

## NEWCOMERS IN LATVIAN COUNTRYSIDE: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POTENTIAL

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**Abstract.** The paper focus on increase of urban to rural migration in recent decades, which led population growth in many rural communities in Latvia's countryside. The Covid-19 pandemic, with its restrictions, has also indirectly encouraged the move of city dwellers to the countryside. Newcomers as a separate category of rural residents receive special attention in scientific literature and research. The potential of newcomers has been studied in Latvia to a limited extent. The aim of research is to evaluate the impact of newcomers in various rural territories of Latvia. The study was conducted using the qualitative research approach - focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. The results of the study reveal the experience of successful use of the economic and social potential of newcomers in the rural areas of Latvia. The vision, knowledge, skills and experience of newcomers enrich and empower local communities, contribute to the spread of remote work in the countryside, the creation of new economic practices, the development and recognition of places/territories. Newcomers are a significant human resource asset for any rural community, especially in remote and depopulated rural areas.

**Keywords:** *newcomers, rural territories, counterurbanisation.*

**JEL code:** R11, A14

### Introduction

In recent decades, urban to rural migration flows have led population growth in many rural communities in Latvia's countryside. The Covid-19 pandemic, with its restrictions, has also indirectly encouraged the move of city dwellers to the countryside. This research as the part of National Research Program project "Cutting-edge knowledge and solutions to study demographic and migration processes for the development of Latvian and European society" (DemoMigPro) VPP-LETONIKA-2021/4-0002 focuses on the evaluation of the impact of newcomers in various rural territories of Latvia.

The results of the study reveal the experience of successful use of the economic and social potential of newcomers in the rural areas of Latvia. The vision, knowledge, skills and experience of newcomers enrich and empower local communities, contribute to the spread of remote work in the countryside, the creation of new economic practices, the development and recognition of places/territories. Newcomers are a significant human resource asset for any rural community, especially in remote and depopulated rural areas.

The study was conducted using the qualitative research approach. The results of focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews were used. As part of the focus group, development experts and representatives from the NGO Latvian Rural Forum, the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Latvia, the Union of Latvian Municipalities, the Latvian Rural Education and Consulting Centre, the Community Cooperation Network "Sēlijas Salas", etc. were interviewed; semi-structured interviews were conducted among newcomers in the countryside and among representatives of rural municipalities. The published and unpublished materials of the NGO "Latvian Rural Forum" were also used - document analysis. A total of 74 interviews were conducted in 2018-2022.

### Literature Review

The broader framework for the analysis of the topic is provided by the process of counter-urbanization and rurbanization, restructuring of urban and rural populations, changes in infrastructure, global and regional changes, as a result of which the question of viability, well-being and social resilience of rural areas is brought up. Since current rural area development projects are aimed at the involvement of local residents and are called "community-led" or "area-led initiatives", newcomers as a separate category of rural residents receive special attention in scientific literature and research.

The phenomenon of newcomers in social sciences is studied in the context of counter-urbanization processes (Mitchell, 2004). Increasingly, cases are observed when families rooted in cities move to less urban areas, incl. rural areas. Relatively speaking, three types of out-migrants are distinguished depending on their motivation to move. The first type is called pragmatic out-migrants, because their desire is to maintain employment, cultural and social ties with the city, but they are looking for more comfortable and pleasant living conditions. The second type of out-migrants is called displaced urbanites, because their move to the suburbs or the countryside is not voluntary. For financial or other reasons, they are forced to leave the cities, but they do so with regret. The third type of out-migrants is called happy movers, because they consciously try to move away from the problems of cities and look for the "ideal countryside" to break ties with the city and start a relatively new life (Karsten, 2020).

Newcomers in suburban and rural areas are not a homogeneous social category. This is confirmed by their different motivations to move to the countryside, as well as their different economic, cultural and social capital. Pro-rural migration is thus a complex and multi-layered process. Considering the trends of depopulation and infrastructure decline in rural areas over the past decades, counter-urbanization processes are mostly perceived in a positive light, as they result in an increase in the number of rural residents and can stimulate economic and social activity in the countryside. A frequently heard discourse in the context of newcomers is the accentuation of their economic and social capital with the aim of attracting residents to rural areas and using the potential of newcomers in the development of places and regions. Therefore, the question of the integration of newcomers into rural communities, the creation of a sufficiently attractive environment and infrastructure, as well as a corresponding level of well-being, so that newcomers consider the possibility of moving to the specific settlement in the countryside and staying there for a long time, is brought up. In this way, the mobility trajectories of citizens can be influenced with the help of political instruments (Berg, 2020).

As mentioned above, motives for migration to the countryside are often related to practicing a city-specific lifestyle in a healthier and more pleasant environment, ideas about a "rural idyll", a change in lifestyle, and various events during the life cycle. For example, the study of new arrivals in the Czech Republic shows that people of retirement age, those whose children have grown up (empty nesters) also tend to move to the countryside. Mostly due to ideological beliefs, young people also choose rural life (Dopitová, 2016). Other studies show that so-called white collars or members of the middle class who can afford remote work, most often move to the countryside. This means that with this category of people comes a certain amount of capital and entrepreneurial skills that are useful for the local community and the development of the area. In other words, the potential of newcomers is evaluated depending on how they localize various types of extra-local or external resources, thus contributing to the economic and social sustainability of the given territory. Newcomers are expected to have entrepreneurship, knowledge and creativity, provided by their relatively high human, social and financial capital. For people who have moved to the countryside, entrepreneurial activities are often not the main goal; more important is a change in lifestyle and the opportunity to realize your ideas in an attractive and peaceful environment. Newcomers often choose relatively underdeveloped places and start their business there, especially in remote work conditions. In this context, there is talk of a "new economy" in the countryside, characterized by knowledge-intensive and high value-added economic activities, which are a known alternative to the usual economic activities in the countryside (Piša, Hruška, 2019). Theoretically, a distinction is made between "rural entrepreneurship" and "entrepreneurship in the rural", where the latter is more rooted in the rural environment and community (Bosworth, Finke, 2019). This means that economic activities in the countryside have the potential to become

increasingly diverse. The same applies to agricultural production: due to the different level of education and experience of newcomers, economic activities in the agricultural sector are also diversified, such as small-scale farms, eco-friendly companies, etc. Newcomers more often than local residents use various digital solutions, create virtual communities for selling their products, etc. (Monllor i Rico, Fuller, 2016). Diversification of economic activities to a certain extent relieves traditional industries in rural areas, helps to cope with various social and economic challenges. For instance, a study in Scotland on the production and distribution of local food allowed the identification of impacts of different scales and types in the local community and region (Thomas Lane, Jones et al., 2016). If until now spatial accessibility or proximity has served as the most important factor for promoting competitiveness and introducing innovations, which are mostly associated with cities, then the results of current research reveal the impact of various creative activities and companies (e.g. business incubators, co-creation places) on knowledge exchange, entrepreneurship processes and wider community cohesion (Merrell, Rowe et al., 2022; Merrell, Füzi et al., 2022). Today's co-locating services, i.e. rural service hubs, operate in a similar way, which at the same time solve the problem of service availability in rural areas, create new jobs, and promote cooperation between different social agents (Goodwin-Hawkins, Oedl-Wieser et al., 2022).

The potential of newcomers can also be evaluated in the context of empowerment. Taking into account the depopulation trends, the shrinking of infrastructure in rural areas, the question of rural development perspectives is brought up. Empowerment in this sense is used as a process in which rural communities move from a position of helplessness to some control over the decisions made. This includes defining problems, identifying existing resources, creating solutions. Theoretically, the empowerment of rural areas can be initiated and achieved by endogenous and exogenous factors (Steiner, Farmer, 2018). In such a context, it is essential to identify what role newcomers play in the empowerment process - whether they participate in promoting the development of the place together with local residents, i.e. endogenously, or whether they come as external influencers of the situation, i.e. exogenously. To a certain extent, nowadays we can talk about new rurality, thanks to the new "energy" that the newcomers insert into the local society. As a result, the so-called agro-social paradigm emerges, which implies the entry of new social agents, the formation of social capital, the strengthening of ties between urban and rural areas, the pursuit of optimal quality food production, health improvement, settlement of abandoned places, etc. (Monllor i Rico, Fuller, 2016).

At the same time, in the literature, counter-urbanization processes are evaluated controversially. On the one hand, newcomers have the potential to diversify the economic environment of rural areas and generally develop places and regions. On the other hand, the population structure, lifestyle, and impact on the environment are changing in rural areas, which can cause significant changes and sometimes even threats to the cultural, social and natural heritage of rural areas. The functions of newcomers in this context may be different - some may use the rural environment as a dormitory and not get involved in its improvement, while others perceive moving to the countryside as an opportunity to return "to their roots" and try to make their own contribution to the rural environment. In general, however, counter-urbanization is treated as an important process in initiating socio-economic changes beneficial to the countryside (Creamer, Allen, Haggett, 2018).

The so-called new mobility paradigm can be defined as a culturally and socially determined movement, including in the analysis both the micro level (a sense of belonging to a place, a sense of home) and the macro level (changes in social, economic and political structures). Along with a physical move to another place of life, one should talk about its emotional, subjective meaning, possible representations of the place. In this sense, specific settlements are not just territories, but 'containers' full of meaning. Not only newcomers but also local residents attach importance to mobility. Theoretically, moving to the countryside is equated with the concept of "potential" or resource, that is, the knowledge, skills, and possible activities of newcomers are considered as those that can improve the economic situation of the place, enrich social relations. On the other hand, newcomers can also create some inequality in the local society (Nugin, Kasemets, 2021). Although rural communities are traditionally associated with stability, security and rootedness, global trends are also affecting rural areas and challenging this stability to some extent. In this sense, newcomers, on the one hand, look for traditional values in the countryside and are ready to realize their understanding of the countryside, but on the other hand, it is precisely the increased mobility that causes significant social changes and blurs the boundaries between cities and countryside. Studies show that the contribution of newcomers is not always positive, as changes in the composition of the population create a new hierarchy and a corresponding rearrangement.

The issues raised in relation to newcomers are related to a certain potential for social inequality, which is caused by different levels of education and income, the amount of power and prestige in society. For instance, the researchers warn against an overly pronounced tendency of policy makers to "put in order" a community or territory and create visible and quantifiable lists of resources. As a result, the community can be associated with the most vocal and visible members of the community or social groups and risks becoming exclusively available only to certain members of the community (the better educated, the wealthiest, who accordingly dictate their values and beliefs to the whole community). Newcomers might impose their vision of the countryside on the local population, who might become a somewhat marginalized social group. If so, the so-called the community-led approach contradicts itself because it assumes an apolitical and inclusive perspective. In the context of social inequality, changes in the social structure in rural areas during the last years have also been analyzed. Rural communities are expected to display traditional characteristics related to solidarity, a sense of belonging, etc., but it should be taken into account that counter-urbanization processes, in parallel with other global and local processes, significantly change both the objective composition of the rural population and the relations between residents. Often, the entire development of community life and territory is dictated by the needs and perspective of a narrow population group ("white settler") and the development of the place (Creamer, Allen, Haggett, 2019).

In the context of the aforementioned possible limitations, in the scientific literature, research and policy making, special attention is paid to the perspectives of the integration of newcomers. Policies are looking for different tools to make it as easy as possible for any newcomer (including refugees and other socially sensitive categories) to enter a certain community. Considering the different and diverse needs of newcomers, complex solutions and the involvement of various social agents are sought. For instance, ways to make information about services more accessible, community resource mapping, social support opportunities, mentor services, etc., are being created. (Making Rural Communities Home, 2018). A special role is played by social activities in the local community, which promote the social involvement/integration of newcomers. Newcomers are expected to contribute to the development of rural areas; therefore the prevailing discourse on the subject of newcomers emphasizes the need to integrate newcomers into local communities in various ways. Integration is analyzed through social (including civic) involvement in local-scale activities, which at least theoretically require time and money, motivation and opportunities. Thus, it is possible to increase social capital and strengthen solidarity in the community. One of the tools promoting integration is the so-called third places, or places where people meet without homes and workplaces. These can be cafés, community centres, beauty salons, etc., but they are united by the opportunity for people to feel psychological comfort (Dopitová, 2016). Regarding alternative forms of employment/business, the role of cultural events and other cultural resources in rural areas is emphasized both in the theoretical literature and in the materials of various projects. Namely, through participation in cultural events and creative activities, communal capacity, sense of belonging and identity are strengthened (Arts and culture in rural areas, 2016). Integration processes of newcomers are also brought up to date through generational renewal in the context of rural regeneration. Generational renewal in rural areas is actualized both in agricultural and non-agricultural aspects, that is, in parallel with the involvement of new people in agricultural production, alternative forms of business and other forms of employment should also be considered in order to attract new people in particular (Murtagh, Farrell et al., 2020). In the case

of success, newcomers feel an emotional belonging to the physical and social environment, accept the existing order and act accordingly (Haartsen, Stockdale, 2017).

Rural migration is discussed from various points of view. One of the aspects to be studied and analyzed is related to the relationship between migrants and the rural community. Nowadays, we no longer talk about stable, sustainable communities, but about fragmented social groups where people can freely join and separate again. This process is called 'networked individualism' (Nugin, Kasemets, 2021). Thus, the integration of newcomers into the rural community/society cannot be viewed as a linear, predictable process. The weakening of social ties and anonymity also finds its place in rural areas, which are traditionally associated with strong social communities. Therefore, it is important to study the impact of the so-called mobile lifestyles on communities in rural areas (Nugin, Kasemets, 2021). Both from the point of view of the integration of newcomers and the development of rural areas, it is essential to update the cooperation opportunities of the involved agents. The term "co-creation" is increasingly used to describe joint cooperation, implying the involvement of equal social agents in creating a "fairer, more sustainable and socially closer society". The experience of various experiments shows that co-creation requires a certain rearrangement in perception and usual social structures, but it is definitely a tool for promoting territorial growth (Leino, Puumala, 2021). An interesting theoretical and practical approach to the integration of newcomers has been developed by researchers in the Netherlands. Namely, using the approach of social rhythms, ways are sought to overcome the "social mix" of various interests and lifestyles in a certain area. Policy makers and community representatives should try to create a polyrhythmic environment that signifies the coexistence and tolerance of different rhythms (Meij, Haartsen, Meijering, 2021).

Summarizing the findings mentioned in the literature review, it can be concluded that significant structural changes are currently taking place in rural areas as a result of counter-urbanization processes. Not only the structure of the population is changing, but changes are also being observed in the relations between local residents and newcomers, in cooperation models and in the very paradigm of rural understanding.

### Research results and discussion

The results of the research generally confirm the theoretical knowledge about the potential contribution of newcomers to the development of rural areas. Interviews with newcomers allow creating a rough social portrait of the newcomer. In Latvia, families with children, couples without children aged 35-55 move to the countryside more often. Proximity to nature, clean and safe environment, more peaceful life dominates as important motives for moving. They are obliged to learn new skills, but those are mostly related to life in the countryside. Newcomers are characterized by having diverse sources of income, new employment and lifestyle models, being bolder attractors of external funding, strengtheners of local communities, belonging to place and community, often double occupancy.

Regarding the economic contribution of newcomers to rural areas, it should be said that newcomers to rural areas mostly work in private business, continuing their previous occupation before moving to rural areas or starting new economic activities. One of the motivations of several newcomers to move to the countryside was initially related to their desire to engage in business and earn money from it. For instance, a newcomer from Riga, who has moved to Viļķene parish, who has a degree in accounting-financing, is purposefully working on the development of a relatively large organic blackcurrant growing company. By trying different types of business, the most economically advantageous type of entrepreneurship is sought. Gradually, as a result of 5 years of searching and trying, the choice was made in favour of growing blackcurrant and sea buckthorn seedlings as a source of profit: *"Maybe it sounds rude to talk about making money, but you can't live in the countryside if you have nothing to live on"*. (D.K., 2018)

Creation of some newcomers' businesses was stimulated by the needs of locals. For example, a young family moved from the peri-urban territory to the deep countryside in Latgale, Šrēdere parish 5 years ago and after some time opened the laundry "Pērle". The idea of a laundry business came to the family quite by accident when they were still living in Olaine. The business was started in the village's former shop premises with a few washing machines and irons. Currently, it has turned into a serious business with a wide range of clients: *"We started with small capacity; there were a few washing machines, a few dryers and a small iron-roller. The beginning was like this: well, if it doesn't happen, then there won't be big losses. Soon we felt that the number of equipment was not enough for us. Demand became greater than our capacity. And we realized that we have to grow"*. (A.R., 2022) Now the service is provided not only in the immediate area, but also in further regions and even in Lithuania, which the entrepreneurs themselves refer to as the export of their services.

Another newcomer, who moved from Mārupe district to Tērvete district, thinks similarly about local needs and an empty business niche: *"I am a car mechanic by profession. Together with a friend, we opened our own garage 15 years ago, but of course, we rent the premises. I have friends and relatives living in Auce, so I looked at that area. All kinds of thoughts were running through my mind about the fact that the service could also be moved to the countryside! People often complain that there aren't many places to get their car repaired! The plan is to stay here, of course. I also want to build a service here, because the barn is made of stones, it won't collapse! Only the roof needs to be replaced and that's it! I'm not in a hurry, but I want to be in time before I retire so that I can enjoy my old age here"*. (K.B., 2020) As can be seen, the motivation of newcomers is shaped by both rational and irrational considerations. In addition to a purposeful business, the motivation for moving to the countryside is also the desire to spend one's old age in the countryside, to be with one's family, etc. In certain cases, even life in the countryside turns out to be more profitable and more comfortable than in the city: *"It gives me great satisfaction that my parents live with me and I can take care of them. My husband works in construction and his hobby is making furniture. In order to develop this hobby a bit more, when we lived in the city, we thought of maybe renting something, but it was not very profitable. Now, in the countryside, we have built a hangar near our house so that we can do it. He supplies his products to my relative's husband, who has his own company, and he sends all his works, equipment and furniture to Denmark, so my husband is also very happy that he can bring joy not only to us in the family, but also to someone else"*. (P.M., 2018)

Business projects started in rural areas are not always successful. There are cases when started projects have to be stopped or reduced, but in general the activities of newcomers in the countryside can be recognized as diverse and creative. They affect both agricultural production, such as growing vegetables, and crafts, such as pottery, and the service sector, such as horse breeding, ecotourism, etc. According to the answers of the informants, agricultural production can be profitable even in small volumes, because people in Latvia value local production: *"From the beginning, people thought that it was not home grown and were suspicious because the product in the city markets is mostly imported from Poland. I let the buyers taste and feel the difference. Its taste is completely different compared to the imported Polish product!"* (E.V., 2019) In the rural areas of Latvia, the exchange of produced products is also characteristic, which is seen both as "archaism" and as an opportunity to strengthen social ties between rural residents. In general, families living in rural areas diversify their sources of income. There are business projects that bring the main income, and there are those that people develop for their own enjoyment: *"Most of the dishes are sold, and even if you can't really call it a business, at least it is possible to recoup the time and materials invested, and the benefit is the joy and sense of well-being you get from doing what you like. There are many small additional supports, financial bridges that give a sense of security when the big business sometimes fails"*. (I.A., 2021) Along with traditional ways of farming and business, new ideas are also being developed in the countryside. For instance, inspired by the idea of rural tourism, a family in Dzērbene organizes festivals on various topics, allowing their guests to express themselves creatively: *"We give them a place here, they come and everyone puts their "I" into action. They can just be*

*special personalities, or they can be musicians, for example, and then they play their music. Maybe they are potters and lead pottery workshops, or they are cooks, and then "chef madness" happens, or they are photographers, and then a photo album is created as a result. People create the festival themselves. The festival takes shape depending on what kind of people come to it."* (R.A., 2021)

Other newcomers in the countryside work in local state or municipal institutions, as well as non-governmental sector institutions. At work, they both use previously accumulated knowledge and skills, and learn new ones, for example, in project management. Among the newcomers, there are relatively many who work remotely or participate in projects and activities of various scales, where the place of residence is not important. It is not uncommon for people who have moved to the countryside and continued their previous occupation for a while to notice business opportunities in their immediate surroundings. Thus, a newcomer in Vecumnieki is gradually developing his business in the production of apple juice and is thinking about further development prospects: *"We have an apple orchard next to us. To save it, we started renting. The apples were falling, we had to think about what to do with them, and it slowly grew to the idea that we could produce juice seasonally. My dream is to give up my computer work and work only with apples, but I have not been able to organize it fully"*. (K.U., 2018) In general, it can be concluded that economic relations between newcomers and local residents are formed organically and naturally. It is often said about the newcomers that *"they have found a way to be in contact with the outside world and continue the previously started things without leaving their country homes"*. (J.L., 2021)

Economic activities in the countryside are closely related to social relations and integration in the local community. Although today communities cannot be considered long-term and stable, the results of the study confirm that newcomers generally successfully integrate into the local society, and relations between the involved social agents are formed fluidly, depending on the situation. In Latvia, there are several examples when newcomers have become community leaders and promoters of local development. This can happen due to a "new perspective" on the resources of the place and the entrepreneurship to develop something that has never existed before. The development leader-incomer sees the development potential, scenario and values more clearly than locals. Place development becomes a mission for him or her as a personality. For instance, one of these types of people developed a new community from the unemployed people in an "empty" place: local school was closed years ago, no shops, no post office, no jobs, no services. Searching for opportunities to develop local place, a woman-newcomer created community cooperation network based on thematic tourism in small rural settlements becoming a promoter of economic and social growth. She (along with some associates) used the approach of collective creation of culture-based place development strategies.

Events, projects, business activities, which often take place in the homes of newcomers, attract the attention of local residents. In general, the interviewees acknowledged that local residents like these activities because they are relatively new and unseen to them: *"We thought that the locals might also like it. Locals like it and are interested in what's going on here because it's something different. One neighbour calls me Weirdo."* (K.U., 2019) The mentioned quote confirms that the newcomers also focus on the local society, involving the local municipality, municipal institutions: *"We created a small music festival "Naive Music Open Air Festival", organized an open air cinema evening with live cello music, and showed "The Little Prince". In order to organize it, we cooperated with the Vecumnieki County Council, the Vecumnieki County People's House, organized several creative workshops - a clay workshop, a tea ceremony, a wind chime workshop, a henna workshop, etc."* (P.K., 2019)

Newcomers come to the countryside with their own vision and understanding, knowledge, skills and experience. There are cases where this previous experience is directly used, but relatively more successful are those in which joint development of ideas takes place in cooperation with the local population. The idea of social support, security and sense of belonging in the countryside is not just a theoretical knowledge; its existence is emphasized by all research participants. Also, by showing possible alternatives, newcomers inspire and empower local residents who, for various reasons, have not dared to start their own business or be active in any other way.

As the interviewed local government managers and specialists emphasize, counter-urbanization processes in the rural areas of Latvia have become highly visible in recent years, which has been further accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, moving to the countryside is not just driven by romantic feelings these days: *"It makes sense that people are increasingly moving to rural areas due to the pandemic. The reasons are different. Many people who work in the customer service and education sectors have lost their jobs and found themselves in a difficult material and moral situation. The pandemic has been going on for two years and no one knows when it will end. Conscientious people, realizing that they cannot work as fruitfully as before, look for the application of their abilities in completely different spheres of activity. Farming seems like a good way out. More and more people are turning to parish councils in different counties to get advice on what they could do in agriculture."* (A.K., 2021) The above confirms that the structure of the population in rural areas is currently changing significantly. Experts predict that *"in the next 10-15 years, relatively rich people who will be able to afford it will live in the countryside, while the poor, on the contrary, will move to the cities in search of social benefits and social housing"*. (N.A., 2021) The obvious contribution of newcomers to the development of rural areas is already being highlighted, that is, the renovation of houses and areas, as well as the improvement of the demographic situation, supplementing the county budget, are a significant benefit. This is followed by economic, social and cultural activities: *"Speaking of the local residents...I think that they definitely get people who deliberately want to live in the countryside, also invest resources, work and it is very valuable that such people come to the countryside; they help to maintain and organize the environment in which the locals live and this is definitely valuable. And yes, in the countryside we are happy for every newcomer, because it is promising for the entire rural area."* (R.H., 2022)

When it comes to the possible integration of newcomers into rural communities, the interviews do not note significant conflicts or inequalities that arise as a result of population restructuring. Perhaps this is because the lack of people and other resources in the countryside has been so great until now that local governments and communities value anyone who is ready to invest their various resources in the development of the respective place: *"New working people who declare their place of residence in the county are those who supplement the county budget; the same with companies. But that's not all; young people are really inspiring, because they spread a lot of innovative ideas, new companies are often formed already during school. New people, new ideas, new growth"*. (M.S., 2020) Representatives of local governments also note the fact that several settlements and counties have become recognizable and popular directly as a result of the newcomers' activities: *"During these years, the family has successfully found its niche in business, developing hemp cultivation and producing everything possible that can be produced from hemp. For this family, the municipality created a 1 km long access road to the property. We are unequivocally grateful to this family for their contribution to the promotion of the county."* (J.V., 2021)

Evaluating the current and researched situation in Latvian countryside in the context of newcomers, it must be said that newcomers are considered important drivers of rural development/revitalization. Therefore, the discussion on how to support and strengthen newcomers so that "they don't burn out" is encouraged. On the other hand, even more support and attention is needed to strengthen joint cooperation between local residents and newcomers: *"A good example is when a newcomer does not disrupt what already exists, but integrates and expands it"*. (J.D., 2022) It is this aspect that is considered the main resource for future development: strengthening social ties between all people and institutions living in the respective territory in order to jointly achieve the creation of a unified rural policy, infrastructure improvements in rural areas.

### Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

1. The situation found within the framework of the conducted research confirms the experience of successful use of the economic and social potential of newcomers in the rural areas of Latvia.
2. The motivation to move to the countryside varies, and the desire to start one's own business can be more or less conscious. At the same time, typical paths can be observed that describe the situation of newcomers and their integration into the local community. Namely, certain economic or social activities cause a chain reaction, attracting cooperation partners, enabling the development of technological and social innovations.
3. Newcomers are a significant human resource asset for any rural community, especially in remote and depopulated rural areas.
4. The vision, knowledge, skills and experience of newcomers enrich and empower local communities, contribute to the spread of remote work in the countryside, the creation of new economic practices, the development and recognition of places/territories.
5. The borders of the community are permeable, social agents of local, national and international scale can be involved in it. Theoretically, it is possible for every newcomer to be integrated into the local society and find his or her niche of economic and social activities.
6. The countryside attracts remote workers, as a result of which the rural employment structure changes. The countryside as itself is in the middle of the process of restructuring; newcomers are considered as a perspective through which explore and analyse economic and social changes in countryside.

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