

# Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Spatial Planning Education to Meet Labor Market Needs in Latvia

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**Abstract:** The labor market is shaped by the demand and supply of the workforce, influenced by national economic growth and various political processes. These factors can alter the demand for certain professions. The interaction between the education sector and employers is crucial to ensure that educational programs prepare specialists needed in the labor market. This study examines the labor market in the field of spatial planning in Latvia, including planner professions, job positions, vacancies, and the associated requirements and duties. Spatial planning, as an interdisciplinary field aimed at improving the quality of places, encompasses various professional disciplines such as territorial planning, urban planning, transportation, environmental, economic, and community planning. The work of a spatial planner includes several distinct professions and job positions. While at the local level in Latvia, the focus of spatial planners is more on territorial planning. The findings indicate systemic issues in the field of planning and a gap between the qualifications prepared by the University of Latvia's Spatial Development Planning Master's program and the job market. The study calls for further discussions on the meaning and significance of spatial planning in the context of sustainable development and suggests updating the professional standard for spatial planners to better align with labor market demands.

**Key words:** spatial planning, competence, profession, labor market, Latvia

## 1. Introduction

Spatial planning as the planning for sustainable development requires comprehensive knowledge, skills, and competencies that allow for the recognition of the interplay between various domains and challenges. The primary objective of spatial planning is to enhance human well-being by improving the quality of places and environmental conditions [1]. Healey [2] defines spatial planning as a collection of management practices aimed at the development and implementation of strategies, plans, policies, and projects, as well as the regulation of the location, timing, and form of development. Thus, the spatial planner fulfills/can fulfill multiple roles, consistent with what is stated in the European Charter of Spatial Planning [3], that the spatial development planner can

be a leader of change, a scientist, a plan developer, a mediator, and a manager.

As spatial development planning becomes more complex and incorporates diverse perspectives, the role of the planner in society is evolving. This necessitates that their knowledge and competencies extend beyond the boundaries of various disciplines [4]. The AESOP (The Association of European Schools of Planning) Young Academics Network [4] highlights the conditions to be considered when planning educational programs: Role of the Planner in Society; Various Roles of the Planner; Interdisciplinarity/Multidisciplinarity; Integration of Diverse Perspectives; Continuous Learning. Davy [5] note that the diversity and variety of planning theories do not imply that all planning approaches are suitable for every situation, therefore, planners must evaluate which approaches to use in the planning process. Since 2023, the National Technical University of Athens has been implementing the InPlanEd project (Integrated Planning Approaches

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in Higher Education: Collaborative Educational Prototype Towards Integrated Approaches in the Planning of Inclusive, People-Centric, and Climate-Resilient Cities). The survey data from the project highlights the competency profiles and necessary skills for planners, as well as the deficiencies in the current educational offerings corresponding to these skills. An international job market analysis indicates a growing demand for competencies in urban planning, environmental planning, and transportation planning, as well as for planners with analytical skills [6]. As noted by Frank [7], further fundamental changes and transformation are necessary for both planning and education and training, to ensure that future generations of planners are as well-prepared as possible for challenges such as climate change, increasing socio-economic inequality, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss, and growing resource scarcity.

At the international or national level, the work of a spatial development planner is more related to the development of visions and strategies, while at the local (municipal) level in Latvia, it is more related to territorial planning. When describing the Latvian spatial planning system, it should be noted that Latvia has two levels of government (state and local), but spatial development planning in Latvia has three levels (national, regional and local) and from a spatial planning perspective, the municipal level is crucial [8]. Therefore, when evaluating the labor market for spatial planners, it is necessary to consider the planner professions and job positions associated with spatial planning. These may be incorrectly classified or separated due to historical habits or other considerations, despite being integral to the overall concept of spatial development planning.

## **2. The Profession of Spatial Planner in Latvia**

Spatial development planning is conducted according to each country's institutional system, and

the knowledge, skills, competence, and role required for a spatial planner can vary between countries, in accordance with national legislation and prevailing policies [9]. Each country sets its own professional standards, and in 2019, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia approved the professional standard for “Spatial Development Planner”. This standard specifies that a “Spatial Development Planner organizes and leads the spatial development planning process at international, national, regional, and local levels and for territorial communities; develops and participates in the creation of spatial development planning documents at all levels — strategies, programs, plans, and other planning documents, forming a sustainable, integrated vision for space and activities within it; organizes public participation in planning, coordinates and leads the implementation and monitoring of policies and actions specified in planning documents, prepares project proposals and develops projects; provides planning consultations; and conducts and leads research. A Spatial Development Planner works in the public, private, and non-governmental sectors” [10]. The professional standard also outlines the skills and attitudes, knowledge, and competencies necessary for performing the main tasks and duties of professional activities, with the most essential professional competencies being the ability to investigate and analyze situations, forecast development, prepare proposals according to societal needs, develop and monitor development planning documents, provide consultations, and establish continuous cooperation with the public [7].

Evaluating the competencies defined by the professional standard for spatial development planners in Latvia reveals a direct and unequivocal connection with the framework of knowledge, skills, and competencies for spatial planners in Europe, which is based on international experiences. At the same time, it outlines the characteristics specific to the Latvian planning system, the planner's work in relation to the

development of planning documents, and their role in the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of development planning documents. The competencies mentioned in the standard particularly emphasize communicative planning and broad, targeted public engagement, which entails active public participation. The professional standard for spatial development planners was prepared and approved five years ago, which also explains why it does not include references to contemporary planning challenges. The standard is relatively focused on planning within a stable and predictable system, although currently, planning takes place in an environment and conditions defined by crises and instability.

### 3. Professions and Workplaces of a Spatial Planner in Latvia

#### 3.1 Spatial Planning Job Classification

According to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), last updated in 2012 [11], the description of the occupational groups for urban planners and transport planners states that planners develop and implement plans, research, and provide advice on economic, social, and environmental factors that determine land use. The duties of professions within this group include coordinating urban development, collecting data on socio-economic processes affecting place development, collaborating with communities and experts, developing plans, programs, and projects, advising on regional development issues, and planning land use.

The Latvian Classification of Occupations, which is based on this International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), ensures workforce accounting and comparison in line with international practices. According to the Latvian Classification of Occupations [12], the second major group “2 Professionals” and the minor group “216 Architects, Planners, Surveyors, and Designers” (Table 1), planners can be territorial planners, spatial development planners, or development planning engineers.

**Table 1 Urban Planners and Transport Planners Professions [12].**

216 Architects, Planners, Surveyors, and Cartography Engineers and Designers
2164 Urban Planners and Transport Planners
216401 Territorial Planner
216403 Transport/Network Engineer
216405 Traffic Organization Engineer
216407 Route Network Planner
216408 Spatial Development Planner
216409 Development Planning Engineer

Comparing the data from the Latvian State Revenue Service on job positions in the private and public sectors (Table 2), it is evident that the number of positions in spatial planning has remained constant over the past year, with 23 spatial development planners [13]. Evaluating the data over a five-year period indicates a slight increase in this profession by 5 positions or 28%, while the number of territorial planners has slightly decreased over the last five years. The increase in the number of territorial planners from 2020 to 2021 could be explained by the implementation of the Administrative Territorial Reform, which necessitated the development of territorial development planning documents for the reformed municipalities. Additionally, municipalities were granted state subsidies for the development of these planning documents. Conversely, the decrease in planner positions between 2021 and 2022 may be related to the results of the Administrative Territorial Reform, which included the centralization of municipal administrative structures and the restructuring/consolidation of job positions.

For a more comprehensive comparison of job positions related to spatial planning, the role of Geographic Information System (GIS) specialist is also included. The number of GIS specialist positions increased more rapidly in 2024 compared to 2023, with a significant rise in job positions in this profession also observed in 2021 [13]. It should be noted that the source of this data is employer reports, which use the professions defined in the national

Classification of Occupations. Employers create job positions within their institutions or companies according to their vision and accordingly apply the

profession codes from the Latvian Classification of Occupations to each job position.

**Table 2** Number of jobs in the professions of spatial development planner, territorial planner and GIS specialist in February of each year [13].

Occupation classifier	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
216408 Spatial Development Planner	18	20	17	23	23
216401 Territory Planner	99	104	96	95	95
Total:	<b>117</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>118</b>
252908 Geographic Information Systems Specialist	40	46	45	45	54
Total:	<b>157</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>172</b>

### 3.2 Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 262 “Catalog of Positions, Classification of Positions, and Procedure for Developing Job Descriptions in State and Municipal Institutions”

This regulation establishes the job classification system in state and municipal institutions, where positions are divided into families, and the monthly

salary is determined according to these families (Table 3) [14]. Territorial planning is classified under family, which includes positions related to the development of spatial planning documents, planning and marking administrative territories, landscapes, transport highways, designing buildings and structures, and planning and controlling construction [14].

**Table 3** Spatial planning position families and monthly salary intervals [15, 16].

Spatial Planning Levels of Family 48	Monthly salary intervals in 2024 (in euro)		
	Minimum	Midpoint	Maximum
Level I - Specialist	803	1145	1490
Level II - Chief Specialist	960	1371	1783
Level III (Chief Spatial Planner, Engineer)	1025	1471	1904
Level IV (Chief Architect, Spatial Planner, Landscape Architect, Assistant Building Inspector, Deputy Head of Department)	1226	1752	2191
Level V (Chief Building Inspector, Deputy Head of Department, Chief Architect)	1483	2118	2649
Level VI A (Chief Project Manager, Deputy Head of Inspection)	1851	2645	3307
Level VI B (Head of Department, Deputy Head of Administration)	2304	3292	3950

There are significant differences in the applicable monthly salary rate depending on the job title (level), with the difference in monthly salary potentially being nearly threefold. The catalog of professions and job classification indicates inconsistencies in the positions of spatial planners and territorial planners. The fact that the chief territorial planner position is ranked lower, while the territorial planner position is at the same level as the architect, landscape architect, and assistant building inspector positions, can affect the choice and

prestige of the profession.

### 3.3 Statistical Reports on Position Distribution in Direct State Administration Institutions

According to statistical reports on position distribution based on the Occupation Catalog classification within direct state administration institutions (including ministries and state institutions) [14], it is evident that Rundāles Palace Museum is the only institution where a position aligns with the

occupation classifier “216408 Spatial Development Planner”, specifically titled “Historical Garden Development Manager”. There are no positions corresponding to the occupation classifier “216401 Territorial Planner” within state administration institutions in Latvia.

Spatial development planners and territorial planners as occupational units are primarily found in municipalities, planning regions, and companies. Notably, neither The Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development (which includes a Spatial Planning Policy Division) nor other ministries or state institutions have such positions. This indicates that in Latvia's context, planner roles are more commonly understood within municipalities — focusing on normative regulation compliance and enforcement.

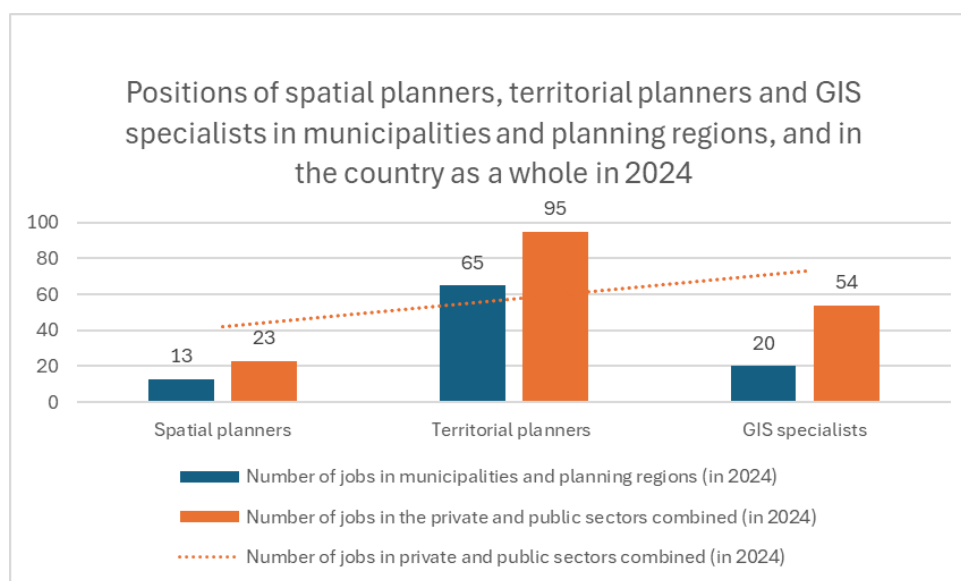
### 3.4 Data from Latvian Municipalities

Data collected from municipal websites reveal that 30 municipalities have territorial planner positions, 11 have GIS specialists, and eight have spatial planners. Two municipalities employ both territorial planners and spatial planners. Eight municipalities combine territorial planner positions with GIS specialist roles. Only Riga City Council has all three: territorial planners, spatial planners, and GIS specialists. One

municipality lacks any planning position; Three municipalities councils feature other planning-related roles such as project managers for planning departments or specialists for land management issues.

Information from municipal websites indicates that planners are in Development and Planning Departments, Property Management Departments, and Construction Boards, with job titles such as development planner, development planning specialist, strategic planning specialist, expert in strategic planning, specialist in territorial planning and land management, and chief project manager in territorial planning. The various job titles and their locations within municipal structural units indicate a lack of consistency in job titles, which consequently affects the duties, required knowledge, and competencies of planner positions.

Comparing the information available on the websites of Latvian municipalities and planning regions regarding the number of planner positions (Fig. 1), it can be concluded that there are 65 territorial planners, 13 spatial planners, and 20 GIS specialists working in Latvian municipalities and planning regions. In the public sector, there are a total of 98 positions in these professions, while there are 74 positions in the private sector (data from February 2024).



**Fig. 1** Number of jobs for territorial planners, spatial development planners, and GIS specialists in municipalities and planning regions, and in the country as a whole.

Comparing available information about planner numbers from Latvian municipality websites reveals there are 65 territorial planners working across local governments along with 13 spatial development planners plus 20 GIS specialists collectively employed by local governments plus regional authorities totaling up to ninety-eight public sector jobs while seventy-four equivalent posts exist privately as per February data in 2024.

As previously mentioned, the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers [14] establishes the job classification system and monthly salary amounts in state and municipal institutions. This is a significant reason why planner positions are named differently, to apply a higher salary group according to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers. For planners, the difference in monthly salary between level 1 positions (specialist) and level 6 positions (chief project manager) can be nearly threefold. Thus, state and municipal institutions, within their budget constraints, can provide employees with more competitive remuneration by applying various job titles.

## 4. Economic Evaluation of Planner Professions in Latvia

### 4.1 Planner Salaries

The reports published by the Latvian State Revenue Service [17] on average salaries by profession, based

on employer-submitted reports (Table 4), show that the average salary of a spatial planner in February 2024 was EUR 1608.60, for a territorial planner it was EUR 1735.99, and for a GIS specialist it was EUR 1969.11. The average salary of a GIS specialist in February 2024 exceeded that of a spatial development planner by 22% and that of a territorial planner by 13%.

According to data from the Latvian Central Statistical Bureau [18], the average gross monthly salary in the country for full-time work in 2023 was EUR 1537. Thus, the salaries of spatial planners and territorial planners are slightly above the national average monthly salary. It should also be noted that the salary increase in the country in 2023 compared to 2022 was +11.9% [18], which can be explained by other macroeconomic processes and the socio-economic situation in the country.

Evaluating the salary dynamics (Table 4) in the professions of spatial development planners and territorial planners in the private and public sectors, an increase in salaries over the last five years is observed. The increase has been more pronounced in the profession of territorial planners and less so for spatial planners. The overall salary increase in the spatial development profession from February 2020 to February 2024 is 29.8%, while in the territorial planning profession during the same period, it is 53%, and the salary increase for GIS specialists is also 53%.

**Table 4** Salary in the professions of spatial development planner and territorial planner in February of each year [17].

Occupation classifier	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
216408 Spatial Development Planner	1238.86	1405.51 +13%	1359.14 -3%	1444.17 +6%	1608.60 +11%
216401 Territory Planner	1131.70	1160.25 +2.5%	1325.61 +14%	1568.23 +18%	1735.99 +11%
252908 GIS Specialist	1290.80	1346.12 +4%	1656.47 +23%	1803.10 +9%	1969.11 +9%

The moderate salary increase for spatial development planners aligns with general economic trends and average salary increases in the country. However, the sharper increase in salaries for territorial

planners may be explained by the requirement to develop and approve territorial plans for newly established municipalities by December 31, 2025, as a result of the Administrative Territorial Reform.

Consequently, the demand for territorial planners has increased, and municipalities are competing with each other and particularly with companies that develop territorial plans, leading to higher salaries for territorial planners. The increase in GIS specialists' salaries can be attributed to the broader use of data and the demand for GIS specialists in both the private and public sectors.

#### 4.2 Demand — Vacancies for Spatial Planners and Territorial Planners in Latvian Municipalities

Evaluating the demand for spatial development planners and territorial planners, available information on vacancies for these positions from 2014 to 2023 has been compiled, including the requirements and duties listed in the vacancy descriptions.

Comparing the demand for these positions over the years, it is evident that the demand was similar for both professions — spatial planner and territorial planner — during the period from 2021 to 2023. Evaluating the offered salaries, the salary for the spatial development planner profession ranges from EUR 1100.00 to EUR 1746.00, with a 58.7% difference between the lowest and highest salaries. In the vacancies for the territorial planner position, the lowest offered monthly salary

(EUR 845.00) is half of the highest monthly salary (EUR 1694.00). The municipalities with the lowest offered salaries for these professions are municipalities, located on the Eastern border of Latvia (border with Russia) highlighting regional differences between municipalities in Latvia.

#### 4.3 Educational Requirements for Spatial and Territorial Planner Vacancies: A Comparative Analysis

Comparing the educational requirements for spatial development planner and territorial planner vacancies (Table 5), it is evident that out of the 13 vacancies reviewed, only 3 specified a requirement for higher education in spatial planning. Most frequently, the requirements listed higher education in engineering (8), territorial planning (7), architecture (6), and land management (5) as appropriate qualifications. Other relevant qualifications mentioned include education in landscape architecture (3), environmental, natural, and social sciences (2), geography (2), and geography with a specialization in territorial planning (2). Additionally, vacancies mentioned higher education in urban planning, economics or management sciences, social sciences, and regional development.

**Table 5 Educational requirements for the positions of spatial development planner and territorial planner.**

Vacancy	Educational requirements
Spatial planner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• second-level professional higher or academic education;</li> <li>• second-level higher or academic education in the field of environmental, natural, social or engineering sciences;</li> <li>• higher education in spatial planning, geography with specialization in spatial planning, engineering sciences or another specialty corresponding to the job duties</li> <li>• higher education in spatial development planning, geography, regional development or a related field;</li> <li>• higher education in engineering sciences, spatial planning, land management, architecture or another specialty corresponding to the job duties</li> </ul>
Territorial planner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher education or incomplete higher education - in engineering, architecture (including landscape), urban planning, spatial development planning, territorial planning, land management, geography or social sciences;</li> <li>• higher education in spatial planning, architecture or education in a related field;</li> <li>• higher education in territorial planning, geography with specialization in territorial planning, land management, architecture, landscape architecture or another specialty corresponding to the job duties,</li> <li>• higher education in territorial planning, land management or architecture</li> <li>• higher education in engineering, territorial planning or land management, architecture, landscape architecture</li> <li>• higher education (in the field of environmental, natural, social or engineering sciences)</li> <li>• academic or second-level professional higher education in engineering, territorial planning or an equivalent field</li> <li>• academic or second-level professional higher education in engineering, economics or management sciences</li> </ul>

Evaluating these requirements, it should be noted that higher education in territorial planning or geography with a specialization in territorial planning is not offered in Latvia, indicating that these requirements are incorrectly or inappropriately formulated. Conversely, the requirement for education in territorial planning for a spatial planner creates a contradiction and indicates a lack of understanding of the knowledge and skills required in these professions within the field of spatial planning.

#### *4.4 Requirements for Spatial Development Planner and Territorial Planner Vacancies*

The requirements listed in vacancies for spatial planners and territorial planners, which include the aforementioned contradictions, indicate systemic issues such as a lack of common understanding and knowledge about spatial planning and territorial planning. They also reflect employers' perspectives on the scope of work for these professions. It is possible that employers (HR departments, direct supervisors of planners who prepare or approve vacancy announcements) do not delve into or are unfamiliar with the offered higher education fields, use long-standing vacancy descriptions and job formulations within the organization without updating them, or use vacancy descriptions from other employers without considering their content (resulting in identical errors and inappropriate requirements). It is also possible that there are insufficient applications for spatial planner and territorial planner vacancies with appropriate education, leading to the inclusion of other educational fields to ensure applications for the vacancy. As noted in an interview with Head of the Development, Investment, and Engineering Department of Municipality, the municipality would need both a spatial planner and a territorial planner and GIS specialist, but due to limited funding, it is possible to create only one position that combines the requirements and duties of all three professions.

Comparing other requirements for spatial

development planners or territorial planners, the most frequently mentioned include knowledge of regulatory acts and previous work experience. Analytical skills, good communication skills, and digital skills (for working with GIS or equivalent programs) are also required. Vacancy descriptions place significant emphasis on previous work experience, meaning that it is difficult for a graduate without prior work experience to start a professional career after obtaining an academic education. Although the University of Latvia Spatial development planning Master's program and the AESOP competency model emphasize the need for a broad perspective and understanding of change processes and sustainable development planning skills for spatial planners, vacancy and job duty descriptions often prioritize knowledge of regulatory acts and legislation as one of the first requirements, followed by an understanding of the challenges and change processes in spatial planning. At the same time, it should be noted that communication skills and public speaking skills, as well as the duty to involve the public in planning processes, are frequently mentioned in vacancy descriptions, indicating the growing role of participation and collaboration in planning. Evaluating these requirements, it can be concluded that municipalities prioritize the performance of duties to meet regulatory requirements, but expect significantly less that planners will have an understanding of spatial dynamics at various scales — change processes, socio-economic processes, and systemic and strategic thinking competencies.

Job advertisements also specify the duties to be performed, and the duties compiled by the author from vacancy announcements, such as “organize, lead, and participate in the development of municipal development planning documents”, indicate that employers consider the main duty of planners to be the development of territorial development planning documents. A significant fact is that when explaining what is meant by territorial development planning



documents, territorial planner vacancies most frequently mention the development of territorial plans, local plans, and detailed plans, while spatial planner vacancies indicate participation in strategic and spatial planning. At the same time, almost all vacancy descriptions mention collaboration with the public and participation as a duty, highlighting the increasing role of public involvement in the planning process.

The analysis of vacancy descriptions indicates that there is a lack of highly qualified, cross-sectoral thinking spatial planners in the Latvian planner labor market, and public sector employers (state administration, municipalities) do not understand the essence and principles of spatial planning. This calls for further discussions on the meaning and significance of spatial planning in the context of sustainable development. Employers' (municipal sector) understanding of spatial planning and territorial planning is based on long-established perceptions of territorial planning as a normative and regulated process, lacking knowledge and understanding of the systemic and strategic perspective of spatial planning. This creates a gap between the qualifications prepared by the University of Latvia Spatial development planning Master's study program — spatial development planner — and

the job market, which offers more positions and duties for territorial planners. Municipalities lack knowledge about the principles of sustainable development, trends in spatial planning, and the methods and approaches used to create sustainable, viable, liveable and attractive territories and places.

## 5. Employment of University of Latvia Spatial Development Planning Master's Study Program Graduates

Since 2007, the University of Latvia has been offering a Professional Master's degree program in "Spatial Development Planning" conducted full-time, 120 ECTS. Upon completion, graduates receive a Master's degree and the qualification of a Spatial Development Planner. After completing the University of Latvia Spatial development planning Master's study program, 183 graduates (2009-2024) are employed in international organizations, companies, ministries, state institutions, municipalities, and academia (Table 6). Graduates hold positions such as department heads, deputy heads, project managers, spatial planners, territorial planners, architects/landscape architects/planners, environmental specialists/planners, GIS specialists, land management and real estate specialists, construction board heads, and others.

**Table 6** Employers of the University of Latvia's spatial development planning master's program graduates.

Organization type	Organization title
International organizations	Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea, Urban climate architects, Energy Cities, u.c
Companies, including planning companies	Latvian State Forests, AS UPB, Layout17 Ltd., METRUM Ltd., Map Publishing Jāna sēta Ltd., Livland Ltd., Surveyor of Latvia Ltd., Latvenergo, ALPS Ltd., Grupa 93 Ltd., Regiona projects Ltd., Labie koki Ltd., Pillar Ltd., etc..
Associations	Association Baltic Environmental Forum, Association Baltic Coasts
Ministry	Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Smart specialization and Regional Development
State institutions	Nature Protection Board, State Plant Protection Service, Central Finance and Contracts Agency, National Library of Latvia, Latvian Geospatial Information Agency, International Youth Programme Agency, State Revenue Service, National Cultural Heritage Board, State Chancellery, State Real Estate, Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
Planning regions	Vidzeme Planning Region, Riga Planning Region
Municipalities	27 municipalities
Science	University of Latvia, Tallinn University of Technology, Latvia university of Life Sciences and Technologies

Summarizing the data on the employment of graduates in Latvian city and municipal governments (Fig. 2), it is evident that over the 17 years since the University of Latvia Spatial development planning

Master's study program has been implemented, its graduates have worked or are working in 27 municipalities (from 43 in total), while none have worked in 16 municipalities.

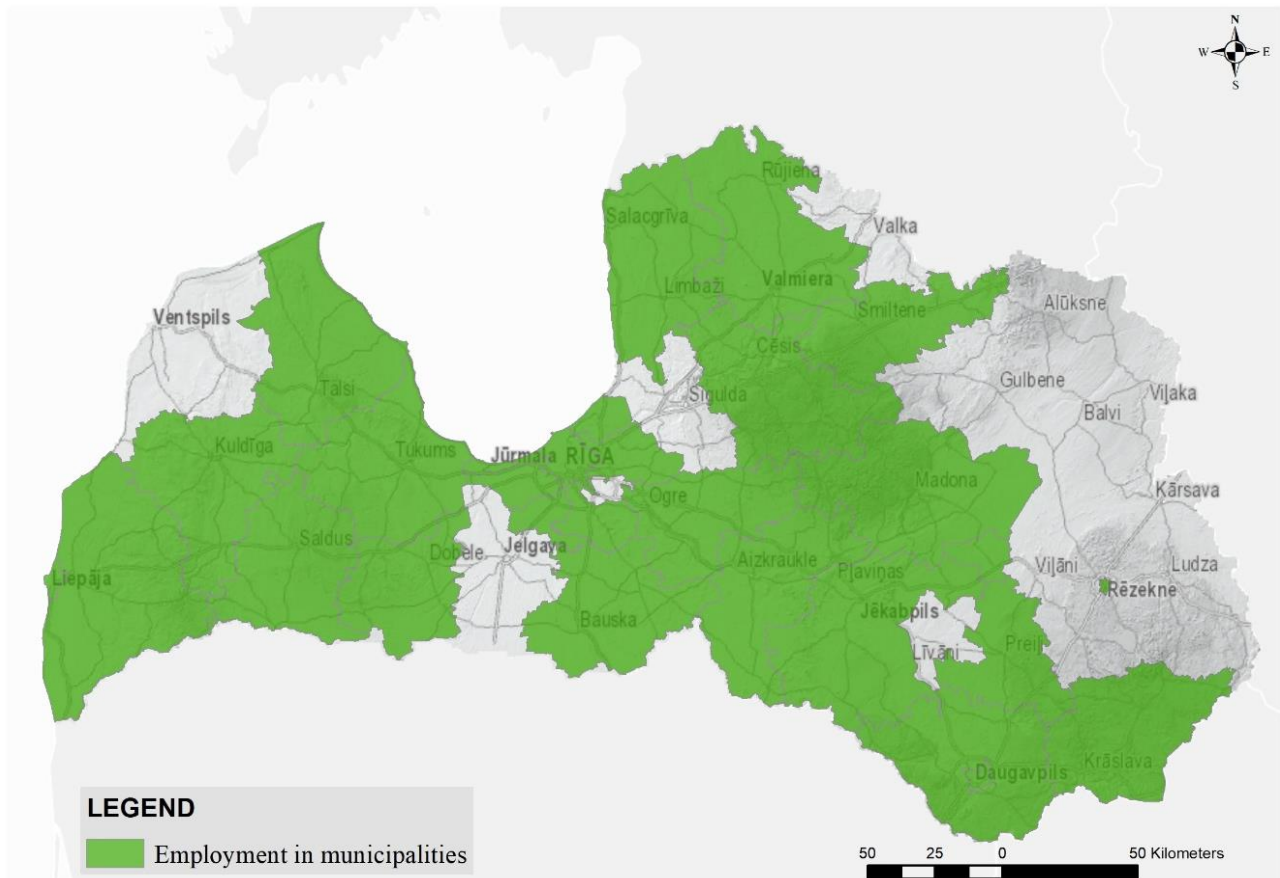


Fig. 2 Employment of university of Latvia spatial development planning master's program graduates (2009-2023) in Latvian municipalities.

## 6. Challenges and Solutions for Spatial Development Planning Education at the University of Latvia in Accordance With Labor Market Requirements

Researchers in spatial development planning, such as Hague and Davy, associate current planning issues with the crises experienced over the past 15 years, which have altered the planning agenda [4, 19]. Hague [19] emphasizes that the crisis in the European Union is deeply spatial in nature. The twenty years in the European Union have also been a period during which Latvia's spatial development planning had to align with the common policy frameworks and planning

practices of Europe, which has only been partially achieved, with planning still being more focused on territorial (land use) planning. As spatial development planning becomes more complex and incorporates the integration of diverse perspectives, the role of the planner in society changes. Today, a spatial development planner must fulfill multiple roles, acting more as a facilitator and driver of processes. [4]. The European Charter of Spatial Development Planning [3] identifies five roles for spatial planners: planner as a leader of change, planner as a scientist, planner as a plan developer, planner as a mediator, and planner as a manager. The University of Latvia Spatial

Development Planning study program primarily prepares planners for three roles — manager, mediator, and plan developer, with a lack of graduates as leaders of change and scientists.

Compiled information on planner positions in Latvia indicates that the role of territorial planner dominates — in statistics, job vacancies, and municipal job titles. To ensure alignment between the professional standard for spatial planners and the University of Latvia Spatial Development Planning study program, it is necessary to initiate the updating of the professional standard, which was last done in 2019.

In the implementation of the University of Latvia Master's program "Spatial Development Planning", cooperation between program graduates working in the field, domain experts, and the academic environment is good and sufficient. Employers are involved in providing internship placements, teaching study courses and lectures, leading seminars and practical classes, and supervising final theses. As the number of planners — graduates, professionals, and researchers — and their international experience grows, there is potential for the gradual formation of a "critical mass" in Latvia — a network/community of spatial planners that can drive and enhance spatial planning in the country, bringing an international dimension to planning. As planning processes become more democratic and co-creation in planning is strengthened, the importance of collaboration among those involved in planning increases. Cooperation between professionals, graduates, the labor market, and the education sector promotes and ensures synergy in spatial development planning, aligning professionalism with labor market demands.

A significant weakness is the lack of planner-scientists in Latvia, which aligns with the priorities and emphases of European planning studies — promoting academic excellence. The University of Latvia Spatial Development Planning study program annually prepares professional planners for the labor

market, but the relatively small number of students and graduates does not ensure scientific continuity and renewal.

## 7. Conclusions

The European Charter of Spatial Development Planning [3] indicates five roles for spatial planners: planner as a leader of change, planner as a scientist, planner as a designer, planner as a political advisor and mediator, and planner as a manager of cities and regions. The University of Latvia's Spatial Development Planning Master's program predominantly prepares planners for three roles — manager, mediator, and plan developer — while there is a notable deficiency in graduates prepared as leaders of change and scientists.

The compiled data on planner positions reveal that the role of territorial planner is predominant, as evidenced by statistics from the Latvian State Revenue Service, vacancy announcements, and municipal job titles. To ensure congruence between the professional standard for spatial development planners and the Spatial Planning study program, it is imperative to initiate an update of the professional standard, which was last revised in 2019.

Statistical data (State Revenue Service, Cabinet of Ministers), information from municipalities and planning regions, planner vacancy descriptions, and the employment summary of the University of Latvia's Spatial Development Planning Master's program graduates indicate that planners occupy various positions (spatial planners, territorial planners, GIS specialists, development planners, strategic planning specialists, project managers, etc.). Concurrently, the analysis of the planner labor market reveals existing gaps and inconsistencies:

- the diversity of planner professions included in the Classification of Occupations, where only the Spatial Planner has a professional standard, while the Cabinet Regulation on job families

classifies territorial planning as a job family group.

- Statistical data and municipal website information show that the majority of positions/job opportunities are in the professions of territorial planners and GIS specialists, which also offer higher salaries.
- The job/ vacancies descriptions for spatial and territorial planners specify incorrect educational requirements. There are significant inconsistencies between the educational offer and the labor market demand for planners in Latvia, which is based on a misunderstanding of the planner's field of work outside the regulatory framework.
- In municipalities, the scope of work for planners is more associated with the implementation of regulatory frameworks, which is most frequently indicated as the primary duty in vacancy descriptions.
- The analysis of the planner labor market reveals systemic issues in the field of planning and a gap between the knowledge and understanding of state administration regarding the significance of spatial development planning in the context of sustainable development.

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