The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
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This section deals with the basics of human existence relating to demographic development such as work and living standards, as well as the necessities for improving the quality of life; things like education, citizenship and the social equality of man and women. Regional cultural diversity; the heterogeneity of languages, ethnic groups and religions; along with the drive for democracy are common topics in all the contributions.

Economic research on creativity, problem solving, and efficiency has shown that homogeneous groups can quickly and easily arrive at decisions that achieve satisfactory results in the short- and medium-term but tend to produce less adequate achievements in the long term. Heterogeneous gatherings, however, will need more time and energy to negotiate a plan of action and will be slower in producing initial agreements, but the more heterogeneous the assemblage of people, the more creative the solutions that tend to be produced. From a medium- and long-term perspective heterogeneity produced the best results.

With this and the living memory of people in mind it is no wonder that the regaining of Independence, particularly for the Baltic states but also for the rest of Eastern Europe, naturally evoked expectations of a quick and easy return to at least the standards of living in the 1930s. This expectation is also touched upon in the chapter on Populations around the Baltic Sea by Marina Thorborg. In the period from the 1950s to the 1990s the similarity in demographic development between the Nordic countries and the European USSR is particularly striking, with low and falling birth, death, and infant mortality rates, women living half a dozen years longer than men and a population growth around the replacement level. In both types of society a high level of industrialization, urbanization, and education together with a high level of economic activity among women contributed to this demographic profile.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union what followed in the Russian Federation was almost a demographic catastrophe, with a population decrease resulting from more deaths than births. That alcohol was a significant killer of men can be gathered from the fact that the men who lived longest lived in Dagestan and Ingushetiya areas (65 and 66 years respectively in the mid-1990s) where the social infrastructure was least developed, alcohol consumption was prohibited by Muslim tradition.

All the demographic figures point to an all-time low in the mid-1990s, and since then a slow recovery, for most nations of the former Soviet bloc. But, as some of the discussions show, changes in accounting and statistical systems can produce new results though very little has changed in reality, as can be illustrated by, for example, the statistics on divorce in table 27.

In the same vein history shows that after every devastating war or great social upheaval a seemingly very healthy generation takes over after all the weak have succumbed. How far this explains the rise in the life expectancy of men in the Russian Federation today and how much can be due to better circumstances is yet to be determined.

A further discussion of the demographic characteristics of the Baltic region – including a treatise on the St-Petersburg area – is given by Gaiane Safarova. Demographically large urban conglomerations in the industrialized world tend to be similar which is also the case for the St-Petersburg region. In both chapters on demographic development the ageing of the population is discussed from different angles. Not only are basic demographic terms explained
– after table 28 – but also some new measurements are introduced such as HDI, the Human Development Index, and GDI, the Gender Development Index, with the latter being compared to HDI in the chapter on women and gender.

In addition to these two parameters other new ways of measuring are presented in the above-mentioned chapter, where a way of assessing the gender aspect by means of GEM, the Gender Empowerment Measure, is introduced. Major trends of development with regard to women are delineated in the same chapter, showing how specific trajectories have shaped the history of women and gender in different areas of this region. Depending on circumstances such as foreign invasions or deep polarization in society, either nationalism or class-consciousness has shaped priorities in regard to gender which has to be taken into account when starting a dialogue across the Baltic Sea.

It is startling to see how similar the verbal superstructure was in the official Soviet version of state feminism and in what developed in Western feminist discourse. However, in practice it still meant different things which of course can explain some of the initial confusion when contacts were intensified after 1991. Interestingly, in the Russian-cum Soviet development in regard to gender, examples of the most advanced state of affairs existed side by side with the most backward ones – the first state school in the world for girls, the Smolny Institute, opened in 1765 while peasant women (and men) were in bondage until 1861 – as this society has been highly stratified throughout history and today this polarization is increasing further. What the Soviet heritage left to all the countries of the former Soviet bloc is the high educational accomplishment of women, on average higher than men – explained in the chapter on work and unemployment – but also a generally high level of education.

In the chapter on education and schools this high general level forms a background to the changes that occurred after regaining Independence and how societies are trying to cope with the transition to a new system. A special section is devoted to the role of universities in Poland under communism and how an informal civil society developed outside the universities. The Polish experience is also valuable for the Nordic countries today, especially for Sweden.

Another supplement section to the chapter on education deals with the latest developments in regard to educational attainment and the learning of foreign languages as a way of reaching out to the world.

However learning a foreign language such as Estonian or Latvian for Russians living in Estonia or Latvia can also be a way of relating to the society where they or their parents most likely have been living for the last generation. In almost all states of the world a basic precondition for attaining citizenship would be fluency in the national language. In these cases accepting a foreign language on par with the national one might mean that 30-40 % of the total population would never speak the national language nor become integrated into that society. Successful economic development seems to have been a more decisive factor for integration than language per se.

These questions are at the core of the chapter on citizenship – the most theoretical chapter – which introduces a number of ways of viewing citizenship from a gendered point of view, how to look at minorities, and how to see the positive potential in diversity and heterogeneity. The origins of liberal thoughts are seen as the inspiration for the evolution of ideas on citizenship and how the “old” opposition against the authorities meant “absolute monarchy, scholasticism, the church, and kinship”; while today this would mean opposing the modern state and its power of taxation, thereby implying the welfare state and its recipients, and meaning that citizenship would not be equal for all as citizenship is about equal rights and duties.
Citizenship was traditionally seen as being developed in three consecutive stages; civil, political, and social. However, under the Soviet system social citizenship – in its basic form of economic security – was provided but not civil or political citizenship. One of the first measures of the totalitarian Soviet state after the illegal annexation of the Baltic states in 1940 was the total destruction of civil society; for example all women’s organizations were dissolved, their membership registers taken over and/or destroyed, their houses or meeting places closed down and taken over and all activities strictly forbidden. This was the same for all organizations, except those controlled from above by the communist party and which were imposed on the people. Hence neither civil nor political citizenship had any chance to develop during more than half a century of illegal occupation.

The state’s protection of its citizens against violence, which is another important aspect of citizenship, was only gradually extended to women, particularly in regard to violence in the family. However, nowhere is this fully implemented yet.

In the same chapter on citizenship new concepts of motherhood are introduced, namely constructivist and essentialist modes of motherhood. In Sweden, for example, both women and men seem to have adopted a constructivist view of motherhood, meaning womanhood may be constructed with or without children. Hence, if the conditions for having a family with children do not involve unreasonable deprivation of work opportunities, money, and time only then do couples decide to have children. Therefore in the early 1990s when Sweden had a high level of social infrastructure including well developed child benefits, Swedish women were number one in Europe in giving birth to many children. When the benefits were cut, Swedish men and women answered by drastically reducing their birth rate to under replacement level. Hence Swedish political campaigns will not increase the birth rate, but concrete measures to ease the life of families with children will, as the young generation, both men and women, do not seem prepared to forsake what they regard as the normal life for having progeny.

On the other hand, the essentialist view of womanhood sees this as a biological condition, that no matter what the circumstances women will always have children. Hence worsening conditions will not have any great impact, therefore benefits to families can always be tampered with without any consequences. This is of course the dream of politicians for saving money, in nations and situations when and where women’s political voice is weaker than men’s. The essentialist view can, of course, also be seen as a leftover from traditional society and from pre-family planning times, when it was thought that some higher spiritual authority and not the couple concerned should decide the number of children being born, irrespective of circumstances. In the Baltic states, for example, politicians seem to have the essentialist view of motherhood, expecting women to take full responsibility for motherhood and renounce professional ambitions. However the steeply reduced birth rate seems to indicate that the women themselves have adopted the constructivist view of motherhood regardless of the number of talks by politicians.

The chapter on work and unemployment demonstrates some of the difficulties when transforming a system of “soft” budget constraints – originally a planned economy – into a system of “hard” budget constraints, a market economy with competition.

In the long run the system of central planning and guaranteed work for all led to inefficiency, a waste of resources, and over-staffing problems. The latest research on developing countries stresses again the hitherto undervalued importance of private property as a dynamic motor for growth by the non-property owning classes, instead of mainly focusing on investment and technology transfer. (De Soto, 2001)
The chapter on work and unemployment shows the similarity in development between market and planned economies in regard to the division of labour, however, there is a time-lag of a generation for the latter ones and an underdeveloped service sector. As unemployment, by definition, did not exist in planned economies, statistics on this naturally first developed in the 1990s. The main feature of economic transition with regard to unemployment was how the political situation shaped policy. Where, for example, mass unemployment was threatening and was deemed politically and socially undesirable, the solution was, de facto, the lowering of wages through inflation and price increases, and keeping people at work thereby drastically lowering the productivity of labour; which of course led to a falling standard of living. Crucial to the success of changing into a market economy was how privatization was carried out. In hindsight, quick voucher schemes, meant to give everybody a share of state property, enabled the elite to capture the bulk of a nation's resources to the detriment of the majority of the population. While the number of those employed shrank, the simultaneous growth of the informal sector blurred the picture, as did the growth of corruption. These worst case scenarios were only experienced by a few countries close to the Baltic Sea, and even there the hope is that their robber barons, like those of the USA a century and a half earlier, would eventually see the economy and the labour market integrated with the outside world as being in their own interest.

Research seems to confirm that some factors – the fewer the years under communism, the more secondary schooling the society had and the higher the chance of joining EU – have so far been crucial in easing the road towards an open market economy and a functioning labour market.
**Glossary**

*Population transfer* usually means an exchange of citizens, generally belonging to a minority in one country for those in another country as a result of an agreement in writing between states seeking to attain a more homogeneous population.

*Expulsion* refers to a coercive, conscious and sustained effort by either a dominant nationality and/or government to expel a minority population across the borders of the state.

*Deportation* means a forced, state-organized round-up and the transportation of populations either into occupied territories or remote areas of the same country.

*Refugees* are categorized as individuals who, because of various forms of threat or pressure, decide to flee abroad and seek asylum in a foreign country.

*Resettlement* can have two meanings: either a process of colonizing areas that have been depopulated for various reasons by groups from the dominant nationality or meaning a process of relocating a forcibly, deported population into new areas.

*Ethnic cleansing* which is widely used today, would mean a systematic, conscious effort by a state or its army to drive out, or kill a population group, defined by ethnic, religious, or nationalistic criteria, or a mixture of these.

*Genocide* which often is used interchangeably with ethnic cleansing, has a more strict definition and applies to a systematic, conscious attempt to exterminate physically an entire population group either defined along religious, ethnic or nationalistic lines. In this strict sense it can only be applied to the Armenians during the First World War and the Jews and the Roma, (Gypsies) during the Second World War.

*Holocaust* means large-scale destruction and loss of life (Greek *holos*, whole + *kaustos*, burnt) referring to the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis during the Second World War.

Hence the Germans leaving Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the Second World War would be a mixture of those being expelled, deported and in many cases simply fleeing. In literature these Germans are referred to as deportees and expellees as well as refugees showing how intertwined and complex the motives and reasons for flight were.

It was clearly a deportation when the Soviet Union made use of its combined administrative-police methods to arrest and haul away “alien” elements of the Belarusian, Polish and West Ukrainian population from the Eastern provinces of Poland after the Soviet army occupied it in September-October 1939.

When people of Jewish “nationality” (according to their Soviet domestic passport) threatened by German invasion were running away from the Western part of the Soviet Union during the Second World War this was labeled as unauthorized flight and as such was perceived by the Soviet state as an illegal and even criminal act which can be seen in the Russian term ‘*bezhenets*’ meaning both fugitive and deserter.

Expulsion, population transfer, forced migration and resettlement are well-known phenomena throughout European history, but after the rise of the system with nation states in Europe they have acquired a more sinister character.

Except for the case of the Jews, almost everywhere suffering a similar fatal stigma – with the exception of the Polish Commonwealth becoming a haven for expelled Jews from Western Europe – deportation was a 20th century phenomenon that was not being used in Western Europe, but in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.