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Ellu Saar
Tallinn University, Estonia

Margarita Kazjulja
Tallinn University, Estonia

Individual Planning or Adaptation: Personal Destinies of Non-Estonians in the Period of Socio-Economic Reforms of the 1990s in Estonia

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the interrelationship between structural changes and personal destinies of non-Estonians. How do non-Estonians who have grown up in a socialist system and have finished their education in the late 1980s or early 1990s experience a societal transformation? Were structural and institutional changes brought about by a minimum of adaptations and fluctuations or a by maximum of turbulence and mobility? How successful were they in converting resources gained in the old system into other types of assets in post-socialist conditions? The paper is based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2003 and 2004 with non-Estonians graduating from secondary educational institutions in 1983 and belonging to the so-called "winners" cohort. One of the central results of the analysis is that non-Estonians' behaviour was not so much directed by purposeful biographical projects but rather it could be characterized as an adaptation to new circumstances. Opportunities proved to be less a matter of individual control and planning than of unfavourable structural conditions. Our analysis indicated the stability of relative rankings in social hierarchy despite the huge amount of job moves. It was evident that having only higher education did not guarantee non-Estonians a stable position in the labour market. Broad social network helped to realize this resource.

Keywords
Personal destinies; Adaptation; Post-socialist structural changes; Social networks; Non-Estonians

As Mayer (2004) maintains:

> the relation to historical time is crucial for the sociological study of life courses because life courses are embedded in definite strands of historical periods. Life courses are subject not only to historical circumstances at any time but also to the cumulative or delayed effects of earlier historical times on the individual life history or the collective life history of birth cohorts. (pp. 165- 166)

The breakdown and transformation of the former socialist societies illustrates in an exemplary manner the major questions which sociological life course research attempts to answer. One aim is to understand how structures, institutions and policies on the macro- and meso-level influence individual life courses (see Gershuny 1998; Mayer 2006). One could expect that the reforms, which took place not only in economy, but also in political and social sphere, could be the turning point of individual life courses. Those changes destabilized people's life paths and forced people make choices in a situation with increased risks and insecurity.

Another aim is to study how on the micro level previous life course events and trajectory constrain or foster transitions and outcomes in later life. Some authors have underlined that sometimes the unexpected consequences of old choices might be even more important than new choices. The transformation period should allow us to answer the question how the resources and characteristics ascribed or acquired before differently shape life outcomes despite the instability of life courses. New political and economic institutions presented people with new opportunities and constraints, but they responded to those opportunities and constraints on the basis of their existing resources. It has been mentioned that during the rapid economic, social and institutional changes in post-socialist societies the meaning of previously gained resources changed as well (Róna-Tas 1998).

The Estonian economic reform has been one of the most radical among the post-socialist countries, particularly with regard to its highly liberal economic principles and the modest role of the state (de Melo, Denizer and Gelb 1996). Estonia is often used as an example of success, especially compared to other former Soviet Union countries (Åslund 1996; de Melo, Denizer and Gelb 1996). As Vodopivec (2000) maintains:

> Estonia provides exceptionally fruitful grounds for the research of labour market adjustment in transition: it is a reform laboratory. It is not only implementing distinctive labour market policies (generally in the direction suggested by the World Bank), but is also clearly in the forefront of the implementation of reforms among the successor states of Soviet Union and has therefore undergone many changes that will ultimately be implemented in other economies as well. (p. 4)

However, the |success story" of Estonia has also been criticized, emphasizing the increase of social inequality[i], the deepening of tensions between economic sectors and generations along the capital-periphery axis (Estonian Human Development Report 1997; Poverty in Transition 1998).

The question is how were people reallocated in the process of intensive structural and institutional changes? Were the life courses disrupted and reoriented or did they show a high degree of stability and continuity? How useful were the education, informal ties and other resources acquired before the transformation period? Did age or cohort membership make a difference? Who were the losers, who were the winners of the transformation?

It has been pointed out that the transition in Estonia means the change from a "gerontocratic" to a "youth-oriented" society (Tallo and Terk 1998). Adaptation to the new environment was relatively successful for younger age cohorts. For example the results of the NORBALT project showed that in Estonia the winners of the transition were the well educated, advancing and ambitious young males 25-34 years of age with Estonian citizenship (Grøgaard 1996: 96). We also anticipated that "during the process of transition to a market economy, the group in the most favourable position would be the younger age cohort, first of all, the 20-29 year-old group" (Helemäe and Saar 1995: 137). The generation that emerged in the early 1990s received many advantages thanks to its youth. This generation has been called the generation of winners due to their successful careers (see Titma 1999; Titma, Tuma and Silver 1998). Nevertheless the previous analysis shows that there is also the great proportion of losers in this winner generation (Helemäe, Saar, and Vöörmann 2000). In this paper we will analyze how changes on macro level affected the life course of this generation. The problem is why some members of the winner age cohort have lost their age advantage in a society, which glorifies youth.

It has been mentioned that the transformation process in Estonia brought about a crucial change in the status of non-Estonians, most of whom were ethnic Russians (Aasland and Fløtten 2001). The transition was for non-Estonians not just about moving from plan to market, but of moving from a privileged nation within a large empire to becoming a minority within a new nationalizing state (Kennedy 2002). Many of them had to choose whether to leave the country or continue to live in Estonia, for what citizenship to petition and whether to learn Estonian becoming the state language. The political changes in Estonia during the late 1980s and early 1990s have demonstrated a link between legal restorationism and segmentational institutions and policies (the citizenship law, the language law; Pettai and Hallik 2002). In the socio-economic domain political measures have had only a limited impact, because it is influenced by past histories and structures. While to date there have been no programmatic measures that would either explicitly support Estonians or discriminate against non-Estonians, the segmentational institutions and policies have contributed to the growth of non-Estonians' socio-economic dependence on Estonians – a dependence attributed to both the Soviet legacy and market transition (Pettai and Hallik ibidem).

Now Estonia is frequently characterized as an ethnically divided society with deeply embedded ethnic cleavages (Evans and Lipsmeyer 2001: 379), politically and psychologically polarized along ethnic-linguistic lines (Hallik 2002: 68). However, previous research is mainly looking at the process on macro-level. There are relatively few contributions from the micro perspective on how societal changes impacted individual life courses of non-Estonians. Nevertheless it is important to identify the structural constraints within the life course, which cut down the set of abstractly possible alternatives to a smaller subset of feasible actions. Emphasizing only the changing social structure does not address how these changes enter the lives of individuals trying to cope with them.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the interrelationship between the structural changes and personal destinies of non-Estonians. How do non-Estonians who have grown up in a socialist system and have finished their education in the late 1980s or early 1990s experience a societal transformation? Were structural and institutional changes brought about by a minimum of adaptations and fluctuations or a by maximum of turbulence and mobility? How successful were they in converting resources gained in the old system into other types of assets in post-socialist conditions?

The paper is based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2003 and 2004 with non-Estonians graduating from secondary educational institutions in 1983 and belonging to the so-called “winners” cohort.

Ethnic Segmentation in Estonian society

After World War II, vast material resources and waves of ethnic Russians were sent to the border areas. The idea was to create Russian-language melting-pots in the Soviet republics and to integrate the population of the empire into one Soviet people.

During the Soviet period, Estonia was in many respects “over-industrialized”, owing to Moscow’s geopolitical interests. The development of defence-related enterprises offered a path for settling a large number of people in Estonia from other parts of the Soviet Union, mainly from Russia. Under the centrally planned economy, the basic factors bringing about labour market segmentation (economic power, management strategies, and employees’ responses) were all a direct function of bureaucratically mediated non-competitive relations between economic organizations and central planning agencies (Mach, Mayer and Pohoski 1994). The main mediating structures between the level of central economic administration and enterprises were ‘branch’ ministries for industrial sectors. However, since Estonia was a part of the former Soviet Union, the mediating structure was more complex compared to Central European countries. The Soviet Union had three types of state enterprises: all-union, mixed all-union-republic, and republic enterprises. The first two types of enterprises were in practice under the control of the ministries in Moscow, the last under the control of the republics. Estonia also had ministries to execute political power over the segment of the economy that was not subordinated to all-union ministries. All-union ministries controlled the most privileged industries, such as those closely connected to the military. This meant that the Estonian labour market was structured along the line of an internal (by Estonian authorities) versus external (by the Central Soviet authorities) locus of control (Vöörmann and Helemäe 2003).

Most of the all-Union enterprises operated on the basis of raw materials imported from other parts of Soviet Union, while labour was also recruited from outside Estonia (Hallik 1998). It is evident that in the Soviet period Estonia already had an ethnically divided labour market. Non-Estonians (mostly immigrants) were concentrated in basic industrial branches closely connected to the military complex. By the end of the Soviet period the Estonian share of industrial workers was less than 40 per cent, and the majority of them were employed in local light industry. A number of industrial fields were generally closed for Estonians (first of all defence industry where this was due to the disloyalty of the local population; Pettai and Hallik 2002). Estonians were concentrated in agriculture, but also in the social service (Kala 1992). The ethnic segmentation of the economy was a by-product of its bureaucratic organization.

There were clear relationships between industrialization and the redistribution of ethnic groups in Estonia. For example, in 1989 over 90 per cent of the non-Estonian population lived in urban areas: over half in Tallinn and the area immediately surrounding the capital, and another 30 per cent in the North-East industrial region, bordering the Russian Federation (Hallik and Kirch 1992). This means that separate Russian-speaking enclaves formed in Estonia (in north-east part of Estonia).

The language-based separation of enterprises (Estonian and Russian based) brought along separate communities of non-Estonians and Estonians. There was

also a parallel set of institutions (schools, kindergartens, clubs, newspapers etc) for Estonians and newcomers with little communication across the language divide (Zaslavsky 1992: 73). Status differentials as well as the allocation of many social benefits were driven more by ideological choices of the command economy than by any societal and market demands. The priority was given to the industrial sector. After the Soviet system collapsed the inevitable result was a drop in status for those (mostly non-Estonians) most linked to the previously privileged sectors, as the enterprises of industrial sector first of all have undergone the greatest transformations or have been closed at all.

Changes in Estonia in the 1990s

The years since 1989 have been of decisive importance to the Estonian economy and labour force. In June 1992 Estonia introduced its own currency. This is considered to be the start of serious economic reforms (Arro et al. 2001). At the beginning of the 1990s, the immediate reaction to economic uncertainty was a sharp decline in demand for labour. There was a certain delay before the employment effects of the transition crisis were felt, as enterprises were at first reluctant to dismiss redundant workers. Estonia took a very liberal approach in embracing a more free market oriented strategy. By allowing enterprises to discharge excess labour without imposing undue costs on them, this ended the period of job security.

At the beginning of the transition period in the first half of the 1990s the employment structure in Estonia was not a result of a market-oriented development but rather a structure resulting from the economic needs of the former Soviet Union (Eamets 2001). In Estonia the disruption of trade with the former Soviet Union created large shifts in the composition of final demand for sectoral outputs. The collapse of the institutional and technological links of the Soviet centrally planned system disrupted the supply of inputs for production and the delivery of outputs.

The share of the service sector increased dramatically, whereas the decline in the industrial and agricultural sectors accelerated. Blue-collar workers were particularly affected, and their numbers declined by almost 1.5 times from 1989 to 2001, while the number of white-collar workers declined by less than one third (Pettai 2001). These changes accompanied collective downward social mobility of industrial and agricultural workers. For them the risks were increasing and the opportunities were decreasing. On the other hand there were certain sectors of labour force for whom new opportunities prevailed, and they have experienced upward mobility (for example employees in finance).

The occupation structure of different ethnic groups was also strongly affected. In 1989, there was some overrepresentation of Estonians among managers and professionals. The share of non-Estonians was higher among skilled industrial workers as well as clerks (see Table 1). Already in 1993 we can notice a clear vertical ethnic segmentation: the overrepresentation of non-Estonians in unskilled and skilled workers positions increased. Non-Estonians were slightly underrepresented among managers and professionals. In the period 1993-2003 this tendency continued. During this period the occupational status of non-Estonians lowered the most sharply.

Table 1. Rate of non-Estonians by occupational group in 1989–2003, %

Occupational group	Rate of non-Estonians					Index*				
	1989	1993	1998	2000	2003	1989	1993	1998	2000	2003
Managers	32	27	24	25	21	91	82	73	76	64
Professionals	31	27	22	24	23	89	82	67	73	70
Technicians and associate professionals	30	29	29	30	26	86	88	88	91	79
Clerks	41	38	33	36	37	117	115	100	109	112
Service workers	35	32	33	31	36	100	97	100	94	109
Skilled agricultural workers	13	9	9	8	-	37	27	27	24	0
Skilled industrial workers	43	45	43	46	45	123	136	130	139	136
Plant and machine operators	33	37	39	42	40	94	112	118	127	121
Elementary occupations	39	43	44	42	40	111	130	133	127	121
Total	35	33	33	33	33	100	100	100	100	100

Data of Estonian Labour Force Surveys (ELFS) 1995, 1998, 2000 and 2003.
* Index was computed using the following formula: (rate of non-Estonians in occupational group / rate of non-Estonians in the labour market) * 100. The value of the index lower than 100 indicates the underrepresentation of non-Estonians in this occupational group, the value greater than 100 indicates the overrepresentation.

A relatively strong reorientation of industry from Eastern markets to Western markets was frequently also accompanied by a transition from more complex production to less complicated work, usually subcontracting (Terk 1999). A lot of enterprises owned by foreign capital use Estonia primarily as a production shop, where products and technologies developed elsewhere are being realized (Borsos-Torstila1997).

The fall in GDP did not lead to high unemployment in the first half of the 1990s. Unemployment in Estonia increased gradually. Some reasons for moderate unemployment growth have been put forth: a sharp drop in labour force participation, relatively flexible labour markets, low employment benefits, and net migration to the former Soviet Union (Eamets 2001).

In 1992 economic activity collapsed under the combined effects of the breakdown of trade relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union, the collapse of the old central planning system, the extensive price and trade liberalization, and the abolition of many subsidies. Real GDP fell by almost 22 per cent, and consumer price inflation reached 1069 per cent. Estonia as well as Latvia and Lithuania had the longest (Estonia 5 years) and deepest (Estonia 35 per cent) recession among all the transition countries (*World Bank Report* 2001). From 1996 to 1998 the situation stabilized; however since the end of 1998, unemployment has increased further as a result of the economic crisis in Russia (Pettai 2001). In 1989 unemployment did not exist, in 2003 the unemployment rate of non-Estonians was 15.9 per cent, while among Estonians it was 7.9 per cent.

The shrinkage of labour market opportunities for non-Estonians is usually explained by Soviet legacies: the concentration of non-Estonians in particular branches of economy and all-Union enterprises, the lack of appropriate cultural and human capital, the lack of social capital (see for example Puur 2000; Hansson 2001; Kaplan 2001; Pavelson and Luuk 2002). However, the previous analysis has shown that ethnicity has significant direct impact on labour market opportunities as well (Helemäe, Saar and Vöörmann 1999).

The economic human capital theory explains the differences in the labour market position as well as in the rewards by differences in human capital investments. But we can not explain the higher unemployment rate of non-Estonians as well as their lower labour market opportunities by their lower educational level. According to the census data from 1989 the average education level of non-Estonians was significantly higher than the average education level of Estonians (Kala 1992). Previous analysis has shown that non-Estonians with higher education have considerably more difficulties in finding a higher professional or manager job. Only good Estonian language skills can improve their chances (Saar and Kazjulja 2002).

The labour market problems of non-Estonians could be associated with the two main ethno-political changes in Estonian society in the 1990s – citizenship and increasing demands for Estonian language proficiency. The citizenship law facilitated the political segmentation of non-Estonian population into different legal categories[ii], but it was not used as a discriminatory device for restricting the job opportunities of non-citizens (Pettai and Hallik 2002). The only area closed to non-citizens is the civil service. Still the underrepresentation of non-Estonians among legislators, senior officials and managers increased markedly from 1989 to 2003 (see Table 1).

The first language law of 1989, which defines Estonian as the state language, accepted a limited Estonian-Russian bilingualism (Hallik 2002). As assessed by Robertson and Laitin (Laitin 1998: 88), the language law of Estonia was one of those having the strongest degree of nationalising and exclusionary pressure. The new language law, enacted in 1995, was meant to reflect the restitutional state development and an exclusionary minority policy (Pettai 1996: 22). There are reasons to suggest that both the legacies of the Soviet period as well as the ethno-political changes contributed to the restrictions of labour market opportunities of non-Estonians.

Data and method

Our analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted from June 2003 to January 2004. The sample of respondents was drawn from a longitudinal study "Life Paths of a Generation" (PG), which was started in 1983 when a research group from Tartu University and Institute of History, Estonian Academy of Sciences, under the leadership of Prof. Mikk Titma, interviewed graduates from secondary educational institutions of that year (see for example Titma et al. 1998; Helemäe et al. 2000). PG has followed the life course of a specific cohort from secondary school graduation until the end of the 1990s (the first study took place in 1983 and follow-ups in 1987, 1992/93 and in 1998) That is, by time of interview in 2003/2004 already it has been collected by us much longitudinal information about members of this cohort.

The interviews were informal and followed a general list of questions about respondents' life path and especially about their biographical experiences in the years following social changes in Estonia at the beginning of 1990s. We look at the

experiences preceding and following societal changes. The biographical investigations operate with a series of case analysis in a comparative and typologizing manner (see also Flick 2006). We suppose that narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experiences and provide information on the interviewee's present as well as about his/her past and perspectives for the future (see also Rosenthal 2004). Certain events and processes are analysed in respect of their meaning for individual and collective life histories.

The initial panel of respondents in PG was se lected to represent the population of 1983 secondary-school graduates (born between 1964 and 1966). Three types of institutions of secondary education were distinguished: vocational schools, specialized secondary schools and general secondary schools. The linkage between each level of education and the future job was clearly defined (Helemäe et al. 2000). Vocational schools trained skilled workers, specialized secondary schools semi-professionals. General secondary school was the traditional academic track. Although the principle of compulsory secondary education was implemented in the 1980s, by estimations based on census data only 75 per cent to 85 per cent of the corresponding birth cohort graduated from institutions of secondary education as full-time students in the mid-1980s (Saar 1997). Thus, selected on an educational basis, the PG cohort is an advanced part of the corresponding birth cohort.

Young adults who were in their 20s at the beginning of the economic changes (about 1989) and are now in their late 30s are often considered to be most successful age cohorts under transition. Because the PG cohort was about 24-26 by the beginning of 1990s, and by definition was the most advanced cohort in terms of education, we considered longitudinal data to provide time-dependent information about the internal differentiation of the “winners of transition” and the ways that led them to success.

The PG cohort obtained their education under the Soviet system, completing their schooling in the mid- to late 1980s, and first entered the labour market at the start of the major social and economic transformations of Estonian society. For us the post-socialist transformation presents the rare opportunity to study how young adults have managed in a rapidly changing situation.

Emphasizing only the changing social structure does not address how these changes enter the lives of individuals trying to cope with them. It is suggested that the biographical research approach is particularly effective in capturing the experience of a changing social system because it focuses on personal destinies and is able to demonstrate how these are linked to societal transformations (Hoerning 2000). The main strength of the biographical approach is that it is able to explore subjectively experienced reality and conceptually reconstruct a changing world as interpreted by the social agents themselves (Hoerning ibidem).

The analysis of the longitudinal data has shown that the type of secondary education has a strong impact on the successful career among youth. We have conducted 32 interviews with members of this cohort, choosing 3-4 interviewees from graduates of each type of secondary education[iii]. We intended to interview persons with different ethnicity, place of residence, gender etc. The interviews were conducted in the homes of respondents as well as in our institute. Each interview lasted 1-3 hours. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

In this paper we concentrate on the analysis of biographies of non-Estonians. Most biographical studies tend to select a few illuminating cases as a starting point for their analysis. Since there are relatively few non-Estonians in our sample (10), we have chosen to present most of them (8)[iv] in the form of biographical profiles as examples of the wider trend. One task for the analyses was to look for common

elements, which occur across different interviews. We are using inductive approach whereby generalizations are produced through analysing a series of biographical profiles. These case analyses are compared and contrasted with each other. The steps of analysis were: first, analysis of biographical data; second, reconstruction of life histories (life as lived); third, development of types and contrastive comparison of several cases[v]. These types are analytic. We can identify patterns of similarity or difference within life course patterns. We are interested in the experience of societal changes, we consider the interviewee's statements on that in the context on his or her whole life. On the basis of such reconstruction we are in a position to construct a type of adaptation to societal changes but also to explain the biographical course that leads to this. This analysis allows us to reconstruct the interrelationship between individual experience and collective framework.

Biographical profiles

The analysis of semi-structured interviews revealed four main types: relatively successful interviewees, losers, and two types of industrial and service workers careers: interviewees having stable careers, and interviewees having an unstable career at the beginning of 1990s, whose life stabilized later.

Relative success

Vitali, university degree, currently businessman, lives in Tallinn.

Vitali’s mother is from Astrakhan, father from Belarus. They met in Kaliningrad during their studies. They were sent to Tallinn after their graduation[vi]. Both have higher education[vii]. Vitali graduated from a secondary school with a language bias (German) in Tallinn with high marks. He had the best report among his classmates, he took part in olympiads. Vitali went in for fencing during his studies, got high places in several competitions and even earned a sports master’s degree. As he mentioned, Estonian was not taught in his school. Vitali tried to continue his studies in the St. Petersburg State University but there were 17 candidates to one place and he was not successful. As he said, a great number of students owed their acceptance to “connections” and acquaintances. Vitali worked one year as a turner and then applied again. This time, he succeeded, by being accepted to a so-called republican place[viii]. Vitali started his studies in the faculty of history in 1984 and finished in 1991, due to interruption by compulsory military service (from 1985 to 1986). His study results were good (he published some papers in journals as well as lectured in the university). As Vitali had a republican place, he had to return to Estonia. As he mentioned, he received good offers in St. Petersburg as well. He was assigned to the department of history in Tallinn Technical University but this department was reorganized, most lecturers were laid off and there were not enough jobs even for the university’s own people. At the beginning of the 1990s, Estonia and St. Petersburg signed a convention to organize the Representation of St. Petersburg in Tallinn. Vitali was offered a chance to start with this organization due to his contacts in St. Petersburg. He worked as an official representative of St. Petersburg in Estonia till 1994. In 1994 the embassy of Russia was formed, which meant that Vitali’s and the embassy’s duties started to coincide. He was not invited to official meetings any more. As Vitali said, he started to lose interest in his work. He decided to start his own business. His old contacts in Russia were very helpful. However, Vitali had some

problems in 1997-1998 as his first business failed due to a crisis in Russia. Nevertheless he managed to start again. Now Vitali has own business and he is also lecturing in the St. Petersburg University of International Relations. He regretted that he did not defend a Candidate's degree (he had no time to write his thesis). Answering to the interviewer's question about his possible career if the Soviet rule had not changed, he said that he would have had the leading post in regional administration. He did not regret that his career has developed in another way. As Vitali stressed several times, he understood in 1998 that we should live in the present time, not spending the whole time thinking about the past and what could have been. He thinks that making unrealistic plans and following impossible ideals would be a damaged life. It is important to get satisfaction and rapture. Vitali attended Estonian courses while he worked as a representative but nobody spoke Estonian with him. Now he feels that knowing other foreign languages is more important. He is able to communicate in German and English.

Irina, university degree, currently scientist (physicist), lives in Tartu (university town in Estonia)

Irina was born in a traditional workers' family in Tartu. Both parents were relatively educated: mother has secondary education; father studied in a specialized secondary school but gave it up. Irina graduated from secondary school with good marks and was accepted to the department of physics in Tartu University. She was a good student. She graduated in 1988. The requirement to work three years in the first workplace was practically abandoned by then and as Irina explained, the decomposition was detectable. She started working in the institute of physics. Her supervisor at the university was working in this institute as well; he knew her abilities and recommended her. Irina worked one and a half years and then stayed home on maternity leave. It was the time of rapid changes. Most young scientists from the institute emigrated to Western countries or to Russia. Only people in pre-retirement age remained at the institute. Irina started to look for a new job as a teacher but it was somewhat difficult to find one, as the number of physics and mathematics lessons in schools had been reduced. She accidentally met her supervisor who proposed that she should continue doctoral studies. Irina decided to accept this proposal. As she explained, she had no choice. She had published some papers before her maternity leave and thus her application for post-graduate studies was accepted. While Irina had not been very hopeful about her studies, she defended her Doctoral thesis successfully. Having a Doctor's degree, she could now work at the institute of physics without any problems. However, she does not have great hopes for the future – she is thinking that young scientists just completing their studies have more prospects because they are more modern, active and practical. Irina, like Vitali (see the previous biographical profile), is not regretting her choices. As she says, it is self-deception to live in the past. Self-pity could destroy the future. Irina emphasized the importance of the support by her family and husband.

Relatively successful interviewees tried to strengthen their position in the new circumstances by mobilizung resources. Education as well as social networks played the primary role among their resources. Irina and Vitali both have higher education. The speciality obtained at university placed Vitali and Irina in a relatively favourable situation. In addition to contacts with relatives and previous co-workers, they also have numerous weak ties to various acquaintances – former fellow students from the university times as well as their lecturers. These weak ties were activated and utilised

during the period of social changes and later by the more successful interviewees. Irina and Vitali are quite optimistic and have rather positive expectations for the future. They mostly see more positive than negative changes in the society. Irina's self-evaluation is quite different from Vitali's. Vitali emphasizes his active role in the adaptation process while Irina stresses the impact of others. She appreciates her success but nevertheless thinks that it was accidental. Vitali is thinking about himself as a winner, Irina does not take herself for a winner.

Relatively stable careers in the group of workers

Galina, specialized secondary education (chemistry), now controller in a factory, lives in Maardu[ix] (small industrial town near Tallinn, 80 per cent of inhabitants are non-Estonians)

Galina was born in the countryside in Russia (near Smolensk). She stressed several times that their family was prosperous. Both parents were working in a kolkhoz. She graduated from secondary school. Her mother did not recommend for her to stay in the countryside and work in agriculture because this work was too hard. Galina’s cousin was studying at Kohtla-Järve[x] (industrial city in the north-east part of Estonia) and she suggested that Galina should come to Kohtla-Järve as well. Following her cousin’s recommendation, Galina joined the specialized secondary school in Kohtla-Järve (chemical industry). She had never before dreamed of studying chemistry but she liked that field of study. The beginning was hard for her because as she said, she was brought up like in a greenhouse. Nevertheless she got used to living away from her family. After graduation, she was assigned to the Maardu chemical factory. Galina preferred to move to Maardu instead of staying at Kohtla-Järve. As she said, it was interesting for her to move to a new place. Galina worked in this factory as a worker until 1994 when her first child was born. It was the time when most Soviet-time big state-owned factories in Estonia were closed or split into smaller units. Many of Galina’s co-workers were discharged. One of her friends recommended her to apply for a job at Elcoteq[xi]. Galina attended brief training courses and then started work in the factory where she is still working now. As she said, the main cause for staying there is that she does not have any choices due to lacking Estonian citizenship. Elcoteq was one of the few enterprises hiring Russian-speaking workers (mainly because of their lower salary level). Most of the workers at Elcoteq are now non-Estonian women with secondary or specialized secondary education. Galina is not satisfied with her salary. She is afraid to lose her job and she has no confidence in the future. Galina has no hope that anything (either the job situation or life in general) would get better. She understands that it is indispensable to know Estonian and English to improve job opportunities. It is very hard for her to learn Estonian because she has only lived and worked in a Russian-speaking environment. Galina is thinking that she is too old. She is setting her hopes on her daughter: the parents pay for her additional Estonian courses as well as for some other hobbies and extra education.

Irina 2, general secondary education, laboratory assistant, lives in a small town in central Estonia

Irina was born in Russia (in the Pskov region). Her parents moved to Estonia (Tamsalu, a town in central Estonia) in the early 1970s. She graduated from a general secondary school in Tapa (a small industrial town near Tamsalu). She started her studies in St.Petersburg but gave up after a few months (she had

problems with the dormitory) and returned to Tamsalu. Her parents worked in the local corn processing factory. They recommended that she should apply for a position in the laboratory of the factory. Irina started working as a laboratory assistant but then changed jobs several times. In 1986 she got married. Before meeting her, her husband had been arrested for attempts to cross the border of the Soviet Union. In late 1980s, he was offered a chance to emigrate. They decided that Irina's husband should emigrate first and Irina would follow him later. They closed own business which have begun after a marriage and sold all property (their house etc.). Then, Irina's mother, who was against her emigration, fell ill, and Irina decided to stay in Estonia. It seems that Irina is a person who tends to give up easily. It was more comfortable for her to continue the life she was accustomed to. She started working again in the corn processing factory as a laboratory assistant. There have been some layoffs during the 1990s but Irina has succeeded in keeping her job. As she mentioned, she has no children and she has never been ill. Irina is quite optimistic and is thinking that her life has passed smoothly in spite of dramatic events in her family life.

Both interviewees belonging to this type are doing relatively well in spite of working in manufacturing. The impact of the transformation process on their life course was rather weak. Why? The firm where Irina2 was working was not closed. Despite some layoffs Irina succeeded in keeping her job. Her experiences, age and childlessness protected her. Galina was at home with her child during the most unstable period in the early 1990s. In Galina's case it seems to have been not a restriction but even an advantage. She was not discharged. The enterprise was closed at the "right" time. Thanks to her network (contacts with previous co-workers) she received the information on working vacancy. She reacted very quickly and was successful in finding a new job. They both have had a reasonably stable career, remained at the same level of social hierarchy and could not see any significant improvement. Due to quite important strategic restrictions – low level of education (or quite "narrow" education received earlier) and not knowing the Estonian language – it is difficult to expect any rapid improvement in the future either. The interviewees belonging to this type in general approved social changes, although there were also changes that made them feel insecure.

Unstable period in the early 1990s, later stabilization

Ljudmila, general secondary education, seamstress in a clothes factory, lives in Narva (Estonia's fourth largest city situated on the border between Estonia and the Russian Federation, only 5 per cent of inhabitants are Estonians)

Ljudmila's mother is a native inhabitant of Narva while her father is from the Kuban region situated near the Black Sea. Her parents met when her mother went to work on the virgin lands. After marrying, they returned to live in Narva. Ljudmila graduated from a general secondary school in Narva with good marks. She was interested in mathematics. Her original wish was to study information technology; however, she was told there were no workplaces in towns for graduates of this field. Ljudmila had a problem with stammering and this lowered her self-confidence. She was afraid that other people would mock her. Ljudmila's parents did not support her aspirations to continue her studies. Her mother thought that she was not good enough to study at a university, and the family had some material problems as well. In the interview Ljudmila pointed out several times that she was lacking her parents'

and friends' support (not material but moral). She blamed the low social status of her parents for the shortage of their encouragement. She thinks that if her parents had been engineers, she would have continued her studies. So she stayed at home and started to work as a sales assistant in a shop – a job she held for ten years. Now she is regretting her choice. In 1985 she got married and the first child was born soon after. In 1988 she gave birth prematurely to their second child who lived only five days. This was a very difficult time for Ljudmila as she and her husband divorced some months after the baby's death. Until then, they had been living with Ljudmila's mother-in-law, but after the divorce Ljudmila and her child were evicted. She found a new place to live and understood that she could rely only on herself. As she said, she decided to become a strong woman. In 1993 her daughter went to school. Ljudmila decided to look for a new job as work days in the shop were too long. She was unemployed for a few months but then got a job as a cloakroom attendant. The salary was very low, but the working schedule was more suitable. Her parents helped her financially as well as with the upbringing of the daughter. She attended an Estonian language course and passed the exam. Ljudmila has Estonian citizenship (her mother was born in Estonia). In 1995 the culture centre where Ljudmila was working was closed and she lost her job. She worked for some months in a private shop but the owner cheated the employees and she decided to find a new job. As Ljudmila likes sewing, she started working in a clothes factory. She feels lucky to have a secure job. She is not afraid to lose her job, because as she explained, there are a lot of clothes factories in Narva and she could find a new job, but she worries about the potential salary decrease. Ljudmila thinks that her life has been peaceful and quiet since 1992. However, she also finds her life boring, and feels that everything is stuck in money problems. She would like to attend computer courses but she lacks the money for that. Ljudmila has self-initiative but material constraints limited her activity. She has no future plans but tries to maintain the present situation. Ljudmila thinks that it is not possible to find a better job in Narva even if she continued her studies in correspondence courses. As she said, it is possible to live well also without higher education. It is more important to have good social contacts, to know the right people. Ljudmila worries about the future of her daughter. She thinks that her daughter should continue her studies but she herself has no aspirations. Ljudmila understands that she is pushing her dreams on her daughter.

Juri, specialized secondary school, now works as a miner, lives in a small industrial town in the north-eastern part of Estonia

Juri's father was born in Russia in the countryside where people did not have passports in the 1950s. His aim was to move away from the countryside, but without a passport, this was very difficult. However, he was recruited to Komi to fell forest, which helped him to get a passport, and a little later he moved to Estonia. Juri was born at Kohtla-Järve. His father worked as a miner while his mother was working in a clothes factory. Both had a very low level of education (mother completed 7 grades, father only 4 grades). They lived in a small mining town in the north-eastern part of Estonia. After graduating from basic school, Juri entered a specialized secondary school[xii]. He was weak in mathematics and had difficulties already during the first course. He studied mechanics for four years but gave up before defending his diploma. As he explained, he had to get married. At about the same time, Juri was called up. He returned from the army service in 1985 and started to work as a turner. He continued his studies in the correspondence department and got a diploma in 1986. In 1989 his friends set up a bar and he decided to become a barman. It was

very difficult time; there was a shortage of products and hard liquor. The competition was tough and the bar went bankrupt. Juri's brother was working as a plumber and he offered Juri a similar job. Juri worked three years as a plumber. Then the state enterprise was reorganized and as most workers lost their jobs, Juri became unemployed as well. When one of his acquaintances set up a business, Juri was employed as his assistant. There were no official borders and they imported school supplies from Belarus. However, the business didn't last long. Juri's father was working as a guard at the time and he recommended Juri the same job in his workplace. Juri held this job for one year and then began working in an oil-shale mine – a job he got thanks to his social contacts. As his father had worked 13 years as a miner and had lost his health there, Juri had sworn that he would never go to work in a mine, but in the meantime he had got married again (Juri divorced in 1986) and needed money. This marriage ended in a divorce a few years later as well. Juri does not like his job but he needs money to pay child support. Nevertheless he thinks that his life has stabilized. At the end of the interview Juri mentioned that he has had a very difficult period: he was a heavy drinker and was at one point ready to commit suicide.

Economic changes in the early 1990s destabilized the life courses of interviewees belonging to this type[xiii]. Individuals working in economic sectors where restructuring was the most profound – such as construction, the service sector and most of all manufacturing – were forced to change their chosen life path. It was the period of searching for new opportunities, but mostly for men. Women have a very important limitation – small children restricted their opportunities. During the transition period all representatives of this type were very active on the labour market. But the process of restructuring of economic sector in the industrial region of Estonia, where all respondents of this group lived, did not guarantee reliable workplaces. The number of workplaces was reduced, the enterprises were closed. Most often new jobs have been found with the help of social connections (contacts with relatives and previous co-workers). These social networks helped to find a new job, but did not guarantee a stable work or a higher level in social hierarchy. One on the crucial restrictions of the interviewees of this type was the weakness of the starting position – they started the transition period with fewer opportunities. Their living standard had declined. They had scare personal resources as well as scare social resources (social networks for instrumental support only). Interviewees having an unstable career during the transition period and now working as skilled workers were aware of their poor opportunities, they have no future plans.

Losers

Eduard, higher military education, unemployed[xiv], lives in Tallinn

Eduard was born in a small town in Estonia in the family of a military man. His father had university education and mother specialized secondary education. They moved several times within Estonia and Eduard attended different schools. Eduard was interested in technology and he even thought about studying in a polytechnical specialized secondary school after graduation from basic school but his father had to make a long business trip to Russia and his parents did not want him to stay behind in Tallinn on his own. So he continued his studies in general secondary school. After graduating from secondary school in Tallinn he entered the Tallinn higher military

technical school. His father did not approve of his choice but as Eduard said, he had lived all his life in military towns and knew everything about this occupation. It was self-evident that he should obtain higher education (his two older brothers had continued their studies too). After graduation Eduard stayed in Estonia. He was assigned to Tallinn because he had a living-place there. Now Eduard thinks that perhaps it would have been better to move to the Far East or Siberia. He moved several times in Estonia. In 1991, before the putsch in Moscow, he left the army as he understood that the Soviet Union was failing and the Soviet army would leave Estonia soon. Eduard wanted to stay in Estonia. He worked for two years as a parking lot guard. In 1993 Eduard started a private business together with his brother who was living in St. Petersburg. They had links mostly to Russian enterprises. In 1998 the firm went under due to the Russian financial crisis and Eduard lost his job as well as the property. He thinks that globalization has a major impact on business: small private enterprises have no future, big strong firms will swallow the small ones. He characterises his life since 1998 as hell. This dreadful period was still continuing in 2003. He is feeling that the long unemployment period is decreasing his chances to find a job. Eduard understands that he has not much time to grasp at something.

Olga, university degree, unemployed, lives in Tallinn

Olga's father passed his military service in Estonia. After demobilization he stayed in Tallinn. Both parents had higher education. Olga characterises her father as a person of principles. Olga graduated from general secondary school with good marks. Her original wish was to study cosmetology. She understood that to become a good cosmetologist she should study at the medical department in the university. However, as she was afraid that she did not have enough patience for that, Olga decided to study some subject connected with economics because she thought that it would be easier to find a job. She noticed an advertisement in a newspaper about republican places in the specialized secondary school of hotel service in Kiev. She passed the entrance exams and continued her studies in Kiev. Olga studied for two and a half years. It was an interesting period because their class had practical training in several places: in Yalta, in Kiev, in Tallinn. She finished her studies in 1986 and returned to Tallinn. She started work in a catering establishment and continued her studies at Tartu University, in the department of economics (she was a correspondence student). It was a conscious decision. She understood that it was not possible to increase her opportunities without having higher education. She got her diploma in 1991. In 1989 Olga was laid off. She got married and a child was born. Olga was offered a job in a bar. She worked there for two years. This was followed by an unstable period: Olga changed workplaces several times. In 1994 Olga and her friend started their own business: they rented a shop and borrowed money, but they were lacking financing and knowledge and their business failed. In 1998 another child was born. After one and a half years Olga started to work again in a bar but in two years the bar was closed and Olga lost her job. Now she is unemployed. Like Eduard (see the previous interview), she understands that she has limited time to find something more stable. She thinks that it is important to know languages (Estonian and English) on a high level. Her husband has graduated from nautical schools. He used to work at a yachting centre and liked his job, but as the centre was reorganized, he lost his job. Now he is unemployed as well. Olga has thought about emigrating but her husband did not want to leave his home country. In spite of the failures, Olga is still hopeful and has plans for the future. She wants to get additional training and perhaps find a job in another country. She holds the opinion that people

who are purposeful and have abilities to use the situation have been more successful.

Despite having a higher education Olga and Eduard did not succeed. They have had no official workplace long time that does not allow them to receive the unemployment benefits. Works which they sometimes have had have been short and informal. They both had difficulties in utilising his qualifications in a changing situation. One reason was that Eduard obtained a degree in a very narrow speciality. The speciality obtained by Olga is of a substantially higher demand (sale and service) but she graduated from the correspondence department in the early 1990s and has had no time to make full use of her education. As she said, she had no opportunity to utilise her qualification. Poor command of the Estonian language had placed additional restrictions on their competitiveness in the labour market. Both of them consider that they have not much time to grasp at something. Losers were facing significant hardship. There was only one breadwinner in their families and that made the economic situation quite hopeless. Their attitude regarding opportunities in the future is very different. Eduard was very pessimistic, he felt deprived, while Olga is not thinking about herself as a loser. In Olga's case, the period of instability is shorter. Besides, as she said, she completely realized the plans regarding creation of family and the birth of children. These circumstances increase her optimism.

Collective fate or individual life courses

Age cohort and changes in the 1990s

It has been stated that the paternalistic state "interfered" much more with individuals' life choices than would be tolerated in a Western-type society. Although the state exerted some pressure on young people in choosing a certain education, they still had a reasonable amount of free choice. A socialist society stabilized life planning and minimized the personal risks involved. The result for individuals was a clear reduction of occupational risk and autonomy of choice. The burden of risk was taken from the individual and placed in the hands of the state. Young people were even freer in their choices in the socialist period compared with the 1990s because the individual risks were lower. The need to cope with the uncertainty was reduced. In a certain sense the socialist state had taken responsibility for the possibility that anything would go "wrong". So individuals had a feeling that nothing could happen that would disturb their life planning. Whatever mistakes the individual made in making an educational or occupational choice could always corrected afterwards (Kupferberg 1998).

The members of our studied cohort received their education either immediately before the transition period or already in the Republic of Estonia. It has made their educational choices not very risky. The decision between work and education was governed less by financial considerations than by social ambitions. The transition period had a twofold impact on their following career and occupational path. It means that the members of the cohort had no time to improve on mistakes previously made by them in their educational choices. Major institutional and structural changes in the 1990s made the improvement difficult. On the other hand the cohort received an advantage in the labour market due to their youth. It is somewhat different from other former socialist countries - for example in East Germany the age group that has benefited from the transformation were those between 18 and about 40 years old in 1989 (Diewald, Goedicke and Mayer 2006: 304).

There were clear differences between graduates of different types of educational institutions. Even though the interviewees belong to the same age cohort, the transition period "hit" them in different life phases. Most graduates of vocational and specialized secondary schools finished their studies in the middle of the 1980s when the transition from the educational system to the labour market was highly institutionalized: the graduates were obliged to work three years in the first job assigned by the state. Their work career was quite stable until the transition period in the early 1990s.

Members of the cohort continuing their studies at universities acquired higher education and started their work careers at the end of the 1980s (women) or even right at the beginning of the reforms (men). The institutionalization of transition to the labour market was substantially weakened. Most of them found a job on their own. There were also differences between the male and female university graduates. Men belonging to this cohort obtained higher education and entered the labour market 1-2 years later than women due to the interruption by compulsory military service. Young women faced the beginning of societal changes just at the moment of their life course when the contradiction between two careers (mother *versus* work) was especially sharp.

Collective fates

Analyzing the biographical profiles of non-Estonians, it is clear that at least in the early years, the transition period led more to a collective fate than increased individualizing variety. Firm closures and company reorganization triggered interfirm-shifts and transitions to unemployment. Almost all interviewees were in some way "disturbed" in their life planning. The disturbance took different forms. Vitali started his career as an official and later created his own business instead of becoming a lecturer at university. Galina changed her job. Irina2 had to make a very hard decision: to emigrate with her husband, or to stay in Estonia. Andrei was moving from one short-term job to another. Ljudmila, Juri and Svetlana had been unemployed for a time and have changed their occupation, Juri even several times. Juri had to accept a job in an oil-shale mine, a job he thought he would never choose. Eduard and Olga have started their own business. It was a forced choice because they both lost their jobs. Only Irina managed to keep both her job and position, but had to begin doctor's degree studies. In her biographical narrative, she emphasizes her luck. She seems to be unaware of the larger institutional and structural context, which predetermined her easy survival of the transition period. She was working in the "right" sector (sciences). Her "luck" was that she got her doctor's degree in the "right" time before the very intensive layoffs in this field in the middle of the 1990s. Our analysis indicates cumulative advantages and disadvantages in the period of intense social and economic reforms found also in other former socialist countries (see Diewald et al. 2006).

The biographical profiles confirm that a period of relative stabilization arrived in 1996-1997[xv]. The career of interviewees belonging to the group of skilled workers has relatively stabilized, after the transition period forced them to change their professional profile and acquire a new profession (through retraining or directly in the workplace). Nevertheless, their position in the labour market is quite uncertain because most of them are working in enterprises owned by foreigner investors. Post-socialist countries are all very sensitive to capital mobility as a lot of foreign direct investments are connected with cheap labour in these countries. There is a potential

danger that if the production input in Estonia becomes more expensive, foreign investors oriented towards export production have no reason to be interested in continuing production in Estonia. For this reason, production could be easily moved to cheaper countries (Terk 1999). In addition, labour demand in specific countries is likewise affected by international economic fluctuations, with the extent of the impact varying according to the openness of the national economy. For example, the Asian crisis as well as the Russian financial crisis in 1998 also caused a considerable economic shock in Estonia due to the fact that Estonia had large trade exchanges with the Russian Federation.

In the situation of great economic and social uncertainty people took different paths into entrepreneurial activities. On the one hand, for one group losing their job and not finding the new job more important are "push" factors (see also Saar and Unt 2006). A significant part of the new self-employment consisted of marginal activities by persons who wanted to avoid unemployment in some other post-socialist countries either (for an overview of this thesis see Hanley 2000). Eduard and Olga are representatives of this group. Wholesale and retail trade as a niche for entrepreneurship was a rather forced choice for them. Both of them, as most non-Estonian entrepreneurs, had micro-enterprises[xvi], which are very sensitive to the global changes. Vitali shifted to entrepreneurial activity voluntarily (not simply because he could not find another job). The businesses started by Eduard and Vitali mostly had dealings with Russian enterprises. The 1998 crisis in Russia had a significant impact on their business: their firms went bankrupt. Vitali – thanks to his social contacts in Russia – was able to start a new business but Eduard has had only temporary jobs since 1998 and is now unemployed. This is a rather typical path for many non-Estonian small firm owners. Olga's business failed as well.

The sample of non-Estonian interviewees does not include people who were working in the public sector at the beginning of the 1990s. We suppose that these groups were relatively better sheltered from unemployment risks as well as from downward mobility. That some of the few expanding sectors like real estate, rental and commercial services were mostly Estonians' monopolies before the 1990s helped them to sustain their position.

The reallocation of non-Estonians seems to result in a mix of stability and mobility. The stability can be observed in the stability of relative rankings in social position for all those who managed to stay in or to re-enter the labour market. The huge amount of mobility can be seen in the exits from firms and firm shifts, in sustained spells of unemployment and in the non-voluntary nature of most labour market moves.

The impact of achieved characteristics

For individual there are different sorts of potential benefits ("positional advantages") that may derive from personal capital. But the positional advantage emerges not from those accumulated skilful characteristics themselves, but from their interaction with the rules of social institutions. These skills only provide advantage insofar as they are salient to the requirement of the institutions. The utility of capital is determined by institutions, which set the rules of its application and thus influence its value. In times of social change, capital accumulated under different institutional conditions is deployed to fit new institutions. Individuals have to match past with present, employing capital developed under one set of institutional rules in transactions guided by another set of rules.

The important question is: why were some non-Estonian interviewees more successful than others? Might human capital be considered as an important asset that helped non-Estonians cope with the societal changes? It has been found that in transitional countries qualificational resources have proved to be a forceful discriminator in all dimensions of labour market transformation processes (Orazem and Vodopivec 1995; Mayer, Diewald and Solga 1999; Narusk and Hansson 1999). Our analysis indicates that for non-Estonians the impact is not so obvious. Higher education seems to have an even twofold impact. There were two extreme types among non-Estonians with higher education: the most successful interviewees as well as the losers. The important difference between these two types seems to be the range of their social network. Vitali and Irina, belonging to the type of the more successful interviewees, have broad social networks and a large "network reserve" (especially Vitali in Russia) which helped them to manage in the new situation. Graduating from university in St. Petersburg was not a restriction for Vitali; on the contrary, it was an advantage because thanks to his fellow students he had many contacts in Russia. The losers, Eduard and Olga, have used their social contacts as well but their networks consist of mostly relatives and close friends. The attempts to replace the kin and former fellow students in their networks by a bigger share of co-workers and former co-workers have become less effective. The specificity of social networks under socialism - the relevance of workplace relationships with colleagues and supervisors - hit them strongly. They had too few opportunities to rebuild their previous networks formed from colleagues because of job shifts, dismissals and the changing work culture (growing work competition and intensity has resulted in the deterioration of relationship with co-workers). They could rely on their family members for compensation of weakened relations at the workplace. The same process took place also in East Germany (Diewald and Lüdicke 2006). Eduard's social networks were also poor of former classmates. Practically all his former classmates (as well as former colleagues) are outside Estonia, both because of the specificity of the high military education received by him and because of the transformations in the society. Obviously, in the case of Olga, the fact that she has received vocational education outside of Estonia and higher education at distance learning courses has restricted her opportunities to restore and use the previous networks of classmates. Obviously a very important restriction for Eduard was having limited social contacts in Russia (only two brothers).

Ron Burt (1998) has emphasized that one of the most essential properties of social capital is that it helps to find the best use for an individual's cultural capital, in other words, for his or her education. It seems that the possibilities for various networks to offer help are different. Most interviewees have used their social contacts to find a job but it is one level when the network attempts to save its unemployed member and to find him or her even just a temporary job. It is quite another level when appointments to high positions seem to operate according to the rule that it is not one's speciality competence that is important – but belonging to *us*, i.e. to the *right* network (see also Hansson 2001). Previous studies have indicated that the role of social networks consisting of relatives and acquaintances belonging frequently to the same social group as the respondents is limited (Kazjulja 2001). These networks have helped people to find a job but not to move up. In order to be able to view a network as social capital for the individual, it must contain sufficient resources and influence. As well people with a lot of weak ties have been better off (see also Völker and Flap 2001).

Earlier studies have shown that the general education acquired in the 1980s had a completely different meaning for Estonians and non-Estonians: those who

graduated from Estonian-language schools had significantly greater opportunities to become white-collar workers, while Russian young people were "directed" by the secondary school to become mostly manual workers (Helemäe et al. 2000). We got some support to this conclusion from our analysis. Two non-Estonian female interviewees have general secondary education and they both are working as manual workers.

Education seems to play a very important role for non-Estonians in becoming a winner. Those non-Estonian interviewees having general secondary, vocational or specialized secondary education remained in the group of manual workers. They all have a job but their labour market position is quite uncertain and they are afraid to lose their job.

It has been mentioned that many non-Estonians are disadvantaged in the labour market partly due to the new language law demanding basic knowledge of Estonian (Titma et al. 1998; Narusk and Hansson 1999). Our previous analysis has indicated that Estonian language competence is more important in the transition from unemployment to employment than it is for the risk of becoming unemployed (Saar and Helemäe 2001). Some interviewees have attended Estonian courses (Vitali, Ljudmila, Svetlana) but they all complain they do not have an opportunity to practise. It is very hard for them to learn Estonian because they have lived and worked in a Russian-speaking environment. Ljudmila and Svetlana are living in Narva where there is no opportunity to communicate with Estonians on a daily basis as only 4 per cent of the town's inhabitants are Estonians. The interviewees living in a Russian-speaking environment do not find having Estonian language competence very helpful. This is quite different from the attitude of non-Estonian women living in Tallinn (Olga, Galina). They think that it is indispensable to know Estonian and English to improve their job opportunities but as Olga said "one should know Estonian and English on a very high level." Vitali, on the other hand, emphasizes that now it is more important to know other languages (English, German), not Estonian.

Estonian citizenship was mentioned only in two interviews. Non-Estonian interviewees do not stress the role of citizenship in the improvement of their labour market opportunities. However, Estonian citizenship seems to have impact on non-Estonians' sense of social certainty. Ljudmila, having Estonian citizenship, mentioned it several times during the interview. For her, this is a reserve for the future. Galina emphasizes that she and other non-Estonians without Estonian citizenship feel like nobodies in Estonian society.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to analyze the interrelationship between structural changes and personal destinies of non-Estonians as well as to explore whether the resources accumulated by non-Estonians before the structural changes at the beginning of the 1990s in Estonia proved useful in the new situation. Aggregate statistics tell us little without complementary close descriptions of how people respond to the uncertainty they are facing. The biographical research approach used in this paper was very illuminating, mainly because we were able to connect the personal and historical dimensions.

Economic and social changes in Estonia destabilized life careers, forced individuals to make unexpected choices and devaluated their previous investments. Their behaviour was not so much directed by purposeful biographical projects and realization of their future conceptions of themselves but rather it could be characterized as an adaptation to the new circumstances. Individuals changed their

plans and behaviour because they had to adapt. Opportunities proved to be less a matter of individual control and planning than of unfavourable structural conditions. As in other post-socialist countries dismissals were often collective experiences, which had nothing to do with individual qualifications and motivation (see for example for East Germany Goedicke 2006). Very important was to live in the right place and work at the right workplace. The changes initiated far more “push” mobility than opportunities for “pull” moves. Contrary to expectations that system change make place for differences in personal characteristics to become more important for success and failure in life a decisive role had structural position at the beginning of changes. Success was less of matter of individual control than a matter of structural conditions. Self-initiative of people was not realized because institutional rules and structural conditions entailed passive coping strategies.

Our analysis indicates clear cumulative advantage and disadvantage patterns in life courses of non-Estonians. The winner/losers divide from the first half of the 1990s consolidated during next period. It was very hard to overcome exclusion of the first phase. The channels by which risks were shifted depended upon pre-existing inequalities of resources. Increasing economic risks in the process of post-socialist transformation were shifted towards the more disadvantaged groups within the labour force; from the market transition benefited those who were already better rewarded. Non-Estonians who were already in middle and lower positions in the 1980s found themselves again in such positions. In this sense the situation of non-Estonians in Estonia was quite close to life course patterns in East Germany where later corrections were also rare (Diewald, Goedicke and Mayer 2006). There are also similar features in recruitment process to elite and upper service class positions. After reunification a West German "import" to elite and upper service class positions in East Germany has taken place (Solga 2006). In Estonia non-Estonians in upper class positions were often replaced by Estonians. This process was supported by liberal ideology, which in Estonia has been fused with nationalism (see Kennedy 2002: 158).

However changes in the 1990s affected two national communities in Estonia differently. Non-Estonians had twofold downgrading risks: as a ethnic group moving from a privileged nation to becoming a minority within a nationalizing Estonia and as most of them worked in industry also as representatives of previously privileged social group (industrial workers).

A radical system change from socialist planning economy to liberal market economy has not devalued prior personal resources. Education played a very important role among these resources. Devaluations of education can be observed, but they were quite selective. They occurred more often by unemployment than by downward mobility as in some other post-socialist countries. But it was evident that having only higher education did not guarantee non-Estonians stable positions in the labour market. They had to have a whole "package" of different assets (higher education, broad social network, good knowledge of Estonian, favourable structural position) to become successful. Very important seems to be the amount of weak ties. Non-Estonians who have experienced a loss of colleague and fellow student networks were in less favourable situation compared with those who managed to keep these networks. Family networks have operated as a buffer in uncertain and difficult situation but these networks were not able to compensate for losses of other relationships especially for people belonging to lower social classes.

However, there were no chances for upward mobility for non-Estonians without higher education. Our analysis indicated the stability of relative rankings in social hierarchy despite the huge amount of job moves. The increase in the vertical mobility

has been far less than expected in other post-socialist countries either (see also Solga 2006; Večernik and Matéjů 1999). However the low stability in occupational field of non-Estonians was quite different from the picture in East Germany.

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Endnotes

i Comparison of the highest income households (the top 20 per cent quintile) and the lowest income households (the bottom 20 per cent quintile) shows that the difference in the disposable income per member of household in these groups differed about 7 times in Estonia. In the European Union, the average difference is 5 times – bigger in the southern member states and smaller in the northern member states (*Indicators of Sustainable Development* 2002: 29).

ii The updated citizenship law from 1938 was accepted in February 1992. In July 1993 the parliament adopted a new Aliens Law, which established procedures for non-citizens to receive Estonian residency and work permits. In early 1995 additional nationalist elements were added to the citizenship law. These changes fragmented the non-Estonian population into three different legal categories: Estonian citizens (in 1999 approximately 30 per cent of non-Estonians), Russian Federation citizens (18% of non-Estonians) and stateless persons (a little less than 50 per cent, approximately 250,000 non-Estonians) (Hallik, 1999).

iii There were distinguished eight types of the institutions of secondary education: rural vocational schools; urban vocational schools; agricultural specialized secondary schools; industrial specialized secondary schools; other types of specialized secondary schools; common grades of general secondary schools; academic grades of general secondary schools (from 8th grade); academic grades of general secondary schools (from 1st grade).

iv We decided to present two biographical profiles from each group. The third type includes four profiles but there is no room to describe all of them.

v Comparison is at the core of grouded theory (Dey 2004).

vi Graduates of vocational schools, specialized secondary schools and universities were required to work three years in the first workplace that was assigned by state.

vii As Vitali said, they both *of course* (my accentuation) have higher education.

viii Some places in certain universities of St. Petersburg and Moscow were assigned to republics. This means that the candidates were allowed to take the entrance exams in local universities and the competition to these places was somewhat lower. The graduates were obliged to return to their home republic.

ix The share of Estonians among inhabitants of Maardu is only 20 per cent.

x Kohtla-Järve lies in the oil-shale fields of north-east Estonia. The oil-shale industry was rapidly expanded in the Soviet period to meet Soviet energy and chemical requirements. Population growth in Kohtla-Järve in the 1950s and

1960s has been due to the influx of a large number of non-Estonians. In 2000 Estonians accounted only for 18 per cent of the population.

xi Elcoteq is a leading European electronics manufacturing services company providing engineering and manufacturing services, supply chain management and after sales services to international high-tech companies. Two of Elcoteq's largest plants (by number of employees) are situated in Estonia, in Tallinn. The number of their employees in Estonia amounts approximately to 3,300, total number of their employees reaches over 19,000. In fact three quarters of the company's capacity are located in Estonia, Hungary, Mexico and China - countries that are highly competitive with respect to market proximity, good availability of skilled labour and favourable general cost levels.

xii Specialized secondary school was more prestigious compared to vocational school. As Juri explained, the scholarship in specialized secondary school was much higher.

xiii Two non-Estonian women and two men belong to this group. We have presented only two biographical profiles due to the restricted length of the paper.

xiv Both respondents who belonged to losers, have defined own position on a labour market, as the unemployed.

xv In Estonia there was a sharp fall in the movements across sectors in 1998; similar processes were detected in Lithuania (Rõõm 2002; Rutkowski 2003).

xvi There were no legal limitations on the Russians' business activities in Estonia in the 1990s. All of them could establish and rent enterprises. Nevertheless Erik Andersen (1997) argues that non-citizens were consistently disadvantaged by Estonia's property reform principles because the low regulations on small-scale privatization contained various limitations on the non-Estonians' participation in the first and second phase. It means that Estonians began operating in the market economy much faster. The large majority of non-Estonian entrepreneurs were involved in small businesses.

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