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# **Names of Newborns in Latvia: Recent Changes**

## Abstract

The aim of the article is to introduce the names given to newborns in Latvia during the last 16 years, in order to identify the latest tendencies for choosing names. The article provides a comparison between the contemporary situation and historical data on the most popular names 100 years ago. There are some noticeable movements in the anthroponymic stock of Latvia. Increasingly, newborns are given two or even three names, although by law it is allowed to have no more than two first-names. An inherited family name has often been chosen as a second name, but more frequently the second name reflects national identity. More and more parents choose names for their children that would be international, easily pronounced, short, and without diacritical marks (*Martin* instead of Latv. traditional *Mārtiņš*). The number of borrowed foreign first names has increased rapidly. Originality has become a factor in name choosing: a lot of neologisms based on Latvian appellatives, mostly with the primary semantics of nature, have been coined (*Kastanis* 'chestnut', *Zemis* 'land'). Though diminutive forms as official names are allowed in Latvia, they are not popular anymore. It is quite common for parents to change the gender of a name (e.g., *Zane* f. > *Zanis* m.). It is fashionable today to give first names of toponymic origin (*Beverīna*, *Turaida*). The article also presents public attitudes towards these changes. A short overview on the comparison of the latest tendencies in neighbouring countries is given as well.

## Keywords

Latvian, onomastics, anthroponymy, given names, identity

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to show the dynamic of the names of newborns in Latvia: 1) to introduce the names of newborns in Latvia during the last 16 years, 2) to give comparison to historical data – the most popular names 100 years ago, 3) to introduce the latest tendencies and trends for choosing the names of newborn babies and to compare with the tendencies in neighbouring countries. This research is based on data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs Ministry of Republic of Latvia (Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde, henceforth PMLP) – lists of names of children born between 2004–2020. 54,977 different names and name combinations given to babies born during these years were analysed. In addition, social network sites, and comments from the inhabitants of Latvia on choosing names for newborns, were also analysed.

It is useful to mention the sources from which young parents usually choose a name for their newborn baby. First, there is a popular dictionary of Latvian first names: *Latviešu personvārdu vārdnīca* (Siliņš, 1990) – it is rather old and has to be supplemented with new first names. There are 8000 first names included in this book, 400 of which are very rare names. In addition, traditional Latvian calendar names are very popular among Latvians (one can find them in almost every Latvian family). This includes about 1000 first names. An enlarged list of calendar names (Bušs, 1999; *Tavs vārdadienu kalendārs*, 2004) was published twice – this includes 5870 first names, and also quite rare names.

A brief note about legislation of the Republic of Latvia must be represented. Giving personal names, using them, as well as changing them is governed by the “Official Language Law”<sup>1</sup> (Section 19, par. 3; Section 23, par. 3). Cabinet Regulation No. 114 “Regulations Regarding the Written Form and Use in the Latvian Language of Personal Names, and also Identification Thereof”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Valsts valodas likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 428/433, 21.12.1999. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/14740-valsts-valodas-likums> (English translation: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/14740>).

<sup>2</sup> Ministru kabineta noteikumi Nr. 114: Noteikumi par personvārdu rakstību un lietošanu latviešu valodā, kā arī to identifikāciju. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 36, 05.03.2004. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/85209-noteikumi-par-personvardu-rakstibu-un-lietosanu-latviesu-valoda-ka-ari-to-identifikaciju> (English translation: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/85209>).

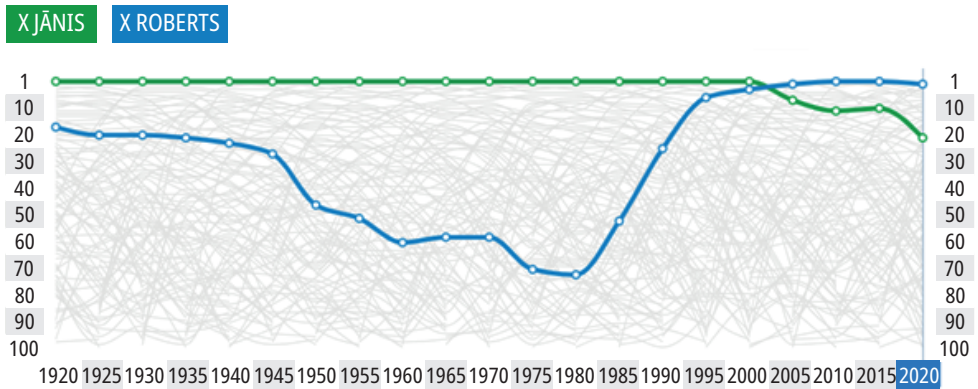
clearly defines how to use personal names. In short, the essence of these laws and regulations is as follows: the personal name must fit into the Latvian language grammatical system (only letters included in the Latvian alphabet are allowed, names must have endings, to show the gender, etc). The number of names in Latvia is defined by the “Law On Registration of Civil Status Documents”<sup>3</sup> (Section 32, par. 1): this law – among other things – states that a child may not be given more than two names (as a comparison: in Lithuania they are limited to 2, in Estonia – 3, in Finland – 3 [or lately, according to new legislation 4], in Germany – 4, in Switzerland – 6, in Austria and Sweden the number is not limited, etc.). During Soviet times two and three names were not allowed to be recorded in passports and other official documents in Latvia (Balode, 2018a, pp. 68–69; Balode, 2020, p. 30).

## 2. Most popular Latvian names over the centuries

If somebody were to ask about the most popular Latvian first name, it would be very easy to answer – it is the male name *Jānis*. Figure 1, a graph from the Statistics Department, clearly testifies that during the last 100 years *Jānis* was in first place until the beginning of this millennium.

The first name *Jānis* is still the most popular nowadays when considering all generations (according to PMLP data, 48,917 in 2018, 48,220 in 2020, 47,637 in 2021) (see Figure 2). However, more recently, *Jānis* is no longer counted in the Top 10 list of names for newborns (see also chapter 3.9). The other most popular male names are: *Andris* (18,847), *Juris* (15,143), *Edgars* (14,514), *Māris* (12,823), *Mārtiņš* (12,754), *Aivars* (11,236), *Artūrs* (10,406), *Kaspars* (8,684), *Ivars* (8,045). It can be clearly seen that the second most popular name *Andris* is almost three times less popular than *Jānis*. Much larger variety can be observed among the most popular female first names: *Kristīne* (13,029), *Inese* (12,537), *Ilze* (11,871),

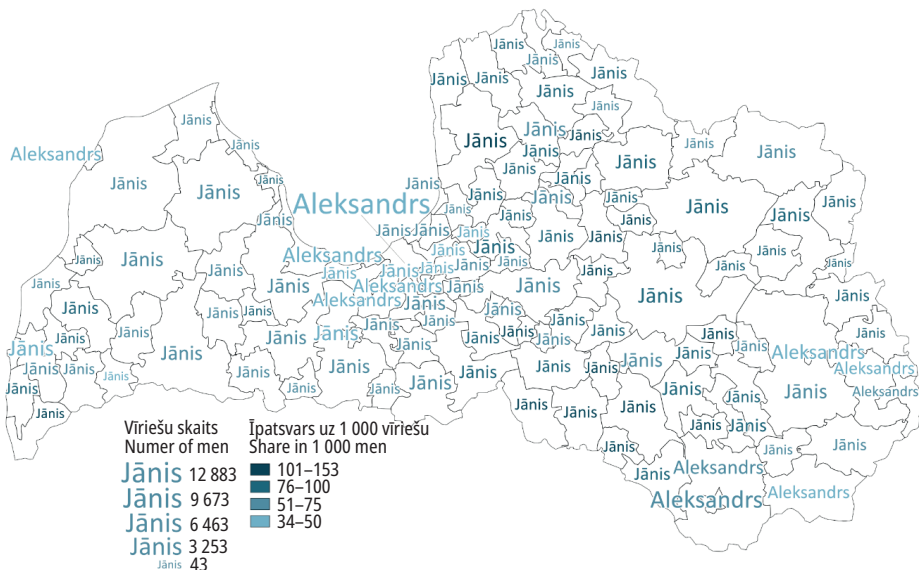
<sup>3</sup> Civilstāvokļa aktu reģistrācijas likums. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 197, 14.12.2012. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/253442-civilstavokla-aktu-registracijas-likums> (English translation: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/253442>).



**Figure 1. Popularity of the male names *Jānis* (green colour) and *Roberts* (blue colour), period 1920–2020 (CSB)**

Source: [https://tools.csb.gov.lv/names/lv/0/0/20/127\\_211](https://tools.csb.gov.lv/names/lv/0/0/20/127_211)

Populārākie vīriešu personvārdi 2020. gada sākumā  
Most popular forenames of men at the beginning of the year 2020

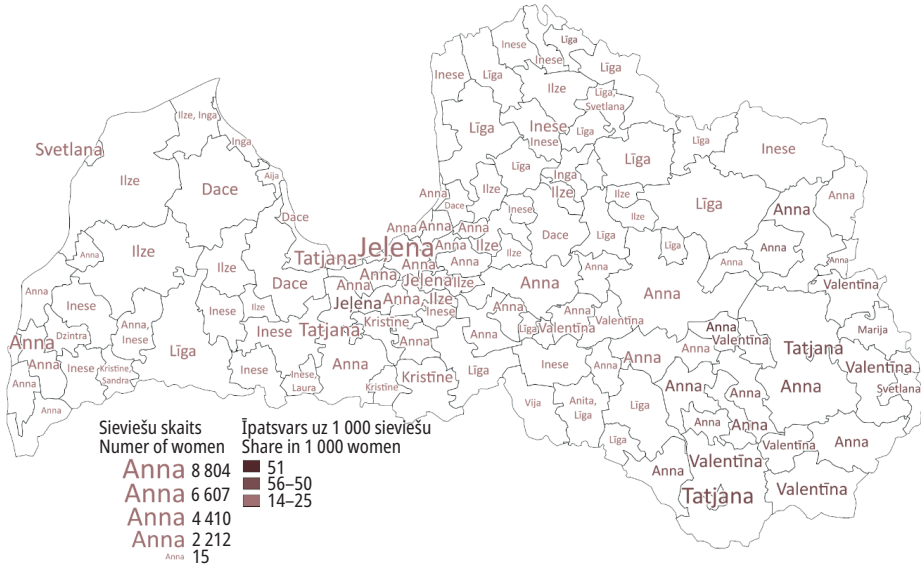


**Figure 2. Most popular first names of Latvian males at the beginning of the year 2020 (CSB)**

Source: <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/iedzivotaju-skaits/publikacijas-un-infografikas/8824-popularakie>

*Inga* (11,070), *Līga* (10,303), *Anna* (10,184), *Dace* (10,093), *Anita* (9,264), *Ieva* (9,100), *Laura* (8,554) (see Figure 3; more examples: Balode, 2019).

Populārākie sieviešu personvārdi 2020. gada sākumā  
 Most popular forenames of women at the beginning of the year 2020



**Figure 3. Most popular first names of Latvian females at the beginning of the year 2020 (CSB)**

Source: <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/population/publications-and-infographics/9820-most-popular-forenames>

The first and second most popular female names – *Kristīne* and *Inese* – are almost equal in terms of frequency. It is easy to compare the names of all Latvians with the names of newborns in Latvia in 2020 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Name of newborns in Latvia in 2020**

Rank	Girls	Boys
1	<i>Emīlija</i> (235)	<i>Olivers</i> (163)
2	<i>Sofija</i> (227)	<i>Marks</i> (163)
3	<i>Alise</i> (219)	<i>Roberts</i> (159)
4	<i>Marta</i> (159)	<i>Emīls</i> (154)
5	<i>Anna</i> (145)	<i>Gustavs</i> (148)
6	<i>Amēlija</i> (140)	<i>Markuss</i> (145)
7	<i>Paula</i> (117)	<i>Kārlis</i> (133)
8	<i>Elza</i> (110)	<i>Jēkabs</i> (132)
9	<i>Dārta</i> (110)	<i>Ernests</i> (131)
10	<i>Estere</i> (104)	<i>Adrians</i> (112)

Source: PMLP.

When compared to the Top-10 names of all Latvians, there is only one matching name with the newborns – *Anna*. Names for newborns are mostly new names (the largest surprise was the male name *Olivers*, earlier unknown in Latvia, as the most popular name, as well as such rare names as *Marks*, *Adrians*). All these male and female names, without exception, are of foreign origin (only *Dārta* is a Latvian hypocoristic from *Doroteja*). But these names are very similar to the names from the newborns' grandparents' and even great-grandparents' generations, cf. Top-10 names of 1920s, 1960s and 1980s (Table 2).

**Table 2. Most common first names of the 1920s, 1960s, 1980s**

Rank	Girls			Boys		
	1920s	1960s	1980s	1920s	1960s	1980s
1	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Sandra</i>	<i>Kristīne</i>	<i>Jānis</i>	<i>Jānis</i>	<i>Jānis</i>
2	<i>Velta</i>	<i>Inese</i>	<i>Līga</i>	<i>Pēteris</i>	<i>Andris</i>	<i>Edgars</i>
3	<i>Mirdza</i>	<i>Iveta</i>	<i>Inga</i>	<i>Kārlis</i>	<i>Juris</i>	<i>Mārtiņš</i>
4	<i>Marija</i>	<i>Inga</i>	<i>Ilze</i>	<i>Antons</i>	<i>Aivars</i>	<i>Artūrs</i>
5	<i>Aina</i>	<i>Anīta</i>	<i>Ieva</i>	<i>Arvīds</i>	<i>Māris</i>	<i>Kaspars</i>

Rank	Girls			Boys		
	1920s	1960s	1980s	1920s	1960s	1980s
6	<i>Dzidra</i>	<i>Dace</i>	<i>Inese</i>	<i>Jāzeps</i>	<i>Aigars</i>	<i>Andris</i>
7	<i>Ausma</i>	<i>Ilze</i>	<i>Linda</i>	<i>Arnolds</i>	<i>Normunds</i>	<i>Māris</i>
8	<i>Veronika</i>	<i>Daiga</i>	<i>Elīna</i>	<i>Alberts</i>	<i>Ivars</i>	<i>Juris</i>
9	<i>Milda</i>	<i>Ināra</i>	<i>Zane</i>	<i>Staņislavs</i>	<i>Ainārs</i>	<i>Gatis</i>
10	<i>Elza</i>	<i>Aija</i>	<i>Agnese</i>	<i>Voldemārs</i>	<i>Guntis</i>	<i>Kristaps</i>

Source: CBS.

There are many publications on the history and traditions of Latvian first names (Blese, 1929; Siliņš, 1990; Bušs, 2004; Hirša, 2004; Siliņa-Piņķe, 2004, 2005, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Jansone, 2010; etc.), but there is little research completed on the contemporary situation of first names.

### 3. Main tendencies of the first names of newborns in Latvia

#### 3.1. Two or more names

For a long time, during the Soviet era, it was permitted to choose only one name. So, after the restoration of independence of Latvia, especially during the last 25 years, in Latvia – as well as in Lithuania – it was and still is fashionable to give at least two names, for example:

*Filips Emanuels*<sup>4</sup> and *Anna Emanuela* – the names of a brother and sister, *Sebastians Matiass*, *Gerhards Daniels*, *Markuss Leonards*, *Raiens Kristiāns*, *Laila Aleksandra*, *Annemarija Lorēna*, *Samanta Beatrise*, *Santa Marta*. Parents often try to give more than two first names despite the law, giving three names: *Aleksandra Elisa Estere*, *Džeims Edvīns Jānis*, *Dāvids Jānis Tomass*, *Oktavia Natalī Velta*; or through other methods: *Nilsmihaels Mariansgabriels* – actually four

<sup>4</sup> In order to protect private data, this article does not specify the year of birth of the person.



names combined into two official names. Here are some comments on the habit of giving two names to babies:

*Nedēļas nogalē izmetu loku uz laukiem, (...) māsīcas jau kopā trijus bērņelus sadzemdējušas.. visiem bērņeļiem divi vārdiņi (...) arī pēdējā mode* [I went to the countryside during the weekend, (...) cousins have already given birth to three children (...) all babies have two names (...) also the latest fashion] (AN2, n.d.).

### 3.1.1. Second name – inherited name in the family

Inherited names in the family have been historically popular, not only in Latvia. Giving two names nowadays also returns to this tradition: for example: *Emīlija Emma* (explained in the comments – both names were given in honour of both grandmothers). *Lauma Ieva* (*Ieva* – given in honour of a grandmother), *Deins Jānis*, *Ivans Jānis*, *Džarnails Jānis* (all these second male names *Jānis* – given in honour of a grandfather).

### 3.1.2. Second name shows ethnic identity

In our era of globalization, when a lot of Latvians emigrate to other countries and establish mixed families, there is a tendency to choose at least one second name for their child which shows their ethnic roots, i.e., they express their identity in names. For instance: two sisters in a mixed Italian-Latvian family were called *Džoija Anna* and *Ambra Laima*: *Anna* is the most international female name, but *Laima* is known only in Lithuania and Latvia – *Laima* being the name of a Baltic goddess. Some further examples: *Fabians Dzintars*, *Metjū Dzintars*: *Dzintars* is a male name with the meaning ‘amber’ used only in Latvian; *Ajami Daina*: female name *Daina* and male name *Dainis* ‘song’ are known as first names only in Latvia and Lithuania; *Džans Luka Erols Jānis*, *Bleikss Lūkass Jānis*, *Konors Jānis*, *Lindens Alens Jānis*: *Jānis*, as already noted, has been the most popular Latvian name for the past few centuries and it is very common in Latvian families to see the name *Jānis* in three generations (see more comments in chapter 3.9.); *Jindržihs Namejs*, *Aramiss Namejs*, *Aristots Namejs*, *Justs Namejs*, *Livio Namejs Udo Luidži*: the second name *Namejs* is connected with the romanticization of the history of Latvians – *Namejs* or

*Nameisis* was a Semigallian (one of the historical Latvian lands) duke in the second half of the 13th century. The name *Namejs* has recently become rather popular in Latvia – there are 19 people listed with it as a first name and 74 with it as a second name.

### 3.1.3. Playing with two names

Parents who chose two names for their child often seemed to be playing with names phonetically or semantically. It is typical to harmonize the initial letters of these names (going further than the usual harmonization of the initial letters of the first name and surname), and also to match names by sound, for example: *Adrija Adrijana, Milda Matilda, Maira Mairita, Unda Una, Arta Marta, Ita Anita, Mārcis Mārtiņš, Mārtiņš Mārcis, Mairis Māris*.

Quite often two similar names are chosen – names of the same etymology, but borrowed from different languages: *Elza Elīza, Māra Marija, Māris Mariuss, Juris Jurgis*. Parents also often play with the same name using diminutive or hypocoristic forms, for instance: *Ieva Ieviņa, Liene Lienīte, Ance Anna, Viktorija Vika, Rūdis Rūdofls, Raivis Raivo*.

There are examples when parents are playing with two names not only phonetically, but also semantically, i.e., names are specifically selected to match the primary semantics, for instance: *Pērle Mirdza* < Latv. *pērle* ‘pearl’ + *mirdzēt* ‘shine’, *Ilze Bitīte* < first name *Ilze* < *Elizabete* + *bite* ‘bee’, *Ešlija Smaida* < first name *Ešlija* + *smaidīt* ‘to smile’, ‘Ešlija is smiling’, *Gunta Gaida* < *gunta* ‘fire, flame’ + *gaidīt* ‘to wait’, ‘fire is waiting’.

### 3.1.4. Second name – Juniors

It is natural if there is the same name for father and son, that they add *Senior* and *Junior*, but a new tradition is to mention this additional name as an official name even in documents: *Ādams Juniors, Daniels Juniors, Ēriks Juniors, Jānis Juniors, Markuss Juniors, Raimonds Juniors*.

### 3.2. International, easy to pronounce name, preferably without diacritical marks

There is a very clearly expressed tendency not to choose a traditional Latvian first name, but an international name instead. Parents especially try to avoid names with Latvian diacritical marks (long vowels with macron *ā, ē, ī, ū*, palatalized consonants *ģ, ķ, ļ, ņ*, consonants with caron *č, š, ž*). Examples from recent years include:

*Amelija* instead of Latv. traditional *Amēlija*, *Beate* instead of traditional *Beāte*, *Emilija* instead of traditional *Emīlija*, *Eriks* instead of *Ēriks*, etc. Even *Martins* among the newborns of 2020 is more widespread than very old Latvian form *Mārtiņš* (with three diacritical marks!): cf. *Martins* – registered 83x and *Mārtiņš* – 52x. On two occasions these names were even ‘joined’ together, one as a first name, the other as a second: *Martins Mārtiņš*, *Mārtiņš Martins*.

According to parents’ thoughts in social media comments, such names without diacritics are suitable for the European, or even global, environment:

(...) *vārdam tāda starptautiska pieskaņa, kas saprotama arī citviet* [the name has an international connotation that can be understood elsewhere] (Lāsma, n.d.);

*Tu izvēlējies vārdu ar garajiem un mīkstinātajiem burtiem, kas paši par sevi nereti rada problēmas. Īpaši, ja ir darīšana ar ārzemniekiem vai datoriem, kas nesaprot latviski ;) ?* [You have chosen a name with long vowels and soft consonant letters, which often causes problems. especially if you are dealing with foreigners or computers who do not understand Latvian ;) ?] (Made, n.d.).

### 3.3. Short (1- or 2-syllable) names

Many Latvian traditional names, especially male names, are rather long, with 3 or more syllables. About half of the most popular 100 female names also have 3 syllables, some even 4 or 5: (e.g., *Evelīna*, *Elizabete*, *Valentīna*, *Aleksandrs*, *Voldemārs*; see Balode, 2019, p. 154). These are two groups of short names becoming fashionable: old hypocoristic names and short new borrowed names from different languages.

### 3.3.1. Old hypocoristic names

Nowadays it is much more popular to give a newborn a short name, often hypocoristic, instead of traditional full names, for instance: female names *Mare, Guste, Katre, Frīda, Lība, Zete, Jūle, Jete, Kate*; male names *Tenis, Antis, Gusts, Krišs, Edžus, Mārcis, Mikus, Uve/Ūve*. There is one girl registered by two names *Kate Katrīna* – the hypocoristic form has been chosen as the first name, and the full form as the second.

### 3.3.2. New short, borrowed names

Modern Latvian families more often prefer to choose borrowed short names instead of long names, for example: 2-syllable female names *Bea, Gia, Ima, Uma*; 1-syllable male names: *Arts, Neds, Bērs, Bils, Deins, Deivs, Diks, Dāgs, Kajs, Klīvs, Nords, Rems, Rets*. Even indeclinable names ending with *-o*: *Neo, Teo, Uno*, which are not characteristic for Latvian anthroponyms.

### 3.4. New borrowed names

During the last 20 years a lot of new names borrowed from different languages flooded into Latvia. Very often they are names of movie/book heroes, musicians, athletes, other celebrities. For example:

- *Bārts Bārts Neils* – hero from “The Simpsons” series.
- *Ronja* – “Ronja, the Robber’s Daughter”.
- *Skārleta / Skarleta* – novel and movie “Gone with the Wind”.
- *Šanele* – *Coco Chanel* – French fashion designer and the name of the hero of a novel recently translated and published in Latvia.
- *Keita, Keitija, Ketija, Kēta, Keitija, Keisija* – perhaps connected with the popularity of the princess Catherine Elizabeth Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge (U.K.).
- *Celīna, Celina, Celine, Selina, Selīna* – given name with many spelling variations, possibly inspired by the name of the singer *Celine Dion*.
- *Aminata* – Eurovision Latvian singer *Aminata*.

Moreover, names of the heroes from youth film series and soap operas are favourites among young Latvian parents: *Abigeila, Ambera, Braiens, Brenda, Brendons, Daimonda, Džastina, Dženifera, Džesija, Džesika, Džoja, Eimija, Eipri-la, Keisija, Kellija, Kevins, Kevins, Kimberlija, Maikls, Megija, Meredita, Raiens, Rainers, Reičela, Trojs, Vanesa*, etc.

Most of these new borrowed names are of English origin, but sometimes it is difficult to determine which language the loan came from, for example: *Amara, Arabella, Braits, Džuzepe, Ervands, Ervijs, Everts, Franks, Henita, Juna, Katana, Keira, Konkords, Lučana, Manuella, Milana, Milisa, Orlando, Romeo, Rūbens, Šarlize, Viorika*.

Even these new borrowed names are very often followed by a Latvian traditional name, for example: *Braiens Mārīņš, Džeims Viesturs, Džons Jānis, Maikls Jānis, Maikls Pēteris, Tasnīma Rasa, Bridžita Madara*.

As was concluded by Latvian TV3 broadcast “900 sekundes” (2014, January 7):

*Arvien vairāk vecāku saviem jaundzimušajiem izvēlas starptautiskus vārdus, kas ir labskanīgi gan latviešu, gan angļu valodā. Pavisam maz ir tādu, kas saviem bērniem dod latviskus vārdus. [More and more parents are choosing international names for their newborns that sound good both in Latvian and English. There are very few who give their children Latvian names.]*

However, this is only partially true – see chapter 3.5.

### 3.5. Neologisms based on the Latvian language

The name in Latvian contemporary society, especially among young artist families, is used as an adornment, as a market commodity. According to Leslie Dunkling (1993), in the English-speaking world, the originality of a name is a very strong reason for naming a baby in a certain way: “Some (...) parents feel (...) that they should invent a name for their child. Their thinking appears to be that they have created the child concerned, so they should also create the child’s name” (Dunkling, 1993, pp. 79–80). Perhaps there are parents with the same thinking in Latvia – they are ready to invent a new name which hasn’t earlier been recorded. Such anthroponymic neologisms often are transparent from the point of view of the primary semantics in Latvian

language. There are a lot of unusual new first names coined based on Latvian appellatives, mostly from the etymons of nature vocabulary (Plēsuma & Balode, 2013), for instance, etymon of fauna:

*Kamene* < Latv. *kamene* ‘bumblebee’, *Bitīte* < Latv. *bite* ‘bee’ + dim. suffix *-īte*, *Spāre* and *Spārīte* < Latv. *spāre* ‘dragonfly’, *Gaijala* < Latv. *gaijals* ‘duck, common goldeneye’, *Žubīte* < Latv. ‘bird, chaffinch’, *Lūsiņa* < Latv. *lūsis* ‘lynx’ + dim. *-iņa*, *Vanags* < Latv. *vanags* ‘hawk’, *Hugo Vilks* < Latv. *vilks* ‘wolf’, *Līva Lapsa* < Latv. *lapsa* ‘fox’.

Parents of the baby girl *Lapsa* wrote about the motives for choosing such an unusual name:

(...) *Mums šis vārds liekas ļoti latvisks, labskanīgs, turklāt šis ir īsts lapsu gads - tās ir visapkārt - gan apģērbu uzdrukās, gan ietinamajos papīros, reklāmās, traukos utt. Mums šķiet forši, ka paaugoties mazā Lapsa varēs ēst lapsiņkonfektes (“Fazer” ražojuma), dungot “What does the fox say” un skatīties “Fox TV” kanālu.* [To us, this name seems very Latvian, good-sounding, moreover, this is a real year of foxes – they are all around – both in clothing prints and in wrapping papers, advertisements, dishes, etc. We find it cool that growing up, Little Fox will be able to eat fox candies (a product of “Fazer”), sing “What does the fox say” and watch “Fox TV”.] (Jolanta, n.d.).

There are many new names, coined based on Latvian appellatives with the primary meaning of flora, for example:

*Kastanis* < Latv. *kastanis* ‘chestnut’, *Zieds* < Latv. *zieds* ‘flower’, *Lapa* < Latv. *lapa* ‘leaf’, *Mellene* < Latv. *mellene* ‘blueberry’.

Other new names stemming from natural objects included names such as:

*Upe* < Latv. *upe* ‘river’, *Salna* < Latv. *salna* ‘frost’, *Rītarasa* < Latv. *rīts* ‘morning’ + *rasa* ‘dew’, *Vēja* < Latv. *vējš* ‘wind’, *Vētra* < Latv. *vētra* ‘storm’, *Jēkabs Pērkons* < Latv. *pērkons* ‘thunder’, *Mia Vasara* < Latv. *vasara* ‘summer’.

There are also neologisms of abstract meaning, for example: *Brīve* < Latv. *brīve* ‘freedom’, *Dzeja* < Latv. *dzeja* ‘poetry’, *Gaismiņa* < Latv. *gaisma*

‘light’ + dim. *-īna*, *Tagadne* < *tagadne* ‘present time’, *Klāvs Klusums* < Latv. *klusums* ‘silence, quietude’.

Even gemstones as personal names were registered recently (between 2016 and 2020): *Smaragds* ‘emerald’, *Rubīns* ‘ruby’, *Pērle* ‘pearl’ (this last one is often used both as a first name and a second name: *Elizabete Pērle*, *Emma Pērle*, *Karolīna Pērle*, *Odrija Pērle*, *Stefānija Pērle*). Some very unusual and very rare names were given to newborns in Latvia during the last several years: *Kosmoss* ‘space’, *Marss* ‘Mars’, *Cēzars* (2x) ‘Caesar’, *Barons* (2x) ‘baron’, *Pirāts* ‘pirate’, *Feja* (3x) ‘fairy’.

Compound names coined on the basis of Latvian appellatives are not characteristic for the Latvian first name system, but some of the new compound names were given during the last 20 years. They were mostly male names: *Saulgaitis* < *saule* ‘sun’ + *gaita* ‘walk’, *Saulvedis* < *saule* ‘sun’ + *vest* ‘to lead, to guide’, *Mierdars* < *miers* ‘peace’ + *darīt* ‘to make’, with the only female name being: *Mīlcerīte* < *mīļš* ‘lovely’ + *cerēt* ‘to hope’.

It should be noted that in Latvian law regarding names and naming, it is stated that the name must serve its main function – to mark personal identity, but at the same time the name must not be offensive or derogatory, and the name must not make it difficult for the person to integrate into society. Compliance of a child’s name with Latvian laws not only relates to its spelling in the Latvian language, but also to whether the name corresponds to the best interests of the child and the society (Neimanis, 2016).

### 3.6. Names change their gender

All Latvian names have their grammatical indicator of gender, which is the ending: female name endings *-a*, *-e*, male name endings *-s*, *-is*, *-š* and sometimes *-o*. Traditionally there are many name pairs which differ only in ending: *Andra* f. – *Andris* m., *Daina* f. – *Dainis* m., *Jūlija* f. – *Jūlijs* m., *Paula* f. – *Pauls* m., etc. Nowadays it is rather characteristic that names change their gender easily, so appear as new names that earlier were not registered in Latvian. For example, a traditional Latvian male name becomes a female name by changing the ending:

*Ervīns* m. > *Ervīna* f., *Gundars* m. > *Gundara* f., *Ilgvars* m. > *Ilgvara* f., *Leons* m. > *Leona* f. Or even more often, a traditional Latvian female name is used as a male name: *Berta* f. > *Berts* m., *Dace* f. > *Dacis* m., *Dite* f. > *Ditis* m.,

*Eleonora f.* > *Eleonors m.*, *Ineta f.* > *Inets m.*, *Klinta f.* > *Klints m.*, *Sarma f.* > *Sarmis m.*, *Zane f.* > *Zanis m.*

### 3.7. Names of toponymic origin

Latvians have not coined many first names based on local place names (in contrast to Latvian surnames, many of which are derived from place names). However, recently, several such newly formed first names were registered. For example, *Rīga*, the name of the capital of Latvia, is rather popular as a first name and as a second name: *Rīga*, *Valensija Rīga*, *Brigita Rīga*. In another example, five girls were recently given the first name *Beverīna* – the name of ancient part of Latvian territory, connected with the romanticization of history, but not used as a toponym nowadays. Two Latvian girls received the name *Turaida* – this is the place of a romantic palace in the middle part of Latvia.

Some names are borrowed from the place names of Europe, for instance: *Londona*, *Milāna* / *Milana*. This clearly corresponds to a fashionable trend in the world, especially among celebrities (cf. one of David Beckham's son's names is *Brooklyn*, Kim Basinger's daughter – *Ireland*, Reese Witherspoon's son's name is *Tennessee*, singer Shakira's son is called *Milan*, guitar player Slash's son's name is *London Emilio*, singer Ashley Simpson's son is called *Bronx Mowgli*) (Fantāzijas lidojumam nav robežu, 2013).

Names of ethnonymic origin are not popular anymore. Only two boys during the last 16 years were named *Latvis* (2018, 2019) < *latvis* 'Latvian'.

### 3.8. Diminutive forms of the first name

During the 1960s, diminutive first names were popular in Latvia. Diminutives (with suffixes *-iņ-* and *-īt-*) can be also used as official names for registration of the person (for more on diminutives in the Latvian first name system see Balode, 2018b). Observations in recent years show that diminutives are no longer chosen by parents, for example, there are no diminutives among 100 of the most popular names of newborns in 2017. The only ones in 2020 were: female first names *Lienīte* < *Liene* < *Helēna*, *Mārīte* < *Māra*, *Elziņa* < *Elza* < *Elizabete*.



More often during the analysed period, diminutives have been chosen as a second name: *Agnija Mudīte, Elza Mārīte, Nora Sarmīte, Samanta Grietiņa, Emīlija Saulīte, Elza Rozīte, Elza Zeltiņa*; with some examples of parents even playing with names: *Ilze Ilzīte, Ieva Ieviņa*. All these diminutives are female names. Only two boys received names in diminutive form: one unusual name, registered for the first time in Latvia – *Miezītis* < *miezis* ‘barley’, and one second name *Edvīns Laimiņš* < *Laimis* < *laima* ‘happiness, fortune, luck’.

### 3.9. Symbolic Latvian name *Jānis*

Last, but not least, returning to the Latvian traditional name *Jānis*, which is the most common name in the country (see chapter 2 and Figure 1 & 2). The first time it was recorded was in Riga in 1290 (Siliņš, 1990, p. 174), but it was not the most widespread first name among Latvians during historical times: for instance, at the beginning of the 17th century the most popular male name was *Hans* (Siliņa-Piņķe, 2014b). During Soviet times this name was given to children in Latvian families as a mark of resistance – to preserve the Latvian identity (Lawson & Balode, 1998), so it was in some way a hidden sign of Latvian cultural heritage. There are a lot of families where the name *Jānis* has been inherited for three or even four generations.

Nowadays there are 47,637 bearers of the name *Jānis*, of which almost 2,000 are non-Latvians (PMLP, data on 11.2021). Though, from the beginning of the new millennium (Bušs 2004, 2005, 2013), the male name *Jānis* is no longer in the TOP-10 list. 25 years ago, there were about 600 newborns named *Jānis* per year. Between 2004 and 2019, 150–200 newborns per year. It seemed that *Jānis* could return, because in some municipalities *Jānis* was the most popular boys’ name (for example, in Sigulda in 2015). However, the latest data does not confirm this trend: in 2020 only 68 boys named *Jānis* were registered in Latvia.

In many cases, parents in Latvia choose *Jānis* as a second name for their children: 42x (2018), 51x (2019). Apparently, the given name *Jānis* often emphasizes ethnic identity both as a first and second name, especially in mixed families or Latvian families living in emigration, for example: *Jānis Maikls, Jānis Bjārne, Jānis Braiss, Jānis Pjotrs, Jānis Elmurads; Deins Jānis, Ivans Jānis, Julius Jānis, Luijs Jānis, Džarnails Jānis*. Double name games are often created, using the same name from other languages: *Jans Jānis, Jānis Jonass, Džons Jānis, Ivans Jānis, Janeks Jānis*.

Despite the general trend of the globalization of personal names, *Jānis* occupies an important place in the Latvian anthroponymy. These are some of the views about the Latvian name *Jānis* expressed in various texts:

*Vislatviskākais vārds (...)* [The most Latvian name] (Draugam, n.d.).

*Deviņas ģimenes dēliem izvēlas īstu latviešu vārdu* [A real Latvian name chosen for the sons in nine families] (Gaidamoviča, 2014, p. 1).

*Daudz Jāņu zinu, ne par vienu neko sliktu nevaru teikt* [I know a lot of Jānis, I can't say anything bad about them] (Danosa, 2018).

*Arī būt par Jāni kādam var nepatikt (...), bet nereti cilvēki, kam ir daudz vārda brāļu vai māsu, bauda īpašu piederības izjūtu* [Someone may not like Jānis, too, but often people with many namesakes enjoy a special sense of belonging] (Strūberga & Veckrāce, 2012).

Balode (2022) also mentions comments from one of the Facebook sites:

*Nedošu dēlam šādu vārdu, jo tāpat ir Latvijā pietiekoši Jāņu. Turklāt citi aizmirst apsveikt vārda dienā* [I will not give such a name to my son, because there are enough Jānis in Latvia. In addition, others forget to congratulate on the name day].

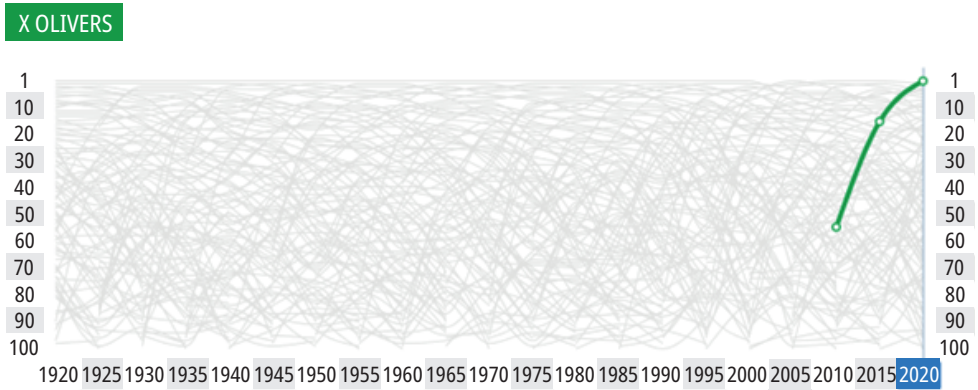
*Nebūs kam likt Jāņu vainagu galvā* [There will be no one to put a Midsummer wreath on his head] (p. 48).

The last example relates to the fact that the name *Jānis* is closely connected to the traditional Latvian Midsummer festival (called *Jāņi*) which is still widely celebrated.

#### 4. Comparison of recent trends in neighbouring countries

It is well-known that fashion for names is contagious; it spreads from country to country, from language to language, from one anthroponymic system to another. Finnish anthroponymist Minna Saarelma-Paukkala said: “naming trends jump from country to country noticeably quicker than before” (Yle News, 2020). It can be influenced by various reasons: on globalization, emigration, political issues, social events, popular movies, music groups, sports stars’ achievements, etc. But very often it is impossible to define the motivation. Nobody can explain why *Jānis* was the most popular name in Latvia for more than a hundred years, but why at the beginning of the 21st century it lost its position, giving way to *Roberts*. Why has *Roberts*, which was not popular for the last one hundred years (see Figure 1), now been chosen so often? And why did the most popular name for newborns in 2020, *Olivers* (see Figure 4), only appear in Latvia in 2010? Usually, the names of grandparents return to their grandchildren after some 80–100 years. But here it is not the case – such male names as *Roberts*, *Olivers* were not popular earlier. The same must be said about the most popular female name *Sofija*, which held first place on the Top-10 list of newborns in Latvia for almost 10 years. *Sofia/Sofija* is currently popular in many European countries. In 2020 in Latvia, the female name *Emīlija*, which was more popular in the beginning of the 20th century and later disappeared, is now in first place (see Figure 5).

When comparing the Top-10 list of Latvia with its northern neighbour Estonia (see Table 3), there are many similarities – *Robin* (1st place) and *Robert* (9th place) have been popular for many years (2011–2016), but it is a surprise that *Oliver* is already in 4th place. It seems that most Estonian parents prefer classical traditional names. As with *Jānis* in Latvia, Estonian *Johannes* is not on the Top-10 list anymore (in 2020 it was the 17th). Also, the female names under review – *Sofia* and *Emily* – are on the top. Name combinations (with and without hyphens) are rather popular: *Karl Gustav*, *Grete-Liis*, *Laura-Liisa*, *Hanna-Liisa*, *Karl-Martin*.



**Figure 4. Popularity of the male name *Olivers*, period 1920–2020 (CSB)**

Source: <https://tools.csb.gov.lv/names/lv/0/0/20/187>



**Figure 5. Popularity of the female names *Sofija* (blue) and *Emīlija* (green), period 1920–2020 (CSB)**

Source: [https://tools.csb.gov.lv/names/lv/1/0/20/598\\_784](https://tools.csb.gov.lv/names/lv/1/0/20/598_784)

**Table 3. Names of newborns in Estonia in 2020**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
1	<i>Sofia</i>	<i>Robin</i>
2	<i>Mia</i>	<i>Rasmus</i>
3	<i>Saara</i>	<i>Jakob</i>
4	<i>Emma</i>	<i>Oliver</i>
5	<i>Emily</i>	<i>Sebastian</i>
6	<i>Alisa</i>	<i>Hugo</i>
7	<i>Eva</i>	<i>Aron</i>
8	<i>Lenna</i>	<i>Artur</i>
9	<i>Maria</i>	<i>Robert</i>
10	<i>Mirtel</i>	<i>Lukas</i>

Source: Ministry of the Interior of Estonia, n.d.

There were many parallels between Estonian and Finnish most popular newborn names in 2020 (see Table 4). Traditional Finnish names are mostly used as a second or middle name: *Maria*, *Sofia*, *Aurora*, *Emilia*, *Olivia*, *Amanda*; *Juhani*, *Olavi*, *Johannes*, *Mikael*, *Ilmari*, *Antero*. Nowadays it is a clear trend that international names are gaining popularity. Popular international names including *Erin*, *Isla*, *Luka* or *Noel* are registered very often. Nevertheless, old names from the epos „Kalevala”, as well as favourite names of the early 20th century (as *Eino*, *Toivo*, *Väinö*) are very popular for modern children to have. *Sofia*, *Emilia* and *Oliver* also hold very high positions in the list.

**Table 4. Names of newborn names of Finland in 2020**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
1	<i>Aino</i>	<i>Leo</i>
2	<i>Olivia</i>	<i>Eino</i>
3	<i>Sofia</i>	<i>Oliver</i>
4	<i>Pihla</i>	<i>Elias</i>
5	<i>Aada</i>	<i>Onni</i>

Rank	Girls	Boys
6	<i>Eevi</i>	<i>Väinö</i>
7	<i>Isla</i>	<i>Noel</i>
8	<i>Lilja</i>	<i>Eeli</i>
9	<i>Helmi</i>	<i>Toivo</i>
10	<i>Ellen</i>	<i>Leevi</i>

Source: DVV; Yle News 2021.

The Top-10 list from Lithuania in 2020 (see Table 5) differs from Latvia's most popular baby names of this year: there are more female names of Lithuanian origin (*Luknė, Liepa, Gabija, Austėja*), although international first names *Emilija* and *Sofija* are also represented, in third and sixth position respectively. The male names are almost all international names, however, *Jonas, Robertas, Oliveris* are not part of the Top-10 list.

**Table 5. Names of newborns of Lithuania in 2020**

Rank	Girls	Boys
1	<i>Lėja</i>	<i>Benas</i>
2	<i>Amelija</i>	<i>Markas</i>
3	<i>Emilija</i>	<i>Lukas</i>
4	<i>Luknė</i>	<i>Matas</i>
5	<i>Liepa</i>	<i>Nojus</i>
6	<i>Sofija</i>	<i>Jokūbas</i>
7	<i>Gabija</i>	<i>Herkus</i>
8	<i>Patricija</i>	<i>Kajus</i>
9	<i>Kamilė</i>	<i>Dominykas</i>
10	<i>Austėja</i>	<i>Adomas</i>

Source: VLKK; Jačauskas, 2020.

Comparison with the current tendencies in Lithuania shows that during the last 30 years – after the restoration of independence, giving babies two names has been very popular. Also, more names of Lithuanian/Baltic origin

(*Smiltē, Saulē, Liepa, Luknē, Ugnē, Gilē, Bitē, Beržas, Ažuolas*) have been created, as well as two-stem neologisms coined according to an archaic model (*Sodautas, Mingirdas, Tautvilas, Justvita, Jolvita*). The male name *Jonas* maintains its position in Lithuania, but it is not as popular as it was before. Historical personal names of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, which were traditionally used in almost all Lithuanian families, seem to be no longer fashionable. (for more on this topic see Kuzavinis & Savukynas, 1987; Sinkevičiūtė, 2011, 2017, 2018; Kuskiene, 2015).

## 5. Conclusions

Latest observations of the last 16 (2004–2020) years of movements in anthroponymic stock in the Baltic countries (especially in Latvia) demonstrate changes in given name choice, which are similar in several countries. During the Soviet era, it was permitted to choose only one name for a baby. Nowadays in Latvia newborns are often given two or even three names, although by law no more than two first names are permitted. An inherited name in the family has often been chosen as a second or middle name (*Deins Jānis*). More often the second name reflects national identity and/or ethnic roots – especially in mixed families or families that have emigrated from Latvia (*Metjū Dzintars*). Parents choosing two names for their baby often play with the names phonetically (*Adrija Adrijana, Unda Una*), or semantically (*Pērle Mirdza* < Latv. *pērle* ‘pearl’ + *mirdzēt* ‘shine’). A rather strange tendency is to mention the additional name *Juniors* ‘junior’ as an official name even in documents (*Ādams Juniors*).

More and more parents choose names for their children that will be international, easily pronounced, short and without diacritical marks (*Martin* instead of Latv. traditional *Mārtiņš*), i.e., according to parents, the form of the name has to be ‘suitable’ for the European, or even the global, environment. Short 1- or 2-syllable names, such as old Latvian hypocoristic names (*Guste, Katre*) or new borrowed names (*Dāgs, Deivs*), are fashionable. The number of borrowed foreign first names is increasing rapidly: these are names from movies, books, music groups, etc. (*Keisija, Kimberlija*). One of the key motivations for choosing a particular name for a newborn is originality: a lot of neologisms

based on Latvian appellatives, mostly with the primary semantics of nature, have been coined (*Kamene* f. < Latv. *kamene* ‘bumblebee’, *Kastanis* m. ‘chestnut’, *Rītarasa* f. ‘morningdew’). Latvians do not have many first names coined based on local place names, but recently several such given names were registered (*Rīga*, *Beverīna*, *Turaida*). Quite often names change their gender: a traditional Latvian male name becomes a female name by changing the ending or vice versa (*Dace* f. > *Dacis* m., *Sarma* f. > *Sarmis* m.). The diminutive forms which can be used as official name forms in Latvia are not popular anymore: only a few girl’s names are registered (*Lienīte*, *Mārīte*). The Latvian traditional name *Jānis*, which is used as a symbol of national identity and was the most popular name for more than 100 years, is no longer on the Top-10 list of Latvians. Names come in fashion cycles, with grandparents’ names returning every 80–100 years. However, recent data shows that nowadays individualization of naming is gaining strength not only in Latvia.

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### Abbreviations

dim. – diminutive

Est. – Estonian

f. – female name

Latv. – Latvian

Lith. – Lithuanian

m. – male name



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