

Multicultural education in Estonia: why is it powerless in responding to islamophobia?

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ABSTRACT: The article aims to outline the differences between three different multicultural education projects and how their initiatives explore and integrate the topic of religious differences and the topic of Islam. Methodologically, the article uses thematic context analysis to compare all three multicultural education projects. Thematic content analysis facilitates the possibility to study what is being discussed in the multicultural context and how it is being interpreted through different ideas and concepts. These education projects aim to create a common language environment and a new (integrated) national identity. Based on the Estonian super-secular society (less than 19% of Estonians considered themselves part of some congregation or religion), the peculiarities of religious orientation are not so much considered in these multicultural learning strategies and Islam occurs in connection with radicalism.

KEYWORDS: multiculturalism, Islamophobia, religion, secularity, radicalism

BACKGROUND

The face of Islam in Estonia was the face of Tatar Muslims. According to 2011 census records, there were 1.508 Muslims, of which 604 were Tatar, 299 Azeri, 148 Estonian and 107 were Russian (Census 2011). Religion is imperative among the Tatars in understanding their nationality and themselves. “Estonian Tatars see religion as something confined to the home, an attitude inherited from the Soviet period. They continue some practices, mostly in the case of the older generation, but they doubt their true character as Muslims or their ‘Muslimness’ (Lepa 2020: 76). The membership structure of the Estonian Islamic Congregation reflects the Tatar understanding of membership in a religious institution: religion is part of a cultural identity and thus one can become a member of the Estonian Islamic Congregation only through membership in an ethnic minority cultural society (Statue of EIC 2015). The goal of

the charter change was to affirm that ethnic groups remain at the forefront of power and to retain ethnic and cultural consistency and control over the congregation. The charter change is also indicative of the internal understanding of the congregation that something has changed inside as well as outside the congregation. It is a defence mechanism to ensure the cultural and ethnic identity of the congregation in the face of varying external identities. Thus, the Muslim community in Estonia is made up of Muslims with a Tatar cultural and ethnic background rather than Muslims with a migratory and Middle Eastern background.

According to the Human Rights in Estonia 2020 report, human rights, in comparison to the rest of the world, have been an equally large pain point in Estonia. Similar to the rest of Europe, far-right populism has spread across Estonia and right-wing politics, especially populist parties, are finding increasingly more success. Consequently, the rise of these parties has brought various questions around migration back into the limelight. However, the latter has largely occurred in a negative light, questioning all that has been achieved on the matter thus far (Estonian Institute of Human Rights 2020).

The 2019 study of the adaptation of newly arrived migrants in Estonia indicated a negative attitude and exclusion based on religious and racial characteristics, which has increased significantly in recent years. The results of the study highlight a persistent need to contribute towards lessening unfounded fears surrounding migrants among Estonians. This contribution must be systematic, based on facts, and raising public consciousness around this subject should include the help of the education system (Kaldur, Kivistik, Pohla, Veliste, Pertsjonok, Käger, & Roots 2019).

Based on the above, it is understandable that the assessment of the Migrant Integration Policy Index of 2020 for Estonia posits that “the legal protections and support for victims of discrimination in Estonia are weaker than in any other EU country, which can undermine awareness, reporting, and trust among potential victims” (Solano and Huddleston 2020:17).

Fear of Islam is rising in the context of immigration. According to the Islamophobia in Estonia Report, in 2019 there were “two examples of physical attacks that could be considered Islamophobic, although it is difficult to make the distinction between anti-migrant bias and specifically Islamophobic bias. Verbal attacks were more common according to refugee organisations, but these were usually not reported to the police. The attacks reflect a hostile attitude towards refugees and migrants, promoted by rightwing politicians” (Rünne & Laanpere 2019: 250). The Runnymede Trust Report (1997) defined the concept of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim prejudice and describes such a closed view through the following perspectives: “1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static, and unresponsive to change. 2. Islam is seen as separate and “other.” 3. Islam is seen as inferior to the West and is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist. 4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism. 5. Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage. 6. Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand. 7. Hostility toward Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices toward Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society. 8. Hostility to Muslims is seen as natural or normal”

(The Runnymede Trust Report 1997:1; Tiliouine & Estes 2016: 626).

However, Estonian society is characterized not only by fear for newly arrived migrants in Estonia, but also by indifference and misunderstanding of religion. A new study on Estonian religiosity and religious life in 2020 noted how the importance of religion had grown year on year, where a growth of 37% in 2015 had increased to 41% in 2020. However, relatively speaking, the growth had been rather small. On average, religion has been more important among women, non-Estonians, and people with lower incomes (Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ 2020). The religious identity of Estonians was most aptly described as “spiritual, but not religious”—this was the opinion of 28% of the study’s participants, while 26% considered themselves non-religious, 22% were apathetic towards religion and 19% of participants considered themselves as religious. Familiarity was most felt with Christianity, Native Religion and atheism. 37% believed in the existence of God. Belonging to a Christian congregation was more prevalent among non-Estonians, making up 26% as opposed to around 20% among Estonians. However, attending church service was just around 5% (Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ 2020).

In conclusion, the situation of religiosity in Estonia underlines the need for discourse surrounding the inclination towards religion rather than the supposed and constant non-religiosity and lack of belonging to a specific congregation. These religious inclinations become apparent not only among questions surrounding identity, but also in common undecidedness (common occurrence of “ratherism”) (Rommel & Uibu 2015).

In light of this, the question to be asked is how are Estonian integration development plans, education strategies and programmes prepared to face the growing migration situation (especially concerning the Afghan crisis) and the nationalist, cultural and religious questions represented by religious immigrants? The Estonian school curricula for both middle and high schools list the following general competencies: cultural and value competencies as well as social and civic competencies. Cultural and value competencies include, but are not limited to, the ability to perceive and value the connection between one’s own cultural heritage and (cultural) diversity as well as those of other nations and peoples, recognise one’s own value structures and take such structures into consideration in decision-making and in being tolerant (Riigi Teataja 2012).

In the Estonian context, a distinction is made between religious education and *confessional religious* education (Religious education 2021). The former is confessional and the latter deals with the description and translation of religious phenomenon. Confessional religious education has spread especially in Christian private schools in preschool and middle school. The confessional religious education given in private schools is based on the conditions set by the school’s council, but even confessional religious education must remain a voluntary choice for students (Riigi Teataja 1998). In accordance with the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, non-confessional religious studies are voluntary for students, but mandatory for the school if the school grade has at least 15 students wishing to study it (Riigi Teataja 2012). Religious studies is taught today in roughly 70 schools (including private schools).

Based on the extreme secularity of the Estonian society, it is important to ask how much do conceptions of multicultural education consider religious diversity and how does religion manifest in these conceptions?

Since 2015, there have been strong attempts to develop multicultural educational strategies and several different programmes have been developed. The following projects have been established in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research: The Co-Learning School Project (2016); The Human Rights Education Project (2017) and; The Unified Estonian School Project (2018-2021). The latter project has resulted in an action plan, a specific school model, thematic packages, analyses and teaching materials. The former two have remained in their research phase. While they were great initiatives, they did not reach their development phase.

The article discusses the extent to which the aforementioned projects and their initiatives promote multiculturalism to consider religious diversity in speaking about multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity and to what extent different religions, including Islam, are covered.

It should be noted that all three school concepts define the concept of multiculturalism differently and use different materials to explain and analyse the concept. Accordingly, the discussion of the concept of multiculturalism is also different for different school concepts - it is not possible to provide a uniform definition.

Methodologically, the article focuses on thematic content analysis of the three multicultural education projects. The thematic content analysis makes it possible to study what is being discussed in the multicultural context and how it is being interpreted through these ideas and concepts (Kalmus, Masso, & Linno 2015). Thematic analysis helps determine:

- (i) What is the purpose and methodology of these projects?
- (ii) How far did their research get?
- (iii) In what manner are multiculturalism and religious themes depicted?
- (iv) What are the actions required for the immediate betterment of cross-cultural integration according to these projects?

The final part of the article compares the results of the analyses and discusses the question of why, despite the development, extensive research, and the creation of different materials for different multicultural education projects, the fear around Islam persists in Estonia?

CO-LEARNING SCHOOL—A CONCEPT REGARDING THE QUALITY REQUIREMENT FOR SCHOOLS WHERE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS STUDY

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The Co-Learning School Project began its development in Estonia in 2016—it described different multicultural school types and competencies. The purpose of this project

was directed at schools with students from different cultures. The development of the project was to be useful for both students as well as schools, and shift more focus on inclusive school environments, culturally aware teaching arrangements, the inclusion of the community, non-formal study and cross-subject integration (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). It was influenced by the migration crisis since in presenting the project's terms of reference, it was emphasised that there were around 400 new immigrants and returnees studying in Estonian schools and schools were continuously receiving students from refugee families as well as exchange students (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). Likewise, it was acknowledged that while multiculturalism in a school setting might be an everyday reality, neither the schools nor the teachers are prepared for the arrival of students with new cultural backgrounds. Five pilot schools were chosen. The Co-Learning School Project launched in three schools and one kindergarten in 2016 (Ministry of Culture 2017).

The project set a goal of achieving the following objectives in 2016-2020:

(i) Describe the current state of multilingual schools from a multicultural standpoint (environment, language use, importance of different cultures) and map out the specific struggles of different school types)

(ii) Describe the quality requirements for schools with students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

(iii) Present a programme that sets forth different crucial support structures that would aid kindergarten and schoolteachers in apprehending and bettering discussions around the topic of multiculturalism and in applying the principles of content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

(iv) Investigate the fruitfulness of these supportive structures in the five pilot schools in the 2016/2017 school year. Choosing the pilot schools would be based on voluntary cooperation starting from May of 2016 (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

In articulating the challenges of the project, various different studies were relied on that supported both a better language immersion for the Russian student body as well as new immigrant integration. For example, it was highlighted that in order to construct knowledge, it is necessary to develop a complete picture of the world, not just a combination of different fragments. In order to decrease prejudices, it is important to not just break racial and ethnic stereotypes, but also, in the Estonian context, overcome the disturbance on an ethnic basis created in relation to different ethnicities. The flexible use of comparative pedagogy, including specifically different teaching methods and technologies, is especially important (Ministry of Education and Research 2016; Kivistik, Pohla, Kaldur 2019). Consequently, the challenges of multicultural schools were that are characteristic of largely Russian-speaking schools and schools with high amounts of immigrant students were underlined.

The following were viewed as challenges for multicultural schools that have been subject to an increasing number of new immigrants:

- (1) The lack of knowledge and skills to teach Estonian as a second language.
- (2) Scarce cultural knowledge.
- (3) Lacklustre topical integration knowledge.
- (4) Ineptitude to involve the parents of students from minority groups or those with immigrant backgrounds.
- (5) Inability to combat the reluctant attitude of students towards other students of different nationalities.
- (6) The lack of monetary resources to hire additional workforce that would better the involvement of immigrant students in classes and create different hobby groups (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

WHAT WERE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY?

The roundtables organised in the Co-Learning School project raised the idea that similar to a bilingual school, the integration within schools with migration backgrounds would benefit from the consideration of and the mindfulness around core values, language immersion, flexible and conscious communication with the community, and the development of an environment that favours integration (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

The development of the model relied heavily on the theory of USA social scientist James A. Banks. The theory is based on five components: content integration, the knowledge construction process, an equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks 1998). In order to see change in the school environment, the following are required:

- Activities that would support integration during and outside of class.
- Excellent content and language integration.
- Cultured teaching arrangements.
- A friendly and inclusive school culture that values diversity.
- Cooperative community (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

The project did not reach its implementation phase and its operational plans, different models, and teaching materials were not developed.

RECOGNITION OF MULTICULTURALITY AND RELIGION IN THE CONCEPT

In setting its goals and expected outcomes, the Co-Learning School leaned on the concise objective of relating multiculturalism in schools through a clear programme. The programme outlined the following:

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- (i) Multicultural schools have a student-friendly school culture that values and supports the integration of different cultures.
 - (ii) The management and the teachers of multicultural schools are well-versed in the principles of content and language integrated learning (CLIL)—the teachers are confident and skilful at its implementation.
 - (iii) Multicultural schools are actively collaborating with the community.
 - (iv) The teaching in multicultural schools is culturally informed and sensitive (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

The project speaks mainly about two aspects of multiculturalism, Russian-Estonian multiculturalism and new-immigrant multiculturalism - these two are differentiated. The Co-Learning School programme does not deal with topics on the culture of religion nor the consideration of students' religious values. The concept of religion does not appear at all in the programme, not even in the introduction nor when speaking about values and ethnic differences. However, the description of the project mentions Islam in relation to constructing cultural knowledge and the integration of culture into school subjects. It is mentioned that knowledge obtained from cultures remains fragmented and different aspects of how to connect various cultures in the classroom are not focused on. Teachers participating in the study mention that in relation to the refugee crisis, it is not enough to "conduct lectures on Islam in schools. Often-times, it is believed that celebrating Saint Martin's Day in Russian-language schools or conducting an Islamic lecture are good examples of cultural education" (Ministry of Education and Research 2016: 6). In regard to outlining existing State measures in relation to supporting multiculturalism in schools, the non-profit Islamic Cultural Centre is highlighted, which organises Islamic Information Days in schools (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). This brings out the idea that Islam is spoken of as a culture that is unknown in Estonian schools and something that Estonian schools should be prepared to know.

Religions other than Islam are not mentioned. The Co-Learning School model is an answer to what teachers and school leaders fear and anticipate. There is a desire to react to the flow of new immigrants in Estonia and quality requirements for schools are developed so that schools would be able to better manage integration. However, this does not take into account the aspects of religiosity of the Islamic faith and its value system. It does not consider the fact that the value system by which students with an immigrant background and parents (if they are Muslim) operate is not secular, but religious. Concurrently, the Co-Learning School programme mentions the necessity for expert advice and the development of 101 materials - this makes it apparent that a broader preparedness which would include religious (including Islamic) topics is necessary for teachers and school staff (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). Religion, in the context of the Co-Learning School Project, is rather viewed as the convergence with the foreign Islamic culture.

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE IMPROVED INTEGRATION OF CULTURES ACCORDING TO THE STUDIES OF THE CO-LEARNING SCHOOL?

Foremost, it was apparent that multiculturalism is always viewed in relation to language teaching in both the context of Estonian-Russian integration as well as the new immigrant context. Language is a tool for integration in the education system as well as a necessity in society as a whole. Language is the basis through which the protection of national identity is created.

The usage of the Banks model is suggested to ensure better integration, of which the founder, James A. Banks, is one of the main developers of multicultural teaching. Chiefly, the starting point was integration and multicultural education where the focus is on valuing and celebrating diversity, concentrating on creating positive relationships with the goal being to show different perspectives to the majority of students and include the background of minority students in study materials (Banks 1998). Foremost, the aim of such an approach is social harmony and the appreciation and knowledge of others (Järv and Kirssi 2019). Herein, it is crucial to remember to talk about different cultures whilst teaching and the aim is to create a unified social environment. However, it was very apparent from the programme what its weak points were. The accountability was mostly placed on schools and the education system to develop an integration-supporting environment for both Russian-speaking students and those with immigration backgrounds. The basis for the creation of this new environment is the recognition of a unified value space by the entire school staff and the conscious development of a unified identity (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). Additionally, schools are expected to have teachers who are better prepared for the integration of students with different cultural backgrounds (i.e. a 101 course for teachers would be required), make proposals for the project, create an environment that would support integration and have stronger linguistic support as well as developing extracurricular projects that would support socialisation (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). The introduction of religious studies into schools which would help students to understand and interpret a different worldview more broadly was not considered in the solutions' proposal.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION PROJECT

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The preparation of the concept was based on the understanding that the various demographic, social and immigrant processes that Estonia is subject to have made Estonian schools more diverse. This results in a situation where Estonian schools, now more than ever, must consider students' cultural, ethnic, religious, ideological and gender-specific backgrounds (Institute of Baltic Studies and Estonian Institute of Human Rights 2017). In support of these differences, the Ministry of Education and Research planned to develop the Human Rights Education Project and establish clear guidelines to ensure the integration of the human rights topic into different areas of the education system. The objective of the study was to highlight understandings

and directives that would aid in defining human rights education more clearly and to implement it more smoothly so that a unified understanding of why it is necessary to raise awareness of human rights education in both the school environment as well as in youth work more broadly would develop (Kivistik et al. 2019).

The study conducted for the project, undertaken in 2017, and its conclusions are based on qualitative data collection from Estonian schools. It consisted of interviews in 10 Estonian schools among 25 focus groups. Additionally, four expert interviews were conducted by experts educated in human rights. In order to create context, laws pertaining to school policies in Estonia were analysed and documents introduced in schools were reviewed (strategies, school rules, curricula, et cetera) in order to understand if and to what extent they include themes of human rights (education). The study's strong advantage is its description of exemplary human rights education practices in both the school context as well as in different projects that have shown great results in other countries such as Finland, Holland, Iceland and Australia (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

WHAT WERE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY?

In conclusion, the general layout set the expectation that both students and teachers would be well-versed in the fact that human rights pertain to all people and they would be able to name specific rights and situations where those rights are infringed upon. The staff, teachers as well as students within the school would be able to relate human rights with school life and studies. However, this ability manifests more in the discussion of the topic rather than as a conscious practice. Especially for students, human rights were mainly understood from an individual rights perspective. Teachers and leaders saw the need, in talking about human rights, to consider the needs of others and highlight those needs next to the needs of themselves (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The study highlighted several great practices of how to include students and parents and what the methods for implementing human rights education should be. On the topic of empowering youth, the study references an idea of a particular school with the creed "Notice, Influence, Change", which sets the objective of teaching to notice those around you and to intervene if help is needed (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

One of the methods highlighted for the teaching of human rights is discussing human rights in the context of history as well as on the examples of topical events. For younger students, this can be in the form of relating it to art and fairy tales. Aside from specific opportunities arising from celebrating something like the Citizenship Day, it is necessary to create opportunities for practising democratic processes (for example, the development of a student council). Additionally, initiatives such as interdisciplinary school projects, movie screenings, creating comics, excursions and inviting foreign guests can also help (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The concept did not reach its implementation phase and its operational plans, different models and teaching materials were not developed.

RECOGNITION OF MULTICULTURALITY AND RELIGION IN THE CONCEPT

The introduction of the study mentions that demographic, social and immigration processes are connected to change. The Estonian school environment is changing to something more diverse and there is an increasing need to consider and understand students' cultural, ethnic, religious, ideological and gender-based backgrounds. The cultural focus of the study is based on the goal for sustainable development agreed to by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 that emphasises sustainable development through global citizenship and valuing of cultural diversity (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The Human Rights Education Project discusses religion from a cultural aspect and those discussions refer mainly to the Islamic religion and cultural space. These aspects manifest in the presentation of the study which had been undertaken with teachers and leaders in mainly dealing with migration topics. For example, the study's analysis highlights that "on the back of new migratory movements, teachers feel uncertain in dealing with the background of students and their parents from these migration areas, especially in regards to adjusting their religious particularities into Estonian norms" (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017:36). Islamic practises are also referenced by teachers' worries of how to establish rules around prayer during class or an exam or absences due to cultural reasons. In response to these worries, the authors of the study propose that when it comes to religious aspects, one should look at the practices of other countries and their effect on society as a whole and build a framework around that. The study clearly noted that these questions emerge from scarce experience with such situations and create a fear of conflict around restricting someone's human rights (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017). In the secular Estonian context, the above proposal can be rephrased accordingly: these situations emerge from limited contact with religion in the classroom and an inability as well as a fear of interpreting a different cultural-religious context.

The part of the study that deals with human rights and the implementation of its fundamental values within schools does not specifically highlight freedom of religion. This is partly understandable as the authors present the list of rights as thematic groups—for example, gender equality, freedom of expression or lack thereof, nationality, skin colour and sexual orientation. These differences do not mention religion. However, the research analyses of the same chapter highlight the topic of religion and outline the scenarios that could occur in a school environment if "a student with a specific religious or cultural background needs to pray during a class or be absent from school for cultural reason" (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017:26). It was noted that as people know little of cultural and religious differences and exposure to such situations is rather poor, people are afraid to make mistakes and create conflicts (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The topics of cultural values, multiculturalism and religion were more palpable in the analysis of exemplary practises of others, mapping the examples of Finland, Holland, Iceland and Australia, which have seen significant changes in the implementation of human rights and their foundational values into their curricula. While the

study does not specifically differentiate between cultural and religious aspects, the description of good practices does (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE IMPROVED INTEGRATION OF CULTURES ACCORDING TO THESE STUDIES?

The broad objective of the Human Rights Education Project is to improve the appreciation of social rights in schools and promote education around global citizenship. Accordingly, students' knowledge about social, environmental, economic and political aspects have to be improved. Human rights education focuses on the student's role in society so that the student would know how to act democratically, notice unjust actions and patterns and feel an intrinsic need to intervene (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The studies and analyses occurred during the migration crisis period, therefore bringing into focus the integration of different cultures. Additionally, the undertaking of the study also happened when right-wing and populist thinking was increasing in Europe. Due to this, the introduction of the social-political context to students was more prominent than for the Co-Learning School model. The descriptions in the study highlight unfair treatment and topics related to minorities—the refugee crisis is one topic that the social-values context is constantly exposed to. Students in the study were able to define minorities as also immigrants and persons under international protection (i.e. refugees) as well as black people. In relation to topics regarding refugees, it was apparent that it is not about people from Portugal or Ukraine, but rather refugees from Syria, the Middle East and North Africa, whose (mass) entry Europe was then subject to (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

The focus group of the study was mainly people from the Estonian education system, including school leaders, teachers and students. The uncertain preparedness for change and fears around specific human rights subjects was apparent from the entire focus group. It was widely thought that many *hot* topics such as LGBT or immigrants are not really class topics as they are controversial and could divide the classroom (Institute of Baltic Studies et al. 2017).

UNIFIED ESTONIAN SCHOOL PROJECT

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

An extensive research project began in 2018 called “Migration dependence and integration challenges for the Estonian government, employers, communities and the education system”. The objective of the project was to map out and present solutions to problems related to migration and restrictions around integration. One of the project's sub-objectives was to develop a suitable school model for Estonia that would take multiculturalism into account (Kivistik et al. 2019).

The project dubbed the school model the Unified Estonian School, which is defined as follows: “The Unified Estonian School is a school that supports the self-fulfilment of the Estonian national identity in the community and values the cultural identity of

students following the national curriculum and/or those with a cultural background who are following a mainly Estonian curriculum based on principles of contemporary learning” (Pedaste, Kirss, & Kitsnik 2019:3).

The school model raised the key issue that Estonia has few “evidence-based methods and means to deal with multiculturalism in society” (Pedaste et al. 2019:3).

The need for the Unified Estonian School was based on the assumptions that:

- (i) A segregated school system recreates social divide.
- (ii) Studying Estonian as a second language is ineffective.
- (iii) Continued education is highly dependent on Estonian language competency.
- (iv) The Estonian society is changing and its members have to be better prepared for this change.

Similar to the vision of the Co-Learning School, the project took into account the need for language learning, making it sustainable and incorporating culturally-sensitive teaching (Rääsk et al. 2020). The project took into consideration the integration of the Estonian society concept which had the main objectives of developing and strengthening a unified national identity, preservation and development of cultural identities and increasing the cultural commonalities of the population. Culturally sensitive teaching was seen as the main supportive agent of multicultural education (Pedaste et al. 2019:3). While the topic of multiculturalism was handled in several different analyses in the study, it was mainly in relation to the question of identity. The Unified Estonian School Project also built on the understanding of multi-identity. In comparison to other concepts, the topics around identity are key discussion points. It takes into consideration that the cultural background of students in Estonian schools is a defining part of their identity (Rääsk et al. 2020). The objective of many of the concept’s base studies is to develop a unified language environment and a (well-integrated) national identity (Ehala 2019).

There were several different methodological approaches and data to be used in developing the concept, starting from different general demographical surveys, integration studies, questionnaires for different target groups, seminars and trainings. The Unified Estonian School is not simply meant for regular schools, but also for different educational institutions including kindergartens and studies for adults. A lot of focus was also put on community studies and a community-supporting role (Rääsk et al. 2020).

WHAT WERE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY?

In comparison to the other education concepts, this concept managed to, from its terms of reference and studies, put together a whole project. Both tools and mechanisms for the prevention and solution of integration-related problems in schools and communities were developed. A migration income-expense model was built which also encompassed the expenses of the Unified Estonian School. The Unified Estonian

School was one project that was included in the wider migration and integration context and helped build clearer packages, models and solutions (Rääsk et al. 2020). Many different studies were undertaken during the project as the project's objectives were broader than just developing a new school model. However, the current description only pertains to the different packages, models and scientific supporting materials (the list of materials is available in the bibliography) of the Unified Estonian School.

Summaries were developed of the Unified Estonian School during 2018-2020 named "The Unified Estonian School—a vision of the future of schools" and a model analysis "The development of the Unified Estonian School model in Estonia". Additionally, different guides, self-analysis tools, teaching materials and thematic descriptions were developed which would support the introduction of the Unified Estonian School model into the Estonian society and education landscape. These materials can be divided into three thematic areas:

(1) Great practises and examples in Europe, including "The European school—an example of cultural and linguistic diversity in school" (Soll 2019); "Multilingual and multicultural school—examples from international practises in Europe" (Säälik et al. 2019) and "The politics of multiculturalism in Norwegian and Swedish schools" (Pukspuu 2020).

These materials highlighted that Europe has been faced with the question of integration and finding of good practices for a long time. Nordic education systems have developed different methods of how to solve the problems arising from multiculturalism as well as marginalisation and radicalisation.

(2) Language teaching methodologies and proposals for making classes more diverse, including "Estonian learning model for adult immigrants—REDEL" (Praagli & Klaas-Lang 2020); "Multi-perspective and culturally-sensitive teaching of history in Estonian schools" (Oja 2020); "Materials supporting culturally-sensitive teaching for teachers" (Järv & Kirss 2019); "Our multi-lingual and multicultural school. Evaluation guideline for schoolmasters and school leaders" (Järv & Kirss 2020).

This sub-category includes methodology, teaching materials as well as self-analysis opportunities for teachers and school leaders. It becomes immediately apparent that multicultural education is associated foremost with building a strong language-teaching foundation. It is believed that through the teaching of the Estonian language, it becomes possible to create a multi-identity for students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds where mutual values are built on the foundation of students' cultural identity and Estonian national identity.

(3) Topics related to radicalisation and support of the community, including "Integration of communities, transnationalism; conflict and radicalisation" (Ainsaar, Maasing, Nahkur, Narusson, Roots, Salvat, Uibu, & Vihalemm 2020), "Prevention of polarisation and radicalisation. Collaboration between the local

government and the community” (Maasing 2018), “Radical violence and radicalisation in schools – 10 answers a teacher should know” (Maasing & Salvet 2020); “Analysis of ethnic conflict” (Nahkur et al. 2020), “Proposals to schools for the prevention of ethnic conflicts and radicalisation” (Nahkur & Maasing 2019).

In relation to radicalisation, the need to increase information pertaining to the multicultural world in school programmes was raised. Additionally, the education system needs to consider ethnic and racial stereotypes and religious polarisation, especially as the root of conflicts. The studies emphasise that schools need to develop a conscious feeling of inclusion and shared values among students and underline tolerance, gender equality, equal rights and a unified national identity” (Nahkur & Maasing 2019).

In addition to special guidance, the standalone document “RITA-migration package 5, main research conclusions and proposals for schools” offers general recommendations on the basis of migration-research results which highlight the importance of prevention of radicalisation in schools (Narusson et al. 2020).

RECOGNITION OF MULTICULTURALITY AND RELIGION IN THE CONCEPT

The preliminary version of the Unified Estonian School made no mention of religion nor any religious perceptions. The terms of reference only touch upon multiculturalism and ethnical as well as racial differences which are to be considered in relation to multicultural educational environments. The subject of religion is integrated into the final report and in many of the materials related to the concept.

Cultural diversity is encouraged but the integration must, first and foremost, happen through language and creating a multi-identity (Tammaru et al. 2020). Similar to the Co-Learning School vision, multiculturalism is always viewed in relation to language study and in the Estonian-Russian integration context. The emphasis of the concept was on the development of different language teaching methods, environments and materials that would form a collection of materials and documents on the entire subject of multiculturalism in education.

Alongside notions of culture and ethnicity, the final report also mentions religion. This is largely connected to research by Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín and Wacziarg, which analysed how cultural diversity, including its religious aspect, is connected to the potentiality of the emergence of large civil unrest and civil wars as well as the number of public services available in the society based on the World Values Survey (Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín ja Wacziarg 2017). The conclusions of the research by Desmet, Ortuño-Ortín and Wacziarg, highlight the potentiality of the occurrence of value-based conflicts such as those based on individual liberty, child-rearing or attitudes towards different cultural traditions. Such a chance of value-conflicts occurring is more likely in societies where ethnic groups that differ greatly in their religious beliefs or ethnic-religious groups live side-by-side with very secular groups (Tammaru et al. 2020).

Next to education that is multicultural and socially just, the Unified Estonian School Project considers the most effective student-centred and integration-supporting approach to be through culturally sensitive teaching methods (Järv & Kirss 2019).

Culturally sensitive teaching is characterised by relating the student's cultural background with the subject of study and its methods – the students are given an opportunity to reflect critically on their life and topics in society and the student's cultural competency and ability to discuss social-political matters is supported (Aronson & Laughter 2016:163).

Culturally sensitive teaching materials also mention religion. For example, in connection with developing a supportive environment, it is highlighted that “when a classroom contains posters that depict people, those people should represent different races, genders and religions” (Järv & Kirss 2019: 4). The term *beliefs* is also mentioned and it is said that “it is important for studies to delve deep into cultures that are related to the student's identity and beliefs” (Järv & Kirss 2019: 2). The text also makes mention of Islam in introducing specific tools for teaching, including the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT). It is mentioned that the tests help to evaluate one's own prejudices towards race, Islam and skin tones (Järv & Kirss 2019: 11).

Religion in the context of the materials and the baseline study of the Unified Estonian School Project was mainly discussed in relation to topics relating to radicalisation. In reference to the polarisation of society, examples are brought of Russians, immigrants and Muslims or the opposition of Christians and Muslims are mentioned. Albeit, these examples are brought in a positive light that society should avoid such polarisation so that the members of these groups would not feel as if they were under the microscope simply due to their national or religious belonging (Maasing 2018). Religion is mentioned in relation to different extremes (radical right-wing, radical left-wing and religion-inspired radicalism). The topic of religion is also raised in relation to propaganda pertaining to radical religiosity (Maasing 2018).

These materials focused on radicalisation define religion as both part of culture, noting that “One of the RITA Project's target groups is new immigrants in relation to whom we talk mainly about cultural identity that is based on ethnic, religious and racial identity” (Maasing 2018:4), and as separate from culture. Religion is what reflects students' diversity (Maasing 2018:9). The term *religion* appears in the context of a warning where a teacher must be vigilant if someone is becoming more religious (Maasing 2018:9). The final recommendation also raises the idea that if collaboration with local government is established and there is a search for a point of contact to encourage integration, then those points-of-contact should be competent in discussing questions around religion in schools (Maasing 2018:11). Religiosity is also discussed in relation to the possibility of conflict, highlighting the Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche 2015 analysis' understanding that, like ethnic identity, religious identity increases opposition to those from another group (Bloom, Arikan, & Courtemanche 2015; Nahkur, Ainsaar, Maasing, & Roots 2020). Similarly, religious themes in relation to radicalisation can be found in the document “RITA-migration package 5, main research conclusions and proposals for schools” as well as in the final report which again associates religion with radicalisation and as a precursor to conflict and relates religion's strong ethnic values to a source of danger (Narusson et al. 2020:7).

Religion was additionally dubbed as a sensitive topic in the research analysis “Multi-perspective and culturally sensitive teaching of history in Estonian schools”. The

study, conducted among history teachers, highlighted that what is meant by religion being a sensitive topic is mainly in relation to Islam as teachers were asked the following question: “Oftentimes, some history lessons can contain sensitive subjects because they can be interpreted in several ways and society’s opinions about the matters can trigger an emotional response. Please rate the level of sensitivity that each of the below topics has for you” (Kaarlõp & Oja 2020:21). The 14 topics listed included the year 1944 in Estonian history, Putin’s Russia, right-wing and left-wing radicalism as well as Islam followed by the topic of migration (Kaarlõp & Oja 2020:21). The list did not mention any other religion nor was there a mention of religion in general.

The materials of the Unified Estonian School Project contained an extensive self-analysis tool for schoolmasters and school leaders called “Our multilingual and multicultural school: evaluation guidelines for schoolmasters and school leaders”. The questionnaire of the self-analysis had religion next to culture and ideology and contained the question of “Which religious, cultural or ideological factors play an important role for students and the school community?” (Kirss & Järv 2020:6). Therefore, religion is foremost related to the background of teachers and students. Following questions that pertain to school organisation, multicultural education and educational goals do not mention religion.

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE IMPROVED INTEGRATION OF CULTURES ACCORDING TO THESE STUDIES?

The entire RITA Migration Project developed thematic summaries which described pluriculturalism and multi-identity. This included studies and thematic analyses such as “Multiculturalism: a theoretical framework” and “Pluriculturalism and inclusion opportunities and challenges in Estonia.” These documents are based on the principle that different cultures and identities are inevitable and necessary in the contemporary globalising world, but the concept of multi-identity needs to be introduced in order to have integration (Raud 2019).

The main suggestion in these materials for schools is that students of other languages should, alongside acquiring Estonian-language education, also acquire Estonian cultural competency and national identity in order to be accepted among Estonians. However, acquiring the new Estonian identity would not exclude one’s own identity, but quite the opposite—school life would support and value the different cultural identities of students. Therefore, it is not necessary to abandon or reject one’s own culture, but the expectation is simply for the change towards multi-identity. The foundation of this understanding is based on the results of the study by Desmeti, Ortuño-Ortíni and Wacziargi (2017) according to which diversity enriches the community only if the diversity is balanced and supported with shared values (for example, in the context of the Unified Estonian School, this would mean the development of inclusion through national identity (Ehala 2019).

According to the idea of multi-identity, the acquisition of new competencies, especially Estonian cultural identity competency, is paramount. This new cultural acquisition means that a new layer of competency is added to previous cultural competency.

It is highlighted that such a multi-identity approach differs from widespread multicultural understandings. Multiculturalism, in the context of integration, means the regulation of power dynamics between the majority and minority groups, mostly the implementation of group-specific compensation methods for members of the minority in order to equalise alleged social barriers in society which restrict them from being successful such as they are (Ehala 2019; Vetik 2018).

The development of multi-identity and the feeling of inclusion is not based on the desire to regulate or organise different ethnic groups, but rather to expand people's cultural competency further so that immigrants would feel like part of the locals. Likewise, one should not ignore nor deny people's national identity which is part of their distinctive cultural competency and a value unto itself. Importantly, it is noted that nobody should be discriminated against nor treated differently due to their distinctive cultural competency (Ehala 2019).

COMPARISON AND INFERENCES—MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN ESTONIA AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Comparing these three education concepts—the Co-Learning School, Human Rights Education Project and the Unified Estonian School—all three concepts are a reaction to the migration crisis and the question of how to manage new immigrant integration into the school environment, considering therein the situation and opportunities of the Estonian school. The Co-Learning School and Human Rights School concepts remained in the initial research phase in which work began on developing their vision and reached only the development of their description and mapping which marked the necessity of the schools and the current climate. Therefore, it was only possible to analyse two documents. The Unified Estonian School Project is thus different—the concept reached programme development with the creation of thematic packages, different school models, study materials and self-analysis opportunities. This, in turn, makes it rank higher in its proverbial weight group as its analyses provided, in comparison to other concepts, several additional documents. Therefore, it is understandable that both cultural diversity and religion and Islam topics are more prevalent in these studies and materials in comparison to the Co-Learning School and Human Rights Education studies.

Additionally, it is apparent that the three different concepts are not only reacting to the migration crisis, but they are in the very epicentre of the crisis, meaning that they describe changes taking place in the society, hot topics and fears as they are happening. It is also to be mentioned that the two former concepts lay a foundation for the third concept by describing the situation in Estonian schools, how teachers, school leaders, the community and students perceive the need for change in schools in order to integrate both Russian-speaking students as well as new immigrants who come from a different ethnic, cultural and religious background.

All the school visions were based on different models of multiculturalism and differently defined how to understand culture in the school setting and to what end it should be applied in school life as well as study materials and the school model. In the

case of the Co-Learning School, multiculturalism was understood on the basis of Banks' theory where the objective is to show the student majority different perspectives and include the background of the minority in the study materials and to focus on the creation of positive relationships in the classroom. In the case of the Human Rights School, the foundation for multiculturalism was rather social co-existence based on respect for one another.

The Unified Estonian School operated based on the theory of cultural sensitivity where the focal point is not a tolerant classroom nor mutually acknowledging co-existence. The culturally sensitive Unified Estonian School focused on the student-oriented culture concept and the student's ethnic and cultural differences are valued in the classroom. Through this individual approach, the students' pluriculturalism and multi-identity are developed. The culturally sensitive approach to students and the classroom relates to the Estonian Education Development Plan 2035 which relies on a student-oriented learning approach (Ministry of Education, 2021).

The original model of multicultural education originated in America, where, as a result of close cooperation between representatives of different ethnic groups, a unique cultural unity and group identity developed (Sile 2013). The modern model of multicultural education requires the individual acceptance of different cultures and the preservation and consideration of their specificities. In addition to their co-existence and intertwining, originality must be preserved. Valuing differences could be an experience that enriches intercultural cooperation. Interaction between cultures should be seen as conducive to the preservation and development of one's identity, the development of multicultural skills and the prevention and successful resolution of conflicts caused by national and other differences (Sile 2013). Banks sees a teacher's multicultural competence as a balance between cultural, national and global self-determination (Bank 1998). M. Ramirez, on the other hand, believes that multicultural competence is manifested in the teacher's striving for maximum personality development; ability to adapt to different situations and for social justice for all citizens (Ramirez 2011). D. Pop-Davis, H. Coleman, V. Ming Lu, R. Toporek define multicultural competence as a collection of teacher characteristics that are expressed in the pursuit of acquiring cultural knowledge and collaborating with people from different cultures; in awareness and understanding of attitudes and stereotypes; in an effort to broaden the worldview; in social activity aimed at overcoming all forms of social injustice (Sile 2013: 7).

Coming back to the article's main question of what is the role of religion in these different concepts and why is multicultural education powerless in responding to Islamophobia in the Estonian society, the following answers emerge from the concepts: the concepts, which understand the needs and changes of education, deal with religion in relation to culture, which forms a background system rather than a matter in itself. Religions are not discussed separately, but only in connection with radicalisation, with religion being understood mainly as Islam. For the development of one's identity, the development of multicultural skills is also the claimed goal of all these school concepts. Consideration of ethnic identity and originality is also important, but it conflicts with the reflection of religion and speaking of Islam in all these concepts. It

is argued that religious identity is to be taken into account, but is essentially avoided or associated with radicalisation.

How religion is understood and why such an understanding contributes to the entrenchment of Islamophobia rather than its opposition can be outlined through five fundamental views:

1. *Religion manifests mainly in relation to culture in these school concepts.* Although religion or religiosity is sometimes mentioned independently next to culture, in discussing different multicultural fundamental theories or describing cultural sensitivity, religion is mainly viewed as a part of cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This approach makes the importance and significance of religion a peripheral issue.

2. *Religion is foremost associated with radicalization.* The Unified Estonian School Project considered ethnic conflict and radicalisation. This is understandable considering the constant threat of terrorism, the ongoing Syrian war and ISIS as well as the active operation of other terrorist groups which are associated with radical Islam. However, due to the aforementioned, one would have expected the descriptions to include mentions of Islam, not the opposition of Muslims and Christians.

3. *Religion and Islam were dubbed as sensitive topics.* All three—the materials of the Unified Estonian School Project as well as the Co-Learning School and Human Rights Education Project—raise the idea that addressing the topic of Islam is feared by teachers because it is highly sensitive. However, the concepts do not take this sensitivity seriously and do not engage in targeting this problem.

4. *The topic of religion is foremost associated with the students' background.* The Co-Learning School's programme had Islam courses and collaboration with Islamic organisations that would educate school leaders and teachers in understanding and dealing with Muslim students. The self-analysis materials for school leaders of the Unified Estonian School focused on studying the students' backgrounds in relation to religion. This knowledge of the student's background was again left in the cultural background system. It was not considered as a separate matter.

5. *The topic of religion is avoided to avoid making religious exceptions in a secular society.* Fear, and consequently an understanding that exceptions are not wished to be made, was apparent in all the school concepts. There was readiness to value and develop (in a culturally sensitive manner) a different (other) value system and worldview. The objective was still to create a multi-identity that consists of a unified value-system based on which interaction in schools happens. That means that the school does not integrate prayer traditions, new holidays, or customs among common values.

Considering the religious juxtaposition of fear and radicalisation, the question aris-

es—are the Estonian Lutheran legacy or the European Christian culture, which affect the creation of unified values, taken into account when creating national identity? None of the concepts raised the question of which attitudes, competencies and skills schools hope to provide students in their discussion with students of other religions and how the value of this different religion is accepted and understood.

Looking at the Runnymede Trust Report, it can be seen that the following insights appear in all school projects: 1. Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static, and unresponsive to change; 2. Islam is seen as separate and “other.” 4. Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism (The Runnymede Trust Report 1997:1; Tiliouine & Estes 2016:626).

All school concepts want to take into account and address the challenges and needs arising from migration and the migration crisis, but until religion and Islam become an object to be seen and taken into account, not just to fear and push to the cultural background, various prejudices, stereotypes and other phobias around the Islamic question will continue to persist.

CONCLUSION AND SOLUTIONS

The practices of good examples were important for both the Human Rights Education Project as well as the Unified Estonian School Project. The practices integrated the subject of religion very clearly with the subject of culture. The Unified Estonian School materials included a study “The politics of multiculturalism in Norwegian and Swedish schools.” The study mentioned that in order for cultures to be able to communicate with one another, it is important to draw attention to the different aspects of the cultures that go beyond the cultures’ general understanding. For the creation of favourable conditions to understand one another, it is necessary for multicultural education to consider and take seriously ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender- and social-class based differences as well as differences of thought and lifestyle (Lahdenperä 2018). In the case of Norway and Sweden, it is highlighted that schools dealing with new immigrants are in constant need of consultation and training in regards to the needs of students with multicultural backgrounds, taking into consideration their social, cultural and religious needs (Pukspuu 2019).

In reference to other great practices of European countries, it is apparent that religious literacy is paramount in the co-existence as well as integration of multicultural people or those with different worldviews (Schalejeva 2020). This is equally true for cultural sensitivity where it is important to not just know different facts about cultures such as cuisine, national holidays and customs, but rather to understand the meaning and history behind these facts. In multicultural school environments, it is important to value religion and support students’ readiness to analyse both religious and cultural worldviews. Religious differences can work parallel to cultural differences in affecting people’s function as an individual as well as within a society. Religion, including Islam, is not just the background of a student, but rather a pivotal part of their world-interpreting schema and multi-layered perspectives for understanding the world.

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