

SOME PREVIOUSLY RELEVANT ASPECTS OF ACADEMIC LIFE: VENIA LEGENDI AND THE STATUS OF A PRIVATE DOCENT IN THE WORLD AND IN RIGA POLYTECHNICUM (1862–1896)

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Summary. The study examines the status of a *private docent*, the academic position which was introduced across the world in the 18th century and which also existed in Latvia from the second half of the 19th century until the end of World War II. The status of the *private docent* as it used to be understood in Latvia is compared with other countries, mainly considering German-type universities. Definition of the terms «*venia legendi*» and «*private docent*» providing examples of academic activity of the lecturers of Riga Polytechnicum (RP) allow considering these concepts from various perspectives in order to make their meaning and usage in the previous centuries transparent for the users in the 21st century. Conducting the present research, the author has used archival documents and library collections, the theoretical framework includes the findings of not only the Latvian scientists, but also researchers from Russia, Germany and other countries.

Keywords: *venia legendi*, status of *private docent*, habilitation, Riga Polytechnicum.

Introduction

Reflecting on the history of higher education institutions, researchers most often focus on their institutional development, including the establishment of new faculties, chairs, development of the research areas, and the increase in student numbers, or scientific achievements of

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outstanding lecturers (mainly – professors), considering their academic careers and schools they established. The legal framework of higher education institutions, formation of academic traditions or various groups of lecturers have been studied much less frequently. Therefore, there are a number of issues that are understood only superficially or even misunderstood all together, because even in the extensive historical studies they are not given special attention. Moreover, in the reviews made at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, which are often the main source of reference for the modern researcher, these concepts frequently were not explained since it was implied that they were familiar to anyone regularly dealing with the academic environment [1, 2]. The institute of *private-docent* in higher education institutions and the terms related to the acquisition of this status is one of such issues.

Habilitation is a strictly regulated process. A person submits a specially developed paper or a range of papers for evaluation and fulfils other specified requirements (taking special exams, participating in a colloquium with leading professors in the field, conducting demonstration lectures to the decision-making body of the faculty), as a result acquiring the right to deliver lectures at a higher education institution (*venia legendi*) and the status of a *private docent*.

Habilitation thesis (*pro venia legendi* thesis) is a scientific paper submitted for evaluation to the decision-making body of the faculty in order to acquire lecturing rights, in German: *Habilitationschrift* (also *Habilitationsdissertation*); in Russian: *диссертация pro venia legendi*. If the doctoral degree was a precondition for obtaining the status of a *private docent*, the habilitation thesis comprised a research developed independently (without a supervisor) after the *viva voce* of the PhD thesis. This work was submitted to official reviewers for evaluation, after that it either could have been accepted (accepted as conforming to the requirements) by the council of the respective faculty, as it happened in the first half of the 20th century at the University of Latvia (UL), or presented in a public discussion at the meeting of a decision-making body of the faculty at the universities of Tsarist Russia.

Inaugural lecture (in German: *Antrittsvorlesung*; in Russian: *вступительная (инаугурационная) лекция*) is a public lecture that may be attended by any member of the public, where the newly elected lecturer (a person who has acquired the rights of a *private docent* or has come from another higher education institution and has been elected to the position of a professor or docent) introduces oneself to the academic community. Such lectures were held in ceremonial conditions, usually on Sundays or any other time free from lectures, so that they could be attended by lecturers and students of other faculties, as well as the

interested public. The timing and themes of the inaugural lectures were usually announced in the newspapers. It was one of the rare occasions when the lecturer had the opportunity to express their thoughts in public on the topic of their choice, therefore, the lecture was usually dedicated to the conceptual issues of the relevant branch or sub-branch of science. This lecture could have been considered as a solemn conclusion of the habilitation process of the newly elected *private docent*.

Demonstration lecture (trial lecture) (in German: *Probevorlesung*; In Russian: *пробная лекция*) is an academic lecture of a candidate for the position of the *private docent* at a meeting of the decision-making body of the faculty, where their pedagogical abilities are tested. The demonstration lecture usually lasted 45–60 minutes, the candidate was supposed to speak freely rather than just read lecture notes, which was not allowed. Two demonstration lectures were required, the theme of the first lecture was determined by the faculty (the dean or professor to whose chair the future *private docent* was supposed to be attached), and the theme of the second lecture – by the applicant. The lectures had to be conducted at two consecutive meetings of the decision-making body of the faculty, and after the second lecture, the faculty decided on awarding the rights of a *private docent*. If the first lecture was found to be successful, the second (usually the one of the applicant's choice) could not be omitted.

Magistrand (in Russian: *магистранд*) – in contrast to the modern understanding of the term *master's student* in Latvia, in the Russian Empire the term was used to refer to the applicants for a master's degree at the faculties of law, physics and mathematics, and history and philology, who had passed difficult and quite time-consuming master's examinations but had not yet publicly presented their dissertation.

Venia legendi – the right to deliver lectures at the university.

Although the author of the article has already tried to reflect on this issue [3], he has to return to it for several reasons:

- these concepts are closely related to the formation of the academic traditions in the European cultural space, which have been influenced by the order established in German universities and which have also significantly influenced the institutional framework of university education in Latvia;
- these concepts are frequently misinterpreted and thus are ambiguous in the biographies or reference materials on specific scholars in encyclopaedic publications (for example, identifying scholars as docents and *private docents* in encyclopaedic entries or mentioning habilitation theses and doctoral dissertations, etc.);

- in the regulatory enactments of the interwar period, which concerned the activities of higher education institutions (for example, in Articles 67–70 of the Constitution of the University of Latvia), these concepts were not explained as being self-evident, only the procedures for election and remuneration to *private docents* were specified;
- different understanding of the term «habilitation» in Latvia in the 1990s, which denoted acquisition of the highest scientific degree (*Doctor habilitatus*) and gaining the title of a habilitated doctor after publicly presenting the second (higher level) dissertation (habilitation thesis).

Admittedly, in other countries, this problem has long been left out of sight of researchers of the history of universities, and only in the last decade more comprehensive papers on the establishment of the institute of the *private docent* in the Russian Empire and its evolution have been published [4].

Definition of the Institute of a *Private Docent* and its Development in the World

In various higher education institution organization models, the title of a *private docent* is known almost exclusively in German-type universities, which had a lasting impact on the higher education systems in Italy, Switzerland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, the Russian Empire, and several Central and Eastern European countries. In the past, this academic position was widespread, although nowadays it no longer exists and can be considered a historical fact.

The very term «*Privatdozent*» (until the end of the 19th century the form *Privatdocent* was also used) originated in German (permissible abbreviations – PD or *Priv.-Doz.*). The fact that the title of a *private docent* at German universities has no direct analogues in many other countries is also confirmed by the fact that the term denoting it has been borrowed from German into several other languages. In both English and French, the words *private docent* or *privatdozent* (very rare and in this sense quite inaccurate *senior lecturer*) and *privat-docent* or *privat-dozent* (*chargé de cours* as a fairly approximate equivalent in French) are used, respectively. Considering the descriptions of the responsibilities of such a lecturer in Latvian exile publications, the title of a *private docent* may be considered a conditional analogue of the title of a *junior professor* or *assistant professor* in the US universities [5]. Similarly, in Spanish, the term *profesor asociado* is considered a direct analogue, although the loan

privatdozent is also used, while in Italy, where this position once existed, a calque *libero docente* is used.

When searching for an explanation in encyclopaedic dictionaries, the Conversion Dictionary of the Riga Latvian Society (1903–1921) should be addressed [6], «*Private docent* (from Latin), a member of academic personnel at a higher education institution that has the right to deliver lectures, but who is neither in the public office nor receives a reward (the first step to academic activity)». The term is explained in a similar manner in the 1908 edition of the Brockhaus Dictionary [7], which states that it is «a lecturer who has under a statutory procedure acquired the right to deliver lectures at the university, but is not attached to any professorship». The definition given in the 1928 edition of the Meyers' Dictionary is slightly more precise [8]. It defines a *private docent* as a lecturer who «after habilitation has acquired the right to conduct lectures (*venia legendi*) in a particular field of science» but «who is not elected as a lecturer and often does not receive remuneration». Analysing the information presented in these definitions, the meaning of the attribute «private» in the compound *private docent* becomes more transparent. It is the person who has met certain requirements and acquired the right to teach at a university, but who does not belong to the elected academic personnel and thus does not enjoy the privileges granted to them (including participation in collective decision-making bodies, eligibility for pension or rights to take certain civil service rank). Therefore, in the relationships between a *private docent* and public administration and higher education institutions, a *private docent* is a subject of the private rather than public law. This is also precisely described by the former Latin title of the professor – «*professor publicus ordinarius*» (or *ordentlich (öffentlicher) professor*), as opposed to the status of «*private docent*».

«The Dictionary of the Latvian Literary Language» provides a much more obscure definition of the term, the entry is classified as «out of date» [9], «Scientific title which is awarded to freelance lecturers of educational institutions (usually university; in several bourgeois countries, bourgeois Latvia, pre-revolutionary Russia); the lecturer who has been awarded this scientific title».

The status of *private docent* evolved in the German universities in the 18th century under the impact of the Enlightenment ideas, when there was certain mismatch between the limited number of chairs and professors on the one hand, and the increase in scientific knowledge on the other. The establishment of this institute was promoted by the desire of the universities to involve, in addition to full-time professors, other suitably qualified persons (doctors, gymnasium teachers, etc.) who lived in or near university campuses. It should not be forgotten that

this time was characterised by the establishment of scientific societies and flourishing of private scientific activity. Many applicants for this status had obtained a doctoral degree, and the tradition of medieval universities already required holders of such a degree to transfer knowledge to other students at the same faculty (becoming so-called *doctor legens*) [10]. With the increase in the number of the awarded doctoral degrees, acquisition of that degree was no longer considered a sufficient proof of an advanced scientific qualification, which would automatically allow to immediately start lecturing a study course. Therefore, the applicant's compliance to the habilitation requirements was assessed. In the process of habilitation, it was necessary to prove the ability to independently conduct research by submitting the paper that had been developed after the *viva voce* of the dissertation, and to prove one's pedagogical abilities (*facultas docendi*) giving trial lectures. Thus, the two concepts soon became closely related, and habilitation meant the same as the acquisition of the status of a *private docent*, i.e., the right to deliver lecture courses (*venia legendi*) [11].

Although initially such an arrangement was one of the paths to an academic career and there were no formal obstacles to the election to the position of a professor without *venia legendi* and the status of the *private docent*, it gradually became almost compulsory, although the necessity to meet these requirements until the middle of the 19th century was determined by traditions rather than strict regulations. The fact that for a long time the procedure for electing academic personnel was determined following a once established procedure, which became a customary law, is generally considered to be an important feature of the development of higher education institutions. When the norms and regulations related to universities started to develop, they initially addressed the status of a full-time elected professors in more detail, but either did not consider the procedures for the acquisition of the title of a *private docent* at all (like, for example, the Statutes of the newly established University of Berlin (*Universität zu Berlin*) in 1810 [11]) or laid down only the general principles. In addition, university statutes initially merely enshrined traditionally established arrangements, without seeking to regulate or change them substantially [12].

For example, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), after the *viva voce* of his dissertation in the spring of 1755, submitted a habilitation thesis «A New Interpretation of the First Metaphysical Knowledge» (*Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio*) in the autumn of the same year and became a *private docent* at the University of Königsberg (Albertina) (*Albertus-Universität Königsberg; Albertina*) delivering very diverse lecture courses [13]. During this period, he did not even receive a regular salary, but rather only occasional payments (fees) from the

audience for specific lecture courses, so he was forced to assume the duties of an assistant librarian at the Royal Palace Library (*königliche Schlossbibliothek; Silberbibliothek*). It was not until 1770, after 15 years of working as a *private docent*, when he gained the coveted position of the Professor at the Chair of Logic and Metaphysics [14]. It should be noted though, that had I. Kant been ready to leave his native Koenigsberg, he would have been able to become a professor at another German university earlier.

Although in principle the university regulations allowed for the possibility that there was certain competition between the lecture courses read by an elected professor and a *private docent*, in reality there was usually an agreement on the division of the functions, i.e., the compulsory and most prestigious study courses were delivered by professors, whereas *private docents* conducted lectures on narrower topics, special courses for the students of other faculties or elective study courses. There were more opportunities for *private docents* if there was a vacancy at the university or the professor could not cope with all basic courses due to a large workload. The competition was also ruled out by the fact that the professor was often the chief evaluator of the *pro venia legendi* thesis, therefore, the persons who had some disagreement with professors or demonstrated conceptual differences in their views were generally not accepted as *private docents*.

In the middle of the 19th century, when many German universities obtained public statutes and their full-time lecturers were considered civil servants, the legal status of *private docents* remained unclear. As early as 1853, the statutes of the University of Koenigsberg provided for the possibility for the ministry to impose sanctions on *private docents*, and later similar provisions were set for the University of Halle (*Friedrichs-Universität Halle*; 1854) and the University of Greifswald (*Universität Greifswald*; 1865) [10]. However, attempts to make *private docents* even more dependent met strong resistance from the academic community, for example, as it happened in 1897, when the Prussian Minister of Education sought to justify the right to dismiss *private docents* for conduct that was harmful to the government (in terms of curriculum). The protest letter signed by 51 prominent professors from the University of Berlin stated that the university life was governed not only by law but also by corporate traditions, so that the excessive dependence of *private docents* on the views of the current minister would severely restrict academic freedom [15].

At the end of the 19th century, at the University of Berlin, *private docents* were the largest group of lecturers (Table 1, p. 16) both at the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Philosophy, and it would have not been possible to fully ensure academic process without them [10].

Table 1

Structure of the academic personnel at the University of Berlin in 1897

	Faculty of Theology	Faculty of Law	Faculty of Medicine	Faculty of Philosophy	Total
Ordinary (full) professors	9	11	14	51	85
Honorary professors*	1	3	4	4	12
Extraordinary professors	7	3	30	40	80
Private docents	1	10	70	86	167
In total	18	27	118	181	344

* At that time, the term «honorary professor» was used to denote the persons who had acquired the right to a full pension, but continued lecturing and still headed chairs.

By the middle of the 19th century, the institute of the *private docent* in German universities became an almost mandatory step on the path to an academic career. This specific feature of the German universities was widely considered in 1919 by Max Weber (1864–1920), one of the founders of sociology. In his view, this made academic career quite uncertain, as *venia legendi* gave the right to conduct lectures, but such affiliation with the university did not guarantee any stable income, so only the people who were well-off or able to earn enough at other jobs could follow this route [16]. Although the small lecture load left *private docents* enough time for research, it made their future academic career a game of chance, because their transformation into full-time lecturers was not guaranteed. M. Weber called the model of teaching and research organisation dominated by many *private docents* only indirectly attached to the university German or plutocratic, as opposed to American or bureaucratic model, where a large number of full-time assistants were responsible for a significant part of academic activity [16].

Due to a large number of doctoral degree holders among the graduates of the German universities, the *viva voce* of the dissertation (*Inauguraldissertation*) had ceased to function as the confirmation of the highest qualification in the second half of the 19th century, it had become only the beginning of a career of a researcher or university lecturer. Therefore, the habilitation process became the next mandatory stage of academic development of a member of academic staff. It is important to make a particular emphasis on this point in order to fully comprehend the essential differences between the similar processes at the German and Russian universities.

In the work of M. Weber mentioned above, he predicted rapid changes in the organisation of universities, as well as a significant increase of the role of full-time assistants in the research career. However, even at the beginning of the 21st century, there were around 5000 *private docents* in Germany who did not receive a regular salary [17]. This led some publicists to a paradoxical conclusion that 5000 *private docents* and 45 018 freelance lecturers (*Lehrbeauftragten*) (according to official statistics for 2002) together became the largest sponsors of the German universities [18].

One of the dark sides of this kind of employment was that sometimes individuals gained the status of the *private docent* not because of their scientific interests, but because they wanted to acquire a noble title, which could give some advantages in the work of a doctor, lawyer, engineer, etc. In order to avoid the situation when many people used this title for self-promotion, stricter procedures for obtaining the status of *private docent* were introduced in Italy in the 1930s [19].

In addition to the German universities, where the status of *private docent* is still relevant, this title is still used to a limited extent in Switzerland, not only in the German-speaking universities but also in those that adopt French as a language of instruction. When the author of the current paper became a Swiss Federal Fellow in 1993/1994 and spent an academic year at the University of Geneva (*Université de Genève*), there was one *private docent* at the Faculty of Medicine, who, together with his general duties at the hospital, was involved in organising special classes in epidemiology and social medicine for both undergraduate and master students. In Austria, on the other hand, as of 1 January 2004, the title of *private docent* was reinstated for the persons who had fulfilled the habilitation requirements and acquired the *venia legendi*, thus replacing the previously ambiguous term *Universitätsdozent*.

Evolution of the Institute of the *Private Docent* at the Universities of the Russian Empire

Considering the universities of the Russian Empire, the position of the *private docent* first appeared at the University of Dorpat (*Universität Dorpat*; *Императорский Дерптский университет* re-established in 1802), which was established as an institution with German as the language of instruction and most directly adopted the traditions and organisational model of German cultural space. The possibility of attracting freelance lecturers, whose status was essentially the same as that of the *private docents* at the German universities, was stipulated already in the regulations of 1803, although the title of the *private*

docent was not mentioned in this document [20]. Only the regulations of 1820 explicitly recognised existence of the *private docents*, setting the «ceiling» on their salaries [21]. Therefore, the earliest holders of this status (the first was the philologist Karl Ludwig Struve (1785–1838), who started his work in 1805) were referred to without mentioning their title in the compilation of faculty biographies published in honour of the centenary of the university's re-establishment, and the title of *private docent* was first attributed to a surgeon Johann Ludwig Jochmann (1787–1814) [21]. On the other hand, the 1839 regulations of the University of Dorpat allowed categorising *private docents* into two categories, namely, freelance (respectively, *private docents* proper) and full-time, who would actually be called *docents* (assistant professors), although until 1863 neither of these academic positions formally existed in the Russian Empire [22].

According to the biographical dictionary of the academic personnel published in 1902, in the hundred years until 1902, 121 persons acquired the status of the *private docent* or the status comparable to it (in the first decades) at the University of Dorpat (since 1893 – University of Yuryev) (Table 2, p. 20). The first Latvians to obtain the right of the *private docent* already after publicly presenting their master's dissertation were a philosopher *Jēkabs Osis* (also *Jakob Ohse*, 1860–1919), who acquired this status on 17 December 1888, and a linguist and folklorist *Jēkabs Lautenbahs* (1847–1928) – on 10 December 1896; since 1878 he had been a lecturer of the Latvian language at the University of Dorpat.

It may be assumed that more active recruitment of *private docents* among the students themselves until the last third of the 19th century had been hindered both by a wide availability of candidates for teaching staff in German universities and by the opportunities for many graduates to pursue rapid academic careers at other Russian universities [20]. Ability of the University of Dorpat to attract more *private docents* than universities of St. Petersburg or Kazan was further hindered by the small population of Dorpat (other Russian universities were located in economically developed big cities), because there were relatively few gymnasium teachers, private doctors or other people working in the liberal professions who could apply for the status of the *private docent* [20].

The activities of the University of Dorpat were regulated by a special Constitution, while other Russian universities were initially subject to the University Regulation of 1804 (*Университетский устав*). Already at the end of the 1820s, this regulation did not meet the needs of growing universities, so the experience of Western Europe was carefully studied. The Commission for the Development of the New Regulations considered the Prussian model to be the best one for the public education system.

The existing institute of the *private docent* in the Prussian universities was particularly highlighted. It allowed attracting additional academic staff in the period when rapid differentiation of scientific fields occurred [23]. The introduction of such a model could significantly increase the number of junior lecturers, because according to the regulation of 1804, only 12 adjuncts (assistant professors) and four masters were envisioned for 28 full-time professors in the staffing structure at three basic faculties of the Russian universities [23].

The University Regulation of 1835 did not yet introduce the institute of the *private docent*, but already at the end of the 1830s at the University of Moscow (*Императорский Московский университет*) the so-called external lecturers (*сторонние преподаватели*) appeared, who were soon awarded the title of *private docents* [24]. In 1842, the procedures to reward the work of the *private docents* were established at Kiev University of St. Vladimir (*Киевский университет Св. Владимира*) [22]. In 1843, it was allowed to employ full-time *docents* (assistant professors) and *private docents* at the universities of St. Petersburg (Saint Petersburg Imperial University; *Императорский Санкт-Петербургский университет*), Moscow, Kharkov (*University of Kharkov; Харьковский университет*) and Kazan (Kazan Imperial University; *Императорский Казанский университет*) [25]. However, the institute of the *private docent* started to develop widely only after the discussions of 1860s on the university reform, which resulted in the adoption of the University Regulation of 1863. Discussions highlighted the possibilities for attracting more young people to the universities, which would be more easily accessible to the students due to a smaller age difference. However, at the same time, concerns were expressed about the unclear status of *private docents* at the university, including the absence of any advantage in applying for a vacancy at the chairs after a longer period of employment [26].

Table 2
Private docents and freelance lecturers with the compatible status at the University of Dorpat (1802–1902)

Period	1802–1820	1821–1840	1841–1860	1861–1880	1881–1902	In total
Faculty of Theology	-	1 (in this case, the person was not named as a private docent)	2	2	7	13
Faculty of Physics and Mathematics	3 (in these cases, no title was used)	8 (three of them had no titles)	2	10 (two of them had no titles)	8	31
Faculty of Law	1	4 (one of them immediately acquired the status of a full-time lecturer)	3 (two of them immediately acquired the status of full-time lecturers)	2 (one of them immediately acquired the status of a full-time lecturer)	4 (all four immediately became full-time lecturers)	14
Faculty of Medicine	2	-	11 (four of them immediately acquired the status of full-time lecturers)	12 (one of them immediately acquired the status of a full-time lecturer)	11	36
Faculty of History and Philology	1 (in this case no title was used)	5	4 (one of them immediately acquired the status of a full-time lecturer)	7 (one of them at the same time acquired the status of the acting docent)	10	27

At the same time, an attempt was made to specify the requirements for the applicants for the status of a *private docent* (at least a candidate's degree, i.e., a defended diploma paper, which was considered to be the lowest degree in the three-level system – candidate, master, doctor) and to reach agreement on the procedural issues: after publicly presenting the paper *pro venia legendi*, two demonstration lectures were required – one on the theme of the candidate's choice, whereas the topic of the other was determined by the faculty council [26]. Several opponents criticised the cumbersome nature of the system, drawing arguments against the public *viva voce*, and pointing out that the requirement for re-approval every three years and uncertainty about the right to use university laboratories could severely limit the number of applicants [26]. One of the most important offers, which was also incorporated in the 1863 regulations, was in addition to *private docents*, who received fees only in proportion to the number of lectures given and the number of students enrolled in their courses, to provide for regularly paid *docents* (assistant professors) on the university staff, who would be subject to similar qualification requirements but who could be assigned certain courses on the permanent basis [26]. It was truly stated that in contrast to the situation at the German universities, the development of the institute of the *private docents* in Russia would not have really guaranteed the academic freedom (*Lehr- and Lernfreiheit*) if students had not been allowed to freely choose the study courses, and that the number of specialists was insufficient to create real competition between professors and *private docents* [26].

According to the Regulation of 1863, the number of *private docents* at the faculties was not limited, however, their duties were determined by agreement with the faculty or the head of the respective chair, and the right of *private docents* to conduct lectures was confirmed by Curator of the relevant school district [27]. In practice, however, the opportunities for *private docents* to enrich the curriculum of the courses they delivered and to temporarily take the vacancies often was not used, and it was observed that the applicants for the status of a *private docent* who were not students of the respective university were often rejected [28]. Therefore, after adoption of the University Regulation in 1863, the increase in the number of *private docents* was not as large as it had been expected [28].

A radical change of the institute of the *private docent* was promoted by the University Regulation of 1884, which abolished the status of the full-time *docents* (assistant professors) at universities, retaining only extraordinary and ordinary professors, and stipulated that only the persons who had proven their pedagogical skills for at least three years in the status of the *private docent* could become professors [28].

This radically changed the status of the *private docent* from a position of an alternative and financially insecure faculty member to the only path to an academic career and a full-time university position [28]. The following candidates could apply for the post of a *private docent*: (1) persons with a scientific master's or doctor's degree (along with the abolition of the 1884 Regulation, the candidate's degree was also abolished, introducing a two-stage degree system; the candidate was awarded Class I Diploma entitling them to get ready for a professorship, but it was no longer considered a degree); (2) persons who had passed all master's examinations (magistrands, applicants for a master's degree) but had not yet publicly presented their dissertation, setting an additional restriction that they could become *private docents* not earlier than in three years after graduating from university; (3) professors from other higher education institutions (in this case, it would be an additional job at another institution); (4) «persons whose scientific work has gained prominence», but in such cases the consent of the Minister and one demonstration lecture was required [28]. As a result, the requirements had become stricter than those stipulated in the University Regulation of 1863, which were only slightly alleviated by the renunciation of the requirement for the public defence of the thesis *pro venia legendi*, which was still retained as a tradition at the Universities of Dorpat and Warsaw (*Uniwersytet Warszawski; Императорский Варшавский университет*) [28].

With regard to academic career development, changes to the regulation promoted convergence between the institutes of the *private docent* in Russia and Germany as the path to the position of a professor and the head of a chair, but other provisions of the Regulation of 1884 introduced significant differences. Particular emphasis should be made on the order how degrees and the status of the *private docent* was obtained, as there was only one degree at the German universities – Doctor, which was obtained by a fairly large number of graduates in a few years after graduation. Thus, soon enough after graduation, they were able to develop a habilitation thesis and become *private docents*, which marked the beginning of a researcher's career, although did not guarantee further academic growth and a professorship. In the Russian Empire, on the other hand, there was no unified system of scientific degrees, as the classical two degrees were in use only at the faculties of Physics and Mathematics, Law, Theology (only in Dorpat) and History and Philology [29]. In these fields, the majority of *private docents* were applicants for a master's degree and not all of them were able to obtain this degree soon after the habilitation. There was only one scientific degree (Doctor) at the Faculty of Medicine, while master's degree was the only degree in pharmacy and veterinary medicine [29].

In these fields, the degree was usually obtained relatively soon after graduation, and the procedure was similar to that adopted at the German universities in contrast to the customary procedures used at the other faculties of the universities of the Russian Empire. Therefore, in these fields, basically only the persons holding a scientific degree could apply for the position of a *private docent*. In turn, technical high schools did not have the right to award scientific degrees in the fields of applied sciences, therefore applicants had to publicly present their dissertations at the universities. It can be observed that in Russia, the impact the fact of obtaining a scientific degree had on the academic careers increased in contrast to many Western European countries, where the significance of scientific degrees had diminished by the end of the 19th century [30]. Moreover, given the complexity of the procedure, in many sectors a 22–23-year-old graduate could expect to obtain the status of a *private docent* in about 10–12 years, i.e., at the age of 35 [31]. The fact that there was a direct link between the degrees and academic titles a person obtained and their civil service ranking was another factor hindering the planned reform in the early 20th century [32].

The cumbersome degree system created shortage of doctoral students at the beginning of the 20th century [12], for this reason, at many universities outside the imperial capitals, most *private docents* actually fulfilled the duties of professors and conducted compulsory lecture courses [33]. In that case, they were entitled to the annual salary, which was just a half that of a full-time professor. On the other hand, when reading only optional subjects, *private docents* could only expect to receive an unpredictable fee (*вознаграждение*) from the university's special funds and the fees calculated depending on the number of students enrolled in the course, who paid one rouble for each weekly academic hour [33]. In addition, the compulsory or optional status of a course could have a significant impact on the students' interest, and the lack of listeners made it possible for the Ministry to relieve a *private docent* of their duties, as it happened in 1898 with Anatoly Alexandrov (*Анатоль Александров*; 1861–1930), a *private docent* at Moscow University [34]. In 1912, the Circular issued by Leon Kaso (*Леон Кассо*; 1865–1914), the Minister of Public Enlightenment, forbade *private docents* to take parallel courses to those already taught by full-time professors, and several *private docents* discontinued their academic activity [31]. The University of St. Petersburg filed a formal complaint against this illegal ruling to the Senate of the Russian Empire [35].

Despite various difficulties, the number of *private docents* grew steadily and, according to statistics, exceeded the total number of professors and other lecturers in many universities before World War I. Data as of 1 January 1911 show that 10 Russian universities had

«8 professors of theology, 455 ordinary professors, 164 extraordinary professors, 12 *docents* (assistant professors) and 681 *private docents*» [36]. However, these figures were relatively small compared to Germany, which in 1910 had a total of 3204 professors and *private docents* [37]. In 1916, *Juris Plāķis* (1869–1942; the field of comparative linguistics) at the University of Kazan and *Augusts Tentelis* (1876–1942; auxiliary disciplines of history) at the University of St. Petersburg became the last Latvians to receive the status of the *private docent*.

Privat-docents at Riga Polytechnicum

The functioning of the institute of the *private docent* at RP, which, similar to the Russian universities, tried to attract the widest possible range of freelance lecturers, especially in the subjects of general education, which could be at least partly provided by the qualified gymnasium teachers, is an issue that has not received much attention. Based on the data presented in «*Album Academicum*» published in 1912 [1] and the German and Latvian newspapers published in Latvia in the second half of the 19th century, a chronological list of RP *private docents* from 1869 to 1888 (Table 3). A half of them were senior-teachers (*Oberlehrer*) at various secondary schools in Riga, several of them were also students of Riga Polytechnicum, at that time holding the positions of assistants, as well as a number of invited foreigners. In the compilation of biographies of the lecturers of RP and Riga Polytechnic Institute (RPI), activity in the capacity of a *private docent* is indicated for only a few (T. J. H. Bienert, G. K. von Buengner, H. Weidemann, P. K. von Westberg), and several members of academic staff holding this position (A. K. H. Bergengrün, G. J. F. Girgensohn, P. Schoop, J. T. Spohr) are not mentioned in the list of lecturers at all [38].

Table 3

Private docents at Riga Polytechnicum (1862–1896)

Year, field	Position, name, surname, notes
1869 Economy	<i>Dr. oec. pol.</i> and <i>private docent</i> of the University of Heidelberg (<i>Universität Heidelberg</i>) Gustav Cohn (1840–1919), became a <i>Docent</i> (Assistant Professor) already in 1869.
1871 Mathematics	Senior-teacher Hermann von Westermann (1842–1918), <i>Docent</i> (Assistant Professor) since 1872.
1872 Botany	Senior-teacher Theophil Joachim Heinrich Bienert (1833–1873), worked until his death in 1873.

1875 Mathematics	Assistant Bruno von Abakanowicz, also von Abdank-Abakanowicz (1852–1900), in 1876 moved to the University of Lemberg (<i>Lwow, Lviv</i>) (<i>Universität Lemberg, Львівський університет</i>) in the capacity of a Docent (Assistant Professor).
1877 Mathematics	Senior-teacher Hugo Weidemann (1854–1887), worked until 1878, and then moved to Gymnasium Fellin (<i>Landesgymnasium zu Fellin</i> ; at present – Viljandi).
1878 History**	Senior-teacher Gustav Joseph Ferdinand Girgensohn (1848–1933), worked until 1890, and then moved to Frankfurt am Main.
1879 Bridge construction	Assistant Gustav Kirstein (1851–1915), since 1880 – Docent (Assistant Professor) in rural construction.
1881 Mathematics and Astronomy	Senior-teacher Gustav Karl von Buengner (1854–1899), worked until 1896.
1882 Forensic Chemistry	Pharmacist Eduard von Keussler (1851–1917), worked until 1885 and then became the owner of a pharmacy in Trentelberg (at present – <i>Gostinī</i>).
1883 Mechanical Engineering and Technical Drawing	Assistant Engelbert Juliuss Arnold (1856–1911), since 1886 – Docent (Assistant Professor) in electrical and mechanical engineering.
1885 Theoretical Chemistry	Assistant Friedrich Peter Heinrich Trey (1851–1917), since 1887 – Docent (Assistant Professor) in chemistry.
1885 Practical Chemistry	Former RP Assistant Johann Theodor Spohr (1855–1919), since 1887 – Docent (Assistant Professor) in chemistry.
1886 Organic Chemistry	Former Assistant of the University of Zurich (<i>Universität Zürich</i>) Paul Schoop (1858–1907), at the same time Assistant, worked until 1887.
1886 Geography	Senior-teacher Bernhard Albert von Hollander (1856–1937), later (starting year unknown) Docent (Assistant Professor), worked until 1898.
1888 Botany and Zoology	Senior-teacher Paul Karl von Westberg (1862–1935), worked as a <i>Private docent</i> until 1895; at the same time from 1889 till 1892 – Assistant in microscopy.
1888 General History	Senior-teacher Alexander Karl Heinrich Bergengrün (1859–1927), worked until 1895.

** In the reference sources about habilitation, the field is named differently – the history of Livland (*Vidzeme*).

Some Previously Relevant Aspects of Academic Life: Venia Legendi and the Status of a Private Docent in the World and in Riga Polytechnicum (1862–1896)

B. Polytechnicum.

I. Lehrkräfte.

Der Lehrkörper des Polytechnicums hatte beim Beginn des Studienjahres 187¹/₂ folgende Zusammensetzung:

Professor	Dr. Nauck . . .	Physik.
"	G. Hilbig . . .	Bauwissenschaften.
"	G. Kieseritzky . . .	Höhere Mathematik.
"	Dr. A. Schell . . .	Descriptive Geometrie und Gradisir.
"	C. Lovis . . .	Mechanik und Maschinenlehre.
"	H. F. Bessard . . .	Ingenieurwissenschaften.
"	Mag. C. Helm . . .	Agronomische Wissenschaften.
"	F. Weber . . .	Chemie.
"	E. Hoyer . . .	Mechanische Technologie, Maschinenkunde und technisches Zeichnen.
"	C. L. Moll . . .	Maschinenbau.
"	Dr. Kleinwächter	Geschichte, Geographie und Statistik des Welthandels.
Akademiker	J. Clark . . .	Freihandzeichnen.
Oberlehrer	M. Gottfriedt . . .	Mineralogie und Geologie.
"	A. Böttner . . .	Politische und Culturgeschichte.
Lector	Dr. J. H. G. Posler . . .	Englische Sprache.
"	K. H. F. Haller . . .	Russische Sprache.
"	C. F. Passard . . .	Französische Sprache.
Advocat	Dr. v. Maszkowsky	Handelsrecht.
Kreisschullehrer	Bürger . . .	Kaufmännische Arithmetik.
Buchhalter	C. A. Eck . . .	Buchführung und Comptoirarbeiten.
Assistent Architect	Pflog . . .	Assistent für Bauzeichnen.
"	M. Glasenapp . . .	Chemische Technologie.
Privatdocent	Westermann . . .	Mathematik.
"	Dr. Dienert . . .	Botanik.
Schreiblehrer	Joh . . .	Kalligraphie.

Figure 1. List of RP lecturers, including *private docents*, in the academic year 1872/1873.

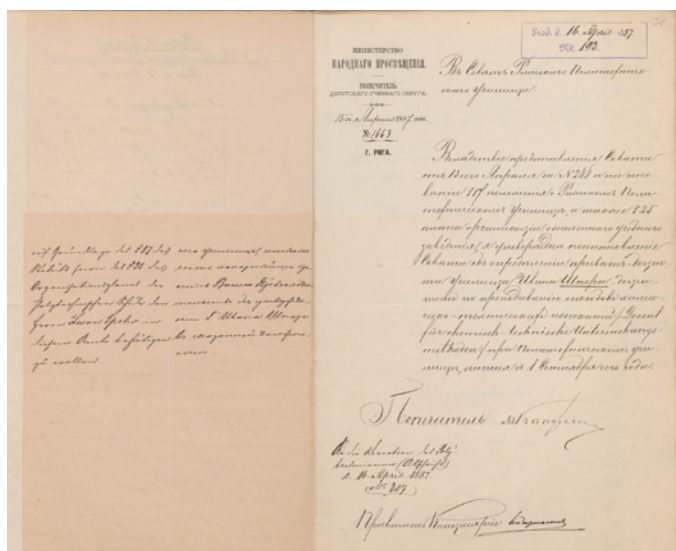


Figure 2. Announcement of the Curator of the Dorpat School District regarding the appointment of a *private docent* Johann Theodor Spohr as a Docent (Assistant Professor), 15 April 1887.

The organizational plan of RP drawn up by Eduard Hollander (1820–1897) in 1870 also envisioned the possibility of recruiting *private docents*, requiring applicants to submit a scientific paper and a syllabus of the planned lecture course, and asking them to deliver a demonstration lecture before approval [39; p. 24]. In fact, recruitment of *private docents* continued until the end of the 1880s, and in the spring of 1888, RP employed 17 full-time (16 professors and one drawing teacher) and 31 freelance teachers (including 16 docents (assistant

professors), three lecturers, four *private docents*, seven assistants and one calligraphy teacher) [40]. However, already at the beginning of 1889, in the atmosphere of russification of the Baltic provinces, the Circular of the Ministry of National Enlightenment ruled that the existence of *private docents* was not in accordance with the statutes of the institution, therefore, the Curator of the Dorpat School District stated that «*Private docents* are not allowed in the Polytechnicum and no one may be employed in this status» [41]. Already after the transformation of RP into RPI, the issue of *private docents* was again discussed in the correspondence with the supervisory authorities at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of professor training [39; p. 38], but this proposal seems to have been rejected because the existence of such an institute was only allowed at the universities.

Conclusions

During the 19th century, the institute of the *private docent* had become an integral part of university life in both Germany and the Russian Empire, opening up the possibility for the high schools to attract qualified specialists from various fields to academic work (gymnasium teachers, engineers, doctors, pastors, members of the judiciary, etc.) and becoming an almost mandatory career path on the way to the position of a professor. Although implementation of this institute in practice differed slightly depending on the country and even on the higher education institution, the common principles of obtaining the status of the *private docent* (submission and evaluation of the habilitation thesis, demonstration lectures at the faculty and introductory lecture after a positive vote) remained unchanged. The long experience of the Russian Empire as best known locally served as a model during the establishment of the University of Latvia. Attempts were made to avoid the mistakes made previously and to create a dedicated model of the institute of the *private docent*.

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SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. RP darbības atskaite. Zwoelfter Rechenschaftsbericht des Verwaltungsraths der polytechnischen Schule zu Riga. Riga, 1873, S. 4.

Figure 2. RP dokumenti par mācībspēku iecelšanu amatā. LNA LVVA 7175. f., 1. apr., 75. l., 34. lp.



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Māris Baltiņš

Daži agrāk aktuāli akadēmiskās dzīves aspekti: *venia legendi* un privātdocenta statuss pasaulē un Rīgas Politehnikumā (1862–1896)

Pētījumā aplūkots privātdocenta statuss, kas pasaulē tika ieviests 18. gadsimtā un, sākot no 19. gadsimta otrās puses līdz Otrā pasaules kara beigām pastāvēja arī Latvijā. Privātdocenta statuss salīdzināts ar citu pasaules valstu, galvenokārt vācu tipa universitātēm. Jēdzienu «*venia legendi*» un «privātdocents» skaidrojumi ar piemēriem no Rīgas Politehnikuma (RP) mācībspēku darbības atspoguļo šos jēdzienus no dažādiem aspektiem, lai 21. gadsimtā būtu saprotams to lietojums iepriekšējos gadsimtos. Autors pētījumam izmantojis arhīvu dokumentus un bibliotēku krājumus, balstoties ne tikai Latvijas, bet arī Krievijas, Vācijas un citu valstu zinātnieku atziņās.

Atslēgas vārdi: *venia legendi*, privātdocenta statuss, habilitācija, Rīgas Politehnikums.