

Kohtla-Järve: One Place, Different Stories*

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This paper follows the methodical axis of finding common ground in the interdisciplinary scientific realm of the early 21st century for two disciplines that stem from the same origin but have followed rather different development paths throughout the 20th century: folkloristics and cultural geography. We will take a short tour through the history of these disciplines, and then attempt to analyse the different descriptions and stories of Kohtla-Järve, the capital of the north-eastern Estonian oil shale mining region, from the viewpoints of these two disciplines.

Preface

It is somehow characteristic that the emergence of folkloristics as a separate discipline is linked to the elaboration of a specific research method for studying folklore at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Kaarle Krohn wrote about this historical-geographical, or 'Finnish', method (*Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode*) in 1926, a source still used and also criticised¹. Still, the influence of this method on Estonian folkloristics has been remarkable. Strangely enough, the name of the method contains the names of two other branches of scholarship – history² and geography. The role of geography was limited to just writing down place names where a story was recorded, to delimit the distribution of certain texts. So, for instance, there are a number regional folk narratives³ about place names that were connected by the coherence of genre attributes (legends) and motifs (hid-

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¹ For instance Alan Dundes (1986: 130–133) brought forth the fact that the book title shows this method as *the* method, not one of many possibilities.

² Peter Burke (2004) has explained the links between history and folkloristics in the European scientific tradition.

³ In principle the link between text and place is also valid for other sorts of folk narratives, e.g., belief legends.

den treasures, churches collapsing) rather than the coherence of the place and the story⁴. But the habit of the Finnish school of ignoring natural and social features ignited criticism from other lines of folkloristics (Hautala 1954: 324–349). New ideas penetrated into the Finnish school of thought after the Second World War. Of these, studies of the ecology of traditions (such as Honko 1972, 1979; Sarmela 1970, 1974a, 1974b) have more linkages to geography. In addition to examining the distribution of the texts, these studies focused more on conditions of distribution (social, cultural and natural) and, connected to this, to the local style of tradition.

Cultural geography, in turn, has been one of the liveliest branches of human geography during recent decades. It dates back to the first decades of the 20th century, but has its roots in the anthro-geography of the late 19th century. Cultural geography studies the interrelations of land and human culture. To counter environmental determinism, a cultural ecological approach was formed, which focused on landscape – how humans have shaped it (Cosgrove 2000: 134–138). The cultural geographical study of the nature-culture interface has been influenced by all the major currents in the social sciences and humanities, such as feminism, post-colonialism, and *cultural turn*, which in reality meant that, in addition to culture, geographers took an interest in social dimensions: ethnicity, gender, social status etc. The *new cultural geography*, which emerged in the 1980s, encompasses both the humanist approach, focusing on the person, and the Marxist approach, departing from social systems (Rose 2002: 455–460). New cultural geography studies representations, normative ways of seeing, otherness, marginality, gender, post-colonialism, law, justice, language, texts, signs, symbols, meanings, power, identity, ideology, knowledge and policy in landscapes (Cloke 1997; Johnston *et al.* 2000; Jones 1991, 2003; Little 1999; Mels 2002; Mitchell 2005; Morris, Evans 2004; Olwig 2002a, 2002b; Palang *et al.* 2004, 2005; Rose 2002; Saltzman 1999; Sooväli 2004; Walker, Fortmann 2003).

The connection between folkloristics and cultural geography in this paper is provided by our study area, Kohtla-Järve. From a cultural geographical perspective, Kohtla-Järve is a area with many contrasts: a rural area that was turned into a town in 1946. Much of the landscape has a mining or industrial history, which

⁴ Contemporary Estonian research into regional folk narratives aims to follow the coherence between place and text, e.g., Mari-Ann Rimmel (2001, 2003), Astrid Tuisk (2001) and Mare Kalda (2002).

also has had an (ecological) influence on its inhabitants – it is a power landscape created by one certain socio-economic formation. Every power has its own ideology, which it tries to pass on to ordinary citizens by means of symbols and representations. Kohtla-Järve is the quintessence of the Soviet industrial landscape in Estonia. Here the introduction of Soviet power brought along a large-scale migration from other parts of the USSR (post-colonialism), which caused, in addition to economic and environmental problems, a socio-cultural division into ‘us’ and ‘them’. These two considerations – that it is a town and that it has a number of immigrants – have not attracted folklorists to its stories. Nevertheless, the area provides good material for studying the creation of traditions (see Jaago 2004c: 177–178). The texts we studied are not part of traditional folk tales or agrarian society, as were the folk tales mentioned above. Not all inhabitants of Kohtla-Järve understand the past in the same way. Similarly, they describe their home differently. In both historical and home narratives, there are many Kohtla-Järves.

In this paper we aim to find out how different people perceive and describe this rapidly-changing landscape, which was created by industrial development (factory chimneys and ash heaps appearing in the former home fields, seen as a sign of progress by the immigrants), immigration (people with alien mentalities sharing the city space) and the combination of these two (as expressed in the common weal, garden design, appearance of the houses etc.).

Method and sources

There are many ways of studying the attitudes of the inhabitants of Kohtla-Järve to their living environment and the dependence of these attitudes on personal histories. Questionnaires, letters and narratives (including biographies) could provide useful materials. A questionnaire administered to 376 school pupils in 13 Ida-Viru County⁵ schools (De Grave *et al.* 2006) showed that the town of Kohtla-Järve had the lowest reputation in the county. It also demonstrated that Russian-speaking schoolchildren have a more negative attitude towards the surrounding landscape, but also know less about it. A qualitative approach permits an analysis of how these attitudes have formed and whether the inhabitants of Kohtla-Järve have a different attitude.

⁵ The county where Kohtla-Järve is located.



A humanistic approach (e.g., Buttimer 1993; Tuan 1974) provides a link between cultural geography and folkloristics, by explaining how different individuals relate to their landscape and talk about it. Biographies give a historical perspective to these relations. The following studies are based on the oral history method.⁶ One of the most serious criticisms of this method has been that the sources are subjective. It has been argued that biographies do not reflect the truth or what really happened. As one historian put it:

Using sources like these [biographies, interviews, memories stored at the Estonian Literary Museum – *T.J.*] brings forward the common problems with oral histories. Memories are incomplete and subjective, many things are remembered erroneously. Remembering is influenced by collective memory and present-day media. Memories have a narrative structure, which tends to change while being re-recorded and retold. (Mertelsmann 2004: 132.)

This approach to oral history shows that these sources are used as illustrations of history and not as material providing opportunities for a study on its own. The object of studying oral histories is not so much to focus on a historical event or

⁶ In the Estonian language, the term *pärimuslik ajalugu* is used. Studying *pärimuslik ajalugu* is one of the branches in folklore studies that analyses folk (traditional) histories. The common term unifying researchers regardless of their different lingual and national traditions nowadays is 'oral history'.



period, but rather on the journey of the narrator from the time of the story-telling back to that event. In text analyses, research has departed from the principle that reality narratives are a reality in their own right, where experiences and memories are expressed according to means (such as story-telling schemes) known to the teller. Therefore, one can speak of different stories all connected to the same place. The diversity of stories is caused by both the diversity of text types and the subjectivity of story-tellers: their differing viewpoints and story-telling traditions and abilities. The story-teller's journey is also accompanied by the journey of the researcher: one can understand the teller's approach to the past in the context of his/her own knowledge and approach. Oral history does not concentrate so much on the level of event as on the level of communication: communication in a certain way, thinking about one's past in a certain way and in a certain form (compare with Tonkin 1995: 93–94).

This paper is based on a selection of letters and thematic narratives. A characteristic feature is that all materials existed before the aims and tasks of this paper were set. Hence all texts are very contextual, they describe phenomena in a complex way and they are not direct answers to questions departing from our problem set-up. This speciality of the source materials leads us to consider this paper as a pilot study: how folklorists and cultural geographers 'read' the same sources.

The letters are of two origins. First, the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, copied forty one private letters from 1957–1964. These are written by ‘natives’: a grandmother (b. 1890) and her granddaughter (b. 1939). Other letters were obtained in 2000–2004, while conversing with story-tellers. Thematic narratives are mostly written ones, in some cases interviews from the Estonian Cultural History Archives⁷ or from the archives for the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore⁸.

Kohtla-Järve features in these texts as home.

Cultural geography sees landscapes as consisting of both material and mental features, steered by underlying factors (Keisteri 1990). The underlying factors include politics, power and ideology – all those factors that define the development of a society, and which also influence people’s attitudes towards their surroundings. As landscapes develop over time, the linkage between geography and history emerges. In this paper we concentrate on two levels: Kohtla-Järve as home in a physical sense and as a mental place. This approach makes it possible to follow the multi-layer structure of the term ‘home’, as well as the distinct and fuzzy boundaries that are not always set by explicit measures.

The multiple layers in the concept of ‘home’

Reading the texts about Kohtla-Järve revealed how the political changes of the 20th century caused radical changes in homes. When people related the stories of their homes, they also told the stories of political changes. Themes that emerged from the home stories included establishing the mines after the First World War, the first battles of the Second World War in 1941, the evacuation of people organised by the German army when the front approached in 1944, battles when the Soviet troops approached in 1944, the building of the town in the 1940s and 1970s, and the demolition of houses due to empty apartments and debtors nowadays (see Jaago 2004a: 157–162).

⁷ The collection *Estonian Life Histories* by the Estonian Literary Museum and Society *Eesti Elulood*, referred to hereafter as EKLA and the number of the fund and story. The collection contains about 40 biographies from Kohtla-Järve, from the years 1989–2001, but the density of the Kohtla-Järve theme in them, of course, varies.

⁸ The materials at the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, are referred to hereafter as MK, followed by the ID of the text and year it was written. If needed, an extension (such as Letters) has been used. The collection contained 19 story-tellers or writers as of beginning 2005.

In addition to the physical state of the home (demolitions, burnings) appearing in the previous list, the mental loss or one's reconciliation between 'ours' and 'alien' also emerged. For instance, a retired person from Kohtla-Järve, now living in Tallinn, wrote:

Compared to other places in Estonia, Kohtla-Järve is an unhappy and God-forsaken place. [---] There is no old Kohtla-Järve any more. Most of it was destroyed by the nitrogen fertiliser factory (the houses fell into a sanitary buffer zone), some by expansion of the oil shale plant, and part was just abandoned when a chance appeared to get an apartment in Sotslinn [⁹] with central heating, tap water and a bathroom [¹⁰]. The former Sotslinn and other new districts leave a rather disconsolate and neglected impression. [---] When I go out to see my sister, I stick my hand through a hole in the door left at the place where a lock once was. This is the business card of the present-day Kohtla-Järve for me and makes me feel dejected. (MK: L3 2003.)

Landscape consists of dichotomies or interfaces (Palang, Fry 2003: 2–9): between space and time, past and future, rural and urban, conservation and use, material and mental, different cultures, insiders and outsiders. The example above gives an outsider's view on how time has transformed space, its material and mental qualities alienating those who once were insiders. Adjusting to changes, specifically rural conversion to an urban fabric, which lasted from the 1950s until the 1970s, is characterised by fitting the place and time into place metaphors¹¹. The Soviet period's toponyms of Punane Street (Red Street), Tahmalinn (Grimetown) and Järve are examples of these metaphors.

Punane Street was formed when the inhabitants of the Järve village were forced to tear down their former houses and move to the former pasture, setting up house there. This happened soon after the Second World War:

In 1949 I went to school on Punane Street – at that time it was the last street that was being built and there was so much mud. [---] They were building, which means there were nine houses – those belonging to the Järve villagers – and then in between the German POWs put up Finnish barracks. (MK: L2 2002.)¹²

⁹ Sotslinn – Socialist Town – is one of the parts of Kohtla-Järve, formerly Järve village, now called Järve, a part near the former village.

¹⁰ The storyteller considers, as do many others, the 1970s and 1980s to be the demolition years of the area.

¹¹ Place names – how they were formed and used, how former names were replaced with Soviet ones and have now changed back (the Sotslinn-Järve case is one example here) – provide a theme for further study.

¹² As part of war reparations, Finland provided USSR with small wooden houses that typically were given to Soviet officers.

Gradually a small garden town took shape, but in the 1970–1980s it once again stood in the way of the expanding city. Older story-tellers mention Punane Street as something meaningful, for instance ‘everything was very beautiful, pretty, green on Punane Street’; ‘knew ones who had to leave their homes, their Punane Street homes and taken out of their third home feet first’ (MK: L2 2002; MK: T2 2003).

Also a letter, written in 1957, tells about Punane Street, where the houses and gardens – the place – had been in the city’s way:

I don’t have any more news. Two houses are being built in our neighbourhood. The schoolhouse was moved from the Narva road – you know it, you and your mother went there – it was pulled here and will be erected, just next to our room up on the street side. Formerly there was a shop inside, now let’s see what’s gonna be there. And the bank was brought over, but it is like a barracks, people lived there earlier. It would be nice if they made it a shop. They will take some land also from us, from where the currants grow (let them take it), not a meter will be left in front of the stairs. If they do not leave a way towards Varese Street, one will have to take a plane to get to the street or well. (MK: Letters K1 1957.)

Interestingly this 67-year-old woman wrote ‘Järve’ at the head of her letters – never Kohtla-Järve or anything else. Her granddaughter, then in her twenties, often used the name ‘Grimetown’, but never ‘Järve’ (MK: Letters S1 1957–1964). It was the same habitat, but different spaces¹³. The grandmother described the former village surroundings, villagers and practices. Weaving was one of the most frequent themes. It appeared to be one of her favourite activities and she could make some money by weaving towels and rugs for neighbours. Her granddaughter wrote about going to the cinema (what were her favourites, what was on), new and already-read books and the related bookshelf dream. She seems to have enjoyed going skating with a friend. The spaces of the grandmother and granddaughter did not coincide, but did not conflict either. It could be argued that human practice, which is linked to a pattern of relations and of course age peculiarities, could be considered one of the identities of a place.

A scheme of social relation develops slowly, but it is intertwined with acceptance of a place, nature included. Estonians, having come to Kohtla-Järve from other parts of the country, fit into the nature, but have difficulties with entering

¹³ Besides territory, the concept of space also contains human practice, its openness or closed-ness in certain directions, and patterns of interpersonal relations. See Johanna Rolshoven (2003) for use of space in folkloristics, or Paul Adams *et al.* (2001) in cultural geography.

the social environment. For example, one woman living in Kohtla-Järve since 1948 explains her relationship with the town:

I just want to add that I have started liking this much-cursed Kohtla-Järve and receive gladly all messages about its past, life and people. [---] For many years now I have participated in the 'Third youth' club at the Kohtla-Nõmme clubhouse. There I have seen some exhibitions by local folklore researchers, and have even desired to contact them, but somehow I have remained passive; maybe I still feel alien. At least for the last 30 summers, all the forests and lands of Ida-Viru have been full of my footprints. (MK: T2 2003.)

Migration studies of the first half of the 20th century have shown that nature creates a strong first impression of a new place, and the emergence of nature as a theme in narratives is the first sign of adaptation to the new homeland (Bönisch-Brednich 2002a: 48–50, 54; 2002b: 70; Jürgenson 2002: 57–71). Still, this could be different with towns, such as Kohtla-Järve, especially when the climatic differences between the new and old homes are insignificant. In that case 'us' and 'them' are defined by cityscape and the social relations therein. In the case of Kohtla-Järve it meant a Sovietising city. So a woman from Leningrad, with a German surname, wrote that she could not stay in her home-town after the Second World War because of that surname. When she moved to the Novgorod region, somebody hinted that she should go to Rakvere. The first impression she got was of beauty: a nice tidy Estonian town, but she would have nothing to do there. She met some soldiers at the railway station who advised her to move to Kohtla-Järve. So she did, found a job there and got a satisfactory apartment (EKLA f. 350, 161). Another story from 1961, in the collection of the Estonian National Museum, relates how the industrial settlement of Kohtla was tidied up in the 1920s and 1930s and became dirty again in the first Soviet years (ERM, KV 92: 1006–1048; see also Jaago 2004b). However, so far the number of Russian-speakers' stories has been very small (four) and therefore it is difficult to explore how they see the place. But these stories focus not on the physical environment, but rather on job and lodging opportunities. The Sovietising city welcomed them. The stories depicting the first Soviet years of Kohtla-Järve in the Russian and Estonian languages differ from one another in how they describe public and private spheres.

For the locals, time and place became parts of the same story. Their story had more layers and went deeper than that of the newcomers. The following example shows the local history of Käva (one of the industrial settlements that later

became part of the town), which, as an ancestors' story, reaches back to the pre-Great Nordic war times (17th century). In this narrative, the private (the farm, neighbours' fields) is intertwined with the public¹⁴ (oil shale mines, museum). One can see the links between natural and artificial conditions, historical continuities and interruptions, reality and narrative reality:

The oil shale mining touched us for the first time in the fall of 1919 when an experimental pit of an underground mine was dug in the field of the Mägi farm. It didn't work out, because the drainage was poor and the ceiling was weak. In 1919, 98 tons were excavated through underground works, while the open pit in Pavandu produced 9,500 tons of oil shale.

Some years later, Martin's horse fell into a hole created by a collapsed ceiling, so that only its ears could be seen, as a farmhand said. The location of the hole where they dug in those days is shown on a map at the oil shale museum. [---]

In about 1921 we were left only 4.5 hectares of fields. Also we lost some hay meadows, so that the size of the farm decreased to about 29 ha. Also other farms in the Käva village shrank, both in terms of fields and hay meadows. Open pit quarries were created in these lands. In 1927 they went underground from a quarry, from where our fields and Suuban's once were. Nowadays a bus stop at the old town department store is located there and underneath it pieces of the Kohtla-Järve Liberty monument, blown up in 1945, are buried.¹⁵ (MK: M2 1993.)

Place and history together create the basis for the story-teller's identity.¹⁶ The presence of layers of history and tales makes a place dependent on human practice and mentality – location is turned into space¹⁷. How can one notice these identities of time, place and space in a society which contains one tradition that

¹⁴ The concepts of private and public spheres are discussed, e.g., by Michael Jackson (2002: 9–12) and Ene Kõresaar (2004: 22–23). Jackson links the public and private through the concept of dialogue (storytelling as a level of communication), Kõresaar with biographical syncretism (the level of synthesis of different texts in biographical narratives). In this case we deal with home and relatives (private), streets and other public places in the town and communication levels (public sphere).

¹⁵ The War of Independence (1918–1920) is important in the context of the birth of the Republic of Estonia, as monuments dedicated to it were demolished during the first Soviet years and they have been re-erected and re-demolished according to political changes. This very monument has seen three births: first in 1928, again during the German times in the Second World War and then in 1993.

¹⁶ Åsa Ljungström (2003) provides an interesting reading of the links between place, history and identity in a paper about farmers-merchants in northern Sweden in the 19th century. Family tales about these men and their deeds have become important these days as a basis for creating and shaping local identities. See also Sooväli 2004: 101–105.

¹⁷ The interactions of space and place have been discussed by Paul Adams *et al.* (2001), Yi-Fu Tuan

carries the local past and another tradition that does not? Our materials allow us to study this from one of two positions (Estonian-speakers' narratives), even though this position contains parts of the other.

Inside and outside of home

The texts about Kohtla-Järve reveal, along with the transience of homes and everyday life in the rapidly changing society, the controversy and also the intertwining of 'us' and 'them', 'ours' and 'alien', private and public spheres. How can one be inside and at the same time outside *one's own* space in Kohtla-Järve? We introduce this topic with a text in which an 84-year-old woman describes her home in an apartment block in a new district of Kohtla-Järve. The narrative links warmth and love ('ours') with theft, smells etc. ('alien'):

Now I have a home in a block that has 150 one-room [¹⁸]-apartments. I live alone, in my warm nest, and I do love it. I protect it with two locks and at night also with a chain and an eye in the door, because somebody else has been using my new, only half-year-old TV, radio etc. for 1.5 years already. The stairs are always filled with fainting people, dog shit, junk and drunks. Some flats are occupied by 'businessmen', some by normal people. (MK: T2 2002.)

She is speaking of contrasts that are part of everyday life. A characteristic feature is that, unlike in another example where the author was depressed by the idea that she should visit her sister in Kohtla-Järve, this lady is not scared of the 'alien'. On the contrary, she synthesises these contrasts into one whole and finds the essential from a more general point of view: she stresses the importance of the mentality of a home, something that is not formed overnight and could not be accepted overnight. This could also be understood as adaptation.

The following example is from about 1960. It shows how a child distinguishes between 'us' and 'them' in his home space:

Their toilet was in the yard, some 15–20 metres from our house. Every year this wooden monster was painted and the smell of chlorine always pushed us farther away. After some years the building was torn down and four walls were erected around the holes. No roof, no doors. It was painted a terrible blue. The kids called it the blue ghost. The residents of the dormitory covered it with all sorts of boards. Once an old

(1977), Marc Augé (1995), Katriina Soini *et al.* (2006) and deserve a separate paper, as there seem to be discrepancies between the understanding of these in different disciplines.

¹⁸ Not one-bedroom, but just one-room – *H.P.*

bed was used for a roof, which was later accompanied by a closet door. All this 'beauty' was pulled down sometime at the very beginning of the 1970s, together with the dorm, because a new bookshop was built there. (EKLA f. 350, 150.)

The bookshop does not receive as much attention in this story as the toilet – the blue ghost. Obviously the length and style in which the toilet was described point to a certain negative attitude. This episode also displays the inability to change anything, the common weal in the town and around the buildings is shaped and defined by 'others'.

A woman who has lived in Kohtla-Järve since 1932 describes its environment from a more generalised socio-political viewpoint:

In the 1950s the settlement turned into [a place] densely populated by immigrants. Construction began. National culture was not that influential any more. Industries expanded and a Russian-speaking society emerged. There were no ethnic clashes. Russians were preferred, mostly for political reasons. Today there is almost no reluctance and the Russians are more [reluctant to the Estonian power]. (MK: J1 2003.)

All three examples have been recorded recently (1990, 2002, 2003), but they describe the situation at the beginning of the 2000s, the first Soviet years, or link these times into a comparison. Characteristic of these texts is the contingency of time; they do not depict a particular moment. Also the first example is a part of describing homes and a stage in the experience of living in Kohtla-Järve for 54 years (at present this woman lives in another house, her former house having been demolished (MK: T2 2004)).

The intensive migration after the Second World War created an environment where a certain conflict arose, both in the urban milieu and in interpersonal relations. But none of these comes up in a general and overwhelming way. As seen from the descriptions of the urban milieu (houses, homes) the conflict concentrates on public (stairs, outer door, neighbours' toilet) and not on private spheres. What about interpersonal relations?

As expected, Estonian-speaking storytellers remember conflicts with Russian children in their childhood. But it is a 'particular' conflict, as they also talk about playing together with Russian children, working in Russian schools, knowing the Russians' viewpoints, and understanding their links to Estonia (cf. EKLA f. 350, 150; 154; 1164; 1354; MK: Dialog, 5. theme, note no. 460. 2002). A woman born in 1942 remembers: '...we were supposed to go home from there [a shop], but one Russian boy pushed me into a ditch and **tramped** on my back.' When

asked why the boy did so the storyteller answered: ‘...but they considered us fascists.’ (MK: L2 2002). A man born in 1927 provides a similar example from the 1950s:

The Russians working in the mine did not tolerate Estonian schoolboys and attacked them when they came alone. One could not move freely and alone. Estonians were cursed as fascists. (EKLA f. 350, 154.)

Did the ethnic divide deepen over time? There were clear boundaries between Estonian and Russian pupils in the 1970s. A woman born in 1956 talks about the 1970s:

Pretty often a party was cancelled because school windows had been broken or the Russians had climbed into the school through another broken window. Every time somebody got beaten up when going home [---]. Once we got smacked around, together with two other girls, in the middle of the day, while going home. People were watching, but nobody cared to say anything to those Russians there. (EKLA f. 350, 150.)

There are pages of explanation of what to avoid and how to behave in order to stay out of trouble, as there are stories about what really happened. Conflicts are described, not in the context of feuds, but rather of safety: which places (ways) and situations were dangerous.

Similar fight models can be found in descriptions of folk cultures (although they have not been formed on an ethnic basis). A large and compact collection about the Finnish agrarian society¹⁹ has, typically, one-page note-like descriptions of village fights, mixed with longer stories about more concrete cases. Leaving aside case descriptions, the fights occurred during village parties, when strangers showed up, and on roads between villages where youths from different villages met and tried to establish themselves through fighting. Against that background, the events in Kohtla-Järve towards the end of the Soviet times could be seen not so much as conflict (in the sense that the enemy is a real one and should be defeated) but rather as behaviour traditional of young people in public places. There are at least two circumstances supporting this idea. First, Maria Yelenevskaya and Larisa Fialkova (2004), while studying migration, explain the reasons for physical violence. According to them, the societal status of immigrants, as a rule, is not high, which has an influence on their children, the second generation of immigrants. Referring also to other researchers, they argue that violence can

¹⁹ Helsinki, *Museovirasto*, Department of Ethnology. These notes and stories were sent by 294 respondents in 1956–1960. One of the eight themes of the questionnaire was village fights.

be understood as part of a 'system of cultural codes', which carries a communication function. Through this, group belonging and power positions could be communicated. Causing physical pain is a rather efficient 'language' when one cannot speak other languages or lacks comprehension. So it is understandable that boundaries of both state power and cultural and lingual comprehension accumulate in ethnic relations and this is why people tend to explain the problem based on ethnic origins.

Another argument supporting the Kohtla-Järve fighting as traditional is the approach adopted currently in Kohtla-Järve (both in the media and in the City Council²⁰) to avoid inter-ethnic tensions and to handle problems without bringing the ethnic issue up. Examples of broken doors, smelly stairways and street crime show that the problems are very serious and attention should be paid to them in order to make the territorially united space more united also in its external and mental dimensions.

It seems that the stories of people in contemporary Kohtla-Järve connect the private and public, the internal and the external into one whole, where, as needed, the negative or positive side is brought forward. This enables the storytellers to be *inside* and *outside* at the same time – the teller moves from one level to another, thereby redefining the boundaries of understanding. An external viewer sees only what can be experienced in the public sphere – causing a lack of ease with the town, an attitude of 'a business card that makes me feel dejected'.

Conclusions

Oral heritage links the stories of place and time into a whole, which permits an understanding and shaping of identity within the group itself. Both history and geography, on one hand, and people's understandings as expressed in texts, on the other, form a whole system, the study of which, in an interdisciplinary way, should be natural rather than surprising.

Scholars departing from different paradigms have different ideas about the role of oral heritage, history or geography in this system. The differing paradigms allow neither a single and theoretical approach nor methods for analysing these relations. In this paper we departed from contextual text analysis. This approach makes it possible to follow the context the storyteller uses for describing a place.

²⁰ Personal communication with one of the co-workers, autumn 2004 – T.J.

The role of the researcher is to interpret the texts, not to create them.

The texts about Kohtla-Järve focus on creating and losing homes, both in a material and a mental sense, intertwined with a synthesis of public and private spheres. This focus is caused by the fact that the area has gone through very rapid changes in the process of industrialisation (sudden creation of new jobs, immigration and urbanising society) during the 20th century. Large societal events cause turmoil in the everyday lives of ordinary people; people may adapt to these changes, but this does not imply indifference. The external changes are balanced, among others, by talking about the change, as illustrated by the example of the man talking about the three centuries of continuity of the family in Käva. These narrations show the understandings as well as boundaries of groups that carry traditions, as people do not talk only about their own past and evaluations of themselves and the situations that are based on that past. The stories also contain layers of the formation of value systems, and also experiences from communication with other groups. The rapidly changing situations during the first Soviet years created new traditions that, in turn, started shaping everyday urban life, but have lost their meaning in the new, post-Soviet political space. But these developments will not be erased fully, as the past was not erased when 'Grimetown' replaced 'Järve' village.

History gives a place an identity, as place creates history. Storytellers, being part of both space and time, put into words the tale of time and place, giving meanings to the stories from the position of their group. As the viewpoints differ, so do the stories, despite the fact that everybody shares the same place and time. Our materials show that public and private spheres seem to be the key concepts in studying place and stories: controversies and intertwining occur, first of all, in the public sphere. Thus, further research should concentrate on following and comparing how groups with different cultural and historical backgrounds describe private and public spheres. The problem is even more intriguing, as stories told in the Russian language do not expose the fight theme, although Russians must have made up one side of those fights. Kohta-Järve – one place, but different stories continue.

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