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Anne Kaun

Being a Young Citizen in Estonia:
An Exploration of Young People's
Civic and Media Experiences

Politics and Society
in the Baltic Sea Region

1

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Politics and Society in the Baltic Sea Region is a series devoted to contemporary social and political issues in the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. A specific focus is on current issues in the Baltic states and how these relate to the wider regional and geopolitical challenges. Open to a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences as well as diverse conceptual and methodological approaches, the series seeks to become a forum for high-level social science scholarship that will significantly enrich international knowledge and understanding of the Baltic Sea region. All books published in the series are peer-reviewed.

Series Editor: Dr. Eva-Clarita Pettai, Institute of Government and Politics, University of Tartu, Estonia. Address: Lossi 36, 51003 Tartu, Estonia. Email: ecpettai@ut.ee

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Introduction

The last number of years have seen massive mobilisations of disappointed citizens all over the world forming a set of new bottom up politics (Kaldor et al., 2012). In a social environment, where citizens have been mainly addressed as consumers rather than citizens, protestors took the streets and squares to reclaim the public and to be taken seriously as citizens again. Estonia too saw some grass-root mobilisation in form of protests proclaiming “Enough with Fraudulent Politics”, these emerged after several scandals involving high-ranked politicians. While revising this study, which originates from my doctoral dissertation, defended in 2012, these latest developments naturally informed my re-thinking of the core message of this book. The aim that lies behind the arguments presented here is to take young adults seriously as citizens and to focus on the question of how their experiences as citizens intersect with media experiences. In this context, the media are considered as a space of possibilities for civic experiences with the potential to both enable and constrain civic engagement.

Current research suggests that we should move from the question of *the* media to mediations.¹ Consequently, we should not be studying the media, but the media in society. However, media are still considered as focal points around which, for example, social change might crystallise. It is not my attempt to question the usefulness of media and communication research with media as its object, but to follow the old suggestion that we need to understand and research them in their specific contexts.

¹ In this context mediation and mediatisation scholars, such as Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp and Fredrich Krotz, often refer to Jesus Martin-Barbero’s *Communication, Culture and Hegemony. From the Media to Mediations* (1993).

This study therefore chooses an inductive approach for discussing the role of the media, namely to let the participants discuss the way media are interwoven with their everyday lives and the extent to which media are constitutive of their social reality. At the same time, I am interested in the question of whether young adults think the media have a growing importance in their lives (mediatisation). In that sense, the project aims to introduce an alternative way of analysing the processes of mediation and mediatisation, namely through analysing the media perceptions of media users themselves. Hence, the focus changes from the question of whether media are changing social and cultural spheres to how this change is perceived and understood by participants in these very spheres, and how they relate to certain ideas about the potential of media to realise social cohesion and establish a common frame of reference. In other words, it is the *experience* of constant mediatisation and mediation that is of interest here. This is in line with Nick Couldry (2000), who suggests that the tremendous importance of media in our everyday lives should be analysed not by focusing on, for example, specific audiences of specific formats, but by deconstructing the idea that the media are the main – and maybe only – entrance point to society's social centre.

More concretely, I am interested in the extent to which media are mentioned when young adults describe their experiences as citizens. In what ways do the media enable or constrain engagement or disenchantment, connection or disconnection? I approach the question of mediatisation in an open, non-media centred, non-technology-driven fashion, which is guided by the participants themselves. While I, of course, ask for their media preferences and usage, this is not the main focus of the project. It is the embeddedness of the civic experience in a media-dominated environment that is of interest, not focusing on certain forms of media.

This makes the aim of the book different from other current approaches used to analyse social change, political engagement, or the state of democracy in relation to the media. Former studies are often – and perhaps unjustly – discussed in terms of optimism and anxiety, especially when it comes to the potential of new media to improve democratic behaviours. For instance, scholars have discussed the fragmentation (Downey and Fenton, 2003; Habermas, 2006) and *ludification* of the public sphere, which is increasingly dominated by entertainment-orientated consumerism (Postman and Postman, 2006; Putnam, 2001; Saxer, 2007). At the same time, numerous studies are optimistic about the potential of all kinds of media to promote democratisation and support alternative forms of civic engagement including fun and recreation

(Hartley, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Micheletti, 2006, 2010; van Zoonen, 2005). This research often concentrates on certain forms of media such as news portals or forums (Freelon, 2011), social networking platforms (Marwick and Boyd, 2011), or activists connecting via social or alternative media (Kavada, 2009; Uldam, 2010).

In that sense, an engagement with civic culture and its relationship with the media can hardly be described as unprecedented. With the growing interest in questions of mediated and mediatised democracy, the field has become fragmented, polarised and contradictory. As indicated above reviews of the field tend to develop utopian versus dystopian perspectives when it comes to the essential question of whether media enable or constrain civic culture. By taking up ideas about the enabling potential of the media and combining it with critical reflections of the conditions for civic culture, this book aims at something in-between. Driven by the experiences of citizens, I aim to reflect the complexity of what it means to be political, and relate to both politics and one's fellow citizens. This hopefully opens an alternative avenue for the investigation of civic culture in relation to media without giving a final answer that might not even be possible or desirable. As a consequence of this aim, I was faced with the challenging question of how to research civic and media experiences in an appropriate manner without excluding or pre-configuring a certain set of experiences.

Researching Experience and the Use of Diaries

Civic experiences as the object of this book, implies engagement with one of the fuzziest notions in the humanities and social sciences, namely experience (Throop, 2003). Definitions of experience, if given at all, refer to a broad range of phenomena that are partially contradictory. Most often, however, experience remains undefined and taken for granted. As an example, I would like to recount Raymond Williams' engagement with experiences. Williams, as one of the central figures in cultural studies connected to the notion of experience, suggested that the purpose of cultural analysis was to explore and analyse the recorded culture of a given time and place in order to understand and reconstruct the specific structure of the feelings of that given culture (Williams, 1961/2001, 1981, 1985). Even though *lived experiences* was, hence, a key notion used to define the object of cultural analysis in *The Long Revolution* (1961/2001), Williams did not discuss experiences in the first edition of

Keywords. A *Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), only the revised second edition from 1983 includes an entry on experience (Williams, 1976, 1985).

Nonetheless, experience is one of the foundational notions in anthropology, cultural studies and philosophy (Pickering, 2008; Throop, 2003) and, although some reject experience as an analytical concept (Scott, 1991), it remains of crucial importance for cultural analysis. This study does not aim to provide an all-encompassing review of the scholarly work on experience or come up with an original definition. Rather, the aim is to provide the context for understanding civic experiences for the analysis, drawing on the broader discussion of experiences in anthropology, cultural studies and critical theory. In this sense, the book seeks to make a conceptual contribution by proposing an analytical approach to civic experiences that includes both action- and non-action-based understandings.

Experiences are here understood as both a stream of encounters (*Erfahrung*) and as disruptions to the stream of everyday life and, in that sense, as specific, consummated episodes (*Erlebnisse*). However, the analytical focus that the book proposes stresses the latter aspect, namely *Erlebnisse*. The episodes in the diaries and interviews are specific and discrete in their narrative form. However, they take shape against the background of a stream of unspecific experiences. They are, hence, related to a superordinate, culturally shared structure of *Erfahrung*. Civic *Erlebnisse* are, in my understanding, citizens' concrete encounters, such as a protest. The book relates civic *Erlebnisse* to experiences as *Erfahrung* by discussing their relevance to civic culture in Estonia as a "structure of feelings" (Williams, 1961/2001).

Civic experiences are often intermingled, enabled, opened up and constrained by the media. As John B. Thompson (1995) argues, people experience the world beyond their immediate surroundings with the help of media and no longer only through the face-to-face exchange of symbols. Through the media, the world of experience is extended far beyond direct encounters. Thompson argues further that

the sequestration of experience in the spatial/temporal locales of our daily lives goes hand-in-hand with the profusion of mediated experience and with the routine intermingling of experiences, which most individuals would rarely encounter face-to-face (Thompson, 1995, p. 209).

I consciously refer collectively to “the media”, since I would like to grasp the complexity of the spaces that all kinds of media open up. In his analysis, Roger Silverstone included simultaneously:

the mass, the globalized, the regional, the national, the local, the personal media; the broadcast and the interactive media; the audio and audio-visual and the printed media; the electronic and the mechanical, the digital and the analogue media; the big screen and the small screen media; the dominant and alternative media; the fixed and the mobile, the convergent and the stand-alone media (Silverstone, 2007, p. 5).

By consciously referring to these diverse media forms and formats, I aim to be open in my approach to the mundane experiences of the participants, in which the media are increasingly integrated in diverse ways. Media are thus of special importance for all dimensions of citizenship in relation to public spaces, not only as epiphenomena that accompany citizenship, but as constituting moments for the possibility and impossibility of citizenship and public spaces, especially the cultural dimension of citizenship that involves media, and which provides the means by which “to know and speak” (Miller, 2007). Civic experiences are therefore related to what Thompson (1995) calls mediated experiences as re-contextualised experiences that reach beyond the immediate surroundings and connect the individual to distant locales. Mediated experiences are experiences that are re-embedded through the use of media.

The intention to engage rather openly with media and civic experiences must of course be translated into a particular method. I considered established methods such as interviews and focus groups, but quickly felt unsatisfied with the way they constrain the process of “getting close” to experiences. Diaries and more in-depth reflections on the other hand fascinated me and inspired by the study *Public Connection* (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007), I decided to engage open ended diaries to capture civic and media experiences. The aim was to let young people tell stories about their everyday lives and issues that they are concerned with in 20 open-ended online diaries. These were further contextualised through 39 in-depth interviews with the writers. The instructions for the diaries were very open and asked the participating Russian Estonian and Estonian students from Tallinn, Tartu and Narva to reflect on issues that have been of concern for them during the last week; that they have discussed with their friends, family or colleagues at least once a week over the course of 2 months.

By applying this method, I followed in the footsteps of a long research tradition of unsolicited and pre-existing dairies, especially in literature studies (Serfaty, 2004). With Philippe Lejeune's work on dairies, a new and enhanced interest in (unsolicited) dairies and their writers emerged during the 1980s. Lejeune dedicated an immense proportion of his research to privately-written, unpublished dairies, and to the history of the diary. Lejeune (2009) systematically traced the diary back in time to its origin in trade. The initial purpose of keeping a diary was to organise one's work life. However, over time the subject matter transformed from spiritual reasoning about the relationship between man and god, to a dialogic relationship between the diarist and an imaginary addressee, this practice crystallised in the heading "dear diary." Lejeune further extended his research to the internet and studied the phenomenon of online dairies. Besides studying these dairies, he asked the diarists about their motivation to keep a diary, and about the relationship they had with their dairies.

By contrast, the scholarly application of *solicited* dairies can be traced back to the early time-use dairies that were widely used in the 1920s (Gersbuny and Sullivan, 1998). Even though dairies have this long history in research, there is a general lack of theoretical reasoning and methodological discussion about them. A review of textbooks dealing with qualitative research methods supports this argument. If dairies are mentioned at all, they are discussed as supplementing in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, and are used by researchers to organise field notes. However, open-ended, solicited dairies – as opposed to pre-existing dairies – can be of great use in capturing subjective states and the perceptions of participants. Using dairies allowed me to get close to the experiences of my participants that took shape in their stories. The openness of this method allowed a broad variety of experiences to be included. The challenge was to bring this diversity over time and between the different participants together. Hence, the diary material was contextualised through in-depth interviews with diarists, non-diarists and representatives of non-governmental organisations, the latter mainly in order to develop a better understanding of the Estonian cultural and political context in a more focused manner.

The aim of this book is to explore civic experience openly, without applying normative definitions of civic engagement. For this reason, a holistic approach is chosen, using a broad definition of the political to investigate all kinds of engagement and orientation without starting from a specific form of political activity. This is consequently mirrored by a methodological approach

that allows for a diversity in civic experiences. The research design is a combination of new and established methods for the empirical investigation of civic experiences. By applying this inductive approach, I also suggest an alternative way of looking at the processes of mediatisation and mediation, starting from lay persons' perceptions of both mainstream and alternative media in connection with their civic experiences. In this sense, this book is an attempt to explore the possibilities and challenges of non-media-centric research from a methodological point of view.

The book begins by providing background information about the historical, socio-demographic and media situation in Estonia today in order to explain the relevance of this particular case for studying the civic experiences of young adults. Part two then proceeds to lay out a detailed theoretical framework. At the same time, chapter two seeks to conceptualise civic and media experience by relating its empirical study to the notion of public connection.

The analytical parts starting with chapter three are introduced by providing information on the participants for this study as well as outlining the data collection process and the basic analytical methods. This is followed by a discussion of civic experiences as they appear in the diaries thus making a theoretically informed distinction between conventional and non-conventional forms of civic participation on the one hand and media-related and non-media-related public connection on the other.

Chapters four, five and six then analyse the diary and interview data along the three key concepts of *critical media connection*, *playful public connection* and *historical public connection*. Critical media connection is discussed as coming in two main formats, labelled as critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors. Playful public connection is presented as a way to investigate the link between orientation (public connection) and practices. Finally, historical public connection is investigated as experiencing history in different contexts: language, places and discursive spaces. Here the complex inter-ethnic relations, especially with regard to contrasting historical narratives among Estonians and Russians, play a significant role.

In concluding the study, I will discuss how we can develop an understanding of a given civic culture through the lens of civic experiences, namely mundane experiences that are anchored in the life worlds of citizens.

1. Being a Young Citizen in Estonia

The aim of the following chapter is to show why Estonia is a particularly interesting case to study young people's civic and media experience. On the one hand, it will provide a brief socio-political overview of the current Estonian situation, both in terms of socio-economic conditions as well as historical and ethnopolitical developments. Both are key to understanding young people's self-perceptions as citizens as well as their attitudes and interactions with the political. On the other hand this chapter will give an overview of Estonia's particular media landscape as it has emerged over the past twenty years. Recent rapid developments in the area of e-government and the wide-spread use of internet-based facilities make Estonia particularly interesting when asking about how media are interwoven with young people's lives.

The following chapter introduces the background of Estonian society in terms of historical developments with a focus on the role of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) for democracy and young people's civic engagement, since the perception of publics and politics can never be examined in isolation from the historical, socio-economic conditions in which they are situated. Estonia, a relatively small country with approximately 1.3 million inhabitants, is situated in the north-eastern periphery of the European Union, bordering Russia to the east and Latvia to the south. In many ways, Estonia is an interesting case of historical division and tension. Today, many of the existing tensions in Estonian society are a result of radical changes after the demise of the Soviet Union. The re-declaration of Estonian independence was accompanied by strong nationalist movements on the one hand, and a strict adoption of neoliberal doctrine, on the other. As the 1990s began, a young and ambitious generation were to substitute the old Soviet elite within both the political and media spheres (Charles, 2009; Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2002). At the same time, differences within in society grew. Marju Lauristin and

Peeter Vihalemm (2002) speak of winners and losers resulting from the regime change, whereby the losers received little voice within the public sphere. The losers were, to a large extent, Russian-speakers based in the industrial north-east of Estonia as well as in the capital, Tallinn. Historically-rooted tensions are still visible today, and reignited when symbolic points of reference are touched upon, this will be discussed in-depth in chapter six (e.g. the removal of a Soviet-era WWII monument from Tallinn's city centre in 2007, and the erection of a new freedom monument close by in 2009). For this book, which aims to explore the experiences of young citizens who could potentially connect to publics and politics, historical conditions are of great relevance, and will be briefly discussed below (Bengtsson and Lundgren, 2005).

Estonia, being part of the Soviet Union between 1940 and 1941 and again from 1944 to 1991, declared its independence on 20 August 1991. As a result of the migration during Soviet times, Estonia's ethnodemographic situation changed quite considerably (Raun, 2001). Thus, according to the census of 2011, almost 25 per cent of the population consider themselves ethnic Russians. 85.1 per cent of the population have Estonian citizenship, whereas 6.9 per cent have Russian citizenship (in total, 89,913 individuals). For 6.5 per cent of the population, citizenship is undetermined (84,494 in total). Ethnic Russians, the dominant group among non-Estonians, mainly reside in urban areas. The highest concentration of ethnic Russians is to be found in the north-eastern county of Ida-Virumaa (Statistics Estonia, 2011). The two biggest cities, Tallinn and Tartu, have ethnic Russians as 36.5 per cent and 16.6 per cent of their overall populations respectively. When it comes to language skills, 37.6 per cent of the inhabitants with Russian citizenship declared that they are able to speak Estonian, whereas nearly 60 per cent of those with Estonian citizenship indicated that they are able to speak Russian (Statistics Estonia, 2000). In the following, "Estonian Russian" is used as a generic term that includes Russian speakers with or without Estonian citizenship, Russian citizens living permanently in Estonia, and stateless people that consider themselves of Russian origin.

Background

As outlined in the introduction, the aim of the book is to analyse individual civic experiences. In order to develop an understanding of civic experiences, it is necessary to place these in a socio-political and economic context. This

is the aim of the following paragraphs. What is outlined here will enable the reader to contextualise the experiences identified and analysed in the upcoming chapters.

An important aspect needed to understand how citizenship is experienced concerns the demise of the Soviet Union, where Estonia (as a newly re-established independent state, heading towards radical societal and economic change) as well as all the other former Soviet states, had to deal with the world's largest diaspora of approximately 25 million ethnic Russians. After Soviet collapse, these ethnic Russians were suddenly facing an uncertain civic status and found themselves in a minority position (Braun, 2000, p. 81). In 1996, 29 per cent of Estonia's total population consisted of ethnic Russians (after Latvia with 33 per cent and Kazakhstan with 31 per cent), the highest share of ethnic Russian population among the states of the former Soviet Union. During the time of transition, there evolved what Raun (2001) calls an "ambivalent situation" concerning the ethnically non-Estonian section of the population. While support for independence from Moscow on the part of non-Estonians greatly increased between 1989 and 1990, there was also the Estonian Russians' fear of losing the status of their generally high social position. This in turn led to opposition towards the prospect of independent Estonian statehood.² This rejection of Estonia's independence among Estonian Russians culminated in a pro-Moscow demonstration on 15 May 1990, in front of the Estonian government building, when protestors threatened to storm it.

After the restoration of the independent Estonian state in August 1991, one of the most urgent issues was the question of citizenship: who among Estonia's then inhabitants had the right to citizenship? With regard to the demographic situation resulting from Soviet migration policy, what would be an adequate solution to questions of citizenship? What are the appropriate requirements for citizenship? Early on, language skills were crucial in the question of citizenship. Language was perceived as the strongest expression of Estonian culture, but only 13.7 per cent of the Russian population was able to speak Estonian fluently in 1989. The Language Law of January 1989³ guaranteed the status of Estonian as the only official language, and required all state officials and others whose work included direct contact with the public to achieve proficiency in Estonian. Language skills also played an important

² The share of non-Estonians supporting independence was 5 per cent in April 1989 and increased to 26 per cent in May 1990 (Raun, 2001, p. 229).

³ Also Law on Immigration (Eesti Vabariigi immigratsiooniseadus).

role in the Citizenship Law established in 1992⁴, which was essentially a restoration of Estonia's Citizenship Law from 1938. Only those Russians who resided in Estonia before 1940, and their descendants, automatically received Estonian citizenship (approximately 75 000 in 1993). "Soviet-era immigrants" could apply for naturalisation based on several requirements, e.g. a certain level of knowledge of the Estonian language (Kirch, 1997, p. 51). These historical developments are still of importance today and are strongly characterising both possibilities and actual civic participation.

The outcome of this legislation was that more than 12 per cent of the population were stateless in the year 2000 (or "grey" passport holders⁵). Different civic statuses – Estonian, Russian or stateless – confer different civic rights. While Russians and stateless people with a permanent residence permit are eligible to vote in local elections and those for the European Parliament. They are, however, excluded from both passive and active suffrage at the national level. As a consequence, there are hardly any national parties that represent the interests of Estonian Russians.

The Estonian Media Sphere(s)

The media are intimately connected to the change in the political system (Bengtsson and Lundgren, 2005), but in what ways did the media guide processes of change as radical as those experienced in the Estonian context in 1989? And to what extent are they functioning as catalysts for the catching-up process of transition? Lauristin and Vihalemm (2002) stress the important role of the media in the transition process in Estonia. They argue that it was the media or, to be more precise journalists, that chose to get politically involved in the first phase of transition and hence played a "decisive role in the formation of the national mass movements" (Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2002, p. 50). During the period of radical political and economic reforms (1991-1994), the mainstream media helped to promote a positive climate for so-called "shock therapy". During the stabilisation and consolidation period (1995-1999), the media landscape was strongly characterised

⁴ In particular, it was Russian-speaking political parties and organisations that mobilised against the Citizenship Law (*Välismaalaste seadus*) (e.g. Russian National Party in Estonia and the Assembly of Russian-Speakers of Estonia) (Kirch, 1997, p. 51).

⁵ Stateless people have a grey-coloured passport instead of a red European or Russian passport.

by commercialisation and foreign capital investment. Today, the Norwegian company Schibsted owns the largest publishing group Eesti Media (that owns national newspapers such as Postimees, as well as local papers, magazines and TV/radio channels) (Lauk and Shein, 2005). The Swedish company Marieberg, being part of the Bonnier group, has also been active in Estonia and, together with Schibsted, owned the Ekspress Group – a publishing house that, besides owning newspapers, controls all Baltic and Ukrainian Delfi online news portals. Bonnier has since sold its shares, but the Ekpress Group has remained the second largest publisher in Estonia. Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm (2002) argue that the commercialisation at the end of the 1990s helped Estonian media to develop and maintain a watchdog position and become one of the main pillars of deliberative democracy. The precise way by which this commercialisation helped this development is unfortunately not further discussed by the authors. This positive view of commercialisation might be linked to the fact that Estonia is often described as a “winning country”, not only in terms of managing the transition, implementing democracy and establishing a free market (Charles, 2009), but also when it comes to the internet revolution (Howard, 2006), Estonia is among the leading countries. Being the first country to allow online voting in 2005, some analysts coined the expression e-Estonia because of how starkly democracy, nation building, and the internet revolution were interrelated.

Natalia Chuikina and Aurika Meimre (2007) describe the complex media landscape in Estonia as still strongly divided along ethnic lines, including Russian-language media produced in Estonia and media from the Russian Federation, popular among Estonian Russians. In 2007, there were around 30 Russian periodicals, but only four daily regional and local newspapers as well as three national newspapers available in Russian. The two newspapers that have the widest circulation are the Russian version of the Estonian daily *Postimees*, and *MK-Estonia*, which is the Estonian version of the Moscow-based *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. As for television, TV channels from Russia available in Estonia are far more popular than Russian-language channels based in Estonia – a trend that is reversed when it comes to the Radio (Chuikina and Meimre, 2007).

Hence, another point of interest used to investigate civic experiences in Estonia in this book is the contested question of the democratising potential of communications technology, which was revived with the *internet revolution* (Howard, 2006). Estonia is a leading-edge country when it comes to the implementation of e-services, the spread of free wireless internet connections,

and the development of an extensive economic, technological and educational programme (Tiger Leap program) – all of which has put Estonia firmly on the map as an “e-state” (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Reinsalu, 2009). Furthermore, Estonia claims to save 100,000 USD per year by holding paperless cabinet meetings, and all legislation is published online only (Charles, 2009). At the same time, civic engagement is still beneath the European average along with other post-communist countries (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Torney-Purta, 2002) and Estonia is one of the most polarised countries in Europe, with a large gap between rich and poor, which of course has implications for the so-called “digital divide” (Lauristin, 2011). The question of the digital divide becomes even more pertinent if legislation is only available online.

One example of the attempts to establish an Estonian version of digital democracy was the TOM (Täna Otsustan Mina – “Today I Decide”) project – an online platform where Estonians could post suggestions for legislation. Estonia has been at the forefront of infrastructure development for digital democracy that only now is being reproduced in larger European countries such as Germany.⁶ The enthusiasm in the beginning (with 359 forwarded proposals in 2001) could not be maintained, and the numbers of proposals had dropped to only 49 in 2005 (Ernsdorff and Berbec, cited in Charles, 2009). The portal was closed down in 2008, because of a lack of both public interest and engagement. TOM’s successor is a similar platform called *osale.ee* (participation web).

However, because of initiatives like TOM, and its aim of being a cutting-edge actor when it comes to information and communication technology, Estonia is an interesting case for examining how its citizens perceive these official attempts at democratisation through technology.

Young People and Civic Participation in Estonia

During the early years of the 2000s, it was quite common to declare civic culture, civic involvement and engagement in Western democracies (but also and maybe especially in post-communist countries), as being dangerously in decline. Democracy was described as being severely threatened by the non-participation of its disenchanted citizens (Buckingham, 2000; Conway, 2000; Milner, 2002; Putnam, 2001; Skocpol, 2003). Young people especially were

⁶ In Germany the discussion platform *Dialogue about Germany* was introduced in May 2011, where citizens could suggest and discuss the most pressing questions of the future.

seen as being increasingly alienated from mainstream politics and the ideal of the “informed citizen”. In reply to this dark picture of the *Diminished Democracy* (Skocpol, 2003), scholars engaged in discussions that broadened the understanding of political and civic engagement beyond traditional political activities such as voting and party membership. New media in particular were proposed as vehicles for new forms of civic engagement for young people in both the scholarly and popular debate.

Additionally, civic engagement and participation gained momentum in the aftermath of the financial crisis. The “civic hibernation” of the early 2000s seemed to be over. In reaction to austerity measures and the economic collapse, a wave of civic protests and disobedience washed over Europe. In the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Spain and Greece etc., young and old took to the streets in broad solidarity to voice their opinions and contradict the narratives of the withdrawn consumer citizen. At the same time, voter turn-outs and party membership remained in decline. What does this all mean for being an everyday young citizen in Estonia?

In general, the level of conventional political participation in Estonia is rather low. Compared to other countries that are part of the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 5, the low voter turnout in elections is especially apparent. Whereas in Estonia only 57 per cent of the population participated in the last national election, the average for the ESS countries⁷ was 73 per cent. When it comes to working for a political party, Estonia lies significantly below the average. In Estonia, three per cent of respondents had worked for a political party or action group during the last 12 months, which compares to an average of 12 per cent among all ESS countries. However, in Estonia, slightly more respondents than the EU average of 4.6 per cent have been a member of a political party (5.4 per cent). If we take *work for a civil society organisation*, *signing offline petitions* and *protesting* as indicators of conventional civic participation, Estonia lies significantly below the ESS countries’ average in all categories.⁸

It is also quite clear that forms of non-conventional participation are rare in Estonia. If we take civic consumerism as an indicator of non-conventional

⁷ The countries participating in the ESS are the EU27 plus Israel, Turkey and the Ukraine.

⁸ The ESS average for engagement in civil society organisation lies at around 12 percent, while in Estonia, only five per cent of the population are engaging in these kinds of organisations. A similar picture is given when looking at the practice of signing petitions. The ESS’ average is around 19 per cent, in Estonia it is eight per cent. When it comes to protesting, the ESS average is 6 per cent. In Estonia only two per cent have been protesting.

forms of civic participation, Estonia has six per cent compared to 13 per cent – significantly below the ESS countries’ average. Also, when it comes to environmentally friendly lifestyles, including activities such as recycling waste and sustainable transportation, Estonia lies beneath the EU27 average (Keller and Kiisel, 2009).

The subsequent chapters are an attempt to provide some insights into Estonian civic culture through the lens of civic experiences. However, before delving into the empirical material, I introduce the notion of civic experiences comprising action-based and orientation-based experiences in chapter three.

2. Civic and Media Experiences

I feel that I cannot trust the state any longer. There is something called legitimate or rightful expectation, which has definitely been ignored. That's also an expression of a basic respect for students (and citizens) (Kajsa – diarist and interviewee).

This introductory quotation is an example of civic experiences as they are understood in this book, namely as the way citizens, in this case young citizens, relate to the political, politics and to fellow citizens. Addressing questions of civic culture and democracy through the rather broad notion of civic experience, the book suggests that democratic values and procedures including participation are, and should be, understood as deeply-anchored in the “life world” (see also Barnhurst, 2003). Hence, the project establishes an approach in which civic culture is understood from a holistic perspective as mediated through experience. Basic to this approach is the assumption that democracy is not understood in its minimalist expression, which starts and ends with electing representatives, but in its “maximalist” form, namely:

a balanced relationship between representation and participation, which reflects the continuous will to broaden participation, while applying a definition of the *political* as being inherent in the *social*, thus suggesting multidirectional participation and enhancing difference and heterogeneity (Carpentier, 2011, p. 17).

This approach to participation presupposes the existence of civic experiences that are anchored in the “life world”. The question then concerns the pre-conditions for civic engagement and participation at an everyday level. What motivates people to civic action and what keeps them from it? At the same

time, we need to inquire into the different ways in which media are involved in that process, without assuming them to be predominant in fostering civic orientation and participation.

For the idea of deliberative democracy in the Habermasian tradition, communication and exchange of information is basic for achieving consensus. Deliberation is based on an open and free exchange of arguments and information; this in turn enables the formation of public opinion among citizens. As discussed earlier, this exchange of arguments and information is often mediated and mediated. Hence, media are highlighted not only as sites facilitating the exchange of arguments and thereby deliberation, but also as critical observers of the political sphere. The same goes for the agonistic public spaces that are the preferred notion here.

Current approaches in media studies, such as mediatisation or mediation, aim to tackle the increasing importance of media for all kinds of political and social processes, such as the constitution of public spaces. Mediatisation is presented as a meta-process comparable to globalisation and individualisation (Krotz, 2009), as a moulding force (Hepp, 2011), and a result of growing institutionalisation and independence of the media (Hjarvard, 2008). One major assumption of the mediatisation hypothesis is the degree to which media are moulded into all spheres of life has increased. However, opinions clash as to exactly how and when the process of mediatisation initially started.

Lilie Chouliaraki (2006), drawing on Silverstone's conceptualisation of mediation, stresses the ethical function of media in their ability to compress time and space and to overcome symbolic and physical distances. In contrast to mediatisation, the focus is here on representational issues in media, for example giving a voice to vulnerable groups.

Both mediatisation and mediation are tackled here from the citizens' perspective. In that sense, it is interesting to look at the role of the media as societal institutions as well as their potentially growing importance (mediatisation), but also at media's representational role (mediation). Thus, it seems logical to focus, for example, on critical media connection, which is analysed in terms of the potential centrality of the mainstream news media for constructing social reality, but also in terms of how specific representations are perceived.

The understanding of the role of media in relation to civic experiences that I would like to stress is grounded in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (1985). Although Laclau and Mouffe do not directly discuss the role of the media in their theoretical discourse approach, there are possible readings that

suggest, on the one hand, that the media are a means of “producing and promulgating social myths and imaginaries (...)” (Torfing, 1999, p. 211) and, on the other hand, that media are sites of struggle for hegemony, and resistance to that hegemony. They are the sites of struggles about identities, distribution of resources and societal control. Media are thus understood as spaces of reinforcement and contestation of power.

Developing the thought that media potentially provide spaces for both producing hegemony and challenging it, one could thus make the connection to the “structural undecidability” of the social, which Laclau and Mouffe (1985) derived from Derrida. Structural undecidability refers to the lack of a foundational centre of the social. This lack allows for an indefinite flexibility of the meanings of social phenomena. Torfing (1999) uses electronically-mediated communication as an example, which, when understood without context and as self-referential, can open up a space for the user or recipient, where they can identify with different discourses. However, Mouffe remains critical about the immediate democratic potential of new media. In an interview with Nico Carpentier and Bart Cammaerts (2006), she stresses that new media are not necessarily more democratic, and might actually enhance fragmentation rather than open up spaces for the exchange of conflictual arguments. Hence, they do not automatically open agonistic spaces for diverse positions, but leave people within self-reinforcing, self-referential communities and unchallenged in their discourses. Here, Mouffe shares Habermas’ (2006) position, especially when it comes to concrete suggestions for establishing democratic structures in the context of media. Mouffe suggests, like the deliberative theorists, that institutional pluralism is crucial for public spaces and democracy but the starting points are crucially different.

Media are also involved in what Laclau would describe as “myth production”, and

by myth I mean a space of representation which bears no relation of continuity with the dominant “structural objectivity”. Myth is thus a principle of reading of a given situation, whose terms are external to what is representable in the objective spatiality constituted by the given structure” (Laclau, 1990, p. 61).

This means that myths are a distorted representation of reality that is inevitable and necessary for the constitution of the social as well as for establishing the necessary frame of reference for social acting. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) describe the myth of the nation state as constitutive for national

politics, which at the same time limits the options for what is understood as meaningful or of common concern. Media uphold and present, in addition to other discursive machineries (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007), myth construction, and could therefore be analysed in terms of the societal myths that they present as social reality.

Couldry (2006a) establishes the notion of the social myth and uses it to discuss the power that is attributed to the media through providing an exclusive entrance point to social reality. Social reality in his terms is mythified in two ways. On the one hand, there is the myth of a common social centre around which society is built. On the other hand, media are understood as powerful gatekeepers to a particular social centre. Both are myths that reinforce the powerful position of media in society (Couldry, 2006a). The ways in which these myths are reproduced and adhered to by the participants in this study will be discussed with a view to analysing the perception of the role of media from a citizens' perspective. In light of these myths, Couldry (2006b) formulates his critique of media-centred media studies that neglect the complex spaces of which media are a part, this thereby foregrounds the importance of mainstream media. From this point, the powerful position of the mainstream media is continually reinforced. Consequently, I establish a decentred perspective on the media as sites of discursive struggle with the potential to both challenge and reinforce existing hegemonies.

Defining Experience

As previously indicated in this study, trying to define the notion of experience leads into a jungle of conceptual confusions. As a first theoretical delineation, I should again emphasise that experiences are here understood as *lived experiences* rather than in terms of certain strands of psychology (e.g. the psychology of emotions), where emotional experiences are, for example, measured as physical reactions (Froehlich et al., 2007; Gjedde and Ingemann, 2008). The engagement here will, therefore, focus on cultural studies, critical theory and anthropology. However, the field remains broad and confusing. One starting point might be to engage with the everyday understanding and usage of the term *experience*. The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* suggests that there at least five different meanings in common usage. The meanings suggested range from *observations and participation leading to knowledge*, to *practical knowledge through activities*, *conscious events constituting human life*, but also *the*

past of a community, and something that is personally encountered and lived through and the process of perception (events or reality). As one can see from the definitions provided by the dictionary, experiences encompass different dimensions, such as time and place. They might be understood as a structure or as specific, subliminal events that are separated from the stream of everyday life. Furthermore, they can be understood as individual perceptions, but also as collective, shared encounters. These different meanings of *experience* in everyday usage reflect to some extent how the word is used also in the scholarly literature.

As argued earlier, experience as a concept is foundational in anthropology and, even though the word experience appears countless times in the titles of articles and books, the concept is far from clearly defined (Throop, 2003). Victor Turner, as one of the most prominent anthropologists looking at experiences embodied, for example, in the ritual process, tried to approach the concept through an etymological definition. In *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982), he traces the Greek roots of the English word experience to *perao*, which relates experience to the notion of “I pass through”, opening up for Turner’s engagement with rites of passage and liminal experiences. In his chapter in *The Anthrology of Experience*, he reminds his readers of Dilthey’s distinction between *Erleben* and *Erlebnis* as two forms of experience (Turner, 1985; 1986). *Erleben*, following Dilthey, refers to immediate living through experience, and *Erlebnis* to the retrospective attribution of meaning. In that sense, experience spans across the duality of fluidity and fixedness. Experience as *Erlebnis* is understood as a structure that has a particular form and coherence. Another distinction is proposed by Husserl, who distinguishes between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* (Warnke, 1987). *Erlebnisse*, for both Husserl and Dilthey, refer to meaningful, conscious units, in other words *lived experience*. *Erfahrung*, by contrast, is understood as scientific experience and implies a longer process which is related to knowledge (Warnke, 1987). This distinction is crucial as it focuses on experiences as *Erlebnisse* rather than *Erfahrung*, on which I will expand later.

The retrospective attribution of meaning to experience is also mirrored in Turner’s distinction between “mere experience” and “an experience”. “Mere experience is simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events. *An* experience (...) stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years and forms what Dilthey called a ‘structure of experience’” (Turner, 1986, p. 35). Distinguishing between *mere experience* and *an experience* implies the procedural character of experience developing through different stages. If mere

experience is converted into *an* experience through reflexive engagement, one can speak of a distinguishable, isolable sequence at the intersection of external events and internal responses (Turner, 1986). Emotions that occur from mere experience potentially create a disturbance or shock. As a consequence, the subject makes sense of the emotions through reflection and thereby transforms mere experience into *an* experience. The meaning of the whole sequence or episode is produced by relating the present experience to former episodes and future expectations, through which a relational structure emerges. The transformational process from immediate perception to mediated judgement, as Geertz (in Throop, 2003) puts it, happens through symbolic forms that organise experiences, e.g. narrations. Geertz, in contrast to Turner, argues that an experience is never a mere experience, because experiences always appear only on the replay of an event that is recounted to us. The post-structural take on experience continues on that line of thought. Davies and Davies (2007) suggest, for example, that researchers can never discern pre-existing experiences that appear independently of the interview situation or other accounts that are collected. Furthermore, the subject cannot reflect and share with the researcher those experiences that exist outside the interview situation. The *self* unfolds in the process of interaction with the researcher.

In cultural studies, one of the most prominent names connected with the notion of experience is, as indicated earlier, Raymond Williams, who suggests a rather broad definition of experience. Williams sees culture as a “whole way of life”, and as a *lived experience* that is embedded in a *structure of feelings* or a general social character of a specific historical period. In *The Long Revolution* (1961/2001) he suggests that the structure of feelings refers to “a culture of a period” (p. 64), which “has to deal with the public ideals [and] with their omissions and consequences, as lived” (p. 80). The dominant social character, on the contrary, is defined as “characteristic legislation, the terms in which [something] was argued, the majority content of public writing and speaking, and the characters of the men most admired” (p. 79). What Williams mainly aims to grasp is that the dominating *zeitgeist*, which is of course experienced by the individual, is however also something other than accumulated individual experience. It is an expression of the specific historical moment and of its legislation and social structuring that lead to a shared form of experience or *Erfahrung*. Williams specifies this understanding of experience in the second edition of *Keywords*, and suggests that experience refers to:

- a) knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection and

- b) a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from “reason” or “knowledge” (Williams, 1985, p. 126).

This definition resonates to some degree with the distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnisse*.

A similar, superordinate understanding of experience as *Erfahrung* is provided by critical theorists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1972) in their work *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Public sphere and experience). Their starting point for engaging with experience is the public sphere as *Erfahrungshorizont* or, as Jameson puts it, “[t]he structure of the “public sphere” [that] is [now] seen as what enables experience or, on the other hand, what limits and cripples it” (Jameson, 1988, p. 157). Here, experience, as with *Erfahrung*, is understood against the background of the capitalist production process. Negt and Kluge suggest that experience is both public *and* private, and provides a unity in (proletarian) life, which means that everyday experience is understood as – building on Adorno – *Verblendungszusammenhang* that keeps the workers from seeing the logic of capitalist society. The production of everyday experience is thus pre-organised by the “cultural industry”. Experiences of the everyday are in that context mainly presented as encounters with the “experience industry” (*Erfahrungsindustrie*). Of interest here, again, is the linkage of individual, empirical encounters with a general kind of collective working-class experience. However, the focus here is not on the political economy of experience as *Erfahrung*, but on individual *Erlebnisse*. I am interested in the superordinate form of experience as *Erfahrung* only to the degree that individual experiences as *Erlebnisse* are linked to the general *structure of feelings* or culture, namely the civic culture prevalent in contemporary Estonia.

Following Husserl’s and Dilthey’s distinction, *experiences*, are understood as both a stream of encounters (*Erfahrung*) and as disruptions to the stream of everyday life and, in that sense, as specific, consummated episodes (*Erlebnisse*). The focus is, however, on the latter one, namely *Erlebnisse*. The episodes in the diaries and interviews are specific and discrete in their narrative form, but they take shape against the background of a stream of unspecific experiences, which I would call *Erfahrung*. Civic *Erlebnisse* are, hence, citizens’ concrete encounters, for example, a protest. Civic experiences as specific episodes are investigated in three examinations of public connection. I conclude that they are related to experiences as *Erfahrung* by seeing their relevance to civic culture in Estonia as a “structure of feelings” in a specific historical period (Williams, 1961/2001).

In general, my understanding of experiences resonates with Dewey's (Dewey, 1930/2005) arguments in *Art as Experience*. He describes an experiential situation as being

under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges (Dewey, 1930/2005, p. 36).

Experiences thus are moments that are given a specific meaning. At the same time, experiences are discrete episodes that are organised in relation to previous and subsequent episodes. They appear as “the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives” (Dewey, 1930/2005, p. 45). Experiences need “external embodiment” (Ibid., p. 58) i.e., some kind of articulation. In Dewey's case, the articulation or “external embodiment” takes the form of the art object. Here, experiences take shape in the narrations of the participants implying different possibilities of structuring the external embodiment of experiences compared to an artwork, as well as the reading of them.

Experiences understood as *Erlebnisse* are related to different objects of experience (e.g. friendship, love, money, school, peers), around which the narration and thereby the experience evolves. In this book, I am interested in experiences that evolve around the objects of *the political*, *politics* and *citizenship*. These experiences are consequently called civic experiences, and they refer to individual understandings of one's position in relation to others within the structures of democratic society.⁹ Furthermore, civic experiences occur when the individual relates to fellow citizens and, in that sense, when they negotiate their relationship to others within the same regulative framework of rights and duties.

The following episode from Anu illustrates the theoretical reasoning about experiences above:

Today I had the possibility to see that Estonian media like to make a big elephant from every little midge. After the education minister Tõnis Lukas mentioned in a conference that we should react to the growing number of boys dropping out from school with curricular work for boys and that in some

⁹ The structures here are not necessarily understood as being congruent with the nation state. Other supranational or global frameworks regulating the code of democratic conduct are conceivable as well, e.g. the European Union.

places segregation of boys and girls has given positive results, news a la special classes and schools for boys were published immediately. It seems that that media feel that people are bored and that they like any kind of panic and it is so simple to spread panic nowadays (Anu – diarist).

Anu refers to a specific event namely reports about a speech by the education minister. This event triggers a general reflection about the media sphere in Estonia and excessive reactions to the talk. She refers to the implied assumptions that media have about their audiences. In terms of the diary this marks a secluded episode referring to a specific event, including reflections and Anu's understanding of it.

The *civic* in civic experiences is linked to the public rather than private character of the experiences of interest here. Dahlgren (2009) reminds his reader of the Greek (*civitas*) and the Latin (*civcus*) source of the word civic. He argues that the civic is linked to the public. Hence, the civic appears “in the sense of being visible, relevant for, and in some way accessible to many people, that is, situated outside the private, intimate domain” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 58). He continues by more broadly defining the civic as a precondition of the political. The subsequently-developed categories of civic experiences are based on Jones' (2006) three dominant assumptions about current research on what he calls “mediated citizenship.”¹⁰ First, he argues that the research is dominated by the idea of “hard news functioning” as the major mediator between the political elite and the ordinary citizen. However, “popular content” may also play a similar mediating role as previous research has shown (Corner and Pels, 2003/2006; van Zoonen, 2005; van Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj, 2010). Secondly, Jones argues that the analysis of political mediation often focuses on information dissemination to the “informed citizen”, as in the work of Schudson (1999), and this is the normative expectation of news media's contribution to political and civic culture. Thirdly, Jones asserts that political and civic engagement is based on, and expressed through, physical activity. However, beyond the question of what important political action actually is, Jones asks “what of the forces and factors that *precede* political action?” (Jones, 2006, p. 370, emphasis in the original). He concludes that political and civic experiences and encounters are largely mediated, since “Western societies have experienced the explosive growth and diffusion of media technologies and their

¹⁰ Mediated citizenship refers here to the involvement of media in the process of becoming and being a citizen (Jones, 2006).

increasingly central location in our public and private lives” (Jones, 2006, p. 365). Further, he argues that

political activity comes, for most people, through their choosing, attending to, processing, and engaging myriad media texts about the formal political process of government and political institutions as they conduct their daily lives (Jones, 2006, p. 378).

Applying Jones’ analysis of “dominating paths” in citizenship studies, we may thus follow the assumption that it is not necessarily news that mediates political issues, the model citizen is not necessarily the “informed citizen”, and physical activity is not essential. Hence, the understanding of the civic includes a broad variety of experiences that are action- and *non*-action-related.

Based on the empirical material used in this study (diaries and interviews) in connection with the aforementioned theoretical approaches, I distinguish between civic experiences that involve some kind of physical action and civic experiences that are mainly based on an orientation or involvement, namely *public connection*. The first category encompasses civic experience as civic participation, and includes a discussion of action-based civic experiences. The second category of civic experience resonates with Jones’ critique of traditional citizenship studies, often focusing exclusively on civic experiences as action. Within this latter category, I analyse civic experience that constitutes public connection, and which are not action-based. The boundary between these two forms of civic experience is, however, not clear-cut. Action-based civic experiences and non-action-based civic experiences often intersect and overlap. Non-action-based civic experiences can (not inevitably) lead to civic activity. At the same time, civic action resonates with non-active, reflexive forms of civic experience.

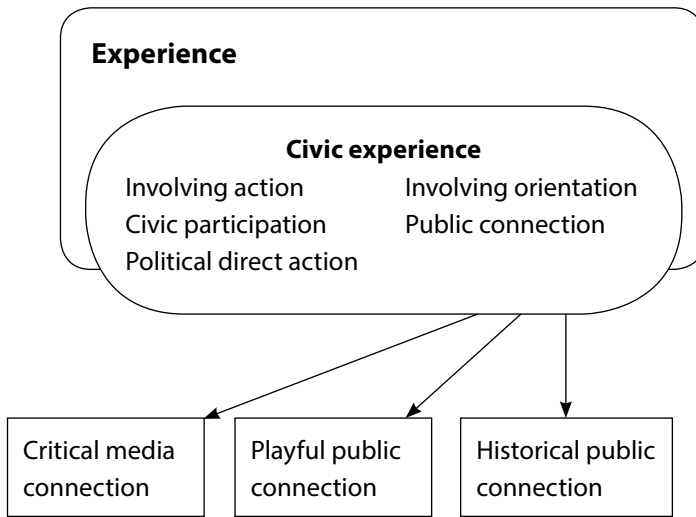


Figure 1. Locating public connection as civic experience

The analysis will focus on civic experiences as public connection, since orientation has largely been overlooked in previous research. A concept related to orientation is *political interest*, which is a crucial variable in political science. There, it has been mainly operationalised as the self-reporting of interest in elections or current affairs. One example of how political interest is measured can be seen in the following question:

Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you, would you say that you have been/were *very much* interested, *somewhat* interested or *not much* interested in the political campaigns this year? (Shani, 2009; cf Teixera 1992).

What is missing here is an in-depth engagement with the diverse forms of orientation and how these evolve and develop in different contexts.

Experience and Narrative

Some of the discussed conceptualisations of experience include the idea of different stages of experience, whereby the transformation process encompasses mainly reflection and links the current experience to the past and future. This

procedural model of experience implies a pre-reflexive form of experience that exists outside of language. The post-structural take on experience, however, suggests that there is no such experience; experiences cannot be accessed and understood outside of language and how the subject talks about them. The subject is, in that sense, discursively reflected and reflecting and “not identical to the subject it was before it engaged in the speech or the writing (...)” (Davies and Davies, 2007, p. 19). It is “always transformed in its encounter with the other, always becoming in the exchange with the researcher and the research, always partial and incomplete in its rendition of self that can be said to exist and preexist” (Ibid., p. 19). Taking this as a starting point, the significance of narration for understanding subjective experiences becomes clear, which also explains the choice of using diaries and in-depth interviews here (Couldry, 2010; Pickering, 2008). Throop notes, however, a tension between experience and narrative in the anthropological discussion, since narration has been seen as *fixing* and *ordering*, while experiences are *fluid* and *flowing*. In consequence, there has been a tradition in anthropology of defining experience as the opposite of narrative (Throop, 2003). Narration in this tradition is understood as a distortion of life as a stream that is lived through – a distortion that is based on a temporal removal of the subject from the flow of the everyday, and as a condensation of complexity. Cheryl Mattingly (2000) considers the general picture of experience in this context as non-narrative, formless, unstructured, fragmented, incoherent and discontinuous. She, however, aims to challenge this dichotomy by arguing that *lived experience* is ordered by remembering and anticipating, which is *narration*.

In a similar vein, Thompson suggests that *lived experiences* are acquired through “the temporal flow of our daily lives; it is immediate, continuous and, to some extent, pre-reflexive, in the sense that it generally precedes any explicit act of reflection” (Thompson, 1995, p. 227).

Through the task of writing a diary, it was suggested to the participants to reflect upon their *lived experiences*. In their narrations they chose specific encounters, specific *lived experiences* that they perceived as meaningful in the context of writing a diary for this research project. Their understanding of the diary genre is of special importance here. Furthermore, through their narrations, the participants established a time frame and order for a stream of experiences.

I was at the one day creativity course. We listened to the music, then we drew, folded and pasted different objects which we imagined. We also had some

other fantasy developing tasks. It was a really fun course! This was organised for us by Malev. Malev is the youth summer working camp organisation in Estonia. I am one of the group leaders there in the summer time and this creativity course was organised for us group leaders (Grete - diarist).

This short episode from Grete's narration about her activities with Malev, an organisation for scouts, includes clear markers of time. She depicts her experiences during that specific day. This is marked by expression of temporality such as *then*. At the same time, she summarizes her experiences with "*It was a really fun course!*" and she embeds this episode in a wider context of the organisation and her role within it.

The methods employed here should be considered within the framework of narrative analysis rather than ethnographic research, since I only partially attempt to fulfil the broadly-employed understanding of the ethnography of Hammersley and Atkinson:

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (2007, p. 3).

At the same time, I am interested in investigating some aspects of young people's lives, which includes finding out how these "people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 4). I attempt to get close to the participants' everyday lives without observing them, but by letting them produce their own narrations of their everyday lives in the form of diaries and in-depth interviews.

Narrative analysis originating from literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics encompasses a variety of research practices and analytical strategies, such as biographical studies, autobiographical approaches, as well as life- and oral histories (Creswell, 2007). Despite, or because of, the intensive engagement with narrative analysis within qualitative research, the field is full of ambiguities and controversies. Hence, one can hardly point to a coherent tradition of narrative analysis (Rogan and de Kock, 2005). In media studies, narrative analysis has a prominent position, especially in film analysis, where it is also referred to as "narrative semiotics" or "narratology" (Bruhn Jensen, 2002). The focus here is on how stories are told through the

media, e.g. movies, by focusing on different levels of analysis, such as technical aspects, plot development and characters. In general, the term narrative may refer to an actual text or more abstract discourse. The understanding employed here is linked to narratives as stories told by individual subjects (Chase, 2011).

Booth (1999) argues that narratives as a research method have experienced a revival since the mid-1990s. This revival is due to the continued importance of the Chicago School, as well as of feminist and critical race theory. Narrative analysis is understood as creating ways for making the voices of the oppressed and subaltern heard, i.e., the voices of those normally excluded from academic discourse. Booth's second argument for narrative analysis is that it stops the subordination of people's lives in favour of the researcher's quest for generalisation. Stories encompass the emotional experiences of the storyteller, which are normally suppressed by so-called "objective", or "abstract" methods.

The diaries and interviews produced encompass meaning that organises and structures the experiences of the participants in the form of stories. At the same time, they serve as disruptions to the stream of everyday activities and routines of the participants. Shaun Moores (2006) argues that analysing the experience of migration permits research into modes of disruptions that might "heighten reflexive awareness." In a similar way, I look at the diaries and interviews as disruptions, not as vast as the migration experience, but as a break in established routines with the potential to trigger an enhanced, temporary awareness and reflection on the part of the participants about their everyday lives. As Moen (2006) argues, narratives are methods and phenomena of inquiry and are treated as such here. With a clear foundation in Ricoeur, Moen focuses on three main characteristics of narratives as research methods: first, all experiences are organised in narrative form. Those narratives are shared between individuals, but they are also produced as "introspectives". Through storytelling, one assigns meaning to certain experiences or aspects of experiences. Second, narratives depend on the social past and present of the storyteller, as well as that of those to whom the story is being told. Stories are not isolable, single structures, but identity constructions that are continuously negotiated and revised. Third, narratives are multi-voiced, i.e., they are shaped by individual experiences, knowledge, values and feelings. At the same time, they are collective stories influenced by the audience and the "cultural, historical and institutional settings in which they occur" (Moen, 2006). For individuals, narratives provide connecting points with their social surroundings.

In this connection process, a multitude of voices are included and related to each other in the personal stories being told or, as Ricoeur puts it:

As for the forms of fragility inherent in the quest for personal and collective identity, they are clearly linked to the power to narrate, insofar as identity is a narrative identity (...). Narrative identity is said to be a mark of power in that it has as its counterpart the temporal constitution of an identity, along with its dialogical constitution (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 18).

Following Ricoeur, narrations are meaningful units that organise episodes in one's life. However, different narrations can evolve around one and the same event, depending on the context. In that sense, Ricoeur (1996) proposes, similar to Mouffe when she speaks about "infinite identifications", that there are always numerous narrative identities of one person that are intertwined with others' life stories. Erfani and Whitmire highlight Ricoeur's political writings¹¹ to analyse the alienation of citizens from the nation state through the processes of globalisation. Ricoeur argues that alienation in a globalised world will never be completely overcome and is a "constitutive element of the human condition" (Erfani and Whitmire, 2008, p. 503). Whereas alienation has often been perceived as negative and something that needs to be overcome, Ricoeur presents it as the condition for the possibility of freedom and creativity, meaning that alienation calls for agency in creating a home in a world that is distanced from the self. This creation of a place in the world happens in and through narrations, in the stories of "who we are", which link individual narrations to collective ones through a process of *emplotment* that gives coherence in a world of disorder (Ricoeur, 1984). Emplotment refers to the ordering function of narratives for all kinds of experiences in different contexts. The narrative establishes an order for all experiential elements in a contiguous plot. By way of ordering, the situational elements are given meaning, and in this way, a specific role in the plot hence a temporal structure is established.

In his later work *Oneself as Another* (1992), Ricoeur describes the narrative as being characterised by *discordant concordance*, which means that a multitude of diverse, partially contradictory practices and events are reconciled in a story that establishes a temporal unity.

The paradox of emplotment is that it inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or which might not have

¹¹ They suggest, for example, Ricoeur's texts in Kearney's edited volume (1996).

happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability exerted by the configuring act (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 142).

This means that emplotment creates a mode of completeness and unity. Identity is constructed throughout the story, while being strongly linked to the concrete formulation of the story (plot). Although emplotment in the narrative establishes a unity and coherence, actors can take several roles: “The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her experiences. Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 147). Hence, narrations are not to be understood as stable entities. They are retold, reshaped, reconfigured and exist alongside each other, which links Ricoeur to Mouffe and her proposal of contemporary fixity of discourse.

The emplotment of civic experience in terms of narrative identity is influenced by, but not bound to, national borders and geographical conceptions of citizenship. By looking at narrations, one can examine the space where relations are established, namely those between the self, the neighbour and the other, without being bound to the nation state as a starting point (Ricoeur, 2007). In Ricoeur’s terms, there are no natural, substantive relationships, which rather are constituted by communication or argumentation. As he states, “[a]rgumentation is the site where the bonds between self, neighbour and others are established” (Ricoeur, 2007, p. 7).

Narrations in the diaries and interviews mark, at the same time, a life process rather than finished life narratives, “and as such they are (...) part of the practice of narrating and understanding what life means” (Rak, 2009). Because the aim here is to understand the connection of the participants with publics, the use of narrations in diaries and interviews seems appropriate as a method of inquiry. By employing a multimodal research design (comprising open-ended, solicited online diaries with a pre-questionnaire, evaluation interviews, and in-depth interviews) I aim to capture narrations that give me the chance to study the participants’ relationship to publics, as well as to understand how they relate to the social and cultural context.

The above discussion about narration encapsulates epistemological considerations, namely the question of “telling stories about stories” (Morley, 1992, p. 173). In Geertz’s sense, the analyses I produce are constructions of other people’s constructions, with different layers of interpretation. Besides the stories told during the interviews, my diarists produced several open-ended stories in their own writing within the time frame of two weeks. Can I

understand these stories as true accounts of their behaviour, or are they “virtual”, produced only for my research? Morley took up a similar discussion of how *Erkenntnis* is possible reflecting about the relationship of text authority and audience response. He tackles the problem of how it is possible to understand the audience as being active and self-reflective, while at the same time their responses are truly representative (Morley, 1992). He asks how we can employ such stories and representations to develop an understanding of how people make sense of TV. Morley argues that, without observational accounts, research is left with stories, which are limited by respondents’ cultural and linguistic frames of reference (Ibid.). But even observations are never objective accounts of truth, coming as they do from the researcher. Therefore, I cast the procedural, situated, narrative identity as the focus of my inquiry.

My goal in producing the representation of the representation (or “second order narration”) of the participants’ narrations is, following Bourdieu, “to provide the means of understanding” (1999, p. 1) through systematic analysis. When discussing truth and objectivity in the studies of media, there has always been the question of why we should understand media usage in its context as going beyond quantitative description of viewing habits. This questioning of the added societal and/or economic value is ever more present in current academic discourse, embedded as it is in increasing competition for research funding. In times of economic uncertainty, the main question might be boiled down to: “why do we need social sciences and humanities anyway?” To answer this question, I would again turn to Geertz, who argues that the main aim of anthropological research, and I would add any research within social sciences and humanities, is “to enlarge the universe of human discourse” (Geertz, 1973/1993, p. 14). This aim goes beyond the purely economic value of research, which is often stressed in current debates (see, for example, Harcourt, 2010). In that sense, I do not aim to produce representative generalisations about Estonian youth or develop policy proposals to improve the political participation of young people. My aim is rather to enlarge the discourse on media and democracy using people’s stories (Back, 2007) as well as to develop existing theoretical accounts through those stories. In that sense, I aim to provide the framework to understand the experiences of the participants and how they relate to the current situation in Estonia.

As for the concrete analytical steps, I follow Ricoeur’s “hermeneutic arc” which describes the movement from the first reading and understanding of a text to an in-depth understanding that is based on an explanatory, structural analysis (Fornäs, 1995; Nygren and Blom, 2001). At the same time, the

analytical process moves between the empirical, material and theoretical, as well as drawing on previous research. This movement is reflected in the chapters that are based on a dialogue between the analysis of the diaries and interviews and of the theories. Both *understanding* and *explanation* constitute the general divide in academic research, and are reconciled in a notion of interpretation that is based on both explanation and understanding (Ricoeur, 1981). In my own analytical work, this meant reading and grasping the meaning of the texts produced by the participants; firstly by using a more structural approach to develop common themes and categories as they arose.¹² The process of formulating general and more specific categories for the texts entailed going back to previous research and theories. Finally, the analysis culminated in the representation of the analytical categories in a story, which is detailed in the following chapters that aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the texts.

Keats (2009) suggests five paths for narrative analysis: firstly, intertextual versus intratextual analysis; secondly, a holistic-content analysis of the development of a story by exploring both implicit and explicit meaning; thirdly, an analysis with a focus on formal aspects of the story's structure; fourthly, an analysis suggesting categories and the quantity of their appearance; and fifthly, an analysis based on counting specific stylistic features. In one way or another, my own analysis is situated at the intersection of these categories, or rather it blends them into each other. Over the ensuing chapters, I propose in-depth analyses of individuals as holistic-content analysis, and look for commonalities as well as differences between the content of individual narratives. While developing an individual understanding of the stories told, I aim for a holistic view of the material, following the development of the different lines in the stories and taking the contexts into consideration. However, I am not primarily interested in the structure of the narration, i.e., focusing on characters, or the beginning, climax and ending (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). Of main interest here are the civic experiences and their major characteristics. During this analytical work of *following*, I also pay attention to formal aspects, but I am less interested in the mere quantity of certain categories or stylistic features being used. Rather, the significance and re-appearance of categories guided by the inter-individual analysis, in the sense of identifying differences and commonalities, as well as the dominating themes and tendencies.

¹² For an in-depth description of the analytical process, including the identification of 'text-based categories' and 'sensitising concepts' see Auerbach (2003).

The “situatedness” and individuality of the meaning-making process of the participants becomes especially obvious when looking at how they interpret the medium of the online diary. In some other contexts, the wide variety in the data might be assessed as a methodological problem of qualitative research methods. But I see its strength as vividly capturing subjective positioning and, since the diarists interpreted the expectations of the reader – the imagined audience – while writing, this is why I would like to discuss the importance of the relationship between the writer and the implied reader (Iser, 1987) for interpreting the genre.

Here, I refer to the questions of how and what the diarists presented in their entries – the narrations – and how far they reflect their understanding of the “diary genre”, which in the relatively modern sense is kept private and is an intimate form of expression. Because I moved the diary into the blurred boundary between private and public – i.e., the internet – the diary also took on a different identity. The internet diary genre thus goes back to a pre-modern understanding, where diaries were shared with people in both the private and public spheres (Lejeune, 2009; McNeill, 2005; Rak, 2009). Additionally, the diaries can be thought of as an opportunity to “write through the seam between the private and the public self...” (Serfaty, 2004, p. 29).

The interpretation of the diary as being a dialogue with me, or even a broader audience, did not apply to all of the diaries in the same way – a number of diarists chose a rather private form of engagement. They wrote about private relationships and family matters. One diarist even used her private diary and copied and pasted it into the project diary after she missed writing entries on two occasions. At the other end of the spectrum were Toomas and Kristjan, who said they were writing for a large, imagined audience. Rather than treating the diary as a therapeutic or private space for preserving memories, they interpreted the genre as a weblog, written in order to engage with a mainly unknown readership. Toomas was even interested in direct exchange with other writers and readers. He was disappointed when it turned out that the diary entries were not going to be shared with anyone else but me.

These kinds of varying interpretations of the diary genre are especially visible in how the diarists started their very first entries. Several participants (Hillar, Aleksandra, and Viktor) started their diaries by addressing me – e.g., “Dear Anne” – followed by a personal introduction, including a few biographical facts. Others used the common “Dear diary” address at the beginning of every entry, and a third group developed headlines and employed theme-orientated entries (Kajsa, Toomas, and Laine). The introductory words

signify a varying perception of the implied readership, because a number of diarists identified only me as their reader while others appealed to a broader audience. Serfaty (2004) identifies similar characteristics of unsolicited online diaries. This broad range of interpretations of the diary genre could stand paradigmatically for the procedural interpretation of expectations by the imagined audience. Genres are never stable entities that can be distinguished from each other in a clear-cut manner.

Civic Experiences of Young People

The young adults participating in my study are mainly students and between 18 and 29 years of age. Some of them would probably not even describe themselves as “young people” anymore, and their lifestyles, interests and personal problems are quite different. However, I consider them still belonging to a group of young people. My aim here is, however, not to develop a coherent picture of a generation born during the 1980s before the political system changed – a generation coming of age in the post-transitional country of Estonia – the aim is rather to present different voices about what matters to young adults in Estonia today as a way of understanding debates on media and democracy from a citizens’ perspective.

Research on young people is well established, and it is not only scholars that are easily willing to speak about the character of youth today; politicians, teachers, experts, policy makers, the media and other institutions all express their ideas about the youth of today in public discourse. As Melucci (1992) argues, it is often the youth itself that is not given a voice, since “adolescence and youth are the phases in life when change is strong, when what has been left behind is so close, when what one is beginning to discern is manifest but sometimes frightening, when words and forms to express ongoing experiences are so difficult to come by” (p. 51). In that sense, young people are often described as “human becoming” rather than human beings (Coleman, 2010). Similarly, Freeland (1992) describes adolescence as a phase between childhood and adulthood – a time of transformation from being a residue of nature in society that is developing into a full social subject with effective characteristics (Melucci, 1992).

Coleman (2010) argues that it is the social imaginary of young people today that forms the basis of youth policy-making. If the youth is imagined as being disenchanting from politics, as being fun- and entertainment-orientated

and disinterested in politics, the adult “expert” will make policy according to these assumptions in order to educate young people to be “good citizens”. There are several accounts of these imaginaries of young adults in post-industrial societies, with reference to mediated citizenship and consumerism. Some adopt Karl Mannheim’s concept of generations being constituted by shared experiences (Kalmus and Vihalemm, 2008). Often, this research crystallises around generational labels such as the “digital generation” (Papert, 1996), the “net generation” (Tapscott, 1998), “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) and the “electronic generation” (Banister, 1994). These labels share the belief that this generation is connected by having grown up with the digital media and the Internet. In a similar vein, Jenkins (2006) argues that young people today use more creative forms of engagement with the world than are offered by digital media. Linked to that are new forms of engaging with politics. This tendency finds its expression in a decline in political participation in a traditional sense among young adults, while their engagement in issues that are fluid, changing, and lifestyle-oriented has increased (Bennett, 1998). There are numerous studies that argue, in a similar vein, that young people prefer engaging in unconventional ways with politics (Arensmeier, 2010). However, the conclusions as to why this is so differ markedly.

Others focus on youth as a stage in life with different preferences for engaging with politics from those common in later periods of life¹³ (Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010; Hoikkala, 2009). Cultural studies’ research on youth, for example, conceptualises youth as a specific phase of life that is more prone to sub-cultural engagement, thus having implications for their civic participation and engagement (Pfaff, 2009). Youth culture approaches are often based on the tradition of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham; applying ideas developed in the 1920s and 1930s by the Chicago School, namely the ethnographic approach to urban sociology’s concept of subculture (Fornäs, 1995), prominent scholars such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall produced works about the emergence of sub-cultures and their potential for resistance. Youth culture is here analysed as a sub- or counter-cultural phenomenon, and the focus lies on the conflictual relationship with the established mainstream “adult” culture (Brake, 1980). Youth, and its liminal character, are imagined as a threat to established values, rules and norms. Furthermore, youth cultures have been analysed in terms

¹³ For a general discussion of the generation and life-phase paradigms see Närvänen and Näsman (2004).

of their impact concerning civic competencies. Youth culture might actually serve as an agent for socialisation of political views and may potentially contribute to knowledge about, and confidence to participate in, current political debates (Pfaff; 2009).

Instead of subscribing to one of the major fields of youth research or presenting a new image of young people, this study aims to give young adults a space to reflect about how they experience the public and politics. Rather than applying fixed categories of citizenship and reflecting on how to improve certain favoured forms of civic participation, I am interested in exploring young peoples' civic experiences as such.

Public Connection

The previously suggested conceptualisation proposes to take public connection, as one form of civic experience, as the joint focus in the analytical inquiries that will follow and in which different empirical forms of public connection will be investigated with respect to their emergence in the diary material and their resonance with current theoretical discussions on civic culture in relation to media. In their final publication, *Media Consumption and Public Engagement*, Couldry et al. (2007, pp. 8-14) present public connection as being basic to all kinds of conceptions of democracy, ranging from liberal to communitarian, and from participatory to representative democracy. The authors show that public connection is assumed, presupposed or invoked in the discussion of a vital democracy. The general definition suggests that public connection refers to the linkage between individuals through shared "matters of common concern". The authors propose that "as citizens, we share an orientation to a public world where matters of shared concern are, or at least should be, addressed: [they] call this orientation 'public connection'." The second assumption is that "public connection is principally sustained by a convergence in the media people consume" (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 3). Moreover, the authors define public connection as a basic orientation towards issues of common concern, which at certain times, e.g. during political upheaval or elections, might be translated into attention and action.

Two premises are crucial for the understanding of public connection: first, even in times of discourses on late modernity (including the fluidity and blurring of boundaries between the private and the public), a distinction between the two spheres remains meaningful. *The public* is here understood

as a sphere where common concerns are addressed and decisions about the distribution of common resources are made “in a world of limited, shared resources” (Couldry and Markham, 2006, p. 256). Couldry et al. (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 3) argue pragmatically that the private sphere, on the contrary, is dedicated to purely individual matters. The second assumption is, if people display a certain form of public connection, it might be sustained by similar media usage.

Furthermore, the authors propose that in order to understand a general orientation towards the public sphere, it is crucial to look at the stream of events of everyday life in which opportunities for political mobilisation are embedded. Public connection is understood as a bottom line – a stable factor in all moments of democracy. That means that an orientation towards issues of common concern is taken to be a persistent factor that follows from events of political mobilisation in any democratic society. The main advantage of public connection here is that it does not refer to action-based forms of civic participation such as voting, campaigning or demonstrating, but encompasses non-action-based engagement. This resonates with my aim of focusing on mundane forms of civic experiences that are potentially, but not necessarily, linked to physical mobilisation.

These implications are most relevant; however, there are also some factors that suggest the slight alteration of the initial definition of public connection. It remains rather unclear as to how issues become common concerns (Fraser, 1992). Couldry et al. (2007) suggest that the public is the space where these common concerns are addressed and decisions about the distribution of resources are taken. Although the authors present a pragmatic suggestion of how to define common concerns (namely as being related to shared resources that need to be allocated and therefore demand common decision-making), they do not consider the question of how common concerns are identified as such. What remains underdeveloped in this conceptualisation is the conflictual, and thereby political, character of what is perceived and accepted as shared concerns. The reason for not taking the conflictual character of public connection into consideration might be the understanding of public connection as a stable bottom line in the everyday. Conflict, by contrast, could be understood as a disruptive moment in the democratic process. Agonistic conceptions of democracy, however, as proposed by Chantal Mouffe and others, suggest that conflicts are integral and constitutive parts of the political process and need to be considered in all phases of the democratic process.

Mouffe argues that the main aim of radical citizenship should be to connect the struggles of suppressed groups in society and establish chains of equivalence in the discourse or, in other words, to show solidarity and establish a counter-hegemony that is expressed and characterised by new egalitarian social relations, practices and institutions (Mouffe, 1993).

The focus here is the conflictual character of citizenship that is achieved by participating in discursive struggles on the basis of the shared democratic values of freedom and equality. Citizens belong to the same political unit by acknowledging the legitimacy of the ethico-political framework upon which democratic institutional structures are built together with the awareness of being a citizen. Civic experiences emerge when individuals acknowledge a shared framework and are aware of co-existing with other citizens.

In this context it might be considered difficult to find empirical examples for the *conflictual* character of citizenship as it is an argument that can be better examined in and through a focus on discourses rather than experiences. However, in the following I would like to provide at least two episodes from the diary material that I understand as representing the conflictual character of civic experiences.

My mom told me about the issue that one young man in high school had said to the Russian ambassador that he should not intervene in Estonian politics. The boy got snubbed by the politicians and the school. He was told that he should apologise. What I was trying to tell was that my mom said that this issue was also discussed on a radio show. The radio show leaders had also discussed the fact that we really don't know what is taught in the Estonian Russians' schools in history classes. Maybe pupils are still taught about the old Soviet time thinking and history?! (Grete – diarist).

In this episode Grete reflects on the still dominant tensions between Russian Estonians and Estonians. The relation between Russian Estonians and Estonians is characterised by alienation and segregation as well as open conflict (during the Bronze Soldier crisis for example). Like Grete, the majority of participants express insecurity when it comes to “knowing” the other. Media representations, just as in the case that Grete discusses, serve as a source of information since direct exchange hardly ever happens. The political character in Grete's quote lies in the reference to this dominant unsolved conflict in Estonian society.

Another related example is taken from Maarja's diary.

Today I went shopping to buy a new fridge; it was delivered an hour ago. The man who was delivering it called me and spoke in Russian. Although I understood what he was saying, I kindly asked him to speak in Estonian for I was the client in this situation and have every right to be served in the official language of the country. I felt that he wasn't so happy about my request. This man seemed a bit arrogant afterwards. But it just might be my impression. I wish they could learn Estonian if they are living here. They were young enough for being born here, too. The language issue is talked about in media, too, quite often. Especially last year after the "Bronze night" (Maarja – diarist).

She clearly links the abovementioned conflict to her everyday life experiences. Starting from a mundane encounter, she generalises the problem and takes a position in terms of the language question. Furthermore she emphasises that this is still a controversial issue that is discussed in Estonian society.

Hence, in my reading, the definition of public connection assumes that there is already a consensus about what is of common concern. I would argue, following Fraser (1992) and others, that common concerns are under constant negotiation, and the subject of an ongoing struggle. In that sense, there is no bottom line of orientation towards shared concerns, but an ongoing struggle and negotiation of the same. Depending on current hegemonies, some issues are established as being important within society. One example of the struggle to establish a specific issue as a common concern was, in fact, brought up by one of the interviewees. He argued that there are hardly any political parties in Estonia that specifically represent Estonian Russians. Hence, the concerns of Estonian Russians, even though they touch upon resources that need to be allocated at a national level, often remain unaddressed. Consequently, issues that might be perceived as of common concern from a Russian perspective are potentially not reflected in mainstream politics.

The second major concern relates to the assumption that public connection is sustained by "a convergence in the media people consume" (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 3). This assumption implies that people can potentially lose public connection as a result of an increasingly diverse media landscape. I would, instead, argue that it is not the specific media format that is important for public connection, but the discourse to which people relate. Even if people share habits of using certain media formats (e.g. specific news broadcasts), they do not necessarily share the orientation towards the same discourse. Furthermore, one could argue with Hanna Arendt (as Couldry did in an earlier lecture on public connection (Couldry, 2004)) for diversity in the public space rather than a convergence that crystallises in "being seen and

being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. That is the meaning of public life (...)” (Arendt, 1958, p. 57). At the same time, one could ask whether convergent media consumption does not also contribute to public disconnection, in that it creates a distraction from issues of common concern that need to be addressed.¹⁴ In the diary material used for this study, there emerged forms of what I call *media criticism* as a reaction to mainstream news. Chapter four therefore introduces two contrasting positions drawing different conclusions from that media criticism, namely *critical media connectors* and *critical media disconnectors*. Yet Couldry et al. do in fact openly maintain shared media usage as a sustaining factor and thus themselves state that it was impressive “how differently people use media to orientate themselves to a public world” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 89).

Out of these concerns, this book suggests a redefinition of the concept of public connection as an orientation towards spaces where the struggle to establish certain shared issues of concern takes shape. This orientation is nowadays often intermingled with media consumption, which means affected, sustained, diverted by media in the form of institutions and social practices.

Civic and Non-Civic Experiences – Two Diaries

The following two diaries mark a distinction between what is here understood as civic- and non-civic experiences. The aim is to carve out the distinction through an analysis of two selected diaries, their contexts, and the empirical examples of the categories developed in the previous chapters. The two diarists can be considered “extreme cases” as their writings almost entirely represent cases of either civic- or non-civic experiences. Most of the other diaries show a variety of narratives about civic- and non-civic encounters.

Kajsa

Kajsa is a 23-year-old Estonian student of social sciences in Tartu, and a heavy internet media user. She states that she uses the internet for non-study and non-work related purposes for up to three hours on an average day. She never watches television, but reads one of the two national newspapers for up to one

¹⁴ This would link to the discussion of entertainment oriented media formats that distract the citizens from issues that are of political importance (Postman and Postman, 2006; Putnam 2001).

hour on an average day. Kajsa is mainly interested in animal rights issues and environmental questions. However, she feels that political representation of the issues that are of interest to her is missing in Estonia. Here she refers to a lack of a political party that specifically focuses on environmental questions. Furthermore, she laments the lack of non-governmental and local groups concerned with either animal rights or environmental issues. The main problem, she argues, is the size of Estonia and the small number of people that are interested in these questions. Therefore, local green activist groups often depend on the enthusiasm and work of a single person and, if they decide to quit, the whole group falls apart. Her diary consists only of narrations of civic experiences that range from discussions with her Facebook friends about a petition on dog meat in South Korea to a discussion about a new Estonian law on gay marriage. In a follow-up entry, she also discusses family values and traditions in Estonia, and her position on the questions of marriage and gay rights, as well as cuts to student funding in Estonia. However, there are no signs of her taking action to change the injustices she discusses in her diary besides the signing and sharing of petitions. She was once a member of an NGO and volunteered in a wildlife organisation, but after moving and beginning her studies her engagement faded. Ever since that time, she has missed the activity and her engagement with animal rights and the environmental issues. However, she feels that it is too much of a burden to start her own activist group while also keeping up with the study work.

One example of the conflictual aspect of civic experiences with fellow citizens is reflected in a specific episode in Kajsa's diary, where she posted a petition on animal rights on her Facebook page resulting in a series of arguments for and against it. Her friends disagreed for various reasons.

Besides her interest in animal rights issues, she is active in a group of approximately 15 to 20 bloggers that share entries about books, films, as well as political discussions and ideas that they do not find in the mainstream media. However, they keep this space exclusively to themselves, and have a rule that new members must be approved by the whole group. In that way, they have established a "*private public space*", as she terms it, with an intense exchange of ideas and thoughts that is different from other discussion forums.

Helene

In contrast to Kajsa, Helene has an average usage level of television, newspapers (online and offline), as well as the internet. She is 26 years old, Estonian, and has just finished her studies of sociology in Tartu. She now works

as an assistant in a marketing office. The second main difference between the diaries of Kajsa and Helene is that Helene almost never discusses civic experiences. Her diary entries are dedicated to her travels, parties, money shortage and relationship. If she mentions popular cultural media content, she remains vague on broader controversial issues beyond her private life. Obviously, the diary served a different purpose for her than it did for Kajsa. Helene uses it to reflect on her emotions, private relationships, and life circumstances.

The “non-civiness” of the experiences Helene describes refers to the fact that her diary consists of reflections that are limited to her private life or, to the “world of intimacy” (Habermas 1962). She does not relate her own precarious job and financial situation to broader issues such as the financial crisis and the austerity measures of the government. She does not seek contact with other people or groups that suffer from similar difficulties, or those who want to protest about them. Hence, she appears alienated from a sphere of negotiation and discusses problems that she faces as hers, and hers alone. One entry in the diary, where she reflects on the attitudes of her grandmother, is emblematic of her lack of connection to public issues, and to the *non-civiness* of her experiences. She writes, for example, that her grandmother had difficulties in accepting that other people in her neighbourhood benefited from social care and received, among other things, new washing machines. Helene thinks that this attitude is “shitty”, but she remains unspecific as to why she feels this way.

When it comes to the question of how civic experiences are related to the media, she is mainly disconnected, i.e., media content is not set into a wider frame of negotiation of common issues. News is of especially low interest for her, because the character of news reporting is “too negative” and “almost disgusting”, but again she does not expand on that opinion.

The above analysis of the two diaries provides the right background against which to go into greater detail about civic experiences.

3. Exploring Civic Experiences in Estonia

Before entering into the actual analysis of the diaries and in-depth interviews and mapping out young people's civic experiences in Estonia, a few words about the participants, the data collection and the methods of analysis are in place. Focusing in particular on the inherent ambivalences and contradictions of personal narrative, I will outline the particular qualitative approach taken in the analysis.

While choosing the appropriate sample for the study, the aim was not to explicitly recruit politically-active students, but students with all kinds of interests and positions regarding publics and politics. Moreover, I sought to achieve a relative balance in terms of gender, ethnicity and place of residence. The specific ethnodemographic situation of Estonia suggested the inclusion of a sizeable number of Russian participants. Thus in ethnodemographic terms, the region of Tartu differs to a great extent from Tallinn and Narva. Whereas Tallinn is characterised by a relative ethnographic balance of Russians and Estonians (55.3 per cent Estonians, 36.5 per cent Russians), Tartu is dominated by Estonian speakers (80.5 per cent Estonians, 15.5 per cent Russians). In Narva, in the north-east of Estonia, only 3.9 per cent are Estonians, while 81.4 per cent are Russians. In order to capture these huge variations, I used quota sampling to mirror that distribution. Nevertheless, the sample shows a certain lack of Russian diarists, which will be taken into consideration during the analysis. This was, in fact, another reason for conducting the in-depth interviews in order to achieve a more balanced participation in ethnic terms. Finally, the gender balance was quite hard to achieve as it was often difficult to motivate male participants to write dairies. Existing studies in the field, indeed, suggest that women are more likely to feel comfortable about writing a diary (Couldry, 2007; Bird, 2003). This is reflected in the slight gender bias when it comes to the number of male diarists in this study.

The focus of the analysis is on civic experiences, what larger categories they actualise, and their character. The background of the participants is taken into consideration merely to position the narratives of civic experiences within a particular context, namely the “life world” of the participants.

	Female	Male	Tallinn	Tartu	Narva	Estonian	Russian	Ukrainian
Diarists	13	7	11	7	2	17	1	2
Inter- viewees	26	13	15	16	8	20	18	1

Table 1. Socio-demographic sample information

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between March 2009 and March 2010. For the political context of the material collection, it is important to know that Estonia had local elections on 18 October 2009. This was reflected in several interviews and diaries, where participants referred to the importance of the upcoming elections as an indicator for the general parliamentary elections in March 2011.

During the interviews, we discussed, *inter alia*, the mediation of the international financial crisis which started in 2008 and reached its peak in Estonia in July 2009. While I was conducting the interviews in September 2009, the financial crisis was one of the major issues in the Estonian mainstream media. Before the financial crisis, the economic boom in the Baltic States had been huge and Estonia had been coined the “Baltic Tiger.” The combination of market reform with a high-skilled, but low-paid, workforce led to rates of economic growth of approximately eight per cent per year in Estonia. The financial crisis hit all three Baltic States hard, and in 2009, at the time of the interviews, Estonia was faced with negative growth rates of 13.9 per cent (Ummelas, 2011).

In both diaries and interviews, participants often make ambiguous statements, sometimes even contradicting themselves. In contrast to the perception of ambiguity as a methodological problem potentially threatening “proper” and “valid” findings, here ambiguity is understood as an important and telling finding (Riessmann, 2008).

In the interviews and diaries, the participants in this study make sense of the world. This “sense-making” is situated and thus susceptible to change in

certain contexts. Hence, ambiguity might be a sign of transitional periods in the lives of the participants. In this sense, a certain context potentially brings out certain preferences and attitudes. The switching between the positions of critical media connection and critical media disconnection is only one example of situated sense-making with changing attitudes as a consequence.

In quantitative research, the ambiguity and contradictory nature of participants' statements is often discussed under the headline of "social desirability" which might cause bias in the empirical material. Social desirability is understood as a perceived, socially-accepted position or attitude. Depending on intervening variables, such as social distance between interviewee and interviewer, the bias is more or less strong (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960).

The following analysis aims to take the discussion beyond this argument and examines the idea that the presented facts by the participants are not simply a mirror of reality but constructions that are "socially mediated and interpreted" (Power, 2004, p. 859). Relying on Bourdieu's concept of the "logic of practice", Elaine Power explains the contradictions between the information given by one interviewee and her contradictory actions. Bourdieu's logic of practice indeed comprises the notion that all practices of an individual always have an underlying logic that is not necessarily rational or stringent. The logic of practice is oriented towards situations encountered in daily life. Instead of casting her interviewee as a liar, Power therefore tries to understand why such contradictions appeared in the interviews. She draws the conclusion that the interview took place in a period of fundamental change for the interviewee, where the participant was still unsure about her own position. Consequently, she gives an account of a socially desired position that others expected her to take (Power, 2004).

In a similar vein, Cate Watson (2006) discusses ambiguities in her interview material. She argues that "situated reliability" is present in those contradictions. Ambiguities and contradictions according to her are a result of the need to tell personal experiences as a "good story" within the interview context. The interviewee as a storyteller is producing a valuable story, and tries to involve the interviewer as a listener to the performance. This tendency was apparent in the post-diary interviews that I conducted with the participants. A number of the participants stressed that they aimed to help me in my research and therefore tried to present important and valuable information, which was not always easy in their eyes. Watson, referring to Ricoeur, describes this aim of telling a "good" story as the "restructuring of narratives of personal experience" by "creating a chronology in reverse" (Watson, 2006, p.

371). Watson understands *identity* as emerging in and through narrations that are linked to discourses, which are experienced not only in linguistic terms but also as material practices. Hence, for example, the narrative identification as *Estonian Russian*, *Estonian* or *Russian* is linked to the hegemonic discourse and its characterisation of the groups. At the same time, the narrations are linked to practices, since they organise them retrospectively into meaningful units.

Following that suggestion, *identity* is understood as procedural and never fully accomplished or that narrative identity is never *stable* (Muldoon (2006). Different, even opposing plots about the same incident are constructed, with discordant events tied together allowing coherent life-story telling. This ability is encapsulated by the notion of *emplotment* that Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1988, 1992) suggests is necessary to understand the “world of the text” in contrast to the “world of the reader”. If one applies this understanding of identity, the stories being told in the interviews and diaries can be understood as processes of writing and re-writing the participant’s own identity. These processes take place in connection with shifting discourses.

In the following I will delve into the material to map out the civic experiences that emerged in the diary material.

Civic experiences and public connection in the diaries

I casted an early vote since it’s impossible for me to elect in my district on election day. And I must say, although it is heart-warming that more people vote with each election, it’s kind of silly how the situation turned out to be Keskerakond¹⁵ against all the others. Of course the way they interpret “dignity” and “democracy” is fascinatingly ghastly, but perhaps that’s only me, I am guessing (Pille - diarist).

In previous chapters the distinction between civic experiences involving *action* and civic experiences as *orientation* was introduced. This chapter will now explore forms of civic experiences further based on the diary material. The distinction between civic participation and civic engagement as two basic forms of civic experiences is here derived from Peter Dahlgren’s suggestion that

[e]ngagement refers to subjective states, that is, a mobilised, focused attention on some object. It is in a sense a prerequisite for participation: To “participate”

¹⁵ Estonian centre-left party Estonian Center Party (Eesti Keskerakond).

in politics, presupposes some degree of engagement. For engagement to become embodied in participation and thereby give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to practical, do-able activities, where citizens can feel empowered (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 80).

Civic experiences involves action gathers, conventional and non-conventional, as well as dutiful and self-actualising forms of civic participation, whereas civic engagement as orientation based includes media-related and non-media-related public connection (see figure below).

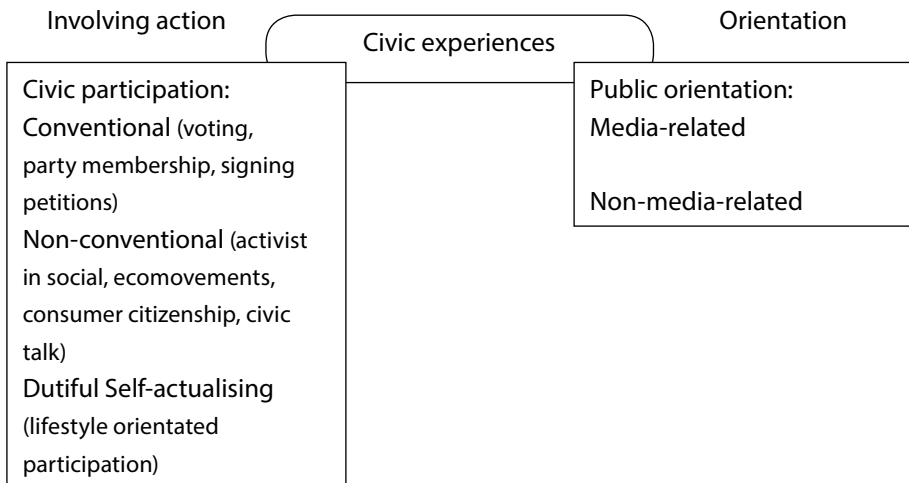


Figure 2. Overview of civic experiences, illustrating the conceptualization of civic experiences

Before continuing with empirical examples of both categories, it is important to note the complex relationship between public connection and civic participation which is not always clear-cut. In the diaries, participants often refer to civic practices and events such as voting and campaigning in elections, although they do not describe the practice of voting itself; or a narration starts out with a reference to public connection, but then moves to a description of specific activities. Later on in the analysis critical media connection will be discussed as well as how it leads to specific actions, namely practices through which critical media connectors aim to improve public discussion on specific

topics. Hence, public connection as orientation is analysed in the context of practices that have their roots in public orientation or that which guides public orientation.

Furthermore, both forms of civic experiences are related to media. As Dahlgren (2009) argues, current societies are highly mediated and the majority of civic knowledge is acquired through media. Media have, following that argument, a special role to play in relation to civic experiences and the democratic process. Andreas Hepp speaks of the moulding forces of the media, and argues that they have to be analysed

in their netting with human action, especially (but not exclusively) with communicative action. Or one could say in the terms of a culturally oriented media and communication research: the specificity of media can only be articulated in their appropriation as a process of cultural localisation. As materialised and institutionalised totalities of a plurality of (communicative) actions media only get “powerful” in nettings with practices (...) this means moulding (Hepp, 2011, p. 13).

In a similar vein, the social anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1990) speaks of our lives as being “translucened” (genomsyrad) by the media. Therefore, the role of media in the civic experiences analysed here is also discussed. The role of media in public connection is discussed later on, in terms of media-related and non-media-related civic participation and public connection. First, however, follows an investigation of conventional and non-conventional civic participation in order to put public connection as orientation into the broader context of civic experience.

Conventional and Non-Conventional Civic Participation

As indicated above, civic participation can differ in character, with its “conventional” and “non-conventional” forms, both of which are dynamic categories. What counts as conventional and non-conventional civic participation hence changes over time and is very much context based. Currently, conventional forms of participation involve activities such as voting, party membership, the signing of petitions, legal demonstrations and membership of non-governmental organisations. These forms of civic participation are often considered as being in decline (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005), especially among young people who are frustrated with the inaccessibility of

the political sphere (Long, 2002). In general, it could be argued that the practices of conventional participation are mainly related to the earlier discussed sphere of politics that Mouffe (2005) distinguishes from the political or, as Verba and Nie suggest, civic participation refers to “activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Verba and Nie, 1987, p. 2). In terms of the role of the media, conventional forms of civic participation are often linked to traditional mainstream media, which function as information disseminators (Norris, 2000). Hence, the “informed citizen” is the focus here.

Conventional civic practices can furthermore be linked to “dutiful citizenship”. Dutiful citizenship indicates one of two different modes in which citizens perceive and relate to the political sphere. Bennett et al. (2009) argue that individualisation, linked with increasing reflexivity, caused a shift in how young people especially engage with politics. They are

(...) less inclined to feel a sense of duty to participate politically in conventional ways such as voting or following the news, while displaying a greater inclination to embrace issues that connect to lifestyle values, ranging from moral concerns to environmental quality (Bennett, Wells and Rank, 2009, p. 106).

The authors call the former *dutiful citizenship* (DC) and the latter *(self-)actualising citizenship* (AC). Dutiful forms of civic participation thus refer to more conventional forms of political activity, such as voting and party membership, whereas self-actualising citizenship refers to non-conventional forms.

In contrast to conventional civic practices, some examples of non-conventional participation include: consuming *fair trade* and ecological products, *boycotts* and other forms of political consumerism, recycling, being active in social and ecological movements or informal local groups, street art, the signing and forwarding of *email* petitions and the ad-hoc organisation of protests (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005; Sörbom, 2005). These diverse forms of participation are often considered as increasing among young people, and are related – as Bennett et al.’s (2009) definition of self-actualising citizenship suggests – to lifestyle issues. Non-conventional participation is often sporadic and individualised (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005) and new media in particular are considered as enabling these forms of participation (Bucy and Gregson, 2001; Hartley, 2010).

The boundary between conventional and non-conventional forms is, of course, not always clear-cut, and conventional forms of participation such

as voting might involve unconventional features.¹⁶ However, the distinction seems analytically useful in the discussion of the diary material and the analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS). Dietlind Stolle and Michele Micheletti (2005) note that non-conventional forms of civic participation are often not systematically measured in larger surveys. The ESS, however, includes at least some variables referring to non-conventional participation (e.g. political consumerism).

In the diaries, conventional civic participation is not as widespread as non-conventional forms. There are three diarists that participate in a conventional sense, namely as party members, working for a political party during the campaign for local elections or voting in the same election.

Siiri describes the point in time when she decided to participate in the election campaign as a significant moment of change:

Today I made a decision: I have to work for my future. So I decided to help one of the main candidates to win the election. I have never done it before. I'm a little bit scared, but it is also very intriguing. So I think this is my challenge of the year. And I hope to learn so much from it (Siiri – diarist and interviewee).

Non-conventional forms of civic participation are characterised by participation in loose networks for social mobilisation and action. In the diaries, forms of non-conventional civic participation range from applying to participate in an anti-racism music festival, forwarding petitions to online networks, developing political board games, commenting on newspaper articles online, volunteering in social organisations, to various forms of civic talk. Eleven out of twenty diarists engaged in and/or reflected on at least one of the aforementioned forms of non-conventional civic participation.

Some of the above-mentioned cases might be interpreted as ambivalent or non-civic. For example, one could ask why playing at a music festival is understood as civic participation. However, civic participation includes the aim to change or preserve certain features of a political community (Adler and Goggin, 2005; Bucy and Gregson, 2001; Hooghe and Stolle, 2004). In this sense, the will to change or establish counter-narratives to a perceived failure to include marginalised groups is the focus of civic participation in the case of the music festival. The diarist presents participating in the music festival mainly as a possibility for the individual citizen to make a difference and

¹⁶ Elections might, for example, trigger non-conventional forms of protest as we saw in Russia in 2012 (Sandomirskaja, 2012).

perhaps change racist prejudices. In a similar way, the political board game that another diarist developed aims to get people involved in political discussions in a playful way.

Another ambivalent form of non-conventional civic participation is civic talk. Dahlgren argues that “certain kinds of communicative competencies [that] are important for a robust democracy” (2009, p. 86). Furthermore, he suggests talk is constitutive of the public and therefore it is a vital factor for democracy. Civic talk is among the basic foundations of the normative idea of deliberative democracy, and is discussed as a potential trigger of participation in more conventional terms (Klofstad, 2009). Civic talk, however, is not only of importance in the deliberative tradition, but also for radical democracy, as suggested by Mouffe. In Mouffe’s terms, it could be argued that the political emerges through conflictual talk, not only between citizens, but also between citizens and the political elite, in which one side tries to convince the other, or aims to establish an alternative discourse will counter the hegemonic discourse. Dahlgren (2009) describes this form of civic talk as “talk with the potential to the political.” As a second form of civic talk, Dahlgren suggests talk about politics as a sphere of ordering practices, discourses and institutions that regulate human coexistence.

One example of civic talk with *the potential to the political* is an episode that Maksim (a diarist) describes:

After the conference I had an excursion in Narva with foreign students. It was interesting for me to observe their behaviour and way of thinking. How are Russian students? What makes me different from them as a Russian student who lives in Estonia? (...) We have talked about differences in our towns and they told me that Narva is quieter and the streets are very clean and the roads are good. But this is of no importance for me. I asked what social problems they had. And they told me very calmly that they don’t have any problems, this was unexpected for me and made me wonder (Maksim - diarist).

Though Maksim does not describe the situation of talk as primarily conflictual, there are tensions. The tensions arise between the idea he has about the circumstances in Russia, and the way the students present them to him, but also about the divergent circumstances of Russians in Estonia and in Russia itself. This does not appear immediately as conflictual, but it points to a conflict of self-identifications and questions of belonging and, in that sense, has a potential to the political. The question of what “Russianness” means for him, as an Estonian Russian, is a recurring topic in his diary. It reflects the tensions

of how to understand and define belonging to a certain community, while feeling excluded from others. Maksim tries to tackle these tensions by discussing them with students from Russia. In the discussion, his expectations and prejudices are countered, which leaves him bewildered. I interpret this episode as talk with conflictual character, since it links back to the persistent tensions between Estonians and Estonian Russians.

Kristjan's diary represents a striking example of political talk as it is almost entirely dedicated to narrations about the political sphere intertwined with the question of mediation of current politics.

I've been teasing people I know recently concerning the upcoming European parliament elections. I'm totally amazed by the combined apathy, naivety, ignorance and irresponsibility concerning the elections. (...) Anyway, I'll try to do my best to agitate folks around me (Kristjan - diarist).

In his diary, Kristjan describes how he is trying to convince people to vote by talking about elections and the European parliament because, he says, it is important to voice one's opinion through voting. Hence, his narration of civic talk is also political talk. However, this form of civic talk is also related to the political, since it has a conflictual character. This is especially the case when he speaks of his aim to "agitate folks around" him.

Media- and Non-Media-Related Public Connection

Civic experience as public connection refers to a non-action-based orientation towards public spaces. Based on the reasoning expressed during previous chapters, civic experiences as public connection are defined as conflictual in character, since they are related to spheres where struggles about common concerns take place.

These forms of civic experience can lead, at certain times and under specific conditions, to action – albeit not necessarily. They appear mainly in the form of interest and involvement on a pre-action level. Civic experiences as public connection can originate in private contexts, for example by relating private encounters with other individuals or media content in agonistic public spaces, they become civic experiences.

In general, one can distinguish between media-related and non-media-related public connection. In a similar vein, Couldry et al. (2007) initially

distinguish between pure *media* connection and pure *public* connection. The first category refers to a dominant pull towards media representations without an orientation towards public concerns, and the latter to a strong public engagement without a link to the media. Couldry et al. argue that there are few actual cases resembling these abstract categories. The more important distinction for them, therefore, is between *media* world connectors and *public* world connectors. *Media* world connectors mainly use and rely on media content to gratify their orientation towards the public sphere, whereas *public* world connectors choose other sources. However, both media- and public world connectors are seen as mediated public connection.

Here, it is also true that cases resembling pure media connection and pure public connection are rare. It is the moulding of media in all kinds of spheres that makes a distinction between media-related and non-media-related public connection difficult and potentially obsolete (Hepp, 2010, 2011). In the diary material it is, indeed, difficult to distinguish between media-related and non-media-related episodes, since they constantly blend into one another. Information picked up from news media, for example, is connected to life episodes that have nothing to do with the representation provided by the media as such. These narrations, however, often refer to broader publics, and are therefore considered as public connection. At the same time, non-media-related orientations towards public issues potentially lead to practices involving media. This is probably related to the inherent character of narrations. Narrations serve – as argued before – the purpose of ordering and creating meaning (Ricoeur, 1988). Hence an encounter with media representations is put into context by previous experiences and future aspirations that are not necessarily linked to the concrete representation.

In the following section, I discuss cases of media-related public connection, non-media-related public connection, and how both are moulded into each other as they emerge in the diaries. Generally, one cannot properly distinguish between diaries that represent media-related public connection and those that represent non-media-related public connection. Different episodes refer to media and public issues in different ways. I therefore chose the diary of one participant to discuss the different categories of public connection and how they are intermingled.

The episode that follows is written by Jaan, a 27-year-old software engineer living in Tartu, and is an example of media-related public connection.

I also remember that some time ago the newspapers wrote about Guantanamo and about some people who were apparently lost and transported to prisons, and were tortured in there. (...) I would like to think that the media has exaggerated these things as being more serious than they actually were... (...) I regret reading these articles from the newspapers as well. It would have been much easier to live without knowledge of these awful things (Jaan – diarist).

Here, Jaan describes an encounter with reports about prisoners in Guantanamo. By choosing to write about this topic in his diary, he attributes a certain importance to it, not only in an individual sense but also in a broader sense; he relates to the media's representation of Guantanamo prisoners by describing his own personal experience, and puts them into a broader context of social relations with others after having read the news. At the same time, he also published his diary entries in his freely-accessible blog and thereby relates to a broader public. Jaan reflects in this entry about events that happened in remote places and that are not directly linked to his private life. However, they cause a strong emotional involvement and lead him to reflect about his news consumption in general.

The second of Jaan's entries that might be described as pure or a non-media-related public connection discusses the common phenomenon of young Estonians leaving the country for better job opportunities abroad. Media are here involved only in the form of interpersonal communication (mail), but not as the main link to the issues discussed.

Another topic was related to the last mail exchange with one of my friends who now lives in Sweden... He has even found a girlfriend from there and is quite happy... but is very crabby in relation to people and things in Estonia, claiming he has never had any real friends in Estonia; all employers are capitalistic vampires and so on. I am crabby related to some things and people in Estonia, as well, and that is the reason why I would like to leave here... however, I still think I have several friends in Estonia and have had more positive experiences with employers as well. But I totally agree with him that what people in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Germany and many other developed European countries have is security, and we don't have it. They have better security against loss of income, crime, violence (Jaan – diarist).

The third narration from his diary is a striking example of how media-related public connection and non-media-related public connection are interlinked and blend into each other:

There was nothing very interesting in media itself. Most of the articles talk about the crisis of the economy, the lack of job opportunities, and problems with paying loans... and I probably should be very happy, while working as a programmer part-time, for having more time for hobbies and can live still better than many others... even if I am actually not very happy, because I had plans to leave Estonia, at least for a few years, but I often think, that if I had the possibility to leave for a longer time, as some of my friends have done, then why not, after some events I am really disappointed with Estonia and at the moment it is much harder than it was maybe a year ago... (Jaan – diarist).

In this episode, Jaan starts with a summary of the general topics in the Estonian news media, and moves quickly to speak about his personal experiences of those issues. This can clearly be understood as media-related public connection. In the latter part of the narration, however, he tells us of his general disappointment about Estonian society, which is not linked to the media as such. His disappointment is related to unspecified events in Estonia, but not directly to the representation of these events in the media (their mediation).

The examples above show the complexity of the relationship between media and public connection. The chapters that follow focus on public connection, however they do not follow a strict division between media-related and non-media-related public connection. They suggest that media play an important role in public connection, while at the same time other non-media-related factors are persistent as well. Furthermore, media-related public connection can easily be transformed into non-media-related public connection. This is also indicated by the “moulding forces” of the media, namely that the distinction between media-related and non-media-related public connection is never clear-cut. It should rather be seen as a dynamic process, moving between media- and non-media orientation. The following three chapters, therefore, aim to unpack this dynamic process by analysing civic experience as orientation, i.e., public connection in three distinct areas namely *media criticism*, *play* and *history*. As indicated earlier, media criticism and play emerged as dominant themes in the diary material, while the third area was mainly represented in the interview material that focused on the tensions between Estonians and Estonian Russians and was, in that sense, less participant-driven.

4. Critical Media Connection

I almost never read anything from the internet papers anymore because they are so full of yellow journalism. I really dislike it! I just see some news headlines and I don't even want to read them (Grete - diarist).

The previous chapter introduced media-related and non-media-related public connection as civic experiences that involve orientation rather than action. This chapter investigates critical media connection as a specific form of media-related public connection that potentially leads to action.

The above quotation from the diary of Grete stands emblematically for the perceived failure of the media to properly support citizens in their deliberations on public issues. The diaries and interviews suggest that the participants reflect critically not only on public issues as they are presented by mainstream news media, but also on news media themselves. They are therefore considered as constructing critical media connection¹⁷, which is another form of reflexive orientation towards public spaces. Looking closer at critical media connection, it becomes clear that the participants establish critical media connection on the *textual*, *producer* and *audience* levels (Vande Berg, Wenner and Gronbeck, 2004). These levels are analysed in the context of how the interviewees have experienced one issue that was broadly discussed in the Estonian media, namely the mediation of the financial crisis.

Even though critical media connection is quite a strong theme throughout all diaries and interviews, there are differences in how the participants act upon their media criticism. Hence, two types of critical media connection –

¹⁷ For the sake of variation, I refer to critical media connection also as media criticism. The meaning, however, remains the same. Criticism is used in order to reflect its everyday character in contrast to critique as a research method (Andersson, 2012).

critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors – are introduced, suggesting that critical media connection might lead to remedial practices (Rojas, 2010) towards mainstream news reporting.

Critical media connection is consequently linked to the previous theoretical discussion on the role of media criticism in democratic societies (Schudson, 2003), since being informed about current issues is often considered essential in democracies (Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Howard, 2006); as Mindich puts it: “After all, there is no democracy without an informed citizenry, and the future of our democracy depends on young people tuning back in” (2005, p. x). At the same time, relating *critically* to sources of information might be considered as an important feature of the informed citizen.

Putting Critical Media Connection into Perspective

To put the media criticism appearing in my material into context, existing research that scrutinises theories on media developed by members of the audience have been surveyed. The main aim thus is to frame the empirical material in the context of these theoretical discussions.

Narrations in the diaries are understood as media criticism if they include a critical interpretation, present logical arguments for this interpretation, and provide certain evidence for the argument (Vande Berg, Wenner and Gronbeck, 2004, p. 222). The definition of media criticism is derived from Vande Berg et al., who argue that “criticism involves organising, systematically and thoroughly describing, analysing, interpreting, and evaluating patterned relationships to share an informed perspective with others” Ibid., p. 222). The authors discuss media criticism as an advanced form of media literacy that requires specific, educational commitment. Though the participants have not necessarily undergone a specific education in media literacy, they can be described as “media savvy” and as having a high level of formal education.

Critical media connection, as discussed in this chapter, can be understood in the light of what David Morley described in 2002 as the tense relationship between the media and its audience: out of common sense, viewers and readers do not uncritically rely on media content but, at the same time, “they are being pushed back into a forced reliance out of a lack of alternatives” (Morley, 1992, p. 142). Hence, we live with a basic mistrust of power, but are rather powerless towards it. In a similar vein, Silverstone states that media criticism

is persistent in the scholarly discourse, and is informed by “ordinary people who are profoundly disenchanting, and whom, (...) the dominant media persistently ignore (...)” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 21). Liebes and Katz investigated the *critical abilities of television viewers* and found that criticism is issued in semantic, syntactic and pragmatic terms. Their analysis of different ethnic groups watching the TV show *Dallas* showed that. With the shift to the *active* audience paradigm, media criticism emerged as an important aspect of the active engagement with media as institution and content, suggesting oppositional critical readings (Liebes and Katz, 1989).

When it comes to the practices of critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors, one can draw links to research on subjective perceptions of the media’s role and its consequences. Studies of the “spiral of cynicism” and “third-person effect” are but two examples of research addressing the question of how people relate to ever-present media content and institutions. Research discussing the spiral of cynicism argues that the media mainly report strategically, which leads to cynicism, distrust and political disenchantment (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 2002).

Strategic news reporting is conceptualised as news that focuses on winning and losing, is driven by “war and games” language, emphasises “performers, critics and audiences,” focuses on candidate style and perceptions and gives weight to opinion polls (Jamieson, 1992, quoted in de Vreese, 2005).

In that sense, people perceiving news reporting as mainly negative, tend to be more cynical about politics as well. Rojas (2010) links this finding to the so-called ‘third-person effect’. The hypothesis of the third-person effect, as developed by Davidson in the 1980s, states that people tend to perceive greater media effects on others as compared to themselves. Consequently, negative perceptions of news reporting might cause responses on the individual level, which is what Rojas (2010) calls “corrective behaviour”. Rojas shows that people perceiving media as exerting influence on public opinion, and who perceive media content as biased against their own opinions are more likely to take up corrective practices in the form of both offline conversations and online publications of their views. This, he argues, is done to “correct” powerful traditional media that sway public opinion.

A broader perspective on media criticism or, better, media *critique*, is typically employed by critical theory scholars. Media critique is here an integral part of a critique of society at large. Mass media are identified as

major vehicles for the circulation of “commodities” of the cultural industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969/2002). The character of the cultural industry, in turn, corresponds to the standardisation of mass production. Hence, the audience’s perception of media is similarly standardised. As a consequence, the subject appears passive and docile. The cultural industry promotes, in that sense, conformity with the hegemonic social and economic system and its norms. Mass culture tranquilises the people, this in turn leads to an advancement of capitalism that diminishes the revolutionary forces that might lead to a collapse of the system. Mass media, such as television, contribute to the commodification of cultural products that have lost their structural difference to other mass-produced products (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969/2002).

After having examined critical media connection in relation to previous research on media criticism, the following section will delve into critical media connection in the context of civic culture.

The Character Critical Media Connection

Mr Keuner ran into Mr Muddle, the fighter against newspapers. “I am a great opponent of newspapers,” said Mr Muddle. “I don’t want any newspapers.” Mr Keuner said, “I am a great opponent of newspapers: I want different newspapers” (Bertold Brecht, *Stories of Mr Keuner*, 1965).

Brecht’s *Mr Keuner* reflects the tense relationship between news media and its audience. On the one hand, citizens depend on media in order to make sense of the world. On the other hand, citizens broadly mistrust mainstream news media (Bishop, 2004). The aim here is to tackle this tense relationship that was, indeed, a strong feature of the diaries and interviews.

Although neither the instructions for writing the diaries nor the interview questions mentioned the usage of any specific media, the majority of participants describe their perception of both traditional and online *news* media. Drawing on the pre-questionnaires, it becomes clear that the participants – diarists as well as interviewees – are heavy media users with a strong internet usage: eighteen participants use the internet between one and three hours per day, and sixteen participants between three and twelve hours per day for non-work-related purposes. A rather large proportion of the participants does not watch television at all on an average day or confirmed a non-heavy usage of less than one hour per day (thirty-eight out of fifty-nine). Printed versions

of newspapers are used only to a marginal extent as most of the participants prefer the online versions of the various newspapers.

In the course of their reflections on news media, all participants present a clearly critical view. One of the clearest examples of critical reflection, namely *media criticism*, is Kristjan's diary, which is dominated by statements about news media such as the following:

My own experience? What I feel is that media are not helping me to fully realise my rights as a citizen, which means that mainstream media are not informative enough. The problem is especially acute when it comes to in-depth analysis of social or political issues (Kristjan – diarist).

Kristjan has a clear idea of the role media should be playing in society, and what society is lacking at the moment. In his eyes, mainstream media are crucial for democracy: they, as a whole, are supposed to enable citizens to deliberate and make decisions. For Kristjan, getting valuable information allows him to fully realise his rights as a citizen. In the theoretical literature, Murdock and Golding (2004) draw a similar conclusion while discussing the "digital divide". They argue that being disconnected from the information stream provided by new technology amounts to disenfranchisement.

In the diaries, media are discussed as institutions and the main driving forces of discourse production and that they are not fulfilling their designated role in the democratic system. The diarists were especially concerned about the lack of variety and quality in mediated discourses. Besides this general reasoning, media criticism was raised in other, more concrete terms such as the over- or underrepresentation of certain groups, values and norms. These findings correspond with the results of Couldry and Langer's (2005) analysis. Their respondents also showed high degrees of dissatisfaction with the media. They found traces of "(...) political dissatisfaction, media dissatisfaction, information overload, media selectivity, lack of representation (...)" (2005, p. 245).

Media criticism refers to a process of negotiation that depends on the specific context. The negotiation is also linked to the "emplotment" or "storying" of critical media connection. The narrations organise the episodes of public connection into discrete episodes. In retrospect, these episodes might be linked to more current encounters and hence the understanding of them changes. As discussed in the previous chapters, narrations are temporary fixations of meaning, which are potentially revised through new reflections. Liisi

(diarist and interviewee), for example, criticises the quality of news broadcasts in her diary. She does not watch news programmes on TV and, in that sense, critically disconnects. Elsewhere, she describes the media in general, but especially TV, as sources of inspiration for her, particularly for her work, which is a specific form of reconnection. There are several similar context-dependent expressions of media criticism in other diaries and interviews.

Critical media connection is often intermingled with a feeling of being trapped between the need to be informed and the wish to not know. On the one hand, as an individual, you are better off without specific knowledge about the world. On the other hand, you are dragged into the spiral of information in order to remain a part of the public world.

There has been almost nothing memorable in the media... there are many mornings when I eat porridge outside and read newspapers, but I often think afterwards that reading news was a waste of time... and I remember one of my former friends, who once said that avoiding reading newspapers is necessary for her to avoid falling into a depressive state (Jaan – diarist).

The diarist stays connected, although he perceives reading newspapers as a “waste of time.” He reads them mainly out of habit. In another episode recorded in his diary, he describes the news he read about Guantanamo and finishes by saying that he would have preferred to not know about the torture and unethical treatment of prisoners that were leaked to media. In other diaries, media criticism is similarly couched in terms of the dialectical relationship of reluctance and compulsion in the consumption of news.

As fairly media savvy recipients, the participants address media critically on the *textual*, *producer* and *audience* levels as suggested by Vande Berg et al. (2004). In the following section, I will draw mainly on the interview material to analyse media criticism according to these three levels.

Excursion: Media Criticism and the Mediation of the Financial Crisis

During the interviews, I took the financial crisis as a starting point to discuss the participants’ perception of the mediation of specific topics. The three different levels of critical media connection (text-, producer- and audience-centred) were addressed by most of the interviewees, though not all levels were addressed in every critical statement.

One example of text-centred critical media connection that was brought up in the context of the mediation of the financial crisis is the following quotation from an interview with a female student from Tallinn:

I have studied graphic design and there was also a bit about advertising but that's why I know some tricks about advertising, about the psyche and so on; ow to project your image, what is important, how a text has to look or image or persons also and so on. And otherwise I don't have so much time, for example, to watch TV and also I don't think it is so important to watch it anyway. For some people it is really important to watch, but there is so much bad and negative information. So I don't really watch it, because good news is really, really rare and that's why I maybe like more print media and also the internet because I decide for myself what site I would like to see and what I am going read. But I think that TV is really powerful, also for advertisements and what is shown in the news. And art and culture are not so popular on TV. So I hope that it will change some day (Lisa – interviewee).

The interviewee assumes media, especially television, as manipulative. She describes herself as “media savvy”, since she has studied advertising. However, she chooses to rather not watch television, which she describes as a continuous flow that the audience has to follow passively, providing narratives that are hard to interrupt. She prefers media that she can choose herself (particular news items and also the speed of consumption). The interviewee acknowledges, at the same time, the powerful position television has to persuade people and potentially change preferences and consumption patterns.

Other critical accounts of the mediation of the financial crisis stress the manipulative character of the media as presented in the below quotation. Like several other participants, the interviewee emphasises that media play the “real” dimensions of the crisis down and, in so doing; they contribute to the distraction of citizens from other important issues. The interviewee furthermore makes a specific criticism of the Estonian news media compared to international and specifically Russian news.

Interviewer: And I would like to discuss the financial crisis. How would you describe the media coverage of the financial crisis in Estonia?

Katia: I don't look at the media from Estonia that much, they are not good. I look up information from the Internet from different countries, like Russia.

- Interviewer: Could you then describe how the media you use report about the financial crisis?
- Katia: I think that if you think about Estonian media they say things are even worse than they really are.

The above quotation also reflects rather typical divides and prejudices that Estonian Russians have towards the quality of Estonian media texts, which also goes the other way around (i.e., the prejudices Estonians have towards Russian media). Critical media connection on the textual level is, then, closely linked to the origin of the news, in this case being whether news originates from Estonia or Russia. The interviewee argues that Estonian media manipulate the public, and of this she is quite sure, even though she does not use them very often. The non-usage of Estonian media by Russian speakers in the Narva region – where this interviewee lives – is a rather common pattern. This is not only due to language barriers, but also, as we have seen, due to prejudices about the quality of reporting, this in turn creates segregated public spaces. Even if there are Estonian and Russian versions of the same newspaper¹⁸, the respective editions only partly overlap in their content. In this sense, my interviews reflect the findings of earlier research that identified separate media spheres for Estonian Russians and Estonians (Vihalemm, 2002a; Vihalemm and Masso, 2002).

As a slight variation compared to the positions discussed above, the following quotation, which is related to the production level of media, highlights the view that news media have created a constant feeling of fear in society by the way they have reported on the financial crisis.

(...) About media coverage?! Actually I think it's like an (...). I think there are several stages, also in this, because maybe also the economic crisis has several stages or goes through different stages, but it's a perception thing. Maybe in the beginning there was a big "wow" effect. Because in the beginning no one really thought that this might be happening and it was like, maybe like, this great terrible depression, but many people fade or say they fade out of the discourse. Maybe the public got used to it in this case. Because every morning they read in the newspapers that unemployment rates are now eight percent and tomorrow they will be nine percent and then the day after, ten percent; so they were trying to produce this and err yeah and to put it on the agenda of the public again. It is important to put it on the agenda, but it's not good to create anger or create fear. Cause if people read every day about or hear from

¹⁸ See, for example, the Russian and Estonian versions of *Postimees*.

the news that unemployment has increased and much more criminal activities, like security people that are taking money out of the bank offices and after the reports these people have to wear protection cloth and maybe pepper spray to protect themselves and so on. It does really create some atmosphere of fear in society (Peeter - interviewee).

This interviewee from Tartu makes clear that he feels there is an agenda behind the newspapers' way of reporting: they try to keep the public discussion alive and the public dependent on their reporting. At the same time, they produce a spiral of fear by spreading more and more negative news and rumours to keep their sales figures up. The interviewee criticises the political economy behind news production; since newspapers and news broadcasts are mainly private ventures, their major goal is profit maximisation, which leads to strategic news reporting focused on negativity and scandal. Consequently, the quote above serves as an example of critical media connection at the *production* level.

The following excerpt presents us with a similar view when it comes to the mediation of the financial crisis. The interviewee here develops a production-focused media criticism as well. In contrast to the previous participant, however, this interviewee puts the political "game" behind the news into focus.

Interviewer: How would you describe the role of media in this whole issue of the financial crisis?

Leena: Well I would say that it seems sometimes that the media are trying to play this crisis part down. But the politicians are saying, "Oh this is a really big, big problem". I know why they are doing it, because afterwards they can say oh this was really big and whatever, but I think it's, there is something more in the middle.

Throughout the interview, she continuously comes back to the political game of "spinning" the representation of the financial crisis to the public. She believes that it is not only the media that are manipulative, but also and in particular *politicians*, who are using the crisis to distinguish themselves from their competitors during the up-coming elections (meaning the local elections of October 2009). The quote reflects the intersection of media logics and the logics of party politics, which are sometimes compatible, and sometimes contradictory. Here, the interviewee holds the opinion that the media follow a different strategy compared to politicians, who wish to capitalise on the crisis

as part of their election campaign. She concludes that, as a recipient of news, you never fully know the “truth”, since the media are part of a social field that is too complex to be completely understood.

Audience-centred criticism was somewhat rarer than the abovementioned forms of media criticism. If the interviewees criticised media at the audience level, they presented the audience as being rather passive, and as mainly interested in tabloid and celebrity news. It was argued, for example, that through their interest in “soft” news and non-political content, the audience is contributing to the growth of non-political media and enhanced tabloidisation.

The participants do not constantly express critical media connection. As argued earlier, public connection is a process of on-going negotiation that changes over time, and is context-dependent. However, the material shows that critical media connection may also lead to action, which will be discussed using the terms *critical media connectors* and *critical media disconnectors*. Whereas critical media connection refers to a general orientation, and is not necessarily action-based, critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors stand for specific actions that follow from media criticism. Narrations representing critical media disconnectors promote, for example, withdrawal from news consumption, whereas critical media connectors promote public debate; both practices are based on the critical assessment of news media in general.

Critical Media Connectors and Critical Media Disconnectors

There are some dominant themes in the diaries and interviews that need to be further highlighted. Here they will be identified as representing critical media connectors or critical media disconnectors. In contrast to Couldry et al., who developed a typology of *media* world connectors versus *public* world connectors, critical media (dis-) connectors evolve from media criticism, rather than from the importance of media to orientate around public issues.

This distinction refers to the different practices that follow from critical media connection as discussed above. Hence, the discussion also reflects the complex relationship between civic experiences as civic practices (critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors) and public connection (orientation), a concept that was introduced in chapter two. The following will thus give empirical accounts of how an orientation (critical media connection) might lead to action.

The distinction between critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors is partly derived from Albert Hirschman's seminal work on *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970). From an economic perspective, Hirschman discusses "exit" and "voice" as two distinct ways of reacting to discontent. He describes exit and voice as "impersonations of economics and politics" (Ibid., 1970, p. 15), where they are both understood as the "imprint" of political action. Both are of equal importance for the economic and the political system. Following that argument, I will treat *connection* as well as *disconnection* as equally important civic experiences that have their origin in media criticism. It is thus not only the practices of the active and involved citizen that should be of interest, but also the conscious decision to *not* participate, to *not* get active, to *not* search for information and to consequently *exit*.

Critical Media Connectors

Critical media connectors reflect a complex set of attitudes towards news media. They are strongly critical when it comes to the power, influence, relevance and quality of news media, and they believe the trend is towards even more powerful media. As a consequence of this criticism, they search for possibilities to actively influence public discourse. In this sense, they challenge the powerful position of mainstream media by presenting issues of common concern. Blogs, but also "tailor-made" information services, are mentioned as examples of such possibilities to create alternative public spaces.¹⁹ Again, Kristjan is one of the most explicit diarists when it comes to the will to "correct" the public discourse. Although he has not yet set up the blog, he discusses, in detail, potential topics to be included in his diary. He embodies the narrative outlining the potential of the internet to serve as both a platform for expressing one's own opinion and as a space to meet and exchange ideas.

For a while now I've been considering the idea of trying to start a web page, which would provide in-depth information concerning politics, media, society etc., and which, at least partially, would be written in easy language, by experts, would be neutral and would have that educational quality I wrote about before. The web page could have other functions as well, besides explaining things it could also be a meeting ground for new ideas, a place for educated

¹⁹ One female diarist mentioned that she might start an information service, which offers her expertise as a trained media-consultant for free, in order to improve public discourse. The diarist has already offered her services on an online platform, where people exchange services for free.

discussion. At least some departments of Tallinn University would stand behind it (Kristjan – diarist).

Besides blogs, the *comment function* on news sites was mentioned in several diaries as a space to actively contribute and challenge dominant discourses.

Last week was somewhat different in one aspect – after what could have been years, I wrote another comment on an online article. In Estonia, it's common to let your anger and frustration out on other people by commenting online. (...) I know that it is an important part of democracy to have an opportunity to let your opinion be known, but what people forget here in Estonia is that you should also respect your opponent's insight into the matter. He/she isn't an idiot just because they hold an opinion that differs from yours (Toomas – diarist).

Toomas presents an ambiguous position towards the comment function. Normally, he has a critical attitude towards using the comment function on news sites; but this time he felt the need to react and post a comment. The comment function, in theory, is often seen as one of the major achievements of the internet in contributing to both a more vivid civic discussion as well as opening up new possibilities for direct citizen participation (Manosevitch and Walker, 2009), but it causes here a certain pessimism and dissatisfaction²⁰. Participants describe these forms of voicing opinion and exercise of citizenship often as “shouting”. In their eyes, only extremists present opinions that have nothing to do with the majority opinion. Cyber bullying, and the “extreme” positions represented in comments on *delfi.ee*²¹ or one of the two national newspapers *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Postimees*, have led to a general public discussion about unedited comment space and exchange on Estonian online platforms. An initiative taken by the Estonian media was launched to provide a general “netiquette” through a code of conduct online.²²

²⁰ A similar, more nuanced analysis of the perception of the comment function online is presented by Annika Bergström (2008).

²¹ News portal, which is available in Russian and Estonian versions.

²² There has been a thorough discussion about the practice of unedited online comments versus edited comments. Edited comment functions were often rejected with a reference to former Soviet censorship. An Estonian initiative focuses on online bullying, and started because of the dominance of offensive comments in online news forums and newspapers (<http://www.leim.ee/>). The initiative is driven and supported by the main Estonian newspapers and news portals.

How can we understand the practices of critical media connectors at large? In theoretical terms, Liesbet van Zoonen et al. (2010) discuss citizenship as a practice in their analysis of posts and comments in reaction to the Islamophobic video *Fitna* posted on YouTube. By voicing their opinions, posters on YouTube exercise active citizenship, the authors argue. Furthermore, van Zoonen et al. (2010) stress that reciprocity, recognition, and listening are not necessarily needed for that form of “unlocated” citizenship to be exercised. Unlocated citizenship refers to a voicing of one’s opinion that is independent from institutions or communal entities. In a similar vein, van Zoonen et al. (2007) conclude, in an analysis of the American TV show *Dr Phil*, that online forums and boards provide a space for giving an account of one’s political standpoint and opinions, as well as offering a platform for mutual exchange.

On the contrary, Jodi Dean (2008) describes a “multiplication of resistance” online, expressed in the circulation of information and comments, which is unable to develop effective counter-hegemonies, and thereby results in the opposite, namely *adding* to “communicative capitalism”. She argues that communication is nowadays detached from political ideas and has become generally depoliticised. As a result, enhanced communication exchanges are no longer fundamental to democracy but integral to capitalist production. Consequently, Dean (2008, 2009) argues that communication, in an era of internet democratic potentiality, has morphed from a message that stands for something beyond its particularity, to a mere contribution to the flow of information of communicative capitalism.

In conclusion, both the comment function and option to write blogs give critical media connectors the possibility to make their voices heard, although they remain generally sceptical about the quality of the discussions triggered online. The question as to whether narrated perceptions and practices of critical media connectors can be understood as important components of civic culture will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Critical Media Disconnectors

Whereas critical media connectors choose to actively voice their opinions, critical media disconnectors choose exit as a logical consequence of their media criticism. Exit refers here to the tendency to consciously avoid mainstream news. Instead of seeing the news media as information disseminators, critical media disconnectors rely on face-to-face exchanges and their personal networks online, without actively seeking information.

Why I don't learn from or keep up with media? Because there is just negative news. I didn't find any positive news at all. I don't want to live in a world where everything is bad. Secondly, news just masks or produces illusions. In reality, things are even worse than presented in the media. Thirdly, it is just uninteresting for me. The local and national media are cyclic. They repeat the same topics for many years (Maksim – diarist).

The diarist Maksim is generally tired of the flow of mainstream news, and therefore prefers to ignore it. Critical media disconnectors state that they do not read printed newspapers at all, and their online versions only occasionally. A number of the diarists who avoid online newspapers describe them as getting more and more spectacle-centred and entertainment-oriented. Critical media disconnectors increasingly receive information from their online social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, as Elisabeth states in one of her diary entries:

I felt pretty fed up with everything, so I did not read much news. Just occasionally peeped into [postimees.ee](#) and [epl.ee](#), since I don't have a newspaper subscription. I get a lot of information through Twitter though (Elisabeth – diarist).

The quotation above reflects the character of critical media disconnection as well as connection being an unstable and constantly negotiated position. Elisabeth experienced the news flow as overwhelming during a specific period in her life.²³ This attitude might change with her life circumstances and/or the news environment. However, in the episode above, Elisabeth exhibits typical traits of a critical media disconnector.

Critical media disconnectors prefer to rely on sources from interpersonal networks consisting of the primary group (such as friends and family members), which often function as gatekeepers when it comes to mainstream news in traditional media, i.e., those peers and family members who confront them with specific articles. Even in a mediatised world, the personal influence of opinion-leaders and the primary group, as described by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), is still relevant, as we can see in Grete's description of an encounter with her mother:

²³ How specific life periods and circumstance influence the individual news repertoire is discussed in-depth by Hasebrink and Domeyer (2010).

Last week or even the week before I hardly read any newspapers at all. My mom just put one article about one old and famous Estonian family under my nose (Grete – diarist).

The seminal work of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), and numerous follow-up studies (for an overview, see Lu, 2007) show the importance of the primary group when it comes to information, as well as its credibility and trustworthiness. Though other studies have shown a strong reliance on mainstream media (Petersson et al., 2006), when it comes to political information, critical media disconnectors rely more heavily on information from their peers and family members.

Media disconnection can be linked to multiple factors; it can be understood as an expression of a general disenchantment with politics and the negotiation of the same in public spaces. A number of critical media disconnectors seem to show a general disillusionment about Estonian society and their role in it, which is enhanced by the feeling that their voice is not considered important and that media are not covering the issues that are of importance to them. One of the female diarists, for example, raises the issue of disinterested politicians in the context of a project for children she was involved in. The project faced cuts and was ultimately terminated. She has been in touch with local politicians as well as civil servants from the relevant institution. At the same time, Liisi shows disconnection with news media, especially TV, as she believes they are not interested in those issues that are of concern for her.

By communicating with the different clerks and institutions of the municipality, one can strongly feel who has worked already for many years in the system and does things just because of fear, to maintain his position and career. It seems to me that there are very few people that do their job wholeheartedly and resist the system of city politics. Alienation, getting stuck in bureaucracy, playing political games and the mentality to fully obey the rules of the party is strong (Liisi – diarist and interviewee).

This tendency of poor efficacy is also reminiscent in the findings of LeBlanc (1999), who describes Japanese housewives that perceive political involvement as taking “other paths” than politicians do. Furthermore, critical disconnection with news media is an expression of choice, namely the preference towards reliable sources within the interpersonal networks of family, friends and the workplace.

Media Criticism as Civic Experience?

This section addresses the question of how forms of media criticism feed into civic culture. In order to answer this question, one has to examine the status of criticism for civic culture. Based on Steven Maras (2007), I refer to criticism as “a space of possibility, generated through different forms of discursive, rhetorical, conceptual and political work that supports different kinds of action” (p. 169). In this sense, criticism is related to the political, but the question remains as to whether media criticism in the diaries and interviews matters in the larger context of democracy and civic culture.

Here, it is necessary to briefly return to the previously discussed notions of the political and political action as suggested by Mouffe (2005), who maintains that both phenomena appear when hegemony is contested, i.e., when the power to define social objectivity is called into question. The objection or contestation can appear in all kinds of social spheres, and therefore the expression of critical media connection in the diaries and interviews could be understood as being political. However, one has to examine the role that critical media connectors and critical media disconnectors, as well as critical media connection as orientation together with play in civic culture critically.

In the case of critical media disconnectors, we can speak in Morley’s terms of “moments of disaffection, incomprehension, and resignation, where many people might fail to make dominant readings of the news, but where this failure is not necessarily anything to celebrate” (Morley, 2002, p. 140). Hence, one could see their practices as problematic for civic culture in terms of their not actively contributing reflections on public spaces that challenge hegemonic discourses. However, the participants that are considered critical media disconnectors are not in fact completely disconnected from the news. They remain connected to discursive publics through their primary groups and individual networks.

When it comes to the actions of critical media connectors, namely corrective actions to improve and contribute to public discourse, one could critically refer to Jodi Dean’s (2008) arguments, that even if the participants produce content and engage actively, they are contributing to what she calls “communicative capitalism”, since they operate within its logics without fundamentally challenging the hegemonic order of media.

Doing is reduced to talking, to contributing to the environment instead of being conceived in terms of occupying military bases, taking over the

government, or abandoning the Democratic Party and doing the steady, persistent organisational work of revitalising the Greens and the Socialists (Dean, 2009, p. 32).

Besides the fact that communicative capitalism potentially keeps citizens from “really doing something”, the “exchange values of the messages” dominates in comparison to the “use value”. In this sense, the content of the exchanged messages becomes irrelevant. Hence, any response to them becomes irrelevant as well, and any political potential disperses into the perpetual flow of communication (Dean, 2009; 2010).

Furthermore, critical media connectors are mainly active in corporate spaces (commentaries on mainstream news and pre-structured blogs as well as Facebook) and thus enact their corrective practices in pre-configured forms. One could, additionally argue, in order to be taken seriously, that the practices of critical media connectors have to be done within in the framework of, or least reinforced by, mainstream media (Bishop, 2004); otherwise they are easily dismissed as marginal. Another important point is that critical media connectors mainly engage within their segregated networks which serve to confirm their ideas and political stances rather than challenge them (Jönsson and Örnebring, 2011; Witschge, 2007). Tamara Witschge (2007), who examines the openness of public debates online, found that the discourse about “honour killings” in the Netherlands was more inclusive in the traditional news media than in the online sources she examined. *Inclusiveness* is here defined as the diversity of actors that receive a voice in the discourse. Rather than facilitating an exchange of diverse opinions, the online debates gathered like-minded people together. The online debates were more closed and hostile to deviant views from the majority position. Consequently, the conflict between different positions that is basic to radical democracy is veiled by a combination of consent and non-confrontation.

When it comes to critical media connection as an orientation towards a sphere where common concerns are negotiated, it becomes even more difficult. I would argue, with Rosanvallon (2008), that critical media connection is an expression of an ever-more demanding citizenry that is mistrustful of both the political and media elite. As a result of alienation from the elite and the disintegration of politics, in the sense that politics appears more and more as fragmented and opaque, a form of counter-democracy evolves. Rosanvallon argues that Western democracies have entered a stage of democratic diffuseness, where “change comes about not through broader political participation

as such but through the advent of new forms of social attentiveness” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 39). He expands on this argument by stressing that civic vigilance and oversight are both essential *and* threatening to democracy. Rosanvallon recaps the history of democratic thought starting in ancient Greece, and shows the role oversight and surveillance of the political elite played then and now for democracy. He concludes, however, that the earlier-discussed change led to “an age of problematic democracy”, in which “citizens no longer think of conquering power in order to exercise it. Their implicit goal is rather to constrain and limit power, while deploring the ultimate consequences of their own preferred practices (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 258). Instead of aiming for political power, political struggle and political activism; the focus now is often on how to *control* those who have power, rather than to question their position as such. An important role is given to the media in general, and to the news media in particular, when it comes the current culture of oversight, transparency and control.

The notion of counter-democracy refers to the growing non-conventional forms of civic practices and orientation, which put the political elite under scrutiny and create a democracy of confrontation. Rosanvallon (2008) remains cautious in his judgment of counter-democracy and, while he acknowledges counter-democracy as an expression of vital civic involvement, he sees the “dark side” of privatisation and segmentation of public opinion. Counter-democracy is difficult to grasp and remains institutionally unstable. Hence, it might give way to populism and lead to depoliticisation. In this sense, lay media criticism can be understood as a sign of the vitality of a democratic system, which also bears, ironically, the potential to depoliticise those same agents.

5. Playful Public Connection

I'm designing a political board game and the prototype is on its way to completion. I want the subtle humour to strengthen the overall mechanics of the game (Pille - diarist).

The previous chapter focused on media-related public connection, or more precisely, media criticism. This chapter will look further at the question of how practices are related to orientation. Some of the practices that are discussed in the diaries can be described as “playful”, since they are linked to enjoyment, voluntary engagement, and an interruption of the stream of everyday routine. By analysing playful practices triggering (or being triggered by) public connection, I aim to examine how these practices are related to orientation. Furthermore, it is discussed why certain playful practices can be understood as civic experiences. Consequently, the analysis is embedded in the on-going debate on playfulness in the study of media and democracy, and concludes by critically engaging with the question of playful practices as being problematic for civic culture.

Playful Moments in Studies on Media and Democracy

The discussion of playful public connection as civic experience can be linked to earlier discourses within media studies. Especially in the context of young people's political engagement, playful practices have been discussed extensively. The conclusions from these discussions are, however, quite polarised. On the one hand, the increasing disenchantment and withdrawal from traditional politics are lamented as the results of an increasing *ludification* of politics. Ludification is here referring to a tendency towards an amusement-dominated

culture, which is often linked to mediatisation and mediation (Raessens, 2006, p. 9). On the other hand, the young generation is presented as developing new, creative, and playful forms of political engagement beyond traditional politics. Jenkins (2006), for example, argues that youth today uses more creative forms of engagement with the world, especially those enabled by digital media. This section aims to connect the analysis of playful practices as detailed in the diary material to the well-established discourse on the role of play for civic practices in the study of media and communication.

The reference to play and playfulness is, then, hardly anything new, especially within the study of media and communication. Play and playfulness is here mainly analysed in the context of the increasing focus on entertainment within mainstream media (Hartley, 2012; Imre, 2009; Silverstone, 1999; Stephenson, 1967; van Zoonen, 2005; Wilson, 2004). These attempts stress the significance of playful elements within society for civic engagement, community, and sociality in general. The authors mentioned above aim to integrate play and entertainment into the scholarship of media and communication.

One of the earliest attempts of so doing was made by William Stephenson, a physicist and psychologist, in 1967's *Play Theory of Mass Communication*. He argues that social and political mass communication tends to be brief compared to mass-mediated entertainment. Such brief political coverage could be understood as being set against the daily fill of entertainment, which is apolitical. In that sense, the informational function of mass media is a mere interlude in its main function of entertaining audiences (Stephenson, 1967). Through interrupting the daily repetitive stream of mass communication dominated by entertainment, the audience is able to receive short messages of political information.

Liesbet van Zoonen (2005), by contrast, suggests an integration of entertainment into the political process, since political activities are mainly carried out during leisure time. They are, therefore, up against tough competition from other leisure-time activities. According to her, the fun element of taking part in politics should not be underestimated. Van Zoonen focuses her analysis on different kinds of media texts, which subscribe to the potential of attracting and integrating people into the political sphere. She takes watching *West Wing* and voting in *Big Brother* as examples of how citizens are getting acquainted with the political environment and practising civic activities. Of course, one has to discuss the significance of such activities and to what extent they are reflected and heard in the political system, but at any rate it is

an attempt to open up the discussion for an integrated view of politics and entertainment culture.

In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins tackles the notion of “serious fun” by referring to “photoshop democracy” and the significance of grassroots mediated activities such as web parodies of candidates during political campaigns. He argues that, through “media participation”, such as self-made YouTube clips, the characteristics of civic engagement and participation change as political discourses are brought closer to the everyday lives of citizens.²⁴ Engagement of this kind bears the potential to change the way people think about community and power. At the same time, expressions of photoshop democracy are reflected in the political sphere when political parties campaign in a grassroots style (e.g. Obama in his election campaign of 2008).

John Hartley develops the metaphor of “silly citizenship” for engaging with politics in a funny and voluntary way, in a sort of “do-it-yourself” (DIY) fashion.²⁵ He borrows the notion of DIY and links it to citizenship as describing the “practice of putting together an identity from available choice, patterns and opportunities on offer in the semiosphere and mediasphere” (Hartley, 1999, p. 178). He adds the notion of silly citizenship, which refers to the changing form of media citizenship from his earlier work on “democratainment” through television (Hartley, 1999). Silly citizenship thus refers to a more “modest but active status of productivity” (Hartley, 2012). Active people, in this sense, can organise smaller ventures without the burden of representing a set political programme. In his attempt to rethink citizenship, he adds a cultural, do-it-yourself dimension to Thomas H. Marshall’s classical definition of civil, political and social citizenship, and thus introduces a new mode of civic connection, namely “purposeful play”:

Citizenship is not simply the cerebral exercise of monitorial scrutiny, it is both a whole-of-body and a body-to-body experience, comedic and competitive,

²⁴ More recent expressions of this kind are Facebook groups such as *Can this trash bin gather more fans than Fredrik Reinfeldt?* (Kan den här soptunnan få fler fans än Fredrik Reinfeldt?), launched before the national election in Sweden in September 2010. The group was launched on Monday 8 February 2010 with the aim of gathering more than 2,048 fans in order to be a bigger than the Reinfeldt camp. On Thursday 11 February 2010 43,011 fans had joined the group.

²⁵ See Hartley’s examples of silly citizenship during the US presidential campaign in 2008, where certain dance-off YouTube clips attracted millions of viewers (e.g. the Obama McCain – Dance off had 10 030 965 views as of 16 February 2010 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzyT9-9IUyE>).

entertaining and festive, in the very performance of political deliberation and participation. It is “communicative action” that includes but is not reducible to Habermasian rationality. “Rethinking communication” entails recognising that civic participation is also – and needs to be analysed by – means of play (Hartley, 2012).

In contrast, Daniel Dayan in his reasoning on “fan publics”, states that “the activities of the fan reflect a world of play and mimicry, a social reality that could be described as closed off, marginal, a game” (Dayan, 2006, p. 752). These publics are missing a “commissive dimension” and any serious sense (2006, p. 752). Fan publics are dedicated merely to the world of play, and lack any seriousness that could link them to “real” publics.

Graeme Turner (2010) argues against the hypothesis of democratisation through the invasion of entertainment formats based on the participation of “ordinary people” as well. Turner acknowledges a certain democratic potential of what Hartley (1999) called *democratainment*, but argues that any democratic dimension of entertainment appears accidentally, rather than predictably.

Other critics of entertainment culture stress the fact that media-saturated societies are dominated by entertainment, and that politics should stay serious and separate from it. The seminal example of this is Neil Postman’s book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He builds his argument on historical comparisons between, for example, the attention spans of politically-interested people in the middle of the 19th century and the sound bite “now this...” television culture of the 1980s (Postman and Postman, 2006). His conclusion is that politics is serious and should be treated as such.

At the core of discussions about the demise (or rise) of democracy is the understanding of the political. Whereas authors such as Jenkins, van Zoonen and Hartley aim to broaden conceptions of the political and political participation, the authors that were discussed later establish a rather strict distinction between the political and political practice from other forms of sociality, in order to stress its importance.

Playful Public Connection in the Diaries and Interviews

While reading the diaries and interviewing the participants, it struck me that they repeatedly told me episodes of public connection that were linked to rather joyful, voluntary ways of engaging with politics. In comparison to

the more “serious” episodes these were a minority, but, at the same time, they were not marginal either. Trying to make sense of these joyful episodes, the similarities to play and playful engagement was obvious. Therefore, I conceptualise these episodes as sharing a voluntary and pleasurable character. These playful practices can be linked to a theoretical and empirical discussion of playful activities in the context of politics (Bers and Chau, 2006; Singhal and Greiner, 2008; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006), where new media especially are discussed as playfully opening up new avenues for civic engagement and civic learning (Gordon and Koo, 2008). Therefore, this chapter will investigate joyful, fun activities that potentially foster public connection (henceforth called *playful public connection*).

I will start here by presenting one diary episode to describe what I mean by playful practices. The rather obvious example of playful practices that follows is a short diary entry by Pille, whose quotation also introduced the chapter.

I pre-elected since it's impossible for me to elect in my district. And I must say, although it is heart-warming that more people participate in the elections with each election, it's kind of silly how the situation turned out to be *Keskera-kond* [Estonian Centre Party] against all the others. Of course the way they interpret “dignity” and “democracy” is fascinatingly ghastly, but that's that I guess. I voted for Reform, of course.

I'm designing a political board game and the prototype is on its way to completion. I want the subtle humour to strengthen the overall mechanics of the game. I also held an RPG-night [Role Playing Game] at Ludo [gaming store] and it turned out to be an immense success with many people interested in my game, mastering a few role-playing groups. I do find it a good opportunity, but it's difficult to find the time and energy to deal with so many people all the time (Pille – diarist).

Pille starts out with an account of casting her vote in the local election. She then turns to a rather general critique of the current political landscape in Estonia. Pille writes about one of her current projects, namely designing a humorous political board game but, unfortunately, she does not explain the logic of the game further. However, I see this as one of a number of possible starting points to draw connections between playful practices (such as playing or developing a board game), civic practices (casting a vote) and public connection (orientation towards agonistic public spaces). Pille is, at least to some extent, interested in politics; she participated in the local elections and

engages in critical reasoning about Estonian politics, i.e., she criticises the logics that are played out in the elections. This general interest has culminated in her attempt to develop a game with the potential to get people interested in politics. The board game is the link between her political interest and her involvement in the gaming scene (She organised a role playing game night in one of the local game stores). This example indicates that playful practices (gaming), not necessarily linked to civic practices, might be linked to public connection and *thereby* become civic practices.

The analysis of other episodes involving playful practices in the diaries shows that they can be helpfully employed, not only to better understand playful engagement with politics, but also to analyse how (playful) practices relate to (public) orientation – a general distinction between different (civic) experiences. After a discussion of the major characteristics of playfulness based on the theoretical literature, I will provide an analysis of additional episodes referring to playful practices²⁶ in the diaries and interviews in relation to public orientation.

Playful Practices Triggering Public Connection

As indicated initially, the diaries and interviews showed that playful practices might trigger public connection. The participants describe, for example, episodes of TV entertainment, movies, concerts and sports that are consequently embedded in reflections about controversial issues being discussed in the Estonian public, hence they trigger public connection. In this sense, the practice of watching a TV show or following a sports event becomes the ground on which they connect with the public world beyond the purely private. This form of public connection originates in pleasurable, joyful episodes rather than in serious or dutiful engagement with media representations, i.e., watching the news has been described as a “duty” in order to be able to participate as citizens in the public realm (Hagen, 1994), as the following quotation indicates:

²⁶ In order to discuss the relationship between practices and orientation, the episodes do not have to be playful. The discussion here aims to combine two arguments, namely that playfulness is interesting enough to be discussed in the context of civic practices, and that the relationship between orientation (public connection) and practices is complex.

We also talked about cookery and Jamie Oliver and wondered why we need higher education and have no courage just to learn something more practical, like hairdressing or cookery, while we still dream of it (Riina – diarist).

The playful moment of watching the show leads to a discussion of both formal education in Estonia and making life choices. In this sense, the show opens up a sphere for negotiating and questioning established values of education. A similar discussion appeared about the first lady's depiction in the media, which focuses on her dressing style, reveals critical reflexivity about the media and their way of reporting current affairs. Here, the public connection has its starting point in entertainment focusing on celebrities.

The findings discussed here contradict the earlier findings of the *Public Connection Project* by Couldry et al., where the authors conclude that they found

(...) no cases where discussion of celebrity culture was linked by diarists to any issue requiring public resolution, contradicting the claims of earlier researchers that celebrity culture may be an alternative route into politics, particularly for the young (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 182).

Certain characteristics of the participants might be of importance here; whereas the *Public Connection Project* in the UK included a wide array of socially-diverse participants, this study focuses on students, which has implications for the way they tell stories and aim share valuable thoughts with me as a researcher. However, it is striking how they use mediated entertainment as a starting point for broader reflections about controversial issues, but also how a certain public orientation determines their usage of popular cultural media. This can be linked to a discussion Edelman presents in his book *From Arts to Politics*. He argues that arts are “the fountainhead from which political discourse, beliefs about politics, and consequent actions ultimately spring” (Edelman, 1995, p. 2). In his broad examination of the importance of art, he also stresses the role of popular culture and kitsch for social and political discernment. Edelman's main argument is that the arts, and the engagement with them, should be recognised as an integral part of social exchange that enables civic culture, since it generates ideas and meaning.

Other forms of playful public connection triggered by popular culture are sports and music, and both constitute “tipping points” between private and public orientation. One female diarist provides examples of connecting with a broader public, mainly through sports events, such as football. Anu's narra-

tions show that she relates to an Estonian “we” in the context of the international match between Estonia and Armenia, for example.

By the way, football match between Estonia and Armenia concluded successfully for us, *we* won 1 - 0! J Very, very good feeling! (Entry week three).

My favourite piece of news was the one published yesterday: the Estonian football team will probably play against Portugal in June. Because of the jubilee year, several interesting games are planned in addition to potential participation in the World Cup. Currently, they are planning games with Equatorial-Guinea, France, Brazil and Portugal, but that’s probably not the whole list. That is something to look forward to! J (Entry week four) (Anu – diarist).

Anu’s creation of “we” is distinct from the competitor (“agonist”). Her narrations also reflect the excitement and emotional involvement that the matches, both live and mediated, cause. The most important point, however, is the feeling of belonging that surfaces in her stories. Football serves as a possibility for her to connect with the “imagined” Estonian community (Anderson, 1983). In general, the potential of sports to engender a collective – here national – identity is of course nothing new (King, 2000). Besides other actors, the European Union, for example, includes sport as an important factor for constructing a common European identity.

In a similar way, the following episode starts out with the playful practice of attending a choir concert, where the lyrics of the songs are connected to the concept of an Estonian national identity.

On Monday, Student Spring Days 2009 began in Tartu and the first event was a singing festival which started late in the evening. Thousands of people gathered in the Cat Valley to sing together. It is for sure one of the most popular events during the student days. And, as our Norwegian lecturer said, it was very patriotic and in almost every song there was an “Eestima” (Estonia) (Riina – diarist).

The quotation above reflects a slightly critical attitude towards choir singing and the song festival tradition as being too nationalistic, which is often linked to the role of the Estonian choir during Soviet times. Joint singing served then as a way of maintaining “Estonianess” and a distinct national identity that was different from the “Russified”, official cultural politics. The practice of joint singing opened up spaces or niches of counter-culture in the sense of

“privatised” counter-publics veiled behind apolitical purposes (Aareleid-Tart and Kannike, 2004). However, after the re-establishment of an independent Estonian state, it became clear that this tradition in particular was based on the exclusion of Estonian Russians, to whom the folklore movement remained closed.²⁷ The festivals today have an ambiguous meaning. As Aili Aareleid-Tart and Anu Kannike (2004) argue, the loss of the political values and importance of what they term as *Singing Nationalism*, has caused cultural trauma in the aftermath of the re-establishment of an independent Estonian state. Estonians developed different strategies to cope with the trauma, ranging from exit and a disconnection with the tradition, to reviving the sense of tradition in the new context of an independent Estonia.

As the examples above indicate, playful practices are not intrinsically linked to the political or politics; neither do they address other individuals in their role as citizens, but public connection that is triggered by such practices adds this component through reflection, and lets them emerge as civic experiences.

Public Connection Triggering Playful Practices

The relationship between playful practices and public connection is, however, not unidirectional; just as playful practices potentially trigger public connection, so might public connection lead to playful practices. In the latter formulation, it is not playful practices that are translated through reflection into an orientation towards agonistic publics, but a general public connection that leads to specific playful practices, as the following episode in one of the interviews shows:

I try to grow up. I read books. I collect information on what's going on. What's happening here, maybe somebody is coming to Estonia for performances and so on. I dance, it's like I get energy from dancing. And I try to connect with others, for example with a German boy. Germany is amazing; I haven't seen anything better anywhere in the world. Germans are funny, they have a sense of humour. They are gentlemen, you can't find gentlemen here. So you keep connections with good people and so you get information and you get involved and so you grow up (Anna – interviewee).

²⁷ In the diaries, the singing contests were mentioned only by Estonian-speaking students from Tartu, where the tradition and the festivities are still very popular. Although the tradition has changed over the course of the past decades, the joint singing still serves to consolidate Estonian national identity (Raudsepp and Vikat, 2011).

The interviewee, with her strong international orientation and will to leave Narva immediately after finishing her studies, describes dancing, reading and travelling as practices based on her orientation towards Germany and other countries. Hence, her connection with a world beyond the “depressing, everyday life in Narva,” leads for her to the joyful engagement with different cultures. The origin of her orientation towards other countries is the perceived shortcomings of her own hometown. In other parts of the interview, she further expresses her disappointment with Narva: “There are hardly any places to meet up and connect with others, since bars and cafes are closing down, but as a student you are constrained in your possibilities to change this situation” (Anna – interviewee). As a consequence, she disconnects from Narva and its physical public spaces and directs her orientation to other spaces abroad through engaging with them in mediated form. Her connection to publics beyond the national realm influences her media practices, which mark a key difference to the previous examples.

The initial example of Pille developing a board game could also be placed in this category, as her existing interest in politics is linked to her private interest in gaming culture.

In contrast to the previous category, the playful practices here follow public orientation and therefore share a civic character from the beginning.

Public Connection and Playful Practices Collapsing into Each Other

This last category dissolves the clear-cut distinction between orientation and practice. It refers to episodes where public connection and playful practices collapse into each other and cannot clearly be divided. The most obvious case of this was a number of jokes that the participants retold in their diaries and during the interviews. The jokes considered here refer to current political developments, here mainly the financial crisis and how politicians handled it.

Telling a joke could then be considered as a practice, maybe even as civic talk. However, it is important to note that even joking about the current economic or political situation conveys a certain orientation towards public issues. Furthermore, a certain degree of knowledge is necessary, as Russell Leslie Peterson puts it, “genuine satire can give us information and insight that enhances our ability to fulfil our roles as citizens in a democracy” (Peterson, 2008, p. 22). However, this orientation can hardly be separated from the practice of telling the joke, since previous knowledge and attitudes are employed in the narration and potentially renegotiated.

The jokes being told should, of course, not be seen as providing trustworthy information, or serving any rational functions, but as points of connection with discursive publics. They actualise important, controversial topics of common concern, or try to establish them as being of common concern. In the following case the financial crisis serves as a frame of reference for joking:

Anyway, the crisis is everywhere. People talk about it, write about it and even the TV is full of shows about helping people handle their financial problems and so on. There are even new jokes and anecdotes about the crisis that people are telling. Most of them are about employers, who are trying to save money by cutting expenses on any kind of funny things like toilet paper and soap, but at the same time the secretary still gets the compensation for her car (Riina – diarist).

When asked about the mediation of the financial crisis, another female interviewee refers to funny nicknames that were circulated in Estonia.

Oh that, that is a big theme (laughter). We call it *masu-majiiis kris* in Estonian and it's the short version of it. And it's a nickname or, like, you would call pets or something (laughter). So, we have funny names for it. That one and *pupu* (laughter), which is a little bit (longer pause) bad word. And they are used to describe the little stadium of crisis. This is also like, I have heard how people joke about it and there was, for example, an article, well not article but a list of new words and vocabulary, which the crisis has. But yes, of course, newspapers write about how, how many people are in employment or unemployed and that's a really high percentage, but we are better than people in Latvia (laughter). So many people are proud of that. But that's not good (Laine – interviewee).

The significance of humour for civic culture is also stressed by Schutz (1977). He argues, drawing on Aristotle and Plato, for a civilising force of political humour. Citizens have to suppress certain primitive behaviours to fit within the highly structured political system. Aggressive humour then encapsulates a form of passive aggression and is cathartic. Furthermore, Schutz argues that humour has a levelling function that allows citizens to critically address “superior” persons and elites. Open political humour is, in this sense, presented as an indicator of democracy.

Boskin (1990) analyses the taboos and constraints of American political humour during the 1980s, and critically examines the general description of political humour as being open and creative. He argues that political humour

is not only creative, free and open, but also bound to rules, such as taboos. At the same time, Boskin stresses that humour aims to transcend borders and societal taboos. However, humour must be analysed in the (macroeconomic) structures of its appearance in society. Following Boskin and his critical assessment of political humour, it is not surprising that jokes about the financial system appeared exactly at this point of time in the diaries. He argues,

to the extent that corporations and their executives ever become the specific objects of national humour, a severe reversal in the economy is usually the cause, not a shift of values, (...) [but] [c]onsequently, no continuous body of political humour directly impinges on the system (Boskin, 1990, pp. 479,481).

Here, he makes clear where the structural constraints of political humour lie, namely in their embeddedness in the macroeconomic societal frame.

This category stands emblematically for the complex relationship between orientation and practice, and argues that in some cases they cannot be distinguished from each other.

Playfulness and Civic Culture?

As I have argued above, playful practices can be understood as a catalyst to, and the starting point for, public connection. Nevertheless, it is necessary to critically examine playfulness in a wider context, namely what challenges might arise for civic culture in connection with playful practices.

Playful practices may appear in the course of civic engagement that contest traditional politics, such as protests organised by the Global Justice Movement. This contestation through playful forms of engagement, for example protesting against the G20 meetings includes carnivalesque features²⁸ (for further analysis, see Uldam, 2010) and ironic actions filmed and shared as YouTube clips.²⁹ These practices could be dismissed with the terms of theoretical discussions of play as inconsequential, since the participants and observers

²⁸ One important feature of actions by the London-based World Development Group is dressing up, for example as politicians <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=4565543&fbid=392483876985&op=2&o=global&view=global&subj=7131786845&id=616581985> (accessed 2 February 2013).

²⁹ The channel of YouTube user Cveitch is one example documenting playful transgression rules and confrontation with authorities <http://www.youtube.com/user/cveitch#p/a/u/2/KGA9ZUEa3ZY> (accessed 2 February 2013).

are always aware of being part of a “game” (Huizinga, 1955). The argument that “this is only a game” could therefore be easily employed to downplay the significance of those do-it-yourself expressions of citizenship to which Jenkins and Hartley refer. At the same time, platforms for civic engagement, such as 350.org organising worldwide human formations of the number 350 (symbolising the upper limit of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere), motivate increasing numbers of people to engage with issues of common concern, such as climate change. Hence, their upper limit for carbon emissions is inserted into different public spaces. In a similar way, forms of public orientation towards, for example, education politics was triggered by entertaining television formats that raised awareness.

Besides that, play has another quality of being internally formalised but externally free from “ordinary” rules. As Roger Caillois (2001) puts it, play establishes a “second reality”, which is a kind of “free unreality”. Therefore, play is often presented as enabling free and creative engagement with certain issues within the given framework of rules (Caillois, 2001). In this sense, structural constraints enable, but also hinder, playfulness. If a critical discussion of the rules of playful civic engagement is neglected, play remains without consequences for the dominating, hegemonic discourse, and thereby the transformative potential of play is lost.

6. Historical Public Connection

Today they [Russians] are still quite distant. In my social surroundings there are some of them, but I don't have any connections with them: different languages, different understandings about history and tradition (Hendrik – interviewee).

The previous two chapters presented two kinds of civic experience as public connection, namely *media criticism* and *playful public connection*. This last chapter will again embark on a specific form of civic experience and its conflictual character. The analysis will start with the in-depth interviews that included a discussion about the relationship between Estonians and Estonian Russians. The material reveals that the experiences of the tense relationship between the two groups are predominantly framed as being based on a missing common historical narrative. The analysis of this chapter is therefore interested in the specific process of relating the lived experience to dominant historical narratives. This chapter does not aim to establish a “history from below” as Hobsbawm (1998) suggests. It is also not generally interested in the problem of narration in history as a discipline (Carr, 2001; Connerty, 1990; Roberts, 2001; White, 2001). The main aim is to examine the strategies of how the participants create links or connect with conflictual publics, and what sites of negotiation they identify in the context of Estonian historical narratives. I therefore aim to follow Pickering's plea for historical cultural studies that ought to “engage as well with popular experiences of pastness and understand how they are constructed and negotiated” (Pickering, 2008, p. 202).

Public Connection and History

The differences between Estonians and Estonian Russians that lead to conflict have varied in their severity over time. “Discursive actualisation” of the differences between the two groups occurred, for example, in the context of the recent Russo-Georgian War of August 2008. Lang (2008) refers to the support of all three Baltic states for Georgia during the violent conflict, and the 3+3 pact between the three Baltic states and Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, which initiated the league of New Friends of Georgia – an informal association between Central-East European and South-East European countries promoting Georgia’s cooperation with the European Union. The outcome of the Russo-Georgian war was the de-facto independence of South Ossetia, which was then recognised as an independent state by the Russian Federation and Nicaragua and some others. During that period, an old discourse on the independence of the Russian-dominated region in north-east Estonia was re-actualised, since parallels – a majority of non-Georgians living in the region of South Ossetia who were striving for independence, supported by Russia – to the Georgian case were quickly drawn. Another example of this discursive actualisation could be seen during the Bronze Soldier Crisis (Brüggemann and Kasekamp, 2008). In April 2007, mainly young people took the streets of Tallinn, demonstrating both for and against the removal of a bronze statue for unknown soldiers – a symbol of the Red Army’s victory over Nazi Germany. The monument was erected in 1947, in the aftermath of the Second World War, and is dedicated to the Red Army soldiers who died in this war. During the mid-2000s, the monument – also called *The Liberator Soldier* or *Alyosha* – became the setting for Soviet-style celebrations of Victory Day on 9 May (Davydova, 2008, p. 392). Not only did Estonian Russians use the place for gatherings, but Estonian nationalists also protested against such pro-Soviet gatherings on the same spot. In this case, agonism transformed into antagonism and “the other” was no longer accepted as an agonist, but became an enemy. The streets of Tallinn saw violence between Estonians, who wanted the Bronze Soldier statue removed, and Estonian Russians protesting against the removal.

During the interviews, I used an article that was considered as one of these discursive actualisations to discuss with the participants how they relate their individual experiences to broader historical developments. The article reported on a Russian student who accused the then-serving Russian ambassador in Estonia, Nikolai Uspenski, of illegitimate involvement in the interior

affairs of a sovereign state. Uspenski criticised the Estonian language reforms, which included the restructuring of Russian schools in Estonia so that 60 per cent of teaching was conducted in Estonian.³⁰ The article served, in this sense, as a representation of the conflict around which the interviewees developed their own narratives of how they experience the relationship between the two groups. The responses to the article, however, present a complicated perspective on the conflict, since it was a Russian student criticising the Russian ambassador – something partly welcomed by the participants and partly rejected as Estonian propaganda.

Although the article referred mainly to the language question in Estonia – that an approved level of Estonian should be a requirement for gaining full citizenship and should form part of the extensive school reform – the participants linked their experiences of the relationship to the discursive struggle for a shared historical narrative for Estonia, as the following quotation from an interviewee shows:

I think Estonians are thinking right now that we should punish Russians because of World War II and the Russian occupation here, and they formulate this legal statement that everybody has to learn Estonian and so on and has to take this Estonian citizenship test and so on. I don't know, but this is just absurd (Oliver - Interviewee).

This Estonian interviewee, from a mixed family background, uses historical events to understand the current situation in Estonian society. He creates a direct link between the role of the Soviet Union in Estonia during the Second World War, and the tests that are now enforced upon Russians who wish to obtain Estonian citizenship. Similar links to the history of Estonia, and the resulting power structure, are frequently made during the interviews. The students refer not only to specific historical events, such as the Second World War and Soviet times, but they also discuss these references in the light of an unshared, divided historical narrative of Estonia that is constructed by the different groups and the rather segregated media.

When asked about personal experiences of the conflict between Estonians and Estonian Russians, as well as their anticipation of future developments, the participants frequently stress the complexity of history.

³⁰ Information from the Estonian Ministry for Education and Research <http://www.hm.ee/kogumik2009/en/22.html> [accessed January 2013].

(...) they [the Russians] are brought up in completely different ways and then you tell them, well this is the truth and now you have to believe in this truth. The whole approach must be completely different. It must be secured so that Russians can respect their own culture. At the same time, I can understand why the Estonians don't like the Bronze Soldier in the middle of their capital. This is really difficult work that has to be done. But if it's done once, then Russia cannot influence a third of our population anymore (Martin – interviewee).

This student refers to the difficulties of establishing a consensus when it comes to historical beliefs and shared traditions. However, politics are supposed to solve the problem and establish solutions for the sake of Estonia's security and sovereignty, especially when it comes to Russia's influence, which can be linked to a still-dominant discourse of a potential threat from Russia. What this illustrates, is that the Estonian historical narrative is not only embedded in internal tensions between different groups within society, but is often linked to external groups and actors (Münch, 2008). Erik Noreen and Roxanna Sjöstedt (2004) suggest that the threat perception in Estonia has changed since the 1990s. When it comes to official policy documents, they argue, Russia's presence as the major threat to a sovereign Estonia has decreased. This is not the case for the participants, who continuously refer to Russia as a threat to Estonia and as a source of tension in the relationship between Estonian Russians and Estonians. The perception of a threat from Russia can be seen as shifting the focus of Estonianess as based on an internal divide between Estonians and Estonian Russians, to an external divide between those supporting a sovereign Estonia and those aligning with external forces.

An example of this relationship between Estonian Russians and Estonians can be seen in the following quotation:

In a way it's more special [here in Estonia] because there is a history that we share and the Russians are living here for quite a long time. But the mentality especially of the old people is really different (...). It is still hard, in a way, to accept for them that the Soviet Union, which lasted for 50 years or so; a really long time, has disappeared. I mean if you have lived for 50 years in kind of a state and then suddenly it is gone, it must feel like a shock, I guess. And most of them didn't come here voluntarily, they were promised a good job and a free flat and so on. So it is not really their fault, it was more the politics of the Soviet Union trying to Russify their areas abroad. But it is a really difficult question and I really don't know what to think. I would be really happy if they could feel like Estonians and maybe learn the language, which is also one of the most important points for many Estonians. Estonians often say, they are

happy with Russians, but they have to speak our language. (...) This has been an issue for such a long time. It is really like a question of identity. I mean during Soviet times, you couldn't really speak about your culture and history or whatever. So the only thing you could do was to speak Estonian (Kajsa – diarist and interviewee).

Even though Estonian Russians and Estonians have experienced the same events, they do not share a common understanding of them. This student clearly identifies historical narratives as the foundation of the divide and the differences that are experienced on a daily basis. Furthermore, she links the legacy of the Soviet Union, especially the politics of the “Russification of the near abroad” (Anderson, Barbara and Brian, 1983), to the importance of the Estonian language in contemporary Estonia. The reason why language is important for many Estonians, and why it is key for integration policy, is the oppression of Estonian culture during Soviet times. The stress is here on the particularity of Estonian history that is still strongly influenced by Russia (Münch, 2008). The student therefore describes the paradox of a shared history that is at the same time *not* shared and which is emblematic of the contingency of identity construction (Carpentier, 2011; Torfing 1999). Estonianess is constructed in distinction to the other – in this case Russians – and occurs on two levels: Estonianess is constructed in contrast to Estonian Russians and to the external other, Russia. As argued earlier in the chapter, there has been a persistent discourse in the north-eastern parts of Estonia about gaining autonomous status ever since the restoration of Estonia's independence in 1991, which is strongly supported by the Russian Federation (Münch, 2008).

These narrations, such as Kajsa's, reflect parts of the dominant narrative of the relationship between Estonian Russians and Estonians. However, the dominant narrative is integrated into subjective, personal experiences. The narrations of the participants serve here as accounts of “reflexive agency”³¹ that is confronted with empirical contingency, through which the participants make sense of their mundane encounters and embed them in their ideas about the overall structure of Estonian society. Several study participants, such as Kajsa and Martin, provide explanations for the conflict, but they are in a sense passive, almost reluctant to suggest how it might be reconciled. For Martin, the conflict is irresolvable on the level of the individual citizen. He redirects responsibility to the sphere of politics, but remains unspecific as to what kind of policy should be introduced. None of the participants suggest full acknowl-

³¹ Nick Couldry (2010, p. 8) speaks of “voice as a form of reflexive agency.”

edgement of diversity through politics, i.e., accepting Russian as a second official language. There are also no significant parties representing Estonian Russians politically. The Centre Party, led by Tallinn major, Edgar Savisaar, is the only larger party that publicly represents pro-Russian positions, e.g. in the Bronze Soldier Crisis.

Taking the reflections above as a starting point, this chapter now sets out to discuss the experience of discourse as a form of public connection. Public connection is here understood as an orientation towards a sphere where common concerns are negotiated, and provides the foundation for an understanding of history as a discursive construction in terms of struggle and conflict about establishing a common narrative.

Discourse, Experience and Historical Time

How discourse and experience relate to each other is a complex question, and has been keenly debated for a long time, especially in feminist and subaltern studies (Canning, 1994; Lewis, 1996). Joan Scott (1991), for example, remains sceptical about the notion of experience, and suggests that the analysis of experiences stands in opposition to discourse analysis. In her reasoning, experience is the history of the subject, while discourse produces experiences. Although experience and discourse are closely related, an analysis of experience precludes the critical exploration of discourse, she argues. In this sense, the concepts reflect the difficult relationship between structure and agency (Canning, 1994). Although this relationship is a complex one, there lies a potential in discussing how experiences relate to discourse to identify if and when subjects establish counter-narratives while reflecting on their experiences of dominant discourses. Besides exploring potential counter-narratives constructed by the participants, the analysis here explores which nodal points of the dominant discourse are identified as “meaningful” by the participants. Hence, the approach of analysing experiences of dominant discourses re-integrates the subject and agency that was often considered missing in the discourse-theoretical approach of Laclau and Mouffe.

What counts as the current dominant narrative is here derived from previous studies of the relationship between Estonians and Estonian Russians (Feldman, 2001; Münch, 2008) as well as from the contextualising interviews with Estonian scholars and NGO members. On an institutional level, the necessity of a common historical narrative as a foundation for Estonian culture

is reflected in policy documents³² on integration that are considered as contributing to the dominant narrative as well. Integration is, in the policy documents, seen as the individual contributing to a strong Estonian culture with a presupposed consensus about what Estonianess means, and which relegates differences to the private sphere.

A notion that is considered helpful in relating experience and discourse to each other is the notion of “historical time” as suggested by Ricoeur (2004). Ricoeur distinguishes between, first, “universal time” that refers to the unfolding of world events in a general sequence. This general sequence comprises moments that are, on a qualitative level, not distinct from one another. The present is basically defined by its relationship to the past and future. In contrast to that, he then develops the notion of “lived time”, which is time as experienced by the individual. The present is defined by what is experienced *now*. In order to link both types of temporality, a third dimension is established – historical time – that harmonises lived experience with universal time. Calendars are examples of devices that synchronise universal time and lived time. The present, in terms of historical time, refers to action and the beginning of a new sequence. These actions are based on past experiences that are linked to cultural and natural events, but also to expectations about future developments (Ricoeur 2004). Ricoeur (1988) derives the notion of the “space of experience” (past) and the “horizon of expectations” (future) from the work of Reinhard Koselleck (1985) to develop an understanding of how past and present are linked.

Historical time is not only quantified and represented by calendars, but also constituted through narratives which are developed *inter alia* by historians. Through the narrative mode of articulation, historical time becomes human time and links universal time to the subjective or lived experience of time. This form of historical time is the focus of this chapter that asks how the participants link their lived experience to dominant historical narratives. Thus, historical time and its employment act as a reference point for the participants’ lived experience.³³ Ricoeur provides, in this sense, the framework to understand how experiences and discourse, or dominant historical narratives, are related to each other.

³² For example, *Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007* or *The Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013* (For further analysis see Brosig, 2008).

³³ I am, however, not going into a detailed analysis of how the historical narrative is produced by different historians, and how the narrative relates to historical knowledge.

Other important aspects here are *forgetting* and *untold history*. Historical time, established by, for example historians, as a meta-narrative, is always also related to forgetting and leaving out. The forgetting or leaving out of certain events in the historical narratives arises in the dialectical context of, on the one hand, the inability of culture to give visibility or readability to specific events (Ricoeur refers here to Hayden White's analysis on the inability to give representation to the Shoa); on the other hand, there is a request, a need to represent and give visibility "arising from the heart of the event" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 254). Morris-Suzuki (2005) calls this inbuilt forgetting "historiography of oblivion" and refers to a history textbook dispute in Japan as a vivid example of "oblivion" as part of establishing a historical narrative. Here, the interviewees continuously refer to a different history being taught in Russian and Estonian schools that leaves out substantial facts about Estonia's past. This "leaving out" and "forgetting", but also re-writing, is seen as the source of tensions between the two groups.

The historical narrative is linked to lived experiences of segregation and differences on the day-to-day level. Although Estonians and Estonian Russians share a specific space of experience established by natural and cultural events (such as the Second World War, the demise of the Soviet Union, the re-establishment of an independent Estonian state, the international financial crisis) the historical narrative that transforms historical time into human time is written or emploted differently for each group. At the same time, power relations have changed and therefore the ways in which dominant historical narratives are constructed have also been altered. If a common historical narrative is, however, understood as being essential for establishing commonality and belonging in a society, tensions inevitably arise (Carr, 2001). I would suggest that the established relationship between subjectively-experienced time and historical narrative should be understood as a civic experience that is public connection, i.e., an orientation towards a sphere of struggle about the "true" story of Estonia that is linked to the contingent construction of political identification.

The main reference points of the participants' experiences of history are *language*, *places* and *discursive spaces*. These categories all link to the objects of civic experience namely citizenship, politics and the political. However, one aspect is more prominent than the others in each category. Experiencing history as language, for example, relates strongly to citizenship as an object of civic experience. The categorising of others, and being categorised, through naming reflects an actualisation of the notion of citizenship including specific

rights and duties. Experiencing history through places (here mainly with reference to the Bronze Soldier monument) links to official memory politics and how they are experienced. The last analytical category, namely experiencing history as discursive spaces, highlights the political and its conflictual character and mainly relates to the struggle about the establishment of dominating historical narratives in discursive spheres (schools and mainstream media). The analysis of specific aspects of how lived experiences are related to historical time starts from the narrations of the participants, and reiterates them in connection with the theoretical discussions earlier in this book.

David Carr proposes that communities construct a “we” by drawing together “a remembered past and a projected future, and these jointly serve to make sense of the present that is being lived through” (Carr, 2001, p. 199). Carr continues by arguing that common narratives hold the community together. The shared narratives are embodied in legends and stories about the birth or foundation of the community, but also in the plans and proposals of leaders and politicians. In Estonia, the official, common narrative, taught in schools and politics, is largely based on the exclusion of Estonian Russians. This clearly surfaces in the narrations of the participants and makes the establishment of a commonly-shared narrative difficult. The narrative about the illegal occupation of Estonia by Soviet troops after the Second World War might serve as an example here. From the Russian side, these same events have been framed as liberation from Nazi occupation by the Red Army (Lang, 2008).

In the following section, the conflict outlined above will be examined by looking at the subjective experiences of my interviewees and how they frame the relationship between Estonians and Estonian Russians.

Experiencing History as Language

The way in which the participants speak of Estonian Russians and Estonians shows a general refusal to name or label the “other” group. Indeed, the majority of the interviewees avoid specifically referring to the other group at all. If they use labels such as *Estonians* and *Russians*, they employ them in a generic way without making any distinctions. Both Estonians and Estonian Russians remain, therefore, as homogenous groups contrasting the own group. Interestingly, interviewees with a mixed family background often identify themselves at the beginning of the interview as Estonian (in the pre-questionnaire). During the discussion, however, they only briefly mention their mixed family background and in some cases explain that their self-identification as

Russians or Estonians is context dependent. One female interviewee, for example, explains that she considers herself Estonian, when she travels abroad. In the context of her Estonian-dominated class at school, however, she usually considers herself Russian and in alliance with the minority in the class. In that sense, they slightly challenge the generic usage of “us” and “them” that dominates the discourse.

Ricoeur proposes that “datability [is], inherent to lived experiences, and singularly to a feeling being distanced from the past and of having a sense of temporal depth” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 154). Besides datability, historical experiences need to be named. A historical narrative provides names for the cultural and natural events of history and situates them in relation to each other. The chosen names in the dominating historical narrative are, at the same time, a constitutive part of the lived experience of history.

In the dominant Estonian discourse there is a slight confusion about how to “name the other”. Elena Nikiforova (2004) argues that, depending on the context, the name for the group of Estonian Russians changes depending on the actualised assumptions. The terms range from “Russian-speakers” to “Russians”, “Estonian Russians” and “ethnic Russians”. Every given name actualises different socio-political and cultural positions of the named. The group of “Estonian Russians” includes Russian citizens settling in Estonia, stateless people of Russian origin and ethnic Russians with Estonian citizenship.

It is therefore important to look at what Couldry (2006a) calls “the power of naming” in social reality and thereby the signifying of specific aspects of identity. The changing names for the Russian-speaking population therefore reflect the complexity of the historical narrative and the different discursive positions taken by the person or institution “naming” the groups that are very diverse. Depending on the context, different connections are actualised, while the power of naming is distributed socially according to dominant cultures (Valentine, 1998). Naming as a practice not only defines the position of the named, but also of the naming in relation to the other. The term *Russians* links the minority group much closer to Russia and enhances their orientation towards Russia as encompassing different values and norms. *Estonian Russians* emphasises both the belonging, but also the cultural distinctness of the Russian-speaking group. The name *Russian-speakers* stresses language as a point of exclusion, where language is still one of the main points of divide between Estonian Russians and Estonians.

Experiencing History as Place

In the interviews, I did not explicitly include the Bronze Soldier or the events that evolved around it in April 2007; but the interviewees repeatedly referred to it as a violent expression of the conflict about historical narratives.

The participants linked the Bronze Soldier Crisis directly to the article that I discussed with them. The interviewees referring to the Bronze Soldier Crisis identified the monument and the events around it as a crystallisation of diverging and conflicting historical narratives.

Like the thing that happened three years ago with the monument and so on. It was really weird that they moved that monument from the centre, although there were no problems, if it just had stayed there. Just because a few nationalistic guys tried to go there with the flag, and so on. And most of them were Estonians. They were saying to remove the Soviet Union and all that blabla, but for the Russian population it is not really connected to Soviet culture because when the Soviet Union broke down, the majority of the population, even more than 90% were for independence. So that means that all of these Russians, Estonians and Ukrainians and so on were against the USSR themselves. They voted for liberation, well not liberation but territorial independence. (...) I was actually against that removal of the monument, and I was there actually. And by accident I was even in the crowd that was dispersed by the police, and that was making that riot.

When I was young, we brought flowers there. So it was like a place where people are coming every year. And this place is going to be removed because of that Estonian - Russian thing. The government did it just because they wanted to. They wanted to remove that monument without hearing what like 45% of the population was thinking about it (Viktor – interviewee).

This interviewee, who has a Ukrainian background, takes up a narrative of historical unity in the fight for independence from the Soviet Union that was also supported by Estonian Russians.³⁴ However, this unity has now largely disappeared, which was painfully evidenced during the events of the so-called “Bronze Night”. At the same time, he refers to *forgetting*, which is inextricably linked to remembering, i.e., to stress or avoid the unity of Russians and Estonians and shared political ideas during times of major change. The question remains as to how conflicts develop from agonistic to antagonistic in

³⁴ This can be linked to the ambivalent position of the Estonian Russians prior to the restoration of an independent Estonian state, to which Raun (2001) refers.

character³⁵, and why they crystallise around a place like the Bronze Soldier monument.

The monument of the Red Army soldier can be understood in light of Pierre Nora's notion of "*lieux de memoire*" (Nora, 1989). The idea of *les lieux de memoire*, or "sites" or "realms" of memory (Legg, 2005), is a way to distinguish between history and memory. Whereas *memories* are linked to specific events that happened, *history* is linked to narratives that historians choose and consider crucial to be remembered and preserved. He connects this distinction to a wider argument, namely that, with the rise of the modern nation state, direct memory that is pre-representational has disappeared. This development from pre-representational memory to representational history goes hand-in-hand with what Nora calls "distance memory", where the past is no longer retrievable as truth by historians. Instead, the historical narrative illuminates the discontinuity of the past. As part of that development, *les lieux de memoire* fulfil the role of empty signifiers that lack a referent in reality; they are their own referent, and they are pure and self-referential. At the same time, they have an ambiguous character: they are closed upon themselves and open to all kinds of signification. They are simultaneously both banal and extraordinary. The Bronze Soldier as *le lieu de memoire* is closed upon itself in the sense of its physical reality. For the historical narrative, however, it works excellently as an object that is open to all kinds of significations. It is the symbol for the unlawful occupation of Estonia by Soviet troops and a monument to the liberation of Estonia from the Nazi regime. The monument is banal in terms of its predictability – it is part of the daily environment of the city. At the same time, it is extraordinary in its symbolic meaning.

The narrations of the participants refer to the monument, and the riots that arose around it, as being of minor importance actually, but that the events made the cleavages in Estonian society more visible. The events around the removal made clear that the politics of integration and the multicultural society had failed. In this sense, the attempt to strengthen the identity and unity of all "Estonians" around a common narrative of Soviet occupation (in contrast to the narrative of the voluntary joining of the Soviet Union as promoted

³⁵ In the April events of the riots including the death of one person, the character of the conflict changed significantly and the adversary was no longer 'the central category of democratic politics' (Mouffe, 2002, p. 90). It was no longer 'the opponent we share a common allegiance to the democratic principles of liberty and equality for all while disagreeing about their interpretation' (Mouffe, 2002, p. 90).

by Russia) failed to stabilise the discursive construction of a strong Estonian identity that includes Estonian Russians.

Nora's more general argument is that history becomes replaceable through a variety of imaginations and narratives. The participants, however, reflect no worries about a historical relativism that allows for all kinds of narratives, but they identify the struggle about the "right" historical narrative as being crucial for processes of identification. Thus, it is not the historical truth or narrative as such that is in question here, but how it is related to the lived experience of separation. For the participants, this is where the conflict arises and is experienced as such. The Estonian participants acknowledge the reasons as to why Estonian Russians believe in another kind of history, but do not seem to accept them as equally contributing to diversity in society. It is rather the state that is supposed "to do something about it" and establish commonality. Estonian Russians reflect a certain frustration about not being heard as part of this process of establishing a common narrative (see Viktor's quote above).

Experiencing History as Discursive Spaces

Besides the Bronze Soldier as a *lieu de memoire*, the participants identify discursive spaces of the conflictual construction of the historical narrative as important for how they experience the conflict, namely schools and the Estonian mainstream media. In these spaces they perceive institutionalised forms of creating a historical narrative that potentially silences other, alternative narratives and forms of remembering (Urry, 1996/1999). That the students explicitly refer to schools and media as discursive sites of the conflict is not surprising, especially when keeping the newspaper article, which was used to trigger discussion, in mind. However, it is interesting to examine how they talk about schools and media as mediators of historical narratives. The interviewees repeatedly refer to the differences in understanding and teaching history in Estonian and Russian schools in Estonia as the following episode illustrates:

I think that everyone wants some good things for themselves and in Estonia there are Russians and there are Estonians and basically I think that there are not that many good relationships between Estonians and Russians. They are in their own schools and they, I think the Russians believe what they have been taught at school and the Estonians believe what they have studied and they have different cultures, (...), it is really like there are so many different sites in this problem (Lisa – interviewee).

The interviewee refers to a rather clear-cut division between Russians and Estonians that is reinforced in schools by the history being taught there. She stresses the complexity of the problem that makes it unsolvable.

History education in schools, especially through textbooks, is often of special interest in the scholarly historical research (e.g. Kalmus 2003). What is learned in history classes is not only a controversial topic in Estonia, but often an issue for impassioned debates the world over (Morris-Suzuki, 2005). Tessa Morris-Suzuki refers to “textbook wars” in East Asia regarding the white-washing of Japan’s expansionism and colonialism, for example. The debate in Estonia should be seen in a similar light. The content of history classes in Estonian schools is seen as important for a more unified identification with the nation state.

Sirkka Ahonen argues, in her analysis of identity politics in Estonian history curricula, that schools are embodiments and mediators of *power*. Based on an analysis of changes to Estonian schools’ history curricula after independence in 1991, she states that “a curriculum is power, with a potential to create unity of thought and action, but, at the same time, with a tendency to exclude individuals and groups who hold to an alternative knowledge” (Ahonen, 2001, p. 191).

By referring to schools as discursive spaces, the participants show an awareness of mediation of power through history classes in Estonian schools. However, their perception is slightly different from the one Ahonen (2001) describes, which she derives from a large-scale European survey on the perception of history among young people, called *Youth and History*. The study, from 1997, identifies a clear gap between Estonians and Estonian Russians in the perception of the historical narratives they were presented with at school. Estonians strongly supported the national narrative, while the Russian students disagreed largely with the popular Estonian perception of Estonia being exploited by the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Russian students anticipated ethnic conflicts, and were less optimistic for the future. The participants largely identified the divergent historical narratives in Russian and Estonian schools as the main problem, emphasising the difference or “otherness” of the circulated narratives that foster division. This implies that the participants are reluctant to unambiguously acknowledge difference between the groups. Establishing a common narrative is still considered the solution to the tensions between the two groups. This idea is also at the core of official integration politics, which reinforce the need for a shared orientation towards a

cultural core (Brosig, 2008). In this sense, the participants largely reproduce (rather than challenge) the official discourse.

Similarly to schools, media are presented as sites where historical narratives are established and reinforced. In the interviews, the media are described as points of disconnection and segregation, but also as the major sites of potential change. After the events of April 2007 in Tallinn, the discourse about integration policies and programmes gained new momentum. Through this discourse, the role of media was actualised and led to an inclusion in the Estonian Integration Strategy between 2008 and 2013. In the programme, officials formulated the goal that the majority of the people whose mother tongue was not Estonian should regularly receive information from Estonian media sources in their own language and should be able to trust these rather than other sources (Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013, p. 16). In order to realise this goal, a number of politicians, interest groups and civil society organisations argued for Russian-language public service channels (television and radio) as a counter weight to the “propaganda” from Russia (Vihalemm, 2008b). The project was never fully realised, though the second Estonian public service broadcaster ETV2 started partly broadcasting in Russian on 8 August 2008 to provide Russian-speakers with an Estonian source of information. However, the share of programmes in Russian has remained low. The majority of programmes are broadcast in Estonian with Russian subtitles.

This official discourse surfaces in the narrations of the participants, who identify the mainstream media as a powerful institution able to bring about a change in the tense relationship. However, the media, in this context, mainly understood as traditional mass media such as television and radio, inhabit an “undecidability”³⁶ for the discourse, in the sense of having the potential to both reinforce the hegemonic order and challenge it through the discursive strategies of resistance.

The following interview extract reflects how the dominant narrative, which constructs Russia as a major driver of the conflict (Münch, 2008), is reproduced by the participants.

Russia has really brainwashed them all about the history, so that they really believe that it is bad here what the Estonians are doing with Russians. And that is also why you can find such articles like this one [referring to the article

³⁶ Mouffe and Laclau derive the notion of undecidability from Derrida, referring to a structural undecidability of the social. Since the social does not have an essential centre, there is a freedom in the interpretation of meaning (Torfing, 1999).

I brought with me], because it is all about different backgrounds. And that is why it's as it is. I don't know how all such media things are going to end. I think it is an endless story (Lisa – interviewee).

The reference to Russia brainwashing Estonian Russians in their understanding of Estonian history reflects the power of the story that is perceived by the interviewees. The historical narrative “provided by Russia” is, in their eyes, wrong and they perceive it as deepening the divide on an everyday level; Estonian Russians are thus “different”, because they believe in a different story told by a foreign power. The Russian media available in Estonia are presented as threatening “counter-publics” that endanger Estonian society. Rather than focusing on the *internal* tensions and exclusions within Estonian society, it is again Russia that is identified as the threat that needs to be contained by, for example, media policy.

The following interview excerpt links up to that issue of providing an Estonian alternative to media produced in Russia.

Yeah, yeah well in the future, I think, I hope that after the Bronze Soldier Crisis the Estonian society realised what we need is an Estonian TV or radio show or newspaper that's in Russian, I mean for the Russian minority so that they don't have to listen to what the Russian government has to say about Estonia. I mean of course they can listen to it too, but then they have the choice between. Before they didn't have the choice so I hope that this is gonna become something, I don't know. Something positive, I don't know. And I guess that's the biggest issue right now and erm and it depends also what the actual government does (Hendrik – interviewee).

This short episode reminds once again of the dominant narrative that Russia is still the biggest threat to Estonia. The conflict is thus not seen as a domestic problem, but one of international relations (Münch 2008). Furthermore, the interviewee refers to what one might call, following Silverstone (2007), the “centrifugal power” of Estonian media providing information for those at the margins of society, here identified as Russian-speakers. Russian media, produced in and distributed from Russia, are seen as enhancing the divisions within Estonian society.

Later in the interview, the same participant identified the attempt to introduce Russian-language media from an Estonian perspective as false inclusion that actually contributes to the persistent problem of integration, which remains without any “true” political inclusiveness. Instead, it is again the

dominant Estonian side that speaks for Estonian Russians, or rather it translates its own voice into Russian.

Actually as far as I heard this Russian version of *postimees* is not a Russian copy of the Estonian version, but because of (long pause) the media's power and because Russians don't have their own political party, at least in a form that would be elected in parliamentary elections, therefore I think they are politically quite underrepresented. Making Russian media is therefore a much easier solution than giving them political power and voice (Hendrik – interviewee).

This quotation can be seen as a counter-narration to the dominant story about the role that Estonian media in Russian has for the conflict.

In conclusion, the participants identify schools and the mainstream media as spaces of experience, to link back to Koselleck's distinction. In these fora, stories are told and shared with a wider audience. Therefore, they are both spaces where the segregation starts and, more importantly, where it could end. The possibility of overcoming the divide through, for example, establishing Russian-speaking media produced in Estonia was taken seriously after the violence during the Bronze Soldier Crisis in Tallinn.

History as Public Connection?

Rather than writing a “history from below”, the main aim of this chapter was to analyse how the participants' experiences of the relationship between Estonians and Estonian Russians relate to the dominant historical narrative in Estonia. Therefore, the chapter investigated how lived experiences are linked to historical time that is established as historical narratives (Ricoeur, 2004). The participants have neither an essentialist idea of history connected to one truth, nor do they seem to adhere to a historical relativism that accepts any historical narrative. They rather emphasise the difference in the narratives as being the main source of the conflict between Estonians and Estonian Russians.

The narratives of the participants referred to mainly three aspects of the relationship between Estonian Russians and Estonians, namely history as *language*, history as *place* and history as *discursive spaces*. When referring to history as language, it is the way the participants name themselves and the other that is of importance. Furthermore, specific places are identified as having special significance in the context of Estonian history. In their narratives, the

participants frequently refer to the Bronze Soldier monument and the events of the so-called “Bronze Soldier Night” as emblematic of the clash of different historical narratives, where the monument serves as an object for diverse signification. Besides this site of history, the participants identify schools and the media as discursive spaces for enacting the dominant historical narrative. Both sites are seen as arenas for establishing and reinforcing a specific historical narrative.

Of special importance is the experience of the conflict through history that is present in the narratives of the interviewees. In contrast to that finding, Merje Feldman concludes that

the notion of identity as it is constructed within the Estonian identity discourse is primordial and biological, determined by fixed civilisational boundaries and genetics rather than choice or contemporary circumstances. The essentialised representations of geopolitics, culture and nation are integral parts of the tensions between Estonia and the EU as well as Estonian and Russian-speaking populations in Estonia (Feldman, 2001, p. 17).

Rather than referring to natural differences that are based on different ethnic origins, it is the identification with divergent histories that is seen by the participants as the cause of the divide between Estonian Russians and Estonians. However, counter-narratives that challenge the dominant historical narratives in Estonia are only present to a moderate degree in the interviews and diaries. The interviews revealed the belief in different historical narratives as the main difficulty in acknowledging diversity. The participants present their understanding of the differences and tensions emerging from this problem, but they consider a common and shared narrative as essential for a reconciled society. In this sense, they reproduce the dominant narrative of Estonian integration policy that was discussed as being problematic for the idea of radical citizenship.³⁷ Since the legal framework is based on the idea of a shared cultural core, the dominant historical narrative excludes Estonian Russians who do not have Estonian citizenship from basic civil rights and, at the same time, they are not acknowledged as an official minority according to the treaties³⁸ of the Council of Europe.

³⁷ The consensus that is expounded by my participants about integration policy is largely based on the exclusion of ethnic Russians, and is a redirection of Russian cultural values to the private sphere.

³⁸ Framework for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Conclusions: Understanding Civic Culture through the Lens of Experiences

The main objective of this book was to explore contemporary expressions of civic culture in Estonia by looking at civic experiences: *how do young people in Estonia experience their relationship with the political, politics and fellow citizens, and how do their civic experiences intersect with media experiences?* These questions were developed on the assumption that civic culture and the experiences it involves should be analysed from a holistic perspective, including all kinds of experiences – action – as well as non-action-based.

Before delving into the question of how civic experience and civic culture relate to each other, the main findings of the book will be summarised. Since, the research started out from the assumption that orientation that is unrelated to action has so far been overlooked in civic culture research, public connection was chosen as a one empirical focus here. However, the understanding of public connection – as a general orientation towards spaces where common concerns are negotiated – was slightly changed to one that acknowledges conflict as endemic to society.

The participants expressed civic experiences in diverse ways. One of these forms was *media criticism*, which is a critical reflection on media as institutions and content, or as Carpentier (2011) puts it, “discourse machineries”. Hence, I distinguished between practices that arise out of media criticism as expressed in the material, namely the practices of critical media *connectors* and critical media *disconnectors*. Both of these groups shared critical standpoints about the media failing in their role as watchdogs and information providers. It is clear that, in the diaries, the participants criticised news media, such as online and printed newspapers, as well as TV news broadcasts. Critical media connectors are encouraged by their viewpoints and the perceived

failure of the news media to become active in changing the situation, as Roja (2010) terms it, to “improve” the public discourse. When describing their ways of being active, they mainly referred to their own blogs, but also to commenting on online newspaper articles and news forums. However, they remained ambiguous about the added value of user-generated content, as it is often only extreme positions that are represented and consequently it is perceived more as “shouting” rather than a mutual exchange or dialogue between citizens. The critical media *disconnectors* suggested “tuning out” from news consumption as a consequence of their critical viewpoints. They mainly perceived news presented by mainstream media as a staged spectacle and a waste of time. News reaches them via their personal networks, face-to-face, or via networked social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The mediating role of people belonging to their “primary group” (Katz and Lazarsfeldt, 1955), such as family members and friends, was crucial here.

Civic experiences also emerged as playful public connection, which refers to experiences that encompass a pleasurable and non-dutiful engagement with public issues. Playful public connection appears at the intersection of orientation and action and was discussed in terms of how playful practices, such as watching entertaining TV shows, might trigger an orientation to public issues and conflictual public spaces. Playful public connection also encompassed the question of how orientation might trigger playful practices that can be understood as civic action. The starting point was an existing interest and orientation towards public issues that led to playful activities. Finally, playful public connection was discussed as a mode of connection in which action and orientation cannot be separated from each other and, in this sense, collapsed into each other.

Civic experiences were presented as having a conflictual character, which emerges in different contexts. The last chapter delves into one major conflict in Estonia between Estonian Russians and Estonians. Hence, this chapter, in contrast to the previous analytical chapters, emerged out of this particular Estonian context, and added another dimension to the discussion of public connection. The participants framed their experiences of this conflict with reference to a *shared, but unshared* historical narrative. Based on the narrations presented by the interviewees, this chapter investigated the way subjective experiences dominate historical narratives. The main interest here was to identify experiential narrations that potentially challenge the dominant historical narrative. These were, however, rare.

Starting methodologically, with an open approach to civic and political engagement, the participants showed an interest and orientation towards public issues and public spaces where common concerns are negotiated, which counters the narrative of the withdrawn, disenchanted citizen that dominated the early years of the 2000s. The participants created links to public issues by using diverse strategies, such as playful practices, media criticism and reflections on societal conflicts. However, the institutions of representative democracy, such as parties and politicians, are rarely mentioned in their stories of public connection. In that sense, one maybe should not speak of the disenchantment or withdrawal of young people from politics, but a growing gap between the “represented” and the “representatives”. The participants engaged less with traditional politics, but they were definitely political in the sense of being oriented to- and participating in the negotiation of conflictual societal issues.

For this form of civic experience, the mainstream and new media played an important role, but not the *most* important role. Looking both at mediatization (the increasing impact of media in all spheres of life) and mediation (the representation of opinions, people, and communities in the media) this book suggested that media as content and institution were not accepted unambiguously. This puts the narratives of the participatory potential of new media of, for example, Henry Jenkins (2006) and John Hartley (2010) into perspective as well. Instead of assuming media dominance in sense-making processes, the book followed the complex process of emplotting orientations to shared and negotiable concerns that are embedded in media experiences, but which were not necessarily steered by them.

Civic Experiences and Civic Culture

The book has touched upon grand, ambiguous, contested theoretical notions, and has situated itself in the broader context of civic culture research – a field that is highly contested as well. In these concluding remarks it is, however, necessary to clarify the linkage between civic culture and civic experiences. Civic experiences that are of interest for the analysis have been defined as *Erlebnisse*, namely episodes in which participants relate to and negotiate issues of common concern that emerge through reflections, and more concretely in their narrations. *Erlebnisse*, in this sense, refers to secluded episodes that stand out from the everyday stream of events. Kevin Barnhurst, quoting

Husserl, states that “people’s experience of the world has these two aspects, a “general indeterminate sense’ and a ‘sense determining itself according to particular realities” (Barnhurst, 2003, p. 141). This quotation reflects the divide between *Erlebnisse* and *Erfahrung*, which are experiences in a “general indeterminate sense”. The latter form of experience encompasses long-term knowledge, identification, trust, practices and values. These *Erfahrungen* are potentially shared by a group of people in a specific cultural and historical context. Experiences as *Erlebnisse*, by contrast, are individual encounters that are made sense of through reflection, and which transform *mere* experience into *an* experience. Thus, for the realm of civic and political engagement, I suggested a distinction between civic experiences as *Erlebnisse* and civic culture as *Erfahrung*, which is similar to Peter Dahlgren’s (2009) distinction between *civic agency* (*Erlebnisse*) and *civic culture* (*Erfahrung*). Dahlgren argues that “civic agency is premised on people being able to see themselves as participants, that they find engagement meaningful, and that they experience motivation via the interplay of reason and passion” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 102). Here, the focus is on the subjective encounters, passions and values that are actualised during and through civic action, which resembles the idea of civic experiences as *Erlebnisse*. However, civic agency can never emerge out of a vacuum, but is embedded in a larger cultural environment that is *civic culture*. Cultures, in contrast to civic agency, “consist of patterns of communication, practices, and meaning; they provide taken-for-granted-orientations – factual and normative – as well as other resources of collective life” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 103). The focus is here on a collective, shared frame in which civic action takes place. At the same time, these cultural patterns are never completely stable or fixed; they are what Dahlgren calls “road markers” for specific ways of “doing” citizenship. Hence, civic culture refers to the cultural patterns in which citizenship and civic agency are embedded.

This distinction is helpful when trying to understand and disentangle larger, commonly shared and negotiated frames for civic life. Civic culture as a road marker for civic experiences, then, has remained in the background of the analysis here, and was discussed in terms of historical pre-conditions framing the civic orientation of young people in Estonia. The developed categories for critical media connection and playful public connection were re-embedded in the broader context of Estonian civic culture. The comment function for online articles, which is perceived ambiguously in Estonia, may serve as an example of how civic culture and civic experiences relate to each other. On the one hand, many participants remain sceptical about the quality

of most comments, and consider them mainly as “hate speech”. On the other hand, the legacy of state control during Soviet times contributes to a reluctance to constrain the freedom of speech through moderation. Hence, the episodic encounters narrated in the diaries are also linked to the wider civic culture in which they are embedded.

However, in Dahlgren’s account, public connection, or orientation that does not necessarily involve action, is missing. Therefore this book has suggested a slightly different conceptualisation, including orientation as an important civic experience that is embedded in the “indeterminate” civic culture. The chapters in turn present different forms of civic experiences as public connection and ask how public connection relates to media experiences, how orientation (public connection) and action (civic engagement) relate to each other, and how public connection emerges in the context of dominant discourses.

Theoretically, the book explores the notion of experience that continues to play an important role in cultural studies, critical analysis and anthropology. Even though the term is widely used, it remains largely undefined and taken for granted. Furthermore, the book places the theoretical engagement with experiences in the realms of civic culture and media research. Here, the contribution lies in the disentangling of civic experiences involving action and civic experiences involving orientation as well as how both are interrelated. The theoretical engagement also involved the development of public connection from consensus-orientation to public conflict orientation, by linking it to Mouffe’s theory of conflict.

The combination of the seemingly contradictory approaches of Mouffe and Ricoeur is an attempt to overcome earlier divides between experience and discourse, as discussed by Joan Scott (1991). By asking how subjective experiences relate to dominating narratives, the book aimed to question the persistent divide between the subjective states and the structure of the social field.

The analyses developed in the previous chapters reflect current discussions in the field of civic culture studies, e.g. the entertainment orientation of mainstream media and the potential disappearance of the informed citizen. They start out from the experiences of the participants and put these into a theoretical context in order to critically engage with the narrations. I therefore proposed an empirically based, theoretically-iterated angle on questions concerning civic culture and media. While analysing forms of civic experience as public connection, it was apparent that the notion of the informed citizen (that was critically examined for example by Schudson (2003) and considered

as disappearing by Mindich (2005)) is still relevant to the participants. They consider mainstream news media as crucial for democracy, however, they relate critically to them. In that sense, we cannot speak of the disappearance of the informed citizen, but the emergence of a more reflexive and demanding informed citizen, as evidenced by the participants' reflexive position on the mediation of public issues. As for mediatisation, i.e., the increasing importance of media in all spheres of life, the participants reflect an affirmative position. Forms of new media were identified as a major opportunity to improve public discourse. In the context of the persistent tensions between Estonian Russians and Estonians, mainstream news media were identified as one of the major discursive sites promoting divergent historical narratives. At the same time, the participants engage with playful forms of public orientation unrelated to the idea of the informed citizen. Hence, the participants present multiple forms of citizenship that are context-dependent and under constant negotiation.

The book also provides an update on the perceptions among young people concerning the tensions in Estonia and shows that the divide between Estonians and Estonian Russians is still a concern. The empirical material showed that the young adults in question identify diverging historical narratives as the major foundation of the tensions between Estonian Russians and Estonians. While not judging one narrative superior to the other, they reflect them as explanations of the conflict. At the same time, the majority of participants insisted on the necessity of establishing a common narrative as a precondition for the cohesion and reconciliation of Estonian society.

How to Continue from Here?

Critical in contrast to *administrative* research, is not primarily interested in short-term problem solving, but aims to identify issues and contradictions, and to examine their importance for the grand processes of social change (Lazarsfeldt, 1972). In this sense, the book aims to contribute not only empirical findings, but also new avenues for investigation in the field.

A historical review of the development of civic experiences linked to grand processes of social and technological change such as individualisation, mediatisation and globalisation still needs to be written, as does an investigation on how civic experiences are included and excluded from current processes of representative democracy. The system of representative democracy is

in crisis, which finds expression in the growing alienation of citizens from the professional elite of politicians. This is manifest in decreasing party membership figures and voter turnouts. New formations such as the global Occupy Movement have gained momentum partly because they largely dismissed the party-based system of representative democracy. Therefore, future studies should focus more specifically on how civic experiences emerge in the context of this growing gap between the representatives and the represented.

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The book gives an intriguing insight into how young people in Estonia, twenty years after the establishment of democracy, perceive their own role as citizens. It does so in a theoretical framework that stresses the embeddedness of the civic experiences in a media-dominated environment, thus closely linking civic and media experiences. Based on the analysis of both qualitative interview data and a relatively new method of using the internet as a complementary tool for engaging with open-ended diaries, the study explores the extent to which young citizens experience the media as being interwoven with their everyday lives and, in fact, constitutive of their social reality as citizens. With its particular focus on young Estonians, i.e. on a generation that has been brought up in a context of rapid political, economic and social change and that is well-known for its fascination with new communication technologies, the book is a valuable contribution to the growing international research on media and civic experiences.

Anne Kaun obtained her PhD from the Universities of Örebro and Södertörn in 2012 and is currently post-doctoral research fellow at Södertörn University (Sweden). Her research includes studies in media experiences and audiences, political and civic engagement as well as mediated citizenship.

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