"ART BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE!"
THE SOVIET CULTURAL POLICY AND ESTONIAN COMMUNITY HOUSES

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Abstract

Estonian community houses were built in towns and the countryside by the local people, who had been joining cultural and other societies since the second half of the 19th century. These cultural centres supported the process of building the Estonian state. The space for culture became basis for the lifelong learning system of informal education, which later was regulated and developed according to the politics of culture and education in the Estonian nation-state (1918–40) and the Soviet Union (1940–91).

After the invasion of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union in 1940, extensive restructuring or sovietization of the Estonian public administration, economy and culture began. The article examines the sovietization process of Estonian community houses, i.e., how they were turned into the ideological tools of Soviet totalitarian propaganda.

Keywords: *History of cultural policy; Estonian community houses, sovietization.*

1. Introduction

Estonian community[1] houses, originating in the 19th-century tradition of grass-roots-level social activism, were built by ordinary people[2] in order to offer space for the new type of cultural activities, such as choirs, plays, orchestras, libraries, and the public festivities to the local communities all over the current territory of Estonia during the Tsarist Empire from the 1880s onwards. These cultural hubs became pre-state cultural institutions with civilizing aims (*Bildung*) for Estonian communities, where a wider public sphere evolved in the circumstances of being under the rule of the Baltic German landlords and the restrictive tsarist state. Cultural practices in the community houses contributed to a shared feeling of togetherness, spreading the national consciousness (*nation-building*) among Estonians at the grass-roots level. Thus, community houses played a vital part in the Estonian national awakening in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In general, Estonian national *awakening* (since the 1860s) was driven by the 19th-century economic, social and political modernization, which formed the preconditions for the emergence of Estonian civil society and cultural emancipation [Kulbok-Lattik 2015]. In response to Russian absolutist central power and the socio-economic situation dominated by the Baltic German nobility, the "*awakened peasants*" were highly motivated to build up their cultural and public sphere with the intention of improving the status of Estonians in society, as the following scholars, Jansen 2004, 2007; Laar 2006; Karu 1985; Karjahärm & Sirk 1997; Raun 2009, et.al, have pointed out. Estonian national aspirations (which initially were related to cultural goals) with time became more political, demanding *"equal rights"* with the ruling Baltic-German nobility in regard to participation in the running of local affairs, as several scholars, like Jansen 2007; Karu 1985; Kulbok-Lattik 2015, 2008 et al., have noted. That is why the construction of community

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[1] Community normally means a group of people who have something in common, sharing a geographical area (typically a neighborhood), or people brought together by common interests, identities, or some combination of these factors. Communities operate by distinguishing those who belong ("insiders") from those who do not ("outsiders"). Community is an important dimension of *social divisions* as well as *togetherness* because inclusion in community relationships promises benefits (material resources or raised social status) that set its members apart from others. The sense of belonging to communities varies greatly: see Putnam [2000] *Bowling Alone.* The ordinariness of community relationships in people's everyday lives needs to be reinforced periodically by extraordinary gatherings such as festivities to celebrate the purpose, achievements, and memory of the community and thereby strengthen members' attachments to the collectivity [Crow 2007: 617–620]. See also: Daugavietis, Janis (2015). *Amateur Arts in Latvia: Community Development and Cultural Policy.* PhD thesis, University of Latvia, Riga.

[2] Ordinary people are understood as "little people", as opposed to the "great people" or the elite.

houses can be seen as the act of collective will to create a room/space for the cultural activities for Estonians, where a democratic *public* in the Arendtian sense [1958] could appear, and as such, have a social and political dimension in the Arendtian sense.

However, with the construction of community houses, Estonians, as a colonized ethnic group having the lowest status in society, created not only a cultural and political public, but also a new spatial model for their cultural development. From the 1880s onwards with the specific operatic-theatrical room-programmes, with the stage, hall, buffet, library room etc. (see the plan of the community house and cultural practices in Appendix 2) new cultural practices became attainable for everyone (masters, servants, men, and women). The space for culture became basis for the lifelong learning system of informal education, which later was regulated and developed according to the politics of culture and education in the Estonian nation-state (1918–40) as well as in the Soviet Union (1940–91). During the years of the first Estonian independent state (1918–40), the network of community houses was set up by the state [Jansen 2007]. By 1940, there were approximately 500 community houses all over Estonia, which operated as local institutions for the development of Estonian cultural policy, being the expression of the socio-economic and cultural vitality of Estonian rural regions [Kulbok-Lattik 2012, Uljas 1987].

In June 1940, the invasion of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union took place. After that extensive restructuring or *sovietization* of the public administration, economy, including the nationalization of private property, propagandistic land reform and mass deportations began.[1] Sovietization was carried out in all the spheres of life. The sovietization process of community houses meant the importation of the Soviet cultural canon (norms, values) and cultural policy model. Bottom-up initiatives by societies were prohibited, community houses (as well as all other private cultural enterprises) were closed and their property was expropriated. As all the cultural organizations became state-operated and state-guided, the Soviet cultural policy model was fully implemented in Estonia. The network of community houses was filled with the so-called Red Corners[2] and compulsory political training of the population was carried out. The new content of cultural policy came from the manipulative rhetoric of a totalitarian state shaping the

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[1] Aigi Rahi-Tamm has mapped Estonian deportations in her PhD dissertation: http://dspace.utlib.ee/dspace/bitstream/handle/10062/528/RahiTamm.pdf?sequence=5; http://okupatsioon.ee/en, see also http://www.riigikogu.ee/public/Riigikogu/TheWhiteBook.pdf

[2] Red Corners were special areas (pinboards or table with books) set up by Soviet authorities in public places in Soviet Russia with the aim to disseminate Marxist ideas and promote the Communist classics.

Homo Soveticus, which resulted in strong centralization, guidelines issued to the community houses, and censorship.

Objectives of the article

In this paper I analyse the *sovietization* process of Estonian community houses, i.e., how they were turned into the ideological tools of Soviet propaganda.[1] In order to achieve this objective I examine: (1) the formation of the Soviet cultural canon to identify its targets, features and also the model of the Soviet cultural policy; (2) the process how the free-initiative amateur art and educational activities in community houses were restructured into subordinate cultural institutions.

Empirical data, archival materials, and methodical guidelines (published from 1940 onwards) are used and analysed. In order to contextualize the Soviet state practices, I use the term *sovietization*. The method of the article is the case study on Estonian community houses with the focus on the history of cultural policy. Given the large number of works written on Russia in this context (a long list of references could be given here). I do not directly deal with this topic here.

2. Soviet cultural canon and cultural policy model

Sovietization is conceptualized as the process of exporting the Soviet model of the state. The process of sovietization, as historians Tannberg [2007], Zubkova [2007], Mertelsmann [2012] explain, implied more than a mere political take-over – it also meant social, economic and cultural restructuring. The population had to be "re-educated" and new socialist elite had to be created. According to Mertelsmann [2012: 14–19], the basic model of sovietization consisted of Lenin and Stalin's Cultural Revolution, the forced collectivization of agriculture and the start of the campaign of industrialization and the planned or command economy. In general, Soviet state practices were coercive and violent. As Gerlach and Werth [2009: 133–178] and several other scholars explain: class struggle and terror, oppression of the "enemies" of the Soviet state, (kulaks, priests, bourgeois specialists), attempts to achieve total control over the population, nationalization of private property, strict censorship, political agitation, the provision of a set of canonized cultural norms were some of the key elements of sovietization. While

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[1] Propaganda is the dissemination of information–facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies – to influence public opinion. Propaganda is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth). Smith, B. L, Lasswell H. D., and Casey, R. D. (1946). *Propaganda, Communication, and Public Opinion: A Comprehensive Reference Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. vii, 435.

Soviet state practices did change over time (influenced by the development of its own inner policies as well as external pressure through the Cold War), the main structures of the state model of the USSR established in the 1930s persisted until its collapse in 1991.

In terms of culture, censorship and indoctrination[1] of the Soviet values, which the vast majority of population perceived as unfamiliar and odd, were implemented. In order to "re-educate" the population of the occupied territories, the Soviet cultural canon (invented tradition conveying Soviet values)[2] and policy model (organizational structure of state practices in culture) were exported as tools for creating the new socialist reality. By 1940, when the Baltic States were incorporated into the Soviet Union, the Soviet official culture had gone through different phases. The avant-garde and iconoclastic *prolet-cult*, which with the slogans of class struggle and Cultural Revolution aimed to destroy the traditional culture of tsarist Russia, was replaced by neoclassicism and socialist realism during the mid-1930s – the era of Stalinist rule. Socialist realism became the Stalinist canon of official culture. Soviet state practices and formation of cultural norms and values have been described as cultivating masses within the frame of developing Soviet modernity. Civilizing and cultivating masses was the main purpose of state cultural policies in the majority of European nation-states at that time. According to David Hoffmann [2003, 2011], Soviet state practices could be seen as a specific type of coercive modernity

Sheila Fitzpatrick [1999] offers several concepts explaining the modernizing practices of the Soviet state, for example: Soviet society as a prison or a conscript army, or a strict type of school, with the elements of strict discipline within a closed institution with its own strict codes of behaviour, and fear of punishment.

On the other hand, as Fitzpatrick [1999: 226] points out, the Soviet state was moving towards the welfare paternalism, where the state acts with a strong sense of the responsibilities of leadership over the dependent population. The Soviet system with the allocative function of the state created dependents, as Fitzpatrick

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[1] Indoctrination refers to infiltrating (drilling, inculcating etc.) concepts, attitudes, beliefs and theories into a student`s mind bypassing free and critical deliberation. According to Huttunen, the opposite of indoctrination is *communicative teaching*, which is based on *"The Bildung as a human teaching situation"* referring to Schäfer and Schaller [1975: 57], where students are not treated as passive objects but as active leaners. Huttunen explains that communicative teaching is a simulation of democracy and democratic mode of action. See more: http://eepat. net/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=habermas_and_the_problem_of_indoctrination.pdf

[2] Raud defines cultural canon as an outlook on cultural tradition established in the cultural environment by a symbolic authority, a list on texts supporting its development, which is used as the most valuable part of heritage. Raud, R. (2013). *What is Culture? Introduction into the Theories of Culture.* Tallinn University Press, p. 430.

[1999: 225] explains referring to Janos Kornai [1980: 315], who has pointed out that in the Soviet-type systems the population is under the "paternalistic tutelage" and care of the party and state. "All other strata, groups, or individuals in society are children, wards whose minds must be made up for them by their adult guardians." A citizen's natural posture toward a state that controls the distribution of goods and benefits is one of supplication, not resistance. It may also be one of passive dependence; indeed the Soviet officials frequently complained about the "dependent" habits of *Homo Soveticus*, his lack of initiative, and his stubborn expectation that the state would and should provide [Kornai 1980] cited in Fitzpatrick [1990: 226]. Thus, Fitzpatrick offers also the concepts state as the soup kitchen or the relief agency to explain the state's monopoly of distributing goods and services and the paternalistic dominance of the state apparatus as the one of the significant features of the Soviet political system.

Over the same period (1918–1940), a characteristically Western modern social structure had ground in Estonia for the two decades of independence. The state practices of culture in the Estonian Republic (1918–1934) were typical to those nation-states of Western liberal democracies where cultural institutional network originated from the national and cultural emancipation and initiatives of the 19th-century civil society. The Estonian engagement with modernity started in the middle of the 19th century with the growing social activism and continued, as Raun [2009] has described, with the emergence of a new generation of Estonian intellectuals and politicians at the beginning of the 20th century.

In addition to this, the growth of urbanization among Estonians and the educational and cultural level, prosperity and the standard of living of the population improved.[1] Cultural policy developments during the years of Estonian independence (1918–1940) could be described as a gradual movement from the free initiatives of civil society[2] (before 1925) towards systematic and organized state interference.

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[1] Raun presents data and statistics: in 1904, Estonians achieved their first major political breakthrough at the Tallinn municipal elections. In 1913, the percentage of ethnic Estonians had increased in Tallinn to 71.6% and in Tartu to 73.3%, the two largest towns in Estland and Northern Livland. The movement of young Estonian intellectuals called "Young Estonia" and its principal developed a fundamental aim for cultural nation-building in 1905: "More culture! This is the first condition for the emancipation of ideals and goals. More European culture! Let's be Estonians, but let's also become Europeans!" Raun, T. (2009). The Estonian Engagement with Modernity: The Role of Young-Estonia in the Diversification of Political and Social Thought. In: *Tuna,* [*Magazine Past*], Special issue on history of Estonia of National Archives Tartu-Tallinn. http://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/en/download_all/76914

[2] According to the statistics presented by Uljas (1987), in 1929 there were 1385 societies of culture in Estonia, in 1940 there were 2200 organizations of non-formal education in Estonia, 60–70,000 individual members.

The years 1925–1929 are considered those that stabilized the country, when the state supported cultural institutions were established and a democratic arm's length principle[1] was implemented. Estonia lost its young democracy in 1934, when the political-economic turbulence (economic crises and nationalistic ideas) spread in Europe between the world wars. This era brought nationalist ideology,[2] developed by the propaganda office, which was implemented with the support of a nationalist/popular cultural policy. The objective of the state was a homogeneous and strong nation-state. Authoritarian state practices[3] in cultural policy, primarily intended to enhance the national cultural identity, were implemented and a well-developed network of cultural institutions was established in Estonia, as Kulbok-Lattik [2008, 2012] has noted.

From 1940, the Estonian Western modern development was replaced by Soviet state practices. The authoritarian state was replaced with the practices of the totalitarian state. Discussing the classic concepts, trying to formulate the distinctive feature that differentiates a totalitarian society from other nondemocratic societies, Juan J. Linz [2000: 70] points out two important characteristics of totalitarianism – a monistic centre of power and citizen (forced or manipulated) participation in political and social tasks; when active participation is replaced by passive obedience and apathy, society is losing its totalitarian nature and degrading into authoritarianism.

Community houses, which had operated since the second half of the 19th century on the basis of civil society by hosting leisure time and cultural practices of

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[1] In 1925, the law of Cultural Endowment *(Kultuurkapital)* was completed and passed. Kulbok-Lattik, E. (2008). Eesti kultuuripoliitika ajaloolisest periodiseerimisest. [*On the Historical Periodization of Estonian Cultural Policy*]. In: Acta Historica Tallinnensia, 12, p. 120–144.

[2] In the current context, ideology is any broader system of beliefs, ways of thinking and categories which serves as a basis for political and social practices. S. Blackburn. Oxford Lexicon of Philosophy. Oxford University Press, 2002, 177.

[3] Authoritarianism is the principle of blind submission to authority, as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action. In government, authoritarianism denotes any political system that concentrates power in the hands of a leader or a small elite that is not constitutionally responsible to the body of the people. Authoritarian leaders often exercise power arbitrarily and without regard to the existing bodies of law, and they usually cannot be replaced by citizens choosing freely among various candidates in elections. The freedom to create opposition political parties or other alternative political groupings with which to compete for power with the ruling group is either limited or non-existent in authoritarian regimes. Authoritarianism stands in fundamental contrast to democracy. It also differs from totalitarianism, however, since authoritarian governments usually have no highly developed guiding ideology, tolerate some pluralism in social organization, lack the power to mobilize the entire population in pursuit of national goals, and exercise that power within relatively predictable limits. Linz, J. J. (2000). Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes. Pp. 70.

local people, offer a good example of the sovietization process – demonstrating how the free initiative activities were subjected to the state administration. In the next section, the formation of the Soviet cultural canon and cultural policy model will be briefly examined by concentrating selectively on the aspects which influenced the cultural practices of folk culture and amateur art in the Soviet Union.

2.1. Formation of the Soviet cultural canon

Immediately after the Soviets grasped power in 1940 in Estonia (and in the other Baltic States), constantly repeated slogans on posters appeared in the press and public places, such as *"Soviet Culture is Nationalist in Form and Socialist in Content", "Art Belongs to the People", "Friendship of Brotherly Soviet Nations", "Socialist Realism",* etc. These slogans, expressing new narratives created by authorities, are the key to understanding the Soviet cultural canon and the ideology behind it. The cultural canon was needed to create a system for indoctrination and re-education of people, thus it was a tool of political agitation and propaganda.

With reference to the Soviet practices, the term *"propaganda"* is closely related to the term *"agitation"*. According to Lasswell [1946: 435], these two terms were first used by the Marxist Georgy Plekhanov, who defined *"agitation"* as the use of slogans, parables, and half-truths to exploit the grievances of the uneducated and the un-reasonable. Since he regarded both strategies as absolutely essential to political victory, he twinned them in the term *agitprop*, which was later elaborated upon by Lenin in the pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* (1902); Lenin defined *"propaganda"* as the reasoned use of historical and scientific arguments to indoctrinate the educated and enlight-ened (the attentive and informed public, in the language of today's social sciences).

An examination of how the Soviet cultural canon was formed reveals that the aims, features and model of the Soviet cultural policy were, as Zubkova [2007] has mentioned, situational. It depended on the tasks which were set up in order to solve various structural problems of Soviet Russia that the party leaders were faced with – illiteracy, the general backwardness of Russia, the restructuring of the economy, etc., which reveals the highly instrumental use of culture in the Soviet cultural policy.

a) Cultural Revolution and acculturating the masses

Lenin considered the Cultural Revolution to be the main aim for the party leaders:

> The main aim of the Cultural Revolution was [...] to cultivate a new human being characterized by a harmonious combination of spiritual richness, moral cleanliness and physical perfection. (V. I. Lenin, speaking about the Cultural Revolution, cited in Hoffmann [2003: 150].

However, as Hoffmann [2003: 15] notes, an enormous gulf loomed between the utopian visions of the party leaders and social reality; after the Revolution and Civil War Russia was an undeveloped, agrarian country with an overwhelmingly peasant population. Rates of illiteracy, poverty, disease and infant mortality remained very high. Acculturating the masses was one of the central tasks of the Soviet authorities during the first Five-Year Plan (1928–1932) period. Fighting illiteracy, building up social and health care systems can be seen as part of a revolutionary attempt to achieve a rationalized and modernized society. (ibid)

Another aspect of the Cultural Revolution was its use in class struggle and freeing society from the "illnesses of capitalism" and the heritage of bourgeois culture, as Hoffmann [2003: 150–152][1] explains it. Thus, the conception of culture during the first decade of the Soviet rule, the first Five-Year Plan period (1928–1932), the so-called *Proletkult*, was futuristic, avant-garde, and iconoclastic. The norms and values (culture, religion) of the previous bourgeois society of the Tsarist Empire were to be re-evaluated by the breaking of all boundaries (including heated discussions between the proponents of sexual liberation and proponents of the family).

b) Creating Soviet intelligentsia and socialist realism

The avant-garde culture was no longer needed to destroy bourgeois culture after capitalist remnants had been eliminated (or deported), agriculture had been collectivized, and a planned economy established, as there was no further economic basis for exploitation and no bourgeois mentality. A new and loyal intelligentsia had been created, as Stalin stated in November 1936:

> Our Soviet intelligentsia is a completely new intelligentsia, connected by its roots to the working class and peasantry. It is now a fully-fledged member of Soviet society; together with workers and peasants, as one team, it builds the new classless socialist society [Hoffmann: 2003, 152].

Once socialism had been achieved (Soviet leaders believed they were achieving socialism already at the beginning of the 1930s), the new purpose of Soviet culture was the perpetuation and legitimation of power. The only officially acceptable form in art and literature after 1932 was **socialist realism** that alongside with monumental architecture legitimated the existing order. As Stalin stated in 1932:

> The artist ought to show life truthfully. And if he shows it truthfully, he cannot fail to show it moving towards socialism. This is and will be socialist realism [Hoffmann: 2003: 160–161].

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[1] As Vladimir Mayakovsky had declared after the revolution, *"We are shooting the old generals! Why not Pushkin?"* cited in Hoffmann, D. L. Stalinist Values … 2003: 150.

Socialist realism was a "realist" depiction of how life was supposed to be – an attempt by the Soviet cultural establishment to construct a reality that did not actually exist. Boris Groys [1998: 427] has argued that the avant-garde and socialist realism shared several traits: the desire **to transform** rather than merely represent life, the belief in a totalistic, all-encompassing artistic vision and contempt for commercialized culture as part of an overall aesthetic-political project – an attempt to organize society and everyday life according to aesthetic sensibilities and political principles.

c) "Art Belongs to the People!"

According to the official rhetoric, the revolution had done away with the exploitation and suppression of workers. Factories, land, railways, and banks now belonged to the people. Making use of everything that was more worthy and better than the culture of the past by critically selecting from the cultural heritage the Soviet people was to begin building a new, higher kind of socialist culture, led by the Communist Party. As Kalinin expressed it in 1938:

> The Soviet system released the creative powers in people by making culture their own. A dream of the best of science, arts and literature came true: people showed due appreciation of and lifted high their cultural heritage, making it part of the new socialist culture [cited in Medvedjev and Hlõstov 1954: 14].

The party leaders selectively incorporated the cultural heroes of the past into the official cultural canon. Hoffmann [2003: 163] explains that the selective rediscovery and incorporation of Russian classics and pre-revolutionary leading figures of the arts[1] into the canon of Soviet culture fulfilled both the (pre-revolutionary) elite's long-standing dream of bringing Russian high culture to the masses and the Soviet goal of creating a common culture to be shared by all the members of the population. In 1939, in a speech fixing targets for the gradual transition from socialism to communism, Stalin declared:

> We want all the workers and all the farmers to become cultural and educated, and we will make it happen in time [Medvedjev and Hlõstov 1954: 14].

Stalinist culture and cultural policy entailed a wide range of norms and practices intended to transform people's behaviour and create a new social order:

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[1] Pushkin, Tolstoy, and others were enshrined in the Soviet literary canon, in the music of Glinka and other classical composers of the pre-revolutionary era, particularly the "Russian Five" (Balakirev; Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov) – all famous for their efforts to compose Russian classical music. Also certain political and military leaders from the tsarist past were rehabilitated (Yaroslav the Wise, Ivan the Great, Peter the Great etc). Hoffmann Stalinist Values … 2003: 163.

Soviet society. Hoffmann [2003] claims that the Stalinist use of traditional institutions and culture for modern mobilization purposes reflected the general demands for mass politics in Europe after World War I. Stalinist culture was to become a particular Soviet version or incarnation of the modern mass culture.

d) Folk culture: the pluralistic unity of the USSR,
"Friendship of Peoples"

In the 1930s, the official Soviet cultural policy emphasized folklore. As Hoffmann [2003: 166–169] describes it, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Gorky championed folklore as

"a genuine expression of people's optimism and aspirations" and suggested that "we need to share our knowledge of the past. It is important for all union republics that a Belorussian knows what a Georgian or Turk is like, etc.

This statement marked the beginning of an official campaign to promote folklore. It was related to another important thesis of the Soviet national and cultural policy – "*Friendship of Peoples*" – which required that all the Soviet nationalities be deeply moved by the art of other Soviet nationalities and developed their folk culture as a representation of the Soviet pluralistic unity. As Slezkine [1994: 447] explains it:

This resulted not only in frenzied translation activity but also in histories of the USSR that were supposed to include all the Soviet peoples, radio shows that introduced Soviet listeners to "Georgian polyphony and Belorussian folk songs", tours by hundreds of "song and dance ensembles", decades of Azerbaijani art in Ukraine, evenings of Armenian poetry in Moscow, exhibits of Turkmen carpets in Kazan, and festivals of national choirs, athletes and Young Pioneers all over the country. From the mid-1930s through the 1980s, this activity was one of the most visible aspects of official Soviet culture.

The government sponsored village expeditions to gather folkloric materials, folk singing competitions, and festivals of national art featuring works produced by various Soviet nationalities. The government established the N. Krupskaya All-Union House of Folk Art in Moscow, as well as institutes of national culture all over the country [Hoffmann 2003: 160–169].[1] Folk culture was used by the party leaders to promote controlled and artificial representation of the Soviet forms of national cultures.

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[1] See also: Shay, A. (2002). Choreographic Politics: State Folk Dance Companies, Representation and Power. Wesleyan University Press.

For an example of the political representation of Estonian folklore, see the figure from 1947.

Figure 1. Evening of Folk Art in Tallinn 1947;
Estonian History Museum, Collection of Posters (F158-1-36).

2.2. Russification and nationalism as the ideological basis for Soviet cultural policy

As a centralized state, the Soviet Union stressed the Russian language and Russian culture – the official propaganda referred to Russians as the "elder brother" of other nationalities or as "the first among equals". Russification was one aspect of the Soviet national and cultural policy. However, the Soviet nationalities policy was based on "national diversity" [1], which was a paradoxical prerequisite for "the ultimate unity" within Soviet Socialism.

As Slezkine [1994: 418] explains it, Lenin's socialists needed native languages, native subjects and teachers ("even for a single Georgian child") in order to "polemicize with "their own" bourgeoisie, to spread anticlerical and antibourgeois ideas among peasantry and burghers" and to "banish the virus of bourgeois

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[1] See also: Warshovsky Lapidus, G. (1984). Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case. In: *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Jul., 1984). Cambridge University Press. P. 555–580.

nationalism from their proletarian disciples and their own minds". Mertelsmann [2012: 12] points out that the Soviet nationalities policy, based on the concept of *korenizatsiia* ("taking root"), needed the help of national cadres to build up and secure the central power of the Soviet system. The basic concepts for national and cultural policies were worked out by Lenin and developed by Stalin. The Soviet concept of "national diversity" and "the ultimate unity of nations" under the red flag and leadership of Stalin, has been visualized in figure 2:

Figure 2. Expression of "national diversity" and "ultimate unity";
Estonian History Museum, Collection of Posters (F158-1-23).

In 1948, closely repeating his earlier statement on national rights, Stalin said:
Every nation, whether large or small, has its own specific qualities and its own peculiarities, which are unique to it and which contribute to what each nation gives to the common treasury of world culture, adding to it and enriching it. In this sense all nations, both small and large, are in the same position and each nation is equal to any other nation [Slezkine 1994: 449].

According to Lenin, national culture was a reality; it was about language and a few "domestic arrangements" – nationality was a "form". National form was acceptable because, as Slezkine [1994: 423] notes, there was no such thing as national content. The content which filled the national form was socialism.

This basic principle for Soviet cultural policy – as set by Lenin and Stalin – was expressed with the main slogan: *"Soviet Culture is Nationalist in Form and Socialist in Content"*, the concept is visualized in figure 3:

Figure 3. "To Develop Soviet Folklore:
Nationalist in Form and Socialist in Content!";
Estonian History Museum, Collection of Posters (F158-1-7).

2.3. State-funded cultural bureaucracy shaping cultural norms and canon

A specific feature of the Soviet cultural policy was its highly bureaucratic nature. As all the cultural organizations were state-funded, they were also guided and controlled by the bureaucracy of state institutions.[1] However, as Hoffmann notes [2003: 5], the party leaders, who retained absolute power in the system, could not dictate the contents of every single propaganda film, hygiene-promoting poster and school textbook produced in the Soviet Union; instead they set up a network

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[1] The coercive mechanisms of institutionalized structures and practices as the impact of Soviet institutionalization on Estonian cultural policy can be analyzed referring to the theoretical concepts of institutional isomorphism. See: DiMaggio, P., Powell, W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. In: *American Sociological Review,* Volume 48, Issue 2, 147–160.

of institutions and a control mechanism to oversee cultural production and the promulgation of the official norms and values.

In cultural policy research, such a dominant role of the state has been described in the Hillmann Chartrand and McCaughey's theoretical framework as the "engineer state" model [1989]. The engineer state acts as the owner of all the means of artistic production and supports only the art that meets political standards of excellence. Funding decisions are made by political commissars. Artistic activity (both professional and amateur) is organized into "creative unions" (or methodically-guiding administrative bodies) so as to monitor new works and ensure conformity with the aesthetic principles of the Communist Party [Hillmann Chartrand, Mc Caughey, 1989: 7–8].

To summarize, the aims of the Soviet cultural policy were to control and acculturate the masses, to set a common cultural canon and norms to reform and restructure society, with the ultimate aim of constructing a monolithic society and a new type of human being: the Soviet Person. The Soviet cultural policy was characterized by the following features: the cultural policy was hierarchical in essence, promoting high culture and Russian culture for the arts, yet with a strong inclination to support folklore, which came to be used as the politicized representation of Soviet pluralistic unity. The cultural policy model of the Soviet Union in the period from the mid-1930s to the1990s was carried out according to the *engineer state* model, which was exported and implemented all over the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. The greatest change in the Estonian society was the suppression of bottom-up free initiative of people, which was not tolerated by state in any spheres of life. As Ray [2007: 512] puts it, "This was inevitable in order to repress and hold back one of the most dangerous enemies of the Soviet totalitarian regime – civil society – with its liberal market values and community involvement."

Below, I try to demonstrate the upheaval related to the sovietization of the cultural practices of folk culture, the amateur art of the Estonian population.

3. Sovietization: the exportation of Soviet cultural policy into Estonian community houses

When the Soviet Union seized power in Estonia in 1940, Leninist principles and well-tried scenarios, which the Soviet authorities had used for the purpose of the Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Union, were immediately applied in the reorganization of cultural life.

3.1. Banning manifestations of civil society and free initiatives

For the Estonian societies running the community houses and other free initiative organizations, everything changed on 23 August 1940, when the Act of Nationalization of Private Companies was promulgated by the Council of the People's Commissars [Riigi Teataja 1940: 109]. This dissolved societies, non-governmental organizations (i.e. museums, libraries, theatres, community houses, and cinemas), foundations and private companies. The assets, collections, buildings and inventory of the societies and companies, now without owners, were taken over by the commissaries, nationalized and handed over to the People's Commissariat for Education of the ESSR. On the basis of the acquired material resources, a state network of cultural institutions – community houses (as well as theatres, libraries, cinemas, and museums) – was created.[1]

Citing the regulation of the Council of People's Commissars of the ESSR, adopted on 9 October, community houses were turned into centre for political education. The guidelines, issued a few days later, instructed that the network of community houses was to be set up, and it was to be approved by the People's Commissariat for Education in towns and counties. The new mission of community houses covered the following fields:

> Political education, agriculture, industry and propaganda about the country's defensive capabilities, libraries, artistic expression of people, organization of work with children and youth, and many other spheres [Reference Book …1982, 4–14].

Aleksander Kurvits's[2] account offers a personal perspective on this process. In 1940, the Ministry of Education issued a compendium compiled by Kurvits (19) – *A Systematic Guide to Acts, Regulations, Circular Letters and Guidelines on Estonian National Education and Culture*. The publication contains all the acts and regulations, circular letters and guidelines of the Ministry of Education issued in the Republic of Estonia in the period 1918–1940 on the management of national education, activities of educational organizations, qualifications, youth work, libraries, community houses, science, art, literature, heritage protection, and the education and career of academicians, alongside with respective explanations.

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[1] Eesti NSV kultuuriasutuste ajaloo teatmik I osa. [*Reference Book of the History of Estonian Cultural Institutions I part*] Taal, E. (Ed.) Central State Archives of Estonian SSR, Tallinn, 1982, 4–14. (hereinafter: Reference Book …)

[2] Kurvits, Aleksander (1896–1958), state official of the Ministry of Education during 1921–1940, who contributed to the development of Estonian free education and establishment of the network of community houses. See: Kurvits, A. (Ed.) (1938). Eesti rahvaharidus ja kultuuriala korraldus. [*Administration of Estonian Free Education and Culture*] Tallinn: Haridusministeeriumi väljaanne.

Several months later in 1941, Kurvits (1941) had to announce *a completely new view on free education and culture* in the first issue of the Bulletins of the People's Commissariat, which replaced the Bulletin of the Ministry of Education. In the regulation, specific instructions, proceeding from the N. Krupskaya All-Union House of Folk Art in Moscow, on how to commemorate the anniversary of Lenin's death in community houses are provided:

> It is necessary to make proper arrangements for the Memorial Day in community houses, clubs, the Red Corners, libraries, etc. early enough and begin preparation and implementation immediately:
> (1) to arrange a solemn memorial meeting in every community house; (2) to arrange various working meetings in different study groups in order to learn about the life and work of V. I. Lenin and the events of the Bloody Sunday; (3) to arrange, also before and after 22 January, at the first available opportunity , public lectures on V. I. Lenin and the events of (9) 22 January 1905 in St. Petersburg; (4) to make respective presentations – speeches, declamations and so on – part of various public Memorial Day meetings and party programmes; (5) to publish special issues of pin-board news in community houses and public libraries etc. [Bulletin…1941].

This is followed by detailed and elaborate guidelines on how Lenin's Memorial Day was to be commemorated in community houses and public libraries, what the programme must look like, which music and declamations are to be selected, how the Red Corners in community houses are to be decorated, see below, photo 1.

How was the situation perceived by people from community organizations, who until August 1940 had operated on free citizen initiatives and now were reading the new rhetoric and guidelines? Per Wiselgrad [1942: 105] has described that many people perceived the hypocritical rhetoric of the new regime as mental oppression. The constitution solemnly promised freedom of the press, speech, association and personal security; in reality none of it was true:

> "Newspapers were day after day filled with detailed announcements about silly and vacuous meetings and of the decisions made, public calls, resolutions, mottos and watchwords thereof. Salutes to comrade Stalin and other party bosses in newspapers were permanent. Also the biographies of Stalin and Lenin were repeated over and over and their portraits were displayed.
> The new regime not only censors matters dealing with actual politics but *interferes with the free time of people* (e.g. workers were made to listen to politicians lecturing about Marxism and Leninism four times a week, with participation in meetings and demonstrations carefully documented)."

Photo 1. Wallboard "Red Ray" 1941 (Seinaleht "Punakiir")
to commemorate the anniversary of Lenin's death in 1941;
Estonian History Museum (AM 1480/R F 2569).

Aarelaid [2006: 175] has described how the abrupt reversal in cultural norms and values caused traumatic syndrome and *double-mindedness*[1] in people. People were psychologically not ready to lose their memories of the independent nation state.

As described above, from the very first moments of the new regime, community houses, in addition to the direct administrative subordination, had to follow methodical guidelines, which were labelled as assistance and sharing of experience. These guidelines, which were tied up and subordinated to the Five-Year Plan cycle's directions and plans of the Soviet Communist Party, were compiled in the Soviet Union central institution, the N. Krupskaya All-Union House of Folk Art

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[1] Double-mindedness (the emergence of double standards) is a deep socio-psychological mechanism for the adaption of people living under the unfavourable conditions caused by major historical upheavals. The main function of this mechanism is the self-protection of individual identities in the permanent coercive process of switching over from one ideological system to another. Aarelaid-Tart, A. [2006: 192–193].

in Moscow, and shared by the local institutions of Soviet Republics[1] – in the forges of methodological guidelines and mandatory repertoire.

With the same regulation of 9 October 1940, with which societies and unions were dissolved and their assets nationalized in Estonia, the Centre for Folk Arts was established under the Department of Political Education in the People's Commissariat of the ESSR. The Centre for Folk Arts took over the functions of the Estonian Education Association, the Estonian Singers' Union and the National Estonian Youth Organization of the previous era. All the larger choirs, folk dance groups and orchestras, which had operated as part of the dissolved societies, were now subject to the Centre for Folk Arts, whose code of conduct was adopted on 30 October 1940 [Reference Book … 1982: 84–85]. According to the law [ENSV Teataja nr. 37, 1940: 442], the mission of the Centre for Folk Arts was "*to promote and administer amateur arts.*"

In 1940 and 1941, the legal structure for the sovietization of community houses was set but due to the beginning of World War II, there was no time for a full implementation of the system. Archival dossiers[2] show that the existing network of community houses was thoroughly studied by the authorities of the People's Commissariat for Education of the ESSR. Extensive reports with precise data on community houses and the people involved (location of the community house, year of construction, condition of buildings, the number and type of amateur hobby groups, the number of people participating in the activities, the social status, as well as the educational level of the people leading the community houses and amateur art activities) about each Estonian county were compiled [ibid].

By the autumn of 1941, Estonia had been taken over by German troops. During the German occupation, the former state of cultural affairs was re-established and assets, buildings, and collections were returned to societies. An active cultural life in Estonia continued largely as it had during independence. However, the conditions of the occupation cannot be called free: the German occupying

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[1] Methodical guidelines from the N. Krupskaya All-Union House of Folk Art in Moscow to Estonian Centre for Folk Art in 1955 ERA.R.-28.2.147; Archival Documents of the People's Commissariat for Education of the ESSR (1940–1941) ERA.R.-14.1.926; ERA.R.-14.1.914; ERA.R.-14.1.556; Archival Documents of the Committee for Organizations of Cultural Education (1945–1953) ERA.R.-1570.1.57; ERA.R.-1570.1.247; ERA.R.-1570.1.179; ERA.R.-1570.1.152; ERA.R.-1570.1.192; ERA.R.-1570.1.262; ERA.R.-1570.1.339; ERA.R.-1570.1.434; ERA.R.-1570.1.131; Archival Documents of the Folk Art House (1940–1959) ERA.R.-28.2.87; ERA.R.-28.2.147; ERA.R.-28.2.151; ERA.R.-28.2.2.3; Archival Documents of the Folk Art House (1966,1967,1973) ERA.R.-28.2.318; ERA.R.-28.2.338; ERA.R.-28.2.314; ERA.R.-28.2.369; ERA.R.-28.2.487.

[2] Archival documents of the People's Commissariat for Education of the ESSR (1940–1941) ERA.R.-14.1.926; ERA.R.-14.1.914; ERA.R.-14.1.556.

troops persecuted and executed Jews and communists or suspected communists, including writers, artists, and socially active people.

During the years of the loss of independent statehood a large part of the cultural and art elite left and the strong nationalist feeling, which had existed, was dispersed into the different worlds of the East and the West. The largest losses of creative people and artists came with the emigration to Germany (1939–1941), the 1941 June deportation and the forced conscription into the Soviet army.[1] Beginning with 1944, when the Red Army took over the Estonian territory once again, the situation was reversed and sovietization continued. After World War II, the Soviet legal structure for administering amateur arts was secured; nonetheless several restructurings took place, until in 1959 the administrative institution for amateur arts was named the Folk Art House of the ESSR, which was subject to the Ministry of Culture [Reference Book … 1982; Kuuli 2007].

3.2. Sovietization of community houses after World War II

In May 1945, the Council of Peoples' Commissars of the ESSR adopted new rules for the administration of community houses [Borkman 1945]. In the same year the regulation was accompanied by instructions and mandatory standard statutes for community houses, which, in Chapter 5, laid down the following: the mission of community houses, the content and form of work, types of community houses, administration and organization of work, rules for the management and dissolution of community houses. According to the document, community houses were categorized according to their duties into the following types: town, central, county, central and local rural municipalities' community houses. The network of community houses was drawn up by the local party organizations in Estonian towns and counties and approved by the People's Commissariat for Education of the ESSR. The *new mission of community houses* was stated to be:

> the cultivation of active and informed builders of the socialist society by politically educating people in the soviet spirit, organizing political, culturally and generally educating mass events and providing quality recreation and entertainment [Reference Book … 1982: 84–85].

Achieving the objectives according to the mission, a community house:

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[1] Karjahärm and Luts [2005] and Kuuli [2007] describe the preparatory steps in re-education the intelligentsia and creating the new cultural elite by the Soviet authorities during the war. See also: Karjahärm, T. and Luts, H-M. (2005). Kultuurigenotsiid Eestis. Kunstnikud ja muusikud 1940–1953. [*Cultural Genocide in Estonia. Artists and musicians from 1940–1953*] Tallinn: Argo; Kuuli, O. (2007). Stalini aja võimukaader ja kultuurijuhid Eesti NSV-s (1940–1954). [*Stalin-era Cadres in Power and Cultural Administrators in the Estonian SSR (1940–1954)*] Tallinn.

(a) carries out mass agitation in order to explain the decisions of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Soviet Government; helps party and council bodies in organizing masses of workers and officials for the execution of those decisions; (b) helps workers in learning the Marxist-Leninist theory; (c) teaches socialist regard for work and public property, explains and implements measures for increasing productivity, especially in agriculture, by popularizing agricultural engineering; (d) carries out work in masses during the elections of the Councils of Workers' Representatives, public organizations, lay judges, etc., and arranges reporting events for workers' representatives and other publicly elected officials; (e) arranges the explaining of domestic and external policy events of the Soviet Union; (f) organizes mass propagation of military knowledge and helps in preparing the population for the protection of the immunity of the Soviet Union; (g) helps to raise the cultural-technical level of the population and popularizes scientific, technical, literary and artistic achievements; (h) organizes cultural recreation and entertainment. [Reference Book … 1982: 84–85].

As can be seen from the above, the work, activities and functions of community houses were explicitly outlined by the authorities. It was a fully politicized agenda with the central task of ideological work for creating the Soviet person and cultivating the masses in accordance with the ideas of building socialist society, that is, the new reality of Soviet Modernity. In addition to the duties stipulated in the statutes, an institutional system of control and hierarchy was put into effect, with community houses of larger towns or county centres being in charge of coordinating the methodical (ideological) work, as well as the central methodical and administrative bodies.

The legal structure for the sovietization of community houses was set and prepared for the full implementation of the system straight after the war in 1945. In comparison with the mission and objectives given to the community houses by the state during the first Estonian Republic (Law adopted in 1931, see above) and Soviet Estonia (rules adopted in 1945), we can see remarkable differences in the roles given to the community houses by the state: from the *"centres for cultural and free educational activities"* (1931), community houses were turned into *"centres for the cultivation of active and informed builders of the socialist society by politically educating people in the soviet spirit"* (1945).

The examination of the rules and guidelines above shows that the importation of Soviet coercive state practices and the cultural policy model was systematic, starting with an abrupt legal reconstruction of society and proceeding with the building up of a top-down governed network of institutions (including trained personnel and professionals).

4. Conclusion

The example of Estonian community houses demonstrates how people's free time self-expression in the network of cultural organizations of the first Republic of Estonia, with its roots in the 19th-century civil activism of society, was replaced by guided and coordinated cultural practices. The well-developed Estonian network of cultural institutions suited the Soviet authorities, who adopted and sovietized the content and model of cultural policy. Within state-owned and centralized institutions, the Soviet cultural canon with local folklore variations was mediated through community houses to the population of Estonia.

A range of party officials and non-party professionals established norms and routines for the rest of the population to follow. Through the creation of a cultural canon, the Soviet leaders sought to provide a set of shared values and common heritage of Soviet mass culture to form a common way of life – a monolithic Soviet society. The final aim of the Soviet cultural canon and cultural policy entailed a wide range of norms and practices intended to transform people's behaviour and create a new social order, a Soviet society and a Soviet person – a mass-man in an atomized society, as Arendt [1985: 318–323] has described.

This leads to a new question for future research: To what extent did the sovietization of Estonian community houses succeed? How did people cope with propaganda and did they accept the change in cultural practices? Where did the cultural power come from during the days of perestroika and the Singing Revolution?

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