THE IMAGE OF THE BORDER GUARD IN SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The profession of border guard is one of the oldest professions and plays an important role in the functioning of the state. Its image is shaped by public perceptions of the professional activities, behaviors and attitudes of its members. In principle, it is a set of opinions about the reputation, prestige and popularity of the profession. In order to find out and study the public opinion on the image and prestige of the border guard profession in today's changing conditions, the authors of the article both discusses theoretical findings on the image of the profession and, by analyzing the results of a survey, studies the public opinions on the image of the border guard profession. The public values professionalism, the highest human values (honesty, justice, patriotism, loyalty, etc.), kind and responsive communication, visual image, as well as positive publicity about the sector, achievements of border guards and other positive events.*

Keywords: *image of the Latvian border guard, popularity, public opinion, reputation and attractiveness of the profession.*

Introduction

Border guards are one of the oldest professions in the world, dating back many millennia to ensure the security and integrity of each country's borders. Today, the main task of a border guard has remained unchanged, but the working methods have changed. However, globalisation and the mobility of workers around the world have contributed to changes in the range of professions and their popularity.

The State Border Guard has also raised the issue of attracting new staff to the service and the need to promote the profession of border guard more widely and actively, as the lack of qualified staff threatens the further successful implementation of the main function of the State Border Guard - "to ensure the integrity of the state border and prevent illegal migration" (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020). One of the solutions, supported by the State Border Guard Service itself, is to promote the visibility of the profession of a border guard in society and to create a positive image in a targeted manner.

In today's highly competitive professional environment (Rozario et al., 2019), it is important to clarify and explore public perceptions of the image

and popularity of the border guard profession in today's changing circumstances, as these have been under-researched, although they are important in the continuity of the profession. Therefore, the authors of the study presented both theoretical and scientific knowledge on the image of the professional and, by analysing the results of a survey, researched and identified public opinions on the image of the Latvian border guard.

The aim of the study - to investigate the public opinion on the image of the Latvian border guard profession today.

Hypothesis - in today's changing conditions, the image of the border guard is still positive and the profession is competitive.

Research methods used in the study: the theoretical presentation used literature analysis to assess the topic of the study in the published materials, practical experimental part conducted a questionnaire.

Theoretical basis

Every profession is worthy of respect - each has a vital role to play in the full functioning of society, its growth and well-being (Latvijas Izglītības un zinātnes darbinieku arodbiedrības Padome, 2020). According to Richard Tavney's opinion, a profession is "not just a collection of individuals who earn their living doing the same job ", but also "a collection of people who carry out their work in accordance with rules designed to establish standards both for the better protection of its members and for the better service of society" (Armstrong, 2019; Tawney, 1982). The British sociologist M. Sacks has a similar view of the concept of profession, calling it a special kind of occupation (or profession) that can be filled only after special training, embodying both a professional ethos and special skills (Saks, 2012). To describe it, he highlights the following characteristics: it has unique and positive qualities, including distinctive knowledge and skills (Saks, 2012). In a similar vein, Austrian researcher Lee Armstrong argues that the profession is based on a traditionally structured professional status, linked to a defined educational system and an established professional code of ethics that defines certain core values of the professional culture: integrity, honesty and responsibility (Armstrong, 2019). Whereas Iranian researchers F. Ghadirian, M. Salsali, M. A. Cheraghi highlight factors such as: 1) a pool of knowledge acquired through formal education, 2) a high level of competence, 3) inclusion criteria, 4) a professional certification process and 5) a set of behavioural and attitudinal norms known as professionalisation (Ghadirian et al., 2014). According to the British researcher M. Sack, a profession that possesses the above-mentioned professional image factors and characteristics enjoys full public trust (Saks, 2012), which can be seen as both a kind of validation that ensures the status and prestige of the

profession, and as a challenge that the profession has to overcome to maintain its viability.

An image is a kind of representation of societal perceptions and stereotypes that have been created through experience. Sociologist Alexei Vorobyov, agreeing with the ideas of French scientist Gustave Lebon, highlights the importance of the image in shaping public opinion: "An image is an emotionally saturated idea that embodies vitality and subsequently triggers action" (Vorobjovs, 2002). In A. Vorobjovs' opinion, an image is that which inspires and influences a certain part of society, which willingly submits to a certain character through its emotional experience and attitude (Vorobjovs, 2002). An image can thus be defined as a public image with a certain stimulating message and which has its own credibility weight.

The image of the profession also includes concepts such as 'professional image' (these are also mutually influential), defined by American professor Laura Morgan Roberts, whose research focuses on organisational management and leadership, as a set of traits and skills that reflect perceptions of competence and character as judged by key constituencies (i.e. customers, bosses, subordinates, colleagues) (Roberts, 2017). This concept refers to one's externally oriented public persona, mainly focusing on reflected evaluations (how others perceive one) rather than one's self-image. L. M. Roberts concludes that a professional's image is formed in interpersonal interactions (Roberts, 2017), because "people are constantly observing [...] behaviour and developing theories about [...] competence, character and commitment which are quickly spread throughout the [...] workplace (Stark, 2020; quoted from an interview with L. M. Roberts, 2020)". Austrian researcher Lee Armstrong, on the other hand, in her publication "A New Image for a New Profession: Self-image and Representation in the Professionalisation of Design in Britain, 1945-1960" (2019) in the context of a professional image, Valerie Fournier recognises that being a professional is not just about acquiring knowledge, but about acting and constituting oneself accordingly (Armstrong, 2019; Fournier, 1999). So, when a person pursues a profession, he or she needs to develop a professional self-image, or a professional's perception of him or herself (Armstrong, 2019). Similarly, the theme of Armstrong's professional image and identity is also highlighted in the insights of British sociologist Geoffrey Millerson. He stresses that professional image has 3 dynamics: self-perception, which determines and reinforces the content of professional behaviour and adherence to it; self-esteem; public (including other professionals) evaluation (Armstrong, 2019; Millerson, 1964). He also offers his interpretation of professional identity as "a set of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about educational achievements and background, working conditions, life style, belonging and loyalty". (Armstrong, 2019; Millerson,

1964). In her publication "Theoretical Foundations of Teacher's Professional Identity" (2019), Latvian psychology professor M. Vidnere highlights the importance of professional self-awareness (it is one of the key factors) in constructing the image of a professional, defining it as a person's self-awareness, for whom a particular professional activity is the main means of realising one's personal value as a formative personality (Vidnere, 2019). In principle, professional self-awareness is a self-assessment of one's own professionalism, which M. Vidnere describes as the objective ability to evaluate the scope of one's work on the basis of one's developed skills, professional mastery, quality, professional performance (Vidnere, 2019). It can be concluded that professionalism is a critical element in the image of the professional, which is a measure of the degree of self-actualisation. Professionalism in its expression reflects the demand of society. The relationship between the professional and the public, on the other hand, must be built on culture, integrity, honesty and the values of accountability (Armstrong, 2019). Similar thoughts are shared by L. M. Roberts in her article "Changing faces: building a professional image in different organisational environments" (Roberts, 2017) stresses that a positive professional image is shaped by both personal and social identity (Roberts, 2017). In particular, she highlights the importance of social identity in the successful management of an impression, which effectively performs two tasks: building credibility and maintaining authenticity (Roberts, 2017). The question arises, how can this be achieved when, in the public's estimation, the only respectable basis for demonstrating professionalism is ability and knowledge? (Armstronga, 2019) L. M. Robert's view of making a positive impression is to try to "educate others about the positive qualities of a given identity group, to advocate on behalf of the members of the identity group and to incorporate one's own identity experiences into workplace interactions and innovation"(Stark, 2020; from an interview with L. M. Roberts). Thus, to gain public trust, a professional must demonstrate a professional performance that promotes a purposeful representation of the profession, highlighting all the unique characteristics and advantages of the profession, including the professional's opportunities for self-realisation.

The impression factor plays an important role in evaluating the image of a profession in order to influence public opinion positively. Public perceptions of image are influenced by a set of interrelated factors: each individual's living and working environment, emotional experience, visual appearance, world view, value system, behavioural culture, verbal and non-verbal communication. These factors determine the attitudinal position (i.e. positive/negative; valuable/less valuable, etc.). Visual perceptions, or "visual codes" according to L. Armstrong, are important for forming impressions about the image of a profession (Armstrog, 2019), which is symbolic of the

character. Each of us has our own signature of professional presence - an indelible statement we make as soon as we appear. It is the energy we bring to a room, and the confidence and initiative we demonstrate. It gives us the opportunity to instantly connect (Women in Business, 2001).

Positive representation of the profession provides feedback, which in turn has a positive impact on its prestige. It is a specific public evaluation, made up of members of the profession itself, clients, the general public and other professional groups (Latvijas Izglītības un zinātnes darbinieku arodbiedrības, 2016). Many factors are taken into account when assessing the attractiveness of an occupation: working conditions - employment status, pay and hours (Eiropas Izglītības un kultūras izpildaģentūra, 2015), and the working environment and conditions in which the industry must work (Latvijas Izglītības un zinātnes darbinieku arodbiedrības Padome, 2016) and opportunities for self-realisation. Positive evaluation builds public trust and confidence.

The theoretical findings provide a general idea of the key features and factors of the image of a profession and the image of a professional or an industry representative, which is the basis for further research on the topic.

The image of the Latvian border guard in the context of legislation

A border guard is an official having a state power and who ensures the protection of an object of national importance - the state border. It is one of the oldest professions, which has been praised, revered and idealised, as well as vilified and vilified, at different points in history. This image also permeates mythological narratives. In Latvia, for example, we identify the profession with the literary image of *Tālavas Taurētājs* (Bugler of Tālava) who stands guard day and night at the borders of the country. It is his mission to monitor and protect the borders of his homeland from enemies so that his people feel safe. In essence, a country cannot exist without this profession.

This profession has existed in Latvia since 7 November 1919, when the first border guards started to form the service and guard the state border. In the historical context, border guards as a profession have been both a Ministry of Defence (1919-1922 and 1991-1997) and the Ministry of the Interior, where it was assigned certain social roles: soldier, civil servant, public official. Currently, a border guard is a profession representing the professional public service of the Ministry of the Interior. According to Article 10 (1) and (2) of the Law of the Republic of Latvia "On State Border Guard Law" of 5 November 2020, "a border guard is an officer of the State Border Guard who has been granted a special rank of service" (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020) and which perform tasks delegated by the State Border Guard in the field of state border control and border surveillance and the prevention

of illegal migration. Whereas the status of an official is defined in Section 32(1) of the Law on the Structure of Public Administration - "In the public administration, officials are included in a single hierarchical system in which one official is subordinate to another official. An official shall act within the limits of his competence and shall perform his duties and exercise his rights independently (Valsts pārvaldes iekārtas likums, 2002). Accordingly, Section 2(6) of the Law on Remuneration of Officials and Employees of State and Local Government Institutions provides that persons who [...] are employed by [...] institutions on the basis of an employment contract, who [...] perform public service, who are appointed, confirmed or have been appointed to an office or otherwise perform certain duties, shall be considered officials (service, work) duties in a state or local authority (Valsts un pašvaldību institūciju amatpersonu un darbinieku atlīdzības likums, 2009). The statutory social status sets limits on the profession's activities, which are inherently restrictive in order to strengthen public confidence in the profession.

Given the important mission of the Latvian border guard, it is a certain image with its own positive and unique qualities. There are certain selection criteria for the suitability of the image of the profession. It is a citizen of the Republic of Latvia, aged between 18 and 40 years, who has at least secondary education and who, by his/her personal qualities, physical fitness and state of health, is suitable for service in the State Border Guard (Valsts robežsardzes koledžas Padome, 2022). It should be noted that a border guard leaves the service at the age of 50, which is another feature of the profession's image.

A person who wishes to become a border guard and serve in the Border Guard shall confirm his/her desire to serve his/her homeland by a solemn oath: "I, border guard (name, surname), swear to be honest and truthful, faithful to the Republic of Latvia, to perform my duties in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, international treaties, laws and other normative acts, to spare no effort, health and life, to protect the Republic of Latvia and its independence and to serve the general interests of society" (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020). It is a symbolic act of a person voluntarily choosing to join the service and to serve his country and society by expressing his readiness. Given the historical tradition of service, society has traditionally looked forward to this pledge, which sets out symbolic codes of values: honesty, justice, loyalty, strength, health, life and service.

The uniform is characteristic of the border guard profession. The uniform is a direct symbol of the idea and power of the State (Students, 1940). The uniform is an integral attribute of the service, having both a functional use and conveying non-verbal messages about the wearer's professional identity and status. The uniform, with all its distinctive insignia, gives a visual

impression of the importance and necessity of the profession, both to the wearer and to society as a whole.

A border guard is under the protection of the state - his life and health are protected by the state (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020). But in return, they are required to keep their word when they take the oath and to carry out their duties in a professional manner. According to the modern Latvian legislation, in order to protect the interests of the State, the State has: delegated certain tasks and responsibilities to border guards, and granted certain rights (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020). The State provides that border guards shall be armed during the performance of their duties and, if necessary, may use their service weapon in certain situations (Valsts robežsardzes likums, 2020).

The Border Guard's course of service and professional code of ethics prescribe a model of internal relations and hierarchical order based on military principles, as well as positive, courteous and "gentlemanly behaviour", so that during service a border guard has only the opportunity to professionally self-realise and represent himself within this model.

The image of the border guard in itself represents the image of the defender of the state, who is entrusted by both the state and its people with the surveillance and control of a strategically important state object - the state border, as well as its protection from the enemy. This determines the status and importance of the profession. In terms of the mission of the profession, this image inherently conveys a very favourable and positive image of itself, which generates full public confidence in the profession and in the sector as a whole.

Study results and analysis

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data needed for the study. To obtain qualitative data, the authors of the study defined the criteria for the participants: people who use computers, mobile phones and social networks on a daily basis; young people aged 15 and older; adults aged up to 69; people from different regions of Latvia. A random sampling method was used to study the elements of the cluster. To identify public opinion, the authors spoke to people of different ages, genders and educational backgrounds. From 14 April to 18 April 2022 VisiDati.lv an anonymous survey was published on the survey service's website. In order to obtain public opinion on the topic, the authors invited members of the target audience to participate in a survey using the social networking tool www.facebook.lv Messenger. As a result, almost half of the 150 respondents invited to take part in the survey responded to the invitation, that is 69 persons (46%). Of these, only 28 were men aged 17-50 and 41 women aged

17-62. The average age of the respondents was 36.9 years. The respondents were from Jelgava, Valmiera, Rezekne, Daugavpils, Jurmala, Riga, the Baltic Sea Region and other small towns, sparsely populated areas, rural areas. As it was important to find out what contemporary society thinks about the image of the Latvian border guard, the authors did not focus on a detailed analysis of demographic data, but instead analysed the content of the surveys.

The authors deliberately asked the participants in question 1 to provide associations (first thoughts and impressions) about the border guard as an image. Taking into account the fact that the participants had not yet explored the topic of the questionnaire, the answers of the respondents can be considered as intuitive associations. Each respondent could write down three associations. The most frequently mentioned terms were: "state border/border and border" - 24 mentions of; "uniform" - 21; "national security" - 17; "national defence" - 8; "passport control" - 6; "border control" - 5; "service dog" - 5; "corruption" - 5; "patriot" - 4; "courage" - 4; "guard" - 4; "smuggling" - 4; "national image" - 3; "national calling card" - 3; "homeland" - 3; "responsibility" - 3; " duty car" - 3; "green" - 3. Among the answers were the following qualities of a border guard: 'courageous', 'honest', 'well-groomed', 'helpful', 'suave', 'orderly', 'poised', 'professional' and 'manly'; service values: 'team spirit', 'strength', 'responsibility', 'courage', 'selflessness', 'endurance' and 'respect'; expressions such as 'Your documents, please! "Please, your documents!", "Lie down!" and "Honour to serve Latvia!"; associations related to belonging: 'My grandfather S.B. was a Latvian border guard', 'Latgale', 'East'; other associations describing the profession: 'the most popular profession in the border area', 'a secure job with social guarantees', 'stressful work', 'useless profession', 'weapons', 'battle', 'discipline', 'forest life' and 'big boots'. These first-moment associations give a general idea of how the profession is visually perceived by the public. This is broadly in line with the image of border guards presented in the media.

When further questions were processed, the following situation emerged:

- Question 2 "Who is a border guard?" 9 participants answered "soldier", 50 - "law enforcement officer of a security authority", 10 - "civil servant".
- Using a Likert scale, participants gave their ratings on the 4 statements in question 3:
  - *For statement 1 "The border guard profession is important for national security", 41 respondents (59.4% of the total number of respondents) answered "strongly agree", 18 participants (26.1%) - "rather agree", 8 participants (11.6%) - "strongly disagree",*

1 participant (1.4%) "rather disagree" and 1 participant (1.4%) "neither agree nor disagree";

- *In statement 2 "Border guard is a prestigious profession in Latvia today", the most frequent answers were "rather agree" - 22 participants (31.9%) and "neither agree nor disagree" - 22 participants (31.9%). 18 respondents (26.1%) answered "rather disagree", 4 participants (5.8%) - "strongly disagree" and 3 participants (4.3%) - "strongly agree";*
- *Statement 3 "The prestige and reputation of the border guard profession depends on each individual border guard" was most frequently answered "strongly agree" by 28 participants (40.6%) and "rather agree" by 21 participants (30.4%). 12 participants (17.4%) answered "strongly disagree", 5 participants (7.2%) - "neither agree nor disagree" and 3 participants (4.3%) - "rather disagree".*

The answers provided show that the public is aware of the status of the professional identity of a border guard. It is a law enforcement officer. The data from the survey show that the general public is aware of the importance of the profession of border guard in maintaining national security, but they are not convinced that this profession is prestigious. The overwhelming majority of respondents agree that the actions, behaviour and attitudes of each border guard affect the prestige and reputation of the profession.

- In questions 4, 5 "Name three factors that positively influence the image of a border guard", "Name three factors that negatively influence the image of a border guard", the participants' answers were summarised and systematised into groups. The article presents the 10 most frequently mentioned positive and 10 negative factors. It should be noted that the answers of the respondents for many of the negative factors were identical or very similar, therefore the number of answers is higher than the number of answers for the positive factors. There was a wide range of opinions on the positive factors, suggesting that members of the public see many positive advantages and features of the profession that may have the potential to further promote the image of border guards.

Table 1 **Factors influencing the profession of border guard**
(created by the authors)

Positive factors		Negative factors	
Name of the factor	**Number of responses**	**Name of the factor**	**Number of responses**
Professionalism and competence of the border guard	14	Corrupt crime, bribe-taking	30
Tidy external, visual appearance	12	Rude, bold behaviour, intolerant, unkind attitude, disrespect	13
Honesty, justice	11	Messy, dirty uniform, ruthless wearing of it	13
Publicity about the work of border guards, their achievements and other positive things	8	Incompetence, unprofessionalism, ineptitude, lack of knowledge and skills of border guards	11
Uniform	8	Low, uncompetitive pay	10
Stable, good remuneration	7	Superficiality, negligence, carelessness in the performance of official duties	5
Communication skills	7	Negative attitude of the border guard himself towards the service and the state, making negative statements in public	5
Positivity, smile	5	Abuse of power	5
Education	5	Drinking alcohol (outside work) in public places	5
Responsiveness	5	Insufficient physical fitness	4

According to the survey data, it can be concluded that the public, firstly, appreciates the appearance, physical fitness level, communication skills and professionalism of a border guard, secondly, is informed about the specifics and achievements of a border guard, thirdly, likes to learn positive things about border guards, fourthly, is not satisfied with negative news and observations about the inaction or criminal behaviour of a border guard.

- The answers to the hierarchical question 6 "Rank in order of priority from 1 to 10 the factors that are important for the positive image of border guards (1 - "least important", 10 - "most important")" are summarised in Table 2 and revealed the public opinion on the positive factors of the profession (as defined by the authors).

Table 2 **Public assessment of factors influencing the positive image of border guards** (created by the authors)

Factor name by order of importance	Place	Points
Professional honesty and justice	10	512
Responsibility and competence	9	468
Patriotism, loyalty	8	447
Good physical fitness	7	419
Ability to communicate in a foreign language	6	379
Discipline	5	368
Maintained appearance, uniform in order	4	368
Communicability	3	342
Agility	2	272
Eloquence	1	220

At the beginning of the study, the authors put forward their own positive influences on the border guard profession, with the aim of assessing public opinion. They concluded that, in general, the factors identified by the respondents were in line with those identified by the authors. Of the positive factors identified by the authors, the survey respondents ranked professional integrity and fairness, responsibility and competence, and patriotism and loyalty highest. These are high values in society.

- In question 7 "Please rate to what extent the following factors influence your opinion of the State Border Guard Service and border guards?" respondents rated the levels of influence of the factors using a Likert scale. Using a Likert scale, the respondents gave their ratings on 4 channels of information:
  - *"Personal experience" 44 respondents (63.8%) answered "very influenced", 14 participants (20.3%) "somewhat influenced", 7 participants (10.1%) "neutral", 4 participants (5.8%) "not influenced" and no participants (0%) "rarely influenced";"Experiences told by relatives, friends and acquaintances" 27 respondents (39.1%) answered "somewhat influenced", 18 participants (26.1%) - "very influenced", 17 participants (24.6%) - "neutral", 4 participants (5.8%) "rarely influenced" and 3 participants (4.3%) "not influenced";*
  - *"Information in the media (TV, radio, press and internet news portals)" 23 respondents (33.3%) answered "neutral", 20 participants (29%) "somewhat influenced", 14 participants (20.3%) "very influenced", 9 participants (13%) "rarely influenced" and 3 participants (4.3%) "not influenced";*

- *"Information, comments, feedback on social networks and blogs" 22 respondents (31.9%) answered "neutral", 12 respondents (17.4%) "very influential", 12 respondents (17.4%) "somewhat influential", 12 respondents (17.4%) "not influential" and 11 respondents (15.9%) "rarely influential".*

The data show that respondents say they rely on their personal experience as a priority, and listen a little to the opinions of relatives, friends and acquaintances. The majority of respondents are neutral about the media, social networks and blogs. However, there is a section of society that is very much or very little influenced by the information disseminated in the media.

- In the closed-ended question 9, 53 respondents chose the answer "Yes". This is 76.8% of the total number of respondents. 16 respondents chose the answer "No". This represents 23.2% of the total number of respondents. The data show that the overwhelming majority of respondents trust the opinion expressed by border guards in the media.
- In the closed-ended question 10, "Is the image of border guards generally positively portrayed in the media?", 56 respondents (81.2%) chose the answer "Yes", while 13 respondents (18.8%) chose the answer "No". The data show that an overwhelming majority of respondents appreciate that the image of the border guard is positively represented in the media.
- In closed-ended question 11, "Does the media provide objective information about border guards?", 46 respondents (66.7%) chose the answer "Yes", while 23 respondents (33.3%) chose the answer "No". The data show that the overwhelming majority of participants agree that the border guard is the country's identity card.
- In the closed-ended question 12 "Do you agree with the award "Border Guard is the country's calling card"?", 56 respondents (81.2%) chose the answer "Yes", while 13 respondents (18.8%) chose the answer "No"..
- The answers to the open-ended question 13 "Name professions with similar prestige as border guards" are summarised in Table 3.

Participants mainly identified public sector professions that play an important role in the life of the country and society, and professions that do not require similar skills and knowledge.

- In closed-ended question 14, "Is border guarding a popular profession nowadays?" 37 respondents (53.6%) chose the answer "Yes", while 32 respondents (46.4%) chose the answer "No". The results show that, at the moment, by a small margin (7.2%),

respondents agree that the profession of border guard is popular and known.

Table 3 **Similar prestigious professions to border guards**
(created by the authors)

Name of the profession	Number of answers	Name of the profession	Number of answers
Police officer	46	President	1
Firefighter	23	Priest	1
NAF recruit	22	Lecturer	1
Customs officer	11	Lawyer	1
Home Guard	9	Municipal police officer	1
Teacher	8	Prison officer	1
Doctor	4	Security service officer	1
Security	2	Truck driver	1
Attorney	2	Janitor	1
Military police officer	2	Summer seasonal road worker	1
Forest ranger	2		

The data obtained enable the identification of factors influencing public opinion, as well as the necessary impulses for the development of a positive image of the Latvian border guard and the promotion of the profession.

Conclusions and proposals

This empirical study is comprehensive and representative, based on the thoughts and emotions of survey respondents at a given point in time. The study provides valuable insights into the public's assessment of the image of the Latvian border guard, and is a valuable source of data analysis for further representation of a positive image of the border guard.

The profession of border guard is a speciality that exists on a long-established model of professionalism. This involves establishing and maintaining traditional values, adhering to a professional code of ethics and maintaining a culture of interaction and communication characteristic of the service.

The image of the border guard is one of the key factors ensuring the competitiveness of the profession. It is the members of the profession who build and maintain the prestige and reputation of the profession.

The public values professionalism, the highest human values (honesty, justice, patriotism, loyalty, etc.), kind and responsive communication, visual

image, as well as positive publicity about the sector, the achievements of border guards and other positive events. The public generally has a positive image of Latvian border guards and trusts them, but also recognises that the image of the profession is negatively affected by the unprofessionalism, unethical behaviour and negative communication of border guards serving in the sector. In principle, the authors' hypothesis - that in today's changing public perception the image of border guards is still positive and the profession is competitive - has been confirmed. However, in today's changing circumstances, the continued competitiveness of the profession must contribute to the development of a positive image of the border guard. Border guards themselves need to carefully develop their professional image. The State Border Guard should organise more active and meaningful events and activities to bring border guards together, to strengthen their professional identity and belonging. The State Border Guard College should take the initiative to teach young cadets to take care of their image before they start their service in the State Border Guard services.

Summary

Border guards are one of the oldest professions in the world, ensuring the security and integrity of national borders. Today, the core task of a border guard has remained unchanged, but the working methods have changed. However, globalization and the mobility of workers around the world have contributed to changes in the range of professions and their popularity. Significant changes in the labour market have contributed to the emergence of new professions and the decline in popularity of many existing professions. The profession of border guard is also experiencing a decline in popularity. The image of the border guard is one of the key factors ensuring the competitiveness of the profession.

In today's highly competitive professional environment (Rozario et al., 2019), it is important to identify and explore public perceptions of the image of the border guard profession and its popularity in today's changing circumstances, as these have not been sufficiently explored to date, although they are important in the continuity of the profession. Therefore, the authors of the study both summarized scientific and theoretical findings on the image of the professional and, by analyzing the results of a survey, investigated and identified public opinions on the image of the Latvian border guard. The public values professionalism, the highest human values (honesty, justice, patriotism, loyalty, etc.), kind and responsive communication, visual image, as well as positive publicity about the sector, achievements of border guards and other positive events. The public generally has a positive image of Latvian border guards and trusts them, but also recognizes that the image of

the profession is negatively affected by the unprofessionalism, unethical behaviors and negative communication of border guards serving in the sector. In principle, the authors' hypothesis - that in today's changing circumstances, the image of border guards is still positive and the profession is competitive - has been confirmed.

In today's changing circumstances, the continued competitiveness of the profession must contribute to the development of a positive image of the border guard. Border guards themselves need to carefully develop their professional image. The State Border Guard should organize more active and meaningful events and activities to bring border guards together, strengthen their professional identity and belonging.

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