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THE STRUCTURE OF PERSONAL SPATIALITIES IN ESTONIA AND SWEDEN

Anu Masso

This article explores the personal spatialities of the majority of inhabitants in Estonia and Sweden. The author analyzed survey data and used variables about the perception of cultural distances, interest in receiving news from other countries via mass media, and contacts with people from these countries. The analysis suggests a hypothesis that in Estonia, personal spatiality is shaped primarily by institutional factors (e.g. the media, the economy). In Sweden, the formation of personal spatiality is based on versatile sources and is more autonomous with regard to the media than in a transition country such as Estonia. The analysis also demonstrates that the symbolic division of the world into East and West shapes the imagined Nordic and Baltic space and people’s thinking patterns about ‘others’.

Keywords: Personal spatialities; lifeworld structure; geo-cultural uncertainty; EU enlargement; multidimensional scaling

Subsequent to the integration of the economic and political spaces within the European Union and the 2004 eastward enlargement of the Union, there is an increasing discourse about spatial relationships within the culturally heterogeneous European Union. The majority of the research and analysis carried out in this field has focused either on political space and networking by organizations, or on economic space and capital flows related to the globalization of the world economy. For example, David Smith’s (2003) geo-political analysis of Baltic Sea cooperation examines two possible concurrent and partly coincidental paths of development – the ‘New Northern Europe’ and the ‘Nordic Near Abroad’ – based on the historical socio-economic relationships of the countries that border the Baltic Sea and the current level of cooperation in the Baltic Sea area. Marko Lehti (2003), by contrast,
uses post-communist status and East–West division as the main frameworks for his own concept of Baltic Europe.

This article aims to contribute to the discussion from the angle of individual spatial perceptions – a little-known viewpoint. Thus far there have been only a few studies of how individuals in the present-day European Union perceive changes in the political and cultural space that surrounds them (e.g. Wæver 2002; Vihalemm & Masso 2007).

Spatial perceptions can nevertheless be an important factor in political decision making. The negative results of the referendum in France and the Netherlands on the acceptance of the EU Constitutional Treaty and the EU-wide discussions concerning the nature of the Treaty are an indirect echo of people’s uncertainties about changing economic and political space. Popular perceptions of what is, and is not, appropriate in certain political and cultural spaces also have an important role to play in socio-political processes, as was demonstrated recently by the Danish ‘cartoon conflict’ (caused by Muslim reactions to cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad in one of the leading dailies in Denmark in September 2005).

The term ‘personal spatiality’ has been used in recent research to describe personal perceptions of distant and nearby space and of the limits to the application of certain laws and customary practices (Natter & Jones 1997; Dickhardt & Hauser-Schäublin 2003). It is seen as a state of mind informed by the two opposing conditions of ‘near’ and ‘distant’: ‘near’ is a known environment where familiarities, similarities, routines, and ordered self-development ensure a sense of safety and security, whereas ‘distant’ is an unknown and risky environment characterized by dissimilarities, disparities and alien ethics, morals and values.

This article analyzes the personal spatiality of the majority of the population in Estonia and Sweden. Estonia represents in this study a country of delayed modernization, recently emerged from behind the Iron Curtain and characterized by a radical strategy of marketization/democratization, rapid economic and political transition from East to West and remarkable developments in information and communication technologies (ICT). Sweden represents a stable welfare country where processes of globalization and the onset of late modernity have proceeded on a step-by-step basis. Although Estonia and Sweden share, more or less, the same neighboring countries, the historic and cultural meaning attached to these neighbors has been markedly different in each case. My intention is to analyze the potential for post-Cold War Baltic Sea cooperation and to what degree personal interactions and perceptions could support it, based on the example of these two countries.

More specifically, the study explores how people’s perceptions of neighboring countries have been formed in the aforementioned contexts. How much do people’s perceptions differ regarding the concepts of distant and near regions? Does the common area of the Baltic Sea or so-called Nordic or Baltic space exist in people’s perceptions, and which countries belong to that space? One aim of the study, on the basis of the different macro-level conditions, is to explore within an Estonian and Swedish context the validity of the often stated theory that in a modern information society people’s spatial perception becomes more subjective and less connected with the actual social structure and territory.
The article uses survey data about the perception of near and distant cultures, interest in receiving news from other countries via mass media and contacts with people from these countries, as viewed by the majority of inhabitants in Estonia and Sweden. Structural analysis of these variables is employed. The first section of this article provides an overview of the theoretical concepts of personal geo-cultural perceptions and personal spatiality; this is followed by a depiction of the background of the two countries; in the third section the operationalization of the concept of personal spatiality and the methodology are explained; the results of the empirical analysis are given in the fourth and fifth parts; and the article ends with a discussion on the basis of the findings of the study.

Personal Spatiality as a Lifeworld Structure

During the last few decades personal spatiality has become a central term not only in social theory but also in cultural geography (Lefebvre 1994; Soja 1995), sociology (Bauman 1997; Castells 1998) and media studies (Appadurai 2003). One of the many reasons for the increased use of this term could be developments in technology and, in particular, developments in ICT.

Some researchers have used the term personal spatiality to describe the perception of space. Rob Shields, for instance, argues that ‘The juggling act of making space and putting into practice spatial codes is indicative of a larger social quality to spatial coding, to spatial practices, to our representations of this “space”, and to our “imaginary geography” in which everything has a place and time’ (Shields 1997, p. 186). The term personal spatiality, as used in this article, has a strong phenomenological basis. This article uses term ‘lifeworld’ as introduced by the Austrian phenomenologist Alfred Schütz in his book Strukturen der Lebenswelt: ‘The ordinary lifeworld is a reality region wherein a person could be engaged and which one could change, and which one affects by the medium of his body’ (Schütz & Luckmann 2003, p. 29).

The point from which an individual self-orientates is the place that each concrete person occupies in space; this is the zero-point of a system of coordinates within certain dimensions which determines the distance between objects in the existing field (Schütz & Luckmann 2003, p. 71). Schütz foresees possible globalizing consequences in the development of communication technologies and increased mobility that change the lifeworld structures of individuals. He argues that, nowadays, the ‘primary zones of relevance’ – the world of immediate activities within the grasp of the individual – are less important than the ‘secondary zones of relevance’, the scope of which depends on the level of technological development of the society (see Schütz & Luckmann 2003). The possibility for individuals to construct the lifeworld autonomously and the multiplicity of lifeworlds that could be described as the main consequences of globalization on the individual level are both disregarded in Schütz and Luckmann’s approach. Other theories, however, have offered solutions to bridge this gap: the ‘virtual world of Internet’ analyzed by Saskia Sassen (1999), ‘mediascapes’ by Arjun Appadurai (2003) and Zygmunt Bauman’s apt notion that
’if the natives turn unbearably nasty, one can always try to find more bearable ones’ (Bauman 1997, p. 90).

The new logic of space could be best summarized in the context of this article by Manuel Castells’ term ‘space of flows’ which he uses instead of the formerly widely used term – the ‘space of spaces’. The latter emphasizes the relatedness to particular home territory, the former stresses the need for communication over state borders (Castells 1998, p. 377). According to Castells’ theory, the regions in the Baltic Sea area could be distinguished as ‘nodal points’ with strategically important functions and as ‘hubs’ coordinating the interactions (within and between the ‘nodes’). If a particular area (or group of individuals) fails to participate in this new networking process, this could result in geographical discontinuity or perceived uncertainty which might exclude the area from the information and economic resources essential to its development. Thus, although the emerging ‘space of flows’ has the capacity to liberate individuals and unite the territorial components of a particular region, the development of communication technologies and transport can also give rise to increasing individual geo-cultural uncertainty. This in turn could serve to separate the territorial components, because the movement of other individuals in space is not always predictable and existing knowledge (see Schütz & Luckmann 2003) is not always sufficient.

As regards coping with possible cultural risks and uncertainty, two groups of strategies are distinguished that are implemented to differing degrees in particular cases. These are, on the one hand, institutional or national strategies such as migration control and/or affiliation to international organizations and, on the other, individual strategies such as foreign language acquisition and/or having a similar habitus. As a result of developments in ICT and increased mobility, the importance of individual strategies is increasing. In this respect, the immense difference between Sweden and Estonia in terms of resources available at the national level is not reflected at the individual level, because the rapid development of ICT in Estonia offers almost the same opportunities for implementation of individual strategies.

Based on this theory, it can be assumed that on the individual level, together with increased mobility and the broadened virtual space, the perceptions of cultural certainty and uncertainty may also increase. Empirical studies in Europe indicate that people who are geographically more mobile (owing to work or other reasons) are also more adventurous, irrespective of their origins. The level of risk depends on socio-demographic background: German women, for example, are less likely than men to succeed in finding a job in another country (Verwiebe 2004).

Western countries have for a long time had opportunities to establish relationships with other countries of their choice; this process of cultural opening has occurred step-by-step in accordance with the globalization of trade, general media, technologies and so on. Yet the fall of the Iron Curtain and the emergence of new reference countries have caused these established relationships to be revised. Empirical research conducted amongst the peoples of Europe indicates that those relationships that existed already prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain are favored mainly because of a vague feeling of certainty rather than for economic reasons (Reiterer 2004). In each post-communist country, a configuration of relationships with other countries is taking shape in the form of sudden accessibility to new technologies and cultural flows; this
configuration is a unique social space in which social proximity does not always overlap with, but is strongly affected by, geographical proximity (see Vihalemm 1998). Empirical research also indicates that mobility has become a considerable social resource first and foremost in post-communist countries. For example, in 2002 the cross-border mobility of young people from Hungary and Slovakia, two former Eastern bloc countries, was nearly four times higher than in the United Kingdom. In order to give a fuller insight into the structures of the personal spatiality of the inhabitants of Estonia and Sweden, a detailed overview of the macro-level conditions that obtain in Estonia and Sweden is provided.

The Institutional and Geo-cultural Background of Spatial Relations in Estonia and Sweden

In Estonia, spatial perceptions during the Soviet period were characterized by detachment from the Western world. Although there were real opportunities to travel widely, from the Baltic states to the Caucasus, the space was still imagined as narrow and limited because a few Western media channels, most notably Finnish TV, promoted knowledge of cultures beyond the Iron Curtain. While on the one hand the international media compensated for the scarcity of actual contacts, it also created a certain feeling of deprivation, because there was no opportunity to ‘see with one’s own eyes, hear and find out’ (see Hlavín-Schulze 1998, p. 73). Two worlds existed in people’s minds: the first was a world created by the official Soviet media in which capitalist countries were portrayed as a collective enemy; the second was a world created as a result of following broadcasts by the Western media – the world of yearning, in which the West became a metaphor for freedom at the grassroots level (see Jakobson 2002).

In the early 1990s, the Estonian economic space underwent a dramatic shift from the East to the West (Vihalemm 2006). This in turn occasioned drastic developments in the field of spatiality. The collective experience of work migration, among other aspects of Soviet society, influenced the personal space of Estonians. Research indicates that this remains the case in the post-Soviet era, which has opened up new possibilities to seek work in Western countries, as well as the prospect of new immigration to Estonia. It is these issues, rather than individual cultural distances with the local Russian-speaking population, that tend to preoccupy Estonians today (see, for example, Oja 2005). Estonians’ spatial perceptions are thus created for the most part by geo-cultural narratives (return to the West), socio-economic possibilities (tourism), and institutional practices (media representations).

Sweden, by contrast, represents a welfare country of stable development, which is situated away from the center of the European Union. Swedish society, despite having achieved relative stability, has also undergone several changes during recent decades. For example, in spite of stable economic growth (an average 3.2% per annum in the period 1994–2000), Sweden has lost its leading position in the Nordic region to Finland (Hedegaard & Lindström 2003), which has used the advantages of the common economic space of the European Union to better effect. In Sweden open state borders and media broadening as a result of electronic media have co-existed,
whereas in Estonia the flows of media across the closed state borders (primarily TV) were characterized as the ultimate reason for the collapse of the totalitarian regime (e.g. Kumar 1997; Castells 1998).

Sweden has centuries-old contacts with its neighboring countries related to population movements. Over the past few decades, Sweden has become home to immigrants, especially refugees, from all over the world and consequently faces major cultural challenges in what was hitherto an essentially monocultural and liberal society. EU enlargement and increased mobility have also raised the fear of immigration and tensions in personal spatialities. Debates are held, as in many of the older EU member states, and doubts expressed about the economic benefits of the Union. Analyses indicate that even in the context of enlargement, the small markets of Estonia and the other Baltic countries played a relatively insignificant role for Sweden and Finland (see Vihalemm 2006).

On the basis of these aforementioned empirical examples one may, therefore, assume that globalization has shaped the lifeworld of the Swedes for quite a long period; spatial narratives, which circulate in the public sphere, shape the lifeworld together with many other factors (including tourism and a high standard of living). Accordingly, the empirical part of this article explores how people’s perceptions of neighboring countries are shaped in the aforementioned context – to what degree is the perception of distant and near regions different in Estonia and in Sweden? What characterizes the structures of cultural distances?

Marko Lehti and David Smith (2003) have stated that the northern part of Europe could be a good example of a regionalism in which nation-states are not the only essential actors. Still, the process should not necessarily take a similar form to nation building, where more intensive contacts between cultures automatically lead to a shared feeling of identity that could be expressed in common institutions and political practices. Current research has shown that the countries of the Baltic Sea region are not economically and socially on a comparable level (see, for example, Smith 2003; Vihalemm 2006). Furthermore, in cultural terms Estonians tend to view Sweden more in the light of positive historic and social connotations (Soovaıli 2000), whereas the Swedish media exhibit colonial thinking (Ekecrantz 2004) or carry connotations that ‘the East’ is dangerous (Vaino 2004). Accordingly, the third question of the empirical analysis concerns mutual perceptions – can a certain Nordic–Baltic space be distinguished in the spatial perceptions of Estonians and Swedes? If so, then which countries belong to such a space?

Data and Method

The concept of personal spatiality is operationalized in this study in order to make it quantitatively measurable in a sociological survey with the help of the following question: ‘How close and understandable to you are the following cultures: to a great extent; to some extent; or not at all?’ In order to explore how people’s feeling of cultural distances relate to institutional practices and personal contacts, two further questions were added: ‘How interested are you in news about the countries on the list in order to be informed about the events in these countries?’ and ‘Various contacts
give an idea of the life in a foreign country. Which contacts have you had with these countries? The options were the following: no contacts; have visited once or twice; have visited several times; spent some time in this country; have relatives or friends in this country; have work and business contacts in this country. These questions are not assumed to represent the whole concept, but just a part of personal spatiality. These variables allow us to make a structural analysis and thereby obtain a comparative picture of the ‘patterns’ of cultural distances.

This article focuses on responses in relation to 12 countries: Latvia (a neighboring country with a similar socio-economic/transition position), Finland and Sweden (neighboring countries with higher living standards), Poland and the Czech Republic (transition countries), Germany (a large EU member state which in the past had cultural hegemony in Estonia), the United Kingdom and Ireland (EU member states which are more accessible because of their language), France (a large EU member state), the United States (a world power and global cultural hegemon), Arabic countries (represented by the media as potential risk areas), Russia (represented by the media as a risk area of immediate experience), Latin America and Asia (distant exotic countries).

Survey data from the years 1991 and 1994 are used to provide some temporal comparison. These data were collected as part of the Estonian–Swedish ‘Balticom: Changing Values and Orientations in Baltic Sea Countries’ cooperation project (for detailed results see Lauristin et al. 1997).

Most of the article uses empirical data collected in Estonia and Sweden during 2002–03. The Estonian survey data come from the representative survey ‘Me, the Media and the World’, carried out by the Department of Journalism and Communication at the University of Tartu in cooperation with the research company Faktum during December 2002 and January 2003. The survey covered the use of media, interests, values and identity, attitudes towards the changes in Estonia during the past 10–15 years, lifestyle and life conditions. One of the questionnaires was completed in the form of an oral interview; the other was filled in by the respondents. The sample was composed of 15–74-year-old inhabitants, according to a territorially representative population model of Estonia. The total sample size was 1,470 persons, of whom 969 answered in Estonian and 501 answered in Russian.

A similar questionnaire was used in Sweden. The media researchers of Södertörn University College in Huddinge, Stockholm, developed a 25-page questionnaire entitled ‘Changing Mediascape’. Six hundred and seventy variables are comparable to the respective variables in the Estonian questionnaire. From December 2002 to March 2003, a mail survey was carried out in the south Stockholm region among 1,270 respondents, of whom 254 were immigrants. This article uses only majority national groups in both the Estonian and Swedish samples. National minorities are excluded from the analysis. The spatial perceptions of national minorities in Estonia and Sweden are not comparable because of the different proportions in the sample (in Estonia 34%, in Sweden 10%), but also because of different historical and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the terms ‘Swedes’ and ‘Estonians’ refer in the following analysis to ethnic and linguistic groups, and do not refer to citizenship or any other civil attachment.
The data collection methods were, to some degree, different in the two surveys. In both countries, the most reliable study method in the given culture was chosen: in Estonia a combination of interview and filling in the questionnaire on one’s own was used, and in Sweden a mail survey. Mail surveys are used frequently in Sweden, because of the high return rate. In order to reduce the sampling error to almost zero, the results of both the Estonian and Swedish studies were weighted. Samples are comparable due to the methods of analysis used in the present article – multidimensional scaling and other methods which aim to find structures of the variables that are not so sensitive to small differences in samples and socio-demographic groups. Similar comparative analyses were made and published using these two surveys (see Kalmus & Vihalemm 2006). The structure of the weighted samples used in the present article is given in table 1.

The data were analyzed in two stages. The first stage involved an analysis of general trends of cultural closeness, interest in news and the number and nature of contacts. The analysis was conducted using percentages, arithmetic means, standard deviations, and the range. The second stage sought to describe the structures of the cultural contacts, comprehensibility of cultures and the media interest and to explain the relations between the groups of variables. The author used a method called multidimensional scaling (MDS). MDS was created in order to analyze data which represent the distances between certain variables or which can be transformed by using mathematical computation (including the data on an ordinal scale). MDS represents the data as a geometric picture on a coordinate grid. In the multidimensional space thus created, the variables are represented as points so that the variables with greater correlation and shorter Euclidean distance are located closer to each other and, contrariwise, the variables with smaller correlation and longer Euclidean distances are located far from each other. The grid, on which the objects are located, may have a minimum of one and a maximum of six axes, which in the MDS analysis are called the dimensions. The dimensions are interpreted as hidden structures, according to which the variables are positioned and grouped. Thus, MDS enables the researcher to conduct two types of analysis – first, to describe the structure of the variables located in the MDS space, i.e. the location and interrelations, and second, to show the hidden structures which form the basis of the multidimensional space. The findings are presented in two parts.

### Table 1 Sample structure of the survey (%)

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<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total sample size (N)</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>1,002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–29 year olds</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>30–54 year olds</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>55–74 year olds</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
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</table>
General Tendencies in Spatial Practices

During the period 1991–2003, all of the social space indicators with which this study is concerned – interest in news, cultural closeness and contacts with other countries – changed significantly in Estonia.

Table 2 shows that in 1991–94, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, there was no sudden increase in interest towards other countries. The interest in what is going on abroad increased from 1994 to 2003, during the accession process when Estonia aimed at ‘catching up’ with the Western countries and fulfilling the requirements of the European Union. It was not only the EU member states that the Estonians became interested in. It was important also to compare Estonia with other transition countries of the same status (e.g. Poland), with other Western countries that had better socio-economic positions, and with the ‘risk country’ Russia. Thus, the media interest changed in line with a change in collective self-positioning (becoming a candidate country, improvements in the economy, etc.) rather than as a result of the opening borders.

The interest in news about other countries varies in Estonia (the data range between the largest and smallest values is 39) more than in Sweden (data range 7), at least according to the data for 2003. Estonians were very interested in news about the Nordic countries, which are close both geographically and culturally, and less interested in what happened in Asia, Arab countries and Latin America. The population of Sweden was interested similarly in EU countries, which have significant economic influence, in geographically and culturally distant countries and in the United States, a global cultural hegemon; routine spatial structures, such as McDonald’s, created by long-term consumption practices, have supported this interest (see, for example, Dickhardt & Hauser-Schäublin 2003). In general, Swedes show much greater interest in news about foreign countries than Estonians, probably because in a stable country, which has gradually opened up to the world over a long period, people have acquired the habit of receiving news about other countries.

As regards perceptions of particular cultures as close and comprehensible, there is no clear line of differentiation (range and standard deviation are rather similar). In Estonia the perceived cultural closeness to different countries is mostly similar, and in some cases even greater, than in Sweden. Attitudes differ mainly with regard to the Nordic countries. Estonians perceive Finland and Sweden as countries which are culturally understandable and close. At the same time, Swedes consider the United States and the United Kingdom, two countries exhibiting cultural hegemony, to be closer than Finland, although there are more actual economic contacts with the latter. Contacts with other countries show that the Nordic identity is a feeling of belonging that in Sweden is based on certain symbolic values rather than on a network of relationships. Despite having economic and personal contacts with Finland (14%), Swedes visit this country less often (61%) than the inhabitants of Estonia visit Latvia (73%) and Russia (64%). Still, since joining the European Union there has been a tendency towards increasing economic cooperation between Finland and Sweden, such as mergers of large Finnish and Swedish enterprises motivated by the need to create industrial complexes large enough to confront global competition. For Estonians, however, the Nordic countries are a desired identity, stemming from the
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a Was not included in the questionnaires conducted in 1991 and 1994.

b Interest in news great or somewhat in the case of Estonia, and very important, quite important, not very important in the case of Sweden.

c Closeness to the culture to some extent or to a great extent.

Source (for 1991 and 1994): Department of Journalism, University of Tartu, Balticom project.
Soviet era when the Slavic peoples perceived the Estonians as more similar to the Nordic peoples, different from and more affluent than the Russians (see also Masso 1999, 2002). A desire to belong to the cultural space of the Nordic countries was supported by family and friendship ties, at least according to the respondents’ own opinions. Comparative data from Latvia show this tendency is especially well developed amongst Estonians, i.e. the Latvians are almost 20% less interested in obtaining news about Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, but are, on the other hand, more interested in Poland and the Czech Republic, and even in Estonia.

Estonians’ active pursuit of personal contacts, including in countries without a considerable expatriate community (e.g. Germany and Latvia) is similar to that of the Swedes. In the period 1994–2003 the number of Estonians that visited Germany, Finland, or Sweden almost doubled. Over the past 10 years, Estonians have continued to make frequent visits to Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Poland. This Eastward orientation is supported by existing family and friendship ties and images created by the media rather than by increasing business contacts. Estonians have relatively few personal economic contacts with Latvia (compared to contacts with Finland), although, unlike in the case of Russia, there are no obstacles to such contacts.

Russia, with which the Estonians had a very close personal experience during the Soviet period, has lost its importance as a destination country, mainly because many young people have never been to Russia. Fewer contacts with Russia mean that the Estonian and Swedish spaces are becoming more similar to each other. However, this is not a pure cultural convergence, in that the behavioral patterns of the past, the impact of, and the narratives constructed by, the media, have given Estonians and Swedes a different understanding of the strategically important spatial nodal points.

In 2003, Estonians had fewer contacts than Swedes with geographically distant countries such as Japan, the Latin American countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Estonians’ area of contact is smaller because they do not have the same financial opportunities to travel; naturally, the wording of the question in the survey and the time factor are also important – for the majority of Estonians these countries have been accessible for less than 15 years.

Generally speaking, Sweden has the media of a developed industrial society. News is not divided geographically, i.e. into East vs. West. However, the geography of the spaces of cultural closeness and personal contacts is clearly divided into East and West, with Sweden belonging to the Western space and Estonia to the Eastern space. Patrik Åker (2005) has also arrived at the same conclusion and explains this trend by the fact that news has become more global, without geographical preferences. Estonia, unlike Sweden, has fragmented media interests, which are divided according to historical memory rather than geography. Estonians are still becoming accustomed to the advantages of an internationally open society (e.g. increased mobility, more contacts, etc.) and adjusting themselves to different cultural contacts. In Estonia, the ways in which people identify themselves in the spaces of the media and cultural openness are tangible (e.g. depending on actual contacts with a concrete country), narrative (e.g. the desirable Nordic identity based on reflections of the past) and based on concrete events discussed by the media (e.g. great interest in what is happening in Russia). Thus, the findings indicate that the attractiveness of different countries depends in Estonia on actual geo-historical factors (historical memory, neighbors), on the one
hand, and on virtual factors of cultural hegemony (language, economic power, production of mass culture) on the other, which do not depend on geographical location.

In what follows, answers to the following questions are sought: how important are virtual (through mass media) and actual mobility in creating cultural closeness with other countries/cultures? To what extent are people’s personal lifeworlds related to institutional practices such as the media, tourism, and economic and political contacts?

**Structures of Personal Spatiality in Estonia and Sweden**

In analyzing space structures in Estonia and Sweden with multidimensional scaling, the author used as scaling variables $3 \times 12$ single variables indicating news interest, cultural proximity, and cultural contacts. In MDS, the number of dimensions is determined by an S-stress criterion, i.e. the analysis focuses on the dimensions of the highest values. In this analysis, the S-stress value on a two-dimensional solution was 0.07 for Estonia and 0.06 for Sweden. As the S-stress values of the third dimension were smaller (0.06 and 0.05, respectively), a two-dimensional solution has been used. The two-dimensional solution also better fitted the hypothesis of the study.

The points in figure 1 marking Estonians’ interest in news, perception of cultural closeness and actual contacts are relatively close to each other, which indicates that cultural distances, contacts, and interest in the news are closely related. The perception of cultural closeness and interest in the news are located close to each other and most strongly correlated ($r = 0.53$). The distance between the perception of cultural closeness and contacts is somewhat smaller ($r = 0.41$). Thus, we may say that following the media is one of the essential strategies in creating personal spatialities, because despite the increase in mobility, personal contacts in foreign countries are not accessible to everybody. Correlation between contacts and interest in the news is weaker, yet statistically relevant ($r = 0.28$). Thus, we may assume that having contacts abroad does not necessarily increase interest in the news. In general, the data indicate that secondary factors are becoming more important in Estonia – personal space is extended in the form of personal contacts and even more so due to cultural symbols and meanings created by the media.

When analyzing spatial variety or the distance between the farthest points, we can see that the media, contacts, and cultural closeness/comprehensibility cover a large part of the multidimensional space. The variables illustrating Estonians’ perception of cultural closeness are gathered around the center of the axes and vary less. This means that Estonians’ opinions, both positive and negative, of other cultures are rather similar. We may say that cultural experiences are transferred – a positive attitude towards one culture creates tolerance towards other cultures and vice versa, rejection and stereotypes may be transferred to several cultures. The variables illustrating Estonians’ interest in the news about other countries are located further away from the center as compared with those of cultural closeness, which indicates that the interest in the media varies by different groups of the population. As expected, Estonians’ cultural contacts varied most in the multidimensional space. Estonians have
different financial resources, previous cultural experiences, and cultural capital (including language skills), which facilitate making contacts.

A country-by-country analysis reveals that Russia differs from other countries in terms of cultural contacts. Thus, the perception of Russia does not follow the general patterns of cultural contacts. The position of Russia in the space may express the pre-independence contacts as well as the closeness of the country and traditional economic contacts. Contacts with Russia, Latvia and Finland differ somewhat from other variables, i.e. are located closely in figure 1. For Estonians, Russia is as culturally close as several European or neighboring countries (e.g. Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Latvia). This suggests that Europeanization is not leading people to contrast themselves with Russian culture as a past reference. Estonians are as interested in news about Russia as they are in news about Finland and Sweden, which indicates that interest in Russia is similar to interest in other countries. Thus, Estonians tend to compare the actual experiences of the past with today’s cultural relations with Western countries. The analysis proves that Russia is perceived as a

![FIGURE 1 Estonians’ media interest, cultural closeness and contacts with other countries (MDS analysis).](image-url)
geographical neighbor, similar to Latvia and Finland, at least by the Estonians. Further business contacts and mutual understanding depend on the government’s foreign policy with regard to Russia and the policy adopted with regard to Russian speakers in Estonia.

Second, Finland is positioned in the multidimensional space somewhat differently from other countries, mainly with regard to personal contacts. This is probably caused by the geographical closeness of Finland and also by the fact that contacts with people from Finland enable participation in the consumption culture, which had a symbolic meaning in the early years of independence. The variables illustrating interest in news about Finland and cultural closeness to Finland are positioned close to each other, which could mean that the Finnish-language media play an important role in creating cultural closeness/distances ($r = 0.462$). The special position of Finland in the personal space of Estonians could also be explained logically by the closeness of the Finnish and Estonian languages, knowledge of the Finnish language in Estonia as a result of TV channels being available at the end of the Soviet period, as well as the developed infrastructure supporting tourism between Estonia and Finland (daily fast ferry, hydrofoil and flight connections, etc.).

Latvia is positioned in the multidimensional space similarly to Finland, i.e. separately from other variables. However, the role of the interest in news in shaping cultural closeness is significantly smaller ($r = 0.4$). The variable illustrating contacts with Latvia is positioned close to groups of variables that characterize cultural closeness and interest in news with other countries, indicating that they are related to each other. Regression analysis indicates that contacts with Latvia are an important reference in opening up to other cultures (standardized $\beta$ coefficient of 0.14 compared with the average of other countries of 0.055) and in being interested in other countries (standardized $\beta$ coefficient of 0.2 compared with the average of other countries of 0.048).

With regard to Sweden and Germany, correlations between single variables were also significant: correlations between contacts and interest in the news (Sweden 0.24, Germany 0.237) and between contacts and cultural closeness were somewhat weaker (Sweden 0.385, Germany 0.361); the correlation between cultural closeness and interest in the news was remarkably stronger (Sweden 0.437, Germany 0.447). Thus, the feeling of cultural closeness/distance with regard to these countries is not necessarily related only to geographical closeness and historic contacts but also by the possibility of obtaining information about these countries from Estonian or foreign media.

The United States is positioned in figure 1 similarly to Sweden and Germany. The only difference is that the correlation between interest in news about the United States and cultural distances is weaker (for the United States $r = 0.389$, for Sweden and Germany the average is 0.442). This indicates that the media support the perception of closeness to countries that are historically and geographically essential, but also facilitate Americanization and the extension of English as a *lingua franca*. Localized globalization patterns created by the local media and based on regional references, i.e. the effects of globalism imposed upon the peripheral countries, such as heritage tourism and free trade, are all equally important.
Arabic countries, Latin America and Asia form a relatively separate group. As the media representation of these regions is relatively modest and they are not the most popular destination countries, cultural closeness is formed on the basis of occasional, yet more versatile and subject-centered, information sources. Similarly, the transition countries of Poland and the Czech Republic and the large EU member states of the United Kingdom and France form a separate group; the respective variables are positioned relatively homogeneously close to the center of the axes, which means that there is relatively little variation. Thus, personal spatiality with regard to these countries and their culture is formed more homogeneously and related more to the media than by personal contacts.

Table 3 presents numeric coordinates of the variables of interest in the news, cultural closeness and contacts in the breakdown of two MDS dimensions. In MDS analysis, a specific dimension includes groups of certain variables, making it easier to describe different patterns of answers. The table shows that, irrespective of whether we are dealing with the first or the second dimension, both represent similar patterns of personal spatiality. This means that Sweden, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Russia are positioned closer to the positive end of the scale; the United Kingdom, Arabic countries, Latin American countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, France, Asia and the United States are positioned close to zero or the negative end of the scale. Thus, irrespective of which concrete variables are analyzed, Estonians’ perceptions of personal cultural space follow certain patterns of closeness/distance.

Thus, the two dimensions have a rather similar structure, but vary greatly (the range in the first dimension is 4.23, and 2.3 in the second). This indicates that secondary relevance zones of the lifeworld have become more accessible for Estonians, which has increased people’s ability to construct their lifeworlds independently. However, different population groups have different opportunities to create and use transcultural networks in reality. Table 3 shows that countries which are geographically and historically close and culturally/linguistically heterogeneous with different representation in the media are positioned in the first dimension. Countries which are not so close geographically and historically, yet are culturally more homogeneous and have similar media representation, are gathered in the second dimension. The findings indicate that a country’s physical location and its location in the historical memory play an important role in shaping people’s personal space.

Estonians’ perception of space may be considered rather obvious: there are clear institutional factors and references to the past (Russia, Latvia). The latter represents Bauman’s ‘globally mobile high up’ lifeworld strategy, according to which the support of a familiar community is used in order to adjust to new cultural contacts (see Bauman 1997). Thus while Peeter Vihalemm’s (2006) empirical analysis argues that Estonia is opening up mainly through the ‘gated community’ of the Nordic countries based on present-day contacts with these territories, the results of this analysis indicate that memory communities, i.e. remembrance of past positive cultural influences from these countries, are also important.

Figure 2 illustrates the structures of cultural closeness and interest in the news and personal contacts in Sweden; it indicates that, compared with Estonia, the three groups of variables are positioned further apart from each other. However, correlations between different groups are significant. As in Estonia, correlations in
Sweden between cultural closeness and contacts \( (r = 0.35) \) and interest in the news and contacts \( (r = 0.24) \) are weak yet significant, which indicates that representations play a certain role in creating one’s personal spatiality. The correlation between cultural closeness and interest in the news is stronger \( (r = 0.4) \). The relatively weaker correlation between these two groups as compared to Estonia (Estonia \( r = 0.53 \)) may be caused by the fact that in a welfare and media society the choice of information sources is greater and the members of society are less willing to use the media.
Spatial variety or distance between the farthest points is different in all groups. The variables of interest in the news vary least and are positioned in the right-hand corner of the MDS space, which indicates that Sweden is a fully formed media society. The variables of cultural closeness vary more (i.e. different information sources, experiences, etc.) and influence the formation of attitudes towards a concrete culture. Clear personal cultural preferences have formed as a result of the longer period of spatial openness in Sweden. The circle around the variables is ‘stretched out’, meaning that single cultural experiences are rather autonomous, i.e. having contacts with a culture neither increases nor decreases cultural distance when people are exposed to other cultures. The variables of personal contacts vary most, which indicates experiences with a concrete country are autonomous and preferences are fully formed in relation to personal experiences, lifestyle, and business and personal interests.

Finland is positioned in the multidimensional space somewhat differently from other countries, yet mainly with regard to personal contacts and cultural closeness. This may mean that the position of Finnish culture in Swedes’ personal space owes less to historic memory (i.e. historic hegemony and Finland as a country ruled by Sweden).
than it does to a tolerant attitude and everyday contacts with the minority groups in Sweden. However, attitudes towards Finland may also be influenced by the fact that both Finland and Sweden are members of the Nordic Council of Ministers, which creates a basis for mutual understanding despite different languages.

Another group, which can be distinguished by similar positions of cultural contacts and perceived closeness in the MDS space, is formed by Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and France. This means that Swedes have a clear understanding and fully formed relations with other large Western countries. The United States and the United Kingdom are positioned closer to each other and away from the other two countries because these cultures are more understandable in that English is the foreign language that Swedes know best. With regard to all four countries, the relationship between cultural closeness and interest in the news illustrates the general trend in the data on Sweden – interest in the news plays an important role (although not as important as in Estonia) in creating personal spatiality.

A third and relatively compact group is formed by the Czech Republic, Poland, Estonia, Asian countries, Russia, and the countries of Latin America, at least with regard to the variables of cultural closeness and contacts. These are, on the one hand, geographically distant countries (Asia, Latin America) and transition countries (the Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia and Russia) on the other. The fact that these variables are clustered together suggests that they do not vary much, i.e. contacts with and the feelings of personal spatiality towards these countries are formed by chance, depending on the preferences of individuals. The fact that Estonia is placed in this group indicates that there is a one-sided distance between the relations of the new and the old EU member states despite the relatively similar geographical location of Estonia and Sweden by the Baltic Sea. The new EU member states of Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Poland form a separate group with regard to interest in the news. This is logical because as a part of the global open media, information about these countries has been available for only 15 years.

Table 3 presents numeric coordinates of the variables of interest in the news, cultural closeness and contacts in the breakdown of two MDS dimensions. The table shows that the two different dimensions of the MDS analysis, each including concrete groups of variables, describe certain perceptions of cultural closeness/distance. Unlike the data on Estonia, it is not possible to distinguish clear ‘poles’ of cultural closeness/distance on the basis of positive or negative values of the coordinates. The fact that different countries are grouped according to the variables of interest in the news or personal contacts indicates that there may be two possible sources of personal spatiality in Sweden – news and personal contacts.

Swedes express higher cultural distances with regard to countries that have been involved in the changes of the last decade (Eastern Europe, the Balkans). Finland has similar coordinates with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans (see contacts and cultural closeness), which may be an indication that cultural uncertainty is not felt only when in contact with a geographically distant and socio-culturally unfamiliar country; it may also be the fear of losing a safe and familiar space. On the other hand, the relatively marginal position of Finland in the perceptions of Swedes could also refer to the exclusion of Finland from the personal space oriented to culturally close Nordic countries like Norway and Denmark, which were left out of the current
empirical analysis. Thus, geographical and historic closeness does not have a clear (homogenizing) impact on the formation of the patterns of the personal cultural space of Swedes as it does in Estonia. The structure of the personal cultural space of Swedes follows to a degree the logic of a psychological community, i.e. personal contacts and sentiments of trust, cooperation, and altruism are important. An example is the special cultural closeness of Finland to Sweden, formed as a result of personal contacts with the Finnish minority in Sweden. Similarly, the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom have an important role in the personal cultural space of Swedes – Swedes have more personal and business contacts with people from these countries. Thus, Western countries are clustered at one end of the psychological community scale, and geographically distant countries and transitional countries are at the other.

In conclusion we may say that the above analysis of the Estonian and Swedish spatial structures enabled us to differentiate between two different spaces of personal relations. The Swedish space is autonomous and hybrid, i.e. the collective patterns of personal space are becoming weaker in Sweden and the individualized patterns of personal space are formed by the so-called subjective perception of a psychological community. This is probably caused by longer traditions of free and open media, better standards of living and greater mobility of the population as a result of longer experience with open borders. The Estonian space is more related to the development of institutions and society and is more homogeneous. The collective patterns of personal space are shaped by geo-historic factors.

Conclusion

An analysis of the personal spatiality of the people of Estonia and Sweden enabled the author to study the relation of secondary relevance factors (mass media) and actual mobility to the creation of personal spatiality and closeness towards other countries’ cultures.

The results of the analysis indicate that the personal spatiality of Estonians and their perception of different cultures are intertwined with collective space; they are shaped by institutional and socio-economic factors (the media, opportunities to travel). The formation of the Estonian spatial structures is closely related to geographical closeness and the historic memory of the community, i.e. the fact that it is easier to understand the culture of geographically close countries helps in making contacts with distant countries. In Estonia, spatial structures are more intertwined with each other, which means that Estonians’ personal spatiality is extended, on the one hand, in the form of direct contacts and, on the other, under the influence of cultural symbols and meanings created by the media.

The lifeworld and perception of cultural distance of the Swedes is based on more versatile (information) sources and is more autonomous with regard to the media than in Estonia, a country that has only recently opened its borders. In the Swedish case, contacts do not arise out of interest in the news or create cultural distance or closeness; personal spatiality is not created by means of the media etc. However, since Sweden is characterized by delineated structures in personal spatiality, the longer experience of global space has not blurred the perception of familiar and close space.
The emerging of new references (accession of the former Eastern bloc countries to the European Union) has created new opportunities to redefine the familiar Nordic space. Hence, the formation of Swedes’ personal cultural space is influenced by subjective and individual references.

Thus, according to the analysis, the creation of a Baltic Sea region is a modern process, as stated in previous studies (see, for example, Wæver 2002), since past narratives still play an important role in spatial perceptions (mostly in the case of Estonia). On the other hand, it is also post-modern, since the networks are created not institutionally but freely constructed by the rising interactions between individuals (in the case of Sweden).

The analysis empirically affirmed the thesis that, besides the real and virtual spatial dimensions described in many spatial theories, there is a third dimension of social space that operates as a structuring factor of lifeworlds – e.g. the personal cultural spaces of Estonians and Swedes are characterized by the existence of concrete references and the addressing of communication to concrete addressees, i.e. to Russia, Finland and Latvia in Estonia, and to Finland, Germany, the Unite States and the United Kingdom in Sweden. Although both countries follow certain patterns of transcultural communication, different patterns of personal spatiality may become an obstacle in communication between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ EU countries. For example, the reasons for personal spatiality are geo-historic in Estonia and psychological in Sweden. The notion of East–West, which according to previous studies still exists and is based on a mutual enemy image (Haukkala 2003), may become, as argued in this study, a viable communication dimension and basis for common understanding, but only if the psychological links between Estonia and Sweden, which are based on geographic closeness, become more relevant and the relationships based on historic memory and contrast lose their importance.

Thus, the symbolic division of the world, rather than political changes or capital flows or geographic divisions, forms the imaginary Nordic and Baltic space and people’s thinking patterns about ‘others’. In this way the analysis indicated that mobility in the global space is a cultural process, a form of learning and sharing rather than a demographic (migration) or economic phenomenon. The results of the analysis show that such global mental geographies do not carry the idea of a national state as suggested by previous analysis (see Åker 2005) but rather are based on broader cultural or regional frameworks.

Acknowledgements
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Notes
1 The original text: ‘Die alltägliche Lebenswelt ist die Wirklichkeitsregion, in die der Mensch eingreifen und die er verändern kann, indem er in ihr durch die Vermittlung seines Leibes wirkt’.
David Bell has doubted the modern myth of mobility, arguing that although in
general mobility is attributed to the Americans (changing their places of work and
living, the number of remarriages, etc.), Americans move to a house within 50
miles of the place where they were born and raised, and live more than half of
their lives close to their childhood home (Bell 1993, p. 105).

Minority groups in Estonia constitute a third of the total population, and are
mainly Russian speakers who arrived in Estonia during the Soviet era and stayed
after the restoration of independence. Minority groups in Estonia are a
heterogeneous group of people, differentiated by their future aims, social capital,
and cultural and political allegiances. For example, from the total ethnic Russian
population in Estonia, almost 41% have Estonian citizenship, 21% have Russian
citizenship, 0.3% citizenship from some other state, and 38% do not have any
citizenship (i.e. possess aliens’ passports). In Sweden almost 12% of residents were
born abroad. The largest immigrant groups are from Finland, the former
Yugoslavia, Iraq and the other Nordic countries.

When talking about Nordic affiliation two more countries are important,
especially for Sweden – Norway and Denmark. In this study only interest in the
news, and contacts with these countries were included in the 2003 survey
questionnaire. Questions concerning perceived cultural closeness to these
countries were not asked in either the Estonian or the Swedish questionnaire,
and for this reason we could not use these countries in our analysis. However, the
analysis showed an increasing interest in the news about Denmark and Norway
among Estonians (26% in 1991, 37% in 1994 and 86% in 2003). Despite this,
actual Estonian contacts with these countries have been modest (5% in 1994 and
17% in 2003). Swedes, by contrast, feel it is not only important to be aware of
what is happening in these countries (83%), but also to visit them (63%) and to
have economic or personal contacts (9%).

Multidimensional scaling (MDS) is a set of data analysis techniques similar to
cluster and factor analyses. The advantage of MDS analysis compared with the
other two methods is that it allows the graphic representation of the grouping of a
large number of variables and description of the hidden dimensions on the basis of
which the groups are formed. While a factor analysis based on correlation analysis
takes into account the correlations between pairs of variables and the result
expresses the correlation of the variable with a concrete factor, in MDS distances
are calculated on the basis of all inter-point distances.

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