



Linguistic Landscapes & Mindsets

visible and narrated multilingualism



Pilot Internship in Empirical Language Research –
ERS Summer School, Riga, Latvia

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Since 2022, as part of the project *Espace – Räume – Spaces (ERS)*, we have been organizing summer schools in Riga (Latvia) for students from various Universities in Switzerland, Europe, and the USA



Latvia is a fascinating, multilingual country



Rīgā ielu uzraksti līdz 1877.gadam bija vācu valodā, no 1877. līdz 1902.g. – vācu un krievu valodās, bet pēc 1902.g. vāciski, krieviski un latviski. Ielas vārds tika brīvi tulkots. Pēc Latvijas neatkarības pasludināšanas 1918.gadā ielu uzraksti bija latviešu valodā. Padomju varas gados, līdz 1991.g., ielu nosaukumi bija latviski un krieviski. Krievu valodā tos atveidoja, nevis tulkoja.

Till 1877 the street plates in Riga were in German and Russian, after 1902 in German, Russian and Latvian. The name of the street was translated. After 1918, when Latvia proclaimed independence, the street plates were in Latvian. Till 1991, during the Soviet period, the street plates were in Latvian and Russian. The names were reproduced in Russian not translated.

Multilingualism in Latvia

The official national language is Latvian

Approximately 40% of the population (in Riga even around 60%) speak Russian as their native language

In the region of Latgale, Latgalian and Polish are also spoken, and in Kurzeme and Vidzeme, Livonian used to be spoken

Swedish, German, and English also have (had) a major impact on the linguistic situation in Latvia

Some Statistics

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Mother tongue and language used at home by region in 2022 (per cent of the population in the relevant group)								
Language use	Language	Latvia	Riga statistical region	Pierīga statistical region	Vidzeme statistical region	Kurzeme statistical region	Zemgale statistical region	Latgale statistical region
Mother tongue	Latvian	64.3	48.0	73.6	92.1	78.0	76.9	45.7
Mother tongue	Latgalian	1.3	0.1	0.5	...	...	...	8.4
Mother tongue	Belarusian	1.2	1.3	0.9	...	1.4	1.7	1.1
Mother tongue	Russian	37.7	57.4	27.4	9.4	18.8	23.1	56.1
Mother tongue	Ukrainian	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.4
Mother tongue	Other	2.7	3.2	3.0	0.5	3.3	2.3	2.7
Language used at home	Latvian	62.0	44.5	74.7	91.6	79.3	78.0	33.6
Language used at home	Latgalian	1.2	...	...	...	...	...	8.8
Language used at home	Belarusian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Language used at home	Russian	34.6	53.0	22.7	7.5	18.4	20.5	55.3
Language used at home	Ukrainian	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Language used at home	Other	2.2	2.5	2.7	0.6	2.2	1.5	2.3

Latvia's multilingual history and present are complex, controversial and rapidly changing, providing valuable insights for experts on Eastern Europe and anyone interested in history and politics

We aim to document the ongoing transformations using low-threshold empirical methods and to reflect on the results together in a seminar during the Autumn Semester 2026





This year, we are focusing on multilingualism in the City of Riga and its surroundings, exploring how it manifests both in public life and in the everyday lives of its inhabitants

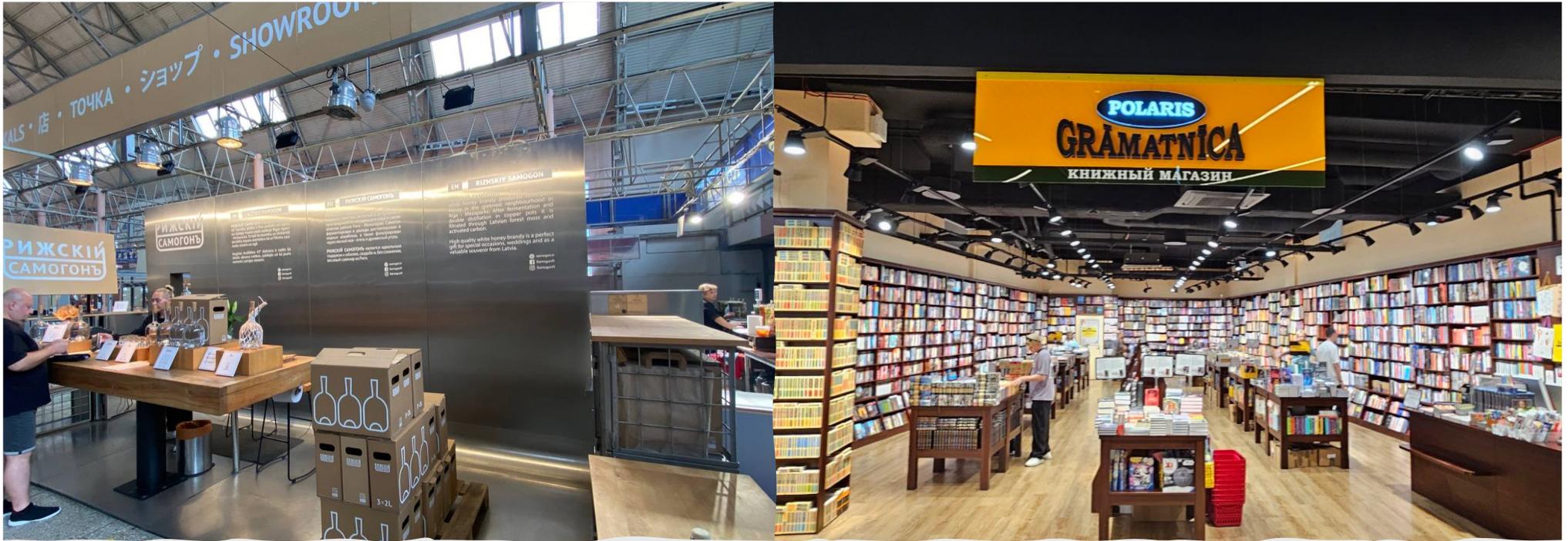


Sociolinguistic research questions

PREF. 8 IECIRKNIS
KRĀSOTĀJU IELA
№ 12
KRESLIŅA MANTIN.
GRUPA. 34. GRUN 113.

Ēkas numura plāksne
laikā no 1918. līdz 1940. gadam
pirmajā Latvijas Republikas
neatkarības periodā
The number plate of a building
from 1918 until 1940
during the first period of independence
of the Republic of Latvia



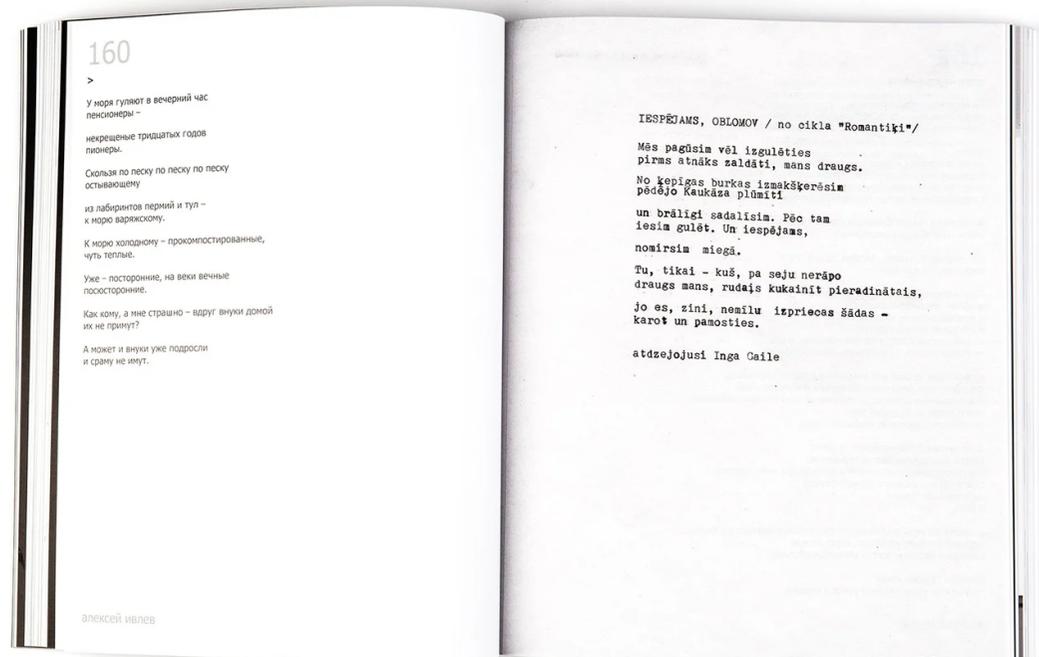


2. What does the oral use of Latvian, English, and Russian sound like in public spaces in and around Riga?

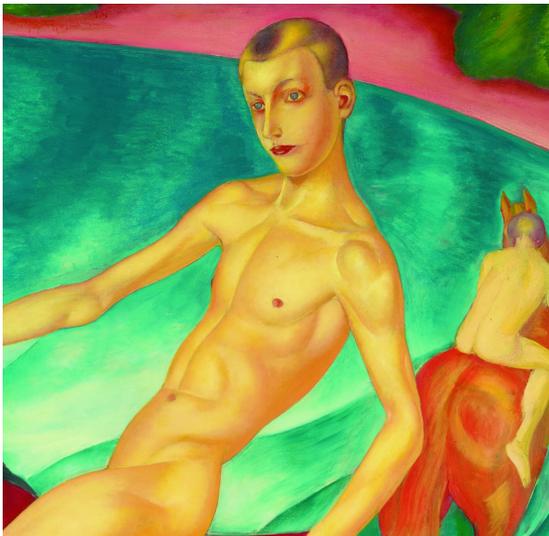


3. What are the language biographies, language practices and language attitudes of Riga's residents, considering their personal linguistic background (Latvian, Russian, English, or other first/family/everyday languages)?

Cultural Linguistic Landscapes Post-imperial Multilingualism as Cultural Reflection



Sociocultural and literary research questions



+++++
skadrons
Īzaks Bābels

How do literary texts, performances and cultural institutions in Riga stage or problematise multilingualism — and which languages are rendered visible, marginal, translated or silenced?

How is multilingualism performed and embodied in artistic practices — and what tensions, ruptures or forms of coexistence emerge?

How do cultural actors reflect on the post-Soviet / post-imperial language constellation — and in what ways do cultural works operate as second-order observations of multilingualism?

Where do cultural practices expose tensions between official language policy, everyday usage and affective attachment?

How do cultural spaces in Riga function as laboratories for negotiating post-imperial multilingualism — as sites where power, memory and belonging are symbolically reconfigured?

RIGA PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL STARPTELPA

RIGA - LATVIA - ST. SAVIOUR'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

25-31 MAY 2026

Possible Objects of Study

- Literary texts (multilingual poetry, code-switching, heterographies)
- Theatre, performances, readings
- Cultural institutions (festivals, bookshops, theatres, museums)
- Paratexts (programmes, websites, event language choices)
- Materiality of language (typography, scripts, spatial staging)



Methodological Add-on (complementary to linguistic data)

- Close reading / close viewing
- Contextual cultural-space analysis
- Assemblage-oriented case studies
- Comparative micro-analyses (Riga & beyond)

Empirical data (interviews, surveys, linguistic landscapes)

- Cultural analysis

= multidimensional understanding of multilingualism



Research methods

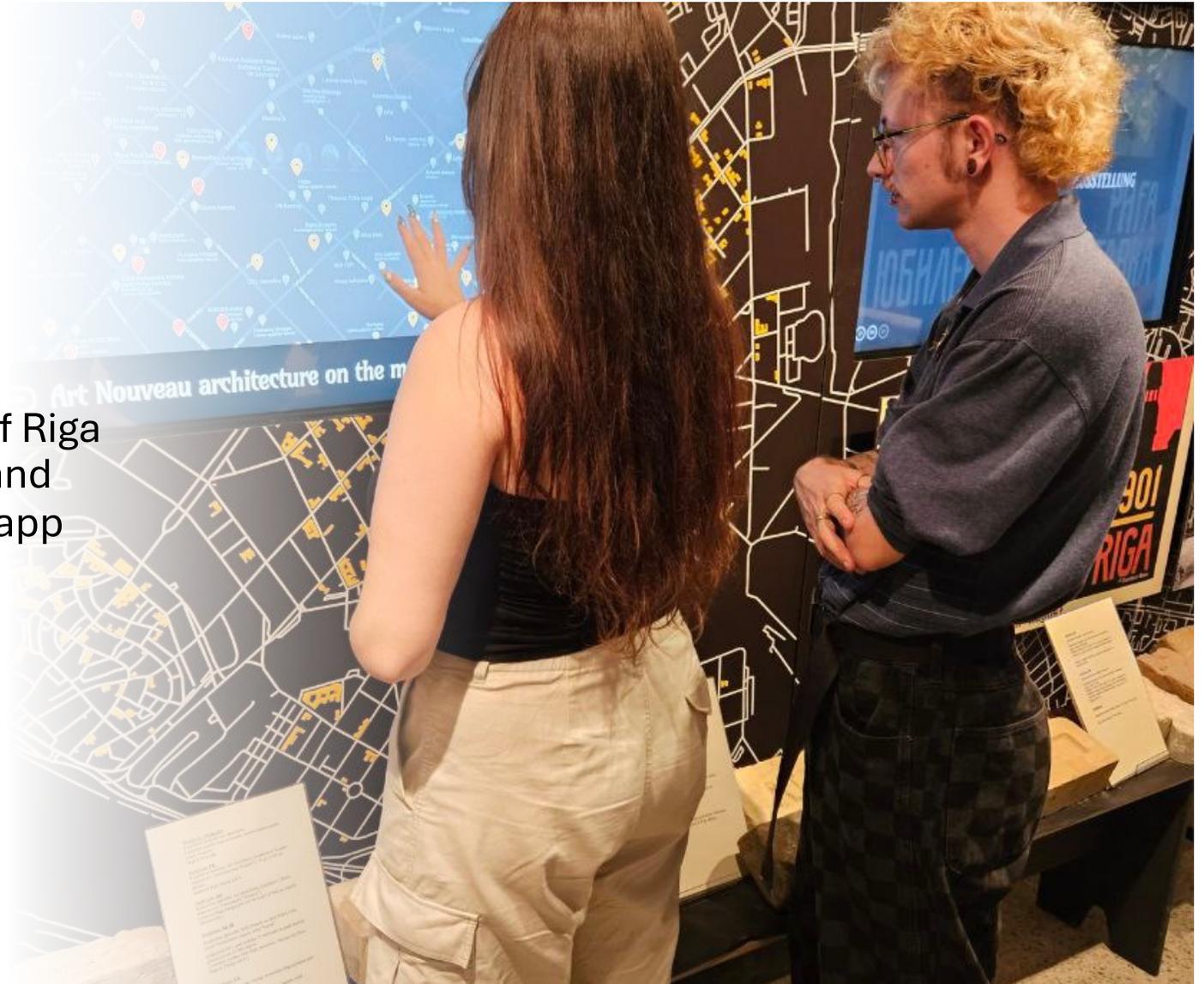


1. Participant and non-participant observation

We will examine everyday situations in Riga to determine, which languages are used, in which way and in which districts and socio-cultural contexts. Depending on the situation, we will either observe passively or participate actively and document the results

2. Linguistic Landscaping

We will explore the linguistic landscape of Riga and its surroundings and document it using an app



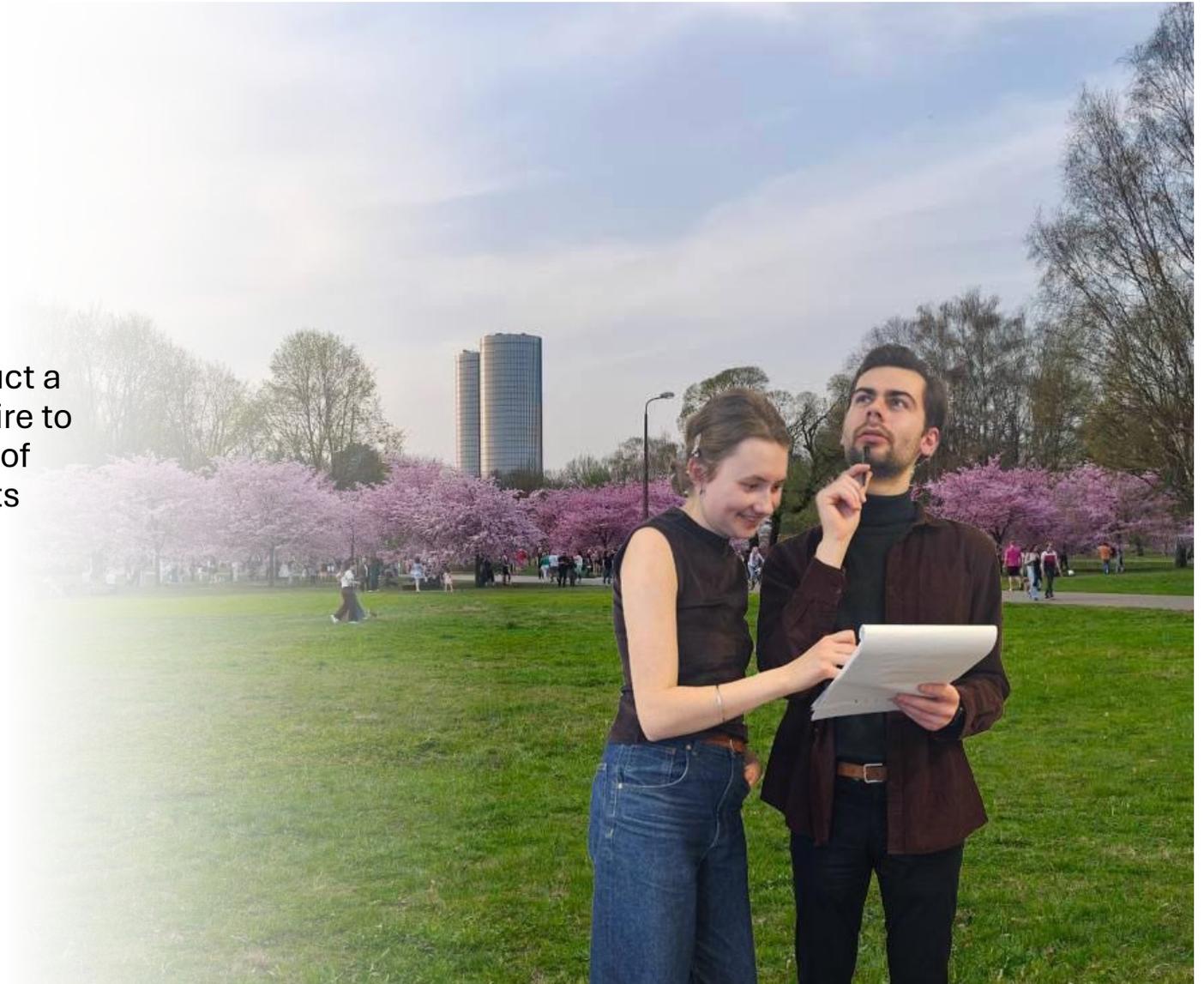


3. Narrative interviews

We will conduct interviews with residents of Riga from different generations and with various first and family languages in order to explore their personal experiences with multilingualism in their own words

4. Survey

Additionally, we will conduct a survey using a questionnaire to obtain a broader overview of language use in Riga and its surroundings





Who can participate?

Participants of the Summer School 2026:
University students, upper secondary school students
and all interested parties

How does the internship work?

1. On Friday, June 5 (3–6 pm) and Saturday, June 6 (9 am–4 pm), a preparatory **block event** will take place, organized by the Universities of Bern and Fribourg. Topics of the course include an introduction to “Multilingualism in Latvia” and an overview of the data collection methods. The course will take place in a hybrid format and will be conducted in German, but other languages may be used if needed
 2. As part of the Summer School 2026 (July 4 – August 1, 2026), the data collection will take place in Riga.
 3. Participation in the preparatory block course and the data collection will be awarded with 3 ECTS
- (2 days in Fribourg + 1 week in Riga)





We warmly invite all interested students to join this exciting project! The insights and skills gained can be applied to multilingual contexts beyond Latvia, for example in other Eastern European countries or in Switzerland

Contact / Information / Registration / Questions



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Music: Swing Machine by Kevin MacLeod | <https://incompetech.com/>
Music promoted by <https://www.chosic.com/free-music/all/>
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