PERIPHERALITY, MARGINALITY AND GLOBAL CHANGE: DAUGAVPILS AND THE FUTURE OF PERIPHERAL CITIES

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ABSTRACT

Demographic changes, coupled with the effects of climate change and increasing deglobalization, are likely to lead to a world of declining economic growth, with negative effects for peripheral cities and regions, particularly in countries like Latvia experiencing demographic decline. Daugavpils, as a paradigmatic peripheral community, is well suited to explore both the effects of decline and possible strategies by which the city may be able to combat those trends. I describe how Daugavpils is losing population at a rapid pace, and its population is aging as its young people are leaving for greater opportunities elsewhere. It has become economically marginalized in a highly centralized country whose energy is concentrated in the capital city, while being stigmatized by virtue of its ethnic character and seeming geographic isolation. Barring drastic change, the coming decades are likely to see continued population loss and brain drain, along with the erosion of such vitality and energy as the city currently can claim. I ask whether this is inevitable, and argue in these pages that it is not. I suggest some of the features of an alternative future. The path to such a future, however, is a difficult one. Moreover, even if the people of Daugavpils can find the will to upend existing power and status relations in order to make possible a better future, they will still need support and resources from the Latvian government and the EU to make it a reality.

Keywords: peripheralization, marginalization, demographic change, aging, localism, participation

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INTRODUCTION

The world is changing in ways that raise significant and difficult questions about the future of small, peripheral cities and regions. Demographic change, including the simultaneous shrinkage and aging of many nations' populations; economic change, particularly the decline of deglobalization and the rise of protectionism; and climate change, with its both predictable and unpredictable effects, all threaten the urban status quo, posing daunting challenges for those cities and regions outside the major regional and global centers of activity, growth and power.

The framing of these cities and regions as peripheral places, subject to the dynamic processes of peripheralization, is central to understanding the scope of the challenge. Being peripheral can be seen as a *condition*. It reflects the relationship between a place and what is defined as the center, which can exist at many different levels. It can reflect the relationship between a small country and those countries that are the centers of global power, or between a small city and the larger city or region that serves as the center of power within the same country. It is widely associated with poor demographic or economic performance, lack of investment, and negative migratory processes such as "brain drain".

Peripheralization is the sum of the *processes* by which centers and peripheries are defined; as K. Ehrlich et al. suggest, "Peripheries should be seen as the result of processes of peripheralization and not as structural conditions of space" (2012, 79). They add that "the emergence of peripheries is also a question of power, not so much individual power, but rather power in the overall societal discourse, within which peripheries are or become meaningless" (ibid.). This may be slightly overstated. There are likely to be at least *some* underlying spatial or geographic distinctions driving center–periphery dynamics, even though those distinctions may be spatially arbitrary, as are as many national borders, or were created by events that happened centuries earlier.[1] That said, the manner in which those distinctions are reinforced and reified, and the ways in which being peripheral comes to reflect not only spatial differentiation but also economic,

[1] Central status may also arise from some chance historical event. It is hard to see any compelling spatial rationale for the primacy of Berlin in Germany and Central Europe, other than the decision of some long-gone Dukes of Brandenburg to make that city their seat. Similarly, it is far from obvious that Paris has more compelling locational assets than, for example, Lyons.

social, and political inequalities, are driven by the processes of peripheralization and the power imbalance underlying those processes. As such, they are closely related to the geographic concepts of marginality and marginalization, and "the perception from the center that peripheries are 'backward' or 'underdeveloped'" (Kuhn 2015).

While there is little doubt that the forces of global growth and globalization over the past few decades have reinforced the marginality of peripheral cities and regions, they have also allowed many such cities and regions to experience a modest level of prosperity by capturing small but not entirely negligible amounts of that growth (Mallach 2023). The probable future forces of de-growth and de-globalization, however, are likely to diminish the potency of their current global relationships and further reinforce their marginality. The first section of this paper describes those forces, and suggests why increased marginality and reduced prosperity are their most likely outcomes.

Within this context of global change, I focus on the small city of Daugavpils in southeastern Latvia as a paradigmatic shrinking peripheral city in which one can observe the effects of peripheralization in the present, and explore how global change may affect its condition in the future. In the second section of this paper, after a historical overview, I describe how peripheralization and marginality define Daugavpils's economic, demographic and social conditions today.

I do not believe, however, that Daugavpils and similarly situated cities across the world are no more than passive victims of inexorable external forces and trends. Although clearly constrained by those forces and trends, they have agency and can influence, if not perhaps fully control, their future. In the final section of this paper, after suggesting how those trends may potentially further marginalize Daugavpils in the coming decades, I suggest that there are ways a city and region may be able to subvert the forces driving it toward ever-increasing marginality, by building greater self-sufficiency and taking advantage of decentralized technologies to neutralize many of the disadvantages of their peripheral condition.

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GLOBAL CHANGE AND THE FATE OF PERIPHERAL CITIES

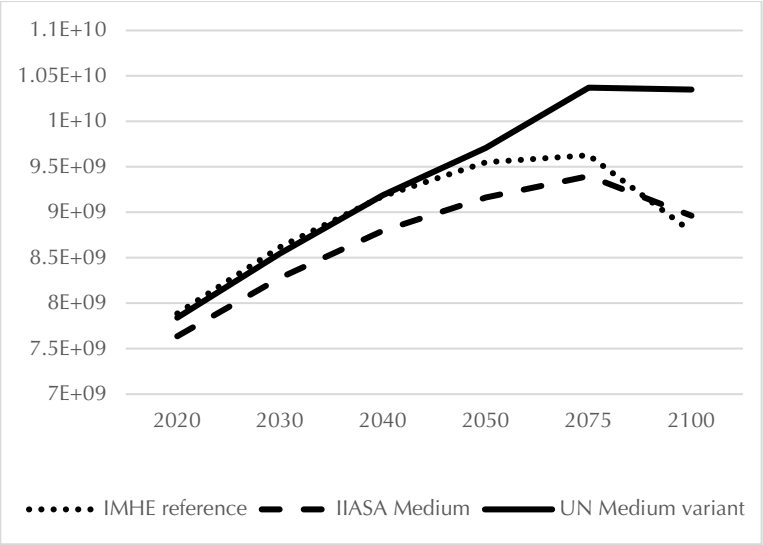
The most plausible global scenarios for the next 20 to 40 years suggest that global economic growth will slow, potentially to the point where negative growth or recession will become the rule rather than the exception. That outcome is likely to result from the conjunction of three distinct trends currently underway. The most powerful one, which is all but certain, is demographic change. Its effects are likely to be exacerbated by two further factors: climate change, and deglobalization. I will briefly discuss each one, suggest how they will interact, and examine how they will, in turn, affect peripheral cities.[2]

From the 1960s for many decades, fueled by alarmist tracts such as *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich 1968), global public policy was predicated on the assumption of rapid, almost exponential world population growth. In recent years, however, it has become apparent that the rapid population growth of the 1960s and 1970s was a transitional phenomenon, and that the long-term global population trajectory is one of gradually slowing growth, leading to likely world population decline before the end of the century. The reference projection of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME 2022) predicts that the inflection point will occur in 2064, when world population will peak at 9.73 billion. The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) projections are close to those of IHME, although peaking around 2070 at 9.4 billion (Lutz et al. 2014). The more conservative United Nations medium variant projection is for world population to peak at 10.43 billion in 2086 (United Nations 2023) before going into decline (Figure 1).[3]

[2] For a more extended discussion of these issues, the reader is directed to the author's book *Smaller Cities in a Shrinking World: Learning to Thrive Without Growth* (2023).

[3] I consider the IHME and IIASA projections more plausible, since the United Nations projections have a long history of over-estimating population growth.

Figure 1. Alternative global population projections to 2100



Population trends vary widely by region and country. Much of the world is already in negative population growth, most notably in Eastern and Southern Europe and in East Asia. Japan has been losing population since 2010, while China and South Korea have moved into negative territory more recently. Europe's population has peaked, and is projected to decline slowly over the coming decades (Eurostat 2022). Most other parts of the world are likely to start seeing population decline by mid-century; during the second half of the twenty-first century, the only parts of the world likely to see significant population growth are the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Latvia is one of the world's fastest-shrinking countries. Since regaining independence in 1991, Latvia's population has dropped from 2.679 million to 1.882 million or by nearly 30%. By 2050, the nation's population is projected to be between 1.466 million (Eurostat) and 1.253 million (IHME), while by 2100 it may be under one million. This decline reflects the excess of deaths over births, long-term net out-migration, and ongoing public health issues resulting in life expectancy being lower than in most other developed countries (Chmielewski 2024). With fewer children being born, fewer young people will enter the workforce, while the share of older adults will increase. While today 21% of Latvia's population is over 65 – already high by global standards – Eurostat projects that this figure will rise to 32% by 2100.

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While the greatest economic impact of declining population comes from the reduction in the size of the population per se, the shifting age distribution will have a negative effect on both productivity and consumption. With fewer young people entering the workforce, productivity is likely to decline (Ozimek et al. 2018; Aiyar et al. 2016), while the increased older population share will both reduce overall consumption and put increasing stress on public finances (Lee and Mason 2017). While rising labor force participation by adults over 65 will partly make up for fewer young people entering the workforce, the growth in the number of "older old" people over 80 will have a contrary effect. Lower growth in productivity and consumption are also likely to depress capital investment.

While the effects of technology are highly unpredictable, it is worth noting that past predictions of dramatic effects of technology on productivity and growth have largely been unrealized (Qureshi 2020). Recent developments in artificial intelligence might compensate for some of these effects, but given the magnitude of change over coming decades, it is unlikely that even under the most optimistic scenarios they will mitigate more than part of the effects of projected declines.

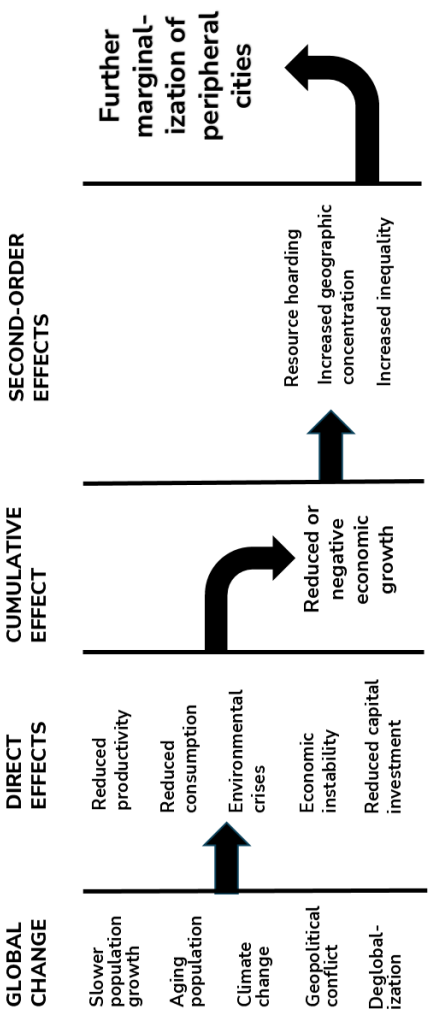
The negative economic effects of demographic change are likely to be exacerbated over the coming decades by the effects of climate change and deglobalization. While there is disagreement about the magnitude of the effect of climate change on global GDP, which is not surprising in light of the difficulty of modeling second-order effects in a complex and uncertain environment, there is broad consensus that – whatever the precise number – the overall effects will be powerfully negative (Newell et al. 2021, Roson and Van der Mensbrugghe 2012, among others). The effect of climate change on GDP reflects many different elements, including the costs of increasingly severe natural disasters, the losses associated with sea level rise and desertification, and the effects of excess heat on productivity.

Similarly, the recent and growing pullback from the relatively unfettered global economy of the past few decades and the rise of protectionism (World Bank 2023), should recent trends continue, are likely to further depress economic growth, particularly in highly export-dependent nations, a category which includes most European economies and the EU as a whole. Latvia's economic growth in recent decades despite its declining and aging population is largely attributable to its integration into the larger

export-oriented EU economy. Should that economy falter in the coming years, the effects on Latvia are likely to be severe.

The direct effects of each of these factors will be exacerbated by the interaction between them, which will create negative feedback loops leading to at best reduced, and at worst negative economic growth in the form of net decline in national, regional, or global GDP and other economic metrics. That decline is likely to lead in turn to a series of second-order local effects, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Potential effects associated with projected global changes



Source: Graphic by author

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Reduced growth is likely to prompt three second-order effects, all of which will increase the marginalization of peripheral cities. They are *resource hoarding*, where those in the strongest economic or political positions both hold onto a disproportionate share of currently available resources and take a disproportionate share of those available in the future; greater *geographic concentration* of resources, with resources concentrating in "winner" cities and regions (Moretti 2012); and *increased inequality* in the distribution of resources. As Friedman (2010) has shown, net economic growth is an all but necessary condition of economic redistribution.

While all three of these effects are also present in today's neoliberal global economy, in an environment of strong overall economic growth, as noted earlier, many peripheral cities and regions can capture *some* growth, even though they may simultaneously be falling behind stronger, more central, regions. In a national or regional environment of economic decline, fewer crumbs will fall for them from the table, as central regions will retain or expand their already-large share of the shrinking pie. In conclusion, the future does not look promising for small peripheral cities, particularly in countries which are already losing population or are likely to start doing so in the near future.

Clearly, not all peripheral cities face the same challenges. The current and future status of any individual city and its region will depend on its distinctive assets and constraints, be they locational, historic, economic, or cultural. Reese and Yi (2011) concluded that far more of a city's prosperity was attributable to what they termed "place luck" rather than intentional economic development strategies. Two key forms of place luck are being close enough to a strong central region to benefit from proximity effects, and the presence of a stable strong, export-oriented industry or institution to anchor the local economy, as Yale University and its affiliated medical center do for New Haven, Connecticut in the United States (Mallach 2022). As a result, some peripheral cities have continued to grow, even in countries losing population. Daugavpils, however, has not been one of those fortunate few.

DAUGAVPILS AS A PERIPHERAL CITY

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Daugavpils, Latvia's second largest city, is located at the southeastern corner of modern Latvia, in the nation's Latgale region. The site of a 1577 castle, it received a charter as a town under the name of Dünaburg in 1582.[4] As a small but strategically located village, over the next 200 years it was fought over and changed hands frequently in the many wars that afflicted the Baltic region. At the end of the eighteenth century, its population was still under 2,000. Dünaburg became a substantial city during the nineteenth century, however, growing to over 110,000 residents by the eve of World War I (Figure 3) making it, according to the city's website, "the largest industrial and cultural center of the northwest part of Russia" ("Daugavpils History").

Dünaburg's growth as a transportation and mercantile center was made possible by its strategic location at the heart of the network of railroads constructed in the 1860s linking it to Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Riga and other cities in the northwestern part of the Tsarist empire. Late nineteenth-century Dünaburg was a multiethnic city. Nearly half of the population was Jewish (47%), while most of the rest were Russian (30%) and Polish (16%) (Zemaitis 2024). Indeed, it is doubtful whether Dünaburg (or Dvinsk as it was renamed in 1893) at that time should be thought of as a *Latvian* city. Under the Tsars, Latgale was also administratively separate from the rest of what became the Latvian nation after World War I, being part of the Vitebsk *guberniya* or governorate, most of which is in today's Belarus.

[4] Sources routinely refer to the city having been founded in 1275, when a castle of the same name was constructed 20 km upriver from the location of the present city. The fact that the castle, Dünaburg (castle on the Düna [river]), and the new castle and town three hundred years later were given the same name hardly seems a basis for claiming that the two widely separated places were actually the same place.

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Figure 3. Daugavpils population trajectory 1770–2010

Source: Gleb Borisov (Gļebs Borisovs) – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0

Daugavpils's status at the time was much less peripheral than it would become later. Its location and its central position in the empire's rail network made it an important regional center. This illustrates how much peripheralization is a relative rather than absolute phenomenon. The redrawing of national borders after World War I, again after World War II, and yet again after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, played an important role in "peripheralizing" Daugavpils, rather than that outcome being solely the result of the city's endogenous features.

The combined effects of damage from World War I and instability in the war's aftermath led to the city's population dropping to 20,000 by 1920. Daugavpils had only just begun to recover before undergoing the even greater devastation of World War II. Although much of the Jewish population – which had played a major role in the city's growth as both an industrial and trading center during the nineteenth century – left during the early years of the twentieth century,[5] nearly all those who remained were killed by the German invaders and their Latvian collaborators between August 1941 and May 1942. By the end of the war, much of the prewar city was in ruins and its population was under 15,000.

[5] Including the author's mother's family, which had lived in Daugavpils at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century if not earlier.

During the Soviet occupation from 1945 to 1991, two features of Soviet policy in Latvia had a significant impact on Daugavpils. The first was the aggressive policy of industrialization, in which Daugavpils was a major focal point; the second was Russification. From a pre-war population of 168,000, Latvia's ethnic Russian[6] population grew to 906,000 by 1989, with the greatest increase taking place between 1945 and 1969 (Heleniak 2006). At the same time between 100,000 and 200,000 Latvians were killed or exiled by the Soviet authorities. The ethnic Russian share of Latvia's population went from 9% to 34%. The Russian influx, which was actively fostered by the Soviet government, served the double purpose of expanding the labor force needed to meet its industrialization goals while colonizing and diluting the ethnic Latvian character of the country (Zembergs 1980).[7] From 1940 to 1989, the ethnic Latvian population share dropped from 77% to 52%.

Daugavpils, by virtue of its rapid industrialization and its proximity to the Russian and Byelorussian SSRs, became home to a large number of Russian migrants, leading the city's population to swell to nearly 130,000 under Soviet rule. While, as Table 1 shows, the Latvian population had grown between the wars to the extent that Latvians had become the city's largest ethnic group, that trend was reversed under Russification. By 1989, 70% of Daugavpils's population was from Russia, Ukraine or Byelorussia, the latter two being largely Russian-speaking people from areas that were then within the Soviet Union. This was the greatest Russified population share of any Latvian city (1989 All-Union Census, 1990).

Daugavpils is a paradigmatic shrinking city. From a population of 126,680 in 1989, its population dropped to an estimated 77,799 at the beginning of 2024, a decline of nearly 40%. Since 2012 Latvia's population has declined by 8%, while that of Daugavpils by 16%. While all of Latvia's regions except for

[6] While the in-migrants are routinely described as ethnically "Russian", it should be noted that they included many people from the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSRs, as well as a small number of Russian Jews, all of whom spoke Russian as their lingua franca.

[7] The relationship between industrialization and Russification, and how the Russian in-migration was organized, remains not entirely clear. Zembergs suggests that industrialization was pretextual – that is, it was a vehicle to create jobs for ethnic Russians who were being (at a minimum) encouraged to migrate – and had little or no economic rationale. He rejects, however, assertions that ethnic Russians were coerced to move to Latvia.

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Pieriga, the suburban ring around the capital city of Riga, showed at least some population decline since 1989, the greatest regional decline was in Latgale, Daugavpils's region, which shares the city's peripheral status.

Table 1. Ethnic distribution of Daugavpils's population 1897 to 2023

ETHNICITY	1897	1935	1989	2023
Latvian	2%	34%	13%	21%
Russian	30%	18%	58%	47%
Polish	16%	18%	13%	13%
Byelorussian	NA	3%	9%	7%
Jewish	47%	25%	1%	<1%
Ukrainian	NA	NA	3%	3%
Other	5%	3%	3%	9%

Sources: (1) 1897 Zemaitis (2024) (2) 1935 Wikipedia (3) 1989 Soviet All-Union Census (Latvian Statistical Office) (4) 2023 Latvia Statistics Portal

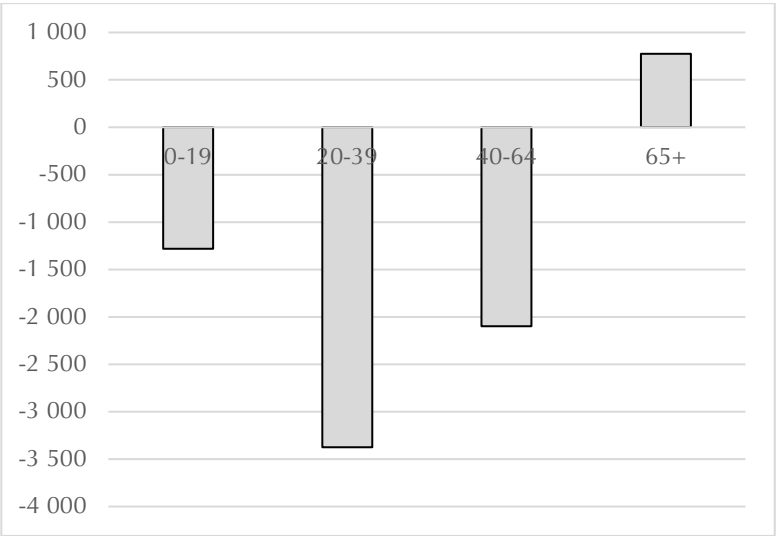
PROFILE OF A PERIPHERAL CITY: DAUGAVPILS TODAY

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The overall decline in population, however, has not been evenly distributed by age group. As Figure 4 shows, while Daugavpils's population over 65 has grown and the proportion under 20 has declined modestly, the number of people of working age, particularly those in their 20s and 30s, has dropped more sharply. Since 2012, the working-age population (20 to 64 years) has dropped by more than a quarter, while the number of people aged 20 to 29 has dropped by 50%.

This is less the product of demographic change as it is the result of brain drain, which plays a significant role in the changing age profile of Daugavpils and other peripheral cities and regions in Eastern Europe and elsewhere (Maleszyck 2021, Smetkowski 2013, among others).

Figure 4. Population change by age group 2012 to 2024



Source: Latvia Statistics Portal, graphic by author

While there is little gender gap with respect to brain drain for people in their 20s, the gap widens considerably later. Between 2012 and 2024, Daugavpils lost 10% of the city's men in their 30s, but 20% of its women.

ECONOMIC MARGINALITY

Many different measures can be used to document Daugavpils's economic condition and its marginality in the Latvian (and EU) economy. I have selected three to illustrate the situation: job change, economic activity (both overall and in knowledge economy sectors), and housing production.

Figure 5 compares the change in the number of jobs between 2006 and 2020 for Latvia as a whole, Riga, Pieriga, and Latgale. The figure shows the bubble from 2005 to 2008 and the economic crisis that followed, during which Latvian GDP dropped by 21%. It also shows the slow return of the national economy to pre-bubble levels, and the greater growth in the Pieriga region. The Latgale region, however, has lagged significantly behind the rest of the country. As the national economy has recovered, Latgale has not, reflecting the extent to which it has become marginal to the Latvian economy.

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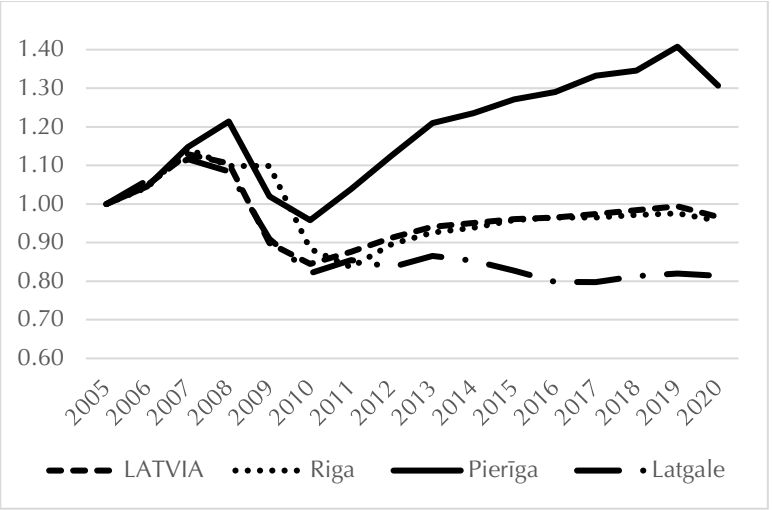
Figure 5. Change in number of jobs (occupied posts)
2006 to 2020



Note: Data is shown relative to 2005 = 1.
Source: Latvia Statistics Portal, graphic by author

While data on total jobs is unavailable for Daugavpils, a dataset containing slightly more than half of the total jobs (excluding jobs in firms with under 50 employees) is available from 2009 onward, shown in Figure 6.[8]

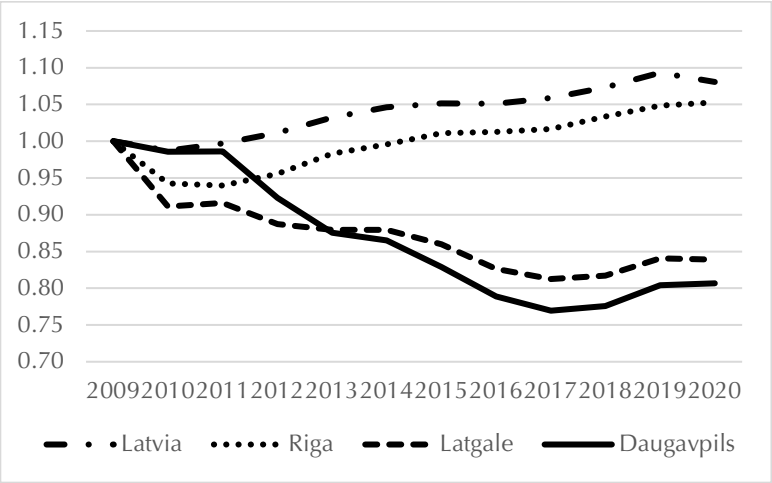
On this narrower measure, the disparity between Latgale and Daugavpils on the one hand, and the rest of Latvia on the other, is even more stark. Since Latvia's economy bottomed out in 2010, Daugavpils has continued to shed jobs even as the rest of the country has recovered. Since 2013, Daugavpils has even fallen behind the rest of Latgale.

Turning to a broader measure of Daugavpils economic marginality, I look at the city's share of Latvia's economic activity in general, and high-tech, high-impact economic activity in particular, on the basis of a cluster of indicators tracked by Statistics Latvia. I then compare that with similar data for the city of Riga. Tables 2A and 2B show the share of national economic activity for the two cities for all enterprises, and for the two sectors which include most knowledge or high-tech industries,

[8] It is unclear why only this dataset and not the total figures are provided by the statistics portal at the city level. It is possible that the data limitation may skew the data against Daugavpils.

information and communications, and professional, scientific and technical activities. For purposes of comparison, Daugavpils contains slightly over 4% of Latvia's population, while Riga contains 32%.

Figure 6. Change in number of jobs in firms with 50 or more employees



Note: Data is shown relative to 2009 = 1.
Source: Latvia Statistics Portal, graphic by author

Table 2A. Share of national economic activity in Daugavpils

	All enterprises	Information and communications	Professional, scientific and technical activities
Number of enterprises	3.0%	1.9%	2.0%
Turnover	1.3%	0.7%	0.5%
Production value	1.7%	0.7%	0.6%
Value added at factor cost	1.5%	0.7%	0.7%
Total purchase of goods and services	1.3%	0.7%	0.4%
Personnel costs	1.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Gross investment in tangible goods	1.5%	0.2%	1.2%
Number of persons employed	2.7%	1.4%	1.5%

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The contrast is stark. While Daugavpils has many business enterprises – although still less than proportional to the city's population – they are mostly small, roughly half the size of the national average. Overall, with respect to measures such as value of products created, value added, or investment, Daugavpils generates only one third of its expected level of economic activity based on population share. In the knowledge industry sectors, the picture is far worse; Daugavpils generates only 10% to 15% of the activity expected on the basis of its population. Put differently, Daugavpils accounts for only about 0.6% of Latvia's total knowledge industry activity.

Table 2B. Share of national economic activity in Riga

	All enterprises	Information and communi-cations	Professional, scientific and technical activities
Number of enterprises	47%	61%	54%
Turnover	64%	91%	78%
Production value	57%	90%	76%
Value added at factor cost	64%	90%	79%
Total purchase of goods and services	64%	93%	78%
Personnel costs	62%	91%	81%
Gross investment in tangible goods	56%	95%	68%
Number of persons employed	55%	86%	67%

Source: Latvia Statistics Portal

By contrast, Riga, with not quite one-third of Latvia's population, accounts for over 60% of Latvia's productive economy overall, 75% of all activity in the professional, scientific and technical sector, and 90% of all activity in the information and communications sector. Marginalization in the Latvian economy is not a problem only for Daugavpils but is the product of a hyper-centralized economy in which the entire country outside the Riga region can be seen as being marginalized to varying degrees. This extreme pattern of uneven development poses a major challenge for the nation's future (Chmielewski 2023).

Table 3. New dwelling units constructed since 2001

	LATVIA		DAUGAVPILS			RIGA		
	Number of dwellings	% of all dwellings	Number of dwellings	% of all dwellings	% of national total	Number of dwellings	% of all dwellings	% of national total
2001-2010	53685	5.0%	557	1.2%	1.0%	21045	6.2%	39.2%
2011-2015	13087	1.2%	68	0.1%	0.5%	5368	1.6%	41.0%
2015-2020	13610	1.3%	44	0.1%	0.3%	5799	1.7%	42.6%
TOTAL	80382	7.6%	669	1.4%	0.8%	32212	9.4%	40.1%
All Dwellings	1063939	100%	46723	100%	4.4%	341882	100%	32.1%

Source: Latvia Statistics Portal

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One effect of the weak local economy is the lack of new housing production in Daugavpils. Table 3 shows the number of new dwelling units built in Latvia, Riga, and Daugavpils since 2001. Even though Latvia's population is declining, housing demand is generated by growth in the number of households as the average size of households declines, replacement of units demolished or otherwise lost, and demand for different and higher quality housing by upwardly mobile households.

Housing production in Riga between 2001 and 2020 was 40% of the national total, significantly exceeding its share of the national housing stock. The opposite was true in Daugavpils. Although the city contains over 4% of Latvia's housing stock, new construction was less than 1% of the national total. Moreover, as the table shows, Daugavpils's share of new construction dropped significantly from 2001–2010 to 2011–2020, paralleling the increased economic marginalization discussed earlier.

The lack of job growth, coupled with low wages and out-migration of young adults, all typical of marginal cities, has led to a weak housing market. Flats offered for sale in Daugavpils on mm.lv are typically priced between €15,000 and €30,000, varying by size and location.[9] This is far below their replacement cost, and far too low to motivate owners to upgrade their apartments or developers to build new ones. As a result, few high-quality dwellings, either new or upgraded, are available, which in turn acts as an impediment to attracting in-migrants, particularly people with strong skills and educational qualifications.

SOCIAL MARGINALITY

The metaphorical elephant in the room in any discussion of social marginality in Latvia is the dual question of ethnicity and language. In contrast to economic questions, where quantitative data allows for fairly clear findings and conclusions, any discussion of these questions is inherently more speculative, reflecting various sources of information, including interviews, public documents, and both traditional and social media. It is a matter, therefore, of posing a question and speculating on its implications while attempting to navigate potential political and cultural minefields, rather than drawing conclusions.

[9] See: <https://mm.lv/dzivokli> (last accessed November 2024).

The question itself is straightforward. To what extent does Daugavpils's distinctive character as a predominately Russian (or Russian-speaking)[10] city exacerbate its marginalization within the economic and social framework of the Latvian nation?

Since Latvian independence, in the wake of 45 years of Soviet occupation and Russification, the fault line between ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians has been a central tension in Latvian society and politics. Understandably in light of the nation's history, the goal of sustaining a distinctive Latvian identity, in which the Latvian language as the nation's sole official language plays an essential part, has been a key element of public policy. It is summarized in the *Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy* adopted by the government in 2012:

> In Latvia, just as in other European States, there is a constituent nation determining the national and cultural-historical identity of the State, as well as national minorities and immigrants. The national and cultural-historical identity of a constituent nation determines the national and cultural-historical identity of the State, and is based on a common language, culture and social memory.
>
> The Latvian constituent nation and national minorities form the Latvian people. Latvian identity – the Latvian language, culture and social memory – unifies the Latvian people. It is the common foundation connecting all the people of Latvia, making it a democratic participatory community. Therefore, it is in the interests of the State of Latvia and its people not only to strengthen Latvian identity, which consolidates the community, making it stronger in the current circumstances of globalization, but also to broaden it so that national minorities and immigrants can also be embraced within it. (Republic of Latvia 2012)

The *Guidelines* reflect Latvia's determination to sustain a small, distinctive language and culture in a largely alien and partly hostile world, an effort any reasonable person can understand. It also reflects the continued weight of historical oppression from the

[10] As noted earlier, a large part of Daugavpils' population is made up of people, including Jews, Belarussians, Ukrainians and Poles, who while not ethnic Russian are generally Russian-speaking in daily life (see Republic of Latvia 2012).

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years of Soviet occupation, summed up in a comment about the Russians by a Latvian friend who grew up under the occupation:

> We were glad to see them[11] go. They had all the good jobs. We lived in communal apartments, they had all the good apartments. They told us not to speak Latvian. They called it a dog's language.

History and memory retain their salience in national cultures far longer than the mere 33 years that have passed since the end of the Soviet occupation. History's salience vividly manifests itself in conflicts over defining the nature of Latvia under Soviet rule, and in the controversy over the demolition of Soviet era monuments. Mihelj (2014) is correct in insisting on "the tight link between the beliefs and interests of the present and the representations of the past."

The proposition that Soviet rule was an occupation imposed by force on the Latvian people is fundamental both to Latvian identity and to the principle, enshrined in the Latvian Constitution, of continuity between today's Latvian republic and the pre-World War II Latvian state. In sharp contrast to that perspective, many ethnic Russians continue to maintain that Latvia during those same years was *a part of* the Soviet Union – as distinct from a colony – and that the Red Army *liberated* – as distinct from occupied – Latvia in 1944 (Zepa 2006; Grootjans 2016).

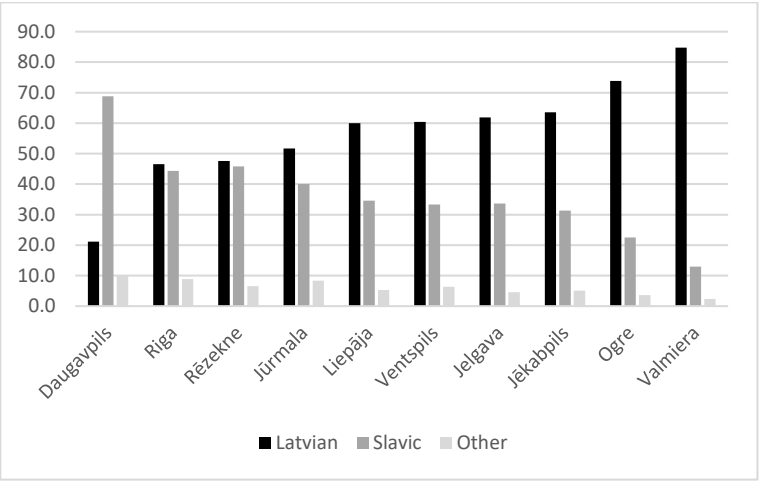
This is the context for the *Guidelines,* which define Latvia as simultaneously a people, a nation and a state, defined by a shared language, culture and social memory. The nation is permeable, in the sense that anyone can become Latvian, but culture is not negotiable. As the *Guidelines* read, "one can be not only born a Latvian but also consciously become one" (p. 12). Minority populations are expected to integrate, at which point "Each person's choice determines whether *alongside his or her Latvian identity*, which is the common one, he or she wishes to maintain also his or her national uniqueness and minority's identity" (ibid.) (emphasis added).

This is the context in which Latvian law mandates exclusive use of the Latvian language in public business and in public-facing signage, requires Latvian-language tests for citizenship, and has moved gradually toward a public education system in which all

[11] My informant is referring to the large numbers of ethnic Russians, many of whom were associated with the Soviet government, military or KGB, who left Latvia immediately after independence in 1991.

instruction is in Latvian. Less officially, it is the context in which political parties dominated by Russian-speakers have never been accepted by other parties as potential governing coalition partners, even after the Russian-led Harmony party won the largest number of seats in the 2011 elections to the Saeima. This extends to relations between the national and local governments: as Chmielewski (2023) writes, "local governments in the east governed by the 'Harmony' Social Democratic Party are sometimes treated as a foreign body within the state."[12]

Figure 7. Distribution of population by ethnicity for Latvian cities



Source: Latvia Statistics Portal, graphic by author

The foregoing discussion provides the framework for addressing the question posed above. Daugavpils, of course, is widely known as the most "Russian" of Latvian cities, as shown in Figure 7, in which for clarity I have combined Russian, Polish, Belorussian and Ukrainian ethnicity into a single metric: Slavic. While many cities have large non-Latvian ethnic communities, Daugavpils stands out as the one in which the ethnic Latvian population is by far the smallest.

An even cursory review of print and social media makes clear that "Russian-ness" is seen as a defining feature of the city. As one

[12] Strikingly, one informant noted that the major non-Russian Latvian political parties do not even maintain offices in Daugavpils, the nation's second largest city. Another informant noted that one party finally did so in the fall of 2024.

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writer aptly puts it, "as Latvia's only majority-Russian city Daugavpils has an odd place in the national consciousness, treated with suspicion and sometimes fear, as a vision of what could have been" (Mawhood 2015). Similar but cruder sentiments appear frequently on the many subreddits on reddit.com devoted to Latvia in general, and Daugavpils in particular, the latter often initiated, it appears, by non-Latvians seeking to understand why the city seems to have a bad reputation elsewhere in Latvia. These are far from the only responses. Many people have positive views about Daugavpils and feel that its reputation is not deserved, but none challenge the starting premise that the city has a bad reputation. The great majority of the negative comments, a few of which I have copied here verbatim, explicitly refer to the "Russian" character of the city:

> It's the troubled place of the country, at least, that's what everyone not from there will tell you. Gopnik, Russian, vatnik overrun place.[13]
>
> Too much Putin loving Russians.
>
> Daugavpils is only barely 20% Latvian (I am a Latvian) and thus the dislike in the general population. It's also in the Latgale region, which is the most distant from Riga and the poorest, most neglected politically, financially.
>
> The biggest difference in my opinion is that in Daugavpils, Russians are Russian. They barely speak Latvian, they hate Latvia, Latvian culture, language etc. and in most cases they seem like actual *gopniks*.
> It's overwhelmingly Russian, to the point that you will fare much much better by knowing Russian language than Latvian […], and this fact is a reason for hatred of Daugavpils within most of us.
>
> They really need to be reminded that this is not their country, if they can't speak Latvian after being born here, they have no right to complain about English, none whatsoever.

[13] In Russian slang, a *gopnik* is a hoodlum or thug, and a *vatnik* is a pejorative term for someone who promotes pro-Putin propaganda.

> Because a lot of Russian or Russian speakers live there, and of course Latvians don't like this for historical reasons.

> Would you live in a different country for 30+ years and still refuse to speak or even attempt to learn their language? while extending your temp residency permit instead of actually trying to get a citizenship? they are waiting for their czar to come.[14]

The reality is far more complex than these simplistic comments would suggest, and a majority of ethnic Latvians have more balanced or nuanced perspectives (Ekmanis 2020). The fact remains, however, that they do reflect widely-held perceptions of Daugavpils in Latvian society, and tend to foster a discourse in which Daugavpils is socially marginalized vis a vis the rest of the country. A perception that Daugavpils is treated unequally in Latvia also emerged in conversations with respondents in the city, who cited such features as unequal wage scales, poor medical services, and the slow, uncomfortable train service between the city and Riga.[15]

Social, cultural and political marginalization interact with and reinforce economic marginalization. Even without overt discrimination, pejorative perceptions of Daugavpils's difference and marginality in Latvian society can lead to negative decisions about mobility or investment, increasing brain drain and discouraging people from moving there or opening businesses, particularly in technology-based sectors that require employees with specialized skills. These processes can lead to what has been called urban stigmatization, "which focuses on the 'lack of qualities' of urban territories, their ugliness, their dirtiness, their deviation from 'the norm', and so forth, [and] adds to the processes of social and ethnic stigmatization to which these spaces and their inhabitants are already subjected" (Béal et al. 2017). Ultimately, these feedback systems create vicious cycles which become increasingly difficult to reverse.

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[14] All comments come from these subreddits, <https://www.reddit.com/r/latvia/comments/wg0z3r/daugavpils_is_bad/>; <https://www.reddit.com/r/BalticStates/comments/14bnbxn/could_someone_explain_the_concept_of_daugavpils/> <https://www.reddit.com/r/latvia/comments/e6opp2/could_you_please_share_your_opinions_about/> (last accessed between November 2024).

[15] Recently a first-class bus service has been initiated which, although no faster than the train, is considerably more comfortable.

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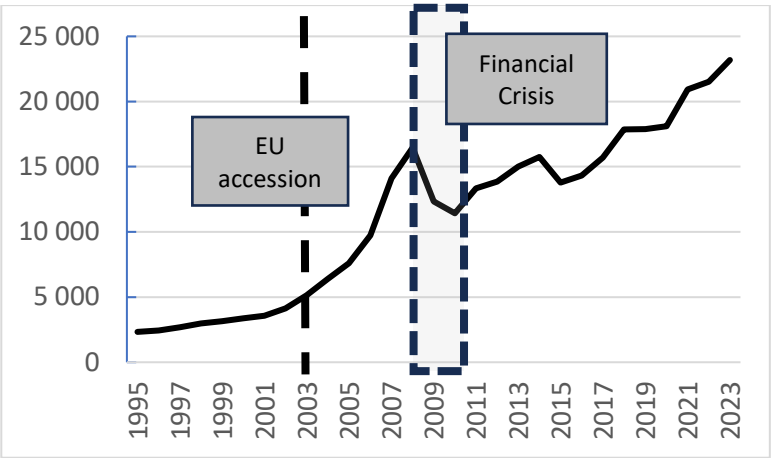
THE FUTURE OF DAUGAVPILS: INCREASED MARGINALITY OR RESURGENCE?

Daugavpils's present condition can be characterized by both extreme marginalization and peripheralization, through its combination of pronounced demographic decline, severe economic weakness, and social marginalization reflecting its status as an "other" within the Latvian social and linguistic space. Daugavpils's status is further exacerbated by Latvia's uneven development, which led Chmielewski to conclude that "the major regional differences in Latvia have a strong impact on the economic indicators: the worse connected, poorer and ageing outskirts are characterized by poorer economic results and socio-economic backwardness as compared to the equivalent areas in neighboring countries" (2023).

In light of the trends outlined in the first section of this paper, and in the absence of any fundamental change in policy or practice at the local or national level, the future prospects for Daugavpils, and indeed, for much of Latvia outside Riga, are not promising. In the first part of this section, I will suggest what those prospects would appear to be under that premise, followed by my exploring what paths – based on a fundamental reconsideration of policies and strategies – might potentially change Daugavpils's future trajectory.

Those issues need to be seen in the context of the larger question of growth, since that is central to how one must think about future alternative ways of organizing economic activity. It is a truism that economics is basically all about growth: how to create it, how to maintain it, and how to restore it when it disappears. That has never been more so than during the past forty or so years of all but universal neoliberal market capitalism, or globalization. Indeed, the strongest, and arguably the only credible argument for globalization, in light of its downsides in terms of inequality and unbalanced resource allocation, is its ability to deliver growth. It has indeed done just that, fueled not only by sustained global population growth, but by the extraordinary growth of China and other East Asian economies.

Figure 8. Per Capita GDP in Latvia 1995–2023



Source: World Bank, graphic by author

Latvia has benefited from this economic model, as reflected in its per capita GDP growth. From 1995 to 2023, the Latvian economy has grown even as its population has shrunk, and per capita GDP has increased by roughly 1,000%, going from $2,330 to $23,184 in current USD (Figure 8). Growth, however, has been spatially uneven. In 2021, per capita GDP in Riga was €28,949, while in Daugavpils it was €10,746 and in Latgale as a whole €8,833. Since 2013, Latvian GDP has grown by 47% (in current Euros), while that of Daugavpils by only 27%.[16]

THE STATUS QUO SCENARIO

While the neoliberal economic model has been shaken by the developments of the last two decades, beginning with the global financial crisis of 2008–2010, and continuing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising tides of deglobalization and protectionism, it still remains the prism through which thinkers and policymakers continue to view the world. As I discussed in the first part of this paper, there are compelling reasons to believe that the model of continued growth is going to be increasingly difficult if not impossible to sustain over the coming decades. If one accepts

[16] Slight discrepancies between national and local data reflect the fact that data about Latvia shown in Figure 8 comes from the World Bank, while regional and local data comes from the Latvia Central Statistics Bureau. Data for Daugavpils is only available for 2013 and after.

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the premises for that conclusion – declining population growth, aging, climate change, and deglobalization – what would a continued focus on growth as the goal of economic activity without significant change in policy or strategy mean for the future of Latvia and Daugavpils?

To begin, in a slow or no-growth world, especially coupled with deglobalization, export demand will decline. That in itself is bad news for the EU in general, and Latvia in particular, because of the region's high export dependency and Latvia's integration into the region. Stable or declining and aging populations throughout the EU at that point mean that domestic demand is likely to be flat or shrinking. As Latvia's economic growth slows, the dominant role of Riga in the national economy dictates that the lion's share of whatever growth takes place will gravitate to Riga and Pieriga. Assuming the combined population of Riga and Pieriga declines by 10% between now and 2050 in keeping with recent trends, the rest of Latvia could see its population decline by 35% to 40%, with Latgale most probably hit hardest. Since Latvian policy and attitudes appear to be largely unsympathetic to immigration (LSM.lv 2019; Mierina 2020; Kaprāns et al. 2021), it is highly unlikely that this decline will be made up by immigration from elsewhere.

Daugavpils is likely to continue to lose population and economic share. To the extent that Daugavpils's existing export industries remain viable, deteriorating local economic conditions and declining labor force availability may prompt them to move their operations elsewhere, further depressing the local economy and feeding the vicious cycle mentioned earlier. A conservative projection of Daugavpils's population suggests that by 2035 it will be between 60,000 and 65,000, and by 2045 it will be between 45,000 and 49,000, with the range reflecting different possible but conservative net out-migration scenarios.[17] More rapid out-migration could lead to an even lower future population.

The effect of such a demographic scenario on Daugavpils's social and physical environment is likely to be severe. While in 2021 17% of Daugavpils's houses and flats were unoccupied or vacant, that number is likely to rise to over 25% by 2035 and to roughly 40% by 2045. At that point, many of the Soviet-era

[17] Since I was unable to find an official population projection, I made one based on an increase in the excess of deaths over births from that 2012–2023, but at a slower trend line than the past decade; and low and high migration scenarios reflecting numbers roughly a third lower and a third higher than the 2012–2023 average.

apartment blocks in which most Daugavpils residents live will be half or more empty.[18] Demand for commercial space in and around the city center will decline, and vacancies will increase. By that point, over one-third of the city's population will be 65 or over, imposing heavy demands on overburdened health and social care sectors.

This is a harsh picture, but it is not, I believe, an inevitable one. In the next section, I will explore what might be needed in order for Daugavpils to avoid this scenario, and find a path to a more vital, sustainable future in the midst of the coming challenges.

AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE

On my most recent visit to Daugavpils, I went into the Rimi supermarket at the edge of downtown to buy some food to take back to my hotel room. What was striking was that everything seemed to come from somewhere else. Fruits and vegetables were from southern Europe, Africa and the Middle East, while most packaged goods were from elsewhere in Europe. In my admittedly cursory survey, Latvia was mainly represented by a variety of bagged snack foods such as potato chips.[19]

From a classic economic perspective, this is as it should be. Goods should be made in countries which have a competitive advantage with respect to that good, and once Latvians acquired a taste for oranges and avocados, it made far more economic sense to import them from the Middle East than grow them in greenhouses in Latvia.[20] This is the basic premise of globalization, and the Rimi supermarket in Daugavpils is as much part of that system as the London office tower of a global corporation.

But the plethora of products from around the world is also a sign of fragility. As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, many things can disrupt the equilibrium of the global system. While that

[18] Seventy-six percent of all dwelling units in Daugavpils are buildings containing three or more dwelling units constructed between 1946 and 2000. Since there was little multifamily construction between 1990 and 2000, it is safe to say that nearly all of these dwellings are in Soviet-era apartment blocks.

[19] I do not want to imply that these were the *only* Latvian-sourced foods in the store. I was not doing a systematic survey. It is likely that some other foods, such as bread and meat, were locally-sourced.

[20] Conversely, since potatoes are grown locally, and transport costs of bagged potato chips are likely to be relatively high relative to the value of the shipment, it makes economic sense for Latvia to make potato chips.

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disruption was short-term in nature, and has been largely corrected – although not without longer-term repercussions – a systemic decline in the global system, which is potentially likely for reasons discussed earlier, would have pervasive long-term consequences. Cities like Daugavpils, which are both integrated into the global economy yet marginal to it, will be most negatively affected, and have the least power to influence its path. Daugavpils, one might say, is caught in a marginality trap.

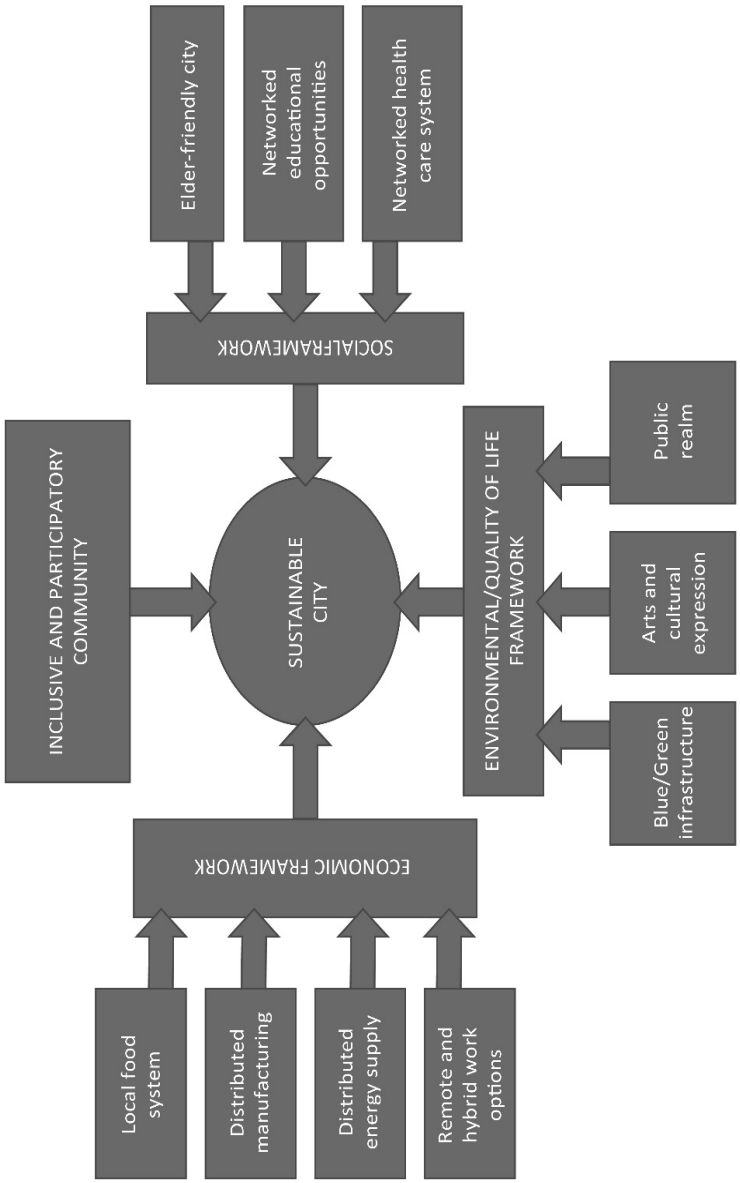
NETWORKED LOCALISM

The central question, therefore, is whether Daugavpils can escape that trap, and if so, how that might happen. Daugavpils cannot cut itself off from the rest of the world. Autarky has never been a sound basis to build a local economy. At the same time, there are many steps that Daugavpils can take to reduce its powerless dependency on the global economy and become a more economically stable, socially connected and environmentally sustainable city, by simultaneously building a localized economic and social fabric while increasing its integration into global technology networks. I have referred to this process as *networked localism*. It is outlined in graphic form in Figure 9.

As Figure 9 suggests, networked localism is a holistic model, that links economic development, enhancing the environment and quality of life, and building a stronger social fabric, in order to create a community where people will find what they need to live satisfying and productive lives. Such a community will not only retain more of its young people but will attract others to come and live there. It will become a thriving, sustainable community.

While clearly it is possible to initiate specific programs in any of the areas shown in the figure without creating a larger, comprehensive framework, such an approach – which can be said to be true of Daugavpils in some respects – misses my central thesis. For a city such as Daugavpils to escape marginalization and decline requires far more than a collection of unrelated projects, however worthy each individual project may be. It requires a *strategy*; that is, a simultaneous focus on building a stronger, more locally based economy; enhancing the physical environment and residents' quality of life; and building a stronger social fabric, engaging residents of all ages in the future of their neighborhoods and their city as a whole. It is only by integrating all of these elements that one can begin to create a thriving, sustainable city.

Figure 9. Contours of a sustainable localized economy



Source: Mallach (2023)

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This is not a prescription for regrowth of Daugavpils's population. In light of Latvia's demographic realities and the trends I have described earlier, such an outcome would be unlikely in the extreme. Daugavpils needs to focus on building a vital, sustainable city without relying on population growth to drive its future vitality.

Describing the individual elements in this strategy is well beyond the scope of this paper, and is something that I have done elsewhere (Mallach 2023). The use of available technology – to support activities such as decentralized manufacturing using CNC technology, to enhance critical services such as educational programs and health care services, or simply to build connections between people within the city and between Daugavpils and elsewhere – is an essential feature of any strategy. It may seem ironic, but in the world of the twenty-first century, the process of building a stronger localized economy and social fabric demands that the city be even more closely tied to global information networks and systems. As I have written elsewhere,

> Networked localism multiplies the resources and capabilities of the people and institutions of any individual city or city-region by enabling the city to become a part of larger national or international networks ranging from distributed power generation to 3D printing and remote learning. The potential of such networks […] is almost incalculably vast. [Such networks] exist in higher education, health care delivery, energy generation, food production, specialized and small-scale manufacturing, and in all likelihood, a host of areas that I cannot even imagine. (Mallach 2023, 171)

One example is that of decentralized manufacturing, which is a key to expanding and diversifying the local manufacturing sector. Using what are known as CNC (computer-numerical-control) machines, almost anything imaginable can be manufactured on an inexpensive desktop machine, coupled with access to raw materials and software. Such systems have extremely modest start-up costs, while being highly adaptable to small-batch production appropriate to meeting local needs. Using readily available open-source software, such machines are manufacturing everything from house kits to prosthetic arms.

Localized manufacturing will not *replace* the global system. Many products are not suitable for local manufacture, either because of their size and complexity, such as cars and trucks, or due to the raw materials needed, such as the rare earths used in

smartphones. But, as I have written elsewhere, "localized manufacturing can generate a wide variety of products for individual consumers such as processed foods, small appliances and household utensils, furniture, and textiles; and products for local institutions such as medical equipment and supplies, and office supplies and furnishings, to name just a few" (Mallach 2023, 224). Localized manufacturing can help build a stronger, more diverse local economy and retain more of the city's resources locally, but create more varied employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people, potentially reducing Daugavpils's current brain drain.

As I note above, engaging local residents, as well as businesses and institutions, is an essential element of the process. Transformational change cannot be dictated by a municipal government (or anyone else) from above to a passive, disconnected, or, worse, disaffected population. It must be simultaneously top-down and bottom-up. This is but one of the many challenges that must be addressed if Daugavpils is to escape the marginality trap, a path of inexorable decline.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

The process of getting to transformative change is difficult under the best of circumstances, and is likely to be particularly difficult under the conditions affecting Daugavpils. The process can be summed up as being comprised of two distinct elements: mobilizing the *will* to change, and mobilizing the *capacity* to change. A summary graphic description of the process is shown in Figure 10.

No significant change can happen in the absence of a broadly-shared will to change. The will to change, however, is far more than dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. It is only when dissatisfaction is coupled with a belief that change is possible, and a vision of what a better future might look like, that the will to change can become a reality. A different way of putting it, from the field of organizational psychology, is that people are imbued with a sense of *hope* (Snyder et al. 1991, Reichard et al. 2013).

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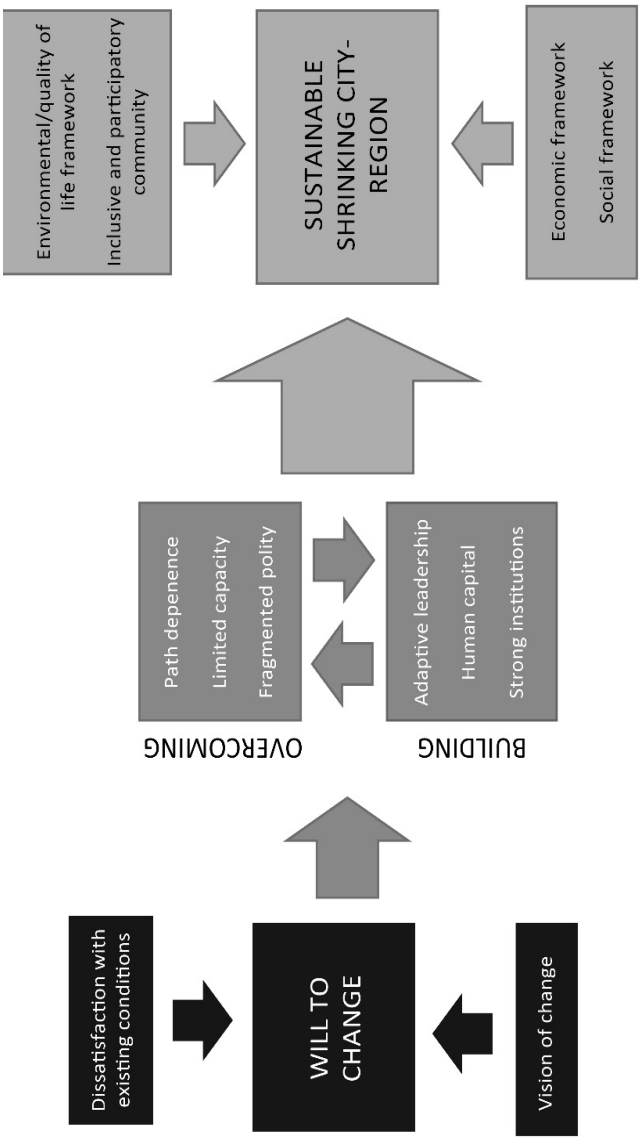
Figure 10. Steps to Change



Source: Mallach (2023)

A critical part of this is that the sense of the future be *shared*. It is not enough that an individual has a vision of their own future, because without engagement in a shared future, their vision will probably drive them to emigrate. Hirschman's framing of the choice between exit, voice and loyalty (1970) is relevant. Exit and loyalty preserve the status quo. In an environment where

expressing voice in the form of a desire for change is seen as disloyal by authority, loyalty is expressed through passivity. It is telling that one informant observed that, in her experience, Daugavpils city government was comfortable dealing with individuals but not with groups. Individuals and their requests are not threatening; they perpetuate clientelism, in which the city can play the role of a benevolent power figure. Organized groups demand a share in the process of decision-making, and implicitly or explicitly challenge the distribution of power.[21] It is important to remember that even in a shrinking city – perhaps especially in a shrinking city – the rewards of power are still substantial, and are likely to be fiercely defended.

The central challenge, then, is to build a system of organized, shared decision-making capable of translating dissatisfaction into a hopeful vision of change. Where this has happened, albeit usually in partial or limited fashion, it has been grounded in the existence of strong community engagement led by institutions of civil society, in which local government as well as institutions such as universities or medical centers have become participants, often (at least initially) reluctantly (Mattessich 1997). In the final analysis, change requires not only that there be an organized citizenry, but that city government is willing to treat them as partners.

Civil society in Daugavpils, in the sense of organizations focusing on the city at large, is emerging but still embryonic. Notable is the Cita Daugavpils project, which has worked to build civic consciousness among city residents, particularly around increasing residents' awareness of and engagement with their neighborhoods, through meetings, graphics and videos. As informants noted, recent amendments to the Latvian Law on Local Governments require that beginning in 2025, Latvian cities must conduct a participatory budgeting process (Staffecka 2024). That process could help build organized citizen involvement in local decision-making in Daugavpils.

In parallel with building the will to change and framing the vision of change, a successful outcome requires the *capacity* to change. Systemic change, especially when it is based on advanced technologies, is complicated. It demands specialized expertise and, depending on individual projects, may require financial resources beyond the limited means of Daugavpils city

[21] One could not unreasonably see some of this as an echo of the Soviet system, in which anything other than passivity on the part of the great majority of the population could lead to severe punishment.

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government. These will have to come largely from Latvia's national government and from the European Union.

National government policy, which is reflected in the *National Development Plan* (Republic of Latvia 2020) and the associated *Regional Policy Guidelines* (Republic of Latvia, n.d.), appears – understandably – to be torn between two competing policy courses. While maximizing the economic impact of public investment argues for prioritizing investment in the Riga area, reducing the country's severe spatial-socio-economic disparities calls for a redistributional approach to public investment. The ambivalence is made clear in the *Guidelines*:

> The goal of regional policy is to create preconditions for development of economic potential of all regions and for reduction of socio-economic disparities by increasing internal and external competitiveness […]. At the same time, it is essential to ensure development of Riga metropolitan area by making the most of Riga metropolitan area's potential to strengthen competitiveness in the Baltic Sea region and development of the Latvian economy, moving towards a knowledge-based and productive economy.

At this point, it does not appear that the national government has a clear policy with respect to economic and social development in Latgale generally or Daugavpils specifically, other than its support for the Latgale Planning Region and for specific projects such as the Special Economic Zone, which offers tax and other advantages to businesses locating there.

CONCLUSION

While all of non-metropolitan Latvia suffers from some degree of inequality relative to Riga/Pieriga, Latgale and Daugavpils are a special case, in that that they are not only by a considerable margin the most disadvantaged region and major city in Latvia but are continuing to fall behind much of the rest of the country. As such, the national government should develop a targeted strategy of support for Latgale and Daugavpils, not merely in the sense of equalizing resources, but explicitly designed in partnership with local government, business and civil society to reduce the region's marginalization and build a more thriving, sustainable region and city. Since a significant share of the resources likely to be available

for this strategy will be coming from the EU, it should be actively involved as well. The strategy should incorporate the technical support necessary to build the local capacity for change. Daugavpils is fortunate to have a strong university in its midst, which can and should play a major institutional role in supporting the transformation of its community into a more self-sufficient, sustainable city.

I do not want to minimize the difficulty of the steps described above. They call not only for new programs and initiatives, but for a fundamental change in public thinking about the future of Daugavpils, and new roles for everyone from the mayor to individual citizens in shaping that future. Yet it is hard to imagine that anything short of such an effort will lead to meaningful change in the city's current downward trajectory.

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