square mile. And this was with today’s standards primitive water delivery, waste removal, and transportation services, but, despite the obvious problems, several factors made high densities in cities the necessary evil. One was the fact that most cities owed their existence to some specific geographical feature: a site along a trade road, a safe harbor, a good location for a bridge, a piece of ground that could be easily defended, and rapids that could be harnessed to provide water power. The cities that developed around these strategic points could not spread very far because of the limits of accessibility. Crowding was reinforced by military considerations as well. Most large cities, at least until the nineteenth century, were walled for security reasons, and the crushing expense of building and maintaining the wall

guaranteed that cities remained as compact as possible. They expanded only when the lack of space for essential urban activities became truly intolerable [2].

Gillham believes that we owe our contemporary version of suburbs and sprawl to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, when rapid growth and change of cities brought us the modern suburb. Factories, mills, mass production and, above all, new forms of transportation and communication have led us to where we are today [7].

Bruegmann believes that it was possible because of new building technologies and infrastructure in the nineteenth century, which allowed for real estate speculators to develop industrial quarters of large cities more densely, than ever seen before. The central arrondissements of Paris topped 200 000 people per square mile in the nineteenth century. Cities in the North America attained even higher densities and did so somewhat later, because they reached the peak of industrial activity later than their counterparts in Europe. But only in the twentieth century sprawl, at last, became a mass phenomenon [2].

CAUSES OF SPRAWL

Urban sprawl develops due to a number of factors. A report from the European Environmental Agency (EEA) refers to economic factors at both macro-level (e.g. economic growth, globalization) and micro-level (e.g. rising living standards, price of land, competition between municipalities), in addition to factors pertaining to demographic trends, housing preference, inner city problems, transportation (e.g. private cars, poor public transport), and regulatory frameworks (e.g. weak land use planning, lack of coordination and collaboration) [8]. Although most researchers believe that the main factor is individual decision.

As household income grows, more households move to the suburbs. Richer households are attracted to larger, newer suburban homes and are pushed from the central cities by concern about crime and public school quality [9].

Glaeser and Kahn note that empirical evidence indicates that a primary cause of decentralization of employment in the United States is the consumer demand for suburban amenities. After all, people prefer big houses, large yards, the convenience of shopping malls, and many other characteristics associated with sprawl [10].

Delafons believes that sprawl in US is caused because of "prairie psychology," which is characterized by supply of land that is viewed as virtually unlimited, highly protected ownership rights and assumption that you should not temper with economic forces [11].

A report by Maine State suggests that sprawl is the result of thousands of families basing decisions on a whole host of powerful attractions. The attractions include: lower prices, cheaper land, lower taxes, privacy, "country living". Each family's decision is made in its own apparent best interest. However, it is often made without full knowledge of the costs [12]. The report by Maine State also gives an excellent example of how the individual decision is made and what consequences it brings:

"Imagine a young couple looking to buy their first home. The couple finds two homes for similar price - one in the city and one outside the city. Though the prices of the two houses are similar, property taxes on the one outside the city are less than for the one in city. This fact makes the decision easy. It seems that the couple can both have a dream house in the country, and save money on property taxes at the same time! So the couple buys home outside the city. After a few months they notice that their checkbook is tight. So they look more carefully at their expenses. They notice higher monthly gasoline credit card bills. They both have longer commutes to work, and simply getting a loaf of bread or gallon of milk takes a trip in the car. Likewise there are more bills for car maintenance. The house insurance bill is higher because they live farther away from a fire station. In the end after they add everything up, they discover that these "invisible" costs of living in the country have more than offset the savings in property taxes. After few years they are often pressed for time. Even the most routine activities take careful planning. Where once they walked to the corner to pick up a bottle of milk or loaf of bread, now they must drive several miles. An hour or so of the day is lost in commuting. Every time their children want to visit a friend, or take a lesson, or go to a basketball game, they have to be driven. Even to get a baby sitter requires driving across town. They haven't gotten to know their neighbors very well because they live in their cars as well. Their old friends don't drop by as often because of the distance. Then, as more families move into the area, it begins to feel less like country. The neighboring farm disappears. The water in the nearby lake is becoming cloudy. There are fewer wild animals to be seen. The last straw is when property taxes start to go up. To serve the new families, the town has had to buy a plock truck, add on portable classrooms to the schools, and hire more staff. New expenses mean higher taxes. Thus part of the original motivation for moving to the country, lower taxes, is disappearing. What to do? They decide to move farther into the country, where the taxes are still low and open spaces remain. But this is only a temporary solution, for the cycle will surely repeat itself. As this example shows, there is an irony in fact that the movement motivated, in part, by the desire to reduce living costs and avoid high property taxes, ends up raising living costs and increasing property taxes, not just for the individual family involved but for everyone [12]."

Costs of sprawl

Kenneth Jackson in his book "Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States" noted that the sprawl-like development include (high local public service costs and increased automobile dependence), as well as benefits (high level of housing amenity and individual open space) [13].

And while sprawl has its advantages, some would argue its costs to society outweigh its benefits. It is a problem primarily due to the hidden costs associated with it, namely greater car dependence, higher infrastructure costs, loss of open space and agricultural lands, more energy-intensive development, urban core disinvestment, and traffic congestion [14].

Its effects are impacting the quality of life in every large and small city. Sprawl leaves behind boarded up houses,

vacant storefronts, closed business, abandoned, contaminated industrial sites and traffic congestion. Sprawl also creates costs, such as the hidden debt of unfounded infrastructure and services, social dysfunction, urban decay and environmental degradation. The list of costs is endless. There is a remarkable number of causes of sprawl, which include demographic changes, growing affluence, rent gradient, transportation, land regulation and federal tax policy [15].

Many studies have found that low-density developments are more expensive to support. The Real Estate Research Corporation of the US Government carried out pioneer research in this field in 1974 in order to estimate the economic and environmental costs of different types of urban development and different forms of growth on the urban fringe. The empirical analyses consider the public costs relating to the construction and maintenance of schools, housing, green space, roads and shopping centers, and estimate the costs to the community in terms of the negative environmental effects (land consumption, air, water and noise pollution) and social effects (car journey time, accidents, psychological and social costs). The main result of this research was the identification of urban density as the fundamental variable of the overall costs sustained by the community [16].

In sum, most of the American public is not unhappy with the current pattern of development in metropolian areas – it simply can no longer afford it [17].

SPRAWL IN RIGA CONTEXT

Although Riga, as a whole, has experienced a decline in population, during the last two decades, the population in rural areas around city has increased.

In 2005 there were 731 762 inhabitants in Riga, but the agglomeration of Riga has increased by 974.6 km² (+14%) and 16, 419 inhabitants (+1. 5%) since 1995 [18]. In 2003 the number of inhabitants increased in 19 of 23 municipalities in Riga Region. The main cause of it was local migration, because the rate of natural increase is negative [19]. In some of the municipalities, the number of inhabitants has increased by 20% during the last decade.



Fig. 1. Chaotic sprawl in Riga Region [23]

New residential areas are usually built in suburban municipalities around urban cores along main roads (Figure 1, 2). Most of the real estate developers choose to build one- or two-storey buildings and rarely multistorey apartment houses, manufacturing and office buildings that usually do not serve local residents and make typical “patchy development” [19]. It means that suburban municipalities of Riga face the same phenomenon as the USA and other countries after the Second World War. It represents the illusion of the so-called “American dream” which is associated with large, single-family houses, lots of land, and a feeling of independence (Figure 3). As the analysis of the planning documents show, suburban municipalities of Riga Region have chosen to go the same way and face the same problems that suburbs in the USA did.



Fig. 2. Area of residential buildings in Loriķi (Ķekava municipality) [27]



Fig. 3. Area of low-rise residential buildings in Vimbukrogs (Ķekava municipality) [27]

The process taking place in suburban municipalities of Riga seems to be more interesting, if we remember the negative rate of the natural increase in Latvia.

We can compare the situation in Riga Region with that in the US “Rust Belt”, where in the 1970s changes in the world and national economies dramatically altered many cities.

Most fundamentally, city manufacturing was strongly influenced and caused massive outmigration of business and people [20] - in some cities (St. Louis, Youngstown) by more

than 50%, while the number of inhabitants in metropolitan areas has actually increased and the suburbs are expanding [21].

This phenomenon represents the tragedy of sprawl, which causes creation of doubling infrastructure and loss of agricultural land, which is turned into suburbs, while there is a lot of vacant land in the city. This absurd situation is one of the main reasons why new planning approaches like New Urbanism have appeared in the USA.

There are many similarities between those shrinking cities and Riga. A new report by CEO's for Cities titled "Driven Apart: How Sprawl Is Lengthening Our Commutes and Why Misleading Mobility Measures Are Making Things Worse," analyses transportation in 51 major US cities and reevaluates the justification for spending billions of dollars on new roads to deal with congestion. According to the report, policy making should instead center on how cities are structured and built, not roads themselves. The key is that compact, multi-use development brings many benefits, including savings in time (spent in traffic) and money (spent on highways.) And to reduce traffic congestion, it is important to reduce the traveling distance, which can be done by making dense mixed-use cities and neighborhoods [22].

Several urban thinkers, like Richard Florida, believe that suburbs will lose their popularity because people will not be able to afford it anymore. He believes that future belongs to those areas, which will be able to attract young, creative, educated people. Florida's approach starts from the assumption that "creativity" - the ability to generate new knowledge or convert the existing knowledge into economically successful applications — is becoming an increasingly important resource for economic development.

For the US, Florida has demonstrated that those cities with a strong concentration of the creative class are showing particularly successful economic development in high-technology sectors [24]. This opinion is supported by several trends.

An article in Wall Street Journal claims that for decades, the suburbs benefited from companies seeking a lower rent, less crime and a shorter commute for many workers. But at present office buildings in many city downtowns have stopped losing tenants or are even filling up again, as the office space in the surrounding suburbs continues to empty. Since early 2009, in major metropolitan areas including Houston, Las Vegas, Miami, Pittsburgh and Phoenix, the occupied office space has increased downtown but dropped in the suburbs [25]. Also the Forbes survey entitled "America's Best Cities For Young Adults" shows that cities like Austin, Houston, New York, Seattle, Minneapolis, which represent the ideas of sustainability in the USA, match young creative adults life stage and personality with a city's physical aesthetics, social networks, career opportunities and basic services [26].

ANALYSIS OF PLANNING DOCUMENTS

To get a vision of how the suburban municipalities of Riga see their future and development, the author has collected data

from planning documents of 12 municipalities in Riga Region (Ķekava, Daugmale, Baloži, Babīte, Salas, Carnikava, Stopiņi, Mārupe, Garkalne, Olaine, Salaspils). These are the municipalities, which after the administrative territorial reform of 2009 were merged in 8 municipalities bordering with Riga. The author has focused on issues related to the population projection, the planned economic activity and the spatial vision. The results have been summarized in Table 1.

The analysis of the planning documents of suburban municipalities of Riga shows that the municipalities expect a continuous growth of population. However, no detailed projections of the population growth are available. This information would be useful to plan how much land is necessary for building and also help to solve the issues related to providing the required engineering infrastructure.

The analysis shows that municipalities of Riga Region plan to develop single-family and low-rise residential buildings. The challenge for them is to create the necessary infrastructure to support this type of development. Mostly, construction is planned within borders of the current villages, but according to Latvian laws, the vision of village is quite blurred and allows interpretation.

There is no precise definition of a village in Latvian legislation, but the definition given by Jānis Turlajs and Gints Milliņš in their book "Latvijas apdzīvotās vietas" proposes that: "Village is a rural area with concentrated building, where the distance between buildings does not exceed 200 m" [28]. However, the Law on Administrative Territories and populated area claims, "The status of village may be granted to such section of a municipality territory in which concentrated building is present or is planned, people are living permanently and the appropriate infrastructure has been developed" [29].

According to this law, the status of a village may be granted to a not populated territory, if it has a plan and an appropriate infrastructure. But what is an appropriate infrastructure?

Does it mean that according to a detailed plan large areas may be transformed into concentrated building? In this situation, the risk remains that despite the efforts of municipalities the chaotic building might occur.

The analysis of planning documents of suburban municipalities of Riga show that commercial activity is not the priority, because most of its inhabitants work in Riga. According to the information of the Spatial Strategic Plan of Garkalne municipality, only 20-30% of its inhabitants work within the borders of the municipality [30].

And there is no reason to assume that the situation is totally different in other municipalities of Riga Region.

The analysis shows that suburban municipalities of Riga see tourism as the main commercial activity, although the documents do not provide a clear vision as to what can attract tourists to a single-family residential building area. Other branches of economy are logistics and food production, because of the geographical location of the municipalities. But those are economic activities that do not require a highly qualified workforce. Only three municipalities plan to develop

the high technology manufacturing because of the high percentage of qualified workforce within their territory. The profile of people who have chosen to live in Riga Region

allows creating science parks or other economic activities with a high added value.

TABLE 1
FUTURE VISION OF SUBURBAN MUNICIPALITIES OF RIGA [30 - 41]

Planning document	Population changes	Spatial vision	Characteristics of planned building	Economic activity
Development programme of Ķekava parish 2008-2020	+	Develop and expand current villages Develop inner network of roads and streets	Low-rise residential building Single-family residential building	Tourism (active, business, recreational) Transport and logistics, food manufacturing and services
Land use plan of Daugmale parish 2007-2019 (amendments of 2009)	+	Sparse single- family residential building	Single -family residential building	Nontraditional agriculture, tourism,
Land use plan of Baloži town 2008-2020	+	Transformation of seasonal residential building to permanent residential usage Location of residential building in areas provided in land use plan	Low-rise residential building High-rise residential building	Services (hotels, cafes & restaurants, auto repairs & mechanics) Tourism
Development programme of Babīte parish 2007-2019	+	Spatial structure of mosaic and interaction with green areas	Single-family residential building	Food manufacturing, business tourism, logistics
Land use plan of Salas parish 2005-2017 (amendments of 2008)	+	Polycentric structure, Development of new villages next to current ones and development of new villages along Riga-Liepāja highway	Single-family residential building	Food manufacturing
Development programme of Carnikava district 2009-2014	+	Transformation of seasonal residential building to permanent residential usage	Low-rise residential building Single-family residential building	Tourism, woodworking
Development programme of Stopiņu parish 2003-2015	+	Convergence of villages creating continuous concentrated residential building	Single-family residential building	Woodworking, tourism, agriculture
Development programme of Mārupe parish 2003-2014	+	New areas for single-family residential building	Single -family residential territory Smallholder territory Commercial territory	Intensive agriculture, tourism (active, rural, business), High-technology manufacturing near Riga Airport
Spatial development strategy of Garkalne district 2008-2030	+	Concentrated building along current villages and main roads	Low-rise residential building Single-family residential building	High-technology manufacturing
Development programme of Olaine parish 2008-2020	+	Development of new single-unit residential building zone and expansion of industrial zone Transformation of seasonal residential buildings to permanent residential usage	Single-family residential building Low-rise residential building	Services and manufacturing
Land use plan of Salaspils district 2002-2012	-	Development of single-family residential building	Single-family residential building	High-technology manufacturing, rural tourism, logistics, quarrying, building material manufacturing

According to the information of the Land Use Plan of Baloži town, the nationality structure of population has changed during last few years. The percentage of Latvians has increased (+5%), while the percentage of other nationalities has decreased. However, the number of “exotic nationalities” has also increased [31]. This could indicate the profile of people who choose to live in the so-called suburbs.

Also statistics of SRDA from the survey “Development of Regions in Latvia 2009” show that 7 out of 8 municipalities (except Olaines municipality) are in top 10 municipalities with

the highest tax revenue per capita. In 2008, only 6 of them were in top 10. Also the tax revenue per capita in three municipalities (Garkalnes, Ķekavas, Babītes) is higher than in Riga [42]. This shows that social segregation in Riga Region occurs that could lead to social problems.

The analysis of planning documents of suburban municipalities of Riga shows the distorted perception of the development that is measured by increase of population and residential buildings. The planning documents of Ķekava municipality are a perfect example that shows a similar

perception of causes and motivation of suburbanization to that of the earlier mentioned example of Maine State.

“Real estate market is rapidly developing in Ķekava municipality because of its geographical location and movement of middle-class people outside the unfriendly environment of city to rural areas.” [41] Significant is characterization of urban environment as unfriendly. Planning documents of Ķekava municipality also forecast that suburbanization will continue:

“Demand for residential areas in Ķekava municipality will remain high despite the government restrictions against inflation and new residential building in Riga city because people want to live in safe, pleasant, rural environment with accessible infrastructure close to the city.” [41]

It is a perfect example that the primary goals of municipalities of Riga Region are attraction of inhabitants that would lead to higher tax revenue and help municipalities to implement their functions. But they have not thought about it in the long-term perspective. The “American Dream” could turn into a nightmare. The income from new inhabitants might be lower than expenses they require. It might cost too much! By allowing massive housing development, suburban municipalities of Riga have already reached the situation where new large housing areas suffer from a lack of local social services, inappropriate technical infrastructure and insufficient public transport. Therefore, the urban structure is being considerably changed, triggering the need to adjust all other spheres of development. Planning new kindergartens and schools and developing new routes for buses are responses to the demands of the residents of new “villages”.

CONCLUSIONS

Although Riga, as a whole, has experienced a decline in population during the last two decades, the population in rural areas around the city has increased.

Establishment of market economy and liberal planning system after the breakdown of the Soviet Union have resulted in low political priority being given to long-term spatial planning. This has created preconditions for urban sprawl and, while urban sprawl is understood by many academics and planners as an undesirable urban form in relation to urban sustainability, it is also the type of development that offers a preferred way of living for many people. Construction of new housing settlements in suburbs became a characteristic feature after 2000, driven by interests of real estate developers and, in most cases, not following any long-term planning strategy. Planning documents of this period in suburban municipalities of Riga show the distorted perception of development that is measured by increase of population and residential buildings. In 2008 the global recession hit Latvia. A major part of the GDP growth up to that year had come from building activities.

After 2008, many new housing projects came to a standstill and urban sprawl was mostly suspended. This may be an advantage, allowing time to contemplate over the future urban structure and consider whether a less market-based housing development is needed.

A general finding that this research demonstrates is that sprawl in Riga Region is not an anomalous result of Latvian zoning laws or cultural antipathy toward cities, although it has been one of the driven factors. Suburbs have been a feature of the city life since the earliest times. It is driven less by regulations of legislators, actions of developers, and theories of urban planners, than by decisions of thousands of individuals. Urban sprawl is a new phenomenon in Latvia and the society is unaware about its consequences. Therefore, a detailed research about economical, social and environmental costs of sprawl in Riga Region should be made.

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Ilgvars Jansons. Suburbanizācijas norise Pierīgā jeb skrējieni pēc „Amerikāņu sapņa” piepildījuma.

Neraugoties uz tendenci samazināties iedzīvotāju skaitam Rīgā, iedzīvotāju skaits Pierīgas pašvaldībā turpina pieaugt. Pēc PSRS sabrukuma un tirgus ekonomikas ieviešanas, attieksme pret ilgtermiņa plānošanu ir krsi mainījusies un dominējošais uzskats par privātpašuma neaizskaramību un pieturēšanās pie „laissez-faire” principa Pierīgas pašvaldībā ir radījis priekšnoteikumus straujai haotiskas apbūves attīstībai. Neskatoties uz faktu, ka vairums akademiķu un plānotāju negatīvi vērtē suburbanizācijas norisi, daļa iedzīvotāju to uzskata par vēlamu dzīvesveidu, iemiesojot sevī ilūziju par tā dēvēto „Amerikāņu sapni” - māju piepilsētā, kur laimīgi aizvadīt ģimenes dzīvi atgriežoties no darba, prom no pilsētas burzmas un problēmām. Tiesa gan, šādas apbūves nekontrolēta attīstība ir radījusi daudzas ar inženierkomunikācijām un infrastruktūru saistītas problēmas, turklāt kā liecina norises ASV, šāda veida attīstība rada virkni „slēptās izmaksas”, turklāt tai ir pārejošs raksturs. Ekonomiskās recesijas iestāšanās gan ir uz laiku apturējusi turpmāku nekontrolētu apbūves attīstību Pierīgas pašvaldībā, kas vieš cerības, ka situācija uzlabosies. Galvenā atziņa, pētījuma rezultātā ir, ka suburbanizācija ir raksturīga pilsētu attīstības iezīme, kuras galvenais dzinējspēks ir individuālo lēmumu summa nevis nepilnības plānošanas sistēmā un likumdošanā, taču tās katrā ziņā ir veicinājušas haotiskās apbūves struktūras veidošanos. Sakarā ar to, ka suburbanizācija ir jauns fenomens Latvijā, sabiedrībā trūkst izpratnes par tās iespējamajām sekām un izmaksām, tādēļ turpmākajos pētījumos ir nepieciešams veikt detalizētu suburbanizācijas ekonomisko, sociālo un vides izmaksu aprēķināšanu

Илгвар Янсон. Процесс субурбанизации в Рижском регионе или стремление реализовать «Американскую мечту».

Несмотря на тенденцию уменьшения количества жителей в городе Рига, количество жителей в самоуправлениях вокруг Риги продолжает расти. После распада СССР и введения торговой экономики сильно поменялось отношение к долгосрочному планированию. Мнение о неприкосновенности частного имущества и приверженность принципу «laissez-faire» в Рижском регионе создали условия для стремительного развития хаотичной застройки.

Несмотря на то, что большинство академиков и планировщиков негативно оценивают ход субурбанизации, часть населения считает ее желаемым стилем жизни, который реализует иллюзию «американской мечты» – дом в пригороде, в котором приятно вести семейную жизнь, возвращаясь с работы в место без городских проблем и суеты. Неконтролируемое развитие такой застройки создало проблемы, связанные с инженерными коммуникациями и инфраструктурой. Опыт США свидетельствует, что такой вид развития создает скрытые издержки, при этом являясь проходящим по характеру.

Начало экономической рецессии временно остановило последующую неконтролируемую застройку в самоуправлениях вокруг города Риги, что дает надежды на улучшение ситуации. Главный вывод исследования, изложенного в статье, что субурбанизация является характерной чертой развития города, главная движущая сила которой - сумма индивидуальных решений, а не недостатки в системе планирования и законодательстве. В связи с тем, что субурбанизация для Латвии является новым феноменом, в обществе не хватает понятия о ее возможных последствиях и издержках, поэтому в последующих исследованиях необходимо детально рассчитать экономические, социальные затраты и затраты в сфере окружающей среды.