# Diversity in Daugavpils: Unpacking Identity and Cultural Engagement among Minority School Youth in Eastern Latvia

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## Abstract

Studies of minority 'integration' often focus heavily on group boundaries of ethnicity, language and identity. This essay challenges these conventional approaches in Latvia by examining individuals' quotidian, lived experiences and how these transcend common analytical boundaries. Using the Daugavpils region as a case study, I explore Russian speaker and Latvian participation in events explicitly linked with 'ethnic' Latvian cultural identity. I argue, by adopting multifaceted analytical measures of identities, ethnicity and belonging, new perspectives on banal integration and minority engagement within national culture emerge. Individuals engage with each other and with 'national' identity and culture in complex ways. Young 'Russian speakers' are often more integrated with their ethnic Latvian peers than the extant literature suggests, both civically and in Latvia's cultural sphere, as consumers and producers of Latvian 'national' identity.

THE SECOND LARGEST CITY IN LATVIA AND A REGIONAL URBAN centre, Daugavpils and its surrounding municipality in the country's southeastern region of Latgale is a heavily Russian-speaking area in a post-Soviet state. Labelled a potential 'next Crimea', Latvia—and Latgale in particular—is precariously perched on the European Union's eastern border with the Russian Federation.[1] Russian media influence and military expansionism has led to concerns that, even in this NATO member state, the region is at risk of transforming into a Russian base for insurrection. Academic and public discourse enforces this narrative, highlighting discontent among Latvia's Russians and perceptions of discrimination against Russian speakers. Indeed, responses to a recent survey suggest

[1]In the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Ukrainian territory, analysts likened the situation in Latvia to that which preceded the Russian annexation of Crimea. In February 2016, BBC2 released a mock-documentary about a hypothetical Russian incursion in Daugavpils, 'Inside the War Room', suggesting that Crimea-style Russian action in Daugavpils would spark a nuclear World War III scenario (Gabriel Range, director, *World War Three: Inside the War Room*, BBC2, 2016).

that half of Daugavpils' residents perceive infringement of Russian-speakers' rights and see legitimate cause for potential armed intervention by the Russian Federation (Bērziņa 2016; Hiršs 2016). However, scenes from Daugavpils on any given day bear little resemblance to an oppressed city of Russian speakers; indeed, given its deep historical roots as a multicultural city, it is often easier to speak Russian here than Latvian.[2] The streets of Daugavpils are peaceful, friends meet in cafes, families go shopping and teenagers attend the local cinema without fear of ethnic violence.

Singers, dancers, even folklorists—these words are not often used to describe the population in Daugavpils and the surrounding municipality, yet these descriptors are more relevant to the daily lives of many young people in the region than a theoretical armed invasion by the Russian Federation. How do Russian speakers connect with the national culture of Latvia, the country in which many have been born and raised? Under what conditions is Latvia more than a 'host land' to Russian speakers? When are they part of—rather than tangential to—the national, civic and cultural definition of 'Latvian'? I engage with these questions using a mixed-methods approach (medium-$n$ survey and ethnography) to explore the salience of ethnicity, language and culture in identity construction among youth in Daugavpils city and municipality, specifically through the lens of the Latvian National Song and Dance Celebration tradition.

This includes the following driving questions: who are Latvia's 'minority youth' and how do they categorise themselves? How do youth in Daugavpils city and Daugavpils municipality engage in ('Latvian') cultural activities? What meaning is attached to participation and how does it inform their attachment to the Latvian 'nation'? In contrast to studies that highlight differences in actions and attitudes between titular (Latvian) and minority (Russian-speaking) populations, I argue these divisions are less pronounced among youth in this region than traditional social science research suggests. Further, I argue that Russian speakers are both consumers and producers of Latvian 'national' identity, which contributes to their perceptions of belonging to the 'Latvian nation' both civically and culturally.

Turning attention away from elite-led discourse and ethnic groupism, this study moves beyond vertical, top-down discussions of how the state has or has not successfully 'integrated' its 'Russian speakers'. Rather, it joins a growing theoretical trend that focuses on the daily lives of individuals, providing perspective on horizontal, peer-to-peer engagement and the banality of integration and national identity in everyday life. Methodologically, this research accomplishes this goal using medium-$n$ survey data and qualitative ethnography (participant observation, interviews and focus groups) in schools and community centres in the Daugavpils area. Empirically, the essay re-examines Russian speakers as active members of the Latvian cultural and civic nation through the song and dance celebration tradition, and contributes to broader research on minority integration.

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[2]Russian is the *de facto* language of the city, and services in Latvian can be limited; for example, basic Russian is often necessary to communicate with transit workers. Similarly, the local cinema operates nearly exclusively in Russian, in direct violation of Latvian language laws, because it is economically advantageous (*Latvijas Sabiedriskie mediji*, 11 December 2014; *Bez Tabu*, 22 October 2014; researcher observations 2015–2017).

*A note on terminology and nationality*

The moniker 'Russian speaker' has been widely used to describe the large minority group in the Baltic states and post-Soviet space in general. While not inaccurate, naming this group has the effect of distancing Russian speakers from the titular nation with an 'othering' ethnolinguistic label. Rather than an embrace of ethnic diversity, the phrase is a catch-all for individuals of varying (usually Slavic) backgrounds. In Latvia, this means that Russian speakers are often conflated with 'Russian', but rarely framed as (civically) 'Latvian'. This is problematic—it confuses language, ethnicity and nationality,[3] and provides a categorisation that the Russian Federation inflates to its tactical advantage to 'protect' compatriots abroad (Russian Federation 2009; Kallas 2016). The term similarly conflates pre-World War II Russian minorities with post-Soviet minorities, whose historical relationships to the titular nation and post-Soviet legal claims to citizenship were dramatically different (Smith 2005; Krūma 2010).

As the concept of 'nation' becomes increasingly intricate, going beyond territory and ethnicity to encompass individual identities and multifaceted ethnicities, Russian-speaker engagement with various elements of civic, cultural and ethnic nationalism complicates what it means to have a Russian-speaking Baltic identity. Early post-Soviet research predicted that economic rational choice would lead to the eventual 'cumulative assimilation of Russian speakers into Balts'; however, it did not preclude the long-term possibility of a Russian-nationalist 'counter-hegemony' in the non-Russia post-Soviet space (Laitin 1998, pp. 358–59). Indeed, despite Laitin's largely realised prediction of linguistic 'assimilation' in Latvia, a 'Russian-speaking identity' has remained the salient unit for social science analysis (Laitin 1998; LVA 2016).

While certainly there is some form of 'Russian-speaking' identity in the Baltic states, it is not the only identity that takes priority in daily life (Laizāne *et al*. 2015). Significantly, the term 'Russian speaker' leaves very little room for individuals of mixed heritage, either excluding them or analytically reducing their identity to their first language. This ignores the multilingual and multiethnic reality of most of Latvia's residents, including 'ethnic Latvians' themselves. Because the term remains the standard in the literature, with some hesitation it is also used here, interchangeably with 'minority population', to reference the category of individuals who identify Russian as their home (but not necessarily only) language.

*The state of Latvian integration*

Integration in the Baltic context has received a deluge of academic attention since the early post-Soviet days and has been imbued with contention from the start. Significant social and political changes wrought during the Soviet period (including a dramatic demographic shift and widespread Russification) prompted post-Soviet 'sovereignty projects' by titular nations (Graney 1999; Galbreath & Galvin 2005). Early elites in the

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[3]In contrast to Russian, in Latvian, as in English, there are no separate terms distinguishing an individual's ethnicity and citizenship/nationality (such as *rossiiskii/russkii*). According to the Office of Citizenship and Migration, the term for nationality (translated as both *nacionalitāte* and *tautība*) takes on both meanings, making the distinction between ethnic and civic identity even more complex (Cheskin 2016).

1990s sought to re-establish the precariously diminished Latvian titular majority in the country and encourage the 'repatriation' of Soviet-era migrants to Russia by implementing strict policies around citizenship, education and the state language (Dreifelds 1996; Eglītis 2002; Silova 2002, 2006; Dedze & Catlaks 2003; Galbreath & Galvin 2005; Šūpule 2007; Kangro & James 2008). Failure to qualify for automatic citizenship and limited Latvian-language knowledge left most Soviet-era migrants and their descendants in civic limbo as non-citizens (afforded many, but not all, civic rights),[4] for years after the Soviet Union collapsed; importantly, minorities descended from citizens of the interwar Latvian state were granted automatic citizenship. Integration efforts, such as the 1998 and 2004 education laws to increase Latvian-language coursework in state-funded minority schools, met with significant protest, including the critique of not sufficiently engaging stakeholders (Galbreath & Galvin 2005). When the Baltic states moved to join the EU, pressure from the international community significantly tempered restrictive legislation geared toward Soviet-era migrants and their descendants, particularly in the realm of citizenship. Portrayals of Latvia as an 'ethnic democracy' (Smith *et al.* 1994; Linz & Stepan 1996; Smith 1996) have arguably overlooked many important nuances of re-establishing independence after Soviet occupation; however, the initial approach of elites to largely exclude Soviet-era migrants has had lasting consequences: a large (but diminishing) permanent resident non-citizen population, a voluntarily segregated school system, and a historical grievance from early disenfranchisement. Nearly 30 years on, there remains a concerted effort to 'integrate' Russian-speakers, who constitute 37% of the population (CSP 2013).

Integration is repeatedly defined as the most desirable form of acculturation, both by multicultural theorists, as well as Latvia specialists and the Latvian government (Karklins & Zepa 1996; Berry 2001; Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija 2011; Zepa *et al.* 2013). Still, Latvia's integration policies geared toward Russian-speakers have been widely criticised as either failing to bridge the divide or promoting assimilation; others note the active attempts of the Russian Federation or Russian-oriented activists to maintain the ethnolinguistic cleavage and pursue separation or self-exclusion agendas (Linz & Stepan 1996; Muižnieks 2008, 2010; Cheskin 2015; Hanovs 2016; Ījabs 2016; Struberga 2016).

Despite missteps at the elite level, both official policies and lived realities point to integration as the desired state of minority–majority relations in Latvia, both politically and socially. The current existence of multiethnic political parties, quotidian acceptance of multiple linguistic traditions and support for ethnic minority education are indicative of a multicultural social reality. Multiculturalism is also now nominally embedded in Latvian law, not least in the normative acts regarding minority education, the goals of which include 'preserving and developing [minority] language, ethnic and cultural

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[4]The status of non-citizen applies only to former Soviet citizens and their descendants who have not been naturalised as citizens of any state. When re-establishing independence from the Soviet Union, the Latvian government reverted to the 1919 citizenship law in the 1991 Renewal of the Republic of Latvia Citizen's Rights and Fundamental Principles of Nationality, invoking the principle of state continuity from the interwar period and providing automatic citizenship only to citizens of the interwar republic and their descendants, regardless of ethnicity (Krūma 2010). Non-citizens are primarily Russian-speaking Soviet-era migrants; they have the right to naturalise, but many have not chosen to do so for both emotional and instrumental reasons.

originality [while] deepening appreciation for the Latvian language in a multicultural society' (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 2013).[5] While significant issues with the top-down implementation of integration policies certainly remain, there is little doubt that successful integration of Russian speakers in Latvia is the intended goal.

### Approaches to studying integration

Research on societal integration in the Baltic states has been plagued by the following in particular: the conflated usage of 'minority' and 'Russian'; an assumption that ethnicity and language are the primary indicators of identity (and, sometimes, loyalty); and an overt focus on elite-led and media discourse on ethnic discord. As such, theoretical frameworks often run the risk of prejudicing analysis in post-Soviet case studies by giving preference to group boundary structures over multifaceted identity construction and subsuming experiences at an individual level. Reliance on the actions of elite actors has led to a tendency to extrapolate top-down discourse on integration, nation and ethnicity to the attitudes of individuals. This has resulted in analyses of contrast between Russian speakers and titulars, as well as a focus on extreme examples of ethnic tension (for example, memory politics, commemoration days) (Budryte 2003; Onken 2007; Muižnieks 2011). Less weight, comparatively, has been given to the significant progress in minority naturalisation, political participation and associational life, or indeed, the quotidian experiences of lived integration and lack of ethnic tensions in daily life. The nature of integration implicitly necessitates a form of precarious boundary-making—without an 'us against them' there is no need for integration. Several dominant frameworks for analysing Russian-speaking minorities in the post-Soviet space, including immigrant acculturation theory (Berry 2001; Pisarenko 2006; Cara 2010; Birka 2013) and diaspora framing (Safran 1991; Brubaker 1996, 2000; King & Melvin 1999; Reis 2004; Birka 2016; Kuşçu 2016), have further solidified these occasionally ill-fitting analytical distinctions. For example, while Berry's immigrant adaptation strategies (integration, separation, marginalisation, assimilation) are popular for analysing the 'left behind' post-Soviet population (Berry 2001), it is often under-emphasised that Berry's framework is built on the psychologies of immigrants. Berry argues, '[immigrant] groups are usually culturally defined … [and] are typically less familiar to the resident population [than minorities], making more salient the well-established relationship between familiarity and attraction' (Berry 2001, p. 621). The Russian-speaking minority in the post-Soviet space falls somewhere in between immigrant and minority, as both culturally defined and familiar to the population. Indeed, the relocation experience for Soviet Russians from the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic to non-Russian republics was 'not only legally and politically defined as internal migration, but was

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[5]In March 2018, the *Saeima* (parliament) approved amendments to the Education Law and General Education Law that initiate an increase in the use of Latvian language instruction and examination in minority schools. By academic year 2021/2022 all general subjects in secondary education are anticipated to be taught in Latvian. However, students will continue to have access to minority language, history and cultural education modules in minority languages ('Discover the Important Facts Regarding the Transition to Studying in the State Language', Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Latvia, available at: http://www.izm.gov.lv/en/highlights/2762-information-regarding-the-transition-to-instruction-in-the-state-language-in-general-education-institutions-offering-education-programmes-for-minorities, accessed 12 November 2018).

psychologically experienced as such' (Brubaker 2000, p. 3). Thus, they did not define themselves as 'immigrants' when the republics broke from the Soviet state, and immigrant frameworks do not fully capture the Russian-speaker experience.

Diaspora frameworks have been similarly loosened to include the post-Soviet minority outside Russia in what Brubaker and Laitin term the 'accidental' or 'beached' diaspora, though without the experience of physical upheaval. Brubaker's (1996) triadic nexus, formed between the national minority, nationalising state (host land) and external homeland, has again become relevant post-Crimea and in the context of a revanchist Russia. However, diaspora frameworks give preference to state-led constructions of population groups (Brubaker 2000). According to Smith, the lived experience of Russians in the Baltic states is more complex, 'Russians in the borderland states have been socially reconstructed and reinvented as a diaspora by political and cultural élites', which benefits both Russian (Federation) and Latvian ethnonational political narratives that seek to claim and exclude the 'diaspora', respectively (Smith 1996, p. 501). Categorising Russian speakers as a diaspora is problematic not because it describes a population distanced from its ethnic heritage, but because 'diasporas' necessitate boundary maintenance and separation from the host state, leaving a precarious balance between moderate diaspora and irredentist fifth column (Smith 1996; Butler 2001; Birka 2016; Kuşçu 2016). Even if, as Brubaker argues, a diaspora does not necessarily possess the qualities of a bounded identity, there remains the implication that a diaspora is unable to fully integrate into the host society; even members who do not actively 'practise' as a member of the diaspora 'may mobilise in times of crisis' (Shain & Barth 2003, p. 453). Indeed, Safran defines diaspora as expatriate minority communities that 'believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host country' (1991, pp. 83–4). This theoretical framing precludes Russian speakers from integrating into their 'host' society by virtue of positioning them as inherently not—or worse, unable to become—part of the Latvian nation.

A further trend in integration literature has been to stratify minorities as analytical groups, differentiating between Russian-speaking ethnicities, regional affiliations, education brackets and age groups (Karklins & Zepa 1996; Dzenovska 2010; Muižnieks 2010; Cheskin 2013, 2015; Zepa *et al*. 2013; Breggin 2014; Laizāne *et al*. 2015; Bērziņa 2016; Birka 2016). However, many such studies home in on stress points or highlight barriers between ethnic Latvians and Russian speakers. In some cases, this 'barrier' is analytically constructed by the nature of the study, placing the Russian speaker out of context from their daily life and in opposition to 'Latvians'. For example, a series of BISS surveys operationalises 'willingness to identify with national group' by asking informants to respond to statements such as 'Latvians and Russians (Russian speakers) are two conflicting camps' and 'I have no problem with Latvians; Latvians are the same as everyone else' (Birka 2016, p. 226). The first statement explicitly puts these narrowly defined groups in conflict with one another. The second statement similarly implies that the respondent is not analytically Latvian; that is, even if Russian speakers and Latvians are 'the same', the question explicitly differentiates the respondent from the national titular group. As Anderson (2006) notes, the fallacy of the census is that individuals are presented with categories into which they are required to fit; this both limits the available identities they can 'officially' possess, and requires them to, perhaps falsely,

choose a primary identity according to the standards provided. In their studies of nationhood in the Habsburg empire, Judson and Zahra note, 'evidence of local behaviours often completely contradicts what historians otherwise imagine to have been true from evidence they draw from party politics or the mass media'; rather, in lived realities, 'nation' is used flexibly to pursue relevant personal or community agendas (Judson & Zahra 2012, p. 22). Individuals with mixed ethnic heritage are faced with the difficulty of defining their ethnicity, and are often left in limbo (Šūpule 2012; Laizāne *et al.* 2015, p. 68).

Civic, ethnic or collective cultural affiliations are able to exist independently of each other or nested in hyphenated identities within the individual (Tajfel 1978; Berry 2001, p. 620). Unpacking the nested identities of Russian speakers is beginning to drive research on integration strategies in the Baltic states, including in this work. Recent studies highlight notable progress with regard to the relationships of young Russian speakers with the Latvian state and ethnic Latvians. Laizāne *et al.* (2015) conducted a study of 89 students in nine minority schools across Latvia using peer-interview methodology. Their results support the hypothesis that Russian-speaking youth in Latvia have a complex identity structure; they recognise their ethnic and linguistic background as different from that of ethnic Latvians, but also identify themselves as 'of Latvia'. Russian-speaking students largely interpret linguistic identity as a personal characteristic, not necessarily as indicative of membership in a larger, salient group. Researchers measured a strong sense of attachment to Latvia, as well as a need to learn Latvian for both integrative and instrumental reasons. While Russian speakers in this study felt distanced from Latvia's political process, they also indicated a sense of closeness with ethnic Latvians, particularly in national, sporting and cultural events. My research continues this trend of engaging in a more nuanced discussion of Russian-speaker integration by turning attention away from strict ethnolinguistic boundaries and exploring the grey areas of Latvian civic and cultural identity that minorities inhabit.

This essay expands the exploration of how Russian speakers are and can be 'Latvian' without assimilation, a concept little explored in the current literature. Few studies consider the unremarkable, everyday experiences of integration that shape (national) identity construction. As Seliverstova and Pawlusz argue, while a 'vast body of literature has developed, which enquires into the everyday life of post-Soviet people … it usually lacks the link between the macro and micro dimensions of nation building' (Seliverstova & Pawlusz 2016, p. 71). While progressive examples of Russian-speaker integration exist when analysts turn to individuals, these are often lost in the discussion of Latvian post-Soviet nation-building, which rarely considers Russian speakers as members of the Latvian 'nation'. Previous research on Latvian and Baltic integration is significant and validly conceptualises important aspects of the history and current status of integration; however, researchers must also be wary of convenient ethnolinguistic categorisations that overlook micro examples of minorities as producers and consumers of national civic culture.

### Latvia's culture conundrum

The idea of 'culture', and particularly 'Latvian culture', has been pertinent to the discussion of ethnic minority integration in Latvia since the fall of the Soviet Union in

1991. Some politicians and ethnic Latvians have made statements expressing the overwhelming need for minorities to embrace 'Latvian culture' in order to become 'Latvian'. In the Latvian context, culture, particularly artistic and folk culture, is an intrinsic part of daily life. Common community activities include not only sports and theatre clubs, but also folk dancing, choirs and folklore collectives. Modernised folk culture is publicly visible and widely celebrated. Preserving the cultural heritage of Latvian territory and the Latvian ethnic nation is deeply engrained in social and political contexts.

This is particularly visible in the Latvian Song and Dance Celebration tradition, 'a unique, complex, very alive and essential organism in the entire ecosystem of the nation' (Laķe & Muktupāvele 2018, p. 16). Iterations of the celebration tradition occur in myriad forms across the country, but the two largest celebrations are the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration and the School Youth Song and Dance Celebration, which occur on rotating five-year cycles in the capital, Rīga. The song and dance celebration tradition is a focal point of both Latvia's cultural heritage and its cultural future, with more than 40,000 active participants and hundreds of thousands in the physical and television audience, significant for a country of less than two million; indeed, 'at some point in their lives 87% of the population of Latvia have been actively or passively involved in the song and dance celebration tradition' (Laķe & Muktupāvele 2018, p. 16). The tradition started prior to Latvian statehood, during the Latvian 'national awakening' in the nineteenth century, and developed with the aim of establishing a distinctive Latvian national culture and defining national borders (Plakans 2011). While cultural and political forces in the region—German and Soviet—have influenced the tradition's development or threatened its repertoire, in its modern iteration, the song and dance celebration tradition is centred on ethnic Latvian motifs and patriotic music. The main festival attractions—the stage folk dance concert and final choir concert—include upwards of 17,000 performers in each event (Laķe & Muktupāvele 2018). Participation is based on regional competitions that stretch over a number of years; groups often form around schools or community centres. The celebration tradition also includes smaller performances by Latvia's ethnic minority cultural groups, as well as visual arts, folklore groups and musical ensembles. Given the complexity of the repertoire, participation provides a source of personal and social prestige. Training and intermediary performances span both the country and the temporal distance between the celebrations, occurring year-round across Latvia.

While multicultural in its development, modern iterations of the celebration tradition have highlighted a debate between competing goals. Is it intended to be a celebration of and for ethnic Latvians or for the country as a whole, regardless of citizen ethnicity? Should it be exclusive and limited to the most talented performers or inclusive and incorporate more amateur participants? These questions are debated among organisers (Laķe et al. 2017), but are also critical to the cultural integration of Latvia's minorities who often remain outside the discussion. How accessible is this pinnacle of Latvian culture to minority individuals? Must minorities participate separately, as representatives of their minority heritage, or can they participate alongside 'ethnic' Latvian peers? Researchers, participants and audience members alike have argued that involvement allows access to a collective 'national' emotion. The celebration tradition epitomises a

growing trend in the literature that considers 'national identity as performance', and operationalises 'informal mechanisms of identity construction and nation building' (Isaacs & Polese 2015; Pawłusz 2016, p. 252). Understanding minority access to the celebrations and the unique national community they engender, therefore, is paramount to the discussion of Latvian minority cultural integration.

In contrast to the push towards adopting a 'Latvian cultural identity', preserving minority ethnic cultural identity has also been a topic of debate in the Latvian context for some time. This has manifested in protests against changing school requirements to include more Latvian-language instruction (2004 and again in 2017–2018), critiques that Russian cultural life is not supported by the state, and discontent with Latvian-language requirements for citizenship and employment (Silova 2006; Djackova 2011a, 2011b; Muižnieks 2010, 2011; Cheskin 2015). However, the Latvian government not only guarantees negative freedoms (that is, limited or no restrictions on minority rights and activities), it provides more support for positive minority freedoms than many of its Western neighbours, such as extensive state support for the minority school system (Berlin 1958; Howard 2009; Djackova 2011a, 2011b; Ekmanis 2013). Focusing the cultural integration discussion solely on the vertical axis—the ways in which the state provides or fails to facilitate integration of minorities—overshadows the horizontal integration that is occurring. The development of and access to a civic-cultural Latvian identity extends across Latvia's population, regardless of preferred home language or ethnicity, for example, through engagement in events such as the song and dance celebrations.

## Methodology

### Contextualising the Daugavpils region and population

To explore the questions of how youth engage with integration, national identity and culture, this study uses data from an original survey distributed to tenth-, eleventh- and twelfth-grade students in the city and municipality of Daugavpils, as well as ethnographic data collected in classrooms from preschool to twelfth grade and cultural community centres in the same region. On the periphery of the country and close to its eastern borders, Daugavpils city and Daugavpils municipality in the Latgale region are particularly important geographic areas to study when engaging this topic. Latgale and the Daugavpils area are historically ethnically and culturally diverse, with substantial Russian and Polish (who are also largely Russian-speaking) minority communities that predate the Soviet period. A popular tourist site, *Baznīcu kalns* (Church Hill) showcases the religious and ethnic diversity of the city, where one can see the worship centres of four religions: Orthodox (largely Russian), Lutheran (Latvian), Catholic (Polish/Latgalian) and Old Believer (Russian). City festivals often highlight this diversity, including performances by numerous ethnic artist groups. In contrast to the western Baltic provinces of Courland and Livland, Latgale was part of the administratively distinct Vitebsk *Gubernija* of the Russian Empire until Latvia declared independence in 1918, hence the considerable Slavic influence in the region. The region also is home to native speakers of Latgalian, a dialect of Latvian, though some argue it is an

independent Baltic language. Compared to western Latvia, Latgale has a longstanding history of ethnic diversity and multilingualism; indeed, this contributes to a distinctive Latgalian identity. The region was also significantly impacted by the Soviet period due to large-scale immigration and Russification. Russian is the dominant language in Daugavpils city and municipality; Russian speakers make up 78.9% and 65.5% of the area, respectively (CSP 2013). The working language of the city is effectively Russian, therefore ethnic Latvians living here are fluent in Russian as well. The demographics of the region also lead to a high rate of interaction between Russian and Latvian speakers, particularly in schools.

High school students comprise a particularly important demographic for the study of identity and culture in Latvia. The cohort studied here, born after 1997, is one of the first to grow up not only in an independent Latvia, but the first generation to spend the majority of their lives as residents of a Latvia integrated into the EU and NATO. Almost all student informants in this study were born after the 1998 liberalisation of citizenship laws, which removed quotas for Soviet-era migrant naturalisation and provided a path to citizenship for children born in Latvia. Most of their schooling has followed the 2004 education reforms that increased the use of Latvian language (60% of coursework) in state-funded minority schools.[6] These students are (with few exceptions) fluent in Latvian.[7] They arguably have a much different and more amicable relationship to the state than cohorts of Russian speakers who grew up in a Soviet environment and experienced a difficult transition after the collapse of the USSR. However, their perceptions and relationship to the Latvian 'nation' have not yet been sufficiently explored.

*Survey and ethnography*

Data for this research come from an original survey, ethnographic participant observation, interviews and focus groups. Using a regional case study, this research contributes to unpacking identity dimensions and participation in Latvian civic-cultural life, operationalised as engagement with artists' collectives that are active in the song and dance celebration tradition. Participant observation was conducted in nine schools and cultural community centres in the Daugavpils region during three research trips between November 2015 and May 2017, including one month embedded in a rural school community. Survey data considered the practices and attitudes of high school youth (ages 16–19); the survey was distributed in February 2016, half a year after the 2015 School Youth Song and Dance Celebration. It was approved by the Latvian National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības satura centrs*) and developed in close collaboration with the research team at the Latvian Academy of Culture studying song

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[6]While initially this reform to increase the level of Latvian used in state-funded minority schools was heavily protested as an 'assimilationist' policy, minority students gained a linguistic advantage, and resistance to the reforms dropped significantly after they were implemented (Silova 2006; Muižnieks 2010; Djackova 2011a; Estii Koostoo Kogu 2011; Ekmanis 2013). While there is a healthy scepticism surrounding the actual level of Latvian used in minority schools, from this researcher's experience, nearly all students who participated in the survey had a competent grasp of the Latvian language.

[7]Ninety percent of minorities in Latvia speak Latvian at various levels (LVA 2016). Most respondents completed this study's survey in the Latvian language without problems, though a Russian-language version was made available.

TABLE 1
SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS: SCHOOL PROGRAMME LANGUAGE, REGION (% TOTAL ($N$))

| | | School programme language | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Latvian | Minority (Russian) | |
| *Region* | Daugavpils city | 37.3% (121) | 42.0% (136) | |
| | Daugavpils municipality | 14.8% (48) | 5.9% (19) | |
| % (*n*) | | | | **100.0% (324)** |

*Notes*: Grades 10–12; academic year 2015–2016; total survey: $n = 324$, total population $= 1,591$, confidence interval $= 95\%$, margin of error $= 5$; Latvian programme: $n = 169$, total population $< 541$, confidence interval $= 95\%$, margin of error $= 5$; Russian programme: $n = 155$, total population $< 1,543$, confidence interval $= 95\%$, margin of error $= 7$.

and dance celebration practices across the Baltic states (Laķe & Grīnberga 2014; Laķe *et al.* 2017). I distributed the survey in eight of the 18 schools in the area (five of 13 in the city and three of five in the municipality). It captured 324 respondents, approximately 20% of all students across grades 10–12 in the region (see Table 1). Schools were surveyed based on the administrative response to my research request, the availability of students, and time and travel constraints.

This survey sought to complicate the question of ethnic/national identity through a multi-question approach. Student respondents were coded by the type of education programme they attended (Russian minority or Latvian mainstream[8]), as well as language(s) of communication with various contacts (such as mother, father, friends, classmates). Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate the type of passport they held (Latvian, non-citizen, other state), as well as the 'nationality' (here: ethnicity) listed in their passport.[9] These demographic questions each measure a different aspect of ethnic/national/linguistic identity, allowing a more nuanced analysis of youth in this region.

It should be noted that questions on nationality/ethnicity are often considered too politically sensitive to include on such surveys, partially owing to sensitivity surrounding non-citizenship. Conventionally, the language that informants indicate as their main or preferred language has been used to categorise national or ethnic identity (namely, 'Russian speaker', 'Latvian'). However, this practice obfuscates nuances, particularly in multilingual youth, and can oversimplify identities. Because the question was particularly relevant to my study and I had the benefit of a 'neutral' affiliation with a non-Latvian institution (University of Washington), citizenship and nationality questions were included in the survey. Students responded with no significant issues.

[8]One dual-track or mixed school, which offered two programmes of education in the same institution (Latvian and minority), was included in the research. However, given the size of the school, the high school curriculum was only offered in Latvian; therefore it was coded as a Latvian school in the survey data.

[9]Nationality (here: ethnicity) (*tautība*) is officially noted in the Latvian population registry. Parents may choose to list their child's *tautība* as any official ethnicity recorded for up two generations (that is, the ethnicity of a parent or grandparent). A person may change their registered *tautī ba* in accordance with the law on names, last names and nationality. Until July 2002, *tautī ba* was officially listed in all passports. Between 2002 and 2012, listing nationality (ethnicity) was optional. It was officially excluded between April 2012 and April 2013, but is currently optional again.

Given the aforementioned constraints in the field, these data are not presented as broadly representative. However, they do offer an important snapshot of youth in Daugavpils area schools that serves as a starting point for further research, particularly since almost no research has been conducted on minorities who participate in the song and dance celebration tradition. Minorities who participate in the main events of the celebrations (that is, the finale choir concert and dance concert) fulfil a largely 'Latvian-centric' repertoire (rather than 'minority' repertoire). Their engagement in these events has been almost completely ignored; this is especially true for minorities who participate in nominally 'Latvian' (rather than 'minority') artists' collectives. The data I present here contribute to filling some of this gap in the knowledge.

Significant data collected through in-depth ethnography also serve to bolster the validity of the survey and descriptive data. Ethnography is a particularly useful instrument in the study of daily life, allowing the researcher to record the processes of social interaction and meaning at a mundane level (De Certeau 1984; Seliverstova & Pawlusz 2016). This process allows the researcher to collect thick descriptions of social interactions that cannot be obtained using other methods; it seeks to 'uncover the explicit and implicit cultural knowledge that guides behaviour' and addresses the '"cognitive content" of identity better than most other methods' (Adams 2009, p. 318).

In my fieldwork, I used three primary ethnographic techniques: interviews, focus groups and participant observation. I conducted face-to-face, semi-formal interviews with eight teachers in Daugavpils city and municipality between November 2015 and February 2016. These were primarily conducted in the informants' workplace (schools), with open-ended questions regarding participation in cultural events, student reactions and personal perceptions of such events. I conducted two focus group discussions with student choir and dance groups during rehearsal periods. To address my line of inquiry regarding expressions of cultural nationalism, I conducted participant observation in six cultural groups in Daugavpils city/Daugavpils municipality, attending group rehearsals and informally talking to participants. Three research trips between September 2015 and May 2017 contributed to the overall field data collected. A criticism of an approach that focuses on cultural collectives and song and dance celebration participants is that informants may be self-selected to be more 'integrated' in national culture. While this may apply in some individual cases, it is important to note that cultural collectives are ubiquitous in Latvia, particularly in schools and small communities. In rural communities, such groups are among a small offering of social activities, and participation may not initially be prompted by 'national' sentiment; for example, participants join to spend time with friends.

A better understanding of Daugavpils city and municipality adds important context to the greater discussion on Latvian integration precisely because it is a hotspot of media attention with a population that is more Russian-speaking than Latvian-speaking. The remote nature of regional schools also presents difficulties for researchers in terms of travel, accommodation and comfort, and therefore they tend to be understudied on the topic of integration. However, I argue that regional schools, particularly in Latgale, are important microcosms of integration. Because of

their remote nature, these schools provide a finite potential friend group population, social activities are limited and ethnic boundaries are less pronounced than in other areas of Latvia (for example, neighbourhoods in Rīga). Ethnicity (or language preference) does not determine or deter social connections or involvement in local/national culture.

## Results

### Who are minority youth? How are they categorised?

How researchers categorise minority identities is of great significance to the integration discussion, particularly when discussing youth. In the Latvian case, home or school language traditionally serve as identity indicators in social science analysis. While these data inform understanding of the environment in which students live or study, analysts must be wary of over-generalising bounded identities based on these indicators alone. Here, I expand the rubric of ethnolinguistic identity to include multiple home/school language environments, as well as students' indicated relationship to the Latvian state as an additional measure of how integrated they perceive themselves to be civically and/or culturally; these data indicate language, ethnicity and civic nationality are not mutually exclusive.

Russian was the home language of 63% of respondents and 20% came from mixed-language homes, in which students spoke at least two languages with their parents. Of the students surveyed who spoke exclusively Russian with their parents, 36% attended Latvian-language high school. An additional 71% who spoke more than one language at home were enrolled in a Latvian programme. This means that while more than 80% of students surveyed lived in some form of Russian home-language environment, nearly half of these students were enrolled in Latvian-language programmes with Latvian-speaking peers (see Table 2).[10]

A dual-stream school, providing both Latvian and Russian minority education programmes, illustrated the banality of this multi-linguistic reality. Though the surrounding area was primarily Russian-speaking, most students were enrolled in the Latvian stream starting in primary school and spoke Latvian with little or no difficulties.

TABLE 2
SCHOOL PROGRAMME TYPE, HOME LANGUAGE (% LANGUAGE SPEAKERS (N))

| | | School programme language | | |
| | | Latvian programme | Russian programme | Total (language) % (n) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Home language | Latvian language | 98% (48) | 2% (1) | 100% (49) |
| | Mixed language | 71% (47) | 29% (19) | 100% (66) |
| | Russian language | 36% (73) | 64% (131) | 100% (204) |

*Note*: Home language: 'other', 'no answer' excluded; Latgalian included with Latvian; $n = 319$.

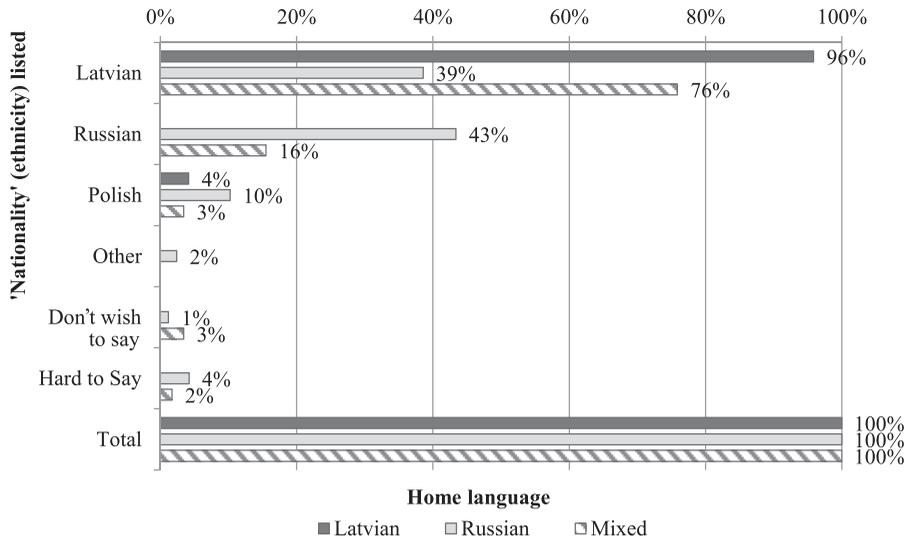[10]Latgalian speakers are included in the count of Latvian speakers.

FIGURE 1. ‘NATIONALITY’ (ETHNICITY) LISTED IN PASSPORT BY HOME LANGUAGE.

Indeed, administrators anticipated that within the next few years, the Russian stream would fade away without any need for state intervention.

> We don’t pressure them artificially [to join the Latvian stream]. We see that it will happen naturally, without any big conflicts. You may have heard in the press about the problems the state law on language caused. But with us, everything has gone very calmly—no stress.[11]

Most students served by this school were from multiethnic or Russian households and nearly all spoke both Russian and Latvian. However, neither school language nor home language provided a definitive indication of the ethnolinguistic or cultural environment or identity of minority students.

The way in which students identified their civic relationship to the Latvian state similarly complicated their identity construction. Of the students surveyed, 94% indicated they had Latvian passports (the other survey options were: non-citizen passports, third country passports or do not wish to answer). This was unsurprising, given the sharp decline of non-citizenship among youth since the liberalisation of citizenship laws in 1998. Less than 0.3% of children born in 2017 are non-citizens (2.3% of children born in 1998); overall, the non-citizen population has declined from 21.1% in 2000 to 11.8% in 2016 (CSP 2017; PMLP 2018). More interestingly, half of the respondents listed Latvian as their nationality (that is, ethnicity) in their passports, though only 15% of these spoke exclusively Latvian or Latgalian with their parents (see Figure 1 and Table 3). Indeed, more than half of those living in exclusively Russian-language home environments listed something other than Russian as their nationality (ethnicity).

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[11]Director, rural school north of Daugavpils city, 9 November 2015.

TABLE 3
'Nationality' (Ethnicity) Listed in Passport, Home Language (N)

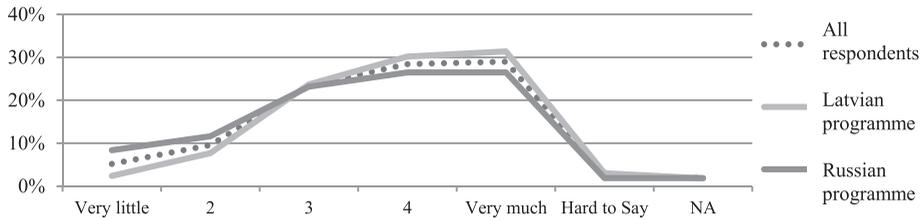| | | 'Nationality' (ethnicity) listed in Latvian passport | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Latvian | Russian | Polish | Other | Hard to say | Abstain | Total |
| *Home language* | Latvian | 46 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 48 |
| | Mixed | 44 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 58 |
| | Russian | 64 | 72 | 17 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 166 |

*Note*: n = 272.



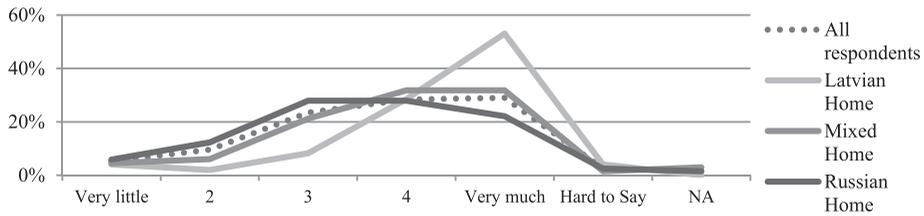FIGURE 2. BELONGING TO LATVIA, SCHOOL PROGRAMME LANGUAGE.



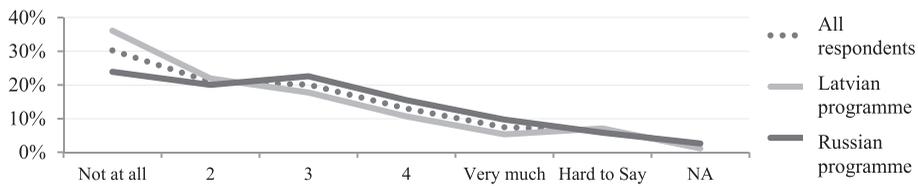FIGURE 3. BELONGING TO LATVIA, HOME LANGUAGE.



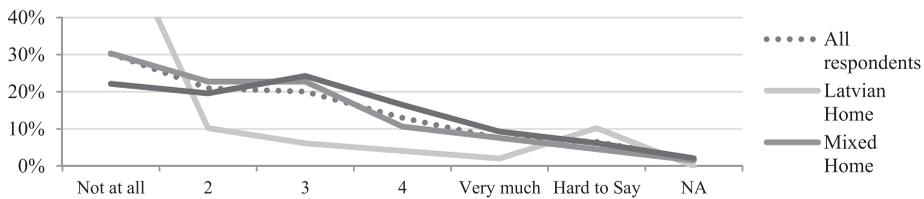FIGURE 4. BELONGING TO RUSSIA, SCHOOL PROGRAMME LANGUAGE.



FIGURE 5. BELONGING TO RUSSIA, HOME LANGUAGE.

When considering perceptions of belonging to Latvia and Russia, trend lines across all population groups followed similar patterns (see Figures 2–5). While Latvian speakers more clearly perceived belonging to Latvia, Russian speakers also indicated a strong sense of belonging to Latvia, and much less to Russia. The finding that a majority of student respondents felt that they belonged to the country in which they lived is not particularly novel.[12] However, it is important in the context of the Latvian debate on integration, which stresses differences between the population groups. These data similarly support the findings of researchers such as Laizāne *et al.*, who argue that students tend to differentiate between national and ethnic identities: '[Students] assign themselves ethnic Russianness, which, in their minds, has little to do with Russia the country. For this reason, many don't feel connected to Russia, they choose not to use the word "Russian" and call themselves "Russian speakers", because they feel more likely to belong to Latvia' (Laizāne *et al.* 2015, p. 17). Particularly in the Daugavpils region, which is frequently described as a Russian enclave, the relatively positive association with belonging to the state demonstrates an important facet of identity rooted in Latvia.

These survey data are reflective of three significant tendencies in Latvian integration: the decline of non-citizenship among youth; the fallacy of conflating 'Russian speaker' with 'Russian'; and the ability of Russian speakers to engage and identify with Latvian social and civic communities. However, many discussions of Russian-speaker integration overlook these overlapping complexities in Russian-speaker identity. While some of these responses among students surveyed in the Daugavpils region may be explained by the long multicultural history of Latgale, these data serve to complicate the way researchers measure identity and minority status in Latvia. 'Russian speaker' cannot be synonymous with 'Russian' nor can it be automatically separated from Latvian national identity. As is reflected by school and home language, Russian-speaking students are neither forcibly 'Latvianised' nor assimilated into a 'Latvian' linguistic environment that excludes their own linguistic background. Rather, young people negotiate their national and cultural belonging in a complex way that goes beyond the common integration indicators of ethnolinguistic heritage.

### How do youth in Daugavpils (city) and Daugavpils municipality engage in Latvian cultural activities?

These survey data complicate how Russian-speaking youth are categorised, and provide insight into how youth in Daugavpils city and Daugavpils municipality perceive their identity in relation to the state. While Russian was the home language of 63% of respondents and 20% came from mixed-language homes, surveyed young people saw themselves as largely connected to Latvia. From an analytical perspective, this indicates a need to re-evaluate the primacy of language as a marker of integration. The second portion of analysis considers how Daugavpils area youth engage with Latvian cultural life. Is engagement only germane to outliers, or is it a much more banal part of the daily lives of youth?

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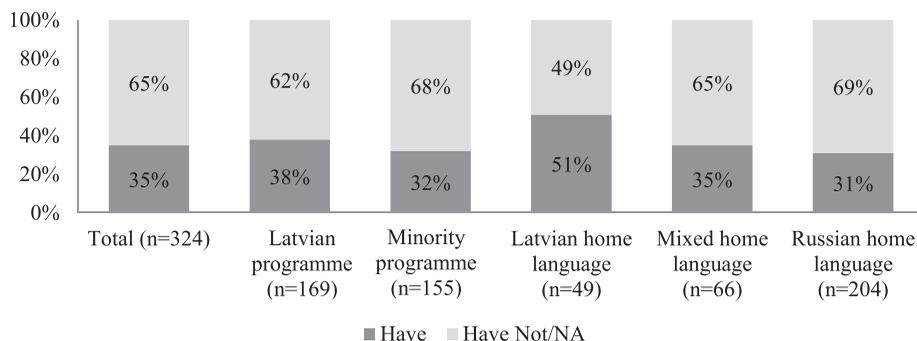[12] See also Birka (2016), Laizāne *et al.* (2015).

FIGURE 6. RESPONDENTS PARTICIPATING IN AT LEAST ONE SONG AND DANCE
CELEBRATION.

The young people surveyed had multifaceted national identities; while ethnicity was often salient, it was not necessarily determinative. Active engagement with their non-Latvian ethnic background did not prevent an individual from also engaging with ethnic Latvian peers or Latvian 'national' culture. Indeed, more than 30% of survey respondents said they had participated in at least one song and dance celebration, regardless of home language or school programme (see Figure 6). Moreover, 72% said they had engaged with the celebration, through participation, attendance or watching it on television. This reflects a rather high level of both active and passive engagement; comparatively, Tisenkopfs's (2008) survey of Russian school youth in Rīga reported that only 1% of students had participated in the 2005 School Youth Song and Dance Celebration.

While 88% of respondents participated in some form of extracurricular activity, those that usually funnel directly into the Song and Dance Festival—choir and folk dance— were the second and third most popular among surveyed students (33% and 30%, respectively). Unsurprisingly, these activities were more popular among Latvian programme attendees (35% sing in choir; 44% dance); however, Russian schools also indicated participation and access (31% sing, 11% dance). For example, in a rural municipality dual-track school, all students in the Latvian stream's first and second grades participate in the youngest folk dance group; as students get older, they chose whether or not to continue with folk dancing, either within the school or externally. According to the director of the school:

> [A neighbouring parish served by the school] is almost 100% Russian-speaking. They have never had a Latvian school, only a Russian school, at least during the Soviet period. Then a few years ago, a folk dance collective was established—Latvian, not Russian. And they competed and for the first time their parish participated in the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration. … This group, which was formed in a Russian environment, has a very Latvian name … the old name of the village.[13]

In discussions with teachers from two minority schools (Polish and Russian) in Daugavpils, directors of the choir and folk dance groups described their engagement in

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[13]Director, rural school north of Daugavpils city, 9 November 2016.

both their respective minority and Latvian 'national' cultural scenes. These two schools produced high-ranking artistic groups with broad repertoires that included both the traditions of their 'ethnic homelands' and 'ethnic' Latvian traditions. According to informants, participation in both of these cultural traditions went hand in hand—it was a typical practice for both the instructors and the students, and was reflected in their performances at school, in local festivals and abroad.

Embodying both majority and minority culture was not a source of conflict; rather, it exemplified the banality of integration in the lives of young people who participated in these groups. According to the dance director of the Polish school (speaking a mix of Russian and Latvian): 'I tell my students, we have two homelands: Poland and Latvia. … Poland is our Fatherland (*otechestvo/tēvzeme*), Latvia is our homeland (*rodina/ dzimtene*). … We are Latvian ambassadors in Poland, and Polish ambassadors in Latvia'.[14] The group has travelled annually to Poland to participate in folk festivals, where their repertoire has included both Polish and Latvian dances, and they have performed as Latvian nationals of Polish heritage. The director herself has choreographed Latvian folk dances, but led rehearsals in Russian, flowing between the ethnic Polish and Latvian repertoire. The case of Polish students in Daugavpils was particularly interesting; they saw themselves through the lens of three ethnic contexts: Polish Latvians who lived in a Russian-speaking city. While Russian was their home language, their education was in Polish and Latvian. In discussions with these students, they remarked on the banality of this environment. Engaging with all of these ethnolinguistic contexts was simply part of their daily existence.

The artistic group directors in both the Russian and Polish schools had years of experience leading their groups to the top tiers of the song and dance celebrations with exemplary performances of the Latvian repertoire. They similarly described the celebrations as emotional for themselves and their students, with a lasting positive effect on participants both as individuals and as 'part of Latvia'.

> They feel so many people doing the same thing, who love the same thing, who love to dance. There are many emotions in the dance celebration. Love for your homeland, for your culture.[15]

> [The Russian choir teacher's] daughter said that she wants to live in Latvia because she wants to participate in the song celebration. She, herself, has participated, and she helped her mother this year. It has remained in her memory since her school years. Her mother is an example, she herself has sung. [The daughter] is grown, but she still remembers those times.[16]

Though perhaps hyperbolic, such stories demonstrate that the national emotional value of the celebration tradition can be germane not only to ethnic Latvians, but also minorities who participate.

Student respondents who had participated in celebrations also assigned positive perceptions to their participation. Above all, the strong emotions engendered by the

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[14]Dance director, Polish school, Daugavpils, 11 November 2015.
[15]Dance director, Polish school, Daugavpils, 11 November 2015.
[16]Teacher, translator for the Russian minority school choir director, Russian school, Daugavpils, 12 February 2016.

celebrations were indicated as the most important element of participating (58% agree). The opportunities to go on an adventure with friends (39%) and uphold traditions (36%) were also top reasons, while 29% noted patriotic motivation. Motivations ranked similarly across population groups, though 'national' factors were, unsurprisingly, stronger among Latvian speakers. The celebration tradition has social, artistic and national value for participating youth. Teachers indicated in interviews that students recognised the uniqueness of the celebration tradition as something deeply Latvian.

Teachers from the minority schools were observed to display a deep investment in being part of the Latvian cultural scene and conveyed the same emotional investment to their students. While they could choose to concentrate solely on the repertoires of their ethnic heritage—which was also clearly highlighted in their performances and in the positive response of the students and their families—they made an active decision to channel their enthusiasm into 'ethnic Latvian' cultural arts as well. Many of the minority school teachers interviewed had applied their own professional talents to creating new Latvian folk dance choreographies and folk song arrangements to be performed by their groups in competitions.[17]

> It always depends on the pedagogue. If the pedagogue is happy, if they want to do this, they create the enthusiasm that is passed on to students. If the pedagogue is simply there because they are forced to be there, the child will also feel that.[18]

> [The choir director] really experiences everything with her students, and her students see that—that's why they also participate.[19]

While the teachers interviewed demonstrated a deep commitment to their role in the maintenance of Latvian culture and its transmission to the country's youth, it is essential to note that many of them are Russian speakers who speak Latvian with difficulty or only with the help of an interpreter. Despite their dedicated promotion of Latvian 'national' culture through their artistic groups, in conventional analysis, their linguistic characteristics would categorise them not only as 'non-Latvian' but as an 'unintegrated' population. Yet they are active teachers of Latvian 'ethnic' arts. This, again, highlights the gap between analysing integration from a top-down perspective (in which they could be seen a potential 'fifth column') and from horizontal realities (showing them to be active facilitators of Latvian 'ethnic' culture).

While observations of minority schools illustrate how individuals in active ethnic minority communities adopt Latvian national culture, observations from a rural community in Daugavpils municipality demonstrate engagement from an inherently mixed ethnolinguistic environment. I observed a local dual-stream school and community centre in rural Daugavpils municipality over the course of several months. The dual stream

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[17]The Latvian Ministry of Culture actively supports new developments in Latvian 'folk culture arts'. Such contributions are new but based on Latvian folk motifs. See Kapper (2016) for an explanation of folk dance.

[18]Director, municipality interest education, Daugavpils, 10 November 2015.

[19]Teacher, translator for the Russian minority school choir director, Russian school, Daugavpils, 12 February 2016.

school served a largely Russian-speaking population, though more students were enrolled in the Latvian programme. According to the assistant director and folk dance director:

> If [Russian-speaking students] are in the Latvian stream, then the parents are interested in the child learning the language, culture, traditions. But we can't say that we don't also try to learn their traditions. We also try to incorporate those somehow, find some sort of commonality.[20]

The school supported an elementary choir and multiple folk dance groups. The choir learned a repertoire that was largely Latvian, though some songs were Latgalian or bilingual in Russian and Latvian. While the choir was quite new and had yet to qualify for a song and dance celebration, participants performed in school performances and competitions in the region. Unlike the examples of the Polish and Russian schools in Daugavpils, which served primarily minorities, here, participants were from both Latvian and Russian education streams. Despite this ethnolinguistic diversity, there was no palpable sense of ethnic tension and no discontent with the Latvian repertoire. Rehearsal was conducted in Latvian, but some students asked for clarification in Russian. The folk dance groups, which have participated in song and dance celebrations, followed a similar pattern. Though they practised primarily Latvian folk dances, ethnicity or language was not a significant factor determining participation. Indeed, observations and interviews indicated that teenagers attended to flirt, for the opportunity to travel with the group (within Latvia and Europe) to song and dance celebrations, or simply for something to do after school in a small town. Regardless of motivation, the students were consistently exposed to the Latvian cultural scene and performed a distinctive Latvian national identity. They wore folk costumes, heard Latvian songs and became part of the greater national fabric when performing not only with their fellow group members, but also with participants from across the country. Exposure to and participation in this type of Latvian cultural experience was a part of the daily lives of the students, as active participants or as passive observers of their classmates.

Many students and teachers additionally participated in amateur artist collectives outside of school in local community cultural centres (*kultūras nami*). My fieldwork extended to the community centre in one of the parishes surrounding the rural school, which had an active folklore group and two youth vocal ensembles. Choirs and folk dance groups often perform a modernised/artistic 'Latvian' repertoire, while folklore groups most closely mirror Latvian ethnographic traditions. Around 17 individuals participated in this local folklore group, which met once per week in a community of less than 500 people. Despite the exclusive focus on an ethnic Latvian/Latgalian repertoire and regular participation in the celebration, the company was open and diverse. Members tended to speak Latvian or Latgalian, but one long-time participant spoke primarily Russian in conversation, while singing the repertoire in Latvian/Latgalian. Her Russian- and Latvian-speaking daughter was also an active participant. Most participants regularly engaged with both Latvian and Russian languages in daily life. Even in this exclusively Latvian–Latgalian ethnocentric community activity, Russian ethnolinguistic identity created no boundaries to participation. Rather, this

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[20]Director, rural school, north of Daugavpils, 9 November 2015.

cultural group provided intergenerational access to community and engaged its members with a distinct ethnic Latvian culture.

The cultural centre was also home to two children's vocal ensembles, a younger group (roughly grades 1–4, 15–20 participants) and an older group (grades 5–8, 7–10 participants). These groups met twice weekly; the repertoire consisted of Latvian children's songs, many of which had been part of official youth song celebration repertoires. Reflective of the local community, participants had diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds. The children played together before and after rehearsal, and often switched to speaking Russian during their free time, though occasionally the director would instruct them to speak in Latvian. Rehearsals were in Latvian, clarifying instructions were given in Russian, particularly for the children who attended the Russian stream of the local school. Again, language preferences placed no significant barrier to either participation, or the ability to learn the Latvian or Latgalian language repertoire. Strong friendships crossing ethnolinguistic boundaries were prevalent among participants, as were diverse references to Latvian, Russian and US popular culture. The children's ensembles also provided a space for parents and guardians to converse while waiting for practice to start or finish, or during performances; these conversations were in Latvian, Russian and Latgalian, often with a high frequency of code-switching, sometimes midsentence. Language was not a communication barrier, nor did it determine the congeniality of the conversation; conversation participants did not bristle if they were addressed in their non-native language.

The individual horizontal interactions observed in cultural collectives in schools and community centres are significant precisely because points of ethnic or linguistic tension are decidedly not stressed. Ethnolinguistic diversity existed organically in these contexts, but it did not carry significant stigma, as many discussions of Russian-speaker integration would suggest, nor did it prevent active participation in Latvian 'national' culture. Multiculturalism is particularly banal to the Daugavpils region, as reflected in the ways both students and teachers practised and performed Latvian national culture. Both participants and bystanders recognised 'Latvian' cultural activities as a quotidian part of the social and cultural environment in which they lived—the Republic of Latvia—although this did not prevent expressions of minority culture. Integration in these collectives and educational institutions did not erase the cultural ethnolinguistic uniqueness of students or teachers. Rather, these spaces provided access to the Latvian nation and allowed students to negotiate their complex identities through multiple artistic expressions. Artistic groups and participation in the song and dance celebration tradition allowed students to connect with the state and nation without denying their ethnolinguistic background. They were not assimilated as ethnic Latvians, but they were 'of Latvia'.

> The best patriotic education is when [a child] participates in a folk art collective. Then he can think 'this isn't foreign, this is mine'. It also belongs to him. 'I belong to the song and dance celebration, it doesn't matter what language I speak'.[21]

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[21]Director, municipality interest education, Daugavpils, 10 October 2015.

Such interactions are deeply nuanced; they are not easily captured in elite-focused or top-down measures of integration, and therefore are often outside the discussion. Yet these horizontal interactions contribute significantly to interpersonal integration and show minorities to be both consumers and producers of a larger Latvian national identity.

*Conclusion*

This study challenges standard interpretations of integration and identity in eastern Latvia. Various methods of inquiry indicated that identities in this region were complex and nuanced, not the oft-perceived binary between titular and minority identities that conventional analyses suggest. Youth demonstrated a distinct connection to both Latvia and expressions of Latvian state culture through civic indicators, as well as in their personal and passive engagement in relevant activities; many did so while simultaneously actively identifying as minorities and Russian speakers. While participation in large-scale festivals may be extraordinary experiences, contact with the Latvian cultural scene through rehearsals and performances were common. Cultural engagement was a banal element of students' daily lives, both for those who actively participated and those who did not. These data demonstrate that neither ethnicity nor language preference barred youth from integrating horizontally or vertically with the state; rather, these young people indicated that they had effective access as both civic and cultural members of the nation, as well as to their own ethnic language and cultural heritage.

Importantly, this access should not mistake integration for 'assimilation'. While Russian-speaking youth in the Daugavpils area participated in 'Latvian folk' collectives, there was little indication that such participation promoted ethnic or even linguistic assimilation; indeed, participation rarely required them to forfeit their preferred language usage, even in nominally 'Latvian' collectives. These students appeared to embrace their non-Latvian linguistic and ethnic heritage, but also found it jarring to think that they should not be an active part of the Latvian 'national' dance or choir performances of the song and dance celebrations. As one student in a Russian minority school in Rīga put it, 'Why shouldn't we be part of the [main choir event]? We can and we do!' (*Mēs varam, un mēs to darām!*) Neither students nor teachers interviewed associated performance in the 'Latvian' elements of the celebration with relinquishing their personal ethnic heritage; rather, they found it positively solidified their connection to Latvia and a broader Latvian national identity/community.

Both survey and participant-observation data bring questions of identity, ethnic boundedness and the value of ground-level integration indicators to the fore. This study provides a focused but in-depth look at the attitudes and practices of a particular region, illustrating the complexity of minority cultural, ethnic and linguistic identification and challenging the bounded frameworks that are often used to analyse minorities in the Baltic states. This essay is not comprehensive; indeed, there is much more analysis to be done with the raw data collected alone. It does not intend to imply that all minorities can or do integrate civically or culturally. Neither does it imply that other barriers to integration are irrelevant or non-existent; indeed, there are many examples to the

contrary. However, while those stories are often heard, this analysis intends to contribute to an understudied aspect of the discussion: multifaceted identity and everyday expressions of Latvian 'national' culture among minorities.

How minority youth position themselves in terms of their Latvian identity, as well as in their actual engagement with Latvian cultural events and activities, is a critical element of the questions regarding the integration of Russian speakers. As an emerging generation with no first-hand knowledge of the Soviet Union, high school students' attitudes towards and participation in Latvian cultural events help measure the progress of post-Soviet national integration and provide a benchmark for future analysis of the integration scene. Identity is demonstratively complex for minority youth; however, they are potentially far less distanced from their titular Latvian peers than the extant analysis may assume, particularly in the Daugavpils region. Certainly, more research on minority youth identity construction in Latvia and on cultural engagement strategies is warranted. This study intends to both highlight the theoretical challenges of this discussion, as well as contribute to the empirical research on cultural identity among Russian speakers in Latvia through the lens of Latvia's 'most Russian' region.

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