

LATVIAN HISTORY COMPETITION  
5<sup>th</sup> COMPETITION ROUND

“MONUMENT”

**REPORT**

In 2005 the Latvian Association of History Teachers (LSVA) announced the fifth round of the national EUSTORY history competition under the topic “Monument”. 239 students submitted 161 research works. This proportion shows that many students worked in pairs or small groups. In comparison to previous years the number of participants stayed almost the same.

As all EUSTORY competitions the Latvian history competition as well encourages students to undertake historical research in their local surroundings. One important criteria for the assessment of the students research is the variety of sources, that their work is based on. Moreover it is important that the local history is embedded in a broader historical context.

The main benefit of local historical research is that history is no longer an abstract construction but students can identify with individuals from their personal surroundings who experienced history. For example, students discover courage of simple human beings such as teachers, national guerillas and others. Apart from that students discover a lot of new and interesting things that aren't written in the official history textbooks.

This year's topic “Monument” gave the students the chance to analyze places and objects with heritage value. It gave the students the opportunity to learn about the history of monuments and get an overview of the architecture used in the time they have chosen. By researching the history of a monument, the students learn about people and events related to this monument.

Participants:

Age	Girls	Boys	Total
11 – 14	62	46	108
15 – 16	29	12	41
17 – 19	56	34	90
Total	147	92	239

In this years' competition there were two first places, three second places and four third places awarded. As a lot of the contributions were very good it was difficult for the jury to determinate the best of them. Three of the prizewinning contributions were handed in by students from Riga.

The Latvian competition organizers see the contest as a contribution to a modern kind of patriotism in Latvia. Thus as a consequence of their research students took care of a graveyard for soldiers who died in the First World War and for a Jewish graveyard. Other students presented their results of their research to a broader public on websites, for example about the Moscow

suburb in Riga and the monument, commemorating the independence of the Livian provinces in 1919. Some students focused on famous Latvians like the high ranking military colonel Oskars Kalpaks (1882-1919).

Rihards Bambals and Līva Dzene, both from Riga, shared the first prize. Rihards wrote about the central market – an outstanding town planning monument. He researched the history of the market from its formation, during the Second World War as well as during the Russian occupation time until nowadays. Līva made research about soldiers' cemetery. The other winners basically wrote about monuments and architecture masterpieces.

A lot of the research topics dealt with churches and graveyards. Some of the entries dealt with town planning. These works were most popular for older students, and it was a good way to understand the local history – and the well-known places that they use in every day life. At large all the students found out, that their local area has a very interesting history and the contributions made obvious, that ordinary things can be very interesting – from a historical perspective.

The quality of researches improved during the past five years constantly. Thus the students started to use sources from archives and museums in this years' competition. Furthermore they were very successful at using material from interviews as well as latest researches from academic scholars. In some cases the research was based on interviews only as material for some monuments was very hard to find. By comparing the different interviews, the students had the opportunity to verify the arguments given.

Analyzing the entries and the development of the competition since its beginning we can highlight some aspects. First of all the history competition is very popular among students and tutors, as they achieve experience in historical research. The basics of research work has to be mastered even in the curriculum for primary school students and composery in secondary school.

A questionnaire for tutors made obvious that it is important to award every student in the award ceremony. This year the best research works were presented at the award ceremony.

50% of the participants participated in more than one contest. One aspect of motivation is that every summer there is made an exhibition of research works and everyone can get acquainted with the names of students and tutors. It is a good possibility to show the hard work to others and increase the interest both in them as well as in possible participation in the competition. Very motivating for tutors is the chance to share their experiences in the summer days which are held by the Latvian History teachers association. That is one of the main things of organizing the competition – the work with the tutors.

One important aspect that has to be trained is organizing research. We recognized that it isn't useful to register students in the beginning of contest. The number of people who volunteer is bigger than the number of research works received by the end of the competition. For many students it is difficult

to carry out research for the competition. On top of the work they have to do it in school. Improving their ability to plan their time is therefore important.

During the process of research students are confronted with many difficulties. Many students want to present maximum material, without sufficient analyzing it. Obviously this lack of criticism is closely related to history teaching in schools, where more time should be spent on critical analysis of sources. Another problem is the use of references, which is new for most students.

Most students submit their competition entry in written form. But presenting the results of research on a website is becoming more and more popular. It shows that students are getting used to working with modern technologies. For us this is as well a sign that students shouldn't have problems to work in international projects in the world wide web.

Still, most national mass media are not interested in the competition and its results. The local press shows more interest. Therefore the competition organizers are thinking about changing the form of working with the mass media. At the same time authors of literature want to use the experience of the competition in extensive publications.

Those competition entries that contain yet unknown sources are kept at the Latvian State Archive. The competition organizers prepare hard files and summaries for this purpose.

At the moment the competition organizers meet special problems, the history teachers association is in a crisis, but they are doing everything to prevent any on impact the students and their research.

Coordinator

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