

Modernisation and development of environmental consciousness in Estonia: a paradigmatic approach

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Abstract

The article takes a closer look at the formation dynamics of environmental consciousness of the post-socialist country Estonia. The development of knowledge, attitudes and practices with regard to the environment are nowadays mostly explained in terms of media effects and information distribution. Too little emphasis is given to the analysis of the structural changes in society. The article aims to fill this gap, by analysing how the structural change of society is related with the change in social actors' concern over the natural environment and natural resources. Inspired by modernisation theories, the author aims to refresh the discussion of anthropocentric and environmental world-views and approaches the analysis through three ideal-type paradigms of modern environmental consciousness: social, environmental, and ecological. The formation of paradigms has been analysed through diverse empirical data on environmental policies, media, and pro-environmental civic and consumer practices. The analysis revealed that the formation of the environmental consciousness in post-Soviet Estonia have been shaped by the clash and intertwining of Soviet and (Western) European types of modernity. This combination creates double-standards in the public discussion and management of the environmental issues because the appropriation of the Western European environmental norms has taken place in the form of translation-like social learning. This condition of environmental consciousness may lead to different kinds of environmental and social risks than in Western European societies that may need different kinds of policy solutions.

Key words: modernisation, environmental consciousness, transition, media, post-Soviet, Eastern Europe

1. Challenge to investigate modernisation and environmental consciousness

In the course of the development of modern society, the nature of environmental consciousness has changed remarkably. Traditional nature-related knowledge and practices have been replaced by the creation, communication, reception, and implementation of expert and scientific information. Theorists of late modernity (whether *second*, *post-*, *high*, *radicalised*, *complex*, *reflexive*, *liquid* etc.) have pointed at the characteristic features of the modern society – complexity, uncertainty, and risk, limited resources, individualised responsibility and access to meaning, specialised knowledge and lack of reference frames – that constitute the base for contemporary environmental conflicts.

Ulrich Beck, whose worry about the degradation of nature has been the most apparent (Beck 1992, 1995, 1996; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), has dealt mostly with the processes of individualisation and the loss of collective sources of meaning. Niklas Luhmann (1989), in his *Ecological communication*, refers to the inability of society to form a holistic view of the environment. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) views solid form of modernity that made it possible to take control of nature now contrasted with a liquid one, which, due to a lack of time for ‘solidification’, diffuses frames of references. Anthony Giddens (1990) highlights the heightened sense of uncertainty within the social, as radicalising modernity uproots individuals from time and space. In addition, Scott Lash (1994) is troubled by the individuals’ inability to form reflective communities.

The analysis how modernity forms the condition of the environment and the social actors’ consciousness about it has until recently been focused to Western European societies. Although there are perspectives on modernity that exclude Soviet republics before the fall of the Soviet Union from the modernity discourse (e.g. Beck 2002: 2), this article, in contrast, treats Soviet society as modern and takes a closer look at the interaction of Eastern and Western modernity.

A. Giddens (1994) and J. Habermas (1976, 1989) emphasise that the institutions of society emanate from its cultural tradition. Therefore, different cultures may respond to the challenge of modernisation in different ways. This is one reason why

the investigation of modernity cannot be limited to the investigation of the change in 'system coordinates' (Beck *et al.*, 2003), but must include their constitutive tradition.

Modernisation is above all an issue of social dynamics and learning processes. Changes in meaning systems enforce individual reactions to social dynamics, which in turn shape the social structure of a society. It is particularly important which agents have closer access to the formation of social dynamics and which agents represent resistance to it. This brings in differences in modernisation processes. The fall of the Soviet Union is often mentioned as an important milestone of modernisation, the beginning of reflexive modernity for the Western world. The peculiarities and paths of the modernisation of (the western part of) the former Soviet Union and its impacts on environmental consciousness are not, however, much discussed in academia.

To differentiate the approach of this article to structural changes from the mainstream research of (pro-)environmental awareness, the concept of environmental consciousness is mainly used. *Awareness* is more appropriate to signify a narrower, technical kind of knowledge, which is the outcome of different types of media consumption (for example awareness of eco-labels or CO₂ footprint). *Environmental consciousness* is more appropriate to signify an understanding of the natural environment in the context of life-world actualisation, which is shaped by the aforementioned structural conditions. It is about the analysis of available meaningful communications and their natural order, while the major part of this order remains inaccessible to the life-world. While environmental awareness is about the reception of alarming messages, environmental consciousness is about relations that connect and separate individuals with one or another kind of nature. The analysis of environmental consciousness is about uncovering the taken-for-granted in life-world communication. Therefore, the approach of this analysis is similar to those (Rannikko 1996; Leiserowitz, Fernandez, 2007; Wielewska, Sikorska, 2007) who approach consciousness as manifest discourse. This article adds to the scarce research that follows the development of an environmental consciousness through the historical periodisation of society.

To illustrate the change in the inter-relationships between the social structure and environmental consciousness over time, the paradigms of environmental consciousness are operationalised.

2. Paradigms of environmental consciousness

To differentiate environmental paradigms by the development of modernity, the concepts of anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric (or environmental) world-view are used that are known in the environmental philosophy and environmental ethics (e.g. Plumwood 1996; Boddice 2011). Many researchers have claimed that the term *environmental* should be replaced by the term *ecological* in order to avoid outmoded definitions (e.g. Dunlap *et al.*, 2000). Here both concepts are used for more nuanced differentiation.

In Table 1 the paradigms are shown in a schematic interpretation.

Table 1. Paradigmatic formation of environmental consciousness

Indicators	Social paradigm	Environmental paradigm	Ecological paradigm
meaning of nature	nature is culturally external, reified as wilderness	nature is a resource, but also a threat to human beings	there are many clashing ideas of what nature is
roots of problem awareness	direct contact with damage, feeling of disorder or uncleanliness	mostly reception of mediated expert information	conflicts between competing expert information and personal predispositions
rationalisation of environmental problems	environmental problems perceived in a life-world form a challenge to the preparedness of the institutions	environmental problems are a matter of sufficient adjustment of technology and control	environmental problems are of a complex nature, the solution is a central issue for economic development

Indicators	Social paradigm	Environmental paradigm	Ecological paradigm
environmental identity of individuals	uncritical mix of cultural norms and freedom to consume	green identity building, ecological consumerism	critique of modern expertise, tribalism, risk calculators, eco-consumers, protesters
environment-related practices	moral exclusion, denial of (the seriousness of) the problems	aware behaviour within the limits offered by the infrastructure - consumer practices and political choices	highly sophisticated consumer behaviour, individualised choices, return to reinvented traditions, protest, and estrangement

- (1) The social (or anthropocentric) paradigm corresponds to the general worldview of the early industrial society, which defines nature as a resource – culturally external. This makes acknowledgement of environmental problems difficult. For example, S. Opatow and L. Weiss (2000) have found that seeing the environment as *out there* or *other* instead of *within us* shows exclusion and denial. If acknowledged, environmental problems are perceived as a contradiction to purity and order, or to personal well-being. Actualised environmental problems are interpreted as simple and transitory threats (accidents happen). Environment-related practices are not defined as environmentally alarmed; they are primarily based on (negative) social norms (though shall not litter, make a fire etc.) and pragmatically shaped routines.
- (2) The environmental paradigm gathers strength in simple modernity, the developed industrial society. In terms of this paradigm, nature is still treated as a resource, but also as a culture theme – frequent coping with environmental problems has brought the environment back to the culturally internal. Therefore, environmentalism is perceived as a social norm. This

world-view represents trust in science, technology, and the liberal economy. According to the environmental paradigm, environmental endangerment and threats from nature originate from the insufficient adjustment of technology (for example, insufficient information distribution) and *excessive* exploitation of natural resources. The environmental paradigm emphasises the importance of sustainable development and *positivist* (i.e. the individual does not have to give up anything) environmental practices, e.g. pro-environmental consumption.

- (3) The ecological paradigm arises in late modernity, the risk society. This paradigm originates from the cognition of ambivalence in risk and 'healing' messages. The ambiguity of the interpretation of environmental problems endangers the rationality of the environmental paradigm and trust in the liberal economy. Ecological thinkers realise that there are no linear solutions to complex problems. No actual distinction can be established between the practices of environmentally and ecologically conscious individuals. The difference might be found only in the rationalisation of behaviour. As the environmental paradigm justifies action with trust in expert systems and sub-policies, the ecological paradigm adjusts individualised risk strategies to given circumstances. This might result in a constant struggle to be aware of a risk situation (e.g. which kind of fish contain fewer dioxins), in re-invention of the traditional lifestyle, in protest against institutionalisation, or in mourning (acknowledgement of personal lack of ability).

Generally, all three modern views of nature are treated as opposites to the construct of the 'traditional view' as in traditional society the environment was not observable from a distance, being the base formula of the life-world instead. The remnants of the 'pre-modern paradigm' are followed in the analysis through reported traditional nature relations: gardening, berry picking, nature observations etc., but it must be acknowledged that the meaning of those is changing according to the structural change.

3. Periodisation and analysis of environmental consciousness of Soviet and post-Soviet Estonia

3.1. Soviet modernity (the 1980s)

Although there are perspectives on modernity that exclude Soviet republics before the fall of the Soviet Union from the modernity discourse (e.g. U. Beck), this article compares the rationality of the social system of the Soviet Union and the developed Western countries. While Western modernity was rationalised on the basis of cost-benefit analysis and the well-being of individuals, Soviet system rationalised itself by five-year production plans and loyalty to the Communist Party. The ultimate goal for the Soviet economic rationality was to outperform the West in economic competition (Waller 2010). The peculiarity of Soviet industrialism was that the causes of environmental problems were attributed to cultural and social reasons (e.g. a lack of Soviet morality, see Lauristin *et al.*, 1985a), not economic-technological reasons as in the Western industrial societies. According to Soviet ideology, environmental problems were intrinsic only to capitalist societies.

Soviet society lived under the illusion of endless natural resources (Matley 1966). Unreasonable extensive production and experiments on nature disrupted the culture of Protestant frugality and the attribution of sacredness to nature. Although norms to protect nature existed, there was no control over the implementation of them, because norm levels were basically classified (e.g. amounts of pesticides) – (Koppel 1988; see also Bostrom *et al.*, 2006).

The decision-making processes regarding environmental issues (as with all other issues) took place without public discussion, by politicised science, industries, and state apparatuses (Kochtcheeva 2002; Rinkevičius 2006; van Assche *et al.*, 2010; Waller 2010). Information about environmental problems and risks was classified (information was considered a privilege rather than a right; see e.g. de Smaele 2007). The media focused a relatively large amount of attention on nature, but the main focus was on harmless issues, e.g. ecological education, natural resources, and parks (Lauristin 1987); environmental problems were rarely identified (Lauristin *et al.* 1985a).

Despite rapid urbanisation, a relatively large number of inhabitants were occupied in the sector of (intensive) agriculture. The practices of the natural economy

were relatively vital (partly due to the low quality of retail products), e.g. berry picking in the woods, gardening, and preservation. The ineffective economic system kept people from extensive consumerism (due to the lack of variety and small number of products), and information about the health and environmental impacts of industrial goods was not provided. Waste problems were not acknowledged during the Soviet period. The views of personal needs (i.e. consumerism), as well as subjective activity, were ignored (Lauristin *et al.*, 1985b). The absence of private property exacerbated carelessness towards the environment among individuals.

On the surface, nature was seemingly important for both individuals and the Soviet system, but this was mostly compensatory. To the system, nature was apolitical, and for individuals it was a convenient umbrella under which national-political issues could be discussed. For example, the Estonian Society for Nature Conservation (founded in 1966), though controlled by the Party, united the Estonian cultural elite in their search for national determination (Estonian..., 2012). The readership of the journal *Eesti Loodus* (Estonian Nature) was, in the 1980s, remarkably high (about 25% of the inhabitants), but this was partly the result of the overall deficit of information and the broad thematic scope of the journal (Lauristin, Vihalemm, 1988; Vihalemm, Kõuts, 2004).

Thus, the planned economy subordinated nature to the Soviet system, showing the culturally external meaning of nature. The denial of environmental problems, lack of information, and absence of inner reflexivity of the society characteristic to the social, anthropocentric paradigm, increased the environmental problems and prevented the formation of the modern environmental paradigm. Although the democratic West had similar exploitive effects on nature, it reacted to environmental problems as they became problematic for the legitimacy of economic rationality. As the authoritarian society limited inner reflexivity, environmental problems could not be problematised publicly. This impeded the development of modern pro-environmental practices, while industrialism and lack of private property disrupted the culture of the Protestant ethic. Although the societal context transmitted non-problematic messages about the environment, the individuals experienced the opposite: cities white with cement dust, the Chernobyl accident, water pollution, acid rain,

etc. To make sense of the officially published information, individuals had to read between the lines and make the individual decisions about the risks. This condition has some common features with the reflexive modernity that is also characterised by the individual risk strategies and duties. Still, as these strategies were not supported by institutional means (that would confirm the existence of risks), the environmental practices and risk strategies specific to environmental and ecological paradigm did not emerge. The knowledge about the ways to tackle environmental problems remained in the narrow circle of experts and scientists who knew how to outwit rigid Soviet institutions.

3.2. The political breakthrough to independence (1988-1991)

In the 1980s, the Soviet Union planned to establish large phosphorite mines in an ecologically sensitive region of Estonia. Despite a long process of classification, information about the mines became public and became a motivation for a national movement to take public action. In 1989, in the light of the public reaction to the phosphorite issue, the Supreme Council of Estonia signed on to the conception of environmental production and rational exploitation of natural resources (Raukas 1997).

The media were freed from censorship and promoted highly critical discussions of national values, as well as environmental issues (Lauristin, Vihalemm, 1997a). Risks that had been hidden till then (e.g. pesticides, issues of underground water, and phosphorite pollution) were visible in media and public debates. The global discussion of climate change, ozone layers and biodiversity was also reflected in Estonian media – as part of the local ‘anti-phosphorite’ discourse.

A highly reflective national debate, which brought about a short-lived wave of an ecological paradigm of environmental consciousness, treated environmental problems from the system-critical point of view (i.e. complexity and contradiction).

Environmental movements primarily supported national self-awareness and the right to decide on environmental issues locally (Aare 1999; Rinkevičius 2006; Bostrom *et al.*, 2010; Börzel, Buzogany, 2010). At the same time environmental awakening was taking place in the West (Burtscher 1993; Rannikko 1996; Dunlap 1998; Mazur 1998). Due to *glasnost*, there was more access to information, and Western and Eastern environmentalism could join in and support common discourse.

The concern about national natural resources and the water supply united environmentally concerned people. These new movements served as the first political parties when Estonia re-gained independence in August 1991. The wave of the internationalisation of NGOs (Rannikko 1996; Waller 2010) brought donor NGOs to Estonia (e.g. the World Wildlife Fund, and Friends of the Earth). Soon after that, in the circumstances of deficits, economic degeneration, and the rapid growth of inflation, environmental issues lost their importance (see Table 2), as the enemy in the form of the Soviet Union was no longer as apparent. By 1992, the environmental organisations had lost their strength and popularity, which shows that the environmental movement did not act on environmental issues, but on the nationalist concern.

Table 2. Dynamics of the issues of concern of social life, 1988-1990, open question, Estonians (percentage of references)

Issues of concern of social life	1988 July	1989 April	1989 June	1989 September	1990 January
Environmental protection	58	51	27	15	15
Economic development	58	37	55	50	41
Political sovereignty	12	29	34	25	45

Source: *Avalik...* (1990)

The beginning of late modernity (often dated to the end of the 1980s) for the West and East was different from the point of view of environmental consciousness. The complexity of the environmental issues that arose, e.g. climate change, exceeded all previous waves of environmentalism. The acknowledgement of those issues depended, however, on modern institutions and value structures that were lacking in post-Soviet modernity.

While environmental concern in the West was tied to media, information, and post-materialist values, in the East it was tied instead to personal experience of polluted areas (Bostrom *et al.*, 1996; Gooch 1995; Weaver 2002) and national political movements. A highly reflective period brought about a short-lived ecological paradigm: very complex issues were discussed in public communication, although cen-

sorship still existed; the relationship between people and nature was treated from a humanitarian perspective. In the West the environmental news coverage decreased in the 1990s due to growing industrial backlash, according to which the environment was not in as bad condition as media reporting had reported (Mazur 1998; Opatow, Weiss, 2000; Curtin, Rhodenbaugh, 2001). In the East, the structures needed for reflexivity collapsed in the course of marketisation. Thus, the wave of the social paradigm made its comeback both in the West (partly due to the weariness of the issue, partly due to the attack of the oil industry) and in the East (structural reasons – the struggle for survival, and orientation to the market economy). The peak of ecological paradigm of environmental consciousness in the end of the 1980s was based on reflection about structural change. The manifest agenda of the independence movement was shaped around environmental concern by coincidence. As the structures that could have reflected the environmental demands of the life-world (by developing relevant institutions) fell apart, the lack of institutional support impeded the appearance of environmentally legitimated practices at the level of individuals.

3.3. Transition period (the 1990s)

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Estonian statehood was restored, and constitutional reform and a multi-party system were institutionalised. At the same time, economic shock therapy was applied: currency reform (1992), privatisation and restitution of ownership rights, rebirth of a banking system, and the collapse of intensive production.

From the mid-1990s, Estonia was clearly oriented to the European Union and began to experience the ‘evangelical belief in the virtues of EU environmental law’ (Caddell 2009). Following the European example, Estonia enacted the Law of Sustainable Development (1995), the first environmental strategy (1997), the first law on waste (1998), and the law on genetically modified organisms (1999). Environmental law during the period of transition was powerless in practice, aimed more to cheat Europe on paper (see Lynch 2000).

In September 1994, when the Russian troops left Estonia, new polluted areas were discovered in the territories of the former Soviet army. As industrial pollution was also a remainder of the Soviet period, the origin of environmental problems was

cognitively tied to the Soviet system (Kiisel 2005), i.e. a characteristic of the past, not to be expected in capitalism. Therefore, positive estimations of the condition of the local environment began to grow (Kaasik *et al.*, 1996).

Materialist-individualist values became more important to people, the economic elite and its arguments were given higher priority, over social, cultural, and environmental issues, and consumption acquired ever-expanding symbolic value (Lauristin, Vihalemm, 1997b). While in Sweden post-materialist values were shared by more than 50% of inhabitants, in Estonia only 2% shared these values (Gooch 1995). The strong utilitarian-pragmatic world-view is a sign of the social paradigm.

The contacts of individuals with environmental information decreased, the audience of media publications segmented (Vihalemm, Kõuts, 2004). As shown in Figure 1, by the end of the century, the issue of the environment was reduced to a non-important and culturally external issue in mass media (the environment did not ‘sell’ well enough), especially after the first economic recession of 1997 (Kiisel 2011).

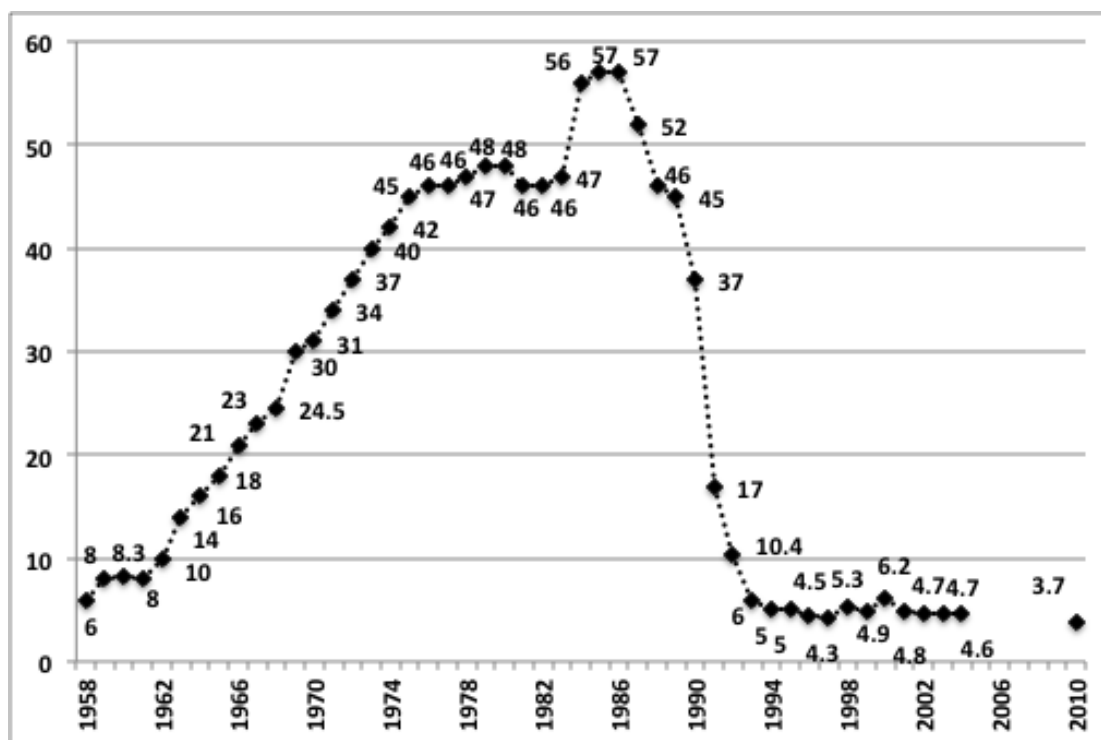


Figure 1. The print-run of the journal ‘Eesti Loodus’ (‘Estonian Nature’) from 1958-2010, in thousands

Source: ‘Eesti Loodus’ (1958-1990); Vihalemm, Kõuts (2004)

High individualisation held back the return of environmental movements till the end of the 1990s. Their membership had scattered and the ability to adopt Western organisational models was difficult until access was available to the first EU funding sources. At the end of the century, the first community protests took place against risky objects.

Changes in the patterns of the economy (mainly the decline in intensive agriculture), urbanisation, and limitations on leisure time severely diminished the nature-related practices of individuals: active gardening and hiking, and nature observations fell about 20% from 1983 to 2002 (Lauristin, Firsov, 1987; *Me. The World. The Media* 2002-2011). The same applied to old consumption practices that relied on Protestant ethics. Soviet container and scrap paper recovery systems fell apart; at the same time, products used more packaging and the rate of consumption went up. Still, qualitative analysis shows that the concept of pro-environmental behaviour spread with the aid of Western contacts: media consumption, travel, networking, etc. (Kiisel 2005).

To sum up, in the period of institutional collapse and paradigm re-orientation, the only meaningful direction was to oppose the 'known' from the Soviet Union and be replaced by the abstract idea of the EU and the market economy. It was obvious that concern over nature and environment protection receded in the face of economic rationality and spontaneous actions to overcome increasing poverty. Although the newly formed societal system grew out of its founding social movements, an uncritical orientation to the EU soon detached society from its life-world context. The separation of the system from the life-world led to a loss of shared rules, values, and frames of references, which resulted in the forceful comeback and domination of the social paradigm of environmental consciousness. This may be the reason why the development of environmental consciousness in the following years was directed more to an uncritical translation of environmental norms and sub-policies of EU than to the reflexivity of social concern about the environment. The translation strategy also prevented reflexivity at the level of local policies so that industry could still dictate its needs to the national planning system. New social institutions were still too fragile to allow excessive reflection about environment. Therefore, from the perspec-

tive of institutions, the transition period can best be described by the social paradigm. At the level of the life-world the experience of travelling and media consumption supported the manifestation of the first signs of the environmental paradigm.

3.4. The entrance into the EU framework (the 2000s)

3.4.1. Institutions and sub-policies

While the attention to environmental problems in Western Europe peaked in the 1970s, the need for the development of substantial environmental policies in the former Soviet states only became apparent in the twenty first century, a few years before Estonia joined the EU in May 2004. Despite the rapid development of its economy, Estonia faced several difficulties in the performance of the administrative obligations assumed during the course of accession to the EU, among them environmental policies, including Natura 2000, strategies of environmental protection, and nature conservation, laws on waste, packaging, forestry, environmental management and planning, as well as energy economics. As the Eastern bloc had been characterised by a deception gap between actual practice and EU reporting (Lynch 2000), the implementation plans of laws and strategies had to be taken seriously at this time. Top-down and internally unreflected directives caused many management problems and also opposition at the individual level (Börzel, Buzogany, 2010). Estonian public institutions were not concerned with reflexion (in the sense of reflexive modernity) as much as with translation. So the institutions were caught between two fires. This resulted in high distrust of the Ministry of the Environment (Eesti..., 2010) with regard to its communication about environmental commitments and duties.

The election platforms of parties seemed to be modern at the beginning of the decade, emphasising the economic saving that accompanies environmental protection (Kiisel 2005). At the same time, there were no substantial action plans to protect the environment. Therefore, the view of the environment was certainly more linked to the social paradigm of environmental consciousness. This ignorance at the political level, but perceived concern at the individual level, helped to form a new Green Party, whose members were elected to the parliament in 2007. The Green Party focused on practical solutions and technological innovation – rather differently from their Western counterparts, who flirt with social democracy. Although The Greens

did not manage to get members elected to the parliament in the next election in 2011, their influence during the election forced other parties to form their platforms under the environmental paradigm (Gold 2011). The platforms are dominated by practical suggestions; historical, ideological, ecological, ethical, and scientific views of the environment being hardly represented. This is peculiar to the environmental paradigm, which is grounded on the assumption that solutions of environmental problems lie in additional adjustment of technology and control. In practice, the gap between public messages and action is notable. The audits of the State Audit Office in 2007-2009 found that Estonia has not substantially prepared for sustainability goals: the state has no targeted climate policies, no clear agreement and plan to save energy, mines are excavated according to the initiative of enterprises, external costs and the best available technology are not considered, the consequences of mining are not dealt with, the control over environmental activities of enterprises is deficient, consideration of the interest of local people and the natural environment is scarce, the public as well as decision-makers lack sufficient and functional information on environmental conditions, and there is hardly any analysis. Therefore, the competition between different views of problem solving that is common to ecological paradigm did not emerge due to the ignorance of environmental matters in the management of institutions.

Civic society has more strength to provide an individual voice in decision-making processes, but the legitimation of this voice is questionable: current social movements are based more on expertise than wide membership. Traditional indigenous organisations are segmented due to bureaucratisation and institutionalisation; modern organisations are not able to attract large numbers of individuals. In opposition to this, there are new late modern movements that take advantage of the loss of solidified ideologies and practices. These movements (e.g. letsdoitworld.org) gather public support to solve certain apparent problems – they are practical and ideology-free, with no desire for institutionalisation. Also, localism is popular: the re-invention of the tradition of village communities helps to build the relations needed for environmental protection. The segmentation of environmental movements is more peculiar to the ecological paradigm of environmental consciousness.

3.4.2. Media

While at the beginning of the decade environmental issues were apparent only in the news flow of online-media (e.g. foreign one-source news about earthquakes and chemical accidents), ten years later issues of global risk are back on the news pages. Although the volume of the newspapers decreased, the attention paid to the environment increased (see Figure 2). Environmental problems are no longer seen as the result of Soviet modernity, but are connected with late modern society. Random value-based texts by environmentalists that emphasise the need for action have been replaced by everyday pragmatic-technical discussions by politicians and economists (Eek 2010; Kiisel 2011). The rise in media attention may be caused by the structural recovery, and increase in reflective readership, localisation of environmental accidents, and certainly the policies of the EU.

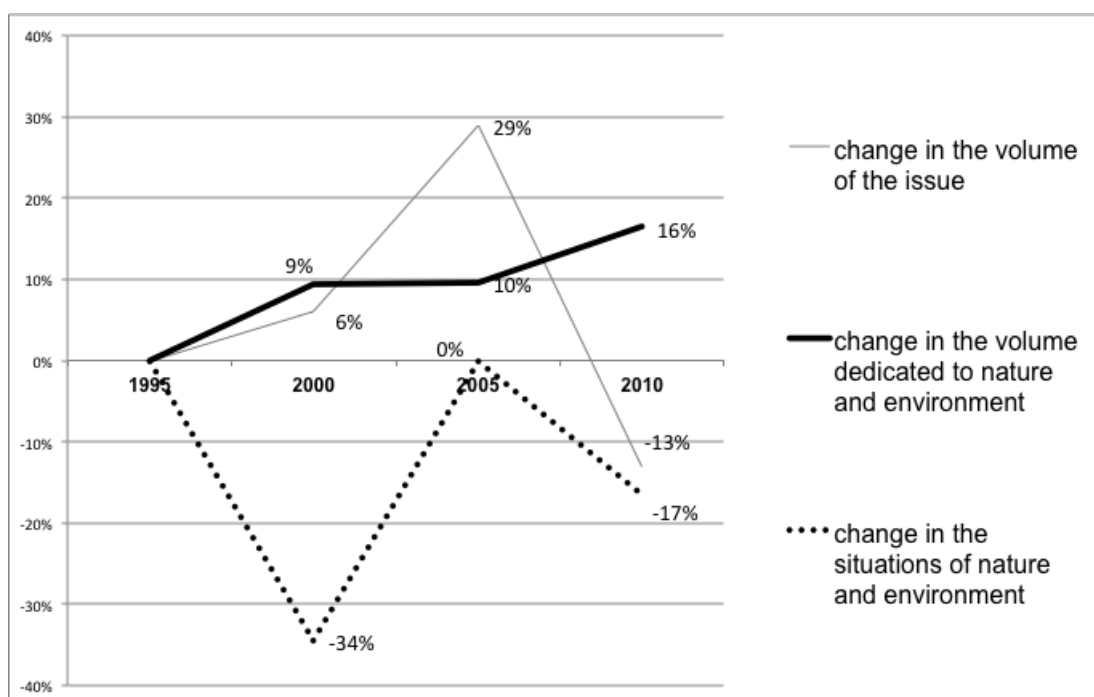


Figure 2. Change in the volume dedicated to environmental issues in Estonian leading dailies from 1995 to 2010 (base year 1995)

Source: Kiisel (2011)

The reflexivity about environmental issues has been, however, interrupted by the segmentation of channels. Environment-oriented magazines lost their former broad-based readership and receded to publications of a particular lifestyle (see Fig-

ure 3). Local investigative environmental journals are losing readership to translated international journals, e.g. *GEO* and *National Geographic*, which focus little attention on local developments.

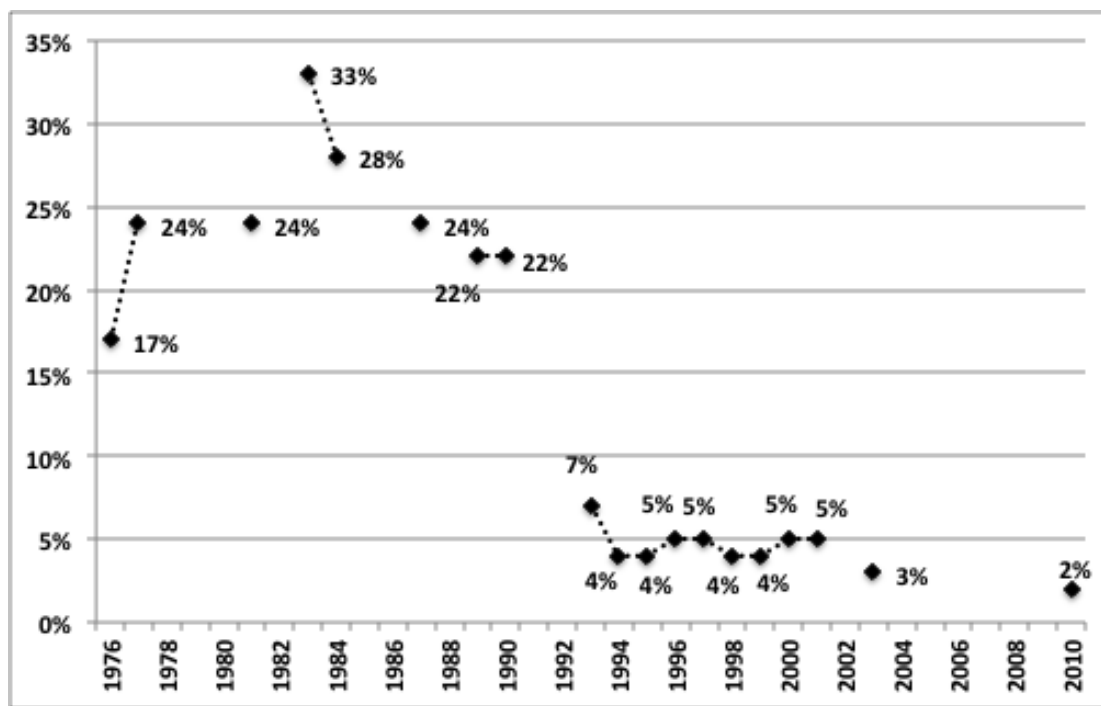


Figure 3. The readership of the journal 'Eesti Loodus' ('Estonian Nature') from 1976-2010, Estonians

Source: Lauristin, Vihalemm (1988); Vihalemm, Kõuts (2004); Baltic... (2010)

Also the content of environmental coverage in news media changed (Kiisel 2011). During the period of the EU accession, the issues of pollution, fisheries, and hunting gained prominence. Since 2007 issues of reflexive consumption, mineral resources, and energy have been prevalent.

The changes in society have also influenced the way that media approach the environment. It is common in contemporary discussions in media that the internal values of environmental acts are rationalised through the EU demands originating from the directives of the EU and problems in their application rather than independent observation of the environment. Therefore, from 1995 to 2010 a remarkable decline occurred in political and juridical viewpoints of nature, which have been re-

placed by technical and economic ones, and the discussion about politics turned to discussion about policies. The rise of the consumerist world-view and decline in ethical, ideological, aesthetic, and cultural-historical viewpoints is the major trend. This means that arguments for not defining environment according to the economic purposes are more and more delegitimised. There was also little rise in ecological and scientific viewpoints. The major changes in view of nature in national dailies can be seen in Figure 4. The figure combines results from two independent inquiries based on a similar methodology (one of the year 1983, the other of 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010) and explores the changes in the angles according to which the nature is observed in the media¹.

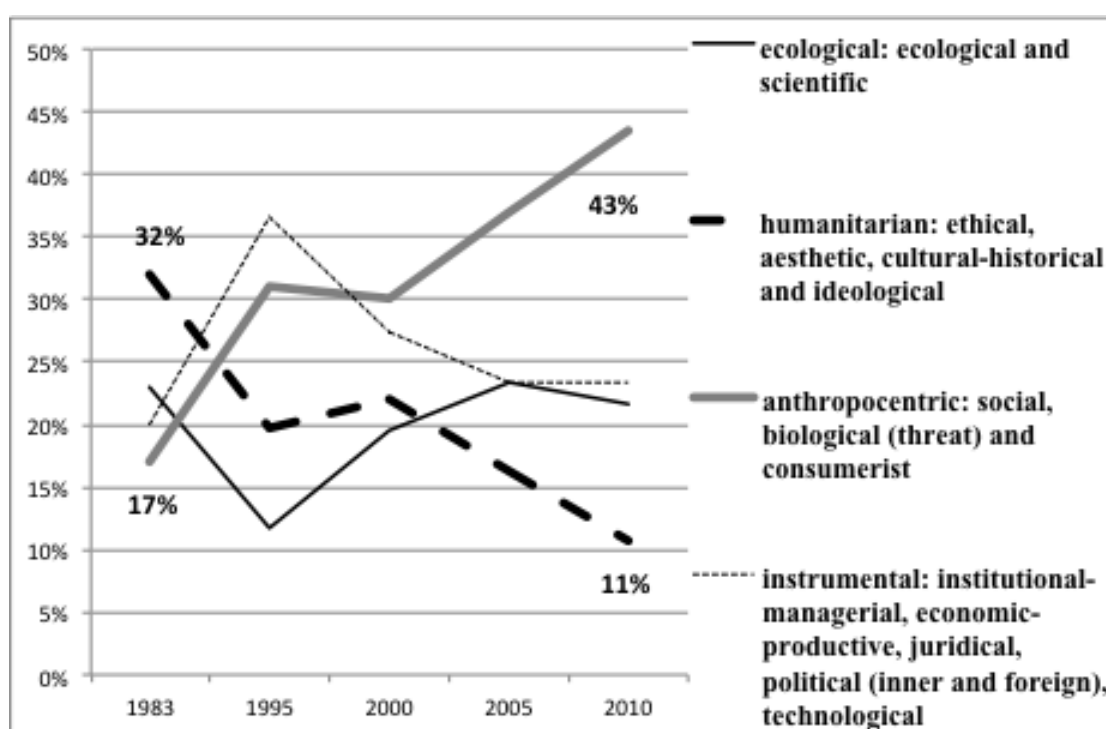


Figure 4. Changes in value orientations of environmental coverage from 1983 to 2010 in the leading Estonian daily newspapers 'Postimees' and 'Eesti Päevaleht' (in 1983 'Edasi' and 'Noorte Hää')

Source: Lauristin *et al.* (1985a); Lauristin (1987); Kiisel (2011)

¹ The form of the composition of the graph is tied to the properties of the data from 1983, from which primary data has been lost. Several changes in the sub-viewpoints mentioned in the text are invisible due to the interaction of the items in opposite directions.

The rise in environment coverage in the media leads to discussion of the environment, but also leads to subsequent fragmentation of environmental issues, which eventually disables the holistic discussion about the problems of the environment. Nature is seen more in the context of danger, connected with storms, insects or floods. This may be a sign of the change in the 'system coordinates'. Nature alienation (the social paradigm) strengthens through technicisation parallelly with the anxiety about the environment (ecological paradigm) that is the social result of the technicisation.

3.4.3. The development of the relations with the environment

While in the beginning of the decade the concern about the environment had adapted a social but passive norm, which was not realised in environmental practices (Raudsepp 2002), the contemporary environmental consciousness is shaped by the global information society and institutionalised practices. Little by little the late modern problems, e.g. climate change, have also been gaining attention (Eurobarometer 2004, 2007; Eesti..., 2010). Readiness for and habits of pro-environmental practices remain lower than among western Europeans (Eurobarometer 2004, 2007). This can be explained by the poor infrastructure and institutional guidelines before 2005, but also by the high level of scepticism (Normak 2005; Eurobarometer 2007).

While in Sweden individualist values are intertwined with post-materialist values, in Estonia individualist values are parts of the value structures of the modern world-view (Kalmus, Vihalemm, 2006). Therefore, it is hardly possible to expect a concern for global problems from hedonist individuals, who are especially common among young people. Also the willingness for active citizenship in environmental issues is highest among youth. This may indicate a rise in reflective and consumer-critical sub-cultures.

Compared to the Soviet period, environmental practices and the meanings related to those practices changed remarkably. Nowadays, individual environmental responsibility is cognitively tied to consumption processes, although pragmatic and normative aspirations are still prevalent in pro-environmental behaviour (Eesti...,

2010). Many re-invented practices, e.g. returning deposit containers to shops, and domestic energy saving, is now undergoing rapid growth (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ranking of environment friendly consumption practices (%)

Pro-environmental practices	2008	2011
Their family sorts returnable packaging subject to a deposit	77	83
Uses organic foodstuffs or eco-friendly products	66	72
Their family sorts paper and cardboard	64	70
Wears used clothes purchased from a second-hand shop	55	60
Their family sorts hazardous waste	55	59
Their family sorts biodegradable waste	47	48
Their family sorts mixed packaging	39	50

Source: *Me. The World. The Media* (2008, 2011)

The rising availability of modern technology (e.g. eco-labelling and waste recollection) has been accompanied by economic scarcity (leading to increasing second-hand purchases and the habit of people making things themselves) and a growth in the suspicion of environmental and health risks (e.g. GMO, organic food and e-substances), a tendency more common among Estonians than Europeans in general (Eurobarometer 2007).

Figure 5 shows that both the indices of consumerism and sustainable consumption have raised in recent years (2002–2011). In compiling the indices, the affirmative responses about following characteristics were aggregated: index of consumerism – preferences for one’s clothing, home decoration and body-related services; index of sustainable consumption – self-estimation of one’s pro-environmental attitudes, waste separation practices and use of environmentally friendly technologies; index of nature orientation – nature-related practices, participation in environmental NGOs and preferences for environment-related information (books, films, media). Among pro-environmental practices, habits that do not contradict the logic of consumerism (e.g. waste separation and organic food consumption) increased

while the personal willingness to choose less exploitive products, reduce consumption, and pay more for eco-friendly products, and personal pro-environmental self-esteem decreased. The decline in nature-orientation (especially by 2008), which was caused by the decrease in the interest in nature and in nature-related habits, slowed in 2011. This may have been caused by the natural strength of tradition, the proximity to natural environments and the rise in environment and nature coverage in news media.

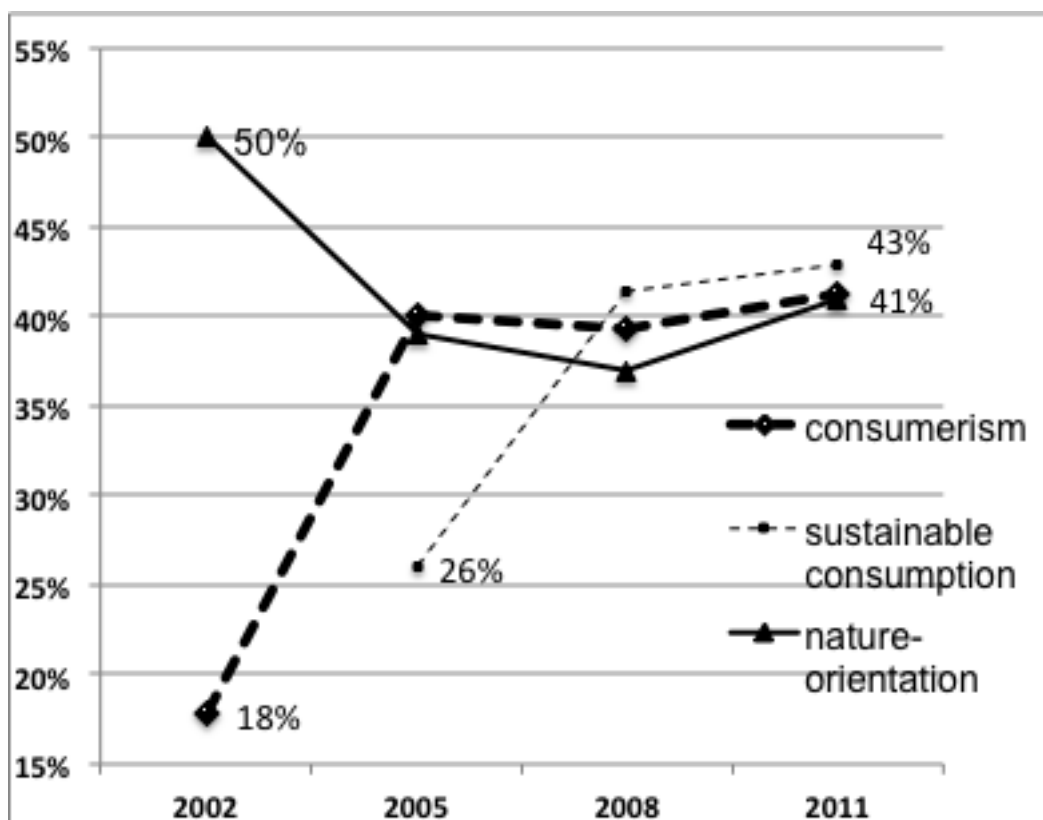


Figure 5. Change in the orientations of consumerism, sustainable consumption and nature from 2002-2011

Source: *Me. The World. The Media* (2002-2011)

To sum up, there is an unstable mixture of environmental paradigms. Reflective approaches (the environmental and ecological paradigms) face the problem of the segmentation of environmental definitions and communication channels. The framework for discussion is unable to depart from the shaky framework of instrumental reason. The messy meaning system may also support a rise in indifference to

nature and the environment. As a result, there may be an unfortunate growing distance between everyday practices and nature.

4. Conclusions

This paper emanated from the viewpoint of environmental consciousness being shaped by the social structural context provided by the transformation of society. Special emphasis in the outline of the historical periodisation of environmental consciousness was given to the Soviet heritage of Estonia. It is postulated in the analysis that the features of the Soviet system increased the extent of its environmental problems, as the absence of reflexivity in society prevented it from adequately responding to environmental problems. The tradition of the divergence between official planning and sudden business interests fed the development and continuation of the social paradigm, and may have also influenced the institutions of present-day Eastern Europe.

The 'phosphorite spring' was a result of the opening of the tightened Soviet system to reflection. *Glasnost* aimed to open channels between individuals and the Soviet power structures, but resulted in communication between individuals about the system itself. Environmentalism and ethnic nationalism became the ideological frames of reference of the independence movement. This movement had similar features to the ecological paradigm, as very complex issues were publicly discussed, but the discussion was possible due to the ongoing existence of reference frames (opposition to the Soviet structures). As can be seen from the analysis of the transition period, at the life-world level the reflection about abstract environmental issues lost its uniting power in parallel with the breakdown of institutions.

The transition period followed the collapse of the Soviet frames of reference. The obvious way to restore the stability was to re-orientate to the still unknown logic of the market economy. The environmental problems lost the power of uniting people, and the infosphere was fragmented and created favourable conditions for new owners of privatised industrial enterprises to act without the public pressure. Environmental problems like Soviet pollution were certainly important at the institutional level. These were, however, still not acknowledged as a system problem, but merely as an occasional necessity. The fragmentation of the public sphere supported the

comeback of the social paradigm in the environmental consciousness characteristic of the early modernity and fast decrease of elements of traditional society.

As the joining of the technological-economic culture of the EU was rationalised for eastern Europe mostly through translation of the EU environmental sub-policies and norms not through inner reflexion, the EU accession process favoured the development of the social paradigm mostly on the institutional level: blind following of norms, difficulties in reflecting bottom-up arguments, and attempts to fool the EU through argumentation, as in the Soviet time, to protect local polluting businesses. This tendency was obvious as the increasing need of governance exceeded the institutional capabilities of reflection. The need for public participation was actualised just at the threshold of the accession to the EU. The ability to participate, in the context of high individualisation, was, however, low. Still, real sub-policies, together with the media's turn to environmentalism, had a remarkable influence on individuals and their reflexivity.

The top-down technological, environmental paradigm makes individuals unable to reflect collectively about the roots of the perceived environmental problems. This may actualise the formation of occasional situational bottom-up initiatives, but these have little power over the actual sub-policies. As the segmenting nature of modernity sets individuals against each other in the environmental discourse, the learning process of society will be impeded unless the system level opens channels for more holistic reflection. It is peculiar to Estonia that new environmental practices are acquired with high scepticism of sustainability discourse. The jump to late modern environmental consciousness (the ecological paradigm) has skipped the intermediate step to environmental paradigm that relies on the belief in sustainable development.

Examining the development of environmental consciousness in Estonia helps to understand the post-Soviet influence on the modernisation processes of Eastern and East-Central Europe generally. As can be seen from the above-cited research cases from Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia, their common features are the lack of a participation culture, an openness to the intentions of industries, a tradition of deceit with regard to superior

powers, a struggle to overcome the contradictions between the bottom-up and top-down meaning systems and a large inheritance of Soviet pollution. Due to the inability to search for its own form of development, Eastern Europe did not develop its reflexivity much internally (i.e. relying on its historical path of dependency), but rather externally (i.e. through the EU). This duality caused problems in the legitimation of system coordinates and creation of the double standards. As translation-like social learning may lead to different kinds of risks than in Western societies, these risks may need different kinds of policy solutions.

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