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The Genesis and Development of Children's Libraries in the Independent Republic of Latvia (1918–1940)

Vaiķu bibliotēku genezē ir raida nepriklausomoje Latvijas Respublikoje (1918–1940)

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Abstract: The article is dedicated to one of the “blank pages” in the historiography of Latvian libraries – the beginnings of children's departments in public libraries and independent children's libraries, from the idea, its implementation and the first twenty years of operation in the independent Republic of Latvia (1918–1940). As there are no academic or popular publications on this topic, the so-called historical method is used in the research, which allows the reconstruction of the emergence and development of Children's departments in public libraries and children's libraries in the context of the library sector's development in Europe and the United States. The main base of the research: press articles and books of the respective period, as well as documents in the National Archives of Latvia on the children's departments of Rīga public libraries.

The study shows that the ideological justification for free children's libraries in Latvia was the same as in Russia and Sweden: the public's desire to protect children and young people from the harmful effects of “pulp” literature (at that time even the term “dirty” literature was used) and to offer them “good” books instead. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, Latvia lacked the main precondition – a network of free public libraries, within which children's departments in public libraries or independent children's libraries could be organised. The first children's department in a public library was only opened in December 1919 in Liepāja (the largest city in Latvia's Kurzeme region), thanks to the enthusiasm of publicist and politician, library manager Voldemārs Caune and his conviction of the need for such a service. Until the Soviet occupation, it was the only children's department at a public library in the province.

The situation in the capital Rīga was different. Here, the first children's department aimed at reducing the “book famine” was established by the State Library of Latvia in February 1922, but soon other organisations became involved in the provision of library services to the younger generation. During the first period of independence of the Republic of Latvia, ten Children's departments were opened in the public library system and at least ten more children's libraries were opened by charity organisations in different city districts. The encouragement of Caune and like-minded enthusiasts, mostly members of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (Hermanis Kaupīņš, Teodors Līventāls, Emma Kalniņa, etc.) also played an important role in their establishment, as did the municipality's readiness to provide the necessary financial support.

Although the Liepāja and Rīga children's libraries were used very actively, insufficient state and local government funding for libraries hindered the establishment of special library services for children in the rest of Latvia. Thus, until the Soviet occupation in 1940, a network of children's departments at public libraries and children's libraries was created only in Rīga. The Soviet occupation saw a new phase in the development of children's library services, as the establishment of children's departments at public libraries or separate children's libraries became mandatory throughout Latvia.

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Keywords: children's libraries, public libraries, pulp literature, Voldemārs Caune, independent Republic of Latvia (1918–1940).

Summary: Straipsnis yra skirtas vienam iš „tuščių puslapių“ Latvijos bibliotekų istoriografijoje – vaikų skyrių viešosiose bibliotekose ir nepriklausomose vaikų bibliotekose pirmiesiems žingsniams pradedant idėja, jos įgyvendinimu ir pirmaisiais 20 veiklos nepriklausomoje Latvijos Respublikoje metų (1918–1940). Kadangi šia tema nėra išleistų akademinų ar populiarių leidinių, tyrime naudojamas vadinamasis istorinis metodas, leidžiantis rekonstruoti vaikų skyrių atsiradimą ir plėtrą viešosiose ir vaikų bibliotekose bibliotekų sektoriaus plėtros Europoje ir JAV kontekste. Tyrimo pagrindas: atitinkamo laikotarpio straipsniai spaudoje ir knygos, taip pat Latvijos nacionaliniame archyve saugomi dokumentai apie Rygos viešųjų bibliotekų vaikų skyrius.

Tyrimas rodo, kad nemokamų vaikų bibliotekų ideologinis pagrindimas Latvijoje buvo toks pat, kaip ir Rusijoje bei Švedijoje: visuomenės noras apsaugoti vaikus ir jaunimą nuo žalingos bulvarinės literatūros (tuo metu buvo vartojamas net terminas „purvinoji“ literatūra) poveikio ir vietoj jos pasiūlyti „gerų“ knygų. Tačiau XX a. pradžioje Latvijoje nebuvo pagrindinės prielaidos – nemokamų viešųjų bibliotekų tinklo, kuriame galėtų būti kuriami vaikų skyriai viešosiose bibliotekose ar nepriklausomos vaikų bibliotekos. Pirmasis viešosios bibliotekos vaikų skyrius Liepojoje (didžiausiame Latvijos Kuržemės regiono mieste) buvo atidarytas tik 1919 m. gruodžio mėn. publicisto ir politiko, bibliotekos vadovo Voldemāro Caune'ės iniciatyva. Iki sovietinės okupacijos tai buvo vienintelis provincijos viešosios bibliotekos vaikų skyrius.

Kitokia situacija buvo sostinėje Rygoje, kur 1922 m. vasarį Latvijos valstybinė biblioteka įsteigė pirmąjį vaikų skyrių, kurio tikslas – sumažinti „knygų badą“, tačiau netrukus kitos organizacijos įsitraukė į bibliotekos paslaugų teikimą jaunajai kartai. Per pirmąjį Latvijos Respublikos nepriklausomybės laikotarpį viešųjų bibliotekų sistemoje buvo atidaryta dešimt vaikų skyrių ir dar mažiausiai dešimt vaikų bibliotekų skirtinguose miesto rajonuose atidarė labdaros organizacijos. Svarbų vaidmenį juos kuriant suvaidino Caune'ė ir bendraminčių entuziastų, daugiausia Latvijos socialdemokratų darbininkų partijos narių (Hermanio Kaupīnio, Teodoro Līvontālo, Emmos Kalniņos ir kt.), paskatinimas bei savivaldybės pasirengimas suteikti reikiamą finansinę paramą.

Nors Liepojos ir Rygos vaikų bibliotekos buvo lankomos labai aktyviai, nepakankamas valstybės ir vietos valdžios finansavimas bibliotekoms trukdė įkurti specialias bibliotekos paslaugas vaikams likusioje Latvijos dalyje. Taigi iki sovietų okupacijos 1940 m. viešųjų bibliotekų vaikų skyrių tinklas ir vaikų bibliotekos buvo įsteigti tik Rygoje.

Sovietų okupacijos metu prasidėjo naujas vaikų bibliotekos paslaugų plėtros etapas, nes visoje Latvijoje tapo privaloma įsteigti vaikų skyrius viešosiose bibliotekose arba atskiras vaikų bibliotekas.

Keywords: vaikų bibliotekos, viešosios bibliotekos, bulvarinė literatūra, Voldemārs Caune, nepriklausoma Latvijos Respublika (1918–1940).

Introduction

The first children's libraries were founded in the United States (US) in the 1820s, but systematic development began in the second half of the 19th century. Their success, effective reading-promotion events, prompted the establishment of children's libraries in Europe.¹ In Latvia, the idea of instituting separate children's libraries only appeared in the press at the beginning of the 20th century, but the first children's department in a public library was only opened in December 1919, a year after the establishment of the Republic of Latvia.

This study examines the development of children's libraries and children's departments in public libraries in the independent Republic of Latvia, starting with the opening of the first children's department in 1919 up to the Soviet occupation in 1940. The paper also outlines

the genesis of the idea of children's libraries in Latvia in order to determine the motivation of the organisers of such libraries. The aim of the research is to evaluate the achievements of children's library services in the independent Republic of Latvia in the context of European and US achievements. The object of the research is children's departments in public libraries (at that time free public libraries in Latvia were also called "*tautas* (people's) libraries" or "free libraries", this article uses the generally approved term – public libraries), as well as children's libraries maintained by a number of civic organisations.

In the first decade of Latvia's existence as an independent republic, a comprehensive network of school libraries was also established with state support. In addition to textbooks and pedagogic literature, school libraries collected fiction and popular science literature for children; nevertheless, school libraries, whose main function is to support the learning process, do serve a special study. In this article, school libraries are only mentioned in certain cases where they influenced the provision of children's services in public libraries.

As the establishment and development of Latvia's children's libraries up to the first Soviet occupation has been little studied to date (there are no research publications), this work is primarily based on the press and books of the period. In addition, documents on children's departments in the Rīga municipal library system in the Latvian State Historical Archives of the National Archives of Latvia (NAL LSHA) were reviewed.

In view of this situation, the historical method² was chosen as the main research method – reconstructing, as far as possible, the first twenty years of the genesis and development of children's libraries from the sources available. Hypothetically, this was in line with general trends for library development in Europe; consequently, the work also reflects the context of children's library services in other countries. In Latvia, as elsewhere in Europe, including Sweden, children's departments in public libraries, as well as separate children's libraries, were established during the so-called "moral panic" period. According to the definition put forward by sociologist and criminologist Stanley Cohen (1942–2013), moral panic is the sudden alarm within a society about an event, circumstance, individual or group of people that are perceived as a threat to that society's values and interests; this is accompanied by calls for control and repression.³ Media correspondents, religious communities and politicians usually play key roles in combating these "harmful" practices. They express their diagnosis and solution to the problem; frequently, new policies are developed and new symbols emerge as outcomes of moral panic.⁴ Moral panic is most often observed in transforming societies, in which the current social hierarchy and value system are under threat.⁵ The opening of public library children's departments and separate children's libraries in Europe was fuelled by public concern about the mass consumption of "dirty" literature ("dirty" is a literal translation of *netīrs*, the common term *pulp* will be used hereafter) in the lower echelons of society, as well as among children and young people. Swedish literary scholar Ulf Boëthius writes about this in his

book *När Nick Carter drevs på flykten: kampen mot "smutslitteraturen" i Sverige 1908-1909* (When Nick Carter was put to flight: the campaign against "gutter literature" in Sweden 1908–1909).⁶ In the summer of 1907, a campaign began in the Swedish press against pulp and colportage literature, particularly the adventure stories of the American detective Nick Carter, authored by John Russell Coryell (1851–1924). They were believed to propagandise violence, thus poisoning the character of young people. Despite criticism in the press (especially in Social Democrat publications), Nick Carter's adventure stories continued to grow in popularity, with works of similar content appearing; consequently, pressure from educators and politicians saw the sale of books banned from the main outlets for this genre – tobacco kiosks. The press then discussed what to offer young people in place of the Nick Carter stories. Teacher Alfhild Valfrid Matilda Palmgren (1877–1967) proposed the establishment of free public libraries for children.⁷ At her initiative, the first Swedish children's and young people's library was established in Stockholm in 1911, accessible to all children in the city, irrespective of their age, social status or other factors.⁸ Initially maintained from donations, it came under the control of the municipality in 1927.⁹ Palmgren emphasised that the library's tasks were to awaken the desire to read good literature in children and to ward the harmful effects of colportage literature, as well as cinema. Swedish library researchers point out that children's and young people's libraries were a tool for stabilising public morale. The library was a place where workers' children had the opportunity to read, to supplement their knowledge so as to improve their social standing in a peaceful, non-violent way.¹⁰

Ideas on the creation of children's libraries in Tsarist Russia and Latvia

Social Democrat and educator Vasilii Zelenko (1878–1957) was one of the most prominent theorists on children's libraries in the Russian Empire of the early 20th century. Born in Latvia's Ilūkste district, he started his political career in Rīga, fleeing abroad during the 1905 revolution and studying at the University of Zürich. He later returned to Russia and settled in Petrograd.¹¹ He began his career as a librarian and teacher before the First World War: he was a lecturer in the pre-school teachers' course named after Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel (1782–1852) and a librarian in the children's library at the people's centre, founded by mechanical-engineering industrialist Emanuel Ludvig Nobel (1859–1932).¹² In 1917, Zelenko's monograph *Detskiya biblioteki* (Children's Libraries) was published in Petrograd. In it, he substantiated the need for children's departments in public libraries, as well as the need for standalone children's libraries.¹³

His main rationale for the necessity for children's libraries, as it was for Swedish educators, was guidance for children's reading so as to restrict their interest in cheap pulp literature. In his book, *Detskiya*

biblioteki, Zelenko devoted a whole section to the criticism of pulp literature, including detective stories.¹⁴ At the beginning of the 20th century, detective fiction achieved great popularity in Russia, starting with the descriptions of the exploits of the US secret policeman Allan Pinkerton (1819–1884), English writer A. Conan Doyle's (1859–1930) stories about private investigator Sherlock Holmes, and ending with the previously mentioned works of American writer Coryell about detective Nick Carter. This literature was given the general derogatory term "Pinkerton novels". According to book researcher Jeffrey Brooks, almost ten million copies of Pinkerton novels were circulated in Russia in 1908.¹⁵ This literature, which was very cheap (one book cost 10-15 kopecks) and garishly designed, was bought and enthusiastically read by both adults and children. As an educator, Zelenko had interviewed about 200 schoolchildren. All of them had read Pinkerton novels!¹⁶ In his view, this was harmful because it damaged literary tastes and moreover had a rabble-rousing effect.¹⁷ In order to reduce the impact of pulp literature, separate children's departments in libraries or standalone children's libraries are needed, to bring together the best children's books that show the younger generation examples of a strong will and hard-working people.¹⁸ Furthermore, a few children's libraries set up by private individuals or charities are not enough; a nationwide network needs to be set up.¹⁹

In Russia, the first public children's library was opened in 1870 in St. Petersburg (Kronstadt), in the premises of a maritime school. It was founded and maintained by a small group of intellectuals.²⁰ At the dawn of the 20th century, children's departments were established at public libraries in several cities.²¹ During this period, the Latvian press (in a number of German-Baltic publications) only described the establishment and maintenance of children's libraries in the US.²² In 1902, the *Rigasche Rundschau* newspaper described pleasant and comfortable children's reading rooms in the US, where not only the best children's literature is available to the younger generation, but story times are also systematically held with readings of fairy tales, ancient Greek myths, and children are introduced to interesting facts about history and geography.²³ Nevertheless, the flattering description of US children's libraries was concluded by doubts as to whether it was beneficial to replace the "best book" from which children should first learn – nature – with story times in reading rooms. So that children's passion for reading did not to stimulate a desire to stay indoors, the article's author suggested organising story times in nature, in the forest.

A correspondent for another German newspaper, *Rigasche Neueste Nachrichten*, pointed out that Europe, including Germany, had adopted the establishment of children's libraries and children's departments from the US.²⁴ Separate departments are needed because for children, unlike adults, the best time to visit libraries are the afternoons, not evenings, and because they need the empathy and advice of librarians on choosing

suitable reading material more than adults do.²⁵ The main goals of children's libraries are to accustom children to reading and to provide them with a safe environment. The compilation of children's libraries should be approached very carefully, refraining from acquiring literature of little value. For young people craving adventure, the gorier the better, the library would offer Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850–1894) *Treasure Island*, the works of Walter Scott (1771–1832) or Charles Dickens (1812–1870), etc. in place of Pinkerton novels. When children's libraries are established in Latvia, the correspondent emphasised, Pinkerton novels will soon disappear and through libraries, children will fall in love with serious and chaste reading.²⁶ A similar justification for the necessity for children's libraries was voiced in the Latvian press: "Reading about all kinds of injustices in pulp literature, which frequently are even praised, it is clear that children cannot derive any benefit from this literature. [...] If pulp literature leaves such a detrimental impression on the coming generation, then the question inevitably arises: how do we protect ourselves from this evil? The best way to do this would be to make sure that no members of the younger generation get their hands on books that could titillate their immature imagination and leave the murky dregs of depravity in their pure souls."²⁷ The solution is the setting up of an abundant children's library in a school or elsewhere.

However, this was difficult to implement in practice because of the lack of a key precondition: a network of freely accessible public libraries. At the beginning of the 20th century, Latvia only had municipal free libraries-reading rooms in Liepāja (founded in 1777, free of charge since the 1880s),²⁸ in Rīga and a few parishes.²⁹ In Rīga, the first free reading room and library was opened in October 1906, but initially it was only accessible to persons over 16 years of age.³⁰ Up to the First World War, three more free public libraries were established in Rīga, but all were located in rented, rather confined premises, and staff numbers were lacking, given the heavy flows of visitors, so the opening of separate children's departments was not yet being planned.³¹

The first children's department in a Latvian public library

In March 1919, the Liepāja City Council entrusted the management of the municipal library to publicist, social democrat Voldemārs Caune (1890–1944). It should be noted that in the January 1919 Liepāja municipal elections, the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (LSDSP) won 54% of the votes and thus more than half (43) of the city council members' seats.³²

In 1906, while still a secondary school student, Caune had joined the LSDSP and immediately took on the role of propagandist, speaking at party conferences and distributing illegal literature.³³ By 1915, he had been arrested four times because of this spirited political activity and spent a total of six years in detention and exile. During this time he found out about the work of librarians and became one: in 1915–1916, he set

up the Narym Municipal library in Siberia. After his release in 1916, he lived in Moscow, where he attended librarianship courses at the A. L. Shanyavsky Moscow City People's University.³⁴ These were the first short (three-week) courses for librarians in Russia with a comprehensive curriculum, which also included lectures on children's libraries.³⁵ In addition, Caune interned at a number of Moscow libraries, so he was aware of the attitudes to children's library services prevailing in Russia. Caune was also convinced that "the safest and most accessible source of books for children would be special children's libraries", which would provide them with useful reading material and deter them from "[...] a variety of Harry Piels,³⁶ Pinkertons and Tarzans. When these are published in thin, cheap pulp booklets, they extract every *kopeck* out of children's pockets given to them for other purposes, spoiling children's tastes and sometimes even their health."³⁷

Under Caune's leadership, the Liepāja municipal library was rapidly modernised. Although it had accumulated a large collection of books (more than 12 000 volumes), this was dominated by 19th century German publications, which could not satisfy the heterogeneous audience of Liepāja library.³⁸ Consequently, the latest Latvian, Russian and German literature was purchased both from shops and private individuals, orders were placed for all Latvian periodicals, the most popular foreign newspapers and magazines. The decimal classification system and card catalogues were introduced, the lending service was adapted to the intensive flow of readers, and opening hours were significantly extended.³⁹ The renovated library opened its doors to readers on 7 June 1919 and immediately attracted great interest from local residents. By July, the library had 523 registered subscribers, of whom 61 or 12 % were children under 15 years of age.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, library attendance was expected to increase even more, so Caune suggested that "[...] a special room for children with a special selection of books and staff be separated off."⁴¹ In the autumn, the opening of a children's department became urgent, as the clamour of children – mostly of school-age – in the common reading room was disturbing adults. One reader of the *Strādnieku Avīze* (Workers' newspaper) expressed his indignation about this: "[...] the reading table is no longer a reading table, but a place where schoolchildren have come to chat and where they can enjoyably pass the time. But those of us who have come to spend the evening with purpose have to return home without having achieved anything."⁴² In order to eliminate this situation, it was stipulated that books should only be issued to children up to lunchtime; however, this was not feasible, because children often stood in line to receive literature even after the specified time limit.⁴³

Given the popularity of the library (by October 1919, the library already had 1 568 subscribers), the city council agreed to open a children's department.⁴⁴ This was opened on 16 December in the library itself, on the third level of the city council building. Children were allocated a separate room with a collection of children's literature, a subscription service and a staff member. The turnover of books was so high that

sometimes there were no Latvian books on the shelves, even though the library had purchased several copies of every Latvian children's books on the market.⁴⁵ In 1922, Caune wrote: "The lack of books in the children's department has led to great difficulties and these have not disappeared even now. [...] Although all suitable books have been bought in numerous copies, even now our children's department has no more than 404 Latvian book titles in 1 304 copies; all told there are now 2 439 books in the children's department."⁴⁶ Teacher and writer Fricis Jansons (1875–1957) explained this being due to a "real lack of children's writers", because there is only one for Latvian readers – Ernests Birznieks-Upītis (1871–1960).⁴⁷ One cannot agree with such a categorical opinion, because in the independent Republic of Latvia, children's literature was supplemented with high-quality works by many notable Latvian authors, including Rainis (1865–1929), Anna Brigadere (1861–1933), Kārlis Skalbe (1879–1945), Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877–1962) and Vilis Plūdons (1874–1940). Children's literature was published not only by the specialised *Andrejs Jesens* publishing house,⁴⁸ but also by many other publishers (Oskars Jēpe (1875–1951), Ansis Gulbis (1873–1936), Jānis Roze (1878–1942), joint stock company *Valters un Rapa*, etc.). We do not have a complete bibliography of children's literature in the independent Republic of Latvia; however, a selective analysis of Latvia's book indicators of the period allows us to conclude that there was progress in publishing children's literature (excluding textbooks): if in 1920, 20 children's books were published,⁴⁹ then by 1930 this figure was around 60.⁵⁰ This is also evidenced by the recommended *List of Books for Children and Young People* (Bērnu un jaunatnes grāmatu saraksts) compiled by the Committee for Combating Harmful Cultural Phenomena of the Ministry of Education (*Izglītības ministrijas Kaitīgu kultūras parādību apkarošanas komisija*), published in 1930 – it lists more than a thousand titles of "suitable" literature.⁵¹ In addition, the range of children's literature was supplemented by several magazines, including those with the longest publishing histories: *Andrejs Jesens. Jaunības Tekas* (Youthful Pathways, 1910–1930), *Mazās Jaunības Tekas* (Youngest Ones' Pathways 1924–1935), *Jaunais Cīrulītis* (Young Lark Chick, 1926–1934), started by the *Vārpa* publishing house and continued by the Latvian Children's Friendship Association, *Latvijas Jaunatne* (Young Latvians, 1924–1940) published by the Latvian Young People's Red Cross, etc. The first editor of *Jaunais Cīrulītis*, writer and librarian Jūlijs Krūmiņš (1889–1968), acknowledged: "If we imagine children's and young people's literature at the time we were young and compare it with that of today – what already exists and comes out year upon year – then we have to admit that a brighter sun shines on today's children and young people. The children of that time did not have a single magazine, but now – there's a whole half-dozen, and worthy, beautiful, and well-illustrated to boot."⁵²

The Children's reading room at the Latvian State Library

From 1920, the Latvian State Library (now the National Library of Latvia) was also planning to establish a children's reading room (actually a lending service), because "there was a dearth of libraries throughout Latvia, students and pupils were without books, there was a real hunger for books."⁵³ Taking over and sorting the massive amount of books from former Tsarist Russian institutions, the library was also creating a collection of children's literature that which could be offered to book-starved children.⁵⁴ Owing to the lack of suitable premises, a reading room for children (under 15 years of age) could only be opened on 1 February 1922,⁵⁵ when the library had acquired more space to accommodate its rapidly growing collection. The children's reading room was located in the city centre, in the former Vidzeme Deputy Governor's House at Jauniela 26, which had been allocated to the State Library. The rooms for children were so confined that only a lending service could be allowed, with no access to shelves. To be able to take literature home required a guarantee from a school principal; nonetheless, the response from children was enthusiastic. Over 1922/1923, 1 000 children had registered, who utilised their lending service almost 16 000 times, but by 1924/1925, more than 1 100 children visited the library 20 000 times.⁵⁶ The total volume of literature issued during the entire operation of the Children's Reading Room (up to August 1927) exceeded 83 000 units, averaging more than 20 000 volumes per year. Nevertheless, the State Library's children's reading room could not beat the performance of the Liepāja municipal library's children's department, where 2 834 readers had been registered as early as 1921 (mostly workers' children according to Caune), to whom more than 50 000 volumes had been issued.⁵⁷ As at that time, the children's department of the Liepāja municipal library only held 2 439 books, each was issued more than 20 times!⁵⁸ Caune pointed out that the Liepāja library had even been forced to give up organising story times so as not to increase the demand for children's books, which the library could not fully satisfy.⁵⁹

In the summer of 1927, State Library management decided to close its children's reading room because "[t]hanks to the solicitousness of the Cultural Foundation, each primary school has its own student library; several private associations have also opened children's reading rooms; on the other hand, the State Library holdings are severely dilapidated and costly to replenish," moreover, the "continued maintenance of the children's department would require a significant, hard-to-justify increase in the budget."⁶⁰ Owing to the high rate of issue of literature in the children's reading room, books rapidly became dilapidated and in order to maintain readers' continuing interest, annual funding was needed for the purchase of additional copies of new Latvian and foreign children's literature, staffing, bookbinding, room repairs, etc. Unfortunately, the State Library did not have enough funds for the proper maintenance of the children's reading room. With the approval of the Minister,

the reading room was closed on 9 September 1927.⁶¹ Very soon, the Rīga City Department of Education requested that the reading room's collection be allocated to the children's departments of public libraries, pointing out that children's literature was rather difficult to obtain.⁶² The collection to be handed over contained almost 1 100 books in Latvian and more than 2 000 books in Russian and German. Although the Minister of Education agreed to the handover, it most likely never happened.⁶³

Children's libraries of civic organisations

On 18–20 August 1923, the first Latvian Librarians' Congress was held in Rīga, organised by the Latvian Librarians' Association, established that spring. One of its founding and long-term board members was Caune and, at his initiative, congress participants adopted a resolution "On children's libraries and reading rooms". This emphasised that "the establishing of new, modernly equipped children's libraries is a necessity"; consequently, congress participants tasked the Librarians' Association with developing a plan for their establishment and obtaining the support of the Cultural Foundation for implementing the plan.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the children's library network project was never developed.⁶⁵ In the short period of Latvia's independence, the Cultural Foundation, founded in 1920, managed to supplement state, civic-organisation and municipal public libraries with the latest and most valuable literature for adults: between 1922 and 1928, 657 sets of literature were distributed.⁶⁶ The Cultural Foundation also funded book sets for primary, secondary and vocational school libraries. Although these were very small (about 200 books each, so a set could not be a fruitful source of reading, only an initiation of further collection development), they were dominated by fiction.⁶⁷ Overall, between 1923 and 1928, more than 1 500 sets of books and periodicals were distributed to various schools.⁶⁸

The support of the Cultural Foundation for libraries depended mainly on the initiative of their maintainers (requests had to be submitted to the Cultural Foundation) and a commitment to ensuring collection development (in accordance with Cultural Foundation requirements for minimum supplementation – 5% per year), an annual report on library operations was to be submitted.⁶⁹ The sporadic support of the Cultural Foundation for children's libraries shows that its role in promoting reading had not yet been properly assessed.

On 20 October 1924, Rīga opened its next public children's library, organised by the Latvian Children's Friends Association (*Latvijas Bērnu draugu biedrība*).⁷⁰ Its founder and director was journalist, politician, LSDSP member Hermanis Kaupiņš (1891–1971), about whom opera singer Mariss Vētra (1901–1965) wrote in his memoir *Rīga toreiz...* (Rīga Back Then...): "Hermanis Kaupiņš lived in the world of children. Hermanis Kaupiņš was addicted to theatre. He was very active in the management of the *Daile* Theatre, founded the Travelling

Theatre, the Workers' Theatre, the Rīga Theatre Museum, organised symphony concerts at Vērmānes dārzs, Arkādija and Grīziņkalns. Nothing happened in Rīga without Kaupiņš being involved, but he was dangerous only because of the Latvian Children's Friends Association and children's mornings, which he had created and managed. If Uncle Kaupiņš had decided to draw some citizen into his children's friends or show them off to the children at a children's morning event, there was no escape. Being so used to children, Hermanis Kaupiņš, without exception, addressed everybody, including those who were annoyed and aggravated, in the familiar *tu* (thou) form, as old, good and close friends. How can you call someone like that Mister Kaupiņš? He became everyone's uncle, big or small.”⁷¹ Kaupiņš had attained the support of the state, local government, as well as a civic organisation for the association's first children's library. To compile the collection, it had received funding from the Cultural Foundation (50 000 roubles or 1 000 lats) and the Latvian Refugee Re-evacuation Society (10 000 roubles). Furthermore, books had been donated by Latvian writers, publishers and other interested parties, paintings by artists, while the Rīga City Council had allocated bright, newly renovated premises in the very centre of the city, in Rīga's Old Town, for a low rent. The library met all requirements: it had separate lending service and reading room, an alphabetical and encyclopaedic catalogue (containing not only book descriptions in a systematic, alphabetical order of branches and authors, but also indexes by subject and title), the collection was arranged in accordance with the universal decimal classification, which at that time had been rarely introduced in Latvian libraries. The library had more than 2 300 books, all in Latvian. At the time, it was the largest publicly available collection of Latvian children's books in Latvia, and gained a large readership.⁷² As soon as in its first months of operation, more than 1 000 children had been registered by the library, and about 10 000 books issued to them.⁷³ In addition, the library organised story times – in less than a year, 15 such activities had taken place, each attended by about 20 children.⁷⁴ In its first years, the library received generous funding (for example, 2 000 lats in 1925), which was used mainly to supplement the collection and employ a librarian. In 1926, the library had some 3 000 books and the number of readers had almost doubled.⁷⁵

Of course, some publicly available collections of children's literature could not satisfy Rīga children's boundless demand for books. Consequently, by 1929, the Association had opened three more children's libraries. One of them was located in the premises of the former *Pie aukstās pīpes* (At the cold pipe) restaurant in Viesturdārzs (Rīga port district), in its “children's club”. This not only featured a children's literature lending service, reading room, and a separate library for parents with literature on raising children, but also a kitchen where children could get a glass of milk or a cup of cocoa.⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the society's libraries soon began to stagnate: in 1930, only 158 new acquisitions had been made across all four libraries, the total

collection being 5 500 volumes. Although the number of readers (2 484) and the issue of books were relatively high (more than 38 000 volumes), a decline could be expected because of the insufficient replenishment of the collection.⁷⁷ The stagnation was probably caused by the growing number of children's libraries run by other civic organisations and children's departments in Rīga municipal public libraries in various city districts.

In parallel with the Latvian Children's Friends Association, the children's library network was supplemented by the Latvian Children's Assistance Alliance (*Latvijas bērnu palīdzības savienība*), which brought together the largest philanthropic and pedagogic civic organisations. The Alliance's main objective was to promote and teach the proper care and upbringing of children.⁷⁸ "There is a lot of talk about body hygiene, but it is just as important to pay attention to the hygiene of the mind and soul, to take care not only of the child, but also of the chasteness and purity of its parents' thoughts and fantasies" emphasised Alliance member, agronomist Laimonis Gailītis (1885–1943).⁷⁹ To this end, in 1926, the alliance, together with other civic organisations, initiated a Commission Combating Harmful Cultural Phenomena, which censored newly published literature, identified publications that were "undesirable" for children and young people, and also compiled a list of recommended literature. The Commission achieved the adoption of a special regulation in 1927 to protect young people from "pulp and obscene" literature. Such publications were banned from being distributed through colportage, being sold in bookshops and other stores, being displayed in shop windows or other public places, being distributed through advertisements, being supplied for a fee or free of charge to persons under 18, or being held in school or young people's libraries.⁸⁰ As a result, the most important sales channels for "undesirable" literature were closed. Ensuring the availability of suitable literature selected by competent educators, the Alliance opened a number of free children's libraries, raising funds from raffles as well as donations.⁸¹ The first library and reading room was opened in Čiekurkalns in July 1925. In this library, children could not only obtain books to take home, but also spend time doing their homework in the reading room.⁸² As quickly as in October, a second children's free library and reading room was opened in a two-storey wooden mansion in Ilģuciems, Pārdaugava, and in December, shortly before Christmas, a third children's library was opened in Sarkandaugava. The collections of these libraries were small at first: 500–600 books, as well as children's magazines, which could fit into one cupboard (literature was not freely accessible). In December 1927, the Alliance's fourth children's free library and reading room was opened in the Latgale suburb. It was set up in two small, newly renovated rooms. The free library's bookcase contained: "some 400 books in Latvian and about 30 in Russian, all new and bound. Original works by and translations of the best writers. Intended for three categories of readers: children under the age of ten (picture books, fairy tales and shorter stories), older children and, for parents – essays on raising children."⁸³ In 1929, the

four libraries had a total of 2 431 readers, to whom 54 182 books were distributed. Total funding was almost 10 000 lats.⁸⁴ The figures for 1930 were gratifying: funding had increased by about 300 lats, the libraries had been supplemented with several hundred books, and magazines also ordered.⁸⁵ Although the number of readers was small: about 200 in three free libraries, more than 500 in one, utilisation was intensive: on average, each book was issued eight times.⁸⁶ So the libraries had developed a small but active readership. In addition, the Alliance's libraries had another important function: they served to promote a healthy lifestyle and combat disease, as evidenced by the systematic lectures given by medical personnel, usually concluded by slideshows or film screenings.

In 1925, the Rīga Latvian Charity Society (Rīgas Latviešu Labdarības biedrība, founded in 1867) also opened a children's free library and reading room in the Latgale suburb with the support of the Cultural Foundation. The library premises were bright, pleasant and elegantly furnished. In 1927, the collection held about 800 books, but a year later – well over a thousand.⁸⁷ From 1926, a Latvian Women's National League children's reading room also operated in the Latgale suburb, where children spent the afternoons reading or doing their homework under the guidance of a teacher.⁸⁸ The Latvian Women's National League considered that the Rīga municipality should be more actively involved in the establishment and maintenance of children's libraries.

Children's departments in Rīga municipal public libraries

Because space was too confined and staff numbers insufficient, the opening of children's departments was a slow process. The first children's department was started in City of Rīga Library No 5 (Grīziņkalns), headed by Emma Kalniņa (1879–?)⁸⁹, a teacher and literary figure, active member of the Latvian Children's Friends Association, later a member of the Ministry of Education Commission for Combating Harmful Cultural Phenomena. The children's literature collection had already been established in 1923; however, a separate room for children could only be allocated in October 1924, when the library had acquired additional space. The reading room was shared by children and adults, so children's events could only be organised on Sundays, when there were fewer adult visitors.⁹⁰ The children's literature collection contained more than 1 000 volumes (mostly in Latvian), so the younger generation responded enthusiastically: in the remaining three months of 1924, more than 900 readers under the age of 15 were registered, visiting the department 6 000 times, and 10 000 books were issued.⁹¹

The brisker opening of children's departments was expedited by the election of Caune to the Rīga City Council in 1925 (as a Social Democrat) and his active work in the Library subcommittee of the city's Education Department. Caune systematically participated in the meetings of Rīga's public library managers, where he put forward ideas for modernising the sector. As early as in January 1926, he reminded the meeting that

children's departments should be set up in libraries, and that the rational Browne Issue System should be introduced in subscription services in place of issuing registers.⁹² Library enthusiast, first chairman of the Librarians' Association (1923–1928), and LSDSP member Teodors Līvontāls (1882–1956) was also re-elected to the city council.⁹³ He called for the adoption of the US experience, where “the children's department has now become a simply necessary component of the public free library, and any library without such a department is already considered to have been left behind, i.e., one which is not at the top of its game.”⁹⁴ Līvontāls was a deputy mayor of Rīga from September 1923 to April 1931. In this senior position, he promoted, as far as possible, decisions favourable to the city's libraries.

At that time, the city's Library No 7 had the best preconditions for establishing a children's department, the organisation of which – in September 1925 – was entrusted to Voldemārs Rubenis (1903–1942), a fellow believer of Caune and his former colleague in the Liepāja municipal library. A highly regarded, recently built, four-storey masonry building in Ilģuciems, Pārdaugava was chosen as the library's home. The second and third levels were allocated to the library, and the owner allowed the premises to be adapted to the library's requirements. The plans for the refurbishment⁹⁵ immediately included a separate room for a children's department, which was opened at the end of 1926, when the library was allowed to hire an additional staff member.

The children and young people's department at the City of Rīga Library No 9 (the fourth in the Rīga public library system), which was opened on 10 January 1931 with a special ceremony, is also worthy of mention. Unlike other Rīga municipal libraries, which were sited in rented premises, a standalone two-storey wooden building was purchased at Vidzeme šoseja 5 in the Vidzeme suburb (now Brīvības gatve 206).⁹⁶ From the beginning of the century, it had been the *Auseklis* (Morning Star) people's centre of the Rīga Latvian Abstinence Society, which also housed a library and reading room. In 1926, the building was in rather dilapidated condition because of its damaged roof. Funded by the municipality, the building was repaired and modernised: electricity connected, tiled stoves, plumbing and wastewater systems installed.⁹⁷

The children's and young people's department at Library No 9, managed by teacher Lidija Kokle (1892–1992)⁹⁸, stood out not only for its beautiful, well-appointed premises, but also for its active cooperation with literary figures.⁹⁹ This was facilitated by the extensive contacts the manager J. Krūmiņš had established with literary figures. One Sunday each month, young readers were invited to children's mornings, where well-known writers talked about various literary issues. The events were well attended – for example, the first activity, dedicated to Jānis Rainis, was attended by about 150 children.¹⁰⁰ The premises turned out to be too small for such a large influx of the latest generation of readers, so it was necessary to expand the library. In 1932, Krūmiņš asked the Rīga City Council to improve the plans for extending the library, adapting

the manager's live-in apartment to the needs of the children's and young people's department, as well as raising the ceiling to make the library lighter and roomier.¹⁰¹ The request was granted and in 1933, a two-storey masonry extension was built.¹⁰² This was the only newly built library building in first period of independence of the Republic of Latvia.

By the time of the first Soviet occupation on 17 June 1940, children's and young people's departments had been opened at all ten Rīga municipal public libraries. The municipality had supplied them with staff, separate rooms with facilities suitable for children, and provided them with secure funding. However, there was no clear strategy for the optimal management of reading. Municipal library instructor and author Ernests Birznieks-Upītis admitted: "Compared to earlier times, children's literature is now very wide-ranging, but the young people demanding novels are a concern to us. We must provide them too, but only the very best ones. This is a difficult task for our librarians. At the current working intensity [...], staff don't even have time to look at them."¹⁰³ How do we ensure that an inappropriate or harmful book does not fall into the hands of a child or young person? Should the most suitable literature be marked with a special symbol? Kokle suggested supplementing children's departments with the most appropriate literature from the adult department – this proposal was also supported by Rubenis, Library No 4 manager and teacher Roberts Buclers (1876–?), Library No 6 manager Jānis Rusmanis (1892–1968) and others. Buclers pointed out that libraries could only indirectly influence the choice of readers by issuing worthy books; moreover, libraries do not even hold any "corrupting" literature.¹⁰⁴ It was concluded that reading management required lists of recommended literature to be compiled by the librarians themselves.

Library managers agreed that children's departments should be supplemented with the most suitable adult literature, but this meant that the budget given to children's departments needed to be significantly increased. Unfortunately, the global economic crisis, which reached Latvia in 1930, hindered the development of children's departments as a permanent source of high-quality reading matter. Thanks to the crisis, people sought solace in literature, library attendance increased, but libraries were unable to meet the demand because of their budget restrictions. Even the head of the city's Department of Young People and Culture, Jānis Aberbergs (1878–1941), admitted that the dearth of books in libraries was a huge problem.¹⁰⁵ He suggested refraining from the acquisition of "low-value trifles" not fearing the loss of seekers of "lightweight content", the main task of libraries was to "provide as much as possible to serious readers."¹⁰⁶ Consequently, each new edition was exhaustively discussed at municipal library board meetings to determine if and in how many copies a work should be acquired. After the *coup d'état* of 15 May 1934, the emphasis on "worthy" literature as opposed to the "low-value" literature of previous years only intensified. "Particularly great interest in books in general has arisen, which has always existed among the

Latvian people, but has never reached today's heights, when every worthy book – even relatively large and expensive ones – is sold out within a few months,” stressed educator Longīns Ausējs (1885–1942 or 1943).¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis (1877–1942), the publishing of books did not reach annual levels prior to the crisis of 1927–1929. Discussions about worthy literature also subsided in the library sector, as the most active debaters (Aberbergs, Caune, Rubenis, Birznieks-Upītis, Kokle, Rusmanis and Kalniņa) were dismissed because of their left-wing political views.

Children's services in regional public libraries

As already mentioned, municipal public libraries in regions were mostly established only after the independence proclamation. With the support of the Cultural Foundation, each organisation involved receiving some 500 books. In January 1925, municipalities maintained less than a hundred of Latvia's 652 public libraries, and most of these had not even been able to significantly supplement the set of books provided by the Cultural Foundation.¹⁰⁸ Of the 20 municipal libraries in cities thirteen could be considered to be in the public domain, as the remainder charged fees for the use of their collection, and some (for example, in Cēsis) also imposed a security deposit.¹⁰⁹ By 1930, the number of municipal public libraries had increased considerably (to 161),¹¹⁰ but funding was still insufficient for full-fledged activities: around 450 000 lats in total, of which more than 360 000 lats was accounted for by the Rīga library budget.¹¹¹ Even in municipal libraries, 40% of staff worked without pay.¹¹² In these circumstances, it was not possible to set up separate children's departments, which would require additional resources to the existing funding. This situation did not change significantly in the following years,¹¹³ even though several municipal libraries gained new premises and permanent funding. For example, the Jelgava municipal library, which was moved to a large three-storey building adapted to the needs of the library in 1937, opening a separate reading room for children and young people; nevertheless, there was still no self-contained children's department. Unfortunately, the library burned down during the Second World War.

This does not mean that municipal public libraries did not have children's literature or that children could not read in them. For example, at the Daugavpils Library, children could obtain literature to take home by submitting a guarantee from a parent or teacher.¹¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

In Latvia, as in other European countries and the US, the emergence of children's departments at public libraries and standalone children's libraries was facilitated by a specific ideological context: the concern of

politicians, educators and librarians about the widespread distribution of pulp literature, especially among children and young people and the desire to protect the younger generation from its harmful effects. In Latvia, as in Sweden and Russia, the LSDSP came to the fore in the fight against pulp literature, and a number of party members initiated and organised the first children's libraries in Latvia. They were designed not only to encourage children to read, but also to steer their reading in the direction desired by maintainers of the libraries (children would only read "good" and "appropriate" literature). What was this literature, "good" and "appropriate" for children, and what methods were used to promote it in libraries and outside would be a topic worthy of further research. What impact has the disparaging attitude of teachers and critics to detective fiction had on the development of literature and publishing? Did the opening of children's libraries and children's libraries in public libraries reduce its popularity among children and young people? Did Latvian minorities (Russians, Germans, Jews, etc.) also have children's libraries maintained by civic organisations? These questions also remain to be answered.

Despite the covert censorship function of children's departments and children's libraries, they were well attended and their books utilised very intensively. Nevertheless, a comprehensive network of children's departments or permanent children's libraries was not established in Latvia, as most libraries did not yet have consistent and sufficient funding for collection development, staff remuneration, or the maintenance of their premises. Children's departments, which in a sense are libraries within libraries, would require additional funding, which, for libraries outside Rīga, would be almost impossible to obtain. Children's libraries were only established in Rīga, funded by the municipality and civic organisations; later children's departments were also instituted in public libraries. Although their operation was hampered by economic difficulties, it is safe to say that, in terms of the development of a children's library network (each municipal public library had its own children's department), Rīga was approaching the level of US cities. The lack of permanent children's libraries or children's departments in public libraries in the regions clearly shows the huge disparity between the level of library development in the capital and the provinces. Voldemārs Caune's modernised Liepāja library can be considered an exception, a singular phenomenon in the Latvian context. It evolved into a sector leader, mainly thanks to Caune's professional qualifications, remarkable enthusiasm, and, undeniably, the support of his colleagues in the LSDSP. Until the 1934 *coup d'état*, the party had significant representation in both Liepāja and Rīga city councils.

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- 75 Latvijas bērnu draugu biedrība [Latvian Children's Friends Association]. *Ārpusskolas Izglītības Kongresu Padomes Biļetens Kultūrdzīves Veidošanai*, 1926, No 1, p. 30.
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 - 98 She only worked at Library No 9 for a short time, as she was transferred to Library No 2 in January 1933. After the *coup d'état* of 15 May 1934, she was dismissed from the municipality. Lidija Kokle and her husband Rūdolfs Kokle (1888–1972) were active in the LSDSP.
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