

REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS ANALYSIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SPATIAL PLANNING OF LATGALE REGION

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Abstract. *This paper offers a contribution to contemporary studies of spatial planning. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between competitiveness and spatial planning. In the topical academic debates, there has been a growing interest in raising new paradigms to introduce innovative ways of undertaking long-lasting regional development problems. Territorial assets and spatial qualities have increasingly been regarded as factors for attracting economic activities and increasing the competitiveness of regions. Spatial and non-spatial policies, planning documents, may have a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of regions and territories by changing endogenous factors and producing shifts related to positioning and increasing the competitiveness of regions. This paper contains an analysis of competitiveness dimensions in the spatial planning documents of Latgale planning region (Latvia) by focusing on a quantitative analysis of the specific dimensions of competitiveness.*

Keywords: *spatial planning, competitiveness of regions, regional development.*

Introduction

In the recent academic and the European Union (EU) debates, there has been a growing interest in raising new paradigms to introduce new ways of undertaking long-lasting regional development problems. Territorial assets and spatial qualities have been increasingly regarded as factors for attracting economic activities and increasing the competitiveness of regions.

The EU regional policy clearly states that Europe has to be transformed into the most successful and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world (EC, 2011). Regional competitiveness is a tool that ensures sustainable growth in the entire EU by taking advantages of territorial diversity.

It has to be mentioned that more and more often, the competitiveness and welfare of certain territories and regions depend on the capacities of their inhabitants and entrepreneurs to use resources and the potential of territory development in an optimal way.

However, competitiveness depends on the way how links with other territories are formed in order to ensure that common advantages of certain territories are used in a coordinated and sustainable manner. In this respect, the

place's assets and spatial qualities have been increasingly understood as factors for attracting economic agents and, consequently, as important features for local development strategies (Servillo, Atkinson, & Russo, 2011).

Spatial and non-spatial policies, planning documents, particularly those of the EU, may have a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of cities and territories by changing endogenous factors and producing shifts related to the relative positioning of regions. Co-operation is the aspect that distinguishes itself on the background of spatial planning (Ežmale, 2011).

However, the research studies regarding spatial planning to facilitate competitiveness are primarily oriented to large-scale territories, while regions have been increasingly recorded as a key spatial entity to facilitate the growth of remote regions. At the same time, the capacity of regions to take advantage of competitiveness in an optimal way is unexplored.

The aim of the research is to analyse the performance of spatial planning documents in accordance with the needs of the competitiveness aspects of Latgale region in Latvia. Two tasks have been set within the framework of the research:

- to elaborate a framework for evaluation of spatial planning documents based on the competitiveness factors of the regions;
- to analyse the spatial planning documents of Latgale region in the context of competitiveness aspects according to the above-mentioned framework.

Research methods – content analysis, deductive and inductive methods, theoretical analysis of scientific literature, comparative analysis, etc.

The Regional Competitiveness Analysis Framework for Latgale region

Latgale region in Latvia was chosen as a pilot region for the research. Latgale region is of particular interest not only because it is the poorest region in Latvia but also because it was the first region in Latvia working actively on the regional policy after harnessing the EU pre-accession funds (Adams, Ežmale, & Paalzow, 2006). Latgale region is situated in the eastern part of Latvia, bordering on Russia, Lithuania and Belarus.

This paper contains an analysis of competitiveness factors in the spatial planning documents of Latgale planning region (Latvia) by focusing on a quantitative analysis of the specific dimensions of competitiveness.

Likewise, the paper contains suggestions regarding spatial planning documents to facilitate the development and competitiveness of Latgale region. In the frameworks of this paper, the term “spatial planning document” means the development planning documents at a regional and local level defined in normative acts of Latvia, including a strategy for the sustainable development of a municipality, a development programme of the municipality and a spatial plan

of the municipality. Totally, spatial planning documents of twenty-one municipalities were analysed, covering all Latgale region spatial entities. The analytical framework for each spatial planning document comprised the following questions:

- 1) What production condition factors are reflected in the documents?
- 2) What demand factors are reflected in the documents?
- 3) What factors for increasing competitiveness are reflected in the documents?
- 4) What regional cluster development factors are reflected in the documents?
- 5) What are specific measures mentioned in the spatial planning documents of Latgale region to increase the competitiveness of the region?

To carry out the analysis of competitiveness factors in Latgale region spatial planning documents according to the framework explained in the next section of the paper, the following steps were completed:

- 27 individual entries were indexed with an individual keyword;
- the related keywords were summarized into keyword categories;
- the quantitative analysis was carried out based on keyword categories (see Table 1).

Table 1 From text reference to keyword category (example)

Original text reference in the document	Key words category	Keywords
Rezekne city development programme 2014-2020 – “... the inhabitants’ age structure in Rezekne city changed in last year’s rapidly...”	Human resources	Inhabitant age structure
Rezekne municipality development programme 2012-2018. “ ... negative saldo of migration”		Migration
Ludza municipality development programme 2018-2024. “....support of existing enterprises...”		Strengthening the advantages of company competitiveness
Ludza municipality development programme 2018-2024. “....support of existing enterprises...”	Factors for increasing competitiveness of regional companies	Strengthening the advantages of company competitiveness

It needs to be stated that due to the complexity of the topic and the unavoidable overlap between the categories, the allocation of individual keywords to one or another category have to be individually reviewed and argued in the analysis process. Consequently, there are different numbers of entries in these four categories. It needs to be mentioned that through categorization it could possibly lose some specific aspects which require an in-depth analysis of each competitiveness needs of spatial development.

There has been a growing interest in academic literature in recent years on creating new paradigms of regional development to introduce new ways of tackling longstanding regional problems. One of these directions is spatial planning being linked to the regional planning theory, which explains the causes and consequences of regional economic disparities and regional competitiveness. (Ežmale, 2011)

As there is an impact of European level planning activities and initiatives on planning practice in the Member States of the EU, an important issue is the practical application of theoretical aspects of planning that includes the results of discussions on basic conditions for the elaboration of high-quality and effective integrated planning documents and concepts in accordance with theoretical conclusions. Aldens (2006) indicates that the unique possibilities of spatial planning relate to its inter – disciplinary nature binding the social and the economic spheres, as well as the dimensions of culture and the environment in the framework of regional development. (Alden, 2006) Regions compete with one another to attract new businesses or industries, creating jobs and thus providing increased material welfare. Gordon (2011) argued that spatial competitiveness can be explained in different ways: as the competition of places, the competitiveness of places and territorial competition (Gordon, 2011). Van der Klassen and Van der Meer (1990) pointed out that the growing importance of the quality of the living environment in combination with the intensifying spatial interactions among European cities causes the increase and change of the nature of economic competition between the cities and regions.

There are different opinions on what factors are important to make places and regions more competitive and attractive for business. Braun (2008) argued that the place must be well reachable, have reasonable land prices, local taxes and normative regulations, as well as it should have an appropriate labour force supply of high quality (Braun, 2008). Bristow (2011) mentioned the importance of technological, social, infrastructural and institutional assets advantages (Bristow, 2011), while Begg (1999) concluded that urban performance is linked to the standard of living, the employment rate and productivity in various ways (Begg, 1999). Particularly the role of human capital spillovers, the role of human creativity and creative industries, the importance of knowledge spillovers as a mechanism underlying endogenous growth are discussed in the many theoretical

research studies (Audretsch & Feldman, 2004), (Morreti, 2004), (Florida, 2005) (Evans, 2009). Many researchers have concluded that the regional "assets" as the source of competitiveness are not only physical factors but likewise also less tangible factors, such as strong communities, democracy, social innovations, territorial identity, city image (Kunzmann, 2006), (Crouch, 2011), (Moulaert & Mehmood 2011), (Metaxas, 2002), (Lekwa, Rice, & Hibbing, 2007), et al. The diversity and difference of cultures and traditions in natural and urban landscapes are the capital of territories for their future socioeconomic development and regional competitiveness in the globalizing world (Kunzmann, 2006).

The concept of regional competitiveness lays between two levels of competitiveness, namely, the micro-economic and the macro-economic ones, and the concept has lately obtained an even greater resonance, which has mainly been facilitated by paying more attention to regions as the most important organizational and management level for ensuring economic growth and welfare (Ežmale, 2012). Regional competitiveness has been first defined as the capacity to produce products and services in accordance with the requirements of the international market and, at the same time, preserving high- and sustainable-income sources; to generalize – regional competitiveness is a capacity of regions to create a relatively high income and employment level under the circumstances of external competition (EC, 2003).

Based on theoretical conclusions and research studies (Filo, 2007; Gardiner, 2004; Gardiner, Martin, & Tyler, 2004; Huggins & Izushi, 2008; Huovari, Kargasharju, & Alanen, 2001; Rugman, Moon, & Verbeke, 2005; Schwab & Porter, 2007; Ežmale, 2011) has elaborated a model for regional competitiveness analysis adapted to the specific features of each region. Considering the previously mentioned model, the author worked out a framework for regional competitiveness analyses for Latgale region in accordance with competitiveness factors subdivided into factors for production conditions, demand factors, factors for increasing the competitiveness of regional companies, as well as regional cluster development factors. Taking into account the fact that regions are open systems, the model includes both internal and external factors of regional competitiveness. See the framework of regional competitiveness analyses for Latgale region in Table 2.

Table 2 Regional competitiveness analysis framework for Latgale region

Factors		
Categories of factors	Internal factors	External factors
Production condition factors		
Human resources	Inhabitant age structure	Inhabitant migration
	Inhabitants' qualification	Attraction of qualified labour force to the region
Infrastructure and accessibility	Transport infrastructure	External accessibility of the region
	IKT	IKT modernization possibilities
	New sites, territories and immovable property offers, competitive immovable property prices	Offers in neighbouring/competing regions
	Administrative infrastructure	Regional representations of public authorities
	Accessibility of other kinds of infrastructure and its quality (dwellings, cultural events, environment infrastructure, energy)	Offers in neighbouring/competing regions
Knowledge resources	Education and science infrastructure	Co-operation with science institutions in other regions
Capital	Attractiveness of the region for investments	Attractiveness of the region for international investments
Natural resources	Natural resources available in the region	Natural resources available in neighbouring regions
Demand factors		
Increase of demand	Structure, amount and growth of local demand	Entry of the region into external markets
Factors for increasing the competitiveness of regional companies		
Strategy, structure and competitiveness of companies	Strengthening the advantages of company competitiveness	Overtaking positive experience and application thereof in work of companies
	Introduction of effective competitiveness strategies	Competitiveness strategies including neighbouring regions for positioning in the national and global context
	Support programmes for new companies at the local level	Support programmes for new companies at the national level
Regional cluster development factors		
Co-operation between entrepreneurs, science, and public institutions		Facilitation of cluster activities
Geographic concentration of economic activities		Application of new approaches in competition and co-operation

Source: Ežmale 2011

The regions have a specific combination of factors increasing their competitiveness and, it means, that each region should focus on the performance of these factors and competitiveness advantages in comparison with the other regions. It has been defined in the EU policy documents that, in the following decade, the EU would become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy of the world ensuring sustainable economic growth and social cohesion (EC, 2003). Consequently, the increase of competitiveness is the central topic in the regional policies of the Member States of the EU.

Spatial Planning Documents of Latgale Region to Facilitate the Development and Competitiveness of the Region

Policy creators and planning specialists adopt decisions on the delivery of social activities in space. Several political decisions impact decisions in the private sector, with the latter being linked with the introduction of actions in a certain place. Spatial plans that consider the economic potential of each territory may enable the development of many important products and competitiveness factors that play a substantial role in the development of the territories. Pursuant to the Latvian development planning system, the following development planning documents have to be elaborated at different planning levels:

- 1) at the national level – the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia and the National Development Plan;
- 2) at the regional level – a strategy for the sustainable development of a planning region and a development programme;
- 3) at the local level: a strategy for sustainable development, a development programme, a spatial plan, as well as a local plan, a detailed plan, a thematic plan just in case of necessity (Ežmale, 2018).

Therefore, to perform analyses of spatial planning documents in accordance with the needs of the competitiveness of Latgale region, local-level spatial planning documents have been selected by applying the regional competitiveness analysis framework.

Sixty-three documents were analysed, covering all Latgale region spatial entities. Four groups of factors determining the competitiveness of the regions were analysed in the Latgale region spatial planning documents.

Firstly, the production condition factors reflected in the Latgale region spatial planning document were analysed through performing a quantitative analysis based on keyword categories (from text references to the key word category) (see Table 3).

Table 3 Production condition dimension topics in Latgale planning documents (N= 63)

Key word category	Key words	Counts
Human resources	Migration of inhabitants	19
	Availability and quality of a labour force	21
	Inhabitant age structure	20
	Inhabitants' qualification	18
Infrastructure and accessibility	Transport infrastructure and access to the region	54
Infrastructure and accessibility	IKT	36
	New construction areas	42
	Immovable property offers, competitive immovable property prices	3
	Technical infrastructure (water supply and wastewater treatment, etc.)	63
	Social, cultural and recreation infrastructure	63
Knowledge resources	Education and science infrastructure	39
	Cooperation with other scientific institutions	3
Capital	Financial institutions	5
	Financial sources and instruments	18
Natural resources	Natural resources, recreation resources	42

Source: constructed by author

As it can be seen in Table 3, the spatial planning documents of Latgale planning region governments contain an analysis of many suggested factors characterizing the production condition dimension of regional competitiveness. It is possible to conclude that all the key words are reflected insufficiently in the spatial planning documents of Latgale region.

The main competitive advantages related to the production factors of the region mentioned in the spatial planning documents of Latgale are as follows: (1) developed communication infrastructure; (2) competitive operating costs and the availability of resources; (3) human resources: a skilled, multi-lingual and well-educated labour force at reasonable costs; (4) tax incentives available in special economic zones of the region and other state support measures.

Secondly, the demand factors analysis was performed (see Table 4).

Table 4 Demand factors dimension topics in Latgale spatial planning documents (N= 63)

Key word category	Key words	Counts
Increase in demand	Structure of local demand	7
	Size of the domestic market	5
	Growth of the domestic market	16
	Entry of the region into external markets	4

Source: constructed by author

As it can be seen in Table 4, the spatial planning documents of Latgale planning region municipalities contain an insufficient analysis of the suggested factors characterizing the production condition dimension of regional competitiveness. It is possible to conclude that several factors (for example, the general demand structure and size of the local market) have been analysed in the limited number of spatial planning documents of Latgale region municipalities.

At the same time, according to different research studies (for example, the FDI market), investments are primarily market – seeking, with nearly ½ of the projects driven by domestic market growth potential and 1/3 by proximity to markets and customers. Investments can boost the competitiveness of domestic enterprises through the enhancement of knowledge and managerial skills and can serve as an important complement to domestic investment in building productive capacity to facilitate development and growth. Therefore, it is important that the spatial planning documents contain an analysis of the structure and size of the local market, the growth of the domestic market, as well as measures for attraction of investments to the regions.

Table 5 Increasing competitiveness of regional enterprises dimension topics in Latgale spatial planning documents (N= 63)

Key word category	Key words	Counts
Strategy, structure and competition of enterprises	Support for strengthening the competitive advantages of enterprises	20
	Support for the creation of new enterprises	21
	Common competitiveness strategies together with neighbouring regions for positioning in the national and global context	14
	Support for innovations	7

Source: constructed by author

According to the data showed in Table 5, the Latgale spatial planning documents contain an analysis of factors for increasing the competitiveness of regional enterprises. It is possible to conclude that several factors have been analysed insufficiently, for example, innovations, increase of competitiveness of related and supported enterprises, etc.

The spatial planning documents of Latgale region do not contain conclusions regarding the advantages of the competitiveness of the region and choosing an appropriate strategy for facilitating the competitiveness. At the same time, several Latgale Spatial planning documents contain information about different support for strengthening the competitive advantages of enterprises, for example, support

for easily starting up enterprises, and support for a rapid launch of investment projects.

Furthermore, it is outlined that the region’s enterprises can take advantage of support, training and employment programmes financed by EU funds or Latvian state support programmes. The municipalities in partnership with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia and a wide range of public and private stakeholders (municipalities, institutions, associations) implement the POLARIS process that enables efficient communication, cooperation and the execution of tasks for investment attraction and a rapid launch of investment projects. The enterprises that choose Latgale region as an investment destination may take advantage of a number of incentives for implementation of investment projects and maximizing the profit. Lastly, funding in amount of 740 million euro from the EU Structural Funds has been allocated for the development of entrepreneurship in Latvia, with larger part of it being allocated to Latgale region in the period 2014 – 2020.

It is mentioned that enterprises of Latgale region have access to: (1) support of the Development Finance Institution “ALTUM”, for example start-up loans, accelerator funds, venture capital, export guarantees; (2) State support programmes for application of modern technologies in production processes and increasing energy efficiency in premises of the enterprise; (3) State Employment Agency support instruments for training of the labour force; (4) innovation vouchers for development of innovative products: research, creation of a prototype, certification etc.

Table 6 Regional cluster development dimension topics in Latgale spatial planning documents (N=63)

Key word category	Key words	Counts
Concentration and networking of economic activities	Geographic concentration of economic activities	1
	Support for cluster activities	1
	Application of new approaches in competition and co-operation activities	2
	Co-operation of businessman, scientific and public institutions	3

Source: constructed by author

As it can be seen in Table 6, the Latgale spatial planning documents contain an insufficient analysis of factors for regional clusters development. At the same time, it is an opportunity to eliminate shortcomings in the current spatial planning

documents in the future; and one of the directions is a deeper analysis of regional competitive advantages, including the establishment of regional clusters of competitiveness and innovations to increase the competitiveness and economic effectiveness of Latgale region, as well as the development of a territorial cooperation network for businessmen and scientific and public institutions. It is crucial to involve the academic sector and business organizations as well as other experts in this process to ensure diverse discussions.

Conclusions

The spatial planning documents of the region define development trends for different territories and places in the future in the context of their strategic roles; likewise, they define frameworks for establishing and improving future development. Each region has a unique combination of factors ensuring their competitiveness, and each region can focus, in their development, on comparative competitiveness advantages in comparison with the other regions (Ežmale, 2011). Spatial and non-spatial policies, planning documents, may have a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of regions and territories by changing endogenous factors and producing shifts related to the positioning of the region. Depending on the specific features of the region, it is necessary to select one of the several strategies for increasing the competitiveness of the region. By an appropriate analysis of the most significant factors of competitiveness, the municipalities can approve decisions related to the measures for enhancing the competitiveness of Latgale region.

The performed analysis leads to the conclusion that the Latgale region municipalities' spatial planning documents should focus more on such competitiveness factors as (1) immovable property offers, competitive immovable property prices; (2) cooperation with other regions scientific institutions; (3) availability and capacity of financial institutions; (4) general demand structure and size of the local market; (5) entry of the region into external markets; (6) support for innovations; (7) concentration and networking of economic activities in Latgale region. Thus, it would reinforce the role of spatial planning with regard to enhancement of the competitiveness of Latgale region. The above mentioned factors should be taken into account in the process of spatial planning in order to ensure better quality of spatial planning documents of Latgale region in the context of regional competitiveness.

Summary

In the topical academic debates, there has been a growing interest in raising new paradigms to introduce innovative ways of undertaking long-lasting regional

development problems. The territorial assets and spatial qualities have increasingly been regarded as factors of attraction of economic activities and increasing the competitiveness of regions. Spatial and non-spatial policies, planning documents, may have a significant role in enhancing the competitiveness of regions and territories by changing endogenous factors and producing shifts related to the positioning and increasing competitiveness of regions. The aim of the research is to analyze the performance of spatial planning documents in accordance with the needs of the competitiveness aspects of Latgale region in Latvia. Two tasks have been set within the framework of the research: (1) to elaborate the framework for evaluation of spatial planning documents based on the competitiveness factors of the regions; (2) to analyze the spatial planning documents of Latgale region in the context of competitiveness aspects according to the above-mentioned framework.

This paper contains an analysis of competitiveness factors in the spatial planning documents of Latgale planning region (Latvia) by focusing on a quantitative analysis of the specific dimensions of competitiveness. Therefore, to perform analyses of spatial planning documents in accordance with the needs of the competitiveness of Latgale region, a spatial planning documents at local level have been selected by applying a regional competitiveness analysis framework. Sixty-three documents were analyzed covering all Latgale region spatial entities. Four groups of factors determining competitiveness of regions were analyzed in the Latgale region spatial planning documents.

The performed analysis leads to the conclusion that the Latgale region municipalities' spatial planning documents should focus more on such competitiveness factors as (1) immovable property offers, competitive immovable property prices; (2) cooperation with other regions scientific institutions; (3) availability and capacity of financial institutions; (4) general demand structure and size of the local market; (5) entry of the region into external markets; (6) support for innovations; (7) concentration and networking of economic activities in Latgale region. Thus, it would reinforce the role of spatial planning with regard to enhancement of the competitiveness of Latgale region. The above-mentioned factors should be taken into account in the process of spatial planning in order to ensure better quality of spatial planning documents of Latgale region in the context of regional competitiveness.

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