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**INSTITUTE OF
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Live human exhibitions in the territory of Latvia: re-discovered events

Abstract

of the report presented at the international interdisciplinary
conference RE: 22 Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference

Reykjavik, Iceland, 13–16 June 2022

Riga, 2022



RE: 22
Nordic Ethnology and Folklore
Conference

Reykjavik, Iceland, 13–16 June 2022

Anotācija

Tēžu publikācija referātam “Dzīvās izstādes Latvijas teritorijā: no jauna atklāti notikumi”, kas 2022. gada 15. jūnijā nolasīts Islandes Universitātes organizētajā starptautiskajā konferencē “RE: 22 Ziemeļvalstu etnoloģijas un folkloras konference”. Prezentācija konferencei tapusi pēcdoktorantūras projekta Nr. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/3/19/516 “Etnogrāfiskie un frīku šovi Latvijas teritorijā 19. un 20. gs. mijā – starp zinātņi, izklaidi un homofobiju” ietvaros.

Summary

Abstract of the report “Live human exhibitions in the territory of Latvia: re-discovered events”, presented on June 15, 2022 at the international conference “RE: 22 Nordic Ethnology and folklore conference” organized by the University of Iceland. The presentation for the conference was made in the project “The Live Human Exhibitions in the Territory of Latvia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries between Science, Entertainment and Homophobia” (No. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/3/19/516).

The Scientific Committee

Aki Guðni Karlsson (University of Iceland), Alice Bower (University of Iceland/Association of Folklorists in Iceland), Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir (University of Iceland), Guðrún Dröfn Whitehead (University of Iceland), JoAnn Conrad (Diablo Valley College/University of Iceland), Jón Þór Pétursson (Lund University/University of Iceland), Kristinn Schram (University of Iceland), Ólafur Rastrick (University of Iceland), Valdimar Tr. Hafstein (University of Iceland), Vilhelmína Jónsdóttir (University of Iceland)

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Theme: *re*:

We make sense of *repetition*: *repeated* patterns (a.k.a. *culture*), *repeated* actions (a.k.a. *performance*), *repeated* words (a.k.a. *folk narrative*), *repeated* rhythms and melodies (a.k.a. *folk music*), *repeated* forms and dispositions (a.k.a. *material culture*; indeed *re* is the ablative case of the Latin *res* for thing or matter). Our fields *were* formed and *reformed* around various notions of *return*: the ways in which people (in various times and places) *recycle* ideas, *restore* behaviors, *remix* words, *recreate* tunes, *reuse* objects, *remember* customs, *remake*, *repair*, *rehash*, *refine* and *reduce*. This is our special *remit* within the humanities and social sciences.

Re-verbs and *re*-nouns mark our perspectives on the various topics we study: they *are* integral to the ethnological/folkloristic touch. As soon as we approach them, our topics shed their “originality“ (so highly valued in most humanities) without losing anything in imagination or creativity; we *reevaluate* them, *review* them from an angle that brings their connections into focus while *recontextualizing* their individuality, *recentering* them in their *relationship* to other ideas, words, objects, and behaviors: their *representation*, *reception*, *recovery*, *recognition*, *reproduction*, *reciprocity*, *resonance*, *reverberation* or *repercussion*.

What better place to *recongregate*, then, to *rehearse* our *respective research*, *retrace* and *renew* our ideas, and *revisit* our topics with *regard* to the *re*-perspective than, *precisely*, in *Reykjavik*?

Bodies and cultures 06

Convenors: Gudrun D. Whitehead (University of Iceland)

Alice Bower (University of Iceland)

Stream: BASE (Bodies, Affects, Senses, Emotions)

Format: Panel

Location: Room H-209

Sessions: Wednesday 15 June, 11:15–13:00

Bodies and cultures. Panel **BASE 06** at conference **RE: 22 Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference**. <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/re22/p/11602>

Accepted papers:

Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenkova (Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia). Live human exhibitions in the territory of Latvia: re-discovered events (<https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/re22/paper/63592>).

Alice Bower (University of Iceland). Attempts at folk healing in two legends of the poet Guðmundur Bergþórsson (c. 1657–1705): a comparative narrative analysis (<https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/re22/paper/63627>).

Zuzana Rendek (Charles University, Faculty of Humanity Studies, Prague). A headscarf as an identity marker and a “symbolic curtain” of protection (<https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/re22/paper/63754>).

Gunnar Óli Dagmararson. “From Odin they learned all sports”: the interplay between sports and the struggle for Iceland’s independence (<https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/re22/paper/63588>).

Live human exhibitions in the territory of Latvia: re-discovered events

Ilze Boldāne-Zeļenkova

(Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia)

Paper short abstract:

Ethnographic and freak shows (staged otherness) at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – a topic without assessment in Latvian science and society. Re-discovery of those events requires a re-telling and a re-cognition of the causes led to their collective forgetting.

Paper long abstract:

Staging otherness events (exhibited people with different ethnic and racial descent or people with physical disabilities) widespread in Western Europe and the USA also took place in the territory of the Russian Empire. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Latvia, as part of this non-typical colonial state, had hosted, as we currently know, more than 18 ethnographic and freak shows and anatomical exhibitions.

Some years ago, Polish ethnologists began the study of this phenomenon within Eastern Europe, including Latvia, indicating a vacuum of information on this topic in Latvian society, literature and social sciences and humanities. Answers to the question – did no such events really take place in the territory of Latvia? – led to the next question – Why do we not know about them?

Re-discovering those events was an amazing process itself. Posters, advertisements (mostly in the local German press) and police registers are evidence of the variety and intensity of this kind of entertainment in Riga and other cities. Re-telling these facts of the cultural history of Latvia need to talk about the 19th century public's entertainment habits, the development of new knowledge and perceptions towards the otherness, and that is challenging in the frame of the political correctness of modern science and the world. The issue of collective forgetting in this context must be seen from the perspective of the 19th century Latvian society's social strata, the availability of venues, and Latvia's historical events caused by the Second World War.