One Area, Several Cultural Spaces: Comparative Analysis of Stories as the Bases of Local Identity¹

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Abstract

The article examines how different ethnic and cultural groups living in the same multicultural micro-environment (a small town) establish the boundaries for the group with which they identify. The article is based on texts that describe local life (personal interviews, life stories, memoirs, local historical research by amateur historians, etc.). We will be looking at the small industrial town of Kohtla-Järve, located in north-eastern Estonia, which became a multicultural environment during the period when Estonia was a part of the Soviet Union (1940–41 and 1944–1991). The regime changes during the 1940s and in 1991 caused the mutual relations between the various communities to become politicised. In order to avoid addressing the political aspects, the research focus in this article is not on communities (e.g. the Estonianspeaking and Russian-speaking communities in Estonian society), but rather on small groups (e.g. the activity groups and cultural societies that uphold and create ethnic and cultural boundaries). From this perspective, Kohtla-Järve can be viewed as a network of intellectual and practical spheres of life that contains junctions for affirming one's 'own' cultural identity as well as intersections where a group can find common ground with groups that constitute the 'other'.

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't is 14 June 2010. I have just arrived in Kohtla-Järve from Tartu, and I want to get from the town centre to nearby Vanaküla in order to take part in the meeting organised by local amateur historians. I have never taken this road before and I ask the bus driver to tell me when the bus gets there. I am speaking Estonian; the bus driver is Russian and does not understand me completely. We are also using different words to describe where Vanaküla is located. As a researcher who specialises in cultural studies, I try to remain alert and pay attention to what language we are speaking, but at some point I notice that I have unconsciously started using Russian. The bus driver has also begun to understand me: "Aaaa, staraya derevnya" ("old village," the literal translation of "Vanaküla" in Russian). There is no cultural conflict in our conversation. We both want to understand each other and make ourselves understood. It is a situation that is strange to me but common in Kohtla-Järve—a meeting on the border of two local cultures.

The focus of this article is on the degree to which different cultural spaces are experienced in the multicultural town. I also examine the places that are perceived as common areas by the different communities (ethnic groups) and where they prefer to function separately. I have been intermittently monitoring the interaction of cultures in Kohtla-Järve since 1991. My research is based on surveys and interviews conducted during fieldwork, the written memoirs and autobiographies of local residents, and research done by amateur historians.

As a researcher, the primary aim I pursue is to observe and interpret: although I proceed from texts pertaining to local life, which have been created for a variety of purposes, I analyse them according to my own research objectives.

In the next section, I will provide an overview of the area in question— Kohtla-Järve. I will thereafter introduce the points of departure for the article, namely, its source material and theoretical framework. In the main part of the article, I will present a comparative analysis of the texts by people of Kohtla-Järve based on the aspect of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity can be analysed both at the level of the community (e.g., the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities in Estonia) and the level of the individual (e.g., the cultural identity of a member of a mixed family). In this article, I look at the manifestation of cultural diversity at the level of small groups: local hobby groups, the staff and students of a school, and miners working in the area. Hobby group activities, school life and the workplace provide representatives of different cultural groups with the opportunity for more in-depth, long-term and varied contact than, for example, random or superficial encounters in such meeting places as the street, public transport or apartment buildings. However, it is probable that the ethnic and cultural boundaries are expressed with different intensity in the aforementioned spheres of activity. For instance, a hobby group focusing on specific cultural features is more likely to create boundaries, while ethnic and cultural boundaries may never become an issue if one works in a mine.

Kohtla-Järve as a culturally diverse town

Kohtla-Järve is a mining and industrial town with a population of 44,000 and is situated on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland. It takes about one hour by bus to travel from Kohtla-Järve to Russia's western border. Kohtla-Järve became a multicultural environment after World War II when Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union. Although there were people of 30 ethnicities living in the town according to the 1989 census, the two largest ethnic groups are Estonians (23.1%) and Russians (63%) (Valge 2006, 59-60).

The Soviet-era migration brought about a significant change in the ethnic balance compared to the pre-war situation (the status quo during Estonia's period of national independence).² Before World War II, ethnic minorities constituted 10% of Estonia's population; this number had increased to 25.4% by 1959 and to 38.55% by 1999 (Veidemann 1999, 143). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991 caused another shift in the balance of mutual relations between the ethnic groups. The political preferences of the Sovietera were dominated by the ideology of a state of workers and peasants, which classified the population primarily on the basis of social categories. After Estonia's independence was restored, however, there occurred a re-emergence of values related to heritage, language, and culture, which were based on the ideology of the pre-war nation state. The contradictions between the two political orientations, namely, the efforts related to the restoration of Estonia's independence as opposed to emphasising the importance

of the unity of the Soviet Union, became topical for journalists in (Soviet) Estonia at the end of the 1980s (see, e.g., Brady and Kaplan 2009, 52) and have retained their importance in contemporary politics (ELK 2008, 4-5; Vetik 2008, 4). In principle, the conflict described above (Estonian versus Soviet identity) also exists in present-day Estonian society and is expressed in private reflections on the Soviet era as well as in the data gathered through sociological surveys (Vihalemm and Masso 2007).3 In general, it appears that at the level of group identity Estonia's ethnic groups are divided into two relatively independent communities that have comparatively little contact with each other (cf. Brady and Kaplan 2009, 65). The primary marker for differentiating between the communities is language use: one consists of Estonian-speakers and the other of Russian-speakers. However, in addition to people's native language, we also have to take into consideration the importance of their medium of education (whether they attended a school where the language of instruction was Estonian or Russian). A more in-depth observation reveals the importance of different identity-shaping experiences (we have to note that the boundaries of language use and experiences might not overlap). We can generally distinguish between two communities: the representatives of the local way of life, and minority groups characterised by their migration experience. This experience determines a community's place identity which, in turn, influences how that community interprets the past and present events occurring in society (cf. Brady and Kaplan 2009, 33).

Kohtla-Järve is an interesting previously environment since the characteristic discussed problems of Estonia in general emerge here in a concentrated manner. Despite the prevalence of the Russian-speaking community, the town has cultural strata that date back to the time before the Soviet era, as well as those that developed within the Soviet system. This is to say that Kohtla-Järve embodies a combination of two contradictory ideologies. On the one hand, the town was established in 1946 by the Soviet regime as a *socialist city* (cf. Valge 2006, 3-7; Löw, Steets and Stoetzer 2008, 102). At first glance, the centre of Kohtla-Järve does indeed appear to be a Soviet town rather than an Estonian one: instead of consisting of small buildings surrounding a central market square and family dwellings with small gardens, Kohtla-Järve has streets that are straight as an arrow, lined with Stalin-era buildings planned by architects from Leningrad (Valge 2006, 42). This difference in the milieu is also felt by the people who live in Estonia. I will provide an example taken from a life story stored in the Estonian Literary Museum (EKLA 350v, 16). In the story a Russian woman who came to Estonia from Leningrad after World War II compares her first impressions of Kohtla-Järve and the neighbouring town of Rakvere. When she came to Rakvere looking for a job and a place to live she found it to be a small, beautiful and clean Estonian town which was, however, completely alien to her. On her way back to Russia she came to Kohtla-Järve, which reminded her of home and turned out to be the town that accepted her. On the other hand, the Soviet town of Kohtla-Järve was built on the sites of

former villages and mining settlements and, as a result, each part of the town has its own history dating back to the time before the establishment of Kohtla-Järve. The town is comprised of districts that are located at a distance from each other and commonly use place-names pre-dating the establishment of Kohtla-Järve (this practice was also common during the Soviet era). The local identity of the Estonians living in Kohtla-Järve is based on their appreciation of the history of the place they call home. They use historical information to emphasise the centuries-long continuity of the place.4 Interruptions in the continuity, namely, drastic changes in the local environment (its transformation from an agricultural environment into an industrial centre and the loss of national independence during the Soviet era), are tied together with a method where the fixed points that represent different time periods are juxtaposed at the time of speaking. This results in a narrative where the place is permanent (everything has been and still is here) while times change (there was that and then there was this...):

Open oil shale mines or quarries were built on these lands. In 1927, they went underground again in the open quarry on our and Suuban's fields. Now [1991], the bus stop next to the old town department store stands in the same spot and the pieces of the Kohtla-Järve War of Independence memorial destroyed in 1945 are also buried there ⁵ (Mägin 1991).

The fact that the sense of continuity of the "us-group" is based, among other things, on the preservation of names (as is in the case of Kohtla-Järve) is confirmed by

research in social psychology regarding the combined effect of variable and invariable factors on the sense of self continuity (Hamilton, Levine Thurston 2008, 120-123). However, coming back to the subject of Kohtla-Järve as a socialist town, we can assume that the urban space was not differentiated according to ethnicity or, for example, where the people came from (native inhabitants as opposed to immigrants) because the Soviet Union worked towards achieving social homogeneity (workers, public officials). Residents could apply for apartments based on their place of employment rather than in accordance with the principles of a free market economy. In spite of this, a closer inspection of the urban environment reveals that Estonians and immigrants who arrived in Estonia during the Soviet time tended to live in different parts of the town. For instance, human geography expert Janek Valge demonstrates in his research on the distribution of dwellings in Kohtla-Järve that the percentage of Estonians is higher in those parts of the town where the houses were built before the Soviet era. The principle of equality characteristic of socialist cities is, however, evident in the context of employment: in 1989 approximately 40% of the population of Kohtla-Järve was involved in the production of oil shale and related industries and the living conditions of this group were similar, regardless of heritage and ethnicity (Valge 2006, 91-92).

In general, regions in Estonia tend to be mainly inhabited by the Estonian-speaking community *or* the Russian-speaking community. Russian-speaking communities dominate places like the

townofSillamäe, created during the Soviet period, Narva, on the border of Estonia and Russia, and Lasnamäe, a city district in Tallinn. Due to the high percentage of Russian-speakers, Kohtla-Järve and the surrounding county are also considered to be dominated by the Russian-speaking community. Therefore, it was natural for my colleague to be surprised by the fact that I conducted folklore-related fieldwork in Kohtla-Järve. "What would a folklorist do in Kohtla-Järve? It is an entirely urban environment inhabited only by Russians," he said. I have also encountered the attitude that Kohtla-Järve is a place lost to Estonian culture on a broader scale. However, when we adopt a closer perspective instead of looking at the big picture (thereby moving from the level of the community to the level of an actual functioning group), the variety of cultures and ethnic groups becomes apparent. This allows us to step beyond studying separate cultural groups in the specific context of time and space and also explore the mutual connections between these groups, especially their power relations. For example, tolerance towards 'the other' also makes it necessary to determine the boundaries of one's "own" culture in more detail.

Framework of the discussion: approach, objective and sources

The study of cultural diversity from the folkloristic standpoint is not very prominent in Estonia, despite the fact that folkloristics tends to compare cultures and that cultural diversity has been a topical issue in Europe and Estonia since the end of the Cold War. To date, the aspects of cultural diversity in Estonian society have been studied from

the folkloristic standpoint by Elo-Hanna Seljamaa who is focused on observing the everyday culture of Lasnamäe, one of Tallinn's districts. She has discussed at length the controversial role of the contemporary (folk) calendar in Estonian society. She deliberately overlooks the discrepancies between Lutheran and Russian Orthodox holidays (Estonia is traditionally a Lutheran country) and discusses the celebration of International Women's Day, which was introduced during the Soviet era, as an example of a holiday that transcends the boundaries of communities and has adapted to life in present-day Estonia. On the other hand, the celebration of 9 May as a 'Soviet Victory Day' has proved to be an event that splits Estonian society in two (Seljamaa 2010). In my research I have used life stories as the bases for analysing migration experiences and the resulting changes in identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of new national borders, and for conducting a closer examination of the experience of cultural boundaries based on the example of a mixed family (Jaago 2011a; 2011b; 2012)⁶.

In my research on Kohtla-Järve I rely on the observation that Kohtla-Järve does not exhibit the characteristics of a culturally mixed area that could be seen as intercultural (cf. Schmeling 2000, 349). Instead, I see groups that can be defined in terms of their culture and which sporadically communicate with each other, whilst establishing definite boundaries between each other. (I would like to emphasise that I do not see the situation described above as a constant state but rather as a process where each group has to adapt to

historical and political as well as social and individual/generational changes.) Hence, one can see certain dynamics in the communication between different cultures: on the one hand there is an orientation to "own" culture which, on the other hand, simultaneously shows a certain portion of "open" communication to "others". Such examples can be found in migration studies elsewhere. For example, describing the institutions established by immigrants in Haifa, Larisa Fialkova and Maria Yelenevskaya conclude: "We do not believe that these institutions contribute to the social isolation of Russian-speaking Israelis because they welcome members of other ethnic groups and accommodate the needs of the wider public" (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2011, 159). For the purposes of the present study, I chose to observe three spheres of activity: hobby groups, school life and the workplace. I assume that hobby groups represent a sphere of activity where both ethnic and cultural boundaries are clearly determined and the inclusion of members of the "other" community cannot be taken for granted. The workplace (the mine in the case of this discussion), meanwhile, is a sphere of activity where ethnic and cultural boundaries are least clearly defined. Bilingual schools as institutions that are officially intended to bring together different communities allow us to gain a better understanding of the specific needs for boundaries between spheres of activity in the context of an integrated institution.

My analysis is based on texts published by local publishers, journalistic interviews and articles, and manuscripts of life histories. Local publications, such as the research conducted by amateur historians comprising school almanacs students' creative works and teachers' memoirs (Toomsalu 2008; Kiristaja 2010; Võrsed 2004), represent the views of the Estonian community. The articles were published in the local Estonian-language newspaper Põhjarannik ("The Northern Coast") which, in 2009, published 30 issues containing texts about the representatives of various ethnic groups living in Ida-Viru County and Kohtla-Järve (with the exception of Estonians). The articles were published in the Meie *inimesed* ("Our people") section and they contain interviews that offer information on the activities of ethnic societies, descriptions of events organised by ethnic communities and so forth. The texts provide an insight into the attitudes of local ethnic groups towards cultural diversity in Estonia. However, since the section was funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals, the Office of the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, and the Integration and Migration Foundation, the articles tend to emphasise the goals of Estonia's integration policy (this is made evident by the choice of topics, the connections between the topics and national integration programmes, and discussions on the successes and criticisms of the policy). The third category of sources is life histories, which are stored in the life histories collection of the Estonian Cultural History Archives (EKLA f 350). This life histories collection is located in Tartu and contains more than 2,500 stories recorded from 1989 to the present time. These stories include nearly one hundred autobiographical narratives in Russian, so the collection can be used to

simultaneously examine the experiences of both the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities.

In the context of cultural diversity, primarily look at Kohtla-Järve as a social and cultural space or a product of social action (Löw 2008). My approach towards cultural contacts and boundaries is inspired by the concept of the semiosphere, created by cultural semiotician Juri Lotman, which makes it possible to look at the boundary between the "self" and the "other" not only as a line that separates cultures, but also as space where meanings are created as a result of a dialogue with the "other" (Lotman 2005, initially published in Russian in 1984). What is more, the semiosphere simultaneously allows us to observe the process of meaning creation from the synchronic and the diachronic perspective. This is important for the purpose of understanding the reasons behind the current positions held by the communities, which are usually connected to past experiences. This aspect is discussed in Estonia's National Integration Programme as the historical dimension of integration (ELK 2008), which I referred to at the beginning of the article. The application of the theories formulated by Martina Löw and Juri Lotman does not presuppose the existence of clear and visible boundaries, such as unambiguous ethnic and cultural boundaries. The boundaries of the space they describe are open and flexible and several of them can coexist in the same place. Furthermore, the boundaries shift over time according to the development of the mutual relations between the communities but never disappear.

The following three examples

boundaries represent the between different cultural groups (if we consider them from the standpoint of the sphere of activity itself) as well as the common ground they share (if we look at the products of the sphere of activity from the perspective of the general public). It is important to emphasise, however, that the boundaries are not absolute from the standpoint of the individual either: the same person may belong to a group characterised by cultural limits in one sphere of activity, while the importance of cultural boundaries is overshadowed by limits related to professionalisation or the career ladder in another sphere of activity.

Example 1: hobby groups

Estonia's national integration policy supports the operation of cultural societies by ethnic minorities. In 2007 there were 153 "cultural societies and other organisations that received support from the state and were operated by non-Estonian speakers" (ELK 2008, 29). This integration policy has been criticised by folklorist Elo-Hanna Seljamaa (2010). In her opinion, the policy restricts cultural self-expression by confining it exclusively to the private sphere. This criticism is, in part, based on a differing understanding of the concept of culture. In the integration programme, "culture" is related to "the preservation of one's culture and language," which largely falls within the purview of cultural societies. For Elo-Hanna Seljamaa, the concept of culture also includes aspects related to everyday life. In this sense, "culture" does not mean engaging in cultural activities in addition to living one's daily life—it is a natural part of life that is connected to all

of the spheres of activity of an individual. This aspect of the criticism is acceptable, although the issue here is clearly the difference in the interpretation of the concept of culture due to the different functions of the approaches, seeing as one is related to cultural research and the other to the shaping of integration policy. The second part of Seljamaa's criticism is problematic, according to my research. Seljamaa claims that a culturally diverse society should strive to exhibit cultural differences in the public sphere since this would allow the minorities to establish contact with influential partners, such as the Estonian government, the Estonian ethnic majority, the European Union, Russia and so forth (Seljamaa 2010, 683-684). Based on my research experience, I cannot unequivocally support making cultural differences a part of the public sphere since, besides promoting contacts and mutual understanding between the different cultural and ethnic communities, this approach could exacerbate conflicts. At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, I encountered expectations similar to those expressed by Seljamaa in Kohtla-Järve regarding integration on the basis of ethnic and cultural differences through joint public events, but this did not yield the expected results.7 It is possible that integration is a process where success in different stages requires the implementation of different strategies. At present Kohtla-Järve has reached a stage where the establishment of local cultural societies resembles the creation of hobby groups (in a mono-cultural society)—although it is impossible to make them palatable for everyone, they are important to a certain group.

I will take an in-depth look at this

subject based on the articles published in 2009 in the *Põhjarannik* in the section titled Meie inimesed and an overview of the 20 years' of activity of the Kohtla Historical Society (Toomsalu 2008). I would like to state in advance that the activities of cultural societies and hobby groups can be interpreted according to Lotman's definition of the cultural boundary: it is important to understand that, although cultural boundaries are important in this field, the activities also provide an opportunity for the definition of the relationships between "self" and "other". This is evident; for example, when we look at the fact that formulating a more thorough definition of one's "self" becomes increasingly important in a culturally diverse environment as well as in the vicinity of cultural boundaries. Therefore, from the perspective of a researcher, cultural boundaries dialogical in nature, although we cannot find evidence of dialogue per se in the texts in question. Despite the fact that there is no direct dialogue with the "other," the entities do define their position and characteristic traits in their environment in a remarkably obvious manner. The definition of "self" is based on differentiating oneself from the "other". Therefore, descriptions of one's "self" also provide the outline of the "other" by default.

The articles published in the section *Meie inimesed* describe the activities of the representatives of various ethnic and cultural communities in Kohtla-Järve and its surroundings. The questions of the journalists are generally focused on the issues of language, the activities undertaken by societies, and school education. To a lesser degree, the articles

also touch upon the topics of heritage and religion (the latter, for example, is discussed in connection with Jews and Muslim Tatars). While (the Estonian) language is viewed as a central marker of ethnic identity by Estonians, other people of various ethnic backgrounds and/or migration experiences see it simply as a means of communication (Ruutsoo 1998, 139-202).8 They switch between languages without paying attention to it: "Our language of communication at home develops completely freely; there are no rules—and we are very comfortable with speaking Estonian as well as Russian" (Põhjarannik 4/07/2009). They learn and forget languages:

Hilja herself began to learn her father's native language—Estonian—only after becoming an adult. [---] Hilja only regrets the fact that she is starting to forget her Latvian, since there is no longer anyone to speak it with and keep the language alive (*Põhjarannik* 28/03/2009).

In this context, Estonian is primarily seen as the national language that is linked to education and career opportunities. For example, a Russian-speaking Estonian top athlete explains: "I guess you have to decide for yourself how much of it [Estonian] they need but if you want to accomplish something, you have to know the language" (Põhjarannik 18/04/2009). To the journalist's question: "Do you always understand what you are talking about?" a Russian-speaking communications specialist at Estonian Oil Shale answered: "At first it was difficult, of course, since I did not know the words they were using even in Russian [---] if I do not understand something, I always

immediately ask for an explanation" (*Põhjarannik*, 30/04/2009). The majority of the articles discuss issues related to the cultural societies. In general, the societies are linked to specific ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Ingrian Finns, Tatars, etc.) and emphasise the need to carry on their cultural heritage (handicrafts, music, language). Contacts with the 'other' mainly develop through joint concerts or public events:

The people of Kohtla-Järve were very surprised on Tuesday when they saw a strange tent near the town's cultural centre with people eating, drinking and dancing in it. It turned out that the Jewish community was celebrating one of its most important religious holidays—*Sukkot* (*Põhjarannik* 10/10/2009).

Experiences related to simultaneous contacts of the same nature with members of different ethnic groups are connected to teaching (dance, music) and, to a lesser degree, parties organised at clubs. In both cases people tend to mention the considerable differences in the temperaments of Estonians and Russians. It is also noteworthy that, although the importance of maintaining one's "own" culture is stressed at the community level, at the individual level people's interest in the "other" tends to arise from their interest in someone they are close to who is a representative of the "other" culture, rather than their fascination with the culture itself.9

The Kohtla¹⁰ Historical Society, established in 1988, is an organisation of local Estonians who are interested in history. Although the activities of the Society are open to Estonia's general

public, they are relatively inaccessible to the people who came to Kohtla-Järve after World War II. The Historical Society expresses its openness to the public through its active collaboration with the Estonian National Museum in Tartu. Between 1988 and 2006, 25 members of the Kohtla Historical Society submitted 112 contributions to the Estonian National Museum (Toomsalu 2008, 16-21). Among the subjects researched were "The bicycle through the ages" in 1997; "The history of skis and skates" in 1998; "Life in Soviet times" in 2004; and "Research into village history" in 2005. When preparing their contributions the correspondents follow the interview plans established by the Museum and used as the basis for telling a story based on the contributor's own experience, which may take the form of a narrative, a study or simply answers to a set of questions. Some contributions have also been prepared at the initiative of the people of Kohtla-Järve who are correspondents of the Estonian National Museum (e.g. the contribution regarding the creation and disappearance of Servaääre Village, submitted in 1997; the contribution regarding the founding of Kohtla-Järve and its effect on the villages, submitted in 2000). These contributions are mostly either memoirs or works of amateur historical research. Therefore, one of the outlets for the members of the Historical Society is the creation of texts in different genres about their places of residence. Through this activity and the agency of national institutions (such as the aforementioned Estonian National Museum) the Society is connected to similar writers and interest groups all over the country.

The manner in which the Historical Society is closed to the locals is expressed through the principles that connect the members of the group. They share the same cultural experience and the same place identity based on their local heritage and similar interpretation of the past. They are connected to each other through the Estonian school system and cultural history. According to the idea behind the Historical Society, Kohtla is more than just a place on a map—it is also an intellectual living space that ties together the people "whose roots are here" (Toomsalu 2008, 9). It is the sense of being connected to a place through one's roots that creates a boundary between the local native population and the people who came to Estonia after World War II. The former see themselves as being connected through their "roots" even to those Estonians whose ancestors lived in or near Kohtla but who reside elsewhere themselves. At the same time, the residents of Kohtla and its surroundings who are locals now but whose "roots" are elsewhere do not converge with the Historical Society.

Despite this, the activities of the Historical Society are, in some respects, open in the context of local cultural life. The Society has published research and memoirs pertaining to local history (e.g. in the series titled *Kohtla vaimne eluruum* ["The intellectual living space of Kohtla"] and *Kohtla-Nõmme lood* ["The stories of Kohtla-Nõmme"]) in addition to organising public events (I mentioned one such event, the commemoration event in Vanaküla, at the beginning of the article) and exhibitions. Its greatest achievement was the collaborative project with the local government, which led to

the establishment of a new museum in the Kohtla mine after it was closed in 2001. Kohtla mine was built in 1937 and before its closure was the oldest among the functioning mines in Kohtla-Järve. The museum has become a relatively popular tourist destination in Estonia and is visited by approximately 27,000 people per year (Kiristaja 2010, 3). From the perspective of the Historical Society, it is also important that the Museum makes it possible to maintain a settlement that grew together with the development of the mine since the 1930s and now possesses a certain degree of cultural and environmental value (Toomsalu 2008, 11).

The activities of hobby groups in culturally diverse environments focus around people who share the same cultural identity. The activities of the societies also include more private spheres (events for members, regular meetings). Although the "others" are not directly prevented from attending these events, their nature presumes that the participants share a strong sense of communality and this creates a boundary between the "self" and the "other". Therefore, while there are no formal restrictions that apply to hobby group activities, identity-related boundaries do become apparent. However, the activities of such societies always include a component that is directed at the public. The closed nature of hobby groups and societies is linked to the need for one's "own" group and culture. The closed and clearly defined nature of the "self" seems to be one of the characteristics of a culturally diverse society (since the "self" functions naturally in a mono-cultural environment even without the presence

of the "other" and, as such, there is no need for establishing specific cultural boundaries).

Example 2: bilingual schools

As a rule, schools in Estonia are either Estonian-speaking or Russian-speaking. As I mentioned before, the medium of education at school (language of instruction) is a significant factor in terms of differentiating between ethnic and cultural communities in Estonia. In accordance with the education reform that is being carried out at the moment, Russian-language schools should be gradually moving towards adopting Estonian as the medium of instruction (in 2011, 60% of all subjects should be taught in Estonian in secondary schools where the medium of instruction is Russian). There is a bilingual school in Kohtla-Järve that has been practising language immersion since 1994. In a school where language immersion is practised, at least 50% of all subjects must be taught in a language that is not the learner's native language. Kohtla-Järve Ühisgümnaasium is currently one of 21 language immersion schools in Estonia and was one of the first to adopt an immersion programme. At the same time this school, established in 1949, has never functioned as a mixed school. It has always consisted of an Estonian-speaking part and a Russianspeaking part, which have furthermore been separate in terms of location: there have been times when each has had its own building as well as times when the space in one building has been divided between the two parts. For example, a former teacher wrote the following about the situation in the 1950s:

The Estonian-language classes had already been located in the kindergarten building for some time. It was like being hidden in plain sight—we were completely separate and everything was done in Estonian (Võrsed 2004, 5).

People also mention the head teacher of the Estonian part of the school (who was not the head teacher of the entire school) and the fact that the study processes were distinctly separate:

At one meeting of the teachers' council a Russian teacher said that our life was easy and that it was as if we were working in a greenhouse. And, in truth, our children were more calm and diligent (Võrsed 2004, 10).

The extracurricular events organised at the school are also divided between the two parts in a logical manner. For example, the song festivals and theatre visits organised by Estonians are closely related to upholding the traditions of Estonian language and culture. During a conversation with the teachers of the Estonian part of the school on 31 January 2006, I learned that the school organises separate parties for the Estonianlanguage and Russian-language parts of the school (MK: Virumaa, 2006). This is due to the different temperament of the students as well as their different understanding of what a party should be like. As a result, each half of the school has its own employee who organises extracurricular activities. Both of these employees have a blog.11 In addition to the separate events, however, the two parts of the school organise joint sports events and undertakings connected to national symbols, such as a trip to the

memorial for the victims of fascism and the celebrations of national holydays that are mentioned in the memoirs.

When we observe the present-day school life by looking through the school's website at http://www.kjug.edu.ee/ index.php (last accessed on 14 December, 2011) it appears that certain sections of the website are bilingual. By clicking on an icon, you can choose between viewing an Estonian-language version and a Russian-language version of the website. It mostly contains general information and notices in both languages for the parents of the students. The Russianlanguage version of the site does not include some areas (e.g. the history of the school). The schedule of events reveals that Christmas is, in part, celebrated separately by the two halves of the school. This is to be expected, since Estonians consider Christmas to be one of the most important holidays in December, while the Estonian way of spending the holiday season and celebrating Christmas is alien to Russians: rather they celebrate the New Year or the Orthodox Christmas in January.

The local practices related to cultural diversity are manifested in the bilingual school: rather than follow state regulations, the educational institution tends to function according to previous experience on how best to cope with the ethnic and cultural situation in question. It follows that the administration of the school is simultaneously run in two languages and some events related to hobby activities are organised for the whole school while others are separate. The opportunities for cooperation are increased by the fact that the language immersion programme works in both

directions: in Estonian as well as in Russian. The less significant the language barrier becomes the more joint events the school will be able to organise. The joint events tend to be of a more general nature (holiday camps, health days, Fathers' Day, sports days, etc.). The events held separately are more closely linked to cultural traditions (e.g. Christmas). Culture-specific events are organised for the language immersion classes (beginning with the 5th year students), such as the Russian Culture Week in October 2011. Meanwhile, the students of both parts of the school belong to a single student community. Texts by students are published in the school's literary almanac, regardless of their ethnic background (Võrsed 2004). The students participate in national inter-school events, such as Olympiads, sports competitions, singing contests and so forth. Looking at the school almanac and the website, it is possible to make guesses as to people's ethnic and cultural backgrounds in this field based, for example, on names or language use. However, this would simply be an observer's interpretation. In this context, the students are presented as a single community that does not categorise its participants based on ethnic or other features. It is noteworthy that the interviews with former teachers of the Estonian-language part of the school (Võrsed 2004, 19-22) contain no questions regarding the links and relations between the Estonian-language part and the Russian-language part of the school. I have experienced the same phenomenon in the course of my own fieldwork: people do not want to answer direct questions about cultural conflicts or even the general attitude towards the "other" community (MK: Virumaa, $2010).^{12}$

Example 3: the workplace

I chose to examine the difference and coexistence of cultures in the workplace on the basis of texts related to working in mines. I used two types of text for this purpose. My first source was the collection of articles Kohtla kaevandus ("Kohtla mine"), published in 2010 as the third part of the series Kohtla-Nõmme lood ("The stories of Kohtla-Nõmme") (Kiristaja 2010). The articles tell the story of the same mine that I mentioned above in connection with the activities of the Kohtla Historical Society. In terms of genre, the collection is a work of research carried out by amateur historians. The collection is structured on the basis of a linear time frame, and the individual articles depict the development of the mine over time.

My second source consisted of the autobiographies of four former miners, which are preserved in the form of manuscripts in the life history collection of the Estonian Literary Museum. Unlike the aforementioned amateur historical research, the life histories do not focus directly on the issue of working in a mine. The discussion of issues related to working in the mine generally comprises a relatively small part of the life story and accounts for just a few pages of the entire life story.

The historical research brings out opinions regarding the upkeep and culture of work of the mine. For example: "The Kohtla mine was known for its highlevel culture of work, low manufacturing cost of oil shale and exemplary upkeep" (Kiristaja 2010, 3). Due to the fact that this is a recurring theme in the characterisation of all of the periods in the mine's history, I believe that this is the theme that carries on the legacy of the mine's history.

Interruptions in the continuity of the history of the mine are portrayed through the political history of Estonia. The political turning points depicted are as follows: firstly, the Soviet occupation in 1940-41 marked the destruction of what had been built up in the Republic of Estonia. Secondly, the German occupation in 1941 which was interpreted as the reconstruction of the mine. The third break in the history of the mine occurred with the destruction of the mine in 1944 when the front moved west, after which it was possible to start the reconstruction works during the second half of the 1940s. Descriptions of the stable period that began in the 1950s focus on two subjects: occupational safety and the development of the technology used in the mine according to contemporary requirements. As is characteristic of the Soviet era, the important issues that are discussed also include the problems related to the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of national production plans.

All in all, it can be said that the texts concerning the operation of this mine prefer to discuss history in terms of a technological rather than a political framework. Accordingly, the sources discuss the adoption of mining machinery and provide rather field-specific technical data. Even if the texts happen to mention the ethnicity or background of the people who participate in the management of the mine, they do not contain stereotypes or judgements based on ethnicity—instead, the texts discuss how specific individuals handled their roles as managers or workers:

However, the mine kept failing to fulfil its production plans and therefore J. Lust had to resign as the head of the mine. He was replaced by an Armenian named Sergei Zebeljan from the 10th mine. He told everyone that we would have to bid farewell to the resort named "Kohtla mine" and start working (Kiristaja 2010, 16).

It is important to note that, due to Estonia's political history, the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity may intertwine with that of power. For example, it might be said that either Estonians or Russians, or some other group, had access to better conditions during the Soviet era or after the end of the Soviet period. In the collection in question, such claims have been avoided. The book presents a field-specific look at mining from the perspective of the management of the mine.

Three of the aforementioned autobiographies of miners are written in Estonian and one in Russian.¹³ The Estonian narrators are older by a generation, having been born between 1926 and 1927. The Russian narrator was born in 1943. The stories were recorded between 1990 and 2007, although the time of narration is mainly important with regard to the life story as a whole and does not have a direct influence on the subject of working in the mine. Two of the texts are handwritten, one has been written on a typewriter and one author has used a combination of handwritten text and typewriting. The shortest story takes up 12 pages and the longest spans 86 pages.

Compared to the previously mentioned research articles, the autobiographies of the miners focus much more on the dangers of working in a mine.

I was teaching new workers in the longwall face [a long, narrow corridorlike supported area of the mine, T.J.]. First the safety techniques—then the support and machines. When you move the support, the roof immediately collapses. That district had only begun its operation and the first roof collapse had not yet occurred. The roof could collapse at any moment. The supports had signs on them that said "Stop! Unsupported!" We were looking at the shearer when I suddenly noticed that one of my students was walking around in an unsupported area. I was afraid to call out and just waved with my arm. If the roof had collapsed, I would have gone to jail. My student would have been dead (EKLA f 350, 487).

The miners discuss specific accidents and the effect of these on the work. They often mention that working in a mine is physically hard work. However, this issue is touched upon in the context of coping with the difficulties and attaining professional mastery.

Ethnic traits are discussed in the Russian narrator's story since he talks about his work experience in an Estonian team as well as in a Russian team. These stories illustrate the difference in the work ethic of Russians and Estonians. Although the narrator describes the difference, he does not present it as an ethnic or cultural conflict. For example, he briefly mentions the characteristics of two of his Estonian colleagues and then links them to a stereotype concerning Estonians:

They stood knee deep in icy water, scraping up oil shale fragments with

their shovels and loading it onto the chain conveyor without saying a word, thereby inadvertently showing me the patient characteristics of a true Estonian (EKLA 350v, 39).

It is noteworthy that while ethnic and cultural boundaries may arise as sources of conflict in other parts of the life stories of the same narrators (e.g. childhood; a political context; relationships in the public urban space), this does not occur in the descriptions of mining work.

The life stories in question are told from the perspective of the people who worked down in the mine, rather than the management. This brings the experiential aspect of the miners' work into the narratives. However, despite the different perspectives of the management and the miners, the focal points of the historical research and the life stories coincide in terms of the description of the mine's development, especially its technological development. Cultural differences are either casually mentioned in the mining stories (as in the case of the life story that describes the work methods that had developed in the Estonian team and the Russian team) or are avoided completely (in the case of the historical research). In my opinion, this is due to the political colouring that accompanies the rhetoric of cultural diversity and unavoidably emphasises the conflicts between the communities. Based on the other episodes in the life stories analysed for this article, as well as my general knowledge of life stories, I can say that the issue of cultural conflicts surfaces in discussions concerning history (cf. Kõresaar 2005). History is not simply a collection of past events that can be left behind—history is used to determine

one's present-day social identity and connection with Estonia (Jaago 2011a; 2011b; 2012). In the case of the topic at hand, the politicisation of the past has been avoided in the analysed texts. This makes it possible to focus on the work that was done in the mine, rather than Estonia's political history. However, it is also probable that this approach allows the narrators to emphasise the continuity, characteristic of themselves and the group they identify with, in regard to the history of the development of the mine.

Conclusion

In this article I have presented my analysis of a culturally diverse environment at the level of a group (rather than the level of an abstract community with schematic characteristics or the level of a specific individual). My sources included texts created by narrators and amateur historians who belonged to certain groups, as well as newspaper interviews with representatives of specific groups. The texts analysed in the article represent three spheres of activity: societies and hobby groups, school life and the mine as a workplace.

The texts portray cultural diversity as a network of intellectual and practical spheres of life of the people of Kohtla-Järve, which contains opportunities for affirming one's own identity as a member of a group as well as intersections where common ground can be found with other groups. The more we deal with culture-specific needs, the more noticeable the boundaries between the groups become. The differences are apparent in the case of hobby activities and ways of spending free time as well as everyday culture—for example, the daily organisation of

school life or the working methods of the miners. In spheres of activity where specific cultural traits are less important than some other characteristics (e.g. aptitude for a school subject, professional competence at work, etc.), the factors that mark cultural boundaries also recede into the background. In these cases, the fading of cultural boundaries is a result of the general context: the different groups live and operate in the same conditions (e.g. a mine where technological development is tied to the given situation, therefore, has the same effect on members of different groups).

The texts or segments observed here do not contain descriptions of cultural conflicts (although such descriptions can be encountered in other episodes of the very same life stories). Therefore, the situations described above do not give rise to opposition based on cultural differences. These situations (unlike historical and political situations) are not seen as a danger to the "self" group. Some of the texts used here (e.g., the newspaper articles) are directed at promoting a culturally diverse model of society and so intentionally avoid the subject of cultural conflicts. Therefore, it is evident that research into cultural diversity in society depends on the texts that are analysed (e.g., the genres of the texts), the size and nature of the group that is observed (e.g. community, family), as well as the situations that are described. As such, it continues to be a multifaceted and topical phenomenon.

Notes

1 This research was supported by the projects SA131578, ESF 8190, and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence CECT).

2 The migration that occurred during the Soviet era (and is defined in present-day Estonian politics as a result of the occupation) plays a significant role in Estonia's integration policy and contributes to the need to stress the importance of the historical dimension in addition to the international dimension. It is said that avoiding the historical and political conflict between the different communities living in Estonia would be impossible and that "simplified solutions along the lines of 'let's live together as friends' unfortunately do not work" (Vetik 2008, 4). Instead, we have to ascertain the common interests of the communities that will allow us to bring Estonian society together (ELK 2008, 4-5).

3 For instance, the sociological identity studies conducted in the 1990s and the 2000s indicate that the identity of the Russian-speaking community currently living in Estonia is based on two factors: the first is the understanding that Estonia is a part of the Soviet Union that broke away (therefore they may not see the Soviet Union as a phenomenon of the past) and the second is related to the fact that living in Estonia is seen foremost as living in the European Union (Vihalemm and Masso 2007). According to this research the concept of Estonia as an independent and historically separate territorial and cultural entity is not a part of the approach that Russianspeakers in Estonia adopt with regard to their "own place". The life histories available

in the form of manuscripts (Estonian Literary Museum, EKLA f 350 and 350v) also reveal that the population of Estonia is generally divided into two in terms of their attitude towards Estonia: those who see Estonia as a territorially and culturally indivisible whole and those who consider Estonia to be a part of Russia (Soviet Union) (see Jaago 2011a). The relationships between the communities are usually not discussed in the life histories stored in the aforementioned archives, although there are a few stories about ethnic conflicts as well as mutual understanding in communicating across ethnic, linguistic and cultural boundaries at the level of everyday life (EKLA f 350v, 5; 57; and 74; and EKLA f 350, 1071).

4 The collection of articles titled "Kohtla 755" that has been prepared by local amateur historians about the history of the region proceeds directly from the wish to celebrate the 755th anniversary of the time when the place was first mentioned in 1241. For local amateur historians the collection is an authoritative reference book (see Toomsalu 2008, 7). The date when Kohtla was first mentioned has been determined on the basis of the Danish Census Book (Liber Census Daniae), a source from the 13th century or, more specifically, the study on the document published in 1933 by historian Paul Johansen (Kala 2005). Johansen's study contains information on Kohtla as well as Järve village and manor (Johansen 1933, 938 and 940).

5 The monument in question was erected in 1932 in memory of the battle of the Estonian War of Independence (1918-1920) fought near Järve village in January 1919 and of those who fell in the battle. The monument was destroyed by the Soviet regime in 1945.

6 All of the articles have been written as part of the project "Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders" and constitute a single body of work in the series of studies concerning Kohtla-Järve.

While interviewing representatives of cultural societies as part of my fieldwork in and near Kohtla-Järve in 1991 I heard the head of the Belarusian cultural society say that he felt the need to organise joint folklore festivals with Estonians (EKRK I 93). The Collection of Estonian Life Stories contains the memoirs of a Russian-speaking man who lived in Kohtla-Järve in which he describes, among other things, his participation in events organised by Estonians. He talks about how he felt alien and excluded when attending the events. This was not due to the standoffish attitude of the Estonians. On the contrary: he could speak Estonian, was known to the people organising the party and was also an expected guest. He felt excluded at the party that celebrated Estonian culture because he became more acutely aware of his different heritage and identity— instead of finding common ground he saw how he was different (EKLA f 350v, 350; cf. Jaago 2011b). 8 On relationships between language and nation-states in Europe see McDermott 2011, 6-15.

9 An Estonian woman who lives in Kohtla-Järve and is married to a Russian man describes her interest in Russian culture specifically as an interest in her husband's intellectual world. She says that they used to attend events that were important to her husband as well as events that were important to her in order to make each other happy. She believes that the common ground of the different cultures is human in nature and can be summarised with the phrase "good people" (EKLA f 350, 405, EKLA f 350v, 57. For an analysis of the life story see Jaago 2012).

10 Kohtla is one of the regions in Kohtlalärve.

11 In January 2006 I gave a couple of lectures to the secondary school classes of the Estonian part of the school. I also met several teachers at the school and was able to ask them about subjects that interested me (MK: Virumaa 2006). You can read the blogs of the individuals responsible for extra-curricular activities in the Estonian-language part and the Russian-language part of Kohtla-Järve Ühisgümnaasium at the following address: http://www.kjug.edu.ee/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=252&Itemid=162&lang=et, last accessed on 14 December, 2011.

12 At times, when I asked people in Kohtla-Järve direct questions about the relations between ethnic groups or the feeling of alienation towards other cultures, the responses were general or neutral. For example, people often mentioned the different temperaments of the ethnicities or the differences in culture-specific holidays. In places where the cultures come into contact with each other, relationships with the representatives of other ethnicities and cultures tend to be rather concrete; therefore, the communication and attitudes are based on the level of actual contacts between people (rather than stereotypes). However, I have also encountered situations where people are motivated by my questions to talk about issues that are important within the context of their own culture. I presume that focusing specifically on one's own culture is a method for dealing with the presence of the "other". 13 The selected life stories (EKLA f 350, 154; 487; and 643; and EKLA f 350v, 39) contain mining-related episodes that could be compared to each other: they are relatively long and describe the everyday work of a miner. The Russian life story discussed here is the only life story in Russian that talks about the life of a miner.

Archive Material

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