

Rokiškis

The city of rabbits

Analyse of a rural area in Lithuania

Research report

Nordplus IT LT/LV 2023

Submitted by: Kira Gatzemeier, Brandon N. Piel, Simo Liikkanen, Dovydas Balčiūnas, Kotryna Kirklytė

12th of May 2023

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
1.2. Purpose explanation - overview of the task	3
1.3. Statistics	3
1.4. Landscape overview	12
1.5. History	13
1.6. Built environment of Rokiškis	14
2. Methods	15
2.1. Theory of the Dérive	15
2.2. Interviews	15
2.3. Observation	16
2.4. Desk Research	17
3. Analysis and interpretations	18
3.1. Observation (A Walk – to Set the Scene)	18
3.2. Market	18
3.3. Bus station	19
3.4. Beach	20
3.5. Hotel	22
3.6. Museum	22
3.7. Tourist information center	24
3.8. Library	26
3.9. Church	28
3.10. Primary personal health care center	30
3.11. School	31
3.12. Bee farm	33
3.13. Local action group	35
3.14. Obeliai community	37
3.15. Rokiškis cheese factory	39
4. Concluding Discussion	41
4.1. Limitations:	41
4.2. Recommendations under the lens of Smart Shrinkage:	42
5. References	46

1. Introduction

Many countries are facing depopulation, especially in Central and Eastern Europe which have some of the highest rates around the world (Ubarevičienė/ van Ham, 2017). Often the declining of a region is started through an economical decline. This leads in many cases to a downward spiral of following consequences. The region gets less and less attractive, less economy, declining tax revenues, declining of service provision and social infrastructure. The labour market conditions falters, young adults are certainly moving out from rural regions for education and employment causes (Ubarevičienė/ van Ham, 2017). To adapt to the new conditions of the changes in rural areas, new transformations are needed.

1.2. Purpose explanation - overview of the task

As part of the interactive excursion around Lithuania and Latvia, we were tasked to take a closer look at the small town Rokiškis in the north of Lithuania. With a concentration on rural areas and the reasons for population decline, the main point was to analyse how people live in the area, what kind of challenges do they face, and what could be improved for a positive development. What follows is an analysis of Rokiškis under this lens of identifying existing or recommending new smart shrinking strategies.

However, the authors of this report are aware that four days in a research site is a short amount of time to make clarified suggestions and objective research. For this reason, the main goal was to get as many opinions as possible from people, make observations during the limited time and paint a broad picture about Rokiškis as a depopulating area. One of the targets was to clarify the quality of life in the town and how people experience living in Rokiškis from different perspectives. We filtered for the challenges, wishes, and worries, that engaged the Rokiškis residents, all while keeping an eye out for bright spots, success, and valued cultural traditions. Furthermore, pulling this as a single example from wider depopulating regions of Lithuania, our research guideline was to approach Rokiškis from a very open point of view. To obtain insights and to get to know Rokiškis as a city and a community, we talked with town leaders, visited one of the elementary schools, talked to everyday people at a market, patronized small businesses, and viewed community institutions and tourist sites.

1.3. Statistics

It is noticeable that the population of the municipality of Rokiškis district decreased by 39 percent since 1996. True, on January 1, 2021, the Rokiškis district municipality registered population growth for the first time in almost 30 years. That is, at the beginning of 2021 there

were 643 more inhabitants than at the beginning of 2020. However, after considering international and internal migration, natural population change, such increased numbers could have been influenced by the general population census conducted in 2021. That is, more accurate calculations distorted the statistics of that year. Also contrary to the general growth of the population of Lithuania, the flow of refugees caused by the war in Ukraine did not affect the growth of the population of the Rokiškis district municipality.

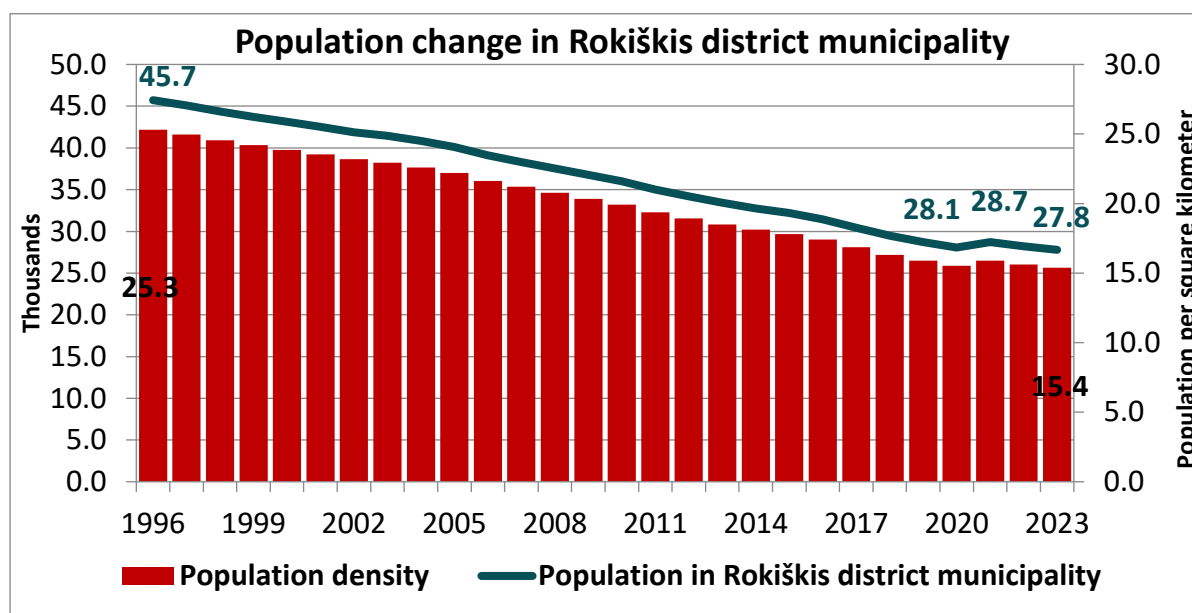


Fig. 1. Population change in Rokiškis district municipality in 1996-2023 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Evaluating the population density, at the beginning of 2023, the municipality of Rokiškis district had 15.4 inhabitants per square kilometer. Comparing this population density with neighboring municipalities, the population density is higher only in the municipality of Utena district. Of course, this clearly correlates with the fact that of the nearest cities, only the city of Utena is bigger than Rokiškis.

In the context of population decline, the Rokiškis district municipality did not face the worst situation in the region. That is, when assessing population decline in the period from 2001 to 2023, in the municipalities of Rokiškis and neighboring districts, the population in Rokiškis and Anykščiai districts decreased by 36 percent, while, for example, in Biržai district municipality, by as much as 38 percent. A better situation during the considered period was recorded in the municipalities of Kupiškis and Utena districts.

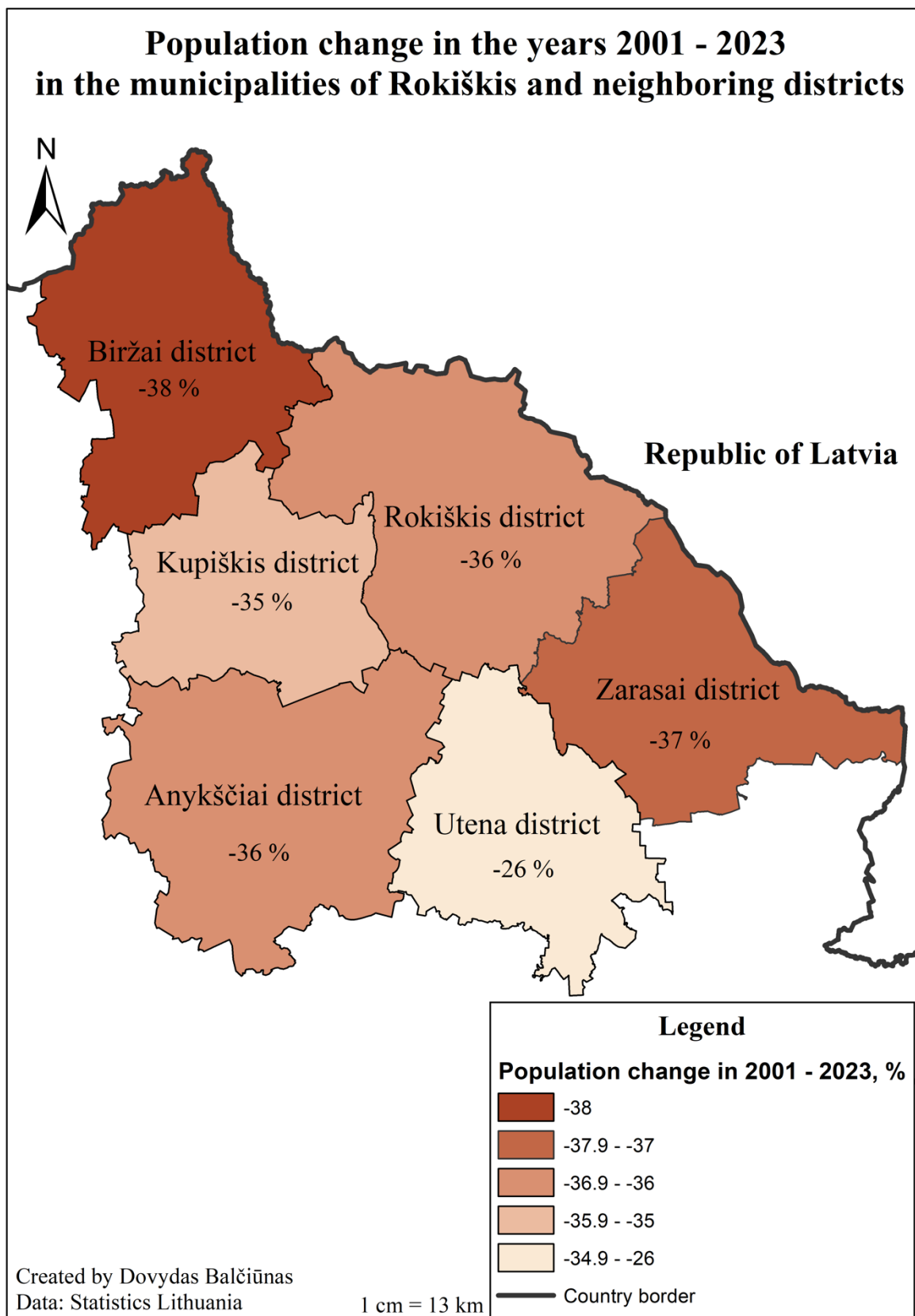


Fig. 2. Population change in the years 2001-2023 in the municipalities of Rokiškis and neighboring districts
(Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

However, why is the population of Rokiškis decreasing so sharply? First, due to negative population change. Examining the natural population change in the municipality of Rokiškis district comparing the years 1994 and 2022, the birth rate in the district decreased by almost 67 percent. As the number of inhabitants in the municipality decreased, it is natural that the mortality figures also decreased during the considered period, but the decrease in mortality was not as pronounced as in the birth rate. When evaluating the birth and death rates, the negative growth trend of natural population change is maintained.

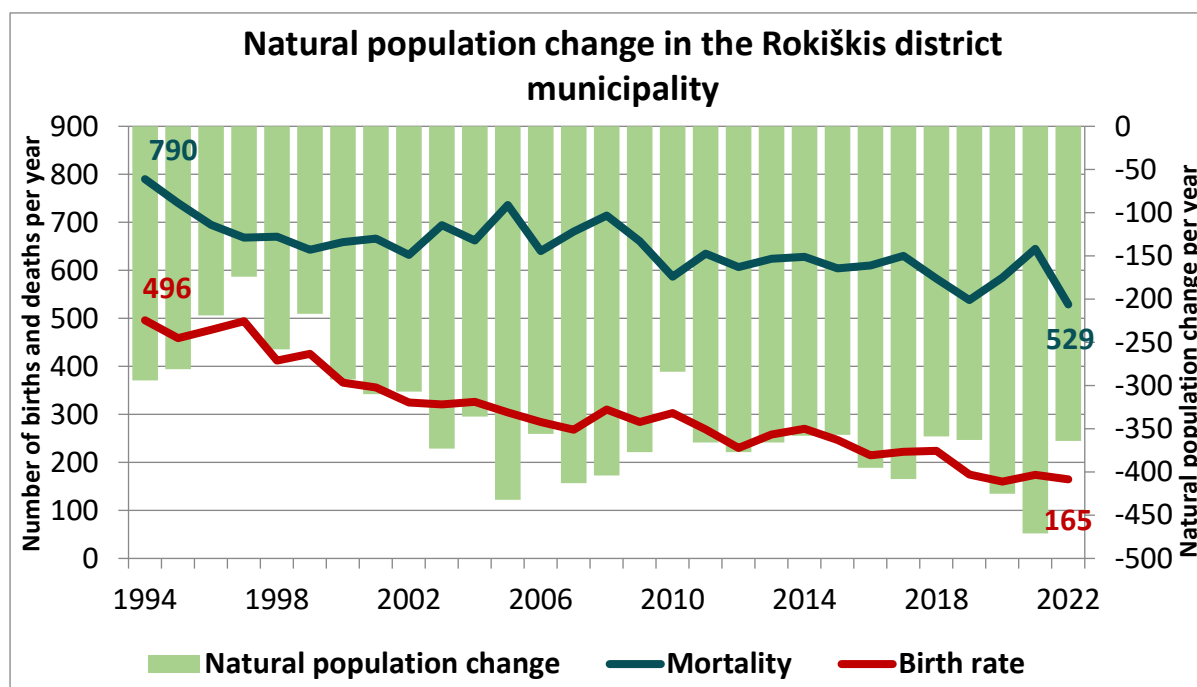


Fig. 3. Natural population change in the Rokiškis district municipality in 1994-2022 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Not only negative natural population change, but also negative net migration contributes to the decline of the municipality's population. That is, more residents emigrate from the municipality than immigrate to it. What is interesting is that when examining the data of international and internal migration, in the entire considered period since 2001, the largest flows of residents from or back to Rokiškis are within the borders of Lithuania. That is, more residents of Rokiškis district municipality choose to move to other Lithuanian cities than abroad. In parallel with immigrants, people who lived in Lithuania move to Rokiškis.

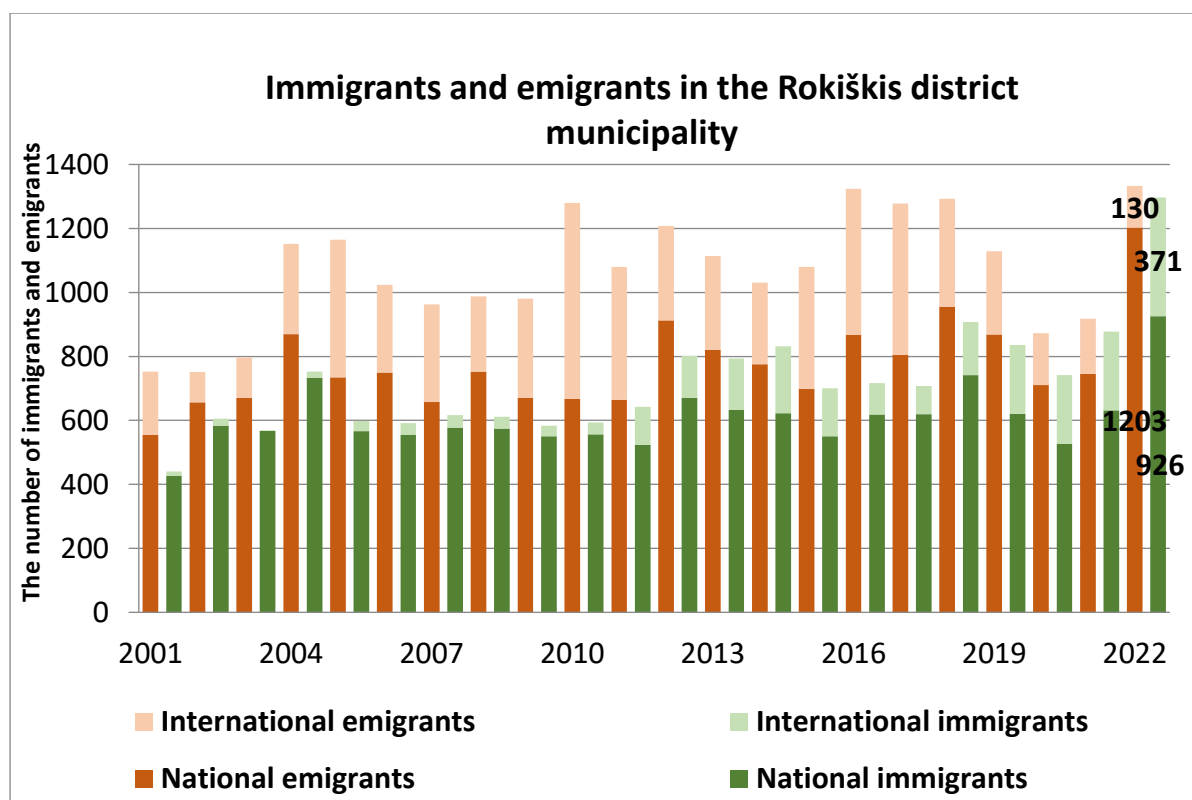


Fig. 4. Immigrants and emigrants in the Rokiškis district municipality in 2001-2022 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Evaluating population decline at a smaller level - at the level of wards - the east-southeast wards of the municipality contribute the most to population decline, where the population has decreased by as much as 40 percent over 20 years. The number of inhabitants is the lowest in the suburban ward of the other city of Rokiškis and in the city of Rokiškis itself. Thus, it can be said that the decline of the population in Rokiškis is influenced by the center-periphery vector. That is, the city of Rokiškis as a municipal center has an influence on smaller depopulation processes in the surrounding territories.

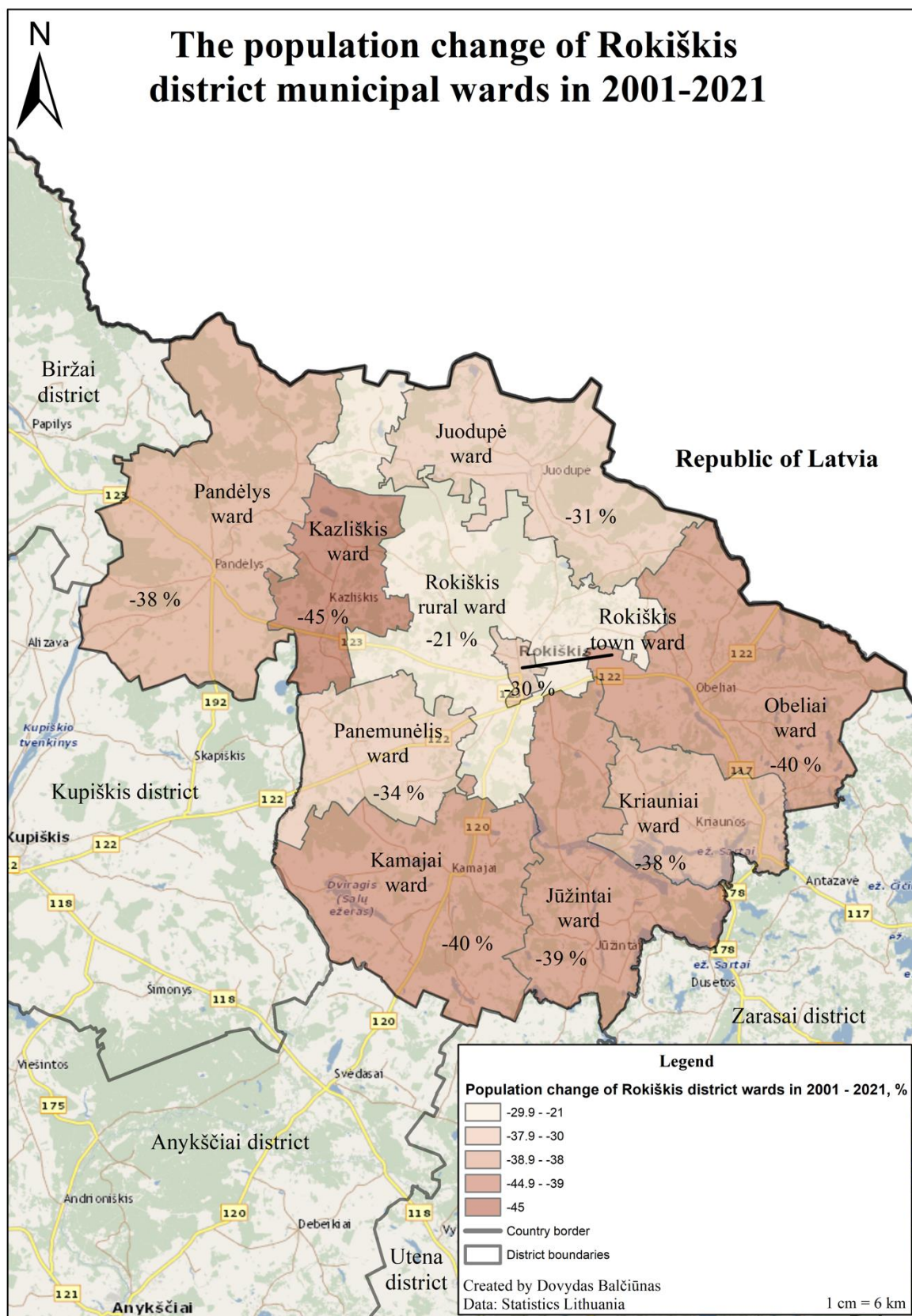


Fig. 5. The population change of Rokiškis district municipal wards in 2001-2021 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

The rapid decline of the population in rural areas also affects the decline of the network of settlements in the self-government of Rokiškis district. For example, according to the data of the 2021 general population census, more than 55 percent of the municipal settlements have only 1 to 9 inhabitants, and this group of settlements only increases during each census. Worth to mention that the following graphics do not include the 3 cities of Rokiškis municipality — Rokiškis, Obeliai and Pandėlys. However, the fragmentation of rural settlements shows a clear trend of rural decline, when a large part of the settlements becomes uninhabitable. The trends observed during the research are also substantiated by studies conducted by Lithuanian scientists. Already in 2013, in the article "The Particularities of Lithuania Rural Settlement Network Alternations during the Period 1989-2011" published by Edis Kriaučiūnas, it is stated that during the examined period of twenty-two years, the number of settlements in Lithuania where no one lives has increased almost twice. The loss of settlements has historically been recorded in the municipalities with the smallest villages, that is, in the North-Eastern Lithuania region, where is the Rokiškis district municipality. The author claims that the increasing relative role of the smallest settlements in the rural settlement system is a consequence of population decline (Kriaučiūnas, 2013).

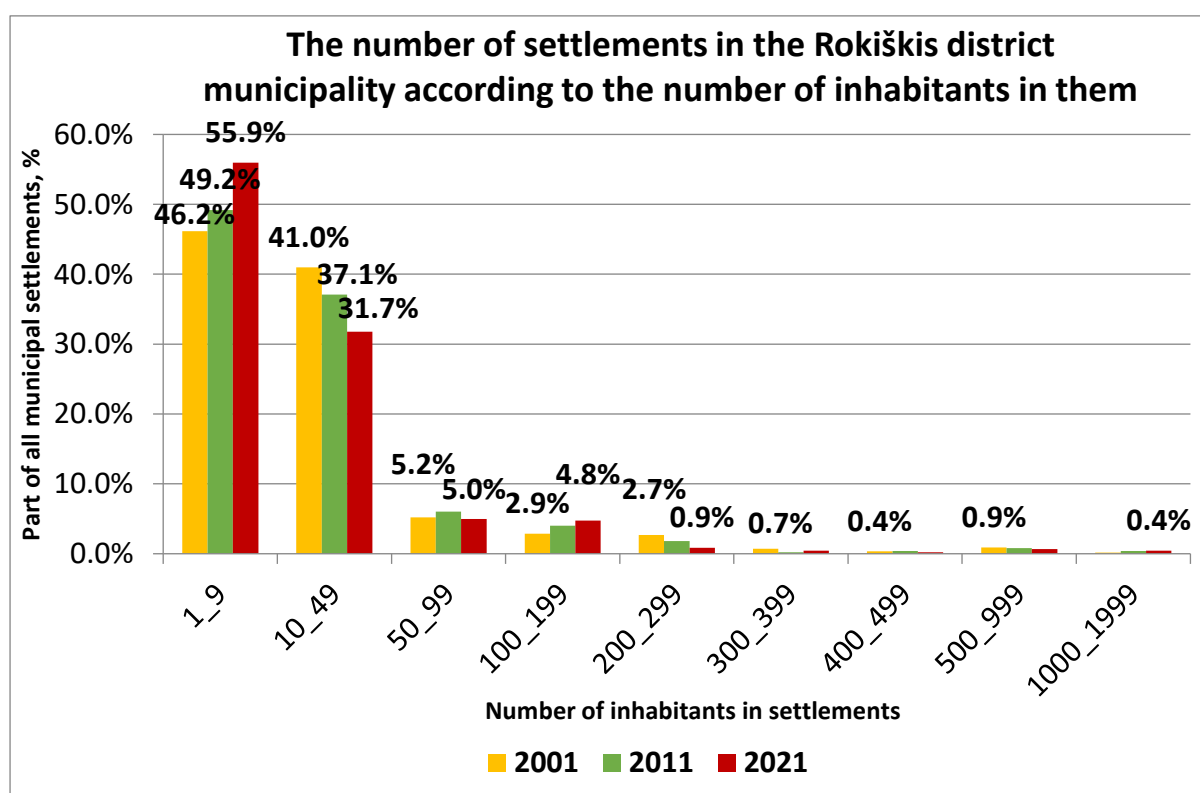


Fig. 6. The number of settlements in the Rokiškis district municipality according to the number of inhabitants in them in 2001, 2011, 2021 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Negative natural population change, negative net migration affects not only the overall decrease in the population of the municipality, the wards, the loss of settlements, but also another very big problem of Lithuania - the aging of the society. Both in 2001 and in 2022, the population of Rokiškis district municipality is on average older than the average of Lithuania or Panevėžys county. In addition, according to the data of 2022, the average age of the population of the municipality of Rokiškis district exceeded 50 years. In 2022, the population over 50 years old was already in the neighboring municipalities of Kupiškis, Anykščiai, Zarasai districts.

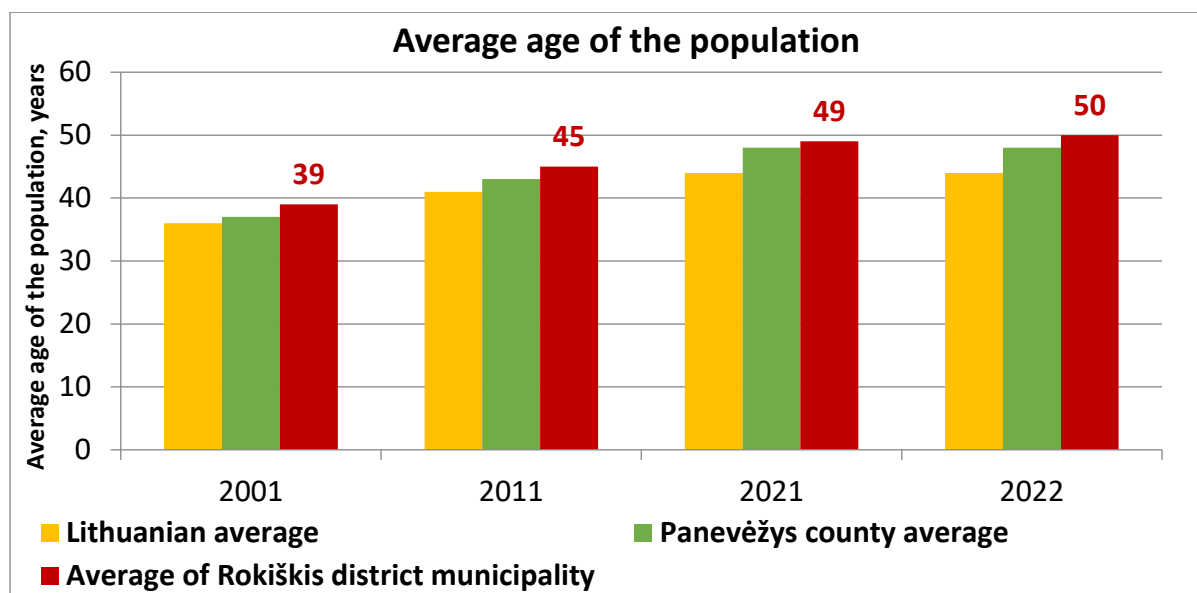


Fig. 7. Average age of the population in 2001, 2011, 2021, 2022 (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Just like the average age of the population, the ratio of registered unemployed to working-age population in Rokiškis district municipality is higher than the average of Lithuania or Panevėžys county. A higher ratio in the neighboring municipalities of Rokiškis district municipality in 2022 was recorded only in Zarasai district municipality. Meanwhile, only in the municipalities of Utena and Kupiškis, the ratio of registered unemployed to working-age population did not reach 10 percent. The higher number of unemployed people in rural municipalities has been examined at the national level for some time. For example, the research examines the changes that have occurred and are ongoing in the countryside, which are difficult to find an analogue in any other area of public life in the state. Due to the low diversification of rural areas, the authors emphasize the frequent problems of rural residents: low investment capacity of rural residents, low purchasing power and professional training of working-age persons that does not meet the requirements of the modern labor market. It is also mentioned that the collectivization that took place in the rural areas did not pay attention to the

entrepreneurship education of the rural population, and the five-decade-long occupation radically changed the structure and economic activity of the rural population. Therefore, when the labour market changes, rural residents are unwilling and unable to retrain, and this increases the number of unemployed in rural areas (Jasaitis; Ratkevičienė, 2012).

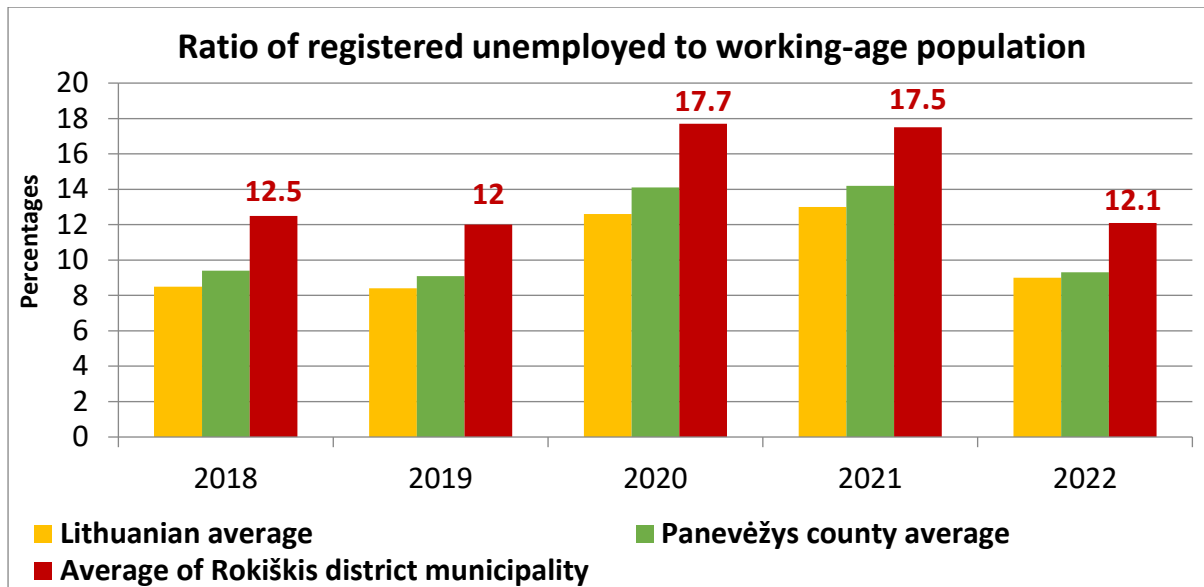


Fig. 8. Ratio of registered unemployed to working-age population in 2018-2022 ((Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

Rokiškis has been known as an industrial city for a long time, but currently, out of 11 companies registered in the municipality of Rokiškis district with more than 100 employees, only 4 are industrial companies. The remaining 7 are budgetary institutions and are elastically dependent on changes in the population.

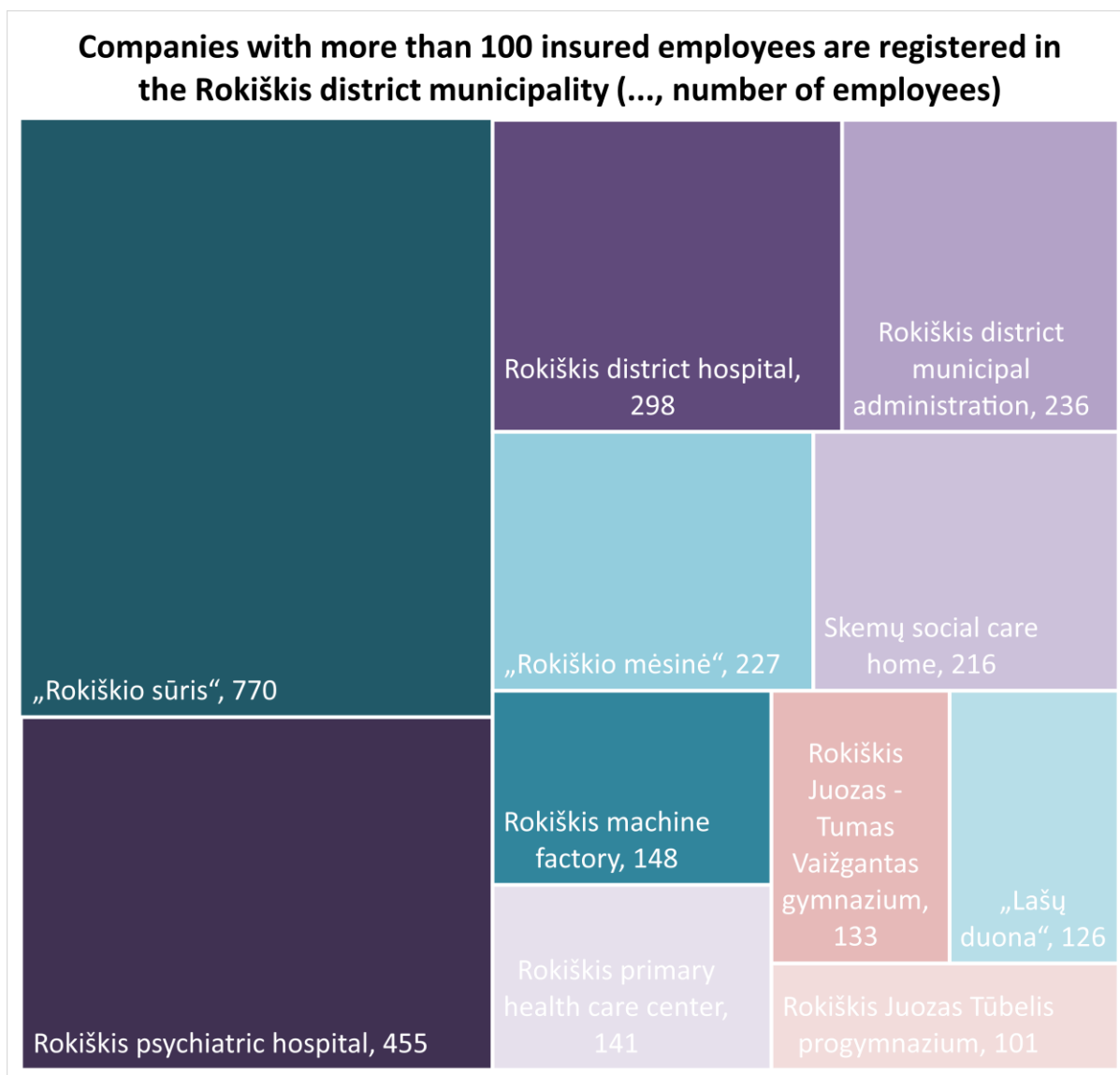


Fig. 9. Companies with more than 100 insured employees are registered in the Rokiškis district municipality (Source: Statistics Lithuania, 2023)

1.4. Landscape overview

Rokiškis District Municipality is in the northeastern part of Lithuania, in Panevėžys County. The majority of Rokiškis District lies in the Western Aukštaitija Upland, reaching the Aukštaitija Highland in the east and the Mūša-Nemunėlis Lowland in the northwest. The highest point in the district, 175 meters, is near Švilpiškis, while the lowest point, 76 meters, is near the border of Rokiškis, Biržai District, and Latvia. (Rokiškio rajono..., 2018)

The district borders Biržai, Utena, Zarasai, Kupiškis, and Anykščiai districts. In the east, Rokiškis District borders the Republic of Latvia.

According to the 2021 data from the State Land Fund, the total area of Rokiškis district municipality is 180,630.83 hectares. Out of this, agricultural land covers 98,672.80 hectares (54,63%), while forests occupy 54,178.57 hectares (29,99 %), mainly consisting of pine forests and mixed forests.

Within Rokiškis District Municipality, the sources of the Nemunėlis and Šetekšna rivers are located. The territory of the district is traversed by the Lėvuo and Kriauna rivers, as well as numerous smaller rivers. In total, there are 42 rivers and 99 lakes, with the longest lake in Lithuania, Lake Sartai, being particularly popular among tourists. The district also includes a part of the Sartai Regional Park and the Moškėnai-Laukupėnai historic sanctuary. Valuable natural complexes are protected in the Notigalė, Suvainiškis, Petriošiškis State Nature Reserves, Junkūnai Geomorphological Reserve, Kampuolis State Hydrographic Reserve, and Čedasai State Ornithological Reserve. (Rokiškio rajono..., 2018)

The predominant useful minerals in the area are dolomite (in the Čedasai deposit), gravel (in the Sniegiai and Prūsėliai deposits), and peat (in the Degesynės, Čelkiai, and Varaščinės peat bogs). Most of the mineral deposits are concentrated in the northern part of the district. (Rokiškio rajono..., 2018)

1.5. History

Roskiskis was first mentioned in 1499 and is the central town of the north-eastern part of the Panevezys district. The name of the town is related to the Hunter Rokas. He was hunting rabbits in that area. The main attraction and historical side of the town is influenced by the manor. The Manor House, which is nowadays a museum was built by the Thiesenhausen family in 1801. The classicism project was rebuilt in 1905 with acquired Baroque elements. Since 1952 the Manor is a regional museum with changing exhibitions, explaining the main history of the place and the family background of the noblemen Astikas, Krosinskis and Thiesenhausen, which modelled the place (rokiskis.lt, 2023).

From 1873 the town started growing due to a construction of a railway line. In the years 1916 to 1950 it was a county, since 1950 Rokiškis is a district centre. The reputation of the town is determined by the old architecture, and cultural traditions. The centre of the city stands out for the Independence Square which was built at the end of the 18th century. The recognizable church of the Apostel and Evangelist St Matthew lines up to the square with a Neo-Gothic style (rokiskis.lt, 2023).

In recent history, Rokiškis was likely affected by the change in the political and economic shifting after 1990. Lithuania is mainly influenced by the former Soviet planning principles, which were facing a different outcome in a new system. The population decline and disparities in the different regions are strongly attached to another kind of philosophy. Regions where back in the days forced to stimulate during the Soviet period by providing jobs in low – tech industry and where after 1990 not in the position to suddenly provide a sufficient level of employment as well as standard of living in a new market system and under the theory of a neo-liberal economy (Ubarevičienė/ van Ham, 2017).

1.6. Built environment of Rokiškis

The centre of town is a wide square bordered by the Rokiškio St. Matthew Apostle Church on the eastern edge. The red brick building has a tower and, as the tallest building on the square, easily catches the eye. In a direct line with the church gates (and through a series of arches constructed within the town square) is the Rokiškis Regional Museum housed in a former manor house. The reason for this line is rumoured to be that the local lord wanted a thousand steps exactly from his front gate to the church. The main street, heading in a southerly direction, is lined with painted shutters. Within the town, the areas closer to the main square in the north are older wooden houses, some in a state of ruin or dilapidation, but generally well maintained. We were able to date some houses in this area to the 19th century. The southern section of the town was composed of the newer development of soviet-style block flats. This area also felt generally well maintained and housed the town sports complex, several schools, and the swimming complex. There was active renovation going on in both of these sections of town. Finally, along the eastern edge of town was a street lined with oaks, containing larger single-family homes, some with a lake front view. Roads and sidewalks are the primary form of transit infrastructure – some even recently build or improved through European Union funding.

Rabbits were a general theme throughout Rokiškis. They featured regularly on the painted shutters, in statues around towns, and a rabbit footprint could be found painted on major sidewalks and byways. As Kiskis is the Lithuanian word for rabbit, this suggests that the town's appreciation of rabbits derives from the story of the town's name (mentioned above).

2. Methods

Our research process was based on qualitative methods such as interviews and observation. We collected semi-structured interviews (of varying formality), discussions, observed the surrounding environment and participated in local facilities. We approached the fieldwork process with a loose thought pattern and let the research area build its own framework to refine it later. This is an inductive approach to research. Our research methods draw heavily from ethnography and are linked also to phenomenology, albeit without going too deep into certain people's experiences but giving space to spatial experientiality. We also incorporate into our research process the theory of *Dérive*, our methodologic approach.

2.1. Theory of the *Dérive*

Getting an idea and impression of the town Rokiškis we used part of the theory of drifting, in the scientific language known as “Theory of the *Dérive*”. It is a technique of a hurried wandering around with the connection of psychological effect influenced by the surroundings. Guided through the nearby environment, the person observes the area without any calculation on the outcome. The coincident plays a big role during the process, as well as the emotions being felt, and the psychological stimulus (Debord, 1958). The main reason using the method was to understand the place better and to see where we naturally get guided to and why. Since we used the drifting on several days, sometimes with main starting and ending points, it can be said, that the method was slightly modified to fit our constraints. Nevertheless, experiencing a new town without any given information before, the questions were asked: where do we get easily attracted to, what kind of neighbourhood lines can we find and how is the narrative of the city drawn in our perspective. The goal was to observe the surroundings without an overruling or perception-warping guideline.

2.2. Interviews

We executed semi-structured interviews with a total of 36 people. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method for their abilities to be precise about the research theme but also giving a lot of space for more unique opinions and experiences. Semi-structured interview is most relevant in cases where researcher wants knowledge from specific things instead of giving too much freedom for the interviewee (Tampere University, 2015). On the other hand, we wanted to give space for personal aspects of interviewees so our interviews can be considered to have elements from more open thematic interview methods. Two of the interviews can be considered as walking interviews although the movement was mostly driving. Walking

interview is a research method which emphasizes the moving between places to gain knowledge of practises and experiences, and ways of observing and understanding the world (Bamberg, 2017). We found walking interviews extremely efficient in adding more spatial information and meanings of the places for our research topic. Interview with the representative of local cheese factory was operated via phone. Most of the interviews included less formal discussion around the question themes and gave us useful information usually from more personal aspects. Four of the 36 interviews were specialist interviews. We modified the questions to suit their expertise and give us more depth to their insight within their specialized fields. Also, the length of the specialist interviews was most of the time longer than others. Another strength of our interview process is we were able to conduct interviews with three of the largest employers in the area (over 100 employees). As an analysis method we chose to process the interviews with qualitative content analysis. We decided not to have precise transcriptions of the interviews and instead summarized as well as analysed the interviews from the notes we took during the interactions. These analyses with summaries are presented in the Analysis section below.

2.3. Observation

Observational research is a research technique where you observe participants and phenomena in their most natural settings (Delve, 2023). We were focusing on how people live their everyday lives, what kind of environment the Rokiškis city and its surroundings create together with both natural and build attributes and compared the circumstances in a small rural village to the municipal centre to create bigger picture about whole region. Referring to the Delve's website (2023), observational research can be divided into three different approaches: naturalistic, participant and structured. We clearly observed the case site mostly participant way as we deployed ourselves to the streets, buildings, parks and dirt roads among the community. We talked to locals, asked their opinions and made sense perceptions. In participant observation researchers actively participate in the study itself. In addition to observing behaviours, a researcher might conduct interviews, take notes, look at documents, and take photographs (Delve, 2023.).

We conducted observation in 31 sites and along walking (or occasionally driving) routes to and from said sites. We spent varying length of time at these observation sites. The amount of time spent in the sites was never predetermined but chosen though our interactions and engagement level and the location's activity level (for example, if there were many people about). If we felt

our observations had naturally decrescendoeed, we drew on our Theory of the Derive and moved on.

In the town of Rokiškis:

- Town Square
- Beach (Lake)
- Church
- Bakery
- Local Sat. Market
- River Park
- Bus Station
- Residential construction site
- Museum/Manor
- Pizza Restaurant
- Local goods store
- Street with historic wooden houses
- Manor grounds
- Supermarket
- Outside display at cheese factory
- Street with oak trees
- Library
- Hotel
- Charity shop
- Pool
- Elementary School
- Tourist information center
- Cultural center

In the village of Obeliai:

- Cultural center
- Village walk
- Park
- Grocery store
- School
- Swimming pond
- Dumping ground

In the surrounding municipal region:

- Lake leisure center

2.4. Desk Research

Additionally, we prepared for our excursion by conducting desk research on the demographics, local business environment, educational and health systems, tourism recommendations, and relative economic standing (within Lithuania). While in the field, we kept up our desk research by collecting local newspapers, visiting informative websites, and checking local social media.

3. Analysis and interpretations

In the following abstracts, the results from the methods used are described and analysed. We list observations first (when available) and then provide an interview summary. This order was chosen because the observations tend to be more descriptive while the interviews expressly show relevant themes related to shrinkage. The interviews are presented in table format with the place and number of people involved listed.

3.1. Observation (A Walk – to Set the Scene)

Arriving in Rokiškis area, it could be seen that the entering of the city seemed less impressive and getting more and more newly constructed towards the centre. Walking from the centrally located hotel on the main street, we got easily drawn towards the main square, the Independence Square and the church. Being in the heart of the city, this place seemed to be the main subject in the town. However, the fact that there were only a few people there on Friday evening also attracted our attention. From the church to the Manor is a straight walking path. Around the square are some restaurants, shops. At the first impressions it was pointing out, that a lot of clothing shops, even several ones near to each other, are located. Several wooden houses in different colours, with painted shutters are lining up on the main street. One of the repeating images was the rabbit, as already mentioned before the connection to the history of the city. We discovered a local products shop which leads to the assumption of the outstanding proud about the in the country well-known cheese-factory. Since our hotel was a bit set back from the main street, a local bakery could be found in front of the building. Many people seemed to stop there according to the queue.

3.2. Market

Observation: Arriving at the market by bus, several older people also took the bus and went next to the bus station for the market. The market was clearly structured by categories, having one corner for food, plants, clothing, household products, and even live animals were being sold. Also here seemed the majority to be older people, but over time more and more families also visited the market. Especially the food area was a crowded spot, as well as the clothing sales booths. Referring to the interviews, the first approach in the market site was difficult. Everyone seemed to be busy with their own business. Many people were not willing to talk to us, even turned around when they saw that we are trying to speak to people. Further outside next to the bus station, was a better area to get involved with the people.

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Market	6	<p>It was noticed that the market is visited more by older people - retired people. All of them emphasized that the Rokiškis district lacks the most jobs. One elderly woman from the settlement of Rokiškis district emphasized that her son and grandson live in the United Kingdom, so her biggest dream is that more jobs will appear in Rokiškis district so that her descendants can return to Lithuania and live near her. Another woman interviewed said that her children did not find a well-paid job in Rokiškis itself, so they moved to Vilnius. The third said that she must go to work in Utena, because there is simply no work in Rokiškis. Also, all the people interviewed at the market emphasized that the rarity and inaccessibility of public transport in rural settlements is the biggest problem, which is especially relevant for people who are still working. Also, people of retirement age in Rokiškis feel lonely, they lack children, relatives and communication. Most of the children have left, their peers are decreasing due to natural reasons, so the survey showed a tendency that elderly people are increasingly facing psychological and isolation problems.</p>

3.3. Bus station

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Bus station	4	<p>Four people were interviewed at the bus station. Two workers and an elderly couple, who were waiting for public transport. The employees emphasized that after the introduction of free public transport in the municipality of Rokiškis district this year, an increase in the number of</p>

		<p>travellers can be felt, so their workplace and the city seem to have recovered. It is true that one of the biggest problems of public transport is the disorganized schedule of public transport, which is inconvenient. For example, two buses leave for Vilnius at the same time, the only bus going to Juodupė leaves before the arrival of the bus from Vilnius, etc. This, in their opinion, causes great inconvenience to the residents. Another big problem is old, uncomfortable buses that are not suitable for the disabled, which reduce the attractiveness of the district municipality and the desire of residents to use public transport even more. The employees of Rokiškis bus station hope that these are temporary problems that will be solved in the future.</p> <p>An elderly couple waiting for public transport at the bus station in the municipality highlighted many global problems: terrorist Russia, which turns our country into an unsafe state for new residents, too little EU integration, too big differences in salaries of ordinary workers and the government. According to them, this reduces the attractiveness of the municipality and the whole of Lithuania and increases the emigration of residents. The couple lamented that the biggest local problem in Rokiškis is the long lines at the polyclinic. A woman has to wait three months to see a doctor. Therefore, he raised a rhetorical question: how can queues to see doctors be so long when the population is decreasing?</p>
--	--	--

3.4. Beach

Observation: The beach and the lake are located near to the manor. Besides the beach is a playground as well as sports facilities. Surrounded by a natural area families came to play with their kids at the playground. Two fishermen were sitting at the lake, some younger people were

doing some boxing and the young adults we interviewed were relaxing at the area. The space seemed to be a perfect spot to go swimming from the dock in summer.

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Beach	4	There were four eighteen-year-old youths on the beach. All four are in their last year at one of the schools in Rokiškis, but after school they will go to Vilnius to study. After studying in Vilnius, they do not think of returning to Rokiškis, because there are no well-paid jobs. Another problem of the city of Rokiškis is excessive conservatism and inability to be yourself, dress as you want, etc. True, young people claim that Rokiškis is the most suitable place for young people to live in the region, because it has a swimming pool, comfortable stadiums, a night club and other infrastructure that is not available in other surrounding cities. This, in their opinion, is a big advantage of Rokiškis. But after school, they lack some extracurricular activities, they would like to have more activities after school to keep the youth busier.



Pic 1. and Pic. 2. The recreational ground of Lake Rokiškis (Personal archive, 2023)

3.5. Hotel

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Hotel	2	<p>Two employees were interviewed at the hotel. One of the interviewees is a seventy-three-year-old man, who also emphasized the problem of loneliness among the elderly. There are no children, his friends are already dead, so he still works, trying to spend his days more cheerfully. Another aspect of working in retirement is a small pension, which makes it difficult for him to live on and afford more. He has lived in the city of Rokiškis all his life, the man who has never lived anywhere else said that Rokiškis is recovering and becoming more beautiful, but the villages are being emptied very intensively. He claimed that all the Rokiškis would soon be in the graves, and no one would need anything. It is true that many hopes are placed on the wind power park currently being built near Rokiškis. He believes that such innovations may lead to the arrival of a new business. The employee of the hotel restaurant is also from Rokiškis, who briefly studied in Vilnius. She mentioned that Rokiškis has everything she needs: she can walk to work, so she doesn't need a car or public transport, housing is cheaper, there are places for children in kindergarten, people are nice. Therefore, she does not see the point of living somewhere else. According to her, population decline is a normal process, but the availability of the most important services must be ensured.</p>

3.6. Museum

Observation: The interview partner, one of the employees at the manor, was very helpful in giving us information. She spoke English, which was a new aspect to the interview methods and everyone in the group could engage in the questioning. One of the main aspects standing

out in the interview, was the fact, that she lived for a long time in Vilnius and moved back because of her father. Being responsible for the aging generation and taking care of family-members was one of the main points coming back.

Another example of engage in the community work was found in the museum. Besides other fundings, the cheese factory supports exhibitions and culture events at the museum. In the museum one could experience modern historical museum pedagogic. Several screens with old letters, books or videos could be taken in a closer look. The exhibition rooms were modelled in an interactive way, to attract the visitors. Having seen this museum it can be stated that the touristic idea and guideline is shown in the museum. For those responsible it seems to be important to attract tourist and make the attractions as easy to understand as possible. Beside the main museum in the manor, several outdoor houses could be visited as well. Attracting people and hosting cultural events are the main business of this site. In 2011 this effort was paid off by being the winner of the “Tourism and Regeneration of Physical Sites” category from the European Union (European Commission, 2023).

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Museum	1	The girl we met in the museum was born and raised in Obeliai, lived in Vilnius for ten years and moved to Rokiškis during the Covid19 pandemic. During the pandemic, it was not only more dangerous to live in Vilnius, but at the same time she wanted to be closer to her family. She said that moving to a city where your family and friends are is much easier than moving to a new place. Therefore, in her opinion, efforts should be made not so much to attract new residents, but to bring back those who left, who come from the Rokiškis district. Currently, the girl is very social, has many friends and acquaintances, communicates with the communities of other towns. Therefore, she believes that being able to communicate with people is an advantage of a small town. The girl said that 48 people work in the museum, so it is a very important workplace in Rokiškis. Also, the

		museum has its branches in other places of the municipality of Rokiškis district - for example in Obeliai.
--	--	--



Pic 3. Rokiškis Manor and municipality museum (personal archive, 2023)

Pic 4. The view from East towards the Church (Personal archive, 2023)

3.7. Tourist information center

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Tourist information center	2	Two girls were working at the tourist information center during the interview. The first one has been working at the tourism information center for only a month and has recently finished her studies in Kaunas. The reasons for her return are affordable housing in Rokiškis and the offered job, which, according to her, is difficult to find in Rokiškis. The second one returned to Rokiškis from Vilnius a few years ago. He began his story with rhetorical questions: "If you could choose where to live:

	<p>Panevėžys women's prison or Vilnius?" I would choose Panevėžys women's prison, because there is more space and freedom. Everything is tight in Vilnius; you can't even breathe air." The girls said that in Rokiškis, the most important thing is to ensure the safety of the residents, because they don't feel safe here in the evenings, as well as less bureaucracy in order to establish their own business, to ensure a better level of education for students. That is, the children of Rokiškis learn less than the children of Vilnius or Kaunas. In peripheral municipalities, more attention must be paid to the needs of young people. Many seniors live in the regions, so all services are increasingly oriented towards them. However, how will a young person want to live in Rokiškis if everything is geared towards the elderly?</p> <p>From the perspective of their workplace, the girls said that the biggest problem in Rokiškis is that there is nothing for tourists to do here. The mansions are wonderful, the city is beautiful, but all this is passed in one day, they do not stay overnight here. And a tourist is someone who sleeps in the area at least at night. Also, such passing tourists do not create added value for local businesses, all their needs are lunch, so only small catering establishments can develop business here. According to them, the biggest ambition of the Rokiškis district municipality must be to attract tourists to the region for a longer period. This will also create new jobs.</p>
--	---



Pic 5. Independence square where Tourist information centre is located (Personal archive, 2023)

3.8. Library

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Library	2	The library surprised with its new building, new, modern tools. The library employees said that there are still 37 library branches in the rural areas of the Rokiškis district municipality. At the beginning of this year, one branch of the library was closed in the village of Augustinavas, this is one of the first such cases in the municipality. However, this department itself was closed because they could not find someone to work in it for a long time. The library administration said that all the remaining sections in the villages are centers of culture and community. Here children are waiting for their parents, they are learning. Seniors use computers to communicate with their children

	<p>abroad. There are also many events and new book launches. It is true that books are more popular in the city of Rokiškis, in villages more people read newspapers, use computers, and communicate. It is true that the population decline is very noticeable. Especially such trends appeared after 2000 years. He said that he kept wondering where that reader had gone. After finding out, it turns out that it died, it emigrated, it can no longer come to the library. And such cases are increasing. Another problem highlighted by library workers is security. It should be noted that both the library and the tourist information center are in the central town square and both institutions have emphasized security. The library staff said that even before our interview, a girl came who introduced herself as a princess of the United Kingdom and behaved inappropriately. The employees joked that the psychiatric hospital in Rokiškis was probably founded here because there are many sick people.</p> <p>From a personal perspective, the employees said that they often visit Vilnius or Panevėžys, go there to the theater, concerts, and go shopping. He said that the relatively short distance to Panevėžys is a big plus. Because you can live peacefully, not rush anywhere, but, if necessary, drive to Panevėžys and feel the rhythm of the big city. The daughter of one of the employees returned to Rokiškis from Kaunas only because it is very difficult to buy an apartment in a big city with Lithuanian salaries, so she chose to return to her hometown, where real estate is affordable. The son of the second woman lives with his wife in Vilnius. They were also thinking of returning to Rokiškis, because they were very tired of carrying their children around the city. However, he faced one problem - his son's wife, who graduated from Vilnius University</p>
--	---

		<p>with honors in chemistry, could only work at the Rokiškis cheese factory in Rokiškis. So, he did not return because he could not find a qualified and well-paid job in Rokiškis.</p> <p>The women emphasized that there are many advantages in Rokiškis, such as short distances, cheap apartments, etc. However, there are also downsides. In Rokiškis, you can't be yourself, you can't dress as you want, behave yourself. It is a very conservative city where everyone knows each other. People go to big cities for more freedom.</p>
--	--	--

3.9. Church

Observation: The church seemed to be one of the main centres of the community in the city. Through our contact person, we went to one of the main masses on Sundays. Many people attended the mass at 11, that even people were standing in the back of the church. In front of the church was a small sales stand with toys and sweets. Being in the church, the majority of the people were quite old, especially women from this age-group seemed to attend. Further in the back, families with children also made their appearance. Seeing many people attending the mass, the church seems to have an influence into the community. During the interview with one of the older ladies at the CARITAS library, we learned that a small library and donations are being provided from the church. The women spoke German and explained that the library is open every day at a certain time, accessible for everyone. Inside of the building especially religious books were visible. She also explained how in earlier days the town got clothes donations from Germany due to a contact person. Nowadays they have enough donations, and the people are not really in need of them anymore. In addition, she explained that many people leave the city and live abroad, Scandinavian countries and the UK are very popular destinations. She herself studied in Vilnius. Like many other interview partners, she confirmed the picture of moving away in a younger age. Furthermore, the impression was given, that donations of the church are less in demand than in the past.

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Church	1	<p>The priest himself is not from Rokiškis, he was brought here, but he has been working in the Rokiškis church for more than a decade. The pastor himself noticed that his main jobs in Rokiškis are funerals, which have doubled in ten years. This indicates an aging population. True, the pastor himself, as the chairman of the religious community organization, emphasized that they divide church life into two periods: before the Covid pandemic and after. This is because the flow of believers has halved. This was mainly influenced by watching Mass on TV or the Internet. In the context of population decline, the concentration of religious communities - parishes - is also taking place. That is, one priest serves three to five parishes. It is true that there is another side, less and less men are choosing to be priests, but as the number of believers decreases, it seems that the number of priests decreases proportionally. There is no significant shortage of priests in the municipality of Rokiškis district.</p> <p>The priest emphasized that when he talks to young people about why they don't live in Rokiškis, most emphasize the decay of the city. He gave an example that how can young people live in a city where bank offices are closed? Another thing is that young people in Lithuania are used to rushing and living intensively, while in rural areas people work slowly, documents are processed slowly, so such bureaucratic slowness annoys them.</p> <p>It is true that the priest also proposed several ways of solving population decline. Rokiškis must take advantage of the problem of rising housing prices and rising interest rates in Lithuania by advertising that they can buy quality real estate in Rokiškis much cheaper.</p>

		<p>Also, the priest believes that just as in the context of self-searching and problem solving, so too in the context of population decline: the bottom must be reached in order to rise to the top. Now Rokiškis is heading towards the bottom.</p>
--	--	--



Pic 6. Rokiškis' Church (Personal archive, 2023)

3.10. Primary personal health care center

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
<p>Primary personal health care center</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>An employee of the personnel department of the Rokiškis polyclinic said that the population decline is causing them problems. The death rate in the district is two to three times higher than the birth rate, so as the number of the population served decreases, so do their finances. Dwindling finances make it increasingly difficult to maintain service quality. Currently, in addition to the central polyclinic, the Rokiškis district municipality has</p>

		three dispensaries, where doctors from several fields work, and three family doctors' offices. Only family doctors attend these. Family doctors and nurses are the most lacking in the region. Basically, universities are trying to solve these problems by advertising jobs in the municipality, inviting them to do a residency in Rokiškis, and paying for their studies for students who are then determined to work in the Rokiškis district.
--	--	---

3.11. School

Observation: In the school the connection to the European Union was again very visible. At the entrance, also the place where the following picture was taken, appeared the ERASMUS+ sign. The strong connection and affiliation seemed to appear around the city. The school itself looked in an appropriate condition, even so some walls could be renovated. Impressive was the fact that all of the classrooms have a smartboard and the digitization as well as the teaching of computer science was expressed through classes like robotics for example. Science was as well as mathematics a several time mentioned topic. The director underlined the need of mathematic teachers. The aging generation of teachers and the absence of young teachers is one of the main challenges faced.

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
School	8	On May 8th, we visited Rokiškis Juozas Tūbelis Progymnasium. We met with some of the school's administration. They agreed to share their opinions about the education situation in Rokiškis town and the municipality. When asked about the number of students, the principal stated that it hasn't decreased. On the contrary, in the past 5 years, the number of students in their school has even increased. According to him, infrastructure and transportation are no longer issues these days. Each school is assigned a specific territory, including the surrounding villages from which children

		<p>commute to this school in Rokiškis town. Some parents choose to live in the countryside in their own houses near the lake, where there is less pollution, so they have to transport their children to school. However, that is their choice rather than a consequence of schools closing in the villages. In total, there are 650 students in the school, and 17% of them live not in Rokiškis town but come from surrounding villages.</p> <p>It is more challenging for schools in smaller towns to maintain their existence because current Lithuanian education policy stipulates that there should be a maximum of 24 students per class in grades 1-4, and 28 to 30 students per class in grades 5-12. When the number of students in a class is lower than 23, the school receives less funding.</p> <p>One of the deputy principals is responsible for the inclusion of students in the learning process at this school. She monitors their development, adaptation opportunities, especially for students coming from rural areas and families facing difficulties.</p> <p>The principal presented examples where the school's teachers participate in international programs by visiting schools in Denmark, Finland, and Germany to gain experience.</p> <p>The increase in the number of students in this school was also influenced by the war in Ukraine that started in 2022. Currently, there is almost a full class of Ukrainian children in this school.</p> <p>When asked about the problems and other noticeable trends that the school faces, the average age of the teachers was mentioned. The majority of teachers are between 50 and 60 years old, and there are also many teachers over 60 years old, while there is a shortage of</p>
--	--	---

		<p>young teachers. Although the municipality is trying to attract young educators to this region by providing support for housing and additional incentives.</p> <p>Local businesses do not specifically support this school, but another school has an engineering class established by "Rokiškio sūris" (Rokiškis Cheese).</p>
--	--	--



Pic 7. Meeting with the Principal at Juozas Tūbelis progimnasium (Personal archive, 2023)

3.12. Bee farm

Observation: The point of moving out of a rural area to a bigger city was confirmed again. Even so we got the impression that Rokiškis is a very nice area, with a lot of natural surroundings, and she likes to hang out in the summertime at the lakes and in the nature, she moved away. Furthermore, she showed us around the district, that we could see an overnight accommodation near by a lake, everything reachable within 30 minutes from the city center. There many summer activities were offered, a nice restaurant and observation tower. Beyond that the transportation was again a topic we addressed during our “walking interview”. She told

us that she is just going around by car, showed us the train station which was closed for public transport 7 years ago and also explained how difficult it is to get around by bus.

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Bee farm	2	<p>On May 7th, we met with local farmers who have a beekeeping business. It is their family business, consisting of a total of 1200 beehives throughout the municipality. The father and daughter work in this farm. Every year, they produce 200-300 tons of honey, which they sell in Lithuania and export abroad.</p> <p>The young farmer Austėja was born and raised in Rokiškis. She completed her school education here but had to move to Vilnius because she wanted to pursue higher education. She has been living in Vilnius from September to May, and during the summers, she returns to her native region of Rokiškis to take care of the bees. When asked if she plans to return to live in Rokiškis after finishing university, she says she wouldn't want to. She likes Vilnius because there are more services and opportunities for young people.</p> <p>She also mentioned that the number of young people in Rokiškis is definitely decreasing. For example, all her friends have left to study and live in big cities, and they are also not considering returning for permanent residency.</p>



Pic 8. and Pic 9. Bee farm in Rokiškis municipality (Austėja Kriaučiūnaitė, 2023)

3.13. Local action group

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Local action group	1	<p>On May 5th, we met with the representative of the Local Activity Group of Rokiškis district. She mentioned the largest operating companies in Rokiškis, including "Rokiškio sūris" (Rokiškis Cheese), "Rokiškio mėsa" (Rokiškis Meat), and the sewing workshop "Lelijja."</p> <p>According to the speaker, the main missing element for preventing the decline of regions is State policy. She provided examples with the Ministry of Education, which states that classrooms should have up to 30 students, which is almost impossible to achieve in rural areas. In her opinion there should be a separate classifier for rural areas.</p> <p>She also observed that the aging population is no longer safe in small towns. Younger people no longer help the elderly with simple tasks like painting fences or changing locks. Now it is necessary to call a professional from a</p>

		<p>larger city, which costs more money due to an additional fee for their travel.</p> <p>She emphasized that the main problems faced in Rokiškis district are social exclusion and services for the elderly and disabled individuals. Although public transportation is free in the municipality, it remains one of the main issues since buses from villages have very infrequent schedules. Additionally, centralized sewage systems are lacking in many places, and the accessibility and quality of healthcare services are decreasing. According to her, although the authorities communicate extensively about ensuring the safety of regions and receive substantial investments, the results are not visible.</p> <p>The Local Activity Group of Rokiškis district receives more funding due to high unemployment in the municipality. A significant portion of job opportunities is concentrated in the town of Rokiškis. Therefore, people living in rural areas cannot choose jobs according to their specialties, and transportation expenses often exceed the minimum wage. It is also mentioned that there is a sense of opposition between local authorities, who argue that companies needing workers should arrange transportation for them, while the companies argue that providing public transportation should be the responsibility of the government. Furthermore, although there is a railway station in Rokiškis town, there are no passenger routes anymore.</p> <p>At the end of the conversation, the expert emphasized that Rokiškis is a prospective town because, although it is located on the outskirts of Lithuania, in the context of the Baltic countries, it is centrally positioned between Vilnius and Riga. Additionally, issues concerning remote areas should not be addressed solely in the center of Vilnius.</p>
--	--	---

3.14. Obeliai community

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Obeliai community	1	<p>On May 7th, we tried intercity transportation and traveled to the town of Obeliai, located 15 kilometers east of Rokiškis. Obeliai is the center of the eldership. The Kriauna River flows through the town, and the Obeliai Lake glistens in the southwest. There stands the St. Ona Church of Obeliai (built in 1868), and there are also a children's foster home, Obeliai Gymnasium, a library, a kindergarten-school, and a history museum (established in 1998). The town also has a post office. Near the bus station, the Raminta Spring can be found. There is a windmill built around 1840, a former watermill from the 19th century, and a historic distillery.</p> <p>During our meeting with the chairman of the Obeliai Community Center, he agreed to drive us in his car and tell us about the town, including the issues faced by the community and how they manage in the context of declining population.</p> <p>One of the main reasons why people are reluctant to move to this town, according to the community representative, is the lack of centralized water supply and sewage systems in the 21st century. Only state institutions, educational institutions, and apartment buildings have centralized water supply. The majority of residential buildings in this town are privately owned.</p> <p>We also learned that the community is dissatisfied with the work of the eldership employees because they don't live in Obeliai.</p> <p>The chairman of the community considers the polluted Obeliai Lake, occupying a 51-hectare area along the southwest part of the town, as a significant problem and</p>

	<p>development opportunity. Due to its pollution, swimming is not possible in the lake. Since there is no centralized sewage system in the town, it can be assumed that the domestic wastewater of local residents contributes to the pollution of the lake. Additionally, the nearby Obeliai distillery and oil factory also contribute to the pollution of the lake.</p> <p>In the opinion of the community chairman, if the Obeliai distillery and oil factory were to close, the residents of Obeliai would not lose many jobs because these factories require highly skilled specialists who are usually from other towns. The wood processing company located on the outskirts of the town creates more job opportunities for the residents of Obeliai, employing more than 130 workers.</p> <p>Through the initiative of the community, funding was obtained from the European Union to build new community houses. These buildings house youth organizations, concerts, theater performances, and educational activities for the residents. It is also a meeting and gathering place for local residents. According to the community chairman, this building plays a particularly important role for the elderly.</p> <p>The head of the community also highlighted a rather interesting point, giving one example. There are jobs in Obeliai, but people don't really want to work. Why should they work when the social unemployment benefit is 400 euros, and the minimum wage is around 600 euros after taxes. Therefore, the difference between social benefits and wages must be greater.</p>
--	---



Pic 10. and Pic. 11. Obeliai city centre and Obeliai windmill (Personal archive, 2023)



Pic 12. and Pic. 13. Obeliai local community center (Personal archive, 2023)

3.15. Rokiškis cheese factory

Rokiškis cheese factory “Rokiškio sūris” is the biggest employer in the municipality. The effect to the whole community seems to be irreplaceable as the factory funds cultural and sports events in the region. The total number of employees is 770 (Rekvizitai, 2023). Due to the numbers, municipality of Rokiškis can be equated to the single industry towns which makes its distinctive features to the city

Institution/place	Number of people involved	Description
Rokiškis cheese factory	1	It is the company employing the most employees in the municipality of Rokiškis district. During a telephone interview, the communication employee of "Rokiškio sūris" said that the company does not feel a big shortage of employees yet. The company tries to keep the old employees and pays for the additional studies and training courses of the employees. The employee notices the population decline from a personal perspective, but the company does not face any negative consequences of the population decline. The production of "Rokiškio sūris" is mainly exported, employees also come from other municipalities to work. Thus, the company is not dependent on local social factors. It is true that the company willingly cooperates with the communities of the Rokiškis district municipality and is the main sponsor of cultural and sports events held in the district. The company provides financial support for traditional events, the winners of the competitions are rewarded with products produced by the company.



Pic. 14. exhibition of old milk trucks near the "Rokiškios sūris" factory (Personal archive, 2023)

4. Concluding Discussion

To start the discussion, we summarise the themes we found within the analysed interviews above. First, Rokiškis has an aging population. While statistically true, this was also felt by many interviewees and was noticeable in social spaces such as the market. There were also concerns about the transit system and a lack of job opportunities for young people, both of which are further elaborated on below. The education system was also a theme (in part because we visited a school) and from our desk research and interviews learned about school closures and an aging teacher work force. From our observations, we saw quality street infrastructure (sometimes sponsored by the European Union). This means that there are opportunities for improving transit infrastructure through planning, organization, and design that do not require the funds and time of building physical road infrastructure. The town was also visually attractive and has many outdoor spaces. While this was mainly noticed through observation, some interviewees noted it as well, for example the youth on the beach. Finally, the manor and the cheese factory seem to be important economic and symbolic hubs. The manor for its ability to draw tourists to the town and to preserve the history of the community, while the cheese factory is the largest employer and also promotes the city through its brand name recognition throughout the country and potentially even farther abroad. Next, we will list potential limitations, before tying these themes together with academic literature and suggestions for the case study.

4.1. Limitations:

Before we move from the mainly descriptive sections of our report to the more normative and/or theoretical, it is important to qualify our findings by explaining our limitations. Some limitations of our report include the limited amount of time allocated to being in the study location. More days spent in the study location would likely increase our precision. Four days would be considered a very short period for conclusive ethnographic research. Our methods were strongly qualitative, so we lack statistical certainty that our data set is representative. There is likely some selection bias in how we chose our interviewees and our observation sites. We did not have a plan to reach the most marginalized or disadvantaged members of the community (given the time constraints and the fact that this is a classroom pursuit and not to be used for actual decision making), therefore, these voices are absent. All this being said, we hope the following will prove insightful and useful.

4.2. Recommendations under the lens of Smart Shrinkage:

One of our frequent themes was the lack of work in Rokiškis. Since we are focussed on smart shrinking, proposing more jobs would be a proposal for conventional growth and outside our scope. Therefore, one idea that this research group considered is whether a town development model can account for the habitual leaving of younger people (university age and young professionals). This would be a general planning attitude that our community will be comprised of families with children and retirement age adults. In this effect, the community would not plan for certain amenities (a lively bar scene, late night transit, co-working spaces) and instead plan on amenities for the target groups (good schools, good healthcare, green playing/sitting spaces). The main key here is that the change is not in policy but in focus or mentality. This builds on Sousa and Pinho's (2015) point that shrinkage may be a useful tool in planning if conceptualized by planners as so. For example, this development model would potentially open up the space for a scene for younger people to form but remove any responsibility for starting said scene from the planning standpoint. This puts the community in a win-win: if a scene springs up from nothing, that is a new community asset, and if nothing happens then that is what is being planned for. This reduces the inefficiencies of plans and funds spent towards unsuccessful attraction or growth initiatives. A drawback to this approach is that the elderly may be separated from their adult children; however, adult children with their own children may be incentivized to move back.

Another theme that seemed to appear in our research was the concept that Rokiškis was sustaining itself well compared to the outlying villages and rural areas. This brings to light questions about how severe the population decrease is. Will Rokiškis experience a sharper population decline if it cannot draw as many people from the surrounding area? In planning for shrinkage, what perspective should be taken? If we consider from Rokiškis town perspective, it may be best to remove services from the outlying areas and concentrate for economic efficiency within the district capital's urban core. If we consider from Rokiškis municipality perspective, planning for shrinkage might be best to focus plans on the outlying areas as sustaining these areas could continue sustaining the urban core naturally. The debate over the merit of even funding smart shrinking that takes place on a national level between the periphery and the core is repeated here at a municipality level.

An asset of Rokiškis is the amount of artwork around town including large murals on flat building and many painted shutters. This process of beautification and place-making is an

effective strategy for creating shared community spaces and potentially improving community members well-being. There are concerns about place-making taking on the form of place-masking where inequality and poverty are not considered when beautifying a place (Fincher, Pardy, & Shaw, 2016). We do not have sufficient information on the planning behind the street artwork to conclude on this within Rokiškis, but recommend that these concerns continue to be considered in future beautification in Rokiškis.

Several times the lack of good transportation was underlined by the interviewed persons. Walking around the town, E-Scooters could be found in the city center, as well as busses, which we learned are free of charge. However, people complained that the bus schedules are not reaching certain areas of the district and leaves especially the older citizens in the district left behind. One of the teachers was living in the countryside for several years. Since she is getting older, she is not able to walk the 7 kilometers from her old house to the bus station anymore. The solution was to move back to the city center to be able to continue her work in school. The question arises how the transportation can be approved to provide a better range in the district. Nowadays the concept of smart cities resulting into smart communities is being discussed. Smart mobility is as well included and leads towards a shifting in spatial planning (Szymanska/Koloszko-Chomentowska, 2022). Bosworth *et al.* (2020) mentions the need of the smart planning strategies also in rural areas. Over all these strategies would take into account the development of social, economic and environmental requirements. A development of a “smart village” would create a sustainable place to live in (Bosworth *et al.*, 2020). Transport strategies in rural areas (also in Rokiskis) are in a need of improvement. The socio-economic development and the development of rural areas transport are strongly connected. Improving the strategies of transport means also improving or preventing marginalisation and social exclusion of different population groups (Szymanska/ Koloszko-Chomentowska, 2022). The aging population living in the district of Rokiskis has very little access to the transportation system. Furthermore, the labour market, educational institutions and the healthcare are being affected. It goes without saying that the topic is very complex and has to be seen through different levels of status. Being one of the main parts of quality of life. Until today the main mobility is concentrated on the car, leaving behind the people which do not own a car. The smart mobility strategies include an access to IT services coming with providing route and timetable information. In addition, access to a provided area at local, regional and international level. The main strategies are network mobility, green mobility, people-oriented mobility and smart mobility. The transport therefore seems to need to meet the needs of the residents in the

areas and transferred to the principles of rural areas. Most of the mistakes transferring strategies is adopting urban-centred approaches. Moreover, smart technologies need communication technologies and support systems. Research in Poland and Lithuania (Szymanska/ Koloszko-Chomentowska, 2022) show that people were very attracted by a ticket which included more than one type of transportation and a system of guaranteed connections between individual modes of transport. Since transport is also a very individual level of movement. The idea of a transport “on-demand” was on the other hand rated very low (Szymanska/ Koloszko-Chomentowska, 2022), that, however, could be an option in the event of Rokiskis. Especially tourists are additionally interested in renting bikes or e-bikes. Therefore, an integrated approach to intermodal transport system could be one of the solutions to the step of a smart transportation system (Szymanska/ Koloszko-Chomentowska, 2022). In term for Rokiskis the younger generation will most likely more adapt to a smart technology approach than the older generation. The idea of a transport on-demand however could be used especially in the surrounding district. Bringing the needs of the different generations together and rethink the transportation system could be an answer. Even so if it means that the bus service might cost again but has a different purpose for the local community and not necessarily concentrate on the financial side.

The importance of the cheese factory “Rokiškio sūris” cannot be overemphasized. With its total amount of employees, the factory is the biggest company in the region measured by its employment effect. From the interview data we can point out that the cheese factory is playing a major role when it comes to funding sports and cultural events. These actions can be crucial important for the local community as there are economic possibilities in making the city lively. We consider Rokiskis might face similar challenges to a single-industry town. These towns have been described to have socio-economic issues and one-sided economy as they might have problems also in competitiveness (Kunanbaeva *et. al*, 2020). It seems that the factory is in a stable position but if it would face problems or being shut down the consequences for the city could be extremely bad. Not only because of the lost jobs but the loss of a strong cooperative factor for a community like Rokiskis would be crucial.

Structural problems are observed in many rural territories such as lack of employment possibilities, skills, not sufficient investment to communication and main services, low numbers of young people. European Commission has planned financial support for these goals implementation providing youth in rural places with opportunities to develop entrepreneurship skills, generate and realize new ideas, adapt to changing environment creating self-employed

work places. (Malcienė et al., 2020). It is really difficult for young people to establish themselves in the municipality of Rokiškis due to the small selection of jobs that match their qualifications, so more attention should be paid to this matter.

5. References

Bosworth, G.; Price, L.; Collison, M.; Fox, C. (2020) Unequal futures of rural mobility: Challenges for a “smart countryside”. *Local Econ*, 35, 586–608.

Delve (website) accessed 10.5.2023. <https://delvetool.com/blog/observation>

Edis Kriaučiūnas (2013) The Particularities of Lithuanian Rural Settlement Network Alternations during the Period 1989-2011. <https://etalpykla.lituanistika.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2013~1407395726103/datastreams/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC/content>

European Commission 2023 https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/awards-and-outreach-activities/eden/previous-editions/eden-destinations/lithuania_en#Rokiškis-manor---winner-2011.

Guy Debord (1958) *Theorie des Umherschweifens*. In: P. Gallissaires, H. Millestaedt und R. Ohrt (1995). *Der Beginn einer Epoche. Texte der Situationisten*, Hamburg, S. 64-67.

Jarkko Bamberg (2017) *Kävelyhaastattelu in a book Tutkimushaastattelun käsikirja* by Hyvärinen et. Al. Vastapaino 2017.

Jonas Jasaitis, Valentina Ratkevičienė (2012) Changes in Countryside Situation: Some of the Most Complicated Challenges to Lithuanian Regional Policy 3(27):80-92. <https://vb.mruni.eu/object/elaba:6092998/>

Kymbat Kunanbaeva, Saule Rahimova, Aleksey Titkov, and Lyudmila Goncharenko (2020) The “smart city” concept as a strategy for managing the infrastructure of a single-industry town. *E3S Web of Conferences* 164.

Lietuvos Respublikos žemės fondas. 2021 m. sausio d. (2021) Nacionalinė žemės tarnyba prie Žemės ūkio ministerijos; Valstybės įmonė Valstybės žemės fondas.

Rekvizitai (website) accessed 11.5.2023. https://rekvizitai.vz.lt/m/en/company/rokiskio_suris/?fbclid=IwAR2nLqRNO9Hy_9K3SyZjp_jSnmjgJphJotkkFtnXnatBgCrbnznTYezPwVWo

Rokiškio rajono savivaldybės aplinkos monitoringo programa 2018 – 2023 metams. (2018) Rokiškis. https://Rokiškis.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/rokiskio_programa_suderinta.pdf

Rokiskis (website) accessed 11.05.2023. <https://rokiskis.lt/en/>

Rūta Ubarevičienė & Maarten van Ham (2017) Population decline in Lithuania: who lives in declining regions and who leaves?, *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 4:1, 57-79, DOI: [10.1080/21681376.2017.1313127](https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2017.1313127).

Ruth Fincher, Maree Pardy & Kate Shaw (2016) Place-making or placemasking? The everyday political economy of “making place”, *Planning Theory & Practice*, 17:4, 516-536, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2016.1217344

Sílvia Sousa & Paulo Pinho (2015) Planning for Shrinkage: Paradox or Paradigm, *European Planning Studies*, 23:1, 12-32, DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2013.820082

Statistics Lithuania 2023 <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/web/guest/pradinis>

Szymanska, E.; Koloszko-Chomentowska, Z. (2022) Sustainable Innovative Mobility Solutions Preferred by Inhabitants of Rural Areas—The Case of Lithuania and Poland. *Sustainability*, 14, 6603. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14116603>.

Tampere University KvaliMOTV (website) accessed 10.5.2023. https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/menetelmaopetus/kvali/L5_3.html

Zita Malcienė, Laima Skauronė, Rasa Glinskienė (2020) Youth Entrepreneurship Promoting in Rural Municipality Situation and Challenges. *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 7(06): 5988- 5994, 2020 DOI:10.18535/ijsshi/v7i06.01.