

HUMANITIES ORGANIZATIONS IN LITHUANIA

(1918–1940)

Summary

Drawing on published, archival and manuscript resources, this book aims to explore and systematize knowledge about scholars' participation in establishing public organizations in the field of the humanities in Lithuania between 1918 and 1940. It also seeks to reveal various aspects of the formation of such organizations and to present their most important achievements. The author identifies general and specific characteristics of the organizational pattern of scientific activity, discusses the essential features of scholarly ideas and their spread within organizations, and considers the scientific and educational accomplishments. Along with previously unpublished resources relating to the establishment of public scientific organizations and their branches in the field of literature, philosophy and war history, this book includes material on other underresearched organizations and on the ties of scientists and contains some new assessments of the trends of public science institutionalization observed during the period under study.

Public learned societies established in the first decade of Lithuania's independent existence following World War I played an important role in bringing scholars together to implement their ideas, as state-funded science and educational institutions were still unable to cover, coordinate and solve all issues related to science development. A significant contribution to the process of science institutionalization and modernization of research infrastructure was made by professional researchers in the humanities and other representatives of the intellectual elite through their participation in forming societies, foundations and their branches, both generic and specialized.

It was attempted to unite researchers working in various areas primarily through the establishment and development multidisciplinary public scholarly organizations. In this respect, opening of the Kaunas branch of the Lithuanian Society of Science at the beginning of 1920 was a significant event that united the efforts of society's members in Kaunas and contributed to the organization of science and education in independent Lithuania. The founders of this branch highlighted the necessity of furthering research into various areas, establishing scientific sections and forming background for the creation of the national acade-

my of sciences. In addition to applied sciences, they recognized the importance of the humanities for the general public.

The multidisciplinary organizational structure developed with the establishment in 1922 of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science, which was directed under its constitution „to assemble Lithuanian Catholic scholars, to provide facilities for scientific work and fruitful activity in the realm of science, to prepare and produce new scholars, and to propagate and enhance erudition and the Christian culture among the Lithuanian nation“. The Academy scheduled a consistent establishment of units that would coordinate activities in different fields.

In 1922 the idea of founding another, more liberal organization was born in circles of scientists. That same year the Liberal Philosophical Society was started.

Throughout the period under consideration, special interest was paid to the question of opportunities for specializing scholarly activity in the humanities, most notably in the field of Lithuanian language study. As the idea of instituting a unified academy of sciences had remained unrealized, a number of learned societies working in the area of Lithuanian studies came into being. Among their founding members were mainly scientists, educators and experts with experience acquired in other organizations.

In terms of science specialization and institutionalization exceptional was the Language Society, founded in 1925, which had as its purpose the study and promotion of Lithuanian language as well as dealing with practical issues in orthography and other topics relating to Lithuanian language. But, according to the members themselves, the activity was slow due to a lack of language specialists and insufficient resources to organize activity and to develop publishing projects. After a few years of its existence the society's activity weakened and in 1931 it was closed.

At the beginning of 1935 it was decided to start a new organization of linguists – the Society for Lithuanian Language. The same year saw registration of its constitution, which was reregistered in June 1936 to meet new requirements. The organization was aimed at the knowledge, study and refinement of Lithuanian language and the promotion of the standard language among the public.

There was still another public organization in the interwar years that was related to the theory and practice of Lithuanian language. With an aim to immortalize the memory of the linguist and educator professor Jonas Jablonskis and to encourage the continuation of his works, a group of linguists representing a youn-

ger generation as well as scientists from other areas decided to establish a foundation in his honour. The constitution of the new organization was presented to the Kaunas City and District Mayor on the 29th of March 1930. In May of the same year, after certain revisions, the constitution was registered and the foundation was incorporated as a public organization. It was aimed at raising funds to support Lithuanian language-related studies, university programs and book publishing.

The Society for Lithuanian History was begun in May 1929 for the purpose of the study and development of the science of history in Lithuania with an emphasis on the history of the Lithuanian nation. Its founding also witnessed of the need for research specialization. The period under consideration also saw the establishment of societies and branches interested in book science, war history and some other areas in the humanities.

Though the establishment and reregistration of societies in the independent Lithuania of the 1930s was regulated by the Law on societies (1936), learned societies in the humanities were different from other ones in their organizational structure, membership requirements, and the scope of internal and external ties. Work specialization and professional competence were particularly emphasized by the founders of the Society for Lithuanian Language, which had an extensive and purpose-oriented organizational structure. Although having a small membership, scholarly organizations in the humanities sought to ensure regular participation and consistent cooperation among their members.

Establishment of scholarly organizations provoked debate and necessitated coordination of liberal and Christian worldviews and methodological positions of the men of science of independent Lithuania. In the fourth decade of the 20th century a younger generation of humanities scholars most of whom received training or acquired specialization abroad came to the forefront of activity. They were able to analyse new global scientific trends and to advance new theoretical and practical ideas concerning research development. Many of them supported modernization of the activity of both state institutions in science and education and public scholarly organizations and sought better coordination of the dialogue between scholars and between societies.

Right from their beginning Lithuanian public scholarly organizations undertook theoretical and applied research activities that were laid out in their constitutions. The first phase of the organization of research work encompassed accumulation, description, classification and investigation of material relating to Lithuanian language. In interdisciplinary terms, an important work started by

linguists and other researchers was the development of scientific terminology in Lithuanian. Societies launched significant linguistic initiatives in the areas of standardization of Lithuanian language, evolution of the press, war history and book art; performed search for sources on the history of the Lithuanian state; investigated problems relating to the quality of scientific publications and composition of bibliography; addressed other issues important for both the academic community and an increasingly sophisticated public of the time.

The second phase in the operation of humanities-related learned societies encompassed activities directed at a more exhaustive discussion of study results and preparation of research works for publication. Professional planning of conferences, meetings and other scientific events and hot topics of scientific discussions attest to an important role of scholarly organizations in the intellectual life of independent Lithuania.

Many of the organizations issued scientific publication series that attempted to combine science and knowledge popularization. For example, the Society for Lithuanian History consisting of professional historians issued the journal titled *Praeitis (The Past)* edited by Augustinas Janulaitis, an active member of the historians community. Funds for the publication of the journal were provided by the Commission on Book Publishing operating under the Ministry of Education, which included *The Past* in the list of subsidized publications. The financial support enabled publishing the first two issues of the journal in 600 copies. Periodical publications were published by linguists, writers, and war historians as well.

The published material included other types of publication series as well. Among them are volumes of congress publications of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science, which reflected the activities of the organization and its members during congresses. The interwar years saw publication of the material from all the three congresses held.

The Society of 27 Book Lovers issued *The Yearbook of the Society of 27 Book Lovers*, which published articles of the society members on the issues of the history of Lithuanian press and provided much factual and biographical material and information on publications relating to book science. In addition, it published data on the activity of the society itself. The first volume of the yearbook appeared in 1933. The publications issued by the organization were representative of its work and beneficial for the general public, though the total output was not large – it consisted of two volumes of the yearbook and several individual publications.

Monographs and collective publications produced by societies' members also contributed to the advancement of Lithuanian culture. Learned societies of Lithuanian linguists were active intermediaries in publication of scholarly literature. Organizations maintained scholarly ties with researchers abroad and with the institutions they represented, participated in international scientific and cultural events, and sent their publications to book fairs.

Along with development of publishing activity and improvement of the quality of the contents of publications, members of scholarly societies also made reviews and evaluated drafts for publication prepared by other authors and attempted to measure their benefits to society and educational institutions. Generally, state and public institutionalization of science in independent Lithuania stimulated development of scholarly literature: in 1920 scholarly works made up only 4 per cent of all the publications, whereas with the establishment of some scientific bodies and organizations their portion increased to 20 per cent in 1925 and 36 per cent in 1930. Nonetheless the publishing activity and other initiatives carried out by the societies discussed in this book were irregular and depended on the consistency and activeness of member participation, their proficiency, and the attractiveness and relevance of the promoted material, along with the priorities in the interests of the public.

In addition to publishing, the social activities of Lithuanian learned societies comprised organization of public events, such as contests, public lectures given by society members, broadcasts on *Radiofonas*, organization of exhibitions to mark special events and so on. Many of the organizations were dominated by the view that the social role of their members shall be limited to research-based reports, lectures and factual material in the domestic popular press. The right balance between science and popularization was an important issue for all the scientific institutions of the time. Humanities-related scholarly organizations attempted harmonising research orientation and the forms of their activity with public needs; they sought to attract public attention to hot cultural, educational or practical everyday issues, though not all of them succeeded in acquiring a strong position under the conditions of the time or gaining sufficient support from the public.

During the period under discussion, humanities-related learned societies of independent Lithuania made a progress in their activity both within scholarly environment and within a wider public and were partially meeting their aims. It was attempted to develop the internal and external ties further and attract better financial support for the scholarly and educational activity. The educational ini-

tiatives of humanities organizations in the period from 1918 through to 1940 are to be viewed as an important contribution to the building of the overall 20th-century humanities culture in Lithuania.

In the interwar years, Lithuanian scientific and cultural organizations, headquartered in Vilnius which was then under the Polish rule, operated under complicated conditions. In the general context of institutionalization of Lithuanian science, the organizational and scientific experience of the Lithuanian Society of Science was of special importance. Right from its establishment in 1907, the society not only united its members for the scholarly and educational projects, but also sought to involve foreign scientists and organizations, developed international ties and promoted scientific and educational initiatives in the arising Lithuanian state. Though due to political circumstances Lithuanian researchers working in Vilnius region were separated from the independent Lithuanian state in 1920, cooperation continued even under unfavourable conditions.

The society further maintained ties with Lithuanian studies researchers abroad. Foreign researchers used the material collected by the organization, provided support and information for it, and helped establishing contacts with foreign scientific and educational institutions, scholarly societies and other organizations. Foreign scientists also made reviews of the research works presented by their colleagues in Vilnius. During the period under discussion the international ties maintained by the Lithuanian Society of Science helped identifying its main research direction – Lithuanian studies. In mid-1940s the organization had contacts with 18 institutions abroad.

A significant role in maintaining the organization's scientific activity under the conditions of the time was played by its leader Jonas Basanavičius who involved in the society Lithuanians from Vilnius region. Basanavičius' encouragement to collect folklore expanded the scope of this initiative – it was due to him that much folk material from Vilnius region was added to the collection and that folklore came to be collected by teachers and pupils. The experience accumulated in the field of folklore and ethnic culture studies still bears historiographic significance nowadays.

Between the wars the Lithuanian Society of Science attempted to maintain good professional scientific and cultural contacts with the science institutions and organizations representing Poles and other nationalities in Vilnius. Communication with intellectuals from different national communities residing in Vilnius had

been maintained for many years and involved not only exchange of scientific literature and information, but also organization of scientific presentations and public lectures. The work experience, the material collected and the studies carried out by the scholarly organizations of the different national communities of Vilnius region was viewed by Lithuanian researchers as an important part of Lithuanian scientific and general cultural heritage. During the period under discussion intense activities were carried out by Polish scholars and new public scholarly organizations and institutions were established in Vilnius by Jewish, Byelorussian, Karaim, and Tatar communities, which collected and studied material relating to their own historical-cultural heritage.

The process of science institutionalization, which had been developed in independent Lithuania, was negatively affected by the Soviet occupation and the establishment of the political regime that strictly regulated all areas of public life. A study of historical documents revealed that from the beginning of the Soviet occupation on 15 June 1940 till Lithuania's forced inclusion in the USSR in early August of the same year reforms were carried out hastily and under political and ideological pressure.

In the beginning of the Soviet occupation it was sought to use the still-applicable laws of the Republic of Lithuania and to clear the way for Soviet reforms, which undoubtedly had to affect both public and state-governed science institutions. Prohibition of the activity of many public scholarly organizations was enforced on the basis of the aforementioned Law on Societies of independent Lithuania, though the fate of some public associations of intellectuals was decided taking exceptionally radical measures. For example, the Soviet regime not only prohibited the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science, but also destroyed its library, confiscated securities held at the bank, and arrested many of its members.

Societies of linguists, historians and scholars in some other fields attempted to continue their activity for some time, but they were floundering. The members were soon to experience Soviet repression; part of them withdrew to the West.

Following the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR in August 1940 a speedy reorganization of science was started. The activity of the majority of science institutions was suspended or disrupted. From the organizational point of view this may be viewed as the beginning of the institutionalization of science along the Soviet lines, i.e. the creation of a network of entirely new science institutions and organizations adopting strict Soviet criteria of cadres selection and certification and adapting the independent Lithuania's projects to establish

the academy of sciences and to transfer the major portion of scientific potential from Kaunas to Vilnius.

In the autumn and winter of 1940 the Soviet system of the award of academic degrees and titles was introduced and new requirements of research work experience and training came to be applied. In order to be selected for further activity at research and education institutions, scholars in the humanities had to satisfy especially strict ideological and political requirements. Simultaneously a Soviet scheme of the organization and coordination of the activities of research and education institutions was implemented.

This pointed to the official intention of the transformation of science system, i.e. an attempt to adapt to the Soviet system suitable researchers, to employ their organizational skills, projects, and developed research basis thus camouflaging the implementation of the Soviet model of science organization, which rejects 'misfit' intellectuals. The same period saw appearing the first marks of an unofficial science transformation, which was aimed at the preservation of the authentic scientific heritage, base, cadres, and research continuity and at the adaptation to the new environment of uninterrupted pressure.

Forming of the principal scientific institution, the Academy of Sciences, was begun not only with the transfer of the Institute for Lithuanian Studies from Kaunas to Vilnius in the October and November of 1940, but also with the passing of the property, valuable material, books and other resources of closed scientific organizations of Vilnius to the academy. Simultaneously it was the transfer of cultural heritage, which had been long assembled and studied by Lithuanians and other nationalities residing in Lithuania. But the preservation and further enhancement of the heritage had not been the central focus of the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian SSR, which was established in early 1941 and was initially concentrated on the consolidation of the Soviet system. Care of the cultural heritage of the Lithuanian nation was largely exercised within the limits of individual initiative and freedom of action allowed.

There were attempts to begin some new public organizations of scientists, but the authorities, though permitting social activity of scholars, did not tolerate different opinions and tried to unify Lithuanian institutions of higher education and science and to establish new organizations following the Soviet model as quickly as possible. On the other hand, emphasis was laid on the importance of „local initiatives“, therefore it was sought to direct the activity of scholars in proper direction.

Soviet lifestyles and political and ideological pressure had by no means become acceptable for all the new organizers of science – some of them still had illusions to safeguard and to continue previously started research projects and to foster cultural heritage. Five out of thirteen members elected to the Academy of Sciences in 1941, including the humanities scholars Mykolas Biržiška, Vaclovas Biržiška, and Vincas Krėvė Mickevičius, fled to the West during the war.

The Soviet regime encouraged the birth of duality: along with the official conduct patterns that were based on the imposed Soviet value system, there existed a hidden behaviour of society members, which was naturally influenced by ethnic culture. The coexistence and permanent interaction between the two different layers of behaviour lead to the acquisition of an experience, which may be characterized as the ability to act under the occupational regime; in other words, the society acquired the capability to exist in the environment of total sovietization. This dramatic experience manifested itself as the ability to manoeuvre and to seek at least minimal self-expression, i.e. to have an authentic cultural life. Nevertheless, the social activity of scholars and the possibilities of forming organizations and clustering intellectuals were highly restricted.

Only with the changing political situation in Lithuania in the late 1980s the question of the reestablishment of public scientific organizations and legitimization of their activity became part of a new cultural movement and a proof of the continuity of Lithuanian culture and its nourishment. The national revival that was spreading throughout the country in 1988 brought about a decision to reestablish under the same name the Society for Lithuanian History that functioned between 1929 and 1940. The Society for Lithuanian Language was also restored in the same year.

In 1989 the process of the restoration of the activity of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Science, which had operated in exile, began. In 1992 its headquarters were moved to Lithuania and the academy started to organize events and to publish publications. Local and émigré scientists began restoration of other scientific organizations, which was based on the cultural values and organizational practices of the interwar period, though it was attempted to adjust to the changed times as well.