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Cultural Heritage and Identities of Europe's Future



## Case Study Reports: Non-formal Cultural Participation and Socialisation in Latvia



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## 1. Executive summary

This report offers fresh insights into the cultural practices of young people in Latvia in non-formal education settings. Two contrasting locations were selected – a group playing the Latvian national instrument *kokle* in the capital city Riga and an ethnic minority cultural association in Daugavpils focused on practising and preserving Polish culture in Latvia. Semi-structured in-depth interviews in addition to participant observations on research sites shed new light on young people’s motivation to engage in non-formal education, and the ways culture is both understood and practised. Despite the two case studies sharing their background in practising traditional culture, they also illustrate how, due to its history, culture in Latvia is frequently interpreted in terms of ‘ethnic culture’ tied to traditional song and dance.

Among the findings is that young people engaged in non-formal education generally acquire (or strengthen) their appreciation for culture, and practise it in other settings and ways as well, such as traditional celebrations or religious practices. Hence, non-formal education settings as a place for practising culture is not detached from everyday life, and it needs to be looked at in the context of a person’s general values system, cultural capital and cultural literacy that cover all areas of life.

Part of young people’s motivation to engage in non-formal education focused on preserving ethnic culture stems from their respect towards their family, their ancestors and their heritage, yet no less important is the opportunity to spend time with friends. Importantly, as this research shows, practising their own ethnic culture makes young people more interested and more sympathetic towards other cultures. This study also demonstrates the importance of language in understanding young people’s views on culture, and language as part of the culture itself as demonstrated by the Polish cultural association in Daugavpils. Being European is understood by young people in Latvia as tied to particular set of values rather than cultural practises, yet their own identification with Europe mainly stems from purely geographic location.

## 2. Introduction

The main focus of this research is on young people’s cultural practices in non-formal education settings in Latvia. The main objective is to use participant observations and in-depth interviews with young people and practitioners to explore two different non-formal education sites – a group focused in *kokle* play in Riga and a Polish ethnic culture association in Daugavpils –

providing insight into young people's cultural participation and their acquisition of cultural literacy. The main research questions are:

- How young people understand and practise culture;
- What motivates young people to get involved in bottom-up cultural practices;
- How is participation in these groups linked with acceptance of diversity and pluralism;
- What are young people's views on European culture and their own identity;
- How do non-formal education settings facilitate the acquisition of cultural literacy?

### **3. Methods**

This study employs qualitative research methods – partially structured interviews and participant observations – as they provide a more in-depth understanding of meanings and motives of the research participants. It is particularly important when exploring somewhat abstract and value-loaded concepts such as 'culture' that people themselves might find it difficult to express and categorise. In our case, we expected the research participants to have a vague and/or diverse understanding of culture, hence, we paid particular attention to not imposing certain pre-defined assumptions but rather allowing the interviewees to express freely their own understanding of the notion. Only if young people insisted on clarification of what is meant by culture a comment, an example, or a vague introduction was provided by the researcher.

### 3.1. Selection of non-formal education settings

Two non-formal education settings were selected in Latvia:

1. Group where young people play a traditional Latvian folk-instrument *kokle* – one of the youth leisure groups offered in a larger youth center in Riga.



Note: Picture just for illustrative purposes, not of the actual location.

Source: <https://koklesrulle.com/2012/04/16/kokletaju-skate-2012-foto/>

2. Polish folk dance group in Daugavpils, also associated with a cultural center offering other cultural activities as well.



Note: Picture just for illustrative purposes, not of the actual location.

Source: viator.com

Several criteria played a key role in selecting the two non-formal education settings. Due to inequality in infrastructure, economic situation and population density, in Latvia possibilities to practice culture substantially differ between the capital city Riga and other regions (Koroļeva

2015). Riga is a city of air, sea and rail connections, its infrastructure is well-developed and the unemployment rate of economically active population stood at 3.9% at the end of 2018; the infrastructure of Daugavpils is less developed and the city's unemployment rate is higher – 9.3%. There are also substantial wage differences, resulting in significantly higher average income among the inhabitants of Riga compared to Daugavpils. Cultural events and places of cultural significance in Latvia such as concerts, movies, exhibition halls, museums etc. are heavily concentrated in Riga, while opportunities to both practice and enjoy culture elsewhere in Latvia are much smaller. Thus, one of the criteria was geographical location. One non-formal education setting was selected in Riga, the other one – in the border city of Daugavpils located in Southeastern Latvia.

Both policy documents and academic literature on culture are focused predominantly on the preservation of a certain 'ethnic' culture: either Latvian or a minority culture. Thus, focusing on two different ethnic groups within Latvia – a majority and a minority group - can reveal interesting and important differences in how the culture is practised and how it links with identities and attitudes towards other cultures.

Ethnicity (self-declared): in Daugavpils, there are 49.0% Russians, 19.9% Latvians, 13.5% Poles, 7.6% Belarusians, 1.9% Ukrainians, 0.9% Lithuanians, 0.4% Roma and 6.8% other nationalities, including the nationality not selected and indicated, while in Riga there are 47.0% Latvians, 36.8% Russians, 3.7% Belarusians, 3.4% Ukrainians, 1.8% Poles, 0.8% Lithuanians, 0.1% Roma and 6.4% other ethnicities, including the ethnicity not selected and indicated (Centrālās Statistikas birojs, 2018). The ethnic situation in Daugavpils largely determined that we chose to study a non-formal education group that is at the same time minority group. This enhances the contrast between Riga and Daugavpils, as in both groups the young people learn specific to their ethnic culture - in one case Latvian traditional musical instruments, in the other case Polish dances.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

A person familiar to the DU CHIEF researcher team helped with access to the *kokle* group and provided contact information of *kokle* group teacher. Group's classes usually take place twice a week in the evening, with some exceptions. e. g. holidays.

At the first meeting, on April 15, the teacher introduced the researcher to the children and encouraged them to be active and to participate in interviews. The researcher also introduced herself, informed about the project and the way the research would take place, and distributed information materials about the project to the children.

1) Participant observation of group activities. In general, young people very quickly accustomed to the presence of the researcher and appeared to feel free while communicating with each other and participating in classes. The researcher was involved in the research process as an observer and as a participant in some activities of the groups, such as singing folk songs together with children. Thus, an environment was created to make children feel more comfortable and open up during the interviews. While participating in group activities, the researcher wrote field research notes on children's behaviour, mood, communication with each other, and other relevant information. The classroom premises were small, and the children usually sat in a semi-circle and this allowed us to observe all of them well. During the classes, children were photographed (as a group) and a few videos of their activities were taken.

2) Qualitative Interviews. Kokle folk-song group consists of five age groups. The research was conducted in its Middle Group (children of Grades 8-11) and that corresponds to the age range of the study. For the most part, the researcher herself invited the children to participate in the interview. However, in a few cases the children themselves expressed their willingness and consent to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted on the premises of the youth center: During the lessons the teacher allowed the children to participate in the interviews and in this case the interviews were recorded in the hallway. The presence of other people around (sometimes other children and their parents were in the hallway) did not distract children and both their confident style of answering and open body language showed that they did not feel shy and answered openly. After classes in the group's premises; 3) on another day when there were no classes – in the hallway or for example two interviews were recorded outside in the youth center in the courtyard.

The interviews were semi-structured and the researcher mostly followed the CHIEF guidelines, but sometimes small changes were made during the interviews to the initial research questions. During the interviews, there were no cases of refusal to answer any questions; but sometimes the researcher had to explain in more detail what is being asked and what is meant by the question, giving some possible examples of answers. Some children struggled with definitions and explanations – for example, what is culture, what is personal or close people culture, European culture and events, etc.

All together 10 interviews were recorded with children and 2 with professionals. Since all respondents were Latvian speaking, interviews were recorded in Latvian. The average length of one interview is 40 minutes.

A very similar approach was taken with regards to the Polish cultural group in Daugavpils. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were performed with two practitioners and 10 young

people aged 15-18 who take part in the activities of the group. Most interviews were conducted in Latvian, except one in Russian – with a practitioner. Interviews and observation took place for three months from March to May 2019.

The dance group has three age groups. The interviews were conducted in the oldest group. In this location, too, young people had difficulty answering questions that defined culture as a general phenomenon. Such questions sometimes drew a confused reaction, making it difficult for the conversation to flow naturally. Part of the reason could be that young people have not thought about what '*culture*' is. It is a word often used in various contexts that encompasses a variety of things, yet the core meaning of '*culture*' seems to be difficult for young people to pin down.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Interviews were coded using NVivo 12. Nodes emerged from reading and analysing the data. On the other hand, during revising of nodes (see below) the conceptual framework, list of research questions and problem areas of the project and work package also guided the selection of nodes. Thus, coding was implemented both deductively and inductively, ensuring that new ideas were duly noticed, yet the analysis also allows to answer our main research questions.

When coding, words or short phrases were used as nodes. As interviews were coded, the coding structure was periodically refined - coding categories were collapsed, expanded and revised, merged with other codes or deleted. The final and main review of data was carried out after coding all interviews from each site. As the result of refining the coding structure, the number of Level 1 codes significantly decreased under which several level of codes emerged (2-3 levels). Riga and Daugavpils, as well as the two observations were coded separately from each other. Overall, three levels of nodes were used. Coding was completed by two experienced researchers who also conducted the fieldwork.

### **3.4 Ethical Issues**

Researchers closely followed the CHIEF guidelines in dealing with any ethical issues. Permission was always asked to conduct interviews, make an observation, and take photos or make audio recordings. There were no objections to photography or filming from either the teacher or the children. All interviews were transcribed. All information that could reveal the identity of the respondent, for example, names, places and other information, was anonymised. Pseudonyms were assigned by the coder randomly from a list of names during or after the process of transcribing the interview.

Participants were not asked about their ethnicity directly, yet people sometimes labelled themselves, revealing their ethnic identity. As the interviews show, it is also possible to feel belonging to more than one ethnicity. Moreover, ethnicity is not necessarily related to language. For example, one of the practitioners in Daugavpils was interviewed in Russian (her preferred language of communication with the interviewer), yet she does not identify as a Russian at all.

## 4. Findings

Involvement in non-formal education has traditionally been high in Latvia, particularly in those related to music and arts (choirs, dance collectives). It is partially related to the fact that musical schools are fully funded by the state, making musical education easy to access. In addition, a wide network of choirs and dance collectives exists in the country, facilitated by the desire to take part in the very popular Festival of Dance and Song taking place in Latvia every four years (and an additional such festival for pupils). Non-formal education in Latvia such as the *kokle group* is subject to quite a few rules and regulations in Latvia tied to funding and laws, including methodological guidelines and a general vision at the national level.

In Latvia the concept of “culture” is generally closely linked to traditional music. Organisations that have “culture” in their mission statement also usually focus on traditional song and dance. One must also note the historical context that has played a major role in the society’s attitudes towards traditional Latvian culture. The non-violent movement for the restoration of independence in the Baltic states was called ‘The singing revolution’ described in several books and movies. It was called the Singing Revolution because of the role singing played in the protests of the mid-1980s. But singing had always been a major unifying force for people of the Baltic countries while they endured fifty years of Soviet rule. In Latvia in particular folk singing and dancing became very popular again, after Stalin’s repressions, during the Khrushchev thaw, and it was practiced widely even under the Soviet occupation, becoming a major part of Latvian identity.

### 4.1. Case 1

#### 4.1.1. Site Description

***Kokle folk-instrument group*** meet and learn the instrument of *kokle* or other traditional Latvian folk instruments at a youth center in Riga. The group is attended by young people interested in, playing Latvian folk music instruments, folk songs, dances, games, traditions and customs. Folklore group classes give participants an insight into the Latvian folk songs, games,

dances, musical instruments, handicrafts. From the age of 7, children have the opportunity to learn the playing skills of a Latvian folk instrument individually (*kokle*, pipe / flute, violin). Folklore groups also provide the opportunity to get involved with the basics of accordion / harmonica, rhythm instrument, acoustic guitar, bass guitar, cello. Folklore group actively participates in the cultural life of Latvia by giving concerts, and every year it participates in the intangible cultural heritage programme “The Flock, the Flock”. The group is divided into 5 age groups. The groups in Riga are attended mostly by girls, so 8 interviews were recorded with girls and only two with boys between the ages of 14 and 18 – all identify themselves as Latvians.

#### **4.1.2. Emerging Themes/Results of Analysis**

##### ***4.1.2.1. The informal settings of practicing and preserving culture***

Practitioners note that *kokle* is just one of the activities offered at the youth centre, among many others.

*Most of it is cultural education because [...] almost every institution has choirs, vocal ensembles, folk dances and contemporary dances, right? There are also visual art groups and a (...) project is now being implemented through the European Union that the private sector is coming into the schools a lot [...]. (Zenta, female, practitioner).*

In setting priorities and developing guidelines, the Youth center is working together with the non-formal education section of the National Education Content Center, which creates the vision of non-formal education across the country; they also cooperate with the municipality as the ministry provides majority of the funding for their activities. There is an Internet platform managed by several people, and in every area, there are those responsible for the management of the methodological work in the city. As the practitioner Zenta explains, “Well, that's all that huge, huge body of things we do”, and *kokle* is just one of the activities within that large set of activities offered to young people in the city. Practitioners also talked about the characteristics of the participants, benefits and aims of participation, funding, interest education and teachers’ work in general, the fact that education is provided in Latvian, problems at work and made comparisons with similar organisations. Currently there are six *kokle* groups at the Youth Center, and 115 people in general play *kokle* there.

Interviews with young people reveal that *kokle* ensemble is not just a place for young people to come and learn to play the instrument. Every year there are competitions, summer camps, and the group sometimes travels to festivals and concerts abroad, for example, to France or Spain. During the Festival of Song and Dance, young people play to the public in the centre of

the city. Thus, the opportunity to demonstrate their skills regularly, to compete, and to learn outside of their regular place of meeting is central to young people's practising of culture. The aforementioned activities are seen by the practitioners as a different form of learning, and as a way to acquire friends.

*And then we have other forms of learning, such as field trips or something else, or the camps I mentioned, when we're in a different environment in a different way. Then it's a conversation, whether on the bus somewhere or going to concerts. Tonight, too, we have a concert, we come here first, warm up and then we gather, and then we go to our concert venue. Now, on their way, they are already finding those like-minded people who are closer to their character. Sometimes it happens completely by accident, for example, in a choir you arrange them by voice, right? And you've come with your girlfriend, huh? And it turns out, your girlfriend has to sing in the third voice and you can't talk to her anymore, (..) you have a girl next to you and you have to get to know her and so it starts. You make new friends. (Zenta, female, practitioner).*

Camps are emphasised as important for building a team and are considered by the interviewed practitioner as,

*very special because then we meet instead of two or three hours, we just live together and we learn completely different, different skills and that is already another level of cohesiveness, and what is the nicest is that (..) on the last day of the camp everyone is already waiting for the next camp. (Zenta, female, practitioner).*

The repertoire is selected and renewed very carefully with feedback being requested from young people. Through learning about songs they also learn about the cultural history of the country:

*Sometimes we... the songs are explained to us, the meaning of the songs, they tell us about the region. That happened. It gives an insight into the nature of the region, one might say the history. (Daiga, female, young person).*

Still, as the songs are traditional folk songs, some young people would like to see something more innovative that young people could perhaps participate in re-creating:

*Sometimes the songs we play are very repetitive and I want something new. We only sing folk songs that are old, recorded, we can't really change anything. (Daiga, female, young person).*

The observation reveals that the participation itself is clearly structured, with the participants well aware of their role and the norms of behaviour expected in that role in a particular situation. Nevertheless, the atmosphere is friendly, free and relaxed, as everyone feels comfortable in their role, not afraid to ask questions, and even in an elated mood. Of course, as in any group, there is certain internal dynamics in terms of formation of smaller friendship groups and leaders within these groups.

Talking about their motivation to participate in the kokle group, young people most often mention that they are motivated by the collective itself and the atmosphere in the group, mainly, that this is the group they feel they belong to.

*People. They are my type of people. They have this legacy in that they are in another layer of society, they are not, like, usual, but they are also not some of the cool unrealistic artistic poets, they are in the middle and I am in the middle too. So we all have similar tastes and things we like and we go out a lot and spend time together even outside practice. (Inta, female, young person)*

Young people note that everyone – even those who do not do well at school, whose attendance is not perfect, or who have different interests is accepted - the atmosphere is very friendly. Despite the participants being similar in their interests, young people also appreciate that the group is attended by people from different backgrounds:

*I think the most interesting thing is getting to know people because we not only have musicians, we have artists, we have athletes, we have different people who attend this collective, you might say .. it interests me a lot. All that sense of togetherness, interesting. (Daiga, female, young person).*

Another important motivation stems from the interest in the activity itself (playing, singing, concerts), and the fact that it provides a meaningful, interesting activity to spend their free time on. Overall, young people usually do not see a deeper meaning for their participation. They just do it for fun because they like it and it makes them feel good. Just a few interviewees mentioned that they are motivated by an opportunity for self-improvement. Some are motivated by patriotism. Daiga (female, young person) mentions that her goal by participating in this

group is: “*To be closer to my family, to my people, to be more patriotic.*” Dainis provides a more elaborate explanation:

*I have more respect for our culture, including our ancestors, all the traditions, it no longer looks so colourless, actually open, very gorgeous, very different but in a way very connected. And it has improved me, my attitude, my character, because I pay more attention to things in our culture, and then somebody asks me a question about my country's culture, then I can tell it in a way that is better understood [...]. And I have improved knowledge and understanding of all these traditions and folklore. And I'm happy because I know what it is, what it does, how it helps, and how it has created our people as they are now. (Dainis, male, young person).*

Still, in relation to the participation in the group, young people do mention that it contributes to their personal growth. Most often young people mention that it has helped their musical development, and improves their communication skills and teaches them to be more sociable. It also provides them with more knowledge about Latvia – its culture, folklore, traditions and history. Interviewees also mentioned that participation in the group, in particular having to perform in front of others, has increased their self-confidence, made them feel stronger and more positive about themselves.

*But I've become much more free and open and I'm so much more confident about myself. I don't even know why, but it just happened. I, I really, can be much more confident and I know what I want and I know what I like. And I, I know myself more and I just, I feel safer and somehow this turned out (..) and somehow everything got better like that. (Inga, female, young person).*

One participant mentioned that the group keeps her grounded, in the sense that it does not allow her to fall into depression and to forget her real “self” when she feels under pressure and cannot fit all the criteria and requirements at school; encouraging young people to dare is seen as being important by the practitioner:

*It is the ability to be independent, to do things independently, to dare. (..) And, (..) and, yes. The fact that you go on in life, and, and you allow yourself to do something more, to risk more, challenge yourself to do something. [...] Of course, it is a interrelationship between a parent and school, but, but (..) but here they acquire what an active person, a public mind person needs, that's what they get here. (Vineta, female, practitioner).*

Talking about future, young people usually see themselves as continuing to play *kokle* as a long-term hobby. There are, for example, opportunities to continue in a group for those who are older in some other folklore group or a choir. Yet, the plans are usually not very certain, as some young people note that they are not sure how their lives will turn out. Some plan to study abroad, some – in Latvia. Some are considering continuing musical or artistic education, some – becoming teachers themselves and working with children their age. Either way, the interviewees express warm feelings and appreciation for having had to opportunity to learn *kokle* and be a participant of the group that will always be a part of them.

#### **4.1.2.2. The role of family, peers, and social networks**

The interviews reveal that young people involved in the *kokle* ensemble pay attention to the attitude of others, mainly, their peers and family. Considering that *kokle* is not a very widespread instrument, friends and classmates do not always know that it is. The strong association with traditional folklore can sometimes elicit some teasing from peers, as one interviewee notes:

*They [friends, classmates - IM] sometimes like to laugh at the fact that, (...) yes, I come here, yes. (...) Ah, every time I say I have kokle they are like, "oh, you'll go to play your panpipe." I'm like "no!" (laughs). But now it's so sweet and not really bad teasing, but yes, I think they are very positive. Very cool, supporting. (Diana, female, young person)*

The concern of being perceived as ‘crazy’ sometimes appears in interviews, notably in an interview with Dainis – a rare male among the *kokle* group participants. Still, young people mostly note that the attitude of peers ranges from neutral to very positive. Moreover, it can make that young person stand out among others.

*Also, for me, when I joined this group, from that moment to this day, I always have the status of a folklorist everywhere outside - everyone at school knew – she is the girl who played kokle at events, you can call her - and so on. I am a big fan and supporter of folklore and go to all those events. And also in groups of friends, if we go to some place we used to sing, or we sing just like that. (Inta, young person)*

The interviews also highlight the crucial role of family. In many cases, family members – either some, or the whole family - are or have been involved with folklore. The family member mentioned the most is mother:

*My mom used to be involved with folklore at a young age, was in a folklore group [name]. They were the best. Travelled. She liked it immensely, maybe she wasn't musically brilliant or capable of singing, but she just liked it and so she wanted me and my brother to be there too. (Inta, female, young person).*

Frequently mother is the one who introduces the young person to *kokle* or brings him or her to the group. Sometimes several members of the family are involved in folklore. Then the involvement is natural and usually starts at a very young age.

*My family is engaged in folklore, my sister started practicing folklore when she was young and my dad found, well, he was friends with the (group name) leader (name) and he found this place in this circle and then he brought my sister here to practice. And she had a great growth there, she learned a lot, she learned a lot. And after I was at an age where I could begin to understand folklore and how to do it, I was also brought down here, and I have been practicing here for 7, maybe 8 years, I don't really remember, but yeah. (Dainis, male, young person)*

Even if the family is not involved with music or folklore, they at least like or have a positive attitude towards the young person being involved in the *kokle* ensemble. In very few cases, the family has little knowledge and understanding of what the young person does. Typically, family supports the young person when he or she need to go to trips connected to *kokle*, as well as by attending their concerts.

*They, either when I take part in contests and so on, then, they really like it, or at least my grandmother really likes to come to my concerts and watch them, and she gets really sad when she's not able to attend (Edgars, male, young person)*

Without the support of family, many young people would not be able to participate in the *kokle* group, particularly those who travel from outside of Riga.

*Of course, there are times when they [parents – IM] cannot make it to a concert we have organised. Then they have seen a video that parents filmed and yes, they support me. For me, when I was younger, when I was still living in another city, I was driven by car here, a lot of parenting time was invested [...]. (Sintija, young person).*

Practitioners, too, acknowledge the importance of the family support.

Young people also usually point to their previous experience: with musical school, being involved in another folklore group or choir before. Those who did not have previous experience with music were sometimes encouraged by their friends who were, or joined their friends. Personal interest is mentioned frequently among the reason to join that was acquired, for example, when a young person heard *kokle* at a folklore camp she was attending. The important role of social networks and word-of-mouth in young people becoming members of the group is best described by a practitioner Vineta:

*But, of course, there is word of mouth advertising very, which works very well for us, girlfriends. And sometimes it is coming with a friend and ending up staying even when that friend himself has already fled. I also have girlfriends' children, but they are quite few. [...] I have been leading this collective for a long time, then, folklore group, then (..) the first kids are so grown up now that they have their own children, and they are already bringing their children here. (Vineta, female, practitioner).*

#### **4.1.2.3. Understanding of culture**

When asked to define culture, several young people said that it is a very broad term than encompasses everything. Some tie it to the identity of a nation, as something created by the people, that forms communities, emotional attachment, *“opportunity for people... to express some grain of thought and important messages and emotions that people need to absorb. [...] [It is] a combination of all possible spheres of activity of the human brain.”* (Inta, female, young person). One interviewee argues that it is the most important part of a nation: *“it shows, as I said, the whole nation, what they do, the things they like, the qualities, the same way individuals have different characters, nations have different culture.”* (Dainis, male, young person). Another notes that culture is the most beautiful side of a nation, something to cherish and bring forward. Some young people tie it with history, traditions, folklore, something ancient and artistic, but also values, thoughts, and attitudes.

Young people’s understanding of culture is very diverse. Some young people point to differences between modern and traditional culture. For example, one of the young people notes that modern culture is developed more, and faster than traditional culture, as *“modern culture grows and grows, it can be built and built, while the traditional [culture] remains, we can just adorn and nurture it.”* (Daiga, female, young person). Others point to regional differences in culture:

*What is emerging in Riga and Pieriga is a completely different culture than where I was in Rucava, which is in Kurzeme. There I was in the camps, we were with the locals, and the culture that was being created there was very different. So I think*

*there will be ... that a very colorful culture has survived.* (Daiga, female, young person).

Another interviewee points to the differences in rural and urban culture. Europe and its culture is also mentioned. When talking about culture young people generally tend to find contrasts and to contrast 'our culture' with others. They also mention development of culture in the context of the development of the country itself or as something to present to the foreigners.

Celebration of festivities with family (or sometimes extended family) is an important part of what forms 'family culture'. Understanding of and interest in folklore results in young people often having somewhat different traditions than most other families in Latvia.

*[...] when I talk to my friends about how they spent this time, they respond in a way that is quite different from the way I spend it. Let's say on Midsummer they eat (..), while in my family, we burn wreaths, sing songs, then dance, play musical instruments, also talk about Midsummer, some fairy tales, folk songs and the like. Enjoying a good time, of course.* (Dainis, male, young person).

Of course, not all follow the traditional way of celebrations. More often it is, as noted by one of the interviewees, a combination – "*There's this kind of a touch of folklore, just something more modern, so to speak*" (Inga, female, young person). Jāņi (Midsummer) are mentioned as some of the most important celebrations, but they also celebrate Christmas, Easter, Mārtiņdiena – as young people say, just as a family festivity, not in a religious tradition. Various cultural activities are also often part of the family culture – attending cinema, theatre, exhibitions, museums, concerts etc. Some young people mention simply eating breakfast or lunch together with their family as part of culture but there are also other things that form their family culture such as family trips, large family gatherings, playing table games, working in the garden, singing or playing instruments together, or participating in folklore shows. For some others there is no particular family culture.

When characterising their family culture, one of the interviewees describes it as simply 'human'.

*It's very human. We all eat at one table, on weekends we try to enjoy time together and work in the garden, weeding the garden. Have some fun together at some Christmas. Very human culture.* (Inta, female, young person).

Another describes their family as very 'cultural'.

*I think we are cultural people, though, because we all read books a lot and that attracts me. Yes, we all attend concerts and exhibitions. (Sintija, female, young person).*

Young people see folklore as an important part of culture.

*[...] it was in this group that I realised how many, to say the least, does folklore have, how different she is everywhere. And it's like a big, important part of the whole culture, yes. (Dainis, male, young person).*

Not surprisingly, some young people refer to interest in, and practice of folklore when characterising their family culture. Often young people talk about family members being involved in or interested in books, theatre, music, etc.

On a similar note, some young people refer to observing traditions as their family culture (such as following the old pagan traditions of celebrating the Summer or Winter solstice). Still others talk about culture in the context of behaving in a certain way (what one is supposed to do or not).'

*Latvians are introverted, they don't talk much, they don't ask them questions. I grew up in a [school type] school with Western specialties, where we were taught to talk to people, ask questions, and have a very successful conversation. I think that is the biggest benefit of multiculturalism thing. (Inta, female, young person).*

Finally, some people characterise their family culture as simply having good relations, always talking through issues, sharing and discussing their thoughts openly. Talking about the topics discussed in family, most young people mention simply everyday events (what has happened, what they have heard or learnt)

Talking about their friends culture, young people note that their friendship group is very diverse, yet at the same time they also share similar interests, mainly, in music, folklore or art.

*The culture of friends is very diverse. I have different friends and classmates. Most of the time we are all like that... we are a bunch of like-minded people, then we go to exhibitions. We like to do something together. Of course, there is one who is interested, I do not know, maybe more in modern art, another is [interested] more in classical or sculptural art, but we try, if someone is not interested, we try to go together and learn something new. (Antra, female, young person).*

One of the interviewees, Sintija, clearly outlines the similarity in the presumably diverse friendship groups:

*I really ... well ... it seems to be similar when ... they are the same ... not the same concerts, but concerts of other genres. Maybe not some classical music, but some other music. Yes, the same keywords, but maybe a different branch of music and a different genre. Sintija (female, young person)*

A similar view is shared by Vēsma (female, young person) “*I live in a predominantly cultural environment that likes theaters and stuff like that, not large number of parties. That will probably be my friends.*”

As noted by one of the interviewees, it is easier to make friends with people who share a culture. One can conclude that friendship culture is mostly focused on a shared interest in different forms of art and music, which can be quite diverse, thus, providing opportunities to learn something new. Some others talking about their friends culture note that their friends are open, educated, cultural people.

Talking about personal culture, young people mention traveling (their traveling experience, with family, or to some events), participation in hobby/interest education, while also mentioning that school takes a lot of their time, and participation in cultural events (especially the Festival of Song and Dance, other festivals, emotions from these events).

*It is probably that sense of togetherness, just singing when everyone is standing on the stage, and seeing all those viewers, and last year when I didn't sing on the stage, but I was just like watching and everyone was standing, and the audience sort of merged with both singers and dancers down there, I just kind of like ... (..) A big crowd of Latvians with one common song is very beautiful and it was really impressive. It seems to me that it is this sense of togetherness and pride about one's own culture and nation. (Diana, female, young person).*

When characterising their own culture, some young people note that it is wide, i.e., that they are interested in more various activities than an average young person. Interestingly, while some young people see themselves as ‘cultural’, others do not.

*At home I'm about, well, usually I'm about culture, well of course I attend a folklore group, but I don't really call myself a cultural person because I don't really look at*

*it, well, okay, I see this gig I really want go or something like that, but if I find out something about cultural events, it is often via television, telephone or the media.*  
(Edgars, male, young person).

It seems from the answers of the young people that they have set a high standard for someone to be called a ‘cultural person’ (which is what they often think about when asked about a ‘personal culture’), and they themselves are sometimes just into folklore, and without a very deep knowledge of it (still – not compared to their peer).

*I don't really know how to describe my culture. I'm not a pure white folklorist, but I'm not a classic. Nor am I a jazz player. I'm not a dancer or a director either. I'm so self-seeking and I can't really define myself. But I feel like I'm on the right track, not choosing one thing, but many things.* (Inta, female, young person).

One of the interviewees admits that she would like to be a more cultural person, i.e., to have more time and energy to attend more cultural events.

#### **4.1.2.4. Cultural literacy**

When asked about cultural education, it is understood by the interviewed practitioner as various forms of art (music, dance, and literature) embedded in traditions and heritage:

*Cultural education? (laughs) Looking at the law, these are the areas defined here, which are (...) cultural education and so on. It is art, music, (..) dance. That's how cultural education is defined, ok? But, of course, this, this, it also includes all of this broader, broader (..) sense of what it contains. So through this area, through art, music, dance we learn traditions, we learn this (..) the whole heritage, be it the oldest that comes from folklore or this modern, be it literature, whether it is poetry or whether it is music, it is in the widest field. This is what we do every day in cultural education.* (Zenta, female, practitioner).

One of the practitioners also sees their role in young people becoming “cultural people” (*kulturāls cilvēks* – Latvian) in general:

*[...] once we leave this space, we are, we become the bearers of our culture. They look at us how we behave, how we act, and that is one of the (laughing) public things that I do with them too, let's say, try to discourage them from something too deviant, or something that, let's say, impacts upon both themselves and, say, us as*

*a folklore group. So... (..) Well, yes, this could be a way of self-presenting, yes.*  
(Vineta, female, practitioner).

Talking about the formation of young people's cultural identity, one of the practitioners describes the importance of respecting traditions:

*If and when you are young you can't break away and, say, start something completely new, no. You don't discover a wheel anew because someone has already done it before you.* (Vineta, female, practitioner).

Young people themselves gave various answers about their identity. One interviewee noted that she is still searching for oneself, another noted that she is who she is – just herself, without any pretending or trying to show off. One young person considers himself a leader, another points to external appearance or belonging as important for their identity. But young people convincingly see themselves as European. For most, it is obvious as Latvia is geographically in Europe, with one exclaiming: “*Yes. (..) I don't know what else I might consider myself. Well yes*” (Diana, female, young person). Some give a more elaborate answer:

*Yes, I consider myself a European. Mostly it is because of geographical location, because I am in Latvia, I am also in Europe. Also because Latvia is in the European Union and I understand what Europe is in Europe that they are trying to help each other. And then you can say, well, if you look at it from a rather rough perspective, then you see, one can say, almost like one whole country.* (Dainis, male, young person).

Still, from the point-of-view of culture, answers are more nuanced. Inta (female, young person) points to ‘being cultural’ as central to being European: “*I consider myself a cultural person, therefore I am European*”. Another young person (Daiga, female, young person) argues that being European means being a part of European culture. However, young people themselves identify with Latvian, not European, culture.

*Do I consider myself a European? In the sense that I belong to such a huge group, I think yes, but (..) because we are simply in the European Union and other organisations. But I don't really think about myself as a European from a cultural point of view, and so on, because I have most contact with Latvian culture and I consider myself Latvian.* (Edgars, male, young person).

European culture is seen by a few of our interviewees as very diverse, a mix of cultures, opportunity to experience other cultures, different cultures in different countries and regions, and this might be the reason why it is difficult to associate with it.

*European culture, I think, is very colourful, gorgeous, diverse, very diverse. I am not sure. I have heard that different things come from different places in Europe, different things. (Antra, female, young person).*

*European cultures vary greatly from region to region, so that Central Europe could be closer to, more in common with one other than, for example, with the South with Northern Europe. Very different. Very different. (Daiga, female, young person).*

Talking about European culture, young people also mention that it has ancient culture, and that it is the most 'cultural' continent in the world. Others point to a common geographic area, freedom of traveling, unified currency, different languages, Christianity as the basis of moral values in Europe, and 'the refugee thing' (not explained further).

Also, the answers reveal that not all young people are interested in what is happening outside Latvia, also in the area of culture. Some answer that they have no idea what European culture is, they have not thought about it.

Young people usually acquire information about culture, particularly about various events, from social media (mainly, Facebook). Other people, including family, friends, teachers, and some internet portals are also mentioned by a similar number of interviewees. The interviews also reveal that young people have most trust in the information received from their parents, followed by friends. Sometimes it depends on the topic.

*As my friends are younger, I trust the opinion of my family as they are older. [...] I trust their opinions more because they have been in this world for longer, they know more, but the point is, when I ask something, I sometimes ask my family and my friends. What I ask the family, they answer quite a very large part of what I want to hear as well as what I want to know about that question. But if I ask friends, then friends have many more points of view, how they look at the issue, and then you can hear much more creative answers. They are much more different [...]*  
(Dainis male, young person).

When asked about what they would show foreigners, young people usually refer to Riga, particularly the old town, other regions, towns, nature, and other tourist places. However, the

answers reveal that young people would also be proud to show off part of their culture – museums, concerts, *kokle*, folklore clubs and shows, cultural events, including underground culture, as well as Latvian food.

Young people mention several large cultural festivals taking place in Latvia, some focused on traditional song and dance, some – on modern music. They also point to differences between regions in terms of mentality, language or dialect, and differences between rural and urban areas. Talking about culture, young people also talk about ‘us’ and ‘others’. They tend to compare themselves with other nations in terms of mentality, songs and dances, food, and other aspects.

Young people also acknowledge very positively the contribution made by the state to preserving culture. Still some note that even more could be achieved, and also the events should be advertised more, and that culture should be supported more financially.

*I think the state supports [culture] because there are many cultural events, many different, many different cultural events involving folklore and contemporary groups, or something like that. In my opinion, there is even more that can be achieved in Latvia. (Daiga, female, young person).*

## 4.2. Case 2

### 4.2.1. Site description

**Polish folk dance group** in Daugavpils. The members of this dance group, according to the practitioners, are of different ethnicities: Latvians, Russians, Byelorussians, and Poles. They dance mainly Polish and Latvian dances. Therefore, this collective is important as a phenomenon that clearly embodies the multicultural environment of Daugavpils.

Folk dance group was established in 1991 in a building with a unique history – in the 1930s it was bought by the Poles of the city of Daugavpils at their own expense by raising the necessary money. Yet, it is not a ‘house-museum’, there are many projects going on: exhibitions, dancing, singing, competitions, theatres, creative classes and various other activities, of course, in Polish. They are free for all participants, as the municipality provides the funding. As noted by practitioners Malgozata (F, P) and Maria (F, P) children come there every day starting from the elementary school. Under one roof, several generations have united – children, youth, and even seniors (at the moment there are three dance groups). Anyone can participate in the group. Still, most emphasis is on children and young people – ‘our future’ (Malgozata, F, P).

The collective already has performed in more than 400 concerts. The group is a regular participant of Polish cultural festivals and minority festivals organised in Latvia - Slavic Culture Days in Daugavpils, organised by Daugavpils City Council and Russian Cultural Center in Daugavpils, International folk culture festival “Belorussian fair in Daugavpils”, as well as other similar festivals in other cities. The repertoire of the ensemble includes dances from Warmia, Greater Poland, Kurpia, Sieradz, Słonska, Opocina, Lubelsk, Pskevorsk and Zhivetskaya gurus, as well as Latvian folk dances. The collective is very active and with a stable number of participants. The classes are four times a week, and participants attend all of them regularly. Participants usually start dancing and participate in other dance group activities at the age of 6-7 years. Overall, the dance group has 3 age groups. 10 young people were interviewed in Daugavpils – 7 girls and 3 boys, aged 15 (3), 16 (5) 17 (1) or 18 (1). Two experts (women age 35 and 62) were also interviewed.

The case of the Polish folk-dance collective is also interesting because for a long time during the Soviet times Polish language and culture was repressed in Latvia, and this adds a special meaning and value to these activities.

#### **4.2.2. Emerging Themes/Results of Analysis**

##### ***4.2.2.1. The informal settings of practicing culture***

Participation in the Polish dance group involves, first of all, regular practice sessions, as well as concerts, sometimes also outside of the country. A few participants also mentioned that they organise (or help to organise) various events such as exhibitions, concerts, festivals, or visits of other collectives from abroad. Importantly, the participants do not just dance, they sometimes also sing, and organise exhibitions of pictures ect., thus, they develop various artistic skills. They also have a Facebook page, where they share information. When characterising the group, one of the practitioners says that they are mainly ‘engaged in cultural activities’ (Malgozata, F, P), and their role in preserving the cultural heritage is also emphasised.

*It seems to me that we are doing enough for this, but, of course, there are no limits to perfection, and, of course, we still have a lot to do. It's very valuable when grandmothers come, who were once forbidden to speak Polish, and now they just cry with joy, and say that, thank God, we have lived to the point where we can speak freely, when it's valuable, get again the same Polish card. They are extremely happy, because it can be done, and, thank God, that they have a place where they can come, let's say, and listen to either a concert in Polish, or some kind of theatrical performance. (Malgozata, F, P).*

Practitioners wish that there was more cooperation with Poland – the country “that they do this all for” (Malgozata, F, P) as it might increase opportunities to travel, especially when local funding is small and decreasing. However, young people themselves mostly say that they are happy with everything. A few young people would like a larger hall, others – more traveling, as lately they have been traveling less, especially to Poland. One young person mentions that it would be good to have more group activities offered to young people who maybe do not want to dance, another would like the group to give charity concerts, and finally one is unhappy with some people not being serious enough about attending all the practice sessions.

Practitioners’ work is also described in interviews, emphasising that they love this work, love these children and young people, have a lot of respect for what they do and are grateful for them coming there. They are also motivated by the opportunity to meet various creative people - artists, actors, etc., and the fact that if one approaches the task with joy, willingness, and enthusiasm, the end result is unpredictable, which is exciting. Thus, the practitioners spend a lot of time planning activities, way beyond what they are expected to do.

*My position is called the organiser of cultural events. I am engaged in the organisation of exhibitions, concerts, all kinds of competitions for children, for youth. I help in organising international festivals of Mrs. [name], that is, such an absolutely creative work. (Malgozata, F, P).*

Practitioners always try to bring something new in the repertoire.

*We rarely repeat ourselves, and if we take, for example, some theatrical productions, this is always some kind of new material. Yes, it is the study of a new text, getting to know new authors and so on. If we do contests, then again this is a getting to know writers, poets and so on, that is, something new is constantly going on, something new, something new. When we go to some master classes in Poland, for example, we bring home some new, we’ll say, classes. (Malgozata, F, P).*

Thus, young people constantly get to learn something new. One of the practitioners describes participation in the group as ‘a school of life’.

*But these children who come to us, they are not indifferent, because participation in collectives is not only the mechanical performance of something. This is a whole life, this is a relationship, this is emotions, it is overcoming some kind of obstacles. This is also the school of life that we go through together. And it’s sometimes*

*difficult for teachers, say, to encounter some difficulties, and for the guys, but if we overcome [them], the result is certainly pleasing.* (Malgozata, female, practitioner)

Talking about benefits from participation, many young people mention that they have learned to be more communicable and open, particularly in the light of having to perform and travel with their group, and meet people from other countries (including other collectives also practicing Polish culture).

*It's an experience to live like that, well, we go there for a week or a couple of days. Well, it doesn't matter, but the experience is in the sense of living far away from home and with (...), with my team in another environment, in another country, with other people around and communicating, finding a common language. Joining in dance or, in our case, Polish culture is very important to us.* (Agnese, F young person).

As Fanceska (F, YP) notes: *'It's interesting to connect with kids from other countries because we have a common theme, that is, culture and dancing, and it's very interesting'*.

Participation is also important to young people as it contributes to their professional growth in terms of dancing and singing, but it also provides them with other skills.

*Well, I learned how to organise events, I also learned how to manage groups of people - helping, for example, visitors. (...) Navigate the city, or even help directly to organise, yes. (...).* (Agnese, F, YP).

These skills stem from young people being involved in organising visits of collectives form abroad, exhibitions, festivals of Polish culture, etc. but simple tasks such as preparing the dress so that it looks good on the stage teaches young people to be more organised. It also teaches them to be more responsible.

*I learned to answer for my own, well, things. We do have (...) costumes and we have to be responsible for them (...) so that everything is neat at the concerts, that everything is beautiful, yeah. They taught that responsibility to work in a group.* (Tekla, F, YP).

They also have to remember about the practice sessions, not to be late, etc. Another young person, Paula, (F, YP) notes that, as they are the oldest group from several, they have to be more responsible, to take responsibility for the younger children, and to show them a good

example. Two young people also mentioned that participation in the group also teaches to work hard, and to overcome oneself. Others learned to work in a group, to help each other. Teachers play an important role in socialising the young people and teaching them certain norms of behaviour such as not being mean to others on purpose.

*[...] in our collective it is very strict with our behavior, we are all very, well, well, for us, since 1st grade education comes not only from the parents, but also from all the collective leaders, assistant parties also go. And the behavior is different for us dancers and other children. I see the difference. (Franceska, F, YP).*

Among other benefits from participation young people mention that it has taught them to be brave and to perform for the public, to make friends, to understand and respect others, to be physically stronger and more tidy. In general, by participating in the dance collective many young people not only learn certain professional skills but also grow as people. Finally, young people learn about culture – not just Polish culture, but also the cultures of other countries.

*For example, if there are children from other countries - from Lithuania, I do not know (..), from America, too, - it is interesting for me to look at their dances and the culture in the country where they live. (Franceska, F, YP).*

Practitioners (Malgozata, F, P) also talk about values they would like to instill in children and young people such as spirituality, love, and respect.

When describing what they like in the organisation, many mention travelling and giving concerts in other cities and countries particularly Poland. It gives them an opportunity to make new friends, see something new, to rest, and showcase what they have learnt. For festivals, they sometimes get to live in Poland, in families, for up to a week. Young people also like the atmosphere in the collective, as they are among friends that feels almost like family you can trust and share your feelings with.

*What I like most about [name] is that it's like a big family. You really respect everyone as your brothers and sisters. It is really a very, very happy family where you can share with someone your feelings. You dance with that family and it's very, very like, I really like it. (Donats, M, YP).*

Dancing itself is sometimes seen as expression of one's feelings. In addition, some young people also like that they can make new friends, both within the collective and abroad, when travelling. Of course, young people also just like dancing and performing. As one interviewee

notes: “*Dancing is my life*” (Tekla, F, YP). Being together with the group, activities with people from Poland, and being closer to Poland are also some of the things young people enjoy. “*Uniting in a dance or, like us, in Polish culture is very important to us*” (Agnese, F, YP).

*What I like about our [name] center is that there are not only dance festivals, dance competitions and all kinds of concerts, but also exhibitions, all kinds of photos. Various singers from all over Latvia or sometimes from Poland also come. It is interesting to hear how its culture is perceived in other countries.* (Franceska, F, YP).

The openness of Polish culture is emphasised as important by one of the young people:

*And it's not that, yes, a Polish house, it [must be] only in Polish. The Polish House, in general, the Polish culture, is very open and people from any country and other cultures can come and find something (..) native there. So this process. (..) I like the fact that I can be, I, I feel that (..) I'm in Latvia, but I can (..) be close to Poland, that I do something for Poland, for the Poles, who live here in Latvia. And we can find some Polish who is a grandmother, that is a Polish, a grandmother or some other oldest relative, and find him his native Polish people, their (..) culture, so that he starts with this Polish language, for example, to practice.* (Paula, F, YP).

One young person also mentions that she likes the creativity.

*Well, I guess it is to create something new and unusual, (..) because sometimes we do some dances that we already have, which we usually have to do so that they are already invented. But (..) there are moments when we have to invent something ourselves and create our own dance, and I like the process the most.* (Veronika, F, YP).

Most young people plan to continue dancing until the 12th grade (end of high school), as some are not sure if they will stay in the city or move to study somewhere else (some young people plan to study in Poland). Still, they hope to keep in touch with the group.

Young people talk a lot about the relationships in the group. They consider each other friends or even family, they like each other, there is a friendly atmosphere, they spend time together, talk, help each other, respect each other, some have grown up together, no one is excluded. They also observe traditions, mainly those related to food, for example, eating together *oplati* before Christmas. Several young people mention the contribution of the teacher and importance

of what she has taught them. Some even say she is like a second mother to them. Teachers, according to the young people, not only provide advice and teach them to dance or sing but also provide important life lessons. They also help them to learn something new, and show mistakes.

*(..) She gives you a feeling that you can control your feelings and you invest them into a job that will be good not only for you but for others. So, I'm a very funny, bright, I think, energetic girl and so she showed me where I can apply it all to have the same fun for others. And she (..) showed that there is always some way to go, there is always some way out of the situation if, if you are with others, you always have someone to go with and they will always help you to overcome some difficult situations and I feel that if I have something, some situation where I need help, then I know where to go with it. (Paula, F, YP).*

Talking about children who come to this group, practitioners express once again their love, acceptance and appreciation of these children. They characterise them as very different and unique, some are civically active and some - passive, however, all are born talented, and those who are interested in engaging in the activities, stay. *“Saturday, Sunday does not matter, they come, perform, they give their smiles to people. Even if there is an empty room, they will act as if it was full.” (Malgozata, F, P).*

Young people mostly got involved in the group either due to personal interest, or family, or a combination of both. Sometimes it was a relative who also danced (an aunt, a brother) and this is how the young people got interested and joined the group. Others mention that the teacher of the dance collective came to the school or kindergarten and invited children to participate, which is convenient, as there is a Polish kindergarten and gymnasium in the city. Some young people had danced before in other collectives and just continued here. Also a typical situation is that the mother brought their child to the dance collective in the first grade. A practitioner also emphasises the important role of the family:

*Another important aspect is the family. That is, if the child is supported in the family and his activities approved: you are great, you are dancing, I will come to your concert, I will invite my grandmother, my girlfriend and so on. That is, the child develops a completely different attitude to this. Yes, there are those children who are only themselves yes, that is, he himself wanted it, and he comes. We never saw mom or dad there at these events. The family plays a large role, when whole ... Over the years, I also began to notice that families began to come to theatrical performances, to concerts: grandmothers, mom, dad, children - it's insanely*

*pleasant, that is, not that the child is just for himself, and so on. The school, of course, also supports the children in their initiatives, and in participating here.*  
(Malgozata, F, P).

#### **4.1.2.3. Understanding and practising culture outside the group**

Several young people also mentioned that they enjoy culture outside of their own collective, for example, the [city] theatre or a famous art museum based in the city. Talking about attending places of culture or cultural events, many young people mention that they like going to concerts. Several also enjoy theatre, some – cinema. Young people also mention that they like and find inspirational larger events such as festivals (including the Polish festival and the Festival of Song and Dance), and events organised at the Polish centre. Other activities are also mentioned by interviewees some of which do not have anything to do with culture but show that young people are generally very active (e.g., school parliament, sport, exchange programmes, video games, guitar, music school).

Cultural activities are some of the common activities young people engage in together with friends (concerts, festivals, cinema, etc.), but other activities are also popular with friends such as simply talking, walking or biking, or playing video games. Music, dancing, or cinema are not among the most popular topics of conversations with friends, though, as sometimes they have different interests.

When asked about their understanding of culture, young people mention a variety of answers. For some it is about traditions and folklore, including festivities. For others, similarly, it is about singing, dancing, and other forms of art. Religion is also mentioned sometimes.

*Culture, now it can be religion, songs, dancing, some kind of (..) buildings. Well I mean (..) something that can (..) unite everyone who (..) in a few years (..) in a few years, (..) in a few years people might find out what people were doing, (..) what people do maybe. (..) What festivities there are in culture.* (Ernests, M, YP).

Often the answers are very broad and general, such as ‘practically everything’, or that it is very individual, very important for every human, something that people make, something that unites in us or that can unite us, something individual for every region or country, something around us that we participate in, or something such as art etc. Some young people could not answer the question about what culture is at all. Interestingly, some young people see culture as something more than art for example, they refer to culture of dressing or behaving.

*[...] for me culture first of all is about external appearance, like how do the parks look like, are they littered, what is the language, what books are written. (Roberts, M, YP).*

Young people also struggle to describe their personal culture. Two of them mention music as an important part of their culture, a few others - religion (Catholicism). One mentions preserving traditions as their culture.

Just a few interviewees were able to say something about their friends' culture. One mentioned that they are people of various ethnicities, another – that their interests are at least somewhat related to culture, still other – that they are simply adolescents who do what adolescents typically do. The most significant characteristic young people usually seek in their friends is helpfulness. They also want their friends to be faithful, to understand them, to have at least some common interests, and to be open and honest.

However, the answers were much more elaborate when characterising family culture. Most young people's family culture involves celebration of religious festivities such as Easter and Christmas, often with an extended family. Summer Solstice is also celebrated, and some families also celebrate the Latvian Independence Day (the 18<sup>th</sup> of November) or the 9<sup>st</sup> of May (the victory over Nazism). The family is usually characterised as Polish family, mixed heritage family, or religious family. Being together with their family and respecting one's family is important for the young people.

*In my opinion, one of the greatest Polish traditions is to be with a family, because Poles spend a great deal of time with their family, for example, going to the cinema or walking in the park because one needs to respect their parents and their family. (Donats, M, YP).*

The common activities are usually conversations, traveling together, attending concerts or cinema, eating together. Church attendance is also a part of family culture for several of our interviewees. One respondent especially emphasises the importance of preserving traditions in family.

*What's important to me in terms of culture ... Maybe preserving traditions because our family (..) still preserves all our traditions, holiday traditions today because we are Catholics and we tried to preserve how it was in our family 50 years earlier and even now . (Tekla, F, YP).*

#### **4.1.2.4. Ethnic and European identity**

Young people themselves often identify as Polish, and are proud of their heritage.

*In one word, Polish. My whole life is related to Poland - I go to a Polish school, I dance in a Polish collective, I go to Poland very often, and for me it is probably the closest [to heart] country. Well, a second homeland, yes. (Agnese, F, YP).*

Due to historical reasons, there are many Poles in the city, and it makes them feel comfortable in the Polish community. It provides opportunities to use Polish language and practice Polish culture. A similar number of young people argue that they feel belonging to both Polish and Latvian culture.

*Well I think Latvian and Polish. I can't put one in the first place, another in the second because, (..) because I have many ... There are many people in my family who are Poles and Latvians. Here in [group name] we dance Polish dance, [practice] Polish culture in Daugavpils (..). But I live in Latvia, (..) in Latvia I am Latvian, (..) I know Latvian, now I am Latvian and Polish too. (Ernests, M, YP).*

One young person (Ilona, F, YP) characterises her culture as multicultural, as she has been involved in Latvian, Polish, as well as Russian culture from her family.

It has to be noted that the city the group is based at is itself very multicultural. Self-identified Latvians are a minority there, with the largest part of society consisting of ethnic Russians, in addition to a sizeable Polish minority.

*I got used to it because for us, in [name of the group] (..) we speak Polish, at school we speak Latvian, but at home we usually only speak Russian. (Ernest, M, YP).*

This statement is confirmed by answers from other young people. Some speak Latvian or Polish at home, others use Polish in some classes at school, yet predominantly the language at home is Russian – simply because they know the language best. On the street young people also usually speak Russian. Not surprisingly, their conversation with the interviewer in Latvian is often filled with words from the Russian language, and the interview with the practitioner, Malgozata, was conducted in Russian, as she found it easier to express herself in this language.

*I feel good [in the multicultural environment] because, for example, if I speak to a person, with a friend who knows all three languages, Polish, Latvian, Russian, I can [...] speak Latvian and switch to Russian, I might not understand, but I know*

*people understand me, I can simply speak Latvian and I can switch to Russian. This is how it is for me sometimes, and I can forget a few words and say it in another language and I know that the person will understand me. It happens sometimes.* (Franceska, F, YP).

Young people have used to the multicultural environment, some note that they like it, while others think that there is no real cooperation, and that these different cultures need to express themselves more, as the other ethnic groups are not easy to notice.

Practitioners emphasise how important it is to preserve their Polish heritage:

*Everything in life is not just so. If you were born, for example, as a Pole, then you need to somehow preserve it. It is very valuable, the connection of generations. Do not lose, do not scatter, no matter how difficult it is, to continue, continue to carry this culture and continue it in your children.* (Malgozata, F, P).

Practicing Polish culture does not distance them from Latvia, however.

*We always emphasise that we are Poles living in Latvia, that is, we have, like, two homelands, Poland and Latvia. We never say that we are only Poles, or we are only Latvians, that is, we always talk about this double, say, side. And here the main goal was to show that the Poles in Latvia feel great, no one infringes, no one oppresses us, that is, we are developing harmoniously on the Latvian land, we exist and, Thank God, that's the way.* (Malgozata, F, P).

Young people mostly learn about Europe and European culture from school, though mostly these are basic facts. They also learn something from the news or on the Internet. However, deeper knowledge is acquired through personal experience, by traveling in Europe or meeting dancers from other countries. For some young people family also serves as a source of information about Europe.

Young people in general have heard many things about Europe: freedom of movement, Brexit, opportunities, united currency, European parliament, Olympic games, continent of faith, EU helping other countries Erasmus exchange programmes. However, their understanding of what 'European culture' might be is limited. One of the most detailed descriptions was provided by Donats (M, YP):

*European culture, in my opinion, is a culture that was founded by a European country, such as monuments or sculptures. It is a common culture where (..) we, we need, we need to respect that culture. I think it's an old, old, (..) classical culture that you need to understand. (Donats, M, YP).*

A few other interviewees mention that it could be a common culture of all European countries, but cannot say what exactly that might be: “*Every country has a different culture and European culture is something common that unites us.*” (Veronika, F, YP). It is “*A culture that unites all cultures*”.

For some young people first associations are with Europe consisting of many countries, and, like a large family, being accepting of everyone. One of the interviewees talks about Europe as the beginning of everything.

*I know that everything starts from Europe. All political things, all technical things. Now, I understand that Europe is has very small country with a lot of people. (..) And they are well grouped and no one interferes with each other's life, for example, in war, because (...) if there were so many people who wanted to go to war, there would be no Europe. (Roberts, M, YP).*

He also mentions colonisation of other continents, and believes that youth culture, the popular trends also begin in Europe. For other young people, too, the associations are overwhelmingly positive. One interviewee says that it is the best place in the world, another – that it is one of the most popular continents. Two other interviewees, when thinking about Europe, mention that it is very modern, young, and that everything happens and changes very quickly there. Cultural diversity itself is considered by one of the interviewees a characteristic trait of Europe:

*European culture. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is that European culture is very, very diverse. Well, for me, Europe as a continent is probably the most diverse in terms of culture, because there are so many nations, so many people, different people with different cultures. (Agnese, F, YP).*

Comparing Europe with other continents, someone mentioned that democracy is important for Europe and USA. Still two other interviewees noted that we are all humans, we are all equal, and everyone needs to be respected. Interestingly, one interviewee believes that Latvia is not fully European “because Latvia was under Russian occupation for a very long time and there will be Russians everywhere.” (Roberts, M, YP). He believes that there is more Russian culture there than European. Being European means, for some young people, being tolerant:

*In my opinion, this is dignity because one of the European countries (..) ideas is that [we] have tolerance. There is a need to respect many national countries and (..) other orientations, (..) because many people are not like us, but all people are human and need to be respected. (Donats, M, YP).*

Another young person, Veronika (F, YP) thinks that it is important to believe in democracy and to be liberal. Thinking about Europe as one big family, Agnese (F, YP) thinks that it is important to be open and honest. Young people have different ideas whether it is important to preserve European traditions, or to be modern and stylish. Just one young person thinks that it is enough to live in the EU to be considered European.

Still, when asked about whether they consider themselves European, two interviewees justify their positive answer by mentioning that they live in the EU. Two – by referring to differing physical traits of people from other continents such as Asia. “*Of course [I am European]! I have a light skin. (laughs)*” (Tekla, F, YP).

Some of the young people do not feel fully European; an interesting perspective is provided by Roberts (M, YP):

*I consider myself half European and half Russian, Russian (..) because I live in Latvia. It's very close to Russia, Belarus, there's a Russian culture there, and my mom and grandmother lived in Russia or Belarus. (..) Born, born in Belarus, so her culture, her standards of behavior were transferred to me, and now I was born in Europe, but with Russian culture. (Roberts, M, YP).*

Still, he wishes he could become more European, and, to do that, he believes one needs to leave Latvia and move to another European country (that has a more European culture).

## **5. Discussion**

This study in Latvia shows that young people engaged in non-formal education generally acquire (or strengthen) their appreciation for culture and practice it in other settings as well. Among them traditional festivities and celebrations with family and friends play a major role, as well as – in the case of Daugavpils Polish youth – religious practices. Thus, non-formal education settings as a place for practicing and preserving non-material culture (Kramsh 1998) is not detached from everyday life.

Practising culture in non-formal education needs to be viewed in the context of a person's general values system, cultural capital and cultural literacy that covers all areas of life. In a broad, anthropological interpretation, culture is understood not only practices such as singing, writing or reading books. 'Cultural capital' is not only about narrow-cultural or artistic activities, but essentially about the process of education and learning in general and acquiring knowledge about the structure and functioning of the physical and social world, as well as about norms, values, and accepted patterns of behaviour. As the interviews show, this is also young people and practitioners in Latvia see the studied non-formal education settings provide them with this kind of broad cultural education. According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital is part of individual's habitus that develops during socialisation. It is acquired mainly through family (as shown in the Latvian case, family often participates and facilitates cultural activities of young people) and in educational institutions, and in this context non-formal education institutions play an important role.

Based on Savolainen (1995), Daugavietis & Leiškalne (2017) define cultural literacy not only as the ability of an individual to discover and use cultural information (e.g. events, facts, works of art), but also his or her orientation that forces the individual to do so, unknowingly. They also use the term 'cultural mastery' meaning a higher degree of cultural literacy, when an individual takes his or her skills to the next level, from a simple user of information to a masterful information manager. Young people involved in the two groups studied in this report can be considered such 'cultural masters'. Cultural literacy is directly influenced by the amount of cultural capital. Unfortunately, research conducted in Latvia (Daugavietis & Leiškalne 2017), confirms Bourdieu's thesis that people who are richer in various forms of capital (cultural, but also health and education), are traditionally more actively involved in cultural participation (eg reading books, attending cultural events). Bourdieu also ties cultural capital to taste. Central to his arguments is the role of cultural capital (alongside social and economic capital) in reproducing social inequalities. The ruling class, according to Bourdieu, sets the dominant aesthetics, and are able to both recognise and access it in a form of symbolic violence. Aesthetic choices are strongly linked with social class. Instilling and acquiring cultural capital at an early age is used as an insidious mechanism to ensure social reproduction as well as cultural reproduction of the ruling class (Bourdieu 1984). At the same time, the so-called omnivore thesis in cultural sociology is that nowadays the middle class and the upper classes of society have become in their cultural consumption from exclusive consumers of "high" art and culture to "omnivores" by incorporating in their consumption also popular and mass cultures (Peterson & Kern, 1996). It is this part of culture today that can, in theory, unite different ethnic communities and socio-economic classes of society. In the case of the two non-formal education groups in Latvia we did not observe the participants as representing what

Bourdieu would call ‘the ruling class’ rich in all kinds of capital. Instead, the groups were proud to announce that they welcome everyone.

Our study also demonstrates the importance of language in understanding views on culture. When hearing the word ‘culture’ young people in Latvia sometimes tend to think about a behaviour within the limits of the accepted norms such as taking off shoes when entering a house, not chewing with an open mouth, etc. This stems from the term ‘cultural behaviour’ of a ‘cultural person’ in Latvian describing the kind of person that adheres to these generally accepted norms, and is in line with the aforementioned broad understanding of culture, cultural capital, and cultural literacy. Thus, we find support for the post-modernist thesis that language conditions our thoughts and interpretations, it filters perceptions and influences the way the categorise experiences (Kramsh 1998), in this case, what we understand with culture.

Overall, young people had difficulty answering questions that defined culture as a general phenomenon. Part of the reason could be that young people have not thought about what ‘culture’ is. It is a word often used in various contexts that encompasses a variety of things, yet the core meaning of ‘culture’ seems to be difficult for young people to pin down. Language philosophers argue that the meaning of a word is not static, but constantly re-invented and re-imagined in contrast to other words (e.g., de Saussure (Koemer 2013), Derrida (Derrida 1973); Lyotard (Haber 1995)). Singing, dancing, and other traditional artistic activities is a very typical (and a rather narrow) way how people understand culture, cultural practices and cultural heritage in Latvia, so young people in the two selected groups are very aware that they are involved in cultural activities.

Language is often seen by scholars as part of culture or, at the very least, very closely tied to it in multiple and complex ways – it expresses, embodies and symbolises cultural reality, with language becoming a symbol of individual’s social identity, belonging, or position in the society (Kramsh 1998). In the case of the Polish group, one of the reasons young people joined was the opportunity to speak Polish, considering that they speak mainly Russian or Latvian with friends and Russian at home. The emotional importance of the Polish language transpired in several interviews. According to Kramsh (1998), culture is a product of historically and socially situated discourse communities, that are to a large extent imagined communities, created and shaped by language.

Kramsh (1998) also emphasises that the culture of everyday practices draws on the culture of shared history and traditions that play a crucial role in identity formation. It is important for people’s identification that they can have a place in a society’s history and that they can identify with the way it remembers its past. Culture serves as precisely that historical dimension of

group's identity. This diachronic view of culture focuses on the way the group represents itself and others through, for example, its monuments, works of art, or popular culture – that punctuate the development of its historical identity. Considering the specifics of the selected sites in Latvia, it is not surprising that we find the support for this thesis. Part of the motivation for young people to get involved in non-formal education and to practice the traditional culture of their ethnic group stem from their respect towards their family, their ancestors and their heritage. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the Polish cultural association.

Still, no less important are the opportunities non-formal education provides in terms of socialising with peers. Cultural practices are social not only in their content but also in their form (Daugavietis & Leiškalne 2017). In fact, culture has a socialising function - cultural participation has a distinctly social character that dominates the aesthetic. Throughout the interviews young people emphasise that they are motivated by being together with friends, and that the group even feels like a family. Practitioners, on the other hand, envisage their non-formal group as one that provides more opportunities for young people to express themselves than a formal educational setting, and that strives to be more inclusive and supportive of every young person. Interestingly, practising their own ethnic culture makes young people more interested and more sympathetic towards other cultures.

As 'culture' is still often understood in a traditional, ethno-national way, young people, particularly in Daugavpils, had even more difficulty talking about European culture. Some young people consider 'being cultural' as central to being European: "*I consider myself a cultural person, therefore I am European*". Talking about European culture, young people also mention that it has ancient culture, and that it is the most 'cultural' continent in the world. Young people in Latvia see themselves as Europeans, yet it is due mainly to them being born in the geographical boundaries of Europe, rather than for any other reasons. Being European is typically associated with a particular set of values such as being liberal, open and tolerant towards diversity, supportive of democracy etc. It remains unclear why these values do not play a more prominent role in young people's identification with Europe.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the key themes identified across the two case studies, three recommendations can be made. First, with regards to culture, often concerns are raised about its *polarising effect* in terms of exaggerating class differences and creating negative externalities in terms of in-group/out-group hostilities (e.g., our culture is superior than these others). The debate that culture is also tied to power and domination is not limited to Bourdieu and is mentioned frequently by critical

philosophers. However, our analysis provides only partial support for this thesis, challenging some of its assumptions. Most young people involved in non-formal education settings came from families rich in cultural capital, that they practiced the culture together with and were set to reproduce further. Yet, contrary to Bourdieu's argument, the possession of cultural capital is not always related to other forms of capital (e.g., the economic capital), partially due to relatively easy and cheap access to various forms of cultural activities in Latvia. Daugavietis and Leiškalne (2017) show, using survey data, that the strongest determinant of cultural participation in Latvia is education, and it also explains differences in cultural consumption of women and men - due to socialisation into gender roles, women tend to be educated in humanities and arts more than men. One can conclude that it is important to preserve easy access to various forms of culture in order to limit the aforementioned risks of class-related cultural polarisation.

Second, while it is true that culture allows distinguishing insiders from outsiders (Kramsh 1998), and young people in Latvia, too, tend to contrast 'our culture' with others, practicing culture in non-formal education settings tends to make them more open and interested in other cultures, without necessarily labelling their own culture as superior. At the same time, as noted by Kramsh (1998), cultural education plays a crucial role in individual's identity formation and, in our case, sense of belonging to their family, their ancestors and their heritage. This was particularly evident in the case of the Polish group. One can conclude that support for practising ethnic-national culture and preserving traditions does not undermine inter-ethnic solidarity but rather makes young people more aware and appreciative of other cultures. As concerts sometimes take place outside of Latvia, or involve hosting collectives from other countries, these young people get to see and experience other cultures more, too – activities that need to be supported in the future as well.

Third, due to historical reasons explained earlier, culture in Latvia is often understood in narrow ethno-national terms, mainly, in relation to traditional song and dance, and emphasis is predominantly on respecting and preserving this culture intact rather than innovating or re-inventing it. Nevertheless, the case studies support the need for a broad anthropological interpretation of culture than spans the narrow borders of ethnic folk culture. Non-formal education contributes to broad cultural education, increasing young people's cultural capital by also teaching them relevant life skills, values, and norms of behaviour. The common use in Latvian of the term 'cultural behaviour' of a 'cultural person' which describes the kind of person that adheres to these generally accepted norms, and is in line with the aforementioned broad understanding of culture, cultural capital, and cultural literacy. The broader concept of culture is important to facilitate as it has a potential to contribute to the formation of a European

identity. As this identity cannot – according to young people – be based on traditional culture (each country has their own ‘culture’), it can be based on shared values and norms.

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