



Contemporary Ethnic Stereotypes of Latvians: Regional Difference

I l z e B O L D Ā N E

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Keywords: *ethnic stereotypes, the borderland, Estonians, Russians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians.*

Introduction: Borderland, Ethnic Stereotypes and Fieldwork

Due to the multiethnic composition of Latvia's population and in the view of politicized ethnicities, interethnic communication and ethnical stereotypes included in it have been determinant in initiating and in the course of several Latvian history processes and they are still a significant pre-condition for successful development of the contemporary society. In order to understand consequences, one should know causes, and this publication is a part from the study, which highlights and analyzes ethnical stereotypes in Latvian society (B o l d a n e 2012).

Five historically ethnographic regions form the territory of contemporary Latvia – Vidzeme, Latgale, Selonja, Zemgale and Kurzeme, and each of them borders with a territory of the neighboring country. In the North of Vidzeme, the Republic of Latvia borders with Estonia, in the East of Latgale – with Russia and Byelorussia, but on its turn, in South of the Selonja, Zemgale and Kurzeme – with Lithuania. Accordingly, geographical location of Latvia's historically ethnographic regions has caused a situation, where ethnic perceptions of the title nation may keep some differences even within one region. It is a need for additional fieldworks to provide full reflection of the situation. The main purpose of the paper is to highlight the differences in Latvian ethnical stereotypes, which dominate in Latvia in general and in the border area of the country, to describe and find the reasons for their existence. Revising case of each historically ethnographic region, the author approaches ethnic stereotypes about the title-nation of the closest border state.

Border areas have always been multi-ethnic territories and they have created a kind of transition – the threshold from one country to another. The borderland is a space, where interaction and cooperation between ethnic groups, significant for interethnic communication, has taken place, and where their influence has been preserved: expressions of material culture, communication practice, tolerance and a variety of ethnic concepts. There is a special theme about borderland residents in ethnology. Many studies in this area have been carried out in 90-ies and in the

beginning of the 21st century (Demski 2003; Gustavsson 2000; *Identity of peripheries* 1997; *Living together* 2001, Sadowski 1995, etc.) when an issue of globalization was actualized. The state's boundary is objectively set on air physical evidence of its integrity (Donnan, Haller 2000; Wilson, Donnan 2005). Few authors presented arguments that the state boundary is a social phenomenon constructed "from above", interferes into the region's population lives, and creates barriers to its cultural and social interaction and economical cooperation. An opinion, that the state boundary doesn't affect the interior climate of borderland community's social life and that members of the same social group, living in different countries, have more common with each other than with members of their own ethnos belonging to other social groups, also can be found in works of ethnologists. The author supports an opinion that the governmentally set border is not only a physical marker; it takes a significant place in feelings of people, – especially in the post-Soviet space. Despite the fact how harmonious in its multi-ethnic and multicultural sense may seem borderland society, in certain political and social situations people are aware of and clearly manifest their national/ethnic belonging, and ethnic stereotypes play quite important role in it.

The author uses a term "ethnic stereotype" as a generalized concept, not always well founded, about physical, moral and behavioral traits characteristic to the members of an ethnos/ethnic group, development/creation of which is influenced by elements of self-identification, as well as by environmental, social and political circumstances defining experience of cooperation between the evaluator's ethnos and the ethnic group to be evaluated. It is a phenomenon emerging from reality and replacing it (Шульгин 2003, 56).

The material of interviews and surveys carried out by the author during 2004–2007 (questionnaires, transcripts and audio recordings of interviews), kept in Collection E 74 of the Repository of Ethnographic Material at the Agency of the University of Latvia "Institute of Latvian History at the University of Latvia", provides the basic source material for the study. Since 1999, the author has participated in 17 field projects, in the course of which the concepts of residents of Latvia, mainly Latvians, about other ethnic groups living in Latvia were studied. Information from respondents was collected and summarized using questionnaires and interview schemes developed by the author.

The aim of the in-depth interviews was to obtain an understanding of the elements constituting a sense of belonging to a people (common culture, history, ethno-psychology) among contemporary Latvians, and about the main spheres of Latvian narratives concerning people belonging to other ethnic groups, as well as about the influence of both of the above-mentioned circumstances on the Latvians' social and political behaviour and interethnic relations in Latvia.

Methods used in achieving the set aim are: in-depth, semi-structured interview, traits recording method, Bogardus scale, observation, content analysis method, synchronic and diachronic comparison method.

In the course of the fieldwork, respondents living in all the historically ethnographic regions of Latvia were interviewed. The interviews covered both genders – 45 (39%) males and 72 (61%) females – and different generations (assuming that a generation gap is 30 years) – 51 individuals or 44% representing the older generation (time of birth: 1910–1940), 34 individuals or 29% representing the middle-age generation (time of birth: 1941–1970) and 32 individuals or 27% representing the younger generation (time of birth: 1971–1982). The profile of respondents in analyzed border areas is close to the proportions mentioned above. The numerical prevalence of older generation respondents was determined by several subjective and objective circumstances:

1) they were more responsive; 2) chronological range of their narratives, and thus also the range of content, frequently revealed the preconditions for changes in the content of ethnic concepts and their emotional disposition, as well as preconditions for stereotypes possessed by members of the next generations.

The state and the borderland: the common aspects and differences in ethnic stereotypes

Previous research works carried out by the author (B o l d a n e 2012, 46–51) have proved that direct communication existing in the past or at present is one of the most important factors in shaping the content of ethnic concepts and stereotypes and initiating their formation. The ethnically diverse human environment in the borderland areas facilitates mutual information exchange about the neighboring people's material and spiritual culture values, thus decreasing impersonality of ethnic concepts and stereotypes.

Image of Estonians in perception of the Latvians

Northern part of Latvia and Vidzeme border with Estonia, and over there a diversity of ethnic concepts about Estonians has been observed. Over the last hundred years, the proportion of Estonians in the ethnic composition of Latvia did not exceed 0.5% (M e ž s 1994, 67). At the time when interviews were carried out, the proportion of the Estonians in Latvia, in total was 0.1%, and in the regions of the North Vidzeme respectively Limbazi reg. – 0.2%, Valmiera reg. – 0.2%; Valka reg. – 0.6% and Aluksne reg. – 1.1% (*Demogrāfija 2005*, 2005, 45).

The Estonians are one of the rare nations, to whom the Latvian respondents attributed an expression “**the same as we**”. It should be marked that this denomination referred to the neighboring people, is being used in the borderland regions more often than in other territories of Latvia. In this particular case, it is grounded on considerations about **similar fate** and **seclusion** as a trait characteristic to the mutual communication of both nations – the Latvians and the Estonians.

In the field research carried out in the borderland regions of Limbazi (*E 74*, 310, 555–558), Valmiera (*E 74*, 325–331), Valka (*E 74*, 311–318) and Aluksne (*E 74*, 561, 319–324), a denomination “the same as we” has been referred to the

representatives of the Estonian ethnos because of **hardworking** nature, too. In narratives of respondents interviewed in the North of Vidzeme, in comparison with the views prevailing in the whole country, more often the comparative degree has been used – the Estonians are the same as the Latvians just more **secluded** and hardworking. Due to these respondents point of view, the closest neighbors are non-hospitable and non-helpfully. However, there are also many panegyric statements in the borderland residents' concepts about the Estonians: **good, easy to live with**, etc.

Language is an important element of the Latvians and the Estonians self-confidence and grounding on it, numerous mutual stereotypes touching both **phonetics of the mother tongue** and **possibilities to communicate in other languages**, occur. Respondents from all the regions of Latvia emphasized a **unique sound of the Latvian and Russian languages spoken by the Estonians** due to the lack of many voiced consonants in the Estonian language. In their ethnic concepts about the Estonians, respondents emphasized also **the Estonians' consistent unwillingness to communicate in the Russian language during the Soviet occupation years**. The same characteristic of Estonians gave respondents lived in borderland.

Most of the respondents interviewed across Latvia think that the Estonians are, or they have created such a concept that they are proud of their nation, state and achievements, and they are not ashamed to speak about it. Initially the Latvians perceived it as an expression of **swaggering** and **haughtiness**. In comparison, people in Vidzeme much less used the term “**haughty**” referring to the Estonians. “**Proud people with high self-confidence**” – the evaluation of Estonians that dominated here.

Due to Latvians' point of view, the Estonians possess patriotism and pragmatism. This statement most often appears in respondents thoughts on care of Estonian politicians about interests of the country and the people, which is the dominant point in the scale of their priorities. Higher life level of the neighboring people both during the Soviet regime years and nowadays served as a illustration of their belief. This is very popular topic among respondents interviewed in the North of Vidzeme.

Table 1

The image of an Estonian in the ethnic concepts of the Latvians

Generally in Latvia	In the North of Vidzeme
<p>“the same as we”: common fate, secluded, hardworking</p> <p>language: the Estonian language, specific pronunciation of the Latvian and Russian languages, do not speak Russian</p> <p>high ethnic self-confidence haughty, arrogant, stubborn, pragmatic, meek and slow-witted</p> <p><u>inhospitable</u></p> <p>“live better life” – better supply of food products during the Soviet years, higher life level nowadays</p>	<p>“the same as we”: common fate, secluded, more hardworking, accurate, perfect</p> <p>language: the Estonian language, specific pronunciation of the Latvian and Russian languages, do not speak Russian</p> <p>high ethnic self-confidence, nationalists; proud and not haughty people cheerful, with good sense of humor good, easy to live with people <u>inhospitable, non helpfully, more ego-centric</u> singing different color sense</p> <p>“live better life” – better supply of food products during the Soviet years, higher life level and lower prices for food products nowadays</p>

Residents of the North Vidzeme were familiar with the concepts about meek and slow-witted Estonians that are wide spreading in whole Latvia and were still running in humor shows of some TV programs couple of years ago. However, more often they emphasized an **excellent sense of humor** possessed by the neighboring people.

In concepts and stereotypes about the Estonians of the interviewed Latvians from the North Vidzeme, emphasis on a daily communication practice and traits connected with the daily routine was more observed and it was expressed in such nuances as an evaluation of the neighboring people’s **color sense** and **skills of singing**. Similarly, in narratives of respondents living in Vidzeme borderland, more often, **the past events** were mentioned and **economic development of both countries compared**.

Image of Russians in perception of the Latvians

In the East of Latgale, Latvia borders with Russia. Over the last century, the lowest proportion of Russians in the ethnic composition of Latvia was in 1935 when it reached 8.8% , while the highest proportion – 34%, was recorded in 1989

(Mežs 1994, 67). In this historically ethnographic region of Latvia, the same as in the biggest cities of the country, a big proportion of the Russian people has been observed. Comparing with Latvia in general, where in 2005 a proportion of the Russian population were 28.6%, in Balvi and Ludza regions, which are located in the direct borderland of Russia, this proportion was respectively 18.4% and 35.6% (*Demogrāfija* 2005, 2005, 44).

Whilst generalizing concepts about the Russians of the interviewed respondents living in all the regions of Latvia and in Riga, it can be concluded that comparing their statements about the Russians with the ones about other ethnic groups, there is no single answer “**lack of communication experience, no evaluation**”. It has been provided by the numerical proportion of the Russians in contemporary Latvia and their location, as well as information actualized in the public space.

The ethnonym “Russian” in the use of all the respondents possesses several meanings. Several factors have provided capacity of its meaning: 1) connecting all the Russian speaking population of Latvia with the respective ethnos; 2) association of several social, social-professional and ethno-confessional groups – communist, immigrant, the Soviet army soldier, Old Believer, etc. – with the Russians.

In the revised narratives of the borderland residents, also such combinations of words as “**Russian church**”, which has been used to define the Orthodox Church and “**Russian side**”, “**Russian districts**” and “**Russian villages**” describing the ethnic composition of the population of certain administrative units, were observed. Regional differences in respondents’ concepts about **the Russian people knowledge of the Latvian language** and the use of it were not observed.

The interviewed respondents from the borderland (Balvi E 74, 293–299, Ludza – the interviews have not been inventoried yet) more often touched the situation in between the wars and mentioned the Russian people as a significant component of the ethnic environment. They emphasized also **the Russian people loyalty** of that time and their **occupation** – peasants, who were wealthier because of better land properties, and artisans. In addition to concepts existing in whole Latvia about the Russians as “**fortune hunters**” and **occupants**, and about their **privileged place and dominant role during the years of the Soviet regime**, respondents mentioned also **common fate** of the Russians and the Latvians – deportations to Siberia and moving to Latvia after annexation of Linava, Purvmala, Gauru and Augspils districts to the brotherly Soviet Russia. Characteristics of Old Believers were present only in narratives of respondents interviewed in Ludza region. Varied description of this ethno-confessional group occurs in other regions of Latgale – Kraslava (E 74, 272–274, 277–280, 282–284, 286, 288–290, 292) and Daugavpils (E 74, 249–255). It is connected with Old Believers presence in these regions. Borderland respondents’ narratives grounded on the reality of the period between the wars completed concepts of the Latvians about **different clothing** of the Russian people – special fashion of men’s shirts and fur coats.

Table 2

The image of a Russian in the ethnic concepts of the Latvians

Generally in Latvia	In the East of Latgale
<p><u>images</u>: soldier, occupant, communist, immigrant = fortune hunter, genuine Russian (living in Russia and Old Believer)</p> <p>disloyal, expressions and activities in the public space against the Latvians</p> <p><u>language</u>: the Russian language, do not know and do not want to learn the Latvian language</p> <p><u>work</u>: lazy, negligent, also enterprising, with initiative workers, chiefs</p> <p>hospitable, open, warm-hearted, aggressive, impudent</p> <p>tasteless clothing</p> <p>Orthodox, Old Believers</p>	<p><u>images</u>: soldier, occupant, communist, immigrant = fortune hunter</p> <p>Russian church, Russian villages/ districts/ side Russian nobleman</p> <p>loyal in between the wars</p> <p><u>language</u>: the Russian language, do not know and do not want to learn the Latvian language; speaks Russian, although know the Latvian language; speaks Latvian</p> <p><u>work</u>: lazy, negligent, workers, chiefs</p> <p>also peasants, carpenters and other kind of craftsmen; Linava, Purvmala, Gauri, Augšpils – prosperous land, rich people</p> <p>different clothing</p> <p>Orthodox. Old Believers</p>

The following traits uniting all the Russian images in concepts of all the respondents can be mentioned: **hospitality, warm-heartedness, enterprising, impudence, aggressiveness, loud behavior** and **negligence**. The Latgalian, who in self-characteristics mention such traits as **hospitality** and **warm-heartedness**, admitted the Russian people superiority in this matter.

Image of Byelorussians in perception of the Latvians

In the Southeast part of Latgale – Kraslava, Daugavpils and a small part of Ludza regions – Latvia borders with Byelorussia. During the 20th century, the largest proportion of Byelorussians in Latvia's ethnic composition was recorded in 1979 and 1989, accordingly – 4.5% (Mežs 1994, 67). At that moment when the field research was carried out, a proportion of the **Byelorussians** in Latvia in total was 3.8%, but in Daugavpils and Kraslava regions respectively – 6.2% and 17% (*Demogrāfija* 2005, 2005, 44).

Table 3

The image of a Byelorussian in the ethnic concepts of the Latvians

Generally in Latvia	In the Southeast of Latgale
<p>“the same as the Russians”: the Russian language, analogue with the Russians view on the Latvian history events, support “Russian parties”</p> <p><u>adapting to the circumstances:</u> low ethnic self-confidence: neglect their language not only in Latvia, but also in their Fatherland</p> <p><u>poor:</u> refugees after the WWII, current state administration system similar to the one during the Soviet years</p>	<p>“the same as we”: “belohvostic’s” language, „meshanka”, the Russian language diligent, hardworking catholics</p> <p><u>adapting to the circumstances:</u> expression “may it be no war!”,</p> <p><u>poor:</u> local peasants, as well as refugees after the WWII, suffered a lot during the WWII</p>

Generally, in Latvia, Byelorussians, as a separate ethnic group forming the Latvian society, **are not recognized** in respondents’ concepts. In the latter a comparison, “**the same as the Russians**” is often met. It results from **the Russian language** used by Byelorussians, **political sympathies** and an **opinion about the history of Latvia**. Respondents interviewed in the borderland regions more often in this context used a denomination “**the same as we**”, which was grounded on the use of **the Russian** and “**belohvostiks**” **language** spoken by local Byelorussians; on their **hardworking** and **warmhearted nature**, as well as on their belonging to the **Catholic religion**. The language and political choices of the Byelorussians have formed certain concepts about their **low ethnic self-confidence**. Respondents of the borderland regions did not emphasize this phenomenon.

The Latvian respondents from all the historically ethnographic regions of Latvia associate the Byelorussian ethnos – the Byelorussians living both in Byelorussia and in Latvia with **poverty**. In the context of concepts of all the interviewed respondents, it can be linked, first, with the situation in Byelorussia caused by the WWII, which forced the Byelorussians to earn/ask for living in the Latvian countryside farms. Secondly, it can be connected with the state system currently existing in Byelorussia, which provokes associations with the Soviet system and goods’ deficit characteristic to the latter. On their turn, the interviewed respondents from the borderland mentioned poverty as a common characteristic of the Latgilians and the Byelorussians in the period between the wars, because at that time peasants in Latgale no matter of their ethnic belonging were poor. It was determined by their small landed property, big families, hereditary and tillage traditions.

Image of Lithuanians in perception of the Latvians

Latvians’ southern neighbors are Lithuanians. The largest proportion of Lithuanians in Latvia was recorded in 1970 – 1.7% of the population (Mežs 1994, 67). During the field research, the Lithuanians formed 1.4% of the population of Latvia, respectively – 6.3% in Bauska region, 1.6% in Jekabpils region, 5.8% in Liepaja region and 6.8% in Saldus region (*Demogrāfija* 2007, 2007, 38).

The Latvians ethnic concepts and stereotypes about the Lithuanians have been formed on the grounds of **mentality** and **culture differences** (more energetic, purposeful, etc., the Lithuanian language, Catholic religion) and **similarities** (similar attitude towards work, similar view on the 20th century history events).

Table 4

The image of a Lithuanian in the ethnic concepts of the Latvians

Generally in Latvia	In the South part of Kurzeme, Zemgale and Selonia
<p>“the same as we”: the Baltic origin common fate hardworking</p> <p><u>language</u>: the Lithuanian language, the Russian language, specific pronunciation of the Latvian language.</p> <p><u>patriotic</u>. history influences the ethnic self-confidence</p> <p><u>work</u>: farm workers in the period between the wars</p> <p>purposeful, energetic</p> <p>catholics</p> <p>“live better life”</p> <p>“the Baltic Georgians”</p>	<p>“the same as we”: the Baltic origin common fate hardworking, similar attitude towards land in social sense</p> <p><u>language</u>: the Lithuanian language, specific pronunciation of the Latvian language.</p> <p><u>patriotic</u>. During the Soviet years patriotic communists, no immigrants. mutual solidarity Lithuanian union in Latvia</p> <p><u>work</u>: farm workers (servants) in the period between the wars, kolkhoz workers during the Soviet years; more hardworking, diligent, see the job to be done faster and perform their work</p> <p>catholics</p> <p>“live better life”</p> <p>imperious; self-seekers, ready to sacrifice a lot in order to achieve an aim, speaks what is on mind, envious, stingy, more hot-blooded, warmhearted, simple and hospitable</p>

Similarly, as in the above revised case with the Latvian Northern neighbors, also characteristics of the Lithuanians in concepts of the interviewed Latvians living in the Southern borderland of Latvia (Bauska – E 74, 240–242, 244, 246–248; Jekabpils – E 74, 300, 302–304, 307, 309; Liepāja – the interviews have not been inventoried yet; Saldus – the interviews have not been inventoried yet) include a comparison “**the same as we**”. The Latvians interviewed in Kurzeme, Zemgale and in the South of Selonia marked a similarity in the 20th century fate of both nations and in belonging to the Baltic language group. They evaluated the Lithuanians as **hardworking, zealous, diligent and possessing bigger initiative**. They emphasized also such traits characteristic to the Lithuanians as **imperious and non-discriminating any means to achieve an aim** on one hand, but **warm-heartedness and hospitality** on the other hand.

An image of the Lithuanian farm worker – what made a part of borderland’s human environment in between war period (Jēkabsons 2003, 90–91, *Latvijas 20. gadsimta vēsture* 2003, 398,) – more often can be met in narratives of the respondents from these regions. In other places stories about the Polish farm workers dominated, although characteristics were quite alike – **hot-blooded, lacking self-control and the Catholics**.

Results of the field research show that the Latvians consider the Lithuanians as **patriotic people**. Respondents interviewed in the borderland saw the Lithuanian patriotism in the events of their past, including the experience of the Soviet years, **mutual solidarity** and **helpfulness**, as well as in the activities of the Lithuanian Unions in Latvia.

Conclusions

The living in the border areas has facilitated and continues facilitating reduction of a social distance among people belonging to different language groups, cultures and religious confessions, who in the concepts of the interviewed respondents from these regions are rather ‘others’ than ‘strangers’, what showed their ethnic stereotypes. The following most important differences between the ethnic stereotypes dominant in Latvia in general and the ones of the borderland Latvians should be mentioned: a) concepts are mostly grounded on a personal communication experience and not in the views dominant in the public space; b) in comparisons used in concepts, a comparative degree of adjectives dominate; c) concepts are more detailed, including many daily routine nuances; d) the use of the past discourse here is more often met than in other cases (local human environment in the period between the wars and during the Soviet years).

In narratives of the borderland residents, the prevalence of individual and local stereotypes over cultural and international stereotypes can be observed. Since borderland respondents are closer to those considered ‘strangers’ by their ‘own people’ living in other areas, the motif of ‘strangers’ has receded behind factors related to the quality of life. The field research data prove bigger diversity of

ethnic concepts about the nation living in the respondent's region or in the near borderland. Negative stereotypes become topical in the situation of competition for social and economic benefits.

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Ilze Boldāne

Šiuolaikiniai latvių etniniai stereotipai: regioniniai skirtumai

S a n t r a u k a

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *etniniai stereotipai, pasienis, estai, rusai, baltarusiai, lietuviai.*

Šio straipsnio pagrindinis tikslas – išskirti latvių etninių stereotipų skirtumus, vyraujančius visoje Latvijoje ir pasienio vietovėse, surasti ir aprašyti jų egzistavimo priežastis. Autorė nagrinėja estų, rusų, baltarusių stereotipus. Tyrimas remiasi apklausų ir tyrimų, atliktų 2004–2007 metais, medžiaga. Tikslui pasiekti taikomi metodai: nuodugni ir pusiau struktūruota apklausa, duomenų užrašymas, Bogardo skalė, stebėjimas, turinio analizė, sinchroninis ir diachroninis lyginamieji metodai.

Gyvenimas pasienio regionuose mažina ir tebemažina socialinį atstumą tarp žmonių, priklausančių skirtingoms kalbų grupėms, kultūrai ir religinėms konfesijoms, kurie, pasak respondentų iš šitų regionų, yra labiau ‘kitokie’ negu ‘svetimi’, o tai atsispindi jų etniniuose stereotipuose. Galima paminėti svarbiausius skirtumus tarp dominuojančių etninių stereotipų visoje Latvijoje ir Latvijos pasienio regionuose: a) sąvokos dažniausiai grindžiamos asmenine bendravimo patirtimi, o ne viešojoje erdvėje dominuojančia nuomone; b) sąvokų palyginimuose dominuoja aukštesnysis (lyginamasis) būdvardžių laipsnis; c) sąvokos yra detalesnės, apimančios daug kasdienybės niuansų; d) dažniau negu kitais atvejais vartojamas būtasis diskursas (vietos aplinka tarpukario ir sovietiniu laikotarpiu).

Pasienio gyventojų pasakojimuose labiau dominuoja ne kultūriniai ir tarptautiniai, bet asmeniniai ir vietiniai stereotipai. Kadangi pasienio respondentai labiau susiję su ‘svetimaisiais’, ‘svetimųjų’ motyvas nėra toks svarbus kaip gyvenimo kokybės faktoriai. Tyrimo duomenys rodo didesnę įvairovę etninių sąvokų, susijusių su tauta, gyvenančia respondentų regione ar pasienyje. Neigiami stereotipai yra labiau aktualūs socialinės ir ekonominės konkurencijos aplinkoje.

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The main purpose of the paper is to highlight the differences in Latvian ethnical stereotypes, which dominate in Latvia in general and in the border area of the country, to describe and find the reasons for their existence. The author deals with stereotypes about Estonians, Russians, Belarusians and Lithuanians. The material of interviews and surveys

carried out by the author during 2004–2007 provides the basic source material for the study. Methods used in achieving the set aim are: in-depth, semi-structured interview, traits recording method, Bogardus scale, observation, content analysis method, synchronic and diachronic comparison method.

The living in the border areas has facilitated and continues facilitating reduction of a social distance among people belonging to different language groups, cultures and religious confessions, who in the concepts of the interviewed respondents from these regions are rather 'others' than 'strangers', what showed their ethnic stereotypes. The following most important differences between the ethnic stereotypes dominant in Latvia in general and the ones of the borderland Latvians should be mentioned: a) concepts are mostly grounded on a personal communication experience and not in the views dominant in the public space; b) in comparisons used in concepts, a comparative degree of adjectives dominate; c) concepts are more detailed, including many daily routine nuances; d) the use of the past discourse here is more often met than in other cases (local human environment in the period between the wars and during the Soviet years).

In narratives of the borderland residents, the prevalence of individual and local stereotypes over cultural and international stereotypes can be observed. Since borderland respondents are closer to those considered 'strangers' by their 'own people' living in other areas, the motif of 'strangers' has receded behind factors related to the quality of life. The field research data prove bigger diversity of ethnic concepts about the nation living in the respondent's region or in the near borderland. Negative stereotypes become topical in the situation of competition for social and economic benefits.

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