



DIALOGUES ON THE FUTURE OF LATVIA

LATVIA IN 2050

SUMMARY

2025



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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years, Latvia's development has been based on a sustainable development strategy for the period until 2030, which is the first national long-term vision for the future of the country. Work has now begun under the auspices of the State Chancellery on the next long-term strategy, which will outline the direction of the country's development until 2050 – *Latvia 2050*.

In spring 2025, dialogue circles were held throughout Latvia – an important stage in the development of the *Latvia 2050* strategy, which explored the views of Latvian residents on the country's growth over the next 25 years. The dialogue roundtable discussions, which were attended by representatives of different generations, backgrounds and regions, revealed how the people of Latvia see the country's future – what they want to preserve, develop and create anew. The discussions also reflect the opportunities and challenges facing the country, its territory, population, public administration, education, environment, security and identity. This is essential for the country's existence and development and must be considered when developing a long-term strategy for Latvia until 2050.

The people are Latvia's greatest asset and the cornerstone of the state, and therefore demography, as a fundamental issue for the existence of the nation, was present in every round of dialogue. Population decline, aging, and emigration have become pressing challenges in all of Latvia, except for a few municipalities in the suburbs, and no longer just in rural areas. On a day-to-day basis, it is closely linked not only to various administrative and functional management issues, but also, in the eyes of the population, to the **fundamental values of the core Latvian identity – language, culture and traditions**. The solutions offered by migration are reflected in a multifaceted vision of the future – openness to opportunities for young people to study and gain experience outside Latvia, but with a desire to see this knowledge brought back to Latvia. Meanwhile, the arrival of representatives from other nations in Latvia is viewed with caution, making it a topic that still requires deeper discussion within society.

Latvia's constant development was particularly evident in conversations outside Riga and its suburbs – **after 25 years, these regions are seen as populated, functionally complete areas with the infrastructure and services necessary for living:** education, healthcare, housing, jobs, and adapted mobility options, while also highlighting the need for **smart local governance and solutions**.

Entrepreneurship is important for balanced regional development, as it not only creates jobs and strengthens the economy, but is also an essential driver of local vitality and place development. Clear and stable conditions are essential for its activity – a transparent, predictable environment with proportionate regulations and a well-organized tax policy that motivates economic activity and considers the specific characteristics of the region and local conditions.

Natural resources are Latvia's treasure and a vital component for a high quality of life, which is how people still see them in 25 years – they want to live in a well-maintained, clean and accessible environment. Nature is not only an ecological or economic resource for Latvia's residents, but also a prerequisite for a healthy and fulfilling life. At the same time, the need for a balance between preserving natural values and economic development is emphasized.

Education and educated people, as it is today, will continue to be the foundation of national development and social stability also in the future. An accessible, high-quality and people-centered education system is expected, enabling people to grow, develop and improve their knowledge and skills at all stages of life, from childhood to elderliness. When talking about quality education, people emphasize the importance of teachers as the backbone of the education system, the need for mutual trust between societal groups, the teaching community and education policymakers, as well as the demand for educational content that is flexible, contemporary and in line with both societal values and the changing needs of technological development and the labor market.

The accessibility and reliability of public administration is a pressing issue for citizens and reveals the vast potential for public administration to develop simpler, more open cooperation and communication with society. More inclusive governance, in which citizens and communities are involved in development processes, promotes a common understanding of what needs to be done and a sense of mutual responsibility, which, in the eyes of citizens, is essential for the country and will strengthen public trust in public administration.

Respect and humanity are crucial not only in citizens' relations with state institutions, but also in mutual relations within society. These values build trust and support, which are essential in everyday life and form a safety net in times of crisis.

In 2050, residents see Latvia as **a green and self-sufficient country with an educated society, a developed and sustainable economy, a high quality of life**

and a specialization in one of the areas where Latvia has accumulated expertise, experience and potential that would allow it to be visible in the world and contribute beyond its borders. It is a country that **has preserved its language and culture, where regions and rural areas are populated, and where there is a reliable and open administration.** This vision is consistent with the long-term development trends of Latvia to date, particularly about strengthening human capital, the quality of education, regional balance, the development of cultural space, public participation etc.¹

At the same time, the dialogue roundtable discussions also reveal the wariness of residents, as the development to date, although seemingly united in a common vision, has not always been similarly understood and implemented in political decisions and policies at various levels. The proposed development directions have at times lacked coordinated and targeted action, with the consequence that the intended results have not always been achieved and reached the residents. Persistent everyday challenges, increasing centralization in governance and service delivery, and the heightened geopolitical instability of recent **years have made residents more cautious about the future and more grounded in their outlook and vision.** The desire to protect the foundations – family, language, quality of life, place, community comes to the forefront. This is in line with other discussions about the future of the country, which emphasize the fundamental values enshrined in the Constitution regarding the existence of the state, the preservation of the Latvian language and cultural environment, and the well-being of the population².

However, it is important to emphasize that this carefulness on the part of the population is not passive – it is permeated by an active sense of responsibility for their families, communities, and country. People want meaningful development based on strengthening what already exists, creating real opportunities and a foundation for staying (or returning) to Latvia and living with confidence in tomorrow. The population's vision for the future combines a desire for stability with an understanding that change is necessary – if it takes place through respectful dialogue and is based on shared responsibility.

¹ *Latvia's sustainable development strategy until 2030.*

² Presentation by Gundars Berzins *Framework for Latvia's Development Strategy 2050.*

Discussion “*Latvia 2050 – democratic, secure and prosperous*” organised by the University of Latvia and the State Chancellery on 3 April 2025.



In 2025, for the second time in Latvia, **a series of discussions with citizens** on issues vital to the country's development was organized **using the dialogue circle method**. The first cycle of dialogue circles on trust levels in society took place in 2023. However, this year, in 2025, citizens were invited to discuss Latvia's development opportunities through 2050 and to share their vision of their own future, that of their loved ones, their communities, and, of course, the future of Latvia in twenty-five years. The dialogue circles took place from February to April 2025.

This summary was prepared by compiling all the views expressed during the discussions.

Objectives of the 2025 dialogue cycle:

- to initiate discussions on the future of the country and society;
- to strengthen citizen involvement in decision-making;
- to listen to the people of Latvia and find out their views, experiences and insights on the future development of Latvia until 2050;
- to build understanding between different people and groups.

What is the dialogue circle method?

The dialogue method was adopted from Finland³, where it has been used successfully in discussions with citizens for several years, holding at least six "National Dialogues"⁴ on topics such as Covid-19 restrictions, the importance of nature, immigration, life in uncertainty, democracy, security and trust.

Dialogue is a constructive and equal way of talking that builds trust and deepens people's understanding of almost any topic. Dialogue can help bring people from different backgrounds together, allowing them to meet and discuss as equals, openly expressing their views, both positive and critical. The aim of this method is to develop the ability to talk and listen to each other, promoting a sense of belonging and the belief that everyone is valuable and can influence developments in the country and society. The method is based on the desire to reduce polarization and conflict in society.

The aim of dialogue methods is not to prove that one's opinion is correct or to achieve unanimity, but a good dialogue is a way for people to reach a common understanding and insights while maintaining human connection and respect for one another.

³ www.timeoutdialogue.fi

⁴ www.kansallisetdialogit.fi

Rules for dialogue circle discussions

Original in Latvian – disseminated to the participants in each dialogue circle:



Uzklausī. Klausīšanās un iedziļināšanās sarunu biedra teiktajā ir tikpat būtiska kā runāšana.



Esi klātesošs un atvērts.



Dalies savā pieredzē, sajūtās, idejās, vairojot savstarpējo uzticēšanos.



Dialogā, kaut dažādi, esam līdzvērtīgi.



Nepārtrauc un neļaujies kārdinājumam uzreiz komentēt tikko dzirdēto. Ļauj visiem tapt sadzirdētiem.



Nenosodi. Mēs nekritizējam citu teikto, bet mēģinām izprast sarunas tēmu un dažādas pieredzes.



Dialogā mums nav jāpierāda sava taisnība. Mērķis ir labāk saprast sarunas tēmu, savu un citu viedokļus.

"Listen. Listening deeply to what the other person says is just as important as speaking."

"Be present and open-minded."

"Share your experience, feelings, ideas, fostering mutual trust."

"In a dialogue, even though different, we are equal."

"Do not interrupt and resist the urge to immediately comment on what you've just heard; allow everyone to be truly heard."

"Do not judge. We don't criticize the opinion of others but rather try to understand the topic and varying experiences."

"In a dialogue, we don't have to prove that we are right. The goal is to better understand the topics and the opinions of others and oneself."

Dialogue circles on Latvia's development in 2050 on a map and in figures



27 DIALOGUE CIRCLES IN 24 LOCATIONS AND ONLINE

Rīga: Jugla (Jugla Library), Centre (*Hyper Creative Centre*)

Rīga Metropolitan area: Ķekava (New Ideas Centre), Carnikava (Ozolaine Community Centre)

Latgale: Pelēči (guest house “Duni”), Daugavpils (DVPI “Vienības nams”), Lūznava (Lūznava Manor), Dekšāres (Dekšāres Community Resource Centre)

Vidzeme: Naukšēni (Naukšēni Culture House), Madona (Madona Business Development Centre), Ape (Ape Craft House), Valmiera (Valmiera Technical College), Launkalne (Launkalne Community Centre)

Kurzeme: Mērsrags (Mērsrags Community Center), Ventspils (Ventspils Youth Center), Pāvilosta (Dzintaru iela 73), Vārme (Vārme Parish Library), Valgunde (Valgunde Parish Community Center), Aizpute (Aizpute Tourism Center)

Zemgale: Bauska (Bauska Community Center), Iecava (Day Center “Iecavņica”), Krimūnas (Krimūnu Community Center)

Sēlija: Kaldabruņa (Kaldabruņa School), Jēkabpils (Jēkabpils City Library Exhibition and Meeting Hall)

Online: two dialogue circles with Latvians living in European countries, the United States, Australia, Brazil, and Canada

Who participated in the dialogue circles?

The dialogue circles were attended by a wide range of citizens, most of whom were united by the fact that they are active locals of their respective areas – entrepreneurs, farmers and home producers, active members of public organizations and volunteers, representatives of residents' councils, local government employees and even members of parliament, museum workers and librarians, school pupils and students, teachers and lecturers, housewives and women on maternity leave, unemployed people, pensioners, engineers, event organizers, researchers, soldiers and reservists, marketing and public relations specialists, musicians, psychologists, cultural workers and artists, journalists, photographers, IT specialists, and many others working in the private sector. The dialogue circles also included people who have moved to Latvia from other countries, such as Ukraine, Russia, and Denmark. Although some dialogue circles included representatives of minority groups in Latvia, their numbers were significantly lower than their share in society.

Number of citizens involved in the discussions

25

Riga

29

Riga metropolitan
area

58

Vidzeme

58

Kurzeme

49

Zemgale

46

Latgale

23

Sēlija

20

Latvians residing
outside Latvia
(diaspora)

Total - 308

Dialogue Circles Action Group

The dialogue circles were commissioned by the State Chancellery and organized in cooperation with the association "Latvian Rural Forum" and the foundation "Fund for an Open Society DOTS".

Project manager on behalf of the State Chancellery – Zane Legzdiņa-Joja

Others involved from the State Chancellery – Kristīne Ozoliņa, Inese Kuške, Ilona Anna Eklona, Pēteris Vilks

Project manager on behalf of the implementing NGOs and coordinator of the Vidzeme, Latgale and Sēlija circles – Anda Šarkovska

Dialogue circle method expert – Ieva Morica

Summary author – Irina Kuzņecova

Summary consultant and author of the analytical section – Kristīne Rolle

Negotiation coordinator – Aiva Apša-Ķīšeniece

Coordinator for Zemgale and Kurzeme, communications expert – Dace Liepiņa-Zusāne

Dialogue circle organisers

Association “Juglas attīstības biedrība”, association “Rīgas centra attīstības biedrība”, association “Daugavkrasts”, Gunita Dzene, association “Nīdermuižas draudze”, Diāna Breidaka, Ina Tuče, Sandis Mesters, Indra Jirgena, Madona District Fund, Indra Levāne, Zane Puriņa, Signe Baltere, Madara Brāle, Development Factory Association, Laine Šildere, Edīte Krasnopa, Elīna Firmane, Signe Pucena, Bauskas Vecpilsēta Association, Agita Hauka, Kristīne Ļaksa, Ieva Jātniece, Vidusdaugavas NVO Centre.

Dialogue circle facilitators and note takers

Facilitators: Ieva Morica, Maija Jankovska, Kaspars Kravinskis, Inese Kuške, Irina Kuzņecova, Jānis Ķīnasts, Kaspars Ņesterovs, Māra Sīmane, Zane Legzdiņa-Joja, Jānis Dzimtais, Linda Jākobsons-Gavala, Nita Jirgensone, Vladislavs Vesperis, Anda Šarkovska, Daiga Rokpelne, Elīna Hermansone and Laine Šildere.

Note takers: Anda Šarkovska, Aiva Apša-Ķīšeniece, Dace Liepiņa-Zusāne, Irina Kuzņecova, Aelita Petrova, Jelena Jekimova, Aiga Smiltāne and Elīna Firmane.

And what did people say about their experience in the dialogue circles?

“I hope that such events will be maintained in the future. It helps to express opinions, which is not so easy to do these days. At least, it’s not so open.” (Rīga, Jugla)

“Dialogue circles are necessary. We are used to coming to an event and that’s it. But we need simple conversations. We need conversations, not virtual ones, but between people.” (Ventspils)

“I felt listened to. It was a good, high-quality conversation. A respectful discussion. I appreciate being listened to.” (Latvians in Europe)

“Tonight, I have a good feeling that people do care. And I hope this conversation won’t just stay here. From time to time, **we need circles like this to have a real talk.**” (Krimūnas)

“It is necessary to come together. This raises thoughts and ideas. **I will take away positive emotions.**” (Naukšēni)

“I’m also glad to be here. Something will ‘stick’ with me, and I’ll think about what we discussed.” (Ape)

“After events like this, **I want to do more** for my town, my people, my region.” (Dekšāres)

“I fell in love with the dialogue circle method — the way we can speak respectfully to one another. In the online world, it’s all just barking, and we carry that anxiety with us into our daily lives.” (Daugavpils)

“The hardest part of the conversation is not to interrupt or say something in response, but **to listen and hear.** It’s cool that everything happens politely, no one interrupts anyone, no one yells at anyone.” (Kaldabruņa)

“I am happy for the young people. I definitely wouldn’t have come myself in 11th or 12th grade, I would have been afraid. There is a place for events like this. **I am very satisfied.**” (Ventspils)

"It forced us to step out of our comfort zone and think differently. This method can be used in some meetings." (Mērsrags)

*"Speaking is my everyday life, but we don't often get out of our bubble. [...] My latest experience was speaking at a wind farm. Two radically different experiences. Here, everything is correct and polite. The other – unmoderated, everything is bad. There, darkness is born; **here, light is born**. We need to understand how this can be applied more broadly." (Vārme)*

It is not easy to imagine such a distant future. There is a great temptation to talk about the present and what worries us or, conversely, what makes us happy and inspires us. This was largely the case in the previous rounds of dialogue. However, the concerns and hopes expressed by people when thinking about the future give us a better understanding of what needs to be protected and preserved, and what, on the contrary, needs to be changed, developed and improved.

The greater proportion of dialogue rounds in rural areas and regions (two rounds took place in Riga) also meant that **demographic challenges came to the forefront**, in particular people staying in or leaving the regions, rural depopulation and the disappearance of villages from the map. This was compounded by a number of issues that need to be addressed now in order for people to stay and start new families: from access to services and housing to roads and mobility, as well as jobs and social security, because without all of this, the future seems difficult to imagine. "Who will live and stay in Latvia? Who will we be?" – people's reflections on these questions as a whole form one of the largest topical blocks that has emerged in the dialogue circles.

Respect, cooperation and humanity in relations with representatives of state (local and national authorities, politicians) and in interpersonal interactions shape the next major theme. This is what people lack and what they want to change for the better – so that in 2050 respectful communication and mutual regard will be the norm at all levels in Latvia.

Quality of life – the participants in the dialogue circles definitely want to raise and improve this so that in the future people can live in an orderly, pleasant, clean, accessible and people-friendly environment; so that healthcare is accessible and ageing is dignified, healthy and active; so that a balance can be found between economic development and the desire for unspoiled nature and landscapes; so that

education, including lifelong learning, is accessible and of high quality for all; so that we know how to use new technologies and are not engulfed by them.

Clearly, the war in Ukraine, Russia's aggression and changes in US policy are creating **a sense of insecurity and anxiety about tomorrow** and even Latvia's existence. Uncertainty about tomorrow fosters a longing for peace. However, all this has been more in the background, rather than the focus of the dialogue. Despite this, quite a few people shared **their optimism about Latvia's future**, hoping that everything will work out and life will be better than it is now. At the same time, there is a desire for clarity and certainty about Latvia's identity, goals and strategic development vision – where are we going and what are we focusing on?

The dialogue circles allowed people to express their opinions and be heard without reproach or condemnation, even when opinions differed. **"Even after 25 years, we will all be sitting here in dialogue circles,"** said a young man from Carnikava, reflecting on his experience in the dialogue circles; many other participants agreed with him. Indeed, addressing complex (and not so complex) issues through dialogue, meetings and respectful discussions, where everyone is listened to and all opinions are equal, could become the norm in Latvia in the future.

2. DEMOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

Who will live and stay in Latvia?

Looking so far into the future, it was impossible not to think and talk about demographics, namely, **the birth rates and population in 2050**. In Riga and the surrounding towns, there was even a sense of satisfaction:

“I think the population is okay. Iceland with 30,000 is okay. [...] There is no need to bring in additional labor. Robotization will free Riga from some things. Not everyone has to give birth.” (Riga, Jugla)

“We are enough for our territory. We could grow a little, but it's not that crazy.” (Riga, Jugla)

“There are a lot of children in Ķekava. There are so many that we can't provide enough kindergartens.” (Ķekava)

“I want this overpopulation to end, so that we can return to living in isolated houses.” (Carnikava).

However, the further away from Riga, the more people shared their concerns about a “demographic catastrophe”, that “there are fewer and fewer people”, because of which “places remain empty”:

“Will the country be able to function with such a small population?” (Mērsrags)

“Demographics – if there are no children, then there is no point to any of it.” (Aizpute)

“Let's not let Latvia disappear from the map. We haven't had a single birth in three months, but we've had 12 deaths.” (Ape)

“If we start with statistics, then in 2035, 75% of Latvia's population will be seniors. So, in 50 years, who will be left?” (Bauska)

“My husband and I were talking about the wars – we don’t have to wait for the Russians to come; we as a nation will disappear sooner or later because the population is declining. That’s what worries me the most.” (Naukšēni)

“Will there be any benefit from all these changes if, in the end, there are no people left living in the countryside or in the cities? If there aren’t, then there won’t be a country either.” (Madona)

The hope that there will be people, that there will be new families, and that, as a result, a particular place will continue to exist and, ultimately, Latvia itself, is expressed in almost every dialogue circle. The issue of whether people, especially young people, choose **to leave or stay** becomes a kind of lens through which the future is viewed: *“When thinking about the future, we want to see young people, not a paradise for pensioners.”* (Pāvilosta) Parents and grandparents expressed their concerns and hopes that their children and grandchildren will stay here and not leave for good, but will return:

“I will do everything to keep my son in Latvia, so that he doesn’t leave.” (Ķekava)

“There are concerns that children will no longer be in Latvia, that they have other interests.” (Aizpute)

“The main thing is for our children to be in Vārme, because it’s cool here, it’s worth staying here; it’s ‘kruti’ here.” (Vārme)

“I want my children to be able to stay here in 25 years’ time, so that they feel appreciated.” (Daugavpils)

“We are all united by the desire for our children to stay here.” (Dekšāres)

“I am a mother of two children and a grandmother of two grandchildren – they are all abroad. I miss them very much and want them to be here.” (Ape)

However, there have also been calls **for young people to go out into the world, gain experience and then return home**:

“Young people need city experience to enjoy socializing, triumphs and disappointments, but ultimately to return home.” (Krimūnas)

*“It’s healthy to gain city experience, travel the world, but hopefully they will come back.”
(Naukšēni)*

“Our young people should travel the world and learn, but home is here – we have to teach them that.” (Ķekava)

This desire is echoed by young people:

“I would like to travel a lot, but that doesn’t mean I will leave Latvia.” (Ventpils)

“I hope I will be in Latvia doing things I like. [...] I hope that in 25 years I will have seen the world.” (Rīga, Jugla)

“In 25 years, I see myself as an accountant in my own company. I want to travel around Latvia and the world.” (Valmiera)

Although **immigration** from other countries was not discussed much, it is still a concern. Fear of otherness and the disappearance of the nation:

“I have a negative attitude when there are so many foreigners.” (Pāvilosta)

“Maybe it’s not so bad that there are fewer of us, but let’s not have people coming here who we don’t want.” (Mērsrags)

“I don’t want to experience Sweden, where immigrants were allowed to come in order to renew the country, and now look at it.” (Vārme)

These fears are mixed with a desire for a well-organized integration policy and an open society (mostly among young people):

“There will be fewer of us, so there must be integration, we must be ready to accept people. We must be smart to make it work.” (Ķekava)

*“Latvians should be nicer to people from other countries; they should accept them.”
(Valmiera)*

At the same time, these demographic issues are closely **linked to people’s own identity** and what they want to preserve in this changing world. The question “*what*

will we be in the future” is just as relevant as the question “who will live and stay in Latvia”.

The Latvian language is something that the participants in the dialogue circles want to preserve:

*"I would like **children** to **continue speaking Latvian** in 2050. This is a problem I see every day."* (Bauska)

*"I hope that the birth rate will increase and **that the Latvian language will not disappear**. I am in favor of international cooperation, but I don't want the Latvian language to disappear. There will be more cooperation, and we will survive."* (Ķekava)

*"In Latvian language class, we discussed that **language is part of our identity**, but in many places around the world, people are switching to English, which everyone speaks. The Latvian language is disappearing, but I don't think it will disappear completely, although it is spoken very little, as is now the case with the Latgalian language."* (Valmiera)

*"We are slowly dying out. **Will we speak Latvian?** So that people don't leave. Language, nature. So that everything doesn't turn into a big city."* (Vārme)

The preservation of the Latvian language for future generations has been expressed more strongly in dialogue circles with Latvians in Europe and around the world:

"I would like my children, who were born in Germany, to speak Latvian in 25 years."

"If our community does not change, then only a small proportion of those who consider themselves Latvian will speak Latvian. We have to choose a path. In Canada, 880 of the 28,000 Latvians speak Latvian at home. In 25 years, very few young people will speak Latvian. There are people who would like to have a "Latvian heritage." It is difficult to find children who speak Latvian at the 3x3 camps (fourth-generation immigrants).

"My children are visiting with their Latvian wives and my grandchildren. The number of Latvians in the world has declined, but our family is still holding on. They all speak Latvian, which is the pride of my life."

Latvia's future is also unimaginable without the preservation and transmission of **culture, national values and traditions** to future generations, but at the same time

"with the view that we are different and can accept everyone" (Daugavpils) and that we feel "confident about our identity" because "we are Latvians, we are proud of our traditions and what we have achieved" (Latvians around the world).

"We have **preserved our traditions**. Song festivals in full swing, handicrafts, skills passed down by masters; we are developing, but we also preserve the Latvian soul and are proud of it." (Bauska)

"Folk **traditions must be preserved** – songs, dances, connection with nature." (Mērsrags)

I want **there to be traditions that remain and develop**. When I was a child, there were cemetery celebrations where relatives would gather. And when the celebrations ended, everyone would start planning for the next year. There should be celebrations where everyone knows they have to go, and that it will happen. It's a kind of stability." (Launkalne)

"Everything is cool here. You can live here, enjoy yourself, and what do you do there, in a foreign country – nothing. You must create opportunities for people – **I don't want culture, dance and song to disappear**. What can I represent abroad – I can sing, I have a language. We are a small country, and we have our own language! These are important things. You must talk to children about this all the time." (Ape)





3. RURAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

So that all of Latvia is important, not just 100 km around Riga!

Demographic challenges are inextricably linked to **rural and regional development** – this was touched upon a lot in the dialogue circles. This was also confirmed by the fact that most of the dialogue circles took place in Latvia's regions and rural areas, with only two in Riga.

People care about **preserving the countryside in Latvia**: *"The greatest happiness is for every rural person to be able to say with pride in 25 years' time that they are from the countryside."* (Ķekava), because low birth rates and emigration are causing concern about the decline and depopulation of rural areas, *"so that these places do not disappear from the map and physically"* (Mērsrags).

*"So that places like Aknīste, Asare, Gārsene and others **don't disappear**. So that old houses remain and are rebuilt, rather than being buried under excavators. So that there are children in schools, so that there is a need to maintain the roads."* (Kaldabruņa)

*"Most likely, **small villages will disappear, due to declining birth rates**, school closures, etc. Only large farmers will remain. They will survive if some kind of business is established. Every place needs its own attraction so that people want to come and see it and maybe stay. We must make it happen ourselves."* (Aizpute)

*"I have three daughters, but I doubt they will return. They each live in a big city. There is work there, there are grandchildren. **There are no perspectives here. Those who left for abroad are unlikely to return.** If there used to be 700 people here when there was a school, 5–10 years ago, now there are only 300. On paper there are 600, but in reality, there aren't that many. And it's like that all over the country, not just here."* (Dekšāres)

*"I would **like my house to never be empty, so that Pelēči doesn't disappear**, because it happens that many villages disappear from the map. I don't want Pelēči to disappear. My oldest grandson says that he will keep the old house. There will probably be some changes to my house, but it won't be allowed to fall down by the roadside. I would very much like **more people to stay in the countryside**. We have a good location by the highway, so there could be more jobs, industry could develop, houses and apartments could be built. So that people could stay here, and then they would have children, and then the schools wouldn't be closed. (Pelēči)*

To prevent this from happening, to keep people in the area instead of them moving to (larger) cities or abroad, it is **critically important** to have a “**living infrastructure**” that makes life livable, namely housing and access to basic services, a well-organized road infrastructure and, of course, jobs so that people can be socially secure. Without all this, people find it difficult to imagine a future in rural Latvia.

It has been repeatedly mentioned in the dialogue circles that there is a lack of housing in the regions, especially in rural areas, *"which is why young people are leaving, because they don't want to live with their parents"* (Kaldabruņa). **The lack of housing** not only **makes it difficult for** people to return: *"We would have people coming to live here – if an apartment becomes available, it is bought the very next day."* (Launkalne), but also the attraction of specialists: *"We would have specialists if we had somewhere to live."* (Pāvilosta) The availability of credit is also considered low:

"We need to talk about the availability of loans for young families in the regions, especially in rural areas. In the city, you can still get something sometimes. Then we can talk about the houses that are available in the countryside. For now, support is just words." (Jēkabpils)

"If everything were sorted out and houses were built, this place would be full within three years. Cultural life is active, but the lack of support from ALTUM and low creditworthiness prevent young people from getting housing." (Krimūnas)

The lack of services is a concern: *"The further away from Riga, the fewer services are available – government offices, banks, clubs. [...] The school has been closed, there is no administration, the library has been closed. When a school is closed, the level of culture declines. There is no transport at all. When the local government closes a school, everything else follows."* (Naukšēni) Cultural life is important to young people. They need places to go outside their homes:

"Why don't young people return to the countryside? Where can young people go in the evening? There is no nightlife." (Ķekava)

"If the town and village worked on cultural life, young people would want to stay here and not go to the city." (Launkalne)

However, **it is precisely the school that has become a symbol of the future:**

“School is the future and the children who should be here. If there is no school, there will be no young families here either.” (Naukšēni)

“The school is an important social hub. Without a school, there’s even less than nothing. I’m a newcomer here, and it was important to me that the school was here.” (Pāvilosta)

“If the state does not change its policy towards rural areas, then in 25 years’ time it will be a very sad sight. As a young family, in 25 years’ time I would think very carefully about whether to come to the countryside, where there are no shops, no post office, no library and no school. Would I come? Then it will be like a dormitory town for Smiltene. If the state is so determined to optimize various businesses and schools, then I don’t see a bright future here.” (Launkalne)

“On the issue of schools, children must travel 35 kilometers in one direction. I would look for a place and move to a place where there is a school nearby. It is important that there is a school nearby. [This] is very important. Especially for families with children.” (Kaldabruņa)

“Don’t you think it’s strange that we, as residents, are panicking about rural schools being closed? The worst thing you can do is close rural schools. It’s genocide. We’ve been farmers here for 35 years. Who decided that the curve for closing schools is this and that? Maybe the curve should be lowered.” (Vārme)



People's sense of **social and financial security** also influences their vision of the future: "People should be prosperous and happy, not run around like horses" (Pelēči), "I don't want to have to look for 10 jobs to survive, but if I want to, I should be able to. Not because it makes me feel fulfilled as a person. Not to go on a trip and then spend a month thinking about how I'm going to survive." (Daugavpils) It has been said repeatedly that **job opportunities** are an essential prerequisite for people not to leave or to return:

*"You need to be able to earn a living, not just survive. If **there are no opportunities to earn money in the countryside, there will be no young people here**, they won't come here."* (Kaldabruņa)

*[young woman] "I want to live in a free country where I can see a future for myself; I want **to be able to earn a good living in my country, not have to look for happiness elsewhere**. Can I afford to stay here?"* (Pelēči)

*"I would like my children to stay here. **Everyone likes living in the countryside, but there is no work**. My son really likes the countryside, but there is no work."* (Dekšāres)

*"For Latvia to have a better future, we need to think about how to bring our children and grandchildren back from abroad so that they can have good salaries, a place to live and work. **If that doesn't happen, even more people will leave**."* (Ape)

*"It is important that my children have jobs **so that they feel secure, start families and stay in Latvia**."* (Bauska)

Financial security and job availability also influence future decisions, such as studying or having children:

"If I know that I will be studying for four years and then after four years I will be needed. Security, clarity. I am studying and I know that I will have a job. Now young people ask what the point of studying is." (Lūznava)

"I don't want children. If I wanted them, you have to be able to provide for them. But to give them the best, you need money. How realistic is that in the future, when it's already difficult now?" (Madona)

However, there is hope, and the key word is **mobility**. In the future, people in Latvia hope to see well-maintained roads and accessible public transport, which would, in turn, promote people's mobility, allowing them to remain in rural areas, as well as providing opportunities for development:

“Many problems could be solved with transport accessibility. If, for example, it took only two hours to get from Riga to Liepāja instead of three, then there would be opportunities for more economic development. People could live in the countryside or small towns but work in places that are easily accessible by public transport.” (Aizpute)

*“The countryside will remain a dormitory area. Fifteen years ago, you had to make a plan to go to Valmiera, but now it's easy to do. **Distance is no longer an obstacle.** There are isolated farms around, but will they make it to Naukšēni? I have my doubts about tourism. Mobility is high, but the outskirts are growing.” (Naukšēni)*

*“I am only concerned about the roads. We **need roads so that people can move around and trade.** All parish centers need to be connected by asphalt roads, not just the big cities. How can I get involved in the green economy if I have to drive 60 km, 34 km in one direction, because there is a good road there?” (Madona)*

*“I am really looking forward to the road connection with Jēkabpils. And we have bad roads. Winters here are a tremendous challenge in terms of roads. **If there is a connection, then there are fantastic opportunities for development!** I currently work in another municipality because I can't drive on normal roads in my own municipality.” (Kaldabruņa)*

*“I can't imagine life without a car, it's impossible. You can't get anywhere. No public transport provides this kind of mobility. I don't think villages will disappear, because there will always be people who want to live in the countryside rather than in a two-room apartment in the city. **The important thing is to have a road, then the kilometers aren't so important.** We have problems in Skudrene, but we're still living. People are busy with their small businesses; if the area is scenic and beautiful, people will come. Old houses are falling apart, some are being renovated, new ones are being built. I don't think people will disappear. We live in a time when we don't see the population declining. It is important to provide roads and cultural opportunities, summer festivals. **If there is mobility, you can work in the city or remotely from home if you have good internet.**”*

An evenly developed Latvia – this is the vision of the future for Latvia shared by several participants in the dialogue rounds. So that “*all of Latvia is important, not just 100 km around Riga*” (Kaldabruņa), so that “*Latvia is not just Riga and Pierīga*” (Aizpute), so that we look at “*Latvia as our family, where all children are equal. We are as strong as our weakest link. Every place is important*” (Pelēči), so that “*after 25 years, there is finally a regional policy that encourages people to live in rural areas*” (Lūznava), so that life is “*everywhere, not just in cities. Culture, health, educational opportunities, job opportunities. Teachers are losing their jobs, doctors are leaving their jobs. Doctors, for example, should have the same working conditions as in Riga. The standard of living cannot be so different.*” (Daugavpils)

For many, centralization processes, i.e., the concentration of resources and services in larger population centers, especially in Riga, are equivalent to the destruction of rural areas, depopulation and, ultimately, disappearance from the map. Centralization and optimization seem to have become buzzwords when talking about regional development:

*“The rich will live in the countryside. **We are optimizing everything**; everyone is moving to the cities.”* (Ķekava)

*“**Centralization is what we did wrong.** And now we are destroying people.”* (Daugavpils)

*“We want people to stay in the countryside, we want a clean environment, we want children and schools for our children. We are concerned that all funding is centralized and taken away from us, and that the cuts will not be reversed. **The move towards centralization must be stopped.**”* (Naukšēni)

A solution has also been proposed – to decentralize state institutions and move them to other Latvian cities:

“Why can’t state institutions be located elsewhere, not just in Riga, since many people can work remotely, using computers? This would create a more educated environment. For example, the State Revenue Service could also be located in Valka.” (Ķekava)

*“Rural depopulation is a serious issue. There are already ways to prevent the destruction of rural areas. We should move towards decentralization rather than centralization. **Institutions should be relocated and distributed across the entire region,** rather than concentrated in one city or the capital. The Talsi region is as large as Luxembourg. For example, the education authority could operate here. This could help to keep jobs in a specific place.”* (Mērsrags)



4. QUALITY OF LIFE

Public space, health, nature, education, technology

It might seem that concerns about demographics and Latvia's development overshadow people's vision of the future, but this is not the case. **People are still hopeful and imagine a future Latvia** where they live in a pleasant, orderly, accessible, clean and people-friendly environment, where they are healthy and active, continue to learn and acquire new technologies (even in old age); the education system is finally well-organized and of high quality, and a balance has been found between economic development and the preservation of natural values. All of this will certainly improve the quality of life and, of course, people's satisfaction with their lives.

Public space for people – this topic was raised quite often in the dialogue circles. People see the future as follows:

*“**A peaceful environment.** There is infrastructure and opportunities for meaningful leisure activities. We are investing in the future – in the environment.” (Aizpute)*

*“The air will be much cleaner, there will be fewer cars, **there will be places to meet on the streets**, and there will be time, because we will work less. There will be opportunities for social expression and for relationships with nature.” (Riga, city center)*

*“Ķekava will be developed as a suburb of Riga with various **social and entertainment venues, access to services** – shops, public gathering places, parking, etc.” (Ķekava)*

*“We have well-lit streets, private houses have been built, schools have been renovated, stadiums have been built, etc. **We have made great progress**, but we must continue and, if there is stagnation, we must find ways to overcome it.” (Iecava)*

*“The roads and streets are in good condition, everything is paved; water supply and sewerage are in order. There are quite a few communities and associations with their own interests, which meet and develop themselves further. But the basis for all this **is a developed and well-maintained infrastructure**.” (Valgunde)*

Economic development is also important: *“Ventspils is a smart port with smart technologies. In fact, I see a modern port in Ventspils that is adapted to today's conditions and open to technology.”* (Ventspils), internet access: *“I want 5G internet in rural areas. The internet is very weak, and that is a big problem. There is 5G on the main road, but people also live in rural areas. I know many people who could work from home, but they cannot do so because they would have to stay in the city.”* (Krimūnas), as well as a safe and accessible environment: *“Everything must be in a favorable environment. The population can be increased if there are places to walk with prams. If you like living there, if the environment is pleasant.”* (Madona)

The participants in the dialogue circles also expressed their hope that not only they themselves would enjoy **good health**: *“You start to understand that health is the greatest value, because if you are in pain, you don't need anything else, you don't want to visit anyone, you don't want to do anything yourself, you don't want anything. I want to see myself physically strong and also morally strong.”* (Lūznava), but also for their fellow human beings: *“There is hope that we will be able to use science and stay healthy longer and be able to function.”* (Riga, center), *“People will choose healthier food, something more natural.”* (Ventspils)

Therefore, it is important *“what **healthcare** will be like in Latvia”* (Aizpute). High quality: *“I choose hospitals in Riga. Why can't you choose high-quality healthcare in Daugavpils? We have only one specialist here who feels confident despite all his insecurities, because there is no alternative.”* (Daugavpils), accessible: *“People can get free help, but you have to wait a very long time to see a doctor paid for by the state.”* (Valmiera), and, of course, better: *“The healthcare system will be better and we will be able to live better.”* (Valgunde) It is also important to think about *“psychological and mental health, because the suicide rate in Latvia is huge. The state does not have the resources to deal with psychological crises or visits to psychologists. It is important to support families mentally and psychologically.”* (Jēkabpils)

Health and healthcare have been discussed in the context of aging and **spending one's old age with dignity**. Thinking about this, the participants in the dialogue circles are hopeful:

*“I hope I will have good eyesight, be able to read, watch TV, travel. 25 years is a long time. I hope **I will be healthy**, that I will be able to continue growing roses, which I really enjoy.”* (Madona)

*"I can dream about my retirement. I hope God will grant it to me. That I will be healthy. That I will be able to live in my own home, potter around in my garden, **travel, instead of biting my nails.**" (Daugavpils)*

*"We want to be independent and healthy. So that when we grow old, we **are not a burden** on the younger generation." (Aizpute)*

*"I will also live here as long as God allows, **I would like to have a dignified old age here.** But when I look at how much my pension will be, I feel bad. Even though I have paid taxes. But it is not dignified to live on medication and food stamps. I hope that something will change for the better." (Krimūnas)*

We need to think about the aging of society now: "What will old people do, how and where will they live, how will we take care of them, their health, their retirement homes?" (Ķekava), especially those living in rural areas:

"There is nothing for people of retirement age to do. In the future, we will need places where pensioners can be active." (Lūznava)

"There are no meeting places for people of retirement age. I am worried about the moment when I will no longer be able to drive because of my age. How will I get to the store in Smiltene? Young families are also coming to the countryside. There will be a village. But what will happen to the older people? Will they just sit around? It's sad." (Lūznava).

During the discussions, people paid a lot of attention **to Latvia's nature**, clean environment, forests and landscape. These are things that they definitely want to preserve and pass on to the next generation as part of their core identity:

"Gardening allows seniors to stay young. In Iecava, this is possible in a small place. We must stay closer to nature, closer to the earth. We must preserve the greenery and tranquility." (Iecava)

"Nature is important, so that we can go mushroom picking, clean, without mosquitoes. We must protect our forests, because they are being cut down a lot at the moment." (Mērsrags)

"Latvia is green, with preserved natural values that we have." (Jēkabpils)

People appreciate **Latvia's greenery** and **clean environment**:

*“Other places are overpopulated; they lack basic things like water. What we have, they can only dream of. We need to instill in young people that **the environment we live in is ideal**. We need to do it today so that it will be there in 50 years.” (Rīga, Jugla)*

*“I think Valgunde is **an exclusive place** to live, **relatively clean**. There are no factories. There is a river.” (Valgunde)*

*“Ecology – **we don’t realize how clean our environment is**; we have nothing to compare it to.” (Ventspils)*

*“I want to see Latvia greener, without rubbish everywhere. People will understand that **Latvia is one of the most beautiful countries in the world**.” (Valmiera)*

*“**We currently live in a very good, green, clean country**. Elsewhere, things are more tragic. I would like to be able to say the same thing in 25 years. But I am frightened by wind turbines and electric cars – the fact that we accept that they will save us. It’s nonsense.” (Madona)*

In the future, it will be important to find a **balance between unspoiled nature and business development**. This is also recognized by the participants of the dialogue circle:

“I also want the environment to be untouched, but of course I also want business to develop. But why do I live here? It’s the nature and the environment, and that’s what gives me the most joy.” (Carnikava)

*“Won’t this approach lead us into a phase of underdevelopment? Highlighting nature is good, but we need to think about how we position it. We are never in the middle – it’s either one extreme or the other. How can we **promote the value of nature without making industry feel threatened**?” (Pāvilosta)*

*“Latvia is very green at the moment. There are no more beautiful and greener places. But we shouldn’t exaggerate our greenness with all kinds of regulations. However, **we can’t survive on our greenness alone. We also have to think about production**.” (Vārme)*

The topic of education leaves almost no one indifferent – everyone has something to say and everyone cares. This is very positive – people are aware that

education promotes national development: “in order to develop, you have to invest in education, as history has proven” (Daugavpils), “Education is the most important thing – if it is not sorted out, the country will suffer greatly” (Carnikava), and it is also “the foundation of a smart society”, ensuring “the ability to selectively perceive information and highlight what is important in this information-overloaded age” (Madona). There is a desire for both educated politicians – “politicians should not only be politicians, but also educated politicians” (Bauska) – and educated voters – “we need educated voters, politically active, intelligent, responsible members of parliament” (Ķekava) as well as society as a whole, which “must be educated, active and thoughtful” (Lūznava).

In the future, people expect **a well-organized, high-quality and accessible education system**, as they see many shortcomings and challenges in the current one. Several circles have expressed the view that teachers are burnt out and young people are tired:

*“I would very much like Latvia to be a prosperous, developed country. **Education should be accessible to all children.** [A score of] 10 is not a criterion for good education. Good education is education that everyone can learn from – both the talented and those who have learning difficulties, but whose education and knowledge is adapted to their needs.” (Rīga, Jugla)*

*“I would like to **improve the quality of the education system.** This is the first prerequisite for developing thinking people. At the moment, everything is wrong – you can’t change your grades, it kills your motivation. It is important that young people can achieve their goals using their own ideas.” (Aizpute)*

*“The conclusion today is that education is definitely the missing element, the Achilles heel of our society; **not enough is being** invested...” (Vārme)*

*“I want to say that we **must first invest in education;** we will not need innovation if people are not educated; we must invest money in children, in clubs, so that children are physically and creatively rich, so that they can bring something new to Latvia.” (Lūznava)*

*“**A good education is important for young people.** The best university in Latvia is significantly inferior to other European universities.” (Latvians in Europe)*

[young woman] “Politicians should stop messing with the school system; no young people like it; teachers have many problems, there are no materials, no books; **everything is changing rapidly.**” (Ventšpils)

“I dream of **free higher education.** That would ensure that the best students study. Finland has free education. Universities are a money-making mechanism that not everyone can afford. This area can be supported by the state – let children study and receive higher education free of charge. This is **our investment in the future.**” (Ape)

[young woman] “**We feel tired.** We have eight-hour days at school – we study until three or four. Usually, they tell us to go home and enjoy our free time, but our e-classroom is full of homework. If you are an activist, you don't have time – there are activities until 7 p.m., and then you still have to do your homework.” (Madona)

“School 2030 was taken from Finland, but you can't always just copy an education model; you have to look at society. We have a past, skills, you can't just replace one thing with another.” (Latvians in Europe)

[young woman] “I am studying in this new system, I can feel how it works. **The teachers are burnt out.** I have teachers from two generations. Salaries need to be increased. School 2030 is dangerous. There are no materials, the program just lists what needs to be done, the teacher explains it for seven minutes, then there are 30 minutes of self-study. How can a first grader learn on their own? The idea is good, so that children learn to find information themselves, but **I'm already burnt out,** I don't want to look at computers and blue screens anymore, I want more information directly from the teacher, not from a computer. I want the teacher to give me information, I want contact.” (Iecava)

Both now and in the future, we need to think about **self-education and lifelong learning**, which is especially important at the moment, when new technologies are rapidly entering our lives. This was also emphasized in the dialogue circles:

“What we have now is a wide range of educational opportunities for people of all ages, who can study in a variety of programs. I would like to keep that, because that is also education. **We need to think about all groups in society.**” (Iecava)

“You live and learn. We **have to learn new skills to keep up with the times.**” (Bauska)

“There should also be **schools for seniors** so that they have somewhere to go and develop themselves in their senior years.” (Jēkabpils)

*"We are currently establishing senior universities in Latvia. **Education does not end with school.** Anyone can retrain at the age of 55 and continue lifelong learning after retirement."* (Valmiera)

The rapid development **of technology** brings both hope and concern. People are worried that *"technology will take over, everything will be done remotely, we will have no contact with each other"* (Ķekava), that *"due to new technologies that are coming in very quickly, children are losing communication skills and reading skills"* (Vārme), that *"robots will work instead of people, and then it will be difficult for people to find jobs because they will be replaced by something better"* (Pelēči), that *"everything will be too digital. Everything was digital at the Olympics, but I find it easier to understand from paper"* (Madona).

The participants in the dialogue circles mentioned that technological development also means opportunities, but you have to know how to use them in order not to fall behind in the future:

*"And I would like to be sure that in 25 years' time I **will be able to use the things that will be created.** New technologies will have to be learned. My grandmother is 90 years old and she does crossword puzzles with the help of Google."* (Mērsrags)

*"**You have to know how to use MI properly,** use its advantages. For example, I record the products I have in the fridge, and it immediately gives me ideas for what I can cook for dinner."* (Ķekava)

*"We need to look at modern technologies that can be used to our advantage. **We need to be open and look at what is happening around us.** The 21st century offers so many opportunities to do things, to decide what is best and most convenient."* (Bauska)

*"I have high hopes for artificial intelligence because I understand that it is all part of progress. Artificial intelligence will have a huge impact on our future. We will even call it by a different name; right now, it is an assistant in everything we do. AI can be used to solve many problems. Most of these tools **are also available in our village, you just need to know how to use them.** Children under the age of five don't need it, but the rest can and should. For now, it is not possible to do all the work with it, but in 25 years, it will definitely be possible in some areas. And at the moment, the coverage is good enough to use it. I don't know how to use it fully yet, but I would like to."* (Kaldabruņa)

It is emphasized that the development of technology and innovation also means security for Latvia in the future: *“Innovation and national security go hand in hand with development; if we have technology, we can feel more secure and be competitive in the market. Young people will then stay in the country; they will see that they can earn a living and live in Latvia, and they will pay taxes for our pensions.”* (Lūznava)



5. PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND PEOPLE

Hear us, be more humane (empathetic) and closer to us

It seems that **a respectful, humane attitude and communication** can work wonders, and perhaps this is the direction we should be looking in to promote trust in public administration, politicians and the state as a whole. Closer, not further away. Hear us, don't just listen to us. "*Empathy, not just paperwork.*" (Jēkabpils)

There has been a lot of talk about listening – that people and their needs are not being heard, that those "at the top" do not listen at all:

*"Many residents have realized that these people are elected as deputies, and their hearing and understanding change. **Deputies don't hear, they don't listen.**"* (Ķekava)

*"For the first time, we all seem to be thinking alike, and I would like **those at the top to hear that.**"* (Carnikava)

*"But residents need to feel that they **are not only being listened to, but also heard.** At the moment, it seems like they are listening, but they are not really hearing. It's the art of politics. In my opinion, they are trained to do this. When the first Saeima was formed, there were training sessions on how to answer questions without saying anything. There were courses like that. The authorities must turn around, we must force them to face the residents and listen to them. And the authorities ignore us completely."* (Valgunde)

*"I want to feel that **my voice is being heard.** I don't want to receive a letter with a standard reply, but a substantive answer. I don't want it to be a formality, but something that contributes to the process."* (Mērsrags)

*"We don't even have representation in the municipality. It's the wrong system. Some parishes don't even have the opportunity to express themselves – they are not listened to. **The authorities are detached from the people, they don't hear anything.** Decisions are made somewhere up in the air, not on the ground."* (Madona)

At the same time, there is a desire for human, simple and understandable communication; hope that this will be the case in the future:

*“Perhaps institutions **will communicate** with people **in a human and understandable way**; we need to return to communication.” (Ķekava)*

*“Simplicity is needed in bureaucracy and politics. Then we can also reach young people. We need **to present things more simply and communicate better**. Simplicity in all sectors.” (Iecava)*

*“Those at the top in Riga should listen to what people in the countryside, in the deep countryside, think. Sometimes **it hurts that those at the top talk too cleverly**. They talk a lot, but do nothing, while we have work to do.” (Kaldabruņa)*

*“When we were with young people from one party, we asked simple questions, but they **answered so complicatedly that we couldn’t understand anything**. Why do they speak ‘political language’?” (Madona)*

*“The young woman is right – **it’s a language that none of us understand**. It’s overly democratic, legally refined. Without prior knowledge, it’s impossible to understand. I wish we paid them for their work, not for using complicated language.” (Madona)*

The participants in the dialogue circles emphasized the need for **a more humane attitude**, so that in the future “people would be the main focus, not just the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers and other [binding] regulations of the local government. That we solve problems, rather than just looking at the letter of the law.” (Iecava), that “children and their families feel needed in this country. They don’t have a problem with you being part of the gray mass that fills the void. Every citizen is needed and feels valued.” (Valgunde), that “when planning everything, see the people!!! Behind everything we plan, we see people and their needs. Not just defense and production, but people!” (Jēkabpils), that “the government is friendly to its citizens, with its thinking and decision-making; meets people halfway, showing that people are needed” (Dekšāres), that “**at the state level, people will be truly respected**. People will be taken into account!” (Mērsrags) and that “politicians will not lose their humanity” (Ventspils).

Closer relations with representatives of public authorities are expected so that in the future “those at the top” are no longer “at the top,” so that the connection is not

lost and **the distance in decision-making is not so great**. And, of course, there must be dialogue:

*“We all have enormous potential, including the state and politicians. Somehow, we don’t know how to manage our own country; we squander it. **The government is detached from ordinary people**. It’s different across the border. [...] We are friendlier and closer, we trust each other. Why is the government afraid of the people? If the whole government were united, as we are today, everything would be fine.” (Bauska)*

*“**Let those at the top think about the ‘average’ people for once**. Unfortunately, that position corrupts people, even if they don’t think so themselves. Let there be specialists in ministerial positions, not people who move from one ministry to another. They take months to prepare their answers!!! (Mērsrags)*

*“**The main thing is to be closer to the people**; the impression given by the country’s leaders is that Latvian society is one big community, with no one standing above anyone else, just a position.” (Ventspils)*

*“Elected **representatives should not lose touch with those who elected them**. Ask them what they want – a swimming pool or an ice rink. **Dialogue with society** should not just be on paper, but should be real.” (Jēkabpils)*

*“For example, **we live here, but those who sit in Riga decide what we need**. I had an example – we were going to a course in Viļāni. It’s a 20 km trip, but the unemployed get their travel expenses reimbursed if the distance is over 20 km. It’s 20 km by bus for me, but in Riga they say it’s only 9 km because they draw a line on the map with a ruler. I’m powerless. They calculate the distance on a computer, as if I can walk straight across a ditch. The locals should be the ones to determine such details. Issues should be resolved on the spot, not by someone who doesn’t know the situation and makes decisions about you.” (Dekšāres)*

*“**Trust from the country’s leaders so that people feel secure**. Following the example of LR 1 Rail Baltica, they act first and think later. Wastefulness. There is turbulence in Europe, there are no leaders like Čakste who can’t go home with the state’s pencil.” (Latvians in Europe)*

*“My hopes for national affairs are currently pinned on the President, who really gives me great hope. I am glad that he is our President. **He feels like the closest president**.” (Ape)⁵*

⁵ The President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs.

*“The issue needs to be reviewed, reducing the budget and sticking to just one election, only local elections; people come to the Saeima from their parishes. The parishes will conduct their own analyses and then go to Riga to vote. **Decision-making takes place closer to the people.**” (Lūznava)*

Those whose municipalities have been affected by **the latest administrative-territorial reform** also point to the distance:

“We want the Aizpute municipality back! There is no one here, no one to answer questions. The reform has failed in the South Kurzeme municipality.” (Pāvilosta)

“There is a huge difference after the reform. Previously, an issue could be resolved in three minutes, now it takes three days. With e-signatures and e-addresses, it’s even worse – you have to go through seven offices before you find someone who is responsible.” (Naukšēni)

Bureaucracy must clearly be reduced in the future, and people agree on this:

*“**Reasonable bureaucracy.** Simpler, clearer processes. No 101 additional questions. Everything is so overly complicated. I am glad that my management at work has a reasonable amount of bureaucracy. There are things that need to be done, but the rest should be simplified. Simple instructions and I know what to do.” (Bauska)*

*“Bureaucracy. **Don’t make new laws**, because they don’t work against those who don’t follow them, but rather against those who do. If there’s one crook, don’t assume that everyone is a crook.” (Mērsrags)*

*“A story about bureaucracy. To renew something, **you have to coordinate with one institution, submit papers to another**, etc. There should be more understanding, simpler rules, and more cooperation.” (Kaldabruņa)*

*“**There shouldn’t be so much paperwork**, bureaucracy should disappear. My grandson is in hospital and he says there’s so much paperwork he doesn’t have time to work. There’s five times more paperwork now.” (Pelēči)*

*“**There is too much bureaucracy in schools.** Teachers just have to report and report. The same goes for family doctors, who have been turned into entrepreneurs.” (Jēkabpils)*

In the context of **entrepreneurship**, people talked about an **understandable and simple tax system**, so that in the future taxes would not be perceived as a burden, young entrepreneurs would be supported, and the shadow economy would decline:

“A new entrepreneur thinks of 150 ways to get around the tax system, because your start is put on the same level as that of larger entrepreneurs.” (Carnikava)

*“I expected entrepreneurs to talk about the tax nightmare. Legislation is changing, **tax policy is changing, it's impossible to keep up with everything**. Tax levels. By 2050, local government will not be what it is today. Communities will decide for themselves and manage their own budgets.” (Bauska)*

*“In order to produce cheese, I have to pay n taxes and duties, and **the requirements are the same as for large cheese producers, even though I am only a home producer**. It is an expensive hobby, just like farming. A person manages 55 hectares of land, but has to work a second job to be able to buy fuel and cultivate the land.” (Dekšāres)*

*“**If the bureaucracy were reduced, there would be great business opportunities**, because we have very talented and hard-working people. If the state supported small businesses more, at least in the first few years without a lot of control, high taxes, etc., it would be easier. And there would be results!” (Ape)*

*“In Naukšēni, too, after 25 years, **I would be happy if people were not paid envelope wages**, if taxes were not so high, if entrepreneurs did not face dilemmas, if the grey economy were reduced.” (Naukšēni)*

*“Business support policy cannot be the same, because we cannot compete with Pierīga. Entrepreneurs are cautious, afraid to expand or start anything new, and **there cannot be the same attitude towards the border region and Riga**, and this must be understood.” (Pelēči)*





Next
Generation
Pork!

6. PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

Let's come together, talk and cooperate in the future

People talked much more about **interpersonal communication and interaction** than about relations with representatives of the authorities, but here too there is a desire for respect and humanity, cooperation and non-judgment, acceptance and openness, coming together and face-to-face communication.

Socially active people, especially in less populated areas, participated more in the dialogue circles. It is therefore logical that the focus of the discussions was also on active **civil society** and **the role of communities and their leaders** in the life of local society.

People are bitter that *"there are meetings, but no residents,"* so there is a desire that in the future *"this will be supplemented by the number of residents and their wishes, because only a few of us cannot decide and continue"* (Valgunde).

This was echoed in Krimūna:

"People don't want to get involved because they've lost faith. They say that nothing will change."

In Pāvilosta:

"We show films at the cultural center, but no one comes."

Also, in conversation with Latvians living in Europe:

"When we organize events, people don't want to attend. It's easier to forget about Latvia. How long will we continue to invest time and money in organizing events? Latvians prefer to drink."

"We represent Latvians, but there is no one at the bottom. There are arguments and squabbles about how long those who organize events can continue."

Bitterness is mixed with hope that *"little by little, someone will come along and things will develop. I didn't come ten years ago, but I came now."* (Valgunde), and a determination to *"continue to be more socially active, invite relatives, friends, neighbours, because it's easy to just sit at home and not go anywhere; we try to*

organize and attend events, encourage people to meet, talk, maybe there will be more participation” (Pelēči).

For many participants in the dialogue circles, **the community is the future** and a great value, because it brings people together, creates a sense of belonging, makes them stronger and even builds self-confidence:

“My future is a community where we create new values.” (Rīga, center)

“I realized how important community is to me. I will have many neighbors, as I do now, because I share everything good that I have. There will be many well-organized municipalities and civically active people. Let's wake up and take everything into our own hands, not leaving it to others to do for us.” (Ķekava)

“I believe that in the future, **small communities like Iecava will be so valuable** that large communities will consider us a kind of ‘billionaires’.” (Iecava)

“It is important to pay attention to the community. To the power of the community. People are important. Community ideas and traditions. They are like **an engine that keeps everything going**. It is important to maintain all of this.” (Mērsrags)

“Community is the key word for the development and viability of a place. When you have that community, you feel stronger, you can influence things. It helps build self-confidence, knowing that you have a shoulder to lean on. It is important to show young people the value of community. It is not that you have to ask for money for everything you do, but you can also do things without compensation. Go to events, participate.” (Jēkabpils)

“Shared traditions are what shape the future. Community clean-ups, street festivals, 11 November celebrations, Christmas markets. We are creating a community.” (Pāvilosta)

“After almost eight years of working in the residents’ council, it was difficult to show that people can act quickly, that they don’t have to wait for happiness, but can create their own environment for themselves and others. We need to instil the belief that this is a good community that is becoming viable. In my opinion, this is the only solution – **to show, tell and demonstrate through communities**. Once people gain faith, things get better.” (Dekšāres)

“A community that does not judge, does not gossip, is open to diversity. There is no need to argue, we do not want to share unwanted, unsolicited advice, it is toxic.”
(Latvians in Europe)

Latvians living abroad, on the other hand, are hopeful that in the future *“the community will be more diverse and stronger, [...] Latvia will not become a burden, it will unite and grow stronger”; “the communities in the cities will shrink, but the community will remain, especially in Garezers”; “the community will exist, but it will be severely transformed. People will speak English, but they will be fans of Latvia – the Irish model.”*

People want Latvian society to have **more cooperation, unity, and the ability to see the bigger picture** in the future, rather than fragmentation and conflict:

*“People from different communities need to come together to agree on what people need most, and **to agree rather than fight among themselves.**”* (Riga, Jugla)

*“My vision is to create a united society, a unified society, to break the tradition that the most delicious food for Latvians is Latvian food. Let's be realistic, anything can happen **at** any moment in the world, **we will either eat each other or we will be able to cooperate,** help and listen to each other.”* (Iecava)

*“According to philosophy, **cooperation is necessary for the future development of humanity.** Being together. We must preserve our values, family values, but at the same time we must also be part of society. We must not be indifferent to what is happening in our village. I have visited Finland, where there is a lot of movement. After 20 years, you understand that people are not indifferent, that they care if their neighbor is doing badly. I am a newcomer to this region, **and I feel very strongly how closed everyone is. Now this is beginning to change.**”* (Bauska)

*“I really believe that the population ranges from pensioners in their huts to the president in his palace. And everyone else is in between. And **as long as we talk in categories – them and us – I don't think we'll move forward.** As long as we divide ourselves, we won't move forward.”* (Valgunde)

*“I hope that **people will be able to work together.** Cooperation is necessary. I welcome everyone with an open heart. It is wrong to hate. Everything depends on the newcomers and the locals. There are people who come here and they are already part of the community. We don't criticize them.”* (Pāvilosta)

*“I would like us to **be less hostile towards each other**. Let’s be more tolerant and stop dividing ourselves. We are all human beings, we all live in Latvia, and there is much more that unites us than divides us.” (Daugavpils)*

*“As entrepreneurs, we take on interns, who live in the manor house. We have three shops. **We need to continue developing our ability to cooperate**. In my field of work, there is a very unusual form of cooperation between farmers. We need to live in positive cooperation. Another entrepreneur is not a competitor, but a partner.” (Naukšēni)*

*“**Unity is the key word**, building a nation that trusts each other. Historical experience is irrelevant; it must be turned into our wealth. We are good at complaining and pointing out what others are doing wrong. The greatest danger in the world today is polarization, **and we must do everything we can to stay together**. Trust is a huge keyword.” (Latvians in Europe)*

Cooperation requires **respect and humanity** in our interactions with one another. The dialogue circles have expressed a desire for the future *to be characterized by “compassion, unity, and humanity among people. Peace nourishes, hatred destroys.”* (Pelēči), so that we remain human in any situation: *“It will make people feel mentally healthier, that our country is like a family, like a home, and that will make our country better.”* (Lūznava), that *“there will be mutual respect. At school towards teachers, in healthcare towards the disabled, towards the poor, and also towards those who behave arrogantly, so that they feel it and get it back. [...] That is the dream I would like to experience.”* (Daugavpils)

Surprisingly, a lot of the dialogue in the circles was about how **important it is to talk** and that you have to know how to talk—this is especially relevant for young people. Talking will be vitally important in the future—in families, communities, and society:

*“In 25 years, I hope [...] that **I will be able to discuss things with my loved ones**. Unfortunately, there is currently a polarization that is being fueled by the uncontrolled nature of the internet, which affects everyone. I hope that a solution will be found.”* (Rīga, Jugla)

*“**Young people don’t know how to talk to each other**, and social media makes it even worse. I doubt that it will help to change things.” (Ķekava)*

*“Maybe time will finally stop and there will be time to have breakfast together with the family, because everyone is rushing around and **there is no communication anymore.**”*
(Carnikava)

*“**We will start learning communication,** interpersonal relationships, intelligence, talking, listening to our children, hearing the wishes and needs of others. This is very difficult at the moment. I work with young people and I thought that they would all be highly motivated, but now I realize that the real world is different. Young people come in for half a day and no one calls them, no one asks them how they are doing, even though they are only in second grade. When young people are asked how they are doing, they perk up because they feel needed. We don't know how to talk to each other.”*
(Iecava)

*“**We have no dialogue between residents and entrepreneurs,** we mock each other. There is no dialogue. Those who build solar panels. They're just making money. But the poor farmer has to go green and do well. There is no conversation. Businesspeople talk to residents as if they were aborigines.”* (Valgunde)

*“**It is important to talk,** because three years ago people were angry. After that, the questions became more constructive and a dialogue began to develop.”* (Krimūnas)

*“About my grandchildren: **I would like them to be able to talk.** They come to visit, and everything is quiet. Games, phones. I hope that will come back. **I want there to be human relationships.**”* (Mērsrags)

*“It is important for the future that we can meet and talk. **That there is someone to talk to in your town.**”* (Aizpute)

*“We don't have traditions, we need a bench. In Daugavpils, there is one tradition – old women sit on a bench, eat *semuškas* and talk. We also need a round table **where people can gather, talk and come up with ideas.**”* (Launkalne)

The conversations also reveal **a longing for getting together**, being among people, socializing and human interaction in person, rather than remotely:

*“As a senior citizen, I am afraid that we **don't have enough time to meet** – and that causes all these problems.”* (Madona)

*[young person] “I believe that not only sports are activities, but also **discussions and events** like this **that help us socialize.** And express our opinions, because we have them.”* (Valmiera)

“People need to get out more – it would create a sense of community and encourage the exchange of ideas. It would be great if more people came back. People are used to staying at home, and the digital age also plays a role. Today, I also felt that we should meet like this more often.” (Naukšēni)

“Let’s have a sense of community, let’s have joint events. **Let’s not feel like we only see people through the window.** We don’t have any shops or a library.” (Launkalne)

“Digitalization and the development of the internet are very helpful to people. Post offices are being closed, but when we get too carried away, **human interaction disappears.** Everything is disappearing, or we simply don’t know how to do it. I’m afraid that in the future we won’t know how to greet people or ask them, ‘How are you?’ I’m not saying that this is a bad thing, but we need to find a balance.” (Dekšāres)

“Everyone is boiling in their own juice here, **we don’t meet as much anymore.**” (Lūžnava)

“This **COVID time has made us retreat into our cocoons,** and some are still there and can’t get out at all.” (Krimūnas)

“The number of lonely people is increasing dramatically, statistically.” (Rīga, center)

In several dialogue circles, the hope was expressed that in the future, Latvian **society will be more accepting and inclusive** than it is today, and that people will be much more open and tolerant. People would like “no group to be lost in the development of the country!!! To see the country as a whole and to see these groups as a whole.” (Jēkabpils); to think more about people with disabilities: “People are pushed aside, losing any opportunity to participate. Disabilities are diverse and represent a significant part of society. But they are restricted by bureaucracy, there are no building regulations.” (Iecava); let us be “accepting. Preserve values – not preserve, but develop.” (Launkalne); let us “become more tolerant in 2050. We are single people, loners. We will have to open up, we live in a global age.” (Bauska)

Latvians living abroad spoke much more about acceptance and tolerance, some of whom had themselves experienced exclusion due to their lack of knowledge of the Latvian language or poor language skills:

“My husband experienced exclusion at a 3x3 camp because he didn’t know the language, but we can work on that. Everyone is an ambassador for Latvia outside Latvia. Everyone has a role and a place. There needs to be an environment where the language is spoken.”

*"It seems important that Latvians and Latvian society come closer to the diaspora. The main threat **is that people in Latvia feel rejected** or only part of the community because they don't speak Latvian well enough, especially in mixed families. Latvia should be inclusive, innovative and care about its people and the country; the common good."*

*There must be a "positive attitude towards mixed families – another Latvian. **It is important that we are also open to those who are not Latvian.** If we are strong in our identity, not intrusive, and say that there is something good here, then people will want to get involved. If not, if we demand that they fit into a narrow framework, then we scare them away."*

*"**I believe that in the future, Latvian society will be more tolerant, more open,** without unnecessary comments about shortcomings or language challenges. I would feel safer if people on the street were happy to see foreign families and if they were accepted and felt welcome."*

*"I realize that I will never be Swedish because I speak a strange language, and I will never be Latvian because I was not born or educated in Latvia. I would like relations with Latvia to be easier, for us all to be more flexible, **without feeling like we belong here or there, like we are strangers or locals.**"*

*"There are few of us, and there won't be many more. The forecast is that there will be 1.3 million of us. The Latvian community must understand that survival will mean breaking down barriers, **seeing ourselves as Latvians in a broader sense, breaking down the Latvian isolation.** We must understand that not all Latvians will have blue eyes and blond hair anymore. We must accept differences in the Latvian language. If someone who grew up outside Latvia says "paldies" (thank you) or "labdien" (good day) with enthusiasm, then we must accept that they can also say "ceturksnis pāri trijiem" (quarter past three) instead of "piecpadsmit pāri trijiem" (fifteen past three). A dismissive attitude is not the only way to pronounce words or do things. Latvians have a long road ahead of them, where we will have to understand who we are. Globalization has been coming for a long time, language is changing, and we cannot continue to speak 19th-century Latvian. **We need to be less afraid and more inclusive in order to survive.**"*

Interethnic relations in Latvia were hardly mentioned, except in Aizpute, where the topic of Russians and integration was raised: *"It is difficult for us to understand how to integrate Russians, because we don't have any Russians in Aizpute, but it*

should definitely be done where they are. And we shouldn't demand perfect Latvian and point out mistakes in the language, etc.” In Daugavpils, “the war has exacerbated our problems. It wasn't so bad before.” People hear others say, “I'm not going to that bar because there are Latvians there. Everyone chooses their own bubble where they feel comfortable.” “There have been cases where a friend spoke Latvian, but the saleswoman told him in Russian not to speak the language of the fascists.” while another no longer wants to “be afraid to communicate in Russian. [...] I was almost punched in the face because I spoke Russian.”

People's responsibility for themselves, their place of residence and Latvia has been expressed in almost every dialogue circle:

*“When I travel on business, I see that Latvia is safe. **We ourselves create this safe environment**, even if it looks uneven. We create an environment where it is pleasant to be.” (Rīga, Jugla)*

*“Happiness and the ability to achieve it are challenges for Latvia as a whole and for each individual at the moment. My hope is that **every Latvian or resident of Latvia will take responsibility for themselves**, because I travel around Latvia a lot and pick up hitchhikers, and what I hear all the time is people passing responsibility on to others. I tend to do that myself. But I see it as a response to competitiveness, knowledge and understanding.” (Rīga, center)*

*“**Each of us is a role model** and an example **through our actions**.” (Iecava)*

*“People have to change. **Vissliktilatvija.lv, that has to stop**. If we take an honest look at ourselves, at what we have done, whether we complain, whether we throw that piece of paper in the trash, or complain that everything is dirty.” (Valgunde)*

*“I am happy. **Everything will be fine for us. We are starting with ourselves**. One neighbor is decorating her house, everyone has their own path, their own yard. If you complain and criticize, nothing will happen. Those who are active will work for at least 25 years and then they will be old people with champagne.” (Krimūnas)*

*“**We can all do something** and not leave everything to those in Rīga. My contribution is entrepreneurship. I want to create something here. I could do it in Rīga, but I chose to do it here. New jobs.” (Mērsrags)*

*“It is important to give children a sense of why we... are able to take responsibility for our lives. We are creating this place, and this place and attitude are important. **Go and do it, that is how we will build Latvia.**” (Vārme)*

*“**We are primarily responsible ourselves!** But everything is in chaos. We often criticize those above us without seeing ourselves.” (Kaldabruņa)*

*“We expect a lot from others and are not always ready to get involved ourselves. **We have to get involved ourselves.** We expect something from cultural workers, but we don’t go to events ourselves, or we criticize them even though we haven’t been there.” (Jēkabpils)*

*“**Who else but us?** Our future depends on it.” (Lūznava)*

*“**Our future is in our hands,** with our work, thoughts, knowledge and vision of the future.” (Pelēči)*

*“I believe that I **am capable of changing my life.** People shouldn’t be lazy, they should go out and change their lives.” (Dekšāres)*

*“I am an optimist, but I also see the bad things. But **if I don’t participate in it and don’t want to do anything about it, then I have no right to complain** that something is wrong.” (Launkalne)*

*“We can’t spend every day thinking about how bad things are. **Hope lies in simply going out and doing something.** Take control of yourself, regardless of what’s going on around you.” (Ape)*

*“Basically, we can all do the things that we can actually influence. Raise three children to be patriots of Latvia, set an example of why it is good to live in the countryside, do not support corruption, do your job with a clear conscience. **We ourselves create the place where we live.** Small choices that create a shared future.” (Naukšēni)*



7.THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF LATVIA

Anxiety and optimism

Anxiety about one's own safety risks, that of one's family and the country has been expressed in every circle. However, this has been more of a background noise than a focus of conversation. People long for security and peace, so that their children do not have to go to war and war does not touch us, so that we do not lose our country and Latvia remains free and independent.

Worries about tomorrow

It makes people **reconsider returning to Latvia**:

"My daughter has been living in Hamburg for many years and has considered returning, but due to the current uncertain situation, the decision has been postponed. For now, it's an open question. Concerns about safety. It causes fear and a feeling of insecurity when you open the news or social media. They even looked for a place to return to, but now they're taking a break." (Pelēči)

"My husband is retired, and we would most likely be in Latvia if it weren't for the damn war." (Latvians in Europe)

Encourages thoughts of **moving abroad**:

"I want to think about a sunny retirement, but maybe I should look for a place with relatives abroad, seeing what is happening in the world. But I would like to live here and enjoy the sea. The question of Latvia's existence is topical. I don't want it to be like it was in Soviet times." (Mērsrags)

"I am worried that my relatives in Latvia think that maybe they should leave." (Latvians in Europe)

Investments in the border region are being held back:

“We are in a wonderful place, but as long as there is a threat at the border, progress will be little. Maybe politicians know how to achieve major development in a place like this, but I understand that those who want to invest money are afraid to invest money in the border region.” (Daugavpils)

It makes people “put their plans on hold”:

“The last three years have been years of tremendous uncertainty in the context of COVID and war; I would like to have clarity in the near future about where to take my family. I am not sure about anything at the moment. We have put our family plans on hold because we don't know what will happen tomorrow. We want our children to live in a peaceful world so that we can focus on priorities such as development, child development, education, school, etc. There is complete uncertainty.” (Iecava)

However, overall, people are positive and even optimistic about Latvia's future:

“I see a positive future for Latvia. Everything is moving in the right direction and, despite the last month or two, Latvia is safe.” (Latvians abroad)

“Life in Latvia will be better than it is now. Something new will be found that will make Latvia more popular. Even if it's just tourism.” (Valmiera)

“Hope is inspired by people who don't give up and keep moving forward. Looking at what has been done so far, there is hope that we are moving in the right direction. I only hope in myself and my abilities. People need to take action.” (Ape)

“But despite my pessimistic words, I would say that I live in paradise.” (Valgunde)

“I am a terrible optimist. I know that things are good and will continue to be good. Things are bad when you're in a wooden box, then it's too late.” (Iecava)

“I used to live in London, and it's true that the quality of life is much better here. I like living in Latvia, and I think the future will be good.” (Riga, city center)

How do people see Latvia's future?

Beautiful:

"It's an incentive to work. A beautiful region, a beautiful city and a beautiful municipality. I hope that we have now reached rock bottom and can start climbing back up. I'm not a detail-oriented person, I like working together. I believe that the government will succeed." (Ķekava)

"I see a very beautiful, happy, green, beautiful Latvia." (Ventspils)

Prosperous and economically developed:

"I would very much like Latvia to be a prosperous, developed country. [...] Let there be prosperity." (Rīga, Jugla)

"I want Latvia to be economically developed, to be in the top 10–15 in Europe, and for the people to have a future. Latvia is a place where it is easy to start your own initiatives. Effective governance. Encourages communities." (Aizpute)

"I look at my children and grandchildren so that they can live in a free and prosperous Latvia." (Vārme)

"I live in an economically developed country that is favorable for investment. I hope there will be economic growth, changes in the territorial location of state institutions, and the development of re-emigration. Everyone who has left will find their niche here and return, because there is no place like home. I believe that they will bring their experience back here." (Dekšāres)

"I want people to live more actively. I want everyone to develop some kind of activity for themselves. I would like to see Latvia moving only upwards, in terms of people and technology. I want everything to develop. Right now we are at the bottom of the ladder, but I want us to climb higher and higher." (Valmiera)

"I want the economy to start moving upwards. When I go to Rīga, it's sad to see so many empty shop windows. Many buildings are empty. I would like a higher standard of living." (Ape)

Self-sufficient:

"I want Latvia to be self-sufficient in all areas." (Jēkabpils)

"In the future, I would like us to become more self-sufficient in many areas. If we were able to provide for ourselves in all aspects. We can produce food, we support local businesses. We also choose local producers when shopping, etc. I choose Latvian

products. If people understand how the economy works, everything will improve. There is a great lack of knowledge about how our economy works. We give our money back to our own people so that they can develop and grow.” (Ape)

With an educated society:

“Economic development is very important, maintaining the pace of recent years. Latvia has well-educated people who form an intellectual powerhouse for Europe and the world. We will never be the largest manufacturers or exporters of timber, but intellectual work is our value.” (Latvians abroad)

“I hope that in 25 years, Latvia will be a creative, educated Latvian state.” (Valmiera)

One that we can be proud of:

“We have so much to be proud of. Our goal is to motivate people to love Latvia, not to be ashamed of coming from Latvia. To live and be proud.” (Latvians in Europe)

“I would like to be proud of my Latvia. I don’t want Latvia to be at the bottom of the list in all areas in surveys. I want to be proud and say that I am Latvian and live in Latvia.” (Ape)

At the same time, there is a desire for clarity and certainty – **what is our identity, our goal, our strategic development vision**; where are we going and what are we focusing on? There is strong demand and interest for a vision of Latvia's development that we know, understand and can explain to each other:

*“At the moment, **I don’t see a common strategy for the country** that is clear to everyone. If the rules were clear to everyone, then everyone would play by them. If you don’t like them, leave. That’s perfectly normal.” (Riga, Jugla)*

*“I would like to wish Latvia, including some institutions, **that Latvia finally finds its identity, because strategically you can’t go** where you don’t know. Neither the LIAA nor anyone else understands where Latvia is going – what is the one central idea around which to turn. Estonia found itself, for example, the Estonians said that we are Scandinavia and started talking about e-things. I really wish our country had one very clear, strategic direction, because we need to understand what we have and what we don't have.” (Carnikava)*

“The goal – where are we really going? Why don't we know where we're going? We're reaching for the stars. We lack positive momentum.” (Iecava)

*“I think we need specialization – **we can't be a country that does everything, we have to specialize in something.** Whether it's IT or integration. Another thing – we need to think on a national level about the things we build that attract tourists. We need to think more broadly. France built the Eiffel Tower, which the public did not recognize at first, but now the Eiffel Tower attracts a lot of tourists. We need to have a vision.”*
(Bauska)

*“Thirty years... **we've been struggling and struggling and we don't know where we're going.** It started with each and every one of us. I don't want us to lose what we have now, and I want us to move in the right direction.”* (Vārme)

*“I would like **smart people to come up with a vision for the future that we can strive for and be proud of.** We need scientists and analytical work to set goals for the country. When President Zatlers visited our school, I asked him **what Latvia's vision was, where we were headed, which sectors we were developing, etc.** He couldn't answer and still doesn't have an answer. Education, defense, health... One of the health ministers was interviewed on TV 10 years ago and she said “That needs to be discussed” in response to every question. I counted and came up with at least 30 questions that needed to be discussed. And that's still happening.*

And what if, **in 25 years, Latvia is a**

a digital superpower?

“I think Latvia has the potential to become a digital superpower. We have a good foundation that is recognized around the world, but the fact that we don't see diversity within ourselves—not in kindergartens, not in people with disabilities—makes us think that the world is perfect. but by creating the right infrastructure and developing digital solutions, we could become a major power in 25 years.” (Rīga, center)

“Set such an ambitious goal. Not to surpass the Baltics, but to set a big goal. To be as developed as Switzerland in the IT field. Switzerland in artificial intelligence.” (Iecava)

Biological superpower:

“I would like us to be a biological superpower. That everything is truly biological, not just copying Poland’s many hectares.” (Riga, center)

“The key to Latvia’s competitiveness is greenery; organic methods don’t produce as much, but quality is more important than quantity.” (Riga, center)

World-famous for its film industry:

“About Straume – maybe we will be the ones to pave the way for small studios. A new generation is coming, and the young will always be wrong. What is happening now is that young people are coming in with new ideas and starting to play a different game. Flow has proven that it thinks differently. This is a promising sign that change is coming to Latvia.” (Bauska)

