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## ORIGINAL PAPERS

### I

ON THE HISTORICAL PERIODISATION OF ESTONIAN CULTURAL  
POLICY  
[EESTI KULTUURIPOLIITIKA AJALOOSESST PERIODISEERIMISEST]

by

Egge Kulbok-Lattik, 09, 2008

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Article is translated in English.

## ON THE HISTORICAL PERIODISATION OF ESTONIAN CULTURAL POLICY

*This article presents one possible periodisation of Estonian cultural policy, dividing it into a series of eras. The article claims neither to cover every detail nor by far to be final, but it is the first attempt to delimit and determine different periods of cultural policy in Estonia.*

### INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on state regulated cultural life, by identifying a set of unifying factors in cultural policy, a set which of course greatly coincides with the periods of political history. While presenting the periodisation the author has made use of works on the periodisation of Estonian history by historians involved in the field and on works on cultural policy by Estonian and foreign researchers.

The introduction discusses the content and reliability of periodisation as a method of putting down history. Further on, the term “cultural policy” within the context of this article is examined and an overview description of the different periods of Estonian cultural policy provided. The summary of the article indicates links between the contemporary problems of Estonian cultural policy and the historical experience of earlier periods.

### About Periodisation in General

One way of reconstructing the past is the periodisation of historical processes. This is always a subjective and conditional method, but the author believes that it has value in that it allows a broader generalisation and an overview when discussing a topic in a complex manner. In this article the author provides a brief overview of the principal points of view on periodisation in Estonian history, which should also explain why the author considers it necessary to periodise cultural policy.

A period is an era, a timespan between two turning points, or epochs. An epoch is a stop, a stopping place that marks a conspicuous point in the flow of time. Epoch creating events (for example, natural or economic disasters, wars etc.) denote changes and are thus notable anchors in the process of history, allowing it to be

broken up and viewed on the basis of the differences.<sup>1</sup> Where no radical upheavals (wars, epidemics, coups, revolutions etc.) have taken place, history is a continuous process in the sense that the past never stops abruptly, but each new part of it has its own previous history that has a long-lasting effect on it. In this case the periodisation of history is still a retrospective construction, a chronological framing of processes and always somewhat arbitrary and dependent on the object or topic of periodisation.<sup>2</sup>

Epistemologically, periodisation is justified by the natural human need for clarity: we need to find clear boundaries in the collection of facts and events that history deals with. This enables us to comprehend humanly the course of history and interpret the complicated relationships and links that have guided this course.

Jaak Valge considers periodisation a convenient generalisation that helps to break up research, but one which also serves a pedagogical objective – through classification it is easier to open up and explain the content of changes and through periodisation a “common language” for historians is formed. At the same time periodisation leads to a dangerous simplification and a modern perspective of history. It is clear that no periodisation can be fossilised, because if new research results should emerge that would disprove the valid periodisations, researchers would unquestionably have to abandon the existing periodisation.<sup>3</sup>

Any kind of periodisation may also contain the creation of cultural identity, as it conceals within itself a power mechanism. Vladimir Biti explains that as cultural identity cannot be homogeneous and subjected to a common embodiment of “cultural memory” in any society, but is heterogenic and multi-faceted due to national, ethnic, racial, religious, social, gender and professional differences, then we must always find out, for what purpose and in whose interests common cultural memory has been periodised.<sup>4</sup> The usage of periodisation as an instrument for creating identity can be observed if we look at and analyse how under different political regimes history has been periodised according to and suitably for the

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<sup>1</sup> Tarvel, E. Eesti lähiajaloo periodiseerimisest. – Ajaloolise tõe otsingul. – 20.01.1999 Tallinnas toimunud konverentsi „Eesti lähiajaloo allikakriitilisi probleeme” materjalid. Toim E. Tarvel. Tallinn, 1999, 105

<sup>2</sup> Valge, J. Kuidas periodiseerida Eesti aega? – Tuna, 2004, 1, 122

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 122

<sup>4</sup> Biti, V. Periodization as a Technique of Cultural Identification. – Cultural History after Foucault. Ed. J. Neubauer, New York, 1999, 177–184

dominant ideology (from the recent past, for example, the periodisations of the Soviet times).

Thus it follows that, given that cultural policy as a subject is so multifaceted and interdisciplinary (history, cultural studies, political sciences, public administration), then parsing it into different historical periods gives us a better overview and clearer picture about this multi-detailed subject, which is one of the aims of our history-related interpretation. Mart Kivimäe says that our history-related interpretation is also a way of conforming with our temporal world (self-interpretation), and this is – from critical historicism rooted in the tradition of history – the anthropological idea of historical knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

### **About the Starting Points of Periodisation**

“The choice of criteria according to which the process of history can be divided into chronological time slots is in principle a free one. The oldest (from Egypt and Babylon) and most wide-spread choice is periodisation using the categories of political history or rulers, types of states, wars or other notable events.”<sup>6</sup>

Periodisation is also possible by generalising the traits of change (or the perception of it) in different fields, such as politics, economy or culture. The periodisations of different spheres of life cannot coincide: an art historian must periodise differently from an ecclesiastical or economic historian. Similarly, no periodisation can be global and still be valid everywhere.<sup>7</sup>

It is also possible to periodise in such a way that the central dominant feature of the period is found and the other processes are more or less ignored. The author of this paper applies this principle in the following periodisation of Estonian cultural policy. This means that time periods of different lengths, despite their seeming temporal disproportion, have been put under a common denominator that describes the central dominant feature of the period, and the common denominator of the

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<sup>5</sup> Kivimäe, M. Kirjandus ja teaduslik objektiivsus ajaloos. Meie ajalooteaduses pidamata dialooge. Sirp, 2005, 23.09. 3–4

<sup>6</sup> Tarvel, E. Eesti lähiajaloo periodiseerimisest, 107

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 109

cultural policy periods thus defined gives their names or titles. The title of the cultural policy period expresses, summarises and characterises the main or central dominant feature of the period – the dominating attitude or principle which shaped cultural policy, or the way cultural policy was put into practice. Thus the temporally very long (Pro)totalitarian period can also be viewed as clearly distinct sub-periods, but the common denominator of this period is (Pro)totalitarianism – during the entire long period, a state regime steered from above, although with different strengths and with different ideological aims at different times. At the same time different sub-periods, which partly coincide with the Estonian periodisation of political history, may be clearly distinguished. Thus these sub-periods are also able to explain the dominating attitudes in Estonian cultural policy of that era.

## TERMS

As the essential assumption of cultural policy is cultural interpretation or understanding of culture, let us first clarify the context of the terms *culture*, *policy* and *cultural policy* and other terms arising in cultural policy discussions in this article.

According to the Oxford Companion to Philosophy the term culture in general can be explained as a people's way of life, including their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts, knowledge, ways of perception, and habits of thinking. The cultural traits of forms of life are learned, but often permeate so deeply that they are difficult to notice from within.<sup>8</sup> The present article focuses on the culture in the context of cultural policy, and in that case the concept of culture is normative and narrow. Lagerspetz says that the concept of culture in the context of cultural policy is politically determined and therefore normative, and is formed historically, changing in time, and that it differs between states.

The enlargement of the term of culture in general as well as in the context of cultural policy has taken place thanks to research into society and culture. The British cultural researcher Angela McRobbie claims that critical cultural studies and many of

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<sup>8</sup> Blackburn, S. Oxfordi filosoofialeksikon. Oxford University Press, 2002, 242

its representatives, “including Brecht, Benjamin and Bourdieu have given us an understanding of culture, which means the demystification of culture and also the demystification of those social relations that produce both culture and academic understanding of culture.”<sup>9</sup>

It is important to have a brief overview of the changes in interpretations of the concept of culture in Western societies, because as understanding of what culture is has changed, so cultural policies have also been changed. Peter Burke, professor of cultural history at the University of Cambridge, has described how the understanding of culture or cultural interpretation has changed. He characterises the old classical interpretation of culture as the reflection of an elite that was cultivated by educated people for educated people starting from Ancient Greek civilisation and continuing through Western civilisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “This is canonised and “opera-theatre like” and oriented at high culture, leaving aside or paying very little attention to other spheres of human activity. Such a cultural interpretation is not appropriate any more in a world which speaks of contemporary cultural democracy.”<sup>10</sup>

Jim McGuigan's analyses of the links between culture, cultural research and cultural policy in “post-modernist conditions” conclude that the term *culture* is proliferating to the point where the term becomes meaningless as everything is culture and we live in “the culture society”.<sup>11</sup>

The term *policy* also requires definition, as English has three equivalents for this Estonian concept: *polity*, *politics* and *policy*. *Polity* points to a formal structure – institutions, procedure and norms. *Politics* describes the process of intermediating and pushing through interests, regulating conflicts and making political decisions. *Policy* is a state activity aimed at values and objectives and covers specific policies like economic policy, education policy, healthcare policy, cultural policy etc. As David Easton argues, policy is a division of values, but the the number of values is

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<sup>9</sup> McRobbie, A. Cultural Studies for the 1990s. Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences, 1993, Vol. 6 Issue 3, p 269

<sup>10</sup> Burke, P. Kultuuriajaloo ühtsus ja mitmekesisus. – Tuna, 2004, 4, 102–117

<sup>11</sup> McGuigan, J. Cultural Analysis and Policys in the Information Age. – Construction of Cultural Policy. Eds: P. Ahponen, A. Kangas, Minerva Kustannus Oy, 2004, 125–147

limited and some groups in society gain more from a particular policy than do others.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Concept, Scope and Aspects of cultural policy. Cultural Policy as a Form of Government**

Mikko Lagerspetz has described the essence of cultural policy: "Due to its political nature, cultural policy is normative, and in this context the definition of culture is politically determined. The field of cultural policy has developed historically, it changes in time and differs between states. In cultural policy the official, national understanding of culture is expressed, through this the values and expectations of the culture of a society are consciously expressed."<sup>13</sup>

Describing in general terms the essence of cultural policy, Jim McGuigan makes the valid point that cultural policy is one of the forms of government, referring to Michel Foucault's (1991 [1978]) theory of governmentality. Foucault's concept of governmentality refers in a very general way to the administrative apparatus of modernity, the emergence of the modern state and its powers of social regulation. According to Foucault, power based on social regulation is a much broader term than power stemming from the cultural policy of a modern state, this first and foremost because "culture" is restricted to practices that social regulation has provided with different meanings.<sup>14</sup> The cultural life controlled by the state with its institutions supports and reproduces the social regulation of the society, providing a different meaning and status to the cultural practices, and thus the hierarchies on which the cultural field are shaped.

Foucault handles power as a mechanism, a network, which interacts not only from the top to the bottom but also vice versa. Although the pyramidal structure of power has its clearly defined "head", the institutional apparatus as a whole produces power. This enables the disciplinary power to be both direct and indirect: direct, as it

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<sup>12</sup> Palmaru, R. Eesti kultuuripoliitika teelahkmed. – Riigikogu Toimetised 2005, 12, 4

<sup>13</sup> Lagerspetz, M. Loengumaterjal kultuuripoliitika, avaldamata materjal. 2004

<sup>14</sup> McGuigan, J. Cultural Analysis and Policies in the Information Age, 132



is everywhere at the same time; indirect because this power interacts constantly and mostly silently and inconspicuously. According to Foucault's power-theory, in order to be able to dominate, power has to create reality through "the rituals of truth". In this process the individual obeys the power not because of threats but because of discipline. Foucault states that with the help of discipline – through supervision, control, distinguishing, hierarchisation, homogenisation, elimination, in short through standardisation – an individual is created.<sup>15</sup> Using Foucault's idea we can view national cultural policy as one of the power instruments of the ruling ideology as well as a strong instrument of identity-building in society. Foucault's idea helps us to understand the concealed relations between cultural policy and the understanding of culture as well as the interaction of cultural policy and social regulation.

Culture has been used for the service of power, just as cultural policy has been cultivated and imposed in order to implement ideologies suitable for the elite since the earliest forms of the society. Cultural policy in such a historical point of view is expressed in cultural patronage, a system of education with limited access. Such a historical view of cultural policy is also supported by the classical interpretation of culture as a reflection of the elite.

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.<sup>16</sup>

Tracing cultural policy through history, the ideological discourse of each era becomes evident. This link between the governing ideologies and cultural policy is also clearly expressed by Marrit Bakke, a Norwegian researcher of cultural policy, who differentiates between the most important forms of cultural patronage in the history of western civilisation and classifies them in the following manner:

- the church: approximately 700–1300;
- aristocracy: approximately 1300–1600;
- royal courts: 1600–1770;
- private clubs, societies and associations of the bourgeoisie: from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century;
- governments and states: primarily after WWII;

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault, M. The Means of Correct Training. – The Foucault Reader. Ed. P. Rabinow. London, 1991, 194

<sup>16</sup> S. Blackburn. Oxfordi filosoofialeksikon. Oxford University Press, 2002,177

- private patrons: throughout history; nowadays especially since the 1960s.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of cultural policy can be clearly illuminated and observed if we look at the development of cultural policy in the context of the formation of the modern state. As structural changes happened in the public cultural life, as one aspect of national consciousness, clear means of financing, and the founding of institutions to run cultural life started to be legally regulated. In this light it may be argued that the birth of cultural policy lies in the emergence of Herder and post-Enlightenment nation states, when culture became linked to the nation state which is able to create institutions that guarantee the sustainability of culture. In the current context the state is a specialised, clearly determined, strictly centralised and disciplined socially active power or complex of powers that alone may use force as an extreme measure in order to preserve the order of different sanctions, as Ernest Gellner (1994, 223) has noted. He (ibid.) explains, that the state is the only body that can guarantee the effective production of an educated and unified culture, so that the results of education would not be poor and below standard. Gellner<sup>18</sup> shows convincingly the connections between culture, the nation state and the ideology of nationalism.

McGuigan says the cultural policy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defined by a narrow interpretation of culture. States began to interfere in cultural life, supporting “arts” and culture for different purposes such as national, propaganda and redistribution purposes, and for generally regulating the production and circulation of symbolic cultural forms.<sup>19</sup>

Cultural policy emerged as an independent concept in Europe after World War II due to both the economic changes (the transition to a welfare society in the 1960s-70s) and the discursive changes stemming from social studies which covered a changed and expanded concept of culture.

Professor Ilkka Heiskanen of the University of Helsinki has explained the emergence of the topics of cultural policy as resulting from the radical changes in

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<sup>17</sup> Bakke, M. 2001. „Arts Funding“. – *International encyclopaedia of the social & behavioral sciences*. Volume 2, 821-825. Oxford: Elsevier cited in Duelund, P. 2003. *Cultural Policy: An Overview*. – The Nordic Cultural Model. Ed: P. Duelund, Copenhagen Nordic Cultural Institute, 2003, 16

<sup>18</sup> Gellner, E. *Rahvused ja rahvuslus*. – *Akadeemia*, 1994, 10, 2223

<sup>19</sup> McGuigan, J. *Cultural Analysis and Policies in the Information Age*, 132

Europe at the end of the 1980s. Such key issues of cultural policy as the nation state, nationalism and national identity emerged, topics that were practically forgotten in the bipolar (cold war) world of 1945–1989. While in the Eastern block the discussion has mostly centered around the topics of nationalism and nation states, debates related to the cultural policy of Western Europe echoed ethnic and racial tensions that stemmed from the massive influx of workers and refugees. But the rapid development of new information technologies and the accompanying massive proliferation of a universal audio-visual culture of Anglo-American origin also made Western countries ask about the future of national culture.<sup>20</sup>

Ever since the achievement of establishing the welfare society, modern European cultural policies have tried to overcome the social, class and geographical barriers typical of an industrial society. But the change of the paradigm of the post-modern era raises questions for these cultural policies.

According to Tony Bennett, cultural policy studies are one of the trends in critical cultural studies. He believes that an education in this field should produce actively involved conscious participants in cultural production, not just critics who, rather than becoming involved with what is going on in the field, remain outside to criticise as bystanders. “And all this because although many theoreticians have considered the relations between culture and power as the focus of cultural studies, cultural studies remain – as they normally do – largely uncoupled from the management and shaping of the actual politics. For such a field of study to call itself “political” is, to put it mildly, misleading.”<sup>21</sup> The reasons listed here have made the sociologists and cultural researchers of Europe reflect on the cultural policies of their states and analyse cultural policy from a historical perspective and assess the influence of different instruments and implementations of cultural policy in society. Although cultural policy as a field has not been widely researched in Estonia, we have been involved the current article includes an overview of it.

The author of the current article defines contemporary Estonian cultural policy in the following way: cultural policy is an agreed conglomeration of decisions

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<sup>20</sup> Heiskanen, I. Cultural Policy in Finland. National Report. Arts Council of Finland, Helsinki, 1995, 29

<sup>21</sup> McGuigan, J. Cultural Analysis and Policies in the Information Age. – Construction of Cultural Policy. Eds: P. Ahponen, A. Kangas, Minerva Kustannus Oy, 2004, 134

and regulations, with the help of which – on the basis of historically formed and nationally legitimised values – generally preferred cultural practices are selected and are implemented administratively and institutionally, including receiving funding from the state budget.

## THE PERIODS OF ESTONIAN CULTURAL POLICY

Studying the history of Estonian cultural policy we may observe five clearly distinguishable periods:

**The prologue from the era of awakening to the creation of statehood (1860–1918):**

**“Self-initiative and the Society Movement”;**

**I 1918 –1925: “The Years of Quests and Foundation”;**

**II 1925 –1934: “The Formation of Purposeful Cultural Policy”;**

**III 1934 – 1990: “(Pro)totalitarian Cultural Policy” and its sub-periods:**

**1. 1934 - 1940 “The Silent Era”**

**2. 1940 - 1944 “The Years of Loss of Independent Statehood”**

**3. 1944 - 1953 “Stalinist Terror”**

**4. 1953 - 1969 “The Thaw and Hoarfrosts”**

**5. 1969 - 1987 “Stagnation”**

**6. 1987 - 1990 “The Collapse of the Regime and the Singing Revolution”**

**IV 1991–1995: transition period “Post-totalitarian Lack of Paradigm”;**

**V 1995–2007: “Elitist and Preservationist Cultural Policy”**

When compiling the periodisation the author has taken a central dominant feature of each period, a central base of the cultural policy at the time, and from it derived the title of the period. These features characterise the dominating attitude or principle or how cultural policy was put into practice during each period.

The (Pro)totalitarian period is divided into six clearly distinct sub-periods, but the common factor of this period is (Pro)totalitarianism – during the whole of this long period a state regime steered from above, although with different strengths and with different ideological aims at different times. The common features of pro-

totalitarian and totalitarian cultural policy have been more precisely described in the introduction to the chapter on the third period of Estonian cultural policy. The main difference between these periods lies in the strength of the implementation of the ideology. This dissimilarity is also mentioned in the titles of the periods: during the pro-totalitarian period there was only a *tendency* towards totalitarianism, but during the totalitarian period the cultural policy was profoundly totalitarian. To anticipate the conclusion of the present periodisation, (pro)totalitarian cultural policy is the main historical experience in Estonia.

### **The Prologue; from the Era of Awakening to the Creation of Statehood in 1918**

The prologue is presented because most of our cultural institutions – theatres, artistic associations, community centres and others, which are significant pillars of independent statehood – were born spontaneously of free initiative in that era. This is an important historical special feature of our cultural policy compared to those of the old monarchist imperial states.

From the era of awakening until the creation of statehood, cultural activities in Estonia were initiated spontaneously. State-run cultural policy existed only inasmuch as measures implemented by the Russian Empire towards one of the Baltic provinces can be so considered. This was a period during which the pre-requisites for the formation of a nation state were created. The society movement of the rural population, and the endeavour for common activities and the vision and actions of the outstanding individuals who guided it, was in its essence cultural and political, with the objective of breaking away from the patronage of the Baltic-German nobility and the Russian Empire to national independent existence and self-determination. Ea Jansen says the pre-requisites for achieving independent statehood were the provision of education in Estonian, the spread of journalism, and the work of leading figures (Faehlmann, Kreutzwald, Koidula, Jannsen, Jakobson, Hurt and others) who carried and propagated nationalist ideas, and the strong society movement, with the

help of which all these pre-requisites reached the grass-root level and guaranteed the mass support necessary for the creation of an independent state.<sup>22</sup>

During that time cultural life, both amateur and professional, operated only within societies, there were no state institutions. It was difficult for the Estonian intelligentsia to make a living from their creative work, as, first and foremost, the numbers of consumers of culture were limited, and secondly, the royalties from literature, art and music were so trivially small.

### **I period. 1918–1925: “The Years of Quests and Foundation”**

From the process of the foundation of Estonian independent statehood, it is clearly possible to observe and confirm Gellner’s claims about the correlations and interaction between culture and the nation-state. In 1919 with a war in progress the subject of subsidies for culture was widely and enthusiastically discussed at the meetings of the creative intelligentsia. Jüri Uljas says that paying salaries to creative people and the rules for this were discussed at the figurative arts congress in August 1919 and at the writers’ congress in September of the same year. (As there has been very little discussion of cultural policy of this particular period in the context of this article in Estonia, the author relies on Jüri Uljas’ work “Eesti Kultuurkapital”<sup>23</sup> when describing this period and the following one.) One of the most vigorous fighters for the creative intelligentsia’s position was the writer and poet Friedebert Tuglas. In January 1919 he wrote an article “The National Development of the Arts”, in which he sketched a plan for subsidising culture.

On November 11, 1918, the first government of the Republic of Estonia took office. Within the Ministry of Education, issues of art and cultural policy were the province of the department of art and heritage protection, which from June 1919 was divided into working groups for literature, figurative art, music and drama, and the heritage board. The department was set two tasks: 1) to create favourable pre-requisites for the development of art, first and foremost by providing artists with better living, studying, working and development conditions; 2) to create the

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<sup>22</sup> Jansen, E. Vaateid eesti rahvusluse sünniaegadesse. Ilmamaa, Tartu, 2004, 20

<sup>23</sup> Uljas, J. Eesti Kultuurkapital 1921–1994. Eesti Kultuurkapital, Tallinn, 2005, 6–34

conditions for improving the artistic and cultural level of the whole of the country and society. A third task was later added, responsibility for artistic and cultural representation both within and outside the country.

At practically the same time the question of the financial problems of theatres was raised. In principle, it was decided that the state would cover 30 per cent of the actors' salaries, a point which concerned the two biggest theatres "Estonia" and "Vanemuine". Other theatres (for example, the Drama Theatre Society) turned to the Ministry of Education for help as well.

At the beginning of the 1920s the general mood of society was not yet ready to support the creative intelligentsia, and there were also no clear ideas for regulatory mechanisms from the state. The years 1921–1924 saw quite a liberal economic policy, and the idea prevailed that the state should promote the freedom of financial activity and of capital, and so no specific acts to subsidise culture were passed.

Also during this period, communal activity, which started as an initiative from the bottom and seized the entire nation, dominated within culture (for example, the extensive setting up of War of Independence memorials). The society movement developed even further, taking in the activities of educational, youth, women's, singing and acting, farmer's, writer's, fire-fighter's and other societies and institutions, and a network of organisations were created. The communal activities of the time may also be regarded, within a contemporary context, as expressions of civic society.

The beginning of the 1920s was a time when the creative intelligentsia became conscious of, and started to express, its interests. This is vividly proven by the formation of professional associations, as these defend special interests. In 1921 the Estonian Singers' Union was formed, in 1922 the Estonian Writers' Union and the Estonian Sports Association, in 1923 the Estonian Artists' Union, and in 1924 the Estonian Academic Society of Musicians.

One of the most important activities of cultural policy in the 1920s, the birth of the Cultural Endowment, was also initiated by the writers, and the law was completed and passed in 1925. This is one of the most fundamental events in democratic cultural policy during both the first period of the Republic of Estonia and

the time of re-independence. The establishment of the Cultural Endowment was accompanied by frantic wars of words and debates between different opinion and interest groups. The principal issues of debate were whether to subsidise culture at all; to what extent to do so; and how to decide the subsidies and who allocates them.

Cultural policy before 1925 was rather chaotic and jumpy. The national cultural life was mostly influenced by initiatives from the grass-root level, not through coordinated organisation. Cultural policy was the subject of intensive debate among the intelligentsia and the political elite.

## **II period. 1925-1934: "The Formation of Purposeful Cultural Policy"**

From 1924 the desire to strengthen the economic functions of the state began to dominate. The new approach drawn up by Otto Strandman played an important role in setting economic policy, which took the course of determining general economic policy. During this period the principles for financing the cultural institutions of the state were established. Acts were passed, or government regulations adopted, which set the terms and amount of state subsidies, and the sources of financing were set, as were the rights and obligations of the participating parties. Examples of this include the Public Libraries Act of 1924; the University of Tartu Act 1925; the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act 1925; the Societies and their Associations Act of 1926, which affected the activities of cultural and educational societies; and the State Applied Art School (Riigi Kunsttööstuskool) Act of 1929.

The years 1925-1934 may be called the period of establishment of cultural institutions, as it was also during this time period, with the help of cultural legislation, that the framework for the support of the principal fields of culture was created.

In 1927 the new Cultural Endowment Act was passed, the most important change in which concerned the strengthening of the government's power over the Cultural Endowment through a change of the staff on the supervisory board of the Cultural Endowment, of which endowment panel members were no longer members.



In 1928, within the supervisory board of the Cultural Endowment a committee on cultural policy was formed, of which Konstantin Päts, among others, was a member. Largely thanks to the work of this committee the most prolific years of the Cultural Endowment began, during which many initiatives in cultural policy were launched, for example, the creation of the network of community centres, the reorganisation of theatres, and the organisation of the work of museums and art schools. This committee also oversaw the establishment of the three cultural temples of Tallinn – the conservatoire, the art museum and the art hall. In February 1929 the committee passed the regulations of the Cultural Endowment cultural propaganda foundation, while K. Päts was appointed to develop the collection of statutes of the art museum foundation. Later the statute collections of the Estonian National Museum and the Estonian Culture Film foundations were developed. Thus, the work of committee involved a very wide spectre of cultural policy. The central figure of the committee was K. Päts, (President of Estonia 1934-1939) who had innovative ideas about constructing Estonian statehood.

Päts saw an ideal society as a balanced integral whole, the individual parts of which were to function in absolute harmony, just like the organs of a living being. The basis of Päts' organic or institutional statehood was the thesis that only those organs that have grown out of the life and needs of the nation and blended in with the state have a right to live. Toomas Karjahärm, a leading cultural historian, says that Päts' socio-political ideas were influenced by social liberalism, solidarity, communal and neo-rural social reformism, agrarian socialism and the way the Anglo-Saxons have been able to create a balanced and stable statehood respecting the rights of citizens. This is based on secure organised institutions, which together support the social government.<sup>24</sup> Päts' thoughts already reached for the need for strong institutions while writing for the newspaper "Peterburi teataja"<sup>25</sup> ("The St. Petersburg Courier"). It can be claimed that the Estonian state was largely built up based on the ideas of K. Päts, the most important one being his conviction that social life is maintained and carried forward by institutions: the bigger and stronger the

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<sup>24</sup> Karjahärm, T. Konstantin Pätsi poliitilised ideed. – Konstantin Pätsi tegevusest. Artiklite kogumik. Koost K. Arjakas. Toim A.Velliste. MTÜ Konstantin Pätsi Muuseum. Tallinn, 2002, 75

<sup>25</sup> Aru, K. Konstantin Päts ja „Teatajad”. – Konstantin Pätsi tegevusest. Artiklite kogumik, 41

institutions the stronger and more stable the nation.

“The history of nations is in fact the history of institutions created by a nation. /.../ The life of the institutions links together generations and bequeaths the future through the fruit of labours and losses of the past. People come and go, but institutions survive generations.”<sup>26</sup>

These words by Päts were very true in the light of Estonia’s later cultural life and its direction.

### **III period. 1934–1991: “(Pro)totalitarian Cultural Policy” and its sub-periods**

1. 1934 – 1939 “The Silent Era”
2. 1940 – 1944 “The Years of Loss of Independent Statehood”
3. 1944 – 1953 “Stalinist Terror”
4. 1953 – 1969 “The Thaw and Hoarfrosts”
5. 1969 – 1987 “Stagnation”
6. 1987 – 1990 “The Collapse of the Regime”

Period III begins in the middle of the 1930s, when in Estonia as in many places around Europe rigidly nationalist and conservative ideas began to gain command, which led the state to a pro-totalitarian regime of governance. By this the author means a policy with totalitarian characteristics, but which was not totally and repressively controlling and authoritarian. This chapter presents the principal arguments why such a long period is viewed as one, while at the same time it is reasonable to differentiate between sub-periods within this era.

This difference between prototalitarian and totalitarian cultural policy lies in the strength of the oppressiveness of the ideology: during the pro-totalitarian period there was only a *tendency* towards totalitarianism, but during the totalitarian period the cultural policy was profoundly totalitarian.

In the years 1934-1991 the following instruments of cultural policy were used to impose the ideology:

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<sup>26</sup> Karjahärm, T. Konstantin Pätsi poliitilised ideed. – Konstantin Pätsi tegevusest. Artiklite kogumik, 78

- censored media or other means of mass communication subjected to the authorities, as a result of which there was effectively no alternative publishing;
- guidelines (or direct commands) to the creative intelligentsia or the supremacy of nationalist propaganda in creative work
- a thorough hierarchical institutional network controlled from above (in both rural and urban areas, for professionals and amateurs);
- a centralised state budget, which focused on ideologically loyal institutions governed from above;
- the nationalisation, control over or replacement of free private initiative by state pressure.

All these instruments of cultural policy can be found in cultural policy in Estonia between the years 1934 and 1991, or the entire (pro)totalitarian period. That is why it is justified to call the III period after its most characteristic trait, clear and total leadership from above or (pro)totalitarianism. It is important to note, and this is one of the main conclusions of this periodisation, that (pro)totalitarianism or strict leadership from above is the prevailing experience in the history of Estonian cultural policy together with everything that results from it.

Naturally the above methods were used at different times in the service of different ideologies and objectives, which results in the sub-periods. There is a great difference between the soft follow-up censorship of the Päts era and a cultural policy constructing/supporting national identity on the one hand, and the violent implementation of foreign culture that occurred during the Stalinist era on the other hand, even though similar traits are clearly noticeable. The institutional model of cultural policy created by Päts did not change during the Soviet occupation until 1991, only the ideology channelled to all strata of the society through all the instruments of cultural policy was turned upside down. The preparation for this was good – the Soviet power took over a very well operating pro-totalitarian system for the Europe of that era, making it totalitarian and implementing its own ideology within it.

### *1. Sub-period. 1934-1939: "The Silent Era"*

At the beginning of the 1920s joint events that involved the entire nation were organised spontaneously and democracy was rooted, and the years 1925–1929 are considered those that stabilised the country, but the world-wide economic crisis between 1929 and 1933 dealt a severe blow to the Estonian economy and affected the nation's political demands and preferences. The people, who were tired of not having a leader and of constant government crises, demanded vigorous solutions to overcome the crisis. Fulfilment of these demands was promised by a rising new political party *Eesti Vabadussõjalaste Keskliit* (The Union of Participants in the Estonian War of Independence), known as the Vaps. The reputation of the new political party was clean, unspoilt by corruption and political bargaining and that is why they gained support among the people. On March 12, 1934, the acting head of government Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner declared a state of emergency and eliminated the Vaps party.

Between 1934–1938, during the silent era, the state was practically governed by three men: Konstantin Päts, Johan Laidoner and Kaarel Eenpalu. The work of the parliament was halted, and while it was not officially dissolved, it was never summoned, political parties were marginalised and were ridiculed and blamed for the country's problems, demonstrations and meetings were banned, and newspapers critical of the government were shut down. Follow-up censorship was set up in the media, literature and theatre. In 1934 newspapers and journals were forbidden from criticising the government and heads of state and from disturbing the domestic peace with polemics, while a January 1935 regulation applied the same rules to brochures and books. A publisher that violated the regulation could in an extreme case be closed down or fined or have its editor arrested, while for milder violations a reprimand or warning was given. The supervision of publishers was placed in the hands of the *Riiklik Propagandatalitus* (Government Propaganda Office), formed in 1934. The ideological basis of the new Estonian state was to consist of nationalism, love of country and solidarity, while the basis of political life was to comprise professional organisations and mass organisations led by the

state, and the basis of the economy was to be private property with a strong government sector.<sup>27</sup>

According to Päts' political ideas the nation was to be organised not into political parties based on their political ideas, but into corporations according to their professions. He was of the opinion that "the insurance of states lies in strong institutions".<sup>28</sup> The following quote is a characteristic example of Päts' view of the corporative organisation of society during the silent era: "Professional organisation must result in the fact that man is not going to bow down before the parties, but he has to feel that those to whom he turns are his closest colleagues and that they agree on everything and work together and assert themselves. /.../ Everyone must feel that they are one big family and that they can only live when they have a common roof of the Republic of Estonia. /.../ And what is most important, they must teach a new moral, a new sense of honour, not only rights are of magnitude, but the one who does most for the state and sacrifices for it is of magnitude."<sup>29</sup> Such thinking was influenced by state-monopolist capitalism, in which Western Europe served as an example. Between 1934 and 1936 fifteen corporations were founded, which also participated in legislative activities. The system of corporations and the creation of support funds, for example, in culture a book support fund, film fund etc., was copied from Italy.<sup>30</sup>

The role of the arts (literature, theatre and figurative arts) was to implement and propagate national ideals. In architecture national dignity and strength were to be expressed.

Additionally, in the field of arts the agreement between the state as employer and artists supported by the cultural endowment was put into practice. For example, writers were told what and how to write. This context is very vividly described by a quote from literary life. The programme article "Literary Marginalia" by Eduard Hubel, the head of the Cultural Endowment Literature Foundation Board may be interpreted as a search for a compromise between official procurement (power) and

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<sup>27</sup> Elango, Õ, Ruusmann, A., Siilivask, K. Eesti maast ja rahvast. Maailmasõjast maailmasõjani. Tallinn, 1997, 283

<sup>28</sup> Karjahärm, T., Sirk, V. Vaim ja võim. Eesti haritlaskond 1917–1940. Argo, Tallinn, 2001, 306

<sup>29</sup> Karjahärm, T. Konstantin Pätsi poliitilised ideed. – Konstantin Pätsi tegevusest. Artiklite kogumik, 86–87

<sup>30</sup> Uljas, J. Eesti Kultuurkapital 1921–1994, 37

art (mind). He writes: "Our literature gains its justification for existence from an original mind, an original style. As long as we are original, there is a reason for our existence /---/ We must take care of and value the silicon of our home terrain, but we must polish it according to European methods, so that it would sparkle, shine as a gem. It is time to give up the admiration of foreign glass pearls and their distribution."<sup>31</sup>

In 1935 the head of the Government Propaganda Office, Hugo Kukke, made a radio speech on the subject of "The opportunities for the development of figurative arts from the starting point of national culture. An appeal to society and artists." He stressed that the further trend in the development of art must be guided by "those tasks that have greater importance from the state, national and cultural, and socio-ethnic point of view".<sup>32</sup>

To guide national or ethnic culture at the grass-root level it was planned, with the 1931 community centres act, to create a nationwide network of community centres. The foundation of community centres (village halls, clubs) had already started in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a broad campaign against taverns and drinking began. In 1900 the vodka monopoly was established in Estonia and as a result of this many of the country taverns were closed, as a result of which there arose a need for suitable places for social interaction to be founded in the rural areas. The coordinated foundation and development of a network of community centres is linked to a man called Aleksander Kurvits, in whose letter to the Minister of Education (18.05.1927) we find the arguments for the idea of setting up the network.<sup>33</sup> By 1938 there were more than 250 community centres. In order to meet the requirements of the Community Centres Act several regulations were passed, for example the community centres building regulation, and the ministry of education and social affairs regulation, which aimed to organise the network of community centres. When organising the network, it was important to remember that the community centre should be located in the central point of a region, that it should be

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<sup>31</sup> Laak, M. Kultuurkapitali lugu 1920.aastate kirjanduskriitika mõistmiseks. – Eesti kirjandusmuuseumi aastaraamat. Paar sammukest XII. Toim S. Olesk. Tartu, 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Uljas, J. Eesti Kultuurkapital 1921–1994, 40

<sup>33</sup> Uljas, J. Rahvamajad Eestis 1920–1940. – Õppematerjal. E. Vilde nim. Tallinna Pedagoogiline Instituut, Tln, 1990, lk 9–15

accessible for the people, and that its radius of activity would be at least seven kilometres.<sup>34</sup> The network of community centres is one of the special phenomena that shaped the Estonian society and an effective instrument of cultural policy of its time. Their role, both in towns and in the countryside as a place for people to get together, and as an institution providing entertainment and as the initiator and distributor of the communal ideas cannot be underestimated.

In the 1930s, the intelligentsia either supported the authoritarian regime or opposed it, though the opposition was not allowed to say much. One example of this was the dismissal of the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Postimees", Jaan Tõnisson who spoke for the opposition and for democracy, for criticising the government.<sup>35</sup> In summary, Toomas Kärjahärm says that the political situation in Estonia and its official ideology had traits characteristic of totalitarianism: etatism, the positioning of the state and the national above the individual, the principle of the leader and the primacy of the head of state in the political system, the harmonisation of political parties and the existence of a monopoly party prototype (Isamaaliit, the Fatherland Union), integral nationalism, corporations, ideological control and censorship, nationalist propaganda, the state of emergency and the infringement of civil rights. But these traits were not carried out to the extreme or developed to their limits like in bigger dictatorships. Estonia had a softer form of dictatorship. With the banning of parties political activity did not die out, it became focused around academic and professional organisations.<sup>36</sup>

The pro-government National Assembly convened in 1937, the elections to which were boycotted by the opposition, wrote the third constitution of the Republic of Estonia on the basis of Päts' draft legislation, and it was passed on June 28, 1937 at the joint sitting of the chambers and came into effect on January 1, 1938.<sup>37</sup>

According to Rait Maruste and Heinrich Schneider, whereas the 1933 constitutional amendments moved the public order from super parliamentarianism towards authoritarianism, the 1937 constitution began a movement back towards the

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<sup>34</sup> Kiis, R. Kohalikud omavalitsused ja kultuur. Rahvakultuuri Arendus- ja Koolituskeskus, Tln, 998, 115–120

<sup>35</sup> Aru, K. Milleks, millest ja kuidas tervendati „Postimeest” 1935.aastal. – Eesti kirjandusmuuseumi aastaraamat. Paar sammukest. XII. Toim S. Olesk. Tartu, 1996

<sup>36</sup> Kärjahärm, T. Konstantin Pätsi poliitilised ideed. – Konstantin Pätsi tegevusest. Artiklite kogumik, 94

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 88

people's sovereignty. The cornerstones of this constitution were the idea of the people's power (like the constitutions of 1920 and 1933), the separation of powers and the balance between them, the strengthening of judicial review, and an increase in the powers of government officials. The 1938 constitution wasn't in force for long due to external factors, and the constitutional mechanisms for the restoration of democracy were not implemented as there was not time to make full use of them.<sup>38</sup>

The silent era of Pääts brought an essentially pro-totalitarian ideology developed by the national propaganda office, which was implemented with the support of a nationalist/people's cultural policy. Its principal objective was to shape a homogeneous society with a strong identity.

Pääts' cultural policy was expressed through powerful nationwide national propaganda events: the Estonianisation of names (including place-names); the propaganda of the national costumes in connection with the XI nationwide song festival (1938); home decoration; and the study of ancient Estonian culture.

The public sphere was paralysed. The state tried to replace the free initiative characteristic of democracy with enforcement by the state and a corporative structure inspired from above. The regime tried to nationalise or control a large part of free initiative, especially as it concerned political organisations and trade unions, but also societies and associations.<sup>39</sup>

## *2. Sub-period. 1940-1944: "The Years of Loss of Independent Statehood"*

The beginning of this period is very clearly marked by the building of Soviet military bases in the Republic of Estonia. However, until the end of World War II the future of Estonia and the other Baltic states was not entirely clear. The Soviet Union and Germany were occupiers with a totalitarian ideology and practice and one of the essences of totalitarianism includes an effort to control and guide all expressions of public life including art.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–90

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92

<sup>40</sup> Kangilaski, J., *Okupeeritud Eesti kunstiajaloo perioodiseerimine*. Ajalooline Ajakiri nr 1, Tallinn, 1999, 23–29



In the July and August of 1941 25 000 civilians and 33 000 conscripts were evacuated from Estonia to areas away from the front. Artists who were in those areas were united into the Estonian SSR Yaroslavl Artistic Ensembles. Zealous historical and political explanatory work was carried out among them,<sup>41</sup> an important preparatory step in raising the new cultural elite. Obviously the conscious ideology of Soviet totalitarian cultural policy lies behind this, and it is a step on the way to the end of Estonia's independent statehood.

By the autumn of 1941 Estonia had been taken over by the German troops. The German occupying troops persecuted and executed Jews and communists or suspected communists, including writers and artists, but they did not interfere in creative matters. An active art life in Estonia continued as it had during independence, but although a certain liberalisation of cultural life could be noted as compared to the control of the silent era, the conditions of the occupation cannot be called free. 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 biggest losses of artists came with the emigration to Germany (1939-1941), the 1941 June deportation and the forced conscription to the Soviet army.<sup>42</sup>

The Soviet regime saw culture as a legitimiser of the socialist public order, culture was a means of communist educational work, a tool of ideology, a part of party work.<sup>43</sup> Toomas Karjahärm and Helle Luts say that one of the principal tasks of the Soviet cultural policy of this period was to reshape the intelligentsia. This meant removing and destroying the old intelligentsia and forming a new socialist intelligentsia based on workers and farmers.

### ***3. Sub-period: 1944-1953 "Stalinist Terror"***

The Stalinist era differs from the period of the thaw that follows because of its total terror, repressions and violence, where unconditional subordination was demanded from people and even minimal deviations from the official line were not

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<sup>41</sup> Kuuli, O. Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953–1969. Tallinn, 2002,13

<sup>42</sup> Karjahärm, T., Luts, H. Kultuurigenotsiid Eestis. Kunstnikud ja muusikud 1940–1953. Argo, Tallinn, 2005,145

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

tolerated. The aim of the terror was to suppress resistance and root out any kind of hope of freedom. The objective of the Kremlin was to subjugate totally the independent intelligentsia and make it an obedient tool of the regime.<sup>44</sup>

The totalitarian Soviet era brought with it a cultural policy which was national in form but socialist in content. Culture was made to function as a propaganda tool. The network of community centres was filled with Red Corners and political training. Year by year the propaganda of social realism became more and more menacing, growing into a compulsion. Olaf Kuuli says that ideological campaigns against theatre critics, musicians and writers were initiated in Moscow. The fight was against formalism, aestheticism and civil nationalism. But until the end of the 1940s the state's attempts at repression were softened by the local leaders in Estonia, surviving representatives of the intelligentsia of the previous era for example Hans Kruus, Nigol Andresen and Johannes Semper. Also the Estonian Communist Party first secretary Nikolai Karotamm understood the need to preserve the already battered intelligentsia.<sup>45</sup>

The regime controlled literature most strictly, then the visual arts. Of all forms of art, music, due to its nature, had the most freedom of expression, which is why composer and conductor Gustav Ernesaks and singer Georg Ots hold special importance in the self-awareness of Estonians.<sup>46</sup>

According to Jaak Kangilaski, attempts were made to destroy the originality of Estonian art in order to assimilate it entirely into the official culture of the Soviet Union. Pseudo-ethnographic national form was allowed, but most of the national heritage and all allusions to Western art were frowned upon. Under such labels as *nationalism*, *cosmopolitanism* and *formalism*, the opportunities for artists to create original work were destroyed.<sup>47</sup>

In March 1949 more than 20 000 people from Estonia were deported to Siberia, mostly farmers and their families. In parallel with the liquidation of the earlier village life the search for "enemies" in the field of culture increased, and the re-evaluation of the cultural heritage of the independence era and the persecution of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 152

<sup>45</sup> Kuuli, O. Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953–1969. Tallinn, 2002, 16

<sup>46</sup> Karjahärm, T. ja Luts, H. Kultuurigenotsiid Eestis. Kunstnikud ja muusikud 1940–1953, 151

<sup>47</sup> Kangilaski, J. Okupeeritud Eesti kunstiajaloo periodiseerimine. Ajalooline Ajakiri, 1, Tallinn, 1999, 27

cultural elite began. The notorious 8<sup>th</sup> full assembly of the Communist Party of Estonia on March 21-26, 1950 was the basis for repressions against people engaged in cultural activities.

Kuuli describes what followed the assembly: "Firstly, on the basis of the assembly decision the leaders of the Estonian SSR was replaced. One of the main things the leaders were criticised for was not fighting hard enough against "civil nationalism" and choosing the wrong staff. Hans Kruus and Nigol Andresen were evicted from the party and imprisoned. After the eighth assembly the campaign to destroy the remnants of the cultural elite gained pace. The governing bodies of the academy of sciences and institutions of higher education were almost entirely replaced, and researchers and academic staff were massively laid off. Members of creative societies were evicted by dozens.<sup>48</sup>

This period also saw the wholesale cleansing of the staff of the cultural institutions, and their replacement by cultural officials appointed by the communist party. Those of the elite from the previous era who hadn't been able to escape during the war were removed from the key positions of cultural life, and often destroyed psychologically, sometimes physically.

Estonian culture as a whole was thoroughly devastated during the high period of Stalinism. The general objective of the Kremlin was to make the European national culture extinct and to replace it with Russian Soviet culture. The achievement of this objective was interrupted by the period of the thaw that followed Stalin's death.<sup>49</sup>

Eduard Shils, in his research published at the end of the 1950s, compared Italian Fascism, German National-Socialism, Russian Bolshevism, French and Italian communism and other radical political movements, and reached the conclusion that ideology as the tool of power of the extremist political powers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by its "intellectual viciousness".

Shils notes that ideology demands that politics must be controlled by a comprehensive set of beliefs that ignores all other considerations. Ideology is totalistic, as, in the spirit of its dictations, it aspires to govern all social and cultural

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<sup>48</sup> Kuuli, O. Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953–1969. Tallinn, 2002, 22

<sup>49</sup> Karjahärm, T. ja Luts, H. Kultuurigenotsiid Eestis. Kunstnikud ja muusikud 1940–1953, 152

life; ideology is “doctrinal”, as it proclaims the total and exclusive political truth that rules it; ideology is dualistic, as anyone who is not with me is automatically against me; ideology is alienative, as it mistrusts, attacks and subverts existing institutions; ideology is futuristic, as it is employed for the utopian culmination of history.<sup>50</sup>

With the help of Shils’ analysis the mechanisms that shaped mental culture into an instrument for implementing power can clearly be observed. The relationship of ideology to culture was aggressive, subordinating and filtrating from the side of ideology.<sup>51</sup>

#### ***4. Sub-period. 1953 – 1969: “The Thaw and Hoarfrosts”***

The era of liberalisation that followed Stalin's death was described for the first time with the word *thaw* by Ilja Ehrenburg, who in 1954 gave this title to his novel. Most of all, this literary expression noted a change in people’s attitude towards life and their way of thinking; but it also tackled the events and processes that caused the changes. For example, the weakening of the NKVD (the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the freeing of many political prisoners, criticism of Stalin and his actions, and a re-evaluation of the current attitudes. Through the creative people the *thaw* was also echoed in cultural life.<sup>52</sup>

Among other things, the thaw in Estonia was also expressed in the re-evaluation of a kind of the culture of the independence era. At the beginning of the 1950s the official ideology had portrayed the independent Estonian state as a whole and the culture from 1920s to 1940 in a totally negative light, calling it a deteriorated civil culture. In the middle of the 1950s the protest of the intelligentsia against this standpoint became evident in discussions about the contents of history and literature textbooks and the entire cultural life and artistic freedom in general. The attitude towards the intelligentsia of the independent time was somewhat corrected. But all these developments still saw setbacks.

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<sup>50</sup> Lepik, P. Nõukogude kultuur ja ideoloogia. – Acta Humaniora A19, TPÜ toimetised. Eesti Kultuur 1940. aastate teisel poolel. Toim K. Kirme ja M. Kirme. Tallinn 2001, lk. 9–16.

<sup>51</sup> Lepik, P. Nõukogude kultuur ja ideoloogia, 14

<sup>52</sup> Kuuli, O. Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953–1969. Tallinn, 2002, 154

Historians almost unanimously agree that from 1956 onwards a change in economic and political life towards normalisation may be detected. In cultural life this began in 1955 when the so-called exaggerations in architecture were condemned, opening the path to functionalism, and later to the spread of the ideology of design in art.<sup>53</sup>

Kuuli says that the high point of the thaw arrived with the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where Nikita Khrushchev made a speech "On the Personality Cult and its Consequences" behind closed doors.

But the liberalisation that followed was shattered by the bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising in the autumn of 1956. The thaw was replaced by hoarfrosts. The "excessive criticism" of the Stalinist era and the Soviet system was revised and in 1957 the party, lead by Khrushchev again, demanded that the creative intelligentsia stress the achievements of Soviet society.<sup>54</sup>

Thus liberal moods and stricter ideological attempts to put pressure on cultural life alternated continually until the end of the regime. But as the total machine of repressions built by Stalin was constrained and the punishment regime softened, the popular fear of the KGB weakened, and during this period cracks appeared in the totalitarian system, easing the final collapse of the system. Kuuli notes that the violent suppression of democracy in Czechoslovakia in the August of 1968 may be considered the end of the thaw, after which fear of democracy and reforms broadened among the Communist Party leaders and that is why ideological pressure on culture increased.<sup>55</sup>

##### *5. Sub-period. 1969 - 1987: "Stagnation"*

After the Soviet troops rolled into Czechoslovakia Estonian hopes of becoming free were replaced by tolerance and stagnation.

The free-time activities of the Homo Sovieticus in Estonia were guided by ideologically educated cultural workers who were trained at the Viljandi School of Culture, and after 1966 at the Tallinn Pedagogical Institute. As the ideological slogan

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<sup>53</sup> Kangilaski, J. Okupeeritud Eesti kunstiajaloo periodiseerimine. Ajalooline Ajakiri, 1, Tallinn, 1999, 27

<sup>54</sup> Kuuli, O. Sula ja hallad Eesti NSV-s. Kultuuripoliitikast aastail 1953-1969. Tallinn, 2002, 156

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 157

of the cultural policy of the Soviet era was “national in form but socialist in content”, cultural workers did not hesitate to develop traditional national ethnic forms of culture (choir music, folk dancing, drama) despite the heavy weight of atheism and Soviet-related courses in their education. All this took place within the framework of public organisation and financing, but also under strict censorship. Culture and sports were available to a large part of the nation, thus fulfilling their role in rooting the identity of a unified homogeneous Soviet person.

The role of professional art was still to support the existing system. Aesthetic and genre canons were set in art, which were to suit the moral code of Soviet man as a builder of communism (socialist realism in art, the Stansilavski system in drama and Russian classical ballet, heroic and bathetic forms in film and music). In criticism there was a sharp opposition to the deteriorating Western and rotting corrupt culture of capitalism. The censorship body GLAVLIT kept an eye on the entire cultural life and means of mass communication. A covert hierarchical system was also imposed in cultural policy, and a privileged creative class loyal to the system – a characteristic of Soviet society – was established.

Cultural institutions, financed by the state and accessible to everyone, functioned paradoxically enough as a covert channel for national resistance. A unique sphere of communication, the lack of alternative media, and a network of cultural institutions subjected to a common goal still at times enabled strong resistance to flourish under the cover of the official ideology. Thanks to the cracks made during the thaw, influences from the free world penetrated through the iron curtain. In literature and arts a dangerous balancing act on the permitted limits was performed and theatre became a forum for free thought, because the audience expected and looked for hidden messages, read between the lines, and understood the keywords.

Covert resistance culminated at the song festivals held every five years, which celebrated the strength of national identity and reflected the growing desire for independence. All this took place despite the policy of russification (the share of ethnic Estonians within the population decreased from 88% in 1938 to 61.5% in 1989) and the attempt to assimilate the nation into a united mass of Soviet people. The self-

evident fundamentals of the cultural policy of the Soviet authorities were hierarchies and a strong centralisation, which tried to create a common consciousness and common way of life, reaching for the ideal of a monolithic society.<sup>56</sup>

#### **6. Sub-period. 1987 - 1990: "The Collapse of the Regime"**

The all-round economic and political collapse of the regime in 1987-1991 may be considered as one of the sub-periods. The events in the Hirvepark on August 23, 1987 denoted a major psychological break – the disappearance or lessening of the general fear. The nationwide campaign against phosphate mining also played a similar psychological role, breaking the fear of resistance.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note that the dominant features of the era were radical political changes, and there was no cultural policy in the usual sense of the word. However, the entire political process drawn from the resistance of a nation without the levers of power and the will to change revolved around cultural policy in its essence. This period may be considered a second era of awakening, when artistic, cultural and intellectual initiatives were relatively important.

The direct signal for liberation was given by the joint plenum of Estonia's creative unions in April 1988, which expressed *de facto* no confidence in the political leaders of the Estonian SSR. A few months later the "Singing Revolution", referred to as the first stage of liberation, began. Music and communal singing inspired and united the popular movement towards independence. During the Tallinn Old Town Days festival spontaneous night-time song celebrations began, where thousands of blue, black and white flags were flown.<sup>58</sup>

It can be said that culture and the arts were the principal levers of political interests in 1988-1991 and the first motives of political and social progress.

When independence was achieved and the organisation of political institutions and the practical work of making the transition to a market economy began in independent Estonia, the intellectuals and people involved in culture, who

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<sup>56</sup> Lagerspetz, M. *Institutsionaliseeritus ja avatus kultuuripoliitikas*. *Looming*, 7, 2003, 1227-1228

<sup>57</sup> Tarvel, E. *Eesti lähiajaloo periodiseerimisest*. – *Ajaloolise tõe otsingul*. 20.01.1999 Tallinnas toimunud konverentsi „Eesti lähiajaloo allikakriitilisi probleeme” kogumik. Toim E. Tarvel. Tallinn, 1999, 105-116

<sup>58</sup> Lagerspetz, M. ja Raud, R. *Eesti Kultuuripoliitika Raport*. 1995, 157

so far had played a central role, had to withdraw, as the economic and political elite came forth.

#### **IV period. 1991-1995: "Post-totalitarian Lack of Paradigm"**

The transition period "Post-totalitarian Lack of Paradigm" could be observed in the years 1991-1995. Claus Offe, who has described post-socialist societies, has described the events as a triple-transformation, when the political, economic and national identity change simultaneously. The most important priority of this period – to legitimise the new economy and the political institutions with the help of a new cultural (national) identity which would be common for all members of the nation – was not congruent with the deepening of the cultural dispersion. The paradox became clearly evident that a democratic and independent social system supports national identity less than does covert resistance to a repressive regime, when the survival strategy of the Estonians against the Russification policy consisted of uniting around cultural institutions.<sup>59</sup>

People also felt intensely the lack of a thorough ideology that they could relate to, either for or against. In 1994 art critic Ants Juske wrote: "/---/ we are still not used to living without an ideology. Now that the time of national ideology is about to end, our cultural people are grasped by a "puberty ideology". The latter is closely connected to the ideology of the time of socialism and the singing revolution. /---/ Its is the attitude from way back that there certainly must be an ideology that holds together the entire culture or nation. /---/ On the other hand, we see that a new generation is happily growing up, who is /---/ little interested in whether these things have the word "national" or "socialist" in front, most of them are not interested in the word "market" either. To sum it up, we have already reached a new paradigm, where the word "nationalism" carries a different quality and Hasso Krull or Raoul Kurvitz will not be helped by Mikk Mikiver's distressed national or socialist timbre."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lagerspetz, M. Estonian identity entering the post-modern world: The role of national culture. – Management of Change: Cultural Aspects of European Enlargement and the Enlargement of the EU. Graz: KulturKontakt, 1998, 55–59

<sup>60</sup> Juske, A. Mure-ideoloogia. Looming, 4, 1994, 559–560



An important phenomenon characterising this era is the initial shock and inability of the cultural figures of the era to adapt in the face of the transformation from a fully financed social system to a market economy, although state support for cultural institutions continued. The author would also like to list some common traits of cultural policy of post-socialist societies that are clearly represented in Estonia too: the lack of any monitoring and analysis system for cultural policy; inconsistent legislation concerning culture; monopolist cultural institutions benefiting from state support and the low capability of the third sector; the sale of cinemas and other cultural buildings from the Soviet era; a decline in prestige resulting from all this; and the onslaught of commerce.

It can also be said that the unique network of cultural institutions created during the era of Päts and made rigidly hierarchical during the Soviet times became disorientated, where previously it had provided cultural life with a create impulse. The prestige of stable networks and hierarchies in culture fell apart, affected by new phenomena, which led to a weakening of the invisible grip of social regulation in the *Foucauldian* sense. In the fertile conditions of these complicated times new directions and forms of art such as contemporary dance were able to emerge and spread as a result of free initiative and various festivals. The newcomers brought their initiatives to life, and this was democratically supported by the newly opened Cultural Endowment.

The most important steps in cultural policy during this critical time were the restoration of the work of the Cultural Endowment in 1994 and the compilation of a report concerning cultural policy, and the comments of the experts of the Council of Europe on this report. The Cultural Endowment became an efficient reviver of cultural processes during this period, supporting initiatives outside the state institutions, until in 1996 on the initiative of Jaak Allik "The Fundamentals of the Estonian Cultural Policy" were developed, and in 1998 the Riigikogu, the parliament of Estonia, approved them.

## V period. 1995-2007: "Elitist-preservationist Cultural Policy"

The period of the elitism-preservationist cultural policy provisionally began in 1995, when minister Jaak Allik compared the network of state cultural institutions that Estonia had as legacies from the past to Egyptian pyramids, which in their uniqueness require preservation. This may be considered a cultural policy aimed at retaining the former models.<sup>61</sup> With such an elitist-preservationist cultural policy Jaak Allik, who was minister of culture 1995–1999, could create something of a rational order in the confusion of a transition society, and also word the development plan for culture in the "The Fundamentals of the Estonian Cultural Policy" approved by the Riigikogu in 1998. Allik led cultural life back to traditional models of preserving and establishing state cultural institutions. Often this resulted in a cultural policy superseding new initiatives, not funding new projects or only minimally funding them. This was supported by right-wing rhetoric about market regulation and the vitality of different art projects. The resources of the Cultural Endowment were also directed to cover the costs within the administration of the ministry, which again cut the sums to be given to initiatives coming from institutions on the outside.

The idea of preserving cultural institutions as the principal objective of the state cultural policy has also been shared by subsequent ministers of culture, although none of them have been involved in cultural policy as systematically as Jaak Allik in 1995–1999.

After Allik the position of minister of culture was for a long time held by the Reform Party, who tried to continue the same policy under Signe Kivi (1999–2002), Margus Allikmaa (2002–2003) and Urmas Paet (2003–2005). Those who implement this model are characterised by the desire to centralise the activities of the Cultural Endowment, the desire not to create the links favoured by the state between culture and business, and the lack of a systematic analysis of cultural policy.

It is important to note that both principles, preservation and elitism, are justified within strict limits; institutions creating national identity must be

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<sup>61</sup> Lagerspetz, M. *Institutsionaliseeritus ja avatus kultuuripoliitikas*. Looming, 7, 2003, 1227

maintained and professional culture is equally important. Thus both trends are still important and valuable. The most important keywords of Raivo Palmaru, minister of culture 2005-2007, are the mapping of the analysis and fields of creative industries. However, it is too early to tell whether this could be a new beginning for a new model of cultural policy.

## CONCLUSION

Estonian cultural policy reflects the official state cultural policy of the society. As the country is young, it has only a short experience of a purposeful cultural policy.

Thus far cultural life in Estonia has been organised by the state, partly through a strong view of the function of cultural policy which led to an ethnic-nationalist cultural policy set by president Pääts, and partly through the hierarchical cultural policy which perpetuated cultural institutions that followed during the Soviet times. Both were guided and led from above.

The ideological content of the first of these was nationalism, which in the middle of the 1930s was understandable as an interpretation of culture, as Estonians had managed to set up their own state, which needed to be built up both economically and culturally. Before independent statehood the status of the Estonian was third-class, after the Baltic-Germans and the Russians. The national identity, which had just been created in a nation-state and had just achieved its right to life, had to be supported.

The pro-totalitarian cultural policy led from above by Konstantin Pääts shaped the national identity and was expressed in the state's support for all forms of professional and folk culture, and at that time most of the institutions subsidising culture that function today were established.

The objective of Pääts' ideology was a homogeneous and strong nation state, so that the feeling of nationalism that started during the awakening era would become rooted in both the towns and the countryside. The cultural policy model this created and its network of institutions also suited the Soviet authorities, who adopted it. The

staff of the institutions were replaced by ideologically educated and loyal employees. The system continued to function purposefully, though the political and ideological content saw a radical change and the measures used were far from the soft follow-up censorship of the silent era.

The new content came from the manipulative rhetoric of a totalitarian state shaping the Homo Sovieticus, the actual expression of which resulted in a hierarchy of culture and censorship. This was implemented through a deeper institutionalisation and centralisation. As a sub-trend of the new ideology, the national psychology was retained as a form of covert resistance, which was also one of the key factors in attaining re-independence.

In connection with the appearance of a new world order, an elitist mentality drawn from the laws of the liberal market economy was added to the cultural policy and its earlier national and hierarchical institutions. In the strong driving winds of economic liberalism the viewpoint began to prevail that generally culture must be able to manage itself, and that the state should deal with professional culture alone. The current Estonian interpretation of culture and the corresponding policy can be described as preservationist and elitist. It is true that both principles, the preservationist and elitism are justified in narrow terms. Obviously institutions creating national identity have to be looked after and it is understandable that professional culture be supported as key factor in the competitiveness of the state.

At present the state cultural policy conceives culture as the activities of established cultural institutions whose principal role is to support national identity, not as an abundant collection of subcultures where activities that synthesise national and global culture in viable subcultures may also renew and strengthen the common cultural consciousness of the nation. Cultural policy aims to retain a system developed to shape a monolithic and homogeneous society, although we are dealing now not with a homogeneous, but with a heterogeneous multicultural society, which has its own nation state.

At the same time, as cultural policy has never gained as much attention as economic and social policy at the general elections, Estonian society lacks a widely-

discussed concise platform, idea or ideology of what the future vision of the cultural policy of Estonia should be. Quoting Tõnu Seienthal:

[...] the current generation of educated people, who for a good cause have deserted the hollow-sounding Soviet slogan of people's friendship and brotherhood, have not been able, while peeking into Brussels, to formulate a clear ideology of national identity for themselves. But it is very necessary, in order to end the manipulations where "the requirements of the European Union" or "Russia's interests" are manoeuvred into the term "Estonia's interests."<sup>62</sup>

Estonian cultural policy has not yet looked for an answer to the question of whether the model of cultural policy led from above created 70-80 years ago, which stemmed from the creation of national policy and took root during the Soviet time with a tight institutional network, is satisfactory and whether it offers enough opportunities for sustainable development in Estonia's changed context, in the common European space, in a world that is open and without borders.

Egge Kulbok-Lattik,

07th of September, 2008

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<sup>62</sup> Heinapuu, A. Hõimulosidaarsus aitab jääda iseendaks. – Horisondi lisaväljaanne 2007, Fenno-Ugria, MTÜ Loodusajakiri, Tallinn, 2007,1