

PATH DEPENDENCY AND LANDSCAPE BIOGRAPHIES IN LATGALE, LATVIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the path dependency of landscapes in Latgale, Latvia from the present perspective at the regional and local scale. During the last centuries Latvia's landscapes have passed through radical changes, which were driven by political events. Each new political era discarded the ideas of the previous era and subsequently reorganized the land(scape) according to the new views. At the regional level the role of history is significant in analyzing landscapes while at the local level the main force is people, often themselves not knowing the history of the place but putting the existing path dependency into practise or disregarding it. The biographies of two former villages are discussed: one which is nearly deserted but filled with forgotten or neglected cultural heritage values and the other – alive and interwoven with some old (almost forgotten) cultural practises. Path dependency in landscapes is relevant only regarding the attachment of people to a place and the experience on which their further desires are based.

Key words: Landscape biographies, landscape change, Latgale, path dependency

Rezumējums: Raksta pamatā ir pēctecīguma (path dependence) izpausmes Latgales ainavā reģionālā un lokālā mērogā no šodienas skatupunkta. Pēdējo gadsimtu laikā Latvijā ir notikušas dramatiskas ainavas pārmaiņas, to galvenie rosinātāji – politisko varu maiņas. Katra jaunā politiskā ēra veidoja jaunas ainavas saskaņā ar tās ideoloģiju un idejām. Rakstā tiek diskutēts, ka reģionālā mēroga ainavas studijas ir cieši saistītas ar vēstures izpratni un tās lomu, kamēr lokālā mērogā galvenie ainavas veidotāji ir cilvēki un to darbības, kuri bieži vien pat neapzinās vietas/reģiona vēsturi, bet praktizē vai ignorē daudzas paražas vai telpiskās struktūras pēctecības ainavā. Vietas piemēri ir apspriesti divu bijušo ciemu ainavu biogrāfijās: viena ir faktiski pamesta, bet glabā tautā aizmirstu un valstiski novārtā atstātu kultūras mantojuma vērtības, otra – dzīva un daudzu senu tradīciju pēctecību caurausta. Pēctecīgums ainavā ir nozīmīgs, ņemot vērā cilvēku sasaisti ar ainavu un pieredzi, kurā viņi balsta savas nākotnes ieceres.

Atslēgas vārdi: peizāža biogrāfija, peizāža izmaiņas, Latgale, ceļš dependancy

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1. Introduction

Already in the late 1960s a Latgalian, Briška (1969b), observed that Latgale's peasants live within a spiral of successive changes, and figuratively expressed it using the Latgalian folk song: "Ceirulš olu dora uz tō mīta gola. Vēl na tai, vēl na tai – sōksim vēl nu gola!" (A lark brews beer sitting on the pole, it's not good, it's not good – let's start over!).

Everything we see in this world is not real in the sense that it has a separate self, but is actually an accumulation of causes and conditions. This ancient Oriental wisdom provokes us to look at landscapes in a different way to explain their present appearance. The interplay of necessities and chances lies at the basis of our diverse world (Siliņš 1999). Landscapes seen as living spaces, as deliberative or fortuitous creations of individuals may give a better understanding of their nature. To this end, one appropriate approach is the study of a landscape's biography where the focus lies on the individual's role in the making of the landscape, the particularity of the landscape itself (Samuels 1979). The perspective of landscape biography allows us to explore the events forming the landscape in a more intimate atmosphere. However, landscape biographies must be studied simultaneously with aspects of landscape change which involves the interpretation of land use/cover, settlement patterns, and functionality change in the context of urbanization, globalization, socio-economic or political processes. The latter provides good basic knowledge about landscape changes at the regional level whereas at the local level some other driving-forces might be the focus.

This paper studies landscape change at the regional (Latgale – a cultural region of Latvia) and local (two former villages in Latgale) levels endeavoring to use the theory of path dependency through which may be revealed the main causes and conditions of landscape evolution. Schwartz (2004) puts the question of historical analysis this way: "while everyone agrees that history matters, no one agrees *how* history matters". According to Sewell (1996, cf. Djelic & Quack 2007) path dependency means "what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time". At the same time the 'hard' version of "path dependency", applicable in economics and political science, refers to specifically those historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties (Mahoney 2000). Mahoney suggests three defining features in all path-dependency analysis. First, it involves the study of causal processes that are highly sensitive to events that take place in the early stages of an overall historical sequence. Second, in a path-dependent sequence, early historical events are contingent occurrences that cannot be explained on the basis of prior events or "initial conditions". The latter is more clearly expressed in the words of Goldstone (1998, cf. Mahoney 2000): "Path dependence is a property of a system such that the outcome over a period of time is not determined by any particular set of initial conditions. Rather, a system that exhibits path dependency is one in which outcomes are related stochastically to initial conditions. Third, once contingent historical events take place path-dependent sequences are marked by relatively deterministic causal patterns or what can be thought of as "inertia"".

Thus, environmental characteristics of the landscape as such should not be considered as initial conditions for the outcome of landscape development. Therefore the selected village landscapes' natural environment is not considered as *a priori* deterministic in this research. The focus is on the formative periods of the landscape, people (landscape inhabitants) and their impact on landscape change. At the regional level today's landscape structure and its most characteristic elements as the result of historical sequences are disclosed.

The spatial boundaries of the surveyed landscape are defined by the mental borders of well-known space of landscape inhabitants. In other words, the conception with antique touch, as Cosgrove puts it (2006), could be used, "landscape as a particular spatiality in which a geographical area and its material appearance are constituted through social and environmental practise". These landscape boundaries very well correspond to the former village frontiers (villages were parcelled into single farmstead plots in the beginning of the 20th century) and this knowledge is handed over to the next generations. Furthermore, reference is made here also to Ingold (2000) that "the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them". This concept of

landscape allows us to concentrate on the individuals and their perception and actions within their home landscape.

In this study, a historical descriptive approach was used and included an analysis of statistical data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia and historical documents and maps from the Historical Archive of the Latvia, air photo analysis, field investigations, interviews and text analysis.

2. Past and present of Latgale in a regional perspective

Latgale is one of Latvia's four cultural regions and is located in the eastern part of the country, on the border of Russia, Belarus and Lithuania. The total area of the region is about 15 thousand km², i.e. ¼ of all Latvia's territory. The population of Latgale region according to its administrative boundaries (Figure 1) is 385 thousand or ¼ of all Latvia's population (excluding the capital Riga with 765 thousand inhabitants).

Political boundaries that for centuries separated Latgale from other parts of Latvia were dissolved only in the beginning of the 20th century when Latvia experienced its first independence (1918-1940). The most essential turning point in Latgale's history was its annexation to Poland as the Polish Inflanty (1561-1772) and after the Great Northern War its incorporation into the Russian Empire as part of the Vitebsk Gubernya. However, these almost 600 years of bondage are considered to be crucial in terms of cultural decline, peasant's enslavement and poverty in total. Serfdom was abolished much later than elsewhere in Latvia (in 1861) and the law granting the legal basis for creation of peasant-owned farms eventually was issued. Upon reunification with the rest of Latvia in 1918, Latgale was most underdeveloped, for instance, only 49 % inhabitants (older than 10) were able to read. As well, amongst other Latvia's regions Latgale stood out with its relatively high rural population density (29.4/km² vs. 14.9/km² in 1930), settlement type (villages vs. single farmsteads) and common field farming practises.



Fig 1. Latgale's planning region according to administrative boundaries established in 2003. The dashed line marks the approximate boundary of the cultural region of Latgale.

2.1 People of Latgale

One of Latgale's distinctive features is the ethnic composition of its population. Latvians (Latgalians) form the majority in only two districts – Preiļi (67%) and Balvi (77%), accordingly in the westernmost and northernmost parts of the region. In Daugavpils – the second largest city in Latvia, only 16% of inhabitants are ethnic Latvians. Here the majority are Russians, Poles and Byelorussians. Although according to statistics elsewhere in Latvia most of non-Latvians

live in urban areas, in Latgale this is not the case. For instance, in the Daugavpils district, 39% of the rural population is Latvian, 38% Russian and 12% Polish. The latter indicates that Slavic people are a significant part of Latgale's countryside, i.e., traditional landscape, and are attached to it; conversely to those Slavs who have entered Latvia during Soviet times and prefer to live in urban areas. Many of Russians that form today's population are descendants of the Old Believers who, as part of a mass migration process at the end of 17th century, entered Latgale in order to escape persecution in Russia. Additionally, many soldiers-ploughmen of Slavic descent settled in Latgale's countryside after the region's annexation to Russia. Many similarities could be found in Slavic and Latgalian landscapes, for example, village organization and building style (Figure 2), but the main difference was related to the presence of religion in them. The Russians belong either to the Orthodox or Old-believer churches, whereas Latgalians and a part of the Byelorussian minority are Catholics.



Fig 2. Russian farmstead in a village in 1920s (source: Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum)

The Catholic faith and its expression is an integral part of Latgale's landscapes and is the greatest relic from the Polish Inflanty. Whereas Catholicism was adopted in Latgale, the Lutheran faith was maintained in Kurzeme, Zemgale and Vidzeme (the other cultural regions of Latvia) and it remains so to this day. Figure 3 illustrates a crucifix that now is situated on an abandoned field in Vacumnīki village. Historically it has marked the village's main crossroads, but as the 'movement to farmsteads' occurred, the centre of village disappeared. In the background the remnants of a Soviet era farm are visible, but the bushes in the foreground are a reflection of today's economic decline whereby previously cultivated fields have overgrown. Nevertheless, the crucifix is still tended which indicates the strength of religion and its obvious manifestation in the landscape.

Such crucifixes have had (and still have) several functions (Zeile 2006). First, they are considered to be an adornment of the landscape – a pictorial symbol of a Catholic country. During evenings in May villagers gathered at crucifixes and sang praises to the Virgin Mary. Eventually these places became an important venue for socialization. If during feudal times every village in Latgale had at least one crucifix, after the abolishment of serfdom the erection of crucifixes diversified and flourished (crucifixes are found in villages, outside individual houses, along roadsides and at crossroads and in graveyards). The crucifixes emerged during the intensive russification processes after the annexation of Latgale to the Russian Empire in 1772 and most of them survived the Soviet era which was characterized by its militant atheistic doctrines.



Fig 3. Crucifix in a layered landscape (photo: A. Zariņa)

3. Paths of landscape evolution

The most relevant path for Latgale's landscape development began in the mid 16th century along with the Valak Reform (1557) introduced by Sigismund August, the king of Poland. After the Livonian War (1558-1583) the territory of Latgale came under the Polish-Lithuanian rule and resulted in the harmonization of laws. The Valak Reform imposed restructuring of lands so that a three-field crop rotation system could be implemented and every peasant could have a share of land in each of the fields (Brežgo 1954). This historical event has left an important imprint on the present landscape structure of Latgale and distinguishes it from other regions of Latvia.

3.1 Land structure: links to the past

The reunification of Latgale with the rest of Latvia in 1918 reduced rural differences through the process of agrarian reforms that in Latgale's case implied the partition of villages into single farmstead plots (Figure 4). This process was referred to as the 'movement to farmsteads' and in substance was similar to the 'enclosure movement' in the Western Europe. One of the goals of the agrarian reform was to eliminate the existence of collective property and as a consequence, at least outwardly, Latgale's landscapes were converted to ones similar to those in the other cultural regions of Latvia. The other goal of the agrarian reform was to reduce the proportion of large landowners (in Latgale 53.8% of land belonged to estates). The agrarian reforms implemented the government of Latvia were a success and by the 1939 practically all villages and manors were parcelled.

The Law of Agrarian Reform (1920 - 1937) prohibited land parcelling into units smaller than 10 ha, although for Latgale this was not considered mandatory in order to resolve various local ambiguities (Mitulis 1928). After the abolishment of serfdom a similar law had likewise been disregarded (Terentjeva 1973). According to statistics (Švābe, 1933) in 1929, farms with a size of 5-10 ha prevailed (33.7%), 15.6% were smaller than 5 ha, but less than 1% of farms exceeded 50 ha. Such a landscape settlement structure is rooted in the hereditary rights that in Latgale were different from the rest of Latvia. In other regions the heirloom was inherited exclusively by the oldest son. In Latgale, on the contrary, land was given to all sons in equal portions when they started their independent life. The custom was to divide the whole of the peasant's possessions, either hereditary leaseholds or properties: arable and meadow strip fields, rights of use of pastures and forests belonging to manors, household plots with all buildings on it (Briška 1969a). This form of land management was called *dzimtsbiržu valdījumi* (hereditary demesne), but in Latgale existed also the other custom – *kopzemju valdījumi* (common land demesne), when common land was re-allotted each year (after the law issued in

1893 – every twelve years) according to the number of adult men in the village. The latter, with few exceptions, was practised in the regions that administratively, before the independent Latvia was proclaimed, belonged to the Pskov Gubernya (Riekstiņš 1935). All in all, in such a manner rural areas were characterized by an increasing number of household properties of a decreasing size. The present landscape structure (Table 1) shows a rather strong linkage to this historical custom. In short, the figures presented below illustrate the main characteristic of Latgale's landscapes: they are composed of territorially smaller farm units (mostly households with the size less than 10 ha) that numerically exceed those in other districts of Latvia by a factor of two.

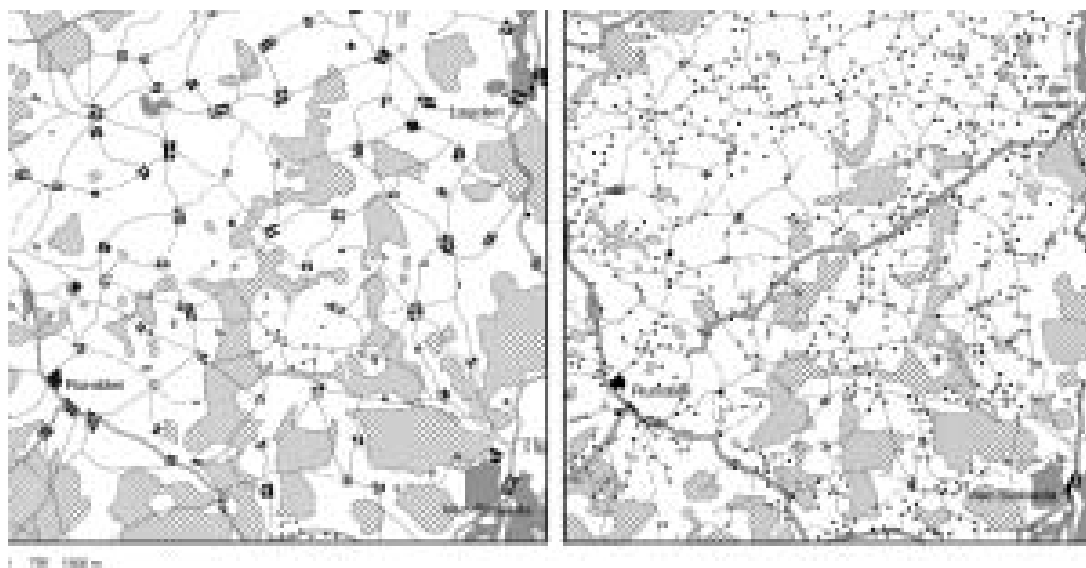


Fig 4. The impact of agrarian reform on landscape structure during Latvia's first independence period (white – agricultural lands, including wetlands and meadows; checked pattern – forests, gray – lakes). On the left the landscape structure in 1922 (Istra Parish, Latgale) when people were living predominantly in villages. On the right the same area in 1929 after the 'movement to farmsteads' when the landscape filled up with farmsteads and new roads.

	In Latgale, average in a district	In the rest of Latvia's regions, average in a district
Number of farms	8021	4635
household plots	6807	2784
private farms	993	1583
Farms that produce 75-100% of agricultural products for the market	2.4%	8.4%
Farms that do not produce agricultural products for the market	61.7%	60.2%
Farmsteads with agricultural lands of less than 10 ha	5902 (72.5%)	2952 (63.6%)
Farmsteads with agricultural lands of more than 50 ha	93 (1.2%)	186 (4.1%)
Average farm size	14.73 ha	23.13 ha

Tab 1. Statistics on farmsteads (small households or large private farms) in Latgale compared with other regions of Latvia (Data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2000)

The period of Soviet occupation (1944 - 1991) yet further unified and simplified the landscapes through the construction of vast drainage tile works to drain agricultural lands, urbanization and the collective farm formation processes.

4. Village biographies and landscape nature

4.1 Landscape of the nearly deserted village of Luņi

The former Luņi village (309 ha) is located at the eastern borderland of Latvia (Figure 1) near Lake Šķaune, about 4 km from the centre of Istra parish, Vecslabada. Natural conditions in the locality are rather unfavourable for agricultural activities mainly due to the intensively articulated moraine relief and wetlands in hill depressions and near the lake. Nevertheless, all of this area has been used for agricultural purposes – predominantly common strip land farming practises until the beginning of 20th century.

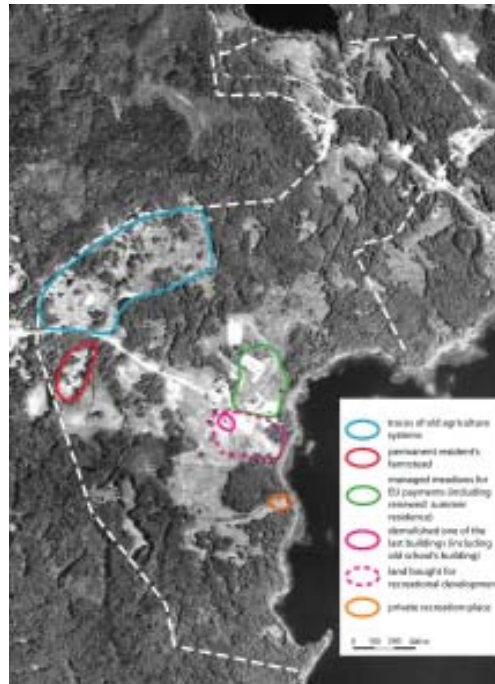


Fig 5. 1996 air photo of the Luņi village territory (dashed line) and the characteristics of the landscape elements and functions in 2006

Today the former Luņi village is a tranquil nook bearing the slight imprint of man's activities in the form of the historical road network and overgrown grassland patches. The sole permanent resident was born here immediately following the village parcelling. He lives in a small farmstead hidden in the woods surrounded by swamps and practices subsistence agriculture. It is thoroughly a local place as the road leading to it essentially ends near the farmstead. Only a few locals use it to access the lake for fishing purposes. However, the first impressions of the harmonious tranquillity can be deceiving. In the former village centre historical buildings have recently been demolished, it is evident that some meadows are being maintained with the aid of the EU subsidies and tire tracks of off-road vehicles on the grassy ground along the lake suggest that these lands are a valuable resource (Figure 5). But the real value, completely ignored by the municipality and state, lies among scattered pine trees and wooded patches not far from the lake where on the former agricultural lands rich evidence of traces of old settlement structures and the former land management system can be found. This is a unique landscape of Latvia where it is possible to distinguish land banks and stone edges from the period of the open field system slightly modified by the succeeding 'movement to farmsteads' process.

The following question arises: how has this landscape survived the individualisation period of Latvia's first independence when people were eager to level their allotted land parcels, namely, to do away with any evidence of the former irrational land management system. Similarly, the Soviet period was characterized by the intensive use of lands regardless of their suitability for a given purpose.

The oldest known land use and administrative map of this place is the geodetic plan (1784) of Vitebsk Gubernia. It shows that village belonged to the large manor Landskorona and that the open field system was practised here. During feudalism peasants belonging to noblemen were the most awkwardly situated in comparison to church and state peasants in terms of restrictions

on personal freedom and the provision of a minimal means of livelihood (Brežgo 1940). Some time later the village became part of the smaller estate Sibelino. The miserable living conditions of the Luņi peasants can be interpreted from the map that is derived from the village parcelling plans and documents (Figure 6). It shows that the total area of the village was 192 hectares; land use – predominantly arable fields with a few patches of dry meadows, but quite a large portion was mire and wetlands. Meadows were considered to be crucial in terms of cattle pasturing and soil fertilization. But soils in parts of the former arable fields are very poor and heavily eroded, formed on gravel or rocky compact loam parent material as indicated by the results of an ecological survey and soil maps. It is assumed that practically all well drained lands of the village were adjusted to strip fields. This is supported by the locals who recall that the landscape was previously entirely open. Strip land banks and edges are found on even steep slopes (20-25 degrees), some of the slopes were converted to terraces to enable the tilling. Additionally, there were no forests within the village boundaries which evidently made peasants completely dependant on the manor. According to the laws of the post-serfdom period (Brežgo 1954; Briška 1969a), all forests (sometimes even single trees) belonged to landlords and could be used by peasants only through the 'right of use', which meant increasingly greater pressure of corvée. In such circumstances this home-landscape could be compared with *living hell* and that is inscribed in the history of this place.



Fig 6. The land structure of Luņi village before land parcelling and 'movement to farmsteads' in 1928

According to the 1897 population census data, 102 inhabitants lived in Luņi on 16 household plots. Ethnically they were Byelorussians; approximately half of them were Catholics, the remainder – Orthodox. In 1928 there were 78 new landowners who had moved their belongings (including houses and subsidiary buildings) to 39 allotted land parcels. But the numbers do not show the real scene: only seven families (from 16 in 1897) are still dwelling there, which means that nine families have left the village for various reasons. As there is no oral or written evidence remaining, it is inferred that they left for a 'better life' in Siberia to where many Latgalians migrated at the turn of the 20th century. If initially (1880s) migration was burdened, after the Revolution of 1905 it was even popularized and facilitated. According to the Vecslabada Church chronicles in the vicinity "there exist no villages where a family would not have decided to leave for far-away lands. The cause of such migration are lean-years as well as a shortage of land to grow sufficient grain not only for bread to feed themselves for the whole year but also for sowing" (Brežgo 1954). For those who stayed in the village the only possibilities to earn some extra money was to leave for seasonal work either in other regions of Latvia or to St. Petersburg, as for example did peasants from Luņi and neighbouring villages.

The Baltic German A. Bielenstein during his travels through Latgale in the late 19th century (Bīlenšteins 2001) drew attention to the poverty and miserable circumstances of the peasants.

He came to a conclusion that the first cause was the irrational *illegitimate* hereditary right (mentioned before), but the main source of the poverty lay in a people's unwillingness to change and to break with traditional customs. The law granting the creation of peasant-owned farms simultaneously prohibited further strip field parcelling in order to avoid uncertainties regarding to who should pay the rent. Yet this regulation was disregarded in practise (Brežgo 1954). Bielenstein suggested that the fulfilment of peasant's hopes and desires would be the expropriation of estate lands – this suggestion shows an origin in the revolutionary ideas of the East (Bīlenšteins 2001).

'Movement to farmsteads' began in late 19th century, sometimes unwarranted, but mainly organized by the wealthiest peasants, later it was promoted by Stolypin's Reform, but fully was accomplished by the Agrarian Reform. The Luņi peasants already in 1920 demanded in an ultimatum that their village be parcelled, but with the condition that they receive about 230 ha of extra land: 150 ha of land attached to the village lands but still the manor's property and 50 ha from the manor's meadows, as well as 30 ha as compensation for the 'rights of use'. However, the process was carried out only in 1928 as there indeed was a reasonable need for land allotments which they eventually received in the form of state land allotments and compensations for the 'rights of use' of pastures (in total 117 ha). These lands were taken from the Sibelino estate, which was nationalized and eventually parcelled (in 1922) as specified by the law. Therefore one can assume that the desire for land had reached a peak by the beginning of the Agrarian Reform. All peasant families had asked for loans to cover the expenses related to the relocation of belongings and in a very short time they had completed the move (the maximum time allowed for moving was 3 years). For all that, peasants from allotments No. 13-17 (Figure 7) kept the strip land boundaries and continued to manage farms within this pattern, and it is likely that also some others did alike.

A new path of landscape development had begun. But to strengthen a path there should be sufficient time for people to adjust to the new conditions, so to say, a certain length of time is needed for the formation of a balance among man's activities, nature's preconditions and the hereditary landscape structure. This time, i.e., the formative period for landscape stabilising was very short – in 12 years the Second World War began which was followed by the new period of landscape development driven by the socialist ideas of the Soviet Union.



Fig 7. Individualization of the landscape: Luņi village plan after the land parcelling in 1928. Wetlands along the lake were drained in the late 1930s by lowering the lake's water level

Practically no statistics or written records exist on how peasants adjusted to the new conditions. From some written sources we can understand that the movement process itself was very hard for many peasants. For example, Briška (1969b) describes an episode when in 1923 he visited a farmstead where a father with his two sons were taking down his belongings in a village and simultaneously building a new house on the allotted land parcel. They asserted that would never again undertake such a task due to the strenuous nature of the work. And when in 1944 the newly built house was burned down during bombardment they did not return, but dispersed. The other obstacle was that the village parcelling was especially beneficial to the wealthier peasants as the allotted land was given accordingly to the share in common lands. It was as well possible to buy some more land through the trading process with other inhabitants. In many cases people ended up with farmsteads with less than 2 ha of land (see, for example, figure 6, allotment No. 11) and eventually had to sell their properties and move to towns. Many peasants were not satisfied with the location of their new farmstead and many complaints were submitted to local courts (according to archive documents). In Luņi, subsequent to the final confirmation of the parcelling plan five peasant families were discontent and asked for allotments from other farmsteads. As it is seen from the land use map (Figure 7) the quality and land use pattern of allotted lands was different in each plot. Some peasants received only wetlands and forests whereas others predominantly arable fields. In such circumstances the pressure and advantage of new individual land management was marginal as individual responsibility was very high.

One of the sequent historical events that highly influenced the former village was WWII. Some young conscripts refused to join the German Army, but instead chose to join the partisans. They hid in the forests of Belorussia from where they were conscripted into the Red Army. Only a small number of them returned to their home landscape (Figure 8).



Fig 8. Anatolij Hamkov – the sole permanent resident of Luņi. The most vivid recollections are related to the partisan movement when he was 14 and the subsequent military operations within the corps of the Red Army. During Soviet times he worked at the local distillery in the parish centre Vecslabada (photo: A. Zariņa).

During the Soviet times all lands were nationalized and peasants managed only garden plots located in the vicinity of their home. Based on interviews with people living near Luņi after WWII

many farmsteads were abandoned and later re-occupied by some locals either from Luņi or other former villages. However, the link between the people and the land was interrupted irreversibly. Therefore it was easy for many of them to burn down their buildings as if it were an accident in order to receive remuneration and to start a new life in the recently established kolkhoz centres and towns. As a consequence in 1981 the remains of twenty farmsteads and twelve functioning households still existed. During Soviet times the former territory belonging to the manor was not occupied and most lived in the centre of the former village and along the main roads. According to locals, all abandoned buildings have recently been gradually burned down as a result of regular and uncontrolled burning of the previous year's grass.

People who now live in former Luņi and neighbouring villages very well remember Soviet times, but have practically no knowledge of the earlier periods. Asked for remarks about open strip-field system they show a very vague inkling of it (just two native inhabitants older than 70 know how this system worked). Some people pointed out that they have noticed odd features on the ground but have never had an interest to find out more. Instead they are very negatively disposed to such research and pointed out that during the Soviet period *all* the land was managed (tilled) and consequently no traces of strip-fields possibly could be found.

Indeed, during the kolkhoz era and especially following the massive land amelioration period all lands were predominantly tilled and only in a relatively few places (where tractors could not be used) fields were left for grazing and hay or forest regeneration. The previous was an account of what happened in Luņi and neighbouring villages where the intensively articulated moraine relief limited intensive agriculture inadvertently resulting in the preservation of traces of the old land management system. Although in 1977 this territory was designated a complex nature reserve "Istras pauguraine" (*Istra's hill lands*), it was done so merely for the protection of the characteristic moraine topography. In 1999 the status of the area was changed to the nature park "Istras pauguraine" without development of a protection plan and without reference to the strip-field traces on the ground.

4.2 Landscape of vivid village Šultes

The former village of Šultes (334 ha) is located in the western part of Latgale some 15 km from the town Līvāni and about 30 km from the district centre Preiļi (Figure 1). Natural conditions are much more favourable for agriculture, compared to Luņi. The territory is located on slightly undulated ground moraine with compact loam parent material and the soils are improved due to the amelioration in early 1980ties.

Šultes has an open landscape with some forest patches, farmsteads arranged linearly along the *main street* and some are scattered (Figure 9). It is well managed: there are no overgrowing fields, on the contrary, a herd of cattle is pasturing, trusses of hay are seen during hay time, there are some arable fields, agricultural machinery is parked house yards and on the fields, there is a functioning Soviet period cattle farm, children can be seen playing outside during summer holidays. This is to say, the place is alive.

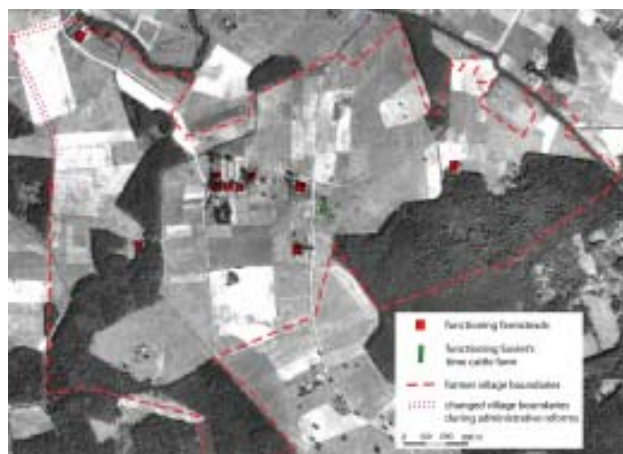


Fig 9. 1996 air photo of the Šultes village territory (dashed line). The land use pattern has experienced minor changes during the last 80 years: wetlands along the river and in depressions have been drained by amelioration and the formerly tilled areas nowadays are used for pasture and as meadows

Visiting there for a few weeks one is left with the feeling that somehow it has stored the diminishing spirit of Latgalian 'being together' without overt cultural expression. Conversely, villagers try to lead a modern life style including the ways they earn a living. But for the most part their attachment to this place stands out. Those who have left, return here either during summer holidays and fetes, either for cooperative work during harvesting time, or for weddings and funerals, but always for cemetery fetes.

The history of the formation of the village is like that of similar villages in Latgale. Generally, the story begins with a young family that settled in a forest, cleared and cultivated the land and as the family grew so did the hamlet. Landlords usually accepted such 'breaking in' on their properties as in the future they could benefit from it (see, for example, Dzeņš 1971). According to the story told by Šultes villagers, the village was established by a young Latgalian from nearest village Vilcāni who married a daughter of a gardener Schultz (German by origin) who served at the nearby manor of Revitova. This is how this unusual name for a Latgalian village came about. Nevertheless, what is important is that this place has grown from one ancestor therefore making all villagers more or less the immediate family (they share the same last name) although these ties are not apparent in everyday communications. The village's history after the abolishment of serfdom was different from that of Luņi. In the 1890s, using a loan from the Peasant's Bank (*Zemnieku banka*), the village bought extra land (forests and meadows) from the neighbouring landlord thus enlarging and diversifying the village property, and simultaneously ending the dependence of corvée. However, such an opportunity was feasible only for wealthy new-farmers as the price of land was relatively high. Many of these new-farmers incited village parcelling as it was more gainful for them compared to those peasants whose share of strip-lands was smaller (Brežgo 1954). But Šultes villagers did not partake in this process until the Agrarian Reform of independent Latvia began. According to the 1897 population census data 98 people (all of them Catholic) lived in 15 households, i.e., about 6 - 7 persons per household. Typically households comprised the father of the family, the wife and their unmarried children. Frequently, three/four generations lived under the same roof. The link between people living in Šultes at the end of 19th century and in 1925 (when the next national census was undertaken) is direct although three families are 'missing'. This is explained by the intervening war, lean-years, migration policy and other circumstances.

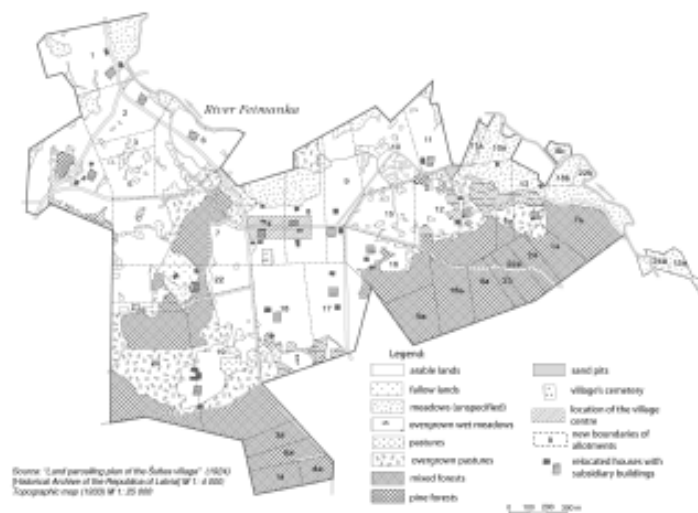


Fig 10. Individualization of the landscape: Šultes village after the land parcelling in 1925

In a letter to Land Survey Committee in 1922 villagers politely asked for their village to be parcelled as soon as possible as they had prepared building materials for construction purposes and if a decision was not taken soon they would be ruined. Parcelling of the village was carried out relatively quickly (by 1925), consequently extra lands from the state fund were not needed. As it is seen from the village parcelling plan (Figure 10) the plots in terms of land use pattern are more or less equal, as are the extra lands (with forest or meadow cover) that practically all farmers gained. Some of the families received large land units, for example, the elder of the village gained 48.5 ha of land in the centre of village (plots No. 7, 7a and $\frac{3}{4}$ of 14) which

was further divided amongst his three sons. The lands in the former village centre were appraised as being the most valuable. In total 15 new farmsteads were established although there were 24 land units. This is because by hereditary rights a family could gain several land units and merge their properties. It also meant that some farmers continued the old custom of equally sharing the property that was newly allotted to sons. For example, the land that was allotted to the elder's family (mentioned previously) was divided into three parts. Through casting of lots brothers defined who would stay on the existing farmstead and who would move away. Two families were able to avoid the relocation of their belongings in Šultes (No. 7 and 8), and as a consequence today the building ensemble of the 7th plot is a monument of national value (Figure 11), although some of its subsidiary buildings were relocated immediately across the street to serve the needs of the brother. The third son moved to the outskirts of the property but in 1960s relocated his belongings next to his brother along the village street. Even if the brothers separated their possessions in terms of living spaces they could not agree about agricultural lands and eventually divided all fields with similar quality into three strips. The situation remains unchanged today in the case of arable fields; descendants of the brothers have not registered their properties in Land Registry as they cannot come to an agreement about the boundaries.

In 2006 only 6 farmsteads were encountered within former boundaries of the village. The family members of merged plots No. 19 and 20 were deported* in 1949 as the total property size exceeded 30 ha. They have never returned but buildings of the farmstead were used for the needs of the kolkhoz. The other deported family's members (from plot No. 18) returned, but left their place in 1980s for living in the near kolkhoz centre as they were unable to maintain the farmstead. The ruins are still there hidden by trees and bushes. One of the farmers went bankrupt and his property was sold at an auction a few years after the parcelling of the village. In total about 80% of farmsteads in Latgale went into debt commitment to banks and many of them gradually went bankrupt (Terentjeva 1973).

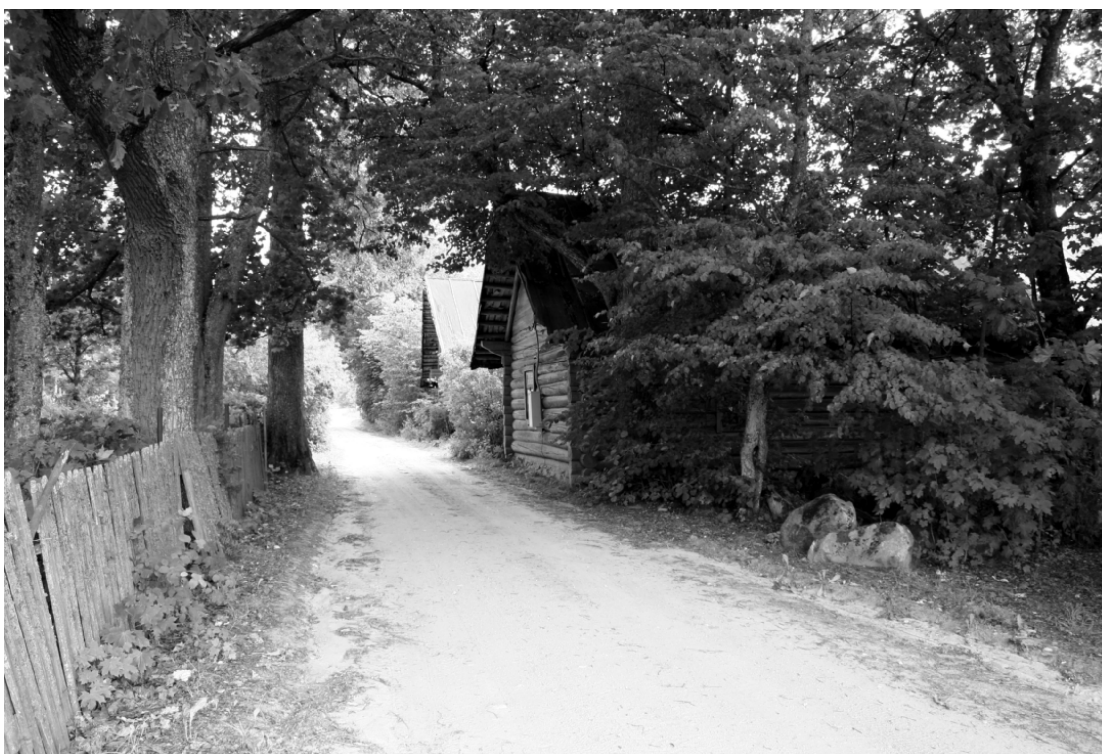


Fig 11. The Main street of the Šultes village in 2006: the depicted farmstead is a monument of national value (photo: A. Zariņa)

However, also in this case the time (about 15 years) to adjust to new conditions was too short in order to put the landscape development path into practise. Family ties among villagers and

* In Latvia two mass deportations took place (in 1941 and 1949) when altogether about 60 000 people were forced to leave Latvia for Siberia (information from the State's Chancellery)

social benefits of living together were inscribed in the character of this landscape and played a role in new landscape changes. The time-tested social system of working together, i.e., the order of pasturing, sowing and harvesting had been organized and could not be terminated and forgotten easily. Parcelling resulted in villagers losing the common space with specific names, for example, 'Forest apiary', 'Hazel meadow' or 'Bricklayer's bight'. Space was named in order to describe in which fields farmers would be working during certain moments of the day as the children had to carry lunch to them. The former villagers still think of 'us' in terms of the old village boundaries – beyond are 'the others'. The elongated fields have for a long time been called *šņores* (strip-fields, literally, cords). In a few cases these old place names are still alive and for the most part existing residents point out that during Soviet times they never forgot that they were on somebody's former property when their horses and cows were pasturing in the kolkhoz's run.

According to the 86 years old Helēna Vilcāne, life was hard during the Soviet period since they had to work in kolkhoz fields (their former properties) with practically no payment. For a period of time they received payment only in kind after the harvest in the autumn. These days were celebrated with large feasts, called October feasts, when the villagers gathered in two households as there was not enough room for all in one. In 1970s life got a bit easier for rural inhabitants as they could earn something on the side. For example, some Šultes residents earned good income from milk production and apple selling. This period is also characterised by the younger generation moving to towns to study and consequently establishing their lives there, as well by physical landscape changes driven by the vast amelioration process.



Fig 12. Different generations side by side on a long bench during a fete in Šultes village in the 1980ties (photo: J. Vilcāns).

In the early 1960s a cattle farm was constructed which speeded up the process of landscape evolution. Simultaneously it was rumoured that a kolkhoz's centre was going to be established in Šultes or at least that it will be obligatory sooner or later to form a compact village again. This event hastened two families to relocate their houses along the main street thus reshaping *in a way* the image of old times or rather *restoring* the feeling of 'being together' (Figure 12). Some families hesitated and at the end refused to move (for example, those from plots No. 12 and 17). Moving corresponded well to the ideology of Soviets concerning the abandonment of farmsteads and movement to villages and was generally supported by the local authorities. Asked how they chose the plots where to build, they answer that firstly you could build whenever you wanted as the land was *common*, secondly kin ties were taken into the consideration (they built closer to nearest relatives).

Today descendants of the families of plots No. 7, 9 and 22 together operate a cattle farm with a herd of about 18 cows, manage their hereditary grasslands and rent extra land from other Šultes inhabitants. They have established a biological farming enterprise and produce ecological milk in the framework of EU agricultural subsidies. Others combine living in the countryside with working in the nearest towns or have their small subsistence economies within the farmstead's boundaries. However, they keep the lands well managed and to maintain the heirloom is more than an obligation for them.

5. Discussion

Latgale's landscapes during last few centuries have passed through different forms of socio-historical affiliations. In the context of landscape formation, five periods can be distinguished: from the common (peasant's) landscapes of the period of late feudalism (1730s -1861) and the succeeding period where Marxist and capitalism ideas lived side by side (1861-1918), to mass individualization of the common landscape (1918-1944) and further collectivization of them during Soviet era (1944-1991), to re-individualization of the collective landscapes (from 1991). All of these periods have left traces in the physical landscapes but as well in people's minds and their subsequent actions.

5.1 Feudal period

Today's landscape structure in Latgale was founded during feudalism and was based on the principle of equality for peasants. But this time is important as the people's mentality was affected by the limited personal freedoms of serfdom. Latgalians were characterized as a deeply humbled, submissive and modest nation (Zeile 2001).

5.2 Post-feudalism period

The Latgalian mentality, severely affected during feudalism, is important during the following landscape formation period of post-feudalism when a strong will power was needed to *combat* the traditional customs of land parceling among sons and the inherent deadlock of this practice (which was actually prohibited by law). The power of tradition triumphed over reasonableness. Djelic and Quack (2007) indicate that the notion of 'path dependency' suggests that the evolution of practices does not necessarily follow a pure logic of efficiency. Latgalians realized, however, the deadlock of this custom and have expressed it in various folk songs, for example:

*Four, six father's sons
Divide their land weeping;
While I, as the only one,
Count my money at the table.*

*Pieci, seši tēvam dēli
Zemi dala raudādami;
Es tēvam viens dēliņš,
Pie galdiņa naudu skaitu (3788).*

This practice was carried out as a manifestation against the inequality experienced during the feudalism era as well as it was the only way to maintain the cultural succession by keeping the family together *on the fatherland*. During the Russification period, which started in the late 18th century (which included the Latgalian orthography prohibition period from 1865 to 1904), Latgalian culture could be transmitted only through family rituals and Catholic traditions (Bukšs 2001) which also included gatherings at crucifixes (very important social aspect). Within this period significant landscape differentiation occurred and generally four landscape types, according to land structure and management, and the expression of power in the landscape, can be distinguished:

- (1) landscape of the manors that mirrored social supremacy and still functioned in the style of feudalism, although serfdom was abolished in 1861;
- (2) common landscapes of peasant villages, that reflected the equality amongst peasants but at the same time signified the unavoidable deadlock of agricultural continuity;
- (3) single farmstead landscapes that were created within the process of 'movement to farmsteads' (peasants become new-farmers);

- (4) landscapes of landless peasants – ephemeral landscapes that characterize the poverty of peasants and their consequent migration (including urbanization) and search for seasonal work elsewhere.

This period of relatively liberated landscape development indicates that the majority of landscape actors are dependant on the strength of customs which eventually fostered landscape evolution in a lock-in condition.

5.3 Independent Latvia

During the next period of enforced Agrarian Reform, landscapes to great extent lost the idea of being the common property, but people – the sense of collective liability. In many villages peasants that used to manage more than a hundred strip-fields now had to adjust to a fixed piece of land of their farmsteads simultaneously reducing their physical and psychological space in the landscape. Individual landscapes emerged very fast, though. The informal customs continued to be practiced to some extent, for example, land parcelling among sons, and land management within old strip-land pattern, and, for the most part, identification with the living space within the former village boundaries was maintained. In economics the theory of path dependence assumes, generally, that people optimize on the basis of their own interests and the information at their disposal (Puffert 2003). This terminology is used to refer also to the condition when people are so path dependant as they do not know how to do things differently, e.g., how to manage new individual space when all future decisions must be taken on their own. A very similar process of landscape formation also happened at the beginning of 1990s when many people regained rights to their former properties, but managed them simply on the euphoria of the national awakening atmosphere.

5.4 Soviet collectivization period

The Soviet period came with new radical changes; land that used to be common, and then individual, became collective. This is the time when agriculture was organized according to orders from the party. But the position of peasants could be compared to that during feudalism, as Briška points (1969b), the only difference is the introduction of machinery and infrastructure. There are more similarities when the hundred year period following the abolishment of serfdom is analysed: (a) peasants worked in vast fields that belonged to an estate (1861) or a kolkhoz (1961); (b) peasants were obedient robots in the hands of overseer or brigade leader; (c) if in the middle of tillage there is a building cluster it was either a manor or a kolkhoz village; (d) from this cluster of houses the ruling class governed: either landed gentry or communist party comrades; (e) peasants were tied to the land where they worked either as serfs or as kolkhoz workers (without passports), which meant no opportunity to move away from manors or kolkhozes; (f) ruling class had power over the physical being of peasants: either by the infliction of physical punishment or by prison and deportation; (g) peasants (serfs or kolkhoz workers) were poorer than other inhabitants; (h) regardless of the hardships associated with their existence peasants were expected to smile and exalt their masters, otherwise they were considered to be mutineers (Briška 1969b). This path dependence is of a different level – one that comes from the outside and is enforced. However, within its frame it was much easier to practise old customs, for instance, revive living in the village settlement structure (as in the example of Šultes).

5.5 Post-socialist Latvia

The period of re-establishing the independence of Latvia was filled with illusions that the *return* will occur to the idealized landscape of childhood. Instead, denationalization of property took place in socialism's influenced landscape (Melluma *et al*, 2006). Generally, path dependence in rural landscapes in Latvia was expressed in the form of denying anything that was related to the Soviet Union and returning to the old customs and values of the countryside. But for Latgale it was slightly different as the ambitions of people have never been as high as for the other cultural entities in Latvia. For the most part, cultural awakening in Latgale has come a reality (for example, the rebirth of the Latgalian dialect tradition which in writings had been outlawed during Soviet times) and is being preserved to the landscapes as well. Today's landscapes more and more tend to differentiate as it was in post-feudalism period. But for the most we can learn from

the similarities with landscape changes in the past and, allegorically speaking, use the path dependency as a key to open the doors of the past. For the villages of Luņi and Šultes no great changes have happened. In Šultes the process of living continues without interruption and its landscape has never lost the function of home. On the other hand in Luņi new people are coming in to manage it with no obligations to the past whatsoever, or else, it exists in pseudo form, for example, a summer resident, who settled with the family in Luņi in the 1950s, has named his single farmstead plot 'Luņi sādža' (Luņi village). The question is: can we say that path dependency (the one which comes from the feudalism period) in Luņi, for example, is lost simultaneously with the abandonment of the place and this landscape is a *tabula rasa* for a new path to be created. In this case the Luņi landscape is still path dependent, and it shows that the links between the past and the future are not so easy to break.

Landscapes as such are path dependent, as they are the accumulation of causes and conditions. The theory of path dependency and its use in this research field might help to discover an often elusive interplay of necessities and chances which makes each landscape different from the other. Certainly, much more enlarged studies are necessary to learn all the aspects of this interesting theory and its implications for landscape research. According to Mahoney (2000), researchers who wish to document the path dependence for a particular outcome may ruthlessly move back in history to uncover a point in time when initial conditions cannot predict the outcome. Consequently, there is a need to develop objective criteria for determining which temporal point represents the "initial" or "starting" condition of a sequence, especially considering landscape studies.

6. Conclusions

At first glance the abandoned appearance of the Luņi village landscape could be explained by its highly unsuitable potential for agricultural use that eventually led to the abandonment of the settlement. However, in the path dependency theory this condition is not the initial cause. The landscape change of Luņi village exhibits the path dependency where deterministic causal processes, such as common land management, shortage of agricultural lands, the impact of emigration and in-migration of newcomers, partisan fighter activities and a call to military service during the WWII, are responsible for the relative ease with which people gave up their homes to settle in Soviet era kolkhoz villages.

Likely the liveliness of Šultes village cannot be explained by the slightly more favourable environmental conditions for agriculture than in Luņi village. Here the causal processes that have led the landscape to its present appearance are kin ties, common land management, the redemption of land from the manor at the beginning of 20th century, deportation, and the building of a farm complex during Soviet times.

However, the initial conditions for both villages' path dependency are the environment of the area where the settlement was established during feudalism and the socio-economical background of this time period. But for the most part the two key causes must be brought to the forefront considering their present landscape physiognomies: the WWII in Luņi and the establishment of the cattle farm together with rumours concerning the possible creation of the kolkhoz centre in Šultes.

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