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# Managing Drinking Time, Space and Networks as Strategies for Avoiding Alcohol-Related Harm Among Young Estonian Adults

Maarja Kobin\*

## Abstract

Research on drinking in Estonia, mainly surveys, indicates that alcohol consumption has increased steadily over the last fifteen years. However, these quantitative studies provide little information about drinking habits and the meanings that are attributed to different consumption patterns. In addition, there is no research that explores how alcohol-related harm is controlled or managed, especially among young people. Current research on alcohol-related harm, primarily from the UK, emphasises calculated hedonism and shows clearly that drinking 'depends on the context'. Relying on Goffman's concept of 'framework', the aim of the current paper is to analyse or give structure to the 'context' by distinguishing the frameworks of drinking time, space and networks that guide young Estonians in their interpretations and perceptions of alcohol related harm, and that also act as a basis for legitimising drinking practices. Differentiating the frames helps to show the dynamics of drinking practices and the interactions in 'context'.

The research is based on open-ended and focus group interviews with young people from rural and urban areas in Estonia and is supported by participant observation in different situations where alcohol is consumed in order to provide a broader view and interpretation on young people's drinking.

**Keywords:** young people, harm, framework, drinking context, Estonia.

## Introduction

Studies concerning alcohol consumption in Estonia have a rather short history. In Soviet times, alcohol consumption was considered a 'secret topic' (Ahven 2000), and there is little data available from that period. Based on current research, alcohol consumption in Estonia is increasing constantly and has shown a continuous rise both among men/boys and women/girls; the consumption of both light and strong alcoholic drinks has increased<sup>1</sup>. (Hein et al. 2008, Tekkel et al. 2009, Narusk 1996, Allaste 2004, Allaste 2008). During the last 15 years, per capita consumption has risen from 5,56 litres in 1996 to 9,92 litres in 2002, up to 12,56 litres in 2007 (Hein et al. 2008: 49, Orro et al. 2011: 49). Since 2008, alcohol consumption has decreased moderately in Estonia. This could be seen, on the one hand, as the result of stronger alcohol policy since 2005 (adaptations of and regulations due to Estonia's accession to the EU in 2004) and, on the other hand, a result of the economic downturn which influenced both the income and employment rate, which further impacted on the affordability of alcoholic beverages (Lai & Habicht 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Light alcoholic beverages are alcoholic beverages with actual alcohol strength by volume below or equal to 22%. Strong alcoholic beverages are alcoholic beverages with actual alcohol strength by volume exceeding 22%. (Hein et al. 2008: 20). Examples of strong beverages could be vodka or cognac, light beverages ciders or mixed spirit beverages.

The surveys suggest that drinking alcohol has increased among Estonians; however, they do not tell us anything about the meanings that are attributed to different drinking patterns, or how alcohol related harm is managed or controlled, especially among young people. This article aims to uncover and analyse the idioms that make up the distinctive frameworks of drinking time, space and networks that guide young adults in Estonia in their interpretations and perceptions of managing alcohol related harm, and that also act as the basis for legitimising drinking practices. In the current paper, alcohol-related harm is interpreted broadly. It could be physical, social or cultural harm – any of which from a young person's point of view might somehow damage his or her well-being. Information from the perspective of young people will create firmer ground for policy makers in understanding and developing approaches aimed at gaining young people's attention and directing them towards sensible and responsible drinking. The latter is, however, hard to do without knowing more clearly how the young people themselves already try to control or manage their drinking.

The following section gives an overview of the current literature regarding alcohol-related harm management among young people; I will then open up the concept of 'framework' which I am using to analyse harm control strategies. After that I will give a short summary of the research methods and data and then turn to the results. The last section of the paper reflects back on the literature, the results and the dynamics of the frames in terms of managing alcohol related harm.

## Calculated hedonism, young adulthood and drinking contexts

Research on alcohol (and drug) studies in the UK has identified the post-modern alcohol consumer.<sup>2</sup> These are young drinkers who practice calculated hedonism, meaning that they do not allow themselves the sensuous indulgence of consuming but always do it in a planned, carefully controlled way, and drinking occurs at specific times, in specific places, and with certain company and intensity. Young people choose when, where and with whom to drink. (Brain 2000, Measham 2004b, Szmigin et al. 2008). There are structuring sets of interdependencies such as education, work and family that bind young people's hedonistic consumption, while for others, who are perhaps less integrated into those structures, drinking can be characterised as unbounded hedonism and their drinking increasingly stretches out across space and time (Brain 2000: 9-10, see also MacAskill et al. 2001). However, for the majority of young people drinking behaviour is a planned letting go, which balances out the constrained behaviour that young people are subject to in the formal structures of everyday life in school, work and family settings (Szmigin et al. 2008: 362, also Griffin et al. 2009). The young adult Finns' 'nights out' have been described by Törrönen & Maunu (2007a: 378) as liminal movements from the linear time of work and everyday life into the cyclical time of their own group of friends. According to Measham (2004a: 343), users not only pursue a desired state of intoxication but also try to avoid an undesired state; intoxication is structured and controllable. Total loss of control could risk personal safety, ill health, embarrassment, social disapproval or cultural credibility (Measham 2004b, Szmigin et al. 2008). The widely used concept 'controlled loss of control' by Measham (2002) refers to self-control

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2 I searched for the literature regarding alcohol related harm from the EBSCO search in e-journals using the following keywords in abstracts 'alcohol(drinking) - risk(harm) - young people' and 'drugs - harm(risk) - young people' for the articles published between 2000-2011. The main criteria in selecting articles was to find research studies that would look at alcohol-related harm management from young people's perspectives, that is qualitative research among young adults (any research which included a sample from the age of 18 up and/or results were expandable according to the authors). In addition to the papers I found from the EBSCO search, I also did a chain track, which means that I looked for relevant papers cited in the papers I got from the EBSCO search. Plus I looked at any other research which was recommended as relevant to my topic; I also looked for research on young people, drinking and harm management done within the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (<http://www.jrf.org.uk/>).

over intoxicated behaviour among British youth. However, recent research by Simonen (2011: 145) on the discourse on intoxication among young Finnish women shows that this concept seems to be inadequate, because it tends to ignore the uncontrolled traits of intoxication and is, therefore, not able to capture the whole drinking scene in Finland.

In an article on typical drinking situations in Finland among young adults, Törrönen & Maunu (2007b: 196) showed how hanging out and drinking with meals encourage the use of alcohol but not necessarily drinking to intoxication. Partying, again, encourages a person to become intoxicated in a controlled way (Törrönen & Maunu 2005) – aiming to raise yourself, together with a group, to a commonly shared feeling or state that requires, as part of a joint purpose, the control of alcohol intake (Törrönen 2005). In partying, the composition of the company predicts the stage of drunkenness. (Törrönen & Maunu 2007b: 192). The actors may have several different, alternative, even conflicting positions towards situations, acting in them, and changing the positions if the events require (Tigerstedt & Törrönen 2005, cited in Törrönen & Maunu 2007b).

Heavy alcohol consumption by young adults can be viewed as a developmental rite of passage, where it is considered very common and normal to behave irresponsibly and participate in risk-taking behaviour (Leigh & Lee 2008, see also Beccaria & Sande 2003). During this rite of passage, young people also develop specific strategies in order to manage any alcohol-related harm. For example, these may include: somebody chosen or designated to stay sober to ensure the safety and welfare of the rest of the group (Szmigin et al. 2008), staying in the company of trustworthy friends, not leaving a drink unattended (*ibid.*, Engineer et al. 2003: 45-46, MacAskill et al. 2001: 22-25). Other strategies include being a designated driver, having an early commitment next day, feeling ill, running out of money or wanting to stay 'in control' (Martinic & Measham 2008: 82). Young people can also manage alcohol-related harm through choosing specific towns and/or avoiding specific venues or 'trouble spots' (Szmigin et al. 2008, Engineer 2003: 45-46). Research has also indicated the importance of factors other than the behaviour of the young people themselves. Alcohol-related harm can be controlled by creating safer bars, taking into account the physical environment and the social environment of the bars (Graham & Homel 1997). Drinking places and drinking spaces are the key constituents of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness; they have the differential and discursive role in the construction of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness (Jayne et al. 2008, Jayne et al. 2011). Both place and time are necessary conditions of drinking: they derive their specific meaning in relation to the motives, storylines and subjective involvement of drinking (Törrönen & Maunu 2007b: 184).

Motivation for drinking depends on the contexts and different drinking styles which occur in accordance with the venue, drinking companions, drinking time, and in accordance with biographical changes. For instance, a study of young males' drinking styles (Harnett et al. 2000) found that by the age of 16-17 young men's drinking style had become more fragmented and diverse, drinking took on a number of different styles depending on with whom, where and on what day they drank. Drinking is likely to become more and differently structured as young men enter marriage or partnership or start families of their own (see also Seaman & Ikegwuonu 2010). With the transition to more adult drinking styles, young men also learn to manage alcohol-related harm, manage their skills and learn to become fully-fledged adult citizens (Harnett et al. 2000).

Current research clearly shows that drinking and alcohol-related harm management depends largely on the drinking context, i.e. it is dependent on the time, place and drinking companions. Young adults are aware of the threats in terms of when, where, how and with whom to drink – all of which develop and change in time with age, experience, status and biographical changes. The aim of the current paper is to identify more closely the frameworks of drinking time (when a person drinks, during the week or at the weekend; but also the length of a drinking event); space (specific local and social contexts, each with its particular behavioural norms and values as perceived by young people; and also certain drinking venues, each with its own norms for drinking and each encompassing certain

risks that have to be handled); and networks (with whom it is considered safe to drink). These will form the basis of an examination of young people's harm management. The framework, an analytical tool by Goffman (1974), will be used to give structure to the concept of 'context' (see also Scheff 2005).

## Structuring the context

The concept of 'framework' by Goffman (1974) offers a structure for analysing the category 'context' by defining different types of contexts (Scheff 2005) and giving some boundaries to the somewhat diffuse term. The framework could be seen as a good analytical tool that helps to locate, identify and understand young people's ways of managing alcohol-related harm and demonstrate how exactly drinking depends on the 'context'.

Very generally speaking, a drinking culture could be considered as a framework of its own – something within which people drink and interpret drinking, organise or make sense of events or activities regarding alcohol consumption. A group's framework consists of other (smaller) frameworks; in my interpretation of Goffman's (1974) framework and in my analysis of data, those are 'drinking time', 'drinking space' and 'drinking networks'. Frames are socio-cultural constructs that provide a background understanding of events and guide actions, which are subject to social appraisal (ibid.). Frames overlap, fit within or merely add to one another. (Scheff 2005: 381).

Coming back to the frameworks of drinking time, space and networks, which I have distinguished as abstract categories to make sense of alcohol-related harm management, then the interaction and dynamics between and within the frames are open. Let us think about young people drinking – when they go out on a Friday night to party and relax, it is legitimised both for themselves and others: *if* they don't have any obligations, *since* they don't have to go to work (drinking time), *then* they can drink as much as they want, *if* they are with friends (drinking networks), *and* the drinking venue is also right (drinking space). The verbal operators *since*, *if*, *not*, *and*, *then* and so on help to indicate the relationship of each frame to the one below and above it (Scheff 2005: 381-382). The verbal operators are understood as the ones that tie or distinguish the 'keys' – some main rules (a 'set of conventions' as Goffman calls them, 1974: 43), which are important for how frames work, but which are open to interpretation and depend on other frames. Keying also assumes mutual awareness and is unavoidably social (Scheff 2005: 371, Goffman 1974). Efforts to break out of some cultural frames are constrained by the limits of still other frames; and by breaking the rules within a frame, a person is risking the sense of self and the micro-order which it depends on (Berger, foreword for Goffman: xvii).

## Method and data

The empirical part of the paper relies mostly on open-ended individual interviews (19 total; 10 carried out in rural areas and 9 in urban areas) and focus group interviews (7 total; 4 in rural areas and 3 in urban areas). Altogether 20 men and 28 women were interviewed. 24 informants (11 men and 13 women) were from rural areas – small towns, villages and/or hamlets – often with one bar/pub or none and no theatre or cinema; and 24 informants (9 men and 15 women) were from bigger towns in Estonia (e.g. Tallinn (capital city), Pärnu, Tartu, Kohtla-Järve). In addition, participant observation was carried out in different situations where alcohol is consumed, for instance, while attending parties and events, to support and provide a broader view and interpretation on young adults' drinking.

The contacts for individual and focus group interviews were made, in the first place, through different personal acquaintances, who then led on to new people (snowballing); a couple of informants were contacted also from nightclubs. In general, interviews lasted 1.5–2 hours, the longest one for

four hours. I used an interview schedule for open-ended interviews covering topics I wished to discuss – e.g. the first time alcohol was consumed, changes in drinking practices, meaning of drunkenness, etc. – which also allowed for new topics to emerge (e.g. drink driving). In focus groups, topics like gender and drinking (e.g. acceptable norms), the meaning of drunkenness, attitudes towards drink driving and others were explored. The focus groups consisted of natural groups, as all the informants knew each other. The latter could be seen as a good basis for open conversation. Focus groups give an idea of how collective understanding about a phenomenon is created and how certain understandings are established as collective truths in the groups (Barbour 2007).

All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews were carried out in the homes of the informants or in cafes. Before conducting the interviews, a full explanation about the nature of the study and its purposes was given; informants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. When using quotations to illustrate the arguments, the names as well as the names of (small) places mentioned in the quotations have been changed in order to guarantee the anonymity.

The age range of informants was 18-36, most of them in their 20s and/or early 30s. The young adults interviewed in rural areas were mostly working and were economically independent; three were unemployed and seeking jobs at the time of the interview. Most of them had secondary education, two of the informants were studying at university, and one was working on a Master's degree. In urban areas, the informants had a higher educational level and were often working in quite high positions, but not all of them. One informant was also studying in the final class of high school but had many older friends with whom she used to drink and party.

The interviews were coded with the help of a qualitative software program NVivo 8. The aim of the analysis was to identify central topics using open coding – in accordance with the subjects that emerged from the material. Codes were compared and relevant categories were formed. Later on the categories were combined and linked with relevant literature and theory to provide an explanation for the phenomenon under research.

## Frameworks of drinking time, space and networks

### Drinking time

For most of the young Estonians, more excessive drinking takes places at weekends, on special occasions (such as a birthdays) or for 'no specific reason' but to party and relax, have fun, forget about worries and troubles, which all represents, therefore, the new 'democratic' drinking culture common among European youth (Eisenbach-Stangl & Thom 2009). Drinking could be considered an escape from the structures of everyday life, a way 'to hit restart' and then return refreshed.

*Let's say, when you've had a very tough week at work or it's complicated, which really exhausts your thinking, then it is good, like you restart the computer, then you restart yourself. But it presumes that you drink quite a lot, forget about work things, at least for that evening. (Male, 28A, urban<sup>3</sup>)*

Nowadays youth culture encompasses an element of wildness and the extreme. The latter would mean a style, an aesthetic, a stream of dizzying activity beyond the usual slow, dull life. Any extreme will disrupt peace of mind and it emphasises the intensity of sensation; extreme is the opposite of everything 'ordinary' (Choquet 2008: 40-43). In terms of reloading and 'hitting restart' due to hard work or family life, drinking and partying – 'to get the best out of it' or 'as long as you can' – is unique

3 In the quotations I have pointed out the gender of the informant, the letter after the age differentiates informants with the same age; urban and rural mark the place of residence.

in its character, something that allows the participant to return to routines with some release. The 'extreme' has a particular relationship with time, reducing it to a dense ball of immediacy (ibid.) – a time for the self, to let go of the self and to grow the self. Drinking for the whole weekend can offer that.

*Well, when I visited Triin [her friend] in Tartu, then it is like planned, like for the whole weekend, we went out for the two days. Well, we go out on the first day, it is a little bit harder on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day and you think that no. But then you think that no, you must go, it happens so rarely. Suppose we weren't feeling that sick either. (Female, 26A, urban)*

However, because of the intensity and speed of the drinking style as well as lifestyle (working from Monday to Friday), some young people limit their drinking to one day only. This way the value of this kind of drinking style – with the purpose of intensive 'letting go' or 'restarting' – is maintained in time and also remains desirable later on.

*Let's just say that you should come out of it, otherwise drinking will not be so interesting anymore either. If you drink for days in a row, then it will all turn into rubbish. But if you drink seldom, it is interesting. (Male, 28A, urban)*

As has been pointed out in previous studies (Martinic & Measham 2008, Harnett et al. 2000, Szmigin et al. 2008) regarding alcohol-related harm management, one of the first things influencing decisions about when to drink is to take into account any duties or responsibilities. These could be taking care of kids, driving, going to work or preparing for school entrance.

*I don't drink at all at the moment. For a month already, I haven't had a drop, I have this little training schedule here, which I haven't finished yet, and I have those entrance exams in January-February to the school, which I have to pass. If I don't get into the school, then it's bye-bye to my work. This motivates me not to drink. (Male, 26A, urban)*

When the broader frame of obligations allows drinking, then permission to drink is given and seen as justified and legitimised both for oneself and others. If not, drinking is regulated, for example, by drinking water ('slowing down', Szmigin et al. 2008) in order to keep up with obligations the following day.

*F: Actually I don't know how to drink like this, when I'm drunk already, [to think that] I should not be drinking anymore.*

*I: So you can't see where the line is drawn? (Interviewer)*

*F: Well, while I'm drinking. But of course, I think ahead, then when I do start drinking, whether there is something I've got to do the next day, then it is like this that I'll start drinking water. It is the same with Triin [her friend] that in some party she simply starts drinking water quite early. (Female, 26A, urban)*

Slowing down depends not only on obligations but also on with whom one is drinking.

*I: So when you are with your workmates or friends you drink somehow differently than when you are with your parents? (Interviewer)*

*F: Yes. I could give you an example. I went to this polite birthday with a long table. But then you feel you can't do it anymore, the line is here – oh god, it is only 1 o'clock. Then you have water for half an hour, then coffee and then you can start drinking wine again. I usually do it like this. When I see it is so early but I'm so drunk, then I'll start drinking water. (Female, 24A, rural)*

Managing drinking time means also controlling drinking speed and quantities, listening to the body and 'knowing alcohol' – how different types of drinks work and how much one can drink in order to stay in control (also MacAskill et al. 2001, Szmigin et al. 2008, Martinic & Measham 2008).

*Tequila is the only drink which I drink pure. I always drink it at a bar, never at home. At the bar, I drink a maximum of 3 shot glasses, not more. Then I feel I can't do it any more, I want something less strong. [...] Mostly I know my drink, I like also whiskey with coke or something, and then I know exactly where to draw the line, and I don't want anything else. Or maybe tequila then. I know also how much I can take. [...] and there is no point in drinking when it doesn't go to your head. What's the point of drinking anyway? I'll have less then if I want to party longer. You don't have to drink that quick and much then.* (Male, 28B, urban)

One of the golden rules that is considered as a basis for lasting through a long night is to stick to one type of drink only and not mix drinks (also MacAskill et al. 2001).

*It depends on the quantity that you have been drinking and how fast you drink. You can reach the limit in an hour or two; when you pour vodka into yourself from a tea glass, then this crossing over the limit will definitely come within an hour. But when you hold it somehow, you manage to keep your tempo appropriate, then you might not cross the line at all. Sometimes you might have a very long-lasting party and you might stay fun up to the end. So it depends how you drink. The golden rule is that when you do start drinking something, you should stick to it. This is the easiest way not to drink too much.* (Male, 28A, urban)

In 'knowing the alcohol' biographical changes, such as entering into partnership, age and experience are the keys that shape how much one can take or how long one can last. The following informant spoke about his drinking history as problematic while he was younger, drinking quite heavily in different periods. By now he can drink vodka in ways that won't cause any trouble for himself or others. It could be also interpreted as 'alcohol maturity' (Martinic & Measham 2008: 82).

*The older you get, the calmer you become. You learn to drink vodka in a way that you won't cause any harm either to yourself or others. You can like keep your mind sober.* (Male, 29A, rural)

## Drinking space

Based on interviews, I distinguished two drinking spaces – urban and rural areas, which constitute two different realities ('spaces') encompassing different norms, values and options for drinking practices and behaviour. The importance of these spaces can be effectively shown by analysing three broad aspects that are considered relevant in terms of harm management, i.e. anonymity, perception of risks in drink-driving and the 'other'. The 'other' could be seen as a threat to social identity – the distinction defines 'I' as similar or different from, as 'better' or 'worse' than members of other groups (Tajfel & Turner 1986: 16).

### Perceptions of anonymity in rural and urban areas

Previous research has found that young people in rural areas exercise stronger self-governance, as there is less anonymity in the countryside than in urban areas. Drunken rowdiness is likely to be witnessed by friends, family and potential future employers (Jayne et al. 2011: 36, 40, see also Valentine et al. 2007). This is a viewpoint that my informants also share, explaining how in the countryside everybody knows everybody.

*In the city, you have greater anonymity. In the city, you mostly don't know other people while partying. [...] But in rural areas, it depends how drunk you get. Maybe somebody will give you a glance and it will be forgotten, but if you have an acquaintance there hanging around drunk, then you will definitely remember it better. [...] In small places, people will notice your actions much better. And it will also remain in their memories. (Male, 28A, urban)*

*The problem is I have lived here for my whole life, and many older people know me, and this is not the best thing. In Tallinn you feel more free; here you have to toe the line a bit. So you won't be caught in the act, then all the village will be full of gossip. (Male, 29A, rural)*

However, the opposite viewpoint was also given. Depending on the point of view, rural areas could also offer anonymity – drinking in a space and in places where nobody knows you, partying and having fun without any social harm. From the perspective of the actor, drinking in a different space allows him to drink in a way that might be considered unacceptable in another space. From one young woman's point of view, drinking in a rural area allows her to negotiate expected gender norms regarding drinking and to 'do' gender in an alternative way. For her, drinking in a rural area means entering into another framework where usual norms can be put aside for a moment.

*In the countryside it is freer, strangers all around. But here in Tallinn I know so many people, and when I do something and should somebody see it, then it is like you have to stay on the straight and narrow and look around, and you shouldn't fall down or fumble around. (Female, 21A, urban)*

It could be said that for young women partying and intoxication-oriented drinking are perceived as expressions of independence and self-security (Holmila 2001, cited in Simonen 2011), connecting drunkenness with a release, enjoyment and authentic experience (Paakkanen 1992, Simonen 2007, cited in Simonen 2011).

#### **Drink driving space and the perception of risks**

In drink driving, which is condemned publicly and seen as antisocial behaviour but practiced in private a lot, one of the most common and easy ways to justify the behaviour is to make a distinction between driving in urban or in rural areas. The spaces of city and countryside encompass certain characteristics as well as risks for drink driving. The city (also referred to by respondents as mainland) symbolises and refers to an unknown surrounding (both for locals and non locals), which encompasses more dangers or possibilities of having an accident or getting caught, while rural areas (village, an island) are perceived as much safer. In the countryside, drinking and driving takes place in the context of 'others' who know how to do it and where the physical context is familiar. This distinction also helps deny the possibility of injury and responsibility.

*I: When you come to town, would you drive while being drunk? (Interviewer)*

*M: No, definitely not.*

*I: Why not?*

*M: Fines and everything. It is totally out of the question. Not without a seatbelt or while being drunk, nothing. [...] But it has happened that the police have been called for the 'city people' [not locals, from the mainland]. Last year young people from the city died in the morning of Midsummer Day. Strangers tend to speed, they don't know the roads, the roads are rather twisty, and they don't know it.*

*I: So the locals drive somehow differently?*

*M: Yes, they drive somehow calmly. They drive at 50 km/h or even 30 km/h to get home. There are many from the city who speed while being drunk. (Male, 25, urban)*

Driving in towns is perceived as having to deal with more detailed information that has to be absorbed and taken into account.

*For example, in the city there is more danger, the pedestrians and zebra crossings. For example, I am driving on the main road but some people will not wait for 2 seconds and turn in front of me, and then I have to break, but when you have drunk a little, then your movements are a little bit slower. Whether you can break at the right time or not/.../ But here it is only one straight road. (Female, 25A, rural)*

### Perceptions and the construction of the 'other'

Young adults, both from rural and urban areas, stress that in the city people's drinking behaviour is considered more cultured or more proper, while in rural areas drinking practices are often seen as vulgar, degraded and unrefined – drinking like an 'animal'. The latter means drinking and partying in such a way that one might not pay so much attention to how much to drink, what one looks like or what one does while drinking.

*I don't bother much dressing myself, I won't put any make up on, right. There [in the countryside] you can be the same animal as anybody else. When I go out here, then I can't climb on the table or anything. (Female, 20, urban)*

*In the country, when you go out you don't have to worry that somebody is different, because people mostly wear jeans or things and they all look the same. When you go to the city, then honestly, it makes me feel distressed. (Female, 29, rural)*

People in rural areas are perceived as left stuck in their environment and unable to find a way out from there. Constrained by structural features (no range of job or leisure time opportunities) both the people as well as drinking places are seen as down-at-heel. Those who have left the countryside to live in bigger towns distance themselves clearly from the friends who are left behind and have not moved on with their lives or with their drinking styles. They no longer share the same ground or have feelings in common.

*I hardly go to X [name of a small place where he used to live] because I haven't got anything to talk about with them [old friends]. As I said, they are stuck at the same level of development, I haven't got anything to talk about with them. /.../ They haven't got anything to do there, they go to the shop at 10 in the morning, they sit on the stairs of the shop. They are drunk there. I don't understand them. (Male, 25, urban)*

When young women talked about going to a rural drinking venue, they perceived being immediately noticed, waiting to be picked up ('fresh meat'). Some young women considered this as a threat to their identity and felt insulted by staring men in the local pub, as is described in the following quotation. Similar to Leyshon's study (2008) on young women's embodiment and drinking in the countryside, young women in my study reflect the idea that in rural drinking venues they feel intimidated and threatened sexually. Therefore, the club scene in the city is often seen as more sophisticated and leaves more room for young women to work on their gendered identity (ibid.).

*You should come with us sometimes, you'd find someone easily. Because in there, when foreign meat comes, new meat, fresh meat, then straight away. When I'd go there with my friend, then everybody would go, 'Who's your friend, what's her name, where does she live?' /.../ It is good to go out there*

*sometimes, in X [name of a small place where she used to live], 'Oh you are here also and long time no see'. But eventually it will just become annoying. 'Take your hand off from me!'" (Female, 24A, urban)*

The study by Glendinning (2003, cited in Jayne et al. 2011: 41) shows that young people express feelings of safety in their rural homes and tend to view cities as less safe, something which is associated with greater public disorder. In my study, I found that young people may deliberately avoid rural drinking places, which are known for their aggressiveness. The 'other' from which the 'I' is contrasted and distanced is seen once again as raw or somehow dirty – people who still don't know how to drink, be drunk and behave in a civilized way (see also Sulkunen 2010: 93).

*But I have heard that in Võru [name of place], everybody talks about it. That bar 'Antsla' is a very awesome place, you can go there and then you can get into a fight again. But I myself have no intention of going to a small god-forsaken place or to some dump. (Male, 28A, urban)*

For some urban informants (more common among those who have more high profile jobs), drinking pure vodka is regarded as characteristic of Soviet times and in the present related to the drinking practices of those who are living in rural areas ('still stuck in time'). Removing oneself from this practice allows one to build a more sophisticated identity based on the type of drink consumed.

*Usually we always drink cocktails, we don't fill the vodka glasses and then start competing. There is no such thing. In my opinion, it is more like a habit of the Soviet times. My uncle just had a birthday, it was like a real 'taking' [meaning here heavy drinking]. Vodka glasses on the table. Actually they last quite a long time, but they get drunk quite fast, but they last long. And then they toasted after every 5 minutes. 'Let's have a shot!' was yelled after every 5 minutes. I did not take the vodka, I drank wine on my own. [...] This is like more of a habit from Soviet times and maybe found more in those smaller places, in country places when you meet and you have those 'jellied-meat tables'<sup>4</sup> and then you drink. (Male, 28A, urban)*

As the previous discussion has already revealed, harm management is strongly connected with the drinking networks.

## Drinking networks

Choice of drinking companions affects the degree of harm to one's social identity or cultural credibility as the following informants explain.

*My responsibility is so big; I can not allow myself to behave in a vulgar way... In some areas, I'm a well-known person in Estonia because of my job, if I'd behave like this, I wouldn't be taken seriously anymore. That's why we choose a place where to drink, we choose where to go out and who to drink with. (Male, 25, urban)*

*But it really depends on who you are with, whether you can show yourself in a bad light or not. (Female, 27, urban)*

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<sup>4</sup> 'Jellied-meat tables' is an expression sometimes used to describe events/parties/birthdays, which are seen as characteristic of the Soviet way of partying or having birthdays. These could be described as with no great variety of food selection (typical foods are potato salad, jellied-meat, etc.) and no variety of alcoholic beverages (typically vodka).

Participants in a study by Szmigin et al. (2008) referred to someone being designated or choosing to remain relatively sober on a given night out, either to drive the others home or to ensure the safety and welfare of the other group members. Drinking with a group of friends reinforces security, which relies on mutual trust and accountability. Often this somebody who remains relatively sober to 'keep an eye on the group' emerges spontaneously during the night out without any previous agreements. This also means that the understanding of one's own and the group's safety is worked out reflexively during the night.

**F1:** *So when I'm totally drunk, then you are a bit sober.* (Female, 20, urban)

**F2:** *Of course.* (Female, 25, urban)

**F1:** *When you notice, then you can watch for me not to drink anymore.*

**F2:** *Take for example, when I went out with Kelli. When I saw that she started drinking at full tilt, then I realised that I should not be drinking that much, otherwise we would both be out. Eventually it was useful that I did not drink that much.*

**F1:** *Somebody has to keep an eye on the group.*

Some young people, though already adults (in their 20s and early 30s), also stress stronger self-control and regulating drinking while with parents (also Martinic & Measham 2008: 82, Seaman & Ikegwuonu 2010). Among young people drunkenness in and of itself is not considered as a deviant act; however, it is still perceived as something that has to be kept hidden from the adults (parents). This may be related to the process of socialisation into drinking itself, which mostly starts with friends but not among family members (characteristic of Nordic drinking cultures in general). Drinking under parental supervision or with them has been seen as uncomfortable among other Nordic drinking cultures, such as Finnish (Rolando et al. 2012: 207, also Tigerstedt et al. 2010). A distance is kept between drinking with friends or with family. This relates to alcohol being seen as an intoxicant and not so much as part of everyday life. However, the latter may be changing, especially among young people, as drinking does not have to include complete drunkenness and is being integrated into more daily activities. Among adults youthful drinking holds dangerous or negative connotations, and this is how parents teach their children. Sometimes drinking is associated with shame and guilt and it has to be hidden from adults or be more strongly controlled. As in Finnish drinking culture, among younger people parents are considered to be the 'others' (Beccaria et al. 2010: 249).

*Well, if I go drinking with my people from work, then it is totally free. But when I'm with older people, then I think, 'Behave well now and don't drink so much'.* (Female, 24A, rural)

There is also a variation in young people's drinking habits compared to their parents. While among the parents 'drinking' might mean drinking at home, young people emphasise going out, the need to let go of energy through dancing and partying.

*But I never party like this with my mother. [...] Besides, I don't see any point in drinking like this at home – to get drunk and then go to bed. I don't see any point. But it is like when I drink and go out, then I have more energy and I don't want to go to sleep but to move around.* (Female, 25, urban)

The networks also impact on the subjective mood for drinking, therefore, the drinking speed, quantity and the purpose of the drinking.

**M1:** *When it's fun and the company is cool, then you drink more quite well. In boring company, you wouldn't want that much.* (Male, 20, rural)

**F1:** *It's the opposite for me. When there is boring company, then you'd get properly hammered, to get to sleep. When it's fun, then you drinkless in order to last longer.* (Female, 22, rural)

**F2:** *Yes.* (Female, 20, rural)

**M2:** *I'd rather not drink in boring company.* (Male, 30, rural)

**M1:** *It's like that. When it's fun, then you are in a better mood, and then you want more.*

## Discussion

Current research in Estonia regarding young people's drinking practices is mostly quantitative in nature and gives very little insight into young people's habits, and how they think about drinking or alcohol related harm management. In this study, I have used qualitative methods to achieve some deeper understanding of the strategies young people use to manage or control their drinking. For that, I have used the concept of 'framework' (Goffman 1974) to interpret and open up the dynamics of managing alcohol-related harm.

Many of the techniques found within the frameworks of time, space and networks – such as no mixing drinks, slowing down or drinking water, drinking with friends only, controlling drinking speed, quantities, avoiding certain venues – have been present also in previous research (Szmigin et al. 2008, Martinic & Measham 2008, Seaman & Ikegwuonu 2010, Engineer 2003: 45-46; MacAskill et al. 2001: 22-25; Harnett et al. 2000). In addition, I have pointed out within the framework of drinking space the perception of anonymity in rural and urban areas and how it could be a platform for (avoiding) harm while drinking; the perception of risks in drink driving in terms of space and the 'other' from whom people differentiate themselves in order to diminish any harm to social identity. The latter is based on perceptions of the vulgar, unrefined and 'animal-like' rural inhabitants and of drinking venues in the countryside loaded with sexual threat to women's identities, aggressiveness towards strangers and old-fashioned drinking practices. Drinking space and place carry certain behaviour norms that impact on the drinking behaviour and the limits of accepted or unaccepted drunkenness (also Jayne et al. 2008, 2011).

How do the frames overlap or interact? This brings us back to the keying (Goffman 1974, Scheff 2005) – the main signals, central elements or rules which tell us how to make sense of things, how to behave and, when we have to make changes within a frame, inform us where we are to avoid possible harm. For example, *if* a group of friends (drinking network) are going out on a Friday night, previously legitimised *if* having no obligations (drinking time) *and* going to a country bar, then this means that they might practice a particular drinking style – drinking like an 'animal' – which they perceive as improper in the city (drinking space). In case of a change in the framework of drinking networks, such as *when* drinking with parents or adults, *then* this means also regulating the framework of drinking time and within it managing drinking speed and quantities in order to stay in control and avoid social disapproval. Drinking with parents might mean switching from a heavy-drinking style to a lighter one. All in all the frameworks have an impact on how one drinks – the drinking pattern.

The overall aim of managing the 'drinking context' is to minimise the risks to physical as well as social wellbeing and everyday life. Drinking is structured and controllable (Measham 2004a: 343). In case of breaking the norms within the frameworks, young people risk harm to their physical health, social identity, safety or social appraisal (Measham 2004b, Szmigin et al. 2008) and the sense of self.

Some of the drinking behaviour and practices could be described as 'unbounded drinking', 'determined drunkenness' or 'heroic drinking' (Simonen 2011) – for example, in the case of partying in the countryside where the drinking space allows bigger anonymity to 'fall down' or 'fumble around', meaning that letting go of the restrictions, control and having fun are valued (as the uncontrolled traits of intoxication, Simonen 2011). However, it could still be seen as controlled drinking since, from the perspective of harm-management, the frame and selection of drinking space allows this kind of

‘uncontrolled drinking’. On the other hand, it could be the case that these young Estonians (in their 20s and early 30s) have already learned how to negotiate and manage any alcohol-related harm or uncontrolled drinking.

A deeper appreciation of young adults’ alcohol-related harm management would help to avoid ineffective and patronising preventive messages and interventions directed at them.

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