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DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2025.0057.02

Authenticity as a Symbolic Capital of the Folklore Field: The Case of Soviet Latvia

Autentiskums kā folkloras lauka simboliskais kapitāls: Padomju Latvijas gadījuma izpēte

Keywords:

Baltic States,
folklore movement,
Late Socialism,
perestroika,
Pierre Bourdieu,
Singing Revolution

Atslēgvārdi:

Baltijas valstis,
folkloras kustība,
vēlīnais sociālisms,
perestroika,
Pjērs Burdjē,
Dziesmotā revolūcija

This research has been supported by the Latvian Council of Science,
the project *Folklore Revival in Latvia: Resources, Ideologies and Practices* (No. Izp-2021/1-0243).

Summary

This article examines the Latvian folklore revival during the late Soviet period (1976–1990) through the lens of field and capital theory. It argues that authenticity functioned as a specific form of symbolic capital within the folklore field, structuring the struggles between folklore revivalists and Soviet cultural authorities. While Soviet officials promoted institutionalized and ideologically aligned representations of folk culture, revivalists mobilized grassroots notions of authenticity – rooted in ancientness, community participation, and national identity – as acts of cultural resistance.

The analysis maps how authenticity, as a contested concept, was central to the symbolic struggles over cultural authority, identity, and legitimacy. It highlights how the agents of the folklore movement – such as ensemble leaders, scholars, and musicians – converted cultural and social capital into symbolic power, facilitating the movement's role in broader national revival processes. The article traces the interplay between institutional control and grassroots agency. It concludes that the strategic use of authenticity enabled a symbolic revolution within the folklore field, prefiguring political transformations of the perestroika period.

This study demonstrates the analytical potential of field theory for understanding the cultural politics of authenticity in non-democratic contexts.

Kopsavilkums

Ar sociālo lauku un kapitālu teoriju rakstā tiek analizēta folkloras kustība vēlīnā sociālisma periodā Latvijā (1976–1990). Pētījuma pamatā ir ideja, ka autentiskums folkloras laukā darbojās kā īpaša simboliskā kapitāla forma, strukturējot diskusijas starp folkloras kustības dalībniekiem un padomju okupācijas kultūras sektoru. Kamēr padomju amatpersonas deva priekšroku institucionalizētai, marksisma-ļeņinisma ideoloģijā sakņotai nemateriālā kultūras mantojuma reprezentācijai, folkloras kustības dalībnieki izvirzīja priekšplānā atšķirīgu autentiskuma izpratni – saistītu ar arhaismu, kopienas līdzdalību, etnisko un lokālo identitāti – kā vienu no nevardarbīgās pretošanās formām.

Prevējās autentiskuma interpretācijas ieņēma būtisku lomu simboliskajās cīņās par kultūras autoritāti, identitāti un leģitimitāti vēlā sociālisma apstākļos. Folkloras kustības aktori, piemēram, ansambļu vadītāji, mūziķi un pētnieki, PSRS sabrukuma periodā izmantoja savu sociālo un kultūras kapitālu plašākos nacionālās atmodas procesos. Autentiskuma stratēģiska izmantošana ļāva īstenot simbolisku revolūciju folkloras laukā, kas sasaucās ar perestroikas laikmeta pārmaiņām Latvijas sabiedrībā un politikā.

Kopumā pētījums ilustrē sociālo lauku teorijas potenciālu folkloras vēstures pētījumiem nedemokrātiskos apstākļos.

The folklore revival in the second half of the 20th century, particularly in the United States and Europe, was a significant cultural movement focused on rediscovering, preserving, and celebrating folklore, traditional music, crafts and similar cultural expressions. From a global perspective, the revival was part of a broader counter-cultural movement that sought to reconnect with traditional values and ways of life in the face of modernization and globalization. As such, it was often intertwined with political and social activism, fueled by nostalgia and romanticism. Part of the revival and its reflection in humanities were discussions on authenticity, a key notion in the folklore scholarship.

This article examines folklore revival as a social movement by applying field and capital theory and focuses on the case of the late Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (1976–1990). Defining folklore as a particular field reveals authenticity as a specific capital of this field. In the following pages, I zoom in from the shared general characteristics of folklore revival in the Soviet western borderlands to Latvian history. Further investigation is based on the definition of folklore as a field and authenticity as a capital, allowing mapping of the struggles in this field between the folklore movement on one side and Soviet officials on the other. In the end, the mobilization of a particular understanding of authenticity led to a revolutionary transformation of the folklore field, nested in the broader framework of political and socioeconomic changes.

A set of specific characterizations outlines the modalities of folklore revival in the Soviet western borderlands – the Soviet bloc countries of Europe, from Bulgaria in the south to the Baltic Soviet republics in the north – despite notable differences between USSR territories and so-called satellite states. First of all, the non-democratic context, to some extent, limited revivalists' opportunities for expression and self-organization, resulting in hybrid co-optation strategies with the socialist state systems. Non-incidentally, the golden age of folklore revival in the USSR coincided with the perestroika and the rapid decline of the communist regime in the second half of the 1980s. Second, the main organizational context of folklore revival here was the extensive socialist system of amateur arts. The landscape of amateur arts was organized according to activities like folk dance, crafts, and folk music, vertically integrated with governance, and formed the primary discursive context of the revival. As the discussion below demonstrates, this system both enabled folklore revival and formed its ideological counterpart. Third, the possibility of folklore revival under the Soviet regime or at least a significant factor of its success was the privileged position

of folklore and other representations of traditional culture in the socialist system of cultural production (Kencis 2024; Kordjak 2016; Cash 2012). While one of the central commandments of the socialist culture was the old Stalin's dictum "national in form, socialist in content", references to traditional culture often were this very "national form". The fourth critical characteristic bridges this national form with nationalist aspirations. In the last years of the 1980s, folklore revival merged with national revivals – anti-imperial, Soviet regime-opposed political movements across the European countries of the Soviet Bloc. A growing body of academic and popular literature has already addressed the National Fronts, a political spearhead of anti-imperial movements in the Baltic States (e.g. Beissinger 2002; Gerner, Hedlund 1993; Smith 1996; Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė 2011; Piirimäe, Mertelsmann 2018). In the Baltics, folksongs formed a core repertoire of the Singing Revolution that brought down the regime (cf. Šmidchens 2014; Naithani 2019). As such, folklore revival in former European socialist countries is recognized chiefly under the term of folklore movements (Stavělová, Buckland 2018; Kencis et al. 2024). A similar path is followed in the current article.

Historic outlines of the Latvian folklore movement were recently detailed by the ethnomusicologist Ieva Weaver and others (2023). Notably, the dominant organizational form of the movement was folklore ensembles or folklore revival groups, which merged musical performance with folk dancing, games, rites and other forms of community participation. The first such ensemble, *Skandinieki*, was established in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) in 1976, following the Estonian forerunners *Hellero* and *Leegajus* (both est. 1971). By 1982, there were already around fifty new folklore ensembles (Spīčs 1982). While in early years, the term 'folklore movement' simply designated general heightened interest in folklore and traditions (similarly as more widespread term 'folklore Renaissance'), closer to the 1990 and in later historiography of the Latvian case, it acquired significant visibility, associations with a social movement, and distinct anti-establishment, anti-imperial connotations.

The folklore field

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu established the concept of the social field almost forty years ago. Since then, it has been developed and explored in countless studies of fields as different as haute couture, art, science, economy, literature, education, politics, religion, sports, law, and many others (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu, Wacquant 1994; Bourdieu 2006; 2009; Massi et al. 2021; Hilgers, Mangez 2015; Martin 2003). Nevertheless, its application in folklore studies and related disciplines has been limited to a handful of cases. The Swedish folklorist Barbro Klein has defined a broad "folklife sphere" or "folk cultural sphere"

akin to a field (e.g. Klein 2000). Nagy-Sándor and Berkers distinguish “the field of Hungarian folk music”, while Jan Grill has published an article on the academic sub-field of ethnology and folkloristics (“ethnographic/nationographic field”) in early Soviet Czechoslovakia (Grill 2015). The broader folklore field was recently defined as a sociocultural semiotic system by Toms Kencis:

The folklore field is structured by historical institutions, managed by various organizations, and inhabited by different agents actively pursuing their agendas. It is articulated within overlapping and often conflicting discourses of education, representation, legitimation, cultural heritage, and national identity (Kencis 2024: 33).

It includes academic studies, creative practice and management of folklore-related activities. As such, it accommodates agency and structure and allows embracing the constant uncertainty that haunts both notions of folk- and -lore since their first conjunction in 1846. In general, the folklore field is characterized by notable historical depth.

Each field has different constraints and logic, in Bourdieu’s favorite analogy – different rules of the game. Fields are “spaces of objective relations that are the site of a logic and a necessity that are specific and irreducible to those that regulate other fields” (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1994: 97). The folklore field, thus, is a constative framework of knowledge and value systems structuring how: (1) meanings of folk and lore are discussed and folklore/traditions performed, (2) opportunities are created and engaged by agents, including the members of folklore movement, and (3) various forms of capitals circulated. Concisely, the logic of the folklore field is the cultural production or cultivation of folklore. On the other hand, the interpersonal relations of agents and the shared goal of folklore cultivation create this specific social space we can call the folklore field.

Emerging autonomous properties of the folklore field during perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union were directly related to the flux state of both dominant fields of power and economics. Massive cultural and social changes took apart the existing system of distinctions and classifications, allowing the valorization of new capitals and their investment into the political dispositif of national revival. However, adherence to specific forms of capital is one facet that forms the identity of a particular field. Boundaries, names and rules of the field are constantly generated through disputes between agents of the field. Agents aspire to differentiate themselves from other agents so they can occupy the field only by virtue of difference; hence, introducing new categories or shifting perceptions generates new (i.e., different) positions in the field – like in the case of various interpretations of authenticity in the folklore field. However, the autonomy is always partial, as the agents are still subject to external demands and reflect their simultaneous positions in other fields. Still, the positions and capabilities of agents in a social field depend on their possession and

distribution of capital assets. Various forms of capital (e.g., financial, cultural, social, and symbolic) are dynamic assets that can be accumulated and exchanged by constituents of the field in pursuit of their interests.

Each field has a specific capital contributing to its unique identity. Field-specific capital is: (1) accumulated over the previous struggles that delimited the field, (2) minimally recognized outside the particular field, and (3) structuring the power relations between all field participants. Commitment to a field-specific logic produces recognizable motivations, behaviors, and beliefs among individual agents of the field. As Damon Mayrl has summarized, "The type of symbolic capital that matters within the field is intimately connected with the logic of the field; the particular orientation that unites the field makes recognition valuable and important within the field" (Mayrl 2013: 4). So, if we see the folklore movement in Latvia taking place in the folklore field, what logic makes authenticity a specific capital inherent to this field?

Authenticity as a symbolic capital: The state-of-the-art

The theoretical framework of fields and capitals provides a highly promising heuristic for a simultaneous understanding of the cultural/symbolic and social dimensions as well as dynamics of folklore movements in non-democratic contexts. From the Bourdieusian triad of field, capital and habitus, I will focus on the former two as an exercise of building the field for further research and, due to methodological concerns, as a study of habitus requires research more focused on agents rather than their interactions and transactions.

Recent literature suggests several valuable possibilities for analyzing social movements through the abovementioned concepts. For example, Lars Schmitt outlines Bourdieu's involvement with protest and social movements and their analysis and lists the benefits of locating the movements in a most fitting social field (Schmitt 2016). Damon Mayrl, in his experimental construction of the social justice field, also promotes the thinking of social movements as embedded in logically unified (i.e. having their logic or consistent rules) fields, demonstrating how this approach "positions symbolic contests for recognition among other actors within the field as central to the work of social movement organizations" and allows firmly anchoring individual actions in social space (Mayrl 2013: 19). Meanwhile, Bridget Fowler challenges the orthodox view of Bourdieu's work as focused solely on social reproduction, arguing that he offered substantial insights into social transformation and historical change (Fowler 2020; see also Gorski 2013). Last but not least, Hanna-Mari Husu also advises heuristics of mapping social movements in their particular fields and devising logic of corresponding capitals and logics (Husu 2013).

Although authenticity is inevitably discussed in papers dedicated to folklore revivals of Late Socialism, it has been conceptualized as a form of capital only in recent research on capitalist societies. Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen and Knut Fageraas analyze symbolic capital production of “attractive authenticity”, which creates an idealized past and a purified iconic image of Røros World Heritage Site in Norway (Guttormsen, Fageraas 2011). Meanwhile, Zsuzsa Nagy-Sándor and Pauwke Berkers, in their study of contemporary Hungarian folk singing, demonstrate how objectified authenticity, represented by heritage classification systems, is the dominant form of symbolic capital in this field (Nagy-Sándor, Berkers 2018). Homologies of seemingly different fields of folklore and adventure sports can be seen in David McGillivray and Matt Frew’s analysis of authenticity as a symbolic capital and resource for constructing personal identity (McGillivray, Frew 2007). These studies show the varied contexts in which authenticity is conceptualized as symbolic capital, highlighting its role in different cultural and social domains. However, at least the largest publicly accessible scholarly databases testify to the absence of a similar approach to interpretations of the recent socialist past of Eastern and Central Europe.

Authenticity in the folklore field

Authenticity, under one term or another, is a concept with a long and diverse history of use all across the spectrum of human and social sciences. Thomas Claviez and co-authors provide three frames of utility for this “highly volatile and historically contingent concept” – classical truth to an original, artist truth to self, and positive definitions of collective identity (Claviez et al. 2020: vii). All three frames correspond to but do not exhaust the use of the term in folklore studies, the discipline that has been driven since its pre-foundations by questions like what genuine folklore is, who is a real tradition bearer, and how to define collective authorship.

An unrivalled critical inventory of the concept in North American and German folkloristics has been published by Regina Bendix (Bendix 1997). Crucial for the current study, she foregrounds the concept of authenticity as a legitimizing force of folklore studies in diverse cultural and chronological contexts, links it to individual agents and political action, and extrapolates to more general dynamics of modernity. However, Bendix focuses primarily on the metadiscursive level – how authenticity is mobilized by scholars, collectors, and institutions – rather than on the emic understandings and grassroots uses among performers. This distinction becomes crucial when considering the Latvian folklore movement, where authenticity functioned not only as a scholarly criterion but as a lived and politically charged practice. In this context, revivalists claimed and negotiated authenticity as a form of cultural resistance,

identity reconstruction, and even subtle dissidence within the framework of Late Socialist cultural politics. Revivalists frequently used handwoven costumes, local dialects, and historical instruments to construct a sense of 'true Latvianness' that subtly resisted Russification and Soviet modernization. This situational use of authenticity as a form of political and cultural empowerment diverges significantly from the commodified or institutionalized authenticity critiqued by Bendix. The Latvian case demonstrates a complex entanglement of institutional control and grassroots agency, more closely resembling the dynamics described by Joseph Grim Feinberg in contemporary Slovakia (Feinberg 2018; see also Cash 2012; Šmidchens 2014). Thus, while Bendix's critique is indispensable for understanding the epistemological stakes of authenticity in folklore studies, it must be expanded – or at least supplemented – when analyzing contexts where authenticity was actively co-produced as a mode of cultural and political expression.

In the Late Socialism period, i.e. during and after the so-called Khrushchev's Thaw, folk culture was increasingly integrated into popular culture, media, and the highly centralized industrial production system. New cultural policies tolerated some self-exploration and community organization under various creative initiatives. At the same time, the first post-war-born generation came to age. Dominantly urban inhabitants with increased leisure time and spending power at their disposal, they discovered folklore as both a means of cultural and ethnic identity and a legitimate source for creative leisure activities with a community-building potential (cf. Davoliūtė 2016 for Lithuania; Cash 2012 for Moldova). The practice of folk culture occurred predominantly within the state-supported, standardized and closely controlled amateur art system.

Regarding singing and dancing, the on-stage, technically demanding performance styles dominated the scene. In exchange for controlling content and form of performance, the amateur art system provided various resources, opportunities for recognition, self-expression and creativity, and overall meaningful leisure activities (cf. Herzog 2010). The Soviet system necessitated that amateur art groups be affiliated with workplaces of participants or cultural sector entities like the network of houses of culture. The institutional support thus was exchanged for meaningful leisurely activities of the employees or other stakeholders. Moreover, the legal framework did not allow independent collectives. For *Skandinieki*, such an umbrella organization was the Latvian State Ethnographic Open-Air Museum. Similarly, the host of the Livonian folklore ensemble *Kāndla* was the collective farm (*kolhoz*) *Ventava*, while especially often criticized by the communist authorities was *Savieši* of Riga Applied Arts Secondary School.

The leading intellectual force of the Latvian folklore movement, musicologist

Arnolds Klotiņš relates the introduction and recognition of supposedly authentic ethnographic ensembles and other novel forms of folklore presentation to international festivals (Klotiņš 1979). In the same programmatic 1979 newspaper article, he cautions against “the depletion of local cultural traditions due to industrialization” and calls for “gentle propaganda and organizational care of authentic folklore ensembles” (Klotiņš 1979: 6). While amateur art activities were organized through a hierarchically organized grid of completions and strict control, the mushrooming of folklore ensembles introduced more and more one-time events or new series like “regional folklore days” or thematic evenings at culture clubs with hybrid forms of performance, more complex to be controlled by the censorship than clearly cut-out folk dance or music repertoire of official performances (cf. Kęncis 2024: 48). The folklore movement juxtaposed authentic (true, genuine, sincere) folklore and performance to invented songs and narratives, staged, ballet-like folk dance performances, and industrially produced faux-folk craft items. As all these modes of expression represented the official state cultural policy, and the notion of authenticity soon gained anti-establishment tones of meaning, overlaid with nationalistic and anti-imperial connotations. Thus, folklore revivals and national revivals were really well aligned in the Baltics.

Nagy-Sándor and Berkers distinguish three types of authenticity in Hungarian folk music: (1) a staged third-person authenticity, roughly an analogue to belonging to a living tradition, (2) an objectified authenticity, “which presupposes the existence of benchmark measurement for the originality of cultural product”, and (3) the artist first-person authenticity, meaning performer’s ability to convincingly convey honesty and directness towards the audience (Nagy-Sándor, Berkers 2018: 406). Meanwhile, in their study of British folk revival, Lea Hagmann and Franz Andres Morrissey similarly find nominal, expressive, and experiential authenticities between the general categories of historical and contemporary authenticity (Hagmann, Morrissey 2020). While both models adequately describe the dominant interpretation of authenticity by the members of the folklore movement, additional explanation is required to characterize the interpretation by Soviet officials opposing them.

Participants of the folklore revival actively created and took positions along the spectrum, investing (by performance, discourse and life choices) into the field-specific capital and thus acquiring social, cultural and other capitals. Valorization of authenticity created a condition within which members of the folklore movement could demonstrate alterity and use it to secure recognition and cultural distinction within their social milieu and the broader field of cultural production. However, members of the folklore movement were strongly inclined towards equalizing authenticity and ancientness, i.e., positioning most archaic as the most authentic

traditional cultural expressions and coupling it with experiential modes of authenticity (cf. Muktupāvels 2025, in this issue; Weaver et al. 2023).

Meanwhile, the Communist Party officials and their associates were promoting different understandings of authentic folklore and performance. While, to some extent, continuation and inheritance of tradition were recognized as practice (e.g. by rural ethnographic ensembles), the archaic was contrasted with creativity and modern presentation, involving the notions of socialist education and taste. Thus, their investment in the folklore field was secured by political capital, i.e. reliance on the Soviet ideology and the underlying principles of Marxism-Leninism. In a nutshell, it was the premise that (authentic) cultural production always corresponds to its socio-economical basis. Therefore, the (folk) culture of so-called 'Advanced Socialism' should necessarily differ from previous epochs, and this very difference makes it authentic. What makes a historical analysis more complicated – while both sides discussed the same subject matter (what are real folklore and a correct way to perform it), the very term of 'authenticity' from a relatively neutral concept became an ideologically loaded concept representing only the interpretation of folklore movement.

In the late 1980s, discussions on authenticity were the main factor shaping identity, rules and form of the folklore field. It carried implicit political connotations vis-à-vis the Communist Party-ruled state that tended to control and regulate every aspect of society. For the folklore movement, as a perceived representation of authentic existence and ethnic identity, a particular understanding of authenticity became a conduit for anti-imperial resistance and acquired strong connotations of self-determination. The folklore movement gained symbolic capital through large-scale events, publications, and the celebration of significant national cultural figures like composer Andrejs Jurjāns (1856–1922) and folklorist and scholar Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923). These events elevated the movement's status and recognition in broader society, contributing to its symbolic power.

Folklore revivalists in Latvia

In the centrally planned economies subordinated to the party-state, the economy was primarily dominated by politics. The ruling class was selected for ideological loyalty even as a degree of division of labor persisted, with different sections of the upper bureaucracy carrying out mainly political, economic, or cultural tasks (Liliana 2018: 133). Within this non-democratic setting, state-imposed limitations on economic capital (doubled by the stagnating USSR economy) raised cultural capital's relative value in symbolic and political struggles. Distributed through varied co-dependent networks, cultural and social

capitals were the main drivers of promotion and distinction besides political power. The Latvian case here corresponds to a broader characteristic of the transition from socialism to capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe: a specific conjuncture of various factors leading to a sudden rapture and revolutionary changes allowing the rise of 'national intellectuals' into power (see Eyal et al. 2000).

An illustrative example is the class composition of the highest LSSR ruling body (along with the Communist Party), the Supreme Council. In 1985, only 16 of 325, i.e. less than 5%, Council members represented creative, media or academic professions, the rest being a peculiar mix of highest nomenclature and manual laborers (*Cīņa* 1985). In the first democratic elections, 201 council members were elected in 1990; now, 74 (36.82%) belonged to intelligentsia (*Cīņa* 1990). Even with a hefty error margin due to uncertainties of classification and considering the difference in elections, the trajectory of change is noticeable. Of those 74, the most significant fractions were composed of university-level teachers and administrators (28), media editors and journalists (11), and scientists (10) – as such, they possessed the highest levels of education and broad social networks.

The folklore movement had actual and direct links to officials, state agencies, and the Communist Party, i.e. combined social capital as resources and networks or more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition. The conjunction of cultural and political fields through specific disposition and valence of capitals might explain the hybrid nature of folk revivals in the Baltic countries: informal groups affiliated with official cultural and educational institutions, hippies alongside the Communist Party members, divided positions within the academic sector, and strong affiliations across smaller fields. In the Latvian case, the latter is characterized by significant support of the movement in fields of literature (LSSR Writer's Union) and academic music.

In Latvia, as in Hungary, Slovenia, and Moldova (Nagy-Sándor, Berkers 2018; Feinberg 2018; Cash 2012), the influence of highly educated folklore movement members had a decisive impact on the framing of revival practices. Despite the limitations voiced in the disclaimer earlier in this article, this leads to at least a concise discussion of the movement leader's habitus. Can the emergence and characteristics of the Latvian folklore movement be understood by looking at the relationship between structural openings, the position occupied by agents (based on the possession of capital), and the habitus and trajectory of agents? Habitus, or the logic of practice, is "an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experience, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu, Waquant 1992: 133). Habitus explains how agents' practices and representations depend on their structural position. Through

the deployment of practical strategies, the active engagement with the folklore field both affirmed and transformed the habitus of individual agents.

For the sake of this study, I have identified five activists of the folklore field who significantly drove the folklore movement by actively engaging in redefining (through discourse and creative activity) the categories and values of the field, and who shaped the challenger side of the discussion on authenticity. Recognized leaders of the movement were the establishers of *Skandinieki*. Helmī Stalte (1949–2023) was a State Ethnographic Open-Air Museum specialist. Stalte had a college degree in pedagogy and a secondary degree in music. The co-leader of *Skandinieki* was her husband, Dainis Stalts (b. Grasis, 1939–2014), also a specialist at the same museum. Stalts studied biology at the State University of Latvia (SUL) but continued art studies at Riga Applied Arts Secondary School (RAAS). He became a member of UNESCO CIOFF (the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts, est. 1970) national section and one of the main organizers of the Singing Revolution key event, the International Folklore Festival *Baltica '88*. Boldly for this time, both identified with the indigenous Livonian people (excluded from the Soviet census in 1978) and became leaders of Livonian national revival, too. In hindsight, it can be metaphorically interpreted as a significant diversification of their capitals.

Outstanding trajectories in the folklore field were taken by two more *Skandinieki* members and leaders of their respective folklore ensembles. Ethnomusicologist, researcher and composer Valdis Muktupāvels (b. 1958) initially graduated from the SUL Faculty of Chemistry but then acquired a second undergraduate degree at the Latvian State Conservatory. While working at RAAS, he led the experimental folklore ensemble *Savieši* (1980–1984), earning as much praise from the folklore movement members as vehement criticism from the opposed forces (see below). Musician and folklorist Ilga Reizniece (b. 1956) graduated from the violin class of the same conservatory. Parallel to participation in *Skandinieki* (until 1987), Reizniece participated in the influential folklore ensemble *Bizīteri* and in 1981 she founded the renowned Latvian post-folk ensemble *Ilgi*. In 1982, Reizniece accompanied the performance of the Latvian folklore-inspired play *Pilna Māras istabiņa* (1981) by one of the leading national revival writers, poet Māra Zālīte (b. 1952). Although Zālīte became a Communist Party member and was elected to the Central Committee of the Latvian *Komsomol* branch (Communist Youth organization with 315 000 members in the LSSR), the play had strong anti-Soviet connotations in its artistic form and content. Stretching the metaphor, one might say that Zālīte successfully hedged her capitals.

Last but not least, the theoretical foundations of a new understanding of authenticity were established by an intellectual with an extremely high volume of

cultural and symbolic capital, the musicologist and firebrand of the national revival Arnolds Klotiņš (b. 1934). In 1975, Klotiņš defended a doctoral thesis on the aesthetics of folklore usage by Latvian composers at the elite Institute of Art History of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR in Moscow. During the studies and following visits to centers of Soviet power, he established multiple social connections and was able to draw upon a broad range of literature, including otherwise inaccessible works of Western authors. The young researcher working in the Art Sector of the A. Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature at the LSSR Academy of Sciences (ILL) regularly participated in events of the UNESCO CIOFF and the Folklore Commission of the Union of Composers of the USSR. Already in his first programmatic articles on types of folklore ensembles (borrowed from CIOFF), Klotiņš proposed a clear hierarchy of value according to types and levels of authenticity and advocated for participatory instead of staged folklore performances (Klotiņš 1978; 1979). In the following years, Klotiņš became one of the most prominent intellectual supporters of the folklore movement, engaging in polemics with critics, proposing new definitions, and providing theoretical legitimization for ongoing practices (for an extended biography and analysis, see Weaver et al. 2023: 54–55).

While those brief biographies of leading figures provide an insight into resources in work during Late Socialism, indicative of conversions of capital are also developments of social trajectories after the fall of the USSR. In terms of political and symbolic recognition, Klotiņš was elected once, and both Stalts were elected multiple times to Riga City Council; Dainis Stalts also served as a parliament member. A highly successful author, Zālīte occupied several notable positions in the cultural sector and became an informal political influencer. Muktupāvels and Klotiņš affirmed their excellence in becoming leading figures and taking senior researcher posts in their respective disciplines. Moreover, they have also provided a scholarly reflection on the history of the Latvian folklore revival (e.g. Klotiņš 2002; Muktupāvels 2006). Meanwhile, Reizniece pursued a purely creative career with her internationally renowned and financially successful post-folk band, *Ilgi*. The highest Latvia state recognition was awarded to all of them, except Muktupāvels, who received a similar award in Lithuania.

In one practice or another, all six agents prioritized specific forms and interpretations of authenticity over others. Their status and expert knowledge in the folklore field disposition of Late Socialism allowed tackling the system on its own terms, on its own ground. Drawing on parallels with Bourdieu's posthumously published lectures on Eduard Manet, they might be entitled as symbolic revolutionaries: "Someone who, even he as is completely possessed by a system, manages to take possession of it by turning his mastery of that system against it. It is a very

strange thing. When an autonomous universe, or field, has reached an advanced stage [of development], this is the only possible form of revolution” (Bourdieu 2017: 411).

Authenticity as taste and creativity

What was at stake in the symbolic struggle was the legitimate valuation of cultural products (heritage and creative practices) and the power to determine the specific rules of the game, i.e. the dominant way of perceiving and interpreting folklore and national culture in general. Routine performances by amateur art collectives and mass-produced faux-folk souvenirs precipitated the folklore movement’s acts of estrangement, communal solidarity and aesthetic transgression. In this symbolic revolution, the banalized Soviet representations of folklore were challenged by a socially constructed innovative (although often promoted as archaic) approach. While struggles to define authenticity took two basic directions regarding objects (content) and (re)presentation, involvement in the folklore field equally allowed the promotion of Soviet values (e.g. mass participation, modernized national aesthetics) and performance of ethnicity as well as local or regional identities.

Mapping of the field necessitates the identification of different voices that transmit authoritative statements about the value of representations of folklore and traditions. To understand the folklore movement, similarly or even more important than the members’ voices are those of its critics. Two figures stand out in this regard, both occupying the highest positions in the governance of cultural production. The first was a choreographer, the Head of the amateur art umbrella organization *Emīļa Melngaiļa Tautas mākslas nams* (Emilis Melngailis’s Folk Art Center) from 1960 to 1980 and the author of several popular Soviet Latvian staged folk dances Arvīds Donass (1914–1998). The other was the Head of the Department of Culture at the Communist Party of Latvia (CPL), Aivars Goris (b. 1931), who published especially critical newspaper articles under the pseudonym Atvars.

In the slightly vitriolic manner characteristic of official criticism of the time, Goris clashes head-on with the folklore movement’s equalization of the authentic and the archaic: “[...] the current wave of folklore has surged up also some sludge, i.e., particular notions representing a metaphysical approach to values of folklore and ethnography, cultivation of certain archaisms, and efforts of juxtaposing them to the international content of contemporary culture of Latvian people” (Atvars 1981: 2; see also Goris 1979; 1982). Similar position has been already voiced also by Donass, who juxtaposes “creative” Soviet staged folk dance with the tendencies of “static archaism” and the “only goal to restore and mimic folklore heritage” (Donass 1979: 3).

His concerns are echoed by another leading staged folk dance choreographer, Ojārs Lamass (b. 1945), who claimed that creative, instead of archaic, forms were required to express the contemporary “soul of the nation” and “our folkloristic riches” must be appropriated for communist education (Lamass 1979). Someone very well versed in the academic terminology and writing under a pseudonym, expressed a dramatic warning concerning the Muktupāvels’s folklore group in the Latvian Communist Part newspaper *Cīņa*: “Sickly archaic liberties [...] similar activities seriously endanger the psychic stability of teens” (Dambrāns 1984: 3).

Overall, the strategy of Party officials and their associates was to circumvent the ongoing discussion around the term ‘authenticity’ (and the creation of new categories), instead emphasizing notions of modern creativity, socialist education, and good taste. The main frame of reference, masterfully invoked by Klotiņš, albeit for contrasting purposes, was the ongoing Union-level discussion on the relationship between tradition and creativity (e.g. Gusev 1977) and the Communist Party of Soviet Union decree *On Further Development of Amateur Art* (Egorov, Bogolybov 1986: 253). The views of the academic folklore research community were also correlated with available forms of capital and positions within the folklore field. For example, while file and rank researchers like Jānis Rozenbergs and Vilis Bendorfs were actively involved in the folklore movement, the Head of the ILL Folklore Department, i.e. leading folklorist of the LSSR, Elza Kokare (1920–2003) stated that nowadays truly authentic folklore performance is impossible, and “no theatricality or involvement of public is going to change it” (Kokare 1982: 3).

The struggle over authenticity placed public displays and performances of folklore in the context of aesthetic education and the old Soviet notion of *kulturnost* (*culturalness*, aptly described by Svetlana Boym as a hybrid of Realist classics and good table manners (Boym 1994)). From this perspective, state institutions and the Communist Party formed a bureaucratic system that managed public taste by creating classifications and hierarchies, and by permitting or restricting certain styles and forms of representation. In the meantime, the rise of folklore revival was a sign of dystopian anxiety about the loss of ethnic identity under Soviet colonial hegemony and related Russification policies. Thus, “good taste” implicitly became a political question at the moment when societal processes external to the field (e.g. urbanization, generational change, rising education levels, new technologies) began to affect the structure of the folklore field and equipped new groups of agents with greater resources to negotiate new arrangements.

Conclusion

While limited to the confines of a research article, the current study nonetheless provides promising evidence for the usefulness of a capital-based analysis in conceptualizing the social field of folklore and folklore revival as a social movement. This approach offers a robust framework for understanding the intricate dynamics between cultural expression, national identity, social change, and power structures. The concept of the field enables a mapping of the movement and its driving forces that goes beyond the methodological limitations posed by agent self-identification and historical hindsight.

The Latvian folklore movement in the late 1970s and 1980s unfolded within a non-democratic context of the Soviet socialist state, which, especially in its later stage, was permeated by all-encompassing cultural, political, economic and ideological transformations that led to the demise of the USSR. The folklore field in Soviet Latvia was a contested arena where different groups with varying interests and degrees of power competed to define and control the meaning and representation of folklore. This struggle was not just about folklore but the broader questions of national identity, cultural heritage, and political authority. Folklore movement was a cultural meaning producer that created values and new points of view in opposition to dominant modes of cultural production. Moreover, the results of the struggle impacted the life paths and career trajectories of involved agents in the long tale of the post-socialist period.

Authenticity was both a weapon and a stake of struggle in the folklore field. Correspondingly, it held different values for different agents. For revivalists, the presumed authentic forms of folklore, traditions and performance represented a link to a national past and an expression of ethnic or local identity. For Soviet officials and aligned cultural leaders, transforming folklore into a tool for ideological education and social cohesion represented a means of relating authenticity with the prevailing political ideology. The current study illustrates how this field-specific capital was negotiated and redefined. The Soviet regime's efforts to manipulate folklore to fit its ideological framework represented an attempt to devalue particular meanings of authenticity. In contrast, the folklore revivalists were engaged in a struggle to introduce new meanings as a form of resistance against cultural and political assimilation.

The roles of institutions and individuals highlighted in the article underscore the importance of symbolic capital in the field. Both intellectuals of the folklore movement and the Soviet officials opposing them possessed resources to influence the perception of folklore and related understanding of authenticity in the folklore field. Their position in the field allowed them to shape the discourse, thus exerting control over the production and perception of authenticity as a form of symbolic

capital. The case study demonstrates how the effects of possessing capital can be embodied in the forms of disposition of agents.

Similarly to other revolutionary contexts, agents of the folklore movement embraced the mode of differentiation from previous dominant trends in the folklore field. In this regard, Bourdieu's idea of symbolic revolution was an excellent gateway to applying his theoretical apparatus to an analysis of transformation. In addition, it revealed at least some robust correlations between structural opportunities and capital-determined positions of agents leading the practices that transform a given field. It seems, especially in the cultural domain, that privileges rather than disadvantages drive change from within. The folklore movement's transformation of the folklore field towards less regulated institutions and practices introduced a new margin for maneuver in the political field. Folklore events became sites for testing new practices and relations, and their emancipatory potential affected other social spaces by removing one of the legitimating discourses of political power, i.e. socialist aesthetic education related to the principle of socialist content in national form.

Results of this study encourage further exploration of folklore as a field and authenticity as its field-specific capital, exemplified but not limited to more nuanced reconstructions of the agents' habitus, application of the concepts to socialist post-colonialism studies, and comparative analysis of historical, transnational fields.

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