

1.1 Institute data and description

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia	
Primary field of science	Humanities and the arts
Corresponding fields of science	Languages and literature Art (arts, history of arts, performing arts, music)
Related fields of science	Earth and related environmental sciences Media and communications
No. FTE academic personnel 2018	0,00
No. FTE academic research personnel 2018	36,37
Total number of FTE academic and research personnel 2018	36,37
Articles in peer reviewed scientific edited journals and conference proceedings <u>included</u> in WoS or SCOPUS in period 2013-2018	62
Articles in peer reviewed scientific edited journals and conference proceedings <u>not included</u> in WoS or SCOPUS in period 2013-2018	210
Monographs in period 2013-2018	32
Patents Latvian in period 2013-2018	0
Patents (Europe and international) in period 2013-2018	0
Total no. of self-reported outputs in period 2013-2018	304
No. of WoS or Scopus outputs in period 2013-2018 per researcher in 2018	1,70
No. of all outputs in period 2018 per researcher in 2018	8,36
No of PhDs completed in period 2013-2018	3
No. of PhDs in period 2013-2018 per researcher in 2018	0,08
Total funding in period 2013 -2018 (Euros)	5.637.131
Total funding in period 2013-2018 per researcher in 2018 (Euros)	154.994

The Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art (ILFA) is a research-only institution, with 36.37 FTE research academic staff (in 2018). Its research is nominally split between three main units – literature, folklore and art (*sic* = arts, specifically music and theatre).

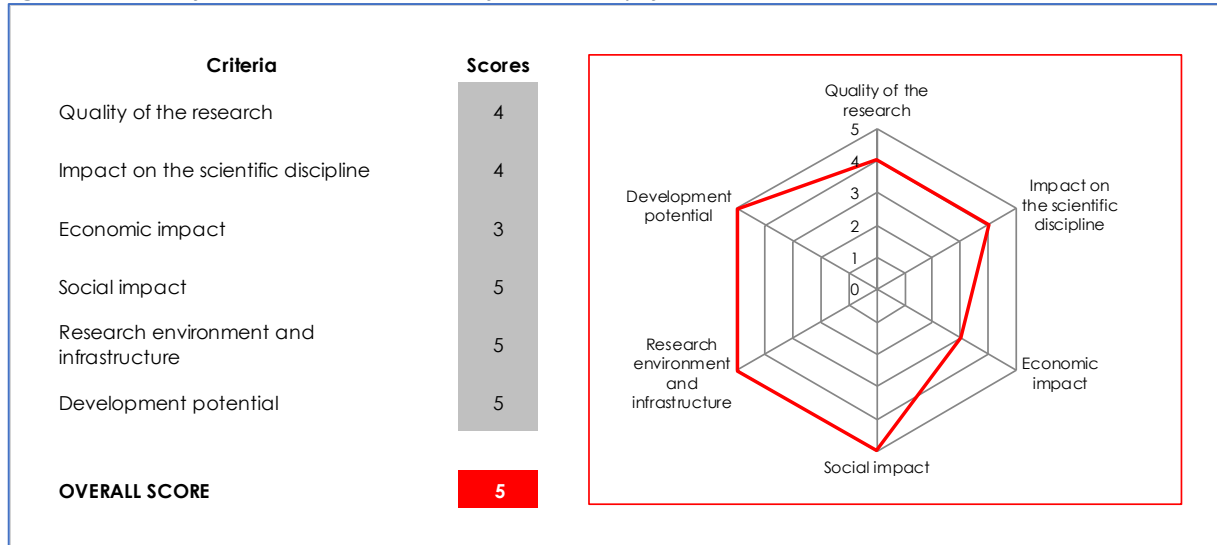
Located now within the National Library of Latvia, while also attached administratively to the University of Latvia, ILFA has the advantage of a location that hosts their landmark Archives of Latvian Folklore (ALF) as well as a wealth of other archival material relevant to their research; it also allows for public access to this material and for support in digitising it, a task which is well on the way to completion.

The research carried out at ILFA is firmly rooted in the study of Latvian culture and traditions. Yet at the same time they have projected those research topics towards global issues (such as gender identity, cultural memory and life-writing, colonialism and post-colonialism, the role of crowdsourcing in the preservation of traditions, digital humanities and environmental humanities), taking active critical angles, thus contributing to placing Latvia and its culture in the international interdisciplinary research scene.

1.2 Expert Panel evaluation

The figure below presents the scores assigned by the Expert Panel in Humanities to the institution.

Figure 1: Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia – Scores



Overall score

Score 5: outstanding level of research

ILFA has a clear conception of where they stand nationally and internationally, and of the significance of their research. The SAR is lucid and well-structured. It provides a clear sense of their plans and strategies to build on their strengths and to tackle the areas in which further progress can be made.

The virtual visit was very well prepared, giving the panel a good grasp of the depth and breadth of their different research lines and projects. The interview was very informative, as were the video and the introductory PowerPoint presentation. The panel's questions were answered succinctly, and the queries addressed perspicuously.

The meeting also demonstrated the strength of strategic management, as well as the atmosphere of mutual support, exchange and cooperation among the staff. Early-career researchers are integrated into all research projects. Doctoral students, based at the University of Latvia and the Latvian Academy of Culture etc, are taught and mentored by ILFA; they are strongly encouraged to build an international study profile and to network among themselves.

ILFA is well connected to Latvian society (including diasporic) through digital and outreach activities, most strikingly through their ground-breaking use of crowdsourcing to create banks of transcribed folkloric material; this involves both schools and the general public and has led to international imitations. Social impact is also assured by the ongoing collection of 'life narratives' and, most recently, 'pandemic diaries'.

The quality and impact of the research during the evaluated period suggest that ILFA is a strong international player, a centre of reference for the study of the culture, literature and traditions of Latvia and the Baltic region. And the expansion to wider areas of research that ILFA has undertaken makes the institution extremely close to the position of being a global leader.

Quality of research

Score 4: very good

The quality of ILFA's publications is consistently high.

ILFA has the advantage of being a research-only unit, whose staff are dedicated to a mix of conservation/archival work and research in a range of a cross-disciplinary humanities fields. Though its academic home is within the University of Latvia (UL), it has a marked degree of intellectual and financial independence and has autonomy in e.g. grant applications, plus it is physically located outside UL in the context of the main academic infrastructure, the National Library of Latvia. But ILFA goes well beyond the baseline of these advantages. Its research was

revealed, at the visit as well as in the advance documentation, to be imaginative, interdisciplinary and proactive. They take nothing for granted. For example, in relation to the question of national cultural identity – which is, after all, their main focus – they take a constructivist angle which allows for a critical-historical approach; and in ethnomusicology they work with the Roma minority. As far as folkloristics is concerned, they are, with the University of Tartu, among the top players in the CEE/Baltic area.

Of the five publications assigned for review, four focus primarily on Latvian and, more generally, on Baltic culture and traditions. The fifth one, on how crowdsourcing is changing the participatory practices in the development of tradition archives, addresses a more general issue of global interest for anyone specialising in the collection, preservation and analysis of culture and traditions. The five pieces are of high quality, and three of them arguably top notch.

All the other publications have, to a large extent, a focus on Latvian and Baltic culture and, via that focus, several of them project the research towards global issues, such as gender identity, cultural memory and life-writing, literary anthropology and colonialism and post-colonialism.

A recent project, the Pandemic Diaries, also reveals ILFA's capacity to adapt their research very quickly to new challenges.

Impact on the scientific discipline

Score 4: very good

Publication (or media-based equivalent) in internationally recognised outlets is a tenure requirement at ILFA.

Several publications are in well-ranked journals, some of them with a substantial number of international citations. One unusual aspect is publications in bilingual parallel text (LV-DE & LV-FR); ILFA also has an in-house journal, *Letonica*. In general, it is obvious that ILFA's researchers strive to have international impact, both via publications and via participation in conferences.

ILFA is in dialogue with the fields they research in, and ahead of the field in some areas – folkloristics, CEE postcolonial theory, cultural memory studies and ethnomusicology of the region. Their work in digitisation of their archival holdings is well developed and their crowdsourcing transcription work is highly innovative and has been taken up by other countries; similarly, the collection of life stories (including the pandemic diaries) is forward-thinking. In the area of digital humanities (DH), they initiated the Baltic DH Summer School and cooperation with digitised intangible cultural heritage collections of the Baltic region. More broadly, ILFA has run or co-run 15 international conferences and 34 international projects, plus four COST actions in the period 2013–2018.

Discussion during the visit reinforced the impression of an international outlook combined with national commitment which had been gained from the advance documentation – for instance, ILFA encourages doctoral students to study abroad but this is mainly fieldwork and does not lead to 'brain drain'.

Economic impact

Score 3: good

The research performed by members of the institution has cultural and social rather than economic impact. It is to be appreciated that the SAR makes that point clearly: the non-academic institutions that they collaborate with are mainly cultural bodies, the Ministry of Culture, etc. Some of ILFA's projects have indirect economic impact, but their full potential is still insufficiently explored by the institution.

ILFA attracts visitors to the Library (in normal times), for example to exhibitions such as that based on the Barons Folksong Cabinet (listed as a UNESCO Memory of the World item 2001), but it is clear that most of the access to their folkloristic, ethnomusical, etc. holdings is remote, due to ongoing digitisation. Most of their very energetic involvement with non-academics, such as schools etc. has no direct economic impact, though it may be understood to have indirect economic effects.

Social impact

Score 5: outstanding

ILFA's research has very high social interest and social impact, both in Latvia and potentially beyond.

Popularisation activities include exhibitions, storytelling, narrative-writing etc.; there is also collaboration with ministries, NGOs and other cultural bodies. The partners we met during the visit were enthusiastic about ILFA's activities in intangible heritage etc.

In this sense it is clear that the interaction between ILFA and society goes both ways, since issues that arise among the general public shape part of ILFA's research. For instance, the crowdsourcing project started with schoolchildren and then grew to include 'citizen scientists' of all ages, and it is contributing to make the voices of the public play an important role in the collection and preservation of traditions. The Pandemic Diaries project not only gathers and disseminates public sentiments and reflections on the effects of the pandemic but, by articulating the contributions as a coherent whole, it will surely provide an excellent instrument for future research in Latvia and beyond.

Research environment and infrastructure

Score 5: outstanding

ILFA's infrastructure is excellent, not least in the sense of physical environment – located in the architecturally innovative National Library, with immediate access to resources on a reciprocal basis and high-level infrastructural support. This also sustains their digitisation of the archives (ALF), display of the cabinet, material artefacts etc.

In addition, ILFA is a cohesive unit in which the different areas of study are properly integrated. There is an unusual level of mutual cooperation among both staff and students, and it was clear from the interviews that management is conducted in the 'non-hierarchical' spirit claimed in the SAR: clear strategy direction together with encouragement of independent thinking. Publications and events are discussed in an open staff forum. Morale is visibly high, and this has effects throughout their activities.

Thus, ILFA's research leaders have a clear conception of the importance of the research carried out at the institute, and think ahead about the development of new synergies. For instance, the plan to hire an environmental scientist to strengthen the new area of research on humanities and the environment is a good example of this attitude.

The institution strives to be internationally competitive and to promote excellent research. As noted above, international publication is a requirement of tenure advancement and there is an emphasis on open access dissemination. The impact of the publications suggests that they are an institution of reference in their specific areas of Latvian and Baltic studies and beyond.

Development potential

Score 5: outstanding

ILFA's current staff (all research-only) is 36.7 FTE or 53 individuals (no age information supplied). The SAR notes that about one-third of these are 15 early-career researchers (ECRs) including four postdocs working alongside experienced researchers, who act as their mentors. Collaboration among staff and students is reinforced by open discussions and surveys of research and events. This combination of number of researchers, the ratio of senior vs early career researchers and the close interaction among them suggest that the Institute is in a strong position to develop and consolidate further its international standing.

ILFA's focus on issues of global interest in digital humanities, queer studies, cultural memory and life-writing, postcolonial studies, environmental humanities, etc, as well as their highly interesting specific projects (ethnomusicology, crowdsourcing, the Pandemic Diaries), are strengths that will contribute to cementing the international standing of the institute.

As shown above, ILFA is already active in several international collaborative projects, with substantial success in acquiring external funding from ERDF and building collaborations with other Baltic countries; it is also involved in four COST Actions. An application to Horizon 2020 is under development, and the research strategy places international competitiveness directly alongside a ‘sound interpretive “reading” of national culture’ in the context of digital and interdisciplinary humanities. The potential for raising this to an even more global, comparative level is clearly there – see Recommendations.

Potential to offer doctoral studies

ILFA collaborates already with several universities, especially UL and LAC, with whom they have close collaboration; they provide an excellent research environment to PhD students in a variety of fields. They also teach some courses as part of doctoral studies programmes. (See further comments regarding doctoral studies in the Recommendations section.) The doctoral and postdoctoral researchers show a high level of loyalty to ILFA and the encouragement to work and study abroad only increases this, being part of the intellectual collaboration with the wider world. The most commonly used epithet was ‘inspiring’.

The resources and the high-calibre expertise housed at the ILFA is appreciated by ministries and other non-academic bodies. Arguably, it is currently under-utilised by the Universities. Presently, ILFA personnel only teach as guest lecturers or invited professors, without the continuity that would allow a stable contribution to the doctoral programmes they participate in.

Alignment with Smart Specialisation Strategy

ILFA shows convincing alignment with the RIS3 strategy. The institute engages in international research in the fields of Latvian literature, intangible cultural heritage, theatre, music and cinema. It develops innovative digital resources (e.g., garamantas.lv, iesasties.lv) and, among other fields, works on interdisciplinary projects in digital and environmental humanities. This focus is of horizontal relevance to such RIS3 priority fields as ICT and the sustainability and coastline economy related aspects of bioeconomy. ILFA also shows a strong contribution to education in its outreach to schools and promotion of lifelong learning, as well as the innovative capitalisation of human resources in its crowdsourcing campaigns.

Conformity with state scientific and technology development

ILFA conforms strongly to the national objectives of scientific and technology development. It plays an important role in the promotion of internationally competitive science, development of human resources in research, as well as modernisation and integration of research and education sectors, increasing their ability to respond to future challenges.

Recommendations

- ILFA should continue to develop its new areas of research. In particular, it should lead more international collaborations, by building further cross-national comparative research on the basis of its well-established Latvian and Baltic core. Virtually all their large research questions – what is cultural identity, narrative memory, environmental or digital humanities – could benefit from further internationalisation.
- Such projects should seek international funding, both within the EU context (ERC, COST etc) and potentially further afield; this has begun, but there is room for more active development.
- The development of the digital infrastructure is a strength, and it should be continued.
- The potential for economic as well as social impact is high. As an institution that promotes cultural sustainability and development, it should not be difficult for ILFA to find partners in the arts industries, in Latvia or abroad, that would be interested in benefiting from and in collaborating actively in, some of ILFA’s projects. Similarly, the digital humanities and crowdsourcing expertise could potentially be collaboratively developed for greater economic impact. However the institute needs to devote resources to, and provide incentives for, these activities.

- It may be beneficial to all parties if ILFA researchers, without losing their basically research-oriented status, could participate in a more stable fashion, via formal agreements, in training and supervising or co-supervising doctoral students, teaching courses etc.
- Some of ILFA's research areas might benefit from formal collaboration with other humanities units e.g. ethnomusicology with JVLAM or intangible cultural heritage with LAC.
- In relation to staff development, this is well developed but could be further consolidated, especially at the postgraduate and postdoctoral level.
- Preserving the fundamentally research-oriented nature of ILFA, as well as that of other institutes, may well mean that institutes as such should not function as PhD-granting institutions, organising doctoral studies that include a two- to three-year programme of coursework. This task seems to belong more naturally to the faculties. However, in order for doctoral programmes to utilise and profit from all the available research expertise, it would be important to establish a system of formal agreements and collaborations with faculties in universities that would allow the research personnel in institutes to have stable teaching connections with doctoral programmes, as well as the capacity to officially supervise or co-supervise.