

Kevin C. Karnes  
Soviet Musicology and Contemporary Practice: A  
Latvian Icon Revisited

When the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were annexed by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, their new leaders brought not only collectivization, deportations, and myriad other familiar terrors of the Soviet system. They also brought with them a radical program of psychological reorientation, aimed at the local populace and devised in the immediate post-Revolutionary years – a program that Stalin called *ko-renizatsiya* or “nativization.”<sup>1</sup> The idea behind the nativization campaign, as Stalin described it in 1934, was to subtly imbed Soviet symbols and ideology within the cultural artifacts, rituals, and historical narratives of the Union’s minority peoples. Thereby, Stalin reasoned, those peoples would be encouraged, perhaps over generations, to regard the Sovietization of their societies not as a foreign (Russian) imposition, but as a reflection of autochthonous traditions and values. Thus those peoples would, in Stalin’s words, come to recognize that “Soviet power and its organs are the affair of their own efforts, the embodiment of their desires.”<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the work of Lowell Tillett, Anatole Mazour, and others, we now understand that Soviet historians played a crucial role in this nativization campaign by rewriting non-Russian historical narratives so as to make them read like

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<sup>1</sup>The most comprehensive account and analysis of this program is found in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001). Also see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Suny and Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Graham Smith (ed.), *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (London and New York: Longman, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>Josef Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’no-kolonial’nyi vopros,” cited in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 12.

variations on canonical Soviet tellings of Russian history.<sup>3</sup> And though it has never been acknowledged in the literature on Baltic musicology (at least to my knowledge), musicologists too acted as crucial implementers of the nativization campaign in the newly occupied Baltic territories.

To be sure, this policy of nativization was, in the Baltic, a foreign import. But what I want to explore in these brief opening remarks are its implications for our understanding of the musicological landscape of the past sixty-seven years, in light of a related point made by the Latvian historian Irēne Šneidere at an international conference on Soviet occupation held in Riga exactly five years ago. In a paper exploring, as she called it, “Directions and Problems in Research on the Soviet Occupation Regime,” Šneidere called upon her fellow historians to move beyond the *documentation* of Soviet-era repressions, and to *analyze critically* the *processes* by which those repressions were implemented and were allowed to occur.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, Šneidere noted, and here I quote from her paper, that “In Latvia, virtually no research has been undertaken on *collaboration* after the Second World War.” “It is,” she continued, “much easier to blame others – ‘foreigners’ – than to dispassionately analyze and shed light upon their actions. Among us, it always said that everything bad came from Moscow, from immigrants, from foreigners. But where were the Latvians? We were right here, we lived here and we collaborated with the Soviet regime. Were we compelled to do so? Yes. But there was also another side to the situation. Latvians also participated in the repressions: They reported on their neighbors to the authorities, they plundered the properties of those arrested and deported, they moved into their homes and apartments. Yes, the system not only allowed it, but encouraged

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<sup>3</sup>Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Anatole Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup>Irēne Šneidere, “Padomju okupācijas režīms Latvijā: pētniecības virzieni un problēmas,” in *Padomju okupācijas režīms Baltijā 1944.–1959. gadā: politika un tās sekas. Starptautiskas konferences referāti 2002. gada 13.–14. Jūnijs, Rīga* (Latvijas vēsturnieku komisijas raksti 9) (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2003), pp. 25–34.

it. The system turned Latvian against Latvian. To this day, we have not overcome the consequences of this form of violence.”<sup>5</sup>

For the sake of the present discussion, I must restrict my comments and observations to the case of Latvia, on account of the limitations of my linguistic abilities. And with respect to Latvia, though it seems never to be mentioned among Latvian musicologists today, it is, I believe, important to recognize that the essential foundations for post-War musicological research, deeply rooted in the Stalinist ideology of nativization, were laid not by Russians but by Latvians. They were laid by Latvians like Jānis Sudrabkalns, who explained to readers of the journal of the Union of Soviet Latvian Composers in 1945 that Latvia owed the entirety of its professional musical culture to the heritage of St. Petersburg.<sup>6</sup> And they were laid by Latvians like Jānis Niedre and Roberts Peļše, who touted the texts of ostensibly ancient Latvian folksongs as evidence of the Latvian people’s age-old spiritual, economic, and military dependence upon benevolent Mother Russia.<sup>7</sup> And they were, throughout the whole of the Soviet period, Latvians like Nilss Grīnfelds, composer, musicologist, and vice-rector of the Latvian Conservatory, who were responsible for some of the most repressive actions taken against musicologists who allowed so-called “ideological errors” to creep into their work.<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, as Šneidere is careful to point out, many Latvian scholars – including, perhaps, some of those just mentioned – were coerced into doing what they did. Some sought political or professional advantage in the situation, and a great many simply collaborated to the extent necessary in order to continue publish-

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 30–31.

<sup>6</sup>Jānis Sudrabkalns, “Latviešu mūzikas svētki,” *Literatūra un māksla* (9 February 1945), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Jānis Niedre, “Latviešu tautas dziesmas par vācu kungiem, atkritējiem un tautas draugiem,” *Karogs* (1942), pp. 157–62; Roberts Peļše, “Latviešu un krievu kulturas sakari,” *Literatūra un māksla* (6 June 1947), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>Mārtiņš Boiko, “Latviešu muzikoloģija/mūzikas zinātne. Vēsturiski kritisks pārskats” (<http://www.lmic.lv/muzikologija.php?lan=1>) (the source for the quotation here); and Joachim Braun, “Milda Zālīte (11.VI.1903.–29.V.1981.) Arnolds Klotiņš (10.IV.1934.–?),” in *Raksti: Mūzika Latvijā*, ed. Mārtiņš Boiko (Riga: Musica Baltica, 2002), pp. 326–29.

ing and teaching. Moreover, we must never forget that all who were active from the 1940s through the mid-1980s, no matter what their professional status, had very good reasons to capitulate to authority. For the musicological landscape was littered with the broken careers and lives of those who did not succeed at negotiating the political and ideological demands placed upon them: Jēkabs Graubiņš, Jēkabs Vītoliņš, and Jūlijs Sproģis, to name a few.<sup>9</sup>

And so to turn back now to Šneidere, I would suggest that confronting – acknowledging, recognizing, and negotiating – this legacy of the impossibly tragic situation of collaboration in the scholarly community must be regarded, today, as one of the greatest, and certainly most important, challenges facing Latvian musicology as a discipline. To illustrate just why I believe that this is so urgent, I would like to devote the remaining few minutes of this brief talk to a look at a single case, that of the most widely studied figure in Latvian musical life during both the Soviet and the inter-war Republican periods, the composer Jāzeps Vītols.

As is well known among students of Soviet nationalities policy, a key strategy in implementing Stalin's vision of nativization was to lavish attention upon local cultural icons of the pre-Soviet past whose lives and work could be portrayed as manifesting "socialist" or even proto-Soviet qualities of some sort. In Latvia, Vītols fit this requirement to a tee. The composer was indisputably a giant in Latvia's cultural history: He was a beloved artist both before and after 1900, and he was founding director of both the Latvian National Opera and the Latvian Conservatory. And conveniently, from the perspective of Soviet scholars, Vītols studied and later taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he associated closely with such officially embraced and ideologically acceptable Russian "classical" composers as Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Aleksandr Glazunov, and Anatolii Lyadov. Furthermore, Vītols was

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<sup>9</sup>On Graubiņš, see Vizbulīte Bērziņa, *Daudz baltu dieniņu. Jēkaba Graubiņa dzīvesstāsts* (Rīga: Atēna, 2006), esp. pp. 210–28. On Sproģis, see Guntars Pupa, "Latviešu mūzikas Sliktais zēns Jūlijs Sproģis," *Mūzikas saule* 35 (2006), 28–31. On Vītoliņš, see Braun, "Milda Zālīte (11.VI.1903.–29.V.1981.) Arnolds Klotiņš (10.IV.1934.–?)". All three figures are discussed briefly in Boiko, "Latviešu muzikoloģija."

downright dogmatic in his calls to write music that appealed to the sensibilities of the national masses. From the early years of Soviet rule, Vītols's music was subjected to analytical explications that trumpeted it as emblematic of the artist's deeply felt and endlessly laudable "progressive realism," in Soviet parlance.<sup>10</sup>

There were, however, obstacles to resurrecting Vītols as an ideal proto-Soviet artist. Most importantly, he was outspoken in his disdain of the Bolshevik Revolution, and he fled Latvia for Germany just prior to the final rout of Hitler's troops from Latvian soil in 1944. In the immediate post-War years, these problems were, not surprisingly, ignored. In 1945, one scholar explained Vītols's emigration as the result of his tragic "straying" into "devilish [and] cunning . . . German hands."<sup>11</sup> In a monograph of 1951, abduction was implied.<sup>12</sup> In a 1958 biography, the composer's departure was attributed to the effects of Nazi propaganda upon a weakened, elderly mind.<sup>13</sup>

Things become interesting, however, when we jump ahead to the period of *glasnost*' and *perestroika*, and indeed to the very recent, post-Soviet past. In 1988, Vītols's memoirs, which candidly reflect upon his experience of the Revolution, were finally published, in their near entirety, in Latvia, in an edition by the musicologist Oļģerts Grāvītis. And in that volume we read, once again, in the editor's commentary, that Vītols's emigration was testimony to the effects of German propaganda upon an elderly intellect.<sup>14</sup> One would expect a fuller picture to have developed in the post-Soviet era. But this has not occurred. In fact, despite Vītols's unparalleled stature in Latvian music history and music historiography, only two substantial studies of Vītols's life and work have been published since 1991. And significantly, both were authored by Oļģerts Grāvītis, the figure who did more, over the course of decades, to cast Vītols in a proto-Soviet guise than

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<sup>10</sup>For instance, Oļģerts Grāvītis, *Jāzeps Vītols un latviešu tautas dziesma* (Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1958), pp. 97–99.

<sup>11</sup>Sudrabkalns, "Latviešu mūzikas svētki," p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Pelše, *Latviešu un krievu kultūras sakari* (Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1951), p. 222 n.

<sup>13</sup>Grāvītis, *Jāzeps Vītols un latviešu tautas dziesma*, p. 43–45.

<sup>14</sup>Jāzeps Vītols, *Manas dzīves atmiņas*, ed. Oļģerts Grāvītis (Riga: Liesma, 1988), p. 323 n. 170.

any other scholar. In the first of Grāvītis's post-Soviet books on Vītols, the musicologist acknowledges that Vītols emigrated, and here I quote, "seeking to escape the threat of new repressions."<sup>15</sup> Perhaps. But if Vītols truly sought to flee "new" – *jauni* – repressions in 1944, then what *prior* repressions had he *already* suffered under the Soviets, presumably in 1940–41? No further commentary is provided by Grāvītis, and the scholar does not cite a single documentary or archival source that might justify or clarify his assertion. That was in 1995. Yet as recently as 1999, the situation was unchanged. For in Grāvītis's second post-Soviet book on Vītols, published in that year, the reasons behind Vītols's departure are once again obscured. Again, the composer is described as a hapless, elderly victim of a mass migration in which he had somehow found himself a participant. Vītols was, in this most recent account, "persuaded" – *pierunāts* – by family and friends to board that ship sailing for Germany in 1944.<sup>16</sup> And as in 1995, so too in 1999: Grāvītis gives us not a single citation, proffers not a single archival document as the source for the information he provides. In the end, this most recent account of Vītols's emigration offers nothing in the way of clarification or insight into the composer's actions and doubtlessly complex motives. Indeed, all it has to offer is further – and, tragically, familiar – obfuscation.

It is not my intention to single out Grāvītis in any personal way, and I've used his work as an example only because it serves to illustrate the point that I wish to make in a particularly vivid manner. And that point is this. During the years of Soviet rule, Grāvītis, like Sudrabkalns, Grūnfelds, and others, did what they had to do in order to survive and publish. And I firmly believe that we who did not live their histories have no right to condemn them for what they did. Yet to work *our* way out from under the shadow of a half-century of historical scholarship distorted by the psychological repressions of Soviet nationalities policy will require that we revisit, question, and challenge that scholarship *wherever* it still claims authority. And this will be

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<sup>15</sup>Grāvītis, *Jāzepa Vītola mūžs fotoattēlos* (Rīga: Jāzepa Vītola fonds, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Grāvītis, *Jāzeps Vītols. Tuvinieku, audzēkņu un laikabiedru atmiņas* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1999), p. 11.

painful, because, as Šneidere points out, those historians who fueled, whether willingly or not, the Soviet propaganda machine with their work were not only Russians writing from Moscow. They were, for the most part, Latvians, many of whom remain active today. And so, we now find ourselves in a situation where to confront the past is also, necessarily, to confront, critically, the present – our sources, the work of our colleagues, and ourselves.

With this, we may begin our panel.

**Kevin C. Karnes**

**Soviet Musicology and Contemporary Practice: A Latvian Icon Revisited**

The annexation of the republic of Latvia in the summer of 1940 was accompanied by the implementation of Stalinist policies of cultural transformation aimed at effecting the spiritual “merging” (*sblizheniie*) of the republic’s citizenry with the rest of the Union’s peoples. In an effort to encourage the Latvian populace to recognize the Sovietization of their culture not as a recent, foreign imposition but as a reflection of autochthonous traditions and values, cadres of historians were dispatched and recruited to rewrite the history of the nation. Given that many of Latvia’s inhabitants had, since the mid-nineteenth century, closely identified their national aspirations with the symbolism and experience of their music-making traditions, it comes as is no surprise that musicologists assumed a central role in this ambitious project of reeducation. As the latter group set to work, they quickly identified Jāzeps Vītols, a prominent composer of Latvia’s pre-Soviet past, as a figure especially amenable to fashioning retrospectively into a ideal proto-Soviet citizen. In the half-century that followed, Vītols was the most studied figure in Latvian musicology. His conservative musical language, cultural ties to St. Petersburg, and Russophilic taste was held up as a model for generations of aspiring composers. Indeed, I suggest, the Vītols case illuminates with rare clarity the legacy of Soviet cultural policy in Latvian music historiography, and the lingering effects of that legacy in the present day.

Retracing the history of Vītols scholarship since 1941, I elaborate a portrait of Latvian music historiography that stands in marked contrast to widely held notions of Latvian historical scholarship more generally: namely, that the musicological discourse on this icon of Latvian music history remained largely unaffected by the cultural transformations of the 1960s and 1970s and by *glasnost*’ in the 1980s. Indeed, the image of Vītols crafted in the Stalin era remains largely uncorrected today, despite the



existence of a wealth of complicating archival material now readily available in the Latvian capital. This situation, I suggest, raises provocative questions about the production of musicological knowledge in post-Soviet Latvia, and about the cultural and institutional contexts in which such production has found support.

**Kevin C. Karnes**

**Noukogde muusikateadus ja kaasaegne praktika: Lati sumboli umbervaatamine**

Lati vabariigi anneksiooniga 1940. aasta suvel rakendati stalinistliku poliitika raames kultuuri teisendamist, mille eesmärgiks oli mojutada vabariigi kodanikkonna vaimset „kokkusulamist“ (sblizenije) ulejaanud noukogude rahvastega. Puudes julgustada Lati elanikkonda tunnustama oma kultuuri sovetiseerimist mitte kui uut ja voorast, pealesurutud kohustust, vaid kui poliste traditsioonide peegeldust, varvati ja lahetati ajaloolaste kaadrid rahva ajalugu uuesti kirjutama. Teades, et paljud Lati elanikud olid alates 19. sajandi keskpaigast sidunud oma rahvuslikud puudlused tihedalt ndmuusikatradsiooni sumbolite ja kogemustega, ei tule ullatusena, et muusikateadlased mangisid selles ambitsioonikas umbermotestamise projektis keskset rolli. Alustuseks võeti umbervaatamisele noukogude-eelne lati viljapaistva helilooja Jazeps Vitolsi kuju, kes on eriti sobiv loomaks retrospektiivi ideaalsest urg-noukogude kodanikust. Jargneva poolsajandi jooksul oli Vitols lati muusikateaduses koige enam uuritud isik. Tema konservatiivne muusikaline keel, kultuurisidemed Peterburiga ja russofiilne maitse toodi eeskujuks kui edasipuudlike heliloojate generatsiooni mudel. Ma vaidan, et Vitolsi juhtum illustreerib toepoolest harvaesineva selgusega noukogude kultuuripoliitika parandit Lati muusika historiograafias ja selle parandi pikaajalist mõju tanapaevale.

Kasutades Vitolsi-uurimise ajaluguo alates 1941. aastast, loon ma pildi Lati muusika historiograafiast, mis on Lati uldisema ajalookirjutuse taustal silmatorkavaks kontrastiks: muusikateaduslik diskursus Lati muusika ajaloo selle sumboli umber jai 1960. ja 1970. aastate kultuuritransformatsioonide ja galsnosti poolt

1980. aastatel uldjoontes puutumata. Vitolsi Stalini ajal loodud kuju on toepoollest suures osas pusinud muutumatusena tanini, vaatamata Lati pealinnas nuud vabalt kattesaadavale rikkalikule, aga samas komplitseeritud arhiivimaterjalile. Ma vaidan, et see situatsioon tostatab provokatiivseid kusimusi nõukogude-jargse Lati muusikateaduslike teadmiste produktsioonist ning kultuuri-ja institutsionaalsest kontekstist, mis on sellist produktsiooni toetanud.

**Kevin C. Karnes**

### **Padomju muzikolõgija, pagatnõ un tagadnõ: Latviešu ikona jaunõ gaismõ**

Ar Latvijas Republikas pievienõsanõs Padomju Savienõbai 1940. g. vasarõ, notika Stalina kultõras põrveidoõšanas programmas izpildõšana – programma, kuras uzdevums bija „tuvinõõšana” (*sblizheniie*) starp Latvieõu un citu padomju republiku pilõõniem. õai progtamai vajadzõja palõdzõtu Latvieõu pilõõniem uztevert savas kultõras „sovjetizõciju” kõ Latvieõu tradõcijas atspoguõojumu (nevis sveõnieku uzspieõana); võsturnieki – gan Krievi, gan Latvieõi – põrveidoja Latvijas nacionõlas võstures elementus. Muzikolõgija arõ spõlõja svarõgu lomu õai põrveidoõšanas procesõ. Sõkot ar õo historiogrõfijas darbu, võsturnieki drõz identificõja Jõzepu Võtõlu kõ „võsturisku komponistu”, kas bõtu põrveidojams kõ ideõls (õkõietams) podomju pilõõnis. Piecdesmit gadu laikõ, Võtõls kõõst par visbieõõkõ põtõtu mõkslinieku Latvijas mõzikas võsturõ. Viõa konservatõvais mõzikas stils, profesionõlõs saiknes ar Põtõrburgas skaõumõksliniekiem un Krieviskõ gaume mõkslõ kõõst par radoõu ideõlu jauniem Latvieõu komponistiem. õis raksts pierõda, ka Võtõla situõcija skaidri atklõj Padomju kultõras politiko mantojumu Latvieõu mõzikas historiogrõfijõ – mantojumu, kas ieilga võl mõsdienõ.

õajõ apcerõjumõ, põrskatu Latvieõu muzikolõgiju kopõ 1941. g., apsvõrot, ka zinõõõanas par Võtõlu dzõvi un darbu vairumõ nemainõjõs gan ar Padomju kultõras transformõcijõm 1960-os un 1970-os gados, gan „põrveidoõõanas” (*perestroyka*) gaismõ 1980-os gados. Tieõõam, Võtõla tõõls, kas attõtõtõs Satlina laika muziko-

līgā, palika vairumā nemainīts līdz šodienai, par spīti daudziem materiāliem Latvijas arhīvos. Šī situācija, varu apgalvot, provocē svarīgus jautājumus – jautājumus par muzikoloģijas izziņas spēku pēcpadomju Latvijā, un par kultūriem kontekstiem un iestādēm, kas atbalsta muzikoloģiju tagadējā Latvijā.

**Kevin C. Karnes**

### **Sovietinē muzikoloģija ir šiuolaikinē praktika: naujas požiūris ī Latvijos muzikos „simboli“**

Latvijos Republikos aneksijā, īvykusiā 1940-ujū vasarā, lydējo stalinistinio režimo jēga brukama kultūrinio „susiliejiemo“ (*sblizheniye*) su likusiomis Sovietū Sājungos tautomis politika. Šis virsmas, arba „kultūrinē revolucija“, turējo suartinti respublikos gyventojus ir piliečius su likusia Sovietū Sājungos „liaudimi“. Priimti naujai peršamā kultūros sovietizavimo politikā per savo senujū tradicijū ir vertybiū sintezē Latvijos visuomenē buvo skatinama pasitelkiant specialiai tam paskirtus ir užverbuotus istorikus, kuriū užduotis buvo perrašyti tautos istorijā.

Nuo pat XIX a. vidurio daugumos Latvijos gyventojū nacionalinē savimonē rēmėsi giliomis tautinēs muzikos kūrybos proceso tradicijomis bei jos simbolika, todėl nenuostabu, kad sovietmečio muzikologai, ėmėsi tautos perauklėjimo projekto, skyrė tam savo didžiausią dėmesį. Grupės funkcionieriū pasiūlyta žymaus latviū ikisovietinio kompozitoriaus Jazepo Vytuolo (Jāzeps Vītols) kandidatūra idealiausiai tiko formuoti naujājį, sovietiškājį piliečio įvaizdį. Daugiau negu pusę praėjusio amžiaus Vytuolas buvo įtakingiausias ir daugiausiai tyrinėjamas kompozitorius Latvijos muzikologijoje. Jo konservatyvi, tradicinē muzikinē kalba, kultūriniai saitai su Rusijos Peterburgo miestu bei meilė rusiškai kultūrai buvo pavyzdžiu visiems tų laikū pradedantiesiems kompozitoriams. Mano manymu, Vytuolo pavyzdys labai ryškiai atspindi sovietmečio kultūros palikimą latviškos muzikos istorijoje. Šių tradicijū poveikį jaučiame dar ir šiandien.

Tirdamas Vytuolo mokyklos istorijā pradedant 1941 metais, išplėtojau ir detalizavau latviū muzikos istoriografijos portretā, kuris aiškiai skiriasi nuo bendrųjų plačiai paplitusių Latvijos is-

torijos mokslo sampratų. Muzikologijos diskursai apie šį Latvijos muzikos simboli liko nepakitę, jiems neturėjo įtakos nei XX a. 7 ir 8 dešimtmečių, nei 9 dešimtmečio *glasnost* kultūriniai pokyčiai. Stalinistinės eros funkcionierių sukurtas Vytuolo įvaizdis lieka nereabilituotas, nors ir egzistuoja daugybė sukauptų ir laisvai prieinamų archyvinių duomenų ir dokumentų, saugojamų Latvijos Respublikos sostinėje Rygoje. Ši situacija kelia daug gana provokatyvių klausimų apie kultūrinių institucijų erudiciją bei bendrąjį muzikologijos lygį, egzistuojantį šiandien posovietinėje Latvijoje.