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Changes in the students' values in Estonia

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Synopsis

This paper addresses problems of value formation in schools. The Estonian educational ideology asserts European human and democratic values. The paper analyses data about students' values, which show social and democratic values are seen as becoming less important, and neo-liberal values of personal well-being and success increasing. Neo-liberal policies of the last decades promoted individual competition and social inequality. Educational policy has generally followed this. Educational theory and ideology did not challenge the social, economic and educational policies. It seems that the dominant practices of teaching and leading at schools (the hidden curriculum) have participated in the value changes. The civic education system could counteract these changes, if the educators would show willingness.

Changes in students' values

Mikk Titma, Jüri Saarniit and their associates have confirmed the Soviet ideology in their studies on work values of secondary school graduates in 1966 and 1983 (Kenkmann and Saarniit, 1994, Saarniit, 1995). The majority of secondary school students considered the opportunities for self-actualisation and benefiting the society as the most significant work values. Good income and material well-being came after this. At the same time, most people lived in poverty. Actually, many of them did not know that people in advanced capitalist countries were well off. They did not have opportunities to visit other countries and compare their living standards with other people outside the Iron Curtain. The underestimation of material well-being was an achievement of the totalitarian policy and ideology. Some scholars justified the Communist policy and argued that people in socialist countries are better off than in the capitalist ones. They used such arguments like lack of unemployment, free education and health care, low costs of living etc.

Comparative data revealed that the American youth had the same structure of the three main values. In difference to the Soviet youth, the Americans paid much attention to job security and career opportunities. According to the Soviet ideology, workers in socialist countries should have better work motivation than in the capitalist countries. The Communist regime disseminated the myth and attacked every challenge to this.

The later studies (1983, 1987 and 1993) revealed something else. The youth's orientation towards personal material well-being significantly increased, and the role of social values diminished in Estonia.

In 1992, good income and material security became the dominant motives. The motive of self-development followed, its role did not change in the period of 1983-1992. The

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decrease of social motives (to benefit other people and wider society) went on (Saarniit, 1995, p. 18).

Table 1: Changes in work values of Estonian students in years 1983-1992

Values	Average in 1983	Average in 1992
To benefit to other people	3.39	3.17
Opportunities for self-development	3.28	3.27
Good income	3.19	3.56
To benefit society	3.19	2.79
To gain a peaceful and secure life	2.99	3.37
Recognition of friends	2.88	2.43

Source: Saarniit, 1995, p. 18. The average on the 4-point scale (1 – insignificant, 4 – very significant value).

The last and probably most comprehensive study on values in Estonia was conducted by Veronika Kalmus, Marju Lauristin and their associates in 2003. The Tartu University scholars revealed a very high self-esteem of Estonian students (Kalmus et al., 2004, p. 256- 262). The majority (59 %) of the youngest group of 15-19 (135 respondents or 9 % of the total sample of 1470 people) positioned themselves into the higher strata (levels 6-10) (Ibidem, p. 261). The majority (58 %) of them had significant or strong consumerist orientations (Kalmus et al, 2004, p. 210).

The study compared 15 social groups, only four of them considered themselves as belonging to the above average levels:

- entrepreneurs – 70 %;
- top managers – 69 %;
- top specialists – 57 %;
- students - 55 %.

Marju Lauristin argues that the data expresses more the expectations than the real positions of the young people. This means that most students look down on poverty and long for prosperity. The study also used the Rokeach (1973) classification of values. The younger people appreciated more the following values: health, family, happiness, love, freedom, self-respect, self-actualisation, honesty, justice, prosperity, equality, social recognition and power (Kalmus et al 2004: 289). There were but little differences between the younger and the average populations. In sum, young people appreciate individual values more and social values less than other age groups do (Table 2).

Table 2: Differences in the young people values in 2003

More favoured than average	Less favoured than average
Love	Honesty
Self-actualisation	Justice
Prosperity	Equality

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of Kalmus et al 2004: 289.

Most of them would like to prosper like top managers and entrepreneurs do. Often, many businessmen want to be well off at every cost. Sometimes, they do so at social costs, even at the costs of others. Still, the role of students with individualist and competitive attitudes (40 %) was not significantly bigger than that with compassionate orientations (37 %). The role of competitive attitudes increased up to 44 % in the age group of 45-54 years and then decreased up to 37 % and 28 % in the following age groups.

There is also other evidence to check the data by Kalmus et al. (2004). Margit Sutrop revealed from an analysis of 349 essays of students in grades 9-12 at 91 schools that most of them worship prosperity and well-being (Koppel, 2004: 57). Students had developed an instrumental attitude towards education as a means for high positions and incomes. Heino and Airi Liimets and their associates conducted six comparable investigations on students' values and lifestyle in years 1975, 1979, 1984, 1990, 1994 and 1998. In the eighties, the role of intellectual activities like literature, theatre and arts started to decrease and that of shopping to increase. In the nineties, the situation remained by and large the same as it was at the beginning of the eighties (Liimets, 2001: 21-23, 2004: 41-43).

A comparative European Social Survey in 2004 in Estonia (a representative sample of the adult population, 1989 respondents) does not confirm the argument that young people are most individualist and competitive. This time, 41 % of students agreed and 31 % disagreed with the statement that society would be better off if everyone looked after themselves (Ainsaar, Kutsar and Harro, 2005, p. 16). The averages for the employed population were 49 % and 28 %, respectively. Actually, the distribution of individualist and collectivist attitudes has been quite persistent. In a representative study in Soviet industrial enterprises in 1983, 42 % argued that people look mostly after themselves and 38 % that they are mostly helpful (Haav, 1988: 12).

The dominance of material values can be explained by low living standards in post-socialist countries. In a leading bank in Estonia, most employees considered their self-actualisation much more important than the material remuneration. It should be mentioned that the average salaries in the financial sector are two times higher than in other sectors.

There are similar tendencies in other post-socialist countries. To find a better paid and more prestigious job in the future was the main motive for learning for 63 % of students in Moscow schools in 2002 (Sobkin, 2006).

In Germany, the people between 18 and 25 appreciate most their self-actualisation. The orientations towards high income and care for other people have practically equal significance for them (Shell 1997: 299).

Table 3: The values of Europeans in 1997

Values	% rating extremely /very important
To help others	95
To value people for who they are	92
To be involved in creating a better society	84
To put more time and effort on personal development	79
To be successful in life	75
To discover new things about yourself	68
To make a lot of money	49

Source: EC 2001.

The data is not sufficiently comparative, but enables one to conclude that the structures of main values in Estonia and some other post-socialist countries differ from those in the European Union on average. In Europe, the social values are most popular. In the transitional countries like Estonia, the role of personal well-being and success has increased and that of social equality and solidarity has decreased. This trend can be proven also by the data on higher education.

Many students prefer the professions that enable one to make a lot of money. The chances for making money are largest in the business, managerial and legal professions. In the last decade, the number of students in law, business and public administration has increased three times and their role in the whole student population has increased up to one quarter.

On the roles of economic and social policies

Here are some evidences of how the neo-liberal policies have promoted economic freedom and individual prosperity and underestimated social equality, solidarity and partnership.

The right wing parties have decreased the individual income taxes from 24 to 22 % and will do it until 18 %. As a result, the opportunities for social programs have decreased and will continue to do so. More than 90 % of the economically active population are employees and they could need the more egalitarian remuneration systems and social programs. As this is not the case, the entrepreneurs and top administrators can increase their own incomes. The trade unions are unable to analyse the work organisation and protect employees against the arbitrariness of their employers.

It is symptomatic that the Estonian management textbooks neglect the social problems of work organisations (Haav, 2004b). There is nothing about the ownership and employment relations. The capitalist firm is considered as a collection of equal people with common goals. In practice, the dominant model of governance is hierarchy. This is so in business, public and educational administration. The labour contract divides people into two unequal parts, the employers and the employees. Hierarchy is the best tool to increase one's power and prosperity and to ignore the social equality, justice and effectiveness. Sometimes, it may lead to social injustice and discrimination. In practice, violation of labour law is commonplace. These facts enable one to argue that the mainstream management education contributes to an increase of both neo-liberal values and social stratification in Estonia.

On the roles of the overt and hidden curricula

It is not easy to evaluate the role of schools in the value changes (Toots, 2004, Toots et al, 2006). Teachers of civics and history have been considered responsible for promotion of democratic values. Both the National Curriculum and its civic syllabus (ROK, 2002) declare the significance of democratic values. Still, the values are not considered as either objects of study or study outcomes. The syllabus and textbooks promote human rights, but not the human and democratic values.

Veronika Kalmus studied the role of the civic textbook in students' knowledge, attitudes and values. She concluded that this role was especially modest in construction of students' political views and values. Media, family and personal experiences played a more important role in this (Kalmus, 2002 and 2003, p. 25). The conclusions were drawn on the basis of students' essays (58 students in ninth grade).

It is necessary to distinguish between the formal value education and the hidden role of the dominant models of teaching and learning. The traditional transmission model of teaching promotes such values like individual competition and inequality. The new transformative model promotes those of co-operation and solidarity (Haas and Poyner, 2005). The old model still dominates in schools in both Estonia (Niinistö et al, 2002) and other countries. In comparison, 168 experts evaluated the civic education in Germany. They concluded that the hidden curriculum was more successful than the formal one. It also had negative effects as it promoted subordination to authority, male chauvinism, learning for better marks, and demonstration of one's superiority (Wilde, 2004, p. 13).

Concerning the management of schools, the education system has been de-centralised in Estonia in the last decades (Haav, 2004a). Still, the autocracy has remained the dominant model of school governance. The autocracy is usually supplemented with democracy for teachers (in study councils) and students (their self-governance). The autocracy may be restricted by the school councils, representing the main educational partners. The school council may become the main governing body, but usually it has but advisory functions. Thus, the autocratic models dominate in both teaching and management. Hierarchy produces inequality and an instrumental attitude towards human beings. In Estonia, the hierarchy is justified with technical arguments. Even in education and social sciences, the hidden social functions of hierarchy are neglected. This means that the school practices counteract the abstract ideals in official ideology.

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