



**Annexes of research**  
**Challenges of Small and Medium-Sized Urban Areas (SMUAs), their economic growth potential and impact on territorial development in the European Union and Latvia**

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## **Table of Contents**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Annex 1: Latvian case study .....   | 3  |
| Jūrmala Ventspils Rēzekne, Valmiera, Jekabpils,.....                        | 5  |
| Annex 2: Data about SMUA's selected for Latvian case study.....             | 39 |
| Annex 3: Template for identifying good practices in SMUAs .....             | 44 |
| Annex 4: EU data analysis approach .....                                    | 47 |
| Annex 5: EU funds.....  | 49 |
| Annex 6: Participation of SMUAs in URBACT projects .....                    | 60 |
| Annex 7: Strategic EU documents on challenges and potentials of SMUAs ..... | 62 |

## Annex 1: Latvian case study

This Annex presents summary of the key findings of several academic studies, research reports about socioeconomic, functional and institutional aspects of the development of SMUAs in Latvia. Several SMUAs are selected for in-depth analysis to provide illustration of different challenges, contextual factors and policies that influence the development of SMUAs

### *General characteristics and trends of SMUAs in Latvia*

Latvia's administrative territorial division is made up of 119 local governments – 9 republic cities and 110 *novads* municipalities. This division was formalised after implementing lengthy administrative territorial reform that was completed in 2009. According to classification of settlements there are 76 cities and towns. Among these 9 are republic cities whose territory takes the whole of local authority's territory. In addition there are 67 towns, which are settlements and territorial divisions inside municipalities. 60 of them are administrative centres of municipalities, as 60 municipalities have at least one town. 5 of those municipalities have several towns, for example Talsi municipality has 4 towns in its territory.

The share of urban population according to formal classification of settlements (republic cities and towns) in 2014 was 58.8%. It was 59.1 in 2004. The largest city of Latvia – state's capital Rīga with its population over seven hundred thousand belongs to large (metropolitan) cities category with high population density. The population of capital city accounts for 32.2% of the total population of the country (it was 31.7% in 2004). All other 75 cities and towns in Latvia as they are classified in the settlements groups formally also are urban areas and their population accounts for 45.3% from urban population (46.4% in 2004) and 26.6% from total population of country (27.4% in 2004). The size of those Latvian urban areas varies and they could be divided into different groups based on their population size, density, and significance for other territories. Not all of them fall into category of SMUAs.

Using the criteria of town's formal status and the typology used in ESPON TOWN project formal criteria (see, **Table 1**) in Latvia there are 3 large SMUAs - Daugavpils, Liepāja and Jelgava, 3 medium sized SMUAs – Jūrmala, Ventspils and Rēzekne, 28 small SMUAs and 41 very small urban areas with population less than 5,000.

Thus, most of Latvian urban areas fall into the category of very small urban areas and in some cases one can doubt about categorizing them as urban areas at all, and their role as urban areas can be debated. Only 4% of all population is living in these very small SMUAs. However it is outside the scope of this report to address this issue. At the same time there are settlements especially in Rīga hinterland (Pierīga) that formally have a status of village, but in fact they are growing urban areas with population more than 5,000. 63.8% of Latvian population lives in 35 SMUAs with population over 5000 inhabitants.