

# THE TERMS, POSITION AND PROBLEMS OF HOBBY EDUCATION IN ESTONIA

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## **Abstract**

Terms and organisation of hobby education have changed during different eras in Estonia. Also, hobby education has received varying degrees of public attention in different political systems. The main aim of this research is to discuss the terms, position and organisation of hobby education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Estonia. The article is divided into three parts: First, an analysis of the terminology in policy documents related to hobby education; then an overview of the field of Estonian hobby education; and lastly a presentation of the results of a survey among the representatives of Estonian hobby institutions.

**Keywords:** *hobby education, terminology, organisation and impact.*

## **Introduction**

Hobby education (*huviharidus*) can be defined in its own right alongside general and vocational education. [Republic of Estonia Education Act] In the article, the notion of *hobby education* is part of non-formal education which covers different interest-driven educational activities, where participants, irrespective of their age, acquire new skills and knowledge or improve acquired ones [Republic of Estonia Education Act].

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Hobby education has been a fluid notion that has been covered by different terms in historical and present perspectives. The aim of this article is to give an overview of the terms and the organisation of hobby education in Estonia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, analyse the current situation and to contribute to the development of cultural and education policies. The article is divided into three parts: (1) overview of the terminology in policy documents related to hobby education; (2) analysis of the field of Estonian hobby education; (3) presentation of the results of the survey among the representatives of Estonian hobby institutions<sup>1</sup>.

The method of the article is primarily sociological analysis that focuses on unlocking the links between discursive practices of cultural and educational policies and organisations in the field. As empirical material, we mainly use surveys on hobby education conducted in Estonia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the sociological quantitative survey carried out by the authors themselves among representatives of Estonian hobby education institutions in spring 2019.

### **Terminology as a form of discursive power**

In this article we use the term discourse in the Foucauldian sense [Foucault 1971]. According to Foucault, the main discourse is shaped by official statements of state institutions and by formal rhetoric of official policy-documents through which the attitudes and values move into the practical world of the cultural and educational field. State interference in culture and education with its dynamics of institutional meaning-making (officially used terms in documents are related to the financial instruments) creates discourses, shapes the selective tradition of culture and education and has an extended impact on the social order or the structure of feelings in the society. As linked to power and state, the control of discourses is understood as a hold on reality itself (e. g., if a state controls the official rhetoric, and the media, they control the *rituals of truth*). Thus, Foucault's ideas indicate national cultural and educational policies as one of the central instruments of power of the ruling ideology, identity and memory-work in society.

There are terminological problems related to the terms of hobby and non-formal education in Estonia [Karu et al. 2019], as well as in Europe. There is no universally defined and direct term for marking leisure educational activities apart from school or work, which include arts, culture, sports, natural sciences, technology and so on [Stofer 2015].

Arts and hobby education has a long tradition and a large institutional network; it has played an important role in the European modernization process, including in the Baltic and Nordic countries. *Bildung*-based popular education triggered the

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<sup>1</sup> Some material from the part one and two has also been published as part of Kulbok-Lattik, Raud, Saro 2021.

society movements, which had a great impact on the formation of the Estonian public sphere and cultural as well as political emancipation since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, access to hobby education can be seen as a basic precondition for the development of professional arts.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in Estonia (and elsewhere in Europe), the term hobby education (or free-education or culture education) was understood as the extracurricular comprehensive interest-based education, including arts – singing, theatrical performance, and later systematic educational activities in libraries, lectures, courses, folk high schools, study circles [Laane 1994, 10]. In the interwar Republic of Estonia (1918–1940), free-education (*vabaharidus*) or culture education (*kultuuriharidus*) was based on a mixed model of state support and private (self-initiated) social activities [Laane 1994; Kurvits, 1938]. During the Soviet era, the term cultural education (*kultuurharidus*) was in use and it was a fully state-funded, ideologically targeted, and carefully regulated policy [Kulbok-Lattik 2014]. Since 1991, the Soviet system of cultural education disappeared, it was not possible either economically or ideologically to carry it on in the newly independent Estonia.

Historical sociological research reveals the discursive nature of cultural and education policies: with the official statements the discourse is shaped and with the rhetoric of official policy-documents the attitudes and values affect the practical world of the cultural and educational field. Also, it highlights the attention paid by the state and the position of the field, discursive path-dependency and interruptions.

### **The terminology of hobby education in Estonian policy documents**

Next, we will analyse how hobby education has been defined in Estonian policy documents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to the definition of the Estonian Education Act, hobby education is “a system of knowledge, skills, experience, values and behavioural norms which is acquired through systematic guided voluntary practice during time free from formal education acquired within the adult education system, vocational training and work and which provides opportunities for comprehensive development of personality” [Republic of Estonia Education Act].

Thus, according to the act, hobby education belongs to the domain of education. But in the framework of the Ministry of Education and Research hobby education is regarded as a sub-area of youth work and policies. Hobby education under the auspices of youth work is targeted only to the age group 7–26 [Youth Work Act]. The Act interprets hobby education primarily in the context of creativity and talent discovery, socialisation and active lifestyle of young people.

Two paragraphs of the Youth Work Act also cover hobby education and recreational activities. A corresponding definition can be found in clause 1: “An

*additional support shall be granted from the state budget, if possible, in conformity with the State Budget Act to rural municipalities and cities to improve the accessibility and diversity of systematic and supervised hobby education and recreational activities for 7 to 19 [emphasis made by the authors of the article] year old young persons with the aim of increasing their opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes relating to the chosen hobby (hereinafter hobby education and recreational activities support)” [Youth Work Act 2020].* It seems, there is no clear understanding exactly which age-group is covered by the term “youth”, since people from the age 20–26 are not eligible for subsidized hobby activities from local municipalities.

The website of the Ministry of Culture also shows that Estonian policy documents do not make a strict distinction between hobby education and recreational activities (*huvitegevus*). The Ministry of Culture defines the recreational activities: *There is no precise definition of the recreational activity in Estonia. Essentially, recreational activities are the creation of opportunities for the diverse development of a young person through systematic, supervised non-formal learning* [Ministry of Culture]. This is essentially the same as the definitions of youth work and hobby education. The concept of the support system for the recreational activity of young people confirms this in a slightly different formulation: *“The recreational activity is part of youth work and is broader than hobby education”* [Youth Work Act 2020].<sup>1</sup>

The standard for hobby education does not directly define the content of hobby education, but consistently indicates that hobby education is targeted towards diverse development of young people [Standard for Hobby Education 2007]. The Hobby Schools Act also just underlines that youth work in a hobby school can be organised for the purposes of the Youth Work Act [Hobby Schools Act 2017].

Hence, while the Ministry of Culture regards hobby education and recreational activities for the whole population as one field, in the documents of the Ministry of Education and Research hobby education is clearly subordinated to youth work and the Youth Work Act, thus excluding the participation of adults in hobby education. This has been the case since Estonia’s inclusion in the European Union in 2004, when a number of policies were harmonised, and the European youth policy also found its place in Estonian education policy.

The key role of youth work (incl. hobby education) in the field of education is undoubtedly important: if young people do not have access to the different vocational and recreational areas (arts, sports, technology, etc.), it may be more difficult to discover their talent and find the right career. Studies have also shown

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<sup>1</sup> Differences in the definition of youth in different provisions are also somewhat confusing: generally, young people are aged 7 to 26, but the state budget support is provided only for hobby education and recreational activities of those aged 7 to 19.

that those who have been taught to create arts or engage in a hobby in childhood will return to this practice later [Kulbok-Lattik, Raud, Saro 2021; KEA 2009].

However, hobby education has a much wider impact on the population than youth work that targets an age group from 7 to 26, as was indicated in the Youth Work Act. It represents life-long interest-driven self-development with many functions, having an impact on individuals' health and well-being and creating cohesion in communities. Hobby education contributes also to the creation of local and national identities. For example, the tradition of Song and Dance festivals is based on the (singing and dancing) hobby education in the communities. Also, it acts as a mechanism for society's talent development and cultural transfer, and ensures the sustainability of high culture. Thus, equalizing the term *hobby education* with *youth work* undermines the meaning and impact of the former. Hobby education concerns all age groups and there are many different terms (free education, non-formal education, amateur arts and folk culture) and forms of work in the field.

We assume that problems in terms are related to lacking research in hobby education. Participation in youth work, satisfaction and statistical surveys have recently been sufficiently carried out in Estonia [Sellio 2017, Murakas et al. 2018], while studies conceptualising hobby education are few, and even these are somewhat outdated [Laes 2012, Väli 2013]. Therefore, when reading the studies of recent years, one can clearly notice an odd terminological twist that shapes the discourse. The study conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Tartu "Satisfaction of young people with youth work" [Murakas et al. 2018] discusses hobby education and recreational activities in a separate chapter (pages 14–31). The chapter provides a valuable insight into young people's and their parents' satisfaction with opportunities to participate in hobby education. But the summary of the report (pages 96–97) and the policy recommendations (pages 95–96) tackle only youth work and not hobby education specifically, which creates confusion in the reader. Thus, such a generalisation in the summary of the research report does not facilitate the awareness and solving of problems in hobby education, it is scientifically unjustified and refers to the need to respond to the official discourse.

The confusion with terminology related to hobby education has been pointed out also by other researchers. For example, in the article "Constructing the meaning of non-formal learning in policy documents" [Karu et al. 2019] the authors state that non-formal learning is defined too narrowly in documents as opposed to formal learning, that the terminology is ambiguous and variable, and that it is used in an instrumental or institutional function. The general term *non-formal education* is used as a broad umbrella definition that contrasts to formal education and refers to extracurricular learning and recreational activities. According to the ongoing

discussions in Estonia, hobby education and recreational activities are conceptualized as parts of non-formal education.

Concluding the first part, we have found that the term *hobby education* in Estonian official documents has been mentioned in different ways, but mainly as a part of youth work. As previously mentioned and referred to Foucault's ideas of power and state, it is very important to be aware that the terms used in the policy-making are not neutral, that they are discursively charged and influence people who are active in the field of culture and education, as well as the collective consciousness of society. Terms are instruments of power because they are used to express the values of society, truth patterns and the canon of culture. Thus, the discourse is shaped by official statements but also by formal rhetoric of official policy-documents through which the attitudes and values move into the practical world of the cultural and educational field. There are always reasons why a phenomenon is called so and not in another way. Those reasons will be discussed in the third part.

In addition to the confusing terms the organisation of hobby education is quite unclearly divided between different sectors and domains of ministries and local governments.

### **Analysis of the organization of the field of Estonian hobby education**

In the newly independent Estonia, the tasks related to culture, sports, youth work<sup>1</sup> and hobby schools have been assigned to local authorities [Local Government Organisation Act]. After the administrative reform of municipalities in 2017, there are 79 municipalities in Estonia (15 towns and 64 rural municipalities). This has created a puzzle with various fragments, where the organisation of arts and culture education and hobby education depends on the municipal budget, political priorities and administrative capacity.

The broad range of hobby education is mapped by the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS), which classifies hobbies into the following areas: (1) sports, (2) technology, (3) nature, (4) music and arts, (5) general culture, including ethnic schools [Public education standard 2007].

In parallel to municipal institutions and general education schools, private institutions are also providing arts and culture education as well as a wide scale of hobby education as a service, often competing with the former for subsidies, students and teachers. In the academic year 2019/20, there were 731 hobby schools in Estonia (of which only 141 were municipal schools, the rest were private), of which 287 are sport schools, 144 music and art schools, 26 technology, nature, creative-hobby

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of the Local Government Organisation Act mentions youth work alone (§ 6.1), while the 2018 version refers separately to cultural, sports and youth work.

houses or centres, and 274 other institutions (see Figure 1). The number of hobby schools has doubled in ten years, mainly owing to private schools. Two thirds of the municipal hobby schools (97 out of 141) are music and art schools [HaridusSilm, platform for Estonian educational statistics].

#### DIVISION OF HOBBY SCHOOLS IN ESTONIA

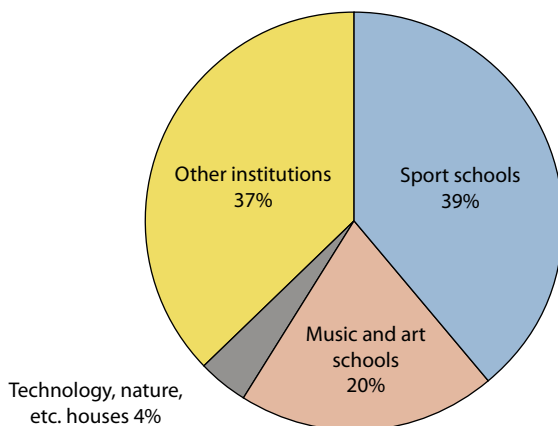


Figure 1. The division of hobby schools in Estonia.

The state's activities in the field of hobby education have been dispersed between several ministries: the national model of additional funding for hobby education was worked out by the Ministry of Culture, but developments are directed by the Department of Youth and Talent Policy of the Ministry of Education and Research and implemented by the Education and Youth Board.

In addition to the mentioned organizational setting, sub-institutions of the Ministry of Culture concern themselves with hobby education: for example, the Folk Culture Centre and the Song and Dance Festival Foundation, where the focus is on providing access to hobby education for all age groups in the field of heritage and folk culture. Additionally, the artistic associations and their sub-organisations are also involved in hobby arts and education, providing a range of training and consultation opportunities for the hobbyists.

Hobby education as part of non-formal education is taking place in the cultural field, in the frame of activities of museums and nature, research and discovery centres (the Estonian Research Council supervises their development activities). In addition to the cultural field, non-formal education and its networks form their own separate institutional field of folk high schools, adult training centres, day-care centres for the elderly that offer opportunities for artistic activities and all kinds of practical self-development such as language and computer learning, social skills, etc.

Thus, there are many different forms of work in the field of non-formal and hobby education – public pre-schools and vocational training institutions, a network of music and art schools run by local authorities, private schools, studios, courses, training providers, etc. – targeted at children, young people, adults and the elderly. The responsibilities for hobby education are dispersed between the domains of different ministries (Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs).

In the following, we introduce a survey where representatives of the field of hobby education in Estonia describe their situation from their own perspective. One of the aims of the survey was to examine how terminological and organisational confusion has impact on practice.

### **Survey in the field of Estonian hobby education**

In order to map the problems related to the institutional organisation of hobby education, we conducted a survey in spring 2019 in the LimeSurvey environment of web-based questionnaires of the University of Tartu. This was the first mapping survey of the Estonian ENO (The European Network of Observatories in the Field of Arts and Cultural Education) and is not statistically representative for the whole field. The questionnaires were distributed through networks and representative organisations of hobby education (hobby schools) and recreational activities. 128 people visited the online survey, 72 of them replied to all questions, the others replied partially or simply visited. For the sake of statistical clarity, we analyse only those answers where all the questions have been answered. In order to ensure anonymity, the respondents did not have to specify the name of the institution for which they provided information. Multiple answer options were available for a number of questions.

72 respondents defined their organisation's area of activity as follows: hobby education (with a curriculum approved in the Estonian Education Information System) (30 respondents), recreational activity (45), pre-vocational training (1), mediation of courses (3), other (14). As we defined hobby education through a curriculum registered in the Estonian Education Information System, the majority of respondents (63%) were in the category of recreational activity. There were four schools, four culture centres or organisers and three youth centres or youth work organisers in the category "Other", but other activities such as "music education in kindergarten", "organising of courses/camps", "promotion and preservation of a minority culture, language courses", etc. were also mentioned. Accordingly, respondents represented a wide variety of different types of institutions.

Most of the respondents represented the field of folk culture (41), followed by fine arts (33) and sports (13). The category "Other" included dance (4), music (4),



theatre (1), STEM/nature, exact sciences and technology, including IT (2), youth work (2), culture club, language learning (1), local government (1), basic school (1), either as a clarification or as a separate area. Folk culture, a term sometimes used for all amateur activities, indicates here mostly folk dance and choir singing that have been very popular due to the Song and Dance Festivals.

It could be noticed that most of the surveyed organisations had a long history and traditions. Nine organisations had operated less than five years, nine for 5–10 years, 17 for 10–20 years and 37 for more than 20 years. Young people (aged 7–26 years, 57 answers), adults (35), children (25) and, delightfully, also the retired (18) were seen as their main target groups. This confirmed our opinion that the main target group for hobby education and recreational activities is not only young people, but people of all ages.

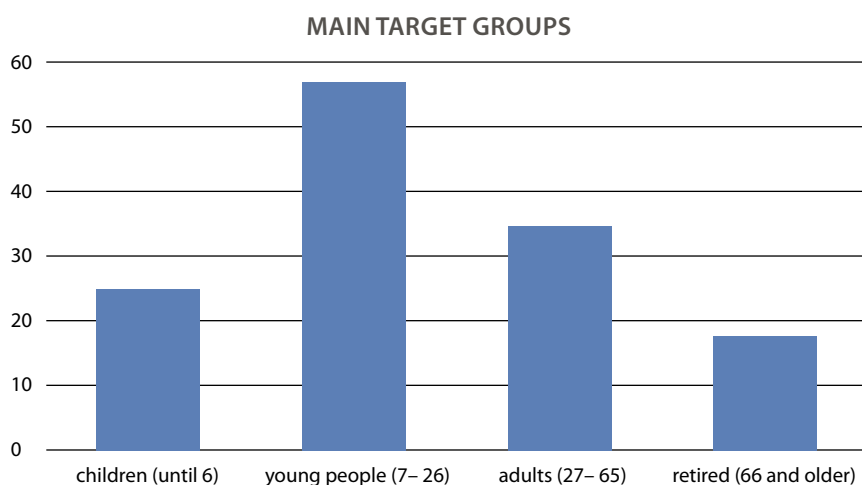


Figure 2. Responses to the question “What is the main target group for your organisation?”

78% of the respondents admitted that the biggest problem in their field of activity is economic (missing or unstable funding, etc.). 46% of the institutions also have organisational problems (lack of suitable premises, rehearsing time, tutors, insufficient information, etc.) and 13% have creative problems (lack of development, low/high level of recreational activity, etc.). In the category “Other”, the remuneration of teachers/instructors (3), lack of (high-quality) instructors (2), limited space, low interest of the population in what is provided in this location, relative poverty of learners/families, lack of public support was also identified as problems.

The main fund providers for hobby education and recreational activities are local authorities (51), students and members (48) and the state (30). Hence, less than half of the organisations receive public support and, in most cases, hobby education is to

be paid for by municipalities and students. A vast majority (55%) of organisations in hobby education receive permanent funding as well as apply for project grants, while 34% operate with permanent funding only and 12% with project grants only. 90% of the respondents stated that the number of students and members had increased or remained the same over the last three years.

In the “Comments” section, three topics can be detected: (1) financing, (2) personnel policy and (3) valuation.

(1) The biggest problem is the uncertainty, lack of transparency and local variability in the funding of hobby education. Public funding provided through the local government is deemed as not transparent and there are no procedures to control its purposeful use. Local funding is politicised in some cases, i. e. depending on the party affiliation of the municipality and school leaders. Municipal and private hobby education is believed to be unequally treated. It is also difficult to navigate the funding systems of different municipalities. *The procedures for the financing of hobby education on a uniform basis in all municipalities (is needed). Today, everyone is different and as we have children from around 30 different municipalities, it is extremely complicated.*

(2) Personnel problems include finding and keeping teachers and instructors, as many work with an authorisation agreement, thus lacking social guarantees and low remuneration. The salaries and image of full-time or part-time teachers is not much better either. There is no quality system for hobby education and therefore, the quality of teaching and the level of teachers have no impact on the funding of organisations.

Teachers of fine arts or sports who work as extracurricular hobby group instructors are, as defined by law, teachers [HKKN 2014], but in most cases, are not remunerated based on the salary scales for teachers working in general education schools and therefore they feel that their work is not sufficiently valued. The unorganised system of professions and fees in hobby education is definitely not sustainable, as demonstrated by the analysis of the financial situation and the social security of instructors of the folk-dance groups, ethnic music groups, choirs and orchestras [Ester et al. 2019].

Another problem is that many instructors in hobby education have the position of a youth worker with a much lower salary than a teacher. Youth work cannot be equated with hobby education, where teachers have to be first specialists in their professional domain (art, dance, music, sports, etc.), secondly in the pedagogy of the subject. Therefore, their preparation is interdisciplinary and takes much longer than a 3-year bachelor’s degree in youth work. For example, in order to become a music teacher, one has to become a musician first, which takes at least 7–11 years. In order to acquire the pedagogical skills, one has to study one or two more years.

(3) The third issue in our study was the topic of valuation: *We wish-expect appreciation, acknowledgement and stable financial support from the state.*

Professional identity requires clear terminology and organisational basis, and national support and acknowledgement is expected. The position of the field and the professional identity of the people working there also depend on the interest and attention paid by the state.

As pursuant to the law, attempts have been made for some years already to introduce the term *youth worker* as a general term in arts and hobby education, which has caused uncertainty and blurring of professional identity among teachers and instructors in hobby education.

The problem of valuation is largely related to the teachers' symbolic capital and income that instructors or youth workers do not have. The position of teacher has historically had a high symbolic value in Estonian society. Also, the minimum salary of teachers has been in correlation with GDP and often used in political pledges.

As vocational and professional identity is a key factor that shapes a person's self-image and self-esteem, by constantly blurring the professional identity people receive signals that their profession is of little value, which does not encourage any person with the dedicated mission or vocation to cultural mediation, causing so-called cognitive dissonance. Yet we know that the communities with people who provide hobby education to local children, young people, adults or the elderly are more cohesive and viable [KEA 2009]. As the contribution of these people to the creation and maintenance of communities has great social impact, these people and professions should be valued.

Here, the centralised cultural and educational policies are favoured not only for more stable funding, but also for a common quality system. *The nationwide system, both in terms of funding and in terms of substantive quality-enhancing regulations*, is expected. Greater valuation of hobby education is also expected from the media, which could cover more amateur concerts, stage productions or exhibitions.

This short overview, while mapping broader problems of hobby education, does not address the development needs of specific municipalities and organisations. Financial and human resources vary greatly by municipality and therefore also the bottlenecks.

## Conclusion

Two major problems have been identified: (1) the financing and administration of the field is dispersed between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Culture as well as state, local municipalities and private entities; (2) hobby education is treated as a sub-area of youth work and not as an independent area of lifelong learning.

It is evident that Estonian cultural and educational policies lack a holistic view of the hobby and non-formal education. Therefore, hobby education as the type of education has lost its historically important position and is trapped both terminologically and administratively between different domains.

In fact, hobby education is an interdisciplinary field that embraces education, culture, health and social wellbeing and it needs a cross-sectoral view and cooperation for the development. As the article demonstrated, the terminological confusion and the institutional plurality affects also professional identity and satisfaction of agents in the field.

Hobby education needs more attention from policy-makers and increasingly academic research in terms of cultural and educational policies' conceptualization and sociological analysis. Only then could it gain a better position and a presence in the priorities of politicians and officials.

Finally, hobby education deserves more attention, conceptualization, and targeting in the context of overall population development (human resources), as well as regulation as a comprehensive system. The current system needs to be taken inventory of at all levels: study programs for hobby group instructors and organizers of culture, as well as the remuneration of art and cultural education-related professions, should be meaningfully linked.

It is important to recognize and value hobby education as part of the educational system and raise its position nationally. Increased knowledge and understanding of the wide impact of hobby education allows us to consider it as a human right and prerequisite for cultural participation and well-being in society.

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