

Universities in Latvia – from the Soviet to European Higher Education Area

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Abstract: The paper will describe the development of universities in Latvia from 1950's to nowadays. The higher education system experienced changes along with the political transformations of the country. Latvia was incorporated in the Soviet Union in 1940, regained its independence in 1991 and joined EU in 2004. Since 2012 Latvia is a fully fledged participant of the European Higher Education Area. The paper will describe the transformations of universities in Latvia from the perspective of a cultural learning theory and transfer of knowledge defined by Gita Steiner-Khamsi. It will provide the reference to an external education model, its modification and metamorphosis into a local educational model. Latvia as a small country and relatively new culture had found itself in the situation to learn from the cultural experiences of countries that have longer experience of democracy and had to overtake the ideas of the education systems from other countries and adopt them to the local needs.

Keywords: Higher education; Bologna declaration; educational borrowing; University; Latvia.

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1. Introduction

In 2018 the state of Latvia will celebrate its first one hundred years. In this relatively short period the country had experienced various political transformations,

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which affected the system of education in the country. In 1919, a year after the establishment of the Latvian statehood, the first national University of Latvia was founded. In 1940 Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, experienced the World War II and was reoccupied again, and this occupation lasted almost fifty years. During that time the University was functioning along with other higher education institutions (HEIs), providing tertiary education suitable for the Socialist system. In 1991 Latvia regained its independence and started to reform its education system in order to fit the European model of education.

The research of the development of university activities is important to find out higher education transformations in the conditions of the political power change because university as a research institution reflects vividly the democratization trends of higher education.

This paper aims at illustrating the development of the universities keeping in mind a complex political context. The task of the research is to find out how due to the political changes the university activities have transformed into a local model specifically corresponding to Latvia's situation. The higher education in Latvia had to adjust to the new political situation several times in a short period of time and therefore supposedly universities have taken over and adapted the higher education model of other countries in order to ensure the continuity of the functioning of the institutions. This paper first presents a historical background of the university development in Latvia, then offers a theoretical framework, and finishes with analyzing university activities during the Soviet period and after regaining independence and joining EU from the perspectives of the theory of educational borrowing.

2. Historical Background

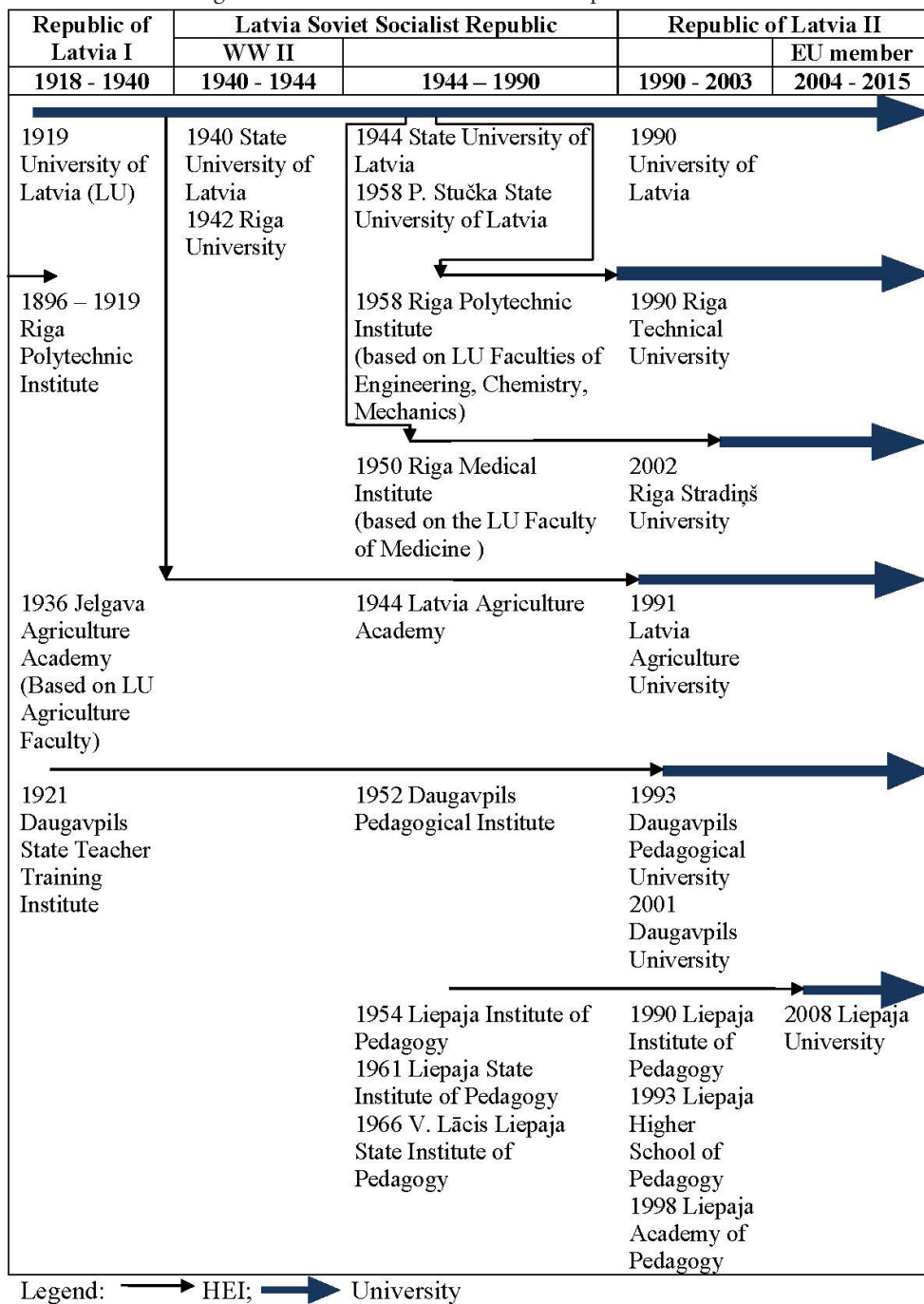
The development of universities in Latvia is to be divided into three mutually unrelated historically determined periods of development (Figure 1) – Republic of Latvia (1918-1940); Latvia Soviet Socialist Republic (1940-1941; 1944-1990) and Republic of Latvia (1990-current). Both the gaps in the development have been connected with historical turning points in the development of Latvia as a state- the Soviet occupation in 1940 and repeated Soviet occupation in 1944, and the restoration of the national independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The university activities have not evolved evenly in those periods but have experienced breaches in the development caused by political changes resulting in introducing new knowledge at the same time destroying the previous knowledge and world outlook.

The first development period of universities covers the time of Latvia as an independent state in the interwar period in 1920-30s. In 1919 the University of Latvia was established as the only classical type university in the world that ensures study possibilities and the advancement of research potential in all classical and modern fundamental sciences in the Latvian language (University of Latvia, 1999, p. 35). The University of Latvia has adopted its own Constitution, and develops academic traditions and terminology in Latvian. Between 1919 and 1940 the university was the largest research and culture centre and was supported by the State. For example, in academic year 1937/ 38, 14.7 % from the total state budget was devoted to education while in the rest of the Europe it was only 12.1% (LU, n.d.). During this period few more higher education institutions such as Daugavpils State Teacher Training Institute, Jelgava Agriculture Academy (based on the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Latvia) a. o. were established, but the University of Latvia remains the only university in the country.

The second period started as a result of the Soviet occupation in 1940 as well as the reoccupation in 1944 when Latvia lost the national independence and the previous development of the higher education institutions were rapidly interrupted. During the next almost 50 years of the Soviet occupation the university activities in Latvia developed based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology.

During this period several new higher education institutions emerged. In 1950 Riga Medical Institute was established based on the Faculty of Medicine and immediately was placed under the Ministry of Health Care. In 1958 Riga Polytechnic Institute (RPI) was re-established based on three faculties (Chemistry, Engineering and Mechanics) of the University of Latvia. RPI was the eldest higher education institute in Latvia, established in 1896; in 1918 due to the World War I it was moved to the territory of Russia and was closed in 1919. In 1954 Liepaja Pedagogical Institute was established, and several institutions had changed their name to stress that higher education institutes had become state owned. The number of HEIs during this period increased to ten; however, the University of Latvia still remains the only university in the country (LPE, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 485-487).

Figure 1. Timeline of Universities development in Latvia



The third period started at the beginning of 1990s when the independence of Latvia as a state was restored in a peaceful way. Latvia, after regaining the independence, took the course to join European Higher Education Area. The Law on Education (1991) stipulated the autonomy of higher education institutions, as well as set the course of two level (bachelor and Master) higher education programs and establishment of private education institutions. The Law on HEI (1995) further supported Bologna process and defined university and non-university types of higher education institutions. The law set the requirement for the share of the academic staff with the doctoral degree. Thus, from 1990 to 2008 by fulfilling the requirements of the Law on HEI (1995) five public higher education institutions changed their name to university (see Figure 1). Two specialized institutions have become Riga Technical University (in 1990) and Latvia Agriculture University (in 1991). Two regional teacher training institutions expanded their offer of study programs and became Daugavpils Pedagogical University (in 1993, since 2001 - Daugavpils University), and Liepaja University (in 2008). Remarkably that Riga Medical Institute in 2002 become Riga Stradiņš University by adding study programs in social sciences at the same time remaining under auspices of the Ministry of Health. Currently there are six public universities out of 60 higher education institutions in Latvia. No private university has yet been established, although about half of all HEIs in Latvia are private (Ministry of Education and Science, n.d.).

3. Theoretical framework

Analysing the effectiveness of the educational processes the interest lies in the essence of reforms in education. It is important to find out whether the reforms in education take place voluntarily or violently, whether they are real or illusionary, whether transformations in education systems are imported, exported or locally adapted in order to explore education in the conditions of globalization and internationalisation. The challenges created to education by globalization intensify the international dimension of education reforms that require innovative comparative assessment and research in the field of education (Fuchs, 2012).

The concept *educational borrowing* that is offered for overcoming the normative paradigm in education research not only answers the questions about the essence of education reforms but also helps to explain the historical and contextual dimension of education the research of which is important for making out specific education transformations in different countries (Fuchs, 2012).

Gita Steiner-Khamsi's theory that is used in this study combines in itself the historical and comparative approaches allowing the «lending and borrowing»

phenomenon in education drawing analytically closer to the comparative research of global education processes (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002).

The theory of educational borrowing as a policy strategy developed by Steiner-Khamsi (2002) consists of three phases:

1. The first phase of the model of educational borrowing is «externalization» that means the import of an external model and perceiving it as a universal tool for solving local problems.
2. The second phase is «re-contextualization» that means active borrowing of transnational knowledge at the same time developing respective processes for suiting local educational needs. It permits to develop dual policy by promoting regional and global identity, maintaining institutional autonomy and permitting to involve local agents as partners into the process of borrowing.
3. The third phase is «internalization» that means that education reforms are incorporated, adapted and perceived as local. Educational policy ideas are borrowed, transformed and internalized into the local education policy and institutions. The ideas are transformed for local needs, and the aims, functions and essence of local system of education.

Applying the above mentioned theory in this study the authors will find out *why* (historical context), *how* (implementation of educational processes) and *who* (agents) implements the transformation processes in the field of university activities in Latvia in the transition from the Soviet to the common European higher education area.

The following factors are essential and significant for ensuring the functioning of higher education and thus will be used for describing the phases of the educational borrowing:

- legislation,
- language of instruction,
- studies related issues,
- academic staff,
- students,
- teaching aids,
- international cooperation.

The mentioned factors will be used in further analysis of the university activities in Latvia during the Soviet period and in the context of common European Higher Education area.

4. University activities in Latvia during the Soviet period (1945-1991)

The Soviet occupation in the Baltic countries cannot be considered a homogeneous process. However, it is possible to characterize common trends all through this period that have influenced significantly the university activities in the whole territory of the Soviet Union and in Soviet Latvia. The Soviet occupation actually interrupts sharply the processes of acquiring the European intellectual area started during the interwar period in the independent Latvia and changes also the direction of higher education processes.

4.1. *Legislation*

The formation of the new Soviet higher education institution started with demolishing the previous system, i.e., the Baltic education systems were unified according to the USSR model—the Soviet legislation legitimized the liquidation of private educational institutions, elimination of «reactionary» study programs and study courses from the curricula, change of the academic staff on the basis of ideological considerations.

Although the education system in the USSR was unified, its supervision institution changed several times. The Ministry of Education of Russia supervised all higher education institutions for a long time. Only later a special Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR was established. With time the centralized supervision loosened and HEIs of Latvia became the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of Latvia Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) (University of Latvia, 1999).

People's education laws of LSSR (LPSR 1975, LPSR 1986) defined that the task of HEIs is to prepare specialists who besides the field knowledge have also mastered the Marxism-Leninism theory and participate in advancing the social economic progress.

4.2. *Language of instruction*

At the higher education institutions the studies were organized in two streams depending on the language of instruction, either Russian or Latvian – usually the groups never mixed and the language of instruction was indicated already when the students were applying for studies. The Russian language instruction was introduced after the World War II, but its share in the university daily life increased. At first the academic staff was coming from Russia as most of the former academic staff was considered unfit to serve in the Soviet universities. Since 1952 the internal correspondence of the University of Latvia has been in Russian (University of Latvia, 1999, pp. 279-280).

4.3. *Studies related issues*

The establishment of the Soviet university in Latvia was based on the propaganda of and putting into life the ideas substantiating the building of socialism similarly as it was in the Soviet Russia after the revolution in 1917 and other Soviet republics. Radical reforms in the Soviet education related to «the revolution of culture» (Ganelin & Golant, 1940), are carried out with the aim to establish a socialist state and implement in it a gradual transition from socialism to communism. Higher education, naturally, is one of the means of attaining this aim which then determines the characterizing features and action principles of Soviet higher education (Ladizjec, 2004).

The most essential processes that were implemented in Soviet universities were formulated in the principles corresponding to the Soviet ideology. The first and most important in the establishment of Soviet universities is the principle of sovietisation and ideologisation which meant the restrictions of the academic freedom needed for the university activities and included in itself: establishing the scientific atheism as the only possible world outlook in science and society in general; ideologisation of study disciplines, especially disciplines of the humanitarian sciences; introduction of compulsory study disciplines, e.g., dialectical materialism, in HEIs; mandatory participation in socially political organizations (Rubene, 2013). Studies of theology were excluded from the study curricula and history of the USSR and Russian language was taught instead (Rubene, 2010).

The science classification developed by Friedrich Engels that divides sciences in natural, technical and social sciences (Engels, 1877-1978) was used in the Soviet Union. For instance, philosophy is explained as one of the forms of social consciousness which is determined by economic relations of the society (Filozofijas vārdnīca, 1974). Social sciences became one of the means for propagating Soviet ideology – dialectical materialism becomes the only possible substantiation of the scientific world view.

However, it would be wrong to claim that research did not occur in those branches of science in the Soviet Latvia that traditionally are called the humanities. Only as regards theology one can say absolutely surely – this branch of science did not exist in the Soviet Union (Rubene, 2010). It was replaced by scientific atheism- materialistic views that criticized and refuted the religious conceptions (Camerjans, 1965). The aim of scientific atheism was to substantiate the legitimacy of materialism as the only possible world outlook. The study process in the Soviet Union was organized based on Lenin's idea about the unity of theory and practice, and that higher education should be

accessible to workers and farmers. The study process is focused on theory and practical courses and internships in factories (LPE, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 485-487). Higher education provided not only knowledge in the chosen specialty, but students were also obliged to study subjects important for the Soviet ideology (Eglite, 2009, p. 96; Heyneman, 2000, p. 178), to have compulsory grades in sports activities as well as in autumn go to help collective farms for harvest (LSM, 2014).

4.4. *Academic staff*

To establish socialist society in Latvia and other Baltic countries academic staff loyal to the Soviet ideology was needed. Therefore «sweeping transformations» in universities and «political cleansing of bourgeois specialists» that took place in accordance with the demands of the working people were introduced. The working people «demanded» that enemies of the working class were not allowed to study in higher education institutions and to restructure study curricula according to the needs of building socialism (LVU, 1959).

Thus, the academic staff that implemented the adoption of Soviet higher education model initially was imported from the USSR so that they gradually prepared new ideologically corresponding local «specialists» to build socialism.

The professors in humanitarian sciences who had worked in the independent Latvia were considered the most reactionary part of the Soviet society after the Soviet occupation. It was officially announced that they advocated pseudo-scientific theories, idealistic views that were directed against the ideas of class struggle. The harm of theology to the atheistic society as the means of lullabying and deluding broad masses of people was especially emphasized.

When the academic staff was discharged in mass none of them was blamed of violating the work discipline or of low quality work- they were all accused of nonconformity with communist dogma and requirements. Students were expelled from the university and academic staff was dismissed due to hostile political, religious views or inadequate social background, i.e., belonging to the bourgeois and affluent farmers' families. Students and professors whose family members had been punished by the Soviet power for political offenses or whose close relatives had emigrated to foreign countries were subjected to political cleansing (University of Latvia, 1999).

4.5. *Students*

Students were admitted to the higher education institutions by passing four entrance exams. There was a limited number of study slots offered in each specialty (study program). However, the aim in the Soviet Union was to involve as many as possible students in higher education in order to implement the embodiment of the Soviet ideology in the society in an institutionalized way. If the entrance exams were not passed, or the grades were below the threshold, the applicants could not be accepted and should wait a year to pass the entrance exams again. For male applicants it was almost certain that it meant to be recruited for the compulsory military service for two years (LSM, 2014). The most important task in the context of sovietisation of higher education was the formation of such a new Soviet personality who would be equipped with materialistic world outlook, would participate in the public production work, would be an active social worker and moreover would be a profoundly educated and humane person able to fight for «the strengthening of the new, more fair social system» (Iljina, 1971, p. 57). The formation of such a person became the key task of Soviet higher education.

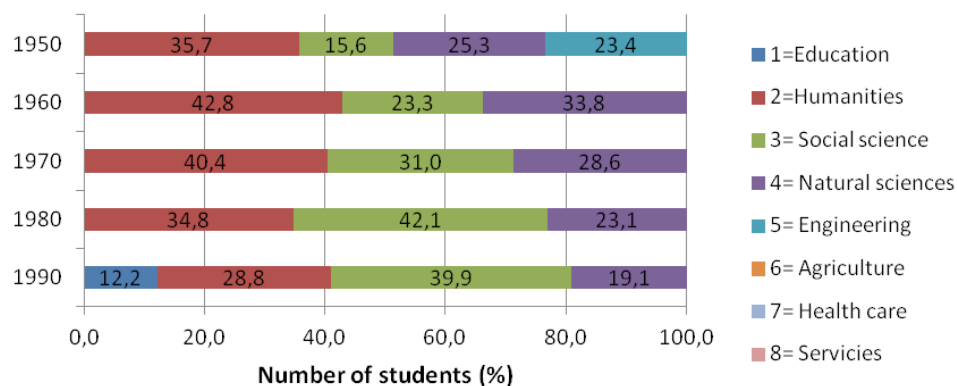
Specialization and professionalization of the Soviet higher education envisaged purposeful extermination of the contradictions between the physical and intellectual work (Rubene, 2013). This principle meant the orientation of higher education to training of specialists-practitioners and to questioning the value of academic knowledge.

The main focus of the higher education system was placed on the natural sciences and ideology and not sufficient focus on the social sciences and languages, except the Russian language (Eglite, 2009, p. 96; Heyneman, 2000, p. 179).

At the University of Latvia students mostly studied in faculties representing social sciences, natural sciences and humanities³ (see Figure 2). In 1950's the university was offering technical disciplines and engineering, and in 1958 these faculties were moved to re-establish Riga Polytechnic Institute. In 1982 the Faculty of Pedagogy was opened and thus, the choice of disciplines offered at the University of Latvia increased (University of Latvia, 1999).

³ Here is used contemporary division of disciplines for the purpose of easing the comparison with the situation nowadays.

Figure 2. Proportion of students by disciplines offered in universities in Latvia.
Source: University of Latvia, 1999



The graduates who had received education in the faculties representing humanitarian sciences in the former independent Latvia were scornfully named «educated unemployed» because they had received broad general education but had learned nothing for practical life thus they could not participate in building the socialist society (LVU, 1959).

The number of students at the University of Latvia during the Soviet period was increasing from 4456 in 1950 to 12077 in 1990 (University of Latvia, 1999) (see Table 1). Although this indicated the significant rise of population with higher education in the USSR and Latvian SSR in particular, the relevant age cohort with higher education in Western countries was twice as high at that time (Heyneman, 2010, p. 79).

4.6. *Teaching aids*

The publishing of textbooks meant for students of Soviet universities was organized centrally, i.e., the textbooks were written by loyal scientists, then they were approved by the Ministry of Education of the USSR and then translated in all the languages of the Soviet republics. Actually Soviet students studied from one textbook that necessarily started with a chapter which glorified the Soviet science and criticized the achievements of scientists of capitalist countries. Thus, for example, for more than ten years the list of compulsory reading in all pedagogy study programs in Latvia included the book «Pedagoģija» [Pedagogy] written by Russian scholar Tatiana Iljina. The book was first published in Russian in Moscow in 1968 and experienced its last publication in 1990. The edition of this book published in 1969 was translated into Latvian and published in Latvia

in 1971 (Ķestere & Āķīte, 2012). In 1987 the second textbook appropriate for Soviet pedagogy studies was translated into Latvian. Its author is the researcher of Soviet pedagogy Yuri Babanski, and the book was first published in Moscow in 1983 (Babanskis, 1987). Although the year 1987 is already associated with the *perestroika* period in the Soviet Union when democratic changes were introduced both in the content of the study courses and the attitude towards the teaching style of the academic staff still the introduction of this new textbook explains that it reveals the issues related to the ideological struggle and presents the advantages of the socialist pedagogy over the bourgeois pedagogy.

Yet it has to be admitted that the situation in higher education of Latvia in the conditions of *perestroika* in the second half of 1980s changes. The textbooks could be developed locally in the respective Soviet republics, but the textbooks published centrally were still considered to be the main reading (Kuebart, 2002).

4.7. *International cooperation*

One of the most important principles of action of Soviet universities was internationalization; however, at the same time universities were functioning in isolation, only contacts with other Soviet republics and Warsaw pact countries were permitted. Thus, the University of Latvia had agreements with Moscow University, Vilnius University, Tartu University, Prague University (Czechoslovakia SR), Rostock University (German Democratic Republic) (LPE, 1984, vol. 5₂, p. 581). The best students were permitted to have a two week exchange practical training in one of the universities of Warsaw pact countries, but others had to undergo practical training at the home institution. Thus in 1974 about 130 students from the University of Latvia went abroad, and about the same number of students from Prague and Rostock came for training in Latvia. (University of Latvia, 1999, p. 334) Until 1989 no cooperation was established with higher education institutions in democratic countries (University of Latvia, 1999, p. 332).

4.8. *Discussion*

Referring to the educational borrowing theory it has to be concluded that during the Soviet period in Latvia initially in higher education there was the import of the ready external model based on Soviet ideology (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). Besides this import was implemented in a revolutionary way and not evolutionary, i.e., in a violent and non-voluntary way (Ozola, 2014). However,

during the Soviet period in Latvia also the second phase – modification of certain higher education components according to the needs of the local education system was present. The generation of young local agents that implemented the Soviet principles of higher education had formed at the beginning of 1960s thus giving a possibility to develop the action model of Soviet universities with the necessary features to satisfy the local needs.

However, it is not possible to identify free academic research, the development of higher education, i.e., autonomous action model of universities in Latvia during the Soviet period- actually the direction of higher education was determined by the Soviet ideology that was compulsory binding in all the Soviet Union. Certainly, not all that happened in the HEI of Soviet Latvia has to be considered «totalitarian». The model of the totalitarian society and education even as an ideal or, speaking more precisely, just like an ideal includes in itself certain values that maybe are never fully implemented but serve as a landmark and constant field of references for evaluating the real processes nowadays.

5. Universities in Latvia in the context of European Higher Education (since 1991)

As mentioned above, the third period in the development of higher education in Latvia started at the beginning of 1990s when independent state of Latvia was restored in a non-violent way. The most significant transformations related to the Europisation of the higher education area took place during this period and are still going on. The change of power again brought along changes in higher education – also this time caused by political processes and not by the advance of sciences and again a breach followed in the development of university activities in Latvia which is considered voluntary and not violent.

5.1. Legislation

The legislative system of higher education institutions refers also to universities; there is no separate law for universities in Latvia. The legislation includes the Education Law (1998), Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995), Law on Scientific Activity (2005) and other normative documents. On the institutional level the legal framework of the university is defined by the Constitution (*Satversme*) of each university, its strategy of action as well as other internal documents. The EU legal framework which is binding for universities of Latvia is defined in the Bologna declaration and Lisbon strategy that describe the key goals of action and priorities in the field of education (Štefenhāgena, 2012).

Latvia became a member state of the European Union in 2004, in fast time fulfilling the set requirements, including education, e.g., joining the Bologna process already in 1999 (OECD, 2000). It was due to the fact that higher education reforms applying to principles of Bologna declaration started already with the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Rauhvargers, 2003). The Education Law (1991) also introduced the transition from awarding the specialist's Diploma to awarding the Bachelor's or Master's academic degree and during the time of signing the Bologna declaration Latvia had already moved to the Bachelor-Master structure. However, the peculiarity of Latvia is that after receiving the Bachelor's degree it is possible to continue studies in the master's or professional study programs lasting for one or two years. Both the academic and professional study programs are not detached by the types of HEIs and they can be acquired also in universities (Rauhvargers, 2003).

The Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995) defines that universities are autonomous education and science institutions with self-governing rights and they are responsible for the quality of education, rational use of finances and material resources, observance of laws and other normative documents regulating the functioning of HEIs. The new wording of the law defines that beginning with September 1st, 2013 in HEIs at least 40 % of staff elected in academic positions must hold the doctor's scientific degree, and in academies this indicator must reach 50 % but in universities – 65%. Until that year the requirement for the universities was to have 50 % of the elected staff with the scientific degree. Beginning with September 1st, 2014 the university must employ at least 5% foreign guest professors from the number of the academic staff who in the previous five years had been employed in an academic position in one of the accredited EU higher education institutions outside Latvia (Law on HEI, 1995).

The Law on HEI also defined principles of recognizing foreign diploma which at that time corresponded to the Lisbon strategy that had already reached considerable level of readiness. (Rauhvargers, 2003)

5.2. *Language of instruction*

Studies in higher education institutions of Latvia after the collapse of the Soviet Union until 1999 as it was during the Soviet period were organized both in the Latvian and Russian languages. The situation changed on December 9th, 1999 when the Official Language Law was adopted the aim of which is to ensure the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language; preservation of the cultural and historical legacy of the Latvian nation; the rights to use freely the Latvian language in any sphere of life in the whole territory of Latvia as well

as to promote the inclusion of minority representatives in the society of Latvia observing their rights to use the mother tongue or other languages promoting faster integration of the society (Official Language Law, 1999). The Law defines the use of the Latvian language as the state language in state and municipality institutions also in the field of education. Thus, since 1999 the official language of instruction in state universities of Latvia is the Latvian language.

Private higher education institutions have the right to choose also another language of instruction because the Law on the State Language defines that the use of the language in private institutions, organizations and enterprises is regulated if their activities apply to legal public interests and that necessary restrictions should be proportionate to the rights and interests of the private institutions (Official Language Law, 1999). Thus, today the choice of the language of instruction in the field of higher education in Latvia is defined by the national legislation.

However, at present HEIs face limited possibilities to attract foreign students and academic staff. These limitations are determined by different normative documents (KPMG, 2011):

- One of the limitations that directly apply to the possibilities of HEIs attracting foreign students is Article 56 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995). It defines that it is possible to study in EU languages only in those study programs which are acquired by foreign students and that are available also in Latvian or which the HEI of Latvia implements together with the accredited higher education institution of another EU country. Such limitations do not apply to private HEIs.
- The knowledge of the Latvian language is the prerequisite to take an elected position in HEIs of Latvia. This does not promote the interest of foreign academic staff to work in HEIs of Latvia. The Law on Education (1998) and Official Language Law (1999) together with the Cabinet Regulations Nr. 733 (2009) define that university teachers must know the Latvia language to be elected and employed in positions in HEIs of Latvia.

5.3. *Studies related issues*

The process of restoring the academic education both in content and functionally was started in Latvia before the restoration of the independence in 1991 – thus, e.g., already in October 1989, The department of scientific communism, University of Latvia, was transformed into the Department of Politology, in June 1990 the Faculty of Theology was re-established, in June 1991

the Department of Civil defence was closed and in December – the Department of Social political history (LU, 1994).

Since 1988 changes have been introduced in the university system in all three Baltic countries, e.g., putting into practice the democratic principles and processes, cancelling the content and methodological restrictions that existed in the Soviet period, especially those applying to social sciences and humanities as well as taking out the compulsory military training from the programs, the transition from the Soviet scientific degree structure to the system corresponding to the Western model, etc. (OECD, 2000).

During the first years of independence the social sciences and humanities in Latvia get back the focus developed in the interwar period- their development is oriented to the preservation of national values, national identity, the care about the social and national advance of the country, realization of the mental world and European values in the past and in the future (Ekmanis, 2007).

Thus, during the post-Soviet period, i.e., after the regaining of Latvia's independence two opposite tendencies were observed in the discourse of higher education: return to the understanding of the dominant academic tradition characteristic to the interwar period (1920s-1930s) as well as the attempts to acquire European academic traditions in an accelerated way, to a certain degree refusing or ignoring the Soviet legacy (Rubene, 2015). It should be admitted that both these development trends actually created a breach in the genesis of higher education in Latvia because in fact they did not continue the development started during the Soviet period. However, the attempts to master the topical European academic ideas in an accelerated way promoted the involvement of higher education of Latvia in the culture space of Europe.

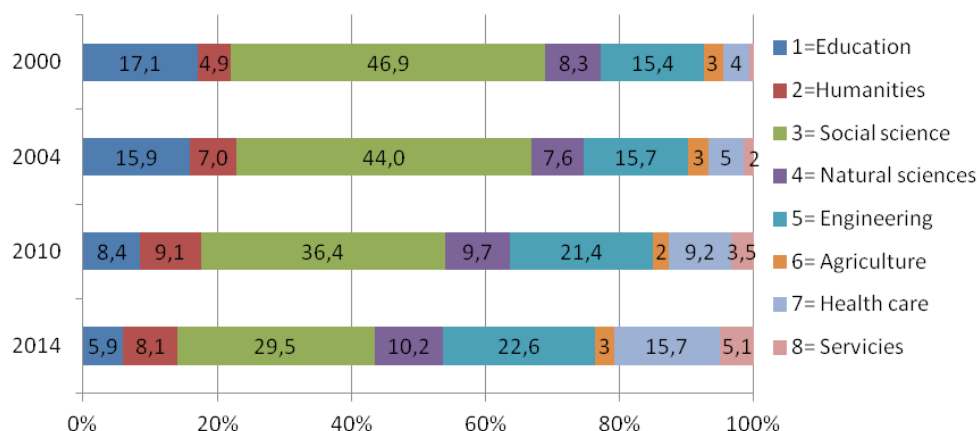
Higher education in Latvia experiences vital changes that are connected with the organization of study programs, interaction of traditional science branches, formation of new science branches and sub-branches, development of technologies and innovations and broadening of international cooperation (Jermolajeva, 2007).

The establishment of European Higher Education Area puts forward as a mandatory condition the specification of the goals and objectives of study programs and focusing on the outcomes in the context of students' competitiveness and demands of the labour market that is an equally topical requirement both for the academic and professional programs, including the doctoral programs. The areas of key competences that the study programs have to orient are defined: to act autonomously using the means interactively, to work in socially heterogeneous groups. Learning outcomes are interpreted as specific or technical, interpersonal and methodological skills (Koçke, 2005).

Due to increased number of universities, the range of the offered study disciplines expands (see Figure 3). The expansion of interest in disciplines of social sciences is shifted by the efforts of government policy by offering more state financed study places in natural sciences and engineering disciplines; however the interest in studying social science disciplines remains high (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006).

Figure 3. Proportion of students by disciplines offered in universities in Latvia.

Source: MoES reports 2000, 2004, 2010, 2014



Note: From 2000 – 2004 – in five universities LU – University of Latvia, RTU – Riga Technical University, LLU – Latvia Agriculture University, DU – Daugavpils University, RSU – Riga Stradiņš University, From 2010 – 2014 – in six universities LU – University of Latvia, RTU – Riga Technical University, LLU – Latvia Agriculture University, DU – Daugavpils University, RSU – Riga Stradins University, LiepU – Liepaja University.

5.4. Academic staff

The development of sciences in the post-Soviet Latvia reveals specific problems that have been created by 50 years of isolation from the world and topical science experience of Europe. As sciences, especially social sciences and humanities during the Soviet times were adjusted to the ruling Soviet ideology then after restoration of independence the researchers in the field of social sciences and humanities often felt a rather cautious and prejudiced attitude from the representatives of natural sciences as well as from the society at large.

The isolation from the research topicalities in the world had created a situation that the researchers of the post-Soviet space often did not know the

most important theories developed in the world in their field. This created the necessity for the academic staff to master their specialty anew in fast way. (Rubene, 2015) The solution of these problems belonged to the topical tasks put forward to higher education in Latvia to be able to join the European culture and science area again. During the course of time the above mentioned problems have considerably decreased but new problems have emerged in the context of common European higher education promoted by the internationalization of university activities.

Guidelines on development of science, technology and innovations 2014-2040 (Cabinet Regulations Nr. 685, 2013) define that one of the sub-goals of science, technology and innovation policy is to promote the international competitiveness of Latvia's science. Also the Sustainable development strategy of Latvia 2030 determines the strengthening of the international competitiveness of research institutions. Taking into consideration the globalization trends it is necessary to strengthen the competence of research institutions and their ability to provide internationally competitive services to foreign enterprises (Saeima, 2010). The academic staff of the universities of Latvia thus is confronted with the necessity to gain recognition in the international scientific arena- this can be achieved by strengthening the international partnership networks, publishing the research findings outside the national boundaries.

5.5. *Students*

Since mid-1990s the number of students and HEIs increased due to growth of the number of higher education institutions including the private ones and because the increased interests of local students to pay for their studies, in case they could not be accepted to the state budget places (LE, 2002, p. 378). Table 1 indicates the number of students in universities in Latvia from 1950 to 2014. Although the number of students at the University of Latvia during the Soviet period was increasing, the expansion of the number of students after regaining the independence was more rapid, because universities were able to accept both students studying in the state financed study places and for fee. The decline of the number of students that can be observed over the last five years can be explained with the demographic decline (smaller Youth cohorts) and insufficient financing of the higher education institutions (Cunška, 2012).

Table 1. Number of Students in Universities in Latvia from 1950 – 2014

	University of Latvia	Riga Technical University	Latvia Agriculture University	Daugavpils University	Riga Stradiņš University	Liepaja University	Total in universities
1950	4456						4456
1960	4777						4777
1970	6901						6901
1980	9330						9330
1990	12077						12077
2000	33942	13878	8072	4007	2268		62167
2004	27857	16510	9984	6338	3499		64188
2010	19657	14811	6108	3276	3913	2257	50022
2014	14020	14452	4480	2320	7385	1516	44173

Source: University of Latvia, 1999; MoES reports 2000, 2004, 2010, 2014

5.6. *Teaching aids*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union universities of Latvia faced the deficit of modern study aids based on the science achievements in the world and corresponding to democratic values. Study textbooks used in the Soviet period rapidly «disappeared» from the lists of recommended literature, thus also the knowledge summarized in the previous period and particular study courses were crossed out from the study programs (Ozola, 2014). It was necessary to renew quickly the range of books for studies available in libraries. The introduction of internet in Latvia in 1994 helped to solve this problem; however, the development of international mobility of students and academic staff was of great importance. Presents of study books received from the Latvian in exile and the new foreign cooperation partners were traditional during the transition period (Stradiņš, 2001). The necessary literature was intensively translated into Latvian which was supported by different international public foundations.

Nowadays when the studies in universities are implemented both in the real and virtual environments students have a wide and diverse access to the study materials. The university libraries as the informational basis of studies and research give a possibility to use freely the intellectual achievements of the world, using more frequently modern information technologies and access to international data bases, on-line catalogues, etc. (LU, 1999).

5.7. *International cooperation*

In order to join anew the European culture and science area the promotion of international cooperation with democratic world after the restoration of the country's independence was the one of topical tasks of the academia. As mentioned before the scholars of Latvia in 1990s had an explicit orientation towards the Western countries and the disregard of the Soviet scientific legacy which actually again created certain one-sidedness in the world outlook (Rubene, 2010).

It was exactly in the post-Soviet period that there was a purposeful internationalization of university activities in Latvia, i.e., the formation of international cooperation network that would promote the mastering of European Higher Education Area. If during the Soviet period the international relations in science were mainly developed with the colleagues in other Soviet republics as well as in the countries of the Warsaw pact countries then after the restoration of Latvia's independence the cooperation with Western European and American scientists was strengthened in particular.

Scientists of Latvian origin all over the world actively supported the recognition of Latvia and promoted the international cooperation in universities. Thus the Second World congress of Latvian scientists took place in Riga in 2001 and gathered more than 800 participants from Latvia and 200 Latvian-born scientists from abroad. The aim of the congress was to promote the return of world-level research in universities of Latvia and give a possibility to develop cooperation with foreign education and science centres. The contacts with foreign Latvian-born scientists were acknowledged as the true promoters of the research thought (Stradiņš, 2001).

Nowadays the researchers from universities of Latvia participate in the international process of studies and research as equal cooperation partners both individually and through their universities. Thus universities of Latvia are represented in several international organizations and cooperation networks that have influence on the development of the legal framework of universities, for example, *European University Association (EUA)*, *Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA)*. The international higher education organizations promote the cooperation of university administrations of different countries in developing the higher education policy ensuring more unified and understandable higher education policy among the European countries (Štefenhāgena, 2012).

5.8. *Discussion*

It has to be concluded that university activities in Latvia during the transition period from 1991 till 2004 correspond to the first two phases of the educational

borrowing theory, externalization and re-contextualization: during the post-Soviet period initially there was a reference to the external model in which learning from the cultural experience of Europe took place both in a diachronous, i.e., historical and synchronous way – trying to return in the European intellectual space at an accelerated speed and trying to master the topicalities of European higher education area. The modification of the external model into the local model according to the needs of Latvia as a democratic country, i.e., starting to develop the science and higher education model corresponding to the modern demands, was also started during this time.

Since 2004 when Latvia became the member state of the European Union the third phase of the educational borrowing model, i.e., internationalization: it is possible to speak about the metamorphosis of scientific knowledge in the local model as a result of purposeful university activities in the democratization, internationalization, mobility and Europeanization process, has been initiated in the university activities in Latvia. That means that education reforms are incorporated, adapted and perceived as local. Educational policy ideas are borrowed, transformed and internalized into the local education policy and institutions. The ideas are transformed for local needs and the aims, functions and essence of local system of education.

6. Conclusions

Looking back at the development of the university activities in Latvia since 1920s it has to be concluded that during the time period after 1991 in comparison with the paradigm transformations caused by the changes of the previous political powers higher education in Latvia evolutions as an independent social system in the context of common European Higher Education Area.

Only one university functioned in the Soviet Latvia but after regaining the independence the number of universities increases and the number of disciplines offered in universities also expands. At present universities offer studies for state and private funding.

Today there are six state-founded universities in Latvia that have developed from higher education institutions established earlier. There is no university among the private HEIs in Latvia or founded during the last 25 years. It means that private higher education institutions cannot offer broad scope of disciplines, but offer only those study programs that are requires by the market mostly business and social sciences. The public universities, on the other hand, offer wide variety subjects, including engineering or sciences that are high cost studies.

Nowadays universities in Latvia are part of the system of public administration institutions and the legal status of their autonomy and self-government in the framework of the existing normative documents allows the universities themselves define tasks and ways of their implementation in order to ensure the outcomes of studies and research in higher education. However, the restrictions imposed by legislation, especially related to the use of languages in the study process forbid the universities of Latvia to compete with other higher education institutions in Europe and the world. Therefore it is necessary to work out a new law on higher education that would be in conformity with the higher education development trends in Europe.

Universities of Latvia as other higher education institutions of Latvia have joined the European Higher Education Area, they took course to Bologna process quite early already in 1999, as the country was motivated to rapidly reform its Soviet education system and become part of EU. Therefore in compliance with the Bologna process higher education system in Latvia become transparent, and easy understandable in the European context. However, currently there is need to let universities to become more open for current trends of the higher education area, paying attention to the student centred learning, and digitalization of teaching and learning processes to become competitive with other European universities.

7. References

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