

## Second Latvian History Competition

### “The Street, the Way...” 2002 / 2003

#### *Report*

The topic “The Street, the Way...” was chosen because it provides many possibilities to explicate a creative approach and to show history under several aspects. We saw three main ways how to deal with this topic: 1) to explore a particular street or way and objects around it; 2) to examine the way of life; 3) to look in an abstract way at various lines, for example, the way of love and so on. This was a possibility to research not only very personal questions but some important questions concerning the environment too.

We consider the resonance to the topic as sufficient – in the quantitative analysis of papers as well as in the analysis of the chosen topics for the students’ research papers. The biggest part of participants devoted their works to the research of a concrete object. These objects are in general an important part of their everyday lives. Another topic chosen was to examine the way of life of the students’ relatives. In those cases we could see a parallel to previous year’s competition. The possibility to continue this theme (“The history of my family”) was attractive for pupils, who were not so brave in the past year.

In total we had 217 research entries in this year’s competition. 193 of these papers were written by individual students, 24 were written by groups of students (2 or 3 students). Altogether, 248 students participated in the competition round 2002/2003. Here are some Statistics on Age and Gender distribution:

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
11 - 14	74	45	119
15 - 16	32	8	40
17 - 19	53	36	89
<b>Total</b>	159	89	248

The absolute majority of students chose to undertake research about a concrete street or way in their neighbourhood. We had 164 papers on this topic. The dominating research method chosen by the students this year was an analysis of material (paper) sources.

Even though the quality of the research has all in all improved compared to last year, we did face some problems in the second competition round.

First, some of our students had problems to meet the demands of research work. Their research usually was good, but they were missing a clear aim, a list of used literature, or references as well as conclusions. In these cases the papers missed the academic demands set by the organisers. We have seen this situation mainly in the papers of students of lower age (between the age of 11 and 15/16). One of the reasons for this situation is that only students of secondary schools (16 – 19 years old) have research methods as part of their curriculum at

school. Another reason might be that their consultants/tutors assistance was not on a high level. It is rather striking that the papers that came from regions of the country where we conducted teachers' and students' seminars on methodological questions, did not show these flaws.

Second, for our second competition round we had rather strong difficulties in finding sponsors. We have established some contacts, but their promise of support was usually aimed at next year's competition. We did succeed, however, to find sponsors for our brochure in which we plan to publish some of the papers of our two competition years' winners.

The third problem of this year's competition round we faced in the contacts with the mass media whose interests are concentrated on the prominent events and people or scandals. Educational issues are usually not a top topic for media reporting. A major drawback in this respect was that the president, who had initially agreed to take part in the award ceremony, cancelled her participation in the end. However, we established good public relations with the boards of education staff in the regions as well as with the municipalities of some regions. This helped to have rather high publicity in the different regions of our country.

We do see some very important highlights during the competition round: one is the high quality of the regional seminars conducted for consultants/tutors, as said before. We have many good discussions and this was also reflected in the higher quality of student's papers. The great percentage of participants who did their research already for the second year, must also be pointed out.

The number of participants in our competition is a great success. We dare say that our competition is becoming a tradition already. We are very glad that we had the second exhibition of students' research in the War Museum and this as well helps to makes our competition well-known in our society.

For the next round we are planning to improve the information on the competition participation, be more precise about the details of our announcement and the criteria for the evaluation by the jury. We are also working on the explaining of the next topic, which is: "Everyday Life in Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

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