

Livonian place names in the Latvian place name landscape

Dr. phil. Valts Ernštreits

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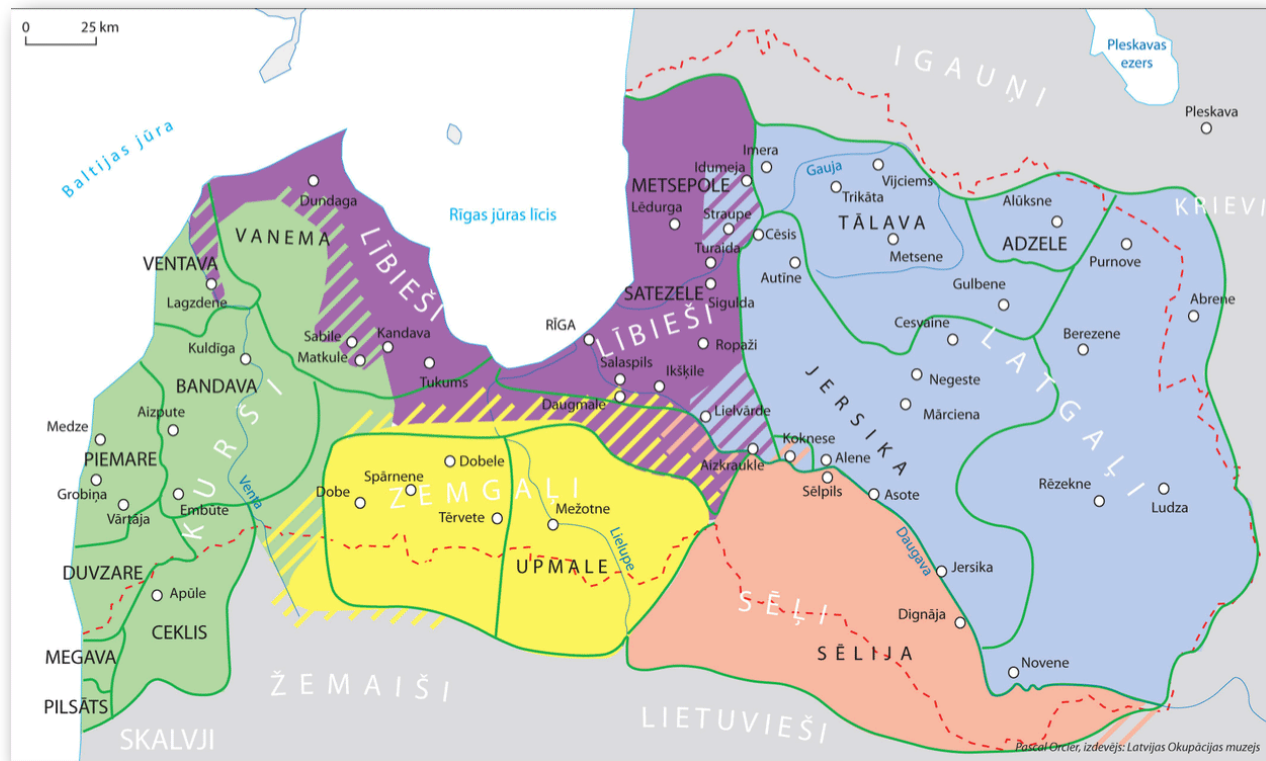


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Introduction

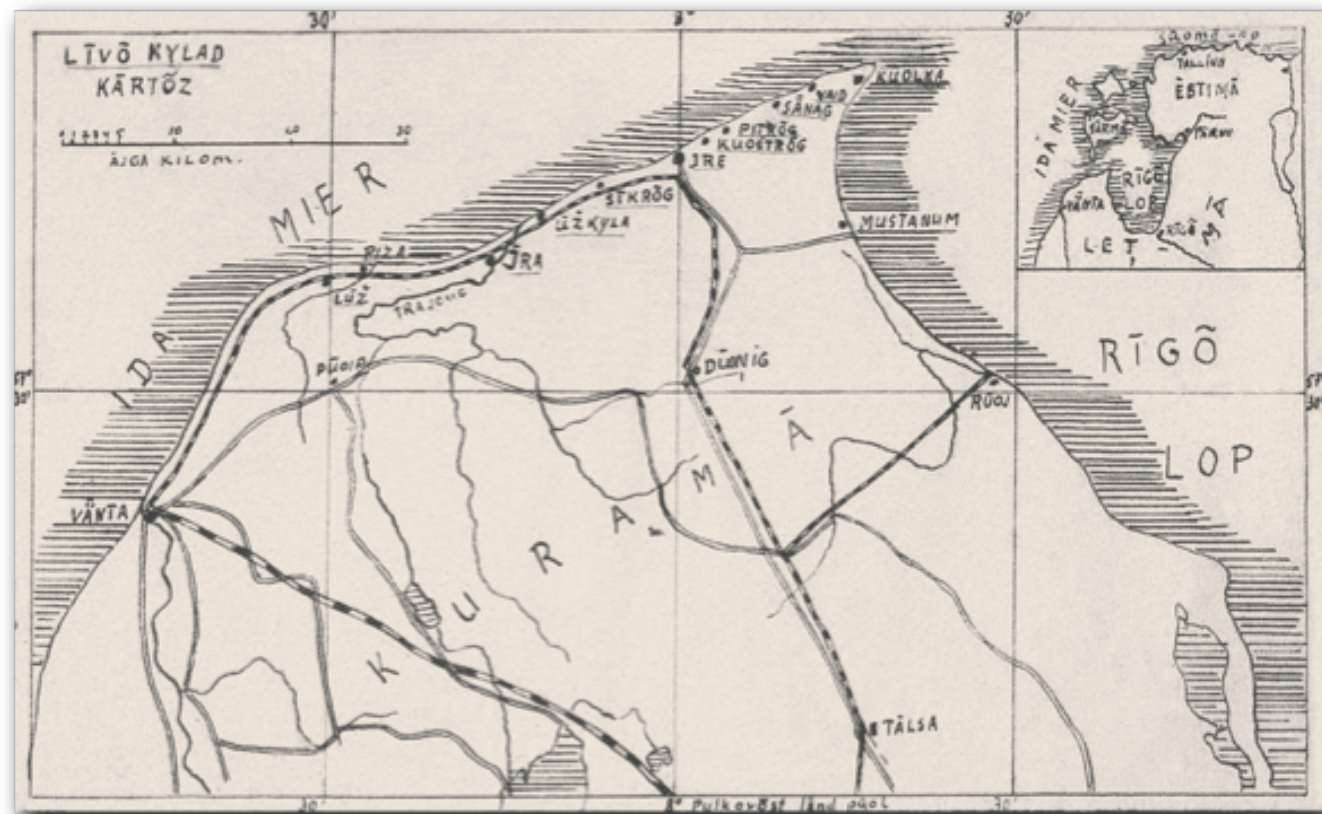
- Livonian, the language of one of Latvia's indigenous nations, is currently one of the most endangered languages in Europe, but was once spoken across a large part of Latvia. Livonian heritage has a significant, though understudied role, in the formation of modern Latvia, the Latvian language and Latvian nation as well as across the broader Northern European region.
- The documentation and use of Livonian linguistic heritage, including place names, holds significant potential for the preservation of cultural diversity and other values in the northern Baltic Sea region as well as for businesses and the tourism industry in the territories historically inhabited by the Livonians.

Latvia in 12th century



Map: Latvia in 12th century. Source: laaj.org.au

Livonian Coast in 20th century



Using Livonian place names

- Article 4 of the State Language Law (1999) expressly states that “The state guarantees the preservation, defence, and development of the Livonian language as an indigenous (autochthonous) language” and that **Livonian can be used for place names** as well as the names of agencies, community organisations, businesses, and events.
- The Place Name Information Guidelines (2012) state that **place names in the territories historically inhabited by the Livonians are also to be in Livonian.**
- However, the points specified in these laws do not represent the actual use of Livonian in public spaces (up to the present, no official signage has been posted anywhere in Livonian) and also are not reflected in the number of studies on Livonian which have been conducted in Latvia.

Using Livonian place names



Collecting of place names

- Even though the territories historically inhabited by the Livonians constitute nearly one-quarter of the territory of modern-day Latvia, and therefore these territories contain many place names of Livonian origin, as of yet no attention has been directed specifically towards place names in the Livonian language.
- Currently, the largest accessible collection of Livonian place names is the Livonian-Estonian-Latvian Dictionary (LELD) published in 2012 and containing 185 Livonian place names (<http://www.livones.net/lili/lv/vietvardi/>).

Collecting of place names

- A project for documentation and mapping of Livonian place names has been currently submitted to fill the gap and provide a source for introducing official place names in Latvia.
- It will use as a base already existing platform of Livonian linguistic databases (www.livones.net/lili/).
- For collection Livonian place names using data from several sources is intended (including place names from corpora, existing maps, metadata from various collections of sources, e.g. folklore, ethnographical, linguistic collections etc) and place names will be supplemented with geospatial information also allowing to connect through the place names and geospatial information data from different collections (ethnography, linguistic, tourism etc) thus creating a powerful tool for further research and promoting Livonian heritage.

Collecting of place names



A pilot project

- At the end of 2018, Dundaga municipality – working in conjunction with signage manufacturers – created sketches of sample signage. There is also consistent interest among Livonian Coast residents and those of other historically Livonian regions in Latvia in using the Livonian language in home names and also for other purposes.
- It is planned to introduce first bilingual place name signs for the villages of the Livonian Coast (within areas of Dundaga , Ventspils region and Roja municipalities) in the late autumn 2019.

Bilingual place name signs for the Livonian Coast



Picture: Visualisation of the bilingual place name signs by Signum and Dundaga municipality Tourist office.

Why are place names in Livonian important?

- The placement of Livonian-language signage in the historical Livonian-inhabited territories is one of the most urgent and important tasks to be completed in order to visually mark the Livonian cultural space.
- These will allow state institutions, local governments, businesses, individuals working in tourism, and residents of the territories historically inhabited by the Livonians to use Livonian linguistic heritage for the enrichment of the appearance and content of the Latvian linguistic landscape, the amplification of the appeal and attractiveness of the region, and the promotion of tourism.
- Bilingual signs will also motivate interest and educate society in Latvia as well as visitors to Latvia about a significant component of Latvia's multi-faceted cultural heritage: the Livonians, their linguistic heritage, and their contribution to the formation of the modern Latvian language, culture, and state.

Tienū! / Thank You!



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