

THE DIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MODELS OF LATVIAN RURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The ongoing changes that are connected with demographic, economic, social and even educational crises influence the action of Latvian rural schools and therefore endanger their viability and sustainability in the future perspective. There is happening the schools' network optimization that affects Latvian rural schools that is why they are reorganized or closed in rural areas of the country. The authors of the article have been researching Latvian rural schools' fluctuation based on the ecological approach and the following viewpoints that rural school is: 1) an educational environment; 2) a live organism that tries to survive in changing conditions; 3) an educational environment as self-organising, self-developing, self-evaluating system of educational environment. The aim of the article is to popularize the results of empirical researches in the connection with the diversity of educational environmental models of Latvian rural schools.

KEYWORDS: educational environmental models, ecological approach, educational environment, rural schools, sustainability, viability.

Introduction

The Latvian rural school as educational environment works in *the global (world scale) educational environment* where the self-developing process can be observed. Conditions' diversity gives leave turn to concrete case studies, where rural school is researched as *local educational environment* in the evolutionary, structural and functional aspects in the context of contradictions, new tendencies, yet unsolved problems and ongoing processes which take place in the global outside educational environment.

The research and evaluation of the rural school as the educational environment is important in the context of European Union (EU) educational environment. Latvia educational environment has become an integral part of EU educational environment, and it directly influences changes in the educational environment of rural schools.

The investigation of the rural school as local educational environment is important and topical in the aspect of *continuous (unceasing) educational environment* where must be succession, systemic approach, fairly equivalent possibilities in the aspect of education accessibility and extraction, offering and quality of education. Uneven and insufficient exchange of information, matter and energy (resources) in the educational environment of our country has caused irregular and unbalanced development in the following dimensions: Riga and regions; cities and countryside. Rural school as open educational environments search for *new opportunities of the development, appoints priorities and directions of the development* in that conditions.

We can diagnose both qualitative and quantitative changes in the educational environment of the rural school. The rural school educational environment assumes subsidiary functions, including redress and preventive functions, enlarges target audience. The modern rural school has become an *inwardly inclusive environment*. It is educational environment of: 1) development of human personality; 2) development of local rural community where education is a sphere of development, precondition of promotion, measure, process, outcome and totality of qualities. Both rural and city pupils learn in modern rural schools, and in the process of promotion of personality development human-centered, individually differential approach should be provided. The rural school is *only* (!) local education environment in many rural places therefore it accepts responsibility for not only sustainable self-development, but also for sustainable development of the whole local rural community. The Rural school has become a formal and non-formal educational environment for pre-school children, pupils and their families, educators, the whole rural community in the context of life-long and wide-long learning. Therefore *rural development* in Latvia is closely related to the development of the educational environment, including the development and sustainability of general education schools in the countryside.

The great *diversity* of educational environments' *models* of rural schools, what exists in Latvia countryside, is the outcome of above mentioned factors' influence. The results of our research testify that attention and activity of pedagogues-innovators and creative pedagogues' collective of Latvia rural school are turned to output of new conceptions of strategic development and practical approbation of new

educational environment's models. It is important to offer scientific conceptions, theories and new, untraditional education environment's models for rural schools nowadays. It is necessary to offer an ecological paradigm, a new perspective for substantiation and maintenance of sustainable development and humanistic target-oriented activities of rural schools in the countryside.

The **aim of the article** is to reveal the results of empirical researches in the connection with the diversity of educational environmental models of Latvian rural schools.

The author of the article used several **research methods**. *Methods of data acquisition*: 1) the studying, analysing and evaluating of scientific literature; 2) content analysis of documents and other information sources on Latvian rural schools; 3) questionnaire (interviews, survey); 4) observation; 5) case study for research of Latvian rural schools' educational environmental models. *Methods of data processing*: qualitative descriptive method.

The research base: There were 25 Latvian rural secondary schools and 6 basic schools that took part in the research from four Latvian regions – Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale and Kurzeme. In total 31 rural schools.

Methodology of Research

• Rural School as Self-Developing, Self-Organizing and Self-Evaluating System in the Context of its Sustainability

In the result of the theoretical research we have distinguished between **two trends in human ecology** (Katane, 2005; Katane, 2007; Katane, 2009):

• **Ecology of Human Development**, representatives – D. Baacke, U. Bronfenbrenner, A. L. Brown, L. Hirsto, W. Huitt, D. Pease, G. Pike and D. Selby etc.;

• **Ecology of Social ("live") Systems Development** – for example, W. Buckley, U. Bronfenbrenner, C. Broderic and J. Smith, F. Capra, A. Kuhn, J. G. Miller; R. K. Merton, T. Parsons etc.

We consider that **Ecology of Education** as one the subtrends of the Human Ecology opens wide possibilities to integrate the conceptions and theories of both trends of human ecology so respecting the **complementarity principle** and show perspective of the third trend. The results of the investigations mentioned above serve as *substantiation for the fact that in our rural school educational environment conception the school is*:

- 1) **the environment of human development** where the school is one of the substructures of rural person (teachers, schoolchildren, their family members, everyone concerned in formal and informal education) ecosystem where education is the means for promoting of this development, but the process of education itself is interrelation of a person with the educational environment;
- 2) **a self-evaluating and self-organising ecological system of education** that is searching for its sustainable development possibilities and is open for the whole local rural community under the changeable conditions of today.

The ecological approach ensures *systemic approach* in educational research. It gives possibility to research educational system or educational environmental system as a living organism, by attributing a special notion to its viability and development in changing conditions. (Fend, 1991; Fingerle, Naul, Shenk, 1978; Merton, 1948; Miller, 1978; Parsons, 1937; 1951; Ray, 1988; Даниелян, 2004; Каган, 1974; Носкова, 2004) etc.

In our investigation in the aspect of sustainable development a **rural school** is described as an **ecological system of education**, which is a "live", holistic organism that develops in its ecosystem, functions in the sphere of education based on the maintenance of self-regulation, self-development and balance with the regularities of the changing environment. The theoretic basis of this basic statement is (Katane, 2005; Katane, 2006; Katane, 2007):

- 1) the scientific foundation of the statements of T. Parsons and R. Merton who suggested to investigate any social system, including the school as a "natural" organization that functions almost like a biological organism, a living being that is able to self-develop and self-regulate in the influence of internal and external environment factors and whose interrelation with the outer environment is subject to definite correlations; the scientists in these investigations should take a position of an observer of a "natural phenomenon" and researcher without direct interference in their activities;
- 2) usage of the notions **"live system"** and **ecosystem** in the conceptions and theories of the representatives of social system ecology – K. H. Fingerle, A. Leschinsky, R. Naul, B. Shenk, J. G. Miller, M. Ray, P. Roeder and others;

- 3) the substantiation of the *homeostasis (self-regulation) principle* of social systems that helps to *maintain the balance with the outer environment* as well as the *morphogenic regularities* and *reorientation regularities* of the development of a social system as a living organism on the basis of the feedback with the outer environment in the publications of W.Buckly, C.Broderic and J.Smith;
- 4) the statements of H. Brunkhorst, H. Gudjons, A.Kuhn, E. Laszlo and others that the *social systems are autopoietic, that is, they continuously renew themselves and are self-referential, that is, they can refer to themselves; the systems have the ability to perceive the difference between the system (itself) and the environment (something else) and the ability to draw consequences;*
- 5) the statements of the Soviet time Russian scientist A. Prigozin who gives the comparison and analysis of two notions the *system* and *organization* stressing that not every social system is an organization, in turn, an organization is always a system, nevertheless, it differs from a usual system having specific features – target oriented, coordinated, self-organizing and self-regulating activities;
- 6) the statements that an *open system, dissipative structure tends to maintain balance with the outer heterogeneous environment*. These basic statements can be found in the conceptions of today's trends of the new, interdisciplinary sciences in the conceptions of the representatives of *synergetics*, including *social synergetics* V.Bryansky, P.Florensky, H.Haken, S.Pozarsky, V.Vasilkova, S.Kapica, H.Knyazeva, S. Kurdyumov, I. Prigozin and I. Stengers etc.

• *Rural School as an Opened Community's Educational Environment*

The authors of the article emphasize that rural school is an educational ecological system of environment that is a *live holistic organism* that develops in its eco-system (environment) and chrono-system (time) based on self-regulation, self-development and balance preservation with outside changing regularities of environment. In order to preserve its own viability in nowadays changing conditions rural schools have to become opened educational environmental systems that can evaluate existing threats and find new directions of development, holding balance with inner and outside environment.

The ideas that an open system, dissipative structure tends to maintain balance with the outer environment can be found in the conceptions of synergetics and social synergetics elaborated by H. Haken and J. Portugali (Haken, Portugali, 1996; 2005), H.Knyazeva and S.Kurdyumov (Knyazeva, Kurdyumov, 2001), I. Prigogine and G. Nicolis, I. Prigogine, I. Stengers (Prigogine, Nicolis, 1977; Prigogine, Stengers, 1983) etc.

In order to provide rural school and community's sustainable development in the future perspective in the whole world, the rural school has to become the whole community's educational environment – *rural community school* that provides *community education* and has *an inwardly inclusive environment* for the citizens of the local community.

Community education is essential in stimulating community members to actively participate in social activities, find or generate employment, increase their incomes and improve their quality of life (Akande, 2007; Decker, 2003; Fairbairn, 1978; Freire, 1973, Freire, Shor, 1987; Gjelten, 1982; Jarvis, 1995, 1999, 2001; Johnson, Bell, 1995; Kerensky, 1989; Lovett, 1982; Minzey, 1976; Minzey, LeTarte, 1972; Poster, Kruger, 1990; Roga, 2008; Willie, 2000; Wilson, 1980; Митина, 2004) etc.

Results of Research

The author of the article researches the educational environmental models of Latvian rural schools. According to I.Katane (Katane, 2006) the diversity of educational environments of rural schools depends on three interactions between educational environment of the rural school and outer environment: 1) the school aspires to influence processes that take place in outside environment; 2) educational environment of the rural school develops under the influence of outside environment; 3) there is a bilateral interaction between educational environment of the rural school and outside environment.

One of the evaluation aspects was the organizational structure of rural schools which testifies about fluctuation within educational environment of Latvian rural schools. There are two groups of the rural schools' structure:

- *the multi-functional structure*, which includes activities such as human resource management (teachers, administration of the school and other workers), implementation of educational and interest related educational programmes, organization of various events, courses and meetings at school, and etc.;

- *the multi-divisional structure*, which consists of separate but similar functional structures coordinated by a rural school that is a center for a rural school that is its branch office.

There is a great variety of educational environmental models of Latvian rural schools that are theoretically divided into four main groups:

- **A traditional educational environmental model** means that the school's operation responds to the Educational Law of Latvian Republic, the school's functions correspond to pupils' audience accordingly to basic or secondary school's educational programs. The school's operation is without any changes because

- firstly, *the school's administration does not see any danger for school's existence and sustainability in future*, there is enough number of pupils and set of forms that have not substantially changed in the last years, that is why the rural school does not want to change anything in its every day work because the basic audience is saved – schoolchildren and youngsters;
- secondly, *the school's administration and all personnel perceive danger of school's existence and its sustainability in future* because the number of pupils and forms have decreased or it has been always a situation that the amount of pupils and forms were very low. Therefore the school as an environmental system is not opened to changes from inside - („from the bottom”), but waits for favourable reforms from outside - („from the top”).

For example, Ezernieku Secondary School, Dagda district represents the widespread educational environmental model that encompasses three educational levels – elementary (1-4 forms), basic (5-9forms) and secondary (10-12forms) (see Figures 1).

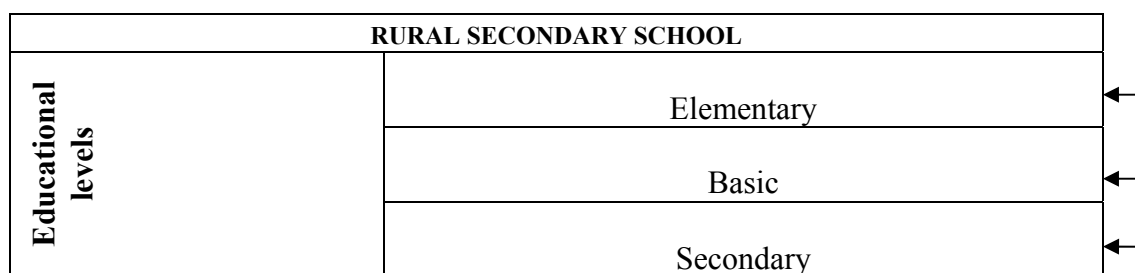


Figure 1. Rural Secondary School – a Widespread Educational Environmental Model (the author's construction)

- **An educational environmental model of structural reorganization** is related to comprehensive schools that as a result of the optimization in the time of the reform in 2009/2010 school year have become the component of the multi-structural educational environment or substructure:

- *have become a multi-structural educational environmental center* that has got *one or two branch offices*;
- *have lost their independence and were joined* to some rural secondary school or basic school in such way becoming *the branch office of this particular school*.

Not only the empirical researches of the authors of the article prove the above mentioned changes, but also the normative document of Latvian Republic's Ministry of Education and Science "*Educational establishments which reorganization or closure was coordinated by Ministry of Education and Science in 2009*" (2009) (in Latvian - LR IZM Normatīvais dokuments *Izglītības iestādes, kuru slēgšanu un reorganizāciju 2009. gadā saskaņojusi Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*. (2009)). For example, Viesītes Secondary School (Viesītes district) as a *rural secondary school (center)* with Elksnu Basic School as a *branch office*; Pilsrundales Secondary School (Rundales district) as a *rural basic school (center)* with Svītenes Basic School, Bersteles Basic School as *branch offices*, etc.

The following documents determine the reorganization or liquidation of Latvian schools, int.al. rural schools:

- Regulations Nr. 29 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvian Republic *Coordination Municipality's Decisions about General Educational Institution's Foundation, Reorganization and Liquidation, its Manager's Recruitment and Dismissal and Educational Board Manager's Recruitment and Dismissal*;
- the application of municipality;
- the decision of municipality about the reorganization or liquidation of the school;

- the municipality’s argumentative justification for the reorganization or liquidation of the educational institution.

What is more, according to the normative documents of the Ministry of Science and Education *Educational Establishments which Reorganization or Closure was Coordinated by Ministry of Education and Science in 2009 and 2010* (Latvian - LR IZM Normatīvie dokumenti - *Izglītības iestādes, kuru slēgšanu un reorganizāciju 2009.gadā saskaņojusi Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija; Izglītības iestādes, kuru slēgšanu un reorganizāciju 2010.gadā saskaņojusi Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*) it is concluded that many Latvian rural schools have changed their status as a result of reorganization. For instance:

- from *basic school* to *secondary school* (for instance, Stalgenes Basic School ⇒ Stalgenes Secondary School, Jelgavas district, 2009 year)
- from *elementary school* to *preschool* (for instance, Strazdes Basic School ⇒ Strazdes Preschool, Talsu district, 2009 year)
- from *secondary school* to *basic school* (for instance, Dzukstes Secondary School ⇒ Dzukstes Basic School, Tukuma district, 2010 year)
- from *basic school* to *elementary school* (for instance, Matkules Basic School ⇒ Matkules Elementary School, Kandavas district, 2010 year)
- from *basic school* to *preschool* (for instance, Brigu Basic School ⇒ Brigu Preschool, Ludzas district, 2010 year)
- from *special elementary school* to *special boarding school* (for instance, Upesgrivas Special Elementary School to Upesgrivas Special Boarding School, Talsu district, 2010 year)

The examples of the change of the status of Latvian rural schools show that the demographic decrease in certain rural areas of the country influenced the new allocated status to a great extent, for example, basic school ⇒ preschool. There is only one positive change of the status, for instance, basic school ⇒ secondary school.

• **A multi-functional and multi-structural educational environmental model within the framework of one school** encompasses rural schools that offer multi-divisional educational environment for all rural community because the rural school is a social cultural environment which offer the formal and non-formal education in the aspect of life-long and wide-long learning. By broadening target audience and functions in the aspect of a person’s age period:

- ‘down’ – preschool and school age children and
- ‘up’ – adult formal and non-formal education,

rural schools as an educational environment system form new substructures. The following examples are mentioned in the connection with a multi-functional and multi-structural educational environmental model.

Nowadays Latvian rural schools (basic, secondary) also include in their educational environment a preschool’s educational level. It means that preschool age children can educate, socialize and enrich their inner world in the premises of rural basic or secondary schools. For example figure 2 shows the educational levels of Skaistkalnes Secondary school in Vecumnieku district.

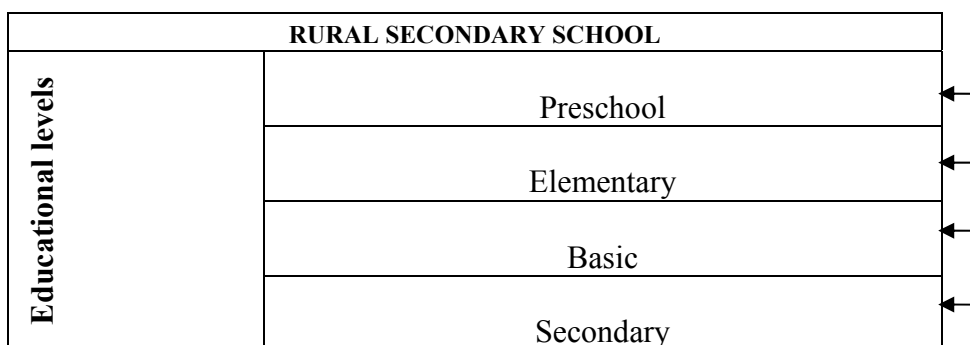


Figure 2. Rural Basic School that Involves Preschool Education (the author’s construction)

Latvian rural schools become complex in structure, expand functions without outward incentives, but motivation to change in the structure and development comes from inside of the school, respectively, from the school’s community (administration, teachers, schoolchildren, their parents and etc.). For instance, Barbeles Basic School offers three educational levels (preschool, elementary and basic), but at

the same time it has such structural units as the Learning Educational Center, Development Center for Children, an Adult Association and other units. (see Figure 3)

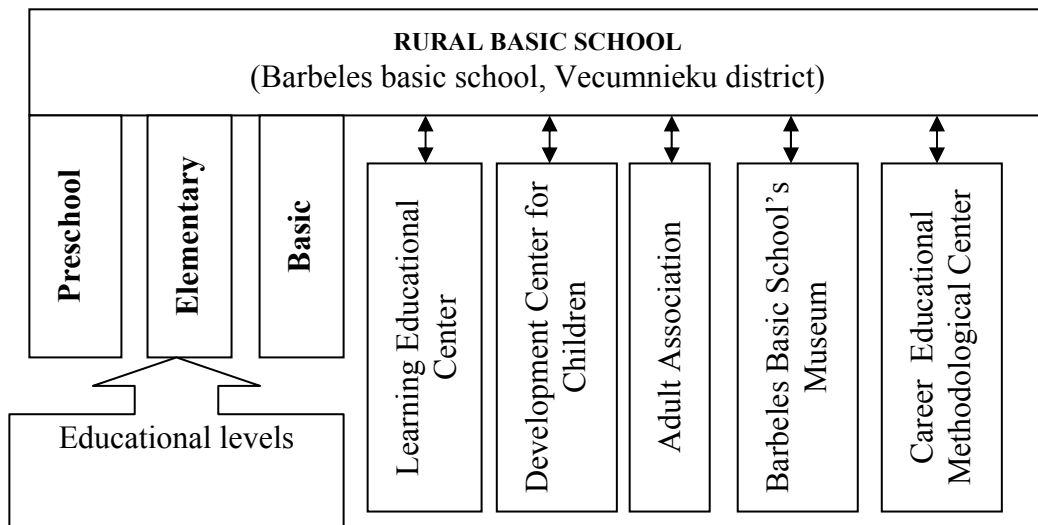


Figure 3. The Inner Structure of a Rural Basic School (the author's construction)

What is more, 2009/2010 school year's educational reform in Latvia encouraged many rural schools, especially small rural schools, to search for the new opportunities for preservation of self-independence, viability in rural areas by involving themselves in various projects in the country (local) and beyond it (international). For example, the project *Changing Opportunity for Schools* (Latvian - *Pārmaiņu iespēja skolām*) which aimed to facilitate schools' reorganization into multi-functional educational, cultural and social support centers, forming partnerships among administrative, educational, entrepreneurship and nongovernmental organizations. This project was carried out in the cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and Latvian Rural Forum. In the framework of this project a new educational environmental model of rural schools appeared *rural basic school - multi-functional center*. (see Figure 4)

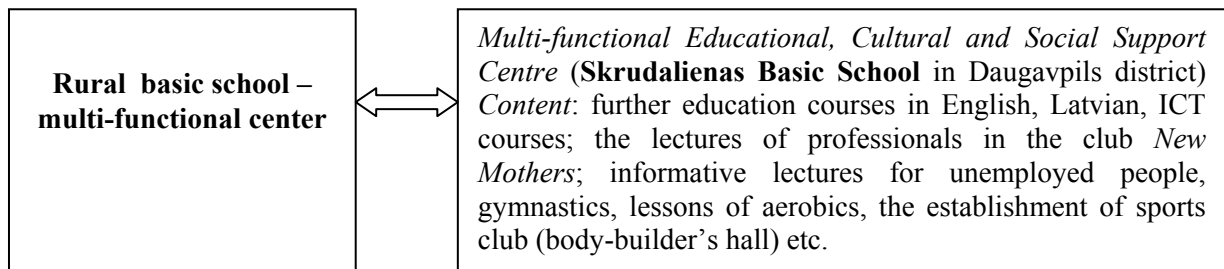


Figure 4. Rural Basic School-Multi-functional Center (the author's construction)

The above mentioned information proves that rural basic schools as multi-functional centers involve pre-school children, schoolchildren, adults from a local community in the process of education, culture and socialization thus providing possibility to acquire knowledge and skills.

- **A combined educational environmental model** includes the features of a multi-structural and multi-functional educational environmental model. The school as a multi-structural educational center or as a branch office broadens its functions and increases its target audience by offering a wide range of formal and non-formal educational programmes. Nowadays rural schools take a lot of non-educational functions, for instance, non-formal, semi-formal and symbolic, such as organization of votes during elections, concerts for aging society of the village and etc. (Левинсон, Стучевская, s.a.). For instance, Svetes Basic School (Svete in Jelgavas district) that offers the educational environmental model – a *rural primary school as a multi-functional center (the center) + rural primary school (the branch office)*. Svetes Primary School has broadened its functions knowing that it is essential for the sustainability and viability of the rural school. The target audience of the school is various – pre-school children, primary

school children, teenagers, youngsters and adults. It means that the school plays a very vital role for a local rural community. (see Figure 8)

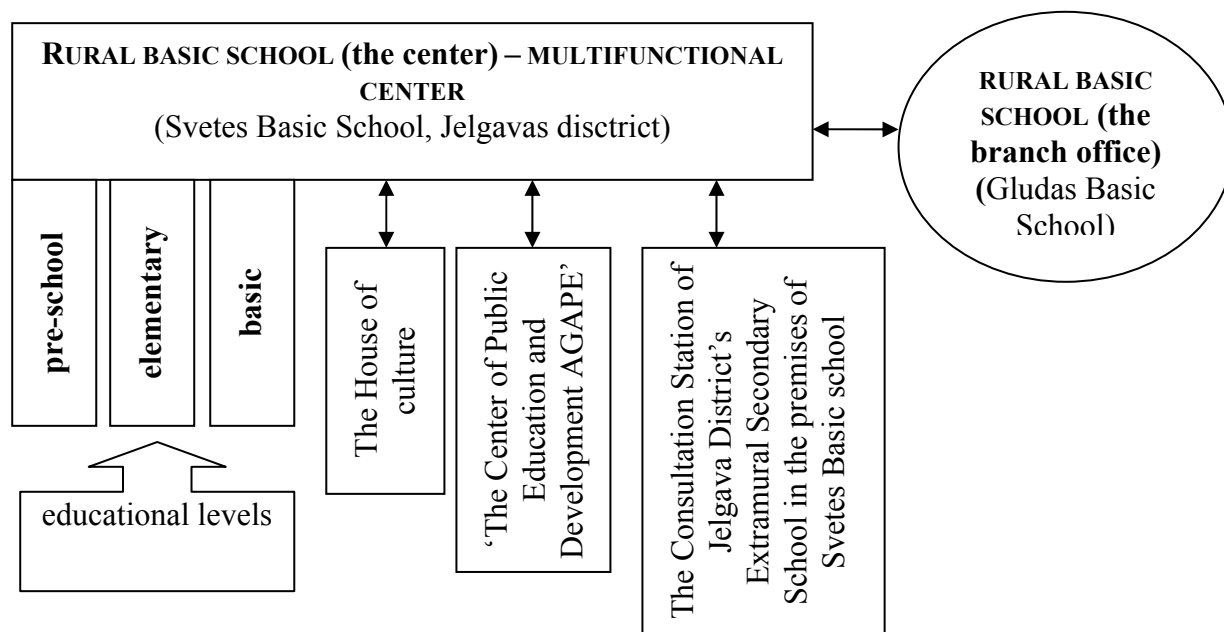


Figure 8. Educational Environment's Model *Rural Basic School (the center)-Multifunctional Center ↔ Rural Basic School (the Branch Office)* (Author's construction)

The research on educational environmental models of Latvian rural schools reflects that educational environment is changing and will be undergoing several changes in the rural areas of Latvia even next years because reorganization and closure of schools are still in the realization process. It becomes diverse in structure allowing to attract investments and broader the educational facilities for native inhabitants of a particular rural district. Unfortunately, no one can foresee how long a certain rural school will function, as changes are rapid and unpredictable.

Discussion

Not only the researches of the authors of the article, but also the other scientist's researches testify the topicality of rural schools' problems in the whole world nowadays. For example, many Russian scientists (Дмитреева, 2004; Галковская, Раудсик, 2008; Калашникова et al, 2008; Телепенко, 2010; Точилина, 2008; etc.), point out the diversity of educational environmental models that are in Russia such as rural school-preschool, rural lyceum, rural social-cultural complex, agroschool, agrolyceum, rural school – television center and etc.

Educational field is impossible without rural schools in rustic areas all around the world due to the fact that they serve as educational, cultural and social community center for the whole rural community.

The school in the rural community is still a respected institution, with a lot more focus on people than on business. (Chalker, 1999) *Rural school* is considered to be *the creator of many innovations* today. J.D. Stern (Stern, 1994) emphasizes such new trends as cooperative learning, multi-grade classrooms, intimate links between school and community, interdisciplinary studies, peer tutoring, block scheduling, the community as the focus of study, older students teaching younger ones, site-based management, and close relationships between teachers and students.

According to E.R. Stephens (Stephens, 1987) *the strengths of good rural schools* are: small classes, individual attention, low dropout rates, safe orderly environment, development of student leadership qualities, strong faculty identity and commitment, strong parental interest in the schools, and strong community support for the schools.

There are also certain conditions and features of rural schools that are represented in nowadays society. On the one hand the good conditions of rural schools are: low rate of crime, cultivation of traditional values and customs, the presence of nature and etc. But on the other hand the negative conditions exist too, for example, diminish of agricultural production, demographic decrease of citizens in

rural areas, difficulty in finding qualified teachers, problems at school with the processes of educating and up-bringing schoolchildren. However, features of rural schools that are drawn from the conditions include reorganization and closure of small rural schools, low material-technical provision, development of pupils' personality traits such as self-dependence, skill to overcome difficulties and other features. (see Table 1)

Table 1. Conditions and Features of Rural School on the Nowadays Phase of the Development of the Society (Шошина, 2008)

<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Features</i>
Economic difficulties of development of agriculture.	Low material-technical provision and viability of any rural school.
The decrease of vital level of rural population.	Low level of culture of rural citizens, opened expression of antisocial behaviour.
The increasing insufficiency of a village in the realization of routine of a local community.	
The decrease of the number of schoolchildren in educational institutions.	Reorganization and closure of small rural schools. Difficulties for schoolchildren at transition to other educational establishments, difference in the level of preparation of pupils, life in boarding schools and problems with transport.
The expansion of scale of appearing of new groups of citizens who live in rural areas.	Stronger segregation among pupils according to material provision.
The insufficient development of scientific methodological, organizational and financial base.	The decrease of competitiveness of graduates of rural schools. Loss of perspective pupils that decide to learn further in urban schools.
The restrictedness of preparation of a working profile for one speciality.	
The complex of psychological, pedagogical problems.	The decrease of interest in learning, the low level of development of motivation in learning activity.
The difficulties for graduates of higher educational establishments (for example, pedagogical institutes, universities) in organization of learning and up-bringing processes.	The inability and even in some cases unwillingness to implement untraditional methods in educational process. The shortage of staff.
Rather wide concept of teachers and pupils.	The opportunity for the realization of personal oriented learning.
The closeness to nature, traditional customs.	The opportunity for establishment of equal up-bringing-up system of the school.
The lower level of crime.	The decrease of level of social concern.
The belonging to the majority of parents to one working body.	The opportunity of realization of close connection between the school and parents and also involvement of public organizations.
Optimal conditions for preparation of pupils for life in the village.	Development of pupils' personality traits such as self-dependence, adequacy to life and skill to overcome difficulties.

Nevertheless the rural school is not just the educational institution but also a social organization (Forands, 2000; Ľihačova, 2003; Raituma, 2009; Šmite, 2004). The educational institution as the organization has dominant *keywords* such as learning, cooperation, integrity, humanism, freedom and responsibility, personal growth, life skills, sustainable education, honesty and trust.

The educational institution as the organization characterizes its systemics, viability, the level of development, technical security, psychological climate, the economic run, management, the purposefulness of resources division, diversity (Šmite, 2004).

Rural schools as educational environmental systems have their own organizational structures. The term *organizational structure* denotes *the social relations that have consolidated themselves in organizational settings*. There are two principal definitions of *organizational structure*. The more common one has its theoretical origins in the positivism of the sociology of functionalist and structuralist: *organization is an objective, measurable, and comparable social fact*. This definition concerns long-lasting social relations, which once they have become consolidated, are autonomous with respect to the people who have created them and act as if they have an existence of their own. The second definition originates in the constructionism of interpretative sociology and symbolic interactionism and views *organization as a*

constant process. It refers to the temporary and ephemeral occurrence of social interactions in organizational settings, which are closely connected to interrelations among organizational actors without ever becoming autonomous and capable of their own action (International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies 3, 2008).

The researches of I.Katane (Katane, 2005) show that Latvian rural schools had already offered multi-functional educational environment for local rural communities at the very beginning of the 21st century in Latvia. They are opened to whole local rural community not only in Latvia, but also in the USA, Australia, Canada, Russia, Byelorussia, etc. (Capper, 1993; DeYoung, Theobald, 1991; Harmon, Howley, Sanders, 1996; Harmon, Howley, Smith, Dickens, 1998)

What is more, reorganization of schools have happened in many countries, for example, Russia, the UK. Russian experience in the reorganization question of rural schools shows that the real changes of a rural school can happen only if there is a normal system of a local municipality and the education plays an important role for a local community. When the agricultural production is stopped, the death of people starts to decrease the number of birth then the hope for a perspective future dies. And adults, first of all, begin to take care about one thing that their children can live in better conditions. Then the question of the competitiveness of modern education becomes essential. The reorganization of any rural school is only discussible with the whole local community - during different meetings of local deputies, principals of schools, parents and etc. (Реморенко, 2007).

Tendencies that happen in educational environment of rural schools in other countries are diverse, for example:

- Tasmanian and Australian rural schools have *Vocational education and training* (VET) programmes (Kilpatrick, Rowena, Kilpatrick, s.a.; Johns, Kilpatrick, Loechel, Prescott, 2004). Benefits for students associated with VET in schools programs include assistance with employment-related decisions, improved knowledge and understanding of industry and the world of work, increased self awareness, and improved personal and interpersonal skills (Misko 1999).
- There was launched a research that is connected with teacher's innovative leadership roles in small rural schools (Koulouris, Sotiriou, s.a.). There are many small rural schools that are located in remote rural communities in Greece. This research examines the change of teachers' roles in remote rural communities. The research describes initiatives that are derived from Europe and national research projects that were done in order to ease the isolation of remote rural communities, and schools, offering teachers distance teacher training, support and networking, by using modern new technologies.
- American scientist B.A. Miller (Miller, 1995) points out building a strong partnership with the school for community development purposes remains a major challenge because this is not generally viewed as a traditional element of schooling. Three approaches to building strong linkages between schools and communities are further identified, each of which reflects learning opportunities and experiences that cross boundaries which have traditionally separated the community as a place of learning from the school:
 - *The school as a community centre*, serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and as a vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of services. School resources such as facilities, technology, and a well-educated staff can provide a range of educational and retraining opportunities for the community.
 - *The community as curriculum*, emphasizing the study of community in all its various dimensions. Students generate information for community development by conducting needs assessments, studying and monitoring environmental and land-use patterns, and by documenting local history through interviews and photo essays.
 - *School-based enterprise* (SBE), which places a major emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills whereby students not only identify potential service needs in their rural communities, but actually establish a business to address those needs.
 - Fourth approach - *technology in schools and communities* is offered by F. Odasz (Odasz, 1999). Rural schools must have not only telephone connections but all possible modern technology that helps to reduce isolation and connects rural schools with the whole world.

The above mentioned partnership approaches between the school and community are long-term benefits for both partners (school and community).

To sum up, nowadays rural schools develop with the pace of time and modern of technology, they seek new opportunities for the future thus thinking of their own viability and sustainability.

Conclusions

- Great changes happen in Latvian educational environment. The changes to great extent are connected with demographic and economical crises in Latvia. In the conditions of these changes the question of rural schools viability and sustainability as an educational environmental system in future perspective has become topical.
- There are the following educational environmental models of rural schools in Latvia:
 - a traditional educational environmental model that offers the most widespread educational environmental models such as a basic or secondary rural school;
 - an educational environmental model of structural reorganization that includes multi-structural educational environment;
 - a multi-functional and multi-structural educational environmental model within the framework of one school compromises multi-divisional educational environment for rural community;
 - a combined educational environmental model involves multi-functioning and multi-structural educational environment.
- Nowadays Latvian rural schools face several changes that influence its organizational structure, making it broader or narrower as well as undergoing such processes as reorganization or closure.
- There are also certain conditions and features of rural schools that are represented in nowadays society. On the one hand the good conditions of rural schools are: low rate of crime, cultivation of traditional values and customs, the presence of nature and etc. On the other hand the negative conditions, that influence the work of rural schools, are: diminish of agricultural production, demographic decrease of citizens in rural areas, difficulty in finding qualified teachers, problems at school with educating and up-bringing schoolchildren. But features of rural schools include reorganization and closure of small rural schools, low material- technical provision and viability, development of pupils' personality traits such as self-dependence, adequacy to life, skill to overcome difficulties and other features.
- Latvian rural schools are very important educational establishments for rural community's inhabitants as they are the place where people gather, educate, communicate, socialize and interact within each other.
- Rural schools have great advantages such as small classes, individual attention, low dropout rates, safe orderly environment, development of student leadership qualities, strong faculty identity and commitment, strong parental interest in the schools, and strong community support for the schools.

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Zusammenfassung

Das Hauptziel des Artikels „Die Vielfalt der Modelle des Bildungsumfeldes der Landschulen in Lettland“ ist die Ergebnisse der durchgeführten Experimente zu präsentieren, die im Zusammenhang mit der Vielfalt der Modelle des Bildungsumfeldes in den Landschulen in Lettland stehen. Die Methodik der Forschungsarbeit stützt sich auf die Landschulen als eigenständig entwickelnde, sich selbst organisierende und selbst auswertende Systeme des Bildungsumfeldes, die versuchen ihr Bestehen in der heutigen Krisensituation und ihre Nachhaltigkeit in der Zukunft zu sichern sowie ein offener Bildungsraum für die gesamte Kommune ist, die Möglichkeiten für lebenslanges Lernen für Menschen auf dem Land bieten und somit die Nachhaltigkeit der ländlichen Kommunen fördern. Mit den Resultaten der Modellklassifizierung für das Bildungsumfeld der Landschulen konnte man feststellen, dass, erstens, die Veränderlichkeit in den Landschulen von Lettland ebenfalls die Vielfalt der Modelle des Bildungsumfeldes zwischen den Schuljahren 2008 bis 2011 einschliesst; zweitens, die Modelle der Bildungsumfeldes der Landschulen werden in vier Gruppen geteilt: das traditionelle Modell des Bildungsumfeldes; Modell des Bildungsumfeldes bezüglich der strukturbedingten Reorganisation; das multifunktionale und multistrukturale Modell des Bildungsumfeldes im Rahmen einer Schule; Modell des vereintem/kombinierten/gemischten Bildungsumfeldes; drittens, die Vielfalt des Bildungsumfeldes der Landschulen in Lettland zeigt, dass es Landschulen gibt, die weiterhin traditionell tätig sind, indem sie nichts bei der Arbeit der Schule ändern, andererseits gibt es Landschulen, die vielseitig und multifunktional tätig sind, indem sie ihr Publikum, sowohl ihre Funktionen erweitern. Somit sichern sie ihre Nachhaltigkeit und ihre nachhaltige Entwicklung in der Zukunft auf dem Land. Andererseits gibt es Landschulen, die sich in Bezug auf die Struktur während der Reorganisation geändert haben. Dadurch ist im Bildungsumfeld von Lettland ein neues Modell „Landschule (Zentrum)-Landschule (Filiale)“ erschienen, die mit Hilfe dieser Filialen den Zugang für die Schüler zur Bildung auch in der Nähe von ihrem Zuhause auf dem Land sichern.