

Veronika Kalmus and Triin Vihalemm

Changes in Young People's Self-Identification and Value Structures in Transitional Estonia¹

Introduction

The transition of East European societies from socialism to capitalism, unique and nonrecurring in its dramatic scenario, has inspired numerous analyses of the institutional development and political restructuring of the countries involved in the process. This analysis is among the few ones, which deal with the cultural and social resources and consequences of transition. The aim of this article is to discuss the patterns of cultural continuity and disruption in post-Soviet Estonia. Based on the concept of *transition culture*, elaborated under different terms by Kennedy (2002), Sztompka (2004), Vogt (2005) and others, we will analyse how the transition process has influenced peoples' thought patterns, whether and how these patterns have changed during the period of transition, and what, if any, are inter-generational differences in this respect. We will focus on the latent structures of self-identification and value consciousness, with a particular emphasis on the mental patterns of the young generation.

Several theories point out the importance of cultural inertia in transitional societies, regardless of quick changes at the level of social structure and ideology. According to Piotr Sztompka (2004), the cultural context of transitional societies is characterised by the parallel existence of old and new cultures, which echo each other in various cultural resources such as ideas, symbols, values and identities. Sztompka uses the term "cultural templates", by which he means accumulated, collectively shared symbolic mental resources used for filtering and interpreting the facts of change. He sketches the process, but does not provide any empirical data. Our methodological ambition, apropos, is to

¹ The preparation of this article was supported by research grants No. 5845 and 6968, financed by the *Estonian Science Foundation*, and the research grant *Estonia as an Emerging Information and Consumer Society: Social Sustainability and Quality of Life*, financed by the Estonian Governmental Scientific Research Support Scheme.

elaborate a framework and tools for meso-level analysis between the general theories of transition culture and empirical measurement.

Method and Data

Our analysis is based on data from the panel questionnaire survey *Me. The World. The Media*, which covered the Estonian population aged 15–74. The first stage took place from December 2002 to January 2003, according to a proportional model of the population with a sample size of 1,470 respondents. The second stage was carried out in November 2005, according to the same sampling model. The achieved sample was 1,475.

The questionnaires included two sets of mental orientation: self-identification and values. We have operationalised the concept of identity in relying on the definition proposed by the social psychologist Henry Tajfel (1981): identity is a part of an individual's self-conception which derives from knowledge about one's belonging in social groups, together with the values and emotional meanings ascribed to the groups. This definition has, in addition to our research, fed several empirical studies of political and cultural identities of minority groups.

In our surveys, identity was measured by the question: "Which groups do you feel a certain belonging to, so that you could say 'we' about them and yourself?" The multi-variable question included different categories (see Table 1), from which a respondent could choose as many as he or she wanted to.

In measuring value orientations, we used twenty-five value indicators from Rokeach's system (see Table 2 for the list of indicators). The values were measured on a five-point scale (from "not important at all" to "very important"). In general, we proceed from Schwartz's theory of value types and its central assumption that values with similar meanings are highly inter-correlated (Schwartz & Sagiv 1995, 101).

In order to reduce twenty-five single value concepts and twenty-two categories of self-identification to generalised mental structures, consisting of items with similar meanings, we used factor analysis (the principal components method, with Varimax rotation). To be able to analyse and compare different factor solutions according to their natural internal structure, we used the criterion of eigenvalues over one, not any fixed number of factors, in extraction.

Identity Structures

Table 1 gives an overview of the factor structures formed among the total samples in 2002 and 2005, and among the sub-samples of young people.

The first factor in 2002 and the second factor in 2005 among the whole population could be labelled as **Network Identity**, which includes the categories *family, friends, schoolmates* and *relatives*. It is worth mentioning that the category of *one's own ethnic group* – Estonians or Russians, respectively – is also a part of this structure. Thus, ethnic identity is constructed in everyday interactions within personal communication networks.

Among the youngest age group, the identical identity structure formed as the first factor in 2002. Three years later, in 2005, an important shift took place. The category of ethnic belonging moved away from the factor of Network Identity (Factor 3) and formed a separate structure (Factor 7). Thus, the meaning of ethnic belonging lost its tribal connotation, a close link with personal communication networks. As the factor loading of the ethnic category in the factor of Network Identity also became weaker in the whole sample, we may say that the construction of ethnic identity probably faces a challenge of change.

Qualitative studies (Vihalemm 2004) also show that Estonian youngsters cannot easily describe their feelings connected with ethnic belonging. "I was born an Estonian, nothing else" was a typical answer in focus groups. The same studies indicate that, in the perception of ethnic belonging, contacts with the outside world (working or studying abroad, and Estonia's achievements on the international arena) and other factors have become more important than everyday communication partners.

The second factor in 2002 and the first factor in 2005, among the whole population, could be called **Sub-Cultural Identity**. This factor is based on the acknowledgement of "we-ness" with people with *similar tastes, world-views, interests/lifestyle* and *memories*, and with *people of the same generation* (in 2005). Thus, the sub-cultural differences and similarities are marked by a sense of belonging to a certain generation.

A factor with a similar structure also formed among youngsters as the second factor in 2002 and 2005. In general, a sub-cultural thought pattern seems to be characteristic of transitional Estonia. In Sweden, for example, self-identification on the basis of perceived similarities in lifestyle and opinions is connected with the same social position and area of habitation (see Kalmus & Vihalemm 2006). This indicates that Estonian transition culture is strongly shaped by a liberal-individualistic, even opportunistic, way of thinking. In the existing social structures and hierarchies, people do not perceive any barriers or facilitators when choosing a desired lifestyle.

Table 1. The structures of self-identification among the whole population and among young people (age 15–29) in 2002 and 2005

IDENTITY OF THE WHOLE POPULATION		IDENTITY OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE (15–29)	
2002 N=1470	2005 N=1475	2002 N=414	2005 N=423
F1 Network I. Family Friends Own ethnic group Relatives, kin Schoolmates	F1 Sub-Cultural I. People with similar... ...lifestyle ...tastes ...world-views ...memories The same generation	F1 Network I. Family Friends Relatives, kin Schoolmates Own ethnic group	F1 Supra-National and Civic I. Europeans People from Nordic countries Humankind All people in Estonia
F2 Sub-Cultural I. People with similar... ...world-views ...tastes ...interests ...memories	F2 Network I. Friends Family Relatives, kin Schoolmates Own ethnic group	F2 Sub-Cultural I. People with similar... ...world-views ...tastes ...interests ...memories	F2 Sub-Cultural I. People with similar... ...lifestyle ...tastes ...world-views ...memories The same generation
F3 Shared Space and Position I. All people in Estonia Same town / county Neighbours The same generation The same citizenship Working people	F3 Supra-National and Civic I. Europeans People from Nordic countries Humankind All people in Estonia The same citizenship	F3 I. with High Social Position Wealthy people Successful people	F3 Network I. Friends Family Relatives, kin Schoolmates
F4 Supra-National I. Europeans People from Nordic countries Humankind	F4 Local Community I. Neighbours Same town / county	F4 Shared Space and Position I. Neighbours Same town / county All people in Estonia The same generation	F4 I. with High Social Position Wealthy people Successful people People having the same citizenship
F5 I. with High Social Position Wealthy people Successful people	F5 I. with Low Social Position Luckless people Poor people Working people	F5 Global and Civic I. Humankind People having the same citizenship	F5 I. with Low Social Position Luckless people Poor people Working people
F6 I. with Low Social Position Luckless people Poor people	F6 I. with High Social Position Wealthy people Successful people	F6 Supra-National I. Europeans People from Nordic countries	F6 Local Community I. Neighbours Same town / county
		F7 I. with Low Social Position Luckless people Poor people Working people	F7 Own ethnic group Own ethnic group

The third factor in 2002 was comprised of the categories *all people living in Estonia, inhabitants of the same town/county, neighbours, the same generation, people having the same citizenship* and *working people*. In 2005, this structure transformed significantly. The third factor in 2005 included civic categories such as *all people living in Estonia, people having the same citizenship* and supra-national categories such as *Europeans, humankind* and *people from Nordic countries*. This structure can be labelled as **Supra-National and Civic Identity**. The latter three categories formed a separate structure – Factor 4 – in 2002. Thus, the new civic solidarity in 2005 became strongly connected with a universalist orientation and with a sense of mental belonging to the Western socio-cultural space. “Return to Europe”, indeed, is a metaphor used widely in Estonian public discourses; joining the EU has obviously strengthened it. Thus, Estonia’s geo-political opening has created a new positive field of meaning for constructing civic identity. The universalist orientation has probably been reinforced by the mass media. Our focus-group respondents also pointed out that discussions of global environmental problems, disasters and wars on TV made them feel that humankind has common problems which also concern Estonia.

The categories *inhabitants of the same town/county* and *neighbours* formed a separate factor – Factor 4 – among the Estonian population in 2005. The factor can be labelled **Local Community Identity**. This structure indicates the feeling of “we-ness” with the people living in the neighbourhood and in the same part of the country.

Thus, significant changes occurred in regional and civic identity categories between 2002 and 2005. Compared with 2002, the factors of regional and civic identity in 2005 had a clearer basis: instead of one large heterogeneous group, the structure combining civic and trans-national categories (Factor 3) and the structure describing local cohesion (Factor 4) formed. Thus, local and global dimensions became more clearly distinct in the structure of identities.

A similar change also occurred among the youngest age group. Instead of Factors 4, 5 and 6, which comprised a heterogeneous mix of trans-national, civic and generational identities in 2002, two clear factors of Supra-National and Civic Identity (Factor 1) and Local Community Identity (Factor 6) formed in 2005.

The fifth factor in 2002 and the sixth factor in 2005 include the categories which mark material and social advancement, such as *wealthy people* and *successful people*. We labelled this factor **Identification with High Social Position**. The sixth factor in 2002 and the fifth factor in 2005 were comprised of the opposite categories: *poor people* and *people who have no luck in life*. Therefore, we labelled the factor **Identification with Low Social Position**. It is significant that the category *working people* moved to this factor in 2005, having clearly a connotation of lack of success. This type of identification may be related to the metaphor of winners and losers, which is widely used in the Estonian public sphere. Being a

“winner” in this context means attaining material prosperity resulting from opportunistic coping with a changed situation.

The same factors – Identification with High/Low Social Position – also emerged among youngsters. There was, however, one interesting variation in 2005: among young people, the category *people of the same citizenship* was also a part of the structure of Identification with High Social Position. Thus, political, economic and social capitals are interconnected in the thought patterns of young people.

Value Structures

In 2005, the basic structure of Estonian peoples' value consciousness was relatively similar to the structure displayed three years earlier (see Table 2). Some important changes, however, took place in the course of three years.

In 2002, the first factor was comprised of very different types of values, according to the Schwartzian typology (Schwartz 1992): individualist as well as collectivist and universal values. In 2005, the factor dissolved into four different components. The first factor then embraced values related to personality development, hedonism and close relationships (e.g., *mature love, happiness, pleasant life and self-realisation*). Accordingly, we labelled the first factor **Personal Harmony**.

Values related to social sensitivity and orientation (*justice, wisdom and social recognition*) formed a separate factor, which can be called **Social Maturity and Recognition** (Factor 5).

Security-type values (*family security and national security*) as well as *honesty* merged in Factor 3, in which *clean environment and health* are core variables; hence, the label of the factor – **Environment and Security**.

The most abstract and cognitive elements of the first factor in 2002 (*inner harmony and freedom*) merged in Factor 2 in 2005. The core composition of this factor (*salvation, equality and world of beauty*) was the same in 2002. We call the value orientation **Spiritual Harmony**. It is important to note that an overall connectedness with universal and collectivist values (such as *equality, world of beauty and world at peace*) is more characteristic of Orthodox religious doctrines, e.g. Russian Orthodoxy.

Table 2. Value structures among the whole population and among young people (aged 15–29) in 2002 and 2005

THE WHOLE POPULATION		YOUNG PEOPLE (15–29)	
2002	2005	2002	2005
N=1470	N=1475	N=414	N=423
F1 Personal Harmony and Security	F1 Personal Harmony	F1 Personal Harmony and Security	F1 Personal Harmony and Security
Self-respect	Mature love	Honesty	Inner harmony
Happiness	Happiness	Mature love	Self-respect
Honesty	Pleasant life	Self-respect	Happiness
Mature love	Self-realization	Justice	Mature love
Wisdom	Self-respect	Happiness	Honesty
Family security	True friendship	Family security	Family security
Self-realization		National security	Health
True friendship		Wisdom	Freedom
Justice		Self-realization	
Pleasant life		True friendship	
National security			
Freedom			
Inner harmony			
F2 Environment and Physical Well-Being	F2 Spiritual Harmony	F2 Spiritual Harmony	F2 Environment and Security
Clean environment	Equality	Salvation	World at peace
Health	World at peace	World of beauty	Equality
Technical development	Salvation	Inner harmony	World of beauty
World at peace	World of beauty	Social recognition	Clean environment
	Inner harmony	Equality	National security
	Freedom	Freedom	
F3 Spiritual Harmony	F3 Environment and Security	F3 Material Well-Being and Hedonism	F3 Material Well-Being and Hedonism
Salvation	Health	Comfortable life	Wealth
Equality	Clean environment	Wealth	Comfortable life
World of beauty	Technical development	Pleasant life	Technical development
	Family security	Exciting life	Pleasant life
	Honesty		
	National security		
F4 Material Well-Being and Hedonism	F4 Material Well-Being and Self-Establishment	F4 Environment and Physical Well-Being	F4 Social Stimulation and Achievement
Comfortable life	Wealth	Health	True friendship
Wealth	Comfortable life	Clean environment	Exciting life
	Power	Technical development	Self-realization
	Exciting life	World at peace	
F5 Self-Establishment	F5 Social Maturity and Recognition	F5 Power	F5 Spiritual Harmony
Power	Justice	Power	Salvation
Social recognition	Wisdom		Social recognition
Exciting life	Social recognition		Justice
			F6 Social Maturity and Power
			Wisdom
			Power

Significant changes took place in the composition of Factor 4. In 2002, the factor consisted of two values: *wealth* and *comfortable life*. In 2005, the former factor of Self-Establishment (with *power* and *exciting life* as the key variables) merged in Factor 4; hence, the label **Material Well-Being and Self-Establishment**. On the one hand, this means that Estonians' value consciousness has become more Scandinavian-like: a strong correlation between *wealth* and *power*, found also in the value structure of Swedes in 2002 (see Kalmus & Vihalemm 2006), probably reflects more clearly formed knowledge about the connectedness of different types of capital. On the other hand, the firm location of *comfortable life* in this value orientation (differently from Swedes) refers to Estonians' steady belief in the inseparability of material well-being and hedonism. Quite probably, this structural relation has the strong connotation of newly found opportunities and pleasures of consumerism, which makes this value orientation distinctive of a transition culture.

To sum up: the basic structure of the value consciousness of the Estonian population was relatively similar in 2002 and 2005. Some aspects of the structure, however, reveal signs of Westernisation and crystallisation.

Young People's Value Structures

Changes in young people's value structures (Table 2) are less profound than one might expect. Firstly, individualistic values still have a strong modernist-hedonistic focal point (that is, values such as *wealth*, *comfortable life* and *pleasant life* are united in Factor 3; in 2005, *technical development* was added to this value orientation). Secondly, *power* is still separated from *wealth*, which indicates that the structural relations between different types of capital have not yet formed in Estonian youngsters' value consciousness. Thirdly, in both years, *salvation* is strongly connected with universal and collectivist values (such as *world of beauty*, *inner harmony*, *equality* or *justice*) that are more the characteristic of Orthodox religious doctrines. Also, *salvation* is connected with *social recognition*, which represents a Protestant orientation. Quite probably, this value composition demonstrates the multi-layered cultural origins of the young generation's core of ethics.

Value Orientations by Age Groups

Figures 1 and 2 display the mean factor scores of value factors in three age groups. Only statistically significant differences are shown.

In 2002, the three age groups differed from each other in regard to four value orientations. The youngest respondents were most individualistic, showing the highest scores on Material Well-Being and Hedonism, and Self-

Establishment. The value profile of the oldest generation in our sample was a mirror image of the profile of the youngest generation: the oldest respondents showed the highest scores on collectivist and universal values such as Spiritual Harmony, and Environment and Physical Well-Being.

The picture was very similar in 2005, whereas this time the three age groups differed from each other in regard to all five value factors. Again, the youngest respondents were most individualistic, showing the highest scores on Personal Harmony, and Material Well-Being and Self-Establishment. Thus, individualisation of values characterises, first and foremost, the younger generation. In 2005, inter-generational differences became even clearer in regard to value orientations.

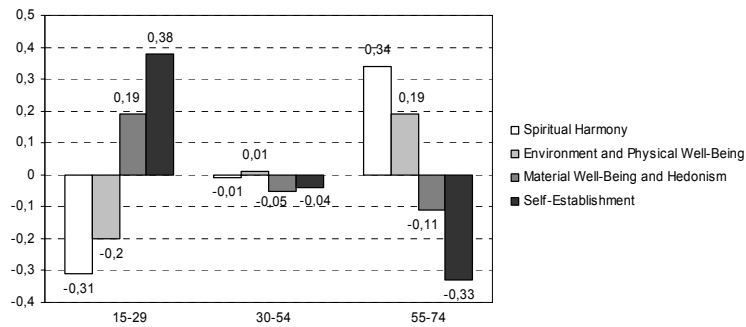


Figure 1. Value orientations (mean factor scores) by age groups in 2002

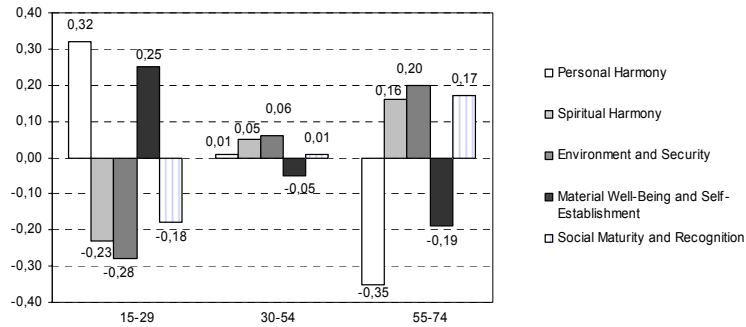


Figure 2. Value orientations (mean factor scores) by age groups in 2005

Conclusions

The analysis of the structure of values and identities indicates that the thought patterns of Estonian people are relatively consistent. Over the last three years these patterns have crystallised and become differentiated by social groups.

The young generation, having been mainly socialised in the cultural context of transition, is characterised by specific identity patterns compared to the whole population. Firstly, the meaning of ethnic identity has lost its close link with personal communication networks. Among the middle and the oldest generation, the sense of ethnic belonging has a somewhat tribal connotation, derived, among other sources, from the era of the Singing Revolution (when people stood hand-in-hand in the Baltic Chain). Among the youngest generation, the patterns of the construction of ethnic identity are different: contacts with the outside world (working or studying abroad, and Estonia's achievements on the international arena) and other factors have become more important than everyday communication partners.

Another interesting feature is that political, economic and social capitals are interconnected in the thought patterns of young people: the categories *wealthy people* and *successful people* are connected with the category *people having the same citizenship*. The connection between political preferences and social position in the thought patterns of young people may have partly resulted from the means of political marketing exercised extensively by Estonian political parties, and several corruption scandals.

It is characteristic of all generations in transitional Estonia that identification on the basis of low social position and identification on the basis of high social position are, structurally, clearly separated. In the thought patterns of Swedish people, however, those categories are a part of one and the same factor. This can be explained by the more developed post-material value culture in Sweden.

Another characteristic feature of Estonian transition culture is the fact that civic solidarity (with *all people living in Estonia* and *people having the same citizenship*) is structurally connected with supra-national solidarity. It seems that the meanings of civic and ethnic identity diverge in the thought patterns of Estonian people: the emerging civic identity forms a link with the EU as a political and economic force; ethnic identity, however, retains its cultural, and somewhat tribal, nature.

The structure of the value consciousness of the young respondents is, with variations in details, relatively similar to that of the whole Estonian population. Also, the changes in young people's value structures over three years are not profound. Moreover, the persistence of several basic cultural patterns in the structure of the value consciousness of the younger generation suggests that generation replacement per se is not the strongest factor in the Westernisation

of mental patterns. Any changes in mental structures probably reflect adjustments in shared knowledge about the interrelations between social phenomena and moral categories (for instance, economic and political capital, and respective values). These adjustments can take place through specific processes of socialisation and personal experiences that are not necessarily common to all young people in a given society, but are more likely among the groups who possess greater economic and cultural resources.

The levels of internalisation of different value orientations suggest that individualisation characterises, first and foremost, the younger generation. In the course of three years, inter-generational differences have become even clearer in regard to individualistic, versus collectivist, value orientations. Thus, the formation of cultural cohesion and inter-generational solidarity in transitional Estonia is not very likely in the near future.

Bibliography

- Kalmus, Veronika and Vihalemm, Triin (2006): Distinct Mental Structures in Transitional Culture: An Empirical Analysis of Values and Identities in Estonia, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36(1): 94–123.
- Kennedy, Michael D. (2002): *Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation, and War*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. (1992): Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries. In Mark P. Zanna (ed.): *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol 25, pp. 1–65. San Diego: Academic.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. and Sagiv, Lilach (1995): Identifying Culture-Specifics in the Content and Structure of Values, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 26: 92–116.
- Sztompka, Piotr (2004): Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity. In Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka (eds.): *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, pp. 155–195. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Tajfel, Henry (1981): *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vihalemm, Triin (2004): *Possibilities of Public Communication of Estonian Language Learning and Ethnic Relations*. Results of a qualitative study presented at the meeting of Estonian Language Training Programme at the Integration Foundation, Tallinn, June 18.
- Vogt, Henri (2005): *Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books.