

# ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN SOVIET LATVIA – THE SOURCE OF A STRONGER NATIONAL IDENTITY

ANETE KARLSONE

Senior researcher

Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia

“Cermauksas”, Laudonas pag., Madonas nov. Latvia, LV-4862

e-mail: anete.karlson@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

This article\* provides an insight into ethnographic research during the Soviet occupation of Latvia, viewed in the context of national self-consciousness. Ethnographic research in Soviet Latvia was conducted by the ethnographic sector at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). By successfully using phrases appropriate to the political situation as well as the right quotations from Soviet ideological works, it was possible to maintain ideas and attitudes developed in interwar independent Latvia, for example, regarding Latvian national costume – in the works of Mirdza Slava. In turn, Aina Alsupe managed to carry out substantial new studies of the history and development of weaving in Latvia, and collect materials on the development of applied art in Soviet Latvia. The studies conducted by both Alsupe and Slava allowed researchers to keep applied folk arts and the folk costume topical, and in doing so to help maintain Latvian cultural identity.

**KEYWORDS:** ethnography • Soviet Latvia • national identity • folk costume • textile history

## INTRODUCTION

To a greater or lesser extent, ethnographic cultural heritage forms the basis of the sense of national identity for many nations in Europe, and in the 19th century, Latvia was no exception to this. However, in Latvia the development of ethnography as a branch of science occurred with varying intensity at different times. Similarly, not all areas of ethnography were equally important in creating and maintaining national identity. In

\* The article was written within the National research program Interaction between the Individual, the Society and the State in Process of the History of Latvia: Conflicting Values and Formation of Shared Values during Historical Turning Points VPP-IZM-2018/1-0018.

this respect, folk costume – and partly also textiles – played a more important role. The purpose of this article is to provide an insight into ethnographic research during the Soviet occupation, viewed in the context of strengthening national identity.

In Soviet Latvia, as in other Soviet republics, researchers in ethnography were forced to work under strong ideological pressure. Nevertheless, research was still performed and the results published. Today, the work of Latvian ethnographers carried out during the Soviet period has been only partially evaluated. (Jansone 2018; Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2019; Karlson 2019) Socialist festivities and other cultural phenomena of the Soviet life-style have also been studied not only by ethnologists (Boldāne-Zeļenkova 2017) but also cultural historians and folklorists (Treija 2007; Rasa 2008; Kruks 2012; Kēncis 2017). Unified overview of the work performed by Latvian Soviet ethnographers was created by Saulvedis Cimermanis (1995). Similar information can be found in publications about Estonia (Viies 1991) and Lithuania (Čepaitiene 2013). In addition there was no focus on issues relating to the way in which ethnographic research was used to maintain cultural identity, rather the research was performed under the influence of both administrative requirements for scientific development as well as reflecting the personal scientific interest and abilities of each individual researcher.

Ethnographic research in Soviet Latvia was conducted by the ethnographic sector at the Institute of History of the LSSR Academy of Sciences, where research topics were divided among scientists. The official titles of the topics varied, but in terms of content, Mirdza Slava (1924–2001) studied the folk costume, while Aina Alsupe (1926–2015) devoted her efforts to areas related to other fabrics and the history of weaving. These two researchers were leaders in their field who studied independent research topics in this area and regularly published the results of their work in Soviet Latvia.

The present article will mainly focus on the spheres of ethnographic research (folk costume and female handicraft) that are most closely related to the visual expressions of Latvian identity found in clothing and interior design, i.e. those areas of the micro-environment that are most closely related to personal identity. As no wider research into the history of ethnography in Soviet Latvia has previously been performed, this article provides only an insight into the subject.

The article is structured so that first the sources used are characterised. Then an overview of the historical situation is given as it comes into connection with the topics discussed, i.e. national dress and female handicraft provide an insight into the situation of ethnographic research in Latvia before the Second World War. Turning to the period of Soviet occupation, the LSSR Academy of Sciences was the main institution determining the scientific processes within the Republic. After a description of the research topics and methods, some attention is given to the scholarly activities of two individual researchers, Slava and Alsupe. The result of the work by the two scholars is characterised, and the usage and importance of national costume and folk applied art in Soviet Latvia are discussed.

## SOURCES

Various sources, both published and unpublished, most of which are written testimonies, but also some oral, have been used to study the topic. The following sources have been used in the article:

1. Unpublished sources – documents contained in the Repository of Ethnographic Material at the Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia (REM ILH UL)<sup>1</sup> on the activities of its ethnographers during the Soviet period;
2. Published sources – articles and monographs by ethnographers, publications on the work of ethnographers in Latvia during the Soviet and other historical periods;
3. Personal memories of researchers who were active during the Soviet period.

The REM ILH UL holds some administrative documents on the activities of Soviet period ethnographers. The amount of material differs depending on the year as does the content from a quantitative and thematic perspective. The documents used in the present article deal with the 1952 to 1972 period (E 67), covering preparation and performance of regular scientific fieldwork sessions, materials from scientific conferences (ethnographers' and archaeologists' annual report sessions), programs of the collection of ethnographic materials, work plans, meeting plans and minutes of the ethnographic sector, the candidate of sciences in ethnography (equivalent to today's PhD) examination program, publication manuscripts, official correspondence and reports, etc. Looking through these documents in conjunction with ethnographers' publications, the extent of the creative work of each researcher and the administrative requirements included in the work become clear.

Scientific articles and monographs by Alsupe and Slava, published between 1959 and 1990 have been used as the published sources for this article (Alsupe 1959; 1960; 1961; 1962a; 1962b; 1963; 1968; 1973; 1982; Alsupe and Kargane 1988; Slava 1960; 1961; 1962; 1963; 1966; 1973; 1990).

Information from scientific literature, through contemporary publications and articles published during the Soviet period, has been used in the article to improve understanding of the development options of the ethnographic sector under conditions of Soviet occupation. In addition, personal testimonies have been used, specifically the memories of ethnographer Dr. habil. hist. Linda Dumpe (b. 1930; a researcher from the same generation as Alsupe and Slava) on the research work in the Soviet era. The memories of the author herself were also used, both from the period she studied at Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts (1982–1986), and from when she began work in the ethnographic sector at the Institute of History of the LSSR Academy of Sciences (1987). (At that time, both Alsupe and Slava worked in the ethnographic sector.) The study also includes memories by Alsupe narrated to the author of the article during the period of collaboration when Alsupe was supervisor of her scientific work.

One of the areas related to the preservation of cultural identity was national costume, its manufacture and use. To understand the significance of the national costume during the Soviet occupation, it is important first to look at an earlier period. National costume had been an important symbol of Latvian national identity since the end of the 19th century. The creation of a national costume was part of the culture cultivation process during the formation of the nation (Leersen 2006). The development of the idea and the visual design of the costume took place in close connection with another tradition established during the period, the Latvian Song Festival (Karlsone 2013). This celebration was preserved during the Soviet occupation and continues to this day (Muktupāvela and Laķe 2018). Similar events take place in Lithuania and Estonia. In 2008 the Baltic Song and Dance Celebrations were included on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2008). The Latvian Song and Dance Celebration together with the Baltica folklore festival was a significant part of The Singing Revolution. (Šmidchens 1996; 2017) In Latvia, these festivals are essential for the expression of national identity and the use of national dress.

From 1888 to 1926, the national costume to be worn at the Latvian Song Festivals was a modern Latvian-style costume (Figures 1–2). It was created as a visual symbol of Latvian identity and its symbolic role continues to this day, although its visual appearance changed for each song festival to meet the fashion trends of the day (as in the first stage, from 1888–1926, it was a modern costume), and in accordance with growing ethnographic knowledge. From 1931, when the personnel of the Song Festival Clothing Commission changed, and the artist Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939) became the Commission's leader, only an imitation of the historical peasants' festive costume as preserved in museums was referred to as national costume (Figures 3–4).<sup>2</sup> (These costume sets were created by ethnographers, because there are only separate pieces of clothing from one owner in the museum collection.) The visual similarity of the national costume to be worn at song festivals to the ethnographic attire generated a demand for research into traditional folk costume and publications dedicated to it.

*Figure 2. Version of the Latvian national costume in 1904*



*Figure 1. Version of the Latvian national costume by Hermine Zalite (1894).*



Rīg. Latw. Beedr. V. wispabrigo dseeda-  
sēšanas swētku kōmisijas isdewums.

Peelikums pee Austruma  
== Nr. 1. 1904. gada ==



Sibmeijs J. Maderneeks.

Druhtats pee S. Deutsd, Rīgā

Tautas apgehrbs ar wilaini

Modernu apgehrbu paraugi

## LATVIEŠU TAUTAS UZVALKI

I. Iegādā

Rīgas, Krustpils, Jēkabpils, Ilukstes, Daugavpils, Rēzeknes, Balvu novads



Jānu Krustpils uzvalks pēc prof. R. Zariņa skicēta

No tautas "Latvju raksti"

LATVIEŠU DZIESMU SVĒTKU BIEDRĪBAS IZDEVUMS 1931. GADĀ

## LATVIEŠU TAUTAS UZVALKI

XI. Iegādā

Nīcas novads



Nīcas cietis tautas uzvalks pēc prof. R. Zariņa skicēta

No tautas "Latvju raksti"

LATVIEŠU DZIESMU SVĒTKU BIEDRĪBAS IZDEVUMS 1931. GADĀ

RĪGĀ, KONSERVĀTORIJĀ

Izgatavots Valstsizdevuma

Figure 3. Women's costume in Krustpils, one of the Latvian regional folk costumes drawn by Zariņš (Dzērvītis 1931 I).

Figure 4. The men's costume in Nīca, one of the Latvian regional folk costumes drawn by Zariņš (Dzērvītis 1931 XI).

Published as early as 1931, recommendations for festival participant's costumes provided extensive information about various parts of the historical clothing worn by Latvian peasants and preserved in museums (Dzērvītis 1931). However, in some places the costume sets described in the 1931 publication lacked historical connection with any particular territory. The joint publication by ethnographer and archaeologist Adolfs Karnups and weaver Elga Kivicka, *Costumes of the Regions* (1938), included much better-grounded reconstruction of historical costume sets, which formed the basis for the creation of national costumes for several regions. In 1938 *Costumes of the Regions* was published in the form of 12 separate booklets, and a year later as a single book. The content of both publications is identical, including the page numbering, and formed the basis for publications on Latvian national costumes for many years to come, including under Soviet occupation.

## WOMEN'S HANDICRAFTS AS MANIFESTATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Since the 1920s the applied arts, especially women's handicrafts, as well as the wearing of national costume, have been regarded as manifestations of national identity.

This attitude was created by multiple publications in illustrated magazines (Anon. 1935; 1939; Dzērvītis and Sunepska 1934; 1935; Miezone 1938; etc.), where women's handicraft types were characterised using the word 'Latvian', as well as the fact that samples from Latvian ethnographic study were used as examples. During the interwar period, many periodicals, such as *Zeltene* ('Folk Maiden'), *Atpūta* ('Recreation'), *Sieviētes Pasaule* ('Woman's World'), *Mūsu Mājas Viesis* ('Our Home Guest'), *Latvijas Saule* ('Latvian Sun'), etc., included items devoted to Latvian handicraft. Many included practical suggestions for the creation and wearing of national costume. In addition, parts of traditional garments as well as interior textiles were used as a rich repository of ornamental samples. In the 1920s and 1930s, Latvian amateur ethnographers paid great attention to the study of traditional peasant clothing and applied folk arts. There were also a number of publications on the topic, including books (Zariņš 1924–1931; Niedre 1930; 1931; Karnups 1933; Dzērvītis and Ģinters 1936) and various research papers (Straubergs 1930; Karnups 1936; 1937a; 1937b; 1937c; 1937d; Dzērvītis 1937; 1938; 1939).

Samples of Latvian ethnographic fabrics were used as examples of different weaving techniques in weaving textbooks (Antens 1931; Kivicka 1934; Antēne 1936). It should be noted that the principle of using ethnographic fabric samples in the training of weavers, along with a large part of the weaving theory, were borrowed from Sweden (for example Collin 1924). Women's handicrafts were included in the curriculum at both home economy and agricultural schools and, of course, craft schools. Various handicraft courses were also popular. Clothing decorated with ethnographic patterns was particularly trendy in the 1930s (Dzērvītis and Sunepska 1934; 1935). Similarly, textiles with Latvian ornaments were often used in interior design.

To discuss the studies carried out within the ethnographic sector during the Soviet occupation, it is first necessary to look at the situation in Latvia during the interwar period. Even though in the 1930s ethnographic cultural heritage was an integral part of national ideology, the issue of ethnographic studies at Latvian universities, foremost the University of Latvia, was not resolved for a long time, with a course in ethnography only launched in 1939. At that time the young Swedish researcher Dag Trotzig was elected Associate Professor of Ethnography at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy at the University of Latvia (Reinsone 2014: 173–175).

During this period ethnographic research was linked to museum activities. Ethnographic materials were collected and accumulated both at the State Historical Museum (now the National History Museum of Latvia) and the Latvian Open Air Museum. The Museum staff and authors of ethnographic articles were actually experts in various other fields. For instance, archaeologist Karnups, architects Pauls Kundziņš, Jānis Jaunzemis, litterateur Jānis Niedre, artists Zariņš, Arvīds Dzērvītis, handicraft masters Kristīne Pāvuliņa, Auguste Siliņa, Aleksandra Dzērvīte. In researching nation-specific way of life, the focus was on subjects such as folk costume, architecture, tools, etc. (Zariņš 1924–1931; Kundziņš 1927; 1932; Niedre 1930; 1931; Andermanis and Kundziņš 1933; Jaunzemis 1935; etc.).

In terms of methodology, during the 1920s and 1930s researchers working in Latvian ethnography (Kundziņš, Karnups, Matīss Siliņš, Jānis Jaunzems, Voldemārs Ancītis) kept up with the latest scientific developments elsewhere in Europe, especially Scandinavia. For example, the world's first open air museum in Stockholm, Skansen, was the model for the creation of the Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum, founded in 1924. (Kundziņš 1932: 1) In the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, when a significant amount of knowledge in the field of ethnography was obtained during the expeditions organised by the Board of Monuments (*Pieminekļu valde*), the research practice used in Scandinavia at that time was used as the example for the creation of questionnaires (Trocigs 1940: 175; Strods 1964: 142–143, 151–152). The historical-comparative method widely used by Swedish ethnologist and cultural historian Sigurd Erixon in the field of ethnography in Sweden, was introduced following the example of scholarly practice in Germany and Sweden. A significant part of this method was mapping the phenomena to be studied (Ancītis 1940: 12; 1943: 6–7).

Linguists already used this method in the 19th century (*ibid.*: 5–6), and it gained popularity in the field of ethnography in the second half of the 1920s and especially in the 1930s. In Latvia, questionnaires intended for the planned Latvian culture atlas were created at the end of the 1930s in co-operation with Swedish ethnographer Trotzig, lecturer at the University of Latvia. However, the work was never completed (Reinsone 2014: 173–182).



## ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE LATVIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES DURING THE SOVIET OCCUPATION

Ethnographic research in this period passed to the Academy of Sciences. From 1946 a group of ethnographers worked at LSSR Academy of Sciences Institute of History and Material Culture. During the 1951–1955 period they worked at the newly established Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. However, after another reorganisation they returned to the Institute of History in 1956, remaining there, with several slight name changes, until 1990.

During the Soviet period, Latvian universities did not provide training for ethnographers. In the Faculty of History at the University of LSSR, a general ethnography course was taught only during the first year. However, research studies could be written on ethnographic themes. These study works were usually supervised by historians, as ethnography was not a field of academic specialisation. The young historians specialised in ethnography in the course of the work. Many of those who later became scholars of ethnography started their careers at the Ethnographic Open Air Museum of Latvia or in the Ethnography Department of the Latvian SSR History Museum. A new generation of researchers entered the field of ethnography at that time: Alsupe, Cimermanis, Dumpe, Lidiņa Jefremova, Anna Krastiņa, Ingrida Leinasare, Slava, Antoņina Zavarina, and others. There were also Russian-speaking scholars whose families had moved to Riga from different regions of the USSR after World War Two. Among those scholars there were also several russified Latvian families, the so-called 'Russia's Latvians', who in most cases were particularly active advocates of communist ideology. Nevertheless the leadership of the ethnographic sector remained continuously in the hands of Latvian scholars (Mārgers Štepermanis, Heinrihs Strods, Cimermanis, etc.).

Researchers could only obtain a scientific degree in Moscow by presenting a dissertation written in Russian. Already in the 1950s ethnographers working at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the LSSR Academy of Sciences reported in the compulsory critical section of their work reports that a lack of qualified staff hindered their work. Therefore, the USSR Academy of Sciences was asked to allocate postgraduate positions (equivalent to today's doctoral studies) to the training of ethnographers and folklorists. Slava was one of the first ethnographers to embark on postgraduate studies in Moscow.

### RESEARCH TOPICS IN SOVIET ETHNOGRAPHY

During the Soviet period, the main focus was on the collective, mainly kolkhoz farmers. Ethnographic research topics also had to reflect the way of life of the working people. Research topics were also identified according to the politically defined directions of the ethnographic sector (Strods 1968: 22–24). The selection of themes took place in close cooperation with the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Ethnography in Moscow (E 67, 21: Kushner 1952).

According to the preserved documents, research topics essentially remained the same over time, only the wording and references to specific political documents changed. A report by Elza Lase, head of the ethnographic sector at the time, entitled



“On the Activities Carried out by the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore at the LSSR Academy of Sciences in the Field of Ethnographic Research in 1953”, rather clearly outlines the organisational principles of ethnographers’ work under the Soviet system:

The ethnographic sector at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the LSSR Academy of Sciences, in drawing up the scientific research plan for 1953, was guided by the decisions of the 19th CPSU Congress, and in this regard the issue of Changes in the Culture and Way of Life of USSR Nations was set as a priority, which is a complex issue and is implemented in close cooperation with the Institute of Ethnography at the USSR Academy of Sciences. From this major and important issue, the institute of the LSSR Academy of Sciences selected one topic, The Family and Family Lifestyle of LSSR Kolkhoz Workers, which is studied in cooperation with other LSSR research institutions, especially local history museums. (E 67, 47: Lase 1953b)

Family and Family Lifestyle was also a research topic for ethnographers in ten other Soviet republics (E 67, 21: Kushner 1952). As with all sectors of the economy, the development of science was carried out in a planned and unified way.

Between 1956 and 1960, the research topic intended for the ethnographic sector was the Latvian Way of Life and Culture, which included 12 subtopics. Among them: 1) Latvian Folk Art Crafts – resulting in publication of *Latvian Folk Art*, followed by volumes II and III (Alsupe 1962b; Zunde 1967), all of which were important for the preservation of national costume and Latvian applied arts; 2) Weaving as a Type of Home Craft Trade in the LSSR in the 19th and 20th Centuries; 3) Latvian Rural Women’s Clothing and its Ornamentation in the 18th and 19th Centuries; and 4) The Use of Ancient Ornament Traditions in Contemporary Applied Arts, and others (E 67, 24: Lase 1955).

In the perspective plan for 1962–1965, only the wording of the study topic changed, while the essence remained the same. The topic of clothing and textile, as well as folk art, was included in the general theme of The Material Culture and Way of Life of Latvian Farmers in the 19th and 20th Centuries (E 67, 28: Strods 1961). Strods (1968: 24), the head of the ethnographic sector at that time, also discussed the research topics of this period in his publication:

In the second half of the 1950s, after the inclusion of the ethnographic sector in the LSSR Institute of History and Material Culture in 1956, the cooperation of historians and ethnographers became even closer. As a result, more research was done on the material culture and way of life of the Latvian people during the fall of feudalism and development of capitalism from the second half of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century. In the second half of the 1950s, and in the 1960s, the study of the main ethnographic issues continued: 1) the Latvian culture and way of life during feudalism and capitalism, 2) changes in culture and way of life in the period of socialism, and 3) ethnogenesis and the ethnic history of the Latvian nation.

Within the study of the way of life of kolkhoz families, Slava began to study clothing. She was an art historian by education, and therefore in her research she focused on the constructive and artistic qualities of the object. However, that was also what the readers actually wanted rather than descriptions of the lives of kolkhoz farmers.

Starting with 1954, Alsupe began working at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the LSSR Academy of Sciences, and her first research theme was also the clothing of kolkhoz workers. Her unpublished manuscript on the subject of "Kolkhoz Workers' Clothing", dated 1955 (E 67, 49: Alsupe 1955), is stored at the REM ILH UL. It is possible that it was created as a report on ethnographic materials collected during fieldwork. However, in the same year she started working on the subject of Home Weaving on the Territory of the LSSR at the end of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries, which marked the start of a more far-reaching study of the history of weaving and textiles.

Under the Soviet system, the ways in which researchers could express themselves was limited. The choice and formulation of a research topic had to be in line with the ruling ideology, and these themes were changed, depending on ideological considerations. In order to be able to research a chosen ethnographic subject ethnographers had to be able to justify its social relevance, in line with prevailing ideological ideas. Dumpe recalled how this was already learnt while at university. Soviet ethnographers had to give credit to the ruling ideology not only in the formulation of their topics, but also in the scientific texts themselves, for example give a negative assessment of the way of life and personalities of independent Latvia, or reference the works of communist party ideologists and the guidelines set by party congresses, etc. However, publications by different authors from different eras of the Soviet period vary in the extent to which such guidelines were implemented.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The quality of ethnographers' scientific work and research methods used by different institutes in the soviet republics were under the radar of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. For example, in a report on the work of ethnographers in 1953, Lase, then head of the ethnographic sector, pointed out:

All employees of the sector advanced their qualification through consultations with the candidate of historical sciences L. Terentyeva, prof. Dr. P. Kuschner and N. Tcheboksarev [employees of the USSR Academy of Sciences], which greatly helped scientific workers in learning ethnographic research methods and analysis of ethnographic matters from the perspective of Marxist dialectics. A study by professor N. Tcheboksarev on anthropological research in the Baltic Complex Expedition in 1952 and candidate of historical sciences L. Terentyeva's "Poseleniye i zhilishche" report helped in Latvian ethnography, while prof. Dr. P. Kuschner's "Ethnography, Its Subject and Methods of Research" report was very useful in studies of general ethnography. (E 67, 21: Lase 1953a)

Regular ethnographic fieldwork, which was initiated in 1947, was started by the Institute of History and Material Culture of the LSSR Academy of Sciences. Scientific fieldwork was an integral part of the scientific work of ethnographers and folklorists. Instructions on the collection of ethnographic material during fieldwork, work methods and topics to be addressed, were received from Moscow. One such example is a document in Russian with the stamp of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences

with no signature, which may have been written in the first half of the 1960s (E 67:19: [no author 196?]). Instructions on the collection of ethnographic material relating to clothing were the same for the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics, as well as Central Asia, Siberia and Middle Russian regions. The instructions were unified for the entire Soviet Union, although the historical situation in each region was different. It is possible that instructions similar to those included in the document mentioned above (E 67, 19 [no author 196?]) were already known in the 1950s, because the report by Slava on clothing gathered during the 1953 fieldwork (E 67, 45: Slava 1953c), similar to a report by Alsupe about 1954–1955 fieldwork material on kolkhoz workers' clothing (E 67, 49: Alsupe 1955), fully complies with the scheme included in the instructions.

Preparation of the regular fieldwork expeditions was discussed at meetings of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore (E 67, 21; E 67, 30; etc.). Prior to each fieldwork expedition, the participants were briefed about the working methods and research topics, with researchers assigned to each topic.

According to work methods approved by the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, each researcher had to design questionnaires about the particular topic to which they had been assigned. From the 1950s both Slava and Alsupe were actively involved in the ethnographic fieldwork organised by the LSSR Academy of Sciences, including designing these questionnaires. Slava also took part in complex Baltic ethnographic expeditions in which scientists of both the Baltic States and Russia worked together. Throughout her career, Alsupe designed questionnaires and material collection programmes to study the history of weaving, other crafts and folk applied arts, for example, "Home Weaving in Vidzeme during the Period of Capitalism", "Crafts in Latvia", "The Rural Handicraftmen's Way of Life", "Weaving with Manual Tools", "Spinning and Weaving Tools and Techniques in Latvia", "The Modern Culture and Way of Life of the Inhabitants of the LSSR" and "A Questionnaire for Craftsmanship Specialists in the LSSR". The ethnographic material obtained in fieldwork during the Soviet period was widely used in preparing publications, reflecting the situation at the end of the 19th, and 20th, centuries.

Materials for the study of various ethnographic areas were methodically collected during ethnographic fieldwork, in which scientists, students of applied art and architecture and other people interested in ethnography took part. After the fieldwork, a report was written, and a folklore concert and exhibition of applied art organised in the area. These measures led to an increase in interest in folk culture heritage among the local population and strengthened national self-confidence, which was not foreseen in the work plans approved by Moscow. These scientific research report sessions often led to the creation of a folklore ensemble or a group of applied artists at a specific location.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, when ethnographers were incorporated as a department at the Institute of History of the LSSR Academy of Science, scientific research report sessions with archaeologists, ethnographers, linguists and folklorists were held in Riga at the Academy of Sciences building during the winter season, often complemented by a concert featuring folklore ensembles (Vīksna 2014: 15–21; Lielbārdis 2014: 68–163). Scientists, students and pupils from the Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts, as well as other interested people were the audience of these events. The author of the present article also attended these events during her school years and remembers the feeling of being part of Latvian cultural manifestation at this events.

In addition to the instructions received from Moscow on research methods (for example, E 67, 19: [no author 196?]), to a large extent ethnographers from the Baltic republics continued to use the historical-comparative method adopted before the war in their research work. In addition, according to Dumpe, an ethnographer of that generation, ethnographic researchers in Moscow had been favourably disposed towards the Baltics and had also borrowed research methods used in the Baltics into their own work. This is partially confirmed by the preparation and publication of Baltics historic ethnographic atlases organised by the Ethnographic Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Terent'yeva 1985; 1986). A letter about the start of the work process was sent by the acting Director of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences Lyudmila Nikolayevna Terent'yeva to the director of the Institute of History of the LSSR Academy of Sciences Aleksands Drīzulis (E 67, 91: Terent'yeva 1964), and the document has been preserved.

#### ETHNOGRAPHER MIRDZA SLAVA

In her scientific work, Slava managed to preserve two main research themes: Latvian patterned mittens, and folk dress. An important part of the latter was the peasants' historical festive costume, used as the basis for Latvian national costume. Within the framework of the Way of Life and Culture of the LSSR Kolkhoz Workers joint ethnographic research theme, in 1952 Slava's research topic, Ornament in Latvian Clothing, was approved, although in January 1953 it had to be changed to Latvian Rural Women's Clothing and its Ornamentation (E 67, 21: Slava 1953a; 1953b). The topic researched by Slava during 1952 was entitled Farmer's Clothing and Household Products and was part of the Family and Family Lifestyle theme (E 67, 21: Lase 1953a). However, despite various formulations, Slava continued to study the historical clothing of Latvian peasants. The theme of ornament originally studied by Slava received exposure later in publications about Latvian patterned mittens (Slava 1960; 1990).

Slava's interest in how Latvian national costume basically reflects the material of the 19th century was already formed while studying at the Riga School of Craft and Art,<sup>4</sup> established in the 1930s by the artist and amateur in the field of folk costume, Dzērvītis. Although under political supervision, the school kept working throughout the soviet period, maintaining its direction of expressly supporting Latvian consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

Most of Slava's publications include an overview of the 19th century ethnographic material combined with descriptions of kolkhoz farmers' and workers' clothing. In the first article published in the *Archaeology and Ethnography* collection (Slava 1960), references to examples from kolkhoz farmers' lives are successfully blended with ethnographic material that reflects the traditions of the 19th century. The article is abundantly illustrated with drawings of mitten patterns (Figure 5), which were swiftly taken up by knitters in their work.

Carrying out the task set by the authorities – of studying “changes in the culture and way of life in the period of socialism” (Strods 1968: 24) – Slava first of all gave a broad description of traditional peasant festive clothing, and only then turned to the clothing of kolkhoz farmers. This part was substantiated by an explanation of how



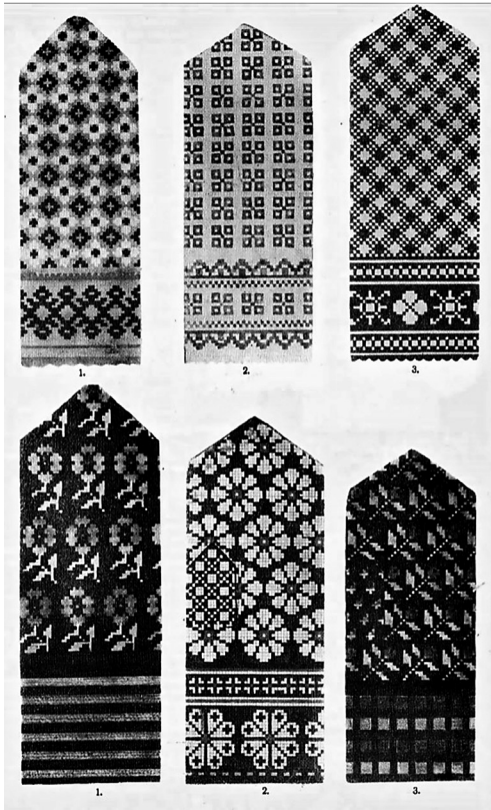


Figure 5. Mitten patterns. Illustration from Slava 1960: 142.

today's perspective, the rest of the article also provides valuable material on the development of clothing in the 20th century, including the reflection of Soviet life.

Slava, as mentioned before, was one of the first ethnographers of the LSSR who obtained a degree in Moscow. She began her postgraduate studies in Moscow in 1953. In 1955 in Moscow Slava presented a dissertation in Russian on "Latvian Women's Clothing and Its Ornamentation in the 18th to 20th Centuries". Based on this, the monograph *Latvian Folk Costume* was published in Latvian in 1966 (Slava 1966). For many decades this was an important source for national costume designers and people interested in Latvian ethnography. From a scientific point

young kolkhoz farmers like to use folk costume as a source of inspiration for their festive clothing, and how there were no relevant publications available to assist them in this (Slava 1962: 111). An article by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was also cited to stress the importance of exploring a phenomenon and its development from its very beginnings (Slava 1963: 193). So, the study of kolkhoz clothing should first include a description of the historical clothing of Latvian peasants of the 18th–19th centuries (Figure 6). Many readers only used the somewhat extensive introductory part of the article, although from



Figure 6. Drawing of Latvian folk costume. Illustration from Slava 1962: 113.

of view one new finding was a way of determining types of traditional shirt. However, in general, in the descriptions of costumes of the regions, Slava used the division of folk costume sets created already in 1938–1939 by ethnographer Karnups (Karnups and Kivicka 1938). In the book the text written by Slava is very similar to that of Karnups, but it is slightly changed, avoiding direct quotations. It is also complemented by references to historical sources and analogues in the clothing of other nations. This allowed her not to refer to the author she used, as Karnups was politically repressed and it was not desirable to mention him.<sup>6</sup> Publicly the possible connection between the two texts is never mentioned. Neither the author of the present article, nor her one-time colleague Dumpe can recall that Slava would have referred to Karnups in relation to her dissertation, although the content similarity is at places remarkable.

Slava's contribution to the study of folk costume did not include much new information from the perspective of theory, but her publications maintained in society the knowledge about national costume at the level of research performed during the time of independent Latvia.

The longstanding pedagogical activities of Slava in Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts was important in maintaining the topicality of folk costume as a national symbol. Slava also actively lectured on Latvian national costume to various audiences, and as an expert in the field collaborated with the Emīls Melngailis Folk Art House (now the Latvian National Centre for Culture). These lectures were recorded annually in the reports as work in addition to planned works (E 67, 21: Lase 1953a). It should be noted that exceeding one's plan was almost a requirement for Soviet citizens.

Slava was able to combine rhetoric corresponding to political ideology at the ethnographers' meetings, reviews of articles by her colleagues criticising bourgeois Latvian ethnographers that stressed the need to emphasise the supremacy of socialist life (E 67, 65: Slava 1962a; Slava 1962b; Slava 1963), and active maintenance of the canon of Latvian national costume within the wider community. She firmly and steadfastly advocated the creation and wearing of the 'right', i.e., 1930s, national costume, without mentioning a time for the formation of such a view. Her publications and lectures on national costume undeniably helped form public opinion on that part of folk culture heritage as a valued and integral part of Latvian culture.

#### ETHNOGRAPHER AINA ALSUPE

The first major topic researched by Alsupe was the history of the development of weaving in Vidzeme. Before that, such fundamental research on the history of the development of weaving had not been carried out in Latvia. There had been articles about individual groups of textiles, but even then mainly in connection with archaeological finds or folk costume.

Already in the 19th century, weaving was well developed on the territory of Latvia both as a traditional skill and a craft. It continued to be actively practiced both in independent Latvia and during the Soviet occupation. In Soviet Latvia, weavers made up the largest part of applied arts handicraftsmen. Therefore Alsupe's research on the history of weaving, including the types of fabric and the history of their development, was very important not only from a purely scientific point of view.

The history of weaving was also the theme of Alsupe's dissertation, "Small-scale Production of Textiles in Vidzeme in the 19th Century and at the Beginning of the 20th Century", which in 1963, after repeated discussions in the ethnographic sector, was approved for presentation (E 67, 91: Strods 1963). Alsupe presented it at the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow in 1964. However, the monograph *Weavers in Vidzeme* (Alsupe 1982), written in Latvian and based on the thesis, was approved for publication only some 20 years later. The topic was considered by the Soviet authorities as completely irrelevant and unnecessary. Alsupe has repeatedly asserted that she saw a sentence written on her doctorate dissertation by Augusts Voss (from 1966 to 1984 head of the Central Committee of the LSSR Communist Party) that read: "When will this nonsense finally be over? A. Voss".

The unjustified and unprofessional criticism, expressed by Voss and other leading civil servants and Soviet party bureaucrats, devalued the system. Often, the accusations against scientific publications were so absurd that they could not be logically refuted causing humiliation for researchers and severely hampering scientific work.

Research topics were changed by administrators, depending on ideological considerations. This fact hampered the scientific work, where the depth and scope of the research on the topic should have depended on availability of sources and the qualifications of the researcher, rather than on other considerations. However, quite frequently, as Alsupe often mentioned at the end of her life, the development of a topic was interrupted and a new topic set that was impossible to complete. This includes research on the history of crafts in Latvia as a whole (Alsupe 1973). During the Soviet era Alsupe failed to carry out research on the history and development of weaving throughout the territory of Latvia, only completing the research in Vidzeme (Alsupe 1959; 1960; 1961; 1962a; 1963; 1982). The scientific articles were abundantly illustrated with pictures of fabric made at various periods (Figure 7). After the restoration of independence, a book on the development of weaving in eastern Latvia, *Fabrics in Latgale* (Alsupe 2008), was published, although there has been no comprehensive study of the phenomenon elsewhere in Latvia. Alsupe was able to focus on the types of textile and the history of their creation across Latvia, albeit in a rather generalised way, in the second edition of the three-volume *Latvian Folk Art*, titled *Textiles of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Alsupe 1962b).

In line with the priorities set for ethnography, Alsupe focused on studying the activ-

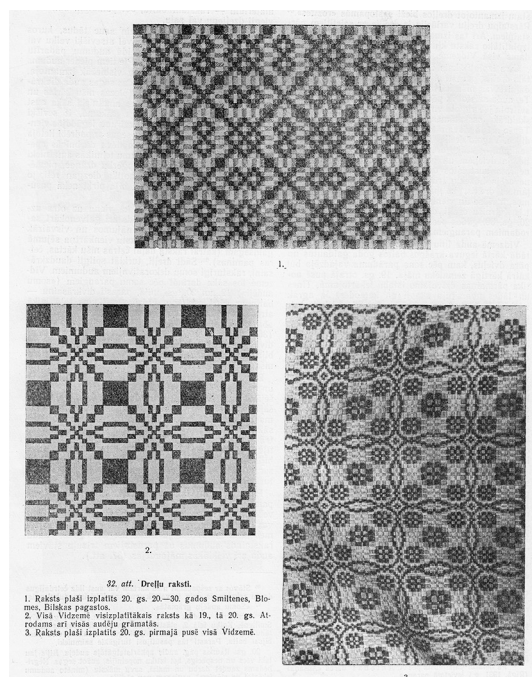


Figure 7. Latvian fabric patterns. Illustration from Alsupe 1960: 182.



ities of applied arts groups and studios. As an ethnography specialist, she collaborated for many years with the Emīls Melngailis Folk Art House, and leading educational seminars, evaluating applied arts exhibitions, acting as a consultant, etc. In the late 1980s, in collaboration with Ausma Kargane, Alsupe published *Applied Arts in Soviet Latvia* (Alsupe and Kargane 1988). The book reflects and describes all branches of applied arts that were included in the scope of activities of arts and crafts studios and groups. The book is a document of its time reflecting on the development of applied arts in Latvia in the 1970s and 1980s.

When evaluating Alsupe's scientific work one can conclude that her lasting contribution is her research on the history of weaving and her honest attitude towards the objects being studied. Careful analysis of the material allows us to obtain information and draw conclusions not only on specific objects, but also on much wider regularities that affect different areas of the history of Latvian culture. Likewise, her belief in the fact that one should not waste energy rebutting non-scientific theories, but rather make efforts to establish scientifically sound information, is of lasting value. Above all it was important to Alsupe to investigate systematically and accurately the research topic, to find all the available information and only then draw conclusions.

#### FOLK COSTUME AND LATVIAN APPLIED ARTS DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

As mentioned before, in the Soviet period, especially in the 1960s, several publications focused on the historical clothing of Latvian peasants, as well as on traditional fabrics. Despite the various administrative rules and politicised wording of ethnographic research topics, publications on Latvian applied folk arts and historical peasant clothing, contrary to the expectations of the party bureaucrats, did not serve the propaganda purposes of Soviet ideology. However, in order to publish them, the fact that applied art is a manifestation of the people's creative spirit was used as a justification for the relevance of these topics in Soviet Latvia, and it was argued that the historic clothing of peasants forms the basis for the national costumes needed by choirs and dance groups for concert performances.

Wearing a national costume during the Song and Dance Celebrations in Soviet Latvia was a compulsory rule of these festivals,<sup>7</sup> which were used for communist propaganda. The organisers attempted to reduce the nation-patriotic significance of folk costumes by introducing dances from other nations along with their costumes to the repertoires of the dance groups. The use of the Latvian folk costume was internationalised by official institutions, defining it as just one of the different folk costumes. However, for members of choirs and dance groups, it was something more than just a regular performance costume.

Each publication by ethnographers – every volume of the *Archaeology and Ethnography* (*Arheoloģija un etnogrāfija*) collection of articles<sup>8</sup> published since 1957 – and other publications on historical peasant clothing and traditional textiles were in great demand, and were used regularly. The text, which contained obligatory 'credit' to the political regime, was read carelessly, omitting the politicised parts. Alsupe's report titled "The



Use of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials for Contemporary Arts and Crafts” also confirms the fact that folk art publications were in demand:

In the aesthetic education of the society and the design of products, handicraftsmen of the republic widely use the values accumulated in Latvian folk art. [...]

As a kind of special literature, handicraftsmen of the republic use archaeological and ethnographic publications: collections of materials and articles, monographs, and individual articles. In particular, there is a strong demand for publications that deal with the issues of folk art history. Observations show that the study process of handicraftsmen would be more targeted and productive if the publishing houses of the republic would issue specific collections of archaeological and ethnographic material and articles for pedagogical purposes. (E 67, 32: Alsupe 1973)

Drawings of parts of Latvian traditional costume and other decorated textiles were actively used to make fabrics for clothing and interior design, which were supplemented by Latvian patterns (Figures 8–9). Thus, a visual micro-world was created which Soviet ideology could not enter.

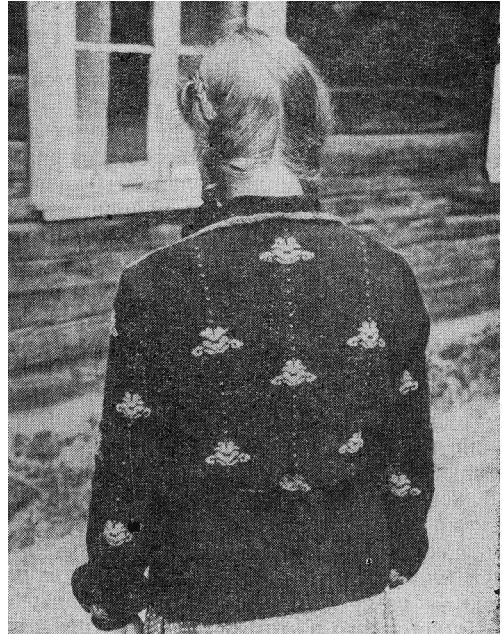


Figure 8. Knitted clothing designed with Latvian ornaments. Illustration from Slava 1962: 135.



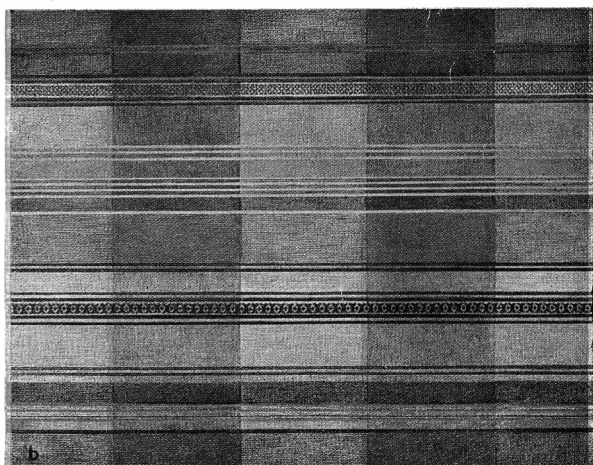
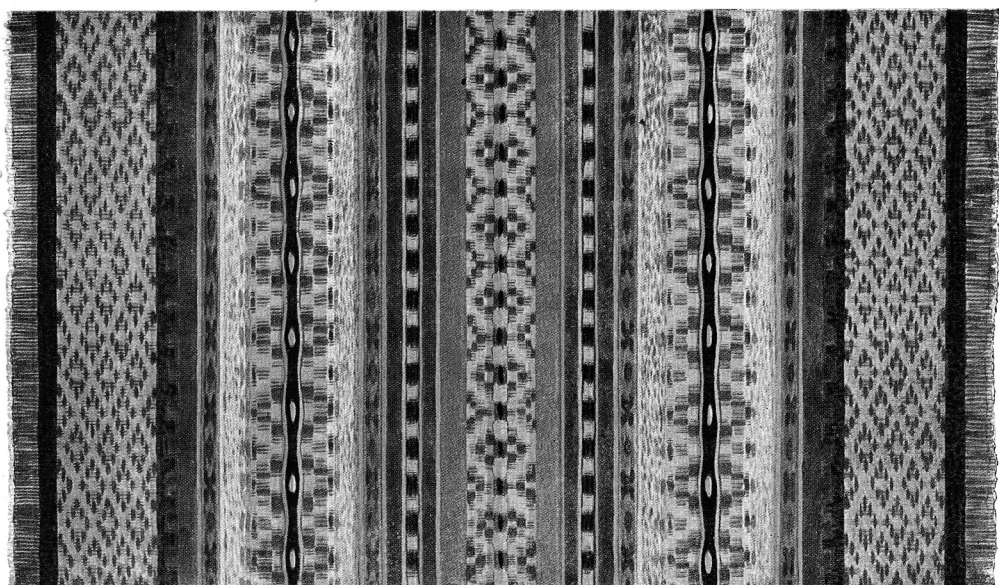


Figure 9. Latvian interior textiles. Illustration from Alsupe 1963: 149.

## CONCLUSIONS

Under the Soviet system, the development of science was planned, regulated and guided by various administrative orders. The ethnography sector was supposed to serve as the propaganda tool of Soviet ideology. The content of research work was influenced by evaluations from both peers and superiors. Nevertheless, studies that were in line with the administrative development of science as well as of interest to the wider public were carried out. By successfully using phrases that corresponded to the demands of the political situation and using Soviet ideological quotes, it was possible to maintain ideas developed in the scholarship of independent interwar Latvia in regard to Latvian national costume, as shown in Slava's work. In her turn, Alsupe managed to carry out substantially new studies on the history and development of weaving in Latvian territory, and collect material on the development of applied art in Soviet Latvia. The studies conducted by both Alsupe and Slava allowed folk applied arts and the national costume to remain topical, which helped maintain Latvian cultural identity.

## ABBREVIATIONS

REM ILH UL – Repository of Ethnographic Material of the Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia

## NOTES

1 In 2006 the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR (together with REM, etc.) became the Agency of the University of Latvia, and in 2016 was reorganised as a structural division of the University of Latvia.

2 For more, see Karlson 2013: 91–99, 186–188.

3 According to Alsupe, from memories, as told to the author.

4 Later the Riga Secondary School of Applied Art, now the Riga School of Design and Art.

5 This is confirmed by the memories of the former students, including the author of the present article (student 1982–1986), as well as her mother (1949–1956).

6 Karnups was arrested in 1946. Based on invented accusations he was deported and remained in exile for the period of 1946–1955. Only several years after the amnesty of 1959 was his criminal record formally expunged (Viksnā 1999), although in reality his social position never recovered, and he remained a 'politically unreliable' person. Upon return he managed to find a position at the P. Stradiņš Museum of History of Medicine, where he worked until his death in 1973.

7 For more, see Karlson 2013: 107–146, 192–203.

8 *Archaeology and Ethnography* is a collection of articles on archaeological and ethnographic, as well as numismatic and other, topics published from 1957. This edition was very popular in the Soviet times among Latvian intellectuals and folk craftsmen.

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- E 67, 91: Terentyeva, Lyudmila Nikolayevna. 1964. Glubokouvzhayemyy, Aleksandr Arvidovich. [Терентева, Людмила Николаевна 1964. Глубокоувжаемый Александр Арвидович.]
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