

Nation-building in the Baltic states: transforming governance, social welfare, and security in Northern Europe

GUNDAR J. KING & DAVID E. MCNABB
Boca Raton, CRC Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-48-225071-8.

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This highly engaging, detailed, and well-researched book shows the other side of nationalism and music, not just as a catalyst for conflict and division as in other conflict-ridden regions such as the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East, but rather as the material that can form and express democratic and nonviolent political and social change. I anticipate that this work will resonate with scholars and artists alike who study and work within past and present revolutions. The deeply immersive ethnographic passages in this volume bring to life the feelings and meanings that accompanied the songs, while the translations are a rich resource for future scholars.

Erica Haskell © 2015
University of New Haven

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A product of more than 20 years of collaborative research, *Nation-Building in the Baltic States* is one of the newest contributions to the literature on Baltic development. Coauthored by Pacific Lutheran University professors *emeriti* Gundar Keiniš-Kings (business) and David E. McNabb (administration), the volume spans the last two decades of Baltic post-Soviet transitions. They compile valuable data on the transformative process, disentangling the progress of each country individually, while placing the analysis in a comparative light. Divided into 11 thematic chapters, the book provides both a retrospective of the last 20 years and identifies current struggles and future plans in the Baltic progression toward deeper European and Nordic integration.

Though each chapter takes on a specific element of the various states of Baltic transformation, several key themes rise to the surface: governance, civil society, welfare, and security. Demography and the challenges of post-Soviet legacies are woven throughout the chapters. The authors present a generally positive outlook of the changing polity in the Baltic states, but argue the countries are not undergoing relatively easy “*evolutionary* change,” rather, they faced “*revolutionary* change” under rapid-fire reforms to comply with the modern European state of affairs. “They had to forge democratic and pluralistic societies . . . and they had to do it almost overnight” (26). The authors maintain that the Baltic countries are “as successful as can be expected” in this transformation, though notable policy challenges remain (41).

As Baltic business experts (Keiniš-King was instrumental in establishing Riga Business School in the early 1990s), one of the key successes in the book is addressing the complexities of fiscal governance for a non-expert audience. While the three Baltic States have come a great distance in their post-Soviet life, the trauma of the 2008 Great Recession has put a damper on fiscal transformations. The authors note that cultural differences have impacted fiscal strategies, and the shifting priorities of

ever-changing governments have been difficult to manage. Pressures to comply with EU standards will continue to positively shape policy, they argue. This section's main triumph is in the authors' work to make the 2008 situation and postrecession recovery understandable for lay readers.

Stressed heavily in the book is the struggle to foster a civic-minded population, a challenge that the authors argue is inherent in the post-Soviet condition. Particularly concerning is the low trust in government (most notably in Latvia), and the concerning state of civil society (most successful in Estonia). The authors offer wide-ranging comparisons, importantly noting that skepticism and distrust is becoming an increasingly *European* phenomenon. They hint at the value of culture-based civic events, i.e., song and dance festivals, as a foundation of "massive cooperation" (106). There may have been value in expanding the cultural insight into Baltic transformation, though this is perhaps not the goal of the book. A significant portion of Chapter 4 is dedicated to the authors' own study of college and university graduates in Latvia. The sample size is small, but it provides original exploratory data of pessimistic trust attitudes among youth, which opens the door for future research.

In addressing the challenges of building EU-compliant education and welfare systems, King and McNabb tap into Baltic cultural/historical legacies and rely on Nordic country comparisons, removing the Baltic cases from the post-Soviet ghetto. Though well-ranked internationally, the countries are at a "halfway point" in education reforms, transitioning out of Soviet legacies and into EU standards. Estonia is shown to be by far the leader in social welfare, while Latvia lags considerably. The authors attribute this difference largely to the incompatible ideals of policy makers and the persistence of Soviet-era minority populations. Estonia and Latvia, however, are demographically similar, begging a deeper evaluation of this explanation.

In this analysis, Russia remains the dominant security concern for the post-Soviet space; "Russia is indeed committed to a long term policy of reestablishing greater influence, if not dominance, in all of its former client states, including Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia," the authors argue (218). Interestingly, the authors' careful interpretation of Russian-speaking populations in this section is somewhat contradictory to their blanket tone throughout the rest of the book. The meticulous delineation of attitudes among the populations stressed here would better inform the minority discussion throughout the rest of the chapters. The authors are somewhat pessimistic about the effect of EU integration and NATO membership; however, the current crisis in Ukraine escalated after the book was written – its effect will call for a return to this argument in future publications.

While the Baltic states have made significant progress, the authors argue that they are held back by passive attitudes and lack of Schumpeterian innovation-originated market power. The Baltic states face common goals, but are divided on their attitudes toward compromise. While long-term challenges remain, the authors anticipate these will be addressed as the countries move into closer compliance with EU and Nordic standards.

Nation-Building excels as a volume that is both reader friendly and rich in information. The authors have clearly committed to this research project, tracing development in three diverse states over 20 years. Helpful tables and maps guide the reader through the multitude of rich country comparisons. Though issues could always

be further untangled in a volume spanning space, time, and theme, King and McNabb are asking the interesting questions future researchers will need to tackle. The book succeeds in its mission to provide a wide-ranging and nonprescriptive explanation of Baltic development. Providing clear and comprehensive distillations on any country in the wide-ranging themes this book covers is a challenge – to do it for three, with external comparative cases, is a feat for which the authors are to be congratulated.

Indra Ekmanis © 2015
University of Washington

Being a young citizen in Estonia: an exploration of young's people's civic and media experience

ANNE KAUN

Tartu, University of Tartu Press, 2013.

(Politics and Society in the Baltic Sea Region, Vol. 1)

ISBN 978-9949-32-274-9.

According to the author, senior lecturer Anne Kaun at Södertörn University in Stockholm, the aim of this monograph is to analyze individual civic experiences by placing them in the Estonian sociopolitical and economic context. Through the task of writing a diary, the author asked the participants to reflect upon their “lived experiences.” Through their narrations, the research participants established a timeframe and order for a stream of experiences. Kaun states that she was interested in the experiences that evolve around the objects of the “political,” “politics,” and “citizenship.”

Kaun claims that her aim is not to produce representative generalizations about Estonian youth, or develop policy proposals to improve the political participation of young people. Instead, she aims to enlarge the discourse on media and democracy using people's stories, as well as to provide a theoretical framework to understand the experiences of the participants, and how they relate to the current situation in Estonia.

Kaun's research interests have been in the medialization of culture, politics, and everyday life. More recently, she has been looking into the relationship between crises and social critique. Throughout her academic career, she has been particularly interested in young people's media consumption and civic experiences. Although the book is presented as a contribution to media studies, the author draws theoretically from various disciplines, such as cultural studies, critical theory, and anthropology.

The book begins by providing background information on the historical, socio-demographic, and media situation in post-2000 Estonia. Thereafter, it proceeds to lay out a detailed theoretical framework. Chapter 2 seeks to conceptualize civic and media experience by relating its empirical study to the notion of public connection. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the methodology. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 analyze the diary and interview data using the three key concepts of “critical media connection,” “playful public connection,” and “historical public connection.” The latter concept refers to the