

The Infiltration of Soviet Folklore: A Morphogenetic Reading of Latvian Folklore Studies

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Abstract: Drawing on Margaret Archer's critical realist theory, the article interprets the history of Latvian folklore studies in the 20th century as a process of social morphogenesis. It demonstrates how the Latvian Folklore Archive and its successors emerged at the intersection of national identity formation, Soviet ideological control and the reflexive agency of individual scholars. Using Archer's notions of structure, culture and agency, as well as the morphogenetic cycle (T1–T4), the study analyses how institutional frameworks and political pressures constrained and enabled folkloristic practice. While Soviet rule transformed folklore collection into an ideologically regulated field, it also opened up spaces for 'silent resistance', semantic code-switching and the informal preservation of traditional material in a somewhat paradoxical way.

Keywords: Latvian folklore studies, social morphogenesis, history of folklore studies, Soviet folklore, folklorists' agency and reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

The history of Latvian folkloristics in the 20th century reflects the social, political and cultural transformations of the period. The collection, systematization and interpretation of folklore in Latvia have been more than a means of preserving cultural heritage; they have also revealed the interaction between political power, cultural frameworks and individual agency. After World War II, folklore studies entered a fundamentally new institutional framework shaped by Soviet ideology.

The Folklore Institute of the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences (1945–1951) and, later, the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore (1952–1955) became the central institutions responsible for the collection and creation of Soviet folklore. From 1947 onwards, scientific expeditions were organized every summer in various regions of Latvia. The first eight expeditions yielded thousands of Soviet folklore items, which are currently stored in the Latvian Folklore Collection (LFK) at the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art at the University of Latvia. Schoolchildren and students were also involved in collecting and creating Soviet folklore. In 1950, one of the official tasks assigned to Latvian folklorists was to promote the creation of Soviet folklore. To this end, samples of Soviet folklore material were distributed, articles were published, lectures and seminars were held, and creative and collecting competitions were held (Kēncis 2019, 2026; Grīnvalde 2021).

This historical period emphasizes the social nature of folklore studies, where ideological objectives were intertwined with professional strategies and personal beliefs. As Rita Treija (2019: 18) has pointed out:

This included both revising the way they presented their scientific work, research methods, and scholarly principles, as well as the approach to the presentation of teaching materials at the University when it came to the lectures and seminars on Latvian folklore. The new Soviet ideas had to be taken into consideration, since there was a clear divide between the unwanted past and the tendentiously imprinted Soviet present.

In such circumstances, folklorists became not only collectors but also intermediaries between the authorities and society, creating space for ‘silent resistance’, selective participation or strategic cooperation. Consequently, Latvian folklore studies in the mid-20th century can be understood as a morphogenetic process in which social structures, cultural discourses and individual agency continuously transformed one another. The key question addressed in this article is how these factors influenced the collection, systematization and interpretation of folklore in Latvia during the first half of the 20th century and the early Soviet period, and how they shaped the development of folklore

studies as a whole. This issue involves both an analysis of institutional structures and ideological pressures and an examination of the personal and professional capabilities of folklorists, particularly how specific individuals were able to react reflexively to these restrictions and use them as creative resources.

According to Margaret Archer's theory of social morphogenesis, individual agency – defined as the ability to reflect, adapt and respond creatively to structural constraints – plays a pivotal role in understanding historical change. Applied to the history of folklore studies, this perspective enables us to view folklorists as active social agents whose reflexivity, professional choices and ethical motivations shaped not only their own activities but also the field's institutional and cultural structures. Here, capacity for action and structure form an interdependent, dynamic circle of relationships. Living in an ideologically determined environment, folklorists were limited, yet simultaneously able to create new meanings and practices that transformed the field of science itself.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The Morphogenetic Approach

The study's theoretical framework is based on Margaret Archer's (1995, 2001) theory of social morphogenesis. Adopting a critical realist perspective, Archer views history as a reflection of social structures, powers and processes, accounting for causality through structural and cultural feedback loops (Bhaskar 1998; Gorski 2018). This approach views history not as a sequence of events but as an ongoing process in which institutional, cultural and individual forces interact to shape social development through transformative and reproductive mechanisms. Archer (2010: 274) defines the morphogenetic approach as both an explanatory framework and a methodological tool:

What the morphogenetic approach is and does: (i) it is an explanatory framework for examining the interplay between structure and agency and their outcomes, and (ii) it is a toolkit for developing the analytical histories of emergence of particular social formations, institutional structures, and organizational forms.

In other words, it is a theoretical program that complements critical realism and serves as an analytical tool to explain the trajectories and dynamics of social formations. The concept of morphogenesis refers to “those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure, or state” (Buckley 1967: 58, as cited in Archer 2010). In contrast, morphostasis refers to processes that preserve the existing form. Thus, the morphogenetic approach allows us to examine the coexistence of tendencies towards change and stability in society, as well as their mutual influence. Archer's view is based on

the conviction that society is not homogeneous, but rather comprises multiple levels, such as structures, cultures and agencies, each with its own characteristics and forces that cannot be reduced to one another. She “endorses a stratified ontology for structures (Archer 1995), cultures (Archer 1996) and agents (Archer 2000), as each has emergent and irreducible properties and powers, and she explains every social outcome as the product of their interplay” (Archer 2010: 274). While these levels are interrelated, they are also analytically distinct, each operating according to its own logic. Structure refers to the system of social institutions, norms and roles that constitute society’s organizational framework (Archer 1995). Structures simultaneously restrict and enable human behavior; they determine what is possible, acceptable or prohibited at a given moment in history. For instance, during the Soviet period, institutional rules and hierarchies influenced how folklorists were permitted to collect and interpret folklore. Nevertheless, they also created opportunities for innovation and adaptation. In turn, culture is a system of meanings, ideas, symbols and values that provides a framework for understanding reality. Archer distinguishes between the cultural system, which comprises the objective relationships between ideas, beliefs and values, and the sociocultural interaction through which people engage with and reinterpret these ideas (Archer 1996). One example of this is the transformation of the concept of ‘folk art’ into ‘work art’ within the context of Soviet ideology.

Meanwhile, agency refers to people’s capacity to reflect, make decisions and act in relation to social structures. Rather than being determined by structures alone, people are active subjects capable of transforming institutions, ideas and themselves (Archer 1995).

Agency Morphogenesis and Reflexivity

In her 1995 work *Realist Social Theory*, Margaret Archer develops the concept of agency morphogenesis, arguing that human agency itself changes over time, just as society does. To explain how people act within society, Archer distinguishes between three analytical categories: agents, actors and persons:

Agents: groups of people or collectives who share similar life opportunities and circumstances.

Actors: individuals who perform specific social roles (e.g., teacher, researcher or civil servant).

Persons: individuals who possess their own inner world, values and reflexivity, enabling them to make informed choices and act creatively.

This distinction enables us to recognize that social change does not occur spontaneously; it begins when individuals reflect on their circumstances and initiate action, thereby altering the structures within which they operate.

Agency morphogenesis begins when changes in structural or cultural conditions create new opportunities and challenges for human action. When people respond to these changes, a new morphogenetic cycle begins, during which the capacity for action itself also evolves.

Archer distinguishes between two types of agents: corporate and primary. Corporate agents, such as organizations or institutions, can influence social norms because they have power and resources. Primary agents, on the other hand, are individuals or groups without such power; they initially respond to circumstances rather than determine them. However, over time, primary agents can organize themselves, gain a voice and evolve into corporate agents. At this point, society undergoes a regrouping – structures and roles are redistributed, and morphogenesis becomes a reality. When primary agents organize themselves and gain a voice, Archer refers to this process as ‘double morphogenesis’, whereby human collectives are grouped and regrouped as they participate in reproducing or changing the structure of society or culture. In this way, they preserve or transform their collective identities as an integral part of preserving or transforming the socio-cultural structures into which they were born.

However, if these changes also involve the development and transformation of the agents themselves – especially the formation of new roles and identities in response to changing structural and cultural contexts – she refers to this as triple morphogenesis. Therefore, social transformation is institutional, personal and cultural in nature (Archer 1995: 255–256; see also Zeuner 1999). Archer emphasizes that these processes are not automatic: “Both agents and actors remain anchored in persons” (Archer 1995: 256).

Every person possesses the capacity for reflexive and creative action. Individuals can assess their opportunities and constraints, compare them with their personal concerns, and decide whether to adapt, resist or create something new. Archer conceptualizes this capacity as reflexivity – the mechanism that connects structure and agency by enabling individuals to evaluate their place in society and make purposeful decisions about their actions. Reflexivity may take different forms, including communicative reflexivity (collective adaptation and negotiation), autonomous reflexivity (individual and creative action), and meta-reflexivity (critical reflection on the system itself) (Archer 2003). Agency morphogenesis and reflexivity are therefore closely related: while structural and cultural changes create new conditions for action, people’s reflexive capacity determines whether these conditions lead to adaptation or transformation. This perspective understands societal development as an evolving process shaped by human action and reflexive deliberation rather than by structural change alone.

Analytical Dualism and the Principle of Emergence

According to the principle of emergence, new properties can arise from existing ones, and these properties are relatively autonomous and influence each other

independently (Zeuner 1999: 79). Society changes through the interaction of structure, culture and agency, each retaining its autonomy; this interaction determines whether morphostasis or morphogenesis occurs. Archer refers to this perspective as analytical dualism. It involves distinguishing between structures and agencies to understand how they interact over time.

Adopting this view enables Archer to avoid what she terms ‘central conflation’, the merging of structure and agency (and, similarly, culture and agency) into a single mechanism that obscures the analysis of their mutual influence. To describe this process, Archer proposes three phases of the morphogenetic cycle that can be precisely linked to the T1–T4 scheme: T1 → T2–T3 → T4 (structure → agency → transformation/stabilization) (Archer, 1995).

T1 – structural/cultural conditioning (specific initial conditions);

T2–T3 – sociocultural interaction (agency responses, collective/individual action);

T4 – social/cultural development (morphostasis or morphogenesis).

These phases form a cyclical process in which the outcome of one cycle becomes the starting point for the next, illustrating how structures and ideas shape people’s opportunities for action, while those actions, in turn, reshape the structures that condition them. This approach helps overcome the long-standing structure–agency problem by explaining the development of events as a shifting balance between preserving existing structures and the changes that occur in society over time. It also offers a different methodological perspective, shifting the emphasis of historiography from description to causation and clarifying the motivational aspects of human behavior. Thus, the morphogenetic approach confirms that historical change does not occur automatically but rather results from people’s reflexive actions under certain structural conditions (Archer & Morgan 2020).

Research Design

To explore these theoretical concepts empirically, this study draws on four case studies focusing on Pēteris Birkerts, Alma Ancelāne, Vilma Greble, and Herta Vaita, all of whom were employees of the Latvian Folklore Archive. Their biographies and archival documents shed light on different forms of agency and reflexivity, demonstrating how these folklorists practiced creative adaptation, intellectual resistance or systemic reflection within the ideologically restrictive conditions of the Soviet era while maintaining folklore scholarship and Latvian cultural memory. Thus, the case studies illustrate morphogenetic agency, revealing how individuals transform institutional and ideological conditions into resources for creative activity.

The study as a whole aims to conceptualize the development of Latvian folklore studies as a social morphogenetic process, in which structural conditions,

cultural discourses and individual actions have influenced and transformed one another, affecting the practices of folklore collection, interpretation and institutionalization. This perspective portrays folklorists as active participants in social spaces, whose decisions and self-awareness (Archer 1995, 2000) demonstrate Latvian culture's capacity to adapt and preserve its identity amid ideological shifts.

SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: THE LATVIAN FOLKLORE ARCHIVE AS A STRUCTURAL UNIT

The collection and recording of Latvian folklore dates back several centuries and can be found in court records, chronicles, sermon books, travelogues, dictionaries and grammars. These sources testify to a long tradition of documenting vernacular and oral traditions, which later became an important resource for the construction of Latvian cultural identity. In the second half of the 19th century, the collection of folklore came into the hands of the Latvians themselves. By the end of the century, it had evolved into a national movement focused on compiling extensive scientific editions of folk songs¹, fairy tales², and melodies³. This was also a morphogenetic response to society's need for self-determination – a cultural mechanism that helped establish a system of national spiritual heritage based on scientific principles.

The establishment of the Latvian Folklore Archives (LFK) in 1924 marked a significant turning point in the development of Latvian culture, providing an institutional response to the need to strengthen national identity. While folklore collection was initially driven by volunteer teachers and local public figures in the second half of the 19th century, by the 1920s, it had become evident that these efforts could no longer guarantee scientific transparency and a unified methodology. On 2 December 1924, the Ministry of Education's Monument Board established the Latvian Folklore Archive (LFK) to continue the work begun by Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956), a teacher at Riga Secondary School No. 2. The LFK became the center for the collection, preservation, research and publication of folklore in Latvia. Initially, most of the work in the archives was carried out by former students of Bērzkalne or her sister, Marija Bērzkalne (1896–1982), in Cesvaine. By the end of the 1920s, the creators of the Latvian Folk Song Index (LD)⁴ and the collectors of regional words⁵ had joined the team. In 1944, the LFK archives already contained around 2.3 million items of folklore.

The institutionalization of folklore collection, in the form of the establishment of the Latvian Folklore Archive, primarily involves T1 – structural and cultural conditioning. Following World War I and the attainment of independence, the formation of a national identity became the primary cultural and political objective. Several influential mechanisms emerged, including state support for the protection of cultural monuments, the strengthening of

academic institutions and the scientific institutionalization of folk heritage. Secondly, it reveals T2–T3 – sociocultural interaction: Anna Bērzkalne and her supporters exploited this structural opportunity to transform a national initiative into a long-term institution. Her actions also exemplify autonomous reflexivity: an intellectually independent, professionally motivated and structurally productive agency that activated a new mechanism: state responsibility for preserving the people's immaterial heritage. Finally, it establishes a new balance by creating T4, with LFK serving as a stable 'hub' among academia, the education system and society. Its regular collection campaigns, cataloging, archival maintenance and preparation of scientific publications set a new professional standard in folklore studies. It is worth noting that this marked the beginning of the next cycle (T1).

Management Changes and Wartime 'Silent Strategies'

In April 1929, the founder of the Latvian Folklore Archive, Anna Bērzkalne, was forced to leave the institution and was succeeded by Kārlis Straubergs (1890–1962), a classical philologist, archaeologist and former Minister of Education, who had been the LFK's only researcher for more than a decade. Only during the Soviet occupation, in 1941, did the People's Education Commissioner grant formal researcher status to the LFK staff. That same year, the archive acquired its most valuable holdings from the family of Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923): the *Dainu skapis* (Latvian Folk Song Cabinet), the manuscript of the final volume of Anšis Lerhis-Puškaitis' (1859–1903) fairy tale collection and the collection of the RLB Knowledge Commission.

During World War II, the contents of the *Dainu skapis* were microfilmed in case the originals were lost or destroyed, and there were even plans to send the microfilms abroad. Four LFK employees⁶ removed a large part of the archive's manuscripts and microfilms to Kārlis Straubergs' home parish of Džūkste, which later became part of the Courland fortress, the most active war zone in Latvia. As the front advanced, the collections were transported with great effort to Irlava and later to Zemīte. These 'silent strategies' – microfilming, the relocation of archival collections and their safeguarding – demonstrate the maintenance of agency during the T2–T3 phase, preserving the archive's morphogenetic potential under conditions of war.

However, during the Second World War and the subsequent Soviet occupation, the LFK underwent a structural and discursive reorganization, marking a transition from morphogenetic expansion to morphostasis – stabilization under conditions of authoritarian control. In 1941, the archive became a state-controlled scientific institution with an ideologically regulated research program. While the archival functions of collection, preservation and classification were retained, their interpretation and public representation were subjected to a new discursive mechanism: the concept of 'Soviet folklore', which demanded reflection on the 'new socialist man' and criticism of 'old bourgeois

traditions'. Thus, the archive was transformed from an open field of creative research into a scientific apparatus whose primary function was to stabilize culture in accordance with the regime's ideology. However, this morphostatic phase did not result in complete stagnation. Agents, including folklorists, archivists, teachers and researchers, employed communicative and meta-reflexive strategies to maintain apparent compliance with official doctrine while continuing to collect and preserve traditional folklore. Furthermore, the example of the LFK demonstrates that change remains possible even under morphostatic conditions, as structures are never completely closed and reflexive agency continues to create opportunities for continuity and gradual change.

Emigration and Institutional Continuity

In September 1944, Kārlis Straubergs took unpaid, indefinite leave and entrusted the leadership of the LFK to Jūlijs Sproģis for a few months before going into exile in Sweden. At least seven employees left Latvia⁷, but eight⁸, including Anna Bērzkalne, who had been rehired, remained loyal to the LFK and continued working there. This highlights the diversity of reflexivity regimes: some chose a strategy of security outside the structure, while others maintained the institution's core from within.

Parallel Academic Centers and Staff Recruitment

During the interwar period, the most prominent Latvian folklore researchers worked outside the LFK, at institutions such as the University of Latvia, the Riga Teachers' Institute, the People's University, and the Jelgava Pedagogical Institute. These researchers included Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938), Ludis Bērziņš (1870–1965), Arveds Švābe (1888–1959), Jānis Alberts Jansons (1892–1971), and Pēteris Birkerts (1881–1956). After the war, only Jansons and Birkerts remained in Latvia. In October 1944, the LFK merged with the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia (UL). Jansons, a former private lecturer at UL, assumed responsibility for the LFK staff and invited his former student from the Riga Teachers' Institute, Vilma Greble (1906–1991), to join the archive. In the summer of 1945, he also arranged for Alma Ancelāne (1910–1991), an LFK employee who had remained with the evacuated folklore collections, to transport them from Kurzeme to Riga. These appointments illustrate how institutional continuity depended not only on formal reorganization but also on the recruitment of individuals who carried professional knowledge and archival practice across successive institutional settings.

Institutional Continuity and Transformation of Mechanisms

From 1945 to 1956, LFK underwent several reorganizations. On 1 May 1945, it became the Folklore Institute (FI) of the University of Latvia⁹, and in 1946, it joined the newly established Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences. After accepting ethnographers in 1950, it became the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore

(IEF). Finally, in 1956, it merged with the Institute of Language and Literature (ILL) to form the Folklore Sector (FS).¹⁰ Each transformation also entailed a new structural balance between academic research and political oversight. From a morphogenetic perspective, this represented a repeated T4 → T1 cycle, in which each institutional outcome became the structural starting point for the next phase of development. These processes clearly demonstrate continuity in mechanisms: while the archival infrastructure and methodological traditions remained largely intact, the institution's discursive function gradually shifted from national to ideologically regulated.

Structural actors led the changes with different modes of reflexivity. Roberts Pelše (1880–1955), who had recently arrived from Moscow and had already been appointed Dean of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia, became the first director of the FI. Seeking to preserve scholarly continuity within the reorganized institution, he invited his long-time friend, the renowned folklorist, psychologist, sociologist and literary scholar Pēteris Birkerts (1881–1956), to join the institute. Together, they sought to maintain the continuity of Latvian folklore scholarship despite the profound institutional transformations of the post-war period. However, this continuity was increasingly constrained by the institutionalization of political ideology as a criterion for research, a process that accelerated after Jānis Niedre (1909–1987) became deputy director for scientific work in 1946.

Having previously worked in Soviet censorship and held several high-ranking positions in the Latvian SSR administration, Niedre played a central role in introducing ideological control into the institute's scholarly work. He became the principal advocate of Soviet folklore within the FI, insisting that it should not only celebrate the new socialist order but also criticize and replace the cultural legacy of the previous periods. His leadership transformed political ideology into an explicit criterion for research and publication. Many scholars, including Anna Bērzkalne, Jānis Alberts Jansons, Herta Vaita (1908–1997), and Boriss Infantjevs (1921–2009), experienced serious professional and personal consequences as a result of these policies.

The practical consequences of these institutional changes are evident in the career of Boris Infantjevs. Before joining the FI at the invitation of Jānis Alberts Jansons, he had already gained experience in collecting folklore as a member of the youth organization *Mazpulki*¹¹, submitting materials collected from 17 storytellers in Viļāni in 1939.¹² Later, while studying classical, Baltic, and Slavic philology, he chose Latvian–Russian cultural relations as the subject of his life's work in Ludis Bērziņš's folk song seminar. The transition from pre-war collecting practices to the new Soviet folklore paradigm is already visible in his first publication (1946), in which he attempted to present newly collected Soviet folklore alongside anecdotes he had recorded in 1937, recounted by 'kulak', in which Kārlis Ulmanis, who was portrayed as superior to both Hitler and Mussolini, appeared in almost all of them.¹³ His later recollections provide

a rare insight into the mechanisms through which Soviet folklore was created, documented and publicly represented. Recalling the collection of songs dedicated to Stalin's seventieth birthday, Infantjevs described how he told a LETA correspondent that Latvians had collected two million folklore texts but only a few songs about Stalin. The following day, however, *Pravda* published the sensational headline: "Two million folk songs about Stalin have been written in Latvia!" (Infantjevs 2004). At the same time, Infantjevs' career demonstrates how the same institutional system that promoted Soviet folklore also exercised political control over scholarly work. Although he completed his dissertation on Latvian–Russian folklore relations in 1950, he had to change supervisors several times until Jānis Niedre's name finally appeared on the title page. Two years later, he was dismissed from the IEF because of his activities in the "Mazpulki" youth organization. Nevertheless, Peļše and Niedre considered his field materials too valuable to discard and transferred them to another researcher for incorporation into a new dissertation. Jānis Alberts Jansons publicly criticized this decision and, as a consequence, was forced to leave the institute. Infantjevs' experience thus illustrates how ideological control extended beyond research agendas to shape scholarly careers, authorship and the circulation of academic knowledge.

Overall, the Soviet period was characterized by structural and discursive reorganization (morphostasis). Hierarchy, censorship, thematic planning, funding control and the regulation of scientific status functioned as real mechanisms that structured institutional action while still allowing limited forms of reflexivity and creative adaptation. This empirically confirms Archer's morphogenetic framework: mechanisms are real and causal, but their effects become visible only through agents' reflexive actions over time.

AGENCY AND REFLEXIVITY IN PRACTICE: FOUR CASE STUDIES

During the Soviet period, the daily routine of the Latvian Folklore Archives clearly demonstrated the workings of Archer's morphogenetic cycle and types of reflexivity. Initially, structural and cultural conditioning – including institutional hierarchies, censorship, ideological requirements and 'correct' definitions of folklore – determined the rules of the game. These guided the social and cultural interactions in which the folklorists, acting as agents, sought opportunities to continue their fieldwork, navigating the balance between restrictions and possibilities. The experiences of four LFK employees – Vilma Greble, Alma Ancelāne, Pēteris Birkerts, and Herta Vaita – illustrate various forms of reflexivity, including communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity. Each case illustrates how human action within an ideologically constrained structure can catalyze social and cultural transformation.

Vilma Greble's trajectory embodies communicative reflexivity, which is a collectively coordinated adaptation that maintains institutional continuity.

Born on 28 May 1906 in Kapukrogs, Kalnciems Parish, Valka County (later Kalnienā, Kalncempju Parish), Vilma Greble came from a large family of carpenters. The fate of her brothers, who were riflemen, and the stories she heard as a child later determined her interest in researching battle songs (Greble 1957). After studying at Gulbene Primary School and the Riga Teachers' Institute under Ludis Bērziņš, she submitted her first folklore materials to the LFK (1928, fund [717]), comprising beliefs, spells, riddles and proverbs that she had recorded from her parents. She began working as a substitute teacher and, simultaneously, studied Latin and Greek to prepare for university entrance.

The blow came with Ulmanis' 1934 coup. As a member of the Social Democratic Party, which she had joined under Rainis' influence, she was banned from working in schools. She then worked as a proofreader and, under the pseudonym V. Vigre, produced literary retellings for schools. Rather than abandoning folklore work, she sought alternative ways to remain professionally active until new opportunities emerged. In 1940, she returned to teaching, delivering lessons in Latvian at the former French Lycée, later known as the Anrī Barbiss 11th Secondary School. She encouraged her students to collect folklore, creating the LFK collection [1769] with students' notes that included a significant amount of Soviet folklore. Greble even had to hide several anecdotes about Stalin.

Vilma Greble also demonstrated her scholarly abilities before the Soviet occupation. Her meticulous study of colors in Latvian folk songs (Greble 1939) was cited extensively by Ludis Bērziņš in the introduction to "Latvian Folk Poetry" (Bērziņš 1940). Between 1933 and 1940, she studied at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy of the University of Latvia, taking courses in psychology, pedagogy and literary history. After the war, however, the Soviet authorities refused to recognize this education, requiring her to complete a second degree at the University of Latvia. In 1951, she defended a thesis entitled "Latvian Soviet Folklore of the Great Patriotic War", drawing on numerous war narratives that she had recorded herself, particularly those concerning her former Riga Teachers' Institute classmate, the partisan hero Otomārs Oškalns. Rather than openly challenging these new institutional requirements, she accommodated them while preserving her own scholarly trajectory. Her scholarly interests nevertheless remained focused on children's folklore and the representation of working life in folk songs. In 1956, she defended her dissertation, "Children's Life and Work in Pre-Soviet Latvian Folk Songs", and in 1973, she published the monograph "Latvian Children's Folklore". From 1950 onwards, she regularly participated in folklore expeditions and, together with Pēteris Birkerts, delivered a lecture on Soviet folklore and its creativity in Ventspils in 1952. She also sought to introduce a praxis of singing teasings in nursing homes by adapting traditional folklore to incorporate 'new realities'.

As for the remainder of her career, Greble devoted herself to work on folk songs for both the popular and academic editions, for which she served as editor for volumes 1–6 (1979–1993). However, her study, "Christening Customs and

Songs”, was not published until after her death.¹⁴ She also compiled an important bibliography on folklore and the work of folklorists. However, it was not possible to publish the sections relating to the first independent Latvian state. In 1970, she was dismissed at the age of 64 due to the institute’s reorganization and sent into ‘well-deserved retirement’, but she continued to come to work for two more decades without pay, performing editorial and archival duties. This coordinated adaptation and quiet persistence turned morphostasis into a resource. She maintained institutional memory and textual infrastructure, transforming constraints into a long-term research resource. In doing so, she also stabilized the field’s ‘supporting structure’ so that future cycles could yield morphogenetic returns.

Alma Ancelāne’s work continues this logic of communicative reflexivity, but with a particularly pronounced profile of ‘silent strategies’. Born on 23 March 1910 in Caune, Seces Parish, Alma Ancelāne later lived in Kalna Blektes. She attended Sunākste Elementary School and graduated from Jelgava II Secondary School, where, at the age of fifteen, her chemistry teacher, geologist and museum curator Jānis Grete, introduced her to folklore collecting. The first narrator was her mother, Minna, who shared children’s songs, proverbs and 200 beliefs, as well as a collection of riddles recorded by her from pupils of Sunākste Elementary School (the Grete collection [1225]). In 1928, Ancelāne enrolled in the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia but only completed her studies in 1940 due to work commitments and her mother’s illness. During her studies, she was a member of the student association and the “Dziesmuvara” choir, with which she toured neighboring European countries. During her studies, she also worked on organizing folk beliefs for Pēteris Šmits’s collection.¹⁵ From 1941 onwards, she worked at LFK, where she remained until 1986.

The outbreak of the Second World War transformed the preservation of the archive into the central expression of her agency. During the war, she helped save the LFK manuscripts and Dainu Skapis (Cabinet of Folk Songs) microfilms by hiding them in Džūkste and Irlava. The Soviet authorities, however, interpreted these wartime actions not as heroism but as political unreliability. In 1952, the institute’s director, Jānis Niedre, threatened to dismiss her, partly because she was the daughter of a farmer. Although she retained her position at the LFK, she was demoted and prohibited from participating in field expeditions. Pēteris Birkerts unsuccessfully appealed for Ancelāne to be allowed to complete her major book on riddles¹⁶, but before this could happen, Niedre himself had already left the institute.

Despite these restrictions, Ancelāne continued to preserve and expand the archive through less visible but equally important forms of scholarly work. Like Greble, she participated in the preparation of several fundamental editions of Latvian folk songs, while her own research focused primarily on riddles and legends. She continued to collect and organize folklore materials. In 1946, she began compiling her personal collection [1757] of beliefs inherited from her

mother, Minna Ancelāne, who had already passed away. The collection also included Soviet war-related folklore, such as anecdotes mocking Hitler and stories told by Russian women about working for the Germans in Irlava in 1945.

The same commitment to preservation is reflected in other parts of her archive. It includes excerpts from the childhood album of a nine-year-old pupil from Sunākste Primary School – album pages, revolutionary and folk songs and so-called *ziņģes*. Only at the end of the 1970s did Ancelāne donate the original childhood album (LFK 1757, 653–731), which her sisters had given her in Kaluga in 1919 while the family lived there as refugees. She also repeatedly documented the works of Elza Šulce, widely regarded as the most prolific creator of Soviet folklore, including songs thanking Stalin for pensions and narratives about encounters with Lenin.

Alongside her archival work, Ancelāne invested heavily in sustaining the next generation of folklorists. For at least twenty-five years, she supervised University of Latvia student internships, during which the catalog of legends was developed, advised student research projects, organized Institute excursions, and led folklore expeditions. Remembered as an optimist with a remarkable sense of humor, she inspired colleagues and students alike.

Overall, Ancelāne, like Greble, acted as a maintainer of collective agency. Her reflexivity took the form of communicative adaptation to structural and ideological constraints, oriented not towards open resistance but towards the long-term preservation of people, collections and scholarly practice. According to Archer, such behavior exemplifies morphostasis with deferred morphogenetic potential: stability that preserves institutional and field memory and prepares the conditions for future cycles of change.

Pēteris Birkerts exemplifies autonomous reflexivity. Unlike Greble and Ancelāne, whose agency was expressed primarily through collective adaptation, Birkerts' actions were grounded in professional autonomy and ethical independence that had been formed long before the Soviet period. As Archer emphasizes, “agency itself must be analyzed as a morphogenetic cycle” because people change not only structures but also themselves when acting in society (Zeuner 1999: 81). Birkerts' career exemplifies precisely such a cycle.

Following the 1905 Revolution, he emigrated first to Switzerland, where he met Rainis, and later to the United States, where he received a broad academic education. During the Second World War, together with his older brother Antons Birkerts, he hid and preserved Rainis's archive in the garden of their home in Lielupe. In 1945, Roberts Pelše invited his old friend to join the newly established Folklore Institute. A year later, Birkerts was elected professor at the Latvian State University and appointed head of the Folklore Material Collection and Classification Sector of the Institute of Folklore.

By that time, Birkerts had already established himself as one of Latvia's leading folklorists. As early as 1923, he published “A Call to Collect Latvian Folk Brachylogisms and Riddles”.¹⁷ Together with his wife, Mērija Birkerts (later

Saule-Sleine), he compiled and published “Latvian Folk Anecdotes” (1925; school edition 1926), “Latvian Proverbs and Sayings” (1927) and “Latvian Folk Riddles” (1927). His most extensive work, the four-volume “Latvian Folk Anecdotes” (1929–1930), brought together 5,671 variants. He also compiled his own folklore collection (BFK – Birkerts Folklore Collection [855]), which he repeatedly cited in his philosophical publications¹⁸ using the corresponding collector’s or narrator’s number. This long-standing scholarly authority shaped the professional independence that characterized his later responses to Soviet institutional constraints. Together with Roberts Pelše, Birkerts helped preserve scientific continuity in Latvian folklore studies despite the profound institutional transformations of the post-war period.

This continuity was increasingly challenged after Jānis Niedre assumed leadership of the institute, marking a shift towards institutionalizing political ideology as a criterion for research. Within this changing institutional environment, Birkerts soon became one of the folklorists most heavily targeted by the Soviet authorities at the institute.

He was criticized for defending Jānis Alberts Jansons, for quoting ‘idealistic philosophers’ in his previous works, and for becoming a lecturer at the University of Latvia. After the war, he was banned from publishing, and most of his manuscripts were ‘locked away in drawers’. His meticulously written diaries, “Bio Chronicles”,¹⁹ preserved today in libraries, museums and archives, document the everyday pressures of ideological supervision and institutional control. One of the clearest examples was the first collection of Soviet folklore, whose introduction and much of its content were actually prepared by Birkerts and his colleagues, but Jānis Niedre appeared as the editor on the title page.²⁰

Despite these restrictions, Birkerts continued to support both scholarship and colleagues. He supervised younger researchers, wrote letters defending colleagues against dismissal, and worked particularly closely with Vilma Greble and Alma Ancelāne, with whom he collaborated for more than four decades. Although differing greatly in personality, all three shared a commitment to maintaining scholarly standards and institutional continuity. Overall, Birkerts’ autonomous agency was grounded in professional self-reflection and ethical independence, allowing him to continue scientific work even when authorship was transferred to others or publication became impossible. This created double morphogenesis in practice: by supporting colleagues, preserving scholarly standards, and continuing research under ideological constraints, Birkerts transformed both the institutional environment and his own capacity to act as a scientist. His example demonstrates that scientific autonomy and professional solidarity could be maintained even within an oppressive institutional structure.

Herta Vaita exemplifies meta-reflexivity. Rather than adapting collectively or acting primarily through professional autonomy, her work demonstrates a critical awareness of the relationship between Soviet ideology, documentation and

long-term cultural memory. Throughout her career, she transformed ideologically conditioned situations into valuable archival resources, thereby preserving materials whose significance extended beyond their immediate political context.

A long-time employee of the Latvian Folklore Archive (since 1928), Vaita worked in several institutions and positions, from the LFK to the Folklore Institute, where she became the youngest research associate and initiated the study of legends. In early 1951, on the orders of Jānis Niedre, she was transferred to the Institute's Ethnography Section and later to the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR, where she conducted pioneering research on G. F. Merkel's manuscripts in the Misiņš Library's rare-books collection.²¹ These institutional transfers illustrate the structural constraints that shaped scholarly careers, while Vaita's ongoing research demonstrates her ability to adapt to changing institutional circumstances and redirect them towards new scholarly purposes.

Vaita was born into a working-class and deeply religious family – her father came from Auce and her mother from Sēlija. After graduating from Riga Gymnasium No. 3, she studied history at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy of the University of Latvia, completing her degree in 1937. Even when her personal biography intersected with political repression and family tragedy (her brother, the poet and composer Edgars Samts (1909–1942), perished in imprisonment in Astrakhan), she continued to transform personal experience into professional commitment, preserving historical and cultural memory through archival work.

A characteristic example is an episode on a train to Melluži. Vaita overheard young Russians singing in a neighboring compartment, followed by a conversation in which a younger woman reproached an older passenger for knowing only the 'old' songs rather than the 'new' Soviet ones. Offended, the older woman recited three verses about Stalin. Vaita immediately wrote the verses down and attempted to identify the narrator. Although the frightened woman refused to provide any personal information, the episode was recorded in the Archive as a documented example of Soviet folklore. In later decades, these verses²² were repeatedly republished and became among the most frequently cited examples of Stalin songs in Latvian Soviet folklore, eventually serving as the basis for Alma Ancelāne's article, "The Image of Stalin in Latvian Soviet Folklore".²³ In Archer's terms, Vaita's work illustrates meta-reflexivity through her critical engagement with ideologically conditioned cultural production. Rather than dismissing Soviet folklore as merely propagandistic, she documented it as historical evidence, preserving materials whose significance extended beyond their immediate political context.

In the context of folklore studies, the morphogenetic approach enables the analysis of three levels – structural, cultural, and agency – whose interaction yields changes at the levels of paradigms, institutional structures and professional identity. Such change involves sociocultural interaction and is

characterized by attempts to protect or increase one's material and/or symbolic interests (Archer & Morgan 2020). This view is also evident in the analysis of the four case studies of employees from the Latvian Folklore Archives. Their biographies and archival materials reveal various forms of agency and reflexivity. Pēteris Birkerts embodies the autonomous reflexive type, characterized by intellectual independence and a defense of scientific autonomy. Vilma Greble and Alma Ancelāne are examples of communicative reflexives: researchers whose collective adaptation to, and creative collaboration with, institutional requirements ensured the continuity of folklore studies. Herta Vaita, on the other hand, represents the meta-reflexive dimension, characterized by self-reflection and a critical attitude towards the system itself – particularly the ideological framework of 'Soviet folklore'. These cases demonstrate how folklorists worked within a morphogenetic field in which structural constraints, such as censorship, institutional hierarchy and ideological requirements, both hindered and stimulated the development of new strategies. In this context, reflexivity became a mechanism that transformed external constraints into internal resources for creativity.

CONCLUSIONS

In Latvia, Soviet folklore collection and research can be viewed as a structural and cultural process in which agents – such as folklorists, teachers, institutions and the state – operate within a specific structural and ideological environment. However, their actions also create new cultural forms and meanings. In this sense, folkloristics reflects morphogenesis: a cycle of societal change in which structure, culture and agency continuously interact to create new configurations. Understanding this cyclicity is essential to grasping how the staff of the Latvian Folklore Archive (LFK) and subsequently the Folklore Institute (FI, IEF) implemented adaptation, non-violent resistance and creative strategies during various periods, from the Ulmanis era to the Soviet occupation, enabling science to endure and evolve amid ideological shifts. Communicative, autonomous and meta-reflexivity were not abstract theoretical categories but observable patterns of scholarly practice, each producing different forms of adaptation, continuity and innovation within the Soviet institutional framework.

The four case studies demonstrate how different forms of reflexivity shaped individual scholarly trajectories. Yet reflexivity was expressed not only through personal biographies but also through everyday practices. The following examples illustrate how ideological requirements were continuously negotiated throughout the research process. Rather than representing simple compliance with political authority, these practices reveal the creative accommodation through which scientific continuity was maintained within an ideologically regulated institutional framework.

The practical application of these reflexive strategies becomes particularly visible in the collection, documentation, interpretation, editing and publication of Soviet folklore. During the Soviet period, folklorists continuously negotiated ideological requirements, demonstrating creative ways to accommodate official expectations while preserving scholarly standards and ensuring scientific continuity. Almost all FI and IEF employees recorded Soviet folklore, often overhearing it on trains, at stations, or in the street when the narrator's identity was unknown. During the first expeditions, storytellers were encouraged to create new songs, and youth groups became spaces for collaborative creativity and expression. Between 1949 and 1951, Pēteris Birkerts included a section entitled "Our New Folklore" in his collection on several occasions. He wrote down proverbs from the workers of the Sēlija collective farm, including: 'All roads lead to the collective farm' (LFK 855, 3443). He also used the 1905–1906 issues of the "Cīņa" newspaper to obtain revolutionary folklore. A variety of socially and geographically diverse voices contributed to the folklore collection. Līna Etmane, Emīlija Ezergaile, and Elza Šulce recited 333 proverbs of various content at the concert of the international folklorists' conference in the Red Hall of Riga Castle on 8 and 9 December 1951. Alma Ancelāne's handwritten Birkerta materials include a song about Stalin, which was obtained from Gunārs Liepiņš, a member of the Communist Youth League in Zūras. Similar songs were also sung by members of the Dubulti Secondary School literary drama club. In Riga, Birkerts had heard a Soviet song which he amended because only bourgeois folklorists spoke of a unified 'national spirit': "What sounded, what flowed in the treasury of folklore? Folklorists, diligent folk, collected the beauty of the folk spirit. He crossed out the word 'spirit' and changed it to 'work'" (LFK 855, 5376). This is an example of semantic code-switching, where 'spirit' is replaced by 'work' to align with ideological discourse.

In 1950, the FI published its only collection of valuable scientific articles,²⁴ which served as a report on the scientific work accomplished over the previous five years. In the introduction, Roberts Pelše wrote: "We have tried to provide the most necessary and the best that we can with our current resources" (Pelše 1950). In this volume, Pēteris Birkerts published an article entitled "Rainis as a Folklorist" (Birkerts 1950), in which he meticulously analyzed Rainis's folkloristic activities but did not examine the use of folklore in his creative work. Boriss Infantjevs completed the research begun by the late Prof. Viktors Černobajevs (1891–1947) on "Pushkin's 'Tale of the Fisherman and the Golden Fish' in Latvian Folklore" (Infantjevs 1950), which was carried out by following the Finnish school methods that Jānis Niedre did not admit to (Treija 2019). However, the quote from Stalin that was successfully found – "We would sit by a broken trough" – made the publication possible. In turn, Vilma Greble, in her article "Latvian Children's Folklore" (Greble 1950), referred to Maxim Gorky's ideas and criticized her professor, Ludis Bērziņš, for his idealistic, unscientific view that folk songs cannot be grouped by age. She stated: "The plan used

in Barons' *Latvju Dainas* is the same as the one used in this collection. This method of classification is not entirely correct, but unfortunately, we have not yet managed to develop a truly correct one that would fully correspond to Marxist methodology" (Greble 1950: 102). Similarly, in her article "Latvian Folk Riddles", Alma Ancelāne mentions both Gorky and Niedre and lists several Marxist classics in her bibliography, even though she does not use any of them (Ancelāne 1950). The presence of such references served as an ideological cover, enabling scientific continuity. Meanwhile, in her article "Latvian Folk Meteorology", Herta Vaita cited only Engels's essay "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man" among the required sources, thus fulfilling the norm (Vaita 1950). Vilma Greble and Alma Ancelāne were also the editors of the second collection of "Latvian Soviet folklore", published in two editions, in 1952 and 1953.²⁵ Decorated with traditional Latvian ornamental motifs, the volumes incorporated Greble's diploma thesis, completed when she graduated from the Latvian State University for the second time, together with the collection of newly created *kolkhoz* songs compiled by Ancelāne.

However, it was not until 1953 that an attempt was made to explain 'what Soviet folklore is' in the "Institute of Ethnography and Folklore articles II". Roberts Pelše emphasized: "Only the Soviet regime created the opportunity... by establishing a special institute for the study of these issues in 1945" (Pelše 1953: 5). In the same volume, Jānis Niedre only analyzed Stalin's writings and developed an ideological justification for the 'recreation' of folklore.

The biographies that conclude this process are symbolic: Vilma Greble and Alma Ancelāne both died in 1991. Greble died on Ancelāne's name day, 25 February, and spent her final days reproaching herself for having worked with Soviet folklore. In contrast, Ancelāne laughed and boasted that she had been paid triple her usual fee for her work on Stalin, displaying her characteristic irony. However, she had also instructed her younger colleagues to study the documents from this period more carefully. She suffered a stroke during the August coup and passed away on 26 September, being buried in the Sunākste cemetery alongside her parents. Their fates conclude a morphogenetic cycle – from forced adaptation to the possibility of a reflective return. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that ideological conformity and scientific continuity were not mutually exclusive. Rather, folklorists continuously negotiated institutional expectations through a range of reflexive strategies that allowed them to preserve scholarly standards while formally satisfying political demands.

Consequently, the history of Latvian folklore studies can be interpreted as a process of social morphogenesis, in which tension between structural norms, cultural discourses and individual agency drives change. This tension reflects the mechanisms of social adaptation. It creates new meanings and institutional solutions that ensure the continuity of folklore studies as a science amid the ideological changes of the 20th century. Despite operating within an

institutionally restricted and ideologically controlled environment, the reflexivity, professional motivation and creative strategies of folklorists played a significant role in social and cultural change. The morphogenetic model developed by Archer enables us to interpret this process not only as the history of science but also as a dynamic morphogenetic process in which institutional, cultural and individual factors interact to create new cultural forms while maintaining continuity with previous traditions. This view reveals that, even under totalitarian conditions, the structure was not static; it created opportunities for subtle strategies, such as changing codes of meaning, informal collection, archiving without publication and symbolic acts of resistance. Using reflective and creative approaches, folklorists maintained the continuity of science while transforming ideological restrictions into resources for creative activity.

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NOTES

- 1 *Latvju dainas*. [Latvian Folk Songs.] Sast. Kr. Barons. I–VI. Jelgava; Pēterburga, 1894–1915.
- 2 Lerhis-Puškaitis, Anss. *Latviešu tautas teikas un pasakas*. [Latvian Folk-Tales and Legends.] I–VII. Jelgava; Rīga; Cēsis 1891–1903; 2001.
- 3 Jurjānu Andrejs. *Latvju tautas mūzikas materiāli*. [Materials of Latvian Folk Music.] I–VI. Rīga 1894–1926.
- 4 Osvalds Līdeks and Ģertrūde Dubulte.
- 5 Edīte Hauzenberga-Šturma and Alvis Aizsils.
- 6 Alma Ancelāne, Zelma Birzniece, Milda Kazeka, Alise Lāce.
- 7 Ella Andersone, Oļģerts Bērziņš, Alfrēds Kvālis, Osvalds Līdeks, Emma Malkava, Kārlis Straubergs, Olga Strunke.
- 8 Alma Ancelāne, Anna Bērzkalne, Milda Kazeka, Hermīne Kronberga, Alma Medne, Anna Siliņa, Herta Vaita, Zenta Veilande.
- 9 LVA, 2372 f., 1. apr., 1 l., 1. lp.
- 10 For materials from the LFK Fonds published at different times, the source citation is preceded by – LFK; FI; IEF; FS, and again LFK from 1992.
- 11 An organization of children and youth in Latvia (1929–1940), which actively engaged in experiments in agriculture and housekeeping and in collecting folklore materials, was established by the newspaper “Mazpulks”.
- 12 LFK 1552, 43461–43544.
- 13 LFK 1763, 1–12.
- 14 *Latviešu tautasdziesmas*. [Latvian Folksongs.] Rīga: Zinātne, 1993. Vol. 6, 607–619.
- 15 Šmits, Pēteris. *Latviešu ticējumi*. [Latvian Folk-Beliefs.] I–IV. Rīga: LFK 1940–1941.

- 16 *Latviešu tautas mīklas. Izlase.* [Latvian Folk Riddles. A Selection.] Sast. Alma Ancelāne. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmija, 1954.
- 17 Mūsu Nākotne [Our Future] (01.05.1923); IMM 5, 592–594.
- 18 *Latvju sakāmvārdu filozofija.* [The Philosophy of Latvian Proverbs.] Rīga: aut. izd. 1937; *Ievads latvju tautas prātniecībā* [Introduction to Latvian Folk Wisdom.] Rīga: aut. izd. 1937; *Latvju tautas dzīves gudrība.* [The Wisdom of Latvian Folk Life.] I un II. Rīga, 1937; *Latvju tautas estētika.* [Latvian Folk Aesthetics.] I un II Rīga: aut. izd. 1938–1939.
- 19 For example, Birkerts, Pēteris. *Manas dzīves un darbības 8 gadi 1945–1953.* [Eight Years of My Life and Work, 1945–1953.] LNB; R, x, 81, 2, 6.
- 20 *Latviešu padomju folklorā. Izlase.* [Latvian Soviet Folklore. A Selection.] Red. Roberts Pelše, Jānis Niedre, Arturs Ozols Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmija, 1950 [178 variants].
- 21 Vaita, Herta. *Garlība Merķeļa rokraksti Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijā.* [Garlība Merķelis's Manuscripts in the Academy of Sciences of the Latvian SSR.] Rīga: Zinātne, 1972.
- 22 LFK 776, 80–82.
- 23 Ancelāne, Alma. Staļina tēls latviešu padomju folklorā. [The Image of Stalin in Latvian Soviet Folklore.] *Literatūra un Māksla.* 52, 25.12.1949.
- 24 *Folkloras institūta raksti.* [Works of the Institute of Folklore.] I. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmija, 1950.
- 25 *Latviešu padomju folklorā.* [Latvian Soviet Folklore.] Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmija. 1952, 2nd edition in 1953.

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