



# The issue of social functions of history in the periodicals of Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s

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*Abstract.* The article is based on such periodicals as *Monthly Magazine of the Ministry of Education (Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts)*, *Our Future (Mūsu nākotne)* and *Educator (Audzinātājs)*, which were published in Latvia during the 1920s and 1930s. The article addresses the issue of social functions of history and its value in school education as reflected in the interpretation of politicians, professional historians and pedagogical community which is demonstrated in the mentioned periodicals. The issue is discussed in a diachronic context taking into consideration that the first independent Republic of Latvia experienced two periods: the period of democratic parliamentary republic and the period of authoritarian regime (after the coup of Kārlis Ulmanis in May, 1934).

*Keywords:* social functions of history, school historical education, periodicals, citizens, civic position, patriotism, patriotic education.

*Anotacija.* Šio straipsnio pagrindas – XX a. 3–4 dešimtmečiuose Latvijoje leisti periodiniai leidiniai, tokie kaip *Švietimo ministerijos mėnraštis (Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts)*, *Mūsų ateitis (Mūsų nākotne)* ir *Pedagogas (Audzinātājs)*. Remiantis politikų, profesionalių istorikų ir pedagogų bendruomenės požiūriu, išreikštu minėtuose periodiniuose leidiniuose, straipsnyje analizuojamas socialinių istorijos funkcijų klausimas ir jų reikšmė mokyklos mokymo procese. Šis klausimas aptariamas diachroniniame kontekste, atsižvelgiant į tai, kad pirmoji nepriklausoma Latvijos Respublika skirstoma į du laikotarpius: parlamentinės demokratinės respublikos ir autoritarinio režimo (po Karlio Ulmanio perversmo 1934 m. gegužės mėn.)

*Esminiai žodžiai:* socialinės istorijos funkcijos, istorijos mokymas mokyklose, periodiniai leidiniai, piliečiai, pilietinė pozicija, patriotizmas, patriotinis ugdymas.

## Introduction

According to Karl Jaspers, the existence of any society depends on education because it forms the new generation<sup>1</sup>. Thus, education becomes a state affair and always serves social goals, and it is consciously directed towards the formation of the definite personality type<sup>2</sup>. The formation of the definite system of education is the result of the appropriate education policy which is a request of the existing society. But this policy, by demonstrating the condition of society, simultaneously plays a crucial role in both the development of the views of pupils and the public consciousness as a whole. First of all, it is connected with history education.

The activities of organization of school history education in the 1920s and 1930s in Latvia were a part of the formation of a new school of the Latvian Republic (*Law on Latvian Education Institutions, 1919*) and so were the transformations in the field of education after the coup in 1934 (*Law on Education, 1934*).

In the 1920s and 1930s history as a school subject was in the center of attention of teachers and the public in all European countries. In the opinion of English teachers of that time, this school subject, like no other, provided excellent opportunities for character development in young people and had a unique educational value which differed from the entirely informational value<sup>3</sup>. School history education can be the main method and the primary tool for the formation of the definite view of the world. In this context the question about the contents of history courses, the place of national history in the process of teaching and its interrelation with world history took a special place in European countries and was discussed in conferences and in the pages of various periodicals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the conditions of construction of a new democratic state a special value was given to the teaching of history. Its goals, perspectives and content specificity were determined by the socio-political and economic conditions of that period and the dominant pedagogical ideas in the country at that time. Therefore, school history education was rightfully in the focus of attention of political institutes and the society of Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s.

The materials of such periodicals as *Monthly Magazine of the Ministry of Education (Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts)*, *Our Future (Mūsu nākotne)* and *Educator (Audzinātājs)* help to grasp the idea about the role of the pedagogical community in the discussion of the questions related to the teaching of history in school. The range of questions addressed in the publications covered all aspects of school education, including the teaching of history: the goals of learning history in school, the contents of the course and the principles of selection of training materials, the organization of the learning

<sup>1</sup> JASPERS, Karl. *The Origin and Goal of History*. New Haven, CT: London Yale University Press, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> MANNHEIM, Karl. *Sociology as Political Education*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> The planning of history syllabus for schools. *The Historical Association. L.*, 1944, p. 18.

process and so on. The analysis of the abovementioned materials gives the notion about the position of historians and the pedagogical community on these questions.

## The concept of the social functions of history during the parliamentary period (the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s)

From the first years of implementation of the Law on Education adopted in 1919 there was a question on the agenda on the conceptualization of school history education, the definition of its content as a whole and the transformation of the content in accordance with educational plans. This, in turn, was connected to the understanding of the subject of history and the anticipation of the goals of its learning in school. As the question of the formation of national identity in the process of the development of the young state was very significant, such attention to this question seems logical. As regards this connection, it should be noted that the educational role of the school course of history is practically always emphasized and the opinions of historians and authors of articles on the question of the place of history in the schooling process are very similar, regardless of the time they were written.

One of the first statements about the purpose of school course belongs to historian Arveds Švābe, who considered that history could promote the formation of citizens for a new state because the knowledge of history *would help to eradicate the spirit of a servant... (there was much of it in Latvians) in future citizens, and at the same time it would teach to respect themselves and their history*<sup>4</sup>. In 1923 Ventmalnieks noted that it was a sacred duty for everyone who loved his nation to know his history, so a patriot of the country had to learn history<sup>5</sup>.

In 1924 (the most productive year in terms of publications connected with school history teaching) Pēteris Dreimanis' article *Work of a Teacher of History in Primary and Secondary Schools*<sup>6</sup> and Jānis Bērziņš' article *The Principle of Work in a History Lesson*<sup>7</sup> appeared in two journals at practically the same time. The publications reflected a different understanding of a few questions of school history education in a concentrated form.<sup>8</sup> Comparing the positions of the authors, we can state that the difference appears in the tasks of this school subject formulated by them. While Dreimanis emphasized the educational moment of history lessons, Bērziņš put the learning tasks first by not excluding the value of history in the education of a citizen. He focused on the specificity

<sup>4</sup> ŠVĀBE, Arveds. Latvijas vēsture. *Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts*, 1923, Nr. 1. 3. lpp.

<sup>5</sup> VENTMALNIEKS, A. *Latvijas vēsture*. Valmiera–Cēsis: K. Dūnis, 1923.

<sup>6</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vēstures skolotāja darbs pamatskolā un vidusskolā. *Mūsu nākotne*, 1924, Nr. 9, 259. lpp.

<sup>7</sup> BĒRZIŅŠ, Jānis. Darba principi vēstures stundās. *Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts*, 1924, Nr. 3.

<sup>8</sup> These articles are interesting because both authors were professional historians, taught history at a university and at the same time paid a lot of attention to its teaching in school, as evidenced in several articles in different publications – *Methodology* in the case of Dreimanis.

of historical knowledge, noting that it was based on *the understanding achieved through mental operations of pupils* but not through *sense perception and its focusing on one or the other form of activities* as it seemed to Dreimanis. The understanding of the tasks of the school subject of history by both historians defined their vision of its basic purpose: for Bērziņš it meant *to follow the logic* both of humanity and different nations; Dreimanis, in turn, associated them with common goals of pedagogy – *the formation of a personality and the development of moral qualities*. Following this approach, history is a method which helps to realize the comprehensive development of pupils: an intensive activity of pupils during the learning process must be targeted at the acquisition of different kinds of experiences and associations as a result of their acquaintance with the life of the nation in the past. It should be noted that the position of Dreimanis dominated both in history teaching and in the process of education as a whole. The historian formulated his vision of the issue in his work *Methodology of History* in 1924<sup>9</sup>.

To sum up the articles addressing the issues of education, we can state that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the educational function of history was mainly associated with the feeling of love to the nation and the country: according to the prevailing view, the school course of history had to promote patriotic education.

## The changes in the understanding of the purpose of school history education after the coup of Ulmanis in May, 1934

A similar statement found its realization in the 1930s. After the coup of Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934, the role of history *in raising the awareness of the qualities of the nation* was especially emphasized under the conditions of the authoritarian regime<sup>10</sup>. Thus, in the first Congress of Latvian Teachers of History held in 1934 professor Ludvigs Adamovičs (Minister of Education at that time) gave an address to the participants of the congress inviting them to look at history from the position of Latvians. *In order to bring the soul and heart of pupils to the culture of the nation, it is important to teach them to refer to the past of their nation*. The idea of national history as promoting the unity of the nation<sup>11</sup> became very popular. In 1934 Ulmanis, addressing the participants of the Congress of Teachers of History, encouraged teachers to make their contribution for *every history lesson to become a confirmation of the faith... in the nation and the state because it is the*

<sup>9</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. *Vēstures Metodika*. Rīga: Gulbis, 1923.

<sup>10</sup> ADAMOVIČS, Ludvigs. Latviešu vēsturnieka un vēstures skolotāja uzdevumi: Izglītības ministra atklāšanas runa pirmajā Latvijas vēstures skolotāju kongresa 1934. g. 29. jul. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II.

<sup>11</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Nācija un vēsture. *Audzinātājs*, 1938, Nr. 10. 505. lpp.

*state that helps to keep forbearance, strengthens the identity and glorifies honour, generates the faith of people in their own strength and the ability of the nation to exist*<sup>12</sup>.

In 1935 and 1938 Dreimanis' published two articles where he wrote about the value of the spirit of the nation in the education of new citizens<sup>13</sup>. The author argued that while their native land, mother tongue and surrounding environment strengthened the spirit of the nation, history contributed to the strengthening of national identity. Therefore, *the nation exists only where its representatives are familiar with the psyche and specificities of their nation in a historical perspective and realize their unity*<sup>14</sup>. According to the author, it is history that helps to understand *the properties of the mindset of the nation* and promotes the birth of emotions<sup>15</sup>. A similar approach can be observed in the works of a number of historians, for example, Augusts Tentelis' articles *The Role of History in Revitalized Latvia (Vēstures loma atjaunotajā Latvijā)*<sup>16</sup> and Jānis Čermak's – *Emotions in Teaching History*<sup>17</sup>. As if summing up everything that was said before, in 1937 Ludvigs Adamovičs noted that the purpose of history was the strengthening of the national identity of Latvians<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to the promotion of patriotism through history teaching, which was understood mainly as the expression of love for one's country and people, the publications under analysis paid much attention to the role of history in citizenship education. The articles often presented it as an activity of a specific person for the benefit of his state. Hence, according to Nikolais Viksniņš, the learning of history is necessary if a person wants to become a worthy member of society but it is only possible through *familiarization with the fate of the nation by empathizing with it: the understanding of the events of modern life is impossible without the understanding of the past*. Nevertheless, it is possible when a person is acquainted with the beliefs of ancestors, their traditions and morality<sup>19</sup> because his motherland and homeland can only love and respect the person who took into himself its (motherland's) image of culture, is acquainted with its nature, achievements of culture, and sensations in the past. In this case, the understanding of the past is moved into the sphere of morality; a person who got the awareness of the past has the right (moral right) to participate in the changes of the present. It should be noted that Dreimanis, speaking about the teaching of history as far back as 1925, underlined that the aim of history teaching in schools was to form in young men the idea of spiritual and moral life in order to strengthen a certain lifestyle, a position in life. It must help a pupil understand the

<sup>12</sup> Kārļa Ulmaņa uzruna Latvijas vēstures skolotāju kongresa dalībniekiem. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II, p. 29. 3. lpp.

<sup>13</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vēsture kā nacionāli patriotiskas audzināšanas faktors. *Audzinātājs*, 1935, Nr. 2. 69. lpp.

<sup>14</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Nācija un vēsture. *Audzinātājs*, 1938, Nr. 10. 505. lpp.

<sup>15</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vēsture kā nacionāli patriotiskas audzināšanas faktors. *Audzinātājs*, 1935, Nr. 2. 71. lpp.

<sup>16</sup> TENTEELIS, Augusts. Vēstures loma atjaunotajā Latvijā. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II. 29. lpp.

<sup>17</sup> ČERMAKS, Jānis. Pārdzīvojums vēstures mācībā. *Audzinātājs*, 1938, Nr. 3. 150. lpp.

<sup>18</sup> ADAMOVIČS, Ludvigs. Pamatskolu Latvijas vēstures programma un mācības grāmatas. *Audzinātājs*, 1937, Nr. 3. 82. lpp.

<sup>19</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Nācija un vēsture. *Audzinātājs*, 1938, Nr. 10. 505. lpp.

life of ancestors and find the appropriate usage to his/her thoughts and emotions. Thus, the school course of history must help form individual abilities which are appropriate to the moral norms and demands of life<sup>20</sup> and *assist to serve to life purposes*. That is why, as noted by Viksniņšs, the knowledge of historical facts was important and necessary for every member of society<sup>21</sup>.

Similar to the above is the definition of the purpose of history in Jānis Lieknis' publication *Memo for History Lessons*<sup>22</sup> where he says his word about the role of history in the formation of outlook in pupils. In turn, Dreimanis' publications *Purposes and the Method of Teaching History in Gymnasium*<sup>23</sup> and *The Principles of Selection of Historical Materials*<sup>24</sup> set a task to train pupils to understand life as determined in the economic and political life of the country through the study of history. Lieknis and Pommers underline the role of history education in the rapprochement of nations as well, noting *that history can acquaint us with our nation and with the features of relations with our neighbours and friends*<sup>25</sup>.

It should also be noted that, in connection with school history teaching, in 1933 Dreimanis raised a question about the role of a personality in public life. In the following years this question would become the dominant one. It was emphasized that through history pupils must evaluate *the importance of a personality in the life of the nation*<sup>26</sup>.

The understanding of the purpose of the school course of history is not limited to the above. Viksniņšs, speaking about the educational value of teaching history, pays attention to *the aesthetic aspect* of history teaching. According to the author, it makes an impact on pupils' senses, resulting in the development of *humanism and altruism*<sup>27</sup>; *it is possible to limit such a human quality as egoism and to develop a sense of unity among generations and the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the common good*<sup>28</sup>.

However, despite the attention paid by historians and teachers to the educational function of history in a number of articles, the authors saw the purpose of the lessons of history in the intellectual development of pupils and the formation of the specific skills in them.

<sup>20</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Daltonas plāns vēstures stundās pamatskolā. *Izglītības Ministrijas mēnešraksts*, 1925, Nr. 3. 76. lpp.

<sup>21</sup> VILKIŅŠS, Nikolais. Modernās vēstures metodikas pamatprincipi. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II. 136. lpp.

<sup>22</sup> LIEKNIS, Jānis. Piezīmes vēstures stundām. *Mūsu nākotne*, 1933, Nr. 5. 370. lpp.

<sup>23</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vēstures mācīšanas mērķi un raksturs ģimnāzijā. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II. 168. lpp.

<sup>24</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vietas izvēles principi vēsturē. *Audzinātājs*, 1933, Nr. 1. 11. lpp.

<sup>25</sup> LIEKNIS, Jānis. Piezīmes vēstures stundām. *Mūsu nākotne*, 1933, Nr. 5. 370. lpp.

<sup>26</sup> DREIMANIS, Pēteris. Vietas izvēles principi vēsturē. *Audzinātājs*, 1933, Nr. 1. 11. lpp.

<sup>27</sup> VILKIŅŠS, Nikolais. Modernās vēstures metodikas pamatprincipi. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II. 137. lpp.

<sup>28</sup> VILKIŅŠS, Nikolais. Modernās vēstures metodikas pamatprincipi. *Pagātne un tagadne*. Rīga: Vēstures skolotāju biedrība, 1938, krāj. II. 145 lpp.



Thus, to summarize the above publications, it can be stated that the tasks of the school course of history were not confined to the educational function alone: its fulfillment was possible through realization of specific tasks of the school curriculum targeted at the acquisition of the necessary skills in the learning process. This connection leads to the conclusion that be it the sphere of intellectual knowledge (ideas, laws and so on) or the sphere of direct knowledge (sensual – sensation, perception and so on, forming the psychological structure of knowledge) or skills, the focus was already set – education through history. As noted by Viksniņšs, though it is important *to teach the young generation to think about historical facts trying to understand their interconnections* in the teaching of history, it is necessary for pupils *to experience the fateful moments of their nation* and thus *to develop their firm intention to work for the benefit of their nation, while strengthening their personality in the process.*

## Conclusions

The analysis of the publications of the 1920s and 1930s leads to the conclusion that under the conditions of development of a national country a special emphasis was put on the educational role of history, in particular in the formation of civic consciousness and patriotism. However, the understanding of the educational function of history was uncertain during the 1920s and 1930s. Before the coup of 1934 the education of civic consciousness was considered primary and meant the formation of an active civic position which was necessary to become an active participant in the *construction of a new national state*. Under the conditions of authoritarian regime after 1934 the understanding of patriotism underwent certain changes: the necessity of an active reaction to the coup and a critical perception of the events was replaced with the trust in the proclaimed truth. The dominant idea of patriotic education rested on the love to everything connected to the native land and the selfless willingness to sacrifice everything for it. It means the promotion of patriotism based on emotional affection to everything that includes the concept of *Homeland*.

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## Comments

1. These articles are interesting because both authors were professional historians, taught history at a university and at the same time paid a lot of attention to its teaching in school, as evidenced in several articles in different publications – *Methodology* in the case of Dreimanis.

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## Socialinių istorijos funkcijų klausimas Latvijos periodiniuose leidiniuose XX a. 3–4 dešimtmečiuose

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## Santrauka

Remiantis publikacijomis, paskelbtomis įvairiuose XX a. 3–4 dešimtmečiuose Latvijoje leistuose periodiniuose leidiniuose, pranešime „Socialinių istorijos funkcijų klausimas Latvijos periodiniuose leidiniuose XX a. 3–4 dešimtmečiuose“ analizuojamas istorikų, politikų ir pedagogų socialinių istorijos funkcijų supratimas. Klausimas tiriamas diachroniniu aspektu, atsižvelgiant į sociopolitinius parlamentinės demokratinės respublikos (1918–1934) ir autoritarinio režimo laikotarpio (po Karlio Ulmanio perversmo 1934 m. gegužės mėn.) procesus. Šis požiūris padeda nustatyti, kurie politiniai pokyčiai valstybėje daro įtaką idėjoms apie istorijos paskirtį mokyklinio ugdymo ir socialinės sąmonės formavimo kontekste.

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