

LATVIJAS SOCIĀLĀ ATMIŅĀ UN IDENTITĀTE  
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SOCIAL MEMORY OF LATVIA AND IDENTITY  
WORKING PAPERS

Klīta Ločmele

REPRESENTATION OF THE  
COUNTRYSIDE AND  
AGRICULTURE AS VALUES  
IN THE LATVIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE DAILY  
“LATVIJAS AVĪZE” (2004–2008)



VALSTS  
PĒTĪJUMU PROGRAMMA  
NACIONĀLĀ  
IDENTITĀTE

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Countryside and agriculture historically have been seen as one of the strongest pillars of Latvian national identity. Since the first national awakening in the middle of 19th century in culture and ideology, Latvians have positioned themselves as farmers, particularly during the first Republic of Latvia (1918–1940). Viewpoint about Latvians as ploughman nation revived again after the dissolution of USSR and retrieval of landed property. Latvia experienced a rapid increase of the number of farms.

Now Latvia is a part of Europe's present-day political, economic and cultural system of values. Social, economic and political circumstances have determined changes in the prestige of the countryside and agriculture. Analysis of the newspaper "Latvijas Avīze" content shows that today the countryside and agriculture are at a crossroads when it comes to their meaning, future and value. It means, that the basic elements of Latvian identity, probably is starting to fall to pieces.

*Key words:* national identity, countryside, agriculture, representation, values, "Latvijas Avīze"

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Paper is focused on analysis of the way in which there is mediated representation of the values of the Latvian nation in terms of the countryside and agriculture. Media representation of these values provides evidence of shifts in national identity.

The countryside and agriculture have undeniably been of historical importance in the establishment and maintenance of the national identity of Latvians. Latvians have positioned themselves as farmers, and they have seen the countryside as the main place where Latvianness, the stability of the nation and its traditions are preserved. Changes in the prestige of the countryside and agriculture, as well as in Latvia's socioeconomic and political circumstances have also led to changes in the meaning, which is attached to the countryside and agriculture in terms of the value system of the Latvian national identity and its representation in the media. Here I specifically refer to the transformation of basic elements of national identity in the daily "*Latvijas Avīze*." As the meanings have changed, national identity itself has changed, as well.

The aim of my research was to look at the meaning, which "*Latvijas Avīze*" attached to the countryside and agriculture during the first five years after Latvia joined the European Union (2004–2008). I have looked at the issue of whether the way in which the paper presents the countryside and agriculture represents values related to the Latvian national identity or whether they are gradually being eliminated from those values.

## Discourse of agriculture

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a part of Latvian nation representatives strived to dispose of the unification of concepts “Latvian” and “farmer” due to serfdom made poverty. But simultaneously, conformable to the ideologists’ viewpoint of discussed period, farmers’ emancipation also was Latvians’ emancipation, who formed the base for equality and wholesomeness of Latvian nation (Plakans, 1974, 1981).

After the establishment of independent state in 1918, Latvia was rustled by “farming wave”. About agrarian reform that was conducted in the first Republic of Latvia historian Katrina Z. S. Schwartz (2006, 8, 43) has written that it was done with the purpose of creating a nation of farmers – conservative and ethnical homogeneous. Other historians, for example, Arnolds Aizsilnieks (1968, 233–257) also point out that creating wide farmers’ stratum was guarantee for social stability and safety of new Republic of Latvia – allocated plots developed citizens who were loyal to authority of Republic of Latvia.<sup>1</sup>

The discourse of agriculture was praised in art and monuments. It was particularly the authoritarian regime of President Kārlis Ulmanis, which supported farmers as the source of Latvian culture. Ulmanis himself embodied the image of a proper Latvian farmer as something, which would be understood in terms of the mentality of Latvians (Butulis, 1999, 7, 19). Also during the same period, the Latvian philosopher Pauls Jurevičs (1936, 235–239) published a book in which he declared that “the Latvian nation can only be saved by our holding on to the countryside.” K. Schwartz (2006, 8) summarizes that the nature of the nation was entwined with the values of farmers and their work.

During the Soviet era, single-family farms were closed down, and collectivisation was organised. The “poesy of agriculture” began to be established in Latvian culture, particularly in the literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Hausmanis, 2001). The idea of the close link between Latvianness and farming survived the 50 years of Soviet rule and was also placed into the cradle of the restored Republic of Latvia.

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<sup>1</sup> More about agrarian reform see also Bērziņš, V. (ed.). (2003). *20. gadsimta Latvijas vēsture*. (Vol. 2, pp. 380–395). Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds.

### **Returning to past: initial hopes and collapse**

During the post-Soviet Latvian renaissance, historians supported the idea that there should be just one historical narrative – that of continuity between the past (the first republic) and the restored Latvian state (Jubulis, 2007). Cultural sociologist Dagmāra Beitnere (2003, 8) emphasizes that the agricultural achievements of the first republic shaped memories of a farm as the symbol of welfare in the country – one, which included not just economic gains, but also national identity and Latvianness.

That is why the equalisation of Latvianness and farming was a typical element in the Latvian nation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The words “resident of the countryside” were seen as an equivalent of the word “Latvian”, notes historian Vita Zelče (2006). The direct transfer of Latvian identity from the first republic to the years of the national renaissance was perhaps the easiest way for the nation in the restored state to define itself and to decide on those values, which are of priority.

The desire to have one’s own farm has been of decisive importance in several eras of the history of the Latvian people. That has been true ever since the cancellation of indentured servitude in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1990s, many people in Latvia moved from cities to the countryside because they obtained or regained rural properties.

Nonetheless, there were circumstances which encouraged an audit of the values of Latvian identity. These included an unstable national economy, the international market, and global processes in the world. The 10 to 20 years, which have passed since the restoration of independence, have not been enough for the stabilisation of a new foundation for identity, although, on the other hand, it was sufficient to make sure that the Latvian values that were communicated during the national renaissance faded, and the Latvian identity took on a new appearance under the effects of the West and of globalisation.

Researcher Dace Bula (2000, 53) writes that the renaissance restored the ability of Latvians for self-representation, but this was threatened by the country’s political and

economic inclusion into the European Union in 2004, which opened the country up to alien cultures and lifestyles.

The initial hope was that the success of agriculture in the first republic would be continued, but for complex reasons, this led to a high level of unemployment in the countryside, hopelessness, and an unwilling and slow departure from the dream of Latvia as a successful agrarian country. Instead there were only a few major farms which had hopes for success, and there was never a proper answer to the question of what would happen to the Latvian countryside in future.

Between the mid-1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, there were two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, statistics, as well as messages sent by individual experts and representatives of the government, suggested that agriculture as a leading sector of the economy was disappearing (and even that this should be facilitated as quickly as possible). By contrast, there were still public calls for arguments that would defend the idea that Latvians are a farming nation, along with the need to preserve agriculture as the cornerstone for the rural population. The idea that “Latvia springs from the countryside”, however, began to fade.

Ministry of Agriculture (2004, 7) saw agriculture exclusively as a manufacturing sector from which the highest level of effectiveness and a focus on sustainable development were expected. National policies were aimed at developing huge farms and country tourism, not at ensuring that traditional agriculture is seen as a priority. The historian K. Schwartz (2006, 1, 84) notes: “As soon as Latvia began to integrate itself into the European and global market, the traditional balance between land, work and Latvianness underwent a radical loss.”

In this study my hope was to see the way, in which “*Latvijas Avīze*” wrote about the countryside and agriculture at a time, when some rural residents were moving to cities or abroad, few farms were developing successfully and buying modern equipment, others were unable to repay their loans, people were selling off their farms, and the countryside began to be a place where there were depopulated farm villages, empty farms, and overgrown meadows.



## The newspaper “*Latvijas Avīze*” and methodology

“*Latvijas Avīze*” is one of three national dailies to be published in the Latvian language, and it has positioned itself as a nationalist and conservative newspaper. It has more subscribers than any other papers and it is one of the most widely read press publications in the country.<sup>2</sup> Newspaper was established in 1988, and, until 2003, it was known as “*Lauku Avīze*” (“*Countryside Newspaper*”). During the renaissance, the paper wrote about rural residents and farming, presenting messages about Latvianness and the traditional system of values which relates to it.

Researcher Ilze Liepiņa (2004) writes that “*Lauku Avīze*” in the first years of 21st century positioned itself as a defender of all farmers’ interests, but looks at them unified, marking them as “agriculture” or “countryside of Latvia.” She notes that concept “farmer” becomes a sinekdoha, which in the newspaper marks wider entirety – “nation”, “Latvians.”

This study is based on content analysis and historical discourse analysis (after researcher Ruth Wodak). I analysed issues of “*Latvijas Avīze*” from August, September and October of each year from 2004 and 2008 – the first five years after Latvia’s accession to the European Union. Such selection of months is supported in practical assumption that this period of year is the most intensive agrarian season and newspaper offers more representation of it. Thereby analysis involved 15 months, 394 issues and 421 publications (interviews, descriptive materials, discussions, photo reports, commentary and feuilletons).

Selection of “*Latvijas Avīze*” covers representing countryside and agriculture see in Image 1.

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<sup>2</sup> After market research company “TNS” data, in autumn 2008 „*Latvijas Avīze*” was in the third place in the top of average audithory of one issue. Since winter 2005, it is an increase for two places. Look more at: Briča, L. (2008). Nacionālais mediju pētījums: Prese, Vasara 2008–Rudens 2008. TNS. Retrieved January 26, 2009, from <http://www.tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=2865>; Krūze, E. (2005). Preses auditorijas pētījuma rezultāti: Ziema 2004–2005. TNS. Retrieved March 24, 2009, from <http://www.tns.lv/?lang=lv&fullarticle=true&category=showuid&id=2117>



Image 1. Some examples of “Latvijas Avīze” covers representing countryside and agriculture (2004–2008)

## **The main research results**

Right now there is a lack of clarity about the cultural and historical value of the countryside, and people who live there are bemused about the fact that the prestigious nature of rural areas is being lost. They're also not sure about their future. New values are emerging – modernisation, entrepreneurship, etc., which do not fit into the traditional representation of the countryside and agriculture. There is an attempt, in other words, to find a new ideological basis for the survival of the countryside and the process of agriculture.

The cause for this process might be the fact that Latvia's second period of independence has not been too long. The country's residents have not clearly defined and stabilised the cultural values of the new Latvian nation. During the process of national renaissance, Latvian values were of great and perhaps even exaggerated importance in the establishment of a national identity. Now, 20 years after the restoration of independence, there has been a critical reassessment of values, which are more based on current socioeconomic and political circumstances. The idea that the Latvia of the 1930s can be restored has disappeared from the agenda.

In the newspaper, rural residents and representatives of government expressed opposite views about the countryside, agriculture, and their meaning and development. There were divergent views on subjects such as administrative and territorial reforms, the existing types of farms (big ones and small ones), and government subsidies for the countryside.

### **An agriculture: mission or business?**

Rural residents support traditional agriculture, including tiny farms, as well as the need for government assistance, while civil servants and representatives of the government believe that agriculture must be seen as a business, not a lifestyle, and the main prerequisite for the survival of farms is economic efficiency.

For example, former Agriculture Minister Mārtiņš Roze in newspaper said that “every farm, no matter how small, is also a business.”<sup>3</sup> He also noted that “the dream of agriculture as a source of income for the family is gone [...] Agriculture is and will always be a business.”<sup>4</sup>

Whereas defenders of small farms, for his part, insisted that “the products from small farms are the ones of which we are proud when we travel abroad. We look for bread from Ķelmēni, for homemade cheese and for pressed hemp. All of these help us to maintain our identity and that which makes us different.”<sup>5</sup>

Interviewed farmer are certain that “each person who lives in Latvia’s countryside is important. I wouldn’t want one major farmer to replace many small farmers.”<sup>6</sup>

Rural residents feel that politicians are not trying to establish a common culture or set of values in the Latvian nation. Farmers, as opposed to bureaucrats and the government, see farming as a mission, a lifestyle or a hobby, insisting that profits are not the main thing for them. They claim that they have a specific “farmer’s gene” which means that farming is their destiny and their challenge in life. A true farmer, they say, is a farmer in his heart: “Only someone who can hear the way in which rye grows is a true farmer.”<sup>7</sup>

According to newspaper, farmers “must be placed on the pedestal” because “they are the ones who do things in Latvia’s countryside in terms of preserving traditional agricultural methods.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, “*Latvijas Avīze*” believes that the choice of farmers and others to live in the countryside is based more on social than on economic factors. Comparatively low opportunities for profits are compensated by pride and other moral benefits from life in the countryside.

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<sup>3</sup> Tomšone, I. Roze: Kāpēc mums piekāpties? (2004, Sept. 11). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Tomšone, I. Apvieno spēkus ražošanai. (2005, Oct. 25). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Tomšone, I. Sākt ražot un celt algas. (2007, Sept. 25). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 11–12.

<sup>6</sup> Šulmeistere, I. No sapņa līdz biznesam. (2008, Aug. 15). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 7, 10; see also Tomšone, I. Saimnieka Belēviča Briežu Valstība. (2006, Aug. 24). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Galkina, I. Ar pieredzi pret dabas untumiem. (2006, Aug. 1). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Tomšone, I. Lauku attīstība visiem un ikvienam. (2004, Oct. 5). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 13.

### **Farmers and Latvians: common character**

This lack of clarity and the fragmentation of values related to Latvian national identity are manifested in mediated reality. For instance, the newspaper describes farmers as having various traditional and positive characteristics such as hard work, a sense of order and a love of the environment, but it also points to shortcomings – thinking that is not focused on business, and an inability to adapt to market demands. The era of modernisation means that many of the positive characteristics, which used to be of value in the countryside, are disappearing – an isolated life, opposition to new influences, an insistence on traditional farming methods, etc. All of these are an obstacle against efficient and business-oriented farming.

For example, paper has argued that “farmers are accustomed to doing everything themselves, even though that is not always the most effective solution.”<sup>9</sup> In another story, farmer himself admits that “there must be many changes in the way in which farmers themselves think. There is a great deal of distrust about the idea that there will be no opportunities related to the European Union.”<sup>10</sup>

It must be noted here that most of the characteristics of farmers that are described in the newspaper are in line with the characteristics which it attributes to Latvians as a whole. Some people of have been interviewed by the paper suggest that Latvians are closely linked to the countryside: “The heart of a Latvian has always been in the countryside,” for instance.<sup>11</sup> A writer from the Sēlija administrative district, Lūcija Ķuzāne, offered the same thought in a question, which she posed to politician Māris Kučinskis: “You are the successors of farmers, and what are you doing with your fatherland while sitting around in Rīga?”<sup>12</sup>

In general, “*Latvijas Avīze*” still represents farmers as guarantee of stability, they overcome various problems, maintaining totality of typical characteristics of farmers and Latvians, too.

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<sup>9</sup> Graudiņš, U. Lauksaimnieki parādu priekšā. (2008, Oct. 31). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Tomšone, I. Lauku attīstība visiem un ikvienam. (2004, Oct. 5). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Dzedulis, Z. Čiris būsē ciematū. (2004, Aug. 24). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10–11.

<sup>12</sup> Grīnbergs, A. Plunkšķis pilsētai, laukiem – šlakatas? (2008, Sept. 25). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 12–13.

### **Modernisation instead traditions**

During the survey period, 21% of articles in *“Latvijas Avīze”* spoke of stability in the countryside and of preserved traditions. 11% of stories talked about modernisation and the contemporary values of the countryside, thus suggesting that the traditional values, which existed at one time gradually are being replaced. When it comes to modernisation, *“Latvijas Avīze”* speaks of European Union Structural Funds, which have allowed rural enterprises to update their equipment, as well as of new and modern jobs, which do not relate to traditional agriculture. For example, the installation of a golf course in a local meadow. There is a story about farmer, which has started a business of importing fillet of crocodile and other delicatessen. Newspaper represents his job positively because he has oriented his occupation in a perspective direction.<sup>13</sup>

Because rural modernisation is the vision for the development of the countryside that is also posited by representatives of the government, *“Latvijas Avīze”* presents the representation of modernisation as an important factor, which stands against the traditions of rural areas and makes the relevant values unclear.

Rural traditions are partly represented in the newspaper by traditional rural symbols – ones, which relate to nature (oak and linden trees, cattle, horses, storks, linen, rye, wheat, potatoes – 43% of all stories), ones, which symbolise rural work (10%) – the plough, the ploughshare, the shovel, the horse-drawn cart, bales of hay, symbols of the local environment (14%) – granaries and other outbuildings, farms, single-family farms, windmills, apple orchards, chests, loaves of bread, etc. 33% of the surveyed stories did not make any reference to these groups of rural symbols.

The recognition of rural values is manifested indirectly via these symbols in the newspaper. I might particularly mention the representation of milk and rye bread. Farmer Gundars is cited in the newspaper: “Milk has always been something more than just milk for Latvia.”<sup>14</sup> The newspaper applies rural symbols to the whole nation. One story argued that bakers use grain from Latvia’s fields to produce “loaves of rye bread

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<sup>13</sup> Viļķina, A. Liellopu vietā – krokodilu fileja. (2008, Oct. 16). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Grīnbergs, A. Piena devējas puķu dārzā. (2004, Sept. 28). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 9.

that are Latvia's pride and joy."<sup>15</sup> In writing about the national symbols, the newspaper often uses diminutive versions of the various words to indicate how important these values are and how close the people of Latvia should be to them.

As traditional rural values newspaper also represents the earth, the surrounding environment, the rural landscape, etc.

The land and the natural landscape are the main rural values that are presented in the newspaper. It has propagandised the view that "land is the most valuable thing that belongs to Latvia,"<sup>16</sup> and that "Latvia needs its land."<sup>17</sup> In an interview, the chairman of the Stāmeriena Parish Council, Raitis Apalups, had this to say: "The families which have not been in a big hurry to sell their land will really benefit from this, because during our freedom battles, Latvians were prepared to lay down their lives for a corner of land. Land is sacred, it is a matter of pure existence."<sup>18</sup>

In the public discourse of Latvians, the land is more than just a working environment for farmers. It is a symbol of Latvians and their transformation from servants of the nobility to rulers of their own land. Latvians could determine their own lives after that transformation. In the collective memory of the nation, this process is of powerful importance, and the newspaper continually reminds readers of the changes that have occurred. In Latvian culture, land is a cornerstone for the emergence of a Latvian identity and for the sustainability of other values of Latvianness. Authors have always produced colourful images of the traditional lives of farmers who exist in the world and have a certain set of values.

### **The present roles of the countryside**

"*Latvijas Avīze*" argues that the countryside is important in Latvia in three ways – as a place where rural residents live, as a place where urban residents can enjoy recreation, and a source of healthy and natural foodstuffs. This indicates, in general

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<sup>15</sup> Tomsone, I. Graudu tirgū – bez katastrofas. (2005, Aug. 22). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Vītola, I. Vīdārgākais hobijs Latvijā. (2005, Aug. 20). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Beļavnieks, J. Zemes apsaimniekošana: vai tikai īpašnieku problēma? (2006, Aug. 10), *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Līcītis, E. Dūmeņi laukos atkal sāk kūpēt. (2004, September 29). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 5.

terms, that the countryside is someplace to visit, but not a place to live. Urban residents “look for a quiet and lovely corner of nature to relax properly.”<sup>19</sup> Words such as “peaceful,” “beautiful,” “untouched nature,” and “corner of paradise” are those, which are used most often to describe areas of the countryside that are of interest to tourists. “No matter what people do in cities, their souls always drag them back to the countryside where they were born,” says interviewee in the newspaper.<sup>20</sup>

The city, by comparison, is described with negative words in “*Latvijas Avīze*” – “noisy,” “hurried,” “crowded.”<sup>21</sup> People are supposed to go to the countryside to gain refuge from all of this and to “get out of Rīga.”<sup>22</sup>

Food produced by Latvian farmers is described in the newspaper as “our own food, without chemicals,”<sup>23</sup> “ecologically clean,”<sup>24</sup> “truly tasty and healthy,”<sup>25</sup> “true treasures from the countryside”<sup>26</sup>, etc. Fruits and vegetables, which are grown in the farmsteads, “*Latvijas Avīze*” contrasts to food in the supermarket, especially to imported goods. Journalist popularize viewpoint that people prefer tomatoes grown in the household plot.<sup>27</sup>

To sum up, “*Latvijas Avīze*” is a repository of the spiritual values of farming, because it preserves and aesthetically represents traditional rural values such as “the unique peace of a country farm,”<sup>28</sup> the alley between fields of rye which leads to people’s homes<sup>29</sup>, the lovely load of potatoes<sup>30</sup>, and other, similar elements of the countryside. According to the newspaper, the countryside is interesting to travellers mostly because of its aesthetic and traditional values.

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<sup>19</sup> Grīnbergs, A. Kazākos, kur aitas gana ... stārķi. (2005, August 30). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Dzedulis, Z. Čiris būvē ciematu. (2004, August 24). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10–11.

<sup>21</sup> Look, for example, Lipska, R. Pļavas griezēm un tūristiem. (2007, Aug. 15). *Latvijas Avīze*. P. 11, 13.; Grīnbergs, A. Lauku dzīve – arī kūlenis gaisā. (2008, Sept. 11). *Latvijas Avīze*. P. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ancītis, T. Allažu superpagasts. (2004, Oct. 14). *Latvijas Avīze*. 10. lpp.

<sup>23</sup> Rūtenberga-Bērziņa, I. Īsta pārtika labākai dzīvei. (2008, Aug. 12). *Latvijas Avīze*. P. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Šulmeistere, L. No sapņa līdz biznesam. (2008, Aug. 15). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 7., 10.

<sup>27</sup> Rūtenberga-Bērziņa, I. Īsta pārtika labākai dzīvei. (2008, Aug.12). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Galkina, I. Metālkalis audzē upenes. (2004, Aug. 3). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Grīnbergs, A. Kalte rudzu vidū – kā Amerikā. (2006, Aug. 19). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10.

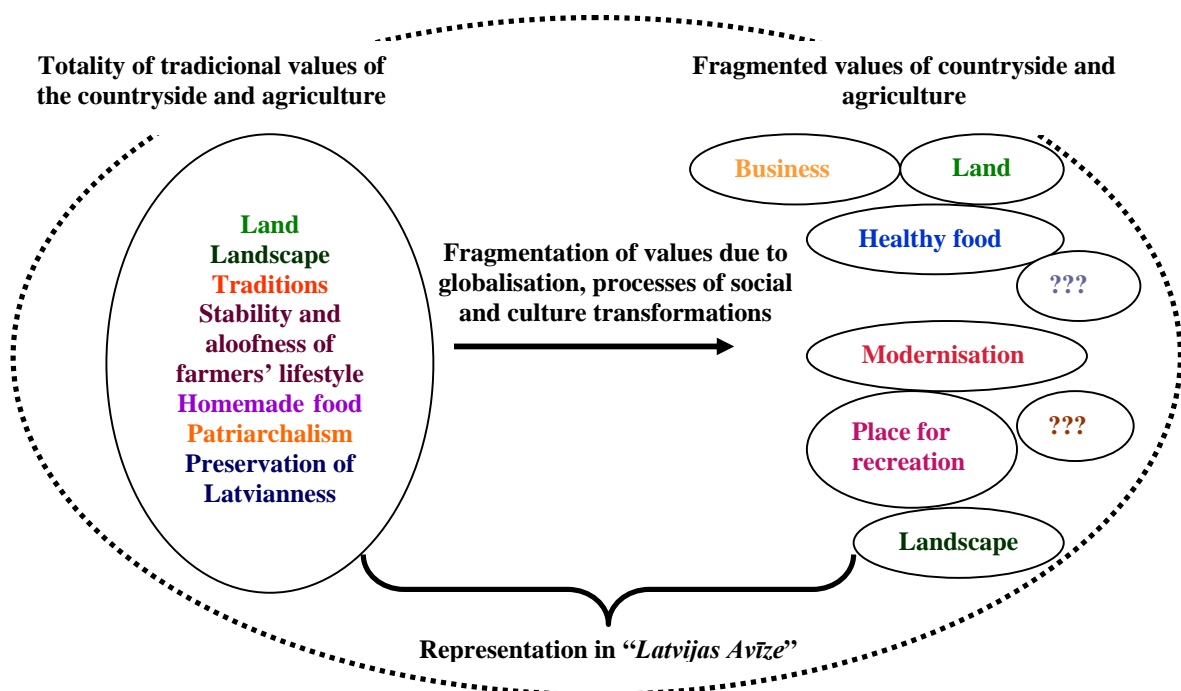
<sup>30</sup> Galkina, I. Nav slikta gada, ja apkopj. (2004, Sept. 18). *Latvijas Avīze*, P. 10.



Although the standard of living in the countryside is lower than in urban areas, and unemployment rates are higher, 67–70% of rural residents do not plan to move to other places in Latvia or abroad (Rasnača, L. (ed.), 2007, 52). This shows that the choice to live in the countryside is supported by various social, not economic circumstances. It is likely that the decision also is based on the value of the countryside and of agriculture, as enshrined in the collective memory of the nation.

## Conclusion

In “*Latvijas Avīze*” between 2004 and 2008, the countryside and farming were presented as values for the national identity of Latvians, but those values have been reviewed. The paper has rejected several of the traditional elements in those values because of the social phenomena that are typical of the post-modern era. According to “*Latvijas Avīze*”, the countryside and agriculture are still values in terms of Latvian national identity, but not as absolutely as was once the case. The traditional values of the countryside and agriculture have been breaking up into fragmentary values. This process is illustrated in figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The modification of countryside and agriculture as Latvian national identity values in the newspaper “*Latvijas Avīze*” (2004–2008)

The result of fragmentation of values has been a lack of clarity not only in terms of the values of Latvian identity, but also of the way in which these apply to Latvia’s countryside and farming. As far as the newspaper is concerned, rural residents are pessimistic about the future of the countryside and its development.

It is likely that a similar study of the way in which the countryside and agriculture was presented in the paper in the early 1990s would have confirmed an even more powerful evaluation of this issue – the countryside and agriculture presented as inviolable elements of Latvian culture and identity. The demands which rural residents are making vis-à-vis the quality of life at this time are occurring at a time when the countryside has little in the way of capabilities, and this ensures that the importance of traditional rural values are diminishing, and the advantages of cities are being seen instead.

The countryside and agriculture may eventually be excluded from the total values of Latvian national identity. It is also possible that the national identity will preserve only some of the traditional rural values – the view that the countryside is a source of healthy food or a location for peaceful relaxation, for instance. These, of course, are values that are identified by urban residents.

Experience in France (Nora, 1998/1992) and other Western countries shows that the countryside in Latvia will probably become a part of collective memory, interwoven with nostalgia about that which has been lost. The fragmentation of national values and the beginning of a less than clear presentation of these values in one of Latvia’s most conservative newspapers shows that there are threats against the continuity of the existing Latvian national identity. Changes in any part of a nation’s identity indicate transformations in the self-definition of the entire nation. The lack of an overall image of values in the newspaper suggests that the elements, which shape the Latvian national values can be expected to change. The older and accustomed values are starting to disappear, and they are no longer representative. At the same time, however, no alternative has yet been produced.

## Summary

Although in Latvian culture countryside and agriculture have been seen as substantial part of Latvian national identity, two last decades have brought changes in conception of importance of these elements of national identity. At first, disintegrating USSR, in Latvia revived wave of farming, and in public discourse Latvians again defined themselves as ploughman nation. But further development of such self-representation silenced economical conditions which were not supporting small households. Especially, uncertainty of countryside and agriculture as values in Latvian national identity prospered after Latvia entered European Union. The historical self-representation of Latvians as a “nation of farmers” is no longer being unambiguously attached to the entire nation.

An article is focused on analysis of the way in which there is mediated representation of the values of the Latvian nation in terms of the countryside and agriculture. Media representation of these values provides evidence of shifts in national identity.

The aim of the research was to look at the meaning, which “*Latvijas Avīze*” attached to the countryside and agriculture during the first five years after Latvia joined the European Union (2004–2008). I have looked at the issue of whether the way in which the paper presents the countryside and agriculture represents values related to the Latvian national identity or whether they are gradually being eliminated from those values.

Article consists of description of countryside and agriculture as historically defined Latvian national identity values, also it gives a brief insight into the analyzed newspaper “*Latvijas Avīze*”, explains used methodology, and offers an interpretation of the main research results.

Basic conclusions present that countryside and agriculture are still values in terms of Latvian national identity, but not as absolutely as was once the case. The traditional values of the countryside and agriculture have been breaking up into

fragmentary values. For example, from totality of traditional values of the countryside and agriculture which existed in previous century and is praised in the literature, nowadays newspaper represents only some of them – ones which as values identify urban residents, for example, healthy food, place for recreation, landscape etc. Thus the newspaper suggests that the elements which shape the Latvian national values can be expected to change. But changes in any part of a nation's identity indicate transformations in the self-definition of the entire nation. In the newspaper's representation, Latvians are no more fully farmers' nations, but still maintain some of its basic features. To conclude, the older and accustomed values are starting to disappear. At the same time, however, no alternative has yet been produced.

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