

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ENVIRONMENT AND REGIONAL POLICY

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Abstract

The paper analyses different aspects and problems characteristic to entrepreneurship environment in Latvia after restoring of independence. The entrepreneurship in Latvia develops under conditions of market economy in a rather complicated inner and outer environment influenced by different circumstances causing rapid changes. At the beginning of transition period to market economy, the entrepreneurship environment in Latvia was affected heavily by decrease of production after the 1990, when during the period 1990-1993 the GDP decreased more than twice, but the formation of fixed assets six times. Such fall in production is to be related in some respects to the general economic crisis characteristic to transition period to market economy in all Central and East European countries. Common features of this crisis were the decline in production and lowering of the standard of living. Internal resources of our country were limited and insufficient, and Latvia was not attractive to foreign investors. The production level of 1990 remains unachieved up to now. The recovering process of production is very slow in agriculture. The allocation of production factors in Latvian regions has developed in an unbalanced way. Two thirds of non-financial investments obtain Riga and Pierīga. Lasting up to now, this unbalanced development leads to unequal production conditions, impeding negatively the activities of entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas, where a certain part of agriculture area remains still unused at all. The unused land grows over and its qualitative indicators of landscapes and biotopes become worse, but the ameliorative systems decline. The yield of crops is changing and it is lower in comparison with other countries. The decline in agriculture has led to diminishing of the role such characteristic and historically developed sphere as milk industry. To help the entrepreneur to cope with conditions affecting his activities, especially in rural areas, it is necessary to provide him with a certain support from the government, regional and local institutions. Presently, there is a growing need in such business support structures as business consultation centres, business parks, industrial parks and others. However, most of the support institutions are concentrated in Riga and it does not comply with the interests of today and future entrepreneurs. Lack of support may be a cause of giving up of entrepreneurship by a number of entrepreneurs. As an important problem in rural areas may turn out the choice of a most suitable form of a production enterprise, being in capacity to provide a successful process, especially in the initial period. In this context, as favourable and supporting to entrepreneurs may be recommended such forms of enterprise and institutions as franchise and monitoring, providing together with financial support also the moral support. Development of entrepreneurship environment in Latvia is a step-by-step process, using advantages and overcoming of disadvantages.

Keywords:

Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship environment, entrepreneur.

Introduction

One of the main priorities of Latvia is a possibly soon approach to social economic level of the EU, from which our country falls behind significantly. In 2007, the GDP per capita in our country was 1.7 times lower than the average of it in the EU, 2.3 times lower than in Netherlands and 2.5 times lower than in Ireland. After this indicator, Latvia was in the fourth place from the end among the member states of the EU, leaving behind

only Poland, Romania and Bulgaria [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008.]. The precondition of accelerated approaching process is intensive development of production and entrepreneurship, which, in its turn, depends on environment where it takes place. This environment may be more or less favourable. In Latvia after restoration of independence, this environment has not been favourable, especially in remote from Riga areas of regions. Notwithstanding the regional policy,

the competitiveness of products is not high and the capacity of entrepreneurs is comparatively low. It creates a necessity to seek for ways how to activate and support the entrepreneur in such environment.

The **aim** of the paper is to find out the opportunities how to facilitate entrepreneurship according to environment in regional context.

To achieve the aim the following **tasks** were carried out:

- 1) characterisation of development features in transition period;
- 2) making out of unused possibilities of production enlargement;
- 3) foresight of the role and place of entrepreneur in production process in compliance with the environment.

The research **object** was the production potential.

The research was based on monographic method, synthesis and analysis, logical – constructive method and analysis of statistical data.

Results and discussion

The entrepreneurship environment in Latvia has developed under impact of changing conditions of transition period to market economy. The beginning of transition period was characterised by rapid decrease of production after the 1990, and it turned out as such to be more difficult to overcome than hoped initially. During the period 1990-1993, the GDP in Latvia decreased more than twice, but the formation of fixed assets six times. As a result, the proportion of fixed assets in GDP decreased 3 times and in 1993 made only 13.54% of GDP. [Bojārs, Vilne 1996.] Such decrease of production

in Latvia is to be in some respects related to the general economic crisis, which was characteristic to transition period to market economy and from which no one of the Central and East European countries, being involved in transition period, was able to avoid. Common features of this crisis were the decrease of production amount and the lowering of level of living. Internal resources were limited and insufficient. Certain hopes were set on foreign investments; however, without fulfilment to a great extent, because the traditional conditions of attraction of foreign investments, i.e. high economic growth, wide market and respective profitability of investments, did not exist. Latvia was unattractive to foreign investors what is shown by the amount of direct foreign investments per capita, being in our country 14.3 times lower than, for example, in Hungary.

The transition period from planned economy to market economy in Latvia turned out to be more complicated than thought initially. The mistake made in the beginning of the transition period, when our country hesitated to turn itself to modern technologies and, therefore, did not restructure the production accordingly, began to show its negative impact. There remained disregarded the idea that increasing of competitiveness of the country required carrying out of a targeted innovative policy that facilitates accelerated development of knowledge based sectors and the increase of proportion of goods with high added value in traditional production sectors.

The difficulties of transition period found their reflection in economic growth. Notwithstanding the high economic growth rate, characteristic to Latvia for some years in succession, sometimes reaching a double figure, it has not been possible to succeed in overcoming of production decline, setting in after the 1990 (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in Production in Latvia 1990-2006 (% , in comparable prices, 1990=100%)

Branches	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2006
Industry	38.3	46.9	51.2	55.5	59.1	66.3
of which mining	38.8	58.8	68.6	84.8	89.3	107.7
food industry	37.8	42.8	45.7	48.0	50.9	59.2
Agriculture	46.8	37.3	39.4	41.0	42.1	45.1
of which crop production	65.4	60.2	58.8	64.7	60.4	74.8
livestock production	37.8	27.0	30.3	30.1	30.9	32.0

Source: Latvian Statistical Yearbook 1999., 2004., 2007. - Riga. CSB

In 2006, the production level in the industry made only 66.3%, but in the agriculture 45.1% of the level of 1990, inter alia in the crop production 74.6%, in the livestock production – only 32%. The level of 1990 was overcome only in mining.

To make up for lost time and to accelerate the increase of production it is necessary to seek for ways and opportunities how to use more rationally the production resources – land, labour force and capital – and to facilitate the entrepreneurship to focus on production of competitive products.

In using of land, an essential role is played by the agriculture area. Its rational use is the main support for successful inclusion of rural territories in a balanced social economic development. Of the total land area of the country, making 6458.9 thousand ha, the used agriculture area made 1839.1 thousand ha or 28.5%, forests – 2929.0 thousand ha or 45.3%, but all other areas – 1456.8 thousand ha or 22.5%. Of the used agriculture area, the arable land was 1188.1 thousand ha or 64.6%, the meadows and pastures – 641 thousand ha or 34.9%, but the permanent crops – 10 thousand ha or 0.5%. During

the period 2000-2007 the used agriculture area increased from 1587.1 thousand ha to 1839.1 thousand ha or of 16%, inter alia the arable land – from 969.9 to 1188.1 thousand ha or of 22.5%. [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008]. Latgale region is the richest with agriculture area. It concentrates 27% of all agriculture area given to usage and is followed by Vidzeme region (21.3%) and Zemgale region (20%). [LRZM, 2007.] The usage of land cannot be called rational, because a certain part of agriculture area remains still unused at all. In 2006, from 2470 thousand ha agriculture area there were used only 1855 thousand ha or 75%. Although the arable land area has increased from 969.9 thousand ha in 2000 to 1205.1 thousand ha in 2006 or of 12.4%, not all arable area is used under crops. The unused land grows over, and, as a result, the qualitative indicators of landscapes and biotopes become worse. The land ameliorative systems decline. When the land grows over, the woodland increases, and this tendency is a rather stable one. According to forecasts, if such tendency will continue, the forests will soon cover one half of Latvia's territory.

The yield of crops is changing and it is lower in comparison with other countries. If in 1996 the average yield of corn made 1.69 t/ha, then in 2005 it made already 2.8 t/ha. However, this indicator also is low. For example, in 2003 the yield of barley in Spain made 2.7 t/ha and it was the lowest average yield level in the EU. The highest yield had the Luxemburg, where in made 6.8 t/ha. The highest yield level of oats was in Ireland, where it made 7.28 t/ha (<http://www.agra-net.com>). The highest and lowest yield indicators of certain crops in Latvia were as follows:

- rye: 2.63 t/ha 1986-1990; 1.77 t/ha in 2000;
- wheat: 2.86 t/ha in 2005; 1.77 t/ha 1995;
- barley: 2.26 t/ha 1986-1990; 1.38 t/ha in 2000;
- oats: 2.14 t/ha 1986-1990; 1.61 t/ha in 2000.

In Ukraine and in Russia the average yield of crops make 3.5 t/ha, but in Kazakhstan, at the average yield of 1.9 t/ha, in several regions it makes even 5 t/ha.

In Latvia, the yield of crops varies of 1.59 t/ha in Latgale region to 2.78 t/ha in Zemgale region. The highest yield of potatoes was in Zemgale region (13.39 t/ha), the lowest – in Kurzeme region – (10.96 t/ha). The highest

yield of vegetables was in Kurzeme region (13.13 t/ha), but the lowest – in Vidzeme region (8.66 t/ha).

Therefore it is understandable that despite the increase of production in agriculture, making in 2007 37.4%, the level of 1990 was not reached in both the crop production and the livestock production. In 2007, the production in agriculture made 50.8% of the level of 1990, inter alia in crop production 87.9%, but in livestock production – 34.5%. In 2007, the sown area made 69.2% of the sown area in 1990, inter alia the crops – 77.3%, potatoes – 50.2%. [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008.]

After the 1990, the livestock production has changed remarkably. In 2007, the production of meat made only 27.4% of the level of 1990, the production of milk – 44.5%, production of eggs – 77%, production of wool – 18.7%. If in 1990 the production of meat in Latvia per capita was 116 kg, than in 2007 – 37 kg. The production of milk decreased respectively from 711 kg to 370 kg. However, the milk production has a special place in livestock production. It is one of the main income sources of employed in the agriculture.

The crop production and livestock production form the basis for such sectors as processing of crops, fruits and vegetables, milk industry and meat industry. The amount and quality of processing products depends on the amount and quality of agriculture production.

The labour force depends on the number of economic active population and the level of employment. In 2007, the number of economic active population in Latvia was 1191 thousand, inter alia the employed 1119 thousand or 94% and the unemployed 72 thousand or 6%. During the period 2000-2007, the number of economic active population has increased of 8.6%, inter alia the number of employed – of 19.2%, but the unemployed – decreased two times. In 2007, the number of economic inactive population made 613 thousand and in comparison with the 2000 had decreased of 15.8%. In 2007, the level of employed males made 67.8%, unemployed males – 4.6%, but 27.6% males were economic inactive; the respective indicators of females made 57.0%, 3.4% and 39.6%. [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008. p. 242] The proportion of economic active population in regions differs (Table 2).

Table 2. Proportion of Economic Activity of Population in Latvian Regions (%)
[Central Statistical Bureau, 2008., p. 244]

Regions	Level of economic activity		Level of employment		Proportion of unemployed	
	2002	2007	2002	2007	2002	2007
Riga	65.6	70.8	58.3	66.7	11.1	5.8
Pierīga	63.6	67.1	56.7	63.9	10.8	4.9
Vidzeme	62.1	61.0	55.6	57.0	10.5	6.6
Kurzeme	60.5	65.0	52.9	61.6	12.6	5.2
Zemgale	58.9	63.6	52.8	59.5	10.4	6.5
Latgale	55.5	61.2	46.0	56.3	17.1	8.0

The level of economic activity has increased more rapidly in Latgale region (10.5%), then follow Riga and Kurzeme (7.9%), but in Vidzeme it has decreased of 1.8%. The employment level has increased more rapidly in Kurzeme (16.4%) and in Riga (.4%), but more slowly in Vidzeme (2.5%). In 2007, the lowest proportion of employed was in Pierīga, the highest – in Latgale.

Investments are characterised by changing amount, branch structure and territorial allocation. The non-financial investments in Latvia have increased from 511.1 million LVL in 1995 to 3441.2 million LVL in 2006 or

6.7 times, but in comparison with the 2000 – 2.2 times. In agriculture, forestry and fishing, the non-financial investments have increased from 24.4 million LVL in 2000 to 138.3 million in 2006 or 5.7 times by changing of their proportion in the total amount from 1.6% in 2000 to 4% in 2006. In processing industry, during the same period the non-financial investments increased from 211.7 million LVL to 558.6 million LVL by changing of their proportion from 13.8 to 16.2%. The territorial location of investments is characterised by high level of imbalance (Table 3).

Table 3. Non-financial Investments in Latvian regions [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008., p.195]

Regions	2000		2006	
	Million LVL	in % of the total amount	Million LVL	in % of the total amount
Riga	829.5	53.9	1695.8	49.3
Pierīga	218.4	14.2	617.4	17.9
Vidzeme	78.6	5.1	247.1	7.2
Kurzeme	227.4	14.8	382.2	11.1
Zemgale	82.8	5.4	289.9	8.4
Latgale	101.4	6.6	208.8	6.1
Total	1538.1	100.0	3441.2	100.0

In 2006, the proportion of investments had been diminished in Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale, but increased in Pierīga, Vidzeme and Zemgale in comparison with the 2000. High proportion is characteristic to Rīga together with Pierīga, making more than 2/3 of the non-financial investment proportion in Latvia.

During the period 2000-2007, the GDP in Latvia has increased from 4750,756 million LVL to 8717,327 million LVL or of 83%, having increased per capita from 2002LVL in 2000 to 3830LVL in 2007. The role of different regions in increase of the GDP is characterised by the added value (Table 4).

Table 4. The Added Value in Latvian Regions (in actual prices) [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008, p.63]

Regions	2000		2005	
	Thousand LVL	in % to the total	Thousand LVL	in % to the total
Riga	2357755	55.4	4600844	57.3
Pierīga	433009	10.2	893890	11.1
Vidzeme	258120	6.1	499810	6.2
Kurzeme	556662	13.1	855483	10.7
Zemgale	308920	7.3	558108	7.0
Latgale	334892	7.9	612863	7.7
Total	4252568	100.0	8029351	100.0

In creation of the added value, the role of Riga and Pierīga has increased from 65.6% in 2000 to 68.4% in 2005 that underlines the growing imbalance. A certain picture of the social economic territorial development may be obtained from a comparison of the proportion of population, economic active population, agriculture area, investments and GDP in regions. So, for example, the proportion of agriculture area exceeds the proportion of inhabitants in Vidzeme and Latgale regions, but the proportion of investments and GDP – in Kurzeme region. In Vidzeme, Zemgale un Latgale regions, the proportion of GDP exceeds the proportion of investments, but in Kurzeme it is lower of 27%. The proportion of investments in Kurzeme exceeds the proportion of agriculture area 2.2

times, but in Vidzeme makes 65%, in Zemgale – 73.2% and in Latgale – 69%.

The irregular development of production has led to unbalanced welfare of inhabitants. So, for example, in 2007, the average of net wages in Riga region made 322LVL per month and was of 58% higher than in Latgale region. In the public sector of Riga region the average of net wages was of 55.6% higher than in Latgale region. In the private sector, the difference between the higher level and the lower level made 78%. [Central Statistical Bureau, 2008., p.258]

The big differences between the central part of the country formed by Riga and Pierīga and the territories of the periphery compel to seek for possibilities, enabling

to level these differences, simultaneously increasing the production in both the extensive and the intensive way with the orientation on production of competitive products for exports. Additionally, the situation is complicated by widening of globalisation and imminent to it impact on all economic spheres from the highest to the lowest level. It requires implementing of respective regional policy that must provide a balanced and long-term development in Latvian regions and different territorial areas. Therefore, the implementation of regional policy must be oriented to diminishing of unfavourable differences between regions and the areas in the framework of regions. It means that there should be provided equal living, labour and environment conditions to inhabitants of Latvia and equal preconditions to entrepreneurship all over our country.

The creation of preconditions to entrepreneurship will relate, first of all, to the entrepreneur involved in production process – to this economic agent called also the fourth production factor. His success will depend on his skills of perceiving of market opportunities and of combining of production factors in such way that allows to obtain a possibly big gain, and how, acting in a

dynamic and real environment where the profit is return to uncertainty, he will trace free niches in the market that others have not yet found, and find resources necessary to his enterprise with the aim to use them for ensuring of a place in the market. His activities will be affected by such conditions as financing, labour force, sale, initiative, knowledge, information, scientific research results, consultations, road net, raw materials, state and self-government support and different business support forms such as business parks, industrial parks, business innovation centres, accounting service bureaus and others.

Presently, the territorial allocation of above-mentioned conditions in Latvia is a rather unbalanced one, as it is evidenced, for example, by allocation of the business support structures (Table 5), which have to provide entrepreneurs with necessary services simultaneously all over the country. In addition, there exists a growing necessity of these services, especially under nowadays globalisation conditions, when the information has to provide the necessary connections between all economic spheres. In Latvia, the local information is not always adequate to the information on the level of the EU.

Table 5. Business support structures in Latvian regions

Support forms	Riga	Kurzeme	Latgale	Vidzeme	Zemgale
Business parks	11	-	-	-	1
Industrial parks	6	1	1	-	-
Business innovation centres	3	-	-	1	-
Virtual bureaus	3	-	-	-	-
Accounting service bureaus	6	-	-	-	-
Business consultation centres	553	25	27	15	15

Source: data of Central Statistical Bureau of Republic of Latvia

Different business support forms are necessary to future entrepreneurs desiring to act independently. Presently, their number is not small. For example, the results of an inquiry carried out by R. Zvirgzdina shows that more than one half of respondents have expressed the desire to work fully independently and single-handed that means to be free in choice of the kind of entrepreneurship, elaboration of production programme, choice of financial sources, seeking for production resources and markets, calculating prices, using profits, simultaneously taking into consideration that he will be dependent on dynamic changes in demand and supply, taste and purchasing power of consumers, price level, the laws regulating the entrepreneurship, and the political and economic situation in the country. It is significant that a great number of respondents think that the starting of entrepreneurship requires a consultant that may be a professional or experienced entrepreneur, being able to recommend how to act and to make use of scientific researches and practical skills in the case of both starting and continuing of entrepreneurship. Lack of necessary consultations has

led often to situations that the entrepreneurs give up the continuation of entrepreneurship.

In solution of problems related to initiative of entrepreneurs and to government and self-government support, as well as to different business support forms there emerges the question what kind of enterprises and institution may be able to combine best of all the initiatives of future entrepreneurs with the possible support, taking into consideration also the appreciation and moral support. To such forms maybe long franchise and mentoring.

Franchise means conclusion of a contract, according to which the owner of intellectual property rights transfers to other part the rights against a payment on a settled or unsettled term to use his trademark, patent, business secret and knowledge. From other systems of contracts the franchise differs in the way that it is based on a unique product, service, business method, brand, reputation or patent. Therefore, the franchise is a good way how to develop the entrepreneurship, because there are lots of things that are ready and must not be created

anew. The funds may be invested in the product and the trademark that have already conquered its place. The entrepreneur is protected from mistakes, because he will have someone who teaches and consults him. [Gavare, 2005.]

Taking into consideration the fact that one fifth of respondents surveyed by R, Zvirgzdina have expressed desire to carry out the entrepreneurship under monitoring of a bigger enterprise allows to recognise this form of entrepreneurship as a suitable for areas removed from the centre.

Up to now, one of the more successful examples of using of franchise and evaluation of its positive impact in Latvia, is the formation of the shop net ELVI that was

created in 2000. It emerged on the basis of the tendency of decrease of the number of retail shops, being caused by intensive competitiveness in trade. To protect the small traders from ruination there emerged the idea to unite the local food traders. As a result, the ELVI concept was created. In 2000, the decision was made to develop a shop net based on franchise principles and with attraction of successful local retail traders. In 2003, the ELVI group started consultations and training of employees as additional service to the partners. The rearrangements and introduction of new cooperation forms allowed to ELVI group's shops to increase essentially their turnover. The ELVI group and the shop owners plan jointly the turnover of every shop, the profit, equipment of the shop and allocation of good groups.

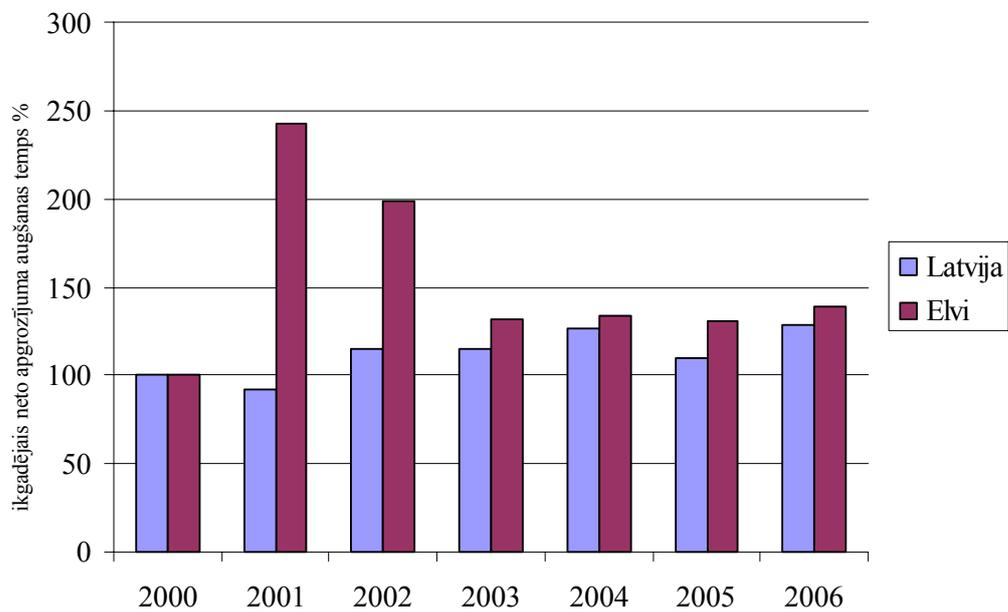


Fig. 1. Growth rate of retail turnover in Latvia and ELVI group, 2000–2006

Source: on the basis of published information of Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

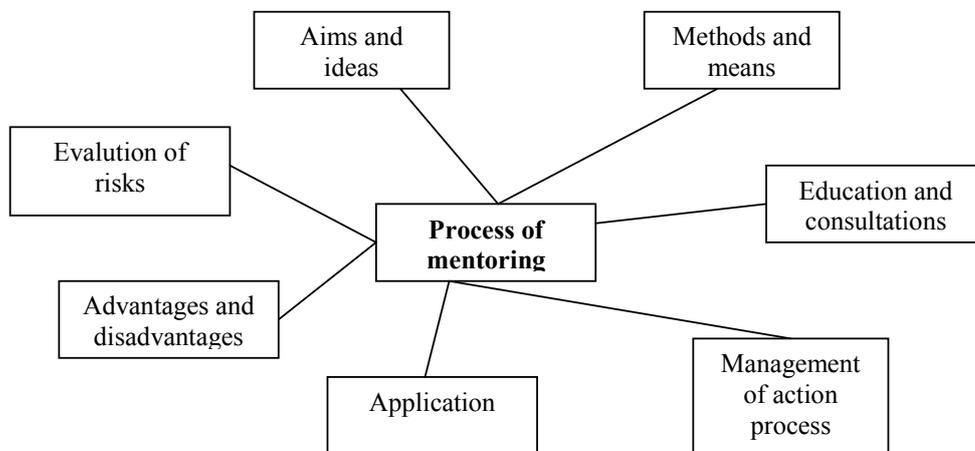


Fig. 2. Activities of mentoring process

Source: concept of authors

The experience of ELVI evidences obviously and demonstrates the advantages of franchise, because the ELVI group has become the third biggest participant in Latvian food market, The experience of ELVI group and other franchisors in the field of cooperation may be used preferably in Latvian rural regions to facilitate and support the activities of small entrepreneurs.

In activation of entrepreneurship, the mentoring may play a significant role. Mentoring is a transfer of knowledge, carried out by experienced mentors and successors of experience. [Tuliki, 2005.] Mentoring is based on mentor's knowledge and experience that allows to successor to evaluate the possibilities and resources, being at his disposal, and facilitate their using in solution of a concrete problem or achieving of a goal.

Mentoring may play a significant role in facilitating of innovations that develops presently in Latvia at a rather slow pace. In Latvia, only one fifth of enterprises is involved in innovative activities. The innovative activities are more related to big enterprises.

Conclusions

- The entrepreneurship environment in Latvia has developed in accordance with social economic processes.
- The Latvian economy has not succeeded in overcoming the decrease in production setting in after the 1990.
- The location of production resources is territorially unbalanced.
- The use of agricultural land is insufficiently economic: the yield of crops is comparatively low; a part of agricultural land remains unused.
- More than two thirds of investments are concentrated in Riga and Pierīga.
- The preconditions of development of entrepreneurship are allocated unevenly all over the territory.
- A certain part of future entrepreneurs express the desire to work independently.
- Acceptable development forms of entrepreneurship in the future may be franchise and mentoring.
- The regional policy should be oriented to possibly soon extermination of imbalance taking place in allocation of production factors.
- The principles of regionalisation should be taken into consideration, when implementing the elements of regional policy.

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