

Nordic-Baltic Region (NBR)
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- 2008 - International Year of Languages
- 2008 - Année internationale des langues
- 2008 - Año Internacional de los Idiomas
- 2008 - Международный год языков
- 2008 - السنة الدولية للغات
- 国际语言年 - 2008 年
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“To celebrate the International Year of Languages, UNESCO invites governments, United Nations organizations, civil society organizations, educational institutions, professional associations and all other stakeholders to increase their own activities to promote and protect all languages, particularly endangered languages, in all individual and collective contexts.

*[<http://sociolingo.wordpress.com>]
(retrieved 16 Nov., 2008)*

FIPLV NBR international conference in Riga, Latvia

One of the central events of the FIPLV NBR was the international conference hosted by the Latvian Association of the Language Teachers (LALT) in Riga, 15-16th June, 2007. Riga, the capital of Latvia, is well-known as the pearl of the Art Nouveau, and recognized for its charming old town and city centre included in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Apparently, one of the basic gains of the conference was the support and interest of the FIPLV associations in the Riga forum, which allowed its organizers to compile a rich programme thanks to the presenters from more than 20 countries of the globe. The subject matter of the conference has been selected in compliance with some of the most topical issues in the language teaching methodology, such as

- Creativity in language teaching and learning
- Intercultural education: practical aspects
- Experience of using the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR);
- European Language Portfolio at school and university.

The title of the conference was *“Innovations in Language Teaching and Learning in the Multicultural Context”*, and there were more than 85 workshops and presentations in English, German, French, Latvian and Russian – the conference languages.



International Nordic-Baltic Region Conference of FIPLV



Innovations in Language Teaching and Learning in the Multicultural Context

15 – 16th June, 2007, Riga, Latvia

The conference programme and abstracts

During the opening ceremony the conference participants were addressed by Anita Auzina, chairperson of the organizing committee of the conference; Vita Kalnberzina, President of LALT; Tatjana Koke, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia and since 2008 – Minister of Education and Science of Latvia; Terry Lamb, UK, FIPLV President; Ranveig Reggestad, Norway, President of the FIPLV Nordic-Baltic region, and Konrad Schroder, Germany, President of the FIPLV European region. The welcoming address was also given by Diana Pauna, Pro-rector of the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, where the conference sessions were held. The conference organizers are most thankful to the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga whose comfortable premises located in one of the most beautiful Art Nouveau buildings, created the specific atmosphere of the event – friendly and encouraging.

The speakers advanced valuable theoretical and practical ideas and novel approaches, sought solutions, highlighting also pedagogical and psychological aspects of language teaching and learning. Some of them are illustrated below.



Rob de Haas, the Netherlands, held a practical, interactive workshop on E. de Bono lateral thinking, 'Six Thinking Hats' and other creative thinking techniques

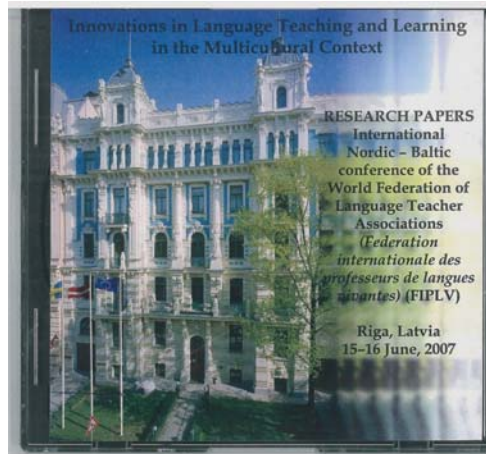


Helen Coltrinari, Canada, held a workshop on differentiated learning



Zigrīda Vincēla, Latvia, gave a presentation on 'Text-based Computer-mediated Communication: Formal or Informal Writing?'

The internationally reviewed conference volume of research papers, CD format, included articles from various parts of the world: Australia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, South Africa, the UK, the USA. The volume has already been included in the catalogues of some of the largest libraries and universities in Latvia, as well as other European countries. Also in the catalogue of the Congress Library, USA. We are truly thankful to the members of the scientific committee of the conference and editorial board for their effort, expert view, advice and recommendations. They included experts from Australia, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, the UK, and the USA.



The conference 500 page CD volume

The volume contains 48 articles written in English, French, Russian and Latvian and provide summaries in each of these languages. It is divided into five parts, each dealing with a different aspect of the innovations in language education in the multicultural context of the twenty-first century. Thus, Part I '*Reconceptualizing language education: trends, challenges and solutions*' highlights important approaches to the interpretation of such concepts as 'identity', 'language diversity', 'language education' and 'multilingualism', as well as 'transformative learning space' within the context of life-long education. This section also describes Vygotskyan cultural-historical theory which is gaining influence as an instrument for language acquisition. Part II is mainly devoted to the many-faceted issues of *intercultural education and developing intercultural communicative competence* and includes 22 contributions. Part III '*Creativity in Language Education*' focuses on the latest research on

developing creative thinking skills, their purposeful integration into the language classes. Part IV is comprised of articles on *the use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP)* and presents some of the best professional experience from Germany and Latvia. Part V is concerned with the *focal issues in language education* as described in the contributions from Hungary, Estonia, Russia and Latvia. We express our deep appreciation to all the contributors of this 500 page volume for their co-operation and meaningful input.

During the conference FIPLV president Terry Lamb presented the FIPLV International award to Olga Ozolina, professor of the University of Latvia, one of the founders of LALT in 2001 and its Board member since then, an outstanding president of the French language teachers association of Latvia, a winner of the European Language Label 2007.



FIPLV president Terry Lamb presents the FIPLV International Award to Olga Ozolina

Olga Ozolina - winner of the FIPLV International Award 2007

The conference guests had also some time for relaxing and sightseeing in Riga and Jurmala, the famous seaside town and resort on the Baltic sea beach.



Terry Lamb, UK Irena Matisone and Zita Goldsmite, Latvia, during the conference lunch on the 'Gutenbergs' open-air terrace

The conference organizers were glad to host the FIPLV World Assembly, the FIPLV and the NBR Executive meetings, as well as the NBR General meeting.



**After the NBR Executive meeting in Riga:
Bengt Henningsson, Sweden; Diana Rumpite,
Latvia; Ranveig Reggestad, Norway; Raija
Airio, Finland; Sigurborg Jonsdottir, Iceland**

The conference guests enjoyed the welcoming party together with the *Latvian Folk Dance group 'Dandari', University of Latvia*, when special dishes typically served at the Latvian national holiday 'Ligo' (John's day) marked on the 23rd of June, were offered.



**The conference welcoming party with the folk dance group
'Dandari' at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga**



**Terry Lamb with the Latvian folk dance
group 'Dandari'**

On the last day of the conference its participants were welcomed to the conference dinner at the popular 'Lido' recreational center, one of the finest and largest log structures in Europe, and famous for its delicious Latvian cuisine.



'Lido' – one of the most favourite places of the visitors to Riga



At the 'Lido'

It was noted that the conference had become an important milestone in the life of both the NBR and LALT and received a highly positive feedback.

Other FIPLV NBR activities

Each year the NBR associations organize their *individual* conferences, seminars and other events to mark *the European Day of Languages* celebrated on 26th September all over Europe. The NBR associations also hold various local *in-service teacher training seminars*, *national and international conferences* and take part in different *projects*.

- **SUKOL (Finland)**

Thus, *SUKOL (Finland)* had a jubilee event in October 2007 when *SUKOL marked its unique - 50th, anniversary*. It is one of the most experienced associations with long-standing traditions and known for its excellent work and many-sided activities.



The presidents of SUKOL at its 50th jubilee



Raija Airio, the president of SUKOL, addresses the guests of the celebrations



At the official dinner

In 2007 and 2008 SUKOL organized sessions for teacher trainees to promote modern methodology and share information on the goals and activities of SUKOL. The events were held at four universities and students majoring in languages were invited to the talks given by more experienced colleagues on the language teacher profession in contemporary school, and the ways how the local language teacher associations and the national federation can help in everyday situations at schools. These activities also serve as part of the federation's campaign to enroll new members.

SUKOL continued to work in close cooperation with the National Board of Education, the Ministry of Education, the Matriculation Examination Board, and the teachers' trade union OAJ having regular meetings with their representatives. SUKOL also cooperated with various publishing houses in Finland. The annual honorary award '*The Language Deed of the Year*' was presented in 2007 to the committee of the National Broadcasting Company YLE which in 1957 decided that foreign programs will not be dubbed on TV, but provided with subtitles. The award is financed by the publishing house OTAVA.

SUKOL publishes the Tempus magazine eight times a year and it is sent to each member of the association. It is a four-color, 40-page, A4-sized journal with articles written by national and international experts, featuring both theory and practice. Issue 6/2008 was the 50-year jubilee edition featuring the events and developments in language teaching during the 50 years of SUKOL.

SUKOL also had a special jubilee DVD '50 Decades of Language Teaching in Finland' made to celebrate its 50 years. The web pages of SUKOL have been completely reworked and the new site was opened on September 26, 2007. The web pages are updated on a daily basis. In the Discussion Forum which is divided into different topics e.g. the matriculation examinations, oral testing, etc., the members can express their opinions, give feedback and ask for help on issues concerning teaching and learning of various languages. The members can also find special offers on the site.

The executive board of SUKOL meets 7-8 times a year. Besides, there are committees working on special topics in between the meetings. The council of SUKOL meets twice a year - in November and April.

- **LALT (Latvia)**

In 2007 *the Latvian Association of Language Teachers (LALT)* together with the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Language Agency, various local cultural societies and other institutions organized *the European Day of Languages (EDL)*. The celebrations included the conference devoted to the issues of the state language policy and language teaching, as well as interesting hands-on workshops on learning various languages which caused great interest not only among schoolchildren and university students, but also other inhabitants of Riga. A colourful concert in various languages was held on the open-stage in one of the central parks of Riga. LALT also organized a national public speaking competition in different languages (Latvian, Russian, German, English, French) with the motto "The Rapidly Changing World and Me in It" (March, 2008). The competition was held both at the regional and national levels. It has already become a tradition which started in 2005 (please, see the details on the website <http://www.lvasa.lv>). LALT also took part in the discussions and meetings at the Curriculum Development and Examinations Centre, Ministry of Education and Science, and other institutions, about the current issues in teaching languages in Latvia (e.g. the situation with introducing new standards in primary and secondary schools, a wider application of the Common European Framework of Reference and European Language Portfolio, etc.). LALT participated at the meetings of the members of the methodology boards of Latvia in teaching English, German, Latvian as the Second Language, Russian, French and other languages to inform on the up-to-date methodological issues and approaches. LALT Board members took part at the state exam in English of the students of the Faculty of Modern Languages, University of Latvia (February, 2007, 2008), wrote reviews on various study programs and courses in languages taught at the University of Latvia (2007-2008), etc. LALT is acting as a partner in the international Lingua project "New Learners in the New Europe" (2005-2008) and the SOCRATES project Erasmus 3 'Consumer Citizenship Network', 2nd stage (2007-2009) initiated and coordinated by the Hedmark University College, Norway (www.hihm.no/concit). On a regular basis, *the member associations of LALT are organizing the state language contests, in-service training seminars, and are taking part in different international and national projects.*

- **LMS (Sweden)**

LMS, Sweden, helped to organize the European Day of Languages 2007 which was celebrated in numerous Swedish schools all over the country. LMS together with many other language associations took part in the event at Serieteket in Stockholm where relevant teaching materials in various languages were shared (www.sprakdagen.nu). Twenty-three local organisations held numerous smaller conferences and lectures all over the country during 2007. The programmes can be found on the LMS home page www.lms-riks.se (16 Nov., 2008).

LMS, Sweden held the annual conference in Östersund on 17-18th March, 2007, with about 300 participants. There was a varied programme in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Swedish. In March 2008 there was the annual LMS conference in Visby with about 450 participants.



The LMS conference at Visby, Sweden, gathered more than 450 participants



The landscape of Visby, Sweden – the venue of the LMS annual conference in 2008

The next annual LMS conference will take place in Uppsala March 21-22, 2009; the programme will be available on the home page www.lms-riks.se at the beginning of 2009. You are welcome to participate!

- **LMS (Norway)**

In September *LMS, Norway* arranged the traditional biannual seminar “*Språkdagene*” (“*Days of Languages*”) in Vikersund. The subject matter of the seminar was “The Use of New Technology in Foreign Language Teaching.” There were lecturers from different colleges, universities, schools, and other institutions, who shared useful views and approaches to the topic. LMS launched a competition to mark the International Year of Languages 2008 and the educational institutions at all levels were invited to participate.

The journal “*Språk og språkundervisning*” (“*Languages and Language Teaching*”) is issued four times a year. The articles basically deal with different aspects of foreign language teaching such as methodology, didactics, language policy, literature, and culture; other articles tackle vocabulary, morphology, syntax, or semantics. Articles are theoretical or/and practical and are written in different languages, depending on the language concerned or the language preferred by the contributor. The most widely used languages are Norwegian, English, and German. In addition, texts are published in French, Spanish, Swedish, and Danish. The articles about teaching of Sámi, Finnish or Russian are mainly printed in Norwegian. Book reviews and reports from seminars and conferences are included as well.

- **STIL (Iceland)**

The goal of the teacher training seminar organized by *STIL, Island*, was to encourage and take up new ideas in the workshops held by experienced teachers of various languages. Thus, an Italian visiting lecturer illustrated practically an interactive game by getting across the meaning to the audience which did not know Italian. The other speakers were from Iceland sharing up-to-date, practical teaching methods (e.g., in teaching Spanish - the use of video

clips with various Spanish speakers, and the production of similar video clips by the students themselves which turned out to be an exciting and motivating activity).

STIL also participated in the Comenius project organized by ALL and CIEP, called “REAL”. The aim was to map the language associations in Europe and find out if they would be interested in establishing a European network. Now when ALL has rejoined FIPLV, efforts should be combined and focused more on the existing European regional structure to make it a strong and active force. Another project of STIL is part of the 3rd Medium-term programme of the ECML, called “LACS or Empowering Language Professionals”. The aim is to further the dissemination of the past, present and future projects of the ECML by stating how the thirty-three members of the ECML gather and share information on the good teaching/learning practice and the projects.

STIL publishes a magazine twice a year, including articles by school and university teachers in Iceland and abroad. It is distributed to all the *STIL* members and sent abroad. The striving is to keep it varied and publish articles on the recent developments in language teaching; sharing of good practice; new books published in Iceland on didactics and methodology of foreign language teaching. MA students in pedagogy are invited to submit at least the abstract of their thesis. The various monolingual associations of Iceland report on their activities, seminars and international conferences held in different languages.

- **The Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania**

To bridge the gap between language professionals, various language teaching institutions, language teacher associations, *the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania was founded in December 2006* by Kaunas Technological University, Klaipėda University, The Lithuanian Language and Literature Union of the Republic of Lithuania, The Public Service Language Centre, Vilnius College, Vilnius University Foreign Language Institute, and Vytautas Magnus University. *Egle Sleinotiene, Director of the Public Service Language Centre in Vilnius, was elected its first president.* It is the second multilingual association in the Baltic states and *now our hopes are turned to Estonia!*



The founders of the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania with Egle Sleinotiene –president of the Association (third from the left)

Numerous political, public, cultural and social changes in the world and Europe had a vital impact on the language policy and also the language teaching policy in Lithuania.

The basic aims of the Association are to represent the needs of language teachers and language teaching institutions, associations and individuals, to make proposals and recommendations regarding language teaching curriculum design and teaching resource preparation to the Government and organizations rendering language teaching services. The

association is independent in choosing forms of its activities and ways of their implementation. It operates on the territorial (active language teachers' associations in different regions), interest group (groups according to their interests) and association (already operating language teachers' associations) basis. The Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania is willing to contribute, share and learn from its FIPLV members, and to promote language diversity observing uniqueness of each of them.

FIPLV Secretary General Denis Cunningham was present at the 1st international conference organized by the multilingual association of Lithuania in Vilnius in June 2007. In 2008 he came to Vilnius to meet the members of the Association and attend a meeting at the Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania to share the best practices and experience of FIPLV. The meeting turned out to be most informative and beneficial. The Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania expressed its wish to join FIPLV in 2008.



Meeting of the Minister of Education and Science of Lithuania, Secretary General of FIPLV Denis Cunningham and representatives of the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania in Vilnius, 2007

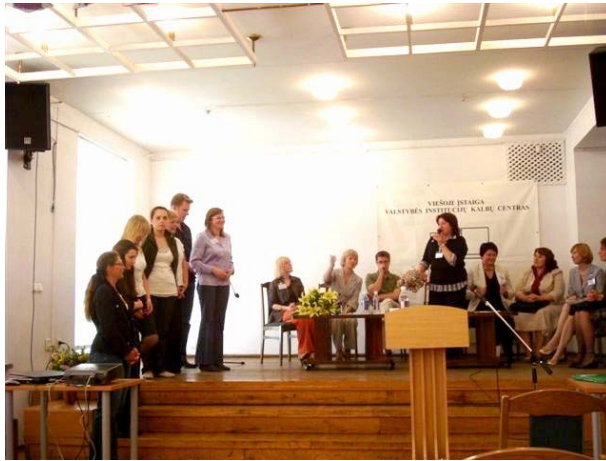
The recent international conference organized by the Lithuanian association took place in June, 2008. Thanks to Egle Sleinotiene and her colleagues the conference turned into a memorable event, held in the beautiful Vilnius.



Minister of Education and Science of Lithuania Algirdas Monkevičius gives a welcoming address at the international conference of the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania in Vilnius, 2008



Raija Airio, NBR president, Finland, shares her vision on the NBR present and future activities at the Vilnius conference, 2008



Egle Sleinotiene extends her thanks to the conference organizers and participants

The meeting of the NBR Executive Board also took place during the conference in Vilnius.



The NBR Executive board – Sigurborg Jonsdottir, Raija Airio and Diana Rumpite, reviewing the NBR Statutes at the meeting

in Vilnius, 2008

The next meeting of the NBR Executive has been planned during the FIPLV World Congress in June, 2009 in Moscow.

Trends of relevance in the NBR

The status of other languages than English is still degenerating. Students seem to be interested in starting studies in second and third language, but less and less students carry out the whole language program covering all the courses. Therefore, *SUKOL* launched a three-year promotional project KISU - "Multilingual Finland". The aim of the campaign was to produce material for students and their parents on the importance of studying languages; to supply information to guidance counsellors, principals and teachers of good practices how to enable the teaching and studying of less widely studied foreign languages; to influence the attitudes of the public through the media of the importance of knowing foreign languages in modern society at large.

The project had a website and there are special campaign materials for sale. The media (newspapers, radio stations and TV) have been interested in the project offering it media time and space. The magazine *OPETTAJA* of the Trade Union of Education in Finland OAJ published an article based on *SUKOL*'s statistics and opened a nationwide discussion on the topic. Another article came out in March 2008. Lobbying for the project is continuous. The latest statistics available show that the trend in studying more languages than just Swedish and English is still declining.

The project KISU ended, but the work to promote studying languages will continue.

The trends of relevance to *LALT* include

- earlier introduction of the 1st foreign language than in Form 4 as it is the present situation at the comprehensive schools in Latvia;
- balanced implementation of the bilingual education with gradual transfer to teaching lessons in Latvian at Russian schools with some subjects still taught in Russian;
- enlargement of the scope of foreign languages taught at school focusing on a wider introduction of French, German, Spanish etc. in the curricula;
- emphasis on the multicultural education in teacher training programs at the universities. It implies the ability of the would-be teachers to teach several foreign languages on an equally professionally high level;
- mutual elaboration of the language teaching policy in the Baltic states including the topical issues of the quality assurance of the final examinations at school and tertiary institutions, with reliable correlation between the Common European Framework levels (CEFR) and the national examination levels and proficiency markers.

Still an exception rather than a rule, but, nevertheless, the teaching of other foreign languages than English is now being introduced in more primary schools in *Norway*. *LMS* promotes this positive change in different ways.

The number of pupils choosing language studies in upper secondary schools is on an alarming low level after the introduction of the new curriculum. The Minister of Education has already announced changes in the national plans to make it easier to combine studies of languages with studies of other subjects. He has also suggested changes in the system of calculating points for admission to higher education in order to give more credits to language studies.

In the higher education there has been an increase in the student enrolment, including the Asian languages such as Arabic and Chinese. For Chinese the admission has been restricted due to the high demand. Other languages are also more in demand. For German and French

the numbers are still lower than some years ago. Languages with few students seem to be “squeezed” as the demand for the more popular languages increases.

Preoccupations and concerns

In *Finland* the main concern is the ever decreasing number of pupils and students studying languages. It already threatens the employment of teachers of German, French and Russian. Support is needed to find new ways to stop this trend.

There is a serious challenge as many of the language teachers in Finland will reach their well-deserved retirement days in a couple of years’ time. It means the need to enroll new members actively. The efforts are focused on students and young language teachers, those who teach students in vocational schools and the teachers who work in evening schools teaching adults.

The monolingual associations in *STIL, Iceland*, are concerned with the new bill worked out by the Ministry of Education to be possibly submitted to the Parliament. It will give more freedom to schools to focus on different subjects, among them languages. The only obligatory language is to be English which may lead to the slow dwindling of other languages except Spanish which due to tourism enjoys great popularity. The issues of concern are "how to support teachers of other languages besides the above mentioned English and Spanish in their struggle with schools and students", "How can we get students and their parents to buy the idea that learning other languages than English and/or Spanish is of a really good use"; "how to introduce the change in pedagogical methods on a wider scale" (Annual report of STIL, 2007/2008).

The goal of LALT is to communicate the ideas expressed by its members to organizations involved in the development of the language policy, as well as language teaching strategies in Latvia; to continue to implement multicultural education by increasing the role of German, French and other languages alongside English and to promote high-quality in-service seminars organized by the individual associations that may be helpful for teacher retraining. LALT is also interested in a wider application of *the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment*, as well as *the European Language Portfolio* in Latvia, having undertaken the initiative to introduce the system of descriptors of the language proficiency level and the use of the respective symbols at the state language examinations in Latvia in compliance with those of CEFR used in Europe. An issue to be solved is more constant LALT funding, as the main income was the NBR conference fees.

The following issues in teaching languages are of major concern in the forthcoming years in *Norway*:

- Teachers’ competence in languages, as many experienced language teachers are going to retire within the next 5-10 years. Younger teachers tend to have less specialisation in languages. This may lead to a lack of language teachers, especially in lower and upper secondary schools. The problem may also affect primary schools.
- The majority of English teachers in primary schools still do not have language studies as part of their education.
- Development of the national and local strategies to improve language teaching;
- Higher status for languages at all levels;
- A more advanced level of research and education, e.g. in teacher education;
- In-service training of teachers;
- Structural and political matters, such as language curricula design; coherence in the curricula at different stages of education; variety of languages; possibilities of combining language studies with other subjects; the number of lessons, etc.;
- Early start for other languages than English (LMS, Norway report, 2007/2008).

**We wish you all a very lucky, happy and prosperous New Year!
May it bring new challenges, new ideas in the Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009,
and every fulfilment of your dreams!**

Diana Rumpite

**Editor of the FIPLV NBR electronic bulletin Nr. 2
NBR Secretary, LALT,
Latvia**

***Riga,
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