

THE SPRAWL OF VILNIUS CITY – SOME CONSEQUENCES OF RURAL – URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS

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Burneika D., Ubarevičienė R. THE SPRAWL OF VILNIUS CITY – SOME CONSEQUENCES OF RURAL – URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS.

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to establish interconnections of development of Vilnius and surrounding rural region. The city has been developing and sprawling very fast during recent years. The revelation of actual characteristics and main factors of spatial fluctuations of the city is most important task of the paper. How development of Vilnius is affected by the trends in surrounding region and how development of the city impacts social and economic processes in surrounding area are among main questions to be answered. Process of transformation of rural Polish speaking area into the mostly Lithuanian urban region has its physical and mental dimensions. Both structures, urban and rural, coexist together on the same space and in such situations some conflict is almost inevitable. The establishment of possible ways of prospective development of the region is final goal of the research.

References 11, Figs. 4. In English, summary in Lithuanian.

Keywords: City, city region, urban region, urban transformations

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Introduction

The fast sprawl of Vilnius city is clearly seen even by the least sophisticated watcher. The territory of the city was growing both legally and physically during the last decades. Such growth mostly appeared because of fast suburbanization, - phenomenon, which did not exist in Soviet cities. It resulted in actual spread of cities into city regions, which involve urban and non urban spaces, societies, economies, perceptions, etc. Metropolitan city regions are being commonly perceived as main drivers and points of increasingly interconnected world economy. Their functioning depends more on relations with other metropolitan areas and regions than on territories surrounding them. The prosperity of national economies depends on abilities of such cities (Smetkowski, 2011). However the processes taking place inside these metro-regions often remain hidden, while the forming of such areas itself could and should raise certain social outcomes.

Though the sprawl of the city is obvious, the consequences of this process, its actual scale and possible future outcomes and problems are not. Authors of the article have tried to fulfill this gap of knowledge. The main aim of the paper is related to the revelation of processes related to city sprawl. Phenomena, taking place in the zone of city sprawl, were the main objects of the research.

Field trips to settlements surrounding Vilnius municipality and conversations with local population and governors were the main tools of establishing differences of such perceptions. Authors tried to find out perceptions of those living in the area as well as

The main aim of this article is related to the identification of interconnections and problems of development of Vilnius and surrounding territory. The research was funded by the Lithuanian Science Council (agreement No. MIP-26/2010).

1. Growth of urban region – clash of two worlds

The growth of Vilnius urban region means that new, different social structure evolves inside the area, which population has at least partly different needs, priorities, worldviews, life quality standards, value systems etc. Such a situation is especially severe in Vilnius case, because social relations between urban society and societies of surrounding areas are quite weak. Absolute majority of city population is formed by immigrants from around the Lithuania or whole Soviet Union or their descendants and do not have any family relations in the area. Mostly Lithuanian and Russian speaking city evolves in Polish and Belarus speaking areas of Polish identity. Very simplified picture could be drawn here. Urban world – predominantly Lithuanian, new, young, economically active, “rich” etc. sprawls in to Rural world – predominantly Polish, older population, economically conservative (almost no rural tourism farms in the area...), “poor”. All this is happening in the circumstances of quite strictly regulated planning system, when changes of land use destination is quite limited.

Legally Vilnius city municipality is surrounded by the territory of Vilnius district municipality and city has no other opportunities for spreading. The small exception is Trakai municipality and its industrial town Lentvaris. Other areas of Trakai municipality are almost excluded from this opportunity, because of the National park status, which limits new constructions very much.

In such circumstances government of Vilnius district municipality finds itself in quite ambiguous situation:

1. Ruling party in Vilnius district, “Polish election action” (decision making force) completely depends on Polish majority. Consequence – tendency to oppose any sprawl of the city, which could change ethnical structure of voters.

2. However, the main municipal income – from local residents’ income tax, which is usually much higher of “newcomers”. Consequence – wish to accept people (income) but not an industry.

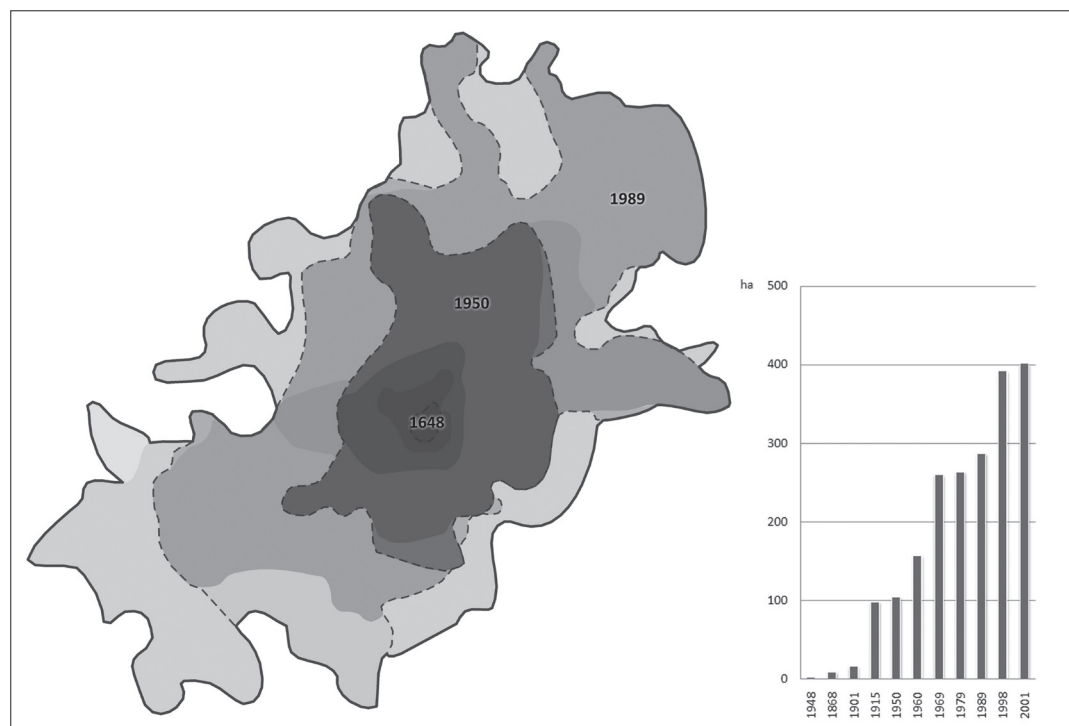


Fig. 1. Expansion of administrative limits of Vilnius city (according to Česnavičius, 1999)

1 pav. Vilniaus miesto administracinių ribų kaita (pagal Česnavičių, 1999)

At present in many cases precaution prevails and spatial planning actions in Vilnius district municipality tries to block new developments and new residential areas (e.g. not foreseeing “built up” lands in master plans).

However, according to questioning of population, wish to have private house is common for most residents of Vilnius, and sprawl continues. In many cases it drives through existing legislation. One of the most common ways is based on private initiative, when people buy land, attend official courses, become farmers and receive permission to build a house in their “farmstead”. Statistical consequence of such circumstances is growing number of farmers but not agriculture in Vilnius district. Final result – chaotic suburbanisation based on private initiative to have a house (from urban residents) and to earn money (from country residents, which sell the land of agricultural destination mostly). At such circumstances not only social but also ecological problems will continue to arise.

Such a spread of urban area inevitably results in greater or smaller conflict between two societies. Typically at the beginning it means that new population is survived by alien environment and ruled by the government formed by old residents. It first of all tends to rely on old residents and their needs, while newcomers could be treated as a potential threat for its existence. Typically such problems are being solved by expansion of formal city limits. Expansion of Vilnius administrative limit clearly illustrates this. (fig.1). However, in this case, the older social structures, which still exists in new urban space, finds themselves in exactly the same situation like new urban one did before. The existing situation would perhaps be better solved by establishment of new, smaller municipalities, which could be closer to people and therefore more appropriate for all its residents.

Many problems related to the spread of urban world into the rural one, which differs not only in the sense of way of life, is not easily visible or observed. One of the fields, which

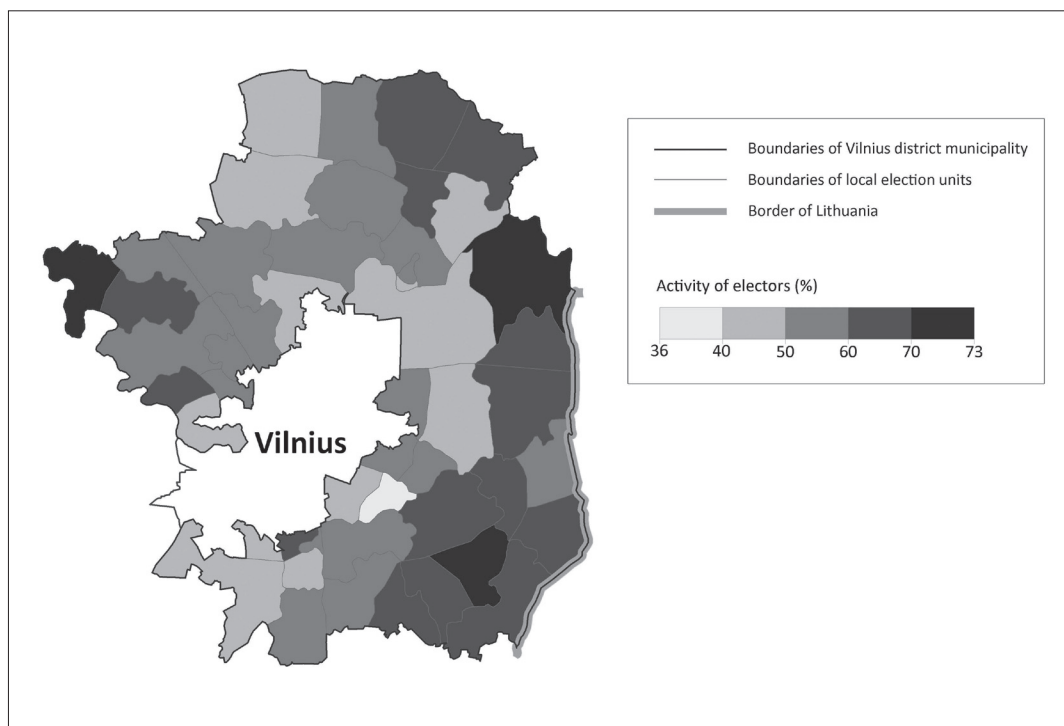


Fig. 2. Proportion of voters during municipal elections in 2011 in Vilnius district (According to the data of central commission for election, www.vrk.lt)

2 pav. Dalyvauciusiuju savivaldos rinkimuose dalis Vilniaus r. sav. rinkimu apylinkese 2011 m. (pagal VRK duomenis, www.vrk.lt)

could be studied more indirectly, is related to the political issues. The results of municipal elections could not only reveal existing political preferences or ethnical structure of population, but also illustrate identity of residents. The results of elections carried out in the spring of 2011 could help identified areas of mixed identity. Fig. 2 shows the proportion of population, which participated in municipal elections. The ignorance (defiance) of such elections could illustrate indifference of local population to the local politics, government and local problems. Obviously it's much higher in areas close to the Vilnius municipality. The difference of voters activity reaches two times comparing closest settlements and most distant ones.

Quite similar situation could be illustrated by the proportion of voters, which voted for ruling party in the region – Polish election party, though in this case results illustrate more proportion of newcomers in to Vilnius district municipality, than identification of its residents (Fig. 3). It is obvious that most of residents, living in closest areas to the city are under the “alien” government for them, though it's the homey one for native residents, which lived here for centuries. Such ambiguous situation can't be properly solved just by spreading limits of city municipality.

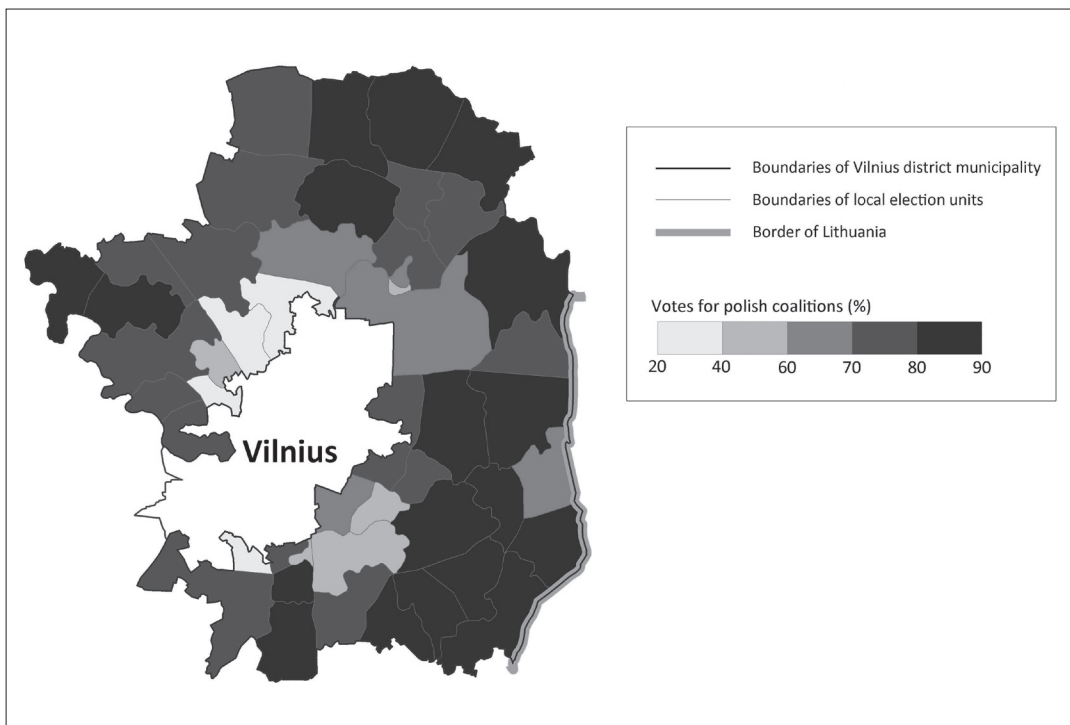


Fig. 3. Proportion of votes for “Polish parties” in municipal elections in 2011 (according to the data of central commission for election. www.vrk.lt)

3 pav. Balsavusiųjų už Lenkų rinkimų akcijos koaliciją dalis Vilniaus r. sav. rinkimų apylinkėse 2011 m. (pagal VRK duomenis, www.vrk.lt)

2. Problems and opportunities of Vilnius city sprawl

Growth of the city in the context of economic, political, social and cultural transformations of society inevitably results not just in expansion of its urban space but also in its segregation and fragmentation. Growing social differences and fragmentation of society redistribute population inside cities. There are little statistical evidences of spatial segregation of Lithuanian cities but the trend itself is clearly visible. Some researches illustrate that those trends are different in different areas and mostly depend on variety of existing housing stock. The more monotonous areas have little proportion of social disadvantaged

groups. This means that soviet „microrajones“ at present as a rule aren't „attractive“ places for most disadvantaged citizens and do not suffer from problem of social disorganization very much. And some quite prestigious areas still suffer from such groups even if it is an area of good location and image (Knezėnaitė, 2011). The appearance and spread of gated communities inside Vilnius city is another example of fragmentation of city space (Krupickaitė, Peciukonytė, Pociūtė, 2010-2011).

Such a redistribution of population inside city is quite certain, though not well studied phenomenon in Lithuania. More hideous and less known process is redistribution of population between urban region and surrounding area. Field research, carried out by the authors of the article revealed that spread of the city is making impact on segregation of population in metropolis region even in areas, which are not directly affected by the city sprawl. Middle and peripheral zone of urban region is a destination for flows of quite rich population from Vilnius. An area almost right behind it serves as a kind of social “trashcan” of the city. Mostly due aging population and emigration some abundance of free and quite cheap housing stock appears in many villages and towns in Vilnius city region. Such supply generates flows of socially disadvantaged groups (e.g. jobless, alcoholic residents, often with young children) from the city to the country. Those newcomers start to cause various problems both to local population and government.

This is also an area, which generates immigration to the city of younger population (though this is common also for more distant or even remote places). Actually none of those, who left to Vilnius from smaller towns for studies returns backwards, as authors found out during their visits to the region. Obviously spreading metropolitan urban region is making negative impact on social structure of more distant surrounding areas. It takes young and active population and exports mostly those that cannot take care of themselves. This impact is not easy visible on a landscape, which does not change rapidly.

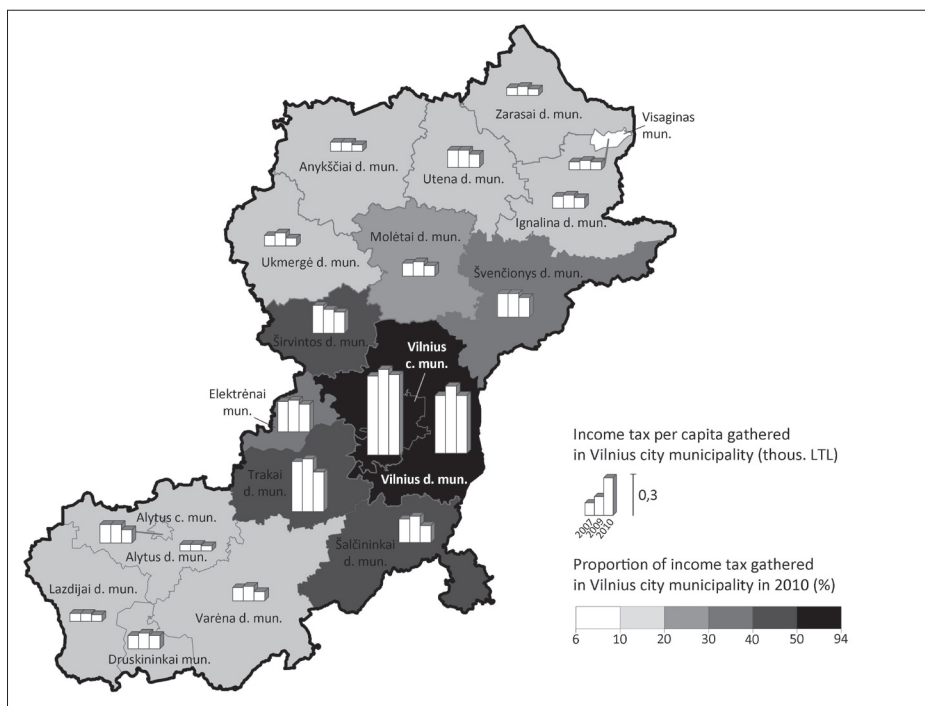


Fig. 4. Incomes of Eastern Lithuania’s municipal budgets from residents income tax, gathered in Vilnius municipality in 2009(data of state tax inspection, www.vmi.lt)

4 pav. Rytų Lietuvos savivaldybių pajamos iš fizinių asmenų pajamų mokesčio, surinkto Vilniaus miesto savivaldybėje 2009 m. (pagal VMI duomenis)

On the other hand Vilnius is the main driver of the growth of surrounding region, because it generates considerable, if not most significant, part of income of residents of surrounding areas. The studies carried out earlier (Burneika, Kriauciunas, 2007) shows, that the development of Vilnius city, has been making positive impact on development of municipalities located nearby since the beginning of this century. As a consequence, those municipalities are not among the least developed ones any more. Vilnius is also the main source of income of budgets of municipalities in the region (fig. 4). Newcomers from Vilnius city, which officially declare their living place in Vilnius district (though it's not an absolute rule, cause many of them officially live in Vilnius or in even much more remote areas), pay taxes for municipal budget. Obviously, Vilnius is one of the main working places for traditional Vilnius district residents. Consequently, biggest incomes to Vilnius district municipality are earned in Vilnius. The impact on more distant municipalities is not so enormous, though it is also quite substantial.

3. Discussion

All economic transformations as well as transformation of urban space are taking place in social environment and all of them could potentially raise some social conflicts. Any transformation means changes of environment and conditions for those who have been living there before. (Burneika, 2003). The sprawls of the city as well as transformation of existing urban spaces could be sources of potential conflicts, because their change living conditions or could be perceived as a potential threat for usual way of life even if they are not. Most conflict situations, which could be heard or seen on mass media, are related to the interests of various groups. So potentially any change of environment (both human and physical) could raise conflicts.

The conflict situation is even more expected in case of various limitations, which reduces supply of potential areas for the spreading phenomena, such as suburbanisation. Even in Vilnius city municipality only 29 % of territory is urbanized, according to the master plan of the city, while majority of other areas, due to the limitations of land use changes, are almost out of the market. (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės bendrasis planas, 2005, www.Vilnius.lt). The spread to the Vilnius municipality is sustained even more by the lack of area formally ascribed for urban development. On the other hand, absence of transformation, in the situations when society and economy is changing could also mean potential conflicts or tensions. It could, for example mean, that governors of the area could not or don't want to adopt infrastructure for changing needs of society (the stable network of schools, while distribution of young families is changing, could be an example of such passiveness). Tension in city sprawl zone also raises because of behaviour of new residents, which tend to raise new, often quite expensive requirements for local government (such as new paved road to their new homes). Conflict situations tend to sharpen because of ethnical differences, which could raise more serious negative outcomes here.

The development of the suburbs could make impact on the environment not only in the zone of spreading. One or another impact could be felt in the core city as well. Deurbanisation and depopulation of central parts is a wide spread phenomena in Western countries. A. Giddens (Giddens, 2005) stated that the more suburban area spreads the more problems to the residents of old centres appear. At present such problems are not clearly visible in Vilnius due to compensating impact of immigration to the city but growing age of residents in sleeping soviet neighbourhoods and emigration to western countries could sharpen such problem in the nearest future.

Cooperation between Vilnius city and Vilnius district in regulating Vilnius city sprawl is almost inexistent and there are no premises for this in the nearest future. The implementation of administrative reform, which would divide Vilnius district municipality into several smaller ones, could help to at least partly solve problems of interrelations of new and old resi-

dents of an area. Otherwise government of the area would be alien at least for a part of its population. Such division could help to create competitive climate for the opportunities, caused by the spread of the city. The further reformation of administrative system strengthening (or in fact establishing) regional level of self-governing and planning also would help to improve development of spatial systems exceeding municipality boundaries.

The change of redistribution of income tax so that it would be allocated both to the place of residence and working place of an employee also could create more favourable circumstances for city development.

Conclusions

1. The development and resulting sprawl of the city space creates new territorial system, which involves both urban and rural societies, lifestyles, landscapes, identities and perceptions. This coexistence raises new problems, which cannot be solved by the changes of city limits, because of dual nature of new urban space. Both structures, urban and rural, coexist together on the same space and in such situations some conflict is almost inevitable notwithstanding legal status of the territory.

2. The sprawl of Vilnius city, according to some indirect indicators and field researches is wide spread phenomenon, which is not going to stop in the nearest future as well as conflict situations arising due to it.

3. Changing administrative system, strengthening regional governing and planning, rational regional policy, based on existing spatial systems but not only on administrative division would create better conditions for regulating sprawl of urban structures as well as preventing and solving problems related to it.

4. At present there are no premises permitting to expect any cooperation between governments of different municipalities and some common planning of processes exceeding municipal boundaries.

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VILNIAUS MIESTO PLĖTRA – KAI KURIOS KAIMIŠKŲ TERITORIJŲ TRANSFORMACIJŲ PASEKMĖS

Santrauka

Per pastaruosius du dešimtmečius Vilniaus miesto plėtra vyko labai sparčiai keisdama tiek vidines miesto erdves, tiek jo apylinkes. Šių procesų pasekmėje susiformavo Vilniaus miesto regionas – miestietiška erdvė, kelis kart didesnė už buvusiąją iki reformų pradžios. Tokia miesto erdvės plėtra nevyko tuščioje vietoje, todėl negalėjo vykti be didesnės ar mažesnės sankirtos su esamomis socialinėmis struktūromis. Būtent daugiausia kaimiško regiono erdvės virsmo Vilniaus miesto dalimi procesas ir yra svarbiausias šio straipsnio objektas. Šio darbo tikslas – nustatyti esmines Vilniaus miesto regiono teritorijos plėtros keliamas pasekmes akcentuojant išskylančias problemas. Miesto plėtros zona yra ta vieta, kur susiduria dvi iš esmės skirtingos visuomenės. Dažniausiai jauna, pasiturinti, daugiausia lietuviška miestietiška erdvė veržiasi į konservatyvesnę neturtingesnę, daugiausiai lenkiškos savimonės kaimišką struktūrą. Skirtingos visuomenės turi skirtingus poreikius, prioritetus, vertybių sistemas, todėl tam tikras konfliktas neišvengiamas. Tokiomis sąlygomis miesto plėtra grasina tradicinėms bendruomenėms ir jų valdžios struktūroms, formuojamoms ir priklausantioms nuo tradicinių gyventojų.

Miesto erdvės plėtros arba kaimiškų teritorijų transformacijos į miestietiškas keliamos problemos dažniausiai sprendžiamos plečiant miesto administracines ribas, tačiau pati transformacija retai kada būna pilna. Miesto ir kaimo struktūros kartu egzistuoja ilgą laiką, todėl bent dalis visuomenės yra valdoma „svetimomis“ rankomis. Naujų mažesnių savivaldybių steigimas tokiu atveju būtų optimaliausias tokių problemų sprendimo būdas. Miesto plėtrai didelę neigiamą įtaką daro ir egzistuojanti savivaldybių biudžetų formavimo tvarka, stabdanti ūkio plėtrą jose, nes savivaldybėms reikia mokesčių mokėtojų, o ne verslo. Gyventojų pajamų mokestis, paskirstomas tolygiai pagal užimtą darbo ir gyvenamąją vietą būtų žymiai optimaliausias.

Egzistuojanti šalies administracinio valdymo, o tuo pačiu ir planavimo sistema nesudaro gerų prielaidų valdyti visuomeninių teritorinių sistemų, apimančių daugiau nei vieną savivaldybę. Prielaidų, kad situacija artimiausiu metu pasikeis ir Vilniaus miesto bei apylinkinių savivaldybių veiksmai bus koordinuojami ir planuojami sistemingai, beveik nėra. Miesto plėtra ir toliau neišvengiamai vyks, bet ji vyks stichiškai, keldama tiek socialines, tiek ekonomines, tiek ekologines problemas.