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Ieva Weaver

Dr. art. in musicology; Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
Dr. art. muzikoloģijā; Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: ieva.vivere@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0003-3363-3552

Digne Ūdre-Lielbārde

PhD in folkloristics; Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
PhD folkloristikā; Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: digne.udre@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0003-2424-2517

Ilaria Da Rin Bettina

MA in East European and Eurasian Studies; University of Bologna, joint degree
with Vytautas Magnus University at Kaunas, University of Zagreb
Maģistra grāds Austrumeiropas un Eirāzijas studijās; Boloņas Universitāte, kopīgā
grāda programma ar Vītauta Dižā Universitāti Kauņā un Zagrebas Universitāti
E-mail / e-pasts: ilariadarin00@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0000-8173-9891

Introduction.
Revivals and Movements in Non-Democracies

This Issue's Subject and Terminology   This journal's *Letonica* special issue, *Folklore Revivals in Non-Democracies*, reflects on the non-democratic circumstances during the socialist era in which many of Europe's folklore and folk music revivals developed. The issue is an outcome of the research project *Folklore Revival in Latvia: Resources, Ideologies and Practices* (2022–2024), funded by the Latvian Council of Science, and therefore the majority of analyses and reflections are written from the Latvian perspective. However, our goal was to analyze broader issues relevant to a wider geographical area, and we are deeply thankful for the valuable contributions that widen the scope of the discussion, including Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and

to some extent Estonian revival histories; also, several articles touch on the Latvian diasporas in the West in the context of Cold War divide. Mostly, articles analyze the revivals emerging in the second half of the 20th century in the Soviet Union and its satellite states; still, some of the articles touch on earlier revival processes. In this introductory article, we have been cautious about extrapolating our conclusions to other countries besides Latvia, leaving it to experts of each geopolitical area. Yet, the Baltic and post-Soviet perspective of our research remains central.

The word *revival* appears in this issue paired with terms such as folk music, folklore, nation, folk. The terminological nuances can point to different aspects and context-specific meanings of revivals, even when related to the shared space of folk culture. Studies on various other revivals disclose similar processes in religion, art, music, and architecture by analyzing great diversity of cultural, social, and political phenomena. Two expanded volumes published almost simultaneously, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* (Bithell, Hill 2014) and *Revival. Memories, Identities, Utopias* (Lepine et al. 2015), invite us to place folk culture-related revivals in a broader panorama of revival processes. This means discussing cultural practices, styles, and artifacts with a focus on their multiple temporalities, namely, "as the selective and deliberate re-purposing in the 'present' of a practice, a style, or an artifact recovered (and often persisting) from a 'past'" (Davis 2015: 12).

In his conceptualization of revival as "a world-wide phenomenon", Owe Ronström has paired it with other "re-concepts" such as revitalization, recreation, reorientation, re-enacting; at the same time, he expresses apt criticism of *revival* as an insufficient analytical concept, which is "often used to imply a difference between original and copy, real and unreal, authentic and inauthentic" (Ronström 1996: 6–7). Even in the narrower field of folk music and folklore, various revivals do not have the same stylistic and ideological content; however, they share the feature of reflecting the past while addressing the present cultural, social, political circumstances and intentions.

As noted by Juniper Hill and Caroline Bithell, although some revival efforts may have purely aesthetic motives, most are driven by implicit or explicit social, cultural, or political agendas, with activism recognized as a defining feature throughout their documented history (Bithell, Hill 2014: 10). The focus of this special issue – folklore revivals in non-democracies – clearly continues this line of theoretical thinking.

In the Baltics, folk music revivals cannot be separated from broader folklore practices, locally described with the emic term *folklore movement (folkloras kustība* in Latvian, *folkloro sąjūdis* in Lithuanian, *folklooriliikumine* in Estonian), which is used by both revivalists and researchers. The temporal reflection on the Baltic folklore

revival movements involves a sharp fracture created in these countries by the Second World War and the Soviet occupation. Under Soviet rule, referring to the heritage of the pre-Soviet past in a positive light was not only a cultural but also a political act. The strong political dimension distinguishes the histories of Baltic folklore revivals from other folk revival processes. Folklore in the Baltics was a vehicle for the revival of national identity and political independence, especially in the 20th century as it was an important part of the Singing Revolution (Šmidchens 2014), which led to the restoration of the independence of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Hill and Bithell suggested not reading the word *revival* too literally with a focus on *re-* prefix only, as in re-contextualization and many other similar notions. Referring to anthropologist Ralph Linton's definition of nativistic movements (Linton 1943), they drew attention to the aspect of *continuity* or perpetuation as another significant understanding of revivals (Hill, Bithell 2014: 5). The Latvian and, more broadly, Baltic folklore movements were not only about re-contextualizing expressive artistic styles in the name of anti-modernity and cultural nostalgia, or creating alternative spaces to the officially promoted Soviet cultural reality. The experienced or inherited knowledge about the radical social, economic, linguistic and cultural transformations since the Second World War and the efforts of restoring continuity with the interrupted past form an interwoven theme for the Baltic revivalists.

The music and folklore revivals after the Second World War developed against the political background of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain. Several volumes have previously pointed to the specifics of Eastern bloc revival histories (Slobin 1996; Stavělová, Buckland 2018). The non-democratic, highly controlled sociopolitical environments added an extra layer of ideological contradiction and difficulty to the revivalist efforts, but also motivated them.

Even though the political aspect of the folklore revivals seems particularly explicit in the case of the Baltic countries, thus making them a good example to analyze from the perspective of social movement theory, crafting alternative identities through folklore activities was common throughout the entire Soviet Bloc. In this view, certain forms of folklore and peasant culture functioned as cultural opposition during socialism: folk art in recreational and youth culture, folk in pop culture, ethnographic research and archives on countercultural elements of folk culture, and peasant heritage in the values and behaviors of dissents and social transformation (Csurgó et al. 2018: 578; see also Ķencis et al. 2024; Herzog 2010). An excellent example of the aforementioned is the *Táncház* (dance house) movement in socialist Hungary, with these grassroots circles offering young people a voluntary, socially engaging alternative to the compulsory and ideologically controlled activities of the communist era (Balogh, Fülemile 2008).

A perpetual doubt during our three-year research project was whether the keyword *movement* allows us to define and academically discuss the Latvian and neighboring folklore movements within the framework of social movement theories. Or, sometimes more strictly: whether we should avoid the emic term *folklore movement* in academic discourse and look for a better, more analytical or widespread concept. In this journal issue, our conceptual decision was to prioritize the term *folklore movement* both to honor the "feeling of movement" (Eyerman 2006) of the researched communities, and to call for a broader interdisciplinary discussion on the twists and incompatibilities of revival and social movement theories, thus also between the humanities and social sciences which still often inhabit separated discursive spaces. At least two conversations are needed in this case. The first concerns the social and political aspects of artistic expression (with which we refer to folk culture in this issue) and the artistic aspects of social movements, which already have a decent research history. And the second – leading to the theme of this issue – concerns the character and range of possibilities for both cultural revivals and social movements in non-democracies, which is a more recent and less developed topic in academia.

Our three-year research project started in January 2022. In February, Russia invaded Ukraine, and the nearby war became a counterpoint to our research and made the flashbacks to the Soviet times even more acute and unresolved. This made our focus on the as yet less-studied non-democratic aspects of revival histories even more crucial, drawing the studied revivals out of a purely aesthetic and cultural realm into the arena of political claims and, at times, limited protest opportunities.

(Non)overlapping of the Social Movement and Revivalism Literature

In social sciences and humanities, many diverse collective, dynamic processes of change are described as *movements*. When generalized, many of these processes contain both cultural and political aspects and share comparable similarities. Still, a disciplinary divide persists between social scientists analyzing social and political movements, and humanities scholars focusing on cultural and artistic movements and revivals, with not much cross-referencing.

Among early 1940s–1950s writings on various movements, a cross-disciplinary view was present in anthropological literature. In his seminal theory, Anthony F. C. Wallace proposed the umbrella term *revitalization movements* to designate "all the phenomena of major cultural-system innovation" (Wallace 1956: 264). He noted that the various framings of such phenomena depend not only on their local characteristics but also "on the discipline and the theoretical orientation of the researcher" (ibid.).

He wrote that, from the viewpoint of behavioral sciences, all such movements follow a uniform process; therefore, he did not differentiate between revivals and social movements. A lot of far-reaching definitions and theories have been developed since then; however, the need for umbrella understandings occurs again in the current wave of academic interdisciplinarity.

In music revival studies, Tamara Livingston is known for defining music revivals as social movements which are "in opposition to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream" (Livingston 1999: 66). Her theoretical frame of reference leads back to Wallace (1956) as well as anthropologist Ralph Linton's theory of nativistic movements (Linton 1943). Nevertheless, for our point it is important that Livingston's definition did not provide a more detailed terminological dialogue with social movement theorists. More recently, a bridging link between music revivals and social movements has been proposed by sociologist Denise Milstein, who highlighted the intersection of art and politics in revivals: "Definitions that categorize revival as a social movement shed light on the intersection of political and aesthetic concerns in the search for new and old sounds" (Milstein 2014: 421).

Overall, despite the fact that the keyword *movement* is widespread within folk culture revival studies, a deeper dive into its theoretical opportunities and impli-cations seems lacking, keeping it to a rather closed conversation within the study field. Recently, Theresa Jill Buckland and Daniela Stavělová called for terminological attention to the related terms *movement, folklorism* and *revivalism*, which occur as different labels for similar practices, but also can signal distinct connotations related to unique social, cultural, and political contexts (Buckland, Stavělová 2018: 8). From the perspective of the case studies covered in the publication edited by them, the term *revival* seems to have a broader meaning than *folklore movement*, which is used as a synonym for the regionally significant *folklorism* processes (ibid.: 9). From our point of view, this proves how diverse the understandings of the concept of *movement* can be.

The literature on social movements is much broader than research on music and folklore revivals, and nowadays it also contains extensive discussion related to cultural and artistic phenomena. Traditionally, artistic revivals did not fit into the modernist conception of social movements, which focused on economic and political protests in the context of class struggle. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, "changes in the nature of the phenomena themselves" and "new patterns in social movements" were noticed (Marx, Holzner 1975: 311), and research on so-called new social movements shifted from the economics and politics to the cultural and identity realm (Touraine 1985). After this cultural turn in research, extensive monographs have been dedicated to the cultural analysis of social movements (Johnston,

Klandermans 1995; Baumgarten et al. 2014; Reed 2019 [2005]). Some authors are noteworthy for addressing and bridging the disciplinary gap.

For the theme of this Introduction, the work of social scientists Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison is of high significance. Since the 1990s, they have been prominent in researching the interrelation between social movements and cultural expressions, particularly music, with an effort to bring the competing discourses of sociology and cultural theory into closer contact. Importantly, they also paid attention to the social agency of tradition in social movements. In their seminal book *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (1998), folk music revivals are seen in the context of social conditions and movements of the time, with a focus on the civil rights, student, and antiwar movements of the 1960s. They criticized the tendency of cultural and musical historians to stress the apolitical nature of music revivals. Specifically, they turn to folk revival studies:

> It is somewhat limited to refer to these developments primarily in terms of a 'folk revival.' For what was going on was much more than a new wave of popularity for folk music [..]; in terms of cultural transformation, it was rather the recombination of folk music with other musical genres [..] and the shaping of a totally new kind of oppositional 'youth' culture that seem most significant and long-lasting. [..] The social movements of the 1960s offered and practiced a new vision of participatory democracy, and that vision formed a central part of the cognitive praxis of the 'folk revival' (Eyerman, Jamison 1998: 107, 109).

By dedicating chapters and sections of their book to folk music revivals (and calling them social movements), they provided a broader sociological explanation to the new wave of mobilization of traditions that occurred in the second half of the 20th century, and suggested seeing its wider audiences and footprints in popular culture. Similar to noting that humanities scholars tend to overlook the political side of arts, they also pointed to sociologists' bias of seeing traditions as barriers to social change, innovation, and progress, and to their lack of a broader understanding of arts and tradition as dynamic mediators and performers of social and political transformation (see also Eyerman 2002, 2006).

A link between the research of artistic processes and social movements was also created by sociologist of culture Shyon Baumann. Based on a comparative review of the literature on social movements and artistic recognition, he found a strong analogy between how the art worlds and social movements succeed. He proposed a *theory of artistic legitimation* by referring to the factors explaining the paths of social movements, such as political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, and framing processes (Baumann 2006). When seen comparatively with social movements, artistic legitimation can be explained as follows:

> Discrete areas of cultural production attain legitimacy as art, high or popular, during periods of high cultural opportunity through mobilizing material or institutional resources and through the exercise of a discourse that frames the cultural production as legitimate art according to one or more preexisting ideologies (Baumann 2006: 60).

In general, music in social movements has been studied the most (see e.g. Garofalo 1992; Roy 2010; Rosenthal, Flacks 2011; Redmond 2014; Kaltmeier, Raussert 2019). Fewer publications exist on the role of folklore (Smith 1967; Reich 1971; Davis 2002), yet the politicization of folklore is the subject of a growing number of studies (e.g., Ķencis et al. 2024). The expanding body of literature connecting art worlds and social movements offers a rich opportunity to broaden academic theoretical interpretations and include less noticed facets in the scope of study.

Our conclusion is that, if a question arises whether the Latvian and other folklore movements can be analyzed in terms of social movement theory, this question is valid and deserves attention and academic dialogue. The skepticism is based on the common understanding of social movements in terms of open activism, protest, strategic action, and public display of collective dissent. Artistic revivals, however, are often about aesthetic and lifestyle choices, able to create such states as "a kind of inner freedom that the phenomenon of the folklore revival brought" (Buckland, Stavělová 2018: 7). The *modality* of revivals may seem much calmer, oriented toward internal opposition rather than external protest. Such subtler expressions, however, become important when encountering non-democratic circumstances – the binding aspect that will be outlined in the next section.

Social Movements and Revivals in Non-Democracies   Social movements are a central focus in sociology and political science, yet their complexity and dynamic nature makes them difficult to define. Broadly, social movements are political phenomena particularly connected to forms of "contentious politics" (Tilly, Tarrow 2007). By characterizing social movements as anti-systemic "challengers" (Tilly 1978; in Castañeda, Schneider 2017: 71), they are positioned as actors that disrupt the status quo, operating outside of the regular polity. Social movements are fundamentally relational, often emerging in opposition to powerful institutions, typically the government. Therefore, they should be studied together with the context in which they arise. However, they vary not only depending on the political context they emerge in, but also by the issues they address, the resources they can mobilize, and the type of actors they involve. When viewed as political actors, social movements can also be analyzed through the lens of power relations.

The contentious nature of social movements stems from the clash between two opposing interests: that of the movement and that of the authority they challenge.

A problem related to social movement studies, according to Charles Tilly and others, is that the term is sometimes too loosely applied to any kind of popular action or protest. From this problem arises the issue of properly defining social movements for the purposes of systematic analysis (Tilly, Tarrow 2007: 8). A vast amount of literature provides definitions across a broad spectrum ranging from very specific to inclusive and vague. Notwithstanding the difficulty in defining them, it is easier to do so through specific, measurable characteristics to facilitate their analysis, particularly in the context of non-democratic regimes. In the following, we will present two conceptions that are insightful, since they operationalize social movements through two different – and therefore complementary – sets of elements.

Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (2020) describe social movements as comprising three key elements: a collective sense of identification, dense informal networks among actors, and conflictual collective action. Collective identity becomes a crucial element in the power of the movement and distinguishes a proper social movement from protest events. The strong ties among its participants guarantee that the movement has a certain temporal continuity. This definition of movement networks limits them to informal and non-hierarchical structures, which would be less available and more controlled in a non-democratic regime. As in the case of Latvian folklore movement in the Soviet Union, it included both formal and informal networks. Finally, to qualify as a social movement, actors must engage in some form of conflict. Without it, they would be more accurately described as "consensus movements" (Della Porta, Diani 2020: 44). Knowing that open conflict is hardly possible in a totalitarian regime, it is still acknowledged that ideological and political opposition was an interweaving motif in the Latvian and neighboring folklore movements.

Three different elements were proposed as criteria for a social movement by Charles Tilly and Lesley Wood (2020: 6–8): campaign, repertoire, and WUNC displays (worthiness, unity, numbers, commitment). The element of *campaign* refers to sustained efforts involving multiple, varied, and interconnected actions tied together by a common narrative thread. The second element, the *repertoire*, encompasses a variety of actions that are used to make claims visible, including artistic expressions. The last element, WUNC, is an acronym for four factors: worthiness (participation of certain social groups or famous individuals that legitimize the movement), unity (objects or symbols that participants display or wear as identifying markers, and coordinated actions such as marching or singing), numbers (ability to attract large numbers of participants, measured through signatures, gatherings and other

engagement forms), and commitment (demonstrated through visible sacrifices, such as enduring adverse conditions or the participation of vulnerable groups). This set of elements presents social movements as strategically organized entities that emphasize public visibility. To a large extent, this description corresponds to the Latvian folklore movement process; however, the most doubtful could be its "campaign" character, as it should rather be considered a wider and vaguer process.

Comparing these two conceptions, we can conclude that the case of the Latvian folklore movement does not fully "tick all the boxes"; still, most of the listed social movement criteria are relevant for discussing this folklore revival movement within the Soviet Union, and possibly also other neighboring folk culture revivals. Criteria such as a collective sense of identification, uniting symbols, repertoire and actions, informal networks, worthiness, and conflictual collective efforts might also be available in non-democracies, with conflictuality not necessarily being overt but interpreted as involving two contending sides – the subjects of the movement and the authorities – who hold opposing interests.

Social movements are often analyzed in terms of democracy or, at least, a positive degree of democratization of the country. Chen and Moss (2019) suggest that the conditions that contribute to democratization – disintegration of centralized authoritarian structures, an increase in the number of participants in politics, and the formation of connections among them – also influence the emergence and development of social movements. The opposite is also true, i.e. social movements contribute to the creation of these elements that foster democratization. Still, movements are often framed as strategic, organized activism, which is not assumed to be possible in non-democratic conditions. It is important to add that scholars have recently stressed that non-democratic systems have been strongly under-represented in social movement theory, and newer, more comprehensive theories have been developed (Rohlinger, Corrigall-Brown 2019).

A key consideration regarding non-democratic systems is the available window of opposition or protest. Unarmed and indirect resistance might be the only opportunity of social protest there, as it is generally assumed that "in most contexts civilians have the strategic advantage with regard to nonviolent resistance" (Schock, Demetriou 2019: 348). Societies in the Baltics have a long history of nonviolent resistance, defined as "the struggle by individuals, by social groups and even by entire peoples, to assert their vested rights by recourse to psychological, social, economic, political and other non-military methods" (Blūzma et al. 2009: 21). In non-democratic systems, individuals and groups that engage in collective actions aimed at countering some aspects of the regime need to find alternative ways to speak up. As repression can take several forms, non-violent resistance also manifests in

numerous forms. Through the decades, scholars have identified different classes of unarmed resistance (Blūzma et al. 2009; Eglitis 1993; Sharp 1973), which can be summarized in the following three categories.

The first is passive opposition: social, political, and economic non-cooperation and acts of omission, such as refusing to sing songs and play certain state-promoted music, or declining to participate in certain mandatory activities. The second is active nonviolent resistance, protest, and intervention, such as singing banned songs, performing unauthorized plays or music, or displaying flags or symbolic colors. The third is spiritual resistance, such as the maintenance of prohibited traditions, cultural expressions, and the celebration of banned holidays. These actions are considered non-traditional, unpredictable, and flexible to change, making them particularly suitable for escaping state control.

Cultural expressions such as music and art form both repertoires and resources for a social movement by nonviolent means. Music might not be political per se but may contain hidden meanings, such as specific melodies and texts, their performance in contentious situations, or by specific actors. Such acts can be interpreted both as the politicization of art and the aestheticization of protest. In non-democratic systems, it is typical to use such alternative resources of opposition, among which is artistic expression (Mathieu 2019).

Steven M. Buechler speaks of "free spaces" as a half-way point between political power and everyday life. This dimension is considered specifically relevant for the creation and consolidation of collective identity, and "free spaces" are possible in non-democratic contexts in informal forms (Buechler 1995: 446). A similar point was proposed by Alberto Melucci, who wrote about two poles of a social movement: visibility and (pre-political) latency (Melucci 1989: 70–73), whereby "the potential for resistance or opposition is sewn into the very fabric of daily life" (ibid.: 71).

Several studies on the Baltic independence movements, including Aině Ramonaitė's article in this issue, point to the folklore movements as pre-political resources – a gradually formed fertile soil for the rapid emergence of nationalist social movements during perestroika in the late 1980s. As noted by Beissinger, "a vibrant nationalist subculture persisted, helping to explain why Baltic nationalisms emerged so quickly once a political opening materialized" (Beissinger 2009: 233).

The aim of this section was to point out that cultural and artistic efforts, such as folklore movements, can be a significant oppositional resource in non-democratic regimes. If the folklore movements analyzed in this issue do not always fit into the dominant theoretical frameworks of social movements, one approach would be to conclude that social movement theory is not relevant here. However, as the cited sources demonstrate, the terminology and frameworks used for describing social

movements actually open up a broader and advantageous perspective for discussing folklore movements in various social and political circumstances. If there is much less research in this area, this might be more of an opportunity than a shortcoming. Non-democratic circumstances are a factor that brings social movements and artistic revivals closer. Some kind of resistance and protest is present in any revival, but in non-democracies it takes a more intense shape, linked to the state's strong control, surveillance, censorship, restrictions on performance, the violent rupture of cultural and state continuity, the threat to its existence, and the difficult flow of communication and influences from abroad.

The Themes and Composition of This Issue   The articles of this issue are grouped under four titles, addressing several issues of folklore revivals in non-democracies: *Folklore as Resource*, *Revival Manifestos*, *Revival as Survival*, and *Cold War Divide*. Other recurring themes in this issue are the sensibility toward successive historical periods and layers of folk culture revivals, the general societal visibility of folklore movements, and the discussion of authenticity under non-democratic political circumstances.

Folklore as Resource   This issue begins with two theoretically innovative articles that bring attention to the instrumentalization of folklore as a discursive and political power. The proposed conceptual frames are the discourse of authenticity, Pierre Bourdieu's field and capital theory, and social movement theory.

Within the context of the non-democratic Soviet regimes in the Baltic States, the meaning of authenticity for the folklore movement crystallized against the backdrop of specific Soviet aesthetics. Much of the thinking that fueled the folklore movement in the Baltics was directed against the Sovietized version of folklore. **Toms Ķencis**, in the article ***Authenticity as a Symbolic Capital of the Folklore Field: The Case of Soviet Latvia***, analyzes the Latvian folklore revival through Bourdieu's field and capital theory, showing how authenticity operated as symbolic capital in the struggles between Soviet cultural authorities and grassroots revivalists. As argued by Ķencis, by mobilizing authenticity as cultural resistance, revivalists transformed social and cultural capital into symbolic power, contributing to broader national and political shifts during the perestroika era.

The question of the visibility and power of the folklore movement in the broader society is analyzed in **Ainė Ramonaitė's** article ***Tracing the Influence of Folklore Revival on Lithuania's National Independence Movement***. Ramonaitė applies resource mobilization theory to examine empirical data on the links between the folklore

movement and the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis*, demonstrating the influence of folk revivalists on the emerging political movement. She concludes that, "although the ethno-cultural movement was not overtly political, it did have a significant and tangible impact on the national independence movement in the late 1980s", thus confirming the importance of the folklore movement in cultural opposition and the independence processes in the Baltic States.

Revival Manifestos The next three articles reveal how the Baltic folklore movement's revivalist practices operated as multifaceted manifestos, articulating cultural opposition through visual, textual, and musical forms. Each case shows how revival was not only a return to tradition but also a deliberate strategy of communi-cation, identity construction, and a creative practice. As these studies illustrate, folk revival in the Baltic context was not merely about safeguarding tradition but about producing declarations of opposition, identity, and self-determination. Through visual symbols, festival discourse, and musical practice, the folklore movement encoded its political aspirations into everyday and performative forms, turning revival into a vehicle for both cultural continuity and political transformation.

The turn toward visually pronounced political statement and folklore move-ment-related expressions of cultural opposition carried out in the visual realm are analyzed by **Digne Ūdre-Lielbārde** in the article *Visualizing Cultural Opposition: Folklore Movement in Late Soviet Latvia*. Besides discussing visual opposition and self-representation within the folklore movement, the article focuses on the rein-statement of the Soviet-banned carmine red–white–carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia at one of its first public displays at the opening concert of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* on July 13, 1988. As argued by Ūdre-Lielbārde, this marked the moment when the folklore movement gained clear political outlines and dovetailed with the claims of the political part of the indepen-dence movement.

The International Folklore Festival *Baltica* was one of the most important events of the folklore movement in the Baltic States. Considering the scale and importance of the festival, it is discussed by several authors in this issue. A novel theoretical approach to analyzing folklore festival programs as manifestos is proposed by **Aleida Bertran** in her article *Theorizing Festival Programs as Manifestos: The International Folklore Festival Baltica during the Singing Revolution (1987–1991)*. Through the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis, Bertran proposes interpreting the discourse of festival programs as manifestos that legitimize the history, heritage, and knowledge of a festival community under censorship. In this view, the festival programs are not only crucial for understanding the festival's

history but also help uncover the degree of political involvement of the folklore movement in the independence claims.

Besides the conceptualization of the value of the archaic, the ambiguity, elasticity and capacity of the term *authentic* is well demonstrated by **Valdis Muktupāvels's** article ***Archaization versus Modernization: The Revival of Instrumental Traditions in Riga Folklore Ensembles, Late 1970s and 1980s***. The revival of musical instruments was aimed at rejecting modernized and professionalized instruments introduced by Soviet cultural policies. This meant that not only more primitive and archaic instruments were favored, but also new ones were created. Authenticity, as Muktupāvels describes it, was imagined to reside in those music instruments considered to be the most archaic, for example, the herders' instruments believed to have originated in prehistoric times. Moreover, as their playing did not require formal musical education, this was important for the members of the folklore movement who distanced themselves from professional interpretations of folk music. Often, the lack of historical sources on folk musical instruments encouraged revivalists to experiment and be creative. As Muktupāvels's article shows, authenticity embraces creativity, and many of the innovations introduced by the revivalists have become part of today's canon of musical instruments considered traditional.

Revival as Survival   The third group of articles comprises several detailed case studies showing how, alongside the wish to reconnect with, preserve, and restore aspects of a community's traditions and heritage, revivals are also a response to social, political, or cultural circumstances and often stand in opposition to the given conditions. These historical case studies focus on revivals as cultural survival mechanisms in the face of radical changes brought by geopolitical events and political regimes.

The term *folklore movement* in the post-Second World War communist and socialist territory in Europe, and especially in the Baltics, is used in a narrower meaning, reserved for the period of late socialism and perestroika. However, heightened interest in preserving and reviving folklore has a longer history reaching back to the national awakenings of the 19th century. Often, these historical layers of revivals form a firm ground for the next waves of revival initiatives. As analyzed by **Aigars Lielbārdis** in the article ***Ethnographic Ensembles in Latvia: From Village to Stage***, one of such important historical layers in Latvia, connected to staging folklore, was the emergence of the so-called ethnographic ensembles. Continuing the practice of staging folklore established during the interwar period, the first use of the term *ethnographic ensemble* in Latvia occurred during the first Soviet occupation in 1941. As with many folklore-related practices, ethnographic ensembles expressed,

promoted, and maintained the aesthetics of the Soviet amateur art, but at the same time they were crucial in preserving folklore and traditions, providing a means to express national sentiment. According to Lielbārdis, ethnographic ensembles set the conditions for the development of a distinctive culture of folk music performance, which in the 1970s developed into a nationwide folklore revival movement.

In the article *Diametrically Opposed? The Survival/Revival Chances of an Interwar Folk Culture Movement under Communist Dictatorship in Hungary*, **Anna Klára Andor** traces the history of Hungary's interwar folklore movement *Gyöngyösbokréta* (1931–1948), which evolved from a tourist attraction into a government-supported campaign for safeguarding peasant heritage and national identity. After 1945, the communist regime dismantled this framework, replacing it with state-controlled ensembles designed to oppose the earlier model, forcing communities and revivalists to seek alternative strategies of cultural preservation. The study also highlights the resilience of *Gyöngyösbokréta* in Vojvodina, Serbia, where it adapted to shifting political contexts and continues to survive today as a festival tradition.

The dynamics between experts and the local population – or rather lack thereof – is discussed in **Lina Petrošienė's** article *Musical Folklore of Lithuania Minor During the Soviet Era (1946–1989): The Voices Lost and the Forms of Revitalization*. The revival of the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor (nowadays divided between the Russian Federation and Lithuania) in the Klaipėda Region of Lithuania started in the 1970s and was largely carried out by folklorists, dialectologists, ethnomusicologists, and other professionals, but not by the Lietuvininkai – the autochthonous people of the region. Moving from the revival to the post-revival phase, as argued by Petrošienė, the revival of the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor can be considered a transition of the tradition into the state of intangible cultural heritage, thus marking the legacies of the folklore movement.

Larysa Lukashenko's article *Preconditions, Establishment, and Development of Folk Music Revival in Ukraine (late 1970s – early 1990s)* examines the historical, political, and socio-cultural preconditions that led to the emergence of the Ukrainian folk music revival between the late 1970s and early 1990s. It situates the revival within the broader context of late Soviet stagnation, tracing how ensembles such as *Drevo, Slobozhany, Horyna, Dzherelo,* and *Rodovid* became key actors in reshaping traditional music. By analyzing their formation, repertoire, and methods of activity, Lukashenko highlights the revival's reliance on both internal cultural traditions and external influences. The article underscores the enduring significance of these early ensembles in shaping the trajectory and identity of the Ukrainian folk music revival into the post-Soviet era.

Cold War Divide   The last group of articles address the larger geopolitical context of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain in folklore movement and folklore research histories by providing three perspectives on Latvian cultural processes and showing that the folklore movement was shaped as much by transnational connections and cross-border networks as by local practices. These articles reveal that the Latvian folklore revival was never confined to a purely local or apolitical sphere: it was inherently entangled with the global tensions and cultural exchanges of the Cold War. Folklore served as both a medium of solidarity across borders and a site of contestation within ideological struggles, allowing revivalists to negotiate identity on a transnational stage.

Even though the relations between Latvian folklore revivalists and folklore researchers have not been without friction, expert knowledge has been an important part of the folklore process. **Rita Zara's** article ***Guests Beyond the Iron Curtain: Cross-Border Visits of Latvian Folklorists during the Cold War*** contributes to the topic of the Cold War divide in the academic practice of folkloristics. During the Cold War, Latvian folklorists in Soviet-occupied Riga worked under strict ideological control and KGB surveillance, with limited contact beyond the socialist bloc. Yet, through the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad, carefully managed exchanges with exile communities in the West created rare cross-border encounters that connected divided Latvian scholarly and cultural worlds.

Another analysis of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* appears in **Ilga Vālodze Ābelkina's** article ***International Folklore Festival Baltica '88: The Return of Latvian Folk Music from Exile***. The festival is examined from the perspective of the relations between folklore revivalists in Soviet-occupied Latvia and the exiled Latvian diaspora of the Second World War refugees and their descendants in the West. By analyzing two Latvian exile folklore groups – *Kolibri* from the USA and *Vilcējas* from Sweden – that participated in *Baltica '88*, Ābelkina addresses the networking of revivalists across borders on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

A focus on the connections and networks between individuals, folklore groups, and media helps to explore the question of the visibility of the folklore movement in a broader society. In her article ***Transnational Networks Behind Folk Music Revivals: A Methodological Study of the Latvian Folklore Group Skandinieki***, **Ieva Weaver** zooms in on the example of the Latvian folklore group *Skandinieki*. The focus on one of the leading groups of the Latvian folklore movement helps to unearth the importance of the transnational ties between the revivalists and their allies in different countries. Weaver's article not only confirms the active contacts and flows of inspirations between Baltic revivalists, but also analyzes the somewhat uncomfortable and previously neglected question of the connections between Baltic and Russian

revivalists, drawing the conclusion that the "history of the Latvian folklore revival can't be written without consideration of the role of Russia". Another aspect of Weaver's article is treating printed media as revival actors in creating the "folklore worlds" on both sides of the Iron Curtain and showing the instrumentalization of folklore as an ideological weapon.

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Folklore as Resource

(Folklora kā resurss)

Toms Ķencis

PhD in folklore studies;

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

PhD folkloristikā;

Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts

E-mail / e-pasts: toms.kencis@lulfmi.lv

ORCID: 0000-0001-8127-5249

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

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 arhaiskumu, kopienas līdzdalību, etnisko un lokālo identitāti – kā vienu no nevardarbīgās pretošanās formām.

Pretējās 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-demo-cratic 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 (Ķencis 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; Ķencis 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 (Spīcs 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/nationgraphic field") in early Soviet Czechoslovakia (Grill 2015). The broader folklore field was recently defined as a sociocultural semiotic system by Toms Ķencis:

> The folklore field is structured by historical institutions, managed by various orga-nizations, and inhabited by different agents actively pursuing their agendas. It is articulated within overlapping and often conflicting discourses of education, rep-resentation, legitimation, cultural heritage, and national identity (Ķencis 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 domi-nant 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 them-selves 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. Ķencis 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 part-icipated in the influential folklore ensemble *Bizīteri* and in 1981 she founded the renowned Latvian post-folk ensemble *Iļģi.* 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, *Iļģi.* 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)pre-sentation, 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 *Emiļa 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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Ainė Ramonaitė

Professor of Politics; Institute of International Relations and Political Science,
Vilnius University
Profesore politikas zinātnē; Starptautisko attiecību un politikas zinātnes institūts,
Viļņas Universitāte
E-mail / e-pasts: aine.ramonaite@tspmi.vu.lt
ORCID: 0000-0002-1867-1852

Tracing the Influence of the Folklore Revival on Lithuania's National Independence Movement

Izsekojot folkloras kustības ietekmei uz Lietuvas nacionālās neatkarības kustību

Summary   The article explores the connections between the Lithuanian folklore revival movement, which emerged in the 1960s, and the Lithuanian national independence movement of the late 1980s. Using resource mobilization theory, it seeks to identify tangible links and resources that connected these two movements, rather than focusing on psychological or abstract symbolic ties. Based on over 100 oral history interviews conducted by the author and colleagues, the article reconstructs the history of the folklore revival in Lithuania and identifies specific empirical mechanisms through which it influenced the national independence movement. First, it highlights the role of folklore in the rise of environmental and heritage protection movements. Second, it underscores the importance of the folklore festival *Skamba skamba kankliai* in the establishment of the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis* in June 1988. Third, it examines the involvement of leaders from the ethnocultural movement in *Sąjūdis*. Lastly, it discusses the role of folklore ensembles in mass rallies from 1988 to 1991.

Kopsavilkums   Rakstā tiek pētītas saiknes starp Lietuvas folkloras atdzimšanas kustību, kas aizsākās 20. gs. 60. gados, un Lietuvas nacionālās neatkarības kustību 20. gs. 80. gadu beigās. Izmantojot resursu mobilizācijas teoriju, rakstā identificētas konkrētas saiknes un resursi, kas savienoja šīs divas kustības, nepaļaujoties uz psiholoģiskām vai abstraktām simboliskām saiknēm. Pamatojoties vairāk nekā 100 mutvārdu vēstures intervijās, ko veikusi autore un viņas kolēģi, rakstā rekonstruēta Lietuvas folkloras kustības vēsture un identificēti konkrēti empīriski mehānismi, ar kuru palīdzību tā ietekmēja nacionālo neatkarības kustību. Pirmkārt, rakstā uzsvērta folkloras loma vides un mantojuma aizsardzības kustību tapšanā. Otrkārt, uzsvērta folkloras festivāla *Skamba skamba kankliai* nozīme Lietuvas reformu kustības Sajūža izveidē 1988. gada jūnijā. Treškārt, rakstā iztirzāta etniskās kultūras kustības līderu iesaistīšanās Sajūdī. Visbeidzot, tajā apspriesta folkloras ansambļu loma masu mītiņos no 1988. līdz 1991. gadam.

Introduction   Both in the public sphere and in academic literature, it is often suggested that the folklore revival movement in Soviet-era Lithuania led to the Singing Revolution of late 1980s, which overthrew the Soviet regime and brought about Lithuanian independence (see e.g. Šmidchens 2014; Davoliūtė, Rudling 2023).

Symbolically, the connection seems obvious. However, the folklore movement was, after all, non-political; moreover, folk culture during the Soviet era was creatively used by the regime to consolidate popular support and construct a new collective identity for the Soviet nations (Putinaitė 2019).

So did folklore and folklorists really play a decisive or significant role in the events of the anti-communist revolution? Is this link between the folklore revival of the late 1960s and the national "revival"[1] of the late 1980s merely symbolic, or is it real, tangible, and demonstrable through empirical methods?

This paper analyzes the specific empirical mechanisms through which the folklore movement influenced the national revival in Lithuania during 1988–1990, and examines the links between the folklore movement and the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis*, founded in June 1988. The article is based on more than 100 oral history interviews conducted by the author and her colleagues between 2009 and 2018 with activists of the ethnocultural movement and leaders of *Sąjūdis*. It builds on the author's previous works on the origins of *Sąjūdis* (Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė 2011) and the ethnocultural movement in Soviet Lithuania (Ramonaitė 2010, 2015; Ramonaitė, Kukulskytė 2014), focusing here specifically on the connections between the folklore revival movement[2] and the establishment and activities of *Sąjūdis*.

The theoretical approach of the article is based on resource mobilization theory (McCarthy, Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983; Edwards, McCarthy 2004) and the relational approach to collective action and social movements (Diani, McAdam 2003). These theories assert that certain material or non-material resources – such as funding, meeting spaces, leadership, organizational skills, celebrity endorsements, pre-existing social networks, and the capacity to build alliances – are crucial preconditions for the

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1   "Revival" ("Atgimimas" in Lithuanian) is a commonly used term in Lithuania for the period 1988–1991.

2   The folklore revival movement *(folkloro sąjūdis* in Lithuanian), sometimes referred to as the "urban folk movement" (Nakienė 2012), is part of a broader ethnocultural movement, consisting of closely intertwined networks of folklorists, hikers, and regional studies activists (Ramonaitė 2010; Ramonaitė, Kukulskytė 2014).

emergence and success of a social movement. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on identifying tangible links and resources, rather than psychological factors (such as emotions) or abstract symbolic connections (such as "national spirit" or "national self-consciousness"), which are often emphasized in historical accounts of the 1988-1991 events (e.g. Bauža 2000).

The article is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the data and methodological challenges in researching cultural resistance during the Soviet era. The second part presents the folklore revival and the formation of a broader ethno-cultural movement in Lithuania in the late 1960s. The third part analyzes the specific mechanisms and links between the folklore movement and the national independence movement. It examines several ways in which folklore revivalists influenced the national movement: the impact of folklore on the emergence of the Lithuanian green movement and heritage protection initiatives; the crucial role of the Folklore Festival *Skamba skamba kankliai* in the founding of *Sąjūdis* in June 1988; the participation of ethnocultural movement leaders in *Sąjūdis*; and the role of folklore ensembles at mass rallies between 1988 and 1991.

Data and Methodological Approach

Historians working on the Soviet era note that research on this period faces specific methodological challenges (see e.g. Streikus 2009). One of the major problems is that ideologization and (self-) censorship render many written documents unreliable. Official records – ranging from statistical data to minutes of organizational meetings – were often fabricated or falsified (Ramonaitė 2015: 23). The entire Soviet press was censored, making it unlikely to contain information about non-systemic movements. Even personal diaries were frequently subject to self-censorship due to fear of potential repression by the regime, and thus may not provide an undistorted account of the period's realities.

It is particularly problematic to investigate activities and practices that did not align with the ideology of the Soviet regime and were under close scrutiny by the secret services. This applies not only to overt dissident activities – those openly opposing the regime, about which considerable material can be found in KGB files – but even more so to activities that skirted the boundaries of legality or were carefully concealed from the regime's view. In Soviet Lithuania, there were many such activities and gatherings, ranging from the Catholic underground to youth subcultures (Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė 2011). In our previous work, we have referred to such formations as "self-subsistent society" – that is, organizations or social communities established without state interference and that avoided the regime's ideological agenda (Ramonaitė, Kavaliauskaitė 2015). Though not overtly political, these groups

functioned as "islands of freedom" or "free spaces" (Polletta 1999), disrupting the regime's monolithic control and, by virtue of their independent nature, arousing the suspicion of the authorities.

Such gatherings often employed "unobtrusive practices" (Johnston, Mueller 2001) or "camouflage tactics" (Ramonaitė 2015), aimed at remaining unnoticed by the regime by disguising their activities as legal and officially acceptable. For example, in Lithuania, hiking clubs operated under the guise of officially permitted and even promoted tourist clubs, while pursuing their own non-systematic agenda – such as cleaning up ancient mounds,[3] commemorating historical dates and figures significant to Lithuania's independence, or visiting sites hidden or neglected by the Soviet regime. These clubs often falsified their official reports to align with what the authorities expected: they might deliberately misrepresent hiking routes or include staged photographs, such as posing at the grave of a Soviet partisan (Ramonaitė 2015). These deceptive tactics make any use of archival material without the contextualization provided by eyewitness accounts highly problematic.

Because of these methodological challenges, this study has primarily employed the oral history method, based on testimonies of direct witnesses. Specifically, it uses interviews from three oral history collections gathered by the author and her colleagues from Vilnius University, preserved in the Archive of the (Post)Soviet Memory Center: the *Sąjūdis* Project Collection, the Invisible Society Collection, and the *Ratilio* Collection.

The *Sąjūdis* Project Collection includes more than 300 interviews with *Sąjūdis* pioneers and activists from various self-sufficient social groups, including the ethnocultural movement, collected between 2009 and 2011. The Invisible Society Collection comprises 96 interviews conducted between 2012 and 2015 as part of the project *Invisible Society of Soviet Era Lithuania: The Revision of Distinction Between Soviet and Non-Soviet Networks.* The *Ratilio* Collection contains 42 interviews with leaders and members of *Ratilio* folk ensemble, collected between 2010 and 2018.

When using oral history sources, other specific methodological challenges were also taken into account. One of the most important issues is that in oral history interviews, the informant's narrative is inevitably influenced by cultural memory (Assmann 2011) and present-day attitudes. With the change of political regime after 1990, and the accompanying shift in memory politics, people may adapt their

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3   Mounds or hillforts (*piliakalniai* in Lithuanian) are important archaeological and cultural heritage sites in Lithuania, dating back to the Bronze Age. These earthworks were often used as fortified settlements or defensive structures, typically located on natural hills or elevated areas. Neglected during the Soviet era, they are now valued not only for their historical significance but also as symbols of national identity and pride.

narratives to better align with current views or attempt to "embellish" their accounts by presenting themselves as fighters against the system. I was aware of these potential issues and sought to verify the narratives by juxtaposing different individuals' accounts of the same organizations and events, as well as by consulting additional archival material.

Folklore Revival Movement in Lithuania   The folklore revival movement in Lithuania can be traced back to the first mass expeditions in regional studies, which began in the 1960s.[4] After Stalin's death, regional studies or local heritage studies (*kraštotyra* in Lithuanian; *kraevedienie* in Russian) were allowed and even promoted by the regime to stimulate grassroots Soviet patriotism (Davoliūtė, Rudling 2023).

In 1961, the LSSR Regional Studies Society (*LTSR Kraštotyros draugija*; since 1965 – *Monument Preservation and Regional Studies Society*) was established in Lithuania (Seliukaitė 2010). In 1963, young activists of the society led by Norbertas Vėlius organized the first so-called "complex expedition" in Zervynos, an impressively authentic village in the southeastern part of Lithuania.

Amateur regional studies activists – students from various disciplines such as history, linguistics, medicine, natural sciences, art, and music – collected rich ethnographic material. Based on this work, the book *Zervynos* was published in 1964 (Milius 1964).

Later, these expeditions grew into a vibrant regional studies movement. Summer expeditions, organized mainly in the archaic villages of eastern Lithuania, attracted hundreds of students who were inspired by the traditional lifestyle and the sincerity of rural people – communities that had been relatively untouched by the Soviet regime – as well as by the charisma and informality of the expedition leaders themselves. As Jonas Trinkūnas, one of the key figures of the ethnocultural movement, remembers:

> It was the most wonderful time, because the village was still so rich and traditional. Can you imagine – for example, in Guntauninkai, a village near Tverečius, Adutiškis, we collect songs in that village, we write them down, we communicate with people, and then we arrange a party. The whole village gets together, the whole village. The women bring cheese, milk, we sit on the lawn. We all have a party, dancing, singing songs. We sing folk songs together. It was a wonderful time (interview, Trinkūnas 2011).

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4   Although smaller-scale regional studies expeditions had taken place earlier, the Vilnius University regional studies research group, led by ethnologist Vacys Milius, was particularly active. This group also contributed to the establishment of the Regional Studies Society in 1961 (Mardosa 2016).

Inspired by these expeditions, the local history club *Ramuva* was established in Vilnius in 1969, with the participation of many well-known figures, such as the poet Marcelijus Martinaitis and Veronika Janulevičiūtė-Povilionienė, who later became Lithuania's most famous folklore performer. In 1970, Vilnius University *Ramuva* was founded on the initiative of Jonas Trinkūnas. Both of these organizations were involved in organizing further expeditions, arranging lectures, evening events, meetings with prominent people, and gatherings with village singers (Mačiekus 2009). All these activities attracted large audiences and helped popularize authentic folklore.

The popularity and spontaneity of *Ramuva* activities, as well as their links with dissident and underground activists, brought these organizations into disfavor with the KGB. The Vilnius City *Ramuva* was forced to close down in 1971, but the Vilnius University *Ramuva* remained in operation. Thanks to its long-time leader Venantas Mačiekus, it was able to maintain formal loyalty to the regime without losing the non-conformist content and style of its activities. Later, Vilnius *Ramuva* activists established the Folk Song Club (later renamed the *Raskila* ensemble), which operated for a time at the Trade Union Palace and then privately in subsequent years (interview, Matulis 2010; interview, Burauskaitė 2014). Thus, the activity did not disappear, but rather changed its forms of existence.

At the same time, folklore ensembles began to emerge. In 1968, the first city folklore ensemble was founded – the Vilnius University Folklore Ensemble *Ratilio* (originally called the Student Ethnographic Ensemble). The ensemble was established by Aldona Ragevičienė, concertmaster of the University Choir, together with a group of students from the Faculty of Philology (Ramonaitė, Narušis 2018). The ensemble emerged almost spontaneously, as various circumstances aligned.

Perhaps the most important prerequisite for the emergence of this phenomenon was the fact that, at that time, the singing tradition was still very much alive in Lithuanian villages, especially in Dzūkija (the southeastern part of Lithuania), but also elsewhere. Young people who came to Vilnius from the countryside to study had a strong desire to sing. In their memoirs, many recall singing at the university – during breaks between lectures, in the student canteen, in dormitories, and at all kinds of parties (Nakienė 2016). The lecturers also shared a longing for the singing village and, rather than forbidding it, supported this student practice.

As one of the pioneers of the *Ratilio* ensemble recalls:

> Apparently, it was the aforementioned desire to sing our songs that first pushed me into the ensemble. After all, from the very first year, even the smallest gathering – what will be, what won't be, and there will be songs. Now it is unthinkable. We used to have coffee in the student café and sing, sing, sing [..] Especially that singing during the breaks between lectures. It's interesting that the lecturers used to like

it too… I'll never forget once when the linguist Jonas Balkevičius, who was the dean of the faculty at the time, a great man, came to give a lecture, and we were singing in the balcony. He came through the door and stopped and listened… We were a little confused. 'It's fine,' he said, 'sing, you might be late for the lecture' (cited in Giedraitis 2014).

Another reason for the establishment of the ensemble was the conscious effort of professors of the time to promote interest in ethno-culture. The ethnomusicologist Jadvyga Čiurlionytė, a sister of the famous Lithuanian composer Mikolojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis and professor at the Conservatory (now the Academy of Music and Theatre), was particularly influential. She was also the teacher of *Ratilio*'s first two leaders, Aldona Ragevičienė and Laima Burkšaitienė.

The students of the Faculty of Philology were also impressed by Norbertas Vėlius, as well as the literary and folklore scholar Donatas Sauka and his brother, the folklorist Leonardas Sauka (Giedraitis 2014).

Around 1967, feeling a strong inclination to sing and having been taught by their teachers to appreciate folk culture, a group of philology students organized themselves into an informal "shepherd's choir", occasionally performing at student events. They enjoyed singing but lacked a leader. At the same time, Aldona Ragevičienė, who did not feel comfortable working as a concertmaster of the university choir, aspired to mentor her own artistic group (Giedraitis 2014).

The inspiration to establish a folklore ensemble came from the celebration of the centenary of the renowned Lithuanian writer, poet and philosopher Vydūnas, held at Vilnius University in 1968. During this commemoration, several university choristers, including the aforementioned Veronika Povilionienė, performed a selection of authentic Lithuanian folk songs under Ragevičienė's direction. After seeing this program, Jadvyga Čiurlionytė encouraged Aldona Ragevičienė to continue this work and to create more folklore programs (interview, Povilionienė 2010; interview, Razmukaitė 2018).

Encouraged by the success of the performance, Ragevičienė posted an announcement at the university about the formation of an ethnographic ensemble. Upon seeing this announcement, the singers of the "shepherds' choir" came to meet Ragevičienė at the designated time. This marked the founding of an ensemble that would later become one of the most renowned (and still active) folklore ensembles in Lithuania – the *Ratilio* Ensemble. Most importantly, this initiative set a precedent for creating ensembles that performed authentic folklore in an urban setting. Following this example, other ensembles soon began to form in Vilnius: *Sadauja* in 1971, *Poringė* in 1973, *Dijūta* (then known as the Ethnographic Ensemble of the Academy of Sciences) in 1979, *Ievaras* in 1979, and *VISI* in 1980 (Nakienė 2016: 102).

Almost at the same time, another similar initiative emerged in Vilnius: around

1967, an ethnographic ensemble led by Povilas Mataitis was established at the State Youth Theater (Liutkutė-Zakarienė 2008). The ensemble's first concert took place in 1968, with a program consisting mainly of sung and danced *sutartinės* (traditional Lithuanian polyphonic songs). Like *Ratilio*, the ensemble aimed for authenticity and historicity – with significant attention given to the reconstruction of authentic costumes, a task undertaken by set designer Dalia Mataitienė. However, this ensemble followed a slightly different trajectory than later folklore ensembles: in 1974, it became the Lithuanian Folklore Theater of the Rumšiškes Open-Air Museum. The performances of the Lithuanian Folklore Theater were noted for their high artistic value, combining a subtle combination of loyalty to traditions with individual expression (Nakienė 2005). However, after becoming a state-sponsored representative collective, touring both within the Soviet Union and abroad, the theater gradually distanced itself from the folklore revival movement, which was much less supported by the regime.

The wave of the ethnocultural movement also reached the villages, where ethnographic ensembles began to emerge. In 1967, the Kalviai and Lieponiai ensembles were established; in 1969, the Lazdiniai and Adutiškis ensembles; in 1971, the Žiūriai, Marcinkoniai, Kriokšlis ensembles; in 1972, the Luokė ensemble; and in 1974, both the Ežvilkas Bandonya and Puponiai ensembles (Karaška 2004). A special mention should be made of the Kupiškėnai Ethnographic Folk Theatre – this collective, founded in Kupiškis in 1966, staged the renowned play *The Ancient Kupiškėnai Wedding* (see e.g. Vaigauskaitė 2016).

Many of these local ethnographic ensembles were inspired by the expeditions of the Society of Regional Studies (interview, Vaškevičius 2014; interview, Trinkūnas 2011). As Albinas Vaškevičius remembers:

> There were ethnographic expeditions, and as a result of those ethnographic expeditions, ethnographic ensembles were formed. [..] At the end of the expedition, there was always a debriefing concert. [..] We would invite all the singers from whom we had collected songs, inviting them to a concert at a cultural center or school. During the concert, we would sing and invite the old ladies who had shared their songs with us. Often, not even on the stage, but next to it, to sing together with us. We would sing one, two, three songs, and they would sing too. And then we would say: well, now you have an ethnographic ensemble (interview, Vaškevičius 2014).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ethnocultural movement spread to other major cities in Lithuania. In Kaunas, the spirit of folklore revival was actively promoted by Veronika Janulevičiūtė-Povilionienė, who had been working at the Lithuanian Folklore Theatre in Rumšiškės since 1974, but lived in Kaunas. She frequently visited regional studies groups and led song evenings (Nakienė 2016: 115). Some of these groups later evolved into folklore ensembles. For example, the folklore ensemble *Kupolė* emerged in 1983 from a regional studies group that had been active at the Kaunas

Academy of Veterinary Studies since 1975. Others were born out of hiking clubs with strong links to the folklore movement. For instance, the ensemble *Goštauta* was founded in 1986 by members of the Kaunas Polytechnic hiking club *Ąžuolas*. Often, folklore ensembles in other cities were established by people who had graduated from Vilnius or Kaunas and had been engaged in regional studies and folklore activities during their university years, later continuing this work when assigned to other regions of Lithuania.

This folklore revival movement had a very ambiguous relationship with the Soviet regime and with the regime-promoted folk art and regional studies activities. On one hand, the fact that regional studies and folk art were encouraged and supported by the Soviet authorities provided a convenient excuse and a "safety net" for the folklore movement to develop. On the other hand, the members of the regional studies and folklore movement themselves avoided and disliked Soviet regional studies, which focused on collecting materials about Soviet partisans, the establishment of collective farms, and promoting a "Soviet folk art" style modelled on the Igor Moiseyev Dance Ensemble. As Antanas Gudelis, one of the leaders of the ethnocultural movement, explains:

> I organically dislike the *Lietuva* ensemble. [..] [All these ensembles of popular dances] were just copies of Moiseyev's ensemble. While [Jonas] Švedas[5] had done something authentic, it was still Soviet folklore. I used to call it "the folk dance of trained Lithuanian women". And everybody [in my circle] looked at it the same way. I was not alone. There was something else here – a striving for authentic things. And those authentic things were pulled from the depths. From the villages (interview, Gudelis 2010).

Non-harmonized, spontaneous, improvisational folklore was attractive to the youth of the time as a form of self-expression and an opportunity to escape Soviet uniformity and ideology. Although the authorities did not forbid the creation of ensembles, they remained cautious about them. For example, the folklore ensemble *Ratilio* of Vilnius University was shown on television and could perform on large stages (e.g., the ensemble's 15th-anniversary program was shown at the Youth Theatre Hall in Vilnius, and the then Minister of Culture attended the concert). However, the ensemble was not allowed to perform outside the USSR until 1984 (when it toured Poland and Bulgaria) and was only allowed to perform in the West for the first time in 1986 (Ramonaitė, Narušis 2018: 108).

The regional studies movement in the 1970s came under the disfavor of the KGB, especially because anti-Soviet nationalist and Catholic underground figures found a niche within its ranks. As KGB General Vaigauskas writes in his booklet:

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5   Jonas Švedas (1908–1971) was the founder and a long-standing leader of the State Song and Dance Ensemble *Lietuva*.

"From the mid-1960s until recent years, the KGB has been facing attempts by clerics and nationalists to ideologically influence young people and the intelligentsia by infiltrating the organizations (clubs, sections) of regional studies and tourism" (Vaigauskas 1986). The KGB notes state that "the objects view local studies as a legal form of carrying out organized national activities" (Tamoliūnienė 2007: 54).

And in fact, these organizations included quite a few underground figures who used the networks of local studies and hiking groups for underground activities and the recruitment of new people. For example, Algirdas Patackas, a famous underground activist and later a political prisoner, took part in regional studies expeditions and had links with *Ramuva*, while Alfonsas Vinclovas, who published *samizdat* books, participated in the Folk Song Club. In Kaunas, the political prisoner Povilas Butkevičius, Vytenis Andriukaitis, who attempted to create an underground university, Šarūnas Boruta, a member of the underground movement of Eucharistic Friends, and the brother of the editor-in-chief of the most famous underground publication, *The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*, were all associated with the ethnocultural movement (Ramonaitė 2010, 2015).

The KGB tried to dismantle the emerging, more dangerous networks of the ethnocultural movement by closing clubs or preventing them from being established. For example, Jūratė Eitminavičiūtė Dručkienė, a course mate of Jonas Trinkūnas, attempted to establish a Regional Studies Centre in Kaunas, but the KGB immediately blocked the initiative (Trinkūnas 2010; Tamoliūnienė 2007). Between 1973 and 1978, the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute (KPI) had an active regional studies group until it was forced to close under KGB pressure (interview, Vaškevičius 2014). However, the same people were able to continue their activities in other ways. For instance, some of the former members of the KPI regional studies group founded the Musical Folklore Group in 1974 at the Rumšiškės Open-Air Museum near Kaunas. When this group was also forced to shut down, its members moved to the regional studies club *Tėviškė* at the Institute of Physical Technical Energy Problems, which became an important center of self-sufficient society in Kaunas, closely monitored by the KGB (interview, Andriukaitis 2010; interview, Butkevičiūtė-Jurkuvienė 2010).

The greatest repression of the regional studies movement came during the so-called "regional studies case" (*kraštotyrininkų byla*) in 1973, in which Šarūnas Žukauskas and Vidmantas Povilionis (later the husband of folk singer Veronika Janulevičiūtė), who had been involved in regional studies and hikers' activities, were convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and of reproducing and distributing underground literature,[6]

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6   Povilionis was sentenced to two years in prison and was imprisoned in a camp in Mordovia (Matulevičienė 2007), while Žukauskas was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and was held in a strict regime camp in Perm (Gelžinis 2020).

and Jonas Trinkūnas was expelled from the university. More than 100 participants of the folklore and regional studies movement were questioned during the trial. However, the movement itself was not suppressed, but continued to develop and grow until the very beginning of the Singing Revolution in 1988 (Ramonaitė 2011).

It can be argued that the folklore revival movement in Lithuania that emerged in the 1960s had a dual character. One part was connected to the national and Catholic underground and, as such, was engaged – at least indirectly – in political activities. The other part remained essentially apolitical but somewhat distant from "normal" (Yurchak 2006) Soviet society. The political character of the movement was more pronounced in Kaunas than in Vilnius, and this had an impact on its relationship with *Sąjūdis*, as we will see in the next section.

The Role of Folklore Revival Movement
in Regaining Independence

This section explores whether, and in what specific ways, the folklore movement influenced the Singing Revolution that began in Lithuania in 1988. The main driving force behind the peaceful mass revolution in Lithuania was the grassroots movement *Sąjūdis* (the equivalent of Popular Fronts in Estonia and Latvia), founded in Vilnius in June 1988. Within a few months, it had spread throughout Lithuania, attracting around 200,000 members. Even more people became involved in mass rallies and other events, the most notable of which – the Baltic Way in 1989 – is estimated to have involved around 0.5 million Lithuanians (Laurinavičius, Sirutavičius 2008: 342).

Both the emergence of *Sąjūdis* as a social movement and the mass mobilization in Soviet Lithuania appear quite puzzling, considering that Soviet society is generally characterized as atomized, passive, and conformist (Streikus 2011; Putinaitė 2007). According to resource mobilization theory, grievances alone are not sufficient for a social movement to emerge; resources are also necessary – especially pre-existing social networks and non-systemic ideas.

In the following part of the article, I will examine whether and how the ethnocultural movement that had been developing since the 1960s contributed to the mass mobilization of the late 1980s. Specifically, I will analyze what kinds of resources the folklore revival movement provided to the Singing Revolution and how they were used.

As Edwards and McCarthy (2004) state, the resources of social movements can be divided into several types: moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material. Moral resources, according to Edwards and McCarthy, are those that give the movement authority and legitimacy (e.g., the support of prominent

individuals). Cultural resources include ideas, cultural identities, specific knowledge, and tactical repertoires, as well as cultural production such as music, literature, and film. Social-organizational resources refer to social networks and organizations – what is often referred to as social capital. Human resources include labor, experience, skills, and expertise. Finally, material resources consist of money and physical capital.

In the following subsections, I will present four main ways in which the folklore revival movement contributed its resources to the national revival: through its direct connection with the Green and heritage protection movements, through the folklore festival *Skamba skamba kankliai*, through specific leaders who participated in *Sąjūdis*, and through singing practices.

The Emergence of Green and Heritage Protection Clubs

Although it is generally agreed that the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis* played a key role in the regaining of independence, even before its establishment, the heritage protection and the Green movements – which were founded about a year earlier – were also crucial (Čepaitis 2007; Laurinavičius, Sirutavičius 2008). These movements, which later joined *Sąjūdis* with youthful vitality, were the first harbingers and catalysts of change. The ecological protest march they organized in Lithuania in the summer of 1988 (28 July – 5 August), which carried the Lithuanian tricolor flag across the country and thus signaled the beginning of political change to ordinary Lithuanians, facilitated the transition toward independence.

It was the Greens and the heritage protection movement that had a very direct link to the folklore revival and the broader ethnocultural movement, which, in addition to folklorists and regional studies activists, also included hiking clubs (Ramonaitė 2011). The Green movement in Lithuania is closely related to the heritage protection or monument protection (*paminklosauga* in Lithuanian) movement, as two of the main Green clubs – the Atgaja Club in Kaunas and the Aukuras Club in Šiauliai – positioned themselves as both heritage protection and ecology clubs. On the other hand, these movements were also somewhat separate: the Young Heritage Protectionists' Club and the Talka Club in Vilnius identified themselves only as heritage protection clubs, while the Žemyna Club in Vilnius and the Žvejonė Club in Klaipėda identified themselves only as environmental clubs. Of all these clubs, Talka, Atgaja and Aukuras had direct links to the ethnocultural movement (Kavaliauskaitė 2011; Kulevičius 2011).

The Talka Club was founded in April 1987 in Vilnius under the auspices of the

Lithuanian Cultural Foundation (whose chairman, the renowned geographer Česlovas Kudaba, was also involved in the regional studies movement – not as an active participant, but as an important patron). The aim of the club was to mobilize the public to save cultural treasures and monuments through very concrete actions – clean-ups (interview, Songaila 2010). However, the club soon began to organize not only clean-ups but also protests against the destruction of cultural monuments in Vilnius, Kernavė, and elsewhere. The original founders of the club were heritage specialists and activists from the public Faculty of Monument Protection of the People's University, but they were soon joined by another group connected to the folklore movement: members of the folklore ensemble of the Faculty of History of Vilnius University, led by Vytautas Musteikis. One of them, Gintaras Songaila, soon became the head of the Talka Club (Kulevičius 2011).

The Atgaja Club was founded in Kaunas in July 1987 as a heritage preservation club, following the example of the Vilnius Talka, which they had learned about through networks of folklorists, hikers, and local historians (Kavaliauskaitė 2011: 259). Saulius Gricius, the founder and ideological leader of Atgaja (like other Atgaja pioneers), was closely tied with the ethnocultural movement: he was a participant and, at one time, the leader of the Kaunas Polytechnic's Hiking Club *Ąžuolas*; he was in contact with Jonas Trinkūnas; and he used to visit the house of Veronika Povilionienė and Vidmantas Povilionis in Kaunas, where a kind of "tea club" was operating. He also participated in the Rumšiškės seminar, organized around 1987, where many activists of the ethnocultural movement took part. Thus, the first and most important core of the Atgaja Club was made up of participants in the ethno-cultural movement, although it was later joined by a wide variety of people, such as artists, punks, heavy rockers, and other "informals". As Gricius himself acknowledged, the idea of the Atgaja Club emerged during the Midsummer festival, while wearing national costumes (cited in Kavaliauskaitė 2011: 259).

The Atgaja Club drew from the ethnocultural movement not only human resources (members and leaders) but also ecological ideas. Saulius Gricius claimed that it was through folklore that he realized the importance of nature in the Lithuanian worldview: "After studying ethnology and folklore, I realized that the spirit and lifestyle of a Lithuanian is natural and green" (cited in Žemulis 2021). According to him, "It is impossible to overestimate the significance of folk song for our culture. It is the songs, tales and stories of the ancients that are the basic science of nature conservation that everyone should listen to" (cited in Žemulis 2021). He also read the works of the famous ethnologist Marija Gimbutienė and was interested in the abilities of old Baltic pagan cultures to live in harmony with nature (Kavaliauskaitė 2011: 259). Preserving nature was also one of the main ethical

principles of the hiking clubs, as stated in the famous Punios Treaty[7] of the hikers (Ramonaitė 2011).

Finally, the Atgaja Club drew organizational skills from the ethnocultural movement. It was their leaders' experience in hiking and their knowledge in regional studies that allowed them to plan the 1988 ecological protest march across Lithuania on an impressive scale (Kavaliauskaitė 2011: 262). Singing folk songs was one of the important unifying activities for club members. Many of the club's activities were linked to folklore and local history: they organized folklore evenings and popularized folk songs among people who had previously been unfamiliar with folklore.

The Aukuras Club, founded in Šiauliai in early June 1988, is also closely linked to the folklore movement (Kavaliauskaitė 2011: 235). Its ideological leader, Rimantas Braziulis, was an active member of the folklore and regional studies movement and one of the founders of the *VISI* folklore ensemble in Vilnius in 1980. After finishing his studies in Vilnius, he moved to Šiauliai and established the Patrimpas Folklore Club. The club organized expeditions, folklore evenings, and folk celebrations. It was the members of the Patrimpas Club who formed the core of Aukuras (interview, Braziulis 2010). Through Braziulis, the Aukuras Club immediately had links with the Atgaja and Talka Clubs: Musteikis from the Talka Club had also participated in the *VISI* ensemble (Musteikis 2010), and Braziulis knew Saulius Gricius through Jonas Trinkūnas (interview, Braziulis 2010).

The activities of the Aukuras Club revolved mainly around the protection of the Kurtuvėnai Landscape Reserve. According to Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė, it was the preservation of the ethnic landscape that has become the central feature distinguishing Aukuras from other green clubs. The members of the club not only organized protests but also invited members to participate in clean-ups and revived the symbolic topography of the landscape – they cleaned up the Bubiai Mound, the Rebel Hill, and other historical monuments. They also revived ethnographic festivals by organizing *Rasos* (the Midsummer Festival) and reviving *Užgavėnes* (Shrove Tuesday), which had been banned during the Soviet era (Kavaliauskaitė 2011).

The Unexpected Connection Between *Sąjūdis* and the *Skamba Skamba Kankliai* Festival

The Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis* (then known as the Lithuanian Movement for Perestroika) was founded on 3 June 1988, when the *Sąjūdis* Initiative Group was formed in Vilnius

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7   The Treaty of Punia was signed in 1966 in the Punia Forest by the most prominent hiking leaders in Lithuania. It outlined the key principles of hiking activity and ethics.

during an event at the Academy of Sciences. The event, which was formally devoted to discussing amendments to the Constitution of the Lithuanian SSR, served – as planned – as the occasion for founding *Sąjūdis*, following the example of the Popular Front of Estonia. The founding itself was not easy and was made possible by a series of fortuitous circumstances, one of the most important being the folklore festival held the week before (Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė 2011).

The inspiration for *Sąjūdis* came from Ivar Raig, a member of the Popular Front of Estonia, and academician Mikhail Bronstein, who attended an economists' conference in Vilnius on 26 May 1988. After the conference, Raig spoke about the Popular Front of Estonia and urged Lithuania to follow its example. At the Institute of Economics, such ideas were met with fear rather than enthusiasm (interview, Medalinskas 2009). However, Alvydas Medalinskas, then a postgraduate student of economics who had contacts from his own background, asked Raig to stay in Vilnius for at least one more day and decided to organize a meeting with a more receptive audience. Organizing a meeting in one day without modern technology might seem like an impossible mission, but Medalinskas was helped by the fact that the *Skamba skamba kankliai* Festival was taking place in Vilnius at the time.

The festival has been held annually in Vilnius since 1974. Although it was originally founded as a festival of stylized folk music, it eventually evolved into a festival of authentic folklore and became a counterpoint to stylized folk art (Ričkutė 2017) – a kind of refuge for a self-sufficient society. What distinguished it from other official Soviet-era events was the absence of Soviet posters, slogans, and official ceremonies – there were simply authentic songs and dances, often continuing spontaneously into the night. The festival is held every year on the last weekend in May, not only in concert halls but also in the courtyards and streets of Vilnius' Old Town, without any tickets. It was therefore common for the members of the intelligentsia, students and others seeking to escape the official culture of the time – even those not necessarily part of the folk movement – to stop by, at least for a short while.

As Medalinskas himself recalls – although he was not a participant in the folklore movement – he had planned to go to the festival that evening and suddenly had the idea that this was where he might find people who could help him organize an alternative meeting with Raig. And indeed, within an hour at the festival, he met people from the Talka and Žemyna Clubs who helped him secure a room for the meeting and invite others to attend the gathering with Raig on 27 May (interview, Medalinskas 2009). It was at this spontaneously organized meeting that the decision to create *Sąjūdis* a week later was made, and an organizational group was formed to secure a hall, gather an audience, and, most importantly, ensure that the members of the *Sąjūdis* Initiative Group would be trustworthy individuals. This fortunate

coincidence reiterates the importance of the social networks of a self-sufficient society as essential resources for the emergence of a new social movement.

People of the Ethnocultural Movement in *Sąjūdis*

Although folklorists played a decisive role in the founding of *Sąjūdis* (Gintaras Songaila was one of the five members of the organizational team created on 27 May), the *Sąjūdis* Initiative Group itself – consisting of 35 members – did not include many representatives of the ethnocultural movement. In fact, only Songaila can be considered a true representative of the folklore movement within the central initiative group.[8]

However, there were others connected to the ethnocultural movement: first of all, the aforementioned professor Česlovas Kudaba, who was a patron of the regional studies movement; Algirdas Kaušpėdas, who had connections with Veronika and Vidmantas Povilionis; and one of the leaders of *Sąjūdis*, Romualdas Ozolas, who had participated in the *Ramuva* expeditions (interview, Gudelis 2010). Vytautas Landsbergis also had some ties to the folklore revival movement – his son, V. V. Landsbergis, was at that time participating in the *Ratilio* ensemble, which had been recommended to him by his father (interview, Landsbergis 2018). As mentioned above, Medalinskas also had acquaintances among folklorists.

However, the most important leaders of the ethnocultural movement were not included in the Initiative Group for several reasons. First, they were unknown to the wider public, while the central initiative group aimed to include prominent figures (well-known poets, writers, and journalists) to ensure *Sąjūdis*'s popularity and make it more difficult for the regime to repress the movement. Secondly, in order to legalize itself, *Sąjūdis* was formed under the banner of perestroika supporters. As a result, dissidents, underground activists, and others already under the government's "magnifying glass" were avoided. The most politically active people of the ethnocultural movement were under KGB surveillance and therefore deliberately avoided direct involvement with *Sąjūdis*. Nevertheless, they remained close to the movement and supported it in various ways – without stepping into the front ranks (interview, Vinclovas 2010).

The situation in Kaunas, the second largest city in Lithuania, was quite different. People from the ethnocultural movement and the related Catholic underground formed one of the most important nuclei of the Kaunas movement, which

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8   Before becoming a leader of the Talka Club, he was a hiker and a member of the folk group of the Faculty of History of Vilnius University.

determined the much more unsystematic character of this group (Bartkevičius, Bulota 2011). The *Sąjūdis* Initiative Group of 42 people was established in Kaunas on 10 June 1988. It included two significant figures of the ethnocultural movement, both former political prisoners – Vidmantas Povilionis and Algirdas Patackas (the latter, in particular, became one of the most important leaders of Kaunas *Sąjūdis*). The leader of the Atgaja Club, Saulius Gricius, and folklorist Saulius Dambrauskas were also part of the Initiative Group (Bartkevičius 2009). Later on, the much more radical wing of Kaunas *Sąjūdis* had a considerable influence on the goals and methods of action of the broader *Sąjūdis* movement.

Folk Songs in Mass Rallies

As shown in the previous subsections, the folk revival movement influenced both the Green and heritage movement, as well as the founding of *Sąjūdis*. But what was its influence on the Singing Revolution? Specifically, what was the connection to the songs heard at the mass rallies of the liberation movement?

The term 'Singing Revolution' originated in Estonia, where it was used to describe the spontaneous mass night singing at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds in June 1988 (Brüggemann, Kasekamp 2014). The term was later adopted in Lithuania, particularly due to the importance of rock music – Algirdas Kaušpėdas, the leader of the popular band *Antis*, became one of the important faces of *Sąjūdis*, and the Rock Marches through Lithuania became important heralds of the movement. Additionally, folk songs accompanied every *Sąjūdis* event.

Most often, these folk songs were not performed during the official parts of rallies or other actions. Instead, they would be sung spontaneously by participants afterwards – usually partisan songs, exile songs, or other patriotic pieces, though sometimes also love songs and other widely known folk songs. As Guntis Šmidchens (2014) observes, it was not so much the lyrics themselves (which were usually lyrical rather than militant), but the very practice of singing that mattered. Singing acted as a bonding force, fostering unity and a sense of togetherness.

While choral singing has deeper and stronger roots in Estonia and Latvia due to the influence of Protestantism, in Lithuania, singing folk songs remained a common practice only until the late Soviet era. As the natural tradition of village singing gradually faded, it was taken up by ethnographic and folklore ensembles that began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. The boom in the creation of these folklore ensembles was particularly intense just before the *Sąjūdis* period. As Regimantas Žitkauskas, a member of *Ratilio* from 1983 to 1991, recalls:

> When the time of *Sąjūdis*, the liberation, was approaching, all of Lithuania was 'boiling' with those folklore ensembles. Apparently, this was a form of resistance. Almost every factory had a folklore group. I myself led three folklore ensembles simultaneously and taught people to play instruments (cited in Ramonaitė, Narušis 2018: 129).

Folklore researchers estimate that in 1986, there were 782 folklore ensembles in Lithuania, increasing to 901 in 1987, of which 771 were located in rural areas and 130 in cities (Apanavičius et al. 2015: 23).

It is difficult to estimate what proportion of participants in the rallies and other activities of the Revival period were members of folklore ensembles, but their importance in inspiring spontaneous singing during these events was undoubtedly great. Although many people in society at that time could sing, and there were numerous songs well known throughout Lithuania, folk singing still needed a leader – someone with a strong voice who could take on that role. This is exactly what members of the folklore ensembles did. As Rima Užpalytė-Daugirdienė, a member and one of the leaders of the *Ratilio* folk group from 1977 to 1986, reflects on the role of folklorists:

> If you know how to sing – you have a weapon. I remember myself: a rally at the Cathedral, a sea of people, and it is enough to start – I myself started 'Oh, don't cry, my mother' (*Oi neverk motušėle*) and the whole Cathedral [square] sang, everyone sang. The ensemble gave the ability to sing, the confidence not to be afraid of an audience of thousands, and the skill to lead it (cited in Ramonaitė, Narušis 2018: 137).

Thus, it becomes evident that the folklore movement made a significant contribution to the Singing Revolution – both through cultural resources, by supporting and expanding the repertoire of widely known songs, and through singing skills and leadership, by providing individuals capable of leading songs that fostered a sense of solidarity among the masses.

Conclusions

The folklore revival movement in Lithuania began in the 1960s with regional study expeditions, during which young people – already studying in the city – rediscovered the beauty of village songs and traditional lifestyles that had remained largely untouched by the Soviet regime. Additionally, the revival was fueled by a tradition of everyday singing in Lithuania, which, although in decline, was still alive at the time.

One can agree with Violeta Davoliūtė (2014) that the folklore revival movement in Lithuania was part of a broader cultural phenomenon – the "rustic turn" – which serves as a kind of counter-reaction to Soviet modernity. However, it was also a distinct phenomenon with its own specific causes. The folklore movement

simultaneously acted as a response to Soviet ideologization, to the suspension and meaninglessness of Soviet rituals (Yurchak 2006), and to the pervasive boredom that affected society (Vaiseta 2014). For the young people of the era, turning back to pre-modern rural traditions meant discovering an authentic way of life and a renewed sense of community through singing.

The energy and knowledge accumulated during the expeditions sparked a boom of urban folklore ensembles and folklore clubs, while the enthusiasm of young people and their teachers encouraged rural communities to form ethnographic ensembles. These ensembles were formally permitted by the authorities because they aligned ideologically with the regime's goals of supporting "peasant culture" or the culture of ordinary working people (notably, the Lithuanian term for folk culture – *liaudies kultūra* – has a dual meaning: "folk culture" and "working people's culture"). However, from the outset, the ethnocultural movement sought to break free from the regime's control and framework. Perhaps by coincidence, the ethno-cultural movement in Lithuania attracted underground actors, a development that in some cases lent it a non-systemic character and triggered repressive responses from the regime.

Although the ethnocultural movement was not overtly political, it had a significant and tangible impact on the national independence movement in the late 1980s. As resource mobilization theory insightfully argues, social movements do not arise out of nowhere – they require pre-existing social networks, individuals with ideas and connections, and access to organizational resources. These were precisely the kinds of resources the ethnocultural movement provided: first to the Green and heritage protection movements, and later to *Sąjūdis*. For the Green movement, folklore offered inspiration for ecological thinking, organizational experience, and a reliable network of committed individuals. For the early formation of *Sąjūdis*, it provided a space for people unbound by the system – an environment where the idea of a popular front, inspired by developments in Estonia, could take root. And for the growth and vitality of *Sąjūdis*, it contributed with the unifying power of song – bringing people together into a peaceful, cohesive, and morally uplifted community.

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Revival Manifestos

(Atdzimšanas kustību manifesti)

Digne Ūdre-Lielbārde

PhD in folkloristics; Archives of Latvian Folklore,
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
PhD folkloristikā; Latviešu folkloras krātuve,
Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: digne.udre@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0003-2424-2517

**Visualizing Cultural Opposition:
Folklore Movement in Late Soviet Latvia**

**Vizualizējot kultūras opozīciju:
folkloras kustība vēlīnajā Padomju Latvijā**

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
folk revival,	folkloras atdzimšanas kustība,
visuality,	vizualitāte,
socialist escapes,	alternatīvās dzīves telpas sociālismā,
Singing Revolution,	Dziesmotā revolūcija,
folk ornament,	ornaments,
symbols,	simboli,
Baltic States	Baltijas valstis

Summary   The folklore movement, synonymous with 'folk revival', is both an emic and etic term describing the increased interest in folklore across large parts of Latvian society from the late 1970s to the 1990s. Aimed against stylized folklore performances promoted by the Soviet cultural policy, the folklore movement became a powerful expression of countercultural creativity and an alternative lifestyle. As a form of cultural opposition, it was part of the Singing Revolution (1987–1991). The aim of the article is to explore folklore movement-related expressions of cultural opposition that were carried out in the visual realm. Based on interviews, analysis of visual materials, and published sources, the article examines three cases of visual opposition and self-representation within the folklore movement in Latvia. First, folk costume and self-fashioning trends reveal a curious connection between the folklore movement and hippie imagery. Second, the Soviet-banned carmine red-white-carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia is considered in the context of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica '88*, marking the point at which the folklore movement gained clear political outlines. Third, the uses of folk ornament, which extended beyond the circles of the folklore movement, functioned as a culturally grounded tool for expressing dissent, and provided a shared repertoire of visual symbols.

Kopsavilkums   Folkloras kustība ir gan emisks, gan etisks jēdziens, kas raksturo izteikto interesi par folkloru plašā Latvijas sabiedrības daļā no 20. gs. 70. gadu beigām līdz 20. gs. 90. gadiem. Vēršoties pret stilizētiem folkloras priekšnesumiem, ko veicināja padomju amatiermākslas kultūrpolitika, folkloras kustība kļuva par spēcīgu kontrkultūras un alternatīva dzīvesveida izpausmi. Kā kultūras opozīcija tā bija daļa no Dziesmotās revolūcijas (1987–1991). Raksta mērķis ir analizēt ar folkloras kustību saistītās vizuālās kultūras opozīcijas izpausmes. Balstoties intervijās, vizuālo materiālu un publicēto avotu analīzē, raksts pievēršas trīs vizuālās opozīcijas un folkloras kustības pašreprezentācijas gadījumiem. Pirmkārt, individuālā tēla un tautas tērpa lietošanas tendencēm, kas atklāj interesantu saikni starp folkloras kustību un ar hipijiem saistīto vizualitāti. Otrkārt, rakstā analizēts padomju okupācijas laikā aizliegtā neatkarīgās Latvijas Republikas sarkanbaltsarkanā karoga publiska eksponēšana folkloras festivāla *Baltica '88* atklāšanas koncertā 1988. gada 13. jūlijā, kas iezīmē politisku pavērsienu kustības attīstībā. Treškārt, rakstā aplūkota plašākas sabiedrības interese par latvisko tautas ornamentu un tā mitoloģisko interpetāciju, kas veidoja kultūras opozīcijas vizuālo simbolu repertuāru.

Introduction

> *Andris took photographs at that summer's Latvian Song and Dance Festival, which he called 'Padomju uzvaras svētki' ('Soviet Victory Fest'). He came home fully disgusted, telling me I hadn't missed anything. The Latvian song festival tradition had been turned into a perverse display of Soviet military might sprinkled with liberal doses of Russian language and culture. Of course, 1985 marked the 40th anniversary of the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic States. In fact, the 1985 Latvian SSR Song and Dance Festival was more like a Soviet military lovefest, with red communist flags, men in military uniforms, mass dancer formations [..] The real Latvian Song and Dance Festival of '85 took place on Folklore Day at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, which was dedicated to Latvian folk music, folk traditions, crafts, and, of course, to the 150th birthday of Krišjānis Barons (b. 1835), "Father of the (Latvian) Daina." No Russian military tunes or communist propaganda there! Latvian folk music ensembles from all over Latvia had gathered together in their beautiful traditional folk costumes to sing old Latvian folk songs and perform folk dances. Artisans demonstrated their skills while selling beautiful handmade baskets, wooden toys, wool blankets, linen towels, jewelry, and ceramics, which attracted crowds of happy people (Laima 2017: 363).*

This emotionally colored account is authored by Rita Laima (b. 1960), an American-born Latvian artist and writer. Her autobiographical book *Skylarks and Rebels: A Memoir about the Soviet Russian Occupation of Latvia, Life in a Totalitarian State, and Freedom* (2017) tells the story of her move to late socialist Latvia after her marriage to photographer Andris Krieviņš. Laima's comparison between the Soviet amateur art system's and Russification policy-controlled Latvian Song and Dance Festival and the Folklore Day at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum – though expressed in extreme binaries, which in reality were more multilayered than this black-and-white account (see Herzog 2010) – sets the scene for introducing the ideas fueling the folklore movement in Latvia. Some of these binaries are folklore as a spectacle vs. folklore as lifestyle, mass-scale parades vs. intimate community gatherings, and institutionalized and Soviet ideology-driven uses of folklore vs. vernacular ones. Laima's partial outsider's gaze, however, is close to how these questions have been voiced in publications, with the folklore movement characterized by such keywords as "true, real, natural, national, and spontaneous", whereas Sovietized forms of folklorism were described as "false, mendacious, artificial, and manipulated" (Boiko 2001: 115). In more elaborate analyses, folklore is seen as a hybrid field that allowed "the cultivation of national resistance and ethnic self-expression under the banners of folklore studies, folk art, and traditional culture", while at the same time it easily "accommodated communist propaganda and socialist internationalism" (Ķencis 2024b: 34; see also Herzog 2010). Despite this ambiguous position, this

article is grounded in the premise that certain folklore-related activities were a form of cultural opposition and counterculture during socialism in Eastern Europe (Csurgó et al. 2018).

The folklore movement, also synonymous with 'folklore revival' (*folkloras kustība*), is both an emic and etic term describing the increased interest in folklore and traditional culture in large parts of Latvian society from the late 1970s to the 1990s. The mushrooming of folklore groups was at the core of the process, but it was interwoven with other fields such as folk art, crafts, and an interest in history and regional studies. Aimed against the stylized folklore performances promoted by the Soviet cultural policy of amateur art, the folklore movement became a powerful expression of countercultural creativity and an alternative lifestyle. As a form of cultural opposition, it became part of the Singing Revolution (1987–1991) leading to the independence of the Baltic States. The folklore movement was a continuation of much earlier processes (Lielbārdis 2025, this issue) and also a global phenomena (Bithell, Hill 2014; Stavělová, Buckland 2018), with the cultural opposition particularly expressed in the Baltic States (Davoliūtė, Rudling 2023 for Lithuania; Kuutma 1998 for Estonia).

Cultural opposition is understood here as "unarmed opposition, i.e., non-violent resistance to the Soviet regime's political, ideological and cultural pressure" (Grybkauskas, Sirutavičius 2018: 53). Discussions on resistance, autonomous, and non-conformist activities show that two forms of resistance can be distinguished: first, deliberate dissent expressed in open political claims, and second, autonomous exercises of cultural freedom, meaning cultural groups with no explicit political program, such as hippies, punks, avant-garde artists, youth cultures, and alternative religious communities (Apor et al. 2018: 10–11). The folk revivalists used the state-supported amateur art system, which nonetheless allowed nurturing anti-Soviet attitudes without expressing overt dissent. However, as will be discussed in the article, in the second half of the 1980s the movement took on the outlines of open political resistance. The social and political changes covering the years from 1985 to 1991 became possible after the USSR's general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, initiated the political reforms of perestroika and glasnost. The emergence of grassroots movements, such as folklore and environmental movements, facilitated the consolidation of popular dissent, thus contributing to the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Karklins 1994; Schwartz 2006; Šmidchens 2014).

In its initial stages, the folklore movement was one example of the "socialist escapes" – an alternative to the permeated and dull reality of Soviet ideology (Giustino et al. 2013). In everyday life under communist regimes, where physical escape was nearly impossible, "socialist escapes" as leisure activities and counter-

cultural ways of life "allowed people to 'escape' socialism 'without leaving it'" (Vari 2013: 3). Building autonomous spaces and alternative identities free of official constraints and dogmas was the motivation behind many of the socialist escapes. Representing a softer form of dissent, or cultural opposition, these activities – from tourism, hitchhiking, and sports to music festivals – were various expressions directed at "people's attempts to acquire their own agency in the field of culture, leisure, and entertainment" (Vari 2013: 4). Drawing from personal experience, Balázs Balogh and Ágnes Fülemile have aptly described the agency that these informal networks provided for the urban folk dance and music revival, or *Táncház*, in socialist Hungary:

> These grassroots circles of voluntary groups of sociable young people sharing similar ideas, tastes and world-views provided a real alternative in the period of socialism, when participation in the communist youth movement, school events, commemorations and political demonstrations were all mandated and ideologically manipulated. It was a real shift from the disfavored compulsory passive presence to a voluntary, emotionally supported active participation, which also created a strong feeling of commonality and solidarity (Balogh, Fülemile 2008: 51).

Many of the socialist escapes were facilitated by the Soviet regime and only later "embraced and turned into escape venues by the masses living under socialism" (Vari 2013: 4). Sometimes there were more twists and turns between nonconformist claims and state-supported activities. For example, the International Folklore Festival *Baltica*,[1] organized annually between Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, was initiated by the USSR Ministry of Culture. A year after a conference in Tallinn in 1985, where Soviet representatives met with the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (*Conseil international des organisations de festivals de folklore et d'arts traditionnelles*, CIOFF), an official decree was passed by the USSR Ministry of Culture, formally initiating the festival *Baltica* (Šmidchens 1996). Seeing this decision as an attempt to control the growing grassroots appeal for the authentic folklore which allowed folk revivalists to build autonomous spaces and alternative identities, Guntis Šmidchens has argued that "Moscow hoped to organize a mass propaganda event which would declare Soviet support for international friendship and ethnic harmony while keeping the Baltic folklore ensembles and their form of performance under strict control" (Šmidchens 1996: 145). This shows that, even though binaries are good for the consolidation of identity, the situation on the ground almost always is more complex than black-and-white accounts of it. From

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1   Since 1987, when *Baltica* took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, it has been a continuing event organized annually in each of the three Baltic States. For more on *Baltica*, see Bertran 2025 and Ābelkina 2025, both in this issue.

the Soviet-initiated and supported festival – the first of which, in Vilnius in 1987, was heavily criticized for resembling Soviet mass-scale propaganda events (Šmidchens 1996: 146–148) – a year later *Baltica* turned into a mass demonstration of anti-Soviet attitudes.

The aim of the article is to explore the folklore movement-related expressions of cultural opposition that were carried out in the visual realm. Representation in visual terms functioned both as a tool for consolidating self-representational expressions of identity (Doerr et al. 2013) and as a means of visualizing discontent against the Soviet regime. Based on interviews with participants of the folklore movement in Latvia,[2] analysis of visual materials (photos and video recordings), and published sources, the article examines both the expressions of visual opposition and the self-representation of the folklore movement in Latvia.

The audial aspects of the folklore movement (Šmidchens 1996; Muktupāvels 2011; Klotiņš 2002; Boiko 2001; Weaver et al. 2023) have been covered extensively, as has the soundscape of the Singing Revolution (Kudiņš 2019; Šmidchens 2014; Martinelli 2019; Ryynanen, Talviste 2023), whereas the visual aspects have received far less scholarly attention. This article aims to fill this gap by exploring three cases of visuality: first, folk costume and self-fashioning trends that reveal a curious connection between the folklore movement and hippie imagery; second, the Soviet-banned carmine red-white-carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia in the context of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica '88*, marking the point at which the folklore movement gained clear political outlines; and third, the use of folk ornament, which reached beyond the circles of the folklore movement and witnessed a wave of new appreciation and application.

Folklore in Soviet Aesthetics

Folklore-related themes had a distinct role in Soviet aesthetics and visual propaganda. As argued by Odeta Rudling, "the visual encodings of the folklore field started to emerge in the Soviet Union by the second half of the 1930s" when the meaning of folklore was reformulated as "an oral poetic creation of the broad masses" (Rudling 2018: 210–211). In this line of thought, folklore became "a controversial mix of revolutionary ideas of contemporary folklore, Socialist Realist clichés, and Soviet propaganda, laced

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2   The interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2024 within the research project *Folklore Revival in Latvia: Resources, Ideologies and Practices,* funded by the Latvian Council of Science (project No. lzp-2021/1-0243), and are stored at the Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK Fkk1 *Folklore Movement Collections: Interviews with participants of the folklore movement*, which currently contains 47 interviews.

with Stalin's cult of personality" (Ķencis 2024a: 9). Folk art was declared as "the basis of all Soviet culture" (Herzog 2010: 118). Folklore-related visuality became part of the aesthetic canon of Socialist Realism. After the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, these ideas were transferred to illegally annexed territories and later to Soviet Bloc countries as well.

Folklore-related visuality was part of the complex web of meanings and attitudes under the *national form and socialist content* slogan. In her study on the visual representations of Soviet-era Song and Dance Festivals in Estonia, Elo-Hanna Seljamaa states that ethnic cultural forms were used as "temporary vehicles for spreading socialist ideology on the way to communism" (Seljamaa 2017: 276). Moreover, as "forms tend to outlive contents", relying on familiar forms meant establishing trust by means of continuity of form, reaching beyond simple subordination (Seljamaa 2017: 287). In a similar way, Sirje Helme sees the use of familiar visual forms as a part of the Soviet ideological manipulation that drew on national sentiment:

> Under the guise of preserving national uniqueness, the use of the decorative aspects of folk traditions was permitted – national folk costumes were allowed on festive occasions, mass choral songs were sung in Estonia and Latvia [..] It was undoubtedly politically significant to create for the rest of the world a picture of a peaceful melting pot of national and international culture. Allowing such minimal nationalistic activity was also a way to control opposition movements (Helme 2002: 7).

The importance of the continuity of familiar, folklore-related visual forms is also revealed in the attempts to establish the new 'Socialist traditions' or 'Soviet traditions'. As part of the anti-religious campaign in Latvia, it was intended to eradicate religious rituals from everyday life (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2017, 2019; Ozoliņš 2025). It was aimed at baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as calendric celebrations. The implementation of these traditions relied on the familiar forms of folklore and folk art. To make the new Soviet traditions accepted by society, "the presence of codes and symbols provided by the traditional culture in terms of the content and the visual arrangement of festivities" was a pivotal resource (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2017: 139).

Folklore was a visual medium of both socialism and national identity (Rudling 2018). This meant that similar or sometimes even identical visual forms could carry oppositional messages. One such medium was the folk costume. In socialist ideology, folk costumes were the most iconic part of Soviet folklore-related visuality: from the Friendship of the Peoples Fountain in Moscow, with statues in folk costume representing the republics of the Soviet Union, to staged folk dance performances under the banners of Lenin and Stalin during the Song and Dance Festivals in the

Baltic Soviet Republics. In their Sovietized form, folk costumes became a "national uniform" (Seljamaa 2017: 285). In Latvia, since the national awakening (1850s–1890s), the folk costume had been one of the most recognized cornerstones of ethnic identity, deeply tied to representations of national sentiment (Karlsone 2015). For most of the Soviet period, in official contexts, the folk costume was used as "a poster-like cliché, asserting the national form of socialist internationalism" (Karlsone 2019: 65). Despite this, alongside the official, Soviet ideology-driven connotation attached to the folk costume, its previously accumulated symbolic meanings remained active. Besides the officially sanctioned uses of folk costume as a kitsch-like decorative element, there existed "a deeply personal connection with the folk costume as a symbol of national identity and as a tradition rooted in the folk culture" (Karlsone 2019: 66). Therefore, the folk costume, especially outside Soviet-authorized performances, was one of the means of expressing cultural opposition.

This was not just a question about the altered content of a national form. There were changes made to folk costumes to adapt them to the needs of the Soviet amateur art system. This was most visible in the folk costumes designed for staged folk dances, with "a new look with stylized costumes and a unified visual image" – skirts were made shorter and lighter, details from different ethnographic regions were mixed, and long artificial braids were used (Gailīte 2024: 204) to fit the dance choreographies with "faster tempos, higher jumps, brilliant, never-fading smiles on the dancers' lips" (Klotiņš 2002: 112). Even though large parts of these Soviet layers have become an integral part of the stage folk dance tradition (Kapper 2016), Sovietized folk dance was one of the most criticized visual and performative expressions of folk art, drawing folk revivalists toward what was perceived as more authentic ways of expression and performance. This is also the reason I have taken this rather lengthy introduction to outline the backdrop against which the ideas of the folklore movement consolidated.

Individualized Visuality, Self-Fashioning and Hippie Imagery

Objection to Sovietized and kitschy forms of folk costume led folk revivalists to develop an interest in what was perceived as a more authentic and individualized look. On the one hand, there was a deep fascination with traditional items of clothing that represented the authentic way of dressing, so historical material was replicated with detailed precision; on the other hand, more playful attitudes existed, with just some elements of the folk costume used in combination with the fashion style of the time. The homogenized uses of folk costume as a national uniform were opposed to by

wearing handmade items of clothing created using traditional techniques and materials. Regional differences of textile traditions were taken into consideration; where possible, inherited parts of clothing were used. Any unnecessary decoration was avoided, and a simple look was preferred, often leading to "partially completed outfit, where the girl only needed a white linen shirt and traditional skirt, which were at best complemented by a woven belt" (Karlsone 2019: 67) (see Figure 1). Some excellent examples of this clothing style can be seen in the film *Latvian Folklore* (*Latviešu folklora*, 1983),[3] which was made with the participation of the folklore group *Savieši*. However, this went beyond the use of folk costume, as anything considered artificial was discarded. The decorative pomposity of stage folk dance was especially rejected. As remembered by Ērika Māldere, folklore group *Savieši* had been invited to sing alongside the stage folk dancers at a TV program: "We were aghast that they [stage folk dancers] had to put on makeup before the concert. The makeup artists also tried to glue fake mustaches on some of our guys. We all said that we didn't need makeup artists; we resisted it" (interview, Māldere 2023).

Considerable efforts were directed at self-education. One of the liveliest hubs for making folk costumes was the Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts, which also housed the folklore group *Savieši*.[4] There was an explicit feeling of authenticity related to crafting one's own folk costume: "We had to sew folk blouses during needlework lessons. I went to the Valmiera Museum, did research there, and embroidered it. I made my folk costume when I was 18 years old. We dyed the yarn ourselves, weaved skirts, sewed blouses" (interview, Māldere 2023). Besides self-education, folklore groups sought advice from leading specialists in the field. As remembered by Helmī Stalte (1949–2023), the leader of the folklore group *Skandinieki*, they went to the Ethnography Department of the History Museum of the Latvian SSR and consulted with its head, Velta Rozenberga: "We studied the costumes from different regions. We were able to look at all the funds. It was an extremely valuable thing to really see how many variants there are for that one costume in one region" (interview, Stalte 2022). Attention was also paid to the archeological clothing of the Baltic ethnic groups, which temporally drew links to the pre-Christian period. This aligned well with the folklore movement's broader interest in the most archaic layers of the ethnic culture.

There were also objections to the unifying character of the folk costume as

3   Directed by Andris Slapiņš, available online: https://www.redzidzirdilatviju.lv/lv/search/movie/163867.

4   The school was also an important place for making traditional folk music instruments (see Muktupāvels 2025, this issue).

such. Refusing to treat folk costumes as "stage props", folk revivalists often chose simple clothing. They opposed "adornments in folk art, which they equated, not without reason, to falsifications of both past and present folklife. Frequently they preferred a coarse shirt and a short sheepskin coat, or even the common clothes of the lower classes of medieval times, rather than emphatic magnificence" (Klotiņš 2002: 116–117). This approach was more open to influences from other cultural currents. The global character of the folklore movement has been highlighted by Mark Slobin (1996: 5). Regarding the Baltic States, Mats Lindqvist links it to the international wave of protest "which originated primarily in the younger generation and which was directed against the modern project in its various guises" (Lindqvist 2003: 198). Musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš – one of the most influential theorists of the folklore movement in Latvia (Weaver et al. 2023) – has argued that, among global cultural processes, parts of the folklore movement were inspired by the rebellious youth movements of the late 1960s, hippies included. According to Klotiņš, one of the elements adopted from hippies was a "freer cultural behavior" (interview, Klotiņš 2022). This could mean tearing down the boundary between the stage and the audience (Boiko 2001: 114–115) to create an idyllic vision of the countryside where everyone is a part of festivities. Rejecting folklore as a staged performance and treating it instead as a lifestyle, folk revivalists "addressed their audience not primarily as artists, but as fellow human beings" (Klotiņš 2002: 118). In visual terms, hippie-inspired elements appeared in the ornamented woven belts – originally part of the traditional folk costume – which some of leading members of the folklore movement wore as headbands (see Figures 1 and 2).[5]

Both the folklore movement and the hippie movement have been characterized as cultural currents whose reaction to social problems and alienation from the Soviet regime turned into rejection of modernization (Lane et al. 2013: 39). As recalled by ethnologist Anete Karlsone, herself an active member of the folklore movement, not everyone was fascinated by hippie ideas; however, she notes that both shared a common ethos:

> The same feeling of freedom which was present in the hippie movement, was also there for the folklore movement. Children of nature, bare-footed, with hair let down and in linen skirts. It was this ideal of the children of nature which was common both for the non-politicized hippies who turned away from Soviet politics and us. At that moment we, at least in the beginning, isolated ourselves from politics as politics equaled the Soviet regime. We went to nature and to traditional culture because it was free of Soviet politics (interview, Karlsone 2022).

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5   For more images see the online exhibition *The Folklore Movement in Latvia*, available at: https://lfk.lv/the-folklore-movement-in-latvia/.

The idea of a socialist escape – carving out spaces for alternative existence – was shared by both the folklore movement and the hippies. Although the hippie movement in the Soviet Union developed under the influence of global countercultural trends that had originated in the West in the 1960s, it adapted to the specific conditions of life in a totalitarian regime. In socialist states, hippies were among the underground and nonconformist youth of the cultural opposition "who developed their own autonomous spheres of cultural activism and criticism of the regimes" (Apor et al. 2018: 19). Oppositional visuality was one of the distinctive characteristics of the hippies. The visual attributes of the hippie movement served as a means "to manifest the wearer's subject position, to resist societal norms through symbolic expression, and also to converge emotionally with young people in the West" (Toomistu 2016: 51). Soviet hippie visuality reflected internationally recognizable imagery through creative self-fashioning, colorful clothing, bell-bottom trousers, long hair, bracelets, necklaces, and headbands. The latter – headband – was one of the distinctive visual features that some members of the folklore movement adopted from the hippie visual repertoire.

Although intended to embody the global, hippie material culture was inherently rooted in the realities of the local, as it was intertwined with the materiality of late socialism: "Soviet hippie things, despite being designed to counter 'Sovietness', were part and parcel of how late socialist society and its system worked: material imperfections created opportunities; absences sponsored underground businesses; and deficits shaped identities" (Fürst 2021: 293). Thus, the scarcity of the state-planned economy led to a "high degree of originality", and self-fashioning went beyond mere replication (Svede 2000: 190). In his detailed study of the materiality of the hippie movement in Soviet Latvia, Mark Allen Svede highlights an aspect of the cross-pollination of ideas, describing Latvian hippies as having a "complex layering of many garments and accessories," with elements from traditional folk costume included (Svede 2000: 198). Similar to the way American hippies used elements of ethnic traditional dress of racial minorities and native peoples, Latvian hippies "revived elements of indigenous folk attire" by wearing outfits analogous to folk costumes (Svede 2000: 198; see also images in Stinkuls 2020; Valpēters 2010: 127).

Direct connection between hippies and folk revivalists was established through artisan, hippie, and writer Alfrēds Stinkuls (b. 1950). Well acquainted with leading revivalists Valdis Muktupāvels and Ilga Reizniece, Stinkuls bridged both movements. As recalled by Ilga Reizniece (Ozoliņa 2021: 88), Stinkuls was the one who inspired the use of ornamented woven bands as headbands among the members of the folklore movement. A certain hippie vibe was also present in Reizniece's choice to wear her long hair down when performing in traditional folk costume as the

Figure 1. Folklore performance at the crafts fair, Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia, Riga, 1980s. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2264, 258. Photo by Alfrēds Stinkuls.

traditional way is to wear the hair in a braid with the folk costume (Ozoliņa 2021: 88). There are also testimonies about how the looks of the folk revivalists left lasting impressions and created the desire to belong to the community. As recalled by Janta Meža, at one of the festivities in Dole in the first half of the 1980s, she saw a vision-like image that sparked her interest:

> In the park, under a large oak tree, two ethereal beings with long hair, headbands around their heads, sitting and playing *kokles* – Ilga Reizniece and Zane Šmite. In a word, this sincere image touched me so much that I realized that this is the real kind of Latvianness, and I want to be a part of it in some way (interview, Meža 2022).

A significant contribution by Stinkuls to the history of the folklore movement is his photographic documentation of events related to it. His collection of color photo slides depicting the folklore movement (LFK 2264) has been deposited in the Digital Archives of Latvian Folklore.[6] In 2020, his extraordinary life story was published in the autobiography *Mati sarkanā vējā* (Hair in the Red Wind). Besides capturing his hippie experience, Stinkuls provides detailed accounts of some of the early events involving folk revivalists. These include in-depth analyses of concert

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6   LFK 2264. Alfrēds Stinkuls Collection. Archives of Latvian Folklore. Available at: https://garamantas.lv/en/collection/1753523/Alfreda-Stinkula-kolekcija.

Figure 2. Folklore group *Bizīteri*, 1981 or 1982. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2248, 5. Second from right – Ilga Reizniece. Photographer unknown.

repertoires and performance styles, as well as his account of an exchange with Saulvedis Cimmermanis (1929–2022), a prominent historian who had publicly criticized the activities of the folk revivalists (Stinkuls 2020: 250–252). Together with the photo slides, this forms a powerful testimony to the countercultural movements of late socialist Latvia. Even though both movements were socialist escapes, they went in different directions: for hippies, it was the "dropping out of socialism" (Fürst, McLellan 2017), whereas for much of the folklore movement, the escape mode of existence evolved into a stance of active political opposition.

The Flag: From Folklore
Fieldwork to Political Dissent
Based on the historical context of the reinstitution of independence in the Baltic States, the process has been described as non-violent resistance (Šmidchens 2014; Škapars 2005; Dreifelds 1996). In non-democratic regimes, where open protest would be violently repressed, opposition movements become "skilled at mounting unobtrusive, symbolic, and peaceful forms of disruption that avoid repression while symbolizing contention" (Tarrow 2011: 103). Cultural opposition against the Soviet regime characterizes the Baltic States, especially in the second half of the 1980s:

> Symbolic reclamation of the nation was a centrepiece of collective action in the early opposition period. Although overt political demands were still risky, and few in the opposition were prepared to ask for full national independence, symbolic demands, like those related to environmental protection, or symbolic deeds, such as commemorating the Stalinist mass deportations of Balts, were important because they laid bare problems widely believed to be symptomatic of a larger problem, the Soviet regime itself (Eglitis 2002: 37).

Therefore, symbols as "a subtle form of communication with tremendous suggestive and emotional power" had the potency to mobilize for collective action during the Singing Revolution (Karklins 1994: 67). Of special importance were symbols of the interwar state, such as the national flag, anthem, and other attributes. With the argument that small acts of dissent, often of symbolic nature, led to actual political resistance, this part of the article analyzes one of the most pronounced visual symbols of the independence movement – the Soviet-banned carmine red-white-carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia – and the ways in which the events surrounding its reinstitution coincided with the activities of the folklore movement. I argue that the use of the banned flag marks a clear point when the folklore movement shifted from a "socialist escape" as an alternative lifestyle choice into a deliberate dissent expressed as openly visible political resistance. Even though there had been activities that could be labeled as political before that, especially on behalf of the Stalts family, the leaders of *Skandinieki* (more in Weaver 2025, this issue), and even altercations with the Soviet authorities and KGB campaigns against individual members of folklore groups,[7] in the public display of the still-banned flag at the opening concert of the *Baltica* festival on July 13, 1988, the folklore movement as a whole demonstrated a clear political position.

In terms of intensity and emotional impact, the Festival *Baltica '88* was the peak of the folklore movement in Latvia, and for many of the participants, the display of the banned flag was the most memorable moment. However, the story of the carmine red-white-carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia cannot be fully understood without historical context, particularly regarding the flag's status and the consequences of displaying it during the Soviet occupation. The use of the carmine red and white colors as a symbol of Latvian ethnic identity dates back to the 1870s and the ideas consolidated during the national awakening (1850s–1890s). The particular colors were mentioned in the 13th-century *Livonian*

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7   The home of the Stalts family were searched by the KGB for illegal literature (interview, Stalte 2022), and a campaign to influence Valdis Muktupāvels, the leader of the *Savieši* folklore group, was carried out (more in online exhibition *The Folklore Movement in Latvia*, available at: https://lfk.lv/the-folklore-movement-in-latvia).

Rhymed Chronicle (*Älteste Livländische Reimchronik*) as the flag of the Latgallian ethnic group (Pumpuriņš 2024). When the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed in 1918, the carmine red and white colors had already been established as a national symbol. Soon after the first Soviet occupation in 1940, the use of the flag was banned. During the Nazi German occupation (1941–1945), it could only be used with permission and alongside the Nazi flag (Pumpuriņš 2024).

Despite the risks, for most of the Soviet occupation (1944/1945–1991), there were people who took the chance and displayed the flag as a symbol of lost independence and self-determination. Such daring acts were often part of youth resistance groups (Rimšāns 2007). If caught, this could result in arrest, torture, imprisonment, or deportation to forced settlement camps in Siberia. The book *Mūsu karoga stāsti: 1940–1991* (*The Stories of Our Flag: 1940–1991*, Bergmane 2015) has collected many of these testimonies. One of the most well-known cases is that of Bruno Javoišs (1941–2025). In 1963, when the events took place, he was a student at the Riga Civil Aviation Engineers Institute. In protest against Russification policies, and as a reminder of Latvia's forced annexation into the Soviet Union, he decided to raise the banned flag on the radio tower directly opposite the main Soviet police department of Riga. Javoišs chose the night of December 5, Constitution Day of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It took serious preparation to sew the flag and to train for the climb up the 76-metre-high tower. Aware of the possible consequences, he wrote a farewell letter to his relatives with instructions for his burial place. Javoišs managed to raise the flag but was caught immediately and sentenced for "anti-Soviet agitation" to seven years' imprisonment in Mordovia (Bergmane 2015: 75–104). Later on with the loosening of the Soviet regime during the Singing Revolution, the flags of the Baltic countries were reinstated even before full independence was achieved. Consequently, some of the first occasions when the flags were publicly displayed have gained special significance in the collective memory of the Baltic States.

Besides analyzing how the events involving the flag manifested political attitudes of the folklore movement, in this part of the article my aim is to shed light on some misconceptions concerning the first displays of the then still-banned flag. First, in several accounts by members of the folklore movement, as well as in other sources, it is emphasized that *Baltica '88* was the first time the flag was displayed publicly (Muktupāvels 2011: 89; Klotiņš 2002: 123; Stradiņš 1992: 153). However, there had already been earlier displays. Second, the accounts of the opening concert of *Baltica '88* have given the impression that there was just one flag and that it was displayed by Dainis Stalts (1939–2014), one of the leaders of the folklore group *Skandinieki* (Šmidchens 2014: 275). However, interviews and video recordings

show that this was not the case, as there were many flags on display, carried by several folklore groups.[8]

Before the opening concert of the *Baltica '88* festival on July 13, there had already been two public displays of the banned flag at mass gatherings that year. The first was the funeral of the dissident and political prisoner Gunārs Astra (1931–1988). On April 19, despite the opposition of the authorities, several thousand people attended Astra's funeral, filling his grave with handfuls of sand (Zelmenis 2024). Astra's coffin was covered with the banned flag.[9] The second occurred a month before *Baltica '88*, on June 14, when Konstantīns Pupurs (1964–2017), a member of the human rights defense group Helsinki-86, carried the flag all through Riga – from the Monument of Freedom to the Cemetery of the Brethren – after the group's demonstration commemorating the victims of the Stalinist terror. Despite the loosening of the Soviet regime, displaying the flag in 1988 was still associated with great personal risks. Following the events, Pupurs was forced to leave Soviet Latvia.

In the paragraphs that follow, I have chosen to give insights into the memories of one of the members of the folklore movement – Iveta Tāle (b. 1962), who at that time was the leader of the folklore group *Klinči* and continues to play an important role in the traditional folk music scene in Latvia. Her story is particularly insightful as it demonstrates how an interest in folklore turned into political activism. Tāle's engagement with political topics developed alongside her passion for traditional singing. As was common for folk revivalists, both individuals and newly established folklore groups carried out fieldwork by visiting the elderly in the countryside, documenting folklore, and learning traditional singing styles and repertoires. Alongside folklore, Tāle documented the life stories of those she met during fieldwork. These revealed a different history from that propagated by the Soviet regime. Tāle recalls: "Political things appeared inevitably, as it became clear that we had been taught nothing of history in schools. I started going to people and listening to what they were saying. We each had our own family stories" (interview, Tāle 2024).

What Tāle experienced during her fieldwork – the silenced memories of the Soviet regime – was not only what fueled her personal engagement, but also an important driving force for the independence movement as such. Towards the end

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8   A video recording of the *Baltica '88* festival's opening shows that at least seven flags were brought in by different folklore groups during the opening concert. Video recording available at: https://arhiiv.err.ee/video/vaata/baltica-88-avakontsert-1-osa.

9   Images available in: Zelmenis, Gints (2021). *Cilvēks vai simbols? Piecas Gunāra Astras portreta skices*, LSM. https://tinyurl.com/Zelmenis–Astra

of the Soviet occupation, both individual and collective memory emerged as spheres where Soviet dominance was challenged. The reclaiming of historical memory and the public voicing of individual memories suppressed during the Soviet years contributed immensely to the mobilization of dissent during the Singing Revolution (Zelče 2009). The first public demonstrations in the second half of the 1980s centered on important dates commemorating painful historical events.[10] The first of these "calendar demonstrations" was organized by the human rights watch group Helsinki-86, the first openly political grassroots organization. Tāle attended the Helsinki-86 demonstration in Riga on August 23, 1987, which resulted in threats from the KGB. She also engaged in environmental protection activities, protesting against the construction of the River Daugava hydroelectric dam (interview, Tāle 2024).

In Tāle's account, the *Baltica '88* festival was closely tied to opposition to the Soviet regime, and the public display of the carmine red-white-carmine red flag was "the mission of the *Baltica* festival. The flag had to be legalized, that much was clear" (interview, Tāle 2024). Planning took place within a smaller circle of people who gathered informally to discuss the question of the flag. The material side of the matter also had to be resolved. Tāle remembers that the flag was made shortly before the event:

> We sent two people to the store to find some suitable fabric. Someone brought a sewing machine to the dormitories where we stayed. My father was the ultimate expert on what the color proportions of the flag should be. Then we sewed. There on the spot (interview, Tāle 2024).

There are also similar accounts from other folklore groups sewing their flags just before the *Baltica* event, for example folklore group *Grodi* (interview, Rancāne 2023). Similar do-it-yourself activities took place in the regions. In Cēsis, where one of the *Baltica '88* concerts took place, Daumants Kalniņš – a jeweler and, at that time, a member of the *Dzieti* and *Spurguļi* folklore groups – recalls that it was not possible to get the right kind of fabric, so it had to be dyed to achieve the carmine red color (Kalniņš 2018: 108).

On the day of the opening concert, shortly before going into the hall of the event, the final push for Tāle and others from folklore group *Klinči* was given by the Estonian revivalists who had arrived with the Estonian flag:

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10 For example, the public demonstrations at the second half of the 1980s commemorated such events as August 23, marking the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) with its secret protocol establishing Soviet and Nazi German spheres of influence in Europe and thus deciding the fate of the Baltic States; or June 14 and March 25, the dates of the mass deportations to Siberia in 1941 and 1949.

They unfolded their flag in the audience stands. But we just stood like fools at the entrance with our flag folded. The Ordelovskis orchestra was playing, and we were just standing there, and the Estonians were getting on our nerves. Then I said — well, that's it, what are we afraid of? Let's just unfold it! (interview, Tāle 2024).

The importance of the banned interwar flags as symbols of resistance to the Soviet regime was shared among all three Baltic countries. The first displays of the flags had already taken place in Estonia and Lithuania earlier that year.[11]

The display of the flags left a remarkable emotional effect, Tāle remembers:

As it all happened there, it was insanely emotional, insanely [..] It was, I think, the first moment in my life when the so-called slowed-down time set in. I've experienced it twice, and the first time was when we displayed the flag [..] all those people were there on their feet [audience] and what happened in that hall is indescribable (interview, Tāle 2024).

According to eyewitness accounts, several high Soviet Latvian officials stood up and left the hall afterward (Šmidchens 2014: 283). Following the opening concert, the festival's procession through the streets of Riga took place, most notably passing the Monument of Freedom, giving an even broader public a chance to see the banned flags out in the open (see Figure 3).

After some of these first, still officially unsanctioned displays of the flags, events evolved quickly. On September 29, 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR passed a decree *On the Culturally Historical Symbolism of the Latvian Nation*, relegalizing the flag as a culturally historical symbol. The decree acknowledged the carmine red-white-carmine red flag as legitimate and permitted its use also as a pennant, emblem, badge, etc., as well as its display on national holidays, work and family celebrations, commemorative days, and cultural and mass events (Stradiņš 1992: 174–175). In 1990, the carmine red-white-carmine red flag became the official flag of the Latvian SSR; in 1991 — the flag of the independent Republic of Latvia (Pumpuriņš 2024).

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11   For Estonia, it was April 17 during a Heritage Protection Society's procession in Tartu, and May 14, 1988, at the Tartu Music Days; in Lithuania, at a commemoration of the June 14 deportations and on July 1–3, 1988, when all three Baltic flags were displayed during the *Gaudeamus* Baltic students' choral festival in Vilnius. The events of the latter are described in detail by Guntis Šmidchens: "Soviet officials rushed to confiscate the flags, which at that moment were still illegal in Lithuania, but they were not able to push through the choir of seven thousand singers, clustered together tightly, singing, and so those who had revealed the festival's true colors remained unpunished. Baltic flags then emerged at every festival event, unmindful of the scores of policemen who looked on. Choirs in the festival procession carried at least four Lithuanian, seven Latvian, and many more Estonian flags, with all singers carrying lapel ribbons of their national colors. From this moment on, public singing events in Lithuania would always include the flags that marked them as being non-Soviet" (Šmidchens 2014: 160).

Figure 3. Folklore group *Klinči* at the procession after the opening concert
of the folklore festival *Baltica '88*. July 13, 1988, Riga.
Personal archives of Iveta Tāle. Photo by Kārlis Roberts Freibergs.

Addressing the dense layer of events that took place within just a few years, Mark Beissinger describes the glasnost era as a time of "thickened history", a period in which events unfolded at great speed and began to generate "a significant causative role of their own" (Beissinger 2002: 42). With the start of mobilization of dissent around 1987, within the short period of "thickened history" between open dissent and the restitution of independence, "new identity frames moved from the fringes of politics to its mainstream in a way previously unimaginable" (Beissinger 2002: 176). The events surrounding the flag indeed demonstrate the idea of thickened history, as there was a rapid move within one year from something previously forbidden and punished to something openly displayed and acknowledged. The flags, in this context, were culturally resonant tools of resistance to the Soviet regime, and as emphasized by Guntis Šmidchens, they were part of the non-violent resistance repertoire as "[t]hey gave the Singing Revolution the visual symbol of self-recognition that is critical to nonviolent mass movements" (Šmidchens 2014: 311).

For the folklore movement, the display of the flags has become one of the most cherished memories of *Baltica '88*, marking the symbolic milestone that turned the folklore movement from cultural opposition towards political self-recognition. As shown with the example of Iveta Tāle, this was a process that took place gradually.

Figure 4. Folklore groups *Skandinieki* and *Grodi* participating at the Baltic Days in Bonn, Germany, August 23 1989 – a demonstration against the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Photo by Uldis Grasis. Latvian State Archive, LNA_LVA F2191_1v_5_12.

There had been activities before July 1988 that confronted Soviet power; however, the public use of the banned flags was a clear visual display of anti-Soviet attitudes and political engagement on behalf of the folk revivalists. In the years that followed, the folklore movement was part of mass gatherings, political demonstrations, and the barricades of January 1991, with their repertoire and symbols used as elements of both cultural opposition and political activism. Some activities were carried out abroad as well – for example, in 1989 folklore groups *Skandinieki* and *Grodi* participated in a political demonstration against the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in Bonn, Germany with the carmine red-white-carmine red flags displayed in large numbers (see Figure 4).

Folk Ornament:
A Repertoire of Culturally Resonant Symbols

One of the core narratives of the folklore movement frames it as one of the first harbingers of anti-Soviet attitudes that ultimately led to political change and the restoration of independence (Šmidchens 1996, 2014; Dreifelds 1996: 53–54; Muktupāvels 2011). This is particularly explicit in emic narratives of folk revivalists themselves. As stated

by Valdis Muktupāvels, one of the key figures of the movement, the folklore movement in Latvia "positioned itself clearly at the centre of political activities that finally led to liberation from the Soviets and the reestablishment of national statehood in 1991" (Muktupāvels 2011: 90). This was also the case in other Baltic States.[12] However, did the ideas initiated by the folklore movement reach different interest groups and wider society, or did they remain confined to the inner circle of the folklore groups? When looking at visual aspects, an example that demonstrates that the ideas did indeed reach wider audiences is the use of the folk ornament. With this seemingly minor cultural expression, I aim to show how the ideas spread beyond the close circles of the folklore movement and became part of the publicly available repertoire of cultural resistance. Folk ornament was culturally resonant because it had already held an established place in the visual language of expressing ethnic belonging and national sentiment. It provided links with the interwar period in Latvia, which was an important reference point for the independence movement, because what was sought was not "a radical break with the past, but rather a return to the (pre-Soviet) past", meaning the time of the independent Republic of Latvia (1918–1940) (Eglitis 2002: 11).

For the folklore movement, one particular folk ornament of significance was the Tree of Austra (*Austras koks*), the official emblem of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica '88*. In 1988, when the first *Baltica* took place in Latvia, a visual motif that had been introduced a year earlier in Lithuania was continued (see Figure 5). The motif of a symmetrical tree or plant is known almost universally as the Tree of Life (Gombrich 1984: 244). In Latvia, the name 'Austra' is derived from folklore. Although her presence in classical folklore genres is relatively rare, Austra is the mythological personification of dawn (Kursīte 2020: 61). In geometric ornament, the Tree of Austra represents the idea of a three-part world model, with the roots as the underground, trunk as the earth, and the branches as the heavens (Kokare 1999: 40). In Latvian folk art, it may have developed from the motif of the herringbone; later it reached its most spectacular forms in folk costumes from the 18th to the first half of the 19th century (Zemītis, Rozenberga 1991: 44). The *Baltica '88* emblem was designed by artist Vitolds Kucins, who drew inspiration from folk art.

In order to move beyond the purely visual perception of folk ornament and grasp the semantic content behind its forms, a particular cultural competence was required. The Tree of Austra was only one among a set of culturally resonant visual motifs, derived from folk art, that circulated during the Singing Revolution.

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12   See Ramonaitė (2025, this issue) for a detailed analysis of the connection between Lithuanian folk revivalists and the independence movement.

The symbolic interpretation of folk ornament, including the names of specific elements and their semantic meanings, had roots in Latvian traditions and broader Baltic heritage. The interwar period saw a widespread interest in folk ornament, accompanied by interpretations of its semantic meanings; it was in this context that the specific, mythology-related names of folk ornaments emerged. The geometric patterns characteristic of Latvian folk art were paired with mythological entities, forming an interpretative system of folk art that connected ornament and mythology.[13]

Even though interest in folk art was heightened also during socialist era, "several aspects of traditional folk culture, including its religious, ethnic, and conservative characteristics, were incompatible with the goal of creating a unified socialist folk culture" (Csurgó et al. 2018: 574). Because of its closeness to religion, mythology-related themes did not align with Soviet ideology, and for most of the Soviet period the mythological dimension was silenced. In line with the slogan *national in form, socialist in content*, the Soviet regime promoted imagery that borrowed the outward form of traditional folk art, but only through appropriation and with socialist content embedded (Castillo 1997). In practice, this meant that the forms of folk ornament were frequently used in Soviet architecture, in festive occasions such as the new socialist traditions mentioned earlier, and in design. However, with the renewed interest in folklore and traditional culture sparked by the folklore movement, the folk ornament-mythology nexus gained new relevance – particularly because the idea of semantic meaning in folk ornament resonated with the folk revivalists' search for what was perceived as authentic and ancient layers of folklore.

Reaching beyond the circles of the folklore movement, folk ornament imagery experienced a wave of renewed appreciation, interest, and use. The restoration of Latvian independence – declared on May 4, 1990, and finalized on August 21, 1991 – was driven by a diverse constellation of grassroots movements, cultural currents, and political forces, with the folklore movement among them. Evidence that the ideas of the folklore movement transcended the closed circles of folklore groups can be seen in the incorporation of folk ornament into the official emblems of environmental and political branches of the independence movement.

Environmental concerns were behind much of the popular dissent in all three Baltic countries. In Estonia, it was the concern for oil-shale pollution and

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13   The originator of the ornament-mythology nexus was artist Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942). In 1923, he published *Latviešu ornamentika* (Latvian Ornaments), a work in which several elements of folk ornament were interpreted as symbols of Latvian deities. Following Brastiņš's approach, this mode of interpreting folk ornament has, in contemporary contexts, become an almost universally accepted framework. See more: Ūdre-Lielbārde 2024.

phosphate mining; in Lithuania, nuclear risk due to the Ignalina power plant; and in Latvia, it was the planned construction of the River Daugava hydroelectric dam. The environmental movement started out as a small group of enthusiasts interested both in cultural heritage, like the neglected churches, and care for nature. From informal gatherings, this grew into mobilization of masses, which in the case of the protests against the River Daugava hydroelectric dam was "the first success story of Latvian collective action against Soviet authorities" (Lane et al. 2013: 52). The official organization – the Environment Protection Club (*Vides aizsardzības klubs*, VAK) – was founded in 1987. Their emblem was the folk ornament-derived eight-pointed star or the Morning Star (*Auseklis, Auseklītis*) (see Figures 6 and 7). Auseklis in Latvian mythology is one of the celestial deities: a male figure, one of the sons of the God, and a male personification of the Morning star or the planet Venus. In folk ornament, according to the ornament-mythology nexus, Auseklis is depicted as an eight-pointed star. However, the meaning and importance of the eight-pointed star reached beyond the environmentalists, as alongside the carmine red-white-carmine red flag, it became a widely used symbol of the whole independence movement (Ūdre 2019). Besides the eight-pointed star, VAK adopted a green-white-green flag with proportions identical to those of the banned flag of the Republic of Latvia. This was a cleverly intended move, as in the black-and-white photos and television footage it was indistinguishable from the prohibited flag.

The Popular Front of Latvia (*Latvijas Tautas fronte,* LTF), founded in October 1988, analogous to *Sąjūdis* in Lithuania and *Rahvarinne*, the Popular Front in Estonia, was a political organization with a decisive role in the reinstitution of Latvia's independence. A year after it was established, its membership was about 250,000, uniting more than 10 percent of the population (Lane et al. 2013: 54). The emblem of LTF was a folk ornament-derived image – 'Jumis' (see Figure 6). In Latvian mythology, Jumis is one of the spirits and deities connected to harvest and fertility. This partially anthropomorphized deity, according to folk beliefs, resided in the last unharvested sheaf of grain and was connected with the rituals of harvest (Kokare 1999: 170).[14] The symbolism of the deity is derived from nature, where 'jumis' denotes twinning fruits or plants. In geometric ornament, Jumis takes the shape of what could best be described as an upside-down letter W, symbolizing the double-pronged grain ear. In archeology, the motif is present already in the Neolithic period (Zemītis, Rozenberga 1991: 32). For the LFT, the emblem of Jumis was chosen in a two-round competition

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14   The aforementioned film *Latvian Folklore* (1983) depicts a reconstruction of such a ritual, with the chasing of Jumis in the last unharvested sheaf of grain.

with nearly 400 proposals,[15] both from professional artists and amateurs. The final version of the emblem in carmine red and white colors, matching the recently reinstated flag, was created by artist Laimonis Šēnbergs (Kalniete 2015).

Besides the emblems of different organizations, another example that illustrates the argument about the popularity of folklore-related themes and folk ornament was the nationwide poll *On the Question of National Symbols* and the representation of folk ornament in it. As part of the opportunities provided by the glasnost era, on July 28, 1988, a Working Group of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR for the Improvement of the Constitution of Latvia and Other Legislative Acts of the Republic was established. Subsequently, a subcommittee was formed to work on questions of "national symbolism" (Stradiņš 1992: 128). In order to gauge public opinion, the subcommittee released a poll *On the Question of National Symbols*. While the status of the flag and people's opinions about it were at the forefront of the poll, it also invited comments on other symbols, such as the coat of arms of cities, and, interestingly enough, folk ornament. The invitation published in the press stated:

> We have a very rich folk ornament, from which you can easily choose what to elevate to the level of national symbolism and what not. Tree of Austra? Sun? Eight-pointed star? Three stars? An oak leaf wreath? Maybe a flower or bird characteristic of our land? (Stradiņš 1988: 4).

When the poll concluded, most of the votes concerning folk ornament went to the eight-pointed star: 21% or 25 787 responders voted for it (Stradiņš 1992: 165). The results of the poll, as well as the work of the subcommittee, culminated in the passing of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR on the Culturally Historical Symbolism of the Latvian Nation on September 29, 1988. The decree consisted of four points. The first two addressed the flag, but the third was directly aimed at folk ornament, stating that the LSSR Supreme Council decided to "support the proposal to use traditional Latvian culturally historic symbols, ornament motives, and compositions (the eight-pointed star, the sun, etc.)" (Stradiņš 1992: 174).

This rather peculiar example of folk ornament becoming part of state legislation not only shows the attitudes that existed in society, but also the seriousness and importance attributed to these seemingly minor expressions of culture. It also supports the argument that the 1980s, especially the second half, was indeed characterized by an increased interest in folklore and traditional culture – an interest

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15   Images of the proposals are available at the digital exhibition *Competition Throws for the Symbolics of the Popular Front* by the Popular Front Museum.
Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnQWnrpbjuw.

Figure 5. Emblems of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* for 1987 (Lithuania), 1988 (Latvia), and 1989 (Estonia), all featuring Tree of Life motifs.

that did not exclusively belong to the folklore movement and the participants of newly established folklore groups, but was much broader, reaching across many fields. The specific attention to folk ornament-mythology nexus aligned with the folklore movement's interest in the most archaic layers of the folklore. With the emergence of grassroots movements, folk ornament became a convenient tool of cultural resistance, both because it could be used to establish links with the interwar period and earlier stages of Baltic history, and because it had the capacity to convey emotional messages rooted in the historical imaginations attached to it.

Conclusions

Folklore movement-related visual expressions were born in distinct non-democratic contexts, most of them functioning as expressions of cultural opposition – a form of non-violent resistance to the Soviet regime's political, ideological, and cultural pressure. The underlying premise forming the main argument of this article is that folklore provided a powerful source for creating alternative cultural spaces, or "socialist escapes" (Giustino et al. 2013; Vari 2013). Without flattening the specific historical and cultural nuances of the Baltic States, which have been discussed in this article, this phenomenon also characterizes many former socialist countries, where folklore "created the sense of a unified community and alternative modes of thought in the period of socialism, even if the application of folklore was multifaceted in the socialist period and ethnographic studies and folk culture activities were mobilized to service the ideological needs of the state" (Csurgó et al. 2018: 573).

The article has analyzed three case studies of visuality. Inquiry into each case has allowed me to go beyond surface-level descriptions of how things looked, leading to nuanced conclusions regarding the folklore movement in Latvia. First, the focus on clothing and self-fashioning has enabled me to contextualize the revival processes

Figure 6. Cover of *Literatūra un Māksla*, No 42, October 14, 1989, displaying the official symbol of the Popular Front of Latvia – Jumis – at the centre of the page, and eight-pointed star by the title of the newspaper and on the sweater of the leader of the Popular Front of Latvia, Dainis Īvāns (left).

with global cultural currents. The folklore movement, in large part, originated as a critical response to the stylized folklore performances promoted by the Soviet cultural policy of amateur art. One of the particular means of visually expressing cultural opposition was the folklore movements' engagement with individualized folk costumes, in opposition to the Sovietized folk costume as a national uniform.

Following my interest in why some members of the folklore movement presented a hippie-like imagery in combination with traditional folk costumes, I have explored the connection between the two movements, revealing that it was personal connections that bridged folk revivalists and hippies. When it came to self-fashioning, for hippies it was Western cultural forms that sparked their desire, whereas for the folklore movement the visual ideal lay in the archaic peasant past and rural idyll. Both movements shared a wish for individualized looks, which – despite, and also in collaboration with, the constraints of Soviet material insufficiencies – was brought to life through various do-it-yourself practices. Through a shared appreciation of hand-crafted and individualized items of clothing and decoration, both movements mastered their material worlds and carved out their spaces of socialist escapes in terms of individualized looks. However, further research would be needed to draw more substantial conclusions about the structural connections between both movements.

Second, the attention to one of the most evident visual symbols of the Singing Revolution – the flag of the Republic of Latvia – has allowed me to argue that its

display at the Folklore Festival *Baltica '88* marked a clear turn towards express-
ing political, anti-Soviet attitudes. By focusing on individual memories of the events
of those days, my aim was to show how political engagement developed gradually:
beginning with folklore fieldwork, which initiated the processes of recovering
Soviet-silenced narratives, and continuing with participation in mass protests. Mats
Lindqvist has aptly described the correlation between folk revivals as a global
phenomenon and the political sympathies of the Baltic folk revivalists:

> In the capitalist world the rebellion was articulated within the framework of the
> visions of the radical left. The idealized, humane and natural world – the world of
> folk music – was often given a socialist coloring. In the Baltic states, people had
> lived within a type of socialist system for several decades. Here, Soviet rule came
> to represent the modernist violation of those ways of life that respected human
> dignity. For obvious reasons, the Baltic states youth rebellion did not form political
> and ideological ties with the left. Opposition was, instead, gradually woven into an
> ideology of ethno-nationalist independence. Folk music appealed to those with
> classic nationalist ideas (Lindqvist 2003: 198).

Folklore-related activities thus became a field of cultural opposition during
the Soviet occupation, with the folklore movement as one of the first harbingers of
the independence movement and the Singing Revolution in Latvia.

Third, a distinct visual feature that characterized the period was the wave of new appreciation, interest, and use of folk ornament, extending beyond spheres directly connected to folklore to include the environmental movement and the Popular Front of Latvia. Folk ornament functioned as a culturally grounded tool for expressing dissent and provided a shared repertoire of visual symbols. Attention to the spread of these symbols reveals that the ideas fueling the folklore movement reached broader strata of society beyond those directly involved in the activities of the folk revivalists.

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Aleida Bertran

PhD in culture theory;
Latvian Academy of Culture
PhD kultūras teorijā;
Latvijas Kultūras akadēmija
E-mail / e-pasts: aleida.bertran-salceda@lka.edu.lv
ORCID: 0009-0000-7151-9238

**Theorizing Festival Programs as Manifestos:
The International Folklore Festival *Baltica*
During the Singing Revolution (1987–1991)**

**Veidojot teoriju par festivālu programmām kā manifestiem:
starptautiskais folkloras festivāls *Baltica*
Dziesmotās revolūcijas laikā (1987–1991)**

Keywords:
folklore revival,
critical discourse analysis,
Baltic identity,
cultural resistance,
symbolic power,
legitimation

Atslēgvārdi:
folkloras atdzimšana,
kritiskā diskursa analīze,
Baltijas identitāte,
kultūras pretestība,
simboliskā vara,
leģitimācija

Summary   The International Folklore Festival *Baltica* was founded at the dawn of the Singing Revolution to be celebrated annually in a different Baltic republic (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) under the flagships of kinship, authenticity, and Baltic unity. Existing literature has explored this festival in the fields of folkloristics, ethnomusicology, cultural heritage, and performance studies. However, the analysis of *Baltica* festival programs remains under-researched. This article presents a conceptual proposal for interpreting the discourse of festival programs as manifestos legitimizing the history, heritage and knowledge of a festival community under censorship. Through the prism of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and the categories of authority and mythopoiesis, it unravels discursive mechanisms that reaffirm cultural, national, and a collective Baltic identity, and ground the enactment of discourse in social practice and performance.

Kopsavilkums   Starptautiskais folkloras festivāls *Baltica* tika dibināts Dziesmotās revolūcijas sākumā ar ieceri to ik gadu organizēt citā Baltijas republikā (Igaunijā, Latvijā vai Lietuvā), par galvenajām vadlīnijām izvirzot radniecību, autentiskumu un Baltijas vienotību. Līdzšinējā literatūrā šis festivāls aplūkots folkloristikas, etnomuzikoloģijas, kultūras mantojuma un skatuves mākslas studiju kontekstos. Tomēr festivāla *Baltica* programmas joprojām ir maz pētītas. Šis raksts piedāvā konceptuālu priekšlikumu interpretēt festivāla programmu diskursus kā manifestus, kas cenzūras apstākļos leģitimē festivāla kopienas vēsturi, mantojumu un zināšanas. Piemērojot kritiskās diskursa analīzes metodi un autoritātes un mitopoēzes kategorijas, rakstā tiek atklāti diskursīvi mehānismi, kas apliecina kultūras, nacionālo un kolektīvo Baltijas identitāti, aplūkojot diskursa īstenošanas praksi kā sociālu un performatīvu fenomenu.

Introduction   Festival programs typically serve a dual function: they provide a textual analysis of what is being represented while simultaneously articulating the narrative framework of festival curators (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991). Festivals with a political agenda or social transformation goals arguably generate "spaces to create or re-appropriate, perform, and embody narratives and symbols of belonging" which, in some instances, institute "nationalist or community narratives" (Picard 2015: 603). This political nature demands a different kind of reading compared to mainstream festivals. Therefore, this article proposes (re)interpreting festival programs as manifestos – texts imbued with a political mission and vision, functioning to legitimize the resurgence of national and cultural identity movements along with their related bodies of knowledge.

This theoretical proposal is explored in this article through a complex and multi-layered case study: the International Folklore Festival *Baltica*, which emerged in the late Soviet Union during the so-called Singing Revolution (1987–1991) under the umbrella of the Baltic folklore revival. Within this socio-political and socio-cultural context, the early festival programs were officially sanctioned, and their discourse operated within a shifting ideological landscape. This situated them within a layered negotiation between compliance and resistance to late-Soviet cultural politics, amid Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika policies (see Lapidus 1992), and towards the collective pursuit of what Šmidchens (2014) referred to as "living within the truth" (Havel 1985: 47).

The history of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* reflects this complexity, as the idea for the festival emerged from an informal discussion among delegates of the XVI World Congress of the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF), organized under the Soviet apparatus and held in Tallinn during 3-9 May 1985 (Ojalo 2016). Amid escalating political tensions and rising national consciousness in the Baltic region (Klotiņš 2002), Festival *Baltica* was inaugurated in Vilnius (Lithuania) in 1987 under the flagships of kinship, authenticity, and Baltic unity. From its inception, the festival has rotated annually among the three Baltic countries (Ojalo 2016).

In the 1988 Latvian edition, the festival became a site of symbolic resistance: the banned national flags of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were publicly displayed during the festival procession, prompting a "mass rehabilitation" of the Latvian national flag during the festival (Šmidchens 2014: 186). That same year, the Estonian Folklore Society was founded by Estonian Festival *Baltica* organizers, further institutionalizing

the cultural production of the Baltic folklore revival. The Estonian delegation also established close cooperation with the Norwegian National Section of the CIOFF to forge ties with the Nordic association, NORDLEK, resulting in a signed agreement on 15 December 1990 (Ojalo 2016).

The Folklore Association *Baltica* was founded on 4 April 1989 in Riga (Ojalo 2016), marking another step in the festival's consolidation. These efforts culminated in April 1990 with symbolic membership in the CIOFF, and in 1991 with full recognition as a national section representing the newly independent Baltic States (Ojalo 2016). Through these developments, Festival *Baltica* should be understood not only as a vernacular expression of cultural identity but also as an increasingly coordinated cultural resistance phenomenon, capable of articulating political aspirations through the language of folklore.

Building on this socio-political lens, this article invites new avenues of understanding the International Folklore Festival *Baltica*, expanding beyond established scholarly interpretations in folkloristics (Rüütel 2004; Šmidchens 2014), ethnomusicology (Boiko 2001; Klotiņš 2002; Muktupāvels 2011), and cultural heritage and performance studies (Kuutma 1998; Kapper 2016). The article is structured as follows: the first section reviews the existing uses and interpretations of the manifesto concept, followed by an exploration of international folk festivals as socio-cultural phenomena for fostering and disseminating socio-political discourse. The second section introduces Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical approach to unravel the narratives of festival programs through the categories of authorization and mythopoesis, which together constitute legitimation discourse (van Leeuwen 2008). Finally, the third section examines the content of the festival programs through the prism of legitimation, considering it the main function of the narratives found in the programs under study.

Manifesto and the Festival Frame

From an etymological perspective, the term *manifesto* derives from the Latin verb *manifestare*, meaning "to bring into the open" or "to make manifest" (Puchner 2002: 449), and the adjective *manifestus*, signifying "tangible" or "taken by the hand" (Bortulucce 2015). Embedded in these terminological roots is a sense of mise-en-scène in social space – a deliberate staging or presentation. Considered a literary genre (Yanoshevsky 2009), manifestos have traditionally been divided into two main categories: artistic and political. Artistic manifestos, characteristic of 20th-century avant-garde movements, aimed to construct "a history of rupture" by actively intervening in cultural history (Puchner 2002: 451). Notable examples include Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909)

and André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924). Political manifestos, on the other hand, such as Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848), function as "an act of legitimization and conquest of power: symbolic power – moral and ideological – together with political domination" (Bortulucce 2015: 15, my translation). Beyond this binary, postmodern manifestos emerged from the counterculture and socio-political activism of the post-May 1968 era in France (Pulliam 2021). Examples like Valerie Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto* (1967) and Theodore Kaczynski's *Industrial Society and Its Future* (1995) challenge traditional categories and reflect new forms of radical discourse. However, as Winkiel (2008) points out, manifestos can also be understood as liminal genres that stand between "action and theory, politics and aesthetics, and the new and the old" (Winkiel 2008: 2). This complex nature renders manifestos as formative genres "in imagining and shaping the future", while simultaneously foregrounding the present as a site where historical agency becomes thinkable (Winkiel 2008: 2). Building on this perspective, this article argues that it is possible to theorize the programs of international folk festivals as manifestos.

International folk festivals, along with other cultural, indigenous, and multicultural festivals, emerged prominently in the second half of the 20th century across various regions. They can be understood as postmodern socio-cultural phenomena influencing both Western and Eastern Europe, aiming to revive folklore and respond to a growing yearning for community and cultural identity amid a spiritually sterile, mass culture-driven environment (Mitchell 2013). The 1960s and 1970s were marked by widespread civil society protests and the rise of new social movements, which fostered a "cultural revolution" opposing postindustrial societal norms (Gassert 2008: 309). Regions grappling with national and political struggles for self-determination voiced concerns over authoritarian power (Klimke, Scharloth 2008). Scholars suggest that this social and cultural transformation was largely driven by educated, middle-class youth advocating for social change and envisioning alternative ways of life (Watson 1993). Within this countercultural milieu, folk revivalists embraced universalism by celebrating their continent as a "patchwork quilt of cultures, peoples, and societies [characterized by] infinite variety" (Mitchell 2013: 69). In the Baltic context, folklore revival was defined as "the conscious recognition and use of folklore as a symbol of ethnic, regional, or national identity" (Šmidchens 1996: xi).

Given that the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* emerged at the intersection of the Baltic folklore revival network (performers, folklorists, and ethnomusicologists), CIOFF-linked cultural diplomacy, and the late-Soviet cultural bureaucracy – articulated through a state cultural apparatus that mobilized folklore for "ideological upbringing" and Soviet unity (Klotiņš 2002) – the festival spanned artistic, political, and countercultural spheres. This complex institutional and organizational entanglement

positions *Baltica* festival programs not merely as descriptive texts, but as program-matic and manifesto-like discourses, aspiring to change reality through language and seeking to authorize visions of Baltic kinship, authenticity, and cultural sovereignty. As Yanoshevsky (2009: 264) asserts, manifestos are discourses in which "knowledge is asserted rather than developed", functioning as revolutionary tools representing the speaker's act of discovering knowledge.

Despite existing literature on international folk festivals, the application of the manifesto framework to festival programs – particularly those bearing socio-political significance during historical moments such as the Singing Revolution – remains insufficiently examined. Accordingly, this article endeavors to contribute to the scholarly discourse by analyzing the programs of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* through this theoretical lens and applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), thereby offering an empirical perspective on manifesto theorization.

Methodological Considerations

Following studies on manifestos (e.g. Topaloğlu, Beşgen 2023), this article employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an interdisciplinary qualitative approach developed in the late 1980s and officially established with the launch of the journal *Discourse and Society* (1990) by Theo van Dijk (Wodak, Meyer 2009). CDA provides "a form of critical social analysis" (Fairclough 2018: 13) that examines the interrelations between language, society, power, and ideology. It views discourse as a social practice, in which situations, institutions, and social structures frame specific discursive events, creating a dialectic relationship between them (Fairclough, Wodak 1997).

Although classical CDA methodologies include textual, contextual, and intertextual analysis, this study draws on the work of Theo van Leeuwen, who argues "that all discourses recontextualize social practices, and that all knowledge is, therefore, ultimately grounded in practice" (van Leeuwen 2008: vii). From this perspective, "discourse can be thought of as representing knowledge of what goes on in a particular social practice, ideas about why it is the way it is, who is involved and what kinds of values they hold" (Ledin, Machin 2018: 64). Van Leeuwen (2008) also proposes four main analytical categories for examining the discursive construction of legitimation: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoiesis.

From this spectrum, and considering Festival *Baltica* as a collective creative project of folklore, the present article focuses on two subcategories of authorization – expert authority and authority of tradition – and on the category of mythopoiesis. Moral evaluation and rationalization are excluded from this analysis, as they respectively depoliticize discourse by presenting values as "detached from the system of

interpretation from which they derive", and obscure contestation by framing actions as either functional and necessary (instrumental) or aligned with a supposedly natural or objective order (theoretical) (van Leeuwen 2008: 110). Given the manifesto-like character of the festival programs, this article concentrates on legitimation practices that foreground values in explicit, context-bound, and critically contestable ways.

The material analyzed consists of the *Baltica* festival programs published in 1987 (Lithuania), 1988 (Latvia), 1989 (Estonia), and 1991 (Latvia), retrieved from the *Baltica 2017* website created by the Lithuanian National Culture Center (LNKC 2017), which developed an online repository of festival archival material for the International Folklore Festival *Baltica 2017*.[1] The 1990 festival edition is not included, as it was ultimately cancelled due to the Soviet economic blockade (Šmidchens 2014).

Analysis of the International Folklore
Festival *Baltica* Programs: Expert Authority

Legitimacy can be conferred through expert authority – namely, a figure whose expertise is either formally recognized or discursively constructed (van Leeuwen 2008). In the Festival *Baltica* programs, expert authority emerges in two overlapping profiles: representatives of cultural institutions, often connected to the Soviet apparatus, and folklorist scholars closely engaged with the folklore revival, who functioned as academic institutional authorities.

The *Baltica* 1987 program opens with a foreword by Jonas Bielinis, Chairman of the Organizing Committee and Minister of Culture of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). From this institutional position, Bielinis writes that "the capital of Soviet Lithuania Vilnius has been bestowed the honor of hosting the 'Baltica' International Folklore Festival of the Baltic republics" (Bielinis 1987: 4), portraying Lithuania simultaneously as a Soviet republic and as a distinct cultural entity (see Figure 1). This phrasing, though aligned with state structures, positions the program's introductory discourse in an in-between state, mediating between official cultural policy and local cultural representation. Such ambiguity reflects the complex institutional setting from which *Baltica* emerged – shaped both by state-driven Soviet cultural programming and by the grassroots spirit of the folklore revival (see Klotiņš 2002; also Ābelkina 2025 in this issue).

A similar dynamic appears in the 1988 program. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, then Chairman of the Organizing Committee of Festival *Baltica* and a high-ranking member of the Latvian Communist Party, presents folklore as a vital source of collective joy and national identity, invoking Krišjānis Barons's folksong compilation work as an expert

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1   Content available at: https://baltica2017.lnkc.lt/go.php/eng/img/131356

authority to highlight its role as spiritual solace (see Figure 2). While his position firmly anchored him within the Soviet establishment, his references to youth and community subtly legitimize the folklore revival's growing autonomy: "It is pleasant that youth is truly interested in it, that folk songs live in the community" (Gorbunovs 1988: 2). However, such figures, though prominently featured in the program, did not necessarily articulate the core revivalist discourse, and their presence should be read within the constraints of controlled publishing and official sanctioning.

By 1989, just months before the Baltic Way (August 23) and the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9), the tone of the festival discourse had shifted. Jaak Kaarma, Chairman of the Festival Committee, Soviet-era official, and member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopts a more politically explicit stance, moving away from the framework of the Soviet Union: "It's an honor that interest and appreciation are shown towards the culture of our small nation, and that you are visiting Estonia". He alludes to the challenges of life under Soviet rule: "It's our concern that everything goes on well, and that the shortcomings in our material and living conditions do not spoil it for our guests or ourselves". Kaarma also directly invokes Estonia's national history and identity, expressing pride and a forward-looking vision: "We hope that the participants of the festival will realize that the Estonians want to take good care of their homeland, and the Estonian culture has respectable past, present and future" (Kaarma 1989: 5).

Similarly, Tallinn's Mayor and member of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR (1985–1990), Harri Lumi, presents Estonia as historically and culturally part of Europe:
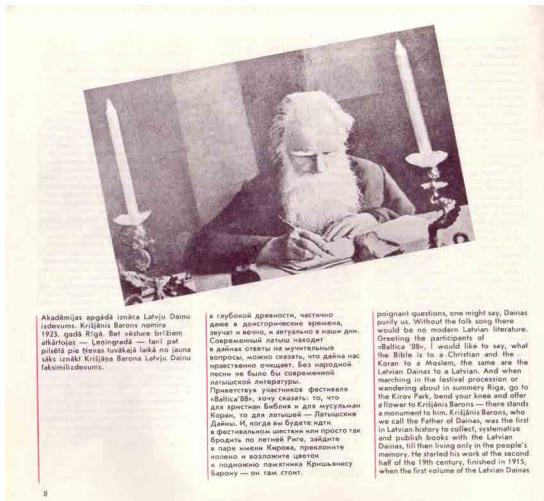
> For centuries this city has connected various nations, and through Tallinn the Estonians have been in contact with Europe and the whole world. One of the aims of *Baltica 89* is likewise communication between peoples (Lumi 1989: 7).

In this framing, Estonia appears as a European actor, and the *Baltica* festival becomes more than just a folklore event – it is positioned as a means of cultural diplomacy, echoing the idea of soft power (Nye 2004: x), where influence is built through culture, values, and persuasion rather than force (Zamorano 2016). This language marks a clear shift from earlier Soviet-centered narratives and reflects the changing political climate of the time.

In 1991, a year after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had declared independence from the Soviet Union, and prior to the failed August Coup and the *de facto* restoration of independence, the political dimension of the festival program's discourse became evident. Representing a voice from the Baltic folklore revival, folklorist and philologist Ingrid Rüütel – Chairman of the Artistic Council and later First Lady of Estonia (2001–2006) – clearly states that "the aim of the Association [Baltica] is to preserve and disseminate the ethnic culture of the Baltic nations" (Rüütel 1991a: 3). Throughout the essay, Rüütel emphasizes the *Baltica* festival's full membership within the CIOFF network, noting: "Our acceptance as a member of such a respectable organization was important not only to our folklore movement, but it also recognized our aspirations for independence in a wider sense." She further adds: "Actually, CIOFF was the first international (moreover: connected with UNESCO) organization who accepted the Baltic countries as its legal members separately from the Soviet Union" (Rüütel 1991a: 3–4).

In doing so, Rüütel highlights and legitimizes with facts the political dimension of the *Baltica* festival community. Her contribution exemplifies how folklore experts connected to the festival, unlike political appointees, articulated a discourse deeply rooted in cultural and scholarly expertise, while grounding their authority in international recognition to enhance legitimacy.

The Authority of Tradition

Tradition, practice, custom or habit function as discursive strategies of legitimation, empowering communities through the rationale "because this is what we always do" or "because this is what we have always done" (van Leeuwen 2008: 108). In the Festival *Baltica* programs, this mode of legitimation plays a significant role in articulating a sense of historical rootedness and cultural authority, reinforcing national identity through folk narratives.

In the *Baltica* 1987 program, Jonas Bielinis, Minister of Culture of the Lithuanian SSR and deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR (1975–1990) writes:

> Folklore is like a book in which every nation has been writing down for centuries its beliefs and tales, its dreams and hopes. Folk songs, dances, games, customs help a modern man of the 20th century to feel the vitality of his roots (Bielinis 1987: 4).

While this voice comes from an official position within the Soviet cultural apparatus, it exemplifies how Baltic folklore was framed as a timeless cultural asset. In an anonymous essay on Lithuania included in the program, folklore is again invoked, this time as a vital process that shapes the distinct identity of a national culture while fostering understanding and appreciation of other cultures. In both cases, folklore is presented as a source of legitimacy and belonging, situating nations within both historical and contemporary perspectives.

In the 1988 program, the authority of tradition is articulated by musicologist and key theorist of the folklore movement (see Weaver et al. 2023) – then secretary of the Board of the Composers' Union of the Latvian SSR – Arnolds Klotiņš, a known ally of the Latvian folklore movement. He describes folklore as "an artistic manifestation of traditional values of life, where aesthetic functions are not yet separated from ethical, intellectually practical, harmonizing man and mankind. This wholeness of world perception, the connection of art and life gets its most vivid manifestation in seasonal custom folklore" (Klotiņš 1988: 18). This quotation portrays folklore as a "whole way of life," namely, culture as "a state or habit of the mind, or the body of intellectual and moral activities" (Williams 1963: 18). His language affirms folklore as a moral and philosophical system, framing tradition as a source of ethical continuity.

In the 1991 program, Klotiņš revisits this idealized past:

> And what are we looking for in ancient folklore if not for man, free of prerequisites of modern civilization? Live in accordance with nature and the natural, not dividing conscience from practice, the ethical from the healthy, and in your simplicity live a fuller, healthier life (Klotiņš 1991: 8).

Through such framing, Klotiņš reinforces the idea of folklore as a counter-model to modernity, contributing to the legitimation of alternative Baltic worldviews (see Figure 3).

Poet and First Secretary of the Writers' Union of the Latvian SSR Jānis Peters, in the 1988 program, traces a genealogy of Latvian resistance through folk songs, arguing that the wisdom ingrained in them provided "everything necessary for human life". According to Peters, folk songs are alive in the 21st century because there is the intellectual power of the unbroken early generations in them, their unusually picturesque, poetic world outlook, the pure ethics and aesthetics of the people (Peters 1988: 7). In doing so, Peters positions folklore not just as artistic expression, but as a repository of national endurance and a quiet form of resistance across generations.

The authorization of tradition also features in the program of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* (1989) through an essay titled *The Main Principles of 'Baltica 89'* by Ingrid Rüütel, President of the Folklore Association *Baltica*. Rüütel, writing as a folklorist, states: "We will not organize grand spectacles or pompous shows, as this is not relevant to folklore, at least in our region. We do not aim at commercial profit, nor we do want to stage a demonstration of Soviet international friendship". In her discourse, Rüütel positions herself as a social actor speaking on behalf of the Estonian folklore movement:

> The folklore movement in Estonia is a revelation of the activeness in the world-wide folklore movement during the last decades. On the one hand, it is connected with the ideals of national identity, home feeling, preserving historical and cultural memory of the nation; on the other hand, with the ideals of national and cultural pluralism (Rüütel 1989: 16–17).

This excerpt reveals a programmatic discourse with the vision, mission, and values of the *Baltica* festival community and, arguably, of the folklore movement more broadly.

Adding to this, Rüütel states that those principles "have been acknowledged in various countries, but they are vital to small nations incorporated in bigger states, which is also the case with the organizers of 'Baltica' – Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians" (Rüütel 1989: 17). Beyond clearly distinguishing the festival community and organizers as an 'in-group' and framing Estonia as a vulnerable small nation, Rüütel also introduces an external threat to the continuity of Baltic folklore: "Our aim is to preserve, revive and develop those national and local cultural traditions, which have already becoming extinct due to the standardization of global mass culture" (Rüütel 1989: 17). To counteract this phenomenon, Rüütel's discourse revolves around three main ideas: firstly, that "Every nation, whether big or small in number, gives the world its unique cultural experience." Secondly, that "All nations have equal rights to exist in our planet Earth. The same Sun and same stars shine to everybody, wherever our home is." And thirdly, "the idea expressed by the motto song of our festival – sing, as long as you live!" (Rüütel 1989: 18–20).

These excerpts position Baltic folklore as a vehicle for self-expression and international recognition. Tradition, far from being static, emerges as a discursive space for negotiating identity, legitimacy, and belonging.

Mythopoiesis

Mythopoiesis, derived from the Greek term *mythos* (myth or tale) and *poiesis* (making or creation), confers legitimacy through storytelling (van Leeuwen 2008). Such stories may be moral or cautionary, or employ symbolic actions, offering a "mythical model of social action" (Wright 1975: 188).

In the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* (1987), mythopoiesis appears in an anonymous festival program essay on Lithuania:

> Lithuania lies on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Historians maintain that our ancestors, Indo-European tribes (from them we inherited one of the oldest languages in Europe), settled here as early as the 3rd millennium B.C. Since of old Lithuania is called the land of amber and songs (Lietuvos SSR mokslinis metodinis kultūros centras 1987: 10).

Despite the program's overall cautious tone, the excerpt illustrates how mytho-poiesis is used to narrate the origins of the Lithuanian people and to confer cultural significance on their intangible cultural heritage, while simultaneously distinguishing Lithuania as an ancient European nation.

Mythopoiesis is also present in the program of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* (1988), notably in the aforementioned essay by Peters. The essay delineates a narrative framework by personifying Latvia as a sorrowful child that has endured many hardships yet maintained its bond with the motherland through folk songs:

> On the dawn of the 20th century Latvia was born. And the world noticed it. Because Latvia is a child of sorrow. Sorrow, because our country Latvia, our republic Latvia, was born in great pains. We have dreamt and ached for our country. We have cherished it and fought for it. We have defended it and we still do (Peters 1988: 4).

These statements narrate Latvian endurance and spiritual resistance through folkloric memory, exemplifying mythopoiesis as a mode of affective national sentiment-building.

In the program of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* (1989), mythopoiesis can be found in the aforementioned essay by Ingrid Rüütel, which references the Estonian emblem for the festival (see Üdre-Lielbārde 2025 in this issue) – a tree with a star on top, designed with neo-pagan aesthetics. Rüütel explains:

> There is much in common in the ancient mythological cognition of the universe by the Estonians and by our kindred and neighboring nations. One of the central images of the cosmogonic reflections of the Finno-Ugrians, the Balts and many other European nations, as well as the North American Indians is the pillar of the world, which connects the three worlds – the world above, the world on the earth and the under world. [..]
> The image of the axis of the world is also connected with the axis of the conical tent (in Estonian *püstkoda*). The word stem 'koda' is traced also in the Estonian word 'kodu' (home), as the Estonians likewise lived once in the conical tent. [..] Thus the emblem symbolizes our home, its reticence and at the same time its connection with the whole world, but first and foremost with our kins in language – the Finno-Ugrians and neighboring nations on both sides of the Baltic Sea, whose cultures are connected through Estonia and Estonians (Rüütel 1989: 19–20).

This excerpt positions Baltic nations on equal footing with European nation-states. In doing so, Rüütel moves beyond framing the Baltic nations solely as modern nations, envisioning them instead as potential postmodern European nations, rendering the concept of family flexible to the cultural and political needs of the *Baltica* festival community.

The quoted excerpts reveal a clear intent to ascribe a cosmological dimension to the cultural symbols employed within the festival community. By explicating the 'grammar' of the emblem, Rüütel both interprets and renders accessible the cultural

universe of the festival community to its audience, while simultaneously linking Estonian folklore and national identity to a supernatural realm. This framing weaves together folklore, home, and metaphysical belonging, elevating tradition to a sacred and intergenerational domain. Mythopoiesis, as the following section illustrates, is further articulated through a Baltic ritualistic and mythical past, expressed in kinship rituals such as birth, christening, upbringing, weddings, and funerals. These rites embody a lasting cosmology and cultural memory in which the family serves as the central axis.

The Family Metaphor as Mythopoiesis

One of the most recurrent and powerful rhetorical strategies in the *Baltica* festival programs is the metaphor of the family, employed both as an ideological construct and as a symbolic instrument to articulate identity, kinship, and cultural continuity (see Figure 4). The metaphor operates on multiple levels: the biological and spiritual family, the festival community, and the Baltic nations envisioned as a united familial body. The family

metaphor functions as an effective political tool because it naturalizes "the terms of political membership" while simultaneously emotionalizing belonging, enabling abstract notions of nationhood or unity to be expressed in tangible and affective terms (Wedeen 1999: 49).

In the program for the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* 1991, folklorist and former President of Estonia Ingrid Rüütel invokes this metaphor explicitly in her essay *Family Rituals and Celebrations in Estonian Folklore*. She depicts the Baltic nations as a "united family", bonded by history and culture, standing together "in happiness as well as in distress". This familial connection is framed not only as metaphorical but also as political and performative. According to Rüütel (1991b: 23), the feelings of the family in question intensified in the late 1980s and supported the Baltic people through folklore festivals, the Baltic Chain, and politically engaged songs and dances.

Rüütel's metaphor is both retrospective and aspirational. In her essay *Association 'Baltica' Independent Member of CIOFF* that also appears in the program Rüütel is envisioning a future in which, "even if some day the door to the family of free European nations is opened for us, the traditional folk culture is still going to be of important and lasting value for us in order to retain and safeguard our national as well as cultural identity" (Rüütel 1991a: 5).

Further, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, then a folklore scholar and professor of psychology at the University of Montreal and later President of the Republic of Latvia (1999–2007), elaborates on the ritual dimension of kinship and family in her contributions to the *Baltica* program 1991. She describes Latvian families as "the main preserver and transmitter of tradition" and details a continuum of rites of passage – birth, christening, upbringing, weddings, funerals – framed within mythical cosmology. Birth is associated with Māra, the ancient goddess of fertility, as the child "enters into this material world through 'the gates of Māra'" to be "received in sheets of white linen by its mother," a process which she calls "a revelation of the mystery of the incarnation." Marriage ceremonies likewise participate in this sacred mythology: "Each bride becoming, for a moment, a daughter of the Sun, each groom becoming, in turn, a Son of God, [thereby forming] a new branch on the vast tree of kinship and consanguinity relations" (Vīķe-Freiberga 1991: 14–15).

A more moral-philosophical approach to family appears in the reflections of Angelė Vyšniauskaitė, leading Lithuanian ethnologist and long-time head of the Ethnography Department at the Lithuanian Institute of History. In her 1991 essay, Vyšniauskaitė presents the family not only as a symbolic unit but also as the pillar of national identity. She frames kinship relations through the lens of Christian morality, emphasizing interpersonal ethics, child-rearing, and hard work. Funerals, in her view,

are not only social rituals but also a "sacred duty" to relatives. She summarizes this moral elevation of familial responsibility by quoting the 9th-century cleric Adam of Bremen, referring to Baltic people as "homines humanissimi", the most humane of men (Vyšniauskaitė 1991: 20–21).

Together, these uses of the family metaphor do more than illustrate personal or cultural values: they legitimize political aspirations, validate symbolic resistance, and cement group cohesion under the guise of natural kinship. Whether framed as a folkloric ideal, a cosmological archetype, or a moral obligation, the metaphor of family emerges as a central organizing principle of the *Baltica* festival discourse. It reinforces a transnational identity that is intimate and resilient. In contrast, the Soviet Union carried forward the Bolshevik regime's use of kinship language, employing it to craft political discourse and to foster a community in which citizens could imagine themselves as sons, daughters, or other relatives of the state's leaders (Tikhomirov 2017).

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis above has shown that the discourse of the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* programs can be meaningfully categorized according to two primary strategies of legitimation: authority and mythopoiesis. Both categories are evident across all the analyzed programs (1987–1991), demonstrating that these documents are not merely descriptive but rather complex articulations of the festival's political, social, and symbolic functions. However, to fully assess the validity of the manifesto theoretical proposal, it is necessary to expand the interpretive framework beyond these categories by situating the festival within its specific context: the political conditions of the late Soviet apparatus and the discursive strategies available to its cultural actors – folklorists, revivalists, scholars, and performers alike.

To better understand the *Baltica* festival programs, James C. Scott's theory of public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990) helps illuminate the festival's ambiguous political positioning. Scott argues that all subaltern groups under domination cultivate two forms of discourse: the public transcript – an outward performance of compliance – and the hidden transcript – a space, often symbolic or coded, where critique, resistance, and alternative narratives emerge outside the immediate gaze of dominant power structures. Crucially, these transcripts are not always spatially distinct but may coexist within the same discursive field, mediated through subtle rhetorical strategies.

In the case of Festival *Baltica*, the programs reflect the elements of both registers. On the surface, they adhere to the expected conventions of state-sanctioned cultural programming – celebrating folklore, international friendship, and values consistent

with Soviet ideals, particularly the image of morally upright and industrious Baltic peoples. This is especially clear in the early programs (1987–1988), where high-ranking Soviet officials such as Jonas Bielinis and Anatolijs Gorbunovs appear as institutional voices, framing folklore within the context of Soviet cultural diplomacy. These contributions operate as the public transcript, aligning the festival with ideological aims such as internationalism and the instrumental use of folklore as a Soviet regional phenomenon.

Yet, embedded within this same textual corpus is a hidden transcript of resistance, which can be most productively read through the proposed notion of manifesto. In this frame, the discourse reclaims cultural, political, and historical agency. This hidden transcript unfolds in three directions. First, it manifests in the symbolic revival of pre-Christian and pagan identities, particularly through references to ancient Baltic mythology and cosmology. Second, it emphasizes national genealogies, portraying Lithuania as "the land of amber and songs" or Latvia as a "child of sorrow" born through struggle – narratives that unite Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians as long-oppressed "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983). Third, it invokes a shared Baltic cultural space, not merely as a regional construct but as a geopolitical unit advocating national emancipation. Through these mechanisms, the programs reconfigure folklore from a Soviet cultural resource into a tool of national reawakening, functioning simultaneously as historical memory and future-oriented aspiration, and embedding a mythopoetic narrative of sovereignty, resistance, and rebirth (see Figure 5).

As the political climate shifted in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's rule, the hidden transcript became increasingly legible, blurring the boundaries between oppositional discourse and public representation. This shift is evident in the transition from the framing of national collectivities (1987–1988) to the articulation of a transnational Baltic folklore community (1989–1991). In line with this, Hall (1997) noted that "the imagined component of 'we-ness' in national identities is constantly (re)produced, negotiated, and instantiated in tangible symbols, practices, and discourses that rely on narratives of collective belonging and otherness" (Zappettini 2016: 85). In *Baltica*'s case, this process of negotiation is discursively inscribed within the programs themselves, which gradually redefine who belongs to the festival community and what that community represents.

This process culminates in what can be described as a discursive dual function. The programs serve both as public instruments for staging of a CIOFF-compliant festival and as covert declarations of Baltic cultural sovereignty (see Figure 6). The concept of family, invoked metaphorically by contributors such as Ingrid Rüütel and Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, becomes a key site for developing this duality. On one level, the
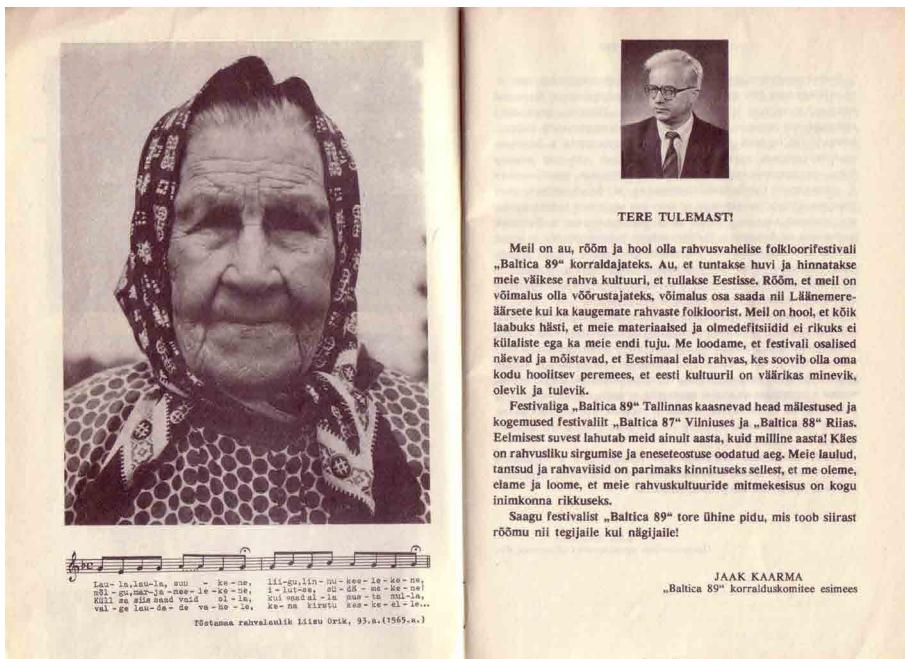
Figure 5. Opening speech by Jaak Kaarma.
Source: Eesti Folkloorinõukogu. Available: https://baltica.ee/en/history/

Baltic family celebrates regional kinship and shared cultural heritage. On another, it functions as a political metaphor that reimagines the Baltic republics not as administrative units within the Soviet Union, but as autonomous members of a broader European community. In doing so, this metaphor enables the redefinition of political membership and collective aspirations.

The manifesto quality of the programs is particularly evident when they articulate a vision of knowledge discovery and cultural revaluation. Drawing on Yanoshevsky (2009), manifestos do not merely reflect existing knowledge; they declare it, assert it, and in doing so, shape new knowledge-based and political realities. Contributions from ethnomusicologists and folklorists such as Rüütel, Vīķe-Freiberga, Klotiņš, and Vyšniauskaitė frame the revival not only as a return to cultural roots but also as a phenomenon worthy of scholarly intervention. Through the festival programs, Baltic cultural actors assert their authority as custodians of authentic tradition and as agents of historical transformation.

Moreover, the programs often highlight symbolic milestones such as the acceptance of *Baltica* into the CIOFF network, the public display of previously banned

national flags, or the rejection of staged Soviet amateur folklore to advocate for spontaneous and "authentic" folklore. These achievements are encapsulated by discourse, transforming the festival from an artistic platform into a political act: a performative space in which cultural sovereignty is enacted and legitimized. Viewing the discourse of festival programs as a form of recontextualization (van Leeuwen 2008) allows the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* to be understood as comprising several spheres – spatial, performative, discursive, and interactional – each with its own degree of representational autonomy. From this perspective, the *Baltica* programs published during the Singing Revolution reveal themselves to be more than cultural documents or archives; they operate as manifestos of symbolic resistance within a liminal historical space. They can be seen as artefacts that help frame "the power of the politics of small things", namely, a normative alternative emerging when human interaction enables a form of freedom that generates power (Goldfarb 2006: 136).

Although this study has examined only a small set of festival programs (1987–1991), the framework developed here – treating festival programs as manifestos – provides a foundation for broader inquiry. Future research could explore how these

texts functioned after the restoration of independence or compare them with programs from other international folk festivals in Europe. Further avenues might include investigating how the programs were received in local and international media or assessing their long-term influence on national narratives. Such work would deepen our understanding of these publications as both representations and enduring legacies of collective political imagination.

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Valdis Muktupāvels

Dr. art., ethnomusicologist;
University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities
Dr. art., etnomuzikologs;
Latvijas Universitāte, Humanitāro zinātņu fakultāte
E-mail / e-pasts: vm@lu.lv
ORCID: 0000-0003-4427-4348

Archaization versus Modernization: The Revival of Instrumental Traditions in Riga Folklore Ensembles, Late 1970s and 1980s

Arhaizācija pret modernizāciju: dažu instrumentālmūzikas tradīciju atdzimšana Rīgas folkloras ansambļos 20. gadsimta 70. gadu beigās un 80. gados

Summary   The article examines the revival of instrumental music traditions in Latvia as part of a broader folklore movement during the Soviet occupation. Unlike the state-supported modernization of musical instruments, the revival of traditional instruments was driven by personal motivation and individual efforts, with scholars playing a significant role through their research and publications. Due to limited resources, the revival relied heavily on experimentation and intuitive creativity which was legitimized with a reference to tradition and archaism.

The study explores how traditional instruments were reintroduced into Latvian musical life, with a focus on urban folklore ensembles, such as the influential *Skandinieki*. The sources of the research include autoethnography, interviews with the revival participants, recordings, and published media. The revival of instruments served three main purposes: accompanying singing, accompanying dancing, and purely instrumental music. These aspects are further explored, detailing the motivations, key figures, and outcomes.

Overall, the revival of instruments symbolized resistance to Soviet occupation by rejecting modernized forms and embracing archaic, pre-Soviet cultural elements. This movement cultivated the idea that traditional culture, particularly its older, simpler forms, was especially valuable and representative of Latvian identity.

Kopsavilkums   Rakstā aplūkota instrumentālās mūzikas tradīciju atdzimšana Latvijā kā daļa no plašākas folkloras kustības padomju okupācijas laikā. Atšķirībā no valsts atbalstītās mūzikas instrumentu modernizācijas, tradicionālo instrumentu atdzimšanu veicināja personiskā motivācija un individuālie centieni, nozīmīga loma bija zinātniekiem, viņu pētījumiem un publikācijām. Ierobežoto resursu dēļ instrumentu atdzimšana lielā mērā balstījās uz eksperimentēšanu un intuīcijā balstītu radošumu, to pamatojot ar atsauci uz tradīciju un arhaiskumu.

Pētījuma fokusā ir tas, kā tradicionālie instrumenti tika atkalieviesti Latvijas mūzikas dzīvē, pievēršoties urbānajām folkloras kopām, tostarp vienai no ietekmīgākajām – *Skandinieki*. Pētījuma avoti ir autoetnogrāfiski materiāli, intervijas ar atmodas kustības dalībniekiem, skaņu ieraksti un publicētie mediji. Instrumentu atdzimšana kalpoja trim galvenajiem mērķiem: dziedāšanas pavadījumam, dejošanas pavadījumam un tīri instrumentālai muzicēšanai. Šie aspekti ir izvērsti rakstā, detalizēti raksturojot motivāciju, galvenos veicējus un rezultātus.

Kopumā instrumentu atdzimšana simbolizēja pretošanos padomju okupācijai, distancējoties no modernizētajām formām un aptverot arhaiskus, tātad – pirmspadomju kultūras elementus. Šī kustība kultivēja domu, ka tradicionālā kultūra, īpaši tās senākajās, vienkāršākajās formās, ir īpaši vērtīga un latvisko identitāti reprezentējoša.

There have been various waves of folklore revival in Latvia, but at the most general level, one can distinguish two main tendencies: those cultural expressions shaped significantly by the idea of modernization, and those opposing modernization in search of alternative forms of expression. The idea of modernization is rooted in cultural evolutionism – the notion that cultural forms develop from simpler to more complex stages. This approach is also applied to situations where earlier cultural products are consciously appropriated in a different temporal context.

Such tendencies are evident in the use of folklore both before and after the Second World War: for example, folk song arrangements for choir by professional composers, or folk dance choreographies created by trained professionals (Klotiņš 2002: 109). A defining feature of the Soviet period was that all artistic activity was expected to comply with the principles of socialist realism – serving the ideological leadership of the Communist party, enacting the vision of its leaders, promoting collective values, and being accessible and appealing to the masses.

In the name of "progress", pre-Soviet culture was often labeled "bourgeois", "conservative", or "regressive", and subjected to ideological scrutiny. Only those elements deemed "progressive" were permitted. Within this framework, folklore was likened to the creative expression of the working people. A specific kind of controlled mass artistic activity known as *samodejatel'nost'* was developed, which included vocal, instrumental, or choreographic forms intended exclusively for staged performance (for more on this, see Klotiņš 2002; Muktupāvels 2011).

Regarding the revival of folk musical instruments during the mentioned period, the idea of their modernization – introducing technological improvements so that the instrument meets the needs of contemporary music – is characteristic. For example, a typical approach was to enable chromatic instead of diatonic scales, as well as to create families of instruments – variations of the same instrument in different sizes and, accordingly, different tonal ranges. It can also be added that the initial idea of such families was likely "borrowed" from the symphony orchestra, where families of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass versions of bowed instruments, flutes, and others are present (Muktupāvels 2011: 81–82).

Different approaches emerged during the wave of folklore revival of the late 1970s and 1980s, commonly referred to as the folklore movement. This period was particularly important for the shaping of instrumental practices, as it provided patterns and guidelines for further development up to the present day. The main attention and efforts of the participants in the folklore movement were directed toward

reviving vocal traditions and repertoire, dances, and traditional singing and dancing contexts (Šmidchens 2014: 276–277), so musical instruments did not take center stage. There was also a dramatic lack of information about traditional instruments and instrumental music – just a few dozen instrumental melodies could be found in academic publications, and recordings were even scarcer, whether published or housed in the Archives of Latvian Folklore (Weaver et al. 2023: 58). At the same time, traditional musical instruments were seen as both representative of ancient culture and interesting and appealing to contemporary listeners; therefore, a significant segment of the folklore movement paid particular attention to them.

The aim of this study is to identify the ideas, resources, and influences involved in the process of how musical instruments were reintroduced into musical life. As a case study, mostly urban folklore ensembles from the city of Riga are examined, among them the ensemble *Skandinieki*, which had a significant influence on the folklore movement during the period in question and beyond (for more on this, see Ieva Weaver's article in this volume, Weaver 2025). The study is based on interviews with participants and on my personal autoethnographic approach. Having joined the folklore revival in the late 1970s, I was particularly interested in the field of traditional musical instruments, became a member of *Skandinieki*, and later founded the ensembles *Savieši*, *Kombuļi*, and *Rasa*. My emic perspective as a revival practitioner is complemented by the critical and analytical approach I developed during my five years of studying natural sciences at the University of Latvia (1975–1980). Published materials from the period in question – recordings, books, and articles – are also used.

The revival of musical instruments, like other revival and revitalization movements, is related to a certain reference culture that "can be known through personal experience or, to a greater or lesser degree, reconstructed – depending on the available (or the prioritized) historical sources" (Morgenstern 2019: 12). Thus, historically informed production of musical instruments and performance, on the one hand, and personal experience fused with intuition and imagination, on the other, are two aspects to be considered and evaluated in the present study. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, two researchers were involved in the study of traditional instruments – Īrisa Priedīte, a researcher at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, and I, a student at the Conservatory. Historian and ethnographer Priedīte's first publication on musical instruments was the booklet *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti* (Latvian Folk Musical Instruments; Priedīte 1978), whose function was apparently to inform museum visitors about the instruments found in the museum, though without detailed description. The next work, *Ko spēlēja sendienās* (What Was Played in the Olden Days; Priedīte 1983), was a small-format book in which the presented information was more detailed, and it also contained previously unpublished sources – mainly

from the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum. A certain drawback was that several descriptions of instrument making and playing were unreliable – seemingly compiled by authors without the necessary knowledge or experience; therefore, the book's practical use was met with some concern.

While studying at the Latvian Conservatory from 1980 to 1983, I conducted research under the guidance of my scientific supervisor, musicologist Dzintars Kļaviņš (1928–2007), and defended my diploma thesis *Organoloģijas pētījumu pamatobjekti Latvijas kultūras reģionā* (Basic Objects of Organological Research in the Cultural Region of Latvia; Muktupāvels 1983). The organological information necessary for the diploma thesis was obtained both by collecting published and unpublished sources and, no less importantly, by conducting organological experiments, which included making instruments, trying out and testing playing techniques, adjusting tuning and tonal range, ascertaining musical qualities, etc. Thus, my research work was intertwined with the need to revive musical instruments in the context of the folklore movement: historical and theoretical materials were brought up to date in the research, while practical work in folklore ensembles with revived instruments provided the necessary exemplification for the diploma thesis.

In general, however, the process of the revival of musical instruments, especially in its initial stage, can be described as a series of individual, spontaneous cases; the activity was mostly personally motivated and directed toward experimentation, both in terms of instrument making and playing. It can be said that the creative, intuitive approach often prevailed over the historically informed one, thus fully confirming Juniper Hill's view on revival movements "as a form of cultural activism that uses elements from the past to legitimate change – change comprising not only reversion to past practices, but innovation" (Hill 2014: 394).

Although the process of the revival of instruments itself did not follow a specific planned direction, three main areas where musical instruments found their application can be identified: accompaniment to singing, accompaniment to dancing, and purely instrumental music-making. In the following sections, the events in each of these areas will be discussed in more detail, describing the motivation for revival, the persons involved, the musical results, and the further development.

Musical Instruments
for Singing Accompaniment

Latvian traditional singing has been documented mostly without instrumental accompaniment. However, in various amateur musical practices of the 1970s, singing accompaniment was very characteristic: singing lessons in general education schools with piano as the accompanying

instrument, vocal ensembles with piano accompaniment, social singing with accordion or guitar accompaniment, popular music concerts with soloists and instrumental group accompaniment, and the like.

The folklore revival developed predominantly according to its own logic; nevertheless, it can be noted that some popular instrumental practices influenced it. Instruments uncharacteristic of traditional music, such as piano, synthesizer, or electric guitar, were not considered, but some relatively easily available instruments common in popular and folk music of the first half of the 20th century – piano accordion and also acoustic guitar – were used.

The use of the accordion was facilitated by the fact that the artistic leader of the folklore ensemble was often a player of this instrument himself or herself. Here, the ensemble *Senleja* with its leader Aina Salmane (1937–2013), or Jānis Teilāns (1941–2019), who led almost ten ensembles in the vicinity of Preiļi, can be mentioned.

The acoustic guitar was mostly played in ensembles where one of the members had rock or contemporary folk music experience, or had learnt it independently. Here one can mention the ensemble *Skandinieki*, where the artist and amateur musician Vilnis Blaževics (1940–1990) played the guitar until the end of the 1970s, or the ensemble *Bizīteri*, where the composer and songwriter Silvija Silava played the guitar. The use of the guitar to accompany folk songs was greatly promoted by Austra Pumpure (1928–2017) – a concertmaster of the Liepāja Theater who had already gained some popularity as a folk singer in the second half of the 1970s, and whose programs included quite a few folk songs, all accompanied by the guitar.

The attitude towards such a symbolically important instrument as the *kokle*, in the context of the folklore movement, was variable and contradictory in relation to different types of *kokle*. Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942), the founder of the revived pagan religion *Dievturība*, in his writings already in the 1930s recommended the *kokle* for the accompaniment of folk songs. During that period, the process of modernizing the *kokle* had begun – ensembles combining instruments of different sizes and ranges sprung up. During the Soviet period, the consistent modernization of *kokles* resulted in modifications modeled on orchestral instrument families: this so-called concert *kokle* family consisted of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass instruments, and in them, the traditional diatonic tuning of the *kokle* was altered with the help of mechanical levers enabling the raising or lowering of the pitch of each string by half a tone. A large part of the repertoire of modernized *kokle* ensembles consisted of folk song arrangements, so the *kokle* accompanied singing, and this became a common practice. At the beginning of the folklore movement, the attitude of the participants and the audience towards these modernized *kokles* was relatively neutral – although the instrument

Figure 1. Modernized *kokles* (front row) played by members of the *Skandinieki* ensemble. 1977. Photo from Marga Stalta's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore.

was associated with Soviet-style stage manifestations, its use was still acceptable. For example, one or several concert *kokles* were used to accompany singing in the folklore ensemble *Skandinieki* (see Figure 1) until the summer of 1979.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, I myself played one of the modernized *kokles* (a 17-string diatonic *kokle* "*Līgo*", bought in an antique shop in 1978) in the *Skandinieki* ensemble. At the very beginning of the 1980s, modernized *kokles* were also played in one of the well-known folklore ensembles in the Latvian provinces – *Madonas Skandinieki*.

The situation began to change in 1980. Guntis Veiskats, a member of the *Skandinieki* ensemble, described his feelings about this change in the following way:

> At that time, there were only those ensembles of *kokle* players – over-age women with Nīca-type wreaths on their heads, who played the big *kokles* [..] And that *arpeggio* technique made me sick. I knew that I wanted exactly the authentic *kokle* – as it was played in the past[1] (interview, Veiskats 2022).

Veiskats, impressed by the Kurzeme type or small carved wooden *kokle* at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, made his own 8- or 9-string *kokle*:

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1   Tolaik bija tikai tie koklētāju ansambļi – pārziedējušas sievas ar Nīcas vainagiem galvā, kas spēlēja lielās kokles [..] Un tas *arpeggio* paņēmiens manī radīja nelabumu. Es zināju, ka gribu tieši autentisko kokli – tā kā senāk spēlēja. (Here and throughout the article, the original Latvian text is provided; all translations are by the author.)

Figure 2. Jānis Poriķis (on the right) playing the *kokle* together with Valdis Muktupāvels (on the left), while the youngest participants of the *Skandinieki* ensemble watch. 1982. Photo from Ilga Reizniece's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2248, 28.

> By that time, I had already started working as a carpenter-restorer at the Open-Air Museum and had already started making my own *kokle*, completely by feel, without any measurements [..] I simply looked at the general design principles, and then – out of my head[2] (interview, Veiskats 2022).

After learning that Jānis Poriķis (1909–1992), the maker of the *kokle* that had inspired him, lived almost next door in Jaunciems, Veiskats invited him to join the *Skandinieki* ensemble. As it turned out, Poriķis had been taught to play by Nikolajs Heņķis-Freijs (1864–1934) – a well-known traditional instrument player from the historic Suiti region in western Latvia since the 1920s. From that moment on, Poriķis, by playing with the ensemble, gave others the opportunity to see and learn the traditional western Latvian way of playing the *kokle* (see Figure 2).

He also crafted new instruments, which members of the ensemble and other interested persons could obtain.

Around the same time, interest in the Latgale-type, or large carved *kokles*, arose, and my brother Māris Muktupāvels and I – with our family roots in Latgale – were among the first to take action in that direction. Māris made his first Latgale *kokle* as

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2   Uz to laiku es jau biju iestājies darbā par galdnieku-restauratoru Brīvdabas muzejā un biju jau iesācis pats savu koklīti taisīt, pilnīgi uz izjūtu, bez kādiem izmēriem [..] Es vienkārši paskatījos tos vispārējos konstrukcijas principus, tad tā – uz dullo.

early as 1981, following a model in the History Museum of Latvia (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2009). Soon after, I also made my own Latgale-type *kokle*, and several *kokles* were then made in my folklore ensemble *Savieši* of Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts. The students, who had learned woodworking skills, chose their *kokle* models from the Ethnography Department of the History Museum of Latvia, after which they made their instruments: Jānis Cīrulis – 12, Gints Mālderis – 3, Didzis Maurītis – 3 (all unfinished), and Kārlis Zemītis – 1, of a rather unusual shape:

> The lower surface of [the *kokle*] was flat, the upper surface was flat, and in the middle it was bent like a twig; it looked like a primitive leather shoe, *pastala*, and I made something similar, just with a slightly different technology, but the shape was about the same[3] (interview, Zemītis 2022).

Already in 1983, following my suggestion and the ethnographic materials I provided, as well as after studying some models in the Ethnography Department of the History Museum of Latvia, Donāts Vucins (1934–1999), a native of Latgale, began making Latgale-type carved *kokles*. He turned out to be the most productive *kokle* maker at the end of the 20th century. His instruments mostly had 11 strings and were usually known for their excellent sound (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2009).

In different folklore ensembles, the question of using small and large *kokles* for singing accompaniment received different solutions. In general, the trend was that in smaller ensembles, songs were accompanied by *kokles* more often than in larger ensembles. For example, in the *Iļģi* (4 members) program *Zemgales dziesmas* (Songs from Zemgale), *kokles* were played in 6 out of 7 songs, in the *Kombuļi* (4 members) program *Divejōda Saule tak, kokles* were played in 3 out of 9 songs; however, in the *Skandinieki* (around 20 participants) program of funeral songs, *kokles* were played in 2 out of 12 songs, or in the *Savieši* (about 30 members) program *Remešu dziesmas* (Craftsmen's songs), *kokles* were played in 3 out of 15 songs. This can be partly explained by the fact that the *kokle* is a relatively quiet instrument; its sound is lost in a larger group of singers. However, it was important to have a good *kokle* player who would not only accompany by simply strumming two alternating chords, but who could play both melody and harmony, doing so with a definite touch of individuality and their own style.

While singing was the focus of the Latvian folklore revival, some elements of vocal music influenced the revival of instrumental music as well. One such element is the continuous sound of a drone. When reviving vocal traditions, it was just the

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3   [Koklei] apakšējā virsma plakana, virsējā virsma plakana un pa vidu kā no klūgām tur tāds izlocīts; viņa pēc tādas pastalas izskatījās, un es [uztaisīju] kaut ko līdzīgu, tik ar drusku citu tehnoloģiju, bet forma apmēram tā pati.

recited-style singing with drone that gained special importance as a characteristic, archaic, traditional, and largely extinct – but therefore all the more important – singing style of all regions of Latvia. In the early 1980s, a story circulated among folklore practitioners about a meeting of music folklorists, where representatives from Latvia and Lithuania argued about what was unique in their country and absent in neighboring countries. It was said that Lithuanian folklorist and folk music researcher Zenonas Slaviūnas (1907–1973) said, "We have *sutartinės*"[4], whereas Latvian folklorist and folk music researcher Jēkabs Vītoliņš (1898–1977) responded, "But we have vocal drone".

Traditionally, recited-style singing has not been practiced with the accompaniment of tonally definite instruments; for the rhythmic support of such singing, stick rattles – *eglīte*, *puškaitis*, *trīdeksnis*, or *čakans* – have been used. Attempts to use the *kokle* to accompany such songs were not successful, mainly because of the monotonous melodic line and the difficulty of harmonizing such a melody. As an exception, the song *Tumša nakts, zaļa zāle* (Dark Night, Green Grass) from the Krustpils vicinity, performed by the *Iļģi* ensemble, can be mentioned (Iļģi 1996); in their interpretation, the recited-style singing has turned into a cantilena-style due to changing harmonies, polyphony of thirds, slowed tempo, and elements that enhance the increased role of aesthetic quality.

In the early 1980s, a new instrument, the *ģīga* – a short- or long-necked fiddle with two metal strings – was born. Its important musical function, in addition to duplicating the melody, was to provide drone accompaniment for singing. Historically, the name *ģīga* was mainly associated with the monochord, which was played with a bow and used for a pedagogical purpose – to facilitate learning chorale parts at home. There were attempts to restore the *ģīga* both in the late 1930s and the late 1940s, constructing a modernized *ģīga* family for the needs of the Latvian folk musical instrument orchestra. Unfortunately, these attempts were not continued, and after the orchestra's activities ended in the early 1960s, the instrument fell into almost complete oblivion. As a rare exception, the use of the big *ģīga* in ensemble with the modernized *kokle* in the folklore ensemble *Duvzare* from Rucava in 1979 can be mentioned (see Figure 3).

It is possible that the first attempt to restore the *ģīga* in the context of the folklore movement was connected with Guntis Veiskats. This time, the impetus for creating the *ģīga* was a *dutar* – a long-necked lute with two double strings, given to him by me. Veiskats comments on it as follows:

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4 Archaic vocal form – multi-part songs with dominant seconds.

Figure 3. A big *ģīga*, played by a member of the *Duvzare* ensemble, and a modernized *kokle* (in the background). 1979. Photo from Igeta Ozoliņa's collection, photographer unknown.

> I only knew the name. I had heard or read somewhere how many strings it should have, but I was very much a minimalist at the time. And I knew that the *ģīga* was played with a bow [..]. [The *dutar*] was fantastic! Somehow, I was slightly influenced by it, and I just made – completely out of my head – a neck as long as possible and a box. It was pure improvisation[5] (interview, Veiskats 2022).

Veiskats's *ģīga* was made from one piece of wood: a carved body with a resonator board attached on top, a long fingerboard without frets, two steel strings, and wooden pegs for tuning. The original tuning of the strings, apparently following that presented in Joachim Braun's article (Braun 1971: 125), was in unison. In an attempt to find a suitable repertoire for the *ģīga*, the initial focus was on dance tunes. This can be heard, for example, in the 1981 album *Senie balsi* (Olden Tunes) recorded by *Skandinieki*, where track A5 *Ģīgas meldija* (Melody of the Ģīga; Skandinieki 1982a) seems to have been taken from the button accordion repertoire and, due to its very slow tempo, does not inspire confidence in its suitability for the *ģīga*.

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5   Es zināju tikai nosaukumu. Kaut kur biju dzirdējis vai lasījis, cik tai jābūt stīgu, bet es tobrīd biju ļoti izteikts minimālists. Un es zināju, ka ģīgu spēlēja ar lociņu [..]. [Dutāra] bija fantastiska! Kaut kur es no viņas nedaudz ietekmējos un uztaisīju vienkārši, nu tā – uz dullo, tādu pēc iespējas garu kātu un tādu kasti, un tā bija tīrā improvizācija.

Figure 4. Guntis Veiskats's *ǵīga* played by Andris Veismanis. His singing is also accompanied by an overtone flute played by Valdis Muktupāvels. 1989. Photo from Valdis Muktupāvels's collection, photographer Pēteris Korsaks.

Already in 1982, a craftsman, Jānis Caune (1932–?) from Eleja in south-central Latvia, offered his model of the revived *ǵīga* and began making these instruments for sale, thus distributing them to a wider circle of interested parties. The instrument had two strings and a specially made bow for playing.

Due to the lack of evidence, it is currently difficult to describe the use of the *ǵīga* in the first half of the 1980s; however, sources from the second half of the decade show that the instrument was used to accompany singing (see Figure 4), mostly melodies with narrow tonal range, highlighting the drone tone.

In the album *Divejōda Saule tak* (The Rising and Setting Sun), recorded in 1986 by the folklore ensemble *Kombuļi*, the 2-string *ǵīga* is heard in two songs with a tonal range of a fourth and a minor sixth, with the basic tone of the melody extended like a drone. In the album *Latgolas dzīsmes* (Latgalian Songs) recorded around the same time by the folklore ensemble *Grodi*, the 2-string *ǵīga* is played in three songs, marking the melody or highlighting one of the tones of the prevailing harmony in a drone-like manner (Kombuļi, Grodi 1989).

The attempt to restore the bladder fiddle – a stick zither with a resonator – described both in the work of Joachim Braun (1962: 24) and in the *Atlas muzykal'nyh instrumentov narodov SSSR* (Atlas of Musical Instruments of the Peoples Inhabiting

the USSR; Vertkov, Blagodatov 1975: 97) developed somewhat unexpectedly. I prepared a description and offered it to the members of the *Savieši* ensemble who were engaged in woodworking. Gints Mālderis comments:

> We made it [the bladder fiddle] in *Savieši* quickly, with one string [..] That bladder fiddle was nothing special; it was a collective effort [..] It was made exactly like that because we needed a rhythm instrument, so we carved it quickly – somehow quite terrible-looking[6] (interview, Mālderis 2022).

After trying out different ways of producing sound, one had to conclude that the sound of the bladder fiddle is not at all similar to the cello, as one might assume when reading Jēkabs Vītoliņš's description (Vītoliņš 1972: 63). On the contrary, the gut string, struck with a bow and in contact with the dried bladder, created a whole spectrum of micro-oscillations, which suppressed the main tone and gave the sound a wild character. Nevertheless, the bladder fiddle was used sporadically as a drone instrument to accompany recited-style singing. One such instance was the review concert of folklore and ethnographic ensembles in Lielvārde on May 22, 1982, when the longest song, *Mēs deviņi bāleliņi* (We are Nine Brothers), published in the *Latvju dainas* (Barons, Wissendorffs 1904, No. 13,646) collection, was sung in a recited style and accompanied by the bladder fiddle, with a duration exceeding 15 minutes. Later, this song – accompanied by the bladder fiddle – was also recorded by Latvian Radio, but it was not broadcast, apparently because of its too-challenging sound. Nonetheless, for the members of the *Savieši* ensemble, the recited-style singing combined with the wild drone of the bladder fiddle was a representation of archaism – thus a value in itself, as it was commonly believed that more ancient origin signified a more "genuine Latvian" quality.

Another instrument, the use of which gradually became associated with singing, is the guimbarde. In 1980, the *Skandinieki* ensemble acquired two "Schwartz"–type guimbardes. Through experimentation, I reached the point of being able to play a melody and also instructed other interested parties. In the album *Senie balsi*, track B4 *Spēle uz zobām* (Playing the Guimbardes; Skandinieki 1982a), one can hear a melody I played together with Veiskats, which can also be found in Emilis Melngailis's publication *Latviešu dancis* (Latvian dance) as a *kokle* melody (Melngailis 1949, No. 346). Originally, it was supposed to be a polka tune, but in the mentioned recording it completely lacks the character of dance music due to both the slow tempo and the barely audible melody line. It is not surprising that with this level of performance

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6   Mēs to [pūšļa vijoli] *Saviešos* uztaisījām ātri, ar vienu stīgu [..] Tā pūšļa vijole nebija nekas tāds, tas bija tāds kolektīvs darbs [..] Tā pūšļa vijole tieši tā arī tapa, jo mums vajadzēja tur ritma instrumentu, tāpēc mēs to ātri kaut kā pabriesmīgu izgrebām.

technique, the guimbarde did not become a dance music instrument, but due to its mysterious, energizing sound, it increasingly began to represent ritual, magical, or ancient associations. This can be heard clearly in the already mentioned album of the *Grodi* ensemble (Kombuļi, Grodi 1989), where the very first song begins with an interplay of drums and guimbarde in D, whereas the singing accompanied by the *kokle* is a tone higher – in E; apparently, such tonal dissonance is a less important factor than the presence of the guimbarde's symbolic image.

Musical Instruments for Dance Accompaniment

The role of choreographic forms in the early stage of the folklore movement was less significant compared to singing. This was largely related to the way folklore ensembles operated – through public performances, brief commentary, and involving the audience as much as possible. Round dances with singing turned out to be a very effective form of engaging performance, but they did not require musical instruments. Still, the demonstration of couple dances required instrumental accompaniment, which in turn required a skilled player with an appropriate musical instrument. It is also known that when choreographic folklore was documented at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century, the characteristic dance music instruments of the time were the diatonic accordion, violin, zither, mandolin, and double bass in various ensemble combinations. However, the availability of these instruments – except for the violin – was quite limited during the period under study.

In the situation of the folklore movement at the end of the 1970s, the real instrument accompanying dancing was most often the piano accordion, but a violin was also suitable for this purpose, as was the case, for example, in the ensemble *Skandinieki* in the second half of the 1970s. However, the characteristic dance music sound of the ensemble *Skandinieki* was created in 1979. The ensemble obtained two non-playable Estonian bagpipes without reeds, but very soon, thanks to the experimentation of me and Veiskats, the reeds were prepared and the bagpipes could be played (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2020). Projecting the instrumental ensemble, I made arrangements of four dances for two violins, bagpipes, and a hornpipe – a primitive clarinet with six fingerholes, actually, a herder's instrument, but I added it probably because of my desire to give the ensemble an ancient, archaic character. The idea of the arrangements was that the bagpipes duplicate the part of the first violin, the second violin plays a third lower, and the hornpipe duplicates the second violin, but in a slightly simplified way. Over time, after several public performances, both the second violin's part of lower thirds as well as the need for a

Figure 5. Instrumental group of the *Skandinieki* ensemble: bagpipe, two violins, recorder, hornpipe, "devil's drum". 1981. Photo from Ilga Reizniece's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2248, 30.

hornpipe were abandoned, and the ensemble of violin and bagpipes was established, both playing and interpreting the same melody in their own way, marking the rhythmic accents with drums or with a stick rattle "devil's drum" (Skandinieki 1982a, track A1; 1982b, tracks A1, A4; see also Figure 5).

As a result of relatively intensive concert activity, such an instrumental lineup became established in the public's consciousness as representative of the ancient, authentic dance music ensemble. For a while, the sound of the dance music of the *Skandinieki* ensemble was enriched by a German-type diatonic button accordion (the accompaniment side buttons play a tonic chord when pushed), played by me, which I learned by myself through experimentation. It can be heard on the album *Senie balsi* (Skandinieki 1982a, tracks A6, B5), but this practice was not continued in the *Skandinieki* ensemble.

It could be that the first restored bagpipes in Latvia, made according to the museum artefacts, were created at the Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts in 1982 or 1983. Kārlis Zemītis, a member of the folklore ensemble *Savieši*, intended to make several wind instruments – pipes and bagpipes – characteristic, in his opinion, of the Latvian people, as his diploma work. He comments:

I was very interested in the bagpipes, but I started with pipes because it seemed simpler. I made quite a lot of them, and they were all such experiments for me [..] I saw [the bagpipes] [in the museum] and made them as ethnographic, quite precisely. I pressed Ingrīdiņa [Ingrīda Brence – a member of the *Savieši* ensemble]; her father could get the skins there [..] And then I specially asked them to make it so that it would be like a bag. And then I proceeded there quite a bit, softened it all [..] And shaping with a lathe – it wasn't complicated [..] It was difficult with those reeds. I really wanted to have the reeds similar to the ethnographic ones. My experience at that time was that they sounded very good for a short time, but quickly wore out[7] (interview, Zemītis 2022).

The most important reason why the instrument was hardly played was "when you play, you can't dance" (meaning that dancing would be his first choice), and "those girls were so pretty both now and then" (meaning that he was much more eager to dance with the pretty girls than to play instruments).

Instrumental music developed differently in the folklore studio of the University of Latvia, known since 1980 as *Dandari*, which specialized in the preservation and popularization of traditional dances. In the late 1970s, they collaborated with the folk music band of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, which included a piano accordion, a violin, and sometimes also a chorded zither and percussion.

Acting as a folklore ensemble since 1980, they continued to use the piano accordion to accompany dances, which was sometimes replaced by the bayan. Depending on the composition of the participants and their musical skills, the accordion was often accompanied by a violin and various percussion instruments, such as a stick rattle *trīdeksnis*, triangle, etc. A chorded zither in poor condition was found in the university warehouse; after some repairs, they attempted to play it, though not very successfully.

Having purchased *kokles* made by Donāts Vucins, they sometimes used them to accompany slower dances. For a short time, the tuba was used as a bass instrument for the band; however, its further use was discontinued following the opinion of an authoritative "expert" from the Emilis Melngailis's Folk Art Center, who argued that it was not suitable for a folklore ensemble (interview, Spīčs 2024).

By the mid-1980s, with improved knowledge of dance music traditions, they bought a traditional Ieviņš-type diatonic accordion and learned to play it. Around

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7   Man tās dūdas ļoti ieinteresēja, bet es sāku ar stabulēm, jo likās tā vienkāršāk. Tās es diezgan daudz sataisīju, un man tie visi bija tādi eksperimenti [..] [Dūdas] es noskatīju [muzejā] un uztaisīju tā kā etnogrāfiskas, diezgan precīzi. Es Ingrīdiņu mocīju, tur viņas tēvs varēja dabūt ģērētās ādas [..] Un tad es speciāli lūdzu, lai uztaisa, lai tā kā maiss tur būtu. Un tad diezgan tur ņēmos, mīkstināju to visu [..] Un virpošana – tas jau nebija sarežģīti [..] Ar tām mēlītēm bija grūti. Man ļoti gribējās, lai ir tā kā etnogrāfiskās no tās niedrītes. Mana toreizējā pieredze bija tāda, ka kaut kādu īsu laiku tās ļoti labi skanēja, bet ātri nolietojās.

the same time, they also acquired a button zither made by the traditional instrument maker Rūdolfs Ivansons (1907–1987). Thus, the ensemble, initially made up of various random and not particularly traditional instruments, was reshaped by the late 1980s into a traditional rural music band – with diatonic accordion, violin, button zither, and percussion.

Musical Instruments
for Instrumental Playing
The actualization of several instruments in the folklore movement is related to an important sphere of traditional culture – herding and herders' music. To present this aspect, folklore ensembles included herding calls, songs about herding, shepherds' games, as well as herders' musical instruments in their performances.

Compared to dance music instruments, these are simpler and made of natural materials – birch bark, wood, horns, animal or bird bones, grass, reeds, etc. However, their apparent simplicity often masks the need for specialized knowledge of construction, playing techniques, and other skills, without which the revival of these instruments is very difficult or even impossible – unless approached through creative experimentation to rediscover or reinterpret these practices.

Since these experiments also involved finding ways to play something meaningful, they resonate with what Juniper Hill described regarding the revival of ancient music: "Ancient music as departure for experimental improvisation and personal expression" (Hill 2014: 404).

Demonstration of herders' instruments in the performance of a folklore ensemble directly or indirectly pointed towards the aspect of archaism: it was believed that herders' instruments originated in prehistoric times; this idea was also found in both popular and specialized literature – for example, in Jēkabs Vītoliņš's *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti* (Latvian folk music instruments; 1972: 53–54) and Īrisa Priedīte's *Ko spēlēja sendienās* (Priedīte 1983: 19–20). Players and audiences imagined that the sound of these instruments served as a kind of testimony to older cultural layers.

Another important aspect of presenting these instruments to the public was the idea of their autochthonous origin – from local, natural resources. Thus, these instruments signaled Latvian identity more strongly than, say, internationally known and later-adopted ones such as the violin, diatonic accordion, or zither.

This aura of ancientness was so powerful for the revival participants that it could overshadow "uncomfortable" details – such as the fact that the wooden horn, whose signal often introduced the performances of the *Skandinieki* ensemble, actually

came from Estonia, or that birch bark playing techniques had been learned from a German musician during his ensemble's visit to the Open-Air Museum.

One of the first herders' instruments to be revived was a reed, and Guntis Veiskats comments on this:

> I heard about the reed pipe, but once on one of the *Skandinieki* trips [..] it was some kind of autumn, and there were rye straws somewhere. And I took one such thick rye straw and thought of cutting a reed in it, cut it and unfolded it, put it in my mouth with the whole reed, pressed the hole with my tongue. Then I blew it, and it turned out that you can play on it. And I cut a couple of fingerholes in it and [..] I remember the surprise of the people sitting around when I started playing it, yes. And then I tried the same thing with canes, and then we played a lot in that way there[8] (interview, Veiskats 2022).

In addition to being demonstrated as a herders' musical instrument, the reed pipe acquired other uses as well. Ernests Spīčs, the head of the folklore studio of the University of Latvia, comments on inviting me to conduct a master class on musical instruments and about its results:

> When you came to make reed pipes, it was [19]82, if I'm not mistaken; it was the first year when we accepted about a hundred participants in the folklore studio, and then you made those reed pipes. Then Uģis Dravnieks came [..] and he and Zigmāriņš [Zigmārs Kristsons; both were members of the folklore studio of the University of Latvia] played those reed pipes so well[9] (interview, Spīčs 2024).

In fact, the reed pipes played by the talented folk musician Uģis Dravnieks (1966–2009) for the folklore studio's dance music band were a kind of instrument that gave the musical accompaniment a specific character of sound and thus greater recognition. A different use of reed pipes could be heard on the LP *Kansanmusiikkia Sibelius-Akatemiasta* (Folk music at the Sibelius Academy; Sibelius Academy 1983), which I received from students of the Sibelius Academy in 1984; in this recording, reed pipes, like other "primitive" instruments, were used in the creation of experimental sonic compositions with elements of ethnojazz, and such an approach seemed to

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8   Dzirdēts bija par niedru stabuli, bet vienu reizi vienā *Skandinieku* braucienā [..] tas bija kaut kāds rudens un tur bija rudzu salmi kaut kur. Un es paņēmu vienu tādu pamatīgi resnu rudzu salmu un izdomāju uztaisīt tam mēlīti, iegriezu un atlocīju, iebāzu mutē ar visu mēlīti, aizspiedu caurumu ar mēli ciet. Tad iepūtu, un izrādījās, ka uz tā var spēlēt. Un es tam iegriezu pāris robiņus un [..] atceros to pārsteigumu apkārt sēdošajos, kad es viņu sāku spēlēt, jā. Un tad es pamēģināju ar niedrēm to pašu, un tad mēs tur daudz ko spēlējām tādā veidā.

9   Tad, kad tu atnāci ar niedru stabuļu taisīšanu, tas bija [19]82. gads, ja nemaldos, tas bija pirmais gads, kad mēs pieņēmām folkloras studijā apmēram simts dalībniekus, un tad tās niedru stabulītes taisīji. Tad atnāca Uģis Dravnieks [..], un viņš tā tīri labi kopā ar Zigmāriņu saspēlēja tās niedru stabulītes.
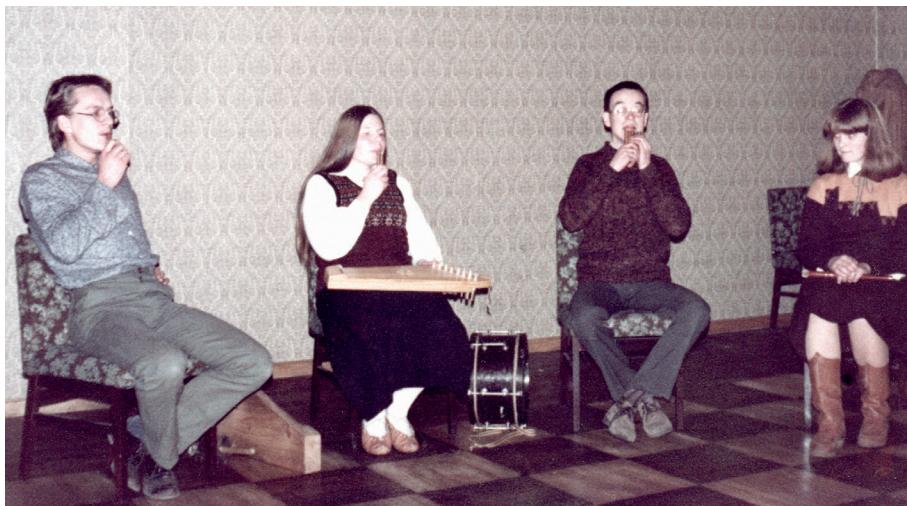
Figure 6. A set of *gārši* played by the *Skandinieki* instrumental group. 1982. Photo by Alfrēds Stinkuls. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2264, 12.

reflect the essence of folk music much better than choral harmonizations or rigid settings for instrumental ensemble.

Members of Riga and provincial folklore ensembles tried to find, besides the reed pipes, other wind instruments that could be imagined as archaic and of local origin, and that would also be interesting from a musical point of view and, no less importantly, easy to play. I proposed such an instrument called *gārši*, synthesizing two different versions of Baltic one-tone whistles: a version documented in Latvian Vidzeme – a panpipe made of reed tubes of different lengths glued together with the help of pine resin and played by one person, and a version known in Aukštaitija – the north-eastern part of Lithuania – a set of 2–7 separate one-tone pipes made of the tubular plant *Angelica archangelica*, and played by two or more players, each blowing one or two whistles.

The proposed set of *gārši* included a 5-tone panpipe (C, D, E, F, and G) played by a soloist, one or more two-tone panpipes (C and D), and several single-tone whistles tuned in unison (D). The repertoire of *gārši*, according to my idea, would be an instrumental version of Sēlija's (a south-eastern Latvian region) characteristic recited-style singing with constant and alternating drone. This music was sporadically performed by the *Skandinieki* and *Savieši* ensembles in the early 1980s (see Figure 6), since 1985 – by the folklore ensemble *Kombuļi*, and was also taught in several master classes led by me.

The *kokle* had a great potential to be used for purely instrumental music. Thanks to Jānis Poriķis, the *kokle* repertoire in the *Skandinieki* ensemble in the early 1980s was comprised of dances from the Suiti region. Māris Muktupāvels, a member of the ensemble at that time, tried to expand the *kokle* repertoire with melodies from Latgale or, more precisely, their interpretations:

> When I started to play the *kokle*, the Latgalian *kokle* tunes seemed to be more varied and interesting compared to the repertoire of the Suiti region in Kurzeme (interview, Muktupāvels 2008).

A significant impulse toward the next developments in the *kokle* playing style arose from the visit of amateur restorer of ancient Russian musical instruments, Vladimir Povetkin (1943–2010), to Riga in 1982. He was particularly interested in the *gusli* – a close relative of the Baltic psaltery-type instruments – and his idea about playing, as I can remember, was "*gusli* – my thoughts", which can be interpreted as a kind of impromptu music-making. This idea was well accepted by some Latvian *kokle* players, who started to improvise rather free, unconventional interpretations of traditional tunes and did not care much about how closely it adhered to the established view on the authentic tradition.

The next significant impulse for the *kokle* playing came from the recordings of the Finnish trio *Primo* (= Primitive Music Orchestra, 1984), who exposed archaic runo-singing and *kantele* tunes to improvisation and polystylistic interpretations, with a touch of blues and other styles. These approaches influenced the performances of small folklore ensembles, first of all *Iļģi* – one of the best-known Latvian bands, who began interpreting traditional music with more space for intuitive, creative music-making, improvisation, and incorporation of elements of jazz, rock, early music, and other ethnic traditions. The band leader, Ilga Reizniece, has labelled this approach as "postfolklore" (Boiko 2001: 116, 117), and it has become a model for many other ensembles in Latvia.

The members of the folklore movement essentially tried to distance themselves from the established pattern of folk-music-based compositions, especially those by Romantic-style composers. To a large extent, this separation was due to the fact that Soviet-style stage folklorism was fundamentally rooted in such a Romantic approach. In this context, one musical event deserves a special mention. On December 29, 1985, a concert was held at the National Philharmonic, the first part of which was dedicated to Baroque music, while the second part, according to composer Imants Zemzaris's intention, featured interpretations rooted in the deepest layers of folk music: compositions from Bela Bartok's cycle *From forty-four duets for two violins*, performed by violinists Indulis Sūna (1950–2022) and Jānis Bulavs (1949–2023), alternated with my improvisations using ancient folk musical instruments – reed pipe, hornpipe,

bagpipes, *kokle*, guimbarde, etc. – presenting musical material from Emilis Melngailis's collection. The description in the concert program read: "E. Melngailis (1874–1954) – From the collection of folklore records *Latvju dancis*. Authentic folk melodies are performed by Valdis Muktupāvels" (Koncerts 1985). Thus, it turns out that the playing of traditional instruments – revived within the folklore movement and influenced by intuitive creativity and ethnojazz – was perceived as representing "authentic" traditions in the situation of the mid-1980s.

Promotion of Knowledge
about Ancient Musical Instruments

Among the participants of the folklore movement, an unverbalized mission was relevant – to educate them-selves and others about various aspects of ancient local culture and to popularize related folklore materials. At a time when public awareness of traditional music instruments was negligible, much of the popularization activity was carried out by folklore ensembles that had these instruments at their disposal. This usually took place during ensemble performances, demonstrating the playing of the instrument and describing its construction, playing style, and context of use through brief com-ments. A member of the ensemble could also tell a tale or legend about the instru-ment or share something from their own experience.

Folklore ensembles, or even broader local communities, often invited guest speakers. Thus, in the first half of the 1980s, I delivered several dozen lectures with demonstrations, as well as master classes in making and/or playing instruments, starting with lectures at the Folklore Friends Club and continuing to classes at the Folklore Faculty of the Folk University organized by the House of Art Workers, which can actually be regarded as a current offer of informal education for a broad public in the capital.

Already in the early 1980s, the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum intended to contribute to the promotion of public awareness of folk musical instruments by pre-paring slide sets and musical recordings. Īrisa Priedīte organized a photo session, focusing both on instruments and playing. The playing of instruments was also recorded, but initially in a rather amateur way – on the museum premises with a magnetic tape recorder and a microphone. In the spring of 1982, the museum reached an agreement with the All-Union company *Melodija* to make a recording for a long-playing record. For this purpose, Jānis Poriķis and I were sent to the company's sound studio in Moscow; both traditional *kokle* and a large number of herders' instruments were recorded. For unknown reasons, the intended record was never released; only part of the recording was published in France in 1985 as part of a joint

project between *Melodija* and *Le chant du Monde* – a series of albums *Voyage en URSS: Anthologie de la musique instrumentale et vocale des peoples de l'URSS*, comprising 10 LPs, one of which was *Musical art of the peoples of the USSR. Estonian/Latvian instrumental music* (Melodija 1985) (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 1987b).

A description of some of herders' musical instruments, their making, and use was prepared by Priedīte in her article *Ar stabuli, tauri – norām pāri* (With a pipe, trumpet – across meadows; Priedīte 1984). The symbolism of musical instruments and instrumental music-making was explored in the article *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti un to lietošanas semantika K. Barona "Latvju dainās"* (Latvian folk musical instruments and the semantics of their use in K. Barons' "Latvju dainas") by musicologists Arnolds Klotiņš and me (Klotiņš, Muktupāvels 1985). This article was not intended as a practical guide, but rather to spark interest and provide in-depth perspectives on traditional instrumental music.

In the mid-1980s, a decision to publish methodical materials on folk musical instruments was made by a state institution – the E[milis] Melngailis's Folk Art Center[10], one of whose functions was methodical support and control of the folklore movement. Folklore specialist Liāna Ose proposed that I prepare such materials for the needs of folklore ensembles, and it was done based on the previously mentioned diploma thesis materials. A softcover book, *Tautas mūzikas instrumenti Latvijas PSR teritorijā* (Folk musical instruments in the territory of the Latvian SSR; Muktupāvels 1987a), was published in 1987 and was distributed among Latvian folklore ensembles.

Sensing this public need for published information about traditional culture that would allow personal participation in its practice, and at the moment of the rise of the folklore movement, immediately after the 150th anniversary celebration of the compiler of the first fundamental collection of folksong texts, Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), one of the largest Latvian publishing houses of that time, *Liesma*, initiated a set of three folklore-related articles to be included in the thematic collection of articles *Padoms* (Advice) for educators and parents, offering an up-to-date perspective on topical pedagogical issues. In one of the three articles *Kur tava kokle?* (Where is your *kokle*?) by me, the making of more than ten simple and not-so-simple instruments is described, including panpipes, reed pipes, birch bark, buzzer, various clappers and rattles, and *kokles*. In the introduction to the article, I invite "parents, teachers, educators, and older brothers to learn an almost completely forgotten part of heritage – folk musical instruments" (Muktupāvels 1988: 146).

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10   At that time, the name of the institution was E[milis] Melngailis's Republican Scientifically-Methodological Center for Folk Art and Cultural-Educational Work.

Evidently, the promotion of knowledge about traditional instruments was primarily in the hands of the revival participants themselves. Some sporadic activities by state institutions were a positive contribution; still, they were not enough to initiate a purposeful and structured process.

Conclusions

The revival of instrumental music traditions has been a part of a broader folklore movement. It took place in a situation where the specific cultural practices of the totalitarian Soviet state prevailed; these were introduced in occupied Latvia and had supplanted the main cultural development trajectories established before the Second World War. The revival of musical instruments was not the central focus of the folklore movement, but it created some symbolically and musically significant practices.

Unlike the modernization of musical instruments, which was supported by state authorities during the Soviet era, the revival of traditional instruments was more personally motivated and thus largely dependent on the individuals who carried it out. In a situation where published sources for revival were very limited, the researchers involved in the process were of great importance, significantly influencing it through their practical activities and current publications. Moreover, in the context of limited resources, experimentation played a significant role, as did intuitive creativity, which was legitimized by focusing on local materials and simple technologies, as well as by following archaic examples of vocal music.

Although at the end of the 1970s it was not clear how the revival of musical instruments should proceed, there was a gradual abandonment of modernized instruments and forms of music-making influenced by popular music. Instead, revived instruments were introduced, and various new forms related to the accompaniment of singing and dancing were established. It became quite common, especially in small ensembles, to play *kokles* to accompany singing. For this purpose, an instrument called the *ģīga*, whose similarities with the traditional *ģīga* were so small that it can actually be considered a new instrument, began to be used more and more. The guimbarde also established itself as an instrument accompanying singing, mainly because of its archaic image. On the other hand, another instrument – the bladder fiddle – was used only fragmentarily due to its challenging sound quality.

Along with the revival of traditional rural dance music bands, bagpipes combined with violins and other instruments played a role in the dance accompaniment, thus emphasizing the importance of an older tradition. The addition of various percussion instruments – *trīdeksnis* and "devil's drum" – played a similar role in enhancing the sense of antiquity.

One of the oldest categories of musical instruments – herders' instruments – became an important field of experimentation, using the local origin of the instruments and their connection with the thousands-of-years-old farming sector – animal husbandry – to legitimize these experiments. At the same time, the use of these instruments, especially the reed pipes, promoted individual expression and gave experimentation a touch of avant-garde or new forms of music that reflected the era.

In general, it can be seen that the revival of musical instruments supported the overarching task of the folklore movement – resisting the Soviet occupation and the cultural forms introduced by it. This was most clearly demonstrated by the deliberate rejection of modernized instruments. The idea of archaic strata of traditional culture as representing the pre-Soviet, the "especially valuable Latvian", was cultivated, giving preference to more primitive instruments or even creating new instruments that conformed with the idea of ancientness.

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Revival as Survival

(Atdzimšana kā saglabāšana)

Aigars Lielbārdis

Dr. philol., folklore researcher; Archives of Latvian Folklore,
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
Dr. philol., folkloras pētnieks; Latviešu folkloras krātuve,
Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: aigars.lielbardis@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0003-3073-4817

Ethnographic Ensembles in Latvia: From Village to Stage

Etnogrāfiskie ansambļi Latvijā: no ciema līdz skatuvei

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
Latvian folklore,	latviešu folklora,
ethnographic ensemble,	etnogrāfiskais ansamblis,
Soviet occupation,	padomju okupācija,
Soviet folkloristics,	padomju folkloristika,
folklore revival movement,	folkloras kustība,
folk music	tautas mūzika

Summary   Currently, 24 folklore performer groups, known as 'ethnographic ensembles', are active in Latvia. The term 'ethnographic ensembles' was introduced in Latvia during the first Soviet occupation in 1941, and the phenomenon became more widespread in the mid-20th century. However, performers of village- and community-based musical traditions were already present in the interwar period and even earlier. On the one hand, the preservation of tradition-based content and forms in the ensembles' performances and repertoire during the Soviet period positioned them as knowledge keepers and preservers of national heritage. On the other hand, ethnographic ensembles also served as instruments for expressing, promoting, and maintaining Soviet ideology and stage aesthetics. In the 1980s, their performances became an integral part of the folklore revival movement, confirming the uniqueness and richness of national culture and strengthening national identity.

This article provides a historical overview of the staging of folk music traditions, traces the origins and conditions for the existence of ethnographic ensembles in the Soviet period, and analyzes their role in the folklore revival movement during the Third Awakening. The study is based on archival research, historical press publications, analysis of audiovisual sources, and interviews with participants of the folklore revival movement.

Kopsavilkums   Šobrīd Latvijā darbojas 24 etnogrāfiskie ansambļi. Lai gan termins "etnogrāfiskie ansambļi" Latvijā tika ieviests pirmās padomju okupācijas laikā 1941. gadā un šis fenomens kļuva plašāk izplatīts 20. gadsimta vidū, tomēr ciemu un lokālo kopienu muzikālo tradīciju izpildītāji bija zināmi jau starpkaru periodā un pat agrāk. No vienas puses, tradīcijās balstīta satura un formu saglabāšana ansambļu uzvedumos un repertuārā padomju gados tos pozicionēja kā zināšanu un nacionālā mantojuma glabātājus; no otras puses, etnogrāfiskie ansambļi darbojās arī kā instruments padomju ideoloģijas un skatuves estētikas izpausmei, popularizēšanai un uzturēšanai. 20. gs. 80. gados to uzvedumi bija neatņemama folkloras kustības sastāvdaļa, apliecinot tradicionālās kultūras unikalitāti un bagātību un stiprinot nacionālo identitāti.

Šis raksts sniedz vēsturisku pārskatu par tautas mūzikas tradīciju iestudēšanu un izrādīšanu uz skatuves, izseko etnogrāfisko ansambļu izcelsmei un pastāvēšanas apstākļiem padomju periodā, kā arī analizē to lomu folkloras kustībā Trešās atmodas laikā. Pētījums balstās arhīvu materiālu, vēsturisku preses publikāciju un audiovizuālo avotu izpētē, kā arī folkloras kustības dalībnieku interviju analīzē.

Introduction   The title of this article is a paraphrase of Jennifer R. Cash's book *Villages on Stage: Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*, which explores how folk traditions are brought to the stage and become tools for shaping national identity and political discourse in the post-Soviet space (Cash 2011). Yet, the display of folk traditions on stage has a much longer history, which differs in each country, although visible commonalities exist across post-socialist countries.

In Latvia, folk music and traditions have primarily been associated with rural settings. However, not all rural people have lived in villages – many resided in homesteads. In the 18th and 19th centuries, cultural exchange also took place in manor houses, churches, and annual fairs, while the growth of manufacturing increased the importance of cities. Their significance in the transmission of folklore, however, has not yet been fully evaluated. Today, Latvian folklore and folk music are largely perceived as tied to the rural environment and peasant culture of the past (Lielbārdis 2024: 253–256). In this publication, the 'village' is used symbolically to denote an imagined, natural, or even romantic rural environment of the past, where folk traditions – including folk music – function and are transmitted in an idealized way.

The term 'ethnographic ensembles' appeared in Latvia during the first Soviet occupation in 1941 and began to spread during the second occupation in the mid-20th century. The combination of 'ethnographic' with 'ensemble' was derived from the ethnographic folklore ensembles and ethnographic choirs that existed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, which served both as vehicles for folk music and dance performances and as instruments of Soviet propaganda, concealed under a Leninist slogan "art belongs to the people."

Although the term and phenomenon of 'ethnographic ensemble' originated during the Soviet period, they still hold a significant place in the Latvian folk music scene. They differ from other folk music performers and folk groups (usually called *kopa*) in their staging style and content, as they adhere more closely to the dialect and folk music traditions of a particular region. From the mid-1950s until the late 1970s, ethnographic ensembles were the only performers of folk musical traditions on the stage, until the first folk music group, *Skandinieki*, was formed in 1976. Alongside folk ensembles and folk groups, professional instrumental orchestras also developed during the Soviet period, usually performing folk music as accompaniment for folk dancers. These orchestras typically played folk music arrangements in a style consistent with the official cultural policy of the Soviet Union and its prescribed guidelines for music and stage aesthetics.

During the Soviet period, ethnographic ensembles, on the one hand, served to express, promote, and maintain Soviet ideology and stage aesthetics in society; on the other hand, the preservation of traditional content and forms in their

performances and repertoire, along with that of individual folklore performers, gave them the role of idealized figures who safeguarded the national heritage during the years of Soviet occupation.

The article provides a historical overview and analysis of specific periods in the representation and staging of folk music traditions in Latvia, reveals the origins and conditions for the existence of ethnographic ensembles during the Soviet period, and contextualizes their role in the folklore revival movement. The publication is based on archival studies, analysis of historical press publications and audiovisual sources, as well as in-depth interviews conducted in recent years with participants of the folklore revival movement.[1] These interviews are not directly incorporated into the text but serve as an additional resource for a broader and deeper understanding of the spirit of the times.

The objectives of the article are addressed in two interrelated parts: the first part characterizes the political and social contexts of staged folk music, while the second part analyzes the role of ethnographic ensembles during the Soviet period, focusing on ideological and aesthetic issues, with only a brief review of the current situation.

From Village to Stage   Looking back, Latvian folk music traditions are rooted in the collective and individual musical practices of local people – singing, performing, or providing musical entertainment at various calendar festivals and family celebrations – as well as in the transmission of these traditions across generations and centuries. Over time, as the environments of performance and ways of life have changed, so too have the circumstances and purposes of traditional singing and music-making.

Contemporary Latvian traditional music largely reflects folk music traditions of the 19th century and earlier (Brambats 1983; Boiko 2003). The golden treasures of musical folklore are the ethnographic[2] and folklore collections compiled from the second half of the 19th century onward by Andrejs Jurjāns (Jurjāns 1894, 1903, 1907,

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1   See the digital exhibition *The Folklore Movement in Latvia*.
Available at: https://tinyurl.com/revival-exhibition (project *Folklore Revival in Latvia: Resources, Ideologies and Practices*, Latvian Council of Science, No. lzp-2021/1-0243, 2022–2024); collection of interviews with participants of the folklore movement (LFK Fkk 1),
https://tinyurl.com/folklore-movement-interviews (Accessed 27.06.2025.)

2   Until the establishment of the independent state of Latvia and the founding of the national scientific institution, the study of traditions in Latvia was framed within the ethnographic concept of Tsarist Russia (and later also during the Soviet occupation) (Hirsch 2005: 10; Zemtsovsky, Kunanbaeva 1997: 19).

1912, 1921, 1926),[3] Emilis Melngailis (Melngailis 1951, 1952, 1953),[4] Jēkabs Vītoliņš (Vītoliņš 1958, 1968, 1971, 1973, 1986),[5] later researchers (Boiko et al. 2008), and others. These collections are now preserved in research and cultural memory institutions such as the Archives of Latvian Folklore (ALF)[6] and the Latvian National Museum of History.[7]

With the loss of what is considered the traditional or agrarian way of life for the majority of society, the contextual basis and functionality of entire genres and layers of folk music – such as those connected to individual and collective work (called *talkas*), everyday events, or family celebrations – have also been partly lost or discontinued. These musical traditions might have disappeared more rapidly, or even wholly, from public use – remaining known only to a narrow circle of researchers or enthusiasts – had they not been given additional roles and functions beyond music. In any case, the landscape of folk music today would be very different if these traditions had not been actualized, consciously maintained, and even revived for use not only in individual and community life, but also for national, state, political, and ideological purposes in different historical contexts.

Traditional music, and folklore more broadly, provide rich soil for the formation and maintenance of national identity. Swedish musicologist Göran Folkestad has pointed out that music serves two primary functions in expressing and communicating national identity: an "inside-looking-in" or in-group perspective, and an "outside-looking-in" or out-of-group perspective. The first uses music to strengthen bonds within the group, making its members feel that they belong to one another. The second aims for recognition by outsiders, presenting the music as typical of a particular nation or group and enabling those outside the group to identify its members accordingly (Folkestad 2002: 156).

Folkestad also draws on Anders Hammarlund's terms "catalytic" and

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3   Jurjāns folklore collection at the Archives of Latvian Folklore (ALF):
https://tinyurl.com/Jurjanu-Andrejs [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

4   Melngailis folklore collection at the ALF:
https://tinyurl.com/Emilis-Melngailis [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

5   Vītoliņš folklore collection at the ALF:
https://tinyurl.com/Vitolins [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

6   Archives of Latvian Folklore, founded in 1924. Digital Archives of Latvian Folklore:
https://www.garamantas.lv/?lang=en

7   Latvian National Museum of History, Museum Storage:
https://lnvm.gov.lv/en/museum-storage/ [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

"emblematic". "Emblematic" music is outward-directed and carries national symbolic meanings; it is performed in contexts where the primary purpose is to play for others or to impress national ideas upon the home group. In this way, music is raised as an emblem – a kind of cultural flag. The "catalytic" function, by contrast, fosters feelings of belonging within the group itself (Folkestad 2002: 156).

In Latvia, traditional music moved from the village to the stage, becoming a key element in demonstrating traditions and emphasizing national aspects. The staging and performance of musical traditions in Latvia over time has been intended: (1) to preserve them as vanishing values, (2) to introduce them to others, and (3) to enable those involved – directly or indirectly in the performance – to affirm their regional and national belonging and worldview (Weaver et al. 2023: 50).

Ethnographic ensembles are among the key actors in realizing these principles, and their roles remain significant today. Five periods in the history of staging Latvian folklore traditions can be distinguished. The periodization is determined either by the presence of a particular political system or by active social processes that subsequently triggered changes in the political situation. In each period, folk music and musical traditions have played an essential role in expressing national identity, official position, or political ideology. In some cases, the aims of individuals and society at large coincided with those of the state and nation, as in the years of Latvian independence during the interwar period or in the years leading up to the restoration of independence in the 1980s. In other cases, however, they clashed with the goals of the colonial government, as under Tsarist Russia or during the Soviet occupation.

Thus, the historical timeframes of the staging of musical folklore can be outlined as follows:

1) The First National Awakening and National Romanticism under Tsarist rule (1896–1918);
2) Latvian Independence, the interwar period (1918–1940);
3) The Sovietization of traditions, performance, and stage culture during the Soviet occupation (1940–1941; 1944–1978);
4) The folklore revival movement and the Third National Awakening during the Soviet occupation (1978–1991);
5) The contemporary period, after Latvia regained independence (1991–).

The Period of the First National Awakening

The documented history of the purposeful staging of Latvian folklore and musical traditions is closely tied to the ideas of the first Latvian National Awakening in the second half of the 19th century (Plakans 1971; Bunkse 1979; O'Connor 2003: 46). This development

was influenced by Enlightenment thought and by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), whose ideas had spread across Europe (Morgenstern 2018: 12; Pettan 2010: 129) and shaped the perception of Latvian culture (Bula 2000). The formation of national identity was further strengthened by the rise of national romanticism, the growing awareness of culture as a value among Latvians, and the interest in Latvian culture within European humanities scholarship in the mid- and late 19th century. Alongside language and ethnicity, tangible and intangible cultural heritage – especially folklore and oral traditions rooted in the rural environment – became the foundation of Latvian national identity (Plakans 2011: 226). Heritage connected to folk poetry and music, including song folklore and calendar customs, served during the First Awakening, and still serves today, as a crucial affirmation of national belonging and a platform for self-awareness. Over time, these traditions have spread through art and culture, taking on representation in diverse genres and forms.

The first ideologically motivated staging of traditions in Latvian cultural history took place during the 10th All-Russian Congress of Archaeology, held in Riga from 1 to 15 August 1896. For Latvian intellectuals and the emerging intelligentsia, then in the active process of formation, the congress served as a display of Latvian culture and traditions, set in juxtaposition with those of other European nations, including Russians and Germans, who had historically expressed colonial policies and cultural supremacy in the 19th century and earlier. Although the congress was organized within the framework of Tsarist Russian research policy, the Latvian ethnographic exhibition was arranged by the Riga Latvian Society Committee for Science.[8] It featured a large open-air ethnographic exhibition on Latvian traditional culture and history, including architectural, ethnographic, and artistic objects and artefacts, as well as their models. Among them were newly built examples of Latvian rural houses, erected in the center of Riga (Plutte 1896). Beginning in 1894, the Riga Latvian Society organized eleven expeditions to different regions of Latvia to collect ethnographic objects for the exhibition (Stinkule 2016; Stinkule 2015; Vanaga 1996; Grosvalds 1895).

During the exhibition, theatrical musical performances of Latvian traditions were staged, including scenes of housework, the night-watch of horses, St George's Day celebrations, herding songs, a Latvian wedding performance, and various folk games (Unknown 1896b). The director of the performances was Pēteris Ozoliņš (1864–1938), while the musical arrangement and selection of folk songs were prepared by Andrejs Jurjāns (1856–1922), a renowned expert on Latvian folk music

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8   *Rīgas Latviešu biedrība* (Riga Latvian Society), founded in 1868.

(Klotiņš 2024). More than 100 singers took part, with actresses and singers Dace Akmentiņa and Maija Brigadere invited as principal soloists. At the same time, folk dances were performed by ballet dancers from the Riga Latvian Theatre (Unknown 1896c). Although the details of the performers are relatively scarce, a press advertisement published a month before the opening of the exhibition invited "ladies and gentlemen with good voices" to participate as singers in the "folk performances" (Unknown 1896a). Thus, the participants may have come from both Riga and the Latvian provinces, bringing different musical and traditional backgrounds, unified and adapted to the performance scenario and musical preferences. In this production, the singers' affiliation with a particular geographical location was not emphasized, nor was it significant whether the tradition was inherited or learned. These aspects became critical criteria for folk music performance groups.

The exhibition was dedicated to "Latvian" traditions that promoted unity and national identity, while boosting self-confidence by placing Latvian cultural heritage side by side with that of the dominant colonial languages and cultures of the time. By including ethnographic and folklore performances, the exhibition became a key event in fostering awareness of Latvians as a nation, elevating their language and traditional culture to the top of the value scale.

Interwar Period   Performances of musical traditions became popular in Latvia during the interwar period, after the First World War and the establishment of the independent Republic of Latvia in 1918. In these years, it was less important to seek a basis and justification for national unity than to focus on regional cultural particularities and, in the performance of traditions, to emphasize their antiquity and uniqueness. One of the regions that received special attention was the western part of Latvia, with performers of musical traditions from villages and hamlets such as Alsunga, Bārta, Nīca, and Rucava.

In 1924, the folk singer and *kokle* player Pēteris Korāts (1871–1957),[9] invited by the linguist Ludis Bērziņš (1879–1965), performed Alsunga music at the University of Latvia, before visiting the folklore collector and composer Emilis Melngailis (1874–1954) at the Latvian Conservatory (Melngailis 1924). A year later, in 1925, musicians from Alsunga – referred to as "the original Suiti orchestra and choir" – together with their founder and leader Nikolajs Heņķis, performed a Suiti wedding play at the Latvian Conservatoire, with the participation of Korāts (Unknown 1925; Cīrulis 1925).

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9   *Kokle* player Pēteris Korāts, an unidentified monochord (*vienstīdzis*) player, and a group of singers from Alsunga. Available: https://www.redzidzirdilatviju.lv/lv/search/178981?q=Alsunga [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

In these years, musicians such as Heņķis and Korāts, along with other people from the Kurzeme region (western Latvia),[10] became frequent guests in Riga, demonstrating folk traditions and music individually, with family members, or in village performance groups at schools, universities, societies, and on the radio.

The traditions and originality of folk music from these regions served as the basis for the first Latvian ethnographic films – *Latvian Wedding in Nīca* (*Latviešu kāzas Nīcā*,[11] 1931, dir. Kristaps Linde (1881–1948) and Aleksandrs Rusteiķis (1892–1958)) and *The Homeland is Calling* (*Dzimtene sauc*) or *Wedding in Alsunga* (*Kāzas Alsungā*,[12] 1935, dir. Aleksandrs Rusteiķis). In both films, folklorist Kārlis Straubergs (1890–1962), head of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (ALF), participated as a consultant and scriptwriter.

In *Latvian Wedding in Nīca*, the leading roles were performed by professional actors, whereas minor roles and group scenes were entrusted to local people of the Nīca area. The film depicts traditional work, clothing, room furnishings, bridal dowries, and other ethnographic objects and practices performed and used by local people. The sound of the film has been lost, but wedding songs and dances from the neighboring village of Bārta can be seen in a short surviving video fragment from 1934.[13]

Wedding in Alsunga illustrates the ethnographic environment and traditions of the Suiti region – mummery, folk games, and the distinctive Suiti recited-style singing with vocal drone. Alongside professional actors, local people from the parishes of Alsunga, Basi, Jūrkalne, and Gudenieki also took part (Daugule 1994).

In the 1930s, organized groups of folk music performers also appeared in other regions of Latvia, including Latgale (the eastern part of the country). In 1930, folksingers from Barkava, and in 1931 from Aglona, performed in Riga at the invitation of Ludis Bērziņš (Bērziņš 1930; Bērziņš 1931). In 1936, the "folk singers and players"[14] of the village Taudejāņi in the Rēzekne region, led by the teacher Stepons Seiļs

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10   See also Bērziņš 1923; Bērziņš 1924; Bērziņš 1926.

11   Recording available:
https://tinyurl.com/kazas-Nica [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

12   Recording available:
https://tinyurl.com/dzimtene-sauc [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

13   Bārta village wedding fragment. Available:
https://tinyurl.com/Barta-wedding [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

14   Also referred to as "folk ensemble" in earlier sources (Unknown, 1939a).

Figure 1. Latvian participants at the 3rd International Congress of Dancers in Stockholm. In the foreground are bagpiper Andrejs Pētersons and *kokle* player Jānis Poriķis; behind them are folk dancers and singers from Alsunga. Riga, 1939. Photographer unknown, LFK 2203.

(1909−1979),[15] took part in the All-Latvian Harvest Festival concert in Rēzekne (Rēzeknietis 1939a).

The Taudejāņi ensemble performed widely across Latvia. Its members included twelve women singers and two *kokle* players (Ozoliņš 1939). According to the Radiophone program, the ensemble was also recorded and broadcast on 9 June 1940 (Unknown 1940).

During the interwar period, traditional lifestyles, folklore, and musical traditions were appreciated not only nationally but also gained international recognition. In 1939, Suiti or Alsunga and Rucava folk musicians, singers, and dancers participated in the 3rd International Congress of Dancers in Stockholm (see Figure 1), where they won the first prize (Unknown 1939b). The festival gathered "some 1,500 folk dancers from peasant countries of Scandinavia and Europe" (including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Holland, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, Hungary, and Scotland) to "demonstrate their folk heritage in dance and song" (Freeman 1939).

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15   Biography of Stepons Seiļs. Profile available:
https://www.literatura.lv/en/persons/stepons-seils [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

The Period of Sovietization   The third period began in 1940 with the first Soviet occupation of Latvia, which was soon replaced by the Nazi German occupation regime (1941–1945) as Soviet troops retreated during the Second World War. In 1945, Latvia was annexed again by the Soviets and incorporated into the family of "friendly republics". This meant that Soviet ideology, cultural administration, and repressive practices were transferred to Latvia in full. The perception and content of traditional culture, as well as the study of folklore, were shaped by the initiatives and cultural policy ideas of Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), Nikolay Marr (1864–1934), Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948), and other Soviet cultural and ideological functionaries. Their directives were implemented through decrees and administrative decisions across the Soviet Union. Gorky's assertion that folklore is not created by society as a whole but only by the "labouring masses" resonated with Lenin's dictum that "art belongs to people", which defined folklore as expression of the interests, thoughts, and aspirations of the working class. In the early years of Soviet occupation, the Zhdanov Doctrine (so-called *Zhdanovism*, 1946) brought about the persecution of writers, composers, and researchers (Zemtsovsky, Kunanbaeva 1997: 5), framing intellectual and cultural life across the Soviet Union until Stalin's death in 1953.

Folklore researchers, folklore itself, and folklore performers became simultaneously instruments and mouthpieces of Soviet ideology, serving as propaganda tools (Kunej, Pisk 2023: 9). The activities of amateur art, known as *samodejatel'nost'* and *narodnost'*, which before the Second World War in Soviet Russia had demonstrated the achievements of socialism and workers' culture, were transplanted to the newly occupied territories after 1945. Only material that was carefully selected and approved by Soviet officials could be promoted. The strictest censorship was applied to all published and performed works, down to "every sound", even though such activities were officially presented as the free creativity of the people (Zemtsovsky, Kunanbaeva 1997: 5).

In the early years of Soviet occupation, major changes were introduced into Latvian cultural life and scholarship under Stalin's slogan "socialistic in content and national in form" (Ķencis 2019; Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2019). Although folklore singers actively participated in these measures for a short period, their involvement largely ended with Stalin's death in 1953. The slogan framed the creation of new Soviet folklore that glorified Stalin's cult of personality and the "great achievements" of the Soviet Union in every sphere of life (Miller 2015; Kalkun, Oras 2018; Seljamaa 2017). In Latvia, this often meant embedding propaganda content within the forms of classic Latvian folk songs, adapting traditional meter and poetic principles to Soviet ideological purposes.

Figure 2. Folk singers performing at the concert of the Baltic Soviet Folklorists' Conference, Riga, 1951. Photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2203, n000146.

The realization of this slogan culminated in 1951, when the first Baltic Soviet folklorists' conference was held in Riga (Jansons 1951). At the conference, alongside traditional folk songs and those addressing the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, performers also presented newly created Soviet folklore (Unknown 1951). These works were likely acquired under the supervision of researchers at the Folklore Institute (formerly the Archives of Latvian Folklore) of the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences, who were responsible for guiding and overseeing the ideological orientation of singers. In 1950,[16] a folklore expedition was conducted in the Sigulda region, during which local folk singers were identified and subsequently invited to perform Latvian folklore at the conference concert (see Figure 2).

In 1952, Soviet folklore was published by two Folklore Institute researchers, Alma Ancelāne and Vilma Greble (Greble, Ancelāne 1952). As both the authors and their colleagues later recalled, such songs were not known or performed by people; nevertheless, to meet the ideological demands from "above" and to validate the existence of "new folklore" among the folk, these texts had to be produced. One evening, as they admitted, they "took a bottle of wine" and composed songs that

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16   Garamantas collection entry: https://garamantas.lv/en/collection/886539 [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

Figure 3. Alsunga ethnographic ensemble, 1951. Photographer unknown, LFK 19510036.

conformed to the slogan "socialistic in content and national in form", attributing them fictitiously to folk performers.

Since the surge in founding ethnographic ensembles came only after 1953, such ensembles were not directly involved in the performance of newly created Soviet folklore. However, specific textual modifications – glorifying Soviet life and condemning the bourgeois past – did appear in ensemble repertoires and often persisted. For example, the Alsunga ethnographic ensemble (see Figure 3), recorded in 1951 before its formal establishment under Soviet conditions, included in its repertoire the song *Kolhoznieka rudzi auga*[17] (The Kolkhozman's Rye Grew), where the word "kolhoznieks" replaced the word "bandenieks" (the ethnographic name for a land tenant). Traditionally, the song lyrics read "Bandenieka rudzi auga"[18] (The Bandenieks's Rye Grew). Such textual substitutions were widespread and recognizable, though they did not fundamentally alter the content in the way fabricated Soviet folklore did – a practice initiated by researchers themselves.

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17   *Kolhoznieka rudzi auga* (The Kolkhozman's Rye Grew). Recording available: https://garamantas.lv/lv/record/366839/Kolhoznieka-rudzi-auga [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

18   *Bandenieka rudzi auga* (The Bandenieks's Rye Grew). Recording available: https://garamantas.lv/lv/record/366173/Bandenieka-rudzi-auga [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

After the Second World War and the annexation of Latvia by the Soviet Union, the country – like the other Baltic republics – was separated from Western and Northern Europe by the 'Iron Curtain'. Slovenian scholar Svanibor Pettan has noted that while interest in folk music was present in both "eastern" and "western" contexts, the approaches, aims, and results differed significantly. The dominant "eastern" model was based on state-supported folklore ensembles with heavily choreographed performances in folk costumes, adapted for a staged show (Pettan 2010: 130). Similarly, Slovenian researcher Rebeka Kunej observes that the majority of folklore groups in Slovenia were established under socialism, when cultural-artistic societies emerged in both urban and rural areas, most commonly comprising theatre ensembles and choirs. Within this framework, staged performances of music and dance folklore became one of the most popular instruments for shaping national identity and the public image of socialist countries (Kunej 2018: 259; Kunej, Pisk 2023: 9; Herzog 2010; Ķencis 2024).

In Soviet times, the principle of *narodnost'* was applied across all spheres or genres of folk art, transforming it into not only an artistic expression but also a political weapon. As Jennifer Cash pointed out, folk art served to represent the culture of local working people, to acquaint the public with folk traditions, and as a political and diplomatic weapon to establish communication paths with the "brotherly" Soviet peoples (Cash 2011: 58).

Soon after the annexation of Latvia in 1940, preparations began for the *Decade of Latvian Art and Literature* (DLAL) in Moscow, originally planned for autumn 1941. The closing concert was intended to feature an "ethnographic Midsummer Eve play" (V. G. 1941). However, the war and subsequent Nazi occupation postponed the event, and the DLAL in Moscow was eventually held only in 1955 (Kalpiņš 1957: 2). Among the participants were the ethnographic ensembles of Nīca and Bārta villages, as well as the "ethnographic collective" of the kolkhoz named after Zhdanov in Preiļi district, also referred to as the ethnographic ensemble of Bindari village. Their performances included *Evening at the Kolkhoz*, wedding plays, and an ethnographic staging of the Midsummer Eve.[19] The DLAL not only showcased Latvian traditions within the Soviet cultural framework but also stimulated the emergence of new ethnographic ensembles across Latvia. In the following years, as in other Soviet republics, these ensembles consolidated their status and role in the broader cultural landscape, performing both as preservers of traditional music and as representatives of Soviet-approved ethnographic ensembles.

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19   Decade-related performance 1. Available: https://tinyurl.com/dekade-1 [Accessed 27.06.2025.]; Decade-related performance 2. Available: https://tinyurl.com/dekade-2 [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

The Period of
the Folklore Revival Movement
During the Soviet period, folklore research was conducted under strict censorship and, like other fields of the humanities, was subject to close ideological supervision. The Folklore Institute, since 1956, the Folklore Sector of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences functioned as the only official institution engaged in folklore research, and it also bore responsibility for organizing folklore-related events – though these, were relatively rare. When the Folklore Sector undertook an expedition, it customarily concluded with a concert featuring folk singers, ethnographic ensembles, local folk dance groups, and occasionally choirs, accompanied by scholarly presentations. These concerts usually took place in the district or parish centers, the most central or populous area of the expedition route. The presentations delivered by folklore researchers and ethnomusicologists emphasized the uniqueness and richness of local music traditions, while also honoring the most accomplished performers who had preserved and cultivated their skills within their communities. Although annual expedition concerts were typically rooted in rural contexts, the 1978 concert marked a significant departure: it was staged as a nationwide event in Riga, aimed at introducing the capital's audience to the folk music performers documented by the Folklore Sector. The following year, in 1979, a similar large-scale concert was organized in Rēzekne, the cultural center of the Latgale region.

The fourth period in the staging of folk traditions was marked by the concert of folk singers and ethnographic ensembles at the Daile Theatre in Riga on 14 October 1978, organized by the Folklore Sector and the Literature Propaganda Department of the Latvian Union of Soviet Writers. The concert featured the ethnographic ensembles of Bārta, Otaņķi, Alsunga, Dignāja, Briežuciems, Auleja, Rikava, Sauna, Salnava, as well as the Vecpiebalga ethnographic ensembles, the instrumental string ensemble of Mērdzene, the Rencēni and Smiltene music chapels, and individual singers. Papers were presented by folklorists Elza Kokare (1920–2003), Jānis Rozenbergs (1927–2006), as well as musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš. Conceived as a reflection on 30 years of folklore expeditions, the concert enabled the audience to appreciate the richness of folk music in its simplicity and freedom from artifice or pretense, while affirming the value of the folk performers' inherited knowledge and singing skills. The emotional atmosphere of the event created conditions for the emergence of a distinctive culture of folk music performance alongside the aesthetics of the Soviet stage. In later years, this developed into a nationwide folklore revival movement and became part of the Third Awakening (Šmidchens 2014; Ūdre 2019: 149).

This concert marked the beginning of the social processes that Lithuanian researcher Violeta Davoliūtė has called the "rustic turn" in Lithuanian culture, or

what Philipp Herzog has described as a "back-to-the-roots" movement in the Estonian folklore revival (Herzog 2010: 132). It was a broad cultural reaction to the failures of Soviet modernity, gaining traction in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and manifested as a return to the rural, pre-modern roots of identity. What began as a vague nostalgia for a lost way of life grew into a politically charged discourse of collective trauma (Davoliūtė 2013: 125). Initially, the rustic turn appeared as a seemingly apolitical interest in folk heritage, but it developed into a broad ethnographic movement that set standards of cultural authenticity, which were implicitly anti-Soviet. Activists mobilized young people through expeditions, folk rituals, and performances aimed at individual and collective self-transformation (Davoliūtė 2013: 125). The rustic turn in Lithuania corresponds to the folklore revival movement in Latvia in the 1970s and 1980s. The increasing intensity of Russification, which threatened the role of local languages in the Baltic States, must also be taken into account here (Herzog 2010: 131; Ķencis 2024: 49). In Latvia, the cultural activists were mainly young people living in Riga, some of them originally from rural regions, who were interested in folk music, began performing it, became the founders of folklore groups, and emerged as informal leaders of folklore revival movement, such as Helmī Stalte (1949–2023) and Dainis Stalts (1939–2014), Valdis Muktupāvels, Ilga Reizniece, Artis Kumsārs (1942–2013), and Iveta Tāle.

These activists, later revivalists, focused not only on performing folklore but also on studying, collecting, and recording it during expeditions. After the 1978 concert, informal and undocumented rumors spread among folklore enthusiasts that researchers from the Folklore Sector, who had previously collected and recorded folklore, would no longer go on expeditions because they had already recorded all the folklore. This prompted folklore enthusiasts to undertake expeditions to visit folk singers, many of whom they had met at the 1978 concert. Although this assumption has never been confirmed, from 1981 to 1985, the Folklore Sector did not organize folklore expeditions, which had been held annually since 1947. Another important reason for folklore enthusiasts to embark on expeditions was the possibility of meeting and experiencing folk singers directly and hearing their performances in person – a characteristic feature of the folklore revival movement that reflected the desire to get closer to the folklore heritage.

Modern Times

The fifth period began with the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, when the hidden political aspirations of the folklore revival movement – the restoration of the status of national culture and language in an independent state – were realized. As a result, certain unifying aspects of the

folklore revival movement – resistance to Soviet stage culture and, more broadly, to Soviet ideology and regime – lost their hidden form and immediate relevance. Although the staging of traditions continues, the central goal of the folklore movement's participants as agents of national awakening has been achieved. As of 2024, there are 281 folk music performer groups in Latvia,[20] including 24 ethnographic ensembles.[21]

Ethnographic Ensemble: Form, Content, and Aesthetics Ethnography, understood as the science of describing (*gráphō*) the people (*éthnos*), had already been present in the Latvian cultural space since the mid-19th century, when Latvian cultural activists and researchers became involved in the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography in Moscow (Lielbārdis 2022: 97; Lielbārdis 2017: 195). The term 'ethnographic' as a marker of ethnic or regional characteristics was also known and used since the 19th century, for example, during the 10th All-Russian Congress of Archaeology in 1896. In the 1930s, expressions such as 'ethnographic dances', 'ethnographic objects', 'ethnographic costumes', and 'ethnographic value' were commonly used to denote folk traditions, architecture, or other phenomena in folk art, while also imbuing them with an aura of antiquity and national romanticism. Musicologist Jēkabs Vītoliņš (1898–1977) described the 1934 concert at the Latvian Conservatory, which featured folk singers from Bērzkalne and *kokle* players from the village of Čabatrova in Viļaka parish, as an "ethnographic evening of Latgale" (Vītoliņš 1934). Thus, the term 'ethnographic' was also applied to folk music.

In the late 1930s, the term 'ethnographic performance' appeared, referring to musical and theatrical presentations rooted in tradition, such as an evening of craftwork (*vakarēšana*) or a Midsummer Eve celebration featuring professional actors, a choir, and musicians. For example, the 1939 Latvian Radio program included an "ethnographic performance with Līgo (Midsummer Eve) songs", directed by the writer Augusts Melnalksnis (1876–1944), with the participation of an ensemble of actors and the choir *Singing Past* (*Dziesmotā senatne*), conducted by Artūrs Salaks

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20   The Latvian National Centre for Culture reports that, as of 2024, there were 281 folklore collectives active in Latvia, including ethnographic ensembles, distributed across regions – 15 in Selonia, 97 in Latgale, 52 in Kurzeme, 55 in Vidzeme, 25 in Zemgale, 37 in Riga, and 6 among the Latvian diaspora. See for more information: https://www.lnkc.gov.lv/lv/folklora [Accessed 20.06.2024.].

21   Recent recordings of ethnographic ensembles are available through the Digital Archives of Latvian Folklore, notably in the collection titled *Etnogrāfisko ansambļu ieraksti*. See for more information: https://garamantas.lv/en/collection/1285899/Etnografisko-ansamblu-ieraksti [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

(1891–1984). The performance was hosted by the popular actor Ēvalds Valters (1894–1994) (Unknown 1939c). In the 1920s and 1930s, folk singers and musicians were usually referred to as a 'choir', 'orchestra', 'group', or 'band', and only rarely 'ensemble'. The specific combination of the terms 'ethnographic' and 'ensemble' had not yet been used.

With the first Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940, followed by the early preparations for the DLAL in Moscow in 1941, the term 'ethnographic ensemble' was used for the first time. Singers from Nīca, Alsunga, Bārta, and Gudenieki were referred to as ethnographic ensembles (LTA 1941). These were stable groups of singers, musicians, and dancers from the villages of Western Kurzeme, already familiar to the Latvian public through concerts at the University of Latvia, the Latvian Conservatory, as well as ethnographic films and Radiophone recordings made in the 1920s and 1930s. Similar performing groups were already known in Estonia in the early 20th century (Kalkun 2017: 12), in Bulgaria and Georgia (Bithell 2014: 194), and in Slovenia during the interwar period (Kunej 2018: 258).

In addition to performing individual songs, dances, or instrumental pieces, the Kurzeme ensembles also staged larger theatrical performances of traditions, incorporating elements characteristic of a stage aesthetic intended for the audience – heightened emotionality, expressive gesticulation, and a distinctive manner of speech. This style of performance is also evident in ethnographic films from the 1930s, where professional actors and directors were involved in the productions. Yet, performance directed toward an audience was not foreign to traditional culture itself, as masquerading during winter solstice celebrations or singing at weddings likewise required acting skills (Kalkun 2017: 10).

Estonian folklore scholar Janika Oras describes the style of Laine Mesikäpp, a 1930s stage folklore performer and professional actress, as a modernized model of performing ancient folk songs that incorporated professional elements: musical diversity, controlled voice production, original compositions based on traditional texts, and external theatricality of performance. According to Oras, Mesikäpp learned from traditional singers but was equally influenced by fellow actors and by the prevailing 1930s attitude toward tradition, which expected adaptation to the modern stage aesthetic of the time (Oras 2024: 115). A similar tendency can be observed in Latvia during the interwar period, where professional directors, actors, and musicians often shaped folklore productions. By contrast, when songs or dances were performed by individual singers, village dance groups, or local folk musicians, the stage style tended to be more robust and straightforward – closer to technical and ethnographic reproduction than to artistic stylization.

After the Soviet occupation, under new political and ideological conditions, the

Figure 4. Aleksandrs Vasiļevskis with the ethnographic ensemble of Bindari village,
named after the Zhdanov kolkhoz in Preiļi district (later the Ethnographic Ensemble of Sauna village), 1955.
Photographer unknown, LFK 1925, 19550002.

ensembles from Kurzeme were delegated to represent the uniqueness of Latvian folk music traditions in Moscow. At the same time, folk performers were also sought in other regions. Already in 1941, a special commission was established to identify people from the general public with good voices who could perform folklore at the planned DLAL in Moscow. One of the leading experts on Latvian folk music, the composer Emilis Melngailis, also took part and most likely chaired this commission (Unknown 1941). Since the DLAL was postponed in 1941 due to the war and finally took place 14 years later, in 1955, the concerts featured the ethnographic ensembles of Nīca and Bārta, which had already been identified in 1941, as well as newly created groups, including the ethnographic ensemble of Bindari village of the Zhdanov kolkhoz in the Preiļi district (see Figure 4). This ensemble was founded in 1954, when the singing of local kolkhoz women was noticed by music teacher Aleksandrs Vasiļevskis (1907–1980), who organized the first activities of the ensemble and the following year led it to perform at the DLAL in Moscow (Solovjovs 1955).

Still today, ethnographic ensembles are composed mainly of women, with men present in smaller numbers. Most members are not academically trained in music but have developed their musicality through the intergenerational transmission of

knowledge and skills within their families or local communities (village or parish). Their repertoire is based on the musical material of their local area. In addition to individual songs, the ensembles also perform theatrical representations of family occasions (weddings, baptisms), calendar customs (Midsummer, Shrovetide), and other rural activities.

In the final concert of the DLAL in Moscow, directed by Eduards Smiļģis (1886–1966), a well-known Latvian theatre director, members of ethnographic ensembles representing the 'working class' of local collective farms (kolkhoz) or factories (see Figure 5) performed alongside professional ballet dancers and academic musicians. Some of the *Decade's* performances had already been staged in Latvia before being presented in Moscow. Musicologist Vītoliņš praised most of the ethnographic ensembles' musical performances, except for the *Latvian Wedding in Nīca* staged by the Nīca ethnographic ensemble. As professional stage, music, and dance directors were involved in preparing the performance, Vītoliņš called it a "spectacle" rather

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22   Nīca ensemble archival entry. Available: https://www.redzidzirdilatviju.lv/lv/search/567756?q=n%C4%ABca [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

than "a strict ethnographic demonstration as we see in the performances of other groups", noting that the centuries-old traditions were accompanied by a symphony orchestra. He stressed the need for clarity about what is meant by an "ethnographic performance", insisting that it must "show the folk-art tradition as it lives in the people and the main task is to expose it and show it in its pure, direct form". As he noted:

> Wedding performances, however, do not take place in Nīca to the accompaniment of a symphony orchestra. This fact alone shows how far [this] performance differs in principle from an ethnographic performance (Vītoliņš 1955).

Vītoliņš's assessment influenced later approaches: stage performances were expected to remain close to traditional performances in their functional environment.

During the preparations for the DLAL in Moscow, new ethnographic ensembles were established alongside the existing or "newly discovered" Kurzeme ensembles, particularly in Latgale – most notably the ethnographic ensemble of Bindari village in 1954 and that of Rikava village in 1955, founded with the assistance of Jānis Rozenbergs (1927–2006), a researcher of the Folklore Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR. Another important milestone in the actualization of folk music and the establishment of ethnographic ensembles was the Latgale Culture Week held in Riga in 1958, which included music concerts, theatre performances, applied art exhibitions, and, significantly, performances by ethnographic ensembles (Unknown 1958). As Jānis Streičs, one of the directors of Latgale Week in Riga and a well-known film director, later pointed out, the event had both a visible and an invisible side. The visible part was to present Latgalian folk art in the capital in a manner consistent with Soviet stylistics, while the hidden part aimed to mobilize Latgale's sense of national community and its unity with the rest of Latvia – something increasingly threatened by Soviet ideology and policies of Russification (Streičs 2018).[23]

In preparation for this event, state and local cultural institutions, with the support of researchers from the Folklore Institute, established ethnographic ensembles in Bērzgale (1956), Murmastiene (1956), Salnava (1956), Kārsava (1957), Izvalta (1957), Aglona (1957) and Mežvidi (1958). The style of performance of these ethnographic ensembles on stage and in cinema was emotionally heightened, exaggerated, and theatrical (Brenčs 1958).[24] Such a stage aesthetic was typical of folklore

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23   News article about *Latgales kultūras nedēļa* in Riga, 1958:
https://tinyurl.com/Latgale-1958 [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

24   Video excerpt (at 4:35) related to *Latgales kultūras nedēļa*:
https://tinyurl.com/Latgale-1958-video [Accessed 27.06.2025.].

performances in other Soviet republics and reflected the broader features of Soviet stage culture. Oras notes that Soviet models of folklore performance and festivals promoted specific characteristics such as pomposity, theatricality, joyful expression, and a controlled, professionalized manner of performance (Oras 2024: 115).

The Soviet stage style was also characterized by another Estonian scholar, Kristin Kuutma. She writes that the aesthetic standards of public performance changed significantly in the 1950s. Under the supervision of professional cultural workers (animators), amateur artistic production was transformed into a more modest form of professional art, while at the same time attempting to copy aesthetics and techniques.

> Folk dances performed for an audience followed the standard of ballet, folk song performance departed from the classical vocal technique of chamber music, the ideal of a folk instrumentalist was expected to be music-making in a symphony orchestra. The repertoire performed was primarily humorous and gleeful, depicting the frisky and playful entertainment of the simple village folk, or the energetic workmanship achievements of the *kolkhoz* members (Kuutma 1998: 2).

By contrast, speaking about the difference between the "eastern" (Soviet) and "western" models of folklore staging, Pettan pointed out:

> In contrast to this model, in which everything was strictly determined, from music and dance arrangements to performance features such as the number and physical appearance of dancers (their unified physical measures, costumes, even smiles on their faces), the "western" model was offering a more relaxed, spontaneous, and varied approaches to rural music (Pettan 2010: 130).

Seeing that the Soviet stage aesthetics suppressed the "raw" performance of traditions and threatened the survival of folk music in its unarranged and authentic forms, just as in 1955 Vītoliņš had opposed the use of the symphony orchestra in ethnographic performances, so in 1978 Ģederts Ramans (1927–1999), Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Union of Soviet Composers, also spoke out against the stylization of folk music. He called for listening to folklore in its original sound and authentic performance – "recordings of folk singers' voices or a performance by a folklore ensemble" (Ramans 1978). This appeal coincided with preparations by researchers of the Folklore Sector for a folk music concert featuring folk singers, ethnographic ensembles, and instrumental groups or bands, all presenting rough, unembellished folk music (Weaver et al. 2023: 51–53). The concert also included a paper by musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš, who, like Ramans, advocated unadorned music free from the Soviet stage aestheticization, which he described as "the playfully dashing young man" and "the coquettishly sweet maiden" (Klotiņš 1978).

This concert marked a turning point in the performance of folk music, moving away from the aesthetics and artistic embellishments of the Soviet stage and initiating a focus on simple, tradition-based, and even intimate modes of performance (see Figure 6). It also launched the folklore revival movement in Latvia, characterized by a markedly different performance aesthetic and a distinct political connotation.[25] Alongside individual folk music performers and newly formed folklore groups in the cities, especially in Riga, ethnographic ensembles and their performances became an essential part of the movement in the following years. Both shortly before and after the 1978 concert, a wave of ethnographic ensembles emerged, particularly in Latgale: in 1978 ensembles were founded in Baltinava, Briežciems, and Dignāja; in 1979 in Zundāni; in 1980 in Pušmucova, Rekava, Upīte, and elsewhere.

In the early post-war years, Klotiņš writes, the desire to present folk art decoratively took precedence over its natural beauty in Latvia, and the notion that professionalizing folklore heritage was the right way to popularize it became deeply rooted among folk music enthusiasts (Klotiņš 2018: 260). Until 1978, the stage performance of ethnographic ensembles oscillated between, on the one hand, Soviet stage aesthetics, characterized by exaggerated enthusiasm, joy, and vitality, and, on

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25   For comparison, see the dance-house movement in Hungary in the 1970s (Pettan 2010: 130).

the other, the pursuit of ethnographically accurate and functionally grounded folk music performance. In the 1980s, however, influenced by the ideas of the folklore revival movement, ethnographic ensembles rejected Soviet stage aesthetics. This shift is evidenced by the ethnographic ensemble concerts in the 1980s and by the *Baltica* folklore festival, jointly organized by the Baltic States since 1987, which adopted a different stage aesthetic. Since 1988, when the festival was held in Riga, it has also carried a strong political connotation and background.

Looking at a map of Latvia, performers of traditional music have historically been concentrated at two ends of the country – in the western and southern parts of Kurzeme and Latgale in the East – while the tradition of ethnographic ensembles is largely absent in central Latvia, in Vidzeme and Zemgale. Several factors may explain this distribution. In Vidzeme, folk music traditions were strongly influenced by the powerful choir movement and by the religious practices of the Moravian Brethren (Hernhut) in the 19th century. In Zemgale, the Soviet repression and deportation of prosperous farming families to Siberia in 1941 and 1949 could be one reason, while the economic activity of the Duchy of Courland and Zemgale in the late 18th century may also have shaped folk music traditions there. By contrast, in Latgale, economic modesty in the 19th century allowed traditional cultural values and features associated with the rural environment to survive longer.

At various times, the emergence and development of folk music performance groups have been supported by traditional cultural and educational institutions, as well as by folklore research authorities, and have received both recognition and praise. In the interwar period, this role was played by the Archives of Latvian Folklore, the University of Latvia, and the State Conservatory, with key figures such as Kārlis Straubergs, Ludis Bērziņš, and Emilis Melngailis. During the Soviet occupation, the Folklore Institute and its researchers, including Jēkabs Vītoliņš and Jānis Rozenbergs, were central, alongside teachers and regional activists such as Jēkabs Ķīburs (1897–1972), long-time leader of the Bārta ethnographic ensemble; Jānis Teilāns (1941–2019), teacher, folklore activist, and leader of many ethnographic ensembles in Latgale; and Aleksandrs Vasiļevskis, founder of the Bindari ethnographic ensemble. During the Third Awakening period, the establishment of ethnographic ensembles was further promoted by folklore researchers and regional cultural activists, among them the poet Antons (Ontans) Slišāns (1948–2010).

During the Soviet period, the formation of ethnographic ensembles was part of official state policy, and the ensembles were institutionally tied to a specific village, hamlet, or collective farm (kolkhoz). A new ensemble could only be established with the approval of local or state authorities, even if the initiative originated from residents or cultural activists. Nevertheless, both the folk music performance groups of

the interwar period and the ethnographic ensembles in the Soviet years ultimately rested on the inheritance, persistence, and transmission of folk music traditions among their bearers, the musical skills of the participants, and the continued desire for music with traditional content across different regions of Latvia.

Conclusions

Semi-institutionalized groups that performed folk music and dances already existed during the interwar period, but the term 'ethnographic ensemble' emerged only in the Soviet period. Although musicologist Vītoliņš noted in the 1950s that "ethnographic ensembles" represented a new "line" of amateur artistic activity deserving serious attention not only in Latvia but also on a pan-Union scale (Vītoliņš 1955), it is clear that under Soviet occupation the interwar tradition of ethnographic performances was continued under the new label of 'ethnographic ensemble', with their foundation years reassigned to present them as achievements of the Soviet system. As Oras points out:

> Soviet officials labelled traditional folklore and amateur arts the artistic creation of the (working) people to fit into prevailing socialist ideology. In 1940 and the postwar years, the institutions connected with folklore research and performance were reformed and/or renamed according to the Soviet models (Oras 2024: 106).

Despite differences in eras and political systems, the tasks of ethnographic ensembles have remained similar – to preserve local traditions and present them to others, thereby fostering local patriotism both within their own and neighboring collective farms or districts, as well as introducing regional folklore to audiences in Riga, Moscow, Stockholm, and elsewhere. The repertoire of ethnographic ensembles, along with the genres and content of their performances, has not undergone drastic changes. Since the 1896 Ethnographic Exhibition in Riga, they have consistently performed traditional plays, games, dances, and characteristic songs.

The emergence of ethnographic ensembles in the Soviet period was stimulated by the DLAL in Moscow, which reinforced the importance of transmitting traditions both within local communities and on a broader stage. Recognition from state-level officials in Moscow or Riga also encouraged smaller district officials and local communities to value the work of these ensembles. Ethnographic ensembles fit neatly into Soviet ideology, representing the art of the "common working people". Although singers and dancers from Rucava and Alsunga had already represented Latvia at the 3rd International Congress of Dancers in Stockholm in 1939, the new political circumstances added ideological motivation to this mission, while also involving larger numbers of participants and creating more complex and professional artistic compositions. Thus, while ethnographic ensembles were sometimes

instrumentalized for Soviet propaganda, they simultaneously safeguarded the diversity, traditional style, and performance practices of folk music throughout the Soviet years and ensured its transmission to future generations.

During the last decade of the Soviet occupation and the period of the Third Awakening in the 1980s, the personalities of individual folk singers, ethnographic ensembles, and their performances became romanticized as carriers of ancient traditions and folk songs, especially in the eyes of folklore revivalists. The performances of ethnographic ensembles became an integral part of the folklore revival movement; thus, their participants, alongside the actualization and preservation of national identity and cultural values, also took part in the political processes of the Third Awakening, effectively turning Stalin's slogan upside down and the socialist form filling with national content (Herzog 2010; Ķencis 2024).

Today, ethnographic ensembles – unlike other folklore performers, such as folklore groups and bands, which are not limited in the choice of repertoire or interpretations and often draw on music from different regions of Latvia – adhere more strictly to the songs, performance styles, and vocal harmonies characteristic of a particular locality. They aim to preserve the traditions of musical folklore connected with annual and family occasions in a form as unchanged as possible. Given the conditions of modern society, including mobility and intensified communication, their repertoires are based not only on cultural knowledge and skills passed down orally, but are also supplemented with materials from archives, research, and publications. Nevertheless, one of the central aims of ethnographic ensembles remains to resist innovation and to continue being 'ethnographic'.

Nowadays, ethnographic ensembles operate mainly in rural areas and hamlets, where, alongside folkdance ensembles, they fulfil the function of folk-art performers. They are primarily engaged for performances at local festivals, visits by state officials, and other events where the cultural characteristics of a particular area to be showcased. Ethnographic ensembles, together with folklore groups, also participate in regional and international folklore festivals as well as in national song festivals. Their survival depends on the ensemble leaders' ability to attract and retain members, available funding, local interest, and the musical tastes and skills of the members themselves.

Although folklore performers and the institutions that administer and organize their activities strive to move beyond the Soviet legacy, the influence of interwar stage traditions, Soviet stage aesthetics, and the peculiarities of amateur art still shape the stage image, performance manner, and style of contemporary ethnographic and other folklore performers. In addition, stage performances are influenced by the aesthetics and style of the folklore revival movement of the Third

Awakening, characterized by an idealization of the past. Thus, contemporary folklore performances continue to be shaped both by earlier stage traditions and by current approaches to adapting folk music and traditions for the stage.

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Anna Klára Andor

PhD in History;
research fellow at the Budapest City Archives
PhD vēsturē;
pētniece Budapeštas pilsētas arhīvā
E-mail / e-pasts: andorannaklara@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0003-1095-5874

Diametrically Opposed? Survival and Revival Chances of an Interwar Folk Culture Movement Under Communist Dictatorship in Hungary

Diametrāli pretēji? Starpkaru perioda tautas kultūras kustības izdzīvošanas un atdzimšanas iespējas komunistiskās diktatūras apstākļos Ungārijā

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
folk culture,	tautas kultūra,
folk heritage,	tautas mantojums,
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Gyöngyösbokréta	*Gyöngyösbokréta*

Summary   During the interwar period, Hungary had a well-established movement dedicated to preserving and showcasing peasant culture. Known as *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Pearly Bouquet, 1931–1948), it was initially framed as a tourist attraction but soon developed into a campaign to protect the enduring cultural heritage of the peasantry. For political and nation-(re)building purposes, it was supported by the government, regarded both as a source of "cultural supremacy" and as part of the revisionist program of a country reduced to a fraction of its former size. Under the communist regime (1945–1989), however, the leadership not only prohibited continuation of this heritage work but also introduced a new program: communist folk ensembles, designed to be "diametrically opposed" to *Gyöngyösbokréta*.

This article examines the consequences of the communist dismantling of earlier frameworks for presenting folk heritage, as well as the strategies used by the eliminated movement and its members to survive and revive. It also explores how communities engaged in safeguarding folk culture – in Hungary and abroad – adapted, and how their practices evolved under uncertain sociopolitical conditions. A key finding is the movement's resilience in Vojvodina (today's Serbia), where it adapted and persisted within a non-democratic system as a festival that continues today.

Kopsavilkums   Starpkaru periodā Ungārijā pastāvēja zemnieku kultūras saglabāšanai un popularizēšanai veltīta kustība, pazīstama kā *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Pērļu pušķis, 1931–1948). Sākotnēji tā tika veidota tūristu piesaistei, bet drīz vien pārtapa zemnieku kultūras mantojuma saglabāšanas kampaņā. Politisku un nācijas veidošanas mērķu dēļ kustību atbalstīja valdība, jo kustība tika uzskatīta gan par "kultūras pārākuma" avotu, gan par valsts revizionistiskās programmas sastāvdaļu. Tomēr komunistiskā režīma laikā (1945–1989) partijas vadība ne tikai aizliedza turpināt šāda veida tautas mantojuma saglabāšanu, bet arī ieviesa pilnīgi jaunu programmu: komunistiskos folkloras ansambļus, kas apzināti bija "diametrāli pretēji" *Gyöngyösbokréta* kustībai.

Rakstā tiek pētītas sekas, ko radīja komunistiskā režīma īstenotā tautas mantojuma saglabāšanas un prezentēšanas sistēmas nojaukšana, kā arī dažādās stratēģijas, ko likvidētā kustība un tās dalībnieki izmantoja, lai pašsaglabātos un atjaunotos. Rakstā pētīts, kā kopienas, kas iesaistījās tautas kultūras saglabāšanā – gan Ungārijā, gan ārvalstīs –, pielāgojās un kā to prakse attīstījās nenoteiktajos sociālpolitiskajos apstākļos. Viens no pētījuma galvenajiem atklājumiem ir kustības noturība anektētajā Vojvodinas teritorijā (mūsdienu Serbijā), kur tai izdevās pielāgoties un pastāvēt nedemokrātiskā sistēmā festivāla veidā, kas turpinās mūsdienās.

Introduction   My paper explores the survival of the principles and the continued activity of the actors of an erased folk culture movement in communist Hungary, as well as these actors' role in its revival. To illustrate the different scenarios of survival and revival of the silenced movement of interwar Hungary, I have structured the paper in three main sections. In the first part, I provide an overview of the movement's development and transformations, including examples from present-day Serbia, where the movement was able to adapt and endure, and I discuss a still-existing festival that serves as a testament to its lasting legacy.

This study is based on extensive archival research in the fields of ethnography, tourism, dance, and theatre, complemented by local historical sources, press materials, oral history interviews, and fieldwork. As no comprehensive history of the *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement and its continuities has yet been written, my aim here is to reconstruct its historical trajectory and to outline its various forms of survival and revival. Given the scope of this article, I focus on documenting and contextualizing the movement rather than pursuing comparative or theoretical analysis, with the intention of providing a foundation for future research on the place of *Gyöngyösbokréta* in Hungarian and European folk history.

The First Attempt
to Systematically Preserve Folk Culture
in Hungary: *Gyöngyösbokréta* (1931–1948)   The period following the First World War was marked by a quest for identity and a return to the past, which manifested in Hungary's (re)discovery of its folk culture (Gönyey [n.d.]: 1). This was not the first instance of revisiting folk traditions in Hungary, as the Millennium Exhibition of Budapest in 1896 had already showcased peasant life and customs. At the turn of the 20th century, the Ethnographic Museum and the Ethnographic Society also organized displays of folk tradition, but these were intended for professional audiences rather than the broader public (Györffy 1939: 82). However, beginning in the early 1920s, the Metropolitan Tourist Office of Budapest – mainly in response to the financial crisis – sought to create summer attractions, especially around August 20, the national day celebrating the country's foundation. For this purpose, the Office decided to organize folk art shows (Volly 1977: 350).

Béla Paulini (1881–1945), a former journalist, became the organizer of peasant customs presentations after achieving remarkable success in 1929 with his folk

Figure 1. The Atkár *bokréta* group on stage. OSZMI TA HGy34, legacy of Béla Paulini.

opera *Háry János*, performed at the Opera House by peasants from his village, with music composed by Zoltán Kodály.[1] Even then, ethnographers advised him to present the peasants' original customs rather than staged folk plays. With their assistance, Paulini began searching for villages where traditional customs – related to weddings, harvests, and other celebrations, such as Christmas or Pentecost – as well as local dances and children's games were still practiced, and where folk costumes continued to be worn.

For the celebration of the foundation of Hungary, Saint Stephen's Day in Budapest in 1931, Paulini invited the first of twelve village groups to showcase their folk customs, which included dances, traditional plays, and songs. This was the first *Gyöngyösbokréta* presentation, which was thereafter held annually. Each participating group, known as a *bokréta*, comprised approximately eight couples (sixteen people) from a single village and was usually led by a local teacher, cantor, priest, or notary. In Figure 1, a *bokréta* group is depicted during the annual Budapest performance, with the group's leaders visible in the background.

It is worth noting that all group members were peasants or farmers, and each group presented its own local dances and traditions. With the guidance and critical approach of ethnographers, *Gyöngyösbokréta* – beyond its touristic function – also aimed to preserve the nation's endangered folk heritage. The government soon

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1   Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) – Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist.

recognized its potential, granting these peasant groups a representative role in constructing national identity (Ujváry G. 2012).

The name *Gyöngyösbokréta* is itself a symbol drawn from Hungarian folk culture. In addition to referring to a component of men's traditional costume – a beaded hat ornament – the word also connotes a bouquet of beautiful flowers, serving as a metaphor for *Gyöngyösbokréta*'s assemblage of vibrant, colorful traditions from many locales.

Indeed, by bringing Hungarian culture to the surface and by presenting it to the public, the *Gyöngyösbokréta* presentations soon gained traction and state support. In 1934, Paulini established the National Hungarian Bokréta Association with the backing of national authorities. The political leadership recognized that the peasants' folk presentations could serve as instruments of nation-building and of revisionist politics concerning the Hungarian territories lost at Trianon.[2] Thus, in addition to publishing its own journals and promoting performances in as many forums as possible, *Gyöngyösbokréta* was widely covered by Hungarian media outlets (Ujváry F. 1984). In some years, it gained national importance and developed into a movement. As a result of the immediate popularity of the first performances, as well as extensive broadcasting and advertising, more than a hundred *bokréta* groups – with 4,000 to 5,000 peasant members in total – joined the Association, and it attracted supporters from across all social classes (Debreczeni 1956: 100; Pálfi 1970: 126–127).

The news of *Gyöngyösbokréta* reached the territories annexed by the Treaty of Trianon via radio, and many *bokréta* groups were subsequently formed in Upper Hungary (today's Slovakia), Transcarpathia (today's Ukraine), Transylvania (today's Romania), and Vojvodina (today's Serbia). They continued to use the name *gyöngyös bokréta* even under non-Hungarian administration, but officially joined the Association only after the re-annexation of these territories to Hungary under the First and Second Vienna Awards.[3]

For these Hungarian minority populations, the movement embodied their

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2   As Hungary was on the losing side in the First World War, it was required to pay reparations, as stipulated in the Treaty of Trianon. As part of this settlement, and due to the redrawing of borders, Hungary suffered enormous territorial and demographic losses, losing 71% of its territory and 63.6% of its population (Gyáni 2021: 42; Vardy 1983: 21).

3   First Vienna Award (2 November 1938) returned to Hungary the region of Upper Hungary in southern Slovakia, which had a predominantly Hungarian-speaking population. Second Vienna Award (30 August 1940) granted Hungary approximately two-thirds of the long-disputed Transylvania from Romania. Nevertheless, the 1947 Paris Peace Treaties nullified these awards, resulting in the re-annexation of these territories to the successor states.

enduring sense of national belonging. Once they were recognized as formal members, they played a unique role in the *Gyöngyösbokréta* celebrations, epitomizing the unity of all Hungarians (Paulini 1940; Kende 1936).

The state-sponsored *Gyöngyösbokréta* presentations, which – through increasing government support – soon developed into a movement, operated across a variety of sectors. For example, the organizers sought to establish new national holidays inspired by the folklore depicted in the *Gyöngyösbokréta* performances. In addition, *bokréta* groups participated in major cultural events attended by dignitaries such as Italian King Victor Emmanuel III and German Reich State Secretary Franz Schlegelberger (Unknown 1937; Zehery 1941). The Bokréta Association also performed abroad – in Vienna, London, Hamburg, Cannes, and Brussels – as a representative of Hungary (Ujváry F. 1984: 31).

Despite its rapid expansion, many people disapproved of *Gyöngyösbokréta* and its treatment of the peasantry. While there were protests against the presentation of peasant culture as a tourist attraction, it was nevertheless the first time that folk customs were publicly displayed – a major step toward the preservation of folk culture, albeit one with notable shortcomings. In the eyes of intellectuals, the image that *Gyöngyösbokréta* performances presented of village life to tourists was exaggerated and misleading.

But for the peasantry, however, participation in *Gyöngyösbokréta* represented a pragmatic opportunity for cultural advancement. As the movement gained popularity, it offered peasants a chance to travel. Many villages sought to participate and attempted to make their performances more appealing, sometimes compromising the authenticity of traditions in order to secure the opportunity to travel to Budapest or abroad. This often provoked local conflicts over participation, as inclusion brought the privilege of travel. While critics emphasized the movement's political dimension, for most participating peasants it primarily offered a chance to present their traditions and temporarily escape the constraints of rural life, rather than to engage in party politics.

Since Paulini and the local *bokréta* leaders lacked ethnographic expertise and pseudo-traditions could have negatively impacted both heritage preservation and the tourism industry, ethnographers were asked to verify the authenticity of the performances. Furthermore, because only peasants who presented their own traditions were allowed to participate in the movement, some questioned its exclusionary nature.

The staging of folklore (and its commodification for tourism), the question of ethnographic authenticity, its use for political propaganda, and the movement's impact on the peasantry were constant targets of criticism. Ethnographers,

writers, politicians, church figures, and local leaders expressed their opinions on *Gyöngyösbokréta* and its influence, although most supported the initiative and sought to help it preserve traditions. Paulini was also eager to discuss these issues openly, as the movement itself was the first in Hungary to attempt to foster a positive image of the country while combining heritage preservation with tourism promotion.

One of Paulini's major critics, choreographer Elemér Muharay (1901–1960), had already challenged the principles of *Gyöngyösbokréta* in the 1930s, particularly regarding the staging and authenticity of traditional dances. This was the moment when the controversies surrounding the direction and future of the folk dance movement began (Muharay 1935: 45).

Annulment and Survival
of the Movement in Hungary (1945–1948)
Despite the critiques, the movement continued to grow until it dissolved in the wake of the Second World War, Paulini's death, and the establishment of the new regime. As a result, the annual *Gyöngyösbokréta* performances in Budapest were cancelled in 1944 (Unknown 1944).

Even before the communists seized power, the movement was facing dire circumstances by 1945, which were further exacerbated by the implementation of a new cultural policy. The Soviet paradigm of "constructive" folk art staging was emulated, as was the case in all people's democracies (Felföldi 2018: 27; Abkarovits 2012: 153–154). The press soon adopted this model:

> We have before us the results of folk-dance culture, which has been raised to a very high level among the Soviet peoples, and we must aim to approach them [..] Folk dance is one of the most striking and widely effective ways of realizing a national culture in form and a socialist culture in content (Szentimrei 1949).

In hindsight, it is apparent that the "socialist theater movement continued many of the traditions of *Gyöngyösbokréta* and created an organizational framework for the involvement and training of young people" (Paládi-Kovács 2004: 5). This narrative was also transmitted to the younger generation: Hungarian dancers and singers participating in the World Youth Festival in Prague[4] in 1947 echoed this sentiment, stating, "We want to follow in the footsteps of the Russian Moiseyev group. We see

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4   The World Youth Festival was established by socialist-leaning NGOs – the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the International Union of Students (IUS) – to promote "peaceful" socialist internationalism and Soviet culture in a "cultural Olympics" format. The first festival was held in Prague in 1947, and thereafter it took place every other year in various Eastern Bloc cities (Koivunen 2014: 125).

them as a role model, and they have been admired by Hungarian audiences when they were visiting Budapest" (Unknown 1947b).

International events, such as the aforementioned Youth Meeting, were held with the participation of communist countries, where folk dance and music was performed under Soviet control (Felföldi 2018: 34). While in the Soviet bloc during these decades such performances represented a controlled and obligatory form of artistic expression, in other geopolitical contexts folk culture was used as a means of protest or rebellion. From the 1970s onward, a similar development occurred in Hungary with the *Táncház* (dance-house) movement, which favored the authentic practice of folk art over staged performances (see Abkarovits 2012; Stavělová, Buckland 2018).

The slogans of progress and education were used to emphasize the importance of the peasantry and its role in the new cultural policy. This narrative was applied across all fields and was also expected to manifest in the performing arts, alongside popular education through radio and the "cultivation" of peasant intellectuals (Bóka 1946). Although socialist newspapers had already appeared during the Horthy era (1920–1944), it was uncommon for them to attack *Gyöngyösbokréta* on ideological grounds. As mentioned earlier, the movement was severely criticized for its exclusivity, as only peasants were allowed to participate, excluding members of other social classes.

On the other hand, the communist newspaper *Kanadai Magyar Munkás (Hungarian Worker of Canada)* harshly criticized the movement very early on: "The art of the Hungarian people is prostituted by the lords for their own profit and they brag about it as if it were their own art. But it is absolutely none of their business" (Unknown 1934). A similar narrative reemerged after 1945: the movement was condemned for promoting "the lords' friendship for the people", for turning folk culture into exploitation and entertainment, among other critiques (Gyertyán 1951; Barsi 1957; Kardos 1954: 418). Even János Manga, an ethnographer and the director of the Institute of Popular Culture, emphasized the gentry's exploitation of the peasantry (Manga 1958).

During the period of the communist takeover, events continued at the local level from 1945 onward, where *bokréta* groups kept performing without endorsing any political message. Yet, until the 1948 ban, they also participated in political events (Unknown 1945c; Unknown 1948). For instance, at events organized by the *Kisgazda Párt* (Smallholders' Party) (Unknown 1945b), *bokréta* groups also performed at activities organized by the *Szociáldemokrata Párt* (Social Democratic Party) and its Youth Group (Unknown 1945a).

Although the "people", "as a basis of reference and legitimacy", were staged in spectacular political performances under the new regime, *Gyöngyösbokréta* could

not for a long time be accepted, as it was seen as embodying the continuity of the pre-1945 order (Csukovits 2011; Volly 1991: 114).

The St. Stephen's Day procession commemorating the foundation of the Hungarian state, which traditionally included the annual presentation of *Gyöngyösbokréta*, was also abolished as a national holiday. Because of its ecclesiastical character and ideological message, it was incompatible with communist cultural policy and was replaced first by the New Bread Day and, from 1949 onward, by Constitution Day (Szabó 2009: 90–91). Nevertheless, not everything could be completely eradicated: for instance, several elements and expressions from the harvest celebrations of the former *Gyöngyösbokréta* festivities survived (Vámos 2018: 32).

In 1946, despite all the difficulties, members began to reorganize the Bokréta Association, which had been left without leadership following Paulini's death (Mohácsi 1946). The Association was officially re-established that same year. The fact that there was still public interest in joining the movement suggests that it retained considerable appeal among the wider population. In 1946, a folk exhibition was held, and *bokréta* groups participated in the Szeged Bread Festival and an event organized by the Salgótarján Women's League (Unknown 1946c: 2).

The largest event after the re-establishment was the *Országos Parasztnapok* (National Peasants' Day) in 1946, where various *bokréta* groups were once again allowed to perform in Budapest, as they had between 1931 to 1944. The Peasants' Days were organized by the *Parasztszövetség* (Peasants' Association), and the idea for the event was inspired by the mass rallies of the communists (Unknown 1946b). The Smallholders' Party, which was to enter a coalition with the Communist Party following the 1945 elections, wished to "show at a mass meeting in Budapest that they had at least as much social background as the Communists and could convince their electorate to take part in large-scale national events" (Vida 1976: 215).

The original plan was to hold the Peasants' Days around August 20, when many peasants traveled to the capital. However, the communist leadership, which viewed the gathering unfavorably, refused to authorize it, and the event was instead held from September 7 to 9 (Czettler 2002). One of the fabricated reasons given was that modern industrial and agricultural machinery could not arrive from the Soviet Union by August 20. In the end, an industrial-agricultural exhibition was included as part of the event, and it was hailed as a "historic achievement" that peasants were no longer sent to Budapest "to see *Gyöngyösbokréta* and fireworks, but to see new wine presses, fertilization, and quality production" (Unknown 1946e).

The Communist Party mobilized every resource to ensure that as few people as possible came to the event from the countryside, as the scale of the Smallholders' Party's gathering was viewed with suspicion. Consequently, Communist leaders

deemed it appropriate for Party leader Mátyás Rákosi himself and Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy to speak at the event (Czettler 2002). The organizers' ability to mobilize hundreds of thousands of participants alarmed the communist leadership, which at the time did not yet exercise absolute power, and the performance of *Gyöngyösbokréta* at this political event ultimately led to the communists' growing resentment toward the movement.

However, *Gyöngyösbokréta*'s participation in the event was not only a political surprise – and an unpleasant one for that matter – but it also provoked discontent from choreographer Elemér Muharay, Paulini's rival in shaping the direction of folk dance preservation and presentation. In his trenchant critique, Muharay identified both the legitimization and revival of a bygone system and the lack of progress in the spirit of *Gyöngyösbokréta*. Unsurprisingly, his article also discussed the folk ensemble he had recently founded, which he considered the foundation for a new form of tradition preservation to replace *Gyöngyösbokréta*.

Muharay had been experimenting with the staging of folk traditions and dances in various projects since 1938 (Unknown 1938a; Sima 1939). The principles guiding these projects – the forerunners of the later folk ensembles – were rooted in the artistic concept of making folk art accessible to a broad audience (Pesovár 1999: 55). The following passage from Muharay's article – which I have chosen as the motto of this paper – succinctly summarizes his ideological stance:

> The concept of the folk ensemble is diametrically opposed in content to the concept of *Gyöngyösbokréta*. The meaning of folk ensemble is the cultivation and modern development of folk cultural values and strengths and the preparation for the reception of higher culture. The most important thing in folk ensemble work is that it seeks that this folk tradition interacts with the higher culture (Muharay 1946).

The article did not go unheeded. First, ethnographer and musicologist János Bartók (1912–1992) fully endorsed the criticisms already expressed and went even further, emphasizing that the leaders of *Gyöngyösbokréta* lacked sufficient ethnographic knowledge to preserve traditions authentically (Bartók 1946). Bartók, like the journal *Köznevelés* (Public Education), highlighted that the collection and presentation of folk traditions should soon be undertaken by a national organization of trained professionals (Unknown 1946a).

The emphasis on distinguishing *Gyöngyösbokréta* from the newly established folk ensembles remained consistent throughout the first decades of their existence, especially in the press (Unknown 1946d; Boldizsár 1951). Professionals – such as dance teachers and choreographers – also expressed negative opinions against *Gyöngyösbokréta* until the early 1950s.

Two of the last events in which *Gyöngyösbokréta* participated were, first, the *Fölszállott a páva* (Fly, Peacock, Fly) dance event, organized by István Volly, and

second, the centenary cultural competition in Gyula, both held in 1948. In fact, after the war, the latter was the only dance event that could legitimately be regarded as a national gathering (Maácz 1977: 17–18). It brought together the traditional peasant groups that had previously achieved great success within *Gyöngyösbokréta* and the newly formed urban, factory, and student groups (Gyapjas 1958). Thus, *bokréta* groups and folk ensembles coexisted at the time, and in many places the *bokréta* itself was transformed into a youth ensemble (Kaposi 1999: 69).

The ensuing press controversy revolved around the presentation of staged folk traditions by the ever-multiplying ensembles. In the columns of the Catholic journal *Új Ember* (New Man), harsh criticism was leveled at the folk ensembles for their lack of progress, claiming that their quality was equal to or even worse than that of the former *Gyöngyösbokréta*. Since this criticism originated from the right-wing, the left-wing *Igaz Szó* (True Word) responded by denouncing the article for devaluing the cultural work of socialist associations (Gereblyés 1948). This exchange illustrates that the entire debate was political in nature.

By that time, however, folk ensembles had little to fear, as in 1948 the new regime officially banned the Bokréta Association. Although *Gyöngyösbokréta* had collected more than 200 variations of 75–80 different dances and 35–40 plays (Pálfi 1970: 146), as well as traditions from an almost-lost folk heritage, neither the press, political publications, nor the ethnographic profession were permitted to shed a positive light on the movement.

Thus, the official survival of *Gyöngyösbokréta* lasted only until this point; yet even after the regime's ban, opportunities for its revival gradually began to emerge.

Revival possibilities (1948–1989)

Revival in Hungary   The seemingly hopeless situation following the ban was further aggravated by the launch of a smear campaign against *Gyöngyösbokréta* on both political and educational fronts (Poór 1951: 23). By the 1950s, local *bokréta* groups – already functioning as folk ensembles, which in itself could be seen as a form of survival – were often subjected to harsh criticism for their performances (Körmendi 1950; Heltai 1964). Due to their prior political involvement, they were labeled as chauvinist-nationalist, capitalist, fascist, and culturally supremacist – accusations that were not entirely unfounded given their participation in various political events (Sas 1960: 139; Zoltán 1959: 35).

The *coup de grâce* came when communist leader Mátyás Rákosi, in a 1949 statement, cited *Gyöngyösbokréta* as a negative example:

> [In] the past, the village and the city were at odds with each other. In the past, the village had only garbage and dross from the urban culture; the culture of the village could reach the city only along the degenerate way of *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Rákosi 1949).

Thus, the *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement did not align with the principles of the new political system, nor with those of the newly established folk-dance movement (*néptáncmozgalom*), which was built on entirely different foundations. *Bokréta* groups were therefore either forced to cease their activities or to join the Muharay folk ensembles (Borbély 1996: 10). In many cases, *bokréta* groups formed the basis of later traditional ensembles,[5] some of which also commemorated the movement through their chosen names (Váradi 2015).

Népi Ének-, Tánc- és Játékegyüttes (The Folk Singing, Dancing and Playing Ensemble) – Muharay's first folk ensemble – made its debut at the National Theatre on March 4, 1946, eighteen months before the Peasant's Day performance (Unknown 1946f). Following this example, local folk ensembles were established across the country. The aim of these folk ensembles was to promote the idea of making folk culture accessible to all (Péterfi 1946), to "represent and develop folk culture to the highest degree accessible to the amateurs", from which performers could even progress to professional status dancers in the newly organized Hungarian State Folk Ensemble (Muharay 1985). Figure 2 illustrates the artistic, choreographed, and professional character of a performance by *Magyar Állami Népi Együttes* (the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble).

In the meantime, the *Táncszövetség* (Dance Association), which had been in planning since 1945, was established in 1947/48 as a central body aimed at coordinating scholarly dance collection, stage performances, and the professional and ideological oversight of the communist dance movement (Zsolnay 1951). News reports about the ensemble – assisted by Russian choreographer Igor Moiseyev – regularly emphasized the contrast between *Gyöngyösbokréta* and the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble (Unknown 1951; Fodor 1963). A 1951 source characterized this contrast as follows: "To falsify the voice of the people: that was the goal of *Gyöngyösbokréta*. To reveal the voice of the people: that is the aim of the State Folk Ensemble" (H. Gy. 1951).

A 1951 memorandum also reveals how the members of the Kapuvár *bokréta* and the local community experienced the banning of the movement. It describes not only how the folk-art presentations were undermined by the new cultural policy but also how the ban on *Gyöngyösbokréta* brought negative changes to the peasants' everyday lives:

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5   Zsámbok. https://Zsambok.Asp.Lgov.Hu/Nepi-Egyuttes [Accessed: 21.12.2025.].

Figure 2. Hungarian State Folk Ensemble, 1954. Source: https://hagyomanyokhaza.hu/hu/node/6853 [Accessed: 21.12.2025.].

The folk attire, dances, and music of the Kapuvár *Gyöngyösbokréta* were not only showcased at the renowned *Gyöngyösbokréta* events organized by Béla Paulini but also remained a vibrant part of the village's everyday life. Traditional attire was prominently displayed during numerous church and religious festivities in the village [..].

The consequences of the ban were severe, leading to a growing number of individuals disengaging from *Gyöngyösbokréta*. To compensate for the scarcity, proponents of the Communist dictatorship, who themselves lacked traditional attire, endeavoured to compensate for this deficiency. During certain festivals, they tried to borrow clothing from local *kuláks*,[6] who were naturally reluctant to lend them. Having learned from past experiences, the *kuláks* kept the clothing stored away – garments that are now considered irreplaceable [..].

The once-vibrant cultural celebrations, characterized by the wearing of traditional costumes and accompanying most village weddings, have since disappeared (Open Society Archives 12846/52).

Folk dance performances thus became compulsory, and people were, in effect, exploited – echoing the practices of the previous regime – while the communist discourse claiming to promote the peasantry proved to be mere propaganda. It is no coincidence, therefore, that in many former *bokréta* settlements, traditions and customs died out during these years. Although open criticism of the work of folk

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6   Kuláks: kulaks, wealthy peasants.

ensembles was scarcely possible, a few articles attest to the fact that the much-heralded progress and development were largely illusory (Kónya 1954).

There was a two-tier attitude on the part of the communist leadership toward the position of local *bokréta* leaders. In non-democratic regimes, the ruling party assigns all state offices to its members. The aim of the communist regime after 1945/1948 was to create a new stratum of intellectuals, and many teachers, notaries, religious figures, and *bokréta* leaders were removed from their positions (Volly 1991: 114). In *bokréta* circles, this was the case for some leaders, who were not allowed to continue their activities in their localities and were transferred to distant municipalities (Pap 2003: 42). In several cases, however, *bokréta* leaders were honored during the socialist period, which is quite striking: some were recognized with the award for folk artists, the *Népművészet Mestere Díj* (Master of Folk Art Award).[7] In addition, László Kovács, a cantor-teacher and founder of the *bokréta* in Tura, was awarded the Kossuth Prize, the highest honor of the Hungarian state, in 1954 (P. P. 1972).

Obviously, the award was not for *Gyöngyösbokréta*, but these examples show that people associated with the movement were not persecuted as much after 1953 because of their *Gyöngyösbokréta* past. In the new regime following the 1956 revolution – the Kádár era – which brought a loosening of state control in all areas, the movement came under less criticism. From the 1970s, as cultural policy was further relaxed, and even more so after the Transition in 1989 (Takács 2016: 24–25; Pataky 1964), the movement was reassessed at both local and national levels (Böjte 1978; Kováts 1989; Minárik 1989). In 1956, László Debreczeni (1903–1986), an expert on the preservation of historical monuments, suggested that it was worth clarifying what was known about the movement and published extracts from some of its documents (Debreczeni 1956: 99–104).

From the 1960s onwards, the movement was mentioned only occasionally in newspapers. Articles and reports on dance groups and village life from that period still tended to describe it disparagingly (Tüskés 1965). However, when former *bokréta* members were interviewed, the movement inevitably took on a more positive tone, as these participants recalled *Gyöngyösbokréta* with fondness and nostalgia (Vincze 1956; Rab 1963).

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7   The Masters of Folk Arts possess the vast knowledge of long-established folk activities and have the power to influence those with whom they interact with. The masters are examples to all because they preserve the values and processes of traditional artistry. Each year, the state recognizes ten individuals (seven prior to 2004) as Masters of Folk Arts. These masters are honored either made prominent works of art or have had life-long dedication to artistic activity. (https://nesz.hu/english/the-masters-of-folkarts/ [Accessed 21.12.2025.]; Nagy 2021: 21–23; Felföldi, Gombos 2001: 131).

Figure 3. *Gyöngyösbokréta* couple from Kapuvár in festive attire, 1941. Museum of Ethnography, Photograph Collection. Photo by István Szendrő.

In 1970, the first comprehensive scholarly paper devoted entirely to the movement was published by dancer and choreographer Csaba Pálfi (1928–1983) (Pálfi 1970). From that point onward, professional opinion began to reassess the movement, and it has since been argued that the Hungarian folk-dance movement as a whole – across its various periods – as well as folk-dance research, benefited greatly from *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Pesovár 1977; Vekerdi 1985: 709; Dégh 1988: 593; Martin 1980–1981: 241–243; Maácz 1977: 17; Bakonyi 1959; Dömötör 1960: 26).

Dance experts emphasized that "despite some negative political traits, it has passed on a very valuable heritage. Wherever there was a *bokréta* group, folk dancing has usually been preserved" (Novák 2002: 91). Folk ensembles have also been able to develop mainly where there has been a continuity of staged tradition-keeping over several decades, usually as successors to *bokréta* groups (Héra 2002: 55). Figure 4 depicts former *bokréta* participants serving as subjects of research and filming in the late 1970s.

The shift in professional opinion also had a local impact: in the 1980s, several local historical studies on the movement were published (Ujváry F. 1984; Fercsik 1981; Galambos 1989; Sitkei 1989). In 1982, a film was produced about

Figure 4. Research and filming of former *Gyöngyösbokréta* participants from Szeremle.
Collected by Mrs. Sándor Manno, 1979, BTK ZTI. TF39238.

Gyöngyösbokréta in southern Hungary, entitled *A Bokréta* (*The Bokréta*), featuring some of the surviving former members and their descendants (Unknown 1982).

Press analysis also indicates that the idea of reviving *Gyöngyösbokréta* was repeatedly raised not only at academic and institutional levels but also in newspaper readers' correspondence. In 1956, *Tolnai Napló* (Tolna County Journal) published the first article on the topic, entitled "Where Have the Koppányszántó *Gyöngyösbokréta* Gone?", in which old *bokréta* members were interviewed to emphasize the continued value of the *Gyöngyösbokréta* practice. The article opened with the question: "If this association was a national asset in the past, proclaiming popular culture at home and abroad, why shouldn't it be a national asset today, proclaiming popular socialist culture?!" (Kovács 1956)

Many similar suggestions appeared in the following decades. Ethnographer István Volly, who had been involved in organizing *Gyöngyösbokréta* performances in the interwar period and remained one of its most committed advocates, was still convinced in 1990 that it was time to revive the movement. Together with the leaders of 10–12 groups of old *bokréta* he planned to stage a performance in Budapest in August, but the event did not materialize due to lack of funding. Nevertheless,

there was parliamentary support for organizing a major *Gyöngyösbokréta* show the following year (Volly 1991: 114–115).

Even if the long-discussed renewed *Gyöngyösbokréta* event never came to fruition, local communities started implementing an increasing number of commemorative initiatives, such as the erection of a statue (1999) and a regional dance-hall assembly (2008) organized in cooperation with associations from former *bokréta* settlements in the area (Csurgónagymarton 2008: 16). *Gyöngyösbokréta* was also incorporated into the curricula of dance education institutions in the 2010s.[8]

A musical folk play illustrating village life at the dawn of socialism, *A baranyai gyöngyösbokréta* (*Gyöngyösbokréta* of Baranya County), was staged in 2019 (Urbán 2019). The State Folk Ensemble and the Hungarian Heritage House jointly organized the *Új Bokréták Fesztivál* (New Bokrétas Festival) in Jászberény, which "expressed our living traditions and recalled the atmosphere of the former *Gyöngyösbokréta* performances."[9]

Revival/Survival Overseas   In keeping with the spirit of the interwar *Gyöngyösbokréta*, Hungarian minority communities overseas organized folk tradition performances in the United States and South America. During the interwar years, some Hungarian communities – such as those in Cleveland and São Paulo – began to stage their own *Gyöngyösbokréta* events, imitating the customs and dances of *bokréta* groups in Hungary (Unknown 1941). In other cases, such as in Venezuela and Argentina, the movement experienced a revival: from the 1950s and 1960s, scouts and local associations learned and performed dances under the name *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Unknown 1967).

These overseas *Gyöngyösbokréta* groups typically performed at local Hungarian scouting or religious events. While not only *Gyöngyösbokréta*, but also scouting and other civic organizations were banned in Hungary in 1948, for members of the Hungarian diaspora these associations provided a sense of belonging and helped preserve Hungarian customs (Papp Z. 2008: 173).

> We Hungarians, old, new, and young, watched the successive scenes, our eyes brimming with tears. [..] It was as if we were at home in the good old days, in happy Hungary, seeing the 'proposal', 'harvest festival', 'Pentecost tradition', 'Palóc wedding', and 'corn husking' (Lendvay 1960).

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8   https://tinyurl.com/dance-education-Hungary-2013 [Accessed 21.12.2025.];
       https://www.nive.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=449&Itemid=101
[Accessed 21.12.2025.].

9   https://hagyomanyokhaza.hu/hu/mane/program/uj-bokretak-fesztival
[Accessed 21.12.2025.].

Thus wrote a reviewer about the 1960 Pittsburgh performance of the Scouts' *Gyöngyösbokréta*. Most of these gatherings were regarded as vital in strengthening Hungarian identity among the diaspora (Unknown 1971). Moreover, residents of the host countries – Americans, Venezuelans, Argentines – were also eager to attend these events, which offered them an opportunity to learn about Hungarian culture (Unknown 1960: 4). In the 1950s, the Hungarian Cultural Association in California also had a group named *Gyöngyösbokréta*, whose dancers participated in the association's balls and events, performing Hungarian village harvest festival traditions (Unknown 1957).

In Cleveland, a *Gyöngyösbokréta* group was established in the 1930s, modeled after the Hungarian groups, and remained active until the 1970s. The importance of the Cleveland events is demonstrated by the participation of Hungarian *bokréta* groups from across Central and South America (Lendvay 1964).

Both in the interwar period and after 1945, Hungarian communities overseas faced difficulties in preserving their traditions, as neither suitable instructors, nor musical materials, nor folk costumes were readily available.[10] The Hungarian community in Argentina formed a large *Gyöngyösbokréta* in 1958, but in addition to these challenges, a newspaper article noted that it was difficult for second-generation Hungarians to learn and perform folk customs they had never seen firsthand (Szeleczky 1958). Nevertheless, *Gyöngyösbokréta* groups and gatherings continued to operate, and there were also instances of Hungarian minorities from different countries overseas organizing joint meetings.

Revival in Vojvodina, Serbia   *Gyöngyösbokréta* also served as an instrument of nation-building intent and revisionist politics during the interwar period. In the territories annexed under the Treaty of Trianon – Upper Hungary (Slovakia), Transcarpathia (Ukraine), Transylvania (Romania), and Vojvodina (Serbia) – *bokréta* groups were formed during the re-annexation period. These groups were officially permitted to join the Bokréta Association only after the return of these territories to Hungary under the Vienna Awards. Nevertheless, tradition-preserving activities under the name *Gyöngyösbokréta* had already been organized among these Hungarian minorities from the mid-1930s onward.

It is therefore understandable that in these regions, as well as among the diasporas in North and South America, the movement and its transmission acquired different meanings. István Volly, who had been involved in the (post)life

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10   In the 1960s, for example, performances by the *Gyöngyösbokréta* dance group in Caracas, Venezuela, had to be called off because the tape recorders containing the appropriate music were lost, see Unknown 1964.
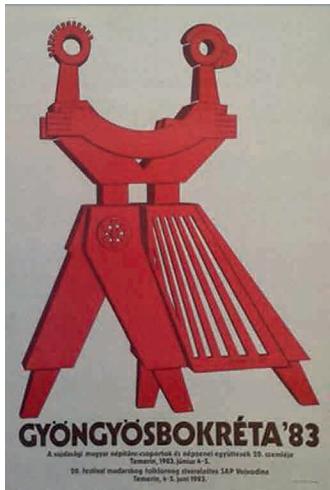
Figure 5. Poster (in Hungarian and Serbian) of the 1983 *Gyöngyösbokréta*. Institute for Hungarian Culture in Vojvodina.

of *Gyöngyösbokréta* since its inception, noted in 1990 that "it is interesting that from the 1940s to the present day, the villages in Bácska[11] have kept the name of *Gyöngyösbokréta* and held meetings in Yugoslavia, even when the name was censored in Hungary" (Volly 1991: 113–114).

It is "interesting" because the movement was banned in Hungary, the motherland, and "interesting" because Yugoslavia was also under a communist regime during those decades, where Hungarians were a minority. "Interesting", but not self-evident, since in the case of Transylvania and Upper Hungary we cannot speak of a similar revival or survival. Maintaining and reviving the traditions of the movement was by no means an easy task. After the Second World War, it also ceased to exist in Vojvodina, but its revival was initiated soon afterward, in the second half of the 1940s (Cs. Tóth 2018; Csorba 1947: 102; Kalapis 1948). At the local level, *bokréta* groups continued their performances in the following decades (Kiss 1945; Nagy 1947; Zabosné Geleta 2010: 275; Tomka 1967).

In 1969, the leaders of the several former participating municipalities re-launched the *Gyöngyösbokréta* gatherings. In the first few years, the event was held in the same municipality – Gombos (Богојево/Bogojevo) – and since 1972 it has become a touring festival, with a different municipality serving as host each year (Dautbegovics 2013). (For example, in 1983 it was held in Temerin; see Figure 5 poster.)

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11   *Бачка* is a geographical name in Serbia referring to the territory of the former Bács-Bodrog county, the northern part of which belongs to Hungary (15%) and the southern part to Vojvodina (85%), with a significant Hungarian minority.

The popularity of the movement is demonstrated by the fact that by 1985 there were already around 2,000 participants, and the celebration of Hungarian folklore traditions had crossed the borders of Vojvodina and even those of the country itself (Hajdú 1986). Clearly, these were no longer local, tradition-preserving events, but gatherings of folk-dance ensembles that presented not only the dance heritage of their own settlements but also that of other Hungarian regions. However, as a minority initiative, the survival of this movement was not without challenges – authenticity being the main concern – so a professional jury was invited to evaluate and assist with the productions (Bodor 1999: 73).

Thus arises the question of how this minority movement in Yugoslavia managed to persist under a communist regime, especially since it was not the case in Hungary. A closer examination of Hungarian-Yugoslav relations during this period provides valuable insights.

Tensions between Hungary and Yugoslavia escalated following the annexation of Vojvodina into Serbia, a constituent part of Yugoslavia. The 1920 Treaty of Trianon delineated new borders, resulting in thousands of Hungarian citizens residing within Serbian (later Yugoslav) territory. Consequently, the Hungarian government expressed concern for the welfare of the Hungarian minority. Beginning in 1938, negotiations between Hungary and Yugoslavia led to the signing of the Treaty of Eternal Friendship, ratified on February 27, 1941 (Olasz 2014: 68; Erdős 2018: 31–32).

Nevertheless, Hungary's involvement in the German invasion of Yugoslavia on April 11, 1941, undertaken to reclaim Vojvodina – resulted in the abrogation of the treaty (Romsics 2020: 189). Following its defeat in the Second World War, Hungary was once again compelled to pay reparations. Under the terms of 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, Hungary was required to revert to its pre-1938 borders, thereby relinquishing the territories reannexed under the two Vienna Awards, including Vojvodina (Farkas 2004: 9).

From then on, the Hungarian government's foreign policy strategy was guided by the principle of gradualism, as it progressively sought to reestablish diplomatic relations, particularly with the democratic countries of the Carpathian Basin. Among these, Yugoslavia was the first to normalize the relations with Hungary, despite the complex historical circumstances and the sensitive issue of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina (N. Szabó 1999: 57).

Vojvodina is a unique region, as it always aspired to a degree of autonomy – a goal that predates the disintegration of historical Hungary. Movements for self-determination were first launched by Serbs living in Hungary during the 1848 revolution. Over time, this aspiration for autonomy strengthened and gradually shifted its

Figure 6. The 50th *Gyöngyösbokréta* Festival in Gombos, Vojvodina, 2013.
Institute for Hungarian Culture in Vojvodina.

focus from the Serbian population to the "economic, cultural, civilizational, and ethnic characteristics of the territory and its inhabitants" (Korhecz 2010: 53), which came to be regarded as essential elements of Serbia within the Yugoslav framework. Vojvodina gained autonomous status under Tito's regime – after Yugoslavia was established as a socialist federal republic in 1945, led by Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1944–1980) – beginning in 1946 (Grove 2018: 6; Bjelica 2020: 151; Tóth 2018: 10–11).

Although there were atrocities committed against the Hungarian minority in the early years (Mák 2014: 174–178), Tito's communist leadership declared that "Yugoslavia distinguishes between the Hungarian people and the former Hungarian reactionary leaders" (Unknown 1947a), implying that Hungarians were accepted as members of Yugoslav society.

Because Yugoslavia was characterized by ethnic diversity and a multitude of national communities, the country's leadership provided space for minorities, including the Hungarians in Vojvodina, under the slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity" (Grove 2018: 6; Ördögh 2017: 36). In accordance with this principle, minority policy granted constitutional rights such as the use of one's native language and the establishment of independent institutions; however, in practice, these measures also

served assimilationist aims (Gruber 2018: 143). To emphasize interethnic solidarity, the closing celebration of *Gyöngyösbokréta* often featured performances by groups representing other nationalities in Yugoslavia, and occasionally even by ensembles from abroad (V. K. M. 1972).

In 2021 and 2023, I attended the *Gyöngyösbokréta* festival, and during my second visit I conducted a questionnaire to explore how much participants knew about the festival's origins and what the event meant to them. I collected 50 responses from participants representing different age groups, genders, and roles. The evaluation of the questionnaires revealed that none of the respondents knew exactly when *Gyöngyösbokréta* had first been held, although some dated its beginnings to the 1960s–1970s, close to the time of its revival in Vojvodina. It came as a surprise to nearly all respondents – except for two – that the festival's origins dated back to the 1930s.

When asked, "What does participating in the festival mean to you?", respondents confirmed what had often been expressed in the press: that it is the most popular cultural event strengthening Hungarian identity (Questionnaire 2023). In conclusion, despite challenges, since its beginnings in the 1930s and its revival in the 1970s, the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina has preserved the *Gyöngyösbokréta* movement more faithfully than in Hungary, and today hosts its largest annual celebrations.

Conclusion

Gyöngyösbokréta (1931–1948) was the first movement in Hungary dedicated to the preservation of folk songs and traditions. Even though the communist regime did everything possible to suppress it – introducing a new model for preserving and presenting folk culture through state-organized folk ensembles – there were always ways to sustain the memory and practices of the movement. A short sentence in a 1968 newspaper article encapsulates the entire debate about the opposition between *Gyöngyösbokréta* and folk ensembles: "From preservation of tradition to performing art" (Szántó 1968).

As this quote suggests, *bokréta* groups – like local traditional ensembles that carried forward the principles of *Gyöngyösbokréta* and continue to thrive – focused on preserving and performing their community's dances and customs in their authentic form. In contrast, folk ensembles depend on choreographers who adapt these traditions and local dances for stage performance. Yet without the first phase – the act of preservation – the second cannot exist. *Gyöngyösbokréta* and local traditional ensembles could survive without staged adaptations, but the reverse is not possible.

The movement experienced both survival and revival not only in Hungary but also among Hungarian minorities overseas and in Vojvodina, Serbia. Although Yugoslavia was likewise governed by a staunch communist regime, the "Brotherhood and Unity" made it possible to revive *Gyöngyösbokréta* in the form of an annual folk-dance festival. In conclusion, the history of *Gyöngyösbokréta* demonstrates the resilience of cultural heritage and the capacity of communities to sustain – and, where necessary, to revive – their traditions even under adverse political conditions.

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Lina Petrošienė

PhD, ethnologist;

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Klaipėda University

PhD, etnoloģe;

Sociālo zinātņu un humanitārā fakultāte, Klaipēdas Universitāte

E-mail / e-pasts: lina.petrosiene@ku.lt

ORCID: 0000-0003-0490-1327

**Musical Folklore of Lithuania Minor
During the Soviet Era (1946–1989):
The Voices Lost and the Forms of Revitalization**

**Mazās Lietuvas mūzikas folklora
padomju periodā (1946–1989):
zaudētās balsis un revitalizācijas formas**

Keywords:

folklore ensemble,

folk songs,

musical instruments and music-making,

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Sovietization

Atslēgvārdi:

folkloras ansamblis,

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etniskās kultūras kustība,

sovjetizācija

Summary   The article examines the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor and the forms and methods of its revitalization during the Soviet era (1946–1989). It aims to reveal the state of *Lietuvininkai* musical folklore after the Second World War, focusing on the specifics and outcomes of their collection, reconstruction, and revival within the broader context of the Sovietization of culture. The division of the territory, the emptying of the region, and its rapid resettlement by newcomers from across the USSR drastically altered the area's demographic composition. As a result, musical folklore entered the final phase of its organic existence; the last authentic examples were documented through folkloristic fieldwork during this period. However, two closely related developments in the 1960s and 1970s – the ethnocultural movement and the establishment of the Klaipėda Faculties of the State Conservatory – created the preconditions for a cultural revival in the region. The pioneers and key figures in this revival were the folklore ensemble *Vorusnė* of the Klaipėda faculties and the instrument maker Antanas Butkus, who laid the foundations for revitalizing the instrumental music of Lithuania Minor. The forms and methods employed in the revival of musical folklore indicate that, during the Soviet period, the musical traditions of Lithuania Minor were effectively reclassified as intangible cultural heritage.

Kopsavilkums   Rakstā tiek pētīta Mazās Lietuvas mūzikas folklora un tās revitalizācijas formas un metodes padomju periodā (1946–1989). Raksta mērķis ir atklāt Prūsijas lietuviešu jeb lietuvininku mūzikas folkloras stāvokli pēc Otrā pasaules kara, pievēršot uzmanību tās vākšanas, rekonstruēšanas un atdzimšanas specifikai un rezultātiem plašākā kultūras sovjetizācijas kontekstā. Teritorijas sadalīšana, reģiona depopulācija un tā straujā apdzīvošana ar jaunpienācējiem no visas PSRS krasi mainīja apgabala demogrāfisko sastāvu. Rezultātā mūzikas folklora nonāca savas organiskās pastāvēšanas pēdējā fāzē; pēdējie autentiskie piemēri tika dokumentēti, šajā periodā veicot lauka pētījumus. Tomēr divi cieši saistīti notikumi 20. gs. 60. un 70. gados – etniskās kultūras kustība un Valsts Konservatorijas Klaipēdas fakultāšu izveide – radīja priekšnosacījumus kultūras atdzimšanai reģionā. Šīs atdzimšanas pionieri un galvenās figūras bija Klaipēdas fakultāšu folkloras ansamblis *Vorusnė* un instrumentu meistars Antans Butkus, kurš lika pamatus Mazās Lietuvas instrumentālās mūzikas atdzimšanai. Mūzikas folkloras atdzimšanas formas un metodes liecina, ka padomju periodā Mazās Lietuvas mūzikas tradīcijas tika efektīvi pārklasificētas kā nemateriālais kultūras mantojums.

Introduction   The folk singing tradition of Lithuania Minor (Prussian Lithuania, see Figure 1)[1], which the local *Lietuvininkai*[2] population had maintained for centuries, disappeared in the second half of the 20th century (Petrošienė 2003: 126–150; 2007: 238). Traditional instrumental music and dance had fallen into oblivion even earlier (Butkus, Motuzas 1994; Mačiulskis 2010). However, in the 1970s, the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor began to be reconstructed and revived, largely through the efforts of institutionalized folklore groups in the Klaipėda Region. These groups were composed of individuals from other parts of Lithuania who had settled in the region after the Second World War, as well as young people and educators who had come to study and work at the newly established institutions of higher education in Klaipėda. It was essentially a process of recon-struction and revitalization of ethnic music – a practice that originated in Europe during the Enlightenment and continues today in many parts of the world (Nettl [2024]; Boyes 1993; Baumann 1996; Cantwell 1996; Cohen 2002; Ramnarine 2003; Olson 2004; Bithell, Hill 2014: 3–42; Stavělová, Buckland 2018, among others).

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1   Lithuania Minor is a historical and ethnographic region that emerged in the first half of the 16th century. It was located between the *Prieglius* (German: *Pregel*) River and the lower reaches of the *Nemunas* (German: *Memel*) River and was inhabited by Western Baltic ethnic groups. In the early 16th century, the names *Klein Litau* and *Klein Litauen* appeared in Prussian chronicles (e.g. Simon Grunau, Lucas David). Later, the term *Preussisch Litauen* (Prussian Lithuania) became widespread in German historiography and is still in use today. In Prussian government documents from the 16th–19th centuries, as well as on Prussian maps from the 17th century onwards, the region was also referred to as the Province of Lithuania or the Lithuanian Domain (German: *Litauischer Kreis*). The area was part of the Prussian/German state from the time of the Teutonic conquest in the 13th century until the early 20th century.

Following the Great Northern War, the Great Plague and the livestock plague in the early 18th century, Prussian authorities resettled large numbers of Austrians (Salzburgers) and Germans in the depopulated homesteads. As a result, the region gradually became multicultural, though it remained dominated by the official Germanic order and culture. After the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles assigned the northern part of Lithuania Minor – the Klaipėda Region – to the Republic of Lithuania. After the Second World War, the Klaipėda Region was incorporated into the Lithuanian SSR, while the remaining territory was divided between the Russian Federation and Poland (VLE 1 [n.d.]; VLE 2 [n.d.]).

2   *Lietuvininkai* are Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor – also referred to as Lithuanians of Prussia (German: *Kleinlitauer, Preussische Litauer*), an ethnic and ethnocultural subgroup of western Lithuanians. The autochthonous population of the region referred to themselves as *Lietuvininkai of Lithuania Minor*, a designation that has appeared in Lithuanian writings as well as in official Prussian and German state documents since the 16th century (MLE [n.d.]).

Figure 1. The ethnographic regions of Lithuania with the northern part of Lithuania Minor, or Klaipėda Region, colored in red. It has belonged to the Republic of Lithuania since 1923.

The object of this research is the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor and the forms and methods of its revitalization during the Soviet period. The study aims to reveal the state of *Lietuvininkai* musical folklore – maintained by the region's autochthonous population – after the Second World War, examining the specifics and outcomes of its collection, as well as the reconstruction and revival movement within the broader context of the Sovietization of culture. Drawing on historical research, the article explores the historical and socio-political conditions that had a decisive impact on the fate of Lithuania Minor and its cultural heritage.

Due to its complex nature, the research object is approached in two distinct yet interrelated parts. First, it analyzes the reconstruction and revitalization of the region's singing traditions during the period 1971–1989 – an initiative that laid the foundation for a broader cultural revival. Second, it examines the subsequent restoration and use of traditional musical instruments between 1978 and 1989, a process that was, to a significant extent, inspired by the earlier resurgence of vocal folklore.

To address these questions, theoretical approaches from music revival and cultural heritage studies are applied (Livingston 1999; Ronström 1998, 2005, 2010;

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 1998, 2004, 2004a, 2006; Kockel 2006; Kockel, Craith 2007). These frameworks help to reveal how folk traditions and practices are transformed and integrated into cultural heritage discourse while preserving their vitality and meaning. The research employs qualitative content analysis, as well as interpretive and historical-comparative methods. The empirical basis of the study includes: 1) an analysis of the *Vorusnė*[3] folklore ensemble's[4] yearbook (1976–1980), which contains event descriptions, photographs, programs, press publications, and other documentation of the ensemble's activities from 1975 to 1997; 2) an analysis of publications, video, and audio recordings of folklore ensembles; 3) a review of online content related to folklore ensembles in the Klaipėda Region and the *Lietuvininkai* community *Mažoji Lietuva* [Lithuania Minor]; 4) semi-structured interviews with respondents.[5]

Ethnologists, folklorists, sociologists, and occasionally historians and philosophers from Lithuania and abroad have explored the development and revitalization of ethnic music traditions through the lens of their respective disciplines. The vast majority of publications addressing aspects of the folklore revival movement in Lithuania are descriptive, discussion-based, or applied in nature. These works often aim to regulate the character of folklore performance, and to utilize folklore for

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3   From its founding in 1971 until 1980, the ensemble was known as the Folklore Ensemble of the Klaipėda Faculties of the LSSR State Conservatory. The name *Vorusnė* – derived from a river name in Lithuania Minor – first appeared in the ensemble's yearbook in 1983. According to the procedure in force at the time, such a name could be officially granted only after the ensemble had demonstrated significant merit. After a decade of activity, around 1981–1982, the then head of the faculties, Vytautas Jakelaitis, referred to the ensemble as *Vorusnė*. The name was officially assigned to the ensemble shortly thereafter, in recognition of its achievements (VM 1976-1980; phone interview with ensemble members R. G., March 29, 2921, and D. K., March 30, 2021).

4   The term 'folklore ensemble' refers to a group of people dedicated to preserving and performing traditional folk culture, with a focus on traditional music, songs, dances, instrumental music, and other elements of folklore. These ensembles play a crucial role in the transmission of cultural heritage, helping to maintain nation's traditions, uniqueness, and authenticity. Folklore ensembles differ from stylized song and dance ensembles, which interpret and adapt folk material in ways that often prioritize artistic expression over ethnographic authenticity. This second type of ensemble does not necessarily strive for authenticity but preserves elements of folk culture, adapting them to suit contemporary audiences or their own creative vision.

5   The project *Susitikimai*+ [Meetings+], partly funded by the Lithuanian Council for Culture and Klaipėda City Municipality, was carried out in 2021–2022. During this period, the author of the article conducted in-depth interviews with individuals who participated in the movement to revitalize the culture of Lithuania Minor during the Soviet era and beyond. Based on the collected material, eight podcasts were produced, and audio recordings of *Vorusnė* from 1979 and 1993 were restored. The material has been made publicly available on the *Folklore. Klaipėda Region* YouTube channel (FKK 2022).

purposes such as national education and identity formation. Applying the theoretical concept of *folklorism*, which has been widely used in European scholarship, Stasys Skrodenis analyzed the folklore revival movement in Lithuania – particularly the use of folklore in staged performances (Skrodenis 2005). Aušra Zabielienė, meanwhile, examines the activities of Lithuanian folklore ensembles operating in Lithuania and Poland through the prism of ethnic identity (Zabielienė 2008: 67–77, 2010: 159–174, 2011: 168–189). One of the most recent scholarly works examining the ethnic music revival movement in Lithuania – from the 1960s to the early 21st century – and encompassing so-called authentic, stylized, and modern forms of folklore is the monograph by Romualdas Apanavičius and a team of authors (Apanavičius et al. 2015). This study, along with the more recent works of historians Vasilijus Safronovas (Safronovas 2008, 2009, 2018) and Odeta Rudling (Rudling 2023), is particularly relevant to the present research. Existing ethnological research does not fully address the period of reconstruction and revival of the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor during the Soviet era – particularly as it relates to the establishment of the Klaipėda Faculties of the LSSR State Conservatory, the formation of the first institutionalized folklore ensemble *Vorusnė* (active in Klaipėda from 1971 to 2000), its influence on the development of other folklore groups in the Klaipėda Region, and its role within the broader cultural and educational processes of Klaipėda. These issues have been partially addressed by the author of this article (Petrošienė 2021, 2023).

The period under study is regarded as the initial and, thus far, only limitedly studied phase of the reconstruction and revitalization of the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor, carried out under challenging historical conditions. Depopulation and the abandonment of territories after the Second World War, followed by their reconstruction and promotion through economic and cultural initiatives, is a phenomenon observed in many parts of the world. A comparable process – characterized by the depopulation of specific areas, and the deliberate revival of ethnic culture to support local vitality – occurred in other regions of the world following the Second World War, for example, on the west coast of Ireland (Kockel 2006: 87–100; Kaul 2009), Ishikawa Prefecture on the Sea of Japan (Hatanaka 2002: 51–70), and elsewhere. Intense economic growth, changes in value systems, and the destabilization of regional communities following the war, as well as the introduction of a law specifically aimed at supporting traditional arts and crafts were all factors that influenced both the decline of local traditions and their subsequent rediscovery. A new mechanism for the transmission and reception of tradition was established, enabling tradition to survive and adapt within a rapidly changing society (Hatanaka 2002: 68). Similar measures for the economic activation of regions in Europe have sparked heated debates regarding the value of these traditions, their authenticity,

commercialization, and related issues (Kockel 2006: 92–96). In studying the ethno-cultural processes at work in Lithuania – particularly in the case of *Lietuvininkai* culture – one must consider the influence of Soviet ideology, which persisted into the second half of the 20th century (LKSIN 2005: 11, 37–39, 283–284, 355–359; Rudling 2023). The regulation of culture and the process of Sovietization all but erased continuity with traditions from the pre-Soviet period. There was an effort, however, to pass on "folk wisdom" embedded in those traditions, to exploit the power of established value systems (Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2012: 208) and traditional forms deemed useful, by imbuing them with "new socialist content" (UŽŠ 1959: 1) and constructing new Soviet traditions.

According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the revitalization of the musical folklore of Lithuania Minor in the 20th century and later can be considered as a transition of tradition into cultural heritage:

> I define heritage as a mode of cultural production that has recourse to the past and produces something new. Heritage as a mode of cultural production adds value to the outmoded by making it into an exhibition of itself. [..] At the same time, the performers, ritual specialists, and artisans whose "cultural assets" become heritage through this process experience a new relationship to those assets, a metacultural relationship to what was once just habitus. Habitus refers here to the taken for granted, while heritage refers to the self-conscious selection of valued objects and practices (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 1).

However, the concept of intangible cultural heritage has only recently been adopted in Lithuania to describe expressions of spiritual culture.[6] It is associated with the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which Lithuania ratified in 2004. In 2015, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania approved the national regulations for the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (NKPVS [n.d.]). Although the restored traditions of singing and instrumental music from Lithuania Minor have been cherished for over 50 years, they were only added to the national list of Intangible Cultural Heritage values in 2020 and 2022. This official status is intended to protect the practitioners of Lithuania Minor's cultural heritage from lingering uncertainties related to the 'legality', 'authenticity', and similar concerns surrounding their activities. It is important to note that the terms 'tradition(s)' and 'cultural heritage' are often used interchangeably, though they are not synonymous. The renowned Swedish ethnologist Owe Ronström, drawing on the case of the island of Gotland and the city of

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6   In Lithuania, the term 'spiritual culture' is commonly used to refer to folklore, customs, and traditions. In this context, 'spiritual culture' is what material culture is not, not necessarily religiosity only. A definition of spiritual culture by the prominent Lithuanian folklorist Bronislava Kerbelytė is available in the Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia (VLE 4 [n. d.]).

Visby as designated World Cultural Heritage sites (1995), illustrates the key differences between tradition and cultural heritage:

> Tradition produces a closed space, you cannot just move into it. Tradition works much like ethnoscapes or VIP-clubs: to enter you have to be a member, or to be invited by a member, and membership is genealogical, it comes with birth. Cultural heritage produces a much more open space that almost anybody can move into. Instead of membership by birth, the right kind of values – and wallets – are necessary, and acceptance of the master narrative of the domain, that of the importance of careful preservation (Ronström 2005: 9).

The musical folklore traditions of Lithuania Minor have become precious, acceptable, and worthy of support for the new settlers who uphold them. Adam Kaul, who studied traditional Irish music, said newcomers can never become "true" locals. Nevertheless, those who are able to merge with the local traditional music environment without tension and acquire the subtleties of the musical style are often accepted as people who understand the deepest cultural ties. Local traditions working together with traditions inspired by global processes (in this case, migration) are not a contradiction. On the contrary, the successful integration of musical traditions can also be viewed as a net increase in the local community's cultural capital (Kaul 2009: 259–268; Kockel 2006: 92).

The Klaipėda Region after the Second World War: Historical, Political, Social, and Demographic Changes

Lithuania Minor and the part of it that has belonged to Lithuania since 1923 – the Klaipėda Region – were geographical and cultural concepts that were used only in a limited way in public discourse during the Soviet era. The Klaipėda Region was officially recognized as Lithuania's fifth ethnocultural region, Lithuania Minor, only at the end of the 20th century. Until 1990, the Klaipėda Region was considered part of Žemaitija, historically known as Samogitia.

The settlements of Lithuania Minor were emptied following the dramatic consequences of the Second World War. According to estimates, the Klaipėda Region, which was incorporated into the Lithuania SSR, lost 80% of its population during the war, while the city of Klaipėda – its entire population. Residents were evacuated to the interior of Germany in 1944–1945. By the end of 1946, only a tiny fraction of the native population – around 3% – had returned to the region.

However, the population increased rapidly due to the USSR's Russification policy of encouraging both voluntary and forced migration from Lithuania and other parts of the USSR. For example, by 1947, the absolute majority of the population of

Klaipėda were settlers, of whom 60% were Russian-speaking and 40% Lithuanian (Kairiūkštytė 1995: 348; Truska 1989: 205; Safronovas 2018: 98, 2008: 60–61). In the districts of the Klaipėda Region, newcomers from the USSR formed small national minorities, many of whom settled in towns and cities. Even without the necessary qualifications, they often occupied leading positions in administrative, party and economic management bodies. Their role was significant in the Sovietization and Russification policies. Nevertheless, the largest group of settlers consisted of displaced people from various regions of Lithuania (Kairiūkštytė 1995: 349–352).

At the same time, between 1945 and 1952, the Lithuanian population was deported to the distant regions of Siberia and other areas of the USSR with harsh climates. Many of the autochthonous residents of the Klaipėda Region – both Lithuanians and Germans – were among those deported. Some returned in the second half of the 1960s. However, following the 1957 agreements between the USSR and the Federal Republic of Germany, former German citizens were permitted to repatriate to Germany. Some of the region's original inhabitants took advantage of this opportunity, resulting in the further loss of indigenous population from the Klaipėda Region (Kairiūkštytė 1995: 370–371).

There are no precise data on how many long-time residents of the Klaipėda Region remained in their homeland after 1958–1960. However, it was clear that they constituted an absolute minority of the region's population. The newly arrived Lithuanians perceived the distinctiveness of this land – its people's character, lifestyle, language and dialects, folklore, architecture, and religious differences. However, openly expressing interest in the region's past was risky due to the Soviet ideology, and the crimes of fascism also cast a shadow over the local population.[7]

In the post-war period, the Soviet authorities in the Klaipėda Region, as in the rest of Lithuania, targeted anti-Soviet elements – a category that automatically included people of German nationality as well as local Lithuanians. The persecution of the Klaipėda Region inhabitants served as a means to identify and eliminate so-called enemies of the people. As a result, relations between the region's long-time residents, especially repatriates, and the newly arrived settlers were often tense and, at times, openly hostile (Kairiūkštytė 1995: 365–369).

In the 20th century, the political affiliation of the Klaipėda Region changed as many as five times (Safronovas 2018: 14). These sudden and radical political and

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7   In the first half of the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, the Soviet Union entered a period of pronounced anti-German antagonism. In the Klaipėda Region, Soviet propaganda promoted a Lithuanian-oriented identity. The region's German past was systematically erased, and the German role in its history was portrayed negatively: "The Germans are the eternal enemies of the Lithuanian nation" (Safronovas 2008: 59–84). Regardless of their actual nationality, the indigenous inhabitants of the region were largely treated and perceived as Germans.

administrative shifts influenced local identity dynamics, which during the Soviet period fluctuated between national/ethnic affiliations and a Soviet identity. The post-war period was shaped not only by the legacy of the war and a changed demographic landscape but also by the influence of Soviet ideology, which was often volatile and contradictory.

For example, before and after the war, the multiethnic Klaipėda – where Lithuanians were not the dominant group – began to be portrayed as a Lithuanian "hometown". However, by the middle of 1946, the open expression of Lithuanian identity began to be suppressed. As military resistance to the Soviet regime intensified in Lithuania, the persecution of individuals accused by security structures of being "Lithuanian-German nationalists" also began (Safronovas 2008: 69).

However, the post-war period saw significant consolidation of Lithuanian identity on a broader scale in the Klaipėda Region. Following Stalin's death and during the subsequent political thaw, the Soviet policy of promoting national identities across the USSR led to the withdrawal of Russian-speaking administrative workers and party members from Lithuania. At the same time, the number of Lithuanians in both party and administrative structures increased significantly. The Lithuanianization of the party apparatus, combined with the conformism of the intellectual elite – writers, film directors, historians, philologists, and artists from various disciplines – enabled these figures to build their careers by integrating into party structures while simultaneously maintaining their loyalty to the Lithuanian nation (Rudling 2023: 114–115).

For several decades after the war, Klaipėda lacked significant Lithuanian intellectual potential. It remained a working-class port city with no institutions of higher education until 1970. The establishment of branches of higher education institutions in the 1970s – such as the Klaipėda Faculties of the State Conservatory, the Faculty of Preschool Education of the Šiauliai Pedagogical Institute, and the Department of Visual Agitation, Advertising, and Exhibition Design of the State Art Institute – played a decisive role in strengthening Lithuanian identity in Klaipėda and the surrounding region. Experienced and emerging specialists in education, culture, and the arts, along with students from various parts of Lithuania, revitalized the city and created conditions for the dissemination and consolidation of Lithuanian identity. Efforts to uncover and emphasize Klaipėda's Lithuanian past gradually gained momentum, eventually challenging and overshadowing the Soviet identity orientation promoted by the regime.

Meanwhile, the region's German past continued to be portrayed negatively in official discourse from the post-war period through to the 1990s (Safronovas 2008: 65, 84, 2009: 98). This official stance likely closed the door to folklorists seeking

access to many local residents who still identified with the German state[8] and maintained close family ties in Germany – particularly with those who had chosen to leave their homeland during the repatriation of the 1960s. The Lithuanians who remained in the rural areas of the Klaipėda Region were the only group toward which the post-war Lithuanian identity of Klaipėda could be oriented (Safronovas 2008: 80).

The intensity of Soviet urbanization of Lithuania, which dismantled the traditional rural Lithuanian world, along with growing disillusionment with Soviet modernity, contributed to the emergence of an oppositional, anti-modernist ethnonationalist movement in the late 1950s. This movement placed particular emphasis on Lithuanian history, language, and culture. The collection and popularization of folklore became central to the ethnocultural movement or the local history movement (Rudling 2023: 185). In Klaipėda, the faculties of the State Conservatory became a significant center of this movement. These faculties trained specialists in Soviet mass culture – musicians, directors of Lithuanian folk theatre and mass cultural events, and choreographers. However, the study program also integrated field research, often conducted in the rural areas of the Klaipėda Region (Petrošienė 2006: 66–70). During these expeditions, lecturers and students became acquainted with the people of the Klaipėda Region and its distinctive cultural landscape.

Due to these circumstances, the ethnocultural movement in Klaipėda developed with a slightly different dynamic than in Vilnius or Kaunas. Its ideas were introduced by graduates of Vilnius University, the Vilnius and Šiauliai Pedagogical Institutes, the State Conservatory, and the Vilnius Art Institute, who later became lecturers at Klaipėda institutions of higher education and employees of various cultural and educational institutions.

In the early 1960s, the Communist Party, perceiving the ethnocultural movement – particularly the dissident activities of local history researchers and proletarian tourists – as increasingly difficult to control, began to impose restrictions. It emerged that some participants were also engaged in anti-Soviet activities, which led to the closure of local history and hiking clubs in Vilnius and Kaunas. Activists within the movement were prosecuted, and high-ranking state officials who were secretly or partially involved in the ethnocultural movement lost their positions.

One such figure was Vytautas Jakelaitis – a party cultural worker, director of the

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8   Historian Nijolė Strakauskaitė emphasizes the attachment and loyalty of *Lietuvininkai* to the state: "Lutheran church and governmental policy, which was embodied by Prussian monarchy, not only determined survival of Prussian Lithuanian ethnic group, dispersion of Lithuanian literature in Prussia, but also influenced formation of a very distinct mentality of this group – respect for church and Prussian monarchy" (Strakauskaitė 2010: 136).

Society for the Protection of Monuments and Local Lore of the LSSR, and Deputy Minister of Culture. In 1973, he relocated to Klaipėda, where he began his academic career (Rudling 2023: 197–204). From 1973 to 1975, Vytautas Jakelaitis served as the Dean of the Klaipėda Faculty of the Šiauliai Pedagogical Institute. From 1975 to 1987, he was Vice-Rector of the Klaipėda Faculties of the Lithuanian Conservatory of Music (VLE 3 [n.d.]). To this day, he is remembered as a distinguished cultural figure who made significant contributions to both Lithuanian culture and the city of Klaipėda. Under his leadership, the Klaipėda faculties established and successfully ran the first folklore ensemble of students and teachers in the region, *Vorusnė*. Additionally, the Experimental Laboratory for the Repair and Improvement of Folk Instruments conducted important work that revived and reconstructed traditional musical instruments of Lithuania Minor.

The Collection of Musical Folklore in Lithuania Minor After the Second World War

As mentioned earlier, Soviet cultural policy was directed toward the cultivation and systemic collection of national languages and folklore, which were treated as tools of ideological influence (Rudling 2023: 47–55, 83–97). After the Second World War, the collection of musical folklore in the Klaipėda Region was initiated – or more accurately, the work that had been carried out in the previous centuries was continued – by official academic institutions such as the Institute of the Lithuanian Language and Literature, the State Conservatory of Music (as the institutions were then named), and the Faculty of Music in Klaipėda, established in 1975. This wave of local history research and proletarian tourism also drew in folklore enthusiasts from the Klaipėda Region – teachers, journalists, and others. The work was challenging, as the local population, now a minority, bore the traumas of war and remained reticent and distrustful of the new regime and government throughout much of the Soviet period.[9] As public leisure activities became increasingly organized,[10] new forms of Sovietized cultural

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9   For many of the region's long-time inhabitants, the war – particularly its final years – left deeply traumatic memories: fleeing their homes into the unknown, the loss of property and relatives, violence at the hands of the Red Army, post-war famine, and more. After 1945, however, there were no opportunities for these memories to be publicly acknowledged or discussed for more than four decades, either in the Kaliningrad Region or the Klaipėda Region (Safronovas 2009: 91).

10   Every Soviet town was required to have its own House of Culture, and every settlement its own club. Reading rooms were established in all settlements, serving simultaneously as clubs, libraries, and "red corners" dedicated to Soviet propaganda literature and ideological agitation (Safronovas 2018: 122-123).

expression gradually took root,[11] while the organic transmission of local traditions diminished and eventually faded.

The first post-war recordings of *Lietuvininkai* songs date back to 20 July 1950 – the day before the Song and Dance Festival in Vilnius. Vilius Vestfolis, a member of the Ernst Thälmann fishermen's artel founded in Rusnė (Šilutė district) in 1948 during collectivization, was among those from whom folklore researchers wrote down a few songs. He recalled that the community had a mixed age choir that performed "old Lithuanian songs" accompanied by the button accordion. In 1950, part of the choir traveled to the republican Song Festival in Vilnius, where they were scheduled to perform four songs. However, they were ultimately not allowed to perform because "their songs are different" (LTR 1950: 2780). This could have meant that the songs reflected the unique cultural heritage of the Klaipėda Region, were ideologically unacceptable, or that the choir's performance did not meet the expected artistic standards.

This situation may also have been a result of the prevailing practice of stylized song and dance ensembles, which had already taken root in the state-supported mass culture of the time. These ensembles used modernized folk instruments and performed original compositions created by professional composers. The State Song and Dance Ensemble, founded in 1940 and renamed *Lietuva* in 1965, along with the many ensembles it inspired across Lithuania, represented the official face of folk music during this period. Folklore ensembles that did not include works glorifying Soviet life in their repertoire were typically excluded from the Song Festival programs (Apanavičius et al. 2015: 22–23, 109–110). Only institutional folklore ensembles affiliated with higher education institutions, factories, or other organizations were permitted to perform a folk song or circle dance at mass festivals.

Returning to field research in the Klaipėda Region, available data show that folklorists and dialectologists visited the area from time to time. However, fieldwork reports often note that the majority of the population consisted of people who had relocated from other parts of Lithuania. The old inhabitants of the region were described as reserved and taciturn – many of them Evangelical Lutherans who cherished their religious hymns but knew few secular songs. As a result, very few secular songs were recorded (KTR 1955: 6).

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11   The new settlers took over the organization of artistic groups and cultural events according to Soviet standards. The history of the cultural center illustrates how cultural life in Šilutė was structured in the post-war period. Initially, a theatre, choirs, dance, and brass bands were established, forming the foundation for both local and republican Song Festivals. From 1963 onward, the number of groups representing folk traditions began to grow.

There was another reason why the people of the Klaipėda Region were reluctant to admit knowledge of secular songs. For example, on June 20, 1959, the Priekule district newspaper *Lenino keliu* (Lenin's Way) published the lyrics of two *Lietuvininkai* folk songs. However, the contributor, Kristupas Reizgys – a well-regarded and educated beekeeper from a collective farm – refused to have his name published. As an Evangelical, he felt uncomfortable appearing before his parishioners with the so-called "dirty" songs (LTR 1959: 3289). In the Klaipėda Region, a strict pietistic religious tradition remained strong. While this helped preserve the Lithuanian language, it also contributed to the decline of the region's musical folklore.

However, in various parts of the Klaipėda Region, valuable authentic songs continued to be preserved by *Lietuvininkai* singers such as Marija Klingerienė, Augustas Deivelaitis, Ana Mažeiva, Erčius Jurgenaitis, Adomas Goberis, as well as by Curonians like Andreiš Balčius, Kersta Balčius, and others – individuals who are well known to folklorists and cultural revivalists today. No evidence has been found to suggest that Lithuanian folklorists conducted field research in the present-day Kaliningrad Region during the Soviet era.

As mentioned earlier, at the end of the Second World War, the Lithuanian population evacuated to the West with the advance of the Soviet army. Dr Jonas Balys, head of the Folklore Archive founded in Kaunas in 1935 and a renowned Lithuanian folklorist, who had paid particular attention to collecting and publishing the folklore of Lithuania Minor in the pre-war years, also withdrew to Germany during the war and later emigrated to the United States. While working at the Library of Congress in Washington, he continued collecting folklore and conducting field research. In 1949, in the vicinity of Chicago, he recorded *Lietuvininkai* songs performed by Gertrūda and Martynas Lacyčiai, who had recently arrived in the United States, using magnetic tape (Petrošienė et al. 2017: 30–31). He published this collected material in 1958 in Boston in the book *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje* (Lithuanian Songs in America) (LDA 1958). The family of Martynas Jankus, the renowned public and cultural figure of Lithuania Minor, also withdrew to Germany during the war. Jankus died there in 1946, and his children later emigrated to Canada. His daughter, Elzė Jankutė, continued her Lithuanian cultural activities there. In 1971, three of her songs were included in the album *A Garland of Rue* (GR 1971).

Summarizing the state of Lithuania Minor's singing folklore during the period under study, it can be stated that this marked the final stage of the living *Lietuvininkai* singing tradition. Between 1948 and 1989, 40 singers from the Klaipėda Region performed 304 Lithuanian songs with melodies for folklore collectors.[12] The richest

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12   For comparison – from 1922 to 1935, 69 songs with melodies were recorded by five singers, and from 1990 to 1998, 13 songs with melodies were recorded by seven singers.

repertoires were preserved in the memories of singers born at the end of the 19th century. However, this repertoire no longer functioned in the natural environment of the *Lietuvininkai* – family and community celebrations.

While the recordings of song melodies in Lithuania Minor date back to the early 19th century, instrumental music did not attract the interest of the clergy and linguists who acted as folklorists at the time. Moreover, there were no music professionals specifically focused on the instrumental traditions of Prussian Lithuanian music-making. Various written and ethnographic sources confirm that, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, cultural promoters of Lithuania Minor formed ensembles of string instruments, wind instruments, and *kanklės* performing at events such as the Midsummer Festival on Rambynas Hill and other occasions. In taverns, bands of various configurations played dance music, but no audio recordings of such performances have survived.

In 1960, during an expedition by researchers from the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature, approximately 20 pieces of music were recorded by photographer and mandolin maker Martynas Kavolis, performed on a mandolin he had crafted himself (Petrošienė et al. 2017: 31–32). This does not imply that there were no other local musicians. In 2000, folklorists recorded several additional pieces performed on the violin, mandolin, and mouth organ by local musicians from the Klaipėda Region, who also shared insights into their musical traditions (KKDM 2017).

Choreographers have also recorded dance and circle dance melodies during their field research in the Klaipėda Region. However, their primary focus was on choreographic specifics rather than instrumental music. Vidmantas Mačiulskis, a recent researcher of the ethnic choreography of Lithuania Minor, has collected and analyzed 91 examples of ethnochoreography from this region in various Lithuanian archives; 28 of these dances, circle dances, and dance songs include melodies (Mačiulskis 2010: 18, 44–45). Some of these melodies are now used by contemporary promoters of instrumental music from the Klaipėda Region.

The musical folklore of Lithuania Minor collected in the post-war period remained silent in practice for some time. The restoration of the region's sung folklore and instrumental music during the Soviet era, as analyzed in the following chapters, confirms what cultural heritage theorists would later write: "The repertoire is passed on through performance. This is different from recording and preserving the repertoire as documentation in the archive. The repertoire is about embodied knowledge and the social relations for its creation, enactment, transmission, and reproduction" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 181).

The Revitalization of Lithuania Minor's Singing Folklore, 1971–1989

Between 1960 and 1970, a new wave of interest in folk songs and dances emerged across many European countries. This renewed attention was driven by multiple factors: significant population and economic growth following the Second World War; rapid urbanization, centralization, and modernization, which created tensions between tradition and modernity; a growing divide between academic folklorists and practitioners who continued to adapt folklore to contemporary needs; and a shift in attitudes towards using authentic sources (Apanavičius et al. 2015: 86–125; Ronström 1998: 39–41). All of these factors were also relevant in the Soviet Union and Lithuania.

However, Odeta Rudling, in her analysis of the development of folklore during the Soviet period, argues that the ethnocultural movement in Lithuania was particularly connected to the proletarian tourism promoted by the Soviet regime, which developed an ethnonational current of the local studies movement (Rudling 2023: 185–228). Many collectors of Lithuania Minor's folklore were not involved in music revitalization efforts. As mentioned earlier, they were professional folklorists, dialectologists, ethnomusicologists, and enthusiasts of ethnic culture from various fields, who did not directly inherit the tradition from *Lietuvininkai* singers and musicians. This created a critical and lasting gap: *Lietuvininkai* themselves were almost entirely excluded from both the collection of their folklore and from the practices of its revitalization – a situation that, to a large extent, persists to this day.[13]

As mentioned earlier, the creation of folklore ensembles and the revival of a Lithuania Minor identity in the Klaipėda Region is closely linked to the establishment of the Music Faculty of the Šiauliai Pedagogical Institute in 1971, which became the Klaipėda Faculty of the Lithuanian State Conservatory in 1975. A pioneer in the folklore revival movement was the linguist Audronė Jakulienė (later Kaukienė), who taught Lithuanian philology and music, and later, Lithuanian philology and drama. In the autumn of 1971, Jakulienė formed a girls' folklore group, which later became the first institutionalised student folklore ensemble in Klaipėda and the entire region (see Figure 2) – eventually known as the folklore ensemble *Vorusnė*. In 1980, the *Alka* folklore ensemble was established, and by 1985, ten folklore ensembles were already active.[14] Later, the *Kamana* folklore ensemble of the Pagėgiai Municipality

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13   A study by Aušra Zabielienė states that from 1990 to 2008, no *Lietuvininkai* participated in folklore ensembles in the Klaipėda Region (Zabielienė 2008: 70).

14   The Kretinga Regional Folklore Ensemble of the Klaipėda Inter-Regional Palace of Culture of the Lithuanian Association of the Blind (1977), the folklore ensemble of the Third Clinic of the Klaipėda City Hospital (1981), the folklore ensemble of the Museum of the Sea and Aquarium (1982),

Figure 2. Folklore Ensemble of the Klaipėda Faculties of the LSSR State Conservatory, 1977. Photo by Elena Matulionienė.

Cultural Centre was founded in 1986, followed by the *Verdainė* folklore ensemble at the Šilutė Cultural and Entertainment Centre in 1988, and the children's folklore ensemble *Vorusnėlė* of the *Mažoji Lietuva* community in 1989.

The activity of the *Vorusnė* ensemble was intense and multifaceted. From the very beginning of the ensemble's work at the Klaipėda faculties, the director brought together and trained students with a deliberate focus on preserving Lithuanian ethnic culture. Both teachers and students sought contacts with the *Lietuvininkai*

the folklore ensemble of the teachers at the Klaipėda Music Faculty of the State Conservatory of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (1982), the children's folklore ensemble of the Klaipėda Medical Workers' club (1982), the ensemble of folk musicians from community household utility institutions (1982), the folklore studio of the Folk Music Department of the Klaipėda Faculties of the State Conservatory of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (1983) and the children's folklore ensemble of the Palace of Educational Workers (1984) were all active. Other folklore collectives from Klaipėda city municipal enterprises and agencies were mentioned but not described, including the folklore ensembles of the specialized auto-transportation enterprise, the combine of community domestic utility enterprises, the restoration workshops, High School No. 22, and the Commerce Club (Sliužinskas 1988: 16). Notably, that publication does not mention the establishment of the *Alka* folklore ensemble in 1980.

community, collected and researched local history and dialect data from archives and fieldwork, organised thematic folklore performances based on academic, written, and ethnographic sources, held concerts in Lithuania and abroad, and collaborated with the folklore ensembles in schools and higher education institutions (FKK 2022). Nonetheless, as the ensemble director recalled: "Members of the *Vorusnė* ensemble received the greatest attention in the land of the *Lietuvininkai*; when we travelled there, we became something like the preservers, revivalists and propagators of its culture" (Kaukienė 2000: 136).

We can only infer how the *Lietuvininkai* spoke and sang from descriptions, hints, and even hearsay recorded in written sources, as well as from the very few audio recordings of singers and storytellers from this region. At the very beginning of the ensemble's existence, the primary source of songs from Lithuania Minor was the fourth edition of pieces collected and published in 1825 by Liudvikas Rėza (Rhesa), entitled *Lietuvių liaudies dainos* (Lithuanian Folk Songs, 1958, 1964). The musical material of this publication became a benchmark in the 20th century, representing the ethnic musical style of Lithuania Minor.

Ensemble director Audronė Jakulienė, dialectologist Jonas Bukantis, and their students conducted field research in villages in the Klaipėda Region, systematically documenting the information they collected. By that time, there were already very few remaining *Lietuvininkai* singers. The most remarkable among them was Ana Mažeiva, whom they visited in 1979 and 1980. She was one of the last individuals who still knew many of the old Lithuanian songs. Other *Lietuvininkai* at that time could recall only a few songs or remembered just the titles of traditional Lithuanian pieces.

The performance programs of the *Vorusnė* ensemble were based on songbooks, Lithuanian literary classics, and collected ethnographic material. The titles of these programs usually reflected their central theme – the land adjacent to the Curonian Lagoon and the culture of its local residents. These included *Jūrų-marių dainos* (Songs of the Sea and Lagoon, 1979), *Lietuvininkų vestuvės* (Lietuvininkai Wedding, 1979), *Mažvydas ir lietuvininkų dainos* (Martynas Mažvydas and the Songs of the Lietuvininkai, 1979), *Treji gaideliai giedojo* (The Three Cocks Crowed, 1981), *Lietuvininkai* (1985), *Žodis ir giesmė* (Word and Hymn), *Lietuvininkump ir žemaičiump* (Among the Lietuvinkai and the Žemaitijans).

The ensemble's director acknowledged the challenges of presenting *Lietuvininkai* folklore and ethnography – not only due to the specific demands of stage performance, but also because of the lack of a direct connection to the living tradition (Kaukienė 2000: 137).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the *Vorusnė* ensemble was invited almost weekly to

Figure 3. Folklore Ensemble of the Klaipėda Faculties of the LSSR State Conservatory
at the Open-Air Museum of Lithuania in Rumšiškės, 1980 (VM 1976–1980).

perform concerts and participate in various events commemorating *Lietuvininkai* and
Lithuanian culture. These events took place in libraries, city halls, dinner parties,
meetings, and gatherings organized by enterprises, agencies, institutions, and
school communities (see Figure 3). The nature of the events was diverse – ranging
from informal gatherings and the initiation of new ensemble members[15] to official
concerts in formal settings, as well as radio and television recordings.[16] These activ-
ities contributed to a broader understanding of Lithuania Minor among both
Lithuanian and Soviet audiences. The ensemble's special focus on *Lietuvininkai* cul-
ture culminated in its first performance outside Lithuania, held in Kristijonas
Donelaitis's home village of Tolminkiemis, in East Prussia.[17]

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15   Escorting into domestic life, wedding congratulations, and bachelorette parties often in-
cluded the reenactment of wedding customs from the regions of the bride and groom, accompa-
nied by the performance of corresponding song genres.

16   According to the Yearbook of *Vorusnė* folklore ensemble, five programs – *Kelionės po Lietuvą*,
Jūrų-marių dainos, *Lietuvininkų vestuvės*, *Treji gaideliai giedojo* and *Lietuvininkai* – were recorded. However,
these recordings have not been preserved in the Lithuanian National Radio and Television archive.

17   The village now known as *Чистые Пруды* (Chistye Prudi) in the Kaliningrad oblast of the
Russian Federation was historically known as *Gut Tollmingkehmen*, and after 1938, as *Tollmingen*
in German.

The *Vorusnė* ensemble maintained contact and collaborated with folklore ensembles from other schools and institutions of higher education. In 1978, the Folklore Ensemble of the Klaipėda Faculties performed alongside the ensembles of Vilnius University and Vilnius Pedagogical Institute at the seventh *Gaudeamus* Song and Dance Festival of Baltic States students, held in Vilnius (Gaudeamus VII 1978: 45–46).

Some of the most cherished and meaningful events were encounters with *Lietuvininkai* themselves. Kaukienė's personal connections with the *Lietuvininkai* community, along with her ensemble's accomplishments, enabled them to participate in a particularly special family celebration. On October 7, 1984, *Vorusnė* was entrusted with organizing the golden wedding anniversary of Grėtė and Martynas Bastijonas, members of *Lietuvininkai* fishing families from the village of Kukuliškiai near Klaipėda.

The ensemble members and the author of this article recall director Audronė Kaukienė's deep passion for the culture of Lithuania Minor, particularly its language and folk songs. She gave presentations at conferences on the songs of Lithuania Minor and the distinctive features of their performance. Often, she would invite ensemble members to the stage to illustrate her points, and she frequently sang herself. For many years, at conferences focused on the challenges of preserving and interpreting folk heritage, she was the only speaker addressing the interpretation of sung folklore from Lithuania Minor (MPKP 1987: 4).

Other folklore ensembles active during the Soviet period engaged in a wide range of activities. Their creative styles varied, depending largely on the makeup of the group, the conductor's level of understanding, and the ensemble's collective musical abilities. One common thread noted by all ensemble directors was that, in their early stages, the ensembles performed songs, music, and dances representing the folklore of all Lithuanian ethnographic regions (Čeliauskaitė 2004; KEKC 2004: DVD33/1–2).

This was primarily for two reasons: first, the ensembles included members from various regions of Lithuania, while *Lietuvininkai* were rarely among them; and second, folklore as a field was still relatively unfamiliar to many participants. They felt a strong desire to learn as much as possible, yet it was practically impossible to learn *Lietuvininkai* songs directly from tradition bearers.

The folklore ensemble of the Klaipėda Marine Museum and Aquarium, since its inception in 1982, has focused on the marine folklore of the Baltic Sea and Curonian Lagoon. Folklore from the coasts of the lagoon and the sea was of primary importance to them. Their first performance program was called *Ant žvejo kiemužio* (At the Port of the Fishers).[18] However, the ensemble included many members from the

18   *Kiemužis* or *kaimas* means "outport" in the local dialect, compared to the standard Lithuanian meanings of "village" or "small village".

neighboring Žemaitija ethnographic region, who also served as informants, resulting in a significant portion of the repertoire being drawn from Žemaitijan folklore. The ensemble featured a strong instrumental section composed of accomplished folk musicians (Sliužinskas 1988: 6–9).

The priorities of many other folklore ensembles differed. For instance, the folklore collective of the Lithuanian Association of the Blind, which operated in Kretinga beginning in 1977 but was officially affiliated with the Inter-Regional Palace of Culture of Klaipėda, performed exclusively folkloric songs and dances from their native Žemaitijan environment. Similarly, the folk musicians' ensemble of public utility institutions (established in 1982) featured a comparable repertoire, playing entirely by ear and from memory. Other ensembles primarily based their programs on songbooks and organized them based not according to regional traditions but rather around calendrical and family holidays, festivals, and their associated rituals and customs.

The folklore studio for folk music students at the Klaipėda faculties (established in 1983) focused on teaching and learning songs and dances from all regions through evening gatherings and ethno-instrumental field research conducted throughout Lithuania. The first children's folklore ensemble affiliated with the Klaipėda Medical Workers Club was established in Klaipėda in 1982. This ensemble also performed songs from all the ethnographical regions and learned to play authentic Žemaitijan *kanklės* and the multiple flute pipes (*skudučiai*) used in the ethnographic region of Aukštaitija (Eastern Lithuania including Vilnius and areas to the north).

The repertoire of *Lietuvininkai* children's songs remained modest: in 1984, the children's ensemble prepared a program of oral folklore titled *Pamario krašto pasakos* (Tales from the Land of the Curonian Lagoon) in 1984 (Sliužinskas 1988: 12–13). The folklore ensembles *Verdainė*, *Kamana* and the children's ensemble *Vorusnėlė*, based in the Klaipėda Region between 1986 and 1989, also alternated between folklore from all Lithuanian ethnographic regions and the repertoire of Lithuania Minor. Over time, initiatives to promote Lithuania Minor's culture helped establish these ensembles as representative of the region's ethnic music.

The folklore ensembles of the Klaipėda Region performed at Sea Days festivals, in the Fishermen's Farmstead at the Marine Museum, at the Rumšiškės Open-Air Museum of Lithuania, and, from 1975 onward, took part in reviews, competitions, and other events involving folklore ensembles. In retrospect, the activity model of these ensembles during the Soviet period resembled that of song and dance ensembles performing a stylized form of folk music – except for their direct access to folklore, their relationship with living traditions, their performance practices, and similar aspects. The folklore revitalization in the city and region of Klaipėda unfolded in

much the same way as in other areas and towns of Lithuania, with one major differ-ence: the autochthon – the indigenous inhabitants of the Lithuania Minor ethno-graphic region – were almost entirely absent from active participation.

The Reconstruction of Traditional
Folk Instruments of Lithuania Minor

After the Second World War, settlers from other regions of Lithuania who moved to the Klaipėda Region brought their own musical traditions with them. Loreta Augėnaitė's research shows that, in the second half of the 20th century, 80% of the musicians living in the Klaipėda Region came from other parts of Lithuania. Folk music was typically played on stan-dard classical instruments, while traditional Lithuanian instruments were almost entirely absent. The most popular instruments in the region were accordion-type instruments (such as the diatonic button accordion, bandoneon, and concertina), followed by string instruments (violin, balalaika, mandolin, guitar, double bass) and wind instruments (cornet, clarinet, trumpet, French horn, tuba, and mouth organ). The majority of the repertoire consisted of Lithuanian folk dance tunes, with a smaller proportion of music drawn from other national and popular entertainment music (Augėnaitė 2001: 77–85). *Lietuvininkai* musicians often joined mixed-ethnic instrumental ensembles formed as needed.

The reconstruction of musical instruments from Lithuania Minor began with the establishment of the Experimental Laboratory for the Repair and Improvement of Folk Instruments at the Klaipėda Faculties of the Lithuanian State Conservatory in 1978. The laboratory's founder, *birbynė* [reed-pipe] player Antanas Butkus – an outstanding researcher and master of historical musical instruments from Lithuania Minor – initiated the idea of reconstructing the *kanklės*-harp. This instrument, which eventually became known as the Lithuanian Minor *kanklės*-harp, is unique and distinct from other Lithuanian and even Baltic psalteries. Unlike the typical hori-zontal playing position of Baltic psalteries, it is played vertically (see Figure 4).

The Royal Society of Prussian Antiquities in Königsberg purchased the instru-ment in the first half of the 19th century from a man living in Šeidiškiai (present-day Lesnoje, Kaliningrad Oblast) near the Lithuanian border. In 1847, Königsberg music theorist Friedrich A. Gotthold described and sketched the instrument in his article *Ueber die Kanklys und die Volksmelodien der Littauer* (On the *Kanklės* and the Folk Melodies of the Lithuanians), published in the magazine *Neue Preussische Provinzial Blätter* (New Prussian Provincial Newspaper) (Gotthold 1847: 241–256; Petrošienė 2023: 101).

Gotthold's publication provided essential information that made the resto-ration of this unique instrument possible. However, instrument maker Butkus went

further, carefully studying musical instruments preserved in museums, written sources, the melodies of the Lithuania Minor folk songs and gospel hymns, as well as the structure and acoustic qualities of classical musical instruments. After analyzing all the information available at the time and identifying and justifying the optimal sound range of the *kanklės*-harp, he undertook a scientific reconstruction of the Lithuania Minor *kanklės*-harp (Butkus, Motuzas 1994).

The Lithuania Minor *kanklės*-harp, crafted by Antanas Butkus in 1984, was a completely new instrument at the time. The master showcased its sound at exhibitions in Lithuania and abroad, presented it at conferences, and participated in discussions, demonstrations, training sessions, and other events promoting instrumental music. He also performed with the instrument in the programs of the ensembles *Vorusnė*, *Alka*, and *Vorusnėlė*. Later, Butkus reconstructed other his-torical instruments of Lithuania Minor mentioned in written sources, including the *psalterium* (1989), the horn-trumpet, drum, violin, and whistle (1990), and the *kanklės*-harp of the Klaipėda Region (1995), shepherd's pipe (2003), and Jokūbas Stikliorius's *kanklės* (2007).

After 1990, the restored instruments were gradually included in the programs of the folklore ensembles in Klaipėda city and the surrounding region, as well as in the activities of the *Lietuvininkai* community *Mažoji Lietuva*, and the broader cultural life of the Klaipėda Region. Folklore ensembles used these instruments to perform melodies of songs and dance music drawn from an extremely limited repertoire – often based solely on the names of dances mentioned by informants or found in

written sources from Lithuania Minor. These dances were reconstructed using only sparse descriptions of ethnic *Lietuvininkai* choreography, publications of East Prussian dances, or were simply the result of the authors' imagination and creative interpretation.

Conclusions   The Second World War and its aftermath had a dramatic impact on the inhabitants of Lithuania Minor and their culture. The division of the territory, the depopulation of the region, and the rapid resettlement by newcomers from across the USSR completely altered its demographic structure. Very few indigenous inhabitants remained, and those who did were viewed by the Soviet authorities as "hostile elements". Cultural life was taken over by the Soviet regime, and controlled popular culture became an ideological tool for shaping the identity of the "new Soviet man".

During the Soviet era, musical folklore was collected in Lithuania and in exile communities in North America in an organized and professional manner. The last valuable examples of living *Lietuvininkai* singing and instrumental music traditions were recorded. However, these recordings were not included in the representative anthologies of Soviet-era folk songs and music. Publications issued in the United States and Canada were not readily accessible in Lithuania and became available only after 1990. As a result, this distinctive musical dialect lost its voice during the Soviet period, along with broader opportunities to learn about it through folklore collections.

The data collected indicate that, in the second half of the 20th century, the centuries-old traditions of Lithuania Minor were fading or had already disappeared. At least two closely related developments in the 1960s and 1970s – the ethnocultural movement and the establishment of the Klaipėda faculties of the State Conservatory – created the preconditions for the revival and promotion of Lithuania Minor's cultural heritage. The pioneers and leading figures in this revival were the folklore ensemble *Vorusnė*, affiliated with the Klaipėda Faculties of the State Conservatory, and instrument maker Antanas Butkus, who laid the foundations for the revitalization of instrumental music from Lithuania Minor. However, during the Soviet period, it was rather difficult to establish contact with the indigenous people of the Klaipėda Region. In general, they did not participate in the folklore revitalization movement and largely remained passive observers of these processes.

From the outset, the forms and content of recovered musical folklore became a new cultural heritage product – funded, maintained, and protected by the state – built on the knowledge, traditions, and artifacts of the past. It no longer possessed

the exclusivity or birth-based membership that Rönström identified as characteristic of traditional culture. Instead, it could be responsibly reproduced and creatively developed by anyone who found meaning and value in it.

Abbreviations

FKK 2022 – Folkloras. Klaipėdos kraštas. *YouTube.*
Available: https://www.youtube.com/@folkloras.klaipedoskrastas [Accessed 26.06.2024.].

Gaudeamus VII 1978 – *Mezhrespublikanskij studencheskij prazdnik pesni "Gaudeamus-78"*, Ministerstvo vysshego i srednego special'nogo obrazovanija Litovskoj SSR, Vil'njus.

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KTR 1955 – Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre Research Centre, Department of Ethnomusicology, Archive of Musical Folklore manuscript, Collection No. 6.

LDA 1958 – *Lietuvių dainos Amerikoje (1958).* Pasakojamosios dainos ir baladės. Sud. Jonas Balys. Boston: Lietuvių enciklopedijos leidykla.

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Available: https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/mazoji-lietuva/ [Accessed 08.07.2024.].

VLE 2 [n.d.] – Gruodytė, Stefanija, Matulevičius, Algirdas. Maras Lietuvoje. *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*. Available: https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/maras-lietuvoje/ [Accessed 08.07.2024.].

VLE 3 [n.d.] – Karaška, Arvydas. Vytautas Jakelaitis. *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija.* Available: https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/vytautas-jakelaitis/ [Accessed 27.06.2024.].

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Larysa Lukashenko

PhD in ethnomusicology;

Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy

PhD etnomuzikoloģijā;

Mikolas Lisenko Ļvivas Nacionālā mūzikas akadēmija

E-mail / e-pasts: larysa.lukashenko@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-5402-4177

**Preconditions, Establishment, and Development
of the Folk Music Revival in Ukraine
(Late 1970s – Early 1990s)**

**Tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas priekšnosacījumi,
iedibināšana un attīstība Ukrainā
(20. gs. 70. gadu beigas – 90. gadu sākums)**

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
folk music,	tautas mūzika,
musical folklorism,	mūzikas folklorisms,
folklorists,	folkloristi,
revival movement ensembles,	atmodas kustības ansambļi,
late Soviet era	vēlīnais padomju periods

Summary   The aim of the article is to explore the historical preconditions, socio-cultural context, and internal and external factors that contributed to the emergence and development of the folk music revival in Ukraine from the late 1970s to 1991 – a period that coincides with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent Ukraine. The introductory section outlines the methodological approaches and reviews the relevant state-of-the-art literature. It also provides the social context in which the Ukrainian folk music revival emerged and developed in the outlined period. The main section traces and describes the history of the founding and early activities of the first ensembles representing the Ukrainian revival movement. The historical, political, and social contexts of the phenomenon are also addressed. The final subsection summarizes the features, results, and achievements of the first period in the history of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement. The results of the study regarding the background of the emergence of the ensembles, their interaction, areas and methods of activity, and music repertoire are presented. The final subsection also offers a brief conclusion of the significance and impact of these early ensembles on the directions and characteristics of the Ukrainian folk music revival in the subsequent decades up to the present.

Kopsavilkums   Raksta mērķis ir analizēt vēsturiskos priekšnosacījumus, sociālo un kultūras kontekstu, kā arī faktorus, kas veicināja tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustības rašanos un attīstību Ukrainā no 20. gs. 70. gadu beigām līdz 1991. gadam – periodu, kas sakrīt ar Padomju Savienības sabrukumu un neatkarīgas Ukrainas nodibināšanu. Ievaddaļā ir izklāstītas metodoloģiskās pieejas un sniegts jaunākās literatūras pārskats. Raksta galvenajā daļā aprakstīta pirmo Ukrainas tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustības ansambļu dibināšanas vēsture un agrīnā darbība, koncentrējoties uz to izcelsmes vidi. Tiek aplūkots arī šīs kustības vēsturiskais, politiskais un sociālais konteksts. Īpaša uzmanība tiek veltīta nozīmīgākajiem ansambļiem, piemēram, *Drevo* (Kijiva), *Slobozhany* (Harkiva), *Horyna, Džerelo* (Rivne) un *Rodovid* (Ļviva) darbībai. Nobeigumā apkopotas Ukrainas tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustības vēstures pirmā perioda iezīmes, rezultāti un sasniegumi. Pētījuma rezultāti atklāj ansambļu rašanās vēsturi, mijiedarbību, darbības jomas, kā arī mūzikas repertuāra izvēli. Sniegts arī īss secinājums par agrīno ansambļu nozīmi un ietekmi turpmākajās desmitgadēs līdz pat mūsdienām.

Introduction   The history of the Ukrainian folk music revival has been ongoing for more than four decades. During this time, it has significantly evolved, expressed not only in the context of performing arts but also through various syncretic and interactive forms, becoming one of the most important components of contemporary Ukrainian musical culture. Moreover, the process of reviving traditional culture has gained particular importance today, as it serves as a form of national identity and a crucial component in Ukraine's liberation war against Russian aggression.

The phenomenon of folklorism began to be actively discussed in the European scholarly environment when Hans Moser raised the issue in his article *Vom Folklorismus in unserer Zeit* (Moser 1962), which he expanded two years later into *Der Folklorismus als Forschungsproblem der Volkskunde* (Moser 2007 [1964]). In post-war Europe, which was ideologically divided into Western and Eastern blocs, attitudes toward manifestations of folklorism and their interpretation varied. In Western Europe, folklorism was primarily perceived as the result of a combination of individual needs and commercial processes[1]. Meanwhile, Soviet definitions of folklorism considered it as a natural and desirable process of cultural development, encompassing the adaptation, reproduction, and transformation of folklore under the umbrella of official Soviet cultural programs. Soviet research and theoretical discussions on folklore were guided by government decrees, Marxist ideology, and the associated belief in the evolution of society and culture – namely, that the worldview, habits, and traditions of an entire society could be forcibly changed through education and the imposition of alternative values (Poljak Istenič 2011: 52–54; Šmidchens 1999: 57–60). These discussions were later extensively described by ethnologist Regina Bendix (1988, 1997: 176–187).

The heightened scholarly interest in the nature and manifestations of folklorism and revivalism during the 1960s was not coincidental. This period marked the peak of the post-war folk music revival movement in the United States, which, in turn, inspired a wave of followers in various countries, including across Europe.[2] By the late 1960s, the revivalist movement had also taken hold in Western Europe, where it assumed diverse forms and expressions within a broad aesthetic

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1   For example, folklorism was defined as the nostalgic use of folk traditions marketed within the culture industry (Šmidchens 1999: 52).

2   It was during the 1960s that the term '*folk music revival*' itself emerged (Velichkina 2024: 108).

paradigm. Around this time, the folk music revival movement began to emerge within the former Soviet Union, particularly in Russia (Olson 2004: 68–105), where it was initiated and nurtured by folklore scholars known as "singing folklorists," as well as in the Baltic States (Boiko 2001: 114). The movement also found resonance in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and other countries of the so-called socialist bloc (Slobin 1996: 5–7).

Since the folk music revival movement in the countries of the Eastern Bloc in most cases unfolded in opposition to official policy and served as a form of protest against musical genres and practices established and approved by the authorities. Scholarly research into this field began only later – after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialist regimes in Europe. Until the early 1990s, "the former East bloc was a nearly blank spot on the map of English-reading ethnomusicology. For reasons of both Eastern and Western politics, few outside scholars specialized in the music cultures of the Soviet Union and its circle of subordinated states" (Slobin 1996: 1). However, starting in the 1990s, following the fall of the Iron Curtain, comparative studies of folk music revival movements in former socialist countries began to emerge within a broader European context. Conferences were convened, bringing together ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, folklorists, and practitioners; their focus often included comparative analyses of revival movements across European nations, the role of politics and ideology, the development of folk music practices in both urban and rural settings, and other related topics.[3] Edited volumes were published (Slobin 1996; Bithell, Hill 2014; Buckland, Stavelová 2018), and scholars from various countries devoted their research to this phenomenon. Monographs (e.g., Olson 2004), journal articles, and other academic contributions also began to appear.

Over several decades of studying the folk music revival movement in former socialist countries within the European context, a complex set of methodological approaches has been developed to examine this phenomenon from multiple perspectives. The trajectory of folk revival movements across European countries may diverge, shaped by distinct sociocultural conditions; consequently, the frameworks for classifying and analyzing manifestations of musical folklorism also vary accordingly (Buckland, Stavelová 2018: 8–11). Most studies focus on the national specificities of revival processes in their historical and practical dimensions, while others explore and generalize the internal motivational and organizational mechanisms of

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3   ICTM World Conferences and Study Group meetings; national symposia and conferences organized by academies of sciences and ethnomusicology institutes (notably in Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Austria); and annual meetings of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology (ESEM).

revival movements (Baumann 1996; Livingston 1999, 2014), as well as termino-
logical and conceptual issues (Ronström 1996, 2014; Buckland, Stavelová 2018:
9–10). Scholars have also attempted to define and justify various directions
and typologies. For instance, Max Peter Baumann (1996: 80–82) distinguishes
between two basic and often contested models of folk music revival: purism and
syncretism. Ulrich Morgenstern (2017: 266–278), drawing on examples from instru-
mental music, identifies and describes four types of European revivalism: the first
includes ensembles modeled after Andreev's so-called 'folk' orchestra;[4] the second
type encompasses the practices of academic folk choirs and orchestras in the Soviet
Union and its satellite states; the third refers to revivalism in European countries,
such as Germany and Norway, which follow the trajectory of the American move-
ment; and the fourth corresponds to the youth folk movement characteristic of
Central and Eastern Europe.

Morgenstern's approach, although it does not differentiate between the
spheres of composition and performance, shares certain parallels with the classifi-
cation proposed by leading Ukrainian ethnomusicologist Bohdan Lukaniuk, whose
methodological framework is rooted primarily in the historical context of the former
Soviet Union. He generally categorizes musical folklorism according to its field of
application – whether in compositional or performance practice – and further by
its professional or amateur orientation. Within performance practice, he identifies
two types: arranged and reconstructive [or revival – L. L.][5] (Lukaniuk 2022: 34).

Arranged folklorism, according to Lukaniuk, is characterized by various forms
of adaptation, arrangement, and the use of non-traditional musical instruments –
all aimed at shaping folk compositions to meet specific audience expectations.[6]

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4   This orchestra was founded in St. Petersburg in 1887 by virtuoso balalaika player Vasilii
Andreev, who simply replaced the instruments of a classical small symphony orchestra with
supposedly national Russian ones. As part of this transformation, he commissioned the creation of
previously non-existent families of balalaikas and domras (soprano–alto–tenor–bass). The
repertoire of this orchestra consisted of arrangements of folk songs and adapted pieces by Russian
and foreign composers (Lukaniuk 2022: 38). A short history of the Agrenev-Slavianskii chorus is
traced by Laura Olson (2004: 28–31).

5   In the Ukrainian folkloristic community, the term 'reconstructive' or 'ethnographic perfor-
mance' dominated for a long time; only in recent years has the term 'revivalism', which aligns
with the European usage, been increasingly adopted (Skazhenyk 2024: 175, 182; Velichkina 2024).

6   In my view, alongside arranged folklorism, it is also important to identify a direction that
adopts and adapts folklore within various strands of contemporary popular music – such as rock,
disco, jazz, and others. This approach might be provisionally termed 'stylistic interpretation'.

This approach can be traced back to the Agrenev-Slavianskii Chorus[7] and Andreev's so-called 'folk' orchestra. It gained particular momentum during the Soviet period, evolving through numerous amateur and professional ensembles, choirs, and orchestras, all actively supported by the authorities. This form of art was widely praised by Soviet musicologists who aligned with the regime and predicted that traditional folk music would be replaced by a new Soviet cultural expression.

The revivalist approach, by contrast, emerged among scholarly folklorists who opposed Soviet ideology but were profoundly concerned with the suppression and decline of authentic[8] folk music. Their work was driven by a genuine commitment to the preservation and revitalization of traditional culture (Lukaniuk 2022: 38–39).

This study focuses on the background and initial stage of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement, which focused on performing traditional peasant repertoire, primarily vocal.[9] It is important to clarify that, unlike the broader concept of 'musical folklorism' – which encompasses various forms of adoption and recontextualization of folk music – this article defines 'revival' as a specific approach aligned with the domain of purism as conceptualized by Baumann, the fourth type of revivalism outlined by Morgenstern, and the reconstructive performance practice[10] identified by Lukaniuk – a direction that originated in, and continues to evolve predominantly within, the countries of Eastern Europe.[11]

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7   A short history of the Agrenev-Slavianskii Chorus is traced by Laura Olson (2004: 28–31).

8   The term 'authentic music' is used here to define music of oral tradition that exists within the community of its bearers. In other contexts, the word 'authentic' may also refer to qualities that indicate belonging to the socio-cultural environment in which this music exists (such as style, clothing, etc.). Discussions about this term in the context of Ukrainian culture are thoroughly analyzed by Sonevytsky (2019: 85–113).

9   Simultaneously, a revival of *kobzar* and *lirnyk* (hurdy-gurdy player) music emerged in Ukraine, representing a distinct form of oral professional musical practice that merits dedicated study.

10   Another synonym used to designate this approach is the term 'authenticity' *(avtentyka)*; however, interpretations of this term vary (cf. Boiko 2001: 114–115; Sonevytsky, Ivakhiv 2016: 136–137; 140–143; Sonevytsky 2019: 88–113).

11   There exists a certain discrepancy in the interpretation of this terminology, particularly when compared with the modern definition proposed by Buckland and Stavělová, who, following other scholars, view 'folklorism' and 'revivalism' as concepts that carry narrower and broader meanings, respectively. However, they also note that "there is enormous variation in associations of the term, and indeed, there may be different labels for similar practices even within Europe itself" (Buckland, Stavělová 2018: 8).
    To clarify this situation, it is important to note that in the practice of Eastern European countries, there long existed no direct equivalent of the term 'revival'. All manifestations of folklore's

Even though the history of Ukrainian folk music revival movement spans over four decades, this topic remains under-researched, underscoring its relevance and scientific novelty. General information about Ukrainian performers who revive traditional music is mostly found online – primarily on the revival movement ensembles' websites, social media, press publications, interviews, and some music websites. An informative reference about revival movement ensembles' activity and a brief history of well-known ensembles, mainly authored by Olena Shevchuk, can be found in the *Ukrainian Music Encyclopedia* (2006–2023). Some milestones in the formation of folk music revival ensembles in specific regions were described by Halyna Kuryshko (2009) and Vira Osadcha (2009, 2014). A few paragraphs of the thesis of Yulia Karchova are devoted to the *Drevo* ensemble's activity and an analysis of some performed songs (Karchova 2016: 155–162); and a short report on *Drevo's* anniversary was published in the 14th issue of *Problems of Ethnomusicology* (Pelina 2019). The direction of folkloristic activity and folk music revival concerning Ukrainian-Polish contacts is partially covered in the article by Olena Shevchuk (2018a) and Iryna Klymenko (2023). Brief information on the origins of the Ukrainian folk music revival and its founder, Yevhen Yefremov, within the context of the contemporary Ukrainian culture, is presented in the research of Maria Sonevytsky (Sonevytsky & Ivakhiv 2016: 140–141; Sonevytsky 2019: 93–100). A brief overview of the Ukrainian folk

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secondary existence in alternative functional contexts – such as the intentional use or quotation of folklore by professional artists, composers, or writers, as well as its recontextualization in other, including staged, forms – were categorized under the umbrella of 'folklorism'.

From this perspective, it is worth recalling the considerable work of Izalij Zemtsovskii (1984), which provides a theoretical overview of these processes and classifies 'folklorism' according to five primary spheres of its manifestation. These include, first and foremost, "folklore in all forms of professional artistic creation," followed by "folklore in science and education; folklore on stage; folklore in festivals and celebrations (including newly created rites); and folklore in mass media (including vinyl records and advertising)" (Zemtsovskii 1984: 7). This classification, then, encompasses traits characteristic of both the 'folklore movement' as defined by Stavělová (and others) and 'revival' in its broader context.

The term 'revival' itself is undoubtedly close in meaning to 'reconstruction', a term that has long been used in Eastern European countries. In its narrower sense, 'folk music reconstruction' referred to a movement that emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1960s (to which this study is dedicated). This gives rise to a terminological inconsistency. In European scholarship, the term 'folklorism' is typically used to describe the folklore movement that "encompassed festivals, performances and competitions of staged forms of folk music and dance" (Buckland, Stavělová 2018: 8). In contrast, in the Eastern European (particularly Ukrainian) context, 'folklorism' has a much broader meaning, encompassing the work of composers, performing arts, and various reinterpretations of folklore within contemporary music, among other forms (Sadovenko 2016: 71–73). At the same time, 'revival', which in contemporary European discourse is interpreted more broadly, has in recent years come to be used in Ukraine as a synonym for the more specific term 'reconstruction of traditional music' – even though a standardized Ukrainian version of this concept has not yet been established (Skazhenyk 2024: 182).

music revival throughout its history, including during the Soviet period, was presented by the author of this article in one of Ukraine's leading ethnomusicological year-books, *Problems of Ethnomusicology* (Lukashenko 2023), which is perhaps the only comprehensive study on the history of folk music revival in Ukraine today. The history of *Drevo* – the pioneering ensemble of the modern Ukrainian folk music revival – and its contemporary followers is explored in an article by Marharyta Skazhenyk (2024).

To sum up, most available resources on the researched topic, especially those found online, have a popular, journalistic character. The limited number of scholarly sources tends to be brief and reference-based, while more extensive studies are focused on narrowly defined thematic issues.

All of these sources were utilized in the present study; however, they did not cover all the necessary information. Therefore, to obtain comprehensive data, in-depth personal interviews were additionally conducted with the leaders of various ensembles (interview, Yefremov 2020; interview, Rodovid 2021; interview, Lukianets 2023).

Socio-Cultural Context

The 1970s in the Soviet Union were referred to as a period of stability, although it was later defined as an era of stagnation. During this time, the authorities' awareness of the impossibility of achieving communist goals grew inversely proportional to the rate of economic development. The general disillusionment was shared even by official propaganda, which introduced the substitute term 'developed socialism' as a supposed transitional stage between socialism and communism. The earlier Khrushchev era, with its slight loosening of the grip of communist ideology, was in the past, while Brezhnev's policies and those of his circle came to be known as "neo-Stalinist" (Plokhy 2021: 396–397).

During Brezhnev's era of ideological doctrine, significant attention was paid to cultural matters. New traditions aligned with communist beliefs were publicly showcased at mass festivals and on stages. The traditional Christmas cycle of holidays was replaced by New Year's celebrations, with carol singing stripped of Christian symbols; Easter was replaced by May Day festivities, accompanied by concerts and outings into nature; harvest festivals became purely collective farm celebrations, honoring combine harvester operators and the collective farm chairman as the host; and a new version of Ivana Kupala was incorporated into the annual Soviet holidays calendar as an agricultural celebration (Helbig 2014: 115–116), whereas church weddings were replaced by newly invented ceremonies in the registry office, etc.[12]

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12   This can be traced, for example, in numerous reports on new Soviet rituals published in the journal *Narodna tvorchist ta etnohrafiia* (*Folk Art and Ethnography*) during the 1960s–1970s.

Regarding the organization of daily leisure, everything was also coordinated by the authorities: almost every village, enterprise, labor collective, educational institution, district or village cultural center, trade union, had to have amateur collectives:[13] vocal and instrumental ensembles, choirs, orchestras of folk instruments, wind orchestras, dance ensembles. Everyone had to sing, dance, play, and glorify Soviet reality at a high ideological level (Pavlenko 2013: 16). The repertoire of every ensemble, regardless of musical orientation, was required to include songs about Lenin and the Party – "a song about electricity, a tractor; and after that, you could have your love songs, calendar songs, or whatever" (Levin 1996: 20). Alongside these thematic prescriptions, certain stylistic conventions were also firmly established: "Every artistic field, folk music revivalism included, had its stylistic norms and internal boundaries that distinguished the canonically official from the aggressively unofficial..." (Levin 1996: 21). Actively supported and encouraged by the authorities, this kind of musical activity – including the folk music direction – was "organized into a pedagogical and entertaining show, performed by and for 'the people', but always ultimately controlled from the top" (Olson 2004: 74).

By this time, the field of arranged professional folk music performance had developed significantly. This refers to professional vocal and instrumental ensembles, choirs, orchestras, and dance ensembles, functioning mainly at regional philharmonics or holding republican status, directly financed by the Ukrainian SSR Ministry of Culture. This support enabled them to refine their performance skills, expand their repertoire, and engage professional choreographers and composers. At the same time, it led to a process of academization: folk dance and song acquired staged forms, often losing regional characteristics and authenticity, while a standardized "canon" of stage folk art was being shaped.

However, under this superficial display of the culture of the happy Soviet population, folk rural traditions and music were still functioning in villages. These traditions were closely tied to the Christian Church, so both traditional and church cultures were, in effect, underground. Conducting traditional rituals associated with religious holidays, such as caroling or acting *haivky* at Easter, was prohibited and persecuted by the authorities (Hanushevska 2024). Many other traditional celebrations were likewise banned or suppressed.[14]

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13   In the Soviet Union, amateur artistic collectives (*самодеятельные художественные коллективы*) were organized groups of non-professional performers formed in schools, factories, farms, military units, cultural centers, and educational institutions, tasked with producing ideologically acceptable and culturally uplifting performances.

14   As I remember from my school childhood, teachers were forced to raid churches during ceremonies to drive pupils out; work actions were organized almost always on all major

The publication of ethnological scientific research and collections of music was subject to strict censorship to avoid revealing elements of Christian culture or, even worse, nationalist ideas. In general, after the Second World War, Ukrainian folkloristic research was limited and concentrated in specific state institutions, the main scientific center being the Institute of Art Studies, Folklore, and Ethnography (now Ethnology) named after Maksym Rylsky in Kyiv (Skrypnyk 2006).

At the same time, individual creative initiatives in the collection, study, and revival of authentic folklore were actively suppressed or even persecuted as manifestations of nationalism. This was part of a broader Soviet policy aimed at Russification and the suppression of national identities, making the 1970s a challenging period for the preservation and revival of Ukrainian folk music.

Fieldwork and Folk Music Research   However, at the end of the 1970s, thanks to scientific and technical progress, portable tape recorders appeared and, most importantly, became available for public purchase and use. This significantly intensified the fieldwork and, crucially, revitalized this research direction in many official academic and educational centers. It also enabled enthusiasts to organize expeditions and record folk music through their own initiative and funding. This primarily replenished existing collections with a large number of new folklore recordings, which elevated research, folkloristic, and pedagogical activities to a new qualitative level. Fundamental research by Volodymyr Hoshovskyi, Sofiia Hrytsa, Oleksandr Pravdiuk, and Mykola Hordiichuk was published at this time. The folklore TV competition *Soniachni Klarnety* and the radio competition *Zoloti Kliuchi* were initiated based on an idea by Sofiia Hrytsa[15] (Ivanytskyi 1997: 92–96; Karchova 2016: 37–38; Ivanenko 1980: 28).

Since 1962, field collection and folk music research have intensified at Ukraine's leading music higher education institution – the Kyiv Conservatory.[16] The initiator and chief driver behind these positive changes was Volodymyr Matviienko,[17] who

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Christian holidays; public consumption of ritual food (such as painted eggs or Easter bread) was strictly forbidden, etc.

15   The idea of popularizing authentic music through the media arose thanks to the active fieldwork and the establishment of contacts between collectors and the best traditional performers.

16   Today it is the Kyiv National Academy of Music.

17   Volodymyr Matviienko (06.01.1935, Kyiv – 06.03.1996, Kyiv) – folklorist, musicologist, and educator. He graduated from the Kyiv Conservatory (1957) and completed postgraduate studies

headed the Cabinet of Folk Music (1962) and taught a course in musical folklore for Conservatory students. It was he who initiated the inclusion of the discipline *Musical and Ethnographic Practice* into the curricula of musicologists and composers, and in 1971, he launched annual student folklore expeditions to various regions of Ukraine (Dovhalyuk, Dobryanska 2021: 7).

According to the recollections of participants in these expeditions, traditional village music became an unexpected revelation for many of them. At the time, musical and folklore subjects in the secondary and higher education systems were mostly illustrated with audio examples performed by professional folk choirs or even played on the piano.[18] Thus, during these expeditions, most students heard the traditional music for the first time, which turned out to be an entirely unfamiliar musical experience for them. As Yevhen Yefremov, a student of Volodymyr Matviienko and founder of the ensemble *Drevo*, recalls:

> It was some completely different music, which was simply unknown to us, and later I had this thought: why, why do we study Beethoven, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Schumann, and anyone else, but we are simply cut off from the music of our people who live and sing all this? [..] We are professional musicians who studied music at school, at college, at the Conservatory, and it turns out that this kind of music is strange to us, and we do not understand anything (interview, Yefremov 2020).

Nascency of the Idea

The powerful new impressions gained during folklore expeditions under Volodymyr Matviienko's guidance were the main driving force that inspired his students not only to study traditional music analytically – its nature and inner logic – but also to engage with it practically, performing it in the same way folk performers did. According to Yefremov, after the first expeditions, he began to try singing on his own, and later, during subsequent expeditions, he sang publicly and received positive feedback from colleagues who noted that he

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there (1960). In 1961–1962, he worked as a junior research fellow at the Institute of Art Studies, Folklore, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (Kyiv); from 1962 to 1984, he headed the Cabinet of Folk Art and taught at the Kyiv Conservatory. He recorded several thousand samples of folk music. Matviienko's transcriptions of folk songs were included in a number of scholarly collections published by the Institute. He was the author of articles in academic journals and encyclopedias, as well as the editor of folk song collections (Shevchuk 2018b).

18   As mentioned earlier, during those years, Ukrainian authentic music was almost unknown, with knowledge of it spreading mainly through the publication of book collections, while audio publications were very few. Therefore, teachers had no choice but to demonstrate arranged performances or play folk melodies on the piano. As a result, students who were expected to become future music theorists and practitioners often had not even heard the live sound of folk music.

sang very similarly to the original performers. After some time, his colleague, folk-lorist Valentyna Ponomarenko, conveyed the interest of several female students who wished to learn to sing from Yefremov.

Thus, in September 1979, a group of female students, led by Yefremov, began gathering and experimenting with singing folk songs. These were senior students Valentyna Ponomarenko, Polina Aron, Tetiana Tonkal, and the youngest, Olena Shevchuk. Later, new participants, such as Serhii Kaushan, Serhii Tseplaiev, and Oleksandr Vasiliev, joined the ensemble (interview, Yefremov 2020).

In Russia at that time, there were already several folk revival movement ensembles. The first, formed in the 1960s, was the Moscow ensemble under the leadership of Vjacheslav Shchurov (Shevchuk 2006: 69). Later came others: an ensemble led by Dmitrij Pokrovsky (1973), the folklore ensemble of the Leningrad Conservatory under the direction of Anatolij Mehnecov (1976), and the Experimental Folklore Ensemble led by Igor Matsiyevsky. By the late 1970s, mainly due to active touring, Pokrovsky's ensemble had become perhaps the most popular.

The Pokrovsky ensemble performed several times in Kyiv, with concerts generating great excitement: concert halls were crowded, and the performances were actively discussed in artistic circles. In October 1979, this ensemble gave another concert in Kyiv, after which members of Yefremov's newly formed ensemble met with signers from Pokrovsky's ensemble to discuss current issues related to sound production techniques, breathing, and articulation. Yefremov recalls: "I realized that much of what he was talking about, I had already felt during the expeditions and had begun to apply. That is, it was in the same direction" (interview, Yefremov 2020).

Thus, the factors that influenced the emergence of the revival movement in Ukraine included the intensification of fieldwork, which led to an expansion of folk music recordings and, consequently, the development of new scholarly studies. Other contributing factors were the increased presence of folk music in mass media and the incorporation of folklore-related disciplines into the educational process, among others. The direct causes included the strong impressions gained during expeditions and the emergence of revival movement ensembles in neighboring Russia.

Drevo. The Beginning of the Ukrainian Folk Music Revival's History

The first attempts were successful: Yefremov had loved singing since childhood, possessed an exceptional voice timbre and was already a young researcher and postgraduate student of Ihor Matsiyevsky. By unanimous agreement among his companions, he therefore became the leader of the new ensemble.

The young singers approached the performance of traditional repertoire with great responsibility: they carefully analyzed recordings, searched for appropriate timbres, and worked on refining dialectal phonetics. The repertoire was selected to represent two contrasting vocal traditions: the archaic heterophonic style of Kyiv Polissia, documented by Yefremov, and the rich subvoice polyphony of the Poltava region, with particular emphasis on sources from the well-known village of Kriachkivka, extensively studied by Valentyna Ponomarenko.

The focus on rural regional repertoire, at the time, did not attract much attention from authorities monitoring "manifestations of nationalism" (Sonevytsky, Ivakhiv 2016: 141). The ensemble's approach to repertoire selection was also supported by Yefremov's scientific advisor, Igor Matsiyevsky (Drevo 2020).

Subsequently, Valentyna Ponomarenko received an invitation from Eduard Alekseev, head of the Soviet Folklore Commission of the Union of Composers, to perform at the annual reporting session of the organization. After some hesitation, since it was to be their debut performance, the young singers eventually accepted the invitation.

Thus, in early December 1979, the first performance of Yefremov's ensemble took place at the House of Composers' Art in the village of Repino near Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), in front of the participants of the reporting session of the Folklore Commission of the Union of Composers of the USSR[19] (Lukashenko 2023: 78). Among the audience were mainly folklore researchers, including leaders and members of two Russian revival ensembles – Anatolij Mekhnetsov and Igor Matsiyevsky.

Despite the artistic rivalry between these ensembles, the performance of Yefremov's ensemble received positive feedback and cooperation proposals from both (interview, Yefremov 2020). Thus, this significant debut marked the beginning of the history of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement (see Figure 1).

According to Yefremov, there were few invitations at first, but despite this, the singers regularly gathered and sang simply for their own enjoyment. Public performances were occasional: they received invitations from journalists (such as the editorial office of the magazine *Kyiv*) to talk about their fieldwork and performance experience, usually followed by a short concert. Invitations also came from unions of artists, writers, and other groups within the artistic intelligentsia. Occasionally, they were invited to official events held in Ukraine and even abroad. For example, it was quite exceptional that in 1981, the Yefremov ensemble was invited on its first foreign trip – to Belgium – as part of an all-Union delegation (interview, Yefremov 2020).

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19   These annual sessions were organized to enable folklorists from each of the then-republics to report on their fieldwork and scholarly research.

Figure 1. Performance of the Yevhen Yefremov ensemble at the Kyiv Philharmonic (leader Yevhen Yefremov in the center). Late 1980s. Photo from the private collection of Iryna Klymenko.

Through practical experimentation, the ensemble developed its own methods for mastering the folk music repertoire. Central to this was the aspiration to internalize the musical style of a specific song tradition and the desire to reproduce the authentic style as precisely as possible. This approach required immersion in the musical tradition through repeated listening to the source recordings. Vocal timbre, original performing techniques, untempered tuning, style of voice leading, extraordinary freedom of variation, and elements of improvisation – all these nuances were diligently sought and recreated by the performers.

Nine years after its founding (in 1988), the Yefremov ensemble chose the name *Drevo* (Tree), by which it is known today (Skazhenyk 2024: 178–179). Thus, more than 45 years ago, thanks to Yefremov's initiative, the first revival ensemble was established in Ukraine, launching a folk music revival movement that has continued to develop along an upward trajectory ever since.

Horyna. The Pioneer of Revivalism
in the Higher Educational Institutions
Simultaneously with the foundation of the Yefremov ensemble as an independent project, the folk music revival movement also began to emerge within higher educational institutions of culture.

As noted earlier, the 1970s were marked by a significant rise in the activities of amateur groups, including folk music ensembles at various organizations and enterprises, as well as the regular holding of district, regional, and republican reviews of

folk art, along with various competitions and festivals. These events were intended to stimulate the artistic and performance level of folk choirs and ensembles.

In this context, the issue of training qualified leaders became increasingly relevant, as the higher music institutions at that time only trained choral conductors for academic choirs – professionals who lacked both the practical skills to lead a folk choir and the necessary knowledge of folk music traditions (Pavlenko 2013: 16).

Thus, in this wave of folklorism, the Department of Folk Choral Singing was established in 1972 at the Kyiv State Institute of Culture[20] (KSIC). This occurred at the initiative of a public activist, folklorist, and professor Andrii Humeniuk, who by that time was already the author of several authoritative folklore studies. In 1979, based on KSIC's branch in Rivne, the Rivne State Institute of Culture (RSIC) was opened and soon reorganized into a separate institution[21] (Kuryshko 2009: 106).

That same year, a student folklore ensemble, *Barvy Polissia,* was created at the Department of Folk Choral Singing. It became the first folklore ensemble at a higher educational institution in Ukraine oriented toward performing folk music in its original form. This initiative came from the head of the department, Vasyl Pavliuk, who led the ensemble for the next 20 years. Pavliuk was also one of the first collectors whose recordings served as the repertoire source for the newly established ensemble[22] (Chemeryk 2024).

A year later, the ensemble was renamed *Horyna,*[23] and under this name, it continues to function to this day. The source material for its repertoire was continually replenished with new fieldwork recordings made in the Rivne Polissia region (Horyna 2017). Remarkably, the founding of this ensemble – and the corresponding need for new source material – prompted both teachers and students to begin the practice of regular folklore expeditions (see Figure 2; Rybak 2017: 106–107).

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20   Today, it is known as the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts.

21   Today, it is known as the Rivne State Humanities University.

22   In the first years of activity, alongside folk songs performed in the revival style, the ensemble also included choral arrangements – mainly psalms, canticles, religious carols, etc. – arranged by Vasyl Pavliuk. This suggests that Pavliuk did not make a strong distinction between arranged and revival approaches to performing folk music.

23   This word originates from ancient vernacular dialects; in the Rivne region of Polissia, it referred to the red thread traditionally used to embroider ritual fabrics and clothing.

Figure 2. Members of the *Horyna* ensemble, led by director Vasyl Pavliuk (in the center), selecting an expedition route. Early 1980s. Photo from the private collection of Vasyl Pavliuk.

Despite being established as a training ensemble[24] with the primary goal of improving students' performance skills, some singers have remained in the ensemble for many years. As the repertoire expanded, requiring a more differentiated approach to performance, various performing groups formed: male and female groups, mixed ensembles, trios, duets, solos, and an instrumental group. Thus, the ensemble aimed to authentically represent the Polissia tradition by adhering to gender and age norms in both ritual and non-ritual repertoires (Horyna 2017).

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24   Training ensembles differed from independent ones in that they were primarily composed of students or younger participants with limited professional experience, and their involvement was mainly intended for educational or developmental purposes. These ensembles were usually homogeneous in age; the participants changed regularly, and sometimes completely, due to the academic cycle and graduation. They were subordinate to one or several leaders, who were personally responsible for choosing the repertoire, organizing rehearsals, performances, costumes, and so on. However, the emergence and activities of independent revival ensembles and those affiliated with educational or other institutions were closely connected. Participants in the former were often teachers and leaders of the student ensembles, while talented students frequently joined independent ensembles even during their studies.

The repertoire includes traditional genres of Western and Central Polissia – such as *koliadky*, *shchedrivky* (Christmas and New Year ritual songs), *vesnianky* (spring ritual songs), Triitsia songs, Kust songs (summer ritual songs), wedding songs, games and dances, and more. The ensemble also strives to recreate characteristic features of Polissia singing – such as an open, powerful sound; a distinctive heterophonic manner; ornamentation; modal and melismatic traits; among others.

Immediately after its foundation, *Horyna* began participating in numerous concerts, competitions, and festivals. During the period discussed in this article, these included the aforementioned TV competition *Soniachni Klarnety*, the radio competition *Zoloti Kliuchi*, and other events.[25]

Dzherelo. Folk Music from Sources

In 1986, another revival ensemble, *Dzherelo* (Source), was formed at the RSIC on the initiative of Raisa Tsapun, a graduate of the Choral Singing Department, and Ivan Sinelnikov, who was beginning his vocal career at the Department. He can rightly be called a co-organizer, as the ensemble originated from their duet. The first performance of the *Dzherelo* ensemble took place at an Institute concert at the end of 1986.

The newly formed ensemble focused on researching and performing the traditional folk song and dance repertoire of Central Polissia and Volhynia (Marchuk 2017). The initial repertoire was compiled from students' fieldwork materials organized by Raisa Tsapun in the villages of Sarny district, Rivne Region. Among the ensemble's first performances was the wedding ritual *Unbraiding a Braid*, recorded in the village of Lyukhcha. During the expedition, the members also became acquainted with the village ensemble *Troyan*, whose performance of ancient songs and unique dances left a strong impression (Stoliarchuk 2023).

While learning authentic songs, the young performers carefully sought to reproduce what they had encountered during expeditions: the heterophonic and polyphonic singing styles, local dialects, and the practice of wearing traditional clothing on stage – each reflecting another facet of the region's cultural heritage. At that time, such an approach was new: appearing on stage in authentic peasant clothing

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25   The ensemble participated in the 20th Serbian Festival (Belgrade-Knjaževac, 1981, Serbia), was a winner of the Republican Review of Student Art (1981), took part in the All-Union Creative Workshop of Folklore Art (Moscow, 1987, Russia), was a laureate of the Inter-University Folk Song Performers Competition (1988), the First Republican Festival *Chervona Ruta* (Chernivtsi, 1989, Ukraine), the All-Ukrainian Youth Creative Report (Kyiv, 1991), and received a diploma at the International Oratorio and Cantata Festival *Wratislavia Cantans* (Wrocław, 1991, Poland), along with numerous regional performances (Horyna 2017).

Figure 3. Presentation of stage costumes created for the ensemble *Dzherelo*. Chief designer Marta Tokar. Rivne, Regional Music and Drama Theater. May 1989. Photo by Oleh Horopakha. From the private collection of Raisa Tsapun.

and singing in the local dialect was unheard of (see Figure 3). These practices were not encouraged, as despite political changes in the 1980s, the cultural and ideological doctrines developed in the previous period remained dominant. According to Raisa Tsapun's recollections, debates raged in the corridors of the RSIC over whether a phenomenon such as a folklore ensemble was even necessary, given the existence of the folk choir (Savsunenko 2019: 24). Nevertheless, performing in an authentic manner – despite official resistance – was gaining momentum. The newly created ensemble *Dzherelo* actively joined this movement and became well known by the late 1980s (Marchuk 2017).

During the first five years of its activity, *Dzherelo* participated in numerous events, including the Interuniversity Festival of Student Art *We and Songs-87* (Mykolaiv 1987); it won the Grand Prix at the First All-Ukrainian Literary and Folklore Festival *Lesyna Pisnia* (Lutsk, 1988), and was a laureate of the Republican radio contest *New Names* (Kyiv, 1989) as well as the television contest *Sunny Clarinets* of the Rivne Region (Kyiv, 1989). The ensemble also took part in various other festivals and concerts both in Ukraine and abroad (Tsapun). Like the *Horyna* ensemble, *Dzherelo* received numerous awards and performed widely at national and international events.

In 1983, the initiative of the RSIC was taken up by the Ethnocultural Center of the Rivne City Palace of Children and Youth, where the youth ensemble *Vesnianka* was founded by the head of the Center Viktor Kovalchuk. The ensemble organically complemented the Center's fieldwork, research, and publishing activities with the

reconstruction and performance of Polissia's authentic singing traditions and the playing of traditional musical instruments. Its repertoire consisted of ritual and everyday songs, dances, and instrumental music from Rivne Polissia. Later, the ensemble was led by Iryna Slyvchuk (Vesnianka 2017), who also became the leader of the children's ensemble *Vesnianochka*, founded four years later in 1987. *Vesnianochka* also performed Polissia repertoire, adapted for children's perfor-mance. Both ensembles – like other ensembles from Rivne – continue to operate successfully today (Lukashenko 2023: 84).

To conclude, the Rivne State Institute of Culture became the first center where student revival ensembles emerged, and to this day, the city of Rivne remains one of the leading hubs for ethnographic ensembles affiliated with educational and extracurricular art institutions.

Slobozhany. The Folk Music Revival in Eastern Ukraine

In Kharkiv, the first student experi-mental ensemble *Dzherelo Slobozhanshchyny* was founded in 1983 through the initia-tive of Larysa Novikova at the Kharkiv Kotlyarevsky Institute of Arts.[26] Novikova, a 1977 graduate, began working as a folklorist at the institute's educational folklore laboratory in 1978 and actively conducted fieldwork. After compiling a substantial archive of recordings, she organized a student ensemble to reproduce and popularize this material (Shcherbinin 2021). The ensemble first performed in 1987 at the Kharkiv lecture hall during a concert dedicated to the 110th anniversary of Ukrainian com-poser and musician Hnat Hotkevych. In 1988, the ensemble changed its name to *Krokoveie Kolo* and continued its activities for about ten more years (Lukashenko 2023: 85).

That same year, in 1983, the ensemble *Slobozhany*[27] was formed at the Kharkiv Maksym Gorkyi State University through the initiative of Vira Osadcha.[28] The

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26   Today, the Kharkiv Kotlyarevsky Institute of Arts is known as the Kharkiv National Kotlyarevsky University of Arts.

27   The ensemble's original name, *Slobozhany*, referred to the local inhabitants of the Slobozhanshchyna region. As the current leader of the ensemble, Halyna Lukianets, recalls: "It was a very original name because practically no one knew the word *Slobozhany*. And at every performance, we had to explain what Sloboda Ukraine was, and why we called *Slobozhany*." In 1992, the ensemble changed its name to *Muravskyi Shliakh* (interview, Lukianets 2023).

28   Kharkiv Maksym Gorkyi State University, where *Slobozhany* was originally founded, is now known as the Karazin National University.

Figure 4. Debut performance of the yet-unnamed ensemble (later known as *Slobozhany*) at the Kharkiv State Institute of Arts. 1983. Photo from the private collection of Halyna Lukianets.

ensemble began as an amateur song club, where bards, amateur singers, and music enthusiasts gathered. Vira Osadcha, an accomplished bard and a member of the club, already held a degree in ethnomusicology and collaborated with the Center for Folk Art, actively conducting fieldwork. Without a doubt, she was familiar with the performance practices of Russian revival ensembles and the Kyiv-based ensemble led by Yefremov. With a substantial collection of fieldwork recordings and exposure to existing revivalist experiences, Osadcha proposed to her colleagues the idea of reconstructing the songs from her *Slobozhanshchyna* collection. The experiment proved successful, and the first concert of the newly formed revival ensemble *Slobozhany* took place in 1983 at the Kharkiv State Institute of Arts, marking the ensemble's official founding (see Figure 4).[29] Initially, the ensemble performed Ukrainian and Russian traditional songs, aiming to reflect the bilingual character of the *Slobozhanshchyna* tradition (interview, Lukianets 2023).

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29   In addition to Vira Osadcha, the ensemble's first participants included Andrii Fedorov, Andrii Ruzhynsky, Leonid Kotukhin, and others.

In 1988, the ensemble was joined by its current leader, Halyna Lukianets. According to her recollections, the ensemble experienced a crisis at that time, caused by both internal dynamics and the choice of repertoire. Gradually, most participants came to the conclusion that they should focus exclusively on performing Ukrainian material. They observed significant differences between Ukrainian and Russian songs in terms of phonetics, articulation, sound formation, and other vocal nuances. As Lukianets explained, when they attempted to sing both Russian and Ukrainian songs, "the throat simply couldn't handle it" (interview, Lukianets 2023).

During this period – the late 1980s – certain social changes were taking place, related to Gorbachev's reformist policies, which brought patriotic sentiments to the surface. In response to these shifts, *Slobozhany* sought to popularize the Ukrainian song tradition through public concerts, festivals, and television appearances. By the ensemble's first anniversary concert in 1988, held at the Kharkiv Teacher's House, they had already fully transitioned to a Ukrainian repertoire, although Russian songs were still occasionally sung during rehearsals or backstage (interview, Lukianets 2023).

In 1988, the ensemble participated in a large joint concert in Kyiv, where they first met and became acquainted with the Yefremov ensemble, *Drevo*. From that point on, a close friendship developed, and whenever *Slobozhany* performed in Kyiv, they almost always attended *Drevo's* rehearsals. According to Halyna Lukianets, Yevhen Yefremov, as the more experienced performer, generously offered valuable advice and demonstrated many techniques in practice: "It was a wonderful period when we absorbed their experience." Yefremov eagerly shared his knowledge with the Kharkiv singers, revealing stylistic nuances and performance secrets – particularly in areas such as melismatics, variability, and improvisation – which he also studied in his scholarly work (interview, Lukianets 2023).

In the late 1980s, the ensemble was joined by a new generation of young participants, mostly students from the Kharkiv Conservatory, who eagerly took part in expeditionary fieldwork. According to Halyna Lukianets, they conducted three or four expeditions per year, through which the ensemble's repertoire was regularly enriched with new songs – most of them recorded by Lukianets herself (interview, Lukianets 2023).

At the time, in order to reproduce folk songs as accurately as possible, the ensemble first created detailed musical transcriptions that captured even the smallest nuances, including melismatics. Songs were then performed based on these notations. However, *Slobozhany* eventually realized that this method dispersed their attention and disrupted the natural flow and sound of the music. By the early 1990s, they abandoned this practice in favor of learning by ear – focusing exclusively on auditory assimilation, just as it occurs in traditional folk environments.

Although the *Slobozhany* ensemble was actively engaged in research and concert activities from the very beginning, their performances initially attracted only a small audience in Kharkiv. According to one of the participants, their work was often perceived in the industrial, predominantly Russian-speaking city as a form of exotic underground music. Most listeners – including even the performers' own family members – were skeptical. Some simply could not believe that local traditional songs could sound polyphonic, harmonically complex, with elaborate melodic lines and layered counter-voices. This reaction is understandable, given that most Soviet citizens were raised on staged and arranged versions of folk music and were largely unfamiliar with authentic rural musical traditions. As a result, the ensemble frequently encountered difficulties (Muravskyi Shliakh 2017). The situation improved significantly after Ukraine gained independence and a Ukrainian cultural center was established in Kharkiv, which began organizing and hosting various cultural events.

Successors of *Drevo*

In the late 1980s, new ensembles – mainly initiated by the first participants of *Drevo* – began to emerge. After graduating from the Kyiv Conservatory and returning to her hometown of Kirovohrad (now Kropyvnytskyi), Nina Kerimova began researching the region's traditional music. To popularize the collected material, she founded the local ethnographic ensemble *Hilka* (Tereshchenko 2021: 26). She was later joined by the ethnomusicologist couple Oleksandr and Natalia Tereshchenko, who also conducted active fieldwork in the Kirovohrad Region, particularly in the area between the Dnipro and Synyikha rivers. As a result, *Hilka's* repertoire came to include almost all musical genres recorded in the region: ritual and non-ritual songs, roundelays, and dances.[30]

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, revival movement ensembles also began to emerge in Kyiv, most of which were likewise initiated by former *Drevo* singers. One of the first was Hanna Koropnichenko, who founded the ensemble *Otava* in 1989. Initially affiliated with a local music school, the ensemble soon grew, incorporating students from the Kyiv State Institute of Culture (KSIC) and other institutions. The ensemble's repertoire was based on the folk music traditions of the Central Dnipro River basin, particularly the Kyiv Region – an area that Koropnichenko had researched extensively (Skachenko et al. 2013: 38–39). In the same year, 1989, Olena Shevchuk, a teacher at KSIC, also founded a student revival movement ensemble, which

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30   Later, Nina Kerimova left Ukraine, and leadership of the ensemble was taken by the Tereshchenko family, who continued to develop *Hilka* by recruiting students from the Kirovohrad Musical College.

continued in various formations until 1995.[31] Its repertoire was based primarily on materials collected during students' fieldwork practice in the Kyiv Region (Skachenko et al. 2013: 39–42).

In 1991, the now widely known student revival ensemble *Kralytsia* was founded at the Department of Folklore of the KSIC. It was initiated by Ivan Synelnikov – one of the founders of *Dzherelo* – who had moved to Kyiv in the early 1990s to live and work. Like other ensembles of the revival movement, *Kralytsia* performed folk music recorded by students during their fieldwork practice. However, the composition of the ensemble has remained fluid: each year, new students enroll, and work must begin almost from scratch – conducting expeditions, listening to recordings, analyzing material, and mastering the performance style (Skachenko et al. 2013: 42–46; Lukashenko 2023: 84).

Rodovid. Performance of
Western Ukrainian Folk Music

Another center of reconstructive folk performance emerged in the late 1980s in Lviv. The movement originated among the participants of the amateur song and dance ensemble *Vesnianka*, affiliated with the Lviv Bus Plant, and led by RSIC graduate Yurii Kondratenko in 1987. In 1989, ten members of *Vesnianka* were invited by Kyiv ethnomusicologist Mykhailo Khai to perform Christmas rituals at the Ukrainian-Canadian enterprise *Kobza*.[32] The employees of *Kobza*, impressed by the ensemble's singing, saw great potential in their work and proposed a collaboration with Kondratenko to collect and preserve traditional music from the Galician Region (interview, Rodovid 2021).

Accepting the offer, Yurii Kondratenko began working as a folk music collector. After recording local repertoire, he invited the most talented *Vesnianka* participants to reproduce it. This led to the formation of the *Rodovid* (Lineage) ensemble, which initially consisted of five singers. When two members later left, the ensemble continued with three core participants – an arrangement that has remained unchanged for over 30 years: Lesia Redko, a geologist; Ivanna Shevchuk, a zootechnician; and Oksana Ostashevska, a metal processing technologist.

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31   Since 1993, the ensemble has been led by Ivan Synelnikov.

32   *Kobza* was the first Ukrainian-Canadian joint venture specializing in musical activities, operating from 1989 to 1992. It included departments dedicated to Ukrainian academic music, church music, musical folklore, and mass musical culture, as well as the first non-state recording studio in Ukraine. *Kobza* also organized folklore expeditions, music festivals, and concerts, and actively supported a range of creative projects (Kalenichenko 2008: 442).

The uniqueness of the *Rodovid* lies in the professional backgrounds of its members. It stands out as one of the most accomplished ensembles in Ukrainian reconstructive performance, despite the fact that approximately 90 percent of similar groups are composed of professional folklorists, ethnomusicologists, instrumentalists, or individuals with formal musical training. In contrast, none of *Rodovid's* core members had a musical education – except for the leader, Yurii Kondratenko, a graduate of the Department of Folk Choral Singing at RSIC. Paradoxically, this lack of academic training proved to be an advantage: the singers' perception and reception of traditional music were not shaped – or constrained – by the auditory experiences and stylistic norms of academic music. Unlike performers with classical training, the *Rodovid* members approached folk material without preconditioned habits.

Another advantage of the group was that two of its three participants – Ivanna Shevchuk and Oksana Ostashevska – were born in villages of the Boiko ethnographic region at a time when traditional music was still in active use, making them true hereditary carriers of the Boiko authentic repertoire. Lesia Redko is a second-generation Lviv resident. Her family was resettled from Nadsiania during the notorious Operation *Vistula*, and her mother, a traditional singer, was the first critic and judge of the Nadsiania songs performed by *Rodovid* (Lukashenko 2023: 78).

Even though none of the singers had formal musical education, they approached the revival of traditional singing from various regions of Western Ukraine as true reconstructors, under the strict guidance of Yurii Kondratenko. They visited villages to learn the repertoire directly from traditional singers, made audio recordings, and then carefully listened to and analyzed the material, experimenting with its reproduction. An essential factor in the ensemble's successful formation was regular trips to villages and master classes with tradition bearers. Particular attention was paid to the accurate reproduction of dialects. According to the participants, Kondratenko, listening attentively from the side, would identify phonetic inaccuracies and make them repeat the same words dozens of times until he was satisfied with the result (interview, Rodovid 2021).

The expedition recordings made by Yurii Kondratenko formed the initial repertoire of the ensemble, later supplemented by material recorded by Volodymyr Hoshovskyi, Yevstakhii Diudiuk, and songs from the family villages of the participants. These included songs from various ethnographic areas of the Lviv Region: Nadsiania, Opillia, and Boiko. Although these neighboring regions are predominantly characterized by monophonic ritual singing and, in non-ritual music, by relatively simple polyphony – typically featuring third-based harmonization in the second voice, occasionally expanding into triadic structure – each is distinguished by a characteristic local dialect and a specific set of musical genres and types.

Figure 5. Performance of the ensemble *Rodovid*, most likely at the International Folklore Festival *Skamba skamba kankliai*. Vilnius, 1992. Photo from the private collection of Oksana Ostashevska.

Immediately after its formation, *Rodovid* commenced an intensive concert activity. The ensemble's debut took place on January 14, 1991, in Kyiv at the Christmas concert *Oi dai, Bozhe* (Oh, give, the Lord), held at the Ivan Franko Academic Theater. They shared the stage with other prominent folk ensembles of the time, including *Drevo*, *Dzherelo* from Rivne, *Hilka* from Kirovohrad, and others. During this early period, while participating in concerts and festivals, *Rodovid* members actively engaged with other revival movement performers, exchanging knowledge and experience about methods of working with traditional material (see Figure 5). This exchange offered both practical skills and a sense of validation for their chosen approaches.

When asked what motivated their work and who inspired them most, they unequivocally cited the example of other ensembles – especially *Drevo* and its leader, Yevhen Yefremov: "We just saw that everyone is preserving their own, promoting it among students, and no one is doing it here [i.e. in Lviv – L. L.]. And it's a bit offensive because we also want to preserve [traditional music] so that it remains" (interview, Rodovid 2021).

Rodovid became the first folk music revival ensemble dedicated to Western Ukrainian music and continues to perform today with its original, unchanged lineup. In 2025, the ensemble celebrated its remarkable 35th anniversary.

Conclusion   From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the birth and forma-
tion stage of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement took place, during which
the first ensembles emerged in various cities across Ukraine, laying the foundation
for the movement's further development.

The Ukrainian folk music revival movement was part of a broader European
revivalist trend, yet it possessed specific features characteristic of Eastern Europe –
particularly in countries under the pressure of the Soviet regime. For the scholars
and folklorists who initiated it, the movement was primarily aimed at reviving and
popularizing traditional rural music, which at the time still survived in villages almost
clandestinely, in defiance of the prevailing authorities. It also served as a form of pro-
test against the artificial musical culture of Soviet society, where artistic expression
was expected to glorify the regime's idols, the existing order, and the supposedly
ideal life in the Soviet Union.

The preconditions for the emergence of this phenomenon were primarily the
intensification of folk music collection and research, significantly facilitated by the
advent of portable tape recorders. As a result, fundamental works by Volodymyr
Hoshovskyi, Sofia Hrytsa, Oleksandr Pravdiuk, Mykola Hordiichuk, and other schol-
ars appeared during this period. The introduction of a new subject, *Musical and
Ethnographic Practice*, into the curricula of art universities initiated systematic stu-
dent fieldwork. At the same time, folk music began to be popularized on radio and
television, and folklore contests, festivals, and other events were held. The opening
of departments of folk choral singing at the Kyiv (1972) and later Rivne (1978)
Institutes of Culture was also of great importance, as they began to focus not only
on the arranged approach but also on the revival of authentic folk music.

The first ensembles emerged in different ways and environments. Some were
independent initiatives, mainly among students and young scholars from art univer-
sities (such as *Drevo*, *Slobozhany*, *Dzherelo*, *Slobozhanshchyny* and others); others
were educational youth and children's ensembles based at art institutions (like
Horyna, *Dzherelo*, and others); and some arose within amateur collectives at enter-
prises (such as *Rodovid*). During this period, ensembles were initiated and
established across Ukraine: in the capital (Kyiv), in the central regions (Rivne,
Kropyvnytskyi), in the east (Kharkiv), and in the west (Lviv).

Despite geographical distances and differences in institutional affiliation, all the
ensembles maintained ongoing connections – meeting at joint concerts, festivals,
and other artistic events, and visiting one another during rehearsals, among other
interactions. Communication also took place through pedagogical and scholarly net-
works. About ten years after the founding of the first ensemble, *Drevo*, its members
began to establish their ensembles, indicating a sense of continuity and the

emergence of a distinct performing generation (a connection that has continued throughout the nearly 45-year history of the Ukrainian folk music revival movement). Analyzing their shared trajectory, it must be said that the ideologist of this movement was Yevhen Yefremov – the founder of *Drevo* – an ethnomusicologist, collector, researcher, and gifted performer of traditional music, who served as a consultant and mentor to many pioneering ensembles (Ivanytskyi 2006: 654).

All revival ensembles were actively involved in fieldwork in their ethnographic regions and in creating their own audio archives. This applied not only to ethnomusicologists and folklorists, for whom folklore research was a profession, or to students completing field practice assignments. For example, the participants of the *Rodovid* ensemble – who were not involved in academic research professionally – regularly met with village performers to learn their singing traditions and, in some cases, even engaged in scholarly study of musical traditions. During this period, the folk music of many regions of Ukraine was studied, reconstructed, and performed by revival ensembles. These included Poltava and Kyiv Polissia (*Drevo*), Rivne Polissia and Central Volhynia (*Horyna*, *Dzherelo*), Slobozhanshchyna (*Slobozhany*), and Galicia (*Rodovid*).

Various approaches were employed in the process of recreating traditional music: ethnomusicologists often began with detailed transcriptions and meticulously learned all stylistic nuances from notation (*Drevo*, *Slobozhany*); non-musicians absorbed the sound by ear, often directly from authentic performers (*Rodovid*); while student groups learned the repertoire under the guidance of a teacher. However, over time, all ensembles gradually concluded that oral tradition music should be adopted naturally through oral transmission. Thus, there was a certain evolution in the approach to learning the traditional repertoire.

The repertoire was diverse. While there was a clear tendency to reproduce the most presentable musical pieces – such as polyphonic songs with expansive melodies, often of a non-ritual character – all ensembles also included ritual music. This repertoire featured some of the oldest monophonic and heterophonic examples of musical folklore, along with instrumental and vocal-instrumental pieces, as well as dances. As a rule, the repertoire of each ensemble comprehensively reflected the tradition of its chosen region.

Ensemble lineups frequently changed – particularly in student ensembles. For example, *Drevo* underwent eight different configurations during the study period, and other ensembles experienced similar transformations. An exception is the *Rodovid* ensemble, whose lineup has remained unchanged throughout its entire history.

For most members of the revival ensembles, the primary motivation for their activity was a love of folk music; secondarily, it was the awareness of the need to

revive and popularize a tradition that had been driven underground during the Soviet era and had begun to decline in the 1970s and 1980s with the passing of its active bearers.

Numerous new ensembles emerged in subsequent years as successors to the pioneers of the folk music revival movement in Ukraine, and many of them continue to thrive today. Over the course of its history, the revival movement has gained wide popularity, securing its place on major concert stages and at festivals, as well as on radio and television, alongside other branches of musical culture. It has also become integrated into the academic sphere – accompanying scholarly events with live performances and enriching the study of traditional music through practical engagement.

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Cold War Divide

(Dzelzs priekškara šķirtne)

Rita Zara

Dr. philol., folklore researcher;
Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia
Dr. philol., folkloras pētniece;
Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: rita.zara@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0002-2998-3579

**Guests Beyond the Iron Curtain:
Cross-Border Visits of Latvian Folklorists
during the Cold War**

**Viesi viņpus dzelzs priekškara:
latviešu folkloristu pārrobežu vizītes
Aukstā kara laikā**

Keywords:
history of folklore studies,
Latvian SSR,
Committee for Cultural Relations with
Compatriots Abroad,
State Security Committee (KGB),
1980s

Atslēgvārdi:
folkloristikas vēsture,
Latvijas PSR,
Komiteja kultūras sakariem ar
tautiešiem ārzemēs,
Valsts drošības komiteja (VDK),
20. gadsimta 80. gadi

Summary   This article examines cross-border encounters of Latvian folklorists during the Cold War, when the Iron Curtain separated exile communities in the West from scholars in Soviet-occupied Latvia. The work of research institutions in Riga, including the Andrejs Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences and its various departments, among them the Folklore Department, was largely shaped by the ideological framework of the Soviet regime. Geopolitical circumstances determined isolation from the West and minimal academic information exchange beyond the borders of the socialist bloc countries. Folklorists in the occupied Latvia worked while being aware of the surveillance of the State Security Committee (KGB). At the same time, the KGB's subsidiary body, the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad, enabled a certain level of interaction between folklorists in Western exile and the Latvian SSR.

Some individuals with a keen interest, including Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, Imants Freibergs, and Austris Grasis, visited Riga. In the 1980s, guests from the other side of the Iron Curtain, folklorists Elza Kokare and Jadviga Darbiniece, were permitted to attend Stockholm and participate in the Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia. These episodes reveal both the risks and possibilities of intellectual life under Soviet occupation.

Kopsavilkums   Rakstā aplūkota latviešu folkloristu saskarsme Aukstā kara laikā, kad dzelzs priekškars nodalīja Rietumu trimdā dzīvojošos folkloras pētniekus no zinātniekiem okupētajā Latvijā. Pētniecības institūti Rīgā, tostarp Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas Andreja Upīša Valodas un literatūras institūts un tā Folkloras sektors, lielā mērā darbojās pēc padomju režīma ideoloģiskā regulējuma. Ģeopolitiskie apstākļi noteica Latvijas PSR izolāciju no Rietumiem un minimālu akadēmiskās informācijas apmaiņu viņpus sociālistiskā bloka valstīm. Okupētajā Latvijā folkloristi strādāja, apzinoties Valsts drošības komitejas (VDK) uzraugošo klātbūtni. Tajā pašā laikā Komiteja kultūras sakariem ar tautiešiem ārzemēs – VDK piesegstruktūra – nodrošināja zināmu mijiedarbību starp folkloristiem Rietumu trimdā un Latvijas PSR.

Rīgu apmeklēja vairāki ieinteresēti latviešu diasporas pārstāvji, tostarp Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, Imants Freibergs un Austris Grasis. Savukārt viešņām no otras dzelzs priekškara puses – folkloristēm Elzai Kokarei un Jadvigai Darbiniecei – 20. gadsimta 80. gados bija iespēja apmeklēt Stokholmu un piedalīties Baltijas studiju konferencē Skandināvijā. Šie notikumi atklāj gan riskus, gan iespējas intelektuālajā dzīvē padomju okupācijas laikā.

Introduction   The Soviet occupation of Latvia and the Cold War rivalry between the global superpowers, the USSR and the US, during the second half of the 20th century created a geopolitical and ideological rift between Latvian folklore scholars on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. The Folklore Department of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences, a key folklore research center in occupied Latvia, operated within the constraints of the Soviet legal and ideological framework. During the Soviet period, folklorists had to navigate between official ideological demands and their personal values. However, there was always the risk of attracting the attention – and potential punishment – of supervisory bodies, the highest of which was the State Security Committee (KGB). Demonstrating loyalty to Soviet ideology and cooperating with the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad was often a necessary condition for any engagement with the world beyond the Iron Curtain.

In contrast, the Latvian exile community was strictly dissociated from the Latvian SSR and opposed to KGB provocations. Nevertheless, some researchers from the exile communities were able to take advantage of certain circumstances that allowed them to visit the Latvian SSR and meet Latvian folklore scholars in their occupied homeland.

Against the Background of the Cold War   The 1980s were a vivid period in Latvian culture, during which traditional culture in occupied Latvia flourished as an alternative way of life, most notably through the folklore movement. At the official institutional level, Latvian folklore research and its interpretations in the Latvian SSR were delegated exclusively to the Folklore Department of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences, the successor to the Archives of Latvian Folklore, established in 1924.[1]

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1   Researchers of the Institute were involved in organizing several events significant to the folklore movement, and also reflected on issues of authenticity in folklore, as opposed to its staged and beautified forms. Thus, for example, the concert of 14 October 1978 and the following discussion marked a significant point in the starting period of the folklore revival (Weaver et al. 2023: 51–53). A critical and analytical assessment of the interaction between these two "worlds", academic and lifestyle folklore movement, however, has yet to be undertaken.

Although a major paradigm shift in theoretical and methodological understanding of folklore studies, such as that experienced by their Western counterparts on the other side of the Iron Curtain, was yet to emerge among Latvian folklore researchers (see Bula 2011: 14–22), the first half of the 1980s was marked by a certain sense of elation, increased openness of the Institute to the wider public, and the launch of a new annual conference. The five-year period between 1981 and 1985 unfolded in anticipation of the 150th anniversary of Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), the prominent systematizer and publisher of Latvian folk songs. As a result of cultural policy planning in the Latvian SSR and cross-sectoral cooperation, the period of five years was filled with ambitious events of both social and scholarly significance (see Grīnvalde 2022: 162–167). The culminating academic event was the International Research Conference *Folk Song and Contemporary Culture*, held in Riga from 30 October to 1 November 1984. It was organized by the Folklore Department in cooperation with the Writers' Union and other institutions. This was the first international conference hosted by Latvian folklorists in several decades, the previous one being the Conference of Folklorists of the Baltic Soviet Republics in 1951. The framework of the Barons' jubilee offered platforms both within the Latvian SSR and across the Iron Curtain, enabling a rapprochement between Western and Eastern scholars. In the West, a notable academic event was the Eighth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia, organized by the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS), which took place in Stockholm, Sweden, in June of 1985.

The aim of this article is to address the following research questions: How possible was it for Latvian folklore researchers to travel to the other side of the Iron Curtain? What can we learn about the ideological conditions of these visits? What were the attitudes toward these travelers in exile society and among fellow citizens in the Latvian SSR? And how did the visitors themselves reflect on their experiences?

The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and its Western Bloc allies on one side and the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies on the other. It was a protracted ideological and strategic rivalry between great powers that began soon after the Second World War and lasted until the early 1990s. Although the Cold War did not escalate into a direct, large-scale military conflict between East and West, it was characterized by an arms race, espionage and a global struggle for influence across a world divided by the Iron Curtain. At its core, the Cold War was driven by opposing visions of political and economic governance. The United States supported the ideas of liberal democracy and market economies, while the USSR sought to spread its model of centralized planned economy under the rule of a single Communist Party.

The Cold War had a profound impact on global politics, economics, and culture in the second half of the 20th century. For both sides, the heightened tensions in foreign affairs and the associated risks were seen as matters of national security. It was the period of competing military alliances, like NATO versus the Warsaw Pact, although the latter's military utility as well as political value have been questioned (Mastny 2005: 74), as well as a nuclear arms race. Moreover, the Cold War was also the arena of an international space race (Reichstein 1999). As part of this unconventional warfare, both culture and science and the involvement of their representatives also served the strategic agendas of the superpowers.

The Cold War was a complex conflict whose distinct historical appearances are often described in metaphorical terms, as noted by German historian and political scientist Wilfried Loth (Loth 2010: 19–22): 'Iron Curtain', 'Thaw', 'Prague Spring', 'Velvet Revolution', etc. He also drew attention to the fact that the designation 'Cold War' was itself a metaphor that originated in a speech by Bernard Mannes Baruch, American statesman, in 1947 (Loth 2010: 19).

The specific period covered by this study is the so-called Second Cold War (1981–1985), which followed the initial phase of the Cold War and the détente of the 1970s, eventually leading to the end of the Cold War (Fink 2022: 205–230; Blair, Curtis 2009: 85–104; Painter 2002: 106–122). In the early 1980s, the strident anti-communist rhetoric of U.S. President Ronald Reagan targeted the dangerously unpredictable Kremlin leadership, whose consecutive leaders, Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982), Yuri Andropov (1914–1984), and Konstantin Chernenko (1911–1985), were seen as unsuitable for measured diplomatic action or, at times, even had ceased to function while in office. This created an atmosphere of insecurity among those Europeans who had to watch the mutually threatening arguments of the big global players. During Reagan's first term of presidency, many Western Europeans lived in fear of war, which only ended with Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–2022) becoming Soviet leader in 1985 (Gilbert 2015: 230).

The periodization of this timeframe is underpinned by increasing global geopolitical turbulences which hit the rock bottom around 1984:

> Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan (1981–89), denounced the Soviet Union as an immoral 'evil empire', and fought the last phase of the Cold War vigorously on all fronts. Alleging that the Soviets were the source of most of the world's problems, Reagan persuaded the US Congress to approve massive increases in military spending, effectively ended arms control negotiations with the Soviets, and pursued an aggressive policy to roll back Soviet influence in the Third World. Reagan's policies resulted in a mushrooming budget deficit; a powerful, and at times anti-US, peace movement in Western Europe; strains within the NATO alliance; and a heightening of Cold War tensions.

This 'second Cold War' proved short-lived, however. After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the Soviet Union began to pursue policies aimed at improving relations with the United States. With the Soviets making most of the concessions, the United States and the Soviet Union reached important arms control agreements. In 1989, faced with chronic unrest in Eastern Europe and economic decline at home, the Soviets allowed communist regimes in Eastern Europe to collapse. The following year, they agreed to German reunification on Western terms. Improved East-West relations and the Soviet Union's retreat from a world role also led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in early 1989 and facilitated negotiated settlements to local and regional conflicts in southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central America (Painter 2002: 106).

However, there are authors who, through their reflections on the second half of the 20th century, argue in favor of "long détente" which, as proposed, existed between East and West from the 1950s to the 1980s as a rather peaceful frame-work for the final stages of the divisions between the Western and Eastern rivals (Niedhart 2017). Literary scholar Eva Eglāja-Kristsone, whose monograph *Iron Cutters. Cultural Contacts between Soviet Latvian and Latvian Exile Writers* (2013) is the most comprehensive study on the disputed connections between Latvian writers on either side of the Iron Curtain, also claims that, among Latvians, détente lingered, since the cultural relationships between the two sides had become more personal and reciprocal (Eglāja-Kristsone 2013: 332).

The Cold War shaped the folklore studies on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and a divide was growing between them. During this period, there were noticeable changes in academic trends, and with the passage of time, we can legitimately ask questions about the extent to which scientific independence was maintained in the face of Cold War dynamics and the overarching influence of each country's unique geopolitical position. The case of Finnish folkloristics, through the lens of Finlandization, has been studied by Eija Stark (2021). She showed that, at this time, folklorists' international contacts were approached with great caution reflecting Finland's official policy of neutrality in the Cold War. The Cold War-influenced and contextualized attitudes towards the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian folklorists and ethnologists in exile in Sweden were studied by Barbro Klein. She observed that these scholars from the other side of the Baltic Sea were viewed with suspicion and were never fully integrated into the Swedish society: "During the Cold War, it was a given that exile scholars from the Baltic countries were not a part of the Nordic world, even though they lived in Sweden and were Swedish citizens" (Klein 2017: 101).

For the last 10 years, the Commission for Scientific Research of the KGB of the Latvian SSR (*LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas zinātniskās izpētes komisija*) has been systematically researching sources produced by the KGB and its substructures. The Commission's studies have covered different thematic axes, covering also topics related to the Committee for Cultural Relations and other KGB subsidiary

bodies (Jarinovska 2016; Jarinovska et al. 2017). While cultural relations in the history of Latvian literature are now relatively well explored – thanks largely to Eglāja-Kristsone's research – and some research has also been done in the history of art (Astahovska 2019), the history of Latvian folkloristics has yet to address contacts across the Iron Curtain. However, as the following sections will show, the conditions and limitations imposed by the undemocratic regime represented by the USSR remained consistent.

If we adopt the figurative term "iron cutters" proposed by Eglāja-Kristsone, we must acknowledge that there were indeed such people who saw and seized opportunities to cross the Iron Curtain in Latvian folkloristics too. Although attempts to bridge the divide were strictly limited, they did occur. Individual motivations varied in each case, however, with the Iron Curtain slightly ajar, the possibility of visiting the long-unseen Motherland or, to the other party concerned, taking a look at any of the capitalist countries, otherwise closed to Soviet citizens, was tempting enough. The Cold War had reduced communication between folklorists in the West and those in the Latvian SSR to a minimum: these are just a few persons and a couple of episodes for which we have archival and oral evidence. However, it is worth taking a closer look at them in order to get a better understanding of the broader disciplinary history of that time.

Sources of the Study

The main sources for this research are life story interviews with witnesses and individuals involved in efforts to bring Western and Soviet folklorists closer. The interviews are relatively recent, conducted between 2015 and 2025. With the distance of time, the informants have been able to reflect on personal and disciplinary history issues that might have been concealed or self-censored, especially under the non-democratic Soviet regime. A total of 19 interviews have been explored through thematic analysis. The life story recordings are represented by two collections of the Archives of Latvian Folklore, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia: Interviews of The Archives of Latvian Folklore – LFK [2250], and Folklore Movement Collections: Interviews with participants of the folklore movement – LFK Fkk [1].

Through careful listening to the interview recordings and close reading of their transcripts, the following themes were identified: interactions between Western and Latvian SSR scholars; communication between the exile community and the people of occupied Latvia; the presence of State Security Committee agents; propaganda efforts; attitudes towards communism or its counterpart, capitalism; and the exchange of literature across the Iron Curtain.

Together with her fellow researchers, the author of this article has conducted several of the interviews analyzed in this article. Topics concerning the occupation period in Latvia and the informant's adaptation to Cold War conditions, regardless of which side of the Iron Curtain they were on, were often difficult for them to articulate. Although several decades have passed since the collapse of the USSR, a noticeable caution in articulating personal memories was evident in many conversations. Common among the informants was the uneasiness of these memories and a perceptible atmosphere of fear and mistrust, shaped by being in the KGB surveillance area. Western Latvians vividly remembered the condemnation they faced from strict and uncompromising groups of exiles, typically the older generation, when visiting the Latvian SSR. Folklorists who remained in Latvia were either KGB-monitored and even repressed or, in contrast, ideologically adapted and supported by official authorities. The latter group, now that Latvia had regained its independence, has been reluctant to highlight their relatively privileged status in the context of Soviet ideology. The relationship of intellectuals to the memory of the past regime and collaboration is uneasy throughout East Central Europe, fluctuating between a willingness to reveal the full truth and more lenient approaches (Zake 2017: 63–64).

To examine the facts mentioned in the interviews from the point of view of KGB informants, the DELTA database of State Security Committee documents at the Latvian State Archives was consulted. Printed in limited copies, documentary evidence of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences was used as additional historical sources. The Institute's small-circulation in-house journal *Vārds un Darbs* (Word and Work), which provides a valuable insight into the formal and informal working life of Latvian folklorists under socialism (see Grīnvalde 2021), was analyzed alongside other press publications of the time, both from the Latvian SSR and exile communities. Printed media, together with radio and television, played a crucial role in disseminating ideas on both sides of the Iron Curtain throughout the 1980s (see Bastiansen et al. 2019).

Being Watched   Folklore researchers at the Folklore Department of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences belonged to the Soviet intelligentsia. Under Brezhnev's rule in the late socialist period, intellectuals were subject to direct Party control. Political loyalty was monitored, and political criteria heavily influenced their careers. Brezhnev's policy envisaged inclusion of leading intellectuals in the Communist Party as well as involvement in direct cooperation with the State Security Committee, the KGB.[2]

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2   An acronym from Russian *Komitet gosudarstvennoj bezopasnosti.*

There was also pressure for their active participation in spreading Soviet ideology and investing in ideological education of academics (Shlapentokh 1990: 173–180). The State Security Committee in the Latvian SSR operated under the same model as in other Soviet republics, subordinated to the centralized KGB organization in Moscow and controlled by the Communist Party (see Knight 2021).

The Institute, like any research institution in the Soviet Union, was an implementer of centralized ideological directives from Moscow. This included structural arrangements within the institution, adherence to ideology at the level of planning time, and, to some extent, methods of work. The Institute's management oversaw the ideological upbringing of the staff, the dissemination of the Communist Party messages and ethos, and the organization of socialist festivals and customs in the workplace (Grīnvalde 2021: 43–47; cf. Karlsone, Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2021: 61–62).

For Latvian folklorists, the repressive nature of Soviet regime – which included hostile surveillance of individuals, denunciations, tests of ideological suitability, criticism of "bourgeois scholarship", public self-criticism, and other rituals of power – was already present in their institutional history during Stalin's totalitarian rule after the Second World War (Treija 2019). In the following decades, representatives of Soviet ideology were less harsh and more refined, yet their disfavor toward folklorists who were not entirely loyal to the ideology still resulted in individual acts of persecution.

For example, in the early 1970s, after unsanctioned, i.e. not coordinated with the Party, exploration and celebration of folk traditions such as the summer and winter solstices and traditional dances, Beatrise Reidzāne (b. 1942), Harijs Sūna (1923–1999), and Māra Vīksna (b. 1949) experienced KGB raids at their homes in search of banned literature: so-called *samizdat*[3], exile publications, interwar-period books, and publications by Western authors. In Reidzāne's case, it resulted in her resignation from the Folklore Sector (until 1979). Only the fact that she was pregnant at the time allowed her to stay at the Institute, reassigned to the Dictionaries Sector. She was also discouraged from attending academic events, such as the 3rd All-Union Conference of Baltists in Vilnius in 1975, where she could potentially come into contact with Western academics and intellectuals who had emigrated from the Baltic States (interview, Reidzāne 2019; interview, Reidzāne 2022).

The musicologist Vilis Bendorfs, in turn, was summoned to the KGB's "Corner House"[4] for questioning about his activities in the folklore movement, his

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3   *Samizdat* (Russian *sam* 'self' + *izdatelstvo* 'publishing') was illegal literature secretly circulated in the Soviet Union, usually provided by dissidents in few typewritten copies.

4   The 'Corner House' (*Stūra māja*) in Riga at 61 Brīvības Street was the headquarters of the KGB.

involvement in "national singing" with his ensemble *Sendziesma*, and also regarding the ensemble *Skandinieki* (interview, Bendorfs 2019). Sometimes KGB agents would come to the Folklore Department posing as regular visitors or readers of archival sources, and in friendly conversations tried to uncover anti-Soviet activities: "For example, he asked: 'Where do you read exile literature? Where do you get exile books?'" (interview, Vīksna 2019). In numerous interviews (Darbiniece 2016; Vīksna 2019; Melne 2019; Olupe 2021; Rožkalne 2021; Reidzāne 2019), there is evidence that people felt that they were being observed and believed that the KGB had a presence in the Academy of Sciences building, where the Institute was located. It had its own working premises, the so-called Second Department. Among folklorists, there were always ambiguous suspicions and uneasy speculation: who among us is the informer cooperating with the KGB?

These conditions in the Folklore Department, as well as in institutions and working environments throughout occupied Latvia, created an Orwellian atmosphere – marked by caution, the moderation of dissenting opinions, and a persistent sensation that BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU. Any travel abroad – even within the USSR republics and socialist bloc countries, but even more so to the West – as well as the admission of foreign academic visitors to the Institute of Language and Literature, could only take place with the ideological approval and consent of the supervising bodies.

It Is Perilous to Look West

Contacts with foreigners, whether through postal correspondence with relatives, the circulation of books not authorized by the ideological regime of the USSR, or listening to Radio Free Europe, the 'flagship of the Western effort' in the international context of Cold War broadcasting (Urban 1997: ix) – were all activities that could potentially lead to criminal proceedings. Any attempt to deviate from the ideologically defined path was always accompanied by suspicion on the part of the supervising authorities. The condemnation of an individual who broke the ban on unauthorized Western information – rarely dismissed by the State Security Committee as merely a personal matter – served as a clear warning to any potential risk-taker that such actions could have serious repercussions, potentially affecting family members, friends, colleagues, and one's personal career.

Unsanctioned communication with the West – particularly with Latvians in exile – was grounds for incriminating a person as guilty of anti-Soviet initiatives. References to the constant surveillance of the State Security Committee, sometimes resulting in "invitations to negotiate", are reflected in recent interviews with

both academics and members of the folklore movement, and other representatives of intelligentsia. The most thoroughly documented case among persons involved in the cultural sector seems to be the case of Valdis Muktupāvels (b. 1958), a key figure in the folklore movement and a musicologist. Starting from 1984, the KGB repeatedly carried out operational actions against Muktupāvels; he was tracked, and his correspondence was monitored. Several recruited KGB agents closely monitored his daily activities, provoked him, created compromising situations and later reported to their KGB superiors. In addition to cultivating nationalism, his transgressions against the Soviet regime included contacts with representatives of Western society, including frequent meetings in Riga during their visits (interview, Muktupāvels 2024). Regarding Muktupāvels, there is a considerable collection of documents from 1984–1987 prepared by KGB agents under the aliases 'Ernests', 'Inga', and 'Lapsa' (DELTA 302792, 308727, 309080, 310825, 310931, 310994, 310996–311003, 31005–31007, 311014).

In the 1980s, however, the KGB's efforts to maintain full control over interactions between Latvians from the West and those in occupied Latvia were often unsuccessful – at least that is how they are revealed in interviews. For example, musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš (b. 1934) who kept mail contacts with some foreigners was unsuccessfully pressured to provide information about Latvian exiles to the KGB (interview, Klotiņš 2022b).[5] Another example of how KGB tactics had become all too familiar and therefore more easily circumvented comes from 1985, when folklore revivalist Ilga Reizniece (b. 1956) met Latvian-Canadian scholar, folk song researcher Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (b. 1937) for the first time at Hotel *Latvia*. During their meeting, others present subtly gestured to Reizniece not to talk too much, as the hotel was known to be equipped with listening devices (interview, Reizniece 2022).

Nonetheless, the KGB was aware that, among intelligentsia, it was a matter of interest to get to know the capitalist part of the world. Therefore, this longing of the Soviet individual for countries beyond the Iron Curtain was exploited in the realm of cultural relations.

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5   When interviewed, Arnolds Klotiņš remembered a visit from a KGB agent to Latvian SSR Composers' Union, where Klotiņš was serving as secretary at the time: "He started talking to me in all sorts of ways: 'We are having difficulty finding out anything, we can't find out where the youth congress meeting will take place. We know that you correspond with people abroad, so tell us when the congress will take place.' I said that I would not provide any information without knowing how it would be used, but he kept pushing: 'Maybe give us a call…'" (interview, Klotiņš 2022b).

Travelling Within Restrictions   During the Cold War, the Soviet Union, including occupied Latvia, was largely closed off from the rest of the world. Both academic and private trips, even to other Soviet Socialist Republics, required official approval and was not available to every folklore researcher. Moscow and Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) were the main centers of colonial power, and Latvian folklorists working on their dissertations frequently travelled there. Other USSR cities visited by researchers from the Folklore Department of the Institute of Language and Literature as part of academic missions included Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod), Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg), Kazan, Kuybyshev (now Samara), Ulyanovsk and Suzdal in the Russian SFSR; Kyiv and Chernivtsi in the Ukrainian SSR; Minsk in the Belarusian SSR; Kishinev (now Chișinău) in the Moldavian SSR; Tbilisi in the Georgian SSR; Grozny in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR; Alma-Ata (now Almaty) in the Kazakh SSR; Dushanbe in the Tajik SSR; and Võru in the Estonian SSR.

However, closer contacts, including regular mail correspondence, were maintained with colleagues from neighboring republics, such as Lithuanian folklorists in Vilnius and Estonian researchers in Tartu and Tallinn. Some members of the Folklore Department also participated in conferences held in other Soviet republics; they travelled to study in libraries and archives, to meet with other Soviet folklorists, and to discuss upcoming dissertations and the like. As the travel descriptions in the magazine *Vārds un Darbs* show, they also took the opportunity to go on tourist trips as far as they were allowed within the socialist bloc (Grīnvalde 2021: 51–52).

Likewise, to be published outside the USSR and its lingua franca, Russian, was a rarity. Folklorist Ojārs Ambainis (1926–1995) had one such opportunity in the face of constraints: in 1977, his collection of Latvian folklore *Latvian Fairy Tales* (*Lettische Volksmärchen*) was published in German. The book was released by *Akademie-Verlag* in Berlin, German Democratic Republic, as part of a series of books featuring selections of folk tales from different peoples of the USSR republics. Ambainis' selection was reprinted several times. In 1978, he was fortunate to be included in the USSR delegation to East Germany and travelled via Moscow and Berlin to Rostock, where he participated in a colloquium dedicated to Johann Gottfried Herder (Ambainis 1978).

Travel to the capitalist countries of the West was a privilege granted only to a small number of USSR citizens. This exclusive and tempting opportunity was offered to selected candidates by the Committees for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad, which were units of the State Security Committee of the Soviet Union. In the Latvian SSR, such a committee was already functioning in 1955 (before its formal establishment in 1964) "to the objectives set by the KGB and under its close

supervision" (Eglāja-Kristsone 2006: 90). Located in the center at Gorky Street 11a[6], the Committee brought together leading writers, artists, filmmakers, scientists and other members of the intelligentsia for focused collaboration. The Committee's declared tasks included promoting the cultural achievements of the Latvian SSR to Latvians who had fled to the West during the Second World War and were living in different countries. However, the real aim of the Committee, operating in the Cold War environment, was to destabilize the Western world (Eglāja-Kristsone 2006: 83).

The Committee did both organize visits of Soviet intellectuals to the West and gave exiles the chance to visit Riga. In order to reach out to Latvians abroad and to cover up the role of the KGB, the Committee operated under the names of various sub-organizations. These included cultural relations organizations. Cultural societies were set up for cooperation between the USSR and target countries in the West: Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Italy, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal, Algeria, and several Latin American countries (see: *Latvijas un ārzemju kultūras sakaru biedrība*).

Imants Lešinskis (1931–1985)[7] who managed the Latvian SSR Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad from 1970–1976, described the mightiness of the organization, using a biblical allusion – a double-edged sword:[8] "To the great delight of the KGB, 'cultural relations' are a double-edged sword: by undermining the political activity of the exile community, they also contribute to the moral decline of the Latvian intelligentsia in their homeland" (Lešinskis 1985: 19).

That was during his time in office, when the focus on Latvian youth in exile and scholarly contacts was increased. The exchange of books, periodicals and sound recordings across both sides of the Iron Curtain was organized.[9] For the representatives of the Latvian exile community, the true intentions and the leadership role of the KGB in these cooperation activities were concealed by all possible means. For example, Western exiled scholars were formally invited to visit Riga by the Latvian

6   Today, Krišjānis Valdemārs' Street 11a is the building of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia.

7   Imants Lešinskis was a KGB agent and a double agent for the Central Intelligence Agency. After defecting from the Soviet Union to the United States, he openly exposed the KGB's methods and disclosed his own activities to the Latvian exile community.

8   "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebr. 4: 12).

9   Exile publications never reached the general public in the Latvian SSR. They were primarily collected and used for the purposes of the KGB operations.

SSR Academy of Sciences, although de facto invitations were prepared by its International Department run by KGB people (Lešinskis 1985: 27).

Similarly, young exiles who visited Latvia over several summers beginning in 1976 to take part in summer courses in which they were taught Latvian language, folklore and folk dances by local experts, according to Lešinskis, did not even realize that they had been under active KGB surveillance throughout these courses. Listening devices were reportedly used on youngsters in their accommodations in Jūrmala (Lešinskis 1985: 25–26).[10] The two-week summer course gathered lecturers who were experts in various fields of humanities, among them folklorists Elza Kokare (1920–2003) and Alma Ancelāne (1910–1991), musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš, linguist Aina Blinkena (1929–2017) (L. R. 1980).

In Latvian exile communities, the cultural relations initiated by the Soviets were generally treated with hostility and suspicion. Individuals involved in these activities were often criticized for collaborating with the communists, submitting to their propaganda, and thus legitimizing the occupation of Latvia (Eglāja-Kristsone 2013: 332; Krūmiņa 2020/2021: 63). The rhetoric at exile events and in the press was often very sharp: "A worm of cultural relations is chewing the apple of exile" (M. D. 1981); "The term 'cultural relations' was invented by the KGB in Moscow to cover their subversive activities." (A. R. 1980); "Isn't it finally time to break away from those who, with bent backs, hat in one hand and bouquet of flowers in the other, humbly greet and accompany the 'cultural' orderlies sent from Riga by the KGB?" (F. L. 1982). In contrast, official periodicals of the Latvian SSR and especially the KGB-curated propaganda newspaper *Dzimtenes Balss* (Voice of the Homeland), addressed to exiles, presented cultural relations as a mutually necessary, thriving, generous and humane activity (see Lešinskis 1985: 2–3).

Visits to Riga   Two individuals who did not stay only on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, but consistently and purposefully visited the Latvian SSR to promote scientific processes among scholars in occupied Latvia, were computer scientist Imants Freibergs (1934–2026) and psychologist Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (b. 1937).[11]

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10   Testimonies from young exiles who travelled to the Latvian SSR during this period reveal awareness that the summer courses were a means of Soviet propaganda and that the Committee for Cultural Relations had ulterior motives to gather information about the exile community, using secret surveillance among its methods (see: Akerberga 1981: 27).

11   After Latvia regained its independence, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga became active in politics, serving as President of the Republic of Latvia from 1999 to 2007.

In addition to their respective academic fields and responsibilities, they devoted their professional interests to creating the first computerized corpus of Latvian folk songs and to studying folk songs based on technological methods. Based in Montreal, Canada, the Freibergs maintained contacts with Latvians in occupied Riga – efforts that were often quite harshly criticized within the Latvian exile community. Continuing this work required a strong internal position and resilience. Their experiences have been well documented (interview, Freibergs 2015; interview, Freibergs, Vīķe-Freiberga 2023; interview, Freibergs 2023; interview, Vīķe-Freiberga 2023; Cimdiņa 2001: 97–106; Freibergs 2024: 106–137).

As a computer scientist, Imants Freibergs made a major contribution to Latvian folklore studies. Together with his wife, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, he pioneered the digitization of Latvian folklore. The project began in 1966 at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, when they received a grant from the Canadian government to carry out this work. This pioneering step was taken several decades before the digitization of folklore manuscripts in various countries around the world began to take off with the increasing development of information technology.

Imants Freibergs presented a paper on the initial results of the computerization of folk songs at the 1967 Congress of Latvian Scientists in Montreal. A delegation of Soviet Latvian scientists – Jānis Stradiņš (1933–2019), Juris Ekmanis (1941–2016), Emīlija Gudreniece (1920–2004), as well as Vilis Samsons (1920–2011) from the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, were present at this conference. This marked the first contact between the Freibergs couple and scientists from the other side of the Iron Curtain, initiating a long and productive cooperation with representatives of the Latvian SSR.

The Freibergs were willing to host Soviet guests in their home and sought to acquaint themselves and their children not only with interwar Latvian literature, but also with contemporary works being written on the other side of the Iron Curtain. "In the late 1980s, groups of artists from Latvia – poets, singers, actors, folklore groups – started coming to visit us regularly. [..] Those who came found out what life was like in the West – not just from the stories they heard in Soviet Latvia" (Freibergs 2024: 108).

Both Imants Freibergs and Vaira Vīķe-Freibergs received official invitations from the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences to visit Riga on professional visits. Vīķe-Freiberga had already visited Riga individually in 1969, when she presented a research paper to a relatively small audience of Soviet Latvian scholars in the humanities. She later reflected on this meeting and the unfriendly reactions of the local researchers:

In 1969 I came and gave my first paper on charms. To a small, very selective group of members, chosen by the Archives of Folklore [Folklore Sector], at the end of which there was a deafening silence. Because they were all completely dumbfounded by the way I had analyzed these folk song texts, and they didn't know how to react. And now there is the silence of death and the sternness of death. And then comrade Kalniņš, who was the head of the sector, spoke up, he said: 'Oh, I remember my sister, every time she went to milk the cows, she used to recite the proverbs, so that the milk in cow's udder would start to flow.' [..] And then immediately the ice seemed to melt, and others in the audience, in a very gentle way, allowed themselves to make a few comments. But you have to understand that this was a situation where... If I happened to go from one room to another, I had Kārlis Arājs in my company. One of the folklorists or one of the linguists from the Folklore Sector would come towards me, and when he saw me, he would freeze as if in fear and almost look as if he wanted to crawl inside the wall. He sticks to the wall and walks past me as if there were a dragon or a beast coming towards him. Not alone, and for several days I noticed the same reaction. And it was only after Latvia regained its independence that Kārlis Arājs, with whom we became friends, told me that they had all been warned not to come near me, not to talk to me. Because I was a CIA agent and a very dangerous person. And the KGB followed me... (interview, Vīķe-Freiberga 2023).

The atmosphere of fear that prevailed during meetings with exiles was mentioned in an interview with Arnolds Klotiņš: "Do I remember the first or the second occasion of [Vaira Vīķe-] Freiberga's visit? We were all invited upstairs to a bigger room. At the elevator, someone asked me: 'May I come too?' The people were frightened – terribly mute" (interview, Klotiņš 2022a). With lectures in Riga, the Latvian SSR, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga from Canada returned on the occasion of the five-year celebration of Krišjānis Barons' 150th anniversary: in April 1983, when she and her husband Imants Freibergs gave a lecture on folk song research, and in 1985, when she gave a stand-alone lecture on the structure of folk songs on May 22 (Ancītis 1987: 325–326).

Imants Freibergs's first professional visit took place in 1973, when the whole Freibergs family visited their country of origin. In his report to the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Freibergs talked about computerization of songs and its advantages, trying to convince that such work could also be possible in the Latvian SSR, where rich collections of Latvian folklore were preserved. Among the audience were literary scholar Viktors Hausmanis (1931–2023), and folklore researcher Kārlis Arājs (1929–2001), who responded enthusiastically to the idea.

However, serious computerization of folk songs in Riga began in the early 1980s, when Imants Freibergs met physicist Harijs Bondars (1942–2011),[12] who was able to attract human resources for the so-called Riga Song Project. The participants were students from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at the Latvian

12   The archive of Latvian SSR KGB documents reveals his connection with the KGB – he was an agent operating under the code name 'Sandis'.

State University, who worked on the transcription of Krišjānis Barons's *Latvju dainas* (Latvian Folk Songs; 6 volumes, 1894–1915) as part of their study program.

This meticulous and highly specialized work (see Kokina, Rāta 1991: 4) lasted until 1994 and was carefully coordinated by Harijs Bondars. The folklorist Kārlis Arājs advised the IT project in terms of content, and also edited the texts. Imants Freibergs, in his turn, attracted Western funding for the next major phase of the digitization of Latvian folklore: the digital transfer of Krišjānis Barons's Folk Song Cabinet (*Dainu Skapis*). This work was carried out at the Archives of Latvian Folklore during the 1990s and early 2000s and, with the involvement of the entrepreneur Ainars Brūvelis (b. 1965), culminated in the online availability of the collection (see *dainuskapis.lv*). This chain of key events illustrates how engagement in the cultural relations contributed to the digitization of the intangible cultural heritage and the implementation of fundamental projects in Latvian folklore studies.

Another benefit – or added value – of cultural relations in the field of folklore studies was experienced in Latvian Soviet literature: it manifested in thematic collections of Latvian folk songs. Inspired by the Freibergs's project of computerizing folk songs, a series of small books titled *My Folk Song* (*Mana tautasdziesma*) was published, each accompanied by forewords and commentaries by the compilers. The most popular selections in Latvia in the 1980s were those compiled by the renowned poet Imants Ziedonis (1933–2013), who was an active participant in cultural exchange on the Latvian SSR side (Eglāja-Kristsone 2013: 83; Cimdiņa 2001: 108).

Imants Freibergs also visited Riga in 1983 and 1984. In 1984, he gave a presentation titled *Studying Folk Songs with Mathematical Methods* at a symposium on folk song translation held at the Latvian SSR Writers' Union (see Figure 1). The

symposium was part of an international conference *Folk Song and Contemporary Culture*, organized jointly by Andrejs Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences and the Latvian SSR Writers' Union. Another exile participant at the symposium was Latvian-American linguist Valdis Zeps (1932–1996), who delivered a paper titled *Folk Song Metrics and Rhythmics*. Despite the international scope of the conference, the exile guests were kept at a distance from local and other socialist-bloc scientists for ideological security reasons. For example, during a trip to Turaida, the Westerners were placed on a separate bus (interview, Darbiniece 2016). This was likely done for the convenience of KGB surveillance.

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga and Imants Freibergs were among the few exile scholars who actively shared their research interests with academics in Riga during visits made under Soviet occupation. In the 1970s, Riga was also visited by Latvian folklorist Biruta Senkēviča (Senkēviča-Ziemane, 1904–1993), then residing in Canada. A former employee of the Archives of Latvian Folklore and author of several books in the Archives' B series, she had continued her folklore research in exile. However, Senkēviča's visit to the Latvian SSR was motivated by personal family reasons. Moreover, in the exile public sphere, she strongly condemned cultural contacts with persons in the Latvian SSR and criticized travelling to communist-occupied Latvia (Cimdiņa 2001: 101–102).

A frequent visitor to Soviet-occupied Latvia and one of the exiles open to cultural relations with compatriots was philologist Austris Grasis (b. 1942), a lecturer at the University of Bonn in Germany. As he pointed out in a recent interview, he was fully aware from the outset that cultural relations were organized and monitored by the KGB. Despite that, unlike the older generation of exiles, for him – and for many other young people of Latvian origin – it was a strong and conscious choice to get closer to their compatriots in the Latvian SSR (interview, Grasis 2025; cf. Freibergs 2024: 107). Most Latvian exiles who visited the Latvian SSR within the framework of cultural relations were similarly informed, yet maintained a critical perspective that allowed them to distinguish between propaganda and factual claims (Zālīte 1998). Starting with a summer language course in the 1970s organized by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad, Grasis tried to visit Riga often, actively seeking contact and establishing connections with Latvian linguists and folklorists. Grasis visited the Folklore Department at Andrejs Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature, where he was received "kindly, but not with much interest" (interview, Grasis 2022b). The main person he met there was the Head of the Folklore Department, Elza Kokare. However, his first meeting with Jadviga Darbiniece took place in Stockholm in 1985, when she participated in the Eighth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia.

Visits to the Latvian SSR brought Austris Grasis together with folklorist Jānis Rozenbergs (1927–2006) and his wife, ethnographer Velta Rozenberga (1929–1997), who kindly allowed Grasis to visit the Latvian folk costume exhibition at the Latvian State History Museum outside office hours and take as many photographs as he wished. It was 1985 when Grasis was particularly drawn to Latvian folklore and national costumes. "[The photos] which I later travelled all over the world with, with a collection of slides. I was in America, Australia, giving a paper on folk costume" (interview, Grasis 2022a; cf. interview, Grasis 2025). In the following years, Austris Grasis addressed various Latvian communities in their homes, inviting them to get to know better and honor their national costume (Grasis 1987; Zariņš 1987). The cross-border visits of Austris Grasis, as well as his activities in the Western world, were reflected in the KGB monitoring reports (DELTA 304029, 309859, 310139, 312370, 30101).

Latvian SSR Guests in Stockholm

During the second Soviet occupation (1944–1990), only two individuals from the Folklore Department of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences undertook academic trips outside the socialist bloc. Both, as Heads of the Folklore Department,[13] took the opportunity to visit Stockholm as part of cultural contacts: Elza Kokare in 1981 and Jadviga Darbiniece (b. 1936) in 1985. These trips were rewards for their professional work and smooth ideological loyalty.

For Elza Kokare, the long-time Head of the Department, this was her second attempt to cross the Baltic Sea and visit the West. In the early 1970s, she was preparing to give lectures at the University of Helsinki, where she had been invited. Her lecture course, focusing on comparative proverb research, was scheduled for the 1973/1974 academic year. Such an opportunity was very rare for Soviet scholars, and Kokare prepared for the upcoming event with great care, including additional study of German, the foreign language she planned to use for the lectures. However, this remarkable academic work was suspended after the younger generation of the Folklore Department was accused of unsanctioned and nationalist activities (see the subchapter *Being Watched*), as well as for having direct contact with Lithuanian folklorists and members of the Lithuanian folklore movement. Later, one of them, Beatrise Reidzāne, ironically commented on the repressive nature of ideological monitors:

13   Elza Kokare served as Head of the Folklore Department (Sector) for over 30 years (1953–1985). She was succeeded by Jadviga Darbiniece, who held the position from 1985 to 1993.

> Research itself and the management of research work is only one of the duties of a Soviet leader; there is another duty – the education of cadres, especially young cadres, to become true Soviet people, internationalists, in the constant struggle against the manifestations of nationalism, which are especially dangerous in such an ideologically important place as the study of folklore (Reidzāne 2011: 133).

After being denied the opportunity to go to Helsinki, several years later Elza Kokare was given another chance to travel as a representative of the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences – this time to Sweden. In 1981, she participated in the Sixth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia, held from June 5 to 8 in Stockholm. The conference was sponsored by the Baltic Scientific Institute in Scandinavia, in cooperation with the University of Stockholm and the Royal Academy of Music. Elza Kokare's paper, *Das Problem der Genese internationaler Sprichwörter in der lettischen Folklore* (The Problem of the Genesis of International Proverbs in Latvian Folklore), was included in the second Plenary Session, chaired by Baiba Kangere (b. 1942, Baltic Scientific Institute) and Austris Grasis (University of Bonn). Another representative supported by Soviet cultural relations who presented at the same Plenary Session was poet Māris Čaklais (1914–2013), who, on behalf of the Latvian SSR Writers' Union, gave a speech on the newest Latvian poetry (Sixth Conference 1981: 396). The conference marked the 10th anniversary of the Baltic Scientific Institute and was well attended, bringing together 120 scientists from 18 countries. Although both Kokare's and Čaklais's papers were recognized as interesting by the exile press, the conference itself was seen as controversial. The debate revolved around whether, and to what extent, the KGB was taking part in organizing the event by delegating presenters from the occupied Baltic countries – that is, how apolitical and ideologically independent this academic forum actually was (V. 1981).

There is no doubt that Elza Kokare's visit was organized by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad. First, it was in fact the only legal opportunity for scholars to travel abroad under the occupation, and it was granted to a very small group of people selected by the KGB. Second, she was mentioned in the propaganda newspaper *Dzimtenes Balss* among Latvian SSR scientists, artists, actors, filmmakers, writers, and other cultural figures who benefited from opportunities to travel abroad in 1981 (see Baranovskis 1981).

Elza Kokare herself, in her trip report *Some Thoughts on the Stockholm Conference*, noted that her feelings about the visit to Stockholm were contradictory. Although she appreciated the opportunity – which had long been a dream of hers to visit the Nordic countries in person – she felt uneasy about the impending contact with exiled Latvians, or "emigrants", toward whom she had never felt particular interest. Moreover, the forthcoming conference was overshadowed by risks: according to

Kokare, it was expected that Soviet scholars might be targeted for sabotage or pro-test actions led by activist Bruno Kalniņš, including a potential boycott of the confer-ence (Kokare 1981: 16, 18–19). That such protest sentiments, though not manifested, were in the air is also evidenced by poet Čaklais's writing in the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art):

> The 6th Baltic Studies Conference, in which I had the opportunity to participate with the paper *The Glance in the New Latvian Poetry (the Invisible Presence of Folklore)*, was an exchange of honest monologues, the next stage of which could be a dialogue. This stage was perfectly understandable, as it was in line with the Institute's own declared aims, and it was also the first time that scholars from the three Baltic republics took part in a conference of this size (the previous one had been attended by four Estonian representatives). The Baltic Institute itself, as well as Stockholm University and the Royal Academy of Music, were apparently solid enough organizations not to allow politicizing battle-mace wavers to prevail, and the atmosphere at Hässelby Palace was one of professional work for all four days (Čaklais 1985: 15).

Protest culture was highly developed in the Latvian exile community: especially Latvian youth seized any opportunity to draw attention in their home countries or on the international stage to the fact of Latvia's occupation. Unlike other diasporas in Western Europe, Latvian exile was political exile, and political activism aimed at being heard by Western governments was part of the community's agenda. The Soviets, on the other hand, tried by all means to silence the anti-Communist activi-ties of the exiles: from repatriations, to later, more subtly presented efforts to per-suade them to return to Latvia, to recruiting informants within the exile community (Zaļkalne 2018: 11). Exile political activism withstood Soviet propaganda pressure for several decades. Latvian protests took many creative forms:

> Latvianness included politics at all levels: participating in international confer-ences, petitioning statesmen, playing political street theatre, disrupting a Soviet statesman's visit with a piglet, holding a happening with mice, marrying a dissi-dent, painting posters, distributing event programmes with altered content, par-ticipating in joint actions of oppressed peoples, wearing T-shirts with appropriate slogans, allowing themselves to be arrested (Beķere 2018: 12).

Overseas missions organized by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad in 1981 were primarily designed to weaken Latvian national activism in exile. The ethos demonstrated by the Committee to Latvians abroad, under the tension and the threat of exposure was as follows:

> In the face of attempts by the reactionary Latvian emigration to torpedo the efforts of Latvians living abroad to expand contacts and cultural relations with Soviet Latvia, using anti-Soviet fabrications and slandering the Committee for Cultural Relations, concrete work was carried out, to make the achievements of Soviet Latvia, especially in science and culture, even more widely known to

compatriots abroad, by organizing more exhibitions abroad, more presentations by all the most prominent masters of culture and art and outstanding scientists of the republic, and, together with *Intūrists*,[14] diversifying the stay of foreign tourists of Latvian origin in Latvia (Baranovskis 1981: 4).

Thus, researchers and other delegates from the Latvian SSR were not only representatives of their fields at academic or cultural events, but also, by their presence, active Soviet players in the Cold War tensions between the West and the USSR.

Elza Kokare's impressions of the conference were fragmentary, as it was very large and she was unable to attend all the papers of interest. In her summary, Kokare concluded:

> The overall impression is that the level of presentations varied widely – from more or less in-depth treatment of individual problems to informative overviews. However, all are characterized by an avoidance of deliberate aggravation of relations and an attempt to find understanding. I will not, of course, present the content of the papers here. I would only like to mention Austris Grasis' presentation on the study of the Curonian language, which included demonstrations of particular recordings. He promised to bring these recordings and provide them to the linguists at our institute (Kokare 1981: 18).

By "avoidance of deliberate aggravation of relations," Kokare was more likely referring to the culture of academic debate she observed during the conference sessions than to the larger geopolitical picture in which the conference took place.

In her essay, Elza Kokare also shared her impressions of Stockholm itself: the nature, parks, architecture, and various local young people, including street musicians (Kokare 1981: 17). The Latvian SSR visitor expressed the emotion she felt during the social intervals of the conference at the lively interest of foreign Latvians in Latvian language, folklore and music-making: "Are we singing properly? Is this how Latvian ethnographic ensembles sing?"[15] (Kokare 1981: 19).

In 1985, when Latvians on both sides of the Iron Curtain celebrated the 150th anniversary of Krišjānis Barons, the Eighth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia took place in Stockholm on June 7–11. Similar to 1981, the conference was sponsored by the Institute in Scandinavia and the Centre for Baltic Studies at the University of Stockholm, in cooperation with the Royal Academy of Music.

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14   *Intūrists* (Intourist), or *Inturist* (in Russian), was a shareholder company of the Soviet Union. The Riga branch had the difficult task of carrying out political and informational work aimed at convincing the "enemies of socialism" of the success of communism and its advantages (Riekstiņš 2001: 11; cf. Lipša 2017).

15   The enquirers were members of *Mālu ansamblis* (Clay Ensemble), a theatre group from Australia and Stockholm, Sweden, which, alongside theatre, was also dedicated to performing Latvian folk music.

The sections on Baltic folklore, eight in total, were organized by exile Latvian Baiba Kangere from the University of Stockholm. Professor Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga,[16] serving as President of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies at that time, gave the lecture *The Work of Krišjānis Barons and its Significance for Latvian Culture* at the opening session of the conference. The delegation from the Latvian SSR was quite numerous; among the participants were representatives from the Writers' Union (Jānis Peters, Jānis Kalniņš, Saulcerīte Viese, Māra Misiņa, Lilija Dzene), as well as two guests from the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences: Director of the Andrejs Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature, Viktors Hausmanis,[17] and Head of its Folklore Department, Jadviga Darbiniece (see Figure 2). Hausmanis's paper *Die Folklore und Lettische Theater* (Folklore and Latvian Theatre), was

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16   Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was President of the AABS from 1984 to 1986.

17   Viktors Hausmanis served as Director of the Andrejs Upīts's Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences (since 1992, the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia) from 1983 to 1999.

included in the plenary session chaired by Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga and Austris Grasis. Darbiniece, in her turn, presented her paper *Kr. Barons's Heritage and the Academic Edition of 'Latviešu tautasdziesmas'* at the second session of the conference (Eighth Conference 1985: 173–174). The KGB agent "Borisov" had taken notes of both of them and other representatives of the Latvian SSR visiting Stockholm (DELTA 302970).

Jadviga Darbiniece, in a life story interview recorded in 2016 (interview, Darbiniece 2016), recalled her working life at the Folklore Department in the 1970s and 1980s as very beautiful and uplifting. At that time, folklore was of interest to a growing number in the general public, as well as to many creative figures – such as poets Imants Ziedonis and Knuts Skujenieks, composer Raimonds Pauls, filmmaker Andris Slapiņš, and others – who came to the Institute to study folklore recordings for their creative projects.

In this atmosphere of folkloric elation shortly before the Third Awakening or the so-called Singing Revolution (1986–1991), Jadviga Darbiniece travelled to Stockholm to attend the Eighth Conference on Baltic Studies in Scandinavia. She recalled the grandeur with which the anniversary of Krišjānis Barons was celebrated in Stockholm:

> Stockholm University hosted the Krišjānis Barons Jubilee Conference [..] in 1985. And we were all there. All the expats were there, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was already in front. Oh, it was a big anniversary! At the State level! We had lunch in the Golden Hall, we drank champagne. [..] Austris Grasis took us in his car to show us around Stockholm's Old Town. [..] Nobody took us there, but Grasis came in his car, picked us up and took us to have a look (interview, Darbiniece 2016).

The Baltic Studies Conference in 1985 brought Latvians in Sweden, Germany, and other Western countries closer together with those in the Latvian SSR. Participation in the conference in Stockholm gave the Latvian exile linguist and folklore researcher Velta Rūķe-Draviņa (1917–2003) the opportunity to get to know Jadviga Darbiniece. Since 1970, Professor Rūķe-Draviņa had been teaching a special course on Latvian folk songs at Stockholm Evening University. In 1987, Jadviga Darbiniece was invited to give several guest lectures at the university.

While visiting Sweden in 1985, together with Viktors Hausmanis, Darbiniece also met with the exile Latvian playwright Mārtiņš Zīverts (1903–1990). Both Rūķe-Draviņa and Zīverts were among those who had previously travelled to the Latvian SSR. Thanks to such cultural contacts, by the time of the collapse of the USSR, some signs of engagement and familiarity between Latvians in Latvia and Latvians abroad were already visible. However, it was only after 1990, free from ideological oversight and policing, that a more active reunification of the divided nation could begin.

Conclusions This article has examined the nature of scholarly exchanges between Western researchers of Latvian origin and Latvian SSR folklorists during the Cold War, with a particular focus on the 1980s. Despite the geopolitical division symbolized by the Iron Curtain, some cases of cross-border engagement did occur. Based on interviews, archival sources, and published historical evidence, it can be concluded that in the field of folklore studies, no stable international networks of scholarly cooperation existed between the West and the Latvian SSR; however, there were several vivid individual cases. Among the guests from beyond the Iron Curtain were Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, Imants Freibergs, and Austris Grasis, who visited Riga, the capital of the Latvian SSR, on several occasions. Conversely, the Latvian Soviet folklorists who managed to attend the Baltic studies conferences in Stockholm, Sweden – organized by the exile community – were Elza Kokare and Jadviga Darbiniece.

The freedom of Latvian folklorists to travel and exchange academic ideas during the Cold War was, understandably, very limited. Paradoxically, it was the KGB and the Committees for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad – established by the KGB – that facilitated not only short-term academic visits between the separated Latvian worlds of 20th-century history (namely, to Riga and to Stockholm), but also contributed to long-term projects involving both sides, such as the digitization of Latvian folklore.

The issues raised in this article can certainly be explored further. In the author's opinion, each episode of contact between the West and the Latvian SSR mentioned here could be developed individually into a broader analytical narrative.

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Ilga Vālodze Ābelkina

Mg. philol., folklore studies; Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art,
University of Latvia
Mg. philol., folkloristika; Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras
un mākslas institūts
E-mail / e-pasts: ilga.abelkina@lulfmi.lv
ORCID: 0000-0002-4251-6350

International Folklore Festival *Baltica '88*: the Return of Latvian Folk Music from Exile

Starptautiskais folkloras festivāls *Baltica '88*: latviešu tautas mūzikas atgriešanās no trimdas

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
folklore revival,	folkloras kustība,
authenticity,	autentiskums,
resistance,	pretošanās,
migration,	migrācija,
Iron Curtain	dzelzs priekškars

Summary   Since 1987, the International Folklore Festival *Baltica* has united the three Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – and has been studied in the context of 20th-century Baltic folklore and national awakening under Soviet occupation (Bendorfs 2021; Bertran 2023; Šmidchens 1996, 2014). This article continues previous research by focusing on the festival's importance for Western Latvian exile folklore ensembles. In 1988, *Baltica* offered exiled Latvians the first opportunity to perform in Soviet Latvia. This study examines the participation of Latvian exile folklore ensembles in the *Baltica* festival before Latvia regained independence, analyzing period press and participant memories, with emphasis on the folklore ensembles that took part in the 1988 festival – *Kolibri* (USA) and *Vilcējas* (Sweden). The period reveals how Latvian exile communities, formed after the Second World War, maintained and re-established contact with occupied Latvia, influencing folklore revival on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Kopsavilkums   Kopš 1987. gada notiekošais festivāls *Baltica* apvieno visas trīs Baltijas valstis – Lietuvu, Latviju un Igauniju, un līdz šim tas pētīts 20. gadsimta Baltijas folkloras un nacionālās atmodas kontekstā padomju okupācijas apstākļos (Bendorfs 2021; Bertran 2023; Šmidchens 1996, 2014). Šis raksts papildina līdzšinējos pētījumus, akcentējot festivāla *Baltica* nozīmi Rietumu trimdas folkloras ansambļu vidū. 1988. gada festivāls bija pirmā reize padomju okupācijas laikā, kad trimdniekiem bija iespējams muzicēt savā vai savu senču dzimtenē. Rakstā pētīta trimdas latviešu folkloras ansambļu dalība festivālā *Baltica*, pirms Latvijā tika pilnībā atgūta neatkarība, analizējot tā laika presi un folkloras kustības dalībnieku atmiņas un izceļot folkloras ansambļus, kas piedalījās 1988. gada festivālā – *Kolibri* no ASV un *Vilcējas* no Zviedrijas. Aplūkotais vēstures periods atklāj, kā pēc Otrā pasaules kara izveidojušās trimdas latviešu kopienas uzturēja un atjaunoja kontaktus ar okupēto Latviju, ietekmējot folkloras atdzimšanas procesus abpus dzelzs priekškaram.

Introduction   One of the most significant turning points in the Latvian folklore revival of the 20th century was the International Folklore Festival *Baltica*. It became an event that proved the ability of the Baltics to self-organize and established a broader understanding of folklore revival as a process, which was acknowledged by intellectual authorities of the time (Zālīte 1988c; Klotiņš 1989; interview, Stalts 2018). *Baltica* was first organized during the final stage of the Soviet Union's existence. The first festival took place in 1987 in Lithuania and became a yearly tradition rotating among the three Baltic States. *Baltica '88* – the first event in Latvia – was a life-changing experience for both local folklore revivalists and Latvian folk music practitioners in exile in the West, to whom it offered a first-time opportunity to perform in their or their parents' occupied homeland behind the Iron Curtain.

This article touches on the subject of migration – a painful topic in the history of the Republic of Latvia that has reduced the size of the Latvian nation during various historical periods, especially after the Second World War.[1] In the 1940s, significant Latvian communities formed in the Western world as Baltic refugees found permanent homes after fleeing the country during the war and spending years in displaced persons (DP) camps.

While various terms have been used to describe these communities, this article uses the term 'exile' to refer to Latvians abroad prior to 1991, aligning with the view that the exile period ended with the full restoration of Latvia's independence. Researchers such as Maija Krūmiņa (Krūmiņa 2020/2021: 62) also follow this principle. Another option is the term 'diaspora', which is more precise when referring to Latvians abroad after independence, when the exile community transformed into a diaspora, as its members and their descendants could safely return to a democratic state without fear of repression.

The term 'diaspora' also aligns more closely with the Soviet-preferred term 'emigration', which is not favored among Latvians in the West and has often been used by those who believe that only deportations to Siberia qualify as 'exile' (Freimanis 2004: 66). By definition, 'exile' *(trimda* in Latvian) refers to a form of punishment or deportation (Ceplītis 1991: 628; Karulis 2001: 1061), but this article

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1   The estimates of displaced Latvians after the Second World War vary, ranging from 140 000 to 201 000 people, which amounts to up to 10% of Latvia's pre-war population (Haas 2023: 123). To these figures should be added the number of Latvians deported to Siberia under the Soviet regime – approximately 15 400 in 1941 and 42 125 in 1949 (Bleiere 2024, 2025).

specifically focuses on Latvians who fled during the Second World War and later resettled in countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia.

During the Soviet occupation of Latvia, dislocated Latvian communities came together to preserve their culture and provide a Latvian environment and education for future generations. The community activities of exiled Latvians in the West have been noted and researched by various scholars across different fields – musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš (Klotiņš 2022), literary scholar Eva Eglāja-Kristsone (Eglāja-Kristone 2016), literary scholar Inguna Daukste-Silasproģe (Daukste-Silasproģe 2002, 2007, 2014, 2019, 2023), folklorist Inta Gale-Carpenter (Gale-Carpenter 1996, 2007, 2016), among others, covering a wide range of topics, from questions of ethnic identity to analyses of specific musical traditions.

This paper contributes to the field by comparing different aspects of the folklore revival in Soviet-occupied Latvia and in democratic countries. The article aims to give a deeper insight into the *Baltica* festival by assessing its significance among Latvian folklore revivalists in Western exile and emphasizing how it fostered unity between folklore ensembles from Latvia and abroad. This is achieved by analyzing the participation of folklore ensembles from the West in *Baltica '88* – *Kolibri* from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, and *Vilcējas* from Stockholm, Sweden. Both participant impressions and opinions, as well as reflections in the festival – published in both the Latvian SSR and the Latvian exile press – have been reviewed to draw conclusions about how the participation of Western Latvian groups and the festival were represented on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Other sources for this research include the festival's printed materials such as booklets, interviews, and video documentation that reflect *Baltica '88* and reveal the Western participants' repertoire, performance, and impressions of visiting Latvia.

Between Authenticity and Arrangements: Folklore Revival in Occupied Latvia and the Western Exile

As in other parts of Europe, the Baltic States experienced a revival of folklore in the second half of the 20th century. While activities that meet the definition of folklore revitalization[2] had already taken place in Latvia several decades earlier (Bendorfs 2021: 219–220), from the 1970s onward, it was not only a rebirth of traditional culture but the

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2   *Revitalization* is a way of cultural preservation where the link with the original context of the tradition has been lost, and the term was first offered by the American-Canadian anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace (Wallace 1956).

emergence of a broader movement. This movement was driven by a shared desire to discard the layer of Soviet folklore in music and broader Soviet political policies (Boiko 2001: 114).

To differentiate between these two worlds, the search for authenticity became a key criterion for folklore revivalists (Weaver et al. 2023: 63). A line was drawn between authentic folklore and arranged folk music. Over time, when referring to their research and revival activities, folklore practitioners began using the term *folkloras kustība* (folklore movement). Guntis Šmidchens has conducted a remarkable study on this topic across the three Baltic States (Šmidchens 2014, 2017), while Valdis Muktupāvels's research highlights specific approaches to the search for authenticity in Latvia (Muktupāvels 2011: 76–87).

The folklore policy in Soviet Latvia involved the activity of staged folklore ensembles and events that represented the official ideology. Every event's scenario had to be reviewed and approved by the authorities and was required to contain a certain dose of propaganda. The unique features of local culture were dissolved in the vast Soviet glorification machine. Despite – or perhaps as a direct result of – these circumstances, the popularity of revitalizing traditional culture through other means grew. More and more folklore ensembles were formed each year, diversifying the folklore repertoire and "making heritage a part of individual life" (Muktupāvels 2011: 76).

In the Baltic States, this tendency developed into a movement against Soviet artistic folk aesthetics, which Latvian folklorists and revivalists describe as mendacious, artificial, manipulated, staged, exquisitely artistic, folkish, pseudo and falsified (Boiko 2001: 115; Klotiņš 1989: 48; Muktupāvels 2007: 93, 2011: 73; interview, Rancāne 2018; interview, Reizniece 2018).

Latvian ethnomusicologist Vilis Bendorfs emphasizes events that encouraged people to learn unarranged folk songs as they were originally sung (Bendorfs 2021: 219–222). Anda Ābele, who had played the *concert-kokle* (a modernized Soviet version of the traditional Latvian box zither *kokle*) for many years, felt the urge in the 1980s to switch her focus to the authentic musical tradition and took every opportunity to obtain sheet music or folk song texts in their raw, unarranged form (interview, Ābele 2020). Helmī Stalte, the leader of one of the key ensembles, *Skandinieki*, has expressed that it is precisely the "raw" folk songs that carry the power of the nation:

> We wanted to get closer to that pure source because everything was so ornamented and arranged. We understood that if we at least slowly get closer to the pure source, it will give the song a whole other power. It will return that power, which we could then give back to everybody in all the regions (interview, Stalte 2022).

A similar but different division between authentic and arranged traditional music existed in the Latvian communities of Western exile. Of course, there was no

Soviet layer in their musical landscape, but folk music arrangements for choirs, professional instrumental ensembles, and staged folk dancing were much more popular than seeking authenticity in the previously described ways. Several aspects can be identified as reasons for this. Firstly, a remarkable number of artists fled Latvia in the 1940s during the Second World War, and many among them were educated musicians – singers, composers, choir conductors, and other professionals. Longing for their homeland already in the DP camps, they continued making music, increasing through choir singing – a format that allowed more people to sing together (Klotiņš 2022: 395).

Traditional music-making could be appreciated but did not necessarily encourage professional musicians to practice it: "Folk music, sung in a traditional style, is beautiful, and has a unique amount of energy and power, it's impressive. This style of singing does not, however, fit with the concept of 'beauty' for Western classical music" (interview, Aldiņš 2025). This appreciative view, based on a particular aesthetic, is confirmed by Klotiņš's study, which reveals the high popularity of folk song arrangements in exile – both in choir and solo compositions (Klotiņš 2022: 401–402).

Additionally, despite the significant number of Latvians who escaped, at least during the first period of exile (in the DP camps), there was a limited amount of traditional music sources. When fleeing, along with practically usable and valuable things, people took with them some folklore publications, but most of them were mailed or brought to the West later, after Stalin's death, when things changed and the Soviet Union became interested in establishing contacts with the so-called "emigrated citizens of the USSR" (Eglāja-Kristsone 2016: 34–35). In 1955, the Soviets formed the Committee for the Return to the Homeland to promote repatriation, and when this did not prove fruitful, the Committee shifted its focus to popularizing a positive impression of culture in the USSR, recruiting promoters of Soviet ideology in exile, encouraging visits of cultural workers in both directions, and other agendas (Eglāja-Kristsone 2016: 34–58). This included the distribution of books and press published in Soviet Latvia.

However, publications that entered exile through the Iron Curtain had to pass through censorship and contain content appropriate to the Soviet regime. Edgars Dunsdorfs (1904–2002), one of the most important researchers and archivists of Latvian culture in exile, would mark such editions with a paper note that said "read with criticism" (interview, Liepiņa 2022). This example illustrates that the exiles did not trust the Soviet authorities, but the Committee's persistent efforts sometimes succeeded, with some exiled artists visiting their homeland with the Committee's support.

By most Latvian exile organizations, such actions were considered dangerous, unacceptable, and a potential for "communism to stick to people" (interview,

Brēmanis 2022; interview, Ozoliņš 2022), and over time this belief split families, friends, and communities, creating a divide between people on both personal and organizational levels (Eglāja-Kristsone 2016: 57).

Despite such a position and the difficult circumstances for mailing or bringing books out of occupied Latvia, over time, some managed to receive valuable sources and new publications from friends or relatives who remained behind the Iron Curtain. Most often, the sources of traditional music that became available in exile were folk music editions by the notable folklorists and composers Andrejs Jurjāns (1856–1922)[3], Emilis Melngailis (1874–1954)[4], and Jēkabs Vītoliņš (1898–1977).[5]

One of the people creatively bypassing the restrictions was Latvian linguist and folklorist Austris Grasis, who lived and worked in several places in Europe and strengthened the Western Latvian communities during the occupation period. Grasis was one of the first, if not the very first, educators who changed the way Latvian folk music was learned and performed in exile. He focused on an approach based on traditional music-making, traveling to different Western Latvian centers on several continents, giving lessons in summer schools and Latvian camps *3×3*, and calling it "the white voice" (in Latvian *baltā balss*):

> In *3x3*, I was the one who started to teach singing. In Catskills [Latvian summer camp base in Upstate New York's Catskill Mountains – I.V.Ā.], we stood from the audience on the other side of the lake and sang. I taught the white voice [..] not *bel canto,* the beautiful singing but as in folklore, from the diaphragm (interview, Grasis 2024).

He believed that it was necessary to return to traditional singing styles, even if it was not a popular opinion at the time. He also made contacts with folklore revivalists in Latvia. A significant source of information for him was the folklore ensemble *Skandinieki*, led by Helmī and Dainis Stalts – two very influential folklore revivalists who played a pivotal role in fostering and sustaining a communication network both within Latvia and among the Latvians in the West. For decades, the Stalts couple bravely stood up to the marginalization of ethnic Latvian and Livonian culture, Russification, and staged and stylized folklore, becoming one of the symbols of the folklore movement in Latvia.

In the late 1980s, Austris Grasis was in close communication with the Stalts family and spent the final pre-independence period during *Baltica '91* singing in

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3   Jurjāns, Andrejs (1894–1926). *Latvju tautas mūzikas materiāli.* Volumes 1–6, Rīga: A. Grothuss.

4   Melngailis, Emilis (1951–1953). *Latviešu muzikas folkloras materiāli.* Volumes 1–3, Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība.

5   Vītoliņš, Jēkabs (1958–1986). *Latviešu tautas mūzika.* Volume 1, Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība; Volumes 2–5, Rīga: Zinātne.

Skandinieki. Such friendships were monitored, as both Grasis and the Stalts were clearly not the supporters of the regime, but somehow *Skandinieki* managed to work fruitfully. Especially after *Baltica '88*, they expressed their anti-Soviet views in the press and, when explaining the meaning of the ensemble's title, compared the Soviets as being in opposition to them:

> *Skandinieki* – those who resonate themselves, as it is said in an ancient book. And right next to it, it is mentioned that there are also such as the "unresonant." Seen through the eyes of the present day, one could say that the occupying power and its servants in our Latvia sought to turn the entire nation into such "unresonant" beings – powerless and without will (Stalte, Stalts 1989: 82).

Not once did the ensemble visit exiled Latvians and participate in significant events in the West, such as the conference of the Latvian center *Abrene* in France in 1989, which was organized by Austris Grasis and was dedicated to defining the best way for Latvia to regain its independence (Drunka 2021), or their own concert tour in North America in the 1990 (Sīmane-Laimiņa 2016: 1). During *Baltica '88*, the ensemble strengthened their ties with exiled Latvians in ways such as taking the musicians of *Kolibri* under their wing (interview, Aldiņš 2025) or accepting an American Latvian, Andris Rūtiņš, into their ensemble just weeks before the festival:

> In Munster, I learned songs from *Skandinieki* recordings, and in 1988, I celebrated *Jāņi* [Latvian Midsummer celebration – I.V.Ā.] in Latvia with my cousin. There was one group of people singing in folk costumes and another group standing and listening. I thought that *Jāņi* is not some concert and sang along. After the concert we started to talk, they were a part of *Skandinieki* and invited me to their rehearsal. I went, and everything happened! I don't quite remember that talk but it was something like: "Listen, Andris, you already know our songs, and you seem so enthusiastic about them. We will have an event in a few weeks, *Baltica*. Wouldn't you like to be part of it?" (interview, Rūtiņš 2024).

Before the 1990s, several albums of Latvian traditional music were released in Western Europe and North America, featuring interpretations of traditional tunes collected or compiled by folklorists such as Jurjāns, Melngailis, and Vītoliņš. Notable examples include the vinyl *The Latvian Folk Ensemble of New York* (Monitor Records, 1960), *Kolibri* (self-released, 1979), and the *Atskan* album by the *Atbalss* ensemble (Sutton Sound, 1982). These three records contain thematically diverse, arranged traditional vocal and instrumental music, revealing the authors' interpretations of traditional music.

One of the instrumental melodies, *Garais dancis* (The Long Dance), in *The Latvian Folk Ensemble of New York* album is described as follows: "The dance is characterized by one of the primitive melodies of which only a very few have survived in dances as compared to the much more abundant ancient song melodies. The arranger has attempted to imitate the ancient harmony in this treatment" (Šķipsna-Rothrock 1960).

This precisely describes how folk tunes were revitalized at that time in the exile — transformed from written sources into free musical interpretations. In Latvia, folk-lorists and revivalists continued to carry out expeditions, visiting people raised with folklore customs in different regions, thus obtaining new material and knowledge. It was clearly not possible for exiled Latvians to pursue folklore expeditions in Latvia, but some expanded their repertoire by connecting with elders who had also settled outside the occupied territory.

Ensembles such as *Vilcējas* (their artistic leader was Silvija Stroda, an Australian-born Latvian who, among other things, also knew and had played music with Austris Grasis) collected a rather large music collection from first-generation Latvians who fled the country and relocated to Sweden, the USA, and Australia (Lancere 1988b: 7). In 1987, the group released a cassette *Turku pupa* (Turkish Bean; self-released) with songs from various regions of Latvia. The choice of music is unique and not used that much in other recordings of that time.

For example, a large part of the recording consists of lullabies, songs of the Latvian naming ceremony *krustabas*, and shepherd's songs. Part of the recordings creates the illusion that the music is performed outdoors, which is achieved by the echo effect. The melodies have not been arranged, and the cassette's description indicates that folklore collections published in Latvia were used for the album (Akerberga 1995), confirming that sources were available. *Kolibri* also collected music from their predecessors; one example is Tekla Martinsone, a singer of the American Latvian choir *Rota*, who originally came from Latgale, a Latvian region with a distinc-tive vocal tradition and dialect. Her repertoire is used in compositions such as *Kas tur spīd* (What Shines There) and the *Rota* song from Zvirgzdiene, the latter of which is included on their debut album *Kolibri* and in the retrospective CD *Kolibri atskatās / Kolibri Reminisces* (Radio Latvia, 2009).

Pēteris Aldiņš, one of the artistic directors of the *Kolibri* ensemble, contrary to Austris Grasis's assumption about the tendency to arrange folk music due to limited access to original sources (interview, Grasis 2024), had access to a wide range of folklore publications, and he expands on this issue by highlighting several aspects that were crucial in his creative process:

> There were certain things that I had a comfortable feeling doing but many things seemed better left to the Latvians in Latvia. Maybe this intuition came from my father, a feeling about what is right, what is wrong and where I would be very mistaken. We grew up in a different cultural setting and to me it felt false and would have been difficult for us to change our singing style. At least me and my brother felt a clear core knowledge, or sense, of what was truly Latvian (interview, Aldiņš 2025).

Overall, it can be summarized that the revival of Latvian folklore in the 20th cen-tury unfolded differently within Latvia and among Latvian exiles. The process in

occupied Latvia was characterized by attempts to achieve greater authenticity and to shed layers of Soviet ideology, and learn about the traditional contexts of folk music. On the other hand, Latvians in exile exercised the freedom of cultural expression. Despite Soviet oversight and a partly dismissive stance toward compatriots beyond the Iron Curtain, communication persisted between both sides, and the exchange of folklore sources and experiences contributed to the evolution of the folklore revival in both worlds divided by the Iron Curtain.

The International Folklore Festival *Baltica* in Latvia until the Restoration of Independence

The folklore movement developed and merged with the events of perestroika in all three Baltic States, and in the second half of the 1980s, the idea of a uniting folklore festival was born. Notably, the initiative to create an international folklore festival came from the Soviet authorities (Klotiņš 2008: 113). The Soviet Union, as a member of the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF), whose guiding principle requires all member states to organize festivals, was criticized for only participating in festivals and not organizing any. According to Liāna Ose, Deputy Director of the E. Melngailis's Folk Arts Centre at that time, this was the reason why the *Baltica* festival was established – to fulfill member obligations and represent the Soviet Union in the council (interview, Ose 2024).

Liāna Ose was one of the key people who made the festival possible, and she points out that the person who supported the idea from Moscow and encouraged the Baltics to organize such an event was Bella Malickaja (*Белла Малицкая*) – the CIOFF representative in the Soviet Union, who was introduced to the Baltic Song and Dance Celebration traditions and believed that Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had the potential to create such a festival. Ose also reflects that Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet at that time, was a supporter of the festival among local politicians. He became the chairman of the organizational committee of *Baltica '88*.

Shifting the focus from politicians, Ose emphasizes writers as important figures in the organization of the festival: "Together with Jānis Peters and Māra Zālīte, we fought and made it possible that the festival would happen, and he [Anatolijs Gorbunovs] was the one who said that it would, that we can organize it" (interview, Ose 2024). It was strategically important to win not only the support of politicians. Writers, and especially poets, had great authority, and in the eyes of the nation, they were even seen as the real leaders (Eglāja-Kristsone 2016: 11).

The already mentioned Jānis Peters, a writer and chairman of the board of the Latvian Soviet Writers' Union, in the festival's booklet, between sentences praising the Soviet Union, emphasizes the power of folklore: "Latvians believe in their ancient folklore which has saved the nation from destruction. The folk song [..] has strengthened our people in political and cultural-historical feuds" (Peters 1988: 5).

Māra Zālīte, born into a family of Siberian deportees and a significant Latvian writer who implements folklore motifs in her creative work, wrote the script for the opening concert of *Baltica '88* and emotionally reflected on the festival in one of the most substantial press publications of the time, *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art) (Zālīte 1988b, 1988c). As a member of the Writers' Union, she helped to establish greater recognition of the value of the folklore revival, although it did not come without a considerable amount of struggle:

> The Ministry of Culture took a firm 'old' position and initially did not agree with the stage concepts for the festival's opening, nor with the conceptual line of the script [..]. In parallel, a polemic that reflected the essence of our conflict began in the press – the incompatibility of authentic folklore with pseudo-authentic ostentation, pomposity, and phoniness cultivated over many decades. The contradiction between the real, living, and natural, but underground folk art, and the cosmetic, mannequin surrogate of folklore (Zālīte 1988a: 3).

Baltica '88 gathered 28 local folklore ensembles and almost as many guest ensembles. Four of them were from Estonia, five from Lithuania, two from Sweden, two from the USA, and one each from Belarus, Bulgaria, Finland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, and West Germany. Among the 21 foreign folklore groups, two were Latvian ensembles – the vocal-instrumental group *Kolibri* (USA) and *Vilcējas* (Sweden). The list of participating Latvian folklore ensembles was compiled following an official audition process. This type of review concert for ethnographic and folklore ensembles was organized for the first time in 1982 (Priedīte 1982: 174).

Prior to that, only performances by staged music ensembles were formally evaluated. However, in 1978, with the help of Liāna Ose, who at the time was working in the Ministry of Culture, *Skandinieki* participated in such an event as a vocal ensemble. Later, folklore groups were integrated into this system and evaluated by experts from Melngailis's center and the Folklore Sector of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences (the name then used for what is now the Archives of Latvian Folklore) (Lancere 1988a: 3). Foreign ensembles were invited to take part in *Baltica '88* by the organizers, who reviewed their applications, but a certain role in organizing the participation of the ensembles *Kolibri* and *Vilcējas* was played by Latvian exile organizations such as TILTS.

If one of the dominating ideas of the folklore movement in Latvia was confidence in the power of song against Soviet rule, then it was mirrored in several

activities of the *Baltica '88* festival, including the appearance of all three Baltic national flags in the festival's opening concert.

Although the 1980s in the USSR was a time when barriers – both literal and ideological – began to crash, decisions such as openly displaying the carmine red-white-carmine red flag were still dangerous, and the leaders of the movement could not guarantee that there would be no unpleasant consequences. The thought of the possibility of regaining independence was still very fragile, but the people were determined – they took self-made or, since pre-war times, carefully preserved attributes symbolizing independent Latvia into the Riga Sports Palace, where the opening concert of *Baltica '88* took place on the 13th of July, and bravely walked in (see Figure 1 and 2).

After the concert, flags were carried through the main street of Riga to the Monument of Freedom and further into the Old Town (see Figure 3). While the Soviet press published photos avoiding the appearance of Baltic national symbols, exiled newspapers emphasized the renaissance of these flags with pictures and stories. These events have a lasting footprint in memory to this day: "In those times it was something unbelievable, daring – a feeling like a closed bag is finally opened. Unstoppable" (online comment, Pārupe 2023); "The Sigulda folklore group also had the national flag in 1988. Besides, it was a special one – saved from independence times [..] under a wooden floor in the sauna" (online comment, Skuja 2023). In her reflections on the opening day of the festival, Māra Zālīte wrote: "While scientists still argue, the nation greets these flags. I see more crying faces than laughing ones. These are the sacred tears of joy, these are the tears of hope that our people cry" (Zālīte 1988b: 7). Vilis Bendorfs emphasizes the political significance of these events with a somewhat poignant phrase: "The 1988 festival had more carmine red-white-carmine red flags and tears of happiness than folklore" (Bendorfs 2021: 222), indicating that the experience of political change was more important to many than an attentive revival of traditional music.

Propaganda praising the Soviet regime appeared most frequently in the press at that time, and the festival's official communication – such as booklets, newspapers, and brochures – was no exception. In the booklet of the *Baltica '87* in Lithuania, there is a statement claiming that the political regime had substantially benefited traditional heritage: "Under socialism, national cultures of Soviet republics have flourished. Traditional forms of folklore have been revived" (Baltica 1987: 10). However, in reality, it did the opposite. There was a demand for content that would create a positive impression of the Soviet regime, and the local folklore of occupied nations was often altered or constructed, including the insertion of praise for regime symbols (see Ķencis 2019). In the introductory words, the chairman of the festival's

Figure 1 and 2. Baltic national flags at the opening concert of *Baltica '88*. Personal archive of the *Kolibri* ensemble.

Figure 3. Latvian flags at the Monument of Freedom after the festival opening concert, July 13, 1988.
Photo from the collection of Alfrēds Stinkuls, LFK 2264, 354

organizing committee, Minister of Culture of the Lithuanian SSR Jonas Bielinis, writes that the festival is being held "on the eve of the 70th Anniversary of the Great October Revolution" (Bielinis 1987: 4). It is an excellent example of attempts to misrepresent the motives of cultural activities in a non-democratic environment.

After *Baltica '88*, it was decided that it was necessary to establish an organization to manage the festival more independently. In 1989, folklore societies from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia united and founded the folklore association *Baltica*. In the same year, it applied for membership in CIOFF. The organization's statutes required that only independent states could become members, but despite this, in 1990, the association *Baltica* was accepted and included in the organization's list of members. The reason for this may be that many Western countries, including Canada, did not initially recognize the occupation of the Baltic States. Regardless, this was an important show of support for the Baltic States in the process of regaining independence. Special support was expressed by the Nordic folklore organization NORDELEK. Following this crucial step, the next festival in Latvia took place in 1991, with many important representatives from CIOFF visiting Latvia to express their support in person.

Baltica is an event of great vitality – to this day, it remains the largest folklore festival in the Baltics, with the most recent festival taking place in Latvia in 2025. It was the 37th time that *Baltica* was held, gathering various Baltic folklore groups and guests united by traditional music and crafts from around the world. The festival has remained significant for Latvians abroad. In 1991, three more exile folklore ensembles came to Latvia – *Dūdalnieki* and their dance group *Dižie* from West Yorkshire, UK; *Ķelnes prāģeri* from Cologne, Germany; and *Teiksma* from Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. The folklore ensemble *Dūdalnieki* (founded in 1983 in West Yorkshire) points to *Baltica* as an important event in the group's development: "The first trip to festival *Baltica* in 1991 was very emotional and gave the drive for further action" (Dūdalnieki 2013: 2). As a member of the group reflected on television after the 1991 festival, during the Soviet occupation years, *Baltica* had served as confirmation that "it has been worth it to come together all these years" (LTV 1991).

Latvian Folklore Ensembles
from the Western Exile in *Baltica '88*   Not only did exiled Latvians have a certain suspicion toward their compatriots living in Latvia; Latvians on the communist side of the Iron Curtain were also cautious about Westerners. Events of the kind and scale of the *Baltica* festival could have two effects – either to unite Latvians living in Latvia and in exile or to highlight the circumstances that distinguished the two groups from each other (Bertran 2023: 111–112; Gale-Carpenter 1996: 96). *Baltica '88* became an example of the former. The week-long festival, with its rich cultural program in various regions of Latvia, provided an environment where tradition could be brought closer to its original context, shedding layers of Soviet propaganda and narrowing the distance between folklore ensembles and their audiences (Klotiņš 1989: 49).

The same can be said about bridging the distance between Latvia and Latvians in exile. Regardless of the differing perspectives on exiled Latvians within Soviet Latvian society, the festival's organizers, participants, and audience warmly welcomed them. In greeting speeches and press articles, exiled Latvians were viewed as part of the broader Latvian community: "A million and a half songs and a million and a half Latvians. About 200 thousand of them emigrated to the West. Today, in this festival, we greet them – our kin from foreign countries – as well" (Peters 1988: 6); "Then our natives from Boston sang – the folklore ensemble *Kolibri*. Salty waters are between us but not in our hearts" (Miesnieks 1988: 4); "Come our own people from foreign lands" (Brila 1988: 12); "One sister sings in Riga, the other sings in Boston" (Laiks 1988b: 8).

Referring to Latvian exile ensembles, unity and a shared sense of strength are recurring themes in articles and interviews. When asked what she would take away from the festival in Latvia, Laura Padega, one of the members of *Kolibri*, replied in a television interview: "Certainly the sincerity, enthusiasm, and the hope and strength that people have now. It is very important for me to see that, and we are very happy to experience it" (LTV 1988).

Kolibri was founded in 1976 in Boston by Latvian brothers Mārtiņš and Pēteris Aldiņš. Their father, Valdis Aldiņš, came from the Selonia region and had received a musical education in Latvia before the war. While temporarily living in DP camps and later after settling in the USA, he led Latvian choirs. The Aldiņš brothers grew up surrounded by arranged choir music and had access to their father's excellent collection of traditional music sources. During the Soviet occupation years, the family maintained contact with relatives in Latvia and received music publications from Valdis's brother: "I was especially interested in the materials of Melngailis and Vītoliņš – there were more unfamiliar tunes there with dialects, and it fascinated me" (interview, Aldiņš 2025). Mārtiņš played the *kokle* in the Latvian Folk Ensemble of New York, and later Pēteris also learned to play the *kokle* from its artistic director, Andrejs Jansons.

Vilcējas was formed a little later – in 1982 – and, as already outlined in the previous section of this article, they focused on the restoration of the ancient sound in folk songs. According to Silvija Stroda in an interview after the group's first concert in *Baltica '88*, reviving traditional singing in exile comes with a set of difficulties related to the inaccessibility of land:

> We are missing such a base as your ensembles have – our song comes from books, but the connection to the locality, the attachment to the place – we lack that. I would like to hope that we could go to Kurzeme and hear – yes, it sounds like this here, go to Latgale and Zemgale and hear – it sounds like that here. We have to think a lot to make the song sound right (Lancere 1988b: 8).

The challenges she described coincide with the words of Pēteris Aldiņš, who adds that in authentic folk music, besides the connection to the place of origin, the context of the tradition is also important: "In Melngailis's collection I found a section of shepherd's songs. We staged it in America, but I refused to show it in Latvia because we did not grow up with chickens and goats, we were never sent out to herd cattle" (interview, Aldiņš 2025).

From this, it can be concluded that *Vilcējas* aimed to enrich their expertise in native music by physically being on their native land, whereas *Kolibri* worked with their own interpretation of folklore, leaving authentic music-making to Latvians in Latvia. Traveling outside the limited official tourism area of that time – which

Figure 4. *Kolibri* and *Vilcējas* during a concert in Cēsis, July 16, 1988. Photo from the collection of Alfrēds Stinkuls, LFK 2264, 345

included only the cities of Riga, Jurmala, the Salaspils memorial, and Sigulda (Starostina 2017: 69) – was another privilege that *Baltica '88* provided its participants. Even if not entirely freely, with activities in Riga and 12 regions, the festival opened access for Latvian exiles to the land of their ancestors (see Figure 4). Perhaps unrelated, but the land was also mentioned in the group's introductory text as the singers entered the stage: "The song comes across the sea back to the homeland" (LTV 1988).

Silvija Stroda shared her impressions with Latvian Television, acknowledging the connection with Latvia: "I think that we sound just as the folk song sounds here, in Latvia. We can sing along, we have the same songs, we have the same language, and at this time, there is a feeling that we can sing it freely" (LTV 1988). However, formally, until the end of the Cold War, the ensembles of exiled Latvians represented their countries of residence, not the Latvian nation. Austris Grasis, who participated in *Baltica '91*, highlights these circumstances as the biggest issue concerning the participation of his ensemble *Ķelnes prāģeri*: "They wanted, by all means, to declare us as Germans and to make us go under the German flag. Most of us were not ready to go, so we participated with some members that joined only for that time, but it

was not the actual structure of the group" (interview, Grasis 2024). In the opening procession of *Baltica '88*, *Vilcējas* managed to bypass this rule by leaving the Swedish folk dancers with the Swedish flag and adding their own flag of independent Latvia to the beginning of the procession (Akerberga 1988: 4). *Kolibri* also entered the opening concert holding a Latvian flag given to them by some of the local revivalists: "It was a politically powerful moment. Sometimes people say that music is politics, and in this case it was so" (interview, Aldiņš 2025).

Looking back at the event through various sources, it is clear that the exile ensembles were received with extraordinary enthusiasm. In Latvian Television's recording of the festival's opening concert, it is visible that after each song, people ran to the musicians and gave them meadow flowers and flower wreaths. This non-verbal action conveyed deep emotion and appreciation for their work. *Kolibri* performed instrumental music with well-crafted ensemble unity that was warmly received by the audience and reflected in the press: "All the concerts were crowded, participants received ovations, and Latvian boys carried the women of the ensemble off the stage in their chairs – each lifted by four strong male hands" (*Laiks* 1988a: 5). Regarding the heartfelt reception of *Vilcējas*, Stroda reflected: "People gifted each of us a loaf of fresh, warm, just-baked rye bread" (*Latvija Amerikā* 1988). Janta Meža, who took part in the festival with the ensemble *Savieši*, emphasized *Vilcējas* as especially memorable: "I remember them, there was a unity in their sound. I would even say that among the diaspora ensembles, they are still the one I'm most interested in listening to" (interview, Meža 2023).

To sum up, it is safe to say that *Baltica '88* reconnected Latvians from both sides of the Iron Curtain and provided exiles with the opportunity to experience their folklore in its native environment – the cities and rural landscapes of various regions in Latvia, even while still under Soviet occupation. The participation of *Kolibri* and *Vilcējas* was well received and left a strong emotional impact on both the participants and the festival's visitors, regardless of their performance style – whether striving for authenticity or blending folklore with a more modern approach.

Conclusions   The article explores the relationship between Latvian folklore revivalists in Soviet Latvia and those in exile in the West. It contributes to previous research on the Latvian folklore movement by highlighting the activities of folklore ensembles and revivalists within the Western exile communities. In occupied Latvia, the folklore revival that emerged in the 1970s was driven by a desire to discover and experience folklore in a more authentic form. This included stripping away the layers of Soviet ideological influence in traditional music, reflecting a broader

aspiration to reject Soviet rule in all aspects of life. In contrast, the folklore revival among exiled Latvian communities in democratic Europe, the USA, and elsewhere, was shaped more by academic music traditions – both because many music professionals had gone into exile and due to limited access to traditional music sources.

Contacts between Latvian folklore revivalists on both sides of the Iron Curtain were viewed with suspicion due to Soviet interference and assumed ideological differences. However, individuals such as Austris Grasis, Helmī and Dainis Stalts managed to work around these obstacles and contributed substantially to the revival of unarranged folklore. The folklore festival *Baltica '88* brought Western exile Latvians closer to Latvia by warmly welcoming the ensembles *Kolibri* from the USA and *Vilcējas* from Sweden. It served as a first-time opportunity for such groups to perform in the Latvian SSR and to experience folk songs in their place of origin – a factor that exiled compatriots recognized as both important and lacking in their preservation of tradition.

The festival's publicity reflected the Soviet perspective, portraying the event as an initiative to strengthen Baltic culture and asserting that its revival was thanks to the socialist political order. However, in 1988, the festival turned into an exceptionally patriotic event, becoming the first public display of the national flags of all three Baltic States – bringing Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia closer to their forthcoming restoration of independence.

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Ieva Weaver

Dr. art. in musicology;

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

Dr. art. muzikoloģijā;

Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts

E-mail / e-pasts: ieva.vivere@lulfmi.lv

ORCID: 0000-0003-3363-3552

Transnational Networks Behind Folk Music Revivals: A Methodological Study of the Latvian Folklore Group *Skandinieki*

Tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustību transnacionālie tīkli: metodoloģisks pētījums par folkloras draugu kopu *Skandinieki*

Keywords:	**Atslēgvārdi:**
folk music revivals,	tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustības,
Iron Curtain,	dzelzs priekškars,
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digital humanities	digitālās humanitārās zinātnes

Summary   This article takes the Latvian folklore group *Skandinieki* as a case study to assess the potential of a network approach for researching transnational flows within folk music revivals. Building on *Skandinieki*'s central role in the Latvian ethnomusic scene, the study explores the group's ties to folklore movements abroad during the Soviet era, particularly in Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, and among exiled Latvians in the West. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining qualitative and quantitative inquiry, and using digital tools for data visualization and exploration. These transnational ties are contextualized within the broader political and pragmatic frameworks of the Cold War. Drawing on a print media dataset, the article maps cross-border connections and highlights the media's role in shaping and promoting the revival movement. It also underscores the importance of source criticism when working with materials related to a totalitarian regime. While recognizing the Latvian folklore movement's unique local character, the article expands the previous geopolitical framing of the movement and situates it within broader revivalist currents on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The study demonstrates the value of network analysis for tracing actual transnational routes and influences.

Kopsavilkums   Šajā rakstā pētīts latviešu folkloras draugu kopas *Skandinieki* gadījums, lai pārbaudītu tīklu pieejas potenciālu analizēt starpvalstu plūsmas tautas mūzikas atdzimšanas kustībās. Ņemot vērā *Skandinieku* centrālo lomu Latvijas etnomūzikas ainā, pētījumā aplūkotas kopas saites ar folkloras kustībām ārzemēs padomju periodā, īpaši ar Igauniju, Lietuvu, Krieviju un trimdas latviešiem Rietumos. Pētījumā izmantota jauktu metožu pieeja, apvienojot kvalitatīvu un kvantitatīvu pētniecību un lietojot digitālus rīkus datu vizualizācijai un izpētei. Transnacionālās saiknes tiek skatītas plašākā politiskā un pragmatiskā Aukstā kara kontekstā. Analizējot drukāto mediju datu kopu, kartēti *Skandinieku* pārrobežu sakari un izcelta mediju loma atdzimšanas kustību veidošanā un veicināšanā. Uzsvērta arī avotu kritikas nozīme, strādājot ar avotiem, kas saistīti ar totalitāru režīmu. Atzīstot latviešu folkloras kustības unikālo lokālo raksturu, raksts paplašina iepriekšējo ģeopolitisko kustības ietvaru un iekļauj to plašākos atdzimšanas strāvojumos abpus dzelzs priekškaram. Raksts demonstrē tīklu analīzes vērtību, lai izzinātu atdzimšanas kustību faktiskos transnacionālos virzienus un ietekmes.

Introduction Various concepts, such as sound communities and music ecosystems, have recently been proposed to describe the interconnectedness of musical practices (Titon 2015; Schippers, Grant 2016). Ethnologist Owe Ronström writes about *musical mindscapes* that encompass the physical and mental aspects of folk music phenomena. His definition of musical mindscapes further leads to the notion of *network*: "Mindscapes are institutionalized in 'domains,' large networks of interlinked practices, ideas, artifacts, and institutions. These domains operate in different ways, with different goals, and occupy different niches in time and space" (Ronström 2014: 52).

The network approach, extensively developed and applied in the social sciences since the late 1990s, has also gained traction in a growing number of humanities studies. However, the application of the network concept takes various forms – ranging from figurative mentions to the use of established network theory, to rigorous network analysis based on graph theory and metrics. The authors of the recent book *The Network Turn: Changing Perspectives in the Humanities* (Ahnert et al. 2020) argue that scholars of the arts and humanities have long been engaged with the network concept – well before it was explicitly named – through "examining communities of practitioners, the dissemination of ideas, or the relationships between certain texts, images, or artefacts" (Ahnert et al. 2020: 7). A more explicit network analysis methodology can open new research perspectives and findings.

Studies of folk music revivals have mainly used the word *network* without discussing its methodological implications. Such studies typically refer to local, transnational, global, or online networks of individuals, primarily musicians. Less often, other types of network actors are mentioned, such as performance activities, venues, organizations, and businesses, or, more abstractly, cultural or discursive networks (summarized from Bithell, Hill 2014). However, the noticeable presence of the network metaphor indicates the relevance and potential of network theory for advancing music revival studies. Ronström's definition proposes a broad understanding of networks, including non-human actors. This aligns with the actor-network theory (Law 1992; Latour 1993), highlighting the heterogeneous nature of networks.

This study builds on previous ideas by testing new approaches for researching the interconnectedness of music revivals. In her seminal article, Tamara Livingston mentions the non-territorial nature of revival communities, which cross state and national boundaries (Livingston 1999: 72). Yet detailed studies on the actual ties

Figure 1. Festive procession of folklore groups at the gathering and concert of ethnographic ensembles and folklore revivalist groups in Aizpute on 25 July 1982, with the folklore group *Skandinieki* in the foreground. Photo by Alfrēds Stinkuls. In 1983 or 1984, this photo was printed in Sweden as a postcard and, under the photographer's code name, Juris Svečturis, distributed among Latvians in the West. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2264, 45.

between local revivals remain rare, often giving the impression of revivals as self-contained systems. In this study on the cross-border contacts of the Latvian folklore movement, I aim to contribute to this less developed research thread. Within the broader subject of transnational flows, I also examine the role of lesser-studied revival actors beyond performers – specifically, the mass media. In Latvia, the folklore movement had a rhizomatic social character, interweaving with media, literature, theatre, art, environmentalism and beyond, thus making a wider perspective on the revival network necessary.

The network studied in this article existed within a non-democratic context. The Latvian folklore group *Skandinieki*, founded in 1976, directly and indirectly opposed the official Soviet regime and everyday reality. *Skandinieki* became the "core revivalists" (Livingston 1999) during the emergence and growth of the Latvian *folklore movement* (a literal translation of *folkloras kustība*). As local authorities in the fields of folklore and political resistance, the group and its leaders were likewise known among folklore revivalists in neighboring countries and among exiled Latvians in the West (see Figure 1).

Network analysts advocate for a precise understanding of the network concept. Digital humanities scholar Scott B. Weingart writes: "Representing information as a network implicitly suggests not only that connections matter, but that they are *required* to understand whatever's going on" (Weingart 2011). The network approach is justified on various levels in this study. Answering Weingart's question, connections are indeed *required* to understand the emergence and growth of the Latvian folklore movement within a non-democratic context. Informal mutual ties – among family members, friends, fellow students, and like-minded individuals – wove and knotted the emerging grassroots movement, especially in its initial phase, before the organization of folklore events was taken over by the official amateur art system. Moreover, developing such a network was a declared goal of *Skandinieki* leaders, which shaped their activities.[1]

The first section of this article situates *Skandinieki* within the broader network of the Latvian and neighboring folk music scenes. In subsequent sections, through an exploration of the *Skandinieki* case, the article places the Latvian folklore movement in a wider geographical context on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Based on traceable encounters and ties, a detailed historical network analysis helps to confirm or challenge the assumptions about the key actors and chains of events, revising previous research and offering new perspectives. A key methodological contribution of this study – alongside highlighting traditional media as revival actors – is the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches with the use of digital tools. The research draws on several sources and methods: semi-structured interviews, coded and analyzed qualitatively; a media text corpus, examined through automated analysis in collaboration with the Digital Development Department of the National Library of Latvia; and the creation, quantification, and visualization of databases in *Grupu Saites* (a digital platform for Latvian popular music data) as well as in the data management and visualization tools *NodeGoat* and *QGIS*. This process embodied my practice of "network thinking" as both a research exercise and perspective.

This study focuses on the rise of the folklore movement during the Soviet Era of Stagnation, before 1987. It was a time when state surveillance and control over public activities in Latvia remained strong, communication with the West was restricted, and the possibility of an open protest movement was unthinkable. Soon after the announcement of glasnost policies by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986, a new social and cultural situation emerged in the Baltics, eventually leading to the Singing Revolution (on this period, see Šmidchens 2014). The non-democratic context of

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1   For a parallel networking process in Lithuania and the role of the folklore movement in the nationalist *Sąjūdis* movement, see Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė 2011.

this study made source criticism crucial and shaped the understanding of actor and link types under such socio-political circumstances.

A few final introductory notes on network theory are required to frame the analytical approach. Network analysts focus particularly on *edges* (ties, interactions, relationships), which distinguishes the study of networks from the study of other forms of alliances, such as communities. Historian Claire Lemercier calls for precise description and in-depth analysis of social ties, "describing exactly how, and at which scale, they matter – which ties matter for what, which do not, and how different sorts of ties interact" (Lemercier 2015: 283). She outlines the methodological considerations and concludes that:

> [A formal network analysis can be fruitful] as long as our aim is not to "map social reality" generally but to understand the patterns of precisely defined ties, by deliberately abstracting them in order to carefully consider their effects, their origins (as they are e.g. sometimes dependent on legal constraints, sometimes freely or even strategically constructed), their changes in response to external events and their consequences (Lemercier 2015: 288).

Bearing in mind that a close look at *edges* is key to network analysis, it is probably still not self-evident what the *nodes* (actors, entities) in a network are. Imagining networking individuals may seem the most empowering, reasonable, and human way of seeing networks in a globalized and mediated social world. However, actor-network theorists stress the role of non-human actors – primarily technology and nature – in understanding social processes, organization, and mechanisms of power (Law 1984; Callon 1984; Law 1992; Latour 1993). John Law writes about the heterogeneity and materiality of networks:

> [..] networks are composed not only of people, but also of machines, animals, texts, money, architectures – any material that you care to mention. [..] If human beings form a social network, it is not because they interact with other human beings. It is because they interact with human beings and endless other materials too. [..] And – this is my point – if these materials were to disappear then so too would what we sometimes call the social order. Actor-network theory says, then, that order is an *effect generated by heterogeneous means* (Law 1992: 381–382).

My study will follow the premise of network heterogeneity, also challenging the view of folk music revivals as isolated histories determined by country, ethnicity, or musical style.

Skandinieki in the Latvian 'Ethnomusic' Network

Skandinieki is a Latvian "folklore friends' group" (*folkloras draugu kopa*) established in 1976 in Riga. In Latvia, it is known for having numerous members, unofficially estimated at several hundred, and for its crucial role in initiating and influencing many other folk music groups and individual musicians. Its leaders, Helmī Stalte (1949–2023) and

Figure 2. Dainis Stalts (center) at the *Baltica '88* festival procession in Riga on 13 July 1988. At that time, the carmine red–white–carmine red flag of the independent Republic of Latvia had not yet been legalized. Photo from the Alfrēds Stinkuls Collection, Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2264, 364.

Dainis Stalts (1939–2014), a married couple, were a driving force behind the rise of the folklore movement – shaping its ideology, repertoire, and musical style, organizing events, promoting folklore in the media, and cultivating the movement's anti-Soviet political orientation.

Helmī Stalte had a family background rooted in Livonian culture. She grew up in a nationalistic patriotic milieu and had participated in informal Livonian gatherings in Riga since the 1960s. She received formal training in music, graduating as a choir conductor from the Jāzeps Mediņš Secondary Music School in Riga. Her mother was an accompanying pianist for opera singers. Dainis Stalts (born Grasis) had already drawn the attention of the KGB while studying biology at the Latvian State University and, according to family testimony, was expelled in 1960 because of his nationalist views and contacts with Lithuanian dissidents (interview, Stalte 2022a). Helmī was the musical leader of *Skandinieki*, while Dainis was the ideological and political mover of the group and of the broader folklore movement (see Figure 2).

The leadership and centrality of the Stalts family and *Skandinieki* is a common knowledge in the Latvian folk music community and in its scholarly research (Šmidchens 1996; Boiko 2001; Klotiņš 2002). This section aims to provide a more detailed and data-driven insight into their impact. The network approach is chosen

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not only out of methodological interest; it also aligns with the strategic efforts of the Stalts family: to spread the idea of reviving the Latvian local heritage, stand against Russification, and to contribute to the rise of the folklore movement by educating future leaders of folklore groups. Helmī Stalte recalls:

> All of this was indeed politically, culturally politically aimed from the early times on. [..] And we raised them [the group members] so that there are capable soloists and group leaders. [..] All we did was drive around the provinces to the memorial houses for writers and poets. It was wonderful! And it also woke up those people [in provinces], and we always learned the songs of the places we went to (interview, Stalte 2022a).

Becoming a contributor to the Latvian music data visualization platform *Grupu Saites* (Group Links)[2] allowed me to provide measured evidence for the centrality and impact of *Skandinieki*. The 'ethnomusic'[3] network comprises 129 groups out of the 1,683 music groups entered in the database by the end of July 2025. Latvian folklore groups typically have large memberships, often involving entire families. In the Top 10 list of groups by membership size across the entire *Grupu Saites* database, folk music groups form a clear majority, with only three groups from other genres. *Skandinieki*, with 232 members listed to date, is the largest music group in the database. According to Šmidchens (1996: 340–341), during the Soviet period

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Skandinieki's internal network reached around 110 members. A more detailed timeline analysis shows that, at any given time, the group had between 15 and 40 members simultaneously.

The centrality of *Skandinieki* was measured by its links to other 'ethnomusic' groups through shared membership. With 50 connections, *Skandinieki* is the most interconnected group within the 'ethnomusic' network. During the Soviet period, at least 13 other folklore groups – including schoolchildren's groups – were founded by *Skandinieki* members. Other remarkable ethno-hubs are the folk-dance club *Rīgas Dančku klubs* (formed in the late 1980s in Riga, 32 links) and the children's folklore group *Kokle* (founded in Riga in 1980, 27 links).

The hub role of *Skandinieki* is evident in the *Grupu Saites* metrics – only two other music groups or projects in the entire database are connected to more groups. Overall, the 'ethnomusic' network is relatively dense and self-contained (see Figure 3), with sparse connections beyond this category. While *Skandinieki* is the most central group within the 'ethnomusic' network, only 25% of its 67 links are to groups whose repertoire and performances do not reference traditional music or ethnic heritage. For comparison, the 'ethnomusic' group with the most outward connections – and thus the greatest integration into Latvian popular music broadly – is *Iļģi*, with 80% of its connections reaching beyond folk music community. Founded in 1981 by former *Skandinieki* member Ilga Reizniece, *Iļģi* pioneered the postfolklore and folk rock genres in Latvia.

Latvia in the Transnational
Routes of Folk Music Revivals

Folk music revival studies have primarily focused on analyzing distinct local cases, occasionally expanded geographically to include musical practices within diasporas. The emphasis on the diversity of revival styles and histories underlines that each revival emerged in response to specific local cultural and social circumstances and was primarily meaningful to the local communities. A few studies have taken a comparative approach, examining commonalities and differences and developing cross-revival conclusions (Kartomi 2014; Quigley 2018). Challenging the notion of a clear contrast between revivals in Western democratic and Eastern socialist states, Colin Quigley pointed to the similarities "in their inspiration and at their moments of inception" (Quigley 2018: 365). Still, she observed that the consequences of the different societal contexts "become more clear as they [revivals] mature and become more formally institutionalized within their contrasting political economies" (Quigley 2018: 365).

The various case studies do not make it sufficiently clear that post-Second World War music revivals emerged amid intensified global cultural flows (Appadurai 1990), during a period described as thick globalization (Sweers 2014). Britta Sweers incorporates a globalization paradigm in the discussion:

> Many of these (East and West) postwar European movements were political, yet they were also shaped by the search for musical alternatives outside state-controlled or institutionalized, mass-media–based networks – issues that already hint at the impact of modern thick globalization (Sweers 2014: 468).

Inspired by studies of more recent global developments (Sweers 2014; Bithell 2014), this section steps back to examine the global cultural flows of revival movements that emerged in the Cold War era. Focusing on folk music revival processes in the second half of the 20th century, this study does not consider the impact of earlier revival waves in Latvia and elsewhere in Europe since the late 19th century (the early Latvian folk music revival processes are discussed in this journal issue by Aigars Lielbārdis; see Lielbārdis 2025).

Looking for the post-Second World War "cultural currents" (Milstein 2014) that led to the origins of the Latvian folklore movement in the late 1970s, it can be noticed that researchers' positionality affects their interpretations. Mark Slobin maps a route beginning with the roots-seeking folk revival in the United States in the 1940s–1950s, which then spread to Western Europe and reached Central and Eastern Europe around the 1970s (Slobin 1996: 5). Slobin highlights the motive of cultural and political resistance in the Eastern Bloc revivals:

> Disallowed and regulated, musical diversity sprang up increasingly in the late 1970s in various forms and flowered in the 1980s as part of the breakthrough of grassroots discontent that culminated in song-filled demonstrations stretching from 1970s Poland to regionwide breakthrough demonstrations in the late 1980s (Slobin 1996: 4).

In the same volume, Theodore Levin outlines a different route, pointing to the transition from professionalized folk music performances to the study of "authentic regionalism" in Russia and, subsequently, other Soviet republics during the Khrushchev Thaw (1953–1964). This perspective was later echoed by Britta Sweers (2014: 468). Levin notes the shift from the seminal approach initiated in Russia by Dmitry Pokrovsky toward nationalism-oriented revivals elsewhere:

> It was Pokrovsky's disinterested embrace of authentic regionalism that more politically oriented cultural activists, both in the Russian Federation and in the colonized republics, later transformed and enlisted in the service of movements for the recognition of a range of "national" and ethnic cultural identities (Levin 1996: 25).

Dmitry Pokrovsky himself explained this process as a revival of the Bolshevik idea that the entire population, rather than just professionals, should be regarded as legitimate artists (Levin 1996: 19). What might seem a transcultural feature is that the historians of the folk revivals in the United States have also mentioned early revivalists' references to Bolshevik ideas (Lund, Denisoff 1971: 395). Still, their article demonstrates the full spectrum of political and apolitical motivations throughout the development of various folk music revivals in the United States. The same can be said for many other folk music revivals, which cannot be reduced to a single political agenda.

When looking at Latvia, or more broadly the Soviet Western borderlands, within transnational revival flows, the possible influences from multiple currents must be considered.[4] So far, the written history of the Latvian folklore movement has not extended beyond the borders of the three Baltic republics. The doctoral thesis of Guntis Šmidchens, *A Baltic Music: The Folklore Movement in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, 1968–1991* (1996), offers the most comprehensive historical overview. In a footnote, he remarks that similar revivals also emerged in Eastern Europe around 1968, but this wider context was beyond the scope of his research (Šmidchens 1996: 111). However, concerning transnational revival currents, Šmidchens wrote:

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4   For the nationalistic character of the folklore field in the Soviet Western borderlands, see Ķencis et al. 2024.

The Lithuanian movement, which strongly influenced those of the Estonians and Latvians, seems to have emerged independently. Of the movement leaders whom I interviewed, none had contacts outside the USSR in the sixties, and none recalled events outside Lithuania which might have inspired them at the time. Even when I asked, for example, if they recalled thinking about the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, none thought that it was an event about which they knew much, or which made them intensify their cultural activities. [Estonian folklorist Ingrid] Rüütel attributes the worldwide revived interest in folklore to large cyclical developments in the history of humanity (Šmidchens 1996: 111).

Active mutual contacts and joint events among Baltic revivalists support the framing of the Baltic region as a unified cultural space. Especially during the Singing Revolution (1986–1991), one can speak of a shared social movement in which folklore revivalists played a significant role (see Ramonaitė 2025 in this issue).

When viewing the Baltic folklore movements through the lens of nationalist aspirations, Šmidchens's analysis gave insufficient attention to the musical interactions with Russian revivalists and experts. This political bias can be explained by the recent independence of the Baltic States at the time of his research. It also served to reinforce his argument about "dissident folklorism" in Latvia and the anti-Russification motivations of Baltic revivalists. Still, also the "fascination with musical diversity" associated by other authors with the Russian revival – and extended by scholars to the histories of other Soviet republics (Levin 1996: 25) – does not provide a sufficient framework for interpreting the Baltic revivals. The Latvian folklore movement emerged from a confluence of wider-ranging aesthetic, cultural, and lifestyle ideologies, combined with strong nationalistic aspirations.

Taking a network approach and identifying actual nodes and ties in the transcultural flows of revivals may help avoid further overgeneralizations. In the next few paragraphs, I will reflect on commonly assumed routes and influences, referring to the interviews with members of *Skandinieki* and other early Latvian revivalists.

In Latvia, the folklore movement arose later than in the neighboring Soviet Baltic Republics of Lithuania and Estonia, as well as Russia. Several *Skandinieki* members emphasized the crucial influence of Estonian revivalists on the formation of their repertoire and performance style. Marga Stalta summarizes it as follows: "It was the Estonians who put *Skandinieki* on the right track. It was a complete revolution. We all realized that this was the way to go. The real folk voice, the real singing, the real dancing" (interview, Stalta 2024). The Estonian connection in the early *Skandinieki* and pre-*Skandinieki* years stemmed from a shared interest in Finno-Ugric heritage, as *Skandinieki* originated from Livonian family heritage, cultural circles, and the Livonian song ensemble *Līvlist* (founded in 1972). Thus, the Latvian folklore movement has its roots in the revival of the identity and culture of a smaller autochthonous ethnic group.

The Estonian folklore groups *Hellero*, *Leegajus*, and *Leigarid*, as well as Igor Tõnurist and Mikk Sarv, are key nodes in the Estonian-Latvian network. Interviewees remembered specific events in Estonia and Latvia involving Estonian revivalists that spurred stylistic innovations. Helmī Stalte, the leader of *Skandinieki*, vividly remembers the encounter with the Estonian folklore group *Hellero*, supposedly in 1978:

> We [*Līvlist*] had a trip to Estonia. [..] The evening took place around a campfire, and there was a folklore group from the University of Tartu called *Hellero*, led by Mikk Sarv. [..] The *Hellero* students were sitting around the fire in their hooded jackets, sitting on the ground, kind of huddled together and singing *regilaul*, those ancient songs. We totally froze, so to say. [..] It really affected us deeply and turned things around for us! [..] We realized that, ooh, this is something real, [..] something like the very salt of the earth. And they sat there without any pretense. The *regilaul*, of course, aren't sung with loud voices, and it was all so spellbinding! [..] And so that made us reflect on a lot of things (interview, Stalte 2022a).

Following this event, *Skandinieki* turned to the repertoire of the oldest Latvian recitative songs and began paying attention to traditional singing styles. Members of early *Skandinieki* also recall adopting the practice of performing in a circle, as well as the fiddling style, from an Estonian ensemble – most likely *Leegajus* – and acquiring bagpipes and guimbardes in Estonia. The Estonians also served as a point of connection between Latvians living in Western Europe and Latvian folk music. Folklorist and revivalist Austris Grasis recalls meeting Igor Tõnurist at a Baltic Studies conference in Stockholm, later receiving vinyl recordings of *Leegajus*, and, inspired by them, beginning a systematic search for traditional Latvian music (interview, Grasis 2024).

Interviews with *Skandinieki* do not indicate such specific turning points arising from contact with the Lithuanian revival. Nevertheless, Lithuania – with its active revivalist scene and large number of folklore groups – was undoubtedly a strong example to follow. As early as the late 1950s, Dainis Stalts was in contact with students involved in the Lithuanian resistance movement. In the 1980s, *Skandinieki* members regularly attended Lithuanian folklore festivals and celebrations, such as the Folklore Festival *Skamba skamba kankliai* (founded in Vilnius in 1973), the *Rasos* (Midsummer) celebrations, winter masking traditions, and folk dance events. *Skandinieki* collaborated with the Lithuanian folklore group *Ratilio* and its leader, musicologist Zita Kelmickaitė, and friendship ties existed between the Stalts family and the Lithuanian singer and revivalist Veronika Povilionienė. The Latvian-Lithuanian network was further reinforced by the shared history of the Balts and the idea of Baltic unity, which also inspired Latvians to participate in the Baltic Prussian revival (Muktupāvels 2023).

The presence of Russian academics and performers in the *Skandinieki* network is inevitable, given Russia's central political role in the Soviet Union. Russian revivalists

organized and participated in major All-Union folklore events in Moscow and Leningrad, which were also attended by Baltic revivalists. They frequently acted as folklore experts, offering methodological lectures and conducting expert visits to Latvia. Helmī Stalte remembered meaningful and empowering contacts with the Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble and Anatolij Mehnecov – an active revivalist, initiator of ethnomusicological education and research in Leningrad (later Saint Petersburg), and leader of the Conservatory's folklore ensemble (interview, Stalte 2022b). Former *Skandinieki* member Ilga Reizniece also mentioned close connections with the Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble, as well as with Vladimir Povetkin from Novgorod, and with Andrey Kotov, the future leader of the *Sirin* Ensemble in Moscow (interview, Reizniece 2022; see also Muktupāvels 2025 in this issue on the revival of traditional instruments, with inspirations from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, and Russia).

However, beyond these few ties of shared interest, the power dynamic with Russian revivalists was often shaped by their roles as legitimizers or paternalistic advisors to the Latvian revivalists. At the same time, Latvian revivalists strategically invoked the "affirmed by Moscow" argument to validate their approach in the eyes of local officials. In 1978, Ģederts Ramans, Chairman of the Latvian Composers' Union, publicly endorsed the need for a folk music revival in Latvia, citing the active promotion of folklore by academic, artistic, and media institutions in Moscow and Leningrad as a model (Ramans 1978). Appealing to the highest authority – the Soviet imperial center – was also a deliberate strategy employed by *Skandinieki*, as recalled by Ilga Reizniece: "With *Skandinieki*, it was typical to travel somewhere, to earn some kind of certificate of honor, to be able to show here [in Latvia] – you see, we are not nationalists, we are recognized in Moscow, we are okay" (interview, Reizniece 2022).

Latvian revivalists, including *Skandinieki*, typically participated in folklore events in the nearest neighboring Soviet republics – Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia. Tours beyond these regions, even to other parts of the Soviet Union, were rare. For folklore groups affiliated with educational institutions (which was not the case with *Skandinieki*), collaboration with twinned institutions in other Soviet republics and even European socialist countries was common. A notable example of transrepublic inspiration was the influence of Armenian children's folklore groups on the rise of the children's folklore movement in Latvia (interview, Spīčs 2022).

The most frequent site of *Skandinieki*'s interaction with foreigners was the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum in Riga, where the group was affiliated during the 1980s. As an official tourist destination, the museum regularly hosted international visitors, including those from countries beyond the Iron Curtain. Both the museum and, more broadly, the public display of the "authentic" and

"traditional" Latvian ethnic identity formed part of the Soviet-era "ethnic tourism" agenda in the 1960s–1980s (Zake 2018).

In the final section of this article, I turn to the connections between the Latvian folklore movement and exiled Latvians in the West. Latvian folklore groups only began traveling to the West in 1988, during perestroika and the final years of the Soviet Union – in the period which lies beyond the timeframe of this study. *Skandinieki*'s first tour beyond the Iron Curtain took place in 1989, with performances in France and West Germany. That same year, a planned tour to the United States was canceled, but the group eventually made the trip in 1990. In 1991, they also visited Latvian exile communities in France and Sweden.

This section shows that *Skandinieki*'s transnational network comprised various traces and influences. Contacts with Estonians were grounded in a shared interest in Finno-Ugric heritage, with Estonian revivalists directly influencing their repertoire and performance style. The Lithuanian connection, rooted in personal friendships and Lithuania's vibrant folklore scene, was strengthened by a sense of historical kinship of Balts. Links with Russia developed largely due to its dominant political role in the Soviet Union but also included a few close cultural associates. Together, these relationships formed a transnational network of varying intensity and impact.

Alongside close friendships, cultural like-mindedness, perceived historical kinships (see Bertran 2025, this issue, on the Baltic family metaphor), institutional collaborations, and power-driven relations, numerous short-term encounters occurred at folklore venues and events – whose long-term impact remains unstudied. Future research could build on this study by reconstructing the full network of performance venues, events, and participants. Such mapping could uncover additional transnational actors and reveal new ties among revival movements.

Print Media as Actors in the Revival Network

Research into the folk music revival can be based on diverse sources, each with distinct strengths and limitations. In the case of Latvia, official archives offer limited insight, as a significant portion of documents is missing or reflects institutional rather than grassroots perspectives. Scholarly literature from the 1970s and 1980s underrepresents the revival and reveals a gap between academic establishments and the community-driven, practice-based revivalist efforts. Contemporary interviews provide valuable firsthand accounts but require critical examination, fact-checking, and broader contextualization. Personal and folklore group archives hold great potential for revealing localized and nuanced histories.

From a network perspective, media coverage – particularly during the formative

years of the revival – emerges as a crucial source and is the focus of the following sub-studies. Public interest in folklore grew significantly in the 1980s, and the media served this interest by documenting events, performances, and debates across radio, film, television, and print. While editorial teams, journalists, and creators were rarely active folklore performers, they played a significant role as documenters, promoters, or critics. In this sense, media actors became the immediate archivists of revivalist events and discourses.

However, interpreting media requires careful source criticism. The Latvian folklore movement developed under a totalitarian regime during the Cold War, in conditions that inevitably shaped media agendas and constraints. Source criticism makes it clear that different media platforms may present divergent perspectives on the revival's history.

Social movement studies provide a strong conceptual basis for analyzing media as revival actors. The relationship between social movements and mainstream media has been a key topic in the field since the late 1960s. However, theoretical models often presuppose an active and strategic cooperation between activists and media as two distinct parties with negotiable interests (Gamson, Wolfsfeld 1993), which is not always the case. More recently, scholars have pointed to gaps in these theories, as they have long focused primarily on democratic systems (Rohlinger, Corrigall-Brown 2019). Even within democratic contexts, scholars have noted that "social movement actors often occupy the role of 'non-official' and 'non-expert' sources, which puts them on the defensive and constrains the amount and type of media access given" (McCurdy 2012: 248), and that "movements often have a distinctive and evolving culture that may, in various ways, conflict with media and mainstream political culture" (Gamson, Wolfsfeld 1993: 115). These issues are even more pronounced in political regimes with relatively closed media systems, where, as Deana A. Rohlinger and Catherine Corrigall-Brown point out, "the state has a great deal of control over what news is covered and how. State actors in these contexts often use mass media to maintain their authority and control over the citizenry, and, as a result, accurate coverage of movements and movement claims is virtually nonexistent" (Rohlinger, Corrigall-Brown 2019: 133).

Early Latvian folklore revivalists did not engage with the media in a strategic manner. Public media, even when sympathetic to the folklore movement, remained instruments of official ideology and authority. Revivalists challenged Soviet ideology, and for them, the focus was more on creating an alternative cultural space, lifestyle, and informal communication networks than on coordinated, full-program activism. In analyses of states with relatively closed media systems, the role of arts as alternative media has been highlighted:

> Since the state uses mass media to control what (and how) information is disseminated to the citizenry, challengers who want to raise collective consciousness about an issue or mobilize supporters to action must use mediums, such as low-powered radio, art, music, poetry, and traveling political theater, which can fly under the radar of authorities (Rohlinger, Corrigall-Brown 2019: 135; see also Kołodziejczyk, Lecke 2020).

Folklore, as a form of communal creative expression, had great potential to become such an alternative medium.

For the analysis of *Skandinieki*'s network in print media, the Digital Research Services of the National Library of Latvia created a corpus of clippings (texts and images) from periodicals issued between 1978 and 1991 that mention *Skandinieki* and its leaders, Dainis Stalts and Helmī Stalte. In the corpus, periodicals were divided into three groups: central Soviet Latvian media, regional Latvian media, and Latvian media in the West. The latter group was distinguished by its clear stand against the Soviet regime and ideology. Regional media were treated as a separate category because reviving regional heritage was a key goal of the folklore movement, and organizing revival events was often easier in the periphery than in Riga – with many significant events taking place outside the capital. The central Soviet Latvian media were organs of power; however, they also included more liberal outlets and authors who allied themselves with the revivalists. Therefore, an automated network analysis was combined with a qualitative, case-by-case inquiry.

At the time of my study, the number of digitized periodicals was 81. Of these, 27 were central media, 31 were regional periodicals, and 23 were published in the West. Absolutely all periodicals contained mentions of *Skandinieki* or their leaders, which proves their public visibility and the general topicality of folklore. The corpus consists of 1,218 unique clippings; the largest number is from the central (45%) and regional press (30%), with Western press clippings making up a smaller proportion – about a quarter of the corpus (25%). Eight periodicals accounted for half (51%) of all the material, making them the most frequent writers about *Skandinieki*. In descending order by the number of clippings, they are: the weekly newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* (Literature and Art), issued by the creative unions of the Latvian SSR to promote and reflect cultural processes; the Western Latvian newspapers *Laiks* (Time) in North America and *Brīvā Latvija* (Free Latvia) in Europe; the Latvian SSR evening newspaper *Rīgas Balss* (Riga Voice); *Dzimtenes Balss* (Homeland Voice), the official Soviet Latvian publication for exile Latvians issued by the Committee for Cultural Contacts with Compatriots Abroad; the regional Madona's newspaper *Stars* (Beam); the daily *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth), issued by the Communist Youth Union; and *Cīņa* (Fight), the official Soviet Latvian propaganda newspaper.

In addition to creating the corpus, Named Entity Recognition (NER) was

applied to it, using the Latvian Natural Language Processing tool NLP-PIPE, developed by the AI Lab at the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science of the University of Latvia (Znotiņš, Cīrule 2018). It provided an automated overview – a so-called distant reading – of the texts by extracting lists of mentioned personal names, organizations, events, and geopolitical entities (GPE data, with 79% precision achieved; Znotiņš, Cīrule 2018: 187). The last data category was used for two further sub-studies. The first study examines how the Iron Curtain could have impacted the transnational perception of the Latvian folklore movement. The second focuses on representations of the Latvian folklore movement in the West, considering the surveilled communication channels between the West and Latvia. For these two sub-studies on the transnational aspects of the Latvian folklore revival, the dataset was divided into two groups: Soviet Latvian media (both central and regional) and Latvian media in the West.

After the Second World War, Latvian society and media existed in two parallel worlds – one in the Latvian SSR and the other across the Iron Curtain. To explore the effect of these two mediascapes, I compared the spatial context of publications about *Skandinieki* on both sides of the Curtain. Arjun Appadurai expanded Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined community* by adding a spatial dimension and introducing the notion of *imagined worlds* – "the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 1990: 7). In line with the significance of media in Anderson's theory, media have been studied as constructors of imagined worlds in various historical and political settings (Rusciano 1997; Segal 2024; Tamm et al. 2024, 2025). Zef Segal, in his study on "space formation within historical texts" in a 19th-century Hebrew periodical, outlines a conception I followed in studying the Latvian printed press:

> The relationship between "geographical space" and "periodical" is not unidirectional. Just as much as the periodical exists within a geographical space, one must explore the ways in which geographical spaces are within periodicals and, significantly, are crafted by them. [..] geographical spaces emerging from the text are mediated geographical spaces with shapes and topographies different from the "normal" world map. They are influenced by cultural, political, ideological, and economic perceptions of writers and readers, but they also serve to reinforce and legitimize such perceptions (Segal 2024).

To analyze the imagined transnational geographies of the Latvian folklore movement before 1987 (prior to the geographical openness brought about by perestroika), I used the lists of automatically detected geopolitical entities mentioned in media clippings from that period. These mentions do not indicate that *Skandinieki* visited these locations; rather, the links are formed through their co-occurrence in
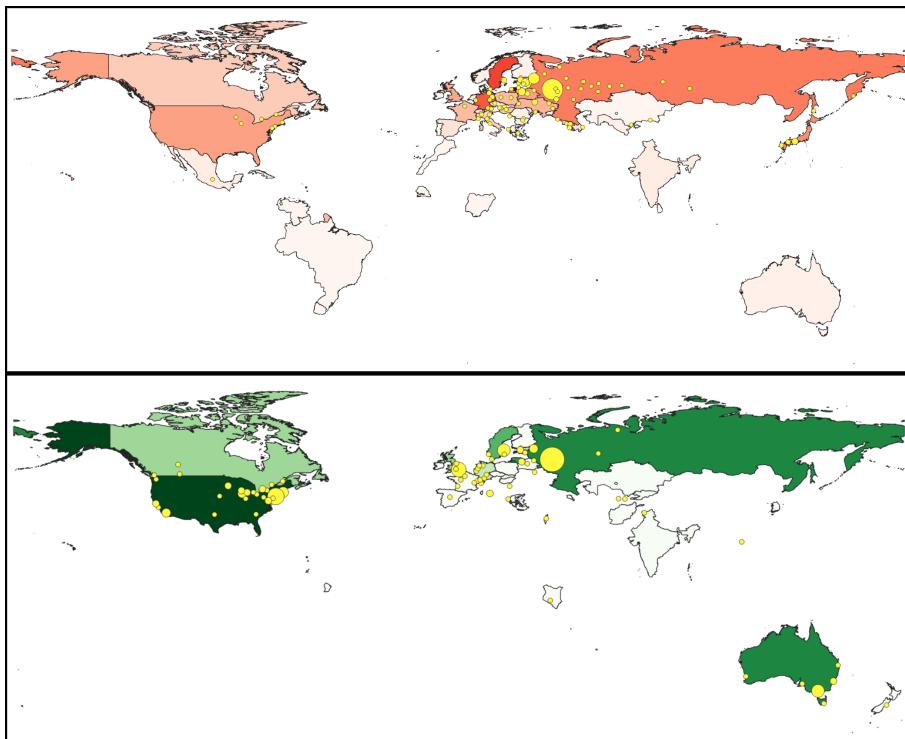
Figure 4. The "world of folklore" as portrayed by the Soviet Latvian press (upper) *versus* the Latvian press in the West (lower). Color intensity (for countries) and circle size (for towns) represent the number of mentions of each place. Darker colors and larger circles indicate higher mention counts, interpreted as greater significance in the media discourse. Countries not visible on the map were not mentioned in the discourse, highlighting the role of media in shaping perceptions of the world. The maps display current national borders to reflect the national framing of revival histories. The maps were created using QGIS-LTR version 3.40.5–Bratislava.

the same texts. In the Soviet Latvian press (517 relevant clippings), 50 states/republics and 91 towns/regions are mentioned; in the Western media (58 clippings), 30 states/republics and 79 towns/regions appeared. Mentions of less specific political entities of that time, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, were excluded from the data or, when possible, replaced by more specific entities such as individual republics. In analyzing the results, I took into account the quantitative disproportion between the Soviet and Western clippings; nevertheless, the lists of places were comparable, and the mapping revealed several areas of significance.

Counting and mapping the mentions of geopolitical entities exposed two distinct "worlds of folklore" in which *Skandinieki*, as representatives of the Latvian folklore movement, were contextualized (see Figure 4 to Figure 6). In this way, the maps show the broader cultural spaces in which Soviet and Western Latvian media

Soviet Latvian press		Western Latvian press		Soviet Latvian press		Western Latvian press	
Lithuania	37	United States	17	Moscow	78	Moscow	12
Estonia	31	Australia	14	St Petersburg	33	New York	8
Sweden	24	Russia	14	Tartu	19	London	7
Germany	22	Lithuania	13	Vilnius	18	Melbourne	6
Russia	18	Sweden	11	Kobe	12	Stockholm	6
Japan	16	Estonia	9	Kyiv	10	Boston	5
United States	14	Canada	8	Tallinn	10	Chicago	4
Belarus	14	United Kingdom	8	Stockholm	9	Los Angeles	4
United Kingdom	13	Germany	6	Minsk	7	St Petersburg	4
Ukraine	12	Israel	3	Voronezh	7	Kalamazoo	3

Figure 5. Ten most frequently mentioned places (outside Latvia) in the Soviet Latvian and exile Latvian press.
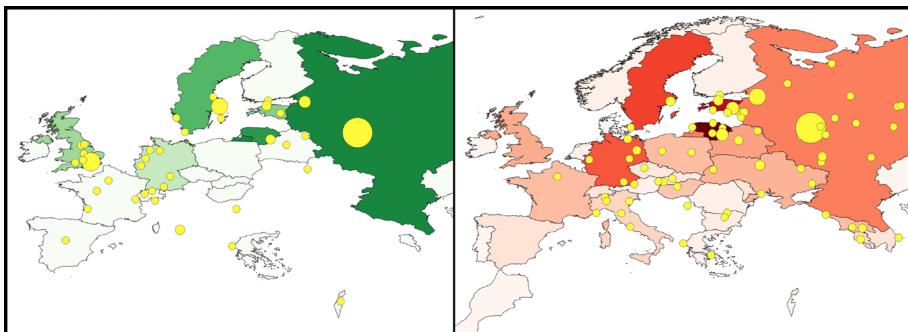
Figure 6. The "Europe of folklore" as pictured by the Soviet Latvian press (right) versus the Latvian press in the West (left). The color intensity (for countries) and the size of circles (for towns) represent the number of mentions of each place. Darker colors and larger circles indicate higher mention counts, interpreted as greater significance in media discourse. Countries not visible on the map were not mentioned in the discourse, highlighting the role of media in shaping our perception of the world. Latvia is excluded here because the focus is on its media-produced connections abroad. The maps display current national borders to reflect the national framing of revival histories. The maps were created using QGIS-LTR version 3.40.5-Bratislava.

situated the Latvian folklore revival. A bird's-eye view (Figure 4) offers initial insights into the spatial hierarchies and highlights sites that cannot be overlooked in a study of Latvian revival history. The dominance – or mandatory presence – of Moscow is evident in both the Soviet and, notably, Western maps. The Western map also highlights the areas where the Latvian diaspora and its media were concentrated, namely, the United States, Australia, Sweden, United Kingdom. In the local Latvian media, Lithuania and Estonia stand out as the countries of greatest significance, confirming the active network of Baltic revivalists (see Figure 5 for a comparative list of the most frequently mentioned places). Still, at the city level, Moscow and former Leningrad hold the leading roles, at least in the media discourse.

The zoomed-in comparative maps of the "Europe of folklore" (see Figure 6) offer more detail on spatial hierarchies, divisions, and overlaps. Both maps provide a

closer look at the significance of Russia – particularly Moscow – and the active revivalist network across the Baltic countries. The Western map focuses on Latvian exile communities in Great Britain, Sweden, and West Germany, as well as the activities in France and Switzerland, while the Soviet Latvian press, predictably, emphasizes events within the Eastern Bloc. The maps also reveal nuanced manifestations of the Iron Curtain, such as the division of Germany and the notably active presence of Italy in the Soviet Latvian network, possibly linked to its Eurocommunist orientation. Further scholarly attention could be directed toward less-discussed points of overlap, such as Sweden's prominent role in both mediascapes and the activities in Belarus. These patterns call for a more detailed qualitative exploration, informed by revival studies and other relevant research on spatial hierarchies – such as the thorough, systematic inquiry into Soviet newsreels that offer broader insights into the Soviet representation of geographical space (Tamm et al. 2024, 2025). The visualized statistics also open new research avenues, such as examining music revivals in the context of cultural diplomacy.

This sub-study demonstrates the formative role of historical media in shaping broader cultural or imagined spaces initiated by folklore events. Alongside reinforcing and refining existing knowledge of spatial hierarchies, divides and overlaps, the statistical evidence also brings to light new points of interest unnoticed or bypassed in previous studies. The created maps invite assessment of the role of specific locations in revival histories and draw attention to the links or communication channels between them. Communication across the Iron Curtain is the focus of the following final section.

Allies and Movements Across the Iron Curtain   Folk revival

studies established early on that revivals include political and apolitical claims (Lund, Denisoff 1971). In Latvia, both existed, but political protest could not be expressed openly. However, when analyzing print media – especially Latvian periodicals in the West – the political strand comes to the fore in the context of the Cold War and the maintenance of the idea of an independent Latvia throughout the occupation years. Social movement scholars have emphasized the advocacy role of international audiences, amplifying local voices for political change. Regarding states with relatively closed media systems, Deana A. Rohlinger and Catherine Corrigall-Brown wrote:

> International audiences are important external targets in closed media systems. Movement actors who can use mass media to bring international scrutiny to a political problem can create an opportunity to effect political change (Rohlinger, Corrigall-Brown 2019: 140).

The concept of political opportunity is used in social movement studies to describe such "external resources that an aggrieved group may 'take advantage' of, but that do not 'belong' to them" (McCurdy 2012: 249).

Exiled Latvians maintained a strong idea of independent Latvia and Latvian national identity. Latvian organizations in the West, including the media, played a politically active and explicit role in advocating for Latvia's national interests at a time when this was not possible within Latvia itself. Western Latvian media regularly reported on human rights violations in the USSR, represented the Baltic republics to Western politicians, advocated for dissidents, and collected news about political repression and anti-Soviet manifestations in Latvia. The duty of political activism and international representation of Latvians was repeatedly emphasized in exile publications (Priedkalns 1983; Apinis 1985). This stance fits into the broader context of literary resistance among Eastern European exiles (Kołodziejczyk, Lecke 2020). Personal and institutional contacts in the West, as well as the interest of exiled Latvians in the activities of *Skandinieki* and the Stalts couple, may have been a factor of *Skandinieki*'s successful endeavors.

There was a great interest in Latvian folklore among exiled Latvians. When visiting Latvia, Western Latvians typically attended the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum fair and other folklore events (Austriņa 1985; Rūgtais Apīnis 1985). Interest in folklore was a form of permissible anti-communism, as were local religions in other republics of the USSR. Journalist Frank Gordon wrote: "Nowhere in the laws of the USSR does it state one cannot collect folk songs, play old musical instruments, or restore old farmhouses" (Gordons 1984). The activities of *Skandinieki* and the Stalts couple were frequently covered in the Western Latvian press, such as *Laiks* (Time) in North America and *Brīvā Latvija* (Free Latvia) in Europe. There, the word *skandinieki* became a common noun for folklore revivalists.

Although "cultural" content in the media was typically considered less political (Fidelis 2022: 74), both Soviet Latvian and exile media used the folklore movement as an ideological argument and weapon. In the exile press, the folklore movement was discussed alongside dissidents, KGB campaigns, and the activities of the PEN International and BATUN (*United Baltic Appeal*) (Latvija Šodien 1982). Publications on the folklore movement often mentioned KGB surveillance and restrictions. Meanwhile, the Soviet Latvian press criticized the Latvian exile press for using the folklore movement to oppose socialist ideals (Dambrāns 1984).

In this study, print media network analysis was used to explore folklore-related communication across the Iron Curtain. A specific feature in this case is that such communication cannot be taken for granted, as it was closely surveilled. The slogan and policy of Soviet internationalism and cultural diplomacy provided official

communication channels, but private communication was closely monitored, diffi-
cult, and unsafe. KGB agents followed the participants of the folklore movement and
reported on their meetings and exchanging packages with exiled Latvians (interview,
Muktupāvels 2024). For exiled Latvians, contacting and visiting relatives in Latvia
was complicated, even if officially legal (Austriņa 1985; interview, Krēsliņa 2024). For
Latvians living in Latvia, arrest and a sentence to a corrective labor camp could be
the price for owning literature printed in the West or publishing in the exile press
(Latvija Šodien 1982: 117). Still, solutions were found, and a network between the
two sides of the Iron Curtain existed.[5]

In this sub-study of the "permeability of the Iron Curtain" (Mattelart 1999),
I considered both official and unofficial, direct and indirect sources of information, as
well as the security factor. The main actors were identified among print media,
editorial offices, and authors, and it was examined how they learned about events
in Latvia. Links between the authors and their references were analyzed to deter-
mine through which channels information from or about Latvia reached the West.
In the period before 1987, 56 publications in the exile press mentioned *Skandinieki*
or the Stalts couple. Starting in 1987, the perestroika effect became noticeable: the
number of publications significantly increased, participants of the Latvian folklore
movement began to visit the West, and the Stalts could give interviews and write
for the Western press. This later period is not addressed in this study. The web-
based research environment *NodeGoat* was used to create a dynamic database
and analytical visualizations. The database supported the subsequent qualitative
in-depth research phase, which included close reading of the publications and
interviews with the authors of publications.

Before 1987, 14 periodicals with editorial offices in the United States, Canada,
Australia, Great Britain, Germany, and Sweden published about *Skandinieki* or the
Stalts. The two most active periodicals during this period were the newspaper *Laiks*,
distributed in the United States and Canada (14 publications), and the journal
Latvija Šodien, issued by the World Federation of Free Latvians in the United States
(10 publications). Both institutions were associated with public figure and journal-
ist Ilgvars Spilners (1925–2014), who may have been a key ally in promoting such
content.

Twenty-six authors could be identified by name, pseudonym (code name), or ini-
tials. For one third of the publications, the authors were anonymous and could not
be identified – likely for security reasons. Figure 7 shows the geographical relations

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5   For a study of the character of Latvian cultural exchange across the Iron Curtain, see Eglāja-
Kristsone 2013.

Figure 7. The left image (7a) shows the connections between authors' places of residence (in red) and editorial offices (in blue). The right image (7b) illustrates the relationship between authors' countries of birth (in red) and their countries of residence (in blue). The visualizations were produced using *Nodegoat*.

of authors and editorial offices. Figure 7a demonstrates that most authors were residents of the United States, though several were based in Latvia. Other authors resided in Israel, Australia, Great Britain, Germany, and Sweden. Figure 7b shows that three quarters of the authors were born in Latvia before the Second World War, meaning they were first-generation immigrants with a strong past network in Latvia. They became refugees during the war and settled mainly in the United States or Australia in 1949–1950. There, they became active members of exile communities and promoters of Latvian independence in the West. A smaller but also represented group of authors, editors, and informants were younger Latvians born in the West. Alongside their reflections on what they had read in Soviet Latvian or exile press, their direct observations and visual documentation brought back from Latvia – such as photographs – were disseminated through the media.

A special category was authors living in Latvia or those who managed to emigrate to the West late in the 1970s and 1980s. They had direct experience of life in the Soviet Union and a recent, first-hand connection to events and people in Latvia. This group includes Jews who emigrated to Israel and other countries, opponents of the Soviet regime who were expelled, and those who married residents of Western countries.[6] Only five identified authors were living in Latvia at the time of their publications (see Figure 8). Two authors who addressed their publications directly to the Western press were the craftsman, hippie, and documentalist of the folklore movement Alfrēds Stinkuls (b. 1950) and the ethnomusicologist and member of the folklore movement Valdis Muktupāvels (b. 1958). The latter was published under the code name Māra Vilceniece, with the publication organized by Alfrēds Stinkuls. The works of three other authors were reprinted from the Soviet Latvian press. These were extended articles on the early years of the folklore movement by

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6   For an overview of emigration from the Soviet Union in 1948–91, see Heitman 1993.
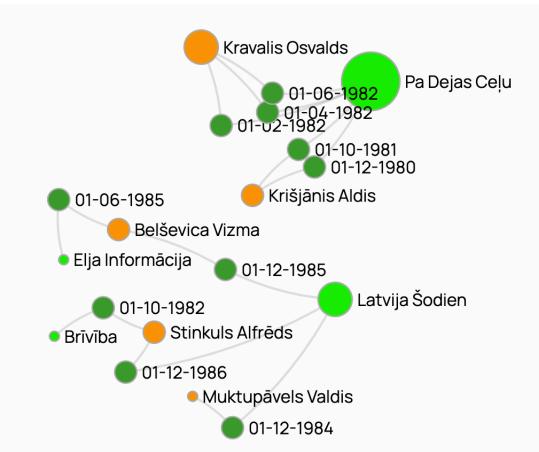
Figure 8. Identified authors residing in Latvia (orange nodes) which had publications about the Latvian folklore movement (dark green nodes) in the Latvian media in the West (bright green nodes) before 1987, i.e., before the effects of perestroika became noticeable. The visualization was produced using *Nodegoat*.

journalist Aldis Krišjānis and poet and literary critic Osvalds Kravalis. A poem dedicated to *Skandinieki* by the poet and writer Vizma Belševica was republished in the West twice.

Notably, one-third of the publications were anonymous. Their references indicate that among them were eyewitnesses of Latvian cultural life and folklore events, photo and video documenters, and individuals with detailed information about the resistance movement, dissidents, KGB surveillance, and travel difficulties. Anonymity was a significant concern even in the West. For instance, a review of the magazine *Latvija Šodien* comments on the anonymous authors:

> The vast majority of the contributors [..] are high-caliber specialists in their field, including several authors who have only recently escaped from Latvia and who have been forced to use pseudonyms in their articles as a precaution (Silkalna 1983).

Editorial offices repeatedly reminded readers that the names of those submitting photographs would not be disclosed (see Figure 9).

A closer look at the case of Alfrēds Stinkuls will give an example of networking activities across the Iron Curtain. Alfrēds Stinkuls was not a member of any performing folklore group but was interested in folk crafts and "national aspirations" in society. He was present at many folklore events and documented them on good-quality color slides and audio cassettes which he had acquired through his contacts in the West.

Stinkuls was in contact with the West from 1969 onward. His cousin in California sent him vinyl records; he listened to Western radio stations, knew English, and was involved in the hippie movement. In 1981, he applied for permission to emigrate to Israel but was denied, and a campaign of intimidation and discrediting followed
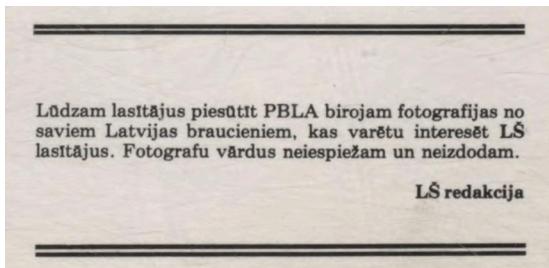
Figure 9. An editorial note in the magazine *Latvija Šodien*: "Readers are kindly asked to send the PBLA office photographs of their Latvian trips that might interest LŠ readers. We do not print or give out the names of the photographers" (1981: 165).

(Stinkuls 2020). He eventually emigrated to the West in early 1986, following his marriage to a Swedish citizen. Both before and after his emigration, he served as an informant to the West, including by publishing on the folklore revival in Western periodicals under his real name and various aliases since at least 1982.

In this section, periodicals in the West are analyzed as a network of editors, authors, and informants who maintained the flow of information about Latvian folklore events across the Iron Curtain. Media coverage of *Skandinieki* and the Stalts couple formed a revival network that extended far beyond the actual folklore performances, engaging a much larger audience in the broader revival-scape. Information and sources obtained from Latvia fueled the interest of exiled Latvians in these folklore events and fostered the development of a parallel heritage revival in the West.

Conclusions   Over the course of this article, the focus shifts from examining the centrality and transnational connections of the folklore group *Skandinieki* to a broader exploration of media coverage of the Latvian folklore revival. Viewing *Skandinieki* as representative of the revival and analyzing media-created revival-scapes reveal a wider network of actors, from performers and event organizers to documentalists and journalists. Geographical mapping also positions spaces themselves as active agents in shaping perceptions of the revival. If folk music revivals can be interpreted as social movements, as Livingston suggested early on (1999), then broader social impact factors and catalysts of change must be considered. One such factor was mass media, which functioned as ideological hubs, provided real-time documentation of revival events, and – through printed copies as impactful non-human actors – disseminated messages among readers. Beyond

expanding the definition of revival actors, the main intention of this study was to "connect the dots" to help explain the transnational power of folk music revivals and their role in larger cultural and sociopolitical changes. These questions extend beyond a conventional ethnomusicological approach and call for engagement with current interdisciplinary methods. For further methodological discussion, I will conclude with some notes on research techniques and perspectives.

The data visualization platform *Grupu Saites* enables further enrichment of data by tracking group links and measuring the centrality and clustering of groups. Adding a temporal dimension to group membership and connections would reveal the dynamics and changes within sub-networks.

In the set of interviews conducted with revivalists, tagging and qualitative analysis of cross-border relationships allowed identifying connections that directly influenced *Skandinieki*. This approach helped avoid assumptions about the impact of generally known influential figures. Further interviews of early revivalists and exploration of their personal and group archives remain of high importance.

Historical print media served as another key source for network analysis, broadening the focus from *Skandinieki* to the wider network of allies and interested audiences across dynamic cultural spaces. One sub-study involved mapping automatically detected geopolitical entities to visualize the media-generated "folklore spaces" in which *Skandinieki* were positioned on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This approach highlighted specific locations (e.g., Moscow, Sweden) that ask for further investigation. Another sub-study explored the network of Western Latvian authors and their connections to Latvia via possible channels of communication. The systematic building and visualization of the database revealed previously overlooked nodes (such as individual authors and editors) and raised new questions for the subsequent qualitative research phase. In both cases, data visualization and the statistical overview of media representations proved to be powerful tools for exploring the field and generating new research directions. This media analysis could be further enriched by compiling a more comprehensive corpus of folklore-related texts and by developing a systematic database of revivalist groups, events, and venues. Contemporary digital technologies make such international-scale investigations increasingly feasible.

This case study of the Latvian folklore group *Skandinieki* was developed to assess the potential of a network approach for analyzing the transnational interconnectedness of folk music revivals. Conceptualizing revivals as actor-networks calls for a meticulous, detail-oriented methodology – one that reveals concrete meeting points and identifies direct actors. As a result, a data-driven analysis can be layered on the more generalized assumptions of influential ideas, territories, and

people. The dynamics of the Cold War and restrictions of the Iron Curtain require more explicit integration into the historiography of cultural revivals. This study shows that, even under the constraints of the Iron Curtain, traceable links existed – between Latvia and Estonia, between Estonia and Sweden, the Latvians in the West and Latvia, and so forth. Alongside individual micro-networks, a broader perspective emerges when considering the decisions, events, and alliances shaped by the cultural diplomacy. While acknowledging the unique local histories, communities, and stylistic variants of revivals, a network approach supports a transnational perspective – one that enables the plotting of the entire "mythical landscape" (Ronström 2014: 52) of folk music.

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