

# A Small Nation with a Big Vision: Bringing the Livonians into the Digital Space

Dr. phil. Uldis Balodis

University of Latvia Livonian Institute



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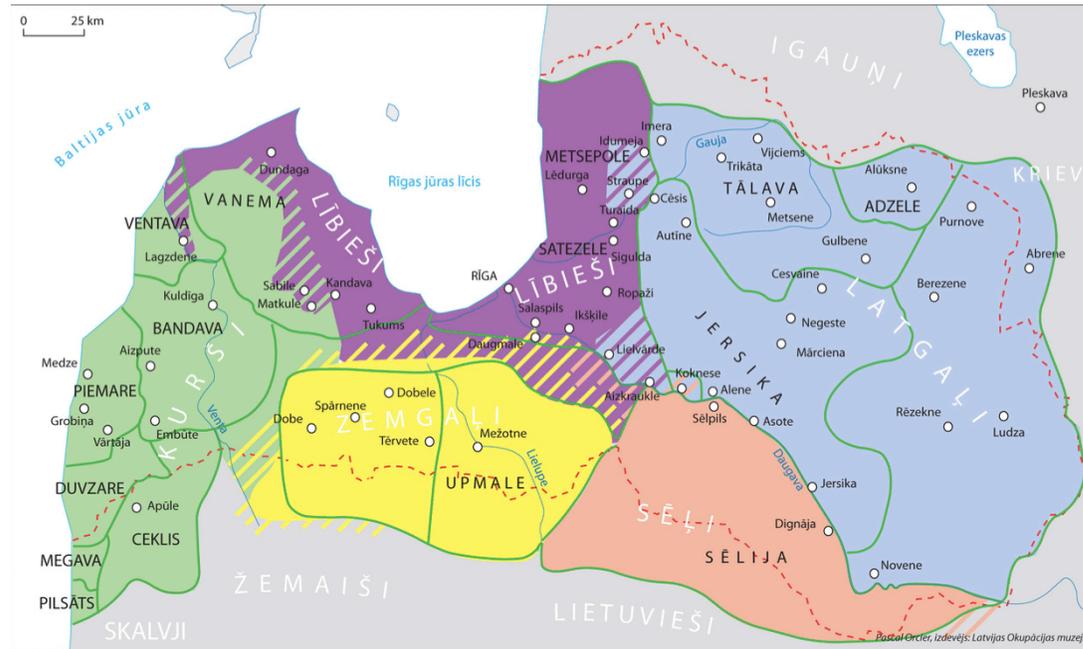
# The Livonian Institute: A Force for Innovation

- The Livonians
- The University of Latvia Livonian Institute
- Our first year
- Challenges faced by smaller nations
- Digital solutions offered by the UL Livonian Institute
- The Future

# The Livonians

- **Livonian is a Finnic language** historically spoken in northern Courland/Kurzeme and along both sides of the Gulf of Rīga coast
- In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Livonians lived in a string small villages in **northern Courland (Kurzeme)**
- With the onset of the Soviet occupation, this area was designated a border zone, which denied the Livonians access to their traditional form of livelihood (fishing).
- As a result of WWII and the border zone, **the Livonians were scattered across Latvia and the world**
- ~30 people can communicate in Livonian
- ~250 individuals consider themselves Livonian according to the last Latvian national census in 2011

# The Livonians



Latvia in the 12th century (Livonians in purple). Source: laaj.org.au



Livonian villages in northern Courland (late 19<sup>th</sup>-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century). Source: virtuallivonia.info

# UL Livonian Institute

## Background

- The UL Livonian Institute was established in September 2018 and is one of the newest institutes at the University of Latvia.
- The only research institution – not just in Latvia but in the entire world – devoted to the study of topics pertaining to Latvia's other indigenous nation: the Livonians.
- Established as part of the Microsoft Innovation Centre

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Background



*The UL Livonian Institute researchers (from left: Valts Ernštreits, Uldis Balodis, Renāte Blumberga, Gunta Kļava; not pictured: Milda Dailidēnaitē, source: livones.net)*

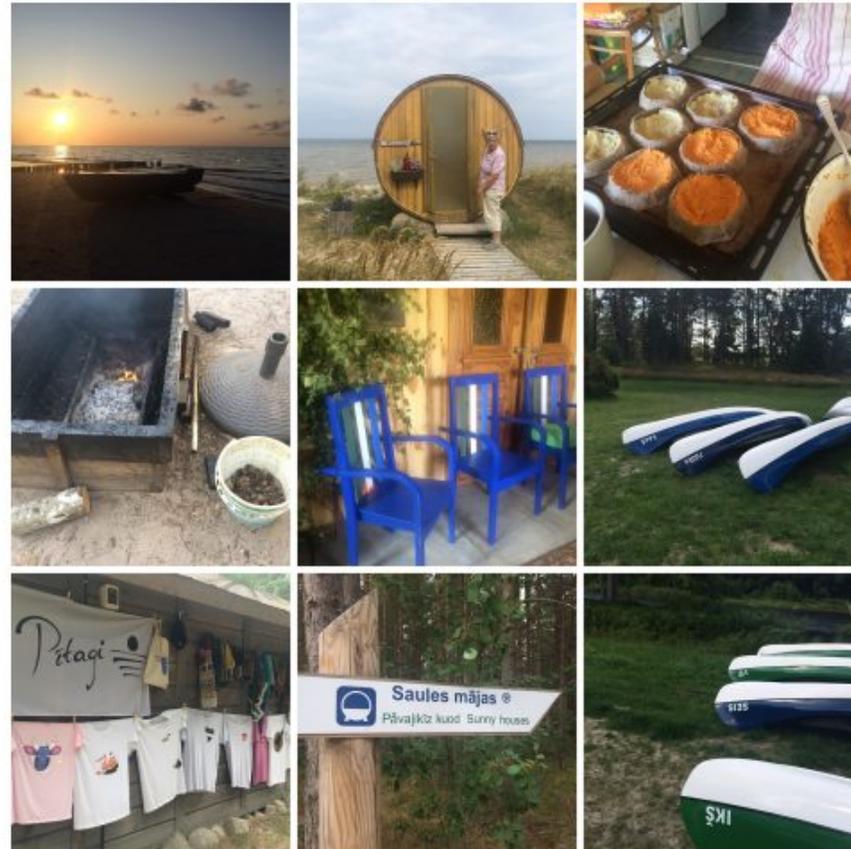
# UL Livonian Institute

*Our first year*

## Research

- The **state sponsored program “Livonian Language”** (a part of the program “Latvian Language”)
  - the **first such program** devoted to Livonian
  - the UL Livonian Institute is in charge of its implementation
- Some of our work this year on this program:
  - a **speaker census** (numbers and proficiency – no count since 1930s)
  - a **survey of the current use of Livonian language** in the territories historically inhabited by the Livonians
  - developing **electronic Livonian language tools**
  - applying this experience and knowledge to **support Latvia’s other Finnic communities** and their language revival efforts

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*Our first year*  
Research



*Examples of Livonian linguistic and cultural elements  
on the Livonian Coast in 2019 (photo: Gunta Kļava)*

# UL Livonian Institute

*Our first year*

## Research

- The **6<sup>th</sup> International Livonian Studies Conference “Livonica”**
  - brought together world experts on Livonian topics
  - first time it was held at the University of Latvia
  - interdisciplinary conference
  - part of the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages
- Addition of the **Livonian Cultural Space** to the **Latvian National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage**
  - A stepping stone to the UNESCO global list
- Continuing the tradition of the **Livonian Summer University**
  - The only university-accredited program of its sort, which brings students from universities around the world and gives them time on the Livonian Coast to learn about Livonian topics and meet experts

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Research



*UL Livonian Institute researcher Milda Dailidēnaitē speaking at the Livonica VI conference (photo: Gunta Kļava)*

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Community

- Educational programs for schools and community events to raise awareness and increase knowledge about the Livonians
- European Museum Night
- European Scientists' Night
- Educational programs for the Livonian Children's Summer and Youth Camp "Mierlinkizt"

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Community



*UL Livonian Institute director Valts Ernštreits (front, seated) leads an educational field trip for the Livonian Children's and Youth Summer School "Mierlinkizt", source: livones.net*

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Community

- Out-reach to cooperation partners in other small low-resource language communities
  - Seto Institute (Estonia)
  - Kihnu Institute (Estonia)
  - Kven Institute (Norway)
  - Sámi community organisations (Finland, Sweden, Norway)

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Community



*UL Livonian Institute director Valts Ernštreits discussing Livonian with future Kven language teachers (Source: livones.net)*

# Unique challenges of less-spoken languages

- Small languages and communities have **the same needs as larger communities** – they need **support for the use and development of their languages** in the modern world and the **creation of resources for this purpose** (online dictionaries, grammars, resources to know literary standards, etc.)
- However...
  - fewer examples of language documentation
  - materials scattered geographically and across different sources

# Electronic solutions from the UL Livonian Institute

- A **series of interconnected databases**
  - **morphological** (grammatical endings, meaningful parts of words) and **lexical** (words) databases
  - a text **corpus**
  - unified orthography
  - databases bring together information from many sources
- A **continuously updated Livonian-Estonian-Latvian dictionary**, which is built on data from these databases and examples from the corpus which illustrate natural language use and is available online (<http://www.livones.net/lili/en/vardnica/>)
  - This is key, as **in the absence of a base of speakers, language tools – including dictionaries – become the teachers themselves**

# Electronic solutions from the UL Livonian Institute

LV EE LI Lībiešu-igauņu-latviešu vārdnīca Paradigmā Korpus Korpus meklēšana Vārdnīca Lietotāji Cron Izeja

Teksti Sākt no sākums Atgriezties pie teksta

25 Teksts:  Vārds+vārdšķira+comb+perfiks+passivs

Meklēt:  Vārdšķira  Kombinācija

līvli++viss+viss noņemt

7 ieraksti

ID	Teksts	Nr	Teikums	Ķeksis	Rindkopa
59769	B-Ābēd-36	1/1	Līvlizt[līvli s *187 NomPl] .	publiski	*
59041	B-Ābēd-4	2/4	Līvli[] mōtlōb ,ku nei knaššō kievādt kui rāndas mittōkuskis āb ūo .	publiski	*
59770	B-Ābēd-36	2/1	Mēg līvlizt[līvli s *187 NomPl] ūom Sūomō-ugrōd rovsugst ,neiž kui sūomlizt ,ēstlizt ,ungārd ja munt .	publiski	
61169	B-TEMP_JL-19	3/8	Ja vanā Zūonkō lā'nd ja pā'zzōn ka Dūoņigō :lkš ōigi līvli[] umītigid ā'b tund se  izt a'žžō ,mis ta ā'b vōiks agā āb sōitaks t'edō .	publiski	*
60225	BL-Ābēd-30	4/1	līvli[] kiliz niemōd jarā ,	publiski	*
46595	C_LELS-8	38/1	Līvlizt[līvli s *187 GenPl] ulzōētami kōrandist barōnōn mingizt ka'zzō i'z ānda .	publiski	
48032	C_LELS-3	100/1	Ta u'm sindimizōst līvli[] .	publiski	

7 ieraksti

Atgriezties pie teksta

Example of text search (for līvli 'Livonian') in Livonian language corpus

# Electronic solutions in progress

- **Using electronic tools to demarcate the Livonian cultural space**
  - Livonian is unique in that **the Latvian State Language Law permits bilingual signage (Latvian-Livonian)**
  - Currently the UL Livonian Institute is applying for funding **to create an official Livonian place name archive**, so that such **signs in Livonian** can be put up throughout the historical Livonian region
  - The **Livonian language is underrepresented/unrepresented** in historically Livonian parts of Latvia
  - This will help **make Livonian part of the visual and physical landscape** of the parts of Latvia where it has been spoken

# Electronic solutions in progress



*Examples of Latvian-Livonian bilingual signs created by Signum and the Dundaga Municipality Tourism Office*

# Electronic solutions in progress

- Using the existing databases to construct **pedagogical materials for learning Livonian**
- Currently, very few Livonian language learning materials exist
- The experience of the Latvian Language Agency combined with the interconnected data of the databases provides the starting point for creating other **digital language learning solutions**:
  - Online Livonian language learning modules
  - Online grammatical reference materials for Livonian
- **Online resources** are vital for a dispersed community like the Livonians, as it makes language learning **location-independent**.

## Long-term vision

- Continuing to explore new ways of applying electronic solutions to small community and low-resource language problems
- Sharing this experience and tools with other endangered language communities around the world
- And, as a result, safeguarding not only the linguistic diversity of Latvia, but that of the world as a whole.



*Livonian Coast view, Pizā (Miķeļtorņis), Latvia*

Thank you!  
Tienū!  
Paldies!



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