

URGENT EDUCATION PROBLEMS OF KLAIPĖDA REGION IN THE 1ST HALF OF 20TH CENTURY

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Introduction

Baltic tribes had much in common, though differences between them also existed – they used to be separated by rivers, marshlands, lakes, wastelands and woods. Therefore, tribes received different names: Prussians, Jatvingians, Lithuanians (lowland and upland Lithuanians), Curonians, Semigallians, Selonians, Lettigallians. Presumably, before 18th century Prussians and Jatvingians were assimilated by Lithuanians, Germans and Slavs. As a nation Lithuanians formed out of lowland and upland Lithuanians, southern Curonians, Selonians and Semigallians.

Formation of Lithuanian statehood was speeded up by appearance of Livonian Brothers of the Sword (Christ Knights) in Livonian, Curonian, Semigallian and Lettigallian territories (end of 12th century – beginning of 13th century) and Teutonic order (beginning of 13th century) in Polish, Prussian and Western Lithuanian territories (Nadruva, Skalva, Lamata), so a large number of historians treat 1236 as the year when Lithuanian feudal state was finally formed under leadership of Grand Duke Mindaugas. In occupied Prussian and Western Lithuanian territories Teutonic order was erecting castles made attempts to conquer Samogitians (lowland Lithuanians) and have an overland route to Livonian Brothers of the Sword (Christ Knights) or Livonian order, as they started calling themselves in 1237. In 1252 Livonian order erected a castle in Memelburg, in the mouth of Dangė (Danė) river. The place was called Klaipėda by Samogitians, continuously attacking the place and trying to take it back.

After wars with crusaders inhabitants of the Great Duchy of Lithuania moved to empty Teutonic territories, inhabited by Scalvian, Nadroviaian and Prussian tribes. Sister tribes were assimilated by Lithuanians. A distinctive culture formed there. Later the area received the name of Lithuania Minor and its inhabitants – Prussian Lithuanians (Raudys, 2009, p. 279-286).

In 18th century ideas of Enlightenment started spreading in Prussia and in the second half of the century – ideas of Physiocracy, celebrating tiller's labour and the land itself. These Western European ideas stimulated Prussian education, appearance of schools, suggestions about introduction of compulsory primary education. The education system was nationalized and creation of German school started. Education had to strengthen centralized power and speed up assimilation of national minorities. Consequently, struggle for rights of Lithuanian language at school intensified. The policy of germanization started. In 17th-18th centuries Prussian speaking population was assimilated – some of them by Germans, some by Lithuanians. Lithuanians were affected doubly: they were colonized, but educated to know legislation, to be loyal and obedient to authorities, to know the Word (Raudys, 2009, p. 386-388; Matulevičius, 1989).

Germanization was increasing and Prussian Lithuanians were assimilated. The process was more rapid in urban areas. World War I created favourable conditions for Lithuanian administration over Klaipėda region – the northern part of Lithuania Minor.

The Problem. Historic development of Klaipėda region formed relevant problems, related to integration of the region into Lithuania and education was no exception. Education became an important sphere, buffering relations between national groups and their ideologies in different social issues. Therefore, *aim* of this article is to reveal the problems of regional education, methods, ways and obstacles of their solution, implementing the education strategy of Lithuania.

Research methods: 1) analysis of scientific literature; 2) analysis of historiography; 3) metaanalysis.

1. Klaipėda Region after World War I

After World War I Poland, Russia and Germany were taking interest in Klaipėda port.

On November 30, 1918 Prussian Lithuanian Council expressed aspiration to separate from Germany and unite with Lithuania (Tilsit pact).

Treaty of Versailles (28 06 1919) determined borders of European countries after World War I and separated the north-eastern part of Lithuania Minor (including Klaipėda) from Germany, delegating France to administrate it provisionally. It sent its troops there. On November 11, 1921 Constituent Seimas (Parliament) of Lithuania adopted resolution about incorporation of Lithuania Minor into Lithuania Proper (as an autonomous region).

In 1922 a preparation for uprising in the region started. It was backed by Lithuanian government. On January 10, 1923 Lithuanian troops, supported by local volunteers, moved into the region and made French unit (60 soldiers) to surrender after a short battle on January 15. They occupied Klaipėda and on January 19 it was announced that the region unites with Lithuania. This step received approval of Seimas on January 24.

France recalled its representatives and the Conference of Ambassadors recognized the region as a part of Lithuania, obligating it to grant free transit in Nemunas and compensate Triple Entente countries expenses of provisional administration. On May 8, 1924 the Convention of Klaipėda region was signed in Paris. It passed the region to Lithuania *de facto* (Vareikis, 1993; MLE, II t. p. 171-199).

Klaipėda region consisted of 4 administrative units: *Klaipėda city, Klaipėda, Šilutė and Pagėgiai districts (counties)*. Autonomous territory (2.848 km²) occupied 5,5 % of entire Lithuanian territory.

Seven hundred years of German administration resulted in a rather varied and multinational structure of the population. It reflected itself in population census of 1925 (see table 1) (Vileišis, 1935):

Table 1. Population and nationalities in 1925

Nr.	Nationalities	PCT	Population
1.	German	41,9 %	59.351
2.	Lithuanian	26,8 %	37.962
3.	Memelländern	24,0 %	33.996
4.	Other nationalities	7,3 %	10.341
	Total:	100,0 %	141.650

Presumably, most Memelländern (Germans of Klaipėda region) were those of Lithuanian origin, employed both languages and wanted to be exceptional among the rest of Lithuanians, living in Lithuania Proper. A huge number of Lithuanians was assimilated due to active germanization in 19th-20th centuries.

Klaipėda became the centre of the autonomous region, where Directorate and other major institutions were functioning. Situation in the city was even more favourable for Germans (see table 2) (Matulionis, 1930):

Table 2. Klaipėda population (population census of 1925)

Nr.	Nationalities	PCT	Population
1.	German	57,3 %	20.513
2.	Lithuanian (together with Memelländern)	30,3 %	10.848
3.	Foreigners (rejected Lithuanian citizenship)	7,0 %	2.506
4.	Other nationalities	5,4 %	1.933
	Total:	100,0 %	35.800

Lithuanian workers, officials and businessmen were arriving to the region and its ethnic structure started changing. Rights of local Germans were not clearly defined and Lithuania was under continuous pressure of Germany, supporting pro-German forces. Stability of political life in 1923-1939 was disorganized by activity of Nazi organizations (Christian Union of Socialist Workers, headed by T. Sass and Socialist National Union, headed by E. Neumann), willing to incorporate the region into Germany (Valsonokas, 1989).

Social, political and economical situation in Klaipėda region was rather complicated. After World War II it changes essentially, as in 1959 Lithuanians made 55,2 % of entire Klaipėda population, whereas Germans retreated to Germany (Vaitekūnas, 1991).

2. Attempts of Lithuania to Solve Education Problems in the Region

In the period of French administration (1920–1923) German education system, also including general education of 6 – 14 year old children remained to be dominant.

The situation changed, when Lithuania began to administrate the region. In 1923 both German and Lithuanian languages became official. Officials and teachers of German origin, making the majority in schools, did not know Lithuanian. In fact, the principle of linguistic equality was being ignored, though Lithuanian government was taking care of Lithuanian language and its nurturance (Čižiūnas, Sužiedelis, 1968).

The Directory, represented mostly by German officialdom and supported by teachers of German origin, pursued the policy of germanization and was resisting the spread of Lithuanian schools. In 1926 Lithuanian government founded Klaipėda region schools society, the activity of which was focused on establishment and support of private Lithuanian schools. The society was organizing charity parties and lotteries. Active founders and members of the Board were Vilius Gaigalaitis (chairman), Valteris Didžys, Jonas Kybrancas, Eduardas Simaitis, Martynas Purvinas, Kazimieras Trukanas, Jonas Užpurvins and others (Purvinas, 1995).

Lithuanian government was taking care of Lithuanian language and history, their teaching at school. It also made every attempt to bring school programmes of Lithuania Minor into line with those of Lithuania Proper.

This reconstruction of education was heavily resisted by Germans of the region. The process experienced lack of Lithuanian speaking pedagogues. After 1933 spread of Nazi ideology started in regional schools. Teaching of Lithuanian history in German schools was tendentious, German textbooks were used for teaching Lithuanian language.

In 1929 only 57 (25,7 %) out of 221 primary schools in the Directory were those using Lithuanian as a teaching language.

In 1933 there were 23 trade schools in the region, in 1936 – 1 state trade school, 3 Lithuanian gymnasiums. In 1934 Lithuanian government established there a Trade Institute, in 1935 – a Pedagogical Institute.

It was difficult to integrate regional schools into education system of Lithuania. For example, after inspection of 102 regional schools (4 Lithuanian, 7 integrated (mixed) and 9 German) in 1929 it was discovered that German language remains to be a teaching language even in those schools, where Prussian Lithuanians were making the majority of all learners; only 17 out of 148 teachers were speaking good Lithuanian, the knowledge of another 46 was poor, 85 of them didn't know it at all, 35 had German citizenship (Gučas, 1986, p. 165-175).

In 1934 the incumbency of a referent for education appeared in the governor's office; he had to control the work of primary schools, however, the pro-German Directory did not allow him to visit them. Due to infringement of regional statutes the governor of Klaipėda region suspended the Directory and legal proceedings were taken against it. Attempts of Lithuanian government to improve the education of Prussian Lithuanians were continuously meeting resistance of local Germans and potshots in German press.

Lithuanian government was supporting loyal Lithuanian organizations: Santara (with its chorus), Minor Farmers' Union, Lithuanian Riflemen Union, Prussian Lithuanian Alliance and others. The region was also in need of specific textbooks and their authors. Geographer M. Gelžinis, an active member in the council of Klaipėda region schools society was one of them.

M. Gelžinis, the author of geography textbook *My homeland. Klaipėda region* explains, why it is necessary to respect and preserve native language: “We speak Lithuanian, as our parents and their parents had been speaking it. We have to respect our parents and their customs. Therefore, we have to respect our own language and speech <...> Realizing that Lithuanian language is a divine gift, we swear to speak Lithuanian“ (Gelžinis, 1935, p. 68).

The problem of Lithuanian language was closely related to political problems of the country: Germanism of people in Klaipėda region and Polonism of those in Vilnius region.

M. Gelžinis is deeply concerned about national upbringing and in the introduction to his textbook he writes: "I publish this book, hoping that it will help teachers and learners, will serve them not only as a pure material, but also as a source of Lithuanian spirit. I hope that it will strike devotion to their homeland and contribute to the major task – to take closer both parts of Lithuania in a natural way" (p. 5).

M. Gelžinis (1935) understands the particularity of Klaipėda region (a part of Lithuanians is germanized, German population is numerous, shortage of Lithuanian speaking teachers, etc.), so he introduces about one hundred geographical terms in German and Lithuanian. The author's approach is rather democratic, as the learners experience no pressure: "Since teachers and learners are accustomed to German terms and very often don't know Lithuanian ones, I included about 100 major geographical terms, used in both languages and employed in primary schools. When doing that I intend to assist those teaching geography in Lithuanian" (p. 5).

M. Gelžinis nails down the official Lithuanian approach that from time immemorial the region was inhabited by Lithuanians: „State. Our homeland, Klaipėda region is an inseparable part of Lithuania. (...) We are Lithuanians and our forefathers had been living here for a thousand years“ (p. 68). The author uses even photos for upbringing of patriotic feelings among schoolchildren. One of them depicts a girl, dressed in a national costume, underneath – an inscription: "This is how a Prussian Lithuanian looked like. We have to be grateful to her – she managed to preserve Lithuanian language and raise children, loving their homeland and the nation" (p. 5).

As a supplementary material, M. Gelžinis also introduced the plan of Klaipėda (Gelžinis, 1935).

Lithuanian government was publishing textbooks in five languages and paid particular attention to national minorities (KAA, F-69, A-1, B-81, 1928, annex Nr. 7):: "...list of employed and suitable for employment textbooks: 1) in Lithuanian; 2) in Jewish; 3) in German (10 denominations in the period of 1922 – 1928); 4) in Russian; 5) in Polish“.

Several decrees had been issued to protect young people from involvement into politics. An address of inspector M. Palukaitis to schoolmasters from February 27, 1931 could be a perfect example of that: "...Neither schools, nor immature young people may be involved into quarrels, disagreements and infighting.<...> The goal of schools and their headmasters will be achieved, if young people will be protected from quarrels of adults and brought up as good citizens in the wide sense of the word"(KAA, F-69, A-1, B-107, L-30).

In 1939 attempts of Lithuanian government resulted in establishment of 60 primary schools (2350 learners) in the region (Lithuanian was a teaching language in all disciplines). Klaipėda region schools society took care of education related issues. It was financially supporting Klaipėda Vytautas Magnus gymnasium, Klaipėda fast learning school at Pedagogical seminary, Pagėgiai K. Donelaitis gymnasium, Šilutė comprehensive school, boarding-houses and schoolchildren from families of Lithuanian farmers. Money was also coming from Lithuanian government, lotteries and charity parties. When Nazi Germany occupied the region in the March of 1939, representatives of above society addressed the occupation authorities, asking permission for further existence of Lithuanian schools, however, the answer was negative. Vytautas Magnus gymnasium was moved to Palanga, the destiny of Pagėgiai K. Donelaitis and Šilutė Vydūnas gymnasiums was also predetermined. Primary schools were closed.

Klaipėda pedagogical seminary was training primary class Lithuanian speaking teachers. It was established in 1902 (started its activities in 1903). Initially those from a two-year Klaipėda preparatory school were admitted to the seminary. In 1913 this school incorporated into the seminary. Since 1925 graduates of gymnasiums could try for the seminary. The training programme included all school subjects and their teaching methodologies (including Lithuanian language until 1909), foreign languages (English, French), pedagogy and psychology.

Since 1923 only persons, speaking both official languages of the region (Lithuanian and German), were admitted to studies in the seminary. 6-7 weekly lessons were given to Lithuanian language. In accordance with a decree of the Directory in 1925 new courses were introduced. They were Lithuanian history, geography and pedagogy. Graduates of the seminary gained teacher's qualification after 1-2 of work in school and passing of final examinations. 29 crops of pedagogues (600-700 teachers) successfully completed their studies in the seminary (M. Šlaža, E. Simonaitis, E. Bajoras, M. Purvinas, J. Purvinas, J. Užpurvins among them). Outstanding figures of Lithuanian culture were giving lectures in the seminary. Most well-known among them were M. Narbutas, E. Kairys, G. Storosta and J. Stagys and others (Purvinas, 1935).

Lithuanian government decided that teachers of primary schools are to be trained at pedagogical institutes. In 1935 the seminary was replaced by a Pedagogical institute. The seminary was closed in 1936 (Sliesoriūnas, 1995).

Klaipėda region schools in 1935 (MLE, II, 2003):

1. *college type* (6 schools):

- 1) Klaipėda Vytautas Magnus gymnasium (1932, Pr. Mašiotas)
- 2) Luise gymnasium (girls, German)
- 3) Auguste Viktoria gymnasium (boys, German)
- 4) Klaipėda teachers' seminary (Lithuanian and German)
- 5) Herder school in Šilutė (Lithuanian)
- 6) K. Donelaitis gymnasium in Pagėgiai (Lithuanian)

2. *high schools* (4 schools):

- 1) Klaipėda Old Town boys' school
- 2) Klaipėdos Old Town girls' school
- 3) Šilutė high school
- 4) Žemė high school in Pagėgiai

3. *Primary* (237 schools)

- 1) Klaipėda -14 schools
- 2) Klaipėda district (county) - 74 mokyklos
- 3) Šilutė district (county) - 66 mokyklos
- 4) Pagėgiai district (county) - 83 mokyklos

There were 247 different type schools. German, Lithuanian and Lithuanian-German were teaching languages in them. Germans dominated in schools, but the situation was changing. In 1923 there were 53 learners (3 %) in Lithuanian schools (out of 1750 schoolchildren), whereas in 1938 – 1348 learners (42,2 %) out of 3200 schoolchildren. There were 1852 learners (57,8 %) in German schools (Purvinas, 1935, p. 92-93).

Lithuanian culture was also promoted. In 1924 first Lithuanian regional papers in Lithuanian appeared: “Klaipėdos naujienos” (Klaipėda News) (1924–1936), “Lietuvos keleivis” (Lithuanian Voyager) (1924–1939) and others. Lithuanian government was financing private schools, activities of Vytautas Magnus gymnasium and initiated the establishment of higher schools: in 1934 – Trade institute, in 1935 – Pedagogical institute (MLE, II t, p. 209-213). The government took the view that culture and music will buffer complicated Lithuanian-German relations. In 1923 a conservatoire was established, in 1935 a subdivision of Šiauliai theatre was moved to Klaipėda.

On March 23, 1939 Germans occupied Klaipėda and a number of Lithuanians and Jews retreated to Lithuania. On the basis of preformed lists mass arrests of Lithuanians started. The population of Klaipėda decreased (from 51168 in the March of 1939 to 41188 in 1941) (Vileišis, 1935).

Klaipėda region schools society, established by Lithuanian government, enshrined Lithuanian language, history, traditions and customs. The number of those learning in Lithuanian schools was increasing. However, confrontation of Germans and Lithuanians remained. The situation was not improving due to continuous pressure of Germany on Lithuania and protection of nationalist ideologies in the region. World War II brought cardinal changes into urgent problems of this region: Germans and Memelländern (Germans of Klaipėda region) practically disappeared, whereas Lithuanians were occupied by the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

- 1) German domination in Klaipėda region for several centuries narrowly changed the situation after its incorporation into the Republic of Lithuania.
- 2) Klaipėda Region Schools Society and its activity, including establishment of private schools, their oversight, increase of learners' numbers in Lithuanian schools and charity enabled to slowly uphold Lithuanian language, history and revive customs and traditions.

- 3) Education and culture policy of Lithuania in Klaipėda region gave positive results: establishment of institutes, Lithuanian schools, publication of textbooks, teacher training, increase of pupils in Lithuanian schools, nurturance of music, etc.
- 4) German-Lithuanian relations were improving, but continuous pressure of German authorities on Lithuanian government and spread of nationalist ideology in the region was an obstacle for that improvement.

World War II changed basically situation in the region: Germans and Memelländern (Germans of Klaipėda region) practically disappeared, whereas Lithuanians were occupied by the Soviet Union. If that would not happen, who knows how regional society, education and relations of people could look like?

- 5) Nowadays Pedagogical faculty of Klaipėda university nurtures educational traditions. It trains teachers and teaches German at school - H.Sudermann gymnasium in Klaipėda is the only German school in Lithuania. It also nurtures musical traditions, which are strong in Klaipėda due to many music schools, S.Šimkus conservatoire and KU faculty of Arts. Klaipėda and its university became conservators of regional traditions and the centre of new Prussian Lithuanians. Are these achievements directly related to stirring activities of Lithuanian authorities and Klaipėda Region Schools Society in 1923–1939?

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ŠVIETIMO AKTUALIJOS KLAIPĖDOS KRAŠTE XX A. I PUSĖJE

Vidimantas Raudys

Santrauka

XV–XVI a. vakarinių lietuvių, prūsų ir atvykusių iš Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės žmonių pagrindu vokiečių administruojamoje teritorijoje (Kryžiuočių ordinas, nuo 1525 m. Prūsijos hercogija) susiformavo kompaktiškai gyvenančių žmonių kalba (tarmė), papročiai, tradicijos, gyvenimo būdas, kurių pagrindu gyventojai vadinti *lietuvninkais*, o jų gyvenama teritorija – *Mažoji Lietuva*. Po I-ojo Pasaulinio karo šios teritorijos šiaurinė dalis atiteko Lietuvos Respublikai (1923) ir ji dažniau imta vadinti *Klaipėdos kraštu*. Šiame krašte per septynis šimtmečius atvyko kolonistų vokiečių, užaugo naujos jų kartos, asimiliavosi vietiniai gyventojai lietuvninkai. Dėl šių sudėtingų procesų XX a. I pusėje Lietuvos Respublikai ėmus administruoti *Klaipėdos kraštą* autonomijos pagrindais iškilo daugybė problemų ir viena iš jų – švietimo ugdymo: vokiečių dominavimas Direktorijoje, mokyklose, mokytojų rengime; politinis priešiškas; žmonių diferenciacija kalbiniu, tautiniu ir ideologiniu požiūriais. Lietuvos Respublikos valdžia dėjo pastangas stiprindama švietimo pozicijas, kad mažėtų įtampa autonominiame *Klaipėdos krašte*. Įkurta *Klaipėdos krašto mokyklų bendrija*, kuri kūrė privačias mokyklas, rūpinosi jų priežiūra, lietuvių kalbos, istorijos puoselėjimu. Lietuviškose mokyklose besimokančiųjų išaugo nuo 3 % iki

42,2 %. Švietimo problemas spręsti trukdė vokiečių mokytojų priešiškas nusistatymas, Vokietijos spaudimas Lietuvos vyriausybei, nacionalistinių ideologijų plitimas. II pasaulinis karas savotiškai išsprendė problemas: neliko vokiečių, memelenderių ir didelės dalies lietuvininkų. Šiandien Klaipėda tapo *Mažosios Lietuvos* kultūros ir tradicijų puoselėtoja.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: lietuvininkai, vokiečiai, švietimas, Klaipėdos krašto mokyklų draugija.