

MODERNIZATION OF ESTONIAN SOCIETY SEEN THROUGH THE RESTAURANT CULTURE IN TALLINN, 1918–1940

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The article discusses possibilities of evaluating the modernization of Estonian society in the light of the restaurant culture of Tallinn. The most suitable features for the estimation, Estonization, internationalization, mass production and general well-being in Estonia, are discussed. A change in Estonization came in summer 1918 when the German occupation functionaries started to grant restaurant rights to Estonians even in the best restaurants. A most revealing sign of internationalization was the eagerness of Estonians towards cabarets in restaurants. They were Russian and German type cabarets, which points to the direction of the impulses. Later on dancing and music followed more clearly models from the West. The spreading of fashion shows, renovation of hotels and building of luxury restaurants as well as growth of alcohol consumption testified to the general well-being at the end of the 1930s.

My dealing with the history of restaurant culture in Tallinn in 1918–1940¹ has proven to be a useful tool to evaluate different features of Estonian history, foremost the so-called grass-level phenomena, which are generally difficult to grasp. So I have dealt with the popular features of the Estonian independence, popular attitudes towards Germans, German Balts and Jewish Estonians, supply of food and drinks in the restaurants of Tallinn and lately how the restaurant culture helps to evaluate the modernization of Estonian society.

Historians do not feel very convenient with the concepts such as modernization. In most cases it means the development towards the stage where the United States or West European Powers are nowadays. One can question if this is the best way to evaluate historical development. On the other hand, modernization offers some standards for evaluation and comparison. In the Estonian case we have an outstanding historian, who has applied modernization to the Estonian development. He is Toivo U. Raun with his article “Modernization and the

¹ Hovi, K. Viinasodasta kynttilälaitoihin. Tallinnan ravintolakulttuurin historia 1918–1940. Turku, 2002.

Estonians, 1860–1914” from the year 1974. He chose for the standards of the Estonian modernization the generally accepted industrialization, urbanization, and social differentiation as well as the national awakening and the marching forth of the Estonian language and culture.²

These factors were also working after the First World War. Other generally accepted standards of modernization are population increase, social emancipation, mass participation, independence, democratization, education, secularization, internationalization, mass consumption, gross product increase, and general well-being.³ All these do not serve well the evaluation of the modernization through restaurant culture, but some do. The Estonization used by Toivo Raun is very suitable as well as internationalization, mass consumption and the growth of wealth. The other features are of minimal or controversial value for the estimation seen through the restaurant culture.

ESTONIZATION OF THE RESTAURATEURS

One decisive change in the Estonization (*eestistumine*) of society might have happened in the summer and autumn of 1918. Second and third rate restaurants were already before the First World War in Estonian, Russian Estonian and Jewish Estonian hands, and just before the war and during it Germans and German Balts abandoned their ownership in the better hotels and restaurants of Tallinn. The German occupation functionaries started to grant restaurant rights to Estonians in summer and autumn 1918. The main Estonian ownership was created just at this point.

So Johannes Janson, a former cook, and Richard Devid, a former waiter, got the right to take over one of the main hotel–restaurants, *St. Petersburg*, on 12 July 1918. Janson and Devid were to become the main restaurateurs of Tallinn between the two world wars. They jointly run the *St. Petersburg* up to 1924, when they gained the right to keep the leading hotel–restaurant *Kuld Lõvi*, too. Janson took the management in the *Kuld Lõvi* while Devid remained in the *St. Petersburg*. In 1933 they changed the duties but continued to jointly advertize the restaurants and hotels. Janson also founded the Association of the Hotel and Restaurant Keepers in 1919.⁴ The aim was of course to defend common interests of the profession but it also was a sign of the further professional organization and mass participation in society. So it was clear evidence of the modernization of society, seen through the restaurant culture in Tallinn.

² Raun, T. U. Modernization and the Estonians, 1860–1914. – In: Baltic History. Eds. A. Zielonis, Jr., W. I. Winter, M. Valgemäe. Publications of the Association for Advancement of Baltic Studies, 5. Columbus, Ohio, 1974.

³ International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 9. Ed. D. H. Sills. New York, 1972, 386–389, 397–398.

⁴ Janson, J. Märkusi ja märkmeid ühingu asutamisest. – In: Võõrastemajade ja Restoranide Pida-
jate Ühing 1920–1940. Tallinn, 1940, 8–36; Hovi, K. Viinasodasta kynttilältoihin, 37–38, 51–53.

Hans Siig was given permission to keep a restaurant on 25 June 1918. He was to become a central figure in the restaurant culture, too. This former town guard (*linnaeht*) had become rich with wartime speculations and his whole career was rather scandalous. He succeeded to acquire and keep two hotel-restaurants, the *Berlin/Franzia/Grand Hotel* behind the railway station and the *De Russie/Progress/Astoria* in Harju Street. The *Grand Hotel* was a clear overstatement, and Siig was later on asked to change its name. The many changes of the names of restaurants reflected also the numerous scandals and unclear businesses.⁵

The first wave of the social rise of the Estonian restaurateurs included Otto Roba, the leading seller of spirits on Raekoja plats (City Hall Square) and Olga Herms, August Sikk and Johann Ibrus. Many restaurant keepers with German names were Estonians by their patronymics. So Heinrich Nieländer, the keeper of the *Imperial*, was Mihkel's son (*Mihkli poeg*), the directors of the *Estonia's* restaurant Erich and Gottfried Wahlfisch were Voldemar's sons. Johannes Mühlberg, the future owner of the *Palace Hotel*, Estonized his name to Mürk. The only prominent café keepers who might have hung to their German Balt identity were Ernst Uppmann and Filleule von Müller from the *Café Contsert* in Viru Street.

Why did the Germans content with this? There might have been just practical reasons. The German and most of the German Baltic restaurateurs had left Tallinn and they could be replaced by Estonians even in the better restaurants. They might even have thought that the profession was not that important. The first hotel-restaurant in Tallinn, *Kuld Lõvi*, had already been in Estonian hands before the war, and the situation had been allowed to continue from the beginning of German occupation. However, it can also reflect the policy according to which Germans did not aim to stay in Estonia. Courland was the main target of the German policy of settlement and it had a steady place in German war aims. The position of Estonia wavered, and in November 1918 the Germans evacuated Estonia but stayed in Courland.⁶

The same drift towards Estonization continued during the whole interwar period. The main hotels and restaurants remained in Estonian hands. Some restaurateurs further Estonized their names. Ernst Assmann, originally from the *Kuld Lõvi* and later on from the *Kajak*, changed his name to Aastalu; Johan Mälvkov from the *Room* took his original name Mälv back. Only a few Jewish Estonians and a little bit more Russians held restaurants, too, but this was not without problems. Mihail Tihonov first held a restaurant called *Birscha* at a corner of Raekoja plats. It was blamed for scandals and for its Russian name. When he later opened the restaurant *Letutshaja Mysh*, he soon had to Estonize its name to *Nahkhiir* in order to have customers.

⁵ Hovi, K. Viinasodasta kynttilältoihin, 38, 39. The following general knowledge about the restaurants and restaurant culture of Tallinn are according to this work.

⁶ See Volkmann, H.-E. Die deutsche Baltikumpolitik zwischen Brest-Litovsk und Compiègne. Ein Beitrag zur 'Kriegszieldiskussion'. Köln, 1970, especially pp. 7–37.

INTERNATIONAL IMPACTS IN RESTAURANT CULTURE

International impacts were very soon reflected in the restaurant culture. The most spectacular was the spreading of cabarets in Tallinn. It started already before the First World War. Open-air spectacles were arranged on Harju Hill with foreign drama groups, jugglers, dancing girls and orchestras consisting of women with generous décolletés. These so-called Vienna bands, known in the whole Baltic area, used to practise prostitution, too. After the war these spectacles moved into restaurants and developed more towards cabarets with a special conferencier. Still the Estonian cabarets were more of Russian and German type. They were socially and politically harmless happenings, contrary to their literary and socially critical forerunners in France.⁷ This also indicates the channels and directions of the cultural impact.

Probably Russian artists appeared in the open-air spectacles already before the war. A new and stronger wave started after the October revolution in Russia. Many artists from Russian theatres, operas and operettas came as refugees to Tallinn. There they tried to earn their living by doing what they had learned. So they filled the cabarets in Tallinn. In many restaurants they formed a half or more of the actors in the first years of independence. The overwhelming share of Russian artists provoked many protests. The Russian language was detested, and if the artists tried to sing in broken Estonian, it was not liked either. The foreign languages were restricted. The Ministry of the Interior even twice forbade the cabarets.

On the other hand, people were so accustomed to the programmes in restaurants that they demanded the cabarets should come back. The *Estonia* restaurant even had an advertisement saying that you can do nothing when people want to have cabaret (*No mis sa ikka lõpuks teed, kui rahvas tahab veidi kabareed*).⁸ Movement towards better cabarets sprang from artists of the *Estonia* theatre and the groups of Central and West Europe, mediated by agencies in Berlin. The first mediated artists came from Great Britain, followed soon by groups from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. At the end of the 1920s and especially at the end of the prosperous 1930s the cabarets with foreign and domestic artists were firmly established in the leading restaurants of Tallinn. The national background of the artists was widened to the United States of America on one hand and to France, Spain and Italy on the other. Remarkably many Hungarian artists and musicians visited Tallinn in the 1930s. Also Romanians participated, spreading gipsy music.

In the 1930s cabarets developed partly towards big dancing revues. The leading cabaret-restaurants were the *Must Kass*, without doubt the famous Parisian *Chat Noir* as a model, the *Linden* up to its closing in 1929 as well as the leading *White Hall* of the *Estonia* restaurant and the *Dancing Gloria Palace*.

Very revealing of the cultural impacts was the rapid and wide spreading of the five o'clock tea. Great Britain was politically and economically most important,

⁷ Cf. Richard, L. Cabaret-Kabarett. Von Paris nach Europa. Leipzig, 1993, 154, 174; Jelavich, P. Berlin Cabaret. Harvard, Mass., 1996, 1–2.

⁸ Päävaleht, 4.10.1923.

and the British navy had helped efficiently in the Estonian War of Independence. The latter aspect proved to be decisive. Even if Germany soon passed Great Britain as the most important trading partner,⁹ all British was highly estimated in Estonia. In this spirit the better restaurants in Tallinn started to arrange five o'clock tea dancing. After the Peace of Tartu the long war time was over, and dancing was again allowed. The evening restaurant *Linden* seems to have taken the initiative, and soon all better restaurants were offering five o'clock tea dancing. Normally they were arranged on Sundays between 5 and 7 o'clock, but the most eager dancing restaurants like the *Marcelle* on Raekoja plats offered them at times every day. The fashion continued without weakening up to the end of independence.

The end of dancing prohibition provoked the same kind of dance revolution as elsewhere after the First World War. These so-called Negro dances spread to Tallinn as well. There were one-step, two-step, espagnol, but also tango and foxtrot. Later on they were joined by black bottom, charleston, rumba and carioca. These dances came clearly from West Europe, probably partly adapted by Germans. They were eagerly learned in restaurants under the guidance of special fore dancers, but they passed soon by. Only tango and foxtrot were accepted in the long run as well as waltz of the older dances.

The dance revolution brought up the national cult orchestras. The most prominent was *The Murphy Band*, originally the band of German Balt schoolboys, led by Kurt Strobel. Another main orchestra was *The Estonian Dance Orchestra*, led by Viktor Combe and the third one John Pori's (Johannes Porisammul) orchestra. It is interesting to note that these main orchestras dominated that fully the life of pleasures in Tallinn that there was no place – and most probably no wish – for German bands, which otherwise ruled the Baltic area. The German Balt Kurt Strobel stressed in the middle of the 1930s that there came nothing good from Germany any more and that he played mainly American and British music. The more popular John Pori, however, had also German pieces in his programme, the Bavarian semi-national anthem *In München steht ein Hofbräuhaus* included.¹⁰ The only exception of the national line – beside the Hungarian and Romanian *primases* – was Raymond José Mitchell, an American mulatto, who for several years led his orchestra in Tallinn at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s.

GROWTH OF MASS CONSUMPTION

The emergence of mass consumption is also seen in the restaurants. There had been some fashion shows already at the beginning of the 1920s but a real mass

⁹ Hinkkanen-Lievonen, M.-L. *British Trade and Enterprise in the Baltic States, 1919–1925*. – *Studia Historica*, 14. Helsinki, 1984, especially pp. 141–147.

¹⁰ Roolah, O. Nii see oli... Kroonika ühest unustuseliiva maetud ajastust. Tallinn, 1990, 178; Ojakäär, V. Vaibunud viiaside kaja. Eesti levimuusika ajaloost I. Tallinn, 2000, 274–275, 332–448.

consumption and the corresponding advertising started at the more prosperous end of the decade. The *Café Marcelle* organized a presentation of foreign clothing for women, a *Modeschau*, in February 1926. At the end of the year another show presented women's styles from hats to underwear. Next March the *White Hall of Estonia* joined in. In its evening Firma Ekite presented women's dresses and underwear, R. Widemann women's hats, O. Kirusk footwear and the hosiery factory O. Kilgas, stockings. All clothes were presented on living models. Also the *Kontsertaed* in Kadriorg presented evening dresses and underwear according to the newest fashions of Paris and London.

The fashion shows continued in the next years. In 1929 the *Marcelle* organized a whole week of *Modeschau* with the latest novelties from Paris, Vienna and London. With the coming of the world economic crisis the fashion shows started to nourish more the mass consumption. The *Marcelle* advertised in November 1929 that Marcelle cigarettes, fabricated by A/S Laferne, were on the sale only in the *Café Marcelle*. Next year the *Marcelle* announced that its dancing girls use only Fascinata face powder, Fascinara skin cream, Stomotol tooth paste, Gloria silk stockings and Estoking shoes. In October the *Marcelle* further advertised Laferne's tobacco products as Marcelle paperossi as well as Manon and Zephyr cigarettes. At the same time a little bit mundane and vicious shadow was cast on the dancing girls. Women's smoking and make-up were still considered belonging to the habits of prostitutes and were strongly detested e.g. in Sweden. Still in December 1931 the *Dancing Gloria Palace* organized a special evening in order to propagate the achievements of the domestic industry. So, measured by the restaurant culture, Estonian society reached the stage of mass consumption at the end of the 1920s.

GROWTH OF WEALTH

The general wealth and well-being clearly grew towards the end of the 1920s. The second period of growth began after the years of depression. I have no exact figures of the gross national income, but the new start was clearly seen in the restaurant culture. Hotel owners began to renovate and modernize their businesses. The first to start was Johan Mälvkov, who restored his hotel-restaurant *Room* every year from 1929 up to 1935. Back in the *St. Petersburg*, Johannes Janson renovated totally the hotel-restaurant in the years 1933-1934. All of the interior was rebuilt, and the hotel obtained a slight functional appearance with large windows. After the renovation the hotel took the name *Bristol*, common in Western countries.

Richard Devid undertook the same in the *Kuld Lõvi* in 1934-1935. The oldest and largest hotel-restaurant in Tallinn was totally modernized. The new interior was generally accepted and admired but the exterior aroused protests. The functional appearance was seen unfit for the still medieval-type street scene. On the other hand, the building had been renewed during 100 years so often that there was

nothing left from the original anyway. The renovation of hotels still continued when Johannes Mürk built the totally new six floor hotel *Palace* in 1936–1937.

The general growth of wealth was also seen in the building and renovation of the new luxury restaurants in Tallinn. Totally new dancing restaurants were the *Dancing Gloria Palace* and the *Dancing Paris* on Vabaduse väljak (Freedom Square) and in its neighbourhood. The cabaret–restaurant *Kyba* was installed in an old café at a corner of Vabaduse väljak, and the *Du Nord* was renewed to restaurant use only. In addition to places concentrating on dancing and cabarets, there were plenty of luxurious night restaurants in Tallinn at the end of the 1930s. They were open up to 6 o'clock in the morning. As a further sign of leisure time and wealth the consumed amounts of alcohol increased (again) at the same time,¹¹ despite the luxurious cafés such as the *Kultas*, *Feischner* and *Corso*, all on Vabaduse väljak, which counterbalanced the use of alcohol.

OTHER STANDARDS OF MODERNIZATION

Other standards of modernization rather testified a reverse development, at least to that seen through the restaurant culture. The only feature of secularization was the concern of the city administration that new restaurants should not be opened nearer than 100 metres to the closest church. This was hardly a testimony of increasing secularization.

Features of growing democracy can be found in the restaurant culture still less. Most problems were connected with the Freedom Fighters' Movement (*Vapsid*). At first they were generally detested in the leftist Tallinn. When some deputy appealed to the City Council of Tallinn (*Linna volikogu*) for helping them, remembering their great deeds, rather than mocking them, the response was a general laughing and somebody asked: "Where should we help them, in drinking?"¹²

The coup d'état of Konstantin Päts hit worst the Freedom Fighters. The Vapses were in that meaning a special political party that they gathered frequently in restaurants, most often in the *Must Kass*, *Du Nord* and *Astoria*. The leaders of the movement were immediately arrested, and the mood of ordinary members was depressed. When the director of the restaurant *Must Kass*, Boris Jakobson, tried to encourage the atmosphere and let sing mocking songs, he was banished to Muhu Island and the waiters were fined. The charge was the lack of respect for the leadership and democratic order of the state.¹³

Most drastic limitations to the restaurants were ordered after the Soviet occupation on 16 June 1939. The restaurants had to close their doors at 10 o'clock p. m.,

¹¹ Eesti Statistika Kuukiri, 1939, 94; Alkoholiuuputus, Kohalikke teateid: Kui palju Tallinn joo? – Päevaleht, 28.1 and 30.1.1939.

¹² Äge sõnalahing kõrtsiküsimuses. – Päevaleht, 7.12.1926.

¹³ Musta Kassi ärijuht Muhu saarele. – Päevaleht, 21.3.1934.

selling alcohol was prohibited and some nationally-minded open-air restaurants at Pirita were closed because of “continuing disorder which was dangerous for the common security”.¹⁴

¹⁴ Pirita Suveaed ja Birgitta suletud. – Päevaleht, 21.7.1939.

EESTI ÜHISKONNA MODERNISEERUMISE AVALDUMINE TALLINNA RESTORANIKULTUURIS 1918–1940

Kalervo HOVI

Eestistumine, internatsionaliseerumine, masstoodangu ilmumine, reklaami areng ning jõukuse ja heaolu kasv on need moderniseerumise tegurid, mida on selgesti näha restoranikultuuri kaudu. Murrang eestistumise suunas toimus suvel ja sügisel 1918, kui Saksa okupatsioonivõimud hakkasid eestlastele andma ka parimate restoranide ja hotellide pidamise lube. See võis tähendada seda, et sakslased ei kavatsenud Eestisse pidama jääda.

Kõige selgem rahvusvaheline joon Tallinna restoranikultuuris oli suur huvi kabaree vastu. Iseseisvuse algul esines Tallinna restoranides hulk vene artiste, kuid aja jooksul nad taganesid eesti ning Kesk- ja Lääne-Euroopa esinejate ees. Tartu rahuga sai tants jälle vabaks. Eestis algas niisamasugune tantsurevolutsioon kui mujalgi Euroopas. Tallinn sai seetõttu oma kultusorkestrid, mis tõrjusid saksa mõju eemale. Kõik inglaslik oli suures soosingus ja nii hakati Tallinna restoranides korraldama kella viie tee tantsuõhtuid. See traditsioon kestis iseseisvuse lõpuni.

Eesti ühiskonna jõukamaks muutumine 1920. ja eriti 1930. aastate lõpul on selgesti näha restoranikultuuris. Restoranides hakkasid toimuma hinnaliste tualettide esitlused ning seal tutvustati Pariisi, Viini ja Londoni moodi. Tallinna esinduslike hotellirestoranide omanikud alustasid oma ettevõtete uuendamist 1930. aastate keskpaiku. Tallinnas ehitati uusi luksusrestorane, nagu “Dancing Gloria Palace” ja “Dancing Paris”. Traditsioonilisest hotellist “Du Nord” sai üksnes restoran. Mõned kabareerestoranid olid lahti kuni kella kuueni hommikul. Üldist heaolu peegeldas asjaolu, et alkoholi tarvitamine saavutas uue rekordi just 1930. aastate lõpul, kuigi uued luksuskohvikud “Kultas” ja “Feischner” olid alkoholi vastu.