

Residents' Attitudes Towards the Environment and More Sustainable Mobility in Vidzeme, Latvia

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This abstract outlines a comprehensive study investigating residents' attitudes towards environmental issues and their propensity for adopting more sustainable mobility practices within the Vidzeme region of Latvia. The escalating global environmental crisis, characterized by climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss, necessitates a fundamental shift in societal behaviors, particularly concerning transportation. Mobility, a cornerstone of modern life, is also a significant contributor to environmental degradation through greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and noise. Consequently, promoting active mobility solutions — such as public transport, cycling, walking — has become a critical policy objective worldwide. However, the success of such initiatives is intrinsically linked to public acceptance, understanding, and willingness to change established habits.

Despite the growing emphasis on sustainable development within the European Union and Latvia's national strategies, there remains a notable gap in region-specific research concerning the socio-psychological factors influencing active mobility adoption. While general environmental awareness is increasing, the translation of this awareness into concrete behavioral changes, especially in diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts like Vidzeme, is not fully understood. Vidzeme, with its mix of urban centers, rural areas, and natural landscapes, presents a unique case study where traditional mobility patterns may diverge significantly from those in larger metropolitan areas. Understanding the nuances of residents' perceptions, values, and barriers to sustainable choices in this specific region is crucial for developing targeted and effective policy interventions.

The primary aim of this research is to assess residents' attitudes towards the environment and their current and potential engagement with active mobility options in Vidzeme, Latvia. To achieve this, the study sets forth several key objectives: (1) to identify the prevailing levels of environmental awareness and concern among Vidzeme residents; (2) to analyze current mobility patterns and preferences within the region; (3) to explore the perceived benefits and barriers associated with various sustainable transport modes; (4) to investigate the influence of demographic, socio-economic, and psychological factors on active mobility choices; and (5) to provide evidence-based recommendations for fostering more active transportation behaviors in Vidzeme.

A mixed-methods research approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The quantitative phase involved a large-scale survey administered to a representative sample of Vidzeme residents (n=484), utilizing a structured questionnaire designed to capture attitudes, behaviors, and socio-demographic information. The survey instrument included Likert-scale questions on environmental concern, frequency of transport mode usage, perceived convenience, cost, and safety of sustainable options, and willingness to adopt new behaviors. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression models to identify significant relationships between variables. The qualitative data approach employed in this study incorporated a comprehensive analysis of various textual sources, including relevant academic literature, scientific papers, and pertinent policy planning documents, alongside the thematic analysis of interview data.

Preliminary findings indicate a relatively high level of general environmental awareness among Vidzeme residents, with a strong recognition of local environmental challenges. However, this awareness does not always translate directly into sustainable mobility choices, as convenience and habit often outweigh environmental considerations. The car remains the dominant mode of transport, particularly in rural areas, due to perceived lack of viable alternatives, limited public transport infrastructure, and the necessity for personal vehicle use for daily commutes and errands. Barriers to sustainable mobility include insufficient public transport frequency and coverage, particularly for inter-municipal travel; a lack of safe and interconnected cycling infrastructure; and a prevailing cultural reliance on private vehicles. Encouragingly, there is a discernible willingness among a segment of the population, particularly younger residents and those in more urbanized centers, to consider and adopt sustainable options if infrastructure improvements and incentives are provided. Factors such as age, income, and proximity to public transport hubs significantly influence mobility choices.

The implications of these findings are substantial for regional planning and policy development in Vidzeme. To effectively promote active mobility, strategies must move beyond general awareness campaigns and focus on tangible improvements in infrastructure, such as expanding public transport networks, creating dedicated cycling lanes, and ensuring last-mile connectivity. Furthermore, targeted educational initiatives are needed to highlight the personal and community benefits of sustainable transport, addressing misconceptions and fostering a culture of eco-friendly mobility.

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transport behavior, active mobility, environmental attitudes, tourism, sustainability