

LIVONIAN IN THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Gunta Kļava, Valts Ernštreits

University of Latvia, LV

gunta.klava@lu.lv, valts.ernstreits@lu.lv

Abstract. In the context of endangered languages, the linguistic landscape is viewed as an effective way of expressing the symbolic value of a language and enhancing language awareness. It is an area where Livonian has been present only sporadically and with the activity of community members, their supporters, and local institutions over time. This article describes the path of Livonian to a more pronounced presence in the linguistic landscape and its possible significance in the language revitalisation process. This article also describes the laws defining the status and use of Livonian in the public space in Latvia as well as Livonian language practice, including a historical overview of the presence of Livonian in the linguistic landscape. This article also identifies the path for the inclusion of Livonian on official road signs, touching upon the formal and substantive arguments of institutions as well as providing insight into the necessity for the use of Livonian in the public space and the role of the linguistic landscape as a significant input both for language awareness in the community and for the strengthening of understanding of the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the general public.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, road signs, endangered languages, language revitalisation, Livonian

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1. Introduction

In the context of endangered languages, the linguistic landscape is viewed as an effective way of expressing the symbolic value of a language, but also of broader changes in language beliefs and ideology and linguistic attitudes in society. The presence of a language in the linguistic landscape serves as a signal of collective identity and equality between the endangered language and the dominant language in society (Dołowy-Rybińska & Hornsby 2021: 166). For endangered languages, language visibility in the linguistic landscape plays an important role

through its symbolic rather than functional aspects (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006: 10), thus, also creating potential stimuli for the preservation of the language in the community (including for both documentation and revitalisation). This also applies to Livonian, which is one of the most endangered languages in the world (Moseley 2010) and the language of Latvia's indigenous people with its status defined in Latvian law (the State Language Law, the Law on the Free Development of Latvia's National and Ethnic Groups and the Right to Cultural Autonomy, etc.).

One of the characteristic features of endangered languages is a lack of use of the language, which is closely linked to the small number of speakers, limited intergenerational transmission of the language, and many other factors leading to the extinction of languages. Thus, it is the visibility of a language in the linguistic landscape, which is one of the sociolinguistic domains (Spolskis 2009a: 89) that can become an effective means for stimulating the self-confidence of the already endangered language community and supporting language revitalisation. Therefore, the functional aspect of a public sign, i.e., to provide information or directions in a language that is unknown to and perhaps not even recognised by the absolute majority of the recipients of this information, becomes less important than the symbolic value of using the endangered language on signs (Spolsky 2009b: 33).

This article examines the current visibility of Livonian as an indigenous language in the linguistic landscape of historical Livonian settlements, focusing mainly on the area that was populated by the Livonians until the 1950s, namely, the northwestern coast of Latvia. This article also discusses the existing legal framework relevant to the visibility of the Livonian language and the process of implementing this legal framework, focusing especially on the idea of installing official bilingual road signs (i.e., in the official – Latvian – and indigenous – Livonian – language) in historical Livonian areas. The purpose of this article is also to formulate the benefits that the inclusion of Livonian in the public space can bring both to the preservation and revitalisation of the Livonians as a critically endangered indigenous community and in the development of the Livonian Coast, which is still one of the most remote regions of Latvia.

2. Methodology

The linguistic landscape, as it was first described by Landry and Bourhis (1997), consists of all publicly visible written words and icons on public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, road directions, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings. All of these aspects combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. This article will look at written language use in the public sphere, as it is a component of public signage that can represent less used, indigenous, and other smaller languages in the context of official language use in the state. In the current study, we are discussing signs featuring written text (direction signs, official signage on roads, names of households, cemetery inscriptions, tourism signs, names of enterprises and institutions, etc.). Only physical signage is discussed, as the use of Livonian in cyberspace would be another broader topic.

This article is based on data obtained during recent years as part of a number of field studies¹ using in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation methods as well as from the authors' involvement in the Livonian language revitalisation process and community efforts to sustain and develop the Livonian language and linguistic landscape. Such involvement is inevitable for critically endangered languages with extremely meagre resources available for research and revitalisation.

As any visual representation of Livonian is rare and therefore significant to the community, any fairly permanent appearance of the language – such as published text, collected data, or public signs – is noted in published sources (media, research articles, monographs, etc.) or in correspondence or interviews with community members or others involved in the language maintenance process. It should be noted that in this context, the absence of a mention is not an indication of the

1 Kļava 2019; Šuvcāne & Ernštreits 2018; The Fundamental and applied research project “Documenting and Mapping Livonian Place Names and Creating an Official Place Name Register”; the postdoctoral project “Applying the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages to Livonian: a New Opportunity for Endangered Languages”; the project “Returning the Voice to Cultural Landscapes: Narratives, Perspectives and Practices of Marginalized Intangible Cultural Heritage” of the joint programming initiative “Cultural Heritage and Global Change: A New Challenge for Europe” implemented by the University of Latvia Livonian Institute.

possible existence of other unknown appearances of the language, but rather indicates an actual absence of such representation.

It is also important to note that the primary area where the Livonian linguistic landscape is observed – the Livonian Coast – extends for almost 100 km, is sparsely populated (fewer than 1000 inhabitants; 700 of them in Kolka), and lacks infrastructure, e.g., the Livonian Coast has only 1 gas station (in Kolka), 5 shops (2 of them in Kolka), 3 cafés (2 of them in Kolka and 2 of them only open for the summer season), 1 Livonian Community house, 1 community centre, 1 culture house, 1 parish administration (all of them in Kolka), and several guest houses and other tourist facilities.

As the first documentation of the Livonian linguistic landscape, this article describes the current situation in the field and recent processes in expanding the use of Livonian in the linguistic landscape. It also tries to avoid comparison with other endangered language communities (e.g., the Sámi languages, the Seto language, etc.), as the historical situation of the Livonian areas is rather different due to the Livonians being an exiled language community and their historical home region no longer their main inhabited area (see Section 3). Therefore, it is not yet clear whether any existing model found in Northern Europe can be applied.

3. The role of Livonian in Latvia

Livonian played a significant role in the formation of Latvian and its variants when Latvian was expanding into the extensive territories inhabited by the Livonians in Vidzeme, Kurzeme, and Zemgale. As a result, Livonian influenced the sound, grammar, and vocabulary of Standard Latvian as well as the development of its variants. The most visible traces of the Livonian language in Latvian are, e.g., the Livonic dialect of Vidzeme and Kurzeme and many Livonian place names (Rudzīte 1994: 289).

Although Livonian linguistic and intangible heritage can still be seen in almost the entire area historically inhabited by the Livonians, it is most pronounced where Livonian remained in use the longest, i.e., northern Vidzeme – in the historic district of Metsepole where Livonian could be heard until the mid-19th century (Wiedemann 1861: IX) – and in northern Kurzeme – in 14 sparsely populated (the number of visitors

increases only during the summer tourist season) coastal fishing villages from Oviši to Ģipka,² in an area historically referred to by the Livonians as *Rānda* ‘the Coast’ and known presently in Latvia as ‘the Livonian Coast’ (Ernštreits 2019: 105).

The historic Livonian area was affected by a series of severe upheavals during the 20th century – i.e., the two world wars, the deportations, emigration, the 1950s Soviet border regime, which forced the Livonian community to move to other parts of Latvia. This led to a decline in the number of Livonians and also Livonian language knowledge. Despite these events, the Livonian Coast, which was the last area densely inhabited by the Livonians, still maintains a very close connection with the modern Livonian community (see Ernštreits 2019: 109). A part of the Livonian community also resides in this area permanently or seasonally.

The Livonian Coast hosts the main traditional events of the Livonian community, e.g., the Livonian Festival, Livonian Flag Day, the ceremonial spring “Bird Waking”, etc., as well as activities connected with acquisition of Livonian language and cultural heritage. Examples of these activities include the “Mierlinkizt” summer youth school, which takes place every year and is intended to promote Livonian identity among young people in the Livonian community, and the International Livonian Summer University, which takes place every four to five years and is intended for current and future researchers of Livonian language and culture. Moreover, in 2019, Latvia’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage mentioned the Livonian language in its description of the “Livonian cultural space”, describing it as a pervasive element that connects various expressions of traditional and modern Livonian culture in a unified cultural process (Ernštreits 2019: 105).

2 For easier reference, Latvian versions of Livonian place names are used throughout the current article.

4. Legal framework for the use of Livonian

When thinking about the use of languages in the linguistic landscape, the most important aspect that makes Livonian stand out among the languages used in Latvia (and more broadly in the European Union) is the indigenous status ascribed to the Livonians and the Livonian language in a number of Latvian laws. It was first defined in the Law of the Republic of Latvia on the Free Development of Latvia's National and Ethnic Groups and the Right to Cultural Autonomy – adopted in 1991, the preamble of which states that “the Republic of Latvia is home to the Latvian nation, an ancient indigenous people – the Livonians, as well as national and ethnic groups” (Law 1991). The status of Livonian is singled out in Section 4 of the State Language Law: “The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection, and development of the Livonian language as the language of the indigenous (autochthonous) population” (Law 1999). The Law on Latvian Historical Lands adopted in 2021 confirms the status of the Livonians as indigenous in both the preamble (“In the historical lands of Latvia, the Latvian nation was formed on the basis of the culture and language of the Curonian, Latgalian, Selonian, and Semigallian peoples as well as the ancient indigenous people – the Livonians”) and in several of its sections (Law 2021).

The status of Livonian as an indigenous language means that Livonian is different from any other language or variety used in the territory of Latvia, including Latvian and all of its varieties. In the context of the current languages in Latvia, it is not directly comparable to other languages or their varieties – neither to ethnic minority languages, nor to the situations or experiences of Latvian varieties – due to differences in positioning, the language rights perspective, conditions for vitality, and competition among languages (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau 2015, Pietikäinen et al. 2011, Druviete & Kļava 2018: 135–139).

The status of Livonian as an indigenous language also means that the use of Livonian in the linguistic landscape is viewed in the context of the needs of the Livonian community and the preservation of its identity, traditional and modern Livonian cultural processes, ensuring the cultural diversity of Latvia, and tourism as well as regional development. However, the indigenous status of Livonian also means that its use must be viewed in the context of Latvian state law and the international obligations ratified by Latvia; foremost among these is the United

Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007 and ratified by Latvia.

In addition to the status of Livonian as an officially recognised indigenous language of Latvia, laws at different levels also regulate its public use. Although in some documents the commitment of the public administration to preserve and expand the use of Livonian as an indigenous language is guaranteed in a general manner, some laws also contain very specific norms related to the use of Livonian in the linguistic landscape.

Thus, Article 18 of the State Language Law stipulates that “(4) names of places, institutions, public organisations, and undertakings (companies) in the Livonian coastal territory, and names of events taking place in this territory, shall also be created and use thereof shall be in the Livonian language” (Law 1999). Article 4 of the Law on Historical Lands of Latvia stipulates that “(7) the State and the relevant local governments shall ensure the preservation and sustainable development of the identity and cultural and historical environment of the indigenous people of Latvia – the Livonians – (..), including by promoting the acquisition and use of the Livonian language and by introducing and using place names in the Livonian language” (Law 2021). Paragraph 7 of the Regulations on Place Name Information stipulates that “Geographical names in the territories historically populated by Livonians shall be created also in the Livonian language according to the norms of the Livonian language” (Regulation No. 50 2021).

The requirement to use Livonian in the linguistic environment is also found in Article 13 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: “Indigenous peoples have the right (...) to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and individuals (...). States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected” (UNDRIP). The objective of promoting the use of indigenous languages on public signage is also included in Article 27 of the Los Pinos Declaration, which is the basis for the United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032): “Development of national language planning to include principles of substantive equality and redress, (...) establish new principles for additive bilingualism, restoration of geographic place names, public signage in indigenous languages” (Los Pinos).

5. Visibility of Livonian in the linguistic landscape

Over the last two centuries, the use of Livonian has been very limited. During the times when the Livonian Coast was an area densely inhabited by the Livonian community, Livonian was mainly the language of the family, the working language in the main traditional occupation of the Livonians, i.e., fishing, and the language of Livonian cultural process, where it is still used today (see Ernštreits 2012). Some attempts to expand the use of Livonian, e.g., introducing Livonian as a language of schooling or church services, creating a single administrative territory in which Livonian could play a significant role, have not been successful due to the small number of Livonians and the ever-changing situation in the area inhabited by the Livonians in the 20th century (Blumberga 2013: 170–173).

Consequently, the linguistic landscape is also a domain in which Livonian currently appears sporadically. This is evident in data obtained during ethnographic studies. The majority of the cases of Livonian language use in the linguistic landscape are historically and also presently found in the last compact settlement of the Livonians, i.e., the Livonian Coast. Outside this area, there are just a few examples of public use of Livonian, which have emerged in recent decades.

One public domain where Livonian is most commonly (though only occasionally) used is on tombstones erected in Livonian Coast cemeteries. Livonian is recognisable here in the forms of the names of the buried individuals (Livonian personal names differ mostly from their Latvian equivalents in their written form, e.g., *Pētōr* ‘Pēteris’, *Kōrli* ‘Kārlis’, *Līž* ‘Līze’, *Biezbārdōd* ‘Biezbārži’, *Kīnkamäg* ‘Kāpbergs’, *Tserbahōd* ‘Cerbahi’, etc.) and more recently also in epitaphs (Figure 1).

A survey of Livonian Coast cemeteries shows that the tradition of using Livonian is quite old. Examples can be seen in burials dating to the late 19th century (for example, the graves of Griet and Aņdrōks Berthold at Kolka cemetery), though visitors to the Livonian Coast may be more familiar with the tombstone at the old cemetery of Mazirbe erected by Livonian captain Aņdrōks Berthold, who emigrated to the United States in the late 1930s, for his parents. However, the tendency to make inscriptions on tombstones in Livonian seems to have especially increased during the Soviet occupation when most of the Livonian community abandoned the Livonian Coast, but community members were

still buried in cemeteries there. As Livonian is not used on the graves of all known community members, even on the graves of those people significant to Livonian culture, these tombstone inscriptions seem to indicate a desire to emphasise a connection between the deceased and their family to the Livonian and/or Livonian-speaking communities.



Figure 1. Inscriptions on tombstones in Livonian at Košrags cemetery. Note that the language of the inscriptions varies – Livonian on the tombstone and Latvian on the tomb frame.

The cemetery inscriptions also include the first memorial to the Livonians erected in Latvia, i.e., the memorial stone to the Livonian poets buried at Miķeļtornis cemetery,³ which was unveiled in 1978 and bears inscriptions in Livonian and Latvian. Livonian, however, is not commonly used on Livonian memorials. Exceptions include the boundary stone in Staicele, on which the name of each land is written in its respective language (*Eesti, Līvõmō, Latvija*); a memorial post commemorating the visit of the President of Latvia Guntis Ulmanis and the President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari to the Livonian Festival in 1998 at

3 In the 1990s, the stone was moved to the cemetery area.

the Livonian Community House in Mazirbe; a memorial plaque to poet Kōrli Stalte, the author of the Livonian anthem, installed in 2020; and the temporary art installation “There are no Livonians” (2021–2022) erected in the summer of 2021 in Miķeļtornis (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The art installation “There are no Livonians” in Miķeļtornis in the summer of 2021.

The Livonian Community House opened in 1939 in Mazirbe and is associated with the best-known example of Livonian language use among the Livonians and in a public space in Latvia, i.e., a granite plaque attached to the Community House, describing the construction of the Community House in Latvian and Livonian. This plaque is also probably a unique example in the entire Latvian linguistic landscape, where public information is simultaneously presented in five languages – Livonian, Latvian, Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian. Originally and then for an extended period, it was also the only example of the public use of Livonian outside cemeteries. This plaque was as symbolically important to the Livonian community as the first book to have been published in Livonian before the 1920s and which reached the Livonians themselves. This was the Gospel of Matthew, published

in St. Petersburg in 1880. Finnish researcher Eemil Nestor Setälä wrote in 1888 that many Livonians said they had read and kept it as a treasure, because it was the only book in their native language they had ever seen (Blumberga 2006: 137).

Major changes in the visibility of Livonian in the linguistic landscape of the Livonian Coast began in the summer of 2004 when signs with Latvian and Livonian names were placed in Livonian villages along the sea on the initiative of the Livonian Union (*Līvõd Īt*). Although it was the first time that the Livonian names of Livonian villages had appeared in public, the signs were visible only to a limited number of people walking along the sea, as they were installed on the dunes, parallel to the sea. Some of the signs have since disappeared.

From the point of view of the visibility of Livonian, one of the most significant initiatives was undertaken by the company SIA “Kolkasrags” at Cape Kolka – the main tourist destination on the Livonian Coast. In 2004, signs with the phrase “Thank you!” in Latvian, English, and Livonian were placed on rubbish bins there. This idea received a widespread positive response (Kļava 2019) and, subsequently, this tourism company has continued to systematically use Livonian on the signage and information boards that it has installed (the most recent one was unveiled at the end of 2021). Recently, the practice of using Livonian has been sporadically introduced by other tourism entrepreneurs, including the use of Livonian in the names of companies and their products (booklets, boat names, camping house names, etc.; Kļava 2019), which has made Livonian more common in the Livonian coastal tourism landscape (Figure 3).

The next important step for the public use of Livonian was taken by the association “Rāndalist”, which was established in Mazirbe. This initiative included two projects implemented in 2013 and 2014, the result of which was information stands and unofficial signs in Latvian and Livonian indicating the way to four Livonian coastal villages – Mazirbe, Košrags, Saunags, and Vaide (still visible). In 2020, the Rural Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs” completed the creation of a hiking trail “Jūrtaka” (Sea Trail) along the Baltic coast. The names of villages are also included in Livonian on some of the signage located on the Livonian Coast.



Figure 3. Numbers in Livonian are used as boat names by one of the tourism companies on the Livonian Coast.

The use of Livonian in the official names of events and institutions has been very modest. Official Livonian names for events are mainly created and used for events associated with the Livonian community or institutions related to Livonian research (*Līvōd pivād* ‘Livonian Festival’, *Vānta Līvōd kultūr pāvad* ‘Ventspils Livonian Culture Days’, etc.). Moreover, there are only three institutions that have used and continue to use names in Livonian in their signage. The first official plaque incorporating Livonian was installed in 1991 at the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Office in Latvia (*Pūojmōd Ministōrd nōvkub biro Leṭmōl*; no longer available). The only municipal institution using its name in Livonian is the Livonian Community Centre in Kolka (*Kūolka Līvōd kubkuodā*), which opened in 2019; Livonian is also included in the visual design of its 2021 permanent exhibition. The only state institution that uses its Livonian name in its signage is the University of Latvia Livonian Institute (*Leṭmō Iļzskuōl Līvōd institūt*), which was founded in 2018.

During the last five years, there have also been some cases of Livonian language use outside the Livonian Coast. In 2018, an information stand was installed near the castle mound in Mazsalaca, the text of which can also be read in Livonian (Mazsalaca 2018). The *Pivāлинд* ('stork') museum, which has been operating in Staicele since 1999, used a Livonian word in its name. Furthermore, in 2020, during the reconstruction of Mērsrags market (located in the historical territory of the Livonians but outside the Livonian Coast), a sign in Livonian was also placed there (*Tōrg* 'market'). Elements of Livonian can also be found in southwestern Estonia, which was once inhabited by Livonians (for example, the café *Ovāt* 'spring' in Ikla near the Latvian border).

Use of Livonian in the public space is characterised by the fact that – with rare exceptions – it is based on private or public (rather than state) initiatives, utilising private funding or project funding in the case of some larger-scale initiatives. This marks a contradiction in the process of shaping the Livonian linguistic landscape. On the one hand, there exist a number of state commitments and objectives (including the use of Livonian in the public space) in the form of state laws and regulations or ratified international agreements (described in Section 3). On the other hand, a lack of implemented measures, which are guaranteed by law, i.e., a failure to fulfill the commitments and objectives stipulated in the law. The domain where this paradox is most pronounced is with respect to official road signs in the last historically inhabited territory of the Livonians.

6. A Case Study: Livonian on road signs

Official road signs are one of the main facilitators of language visibility in the public space. They can serve both as proof of language status and as an indication of intangible cultural heritage in the area. For an endangered language, road signs can serve as a tool for emphasising the importance of language in the language community and promoting a positive social identity for the ethnolinguistic group (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 27). For indigenous languages, such signs are also a tribute to the heritage of indigenous peoples.

As noted above, Livonian has the status of an indigenous language in Latvia (since 1999) and the State Language Law and other laws also

explicitly specify the possibility or requirement of using Livonian on official road signs; however, despite this, Livonian is still not used on signage on the Livonian Coast. The reasons for this can be found by examining the initiatives undertaken to raise the visibility of Livonian in the linguistic landscape – from the time when this possibility was first introduced in the law up to the present day when the introduction of signs is only a question of time and money.

6.1. The first initiatives to introduce bilingual road signs

At the national level, the idea of placing bilingual (Latvian and Livonian) signs on the Livonian Coast was raised as early as 1999 through Article 18 of the State Language Law, which would have implemented a practice that was widespread worldwide and especially in the European Union. Nevertheless, after the adoption of the law, this intention remained merely theoretical and no state initiative followed to introduce such road signs, even though this issue has been raised several times since the law was adopted by representatives of the Livonian community and local authorities.

Significant attention to the idea of introducing bilingual signs on the Livonian Coast came in May 2018 with the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between Ventspils, Dundaga, and Roja municipalities with Livonian community organisations – the Livonian Union (Līvōd Īt) and the Livonian Culture Centre (Līvō Kultūr sidām) – and the Rural Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs” (Memorandum 2018). In the discussions prior to the conclusion of the memorandum, the municipalities whose territories included the Livonian Coast and the Livonian community were encouraged to start work on implementing bilingual signage on the Livonian Coast (Minutes 2018). This led to the inclusion of this measure in the 5-year Plan for ensuring the sustainability of the Livonian cultural space, which had been added to Latvia’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Although the proposal originally came from the Livonian community in the context of implementing state obligations detailed in the State Language Law, the representatives of the local governments and “Lauku ceļotājs” emphasised the significant role of road signs in promoting cultural tourism and recognising the Livonian Coast as a cultural and historical territory.

During the implementation of the memorandum and the plan for ensuring the sustainability of the Livonian cultural space, work was started on a pilot project for the introduction of bilingual signs, which aimed at replacing the existing village signs with bilingual Latvian-Livonian signs. Taking into account the potential of Livonian for promoting tourism, technical coordination work was undertaken by the Dundaga Municipal Tourism Information Centre, which identified the information needed to implement the pilot project, ordered road sign layouts, and calculated project costs. The centre also involved the University of Latvia Livonian Institute (founded at the end of 2018) – which corrected the Livonian forms of village names so that they were in accordance with the orthographic principles of Standard Livonian – and obtained approval for the use of Livonian on road signs from the State Language Centre.

In preparing the pilot project, it was also revealed that the costs of production and replacement of the signs was relatively small, and local governments would be ready to find funding for this purpose from their tourism budget without requesting additional funding from the state. At the beginning of 2020, after gathering all the necessary information, Dundaga municipality sent a letter to the institution responsible for the approval of road signs – i.e., the state enterprise “Latvijas Valsts ceļi” (Latvian State Road Administration; LVC) – requesting to coordinate the change to bilingual signs on the territory of the Livonian Coast.

6.2. The refusal to approve new road signs and its reasons

Despite the reference to the State Language Law included in the letter from Dundaga municipality, LVC refused to approve the installation of the bilingual signs requested in this letter.⁴ Consequently, the University of Latvia Livonian Institute became involved in solving this problem. The institute corresponded with LVC until the summer of 2021 and through the exchange of several letters tried to obtain the

4 It should be clarified at this point that LVC provided approval for the inclusion of Livonian in specially designed tourist information signs to be installed on municipal roads, but this approval was, in fact, revoked by LVC’s argument in the same reply letter about the non-compliance of Livonian with road traffic regulations and road sign standards.

legal arguments from LVC for the refusal mentioned both in the letters addressed to the Dundaga Municipal Council and the follow-up LVC letters.

LVC's reply letters set out two main arguments to justify the refusal: 1) the Livonian Coast is not an administrative-territorial unit, therefore the boundaries of the territory, as stated in the wording of the State Language Law, in which bilingual road signs are to be installed, cannot be identified; 2) "road traffic regulations and road sign standards do not provide for the use of the Livonian language in the technical measures for traffic organisation in the territory of the state of Latvia" (Correspondence).

Additional reasons given for the refusal were that (3) "bilingual road signs may mislead road users"; 4) "the standard does not directly specify the language to be used on road signs, but in practice it is accepted that the information on road signs is given in Latvian, except for the names of certain foreign cities", "since the given norm does not indicate the use of any specific language on road signs, it is accepted that on the territory of the Republic of Latvia the information on road signs is given in the official language, i.e., Latvian" [namely, the use of languages is determined by practice and not by law, and in the current practice the Livonian language is not used – author's note]; 5) "the technical measures of traffic organisation should primarily be used to organise traffic and not to address questions regarding the use of the Latvian or Livonian languages"; 6) "we invite you to address the problems for the use of the Livonian language with detailed descriptions and specific proposals to the relevant ministries" (Correspondence).

Similar arguments were later used in discussions about the installation of bilingual signs that appeared in the public media in connection with the erection of the temporary art installation *Mingiži līvidi āb ūo* (see next section). In these discussions, one of the main arguments of LVC continued to be that the Livonian Coast is not formally defined as an administrative territory ("no regulatory enactment determines what the territory of the Livonian Coast is, no boundaries are defined, therefore 'Latvijas Valsts ceļi' cannot determine what belongs and what does not belong to this territory"; LSM 2021), but the comments of the Ministry of Transport ("The Ministry of Transport believes that it is necessary to start not with a single sign in Livonian, but rather that a system must be developed for the whole territory so that there

is no desire to require signs for each language or dialect” (LSM 2021) reveal the deeper reasons for LVC’s approach to the discussion on the installation of bilingual signs.

The whole set of arguments mentioned in the correspondence and also in the public media shows that a part of society, including the responsible state institutions, lacks an understanding of the general role and place of the Livonians in Latvia, the needs of Livonian as an endangered indigenous language, and the role of state and local governments as well as society in this process. It can be concluded from the argumentation of LVC and its supervising ministry that the refusal to install or approve bilingual road signs is less related to the Livonian issue (about which, as already mentioned, there is a lack of information and understanding in society), and more to the wider issues connected with the implementation of language policies by state and municipal institutions and the lack of sufficient experience in implementing horizontal policies.

This argument also reveals a wider cross-sectoral lack of understanding and knowledge of the aspects of language management at the national level, namely, that the use of languages is not only the responsibility of the ministries directly involved (e.g., the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture), but that it also affects all areas concerning the use of language in the public sphere. This, *inter alia*, applies in particular to official signs on public roads, the role of which is not merely to organise road traffic (see arguments 5 and 6), but also to comply with a common legal framework for language policy and language use.

In this context, in the last letter sent by the UL LI to LVC on 9 June 2021, which summarised all the arguments provided by LVC during this year and a half, it was concluded that there are no objective, legally justified obstacles to the approval of signs that include Livonian in addition to Latvian, and that the reasons for the refusal are, in fact, subjective without regard to the statutory obligations of the state and could even be considered discriminatory in the context of the rights of indigenous peoples (Correspondence).

6.3. A work of art as a creator of awareness and an incentive to seek a solution

As a result of the correspondence described in the previous section, no significant progress was made in the introduction of bilingual signs, but the situation was significantly changed by an art object that was erected in Miķeļtornis on the Livonian Coast in July 2021, i.e., the temporary art installation *Mingiži līvidi āb ūo* (“There are no Livonians” by V. Ernštreits). The aim of the art object was – through bilingual road signs used as a means of visual communication, on which the text in Livonian is crossed out – to make people consider the situation of the Livonians in modern Latvia, the public’s awareness and ability to empathise with the Livonians’ problems, and the gap between laws and practice, including the introduction of Livonian on road signs. The art object, which was supplemented by accompanying text and videos in Livonian, caused widespread resonance and discussion both on social networks and in public media, which resulted in attention to the issues of the public use of Livonian at the national level (see also the artwork’s web page (Nolivonians) for detailed argumentation and visuals).

As a result of public discussion, a cross-sectoral meeting on the possibility of installing road signs with information in Livonian was convened on 4 August 2021 (Minutes 2021). The participants included the Latvian Ministries of Justice, Culture, Transport, and representatives of the President’s Chancellery who discussed the possibility of installing bilingual road signs and identified possible obstacles. Only a few weeks later, on 17 August, a second meeting of the group was convened, at which its members agreed on a new standard for bilingual road signs. The group also agreed that no further requests for the installation of road signs where Livonian is used together with Latvian would be refused and that the proposal and installation of such road signs may be started immediately, including by local authorities or third parties, if appropriate financial resources are available.

Although the meeting was dedicated to the public use of Livonian, the standard developed for bilingual road signs was also extended to such road signs, which include the second variant of Latvian mentioned in the State Language Law, i.e., the Latgalian written language. On 18 November 2021, the first five bilingual road signs (in Latvian and Latgalian) were installed at the border of Balvi municipality (Lakuga

2021), and bilingual road signs are planned to be installed on the Livonian Coast in the first half of 2022.

In general, the path for the inclusion of Livonian on official road signs shows that it is the knowledge and awareness of the public that is crucial in ensuring the visibility and status of an endangered language (Brenzinger et al. 2003: 15), as even legal obligations can be ignored, suspended, or delayed if the party involved does not understand why such obligations are necessary (see also the previous section).

7. Why should Livonian be visible?

When considering the availability of Livonian in the public space, an extremely salient question is why this would be necessary at all and also what are the benefits of using Livonian in the public space since there are very few people who can understand it? There are, indeed, a number of benefits here, both for society as a whole and for the indigenous Livonian community in particular.

One of the benefits for wider society, not just for endangered languages and their communities, is the opportunity to see and use these languages and cultural heritage in tourism and associated ventures, as the linguistic landscape is the part of the visual landscape where an endangered language can be most clearly represented (Olko 2021: 146–152). Taking into account the history of the Livonian Coast during the last century, tourism is currently one of the main areas of business in one of the least economically performing parts of Latvia. Until now, companies in this area have mainly focused on providing recreational services and nature tourism, but the visibility of Livonian as part of Livonian intangible culture in the public space may encourage visitors to the historic Livonian territory to learn more about Livonian heritage. This would also encourage tourism providers to develop their businesses by offering services related to Livonian heritage, thereby overcoming the current problems related to the seasonality of tourism, i.e., the lack of tourism supply, catering services, and infrastructure in the so-called low season, which makes up most of the year (see Kļava 2019). This aspect is also aided by the supportive attitude of local governments, for example, towards the placement of bilingual road signs or the use of Livonian in tourism products.

At the same time, given the interest of modern users of tourism products and services in having unique and authentic experiences, products referring to this heritage as well as the use of language in the linguistic landscape can contribute to revitalising and promoting Livonian without limiting it only to symbolic or folklorised (or often self-folklorised) dimensions (Olko 2021: 146–152). The Livonian community is still closely linked to its historical territory, i.e., the Livonian Coast, where a number of events significant to the community take place, including the annual Livonian Festival, general meetings of Livonian cultural associations, the “Mierlinkizt” Livonian summer youth school, and other events relevant to the Livonian community (Ernštreits 2019: 105–106). The visibility of Livonian in the linguistic landscape of the Livonian Coast can make a significant contribution to raising awareness of the Livonian community, showing that Livonian has both status and practical use, promoting community members’ sense of belonging to the Livonian community (i.e., to the area it historically inhabited), and encouraging the view that Livonian also has a place in the modern world and in the Livonian community itself, thereby contributing to the preservation and revitalisation of the language. At the same time, the visibility of Livonian in the rest of society can promote interest as well as expand knowledge and awareness of the Livonians and Livonian – as an endangered indigenous language of Latvia – as well as of Livonian heritage, which has profoundly influenced both modern Latvian culture and language.

For indigenous languages and endangered languages, their presence and visibility in the linguistic landscape may not so much ensure the realisation of their informative function but instead show their symbolic value. It is clear that such languages cannot compete in any territory with state/official languages or other popular and widely used languages, or pose a threat to them. However, it is the presence of these endangered languages that gives them a certain role in the linguistic landscape, thus enhancing their prestige and opportunities for their preservation as well as raising the collective awareness of such languages (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 27, Cenoz & Gorter 2006: 78, Pietikäinen et al. 2011).

Moreover, the linguistic landscape of a language also reveals the importance of understanding multilingualism, where linguistic diversity and its preservation are transformed from a more declarative setting into real practice. Also, in the linguistic landscape, the different processes

and forces involved in language policy and the different historical circumstances of its development and implementation in a given country or territory determine the diversity of indigenous and endangered languages in the linguistic landscape. These factors also certainly affect the value of that language, its symbolic role, and possibly also its functions (Pietikäinen et al. 2011).

8. Conclusions

Currently, Livonian appears sporadically in the linguistic landscape. Historically, it has been primarily visible in cemetery inscriptions, but in the last decades, it has also been introduced and continues to appear on signage put up mainly by private or public initiatives, including tourism entrepreneurs with private funding or project funding (in the case of larger-scale initiatives). However, in some domains, e.g., the names of institutions or on official road signs, Livonian is still not visible. This is likely due to an insufficient understanding of indigenous issues or their greater benefit to society as well as inadequate knowledge of aspects of language management within society and especially state and municipal institutions. It also indicates that the rights of endangered languages with limited representation on the national level – especially those, which are small in number and detached from their historical area – become contested despite official recognition at the state level and even internationally.

Efforts to introduce Livonian into the Latvian linguistic landscape show that the use of Livonian is not hindered by a lack of legislation, as, on the contrary, the legal framework for the wider use of Livonian in the public sphere is sufficient. Its use is also not impeded by a lack of financing, as the investment required for the much wider visibility of Livonian, for example, on the sparsely populated Livonian Coast, is relatively small. At present, the use of Livonian is most limited by the lack of public initiatives and public knowledge and awareness not only of indigenous issues or the role of the Livonians in the Latvian cultural landscape but also of the direct benefits of expanding the use of Livonian in the context of regional or tourism development. In this respect, Livonian plays a very important role in the linguistic landscape of Latvia, moreover, not only on the Livonian Coast but also in all the territories that historically were inhabited by Livonians.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the Livonian community – as well as from the perspective of preserving and developing Livonian – signs in Livonian will not reintroduce the use of the language in other domains. However, the use of Livonian in the linguistic landscape of the Livonian Coast is important, first and foremost, as a symbol and recognition of the value of this community as well as a tribute to Livonian heritage in Latvia. A survey of various experiences elsewhere in the world, such as the position of the Sámi language and changes in its use in public inscriptions, shows that different uses of a language in the linguistic landscape may raise questions about language functions in general but also open up new opportunities for endangered indigenous languages (Salo 2012: 257).

In general, the presence of Livonian in the linguistic landscape should not be seen as an endpoint in ensuring the use of the language, this should instead be a part of a broader strategy to raise language awareness in the community and also stimulate a broader awareness of diversity in Latvian society as a whole. More common use of an endangered language in the linguistic landscape will not increase its use in communication or ensure its revitalisation – and may, in fact, sometimes hamper revitalisation efforts, but measures that promote language awareness within the community can serve as a precondition or set of preconditions, which increase the use of a language (including willingness to learn and improve it, etc.) in the community (Sallabank 2013: 218).

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Kokkuvõte. Valts Ernštreits, Gunta Kļava: Liivi keele koht keelemaastikul.

Ohustatud keelte kontekstis peetakse keelemaastikku efektiivseks keele sümboolse väärtuse väljendamise ja keeleteadlikkuse edendamise vahendiks. See on ala, milles liivi keel esineb sporaadiliselt ja seda enamasti kogukonna, selle toetajate ja kohalike institutsioonide vahendusel. Artikkel käsitleb liivi keele teekonda suurema nähtavuse suunas keelemaastikul ja keelemaastiku võimalikku rolli keele taaselustamise protsessis. Samuti esitleb artikkel õigusakte, mis määratlevad liivi keele staatust ja selle kasutust avalikus ruumis, ning nende rakendamist, lisaks esitades ka ajaloolise ülevaate liivi keele esinemisest keelemaastikul. Artikkel vaatab samuti pürgimusi kasutada liivi keelt ametlikel liiklusmärkidel ning riigiasutuste formaalseid ja sisulisi vastuargumente sellele initsiatiivile. Samuti toob artikkel üldisemalt esile liivi keele kasutamise vajadust avalikus ruumis, keelemaastiku olulist rolli keeleteadlikkuse edendamisel liivi kogukonnas ning mitmekeelsuse ja kultuurilise mitmekesisuse tähtsusest arusaamisel ühiskonnas.

Märksõnad: keelemaastik, teeviidad, ohustatud keeled, keele taaselustamine, liivi keel

Kubbōvōttōks. Gunta Kļava, Valts Ernštreits: Līvō kīel kūož kīel mōnists.

Ādāstōd kīeld kontekstōs kīel mōnist vōib vōlda kīel simbōliz vārtōks ulznāgțimiz ja kīel tādōlpanmiz kazāntimiz vaindōks. Se um arā, missōs līvō kēļ um nādōb set sporādlic vīņō ja amā jemīņ kubgōn, sīe tigtiĵizt ja pāikalizt institūtsijđ abkōks. Kēra nīžōb iļ līvō kīel riek, laz se vōlkō jo jemīņ nādōb kīel mōnists, ja kīel mōnist kūož kīel virgtimizōs. Nei īž kēra vōtāb īdōkubbō pandōkši, missōs um kēraltōd līvō kīel status ja sīe kōlbatimi immōrgouņs, nīžōb iļ sīe, kui ne pandōkst strōdōbōd, ja tāmikšōb ka istōriliz iļvaņtļōks iļ sīe, kui līvō kēļ um vōnd nādōb kīel mōnists. Kēras sōbōd vaņtōltōd ka kōļimizt kōlbatō līvō kīel kuožvīņōd pāl ja vald institūtsijđ argumentōd seļļiz īrgandōks vastō. Nei īž se kēra nīžōb iļ sīe, mikšpierāst līvō kīeldō vōlks kōlbatōmōst immōrgouņs, iļ kīel mōnist tāntōks, nustōs kīel vārtōkst līvōd kubgōns, ja setmiņkēļit ja kultūr setmiņpūolit tāntōkst mūoštamiz pierāst kubgōns.