STUDYING HOME FIELDS: ENCOUNTERS OF ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN ESTONIA

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, two disciplines with early common roots, ethnology and anthropology, have re-encountered each other in a new form in Eastern Europe. Ethnology in Estonia grew out of the German tradition of *Volkskunde*, which concentrated on the study of European folk culture. As Tamás Hofer noted in 1968, such research has developed “more or less independently in each European country”, and “even the terms in the national languages (*Volkskunde*, *folklivsforskning*, *néprajz*, *národopis*, etc.) are not congruous in meaning” (Hofer 1968). As a result, it is difficult if not impossible to summarize the history of what is today also known as European ethnology (Gingrich 2005, 77). In Estonia, ethnology, then called ethnography, originally focused on the cultural traditions of local peasants. However, throughout its history, Estonian ethnology has included a considerable amount of research among Siberian peoples, mostly Finno-Ugric groups, and more recently research in other regions and cultures. Ethnology has developed in close contact with the museological representation of Estonian culture and thus also with the study of material culture, a feature that is also paralleled in early anthropology (e.g., Stocking 1985).

Anthropology refers to the study of social and cultural features of humankind and historically meant studying the cultures outside the Western world, in earlier research described as “primitives”. Its history has been relatively more uniform than that of ethnology, perhaps primarily due to its formative Western origins being restricted to Britain, the United States, and France (labeled as “Franglus” anthropology by Verdery 2007). In its modern form, ethnology and anthropology have become increasingly close in their research subjects and theoretical approaches.
Having grown apart during the twentieth century, the current reunion of anthropology and ethnology in some Eastern European countries has been free neither of uncertainties concerning identity and competence, nor of battles for resources and for the institutional right to survive (Buchowski 2004; Hann et al. 2007). The parallel existence of separate departments of anthropology and ethnology in Estonia offers an unusually harmonious account that nevertheless allows for reflection upon the temporality and identity of the changing research on Estonian culture and society.

A handful of foreign anthropologists have carried out classical anthropological research on Estonia as an unfamiliar society (e.g., Abrahams 2002; Assmuth 2005; Feldman 2000, 2005; Nikiforova 2005; Rausing 2004), and some Estonian ethnologists and anthropologists have done research in other cultures (e.g., Gross 2009; Leete 2009; Toulouze & Niglas 2006; Vallikivi 2009). Those overlaps suggest a considerable contemporary affinity between the two disciplines. This special issue brings together Estonian ethnologists and anthropologists who have carried out research in Estonia. This approach allows us to highlight the disciplinary history over a long period of changes in theoretical and regional focuses, sociopolitical changes in Eastern Europe, and to depict some remaining methodological differences between the two disciplines.

In this introductory article we concentrate on the history of Estonian ethnology as an example of Eastern European ethnology, drawing parallels with comparable developments in “Franglus” anthropology and noting some of the reasons why the two disciplines grew apart. We discuss the main developments in Estonian ethnology from its nineteenth-century beginnings up to the 1990s, and how anthropology and ethnology, with their now rather different institutional baggage, met in the Estonian academy in the 2000s.

The last part of the article discusses the current situation in Estonian ethnology and anthropology and the contributions to this special issue, concentrating first on the growing commonalities and on the topics shared by all the articles presented here: temporality, identity, and change. Finally, we discuss the methodological differences between the two disciplines that result in the fundamentally dissimilar approaches of our contributors and affirm the continuing necessity of such a parallel existence.

Changing Research Into Cultures

The Beginnings

Ethnology in Tsarist Russia encompassed interest in the small nations on the periphery of the Russian Empire, including Estonian peasants. These peasants, seen as similar to any peripheral groups from the imperial standpoint, had a very different meaning for Estonian ethnographers as well as the local population. In Estonia, ethnology grew out of the Baltic-German Enlightenment context. According to Chris Hann (2007, 9), in this discipline, “the general focus was on one’s own nation; although much of this scholarship was concerned with local and regional variations, the ‘native ethnographers’ were also, sometimes consciously, caught up in their respective national movements. Their dominant temporal mode was determined by this political context”. As a result, ethnology primarily concentrated on European peasantry, with the aim of
understanding and preserving a way of life that was seen to have given rise to nations and states.

Estonian ethnography, or rahvateadus (a term closely following both the Finnish kansatiede and German Volkskunde”), as well as amateur activities preceding the institutional establishment of the discipline, was greatly influenced by German national romanticism. Several of the up-and-coming luminaries of the new Estonian national movement were influenced by the German Volkskunde and Finnish historical-geographic academic context (e.g. Mihkel Veske, Oskar Kallas, Matthias Johann Eisen, Jakob Hurt, and others). The budding nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe and the Estonian National Awakening of the second half of that century strengthened the importance of the study of Estonian subjects, which became ethnology’s main raison d’être over the years of independence and occupation in the twentieth century.

The hallmark of European ethnology and ethnography was the extensive collection of oral history and material artifacts, and of folk art in particular. This took place in the context of great changes in different European countries, including Estonia, which had alerted many intellectuals to the possibility that the traditional peasant way of life was vanishing or had already vanished, remaining only in people’s memories and isolated practices, such as songs, stories, riddles, etc. This is similar to the early salvaging missions of the nineteenth-century anthropologists focusing, for instance, on Native Americans. Some local intellectuals, such as Mihkel Veske (1843–1890), an Estonian linguist and theologian, and a University of Leipzig graduate from 1872, noticed signs upon their return to Estonia that the traditional peasant life was disappearing and considered it vital to salvage this way of life for future generations (Leete et al. 2008, 16). The aim of both early anthropology and ethnology was to collect and preserve the knowledge, practices, and artifacts that were seen to constitute national roots, and to preserve the knowledge of traditional customs.

Engaging the Public in Collecting Missions. In a letter from 1872 to the members of the Society of Estonian Literati, one of the best-known Estonian folklorists, Jakob Hurt, the head of the society, pointed out that its scientific aim should be to collect “the olde Estonian people’s memories, but especially olde Estonian people’s songs and poetry from people’s mouths” (Hurt 1872, as cited in Mälk 1963, 63–134). His plea to the members of the society aimed to activate collecting missions in the Estonian countryside. Such missions were to salvage as much as possible of the disappearing cultural features, recording not only the folk songs and legends but also various features of peasant daily life.

Folklore remained high on the agenda of national romanticism throughout the nineteenth century, and was also widely used in Western anthropology. In 1888, Hurt published his second, most widely known public appeal, Some Pleas to the Inspired Sons and Daughters of Estonia (Hurt 1888, 45–56), inviting people to contribute to the collection of folklore. Hurt’s calls were avidly answered by teachers and other active local members of the peasant society. Ea Jansen (2004, 24–27) offered the following astonishing statistics: of Hurt’s approximately 1,200 correspondents, 42% were teachers, 34% peasant farmers, 9% were people related to higher educational institutions, and 7% were craftsmen. Ten percent of all the respondents were city dwellers.
Teachers at rural schools were often the key informants also for university researchers who ventured into the countryside. They helped with accommodation and information but would also “take the collectors to the songsters and help to plead with and beseech them” (Õunapuu 2007, 25). In response to Hurt’s plea, 114,696 pages of folk songs and poetry were contributed by local correspondents between 1888 and 1906. This enormous collection moved the main figures of the national movement to establish the Estonian National Museum (ENM) two years after Hurt’s death, in 1909. In addition to collecting oral tradition, the ENM was to house the material heritage of Estonia. Jaago (2005) characterized the academic value of Hurt’s work as pioneering the practice of fieldwork and initiating the local network of correspondents. The systematic nature of such arrangements of collection later helped to introduce the topographic principle that flourished in both the ENM and the Estonian Folklore Archives.

The early collecting missions of artifacts had to record such details as what items were not given or sold to the collectors, how people received the collectors, what people in that parish looked like (short, tall, dark-haired, light-haired, etc.), what clothes they wore, the cost of the travel, as well as any other observations the collector may have had (Eesti Rahva Muuseum 1913). Hurt’s plea from 1888 also contained a detailed description of what to ask and how. Those responding to the appeal were provided with the first detailed questionnaire asking them to describe six different “grains for knowing our olden times” (Hurt 1888, 47), from folk songs and proverbs to “the old ways and customs” and “old folk belief and superstition”.

Some Parallels with the Beginnings of Anthropology as a Field Science. The roots of ethnology and anthropology were closely intertwined: the classic texts, even the usage of the term “ethnology”, overlapped (see Barth 2005, 5–7; Kockel 2008). In this light, it is interesting to compare Hurt’s work with some highly significant developments in British anthropology of the same period. Improving data collection was increasingly a concern for the anthropological/ethnological research on “uncivilized nations” in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1874, the Royal Anthropological Institute published the first edition of Notes and Queries on Anthropology, For the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilised Land (Garson & Read 1892). That booklet of instructions for travelers among “wild races” detailed what data to collect. This marked a notable shift in anthropological approach to data sources. Until then, the vast majority of anthropological discourse was based on travelers’ and colonialists’ accounts of their experiences, although attempts to issue questionnaires to travelers were made as early as 1800 (Urry 1972). The so-called armchair anthropologist, in essence a philosopher, mostly resorted in his research to speculation based on available bits and pieces of information that had haphazardly trickled back to the Western world from colonialists and explorers.

The publication and systematic use of Notes and Queries marked an important turn in anthropology toward acquiring data in researchers’ terms. It set the guidelines for asking questions in response to what researchers themselves considered to be important for their particular interests (see also Kuper 1983). The introduction of the First Edition to the Notes and Queries criticizes the earlier travelers’ accounts of the “modern
savages” as follows: “information thus obtained has been lamentably distorted in order to render it in harmony with preconceived ideas; owing to this and other causes, the imperfections of the anthropological record surpass those of other sciences, and false theories are often built upon imperfect bases of induction” (Garson & Read 1892, vi). Furthermore, “[t]he rapid extermination of savages at the present time, and the rapidity at which they are being reduced to the standard of European manners renders it of urgent importance to correct these sources of error as soon as possible” (Garson & Read 1892, vi).

The nature of Hurt’s data collection is similar to, but at the same time very different from, the nature of Notes and Queries and other expeditions of the early anthropologists. First of all, both exercises in data collection aimed to map out the disappearing cultural features that would likely otherwise be lost to humankind. Hann suggests (2007, 9) that “the ethnographers’ mission was, above all, to document the culture of the peasants, in the conviction that among them one could find, in unsullied preindustrial settings, the essential traits of the nation”. Hurt (1888, 49) also observes the urgency of this task: “particularly in relation to olde songs, it needs to be especially noted that now is the last chance to collect them. One more generation on, and there will not be one to be found in people’s mouths. In the olden times, they were sung everywhere in Estonia’s land at every life event and situation (...) but now (...) olden folk song has faded. The modern-time spirit has become the fatal plague to them.”

Secondly, amassing data rather than analysis was characteristic of both ethnology and anthropology during that period. For instance, Sir James Frazer (1905, as cited in Urry 1984, 40), an archetypal armchair anthropologist himself, described the simple collecting role of the early anthropologist: “It is our business to prepare (...) by collecting, sifting, and arranging the records in order that when, in the fulness of time, the mastermind shall arise and survey them, he may be able to detect at once that unity in multiplicity, that universal in the particulars, which has escaped us.” In turn, Ilmari Manninen critically assessed the work done in Estonia until the 1920s (Manninen 1923, 4): “Old artifacts have been collected in uncountable quantities. (...) Let us not assume that by collecting and arranging collections into museums we have done all that we can to rescue the nation’s material culture.”

In spite of such similarities, there were key differences between the two disciplines of European ethnology as embodied in Estonian ethnology and “Franglus” anthropology. Those differences moved them in dissimilar, and in some cases opposite, directions. First, the type of data acquired differed considerably. Hurt’s ambassadors recorded various aspects of locals’ lives, particularly folktales, songs, and legends that were seen to form a link to the past. Although the “primitives” were thought to also provide a glimpse into the past forms of human existence, preceding civilization, Notes and Queries paid attention to a much greater scope of “anthropographic and ethnographic” data. Such remarkable diversity demanded that the researchers consider the implications of completely different religions, kinship systems, and economic and political arrangements.

This soon led the researchers to acquire data over the course of their prolonged presence in the studied culture, leading us to the second key difference: methods of acquiring data were becoming increasingly different. In his Preparatory Note to the ethnographic section of the 1892 edition of Notes and Queries, Charles Hercules Read...
expressed the emerging methodological awareness of the particular demands of the empirical data on anthropological subjects: “It is an obvious fact that to obtain even superficial answers to the queries which form the body of [Notes and Queries] would necessitate a long continued residence among native folk” (Garson & Read 1892, 87). Those anthropologists who started venturing into faraway lands came to recognize that “the complexity they attempted to make sense of was located within the social structure of particular cultures” (Urry 1989, 231). To comprehend this complexity, the researcher had to be present in the culture for an extensive period of time and ask questions arising out of the aim to understand the context and meaning of the studied people’s lives.

The third difference, and one of the main reasons for such divergence between the two disciplines, was the closeness between the research subjects and the researchers. While anthropologists explored perplexingly exotic cultures, ethnographers, by contrast, shared the language and often a background knowledge of their research subjects. It is important to note that this went beyond the superficial presence within the territory of the same nation-state or language group. The peasants and intellectuals of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Estonia led a life not at all remote from each other, and collectors often knew their subjects personally. Therefore, Hurt’s students were certainly not approaching unknown tribes or more marginal sectors of the society. Indeed, as the data by Jansen (2004) quoted above demonstrate, a large proportion of the data was in fact contributed by the locals themselves. As such, the “natives” were reclassified as collectors and correspondents rather than informants. The fact that the contributors to the collection of Estonian folk data were often the research subjects themselves underlines a fascinating aspect of early ethnography in Estonia and in European ethnology more generally, and demonstrates its notable difference from early anthropology.

By extension, and as the fourth key difference that distinguished the anthropology and ethnography of that period, the ethnographers shared their mission with their subjects; it was their common national “project”. The Estonian ethnologist and researcher of Livonians Jüri Linnus (1988, 24) pointed out that “Already the second half of the 19th century saw the rise of the Estonian local history movement. This was facilitated by the rise in educational level and the formation of a national intellectual elite” (see also Leinbock 1934). “Mapping” or “salvaging” the national past was the goal that both the researchers and the researched strove to attain. This stands in stark contrast to the relationship between the anthropologists of the 1890s and their subjects, as the following extract reveals: “It is almost impossible to make the savage in the lower stages of culture understand why the questions are asked and from the limited range of his vocabulary or ideas it is often nearly as difficult to put the question before him in such a way that he can comprehend” (Garson & Read 1892, 87).

Such contrasting beginnings had major implications for the development of the respective fields of ethnology and anthropology. As a result, the methods, research ethics, principles and theories of the two disciplines have evolved somewhat differently, although common ground remains obvious.
Between the World Wars

With the birth of the new republic after the First World War, many changes affected the academic research on local life in Estonia. At the University of Tartu, where Estonian was now the language of instruction, several new disciplines became part of the curriculum, including Estonian and Finno-Ugric languages, Estonian history, archaeology, folkloristics, and ethnography. The disciplinary and institutional foundations of academic ethnography were laid by Ilmari Manninen, a Finnish folklorist who became the director of ENM and worked as a Docent of Ethnography at the University of Tartu in the 1920s.

Two main features characterized the developments in ethnography in the following two decades. First, a certain division of labor between ethnographers and folklorists that had emerged, concentrating on material and oral culture respectively, was now cemented with the founding of two separate chairs at the University of Tartu (Jaago 2003). Having acquired remarkable collections of oral heritage, the lack of material artifacts started to stand out and calls were made to concentrate on artifact collection: “work in this field, compared for instance with folklore, is lagging far behind”, as Ferdinand Leinbock (who later changed his surname to Linnus) (1934, 22) lamented the situation around the time of the establishment of the ENM in 1909. This call appears to have been so successful that, by 1923, Manninen made another plea to the public “interested in distinctive Estonian culture” that called for the description of the aspects of culture that “are not and cannot be in the museum” (Manninen 1923, 4). The same ideas were also expressed in Manninen’s opening lecture of the Chair of Ethnology at the University of Tartu in 1924 (Manninen 2005), although he stressed that “the study of old Estonian material culture should be the priority of ethnographic work here and the study of such intangible things as national customs, which are also important, should be of secondary importance” (Manninen 2005, 317). That priority remained in place for the next 60 years. The ENM and the museological aspects of the research acquired a considerably central position in Estonian ethnology, not only to supplement the material side of the project of nation building but as a site of methodological discussions of data collection, its choice and display (cf. Leete 2005).

Again, in amassing this information on Estonian culture, local activists played a considerable role. By 1931, the ENM had created a countrywide network of regular correspondents, similar to, and in fact based on, Scandinavian models (Linnus 1988, 25). Tiina Tael (2006, 8) describes how those correspondents were supplied with detailed questionnaires to which they had to give precise and reliable answers, and these were collected from several elderly residents of the studied villages, ideally in the local dialect.

The network of correspondents and collectors used for ethnographic collections is also at the heart of the second important characteristic of those years in ethnography. The overall aim of the ethnographic efforts was to “map the nation”, to describe the regional variations of the cultures’ various aspects. According to Linnus (1995, 94–95) the cartographic method developed by Manninen was perhaps the most important methodological innovation of that period, although it built on earlier topographic practices providing material and immaterial data for the ENM. Its aim was to provide
information on the uniqueness and unity of the traditions in the Estonian territory, “to
determine the geographical spread (…) and the typical variations in Estonia and to
establish ethnographic cultural areas” (Linnus 1988, 24). Such efforts in mapping the
origin and dispersion of artifacts, traditions and tales across the counties and parishes of
Estonia had a certain affinity with diffusionism. This approach was widespread in
nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American anthropology and
ethnology, and concentrated on the hypothetical spread of features between cultures.
In Estonia, Gustav Ränk (1934, 194) compared the “Peko cult” in southeastern Estonia
with similar religious groups in Russia, and concluded that Russian and Belorussian
customs “are similar to customs in the Peko cult to the degree that allows them to be
seen as genetically linked” (Ränk 1934, 198).

Globally, the reconstructions of the past in the two disciplines remained a
characteristic feature, revealing the desire to discover the human, including national,
past. The aim was to strip away the influence of the “civilized man” to reveal the
“authentic” present, which would inform readers of the “true” past. Over a period of
decades at the beginning of the twentieth century, this description was increasingly
recognized as in itself problematic, distorting the realities that anthropologists were
exposed to during fieldwork. Such criticism, especially from American anthropologists
(e.g., Benedict 1932; Boas 1920) demanded more advanced methods that would look
at the “dynamic phenomena of cultural change, and try to elucidate cultural history by
the application of the results of their studies” (Boas 1920).

The otherness of the studied cultures at the center of anthropology forced
researchers to demand greater details, which eventually led to the advancement of
field methods and a significant theoretical emphasis on epistemological questions. The
same factor also led anthropologists to try to understand societies as wholes. Aiming
to offer a “total ethnography” (Marcus & Cushman 1982, 31), anthropologists
presented descriptions of cultures and societies in their entirety. Instead of mapping
regional variations, the totality was picked apart by studying the main institutions of
the society, from its political make-up to subsistence provision, from its faith to its
family structure (e.g., Lowie 1935; Malinowski 1922; Schapera 1930). Functionalism,
which was soon to reign over the discipline of anthropology, saw “human cultures as
organic and functioning wholes” (Benedict 1932), and, as such, contributed consid-
erably to this approach. In the United States, attempts were also made to describe the
psychological nature of a people (Benedict 1934; Mead 1935). Functionalism, which
was strongly rooted in sociological thought and in social anthropology, also had a
following among European ethnologists. In Estonia, the “functionalist observation”
developed among some ethnographers in the 1930s and the representatives of the
“ethnological approach” in folkloristics.10

Otherwise, the developments in German ethnology in which diffusionism had
become the dominant paradigm continued to have a major impact on Estonian research
on the origin and dispersion of folk traits. The historical-geographic method that had
become central in the field was multidisciplinary, bringing together linguists, folklor-
ists, archeologists and historians and those close links remained important during the
Soviet era.
Cold War Period

The twentieth-century turmoil and challenges to the preservation of the nation kept Estonian ethnographers firmly focused on the national past. During the Soviet years, the discipline faced concerns that had no equivalent in the West. For a variety of reasons that we will address below, the focus of that era was on the “traditional peasant culture” (Vunder 1996). Nevertheless, contemporary topics were becoming increasingly important. The present had, however, become highly politicized, complicating the interest in modern-day matters. The ethnography of the Soviet present was a new focus most actively promoted by the Soviet authorities, beginning in the 1940s. Referring to Yuri Slezkine, Leete (2000, 176–77) suggests that the central aim of encouraging such research was the popularization of the new system. The Soviet ethnographers were expected to present their research in Marxist terms, concentrating on such topics as society’s position in the chain of socio-political formations and class structure, and depicting the base and superstructure of the society (see also Dunn and Dunn 1974).

Past and Present. The first expeditions to collect contemporary data on the new, Soviet Estonia took place in 1949, during the period of forced mass establishment of kolkhozes, just a few months before the mass deportations of that year. As Karin Konksi (2004, 14) pointed out, what was experienced in the field in this situation just could not have possibly generated the results that were demanded from the researcher.

The complexity of the contemporary situation, as well as the training that ethnographers had received and the more general interests of the institutions within which they carried out their research, meant that, for practical and institutional reasons, ethnographers were oriented to the past. Within the Soviet system, ethnography became institutionalized as an ancillary science of history (e.g., Kuznetsov 2008). According to Vunder (1996), history was central to ethnologists’ training. Research took place mostly within the “historic-geographic approach, and maps of distribution were frequently utilized” (Leete et al. 2008, 24; see also Goldberg 1984), aiming to discover and compare the earliest forms of particular heritage elements—artifacts, songs, etc. For at least a decade after World War II, the leading scientist in ethnology was Harri Moora, an archeologist who positioned ethnology as a historical science which was to study the “folk culture of the feudalist period” (Konksi 2007). Ethnologists’ training and their consequent careers continued to be strongly related to museology.

In addition to such practical reasons, the Soviet politicization of research on present phenomena caused at least some of the unwillingness among many Estonian scientists to participate in the study of contemporary life. Arved Luts, one of the rare Estonian ethnographers who did study the present, noted that contemporaneity was experienced as an imposed, unwelcomed theme (Konksi 2004, 17). Vunder (1996) lists such strategies as “dealing with historical problems and more or less superficial or descriptive research”, a certain passivity, keeping aloof from research “made to order”, and concentrating on material heritage, which allowed the Soviet Estonian
ethnographers “to protect themselves from the pressure of Marxist dogmatism” (Vunder 1996; see also Krikmann 2001).

The political reality during the Cold War separated European ethnology into Western and Eastern varieties. In Western European ethnology, the 1960s brought along considerable criticism of the material focus, and this field was abandoned for the next 20 years (Löfgren 1997). The Western tradition of ethnology approached both anthropology and other developments in various fields of cultural studies, or as Löfgren (1996), referring to Swedish developments, put it: “an anthropologization of the discipline took place.” Throughout the decades after World War II, anthropologists increasingly offered the detailed context of the studied cultures to “interpret culture” (Geertz 1973) and to understand the process of collecting data, resulting in countless publications on field methods, field ethics, and so on (e.g., Epstein & Gluckman 1967; Mitchell 1969; Rynkiewich and Spradley 1976).

Despite the Cold War separation, the paradigm shifts in European ethnology and anthropology were also reflected in Estonia. According to Vunder (1998, 23), “In the 1960s when serious changes of paradigm occurred in European ethnology, issues such as socio-historical context, art-historical aspect, the role of craftsmen in processes of innovation and the semantics of ornament were raised in the studies on Estonian folk art as well”.

In the Field. Soviet Estonian ethnographers’ research largely remained focused on material culture and/or historical perspective. Similarly to European ethnologists until the 1960s, for ethnographers in Soviet Estonia, fieldwork equaled collecting artifacts and interviewing primarily those who were expected to be in possession of knowledge regarding historical artifacts, primarily the elderly.

Pärdi (1995, 79–80) describes the approach that characterized Estonian ethnology over the whole century of collecting expeditions and pointed out that field notes were rarely if ever used in research:11 “the main disadvantage lies in the fact that man has been completely eliminated from these sources, either by chance or on purpose. (…) The aim of this kind of description was to give as “objective” a survey of culture in the past as possible. The personalities of both the questioner/collector and respondent had to be eradicated from it. They were both regarded as mediators of “historical truth”, not participants in explaining it.”

As a historical, museologically driven science, ethnography was expected to provide material for museum archives. Fieldwork was very closely related to this museological aspect, as one of the primary goals of fieldwork was seen as collecting either artifacts or data for the archives of museums. The field data was not approached by the researcher in its raw form but had to be first “treated”: having collected data and artifacts in the field and kept a diary, the ethnographer had to hand this material over to the ENM (photos, film recordings and field diaries). In addition, the ethnographer had to provide an ethnographic field report, which was filed in the Ethnographic Archives. Pärdi explains that the field diary, although an obligatory part of fieldwork, was never considered equal to “scientific” ethnographic sources (Pärdi 1995, 81). Analysis started once the information was archived according to standardized and fairly arduous norms. Thus, rather than flowing from the immediate...
experience in the field to the more mediated writing-up after fieldwork, analysis was somewhat disconnected from the fieldwork experience.

The field experience itself made its way into published research only as brief passages, and with no reference to fieldwork as a method in the rest of the text. The following example is a typical description of a field experience of the Soviet period:

“The following text is a preliminary summary of the data collected during summer fieldworks (välitöödel) in 1957–1959 in Saaremaa and Muhu” (Liiv 1962, 39). It is worth also explaining that, in Estonian practice, fieldwork (välitöö) is to this day usually referred to in its plural form välitööd, suggesting either multiple entries to the same or to several “fields”, or expeditionary entries, as a group of researchers make the same field their work. Such collective fieldwork distinguished ethnography from anthropological field traditions. In many cases, the “expeditions”, a term used particularly beginning in the Soviet time (Vunder 1996), had several members who concentrated on different aspects of the studied village or region (cf. Konksi 2004, 26). According to Vunder (1999, 33), this followed the fieldwork tradition of Tsarist Russian peripheral areas at the end of the nineteenth century. The collective nature of the short-term entry broke up the picture of the studied area into parts and generated a particular relationship between the research subjects and researchers.

Globally, the anthropological preoccupation with the politics of the field and fieldwork also occurred relatively late in the twentieth century. However, certain changes started to occur in anthropological fieldwork during decolonization in the 1950s. No longer supported by colonial infrastructure for free research access to “exotic” peoples in the colonies, anthropologists were increasingly looking for research topics closer to home, thus triggering the “repatriation of anthropology” (Marcus & Fischer 1986, 113). Nevertheless, the next important fieldwork-related development still occurred in relation to post-colonial sentiments rather than as a reflection of this “repatriation”. Reflecting on the process and politics of data collection and writing became the main preoccupation of anthropologists and, somewhat later, European ethnologists, beginning in the mid-1980s.

Emerging Reflectivity. It is during that decade that the topic of scientific authority, but also the power of textual construction of the scientific discourse, became thoroughly questioned in Western social sciences, anthropology included. Over time, especially in the United States, anthropologists became more concerned with both anthropological links to colonialism (e.g., Asad 1973) and the anthropologist’s right to represent the studied culture. At least in part, such changes came in response to mounting criticism from the members or representatives of the researched cultures (see, for example, Deloria 1969 and Said 1978), as well as the evolving readership among the subjects of research. In relation to that, the writing practices of anthropology then came under fire for contributing to a controlling and exoticizing discourse without giving voice to the subjects of research. After the publication of Writing Culture (Clifford & Marcus 1986), anthropologists started increasingly to recognize and describe presence in the field, reflecting on the implications and impact of research with increasing zeal. This paved the way for the expectation of self-reflection in research and publications. In European ethnologies, reflectivity also started to emerge, although usually not in
response to as sharp divisions between the researcher and the researched as in the classic, and still prevalent, anthropological fieldwork in non-Western locations.

Soviet Estonian ethnographers had few comparable pressures, as the home field did not trigger the same kind of epistemological reflectivity that the global inequalities between the researcher and the researched caused in anthropology. Criticism of non-reflective fieldwork did not find its way into Estonian ethnology until the 1990s. A historical, museum-centered discipline, the ethnography of the time was shaped by the institutional requirement to archive all field materials centrally. With its emphasis on archivization and on secondary data, the relationship of the ethnographers with their data was mediated much more through text than through personal relationships in the field.

Since the 1960s, the concept of folk culture had expanded both socially, including urban subjects and urban and rural relations (e.g., Mäsak 1981, 1987), and in the temporal scope. The methods in use included networks of correspondents, written questionnaires, short-term ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and visual documentation in the form of both photos, videos, and figures for the archives and, as the orientation was mostly to the past, there was ample use of archival and other historical documents and other forms of secondary data. Having originated as a science concentrating on the local peasant culture and its history, ethnology placed a strong emphasis on providing data and scientific analysis and understanding to Estonian museums and archives. The length and frequency of ethnographic fieldwork were dictated not only by the interests of the researchers but also by the interests, work plans, and resources of museums (the Estonian Museum of Ethnography and the Estonian Open Air Museum being the most important influences). The teaching of ethnologists at the University of Tartu Faculty of History focused on the historical approach, which inevitably influenced the way ethnologists understood and utilized their methods.

The relative lack of concern regarding epistemological issues in ethnography was paralleled by certain shortcomings in teaching ethnology, as Elle Vunder, the “Grand Old Lady” of Estonian ethnology, and the first elected professor of ethnology, confided in 1996. She regretted that, although “it would have been possible and necessary to apply new theoretical and methodological ideas of Western ethnology as early as the 1980s, at least in university instruction”, research in those years was methodologically weak and haphazard (Vunder 1996, 23–24). Vunder was seconded by the Estonian sociologist Henn Käärik, who noted in 1988 that in studying modern Estonian villages “ethnographic literature has so far paid little attention to the methodological basis” (Käärik 1988, 7). As a result, research remained compilative rather than analytical (Vunder 1996) and, although to some extent Estonian ethnologists did approach the new directions that had dominated European ethnology since the 1960s (cultural processes and cultural communication), later internal criticism lamented the “sham-bolic lack of theories, forced topics, monotonous approaches, descriptiveness and extremely low tempo of publication” (Vunder 1999, 34) of the late Soviet years.

Such self-deprecation may have come partly in response to the comparisons with the Western European counterparts of the Soviet ethnographers. The length and effect of the separation between the politico-geographic branches of the discipline were
described in an assessment report from the early 1990s by Mats Hellspong, an ethnologist from the Swedish Academy: “The strength of Estonian ethnology has been its well-established historic-geographic, or diffusionist, method, dating back to the period between the two world wars. [Estonian ethnologists] have used the Scandinavian tradition, abandoned over the last decades in other Nordic countries. (...) On the other hand, Estonian ethnology has not had many opportunities to pursue [newer] international developments. (...) Looking from Sweden, the current interests and methods are reminiscent of the situation in Swedish ethnology in the 1950s, although it is of course also possible to notice some more recent trends” (“Rapport om estnisk etnologi för HSFR juni 1992”, as cited in Viires 1993, 42). The 1990s were a period of amounting internal criticism and critical self-reflection among ethnologists.

**Estonian Ethnology and Anthropology Today**

In the context of newly re-established independence, the structure of the discipline as it had developed slowly changed, allowing ethnology to emerge as a renewed discipline. Once independence was restored in 1991, the Chair of Ethnology was established in 1992 in the Faculty of History. Discussions of the quality and future directions of ethnological teaching (e.g., Vunder 1996) reflected increasingly scarce resources, but also a competition with “pure” history within the Faculty of History. In the context of the newly (re-)established independence, one important role that ethnologists were perceived to play was providing data on national heritage (Runnel 1995; Vunder 1996). This may reflect the situation in the rest of the Eastern European departments more generally. In different national contexts, the reasons for concentrating on national heritage may be hidden in institutional history, research traditions, restricted funding, and public expectations, allowing some onlookers to conclude that “the CEE ethnographers/anthropologists are still confining themselves to their national frames” (Hann 2005), and “ethnology and ethnography as ‘folk’ or ‘national’ studies have remained very much alive in Europe and dominate in the Eastern parts of the continent” (Vermeulen & Alvarez Roldán 1995, 9; see also Craith, Kockel and R. Johler 2008; Kaschuba 2006).

At the same time, ethnographic and ethnological contributions to nation building have become important topics (e.g., Kannike 1994; Pärdi 1998). Several publications have strengthened the self-reflective edge of the discipline (e.g., Kuutma 2005; Kuutma & Jaago 2005; Leete 2000; Nõmmela 2007). Various expressions of identity and identity politics in both Estonia and the Arctic/northern Russia have formed an important research topic since the mid-1990s, reflecting overall developments in European ethnology, which started critically to analyze the (re)construction of “the simplistic notions of a ‘national culture’” (Löfgren 1999, 80). In this new atmosphere, it was inevitable that a certain “crisis of identity” (Pärdi 1998, 253) and a growing need for self-reflection (e.g., Kõresaar 1995; Pärdi 1995, 1998, 2000; Plaat 1996; Viires 1998; Vunder 1996, 1999), including reflection on the methodological issues in direct comparison with anthropology (Runnel 2000), would ensue.

**The Rise of Contemporaneity.** By the end of the 1990s, an abrupt generational change had taken place in Estonian ethnology, and was echoed in a rapid growth in the variety of
scholars’ interests, especially in contemporary topics. Considerable demographic changes took place among ethnologists in the 1990s. While the older generation concentrated on publishing retrospective edited volumes, the new one triggered an expansion in topics studied, and the field became much “livelier in its theoretico-methodological explorations” (Leete et al. 2008, 31). In this sense, Estonia appears to have differed considerably from its Central European counterparts, where researchers, according to Hann (2009, 217), were clearly divided according to generational position into anthropologists and “folk scientists”, with the latter viewing the emerging science of anthropology with great suspicion. The shift from a historical perspective to the study of contemporary society appears to have been very rapid in Estonia since, as Heiki Pärdi (2000, 81) mentioned, by 2000 “almost no-one” studied classic folk culture any more. Institutional guidance on what topics to pick lessened markedly and, methodologically, the new researchers were free to explore, develop, and employ a huge range of new approaches.

Ethnologists found inspiration in “new cultural history”, oral history, literary sciences, social and cultural psychology, cultural semiotics, sociology and anthropology. Narratives, either as biographies/memoirs or as presented in mostly semi-structured interviews, memories and the past, have remained the focus for many ethnologists studying Estonia, but in a new way. PhDs are completed and current doctoral research is carried out both in Estonia and abroad in both ethnology and anthropology departments (at the University of Tartu, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, the University of Washington, the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales in Paris, and at Cambridge University). The themes span both contemporary and historical topics, focused on Estonia as well as on various Finno-Ugrians in Russia but also, for instance, on subcultures in Germany and Yakutia (Russian Federation), and on gender issues in Egypt and Indonesia. In this sense, ethnology has approached its sister discipline, anthropology, considerably.

On the other hand, methodologically speaking, ethnology in Estonia has retained its main features and strengths: archival sources and memoirs have great importance in contemporary ethnological analysis, and the past and history, including the past in the present as a topical problem, take important and prominent positions in ethnological writings (see Jürgenson 2008; Köresaar 2005; Leete 2000; the articles by Kannike as well as Jõesalu and Köresaar in this special issue, etc.). Fieldwork in Estonia is short-term, and data collection in the field consists of concentrated observations and interviewing (e.g., Kannike 2002; Rattus 2007, 2011; Võsu and Kaaristo 2009; and Bardone et al. in this special issue).

Meeting Anthropologists at Home. It was via individuals’ personal pathways after 1991 that Estonian ethnology came into immediate contact with anthropology. On the one hand, studying various Arctic peoples in Russia brought several ethnologists to long-term fieldwork as it has been practiced in Anglo-American anthropology. On the other hand, several graduates with ethnology backgrounds studied abroad within the spheres of influence of anthropology. Also, various anthropologists from other European countries and the United States taught on different occasions in Estonian universities.
In 2006, two departments were established in which anthropology figured as part of the title: the Estonian Academy of Arts introduced an MA program in Folk Art and Cultural Anthropology and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology was established at the Estonian Institute of Humanities at Tallinn University, an institution that had never before offered ethnology or ethnography as areas of study. The department is, and has mostly been, staffed by non-Estonians, with only a few Estonian anthropologists with their PhDs completed or being completed at anthropology departments in Manchester, Cambridge, and London (UCL and Goldsmiths). A few Tallinn graduates have started their doctoral studies at the anthropology departments of the University of Edinburgh and the Australian National University. The staff has carried out its fieldwork in both European and non-European locations (Central and South America, India, Norway, England, Estonia, Latvia, Ireland, New Zealand and Yakutia). The common feature among the varying topics and locations is classical British long-term fieldwork (one year or longer), at the studied sites in the first instance, often followed by regular returns over several years. This international mix of researchers and field sites has resulted in an identity clearly different from the ethnological traditions in Estonia, and is based almost entirely on the British anthropology tradition.

In many countries, the two fields of anthropology and ethnology have shown considerable overlap. In some cases, the two words are used interchangeably while, in others, some differences have remained, although points of strong compatibility in theories, topical interests and regional and temporal scope have emerged (see for instance Hann et al. 2007; Kürti 1996; Sárkány 2002). In Eastern Europe, anthropologists’ interests and research locations are often similar to those of local ethnologists. This inevitably raises the question of whether there is any difference between anthropology carried out at home and ethnology practiced in its traditional setting and, as an extension, whether there is any point in the institutional separation of two disciplines with practically the same approach to more or less similar subjects of research.

Indeed, some recent debates appear to suggest that anthropology should have no place in Eastern Europe today. Chris Hann (2007) notoriously suggested that anthropology was nothing more than a Western import to Eastern Europe and offered little to the post-socialist world. This is not a neutral area of agreement on practical institutional arrangements, but a highly contentious battleground. Hann contrasts the apparently strong emphasis on local history in ethnology with the anthropological lack of temporality (Hann 2007), which he considers particularly inexcusable in home areas. Buchowski (2004) refers to hierarchies of knowledge, noting that local research was ignored or, to quote another author lamenting the conceited attitude of anthropologists, was seen in Mary Douglas’s terms as “dirt”, “a matter out of place” (Kürti & Skalník 2009, 10). Buchowski (2006) has gone so far as to compare the relationship between anthropology and ethnology to orientalism. Debates about the quality of research are similarly wounding and plentiful in Hann et al. (2007; Bošković 2007; Scheffel 2007; see also Hann 2005; Kürti 2008), and Hann has concluded that “it is generally a mistake to attempt to create a separate discipline called social anthropology, as a rival and competitor to the established intellectual communities” (2007, 2–3). Given the situation in Estonia, where precisely this creation of a separate
discipline has occurred, how does the current reality compare to this contested field in many other Eastern European countries?

In response to Hann’s article, Kalb (2007) pointed to the possibility of the coexistence of the two disciplines based on their common research traditions and the features which can merge; global debates such as those in Ribeiro and Escobar (2006) suggest that there is a great need to “foster more heterodox initiatives of scholarly networking and publishing”, since “diversity and creativity feed each other” (Ribeiro & Escobar 2006, 5–6). With the current set-up of institutions, which do not fight for resources but appear to collaborate and form alliances, Estonia provides good reasons to suggest that such an ideal is achievable.

The collaboration between Estonian ethnologists and anthropologists (as well as such other disciplines as folkloristics, semiotics, and contemporary cultural studies) takes place mostly under the auspices of the Center of Excellence in Cultural Theory (CECT), a joint research organization established in 2008. Uniting researchers from both Tartu and Tallinn Universities, it organizes theoretical seminars, intensive seminars, symposiums, and a conference once a year. CECT is also a partner of the Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts, organizing graduate schools and seminars for PhD students from various Estonian universities and academies. In addition, Estonian anthropologists and ethnologists have organized joint panels at international conferences, have coordinated some collaborative research projects, and have a joint presence on the boards of some publishing series.

The two disciplines of anthropology and ethnology have coexisted in many Western European countries over a long period of time, for example in Sweden (Gerholm 1995), Finland (Siikala 2006) and Germany (Gingrich 2005). In some cases (e.g., Slovenia, Serbia), the word “anthropology” has become part of the name of the newly renamed ethnology departments. In other cases (e.g., Bulgaria and Estonia), there are parallel departments of ethnology and anthropology in the same or at different universities. In other words, Estonia appears to have followed the path of the institutional separation of the two disciplines. Instead of a collision or digestion of the foreign discipline into the local, without it acquiring an independent foothold in the country (as Ćiubrinskas (2006) reported on the Lithuanian situation in the early 2000s), the two disciplines have their own niches in Estonia, catering to equally respected research, teaching and public needs.

Differences in the Field

Gupta and Ferguson (1997, 2) have suggested that the difference between anthropology and related disciplines lies “in the distinctive method anthropologists employ, namely fieldwork based on participant observation”. Such fieldwork is characteristically rather long; several months, usually one year or longer in one or a few connected sites. Anthropology has “branded” ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., Kuper 1983; Stocking 1992), from its practice of prolonged stays in faraway places, as a theory that is fundamentally rooted in such methods. While researching remote cultures makes it often more practical to stay longer, anthropologists come to home areas with the same expectation that a lasting presence is the key to understanding the studied people.
With the British social anthropology context as by far the greatest influence on current anthropology in Estonia, long-term fieldwork is established as the principal choice for research at the postgraduate and doctoral levels, independent of the geographic and cultural distances between the researcher and the research. Herein lies a difference that is rarely mentioned in most of the debates over Eastern European ethnological and/or anthropological studies of the region (see for instance Kürti and Skalník 2009): the difference in fieldwork. We would like to draw attention to this difference and to demonstrate the implications this has on the research carried out by the respective scholars.

The institutional context of Estonian ethnologists nowadays includes teaching anthropological fieldwork, primarily by lecturers practicing such methods in Arctic cultures. There is, however, no requirement to carry out long-term fieldwork on the post-graduate level. The reasons for such a preference are rarely explicitly discussed in ethnological self-explorations. The implicit rationale may be reflected in Marleen Nõmmela’s contemplation, in her monograph, of the fieldwork of the ethnologist Gustav Ränk:

“We can ask here what is to be considered fieldwork: is it living with the studied group for a year or could it also be a few days in a region? Understanding the concept actually depends on the competence of the researcher in terms of knowledge of the culture and goals which allow both to be seen as fieldwork. Competence is influenced by the researcher’s venture into a foreign culture where becoming accustomed takes longer, or in a familiar environment that they already know well. There is also a difference in whether the researcher wants to collect artifacts or delve deeper into some cultural realm of the studied group. (Nõmmela 2007, 27–28; see also Ruotsala 2001)

A very perceptive undergraduate collection of interviews with practicing Estonian ethnologists reveals similar reasoning around the long-term fieldwork at home. One interviewee who has carried out fieldwork both in Estonia as well as in Siberia: “When you go to study a far away culture that differs from your own, you desperately need a longer experience…. To study Estonians, for instance, you do not need several months to start to even understand anything” (Lõhmus 2004, 25). This may be relevant in other Eastern European contexts (see Banks 1996). Personal decisions on the length of fieldwork may emerge from the same rationale, or may be based on institutional requirements, financial restrictions, on traditions or practicalities. Whatever the reason, the ethnological research in Estonia is composed of short-term entries into the field for the purpose of interviews and concentrated observations, and intensive use of biographical and archival data.

As a result of this clear difference in method, Estonian anthropologists and ethnologists studying their compatriots concentrate on different topics, stress different aspects of social life, and produce results that are likely to remain starkly dissimilar. This is not to suggest that mutual learning from each other’s methods and epistemologies does not occur or is not already unfolding. Ethnologists have produced publications where the topic of fieldwork is at the center, and is also considered with reference to studying home areas (e.g., Pärdi 1995; Reha, Järv and Jaanits 2011;
Runnel 2000). Anthropologists, on the other hand, are increasingly recognizing that traditional field sites and career pathways have changed to the point that the anthropological long-term fieldwork ideal has in many ways become increasingly unattainable for many graduates and researchers, and this reality also affects the training of Estonian anthropologists. Whilst long-term fieldwork is still required from most Western European doctoral students, young anthropologists in Europe are currently called to reflect upon their solutions to the external contingencies that often prevent anthropologists from indulging in “slow science” (Rivoal & Salazar 2012).

Temporality, Identity and Change in Anthropology and Ethnology

In the last part of this article we will discuss the overarching similarities and the remaining differences between the two disciplines as they are represented in the articles of the present issue. This special issue encompasses a selection of work currently being done on Estonian society and culture by Estonian anthropologists and ethnologists. The topics of temporality, identity, and change frame both our analysis of Estonian ethnology and anthropology and the contributions to this special issue. The similarities and differences that have emerged in methodology, theory and topics define the changing identities of the two disciplines of ethnology and anthropology. At the center of this are relationships with the field, the research subjects and time (both the time of our and our research subjects’ lives and the time spent in the field).

Both ethnology and anthropology have developed from efforts to locate and understand what they study in relation to the past: for anthropology, the past was used to comprehend humanity’s present diversity while, for ethnology, it supported the search for and understanding of national identity. The changes over the twentieth century have gnawed away at such underlying nationalist and evolutionist certainties and have generated new identities for the disciplines in their shifting focuses and localities. Having lived through two decades of rapid changes, personal, group, and disciplinary identities have been in flux and this reality is reflected in the texts produced by the current generation of ethnologists and anthropologists.

Temporality is so obviously present in all our contributions that it raises the question of whether we are dealing with “people with a fundamentally historical world view” as Rausing (2004, 5) has described Estonians’ relationship with their past. In this, Estonian anthropologists researching their compatriots refute the central charge made by Hann (2007) regarding the lack of temporality in anthropological research; similarly, Estonian ethnologists, despite having moved far from the origins of national ethnography so concentrated on the past, often still creatively weave the past into their research on the present. Temporality comes through the prism of nostalgia in articles in this issue by Kannike and, in a different format, by Kõresaar and Jõesalu. For Kannike, nostalgia is observable in the ideals of renovating and furnishing homes. Through their relations to the material expressions of the “nostalgic longing for an alternative time-frame” people break free from the public representations of the past, interact with multiple potential pasts, and forge new personal identities. Their nostalgia nevertheless “goes hand in hand with active participation in civil society
and the emergence of neighborhood cultures”, making this article a study about how past and present are experienced and expressed simultaneously and how the public and private discourses on the past need to be negotiated to gain a sense of identity. The increasingly politicized, standardized, and commercialized public discourse on nostalgia has changed along with people’s private discourses. Such discourses appear to have become gradually more ambivalent, generating heterogeneous expressions of nostalgia, observable in their representations of the ideal home.

Focusing on the past in the present, Jõesalu and Kõresaar study the dynamics of post-Soviet Estonian remembrance culture, showing how the meaning of “mature socialism” (1960s–1980s) has been reflected in the autobiographical and commemorative practices of Estonians since regaining independence. The authors note that “remembering the early Soviet period is still one of the main anchor points for identity building in Estonian society”, through which memories of the rest of the twentieth century are filtered. They concentrate on more recent transformations, demonstrating how, with a change in generations, the remembrance culture has moved from the 1990s discourse on rupture to the period of normalcy that developed in the post-Stalinist decades. Like Kannike, Jõesalu and Kõresaar also discuss the changing content of nostalgia, but concentrate on how it is framed by the personal Soviet experiences of different generations.

Offering in-depth analyses of the case studies of performative acts by two tourism farms in southern Estonia, Bardone, Rattus and Jääts (this issue) similarly stand at the interface between the past and present, revealing the position of the rural past as a feeling and as play for contemporary tourism entrepreneurs. The authors discuss how rural entrepreneurs respond to changes that have occurred over the last two decades by creatively negotiating their identities on the crossroads between past rural identities and new constraints and opportunities. As they re-examine their identities, the rural entrepreneurs perform publicly their personalized interpretations of rurality, demonstrating what has remained meaningful in rapidly transformed rural life. Their article shares features with Kesküla, who has also discussed the position of tour guides in their efforts to recreate the past through their personae. Kesküla’s account of Estonian mines that have become industrial heritage sites also bestrides two eras: the present, which, similarly to the Bardone et al. account, has changed beyond recognition under the pressures of commercialization, and the past, which is referred to and used as the source for coping with changed identities in and of the mine. The past identity as a “real” miner and the setting of an actual working mine generates an authentic setting for the heritage display but, perhaps more importantly, it reproduces the old working mine relations and hierarchies for the workers themselves.

Annist’s article in this issue looks at how the past is presented in struggles over authenticity in the Seto region of southeastern Estonia. The article concentrates on the implications of institutional heritage management, which is vital for the identity creation of the Seto minority and the process of diversification of that region. She considers the Seto area to be a temporal and spatial heterotopia that represents everyday experiences in relation to the past and challenges modern Estonian culture. The change that institutional support for the Seto culture has triggered can be witnessed in the paradoxical hegemonic presence of the Seto heritage and the local loss of power and identity in negotiations with the state over local concerns.
Viewed in this framework, the articles have a great deal in common, reflecting both the shared roots of the disciplines, as well as the recent increase in fusions discussed above. And yet, the contributions to this special issue also demonstrate broad trends that mark the divide between how the two fields of anthropology and ethnology carry out research in Estonia. There are two lines of demarcation that appear to define the two fields in their home-ethnographies. On the one hand, we can observe two types of contextualizations: general and local. Ethnologists set the scene by offering the general background (i.e., the public discourse, relevant historic facts, etc.) to their topic. Anthropologists, by contrast, provide a wide range of details about the local context, which is not so much the background to the studied topic as it is a part of it. On the other hand, and related to the first demarcation, our authors appear to fall into their respective disciplinary confines in terms of which data they choose. Ethnologists concentrate on people’s representations of their life-worlds reflected in descriptions given by informants, including explanations regarding the observed phenomena. Anthropologists present descriptions of realities they have shared with their subjects, in conjunction with representations the latter give to those realities (and their descriptions; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 8–10).

Ethnologists concentrate on representations offered by the research subjects, as well as on particular cases with targeted, intensive short-term observations and follow-up interviews. Conducting interviews or observing an event over a short period of time positions the ethnologist as an unusual, extraordinary guest and requires topics where the general context offers a sufficient backdrop to understand the representational realities offered by the people. Anthropologists, in turn, seek to become part of the daily life of the research subjects during lengthy fieldwork and their varied and less targeted ways of acquiring data, including ongoing, often diffuse, and non-specific participant observation. As a result, the particular context cannot but dominate over the general.

Indeed, this has become the trademark of anthropology: for most anthropological studies, comprehending the internally consistent and plausible rationale of the particular research situation is the leading goal. Anthropology often concentrates on understanding and analyzing the logic within a particular local situation. The meanings and understanding are derived from the links of a particular phenomenon to the network of other, often daily and mundane, features in the field. It generates interest in what surfaces as locally important – which can rarely be pre-defined (cf. Leete 2001). Observing immediate social relations may challenge the representations offered by people about their lives. On the other hand, analyzing the representations in the setting of the general, wider sociopolitical context enables ethnologists to study the presence of discords in personal and public ideals. As the articles demonstrate, those differing approaches are related to different methods of research, generate two rather different perspectives on Estonian society and culture, and frame the topics that either discipline takes on.

Kannike’s article in this issue has focused on nostalgia from a large array of sources. The foci of involvement of the researcher include such public narratives as personal and collective blogs, journals, and interviews. This enables Kannike to describe the diverse and relaxed conceptualizations of history and the past as they are reflected in people’s relations with their home. From reflections in biographies,
public representations of nostalgia, and debates on the public arenas, she gauges how the experience of time and the meaning and significance of the temporal dimensions of nostalgia relate to the context of public representations of the past, and how the creation of the “private space makes it possible to escape from the constraints of public time and linear concepts of history”.

Similarly to Kannike, Jõesalu and Kõresaar offer a specific context for their study of written autobiographies by looking at the bordering sources of information: museum exhibitions, theatrical productions, written media reports, etc. As a result, they map the shared textual experiences of mnemonic communities. Looking at how mnemonic processes unfold in the public sphere parallel to the private and informal sphere, Jõesalu and Kõresaar have been able to detect and demonstrate the coexistence of two discourses of rupture and normalcy, one of which is present in both public and private discourse, and the other is reflected in the autobiographical details of personal everyday experiences.

The article by Bardone et al. presents an analysis of highly targeted observations and interviews with people involved in the studied performative interpretations of rurality. They offer the reader the general background of contemporary changes in rural Estonia into which the studied events fit. Concentrating on the specific event, the researchers provide valuable snapshots of how the observed phenomena frame people’s relations in this specific instance. For example, they describe how performers gathered at the event act “as if they are a large family of former times” (Bardone et al., this issue). Analyzing the “as if” families that gather for the specific event has allowed them to concentrate on the event, the script and the representation. This is indispensable information, and may also become the basis of new lived realities. At the same time, it is in clear contrast with the anthropological efforts to trace real family ties to understand long-term everyday arrangements and how these link to the “as if” relations.

Kesküla (this issue) carried out year-long fieldwork in the mining communities and the mining museum, and her account presents a picture of the activities of the mining guides in the local context of miners’ lives and status in the community, as well as in the context of the working mines. In her discussion of representations of ethnicity, gender, and class in the mines, she frequently refers to this local context. Although the mining industry and its legacy are part of the general national negative discourse of the Soviet past, the particular local context is very different. As the author has demonstrated, the studied mining museum domesticates, rather than alienating, the mining industry and heritage.

Annist’s original year-and-a-half-long fieldwork in centralized villages of southeastern Estonia has been complemented with later regular returns as a participant in Seto activities and to interview the locals. Her article in this issue offers an example of how anthropological research opens up the topic under scrutiny. Although present in the particular locality, her observations and interests are diffuse and guided by the opportunity to indulge in “slow science”. As a result, her analysis reveals the presence and problems of a group that has been of little relevance to the Seto ethnographers over more than a century of research on this region: locals who do not identify with Setoness. Her article considers the creation of a hegemonic group via funding that channels local diversity and marginalizes the ethnographically excluded.
Conclusion

The present article has described the encounter of Estonian ethnology and anthropology, unearthing lasting differences that possibly characterize many, if not most, of the post-Soviet academic situations, and that shed light on the importance of disciplinary histories. The history of Estonian ethnology reveals particular points which generate important comparisons with anthropology. Having arisen from the national movement of the nineteenth century, the relations between the people studied and their Estonian ethnographers substantially differed from those between anthropologists and their research subjects, despite the similar early salvaging approaches of both disciplines. In the first half of the twentieth century, Estonian ethnographers’ concentration on accumulating artifacts with the help of a widespread network of collectors, and efforts to map the nation and to analyze the spread of material features stood in contrast to anthropologists’ increasing interest in mapping the local context in ever greater detail to understand cultures as functional wholes.

The Soviet years sharpened differences further as Estonian researchers avoided ideological pressures on the academic world by directing their attention to the past and material collections. Anthropologists on the other side of the Iron Curtain honed their skills by interpreting studied cultures and, after the crisis of representation in the 1980s, recognized their tools of acquiring data as ideologically adulterated per se. Both before and at the end of the Cold War, contacts with Scandinavian and German colleagues brought to Estonian ethnography/ethnology knowledge of Western developments in the field (Vunder 1996), including in anthropology (see also Vunder 1999).

Since the 1990s, changes in Estonian ethnology have been thorough. Changes have occurred also in anthropology, and we can observe a process of rapprochement between the two disciplines, which have become institutionally closely related or even fully integrated in some countries. In some cases, this has led to the treatment of the two disciplines, when working at home, as if they were exactly the same (e.g., Kürti & Skalník 2009); in other countries, wars are being waged over which of the two is better suited for research on the post-socialist present. We have aimed, first of all, to problematize the similarity between the two disciplines when they research home areas and have pointed out one of the most central and long-running distinctions between the two disciplines as being related to the practice of fieldwork.

After establishing the presence and implications of such a difference, we have aspired to demonstrate the possibility of the harmonious coexistence of ethnology and anthropology. They share considerable common ground, yet have differences that are significant enough to justify an institutional separation that would make it possible to continue advancement of the strengths of both disciplines, allowing for mutual cross-fertilization. The existence of alternative approaches prevents the development of dominant research frameworks. The increased heterodoxy, in itself of great value, also generates greater awareness of the “social, epistemological and political conditions” (Ribeiro & Escobar 2006, 6) of the production of the disciplines – and such goals are both liberating and enriching. The articles in this special issue are a testimony to the possibility of the non-competitive co-existence of two disciplines with notable
similarities in their present theoretical and topical interests, and to the value that is derived from their lasting methodological differences.

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Notes
1 Until the 1980s, Estonian ethnology was referred to as ethnography (see Pärdi 1998 for an overview of the development of the term). In anthropology, ethnography refers to in-depth, mostly qualitative description of any studied social group, institution or phenomenon (e.g., “an ethnography of urban nomads” (Spradley 1970) “an ethnography of the Khoisan peoples” (Barnard 1992) or “an ethnography of global connection” (Tsing 2005)).

2 Estonian ethnography also closely followed the linguistic focus of Romanticism. Estonian ethnographers turned their attention to Siberian linguistic relatives: the Finno-Ugric tribes, Estonians’ “little brothers”. The vision of the linguistic unity of Finno-Ugrians had an element of social evolutionism hidden in it, as the Siberian Finno-Ugric groups were seen as displaying features that Europeanized Estonians were considered to have lost. As Ilmari Manninen noted in 1924: “We need a perspective beyond our own nation. (. . .) [L]et us think of our kindred people [I. M.’s italics], who have not yet become civilized nations and are therefore lacking a qualified work force to do research” (Manninen 2005, pp. 317–18).

3 Reference could here be made to Frazer’s The Golden Bough (Frazer 1922) as well as Boas’s collection of folklore amongst the Native Americans (e.g., Boas 1914).

4 See also Jaago 2005.

5 As the Estonian folklorist Oskar Kallas (1868–1946) suggested at the first meeting of the active members of the newly established ENM in 1909, collecting antiquated items may have had some practical purposes: “To begin with, less emphasis on collecting newer art, and more on the old art and more generally folk pieces – material artifacts, as it would be too costly to acquire modern art items and this would be beyond the financial capacity of the museum” (Leinbock 1934, 7).

6 However, A.W. Hupel, an eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pastor, publicist and linguist, had already developed an extensive network of correspondents for collecting various materials from the local folk (see Jürjo 2004).

7 It is worth mentioning that, in this interest in physical features, ethnology resembled Anglo-American anthropology of the same era, e.g., Boas (1911); Notes and Queries (Garson & Read 1892).

8 Even though the mutual acceptance, understanding and respect was somewhat overstated by the collectors who ignored the frequent suspicion and dislike that the locals displayed; see for example Kannike (1994).

9 Today, the information from this network forms a special collection at the ENM.
10 Hiiemäe (2003) offers an overview of Oskar Loorits’s activities, including his ideas in the 1930s which included a discussion of the function of religion.

11 Pärdi’s italics.

12 Interestingly, around the same period, Soviet ethnographers, who had the whole Soviet “Empire” available for research, started to increasingly venture into “exotic” field sites. We thank Anu Kannike for pointing out this fascinating opposite development in the two fields.

13 The Estonian Institute of History had contained the Ethnography/Ethnology Sector, a research institute, since 1983.

14 It should be noted that, at the University of Tartu, lectures in social and cultural anthropology were offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences beginning in 1990 by the eminent poet and author Jaan Kaplinski, standing in as a local amateur, and, beginning in 1992, by some anthropologists from the United States. In 1995, however, when the faculty was reorganized into departments, no anthropology department was established. Since then, courses in anthropology have been taught occasionally by different lecturers (see also Gross 1997).

15 The program consisted of only two staff members and was closed in 2012.

16 Admittedly, in such discussions, the value of research abroad, supposedly the greatest strength of anthropology, is not considered and the discussions appear to concentrate on whether anthropologists and ethnologists have anything different to offer in terms of researching their compatriots.

References


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