

4th LATVIAN HISTORY COMPETITION**“THE NEIGHBOURS”
2004/2005****REPORT**

The topic of the 4th competition round was “The Neighbours”. The topic was chosen for different reasons. At first it allows to research local history. Secondly it is connected with everyday life. Thirdly it does arise any political questions.

Another thought was important for this choice. Every year some pupils don't finish their research because of several reasons. But at the same time they have collected a big amount of historical sources which should not get lost but saved as a heritage in our culture and history. Therefore this year we chose a topic that could be seen as a continuation of the previous year's topic. People who have collected materials for the 3rd competition round under the title “Everyday life of the 20th century” but did not finish their work could use the same material for the new topic: “The Neighbours”.

In our information material for the new topic we advised to write about people in the students' surroundings. Nevertheless some students decided to write about concrete things in their neighbourhood. For example some of them wrote about buildings that have a certain historical meaning, others about people who are connected with these objects. We found that concrete objects such as architecture helped the students to discover stories about interesting personalities and historical events that are “behind” these things. This helped us to define the topic for the competition round 2005/2006: “The Monument”.

In this competition year and 237 participants handed in 174 research papers.

Year	Papers	Participants
2001/2002	250	264
2002/2003	217	248
2003/2004	237	318
2004/2005	174	237

The following table reveals that the main target group of the competition are girls aged between 15 and 16 years. This seems to be a fact that the organizers of the competition cannot influence.

Age	Girls	Boys
11 - 14	46	28
15 - 16	84	46
17 - 19	26	7
Total	156	81
Total girls and boys		237

The first statistic shows that the number of papers has decreased, but not the number of participants. This is due to the fact that some students decided to work in groups. Until now the statute of the Latvian History Competition allows to work in groups of three. In order to increase the number of papers in the future we decided to change the statutes and let students work in pairs only.

Secondly, a certain number of different contests have been installed in schools. Students and teachers want to make use of this variety of competitions and thus less people decide to take part in the history competition but choose another competition.

Thirdly, the number of participants is decreasing because of recent changes in the culture of learning and teaching in Latvian schools. When the Latvian History Competition started it offered the chance to try out new methods in history teaching. Students discovered that history can be found everywhere in our daily life and personal surroundings. It was

something new that students could undertake research and draw their own conclusions. Nowadays this has become everyday life in learning so that it is difficult for teachers to motivate students to take part in the history competition. Moreover teachers themselves are tired and are not motivated to undertake any effort above their daily teaching "business". This is mainly a social problem that the organizer of the history competition cannot influence or change.

On the other hand this year we received researches from *all* regions of Latvia for the first time. But nevertheless, almost 50% of the total amount of works are from schools in Riga. In previous years students from other regions than Riga handed in the preponderant amount of research papers.

The result of the contest led us to some general conclusions about the organization of the competition. For the first time the organizers declined from regional seminars. In previous years we covered all Latvian regions with our seminars. Now we can already rely on the good network that we have with regional teachers. Moreover, the quality of research proves that students and their tutors have become familiar with the standards of a good research paper.

In the same time we observed that many students, especially the younger ones, do not have a tutor. A survey among the participants showed that these younger students got the information about the competition from their elder brothers, sisters or schoolmates. Unfortunately they can't be tutors. We thus think that it is still important to get more teachers involved.

As in previous years we prepared an exposition of awarded competition papers in this year as well. The works were first shown in Riga, in the War museum of Latvia, after that it moved to the summer days of the Latvian history teachers association in one of the Latvian regions. On this occasion, the local press wrote about the exhibition and highly appreciated it. Unfortunately it was the only press interest about our contest this year.

Just now we are continuing as in previous years research in Latvian state archive. We think that this could be a good motivation for students.

Currently we are negotiating with a publishing house about the publication of awarded research papers. We hope to get this chance to share our methodical experience with a broader public.

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