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Invisible work in the Latvian countryside[1]

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Introduction

This article is about rural people who "don't work". It is about people often referred to as lazy and unenterprising layabouts who have lost the habit of working and become used to "lying on sofas"; people who constantly avoid employment, preferring instead to live on social benefits and, quite frequently, alcohol (see, e.g. Brauna 2011, Brila 2012, Grīnvalde-Iruka 2012, Misiņa 2012). However, the inverted commas in "don't work" are intentional. This article invites the reader to take a deeper look at the idea of *work*, to see beyond the accepted definition of work as a purely wage-earning activity and to examine carefully the characterisation of *the unemployed* as a social group in Latvia by looking at their circumstances in a broader socio-historical context. By applying this approach, the links between contributing factors are revealed, such as class differences, social inequality and alcoholism. It also turns out that many of those who "don't work" are, in fact, working. They engage in activities that sustain their existence. However, these activities can't be measured or evaluated according to the criteria of *productive wage labour* under the capitalist system of production. For the purpose of this analysis the term "invisible work" seems more appropriate.

This article will survey the predominating definition of work that is broadly accepted by Western industrial society together with alternative treatments of work suggested by social anthropologists in recent decades. The theoretical analysis of work will be supplemented with extensive empirical case studies from rural Latvia and socio-historical context, paying particular attention to the labour experience of rural people during the Soviet period, alcoholism, and the recent social support programmes implemented by local municipalities. It will be shown that the so-called *simtlatnieku* or "hundred-lats" beneficiary programme serves as a kind of substitute to the *kolkhoz* labour-model. The article concludes with a discussion of work as a Latvian virtue, showing that this partially depleted ideal can be applied neither to the work performed by rural proletariat, nor to the work carried out by smallholders. We will see that within Latvian society three contradictory conceptions of work exist

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simultaneously: (1) work as a universal guarantee of status and income; (2) work as the basis for the image of the industrious peasant sanctified by Latvian literature, and (3) work as the productive labour demanded by the free market . By way of conclusion we will suggest that the invisible work plays a key role in sustaining life in the countryside.

Depending on the way we interpret and define work, we either see or do not see people working. In a broad sense, work is one of the pre-conditions of the mankind's existence and one of the basic institutions of society; it exerts a decisive influence on numerous social processes. Human life in any community largely depends on tthe way in which work is conceptualised and the manner in which it is organised (Applebaum 1992: ix). What, then, do we consider work in modern Western societies, including Latvia?

What is work? An economic perspective

One of the essential characteristics of Western societies is the general use of a narrow definition of work including only wage labour or a productive activity valued by the profit it brings. This concept evolved in tandem with the development of capitalist economy and was consolidated during the industrial age (Ehmer 2001, Zimmerman 2001). However, emerging signs of this system of thought were noticeable long before wide-scale industrial production had taken root. Adam Smith, the Scottish Enlightenment thinker, is regarded as the founder of this system of thought. He laid out these ideas in his treatise on political economy *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Smith pointed out a direct relationship between labour and the value of commodities:

> The value of any commodity [...] to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities. (Smith 1904 [1776]: I.5.1.).

Almost a century later when industrialisation was in full swing in Great Britain, Germany, France, and America, Karl Marx carried out a detailed analysis and critique of the capitalist mode of production in his voluminous monograph *Das Kapital* where he investigated the relationship between labour and value. In some sense Marx was promoting Smith's definition of labour as a purposeful process during which man achieves the changes in nature he envisaged beforehand (Marx 2010 [1973]: 157-158). Marx suggested a complex "law of value" proposing three labour-related values: use-value, value (or "substance of value"), and exchange-value. The use-value of a commodity was its appropriateness for usage or consumption for the purposes why it was produced; the exchange-value was the value that the labour product in the form of a commodity acquired at the market; at the same time, the very substance of value was the labour invested in the commodity measured by the labour time required to produce it (Ibid, 47 – 86, Firth 1979: 177 – 182).

Marx stressed that labour power (*Arbeitskraft* in German)[2] as a saleable commodity provides the capitalist with an opportunity to profit from the surplus value

[2]Marx defined labour power or labour-capacity as the total aggregate of physical and intellectual abilities that the body and personality of a living person embrace and that are put into practice every time a labourer produces some use-value (Marx 2010 [1973]: 149).

produced by the labourer. Marx described in minute detail the process by which labour as a free and legally correct option becomes a legally abstract and statistically codified category that is alienated from the labourer. It is this type of impersonal labour, measured in time and money, which is the very cornerstone of capitalism (Biernacki 1995, quoted by Zimmermann 2001: 16562).

The Marxist critique exerted a significant influence on governmental policies used in various countries and on the conceptualisation of labour in the social sciences. Work, or more precisely wage labour, was paired with its opposite, non-work or unemployment. Furthermore, employment and unemployment, which is regulated by legislation within the standardised economy of a state system, became linked with social and political rights and obligations, for instance tax payments and social guarantees (Zimmermann 2001: 16562). Both in capitalist and in socialist industrial societies, wage labour became the main model for social relations and the source of social status; it was the "entrance ticket" to the political community of the state (Ibid: 16563).

A similar understanding of labour has evolved in Latvian society. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the rapid changeover to a neoliberal market system, one of the main indicators for the health of the national economy has become employment/unemployment statistics. National development—including development in rural areas—is measured using these indicators together with statistics for GDP (gross domestic product) growth per capita and productivity (i.e., the utility of resources used in production – land and other raw materials, various technologies, buildings, labour).[3]

It is as if the numbers speak for themselves. Out of 1.03 million economically active Latvian inhabitants aged 15 – 74, 16.2% were unemployed in 2011 (CSP 2012). In the first two quarters of 2012, the number of people seeking employment did not change (Ibid). At the end of September 2012, the proportion of registered unemployed individuals in the region of Kurzeme was 11.6%, in Zemgale – 12.1%, in Vidzeme –13%, and in Latgale 21.6% (NVA 2012).[4]

The primary employment in rural Latvia in 2011 remained in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sectors employing 25% of inhabitants. 16.7% of the rural workforce was employed in the industry and energy sector, and 13.8 % were employed in the service sector (including commerce, food/catering, hotels/tourism etc.) (LVAEI 2012: 7).

[3] As has been shown in otherpublications, development that is primarily oriented toward economic growth does not automatically guarantee an improvement in the standard of living for the greater part of society, especially in rural communities (Cimdiņa, Raubiško 2012a, 2012b).

[4] Two separate unemployment indicators are cited here: *work seekers* as used by the Central Statistical Bureau (Centrālās statistikas pārvalde or CSP), and the narrower category *registered unemployed,* which is used by the State Employment Agency (Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra or NVA). In accordance with definitions used by the International Labour Organization and member states of the European Union, employment seekers are people between the ages of 15 – 74 who may or may not be registered with the State Employment Agency, who have actively looked for work during the preceding four weeks and would be willing to start work within the next two weeks. Those who count as unemployed are people of working age (from 15 – 62 years old) who have registered with the State Employment Agency and who have been assigned status as unemployed. Unlike unemployment statistics that are registered monthly, the number of people seeking employment in the various regions of Latvia is estimated once annually. In 2011 the number of people looking for work in the regions of Kurzeme was 15.1 % of the workforce, in Zemgale – 18.5 %, in Vidzeme – 12.7 %, and in Latgale – 18.7 %.

According to specialists at the Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics (*Latvijas Valsts agrārās ekonomikas institūts*), only slightly more than half of the number of hours worked in agriculture were in the commercial sector[5], but paid work made up only slightly more than one third of all hours worked (SUDAT 2011, quoted in LVAEI: 7). The remaining paid (and, as we shall see, not formally paid) work took place "outside of business" in existing subsistence farms. In 2010, large agricultural crop and dairy livestock farms paid, on average, 90% of their workforce, and vegetable, pig, and poultry farms paid 80% of their workforce, but small dairy farms on average paid only 3% of their workforce. The remainder of the work was done using unpaid family labour. The 2010 agricultural statistics show that an average agricultural labourer was employed only part-time, but agricultural productivity in agribusiness[6] was 6.5 times below average for the Latvian economy (LVAEI 2012: 7-15).

The low level of labour productivity[7] in the Latvian economy is a much discussed problem[8]. Experts and policy makers argue that increasing productivity with state-of-the-art technology and raising the qualifications of employees are the main instruments for improving the economy. Increased productivity will raise corporate income levels and improve competitiveness, which in turn will ensure economic development and the wellbeing of the community in general (Krasnopjorovs 2011, LVAEI 2012: 20). While analysts emphasise the need to strike a balance between productivity and salary levels, public discussions revolve around two conflicting viewpoints: one group links low productivity with a lack of competence and willingness to work, while others believe that the missing factor is appropriate remuneration (see, for example, the debates in the Latvian Internet portal *Apollo* - Apollo 2012).

However, neither statistics, nor debates adequately reflect the lives and work of the people who are the central focus of this article. This group might be considered the contemporary "rural proletariat". Some of them have registered themselves as unemployed and work in the so-called *simtlatnieku* or "100 Lats" beneficiary programme (temporary paid community service labour) or they receive the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) benefit[9] and/or other social benefits. Some work illegally in

[5] Commercially oriented farms are those, which have a standard output (the value produced by the crop from one hectare of agricultural land or one farm animal in one year after prices are determined for each region) that exceeds 4000 EUR annually (LVAEI 2012: 12).

[6] Here productivity is defined as the added value produced per annual work unit (AWU). One AWU corresponds to the work performed by one person on an agricultural holding (including temporarily employed) during one year, which consists of 1840 agricultural work hours (LVAEI 2012: 9).

[7] Generally defined as the goods or services produced by a single employee during a given time period.

[8] In 2011, productivity per capita in Latvia was only 62.7 % of the average for the European Union, but productivity per hour was 53.1 % (Eurostat 2012 a, 2012b).

[9] The GMI benefit is calculated by adding together the guaranteed minimum income level for each family member (currently 40 LVL per adult, 45 LVL per child) and subtracting total family income (the following are not considered income: child care allowance, childbirth allowance, funeral allowance, any additional allowance for twins or multiple children born at a single time to one mother, the first 50 LVL of a parental allowance, additional allowances for children with disabilities, care allowance for a disabled child, allowance for a disabled person who requires care, allowance for a child with celiac disease, allowance for the compensation of transportation expenses for the handicapped, vocational training scholarships for the unemployed, or any allowances for additional training or requalification, as well as informal education during the training period). GMI benefit decisions are made by social service workers at the local level who sign cooperation agreements with benefit recipients. Such agreements might include retaining unemployment status, participation in local

agribusinesses, mostly on farms. Some don't have any official employment or status, but maintain regular activities that help them to ensure their own survival. They grow fruits and vegetables, harvest food from forests, rivers, and lakes, and receive other goods or sometimes money through barter for their work. These people are united by the fact that their activities only partially fall within the national statistical framework; the work they do tends to remain unnoticed and often is not considered work at all.

Even if their activities are considered work[10], it is not seen as necessary or useful work that enhances the productivity of the nation. We will return to these people shortly, but first we need to establish a broader understanding of the concept of work which allows for this "invisible work" to become visible.

Alternative perspectives on labour

In the 1960s and 70s the definition of work in the social sciences was transformed. As a result of a general turn towards agency/activity/practice in contrast to the previously dominant social system/structure, social scientists began also to look beyond the predominant definition of work as wage labour. By shifting attention from the idea of work as a status to work as an activity or practice, researchers began to take notice of kinds of work that did not fall within the strictly defined economic production sector e.g., a woman's work at home, volunteer work. They also looked at the social interactions taking place within work environments and at the significance that the workers themselves assigned to various types of work in specific contexts.

To begin with, anthropologists looked at work done in non-industrial, non-capitalist communities among hunters and gathers, gardeners, animal herders, nomads, farmers etc. Gradually they began to analyse the capitalist features entering into these environments, as well as work in Western industrial and post-industrial societies, including post-socialist countries. Some 20th century research was done using the cultural ecology method, which places the main emphasis on the interrelationships of people and the natural world through the use of various instruments and the use of technology in diversified farming practices (e.g., Lee 1979, Sahlins 1972, Netting 1993). The so-called peasant economies research has been just as important since the middle of the 20th century (e.g., Dalton 1971, Mintz 1973, Roseberry 1978, Wolf 1957, 1966). Starting in the 1970s, when the Society for the Anthropology of Work was founded in the United States, a great deal of attention was paid to work done in industrial environments. Marxist theory was central to this body of research whether or not one was in agreement with it. Social scientists borrowed ideas from Marx, opposed his ideas, or offered various interpretations of his work (e.g. Applebaum 1981, Burawoy 1985, Gamst 1980, Nash 1981). The

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community service projects, medical treatment and other specifications.(http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/1516).

[10] In accordance with the internationally determined survey methodology used by the Central Statistical Bureau, all inhabitants who do some kind of work for pay in money or some other kind of compensation during the week of the survey, even for an hour, are considered employed. Part-time, seasonal, and short-term workers are also considered employed, as well as family members who work without compensation in family businesses or family farms (or fisheries) are also considered to be employed. Also, people who are not usually economically active, but who do some kind of work – for example a pensioner who works as a baby sitter, school children who hand out leaflets, or a homemaker, who teaches private lessons – are considered to be employed (in an excerpt from personal communication with Zaiga Priedīte, Head of the Employment Statistics division at the Central Statistical Bureau on 24.10.2012). Notably, housewives are in general considered to be unemployed.

conceptualization of work as a life model rooted in a specific socio-cultural environment was a parallel area of research (Gamst 1995, Godelier 1986, Procoli 2004, Wallman 1979). Even so, anthropologists retained their interest in work as process/activity intrinsic to the formation of personal identity (Corsin-Jimenez 2003). Finally, the change from socialist to capitalist economies and the restructuring of the concept of work and the work practices was a timely theme in research that examined the drastic social changes in post-socialist societies, especially in rural territories (Abrahams 1996, Buchowski 2003, Caplan 2007, Hann 2003, Jancius 2006, Leonard, Kaneff 2002, Petrick, Weingarten 2004, Read, Thelen 2007, Rudd 2006).

In this diverse body of anthropological research work was revealed as a complex reality where the main aspects of living are dynamically interconnected. Work resists classification as a strictly economic, political, or social phenomenon, but rather should be seen as a form of living that is created through the interface of various economic, political and social factors. To approach work anthropologically means to pay attention to the socio-historical context of work organisation and work relations, as well as the ideological meanings of work, including common-sense definitions and individual interpretations. It also means to accept that work has no universal definition: some societies, as anthropologists have shown us, do not separate work from other spheres of life and may not even have a specific term for "work".[11]

Even if work is separated from other fields of activity as it is in Western societies, meanings of work are not constant: they change along with the transformation of social institutions over longer periods of time. Yet, as anthropologist Cato Wadel has reminded us, "work" not only reflects the social change; it also helps to sustain vital social institutions, such as family, community, democracy without which society (here modern industrial society) could not exist (Wadel 1979). Critical of the dominating economic view of work which focuses strictly on the creation of economic value in the market and thus allows for limited observations, Wadel urged social scientists to widen the definition of work so as to include the "hidden work". The latter, according to Wadel, comprises all kinds of effort invested into maintaining institutions and values that cannot be measured in economic terms but are nevertheless essential for social life to continue. Among examples of such work are the seemingly trivial activities of visiting one's neighbours, giving a helping hand or simply listening to the worries of others, which help to sustain the community (Ibid.: 374), or engaging in informal communication within the formal (work) organisations (Ibid.: 373), or "hidden" effort required of citizens to participate in the political processes of a democracy (Ibid. 375-376)

Following Wadel's call for a wider definition of work from a social, not strictly economic standpoint, which embraces the "hidden work" that sustains social life in general, here I would like to descend to a lower level of abstraction and concentrate on the invisible physical work, which allows many people in the Latvian countryside to sustain their lives. This kind of work is made invisible by the ideological preference for productive wage labour as a means to create added value.
The invisibility is structurally determined, meaning that the invisible is excluded from the field of visibility by virtue of the rules that structure this field (Althusser 1997 [1968]). To use the example provided by Louis Althusser, a stable scientific theory will not allow for seeing new objects and problems, as the main task of theory as a

[11] That is why French anthropologist Maurice Godelier called for a comprehensive study of "work and its representations across time and across cultures", involving not only anthropologists, but also historians, linguists, and technologists (Godelier 1980: 1).

structured and demarcated field is to prevent any novelties (Althusser 1997 [1968]: 21–22). Building on Althusser, political scientist Yves Winter contends:

> To see is to encounter objects in a field of visibility, a field that is constituted through a series of political, cultural, and scientific procedures that determine what objects and problems are intelligible. The invisible, then, is not just a generic oversight but marks that which is foreclosed (Winter 2012: 198).

The excluded or invisible work in Latvian society can thus be seen as a product of concrete political and cultural modes and a power relationship whereby those who don't hold a paid job are morally inferior due to their falling out of the community of labourers and producers. The economic view of work here blends with the folk concept, according to which a paid job is a qualification of a grown, mature person (Daniels 1987) and a prerequisite for a participation in a moral community (Wadel 1979). The folk understanding of work here reinforces the narrow economic definition and delineates the field of visibility leaving almost no possibility for the invisible "objects" break into the closed structure of visibility and become seen. Just like housewives, volunteers and performers of "emotion work" (for example, flight attendants) in the United States during the 1980s (Daniels 1987), the unemployed, benefit recipients and "100 lats" workers in Latvia are pushed in the field of invisibility where they work but "don't work", as their work holds no material or symbolic value. It is to these people stigmatized as "layabouts and alcoholics" that I turn next.

Invisible work

Alma's[12] *story*

A small rural district in Kurzeme. Alma is a 58-year-old woman, who currently works as a milker at one of the big local dairy farms. Every morning at 5 o'clock she goes to the farm where she and her colleague (one of the owners of the farm) are in charge of 100 cows and 20 calves. In the summertime, after milking the cows are let out to pasture and then milked again at three o'clock in the afternoon. Between milkings the farm must be cleaned, the milk containers washed, the cow feed replenished, and the water pipes regulated so that the cows have enough to drink. In the winter, when the cows stay at the farm there is even more work to do—on top of the milking, the feeding, and the watering, the cows' udders must be very carefully cleaned and the manure must be dealt with. Once a week, when Alma has her day off, her 20-year-old daughter Annija comes to work in her place. Neither Alma nor Annija work legally – they are not officially employed and instead get their pay "in hand" or "in the envelope". The farm owners pay honestly and regularly. Alma earns about 170 LVL per month. The owners say they pay all of their employees illegally because officially paying taxes for them would mean that their salaries would be much smaller. "The stick has two ends," says the owner.

[12] The names of all of the interlocutors have been changed here in order to protect their privacy. No civil parishes have been named for the same reason, but the rural districts or regions where the informants reside have been indicated.

Alma stays in a little house not far from the farm with a relative of the owners that they have allotted to her. They came up with this solution so that Alma would not have to walk several kilometres from the village centre where she has an apartment in one of the two-storey buildings built during the Soviet period. Like many of the other townspeople, Alma bought her apartment with privatisation certificates during the 1990s. The farmer's wife offered to let her stay in the main house with the family, but Alma wasn't comfortable with that. The small simple house is Alma's kingdom, the place where she feels free. When she moved in she cleaned the entire house from top to bottom and washed the grease from wooden floorboards, but she wasn't able to get them as white as she had hoped. Alma has also managed to make herself a kitchen garden. That is where Alma spends her "second shift" when she returns from the farm. She cleans the rooms, prepares food, and then goes to work in the garden. Alma and her housemate have planted such a large potato patch that they can scarcely manage to weed it. They have both early and late potatoes, onions, cabbage, strawberries, and cucumbers and tomatoes in the plastic greenhouse. The garden harvest—especially the potatoes—provides them with food for the entire winter. Alma gives some of her harvest to her children, to her daughter in particular, who as a three-year-old son, Kalvis, with her boyfriend. To better manage her debts and her livelihood, Alma borrowed some money to buy a bull and a calf. She keeps them in the farmer's stable close by[13]. The owners also allow her to cut hay for her animals, but she has to buy additional feed flour for the calf. Alma would also like to keep a cow and a sow, but doesn't think her health will allow it.

Alma has a serious brain disorder that presents as dizziness, strong migraine, loss of consciousness, and other symptoms. Her doctor has said that she may not overexert herself or hold down a job. "I'm not allowed to do heavy work, in fact, any work. I feel myself that I can't do it. I'm not even allowed to tell anyone [that I am working]. But how else will I manage?" Alma asks rhetorically. The GMI benefits that Alma receives due to her low-income status and the free medicine and hospital visits that are included in her benefits still do not cover her medical costs. She has to cover transportation expenses to and from the hospital in Liepāja, some examinations must be paid for separately, and she has to pay out of pocket for certain medicines, for pain relievers, and IV treatments. The pain is indescribable, says Alma. The debts she has accumulated over the past years for medicine and doctor's visits have a prominent place in her budget and are among the reasons Alma can't afford to work any less than she does. She can't afford to take two days a week off from the farm.

Another important payment, one that Alma has almost paid off, is the land tax debt accrued for the three hectares of land in another rural district in Kurzeme that she inherited from her mother. Alma got the land, but not the house. The house belongs to her brother, whose family moved away long ago. The building is in bad repair and Alma's 35-year-old son, Andis, lives there now. Alma feels bitter that she isn't able to tend the territory for various reasons: "I had planted plum trees and cherry trees there, well everything growing there, including the flower garden. Everything was weeded! I don't like to talk about it. It was like a real home. I worked myself hard, but at least everything was blooming. Now [...] only the front is kept."

Alma's *oma*, her mother's mother, used to live there. She was a poor farmer's daughter who married into a wealthy farming family. Alma remembers how she lived with her own mother and five brothers and sisters in the bathhouse not far from *oma's*

[13] During field work in 2010-2012, we discovered that in Lower Kurzeme the local word for barn (*kūts*) is stable or stall (*stallis*).

house. There was no stove and sometimes the children woke up in a snowdrift. Alma's father did not live with his family, he only showed up occasionally. Later her mother had a boyfriend.

At first Alma studied to be a house painter. She lived in Liepāja for a few years during her youth, and then she moved in with her mother, who lived in a small village not far from Liepāja. That is where Alma got to know her first husband. She followed her husband for a while as he worked in Soviet farms around Latvia. They lived together in Bauska for a while. Eventually Alma divorced him and took her two very small children (her sons, now aged 35 and 33) and moved back in with her mother, who was living in a different civil parish near Liepāja, the place where Alma is still living today. Since then Alma has been raising her children by herself.

Just like her mother, Alma became a milker and a pig-tender at one of the Soviet farms near Liepāja. Alma was good at her job. At the height of her powers she was responsible for 20 cows—first-calf heifers[14]. Alma remembers with pride that she managed to milk them, tame them, and accustom them to the milking machines and the milking process in general. Alma was also one of the best pig-tenders and for several quarters in a row her sows produced the greatest number of piglets. This caused jealousy among her rivals. "It's a shame about those farms," says Alma, remembering the *kolkhoz* times. "[Those were] good times, truly. We got good advances and had our own animals. [...] Cows, geese, I had a sow." Like many Soviet workers, Alma had a small kitchen garden, grew vegetables, and privately kept several animals. This allowed her to provide for three children. Alma's daughter was born during her second marriage, which unravelled after ten years of living together. Alma's second husband was a heavy drinker for many years and hung himself in the end.

Even so Alma was unable to save up enough money to buy some goods as easily as the Soviet bosses, the brigadiers and the agronomists: "There were some who saved thousands. You needed to save, but I'm no good at that. [...] They took milk from the farm, carried it home, fed their animals, and then gave the milk to the processing plants. I couldn't. My cow was pregnant. I couldn't take a litre of milk from the farm and bring it to my daughter. Well, I couldn't. I never learned how to steal. [...] I thought it was better to earn a living honestly."

Alma talks about the private houses that were built during the late Soviet period: "[The bosses] built such houses for their children. They didn't have to go to their barns over ground. They built in underground passages. They must still be there. [...] the [bosses'] children live there now." Some houses remain unfinished. "When the Russian times were over, they stopped building, because there was nothing left to steal," says Alma. She repeatedly emphasises that only "bosses" built houses, they helped each other out: "Only the powerful people helped each other, that's how it was. The little black worker had only his pitchfork [to work with]. [...] Did any milkmaid ever own a car? – Not one. Only powerful men drove and changed their cars. The rest of us could work from morning until night."

But Alma is proud that despite her poor beginnings and the unfavourable family circumstances, which have shaped her entire life, she has survived and managed to care for her children: "No one helped me raise my children. I have never

[14] First-calf heifers (*pirmpienes*) are cows that are calving for the first time. It is difficult to accustom these cows to milking machines. They tend to rest, to fall to the ground, and to kick the machines with their hooves. First-calf heifers must be "broken in" in the same way that horses must be accustomed to the saddle.

had any complaints about my work or any bad marks on my work record. If I were some sort of lush… [...] Well, sometimes people like that were called out to the supervisor and lost their jobs. There was none of that, only appreciation. A drunk couldn't do it."

Still, she admits that she used to drink every once in a while. Alma's mother also had a drinking problem. She died in a serious car accident that took place when both Alma's mother and the driver of the car had been drunk. From her words it is clear that Alma wishes the drinking in her family and among her friends had not had such a great impact on her life, on her own health, and on the lives of her children. Both of Alma's sons have golden hands and do piecework and seasonal jobs to survive. And Alma admits they both drink.

Her daughter Annija doesn't use alcohol. She lives together with her boyfriend and raises her three-year-old son. Alongside her work at the farm she also had a "100 Lats" position in the civil parish for a while. Annija's schooling ended when she completed the 8th grade. Now she plans on finishing 9th grade at night school soon because she has heard that those who don't have a primary school education might have trouble receiving social benefits.

In addition to dealing with her health problems and her debts, one of Alma's main priorities is helping her daughter and grandson, whose family lacks harmony and a decent existence according to Alma. One could say that Alma continues to do what she did when she was a young woman. She works "on several fronts" and takes care of her now grown children. Alma doesn't want riches, but she would like a quieter life with less worry and hard work. Her opinion about her circumstances is tinged with a certain sense of fatalism: "Well, everything is already set; it has been like this from the beginning. It [life] all is full [of difficulties] [...] you can't stop it anymore."

But even so, Alma has her mind set on paying off her debts and getting on. She will continue to work and to "move", which is how Alma describes her activities apart from her illegal job on the farm. Once a diligent reader, she can't handle sitting in front of the television with her newspaper for too long.

Alma's story reveals long years full of work. She continues to work now too, although she is not officially employed and receives the GMI benefit as an unemployed person. The invisibility of Alma's work is twofold. Firstly, she has been hired informally and receives pay "in the envelope", without any taxes being paid. This job has not been registered in the state statistical system,[15] although Alma can still be seen as a producer of added value: employed within shadow economics, she produces milk which is made into foodstuffs sold in the market. The unofficial salary combined with the GMI benefits helps Alma to cover the costs of medical treatment for which social benefits alone would not be enough.

Alma's second "job" is even less visible. It is the work she does at home and in her kitchen garden securing most of the food she needs for herself and also some for her daughter and grandson.

At a first glance, Alma would seem to be the victim of her previous harmful life and probably unwise choices, a person who is now dependent on state benefits. Yet a closer look at Alma reveals a hard worker, who has found a way to lead a life

[15] The State Employment Agency lists Alma as an unemployed person, which has allowed her to secure the low-income status in her civil parish and get the GMI benefits. However, according to the definition used by the Central Statistical Bureau, Alma should still be considered as employed (see Footnote 4 and Footnote 10).

despite unfavourable – and often structural, not individually defined – circumstances she has found herself in.

Vilnis' and Ritma's family in Latgale seems to successfully deal with similar problems.

Vilnis' and Ritma's story

A rural district in Rēzekne, Latgale. We meet Vilnis (29 years old), Ritma (25 years old), and their children—three-year-old Varis and ten month old Mudīte — for the first time in the stadium in the village centre where they have come for a walk. Vilnis has just finished work for the civil parish in the local "100 Lats" programme. He works as custodian of the stadium. Ritma doesn't work because she has a serious illness — epilepsy. Her seizures have been lasting for up to two weeks lately and, when they occur; Ritma needs to be in the hospital, either in Riga or in Daugavpils. Little Varis also has a health problem. One of his lungs is not fully developed so he has serious difficulties with asthma. He used to have to take an oxygen tank with him everywhere, but now he just uses an oxygen machine when necessary. Varis also occasionally needs to spend time in the hospital in Rīga or Daugavpils.

Because of the health problems his wife and son are dealing with, Vilnis is unable to work a full time job in Rēzekne or some other place that is far from home. He has to be ready to run to his family whenever they need him and that can't be predicted ahead of time. It wouldn't be worth it economically for the whole family to move to the city. Five years ago Vilnis and Ritma tried living in Rēzekne, but living expenses were much greater than in the countryside and they went into debt. Vilnis lost his job as a cashier at Rimi[16], and then he was dismissed from his informal position as a guard. His employer didn't keep his promise to pay out salary earned when Vilnis turned in his guard uniform. Based on their experience living in Rēzekne and going for medical treatments in Rīga neither Vilnis nor Ritma want to live in the city. "It's boring. There is nothing to do. Maybe fix a stool in the evening, that's all," says Vilnis.

Vilnis has enough work here in the village. He still has two months of work in the "100 Lats" programme, but he can earn extra money doing various kinds of piecework — he mows hay, cuts wood, digs potatoes etc. Vilnis is in high demand as a pieceworker and has had the same employers for some time now. He has enough work during the spring, summer, and fall seasons, but winters are usually not busy at all. He won't go into to the forest to log because the local forest owner only pays seven lats a day, which is too little for such difficult work. Vilnis gets five or six lats a day for chopping wood. Vilnis is also helping his friends, whose main line of work is transporting petrol and other goods from Russia, to install a sawmill in an old pig farm. When it is ready, Vilnis will work there, too. But it will be hard to find other workers. People don't want to work and complain that the pay is too little. A good quality sawmill worker can earn between 150-250 lats in a month.

Vilnis and Ritma do a lot of work on their little house. They were given use of the house in exchange for the caretaking they do for the owner. She is a local woman who moved to Rīga long ago. They spend most of their time in their three kitchen gardens. That is where Vilnis and Ritma grow most of what they eat: potatoes (which take up 1500m^2 by themselves) and root vegetables, and cucumbers and tomatoes in small cold frame greenhouses. A local man helps them plough up their gardens. They

[16]A chain of grocery stores in Latvia.

can their vegetables for the winter and make jam and compotes, which they store in the cellar. During our visit we can see that this year's harvesting and canning is almost finished. The firewood is neatly stacked in the shed for the winter and there are a great deal of potatoes, apples, canned vegetables, and jars of compote in the cellar.

When it comes to groceries, Vilnis and Ritma usually only spend money on cream, the occasional litre of milk, and oil. Their income comes from Vilnis "100 Lats" benefits and the salary he receives for doing odd jobs, as well as Vilnis' and Ritma's disabled persons' benefits. Ritma gets almost all of her medicine for free. She only has to buy one kind of medicine that costs her seven lats per package.

Vilnis sometimes gives money to his brother, who uses it to buy alcohol. He usually pays Vilnis back once he gets his GMI benefits. For a while he worked in the "100 Lats" programme, but later he was barred from it[17]. Vilnis brother drinks despite the fact that his father died in his arms from drink, and despite his own health problems. He gets money to buy the local homebrew by picking up jobs at a local farm. The woman there tends to hire help for cheap.

Vilnis used to drink a lot with his brother. The boys started drinking with their parents when Vilnis was in his last year at elementary school, and once they had started, they drank more and more. He drank less when he moved to a different rural district to study at the technical college there, but then his brother joined him and they both drank heavily. The army saved Vilnis. He spent a year there and wasn't permitted to touch a drop because he had to guard the munitions warehouse. Since that time Vilnis doesn't drink, only a glass or so during the holidays.

Holidays are very important in Vilnis and Ritma's family. The young parents don't pass up any of the social events arranged in their civil parish and celebrate holidays at home as well. The family celebrates names' days and birthdays, Christmas, Easter, and Midsummer. They prepare a feast that always includes *rosols* (salad made from meat/sausage, potatoes and pickles) and egg salad with cheese, and they enjoy trying recipes for other delicacies such as carrot cake with walnuts.

Despite their health problems and their meagre means, Vilnis and Ritma seem full of resolve. They view their situation pragmatically and conclude, "You have to live with what you have". Like Alma, Vilnis and Ritma could be looked at as people cared for by the state, due to their status as benefit recipients and "100 Lats" workers. Yet such a perspective would gloss over their energetic attitude and active life position and the considerable amount of work they perform outside the officially guaranteed "100 Lats" employment. Like Alma, Vilnis and Ritma are engaged in two additional types of work. One is piecework done by Vilnis for money or in-kind payments at different farms, both subsistence and commercial. The other is Vilnis' and Ritma's constant work at home and in their three kitchen gardens, which allows them to continue a somewhat stable family life. This visibly-invisible work may be even more important than work that brings money, because it creates and sustains a sense of home and family, a sense of safety and continuity despite the daily hardship Vilnis and Ritma encounter.

[17] In Rēzekne district "100 Lats" workers who miss work because of drinking get a warning and are asked to make up their hours. If the problem continues, if they systematically don't show up for work and refuse to cooperate with the municipal authorities, they can be barred from the programme. These people can also lose their unemployed status and their GMI benefits. Unemployed status can be renewed at the State Employment Agency three months after it has been revoked.

But let us now turn to a different theme that has been raised both in Alma's story and in Vilnis and Ritma's story and is an acute social problem in many civil parishes — alcoholism and its effects on work.

Alcoholics, layabouts, and the "100 Lats" beneficiary programme as guaranteed employment

There is a great deal of unemployment in the countryside, but paradoxically there are no decent workers — this assertion has become a truism. Opinions about layabouts, or *loderi*, and alcoholics abound. People are often strict, dismissive, and condemning, occasionally accepting and resigned. Farmers and entrepreneurs, civil parish employees, urbanites with country properties, politicians at various levels of government — everyone has an opinion.

Admitting that employment/unemployment in the countryside cannot be separated from the alcoholism[18] that exists there, I will make a start at viewing these two interacting factors within a broader socio-historical context. I will examine the assertion that "many people just drink and don't work" by taking a closer look at the "unemployed alcoholics" – at how they live and work or don't work in the present circumstances.

If we look more closely at the rural proletariat we see that it is made up of people who used to work in the *sovkhozes*, factories or other industrial enterprises during Soviet times. Even though I don't have accurate statistics, stories told by country people who lived through the Soviet period tell us that for at least some of these people — especially today's unemployed men who have not yet reached retirement age — alcoholism was already a problem during that time and that there is a visible succession in the pattern of alcohol use.

As the head of social service in a rural district in Kurzeme emphasises:

> We didn't start living today. All of this has existed since that start of Soviet period, since the *kolkhoz* times. We know these people; they were all somewhat dependent back then. Only then they all worked — drunk or sober. What they were like isn't important; they used to be able to live their lives that way. Now it is no longer possible. Firstly, there is little work and secondly, who wants a drunkard? Times have changed. But they do try [to work and survive].

The words of the social worker are confirmed by another local government worker form the same civil parish, who once worked as a mechanic at the local *sovkhoz*:

[18] Qualitative data acquired during fieldwork done for the study "*Savs kaktiņš, savs stūrītis zemes* – Development Strategies and Cultural Changes in Rural Latvia" during 2010-2012 support the tendencies that have been uncovered in earlier studies. For example, in 2006 the Regional Study on Socio-psychological Portraits of the Unemployed („Reģionālajos pētījumos par bezdarbnieku sociālpsiholoģisko portretu") established that on average every fourth unemployed person in Latvia has a medium or high risk of alcohol dependence, and every seventh has a medium or high risk of dependence on narcotics. The study states that the risk of dependency is greater among unemployed men (the addiction risk group comprises 38% men and 15% women in total), especially men aged 55-64 (about 70% of the men in the risk category were in this age group), as well as men aged 44-55 (more than 50%). The risk of dependency is also significant (22%) among men up to age 44. The study also concludes that risk of dependency is closely related the professional status of the unemployed. Risk of alcohol dependency applies to more than half of unemployed men who have not received any sort of certified professional qualification with the last five years and almost half of those who don't plan on working in the near future (Hazans 2006: 60-64).

Of course a large number of *kolkhoz* workers would disappear, lie down or go look for a bottle when the boss wasn't on their case all the time. [...] Whoever didn't want to work would creep into the bushes; now he sits at home and drinks beer while he has the money. And when the money runs out he collects his welfare, which is one thing he can't be refused.

People from the Rēzekne district share similar experiences. As one of the present day farmers says: "Of course not everybody worked at the *sovkhoz*. There were those who just hung around the workshops. I remember it myself. I worked there."

Such unwilling workers had to be "herded" by the brigadiers and driven to work. A one-time veterinarian, Lauma, characterises this process:

[W]hen the *sovkhoz* and *kolkhoz* system existed, if people sat on their asses, the agriculturists would go [and urge people to work]: now please, go to work. Please, the beets need weeding, the manure needs scraping. Now no one goes around and says, "Please go to work".

Vitolds, once a *kolkhoz* machine-operator, now a small dairy farm owner, recalls:

When we had the *sovkhoz*, *kolkhoz* system people were simply used to the fact they there would always be guaranteed jobs. You don't want to work here, go to Rēzekne, go wherever. [...] You could always find a job in your speciality. It was guaranteed. Just try NOT to work at the *sovkhoz*. The sub-district manager would take you by the collar and drag you to work. […] You drive to your job, work, collect your pay. Maybe people were used to it that way, which is why it's harder for them now. [...] [Now] everyone has to think [about] everything themselves.

The massive reduction in jobs and the attendant lack of income, instability and unpredictability caused by the drastic social change during the 1990s encouraged many to start or to continue to seek solace in drinking. Alcohol use in Latvia had risen significantly since the 1960s. By the early 1980s it had reached 11 litres per capita absolute alcohol consumption per year (Leifman, Henrichson 2000, Trapenciere et.al. 2000). According to various sources, alcohol consumption during the 1990s remained somewhere between 5 and 10 litres per capita (see e.g., *Narkoloģijas centrs* 2000, Tisenkopfs 1999). However, several researchers claim that actual alcohol consumption was greater than shown by statistics. For example, it has been estimated that in 1993 alcohol consumption was more than three times higher than the officially recorded 6,4 litres per capita, reaching a level of 20 litres per capita consumed annually (Strazdiņš et. al. 1995: 32; see also Muižnieks 1996 for data from 1995). Alcohol related deaths rose from 3.1 cases per 100 000 inhabitants in 1981 to 10.1 cases in 1993, reaching a record level of 16.5 cases per 100 000 in 1994 (Vasaraudze 1996). According to data from the Narcology Centre, alcohol related deaths were at 9.6 cases per 100 000 in 1999, but deaths caused by cirrhosis of the liver were at 13.1 (*Narkoloģijas centrs* 2000: 12).

The response to adverse social change by people from the Rēzekne district likewise often manifested itself in the use of alcohol, especially among men. As one of the leading social service workers in the district remarks, in the early 1990s there were "plenty" of men who had lost their jobs and could no longer provide for their families, especially if they lived more than 10 or 20 kilometres from Rēzekne. "A lot of men solved their problems through drinking," she says. She adds that "people here don't consider alcoholism an illness". In circumstances where there is little chance of finding paid employment, one might characterise the mood and attitude of the drinkers as "Well, what [else] can I do?"

Vitolds explains that many long-standing *kolkhoz* workers started to drink because they couldn't bear the fact that the collective resources that they had carefully accumulated and tended were being squandered:

> They were *sovkhoz* bosses, mechanics, engineers [...] they were the ones who had been the driving force of the *kolkhoz*. It was [important] for them to earn that rouble and reinvest it so that the *kolkhoz* would get richer. If he was an engineer or a mechanic, he guarded the machines and made sure that that new car or tractor came from the factory. And then, when they started to give it all away left and right. [...] just let it all go [...] not privatised, but stolen, broken. A lot of people couldn't bear it. Those with weaker nervous systems hung themselves or simply drank themselves to death.

Lauma emphasises, that overall drinking increased because people had suddenly lost their safety and stability, or, as Lauma puts it, their "hope for the future":

> People can't simply restructure the experiences that they had then [during the Soviet period]. Daily life was different — you went to work in the morning and you knew [what to expect]. Now you have no idea what tomorrow will bring. And for some people [...] well, it's an escape. Drink a gram, as the boys say, and things get easier.

Irēna, a small landholder, is one of those local women whose menfolk are seriously drinking at the moment. She explains that alcoholism didn't only affect the men:

> Earlier everyone had to work. [...] They [the workers] were controlled, they were kept in hand. But as soon as they were let loose, they became a herd of sheep going every which way [...] And a lot of women drank themselves to ruin as well. [...] Two of my female classmates have already died. They also drank [...] It depends on the person. [It depends] on their will power.

Irēna explains that her husband was offered a job as a long distance driver, but: "He can't. As soon as he gets his first pay check, he spends it all on alcohol. That takes him three days. And so who will want you then?"

It is clear that because of various circumstances it has been impossible for some of the former *kolkhoz* and factory workers to adjust to a new way of life in the free market economy – an economy in which paid employment is not guaranteed, but must be obtained through struggle, by proving one's skills and ability to work. As Marx would say, these people are unable or unwilling to sell their work as a commodity. It should be emphasised though that this is not simply due to personal characteristics, but has often come about due to broader structural conditions independent of the workers themselves.

In this situation the "100 Lats" beneficiary programmes[19], which were created with the goal of reducing the consequences of the recent financial crisis in the labour

[19] This refers to two European Social Fund measures that co-finance certain projects. First is Work Practice Measure for the Acquisition and Maintenance of Job Skills in Municipalities („Darba praktizēšanas pasākumu nodrošināšana pašvaldības darba iemaņu iegūšanai un uzturēšanai"), which lasted from September 2009 to December 2011. Within the framework of this project, unemployed individuals could participate in community work that required only little qualifications or physical labour and that was beneficial to the local community. Initially such workers would receive a 100 LVL stipend, but from July 2011 the amount was reduced to 80 LVL. Second is the project Paid Temporary Community Service („Algotie pagaidu sabiedriskie darbi") which began in January 2012. As a part of this project, individuals who are registered as unemployed can participate in similar community service work for up to 4 months receiving a stipend of 100 LVL and a 10 LVL deposit into their unemployed person's pension insurance.

market, serve as a kind of replacement for the previously guaranteed and stable work provided by the *kolkhoz* system. Just as in a Soviet farm, the "100 Lats" programme guarantees wage labour and, just as in a Soviet farm, the work done in the "100 Lats" programme may not be important for the worker himself. Work is often done without hurry and without much concern for quality. However, research done in the countryside shows that some of the workers do their assigned jobs honestly, with concern for the outcome. The main difference between work in a *kolkhoz* and work in the "100 Lats" programme is that in the later payment is not dependent on *how well* the work is done, nor on *how much* work has been completed. As we shall see, it is precisely the lack of connection between the compensation and the quality and productivity of work that reduces the motivation of the "100 Lats" workers to work. This makes the programme familiar and attractive in terms of form (similar to the *kolkhoz*), but not in terms of content.

The "100 Lats" beneficiary programme gets very mixed reviews from those who implement the programme (municipal government employees), from the regularly employed, and from those who employ others. Some work leaders deny the usefulness of the programme, calling it a "total waste of money", while others express their regard for the opportunity to "activate" the unemployed and do some local clean-up work with their help. Local employers (mostly farmers) express the viewpoint that the "100 Lats" programme has degraded the unemployed even further, has disaccustomed them from working and from the process of looking for work. For example, a farmwoman from the Rēzekne district called the "100 Lats" programme "a subsidy for alcoholics to continue drinking". At the same time, she admitted that for some of the "100 Lats" workers, such as the former postmistress of the parish, who worked as a custodian in the programme, the money they can earn provides significant relief and helps them survive. The custodian didn't throw her stipend away on the bottle; she kept a cow and tended to her garden.

But even more important than listening to the opinions of various people who are not involved in the programme – which belong to the afore-mentioned invisibility and stigmatisation mode – is to ascertain the opinions of the "100 Lats" workers themselves about their life and their work. Let us therefore turn our attention to two more "100 Lats" beneficiaries from two different civil parishes in the Rēzekne district.

Fifty year old Vanda started working in the "100 Lats" programme after her husband, Leonīds, had completed his allotted time there. Only one member of a family can work in the programme at a time. Earlier, during the Soviet period, Vanda worked at "Rēzeknes Dzirnavnieks"[20], but later she worked in a kindergarten. Vanda lost that job when she went on maternity leave in 1997. Then Vanda registered with the State Employment Agency and has sought work and worked whenever an opportunity presented itself ever since. For four years Vanda had a private arrangement taking care of an old woman, a pensioner. But when the woman passed away Vanda was left without a job again.

Vanda's husband, Leonīds, doesn't have a paying job either. During the Soviet period he worked on a *sovkhoz* as a tractor driver, but after Latvia regained independence he worked in the local forestry service for many years. When the forestry service was liquidated a few years ago, Leonīds was forced to look for other

[20] One of the main regional flour production companies.

work, but he was unable to find anything. He lived in Jelgava and worked as a well digger with a crew there for a while. When he returned, Leonīds entered the "100 Lats" programme. At the moment he receives a GMI grant that is given to able-bodied inhabitants of the Rēzekne district in exchange for 12 hours per week working in civil perish territory.[21]

Vanda and Leonīds have four children, three of whom live at home. The oldest daughter, from Vanda's first marriage, is 29. She and her boyfriend are now living and working in England. The middle daughter is 20 years old; she is studying to be a chef at a professional technical school. Their 18-year-old son is in secondary school, and their youngest daughter is in the 7th grade.

During the winter the family lives in an apartment, but on weekends and in the summer time, they stay with Leonīds' mother in the countryside. Leonīds and Vanda have 2 hectares of land where they grow wheat for their hens, potatoes, and other vegetables. Leonīds and Vanda pay local farmers who have a tractor and a combine to work their land. When they have no money, the tractor owners plough the field in exchange for a promise of future payment. The family also has rabbits. They get milk from Leonīds' sister, who has a cow. During the summer Leonīds and Vanda help prepare hay for the cow. Vanda says that the family also uses food from the grocery packages that the Social Service together with the Rural Support Service hand out in cooperation with some charitable organisations. In the store Vanda mostly buys bread and meat or meat products.

Members of the family pick up work whenever they have the chance. Last summer all three children went to the neighbouring village to pick berries, but in the fall they dug potatoes at a local farm. Since they have their own potatoes, Vanda and Leonīds received payment in money and not in kind. Sometimes Vanda's mother, a pensioner who also lives locally, gives her money.

Apart from the "100 Lats" programme, Vanda doesn't think her family has much of a chance of finding employment. Her husband could go work in the woods if his back didn't hurt. Traveling for work isn't really an option since travel expenses, living expenses, and food must be taken into consideration, so a large part of the earnings would be spent almost immediately. "It is better that we all eat from one pot," says Vanda. She doesn't think about leaving herself because she doesn't want to leave the children. And she is used to life in her civil parish: "When you are used to your place, where else can you go. [...] If I were younger, I might go to another country", Vanda adds with a smile.

Vanda is very happy about her chance to work in "100 Lats" programme. She thinks it is a very good project for the people — there is a big difference between having nothing and having 100 LVL. "Then you live on those hundred lats. And if we didn't have those hundred lats I don't know how we could [manage]. It is very good for us here in the countryside that we have that money," says Vanda. When asked how much she would need for a month she replies that 150 LVL would be enough. When Vanda has finished her current four-month work period she will put her name

[21] In accordance with recent amendments to the Social Services and Social Assistance Law, social services in rural municipalities have the right to involve able-bodied clients who have received social assistance for at least three months in a row in 1) projects that facilitate the preservation, renewal, and acquisition of job and social skills (for up to twelve hours per week over several days) that benefit the community and don't replace the work done by regular employees; 2) work with the territory managed by the municipality, signing contracts with able-bodied clients for a limited period of time (15.12.2011. the law "Grozījumi Sociālo pakalpojumu un sociālās palīdzības likumā", is available here: http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=241847.

on the list for another chance at the programme. Taking into consideration the number of people waiting (about 80), Vanda hopes that she will work again in about eight months.

When asked if any good comes from the "100 Lats" programme, Vanda replies that the civil parish has become cleaner. As a part of the programme Vanda has cleaned pedestrian pathways in the village centre during the winter, during the summer she weeds and sweeps the school territory, and together with other "100 Lats" workers she has tended the cemetery. The local social worker also agrees that their civil parish has really improved as a result of the work done by the "100 Lats" workers— land along the roadside has been mown, dry branches have been cut down, fallen branches have been cleared from the roads etc. The "100 Lats" workers are also involved in supplying winter firewood for the school and municipal buildings, as well as for pensioners that need it.

When her supervisor gives Vanda a job she does it diligently. She distances herself from those people on the programme who tend to drink heavily and, according to the social worker, have lost their place in the programme because of that. "Let them stay home if they don't want to work. If you [want to] drink, then don't work," Vanda is strict.

Andris, a 49-year-old "100 Lats" programme participant in a neighbouring parish may well be one of those who Vanda thinks should stay at home. When we met Andris on a workday morning, he looked like he had either already managed to have a drink or that he was hung over. But over the course of the conversation we discovered that Andris doesn't only drink, he also does other things.

Andris is a driver by profession. During the Soviet period he worked in a local *sovkhoz* as a driver, a builder, and furnace-tender. At the *sovkhoz* he "had everything", says Andris — a wife, children, a house, a job, a garden, a cow, a greenhouse. But with the changes that came in the 1990s he lost his job. His wife, Ināra, worked as a teacher in the local school. When the school was transformed into an orphanage, she lost her job as well. Now his wife works seasonal farm jobs in England and comes home to Latvia when the seasonal work ends. Andris and Ināra's three daughters have also left the parish. The oldest lives with her husband and children in Denmark, the middle daughter lives in Jūrmala, and the youngest lives in Rīga. They wouldn't really have anything to do locally, says Andris.

Three years ago Andris himself spent about ten months working in England, but he hasn't returned there since then. One needs a strong back and good health, Andris says (he seems to have a few health problems). Andris used the money he earned in England to support his daughters, who were still studying at the time, as well as to do some work on his apartment. His last paid job was two years ago, when he worked for a transportation firm as a long-distance driver. He earned close to 1000 LVL driving to Germany, Poland, and France, but then he got into a conflict with the boss and quit. Andris had hoped to find another salaried position, but he wasn't able to, and ever since he has been surviving on the occasional odd job and the "100 Lats" programme. When we were talking with Andris he was participating in the programme for the second time, receiving a lower stipend of 80 LVL. He wasn't sure what kind of job he might find when his stint with programme ended in one month's time.

Just like Vanda and Leonīds' family, Andris lives in an apartment house in the centre of the village and works a piece of land three kilometres distant from his home. Andris grows his potatoes and other vegetables there, and gathers wood for heating

his apartment as well. In addition, Andris fishes in a nearby lake and picks mushrooms in the forest. Sometimes Andris makes a little money on the side by digging potatoes or making hay at one of the local farms. At a respectable farm Andris can earn 5 LVL for a day of digging potatoes.

The "100 Lats" stipend gives Andris some very necessary cash, but in contrast to Vanda, he doesn't express appreciation for either the job or the money. Andris emphasises several times that he gets "only 80 lats".

> The salary determines the job. [...] I can do the job in a week or in a month. [But] I have no interest in doing it in a week. They won't pay me any more. [...] I would do it [finish the job] until evening or work more with a good conscience, if I were to receive even a kopek [for it]. But if I don't get [paid] any more than 80 Lats, I do it *haltai-baltai* [carelessly], as they say.

Andris admits that he sometimes drinks, but he does do his work: "I work according to my own conscience... [although] slowly and calmly." Andris sees himself as potentially a good worker, who would work properly and reliably for an adequate salary. When asked what the minimum wage would need to be so that he could manage Andris mentions the same sum that Vanda mentioned, 150 LVL.

From the examples here we can conclude that none of these people are "lazy drunkards", not Vanda and Leonīds, not Andris, and not Vilnis mentioned above. They are people who are trying to come to terms with the vicissitudes of their lives, namely with the unpleasant circumstances in which they find themselves due to structural social change. All of them work "invisibly", that is, in addition to "100 Lats" programme they work at home and in their kitchen gardens, which helps them to survive and sustain their families.

These life story fragments also demonstrate the variation in motivation and interpretation that exists within this seemingly homogenous social group. Not only are not all "100 Lats" programme beneficiaries "lazy drunkards", they also vary greatly in their attitudes and their behaviour.

It is important also to pay attention to the differences between the recipients of social benefits in various regions. The social worker in Vanda and Leonīds civil parish says that sooner or later everyone in this parish — except for pensioners, farmers, and those people who have jobs in the local municipality, the school, or the store — goes through the "100 Lats" programme. Compared with the neighbouring civil parish in Northern Vidzeme, where she worked before, in the Rēzekne district people participating in the "100 Lats" programme have many fewer alcohol problems. Most of the "100 Lats" workers are from families with children where the parents lost their previous *sovkhoz* or factory jobs and have not been able to regain their footing in the new economic landscape. By contrast, according to the social worker's experience in Northern Vidzeme, most of the "100 Lats" workers there, predominantly men around 40 and older, drink seriously and have no desire to work. In the Kurzeme district where Alma lives, the work organiser likewise says that there isn't anyone in the programme who doesn't drink. Of course, these small insights do not provide enough information to come to any generalised conclusions, but they do warn against characterising these people without critical assessment.

Yet there is one trait that could be attributed to a large part of rural proletariat who currently hold no paid jobs. Namely, these workers see work as a guaranteed right, as a status they are entitled to, which would allow them to provide their living and on the whole ensure an acceptable life, just as it used to be during the Soviet

times. As we saw in the previous sections, some workers have been unable to make the change from a situation in which work is guaranteed to one in which work must be sought by selling one's skills in the free market.

This understanding of work as a guaranteed status and a guaranteed source of income does not agree with and often even contradicts the idea of hard work as a virtue which seems to have retained its force in the realm of collective representations.[22] In public discourse, the virtue of work – the cornerstone of the Latvian self-image as a nation – is linked to the countryside, to those who tend the soil. But can this ideal (the idealised view of industriousness) really be attributed to the contemporary work in rural areas? Before we answer this question let us briefly look into the genealogy of work as a virtue.

Work as virtue?

The characterisation of Latvians as diligent workers reaches back to the second part of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century when the Latvian nation was conjured in both national politics and literature alongside with its affirmation on the international stage.

It is important to note that the image of the Latvian people is not simply "workers", but "peasant workers". Borrowing from a rich body of folklore material, the Latvian literature has produced a figure of a strong productive peasant farmer — a tireless labourer and steward of his land. As political scientist Katrina Schwartz has accurately observed, it was precisely this image of farmer that went into the conceptual core of agrarian nationalism (the triad of man, soil/nature, and man's productive work tilling the soil) so powerfully resurrected in Latvia in the 1990s (Schwartz 2006: 1-91). This political vision was based on the rebirth of rural Latvia as a prerequisite for economic development and the health of the nation. We can surmise that the virtue of work, which is inextricably bound with stewardship of the land, is not a neutral concept.

Let's examine a bit more the "content" of this virtue that has been idealised over time. In the rich body of Latvian folk songs, work is revealed as the basis of life — in fact, work is inseparable from life (Jansons 1973 [1960]: 13-16). For example:

I thank my mother
For the virtue she cherished:
I tired not from singing,
Nor from a life of work.
(Ibid: 14, LD 94_1 II suppl.)

Did bread come of itself
In a wealthy place? –
The sun has not risen,
If my back is not wet.
(Ibid: 60, Sel. I 982)

Through working, man becomes a part of nature and social life and gains recognition as a virtuous worker. Folklorist Jānis Alberts Jansons emphasises that in the language of the Latvian folk song *tikums* (virtue) in its most basic form always refers to *darba tikums* (the virtue of work). The ability to perform work well, day in and day out, is connected to all of the other virtues that are dependent on the virtue of work in some sense: bravery, wisdom, compassion, harmony, the joy of living etc. (Ibid: 12-52).

[22] The virtue of work could be viewed as an ideal form which lingers on, even if tis substance is partially depleted (MacIntyre 2007: 5).

It is also important to note that folksongs are indicative of a particular socioeconomic context, as in this example, which characterises the unpaid labour of Latvian serfs during the period of German feudalism:

Hell is the master's threshing-barn,
Hell is his threshing-floor;
Gold is my threshing-barn,
Gilded is my threshing-floor.
(Ibid: 13, Sel. I 1866)

This day, that day,
I must work for my master.
I will work again for myself
When my strength is gone.
(Ibid: 77, LD 31706)

Likewise, the Latvian literature of the 19th – 20th centuries provides rich insights into the idea of work and work and property relations during various time periods. In the project „*Savs kaktiņš, savs stūrītis ...*" literary scientist Aija Priedīte has analysed this theme in depth (see Priedīte 2011, 2012a, 2012b). In her research Priedīte turns to the ideal of heavy, unrelenting, and well executed labour that can be found in the work of authors Anna Brigadere, Jānis Purapuķe, Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš and others. She traces the connection between this type of work and ownership of land and a home, or striving towards such ownership (Priedīte 2012b: 187-218), showing how at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries the ideal model of work was work *for oneself* and *in one's own place* or to create *one's own place*. This insight casts a different light on work and working relationships during the Soviet and post-Soviet years. Relevant passages are easily found in Latvian literature, as, for example, this conversation in Juris Purapuķe's 1898 novella between Pēters Zelmenis, a servant who has become his own master, and his son shows that the current social processes are nothing new for Latvians:

> „Don't all land owners complain about the lack of workers? – Now everyone wants to be master, to receive a large salary, but rarely does anyone want to work. That is why landowners are ruined and servants are ruined.
> Yes, ruined; and still in places servants would rather be idle and die of starvation than work for a moderate wage.
> How sad: an entire people's prosperity is destroyed by this kind of thinking." (Purapuķe 1948: 142, quoted in Priedīte 2011: 49).

As Aija Priedīte observes, if Purapuķe's land owner sees his land as the potential source of good harvest, profit, and as enhancing the general wellbeing of his family, the servant associates the same land and harvest with heavy (and insufficiently compensated) labour (Ibid.) Fieldwork carried out for the purposes of current article has revealed similar sentiments among the former *kolkhoz* workers who sometimes see working for farmers as unfairly remunerated employment.[23]

As regards farmers themselves, and especially smallholders, hard work on their farms indeed often forms the core of their life, close to how it has been portrayed in literature. And yet the heavy farm labour, which supposedly has its own moral value as the "basis for the Latvian way of life", does not always bring profit and is not

[23] Polish anthropologist Michał Buchowski has observed akin attitudes among the Polish rural proletariat (Buchoswki 2004).

valued as competitive in the market economy, but rather is seen as "backward" and insufficiently productive.[24]

Many of the close to 90 farmers we have met in various rural districts, both non-commercial small holders and commercial farm owners, have said that they do not wish this kind of hard and insufficiently profitable labour on their children and they would like them to do something else with their lives (This does not mean, however, that there are no farms in the countryside where the younger generation takes over or wants to take over farming from their parents).

A small dairy farmer in Rēzekne district, whose son and daughter are both in their final years of secondary school and help their father a lot with the farm work, says of his son potentially staying on at the farm: "Why ruin the health of a young man? – "Yes!" adds the farmer's 72 year old mother, who continues to work daily on the farm. "There is no need for him [the grandson] to shovel the same shit we shovel."

"It isn't worth it," says a small holder in one of the districts of Kurzeme region. "I don't recommend it either. I don't even want my son to come here to the countryside. The work is simply not worth the effort."

But a local government worker in another civil parish in the same rural district, who has a dairy farm with 30 cows, anxiously concludes: "The worst thing is that all the young people are leaving. But of course, how can we keep them here, with heavy labour form morning till night!? And in the end you can barely make ends meet. That isn't really much of anything."

It is interesting to note that despite the understanding that hard work does not pay and is not appreciated, farmers continue to do it and also expect it of their paid (in money or in kind) workers. And so relationships between farmers and representatives of the local proletariat are very similar today to those between landowners and farmworkers (including pieceworkers) in the first half of the 20th century. Anthropologists might call such relationships patron-client relationships. It is not uncommon for mid-size farm owners to hire additional help for a limited time or permanently. Most often such agreements are informal and do not include the payment of employee taxes. The worker may become something like a member of the family – he is allowed to make use of extra space, he may eat with the family or be given food and clothing separately. Some farmers accept alcoholism or binge drinking that is often found among such workers, as long as it does not significantly interfere with work.

So far I have described two different understandings of work in the daily rural life and public discourse: work as a guaranteed right to earn one's living associated with the proletarians and work as a virtue linked to the peasants. Neither of these meanings corresponds to a third, ideologically predominant interpretation of work as productive wage labour that produces high added value and leads to an increase in the GDP. These criteria cannot be applied neither to small and mid-sized farms, standing with one foot in the subsistence sector and with the other in the capitalist production sector, nor to the rural proletariat. Rather, common to both farmers and farm labourers is their continuous heavy physical work in a rural environment that remains "invisible", i.e., not considered to be work or work that is appropriate for today's

[24] Again, Buchowski has observed a similar transformation in the Polish countryside in the post-Soviet period (Ibid.). He shows that farmers, whose ethical core is derived from heavy, unrelenting labour and independence or self-sufficiency that is guaranteed by stewardship of the land, and who therefore feel separate from and better than the local proletariat and office workers, have still not accepted the fact that their heavy labour does not result in corresponding profit.

economy due to its lacking productivity. For the landowners, work is an investment in their farms, but for the proletariat (of which many are officially unemployed and receiving welfare), work is tending to their kitchen gardens without which it would be impossible to survive. As says the head of social service in a Kurzeme district, almost everyone has a garden, and "a person without a garden is a very lazy person in our eyes". It seems that many of those who are being asked to get up from the sofa haven't even had a chance to sit down in one. This is determined by a rural lifestyle that demands "movement" or practical activity — working the land and tending the garden, milking, sawing, digging, fixing something etc.

Perhaps under the present circumstances, when a stable increase in jobs is not guaranteed (Hazans 2010) and an immediate leap in the qualifications of the presently unemployed is likewise unlikely, the invisible work should be seen just for what it is — the main way to sustain what has remained of life in the countryside?

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