

# IDENTITY OF LATVIAN AND LITHUANIAN CITIES ON THE BALTIC SEASHORE

## Latvijas un Lietuvas pilsētu identitāte Baltijas piekrastē

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**Abstract.** *The Baltic seashore cities Liepaja, Ventspils and Palanga people's relationships with the sea had an impact on architectural quality of surrounding, which reflect understanding of the economic, culture and art. One of the sustainable development preconditions is identity, which can be achieved by identification, preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, natural objects and specific landscape. Identity of city environment is formed by cultural heritage that encodes information about many processes in the past. There is limited knowledge of the identity of coastal cities in the Baltic countries, where living environment is rich with forms and structures, which can satisfy individual's physical and mental needs, and inspire new ideas. To realize sustainable and balanced development of the Baltic seashore cities Liepaja, Ventspils and Palanga, structural changes are carried out using different spatial development models.*

*The goal of this research is to compare models of sustainable spatial development of the Baltic seashore Latvian cities Liepaja and Ventspils, as well as Lithuanian city Palanga, and to assess their effects on the citizen quality of life.*

**Keywords:** *identity, balance, sustainable spatial development, cultural heritage.*

### Introduction

The Balts living since ancient times has been associated with the presence of the Baltic Sea and costal natural features – wind, sand and water. Human and natural relationships were developed diversified. Area population and landscape discover interaction of natural, political and economic in different conditions. The Baltic seashore cities Liepaja, Ventspils and Palanga people's relationships with the sea had an impact on architectural quality of surrounding, which reflect understanding of the economic, culture and art; that has made the city unique. Relationships between consumers and producers down the quality of the living environment. One of the sustainable development preconditions is identity, which can be achieved by identification, preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, natural objects and specific landscape.

The goal of this research is to compare models of sustainable spatial development of the Baltic seashore cities Liepaja, Ventspils and Palanga, what are similarities and differences in their patterns of development, as well as to assess their effects on the citizen quality of life.

### The regional development of the Baltic Sea coast

In Latvia and Lithuania (Figure 1), elaborating development projects, the variety of territories in city should be maintained, to preserve industrial and culture heritage, local landscape, as well as to create contemporary cultural environment and to strengthen local identity. City sustainable development is promoted by local scale action to promote environment, social and economic improvement and to preserve identity (Jākobsone, 2001: 85). In the regions, where the historic identity is lost, people try to study, preserve and renew objects of heritage value and landscape features, as well as typical scenery, in order to design new identity. It is important not only to propose balanced development basic principles, but to implement them, that is why in the territory planning the priority should be person and his residential, providing employment, health,

recreation, traffic and communal services, as well as the rational use of natural resources (Brīņķis, Buka, 2001: 10).



Figure 1. Map with Baltic Seashore cities of Latvia and Lithuania.  
(<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europa/latvia.re198.jpg>).

In the Baltic States there were changes not only in politics, economics and in social, planning and legal fields, but also in the growth of cities. In Lithuania development of the Baltic seashore populated areas was solved in a complex way. Seaside Regional Park (1992) is founded in territory between Klaipėda – ice-free harbour, the centre of industry, trade, education and culture and Palanga – sea health resort with populated area *Šventoji*. Ventspils well-organized Baltic Sea coast beach is surrounded by forests. Greenery system includes woods, parks and well-organized squares. In Liepāja the substitution of ownership created changes and promoted functional fragmentation of Liepāja planning, corresponding to the interests of individual entrepreneurs and enterprises. There were separate models of sustainable spatial development created in order to improve the living environment quality of inhabitants in cities.

### The development model of resort city Palanga

In Palanga the historic planning (Figure 2) with regular street network was being preserved. At Palanga administrative territory the old road Klaipėda–Liepāja has become the main street – *Vytauto gatve*, from which a perpendicular branch along the *Ronže River* – the reconstructed *Jona Basanavičiaus gatve* (2006) – leads to the West to the Baltic seashore (Figure 3).

The promenade is completed renowned bridge on piles (Figure 4) in the sea (1998). *Kretingos gatve* takes from the town centre to the East out of city, where there is created a detour road – *Klaipėdos plentas*. In the resort of international significance the construction of living houses is moved to the locality of main roads by *Kretingos gatve* and in the territory between *Vytauto gatve* and *Klaipėdos plentas*. A modern trade and business centre is developed. Culture is

a priority for Palanga. The green system created by Palanga Botanic Garden, large-scale pinewood tracts by the seashore, household gardens and squares. Lithuanian Ministry of Culture announced Palanga the Capital of Culture (2013).

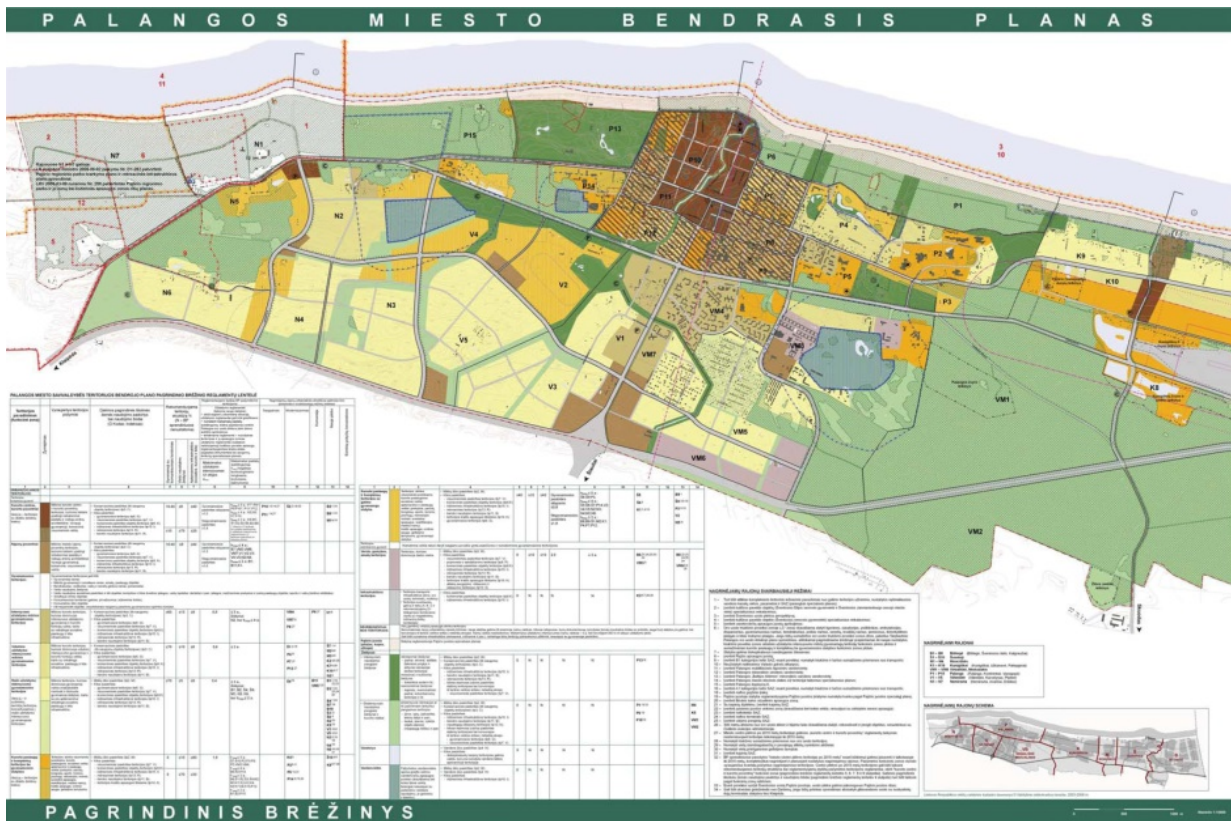


Figure 2. The Strategic development plan of Palanga City till 2015. (<http://www.miestai.net/forumas/showthread.php?t=5793&page=3>).



Figure 3. Jona Basanavičiaus gatve in Palanga City. Photo: S. Ozola.  
Figure 4. Seashore of the Baltic Sea near Palanga. Photo: S. Ozola.

Strategic development plan of Palanga (Figure 2) reflects a long-term vision of the municipality, long-term development trends of all sectors, and is based on political, economic, social and cultural analysis. The goal of strategic plan – defines the role and significance of Palanga in Lithuanian economic and social life, evaluates ever-changing trends of development, analyzes their importance in the municipality policy, forms alternative development perspectives and recommends allocation of national and the European Union structural funds.

## The development model of port city Ventspils

In order to promote the development of Ventspils “The territorial planning of Ventspils City” (Figure 5) was elaborated, keeping the functional structure of territory and promoting harmonious development of environment. Administrative borders of Ventspils City to the South from the Venta River includes *Ostgals*, where Beach Water Park, South–pier Promenade, Yacht Harbour and renown theatre building “*Jūras vārti*” (2010, arch. *Juris Poga, Astra Poga*, interior *Imants Rubīns, Ivo Tacs*) are situated. In locality of *Kaziņmežs* an Adventure Park and Seaside open–air museum are created. On the seashore a recreation and culture centre develops. City environment is being enriched by fountains “*Saules laiviņas*” (2000, arch. *Juris Kronbergs*, sculptor *Inta Berga*) and flower clock (2002, author *Jānis Trops*).

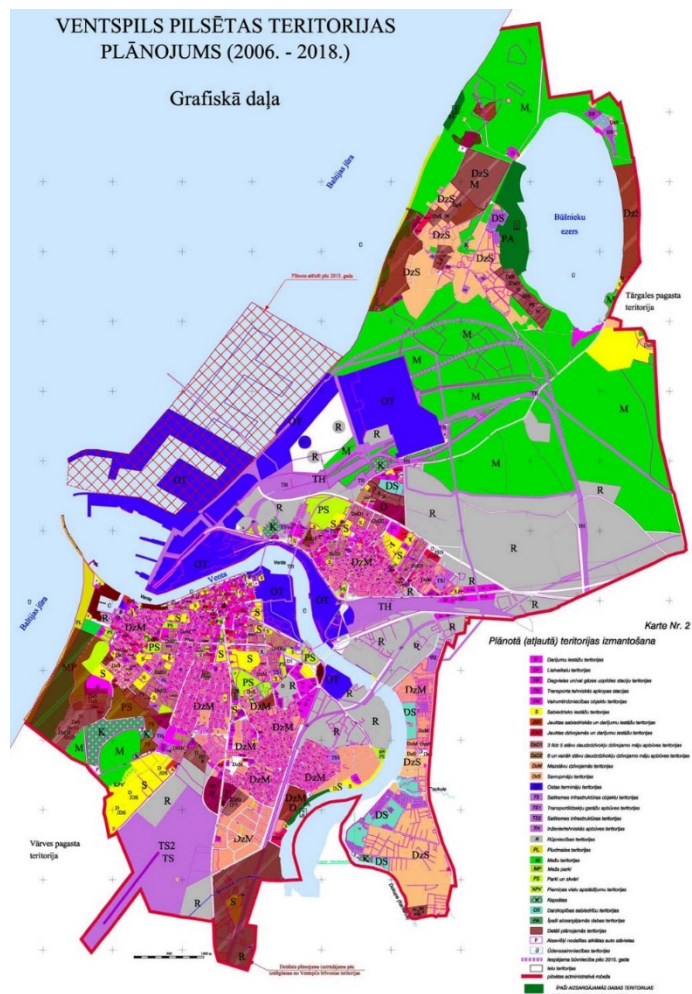


Figure 5. Ventspils City territory planning 2006–2018.

([http://www.ventspils.lv/files/dokumenti/teritorijasplanojums/sadala/27072012/2013-04-15\\_15\\_31\\_37\\_02\\_Planota\\_atlauta\\_izmantosana.pdf](http://www.ventspils.lv/files/dokumenti/teritorijasplanojums/sadala/27072012/2013-04-15_15_31_37_02_Planota_atlauta_izmantosana.pdf)).

Many business and public objects – Creative work house, the Central library of Ventspils, Digital Centre, the house of craftsmen and the international writer and translator house – are placed in Old Town. Harbour (*Ostas*) Street Promenade (Figure 6) with a business centre of stock–company “*Ventspils nafta*” (2003, architect office Ltd. “*Tugalev LTV*”) and city environment objects created on the coast of the Venta River. The renown Livonian castle is turned into culture centre.



Figure 6. Harbour (Ostas) Street Promenade on the left bank of the Venta River. Photo: S. Ozola.

Figure 7. The main traffic artery of Ventspils – Alleé of Kuldīga Street. Photo: S. Ozola.

The production units developed on the shore of the river, in the locality of bridges and by railroads. On the East coast of the Venta River to South from transport centre there is land allocated to societies of gardening, low-storey constructions and farmsteads. The main road roundabouts and bridge creates a link for hub on the right shore of the Venta River with the main traffic road on the left short of Ventspils – reconstructed Kuldīga Street (Figure 7). Not far from bus station there is Water Adventure Park, as well as Olympic Centre “*Ventspils*” (1997).

Administrative borders of Ventspils to the North from the Venta River include territory behind harbour enterprises and production units, as well as populated area *Staldzene*. The popular places by tourists – coastal cliffs of *Staldzene*, Deer Garden and *Būšnieku Lake* – promote creation of the tourism centre. A part of *Būšnieku Lake* coast is “Natura 2000” Special Protection Area.

Historically developed low-storey construction dominates in *Pārventa*. Many-storey living houses, business and public objects are places in the locality of main streets. Centre of *Pārventa* developed in the locality of Talsu, Aviatoru (*Lidotāju*) and Targales streets. The main roads provide a link between hub and production units on the harbour shore. Amber (*Dzintaru*) Street and Courland (*Kurzemes*) Street join production units in the locality of Seaside harbour.

### The development model of port city Liepāja

Liepāja threefold division planning (Figure 8) have created by Trade Port (Figure 9) and Naval Port canals – each part has a unique cultural and historical heritage (Figure 10), the attitude of local government is important in order to preserve the heritage. In a short period of time many production units were closed and the search of new urban space solutions were initiated without historic planning analysis. Many buildings were renovated, but others – were created anew, however countless architecture and green areas were gradually disappearing, leaving open spaces, where sea winds run. Historical buildings were rebuilt to hotels and guest houses, as well as used as offices. Since 2001 year in Liepāja several churches was built. Entrusting the construction of new buildings and renovation of old houses to individuals and legal entities, urban environment obtains uneven quality. In Liepāja culture, education, sports, medicine and trade fields were reorganized: several educational and medical institutions were closed, despite that the development of residential areas should be promoted, preserving little local scale culture, education, sport, medicine, trade and entertainment institutions nearby inhabitants’ residence place.



Figure 8. Liepaja. Territory planning 2011–2023 (Liepāja, 2011).

Figure 9. Liepaja Trade Port. Photo: S. Ozola.

Figure 10. Walking street in Old-Liepaja. Photo: S. Ozola.

Until March 2009, in Liepaja city territorial planning 42 amendments were made, as well as 32 detailed plans were created and 12 more detailed plans were under development. While changing the functional meaning of territory in a hurry, sometimes the current construction was ignored. The Parliament of Latvia adopted the law of Liepaja Special Economic zone on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 1997 for the period of twenty years. Liepaja Special Economic zone was created for the development of trade, industry, shipping and air traffic, as well as for the exchange of international goods through Latvia. The detailed planning of Naval Port residential area and industrial park was elaborated (2001). The territory of Naval Port was divided for enterprises to do the business. Protected object status was not allocated to the building complex of Naval Port Town. The military heritage was supposed to preserve in only one quarter (Liepāja, 2011). Diver’s learning centre (2001) and sport complex (2007) were built, but dockyard “*Tosmare*” stopped the work and the culture centre of the enterprise was closed. Temporary art gallery “*K. Māksla?*” local government’s affiliate and police station were liquidated.

In North suburb constructions of new public, culture and apartment houses has not been, except supermarkets. Liepaja’s sugar–refinery stopped production (2007) and the club was liquidated. Culture and sport establishments in the neighborhoods of “*Lauma*” residential area were rebuilt into supermarkets. In the area of *Zaļā birzs* residential buildings are not public centre with culture, education and trade objects. Large–scale objects were included in Liepaja City environment. In New Liepaja library was liquidated, but Olympic sports centre ice hall was opened, as well as Liepaja Olympic Centre (2008) was created and Metallurgists’ Culture Palace was rebuilding. In the northern part of city old production units were replaced with supermarket. Newly constructed buildings were laid out on the road Liepaja–Grobina. In Old Liepaja historic environment were implemented a number of urban reconstruction projects. In the South–West district there was a living house complex “*Rietumu krasts*” (2009), supermarket “*BAATA*” (2009) built and other shopping places were created, however the same as in *Ezerkrasts* there are no public centre with culture objects.

Administrative borders of Liepaja City includes territory to South from Trade Canal to *Pērkone* River and part of Liepaja Lake with “*Natura 2000*” Special Protection Area, as well as the areas to the North – New Liepaja, Naval Port, *Tosmare* Lake and *Beberliņi* reservoir, its shore is “*Natura 2000*” Special Protection Area. After closing of several railroad lines and dismantling

of railway tracks New Liepaja diminished the significance of hub. City's green structure includes parks, squares, street greeneries, household gardens, as well as woods in the northern part of city. In Liepaja during large-scale street reconstruction (2011–2012) thousands of green trees were liquidated.

### Conclusion

Liepaja, Ventspils and Palanga – cities on the bank of the Baltic Sea have chosen different sustainable development models. In Palanga the specialization of the economic sector does not change. Clearly defined perspective planning of historical and contemporary construction territories is the advantage of chosen model for health resort. Ventspils planning and functional zoning intends creation of specialized centers. The development model of export city and transit port city clearly defines supermarket construction places with well-thought-out, arranged territories of business and public institutions in residential building. The development of green areas and industrial zone happens purposefully and thought-out. A disproportion of industrial and residential areas has increased after liquidating and limiting of several economic sectors and changing of specialization in Liepaja. Perspectives of spatial environment development are unclear, but in New Liepaja, North suburb and Naval Port the residential building development have not been intended. Many family houses are located in inappropriate conditions, nearby industrial territories. Green structures have been reconstructed, but creation of new parks and broadening of green zones in order to diminish the disadvantaged influence and to improve aesthetics of environment have not been intended. To provide balanced development, it is necessary to improve the environment, preserving green areas and to create the development model of territorial planning for the complex solution of economic, social and environment problems, using the latest achievements of science, in order to stop the decrease of inhabitants in Liepaja. The common features of cities are the improvement of streets and squares, creating a modern urban environment, but the attitude towards historical greenery and buildings and understanding of development is different. In Palanga and Ventspils, the legacy and values of the previous generations are developed, adding to new accents. In Liepaja, which developed successfully in the last century, after restoration of independent Republic of Latvia radical changes have been made for the functional use of territories, but a positive effect on the city's growth does not show. Nowadays Liepaja is characterized by economic stagnation: the city of two harbors is unable to exist without government's grants even if a Special Economic Zone has been established. Identity of Liepaja could be preserved if results of previous generations were taken into account.

**Kopsavilkums.** *Šajā rakstā tiek salīdzināti Baltijas jūras piekrastes pilsētu – Liepājas, Ventspils (Latvija) un Palangas (Lietuva) ilgtspējīgas telpiskās attīstības modeļi un tiek novērtēta šo attīstības modeļu ietekme uz minēto pilsētu iedzīvotāju dzīves kvalitāti.*

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