

EVA EGLĀJA-KRISTSONE

Digital Resource Literatura.lv: An Introduction

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The digital resource Literatura.lv is a brand new project,¹ which started in 2015 when the researchers from the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia (hereinafter, ILFA) began creating an informative online resource on Latvian literature in Latvia and abroad. The website tracks and records the development of Latvian literature and provides a reliable and comprehensive source of data, including an extensive and expertly created database of personalities connected to Latvian literature, literary works, awards, organizations, and mappings, which covers the period from the 16th century to the present day. The resource has become increasingly voluminous in terms of data and information, more creative and diverse in its manifestations, open and suitable for researchers to select, group, and use data in their research. In addition to the goal of managing the profiles of about 5,700 persons and over 48,000 literary works, it is also essential to inform and educate the public by promoting not only our literary canon but also forgotten or minoritized authors, as well as contemporary writers, translators, editors, critics, and researchers.

One of the main aims of this publication is to share information about the digital resource Literatura.lv as an ongoing project in digital humanities (hereinafter, DH) with a wider international academic society. In recent years, there is a rapid growth in the number of cultural resources accessible online. We have to promote the potential of these resources among academic communities across Europe, and instruct users on the terms and conditions for reusing them.² The article surveys the digital resource, Literatura.lv, in general,

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- 1 This publication was supported by the project “Digital Resources for Humanities: Integration and Development,” Project No. VPP-IZM-DH-2020/1-0001.
 - 2 Joris Hubert Fons Marie Colla, et al., *How to Facilitate the Cooperation between Humanities Researchers and Cultural Heritage Institutions. Guidelines*, Digital Humanities Centre at the

examining its institutional significance, scope and accessibility, and the average user profile, and explores how digital resource fosters research through its multimodal content.

Literatura.lv is part of ILFA's digital resources along with Garamantas.lv³ and Iesaisties.lv⁴ and is available to everyone without any restrictions. The Institute has created and developed digital resources that attract a wide range of users by offering content and technological solutions. Public databases, the involvement of the public and accessing them through various channels have been highlighted in various local and international evaluations as a success and advantage of the ILFA that significantly contributes to the digital visibility of Latvian culture and uses society's digital skills to update the cultural content. The first and core element of ILFA's digital infrastructure is the digital archive of Latvian folklore (Garamantas.lv) established in 2014. Garamantas.lv is one of the pioneering platforms curating the crowdsourcing⁵ and outreach initiatives to increase societal involvement.⁶ By the end of 2021, the new public interface Dati.lulpmi.lv was launched, enabling the user to explore data across different disciplines (literature, folklore, theatre, music, and oral history) on one platform and providing public access to experimental projects carried out by the researchers or research teams.

It is essential to mention the forerunners of Literatura.lv. The digital resource is based on the existing research carried out by literary scholars at the ILFA (directories of various publications, biographies of authors and other people working in the field, and monographs). The beginnings of the data set created by the researchers of the Institute can be traced back to 1965, when the

Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, 2019 (published online). Access on the Internet: https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS2786720&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US&fromSitemap [Accessed on 10 22 2021].

3 The digital archive of Latvian folklore.

4 A platform of digital participatory tools.

5 Sanita Reinsone, "Searching for Deeper Meanings in Cultural Heritage Crowdsourcing," in: *A History of Participation in Museums and Archives: Traversing Citizen Science and Citizen Humanities*, ed. by Per Hetland, Palmyre Pierroux, Line Esborg, London: Routledge, 2020.

6 Sanita Reinsone, "Participatory Practices and Tradition Archives," in: *Visions and Traditions. Knowledge Production and Tradition Archives: Folklore Fellows' Communications*, (eds.) Lauri Harvilhti, Audun Kjus, Cliona O'Carroll, Susanne Österlund-Poetzsch, Frederic Skott, & Rita Treija, Porvoo: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2018.

biographical dictionary *Representatives of Latvian Literature* was published by the publishing house “Zinātne.” However, the authors, considered inappropriate and banned by the regime, were not included in this edition. Thus, the dictionary was incomplete. However, the structure of the lexicon is similar to the edition of *Latvian Literature in Biographies*,⁷ published by the researchers of the Institute in 1992. This encyclopedic dictionary, which included biographies of more than 1,500 writers, became the factual basis of the database “Literates” (Literati.lv) created by the ILFA researchers.⁸ Initially, the database “Literati” was available only on the local network of the Latvian Academic Library. This database of literary personalities is the first computerized repository of its kind in the cultural sector in Latvia. The supplemented and revised edition of *Latvian Literature in Biographies*⁹ was published once again in 2003. In 2013, it was integrated into the virtual encyclopedia of humanities. The above-mentioned encyclopedic dictionaries, indexes of novels, collections of poems and short stories, and the virtual encyclopedia of humanities form the basis of the digital resource, Literatura.lv.

Three main objectives are important in building up this resource: (1) to serve the teaching, learning and research needs of the academic community and beyond, e.g., cultural industries, on Latvian literature; (2) to provide easy access to materials on Latvian literature anytime and anywhere in the world; and (3) to promote Latvian literature as a subject and the use of methods of DH to the users globally. Every year, about 300 entries about personalities are supplemented, re-created and added. It is important to emphasize that these are not the so-called “fast data” but extensive, high quality and relevant data. The Literatura.lv resource is based on the researchers’ careful data preparation, verification, and specification.

The systematic approach of entering data is one of the critical elements for success. The method to follow significant or milestone anniversaries of writers, translators, and critics (around 40 each month) has been twice as successful, because, firstly, the data for each personality is updated, corrected, and/or supplemented regardless of the literary taste or interests of the editors. Secondly,

7 Viktors Hausmanis (ed.), *Latviešu rakstniecība biogrāfijās*, Rīga: Latvijas Enciklopēdija, 1992.

8 Anita Rožkalne, a literary scholar and researcher of the ILFA, was the database manager in 1992–2002.

9 *Latviešu rakstniecība biogrāfijās*. Rīga: Zinātne, 2003.

each anniversary entry is publicized on Literatura.lv “Facebook” profile, reaching a significant number of audience and introducing various literary generations, centuries, nationalities, and genres of the history of Latvian literature. Of no less importance is the popularity, visibility and respectability of the resource provided by the regular and diverse sharing of information, the openness to the contribution and cooperation of the public, individuals and other cultural heritage institutions.

Coincidentally, the digital resource is very popular with high school and university students (the average age of a user ranges from 18 to 34 years), and it is especially prevalent during the school year, from September to June. On average, Literatura.lv is visited by more than 2,000 users a day using different devices (PCs, mobiles, and tablets), as the interface is suitable and easy to use in all of them. The most viewed author profiles are those included in the Latvian cultural canon and school curricula: Kārlis Skalbe, Anna Brigadere, Imants Ziedonis, Rainis, Krišjānis Barons, Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, Aleksandrs Čaks, Māra Zālīte, Aspazija, Rūdolfs Blaumanis, Ojārs Vācietis, Jānis Ezeriņš, and Regīna Ezera, to name just a few. However, an equally important group with more specific and in-depth interests is made up of university lecturers, local researchers, family tree enthusiasts, library staff, etc.

Evaluating the average profile and the number of Literatura.lv users, “Google Analytics” indicates that there are almost 300,000 users a month. Besides the new users, many returning visitors regularly visit the site. Interestingly, the proportion of Literatura.lv website users with a slight predominance in men, unlike the “Facebook” page of Literatura.lv where women predominate, and the age of users present the following picture: Most of the users are in the age group 25 34 and slightly less in 18 24; further the number of users in the age groups 35 44 and older decreases accordingly. Thus, the user of Literatura.lv has primarily grown and matured in the digital age; their requirements are higher, requesting innovations, diverse offer, and renewed visual materials and website design.

Since 2018, the Literatura.lv “Facebook” page¹⁰ has gained considerable popularity and a substantial number of followers. According to statistics and readers’ feedback, the public is eager to receive information about the facts and personalities of Latvian literature and its current process. Social networking

10 <https://www.facebook.com/LVliteratura>.

allows us to reach an average of 10,000 users per month. The popularity is primarily due to the literary tradition of celebrating the anniversaries of writers (around 400 entries a year, 95% of which are commemorations). They inform the public about the achievements of well- and lesser-known authors and their role in the literary process. “Facebook” is beneficial as a means of volunteer involvement in knowledge sharing. Shares made for every post sometimes range from 10 to 450 shares, e.g., the post about Regīna Ezera’s anniversary was shared 451 time, Aleksandrs Čaks’—344 times, etc. The shares allow some FB posts to reach up to almost 60,000 FB users, e.g., posts on Regīna Ezera (55,200), Zenta Ērgle (30,700), Aleksandrs Čaks (28,300) and Vizma Belševica (14,600).

As Literatura.lv has free access with no sign-in requirement not only to local researchers and readers but also to the global community thanks to the English interface and translated metadata fields, the analytics show that the language used in search is Latvian in 43% of cases, English in 35%, and Russian in 12% of cases. Although 90% of the users are located in Latvia, 2,5% live in the US, 0,8% in the UK, 0,7% in Russia, 0,6% in Germany, 0,5% in Ireland, Sweden and Indonesia, and 0,3% in Lithuania.

Currently, Literatura.lv includes more than 5,700 biographical entries about writers, literary scholars, publishers, critics, editors, translators, book artists, and others, as well as basic information about almost 48,000 works, 3,500 organizations, receivers of 265 different awards, around 100 audio files, 8,500 pictures/photos, one virtual exhibition and three crowdsourcing “Read Aloud” activities. The idea is to offer multimodal content, including interactive and complementary material such as audio, images, or exhibition, which may increase the user’s motivation when dealing with literary history and contemporary literature.

Literatura.lv strives to create a complete database of all Latvian writers, translators, critics, and publishers and in addition to historical data, to track the processes in contemporary Latvian literature. The resource is regularly updated with information about the published books and latest reviews of current books. The links to online publications and writers’ blogs or webpages are also included. The collaboration is initiated with every new author to jointly develop their profile on Literatura.lv by providing information about their work experience, education, publications, personal information, and literary reception.

General digitalization trends at the national and global level make access to different types of data and documents much more convenient and fast. Thanks to several digitization projects, we can verify both life and education data, obtain photos and audio recordings. For example, around 500 new photos have been added to individual profiles thanks to digitized documents, such as passports from the National Archives of Latvia and student cards or other documents from the University of Latvia (mainly from the 1920s and the 1930s).

Following the tradition and the printed editions of writers' biographies, the central axis of *Literatura.lv* is personality and biographical data. However, due to the less limited capabilities of the digital resource, they are expanded, linked, and searchable. The digital resource enables to extract the biographical corpus of a particular group of writers, translators, and publicists applying genre/time/place criteria. Every author, translator, publisher, publicist, literary critic, or scholar has a profile with a field of metadata, which makes the resource easy to search. The necessary information can be obtained by filtering and selecting according to specific criteria that helps to analyze writer's biography, to show the links between the author's life and their works. Various search options make it possible to find the biographical information, learn about person's activities in a literary field, their literary reception, translations, awards, and view their life events on a map. Thanks to the integrated geographic information system (GIS) and mapping tools, the editors trace out both personal life events and data of literary works and organizations, thus creating an extensive and exciting set of maps.

Two retrieval interfaces are provided; one for quick search for beginners, while an advanced search is for searchers that are more sophisticated. A quick search looks for the results in an entire database and in all sections and collections. The next level is to use the original interface, in which the data set is split in six interlinked menus: Persons, Works, Organizations, Rewards, Audio, and Map, and two additional sections: Exhibitions and Read Aloud.



FIGURE NO. 1.

Each of the section allows options of data filtering, but sections "Person," "Works," and "Map" offer an additional advanced search.

(a) “Persons” can be sorted by name, date of birth, date of death, and occupation. For example, the user wants to find all the poets named “Jānis,” and they get 56 results. Alternatively, write “1918” in the box “Birth” and get 24 persons from a database of those born in 1918. The advanced search has an option to filter by gender and membership and use the “from”–“to” option in birth data. For example, the user wants to find all women who have been the members of the Latvian Writer’s Union from 1980 to 2021. When they find a concrete person, e.g., one of the most outstanding and famous poets today, Kārlis Vērdiņš, they should pay attention that he has been assigned different roles: Author (202); Translator (1); Poetry translator (11); Compiler (12); Editor (34); Author of the comment (13); and Person of reception (77). Literary works and reception documents, in turn, are described through bibliographical categories such as title, year of publication, and genre. The genre in turn, contains several sub-categories. Persons might be filtered by “having” or “not having” a picture. In the pictures, the user can find not only portraits or group photos, but also the samples of writers’ manuscripts and signatures,¹¹ photos of their monuments and graves.

(b) “Works.” It is possible to sort literary works by the year they were published (or written, if not published by now), genre, type of issue, publisher, and periodical. For example, it is possible to search for publications of Latvian authors in a Lithuanian journal *Literatūra ir menas* and get 14 results, or write the word “laime” (happiness) in a box “Title” and get 55 units where this word is included in a title. The use of advanced search will help to sort information by the work type or by the role of a person (author, translator, publisher, compiler, and/or editor) or by the publisher and periodical. It also allows finding works by their original language.

(c) “Organizations” can be sorted by the name of the organization, type, and location. For example, the user might want to search for all the periodicals (type) published in Liepāja (location) and get 11 results.

(d) “Rewards” is possible to sort by title, description, and category, e.g., the user can search for awards in 1918–1940, etc., or find all the nominees and prizewinners of the Annual Latvian Literature Award. Rewards include a wide spectrum of awards, not specifically the achievements in the field of literature.

11 The initiative has been launched in cooperation with the Museum of Literature and Music, regional museums, the National Library of Latvia, and the Academic Library of the University of Latvia.

(e) “Audio” is searchable by title, performer, collection, place, and year. However, since the collection, which currently contains only about 100 units, has been just started, it is easy to overlook the content. “Authors’ Voice” collection cooperates with the National Library of Latvia, the Latvian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents, and the Museum of Literature and Music. The user is invited to listen to the readings of Anšlavs Eglītis, Gunars Janovskis, Velta Sniķere, Gunars Saliņš, Linards Tauns, Astrīde Ivaska and others.

(f) “Map” offers different types of visualization as clusters, heat maps, markers, or circles, and the user is free to choose the most convenient one. It is also possible to see all the places of organizations or person’s life events on the map. The advanced search also makes it possible to dig deeper in a database of persons, selecting “birth time/place” in order to see the places around the world where the persons included in Literatura.lv database were born. On the other hand, find the places of emigration, deportation, detention, military service, etc.

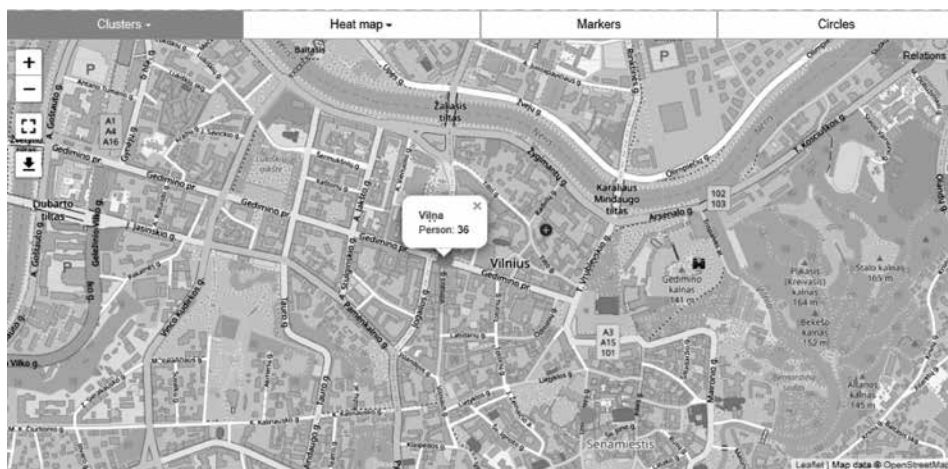


FIGURE NO. 2. The map shows 36 persons from Literatura.lv who have had connections to Vilnius through their lifetime.

(g) “Exhibitions.” Since the autumn of 2021, the digital resource Literatura.lv has had a new section, “Exhibition,” which presents a model of the virtual exhibition as a new praxis for LFMI. The first exhibition, “A New History of Latvian Literature: The Long 19th Century”¹² is a glimpse into different

12 <https://literatura.lv/ilgaisgadsimts/>.

impulses that have caused changes in Latvian literature of the period. The exhibition touches on Baltic German societies, the history of reading habits and the culture of Biedermeier, followed by the movement of New Latvians, collection of folklore, visual literacy, novels, and literary periodicals, and the role of translations that shaped literary horizons. Currently, the exhibition is available only in Latvian: <https://literatura.lv/ilgaisgadsimts/>.

(h) “Read Aloud” ILFA has integrated crowdsourcing tools into its digital resources. The team of Literatura.lv manages various “Read Aloud”¹³. Crowdsourcing campaigns prove that the cultural heritage and humanities data can be a source for artistic inspiration and creativity. There are three campaigns offering the public to read aloud and record a poem. Crowdsourcing campaign “Recite Veidenbaums’ Poetry”¹⁴ turned out to be a successful project that linked the cultural heritage with a powerful platform for individual engagement. The second campaign, “Let’s Read Poetry!,” was dedicated to the Latvian children’s poetry before World War II; and the third one, “Poetry Wheel 1919,” was a present to the National Library of Latvia on its 100th anniversary and includes poetry published in a book format or periodicals of 1919.

The DH have been increasingly collaborative. The collaborative projects attract more resources and more attention. There have been joint projects with other research or cultural heritage institutions, during which Literatura.lv obtains data and texts, e.g., in cooperation with the National Library of Latvia, “Corpus of Latvian Novels (1873–1920)” has been created. Many of the novels have already been added to Literatura.lv, and the mapping provides information about the places and place names mentioned in them.

One of the current aims of Literatura.lv is to develop a model that focuses on participation of individuals and communities in digital resource through biographical stories, bibliographies, cartographic data, and to help people see themselves in the history. Therefore, cooperation has been established with private individuals, who have created or whose personal archives contain data sets that can be used to develop Literatura.lv. The cooperation with cultural heritage institutions, such as the National Library of Latvia, the Museum of

13 Eva Eglāja-Kristone, Signe Raudive, “Sabiedrības iesaistes akcija “Lasi skaļi”: estētiskie un izglītojošie dzejas ieskaņošanas aspekti” [Crowdsourcing Campaign “Read Aloud”: Aesthetic and Educational Aspects of Poetry Recording]. *Letonica*, 2020, No. 42, pp. 66–83.

14 <http://lasi.literatura.lv>.



FIGURE NO. 3. The map of the places mentioned in Ivande Kaija's novel "Inherited Sin" (Iedzintais grēks, 1913).

Literature and Music, and many regional museums, which have compiled and have available data resources, suited to integrate in Literatura.lv, has been developed. In addition, it is worth noticing that lately, people have intensively begun investigating their family's histories, using biographical data harvesting to make their digital family tree. Thus, it provides additional data for wider use beyond the individual or family research.¹⁵

It is crucial to keep the records of social networks of creative personalities, cultural workers, critics, and writers, which would provide the future researchers with documentary evidence of a person's life and period and reveal the impetus for creating literary and artistic works. The question of how to preserve their digital heritage becomes relevant. Virtual diaries and social network entries written by creative personalities are not currently stored. The fate of entries made by the users of personalized social networks is often unclear, especially in the event of the death of the author of the entry. Also, the entries can be deleted due to an accidental technical failure or if the platform becomes obsolete

15 There is also a sub-project in genealogy and social networking website Geni.com <https://www.geni.com/projects/Literatura-lv>.

or is removed. Such a fate has befallen several Latvian writers' blogs, including Andra Manfelde's blog, whose entries posted on a blogging platform, *Posterous*, currently can only be retrieved from the Internet Archive, *WayBackMachine*. With the author's permission, we placed the blog on *Literatura.lv*,¹⁶ structured it by separating every entry as a unit of the digital diary (Text), and arranged all the places mentioned in the text (Places) for the future research.

#LIT-4-2

Next Unit



Unit	Text	Places
Title	2. VisBija	
Unit number	2	
Repository	Latvijas literatūra	
Categories	diary	
Languages	Latvian	
Files	ManfeldeAndra-blogs-002	
Author	Andra Manfelde	
Place and time of recording	06.10.2010, Gotlando Gotland, Sweden	

Next Unit

FIGURE No. 4. The structure of a unit of Andra Manfelde's blog in *Literatura.lv*.

To summarize, the digital resource *Literatura.lv* strives to become more open and collaborative by inviting the public to participate and offering new opportunities for the researchers to collaborate. Every university student or tenured scholar is welcome to use the various search options in order to find information about Latvian literature, specific authors or works, biographical data or places, and to discover Latvian literature in new cultural, factual and social contexts and relations. Cultural media, libraries, schools, universities, and researchers refer to *Literatura.lv* as an authoritative digital resource. Attentive clarifications and demand for timely, complete and accurate data provided by professionals are the basis for maintaining and improving such a resource. The potential resides in bringing together a database function and a subtle metadata, and an archival function, concerned with the preservation and transmission of memory, and a present-bound artistic, performative and creative function.

16 <https://www.literatura.lv/en/collection/Andras-Manfeldes-emuars-Posterous/1457660>.