ORIGIN AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL TERM "BALTICS": HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

ĢEOGRĀFISKĀ NOSAUKUMA 'BALTIJA' RAŠANĀS UN ATTĪSTĪBA: IESKATS 19. - 20. GADSIMTA AVOTU LIECĪBĀS

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to explain the historical origin, development and understanding of the geographical term "Baltic" or "Baltics". A wide range of local and foreign historical sources have been used for the study. Applied historical sources show the use of term by different ethnic groups in local society as well as abroad. Events of two centuries are marking a different trend in the semantical content of the term. The results of the study show that period of the rule of Russian Empire over the Baltics is closely connected with a rather narrow understanding of the concept, which was formed by the elite of local German-speakers, and related to areas inhabited by Baltic Germans, Estonians and Latvians. Later periods were marked by changes related to the period of independent Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the period of their occupation, and the period after the restoration of their independence. These periods of history strengthened a broader understanding of the term associated with the three Baltic States.
Keywords: *Baltic, Baltics, identity, toponym, ethnonym, history*

Introduction and first evidence

The study is based on selected sources reflecting public knowledge and opinions in the 19th and 20th centuries that allow us to understand traits related to the identity of society and the popularity of the mentioned terms. The sources used in this article are newspapers, magazines, prose works and encyclopaedias.

The meaning of the term "Baltic", or frequently "Baltics" (in the plural sense), is self-evident today and is widely used worldwide, identifying the three countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania located on the shores of the Baltic Sea. However, this is the result of long, often exciting historical events.

The origin of the Latinised term *Baltia* (meaning the sea) is found in the texts by the ancient Roman author Gaius Plinius Secundus, known as Pliny the Elder (23/24–79), from the 1st century AD (Zeids, 1992). Regular use of it began many centuries later with the maps made by the Dutch cartographer Gerardus Mercator (real name Gheert Cremer, 1512–1594). The best-known of these were published after his

death in the early 17th century. These maps show the seacoast of the medieval state of Livonia, and on them the sea is called, in Latin, *Mare Balticum* (Mercator, 1607). From that moment on, the concept of the Baltic Sea was familiar to the very narrow circle of European geographers as a hydronym. However, it was not yet used as the name of the land area bordering the sea (a toponym).

Starting from the 13th century, the area of modern-day Latvia and Estonia (former Livonia) was ruled by the ethnically mixed social strata speaking German; centuries later they were called Baltic Germans (*Deutsch-Balten, Deutschbalten*). In German texts, the use of the term "Baltic" became more common after 1761 with the establishment of a new city in the northeast of Estonia named Baltischport, meaning "Port of the Baltics" (Russian analogue: Балтийский, Estonian: Baltiski, later Paldiski). Starting from about 1763, local newspapers such as *Rigasche Anzeigen* ("Advertisements of Riga") began to report about regular cargo ship traffic from Baltischport (Verzeichnis, 1763). The new toponym was understood very locally: it was only applied to the aforementioned city, and therefore it had little importance. After the Russian annexation of Courland in 1795, a term derived from the German *Ostsee* ("Eastern Sea", the German analogue for the Baltic Sea), *Ostseeprovinzen* (Eastern Sea Provinces), was used for the provinces of Estonia, Livonia and Courland. Since the family of the Russian tsar was of a German descent and a dominant part of the educated upper class of society was brought up in the German culture, Russians also used the same German designation, *Остзейскй край* and *остзейские провинции*.

The geographical term *Mer Baltique* (Baltic Sea) was found as early as the middle of the 18th century in the famous *Encyclopedie*, edited by the great French scientists of the Enlightenment era, Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean le Rond d'Alambert (1717–1783) (Encyclopedie, 1751). The headword "Baltic Sea" can also be found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at the beginning of the 19th century (Britannica, 1810). Despite this, it was not used regularly in further reference books as a headword. For a series of leading French reference books in the first half of the 19th century, the Baltic and its eastern coastal region did not exist at all (Encyklopedie, 1823–32; Encyklopedie 1841–43). *Mer Baltique, Provinces Baltiques* and even *Baltia* are permanently present in French universal encyclopaedias only from the 1860s (Grand Dictionaire, 1867). In American reference books the headword "Baltic" emerges by the middle of the century (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1851). In the case of Russia, public knowledge was built mostly on a German base; it did not even have its own Russian edition of such scientific reference material, and one was created only at the end of the 19th century in cooperation with the German publisher of encyclopaedias Brockhaus.

Until the middle of the 19th century, local people identified with a particular province or governorate. This situation is well-illustrated in German encyclopaedias

by the turn of the 18th and 19th century, in which some information about separate toponyms (Estonia, Livonia, Riga) may be included, but where the united name of the whole territory is not found (Hübner, 1795; Conversations-Lexikon, 1809–11). Around the end of the 19th century in the most important German encyclopaedias, Brockhaus and Meyers, there were already unifying designations for the region: the headwords "Eastern Sea Provinces", and the rather random single headword *Baltia* in its narrow Latinised sense with a connection to the text of Pliny the Elder (Brockhaus, 1894–96, Meyers, 1885–92).

The beginnings of Baltic identity

The spread of knowledge about the region was facilitated by the work of Elisabeth Eastlake-Rigby (1809–1893) – a well-known British author and journalist. She wrote the book *Letters from the Shores of the Baltic*. The appearance of such a publication was an unprecedented contribution to the knowledge of the Baltics abroad. In 1846, work by Eastlake was published in German under the simpler, iconic title *Baltic Letters*. Excerpts from the book were also published by the local press (Eastlake, 1841; Eastlake, 1844; Eastlake, 1846). Almost simultaneously, the initial push in the introduction of the term was given by the German writer from Austria-Hungary, traveller and physician Aurelio Buddeus, known as Budde (1817–1880). In 1847 he published a fascinating description of a journey through Courland to Riga. Although his study does not contain a common conceptually unifying view of the region and its people, Buddeus highlighted the similarities of Baltic landscapes, manors, and common features in the way of life (Buddeus, 1854).

The first broadest survey in German where the Baltic concept was systematically used was a series of "Sketches of the Baltics", published between 1852 and 1855 by the Baltic German physician and writer Georg Julius von Schultz, known as "Dr Bertram", (1808–1875) in the popular weekly journal *Das Inland* (Schultz, 1852). The aim of the journal was to describe common features in the geography, society, history and culture of Courland, Estonia and Livonia. Compared to previously mentioned publications, Schultz's "Sketches of the Baltics" became much more recognisable to the public, as *Das Inland* was popular throughout the educated German-speaking strata. Schultz was fascinated by the culture and lifestyles of the cities and countryside and always saw a lot of unifying elements.

Sources indicating that the idea of a united Baltics broke through after the first issue of the literary magazine *Baltische Monatsschrift* ("Monthly Magazine of Balts") in October 1859. The magazine managed to gain wide influence throughout the German-language space all across Europe. The new type of toponym promoted by that journal was *Baltenland*, or in shorter form *Baltland* ("Land of the Balts"). The title of *Baltische Monatsschrift* made it clear that it was meant for a specific nation, consisting of different strata of society and united by the German language. For the people

inhabiting the region the name “Balts” or “Baltians” was given, German: *die Balten*; Estonian: *baltlased*; Latvian: *baltieši* (Cerūzis, 2022). The magazine started to promote all aspects connected to the Baltics or “Balticness” – above all, the idea of the cultural, religious (Lutheran), legal, economic and political unity of the provinces. It quickly became popular in the educated part of society. In 1882, ***Baltische Monatsschrift*** published the world’s very first academic article to reflect on the origin of the word “Baltics”, which portrayed the Baltic people (Balts) as a unified nation (Berkholz, 1882).

Practical and political importance

The use of the toponym “Baltics” and the ethnonym “Balts” in the second half of the 19th century was of great utilitarian significance. Their popularity was facilitated by practical as well as political needs. Previous designations for the region and people were too many and they did not indicate badly needed unifying features in the western provinces of Russia (German: *Ostseeprovinzen; Livland, Kurland, Estland; Livländer, Kurländer, Esltländer*, etc.).

Russians began to abandon the use of the earlier derivations from German *Ostseeprovinzen* (Russian: *Остзейскй край, остзейцы*). Due to overall russification, the German nature of the term was no longer acceptable, so it became one of the range of attributes to be combated. The turning point here was 1893, when Dorpat/Tartu was renamed with the Russian toponym Yuryev and around the same time the Russian Empire began to use *Прибалтика* and *Прибалтйские губернии* (“Baltics”, “Baltic governorates”) in official correspondence. The transformation soon affected the academic and scientific field, so, for example, by the end of 19th century, the first Russian edition of Brockhaus Encyclopaedia was already using the new term “Baltics” (Энциклопедический словарь, 1898). On the other hand, it could be seen that the Russian term had different semantic content. Russian publicists used the term in a narrow geographical sense. Similarly, like Russians, in the middle of 19th century Latvians also used a name derived from the German language tradition for the Baltic – *Austrumu jūra* (“Eastern Sea”), but in the 1860s they began to introduce the term “Baltics” (Dinsbergs, 1864). In the autumn of 1868, the first issue of the Latvian newspaper *Baltijas Vēstnesis* (“Herald of the Baltics”) produced by the Riga Latvian Society was published. As the term “Baltics” was new to Latvians, the editorial board decided that it should be explained as being the land that stretches along the Baltic Sea (Anonymous, 1868).

In contrast with the views of Russians and Latvians, the local German concept of “Baltics” was much more complex than a geographical term alone. In their view the concept had a political, and even an ethnic meaning. In newspapers from the 1860s, polemics appeared about the cultural, historical and legal differences between Courland, Estonia and Livonia and inner Russia. Russian newspapers saw Baltic

identity as resulting from misunderstanding of their former privileges by Baltic aristocrats (nobility) and denied the existence of a unique Baltic identity, as they believed it consisted only of eminent German elements borrowed from the culture of Germany (Bärens, 1865), while Baltic German newspapers, which tended to be rather conservative, wrote that all people loyal to the homeland should agree with the idea of Baltic unity, that in that way it would be possible to overcome the political and national tension in the Baltics within a short time (Buchholz, 1881). The Baltic Germans disagreed with arguments that in fact Baltics would thereafter develop as a nation consisting of, or at least led by German-speaking people. Despite this, local Germans themselves concluded that the uniqueness of the Baltics was largely based on the German language and culture. For example, in 1880 German-language newspapers published a series of articles on the ethnic situation and tried to find out what exactly was the "Baltic essence" of the homeland. These articles clearly stated that the identity of the homeland was inextricably linked with many aspects connected to German culture, and that the cultural identity of Estonians and Latvians had also been preserved thanks to the efforts of local Germans (Meyer, 1880; Ruetz, 1880).

These views of a common Baltic identity were not limited to the press. Prose writers were also expressing similar views in 1880: a prominent Baltic writer, Theodor Hermann Pantenius (1843–1916), in his very romantic novel titled *In a God's Land* wrote about the Baltics as the home of a united family consisting of speakers of different languages (Pantenius, 1880–81). Maybe some more critical moods emerge in lyrics by the Baltic writer Victor von Andrejanoff (1857–1895). He admits that the Baltics have their own identity, but says that it is not a modern or good one; rather, it is a kind of protection system, where everything is determined by acquaintances and beneficial contacts, but not by competence or freedom (Andrejanoff, 1880).

Growing popularity of Baltic identity

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of the Baltics was already widely entrenched in society.

The Baltic German legal historian Friedrich Georg von Bunge (1802–1897) summarised the private and civil law of the provinces (Bunge, 1847–48). His work was thereafter referred to as the "Baltic Private Law Code" and the civil law of Latvia is largely built on its base. His son Theodor von Bunge (1826–1911) described the procedure for handling civil cases in court, for which the symbolic name Civil Procedure of the Baltics was given (Bunge, 1890-91). Under the leadership of the nature researcher Karl Reinhold Kupffer (1872–1935), for the first time in world history, a book, *Geography of the Baltics*, was published, in which all geographical aspects of the territory are described in a unifying way (Kupffer, 1911). The terms "Baltics"/"Balts", both toponym and ethnonym, started to be used in the names, brands and logos of industrial enterprises. The most vivid example here is the Imperial

Automobile Plant of the Russian Empire – Russo-Balt (*"Русско-Балтийский вагонный завод"/"Russisch-Baltische Waggon-Fabrik"*), founded in Riga, which was the first to produce cars in the Baltic region. The oil refinery Oehlrich & Co. in Riga even called the petrol it produced the Special Baltic. These companies, as well as other enterprises, placed advertisements in the yearbook, which also featured the popular term in its title, *Yearbook of the Balts/Baltic* (Baltisches Jahrbuch, 1905).

The revolution of 1905 in the Baltic region was a huge upheaval in the paradigm. It is usually mentioned as a turning point by many scholars (Hollander, 1924; Garleff, 2005). The possibility of creating a united Baltic nation was under threat, since left-wing and anarchist revolutionaries usually turned against the influence of the Baltic German leading strata. Under the influence of the German Empire's press, the Baltics began to be often called by a different term, *Baltikum*, which was borrowed from the Latin *Balticum*. This term had previously begun to be used by German naturalists and archaeologists who wanted to refrain from engaging in polemics about Baltic identity. The term *Baltikum* had an ending which local German-speakers did not associate with statehood but rather to laboratories or technical solutions (for example, *herbarium, aquarium* etc.). At the same time as the term *Baltikum*, a second new term, *Baltentum* – close in meaning to usual "Balts" – started to circulate in the local German press, from 1905 to 1906. This was borrowed from the romantised *Deutschtum* ("Germanness" – the spirit of the nation) used in the German Empire. The term was treated as a designation for a Baltic special consciousness, for now often understood as consisting of German cultural elements (Vietinghoff-Scheel, 1906).

During the revolution of 1905, there were also outbursts that contested other Baltic traditions. For instance, the importance of the church and religion was belittled, and the so-called church demonstrations – rallies, speeches, and displaying of red flags in the churches – occurred. The Lutheran church was considered one of the strongest elements of Baltic identity before the revolution; it was held to be an important essence of the Baltic way of life. The concept of a "Latvian Revolution" introduced at that time became one of the components of the image of the Baltics – Latvians were often seen as strongest opponents of Baltic identity there (Transehe-Roseneck, 1906, 1908). Felikss Cielēns (1888–1964) – participant in the revolution, one of the leaders of the Latvian social democrats and later Latvian minister of foreign affairs – stated that instead of a united Baltic territory the revolution created the idea of a separate Latvian state (Cielēns, 1961).

Abroad, however, under the influence of this revolution more information about the region emerged. So, for example, separate headwords for "Courland", "Estonia" and "Livonia" can be found in the volumes of *Britannica*, and each is described as a "Baltic province" (Britannica, 1910). Even the special headword "*baltische Provinzen*" ("Baltic provinces") appeared for the first time in a German

encyclopaedia (Brockhaus, 1906). In this way, the encyclopaedias, representing the most popular source of knowledge, created the conditions for the world to learn the term "Baltics" and to link it to Russian-ruled Baltic soil.

The impact of wars: "Baltics" against "Latvia" and "Estonia"

During the years of the First World War, the Baltic Germans suffered greatly due to the anti-German measures introduced by Russia. Baltic Germans were forced to move away from their vision of a united Baltics. The establishment of German power in Courland, and especially the capture of Riga on 3 September 1917, gave the opportunity to return to the issue of a united Baltic nation. In 1918, by which time the former Baltic governorates of the Russian Empire had been completely conquered by German forces, an opportunity arose for the local elite to work on the idea of a united Baltic state (*Baltenland*). Here, medieval Livonia was a historical precedent to build on. As had been typical in the century before, during the events of 1917–1918 Baltic Germans reflected an idealised vision of a united Baltics in the press. The Baltic people at this time were portrayed as a politically united society, residing in a united geographical area (*Baltenland*) and expressing a clear desire to separate from Russia and build their own statehood (Brutzer, 1918). However, the defeat of the German Empire in the war very soon put an end to this project.

Longing for the unfulfilled dream of Baltic unity meant that Baltic Germans often distanced themselves from the attributes that were connected to the new separate national state. Avoidance of the use of the terms "Latvia" and "Latvian" became typical. Often the use of the term *Lettland* for Latvia in German was replaced by the more general terms *Vaterland* ("fatherland"), *Muterland* ("motherland"), and *Heimat* ("homeland") (Boström, 1983). These non-specific terms were more acceptable to Baltic Germans than the term *Lettland* (which in German means "Land of Latvians"). The most famous politician of Baltic German descent, and editor-in-chief of *Rigasche Rundschau* ("Observer of Riga"), Paul Schiemann (1876–1944) tried to justify the use of traditional non-specific German terms instead of "Latvia". In his opinion, due to the Baltic twist of these terms it would be possible in this way for local Germans to promote a sense of belonging to the new country and strengthen the unity of all citizens (Schiemann, 1932). Schiemann's views were not accepted by the Latvian public. The goal of Latvians was to cultivate a Latvian identity and to absorb Baltic Germans into the national state, not to promote aspects of a common Baltic identity. The discussion ended with the government's decision to use the word "Latvian" as appropriate in the names of all state institutions (Liepiņš, 1932).

The Baltic States: the emergence of a new or modern meaning of "the Baltics"

After the First World War, the image and understanding of the Baltics changed, with the meaning of the term tending to expand. The basis for the change was the collapse of the Russian Empire, as a result of which five independent countries – Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – emerged on the shores of the Baltic. The Baltic Germans lost their monopoly over the meaning of the term "Baltics" and the new countries did not pay any attention to the earlier understanding and tradition of the term "Baltics". In the Latvian and Estonian literature, neither the sources related to the terms "Baltics" and "Balts" nor the authors related to this topic were studied and discussed until the 21st century (Jansen, 2007; Cerūzis, 2020). Starting from the 1920s, there was a tendency to call all five new countries "the Baltic States". In 1919–1925, all five countries regularly met at cooperation conferences, trying to create a Baltic Union. The idea did not materialise because of territorial disagreements between Poland and Lithuania. The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian attitudes towards the elements of unity shared by all three countries were also different – and not always in a positive way. Historically, the Lithuanians, who were even geographically separated from the Baltic Sea, had little to do with the Baltics. The leading Estonian politicians often associated themselves with the Nordic countries (Taurēns, 1999). Positioned between Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia – and its capital Riga especially – was considered the centre of the Baltics at that time. The largest German minority lived in Latvia (almost 70,000 people, or 3.7% of the population) and were still an enthusiastic supporter of the Baltic identity (Cerūzis, 2004). Consequently, the most advantages to strengthen the concept were to be found in Latvia. The idea of political Baltic unity was especially promoted by Latvian minister of foreign affairs Zigfrīds Meierovics (1887–1925). He was most actively involved in organising the important cooperation conferences and was seen as a unifier of the Baltics. Latvian diplomats were especially active promoters of unity: for example, in Paris between 1918 and 1920 they ran the newsletter *Revue Baltique* ("Baltic Review") dedicated to the demands for independence of the three Baltic States (Revue Baltique, 1918-20).

A new term, "Baltic States", began to appear in the foreign press and encyclopaedias. This trend, however, was not yet permanent. So, for example, in the 1920s the German *Brockhaus* was already calling three new states the Baltic States (Brockhaus, 1923), while other universal encyclopaedias, including the prominent *Britannica*, continued to use the headword "Baltic" only as a hydronym for the sea and didn't rush to supplement it with new headwords as a result of the political transformations recently seen in the Baltics. A rather up-to-date approach was seen in the leading universal reference work of the United States of America. This took an extended look at the Baltic provinces and Riga, but in a much broader sense, writing

about five territories – adding Finland and Petrograd (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1918; Encyclopaedia Americana, 1919). Despite that, in smaller and cheaper reference books from the USA up to the start of Second World War it was almost impossible to find any headwords or information connected to the Eastern Baltic region (The New National Webster, 1935; The Modern Dictionary, 1937).

Overall knowledge of the Baltics abroad was still rather too weak to produce confidence in some circles of Latvians. Voldemārs Reiznieks (1877–1944), a representative of the Latvian Ministry of Defence, wrote about the need for a "new Baltics". He claimed that at that time there was neither a Baltic ideology nor a type of Baltic people (Reiznieks, 1933). Despite the critical statements from Reiznieks a new geographical understanding of the three Baltic States had already begun to be initiated. Around the middle of the 1930s, the Baltic States had achieved a place not only in the world's best-known universal encyclopaedias, but also in other reference books published by European states, for instance in Italy (Enciclopedia Italiana, 1933).

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the emergence and development of the geographical term "Baltics". For that purpose, the most important historical sources were collected and analysed. The source base for the study was built on texts from newspapers, magazines, literary works, encyclopaedias and studies of various natures. Applied historical sources show different periods in the development of Baltic identity. Each period relates to different elements of cultural and political meaning, and discussions about the understanding of the term in different ethnic contexts.

The beginning of the systematic use of the geographic term "Baltics" (as a toponym, or macrotoponym) can be dated to the middle of 19th century. The introduction of the term was initially a result of the romantic feelings of the local German-speakers and manifested itself in literary works highlighting outstanding features of the homeland. This Baltic identity applied only to the provinces of Courland, Estonia and Livonia, and did not cover the whole of the modern-day Baltics. The start of the 20th century showed growing awareness of the eastern Baltic region abroad. The impact of the First World War on the term "Baltics" and the proclamation of the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) marks the start of a new period. This period is characterised by heated debates about the unifying traits of the Baltics and the individual national traits of each Baltic State. Since the First World War and the movement for the independence of the Baltic States, a period of reorientation of the meaning and a new, geographically broader understanding of term "Baltics" began. Despite the occupation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (1940–1991) this new understanding of the Baltics as closely related to the three Baltic States survived and strengthened internationally.

Kopsavilkums

Šajā rakstā izklāstīta ģeogrāfiskā nosaukuma ‘Baltija’ izpratnes attīstība. Pētījuma pamatā ir laikrakstu, žurnālu, literāro darbu, enciklopēdiju un dažāda rakstura pētījumu informācija. Vēstures avoti ļauj nošķirt vairākus attīstības periodus toponīma jeb makrotoponīma ‘Baltija’ un etnonīma ‘baltieši’ attīstībā. Sistemātisks toponīma ‘Baltija’ lietošanas sākums attiecināms uz 19. gs. vidu. Sākotnēji tā izpratnes pamatā bija vācbaltiešu romantiskā dzimtenes izjūta, kas spilgti izpaudās literārajos darbos. Līdz Pirmajam pasaules karam Baltijas identitāti attiecināja tikai uz Igaunijas, Kurzemes un Vidzemes guberņu un šāda, ģeogrāfiski šaura Baltijas starptautiskā atpazīstamība strauji palielinājās. Pēc Krievijas Impērijas sabrukuma sākās toponīma ‘Baltija’ plašākas izpratnes periods. Liela nozīme te ir trīs valstu – Igaunijas, Latvijas un Lietuvas starptautiskajai aktivitātei, kas ļāva tām identificēties citu Baltijas jūrai pieguļošo valstu starpā. Jaunais toponīma izpratnes veids, kas saistījās ar trīs Baltijas valstīm, nostiprinājās 20. gs. 30. gadu otrajā pusē.

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