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The Legitimization Discourse of Virtue Education Under Dictatorship and Its Reception in the Schools of Soviet Latvia from 1947 to 1982

Le discours de légitimation de l'éducation à la vertu sous une dictature et sa réception dans les écoles de la Lettonie soviétique de 1947 à 1982

El discurso de legitimación de la educación en virtudes bajo la dictadura y su recepción en las escuelas de la Letonia soviética de 1947 a 1982

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Résumé de l'article

Cette étude s'intéresse au discours officiel de légitimation de l'éducation à la vertu soviétique et à sa réception dans la pratique scolaire en Lettonie. Les sources de ce discours officiel sont deux manuels de formation des enseignants (1948, 1971) et trois recueils d'articles scientifiques d'universitaires lettons (1962, 1964, 1967). Un échantillon aléatoire de 10 caractérisations d'étudiants (rapports de fin d'études) annuelles de 1947 à 1982 (N=367) est utilisé afin de capter la réception du discours dans la pratique scolaire. La comparaison du système de vertus ressortant des 3,054 mentions des vertus des élèves observées dans les caractérisations du système de vertus soviétique officiel révèle de nombreuses similitudes, mais aussi des différences notables et des omissions surprenantes : le « collectivisme » occupait une position prééminente à la fois dans le discours officiel et dans la pratique scolaire, et la « discipline » a perdu un peu de son importance dans les deux sphères, mais étonnamment, le « patriotisme » et l'« internationalisme », officiellement importants, ne figuraient presque pas dans les caractérisations. Les implications pour la pratique et les recherches ultérieures sont discutées.

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The Legitimization Discourse of Virtue Education Under Dictatorship and Its Reception in the Schools of Soviet Latvia from 1947 to 1982

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Abstract

This study addresses the official legitimization discourse of Soviet virtue education and its reception in school practice in Latvia. The sources capturing the official discourse were two teacher training books (1948 and 1971) and three collections of scientific papers by Latvian academics (1962, 1964, and 1967). A random sample of 10 student characterizations (graduation reports) per year from 1947 till 1982 (N=367) was used for capturing the discourse reception in school practice. The comparison of the virtue system emerging from the 3,054 mentions to students' virtues found in the characterizations with the official Soviet virtue system revealed many similarities and also notable differences and surprising omissions: "collectivism" held a preeminent position both in the official discourse and in school practice, and "discipline" lost relative weight in both spheres, but surprisingly, the officially important "patriotism" and "internationalism" were almost absent in the characterizations. Implications for practice and further research are discussed.

Keywords: legitimization discourse, school practice, Soviet Latvia, student characterizations, virtue education

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El discurso de legitimación de la educación en virtudes bajo la dictadura y su recepción en las escuelas de la Letonia soviética de 1947 a 1982

Resumen

Este estudio examina el discurso oficial de legitimación de la educación en virtudes soviética y su recepción en la práctica escolar en las escuelas de Letonia Soviética. Las fuentes que contenían el discurso oficial fueron dos libros de formación de profesores (1948 y 1971) y tres colecciones de artículos científicos escritos por académicos letones (1962, 1964 y 1967). Se utilizó una muestra aleatoria de diez caracterizaciones de estudiantes (informes de graduación) por año desde 1947 hasta 1982 (N=367) para captar la recepción del discurso en la práctica escolar. La comparación del sistema de virtud que surge de las 3054 menciones a las virtudes de los estudiantes encontradas en las caracterizaciones con el sistema de virtudes soviético oficial reveló muchas similitudes y también diferencias notables y omisiones sorprendentes: el "colectivismo" ocupó una posición preeminente tanto en el discurso oficial como en la práctica escolar, y la "disciplina" perdió peso relativo en ambas esferas, pero sorprendentemente, el "patriotismo" y el "internacionalismo", oficialmente importantes, estuvieron casi ausentes en las caracterizaciones. Se discuten las implicaciones para la práctica y la investigación futura.

Palabras clave: discurso de legitimación, práctica escolar, Letonia soviética, caracterizaciones de los estudiantes, educación en virtudes

Le discours de légitimation de l'éducation à la vertu sous une dictature et sa réception dans les écoles de la Lettonie soviétique de 1947 à 1982

Résumé

Cette étude s'intéresse au discours officiel de légitimation de l'éducation à la vertu soviétique et à sa réception dans la pratique scolaire en Lettonie. Les sources de ce discours officiel sont deux manuels de formation des enseignants (1948, 1971) et trois recueils d'articles scientifiques d'universitaires lettons (1962, 1964, 1967). Un échantillon aléatoire de 10 caractérisations d'étudiants (rapports de fin d'études) annuelles de 1947 à 1982 (N=367) est utilisé afin de capter la réception du discours dans la pratique scolaire. La comparaison du système de vertus ressortant des 3,054 mentions des vertus des élèves observées dans les caractérisations du système de vertus soviétique officiel révèle de nombreuses similitudes, mais aussi des différences notables et des omissions surprenantes : le « collectivisme » occupait une position

prééminente à la fois dans le discours officiel et dans la pratique scolaire, et la « discipline » a perdu un peu de son importance dans les deux sphères, mais étonnamment, le « patriotisme » et l'« internationalisme », officiellement importants, ne figuraient presque pas dans les caractérisations. Les implications pour la pratique et les recherches ultérieures sont discutées.

Mots-clés : discours de légitimation, pratique scolaire, Lettonie soviétique, caractérisations des élèves, éducation à la vertu

Introduction

The Russian Revolution of 1917 started the building of a new world, in which, along with political and economic tasks, the education of the New Soviet Man, "the New Person born of the Revolution,"[1] took an essential place. "Through this purely idealistic vision that was taken from Marx and Engels, Lenin and his party carried out their utopian reforms in the hopes of recreating the perfect citizen."[2] The New Soviet Man became a part of the ideal future society proclaimed by the Communists— totalitarian ideologies have the tendency to explain not what is, but what becomes.[3] The ideas of Bolsheviks attracted various social groups, including intellectuals, who became involved in the shaping of the New Man: scientists, through the concepts of eugenics in the 1920s;[4] cultural intelligentsia, through the art of the avant-garde;[5] and psychologists and pedagogues, who educated and re-educated the young generations.[6] In turn, the state provided the instruments for the implementation of these projects,[7] one of the most important of which was the Soviet education system under strict state supervision.

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[1] Madhavan K. Palat, *Utopia and Dystopia in Revolutionary Russia: The Russian Revolution Centenary,* Lecture: 7 November 2017 (Delhi: Ambedkar University Delhi Press, 2017), 42.

[2] Jon Savage and Olga V. Velikanova, *"Re-Creating of Mankind: The Philosophy and Actualization of the 'New Soviet Man'"* (Theses, University of North Texas, 2011), 6; Savage-Jon-080211-Final.pdf (unt.edu) (accessed 7 November 2023).

[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1976), 470.

[4] Sofya V. Kogan, "Detstvo kak etap formirovanija "Novovo celoveka" v dovojennom sovetskom obscestve" [Childhood as a Stage of Development of the 'New Person' in the Soviet Pre-War Society], *Izvestija RGPU im. Gercena* [News of A. Herzen Russian State University of Pedagogy], no. 150 (2012): 164-170; https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/detstvo-kak-etap-formirovaniya-novogo-cheloveka-v-dovoennom-sovetskom-obschestve/viewer (accessed 22 July 2021); Savage and Velikanova, "Re-Creating."

[5] Palat, Utopia and Dystopia.

[6] Uwe P. Gielen and Samvel S. Jeshmaridian, "Lev S. Vygotsky: The Man and the Era," International Journal of Group Tensions 28, no. 3/4 (1999): 273-301; https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021837200385 (accessed 7 November 2023).

[7] Palat, Utopia and Dystopia, 14.

One of the most important edges of the New Man was the new Soviet morality: "The Soviet value system, which had to be acquired and accepted by everyone, represents part of this [Soviet] ideology."[8] The subordination of any moral rules to the Soviet ideology appears clearly in the pedagogical discourse: "There is not, and it cannot be, any universal human morality. In a society which is divided into antagonistic classes, each class has its own morality."[9] Hence the necessity of educating young generations according to Communist ideology and specific morality.

Attitudes towards the New Soviet Man concept changed during the history of the USSR: utopian propaganda rhetoric was gradually silenced, and the New Man project became routine, massive, and pragmatic. However, the most important discourses of the New Man[10] remained essentially unchanged until the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s to early 1990s.

Together with Soviet Army troops and Communist functionaries, the concept of the New Soviet Man arrived in Latvia after World War II. The idea of New Soviet Man, including his inherent Soviet virtues, needed to be legitimated in the public space, namely, propagated among and explained to youngsters, parents, and the general public in Latvia, who were rather suspicious regarding Soviet power. Latvia, like the other Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania, was an independent country in the interwar period (1918–1940) but was annexed into the Soviet Union in 1940 and remained under Soviet dictatorship until 1991. School classrooms were populated by former residents of free Latvia, and in later years, by their descendants, who had grown up with parents' stories about the independent Latvian state. Creating the New Soviet Man out of Latvians became an important task of political propaganda, and it was carried out at school by pedagogical means. Since education is always a strategic place for legitimizing a power shift and introducing a new order,[11] Soviet leaders gave education the central role for construction of socialism from the very beginning. And so, the

[8] Iveta Ķestere, "Value Orientation in Soviet Youth Organizations," in *The Baltic Countries under Occupation, Soviet and Nazi rule 1939–1991*, ed. Anu Mai Kõll (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International), 294.

[9] Tatjana Iļjina, *Pedagoģija* [Pedagogy] (Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1971), 95.

[10] Four discursive domains of the New Soviet Man project have been identified (see Iveta Kestere and Manuel Fernandez Gonzalez, "Educating the New Soviet Man: Propagated Image and Hidden Resistance in Soviet Latvia," *Historia Scholastica*, 7, no. 1 (2021): 11-31), namely, socio-biological discourse (gender, body, sexuality, and health); social discourse (social class); spatial discourse (nationality) and discourse of individuality (personality, character traits).

[11] Thomas S. Popkewitz, "Culture, Pedagogy, and Power: Issues in the Production of Values and Colonialization," *Journal of Education* 170, no. 2 (1988): 88; https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748817000204 (accessed 7 November 2023); Myriam Southwell and Marc Depaepe, "The Relation between Education and Emancipation: Something like Water and Oil? Introducting the Special Issue," *Paedagogica Historica, 55,* no. 1 (2019): 2.

legitimation and shaping of the New Man with his specific Soviet morality started in Latvian schools under the strict Communist supervision.[12]

Although more than 30 years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Soviet virtue education concepts are still important for at least two reasons: 1) these concepts reveal the vision of a totalitarian state about rising a virtuous personality in a specific, isolated society with limited access to Western culture, including religion; and 2) people brought up under Soviet communist prescriptions joined Europe after the collapse of the USSR and today they form a part of European society. In addition, some of them are also teaching children and students in schools and universities, and inevitably they still reproduce somehow their experiences of former Soviet educational settings. Thus, Soviet-era research also helps to understand and explain the diversity of today's European human landscape, certainly in an age of the present war in Ukraine, which is, by the way, partly caused by the craving for the restoration of the Soviet state.

The New Soviet Man has been studied mostly from the perspective of its creators, the propagators of Communist ideology (e.g., Kogan, Savage and Velikanova, Svičiulienė, Bardziński, Ķestere[13]), while the recipients of the New Soviet Man project and its immediate end-users, namely pupils and teachers, were largely ignored. Hence, the aim of this study was to find out how the official discourse of Soviet virtue education was implemented in the practice of Latvian schools.

This paper is structured along the exploration of two overarching research questions: RQ1) What was the official discourse of Soviet virtue education at school in Latvia? and RQ2) How the official discourse about Soviet virtue education was received at school? This is self-evidently not an easy issue in historical educational research. Indeed, as much research in that regard has shown, there is no direct link between the imposed standards of the curriculum and effective learning impacts. What one gains as an individual in both the short and long term from upbringing and education is not always easy to assess through the traditional sources of history of education. And this applies *a*

[12] Iveta Ķestere and Iveta Ozola, "German Fascism, Soviet Communism, and Latvian Nationalism in the Education of Latvia (1940–1944)," *Paedagogica Historica*, 56, no.5 (2019): 624-641; https://doi.org /10.1080/00309230.2019.1669678 (accessed 7 November 2023).

[13] Kogan, "Childhood"; Savage and Velikanova, "Re-Creating"; Iveta Ķestere, "The Classroom as an Arena for Political Propaganda: Communism and Nazism in Latvian Classrooms (1940–1956)," *Annali online della Didattica e della Formazione Docente*, 8, no. 12 (2017): 34-69; Jūratė Svičiulienė, "Soviet Mythology and Propaganda of the 'New' Man," *Sovijus. Tarpdalykiniai kultūros tyrimai* [Interdisciplinary Cultural Research] 4, no. 2 (2016): 55-66; Filip Bardziński, "The Concept of the 'New Soviet Man' As a Eugenic Project: Eugenics in Soviet Russia after World War II," *Ethics in Progress*, 4, no: 1 (2013): 57-81.

fortiori to the moral and ethical aspects of the formation of a person.[14] But there are, of course, indirect ways to gain insight into this anyway.[15]

Therefore, we have, for clarity, broken up these two research questions into the following sub-questions:

RQ1-a: Which virtues were officially considered to be the most important ones?

RQ1-b: Were there any changes in the prioritization of Soviet virtues across time?

RQ2-a: Which virtues were put forward most often in everyday practice at school? Were there any differences by student gender, school location, and language of instruction in this respect?

RQ2-b: Were there any changes in the reception of the official discourse at school across time?

In this research these issues were studied for the period between 1947, when the first sources were available, and 1982, when the Brezhnev "era" ended in the Soviet Union and the advent of Gorbachev's *perestroika* began.

Materials and Methods

Sources and methodological challenges

In order to unfold the official discourse on Soviet virtue education at school in Latvia (RQ1), it was considered that in the public space of the Soviet Union there was a strict hierarchy in dealing with any educational issue (as with any economic, political, and cultural issue):

(1) First of all, the main guidelines for creating the public opinion were given by the congresses of the Communist Party, the plenary sessions of the Party and/or by the speech of the Leader of the Communist Party. Every word was important in these texts, as they announced current priorities in the life of the whole country.

[14] Marc Depaepe, "Jenseits der pädagogischen Illusion? Historisch-vergleichende Überlegungen zur Wirkungsgeschichte der moralischen Bildung von Kindern und Jugendlichen (Vortrag zum Empfang der Comenius-Medaille für mein langjähriges Engagement in der historisch-pädagogischen Forschung)," *Historia Scholastica* 9, no. 2 (2023): 13-59; https://doi.org/10.15240/tul/006/2023-2-001 (accessed 20 April 2024).

[15] See, e.g., Kristof Dams, Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon, "Sneaking into School: Classroom History at Work," in *Silences & Images. The Social History of the Classroom*, ed. Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn and Kate Rousmaniere (New York, etc.: Peter Lang, 1999), 13-46.

(2) The messages addressed to the youth and their educators, on the basis of Communist Party documents, were stressed, sharpened, and specified by the Congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) and the Central Committee of the Komsomol—the supreme body between the Komsomol congresses. These documents were pipelined to every Soviet republic through local Komsomol organizations.

(3) The instructions of the Communist Party and the Komsomol were translated into educational practice by academics gathered in the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in Moscow and in the Scientific Institutes of Pedagogy in the Soviet Republics, including Latvia.[16] These institutions produced collections of articles and textbooks for teacher training and schools under strong censorship.

The study presented in this paper specifically focused on the end-product of this process, namely, on teacher training literature, for understanding the official conception of the system of virtues to be acquired by students at school. Two teacher training books translated from Russian to Latvian and in use in Latvia during the period studied were used as the main sources. The book *Pedagogy: A Textbook for Pedagogical Schools* by Jesipovs and Gončarovs (1948) was the textbook used from 1948 till approximately the 1970s in training for primary and elementary school teachers. The book *Pedagogy* by Iļjina (1971) was used since its publication till the end of Soviet Union (and eventually beyond) for teacher training in general, including universities.

Three main reasons motivated the methodological decision of using teacher training books as witnesses of the official Soviet system of virtues: their systemic character, their close connection with Soviet ideology, and their intended direct impact on school life through teacher training. First, teacher training books present a deep reflection on the Soviet discourse of virtues, in an effort of systematization and explanation to teachers and school management staff. They integrated information about the official discourse from the higher hierarchical sources mentioned above, including foundational text from Marks, Engels, and Lenin, as well as Stalin in the textbook of 1948, and presented in a schematic and hierarchical way the understanding of the Soviet virtue system at a given point in time.

Second, the moral teaching embedded in those books was the official, fundamental moral understanding within the Soviet Union. The system of virtues they contain was explicitly based on Soviet ideology and was strictly censored by Soviet officials. Communist moral education was legitimized because of its connection to Marxism ideology and a philosophical doctrine called “scientific materialism”: “the Soviet moral education conviction is based on other principles of Marxist-Leninist science. Marxism-

[16] *Writings on the History of Pedagogical Science in the USSR (1917–1980)*, ed. Nikolai P. Kuzin and Mariia N. Kolmakova (Moskva: Pedagogika, 1986).

Leninism science gives it clear goals and beliefs."[17] The same statement is in use 20 years later: "Communist morality is closely linked to the Marxist ideology and the scientifically materialist worldview. . . . [Universal norms of morality] can be asserted when they do not contradict the Marxist understanding of the essence of morality. . . . However, in their interpretation and justification, the principles of class struggle and historical perspective must always be respected."[18]

Thirdly, these books were well known by teachers and school management, and they represent the last link of the chain of legitimation of character education between the Soviet officials and the school.[19] They both contain many practical applications and pedagogical advice about how to implement Soviet moral education at school. In addition, both refer to the moral codes in force at Soviet schools at their time. For example, Jesipovs and Gončarovs[20] refer to the All-Union "Code of Students," approved in August 1943 by the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, which contained twenty-two "behaviour rules to be memorized and to be followed by pupils,"[21] and which, during post war period, was "one of the main disciplinary tools that was available to be used in schools."[22] In its turn, Iļjina[23] devoted a whole section of her book (pp. 99–106) to the explanation and the application at school of the "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism," adopted by the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party in 1961.

The analysis of the teacher training books focussed on the system of virtues embedded in the structure of those sources, in particular in the table of contents. The relative emphasis given to each virtue in the body of the text was also analysed for exploring which virtues were officially considered to be the most important ones (RQ1-a). In addition, the fact that those books were written with more than twenty years apart allowed for addressing the eventual changes of the official discourse over time by comparing them (RQ1-b).

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[17] Boriss P. Jesipovs and Nikolajs K. Gončarovs, *Pedagoģija: Mācību grāmata pedagoģiskajām skolām* [Pedagogy: A Textbook for Pedagogical Schools] (Riga: Latvijas valsts izdevniecība, 1948), 246.

[18] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*, 97.

[19] Manuel J. Fernández González, "Legitimation of Virtue Education in Teacher Training Discourse during Soviet Latvia," in *Society. Integration. Education. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, Rezekne May 24-25*, vol. 1, *Higher Education*, ed. Velta Lubkina, Alens Indriksons and Svetlana Usca (Rezekne Academy of Technologies, 2019): 194-204; http://dx.doi.org/10.17770/sie2019vol1.3916 (accessed 20 April 2024).

[20] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, *Pedagoģija,* 285.

[21] John T. Zepper and William W. Brickman, *Russian and Soviet Education 1731–1989: A Multilingual Annotated Bibliography* (London: Routledge, 2014), 36.

[22] Kirill A. Maslinsky, "Codes of Conduct in the Soviet School System. Part 1: The Teacher as the Mouthpiece of the State," *Russian Education & Society* 58, no. 5-6 (2016): 438; https://doi.org/10.1080/10609393.2016.1295779 (accessed 7 November 2023).

[23] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*.

Additionally, the treatment of the virtues in the three collections of scientific papers written by leading scholars of Soviet Latvia and published by the Latvian State University in 1962, 1964, and 1967 within the series "Questions about upbringing in the Soviet school" was also analysed. Those scientific papers intended to help teachers to educate students' "communistic consciousness." The authors repeatedly declared their compliance with Soviet ideology and used the hierarchical legitimation discourse characteristic of Soviet educational sciences: references to the founders of Communism, the documents of Communist Party, the classics of Soviet pedagogy, the leading Russian scholars, and lastly, scholars from Soviet Latvia. Other pedagogical arguments appear in a secondary place.

Sixteen papers (out of twenty-four) referred explicitly to Soviet virtue education: e.g., school traditions in character education[24], education of strengths of character,[25] and self-criticism for virtue education,[26] and contained accurate definitions and examples of different Soviet virtues. For these reasons, they are a precious source, in combination with the two teacher training books, for understanding how Soviet propaganda for teachers legitimated character education and how the main Soviet virtues were officially understood at this period.

If the sources for analysing the official moral discourse were clear and transparent, then, in turn, finding out how it was received in everyday school practice (RQ2) was methodologically challenging. The "characterizations of students" or graduation reports were chosen as a source for addressing this issue, because they are a massive "eyewitnesses" to the practice of the Soviet school, and they have not been studied so far.

A description of the context and contents of those characterizations may be useful to make explicit the rational of the methodological approach. Soviet moral values were instilled by teachers in the classrooms, and by the Komsomol and the Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization (Red Pioneers) during out-of-class activities. Communist upbringing practices were supervised by the Communist and Komsomol leadership of

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[24] Nikolajs Klēģeris, "Padomju skolas tradīciju iedzīvināšana un saglabāšana" [Reviving and Preserving Soviet School Traditions], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 48, no. 1 (1962): 55-80.

[25] Aina Stepe, "Rakstura voluntāro iezīmju audzināšana - svarīgs uzdevums komunistiskā apzinīguma izveidošanā vakara (maiņu) vidusskolā" [Developing Voluntary Features of Character: An Important Task in Shaping a Communist Consciousness in Evening (Shift) Schools], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 48, no. 1 (1962): 81-97; Aina Stepe, "Intelektuālā aktivitāte stundā kā pamats vakara un maiņu skolu skolēnu gribas audzināšanā mācību procesā" [Intellectual Activity in Lessons as a Basis Cultivation of Willpower in the Learning Process of Evening School and Shift School Students], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 69, no. 2 (1964): 171-192.

[26] Voldemārs Zelmenis, "Skolēnu audzināšana kritikas un paškritikas garā kā komunistiskā apzinīguma ieaudzināšanas nosacījums" [Criticism and Self-criticism in School Education as an Essential Condition in Shaping Communist Consciousness], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 48, no. 1 (1962): 99-120.

each Soviet republic, the Ministry of Education, and the local Education departments. In schools, the principal, his deputy for upbringing matters, the Communist teacher organization, the school's Komsomol organization, the Red Pioneers' leader, and the classroom teacher were responsible for students' upbringing in the spirit of communist morality. The success of the formation of the New Soviet Man during the school years was evaluated by the classroom teacher, who wrote each student's "characterization" twice during comprehensive education; after finishing the eighth grade and after graduating from high school. The graduation report usually was signed by the classroom teacher, the school principal, and the student's Komsomol leader, and certified by the school seal. Characterization was not prepared for a specific institution but contained an overview of the student's academic achievements and moral stance throughout the entire time of schooling.

The final graduation reports were an important "entrance ticket" to the Soviet universities, where the learning places were limited. Having a "bad" report implied serious risks for further career development and was a relevant obstacle to climb up the Soviet social hierarchy. As a result, graduation reports turned into a tool of discipline, especially in the final year of high school. The threat of receiving a poor characterization made students strive to comply with all the propagated norms of the Communist moral. The graduation report served as an external stimulus or whip for showing "correct" moral behaviour and pushed pupils to "perform" the New Soviet Man, even if they implicitly disagreed with one or other norm of Soviet morality. In their turn, teachers, who knew the power of graduation reports, tried as much as possible not to harm students. By doing so, they also protected the reputation of their school, because good results in upbringing raised the school's rating in the eyes of education officials. Therefore, each negative sentence in the graduation report pointed to students' serious transgressions. While some negative remarks certainly made their way into the selected reports, they were not analysed since this part of the study focuses on the reception at school of the official discourse about Soviet virtues.

In this research, it was assumed that in the students' reports classroom teachers mentioned the Soviet virtues they considered to be the most important ones, and that this would reveal how deep the official legitimation discourse of Soviet virtue education had penetrated teachers' mindset. When analysing the characterizations of students, first the frequencies of Soviet virtues mentioned were explored, as well as the differences between student gender, school location, and language of instruction (RQ2-a). Additionally, the eventual changes on the main virtues mentioned across the years were analysed (RQ2-b).

Student characterizations: sampling and analysis methods

Characterizations of students of the Soviet era were found in the Archives of the University of Latvia stored in the students' personal files of the Fond No. 1340. Access

to the characterizations was granted by the rector of the University of Latvia. For ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, the data were analysed in aggregate form and no names were used in the publication of results.

Considering the resources available, a random sample of 10 characterizations per year from 1947 till 1982 was selected (N=367). As one of the initial hypotheses was that there might be differences by school language,[27] student gender, and location of the school, a stratified proportionate sampling technique was used. As only one of the researchers spoke Russian, for convenience reasons the first selection layer was school language, keeping a proportion of 60 percent Latvian speaking and 40 percent Russian speaking schools within the ten characterizations per year. Characterizations were not sampled in function of the gender of students or the location of the school, but the final sample reproduced quite accurately the distribution of the population studied.

Two hundred sixty-nine characterizations (73.3%) corresponded to female students and ninety-eight (26.7%) to male students, which corresponds approximately to the distribution of the students at the university. Most of them were from Riga (52%) and from other Latvian cities (41%), but countryside schools and other Soviet republics were also represented (4% and 3%, respectively).

Quantitative content analysis, which transforms qualitative data into quantitative form, was chosen as the appropriate analytic strategy for answering the second research question.[28] Instead of using pre-existing categorizations of virtues,[29] the categories retained for the analysis of the characterizations emerged from the data during the coding process, following the grounded theory principle.[30]

At the beginning of data analysis, two researchers worked together on the elaboration of categories for enhancing intercoder reliability. Most of the reports presented a similar underlying structure, which contained approximatively the following sections: study-related qualities, political education, collective virtues, relational virtues, and personal qualities. Those sections were used as broad "virtue categories." When a concrete virtue was mentioned, it was allocated as a keyword to one of the broad

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[27] Schools with Latvian or Russian language of instruction operated in Latvia and in other Baltic countries. After World War II, Latvia was flooded by Russian-speaking immigrants from all over the Soviet Union, and the number of Latvian speaking schools declined: in 1945, Latvian was the language of instruction for 78–79 percent of pupils, but by 1963, the number dropped to 55 percent (Daina Bleiere, Ilgvars Butulis, Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga and Antonijs Zunda, ***Latvijas vēsture. 20. gadsimts*** [History of Latvia. 20th Century] (Rīga: Jumava, 2005), 358).

[28] Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011).

[29] Robert E. McGrath, "Character Strengths in 75 Nations: An Update," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 41-52; Christopher Peterson and Martin E. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, *A Framework for Character Education in Schools* (University of Birmingham, 2017).

[30] Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London: Routledge, 2017).

categories. Conceptually close keywords were regrouped under overarching terms (sub-categories) within each category; for example, the keywords “tireless,” “perseverance,” and “diligence” were placed under the sub-category “effort in studies.” Once the category system was established, researchers worked individually on the reports allocated to them. Only the statements containing references to students’ virtues were coded. References to students’ artistic abilities were not considered for analysis. Intercoder reliability was tested using Cohen’s kappa, which was 0.70 (“substantial agreement”[31]). The data obtained were statistically processed using Excel and SPSS software. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for testing the reliability of the data set. The reliability was very high for the whole data set (overall Alpha = 0.912) and for each virtue category (Alpha values between 0.885 and 0.907). The final system of virtues that emerged from the characterizations is in itself one of the relevant results of this research and is presented in the next section.

Findings

The official discourse about Soviet virtues

Before addressing the evidence about the official system of Soviet virtues found in teacher training books and academic literature in Latvia, it is useful to refer to the social and anthropological premises of Soviet virtue education according to those sources. A preliminary consideration is that, for Soviet educational theorists, it was impossible to teach character and virtues in a capitalist or bourgeois society. The education of a flourishing personality would be possible only after the establishment of the purpose-built Soviet society: “The radical improvement and development of humanity through upbringing will be possible only after the socialist system will replace the exploitative society through revolution, creating the conditions for a truly comprehensive development and upbringing of human beings.”[32] In addition, from the perspective of Soviet anthropology, virtue education was necessary because virtues and moral qualities are not inherited: “Marxist pedagogy and psychology categorically deny the idea that man could have inherited moral properties.”[33] But “with proper education and under conditions of positive influence, it is possible to ensure the formation of moral qualities corresponding to the goals and tasks of communist education.”[34]

The Soviet conception of morality was radically marked by the ideology. Bolshevik/ Communist moral values were those of the proletarian class, and therefore radically

[31] Richard J. Landis and Gary G. Koch, “The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data,” *Biometrics* 33 no. 1 (1977): 159-174.

[32] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*, 41.

[33] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*, 93.

[34] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*, 94.

different from those of the bourgeoisie/capitalists.[35] The division of morality into classes led to the claim that all "good" virtues belong to the workers and the "bad" ones (vices) to the bourgeoisie. As the bourgeoisie was supposed to have been destroyed by the Soviet Union, "bad" bourgeoisie's virtues became synonymous of the "remains of the past." The morality of the new Soviet society was a belligerent one—a virtuous New Man had to fight against bourgeois morality, which, according to the official discourse, included such anti-virtues as dishonesty, egoism, laziness, drinking, careerism, humiliation, profanity, violence, racial intolerance, discrimination, prejudices, and many other condemnable inclinations. In this battle between "good" and "bad" morals, no one could remain neutral or look for compromises.

Virtue education has an independent and relevant place in both teacher training books,[36] and they basically refer to the same Soviet virtues to be officially considered to be the most important ones (RQ1-a), namely, patriotism, collectivism, discipline, willpower, and humanism. However, regarding the prioritization of Soviet virtues between 1948 and 1971 (RQ1-b), relevant differences were found (see Table 1):

Table 1. The virtue system in teacher training books in 1948 and 1971.

Jesipovs & Gončarovs (1948)	**Iljina (1971)**
Chapter 11: "Contents and methodology for virtue education" • Education in Soviet patriotism • Socialist human education • Education for collectivism • Education of discipline • Education of willpower features of character	*Chapter 6: "Virtue education"* • Patriotism • Humanism • Collectivism *Chapter 7: "Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalist education"* • Patriotism and internationalism *Chapter 21: "Upbringing methods"* • Discipline • Willpower *Chapter 22: "The school collective"* • Collectivism

[35] Iljina, *Pedagoģija*, 95.

[36] Iljina, *Pedagoģija*, 95; Jesipovs and Gončarovs, *Pedagoģija*.

In Iļjina's book (1971), the virtues of "patriotism" and "collectivism" made the object of two separate chapters, and a new virtue, namely "internationalism" was introduced. On the other hand, "discipline," "willpower," and "Socialist humanism" were relegated to a secondary place compared to Jesipovs and Gončarovs's (1948) book. Therefore, as a hypothesis, if the official discourse had permeated school practice, it could be expected that the former virtues would be increasingly highlighted in characterizations of students, and the latter ones would be progressively less relevant in those reports.

A better understanding of the treatment of these main Soviet virtues in the sources would be useful for interpreting the results. Upbringing under "socialist humanism" included "fostering love and respect for parents and other adults," and the education of the "sense of duty and responsibility, honour, and human dignity in children."[37] Education for collectivism included the virtues of "companionship and friendship between children," and the upbringing of children's collective consciousness. Soviet discipline had to be conscientious, internalized, belligerent,[38] and should be educated strictly: "While attaching the highest importance to methods of persuasion, Soviet pedagogy does not reject coercive methods,"[39] and should appear in every aspect of school life: "Punctuality disciplines brings up the character of a young person."[40] Character strength was understood as willpower: "It is necessary to develop in students the character features related to strong will,[41] and it included purposefulness, resolution, patience, manliness, courage, self-control, bravery, and endurance.[42] Character strength manifested in the virtue of laboriousness.[43] By giving oneself up completely to work, one could become a hero and receive state awards, the title and decorations of a "Socialist Work Hero."

The concept of patriotism is elaborated below more in detail due to its relevance in the discussion section. Patriotism meant love for the Soviet homeland, pride for it, loyalty to it, and willingness to defend it. Patriotism also meant self-denial. The needs of the homeland and the duty of its citizens had to be placed above personal interests and needs: "Soviet patriotism manifests itself in the confidence to the Communist Party, in an unselfish willingness to serve the Lenin-Stalin's cause."[44] It is important to note that "the notion of *Latvian patriot* was never used; consequently, it was installed in people's

[37] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, ***Pedagoģija***, 264, 267.

[38] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, ***Pedagoģija***, 269, 271, 276.

[39] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, ***Pedagoģija***, 248.

[40] Klēģeris, "Padomju skolas," 145.

[41] Stepe, "Rakstura voluntāro iezīmju," 85.

[42] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, ***Pedagoģija***, 296-98.

[43] Jānis Anspaks, "Pusaudžu profesionālās orientācijas audzinošā nozīme" [The Educational Value of Giving Vocational Orientation to Young People], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 48, no. 1 (1962): 7-35.

[44] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, ***Pedagoģija***, 29.

memory that patriotism is Soviet and socialist."[45] In official documents, the homeland is understood solely as the Soviet Union, which meant that the national identity of the inhabitants of the Soviet republics had to be subordinated to the interests of the Soviet society, which was presented as a historically new community—the Soviet Nation (*Volk*). It has been argued that the confusion between "alien" Soviet patriotism and Latvian national identity led to an active conceptualization of national identity in the current public space of the nation-state of Latvia.[46]

Soviet patriotism was closely related to intolerance. In Iļjina's account of the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, intolerance is mentioned four times in relation to the violation of the social interests, injustice, social parasitism, unfairness, careerism, acquisitiveness, racial and national dislike, and the enemies of communism.[47] The essence of Soviet virtue education was clear: "communist virtue must be understood as an action, it pushes to fight."[48] The Soviet Man had to learn that his moral duty was to fight against capitalists, imperialists, exploiters, aristocracy, bourgeoisie, racism, colonialism, militarization, and warlords. Soviet patriotism considered itself as a "patriotism of a higher level,"[49] superior to other forms of patriotism, and therefore conceptually close to nationalism or "banal nationalism."[50]

Reception at school of the Soviet virtue discourse: characterizations of students

For studying the reception at school of this official discourse about Soviet virtue education (RQ2), the virtue system that emerged from the analysis of the characterizations of students is presented first, including details about the frequency of virtue categories and specific virtues, as well as the differences by gender, school location, and school language, as they reveal what were the practical priorities of school management staff and classroom teachers regarding virtue education. And then, the evolution of the reception of the official discourse across the years, as manifested by changes in the frequency of references to virtues and in their prioritization, is presented.

The characterizations provided a rich variety of details about students' personalities and enabled the capture of which virtues were emphasized in everyday school practices (RQ2-a). The system of virtues that emerged from the characterizations of students included thirty-two virtues regrouped into six virtue categories: "Personal qualities,"

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[45] Ķestere, "Value Orientation," 294.

[46] Inese Šūpule, "*Etniskās un nacionālās identitātes sociālā konstruēšana mijiedarbībā: Latvijas gadījuma izpēte*" [Social Construction of Ethnic and National Identity in Interaction: A Case Study of Latvia] (PhD diss., University of Latvia, 2012).

[47] Iļjina, *Pedagoģija*, 99-106.

[48] Jesipovs and Gončarovs, *Pedagoģija*, 246.

[49] Iļjina, Pedagoģija, 114.

[50] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

"collective virtues," "relational virtues," "study-related virtues," "political education," and "intellectual virtues" (see Table 2).

Table 2. Soviet virtue system emerging from characterizations of students.

Virtue categories (rank) ***Sub-categories***	**N**	**%**	**Keywords *(% within virtue category)***
(1) Personal qualities	830	27%	
Responsibility	*195*	*23%*	Conscientiousness, responsibility, commitment to duties
Readiness to physical work	*142*	*17%*	Diligence in physical work, readiness to work
Discipline	*141*	*17%*	Discipline, obedience, executes orders
Autonomy	*78*	*9%*	Autonomy, independence at work
Moderation	*68*	*8%*	Honest, intelligent, reserved, modest, subtle, sensitive
Equanimity	*62*	*7%*	Calm, tempered, phlegmatic, balanced
Seriousness	*53*	*6%*	Seriousness in general life, correct
Self-demanding	*44*	*5%*	Self-criticism, demanding on oneself, principled
Cheerfulness	*30*	*4%*	Joyful, cheerful
Self-respect	*17*	*2%*	Self-esteem, truth seeker
(2) Collective virtues	742	24%	
Active participation	*275*	*37%*	Participation in wall newspapers, press, school events
Leadership, organizing skills	*206*	*28%*	In communist work, at school, leads pioneers, has authority
Sociability, communicability	*173*	*23%*	Fits in the collective, friendly, listens to others
Critical observation of others	*33*	*4%*	Demanding towards comrades
Initiative	*31*	*4%*	Takes initiative
Prioritizing collective interest	*21*	*3%*	Sets the interest of the collective above own interests
Material care	*3*	*0%*	Participation in collective works, care of inventory
(**3) Relational virtues**	585	19%	
Service	*163*	*28%*	Helpfulness (towards other people), responsiveness
Good manners	*130*	*22%*	Courtesy, well-educated, good behaviour
Honesty	*93*	*16%*	Virtuous, open, transparent, fair
Kindness	*90*	*15%*	Sincerity in relationship, kind, good-natured
Respect	*75*	*13%*	Respect for elders, teachers; tact

Justice	*28*	*5%*	Just, equitable
Humanism	*6*	*1%*	Human
(4) Study-related qualities	519	17%	
Cultural awareness	*193*	*37%*	Reads a lot, curious; aesthetically developed
Effort	*175*	*34%*	Commitment to study, perseverance, diligence, willpower
Carefulness	*151*	*29%*	Careful, orderly, systematic (in notebooks, in clothing)
(5) Political education	195	6%	
Political understanding	*173*	*89%*	Politically correct, well oriented
Internationalism	*22*	*11%*	Knowledge about foreign policy issues
(6) Intellectual virtues	183	6%	
Logical thinking	*83*	*45%*	Good reasoning
Quick understanding	*59*	*32%*	Quick-witted, discerning
Deep thinking	*41*	*22%*	Thoughtful, considerate
Total	**3054**	**100%**	

The obvious similarity between these virtue categories and the official Soviet virtue discourse presented in the previous section (see Table 1) indicates that classroom teachers were well aware of the main aspects of moral education described in the teacher training literature and used them in the characterizations. However, there are also notable differences and surprising omissions which are challenging for interpretation, which will be addressed in the discussion.

As regards the frequency of the virtue categories and the specific virtues (sub-categories), overall, 3,054 mentions to students' specific virtues were recorded (see Table 2). The most often retrieved virtue categories were "personal qualities" (N=830, 27%), e.g., responsibility, autonomy, discipline, moderation, cheerfulness; and "collective virtues" (N=742, 24%), including active participation, organizational skills, sociability etc. The primacy of personal and collective virtues is in line with the aim of the characterizations and the diversity of students: while references to their political orientation and their study-related qualities were almost never absent, the comments on specific aspects of the students' personalities and on their involvement at school were wordier and more variated.

Regarding specific virtues, active participation and leadership/organizational abilities (both collective-related qualities) were the most often mentioned (N=275 and N=206, respectively). Three personal qualities were also included in the top twelve: responsibility (N=195), readiness to physical work (N=142) and discipline (N=141). All three are extrinsic personal qualities directly related to work, while other students' personal qualities that are by nature more intrinsic, such as honesty, moderation, or self-exigence, were not among the most often mentioned. As expected, all the three

study-related qualities (effort, carefulness, cultural awareness) were within the top nine. Helpfulness and good manners, both relational virtues, were also frequently mentioned in the data set (see Figure 1).

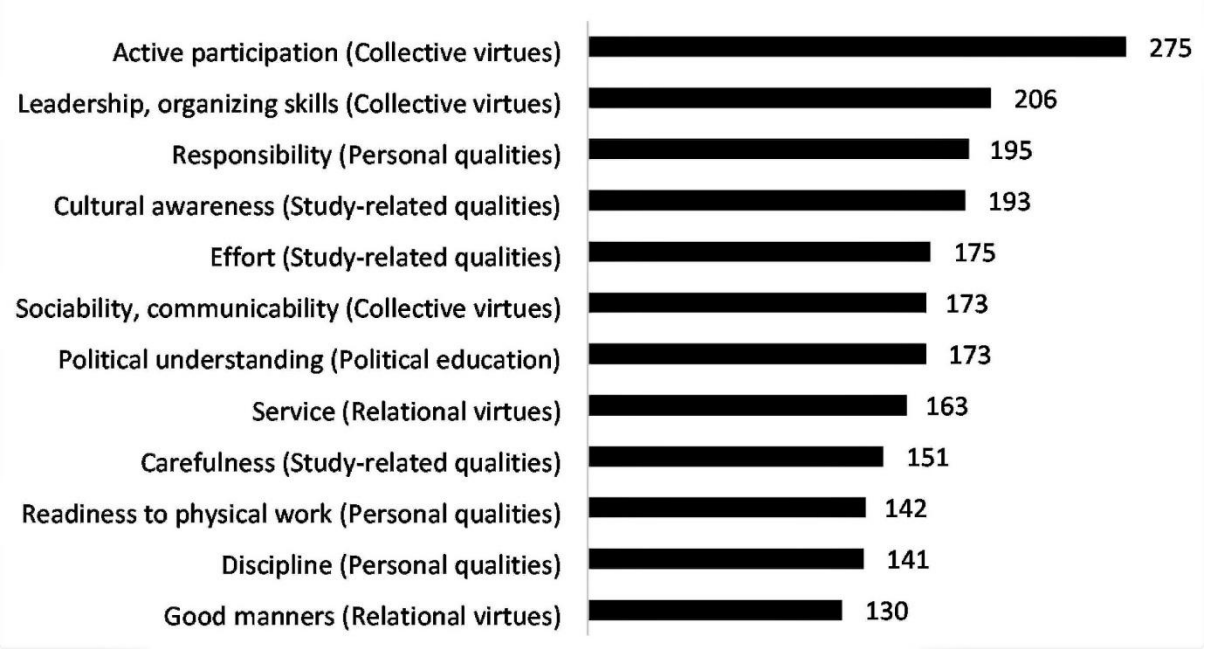

Figure 1. Frequency of top-12 specific virtues (and respective virtue category).

No significant differences by gender, school location, nor school language were found in the characterizations. Female students' reports mentioned more virtues (M=9.0; SD=4.06) than the male students' ones (M=6.6; SD=3.46), but the high standard deviations in both cases point to significant individual variance. Classroom teachers in small-town schools mentioned slightly more often study-related qualities, and in schools with Russian language instruction, pupils' qualities related to collective virtues were mentioned relatively more often than in those using Latvian. But those differences are not statistically significant.

The exploration of changes in the reception of the official virtue discourse at school over time (RQ2-b) was done in two steps. First, the dynamics of the average number of virtues mentioned in each report across the years were explored. Overall, the average number of virtues per characterization was 8.3 (Mo=8), with relevant individual differences (SD=4), but there is a clear growing dynamic across the period studied (1947-1982) (see Figure 2).

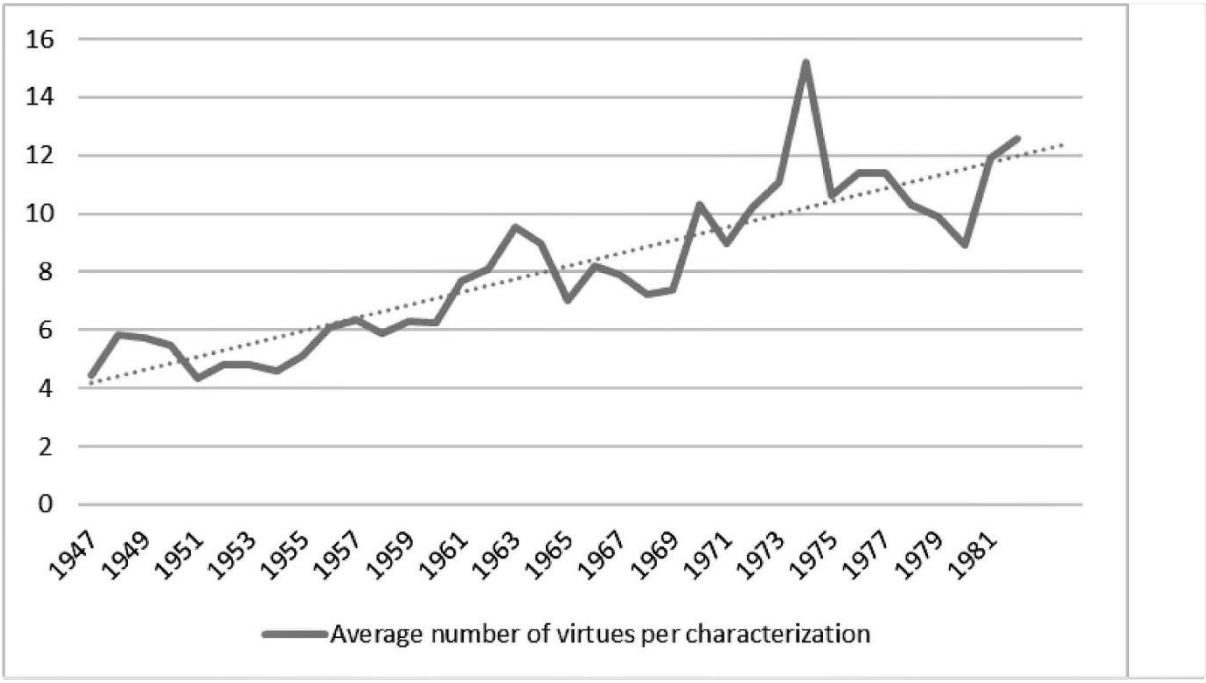

Figure 2. Frequency of virtues in student characterizations (1947-1982).

The average number of virtues per characterization report was quite stable between 1947 and 1960 (M=5.5, SD=2.6), but increased by 53 percent between 1960 and 1963 (from M=6.25, SD=2.3 to M=9.56, SD=3.1 respectively). Then it fell again to around 7 virtues per characterization report in 1968, but the following years it increased rapidly, reaching a peak of more than 15 virtues per report in 1974 (M=15.2, SD=3.1). Between 1976 and 1980 the frequency of virtues per characterization report diminished again, reaching 8.9 in 1980 (SD=2.5), to rise again in 1981-1982 (M=12.3, SD=4). The statistical significance of this progressive increment was analysed using linear correlation analysis. A statistically significant strong positive correlation between the years and the overall number of mentions to student virtues was found ($r^2 = 0.717$, $p < .000$), with a positive slope of 2.3 across the years. A significant positive correlation existed also for each virtue category, which was stronger for the categories “intellectual virtues” ($r^2 = 0.689$, $p <.000$) and “personal qualities” ($r^2 = 0.610$, $p <.000$). The possible reasons for these dynamics are addressed in the discussion.

Secondly, the relative weight of each virtue category across the years was analysed. Overall, it was quite constant: 5-6 percent for intellectual and political virtues, 17-19 percent for relational and study-related qualities, and 25-27 percent for collective and personal virtues, with standard deviations oscillating between 2 and 5. Only two notable changes were found: the relative weight of “collective virtues” decreased significantly with a negative slope of -0.29 percent per year ($r^2=0.33$; $p <.000$), dropping in average from 31 percent at the beginning of the period to 20 percent at the end; and the relative

weight of intellectual virtues increased significantly across the years with a positive slope of 0.17 percent per year, (r^2=0.46; p <.000), but its overall relative weight remained low (M=5%, SD=3). There were almost no significant changes over time regarding the relative weight of the four other virtue categories. The loss of relative weight of collective virtues in the characterizations contrasts with the increasing importance given to collectivism that was found in the teacher training books. Among the specific virtues (sub-categories), it can be noted that the relative weight of the virtue of discipline, which had lost importance in the teacher training books between 1948 and 1971, also decreased significantly in the characterizations, with a negative slope of -0.12 percent per year between 1947 and 1982 (r^2=0.26; p <.005); however, these changes are too small to allow drawing any significant conclusion.

Summary of the findings and limits of the study

In the teacher training books and academic literature regarding Soviet virtue education in Latvia, six virtues were particularly highlighted: three of them, namely, "patriotism," "collectivism," and "internationalism" gained in importance between 1948 and 1971, while "discipline," "willpower," and "humanism" declined. In the characterizations, between 1947 and 1982, the virtue categories most often mentioned were "personal qualities" and "collective virtues," and the most often reported student virtues were "active participation," "leadership/organizational abilities," "responsibility," and "cultural awareness." "Patriotism" and "internationalism," which were increasingly important virtues in the official discourse, were almost absent in the characterizations. The average number of virtues per characterization increased significantly in the period studied, with a peak in 1974. The relative weight of "collective virtues" in characterizations dropped from 31 percent to 20 percent during those years (while collectivism gained importance in the official discourse), and the virtue of "discipline" lost relative weight in both the characterizations and in the official discourse.

One of the limits of this study is the assumption that teachers recorded the virtues they considered to be the most important ones, and that this would reveal how deep they had assumed the official legitimation discourse of Soviet virtue education. It should be noted that in Soviet "self-suppressing society"[51] people gradually started to lose respect to Soviet ideals, and this created a deep gap between external public performance, often implemented out of fear, and individual inner convictions[52]. Therefore, it is possible that the reports analysed showed how teachers understood "they were expected to write" them, rather than their own mindset.

[51] Gielen and Jeshmaridian, "Lev S. Vygotsky," 290.

[52] Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

Discussion: Concordances and Divergencies Between the Official Discourse on Soviet Virtues and its Reception at School

For understanding how the social legitimation of Soviet character education was implemented, it would be useful to consider that legitimation in social sciences "is often not gained by winning scholarly arguments or excavating empirically incontrovertible 'hard facts' but by persuading significant actors in the field that certain discursive themes carry more 'symbolic capital' than others."[53] In the education field, reliable academics and teacher trainers, under the censure of the Communist Party's officials, took on the duty of elaborating a persuasive legitimation discourse that would stress the "symbolic capital" of Soviet character education and that would be acceptable for the main educational actors: teachers and school principals. A coherent and easily understandable "system of Soviet virtues" had to be presented to them as a part of the so-called Soviet worldview and as an essential trait of the New Soviet Man. The system of virtues found in the teacher training books and academic sources in Latvia, which includes the virtues of patriotism, collectivism, internationalism, discipline, willpower and humanism, presents remarkable similarities with the main five features associated with *vospitanie* (Soviet moral education) in the USSR of the 1980s,[54] namely, collectivism, discipline, conscientious attitude towards labour, patriotism and proletarian internationalism, and opposition to all incompatible ideologies.

Teachers' and principals' task was to put Soviet virtue education into practice, embedding the Soviet system of virtues into the New Man. Some of the findings of this study clearly speak in favour of a good reception of the Soviet virtue discourse at school. First, the increasing number of virtues mentioned in the characterizations over the period studied seems to indicate that the "language of virtues"[55] used regularly in the official Soviet documents was spreading progressively among classroom teachers and school management staff, independently of the school location or language of instruction. The peaks reported in 1963 and 1974 could correspond, respectively, to the impact at school of the promulgation of the Moral Code of the builder of Communism in 1961, and to the publication in 1971 of Iļjina's teacher training book in Latvian, but more research is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

In addition, a number of official virtues were echoed also in the characterizations, as for example, collective virtues and study related qualities. Many students were characterized as socially active and engaged in community work, as called for by the Communist Party and the Komsomol documents. The pervasiveness of collective

[53] David I. Walker, Michael P. Roberts and Kristján Kristjánsson, "Towards a New Era of Character Education in Theory and in Practice," *Educational Review* 67, no. 1 (2013): 79.

[54] Mark J. Halstead, "Moral and Spiritual Education in Russia," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 24, no. 3 (1994): 423-438.

[55] Sophia Vasalou, "Educating Virtue as a Mastery of Language," *The Journal of Ethics* 16, no. 1 (2011): 67-87.

virtues in the reports could be also explained by the fact that high involvement in school activities was simply compulsory: there were many social obligations for pupils, and it seems logical that classroom teachers often referred to them writing students' reports. Social activity was a widely accepted and important indicator of "good" personality, which was highly valued both at the workplace and in higher education institutions.

Among the study-related qualities, which were often reported and also were stressed in the official discourse, cultural awareness was mentioned more often than academic effort and carefulness, which might seem surprising. A number of factors need to be taken into account in the discussion of this finding: first, the reports were written by teachers who, given the nature of their profession, highly valued culture and therefore judged their students through this lens; second, the students who submitted their characterizations to enter university had worked purposefully to improve their education and to increase their cultural level; and third, reading books and visiting arts institutions (especially museums, theatres, concerts) were important hobbies in the modest Soviet daily life, where political propaganda, which did not interest young people, was given a large place in the mass media.

There are, however, some surprising divergencies between the officially important virtues and the virtues found in the characterizations. One of the most striking discrepancies is that none of the characterizations mention the attitude toward the Soviet homeland, namely, Soviet patriotism. In addition, as explained above, Soviet patriotism conceptually included such concomitant virtues as internationalism, intolerance, "fight against…," "the struggle for peace," self-denial, and prioritization of the collective interest, and these concomitant virtues were also reported far less often than it could be expected, given their official importance. The analysis of students' graduation reports did not provide evidence that students were framed as fighters against capitalism and all its "wrong" virtues, which could lead one to think that probably the virtue of "intolerance" against capitalism and bourgeoisie highlighted in the official documents was not so popular in everyday practice at school. Knowing Soviet "masochistic respect for authority"[56] and how scrupulously all the guidelines included in the Communist Party documents were followed, all these discrepancies are challenging for interpretation.

Different possible pedagogic and strategic explanations of the absence of Soviet patriotism and its collateral virtues in the reports could be discussed. Pedagogically, there was certainly a lack of specific indicators for assessing this attitude towards the Soviet homeland at school. In addition, in almost all the characterizations, patriotism was indirectly referred to by recording students' participation in youth organizations (Octobrists, Red Pioneers and Komsomol), which had a major role in education for

[56] Gielen and Jeshmaridian, "Lev S. Vygotsky," 288.

Soviet patriotism.[57] It could also be argued that the rarity of allusions to such important virtues as patriotism, internationalism and intolerance could be framed as a matter of priority in the virtue acquisition process, not as an indicator of the importance given to those qualities. In addition, strategically, the Communist Party did not insist on the practical demonstration of patriotism at school, because the key was to be able to assert it in the future, first by two years of service in the Soviet Army for boys and then by the willingness to defend the Soviet Union in the event of military conflict. This willingness was kept alive by the belief in the possibility of an imminent military aggression from the West (particularly the United States), which was regularly and convincingly cultivated in the Soviet public space.[58] Therefore, the school task was to train future soldiers, whose virtues (discipline, conscientiousness, companionship) would demonstrate patriotism in practice when the Soviet homeland would need it. Demonstrating patriotism was expected not only from boys, but also from girls, who, though they did not serve two years in the army, learned the basics of military training at the Soviet school and the university[59]. It should be noted here that the association of patriotism with the Soviet army in Latvian schools aroused negative feelings in a large number of teachers and students because the communist troops had arrived in Latvia as occupiers. Latvian patriotism was often at odds with Soviet patriotism, as evidenced by the severely punished attempts to resist the occupiers that occasionally broke out in Latvian schools.[60]

The acceptance of some virtues and the filtering of others in everyday practice at school in Soviet Latvia could be discussed through the lens of what Holland sees as the pervasiveness of Christian religion influence in ethics and cultural norms throughout the world, even when the religion itself is rejected: "To live in a western country is to live in a society still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions."[61] The influence of

[57] Ķestere, "Value Orientation"; Iveta Kestere, Arnis Strazdins and Inese Rezgorina, "Happy Soviet Childhood. Forgotten Disciplining Tools in Latvia's Public Space," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 69, no. 1 (2023): 197-214

[58] Catriona Kelly, "Defending Children's Rights, 'In Defense of Peace': Children and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 734.

[59] Iveta Ķestere, Irena Stonkuviene and Zanda Rubene, "The New Soviet Man With a Female Body: Mother, Teacher, Tractor Driver…," *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 45 (2020): 97-109; https://doi.org/10.15388/ActPaed.45.6 (accessed 7 November 2023); Maria I. Lazda, "Gender and Totalitarianism: Soviet and Nazi Occupations of Latvia (1940–1945)" (PhD diss., Indiana University, US, 2005).

[60] Heinrihs Strods, "Resistance in Latvia 1944–1991," in The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940–1991. Selected Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia, ed. Valters Nollendorfs et al., vol.14 (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2005), 286-298; Jānis Rimšāns, "Manifestations of Youth Resistance against the Communist Regime in the Latvia SSR (1965–1985)," in Latvia and Eastern Europe in the 1960s –1980s. Materials of an International Conference 10 October 2006, Riga, ed. Andris Caune et al., vol. 20 (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2007), 116-132.

[61] Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Hachette, 2019), 14.

religious values such as universal love and the unity of mankind, even deprived of their God-given and therefore absolute character,[62] might also have been latently present in Soviet education because, as Harari put it, "if a religion is a system of human norms and values that is founded on belief in a superhuman order, then Soviet Communism was no less a religion than Islam."[63]

Up until the middle of the twentieth century, it is easy to find examples around the world where education and training were aimed at obedience and self-control as the main characteristics of character development, with the first serving as a means to achieve the second.[64] In those cases, the moral order that had until then been passed on to children and young people was based on cultivating respect for everything that radiated authority within existing social structures, weeding out bad tendencies in the self and allowing the good to grow, and learning to absorb responsibility, including through the inner compulsion of conscience. This fulfilled an important role in personal influence, including through creating feelings of guilt and conflicts of conscience. In this regard, not only the Soviets, but also other mass movements of the 1930s on the European continent have shown far less scruples. Their ideologies that deliberately pursued the creation of a "new man" in a "new" social "order" were exposed in plain sight as a "fascist" or "fascistoid" re-education; a "utopia" in which the will to straighten the "crooked wood" of humanity, according to the old image of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), usually ended disastrously.[65]

Therefore, not much effort is needed to draw formal as well as substantive parallels with other situations in which dictatorial or semi-dictatorial regimes have attempted to monopolize the moral education of the youth. Obvious are the comparisons with Mussolini and Franco, about which very interesting studies have recently been published.[66] What is striking, among other things, is the one-sided emphasis on the militaristic and disciplinary aspects of character formation, matters that were also present in the Catholic discourse on upbringing and education in some countries,[67] particularly in the above-mentioned regimes, where it was intertwined and supported as a state religion, even though the interpretation of, for example, the attention to the

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[62] Halstead, "Moral and Spiritual Education", 425.

[63] Yuval N. Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Random House, 2014).

[64] Nelleke Bakker, "Child Guidance and Mental Health in the Netherlands, *Paedagogica Historica* 42, no. 6 (2006): 769-791.

[65] Depaepe, "Jenseits".

[66] Jana Wolf, In der Schmiede des "neuen Menschen." Ausleseschulen im italienischen Faschismus (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022); Federico Guillermo Serrano López, Niñas y niños vigilados. La preparción para la sexualidad en Colombia y España en la primera mitad del siglo XX (Madrid, Baranquilla: UNED/Universidad del Norte, 2022).

[67] Marc Depaepe, "Katholische und nationalsozialistische Pädagogik in Belgien, 1919-1955. Ihre ambivalente Beziehung im Spiegel der ‚Vlaamsch Opvoedkundig Tijdschrift,'" *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 44, no. 4 (1998): 504-522.

physical body, hygiene, sexuality and the like in all those constellations, of course had its own interpretation.

Soviet virtue education was effective for enhancing virtues such as active participation, responsibility, grit, and discipline, which were compulsory at every school through the ages. However, looking at the system of virtues found in the data (official documents and student characterizations) from the perspective of virtue ethics theory, a very significant absence becomes readily apparent: the lack of any mention to phronesis or practical wisdom. An interesting point arises for discussion: Was there a place in Soviet Latvia for the cultivation of authentic "intelligent virtue,"[68] or was Soviet virtue education simply the thoughtless domestication of youngsters? In virtue ethics theory, personal freedom and personal moral conscience plays a central role in the process of virtue growth,[69] which is led by the integrative virtue of "phronesis" or practical wisdom, a virtue the ancient Greeks called *auriga virtutum*, the principle of action and charioteer of virtues, and which is absent in the Soviet virtue education system. In order to understand this fact, it could be useful to consider that "what totalitarian rule needs to guide the behaviour of its subjects is a preparation to fit each of them equally well for the role of executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation, *the substitute for a principle of action*, is the ideology" [70].

Communist education aimed at "the transformation of moral ideas into motives for pupils' behaviour,"[71] and the Communist ideology provided concrete practical guidance for action, which made practical wisdom useless or even dangerous. In addition, under authoritarianism, "every phenomenon had an ideological value (positive or negative) and therefore, it had to carry a label to guide everyone towards a 'correct' understanding of it."[72] This implies that the accordance with Soviet ideology was the sole legitimization principle of any moral education or moral decision: "in Soviet Russia whatever furthered the emergence of a Communist society was considered moral."[73] In this context, it could be argued that in Soviet moral education common-sense phronesis was evicted by the Soviet ideology, which included a set of Communist beliefs, ideological tenacity, political awareness, love and loyalty to the Communist Party, and advocacy of its ideological values. The fact that half of the students' graduation reports emphasized that students were "politically educated," which in the Soviet language

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[68] Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2011).

[69] Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[70] Arendt, *The Origins*, 468.

[71] Jānis Anspaks, "Mācību un audzināšanas vienotība padomju vispārizglītojošajā skolā" [Education and Upbringing as a Single Process in Soviet Comprehensive Schools], *Audzināšanas jautājumi padomju skolā* [Upbringing Questions at the Soviet School] 69, no. 2 (1964): 23.

[72] Tiiu Kreegipuu and Epp Lauk, "The 1940 Soviet Coup-d'État in the Estonian Communist Press: Constructing History to Reshape Collective Memory," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2007): 50; http://hdl.handle.net/10062/15739 (accessed 7 November 2023).

[73] Halstead, "Moral and Spiritual Education," 425.

should be understood as having the "correct" ideological convictions, speaks in favour of this thesis.

Conclusion

Many similarities and also notable differences and surprising omissions were found when comparing the legitimization discourse of virtue education in Soviet Latvia, as revealed in the teacher training books and academic sources analysed, and with everyday educational practices, as reflected in the student characterizations. Examples of similarities are the treatment of "collectivism," which held a preeminent position both in the official system of virtues and in school practice, as indicated by the high number of references to collective virtues, "active participation," "leadership/organizational abilities," and "responsibility"; and the virtue of "discipline," which lost relative weight in both the characterizations and in the official discourse across the years. Moreover, the average number of virtues per characterization increased significantly in the period studied, which could indicate progressive social acceptance in school practice of the language of virtues used in the legitimization discourse.

However, not all the officially proposed Soviet virtues were easily accepted in practice. Surprisingly, Soviet patriotism and its satellite virtues of hatred education, intolerance, and internationalism, which also were increasingly important virtues in the official discourse, were almost absent in the characterizations. While it could be challenging to explain its reasons, it can certainly be said that there was a certain "filter" in the reception of the Soviet virtue discourse at school.

It has been recently argued that nowadays there is a "resurgence of character in policy, education, business, parenting, and elsewhere."[74] Making an abstraction of the ideological context of Communist morality, many of the virtues that were prioritized in the Soviet school are also highly valued in a democratic society, e.g., responsibility, social activity, work for community.[75] Notwithstanding these similarities, there are crucial differences between Soviet and democratic education in the methods by which morality is shaped at school. The fear of getting a bad characterization is no longer a pedagogical tool for virtue education in Latvian schools today. The image of the New Soviet Man remains only as a curiosity of the past (even though covert Soviet reality is still here, living amongst the inhabitants of Europe). In modern Latvian schools, the written "language of virtue" is no longer used. Characterizations are not issued to students *en masse*, and moral qualities are no longer performed under the watchful eye of the teachers' and Communist organizations' body. The school is only asked to

[74] Tom Harrison, THRIVE: How to Cultivate Character so Your Children Can Flourish Online (London: Hachette UK, 2021).

[75] Michael Lamb, Emma Taylor-Collins and Cameron Silverglate, "Character Education for Social Action: A Conceptual Analysis of the# iwill Campaign," *JSSE-Journal of Social Science Education* 18, no. 1 (Fall 2019): 129, 131-132.

produce clearly measurable assessments of knowledge and competence, namely, marks in graduation diplomas. In future research, it would be reasonable to find out how moral qualities are (or are not) assessed elsewhere in the post-Soviet space and in education institutions of “old” European democracies, in particular considering the ubiquitous request from higher education institutions and the labour market for self-assessments of character traits in dedicated sections of the curriculum vitae, motivation letters, and work interviews.

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