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Inna JÄRVA

Pedagogical College of Tallinn University, Estonia

## **The role of grandparents within the family and in child rearing among the Russians living in Estonia**

Rola dziadków w rodzinie i wychowaniu dzieci wśród Rosjan  
mieszkających w Estonii

### **Streszczenie**

W krajach postsowieckich koniec XX wieku był czasem krytycznych zmian, kiedy to struktury instytucji społecznych i normy ludzi żyjących w czasach przemian zmieniły się radykalnie w bardzo krótkim okresie. Proces zmian w Estonii miał jeszcze większy wpływ na społeczność rosyjską. Ich mobilność społeczna zwiększyła się znacznie w ciągu jednego pokolenia w porównaniu do ludności estońskiej, ponieważ jeszcze przed odzyskaniem przez Estonię niepodległości pracownicy przemysłowi stanowili połowę dorosłej ludności (Tammaru 1999). Trzydzieści lat wcześniej Herbert Marcuse (1966) zauważył, że w zachodnich kulturach *deproletaryzacja* stała się nowym zjawiskiem polegającym na zastępowaniu klasy pracowników przemysłowych przez pracowników sektora usługowego. W rezultacie życie większości ludzi stało się bardziej niestabilne i mobilne. Rosjanie mieszkający w Estonii nauczyli się poszerzać swoje kulturowe horyzonty, podejmować ryzyko z własnej inicjatywy i przekazywać swoim dzieciom i wnukom te nowe poglądy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** deproletaryzacja, rola dziadków, przekaz rodzinny, wychowanie.

### Abstract

In the post-Soviet countries, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a critical period of transition when the structure of the social institutions, and the norms of people living through the transition, were radically changed within a very short time. The process of change in Estonia had impacted more on the Russian community, whose social mobility has considerably increased within one generation, when compared with the Estonian population, since even before the restoration of Estonian independence, industrial workers made up half of the adult population (Tammaru 1999). Thirty years earlier Herbert Marcuse (1966) had noted that in western cultures *deproletarianisation* was a new feature of culture, with the industrial working class being replaced by workers in the services sector. The result for most people had been a more unstable and mobile style of life. The Russians living in Estonia had learned to expand their cultural horizons, to take risks on their own initiative, and to teach these new worldviews to their children and grandchildren.

**Keywords:** deproletarianisation, the role of grandparents, family transfer, upbringing.

### Theoretical background

The research is based on a socio-cultural approach, which allows education to be seen from two perspectives – the educational environment as a system of cultural meanings, and in terms of social practices. Child-rearing practices are related to a society's socio-cultural factors. Using the anthropologist Margaret Mead's theory of generation gap, there are three distinct forms of socialization:

- 1) *postfigurative*, in which children learn primarily from their forebears,
- 2) *cofigurative*, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and
- 3) *prefigurative*, in which adults learn also from their children.

Margaret Mead declared that humanity was entering a period, new in history, in which the young are taking on new authority in their prefigurative apprehension of the still unknown future<sup>1</sup>. Interpreting her theory from the point of socialization it could be concluded that socialization in a prefigurative culture when compared with the previous kinds of cultures would be more child-oriented and democratic as a child becomes a more equal subject in a bi-lateral process and in dialogue with his parents.

In the traditional Russian socialization, the child acquired his knowledge through early obligations, tight personal relations with the community and continuous communication. He became a part of traditional collective society and shared the values of his community. The existing network of family upbringing, rituals, and social relations was primarily directed towards preserving the status quo. An important role was played by the image of the sacred homeland

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<sup>1</sup> M. Mead, *Culture and commitment: a study of the generation gap*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY 1970.

(“Mother Russia”) of whom a child had to become worthy. Grandparents had an essential role in the upbringing of children<sup>2</sup>.

The middle generation belonged to the urban environment, where social relations were less personified and more anonymous. The established ideology allowed for greater freedom. The acquisition of cultural capital became important in the family upbringing<sup>3</sup>.

The greatest transformation took place in the younger generation, which may be called the generation of the Great Break when individualism and personal autonomy had started to acquire relatively greater importance<sup>4</sup>. The culture of the younger generation of parents was characterised by cultural pluralism, westernisation, ethnic cultural influences, virtual culture and individualisation<sup>5</sup>. Russian parents living in Estonia had largely accepted the standards that were characteristic of the general Western European family: a tendency to emancipation and women’s high educational status. In many ways this approach meant rejecting the earlier cultural heritage since in comparison with traditional culture, both forms of existence as well as the functioning of the culture has been transformed.

Contrasted with the previous generation who were living in a more static and stable environment, today’s generation living in a dynamic, modern-day, mobile environment needed an education and upbringing which promoted rapid retraining in response to the challenges of this turbulent environment. This new social context emphasised the importance of new attitudes – creativity, enterprise and mobility – which were being developed by business games such as Monopoly and within the home. The children’s almost limitless freedom in behaviour, clothing and personal opinion was replacing the rigid structure of obedience with on-going learning. Humanistic values as ideals of the outlook on life also applied to the younger generation, but they had become more abstract<sup>6</sup>. As a result, the sacred patriotism and morality, that had always been the core of Russian upbringing and according to which, one had to raise citizens worthy of the

<sup>2</sup> V. Abramenkova, *Social’naâ psihologiâ detstva: razvitie otnošenij v detskoj subkul’ture*, Akademiâ pedagogičeskikh i socia’l’nyh nauk, Moskva – Voronež 2000; B.N. Mironov, *Sem’â nužno li oglâdyvat’sâ v prošloe? Psihologiâ sem’i*, Bahrah-M., Samara 2002, pp. 213–237.

<sup>3</sup> N.V. Korovicina, *Srednee pokolenie v sociokul’turnoj dinamike Vostočnoj Evropy vtoroj poloviny XX veka*, Logos, Moskva 1999; I. Järva, *Põlvkondlikud muutused vene perekondade kasvatuses: sotsiokultuuriline käsitlus*, Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikool Sotsiaalteaduste Dissertatsioonid 9. 2004, TPÜ Kirjastus 2004.

<sup>4</sup> U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization. Institutionalised Individualization and its Social and Political Consequences*, Sage Publications, London 2008.

<sup>5</sup> N.V. Korovicina, *Srednee pokolenie v sociokul’turnoj dinamike...*, op. cit.; Eadem, *Čelovek i obšestvo v dvuh sistemnyh transformaciâh Central’noj i Vostočnoj Evropy*. V sb.: *Sociokul’turnye transformacii vtoroj poloviny XX veka v stranah Central’noj i Vostočnoj Evropy*, RAN, 7–14, Moskva 2002.

<sup>6</sup> I. Järva, *Põlvkondlikud muutused vene perekondade kasvatuses...*, op. cit.

motherland<sup>7</sup>, lost its authority to individual autonomy and personal growth. On the other hand, parents' authoritarianism was replaced by democratic relationships between a child and a parent<sup>8</sup>.

In the doctoral thesis of the author<sup>9</sup>, the purpose was to analyze and compare the upbringing of children in Russian families of Estonia over three generations. The role of grandparents was not a focus in that study and now needs to be investigated.

The role of grandparents in a family is best understood within the context of shared expectations and obligations regarding the ageing of individuals and the succession of generations<sup>10</sup>. M. Silverstein and V.L. Bengtson<sup>11</sup> have codified six principal dimensions of solidarity between generations. These dimensions comprise (1) structure (factors such as geographic distance that constrain or enhance interaction between family members), (2) association (frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members), (3) affect (feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members), (4) consensus (actual or perceived agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members), (5) function (exchanges of instrumental and financial assistance and support between family members), and (6) norms (strength of obligation felt toward other family members).

## Methodology and sample

Research questions of the study:

- Grandparents have a role in the lives of their grandchildren, but what exactly is that role?
- How close are grandparents to their grandchildren and grandchildren to their grandparents?
- How much do grandparents participate in upbringing of their grandchildren?

The aim of this research was to ascertain the role of grandparents within the family and in upbringing of the grandchildren among the Russian population living in Estonia.

<sup>7</sup> O.A. Platonov, *Svâtaâ Rus' Ènciklopedičeskij slovar' russkoj civilizacii*, Ènciklopediâ Russkoj civilizacii, Moskva 2002.

<sup>8</sup> I. Järva, *Muutuvad inimsuhted: lapsed ja nende vanemad nüüdisaja Eestimaa vene perekondades. Uued ajad – uued lapsed*, TLÜ kirjastus, Tallinn 2008, pp. 112–129.

<sup>9</sup> I. Järva, *Põlvkondlikud muutused vene perekondade kasvatases...*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> V.L. Bengtson, P.S. Oyama, *Intergenerational Solidarity: Strengthening Economic and Social Ties*, United Nations Headquarters, New York 2007, source: [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/egm\\_unhq\\_oct07\\_bengtson.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/egm_unhq_oct07_bengtson.pdf) [access: 10.09.2013].

<sup>11</sup> M. Silverstein & V.L. Bengtson, *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Structure of Adult Child-Parent Relationships in American Families*, "American Journal of Sociology" 1997, Vol. 103, № 2, (pp. 429–460) p. 432, source: <http://www.techsociety.com/articles/AJSv103p429.pdf> [access: 23.01.2014].

The method of collecting data was focus group interviews. The sample of the study was 71 respondents. In the focus group there were 7–9 respondents. For the author it was important to identify the anthropological meaning of the different generations: 1) the respondents from the older generation who were grandmothers and 2) the respondents from the younger generation were childless or with children up to kindergarten age. Amongst the people in younger generation (age 19–28) there were 6 focus group interviews and in the older generation (46–65 years old) there were 3 focus group interviews. Focus group interviews were made in March–September 2012, October 2013 and March 2014 in Tallinn and Narva (Northern-Eastern Estonia).

## **The results**

### **Geographic (distance that constrain interaction between family members)**

Previously there were extended families where many generations lived together. Today this is history – in a modern family members prefer to live separately. There are only a few grandparents who are living with their adult children and grandchildren. The dominant nuclear family model means there are fewer opportunities to communicate as a whole family. At the same time most of the people from the older generation and 4/5 of the younger generation find that they were always open for communication with the other generations, but sometimes their time was limited.

### **Association (frequency of social contact and shared activities between family members)**

2/3 of the grandparents were employed people who did not give up their active and independent lifestyle for their grandchildren. This data was strongly supported by the results of the interviewed grandchildren: 3/4 of the youth who were interviewed also declared that their grandparents did not systematically take part in their upbringing.

The grandparents were hard-working, nimble, mobile and sociable. They explained that in reality it was hard for them to take up the new role of grandparent, because it is associated with aging. Grandmothers were child care providers more often than were grandfathers. They looked after the grandchildren according to the needs of a young family, only one tenth of the grandparents were involved on a daily basis with the upbringing of their grandchildren. Grandparents mostly had a role as family guests, who had no direct obligations or responsibilities in childrearing. When taking care of their grandchildren, grandpa-

rents valued emotional satisfaction: to feel useful, to be part of the youth social network.

Both generations stressed that there were family traditions, which carried from generation to generation, and helped to build the togetherness between generations. There were certain traditions in every family: one of them was celebrating birthdays together with grandparents, another was to celebrate other family occasions. There were 1/6 of the families which celebrated their family reunion.

### **Affect (feelings of emotional closeness, affirmation, and intimacy between family members)**

2/5 of the younger generation wanted to be similar to the older generations by saying that relationships were more personal in the past, people talked directly and without technical devices: *they were more approachable and kind-hearted; also, they could value what they had.*

The generation of grandparents believed themselves to be hard-working, honest, modest and conscientious. The young generation thought that the main characteristics of their grandparents were sweet-temper, civility, caring for people and then hard work. The younger generation could see experience, loyalty, helping and self-discipline in their grandparents. The youth considered their relations with the older generation to be very positive and even more harmonious than with their own generation or even with their own brothers and sisters. It is interesting that a quarter of the younger generation did not find any faults in the older generation. This proves the honouring relationship with grandparents.

The younger generation believed themselves to be successful, smart, purposeful and useful for the society. They also thought that they had well-developed communication skills and independent thinking and they had a knack with technology. They confessed that they did not keep their word; they were coarse, egoistic, too rational, would rather communicate with the TV set and computer than read a book; they did not honour people older than themselves.

The older generation emphasized the competitive ability amongst their grandchildren. They also recognised the adventure in the younger generation's actions and thought it was good for their courage and creativity. There were four grandmothers who claimed that they owed all their contemporary knowledge to their children and grandchildren.

At the same time a fifth of the grandparents were quite critical towards their grandchildren. They confessed that their grandchildren did not keep their word; they were too rational, they spent too much time at the TV set and computer; and their behaviour verged from one extremity to another (aggression versus stress).

### **Consensus (agreement in opinions, values, and lifestyles between family members)**

The research showed that the foundation of values among grandparents and grandchildren are the universal values: family, love, safety of a family, goodness and caring. At the same time the grandparents are more tuned into stability and the young generation into protest against current standards.

A third of the younger generation claimed that their grandparents were born during the Soviet regime and because of that they had problems in communication and expressing themselves: *They are clumsy in technology. Their outlook on life reflects yesterday: they can be understood, but their advice does not have to be taken.* The young respondents declared that there are several reasons for disagreement in opinions: political views, new technology that shapes a new type of a person, attitudes towards spiritual values, different tastes in music, cinema, fashion and even food. A quarter of the younger generation preferred fast food, others said that their grandparents ate unhealthy food – rich meat and little vegetables.

The generation of grandparents admitted that their experience did not work in the circumstances of the modern world and they considered the different behaviour of the younger generation as natural. To minimize the differences, the older generation found that it was important to love, trust and honour their grandchildren, to not press their opinions upon their children and tried to be self-critical.

### **Exchanges of instrumental and financial assistance and support**

Common activities with little grandchildren when they were children were walking with grandchildren in the woods, helping with homework, playing together if children are young. A quarter of grandmothers read fairy-tales to their grandchildren. Together they did gardening, watched children's programmes on the TV, and went to the woods to pick berries and mushrooms. Less than a fifth in grandparents talked about their childhood and liked to sing to their grandchildren. Tourist trips, hiking, sports, theatre, cinema, playing an instrument were not popular activities.

In the single-parent families, the grandparents were more involved in the upbringing of the children and the role of. If people lived together with grandparents, then their main duties were cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry and dish washing.

In Narva where the Russians make up 95% of the population the role of grandparents is more traditional. It could be explained by influence of the traditional Russian upbringing culture. On the other hand the economic crisis in

Narva was more severe than in Tallinn. Many grandparents were responsible for the economic well-being of their children and grandchildren, and they tried to help them with real help raising the children and economically when possible. At the same time their style of upbringing was not so tolerant – it was more like it is in Russia.

### **Function - strength of obligation felt toward other family members**

As was already mentioned the grandparent's role was not accompanied by the concrete obligations as before. The grandparent role still had a high emotional value. The younger generation helped their grandparents with their housework (greenhouse, garden) and with computers. Perhaps this help was not systematic, but grandchildren and grandparents did not even discuss the need for help – they say that they would not leave anyone in trouble and they knew that they will also get help if it was needed.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

The data from the research shows that among the Russians living in Estonia the core values are formed by universally vital values, such as children and grandchildren, the safety of the family and health. At the same time the family culture of today's Russians living in Estonia has been influenced by the fundamental changes in the social environment, economic and political affairs and in the general quality of life. Urbanism, entrepreneurship, the broadening of the social contacts have shaped more informed, autonomous, self-trusting and mobile persons who are more prepared to tolerate the influence of this new environment, but who care less about the traditional standards and rules. Individualistic tendencies are characteristic not only of the younger generation, but their role has increased also in the generation of grandparents who have changed as well because they want to develop with others.

The nuclear family model means there are fewer opportunities to communicate as family. This has weakened the links between grandparents and their grandchildren. Still the links between generations in families can be seen both on a spiritual level (communicating, love, trust, mutual understanding, common interests) as well as in real help given by generations to each other as far as homework, children's upbringing and economical aid are concerned. Despite their differences in behaviour and views, both generations acknowledge and value the solidarity between the generations.

The grandparent's role has changed in its content and is no more accompanied by the concrete obligations as before. This role could be compared with the role of grandparents in Northern European cultures where grandparents do not

much participate in the upbringing of their grandchildren systematically. Regular and intensive grandchild care is more common in Southern Europe, with 20% of grandparents in Italy providing almost daily childcare compared with just 2% of grandparents in the Netherlands<sup>12</sup>. The results of the study are also supported by the investigation made by L. Stasova and E. Krisikova<sup>13</sup> in the Czech Republic.

At the same time the role of the grandparent has a big emotional value. The emotional link is essential for both generations. It is important for grandparents to get emotional satisfaction in their communication with grandchildren. The emotional link with grandmothers is also positive for grandchildren, as is proved by the positive image of grandparents the eyes of grandchildren. The young people see the image of a today's grandparent in their life wisdom, but also in their contemporary life-style, where the grandparents are not afraid to learn from the young, especially in the area of information technology. It could be claimed that in the contemporary culture of the Russian family living in Estonia there can be seen some features of prefigurative culture, in which adults learn also from the younger generation.

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<sup>13</sup> L. Stasova, E. Krisikova, *Relationships between children and their grandparents and importance of older generations in lives of today's families*, [in:] 4<sup>th</sup> International Interdisciplinary Scientific Conference November 22–23, 2012. Abstracts, Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte, Riga 2012

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