

COMPENDIUM SHORT PROFILE: LATVIA

(Based on the comprehensive country profile of Baiba Tjarve and Gints Klāsons:
<http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/latvia.php>)

1. Facts and figures

Political system:	Parliamentary democracy
Year of membership to the Council of Europe:	10 February 1995
Year of membership to UNESCO:	14 October 1991
Population:	1 968 957 (2016)
Non-nationals of total population:	38.2% (2016)
Official language(s):	Latvian (Russian spoke by 32% of total population)
Share of population using the Internet	82.6% (2016)
Public cultural expenditures per capita:	141.5 EUR (2014)
GDP in Billion EUR:	24.4 (2015)
Accession to Key Cultural Conventions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>European Cultural Convention</i> (1955): 7 May 1992 • <i>European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages</i> (1992): not signed • <i>UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions</i>: 6 July 2007 	

2. Historical perspective

General context

During the first half of the 1990s, Latvia passed through a transition period from a totalitarian to a democratic society that brought forth crucial social, political, and economic changes. These changes resulted in the introduction of democratic processes, administrative reforms, liberalisation of the economy and introduction of a free market, stabilisation of the new political and economic institutions through privatisation of cultural enterprises, decentralisation of cultural processes and introduction of new legislation.

The first cultural policy document *The Main Cultural Policy Proposals of Latvia* (1995) outlined the most important tasks of state cultural policy for the first 10 years after regaining Latvian independence in 1990, i.e.: not to interfere with creative processes while simultaneously ensuring favourable conditions and necessary resources for cultural development and the cultivation of creative initiative.

The development of each sphere of culture needed to be reviewed and improved, taking into account the new emphasis and the strategic aims of the national cultural policy. A

new document – State Cultural Policy Guidelines (2006 – 2015) called for a more integrated approach to the planning and implementation of culture-related policies.

A new mid-term cultural policy document "Creative Latvia" has been elaborated for the period 2014-2020 that corresponds to the main planning documents at national and EU level. The document was adopted by the government in July 2014.

3. Overall description of the system

General context

The Latvian cultural policy model is centralised around the Ministry of Culture, which is the main institution formulating and co-ordinating state cultural policy. However, there have been some changes towards decentralisation and involvement of non-governmental organisations and the civil society in the cultural field. The Ministry of Culture has signed numerous agreements with non-governmental organisations (e.g. The New Theatre Institute of Latvia, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art), delegating a number of specific functions. There are advisory boards or councils in most areas of the cultural sector which include culture operators, experts and representatives of other ministries, municipalities and non-governmental organisations, who actively participate in the policy making process and allocation of financial support.

The economic crisis (2008-2010) provoked new developments concerning the governance of cultural institutions. On the one hand, decentralisation processes accelerated: The Ministry handed over responsibility for amateur art, cultural education and some professional art institutions to municipalities. On the other hand, there is a tendency towards centralisation within the state administration: State agencies that used to be operating at arm's length (National Film Centre, The State Authority on Museums) were either integrated into the structure of the Ministry of Culture or transformed into budget institutions without autonomy.

The arm's length body State Culture Capital Foundation (CCF), which started operations in 1998, was a major milestone in Latvian cultural policy, since it completely changed funding patterns in the cultural sector: The financing of cultural projects which had previously been the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture was delegated to the CCF. Funding applications are evaluated by expert bodies which report to the Council of the CCF. These bodies also monitor how the allocated grants are utilised. In nine cultural fields, they are composed of seven experts nominated by governmental and non-governmental cultural organisations (5 experts) and the Minister of Culture (2 experts) and replaced every 2 years. The goal of the CCF is to provide financial support and promote balanced development of creative work in all sectors of culture and art and encourage the preservation of cultural heritage. It also facilitates the development of international relations and promotes Latvian art and culture worldwide.

Division of tasks and main players in cultural policy

Institutions in charge of general policy guidelines, legislation and the budget of Latvia are the *Saeima* (Parliament) and the *Cabinet of Ministers* (highest executive body of the country, formed by a Prime Minister invited by the State President). According to its Constitution (*Satversme*), Latvia is a unitary state, made up of 4 regions (Vidzeme, Latgale,

Kurzeme and Zemgale), which are not autonomous territories similar to federal states in the EU.

At the end of 2008 a regional reform, adopted by the Parliament and aimed at increasing the capacity of local administrative units, reduced the number of small municipalities operating on two territorial levels of local administration: On 1 July 2009, 110 local governments (counties) and 9 republican cities replaced more than 500 previous administrations.

The *Law on Local Governments* (1994) defines the division of labour and responsibilities between the state and local authorities in providing services, including those in the cultural field. Section 15 of this law mentions the following autonomous tasks of local governments: "to maintain culture and facilitate the preservation of traditional cultural values and the development of creative folk activity (organisational and financial assistance to cultural institutions and events, support for the preservation of cultural monuments, and others)".

Since the long and complicated process of regional administrative reform that was completed in 2009, municipalities are developing, step by step, their own cultural policies and are becoming more independent regarding the content and character of cultural life in the regions.

The *Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia* is responsible for strategic development, implementation and supervision of cultural policy and cultural education policy. The Ministry co-operates with non-governmental bodies, such as consultative councils, creative unions, funds etc. and shares responsibility for co-operation programmes and financing in the cultural field with municipalities. However, it remains the most important actor in the development of cultural policy and financing cultural activities, particularly as regards professional art.

The *National Board of Culture*, established in 1995, is the most important advisory body to the Minister of Culture in the fields of cultural policy and cultural economy. Its main tasks are to promote public participation in cultural life and to enhance co-operation between the state, public institutions and individuals. Its functions are to analyse and make proposals regarding the strategic direction of some cultural sectors, to participate in the preparation of the cultural budget, draft plans for laws and investment policies.

Financing of culture

- Latvia's economy experienced a GDP growth of more than 10% per year during 2006–2007, but entered a severe recession in 2008 as a result of an unsustainable current account deficit and large debt exposure. From 2011 to 2013, GDP increased on average by 4.4% every year being one of the most rapid growths in EU. However, GDP is still about 7.5% lower than before the crisis in 2007.
- **Total public expenditure on culture** in 2014 was 283.1 million EUR. It corresponds to 141.45 EUR per capita and 1.2% of gross domestic product. Following a decline in 2008-2010, total expenditure on culture in the public sector has increased every year. Although during the last three years the share of cultural services in the total public expenditure increased from 2.5% to 3.2%, its share in GDP of 1.1% - 1.2% did not change substantially over the last eight years.

Public culture expenditure at all levels of government per capita, in EUR, 2000-2014

	2000	2005	2010	2011	2013	2014	2015
Latvia	3.2	27	52	63	70	141	234

Public cultural expenditure: by level of government, in million EUR, 2015

Level of government	Total expenditure	% share of total
State (federal)	305.2	66.2%
Regional (provincial, Länder)	--	
Local (municipal)	155.8	33.8%
TOTAL	461.0	100.0%

Source: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

4. Main cultural policies and priorities

The following vision guides the Cultural Policy Guidelines 2014-2020 "Creative Latvia":

Latvia is a country with a rich and nourished heritage, a vibrant and diverse cultural life, creative people, creative industries with high export potential, and improving the quality of life for everyone. To reach this vision, the following priorities have been outlined:

- preservation and development of cultural capital involving community members in cultural processes;
- a creative life-long learning and cultural education system oriented towards labour employment;
- cultural and creative industries with high export potential; and
- creative territories and accessibility of cultural services.

The majority of the budget of the Ministry of Culture is allocated to public culture institutions which are under the responsibility of the Ministry. Only a tiny proportion of the allocations are meant for non-governmental institutions.

Municipalities maintain a huge network of municipal cultural institutions: cultural centres, public libraries and museums. It is considered that municipalities prioritise amateur art activities, especially those which are forming traditions like the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration (choir singing, folk dancing, folk groups, etc.). However, larger municipalities consider also professional art as part of their policies. Especially significant improvements in this respect started when new concert halls offering diverse professional performing art events were built in three cities: Cesis (2014), Rezekne (2013) and Liepaja (2015).

Meanwhile, the budget of the grant giving body - the State Culture Capital Foundation - is supporting diverse types of culture and art organisations, and individuals. The Council of the foundation endorses annual priorities which are published on the foundation website.

Latest developments:

Since 2014, preparation of the centennial celebration of the Republic of Latvia is taking place; it will be celebrated from 2017 to 2021. Series of public discussions for various target audiences took place and laid the foundation for cooperation with local authorities, institutions, organisations, and with the broader society in Latvia and outside. The celebration will cover all sectors – culture, education, economy, as well as environment,

sports, welfare, health, defence, agriculture and other fields – marking major events and reflecting the story of hundred years.

On 30 October 2014, the Latvian Ministry of Culture and the Foundation of the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art signed a memorandum of intent regarding the development and construction of the Latvian Museum of Contemporary Art. It was signed on the basis of the successful long-term collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, the ABLV Charitable Foundation and the Boris and Inara Teterev Foundation, as notable benefactors in the realm of Latvian contemporary art, and ABLV Bank as the principal supporter of the formation of the Museum of Contemporary Art's collection. It is planned that the Foundation's founders will provide financing in the amount of at least EUR 30 million for the construction of the museum. The Foundation plans to open the new museum on 18 November 2021.

In the autumn of 2015, the concert hall "Great Amber" was opened, which is not only the home of the Liepaja Symphonic Orchestra and the Emils Melngailis' Music Secondary School, but also the epicentre of important art, music, and other creative events. The Great Amber is the third multifunctional cultural centre in Latvia, which were built using financing of the European Regional Development Fund fundraised by the Ministry of Culture. Similar to the concert halls in Rezekne, Cesis and Liepaja, it is suitable for diversified professional cultural services, for amateur art and education activities.

In 2015, the Ministry of Culture established a Media Policy Unit whose guidelines and action plan are currently developed. In 2014, the Creative Industries Board has launched its work in the Ministry of Culture. Its tasks are to co-operate with state, local and non-governmental institutions for developing and implementing the creative industries policy, for budgetary and investment planning as well as for drafting laws and other regulatory acts.

In 2015, plans for a "Future House" of the Occupation Museum, whose construction and completion was scheduled to 2017, provoked broad discussions in society. The "Future House" is planned as a part of the memorial of victims of the Soviet occupation, based on a concept of architect Gunars Birkerts. Several well-known architects argued strongly against this project considering that its implementation would substantially aggravate the architectural value of the Occupation Museum and the Strelnieku Square (Riflemen Square) where it is located. This ongoing discussion among architects and in society as a whole led to delays of the construction works for the project.

5. International cooperation

General context and main actors

The main institutional structures involved in the processes of international cultural cooperation are The Ministry of Culture, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Latvian Institute. The cultural policy document "Creative Latvia 2014-2020" sets the following priorities in the field of international cooperation:

- to secure international cooperation and competitiveness in the cultural and cultural heritage sectors; and
- to establish a positive image of Latvia with the help of cultural diplomacy.

Latvia actively participates in international organisations and networks, such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, ICOMOS, ICCROM, ICOM, NEMO etc. Artistic mobility is also mentioned in cultural policy documents as one of the important aspects of international collaboration and is secured with mobility grants from the Culture Capital Foundation and participation in the Nordic-Baltic Mobility programme.

In 2014-2015, the priority of international cultural policy was Latvian culture as part of European cultural diversity. It was implemented through two major projects: Riga as European Capital of Culture in 2014 and a cultural programme in the framework of Latvia's Presidency of the European Union in 2015.

The *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* sets foreign policy priorities in its Annual Report. Culture is an integral part of foreign policy.

The *Ministry of Culture* signed intergovernmental and inter-ministerial agreements and programmes with approximately 30 countries to encourage cultural exchange and co-operation between professionals working in the field of culture.

The *Latvian Institute* (<http://www.li.lv/>) inter alia offers special assistance to international journalists, editors, producers, researchers and other professionals.

Considerable international cultural co-operation is also undertaken in the non-governmental sector in Latvia. Individuals and organisations co-operate through networks, in joint projects as well as through personal contacts.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, international cooperation is becoming stronger and more diverse and very fruitful contacts have been established with the Baltic and Nordic countries, as well as with several cultural representations of foreign countries. There are 36 embassies and several foreign cultural centers situated in Riga that are significantly enriching the cultural life of the country.

Public policies pay special attention to *cooperation in the Baltic region*. The co-operation of the Baltic States constitutes the following institutional frameworks: the Baltic Assembly, the Baltic Council of Ministers and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The parliamentary co-operation takes place within the Baltic Assembly, but all matters related to practical co-operation are being dealt within the format of the Baltic Council of Ministers. [The Council of the Baltic Sea States](#) is an overall political forum for regional inter-governmental cooperation. It includes an international cultural network in the cultural field: [Ars Baltica](#) (established in 1991). A [programme](#) of cultural cooperation for the period 2015-2018 between the Culture Ministries of the three Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) was signed to improve cooperation at regional level.

Public financial support for international cooperation is available from the Ministry of Culture and the State Culture Capital Foundation. The Ministry of Culture finances some international cultural projects and supports the participation of Latvian cultural institutions and professionals in international organisations and programmes. Apart from these activities, the Ministry of Culture also secures co-financing for the projects supported by EU programmes.

In view of the massive emigration flow over the past two decades, cooperation with the Latvian diaspora has become one of the priorities of the Foreign Ministry work aimed at promoting political and civic participation of the diaspora, preserving Latvian identity and bonds with Latvia, and strengthening cooperation with compatriots abroad. According to

estimates by the Foreign Ministry, about 370,000 Latvian nationals are permanently residing outside Latvia, most of them emigrating in the past decade