



*WorkAndFun, Ignas Maldus, Baumanis Grant recipient*



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AABS, University of Washington  
Box 353420, Seattle WA 98195-3420, USA  
[www.aabs-balticstudies.org](http://www.aabs-balticstudies.org)

The AABS 2021–2022 membership year runs from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. To renew your membership online, visit [www.aabs-balticstudies.org/membership](http://www.aabs-balticstudies.org/membership).



# AABS President's Annual Report



The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted scholarly life. Campuses closed, teaching switched to MS Teams, Zoom and other online platforms, while conferences were either cancelled or turned into on-line events that lacked the dynamism and networking opportunities of in-person conferences. While this did enable many of us get stuck into writing forgotten papers and books (and the *Journal of Baltic Studies* editors have had to cope with an increasing flow of submissions during the pandemic) and catch-up with our reading, I think it is fair to say that we are all looking forward to a return to normality, starting with the 28th AABS Biennial Conference — “Baltic Studies at a Crossroads” — from May 27-29, 2022 at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The AABS board, which has continued to regularly meet in both online and blended formats, also used this time to reflect on our grants and fellowships programs, as well as our awards and prizes. In 2020 we took the decision to increase the size and number of our grants to help early career professionals in Baltic studies through the financial strains and stresses of the pandemic. After the decision to cancel our 2020 conference in Charlotte, we redirected the travel grants budgeted

for the AABS conference to the 14th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (CBSE) hosted by the Institute of Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University, which was held in-person and with a strong turnout from AABS members.

We have seen a big increase in applications to our fellowship and grants programs, especially the Baumanis Grant for Creative Projects in Baltic Studies. At the initiative of AABS Treasurer Uģis Sprūdžs, the board formed a sub-committee to assess and update our evaluation processes, which has successfully allowed us to manage this significant uptick in applications. Ineta Dabašinskiene, Vice-President for Professional Development, in cooperation with our Administrative Executive Director Liisi Esse, did a superb job of managing the complicated evaluation process in a timely manner. I hope to see old friends and colleagues, AABS members both old and new, at Seattle in late May!

— **Dr. Daunis Auers**  
AABS President, 2020-2022





# Overview of AABS Activities

## Book Publication Subvention

In 2020, Dr. Una Bergmane's book *The Politics of Uncertainty* by Oxford University Press was awarded the first Book Publication Subvention. In 2021, the AABS Board decided to start accepting applications for this grant on a rolling basis (instead of presenting two set deadlines each year) and disseminated information about the subvention

more broadly by reaching out to various publishing houses. Since then, the AABS Book Publication Subvention Committee, consisting of AABS President-Elect Dovilė Budrytė, AABS Director-at-Large Andres Kasekamp, and AABS Executive-Officer-at-Large Guntis Šmidchens, have awarded three more projects.

## Student Affairs

The AABS Student Representative Kristo Nurmis has been in contact with Vice-President for Conferences Laura Dean, discussing some preliminary ideas about a graduate student event at AABS 2022. The initial idea is to organize a job market luncheon that would include both successful young academics and people from outside academia.

In collaboration with the 14th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe (September 1-4, 2021, Uppsala, Sweden), AABS

invited students and early career scholars who had been accepted to present at the CBSE 2021 to apply for travel grants to support their travel to the conference. The AABS Student Travel Grants Committee, consisting of Student Representative Kristo Nurmis, Executive Officer-at-Large Guntis Šmidchens, Administrative Executive Director Liisi Esse, and Member of the CBSE Organizing Committee Michael Loader, was happy to be able to award 17 generous travel grants.

## Grants and Fellowships

The number of grants and fellowships that AABS awards each year, as well as the number of applications we receive, continues to demonstrate a steady increase. This is especially true for the Dissertation Grant for Graduate Students (26 applicants, four awardees in 2021) and Emerging Scholars Grant (11 applicants, four awardees in 2021). This positive trend is likely strengthened by the growing visibility of our programs due to increased social media activities and the expansion of financial support that we offer.

As in previous years, a committee consisting of AABS Vice-President for Professional Development Ineta Dabašinskienė as Chair, President Daunis Auers, and Director-at-Large Andres Kasekamp had to make difficult decisions during the

selection process. Many proposals presented interesting and methodologically diverse research topics — covering identity, security, gender, media, citizenship, and others — from a wide range of disciplines — including history, anthropology, linguistics, and Arctic studies. The committee used a newly adopted evaluation system with more transparent and detailed criteria; thus, the process became more manageable.

The projects awarded in previous years follow set deadlines and demonstrate work in progress. However, some modifications to the original plans have been made, mainly because of travel restrictions and other issues imposed by the pandemic. Some grantees have thus proposed adjusted plans that have been approved by the board.

	2019		2020		2021	
	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards	Applicants	Awards
Baumanis	16	1	12	3	17	5
Birnitis	2	1	6	1	6	1
Dissertation	3	2	8	3	26	4
Emerging Scholar	5	3	8	2	11	4
Grundmanis	1	1	1	1	1	1
Saltups	0	0	3	1	1	0
Total	27	8	36	11	45	15

— Compiled from AABS Board of Directors' reports by Dr. Liisi Esse, AABS Administrative Executive Director



# AABS Treasurer's Report

## Report as of October 1, 2021

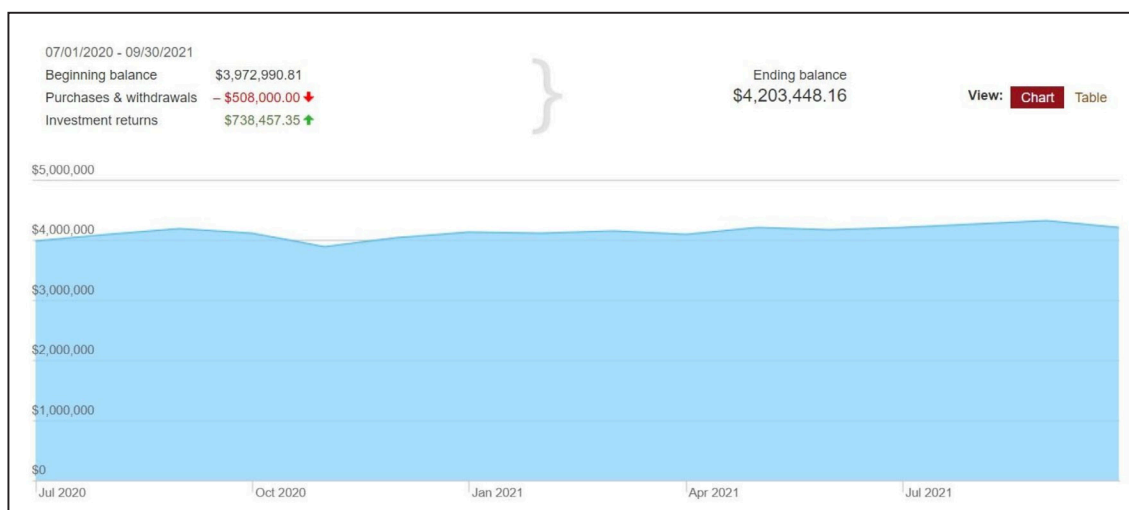
The value of the Association's investment portfolio increased by 5.7% over the period from July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021. In dollar terms, the net asset value changed from \$3,972,990.81 to \$4,203,448.16, an increase of \$230,457.35. This is the result of portfolio income, unrealized gains and losses, as well as withdrawal of \$508,000 to cover grant payments and operating expenses in the current and previous fiscal year. Our money aims to be 50% invested in equities and 50% in fixed income securities — inflation-protected U.S. Treasury bonds and short to intermediate maturity U.S. Treasuries. This is in keeping with the Association's long-term strategy of a balanced stock and bond investment portfolio.

Recent stock market turbulence notwithstanding, during the last 15 months equity markets worldwide have on average produced high returns, while fixed income has not. This is because of inflation expectations in the USA that diminish

the value of fixed-term, fixed-rate debt obligations. This has the greatest effect on bonds with long maturities — greater than 15 years — and the AABS portfolio has little exposure to that market sector. However the AABS portfolio does have over a third of its money (37%) allocated to short and intermediate term bond funds that have moderately declined in value (-.9%) due to these inflation expectations.

To better manage this risk exposure we have undertaken an upgrade to the AABS investment account at Vanguard, converting from a simple mutual fund account to a brokerage account. This will give us additional investment choices that are unavailable in the traditional mutual fund universe. In particular, there is an ETF (exchange-traded fund) consisting of short term investments in inflation-protected treasury securities that we could use instead of our current Vanguard mutual fund in generic short-term Treasuries. That pertains to approximately 9% of the AABS portfolio.

— Ugis Sprudz, CFA, AABS Treasurer



Graphic depictions of the portfolio's balance and net investment returns since July 2020.

# Report on the *Journal of Baltic Studies*

Most frequently used  
words in JBS article  
titles in 2021



- **Usage** in 2020 increased by 13%, from 23,866 downloads in 2019 to 26,937 downloads in 2020
- **Median days** submission to first decision: 50 days in 2020
- **Average speed** of article publication, from entry into Production to online publication: 19 days in 2020, 16 days in 2021 as of June 18
- **2019 Impact Factor:** 0.423

- **2019 CiteScore:** 1.1
- **15,343 downloads** in 2021 as of September 1 (plus 14,020 downloads of older journal content via JSTOR)
- **2020 Impact Factor:** 0.447, 71/80 Area Studies
- **2020 CiteScore:** 0.9, 223/1037 Cultural Studies and 186/306 Arts & Humanities (miscellaneous)

— Data provided by Madeleine Markey, Taylor & Francis

**Top downloaded article in 2021 as of September 1:**

Jordan, Paul. (2014). Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism? *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 45(3), 283-303.

This paper explores the inherent tensions between nation branding and nation building. To what extent is nation branding a tool or a practice? What images of the nation do branders seek to promote, and who is this image for? Is nation branding merely a more palatable version of nationalism? In particular, this paper focuses on the debates surrounding the launch of Brand Estonia in 2001/2. Brand Estonia, with the slogan “Welcome to Estonia: Positively Transforming,” was launched to coincide with Estonia staging the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002. It is a unique and interesting case study, given the level of controversy that the initiative generated amongst the Estonian public. Estonia was the first Former Soviet Republic to launch a nation branding project and, perhaps more controversially, it was managed by a British-based company, Interbrand. However, little scholarly attention has been paid to public-level discourses concerning Brand Estonia. The empirical findings discussed in this article highlight some of the more salient narratives on national identity that Brand Estonia engendered and therefore aims to fill this gap.

**Top downloaded article in 2020:**

Cheskin, Ammon. (2013). Exploring Russian-Speaking Identity from Below: The Case of Latvia. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 44(3), 287-312.

Recent research on the acculturation strategies of Russian speakers in Latvia has demonstrated that there is a high level of support for integration (identifying with both Latvian and Russian cultures) compared to marginalization, separation, or assimilation. However, a number of researchers have also highlighted the negative impact of top-down narratives and discourses produced by the country's politicians and journalists. These discourses, it is argued, hamper the integration process by creating incompatible identity positions between "Russian-speakers" and "Latvians." Accordingly, this research turns to focus group interviews with Russian speakers in Latvia in order to uncover the nuances of their identity-forming processes, their relations with the respective Russian and Latvian states, and their acculturation strategies, which are commonly overlooked in top-down accounts. Based on the analysis of the qualitative data it will be argued that there is great potential for an integrated, yet culturally distinct Latvian-Russian identity in Latvia.



# Though-provoking finds in JBS

Astapova, A. (2020). Ferroconcrete cases, sausage migrants, and Santa Barbara: Self-reflexive metaphors among Russian-speaking refugees in Estonia. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 51(1), 87-103.

Since the onset of the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, Estonian public discourse — as in the other Baltic states — has been preoccupied with the imagined inflow of generic dark-skinned Muslims from Africa or Asia. In reality, it is Russophones from post-Soviet states who have remained the major asylum-seeking group in the country. Estonia has attracted Russophone asylum-seekers by geographical proximity, as well as a reputation of being more welcoming for refugees than other European countries. Potential applicants see it as culturally and linguistically comfortable due to former Soviet presence (as compared to Western and Northern Europe), yet not overflowed with fellow Russophone asylum-seekers (as compared to Eastern Europe).

In this research, Russophone refugees living in Estonia were interviewed to analyze how they conceive of the legal asylum-seekers process. Certain metaphors categorizing fellow asylum-seekers crystallized in their discussions. These

include (1) ferroconcrete migrants who are seen as having a perfectly prepared application to receive refugee status; (2) sausage migrants who presumably seek better life, or “sausage”; and (3) Santa-Barbara migrants simply looking for adventures or drama in their lives. These unwitting vernacular categorizations stem from the collective memory of the given group — for example, the popular soap opera from the 1990s called “Santa-Barbara,” the longest-running television drama series once broadcast in Russia about the unbelievably eventful lives of an extended Californian family. More than that, these schematic categories appear due to unavoidable legal simplifications. Concise metaphors, part of the vernacular explanation, serve to justify whose cases are successful and whose are not. They become digestions of legal demands and factual procedures, shaping refugees’ strategies of building up bona fide “ferroconcrete cases” as opposed to bogus “sausage” or “Santa Barbara” stories.

**Anastasiya Astapova** is an associate professor in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu and a member of Estonian Young Academy of Sciences. In addition to migration and the Russophone population in the Baltic states, Astapova researches Belarus (see, monograph *Humor and Rumor in the Post-Soviet Authoritarian State*, Rowman and Littlefield 2021), as well as on conspiracy theories (see, co-edited volume *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe: Tropes and Trends*, Routledge 2020, and a co-authored volume *Conspiracy Theories and the Nordic Countries*, Routledge 2020).

Strenga, G. (2021). Turning transport workers into Latvians? Ethnicity and transport workers’ guilds in Riga before and after the Reformation. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 52(1), 61-83.

Robert Bartlett in his influential work *The Making of Europe* defines Riga as “a distinctively colonial town” and “a city of God,” a large cosmopolitan city that helped to bind together the far ends of the medieval West. Riga, like two other Livonian cities Reval (Tallinn) and Dorpat (Tartu), was a multilingual and multi-ethnic hub where the Middle Low German urban merchant elites and artisan middle classes lived alongside the indigenous populations — Baltic Latvians, Finno-Ugric Livs and Estonians — and small minorities of Russians, Swedes, Finns and Lithuanians. Generations of historians researching medieval and early modern Riga have been preoccupied with the history of indigenous populations in the city, the so-called “non-Germans” (Latvi-

ans and Livs). Yet, most of the approaches to this question have been rooted in the early 20th century perceptions of ethnicity. This article focuses on the question of ethnicity in late medieval Riga and suggests that the current perception of ethnicity has to be revisited. It argues that the late medieval transport workers’ guilds that have been considered to be “Latvian brotherhoods,” were not ethnic groups until the Reformation and gained an ethnic character only during the religious reform. The article is a detailed study of social, religious, and ethnic aspects of the groups’ activities, putting medieval ethnicity in a broader context and emphasising the role of the Reformation in formation of ethnic identities in the Baltic cities.

**Gustavs Strenga** is a historian and researcher at the University of Greifswald, and is affiliated with the National Library of Latvia as a senior researcher and exhibition curator. Strenga has been a fellow at the PhD research group “Friends, Patrons, Clients. Practice and semantics of friendship and patronage in historical, anthropological and cross-cultural perspectives” at the University of Freiburg, and a postdoctoral research fellow (2018-2020) at Tallinn University, where he worked on the project “Economy of symbolic exchange. Gift-giving as a social, cultural and political practice in the late medieval Livonia.” His main research interests are the history of medieval Livonia, memory studies, gift giving as a historical phenomenon and book history. At the University of Greifswald he is part of the project “Saints and Heroes from Christianization to Nationalism: Symbol, Image, Memory (Nord-West Russia, Baltic and Nordic countries).”

## An Interview with Organizers of 14th Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe: 'Rights and Recognition in the Baltic Context'

*In 2021, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania marked 100 years of international recognition de jure as modern independent states, and 30 years of recognition of their reestablishment as independent democracies following a half-century of Soviet domination. It also marked 300 years since the Treaty of Nystad ended Swedish rule in the Baltic territories, resulting in the creation of provinces of the Russian Empire with their own particular system of rights and regulations. Similar to today, however, these rights were not applied evenly across society. Then as now, some voices were suppressed, and some groups struggled for recognition. Thus, the main theme of the CBSE Uppsala in 2021 was rights and recognition in their broader meanings, as they pertain to the societies of the eastern Baltic littoral.*

Conference organizer **Dr. Michael Loader** is a political historian of the Soviet Communist Party, nationality politics, and Soviet Latvia. He received his PhD from King's College London in 2015 and is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Glasgow and the Assistant Editor of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*. His publications on Soviet language, education and migration policy, the Latvian national communists, Soviet power struggles and political purges have appeared in several book chapters and in *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, and the *Slavonic and East European Review*.

Conference organizer **Dr. Matthew Kott** is a historian based at IRES, Uppsala University, specialising in the contemporary history of societies in the Baltic Sea region, Latvia in particular. He has written on a range of subjects including the Waffen-SS, fascism, Stalinist repressions, anti-Semitism and antiziganism, racial science, and migration. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (UK) and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Baltic Studies*.

### How are you both feeling after pulling off a successful conference, especially in a pandemic?

In a word — fantastic! We were delighted that it all came together. Relief is something else we are feeling strongly because whether the conference would actually go ahead hung in the balance until the last few weeks. It was like a breath of fresh air to experience a conference in person again and to enjoy the exchange of ideas, networking, and socializing that only really happen organically in person. We are particularly happy that early career scholars could come.

### Describe the conference program and attendance.

The program was organized into 39 panels across six thematic streams (History; Language, Culture, Media & Literature; Migration, Minorities & Identity; Politics, International Relations & Security; Society – Sociology, Economics, Law & Gender Studies; and Sustainability – Cultural Heritage and Urban Planning). The largest streams were History and Language, Culture, Media & Literature. In total, 110 people attended. In addition to the Baltic states, people attended from the US, UK, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Canada, Denmark, Austria, Finland, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Thirty-four people presented papers that were transferred over from the cancelled 2020 AABS Charlotte conference.

Dr. Ivars Ījabs, Member of European Parliament for Latvia, gave the keynote address, which was followed by an AABS-sponsored reception in the grand University Main

Building. On the last night we enjoyed a three-course conference dinner at Norrlands Nation. As at previous CBSE, there was a writing workshop for early career scholars provided by the JBS editorial team.

### What was the significance of the theme, "Rights and Recognition in the Baltic Context," and how was it manifested in the conference?

Due to the specific circumstances of the pandemic, a significant number of those who wanted to take part were not able to do so. As such some of the common threads originally planned with panels and streams fell by the wayside. In the end, however, there were still a significant number of presentations touching on issues of minority rights, gender, diplomacy, and other topics related to the general theme.

### What highlights were especially impactful in your view?

MEP Ivars Ījabs keynote was especially engaging. It was not a lofty and highbrow keynote, but instead offered an illuminating and frank assessment of behind the scenes at the European Parliament, and the Baltic role in the future of Europe.

Tallinn University PhD student Airi Uuna's paper on the Soviet Estonian television advertising agency was particularly interesting, as was her showing of one of the TV adverts in all its kitschy glory.

The student volunteers and interns with their positive attitude helped make the conference a success for everyone.





## What was the significance of hosting the conference at Uppsala University?

Uppsala has been a center of Baltic studies since the period of Baltic independence, with people like Professors Haralds Beizais and Alexander Loit later having worked or studied there. The Dean of the Faculty, Professor Joakim Palme, who has a Baltic connection, welcomed everyone to the AABS reception and said that he would have liked to have actually presented a paper at the conference if he had had the time.

## What are the complexities of planning and hosting a conference in a pandemic? Any words of wisdom?

The pandemic meant that the goalposts were moving constantly (travel restrictions on US citizens were reimposed just two days after the conference!), requiring an even greater-than-usual amount of planning for every eventuality. So, as to advice — preparation, preparation, preparation! It was a mixed blessing taking on panels and papers from the cancelled 2020 AABS conference at Charlotte because they needed to be integrated into the streams of our

conference, but we made it work. A flexible program was key because it needed rebuilding late on due to dropouts. As large scale a conference as this will not likely function as a hybrid, so the decision must be made early to be either an all-digital or in-person-only conference (which will impose limitations either way) but with the recognition that circumstances may require it to be cancelled entirely.

People were very understanding of the need to wear masks and maintain physical distancing as best they could during the conference, and we appreciated the goodwill and understanding from attendees during the extraordinary circumstances in which the conference took place.

## What feedback on the conference have you heard?

People were very positive. Our choice to have an in-person conference despite the risks and uncertainties was vindicated. The travel grant winners have been especially grateful as we strove to make the conference as accessible as possible for students and early career scholars.

*Photos courtesy of: Paraskevi Palivani*



## Looking Forward to the 28th Biennial AABS Conference: 'Baltic Studies at a Crossroads'

Planning is well underway for the upcoming Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies 28th Biennial Conference at the University of Washington in Seattle. After the cancellation of the 2020 conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, and a successful Conference on Baltic Studies in Europe in Uppsala, Sweden, we are preparing for an in-person conference in Seattle. We will continue to monitor the pandemic situation closely and will have more updated safety guidelines as the conference gets closer. The conference home will be at The Graduate (<https://www.graduatehotels.com/>), located in the heart of the University District and steps from the beautiful University of Washington campus. The conference will be split between the hotel for cultural events, poster sessions, the book exhibit, and registration, and the historic Denny Hall a few blocks away on campus, which will host panel sessions.

New information about the conference is updated often on the conference website (<https://aabs-balticstudies.org/aabs-2022-in-seattle/>). We are working to organize home stays, and a room-share folder was recently added where attendees can sign up to share a room with someone at the conference hotel. Scholarships will be available for gradu-

ate, undergraduate, and junior and/or under-employed faculty, so look for that information in the coming months.

We will have an opening reception where the University of Washington choir will perform works from the Baltic states and university officials will welcome everyone to the conference. The keynote will feature emerging voices from Baltic literature, highlighting the strengths of the UW Baltic Studies program. AABS Graduate Student Representative Kristo Nurmis is organizing a graduate student luncheon on "Navigating the post-COVID Job Market In and Outside Academia," sponsored by AABS. We have a film screening planned on Saturday night in cooperation with the Baltic Arts Council of the Northwest. We are also seeking to facilitate connections between the Baltic states and local Indigenous populations and scholars, so we are working on a luncheon keynote focusing on Indigenous and Baltic Connections. Tours of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, Henry Art Gallery, and Baltic Collections in the UW Library will be available throughout the conference. Finally, our closing reception will highlight local Baltic dance groups in the Pacific Northwest and will be a great way to close out and celebrate connections made at the conference.



Japanese cherry trees bloom in the Liberal Arts Quadrangle at University of Washington, Seattle.



We are seeking to innovate our conference and make it appeal to a variety of academic audiences at all stages of their academic careers. In addition to proposals for panels, paper presentations, roundtables, and film screenings, there will be a variety of ways to engage with other Baltic studies scholars. We invite scholars at all academic levels from undergraduate students to professors to submit poster presentations in developing research or ongoing projects. We are also hoping to promote books published since our last conference in 2018 with several new book panels highlighting the research and discussing the impact of the work. If you have published a book recently, please submit a book panel and our division co-chairs can help you find discussants. We have also already received two proposals for workshops within the conference focusing on Baltic music and Baltic history and memory where participants can attend several interconnected themed panels on a given topic and have more concentrated networking opportunities with scholars in their specialty. We also hope to feature books and edited volumes in progress and offer scholars the opportunity to workshop a book project with leading scholars in the field.

Lastly, we are currently looking for sponsors for film screenings, receptions, lunches, coffee breaks and graduate student travel that will enhance the conference experience and offer attendees expanded conference benefits. We offer donors different levels of support and benefits, including name recognition, advertising in the conference program, VIP invitations to the conference, etc. Visit the website at <https://aabs-balticstudies.org/aabs-2022-in-seattle/support-us/> or by scanning the QR code below and click the donate button. You can also write to [aabs2022@uw.edu](mailto:aabs2022@uw.edu) if you are interested in sponsoring a specific event, such as a film screening, reception, lunch, or coffee break.

— Dr. Laura Dean, VP for Conferences

## About the Call for Papers

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have marked 100 years of independence, 100 years of *de jure* international recognition, and 30 years of the reestablishment of independence following a half century of Soviet rule. While acknowledging the past, the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies Conference in 2022 will look toward the future to explore how the Baltic states will move forward into the next century, as a crossroads between Europe and Asia, Nordic and Eastern Europe. Similarly, the field of Baltic studies is at a crossroads between new and old diaspora communities negotiating the implications of what it means to advance the study and research of the Baltic states into the next century.

The conference will build on the deep connections with Baltic studies and Baltic communities in the Pacific Northwest. The University of Washington is the only Baltic studies program in North America, offering courses in all three Baltic languages and different aspects of Baltic studies. The conference will promote intersections of academic disciplines, scholarship, and community by focusing on the implications for the Baltic states in the future at the crossroads of different regions, cultures, religions, and historical perspectives. We will discuss the role of Baltic studies in the next century as Soviet legacies fade and European futures are solidified. How does the region fit into larger European and transnational trends? What types of innovations do we see in the Baltic states? Where are the Baltic states headed in the future? The conference will showcase the latest cutting-edge Baltic research and highlight connections to local diaspora and the tech industry in the Pacific Northwest.

The conference will bring together scholars from around the world and foster collaboration between Baltic and Pacific Northwest researchers. The three-day program will feature panels, roundtable discussions and workshops open to all UW affiliates. The conference will also include public events, such as keynote talks by leading Baltic scholars, film screenings, exhibit openings and tours of UW's Baltic collections.

The 2022 AABS Conference's program is divided into nine broad divisions:

- History, Memory, and Jewish Studies
- Politics, International Relations, Security
- Sociology, Anthropology, and Gender Studies
- Communication and the Media
- Literature and Language
- Arts, Music, and Religion
- Economics and Business
- Libraries, Archeology, and Museums
- Digital Humanities and Technology



## We need your support for the 28th Biennial AABS Conference!



We are looking for supporters for our upcoming AABS conference Baltic Studies at a Crossroads planned for May 27-29, 2022 at the University of Washington in Seattle. Please consider donating to fund graduate/undergraduate student travel or support the conference at any funding level.

<https://aabs-balticstudies.org/>

# WorkAndFun

**Ignas Maldus**  
2021 Baumanis Grant Recipient





**“ I believe that places (buildings) of special occasions are an essential part of the humanistic side of history. I want to collect those places, add a sincere perspective, and present it in an artistic way ... It is already hard to find those buildings-witnesses (as the majority are rebuilt), so my trip might be one of the last opportunities to make an archive of Soviet leisure memories. ”**





# 2021 Grant & Fellowship Awardees

## Emerging Scholars Research Grant

Proposals are evaluated according to the scholarly potential of the applicant and the quality and scholarly importance of the proposed work, especially to the development of Baltic studies.

**Dr. Maarja Merivoo-Parro, Baltic Heritage Network**  
Spontaneous Finnish Humanitarian Aid as Catalyst for Independent Estonia: From a Personal Touch to the Success of a Nation



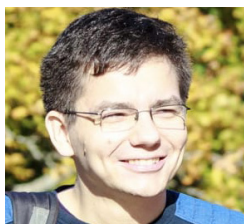
During the last years of Soviet rule, Finns created a spontaneous voluntary network for supplying humanitarian aid and empowerment to Estonians via personal informal contacts and cultural exchange. This unique contribution had a real impact not only during the regaining of independence, but also afterwards and is directly connected to the relative economic upper hand Estonia has enjoyed when compared with other former Soviet states. Although Finnish aid is a well-known social and historical fact, almost nothing has thus far been published on the topic of this vast and influential popular movement. This research seeks to change that.

**Dr. David Trimbach, Oregon State U.**  
Sea-stonia: Exploring Estonians' Sense of Place of the Baltic Sea and Seaside



Estonians are shaped by their relationships with the Baltic Sea and seaside. The sea and seaside have been places of sustenance, refuge, community, and even danger. This relationship is demonstrated by Estonia's conservation efforts and maritime culture, which are being challenged by human-driven pressures and climate change impacts. This project explores Estonians' sense of place of Baltic Sea and seaside in order to better understand how and why residents connect and derive meaning from these places. Through surveys and interviews, this study will produce scholarly- and policy-relevant findings that can contribute to interdisciplinary Baltic studies' research and applied coastal planning.

**Dr. Jānis Juzefovičs, Rīga Stradiņš U.**  
Making Sense of the COVID-19 Crisis: Information-seeking and Trust-making Strategies of the Baltic Media Audiences at the Times of the Coronavirus Pandemic



This research project aims to explore media practices and media-related attitudes of audiences in Latvia and Estonia during the COVID-19 crisis with special interest in Baltic Russian-speaking media users. The project builds on my recent extensive inquiry into media practices and media-related sentiments of Baltic Russian speakers during the Ukraine crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has provided a unique opportunity to examine how strategies employed by these audiences to deal with complex and contradictory information flows during politically turbulent times are utilized in the context of a non-political crisis situation.

**Dr. Charles Perrin, Kennesaw State University**  
Forgotten Prisoners of the Tsar: East Prussian Deportees in Russia during World War I



The topic of this research is a forgotten story from World War I: the deportation of thousands of civilians from East Prussia to Russia by soldiers of the Russian army. Using published and archival sources in seven languages, my book will go beyond the paradigm of national suffering and, more broadly, correct some misconceptions about civilian internment during World War I. It will show civilian prisoners were not only held in internment or concentration camps during the war and deportation was not always "synonymous with concentration camps." The book will also argue that the deportation of civilians from Russian-occupied East Prussia was not genocide.

## Jānis Grundmanis Fellowship for Study in the U.S.

The Jānis Grundmanis Graduate and Postgraduate Fellowship is established in the memory of Dr. Jānis Grundmanis. Preference is given to applicants studying in the field of humanities or social sciences.



**Zane Vāgnere, Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia**  
Mid-Career Master in Public Administration, Harvard Kennedy School

Policy makers in all areas are facing the challenge of how to address the unintended or undesired consequences of perpetual and disruptive change while maintaining an open environment that fosters innovation and allows people and business to flourish. Providing solutions in the context of such complexities requires a new type of leader with strong competencies in interdisciplinary and international cooperation, network-based team collaboration, and efficient interaction between the public and the private sectors. My particular focus at HKS will be in studying the impact that tech development has on the media and public opinion, and to better understand the role and motivation of corporations in the public policy making process.

## Baumanis Grant for Creative Projects in Baltic Studies

The Baumanis Grant is an award made to honor Velta Marija Baumanis of Mount Brydges, Ontario, who left a generous bequest to AABS at the end of her career as an architect. Awards are available for creative projects that promote Baltic studies. Preference is given to topics with a pan-Baltic or comparative aspect.

### Sami Siva, Univeristy of Tartu

Borderlands: Stories from the Baltics

“Borderlands: Stories from the Baltics” is a visual project that explores society, culture, and politics in the border regions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It collects the personal stories and photographs of the very people who make up these societies in order address such questions as: What is a border? What constitutes a border? Phase one of the project will be conducted along the borders of Estonia and Latvia from Narva to Daugavpils over a period of 10 months. The project outputs include a multimedia online portal and a photography book.



Right: A photo from “Borderlands” by Sami Siva



### Ignas Maldus (Maldžiūnas), photography artist WorkAndFun

The site-specific visual art project “WorkAndFun” is about abandoned places where the “New Soviet Person” had fun, relaxed, and spent leisure time. I wander through old buildings and restore people’s festive past. The older generation and even their children (based on photos) can remember places that were special occasions to escape from the Soviet work reality and daily routine — in the meantime, it was the same seasonal routine. Time perspective lets us review the Soviet past with fewer emotions. I agree that this period is traumatic, but at the same time, people tried to live as happily as they could — they celebrated feasts, birthdays, anniversaries, danced, and had fun. It was done in a trite way, but emotions were pure and let people forget daily oppression.



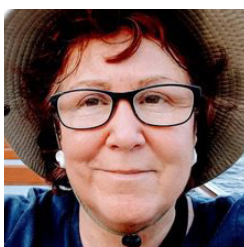
### Dr. Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė, historian People of the Borderlands

Living in the Schengen area made us forget what borders are and the pandemic brought these borders back. People living in the border zone suddenly found themselves isolated from their neighbors. The goal of this project is to investigate people who live on the borders of Lithuania and Latvia and the borders of Latvia and Estonia, to show their relationships and tell a visual story of the transbaltic neighborhood. We want to find out whether living in a different but neighboring country, speaking different languages and belonging to different religious community but living close by brings people together or moves them apart. Do the people of borderlands have unique identity, language and everyday rituals? The final outcome of the project – an exhibition of photos and short stories – will tell a visual story of the Baltic neighborhood.



### Dr. M. Lee Alexander, William & Mary “Old Love Does Not Rust”: An Exploration of the Baltics in Poetry

The goals of this project are two-fold. First, to produce an original poetry collection inspired by the Baltic countries. It will be comparative as similar topics are addressed for each country so readers can appreciate the complex variety of the Baltic nations. The second goal is to provide an accompanying writing guide, so readers can try their hand at composing poems related to Baltic themes. This collection and guide will be available in print and online, and is designed for levels from secondary school up. Thus, Baltic studies is introduced to the wider international community, and for a potentially younger audience.



### Heidi Erbsen, Tartu University More than Just Movies: Baltic Language Learning Film Festival

This project brings together teachers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to create a resource for teaching the history, culture, and languages of the three Baltic countries through film. The educational resource will include lesson plans for 10-15 movies in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian (and possibly Russian and English), which can be used in educational environments and by independent learners to understand the languages and cultures more deeply. At the end of the yearlong project, a mini film festival will be held to introduce three of the films and present the final book of resources.





## Dissertation Grants for Graduate Students

Proposals are evaluated according to the scholarly potential of the applicant, and the quality and scholarly importance of the proposed work, especially to the development of Baltic studies.

**Laima Vincė, Vilnius University**  
Memory and Postmemory in Literature by North American Writers of Lithuanian Descent

This dissertation explores literary nonfiction, fiction, drama, poetry written in English by North American writers of Lithuanian descent as a collective body of work. Twenty writers responded to a survey questionnaire that invited them to reflect on family narratives, literary influences, education, and questions of identity. Then, the writers participated in follow up interviews. Over the course of four years this author read critically literary work published by this group in North America and established that, with few exceptions, the literary work produced by this group is postmemory writing, including rite of return narratives, and memoir.



**Marija Norkunaite, University of Oxford**  
'Where did I do wrong?': Imagining the 'State' in a Former Socialist (Mono-)town in the Baltics.

Because of their specific socialist past and the resulting demographic composition, the predominately Russian-speaking towns of Visaginas, Daugavpils, and Sillamäe appear alien and threatening to the national state in popular Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian imaginations. The loyalty of Russian-speaking residents is continuously called into doubt. However, little research has been done as to how the "state" is understood among the people there and how these understandings emerge. This thesis aims to ethnographically ascertain what is behind the concept of the "state" in the minds of its Russian-speaking subjects in these towns.



**Oliver Aas, Cornell University**  
The Baltics in the Arctic

This project seeks to understand the cultural and historical implications of Baltic Arctic explorers in the global context. Though Baltic Arctic exploration is often discounted from dominant narratives, it is increasingly clear that the Baltics have paid a large role in the development of Arctic voyages. This project then looks at both the cultural afterlife of Baltic exploration (in literature, film and media), but also the historical circumstances of Baltic presence in the Arctic region.



**Liisi Veski, University of Glasgow**  
The Conservative-statist Thought and the Rhetoric of National Unity During the Authoritarian Period in Estonia (1934–1940)

My dissertation focuses on the interlinked concepts of national unity and national community in 1930s Estonia, particularly during the authoritarian period of 1934–1940. I am analyzing how these concepts were rhetorically employed for legitimating the authoritarian system and how reframing the state-nation-individual relationship in public discourses changed as a result of the political shift.



## Aina Birnītis Dissertation-Completion Fellowship in the Humanities

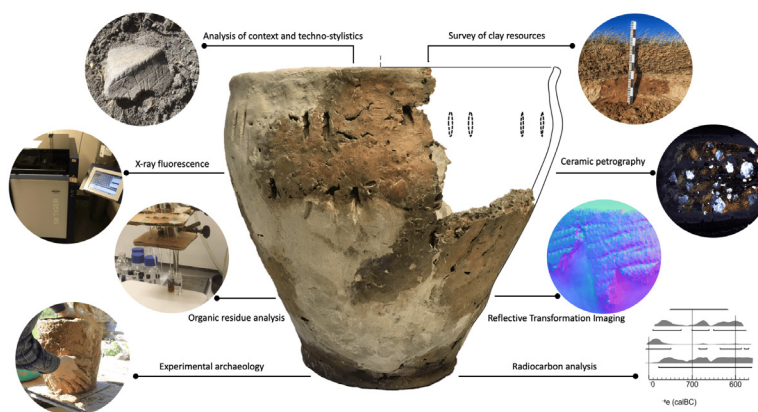
The Aina Birnītis scholarship supports a year of research and writing to help advanced graduate students in the humanities in the last year of PhD dissertation writing. The fellowship is supported by a bequest of Aina Birnītis, a librarian by profession living in Carlton, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.



**Vanda Visocka, University of Latvia**  
Pottery Production, Function and Meaning During Bronze and Pre-Roman Iron Age in East Baltic

Archaeological pottery is like a mirror that reflects different aspects of everyday life in prehistoric humans, including craftsmanship, aesthetics, and spiritual values. Prehistoric ceramics were not only a utility,

but also served as an artistic expression of the individuals and community. When traditions and values of these communities changed, pottery transformed with them. Such transformations are clearly seen in East Baltic during Bronze and Pre-Roman Iron Age (1800–1 BC). This project will result in a comprehensive study on several technological, stylistic, and sociocultural aspects of the pottery production and its role in Bronze and Pre-Roman Iron Age communities in the East Baltic. It will provide researchers with new meaningful data regarding chronology and dietary patterns.



Methods of pottery analysis used in thesis project (central pot from Brikuļi hillfort, National History Museum of Latvia, Inv. No. A 12468: 211, photos: V. Visocka).

## Book Publication Subvention

Book Publication Subventions are awarded for individually authored books, edited volumes, and multiple-authored books in English that make a substantial scholarly contribution to Baltic studies. The applications must be submitted by publishers, not authors. Proposals are evaluated according to the scholarly potential of the applicant, and the quality and scholarly importance of the proposed work, especially to the development of Baltic studies.

**Dr. Una Bergmane, Helsinki University**  
*The Politics of Uncertainty*  
 Oxford University Press



Ahead of the 30th anniversary of the Soviet collapse, this book aims to tackle the interplay between international and domestic dynamics in the Soviet disintegration process. Based on extensive archival research, this book investigates the triangular relations between the US government, Baltic independence movements, and Moscow during the perestroika years. The study demonstrates how in the space of three years, Washington and its European allies moved from extreme prudence regarding the Baltic states' claims, to fully embracing their independence and weakening the USSR. It argues that this change was driven much more by uncertainty, domestic pressures and last-minute decisions than by *realpolitik* calculations and long-term strategy.

**Dr. Francis Young, historian**  
*Pagans in the Early Modern Baltic: Sixteenth-Century Ethnographic Accounts of Baltic Paganism*  
 Arc Humanities Press



This book provides an edition of 16th-century ethnographic accounts of Baltic paganism in English translation for the first time. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the last European polity to renounce paganism and accept the Christian faith, in the late 14th century. However, the conversion of the Baltic region continued into the early modern period and the ongoing pagan beliefs and practices of Lithuanians and Prussians excited the interest of early ethnographers. This volume brings together key Latin texts with a critical introduction placing them in the context of early modern ethnography, Baltic history, and Reformation religious polemic.

*Below: Woodcut showing Lithuanian pagans worshipping trees, snakes and fire, from Olaus Magnus, On the Northern Peoples (The History Collection / Alamy Stock Photo).*



**Dr. Michael Loader, U. of Glasgow**  
**Dr. Siobhán Hearne, Durham University**  
**Dr. Matthew Kott, Uppsala University**  
*Defining Latvia: Recent Explorations in History, Culture, and Politics*  
 Central European University Press



In just over a century, Latvia has transitioned from imperial periphery to nation state, communist republic, and finally an independent republic following the collapse of the Soviet Union. *Defining Latvia* brings together the most cutting-edge research on Latvia's multiple social, political, and cultural contexts, written by political scientists, historians, and area studies specialists from across Europe and North America. In the volume's temporal breadth — from the 19th century to the present — the editors and contributors make an important argument for understanding the construction of Latvian identity as a continuous and interconnected process across significant political and ideological ruptures. The volume moves beyond solely the political context of Latvia's turbulent history to incorporate a variety of unique social and cultural perspectives. The chapters speak to rapidly developing trends in the fields of history and political science, including the history of antisemitism, language politics, memory, photography, and political extremism.

**Dr. Gustavs Strenga, U. Greifswald**  
*Remembering the Dead: Collective Memory and Commemoration in Late Medieval Livonia*  
 Brepols Publishers



Medieval memoria — commemoration of the dead — was both a form of collective memory and a social practice. This study reveals the importance of memoria in late medieval Livonia as a form collective memory for different groups and institutions: urban government and guilds, the Teutonic Order, bishops and cathedral chapters, and monastic communities. The book will also discuss how the collective memories of the groups featured changed during the Reformation when the liturgical commemoration was abolished, but the dead were still remembered.



# Reflections from 2020 AABS Grant Recipients



**Mārtiņš Laizans** is a recipient of the Aina Birnītis Dissertation Completion Fellowship for the project Neo-Latin Heritage of the Livonian Basilius Plinius: Poetics, Rhetoric, Esthetics. He is a doctoral candidate at the University of Latvia and a researcher in the project "RIGA LITERATA: Humanist Neo-Latin Heritage of Riga within European Respublica Literaria" — supervised by professor Dr. Ojārs Lāms. He also was a research fellow at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Neo-Latin Studies in Innsbruck, Austria.

## Describe your research project and how AABS funds have impacted your work.

As a graduate of Classical Studies, I became interested both in the translation issues of Latin and Ancient Greek works into Latvian, as well as in the reception of classical heritage in Latvian culture. After receiving my master's degree, I took the advice of Prof. Ojārs Lāms to dive into the almost unexplored world of Riga humanists of the 16th and 17th centuries.

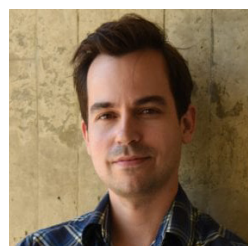
Thus, my current research is focused on Basilius Plinius, a humanist from Riga, whose textual heritage has been almost unstudied (except for a thesis by Arnolds Spekke in 1920s). The main goal of this research project is to put his texts into the wider context of the humanist Respublica Litteraria. Although focusing on one author, this research endeavours to make Riga humanism more recognizable in the contemporary research fields of Neo-Latinity and Early Modern Studies.

AABS funds have had an immense positive impact on my work. However, due to the pandemic, my initial plans (visit-

ing research libraries and archives outside of Latvia) had to be modified several times. At least now, since June 2021, the funds are being fully used as initially planned — I am and will be gradually completing my thesis chapters at research institutions in Vienna, Innsbruck, Munich, Berlin, and Wolfenbüttel over the summer and autumn of 2021.

## What has it been like to do research in a pandemic?

During the pandemic, the indefinite closure of archives and libraries had a devastating impact both personally and concerning research activities. At least the silver lining has been the rapid development of digital collections all over the world, particularly those of rare and old books. The availability of these collections prevented my research from being brought to a standstill, although the work slowed down considerably. Also the "zoomification" of everyday life allowed me to attend a lot of international events that otherwise would have been impossible.



**Dr. Miles Beard** is the recipient of a 2020 Baumanis Grant for Creative Projects for his project: "No More Creative Act": A New Novel of Nationhood. He received his PhD in English from the University of Strathclyde and joined Tallinn University as a Teaching and Research Fellow in the autumn of 2020. With a research background in authorship, critical theory, and literary culture, he is tackling some of these considerations from a Baltic perspective and manifesting new geopolitical connections to Scotland in his book.

## How did you come to do work in Baltic studies?

Strange though it may sound, I initially approached Baltic studies through my experiences living in Scotland. I was in Edinburgh for the Scottish independence referendum result in 2014 in which the country narrowly chose to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and subsequently witnessed the independence movement's resurgence in the wake of the Brexit referendum in which Scotland chose to remain in the European Union by a wider margin, but would be forced to leave it due to the majority result in England.

Since that time, the Baltic states have featured regularly

in discussions of model nations that Scotland could aspire to being like in the advent of achieving the restoration of their independence (a phrase I borrow from Baltic studies that isn't readily applied to Scotland, though I believe it should be).

These discussions sparked my interest in the region and led me into further research of new connections that could be drawn, and what a shared future inside the European Union as smaller nations might look like. Because my background is in literature, the opportunity that the AABS afforded me to approach this topic creatively was too good to pass up.



## Describe your research project and how AABS funds have impacted your work.

The Baumanis Grant for Creative Projects in Baltic Studies given to me by the AABS has provided much joy during an otherwise bleak period. Alongside other funding I had secured, it allowed me to pick up sticks from Glasgow, where I had just graduated with my doctorate, and move to Tallinn University in Estonia.

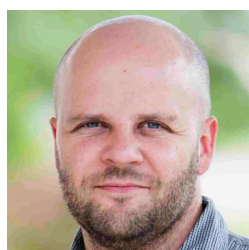
I joined TLU as a Teaching and Research Fellow in English and Creative Writing to complete a creative-critical novel drawing on the themes of identity, nationhood, and literary culture, tackled from a comparative perspective. Having the support network of the university during this time was very welcome, and I was pleased to be able to join in many of its departmental activities as well, including delivering an intercultural seminar on academia in the UK and participating with other post-doctoral researchers in their project outputs.

Without the added boost the grant gave to the project, I think the entire endeavour would have had to have been cancelled at the last minute due to the pandemic, so I am very grateful that it came to me when it did last summer.

## What has it been like to do research in a pandemic?

Writing is typically a solitary act, so from the most literal lens I would say not much about my approach to the project has changed. Everything else, of course, did change — probably in ways I couldn't even identify now. For most of the first semester at TLU it was like there wasn't a global pandemic at all — a welcome change from the strict lockdown conditions that came into place in Scotland. Following a steep rise in cases after Christmas, however, life in Estonia became quite restrictive for several months. One silver lining was to learn what a wonderful resource the National Library of Estonia is to its residents. Not only is the majority of its collection freely loaned (very different from the national libraries I am used to where every object is reference-only), but it made contactless pick-up or delivery possible as well. This was invaluable for my research and made working from home during those days much more tolerable. I've been given the impression that the public services such as this are distributed with a people-first perspective, which is something I really value.

All in all, I have learned so much from my time here — both despite and because of the pandemic — and, once again, I'm truly grateful to AABS for the opportunity.



**Dr. Dainius Genys** is the recipient of a 2020 Emerging Scholars Grant for his project: Mapping Emotional (In)equalities in the Baltic States. He is a sociologist at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, focusing on civil society issues. Lately, he has been dedicated to the analysis of the interaction between social capital and the dynamics of the emotional state of society, especially in the context of Lithuanian emigration.

## How did you come to do work in Baltic studies?

Since the very beginning of writing my dissertation, I have focused on the liberation and development of Lithuanian society (society and the individual) and have been constantly looking for opportunities for a comparative perspective. Of course, the Baltic states, due to their historical similarities, were the most convenient and, at the same time, the most relevant perspective. At first it seemed to me that, globally, such a comparison was quite narrow. In 2014, I had a chance to attend the AABS conference — held at Yale University — for the first time and I was pleasantly surprised by how many people are interested in Baltic studies and what original research they are doing. My understanding began to change, I realized that it was not the geographical latitude, but the interpretive angle that mattered. Today, I am convinced that the unique experience of the Baltic states can greatly enrich

many aspects of sociological research, especially in the areas of transformation and democracy.

## Describe your research project and how AABS funds have impacted your work.

My project is dedicated to a so far under-researched topic — studies of emotions — in the Baltic states. My research project for the AABS Emerging Scholars grant seeks to merge my previous research on emotion of Lithuanian emigrants by adapting this experience to a comparative analysis among the Baltic states. In particular, the project aims to investigate the contexts that determine the peculiarities of the emotional state of emigrants in each country, and to compare its qualities among the Baltic states. The pandemic provided the opportunity to go the extra mile and take into account the so-called new reality, that is, to not only to conduct empirical data, illus-

trating dynamics of democratic, economic, and emotional wellbeing development, but to also look for a relationship with COVID-19 statistics among the Baltic countries.

The Emerging Scholars grant provided an opportunity to expand the geographical area of research to test hypotheses in similar but different contexts across the Baltic states. I hope that soon I will have an opportunity to share the results of the study with the AABS community, and perhaps even foster some interest among other colleagues to take a closer look at the range of emotional inequalities and its causes. The opportunity to participate in this program is a kind of challenge, as the competition is quite significant, however it only further encourages the refinement of the idea and its thorough implementation.

### What has it been like to do research in a pandemic?

It's a new and exciting experience. In the beginning, like everyone else, I had to experience resentment and some anxiety about the prospects of the research. On the

other hand, reality dictated new ideas, so there was no time to lean into depression, because hastily mastered online work opened new opportunities and encouraged the search for partners, co-workers and like-minded people. The very rapid accumulation of new data, which in many cases became publicly available, made it possible to supplement the idea of the study with today's realities. I'm glad I had a chance to make use of the pause during quarantine to be able to publish a couple of articles that were only planned at the end of the project. Of course, it is sad that field research has not been realized. On the other hand, today's adjusted project seems promising and feasible, perhaps even covering a broader scope — I want to believe that I will be able to achieve a little more than initially expected. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Emerging Scholars committee, which, despite the challenge of the times, was extremely understanding, and consistently supported and encouraged making necessary changes to adjust the project under unusual circumstances.

**Don't forget to renew your AABS membership:** *It's now easier than ever to check and renew your membership status and change your contact information at <https://aabs-balticstudies.org/member-area/>. US-based members may also renew their membership by filling in and mailing the membership form enclosed with the newsletter.*

## AABS Launches Podcast 'Baltic Ways' with FPRI

In October, AABS launched Baltic Ways, a podcast bringing listeners insights and interviews from the world of Baltic studies. Baltic Ways is produced in partnership with the Foreign Policy Research Institute and is hosted by Dr. Indra Ekmanis, Fellow and Editor of FPRI's Baltic Bulletin, and AABS Newsletter Editor. In interviews with experts and practitioners, the podcast explores the past, present and future of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and the ways these countries impact the politics, history, and culture of the geographical neighborhood.

Episode one covers the geopolitics of the three countries and their relevance as a collective Baltic region with Dr. Andres Kasekamp, Chair of Estonian Studies at the University of Toronto and Director-at-Large for AABS. Episode two features an interview with Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs, looking at the past decade of the country's foreign policy and the challenges ahead. The podcast is available through the AABS and FPRI websites, as well as on Apple, Spotify and other podcast listening apps.

The Baltic Initiative in FPRI's Eurasia Program is the production partner for Baltic Ways. The Initiative focuses on supporting scholar analysis of geopolitics, geo-economics, defense and security issues in the Baltic Sea region, their roles in European security, as well as implications for US.



*The title of the podcast is a reference to the Baltic Way demonstration of 1989, while the show art draws inspiration from the Spīdola radios produced at VEF in Riga, Latvia, in the 1970s (graphic design: I.Ekmanis).*



# BALSSI Continues Online for Summer 2021

Hosted by the Indiana University Language Workshop, BALSSI 2021 offered eight weeks of intensive online instruction in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. With support from the Baltic Studies Consortium, the AABS, the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center, and the Department of State's Title VIII program, BALSSI 2021 trained four students of Elementary Estonian, five students of Elementary Latvian, and four students of Elementary Lithuanian. Classes were originally scheduled to be held on the Indiana University campus, but were moved online in March 2021 in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

The 12 BALSSI students joined 360 students of other languages in the online program. Enrollments in 2021 were roughly 70% of 2020 enrollments, a trend that almost perfectly mirrors trends among non-BALSSI languages in the Workshop. Prior to COVID-19, BALSSI was embedded in the larger in-person Workshop, providing students access to a wide range of career-planning, grant-writing, and area studies presentations, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and enriching the language-learning experience.

Although Indiana worked to maintain this atmosphere as much as possible in the online format, 2021 attendance in cultural programming in general — and cross-language programming in particular — was markedly lower than attendance in BALSSI 2018 and 2019. Low co-curricular attendance was characteristic of all programs, not just BALSSI.

Support for faculty compensation was provided by AABS, the BALSSI Title VI Consortium, and direct funding from IAUNRC. Student support was provided by the Department of State Title VIII Fellowship program and by AABS. In addition, Indiana University provided tuition remissions to bring tuition for non-resident students to resident rates.

Not including the tuition remission, it cost \$8,050 per student to deliver BALSSI 2021 programming. With the tuition remission included, the full on-the-books cost of the program was \$19,826 per student. In 2021, Indiana awarded one \$3,500 AABS Scholarship, to a Cornell linguistics PhD student. The remaining AABS funds were used for instructor compensation.

As in 2020, BALSSI was larger and more diverse than in the recent past, with higher percentages of lifelong learners and self-funded students than before 2020. Indiana attributes this primarily to the online format, which made the program less expensive and more accessible. Indiana plans to retain online options in 2022 to continue to make BALSSI accessible to the broadest possible audience.

The greatest impact of the online format was, perhaps, on the co-curricular program. Whereas the online co-curricular program in 2020 was well attended, despite Zoom fatigue and connectivity issues, in 2021 attendance in cultural programming dropped across the Workshop. Student feedback suggested that the difference was that students had other options in 2021, even though their courses were online. That said, as in 2020, the online format made it possible to: (a) invite guests who would never have been accessible to BALSSI students in person due to prohibitive travel and accommodation costs; and (b) offer a range of virtual and game-based experiences that are only available only online. As several instructors and students noted in their program evaluations, these are aspects of BALSSI 2021 that it would make sense to retain in 2022, regardless of the mode of instruction.

Capitalizing on the experience of two years of online BALSSI and the availability of funding for overseas study, Indiana had planned to extend its "online+overseas" instructional model to the BALSSI languages in 2022. These courses combine four weeks of intensive online study with four weeks of in-country immersion study. In September 2021, the Indiana University Study Abroad Office announced that it would not be considering new short-term programs for summer 2022 until next spring, in hopes of having a clearer understanding of COVID-related restrictions. Additionally, Indiana has changed its policy on hiring overseas faculty to teach online courses in ways that are problematic for an online+overseas BALSSI as originally conceived. Finally, AABS has provided recommendations for overseas partners that partially conflict with Indiana's original model, but that might be feasible under a program restructured to conform to Indiana's new HR policies.

For all these reasons, in consultation with AABS, Indiana has opted to delay the launch of an online+overseas version of BALSSI to 2023 at the earliest. The 2022 program will be conducted in online or online/in-person hybrid formats (depending on COVID-19 restrictions) as in 2020 and 2021. Over the course of the next year, Indiana will work with AABS to plan out and stand up an online+overseas BALSSI for 2023.

Indiana University is honored to have been able to host BALSSI in 2021 and thanks its Consortium partners for their support. We are particularly grateful to AABS for its generous contributions and for its ongoing support for summer instruction in Baltic languages.

— *Indiana University Summer Language Workshop*

# Finding a new voice during the pandemic

**Dr. Heather MacLaughlin Garbes** is currently Affiliate Assistant Professor at the University of Washington, where she helped develop and maintains the UW Baltic Choral Library, the first collection of its kind in the United States. She is also Founder and Artistic Director of the Mägi Ensemble. Dr. MacLaughlin Garbes has presented at ACDA Divisional, College Music Society's National and International conferences, the Library of Congress and the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies conferences. She co-authored the chapter "Baltic Languages: Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian" in the book *The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal* (Scarecrow Press).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge for everyone, with cancelled conferences, a shift in mentality to the online world, and a "new normal" in our everyday lives. When singing was discovered to be a super-spreader activity (due to virus transmission via aerosols and droplets), choirs were essentially told to stop gathering, and had to create new ways to rehearse and perform together. For the choral world, this meant a sudden pivot to a whole new online world, learning new skills with virtual choirs, music videos and streaming concerts.

I am the Founder and Artistic Director of Mägi Ensemble, a professional women's vocal ensemble based in Seattle that performs and records music from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We had just finished our annual fundraising gala before the pandemic, then had to postpone a collaborative concert with three other choirs from Seattle when we learned that singing was especially dangerous. We also had to cancel our tour to Estonia to celebrate our namesake, Ester Mägi's 99th birthday in January 2021. Unfortunately, Mägi passed away on May 14. We are planning on traveling to Estonia for the commemoration of her 100th birthday on Jan. 10, 2022.

Adapting to the realities of the pandemic, Mägi Ensemble created four virtual choir performances. The process for these projects is involved: A guide track is created with the vocal lines played at the performance tempo and often includes a video with the conductor, depending on the complexity of the piece. The singers then practice their parts at home, record their part alone and then submit it. Once all of the audio and video recordings are submitted, we align, mix, and balance the individual audio tracks. We then align and assemble the video tracks into a composite before putting the video and audio back together. Mägi Ensemble is fortunate to have a team of three people that put together both



**Above:** The Mägi Ensemble with the group's namesake, Estonian composer Ester Mägi, front, second from right.

**Below:** The Mägi Ensemble with Latvian composer Pēteris Vasks.





Seattle-based Baltic women's ensemble, the Mägi Ensemble, collaborates with women's a cappella vocal ensemble, Latvian Voices, in a concert and masterclass series.

the audio tracks and created the videos for our projects. Overall, it takes approximately 15 hours of editing to produce each song.

Although we are very excited to get back to singing and performing together, the time we spent in the online world opened our eyes to the many ways to include audience members (and singing participants) from all over the world, instead of being limited to people in the same geographic area. Mägi Ensemble hosted a Baltic Trivia night in January 2021 with participants from across the United States, as well as Sweden, Finland and Mexico! As the pandemic forced cancellation of in-person events throughout the performance season, we also moved our fundraising gala to an online platform for the evening and had a wonderful night of sharing Baltic repertoire and sto-

ries of our history.

We are now in the process of planning our 10th anniversary performance season. Even with our return to live performances in front of audiences, we plan to continue to produce online content for our worldwide audience. We will be including a virtual element with past Mägi Ensemble members, who will submit audio and video files recorded at home to bring us all back "together" to celebrate our first 10 years.

We look forward to singing together for many years to come — both on screen and in person — and are excited to continue to perform and record outstandingly beautiful music from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

— Dr. Heather MacLaughlin Garbes

To view the Mägi Ensemble virtual songs, visit their website: <https://magiensemble.com/>



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