

National report for Estonia

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Contribution to the European report:

Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (2008) *Cross-Cultural Contexts of Research: Factors Influencing the Study of Children and the Internet in Europe*. A report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

Universities and Disciplines

There are 11 universities in Estonia, including 6 public universities and 5 private universities. The number of academic research bodies, according to the [Research and development institutions register](#), is 75. Media and communications studies exist as a discipline. It is, however, relatively small, when considered at an international level. Informatics exists as a sub-discipline of computer science or mathematics, although IT and society relationships are studied mostly within the field of media studies.

National Data Collected

The State Information Office (RISO) collects information society related statistics through private market research bureaus and the National Statistics Office collects data about households and enterprises. Special data collection related to children is not carried out regularly, although some data are available from household surveys. The Government buys data annually, covering general ICT use among 6 to 14 year-olds from a private market research company. The age range in these surveys usually starts at 15. Once a year, 6 to 14 year-olds are also included in the e-monitoring survey carried out by a private market research company. The annual e-monitoring survey of general ICT use includes a sample of 6 to 14 year-olds. The e-monitoring survey of general ICT use is conducted twice every year among 15 to 74 year-olds and once a year also among 6 to 14 year-olds.

Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

Uniform procedures for research proposals are not required in fields like sociology or media research, but studies related to medicine and animal testing need the approval of ethics committees. All applications to the Estonian Science Foundation and applications of target financed projects have to be checked by the faculty boards.

Pressures to conduct research

There is a strong pressure on researchers to produce a number of publications of good quality, where quality is defined by international reach and the peer-review process. Academics occupying all positions are re-elected, the quality of research in terms of the number of publications being the most important criterion, and tenure tracks are not possible. Industrial collaborations are common, mostly in order to bring in money but more recently also to disseminate knowledge.

Factors influencing the orientation of research

Industries only rarely approach researchers to carry out research, but ministries and research council approach scholars quite often. Collaborations happen at times, but these studies have mostly covered language technologies or technology-related innovations.

National Research Traditions

We have strong traditions in both quantitative and qualitative research practices. Studies of journalism and media have been conducted in the University of Tartu since the 1950s. Interpersonal communication is not institutionalised; there have been single studies done

mostly in the last 5 years. The internet has been studied in Estonia since 1998 when the first internet user studies were conducted by BMF (Baltic Media Facts).

Sources of Funding for Research

Our main source is Government and council funding; commercial funding is seen at times and some good studies have been made publicly available. Estonia does not have a long-established tradition of third sector initiatives; therefore charities rarely fund research in Estonia. The high frequency of funding by academic institutions is explained by the fact that scientists are usually free to pursue their own research interests and find their own topics. Also, Government research funding is mostly provided through the Research Council at the Ministry of Education and Science; thus, the academic sector is actually indirectly funded by the Government.

Commercial enterprises sub-contract regular e-monitoring studies, but they rarely fund any specific studies, with the exception of the 2006 Children and the Internet study funded by Microsoft Estonia. EU funding has become more prominent since 2003, which was right before Estonia joined the EU (in 2004); since then EU funding has become more regularly available. Estonia, as one of the most successful e-states in Eastern Europe, is very often invited to participate in European comparative studies.

Political initiatives influencing research

Estonia has had an Information Society policy since 1998, following the example of the EU white paper in the area. This has initiated digital divide studies (in 2002 and 2008) (not included in the EU Kids Online repository as they focused mostly on working age and elderly people). The Tiger Leap Foundation was established in 1997 to support the introduction of the internet into Estonian schools: initially secondary and primary schools, and later, universities as well. This has stimulated studies on the internet in school environments and in learning contexts. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, media regulations have become very liberal, relying mostly on self-regulation by the media. Therefore, any kind of media research with the aim of controlling or checking media content (e.g. studies of school textbooks or internet regulation for the safety of children) tends to be interpreted as an attempt to censor media. In addition, an attempt by the Minister of Justice to initiate regulating Internet commentaries has met with considerable public resistance. The internet has had a great impact on Estonian legislation. From 1991 all laws and regulations that are in force or have been in force are electronically available on the homepage of *Electronic State Gazette (Riigi Teataja)*. The internet has also had quite a major impact on the content of the present day legal provision of Estonia. The most important provisions are the following:

Constitutional law and administrative law: Estonians can elect members of the Parliament on the internet (e-elections); national authorities can make decisions in an electronic form, citizens can make applications to national authorities (e.g. apply for a new passport, social services, declare taxes etc.) through the internet.

Penal power: the intrusion into computer-held data, illegal elimination or change in the means of identification in a terminal equipment; prevention of the functionality of computer systems; distribution of spyware, illegal software and computer viruses; computer-related fraud are considered a criminal offence. The following acts are viewed as a terror-related crime: intrusion of computer data or the prevention of the functionality of a computer system; also threatening to do such a thing as long as the threat has been made in order to induce an international organisation or a country to do something or not to do something, or when it seriously affects or destroys the political, economical, social or constitutional arrangements of the country or seriously affects or destroys the actions of the international organisation or intimidates the public.

Partnership laws: one can establish private companies through the internet while using a special website made for entrepreneurs (all the documents for the commercial register will be sent only via the Internet); the governing council of the public company may take decisions via the internet.

Contract law: most contracts can be entered into through the internet (so-called distance contracts).

Money-laundering: as the internet is used daily for managing financial transactions it has brought along greater risks and therefore also the legislation in force in Estonia about money-laundering and financing terrorism is more severe than provided by the directives of the EU.

The Tiger Leap Project started in 1997. Initially it focused on connecting schools to the internet and providing computers, internet connections, learning software, teacher Training, etc. for primary and secondary schools. Tiger Leap Plus project also focused on higher education and has continued to provide teacher training and software development. There are several training programmes for teachers in the framework of the Tiger Leap Project. The Estonian government has used the Tiger Leap Programme as a metaphor for the 'internetisation' of Estonian society. In the early 2000s the Government also started initiatives that would provide Public Access Internet Points at every municipality centre and public library.

In 2002, there was a large research project called Digital Divide, which resonated in the society and the media and helped to raise awareness of internet use and non-use. The Estonian Government in cooperation with the private sector (the media and banks) started a training programme aimed at providing internet training for 100,000 individuals, mostly of working age or retired people. In 2008, the Government focused on the promotion of the use of electronic ID-card by funding an advertisement campaign to popularise digital signatures. In a sense, e-voting campaigns in 2005 and in 2007 can also be viewed as internet promotion campaigns attempting to raise awareness of public services online. Each year, the Estonian Tax Office also campaigns for online tax declarations. Several Estonian media organisations and online content providers initiated a campaign in 2004 to fight against flame and hateful comments in online environments. They even constructed a new Estonian word for it: "leim". They provide rules of conduct and recommendations for online behaviour on the website: www.leim.ee. ISPs have made agreements among themselves concerning technical issues, but not that much on security issues.

Particular debates and concerns about children

There is some media debate about advertising targeted children (whether it is too extensive, whether it should be allowed in schools as it currently is, etc.). Margit Keller and Veronika Kalmus have published some academic papers and newspaper articles about the issue of vulnerable and manipulated children vs. empowered and creative children vis-à-vis consumer culture. Auli Andersalu-Targo has defended a Master's thesis "Children consumer socialization and money attitudes" and published some articles about the issue in the media.

Media debates on dangerous spaces arise quite often, especially concerning youngsters "hanging out" without any "meaningful purpose" in shopping malls. This issue has also been addressed in an academic study by political scientist Anu Toots.

Case Studies

The Institute of Journalism and Communication of Tartu University carried out a questionnaire survey "Youth and the Internet" in comprehensive schools in three cities (Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu) in autumn 2007 (N= 713) among 12 to 17 year-old pupils. (Most of the members of the Estonian team participated in it.)

This study is a part of the grant project "Children and young people in the emerging information and consumer society" financed by the Estonian Science Foundation (project leader Veronika Kalmus). The choice of the topic was partly conditioned by the fact that issues and problems related to so-called information and consumer society are prominently represented in the research agenda of the Institute of Journalism and Communication (the Institute has a target financed project "Estonia as an emerging information and consumer society: Social sustainability and quality of life", 2006-2011). Also, there are several graduate

students (PhD and Master students) working on related topics. Moreover, members of the research group have contacts with research groups in various European universities and international research networks dealing with similar issues (e.g. the international research network MEDIAPPRO and the Network of Sociology of Consumption of European Sociological Association). The group realised that they did not have enough scientific knowledge about how young people, their parents and educators reflect upon the emerging information and consumer society and its culture. What is seen as a source of possible threat or as having a real potential for cultural creativity and meaningful construction of identities and lifestyle? One of the aims of the project, thus, is to publish a collection of articles in Estonian where the results of the research and their implementation possibilities would offer information about the socialisation processes of the young and also offer chances for reflection about the groups involved in these processes (e.g. parents, teachers, kindergarten teachers, journalists, etc.).

The methodology of the study "Youth and the Internet" (questionnaire survey of pupils) was chosen mostly due to the existing research tradition: the research team has access to the databases of the international survey MEDIAPPRO, the survey of pupils in Estonia "Youth and Media 2005" and the population survey carried out in Estonia "Me. The World. The Media" (waves in 2003 and 2005), which provided an opportunity for comparative analysis of the survey databases. The grant project as a whole, however, is characterised by interdisciplinarity in the sense of it synthesises different social sciences, as it combines the approaches and methodologies of sociology, media studies and ethnography, including in-depth and semi-structured interviews; combined observations; participant observations; socio-semiotic and discourse analysis of (media) texts; content analysis, including visual content analysis; anthropological approach to the uses of media technologies, including ethnography in online environments and ethnography of visual communication. The choice of so many different methods was conditioned by the complex nature of the research subject (socialisation in the emerging information and consumer society) as well as by various academic backgrounds and interests of the researchers and graduate students participating in the project. The age of the surveyed children (12 to 18) was determined by an opportunity for comparative analyses: both diachronically (with previous studies in Estonia) and internationally (with the MEDIAPPRO database).

Several indicators were taken from previous questionnaires for the sake of comparability. New indicators were developed by individual researchers and graduate students to meet their particular research interests (e.g. questions about social networking sites, blogs, homepages etc.). Also, new questions were designed according to the changing nature of the Internet (new phenomena and activities were taken into account).

The survey is a part of the grant project "Children and young people in the emerging information and consumer society" financed by the Estonian Science Foundation. This is the most common source for funding research of this type and scale in Estonia; applying for grants from this foundation is strongly encouraged by Tartu University. The Estonian Science Foundation has a competition "My First Grant", which was suitable for the academic profile of the main applicant.