

Formative research based social media advocacy campaign to curb alcohol harms in Estonia

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Alcohol is a big problem in Estonia

- Alcohol contributes 10% of the burden of disease in Estonia
- Causes 28% of early deaths among men
- Liver cirrhosis mortality among women has risen 35 times since 1992 (Pärna et al. 2010)

Task: To develop an advocacy campaign to inspire policy change

- PROBLEM: People AND politicians do not know what works in alcohol policy
 - Discourse: “mass education” or “banning, which won’t work”
- Evidence-based policy measures have worked in Estonia historically, but recently there has been little political will to implement them
- Need wide-spread social and political support for
 - alcohol excise tax increase
 - reduction of availability
 - limiting advertising

Where to start?

Formative research

- Until recently, little has been known about why the harmful pattern of drinking persists in Estonia
- The myths and beliefs about the nature of alcohol abound and inform action – an internally consistent discourse
- The content had not been systematically analysed

Formative research

- 3 natural focus groups with women, 5 with men in workplaces in Tallinn, Estonia, in the summer of 2011
- Inquired about alcohol's cultural position, drinking habits – alcohol not defined as a medical issue
- Formed a basis of doctoral thesis research

Estonian men's drinking habits

- Using the “drinking habits” concept from Tigerstedt & Törönen, 2007:
 - PURPOSES of drinking: to relieve excessive self-consciousness, worry about what others think, to relieve the “pain” from shortcomings in the national character
 - DEGREES of drunkenness: both “moderate” and “drunk” serve the purpose of “forgetting the self control”
“moderate” or “drunk” not dependent on the quantity, more a property of the occasion
 - CONTROL OF DRINKING: strictly on self. “Every man has to learn to know their own limit”. Also, strictly controlled by the work schedule

Because Estonians are...

- Participant 1: *The stereotype is that an Estonian is generally tongue-tied and introverted (“drawn into himself”) type, who cannot utter a word, and the only moment when they can display their emotion... where they can express themselves or open up is when they are drunk, then it’s, like, forgivable.*
- Participant 2: *Then everything is permitted.*
- Participant 3: *This is not my idea, but I agree in principle and I cannot argue with that. (Older men).*

Alcohol has “always” helped

- *It's also psychology. Estonia has been very much put down all the time and there were no other ways of letting go. Alcohol has been a very big help all the time. People drink to relax. For example, Estonians were under the rule of Germans. They worked all day and in the evenings they gathered, had some beers, partied, so that they would not have to think about this slavery. Perhaps this is where it came into the psyche of Estonians.*

(Younger men).

Estonian men don't express...

- Participant 1: *If Estonian men sit around and absorb all the negative emotions inside, they don't let it out... then some start drinking, some start injecting drugs. Some will find other ways... but the Mediterraneans express their emotions differently.*

- Moderator: Why do Estonians not express their emotions?

- Participant1: *The culture is different. It has developed like this over long period of time.*
(Older men)

Self-consciousness when sober

- Participant 2: *Perhaps it's the trepidation about what they might think of me when I say something ...and there will be a longer pause for reflection before saying anything.*
- Participant 4: *There is a lot of analysis. If you drink alcohol then you won't start analyzing like that.*
- Participant 1: *If you haphazardly blurt something out when drunk, then you don't feel embarrassed and no one else feels embarrassed either.*

Alcohol as a relief from family and work stress

- Participant 1: *I used to get drunk often. As drunk as possible... But then, another stage of life began. If you have a family, then you can no longer do such things, sadly.*
- Moderator: *Sadly?*
- Participant 1: *In some sense this is unfortunate. Look. Estonian alcohol culture or the lack thereof has developed to the point, where men, in principle, cannot release themselves from stress in any other way. (Younger men)*

Other relevant findings

- Many comments about the oppressive nature of the national character, especially men
- “alcohol has always helped”
 - To express self
 - To cope with the cold
 - To relieve stress
 - To live through serfdom, Soviet occupation, now the demanding work regimens and demands of the family life
 - “We in the North don’t self-express like they do in the Mediterranean”
- *Since we want to belong and relate but don’t know how to, alcohol brings us together.*
- Belief that alcohol and the level of current drinking is a given, immutable part of life

Quitting drinking “is solitary”

- Drinking is construed as social, quitting drinking means losing friends
- Beginning drinking in adolescence is a necessary part of socialization, normal development
- Teaching kids to drink at home is a rational choice that protects them from self-styled experimentation
- All forms of trying to control drinking will lead to people wanting it even more – “the forbidden fruit effect”

Theoretical de-coding

- Used discourse analysis to make sense of data
- Discovered the hegemonic structure of alcohol discourse in Estonia:
 - Discourse is a form of social control
 - Those with more access to *speech* shape the discourse with a goal to make tenets of the arguments part of normality, everyday, common sense
 - Those who stand to lose most from the new status quo start defending it as part of their normality

Is Estonian alcohol discourse hegemonic?

- Mark Haugaard (2006) defines hegemony as a leadership that is in a position to create and lead consensus of meaning, offering representation and workable mental models simultaneously to diverse groups and (competing) interests
- Alcohol industry aligns its communication with several dominant discourses in post-Soviet Estonian society: neoliberal, freedom-seeking values in terms of patriotism (collective), hedonism (individual), and entrepreneurial success (economic). Also offers distinction by drink brands
- Anti-regulation discourse has been previously shown to be supported and internalized by NGO staffers (Kollom, 2010), general adult population (TNS Emor, 2011), decision-makers (Lagerspetz, 2001) in Estonia.
- Formative research showed working adults' internalization of such discursive elements as “drinking being a necessity” for expression of national identity and for adolescent development, and self-responsibility for consequences

How to become a hegemon?

- The hegemon will try to tie their tenet to most important current narratives:
 - Patriotism, neoliberalism, femininity, masculinity, hedonism, authenticity, self-reliance, organic, healthy
- Hegemon will gain and maintain the position of power by keeping abreast of moods in diverse groups. While different civil society groups quarrel, the hegemon offers a new framing that most everyone can kind of agree and allow everyone to make one step forward.

Haugaard, 2006

Is there hegemonic dominance in alcohol discourse?

- Alcohol industry uses several forms of speech:
 - PR, marketing, sponsoring teams and events, naming buildings, creating spaces and rituals, direct lobby
- Over time, has tied all the important narratives to alcohol. It's patriotic, feminine to drink etc.

HOW TO INTERVENE?

**LEARN FROM THE HEGEMON: BUILD
CONSENSUS ON EXISTING CONSENSUS**

Some insights for planning

1. Recognize that health has nothing to do with it
2. Look at what narratives are important and how they have become tied to alcohol
3. Start to build critical consciousness by de-linking the narratives from alcohol one by one
4. Don't struggle or impose, go where there is an acceptance, a need for information first
 - *EVERYONE thought that it was not right that children and adolescents drink*

1. Employees and parents at workplaces

- Based on the previous work of Health Estonia Foundation, we put together a 2-hour workshop called “Alcohol Independence”
 - Sold to workplaces as a “social responsibility” project
 - Addresses “lifeskills needed for 21st century success”
 - Executive function- prefrontal cortex development
 - alcohol intervenes with development
 - How to be an “authoritative parent”

What this does?

- Explains many myths about alcohol
- Stays firmly in the neoliberal discourse – “power to” get success and self-reliance
- Explains that parents can reinvent their domestic alcohol policy (sense of control)
- Teaches some preventive techniques (efficacy)
- *“You came to talk about children but I now realize how alcohol affects my work performance too”*
- Builds community – brings theme out to the open, participants want to keep talking, relating

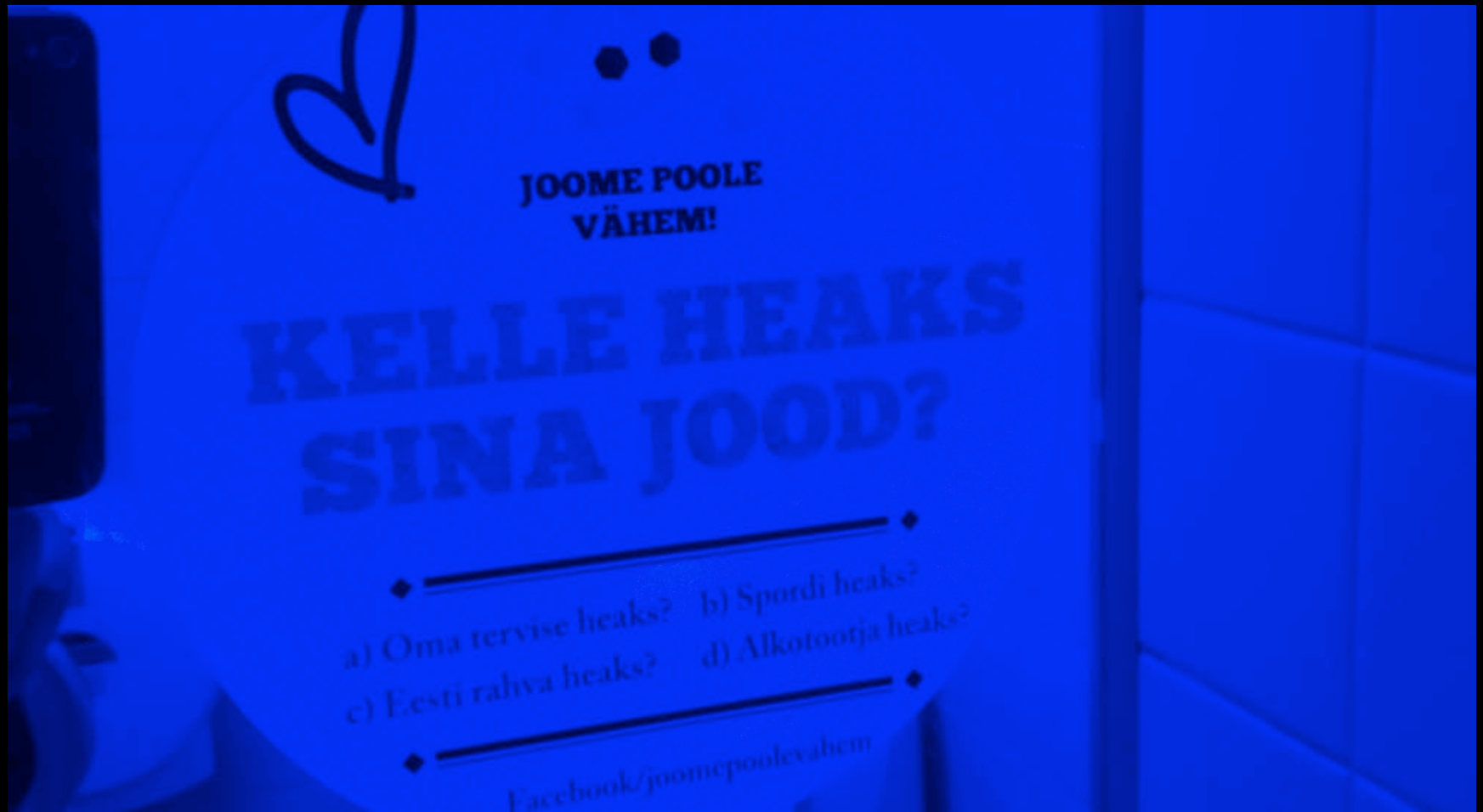
2. General population

- Joome poole vähem! – campaign
- (“Let’s drink less by half!”)
- Set a national goal to cut drinking from current 10.6 litres per capita annually to less than 6 by 2018
- Uses flag colours
- Builds on nationalistic themes and the “collective” of Estonianness.

So far:

- Started in June 10, 2013
 - Statoil gas station toilet mirror stickers
 - Facebook community for collaborative learning and discussion (now almost 2000 members)
 - Men's clinic handing out flyers
 - Outdoor campaign in August for 2 weeks in 2 larger cities

Sticker on a public bathroom mirror



Outdoor posters



Who do you drink for?

POOLE VAHEMI!

Kelle heaks Sina jood?

- a) oma tervise heaks?
- b) spordi heaks?
- c) alkotööstuse heaks?
- d) Eesti rahva heaks?

Contributions from followers



Getting interactive



Messages

- “Let’s drink less by half”
- “Let’s live better by half”
- “Let’s give Estonia a better future together – let's drink less by half”
- “For Estonia – less by half alcohol”
- “In every 4 years as many people die as a result of alcohol than were killed in the War of Independence. If we have friends like alcohol, who needs enemies?”

Engagement of other organizations

- Writing joint manifestos, declarations
 - 8 step action plan for local governments, election time manifesto on August 28.
 - 8 organizations signed, including Estonian Debating Society, Estonian Boy Scouts, Medical Students Union, Association of Psychiatrists, Association of Oncologists
 - Planning a joint letter to the parliament members Regarding alcohol excise tax and lack of funds for youth extracurricular activities.

Aims

- Joome poole vähem!
 - Is a recruitment slogan, meant to activate
 - Not perfect
 - Aims to give voices to many different organizations and to many different reasons to cut drinking
- Common vision- to cut drinking by half by 2018 when Estonia turns 100
- Medium-term goals: explicit policy goals in every party's election program in 2015
- Until then - consensus building and collaborative learning by engaging organizations and small groups

How do we measure?

- We will measure policy declarations by
 - Organization
 - Local governments
 - National governments
- Few questions in omnibus surveys to see whether tolerance towards youth drinking and drunkenness changes.
- Eventually want to see the change on per capita level!

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Thank you!

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