

# ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND LOCAL PATRIOTISM: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN RIGA CITY GOVERNMENT BEFORE AND AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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The article examines Riga's city government in the periods immediately before and after the First World War from an interethnic perspective, focusing on relations between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians. The article argues that a simple model of one ethnic group displacing another from power is inadequate to explain the operation of city government in Riga in 1919–1934. Baltic German politicians, dominant in municipal politics before 1914, occupied a subordinate but nonetheless important role in city government during the interwar period, largely based on their pre-war status. Similarly, Latvians served in city government prior to 1918, albeit in smaller numbers and lower positions than their Baltic German counterparts.

*Key words:* Interethnic relations, interwar period, urban history, city planning, Riga.

## INTRODUCTION

In its 800-year history, the city of Riga has played many roles in relation to the territory surrounding it across the centuries. Perhaps the most radical transformation was the one from a regional administrative centre into a national capital that took place following the declaration of an independent Latvia on 18 November 1918. The metamorphosis undergone by formerly cosmopolitan Riga during the interwar period was all the more radical due to the city's complicated ethnic composition and the historical roles played by the city's major ethnic groups. The establishment of a new Latvian national state, even one with

generous protections for its ethnic minorities, meant a fundamental shift in the balance of power between the country's ethnic groups. Although it took the incipient Latvian state until the summer of 1919 to assume lasting control of the city, from that point onwards, Riga and its cityscape underwent drastic transformations in their political, economic, and cultural significance for its inhabitants and for all the citizens of the new Latvian state.

Though Riga had long been the centre of Latvian cultural life, as the national capital, its role in shaping and displaying national culture was expanded and amplified in the first period of Latvia's independence, 1918–1940. New national institutes, political, juridical, economic, and cultural, were created, sometimes from scratch and sometimes on the basis of ones which had existed prior to the outbreak of the First World War and which were now adapted to the needs of the Republic of Latvia. All of this meant a transformation of Riga's character and of its cityscape, both at the symbolic and at the physical level. While Riga did indeed experience profound change during this period, municipal government in the city during this period represented continuity with past traditions, both of urban management and of fruitful inter-ethnic cooperation.

This contrasts starkly with national government, which was in essence wholly new, representing a rupture with the past, and in which relations between the ethnic minorities and the Latvian majority were more greatly characterized by conflict and gridlock than by productive work undertaken in the public interest. Politics in a multi-party system is always characterized by conflict and compromise, negative rhetoric, posture and pretence, and tough negotiation. Riga's municipal politics, both before and after the First World War, are no exception; yet for a historian, the adversarial aspects of politics should not obscure the cooperative ones. The important role played by city government in ushering Riga through the changes of the 1920s and 1930s is necessary to understanding the city's transformation along ethnic lines during the interwar period. In order to understand what differentiated government at the municipal from the national level, it is necessary to

examine interethnic politics in the decades leading up to independence in 1918, when the basis for interethnic cooperation (and competition) in the interwar period between Baltic Germans, Latvians, and Russians were laid.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarship on interethnic relations in interwar Riga has generally lagged behind research on this topic in the eras immediately preceding it. While there is a considerable amount of scholarship on interethnic relations in interwar Latvia, particularly regarding relations between the country's Baltic German population and the Latvian majority, nearly all of this work is framed in a national, international, and more rarely a transnational perspective. Latvian and German scholars have together created a robust historiography of the connections between their linguistic and cultural spheres at these levels, but often without narrowing the scope of their research below the scale of the nation state. Given that Riga was home to the large majority of Latvia's Baltic Germans during the interwar period, looking more closely at the city as a political, economic, and cultural unit can yield insights that may be lost when adopting a wider geographical or political perspective.

The state of research on interwar Riga is likewise well-developed in certain senses, under-developed in others. While the first Republic of Latvia has received relatively lavish attention from Latvian scholars, treatments of the city of Riga as a unit of analysis in its own right have generally been lacking, though naturally its role as the country's capital and largest city have kept it in focus in more general studies as well. Regarding municipal politics in interwar Riga, very little work has been done, as the main contributor in this field, Dzidra Ozoliņa, herself noted more than twenty years ago.<sup>2</sup> While Ozoliņa's research on municipal politics in interwar Riga is a crucial source of data and summary of developments for this article, her work does little to address any questions of interethnic cooperation (or antagonism) within municipal politics, focusing instead on Latvian political and economic history within the urban context.

As the comments above on the historiography of the interwar period make clear, work on interethnic relations and work on Riga tend not to intersect or overlap. Yet cooperation between Riga's

ethnic minority groups and members of the Latvian majority was crucial for governing the city during the period of democratic rule, 1918–1934, as will be demonstrated. This article is intended to contribute to this deficit in the historiography. In doing so, however, it is necessary to begin with the period prior to the outbreak of the First World War, an era of industrialization and expansion in which Riga witnessed the beginnings of multiethnic governance.

## PART I: MUNICIPAL POLITICS AND ETHNICITY IN 1878–1914

Prior to the First World War, governmental institutions in the Baltic region had been dominated by the local Baltic German elite, with a certain degree of power-sharing with Russian officials and bureaucrats appointed from St. Petersburg. Ethnic Latvians, constituting around 75% of the population of the future territory of Latvia, had exercised little or no influence on government at the provincial level, where policy was instead dictated by the local nobility in conjunction with officials appointed from St. Petersburg. The deeply conservative agendas of both of these ruling groups meant that there was little possibility of democratic reform in Imperial Russia's Baltic Provinces.

The cities of the Baltic provinces were a notable exception in the level of political participation that they allowed to Latvian and Estonian citizens, albeit only to the wealthiest among them. The administrative autonomy of towns and cities in the Baltic had come under attack from the 1870s onwards with the forced implementation of empire-wide municipal election statutes. The Baltic provinces had long constituted a special region with exemption from most such universal policies, but this had begun to change from the 1870s onwards, with the imperial municipal statutes of 1870 being belatedly implemented in 1878.<sup>3</sup> Although this statute and others that followed restricted the franchise only to a tiny propertied elite, usually 1% or less of the total population in the case of Riga, it was ethnically neutral, allowing for the historically disenfranchised ethnic majorities of the Baltic provinces to play a role in city government in the decades leading up to 1914. Thus by

1918 there was already considerable precedent for different ethnic groups interacting together politically at the level of municipal government in the Baltic.

In Riga, far and away the region's largest city, Latvians had increasingly played a larger role in the city's elections and administration across the 19th century. Up until the First World War, they still played a junior role next to the Baltic Germans and local Russians in municipal government, despite making steady electoral gains with each new municipal election.<sup>4</sup> Baltic Germans managed to maintain control of Riga City Government through the outbreak of the First World War, unlike in many cities in the Baltic provinces, where Latvian–Russian or Estonian–Russian political coalitions were able to seize the reins of city hall.<sup>5</sup>

Despite continued Baltic German control, in the years between the implementation of the municipal reform of 1878 and the last city council elections before the First World War in 1913, the ethnic composition of Riga City Council underwent a considerable transformation. The conditions limiting the franchise in city politics were linked to property ownership and tax payment, and although the precise limitations underwent a number of changes from 1878–1892, the result generally only left a tiny fraction of the city's population able to vote, some few thousands of individuals in a city of nearly half a million.<sup>6</sup> This was favourable to the local Baltic Germans, who generally occupied high socio-economic status compared to the majority of the population. However, the emergence and continued growth of a Latvian middle class during the period of Riga's industrialization had also brought municipal political rights to ethnic Latvians. Wealthy Russian merchants and industrialists also constituted a fair portion of the city's elite. All of this meant that from the last decade of the 19th century and onwards, municipal politics were far more contested and ethnically charged than in prior eras.

For Latvians eager to exercise political influence across Latvian-speaking territory, Riga constituted far and away the greatest prize; if political control of Riga could be attained, Latvian politicians felt certain that the rest of Latvian territory would follow.<sup>7</sup> Its political importance was no less clear to Baltic Germans eager to maintain

their dominant position, or to the smaller local Russian elite determined to hold onto its own influence. Thus competition for voters in the municipal elections in the decade or so before the First World War was intense. Although the electoral campaigns of 1905 and 1913 were largely fought out along ethnic lines, appeals to ethnic loyalty or antagonisms were by no means the only lines of attack. The extreme restriction of the franchise meant that most voters were of very similar socio-economic status, regardless of ethnic identity. In addition, the lines between the Baltic German and Latvian elites were oftentimes somewhat blurry. Although middle-class Latvians had increasingly come to reject Germanization, choosing instead to form a distinctly Latvian middle class, for centuries the assimilation of upwardly-mobile Latvians into the ranks of the local Baltic Germans had been the norm. The systemic pressures this put on Latvians to embrace German language and culture were still prevalent in the early decades of the 20th century, and it is likely that stark depictions of Baltic Germans as the ethnic Other were more problematic among this propertied and educated elite than among working-class or rural Latvians. Latvian political leaders in the elections of 1905 were well aware that a considerable number of their ethnic fellows were sympathetic to the existing Baltic German city administration, which was widely perceived as having done an effective job of managing the changes brought on by the industrialization and expansion of the city in recent years.<sup>8</sup>

Since Baltic German voter solidarity was exceptional, it was likely this group of Latvian-speaking “swing voters” at which most political appeals were directed. Both the Baltic German and Latvian electoral committees in 1905 took considerable pains to emphasize their intention to administer the city for the common good, without ethnic chauvinism or rancour. This position did much to temper chauvinistic ethnic rhetoric while not directly removing ethnicity as an issue; given that the majority of the city’s poor and working-class residents were ethnic Latvians, debates over city social programmes were fundamentally tinged with an ethnic dynamic, even if this was not often overtly mentioned. Latvian voters also likely placed value on the experience and expertise of the Baltic German-dominated city government, not wishing to

switch horses mid-stream in a time of considerable social change. Martial law had been declared briefly in 1899 due to strikes in Riga, and 1905 was characterized by even greater unrest and upheaval.<sup>9</sup> The reforms brought about by 1905 eventually led to even greater levels of political participation for Latvians. They were able to participate in the debates in the provincial *zemstvo* regarding the reform of local government, providing additional valuable political experience at level outside that of communal politics in the years just prior to 1914.<sup>10</sup>

The last municipal elections before the war, in March 1913, were particularly hard-fought, with ethnic considerations playing a prominent role.<sup>11</sup> With more Latvian voters added into the electoral rolls than ever before, Latvian political leaders seem to have detected a real possibility of victory, and campaigned accordingly. Aided in part by the political fragmentation of the Latvian electorate, which continued to be split in its orientation towards the Baltic German city government, after the tallying of votes was complete, Baltic Germans remained the single largest group in city council, with 40 out of 80 seats.<sup>12</sup> However, ethnic Latvians now held 23 and ethnic Russians 15, with other, demographically weaker ethnic groups holding the remaining seats.<sup>13</sup> Given that Baltic Germans had held 64 out of 72 seats in 1878, this represented a fairly radical shift in Riga city politics, one that necessitated far more compromise and cooperation between different groups than had been required in previous eras.<sup>14</sup>

Baltic German politicians, in 1913, had run on a platform that had changed little in decades, emphasizing their candidate's deep collective experience in city government and management, and stressing that their candidates (in contrast to their opponents) would engage in policies oriented towards supporting the overall welfare of the city, without ethnic favouritism. In some sense the Baltic German victory in 1913 can be seen as a referendum – admittedly one embracing only the elite – on city government during the previous twenty to thirty years of rapid social and economic change, all the more so since a considerable portion of ethnic Latvian voters chose to cast their votes in favour of the Baltic German electoral list that year, all appeals to ethnic solidarity notwithstanding.<sup>15</sup>

The ability of Baltic German city politicians to appeal beyond their own ethnic group, on the basis of sound managerial policy and good stewardship of the city, undoubtedly had its roots in the general effectiveness of city government in the years leading up to the First World War. Riga's city government, prior to 1914, had widely been admired throughout the Russian Empire, with an effective implementation of social services meant to keep the city safe, healthy, and prosperous.<sup>16</sup> Mayor George Armitstead, in office 1901–1912, is widely credited with having presided over the city's transformation into a modern metropolis during this time, but Armitstead himself drew on older traditions of city politicians professing to place the civic interests of the city above any narrow ethnic ones.<sup>17</sup>

Although social grievances were far from absent in pre-war Riga, on the whole the provision of public services seems to have achieved the aims desired by the city fathers. City-planning was conducted in a methodical manner, and in addition to well-paved and broad avenues and boulevards, Riga boasted an expanding system of electric streetcars, a city waterworks, gasworks, slaughterhouse, power station, two city hospitals, an extensive network of city-run poor houses and orphanages, and an impressively large and well-tended system of public parks and cemeteries. Although many of these facilities were concentrated in the inner city and thus disproportionately served the Baltic German upper classes and elite, their existence also benefitted the well-off Latvians who comprised their ethnicity's urban electorate, and this group was likely to have also looked favourably on their implementation in recent decades. In cultural questions, there is evidence that the city administration was making progress towards overcoming deep-seated prejudices against the status of Latvian as a literary language; since 1887, the city had granted a stipend to the theatre run by the Riga Latvian Society; in November 1899, the city council voted unanimously to sell the Riga Latvian Society property owned by the city for the purpose of establishing a Latvian ethnographic museum; and in 1908, it also voted unanimously to construct a third, Latvian city theatre in addition to the existing German and Russian theatres, today's National Opera and National Theatre, respectively.<sup>18</sup>

While the city council elected in 1913 had little time to exercise its influence on public life in Riga, its composition is nonetheless indicative of the potential for cooperation between the city's ethnic groups at the level of municipal politics. While there is no question that ethnic chauvinisms, prejudices, and antagonisms played a role in shaping relations between city councillors in 1913, developments in Riga city government on the other side of the divide of the war years 1914–1919 show that these tendencies did not prevent shared responsibility and a productive engagement across ethnic lines which produced positive results for the city as a whole. The shared experience of working together in city government in the decades leading up to the First World War constituted a crucial base on which to build further political relations between Riga's largest ethnic groups in the interwar period, albeit under political conditions which meant an inversion of the power relations between Baltic Germans and Latvians.

## PART II: ETHNIC INVERSION AND THE RESUMPTION OF CITY AFFAIRS 1919–1934

During the First World War, Riga went through a storm of political, economic, and social upheavals, each bringing consequences and changes for city government with it. The Baltic German-dominated city council elected in 1913 remained in office until 1917, though with increasingly little sway over city affairs as Imperial officials seized *de facto* control of the city, which was perilously close to the front for the great majority of the war. The changes in city government in the period from 1917–1919, following the February Revolution, Imperial German occupation, the period of Bolshevik rule in the first half of 1919, the seizure of the city by the Baltic German *Landeswehr*, and its eventual return to the control of Latvian nationalist forces, were ultimately ephemeral in nature, with little or no lasting effect on the long-term development of the city. In a comparative analysis of city government and interethnic relations before and after the war, the declaration of Latvian independence, on 18 November 1918, is an appropriate starting point, from which we can move quickly to the summer of 1919, when life in

Riga began to return to normal, with a final end to wartime conditions coming following the successful repulsion of the Bermondts attempt on the city in November of that year.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after the declaration of an independent Latvia, social organizations and political parties active in Riga came together to form a new city council, which although not democratically elected by the city population, was nonetheless roughly representative of the population. It was formed with 90 seats, of which 36 were granted to the social democrats and their allies, 27 to bourgeois Latvians, and 27 to the city's ethnic minorities, who generally also represented a middle-class standpoint.<sup>20</sup> This council first met on 30 November 1918, and in December elected Gustavs Zemgals of the Radical Democratic Party as mayor of the city (*pilsētas galva/ Stadthaupt*), with two medical men serving as deputy mayors: a prominent Social Democrat, Dr. Pauls Kalniņš, and a Baltic German, Dr. Leo Berkholz.<sup>21</sup> Thus the leading triumvirate in city government roughly reflected the power relationship between the city's social and ethnic groups at large.

The activities of this new city council were interrupted by the approach of the Red Army, with most fleeing to Liepāja (Libau) at the turn of the New Year.<sup>22</sup> However, on 4 July 1919, with the city firmly in the control of Latvian nationalist forces following the defeat of the Baltic German *Landeswehr* in the battle of Cēsis (Wenden) on 22 June Colonel Balodis of the Latvian nationalist forces called for the city council chosen the previous autumn to reconvene. This not being entirely possible due to the continued dispersal of its members, the same political groupings formed a new but roughly similar council, this time comprised of 30 represents of the Social Democratic Party of Latvia (LSDP), 25 bourgeois Latvians, and 35 members of the city's ethnic minority communities.<sup>23</sup> This brought with it the reinstatement of Zemgals as mayor on 5 July 5 1919, in which office he remained until 3 February 1920. These developments represent the end of the chaotic phase in Riga's governance which had begun in 1914; although Bermondts's attack on the city in November would briefly re-introduce a state of war and cause considerable destruction, Riga's representative institutions continued to function on a stable basis from July 1919 onwards.

Although the city's ethnic minorities were granted the single largest delegation in city council if viewed as a bloc, the introduction of a more liberal franchise in city elections meant that the city council in the interwar period would be much more representative of the city's general population in comparison to the period before the First World War. On 18 August 1919, terms for municipal elections were adopted which gave the vote to all adults 21 or older who had resided in the city for at least eight weeks, regardless of gender; a proportional electoral system also guaranteed the representation of smaller interests and groups.<sup>24</sup> The rights of the city's ethnic minority populations were uninhibited insofar as the election laws made no allowance for ethnicity at all; representation was based on voting strength, although it should be noted that the adoption of the proportional system was advantageous to the ethnic minorities, essentially guaranteeing most groups some measure of representation.

The first communal elections in Riga after the First World War, and the first truly democratic ones in the city's history during peacetime, took place on 18 January 1920.<sup>25</sup> The election returns produced a city council roughly similar to the ones selected in the autumn of 1918 and the summer of 1919, with 30 city council members from the Latvian bourgeois parties, 28 from the ethnic minorities, and 32 from the socialists. The proportions between these three groups remained much the same for the duration of the period of democratic governance in Riga, ending in 1934. In ethnic terms, the city council in 1931 was comprised of 74 ethnic Latvians, 13 Baltic Germans, 3 ethnic Russians, 8 Jews, and 2 Poles; it is likely that the ethnic proportions of the city council across the previous decade were quite similar.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the clear preponderance of ethnic Latvians among city council members, this fact was likely of very limited significance in pragmatic political terms. As the years passed, the tendency for city politicians to group themselves by political and economic interests rather than by ethnicity only increased, and there is much to indicate that at the onset of this new chapter in Riga's history, other political fault-lines were at least as important as ethnicity.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the most notable disturbance in municipal politics up until

1934, the so-called “crisis in city government” of 1920, resulting in a disruption of city council business from the end of 1920 until 21 April 1921, was caused by the ideological divide between the large Social Democratic faction and the bourgeois majority, rather than by ethnic tensions.<sup>28</sup>

In comparison to the city’s Russian and Jewish communities, the role played by Baltic Germans in Riga city government in the 1920s and early 1930s stands out, due principally to their dominant role prior to 1914, but also due to their elevated socio-economic status, even after the war. Although the minorities formed a bloc in the city council, and Baltic German politicians depended on the backing of their Russian and Jewish political allies, there seems to have been little doubt as to which group stood in the leadership role of the bloc. The leader of the Baltic German fraction was also the leader of the minority bloc, rather than there being a rotating leadership or some other power-sharing scheme, and German was the general language of discourse in the minority bloc’s meetings, although Russian was also commonly spoken, as most Baltic German politicians spoke it fluently due to its preferred status in administration and commerce before the war.<sup>29</sup> Although the municipal minority bloc’s solidarity was not always guaranteed, the community of interest was generally strong enough for it to function effectively, and the other groups seem to have felt that Baltic German leadership was the best option available for securing their communities’ interests.

For its part, the city’s Baltic German population was able to punch well above its weight at the polls, due to a rigid discipline on voting day which helped boost their share of the electorate above their share of the population. Although it is impossible to say whether the result was due to low turnout among other ethnicities or due to non-German voters’ assistance (or due to some combination of both), the Baltic German list received 14.7% of the total vote in 1928.<sup>30</sup> In 1931, the united Baltic German electoral list received more than one-third the votes received by all of the Latvian bourgeois parties together, and in 1928, more than half.<sup>31</sup> Given that Baltic Germans represented around 12% of the city population, these numbers indicate an outsize influence in

municipal politics, and one reason for this influence, and possible appeal, was the fact that Riga's Baltic Germans, far more than any other group, collectively possessed deep and wide-ranging knowledge and experience of communal affairs.

In addition to this, the fact that Baltic Germans had formerly dominated city government was absolutely crucial at a pragmatic level. This is because, in stark contrast to politics at the state level, Riga city government in the interwar period was a relatively organic continuation of its former self. Indeed, the changes to the electoral law beginning in 1920 can fairly be considered to be the largest changes made in Riga city government up until 1934, since pre-existing departments, properties, employees, debts, obligations, facilities, and overall the pre-existing structure of city government were all assumed more or less seamlessly by the new city government of Riga that came into being in 1919. Naturally the outward face of city government changed somewhat as the language of administration shifted from German to Latvian (attempts to conform with Russianization requirements had only ever been half-hearted), but there were no large-scale reorganizations of existing departments, and with the success of Baltic German politicians in deferring (and outright avoiding) the language exams, there was no abrupt mass release of municipal employees. In ethnic terms, the shoe was most certainly on the other foot; but it was still essentially the same shoe.

All of this made Baltic German cooperation more or less indispensable to the Latvian politicians coming into control of Riga city government in 1919, a cooperation that had to be negotiated for within city government, in terms of representation in various commissions, posts, and offices. A return to normalcy and bringing city services back into smooth operation was urgently needed, and the Baltic Germans were the group most intimately familiar with the running of all branches of city government. Not only this, but Riga's dire financial situation made Baltic German connections to credit institutions in Western Europe indispensable for the city. City government in the interwar period inherited not merely the offices and institutions of its predecessor, but a vast array of laws, regulations, strictures, and ordinances reaching into every facet of

economic life in the city. There were regulations in force for every kiosk selling fruit, flowers, or newspapers on every city corner, exhaustive building regulations, strict rules for the opening and closing hours of shops of every sort, the establishment of city-owned businesses in order to combat speculation, and so on almost *ad infinitum*, in a meticulous system of regulation of economic activity and civic space.<sup>32</sup>

These factors necessitated contact and cooperation with older city officials familiar with the pre-existing statutes. Not only these older regulations necessitated interethnic collaboration; new projects also required it. The city of Riga embarked upon ambitious programmes to expand and de-privatize the streetcar network, pave city streets, provide electric street lighting, introduce a city bus service, create a new and modern central market facility, and to expand the sewage and water network. Under Armitstead's tenure, the value of the city's assets had increased by almost seven-fold, although its level of debt also rose drastically.<sup>33</sup> Undertakings ostensibly embarked upon for the benefit of the public, such as the City Savings Bank, at which nearly one in five Rigans had an account by 1913, also produced a considerable profit for the city (and for investors).<sup>34</sup> Most of these projects could be traced back entirely or in part to efforts undertaken in the decade before the First World War, and a familiarity with older city plans was necessary to efficiently carry these projects forward. Maintaining modern, relatively recently established institutions, such as city financial institutions, required a similar familiarity.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in large measure, the sweeping modernization measures undertaken by city government under Baltic German mayor George Armitstead, and the need to continue and expand them during the interwar period, helped insure an influential role for Baltic German experts and politicians in interwar city government.

The fact that many improvement projects were undertaken through credit from foreign lending institutions, even into the 1930s, further strengthened the Baltic German position in city government.<sup>36</sup> Riga city government's pressing need for credit abroad during the interwar period was one of the reasons that the assumption of the city's debt from before the war was unavoidable,

and why maintaining existing relationships with foreign creditors continued to be crucial, despite the fact that the pre-war debt obligations weighed heavily on the city's budget.<sup>37</sup> While the city had managed to escape some of the debt obligations taken on under German occupation in 1917–1918 with the help of decisions reached in the Hague, and the League of Nations allowed the repayment of others under extremely favourable circumstances due to the rampant inflation of the German mark in the early 1920s, both the burden of prior debt and the need for new loans were pressing.<sup>38</sup> The liquidation of virtually all of the capital of municipal credit institutions by the time they resumed business in the early 1920s made the situation all the more dire.<sup>39</sup> In the summer of 1919, the city faced debts of nearly four million roubles, with estimated municipal incomes of 150 000 roubles.<sup>40</sup>

Despite these obstacles, municipal government pushed forward with the various modernization projects for Riga, gaining traction as the 1920s wore on. For example, between 1925 and 1932, the cumulative length of city streetcar tracks nearly doubled, going from 48.4 to 85.1 kilometres; ridership rose steadily throughout the same period, falling somewhat with the effects of the economic crisis in 1930 and 1931.<sup>41</sup> The city-owned gas and electric ventures, the latter first launched under Armitstead's tenure, saw their rates of use more than double in the period 1925–1932, and the use of the civic water system rose by nearly 50% as well.<sup>42</sup> The city's health insurance plan similarly saw its enrolment nearly double between 1924 and 1930, such that by the latter year, nearly one in three Rigans was a participant.<sup>43</sup> The number of social workers active in the city increased exponentially in the same six-year period, rising from just 222 in 1924 to over five thousand by 1930.<sup>44</sup> From 1924 to 1932, the greatest increases in the city's income came from city-owned enterprises, but its greatest increases in expenses also came from public health and social services, and expenditures continued to exceed incomes.<sup>45</sup> The broad expansion of city services and enterprises was inevitably accompanied by growth in the city payrolls: from 1925 to 1932, the number of city employees rose from 4590 to 6000.<sup>46</sup>

The long-term nature of all of the projects listed above, along with a variety of other city services, helps to explain why the

prominent, though clearly subordinate, role of Baltic Germans in city government lasted not only for the first few years following the end of hostilities in and around Riga, but across much of the 1920s and into the early 1930s. Baltic German representation on the executive board of the city council (*pilsētas valdes sēde/Stadtrat*) throughout the period 1919–1934 was out of proportion to their numbers in city council, sometimes approaching 25 per cent.<sup>47</sup> Numerous offices continued to be filled by Baltic Germans, not least among them that of director of the city statistical bureau, the publications of which inform this research.<sup>48</sup> Two Baltic Germans in particular played outsize roles in city government in the interwar period; Walter Sadowsky was in charge of managing the city's finances for many years, and the city councillor Georg Ullmann headed the trade commission, additionally appearing regularly in the executive board throughout the interwar period.<sup>49</sup> Although these were just two positions, they were among the most important in all of Riga city government, and speak both to the important role played by Baltic German politicians, and to the degree on which governing Latvian politicians felt that their Baltic German counterparts could be relied upon to advance the city's interests.

However, as well as lasting pragmatic considerations, this prominent Baltic German role in city government had much to do with the political constellation in the city council, where socio-economic identity played at least as large a role in shaping politics as did ethnic identity. Fragmentation of the Latvian-speaking delegation in city council was the single most compelling reason for interethnic cooperation in the interwar period. Although ethnic Latvians comprised anywhere from two-thirds to three-quarters of the city council depending on the year, roughly a third of these were Social Democrats. Furthermore, the bourgeois Latvian parties themselves were by no means unified; the Baltic German councilman Helmut Stegman identified two main camps among the various parties, one distinctly Western European (likely synonymous with a German-language education) in its outlook and more conservative, the other centre-left, influenced by Pan-Slavism and Russian-oriented (though not Bolshevistic).<sup>50</sup> The composition of city government appointments and offices in the 1920s and early

1930s make it clear that bourgeois politicians of various ethnic backgrounds found it less distasteful to work with one another than to enter into political alliances with the Social Democratic faction, which, although not particularly radical from an objective standpoint, was permanently tainted by an association with Bolshevism, one only worsened by the negative experience of Bolshevik rule in 1919. This did not prevent the minority bloc from cooperating with the Social Democrats when it suited their interest, as these were perceived to be more tolerant regarding the linguistic and cultural questions that had recently become of such importance to the city's ethnic minorities. However, this cooperation was the exception rather than the rule, and declined sharply with the departure of Paul Schiemann from the leadership of the Baltic German fraction.<sup>51</sup>

The Baltic German fraction in Riga City Council, for its part, drew deeply on past political traditions in shaping the image of itself that it presented to voters and to the ethnic Other in city government. The position presented by Baltic German communal politicians in the decades before the First World War continued to exist as the core of the new political outlook of the Baltic German community during the interwar period: the common good of the city, irrespective of ethnicity. The Baltic German leadership held this to be the only way to secure lasting influence in city government, while (somewhat cynically) admitting that it did not preclude a robust defence of Baltic German interests.<sup>52</sup> This was all the truer in cases where private property or tax dollars were at stake, since the economic interests of an influential section of the Latvian middle-class overlapped with those of the relatively affluent Baltic German community.<sup>53</sup>

In general, given the profound urbanization of Latvia's Baltic German population following the First World War, and their extensive interests in industry and trade, the welfare of Riga was indeed largely synonymous with the welfare of Balticism in Latvia. In light of this, the seemingly high-minded political stance carried forward from the previous era was likely less of a mere rhetorical posture than it might seem to the cynic, although measures to alleviate living conditions for the (overwhelmingly

Latvian) working classes of Riga were one weakness of this avowedly ethnically-neutral stance. Cooperation in the 1920s was further aided by an improving economic climate and continued political stabilization, which did much to ease tensions between Baltic Germans and Latvians.<sup>54</sup> As time passed, Baltic Germans were better able to reconcile themselves to the new political reality, likely leading to increased political engagement.<sup>55</sup> On top of an improving domestic situation, international considerations also helped emphasize the importance of cooperation with Riga's Baltic Germans, since an expansion of trade with the Baltic States was a significant component of Weimar foreign policy.<sup>56</sup> Baltic German industrial enterprises in Latvia (supported by Baltic German banks and credit institutions in Riga) were also established or re-established in the 1920s, quickly came to be of crucial importance to the national economy.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, even as the self-confidence of the Latvian majority increased, cooperation with local Baltic Germans remained important. It is likely that continued Baltic German representation in city government out of proportion to the group's demographic significance in Riga rested on some combination of these two factors: that of a reliance on deep experience combined with a collusion of socio-economic interests across ethnic lines. The Baltic German political leadership considered its importance in city government to exceed its numbers on the city council, and even the number of councillors itself was slightly disproportionate to the number of Baltic German voters. An already tight electoral discipline among Baltic German voters became nearly legendary during the interwar period. There is no doubt that the electoral system allowed smaller groups to maximize their representation, but it also remains entirely possible that a (fairly limited) segment of the non-German electorate may, as in 1913 and 1905, placed some measure of faith in Baltic German experience and competence and voted across ethnic lines during the interwar period as well.

## CONCLUSIONS

This account has stressed the positive aspects of the new working relationship between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians in Riga's city government during the period 1919–1934, highlighting continuities in the city's governance and administration between that period and the one preceding it, on the other side of the caesura of the war years 1914–1919. Naturally ethnic antagonism and conflict were not absent from city hall, and the memoirs of Baltic Germans as well as the press of the period make it clear that both voters and politicians used ethnicity as a category of practice by which to organize competing political blocs. Ethnic chauvinists were to be found not only among the newly-dominant Latvians, but among the more conservative Baltic German politicians as well.<sup>58</sup> Yet for much of the interwar period, certainly across the 1920s, these more ethnically antagonistic elements played a marginal role in shaping political relations between Baltic Germans and ethnic Latvians in Riga city government. More pronounced was the trend towards cooperation and effective work together on behalf of the city. Despite a host of challenges, the city government of Riga succeeded in carrying the modernization programme of the decades before the First World War forward, effectively completing Riga's transformation into a modern metropolis, with an infrastructure comparable to that found in large Western Europe cities.<sup>59</sup> One of the things that made this productive work possible was the existence of a tradition of civic values and civic identity able to transcend ethnic boundaries, despite its long association with the urban Baltic German elite. The fact that Latvian officials, from the mayor downwards, honoured numerous deceased former Baltic German city employees with wreaths at city expense, not merely acquiescing to it but in some cases proposing it, might seem like a historical triviality, but it says much about the ways in which service to the city was respected across ethnic boundaries, in a way which had no direct analogy at the level of the state.<sup>60</sup> Such sentiments were considerably strengthened by the importance of class identity in interwar, which left ruling bourgeois Latvian politicians with far

more in common with Baltic Germans on many practical issues than with the Latvian Social Democrats, whatever distaste they might have with the *Baltische Landeswehr's* putsch or decades' worth of nationally antagonistic rhetoric.

Such ethnic antagonisms, coloured by the victory of Latvian national activism in the 1930s, have tended to dominate the modern historiography of Riga. The rallying cries of ethnic chauvinism leap from the pages of dozens of different periodicals from the period, across twenty years, mostly answered only by the lone voice of Paul Schiemann, with his idealistic vision of a national state. But those disposed towards toleration of their ethnically different neighbours tended, largely for political reasons, to be less vocal, in press and in public. Their story, one of reconciliation and cooperation, has been overshadowed by that of antagonism and conflict. Perhaps it will always be so, given the ultimate course taken by events. The rise of anti-minority sentiment in the early 1930s put great strains on the cooperative efforts outlined here, and the *coup d'état* of 1934 effectively ended them, making the interethnic work of 1919–1934 seem like an abortive effort of little significance. Yet for the historian, each layer of detail is of value, and those whose quiet work has long gone unsung often have the most to tell us about the patterns that characterize a society. The pronounced continuities in Riga city government before and after the First World War, and the role played by Baltic Germans in serving as a conduit for the transmission of civic values between these two periods, can contribute towards an understanding of the way that countervailing, less prominent trends and forces can sometimes nonetheless shape the history of a city, a capital, or a nation.

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- <sup>3</sup> Michael F. Hamm (1980). Riga's 1913 City Elections: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics. *Russian Review*, 4 (39), p. 447.
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- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 461.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 446.
- <sup>7</sup> Margerethe Lindemuth (1976). *Das Lettisch-deutsche Verhältnis vor dem ersten Weltkrieg auf Grund der lettischen Presse*. Hannover-Döhren: Hirschheydt, p. 34.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 56.
- <sup>9</sup> Reinhard Wittram (1951). *Zur Geschichte Rigas. Schicksale und Probleme im Rückblick auf 750 Jahre Stadtgeschichte 1201–1951*. Bovenden: Baltischer Verlag, p. 10.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Jānis Bērziņš (2014). Latviešu deputātu darbība provinciālpodomēs zemstes pašvaldības reformas projekta sagatavošanā (1905–1907). *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 3, 57.–92. lpp.
- <sup>11</sup> Hamm. Riga's 1913 City Elections, p. 460.
- <sup>12</sup> Wittram. *Zur Geschichte Rigas*, p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> Hamm. Riga's 1913 City Elections, p. 455.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 444.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 458, 460.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 446–447.
- <sup>17</sup> From a speech given to the society for communal social politics in Riga by Mayor George Armitstead on 19.11.1907. *Hefte der Gesellschaft für kommunale Sozialpolitik in Riga*, 1. Jahrgang 1907/1908, enthaltend Heft No. 1–9, p. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Wittram. *Zur Geschichte Rigas*, p. 26.
- <sup>19</sup> Mark R. Hatlie (2014). *Riga at War 1914–1919: War and Wartime Experience in a Multiethnic Metropolis*. Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut, pp. 279–280.
- <sup>20</sup> Ilona Celmiņa (2000). *Rīgas pārvalde astoņos gadsimtos*. Rīga: SIA Rīgas nami, 171. lpp.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 174. lpp.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 175. lpp.; Ozoliņa. 1918.–1934. gads Latvijas pilsētu pašvaldību dzīvē, 89. lpp.
- <sup>25</sup> Celmiņa. *Rīgas pārvalde astoņos gadsimtos*, 176. lpp.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 177. lpp.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 179. lpp.
- <sup>28</sup> Ozoliņa. 1918.–1934. gads Latvijas pilsētu pašvaldību dzīvē, 90. lpp.
- <sup>29</sup> Helmut Stegman (1960). Aus meinen Erinnerungen. I. Stadtverordneter in Riga 1920–1933. *Baltische Hefte*, 7. Jahrgang (1960/61), pp. 91–113, here p. 101. The author makes the claim that all of the Baltic German city councillors spoke Russian; he himself spoke fluent Latvian, and praises Sadowsky's mastery of the language, though emphasizing that even in general city council sessions the Baltic German delegation always spoke German as a matter of principal.

- <sup>30</sup> Herbert Pärn (ed.) (1928). *Rīgas pilsētas domnieku vēlēšanas 1928. gada 18./19. februārī*. Rīga: Rīgas pilsētas statistikas birojs, 21. lpp.
- <sup>31</sup> Ernst von Bulmerincq (ed.) (1931). *Rīgas pilsētas domnieku vēlēšanas 28./29. martā 1931. gadā*. Rīga: Rīgas pilsētas statistikas birojs, 8. lpp.
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- <sup>33</sup> Dzidra Ozoliņa (1994). Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldības kredītiestādes un to klientūra: 19. un 20. gs. mija – Pirmais pasaules karš. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 9/10, 38. lpp.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 43., 38. lpp.
- <sup>35</sup> Such as the city's discount bank (*Diskonto banka*), pensions for the workers of which are discussed in the executive board's minutes for 6.3.1931. LVVA, 2927–1–61, 1030. lp.
- <sup>36</sup> Riga City Government Executive Board Minutes for 28.2.1930. LVVA, 2927–1–48, 793. lp.; the same for 13.5.1930. LVVA, 2927–1–51, 1892. lp. for dissatisfaction with crediting ratings abroad (specifically from Lazard Brothers, London/Paris).
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- <sup>40</sup> Ozoliņa. 1918.–1934. gads Latvijas pilsētu pašvaldību dzīvē, 87. lpp.
- <sup>41</sup> *Rīgas pilsētas statistiskā gada grāmata. 1931–1932*. Rīga, 1933, 54. lpp.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.–116. lpp.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. lpp.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 201. lpp.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 227. lpp.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 238. lpp.
- <sup>47</sup> At times, Baltic Germans constituted two out of eight total members sitting, but more typically 2 of 10 members; cf. minutes of Riga City Government Executive Board 1928–1933 in general, and specifically those of 5.2.1932. LVVA, 2927–1–728, 514. lp.
- <sup>48</sup> *Rīgas pilsētas statistiskā gada grāmata 1931–1932*, title page.
- <sup>49</sup> Regarding Sadowsky, cf. Stegman. Aus meinen Erinnerungen, p. 97. Regarding Ullmann, cf. Stegman, pp. 97–98, and also Riga City Government Executive Board Minutes from 7.2.1930. LVVA, 2927–1–48, 485. lp.; Ullmann was asked to serve as Riga's representative in the organizational committee for Latvian products propaganda week in 1930, a request indicative of the breadth of his responsibilities and competency. Speaking generally, his name appears among the members of the city council's executive

board perhaps more consistently than any other in the years 1919–1934, and the board's minutes show frequent questions posed to Ullmann on city financial matters from the period before 1914.

<sup>50</sup> Stegman. Aus meinen Erinnerungen, pp. 93–94.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 93, 99.

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<sup>53</sup> Though the group was widely perceived as being affluent, its economic fortunes in the aggregate declined sharply after the First World War; although some of the country's richest and most powerful businessmen were Baltic Germans during the interwar period, the majority of Baltic Germans were not wealthy, though overwhelmingly white-collar in terms of profession.

<sup>54</sup> Leo Dribins (1996). Latvijas nacionālā valsts un vācbaltiešu minoritāte: Dialogs bez atrisinājuma. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 3, 80.–81. lpp.

<sup>55</sup> Raimonds Cerūzis (2004). *Vācu faktors Latvijā (1918–1939): politiskie un starpnacionālie aspekti*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 121. lpp.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 119.–120. lpp.

<sup>57</sup> Raimonds Cerūzis (2002). Vācu faktors Latvijas saimniecībā (1918–1939): tradīcija un korporatīvā noslēgtība. *Latvijas Vēsture*, 2, 51., 53. lpp.

<sup>58</sup> Stegman. Aus meinen Erinnerungen, p. 97.

<sup>59</sup> Both the last generation of Baltic German and the first generation of Latvian municipal politicians used the cities of Western Europe (particularly Germany in the case of the former) as the standard by which to measure progress in Riga.

<sup>60</sup> Riga City Government Executive Board Minutes for 15.2.1932. *LVVA*, 2927–1–728, 701. lp.

## TAUTĪBA, ŠĶIRA UN LOKĀLPATRIOTISMS: PĀRMAIŅAS UN PĒCTECĪBA RĪGAS PILSĒTAS PAŠVALDĪBĀ PIRMS UN PĒC PIRMĀ PASAULES KARA

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Pētnieciskās intereses: starpetniskās attiecības un urbānā telpa Rīgā starpkaru periodā.

Rakstā apskatīta Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldības darbība laikā pirms un pēc Pirmā pasaules kara starpetniskā perspektīvā, koncentrējoties uz attiecībām starp vācbaltiešiem un latviešiem. Tiek apgalvots, ka, lai izskaidrotu pašvaldības darbību Rīgā laikā no 1919. līdz 1934. gadam, nepietiek ar vienkāršotu modeli, kur viena etniskā grupa nomaina otru, izstumjot to no varas pozīcijām. Vācbaltieši, kas pilsētas politikā bija dominējuši līdz 1914. gadam, starpkaru

periodā ieņēma pakārtotu, taču nozīmīgu lomu pilsētas pašvaldībā, kas lielā mērā balstījās uz viņu statusu pirms kara. Tāpat arī latvieši bija darbojušies pilsētas pašvaldībā pirms 1918. gada, lai gan mazākā skaitā un zemāka ranga amatos nekā viņu vācbaltiešu kolēģi.

*Atslēgas vārdi:* starpetniskās attiecības, starpkaru periods, urbānā vēsture, pilsētplānošana, Rīga.

### Kopsavilkums

Rakstā apskatīta kontinuitāte un pārmaiņas Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldībā laika periodos pirms un pēc Pirmā pasaules kara starpetniskā perspektīvā, koncentrējoties uz attiecībām starp vācbaltiešiem un latviešiem. Tiek apgalvots, ka, lai izskaidrotu pašvaldības darbību Rīgā laikā no 1919. līdz 1934. gadam, nepietiek ar vienkāršotu modeli, kur viena etniskā grupa nomaina otru, izstumjot to no varas pozīcijām. Vācbaltieši, kas pilsētas politikā bija dominējuši līdz 1914. gadam, starpkaru periodā ieņēma pakārtotu, tomēr nozīmīgu lomu pilsētas pašvaldībā, un tas lielā mērā balstījās uz šai etniskajai grupai raksturīgo ideoloģisko nostādni un praktiskajām zināšanām. Tāpat arī latvieši bija darbojušies Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldībā jau ilgi pirms Latvijas neatkarības pasludināšanas, lai gan mazākā skaitā un zemāka ranga amatos.

Rakstā izmantoti Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldības arhīvu materiāli, kas glabājas Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvā, vācbaltiešu politiķu publicēti memuāri un citi avoti, lai novērtētu pārmaiņas, ko neatkarīgās Latvijas nodibināšana ienesa pilsētas pārvaldē un politikā starpkaru laikā Rīgā.

Neraugoties uz pilsētas elektorāta krasu paplašināšanos, Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldības pamatforma un tās raksturs laikā starp šiem diviem periodiem nemainījās. Daudzējādā ziņā modernizācijas vilni, kas raksturoja pilsētas pašvaldību divdesmit gadu laikā pirms 1914. gada, turpināja starpkaru laika pilsētas pašvaldība, kas gan īstenoja projektus, kas bija aizsākti līdz 1914. gadam, piemēram, kanalizācijas darbus un ielu asfaltēšanu, gan uzsāka jaunus, kā pilsētas autobusu transporta pakalpojumu ieviešanu, un pastiprināja dzīvojamo ēku būvniecību.

Latvieši, kas bija ieguvuši amatus pilsētas pašvaldībā, pilsētas multi-etniskās demokrātiskās pārvaldības perioda laikā strādāja kopā ar vācbaltiešu municipālajiem politiķiem un ierēdņiem. Līdzīga sadarbība notika arī ar pilsētas krievu un ebreju minoritātēm, taču vācbaltiešu loma bija daudz ievērojamāka sakarā ar viņu tradicionālās lomas pilsētas pārvaldē prestiža uzturēšanu, vācbaltiešu kopienas relatīvo daudzskaitlīgumu un viņu lielo pieredzi komunālajās lietās. Pilsētas paļaušanās uz ārvalstu kredītiem starpkaru periodā, kā arī tirdzniecisko sakaru

atsākšana ar Rietumeiropu nozīmēja to, ka vācbaltiešu finansiālie sakari ārzemēs pilsētai bija izšķiroši nozīmīgi, sevišķi 20. gs. 20. gadu pirmajā pusē, kad pilsēta sāka atkopties no 1917.–1919. gada kauju radītajiem postījumiem. Tā kā pieredzējušie vācbaltiešu ierēdņi labi pārzināja pilsonisko institūciju darbību un oficiālos dokumentus, latviešu politiķiem un ierēdņiem bija vieglāk strādāt ar viņiem kopā, un tas apvienojumā ar politisko spiedienu no minoritātes bloka puses noveda pie tā, ka daudzi vācbaltiešu (un daži krievu) ierēdņi saglabāja savus amatus, kaut arī pārvaldes iestādēs parādījās arvien vairāk latviešu un notika pāreja uz valsts valodu (latviešu) kā pilsētas pārvaldes valodu. Latviešu un vācbaltiešu sociāli ekonomisko interešu saskaņošana arī veicināja sadarbību, par spīti etniskajam saspīlējumam.

Iepriekšminētie faktori rada krasu atšķirību starp Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldību laikā no 1919. līdz 1934. gadam un visas valsts pārvaldes institūciju – Saeimu. 20. gs. 20. gados izveidotajām valsts institūcijām nebija precedentu Baltijas reģiona vēsturē, jaunajai teritoriālajai vienībai tika realizēts pārvaldības veids, kas maz līdzinājās jebkam, kas bija darbojies iepriekš. Saeima patiesībā nebija turpinājums Vidzemes bruņniecības pārvaldības institūcijai, nedz ar to tieši saistīta, lai gan aizņēma to pašu ēku, faktiski tā bija radīta *ex nihilo* (no nekā). Pragmatiskā un simboliskā skatījumā Latvijas Republikas valdībai starpkaru periodā bija jānodibinās pašai, maz ļaujoties uz kādām pagātnes tradīcijām vai pieredzi. No otras puses, Rīgas pilsētas pašvaldība, kaut arī tā būtiski mainījās starpetniskā un demokrātiskā aspektā, turpināja tās institūcijas darbību, kas jau bija pastāvējusi līdz 1914. gadam. Varbūt Rīgas kā Hanzas savienības locekles korporatīvajām tradīcijām starpkaru periodā bija maza loma, taču jaunāka laika tradīcijas – racionāla, moderna pārvaldība, kas bija ieviesta pēdējās desmitgadēs pirms 1914. gada, – bija izšķirošas, izstrādājot municipālo politiku starpkaru laikā Rīgā. Lai gan starpkaru laikā pilsētas pašpārvaldes institūcijās starpetnisku konfliktu – galvenokārt valodas un terminoloģijas jautājumos – netrūka, visumā tomēr valdīja produktīva sadarbība. Starpkaru laikā Latvijas starpetnisko attiecību historiogrāfijas veicināšanai nepieciešams rūpīgāk izpētīt sarežģītās tendences, kas ietekmē etniskā antagonisma vienkāršotu modeli.