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CHANGES IN DISCOURSE ON ECOLOGICAL RISKS IN LATVIA

Abstract: Looking back at the comparatively recent past – the 20th century when Latvia was occupied and illegally incorporated into the Soviet Union, the Latvian economy progressed in line with the Soviet „collectivization” policy and according to the Moscow’s vision and directions. Such concepts as environmental protection and quality of life were not popular.

Nonetheless, at the end of the 1980 s the role of ecological values proved to be crucial in the development of civil society. Mr Dainis Īvāns, one the founders of the Popular Front of Latvia, says that then his article against the construction of a hydroelectric plant near the city of Daugavpils was motivated by the desire to live in a preserved environment and green Latvia. However, in that case ecological values became a stimulating factor for social and political mass mobilization.

Over the last twenty years, Latvia has reviewed every area of public policy, including the environmental policy. Still, the Latvia’s society, as any contemporary society, is exposed to various conscious and unconscious risks and has to find solutions to different threats that are characteristics of a risk society.

High level of ecological awareness is needed to identify and prevent the potential ecological risks. Therefore, over the next years, it is necessary to find and implement socially efficient mechanisms – sociological researches, social advertising, information campaigns – so as the Latvia’s society not only expresses its readiness to participate in activities minimizing ecological threats but actually changes to a green lifestyle.

PowerPoint presentation delivered at the Conference.

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Latvia is located in the Northern Europe



On the East coast of the Baltic Sea



**Latvia's territory –
about 65 thousand sq. km**

**Population –
about 2 millions**

Coat of arms and flag



Structure of Presentation

- 1. Origins of the Latvian environmental values – beliefs, folklore**
- 2. Role of environmental values during struggle for national independence**
- 3. Environmental values in public opinion – comparison of data from the World Values Survey (1996) and national researches (2006, 2010, 2011 and 2012)**
- 4. Conclusions**

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1. Origins of the Latvian environmental values – beliefs, folklore

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Beliefs

- **Up to the 13th century (at least) religious tradition was based on paganism**
- **Cult of Mother**
- **Polytheism**
- **Latvians worshiped:**
 - **the Sun,**
 - **the Thunder,**
 - **the Moon,**
 - **the Mother Earth,**
 - **the Mother Wind,**
 - **the Mother Forest**



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Folklore

- **Folklore reflects the world perception and expresses social and cultural identity**
- **Latvian folk songs (about 270 000 all together) glorify nature:**

**Whose those hills, whose those valleys,
Whose those green oak-trees?
Pine-trees' hills, spruce-trees' valleys,
Bees' green oak-trees.**

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**Latvian folk songs
teach
us to protect nature:**

**I walked through a silver grove,
Breaking not a single branch,
If I'd broken any branch,
I'd be walking all in tears.**

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2. Role of environmental values during struggle for national independence

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- **In the 20th century, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union and lived according to directives from Moscow where environmental values were not priorities**
- **Situation changed in 1980s when environmental values turned to be vital in the formation of civil society**
- **Campaign against the construction of the Daugavpils hydroelectric power station (eastern Latvia) began national awakening movement**

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- **Environmental values became a factor of socially political mobilisation**
- **Protests against the Daugavpils power station are linked with the beginning of awakening. However, at first, they were aimed at protecting:**
 - **Natural environment**
 - **Ecological values**

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- **After the restoration of independence, Latvia strives to reach balance between the needs of industrial society and the available natural resources**
- **It is possible only in case of an advanced environmental awareness and ecological culture in the society**

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***3. Environmental values in public opinion
– comparison of data from the World
Values Survey (1996) and national
researches (2006, 2010, 2011 and 2012)***

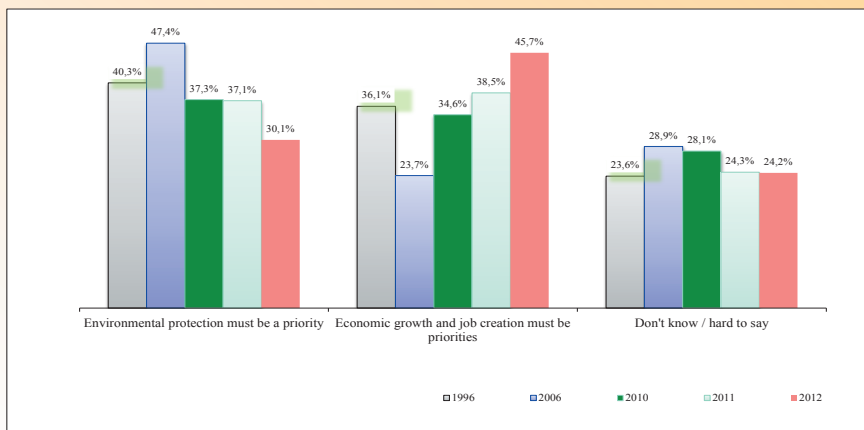
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The presentation contains data from the few researches that have been carried out in Latvia about public opinion on:

- environmental protection,
- readiness to take action in this regard,
- level of environmental awareness

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Which of the following views do you agree with?

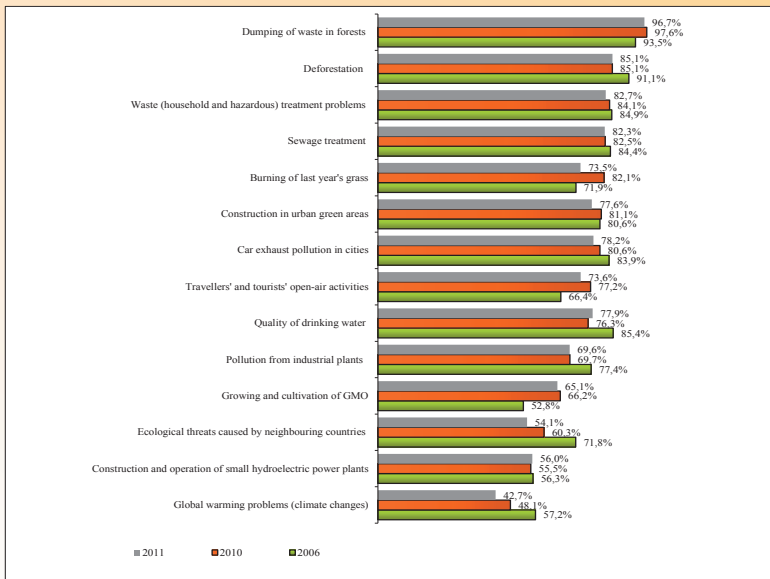


Source: Values Surveys Databank 1996
Research Centre SKDS 2006, 2010, 2011
RSU 2012

The respondents were asked:

Please, assess how urgent, in your opinion, the following problems related to environmental protection are in Latvia!

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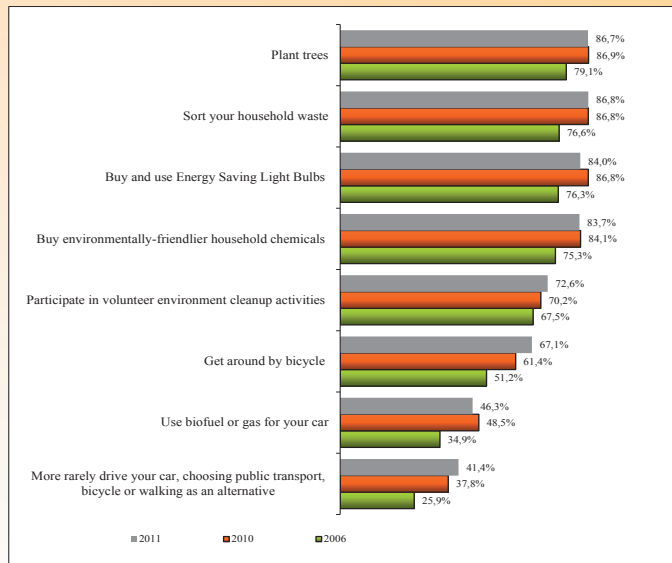


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To evaluate the readiness to participate in improvement of environmental situation, the respondents were asked:

Please, indicate whether you would agree to participate in the following activities to improve environmental situation?

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4. Conclusions

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- **Environmental values discourse developed on the basis of the ancient Latvian traditions and folklore**
- **Before Christianity, the religious elements were related to natural phenomena and environmental figures**
- **Latvian national awakening started as standing up for environmental values**
- **Environmental values had a special role in the formation of civil society**

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- **Today, Latvia strives for balance between industrial and environmental issues**
- **Formation of ecological culture in Latvia is in process**
- **Environmental awareness is influenced by economic, political, social and other developments**
- **More work is needed to educate and inform the society in order to promote the development of strong and stable environmental awareness**

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