The Centrality of Culture in the 20th Century Estonian Press

A Longitudinal Study in Comparison with Finland and Russia

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Abstract

The present article highlights the importance of the comparative longitudinal study of mass-mediated content in comparing the evolution of public spheres in neighbouring countries. In order to contextualize our research on the Estonian media system, we simultaneously conducted a similar study on Finnish and Russian newspapers of the same period. The 20th century was a period of rapid change in Estonian society and, compared with Finnish and Russian newspapers, Estonian newspapers paid more attention to issues that were labelled as "cultural". In the Estonian press the understanding that 'culture' is important prevailed, as it was one of the most stable elements of content throughout the century. The significance of governance-politics and economics depended on the political situation and historical context. The interpretation of data is based on the binaries "centre" vs. "periphery" and "self-reference" vs. "other-reference".

Keywords: media studies, longitude, content analysis, culture, system theory, Soviet Union, Estonia, Russia, Finland

Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union definitely changed the understanding of the roles of politics and mass communication in society. This is true not only of the three Baltic countries, but of the whole "Eastern bloc". As follows, we offer an introduction to how the Estonian mass-mediated understanding of "culture" has changed during the past 100 years. In order to do that, we make comparative references to Finnish and Russian media systems. Although the historical context of these three countries is similar (part of the Russian empire before the 1917 revolution), there are differences, as the logic of history has been different in all three cases. Despite similarities in history, these three countries have gone through major social changes in a relatively "short" period of time, with different consequences for their fate. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the dynamics of the content of the Finnish and Estonian press was rather similar, compared to the Russian media. It was only after the 1940s that the relationship between Russian and Estonian mass-mediated content can be explained by the binary analogy of "centre" vs. "periphery" (Lotman 2001: 162-163), i.e. what was

considered "important" from the centre-oriented perspective (*Pravda*) was different in the case of the more peripheral Estonia (*Rahva Hääl*).

Although both newspapers were considered to be "party press", their representations of Soviet ideology were somewhat different. As *Pravda* was considered the official voice of the Soviet Union, it had a defining role in every imaginable field of life. And this, in turn, seems to have predefined what was essential and what was unnecessary in the agenda of *Rahva Hääl*, the unnecessary being such topics as army and defence policies, regional politics, more detailed looks at the economy and environment, etc. An understanding that the building of communism was essential from the perspectives of all possible angles of "state" and "society" prevailed. There simply was no official need to discuss the (dys)functionalities of state and society.

And this is where the Finnish Helsingin Sanomat was different. Finland maintained its independence after World War II. Quite visibly, the dynamics of Finnish mass-mediated content was more stable than that of Estonia and Russia. Especially as concerns issues related to 'state and legislation'.

Our analysis is based on a quantitative study of journalistic texts from Estonian, Finnish and Russian media, and also includes qualitative aspects (e.g., latent content analysis). Through a comparison of different journalistic cultures we can create a reference system that enables us to emphasize the historical context, an inherent aspect of a longitudinal enterprise. Our basic aim is to illustrate the Estonian state-to-mass-media relationship with cases from Finnish and Russian media. Finnish and Russian cases were chosen because both these countries have had a major cultural and political impact on Estonia during 20th century, Russia as a major counterpart of the Soviet Empire and Finland as a culturally close neighbour that managed to maintain its independence after World War II. Use of the Finnish media system for reference also makes sense because Estonia and Finland both share the legacy of being a part of the Russian empire prior to the revolution, as well as because the fate of these two countries was different, especially after World War II. In this sense the comparison of these three media cultures is illustrative, as it demarcates the differences between totalitarian and democratic media systems. But this is not the only difference: we also suggest that, in a totalitarian media system, the binary of 'centre' and 'periphery' unavoidably encourages the "totalitarian periphery" (Estonia in our case) to develop its own logic of representing social reality.

Our research implies that the status of different areas of life (such as economics, legislation and administration, culture and identity policies, etc.) varies in different countries, and this allows us to bring forward differences in the "collective representations" of these countries. The main goal of our study is to assess changes in the dynamics of the content of 20th century Estonian mass-mediated communication in comparison with neighbouring countries (Finland and Russia). It is also important to stress, that this framework challenges us to pay special attention to indicators/variables that can be used for describing and comparing changes in mass-mediated content in different countries/cultures. The nature of this goal is interpretive – our conclusions could possibly falsified only by showing that the logic behind the interpretation is not correct.

The basic variable of our analysis is 'topic' – a subject matter that can be defined as the organizing principle of communication. Use of the word 'topic' in communication studies belongs to the several fields involved in the study of content. Just to mention a

few: agenda studies (see McCombs, Shaw 1972, Funkhouser 1973), Anthony Downs' study of issue-attention cycles (Downs 1972) and comparative studies of propaganda during World War I and World War II, designed by Harold Lasswell (Lerner, Pool, Lasswell 1951). The etymology of 'topic' goes back to Greek: *Topika*, something that is characteristic of a place – *topos*. In discourse analysis 'topics' are also sometimes referred to as 'themes' (for the concept of 'topic' or 'theme' as "semantic macrostructure", see van Dijk 1985: 115). Quite correspondingly, *Thema* (Greek) is something laid down, from *tithenai* to place. This means that a 'theme' is something that we can observe, as it is virtually laid down in front of us. These two terms are synonymous, as they refer to phenomena that exist in a time-space outside our bodies. In the following, we use the term 'topic' as it seems to better reflect its twofold nature: being virtual and real.

It is also important to note that, in our analysis, topics are defined strictly according to what they say they stand for, i.e., 'culture and education' as a main topic represents stories that especially favour one of these particular issues. On the comparative level, we exploit a somewhat broader understanding of "culture" by delimiting it with other variables such as 'human interest topics', 'education', 'cultural activities and social events' and implicit statements in journalistic texts that were made about culture and mass media (latent content analysis). We also differentiate between "main topics" and "subtopics", as journalistic texts are often charaterized by having different foci in one article.

Comparative Content Analysis

The idea of comparative content analysis is based on the assumption that mass-mediated texts in different countries share structural elements that can be considered "common denominators" from the comparative point of view. This is a cultural-sociological paradigm: we basically assume that many social processes can be better understood if we focus on cultural contexts that include mass media, which play a major role in the modelling of the everyday realities of individuals (for a different economy- and administration-based interpretation of the transformation of post-Soviet societies, see for example Åslund 2007).

Theoretically, we have been inspired by the ideas of G. Gerbner, as presented in *Towards "Cultural Indicators"* (Gerbner 1969). The central question is whether some components of journalistic texts have special meanings, a certain "scheme of social accounting for trends in the composition and structure of mass-mediated public message systems". We ask this Gerbnerian question, "…whether changes in the understanding of time, space and society bring about systematic variations in the content of public messages that are realised through the cultivation of the collective consciousness of elements of existence". In this sense, changes in mass-mediated content that can be traced over decades serve for us as a kind of symptom of cultural and social change. Roman Jakobson in his essay "The speech event and the functions of language" suggests that the functionality of communication is an undeniable aspect of any linguistic study (Jakobson 1995: 76-77). From our perspective, the study of the content of mass communication is the study of the *phatic* function of communication, which determines the nature of the contact between audience and medium. In our terms, by focusing on the longitudinal change in mass-mediated content, we can study how the locus of communication changes over decades. From our point of view, this is the "cultural indicator"

that changes from time to time and therefore makes a difference in the nature of public communication. Although this is a quantitative analysis, the text as a research object is qualitative, as it includes *cultural meanings* (Jakobson 1960), and therefore it requires the use of a methodology that will explain the nature of change.

In the 1920s, Harold Lasswell developed a method of content analysis for journalistic texts to reveal the social reality of a specific epoch (Lasswell 1948; Lazarsfeld 1960). With this method, one can investigate communication messages by categorizing message content into classes in order to measure certain variables (Rogers 1997: 214). Unlike the classical version of content analysis (Berelson 1952), where a researcher avoids taking latent or connotative meanings of texts into account, we followed "a constructivist re-conceptualization of quantitative measurement" (Schrøder 2002: 105), where the analyst is a reader of the meanings of a text (Krippendorff 1980: 22).

Typically, longitudinal studies focus on a period of 20 to 30 years in the media system of one particular country. As a result, these studies have generally shown a relationship between social change and change in mass-mediated content (Luostarinen 2004, Becker 2000, Huang 2008, Mervola 1995, and Barnhurst and Nerone 2001). In our study, we chose a somewhat longer period (the 20th century), as it is assumed that a shorter period (for instance, pop culture is normally described in terms of *decades*) is insufficient to discuss social trends, instead tending to focus on changes related to particular social/historical events. For example, Huang (Huang 2008) conducted a study that was based on articles published in a Chinese daily from 1945 to 2005. By studying the binary "institutional authority" vs. "individual authority", he concluded that Chinese culture became more democratic during the second half of the 20th century (Huang 2008: 8).

A Comparative Glance at 'Culture'

The Russian Empire had common regulations for journalism, including censorship. 1905 was a symbolic year, as the 20th century arrived with different political choices for the three countries under study. Also, it needs to be stressed that all three newspapers in focus were published in the capitals of these countries and that they had rather stable ownership. *Pravda* was transformed into *Komsomolskaja Pravda* in 1991; *Eesti Päevaleht* has had different owners since its privatization in 1991.

In the case of Estonia, the choice was between *Postimees* and *Eesti Päevaleht* (Estonian Daily). *Postimees* was first published at 1886 and has operated continuously since then. We did not select *Postimees* due to the fact that, during the Soviet period, it was a local paper with a restricted circulation area. Nowadays it has regained its status as the largest (non-tabloid) daily. *Eesti Päevaleht* started to appear in 1906 and it is included in our sample until the last year of The Republic of Estonia (1940). After the war, it was transformed into *Rahva Hääl,* which was considered to have the highest priority in the local mediascape (issued 1940-1994), being the publication of the Communist Party.

In the case of Russia, our sample starts from 1917, when *Pravda* had its first legal publication. *Izvestiya* (established 1917) can also be treated as a central daily. *Pravda* was the official paper of the Communist Party (today it has a pro-communist attitude), and *Izvestiya* represented the ideas of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR – and thus had a narrower basis of represented ideas. This was the primary reason for choosing *Pravda* for our analysis.

In Finland, the *Helsingin Sanomat* has the largest circulation in all the Nordic countries and is the only Finnish newspaper that can actually claim to be national (Salokangas 1999; World Press Trends 2009). Although Finnish media researchers have stated that the *Helsingin Sanomat* cannot be taken as a "representation of Finnishness", it is without doubt the most important daily newspaper in Finland. Since *Helsingin Sanomat* was established in 1889 (originally called *Päivälehti*), it has been owned by the Erkko family.

As central dailies these three publications represent leading constructions of social reality, "leading" in the sense that they represent what the political/cultural elite disseminated to the broader public. The present study does not include analysis of the diversity of social constructions in the public sphere; to do that, we would have had to broaden our sample to include specialized print media, for example cultural and political magazines and yellow press publications.

Our results show clearly that 'economy'-related issues (being the most ideologically loaded) prevailed through the Soviet period in the cases of Estonia and Russia. However, 'culture' seems to have had a special niche in Estonian journalism during this same period. We suggest that binaries such as "centre" vs. "periphery", "self-reference" vs. "other-reference" as well as the most essential binary of "individuals" vs. "society" can be applied as organizing principles in the comparison of different media systems.

We think that 'culture' had a special niche in Soviet period Estonian journalism for two reasons: a) Estonia had a peripheral position in relation to the very central party newspapers such as Pravda and b) as Pravda was not translated into Estonian, the centralized ideology even in the most central party newspaper, such as Rahva Hääl, had a rather different status due to the "peripheral" context of local topics than it had in the very centralized Pravda. We suggest that *re*printed Soviet ideology created a contextual clash between local (Estonian) and Soviet contexts. This can be noted especially in examples of normative statements about the media system itself. It was just impossible for reflections on the role of the media system to be copied from Pravda, because having a discussion over the role of media in society (or any other issue in a self-reflective manner) in a peripheral newspaper was simply unimaginable. Therefore it left a "vacant space" for other issues of a more local nature, such as 'culture'. Our point here is that adding local/peripheral context to the official Soviet ideology gave 'culture' a higher "rank" than would have been thinkable in a separate local newspaper, without ideological reprints from central dailies. We suggest that on the comparative level, a "topic" (i.e. 'culture') could be considered an indicator/variable that can be applied to the study of changing public sphere. Here it seems suitable to apply Niklas Luhmann's reflection on self- and other-reference, as a principle that is central to the formation of identity of a particular media system (Luhmann 2000: 10-13). That kind of approach to a 'topic' as a cultural indicator seems to be helpful in the interpretation of how ideologically converging media systems were related to each other.

Method

In order to lessen the possible impact of random events on general trends, special attention was paid to the creation of the sample. We concentrated on the highly centralized and ideologized party press (for Russia and Estonia), which purportedly reflect what was "most important" according to the current state of the art. The censorship in these

publications was high (Vihalemm 2004: 4-7). The most important newspapers published throughout the 20th century, *Päevaleht/Rahva Hääl/Eesti Päevaleht* (Daily/The People's Voice/Estonian Daily), *Helsingin Sanomat* (Helsinki News), and *Pravda* (The Truth) were chosen. It was important that the daily newspapers selected for our sample were published throughout the century and had the status of being "major newspapers".

For analysis of an unclear amount of data, we used a multi-step principle of creating a sample (Budd et al. 1967). The data were gathered from each fourth year, in order to determine trends in the dynamics of media and society. The results are presented in a sequence of decades. In some cases, the data consisted of three samples and in some cases two samples (e.g., 1) 1921, 1925 and 1929 and 2) 1933 and 1937, respectively). This does not allow us to determine exact historical moments when changes in mass-mediated content occurred, and this is not our purpose. The idea of a longitudinal study is to compare data on different periods of time according to principles defined in a research design. In our case, the ultimate goal was the organization of data into decades in order to make sense of the entire past century.

The selection of every fourth year focuses on an even shorter period, and therefore provides a more frequent look than the customarily used 5- or 10-year periods in longitudinal studies; for example, Mervola (1995) employed a five-year interval in studying Finnish newspapers, and Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) used 10- and 30-year intervals to investigate US journalism. The design of our study conforms to suggestions made by other researchers to select daily newspaper articles to achieve representativeness of material sourced from a long period (Riffe et al. 1993). Studies that compare the representativeness of different sampling strategies conclude that, for daily newspapers, a random week provides a good representation of the whole material (Riffe et al. 1996). Our aim was to gather a typical sequence of daily newspapers. The period of study started in 1905 and we included every fourth year until 2009.

From each selected newspaper issue, the sample was composed of: 1) articles on the first page, those being the most accentuated by that edition (including news), 2) editorials, 3) letters from readers, 4) opinion articles (written about different topics). We mapped the content of 2242 Estonian, 1723 Russian and 2079 Finnish daily newspaper articles.

The method used to analyse each of the three dailies was similar, and was based on a code-book that evolved during the pilot study. Researchers with knowledge of all three languages coded textual content based on analytical categories. The reliability of coding by the seven researchers was high – on average 82%.

We focussed on the Estonian example, which we contextualized through comparison with our neighbouring countries (Finland and Russia). We mapped the content of 2139 Estonian, 1723 Russian, and 2079 Finnish newspaper articles, including information on authors, sources, topics, actors, and temporal and spatial dimensions.

The method of our research assumed a distinction between a) the "main topics", which represented the main frame of reference of a journalistic text (i.e. politics, culture, economics, human interests, values and human relations), b) "subtopics" (a more detailed distinction between contexts presented in a particular journalistic text) and c) the block of "latent content analysis" (a quantitative analysis of journalistic texts according to a predefined typology of statements, which in our case was coherent with the categories of "main topics").

The LCA block consisted of eight groups of statements (public sphere, politics, culture, state and the structure of society, relations between the individual and society,

mass media, relations between the individual and power, and definitions given to the individual), which in turn were divided into a) normative statements that represented typical understandings of the field and b) binaries that illustrated the share of the pros and cons on particular issues. In this general overview, we only used the first part, which illustrated the dynamics of normative statements. Presumably, the share of "normative definitions"[1] given in a particular field indicated the presence of a hegemonic practice in that particular field. The lack of such definitions while the number of topics remained high would be an indicator that the norms established inside that field were taken for granted (e.g., they would not need a separate emphasis in journalistic texts). And, vice versa, the higher the number of normative statements, the less taken for granted the "truths" of a particular area of life seemed to be.
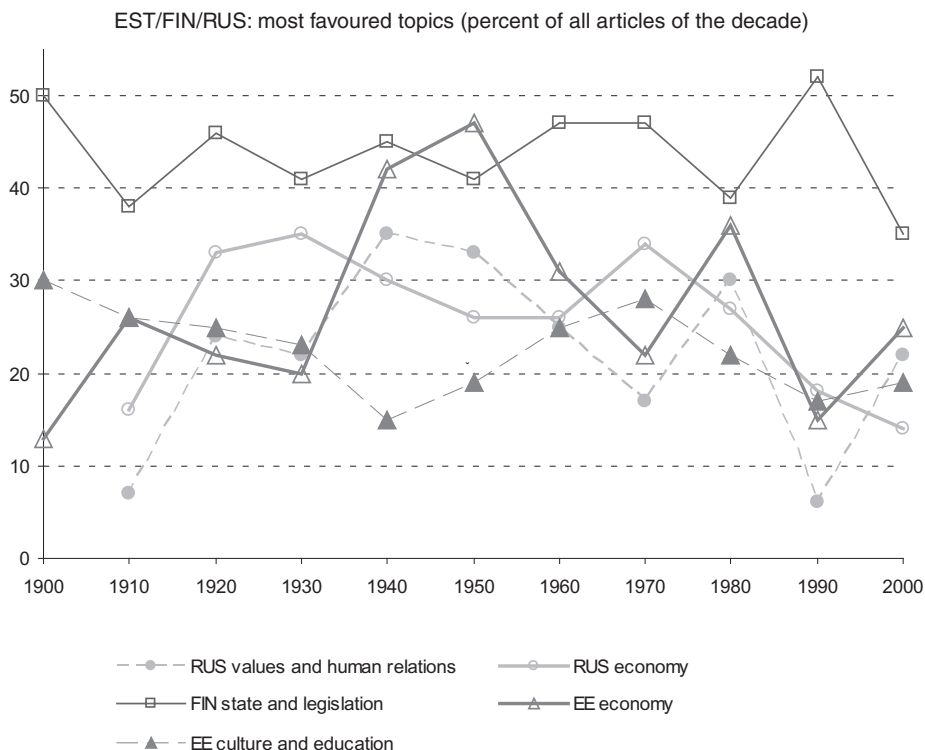
Interpretation of Data

'Culture' among the most favoured main topics

Although the list of main topics was identical in our three cases, their order of prevalence was different. There were three major observations in the context of main topics of our research (see Figure 1).

First, for Estonia and Russia, 'economics' as the main field was dominant (with minor exceptions) throughout the century, whereas in the case of Finland, the dominant field in all decades (without exceptions) was 'state and legislation'.

Figure 1. *The Most Favoured Main Topics*

EST/FIN/RUS: most favoured topics (percent of all articles of the decade)

- – ● – RUS values and human relations   — ○ — RUS economy
- — □ — FIN state and legislation   — △ — EE economy
- – ▲ – EE culture and education

Second, the spread of the rest of the main topics in the case of Finland was rather well balanced: there was no reason to believe that any of them deserved special attention in terms of position among other main topics. In comparing the rest of the main topics, the cases of Estonia and Russia differed. In the case of Estonia, the field of 'culture and education' seemed to be of greater importance than the rest of our predefined areas of life.

Third, in the case of Russian media, the second prevalent main topic was 'values and human relations'. Among the rest of the main topics, there were no clearly prevalent fields, except for the transition period in the 1990s, which seemed to be a special case in all three countries.

'Culture' and 'Human Interests'

Our comparative study of the dynamics of the topics in the three media systems is based on the binary opposition "the individual" vs. "society". Among the main topics, 'culture and education' is a field that represents how society (i.e. "media" in our case) valued norms that regulate individual behaviour in various subjective contexts. In the following, we interpret the topic of 'culture and education' on the basis of 'human interest topics'. This is because the field of 'human interest' represents the very subjective and "grassroots" level of discussion of the individual's social space, which presumes the existence of 'culture'. This forms a "background system" that helps us understand changes in the dynamics of 'cultural' topics.

Figure 2 presents the two main topics from our sample: culture and education, and human interest topics in Finnish, Russian and Estonian media.

Figure 2. *Culture and Education, Human Interest Topics*

EST/FIN/RUS: culture and education/human interest topics (% of the total amount of stories
N: EST=1579, FIN= 2084, RUS= 1727)
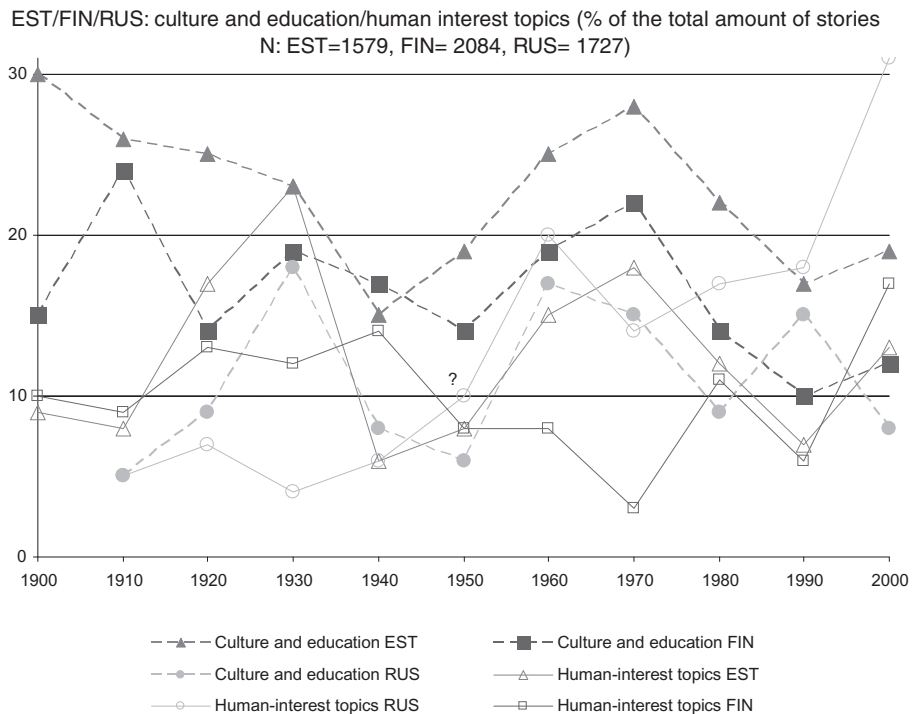
'Culture' as a main topic was valued in the Estonian *Rahva Hääl* throughout the century. The sole critical period that one can point to was the 1940s and 1950s, when the ideology of Sovietization was most dominant. In addition, there was the period of regaining independence in the 1990s, when 'culture' received somewhat less attention than was common in previous decades. It is also important to note that the 'human interest topics' strongly correlate with the issues related to culture, as culture-related topics were able to offer a kind of "cover" for the standardized ideological discourses.

In the Finnish sample, it is interesting that the representations of culture and education were negatively correlated in the 1960s and 1970s. It was also in the 1910s, the time when the Finnish Republic was born, when human interest topics were considered less important. In order to interpret these changes, it would be necessary to conduct a complementary analysis on this subject, as our data are not sufficient to provide an explanation of these changes.

The Russian Revolution brought about many structural changes in society. Also 'culture' as a topic lost its importance until the 1930s. During the war, this topic lost its recently gained importance and emerged again only in the 1960s, when the new post-war generation took over. The 1970s formed a period of stagnation. It was only in the 1990s that the dominant ideology changed. A rise in the incidence of human interest topics in Russian media can be noted beginning in the 1960s; beginning in the 1980s, one can even say that such topics became even more important than 'culture and education'.

In comparing our three cases in terms of main topics, there are two important aspects to stress.

First, our three cases are similar in the sense that there were three major turning points in the course of century: a) WW II (the attention paid to culture and education diminished, down to 8% in the case of Russian media, and 17% in the case of Finland; the decline compared to previous decades was significant), b) the new increase in attention paid to culture and related issues started in the 1950s in the case of Estonia; in Russian and Finnish media, the increase started later, in the 1960s. In Russian media, this increase lasted only two decades, until the end of the 1970s (although a decline had already begun in the 1970s). In Estonian and Finnish media, the increase ended later, in the 1980s, but it was still at a relatively high level (22% in the case of Estonia in the 1980s, and the percentage in the 1990s was still almost as high as it was in the 1960s in Finland – 17%), and c) all three countries went through a "transition" period in the 1990s. In this respect we can refer only to the Russian media, which rather quickly recovered from the shock and redirected themselves to entirely new journalistic preferences. This indicates that by 2000 the rubric of human interest topics seemed to have found its niche for the audience, whereas culture and education fell into decline, as it had right after WW II.

The situation was similar in Estonia and Finland, in the sense that the attention that the media paid to journalism and human interest topics was similar to the period after WW II, but the nature of the attention was different than in the case of the Russian media (see Figure 2). In this sense, Estonia and Finland represent much more stable journalistic traditions, which visibly tend to preserve existing traditions, rather than tending towards something new (it is still impossible to determine anything particular about the "new practice" in the case of the Russian media).

Second, the Finnish media seem to represent a somewhat different journalistic culture, as the position of human interest topics has been entirely different. While in the

case of Estonian and Russian media 'culture' and 'human interest' topics seem to have a positive correlation, the Finnish case is the opposite. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the coverage of these issues was in constant decline, and remained so until the 2000s (with the exception of the 1980s). It seems that the basic characteristic of Finnish media is the focus on state- and nation-level topics. This explains the relatively low representation of human interest topics, as the capacity of the media is a constant that is impossible to exceed. This indicates that when the main media focus is on state- and nation-level topics, there is no room for the rest of the issues in the mainstream.

Subtopics: Education, Cultural Activities/Social Events and Science

In the comparison of these three subtopics (see Figure 3), there were four major observations. First, the attention that was paid to culture-related issues in the Estonian context stood out in comparison with that in Finland and Russia. We chose the issues of "education" and "cultural activities and social events" because these two variables were most influential in the cases of Russia and Finland. A separate look at the Estonian context would add issues such as 'media' and 'art and literature', but the corresponding reference was almost non-existent in *Pravda* and *Helsingin Sanomat*.

Figure 3. *Subtopics from "Culture"*

Subtopics from 'culture' (% of the total amount of stories N: EST=1579, FIN= 2084, RUS= 1727)
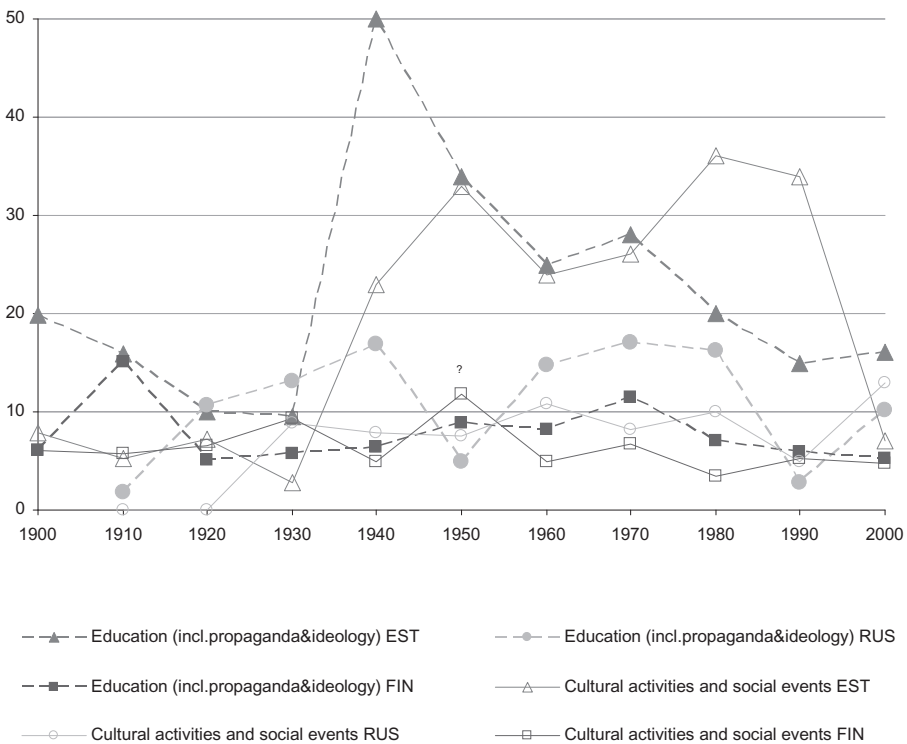
Second, in comparing these three cases, Finland was again the least volatile. It was only in the 1910s and 1970s that the focus on issues related to education rose over 10%. The percentage of the rest of these three variables remained below 10% throughout the century.

Third, the order of prevalence of these subtopics was similar in Estonia and Russia. Issues related to education (and propaganda) were dominant over the issue of "cultural activities and social events". In the case of Finland, this situation applied only from the 1960s onward. Up to the 1960s, the most prevalent issue was "cultural activities and social events".

Fourth, it is noteworthy that "science" (although it is not shown in Figure 3) was one of the three most influential subtopics in the Estonian media. This was especially true during the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, the period when the cult of the power of rational thinking and planning prevailed in the Soviet ideology. This was also clearly present in *Pravda*, but the Estonian case still seemed to be somewhat anomalous. In Finland, there were only two decades when the subtopic of "science" was stressed in more than 5% of the articles: the 1960s and 1970s.

Normative statements about culture and mass media (the issues of self- and other-reference)

The section on normative statements confirms our previous observations on the dominant role of the culture-related issues in *Päevaleht/Rahva Hääl*, compared to *Pravda* and *Helsingin Sanomat* (see Figure 4). There are three aspects that seem to be worth stressing.

First, during the course of the century, in the Finnish and Russian contexts, statements on the role of mass media prevailed over statements on culture. The case of *Päevaleht/ Rahva Hääl* is the opposite: starting in the 1910s, normative statements on culture were constantly valued above 10% (except in the 1940s, when it was 9.2%, a period that also marked the peak of statements made on culture in the case of *Pravda*). "Culture" was discussed at an especially high level in the period 1960-1990, in more than 15% of all statements. In the 1980s, the percentage was as high as 19% of all statements.

Second, the case was the opposite in regard to statements made on the role of the mass media in society. In *Päevaleht/Rahva Hääl,* "media" in this respect was present in less than 5% of the statements, except in the 1960s, 1970s and the first decade of the 21st century (6, 6 and 5.9%, respectively). The Finnish and Estonian cases were similar, in the sense that there was no time in the 20th century when the order of prevalence of these two groups of normative statements changed. The sole exception that applies to both Russia and Finland was the first decade of the 21st century, when statements about "culture" became prevalent in all three countries.
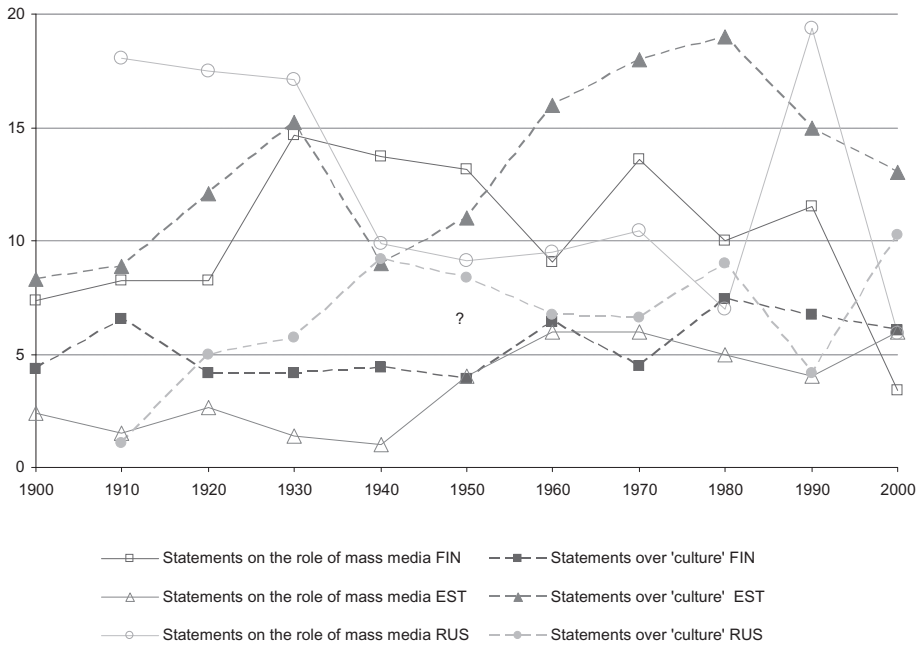
Third, the Russian case seems to be different, as the dynamics of these two groups of variables was rather close, especially after WW II; the period preceding the war can be said to be rather similar to the cases of Estonia and Finland.

At this point we refer to Niklas Luhmann's theoretical framework of self- and other-reference. In our case, normative statements about culture can be defined as "other-reference" from the media's point of view, whereas for a culture in which the media act as a mediator, statements about culture function as "self-reference".

The case is somewhat different in regard to statements about the role of mass media. From the point of view of the media system, these issues are purely self-referential. In addition, as the media system is a part of culture, it can also be said to be self-referential from the point of view of the whole cultural system.

Figure 4. *Normative Satements about "Culture" and "Mass Media"*

Normative statements in the LCA (% of the total amount of normative statements, N: EST=11379, FIN= 24486, RUS= 18333)

—□— Statements on the role of mass media FIN	– ■ – Statements over 'culture' FIN
—△— Statements on the role of mass media EST	– ▲ – Statements over 'culture' EST
—○— Statements on the role of mass media RUS	– ● – Statements over 'culture' RUS

At the beginning of this chapter, we pointed to the peripheral role of the Estonian *Rahva Hääl* in relation to *Pravda,* which had a very central position in the ideological system of the Soviet Union. The difference between *Pravda* and *Rahva Hääl* in regard to the presence of normative statements on culture and media seemed to be hidden in the binary opposition "centre" vs. "periphery". Specifically, in the central newspaper *Pravda,* the statements about the role of mass media in society were self-referential, as they reflected the dominant ideology. Although the Estonian *Rahva Hääl* was supposed to be the carrier of the very same ideology, its relation to the central medium (*Pravda*) was still peripheral. This indicates that what came from the centre unavoidably had the status of other-reference, whereas the place of self-referential issues (as there was no way that Estonian media could develop an independent discourse about the role of the media in society) was replaced by statements about culture, as this was the closest self-referential issue to statements about the media's role in society. This hypothesis definitely requires a more detailed approach than the scope of our present discussion allows.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previously we stated that the main goal of our study is to assess changes in the dynamics of the content of 20th century Estonian mass-mediated communication in comparison with neighbouring countries. That required special attention to indicators/variables that could be used to describe and compare changes in mass-mediated content in different countries/cultures. During the course of this modelling, we suggested that there are three main axes that can be used to better organize the interpretations of our data: a)

"centre" vs. "periphery", b) "self-reference" vs. "other-reference" and c) "individuals" vs. "society". The latter distinction is rather general and helps us only when it becomes necessary to point to the ideological contexts of the 20th century.

In the comparison of the three countries, the case of Estonia was the only one that featured 'culture' as the third main topic, after economics and issues related to the state and legislation (see Figure 1). Interestingly, 'state and legislation' was the common de-nominator for all three countries, being one of the most valued topics in all three cases (especially in Finland). Also 'economy' turned out to be rather well valued in all three cases. Still, this is where the main difference between democratic and totalitarian socie-ties occurred: economics-related issues received special treatment in the Russian and Estonian press, whereas in the Finnish press the treatment of the 'economy' was similar to the rest of the topics under investigation. And, compared to the Finnish case, 'state and legislation' were clearly undervalued in the cases of the Russian and Estonian samples.

The basic assumption of this research is that newspaper texts construct a consistent system that forms the foundation for the *socio-cultural world-view* of potential read-ers. This is the context of the understanding of mass mediated content as a "cultural indicator".

Looking once more at Figure 1, we can see that the most valued topic in the Russian case was 'values and human relations': this is a good illustration of the fact that the education of a decent Soviet citizen started at the level of the individual and, as a result, legislative issues were undervalued. This makes sense if we consider the conditions in these totalitarian societies, which really did not value the discussion of legislation and related issues. It was possible to discuss 'state and legislation' only within the limits of ideology and propaganda – and there was not much informational value in these mes-sages. This is where the Estonian *Rahva Hääl* seemed to follow a somewhat different journalistic tradition than did the Russian *Pravda*. Namely, as we stated above, issues proclaimed to be cultural had an exceptional position compared to the Finnish and Russian media. The case of Finland is understandable: the attention paid to 'culture', 'economics' and other fields of life was rather well-balanced. The differences between the Estonian and Russian cases can be explained only via the binary relationship between the ideological centre of the system (*Pravda*, very strict and limited regarding possible variations in official ideology) and the periphery (*Rahva Hääl*, somewhat adaptive to the local setting).

In Estonia, the discourse on 'culture' has been predominantly related to different educational practices. The importance of 'culture' in our study can be traced to the fact that 'human interest topics' – a soft version of cultural journalism – 'education' and the subtopics of 'cultural activities and social events' correlated well with the changing understanding of 'culture' during the occupation. It is notable that during the period of the worst stagnation, the 1970s, when the focus on issues related to 'culture' was sup-pressed, the field of 'popular science' emerged as a kind of replacement that offered a somewhat "de-ideologized" zone of discussion. It is also important to note that the rubric of 'science' offered the possibility to exceed the otherwise very strict limits of the Soviet Union and of referring to geographically/politically distant places.

Also, we can assume that the relatively high position of 'culture' in the Estonian media system was a product of totalitarian journalistic practice that especially did not allow the media to discuss issues of self-reference (such as the media system itself)

that might have included ”misrepresentations“ of the Soviet system. 'Culture' was one of the few areas of local context media that maintained a kind of self-reflective function for its readers, while it still carried, from the media's point of view, a function of other-reference. Ideologically it was correct to reflect the reality from outside the media system (the media's other-reference). Paradoxically, the ideological system itself created a situation that featured local topics (such as 'culture' or 'human interest topics') as being self-reflective from the reader's point of view. Theoretically it would have been different if there had been a separate newspaper (such as "Pravda" in Estonian) for translated ideological texts.

Note

1. For example, "social stratification occurs as there are manifest corporate interests in society" or "culture is the variety of attitudes and values of a particular setting" or "the role of politics is to maintain power" or "'public' is something that represents the general interests of individuals".

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