

POLES IN LATVIA AT THE ONSET OF THE 21ST CENTURY¹

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with 2 figures and 3 tables in the text

CONTENT

<i>Summary</i>	447
1 Introduction	448
2 Methodological framework	448
3 Population and settlement patterns of Poles in Latvia in light of the results of the national census of 2011	450
4 Organisational activities of Poles in Latvia.....	453
5 Schools for the Polish minority in Latvia.....	456
6 Conclusions	458
7 References	459

Summary

The article deals with the population and settlement patterns of the Polish minority in the Republic of Latvia in light of the National Census of 2011. The research paper also showcases the activities of major social organisations and Polish minority schools in Latvia. The research was conducted through a series of in-depth interviews. The review subjects were leaders of Polish organisations. The main goal of the interviews was to elicit the opinion of the most active and most competent activists. Research on the Polish minority in Latvia is an attempt at filling the blank the author believes is present in the geographical literature regarding the Polish situation abroad.

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1 Introduction

Currently, the ethnic composition of many countries is varied. Countries both small and very large are inhabited by numerous, often very distinct ethnic groups, including national minorities. These are the result of mass migrations, a change in national borders (i.e. Poles in Latvia) and other reasons. National minorities are a frequent topic of research, in recent times especially, undertaken by researchers of many different scientific disciplines. Sociologists, ethnographers, political scientists, cultural experts, historians, and even geographers have taken up the topic of national minorities on numerous occasions.

By the end of the 1980s, due to the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the Baltic republics under the influence of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) have seen the creation of many different social movements whose aim was a national renaissance, resulting in the abandonment of USSR structure and independence (BIERNAT 2003). After many years of Communist rule, Latvians could finally enjoy the independence they had so longed for. The events of this period have dramatically changed the situation of national minorities in Latvia. As a result, Central and Eastern Europe was beginning to be a part of European integration, which led to Latvia joining NATO and the European Union (EU) in 2004. The economic and political relationships between Poland and Latvia have also undergone changes.

The appearance of an independent Latvia on the political map has substantially improved the situation of national minorities in the country. While this did not solve the problems of said minorities, it gave the representatives of specific nationalities an opportunity to speak up about their aspirations and expectations (JEKABSONS 1993). In recent years the Polish minority in Latvia is seen as a positive factor in Polish-Latvian relationships, but it still has little visibility in the media.

2 Methodological framework

The research was carried out using the sociological method of an in-depth interview, according to which the respondent is questioned based on scripts prepared beforehand, consisting of open questions that allow for a completely natural conversation. During the interview, the interviewer may ask additional questions to elicit more detail on that topic. A special kind of in-depth interviews is one conducted with elite representatives – experts within a community. It is worth noting that members of the elite are accustomed to answering questions regarding their thoughts and opinions, so a researcher aiming to elicit information can make for an interesting conversation partner (KVALE 2011).

The interviews were conducted in autumn 2012 using a method of direct meetings with leaders of Polish organisations who run their businesses in Latvia. 19 interviews

were collectively conducted in eleven institutions. The aim of the interviews was the elicitation of the opinion of the most active and most competent Polish organisation activists.

Table 1: **List of Latvian institutions where the interviews were conducted**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Name of institutionī</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>
3	Association of Poles in Latvia [Związek Polaków na Łotwie], including departments in Riga [Rīga], Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Krāslava	Varšavas ielā 30, Daugavpils	4
4	Polish Culture Centre in Daugavpils [Centrum Kultury Polskiej]	Varšavas ielā 30, Daugavpils	3
1	Polish embassy in Riga	Mednieku iela 6b	2
6	Ita Kozakiewicz Polish High School	Nīcgales ielā 15, Rīga	2
7	Józefa Piłsudski Polish High School	Varšavas ielā 2, Daugavpils	2
2	Polish Women's Club [Klub Polskich Kobiet]	Varšavas ielā 30, Daugavpils	1
5	Polish kindergarten in Daugavpils	Vienības ielā 38b, Daugavpils	1
8	Stefan Batory Polish High School in Rēzekne	Lubanas 49, Rēzekne	1
9	Polish Primary School in Krāslava	Rēzeknes 39, Kraslavie	1
10	Young Poles Association in Latvia [Związek Młodych Polaków na Łotwie]	Rīga	1
11	Seniors' Club in Daugavpils	Varšavas ielā 30, Daugavpils	1
TOTAL:			19

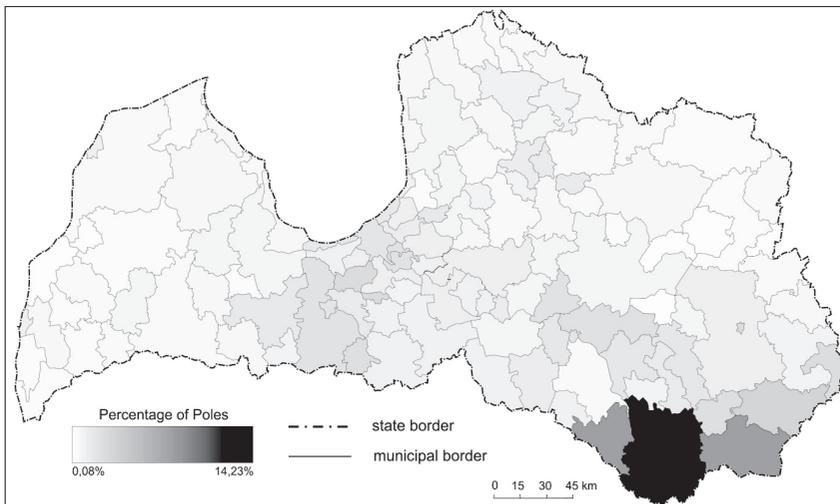
Source: own study

Interviews concerned issues relating to: opinions regarding the conduct and results of national censuses, cooperation with other Polish organisations in Latvia and Poland, special organisational structure, activity effectiveness, unresolved issues regarding the Latvian nation (now and in the past), support/cooperation by/with Poland and the situation of Poles in Latvia, etc.

3 Population and settlement patterns of Poles in Latvia in light of the results of the national census of 2011

In spring 2011, a general national census² (as of March 2011) was conducted in Latvia, serving as the first census since entering the EU. During the pre-census period, leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia were not particularly active. There were no articles regarding the census or advertisements encouraging people to declare their Polish nationality in “Polak na Łotwie”, the periodical published by Związek Polaków na Łotwie. According to the leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia, the number of Poles was understated in the census. The erasure of the “nationality” section on passports is seen as the main reason for this. The lack of a requirement to declare a nationality in official documents has a detrimental effect on national identity and serves to reinforce assimilative processes among Poles residing in Latvia.³

Figure 1: Participation of people declared as Polish in Latvia by municipality during the national census of 2011



Source: own study based on CSB5 data

² During the period of Latvia’s membership in the USSR four censuses were carried out (1959, 1970, 1979, 1989). Unlike Lithuania, Latvia was filled with more ethnically diverse people and had a lower percentage of native Latvians. As P. EBERHARDT (1996) notes, this was caused mainly by the large influx of Russians (from 10% before the war to 26% in 1959). The Polish population remained at a steady level of about 60,000 people. The first national census in independent Latvia took place in 2000. Poles were the fourth-largest national minority in Latvia, right after Russians (703,243 declarations – 29.6%), Belarusians (97,150 – 4.09%) and Ukrainians (63,644 – 2.68%). Over 59,500 people have declared themselves Polish, making up 2.5% of the general populace.

³ Based on the author’s interview with the leaders of the Association of Poles in Latvia.

According to the 2011 census, Poles were the fourth-largest national minority in Latvia, right after Russians (557,119 declarations – 26.9%), Belarusians (68,202 – 3.3%) and Ukrainians (45,772 – 2.2%). Over 44,700 people have declared themselves Polish (2.2% of the general populace). Out of the 44,772 declaring to be Polish on the census, over 46% resided in Latgale, while 37% were found in the Riga [Rīga] region. The municipalities with the largest populations of Poles (Table 1) were: the city Daugavpils (nearly 13,300 people declaring as Polish), the city of Riga (12,200), and the municipalities Daugavpils (3,200), Krāslava (near 1,400), and Jelgava (approx. 1,100). The municipalities with the highest Polish contribution (Fig. 1) were the city of Daugavpils – 14.2%, the Daugavpils municipality – 12.8%, the Krāslava municipality – 7.8%, and the Ilūkste municipality – 7.8%. All of the above-mentioned municipalities are situated on grounds that were historically part of the Polish Inflanty Voivodship.

Table 2 shows the result of the simultaneous analysis of two variables: the population and percentage of Poles in Latvian municipalities. Both variables have been standardised and the standardised values were summed up. This makes selecting the ‘most Polish’ administrative units possible.

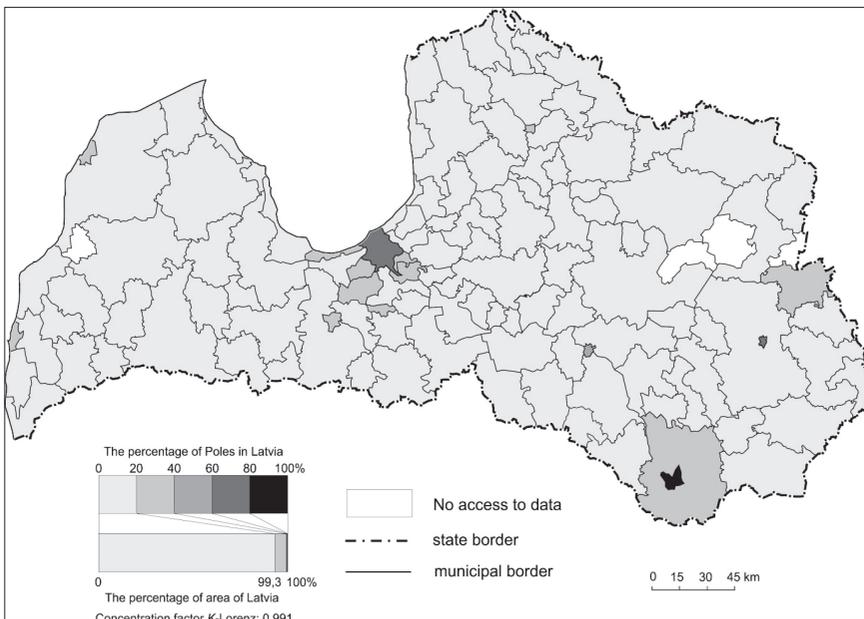
Table 2: Municipalities with the largest population and percentage of Poles within the general number of citizens (based on the 2011 national census)

<i>Administrative unit</i>	<i>Polish population</i>	<i>Percentage of Poles</i>	<i>Polish population</i>	<i>Percentage of Poles</i>	<i>Total</i>
			<i>Standardised values</i>		
Daugavpils city	13,278	14.23	7.78	6.68	14.47
Daugavpils	3,226	12.84	1.72	5.97	7.69
Riga city	12,208	1.85	7.14	0.31	7.44
Krāslava	1,374	7.85	0.60	3.40	4.00
Ilūkste	626	7.83	0.15	3.39	3.54
Jēkabpils	694	2.82	0.19	0.80	0.99
Dagda	266	3.21	-0.07	1.00	0.94
Rēzekne	795	2.46	0.25	0.62	0.87
Olaine	510	2.54	0.08	0.66	0.74
Jelgava	1,083	1.82	0.43	0.29	0.71

Source: own study based on CSB5 data

The concentration of Poles in Latvia is very high. 80% of all Poles residing in Latvia are gathered within a territory of about 6.7% of the country’s area (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Areal concentration of Poles in Latvia in 2011



Source: own study based on CSB data

The results of the Latvian 2011 census have once again proved that the Polish language is not a key factor in maintaining the Poles' national identity. Only 1,800 people, including 1,400 people who declared themselves to be Polish, said that Polish was the language they used at home most often. The majority of people declared as Polish – over 30,000 – said that Russian is the language they use most often at home, while 8,000 said it was Latvian.

Polish was most often used at home in Daugavpils – 788, including 714 declaring themselves as Polish, and Riga – 496, including 357 people of a Polish nationality. Interestingly, over 4,700 people declaring themselves as Polish could not declare what language they use at home. Only 285 Poles said they used Latgalian. People of nationalities other than Polish said that they used Polish at home, including 200 Latvians, 54 Russians and 47 Belarusians.

To sum up, Poles have been present in Latvia since the time of the Inflanty Voivodeship. Poles in Latvia invariably concentrate around two of the largest cities – Daugavpils and Riga, at the same time functioning as the indigenous people of those regions. The functioning of the Polish minority in multicultural communities greatly increases their susceptibility to assimilation.

4 Organisational activities of Poles in Latvia

After the war, the Soviet government controlled the functioning of minority organisations in Latvia. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Eastern and Central European countries saw an increase in importance of the perception of nationality and religion, in dominant nationalities and minorities alike. The implementation of glasnost and perestroika in the USSR by M. Gorbachev at the end of the 1980s led to the revitalisation of the institutionalisation of Polish life in Latvia. 1991 was the year Latvia regained independence, which marked the beginning of a new era for the country. These countries had to be reformed in all areas of life. The changes occurring in the 1980s in the USSR had a positive influence on the aspirations and goals of Poles in Latvia to create their own organisational structures. Social and cultural needs were also openly addressed, along with the right to defend one's own rights.

During the Soviet period, the only Polish organisation functioning in Latvia since the 1970s was the Polish Culture Club "Polonez" at the Dom Kultury Budowniczych in Riga. In the mid-1980s, due to changes implemented in the USSR by Gorbachev, the domestic politics of the country changed, thus changing the situation of the Latvian Polish minority (GRĘDZIK 1999). Poles took the change well, becoming strongly involved in the rebuilding of their national identity (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999). By the end of 1988, the Social and Cultural Association of Poles in Latvia (SSKPL) was called into existence as an organisation spanning the whole of Latvia. During the first Meeting of Poles in Latvia that took place in January 1990, the SSKPL was transformed into the Association of Poles in Latvia (ZPL)⁴ whose first president was the first Polish community activist, Ita Kozakiewicz. The revitalised Polish national movement was quickly reflected in ZPL departments at the beginning of the 1990s. Its leaders paid special attention to the lack of intellectual elites in the Polish environment caused by the lack of possibilities for Poles to gain a proper education. The first action the ZPL took was the creation of education opportunities for Poles. The first step was the creation of an educational network where subjects would be taught in Polish. The Polish youth was also sent to study in Poland (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999).

The aims of the ZPL became as follows: integration of Poles in Latvia, revival of Polish education, renewal of religious life and the protection of Polish heritage in Latvia.⁵ During its first year, the ZPL has created eight departments in Riga, Daugavpils, Krāslava, Jēglava, Ventspils, Dobele, Liepāja and Rēzekne. In 2000, 15 ZPL departments were already functioning in Latvia, with new departments in Jēkabpils, Cēsis and Ilūkste (BIERNAT 2003). The aims for the upcoming years are the strengthening of the Polish authority in Latvia, further support for Polish education growth, support for Polish business and the creation of the organisation's website. The

⁴ In 1922-1934 and 1938-1939, Związek Polaków w Łotwie functioned in Latvia; Związek Polaków na Łotwie is often considered its 'successor'.

⁵ based on the Statute of the ZPL [Statut Związku Polaków na Łotwie] (2005).

organisation leaders declared that they would make an effort for Polish to become a regional language in Latgale.⁶

In 1998, Daugavpils saw the inception of the Educational and Cultural Association “Promień” (‘Ray’), whose main aim was the development of Polish culture and education in Latvia. It began with an attempt to create a Sunday school that would allow both children and older people to learn the Polish language (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999). The Association became a subsidiary of ZPŁ after its creation.

Along with the gradual rebirth of the Polish national awareness, there have been efforts to restore Polish scouting in Latvia. In 1989 two scouting troops (male and female) were created in Riga. A year later they swore their official oaths. In 1993, a female troop was created in Daugavpils and a “Zuchy” troop was created in Riga. Polish scouting representatives would often take part in various events in Poland, including pilgrimages to the Jasna Góra Monastery and scout rallies (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999).

In 1997, the Polish Culture Centre (CKP) was created. Its creation was supported by the Daugavpils Municipal Council (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999). The creation of the CKP was a way for the Latvian government to express their openness to the idea that the Polish minority could aim to preserve and cultivate their national identity (MAKOWSKI 2009). The organisation shares many of its members with the Daugavpils division of ZPŁ. One of the most important aims of the SKP is the popularisation of knowledge about Polish culture and folk customs. The Centre organises numerous artistic events, helps cultivate talent in young people, and also organises many competitions, concerts and festivals. Additionally, CKP is responsible for the realisation of projects together with Polish schools in Latvia and the different departments of ZPŁ. The CKP serves as a base for a theatre group, the “Kukułeczka” folk dance group, the “Barwy Daugawy” vocal band, the “Szkolna Chatka” children’s club, the “Promień” choir, the Seniors’ Club, the Polish Women’s Club and a library.⁷

In 1998, another organisation, consisting of youth known as the ZMPŁ (Young Poles in Latvia Association), branched off from ZPŁ. Its main aim is the unification of Polish youth and granting them the ability to communicate in their native language. The ZMPŁ organises courses and summer schools of the Polish language, as well as meetings with Polish politicians and people of culture during their time visiting Latvia.⁸

Since 2005, the “Semper Polonia” Scholarship Club has functioned as part of the CKP. Members of the club focus mostly on the popularisation of Polish culture amongst the young and care for Polish graves. The club mostly consists of Poles studying in Daugavpils.⁹

In 2011, the “Inflanty Renaissance” [latv. Infļantu Renesanse] Association was created. This is an organisation of a historical and cultural character. Graduates of

⁶ based on the author’s interviews with ZPŁ leaders.

⁷ based on the author’s interview with CKP and ZPŁ leaders.

⁸ based on the author’s interview with ZPŁ leaders.

⁹ based on the author’s interview with ZPŁ leaders.

the Daugavpils University Polish philology are responsible for the creation of this initiative. Their aim is to conduct research regarding the history of the Polish Inflanty Voivodship.¹⁰

In 2013, according to data provided by the Polish Embassy in Riga, eleven Polish socio-cultural organisations (Table 3) functioned within Latvia, the most important of which was the ZPŁ with 15 departments.

Table 3: **Polish organisations registered in Latvia (as of 2013)**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Name of organisation, headquarters</i>	<i>Year of establishment</i>	<i>Leading organisation theme</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>
1	Polish Culture Club „POLONEZ”	1978	cultural	Riga
2	Association of Poles in Latvia	1990	cultural	Daugavpils
3	Charity Society in Latvia	1991	charity	Riga
4	Polish Women League	1995	charity, cultural	Riga
5	Polish Culture Centre in Daugavpils - Polish Women’s Club - Seniors’ Club	1997	cultural, educational, youth	Daugavpils
6	Young Pole Association in Latvia	1998	youth, cultural	Riga
7	Club of Scholarship “Semper Polonia”	2005	youth	Daugavpils
8	Association “Odrodzenie Inflant”	2011	cultural, academic	Daugavpils
9	Association of Headmasters of Polish schools in Latvia	x	trade, educational	Riga

Sources: own study based on field data and data provided by the Polish Embassy in Riga

The spatial structure of Polish organisations is closely related to the modern distribution of Poles in Latvia. The highest concentration of organisation headquarters or their divisions is in Daugavpils and Riga – which have two of the largest concentrations of Poles in Latvia.

Leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia stress that, although the two largest concentrations of Poles in Latvia are similar in size, the Daugavpils organisations are much more active than those in Riga. This mostly stems from the size and the character of the areas in which they function. Riga is a much larger city and the Poles living there are much more dispersed. Even though Daugavpils is the second-largest city in Latvia, its population is much smaller than that of the capital city. Additionally, for centuries it has been considered a cultural centre for national minorities, including the Polish people.¹¹

¹⁰ based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

¹¹ based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

The Catholic Church also plays a crucial role in the lives of Poles in Latvia. After many years of oppression, it has undergone a renaissance as Latvia has regained independence (JĘDRZEJEWSKI 1999). As A. GAWKOWSKA (2009) notices, Poles in Latvia are very religious, so there is a great demand for masses to be conducted in the Polish language. Additionally, elders often treat participation in Polish mass as an opportunity for social encounters. In 2013, over 20 churches in Latvia conducted masses in the Polish language, mostly in Latgale, the largest concentration of Poles in Latvia. The Polish pastoral service is conducted by both Polish priests and Latvians.¹²

It is worth noting that aside from officially registered organisations, there are also a number of Polish artistic groups, including dance, musical, theatre and athletic groups functioning in Latvia. Polish media are also present in Latvia, although on a much smaller scale than in Lithuania. In 1989, the first Polish periodical in Latvia – “Pole in Latvia” – started being published. The periodical offered a commentary on current events in the lives of Poles in Latvia. It described the meetings of Polish and Latvian politicians, and recapped many important historical events in Latvia involving Poles. There are also three Polish radio shows aired in Latvia: “Nasz Głos” on the 4th channel of the Latvian Radio, “Polskofalowska” and “Głos Młodych Polaków” on the Daugavpils local Radio Alise. The Latgalan television also airs two Polish programs “Akcenty Polskie” and “Na Falach Daugawy”.¹³

Polish radio shows and television programs in Latvia started to undergo a crisis from January 1st 2012, when financial support for Poles in Latvia was transferred from the Polish Senate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to the lack of financial support, the “Polak na Lotwie” periodical and the radio show has been discontinued, and the television programs were only continued thanks to the generosity of the Latvian television stations, which increased the amount of commitment each month.¹⁴

In 2012, thanks to support from the Polish Embassy in Riga, the “polonika.lv” project was initiated. Its aim is the collection and spreading of photographs and documents of Poles living in Latvia. A blog devoted to noble families in Latvia, the cultural heritage and activism of Poles in Latvia is also run as part of the project.¹⁵

5 Schools for the Polish minority in Latvia

During the period when Latvia was part of the USSR, Polish education was almost completely eradicated. The Soviet government stated that this was due to the lack of people wanting to study in the Polish language, although in truth they were

¹² based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

¹³ based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

¹⁴ based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

¹⁵ based on the author’s interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

trying to prevent the facilitation of the national identity of Poles living in Latvia. It was only at the end of the 1980s that it became possible to study in the Polish language. The restoration of Polish education was met with large support from the Latvians (BOROŃ 2011; RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003). In 1989, as part of an initiative made by the ZPŁ, a Polish class was established in a school in Riga. This was later turned into the first Polish educational facility in independent Latvia. On December 12th 1989 an understanding was signed between the National Education Minister of the PRL and the National Education Minister of the Latvian SRR for the period of 1989-1995. The Latvian side was obliged to help raise the level of Polish language teaching and other subjects taught in the language, preparing the proper textbooks and methodological assistance, as well as to help hire teachers and kindergarten caretakers (RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003). As part of this understanding, the Polish Ministry provided Polish textbooks and brought in teachers from Poland (URLIŃSKA 2007).

In 2013, there were seven educational institutions with Polish as the main language in Latvia, including three in Daugavpils, which has the largest concentration of Poles in Latvia. The oldest Polish school in Latvia, the Ita Kozakiewicz School in Riga, is a collective institution that consists of a kindergarten, a primary school and a high school.

The I. Kozakiewicz School in Riga was started in 1991. During the first year of the school, two first-grade classes were created, along with one second-grade class and one third-grade. Initially, the school hired 14 teachers, including eleven from Poland. In later years, the number of students steadily increased. In 1993, the school moved headquarters. In the middle of 1993 there was a serious conflict between parents and the governing body of the Riga school. Some parents were in favour of a change of the institution's profile to that of a Russian school. Due to increased tension the school has been divided and the Experimental Polish School was created under the patronage of the Pedagogical Department of the Latvian University. However, due to changes in staff, in 2003 the school ceased to function as a minority school. In 1995, the I. Kozakiewicz School was accredited, which placed it on an equal footing with Latvian schools (URLIŃSKA 2007).

On September 1st 1991 a Polish school was created in Daugavpils after nearly a 40-year break. In 1993, the school reclaimed its former building whose renovation was financed by the ZPŁ (RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003). In 1998, due to accreditation, the institution has received the title of a high school. Since 2000, the school has come to claim another building, which allowed for the creation of an events hall and a gymnasium (GRĘDZIK 1999).

In September 1991, the Polish Initial School in Krāslava was created. However, despite gaining the status of a nine-year-program school, it was declined accreditation in the school year 1996/97. The reason for this was mismanagement of the institution. In 1998, the accreditation procedure was repeated and this time, the score was positive (GRĘDZIK 1999; RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003). In September 1993, a Polish Initial School

has been created in Rēzekne. In the mid-1990s, there was a shortage of textbooks and teaching tools in the school. In 1997, the institution gained a new, much larger building, along with a Latvian accreditation, and in 2000 it was transformed into a Polish primary school (RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003).

An independent Polish kindergarten has been functioning in Daugavpils. Group activities are conducted in Polish and Latvian, based on the curriculum for national minorities. The kindergarten prepares the children for studying at a Polish gymnasium.¹⁶ On September 1994 the Polish Primary School in Jēkabpils was established (RUNIEWICZ-JASIŃSKA 2003). The school received accreditation in the school year 1995/96 (GRĘDZIK 1999).

The number of students in educational institutions with Polish as the main language in Latvia has remained steady for the last couple of years. These schools are also attended by young people of other nationalities, although the vast majority is Polish. These Polish institutions aim to teach the Polish language and pass on the knowledge of Polish culture, history and geography. In such schools, the subjects of language and literature, religion, Polish history and extracurricular activities are conducted in the Polish language.¹⁷ According to M. STANISŁAWSKA (2003), this is an exceptionally challenging task considering the fact that many children do not speak Polish at all.

It is also worth mentioning that for about 20 years Polish philology has been available at the Department of Humanities at the University of Daugavpils. The classes are conducted at the BA level. At the MA level, it is possible to specialise in teaching the Polish language.

6 Conclusions

Poles living in Latvia are concentrated around two major cities – Daugavpils and Riga. The large distance between these areas makes communication within the group as well as the management of Polish organisations in Latvia much harder. Additionally, this has caused the two concentrations of Poles to become isolated from one another.

The Polish minority in Riga is much less active. At the same time, it is much more susceptible to assimilation, due to functioning in a multicultural city. Poles in Daugavpils, on the other hand, are concentrated in a much smaller unit, and thus are much more active. This has led to the transfer of the ZPL headquarters to the CKP in Daugavpils, among other activities. It is important to note that Polish activity has been reduced in recent years. The reason for this is the lack of funding and proper

¹⁶ <http://www.gwiazdka.lv/> - access on December 6th 2013.

¹⁷ based on the author's interviews with leaders of Polish organisations in Latvia.

support from the Polish government that would allow for the realisation of statutory aims of specific organisations. Additionally, there is a lack of involvement of young Poles living in Latvia in activism.

Polish schools can function in Latvia thanks to the activities of the ZPŁ, which stresses the importance of Polish schooling in the independent Latvian Republic. They play a vital role in the cultivation of Polish traditions and nurturing the Polish national identity among the youth.

The problem Poles living in Latvia face is the fact that they are often considered Russians, since they mostly use the Russian language. Despite this, they often maintain a Polish national identity. They are distinct from other minorities in that they are Catholic. On the other hand, the Polish integration into the Latvian society serves to hasten the assimilation process, which consequently leads to decreasing the population and activity of the Polish minority.

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