

The Relationship Between Social Capital and Acculturation Expectations of Estonians in Estonia: Perceived Threat as a Mediator

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This study examines the mediating role of perceived threat from other ethnic groups in the relationship between social capital and acculturation expectations of the host population. Consistent with Stephans' theory, the article examined the impact of three types of perceived threat: economic, cultural, and physical. The sample consists of ethnic Estonians born and living in Estonia (N = 309). The study examined how the perceived threat affects the relationship between social capital indicators (general trust, ethnic tolerance, bonding and uniting social capital) and acculturation expectations ("multiculturalism", "melting pot", "segregation"). The results showed that physical perceived threat was a mediator of the relationship between ethnic tolerance and "multiculturalism". With the increase in physical threat, the preference for "multiculturalism" decreased. Economic threat has been shown to mediate the relationship between general trust and "segregation", as well as connecting social capital and "segregation". In these two cases, the economic threat increased the likelihood of a preference for "segregation" by the host population. The mediative role of cultural threat was not confirmed in the present study.

Keywords: perceived threat, acculturation expectations, bonding social capital, bridging social capital, trust, ethnic tolerance, Estonia

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Взаимосвязь социального капитала и аккультурационных ожиданий эстонцев в Эстонии: воспринимаемая угроза как медиатор

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Настоящее исследование посвящено изучению медиативной роли воспринимаемой угрозы со стороны других этнических групп во взаимосвязи социального капитала и аккультурационных ожиданий принимающего населения. В соответствии с теорией Уолтера и Куки Стефанов, в статье рассматривалось три вида воспринимаемой угрозы: экономическая, культурная и физическая. Выборка состоит из этнических эстонцев, родившихся и проживающих на территории Эстонии (N=309). В исследовании проверялось, каким образом воспринимаемая угроза влияет на взаимосвязи показателей социального капитала (общее доверие, этническая толерантность, связывающий и соединяющий социальный капитал) и аккультурационных ожиданий («мультикультурализм», «плави́льный котел», «сегрегация»). Результаты показали, что физическая воспринимаемая угроза оказалась медиатором связи этнической толерантности и «мультикультурализма». С ростом физической угрозы, предпо-

чение «мультикультурализма» снижалось. Экономическая угроза оказалась медиатором взаимосвязи общего доверия и «сегрегации», а также соединяющего социального капитала и «сегрегации». В этих двух случаях экономическая угроза увеличивала вероятность предпочтения «сегрегации» принимающим населением. Медиативная роль культурной угрозы в настоящем исследовании не подтвердилась.

Ключевые слова: воспринимаемая угроза, аккультурационные ожидания, связывающий социальный капитал, соединяющий социальный капитал, доверие, этническая толерантность, Эстония.

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Introduction

Between 1918 and 1940, Estonia was a predominantly ethnically homogeneous country, where 88% of the population were Estonians. From 1945 to 1989, the native population of Estonia decreased from 1 million to 965 thousand people, while the non-Estonian population increased from 23 to 602 thousand people in 1989 [23]. At the beginning of 2020, 1,328,976 people live in Estonia, of which 68.4% are the Estonian population, and 24.7% are Russians [1].

During the Soviet period, the migration policy of the Soviet state implied the migration of the Russian-speaking population to the territory of Estonia. After the collapse of the USSR and gaining independence, Estonia's migration policy has undergone some changes. If before that the orientation of the state was towards the Russian-speaking population, now the goal of the state has become, first of all, the development of the Estonian nation. The change in the vector of development of the state gave rise to many socio-cultural and psychological problems of various ethnic groups, which led to the development of a special integration policy, which operates and develops to this day [22]. However, at present, the Russian-speaking population still has problems in acculturation and relations with the Estonian population.

One of the factors influencing the process of acculturation is social capital, which is a social resource for productive intragroup and intergroup relationships. It was found that social capital can influence both the acculturation strategies of ethnic minorities or migrants and the acculturation expectations of the host population [5; 10].

According to W. Stefan and K. Stefan [19], there is such a concept as an integral perceived threat, which is one of the important predictors of attitudes towards another ethnic group. The authors identify 3 types of perceived threat: economic, cultural and physical.

This study aims to examine how perceived threat interacts with social capital in explaining the acculturation expectations of the host population.

Social capital and acculturation expectations

According to R. Putnam, social capital is "... the traditions of social interaction, which presuppose norms of reciprocity and trust between people, the widespread distribution of various kinds of voluntary associations and the involvement of citizens in politics in order to solve the problems facing the community" [3, p. 224]. At the same time, social capital can be considered at the group level and at the individual level. At the group level, R. Putnam suggests that social capital is determined by such indicators as trust and social ties within the organization [18]. At the same time, ethnic diversity is one of the important factors that affects intragroup cohesion and intergroup relations [ibid.].

Social capital at the societal level of society is divided into bridging and bonding social capital [17]. Bridging social capital measures the degree and quality of interactions with members of other groups. Bonding social capital determines how a person interacts with members of a social group to which he himself belongs. Later, various researchers began to use this division to measure the individual level of social capital [20].

Acculturation expectations, according to J. Berry, are divided into 4 main types: "multiculturalism", "melting pot", "segregation" and "exclusion" [7]. These acculturation expectations differ in two main components: 1) the search for ways to interact with one's own or with another group; 2) preserving the cultural traditions and identity of their group or following the traditions of another group. These acculturation expectations are schematically shown in Fig. 1.

“Multiculturalism” assumes that an ethnic minority will live in a multicultural environment, preserving their culture and identity, but actively interacting with another group. “Melting pot” means that an ethnic minority assimilates into the host population, adopting the local culture, abandoning their culture. “Segregation” means that an ethnic minority maintains its culture, but does not actively contact the host population. There is also a fourth type, called “exclusion”, which assumes that people abandon both their culture and interaction with another ethnic group, isolating themselves from both communities. This type is the least popular, since, in fact, it does not imply any acculturation or normal life in society.

The Role of Perceived Threats in Acculturation Processes

Attitudes towards ethnic minorities can be formed both in a positive and negative way. According to the theory of integral threat W. Stefan and K. Stefan [19], the threat from other groups can be both real and perceived. At the same time, the perceived threat is divided into 3 types: economic, cultural and physical. Cultural threat describes a threat to the values and traditions of a group, an economic threat to a country’s economy, labor market and other economic resources, and a physical threat to life, health and physical well-being.

According to the theory of intergroup conflict [13], the reasons for intergroup tension can be both

economic reasons and differences in culture. The host population may see ethnic minorities as a threat to their cultural traditions and values, as well as see them as competitors for jobs. In this case, there may be a tendency to restrict the rights and freedoms of another group, which only increases intergroup tension. Studies by K. Manevska [12] have shown that authoritarianism in the context of restricting the freedom of another group has more often reasons associated with culture, and not with the economic component. According to the theory of ethnic competition, the receiving group may consider representatives of another group as direct competitors for jobs, which leads to the desire to exclude the other group from this competition [14]. There may also be a physical threat towards members of other ethnic groups. In this situation, the media play a huge role, which can describe the negative experience of interaction with this group. In this case, people often overestimate the size of the group, especially if its members migrate in large groups. This can lead to an increase in the level of intergroup tension and the development of negative attitudes towards another group [8; 24].

According to the contact hypothesis, a positive experience of interaction with another group can lead to a decrease in intergroup tension [6; 16]. According to this hypothesis and further research by T. Pettigrew, under the condition of personal interaction, some stereotypes regarding the outgroup can change for the better. However, it is worth noting that if during personal communication some stereotypes are confirmed, then negative

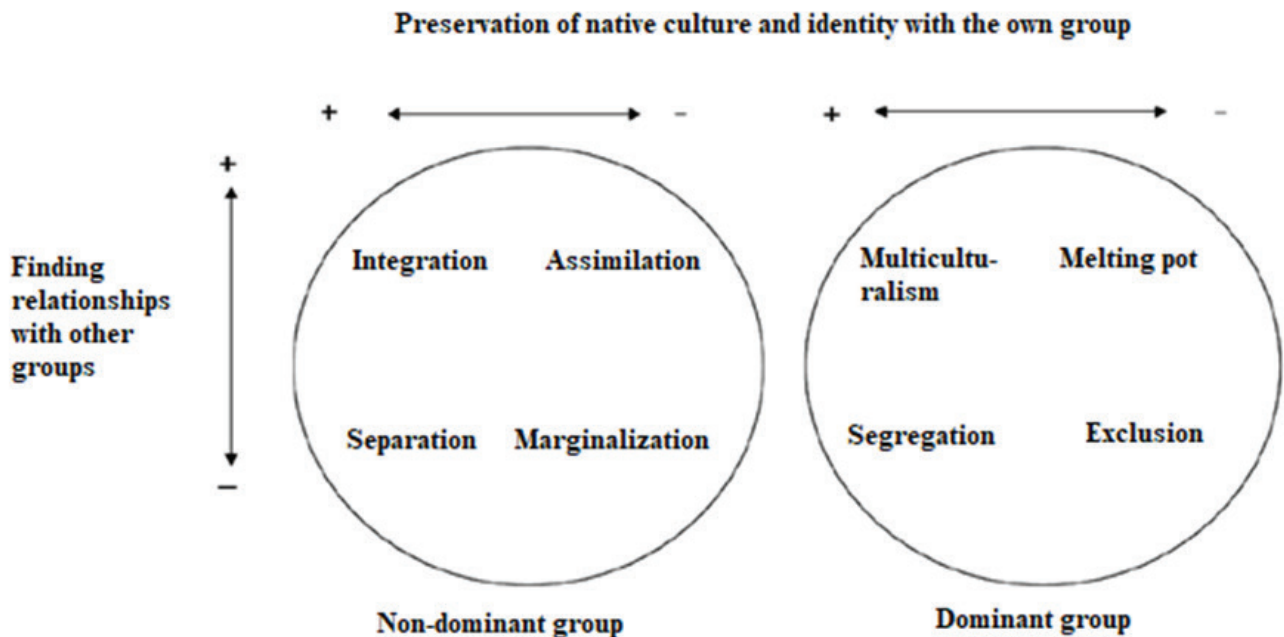


Fig. 1. Acculturation strategies of ethnic minorities and acculturation expectations of the host population according to the classification of John Berry [quoted from: 7]

attitudes can also be aggravated. In particular, this can relate to the economic threat, since, according to the theory of ethnic competition [14], in this case, personal interaction can lead, on the contrary, to an increase in the level of intergroup tension.

The study aims to find out how the level of perceived threat from other ethnic groups correlates with the nature of the relationship between indicators of social capital and acculturation expectations of the host population.

Methods

The study involved 309 people from 18 to 86 years old, born and living in Estonia, who identify themselves by ethnicity as Estonians. Among them, 163 people are men and 146 are women, the median age is 17.57.

The research was carried out by the method of socio-psychological survey. All participants were asked to answer a number of questions that were included in the following types of scales: 1) social capital at the group level; 2) social capital at the individual level; 3) perceived threat from ethnic minorities; 4) the acculturation expectations of the host population. In all cases, the respondents were asked to rate the degree of agreement with various statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "absolutely disagree", 5 means "absolutely agree".

1. Social capital at the group level. In this case, we used the scales for assessing general trust [25] and assessing ethnic tolerance [9], which were previously tested in Russia [4]. The general trust scale consisted of two questions ($\alpha = 0.82$); ethnic tolerance scale included 6 questions ($\alpha = 0.77$).

2. Social capital at the individual level. Two scales were used here [11; 21], including 9 questions each, assessing the level of bonding ($\alpha = 0.92$) and bridging ($\alpha = 0.95$) social capital, previously tested in Russia [4].

3. Integral perceived threat from ethnic minorities. To assess this scale, we used the MIRIPS Berry questionnaire, previously adapted in Russia [2]. To assess the perceived threat, 6 questions of the Perceived Security Scale, recoded into the Perceived Threat Scale, were used. Each type of perceived threat (cultural ($\alpha = 0.53$), economic ($\alpha = 0.51$), physical ($\alpha = 0.63$)) was assessed using two questions.

4. Acculturation expectations of the host population. To study these indicators, the MIRIPS Berry scale was used, previously adapted in Russia [2]. The respondents were asked to answer 4 questions to assess each of three types of acculturation expectations: multiculturalism ($\alpha = 0.58$), melting pot ($\alpha = 0.60$), segregation ($\alpha = 0.54$).

Regression analysis was used to test the mediative role of the perceived threat, with additional testing of mediation in SPSS using the Process 3.5 plug-in.

Results

Descriptive statistics. Table 1 shows the mean values for the scales used in the study. Among the indicators of social capital at the group level, we see that the level of ethnic tolerance is at a high level, while the level of general trust is at an average level. Thus, we can say that Estonians are tolerant towards other ethnic groups, while the level of trust in other people is not very pronounced, both in the positive and in the negative direction. At the individual level, bridging and bonding social capital is low, but the level of bonding social capital is slightly higher. This suggests that the frequency and quality of social ties in relations with one's own group is higher than in relations with Russians.

We see that the level of cultural and physical threat is at a low level, while the level of economic threat is much more pronounced. Thus, it can be said that Estonians do not perceive very strongly the threat to their culture and physical safety from other ethnic groups. At the same time, they see to a greater extent a threat to the country's economy and the labor market.

Of the three types of acculturation expectations, multiculturalism is the most preferred. Melting pot and segregation are less preferred. Thus, according to this table, it can be assumed that Estonians prefer to live in a multicultural society with other ethnic groups. Life in a single society, when another group is assimilated, or in a parallel society, when another group lives separately, is less preferred for Estonians.

The mediative role of the perceived threat. Further, a regression analysis was carried out, which tested the mediative role of the perceived threat in relation to the relationship between indicators of social capital and acculturation expectations. The basic diagram of this analysis is shown in Fig. 2.

From table. 2, we can see that of the four components of social capital, only ethnic tolerance has statistically significant links with "multiculturalism". Ethnic tolerance has a positive direct relationship with "multiculturalism". At the same time, the perceived physical threat has a negative impact on the relationship between ethnic tolerance and "multiculturalism". Thus, we can say that the more Estonians are tolerant of other ethnic groups, the more the preference for "multiculturalism" is manifested. At the same time, if Estonians see a threat to life and health in another ethnic group, they will be less willing to live in a multicultural society with this group. The

Table 1

Description of the mean values of the variables used by Estonians in Estonia

Variable	Estonians (309 people)	
	Mean	Standard deviation
General trust	2,97	,86
Ethnic tolerance	3,89	,77
Bridging social capital	1,47	,60
Bonding social capital	2,29	,68
Cultural threat	2,08	,97
Economic threat	3,22	1,05
Physical threat	1,68	,77
Multiculturalism	4,51	,58
Melting pot	2,14	,77
Segregation	2,10	,61

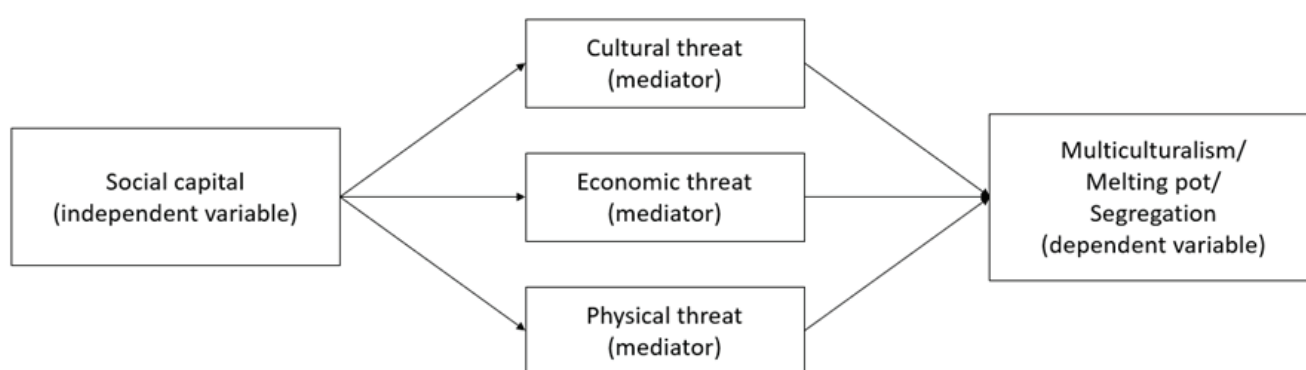


Fig. 2. Graphical representation of the tested model

mediative role of the economic and cultural threat is not confirmed in this case.

The results are presented in table 3 show that a direct relationship exists between “melting pot” and ethnic tolerance and between “melting pot” and bonding social capital. At the same time, the nature of this connection is different: ethnic tolerance has a negative impact on the choice of the “melting pot”, and bonding social capital has a positive effect. We also see that there is no indi-

rect impact of the perceived threat in all four cases. Thus, we can say that with a high level of tolerance of Estonians towards other ethnic groups, the desire to absorb another ethnic group into their society decreases. The higher the level of social interaction with their ethnic group, the more the desire and readiness of Estonians to accept another group into their society is manifested in the event that another group renounces its culture and is ready to adopt the local one. This situation seems quite

Table 2

Mediative role of perceived threat in the relationship between social capital and acculturation expectation “multiculturalism”

Types of effects	Multiculturalism (dependent variable)			
	Independent variables			
	General trust	Ethnic tolerance	Bridging social capital	Bonding social capital
Direct	-,033	,199***	,016	-,068
Indirect (cultural threat – mediator)	-,001	,011	,014	,022
Indirect (economic threat – mediator)	-,017	,017	-,037	,002
Indirect (physical threat – mediator)	,011	-,019***	,007	,008
General	-,040	,208***	-,001	-,037
F	1,07	26,00***	,00	,56
R ²	,00	,08	,00	,00

Note: “*” – p < 0,05; “**” – p < 0,01; “***” – p < 0,001.

interesting, since the declared level of multiculturalism (4.51) is much higher than the level of the melting pot (2.10) (see Table 1). In the case of high tolerance, Estonians are ready both for life in a multicultural society and for the acceptance of another group into their society, taking into account the acceptance of the local culture. However, in the case of a high level of ramification of social ties within a society, there is a preference for the absorption of another group into its own society. There is no connection with multiculturalism in this situation. It is also worth noting that the mediative role of the perceived threat is not traced.

Finally, in table. 4 we can see that bridging social capital and general trust have a positive direct effect on the preference for “segregation”. Moreover, in both cases, the perceived economic threat leads to an increase in the likelihood of preference for this strategy. These results are extremely unusual. In other words, the higher the frequency and quality of interaction between Estonians and another group, the more Estonians expect that the other group will prefer not to get closer to the local community, but to live in parallel in their own society. Moreover, if Estonians see threats to

their labor market and the country’s economy, they are even more ready to separate from another community. The same situation is observed when general trust is a predictor. The level of economic threat also increases the likelihood of choosing “segregation”. At the same time, no direct influence of the level of trust among the host population of Estonians on the preference for “segregation” is observed.

Discussion

According to the results of the study, it can be seen that various indicators of social capital predict the acculturation expectations of the host population in completely different ways. The mediative role of the perceived threat is indeed confirmed, but not in all cases.

Overall trust is not directly positively associated with any of the acculturation expectations, but the level of perceived threat is positively associated with a preference for “segregation”. Thus, we see that general trust can predict a preference for “segregation” only indirectly

Table 3
Mediative role of perceived threat in the relationship between social capital and acculturation expectation “melting pot”

Types of effects	Melting pot (dependent variable)			
	Independent variables			
	General trust	Ethnic tolerance	Bridging social capital	Bonding social capital
Direct	-,023	-,20***	,052	,22***
Indirect (cultural threat – mediator)	,000	,000	-,004	-,009
Indirect (economic threat – mediator)	,018	-,012	,035	-,002
Indirect (physical threat – mediator)	-,008	,012	-,007	-,008
General	-,012	-,20***	,076	,20**
F	,06	12,65***	1,07	9,78**
R2	,00	,04	,00	,03

Note: «*» – p < 0,05; «**» – p < 0,01; «***» – p < 0,001.

Table 4
Mediative role of perceived threat in the relationship between social capital and acculturation expectation “segregation”

Types of effects	Segregation (dependent variable)			
	Independent variables			
	General trust	Ethnic tolerance	Bridging social capital	Bonding social capital
Direct	,079	-,053	,197***	-,001
Indirect (cultural threat – mediator)	,000	-,002	-,002	-,004
Indirect (economic threat – mediator)	,015*	-,012	,028***	-,002
Indirect (physical threat – mediator)	-,010	,011	-,007	-,006
General	,083*	-,056	,216***	-,013
F	4,46*	1,62	15,06***	,07
R2	,01	,01	,05	,00

Note: «*» – p < 0,05; «**» – p < 0,01; «***» – p < 0,001.

through an economic threat. It turns out that even in the case of a high general level of trust, if Estonians believe that another ethnic group threatens the labor market and the country's economy, alienation from the other group will occur.

The level of ethnic tolerance leads to a positive relationship with "multiculturalism" and "melting pot", two acculturation expectations that seek to incorporate another ethnic group into society, as opposed to "segregation". However, the level of physical threat is a mediator that reduces the preference for "multiculturalism". Thus, if Estonians feel a threat to life and health, ethnic tolerance contributes less to the intention to live in a multicultural environment.

The level of bonding social capital showed an extremely direct relationship with the choice of the "melting pot", the perceived threat in this case did not work. It turns out that the better the relationship between Estonians and the representatives of their group, the more likely they are ready to accept another group into their society, provided that the other group adopts the local culture. At the same time, the quality of relationships with another group does not in any way affect the desire to live with another group in the same society.

The level of bridging social capital has a positive relationship with "segregation". At the same time, the level of economic threat increases the likelihood of choosing a given acculturation expectation. Thus, we see that interaction with another group does not lead to the acceptance of another group into our society on any grounds, but to alienation from this group. The fact that the threat to a country's economy and jobs only exacerbates this alienation suggests that it is the high level of economic threat that leads to the choice of a strategy of alienation from another group. According to the Allport contact hypothesis [6], the level of inter-

group tension, in theory, should decrease in the case of a high level of bridging social capital. In our case, the opposite situation occurs. The influence of the economic threat in this case can be confirmed by the theory of ethnic competition [14] and the normative theory of intergroup relations [15]. According to these theories, the desire to separate from another group may be due to the fact that labor resources are limited, and representatives of other ethnic groups are perceived as direct competitors for these resources.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the economic threat has mediative effect in the relationship of general trust and bridging social capital with segregation. Physical threat has a negative impact only on the relationship between ethnic tolerance and multiculturalism. The mediative role of cultural threat has not found empirical confirmation in our case, from which it can be concluded that cultural threat is to a lesser extent related to the acculturation preferences of Estonians.

We can see that the perceived threat from another ethnic group is one of the important factors that can quite seriously affect the acculturation expectations of the host population and the subsequent acculturation of an ethnic minority. At the same time, different types of threats can affect the acculturation process in different ways. The results of this study can be useful for the development of the Estonian state migration policy with regard to the mutual acculturation of the host population and ethnic minorities.

Subsequently, it is planned to compare what role the perceived threat plays in different contexts: from the side of migrants and from the side of ethnic minorities.

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