

## **Future visions for Rīga and its population lack long-term point of view**

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A futurological study recently completed by SIA "Jaunrīgas attīstības uzņēmums" in cooperation with "Analītisko pētījumu un stratēģiju laboratorija" and titled Lifestyles and Values of Rīgans in 2020 indicates that most of the respondents, both Latvians and Russians, lacked a long-term vision of what would be best for the future of Rīga and were uncertain about the profile of its inhabitants. There exist strategic documents that ought to influence development of the city, however they lack details on the very people living in Rīga in the future.

According to chairman of the board of SIA "Jaunrīgas attīstības uzņēmums" Valters Māziņš, while carrying out the long-term Andrejsala property development project, it will be important to plan an urban environment that achieves harmony with the general development trends of Rīga and anticipates the needs of the future population. "Our study can be helpful in planning the urban development of the city and in defining the needs of the social infrastructure as well as in image-making of Rīga internationally," comments Valters Māziņš.

The results of the study reaffirm the fact that there are notable differences in perceptions of the city as reported by Latvian and Russophone respondents, mostly because of two different media environments, the cultural divide, ways of accessing information, distinct circles of friends and acquaintances and a number of other factors. The two communities' ways of planning, carrying out and using the urban public space, products of culture and engaging in entrepreneurship vary to a significant degree, resulting in barriers for creating large-scale urban development projects and slowing down the growth of the arts and entertainment, educational and innovation sectors.

The study's conclusions show that in the future the attractiveness of residential areas will largely depend on the availability of diverse arts, entertainment and professional opportunities, which is related to conversions of economic capital into cultural capital and vice versa. Among the motivations for choosing to live in Rīga, if compared to other countries and cities, there will be its general calmness and relaxed atmosphere, living close to one's family and friends as well as a sense of identity and belonging. The study also characterises the future Rīgans as "virtual citizens" who probably will live somewhere else.

A comparison of the future visions of Rīga and other cities, for instance those of Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Berlin, Oslo, Helsinki, Stockholm, Warsaw, Vilnius and St. Petersburg, showed that they are largely similar to each other. All of them tend to bring up the same keywords: knowledge (science, high technology and innovation), creativity and the status of a metropolis or 'a centre', e.g., of the Baltic region, Europe or on a global scale. Nearly all of the cities also mention a population increase due to immigration, from which it may be inferred that population will be the most valuable resource in urban development.

Moreover, the results demonstrate that imitating of other successful cities may not readily guarantee competitiveness, media attention and attractiveness among multinational corporations. It was suggested that Rīga should define for itself a unique set of features or characteristics that could serve as a basis for a distinct image of the future city, the competitiveness of which should also be sustainable in the longer term. The winners will be those cities that will consider the aspect of tolerance while creating the infrastructure for social environment, governance, business, etc. It is believed that tolerance, as part of the local culture (openness towards various social groups, immigrants and minorities), will foster the functioning of the creative economy and the so-called creative class.

Another conclusion is that Rīga should avoid confining itself to the status of the cultural capital while forgetting about the growth of creative industries.

The aggregated data attests that there are differences in the ways the Latvian and Russian press portray the future environment and people's lives. Latvian newspapers tend to emphasise the visual aspect of the city (new construction, architecture, infrastructure,

investment, Rīga's role in Europe), while the Russophone press focuses on the people: the current and future living standards, transport and natural environment issues, and the like. Articles that talk about Rīga's future do not mention people as active co-creators of its future; at the maximum, they concern the most socially active and the relatively well-off Rigans. The future expectations portray a pleasant and easy environment for living, working and recreation, however it appears too sterile and faultless because of a seeming absence of the actual population.

The results were used to write up four imaginary scenarios for the future of the city titled Rīga and Rigans in 2020 and discussing the mutual influences of demography, ideology, technology and resources. Experts evaluating the scenarios attributed the highest likelihood to the scenario involving a mix of resources and demography (energy, geography, natural environment, transport, climate, etc.) used as the basis for ensuring a certain living standard for Rigans and for responding to changes in the overall sociodemographic profile.

In the experts' view, immigration (including from other areas of Latvia), changes in the numbers and make-up of the population, modifications of the societal values, issues of ethnic/national identity, impact of new technology on the workings of the public sector as well as fragmentation of the society will have the strongest influence.

SIA "Jaunrīgas attīstības uzņēmums" has submitted the results of the study to the Latvian Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government, the Rīga City Council, the Rīga Region Development Agency and the Latvian Institute.

#### **Summary of the study**

The study aimed to portray a future population of Rīga by inviting to imagine its values, traditions, behaviours, needs to socialise and consume culture as well as expectations regarding the urban environment. It attempted predictions at some of the possible scenarios and underlying factors for the future development of Rīga.

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